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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 (Caymites, Placide, Barrère, 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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experienced domestic violence in the past 12 months (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática [INEI], 1999). Using non-representative samples of parents or children, other studies have indicated that physical and corporal punishment are common in non-western settings, with the prevalence ranging from 37 to 71% (Smith & Mosby, 2003 of Jamaica; Tang, 2006 of Hong Kong; Youssef, Attia, & Kamel, 1998 of Alexandria, Egypt).

Although a growing body of evidence has suggested that physical punishment may have negative effects on children, including an increased risk of anxiety, aggression, and psychiatric disorders (Afifi, Brownridge, Cox, & Sareen, 2006; Frias-Armenta, 2002; Gershoff, 2002; Rodriguez, 2003; Turner & Muller, 2004), there is relatively little research on physical punishment in developing countries. One study in Mexico found that family violence, both as experienced by the child and observed between their parents, had a direct influence on the psychological and behavioral problems encountered by the children (Frias-Armenta & Gaxiola-Romero, 2008). International studies on parental violence toward children have been constrained by a lack of consensus around what constitutes harsh physical discipline and by considerations of cultural relativism, with physically abusive punishment by caregivers being perceived as rooted in cultural patterns of childrearing (Korbin, 2003). Research has noted the strong endorsement of physical punishment in countries such as India, Singapore, South Korea (Douglas, 2006), and Zimbabwe (Shumba, 2001), and among Asian, Middle Eastern, and Latina women in the United States (Maker, Shah, & Agha, 2005).

Studies have documented that parents who experienced physical punishment in childhood or were victims of child abuse, or who witnessed domestic violence in their families of origin are more likely to physically punish and/or abuse their own children (Douglas, 2006; Lunkenheimer, Kittler, Olson, & Kleinberg, 2006; Tajima, 2000, 2002; Taylor, Guterman, Lee, & Rathouz, 2009). Social learning theory has been used to explain these linkages. Social learning theory posits that humans learn by observing others; that individuals are most likely to model behaviors of people they identify with, the degree of identification being a function of the level of similarity between a person and oneself and the degree of emotional attachment that is felt toward an individual; and that response consequences such as rewards or punishment influence the likelihood that a person will perform a particular behavior in a given situation (Bandura, 1973, 1977). Thus, children who are physically punished and who witness violence between their parents learn that coercive force, aggression, and violence can be used to solve conflicts. However, the association between witnessing parental conflict in childhood and use of physical punishment has rarely been examined in low and middle income countries.

Research has also shown that wife abuse in the home is a significant risk factor for all forms of violence against children (Appel & Holden, 1998; DiLauro, 2004; Guterman & Lee, 2005; Kanoy, Ulku-Steiner, Cox, & Burchinal, 2003; Tajima, 2000; Taylor et al., 2009). These findings have been attributed to increased stress and frustration and reduced psychological wellbeing, which are considered to lead, in turn, to a breakdown of parents' coping capacities (Conger et al., 1992; Paxson and Waldfogel, 2003; Tang, 2006; Weinberg, 2001), particularly where social norms allow parents to vent their frustrations on children. Prior studies have focused on partner physical violence and have not considered how other forms of IPV are related to physically punitive parenting behaviors. A recent study by Chang, Theodore, Martin, and Runyan (2008) found that the risk of child maltreatment was higher in homes where partner psychological abuse was presented. Another study in Mexico found that negative family ties (defined by the presence of conflict between family members) was a significant predictor of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse among the Mexican families studied (Muñoz-Rivas, Gámez-Guadix, & Jiménez, 2008). Overall, research on this topic remains sparse in international settings.

Purpose

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.

Hypotheses

Two hypotheses guided the analysis:

- (1) Mothers who had experienced IPV would be more likely to resort to physical forms of punishment than mothers who had not.
- (2) Mothers who were physically punished in childhood would be more likely to use physical punishment than mothers were not.

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