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**University students' perceptions of parental discipline techniques: Personal acceptability of the use of corporal punishment**

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in *School of Human Ecology*.

by

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Under Mentorship of Dr. Trent Maurer

**ABSTRACT**

*This study examines college students' perceptions of the use of physical punishment as a discipline technique. Factors such as social acceptability, effectiveness, short and long-term behavior recurrence, and abusiveness were assessed. Current literature shows that the use of corporal punishment in childhood leads to negative developmental consequences across the lifespan. Additionally, physical punishment has not shown any effectiveness for either short- or long-term behavior correction (Gershoff, 2013). This study incorporates a vignette style methodology, in which participants read one of two randomly assigned vignettes (i.e., developmentally appropriate discipline or corporal punishment). They were asked a series of questions on the discipline used. A one-way MANOVA was conducted on the quantitative data, in addition to a qualitative analysis. The results of a one-way MANOVA revealed that the three of the dependent variables had statistically significant differences between the two vignettes. A comparative analysis observing the difference between current research findings to the participant's ratings showed that there are some existing gaps between the literature and the participants' perceptions in regard to the severity of the developmental outcomes. However, this study was consistent with the research on declining acceptability of physical punishment. These results can be implemented in targeting educational content and conversations to pinpoint the components of physical punishment that have a lack of understanding and need more awareness.*

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## **University students' perceptions of parental discipline techniques: Personal acceptability of the use of corporal punishment**

Parenting strategies can be very personal topics that hold a high variation of individual beliefs and values. There can also be a divide in what individuals believe to be the best practices and techniques. Regardless of personal beliefs, one disciplining technique specifically that has been empirically associated with negative developmental outcomes for children is physical punishment. This study aims to examine university students' perception of the use of physical punishment as a discipline strategy. The main question that this study seeks to answer is if college students rate corporal punishment as an abusive behavior. Additional purposes are to measure the number of individuals who deem corporal punishment as an acceptable behavior, as well as the degree of its perceived effectiveness as a behavior management strategy.

Corporal punishment is a technique that parents use on their child often times for behavior management and disciplining purposes. This is defined by Merriam-Webster's Dictionary as any "punishment that involves hitting someone" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This can include actions of spanking, slapping, pinching, paddling, etc.; it is also referred to as physical punishment. Although there has been recent increasing disapproval of the use of corporal punishment, it is still a very common disciplining strategy. When parents were asked about their beliefs on physical punishment, 77% of men and 65% of women agreed with the statement that, "a child sometimes needs a good hard spanking (Child

Trends, 2013). As of 2019, studies reported that 62% of children ages two-four years old have experienced spanking within the past year (Finkelhor et al., 2019).

There can be many misconceptions when referring to child maltreatment, especially in regard to use in parenting and discipline. Awareness and education on the topic of child abuse is important discuss because it allows people to feel more confident and comfortable in reporting a case they might suspect, as well as, increased personal knowledge for future decisions. In order to create positive change on social issues, it is an integral first step to evaluate what current societal perceptions and values are and be able to compare them to empirical evidence. Obtaining accurate and natural data on the topic of corporal punishment is difficult task in the field of child development, due to the fact of participants might not engaging in the behavior to the extent they normally would without an observer in the environment (Gershoff, 2013). This supports the reasoning as to why research on this topic is of high importance. Not only to increase awareness and education on the subject, but ultimately aiming to decrease the cycle of child maltreatment from the use of corporal punishment.

### **Literature Review**

The use of corporal punishment to discipline a child is a behavior that can be seen in everyday public life. For some families, it can be used as a regular discipline technique for trying to correct their child's behavior. Oftentimes, parents can be unaware of the negative impact that physical punishment can have on the development of their child. When an individual experiences child abuse and neglect, it can be easily, "transferred from one generation to another", making it difficult for the persons involved to realize the

problem at hand (Altan et al., 2018, p. 51). Current research has been conducted on the potential consequences of corporal punishment on children's lifelong development, as well as current perceptions of physical punishment. However, there are not many research findings on the perceptions on the degree of abusiveness of the behavior as well as its effectiveness.

### ***Developmental Effects and Outcomes***

Corporal punishment and physical child abuse can often be viewed as two very different behaviors; however, regardless of the intentionality of the physical act, they both can create negative outcomes in the development of the child. A study done on the effects of both physical child abuse and physical punishment found that they are both predicting factors of lifetime aggression (King et al., 2018). When there is an abusive parent-child relationship, it often begins as physical discipline that escalates as a means to gain control in a power struggle between parent and child (Greenwald et al., 1997; Smith et al., 2007).

When a child is performing a mistaken behavior or is acting in an unfavorable manner, parents and caretakers often think about what they can do to cease the child's behaviors instantly. In life moments like this, especially when in a caretaker role, there are often a lot of responsibilities and stressors happening around them in addition to parenting and child care, so it can be easy to use a parenting strategy that will quickly help their environment in the short term (e.g. spanking). However, spanking and other types of physical punishment do not display effectiveness at immediate behavior correction. Physical punishment holds an even more robust correlation to long term

non-compliance, with a negative correlation between the amount of physical punishments that was administered and long-term compliance (Gershoff, 2013)

Alongside aggression, research on physical punishments, specifically spanking, are linked to other negative social-emotional outcomes such as low self-esteem (Cuartas, 2021). Early social-emotional development in a child's life is an imperative stepping stone to other higher-level cognitive abilities. The effects of delayed social-emotional development in early childhood transcend into later difficulties in maintaining attention, processing information, reducing stress, and forming relationships (Cuartas, 2021). Further implications of these developmental delays have shown a decreased level of school readiness (Weegar et al., 2018).

The use of physical punishment outcomes can be affected by the attachment style between parent and child. Early attachment to a caregiver is theorized to play a role and be represented in an individual's lifelong attachment style (Bowlby, 1969). Additionally, forming a secure attachment to a parent/caregiver fosters many favorable developmental outcomes. On the other hand, when a child forms an insecure attachment style, this results in both short-term and long-term negative outcomes for that child. The immediate effect of this attachment style is when the parent uses spanking before the age of one year old, the child will show externalizing behaviors at age three (Ward et al., 2020). Whereas, with a secure attachment in which the parent offers warm and nurturing practices, the immediate effects of spanking are not as severe as what is seen in insecure attachment.

### ***Perceptions***

Current perception studies have found that corporal punishment is often seen as acceptable behavior. In a study released by *Child Trends*, they found that 77% of men and 65% of women agreed that, “a child sometimes needs a good hard spanking” (2013). Additionally, studies found that it is also a commonly used practice for child discipline. In a National survey, they found that 49% of children, ages zero to nine years old, have experienced spanking from caregivers (Finkelhor, 2019). One explanation for this might be that there is a lack of awareness about the negative effects of corporal punishment. One study was done with college students as the target population showed that overall, they had high awareness and knowledge of child abuse (Altan et al., 2020). However, there was no attention to the awareness of physical punishment and its similar effects.

The negative effects of corporal punishment can sometimes not in the perceptions or awareness of individuals, to the extent that some may perceive the opposite to be true and that it is an effective and integral disciplining strategy. Two out of three students rated spanking as an effective means of discipline among college students (Brown et al., 2018; Graziano and Namaste, 1990). Among these perceptions as well as the other studies mentioned, it is clear that there is a gap between the current research on the effectiveness of corporal punishment, and the current attitudes and understanding.

Even though there has been similar research done on the topic, there is no information on whether college-aged individuals perceive corporal punishment as an abusive act, or effective for behavior correction. This study is a variation of a study done by Smith et al. (2007). They researched college students' attitudes towards parental discipline on varying levels of severity of the child's behavior and the parent's discipline.



They found that the larger the difference in the severity of physical punishment as compared to the severity of the child's mistaken behavior (e.g. highly severe physical punishment of a mild behavioral transgression), the more abusive the behavior was rated (Smith et al., 2007).

### **Research Questions/Hypotheses**

This study has four main research questions for trying to analyze specific components of physical punishment. They are: do students deem corporal punishment as acceptable behavior? To what degree do students perceive corporal punishment to be an effective behavior management strategy? To what extent do students believe that the use of corporal punishment will decrease unwanted behaviors from children? To what extent do students consider the act of physical punishment as abusive behavior? To most accurately address both the research questions and hypothesis for this study, they are linked to the dependent variables (i.e. acceptability, effectiveness, short-term and long-term behavior correction, and abusiveness), as well as the survey items.

Through this study, the first hypothesized outcome is that there will be no significant difference between the ratings of acceptability (both social and personal) between the participants in the two assigned vignettes. Secondly, if participants are shown the corporal punishment vignette there will be a significantly higher rating of effectiveness as compared to the participants who were instructed to read the developmentally appropriate vignette. Thirdly, if the participant is shown the corporal punishment vignette there will be a significant higher rating of effectiveness in correcting the behavior in the short term, as compared to the developmentally appropriate vignette.

Conversely, if the participant is shown the developmentally appropriate vignette then there will be a significantly higher rating of long-term effectiveness when compared to the participants shown the corporal punishment vignette. Lastly, I expect to find that there will be little to no perceived abusiveness for the DAP vignette and rated slightly abusive for the corporal punishment vignette; however, there will be a significant difference between the two.

## **Method**

### ***Sample and Participant Selection***

This survey was distributed to participants through an online link. The link was sent to student groups around campus, including undergraduate classes, the child and family development club, and Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority. One university Child and Family Development professor distributed the survey link to his three courses through a news post on the Folio Learning Management System, an online class collaboration platform. Additionally, the survey link was posted on an online information portal used by Kappa Kappa Gamma and was announced to the organization at a weekly chapter meeting. Lastly, the Child and Family Development Club received the survey link at one of their monthly meetings.

The study included 115 college-age participants, with a minimum age of 18 years and a maximum age of 38 years ( $M=20.170$ ,  $SD=2.145$ ). From our sample, 20.0% were male, 71.3% were female, 0.0% were Genderqueer or non-binary, 0.0% self-reported their identity as “A better description not specified above”, 0.9% preferred not to answer, and 7.8% did not respond to the question. Ethnicities reported were 0% American

Indian/Native American, 5.2% African American/Black, 1.7% Asian/Asian American, 1.7% Hispanic/Latino/Latina, 76.5% white, 6.1% multiracial, 0.09% reported as a “better description not specified above”, and 7.8% did not respond to the question.

### *Assessments and Measures*

This study used a vignette style research method, in which participants were randomly assigned a vignette about one of two scenarios of parenting strategies (i.e., developmentally appropriate or corporal punishment). Reference Appendix A for a copy of the vignettes and survey questions. The measures used in this study are primarily based on two prior research projects that have been reviewed and published. The design of the research questions was based on Smith et al. (2007), which was a study that was done on college students' attitudes towards parental discipline. The vignettes that were used were adaptations vignette seen in Brown et al. (2018); however, detail was added to enhance ecological validity. Additional detail was added in regard to the child's age and the specifics of the child's mistaken behavior.

There are two possible vignettes; the randomization software provided through Qualtrics randomly assigned one vignette to each participant. Following the vignette, each participant was given the same questionnaire about what they read. It includes one manipulation check question about what behavior was displayed by the parent in the vignette. Following that, six questions were asked of participants to rate the personal acceptability, social acceptability, effectiveness, short term behavior recurrence, and long-term behavior recurrence of the behavior that was seen in the vignette on a six-point Likert-type scale. Additionally, one question related to the perceived abusiveness of the

parent's behavior seen in the vignette, was rated on a four-point Likert-type scale. Following that, the participant was given the opportunity to answer an open-ended question about what strategy the parent could use in order to discipline the child's behavior more effectively. Lastly three demographic questions were asked on the topic of race, gender, and age.

### ***Procedure***

Prior to the participant beginning the survey, they were notified in the post with the survey link about voluntary participation as well as a very brief description about the purpose of the research. After the participants began the survey, they were first shown an informed consent page. This document included all information regarding the nature of the study, as well as, informing them that they have the right to stop participation at any point during the survey. Due to the study being held completely virtually, there was a disclaimer letting them know that clicking the arrow to continue the survey meant they had read and acknowledged the informed consent form and agreed to continue participation. After reading over it, and if they chose to continue, they were instructed to continue on to the survey meaning that they accepted and acknowledged the nature of the project and were willing to participate. Vignettes were then randomly assigned to the participants using randomization software through Qualtrics. Once they finished reading the vignette, they clicked on the next page to start the first question. Immediately after they finished the first question, they moved on to the next page where they completed the second question, and so on. They then were asked a set of demographic questions including their sex, age, and ethnicity. Following their participation in the survey, they

were shown a debriefing page about the intentions of the survey, that additionally, provided them with any resources or support contacts in the case of being emotionally alarmed due to the topic being discussed.

## **Results**

This study was aimed to address the perceptions on the social acceptability, effectiveness, short term reoccurrence, long term reoccurrence, and abusiveness of the use of corporal punishment. A series of quantitative statistical tests were administered among the Likert-Scale data. Additionally, a qualitative analysis was performed to assess proportional differences and patterns between the two independent variable groups.

### ***Quantitative Analysis***

Prior to conducting a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) a series of Pearson's Correlations were performed between all of the variables in order to run a MANOVA with the assumption that dependent variables would be correlated to one another. Within the correlation matrix (see Table 1), a pattern of significant correlations was displayed among the dependent variables, thus suggesting the appropriateness for a MANOVA. Additionally, the Box's M value of 128.110 was associated with a p-value of .000, which is statistically significant at an alpha level of .005. As recommended by Huberty and Petoskey (2000), to minimize the chances of obtaining a statistically significant Box's M Test, it can be beneficial to lower the alpha level to .005. However, even with the use of the lowered alpha level, Box's M still remained statistically significant ( $p < .005$ ). In account of these significant results, both the sample size and cell size were examined for equivalence. As stated by Allen and Bennett (2008), if the cell

sizes are greater than 30 participants per group and the cells are equal in size, then MANOVA remains robust despite Box's M infringing upon the homogeneity of variance matrices assumption. This study included a substantial sample size ( $n=115$ ) and had an equivalent number of participants in each cell that totaled greater than 30 participants in each group. Therefore, the data satisfies the criteria previously mentioned further satisfying the assumption of homogeneity (Allen & Bennet, 2008). Meeting this assumption further justifies the appropriateness to carry out a MANOVA.

A one-way MANOVA was performed to test the hypothesis that there would be one or more mean differences between the vignette assigned (developmentally appropriate discipline or corporal punishment) and the perceived rating of social acceptability, effectiveness, short term reoccurrence, long term reoccurrence, and abusiveness. However, when analyzing the correlation matrix for potential patterns for MANOVA, there was a stronger correlation with social acceptability, so personal acceptability was omitted from MANOVA. The MANOVA conducted revealed a significant multivariate main effect for the vignette assigned, Wilks'  $\lambda = .523$ ,  $F(5, 88) = 16.083$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial eta squared = .477. Power to detect the effect was 1.0. Thus, the hypothesis that the independent variable groups had a correlated effect on two or more dependent variables. The multivariate effect size was estimated at .477, which implies that 47.7% of the variance in the dependent variables was accounted for by the vignette assigned. Given the significance of the overall test, the univariate main effects were examined. Significant univariate main effects for the vignette assigned were obtained for rating of socially acceptability,  $F(1, 92) = 67.112$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial eta square = .422,

power = 1 ; rating of effectiveness,  $F(1, 92) = 10.876, p < .001$  , partial eta squared = .106, power = .904 ; and perceive abusiveness, ,  $F(1, 92) = 39.375, p < .001$  , partial eta squared = .300, power = 1.

To elaborate further on the three dependent variables that displayed a significant difference between groups, the quantitative dependent variables were assessed on a Likert Scales with numbers assigned to varying language from strongly agreeing with either side of the concept (e.g. very effective or very ineffective) (See Appendix A). The mean score for social acceptability for the developmentally appropriate discipline ( $M = 5.540, SD = 1.071$ ) fell in between “moderately acceptable” (5) and “very acceptable” (6); whereas, corporal punishment group ( $M = 3.390, SD = 1.453$ ) had an average rating from “slightly unacceptable” (3) and “slightly acceptable” (4). Secondly, the perceived effectiveness rating for the developmentally appropriate discipline ( $M = 4.750, SD = 1.139$ ) was between “slightly effective” (4) and “moderately effective” (5); however, the corporal punishment vignette ( $M = 3.83, SD = 1.554$ ) was perceived between “slightly ineffective” (3) and “slightly effective” (4). Lastly, as for the perceptions of the abusiveness of the behavior for the developmentally appropriate group ( $M = 1.020, SD = .144$ ) was only two hundredths of a decimal above “not at all abusive” (1). Whereas the corporal punishment vignette group’s rating of abusiveness ( $M = 1.83, SD = .877$ ), averaged just below “slightly abusive” (2).

Based on a series of Levene’s F tests, three of the five dependent variables were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). Specifically, Levene’s F test revealed that the variances in ratings of social acceptability, effectiveness, and abusiveness were not homogeneous.

Given that more than one of the dependent variables were significant within this test, the alpha level was adjusted to a more robust value of .001 instead of .05 in order to lessen the probability of the p-value being significant (Allen & Bennett, 2008). Once reevaluating the univariate p-values of the three dependent variables among the lowered alpha level, only the effectiveness variable ( $p = .018$ ) was no longer classified significant ( $p > .001$ ). Undeterred by the adjustment of the alpha level, the other two dependent variables, i.e., social acceptability ( $p = .000$ ) and abusiveness ( $p = .000$ ) remained significant ( $p < .001$ ).

Two variables remained non-significant in Levene's F test (i.e., short-term recurrence of the undesired behavior and long-term recurrence of the undesired behavior) prior to the adjustment of the alpha level. A univariate analysis of variance of these variables was conducted as a follow-up test with the MANOVA. This revealed that the difference in ratings of short-term recurrence of the undesired behavior between the developmentally appropriate vignette ( $n = 48$ ,  $M = 3.250$ ,  $SD = 1.391$ ) and the corporal punishment vignette ( $n = 46$ ,  $M = 2.910$ ,  $SD = 1.473$ ) were not statistically significant,  $F(1, 92) = 1.301$ ,  $p = .257$ . Similarly, the difference in ratings of long-term recurrence of the undesired behavior between the developmentally appropriate vignette ( $n = 48$ ,  $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = 1.509$ ) and the corporal punishment vignette ( $n = 46$ ,  $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 1.366$ ) were not statistically significant,  $F(1, 92) = .707$ ,  $p = .403$ . A visual representation of the univariate analysis of variance main effects across all dependent variables can be seen in Figure 1.

### ***Qualitative Analysis***



Qualitative data was obtained from an open-ended response question included on the survey. The question asked participants to reflect on the disciplinary strategy that they were shown and respond with any actions the parent could have taken instead that would have been more effective. The analysis procedure for the qualitative data began by sorting the responses by which vignette they were assigned. Then looking at one vignette group at a time, answers were analyzed for patterns or repeating trends. Based on the types of common responses, they were then tallied and calculated into proportions.

Among the participants who received the developmentally appropriate vignette, common themes emerged among the answers. The most common recommendation given by the participants in this test group was that the mother should have used an incentive or a positive reward (21.154%). Additionally, 19.231% of the participants who had the developmentally appropriate vignette wrote that a more effective option would be to place the child in time-out. Although this is a developmentally appropriate form of discipline, 7.692% of the participants said that this was effective and/or they could not think of anything more effective to do. Conversely, out of the participants who were shown the developmentally appropriate vignette 9.615% of them said that using physical punishment would be a more effective discipline strategy for the parent to use.

Subsequently, patterns within the responses among the participants that were assigned the corporal punishment vignette were noted. The most common recommendation given from this group was that the parent should take away their child's toys (36.957%). However, 16.667% of the answers included a statement about the parent should not have used corporal punishment, making this the second most common

recommendation for the corporal punishment vignette group. However, 12.500% of the answers endorsed the use of spanking and/or suggested using additional spanking to what the parent had already done.

### **Discussion**

This study was aimed to address the university student's perceptions on the social acceptability, effectiveness, short term reoccurrence, long term reoccurrence, and abusiveness of the use of corporal punishment as a disciplining technique. The current research on the use of corporal punishment indicates both negative developmental effects for the child, as well as weak effectiveness. Despite these findings, literature on perceptions of the use of this practice shows that it is highly accepted and used by parents and caregivers. The results of this study indicate consistency with the literature on perceptions of corporal punishment.

#### ***Research Question & Hypothesis Outcomes***

The purpose of this research project was to obtain insight to university students' perceptions of the use of corporal punishment as a way to discipline children. The main research question examined was if the use of corporal punishment would be labeled as an abusive behavior from parent to child. The hypothesis for this study pertained to each of the dependent variables (i.e. acceptability, effectiveness, short-term and long-term behavior correction, and abusiveness).

The first hypothesis was that there will be no significant difference between the ratings of acceptability, both socially and personally, between the participants in the two assigned vignettes. The results were inconsistent with this hypothesis, due to the fact that

through MANOVA testing, ratings of social acceptability reported having a significant difference between the two vignette groups. As mentioned previously in the results section, the rating for social acceptability of the developmentally appropriate vignette was moderately-very acceptable. However, the results reflect the meaning in the difference due to the corporal punishment vignette averaging in between slightly acceptable and slightly unacceptable. In response to the research question for this variable, asking if students deem corporal punishment as acceptable behavior, the results show that students who had the corporal punishment vignette rated the behavior significantly less acceptable as compared to the developmentally appropriate vignette.

Secondly hypothesized, was if participants are shown the corporal punishment vignette there will be a significantly higher rating of effectiveness as compared to the participants who were instructed to read the developmentally appropriate vignette. Although there was a significant difference found between these two groups in regard to this variable, the results do not support the hypothesis. There was a higher rating of effectiveness for the developmentally appropriate vignette. However, the answer the research question on the extent to which students perceive corporal punishment to be effective, would be that the average score of participants ratings was in-between “slightly ineffective” and “slightly effective”.

Thirdly, due to there being no significant effects within both the short-term and the long-term behavior recurrence, the third hypothesis was not supported by my findings. The hypothesized outcome for this variable states if the participant is shown the corporal punishment vignette there will be a significant higher rating of effectiveness in

correcting the behavior in the short term, as compared to the developmentally appropriate vignette. Vice versa, if the participant is shown the developmentally appropriate vignette then there will be a significantly higher rating of long-term effectiveness when compared to the participants shown the corporal punishment vignette. In relation to the research question addressing the extent to which students believe that the use of corporal punishment will decrease unwanted behaviors from children, mean scores for all groups had a central tendency to the middle of the scale.

Lastly, I expected to find that there would be little to no perceived abusiveness for the DAP vignette and rated slightly abusive for the corporal punishment vignette; however, there would be a significant difference between the two. This hypothesis was supported by the results due to the MANOVA results showing the vignette produced a significant difference in the ratings of abusiveness, with the corporal punishment vignette being rated higher in the level of perceived abusiveness than the developmentally appropriate scenario. To further answer the final research question of to what extent do students consider the act of physical punishment as abusive behavior, would be that it is not seen as highly abusive behavior; however, it was significantly higher than the developmentally appropriate scenario.

### ***Comparative Analysis to the Literature & Implications***

Previous perceptual research on the use of corporal punishment has indicated the decreasing, but still accepting views of physical punishment. One study showed that two out of three students on a college campus rated spanking as an effective means of discipline (Brown et al., 2018; Graziano and Namaste, 1990). This is fairly consistent

with the results of this study due to the fact that the sample is also college students, and the effectiveness rating of the physical punishment average for effectiveness in this study was a few points below slightly effective. However, this is inconsistent with the literature on the actual effectiveness of the use of corporal punishment. Physical punishment, such as spanking, is not an effective technique in behavior management both for the short and long term (Gershoff, 2013).

In previous research, participants were accepting and in favor of using spanking as a form of discipline. One study published that 75% of men and 65% of women agreed with the statement that “a child sometimes needs a good hard spanking” (Child Trends, 2013). However, the result of this study found that 9.615% of participants recommended the use of spanking when assigned to the developmentally appropriate vignette, and 12.500% who had the corporal punishment vignette approved of it or suggested more. Conversely, out of those who received the corporal punishment vignette, 36.957% mentioned taking the toys away as a consequence would be a more effective technique. This shows that participants may have an understanding of developmentally appropriate discipline being more effective than spanking.

Additionally, current literature on the use of physical punishment indicates negative developmental outcomes for the child. The consequences of its use are parallel to resulting factors of physical abuse in early childhood (King et al., 2018). Therefore, the use of spanking and other corporal punishments is abusive by nature with the intentional/reasoning being the differentiator. The perceptions in this study were inconsistent with this statement, with the rating of abusiveness not entering the threshold

of an abusive label of the Likert-scale (reference Appendix A for question labels and numbers). This shows that there could be a lack of understanding of how serve the developmental outcomes of the use of corporal punishment can be.

An additional implication that could be made is that since the participants for the study were recruited through two of a professor's child and family development classes, they could have an increased educational background on the use of corporal punishment. Discussed later, this could lead to further research on the impact of education has on the perceptions of corporal punishment.

### ***Reflective Critique***

The process and opportunity to conduct undergraduate research has been one of the best opportunities for educational growth in my undergraduate career. I have gained and accomplished many professional, academic, and personal skills and goals within the time I have spent working on this project. I have also increased my insight, knowledge, and most importantly passion for research. Lastly, I got to expand my education outside of classroom walls and create my own learning path.

When taking the first steps of my project, I was unsure of the process and my ability to be able to complete it. I had come into the program with prior knowledge of research and statistics, due to my double major in psychology. Since having that previous knowledge of statistics, it opened a door that allowed the incorporation of doing an increasingly complex qualitative analysis in this project. However, I had never done anything this elaborate or autonomous in regard to my education. My faculty mentor always fostered a scaffolded research process that allowed me to build my own autonomy

when it came to learning the skills required to conduct this project. Even though there came times of great uncertainty, I learned how to be courageous and resilient to the process of growing as a researcher.

Specific research skills that I obtained through this project, was creating a research design from the ground up, applying to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and learning how to conduct and report a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). My prior experience with research had been for research and analysis classes that were created by the professors. So, I had never experienced the process of brainstorming ideas, creating a research design, or constituting measures. This project was the first time that I was able to do those beginning steps independently with the guidance of my mentor. Which then led me to applying this study for IRB review and approval. This was also a process I had never been a part of, so doing it individually was a great learning experience. I did receive comments back twice on my application, which taught about taking feedback, patience, and paying attention to details. Lastly, my practical research skills of statistics expanded the most from this project. I began not having an idea about what MANOVA to then teaching and interpreting the entire statistical test partially by myself.

Additionally, I have grown my personal skills and confidence with my education. I have learned so much from my meeting with my mentor, that it has prepared me for the dynamic of obtaining an advanced degree in a graduate program. I have gained skills in preparing things to discuss while also learning how to work with faculty in an academic setting. My confidence as a student and researcher has greatly benefited from this project

and process because I learned how to create a unique education for myself by taking extra steps outside of normal course requirements.

Lastly, I have grown my passion for continuous learning and research. Through this process I have gotten to hear from other students conducting research in fields outside of Child and Family Development and Psychology. It is a true gift to be given opportunities to learn something new, especially if it is outside of the field you are interested in, because not everyone gets to hear from young researchers with various backgrounds and interests. All in all, this research project has provided me with holistic growth in many facets of my life (i.e. professionally, academically, and personally) and it has been a true gift of learning.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Limitations to this project included the sample, time, and lack of current vignette research. First, as a result of recruiting participants through a university, the ages of the participants did not have a widespread range. Research on this topic would be more comprehensive if it were done on more age ranges. This additionally limited the diversity among the participants. The link to participate in the survey was initially distributed to groups in which the participants were majority female; thus, causing the majority of the participants to be female which could be a possible confounding variable to the results. Additionally, this could possibly have affected ratings because of the gender of the characters in the vignette (mother and son).

Second, time was a limitation to this project. This project began in August of 2020 and ended in October of 2021. Time put the biggest constraint on the data collection



phase of the project. With more time, the number of participants could have increased. The survey could have also been distributed to more groups. This would have decreased the likelihood of sampling bias affecting the result.

Lastly, while conducting the literature search and review, finding vignette-based research to validate and base the methodology on was limited. There is a lack of current vignette style research on this topic. Despite limited options and accessibility, this limitation did not drastically interfere with the study. It ultimately made the research process harder, especially when combined with the limitation of time.

Future research could incorporate an educational element to study if individuals' perceptions will change based on the research on corporal punishment. Alternatively, the survey could incorporate a retrospective question on whether or not the participant had experienced corporal punishment as a form of discipline. This could be further compared to their perception of the use of corporal punishment. This would connect to the literature of the generational cycle of abuse (Altan et al., 2018, p. 51), and attempt to explain the reasoning behind perception of physical punishment.

Table 1  
*Pearson's Correlation Matrix, Means, and Standard Deviations Associated with the Vignette Assigned*

	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
1. Social Acceptability	1.000					4.480	1.630
2. Effectiveness	.350*	1.000				4.270	1.408
3. Short Term Reoccurrence	.107	-.343**	1.000			3.870	1.419
4. Long Term Reoccurrence	-.035	-.497**	.436**	1.000		3.150	1.452
5. Abusiveness	-.549**	-.515**	-.002	.180	1.000	1.410	0.732

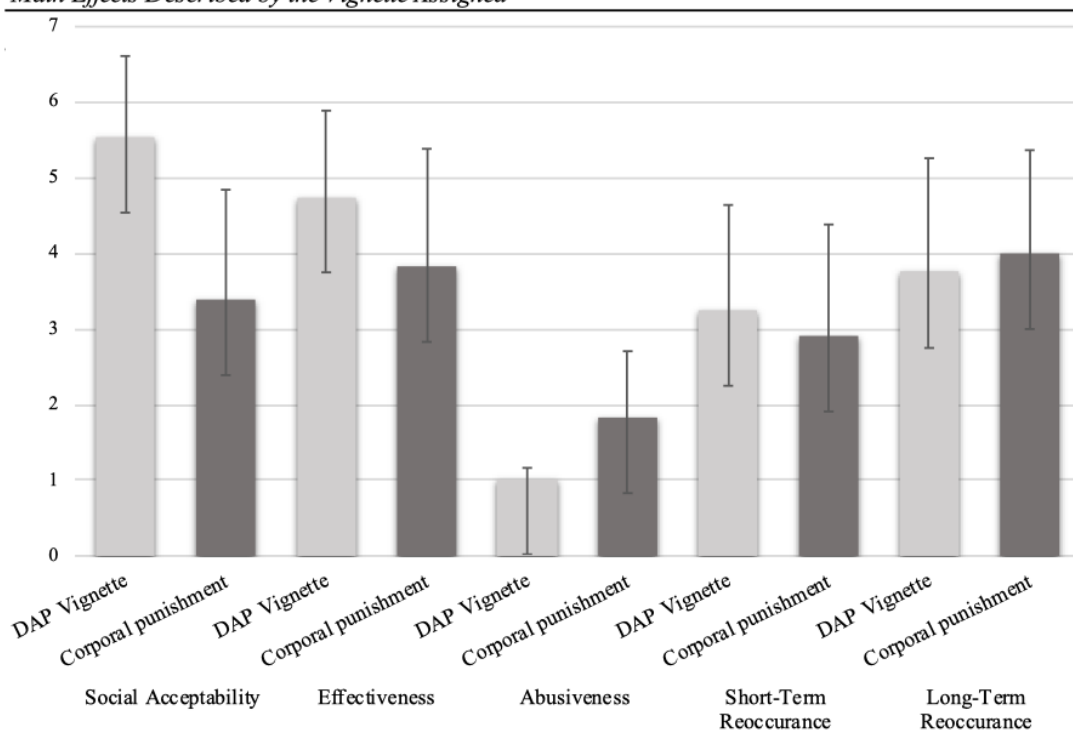
\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2  
*Significant Differences Described by the Vignette Assigned*

		Mean	Standard Deviation	Significance
Social Acceptability	<i>DAP Vignette</i>	5.54	1.071	
	<i>Corporal punishment</i>	3.39	1.453	
	<i>Total</i>			.000
Effectiveness	<i>DAP Vignette</i>	4.75	1.139	
	<i>Corporal punishment</i>	3.83	1.554	
	<i>Total</i>			.001
Abusiveness	<i>DAP Vignette</i>	1.02	0.144	
	<i>Corporal punishment</i>	1.83	0.877	
	<i>Total</i>			.000

Figure 1

*Main Effects Described by the Vignette Assigned*

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## Appendix A

### Developmentally Appropriate Vignette:

*Ethan, a 4-year-old boy, is playing with a few toys before he takes his nap for the day. His mother asks him to put away his toys. After refusing to do so a few times, Ethan begins to ignore his mother. Ethan's mother tells him, "You can put your toys away, or I will put them away and you will not be allowed to play with them after your nap". After refusing again, Ethan's mother picks up the toys, and does not give them back after Ethan's nap.*

### Corporal Punishment Vignette:

*Ethan, a 4-year-old boy, is playing with a few toys before he takes his nap for the day. His mother asks him to put away his toys. After refusing to do so a few times, Ethan begins to ignore his mother. Ethan's mother tells him, "You can put your toys away, or I will put them away and you will get spanked". After refusing again, Ethan's mother picks up the toys, grabs Ethan by the arm and spanks him a few times.*

### Survey Questions:

Q1: What discipline strategy did the parent use?

Spanking (1)

Not letting the child play with his toys after nap (2)

Q2: In your personal opinion, how acceptable was the parent's discipline strategy?

Very unacceptable (1)

Moderately unacceptable (2)

Slightly unacceptable (3)

Slightly acceptable (4)

Moderately acceptable (5)

Very acceptable (6)

Q3: How socially acceptable was the parent's discipline strategy?

Very unacceptable (1)

Moderately unacceptable (2)

Slightly unacceptable (3)

Slightly acceptable (4)

Moderately acceptable (5)

Very acceptable (6)

Q4: How effective do you think the parent's discipline strategy will be in correcting the child's behavior?

Very ineffective (1)

Moderately ineffective (2)

Slightly ineffective (3)

Slightly effective (4)

Moderately effective (5)

Very effective (6)

Q5: How likely do you think the child will be to ignore his mother's directions to put up his toys again in the next 1-2 days?



Very unlikely (1)

Moderately unlikely (2)

Slightly unlikely (3)

Slightly likely (4)

Moderately likely (5)

Very likely (6)

Q6: How likely do you think the child will be to ignore his mother's directions to put up his toys again two months from now?

Very unlikely (1)

Moderately unlikely (2)

Slightly unlikely (3)

Slightly likely (4)

Moderately likely (5)

Very likely (6)

Q7: Think about the discipline strategy the mother used: What could she do to more effectively get her child to comply with her directions?

Q8: To what extent would you consider the parent's discipline strategy to be abusive?

Not at all abusive (1)

Slightly abusive (2)

Moderately abusive (3)

Very abusive (4)

Q9: What is your gender?

Male (1)

Female (2)

Genderqueer or non-binary (3)

A better description not specified above (4)

Prefer not to answer (5)

Q10: What is your current age? (Please use a numeric response)

Q11: What is your race?

American Indian/Native American (1)

African American/Black (2)

Asian/Asian American (3)

Hispanic/Latino/Latina (4)

White (5)

Multiracial (6)

A better description not specified above (7)