



Physical Discipline and Socioemotional Development in Low-Income Ethnic Minority Preschoolers: The Moderating Role of Maternal Parenting Qualities

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Introduction

Parents' use of physical discipline is widely discouraged, due in part to negative outcomes for children. However, studies with African American children have found neutral or positive outcomes, often resulting in the conclusion that these children do not experience negative effects. The outcome variable most often examined in the literature is externalizing behaviors, leaving a gap in understanding how African American children may be experiencing undesirable outcomes in different areas. In addition, there is a paucity of research regarding Latino families, leading to little information being known about how this parenting practice functions in the Latino culture.

In a longitudinal study of low-income African American and Latino preschool-aged children, we examined:

- 1) Associations between child exposure to physical discipline and child internalizing and externalizing behavior problems when children were age 3½ years
- 2) Whether maternal parenting sensitivity may moderate associations between physical discipline and behavior problems
- 3) Similarities and dissimilarities in these associations related to child ethnicity

Method

Participants

- 287 families (54% boys) from the Dallas Preschool Readiness Project
- 46% ($n = 131$) African American, 54% ($n = 156$) Latino
- 212 (74%) families below 100% FPL; African Americans had lower income on average and more variability, $M_{AA} = .72$ ($SD_{AA} = .70$), $M_L = .88$ ($SD_L = .46$)

Measures

Physical Discipline – collected at child age 3½ years

- Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire-Shortened (PSDQ; Touliatos, Perlmutter, & Straus, 1990). 27 items: 5-point scale. Maternal report.

- 4 items of the PSDQ addressed physical discipline scale: Confirmatory Factor Analysis revealed a strong fit, $CFI = .998$, $RMSEA = .038$. Physical discipline score was a sum of these items.

- I spank (1), grab (2), slap (3), physically punish (4) my child

Child Behavior Problems – collected at child age 3½ years

- Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL/2-3). 100 items: 3-point scale measuring externalizing and internalizing problems. Maternal report.

Maternal Parenting Sensitivity – collected at child age 3½ years

- Videotaped mother-child interaction in 12-min semi-structured protocol in which "Pizza man" and Duplo blocks tasks were utilized

- Global ratings of parenting qualities (5-point scales): sensitivity, positive regard, cognitive stimulation, detachment, negative regard, and intrusiveness

- A Bi-Factor Model Analysis supported a "harsh-intrusive composite" consisting of sensitivity (-), detachment (-), negative regard (+), and intrusiveness (+), and a "sensitivity/child-oriented composite" including all six qualities with expected directional weightings.

Results

Descriptives by Ethnicity

	African Americans			Latinos		
	Mean	SD	Range	Mean	SD	Range
Physical Discipline	8.54	2.73	4-16	8.03	2.92	4-18
Externalizing Problems	48.46	10.98	28-77	47.83	10.36	28-82
Internalizing Problems	48.82	10.87	29-80	49.86	11.28	29-79
Sensitivity Composite	2.50	4.48	-8-12	4.71	4.08	-6-11
Harsh-Intrusive Composite	-.68	2.56	-5-8	-1.10	2.02	-4-5

Intercorrelations of Study Variables by Ethnicity

	Physical Discipline	Externalizing Problems	Internalizing Problems	Sensitivity Composite	Harsh-Intrusive Composite	Income-to-Needs
Physical Discipline	---	.15+	.26**	-.21*	-.02	-.18*
Externalizing Problems	.31***	---	.70***	-.24**	.17+	-.26**
Internalizing Problems	.25**	.76***	---	-.33**	.14	-.23**
Sensitivity Composite	-.23**	-.20*	-.21*	---	-.55***	.36***
Harsh-Intrusive Composite	.13	.09	.04	-.67***	---	-.15+
Income-to-Needs	.00	.02	-.12	.23**	-.15+	---

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$, **** $p < .001$

Correlations for African Americans are in purple above the diagonal, while correlations for Latinos are in blue below the diagonal

Multivariate Predictions of Behavior Problems

- Internalizing and externalizing problems were each regressed on the income-to-needs ratio, physical discipline, and parenting qualities separately by child ethnicity in sequential models. The final models are shown in tables below.
- Harsh-intrusive parenting moderated effects of physical discipline on both externalizing and internalizing behavior problems for African American children, but not Latino children.
- Maternal sensitivity did not significantly modify effects of physical discipline.

	Externalizing Behavior Problems				Internalizing Behavior Problems			
	African Americans		Latinos		African Americans		Latinos	
	β (SE)	t	β (SE)	T	β (SE)	t	β (SE)	t
Physical Discipline	.42 (.30)	1.43	1.01 (.23)	4.31***	.84 (.30)	2.85**	.89 (.28)	3.24**
Income-to-Needs	-3.74 (1.33)	-2.83**	1.34 (1.90)	0.71	-2.00 (1.34)	-1.50	-1.93 (1.94)	-.993
Sensitivity Composite	-.08 (1.00)	-.08	-1.55 (.79)	-1.96*	-2.02 (.98)	-2.05*	-2.09 (1.03)	-2.04*
Harsh-Intrusive Composite	8.53 (2.72)	3.13**	2.90 (2.43)	1.20	5.08 (2.52)	2.02*	4.78 (2.74)	1.74+
Phys Disc X Harsh-Intrusive	-.81 (.33)	-2.44*	-.35 (.29)	-1.23	-.59 (.29)	-2.01*	-.46 (.33)	-1.379
Total R ²	.13**		.12**		.19***		.11**	

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$, **** $p < .001$

Note: Beta coefficients are unstandardized

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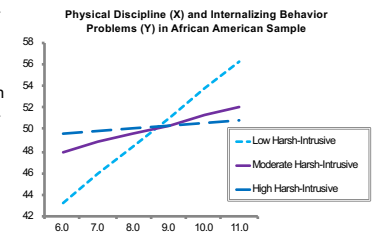
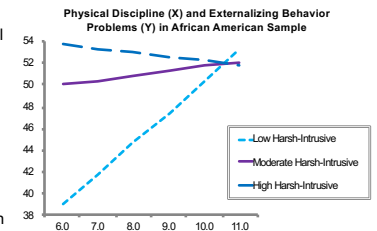
Note: Beta coefficients are unstandardized

Moderation of Physical Discipline by Maternal Harsh-Intrusiveness

- Simple slope analyses were conducted to examine the maternal harsh-intrusive composite as a moderator of the association between physical discipline and behavior problems in the African American sample.

- For externalizing problems, there was a stronger effect of physical discipline when harsh-intrusiveness was low than when harsh-intrusiveness was greater.

- For internalizing problems, there was a stronger effect of physical discipline when harsh-intrusiveness was low than when harsh-intrusiveness was greater.



Findings

- Physical discipline was linked with more internalizing problems for both African American and Latino preschoolers; in contrast, physical discipline linked with more externalizing problems only for Latino preschoolers.

- For African American, but not Latino children, maternal harsh-intrusiveness moderated associations between physical discipline and behavior problems:

- For both externalizing problems and internalizing problems, there were greater effects of physical discipline on behavior problems when African American mothers were less harsh and intrusive.

Discussion

- The current study's results suggest that African American children do in fact experience negative outcomes from physical discipline, contrary to what is often found in the literature.

- The exploration of internalizing problems as an outlet for negative outcomes provides a new insight into how children in this culture may be experiencing physical discipline, as externalizing behavior problems are normally the only outcome variable examined.

- In addition, few studies have examined Latino families in relation to discipline practices. The current study's results suggest that Latino children experienced both externalizing and internalizing problems when physical discipline was present, regardless of maternal parenting qualities.