

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Wait Until Your Father Gets Home? Mother's and Fathers' Spanking and Development of Child Aggression

Lee, S. J., Altschul, I., & Gershoff, E. T. (2015). Wait until your father gets home? Mother's and fathers' spanking and development of child aggression. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 52(1), 158-166. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2014.11.006

SUMMARY: Researchers examined whether fathers' and mothers' (N = 1,298) spanking contributed to development of child aggression in the first five years of life. Overall, results indicated that mothers spanked more frequently than fathers. This suggested that the processes linking spanking to child aggression may differ for mothers and fathers.

KEY FINDINGS:

- When examining fathers only, fathers' spanking was not associated with subsequent child aggression.
- In studying both parents, only mothers' spanking was predictive of subsequent child aggression.
- More mothers than fathers reported spanking their child at all three ages (one year, three years, and five years).
- Spanking by either parent did not improve children's behavior over time.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Facilitate new ways to promote community involvement for military families seeking new social support for parenting
- Collaborate with military parenting programs to educate parents on the potentially harmful effects of spanking and child aggression

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer education for military parents on developmental needs and outcomes for youth in order to minimize child aggression trajectories
- Provide additional materials or courses for new parents and families to gain further insight into healthy and positive parent-child relationships

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote additional research on spanking and child aggression levels, specifically in military youth and families
- Encourage education for professionals who work in military youth programs around alternative methods to discipline

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METHODS

- Respondents were recruited at hospitals and over the telephone at the time of the child's birth. Both verbal and written informed consent were obtained from participants at each interview.
- Researchers used data from fathers and mothers who participated in a previous study called the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS) core interviews and the add-on In-Home Longitudinal Study of Pre-School Aged Children.
- Variables that were measured included: spanking child at 1, 3, and 5 years of age, child aggression, parenting stress, daily caregiving involvement, partner aggression, and parenting risk factors such as mental health issues and intimate partner violence.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were parents (N = 1,298) who were married or cohabiting, ages 15-61 years at birth of child.
- Over half of the parents (65%) were White with an average income of \$38,766, and 25% of the sample had a high-school degree or GED and higher.
- Interviews were conducted with mothers and fathers (separately) of children at baseline, near the time of the target child's birth, (Wave 1) at one year (Wave 2), three years (Wave 3), and five years old (Wave 4).

LIMITATIONS

- Participants were selected from a previous study that was related to child well-being and at-risk families, which may produce different results when compared to families and children who were not sampled from that study or population.
- Frequency of spanking the child and parental stress levels were measured via self-report which may allow for skewed results, as parents may be unsure, embarrassed, or guilty when responding to the survey.
- Results from this sub-sample of married or cohabiting mothers and fathers living in urban areas may not be generalizable to parents living in non-urban geographic locations.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine and compare single-parent households in relation to the development of child aggression
- Explore the differences between parents who are not married or cohabiting to further understand associations between time at home, spanking, and child aggression
- Compare families who have not used spanking and associations between children's behavior over time

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