

Parental Physical Punishment Effect on Assertiveness: A Comparative Study of Male and Female of Higher Secondary School Students

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ABSTRACT

Harsh punishment in childhood is associated with multiple negative outcomes including increased assertiveness of social skills. The present study investigates the level of assertiveness of 200 High School students who have received harsh punishment, comprises 100 male and 100 female students, and compare between male and female students who are having same demographic variables by employing the structured questionnaire constructed by the researcher, and the Rathus Assertiveness Scale (Rathus, 1973). The results demonstrated that male students scored higher than female students which can be interpreted as males are more assertive than female students. This may suggest that females are being physically weaker than the male student may need more support than male students.

Keywords: Parent, Physical, Punishment, Assertiveness, Male, Female

Parents continue to still heavily influence their children's everyday lives and especially in regards to their children's education (Spera, 2005)^[42]. The parents' involvement and authority continue to have a significant determining factor in their children's academic achievement and success in school. Physical punishment on children is a commonly practised and widely accepted form of discipline in churachandpur, Manipur. In India, while corporal punishment is banned in schools (under Section 17 of the RTE Act, 2009), there are as yet no laws specifically against physical punishment of children by parents, though there are laws against assault cruelty to children (Basu, 2021^[8]).

It is a method of critical thinking where an individual speaks up in defence of their views with a confident declaration person's rights without either aggressively threatening the rights of another, an affirmation of a statement in light of erroneous information. Assertive people can be outspoken and analyze information and point out areas of information lacking substance, details or evidence. Assertiveness supports creative thinking and effective communication. Assertive techniques is a means of "reciprocal inhibition" of anxiety use for treating neurosis as an intervention in behaviour therapy (Wolpe, 1958)^[47]. Humanistic

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psychology is interest in conscious motivation and goal setting, self-assertion and development of personal potential to the ability of self-improvement and self-actualization. Assertion, according to Galassi and Galassi (1978)^[20] “is the direct and appropriate communication of a person’s needs, wants and opinions without punishing, threatening, putting down others, and doing this without fear during the process.” Clinical psychologists accepted uncertainty (non-assertiveness) as a reason for some mental illnesses and implemented various training programs aiming to develop assertiveness.

Adolescent assertiveness is important for an individual's future social relationships and interactions. It lies at the center of interpersonal conduct and the foundation of human relationships (Landazabal, 2009)^[29]. According to research, individuals who exhibit assertive behaviors have better self-worth and are more successful in life (Ayaz, 2002^[6]; Bal, 2003^[7]). Other advantages of assertiveness include better communication, less conflict, and more self-esteem. Assertiveness may also assist a person in setting boundaries, advocating for themselves and others, and making confident judgments (Parray & Kumar, 2016)^[33]. Effective communication requires assertiveness, and this can aid in the avoidance of misunderstandings, the resolution of conflict, and the development of stronger relationships. Another key advantage of assertiveness is the ability to advocate for oneself and others (Hasibuan, Purwanto, & Japar, 2018)^[27].

The assertiveness of different genders is based on their gender roles. According to the psychological literature on gender roles, many different types of psychopathologic behavior are congruent with traditionally defined feminine roles like emotional, delicate, and dependant, whereas traditionally defined male roles are seen to be more assertive, dominating, and forceful (Arrindell et al., 1997)^[4]. Nevertheless, the pieces of evidence around this are not very reliable. Older empirical studies suggest that men are generally more forceful than women, and the degree of assertiveness is a crucial component of the masculine persona (Gervasio and Crawford, 1989)^[23]. However, these claims are not always validated. A study by Eskin (2003)^[18] on self-reported assertiveness revealed that girls were more assertive and expressive than boys.

Similarly, Chandler et al. (1978)^[14] revealed that assertiveness is more situation centric, and in specific circumstances, women were more assertive than men. According to the findings of their study, women (college students) are more inclined to be socially "confrontative," more willing to express themselves and advocate for themselves forcefully in competitive settings such as job interviews, and are outspoken about their sentiments. Other than this, many studies have not found any gender difference in assertiveness and referred to personality as the better predictor (Shafiq, Naz & Yousaf, 2015^[41]; Arrindell et al., 1997^[4]).

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2006) defines physical punishment as “any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light”. Physical punishment is the use of physical force to cause a child to experience pain but not injury for correction or control of the child’s behaviour; most often practised on minors in home and school settings, and the common methods are spanking or paddling.

Physical punishment is an extremely common practice in India. A survey conducted by the National Commission for the Protection of Children's Rights in 2009-2010 discovered that 99.9 percent of the children who participated in the research had suffered physical or verbal

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punishment. Another survey by Hindustan Times on parents reveals that 76.4% of parents admitted hitting their children when children irritate them. This is not limited to children's homes but is extended to schools. According to Ateah and Durant (2005)^[5], 59% of mothers employed physical punishment on their children, with 88% of reported occurrences including spanking or slapping in Canada. Similarly, according to Nobes and Smith (1997)^[32], most (75 percent), British parents use physical punishment. Lastly, research on Australian children indicated that 94% of those aged 4 to 14 had been smacked, and 36% had been spanked with an implement (Saunders and Goddard, 2005)^[40].

Research has also indicated that physical punishment is more common in academically weaker students. According to Qasem et al. (1998)^[38], 21% of parents believed that failing in school is a valid reason for physical punishment. Another study revealed that failing in class is one of the biggest reasons for dropping out of school, resulting in parents' punishment (Bowditch, 1993)^[12]. Hence, it can be concluded that low academic achievers will receive harsher punishment from their parents.

The punishment received by boys and girls is also not similar. Studies show that male children receive more punishment than that females. A study by Alyahri and Goodman (2008)^[2] reveals that the male gender is 1.98 times better predictor of harsh corporal punishment than the female gender. Similarly, Straus and Stewart (1999)^[45], in their study, found that 14.3 % of parents punish their boys while only 12.9% punish girls. In addition to the prevalence and frequency of physical punishment, study data show gender variations in the sorts of punishment children get. Girls are subjected to milder corporal punishment such as slapping, pinching, or additional domestic tasks, but boys are smacked with an item or beaten with a wooden stick and are more likely to face severe corporal punishment (Beazley et al., 2006)^[11].

It is generally accepted that physical punishment has a detrimental effect on internalizing problems. (e.g., Gershoff, 2002^[22]; Straus & Paschal, 2009^[46]). Findings on the effect of physical punishment are all consistent with the growing body of literature on the impact of adverse childhood experiences on neurological, cognitive, emotional and social development, as well as physical health (Anda RF, et.al, 2006)^[1]

. Some studies (Gunnore & Mariner, 1997^[26]) have found a relationship between physical punishment and negative outcomes to be moderated by other factors, while other studies have found no relation (Bradley, et.al, 2001)^[13] Most studies have found negative effects (Grogan-Kaylor A. 2004^[25]) and there are no studies to have found physical punishment to have a long-term positive effect, (Durrant & Ensom, 2017)^[17].

Physical punishment by parents has a variety of harmful outcomes. Physical punishment can predict aggressive behavior and peer victimization (Gershoff, 2002^[22]; Straus and Kantor, 1991^[43]). Furthermore, Barker et al. (2008)^[10] used a longitudinal design to show that high levels of harsh reactive parenting predicted peer victimization in preschool.

There is also evidence connecting physical abuse to poor cognitive or academic outcomes. Children who have experienced physical abuse have lower school performance, more verbal deficits, more significant thought problems, lower IQ, lower receptive language skills, and more discipline problems in school (Lansford et al., 2008)^[30]. There is some evidence that non-abusive parental physical punishment of children is linked to emotional and behavioral issues in childhood (Gershoff, 2002)^[22].

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Coercive approaches have been linked to lower levels of confidence and assertiveness in youngsters and higher levels of shame and powerlessness (Baumrind & Black, 1967^[9]). According to the classic study of Mummery (1954)^[31], one common characteristic of assertive children is domestic strife; coerciveness, harsh punishment, and autocratic discipline are positively associated with assertive, forceful behavior, but such behavior is generally expressed negatively in the form of aggression. A study on Japanese mothers revealed that assertiveness or children are often controlled with criticism and physical punishment (Ujie, 1997)^[48]. According to the researchers, assertiveness is appreciated in American culture, but Japanese children's mothers do not always consider it positively. Rather it has certain negative perceptions attached to it. Since Indian culture is somewhat similar to Japanese, both conservative societies, such beliefs can be lent to India as well.

Objectives of the study

1. To examine the level of perceived parental physical punishment in the comparison group.
2. To identify the independent effect of “gender” on perceived parental punishment and assertiveness.
3. To identify the independent effect of “academic achievement” on perceived parental physical punishment and assertiveness.
4. To identify the prediction of parental physical punishment on assertiveness.

Hypotheses

1. There will be a different level of perceived parental physical punishment in the comparison group.
2. There will be a significant independent effect of “gender” on perceived parental punishment and assertiveness.
3. There will be a significant independent effect of “academic achievement” on perceived parental physical punishment.
4. It is expected that perceived parental physical punishment will predict the level of assertiveness.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Two (200) Higher Secondary School Students from Churachandpur District of Manipur State served as a sample for the present study. High and low academic achievers based on the results of the last examination, and students who experienced parental physical punishment on them (100 male and 100 female) students who do not experience parental physical punishment were the targeted population. Identification of experience of parental physical punishment, and to control extraneous variables were done with the help of a socio-demographic profile (a structured questionnaire) which was constructed by the researcher for the present study.

Tool used

Rathus Assertiveness Scale- was developed and standardized by Spencer A Rathus. It is a 30-item self-report instrument designed to measure assertiveness. Each item is answered from +3 “Very much like me, extremely descriptive” to -3 “Very much unlike me, extremely nondescriptive,” without including 0. High positive scores indicate high assertiveness while high negative scores indicate the opposite. The completion of the scale was not time-bound.

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Design of the study: this study aims to compare the assertiveness level of high school students who are physically punished and unpunished. It will be a comparative study in nature.

Procedures: The conduction of the data collection for the present study will follow stepwise: (i) construction of Socio-demographic profile and psychological tests procurement, multiplication of the psychological scale/subscales will be done, (ii) required permission for data collection were taken from the authorities when required, and consent also taken from participants and their guardians (ii) Sample selection and identification done by employing the Socio-demographic profile, and the convenience sampling procedure was followed as per availability of respondents (iii) administration of the selected psychological scales on the selected samples by following the American Psychological Association (APA) code of ethics and the prescribed instruction of the manual shall be followed,

RESULTS

The raw data were screened for outliers and missing data. The scales used were checked for parametric assumptions- the normality, homogeneity and reliability to know its applicability in the targeted population. The skewness and kurtosis showed its normality, Levene's test (Levene 1960) was used for Homogeneity of Variances checked which showed non-significance (among boys .32 and girls .31). The reliability test showed trustworthiness of the scales (among boys $\alpha = .71$ and girls $\alpha = .67$). punishment has significant difference on the assertiveness of boys (M=53, t= 8.44: p<0.01) and girls (M= 44, t=8.44: p<0.01). Non-punishment has a significant difference in the assertiveness of boys (M=35, t=5.63: p<0.01) and girls (M=27, t=5.63: p<0.01).

Table 1: Showing Mean, SD, SEM, Normality, Reliability, Homogeneity, t-test, ANOVA, and Correlations on Assertiveness

Stats	Punished		Un Punished			
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls		
Mean	53	44	35	27		
SD	13.62	11.93	9.78	8.54		
Skewness	-1.62	-1.53	-1.23	-0.96		
Kurtosis	1.52	1.49	1.15	1.23		
Reliability	Among boys $\alpha = .71$		Among girls $\alpha = .67$			
Homogeneity (Levene's test)	Among boys $\alpha = .32$		Among girls $\alpha = .31$			
t-test	t-test between boys and girls = 8.44*		t-test between boys and girls = 5.63*			
Gender effect on assertiveness (ANOVA)						
	Among boys			Among girls		
IV	F ratio	sig	Eta sg	F ratio	sig	Eta sg
Gender	121.36	.01	0.52	115.12	0.02	0.35
* = significant at .01 levels (2 tails)						
** = significant at .05 levels (2 tails)						

Gender effect on assertiveness is found to be significant at .01 for boys and 0.02 for girls. This means that there is found to be a significant difference between the assertiveness level of boys and girls. Boys are found to be more assertive than girls. There is a significant

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difference in assertiveness among students' scores. And society assumes that male students tend to score higher on assertiveness comparison to female students (Parray & Kumar, 2016)^[33]. Studies have shown that the more children are exposed to aggressiveness, in this case, physical punishment, they consequently show marked improvement in their assertive behaviours.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the study is to investigate the level of assertiveness in punished and unpunished boys and girls. To assess these, data were collected from two hundred punished and unpunished higher secondary school students from Churachandpur district of Manipur state on the Rathus Assertiveness Scale. The effect of gender on the level of assertiveness was also studied. The data were analyzed using ANOVA, normality, homogeneity, and reliability tests. The results reveal that gender has a significant effect on assertiveness levels; hence, the hypothesis is retained. The results are in line with some of the previous research. According to research conducted by the Harvard Kennedy School's Gender Action Portal, males exhibit more assertive behavior than females. This finding demonstrates that males display assertive behaviors more frequently than women; it is not an assessment of women's assertiveness. Women have the same ability as males to act and talk assertively, but they are more aware of their surroundings. There appears to be support for the concept that women have assertiveness issues distinct from those of males. With managers and superiors, men reported being more forceful than women. Men may also be louder when expressing their thoughts and appear to take the initiative more readily in social interactions with members of the opposite sex. This latter conclusion is consistent with Gambrill and Richey's (1975)^[21]. Females, on average, find it more difficult to be assertive, such as expressing sentiments and opinions, than men. The environment may teach us assertive conduct. The family is the first social setting for children, although other elements such as culture, age, and gender have a role (Anggraini, Yusuf & Bentri, 2019)^[3].

Another hypothesis was that perceived parental physical punishment would predict the level of assertiveness. This hypothesis was also retained, and it was found that punished students showed higher assertiveness. Although not many researches are conducted to study the effect of punishment on assertiveness, studies have revealed that harsh physical punishment in childhood can lead to more aggressive behavior in later life. Elizabeth Thompson-Gershoff (2002)^[22] conducted meta-analyses that confirmed that spanking and other forms of CP are associated with increased aggressive and delinquent behavior in children, poorer parent/child relationships, worse child mental health, increased physical abuse of children, increased adult aggression and criminal behavior, decreased adult mental health, and increased risk of abusing.

Clinical interviewers' judgments of parents' strict disciplinary procedures when their children were five years old were predictive of violent conduct later in life in the Child Development Project, even when externalizing difficulties at age five were statistically controlled (Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1990)^[15]. Hence, according to the research, strong physical punishment is likely to lead to subsequent aggressiveness and behavioral issues in general.

Limitations and future implications

This study is limited in that the effect of assertiveness if caused by other factors were not considered. Assertiveness was not distinguished from aggressiveness. The family environment could be explored as a contributing factor for the method of discipline the child

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receives. Some researches were done in the previous decades while recent studies on parental physical punishment, are not easily available. Physical punishment may be banned in educational institutions but there is nothing to protect children from the same in their own homes. It must be taken in seriousness that parental physical punishment is still rampant in society.

In conclusion, this study and previous studies indicate that there is a greater need for assertiveness training for adolescents so that they can able express their feelings, opinions in the right way because assertiveness is much important for the students to achieve more in their education as well as in personality development. (Parray & Ahirwar, 2018)^[35].

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Conflict of Interest

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