



Spanking can fuel aggression, anxiety in kids

Physical discipline leads to more behavior problems, research suggests

[Reuters](#)

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NEW YORK - Children who are spanked when they misbehave are more likely to be anxious and aggressive than children who are disciplined in nonphysical ways, research shows. This is true even if spanking is the "cultural norm."

Whether parents should spank their children or use other forms of physical discipline is controversial. Some experts argue that children should not be spanked when they act out citing evidence that it leads to more, rather than fewer, behavior problems and it could escalate into physical abuse. There are data to support this argument.

Other experts, however, argue that the effects of spanking and physical discipline might depend on the characteristics of the child and family and the circumstances in which it is used.

To investigate the latter theory, researchers questioned 336 mothers and their children in China, India, Italy, Kenya, the Philippines, and Thailand about cultural norms surrounding use of physical discipline and how it affected their children's behavior.

Jennifer Lansford, a research scientist from the Center for Child and Family Policy at Duke University spearheaded the survey. She told Reuters Health that "across the six countries studied, children who were physically disciplined more frequently were more aggressive and anxious than were children who were physically disciplined less frequently."

"However, in countries where the use of physical discipline was more common, being physically disciplined more frequently was not related as strongly to aggression and anxiety as it was in countries where physical discipline was less frequently used," she said.

Not surprisingly, in Thailand, a country where peace-promoting Buddhist teachings predominant, moms were least likely to spank their children or use other forms of physical discipline.

In Kenya, on the other hand, where use of physical discipline is common and considered normal for the most part, moms were most likely to spank or engage in similar disciplinary tactics. In a study conducted in Kenya in 2003, 57 percent of grandmothers reported caning, pinching, slapping, tying with a rope, hitting, beating, and kicking as forms of discipline they had used on their grandchildren.

One question the findings raise, according to Lansford, is whether being physically disciplined more frequently causes an increase in aggression and anxiety or whether children who are already aggressive and anxious are simply physically disciplined more often. "On the basis of other work conducted in the United States, the answer is probably some of each," Lansford said.

"Another question is whether physical discipline is appropriate in this day and age, regardless of how accepted it may be," she added.

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