International Variations in Child Discipline: Harsh Discipline in the Developing World

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Culture and child abuse

- society’s shared fund of ideas, beliefs & behaviors about social conduct
- “Culture is the negotiable template for daily life ... that directs parents in their parenting tasks & helps define unacceptable acts”
- Culture includes the shared understandings among a group of people about how parents should raise their children.
Measurement issues

- Child abuse definitions & recognition vary by culture / country
- Few countries collect official child abuse data
- US has reputation for high homicide rate
- Largest literature on child abuse is in US
- Widespread perception that child abuse is US problem!
Child discipline by parent report in the US (NC & SC 2003)

- Spanking 45%
- Spanking (object) 25%
- Slapping face 6%
- Pinching 6%
- Yelling 75%
- Taking privil. 85%
- Time-out 79%
Harsh discipline in past year

Overall 4.3%
- Shaking < 2 2.6%
- Beating 0.3%
- Burning 0.2%
- Kicking 0.3%
- Hitting with object (not on buttocks) 3.4%
North & South Carolina harsh discipline rates by selected demographics 2003

- **Age:**
  - 0-4 yrs: 2.8%
  - 5-8 yrs: 5.3%
  - 9-12 yrs: 5.9%
  - >12 yrs: 3.8%

- **Gender:**
  - Male: 3.4%
  - Female: 5.3%

- **Perpetrator:**
  - Mother: 3.6%
  - Father: 2.2%
Western modes of child rearing

- Antiquity - Infanticidal mode
- 5th to 14th century - abandonment mode
- 14th to 17th century - ambivilent mode
- 18th century - intrusive mode
- 19th century - socializing mode
- 20th century - helping mode
Infanticide in antiquity

- Supported by Plato and Aristotle
- Ancient Greece - Infants examined by Council of elders - if weak or deformed thrown from mountaintop
- Roman Law of Twelve Tables - forbade raising of deformed children
- “Slaughter of the Innocents”
Abandonment

- Founding of Rome
- Abandonment of Moses
- Development of Foundling Hospitals
- Wet nurses & apprenticing
- “Street Arabs” & “Guttersnipes”
Ambivalent mode
Intrusive mode
“Withold not correction from a child: for if thou strike him with a rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with a rod and deliver his soul from hell.”

– Proverbs 23: 13-14
Socializing mode
Helping Mode - 20th century

- 1904 National Child Labor Committee
- 1937 Fair Labor Practices Act
- Development of kindergartens
- 1962 Recognition of child abuse
International data on physical abuse

- **Egypt**: a cross-sectional survey of children in 4th grade
  - 37% were beaten or tied-up & 26% reported physical injuries

- **South Korea**:
  - 69/1000 4th & 5th grade children report severe violence:
    - defined as kicking, beating, biting, throwing, or threatening with a knife or a gun *more than 2 times a month*  
  - Parent: 67% whipped & 45% hit, kicked or beat children
International data on physical abuse

- Romania:
  - 4.6% of children report severe & frequent abuse such as hit with object, burning, or being deprived of food
  - 47% of parents admit to beating their children “regularly” & 16% report beating with objects.
WorldSAFE: World Studies of Abuse & the Family Environment

- An international project investigating violence toward women & children.
- *WorldSAFE* seeks to examine factors related to violent behavior, & see how these factors vary across cultures.
- Every *WorldSAFE* site has ties to community agencies or NGOs involved in violence against women or children.
Fielded **core survey questionnaires** for women, aged 15-49 with ≥ one dependent child

**Sampling** conducted in similar ways
- A defined population is selected.
- Random sample of households
- Within homes, a woman is randomly selected
- An Index Child is randomly chosen

Interviews of 1/2 hour in the home
19 samples in 6 countries (14 in India)

- Chennai non-slum
- NC & SC in USA
- Delhi Non-slum
- Manila, Philippines
- Trivandrum, India
- Temuco, Chile
- Ismailia, Egypt
- Trivandrum-rural
- Lucknow Non-slum
- Chennai slum
- Brazil slum
- Nagpur slum
- Vellore Non-slum
- Vellore Rural
- Nagpur rural
- Bhopal slum
- Lucknow rural
- Bhopal rural
- Delhi slum
Average years of maternal education
Measurement of poverty in WorldSAFE

- Asked about possessions
  - 0-13 items including radio, TV, heater, bicycle, etc.
  - Summary measure: number of appliances
Parent-child conflict tactics scale

- All adults use certain methods to teach children the right behavior or to address a problem.

  I will read various methods that might be used & I want you to tell me how often you have used this with (child’s name) in the last year.

- Tell me if you have done this to (child’s name): never, once or twice, or three or more times in the last year.
36 items about discipline

- Explained why something was wrong
- Told child to start or stop doing something
- Slapped face or head
- Made him/her stay in one place (time-out)
- Shook him/her
- Hit on buttocks with an object
Physical discipline in 5 countries

- USA
- Chile
- Brazil
- Egypt
- Philippines

- Spank
- Slap
- Hit(object)
- Beat-up
Notes on physical discipline

- In 11 of 14 Indian communities slapping face more common than spanking
- In Chile, Brazil & Philippines, spanking more common
- Beating-up reported in Egypt & in less educated communities of India
Non-physical discipline in 5 countries

USA, Chile, Brazil, Egypt, Philippines

Yell, Time Out, take Privil.
Non-physical discipline in India

- Yell
- Time-out
- Take Privil.

Locations:
- Chennai
- Delhi
- Trivandrum
- rural Tri
- Lucknow
- Chen slum
- Nagpur slum
- Vellore
- rural Vell
- rural Nag
- Bhopal slum
- rural Luck
- rural Bhop
- Delhi slum
Notes on non-physical discipline

- Yelling is frequent
- Time-out less common in developing countries
- Taking privileges away frequent in US, Chile and one Indian slum
Percent parental self-report of shaking children under 2 years of age

- Chennai
- USA
- Delhi
- Philippines
- Trivandrum
- Chile
- Egypt
- rural Triv
- Lucknow
- slum Chenn
- Brazil
- slum Nag
- Vellore
- rural Vell
- rural Nag
- rural Bhopal
- rural Luck
- rural Bho
- rural Delhi
- slum Delhi
Percent parental self-report of harsh punishment (abuse?)
Notes on harsh punishment & shaking

- More than 10% of infants are shaken in every community but the US & Chennai
- Median rate of harsh punishment in low & middle income communities is 4 times the US
- In Bhopal the rate of harsh punishment is >30%
- India alone contains the lowest & highest rates
- Strong relationship to years of maternal education
World Report on Violence Against Children

- Paucity of population-based data in most countries.
- Most instruments developed in Western countries and translated (JVQ, PC CTS)
- Recommended scientists and policymakers develop a shared set of definitions and research tools
Three Tools (ICAST)

- Complementary research instruments developed in multi-national, multi-lingual, multi-cultural context.
- Instrument for children, young adults, and parents.
- Intended to drive research, policy, advocacy, and evaluation.
- A tool kit— instruments, field guides, ethical considerations, data entry templates.
Development

- **Step 1** Initial consultation: Three day meeting with approx 50 child protection researchers and clinicians, after the ISPCAN World Congress in Brisbane.

- Working groups discussed their experiences measuring child abuse and drafted preliminary questionnaires.

- Leaders of the working groups refined the draft tools through email exchanges.
Step 2 Delphi (expert review) studies. Approx 120 experts around the world were asked by ISPCAN to participate.

They were divided randomly into two groups: ICAST R and ICAST P.

Limited review of ICAST C (roughly 10 participating scientists)
Pilot testing

**ICAST R**
- Colombia:
- DR Congo:
- Egypt:
- India:
- Kyrgyzstan:
- Lebanon:
- Malaysia:
- Russia:

**ICAST C**
- Russia
- Iceland
- India
- Columbia

**ICAST P**
- Colombia
- Egypt
- India
- Lebanon
- Malaysia
- Russia
- DR Congo
Field testing

- Convenience sample of approximately 120 subjects per instrument per sight.
- Translation, back translation.
- Local ethical review where possible. ISPCAN ethical review for all sights.
- Focus groups
- Local data entry
- Central data cleaning and analysis
Psychological victimization example (ICAST CH)

![Bar chart showing the level of wishing you were dead in different countries: Columbia, India, Russia, and Iceland. Russia has the highest count, followed by India and then Columbia and Iceland.](image)
Neglect example (ICAST CH)

- Columbia
- India
- Russia
- Iceland

Bar chart showing the number of people who felt not cared for in different countries.
Sexual victimization example

- Tried to have sex with you (unwilling)

Columbia | India | Russia | Iceland
---|---|---|---
2 | 4 | 18 | 2
Physical victimization example

- Columbia
- Egypt
- India
- Lebanon
- Malaysia
- Russia

(spanking)
Severe physical victimization example
Application

- Studies in various stages of development in Georgia, Italy, Belarus, Greece, Ecuador, China, Thailand, Switzerland, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Saudi Arabia
- The Georgia study was commissioned by UNICEF Georgia coordinating with the Ministry of Education to inform the development of a Safe Child and Safe Schools policy
Recent NC spanking data

- Survey of nearly 3000 parents of NC children less than 2 sampled by birth certificates
- Anonymous telephone survey
- Used PC-CTS
- 52% response rate
Percent of children unspanked by age in months

- 6% spanked at 3 months!
- 25% are already spanked at 9 mo. visit to MD
- 50% spanked by 15 months!
Summary and discussion

- World perception that US has biggest problem of child abuse
- Evolution of less violent approaches to discipline over time
- Survey data reveal that nearly all parents yell
- Spanking is common in the countries we studied
- 22 countries have outlawed corporal punishment
- 4.3% of US children are harshly physically punished
Summary II

- Low & middle income countries have a higher rate of harsh punishment, psychological punishment, & shaking
- 15% of low & middle income children appear to be physically abused
- With the addition of neglect & sexual abuse, large portions of the world’s children are in harms way
- We didn’t include spanking of children at 3 months of age as abuse but AAP anticipatory guidance recommendations may be too late