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Associations between Arab Mothers' Self-Efficacy and Parenting Attitudes and their children's Externalizing and Internalizing Behaviors: Gender Differences and the Mediating Role of Corporal Punishment

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Abstract In this study we examined the association between Arab mothers' self-efficacy and parenting attitudes and their children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors, and whether these associations are mediated by the use of corporal punishment. Further, we examined whether the child's gender moderates these associations. We included 2380 mothers of kindergartners who answered a questionnaire assessing levels of self-efficacy, attitudes on corporal punishment, use of corporal punishment, and their children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Using structural equation modeling we tested for the mediation by corporal punishment of the association between self-efficacy, attitudes on corporal punishment and children's behaviors. We further tested possible moderation by gender of the model. Results supported the hypothesized mediation effect of corporal punishment. Results suggest that mothers' low self-efficacy and attitudes supporting corporal punishment were associated with elevated likelihood of use of corporal punishment which, in turn was associated with elevated levels of child's internalizing and externalizing behaviors. No moderation by gender of this pathway was found, suggesting that boys and girls react similarly to the use of corporal punishment by their mothers. Interventions aimed at helping Arab mothers understand the impact of their behavior and guide them toward effective disciplinary strategies are suggested.

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A significant amount of research over the years has taught us that the mother is the leading influential source of learning socialized behavior in the first years of life especially in kindergarten age (Hamre and Pianta 2001; Maldonado-Carreno and Votruba-Drzal 2011; Zellman and Perlman 2006). Characteristics of mothers that are potentially influencing children's behavior are their attitudes against behavioral transgressions, the efficacy of the maintenance of these attitudes against undesirable behavior, and the way prohibition of undesirable behavior is enforced (Ardelt and Eccles 2001). However, addressing effects of mothers' characteristics, to our knowledge, has been fairly scarce among non-western societies (Khoury-Kassabri et al. 2013), implying that most of our current knowledge on the influence of maternal characteristics on child behavior may not apply to non-western mother-child relations. It is interesting and important to explore this topic among Arab minority mothers in Israel since this cultural group differs in several regards from western oriented mothers including those from the Jewish majority in Israel.

First, in the Arab society there is a general emphasis on interdependence, mutual cooperation and the extended family (Haj-Yahia 2000), with more patriarchal and traditional values in the cultural sense, which in turn affects the way parents discipline their children. Arab mothers use corporal punishment as a way to deal with their children's misbehavior more often than Jewish mothers (Khoury-Kassabri 2010). Indeed, children in the Arab community are often treated as parental possessions instead of autonomous entities unlike the Jewish sector which generally holds tolerant parenting strategies (Mikulincer et al. 1993).

In recent decades, however, Israeli Arab society has been experiencing significant economic, political and social changes. Due to women's education, work outside the house, relationship and proximity to the Jewish population, young Arab women seem to hold more modern views than the older generation (Al-Krenawi and Graham 2000; Gharrah 2015). Additionally, a study that examined the change in the division of labor and decision making in the Arab family (Haj-Yahia and Lavee 2017) has found that young Arab woman reported grater marital partnership than their mothers in terms of decision making and division of labor. Furthermore, studies among Arab mothers showed that the higher their education the stronger their self-efficacy (Khoury-Kassabri et al. 2013), and the less authoritarian and controlling parenting style they have than less educated mothers (Dwairy et al., 2006). Second, from a socio-economic perspective, Arab parents often experience adversities as a result of the high rate of poverty and unemployment in their environment (Gharrah 2015). Subsequently, these adversities may also influence their parenting. In fact, a study in Israel has found that Arab mothers are more prone to use corporal punishment than Jewish mothers (Khoury-Kassabri and Straus 2011). However, it has not yet been documented what maternal attitudes are responsible for this high rate of punishment, nor what its effect is on their children's behavioral and emotional problems. This study will thus address the question whether parenting attitudes and self-efficacy of Arab mothers in relation to their likelihood of use of corporal punishment will influence their children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors, after controlling for mothers' socio-economic status?

1 Maternal Parenting Efficacy and Attitudes

Maternal self-efficacy and maternal attitudes concerning disciplinary methods have been linked to children's externalizing and internalizing behaviors (Ardelt and Eccles 2001; Coleman and Karraker 1997; Coleman and Karraker 2003; Jones and Prinz 2005; Khoury-Kassabri et al. 2013; Nebbitt 2009). Self-efficacy and attitudes are both significant in explaining display of behavior (Ajzen 1991, 2002). Caregivers who feel they have no control over their children's misbehavior, thus caregivers with low self-efficacy may store negative thoughts and emotions regarding their children and the appropriate manner to deal with their behavior (Bugental et al. 1990). Therefore, it may well be that mothers who feel incompetent at the same time store thoughts approving the use of aggression as a way to deal with their children's behavior. Hence, the cognitive frames of self-efficacy and attitudes toward disciplining seem to intertwine with each other and synchronously effect children's development. Thereby, the manifestation of attitudes toward disciplining and self-efficacy by the main caregiver may appear significant in clarifying children's developmental process, specifically the development of their internalizing and externalizing behaviors.

In the current study we will attempt to expand the model that was employed in the study by Khoury-Kassabri et al. (2013) among Arab mothers. In their study, maternal characteristics such as, stress and self-efficacy as well as marital relationship aspects such as, division of labor, agreement on discipline and husband's support predicted use of corporal punishment which in turn, lead to children's behavioral difficulties. In our study we aim to distinguish between externalizing and internalizing behaviors as outcome of this risk chain, add attitudes toward corporal punishment as predictor, and put focus on gender differences in type of outcomes of this process. We exclude marital relationship aspects as we focus on the impact of maternal characteristics on children's externalizing and internalizing behaviors (Khoury-Kassabri et al. 2013).

2 Caretaker Self-Efficacy and children's Behavior

In accordance with the literature, we presume that maternal self-efficacy is linked to children's behavioral consequences (Ardelt and Eccles 2001; Jones and Prinz 2005). Self-efficacy in essence is the actors' view on their ability to act in a certain desired way, which brings about a satisfactory outcome (Bandura 1997). In the current study, self-efficacy will be considered as the mother's perceptions regarding her own competence to discipline children (Coleman and Karraker 2003). The influence of self-efficacy in a deprived environment is much more salient than its influence in a safer environment (Ardelt and Eccles 2001; Jones and Prinz 2005; Hill and Bush 2001). Indeed, if the mother feels confident in her parenting skills, she provides protection and a sanctuary place for her child from outside threats. Therefore, focusing on the Arab society, which is characterized by high rate of poverty and unemployment (Gharrah 2015), we hypothesize that maternal self-efficacy regarding disciplinary behavior is an important factor to take into consideration when addressing children's behavioral difficulties. A recent study has found that Arab mothers, who reported lack of competence in their parenting skills, were more likely to report behavioral maladjustment among their children than mothers who reported higher levels of self-efficacy (Khoury-

Kassabri et al. 2013). Patently, children who do not receive clear guidelines and direction from their mothers, are at risk of displaying behavioral and emotional difficulties. A mother who feels secure in her ability to monitor and control her child's behavior directly influences his competence by modeling (Ardelt and Eccles 2001). Indeed, it has been found that mothers with high self-efficacy function as role-models for their children which, consequently leads to their children feelings competent (Ardelt and Eccles 2001). On the other side of the continuum, mothers with low self-efficacy may not have the motivation or the skills to monitor their children's behavior. Thereby, these mothers may lose grip over their children's actions which, in turn may lead their children to function in a maladaptive manner. Interestingly, parents with low self-efficacy tend to view their children as difficult, which, ultimately may become a self-fulfilling prophesy (Bugental and Shennum 1984; Watzlawick 1984). Thus, these children may act accordingly to the way their parents view them and therefore, low self-efficacy of the mother may elicit conduct problems. Furthermore, children with mothers who feel lost and dread in their parenting skills report more symptoms of anxiety than children with mothers who feel confident in their parenting skills (Hill and Bush 2001). It is likely that these children experience confusion and uncertainty by the way their mothers express their love, which seems conditionally (Hill and Bush 2001). Therefore, children who are raised by mothers with low self-efficacy may also be more inclined to develop internalizing behavior such as, symptoms of anxiety and emotional problems than children who are raised by mothers with high self-efficacy.

3 Attitudes on Discipline and children's Behavior

Understanding the formation of attitudes and perception concerning disciplinary tactics is essential in understanding its influence on display of behavior (Huesmann 1998). Mothers' propensity to view force as a legitimate act of discipline is likely to facilitate behavioral and emotional difficulties among their young children. Particularly, mothers who support the use of physical punishment are likely to transfer their attitudes to their children (Bower-Russa 2005), which in turn may elicit their children's susceptibility to perform an act of violence. Resorting to hostile attributions and attitudes legitimizing aggression as a disciplinary tactic consequently, may lead to violent acts not only on the part of the caretaker, but equally on the part of her child (Dodge 1986). When parents believe in authoritarian control strategies as a way to discipline their children, the risk for their children to abuse others increases (Bower-Russa 2005). Thus, maternal attitudes approving corporal punishment are likely to increase their child's externalizing behavior. Similarly, approving the use of corporal punishment by the mother may trigger further negative consequences such as, depressive feelings and anxiety among their children. Naturally, approving the use of corporal punishment ultimately results in its use. The use of corporal punishment has been linked with depressive symptoms among Jewish and Arab students who reported high levels of exposure to physical punishment by their parents (Davidov and Khoury-Kassabri 2013). However, there is a lack of evidence regarding how attitudes toward corporal punishment and its use affect internalizing behaviors among children, especially among young children. This study will attempt to fill this gap by exploring the effect of mothers' attitudes toward corporal

punishment on young children's internalizing behavior and whether this relationship is mediated by the use of corporal punishment.

4 The Mediating Role of Corporal Punishment

Addressing the use of corporal punishment is quintessential in the investigation of caregivers' effect on children's developmental difficulties. In the present study we will define corporal punishment as a disciplinary approach, which includes the use of physical aggression in an attempt to deal with misbehavior (Donnelly & Straus, 2005).

Principally, the use of corporal punishment increases externalizing behavior among children because children tend to imitate the model provided by their caregivers' behavior (Walters 1991). Additionally, exposure to aggression from an early age is likely to elicit hostile attribution (Hyde, Shaw & Moilanen, 2010) as well as to provoke internalizing behavior such as depression (Davidov and Khoury-Kassabri 2013). In fact, mothers with low self-efficacy are inclined to use corporal punishment more often than mothers with high self-efficacy (Khoury-Kassabri et al. 2013) in order to instill discipline in their children. Hence, it is probable that children who grow up in an environment where the mother feels incapable in her parenting skills, develop behavioral difficulties as a result of her behavior manifested by punitive punishment that consequently infuses fear and anxiety (Bugental and Goodnow 1998; Grusec and Goodnow 1994) as well as aggression (Hyde et al. 2010) among children.

Moreover, mothers who store attitudes approving the use of corporal punishment are likely to apply their beliefs (Straus 1992), which elicits the use of corporal punishment that eventually leads to behavioral difficulties among young children. Indeed, children who experience negative emotions due to corporal punishment, tend to focus on their pain and embarrassment, which either results in feelings of revenge leading to reinforcing aggressive behavior or results in internalizing their feelings leading to depressive behavior (Eisenberg 1988).

It appears that the use of corporal punishment by mothers may emerge from feelings of low self-efficacy. In fact, mothers who feel they lack the capacity to discipline their children (i.e., mothers with low self-efficacy) are more inclined to use corporal punishment to monitor their children's behaviors and discipline in case of transgression of rules than mothers who feel competent in their parenting skills. This in turn, is likely to facilitate their children's internalizing and externalizing tendencies (Khoury-Kassabri et al. 2013). Additionally, elevated attitudes supporting the use of corporal punishment is likely to reinforce the use of corporal punishment by mothers. Therefore, we propose that corporal punishment applied by mothers will mediate the relationship between low self-efficacy and attitudes supporting corporal punishment on the one hand and children's externalizing and internalizing behaviors on the other hand.

5 Child Gender as a Moderating Characteristic

Studies investigating children's behavioral difficulties consistently show that boys display more externalizing behavior than girls (Muris et al. 2003; Moffitt et al. 2001) while, girls display more internalizing behavior than boys (Crick and Zahn-Waxler

2003). In accordance with these findings, within the Arab society, exposure to corporal punishment is more frequent among boys than girls and boys show lower levels of internalizing behavior compared to girls (Davidov and Khoury-Kassabri 2013). The use of physical punishment among boys is often perceived as normative which may buffer the negative outcome physical punishment may have on Arab boys (Lansford et al. 2005). However, the use of corporal punishment may more likely elicit externalizing behavior among boys than among girls, since they are more exposed to it and therefore may be likely to imitate their caregivers' behavior. Girls on the other hand, may be more likely to develop internalizing behavior rather than externalizing behavior in response to corporal punishment. The use of physical force on the female's body is regarded as deplorable within the Arab society (Youssef et al. 1998). Therefore, when corporal punishment is enforced on Arab girls its effect may be traumatic and likely to trigger negative emotional reactions. We postulate that the impact of corporal punishment will be stronger on externalizing behavior than internalizing behavior among boys while, the impact of corporal punishment will be stronger on internalizing behavior than externalizing behavior among girls.

Kindergarten children are mostly affected by their parents' behaviors as they still are in the phase of early development which signifies the strong impact parents have on their children's behavior. Indeed, when children are in their early age their relationship with their mothers is especially central because most young children are in the phase of exploring their environment and testing their limits in their search of autonomy (Coleman and Karraker 2003). Therefore, this study will focus on children in their early development phase, ergo children in kindergarten from their mothers' perspective.

6 Proposed Model, the study's Question and Hypotheses

This study aims to explore the contribution of Arab mothers' attitudes supporting corporal punishment and their experienced parenting self-efficacy to children's externalizing and internalizing behaviors and the mediating role of corporal punishment (see Fig. 1). This study will address the question whether maternal attitudes supporting corporal punishment and maternal self-efficacy predicts the use of corporal punishment and whether the use of corporal punishment is associated with greater likelihood of developing external and internalizing behaviors?

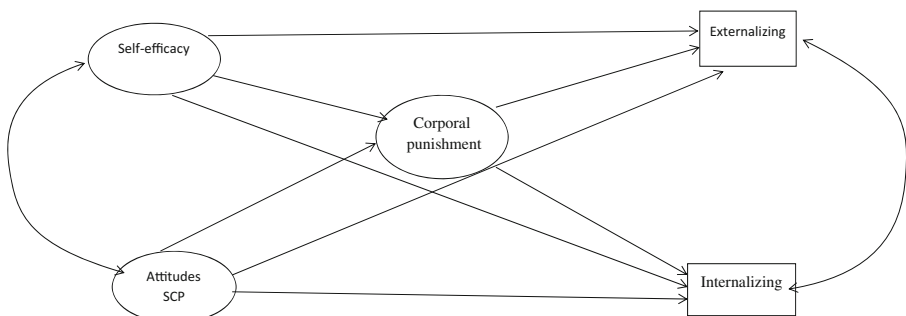


Fig. 1 Hypothesized model. *Note.* = SCP = supporting corporal punishment

The hypotheses to be tested in this study are:

- (1) Stronger mother's self-efficacy will be associated with lower levels of using corporal punishment.
- (2) The higher the mother's self-efficacy the lower her child's externalizing and internalizing behaviors.
- (3) Stronger mother's attitudes toward the use of corporal punishment are associated with higher levels of using corporal punishment with their children.
- (4) Attitudes supporting corporal punishment are associated positively with children's externalizing and internalizing difficulties.
- (5) Higher levels of mother's use of corporal punishment will be associated with higher levels of externalizing and internalizing behaviors of their children.
- (6) Corporal punishment will serve as a mediator in the association between mothers' self-efficacy and attitudes supporting corporal punishment and children's externalizing and internalizing behaviors.
- (7) Gender will serve as a moderator in the association between corporal punishment and externalizing and internalizing behaviors, implying that girls will show higher levels of internalizing behaviors in response to corporal punishment while boys will show higher levels of externalizing behaviors in response to corporal punishment.

7 Method

In the fall of 2011 Arab mothers in Israel took part in a large survey examining discipline methods. Research assistants delivered questionnaires to mothers of children in kindergarten settings. The mothers were asked to complete the questionnaire and return the completed questionnaire in a sealed envelope. The questionnaires and the procedure were approved by the Hebrew University Internal Review Board and by the Israeli Ministry of Education.

7.1 Sample

The majority of the Arab population lives in the northern and central parts of Israel, therefore kindergartens in the north and in the center of Israel were approached to participate in the study. A probability stratified sample was used based on the locality SES index according to the Central Bureau of Statistics. The index that describes the SES of the locality in Israel is based on the level of education, income, employment, housing characteristics and receipt of social benefits (Gharrah 2015). In clusters that have up to 20% of Arab localities, all localities were randomly sampled. In clusters that have less than 20% of Arab localities, all localities were included in the sample. All kindergartens in each locality were sampled, except for four very large localities in which 50% of kindergartens were randomly sampled. A total of 2447 mothers whose children attended 131 kindergartens participated in the study. The approximate response rate of the mothers was 62.6% who children learn in 131 kindergartens (out of 150, response rate was almost 87%), while the average number of children in the kindergartens included in the current study was 29.84 (SD = 4.58). The sample

consisted of 50.1% boys. Average mothers' age was 32.97 years ($SD = 5.66$) with an average score of education 3.40 ($SD = 1.17$; range 1–5), while the average of family's economic situation was 2.54 ($SD = 1.32$; range 1–6). Due to missing data for the relevant factors, we tested the hypothesized models on data from 2380 mothers.

7.2 Measurements

7.2.1 Dependent Variable

Child's Adjustment Difficulties Children's adjustment difficulties were assessed by having the parents complete the parent version of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman 1997), developed for children aged 4–16 years old, which, was translated into Arabic by professionals. The translated questionnaires are available at the official website of the SDQ (www.sdqinfo.com). The SDQ has 25 items that are rated on a 3-point Likert scale (0 = not true, 1 = somewhat true, 2 = certainly true), measuring five types of difficulty: hyperactivity (e.g., "Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long"), emotional symptoms (e.g., "Often unhappy, depressed or tearful"), conduct problem (e.g., "Often fights with other children or bullies them"), peer problems (e.g., "Rather solitary, prefers to play alone") and prosocial behavior (e.g., "Helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill"). Its psychometric properties have been found to be adequate in studies across cultures, languages, and socioeconomic backgrounds, including in Israel (Goodman et al. 2000; Mansbach-Kleinfeld et al. 2010).

In our study we used two measurements to assess the child's externalizing and internalizing behaviors each separately. A Principal Component Analysis revealed that conduct problems was best represented by 4 items that were averaged to yield an externalizing behavior score ($\alpha = .70$), while emotional symptoms were best represented by 7 items that were averaged to yield an internalizing behavior score ($\alpha = .67$).

7.2.2 Mediating Variable

Likelihood of Using Corporal Punishment The use of corporal punishment by mothers was assessed by the Dimensions of Discipline Inventory (DDI; Straus and Fanchier 2007) that has 28 items measuring several discipline methods such as corporal punishment, monitoring, ignoring behaviors etc. Preliminary testing of the DDI in a US sample yielded good reliability estimates as well as evidence of validity (Straus and Fanchier 2007). The DDI was translated into Arabic by professional translators and was widely used among Arab mothers in the past (see Khoury-Kassabri 2010; Khoury-Kassabri and Straus 2011). Mothers were asked to report how likely they would be to use each of the behaviors towards a child if the child misbehaves. The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = "not likely at all" to 5 = "extremely likely". The behaviors include the use of physical force to discipline children (e.g., "you will hit the child on the hand or buttocks"). A Principal Factor Analysis revealed that 5 items best represented the likelihood of using corporal punishment. The scores on these were averaged to yield a use of corporal punishment scale for mothers ($\alpha = .79$).

7.2.3 Independent Variables

Self-Efficacy Mothers' self-efficacy was assessed by the Self-Efficacy Parenting Tasks Index-Toddler Scale (SEPTI-TS; Coleman and Karraker 1997) which was translated into Arabic. The scale includes 8 items that measure efficacy to discipline and set limits (e.g., "Setting limits for my child is relatively easy for me"). The items ranged on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Item scores were averaged to yield mothers' self-efficacy score ($\alpha = .70$).

Attitudes toward the use of Corporal Punishment Mothers' attitudes towards corporal punishment were assessed by a scale that was developed in Arabic by Khoury-Kassabri et al. (2013). The mothers were asked to rate their level of agreement with the use of physical punishment to discipline children, when facing a child's misbehavior (e.g., 'A child cursed at a student or shoved or hit a student'). The 17 items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. Item scores were averaged to yield a scale score reflecting attitudes towards the use of corporal punishment for mothers ($\alpha = .98$).

7.2.4 Moderating Variable

Gender A multiple group analysis was tested to compare the fit of the model that presented in Fig. 1 to the data for boys and girls.

7.2.5 Control Variable

Mother's Demographic Information A measure of Social Economic Status (SES) was created from two relevant factors: *Mothers' education level* (ranging from 1 = elementary school to 5 = postgraduate degree) and *family's total income* for the month ranging from 1 (up to 3500 NIS which is approximately 950 USD\$) to 6 (20,000 NIS which is approximately 5000 USD\$).

7.3 Statistical Analysis

For a preliminary analysis we computed the descriptive statistics of the dependent variables (internalizing and externalizing behaviors), mediating variable (mothers' use of corporal punishment), and independent variables (self-efficacy and attitudes towards the use of corporal punishment), and tested sex differences in these measures. Then, Pearson correlations were computed between mothers' characteristics and child's adjustment variables. All combined the study hypotheses form the structural model presented in Fig. 1. The model was tested by Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) through the AMOS 22 statistical program. First, we fitted the model for the whole sample and examined the direct and indirect effects simultaneously, then, we performed multiple group analysis with boys and girls as groups. For all models, we have controlled for mother's SES. To measure model fit to the data, a number of consecutive

models were tested and goodness-of-fit indices were computed following the recommendations of Raykov et al. (1991). We reported the normal fit index (NFI), comparative fit index (CFI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). We used the bootstrapping technique to account for violation of the assumption of normality of the data (Adèr et al. 2008). We first tested the direct effects of the mothers' self-efficacy and attitudes towards corporal punishment on children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Then the mediating effects of corporal punishment used by mothers were included in the model. Finally, we performed a multiple group analysis comparing boys and girls by a model assuming equality of parameters to a model unconstrained.

8 Results

8.1 Descriptive Statistics

The means and standard deviations of mothers' characteristics and child's behavioral adjustment difficulties are displayed in Tables 1 and 2. With respect to gender differences, boys showed higher levels of externalizing behavior ($M = 1.75$, $SD = .55$) compared to girls ($M = 1.56$, $SD = .51$) $t(2, 2401) = 8.44$, $p < 0.00$, while there was no difference between boys ($M = 1.44$, $SD = .37$) and girls ($M = 1.4$, $SD = .36$) in their internalizing behaviors $t(2, 2401) = 2.301$.

The Pearson correlations between mothers' and child's behaviors are displayed in Table 3. Corporal punishment used by mothers was negatively associated with self-efficacy, positively associated with attitudes supporting the use of corporal punishment and self-efficacy was negatively associated with attitudes supporting the use of corporal punishment. Child's externalizing and internalizing behaviors were negatively associated with mother's self-efficacy and were positively associated with attitudes supporting the use of corporal punishment and corporal punishment used by mothers.

Table 4 represents the correlations between mothers' characteristics and the behaviors of boys and girls separately. Interestingly, there was a stronger correlation between the use of corporal punishment by mothers and girls' externalizing and internalizing behaviors than boys' externalizing and internalizing behaviors. Further, there was a stronger correlation between mothers' characteristics and externalizing behavior for girls than for boys while, a stronger correlation was found between mother's characteristics and internalizing behavior for boys than for girls.

Table 1 Means and standards deviations of mothers' characteristics and children's behaviors ($N = 2380$)

	Mean	SD
Attitudes	1.680	.799
Self-efficacy	4.010	.574
Corporal Punishment	1.000	.705
Child's externalizing behavior	1.664	.547
Child's internalizing behavior	1.431	.372

Table 2 Mean difference between boys and girls

	Total			Boys			Girls			F-test
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	
Internalizing	1.43	.37	2404	1.446	.375	1223	1.412	.365	1181	.812
Externalizing	1.66	.54	2403	1.754	.560	1222	1.568	.517	1181	16.512*

* $p < 0.01$

8.2 Mediation Model

The results of the model fit analysis present a good fit of the data to the model $\chi^2(2, 2380) = .451$, n.s., NFI = 1.00, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000.

The model explored simultaneously the direct and indirect effects. The direct effects tested the correlation between maternal characteristics variables on corporal punishment and externalizing and internalizing behaviors, in addition, the effects of corporal punishment on child externalizing and internalizing behavior. The indirect effect explored the association between the independent variables on the dependent variables via the mediator.

We used the causal steps approach (Baron and Kenny 1986) to test for significance of different paths. The dependent variables of children's externalizing and internalizing behaviors were both directly and indirectly affected by the mothers' self-efficacy. The standardized regression coefficient between self-efficacy and corporal punishment ($\beta = -.333$, $b = -.412$, $se = .023$, $p < .01$) was statistically significant. Meaning, the stronger the mother's self-efficacy the lower her use of corporal punishment. Furthermore, we found significant association between corporal punishment and externalizing behavior ($\beta = .274$, $b = .213$, $se = .016$, $p < .01$) and internalizing behavior ($\beta = .199$, $b = .104$, $se = .011$, $p < .01$) (see Fig. 2). I.e., the higher the mother's use of corporal punishment, the greater her child's internalizing and externalizing difficulties.

The standardized indirect effect between self-efficacy and externalizing behavior was $-.091$ (90% CI: $-.107 \approx -.77$) while the indirect effect between self-efficacy and internalizing behavior was $-.066$ (90% CI: $-.081 \approx -.053$). This indicates that the influence of self-efficacy was partially mediated by corporal punishment for both

Table 3 Correlation matrix mothers' characteristics and their children's behaviors

Variables	Variables				
	1	2	3	4	5
Attitudes	-				
Self-efficacy	-.110**	-			
Corporal punishment	.225**	-.354**	-		
Child's internalizing behavior	.083**	-.324**	.297**	-	
Child's externalizing behavior	.094**	-.286**	.349**	.388**	-

** $p < 0.01$

Table 4 Correlation matrix mothers' characteristics and their children's behaviors for girls and boys separately

Variables	Variables				
	1	2	3	4	5
Attitudes	-	-.116**	.214**	.082**	.113**
Self-efficacy	-.107**	-	-.358**	-.307**	-.285**
Corporal punishment	.237**	-.348**	-	-.305**	.385**
Child's internalizing behavior	.089**	-.328**	.286**	-	.391**
Child's externalizing behavior	.078**	-.278**	.312**	.374**	-

** $p < 0.01$. Bolded correlations represent the findings for girls

externalizing and internalizing behaviors. Meaning that mother's self-efficacy predicts her use of corporal punishment, that in turn increases the child's externalizing and internalizing behaviors. In addition, the direct effect of mother's self-efficacy on child's outcomes remains significant after controlling for the mediation variable - corporal punishment (partial mediation) (Fig. 3).

The results further indicate that the children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors were indirectly affected by mothers' attitudes towards corporal punishment through the mediated effects of the use of corporal punishment by mothers. The standard regression coefficient between attitudes toward corporal punishment and corporal punishment ($\beta = .187$, $b = .164$, $se = .017$, $p < .01$) was statistically significant, as was the standardized regression coefficient between corporal punishment externalizing behavior ($\beta = .274$, $b = .213$, $se = .016$, $p < .01$) and internalizing behavior ($\beta = .199$, $b = .104$, $se = .011$, $p < .01$).

The standardized indirect effect between attitudes supporting corporal punishment and children's externalizing behavior was .051 (90% CI: .040 \approx .063) while the indirect effect between attitudes toward corporal punishment and internalizing behavior was .037 (90% CI: .028 \approx .048). The direct paths between attitudes supporting corporal punishment and children's externalizing and internalizing behaviors were insignificant. These results indicate that the association between attitudes supporting corporal punishment and both internalizing and externalizing behaviors is fully mediated by the use of corporal punishment. That is, mother's stronger support of the use of corporal

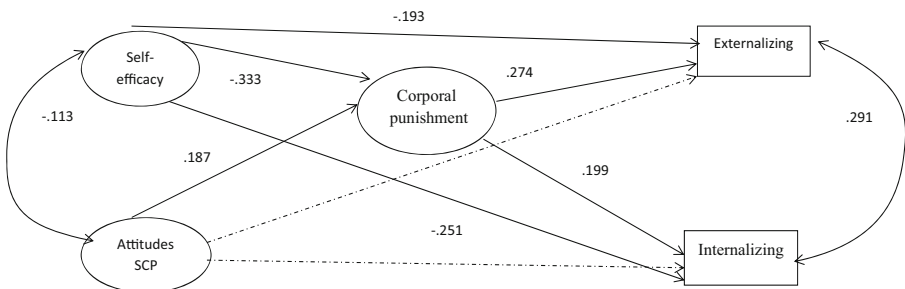


Fig. 2 Structural equation model results. $\chi^2 (3, N = 2380) = 45.162, p < 0.01$ with NFI = .96, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .07. The paths represented by the dotted lines were statistically insignificant. Note. = SCP = supporting corporal punishment

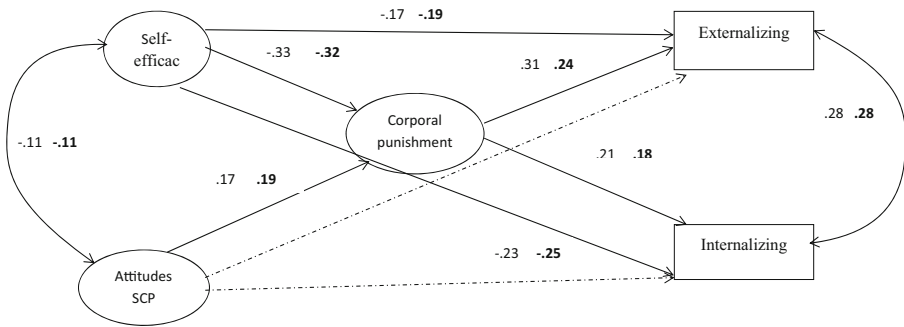


Fig. 3 Structural equation model results. We tested this model by contrasting boys versus girls. The paths represented by the dotted lines were statistically insignificant. The coefficients in regular print and those in bold print, represented, respectively the results for girls and boys. *Note.* SCP = supporting corporal punishment

punishment increases her actual use of corporal punishment, which results in greater levels of internalizing and externalizing behaviors of her child.

The overall model explained 15% of the variance for the dependent variable of children's externalizing behavior and 14% of the variance for the dependent variable children's internalizing behavior.

8.3 Moderation Model

Finally, we tested whether corporal punishment affected externalizing behavior more in boys than in girls and whether corporal punishment affected internalizing behavior more in girls than in boys. First a model in which all paths were unconstrained across gender was fitted. Then, we compared this model to a model in which all paths were constrained to be equal across gender. The multiple group analysis yielded no difference between boys and girls in the effect of corporal punishment on children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 2.01, p = .91$. The results show that corporal punishment affected externalizing behavior more than internalizing behavior for both boys and girls (girls: *Internalizing*; $b = .110, \beta = .215, p < 0.01$. *Externalizing*; $b = .227, \beta = .311, p < 0.01$ and boys: *Internalizing*; $b = .098, \beta = .184, p < 0.01$; *Externalizing*; $b = .193, \beta = .241, p < 0.01$).

9 Discussion

The aim of the present study was to test whether the link of maternal parenting self-efficacy and maternal attitudes against corporal punishment with children's externalizing and internalizing behaviors is mediated by the likelihood of actual use of corporal punishment by the mothers. The study used a representative sample of Arab mothers' reports on their young children's behaviors within the Arab society, a traditional culture yet cultivated within Israel, a modern culture (Ben-Arieh and Haj-Yahia 2006). The study addressed first whether the likelihood of use of corporal punishment mediates the relationship between self-efficacy and attitudes and both externalizing and internalizing behaviors, and then whether there is a gender difference in the effect of corporal punishment on children's externalizing and internalizing behaviors.

With respect to the effect of maternal self-efficacy, it was found that mothers' use of corporal punishment partially mediated the relationship between maternal self-efficacy and children's externalizing behavior. Indeed, a previous study has shown that low self-efficacy among mothers was directly linked (Khoury-Kassabri et al. 2014) to externalizing behavior. The current finding on the indirect link of self-efficacy via corporal punishment to levels of externalizing behavior suggests that mothers who feel they lack the capacity to discipline their children are likely to facilitate externalizing behavior among their young children through the use of corporal punishment as a result of their inexperienced incompetence to discipline their children. Consistent with previous studies, mothers' feelings of incompetence and helplessness may worsen children's developmental process by reinforcing their need to retaliate and seek their parents' attention by exhibiting conduct problems (Bor and Sanders 2004; Glatz and Buchanan 2015; Weaver et al. 2008; Yaman et al. 2010). In fact, among the predictors of daily stress and marital discord, maternal self-efficacy was the strongest predictor of toddlers externalizing behavior (Yaman et al. 2010). The current study shows that maternal self-efficacy is not only an essential maternal characteristic in children's development it is also a characteristic that is likely to predict the use of corporal punishment by mothers. The use of corporal punishment in turn is associated with children's display of externalizing behavior. Previous studies showed that self-efficacy is especially imperative among societies characterized by a low social economic state (Ardelt and Eccles 2001; Jones and Prinz 2005; Hill and Bush 2001), which is often the case among Arabs living in Israel.

With respect to internalizing behavior, findings confirm that corporal punishment also mediates the relationship between maternal self-efficacy and children's internalizing behavior. While previous studies have stressed the influence of low maternal self-efficacy on children's conduct problems (Bor and Sanders 2004; Glatz and Buchanan 2015; Weaver et al. 2008; Yaman et al. 2010), little is known regarding the influence of maternal self-efficacy on children's internalizing behavior. This study attempts to fill this gap. Interestingly, low maternal self-efficacy is associated with internalizing behavior in the same way as externalizing behavior, indicating the important role maternal self-efficacy may play in the development of not only children's behavioral but also their emotional problems. Although, there is a lack of evidence concerning the association between self-efficacy and children's internalizing behavior especially among young children within the Arab society, this study shows that Arab mothers with low self-efficacy are likely to directly enhance their children's internalizing behavior as well as by means of corporal punishment.

Many studies have stressed the important role corporal punishment play in children's developmental process (Ferguson 2013; Lansford et al. 2005). This study provides further evidence concerning the role of corporal punishment on children's externalizing behavior and adds the importance of corporal punishment as a means of transferring maternal experiences of low self-efficacy on children's internalizing behavior. Indeed, corporal punishment seems to facilitate children's behavioral problems and children's emotional problems similarly.

Because the use of corporal punishment is derived from the attitudes supporting the use of corporal punishment (Henry et al. 2000), we hypothesized whether the likelihood to use corporal punishment mediates the relationship between attitudes supporting corporal punishment and children's externalizing and internalizing behaviors. With

respect to externalizing behavior, our results were consistent with this supposition. In fact, the relationship between attitudes supporting corporal punishment and children's externalizing behavior was fully mediated by corporal punishment. Within the Arab society, from a traditional point of view, corporal punishment is considered normative (Dwairy 2004). Therefore, attitudes supporting corporal punishment are prevalent in comparison to western societies (Khouri-Kassabri 2012). Our results suggest that Arab mothers who support corporal punishment are more likely to actually use it, and thereby are likely to enhance their children's externalizing behavior. Indeed, children who are raised by mothers who support the use of corporal punishment and subsequently apply it, are a risk of imitating their mothers' behavior in this regard. Hence, these children may be inclined to view aggression as a legitimate solution to various conflicts and consequently use it in their everyday life. In terms of internalizing behavior, consistent with our expectation and given the limited available literature, we found that corporal punishment mediates the relationship between maternal attitudes toward corporal punishment and children's internalizing behavior strictly by means of corporal punishment. A possible explanation for the current finding is that attitudes supporting corporal punishment naturally predict the use of corporal punishment which, in turn, is likely to elicit children's internalizing behavior. Therefore, mothers' attitudes supporting the use of corporal punishment may enhance the developmental of children's internalizing behaviors. Thus, it appears that the effect of attitudes towards corporal punishment on children's emotional problems is dependent on whether the use of corporal punishment will be inflicted on children by their mothers.

Contrary to our hypothesis there was no moderation effect of gender on the effect of corporal punishment on children's externalizing and internalizing behaviors since, corporal punishment had a greater effect on externalizing behavior than on internalizing behavior for both boys and girls. This is particularly interesting as studies show that girls are more likely to demonstrate internalizing behavior while boys are more likely to demonstrate externalizing behavior in response to corporal punishment in their early teens (Davidov and Khouri-Kassabri 2013). It is probable that in our study the children react similarly to the use of corporal punishment because they are still in the early stages of their development. A possibility is that sex differences in internalizing are not yet as salient as they become later in development. This may indicate the impact of harsh ways of socialization through which girls learn to suppress their feelings and boys are encouraged to express theirs (Crick and Zahn-Waxler 2003) may only become visible later on in the elementary school period. Therefore, future studies should replicate this unique trend. Additionally, it may well be that mothers' reports of their children's behaviors effect this current trend because mothers who use corporal punishment view their children as problematic and therefore, report symptoms of externalizing behavior more often than internalizing behavior among their children independent of the child's gender.

This study has several limitations. Because the current study is cross-sectional, no conclusions on the direction of the demonstrated associations can be drawn, nor on the causality of the relationships. Although we examined the theoretical link between maternal self-efficacy and attitudes toward corporal punishment on the use of corporal punishment and its link to children's externalizing and internalizing behaviors, the direction of the mutual influence between these variables as assessed through mediation analyses poses a common problem. It well may be that parents who have children with behavioral and emotional problems, feel less capable in disciplining their children

because of these problems, and therefore show insufficiencies in their parenting strategies as expressed by the use of corporal punishment which further elicits their children's behavioral problems (Coleman and Karraker 2003). Future studies should test the causality of the association between maternal characteristics and children's behaviors by longitudinal and experimental studies. Furthermore, maternal characteristics and children's behaviors in the current study are assessed only from the mothers' perspective because the study is based on mothers' reports. Due to this limitation, it is possible that children's behaviors reports are biased especially in cases where mothers use corporal punishment (Khoury-Kassabri et al. 2013). Therefore, future studies should collect other informants' assessments such as, teachers, fathers or use other methods such as, observations. Furthermore, in this study, because of the sampling method, we were able to calculate only the response rate of the whole sample, but not in different groups. Finally, this study investigated the influence of mothers' characteristics on their children's development with the exception of their fathers. In fact, a study investigating the influence of parents on their adolescent children among the Chinese families has found that the relationship between father and child was more important in influencing family function than the mother-child relationship (Shek 1999; Shek 2005). The Arab culture is similar to the Chinese in the sense that the father takes the control over the decision making in the family. However, today the structure of the Arab family is changing as mothers are more educated and independent as opposed to the older generation. This in turn may affect the role the father takes in his children's lives (Haj-Yahia and Lavee 2017). It will be interesting to examine the position of the father in the modern Arab family and how it influences children's developmental process.

9.1 Research and Practical Implications

The current study has several implications for future research. As mentioned above longitudinal and experimental studies including the period of childhood to adolescence are needed in order to test whether the impact of maternal self-efficacy and attitudes toward corporal punishment, and the resulting effects on child adjustment remains stable over the course of development particularly within the Arab society. Next, additional studies are needed to examine the association between maternal self-efficacy, attitudes toward corporal punishment and children's internalizing behavior specifically. It is interesting to examine whether Arab children are more inclined to develop internalizing behavior in response to maternal self-efficacy and attitudes toward corporal punishment than children from western societies. Additionally, information gathered from both teachers and their caregivers is potentially more reliable as mothers' as well as teachers' perspective on their children's behaviors provides an additional perspective. Further, the use of other methods such as, observations may provide additional perspective on the way mothers' characteristics affect their children's emotional and behavioral attributes.

This study elucidates that low maternal self-efficacy did not only predict the use of corporal punishment but also effects children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors similarly. It is therefore, expected that preventions and interventions targeting the mothers' ability to feel competent in her parenting skills may affect their tendency to use corporal punishment and by consequence also prevent the development of their children's problem behavior. This is especially imperative within the Arab community where certain mothers are forced to often deal with their children's misbehavior

singlehandedly (Dwairy 2004), and particularly, these are the mothers who use corporal punishment (Khoury-Kassabri et al. 2014). Additionally to maternal self-efficacy, beliefs in the use of corporal punishment affect children's externalizing behavior by means of the use of it equally for boys and girls. In the Arab society, girls are often considered as weak and therefore, are likely to develop internalizing behavior in response to harsh disciplinary tactic. However, this study shows that girls at kindergarten age react similarly to boys, and specifically they are equally likely to develop externalizing behavior than internalizing behavior in response to corporal punishment. This, in turn may raise awareness and subsequently information as to why girls particularly Arab girls exhibit externalizing behavior. Previous studies have stressed the deleterious effect corporal punishment has on children's development (Ferguson 2013). Interventions should provide Arab mothers the skills and parenting techniques which will help mother's to understand the impact of their behavior and guide them with effective coping strategies. Finally, it is important to mention that in early development parents have substantially more power over their children's developmental process than in later development. Indeed, the findings show that maternal self-efficacy and maternal attitudes toward corporal punishment are associated with children's behavioral and emotional problems within the Arab society among young children. Henceforth, interventions aimed at Arab mothers should start when their children are in their early age.

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