

Spanking can be detrimental for children's behavior, even 10 years later

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Past research has indicated that physical punishment, such as spanking, has negative consequences on child development. However, most research studies have examined short-term associations—less than one

year—between discipline and development. Now, researchers at the University of Missouri have found that physical discipline experienced during infancy can negatively impact temperament and behavior among children in the fifth grade and into their teenage years.

"Long-term studies on the links among parenting, temperament and children's social behaviors have been limited, especially among racially diverse, low-income populations," said Gustavo Carlo, Millsap Professor of Diversity at MU and director of the MU Center for Family Policy and Research. "Our findings show that differences exist in the roles of parenting, temperament and self-regulation and how they impact a child's development."

Carlo's team analyzed data from 1,840 mothers and children enrolled in the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project. All participating families were at or below the [federal poverty level](#) and identified as either European American or African American. Information was collected when children were approximately 15 months old, 25 months old and in the fifth grade. Researchers used surveys of mothers and children, home visits and interviews with fifth grade teachers to complete the study.

The researchers found that if African-American children experienced severe punishment at 15 months they were more likely to exhibit increased aggressive and delinquent behaviors in the fifth grade. They were also less likely to show positive behaviors, such as helping others. No link was found between punishment and negative emotions for European-American children. Instead, among European- American children, [negative emotions](#), such as irritability, predicted such outcomes. For both groups, good self-regulation predicted better behavioral outcomes.

"Our findings show how parents treat their children at a young age,

particularly African-American children significantly impacts their behavior," Carlo said. "It is very important that parents refrain from [physical punishment](#) as it can have long-lasting impacts. If we want to nurture [positive behaviors](#), all parents should teach a child how to regulate their behaviors early."

Carlo suggests that this research will help parents, educators and other resource providers understand well-being and resiliency in low-income, racially diverse children.

"Negative emotionality and discipline as long-term predictors of behavioral outcomes in African-American and European-American [children](#)," recently was published in *Developmental Psychology*. Co-authors for the study from the Department of Human Development and Family Science were Cara Streit, doctoral candidate in [human development](#) and family sciences; Jean Ispa, professor; and Francisco Palermo, assistant professor. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the funding agencies.

More information: Cara Streit et al. Negative emotionality and discipline as long-term predictors of behavioral outcomes in African American and European American children., *Developmental Psychology* (2017). [DOI: 10.1037/dev0000306](https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000306)

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