Corporal Punishment and Aggression in Adulthood: a Product of Social Learning

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CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AND AGGRESSION IN ADULTHOOD: A PRODUCT OF
SOCIAL LEARNING

by

Derek Schneider

A Proposed Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Criminology

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December, 2012
CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AND AGGRESSION IN ADULTHOOD: A PRODUCT OF SOCIAL LEARNING

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December, 2012

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, Faculty Chair
Abstract

Corporal Punishment and Aggression in Adulthood: A Product of Social Learning

The focus of my study will be on the relationship between child abuse and aggression in adulthood. Individuals who support corporal punishment are more likely to support using violence against other adults, as compared to those that do not support corporal punishment. In other words, adults that are likely to use violence to resolve conflict with children are more inclined to use violence to resolve conflicts with other adults. Bandura (1977) explained that human behavior is learned observationally through modeling. The idea of modeling involves observing others and beginning to form an idea of how new behaviors are performed; on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action.

Keywords: Corporal punishment, aggression, social learning theory
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Christopher Morley (1890-1975) once wrote, “We call a child’s mind small simply by habit; perhaps it is larger than ours is, for it can take in almost anything without effort.” Bartol and Bartol (2011) explained that the first few years of a child’s life are the most important for emotional and physical development. Unfortunately, children can pick up negative behaviors that can have an impact on their life and their future behavior. Conversely, certain forms of corporal punishment and child abuse have been used in parallel in explaining why some children have become aggressive compared to children who use more pro-social means to resolve conflicts.

**Purpose of the Study**

The focus of my study will be on the relationship between child abuse and aggression in adulthood. During childhood and adolescence, observations of how parents behave, provides a learning tool for children as behavioral alternatives to what behaviors are “appropriate.” If family-of-origin stressors are handled with anger and aggression, then the child who has grown up in such an environment may be at greater risk for exhibiting those behaviors as an adult (Mihalic & Elliot, 1997). This study will focus on the individuals that experienced abuse as a child and whether that childhood experience is related to a tendency to use violence to resolve conflict as an adult.

**Rationale**

Corporal punishment is important because child abuse has serious implications for the child and their development as they progress from childhood to adolescence, and later adulthood. Social learning theories provide an important framework for understanding the transmission of aggression because most of our social values and behavior are learned. This research is needed
CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AND AGGRESSION IN ADULTHOOD

because learned behavior is often emulated behavior that contributes to all facets of life:
Prosperity, innovation and sometimes, crime.

Statement of the Problem

According to Bandura (1978), individuals, and especially children, model their conduct on behaviors they observe. Thus, children who have been physically abused may be more likely to engage in violent behavior, whereas children who have been sexually abused should be more likely to engage in sexual offenses. Similarly, research suggests that corporal punishment is related to higher levels of child externalizing behavior (Lansford et al., 2012). This is pertinent information because findings sponsored by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) found that childhood abuse and neglect increased the odds of future delinquency and adult criminality by twenty-nine percent (Widom & Maxfield, 2001). Finkelhor et al. (2009) explained that children who are exposed to violence undergo lasting physical, mental and emotional harm. These children have the potential to suffer from difficulties with attachment, regressive behavior, anxiety, depression, conduct problems, violence and aggression (Finkelhor et al., 2009).

Analytical Strategy

A quantitative analysis will be utilized in this study to determine if there is a relationship between corporal punishment/child abuse and aggression in adulthood. Quantitative research will be conducted using the General Social Survey (GSS) where I will cross-tabulate different variables to determine if child abuse and spanking are related to self-reported tendency to use violence to resolve conflict. In particular, I will focus on whether respondents who were abused as children have different attitudes towards spanking and aggression; while also allowing for control variables, such as, education, age, gender and race.
Review of the Literature

Social Learning Theory

Bandura (1977) explained that human behavior is learned observationally through modeling. The idea of modeling involves observing others and beginning to form an idea of how new behaviors are performed; on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action. Felson and Lane (2009) explained that vicarious learning is more likely when either the model or observer is rewarded, but it can occur without any kind of favorable consequences. According to this argument, some children learn to do what has been done to them. The child victim later becomes the perpetrator, resulting what has been called the intergenerational transmission of violence. Social learning theory helps explain this idea of the intergenerational transmission of violence. Under social learning theories, the intergenerational transmission of violence is the abuse that a child endures and later using that learned behavior (violence and aggression) in conflict situations. Bandura (1977) explained that during exposure, observers acquire mainly symbolic representations of the modeled activities, which serve as guides for appropriate performances. The symbolism behind aggression is the intimidation and compliance that the child witnesses. These behaviors have the potential to shape a child’s cognitions and later, emulate that behavior they witnessed as a child.

According to the social learning perspective, people vary in what they teach, model and reinforce with their children. At first, control is necessarily external. In an attempt to discourage hazardous conduct in children who have not yet learned to talk, parents must resort to physical intervention (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1977) also explained that symbolic modeling influences the development of moral judgments by what it portrays as acceptable or reprehensible conduct.
and by the sanctions and justifications applied to it. In other words, children apply symbolic meanings by the actions that are imposed upon them.

**Child Abuse and Exposure Literature**

There is a considerable amount of research on corporal punishment/ perceived child abuse and adverse effects that the child endures throughout his or her life. Researchers have gathered a tremendous amount of research pertaining to children who endure abuse and how that can affect their emotional, physical and psychological development. For children, corporal punishment/child abuse is a symbolic representation as to how to deal with bad behavior, with aggression. If child abuse persists into adolescence and young adulthood, it is that constant reinforcement that views aggression and violence as the way to deal with interpersonal conflict.

Corporal punishment (CP) is still commonly used today and idea of correcting behavior transcends the use of spanking. According to Straus (1994) corporal punishment is defined as, "The use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain but not injury for the purposes of correction or control of the child’s behavior" (p.4). Lansford et al. (2012) explained that even though corporal punishment is intended to discipline and correct behavior, CP still causes physical pain to the body, which may cross that threshold and constitute physical child abuse. Spanking on the buttocks, slapping the hands or face and grabbing or shoving the child with more intensity that is required are all common forms of CP. A majority of American families favor the use of corporal punishment, 77% of men and 65% of women (Lansford et al., 2012). Straus and Paschall (2009) reported that 93% of parents had hit their two to four year old child within a two week period and 58% of parents had hit their five to nine year old child within a two week period.
Research has shown that there are appropriate times to use corporal punishment, but there still remains that fine line of striking a child to discipline and child abuse. Simons and Wurtele (2010) explained that parents who usually engage in corporal punishment as a means to discipline their children usually exhibit certain characteristics, according to a number of studies. These parents were more likely to be young and unmarried, have a lower educational attainment and to have more children with fewer financial resources. Studies also show that parents tend to use corporal punishment in more stressful situations. Researchers have found that a majority of parents are more likely to spank when a child’s misbehavior results in a threat to a child’s safety (i.e., running into a busy street, lighting matches, etc.) as compared to transgressions that may involve violating others’ rights (i.e. stealing, hitting a peer or sibling, etc.). Simons and Wurtele explained that it may be conceivable that through frequent experiences of CP, children may develop attitudes about the appropriateness of CP as well as attitudes that support the use of aggressive approaches when resolving interpersonal conflict.

For a child, frequent encounters with corporal punishment have the potential to establish conflict resolutions tools for troublesome situations. Strassberg et al. (1994) examined the relationship between reported disciplinary practices of preschoolers’ parents and the child’s aggressive behavior towards their peers. They found that children who were spanked behaved significantly more aggressively with their peers compared to the children who were not spanked. This finding suggests that by observing their parents, spanked children may be learning that hitting is appropriate when resolving interpersonal conflict (Strassberg et al., 1994). This presents researchers with the side effect of spanking that definitely needs further exploration.

As mentioned, spanking for certain transgressions are utilized for a child to discontinue a behavior (i.e. running into a busy street), butspanking anytime a child’s misbehaves can hinder
useful problem-solving skills. Simons and Wurtele (2010) examined the relationship between parental approval and children’s approval of the use of CP as a means of punishment for all transgressions. Simons and Wurtele also examined if these children would be more likely to recommend hitting to resolve social disagreements with both peers and siblings. They found that eighty-two percent of parents reported experiencing some form of CP during their childhood and seventy-one percent of parents were currently using CP as a means to discipline their children (Simons & Wurtele, 2010). Results also indicated that children who were frequently spanked showed a substantial willingness to endorse spanking as a corrective action for misbehavior in comparison to those children who were spanked less frequently and children that were never spanked. There was a strong association between experiencing spanking and willingness to hit to resolve conflicts between peers and siblings. Surprisingly, of the children who were never physically punished, one-hundred percent advocated the use of pro-social strategies to resolve conflict with peers and siblings (Simons & Wurtele, 2010). In contrast, sixty-three percent of the children who were frequently spanked were willing to hit a peer during a conflict in comparison to twelve percent who were spanked less frequently. Similarly, seventy-nine percent of children who had experienced frequent spanking were more likely to support hitting during a conflict with a sibling in comparison to thirty-eight percent of children who were spanked less frequently (Simons & Wurtele, 2010).

It may seem conceivable that constant discipline with spanking can begin to shape a child’s mentality towards aggression. Frequency of CP was the strongest predictor of children’s endorsement of hitting to resolve conflict situations (Simons and Wurtele, 2010). Simons and Wurtele go on to explain that ideally, parents use disciplinary strategies, such as spanking, to teach their children about self-control and responsibility for their own behavior. These
researchers also paint a picture of the fine line that exists between spanking and child abuse by explaining that spanking teaches our children about the morality of hitting, that it is morally acceptable to hit those you love whenever they misbehave. This finding implies that children do learn from their parents’ disciplinary strategies. For the children who are physically punished, they observe and learn that it is acceptable to hit others to resolve conflicts (Simons & Wurtele, 2010).

Child abuse can be very dangerous for a child’s development but there has also been research that explains how this abuse can be just as detrimental for an adolescent. Lansford et al. (2009) explained that parents tend to decrease their use of physical discipline during late childhood to early adolescence. Lansford et al. (2009) explained that during adolescence, the parent-child relationship is said to be transformed, changing from independent parental decision making to mutual decision making. Kuhl et al. (2012) explained that adolescence is a time when cognitive and psychological resources guiding decision making are developed; adolescents then acquire human and social assets that shape their later lives. However, some parents are unable or unwilling to adjust their socialization efforts and may maintain or even increase their levels of physical discipline (Lansford et al., 2009). Deater-Deckard et al. (2003) found that young adolescents who reported that they received higher amounts of CP were more likely to endorse the use of CP compared to teens who had not experienced CP. Deater-Deckard et al. concluded that, “The development of attitudes about the appropriateness and effectiveness of physical forms of punishment is an important component of the social cognitions underlying the intergenerational transmission of physical discipline” (p.357). Given the developmental importance of these years, studies have identified child abuse as a potentially disruptive force in adolescents’ lives, highlighting its negative psychological and behavioral ramifications; for
example, victims have reported higher rates of depressive symptoms, social anxiety, suicidal thoughts, substance abuse, anger and aggression (Kuhl et al., 2012).

Adolescent children who have been victim of persistent corporal punishment not only begin to adopt aggressive strategies, but may also be forced into situations that could facilitate aggression. Johnson and Mollborn (2009) explained that child abuse in adolescence is an early life hardship that can disrupt the orderliness and timing of transitions to adulthood, propelling these children towards experiences that challenge the norms about childhood and adolescence. Kuhl et al. (2012) explained that these challenges may hinder an adolescents’ self-image that may encourage them to assume adult roles and responsibilities at a point in their life that may be inconsistent with their normative development. Adolescents experiencing violent victimization may be at a higher risk of entering volatile intimate relationships which could subject that individual to the consequences of intimate partner violence (IPV). This consideration is important given that early union formation is a risk factor for violence and aggression within those relationships (Demaris et al., 2003; Kuhl et al., 2012). Wareham et al. (2009) explained that dysfunctional parents become role models for their children regarding the appropriateness of using anger and aggression to deal with stressors and frustrations when interacting with an intimate partner. Modeled behaviors are reinforced when the individual perceives favorable outcomes from the use of violence and aggression. This phenomenon introduces the idea of “cycle of violence.” Children who are abused learn to use aggression to resolve interpersonal conflict; thus, that abuse they endure has the potential to perpetuate violence and aggression later in life.

**Research Question**
Children who witness and endure physical abuse will associate it with underlying meanings of how to handle stressful and conflict situations with aggression. This idea leads the central research question in this study: Does being beaten as a child increase the likelihood that individuals will use violence to resolve conflict as adults?
Methodology

Research Design

This study will use an exploratory and quantitative analysis research design. Babbie (2010) explained that quantitative analysis is a numerical representation and manipulation of observations for the purpose of describing and explaining phenomena that those observations reflect. Quantitative research also looks at the relationships between variables and can establish cause and effect in certain circumstances. Exploratory studies are usually done for three purposes: (1) to satisfy the researcher’s curiosity and desire for a better understanding of a research topic, (2) to test the feasibility of undertaking a more extensive study, and (3) to develop the methods to be employed in any subsequent study. These types of studies are important because they offer new interests for researchers to topics that are relatively new or unfamiliar to the researcher (Babbie, 2010).

Data Collection Model

Data will be collected from the General Social Survey (GSS), a national data program for the social sciences that has been collected since 1972 by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), a social science research center at the University of Chicago. The research ascertained is designed to monitor social change in the United States and to compare the United States to other nations.

Subjects

The subjects were individuals who responded to versions 1 through 9 of the 1994 General Social Survey, conducted for the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). Questions that were pertinent to this study were only asked from 1974-1994 in interviews, surveys, etc. so the last year of participation, 1994, was utilized. Participation was voluntary and data are
anonymous. The median length of the interview was said to be about an hour and a half. Each survey from 1972-2001 was independently drawn from a sample of English-speaking persons at least eighteen years of age and over, living in non-institutional arrangements within the United States. Versions 1 through 9 included a number of questions relating to child abuse, corporal punishment, assaultive behavior, gender, age, race and education of the respondent.

**Measures**

I assessed spanking and adult aggressive behavior, as the dependent variables, using the questions, “Are there any situations you can imagine in which you would approve of a man punching another adult male?” Respondents answered, yes (1) or no (2). Spanking and corporal punishment were also another dependent variable utilized, using the question, “Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree that it is sometimes necessary to discipline a child with a good, hard spanking?” Respondents who responded that they strongly agreed were coded (1), agree (2), disagree (3) and strongly disagreed (4).

I assessed child abuse as the independent variable, using the question, “Have you ever been punched or beaten another person?” For the respondents who answered “yes,” they were then asked the question, “Did this happen to you as a child or as an adult?” Respondents were coded (1) for child, (2) for adult and (3) for both. Because it is not the core focus of this study, respondents who answered yes to being beaten only as an adult were deleted from the analysis. Where the respondent answered the question that they were beaten as only a child will be abbreviated (child) and abused as both child and adult will be abbreviated (child/adult).

For the purpose of this study, I began by conducting a bivariate analysis through the use of cross-tabulation with the independent variable (Have you ever been beaten as a child?) and the appropriate dependent variables (DV #1: Aggression used as conflict resolution tool, and; DV #2
approval of spanking) to determine if experiencing childhood violence is related to later use of violence to resolve conflict. Aggression used for conflict resolution was operationalized in three ways to determine if spanking has an effect on a child's motive to use aggression to resolve interpersonal conflict. I assessed being beaten as a child with the approval of spanking. I also assessed being beaten as a child and the approval of a man punching another adult male. Lastly, I assessed spanking with the approval of a man punching another adult male.

After exploring the bivariate effects of experienced childhood violence on my dependent variables, I examined the same relationships while controlling for the impact of key background characteristics, such as education, age, gender, and race.

Gender and education are particularly important because there are a multitude of studies that need to be done in order to implement necessary policies to combat progression of intergenerational transmission of aggression. There are a multitude of transgressions that can transpire as a result of child abuse, both internalizing and externalizing. More research is needed to determine which gender is affected the most when being exposed to child abuse. Education is of interest because there is a perception that people with a lower education status tend to be more problematic and prone to crime (Taylor et al., 2011).
Results

**Bivariate Analysis**

After the data for individuals who had missing or inappropriate responses were deleted, 6,789 respondents remained: 44% were abused a child and 22.1% were abused as both a child and adult. As mentioned, the respondents who answered that they were punched or beaten by another person only as an adult were deleted from the analysis. For the male respondents, a majority of them reported that they were beaten only as a child making up 48.1%. For the female respondents, there was an opposite effect where 53% reported that they were beaten only as an adult and only 30.3% reported that they were beaten only as a child, as shown in Table 1. Percentages varied greatly because they were in respect to being beaten as only a child, only as an adult and both as a child and adult which equaled 100%, which you will see in the tables below.

Table 2 exhibits the race of the respondents remained relatively level throughout all races. White respondents were shown to report being beaten as only a child and as both a child and adult slightly more than the black and other race respondents.

**Table 1**

*Gender of respondents who reported being beaten*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beaten as a child or adult</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>N=</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>4448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
<td>2341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>6789</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cross-tabulating being beaten as a child with the approval of a man punching another adult male had no substantive results, 42.2% who were only beaten as a child said that they approved the use of violence compared to 41.4% who said they did not approve. Cross-tabulating being beaten as a child with the approval of a spanking also had no substantive results. All percentages were moderately even between those who strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Spanking cross-tabulated with the approval of a man punching another adult male did yield some important, yet, modest results as shown in Table 3. Individuals that favor spanking are slightly more likely to approve of punching another man than those that do not favor spanking.
Table 3

Approval of spanking and man punching another adult male

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Favor spanking to discipline child</th>
<th>Ever approve of a man punching another adult male (Column %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=</td>
<td>2561</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An interesting pattern was also exhibited with the amount a person was beaten and their approval of a man punching another man as shown in Table 4. For people who were beaten once, 20.8% were more likely to approve the use of violence. For respondents who were beaten two to three times, 35.2% were more approving for the use of violence. Lastly, for the respondents who were beaten more than four times, 44% approved the use of violence during conflict situations. This finding suggests that frequency plays a substantial role in the approval of violence being used during conflict situations. Again, for the respondents who did not approve of a man punching another adult male were irrelevant because of the pattern that is exhibited with the respondents who answered “Yes” for the approval of a man punching another adult male.
Table 4

*Number of times a respondent was beaten and their approval of punching*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If beaten- How many times</th>
<th>Ever approve of a man punching another adult male (Column %)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 times</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+ times</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=</td>
<td>2478</td>
<td>873</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Controlling for the impact of education*

For the respondents who were beaten as a child and approved a man punching another adult male, the pattern varied greatly. According to Tables 5.1 and 5.2, it appeared that respondents who had attained a higher degree level were more approving in the use of violence against another adult male, 59.2% who were beaten as a child and approved a man punching another male had their graduate degree compared to 34% who had less than a high school diploma. In actuality, what these tables seem to show is respondents with higher levels of education were more likely to report that they were beaten as a child and less likely to report that they were beaten as adults. Respondents who were beaten as both a child and as an adult did not yield any meaningful results.
Table 5.1

Respondents who were beaten as a child and approved punching another male

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ever approve a man punching another adult male (Column %)</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>RS highest degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BA/BS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaten as a child of adult</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=</td>
<td>1006</td>
<td>2566</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2

Respondents who were beaten as a child and disapproved punching another male

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ever approve a man punching another adult male (Column %)</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>RS highest degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Less than HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AA/AS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BA/BS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaten as a child of adult</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>865</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was a moderate pattern for the respondents who were beaten as a child and approved both a man punching another adult male and spanking. Approval of violence appeared more prevalent among higher educated respondents. 52.5% who approved spanking and hitting another adult male had a bachelor's degree and 60% had a graduate degree compared to 32.5% who approved spanking and hitting another adult male had a high school diploma and 26.2% who had less than a high school diploma. Again, respondents with a higher educational attainment reported that they were more likely to being beaten as a child and less likely to report being beaten as an adult. The tables for these findings resemble the tables above, but with
slightly different percentages. Again, the respondents who were beaten as both the child and adult did not yield any meaningful results.

Controlling for Gender

For the respondents who were beaten as a child and approved the punching of a man by another adult male, the difference was only apparent for males, but not for females. In table 6, males who were subjected to violence as both a child and as an adult were slightly more likely to support punching another man; there was no effect for females. Similar statistics were shown for being abused as a child and the approval for the use of spanking.

Table 6
Respondent’s gender who were beaten as a child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ever approve a man punching another adult male (Column %)</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondent sex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaten as a child or adult</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>30.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>52.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=</td>
<td>3213</td>
<td>1553</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Controlling for age

Percentages were relatively stable throughout all ages for the respondents who were abused and the approval of a man punching another adult male in a conflict situation, with one exception. Respondents eighteen to twenty-three years of age reported more support for the use of aggression in conflict resolution situations. For respondents who reported that they favored the use of punching another adult male, ages eighteen to twenty-three showed a mean approval percentage of 54%. Respondents twenty-four years to roughly eighty-three years of age had a
mean of 40.5% in which they approved the use of punching another adult as a conflict resolution tool. There was little to no difference for the respondents who reported that they were abused as a child and approved spanking.

Controlling for race

For this particular study, race did not play a significant factor for children, children/adults who were abused and their perception of using aggression towards another person. There is a slightly higher percentage for whites and the approval of aggression but not enough to conclude any meaningful findings according to Table 7. There was little to no difference for the individuals who were beaten as a child and approved spanking.

Table 7

Race of respondent who were beaten as a child and approval of punching another male

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beaten as a child or adult</th>
<th>Race of respondent</th>
<th>Ever approve of a man punching another adult male (Column %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=</td>
<td></td>
<td>4216</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Discussion

I asked the research question: “Does being beaten as a child increase the likelihood that individuals will use violence to resolve conflict as adults?” Even though the two bivariate findings, being hit as a child with the approval of spanking and being hit as a child with the approval a man hitting another adult male did not yield any noticeable results, there were still important results in the analysis where I controlled for the effects of gender, education, age and race. On the other hand, the relationship between spanking and the approval of a man punching adult male deserves some attention because of the implications involved. Eighty-one percent of the respondents who approved spanking also approved the use of violence against an adult male compared to 19.5% who disagreed that it was ok to use such violence/conflict resolution tactics. This finding implies that those individuals who support corporal punishment are more likely to support using violence against other adults, as compared to those that do not support corporal punishment. In other words, adults that are likely to use violence to resolve conflict with children are more inclined to use violence to resolve conflicts with other adults.

Another important finding was the amount a person was beaten and their approval of a man punching of another adult male. This finding suggests that frequency plays as important factor in the use of aggression in interpersonal conflict situations, which suggests that social learning theories can help explain why children learn to become aggressive. The social learning theory may help explain how multiple episodes of aggression can act as a reinforcement as to how to handle conflict situations. Lansford et al. (2012) explained that corporal punishment is not associated with increased child externalizing behaviors if such punishment is infrequent and not severe (i.e. only spanks on the clothed buttocks or slaps on the child’s hand). This can be an area that deserves future research because research suggests that the use of an object (belt,
paddle, switch, etc.) for spanking is quite frequent in the United States. For children, frequent corporal punishment episodes offers constant reinforcement as to how to handle a situation, with "aggressive discipline."

Age was also an interesting variable in the controlled analysis. As mentioned, respondents who were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three who reported that they were beaten as a child had a higher approval percentage for the use of violence. An explanation for this finding may include for the respondents that were beaten as a child, they may not initially know how to handle conflict situations effectively. As they move out and establish themselves, they may soon develop pro-social alternatives to aggression when confronted with adversity. More research is needed to determine how brain development and maturation plays a significant factor in determining if abused children can diminish their aggressive tendencies and adopt a more pro-social avenue for conflict resolution.

For both bivariate and controlled analyses, findings supported that the respondents who answered that they were beaten only as a child yielded much more interesting results compared to the respondents who answered they were beaten as both a child and adult. The findings within this study found only a small association between being beaten as both child and adult, and reported aggression. Even though this was the case, there are still variables to consider that may yield different results in future research when looking at prolonged abuse.

Limitations

Limitations can occur anytime secondary data is used because of the fact that we are not receiving the information directly, but analyzing what others have studied. I used single-questions to measure complex forms of social behavior. For example, in the GSS, spanking is the only variable used to represent corporal punishment when in actuality, corporal punishment
can involve an array of disciplinary acts involving the child. Nonetheless, the measures I relied upon provide a good starting point for exploring the relationship between childhood violence and the later use of aggression to resolve conflict.

*Implementation of healthy alternatives to corporal punishment*

Lansford et al. (2009) explained that more research needs to be done on discipline strategies and parenting practices. As a child ages, his or her cognitive abilities become more sophisticated, therefore, the parents need to rely more on reasoning and other nonphysical forms of discipline. A child's internalization of morality and the development of social and emotional competence can be established through reasoning, offering explanations, providing guidance about rules and morals and also discussing how the child's behavior affects others. Future research can offer this guidance for parents in reducing the use of physical discipline and increasing pro-social forms of conflict resolution. Lansford et al. (2012) found that children who experienced mild spanking in one year were at increased risk of experiencing harsh spanking the next year. The risk of mild spanking escalating into harsh spanking and the link between harsh spanking and increases in future child externalizing behaviors suggest the need to work with parents to find alternatives to spanking for managing a child's behavior (Lansford et al., 2012).

*Conclusion*

Social learning theories have offered a number of credible explanations as to why our behaviors transpire the way they do. From birth, through childhood into adolescence and adulthood, we learn a multitude of behaviors that impacts our lives. Those behaviors shape who we are and how we react in certain situations that can enable us to strive or become victims of manipulation and coercion. Corporal punishment has been used to correct behaviors and is still widely used in global society today, but there still remains a fine line between corporal
punishment and child abuse. Research has shown that frequent corporal punishment/child abuse has the propensity to shift a child’s cognitive processes from pro-social means to aggressive means in dealing with conflict resolution. If parents can cut down on the frequency of corporal punishment and utilize more effective conflict resolution tools, then I believe that will enable a child to experience a life full of prosperity and opportunity. If parents and authority figures can be educated on the serious implications involved with corporal punishment/perceived child abuse, then we may be able to reduce the intergenerational transmission of aggression and violence.
References


