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Factors Contributing To Attitudes Towards Disciplinary Parenting Styles

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**FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ATTITUDES
TOWARDS DISCIPLINARY PARENTING STYLES**

Amanda Marshall

COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ATTITUDES TOWARDS DISCIPLINARY PARENTING
STYLES

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
REQUIREMENTS OF THE HONORS COLLEGE
FOR HONORS IN THE DEGREE OF
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE
IN
PSYCHOLOGY

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

BY
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COLUMBUS, GEORGIA

2015

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FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ATTITUDES TOWARDS DISCIPLINARY PARENTING
STYLES

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ABSTRACT

The debate on whether or not corporal punishment is an acceptable method of discipline for children has been continuously researched and has consistently shown that the use of corporal punishment has a multitude of negative consequences on children (Gershoff, 2013). The present study aims to understand the factors which may contribute to the persistence of these supportive attitudes towards corporal punishment and abuse. The results of this study reveal that the age an individual becomes a parent/guardian is negatively correlated with their support for corporal punishment and acceptance of physical abuse. Strong correlations were also found between acceptance of abuse and support for the use of corporal punishment. Implications of the study and suggestions for future research are discussed.

INDEX WORDS: Corporal punishment, Disciplinary styles, Parenting attitudes, Abuse

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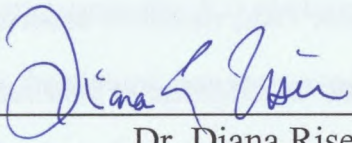
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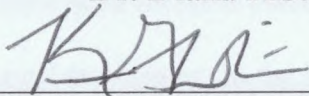
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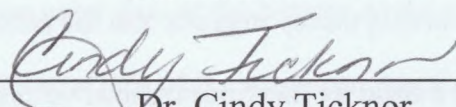
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by
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Factors Contributing to Attitudes towards Disciplinary Parenting Styles

The children who are growing up today will lead the world tomorrow. Every interaction with their parents, teachers, and peers, every experience they have or witness, is building the foundation of who they will become (Bandura, 1971). It is the responsibility of the current generation to facilitate their potential for success. For a young child, their parent is the greatest influence in their life; therefore, the parent's actions have a great impact on the child (Belsky, 2013). Around the world many countries have implemented laws to protect children from corporal punishment due to its consistent presentation of negative long-term consequences (Belsky, 2013; United Nations, 2002). However, the United States population persists with positive regard for physical discipline despite the immense body of research suggesting it should be completely eliminated from modern parenting (McCoy & Keen, 2014). It is important to understand the factors that contribute to the type of parent one becomes and the development of attitudes toward parenting modern adults hold. Thus, we aim to understand the contribution of one's experiences throughout childhood to the development of their current attitudes toward disciplinary styles.

Social Learning Theory and Intergenerational Transmission of Abuse

Bandura's (1971) social learning theory suggests that the actions of the individuals a child interacts with will influence a child's education on social norms. For children who grow up in homes with domestic violence, the first instance of violence a young child will experience or witness will likely be in his or her own home (Michalic & Elliott, 1997). Michalic and Elliott (1997) found that 82% of male participants in their study who had reported witnessing violence within their home as a child were also victims of violence within their home as a child. Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1963) found that when children view acts of violence they are often learning

how to repeat those violent behaviors through observational learning. Although females are generally more affected by domestic violence, displaying more internalizing problems such as depression than the males who also experience it, intergenerational transmission of violence is a potential consequence for both sexes (Michalic & Elliott, 1997). Social learning theory of aggression (Bandura, 1978) would suggest that a child who views abuse within the home learns to become an abuser or a victim, which is a potential, but not always the case (Michalic & Elliott, 1997). This may be due to the resilience of some victims, as a majority of victims will choose not to continue the cycle of abuse (Luthar, 2008). The obvious downside to this is that a percentage of victims will continue the cycle of abuse, making it imperative to understand the motivating factors contributing to a victim's decision to abuse or to not abuse.

Intergenerational transmission of abuse does not afflict the majority of those who have experienced abuse (Luthar, 2008; Smith, Cowie & Blades, 2011); however, it is not just the instances of abuse which are worrisome. It is obvious and widely accepted that abuse has negative consequences for the victims; however, not as much thought is given to the use of physical punishments which have been found to correlate with negative outcomes as well (McCoy & Keen, 2014). Physical punishment in the United States often consists of spanking which can range from an open palm slap on the bottom, to the use of objects such as a switch or belt to spank a child's rear. Nearly 70% of the American population is accepting of the use of spanking to discipline a child (McCoy & Keen, 2014), which may be why people, in general, are simply less accepting of the idea that spanking a child can have a negative long term outcome. McCoy and Keen (2014) discuss South Carolina's definition for acceptable corporal punishment as within reason and not in excess. One must wonder, if corporal punishment in excess is defined as abusive and illegal, then why are we not more focused on the blurry line between punishment

and abuse? The public does not seem to consider corporal punishment abuse until the child has sustained an injury or shows signs of physical marks remaining after a punishment. There must be a more distinct definition of how far is too far to enable the few American laws against corporal punishment to be effective.

Social Reform and Policy Changes

Although changes are being made worldwide, our society has shown little progression as far as corporal punishment is concerned. Corporal punishment of a child is illegal in over twenty-four countries as of 2010 in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which was ratified in 1990 (United Nations, 2002). Since 2010 these numbers have increased to thirty-one countries with laws against using corporal punishment to discipline children (Belsky, 2013), and seventy countries have implemented laws against using corporal punishment in schools; however, in the United States little is being done in our legal system to define and prevent physical punishment. On the contrary, in some states it is still legal for faculty members to use corporal punishment in schools to discipline students (Belsky, 2013; Smith et al., 2011). In this modern age where respect is expected to be given equally to every citizen, how does the utilization of physical punishment by school faculty members on children seem appropriate or decent? By now there should be laws protecting the children of the United States from experiencing this in their school environment.

It is obvious when we view definitions like that provided by South Carolina that even the preventions that have been put in place are rather malleable to the public's interpretation. There is no real definition for excessive punishment and therefore interpretations of the law are left up to the people. In instances of potential abuse this can be a hindrance in determining whether or not a child has been abused because people do not have a distinct definition to base their

decisions on. It is very easy to cross the line from punishing a child to abusing a child. When parents are punishing a child physically there is a possibility that the parent is already upset because of the situation and may not be in a rational state of mind, thus less capable of determining where that line is (Smith et al., 2011). Parents often feel the need to punish their child immediately following the misbehavior; however, in homes where physical discipline is the go-to punishment this may result in accidental abuse of the child. The likelihood of abuse can be lowered if the parent takes the time to think about an appropriate punishment; giving them a moment to cool down and not react out of frustration.

Furthermore, not all parents use physical punishment, and so there are likely other factors which contribute to a parent's decision to choose physical punishment as a primary disciplinary method. In order for one to cross the line from punishment to abuse, they must first be in the position to do so. Frequent use of physical punishment can put a parent in that difficult situation. A parent that never uses physical punishment is not going to face the same struggle in determining what an inappropriate extent of punishment is before crossing the line to abuse, simply because no physical discipline is involved. Unfortunately, the majority of children in the United States will be spanked by the time they reach their teens (McCoy & Keen, 2014). Not all abused children grow up to become abusers, and not all children who are spanked are necessarily abused; however, there must be factors beyond the individual's social learning in the home which motivates them to choose corporal punishment for their children. In light of the many negative outcomes which correlate with the use of corporal punishment (Gershoff, 2013), understanding these underlying factors is important in the effort to reduce the frequency of corporal punishment use in the United States. To determine what factors contribute to the

decision to utilize physical discipline, for both those who have and have not previously experienced abuse or physical punishment, we must explore the potential contributing factors.

Factors within the Home Environment

Understanding what leads one to utilize different methods of punishment is extremely important when we acknowledge the negative consequences associated with physical punishment. Children who are physically punished are more likely to be physically abused; often because abuse is the result of instances of punishment that escalate beyond the parent's intentions (Gershoff & Bitensky, 2007). Many factors contribute to this outcome. Parental self-efficacy for one is a multifaceted factor contributing to parental style. Parental self-efficacy is the confidence one has in their ability to parent well. Demographic factors such as annual income and whether or not the individual is a single parent can contribute to the level of self-efficacy a person might have because these demographic factors can help or hinder a parent's ability to provide, monitor, and care for their child (Coleman & Karraker, 1997).

Consistently having to deal with external stressors, such as a low income can, cause anxiety and stress in the household which may influence how the parent handles everyday parental decisions, such as punishment (Coleman & Karraker, 1997). The age of the individual when they first gain parental responsibility may also contribute to these circumstances as younger parents may not have the same resources or support systems as other parents (Baldwin & Cain, 1980). Younger parents may feel stressed and rely on partners or family members for help as they struggle to provide for their family; however, younger parents are more likely to become single parents (Baldwin & Cain, 1980). Research has shown that teenage parents are more likely to live in poverty (Baldwin & Cain, 1980), and the stress of an impoverished environment may contribute to the acceptance of physical punishment within the home. As

discussed previously, it is often not the parent's intent to abuse their child, but rather abuse occurs as the result of a stressful situation and comfort with use of corporal punishment. Measures should be taken to educate parents regarding better disciplinary styles in order to decrease the potential for abuse within the home as a byproduct of frequent corporal punishment utilization.

As an illustration, in some countries where spanking is prohibited, spanking did not cease to be used as a method of punishment and in fact saw a slight increase in use after the ban was put in place due to parental frustration with not knowing what acceptable methods of punishment would be effective in disciplining their child (McCoy & Keen, 2014). The reason for this unfortunate reaction is that parents who had previously used corporal punishment as their go-to method for discipline simply lacked knowledge about alternate disciplinary options (McCoy & Keen, 2014). Being told that the only method they knew was now illegal caused increased stress for these parents in disciplinary situations which likely lead to the increase of use. This information is extremely important and highlights the importance of education about various disciplinary options for parents. Parents who are without the knowledge of alternative methods are likely to revert to physical discipline simply because they are unaware of effective alternative methods (McCoy & Keen, 2014). Therefore, it is important to educate parents about the many different disciplinary options for efforts to decrease physical punishment to become more efficient.

Undoubtedly, household environments differ from family to family. Some household are multigenerational with many adults, while others have only a single parent. These differences are important when assessing the parent's decisions regarding punishment. The parent-child relationship can be different depending upon the environment. In a two parent household, or a

household with multiple guardians, if parents/guardians frequently disagree about the household rules or punishment methods, then there is no consistency for the child. One guardian may allow different behavior than another. One may employ more strict punishment than the other. The child may learn what to expect from different guardians; however, the structure is not consistent. Furthermore, frequent differences in opinion on parenting methodology can cause stress in the home environment and confuse the child.

There are a multitude of factors which contribute to the household environment in which parents and children interact. Belsky (1984) suggests that there are three domains of factors which contribute to the development of the home environment and parent-child interactions. Belsky (1984) describes these domains as individual psychological resources of parents, which may include factors of stress and resilience; characteristics of the child, which includes temperament and evocative forces (the reactions elicited by temperament); and circumstantial sources of stress and support. A parent's psychological resources may contribute to their decisions; for example, a parent who is stressed may not have time to think through their decisions or have a stronger reaction to small frustrations. On the account of evocative forces, children who tend to be more hyperactive and disruptive often experience more physical punishment than quieter or less active siblings (Day, Peterson & McCracken, 1998; Smith et al., 2011). Children might experience difference in punishment related to their genetically inherited temperament which may indicate that the parent of a difficult child also has a difficult temperament (Belsky, 2013). A more difficult temperament may elicit a harsher punishment because parents feel that the child is in need of more discipline due to their temperament (Smith et al., 2011); this is especially true for younger children (Day et al., 1998). The choice for this parental style is likely influenced by the individual's developmental history (Belsky, 1984)

which sheds light on the importance of this research and understanding of participant history regarding the relationship with their parents, as well as the types of punishment they experienced.

The Current Study

This study aims to determine factors which contribute to the development of current attitudes towards parenting styles and forms of discipline. Variables of interest include experience with physical and emotional abuse as a child, experience of various disciplinary styles as a child, parental self-efficacy, age at which the individual first became a parent, and current attitudes of acceptance towards physical abuse, emotional abuse, and corporal punishment. Self-report of parental competence and conflict were used to determine current feelings individuals have towards their ability to parent, as well as current experience with potential difficulties in parenthood. Individuals were asked to indicate their previous experience with various punishments. The individual's current views of those same methods were taken as well. The intention here was to observe how past experience with different punishment styles may correlate with current views of how acceptable those punishment styles are. Also, demographic information such as socioeconomic status, age the individual was when they first became a parent or guardian, and education was collected. It is suspected that these factors may contribute to the household environment and can shed some light on the environmental differences that may contribute to attitudes towards disciplinary style. These demographic factors will also help to gain a better overall understanding of participants' situations and individualized factors.

I hypothesize that those who experienced physical abuse and emotional abuse are more likely to have supportive attitudes towards use of corporal punishment. It is my suspicion that

physical and emotional abuse will frequently co-occur. Therefore, variables will be analyzed together (abuse occurrence and no abuse occurrence) as well as individually (physical, emotional, or both types of abuse). Secondly, I hypothesize that participants who became parents or guardians at a younger age are likely to have more supportive attitudes towards corporal punishment. Third, I hypothesize that the relationship between experience of abuse and acceptance of corporal punishment will be moderated by the individual's parental competence. Finally, I hypothesize that since those who self-report physical abuse are likely to have also experienced emotional abuse; these individuals will likely fall into two categories those who continue abuse and those who end the cycle of abuse, thus making them less likely to be in support of corporal punishment overall.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were recruited through SONA, an online system for research participation regulated by the Department of Psychology, as well as through social media such as Facebook. Students who participated through SONA may have received extra credit in psychology courses for which the professor allowed it, but those who were recruited through social media received no compensation. A total of 325 participants completed this survey. Only 301 participants were included in the study as a total of 24 were excluded for various reasons. Eight participants were excluded for not signing the informed consent form denoting their rights as a participant. Three participants were excluded because they indicated in the demographics that they are less than 18 years of age. Thirteen participants were excluded for not completing the survey or skipping more than two-thirds of the items. From those who reported demographic information approximately 72 (23.9%) were males and 212 (70.4 %) were females. The age

range of participants was 18 to 78 years of age with a median age of 19. Most frequently participants were between 18 to 21 years of age; participants within this age range make up 72.1% of the sample. The sample contained 145 participants who identified as European American (48.2%), 84 who identified as African American (27.9%), six who identified as Latino/a (2.0%), seven who identified as Asian (2.3%), 36 who identified as multi-racial (12.0%), and five who indicated that they preferred not to answer.

It is important to note that 252 participants (83.7%) reported that they did not experience abuse as a child. Twenty participants (6.6%) reported experience of only emotional abuse as a child. Four participants (1.3%) reported that they had experienced only physical abuse as a child. Twenty-five participants (8.3%) indicated that they had experienced both physical and emotional abuse as a child. Figure 1 depicts the co-occurrence of perceived physical and emotional abuse as reported by the sample as well as instances of only one type of perceived abuse.

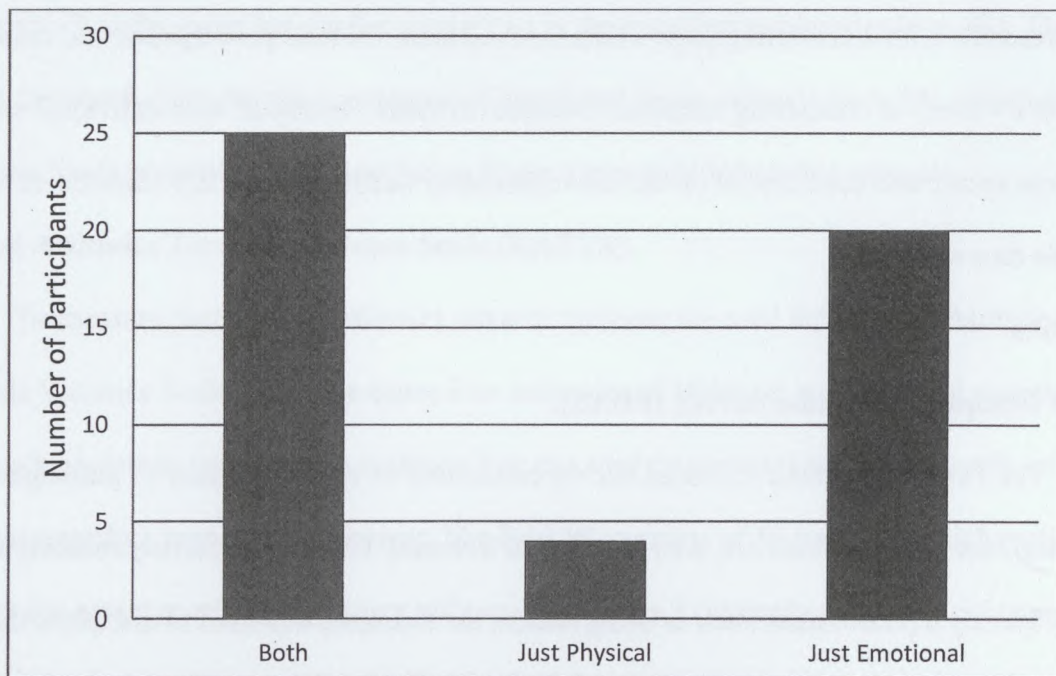


Figure 1. The above graph depicts the co-occurrence of perceived emotional and physical abuse as well as instances of only physical or only emotional abuse.

The majority of our sample – 167 participants (55.5%) – identified as middle class, although some participants fell into every category of socioeconomic status ranging from very poor to upper middle class. Of the participants who indicated whether or not they have children 248 (82.4%) reported that they have no children. Fifty-three participants (17.7%) indicated that they have biological children, step-children, or both. The age range for the age these participants reported they were at the birth of their first child, or age they first became a guardian, is 16 to 39 years of age.

Procedure

The measures described below were taken from reliable sources, such as previous research studies, and were used to construct a survey which would measure all of the variables of interest. Participants were provided a link to SurveyMonkey, a secure website where they could take the survey confidentially (SurveyMonkey Inc., 2015). At the end of each survey participants were presented with a debriefing page which thanked them for their participation and made them aware of a variety of counseling resources available to them. Results of each individual survey were kept secure and confidential on the SurveyMonkey website where only researchers could view the data collected.

Measures

Parent Discipline Attitudes Survey (PDAS).

The Parent Discipline Attitudes Survey consists of 21 questions rated by participants in two categories (Buntain-Ricklefs, Kemper, Bell & Babonis, 1994). First participants respond to how frequently a punishment, such as being shaken for example, was used to discipline them as a child on a scale of 0 (never) to 5 (very often). Then they respond to how acceptable they feel those same punishments are to use on the same scale, 0 (never) to 5 (very often). We included

two items which asked participants whether or not they felt that they were physically or emotionally abused as a child. The "yes" or "no" response to whether or not the individual perceives their experiences as a child to be physically or emotionally abusive were examined as dichotomous variables: Perception of Physical Abuse and Perception of Emotional Abuse. The Parent Discipline Attitudes Survey has favorable internal consistency ($\alpha = .86$) (Buntain-Ricklefs, Kemper, Bell & Babonis, 1994).

For the current study, measures of Cronbach alpha were determined for the experience subscales to determine if the measures are reliable. The experience of physical abuse subscale was found to have very good reliability ($\alpha = .87$). For the experience of emotional abuse subscale Cronbach alpha was still good ($\alpha = .74$), but not quite as high as other measures which is likely due to there being significantly fewer items on the emotional abuse subscale. Cronbach alpha was also determined for the acceptance subscales. For the acceptance of physical abuse subscale the Cronbach alpha value has similar strength as in the experience subscales ($\alpha = .81$). There was a weak Cronbach alpha for the acceptance of emotional abuse subscale ($\alpha = .55$), which once again can likely be attributed to there being fewer items included on this subscale.

Revised Attitudes Towards Violence Scale (RATVS)

To measure participants' attitudes towards violence we used the Revised Attitudes Towards Violence Scale which measures four subscales of violence; war, corporal punishment, penal code violation, and intimate violence. For this study's purposes we focus mostly on the subscale regarding corporal punishment. The RATVS consists of 39 items for which participants indicate the extent to which they agree with each item on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale. For the current study the Cronbach alpha was determined for the corporal punishment subscale, which consists of eight items, and was found to be very good ($\alpha = .86$).

Parent Problem Checklist (PPC)

To measure disagreements between partners we used the PPC which consists of sixteen items for which the participant is asked to answer whether the item has been an issue in their home during the last four weeks (yes or no), and to what extent it has been an issue on the scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). The items include questions regarding disagreements about sharing workloads or how to discipline the child(ren) and whether the child(ren) misbehave more with one parent than the other. For the subscale regarding presence of problems internal consistency was very good ($\alpha = .82$), and even better for the subscale regarding how pertinent problems were in the home ($\alpha = .89$) (Stallman, Morawska & Sanders, 2009).

Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSCS)

In order to measure parental competence we utilized the Parenting Sense of Competence Scale. This scale consists of 17 items which ask questions such as "My talents and interests are in other areas, not being a parent" and "Being a good parent is a reward in itself" which are rated by participants on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Original scale items only mentioned "mother" (Ohan, Leung & Johnston, 2000), so to be more inclusive we adapted the scale by changing the word mother to parent. There were nine reverse-coded items included in this scale. For the current study, Cronbach alpha was determined for the PSCS and was found to be strong ($\alpha = .81$).

Parental Acceptance-Rejection/ Control Questionnaire (PARQ/C)

We are interested in how the individual's childhood experience contributes to their current views on discipline as an adult; we utilized Rohner's (2004) Parental Acceptance-Rejection/ Control Questionnaires for mothers (PARQ/C M) and fathers (PARQ/C F). We utilized the shortened revised versions for these surveys which consist of 29 items each asking

the participants if the item is 1 (Almost always true of my mother/father) to 4 (Almost never true of my mother/father). Items ask participants to reflect on how true of each parent instances such as "Said nice things about me" or "Paid no attention to me" are when they think about their childhood (Rohner, 2005).

Warmth and Competence Scale (W&C S)

Based on Fiske and colleagues' (2002) research on stereotypes we adapted a Warmth and Competence Scale (W&C S). The scale had five categories: Infancy and Early Childhood, Childhood, Adolescence, Adulthood, and Late Adulthood. For each of these categories participants were asked to respond to six items. For each age group participants were asked to respond on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely) to what extent they feel members of that age group possess the six attributes. The six attributes were warmth, friendliness, sincerity, intelligence, competence, and capability. These items were adapted from attribute items used in Fiske and colleagues' (2002) research on racial stereotyping. These six major attributes were taken and applied to the different age groups specified above. For each group the age range is provided before the survey items, and an example of an item from this scale would be, "In your personal opinion, how friendly do you feel members of this group?" This scale was used to determine if stereotypes about children contribute to adult attitudes towards acceptable punishments.

Demographics

The demographics sheet for this study consisted of twenty-six items which asked participants to indicate gender, race, age, native language, and other descriptive variables. Also, the demographics included items which asked participants to indicate socio-economic status, satisfaction with their financial situation, and overall health. Moreover, participants were asked to indicate how many children they have, whether or not those children are biological, step, or

adopted, as well as descriptive factors for those children such as gender, age, and race. Some more items which are asked on the demographics sheet are relationship status, employment of the participant and their partner (if they have one), age that the participant became a parent or guardian (if they are one), and highest education level. Refer to Table 4 for the average scores within the sample on measures for variables of interest.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

A preliminary analysis on variables of interest was conducted to ensure that future exploration of more in depth relationships would be possible. The results of the preliminary analyses found in Table 1 reveal that there is a small correlation between perceived experience of emotional abuse and acceptance of both emotional ($r = .23, p < .05$) and physical abuse ($r = .24, p < .05$). Perceived experience of emotional abuse also correlates with support of corporal punishment ($r = .21, p < .05$) (Table 1). It is interesting that perceived experience of physical abuse does not significantly correlate with acceptance attitudes towards corporal punishment, physical abuse, or emotional abuse since perceived experience of physical abuse strongly correlates with perceived experience of emotional abuse ($r = .66, p < .01$), which does correlate with acceptance attitudes towards corporal punishment, physical abuse, and emotional abuse since (Table 1). From these results we can conclude that a relationship does exist and further investigations of the data will likely yield results of a more complex relationship.

Table 1

Preliminary correlations between self-reported experience of physical abuse and emotional abuse with acceptance of physical abuse, emotional abuse, and corporal punishment.

	1	2	3	4
1. Acceptance of Corporal Punishment	--	--	--	--
2. Acceptance of Physical Abuse	.66**	--	--	--
3 Acceptance of Emotional Abuse	.37**	.54**	--	--
4 Perceived Emotional Abuse	.21*	.24*	.23*	--
5 Perceived Report Physical Abuse	.16	.16	.13	.68**

Note. Report Emotional Abuse – The participants self-report (yes/no) of their experience of emotional abuse as a child. Report Physical Abuse – The participants self-report (yes/no) of their experience of physical abuse as a child.
 **($p < .01$). Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
 *($p < .05$). Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Unfortunately, a preliminary analysis did not support the potential for a predictive relationship between childhood experience of physical and emotional abuse, and current acceptance attitudes towards physical and emotional abuse (see Table 2). There are, however, strong correlations between physical and emotional abuse both in experience ($r = .68, p < .01$) and current acceptance ($r = .54, p < .01$). This is very interesting since the results of the first preliminary analysis suggest that there is an existing relationship between perceived experience of emotional abuse and acceptance of abuse. Based on the correlations found between these variables further exploration of potential relationships will be conducted in order to examine how childhood experience with physical and/or emotional abuse relates to current acceptance attitudes towards abuse, mediated by other variables.

Table 2

Preliminary correlations between experience of physical abuse and emotional abuse with acceptance of physical abuse and emotional abuse.

	1	2	3
1. Experience of Physical Abuse	--	--	--
2. Experience of Emotional Abuse	.68**	--	--
3. Acceptance of Physical Abuse	.18	-.07	--
4. Acceptance of Emotional Abuse	.07	-.01	.54**

**($p < .01$). Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Hypothesis Testing

The first hypothesis was that participants' perceived physical abuse and perceived emotion abuse experience as a child would correlate with their current attitudes towards the use of corporal punishment. A Pearson's correlation analysis was used to analyse these variables; results can be found in Table 3. No significant relationship was found between the participants' perceived experience of abuse (physical or emotional) and their current attitudes towards acceptance of emotional abuse or use of corporal punishment. Thus, the hypothesis was not supported by these results. However, the correlations suggest that perceived experience of emotional abuse negatively correlates with acceptance of physical abuse ($r = -.15, p < .05$). This suggests that an individual's perceived experience of emotional abuse correlates with their lessened acceptance of physical abuse. To explore this variable further a regression analysis was conducted to determine if perceived experience of emotional abuse is predictive of decreased acceptance attitudes towards physical abuse. The results of the regression analysis did not support this hypothesis; $b = -.06, t(297) = -1.07, p = .28$. Only 0.4% of variance was explained by the model; $R^2 = .004, F(1, 297) = 1.15, p = .28$.

The second hypothesis was that participants who became parents or guardians at a younger age are likely to have more supportive attitudes towards corporal punishment. The correlations show a strong negative correlation between these variables ($r = -.49, p < .01$), which supports the hypothesis. Refer to Figure 2 for a depiction of the linear relationship between age at first birth/guardianship and scores on the Corporal Punishment subscale of the Revised Attitudes Towards Violence Scale (RATVS) which is the five point scale used in this study to measure attitudes towards corporal punishment.

In addition to running a correlation analysis between age at first birth/guardianship and corporal punishment acceptance, the contribution of age at first guardianship to acceptance attitudes towards physical and emotional abuse was also examined. The results of this analysis revealed something very interesting. A strong negative correlation exists between age of first birth/guardianship and acceptance attitudes towards physical abuse ($r = .60, p < .01$); however, no significant relationship exists between age at first birth/guardianship and acceptance attitudes of emotional abuse. This is extremely interesting since the preliminary analyses revealed strong positive correlations between all three variables: corporal punishment acceptance, physical abuse acceptance, and emotional abuse acceptance (refer again to Table 1). Refer to Figure 3 for a depiction of the linear relationship between age at first birth/guardianship and scores on the Physical Abuse subsection of the Parent Discipline Attitudes Survey (PDAS), which is the five point scale used to measure experience with and acceptance of different forms of discipline. Refer to Figure 4 for a depiction of the linear relationship between age at first birth/guardianship and scores on the Emotional Abuse subsection of the PDAS.

The third hypothesis was that the relationship between experience of emotional and/or physical abuse and acceptance of corporal punishment will be moderated by the individual's

score on the parental competence scale. An initial correlational analysis of these variables revealed no relationship between scores on the Parental Sense of Competence Scale (PSCS) and any variables of interest. Again these correlations were run with the larger final sample size, but once again no significant correlations were found between scores on the PSCS and the variables of interest. No more steps were taken to further investigate this hypothesis as the necessary foundational relationships were not found.

The final hypothesis was that since those who self-report physical abuse are likely to have also experienced emotional abuse, these individuals will likely fall into two categories those who continue abuse and those who end the cycle of abuse, thus making them less likely to be in support of corporal punishment overall. In order to analyze this relationship concisely, the two abuse variables Experience of Emotional Abuse and Experience of Physical Abuse were collapsed into one variable: Experience of Abuse. This collapsed variable indicated that the participant had experienced abuse if they had responded "yes" to either abuse variable. An Independent samples t-test was used to analyze this relationship. The results did not support the hypothesis showing no significant relationship between the experience of abuse and attitudes towards corporal punishment, $t(291) = 1.03, p = .31$.

Table 3

Correlations between all variables of interest: Abuse experience, abuse acceptance, corporal punishment acceptance, parental sense of competence, and age at first guardianship.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Acceptance of Corporal Punishment	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
2. Parental Sense of Competence	.01	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
3. Experience of Physical Abuse	.19**	-.01	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
4. Experience of Emotional Abuse	.04	-.04	.62**	--	--	--	--	--	--
5. Acceptance of Physical Abuse	.62**	-.05	.38**	.12*	--	--	--	--	--
6. Acceptance of Emotional Abuse	.37**	-.06	.25**	.35**	.46**	--	--	--	--
7. Perceived Emotional Abuse	-.09	.08	.40**	.47**	-.15*	-.09	--	--	--
8. Perceived Physical Abuse	-.10	.07	.40**	.41**	-.11	-.09	.65**	--	--
9. Age at First Guardianship	-.49**	.05	-.30*	-.14	-.60**	-.18	-.21	-.17	--

Note. Perceived Emotional Abuse— The participants self-report (yes/no) of their experience of emotional abuse as a child. Perceived Physical Abuse— The participants self-report (yes/no) of their experience of physical abuse as a child. Age at First Guardianship— age at which the individual first became a parent or guardian.

**($p < .01$). Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*($p < .05$). Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics

Measure	N	Range	M	SD
RATVS_CP	293	1.00-5.00	2.21	.79
PSCS	281	2.18-5.82	4.12	.69
PDAS_Exp_Phys	301	0.00-5.00	.57	.58
PDAS_Exp_Emo	301	0.00-5.00	1.03	1.14
PDAS_Acc_Phys	300	0.00-5.00	.45	.45
PDAS_Acc_Emo	300	0.00-5.00	.56	.56

Note: RATVS_CP – Revised Attitudes towards Violence Scale, corporal punishment subscale. PSCS – Parental Sense of Competence Scale. PDAS_Exp_Phys – Parent Discipline Attitudes Survey, experience of physical abuse subscale. PDAS_Ex_Emo – Parent Discipline Attitudes Survey, experience of emotional abuse subscale. PDAS_Acc_Phys – Parent Discipline Attitudes Survey, acceptance of physical abuse subscale. PDAS_Acc_Emo – Parent Discipline Attitudes Survey, acceptance of emotional abuse subscale.

Exploratory Analyses

Many previous studies have analyzed the relation between acceptance and use of various disciplinary styles with various demographic factors. Although the current study does not go into these demographic factors with great depth some exploratory analyses were conducted with these variables of interest: gender, education level, current socio-economic status, race, and age at first guardianship. The exploratory correlations between these demographic factors and acceptance attitudes towards corporal punishment, physical abuse, and emotional abuse can be found in Table 5. Furthermore, since the topic of interest in this study is corporal punishment, which often manifests in the form of spanking, Table 6 depicts these variables of interest and their relation to experience of spanking as a child.

Table 5

Exploratory correlations: Demographic factors and acceptance attitudes towards corporal punishment, physical abuse, and emotional abuse.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender	--	--	--	--	--	--
2. Highest Level of Education	-.01	--	--	--	--	--
3. Current Socio-Economic Status	-.08	.10	--	--	--	--
4. Age at First Guardianship	-.07	.75**	.25	--	--	--
5. Acceptance of CP	-.14*	-.15**	.07	-.48**	--	--
6. Acceptance of Physical Abuse	-.10	-.08	.14	-.53**	.52**	--
7. Acceptance of Emotional Abuse	-.09	-.05	-.03	-.21	.40**	.68**

**($p < .01$). Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*($p < .05$). Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Gender. A series of Independent samples t-tests were conducted to analyze gender differences for experience and attitude variables of physical abuse, emotional abuse, spanking, and corporal punishment acceptance. No significant difference was found between gender and corporal punishment acceptance attitudes, experience or acceptance of physical abuse, or experience or acceptance of emotional abuse. Significant differences were found for gender in the directly reported experience of spanking, $t(280) = -1.27, p < .05$, as well as the direct report of acceptance of spanking with an object, $t(282) = -3.28, p < .001$. These results suggest that gender may contribute to one's experiences with spanking as a child as well as the development of his or her attitudes towards spanking as an acceptable form of discipline.

Education. The exploratory correlational analyses performed indicate the existence of a strong positive relationship between highest level of education achieved and age of first

guardianship ($r = .75, p < .01$). This suggests that individuals with a higher education tend to become parents or guardians at a later age than individuals with a lower education level. Higher education level is also negatively correlated with acceptance attitudes towards corporal punishment ($r = -.15, p < .01$). Similar results were found on the direct measure of spanking acceptance ($r = -.14, p < .05$) and acceptance of spanking with an object ($r = -.17, p < .01$). These results suggest that as the level of education increases one's acceptance of corporal punishment decreases.

Socio-economic Status. No significant results were found for acceptance attitudes towards corporal punishment or any form of spanking in relation to socio-economic status.

Race. For the analysis of race only participants who identified as European American or African American were included in the formation of a collapsed variable. European American participants were coded as 0 and African American participants were coded as 1 allowing for this variable to be analyzed simply. A series of Independent samples t-tests were conducted to analyze race differences for experience and attitude variables of physical abuse, emotional abuse, spanking, and corporal punishment acceptance. No significant difference was found between race and corporal punishment acceptance attitudes, experience of physical abuse, experience or acceptance of spanking, or experience or acceptance of spanking with an object. There was, however, a significant difference for race and experience of emotional abuse $t(227) = -2.65, p < .05$. The results of this analysis also show a significant difference between race and acceptance attitudes towards physical abuse, $t(227) = -4.34, p < .01$, as well as acceptance attitudes towards emotional abuse, $t(227) = -4.04, p < .001$. As for direct report of spanking experience and acceptance the only form of spanking that revealed a significant difference for race was spanking with a belt; experience of spanking with a belt, $t(227) = -7.01, p < .05$, and acceptance of

spanking with a belt $t(227) = -7.10, p < .001$. These results suggest that race does somehow play a role in different experiences and the development of attitudes towards physical and emotional abuse, as well as some methods of corporal punishment.

Table 6

Exploratory correlations: Demographic factors and experience of spanking and acceptance of spanking.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
2. Highest Level of Education	-.01	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
3. Current Socio-Economic Status	-.08	.10	--	--	--	--	--	--
4. Exp. Spanking	-.08	.03	-.07	--	--	--	--	--
5. Exp. Spanking with object	-.15*	.07	-.02	.50**	--	--	--	--
6. Exp. Spanking with belt	-.02	-.10	-.09	.68**	.49**	--	--	--
7. Acc. Spanking	-.06	-.14*	.11	.32**	.01	.21**	--	--
8. Acc. Spanking with object	-.19**	-.06	.09	.17**	.37**	.12*	.33**	--
9. Acc. Spanking with belt	-.09	-.17**	.00	.32**	.07	.47**	.57**	.35**

Note. Exp. – this indicates that the item is an experience variable. Experience variables are items to which participants indicated how frequently they experienced that form of discipline as a child. Acc. – this indicates that the item is an acceptance variable. Acceptance variables are items to which the participant indicates how frequently they think that is an acceptable form of discipline.

**($p < .01$). Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*($p < .05$). Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Discussion

The first, third, and fourth hypotheses of the current study were unsupported by the results of the correlational analyses performed. There was no significant relationship between self-reported experience of physical and/or emotional abuse as a child and current attitudes

towards corporal punishment or abuse (physical and emotional). Average scores on the Parental Sense of Competence Scale were not found to correlate with any of the variables of interest. Although this particular study did not reveal a significant relationship between experience of abuse and abuse acceptance attitudes, we know from previous research that evidence of this relationship does exist (Belsky, 2013; Smith et al., 2011). Further investigation is necessary to fully understand the multitude of factors contributing to the persistence of corporal punishment and abuse acceptance attitudes in our society.

The second hypothesis was supported by the results of the correlational analyses between age the individual became a parent/guardian and supportive attitudes towards corporal punishment. This result suggests that individuals who become parents or guardians at a younger age are more likely to be in support of corporal punishment than those who attain a parental role at a later age. These results are in accordance with previous research which has shown that younger parents may be more stressed because they are more likely to struggle financially and be raising their child alone (Baldwin & Cain, 1980). In addition, the correlational analyses between the age at which the individual became a parent/guardian and acceptance attitudes of emotional and physical abuse were examined. Age at first birth/guardianship strongly correlated with acceptance of physical abuse; however, it is very interesting that the age at first birth/guardianship did not significantly correlate with acceptance of emotional abuse. Baldwin and Cain (1980) found that children of teenage mothers often had difficulties with social adjustment. As previous research has suggested, a child's behavior may evoke harsher punishments from their parents (Smith et al., 2011), and so it may be possible that a bidirectional relationship exists between the increased likelihood of behavioral problems in a child of a younger parent and the parent's endorsement of physical punishments.

Additionally, the exploratory analysis of education suggests that individuals with a higher education level not only have children at a later age, but are less likely to accept corporal punishment as an acceptable method of discipline. These factors may be contributing to an individual's development of acceptance attitudes. Younger parents may not have had the chance to pursue higher education before the birth of their first child or before taking on guardianship responsibilities, and therefore are more likely to be accepting of corporal punishment.

Referring to Figures 2, 3, and 4, a clear trend can be seen which suggests support of these results; however, it is intriguing that the average scores on acceptance of emotional abuse are so much lower than scores on acceptance of physical abuse. Today's society seems to put a strong emphasis on anti-bullying campaigns and understanding the perspective of others. It is possible that the constant emphasis on empathy is creating social change resulting in widespread unacceptance of emotional abuse. Eslea and Smith (1998) showed that implementation of anti-bullying seminars in schools significantly decreased the prevalence of bullying. In a society that is empathetic and understanding of other individuals, a society that does not tolerate bullying, emotional abuse can start to dissolve and become less of a problem in our children's schools and society (Eslea & Smith, 1998). However, this trend of decreased acceptance of emotional abuse is quite outstanding when we consider the persistence of such high acceptance for physical abuse and corporal punishment.

There are likely a multitude of factors contributing to the differences in individual acceptance attitudes regarding physical and emotional abuse. For one, cultural differences are likely contributing to the current supportive attitudes towards the use of corporal punishment and acceptance of physical abuse. Flynn (1996) discussed the various factors which have been found

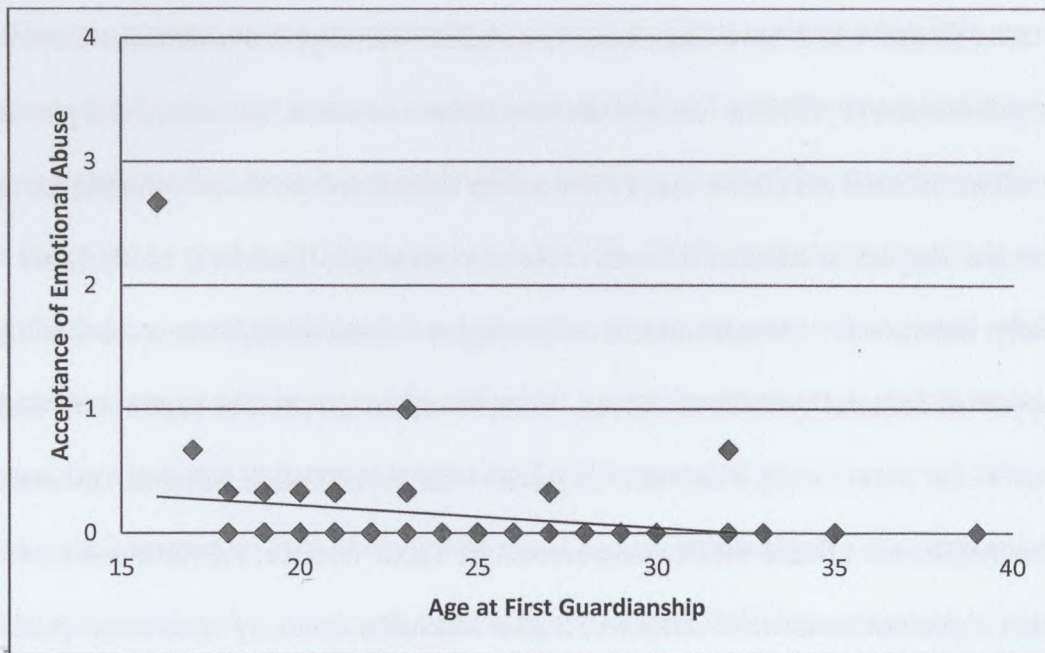


Figure 4. Depiction of the linear relationship between age at first birth/guardianship and scores on the Emotional Abuse subsection of the Parent Discipline Attitudes Survey (PDAS), which is a five point scale. Scores closer to 5 indicate higher acceptance attitudes towards emotional abuse, and scores closer to 0 indicate lower acceptance attitudes towards emotional abuse.

to correlate with individual's support towards corporal punishment. Relative to our study, which was conducted in the southeast, Southerners have been found to have more support for corporal punishment and find it more acceptable to spank a child than people from other regions of the United States (Flynn, 1996). Also, people who identify as a conservative Protestant or as a conservative of a Protestant denomination, and follow the Bible literally, are more likely to be in support of corporal punishment and spanking than people who do not identify as within that category (Sherkat & Ellison, 1999). This could partially explain the high prevalence of supportive attitudes towards corporal punishment found in this study because the majority of participants are Southerners and there is also a high Protestant population in the area the study was conducted. However, this study did not ask participants to identify their home region or religious affiliation.

Other factors which have been found to correlate with supportive attitudes towards corporal punishment in previous research are socioeconomic status, education, and potentially race. Previous research has shown that a relationship exists between socioeconomic status and education and supportive attitudes towards corporal punishment (Lansford, 2010). More specifically, individuals with more education and higher socioeconomic status are less likely to be in support of corporal punishment (Flynn, 1996; Lansford, 2010). The exploratory analyses performed in the current study found similar results with the education variable; however, no significant results were found with the socioeconomic status variable. Previous research has shown that higher socioeconomic status and higher education are likely to co-occur (Lansford, 2010); therefore, the results of the current study suggest that education plays a stronger role in attitudes towards use of corporal punishment than socioeconomic status. Further research, with a direct measure of these variables, would be necessary to say this definitively.

Previous research suggesting that race plays a role in acceptance attitudes towards corporal punishment generally focus on European American and African American participants. The same was done in the exploratory analysis of race in the current study which revealed differences between the two races in acceptance attitudes for emotional and physical abuse, as well as corporal punishment. A prevalence of support for corporal punishment has been found among African American families in some studies (Straus & Stewart, 1999), while other studies have shown that race may not be a strong distinguishing factor in attitudes towards acceptance of corporal punishment (Flynn, 1996; Lansford, 2010). Lansford (2010) suggests that religion may be a more prevalent contributing factor than race; however, the inclusion of race in the variables of interest in future studies might shed light on some cultural differences that may be present across various ethnic groups.

The way societal norms are currently structured people are unsure when it is appropriate to intervene, and do not want to cause a scene when there is not actually abuse occurring. They also may be unaware that there is a problem if the situation is something they frequently witness because they may be used to it (Mrug, Madan & Windle, 2015). Unfortunately, this leaves many cases of child abuse unacknowledged as people make up excuses as to why a parent might be acting a certain way, or why it is not that individual's place to intervene. A shift in social acceptance must occur to decrease instances of child abuse that goes unreported. When individuals are educated on how to recognize abuse and are encouraged to step forward when they witness something that is not right abuse can be stopped. Bullying campaigns teach children to step up when a peer is being put down through vicious words, but the focus is on emotion and not on physical violence. The same emphasis should be put on stepping forward when an individual witnesses an adult mistreating a child. It is possible that some people would rather be a bystander than risk getting involved in a situation that they are not entirely certain about. Some may simply want to avoid conflict, or feel that it is not their place to intervene. Acceptance cannot be the norm anymore. The change of individual attitudes can lead to a societal shift in acceptance which can decrease the prevalence of abuse occurrences.

Bandura's (1978) social learning theory of aggression informs us about the consequences of letting children witness and experience acts of violence. Whether those acts of violence are in the home, on the playground, at the school yard, or right in front of you at any given moment, it is our responsibility as a society to step up and change what is happening. Children are taught to be emotionally equipped to understand the feelings of others, but society somehow seems disengaged regarding the affects physical violence can have on one's emotional state. We have seen in social research that when people experience or witness violence frequently

desensitization occurs and they respond to it less and less (Mrug et al., 2015). Desensitization to violence can cause individuals to be less aware of the violence around them but also more likely to engage in violent behaviors (Mrug et al., 2015). If individuals are unable to see the full extent of their actions, or the actions of those around them due to desensitization, then abuse may be more likely to occur. By changing acceptance attitudes and becoming educated on the topic, individuals can make decisions to positively affect another person's life whether it be reporting abuse that they witness to save a child from a terrible situation, or furthering their own education to improve their own parenting decisions.

In order to structure a foundation upon which growth can occur, laws need to be constructed and current laws must be reformatted. In over 31 countries corporal punishment has become illegal, but in the United States there are still multiple states which allow schools to use corporal punishment to discipline students (Belsky, 2013; Smith et al., 2011). As a nation we must step forward into the future and make a change. The United States is falling behind in disciplinary reform, and as we can clearly see from the research, corporal punishment is correlated with a plethora of negative consequences (Gershoff, 2013). South Carolina's vague definition of excessive corporal punishment (McCoy & Keen, 2014) is just one example of the lack of initiative in this country to create disciplinary reform. Stringent definitions of abuse need to be assembled so that abuse cannot be overlooked when individual's definitions are not synonymous. 'Excessive corporal punishment' is not a durable definition; it is a vague explanation which leaves it up to the parents to determine what they feel is appropriate, and the court to determine how far is too far. This is not good enough.

Previous research has provided us with the knowledge that laws are not enough. In order to create real change people must be educated. Simply making the corporal punishment of

children illegal will not miraculously change the minds of the many of people who frequently utilize corporal punishment as a disciplinary method. Without the education of alternative methods those individuals may become frustrated and more likely to use corporal punishment because they do not know what else to do (McCoy & Keen, 2014). Education is the only way to solve this society-wide predicament. Parents should be educated about the adverse consequences of corporal punishment, as well as the many more effective and healthy alternative disciplinary methods available so that they may be well equipped to make informed decisions about parenting methodology.

Limitations

There were several limitations in this study. First, the sample collected was specific to a particular region (the majority of participants are from the southeast), which could have contributed to the general attitude trends that were found. Second, there were only three survey items for emotional abuse acceptance and the Cronbach alpha for acceptance of emotional abuse was very low ($\alpha = .55$), which may partially explain why we did not find many significant results correlating with this variable. Third, the population which the majority of participants come from decreases the generalizability of this study's findings. The majority of participants are college students who do not have children; twenty-one years of age or younger. This sample is not ideal when measuring parenting attitudes; although, attitudes towards disciplinary styles were of interest regardless of whether or not the participant had children of their own. Also, there were significantly more female participants than male participants. This study also did not analyze race, socioeconomic status, or education level beyond exploratory analyses; however, these demographic variables may have been important contributing factors based on previous research and should be examined further in future research.

Another limitation of this study is that all participants took this survey online and therefore we were unable to control for environmental factors which may have been present during their participation. It is possible participants had a quiet areas where they could focus on the survey items; however, it is also possible that they took the survey in an environment which provided many distractions during their participation. A final limitation of this study is that there was a low occurrence of abuse within the sample. The majority of participants did not experience any form of abuse as a child, which is limiting in our investigation of how childhood experience of abuse may contribute to current adult attitudes.

Future Directions

Further research is always necessary, and in this particular case very important. In future research it would be ideal to gather a sample which includes all regions of the United States in order to gather a broader picture of nationwide attitudes towards various disciplinary styles. This might even reveal regional differences in acceptance attitudes (Flynn, 1996) which would be important for implications of this research and how it might be culturally best to approach education about healthy and effective disciplinary styles. Furthermore, for subscales such as the emotional abuse acceptance subscale more items should be included. There might be surveys in existence which include more items which would help to obtain a clearer picture of participants' acceptance of emotional abuse. Also, having more scale items might help to improve the reliability and validity of the scale.

Future studies may be strengthened and have a better idea of the factors contributing to participants' views if demographic questions include religious affiliation, region of origin (or where the participant lived for the majority of their life), and region of current residence. Also, it would likely be in the benefit of the study to have a stronger focus on correlations between

socioeconomic status, education level, and race with attitudes of support towards use of corporal punishment as previous research has identified these as potential contributing factors. This study only included a section of exploratory analyses regarding some of these variables; however, those were not variables of interest in the hypothesis testing for this study. In future research, it may also be in the best interest of the study to collect from a sample of more individuals who experienced abuse as to have a more equal division of those who experienced abuse as a child and those who did not experience abuse as a child. Additional, it might be beneficial to include scales geared towards those who do not have children in order to determine if having children influences one's opinion of which disciplinary methods are acceptable to use on children.

Conclusion

An investigation into the potential relationships between experience of abuse as a child and current attitudes towards abuse and use of corporal punishment are important for the advancement of knowledge in this subject area. Learning more about the factors which contribute to the development of attitudes towards disciplinary style may help to reduce the wide-spread use of corporal punishment and enable parents to make healthier choices about how to discipline their children. This research shows support for the hypothesis that individuals who become parents/guardians at a younger age are more likely to support the use of corporal punishment and have higher acceptance attitudes towards physical abuse. In light of this finding, it may benefit the society as a whole to begin wide-spread education about appropriate parenting methods and effective disciplinary styles. By utilizing the information found here and in previous research the shift in societal attitudes towards the use of corporal punishment can begin, as well as the extremely important wide-spread education on this topic. It is common to believe that parenting comes naturally or is intuitive; however, this is not the case. Compassion and

understanding may come naturally to an individual, but no matter how much love one has to give an education about effective parenting styles and disciplinary methods can benefit everyone.

Understanding child development and what methods are within any parents' capability can affect how children today develop into healthy, well-rounded adults for tomorrow.

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