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The Aftereffects of Corporal Punishment on Adults: Association of Childhood Spanking with Adult Stress Levels

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THE AFTEREFFECTS OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT ON ADULTS:
ASSOCIATION OF CHILDHOOD SPANKING WITH ADULT STRESS LEVELS

BY

MARIE SANYANG

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
Graduation with Honors from the
South Carolina Honors College

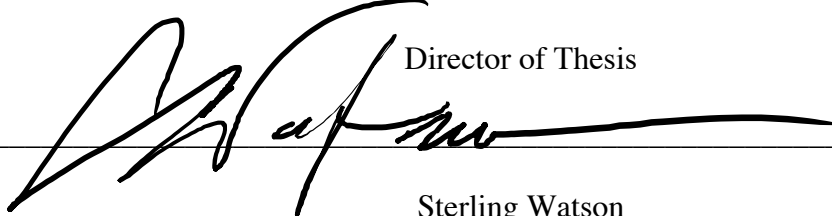
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Thesis Summary

This exploratory study sought to evaluate the stress levels of adults who experienced childhood spankings. It was hypothesized that those who experienced frequent spankings would report increased anxiety, reduced socialization, and decreased emotional regulation in times of stress and that those who were spanked would report lower emotional and physical health regulation and higher mental health diagnosis. Results focused on the frequency and severity of spanking and the combination of spanking with other punishments. Results supported hypotheses, showing a positive correlation between frequent and harsh spankings with diagnosed developmental and depressive disorders. Further study would focus on the long-term effects of combined punishments.

Abstract

Spanking has been an acceptable form of punishment for centuries. Previously thought as effective, studies have now shown the detriments of spanking, including increased aggression, drug abuse, and stress levels. This exploratory study sought to observe the stress levels of adults who experienced childhood spankings. It was hypothesized that those who experienced frequent spankings would report increased anxiety, reduced socialization, and decreased emotional regulation in times of stress. It was also hypothesized that those who reported being spanked would report lower emotional and physical health regulation and higher mental health diagnosis. Fifty-four participants were composed of undergraduate and graduate students at the University of South Carolina. While many factors were considered, including race, class, and family dynamic, the ultimate focus of the study was on the frequency and severity of spanking and the combination of spanking with other punishments. Statistical analysis was conducted using the statistics package available in MSE Analysis ToolPak (Excel 2021). The potential confound of anxiety related to Covid-19 was evaluated. Extreme positive significance was found between the severity of spanking and seeking validation from authority figures, partners, and peers. Those frequently spanked were more likely to endorse and use spanking, and there was a significant difference in response from those who experienced combined punishments than either those who experienced frequent or harsh spankings-those who experienced combined spankings self-reported suspecting developmental or depressive disorders and stronger desire and willingness to seek counseling. The research supported the hypotheses by showing positive correlations between frequency and severity of spankings and diagnosed developmental and depressive disorders. Further study would focus on the long-term effects of combined punishments.

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**The Aftereffects of Corporal Punishment on Adults: Association of Childhood Spanking
with Adult Stress Levels**

Spanking is a common disciplinary action used in several households, the purpose of which is to correct any unwanted behaviors (Tomoda et al., 2009). However, several studies have demonstrated that spanking is not an effective reinforcement to correct behavior. In fact, spankings will often lead to children simply hiding or lying about unwanted behaviors to their parents. According to Gershoff (2013), children who were spanked often were more volatile and quicker to anger than those who were disciplined using other methods. It was also found that younger children who were spanked had a harder time expressing their emotions appropriately. Rather "Children learn by more complicated methods than just which behaviors elicit a punishment; indeed, successful socialization requires that children internalize reasons for behaving in appropriate and acceptable ways" Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Spanking is not an effective disciplinary action to impose on children and is detrimental to their development. While spanking in any capacity can be harmful to child development, frequent spankings can illicit trauma responses within children that will later hinder their capabilities to be fully functioning members of society (Gershoff, 2013). Adults who were spanked as children experience elevated stress levels and have a harder time handling stressful situations than those who received minimal or no spanking as children. They are also more likely to be more emotionally reserved, experience difficulties within intrapersonal relationships, and be more susceptible to anxiety and depression. Proper research and categorization of the effects of childhood spanking on adults can improve research on finding causes for and diagnosing mental illnesses; the results of said research can be used to further advocate for decreased violence against children.

Before conducting an in-depth discussion of the adverse effects of spanking and how to implement more effective methods of correcting unwanted behavior, one must dive deeply into the origins of spanking and the use of corporal punishment on children. One must also discuss the psychology behind negative and positive reinforcement and punishment as they correlate to behavior and play a role in explaining behavioral control. Modern religion is often stated as the origins of spanking. For example, "spare the rod, spoil the child," which is paraphrased from Proverbs, is stated as justification for using corporal punishment on children¹. However, the history of corporal punishment goes beyond the creation of modern religion, with records dating as far back as 2000 BCE (Geltner, 2014). Corporal punishment in that time, however, was reserved for criminals, with the idea that it would only be used in cases where "an eye for an eye" applied; thus, a person who broke another's arm would have theirs broken, a man who killed would be killed himself, etc. (Geltner, 2014).

As society progressed and organized religion began to spread, corporal punishment was adjusted to apply as punishment for committing sins. Judaism and Islam continued to adopt the "eye for an eye" ruling for their punishments. Early Christianity limited corporal punishment to members of the clergy (Geltner, 2014). Catholic and Puritan Christians began the practice of using corporal punishment, particularly spanking, on children in order to "beat the sin out of them" with the idea that the child would remember the fear and pain of the spanking and would therefore refrain from committing sin (Steele, 2018). This practice was countered first in the Enlightenment period, where John Locke introduced the concept of *tabula rosa*, the idea that children were not full of sin but instead born with a blank slate that, with the nurture and care of

¹ The phrase as penned by Samuel Butler was, "Spare the Rod, and spill the Child"; was intended as a broad metaphor for contraception satirizing similar phrases regarding childrearing in Proverbs (verses 13:24, 23:13, and 29:15; Butler 1905, pg. 126)

the parents, could be filled with the tools needed for them to be functioning and respectable members of society (Steele, 2018). In fact, many of Locke's ideals-while unpopular at the time-have been implemented in newer parenting techniques and have been proposed by child development experts.

However, Puritan values for childrearing remained largely popular well into the 20th century, when more studies were being conducted in regard to corporal punishment and child development. Dr. Benjamin Spock's 1946 book *Baby and Childcare* detailed ideals similar to Locke and encouraged gentle parenting (Steele, 2018). Spock's book was revolutionary, but following the rebellious teens of the 60s and 70s, his teachings were advertised ineffective and detrimental by opposing organizations and psychologists, and thus spanking and corporal punishment remained prominent to correct behavior in children (Steele, 2018). The 20th century did, however, start the shift from corporal punishment being used by all authority figures (teachers, religious figures, etc.) to being the sole responsibility of the parent. While few states and countries made the initiative to make this a legal shift, it was largely seen in part to be morally inappropriate for teachers to conduct spankings on students. From the 20th to 21st century, as more studies concluded the detrimental effects of spanking on children from any authority figure, including parents, countries began to make the decision to make spanking illegal; some, like Scotland and Sweden, have made any physical punishment against children illegal while others like England and the United States have overall allowed physical punishment so long as it doesn't leave any marks (Apt Parenting, 2020).

One reason for the continued prominence of using spanking and corporal punishment on children despite the increasing number of studies that do not support the practice involves the cultural belief that children need strict guidance in the form of authoritarian rules and

punishments-in order to be upstanding adults. According to this reasoning, when children commit an unwanted behavior, they need a memorable punishment in order to not repeat the behavior; pain can be a powerful tool as it can be used to condition a certain response. In this case, using physical pain will condition the children to not behave a certain way. Pain can often cause "memories" within the body; this is because when pain is inflicted on the body, pain receptors send signals to the amygdala. The amygdala plays a role in emotional response regulation; overexpression of it can lead to disorders surrounding anxiety, fear, and depression (Neugebauer, 2015). Expression of the amygdala also triggers the body's flight or fight response. As such, repeated exposure to pain in the form of frequent spankings can cause the amygdala to constantly express, eventually leading to anxiety. Even simply imitating spankings-in the form of verbal threats, hand motions, or sounds-can trigger the same response as if a spanking had occurred. This explains why adults who were often spanked as children tend to be "jumpier" than their peers and why they may be quicker to anger or frustration as hyperactivity of the amygdala causes an increase in impulsivity and decreases emotional regulation.

It prompts an interesting discussion: how much spanking is too much spanking, and how does one determine what is trauma and what is merely proper parenting? It has been found that adults who experienced frequent spanking (harsh corporal punishment or HCP) as children exhibit much less grey matter volume (GMV) than adults who experienced rare spankings or none at all. Harsh corporal punishment is defined as "frequent punishment, usually using objects on the bottom, not done out of anger, and as a means to correct unwanted behavior by parents" (Tomoda et al., 2009). Specifically, there was reduced GMV present within the prefrontal cortex, known for logic and decision making, and in the right anterior cingulate gyrus, known for emotional and impulse control as well empathy and decision making (Tomoda et al., 2009).

GMV is important for the functioning of the brain because grey matter contains most of the brain's neuronal bodies that are necessary for the brain to control the regions that are involved in muscle control, emotional regulation, and sensory perception. HCP is known for causing increased aggression, anxiety, and depression in children. From the results of this study, frequent spankings create similar stressors to the body as more extreme beatings and trauma. According to Afifi et al. (2017), "spanking had the same impact as physical and emotional abuse; it increased the risk of attempted suicide, moderate to heavy drinking, and habitual drug use." Sheu et al. (2010) further reiterate this statement in their study, which found that "adults who experienced frequent HCP exhibited higher stress levels than those with less frequent or no HCP."

Given that the Tomoda (2009) study found reduced gray matter volume up to 19.1% in adults who experienced frequent HCP, it can be concluded that frequent CP is severely detrimental to child development. The findings from the Tomoda (2009) study may also be able to explain why children that are "hard to discipline" tend to increase in aggression despite receiving frequent spankings. The reduced GMV indicates that the children exhibit increased aggression as they are less in control of their emotions; it can also explain why they tend to be "hardheaded" and struggle to follow instructions, even when repeated- with a decrease of 16.9% in GMV of the anterior cingulate, children would exhibit more impulsive actions; combined with an overall reduction of 33.6% in GMV present in the prefrontal cortex, children would be less inclined to make proper decisions when faced with problems. Thus, they exhibit the aggressive and hotheaded behavior that is commonly associated with problem children.

While spanking may give parents the desired results temporarily, in the long-term, increased spanking leads to increased behavioral problems as children develop, causing problems

for teenagers and adults. Why, then, is spanking still being used to correct behavior? Oftentimes, parents are unaware of other methods and don't have the patience to try. Because spanking gives temporary results, parents believe that repeated unwanted behaviors are the result of their child deliberately disobeying their orders; very few are able to conclude that it is because spanking is an ineffective disciplinary measure. Another reason for the persistence of belief in spanking as a successful deterrent of unwanted behaviors is the illusory correlation effect. Most adults believe that because they were spanked as children, they turned out to be well-mannered adults; thus, they must also spank their children in order to prevent them from becoming entitled adults.

This, however, is simply a result of correlation and not causation. Multiple studies have shown the opposite effects: spanked children are quicker to anger, tend to use violence when placed in conflict, and are more guarded than their peers who are disciplined using other methods. These spanked children become adults who, when faced with conflicts or overwhelming situations with their own children, resort to using spanking to solve the conflict. In fact, children who were spanked are seven times more likely to spank their own children, thus continuing the use of spanking to correct unwanted behavior. Because they weren't allowed the ability to regulate their emotions as children, they are less likely to take time to regulate their emotions as adults dealing with difficult children, and they resort to spanking most often as the first -or only- disciplinary action. This teaches their children that violence is the solution to conflicts, which is oftentimes why children who experience spankings tend to have difficulties forming relationships.

The purpose of this thesis is to better understand how spanking may have long-term effects on adults and how those effects impact their daily lives. It seeks to find answers to several questions, including further studying the long-term effects of spanking on adult mental, physical

and emotional well-being, as well as studying how spanking enhances adult stress levels. From data presented in similar studies, it is expected that experiencing more frequent childhood spankings will lead to higher stress and a lower ability to cope successfully when placed in stressful situations. It is also expected that adults who experienced spanking will exhibit lower positive emotional and physical health and higher negative mental health.

The results from this study can be used to recognize corporal punishment behaviors that may not be commonly perceived as causing trauma responses. Parents and caregivers can be taught more about corporal punishment and its consequences in order to eliminate the option of spanking as a discipline. The results may also help shed light on why spanking remains a prevalent form of discipline despite evidence proving that it is an effective method. Being knowledgeable about the effects of spankings can also help adults who experienced spankings to recognize their own trauma and seek the proper therapy to overcome such trauma before they embark on their own parental journeys, further breaking the cycle of spankings as a punishment. Knowing the adverse long-term effects of spanking on adults can help develop alternative methods of discipline for children that allow them to correct their mistakes while also being able to develop their emotional, mental, and social health.

Methodology

Data collection was first conducted in three-part surveys from October 2021 to December 2021. Target groups were 18-30 undergraduate and graduate students at the University of South Carolina. Surveys used anonymous data collection in order to reduce survey bias, and participants were asked to use and store a secret password in order to match each of the survey parts to one participant. However, due to inaccurate sample sizes within each survey and participants forgetting their passwords, the surveys were combined into one, and data was

recollected from February 21, 2022, to March 7, 2022. The surveys included questions on participant background (age, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, and socioeconomic background) as well as questions on family relationships, partner relationships, academic and work commitments, and personal health taken from the Negative Event (hassle) Scale for University Students and Positive (uplift) Scale for University Students respectively. The survey was given in multiple formats, including scaling, multiple-choice, and open-ended questioning. Questions on spanking were based on the Corporal Punishment Checklist from Hecker et al. (2014), the Corporal Punishment Measure by Turner and Kopiec (2006), and the KAP Survey towards Use of Violent Forms of Child Discipline compiled by UNICEF. Data were analyzed using statistical analysis.

Participant Demographics

The gender distribution of participants was predominantly binary. Out of 54 participants, 37 (68.5%) reported being female, while 15 (27.8%) reported being male. One participant (1.9%) reported being nonbinary, and one participant (1.9%) chose not to disclose it (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Gender Demographics*

<i>Gender</i>	<i>N (54)</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Female</i>	37	68.5
<i>Male</i>	15	27.8
<i>Nonbinary</i>	1	1.9
<i>Privacy Preference</i>	1	1.9

The class distribution of participants was heavily composed of senior (68.5%) and junior (20.4%) members of the university. First-year students (7.4%), sophomores (1.9%), and graduate students (1.9%) did not represent a significant percentage of the data (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Class (College) Demographics*

<i>Year (in college)</i>	<i>N (54)</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>First-year student</i>	4	7.4
<i>Sophomore</i>	1	1.9
<i>Junior</i>	11	20.4
<i>Senior</i>	37	68.5
<i>Graduate</i>	1	1.9

The sexual orientation of participants is mostly composed of heterosexual students (70.4%). Combined, LGBTQ+ participants present significant data (29.7%), but individual data presents insignificant. This would be important to keep in mind, as a more evenly distributed demographic may present completely different data.

Table 3. Sexual Orientation Demographics

<i>Sexual Orientation</i>	<i>N (54)</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Heterosexual</i>	38	70.4
<i>Gay</i>	3	5.6
<i>Lesbian</i>	2	3.7
<i>Bisexual</i>	8	14.8
<i>Pansexual</i>	1	1.9
<i>Asexual</i>	2	3.7
<i>Other</i>	0	0

As Table 4 shows, the ethnic backgrounds of participants were heavily composed of white (European) students (83.3%). Other ethnic groups combined would present significant data, but individual data is heavily skewed towards white students, playing a role in how the data was presented. Participants could identify with more than one ethnicity, further skewing the data collected.

Table 4. Ethnic Background Demographics.

<i>Ethnicity¹</i>	<i>N (54)</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Black²</i>	3	5.6

<i>African/Caribbean</i>	1	1.9
<i>White³</i>	45	83.3
<i>Hispanic or Latino</i>	0	0.0
<i>Asian⁴</i>	8	14.8
<i>Native American</i>	1	1.9
1. <i>More than one ethnicity can be listed</i>		
2. <i>American descendants of slaves</i>		
3. <i>European</i>		
4. <i>Middle East (West Asia)/East Asia/South Asia/Southeast Asia/North Asia</i>		

The majority of participants identified with the Christian faith (48.1%), while all other faiths make up a combined 51.9% (see Table 5). Because most of the participants identified as Christian, this may play a role in the outcome of the data collected, but overall, data does not indicate major significance within how participants answered the survey.

Table 5. Religious Background Demographics

<i>Religion</i>	<i>N (53)</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Christian</i>	26	48.1
<i>Muslim</i>	3	5.6
<i>Jewish</i>	3	5.6
<i>Buddhist</i>	0	0.0
<i>Hindu</i>	1	1.9
<i>Sikh</i>	0	0.0
<i>Atheist</i>	6	11.1
<i>Agnostic</i>	8	14.8
<i>Uncertain</i>	5	9.3
<i>Other</i>	2	3.8
<i>Note: One data point was not recorded.</i>		

As Table 6 shows, immigrant status was distributed among those who were not immigrants (74.1%), those whose parents were immigrants (14.8%), those whose grandparents were immigrants (7.4%), and those with immigrant great-grandparents or higher (3.7%). While most participants were not immigrants, enough have ties to an immigrant family, which may affect how surveys were answered.

Table 6. Immigrant Status Demographics

<i>Immigrant Status</i>	<i>N (54)</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>1st generation</i>	0	0.0
<i>2nd generation</i>	8	14.8
<i>3rd generation</i>	4	7.4
<i>4th generation or older</i>	2	3.7
<i>Not an immigrant</i>	40	74.1

Half of the participants are first children (50%), 13 are the youngest in their immediate family (24.1%), 10 are middle children (18.5%), and 4 are only children (7.4%). The data is evenly distributed, making it quite significant as a factor to consider when analyzing the survey answers.

Table 7. Family Background

<i>Sibling Rank</i>	<i>N (54)</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Single Child</i>	4	7.4
<i>First</i>	27	50.0
<i>Middle</i>	10	18.5
<i>Youngest</i>	13	24.1

The socioeconomic class was mostly split between the upper-middle class (72.2%) and lower middle class (20.4%), with the poor (1.9%) being an outlier. Two participants were unsure of their status. This data overall would not be significant to keep in consideration while collecting data, but a close study of the middle classes may be interesting to observe at a later date.

Table 8. Socioeconomic Class Demographics

<i>Socioeconomic Class</i>	<i>N (53)</i>	<i>%</i>
----------------------------	---------------	----------

<i>Below poverty</i>	0	0.0
<i>Poor</i>	1	1.9
<i>Lower middle-class</i>	11	20.4
<i>Upper middle-class</i>	39	72.2
<i>Wealthy</i>	0	0.0
<i>Unsure</i>	2	3.7

Questionnaires

Negative Event (hassle) Scale for University Students

This questionnaire focused on the negative day-to-day events that occur in the life of the average university student. It measured distress levels, fear, anxiety, shame, and frustration. The original scale was on a six-point scale, with zero being not finding the event to be a hassle and five being finding the event to be extremely hassling and focused on emotions within the last month.

Positive (uplift) Scale for University Students

This questionnaire focused on the positive day-to-day events that occur in the life of the average university student. It measured positive emotions such as determination, excitement, and enthusiasm. The original scale was on a six-point scale, zero being not uplifted by the event and five being extremely uplifted by the event, and focused on emotions within the last month.

Corporal Punishment Checklist, Hecker, et al. (2014)

This checklist focused on the different methods of corporal punishment used by caregivers. It is commonly given to children to assess the level of severity of punishment. The checklist is six questions, three of which are focused on parental corporal punishment, and the

other three are focused on corporal punishment from teachers. This checklist was one of the inspirations for the section of my thesis that focused on appropriate and inappropriate (severe) methods of punishment and spanking.

Corporal Punishment Measure, Turner and Kopiec (2006)

This measure focused on measuring the frequency of corporal punishment on teens of age 13. It was in a scaled format, with zero being never and 6 being more than 20 times that year. This checklist was one of the inspirations for the section of my thesis that focused on appropriate and inappropriate (severe) methods of punishment and spanking.

KAP Survey Towards Use of Violent Forms of Child Discipline (compiled by UNICEF)

This survey is a compilation of many different questionnaires that ask a range of questions on spanking, corporal punishment and discipline, and interpersonal relationships. The formatting of the open-ended questions I asked about spanking was based on this survey.

Results

Sample Distribution Summary

Of the 54 people sampled, 41 participants reported being spanked as a child, 11 participants reported never being spanked, and 2 participants chose not to disclose it. Of the 41 participants who reported being spanked, 26 reported rarely being spanked, ten reported being spanked moderately, and 5 reported frequent spankings. Eighteen respondents reported the severity of their spankings was in proportion to their punishments, 16 felt that the spankings were harsh in relation to their punishment, and seven felt that the spankings were extreme/unduly harsh in relation to the punishment. Of the 41 participants who reported being spanked, 38 were spanked in conjunction with other punishments such as conversations and taking away

privileges/entertainment. The results were analyzed by comparing the frequency of spanking, the severity of spanking, and spanking combined with other punishments.

Beliefs about spanking

Those who reported receiving harsher spankings were significantly more likely to spank a child that conducted an unwanted behavior and were significantly more likely to spank their own children. In comparison, those who were frequently spanked were the least likely to spank a child that conducted unwanted behavior and less likely to spank their own children (see Table 9).

Table 9. Correlation Between Viewpoints on Spanking as a Punishment as Reported by those Frequently Spanked, Harshly Spanked and Spanked in Combination with Additional Punishments

<i>Severity of Spanking</i>	<i>Would you spank _____?</i>		
	<i>a child that has conducted an unwanted behavior</i>	<i>your own children</i>	<i>other people's children or encourage them to spank their children</i>
<i>Frequent</i>	-0.235	-0.245	-0.213
<i>Harsher</i>	0.407**	0.443**	0.175
<i>With other punishments</i>	-0.084	-0.038	-0.040

** $p < 0.005$

Those not spanked, spanked rarely, or spanked moderately were more likely to be against spanking in any capacity (~60% of total participants, Table 10). However, as those frequently spanked make up only 0.09% of the total participant demographic, it is uncertain whether this data is significant within the category of those who were spanked in any capacity, whether rarely, moderately, or frequently, those who received moderate or rare spankings were largely

against using spanking as a practice, nearly 68% of the total 36 participants. Compared to those frequently spanked, who reported roughly 67% of the total 5 participants in favor of spanking, there can be a reported positive correlation between those who were spanked frequently and being in favor of spanking and spanking their own children.

Table 10. Analyzing Frequency of Spanking and Effectiveness of Spanking.

<i>Preferences Regarding Spanking</i>	<i>Frequency of Spanking</i>			
	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>Rarely¹</i>	<i>Not often²</i>	<i>Frequently³</i>
<i>Do you think spanking is an effective means of correcting unwanted behavior?</i>				
<i>No</i>	8	14	5	1
<i>Unsure</i>	2	4	4	1
<i>Yes</i>	1	8	1	3
<i>Would you spank a child that has conducted an unwanted behavior?</i>				
<i>No</i>	10	19	7	1
<i>Unsure</i>	1	4	2	1
<i>Yes</i>	0	3	1	3
<i>Would you spank your own children?</i>				
<i>No</i>	11	16	7	1
<i>Unsure</i>	0	6	2	0
<i>Yes</i>	0	4	1	4

1. *once in a few months*
2. *more than once a month*
3. *more than once a week*

Note: Frequency of spanking includes participants who reported not being spanked

Those who were spanked in some capacities, while largely against the use of spanking, were more likely to believe that spanking should only be used as a last resort. Those frequently spanked (Table 11) were in favor of spanking, but either as a combined punishment or as a last resort.

Table 11. Comparison of Frequency of Spanking and Use of Spanking as a Punishment.

<i>Frequency of Spanking</i>	<i>Should spanking Be Used as a Punishment?</i>			
	Effective on its own	Conjunction with other punishment	Never be used	Should only be used as a last resort
<i>Not at all</i>	0	0	9	2
<i>Infrequently</i>	1	2	14	9
<i>Not Often</i>	0	1	4	5
<i>Frequently</i>	0	2	0	3
<i>Grand Total</i>	1	5	27	19

1. *once in a few months*
 2. *more than once a month*
 3. *more than once a week*

Note: Frequency of spanking includes participants who reported not being spanked

Those who reported that the severity of spanking was in line with their actions were more likely to endorse the effectiveness of spanking (33% of total participants, Table 12). Twenty-seven participants (50%) reported that spanking should never be used, most of whom reported being spanked in some capacity. Regardless of the severity of spanking, participants were against the use of spanking as a practice. Among those who were spanked, those who felt that the spankings were justified or that they were harsh but not extreme were more likely to report the use of spanking as a last resort (41% of 34 participants).

Table 12. Comparison of Severity of Spanking and Use of Spanking as a Punishment.

<i>Severity of Spanking</i>	<i>Count of How Spanking is Viewed as a Punishment</i>			
	<i>Effective on its own</i>	<i>Should be used in conjunction with another punishment</i>	<i>Should not be used</i>	<i>Should only be a last resort</i>
<i>I wasn't spanked</i>	0	0	9	2
<i>It was justified</i>	1	4	6	7
<i>It was a little harsh</i>	0	1	8	7
<i>It was extremely harsh</i>	0	0	4	3
<i>Grand Total</i>	1	5	27	19

Relationship Findings

Using the Negative Event (hassle) and Positive (uplift) Scales for University Students, students were asked several questions pertaining to personal care, interpersonal relationships, and school and work life. It was found that those who were frequently spanked exhibited extreme instability in times of stress or uncertainty, such as when dealing with bad academics or conflict within their relationships (platonic, familial, or intimate). Those who were spanked frequently and those who were harshly spanked also exhibited higher stress when faced with instability in their interactions with authority figures (in this case, professors) as well. Across the board, those who were frequently spanked, harshly spanked, or spanked in combination with another punishment showed positive significance in needing positive feedback from partners and positive

significance in being impacted by negative feedback from professors; Those who were frequently spanked, spanked harshly or spanked in combination with other punishments are extremely likely to seek and depend on validation from intimate partners and authority figures. Those who were spanked in conjunction with other punishments, however, were more likely to heavily depend on their well-being on the status of relationships outside of their families while showing extreme aversion towards their parents. In terms of emotional regulation in all data sets, those frequently spanked, harshly spanked, or spanked with other punishments reported being more easily frustrated ($r=0.374, p<.05$; $r=0.274, p<.05$; $r=0.373, p<.05$, respectively).

Survey results showed significant relations between the frequency of spanking, severity of spanking, combined punishments, and attitude towards interpersonal relationships. All three focuses showed significant results in relation to receiving positive feedback from partners ($r=0.506, p<.05$; $r=0.411, \text{trend } p = 0.052$; $r=0.350, p<.01$, respectively). Those who were frequently spanked, spanked harshly, or spanked in combination with other punishments were significantly likely to place a high value on their relationships with partners and authority figures; lack of validation from intimate partners and authority figures causes them to be stressed out. Correlation is also present between the frequency of spanking, the severity of spanking, and valuing time alone. Those who were frequently spanked also reported a significant negative correlation with spending time with relatives ($r=-0.369, p<.01$). Correlation is shown between the frequency of spanking, combined punishments, and receiving negative feedback from professors ($r=0.316, p<.05$; $r=0.303, p<.05$ respectively), as well as receiving negative communication from professors ($r=0.303, p<.05$; $r=0.313, p<.05$, respectively). Those frequently spanked and spanked with combined punishment also reported being extremely impacted by conflict from partners ($r=0.458, p<.05$; $r=0.304, p<.05$, respectively). Those harshly spanked and

given combined punishments are more prone to being negatively impacted by perceived instability in relationships with intimate partners and are more insecure and anxious when dealing with authority figures.

Discussion

Those with frequent spankings reported the most significant data across all survey subjects. Significant data was heavily focused between social interactions, relationships with partners, and academic success; this suggests that children who are more frequently spanked have a higher risk of developing anxiety, a need to be in control of their environment, overdependency on partners, overvaluing authority figures, and are more prone to having a heavy critique of themselves. The severity of spanking was the second most significant, mainly focused on social interactions and relationships with family, partners, and friends. Those harshly spanked were more prone to anxiousness, self-consciousness, self-soothing, avoidance of family, and dependency on intimate partners and friends in lieu of family connections. Combined punishments reported data focused on family and personal health, with a significant portion of participants self-reporting diagnosis of developmental or depressive disorders as well as a stronger desire and willingness to receive counseling. Those who received spankings with other punishments presented higher avoidance of family members and increased awareness of mental health. This is particularly interesting because combined punishments are often thought of as being more fair and less harmful to the child than simply using spanking. Significant data of those who received combined punishments were quite low compared to those frequently or harshly spanked, and the data given is focused on familial relationships and personal health. Further research is needed to determine exactly why the combined punishment data is presented in such a manner.

Conclusion

This study sought to observe the stress levels of adults who experienced childhood spanking by conducting a series of questionnaires from which statistical analysis was applied. From previous studies' data on spanking, it was expected that frequently spanked individuals would report increased anxiety, reduced socialization, and reduced emotional regulation in times of stress. It was also expected that, regardless of frequency or severity, those who were spanked would report lower emotional and physical health regulation and higher mental health diagnoses. Through my study, I was able to conclude that both of these hypotheses were correct. The results from this study have shown the severity of the long-term effects of spanking, particularly in adults' ability to regulate emotions and stress, something that is a necessity when dealing with constant life changes within careers and relationships. If adults cannot properly manage their emotions and are rigid to changing environments, they will be hindered in their personal and professional lives. The results of the study also demonstrated that those who were spanked reported higher rates of health diagnoses; healthcare providers may use a history of spanking as a factor when considering diagnoses in conjunction with physical and emotional abuse.

Quite interesting were student responses to open-ended questions; many of the students, when asked why spanking is used, stated that it is used mostly due to generational habit than any real effectiveness in changing child behavior. While results ultimately did reflect the hypotheses, the data collected is limited in its scope of representation. Because data was heavily centered on the responses of majority white, cis-gendered, heterosexual participants within the upper and lower-middle classes, it cannot be said that the data collected is a complete reflection of the population of UofSC. While UofSC is a predominantly white institution, minority students make

up a sizeable demographic at the university, and receiving data from them would more accurately represent the thoughts of the student population at UofSC as ethnically diverse students may answer completely different from transgender students or international students. If given a chance to redo this study, prioritization would be made to promote the survey to a wider variety of UofSC students in order to represent those students more accurately. A wider diversity in participant demographics could potentially reflect data that has been presented in previous studies and possibly present new data, particularly when family dynamics are taken into consideration.

Future Endeavors

Further studies of this topic may focus primarily on the use of spanking combined with other punishments, as these participants proved to be more in tune with their mental health, self-reporting developmental or depressive disorders, and a higher willingness to pursue counseling. These participants also reported being more distant towards family members, particularly parents, so observing this topic further may shed interesting information on combined punishments that were not previously considered. Are all combined punishments detrimental to the child's bonding towards parents, or are there specific combinations such as conversations followed by spankings or vice versa that cause those children to be more averse towards their parents? Another topic that would be interesting to observe in relation to spanking is the observation of familial ranking and spankings. Within this data set, participants ranged from only children to youngest children, but further studying focused on birth order, punishment, and how participants interact with parents, siblings, and other family may prove significant data, as parents often utilize completely different methods of punishments with each child. Are those from larger families more or less connected to their families despite being spanked, do older

children hold more adversity than youngest ones, and how does this affect how each sibling interacts with each other? Immigrant status and traditional, single parent and nontraditional homes must also be taken into consideration, as well as socioeconomic class. Are poorer parents more likely to spank than richer parents, and are richer parents more willing to use combined punishments? Are immigrant parents or those who are second or third-generation immigrants more likely to spank their children than those who are not immigrants? Further research design can be focused on in-person testing, through which monitoring of the amygdala and heart rate can be conducted while participants are presented with varying situations of punishments in order to quantitatively observe the stress levels of those who were spanked frequently, spanked harshly, or given combined punishments. In particular, observing negative versus positive punishment and reinforcement compared to corporal punishment through readings and simulations in order to see how participants contextualize spanking as a discipline.

Limitations

Covid-19 regulations are a major limitation in how the study was designed and conducted, as in-person testing and monitoring were not possible. Given the time frame of the data collection, it is possible that a longer study would have presented a larger data set from which more accurate data could have been analyzed. A longer study may have also allowed for the analysis of multiple data sets in addition to participant stress levels. Initial formatting of the study could have also been improved upon, with initial data collection done through a three-part survey; perhaps starting with a combined survey would have lent a larger sample size, leading to a more comprehensive data analysis.

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Appendix: Survey vs. 2

Description Thank you for participating in this survey! The data from this survey will be used to help me write my senior thesis on the stress levels of adults who experienced spanking as a punishment as children. The data from this survey will remain anonymous and will not be used in anything beyond my thesis, so please do your best to answer each to the best of your ability.

This survey contains questions relating to your relationships with friends, coworkers, authority figures, family, and yourself, as well as stress measurements. Part Two of the survey focuses on interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships

By continuing you agree to participate in this study.

Demographic Information

1 What is your religious affiliation?

- christian
- muslim
- jewish
- buddist
- hindu
- sikh
- other
- atheist
- agnostic
- uncertain
- prefer not to answer

2 If you chose other above, please specify.

3. Are you an immigrant to the USA or a child of immigrants?

- Yes
- No
- Other

4 If yes, which generation?

- first-gen immigrant
- second-gen immigrant (parents are immigrants)
- third gen immigrant (grandparents are immigrants)
- not an immigrant/fourth-gen or older
- Other

5 What was the socioeconomic status of your family growing up?

- below poverty
- poor
- lower middle class
- upper-middle-class
- wealthy
- unsure
- prefer not to answer
- Other

Relationship with friends

6. How impacted are you by negative feedback from friends?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
7. How impacted are you by negative communication from friends?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
8. How impacted are you by conflict with friends?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
9. How much do you value receiving support from friends?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
10. How much do you value giving support to friends?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
11. How much do you value positive feedback from friends?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
12. How much do you value positive communication with friends?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
13. How much do you value positive communication with friends?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent

Relationship with family

14. How impacted are you by negative communication from your parents?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
15. How impacted are you by conflicts with your parents?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
16. How impacted are you by negative feedback from your parents?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
17. How impacted are you by conflict with your relatives other than your parents?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
18. How impacted are you by negative feedback from your relatives other than your parents?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
19. How enjoyable do you find doing activities with your relatives other than your parents?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
20. How much do you value positive feedback from your parents?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
21. How much do you value doing activities with your parents?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
22. How much do you value receiving support from your parents?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
23. How much do you value the opinion of your parents?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent

The next questions involve your social interactions with peers.

- 24 How impacted are you by negative communication from your peers?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
- 25 How impacted are you by conflicts with your peers?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
- 26 How easy is it for you to do tasks with your peers, such as group projects or presentations?
 Extremely difficult Difficult A little difficult Somewhat easy Moderately easy Extremely Easy
- 27 How enjoyable do you find social events?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately Extremely
- 28 How likely are you to go to a party or large gatherings?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately Extremely
- 29 How likely are you to go out for drinks with friends or peers?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately Extremely
- 30 How much do you enjoy your college?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
- 31 How much do you enjoy the events held at your campus?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
- 32 How much do you value receiving support from your peers?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
- 33 How much do you value positive feedback from your peers?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
- 34 How much do you value receiving support from your coworkers?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
- 35 How much do you value team-building activities?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
- 36 How much do you value giving support to your coworkers?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately To a Great Extent
- 37 How anxious do you get in social situations?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately Extremely
- 38 How anxious do you get at the thought of social situations?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately Extremely
- 39 How worried are you about making mistakes during social situations?
 Not at All Very little A little Somewhat Moderately Extremely
- 40 How likely are you to go out alone (for drinks, dinner)?
 Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Neither Agree nor Disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

Not Applicable

41 How much do you value connecting with loved ones?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

42 How much do you value giving support to loved ones?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

43 How likely are you to go to social events alone?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

44 How much do you value working in your community?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

45 How much do you value connecting with others on a spiritual level?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

46 How much do you value giving to charities and nonprofits?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

47 How easy is it for you to connect with new people?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

Academic Performance

48 How stressed are you by your study and class load?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

49 How stressed are you about meeting deadlines for classes?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

50 How skilled are you at time management?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

51 How hard is it for you to complete assignments on time?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

52 How impacted are you by negative communication from your professors?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

53 How impacted are you by negative feedback from your professors?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

54 How impacted are you by conflicts with your professors?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

55 How anxious do you get when you aren't doing well academically?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree

- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

56 How well do you cope with not meeting your own academic expectations?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

57 How enjoyable do you find courses not related to your desired career field?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

58 How much do you value support from your professors?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

59 How much do you value positive communication from your professors?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

60 How much do you value positive feedback from your professors?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

61 How much do you enjoy your major?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

62 How much do you enjoy your courses?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

63 How well do you deal with academic setbacks?

- Strongly Agree

- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

Personal Care

64 How worried are you about your health?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

65 How self-conscious are you about your physical abilities?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

66 How worried are you about your medical care?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

67 How worried are you about getting sick?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

68 How much do you value having a personal care routine?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

69 How much do you value being in physical shape?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

70 How much do you value eating healthy?

- Strongly Agree

- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

71 How much do you value your spiritual health?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

72 How much do you value your mental health?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

73 How much do you value your emotional health?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

74 How well do you cope with not meeting your personal expectations of yourself?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

Workplace

75 The following questions involve the workplace environment. If you do not have a job, you may leave these blank.

- I have a job.
- I do not have a job.

76 How enjoyable do you find the nature of your job?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

77 How stressful do you find the nature of your job?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

78 How stressful do you find your workload?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

79 How stressful do you find meeting deadlines?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

80 How valued do you feel at work?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

81 How well do you feel your skills apply to your work?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

82 How impacted are you by negative feedback from your supervisor(s)?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

83 How impacted are you by negative communication from your supervisor(s)?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

84 How impacted are you by conflict with your supervisor(s)?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

85 How impacted are you by disagreements with your supervisor(s)?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Not Applicable

86 How difficult has it been to find a job?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

Relationship with Partner

87 The following questions involve your relationship with your partner. Indicate your relationship status.

If you do not have a partner, nor have had a partner in the last six months, you can leave the questions in this section blank.

- I currently have a partner.
- I have had a partner within the year.
- I do not have a partner.

88 How impacted are you by negative communication from your partner?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

89 How impacted are you by conflict with your partner?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

90 How impacted are you by disagreements with your partner?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

91 How impacted are you by rejection from your partner?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

92 How impacted are you when your partner does not meet your expectations (disappointment)?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

93 How much do you value intimacy with your partner?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

94 How much do you value positive communication from your partner?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

95 How much do you value giving support to your partner?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

96 How much do you value receiving support from your partner?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

97 Were you spanked as a child?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

98 Would you spank your own children?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

99 Would you spank other people's children or encourage them to spank their children?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable

100 In your opinion, is spanking effective? Why or why not?

101 In your opinion, is spanking abusive towards children? Why or why not?

102 In your opinion what is the difference between spanking and beating?

103 In your opinion, what do you believe is the appropriate age to start spanking your children? why or why not?

104 Would you spank your pet? why or why not

105 Which of the following classify as APPROPRIATE discipline for unwanted behavior of a child? Check all that apply.

- pinching (of ears, arms, legs)
- spanking with hands
- spanking with belt
- spanking with stick, switch or other object
- slapping
- kicking
- punching
- taking away privileges such as meals, privacy
- shaving hair, destroying clothes or otherwise retracting the right to their bodily autonomy

106 Of the choices you picked, why do you find them to be appropriate discipline for children?

107 Which of the following classify as INAPPROPRIATE discipline for unwanted behavior of a child? Check all that apply.

- pinching (of ears, arms, legs)
- spanking with hands
- spanking with belt
- kicking
- punching
- verbal berating
- taking away privileges such as games, television, technology
- taking away privileges such as meals, privacy
- shaving hair, destroying clothes, or otherwise retracting the right to their bodily autonomy

108 Of the choices you picked, why do you find them to be inappropriate discipline for children?

109 Of the choices you picked, which would you choose to change unwanted behavior in your pets?

110 Of the choices you picked, which would you choose to change unwanted behavior in your friends, coworkers, partners, parents, or peers?

111 Of the choices you picked, which would you allow others to choose to change unwanted behavior in you?

