

Neighborhood quality not a factor in effect of spanking

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The quality of the neighborhood has little effect on whether parent's use of corporal punishment is related to children's behavior problems, a new report by the University of Michigan says.

The findings stand in contrast to other studies that found the effects of corporal punishment varied by the parents' perception of their neighborhood as a good place to raise children. Some authors have suggested that in neighborhoods where social control is low and social norms are frequently violated, that strict parenting—which could involve spanking—may protect children from harm.

Andrew Grogan-Kaylor, an assistant professor in the School of Social Work, conducted the research which appears in the October issue of *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*.

Grogan-Kaylor studied 1,943 mother-child pairs from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, which used data from the Behavior Problems Index (BPI)—a 28-item measure of children's behavior. When asked to quantify the degree to which their child engaged in particular problem behaviors, mothers could indicate "often," "sometimes" or "never."

The mothers also answered questions about the frequency they spanked their child within the last week, but the survey did not define "spanking."

The survey asked respondents for their perceptions of their

neighborhood's strengths and problems, as well as questions regarding what cognitive stimulation the mothers provided their children, such as reading books to them. Information was also collected about the mothers' emotional support of their children, such as talking to them in a loving manner.

Children ranged in age from 4 to 14 years old, and 49 percent of them were boys and 51 percent were girls. The sample was racially and economically diverse. Grogan-Kaylor analyzed two sets of behavior problems: externalizing—which included cheating, lying, bullying and arguing excessively; and internalizing—which involved feeling fearful, unworthy and withdrawn.

The children were less likely to exhibit anti-social behaviors when their parents offered them emotional support and participated in activities that encouraged learning, he said. Children also did not feel as anxious or depressed when their neighborhood was safe, the study showed.

Source: University of Michigan

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