

Evidence-based paper calls for corporal punishment ban

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Corporal punishment should be prohibited nationally and supported by a public education campaign and greater access to parental supports, according to a new research paper.

The three-tiered strategy to outlaw [corporal punishment](#) is outlined in the paper which reviewed laws in Australia allowing the practice,

[international agreements](#) on children's rights, evidence of its adverse effects, and the outcome of legislative reforms in countries that have implemented bans.

Professor Daryl Higgins, the Director of Australian Catholic University's Institute of Child Protection Studies, was one of the co-authors of the paper published today in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*.

Professor Higgins said the paper, *Corporal punishment of children in Australia: The evidence-based case for legislative reform*, showed the time for excuses and inaction when it came to prohibiting corporal punishment in Australia was over. Globally 65 countries have implemented bans.

According to the recently released Australian Child Maltreatment Study, of which Professor Higgins was a chief investigator, 61% of those aged between 16 and 24 experienced four or more incidents of corporal punishment in childhood.

The ACMS research found while 38% of respondents aged 65 or over believed corporal punishment was necessary when raising children, the figure dropped by more than half to 15% for those aged 16 to 24.

Professor Higgins said while the change in attitude was welcome, the paper published today showed there was a danger in waiting for support for corporal punishment to continue to fall.

"We cannot continue to ignore the conclusive evidence that shows corporal punishment significantly increases the risk of developing serious lifelong mental health disorders, often accompanies experiences of child abuse and neglect, and undermines a child's right to a life without violence," Professor Higgins said.

"It is time to ramp up our efforts to help parents and caregivers use positive parenting techniques rather than outdated and ineffective forms of discipline that do nothing but harm children and breach their right to safety."

The paper argued corporal punishment had life-long detrimental effects on children including reducing trust and connection with those raising them, lowering [self-esteem](#), increasing behavioral and [mental health problems](#), and increasing the risk of substance abuse.

It found in countries that had changed legislation and followed this with public education campaigns and alternative strategies for parents and caregivers, rates of corporal [punishment](#) decreased.

The team of 14 leading Australian academics behind the paper called for a whole-of-government approach and the use of regular national parenting surveys to measure the impact of legislative change and monitor child well-being and the prevalence of maltreatment.

More information: Sophie S. Havighurst et al, Corporal punishment of children in Australia: The evidence-based case for legislative reform, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.anzjph.2023.100044](#)

Provided by Australian Catholic University

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