

The Physical Punishment in the Emerging of Children Aggressive Behaviours

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Abstract

The focus of the present study is the exploration of factors related to physical parental punishment and the display of aggression among school-age children. The study was conducted in Tirana and Durres with children of seven elementary schools, in a total of 830 children of the group-age 7 to 11 years old. Our *aim* is to identify the differences between physically punished children and physically non-punished children in the emergence of aggressiveness in general, identification of forms of aggression that exhibit the physically punished children, identification of gender differences in the manifestation of forms of aggression in physically punished children. We used the Direct and Indirect Aggression Scales (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz & Österman, 1992) and four questionnaires were designed to collect information from the child whether the parents were involved in these forms of punishment or not. The *results* of the study showed that there were differences in the display of aggressiveness among physically punished children and physically non-punished children; there was also a tendency for physically punished children to exhibit a higher level of Direct Aggression. Findings also emerged in terms of gender differences in the appearance of aggressiveness in physically punished children. The conclusions highlight the role played by the physical punitive factor in the emergence of aggressive behaviour in

children. In this context, the role of parental patterns and what they transmit to the child should be taken into account by the authoritarian figures that are in daily contact with the child - parents or teachers.

Key words children; physical punishment; aggression; parents;

1. Introduction

The physical punishment remains one of the most difficult issues to be managed by the mental health structures and professionals who have in the focus of their work the early-age rehabilitation interventions (Action for Children and Youth Aotearoa, 2003). Physical or body punishment is generally defined as the use of force in order to cause pain (Keenan & Shaw, 1997) with the aim of correcting behaviour. Among researchers it was recognized that it was very difficult to distinguish between physical punishment and physical abuse, arguing that it was very difficult to divide in a straight line the whole concept (Baumrind, Larzelere & Cowan, 2002).

Parental punitive and non-punitive practices vary to the ways and frequency of physical punishment to their children as well as to the reason for the use of punishment for correcting behaviour in children or adults (Baruah & Kausik, 2017). Parenting aims to equip the child with morals, develop the emotional world and help to evolve a self-concept that allows the child to assume responsibilities at an adult age. Parental efforts in child education for what is adequate and inadequate, good and bad, encourage the installation of what is the standard of values, attitudes and personal beliefs of the child. Moreover, these are the essential elements that become part of the personality that the child will develop in the future.

The positive discipline helps children understand why some behaviours are inadequate and why some others not. Currently there are two main techniques used for younger children's positive discipline (Keenan & Wakschlag, 2000).

The first is the "*exercise of force*" approach, which implies the punishment of a child in every case when the child behaves inappropriately (*idem*), while the second is an "*inductive approach*", which implies setting some limits and explains the logical consequences reasoned and straightened (Jones, Nagin & Roeder, 2001; Keenan & Shaw, 1994). Non-positive parental practices based on the use of the physical punishment certainly have serious consequences in building the personality of the child but also in the

manifestation on the child, in some cases they cause mental health problems as a result of the physical abuse. A very significant element in the child's growth experience is the level of the child exposure to parenting aggressiveness (Johnson, Cohen, Smailes, Kasen & Brook, 2002). This aggression seems to be constant and it often happens that the child internalizes the violence he or she has suffered, trying to disclose it against his or her peers (Allen, Atkins, Baucom, et al., 2005). It is widely accepted that physical parental punishment will guide the child towards later aggressive behaviours (Ang & Goh, 2010).

As it results from various research on the field, there is a link between physical punishment and the display of aggressive behaviour on the side of the child (Smith & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Straus & Paschall, 2003).

Based on the results by American Psychiatric Association, regarding the effects of physical punishment against children lay hold of the most rigor measures against the physical punishment of children in schools as cited in Allen (2011).

This typology might take two possible forms: The first is the positive linear link. This has been identified by the findings achieved through successive studies (Deater-Deckard, Dodge, 1997; Gershoff, 2002a; Gershoff, 2002b; Grogan-Kaylor, 2004; Holden, 2002) that relate to the strong positive between physical parent punishment to children and the high levels of aggression identified in later child relationships, as well as with their antisocial behaviour. Second, the latter group of researchers (Ahmed & Haque, 2007; Crick, Grotpeter & Bigbee, 2002; Coyl, Roggman & Newland, 2002; Grusec & Goodnow 1994; Straus & Stewart 1999) have suggested that the presence of physical punishment in children can contribute to increasing emotional issues in children at a later developmental age.

2. Method and Materials

The present research is an exploratory and co relational approach. Its focus was related on children aged 7 to 11 years, including kids from the 2, 3, 4 and 5 grades respectively in 4 schools of Tirana and 3 schools of Durres in Albania.

The sample consisted of 880 participants, 442 boys and 438 girls. The children's selection was conducted according to the ranking number in the class, based on the school location and the age of the child.

Regarding the subjects involved in the study, about 53% of them belonged to the age group 7-9 years old and 47% belonged to the age group 10-11 years old. The minimum age of the youth participating in the study was 7 years and the maximum was 11 years, with an average of 9 years ($M = 9.07$) and the standard deviation ($SD = 1.6$). See Table 1 for gender and age frequencies.

Table 1: Data analysis of participants variables of age and gender (N=880)

			Gender		Total
			Female	Male	212
Age	7 y.o.	No	106	106	
		% . Age	50%	50%	100%
	8 y.o.	No	132	122	254
		% . Age	59,3%	40,7%	100%
	9 y.o.	No	67	88	155
		% . Age	36,0%	64%	100%
	10 y.o.	No	96	93	189
		% . Age	52,2%	47,8%	100%
	11 y.o.	No	37	33	70
		% . Age	62,3%	37,7%	100%
Total		No	438	442	880
		% . Age	49,9%	50,1%	100%

For the data collection we used the Physical and Verbal Aggression Tool (Direct Indirect Aggression Scales (DIAS), Björkqvist, Lagerspetz & Kaukiainen, 1992). DIAS is an instrument which consists of 24 statements that assess the level of physical and verbal aggressiveness and is used as a self-report measure (see Table 2 for its reliability). We also designed a questionnaire composed of four statements for the purpose of collecting data related for the identification of children who were physically mentally punished by parents such where, by whom, in what ways and for what reasons. Descriptive and co relational data analyses were performed with the SPSS version-18 statistics.

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the total questionnaire and its subscales

Subscales	Cronbach's Alpha n=240
Direct aggression	.88
Indirect aggression	.89
Physical aggression	.95
Verbal aggression	.93
Total	.90

Relating the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, co relational scores resulted in values greater than 0.9 as for the total questionnaire and the subscales (see Table 2).

3. Study Results

Referring to data from descriptive analysis regarding the occurrence of physical aggression in children at a moderate level (see Table 3). This certainly gives us an information about the use of aggressive forms in social interaction between children. Most often, children showed direct verbal type of aggressiveness on moderate levels that were represented either by direct physical aggression or indirect physical one.

Table 3: Physical aggression degree in children

-	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Physical Aggression	880	,31	4,03	1,8	,75

Children show physical aggression, while verbal aggression appeared on higher levels (M = 1.8). It is proved that aggression in the whole for the sample group was at a moderate level, there were some physical and verbal differences in school-age children.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for the relation between physically punished and non-punished children in the display of overall aggression

-	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
-					
Physically punished	452	1	3,04	1,9	,44
Physically non-punished	428	1	1,54	,6	,27

There was slight difference between the quality of response of respondents that tended to be more prone to physical punishment than any other type of behavioural modification technique. Children physically punished by their parents exhibited moderate levels of aggression against others; while those that were not punished by parents showed low levels of aggression (see Table 5).

Table 5: T-test of gender differences in physically punished and physically non- punished children

-	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Physically punished children	Male	168	23.53	4.833	.955	.341
	Female	284	22.80	5.227		
Physically non-punished children	Male	189	259.26	170.583	2.256	.025
	Female	239	198.07	187.156		

Based on average we say that male present a higher stress levels ($M = 259.26$, $Ds = 17.583$) compared to women ($M = 198.07$, $Ds = 187.156$).

The difference between boys and girls physically punished by their parents in terms of direct verbal aggression, these data show that boys were more likely to exhibit higher levels of direct aggression both physically and verbally than girls.

The difference in respect to the level of direct verbal aggression was.

Despite that in the mean, their level of aggression in children physically punished was moderate. What is noticeable is the form of aggression that most typically appeared in physically punished children, indicating that the overall level of aggressiveness in physically punished children was moderate.

This moderate level also appeared in specific types of aggressiveness, such as direct ($M = 2.41$) and indirect ($M = 1.56$). ($1.33 < M < 2.67$). Regarding the aggressiveness either girls or boys physically punished by their parents, generally show moderate levels of direct aggression. However, there was a higher level of direct aggressiveness among boys ($M = 2.62$) than in girls ($M = 1.84$).

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics for the subscales and overall aggression by gender

Gender		N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Female	Direct aggression	438	1	3,58	1,84	1,04
	Indirect aggression	438	1	2,58	1,24	,61
	Physical aggression	438	1	3,57	1,47	1,05
	Verbal aggression	438	1	3	2,04	1,12
	Valid N (list wise)	438				
Male	Direct aggression	442	1	2,56	2,62	,40
	Indirect aggression	442	1	2,80	1,56	,41
	Physical aggression	442	1	2,75	2,43	,44
	Verbal aggression	442	1	3	1,29	,47
	Valid N (list wise)	442				

When referring to the average scores on aggression level values for the selected Campion, ($1.33 < M < 2.68$) there was a moderate level of aggression. We noticed that the level of direct aggression ($M = 2.62$) in boys who were physically punished by their parents was in the upper limits of the area (1.34 to 1.67).

Physically punished boys from their parents exhibited a moderate level of direct aggression with a tendency to become high. When compared, the level of direct aggressiveness between girls and boys physically punished by their parents, there was a higher difference in the respective mean gender values. Girls exhibited moderate levels of direct aggression while boys had almost high levels of direct aggression.

Referring to the assessment scale used in the present study, direct aggression consists of two subscales: physical aggression and verbal aggression.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics for direct aggression of two subscales, physical aggression and verbal aggression in children in the display of overall aggression

Gender		N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Female	Physical aggression	438	1	3,57	1,4	1,05
	Verbal aggression	438	1	3	2,0	1,12
	Valid N (list wise)	438				
Male	Physical aggression	442	1	2,75	2.4	,44
	Verbal aggression	442	1	3	1,2	,47
	Valid N (list wise)	442				

More than half of the children participating in the research (62.7%) reported that their parents have been subjected them physical punishment when they made a mistake. From the study, it can be referred that were more boys who were physically punished by their parents. Thus, of all the girls in the study, half (52.6%) said they were physically punished by their parents and more than half of the boys (71.1%) reported the same thing. The main practitioners of the physical punishment in children were mothers (69.2%). Despite the sex of the child itself, physical punishment was exercised by more mothers (65.6%) than by the father (34.4%).

From descriptive analysis of the types of physical and verbal aggression by gender for children who were physically punished by their parents, there were evidences of a moderate level of direct physical aggressiveness by parents. For boys physically punished by their parents, there was a moderate level of direct physical aggression, whereas the direct physical aggression shown by female parents was generally low. Boys revealed more direct physical aggression than girls. The difference between boys and girls physically punished by their parents in terms of direct physical aggression was $[2.433-1.65 = 0.783]$.

Afore, we decided to use the non-parametric Maan-Whitney Test as the data distribution for this variable is not normal then inferential tests will use non-parametric tests. To analyze whether there are gender differences in the overall level of direct verbal aggression, the Mann-Whitney test (non-parametric test).

Table 8: Differences for gender in the level of Direct physical aggression

Test Statistics ^a	-
	Directphysical aggression
Mann-Whitney U	9473,5
Wilcoxon W	20058,5
Z-score	0.038
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
a.Grouping Variable: Gender	

Ranks				
	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Direct physical aggression	Female	145	130,73	20058,5
	Male	139	153,78	20411,5
	Total	284		

Test data for gender differences in the level of Direct verbal aggression was Sig = 0.188 > 0.05. Thus, we could suggest that there is no difference between the display of direct verbal aggression for both sexes. As in relation to gender differences in the display of direct physical aggression, Sig = 0.038 < 0.05 there was a significant statistical difference between the levels shown by boys and girls physically punished by their parents.

4. Conclusions

Referring to the results of the research, we can conclude that the children who participated in the study showed a moderate level of aggression, orientated by two typical forms as direct and indirect. Physical and verbal aggressions were at an average level, but there was a tendency for children to get more focused on direct verbal aggression than direct physical aggression.

It can be noted that children who were not physically punished by their parents exhibited a low level of aggressiveness, whereas those who were physically punished exhibited a moderate level of aggression. Referring to the most typical forms of showing the repertoire of aggressive behaviour in physically punished children, it appears that direct aggression was at higher levels and the indirect on was at moderate levels.

Referring to these conclusions it is important to be aware of the way children intend to design their experiences in all the social and emotional relationships they are involved (Vygotsky, 1978). The level of child exposure to parenting aggression encourages the child to embed what he or she had experience in relation to others.

The Albanian school-context is surely a vulnerable reality that has to depict more deep analysis on the social and family system as a significant indicator of the single members mental health vulnerability. A national strategic program is also of great relevance for an accurate psychosocial prevention and prognosis.

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