Maternal violence, victimization, and child physical punishment in Peru

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This study examined whether mothers’ experience of violence was a risk factor for physical punishment.

Methods: Data were derived from the nationally representative 2000 Peru Demographic and Family Health Survey. Participants were 12,601 currently married women who were living with biological children aged 0–17 years and were responsible for disciplining the children. A multinomial logit model was used to determine the probabilities of using no physical punishment, slapping/spanking only, beating only, and both slapping/spanking and beating to discipline children.

Results: The study found that childhood history of physical punishment, a greater variety of intimate partner emotional violence and experience of intimate partner physical violence increased significantly a mother’s probability of using physical punishment with her children, even after controlling for confounding factors. A mother’s history of physical violence victimization by someone other than the current partner was also a significant factor for beating children as opposed to using non-physical forms of punishment.

Conclusions: Mothers were at substantially increased risk of using physical punishment if they were victims of parental physical violence in childhood, intimate partner violence in the current union, and physical violence by someone other than the current partner.

Practice implications: Increased public education is needed of the negative consequences of intimate partner emotional and physical violence victimization for mothers’ childrearing strategies. There is a need to integrate intimate partner violence into child welfare programs and develop effective screening mechanisms for maternal violence victimization and child maltreatment.

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Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) and child physical punishment are major international public health concerns. Nationally representative samples of ever-married women of reproductive age in Latin America and the Caribbean have demonstrated that 39% of women in Colombia (Ojeda, Ordóñez, & Ochoa, 2005), 18% of those in Haiti (Caymitte, Placide, Barrière, Mariko, & Sévère, 2001), and 41% of those in Peru (Reyes & Ochoa, 2001) have ever experienced IPV. In a 1999 survey undertaken by the National Institute of Statistics in metropolitan Lima, 82% of women interviewed said that they knew someone who had

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Mothers who were physically punished in childhood would be more likely to use physical punishment than mothers who had not. (1)

Mothers who had experienced IPV would be more likely to resort to physical forms of punishment than mothers who had not. (2)

The similarities between IPV and child abuse, the tendency for these forms of violence to co-occur, and the need to ensure children’s health and wellbeing call for an increased global understanding of parental violence toward children. Using data from the nationally representative 2000 Peru Encuesta Demográfica y de Salud Familiar (Demographic and Family Health Survey [DFHS]), this paper expands upon current knowledge of the association between maternal violence victimization and child physical punishment in two-parent families (i.e., those in which a mother and her partner are formally married or cohabiting, regardless of the partner’s relationship to the child). The paper attempts to fill a gap in the developing country literature by shedding light on the association between childhood history of physical punishment and partner emotional and physical violence on maternal use of physical punishment. Increased knowledge of these issues may help better predict which families are at risk of physical violence toward children and could help improve the design and implementation of family violence prevention programs.
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