

New study in *Child Development*, Vol. 80, Issue 5, by researchers at Duke, University of Missouri-Columbia, University of South Carolina, Columbia University, Harvard University, and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The study was funded by the National Institute of Mental Health.

Here is a news report on the study which was funded by the National Institute of Mental Health:

In study of low-income toddlers, spanking found to have negative effects

A new longitudinal study that looks at how low-income parents discipline their young children has found that spanking 1-year-olds leads to more aggressive behaviors and less sophisticated cognitive development in the next two years. Verbal punishment is not associated with such effects, especially when it is accompanied by emotional support from moms. In addition, 1-year-olds' fussiness predicted spanking and verbal punishment at ages 1, 2, and 3.

The study, which explored whether mothers' behaviors lead to problematic behavior in children, whether children's challenging behaviors elicit harsher discipline, or both, appears in the September/October 2009 issue of the journal *Child Development*. It was conducted by researchers at Duke University, the University of Missouri-Columbia, the University of South Carolina, Columbia University, Harvard University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Beliefs on spanking vary across cultures. In this study, the researchers looked at more than 2,500 exclusively low-income White, African American, and Mexican-American mothers and their young children, interviewing and observing them at home when the children were 1, 2, and 3 years old. All participants' family incomes were at or below the federal poverty level.

Using their own interpretations of spanking, mothers reported how often anyone in the home had spanked their children in the past week. Researchers also made in-home observations of how often mothers verbally punished (scolded, yelled, or made negative comments) their children during the visits.

The study found that African American children were spanked and verbally punished significantly more than the other children in the study. The authors speculated that this may be due to cultural factors, such as belief in the importance of children's respect for elders and in the value of physical discipline to instill that respect. Moreover, some African American mothers say that in preparing their children for a harsh, physically dangerous, and racially discriminating world, there is little room for error in their childrearing.

The authors also uncovered information about the effects of those types of discipline.

"Our findings clearly indicate that spanking affects children's development," according to Lisa J. Berlin, research scientist at the Center for Child and Family Policy at Duke University and the study's lead author. Specifically, children who were spanked more often at 1 behaved more aggressively when they were 2 and had lower scores on tests measuring thinking skills when they were 3. These findings held up even after taking into consideration such family characteristics as mothers' race and ethnicity, age, and education; family income and structure; and the children's gender. The study also found that children who were more aggressive at age 2 and had lower cognitive development scores at ages 1 and 2 were not spanked more at ages 2 and 3. "So the mothers' behaviors look more influential than the children's," said Berlin.

Unlike spanking, however, verbal punishment alone didn't affect either children's aggression or their cognitive development. But interestingly, when verbal punishment was accompanied by emotional support from moms, the children did better on the tests of cognitive ability.

The study was funded by the National Institute of Mental Health.

Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 80, Issue 5, Correlates and Consequences of Spanking and Verbal Punishment for Low-Income White, African American, and Mexican American Toddlers by Berlin, LI (Duke University), Ilsa, Jivi, and Fine, MA (University of Missouri-Columbia), Malone, PS (University of South Carolina), Brooks-Gunn, J, and Bracy-Smith, C (Columbia University), Ayoub, C (harvard University), and Bai, Y (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill). Copyright 2009 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.

<http://www.scienceblog.com/cms/study-low-income-toddlers-spanking-found-have-negative-effects-25157.html>

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See a report on physical punishment of children in the U.S. - what research tells us about its effects on children written in lay language. The report and endorsement forms are online at:

<http://www.phoenixchildrens.com/about/community-outreach-education/effective-discipline.html>