

## **Does Subjective Well-being Depend On Childhood Punishment? - An Exploratory Study**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In India parents and teacher mostly use corporal punishment as a disciplinary technique. The purpose of the present study is to see whether the effect of corporal punishment continues in adulthood. Further, the study also tries to find out the effect of gender and perceived effect of punishment on SWB and adjustment of young adult. 186 participants (Female 100 and Male 86), aged 19 to 24 years, participated in the study. Results showed that childhood punishment as well as perceived effect of punishment had negative effect on SWB and adjustment of young adult. There was no gender variation on the variables. However, an interactive effect of gender and punishment on both variables was evident. Thus the present study implies that it is necessary to psycho educate authority figure about the negative effect of punishment.

**Keywords:** *India, Corporal Punishment, Subjective Wellbeing, Adjustment, Young Adult*

**D**iscipline is the method by which adults teach children moral values, self-control and organize their behaviour (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2007). To maintain social norm, it is the legal as well as moral duty of the parents, teachers to make their children disciplined. It is a powerful tool for socialization. The goal is to develop responsibility in the child, so that they can take care of self and others which ultimately foster well-being and adjustment. Disciplinary technique can be of three types (Hoffman 1963)-

#### ***Induction technique***

In this method adults communicate what children can do or cannot do and set certain standers. The child has to follow these.

#### ***Power Assertion***

Here adult uses threats, physical violence to change the behaviour of the child

#### ***Withdrawal of love***

If children misbehave or violate standard set by adult; adult ignores, isolates the child. Sometime shows direct dislike to correct child's behaviour.

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Controversies exist among researchers and social workers regarding the effectiveness of the types of technique to maintain proper discipline. According to some researcher, inductive discipline is most effective form of discipline (Pettit, Bates & Dodge, 1997). But power assertive techniques especially corporal punishment is most popular form of disciplinary technique used by adults.

Straus (1994) defines corporal punishment as the use of physical force in such a way that the child experiences pain not injury. The purpose is to correct and control of the child's behaviour. According to Rohner, in corporal punishment adult (for example parents) directly imposes certain physical discomfort or pain on the child when he/she does not obey them and to prevent any unwanted behaviour.

Corporal punishment includes both direct infliction of physical discomfort i.e. spanking, slapping, whipping and indirect infliction of physical discomfort. In case of later the child has to perform some painful act like kneel down etc.

Besides physical punishment parents and teachers also use psychological punishment as a disciplinary method. Children and adolescence experience psychological punishment in the form of sarcasm, ridicule, name calling. These forms of punishments also have negative effect (Egeland & Erikson, 1987).

Corporal punishment is most popular disciplinary technique in India. Ministry of women and child development conducted a nationwide study in the year 2007. 12,447 children (age between 5 to 18 years) and 2,324 young adults (age between 18 to 24 years) participated in this study. Sixty nine percentage of participants reported that they have experienced corporal punishment (Kacker, Varadan & Kumar, 2007). Covell and Becker (2011) found that corporal punishment is widespread incident across India. Marrow and Sing (2014), conducted a longitudinal study in Andrapradesh and found that it is very common method of discipline across the schools of Andrapradesh.

Only one positive effect of corporal punishment is that the child immediately complies with adult (Gershoff, 2002). They obey adult out of fear. But it has several negative consequences. It can upset the harmonious relation between parents and child (Azrin, Hake, Holz & Hutchinson, 1965; Azrin & Holz, 1966). Punishment creates fear, anxiety and anger in children. They perceive it as parental rejection. Sometimes they want to avoid their parents. These may result in disruptive parent-child relationship (Bugental and Goodnow, 1998). Besides home, young adults spend a long time in colleges/ universities. So interest in curricular and co-curricular activities and harmonious relationship with teachers and peers are required for good adjustment. Corporal Punishment is very common disciplinary technique in school. But it has much negative effect on children. Children start to fear their teacher and may also start to dislike that particular subject.

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Anxiety causes from punishment also demotivate them. One develops poor self-esteem, emotional unresponsiveness, emotional instability and negative view about world due to high level of punishment (Rohner, Kevin & Cournoyer, 1991). However, most of these studies focus on immediate effect of punishment, but there is very little research on the effect of punishment in later life.

Therefore, present study aims to find out the long term effect of childhood corporal punishment and psychological punishment on Subjective Well-being (SWB) and adjustment of young adult.

### *Objectives*

- 1) To see the long term effect of childhood corporal punishment and psychological punishment on SWB and adjustment of young adult.
- 2) To see the perceived effect of childhood corporal punishment and psychological punishment on SWB and adjustment of young adult.
- 3) To see whether the effect of corporal punishment and psychological punishment are influenced by gender.

## **METHOD**

### *Participants*

186 (Female 100 and Male 86) undergraduate and postgraduate students participated in this study. Sample was drawn from various colleges and universities of Kolkata, West Bengal. Age of the participants was between 19 to 24 years (mean age 21.4 years and SD 2.45). All of them were unmarried. Participants with family income below Rs 7500 or above Rs 42000; with history of separation, divorce and death of parents and who have any physical or psychological illness were excluded from the sample.

### *Tools used*

**Information Schedule:** It is used to collect socio economic details of the participants.

**Event summary questionnaire:** Melissa J. Spencer (1999) developed this questionnaire. Here participant reported the extent to which they experienced punishment at both home and school. In addition, participants also reported the extent to which they were ridiculed and whether or not they experience punishment.

**Subjective well-being inventory:** Sell and Nagpal (1992) developed this inventory. SWB measures feelings of well-being and ill-being as experienced by an individual in various day to day life concerns. It has of 40 items. After each question there are 3 options. The respondent has to select one option which s (he) thinks most applicable to him/her.

**Adjustment inventory for College Student:** Sinha and Sing (2002) designed this inventory. This inventory can be administered to English/ Hindi knowing college student of India. It measures adjustment in five areas- Home, Health, Social, Emotional and educational. It helps to identify poorly adjusted student. This inventory consists of 102 items. There are two options- yes and no against each question.

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### *Procedure*

Initially the researchers administered the questionnaire to 192 young adult. They rejected 6 data and finally 186 young adult participated in this study among them there were 100 female and 86 male (age 19 to 24 years). All of them were undergraduate and postgraduate students. Each participant completed 3 questionnaires in following sequence-Event summary questionnaire, Subjective Well Being Inventory and Adjustment Inventory for College Student. Researchers ensured that the confidentiality of information was maintained.

### **RESULT**

*Table 1, Showing Mean, Standard Deviation and F ratio of adjustment of High punished and Low punished group.*

	Low punished Group		High Punished Group		F ratio	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Overall adjustment	31.51	11.8	44.64	11.5	51.27	0.01
Home adjustment	3.6	2.5	6.7	2.9	51.37	0.01
Health adjustment	3.4	2.4	5.68	2.3	20.25	0.01
Educational adjustment	5.5	3.3	7.8	3.9	16.75	0.01
Social Adjustment	7.4	3.8	9.2	2.8	13.78	0.01
Emotional adjustment	11.5	4.7	16.3	4.5	42.56	0.01

Table 1 shows that high punished group's adjustment in various domains – home, health, educational, social, emotional as well as overall adjustment are unsatisfactory compare to the low punished group. These differences between two groups are significant.

*Table 2, Showing Mean, Standard Deviation and F ratio of SWB of High punished and Low punished group*

	High punished group		Low punished group		F ratio	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
SWB	88.41	9.2	79.66	10.9	32.126	0.01
Positive affect	41.88	5.6	38.46	6.04	14.05	0.01
Negative affect	46.47	6.2	41.03	6.7	28.75	0.01

Table 2 shows that overall SWB, reported by low punished and high punished group, differ significantly. It is more in case of low punished group.

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**Table 3, Showing Mean, Standard Deviation and ‘t’ of adjustment of both perceived effect group**

	Positive effect		Negative effect		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Overall adjustment	37.61	11.21	49.3	9.7	3.9	0.01
Home adjustment	4.89	2.9	7.24	2.8	2.83	0.01
Health adjustment	4.06	2.2	5.7	2.2	2.53	0.02
Educational adjustment	6.17	3.65	9.42	3.7	3.01	0.01
Social Adjustment	8.56	2.5	9.73	2.7	1.49	0.1
Emotional adjustment	4.5	1.34	17.29	3.64	2.2	0.03

Table 3 shows that there is significant difference in home, health, educational, emotional as well as on overall adjustment of both perceived effect groups. Those who perceived the effect as positive have better adjustment in above mention domains compare to the individuals who perceived the effect as negative.

**Table 4, Showing Mean, Standard Deviation and ‘t’ of SWB of both perceived effect group**

	Positive affect		Negative affect		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
SWB	85.44	9.4	76.01	10.91	2.8	0.01
Positive affect	40.67	5.04	37.64	6.8	1.7	0.1
Negative affect	44.22	6.08	39.27	6.48	2.67	0.01

Table 4 show that group who perceived the effect of punishment as positive report more overall SWB and less negative affect compare to the group who perceived the effect as negative. The differences between these two groups on SWB and negative affect are significant.

**Table 5, Showing interactive effect of gender and punishment in case of adjustment**

	M	SD	t	p
Female	29.27	10.51	-2.71	0.01
Male	35.49	14.32		

Table 5 shows a significant interactive effect of punishment and gender on adjustment. It is also observed that high punished male has more unsatisfactory adjustment compare to their female counterpart.

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**Table 6, Showing interactive effect of gender and punishment in case of SWB**

	Mean	SD	t	p-value
Female	86.92	8.3	3.34	0.01
Male	91.86	9.4		

Table 6 shows a significant interactive effect of punishment and gender on SWB. It is also observed that SWB is low in high punished male compare to their female counterpart.

### **DISCUSSION**

In the countries of south-east Asia like India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka corporal punishment is the most popular disciplinary technique (Jabeen, Karkara, & Karlsson, 2004). Corporal punishment has several negative effects. Researches show that it can increase aggression, reduce moral internalization and also affect mental health (Gershoff, 2002). Present study also found several long term effect of corporal punishment on SWB as well as adjustment of young adult. Total 186 students (Female=100 and Male= 86) participated in the study, among them 124 participant falls in the high punished group and 62 falls in the low punished group. 58% reported that earliest occurrence of punishment was between 6 to 12 years age, 12% reported it occurred between 13 to 17 years, 26% reported it occurred at age 5 years or less and 3% reported it occurred at age 18 and above. The punishment occurs most recently between 2 and 5 years ago for 52% of the participants, 5 to 10 years ago for 29% of the participants, within last 2 year for 16% and more than 10 years ago for 3%.

Present study tries to find out the effect of punishment on adjustments of young adult. It is found that young adults, who received high level of punishment in their childhood, have unsatisfactory adjustment compare to the low punished group. Further, among the high punished group those who perceived the effect of punishment as negative have more unsatisfactory adjustment than who perceived it as positive.

Now if domains of adjustment are considered, it will be found that in each domain- home, health, educational, emotional and social, high punished group has more unsatisfactory adjustment than low punished group. High level of punishment affect individual's relationship with parents, siblings; which in turn may hamper their home adjustment. Arzin et al. (1965) found that corporal punishment effect parent-child relationship. Straus (1991) also observed high level of sibling assaults among children who received corporal punishment. Further punishment in school also affects teacher-student relationship. This may contribute to unsatisfactory educational adjustment. Those who perceive the effect of punishment as negative report more unsatisfactory home and educational adjustment compare to those who perceived the effect of it as positive.

In comparison to low punished group, high punished group has unsatisfactory health adjustment and among them who perceived the effect as negative have more unsatisfactory adjustment.

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It is also observed that individuals who received high level of punishment have more unsatisfactory social adjustment compare to the low punished group. Studies found that high level of physical punishment is associated with aggression in adulthood. Bryan and Freed (1982) found that problems with aggression were significantly more in case of college students who reported receiving high level of punishment at young age. This may be the cause of poor social adjustment among high punished group. According to Bandura (1973) parents who used corporal punishment encourage aggression in children through social learning. Children find aggression as an acceptable and useful strategy. Further, the social adjustment of the group who perceive the effect of punishment on them as negative does not differ from the group who perceive the effect as negative. It indicates that whatever the perceived effect, individuals who exposed to aggression in their childhood learn aggression through modeling.

Young adult who received high level of punishment in their childhood are more emotionally unstable compare to the low punished group. Rohner et al. (1991) observed greater emotional instability in individuals who received high level of physical punishment. Present study also finds that the emotional instability is more in case of participants who received high level of punishment.

Present study shows that corporal punishment has significant effect on SWB. SWB means one's evaluation of his/ her own life. It is closely related to adjustment. Well-adjusted individuals have high SWB in comparison to individuals with unsatisfactory adjustment. In this study, it is observed that high punished group report less positive affect and more negative affect in comparison to their low punished counterpart. It means high punished group experience low frequency and intensity of pleasant affect and more negative emotions- like sadness, anxiety, worry, anger.

It is also observed there are interactive effect of gender and punishment in case of both adjustment and SWB. Male participants who received high level of punishment have poorer adjustment and reported low level of SWB compare to their female counterpart.

### **CONCLUSION**

To conclude, it can be said that corporal punishment as well as perceived effect of punishment have negative effect on the SWB and adjustment of young adult. It can be also conclude that there is interactive effect of gender and punishment on both variables.

### **IMPLICATION**

Among the various disciplinary methods punishment (both corporal and psychological punishment) is most frequently used by authority figure. Present study shows that punishment has negative effect on SWB and adjustment and these effects also continue into adulthood.

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Therefore, it is necessary to psycho educate authority figure about the negative effect of punishment.

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### *Conflict of Interests*

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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