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Effects of Parental Discipline on Their Child's Self-Esteem

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Although there have been a significant number of studies conducted on studying the effects of discipline and punishment styles used on children and its relation to aggression and violent behavior development in the children; not much published research has been done on how different discipline styles, such as spanking or yelling, affect the self-esteem of a child. There is also even more limited research on how it affects young boys differently than it affects young girls. According to a study by Moss and Keller (1992), it was found that although the number of boys abused is far greater than the number of girls abused, it is actually the girls whom suffer the most long-term consequences of child abuse. Although it is difficult to draw the line between abuse and mere physical discipline, this study prompted me to include an analysis on gender to see if using spanking as a method of discipline had similar effects. The present study tested three hypotheses regarding how a parent's physical discipline styles affect the development of self-esteem in children and more specifically, if there is a difference between boys and girls. My first hypothesis states that the use of physical discipline, such as spanking, will have a significant effect on a child's feelings of self-worth. My second hypothesis states that girls are more likely than boys to believe physical punishment is harmful to their self-esteem. My third hypothesis states that physical discipline (spanking) is more detrimental to a person's overall self-esteem than is verbal discipline, such as yelling at a child.

Method

A sample of 105 adults (64 female and 41 male) were surveyed on a series of questions concerning discipline styles used by their parents as they were growing up, as well as questions regarding measures of self-esteem. The participants

were recruited from an introductory psychology course at Boise State University. The participants gathered in a large lecture hall and were administered the questionnaire in paper format. Participants were compensated for their participation with course credit. The questionnaire used in this study was developed by the individuals creating the study. Five questions were chosen concerning discipline styles of the parents while the child was approximately 2-6 years old and questions regarding the participants self-esteem as they would rate it now.

Results

There was not a significant association found between self-esteem, rated on a scale of 1=*low* to 3=*high*, and being spanked as a child, $X^2(2, N=107)=2.79, p=0.248$. A significant association was not found between gender and belief in spanking being harmful to children, $X^2(2, N=104)=1.31, p=0.520$. For the following question, "during childhood what made you feel worse," respondents answered using a multiple choice method in which they could choose between "being yelled at by parents" or "being hit/spanked". There was not a significant association between the method of discipline used by parents and the level of self-esteem of the respondent, $X^2(2, N=93)=4.53, p=0.104$. A significant association was not found between being spanked as a child and belief that spanking was harmful to children, $X^2(N=108)=1.69, p=0.193$. No significant association was found in regards to being spanked as a child and gender, $X^2(2, N=105)=0.30, p=0.861$.

Abstract

The present study examined the significance of methods of discipline used by parents and how these methods of discipline consequently affect their child's self-esteem. This study measured the association between being spanked as a child and the participant's level of self-esteem. Individuals were given a questionnaire which asked about methods of discipline their parents used on them, if they were ever spanked as children, if they believe spanking to be harmful to children, which method of discipline (spanking vs. being yelled at) made them feel worse, and how they would rate their current level of self-esteem. The results indicated that there was not a significant association found between those who were spanked as children and those who believed it to be harmful to spank a child. Overall, my results showed that spanking did not show to be significantly harmful to self-esteem.

Discussion

Being spanked as a child did not show to have a significant influence on the development of self-esteem in the participants of the study. This study also showed that not very many participants thought spanking was a harmful method of discipline. According to the Boise State students, the majority were spanked as children and only a very small number felt it affected their self-esteem or felt it affected their beliefs about spanking. Upon measuring my first hypothesis, it was found that students who were spanked as children did not have significantly lower self-esteem than the students who were not spanked as children. After measuring my second hypothesis, it was found that a slightly larger number of females were more likely than males to believe that spanking is harmful to children and their self-esteem, although the number was not large enough to be considered significant. After measuring my third hypothesis, it was found that a slightly larger number of females also believed that spanking was more hurtful than yelling at a child. However, overall most students agreed that yelling was far more hurtful to them than being spanked was. Although no significant associations between discipline styles and self-esteem were found in this study, it is still imperative to further research in this area in order to help parents choose more effective methods of discipline to use on their children.