

Critique of the Temple study, Childhood Corporal Punishment and Future Perpetration of Physical Dating Violence

Study Deficiencies

This spanking study suffers from the following common deficiencies:

- √ - Uses a vague or inaccurate definition for “spanking”
- √ - Combines overly severe physical punishments along with ordinary spanking
- √ - Includes physical punishment of adolescents, which is an inappropriate age
- √ - Fails to control for frequency of spanking usage
- √ - Fails to limit spanking to younger ages, especially under 7 years
- √ - Relies upon statistical correlation rather than true causation
- √ - Fails to control for, or define, child behavior prior to use of spanking
- √ - Fails to compare spanking with other available correction measures
- √ - Relies upon retrospective interviews, rather than longitudinal observations

The design of this study is flawed for the following reasons and the results, therefore, invalid:

- The study relies upon retrospective reports by adults (asked at 20 years old to recall) which are most highly correlated with self-reports about their experience with being spanked when they were children. Such reporting can be biased toward remembering the most negative experiences as children. Furthermore, the reports of physical punishment were not corroborated by the parents of the participants.
- The effect of interparental violence was not measured and, yet, the modeling of spouse abuse has a profound effect upon a child’s choice of methods for conflict resolution.
- The data for this study was derived from a prospective Swedish study on adolescent risky behaviors, but the data was gathered retrospectively, with participants being asked about their spanking experiences as a child.
- Behavioral tendencies of the children prior to being spanked are not considered, which will affect the outcome of the spanking. For example, children who are spanked may have a number of behavioral problems to start with, and any aggression or mental health issues they develop could have more to do with those underlying behavioral problems than the spanking itself. Yet another possibility is that adults with mental health problems could be more likely than healthy adults to recall being spanked as kids.
- The participants were not asked about the age at which they may have been spanked or the frequency of its usage. Therefore, the physical punishment could have been overly frequent and administered during the teen years, which is inappropriate and prone to abuse.
- The specific survey question did not define the actual method or setting in which spanking was used. Participants were asked, “Thinking back to when you were a child, how often did your parents discipline you by slapping, spanking, or striking

you with an object? (never, sometimes, often, or always).” This opens the door for the inclusion of abusive practices of physical punishment and therefore taints the results.

- Despite the retrospective questioning and the focus on inappropriate physical punishment, the effect of this physical punishment was only what Ferguson (2013) called “trivial” in magnitude.ⁱⁱ An adjusted effect size of 1.29 is equivalent to effect sizes of $d = .14$ or $r = .07$. All of these effect sizes are considered tiny in magnitude even when they are barely significant, as is the case in this study. Sample size = 758.

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References

ⁱ Temple JR, Choi HJ. Childhood Corporal Punishment and Future Perpetration of Physical Dating Violence. *Journal of Pediatrics*. December 2017. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jpeds.2017.10.028>

ⁱⁱ Ferguson, CJ. *Clinical Psychology Review*. 2013. 33:196–208. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2016.1145613>