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Report on Physical Punishment in the United States

Endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics and other leading child welfare organizations

A new report released by Phoenix Children's Hospital in collaboration with a researcher at the University of Michigan concludes that there is little evidence that physical punishment improves children's behavior in the long-term. Rather, the report cites substantial evidence that physical punishment puts children at risk for negative outcomes such as increased aggression and mental health problems.

The report, authored by Elizabeth T. Gershoff, PhD, a researcher from the University of Michigan and reviewed and endorsed by Phoenix Children's Hospital provides a concise review of one hundred years of social science research and hundreds of published studies on physical punishment conducted by psychology, medical, education, social work and sociology professionals on the effects physical punishment has on children. Individuals representing 30 organizations participated in its development and it has already been endorsed by American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Emergency Room Physicians, American Medical Association, National Association of Counsel for Children and National Association of Regulatory Administration.

"The report and its conclusions are a valuable tool for us and substantiates our observations at the Phoenix Children's Hospital Behavioral Medicine Clinic for the last two decades," said Dr. Eric Benjamin, Section Chief of Psychiatry at Phoenix Children's"

The report created for parents and caregivers, policy and program makers and children themselves concludes that:

There is little research evidence that physical punishment improves children's behavior in the long term.

There is substantial research evidence that physical punishment makes it more, not less, likely that children will be defiant and aggressive in the future.

There is clear research evidence that physical punishment puts children at risk for negative outcomes, including increased antisocial behavior and mental health problems.

There is consistent evidence that children who are physically punished are at greater risk of serious injury and physical abuse.

“This consensus endorsed by the AAP is a huge step forward for effective discipline in the United States”, said Marcia Stanton, Community Relations, Phoenix Children’s Hospital. “At Phoenix Children’s Hospital, our goal is to help parents deal effectively with challenging behaviors and providing parent education about alternative methods is part of the solution.”

Research showing the mounting evidence that physical punishment of children is an ineffective parenting practice comes at a time of decreasing support for physical punishment within the United States and around the world. The majority of American adults are opposed to physical punishment by school personnel (77 percent) and an increasing number of Americans (29 percent) are opposed to physical punishment by parents. At the same time, there is a growing momentum among other countries to enact legal bans on all forms of physical punishment, bolstered by the fact that the practice has come to be regarded as a violation of international human rights law.

“Forty years ago, parents put their children in cars without car seats or seatbelts—we survived, but no parent today would think of taking that risk even though our parents did. Just as norms about child car seat safety changed, it’s time for norms about discipline to change,” said Dr. Gershoff.

The full report can be downloaded at www.phoenixchildrens.com/discipline.

About Phoenix Children’s Hospital

Phoenix Children’s Hospital is Arizona’s only licensed children’s hospital, providing world-class care in more than 40 pediatric specialties to our state’s sickest kids. Though Phoenix Children’s is one of the ten largest freestanding children’s hospitals in the country, rapid population growth in Arizona means the Hospital must grow as well. Phoenix Children’s recently announced a \$588 million expansion plan to bring its special brand of family-centered care to even more patients and families. The plan includes a significant upgrade of the Hospital’s current campus, an aggressive physician recruitment effort, and new satellite centers in high growth areas of the Valley. For more information, visit the Hospital’s Web site at www.phoenixchildrens.com.

About the Author:

Elizabeth T. Gershoff, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Social Work at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She received a doctoral degree in Child Development and worked for five years as an Associate Research Scientist at the National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University. In her current research, Dr. Gershoff focuses on the impacts of parenting and violence exposure on child and youth development over time and within the contexts families, schools, neighborhoods, and social policies. She also studies the long-term impacts of school-based violence prevention on youth mental health and academic achievement.

We will be back in touch at a later date with a request for endorsement of this important report. In the meantime, please let me know if you have any comments or suggestions.