

Stress, substance abuse associated with some fathers spanking their children

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Biological fathers are more likely to spank their children when they are unable to cope with stress from parenting or they use abuse alcohol and drugs, a new study indicates.

The study also finds that fathers used corporal punishment—which involves physical force to a child to correct a behavior—more often on boys than girls.

The research, which appears in the current issue of *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, is among the first studies to shed light on paternal stress, drug/[alcohol](#) use and corporal punishment, while accounting for the father's mental health and involvement with the child.

Brian Perron, an assistant professor of social work at the University of Michigan, collaborated on the research with Shawna Lee, assistant professor at Wayne State University and the study's lead author; Catherine Taylor, an assistant professor at Tulane University; and Neil Guterman, a professor at the University of Chicago.

The study uses data from 2,309 biological fathers from 20 cities nationwide with populations that exceed 200,000 people. The sample includes married and cohabiting fathers, as well as fathers who do not live in the same home as their children but saw them more than once in the last 30 days. The children were 3 years old.

Fathers provided background about themselves and their mental history,

such as feeling anxious or depressed. They also answered questions about the frequency of using alcohol and drugs within the last 12 months.

When asked about the frequency during the last 30 days of disciplining their child, respondents could indicate "none," "only once or twice" (moderate corporal punishment), or "a few times to every day or nearly every day" (heavy corporal punishment). Overall, 61 percent of the fathers reported no corporal punishment, 23 percent indicated moderate corporal punishment and 16 percent was considered heavy.

Among the other findings:

- Younger fathers were more likely to engage in heavy corporal punishment than older fathers.
- Cohabiting fathers and fathers who were not married or living with the child's mother were less likely to report spanking than married fathers.
- Children who were more aggressive, as reported by their mothers, were more likely to be spanked by their father.

Stress, depression and drug use also were associated with fathers using corporal punishment. These men were more likely to indicate they spank their children often, the study indicates.

Regarding alcohol consumption, drinking heavily in one day—which is considering having at least four drinks—was associated with both moderate and heavy corporal punishment.

Researchers also analyzed how race played a role in the fathers' behaviors. Although African American fathers were significantly more likely than white fathers to engage in moderate corporal punishment,

they were not more likely than white fathers to use heavy corporal punishment.

In contrast, Hispanic fathers were significantly less likely to engage heavy corporal punishment than white fathers. Researchers said this finding is important given the limited research available on Hispanic [fathers](#) and their parenting practices.

The findings are consistent with other studies that focus on mothers. For example, prior research with mothers has shown that parenting stress increases risk for spanking, Lee said.

Provided by University of Michigan

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