

Parents get physical with unruly kids, study finds

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Parents get physical with their misbehaving children in public much more than they show in laboratory experiments and acknowledge in surveys, according to one of the first real-world studies of caregiver discipline.

The study, led by Michigan State University's Kathy Stansbury, found that 23 percent of [youngsters](#) received some type of "negative touch" when they failed to comply with a parental request in public places such as restaurants and parks. Negative touch included arm pulling, pinching, slapping and spanking.

"I was very surprised to see what many people consider a socially undesirable behavior done by nearly a quarter of the caregivers," Stansbury said. "I have also seen hundreds of kids and their [parents](#) in a lab setting and never once witnessed any of this behavior."

Stansbury is a trained psychologist and associate professor in MSU's Department of Human Development and Family Studies. With the study, she wanted to get a realistic gauge of how often parents use what she calls positive and negative touch in noncompliance episodes with their [children](#), in a real-world natural setting, outside the laboratory.

A group of university student researchers anonymously observed 106 discipline interactions between caregivers and children ages 3-5 in public places and recorded the results. The data were vetted, analyzed and published in the current issue of the research journal *Behavior and*

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