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Corporal Punishment and Affect Dysregulation in the Parental Role*

1. Introduction

Corporal punishment is still a common child-rearing method.¹ Despite the awareness of its harmful consequences for child development and the proven links to problems in adulthood, the debate on its appropriateness remains very topical. In addition, research shows that the mere awareness of the harmful effects of corporal punishment is often not enough for parents to actually stop using it.² Even parents who do not agree with the use of corporal punishment in child-rearing sometimes find themselves in a situation when

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¹ N. duRivage, K. Keyes, E. Leray, O. Pez, A. Bitfoi, C. Koç, ... V. Kovess-Ma, *Parental use of corporal punishment in Europe: Intersection between public health and policy*, PLoS ONE 10(2): e0118059. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0118059 (2015). J.E. Lansford & K. Deater-Deckard, *Childrearing discipline and violence in developing countries*, "Child Development" 83 (2012) 1, pp. 62-75. M.J. MacKenzie, E. Nicklas, J. Waldfogel & J. Brooks-Gunn, *Spanking and child development across the first decade of life*, "Pediatrics" 132 (2012) 5, pp. e1118-e1125.

² J. E. Lansford, C. Cappab, D. L. Putnick, M. H. Bornsteinc, K. Deater-Deckardd, R. H. Bradleye, *Change over time in parents' beliefs about and reported use of corporal*

they do not know how to react except by corporal punishment (most often spanking). This article presents current research about the prevalence of corporal punishment, the connection between corporal punishment and development outcomes, as well as the intergenerational transmission of affect regulation, which explains the involuntary, impulsive corporal punishment of children in the family.

2. Child-rearing and corporal punishment

Corporal punishment is one of the punitive child-rearing methods. Child-raising is a process in which parents allow and guide children's physical, psychological and emotional development. Child-rearing occurs in the relationship between the parent and the child, two persons who are on different developmental levels. In the family, the interaction between the child and the parents is not a one-way process: family members influence each other and thus co-create mental, behavioral and emotional patterns.³ With the definition of child-rearing as an interpersonal influence, child-rearing can be understood as a conscious, targeted activity or as an unconscious, targeted activity. An unconscious targeted child-rearing activity can be explained by the process of projection-introjection identification in the family, where parents, who want to maintain internal equilibrium and resolve painful contents, transfer their intrapsychic contents into the family system and consequently in their relation with children.⁴ Because of the child's dependent position, parents, with their unconscious activity, unfavorably influence the child's reaching of his potentials at the behavioral, emotional and biological levels.

Restricting the child's activity, or disciplining a child, is a part of child-rearing. Discipline in child-rearing can be defined as the targeted influence

punishment in eight countries with and without legal bans, "Child Abuse and Neglect" 71 (2017), pp. 44-55.

³ E. M. Cummings, J. M. Braungart-Rieker, T. D. Rocher-Schudlich, *Emotion and personality development in childhood*, in: R. M. Lerner, M. A. Easterbrooks, J. Mistry (eds.), *Handbook of psychology: developmental psychology Vol. 6*, New Jersey 2003, John Wiley&Sons Inc., pp. 211-240; N. Darling, L. Steinberg, *Parenting style as context: An integrative model*, "Psychological Bulletin" 113 (1993) 3, pp. 487-496.

⁴ C. Gostečnik, *Relational family therapy: The systemic, interpersonal and intrapsychic experience*, New York 2017: Routledge.

of parents on the child in order to create acceptable, adapted behavior and self-control in the child.⁵ Such disciplining covers a lesser part of child-rearing, since child-rearing includes not only subordination to rules, but also the pursuit of the child's independence and the promotion of his autonomy. Disciplining, as the teaching of rules, is not equal to punishment. Punishment is a consequence of the violation of pre-set norms and rules, while disciplining is the teaching of discipline or subordination to rules and regulations. Punishment can thus be understood as the result of a specific unwanted behavior, while disciplining is the activity of the child-rearer, with the aim of preventing the violation of rules as much as possible. Punishment is therefore defined as one of the ways of disciplining children in the family⁶; it is parental response to unwanted behavior in a child with punitive child-rearing methods.

In punishment, we should also take into account the bi-directional relationship in which child-rearing is carried out. Punishment as a response to unwanted behavior of a child, with the aim of preventing this behavior, has an effect only if the child can link the discomfort of punishment to his behavior. It can therefore be said that punitive child-rearing methods are determined by the child according to his ability and readiness to connect punishment with his behavior.⁷ How the child understands the parents' behavior and responses to his behavior depends, of course, on the relationship that parents form with their child. We can assume that the more this relationship is rich with connectedness and responsiveness to the child's needs, the greater the likelihood that the child will be able to link the punishment with his behavior and give it the meaning that will enable him to change his behavior. It is therefore important for child-rearing punishment to be imposed by a person who has previously formed a close relationship with a penalized person through supportive child-rearing measures.

⁵ M. Peček Čuk, I. Lesar, *Moč vzgoje. Sodobna vprašanja teorije vzgoje*, Ljubljana 2009, Tehniška založba Slovenije; N. J. Salkind, *Child development*, New York 2002, Macmillan Library Reference.

⁶ R. S. Socolar, E. Savage, H. Evans, *A longitudinal study of parental discipline of young children*, "Southern Medical Journal" 100 (2007) 5, pp. 472-477; R. S. Socolar, E. L. Savage, H. Evans, *Factors that affect parental disciplinary practices of children aged 12 to 19 months*, "Southern Medical Journal" 98 (2005) 12, pp. 1181-1191; M. A. Straus, A. Fauchier, *Manual for the Dimensions of discipline inventory (DDI)*, New Hampshire 2007, Family Research Laboratory.

⁷ M. Peček Čuk, I. Lesar, *Moč vzgoje. Sodobna vprašanja teorije vzgoje*, Ljubljana 2009, Tehniška založba Slovenije.

Child-rearing methods can be punitive or non-punitive. Considering the wider definition of child-rearing as the development of the child's potentials of independence and autonomy and the promotion of moral and acceptable behavior⁸, child-rearing methods are defined as a means of restricting the child's behavior and a means of responding to the child's needs. In this regard, punitive methods cannot be linked solely to restricting the child's behavior, because through an ever-more conscious activity, with his understanding of the consequences of his own actions, the child develops his independence and autonomy. Similarly, non-punitive methods are not only in function of enhancing autonomy: by non-punitive child-rearing methods, parents restrict the child's behavior, emotions and thinking as well. Many authors⁹ emphasize, in their studies, that parents prevent the violation of rules and restrict unwanted behavior to a larger extent by using non-punitive child-rearing methods.

Punitive child-rearing methods are¹⁰: (1) corporal punishment (the use of objects for punishing, spanking, shaking, mouth washing with soap), (2) psychological violence (reprimand, threat, contempt, silence, inducement of shame and guilt, intentional withholding of affection), (3) punishment and restitution (additional work, compensation or reparation, apology), (4) restriction (taking pocket money, activity restriction, going to bed without a meal). Non-punitive child-rearing methods are¹¹: (1) diverting attention ("time out" - sending the child to a corner, offering something the child wants to do), (2) explaining and teaching (explanation of rules, clarification, demonstration of appropriate behavior, (3) ignoring inappropriate behavior (deliberately

⁸ M. Peček Čuk, I. Lesar, *Moč vzgoje. Sodobna vprašanja teorije vzgoje*, Ljubljana 2009, Tehniška založba Slovenije.

⁹ P. Kornhauser, D. Pleterski-Rigler, *Zagotovimo našim otrokom mladost brez telesnega kaznovanja*, in: P. Kornhauser (ed.), *Zagotovimo našim otrokom mladost brez telesnega kaznovanja*, Ljubljana 2007: Zveza prijateljev mladine Slovenije, pp. 54-98; S. Poljak, *Discipliniranje otrok v družini - načini, stališča in medgeneracijske povezave*, "Psihološka obzorja" 18 (2009) 4, pp. 93-113; R. S. Socolar, E. Savage, L. Keyes-Elstein, H. Evans, *Factors that affect parental disciplinary practices of children aged 12 to 19 months*, "Southern Medical Journal" 98 (2005) 12, pp. 1181-1191; M. A. Straus, C. J. Field, *Psychological aggression by American parents: National data on prevalence, chronicity and severity*, "Journal of Marriage and Family" 65 (2003) 4, pp. 795-808.

¹⁰ M. A. Straus, A. Fauchier, *Manual for the Dimensions of discipline inventory (DDI)*, New Hampshire 2007, Family Research Laboratory.

¹¹ M. A. Straus, A. Fauchier, *Manual for the Dimensions of discipline inventory (DDI)*, New Hampshire 2007, Family Research Laboratory.

not paying attention to unwanted behavior, coping with consequences of behavior), (4) prize (praise, cash prize, toy), (5) control (warning, checking).

Studies have shown that parents tend to use slightly more non-punitive than punitive child-rearing methods.¹² However, punitive child-rearing methods cannot be fully equated with violence against children in the family, since they are related in different ways to the effects in child development¹³, the personal experience of parents and the organization of the family system.

3. Corporal punishment and physical violence

Corporal punishment is the use of physical power in order to cause the child pain, but not injury, in order to correct or control his behavior.¹⁴ This child-rearing method usually involves a palm-hitting, rough dragging or pushing the child, pulling ears, pulling the hair, shaking, and also hitting with objects such as a belt, cooking spoon or some other hard object. There is much literature that advocates the unacceptability of these child-rearing

¹² P. Kornhauser, D. Pleterski-Rigler, *Zagotovimo našim otrokom mladost brez telesnega kaznovanja*, in: P. Kornhauser (ed.), *Zagotovimo našim otrokom mladost brez telesnega kaznovanja*, Ljubljana 2007: Zveza prijateljev mladine Slovenije, pp. 54-98; S. Poljak Lukek, *Kaznovanje kot vzgojno sredstvo in predelave starševskih stisk v relacijski družinski terapiji. Doktorska disertacija*, Ljubljana 2011, Univerza v Ljubljani Teološka fakulteta; S. Poljak, *Discipliniranje otrok v družini - načini, stališča in medgeneracijske povezave*, "Psihološka obzorja" 18 (2009) 4, pp. 93-113; R. S. Socolar, E. Savage, L. Keyes-Elstein, H. Evans, *Factors that affect parental disciplinary practices of children aged 12 to 19 months*, "Southern Medical Journal" 98 (2005) 12, pp. 1181-1191; M. A. Straus, C. J. Field, *Psychological aggression by American parents: National data on prevalence, chronicity and severity*, "Journal of Marriage and Family" 65 (2003) 4, pp. 795-808.

¹³ E. T. Gershoff, *Corporal punishment by parents and associated child behaviors and experiences: A meta-analytic and theoretical review*, "Psychological Bulletin" 128 (2002) 4, pp. 539-579; A. Grogan-Kaylor, *The effect of corporal punishment on antisocial behavior in children*, "Social Work Research" 28(2004) 3, pp. 153-162; M. K. Mulvaney, C. J. Mebert, *Parental corporal punishment predicts behavior problems in early childhood*, "Journal of Family Psychology" 21 (2007) 3, pp. 389-397; M. A. Straus, V. E. Mouradian, *Impulsive corporal punishment by mothers and antisocial behavior and impulsiveness of children*, "Behavioral Sciences and the Law" 16 (1998), pp. 353-374; M. A. Straus, D. B. Sugarman, D. B., J. Giles-Sims, *Spanking by parents and subsequent antisocial behavior of children*, "Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine" 151 (1997) 8, pp. 761-767.

¹⁴ M. A. Straus, J. H. Stewart, *Corporal punishment by American parents: National data on prevalence, chronicity, severity, and duration, in relation to child and family characteristics*, "Clinical Child & Family Psychology Review" 2 (1999) 2, pp. 55-70.

methods.¹⁵ On the other hand, there are authors who consider it necessary to distinguish between mild and serious physical punishment methods and that research does not confirm negative consequences for mild forms, such as spanking.¹⁶ In addition to research showing the connection of any physical punishment with undesirable developmental outcomes for the child¹⁷, we can defend the unacceptability of corporal punishment in child-rearing from the following starting points. Corporal punishment is the restriction of the child's behavior, regardless of his specific developmental and individual needs, and the lack of response of the parents can also be a result of affect dysregulation. Such a child-rearing approach does not give the child the opportunity to associate his behavior with consequences, because of the lack of response of his parents, child-rearing methods exceed his developmental and individual abilities. The child's inability to control his behavior and to protect himself against further punishment can affect his emotional experience, behavioral adjustments and thinking.¹⁸

¹⁵ L. P. Alampay, J. Godwin, J. E. Lansford, A. S. Bombi, M. H. Bornstein, L. Chang, ... D. Bacchini, *Severity and justness do not moderate the relation between corporal punishment and negative child outcomes: A multicultural and longitudinal study*, "International Journal of Behavioral Development" (2017), pp. 1-12; S. Fréchette, M. Zoratti, E. Romano, *What is the link between corporal punishment and child physical abuse?*, "Journal of Family Violence" 30 (2015), pp. 135-148; E. T. Gershoff, *Corporal punishment by parents and associated child behaviors and experiences: A meta-analytic and theoretical review*, "Psychological Bulletin" 128 (2002) 4, pp. 539-579; E. T. Gershoff, A. Grogan-Kaylor, *Spanking and child outcomes: Old controversies and new meta-analyses*, "Journal of Family Psychology" 30 (2016) 4, pp. 453-469.

¹⁶ R. E. Larzelere, *Child outcomes of nonabusive and customary physical punishment by parents: An updated literature review*, "Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review" 3 (2000) 4, pp. 199-221.

¹⁷ K. Deater-Deckard, J. E. Lansford, K. A. Dodge, G. S. Pettit, J. E. Bates, *The development of attitudes about physical punishment: An 8-year longitudinal study*, "Journal of Family Psychology" 17 (2003) 3, pp. 351-360; N. duRivage, K. Keyes, E. Leray, O. Pez, A. Bitfoi, C. Koç, ... V. Kovess-Ma, *Parental use of corporal punishment in Europe: Intersection between public health and policy*, PLoS ONE 10(2): e0118059.doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0118059 (2015); E. T. Gershoff, *Corporal punishment by parents and associated child behaviors and experiences: A meta-analytic and theoretical review*, "Psychological Bulletin" 128 (2002) 4, pp. 539-579; E. T. Gershoff, A. Grogan-Kaylor, *Spanking and child outcomes: Old controversies and new meta-analyses*, "Journal of Family Psychology" 30 (2016) 4, pp. 453-469.

¹⁸ S. Poljak Lukek, *Ko odnosi postanejo družina. Oblikovanje edinstvenosti in povezanosti skozi razvojna obdobja družine*, Celje 2017, Celjska Mohorjeva družba.

In the Report on Violence Against Children, the United Nations Children's Fund introduced a definition of physical violence which also includes any corporal punishment.¹⁹

“Physical violence against children includes all corporal punishment and all other forms of torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment as well as physical bullying and hazing by adults or by other children. ‘Corporal’ (or ‘physical’) punishment is defined as any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light. Most involves hitting (‘smacking’, ‘slapping’, ‘spanking’) children with the hand or with an implement - a whip, stick, belt, shoe, wooden spoon, etc. But it can also involve, for example, kicking, shaking or throwing children, scratching, pinching, biting, pulling hair or boxing ears, caning, forcing children to stay in uncomfortable positions, burning, scalding or forced ingestion.”²⁰

The link between physical violence and corporal punishment in child-rearing is also confirmed by the results of the survey, which leads to a conclusion that persons who have been subjected to corporal punishment - in comparison with those who do not have this experience - are more likely to become the victims of physical violence.²¹

Since 2006, the European Union has called on all members to completely prohibit corporal punishment of children, and the Council of Europe adopted a resolution in 2009, which obliges all members to completely prohibit corporal punishment.²² Sweden was the first country, since 1979, to ban the corporal punishment of children legally, and by October 2018, 54 countries from all over the world followed this example, also in response to appeals from international organizations²³. The authors emphasize, however, that the legal prohibition of physical sanctioning in child-rearing itself does not necessarily lead to a decline in the use of this child-rearing method. In order to reduce corporal punishment in families, it is necessary

¹⁹ UNICEF, *Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children*, New York 2014, United Nations Children's Fund.

²⁰ UNICEF, *Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children*, New York 2014, United Nations Children's Fund, pp. 4.

²¹ S. Fréchette, M. Zoratti, E. Romano, *What is the link between corporal punishment and child physical abuse?*, “Journal of Family Violence” 30 (2015), pp. 135-148.

²² <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/corporal-punishment#> (02.11.2018).

²³ <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/countdown/> (02.11.2018).

to raise public awareness of the consequences of this method of punishment and the publicity of the adopted law.²⁴

We conclude that any corporal punishment of children in the family is an expression of physical violence, since it prevents the child to defend himself, and the long-term consequences of such behavior do not justify the immediate effect of the punishment.

4. Prevalence of corporal punishment in child-rearing

Corporal punishment is still a common method of disciplining children in the family. According to the United Nations Children's Fund, "around the world, 80% of children are spanked or otherwise physically punished by their parents."²⁵ A recent survey on the use of physical punishment in European countries has shown that 91.1% of parents from time to time hit, spank or slap their child when he behaves inappropriately, and that 8.9% of parents use this type of punishment frequently; in countries where corporal punishment is not prohibited by law, there is a 1.7-fold higher probability of parents to use corporal punishment in child-rearing.²⁶ According to international research, 63% of parents in developing countries reported that they had used physical punishment in the last month (the results range from 28% in Bosnia and Herzegovina to 84% in Jamaica).²⁷ A recent survey on a representative sample of the American population showed that 57% of mothers and 40% of fathers physically punish (spank) three-year-old

²⁴ N. duRivage, K. Keyes, E. Leray, O. Pez, A. Bitfoi, C. Koç, ... V. Kovess-Ma, *Parental use of corporal punishment in Europe: Intersection between public health and policy*, PLoS ONE 10(2): e0118059.doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0118059 (2015); J. E. Lansford, C. Cappab, D. L. Putnick, M. H. Bornsteinc, K. Deater-Deckard, R. H. Bradleye, *Change over time in parents' beliefs about and reported use of corporal punishment in eight countries with and without legal bans*, "Child Abuse and Neglect" 71 (2017), pp. 44-55.

²⁵ UNICEF, *Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children*, New York 2014, United Nations Children's Fund.

²⁶ N. duRivage, K. Keyes, E. Leray, O. Pez, A. Bitfoi, C. Koç ... V. Kovess-Ma, *Parental use of corporal punishment in Europe: Intersection between public health and policy*, PLoS ONE 10(2): e0118059.doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0118059 (2015).

²⁷ J. E. Lansford, K. Deater-Deckard, *Childrearing discipline and violence in developing countries*, "Child Development" 83 (2012) 1, pp. 62-75.

children and that 52% of mothers and 33% of fathers physically punish (spank) five-year-old children.²⁸

5. Corporal punishment and the family context

According to research, corporal punishment can be linked to some of the characteristics of family systems, developmental features and parental characteristics. In their study, Woodward and Fergusson²⁹ linked corporal punishment with early parenting, family stress, marriage conflicts and violence between spouses, and an unstable family system. A recent survey on a representative European sample also showed that the frequency of using physical punishment is associated with the lower age of parents as well as with the lower level of their education; there is no link, however, to the legal status of parents or to single-parenting.³⁰ Our preliminary research has shown that parents who more often physically punish their children also report a lower self-esteem and the feelings of inefficiency and impulsiveness.³¹ It has also been shown that a positive correlation between the frequency of spanking and depressive symptoms in a child is higher in families where mothers consider corporal punishment an inappropriate method of child-rearing³² and that the impulsiveness of parents in child-rearing and the feelings of the loss of control are positively related to the development of symptomatic behavior in the child³³.

²⁸ M. J. MacKenzie, E. Nicklas, J. Waldfogel, J. Brooks-Gunn, *Spanking and child development across the first decade of life*, "Pediatrics" 132 (2012) 5, pp. e1118-e1125.

²⁹ L. J. Woodward, D. M. Fergusson, *Parent, child, and contextual predictors of childhood physical punishment*, "Infant and Child Development" 11 (2002), pp. 213-235.

³⁰ N. duRivage, K. Keyes, E. Leray, O. Pez, A. Bitfoi, C. Koç. ... V. Kovess-Ma, *Parental use of corporal punishment in Europe: Intersection between public health and policy*, PLoS ONE 10(2): e0118059. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0118059 (2015).

³¹ S. Poljak, *Discipliniranje otrok v družini - načini, stališča in medgeneracijske povezave*, "Psihološka obzorja" 18 (2009) 4, pp. 93-113.

³² V. C. McLoyd, R. Kaplan, C. R. Hardaway, D. Wood, *Does endorsement of physical discipline matter? Assessing moderating influences on the maternal and child psychological correlates of physical discipline in African American families*, "Journal of Family Psychology" 21 (2007) 2, pp. 165-175.

³³ S. Poljak Lukek, *Kaznovanje kot vzgojno sredstvo in predelave starševskih stisk v relacijski družinski terapiji. Doktorska disertacija*, Ljubljana 2011, Univerza v Ljubljani Teološka fakulteta; M. A. Straus, V. E. Mouradian, *Impulsive corporal punishment by mothers*

6. Correlation between physical punishment and unfavorable outcomes in child development

Corporal punishment of children in the family is associated with unfavorable outcomes in the child's development. Research has confirmed the link between the frequency of corporal punishment and the behavioral problems of the child³⁴, the antisocial behavior of the child³⁵ and the emotional problems of the child³⁶. A study on a European sample of parents also showed that both the values of externalized problems and the values of internalized problems are higher in children whose parents report the frequent use of physical punishment; there is also a link between the experience of corporal punishment and depressive and anxiety symptoms in children.³⁷ A recent meta-analysis also belied the objections that unfavorable outcomes in child development can be attributed only to severe forms of physical violence. The authors conclude that the research links both physical violence and spanking to unfavorable developmental outcomes.³⁸ Spanking is associated with

and antisocial behavior and impulsiveness of children, "Behavioral Sciences and the Law" 16 (1998), pp. 353-374.

³⁴ K. Aucoin, P. J. Frick, S. D. Bodin, *Corporal punishment and child adjustment*, "Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology" 27(2006) 6, pp. 527-541; E. T. Gershoff, *Corporal punishment by parents and associated child behaviors and experiences: A meta-analytic and theoretical review*, "Psychological Bulletin" 128 (2002) 4, pp. 539-579; S. K. Lynch, E. Turkheim, B. M. D'Onofrio, J. Mendle, R. E. Emery, W. S. Slutske, N. G. Martin, *A genetically informed study of the association between harsh punishment and offspring behavioral problems*, "Journal of Family Psychology" 20 (2006) 2, pp. 190-198.

³⁵ F. J. Elgar, P. D. Donnelly, V. Michaelson, G. Gariépy, K. E. Riehm, S. D. Walsh, W. Pickett, *Corporal punishment bans and physical fighting in adolescents: an ecological study of 88 countries*, *BMJ Open* 2018;8:e021616. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2018-021616 (2018); A. Grogan-Kaylor, *The effect of corporal punishment on antisocial behavior in children*, "Social Work Research" 28(2004) 3, pp. 153-162; M. A. Straus, V. E. Mouradian, *Impulsive corporal punishment by mothers and antisocial behavior and impulsiveness of children*, "Behavioral Sciences and the Law" 16 (1998), pp. 353-374.

³⁶ K. Aucoin, P. J. Frick, S. D. Bodin, *Corporal punishment and child adjustment*, "Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology" 27 (2006) 6, pp. 527-541; F. W. K. Harper, A. M. Brown, I. Arias, G. Brody, *Corporal punishment and kids: How do parent support and gender influence child adjustment?*, "Journal of Family Violence" 21 (2006) 3, pp. 197-207.

³⁷ N. duRivage, K. Keyes, E. Leray, O. Pez, A. Bitfoi, C. Koç, . . . V. Kovess-Ma, *Parental use of corporal punishment in Europe: Intersection between public health and policy*, *PLoS ONE* 10(2): e0118059.doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0118059 (2015).

³⁸ E. T. Gershoff, A. Grogan-Kaylor, *Spanking and child outcomes: Old controversies and new meta-analyses*, "Journal of Family Psychology" 30 (2016) 4, pp. 453-469.

higher aggression in children, more anti-social behavior, more externalized and internalized problems, more problems in mental health, and a more negative relationship with parents; in addition, these children have a lower ability of moral judgment, lower cognitive ability and lower self-esteem.³⁹

7. The correlation between physical punishment and unfavorable outcomes in adulthood

Specific forms of child-rearing methods are also linked to the course of further development. Punitive discipline is associated with depressive conditions in adulthood and with the quality of adult relationships with parents.⁴⁰ From the point of view of personal perception, undergoing excessively restrictive behavior by parents can, in adulthood, influence the ability of self-control, i.e. prevent effective control of one's own experience⁴¹, thereby preventing the functional adaptation of an adult. The development of children in the family is characterized by adult self-awareness⁴², adaptation in adult relationships⁴³ as well as anxiety or depression in an adult⁴⁴. Depressive and anxiety conditions and hostility in adulthood are positively correlated with punitive discipline in childhood, while well-being and the assessment of closeness with parents are negatively correlated, and individuals with the

³⁹ E. T. Gershoff, A. Grogan-Kaylor, *Spanking and child outcomes: Old controversies and new meta-analyses*, "Journal of Family Psychology" 30 (2016) 4, pp. 453-469.

⁴⁰ S. Poljak Lukek, *Ali lahko izkušnjo kaznovanja v vzgoji iz otroštva povezujemo z depresivnimi ali s tesnobnimi stanji v odraslosti?*, "Psihološka obzorja" 21 (2012) 3, pp. 29-36.

⁴¹ B. F. Chorpita, D. H. Barlow, *The development of anxiety: the role of control in the early environment*, "Psychological Bulletin" 124 (1998) 1, pp. 3-21.

⁴² C. G. Hindy, J. C. Schwarz, *Anxious romantic attachment in adult relationships*, in: M. B. Sperling & W. H. Berman (eds.), *Attachment in adults. Clinical and developmental perspectives*, New York 1994, The Guilford Press, pp. 179-203.

⁴³ W. H. Berman, M. B. Sperling, *The structure and function of adult attachment*, in: M. B. Sperling & W. H. Berman (eds.), *Attachment in adults. Clinical and developmental perspectives*, New York 1994, The Guilford Press, pp. 1-30; R. Karen, *Becoming attached. First relationship and how they shape our capacity to love*, Oxford 1998: Oxford University Press.

⁴⁴ B. F. Chorpita, D. H. Barlow, *The development of anxiety: the role of control in the early environment*, "Psychological Bulletin" 124 (1998) 1, pp. 3-21; J. Stuewig, L. A. McCloskey, *The relation of child maltreatment to shame and guilt among adolescents: Psychological routes to depression and delinquency*, "Child Maltreatment" 10 (2005) 4, pp. 324-336.

experience of corporal punishment experience a higher level of depression.⁴⁵ A recent meta-analysis also confirms the links between corporal punishment in childhood and adult anti-social behavior, the problems of mental health in adulthood and the adult approval of corporal punishment.⁴⁶

8. Intergenerational transmission of corporal punishment

Parents who were physically punished as children are more likely to discipline their children by corporal punishment.⁴⁷ Presented links between the experience of corporal punishment in childhood and adulthood problems can also be interpreted as an intergenerational transmission of corporal punishment. Parents who themselves were physically punished can develop mood disorders, antisocial behavior and other mental disorders⁴⁸, they experience more stress, are less self-confident and more impulsive⁴⁹, making it more likely that in a stressful situation when the child behaves inappropriately, they use physical punishment more often.

Our initial research has shown that the experience of corporal punishment in childhood is associated with the parental feeling of inefficiency, stress

⁴⁵ S. Poljak Lukek, *Kaznovanje kot vzgojno sredstvo in predelave starševskih stisk v relacijski družinski terapiji. Doktorska disertacija*, Ljubljana 2011, Univerza v Ljubljani Teološka fakulteta S. Poljak Lukek, *Ali lahko izkušnjo kaznovanja v vzgoji iz otroštva povezujemo z depresivnimi ali s tesnobnimi stanji v odraslosti?*, "Psihološka obzorja" 21 (2012) 3, pp. 29-36.

⁴⁶ E. T. Gershoff, A. Grogan-Kaylor, *Spanking and child outcomes: Old controversies and new meta-analyses*, "Journal of Family Psychology" 30 (2016) 4, pp. 453-469.

⁴⁷ S. Poljak, *Discipliniranje otrok v družini - načini, stališča in medgeneracijske povezave*, "Psihološka obzorja" 18 (2009) 4, pp. 93-113; R. S. Socolar, E. Savage, H. Evans, *A longitudinal study of parental discipline of young children*, "Southern Medical Journal" 100 (2007) 5, pp. 472-477; M. A. Straus, *Beating the devil out of them: Corporal punishment in American families*, San Francisco 1994, Jossey-Bass/Lexington Books.

⁴⁸ S. Poljak Lukek, *Ali lahko izkušnjo kaznovanja v vzgoji iz otroštva povezujemo z depresivnimi ali s tesnobnimi stanji v odraslosti?*, "Psihološka obzorja" 21 (2012) 3, pp. 29-36; J. Stuewig, L. A. McCloskey, *The relation of child maltreatment to shame and guilt among adolescents: Psychological routes to depression and delinquency*, "Child Maltreatment" 10 (2005) 4, pp. 324-336.

⁴⁹ S. Poljak, *Discipliniranje otrok v družini - načini, stališča in medgeneracijske povezave*, "Psihološka obzorja" 18 (2009) 4, pp. 93-113; M. A. Straus, V. E. Mouradian, *Impulsive corporal punishment by mothers and antisocial behavior and impulsiveness of children*, "Behavioral Sciences and the Law" 16 (1998), pp. 353-374.

and impulsiveness in responding to a child's inappropriate behavior, as well as with parental low self-esteem.⁵⁰ We can therefore presume that the experience of corporal punishment which, at that time, affected their perception of the parental role and the ways of child-rearing, has marked their current choice of child-rearing methods. Since parents who were physically punished themselves feel less confident, experience more stress in child-rearing and are more impulsive in their decisions, they can quickly resort to less appropriate methods of child-rearing, such as corporal punishment, for example.

The fact that children whose parents approve of corporal punishment more often resort to violence in resolving interpersonal conflicts, and that corporal punishment is often the strongest predictor of the child's adoption of violent problem-solving⁵¹, can also explain the intergenerational transmission of corporal punishment. With the exposure to corporal punishment, children already have an experience that violent stress-handling in relationships is acceptable, so as parents they will more likely violently resolve a situation when their child will behave inappropriately or will not follow their instructions and rules. In addition, corporal punishment is linked to the child's reduced sense of control over the situation, and to a reduced ability to control body reactions, which increases the feeling of anxiety.⁵² Reduced control, which is transmitted to one's perception in adulthood, can increase impulsivity in raising children, thus allowing the increased use of corporal punishment.

9. Affect regulation and corporal punishment

In the following section, we present emotional regulation as a permanent response mechanism, which can explain the intergenerational transmission

⁵⁰ S. Poljak, *Discipliniranje otrok v družini - načini, stališča in medgeneracijske povezave*, "Psihološka obzorja" 18 (2009) 4, pp. 93-113.

⁵¹ D. A. Simons, S.K. Wurtele, *Relationships between parents' use of corporal punishment and their children's endorsement of spanking and hitting other children*, "Child Abuse & Neglect" 34 (2010), pp. 639-646.

⁵² R. A. Graham, C. F. Weems, *Identifying moderators of the link between parent and child anxiety sensitivity: The roles of gender, positive parenting, and corporal punishment*, "Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology" 43 (2015) 5, pp. 885-893.

of corporal punishment in the family or the autonomic or impulsive disciplining of children. Emotional regulation is the ability to control, maintain and escalate emotions and is shaped through the emotional, social and cognitive development of children.⁵³ Parents play an important role in the affect regulation of children as an external support system that helps regulate new emotional states.⁵⁴ With their reactions, parents transform the child's physical states into manageable emotional and behavioral responses. However, because of the extreme vulnerability of the child, the adult cannot react appropriately and timely in every physical condition, and emotional dysregulation also occurs in the relationship. Emotional dysregulation refers to unadjusted, inflexible emotional regulation strategies, such as limited expression of feelings, the lack of control over the duration and intensity of emotions, emotional incompetence, the inability to integrate different emotions, and the inability to talk and think about feelings.⁵⁵ Emotional dysregulation is not the same as the absence of emotion; it is inability to maintain connection in a certain physical state. Permanent emotional dysregulation models are perceived as threatening to development, as current deregulated emotional responses can develop into permanent unadjusted emotional and behavioral patterns.⁵⁶ Disorders in the regulation of emotions in the child's development can mean the dissociation of certain emotional states. In the case of an early or extreme traumatic experience (such as frequent corporal punishment), not only a distorted perception of

⁵³ N. A. Fox, C. A. Stifter, *Emotional development*, in: B. Hopkins (ed.), *The Cambridge encyclopedia of child development*, New York 2005: Cambridge University Press, pp. 234-241; R. A. Thompson, M. A. Easterbrooks, L. M. Padilla-Walker, *Social and emotional development in infancy*, in: R. M. Lerner, M. A. Easterbrooks & J. Mistry (eds.), *Handbook of psychology: developmental psychology*, New Jersey 2003, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., pp. 91-112.

⁵⁴ E. M. Cummings, J. M. Braungart-Rieker, T. D. Rocher-Schudlich, *Emotion and personality development in childhood*, in: R. M. Lerner, M. A. Easterbrooks & J. Mistry (eds.), *Handbook of psychology: developmental psychology Vol. 6*, New Jersey 2003, John Wiley&Sons Inc., pp. 211-240.

⁵⁵ K. K. Hyoun, K. C. Pears, D. M. Capaldi, L. D. Owen, *Emotion dysregulation in the intergenerational transmission of romantic relationship conflict*, "Journal of Family Psychology" 23 (2009) 4, pp. 585-595. R. Karen, *Becoming attached. First relationship and how they shape our capacity to love*. Oxford 1998: Oxford University Press.

⁵⁶ N. L. Galambos, C. L. Costigan, *Emotional and personality development in adolescence*, in: R. M. Lerner, M. A. Easterbrooks & J. Mistry (eds.), *Handbook of psychology: developmental psychology*, New Jersey 2003: John Wiley&Sons Inc., pp. 351-372.

one's own and others' feelings is formed, but also a distorted perception of one's own body and body symptoms.⁵⁷

Child-rearing where the main parental tasks are to respond to the child's needs and to control his behavior⁵⁸ requires from parents to respond to the child's dysregulated physical states, which are reflected in unadjusted responses. When parents calm maladaptive behavior in a non-violent manner, they allow the child to form a non-violent internal regulatory system.⁵⁹ When parents fail to calm their own emotions, they respond to the child's in an emotionally dysregulated manner, which may mean that they will more likely use physical punishment to calm their own and the child's physical agitation.⁶⁰ Parents who feel they have less control over their emotions, who are subjected to increased stress in family relationships and who feel unconfident will have greater difficulties in calming a dysregulated emotional state, which can result in the use of corporal punishment. This connection can explain why research shows that parents use corporal punishment to a greater extent than they consider it justified.⁶¹ Parents often use physical punishment impulsively, in the moment of affect dysregulation, when they cannot control their emotions; they react in accordance with the established mechanism of affect regulation, which, if they used to be physically punished in childhood, is usually associated with violent, physical pacifying, i.e. by physical reaction. Only in this way can they first calm their own body and then the body of the child. In this case, emotional agitation does not calm down by a conscious change of emotional response but by

⁵⁷ C. Gostečnik, *Relacijska paradigma in travma*, Ljubljana 2008: Brat Frančišek in Frančiškanski družinski inštitut; J. J. Gross, *Emotional regulation: Taking stock and moving forward*, "Emotion" 13 (2013) 3, pp. 359-365.

⁵⁸ E. E. Maccoby, J. A. Martin, *Socialization in the context of the family: parent-child interaction*, in: P. H. Mussen (ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: socialization, personality, and social development Vol. 4*, New York 1983: John Wiley, pp. 1-101.

⁵⁹ R. A. Thompson, M. A. Easterbrooks, L. M. Padilla-Walker, *Social and emotional development in infancy*, in R. M. Lerner, M. A. Easterbrooks & J. Mistry (eds.), *Handbook of psychology: developmental psychology*, New Jersey 2003, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., pp. 91-112.

⁶⁰ J. J. Gross, *Emotional regulation: Taking stock and moving forward*, "Emotion" 13 (2013) 3, pp. 359-365. K. K. Hyoun, K. C. Pears, D. M. Capaldi, L. D. Owen, *Emotion dysregulation in the intergenerational transmission of romantic relationship conflict*, "Journal of Family Psychology" 23 (2009) 4, pp. 585-595.

⁶¹ M. A. Straus, V. E. Mouradian, *Impulsive corporal punishment by mothers and antisocial behavior and impulsiveness of children*, "Behavioral Sciences and the Law" 16 (1998), pp. 353-374.

oppression, where the autonomic nervous system learns that emotionally responsive behavior decreases with each new emotional agitation.⁶² To some extent, parents become unresponsive to the child's needs, and the child becomes unresponsive to his inner perception, but when agitation is too high, a dysregulated response in the form of a violent calming of the situation arises again. Despite corporal punishment, children fail to change their behavior in the long run⁶³, while parents, despite the awareness of the inadequacy of corporal punishment, hit the child.⁶⁴

10. Conclusion

By corporal punishment, parents react to the unwanted behavior of the child in such a way that they ignore the child's needs (in the case of corporal punishment, they ignore his physical weakness) and only restrict and control his behavior. Due to the lack of pursuing the child's independence and his specific developmental needs, the physical punishment lacks a basic element of child-rearing, which is the pursuing the child's individuality. That is why corporal punishment is not educational, even if it has an immediate positive effect. In addition, with the mechanism of emotional regulation we have shown that corporal punishment in the family can also be a manifestation of parental non-controlling of physical tension. Impulsive child-rearing is thus more closely related to parental experience and less to the child's individual needs, which means that in the event of impulsive punishment, the child can adapt only by transforming his own experience. Furthermore, since the child cannot avoid punishment by changing his behavior (because he may be the target of punishment simply because he is a child), the physical punishment loses its educational component.

Individuals can soon find themselves in a circle of violence that they cannot break when raising their own children. Even though they are aware of

⁶² J. J. Gross, *Emotional regulation: Taking stock and moving forward*, "Emotion" 13 (2013) 3, pp. 359-365.

⁶³ E. T. Gershoff, A. Grogan-Kaylor, *Spanking and child outcomes: Old controversies and new meta-analyses*, "Journal of Family Psychology" 30 (2016) 4, pp. 453-469.

⁶⁴ S. Poljak, *Discipliniranje otrok v družini - načini, stališča in medgeneracijske povezave*, "Psihološka obzorja" 18 (2009) 4, pp. 93-113; M. A. Straus, V. E. Mouradian, *Impulsive corporal punishment by mothers and antisocial behavior and impulsiveness of children*, "Behavioral Sciences and the Law" 16 (1998), pp. 353-374.

the inadequacy of corporal punishment, because of the established patterns of affect regulation they can recur this child-rearing method again and again. At the same time, they experience a lot of guilt, helplessness and deep distress. Understanding the dynamics of intergenerational transmission can help professionals approach parents properly and empower them in a way that enables more effective parenting. The distress that parents experience with their children can be understood as an expression of the deepest and most vulnerable psychological pain that, implicitly or through an affective symbolic atmosphere, mark the perception of oneself and significant others, and thus importantly define the ways of forming and maintaining relationships in adulthood. To break the cycle of domestic violence, parents should therefore, first of all, become aware of their own pain, and of the fact that they are enabled to take responsibility for their parental decisions.

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