

Children raised with corporal punishment at greater risk of developing cancer and heart disease

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(Medical Xpress)—Parents who smack or shout at their children could be placing them at greater risk of developing cancer, heart disease and asthma.

Psychologists from Plymouth University have published research in the prestigious [Journal of Behavioral Medicine](#) which shows that the use of harsh punishment in childhood increases the risk of disease in later life.

They say the link could be caused because harsh punishment causes stress, and the increased stress levels in childhood then cause [biological changes](#) that increase the risk of disease in later life.

Professor Michael Hyland, from the University's School of Psychology, led the study. He said: "Early [life stress](#) in the form of trauma and abuse is known to creating long term changes that predispose to later disease. But this study shows that in a society where [corporal punishment](#) is considered normal, the use of corporal punishment is sufficiently stressful to have the same kinds of long term impact as abuse and trauma."

The study, conducted by Professor Hyland and colleagues Dr Ahmed Alkhalaf and Dr Ben Whalley, involved 700 people in Saudi Arabia, 250 of whom were healthy but another 150 who each had asthma, cancer or [cardiac disease](#). Participants were asked whether, and how often, they

had been physically or verbally punished as children.

Those who had cancer were 1.7 times more likely to have been beaten as a child compared to the healthy sample: Those with cardiac disease were 1.3 times more likely and those with asthma 1.6 times more likely.

Professor Hyland, who teaches [health psychology](#) within the University's School of Psychology, added: "Our research adds a new perspective on the increasing evidence that the use of corporal punishment can contribute to [childhood stress](#), and when it becomes a stressor, corporal punishment contributes to poor outcomes both for the individual concerned and for society."

Corporal punishment was first banned in the home and school by Sweden in 1976, and since then almost another 30 countries enacted similar legislation.

In many countries (including the UK) corporal punishment is banned in schools but not in the home. In yet other countries (including the USA) there is no universal ban of corporal punishment in schools.

Across the world, the use of corporal punishment for children has decreased over time, but it still remains widespread and is experienced by around 50% of children worldwide.

More information:

www.springerlink.com/content/7223127253327560/

Provided by University of Plymouth

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