

## Research Article

# Domestic corporal punishment of children: prevalence and pattern

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Corporal punishment is a disciplinary method in which the supervising adult deliberately inflicts pain upon a child in response to child's unacceptable behaviour. The main objective is to study the prevalence and pattern of domestic corporal punishment among parents attending our medical college hospital.

**Methods:** Cross sectional study done on parents attending our paediatrics out-patient department (OPD). Corporal punishment usually includes physical assault, psychological aggression and nonviolent disciplining. We used pretested questionnaire for the same. Consent was obtained from parents and they were assured of confidentiality.

**Results:** Overall prevalence of corporal punishment in our study was 94%. Various pattern of punishments were observed, e.g. 81% of parents beat the child with hand, 6% by using stick, 4.5% by using hand and stick, 2% by using broom stick, 0.5% using belt, remaining 6% did not inflict punishment. 57.3% boys and 42.7% of girls were punished. 74.7% belongs to village remaining 22.3% belongs to semi urban area.

**Conclusions:** This study can be regarded as an eye opener for high level of prevalence of domestic corporal punishment in our region. A larger multicentric study is needed to assess the prevalence and profile of corporal punishment in India. This will help in implementing new schemes directed to reduce the corporal punishment and promote positive parenting practices.

**Keywords:** Domestic corporal punishment in children, Positive parenting practice, Pattern of punishment

## INTRODUCTION

Corporal punishment was recorded as early as 11<sup>th</sup> century BC. Worldwide children are exposed to corporal punishment in home and at school.<sup>1,2</sup> The situation in India is no better than the rest of the world.<sup>3</sup> Various studies have established the link between childhood corporal punishment and later psychological problems which includes psychological depression, aggressive behavior, behavior problems, and academic difficulties.<sup>3-8</sup>

Until late 20<sup>th</sup> century parents had the right to beat their children in order to have good conduct, as early as 21<sup>st</sup> century since domestic punishment influenced the psychological behavior of the child, it has been banned in many countries. India was one among the countries which were signatories to United Nations convention on rights of children. The formation of National Council for protection of child right in the year 2005 is a giant leap in protection of child right in India.

**METHODS**

This is a cross sectional study done in Chengalpattu medical college hospital (semi urban based medical college hospital) Chengalpattu, Tamilnadu, India. Our hospital caters to the middle and lower income population. The responders of this study are the parents attending the paediatrics outpatient department during the period of 22 February 2016 to 27 February 2016. All the willing parents attending our outpatient department formed as the study group and included. Parents who are unwilling to participate were excluded. The following pretested questionnaire was asked to the parents and answers were documented by trained health worker.

- Whether beats the child?
- Who beats the child: father or mother or both?
- Reason for punishment: disobedience, not eating, not studying?
- Mode of beating?
- Which part of body was beaten?
- Use of heated iron rod?
- Psychological aggression: shouting, threatening or both?
- Advice given or not?

We documented age of mother, age of the child, sex of the child and place of residence-village or town. The whole process took approximately 10 to 15 minutes per person. The data were analysed.

**RESULTS**

The study group consists of 240 parents. Among 240 (100%) parents 225 (94%) parents said that they beat the child, 15 (6%) did not beat their child (Table 1, Figure 1).

**Table 1: Whether beats the child: yes/no.**

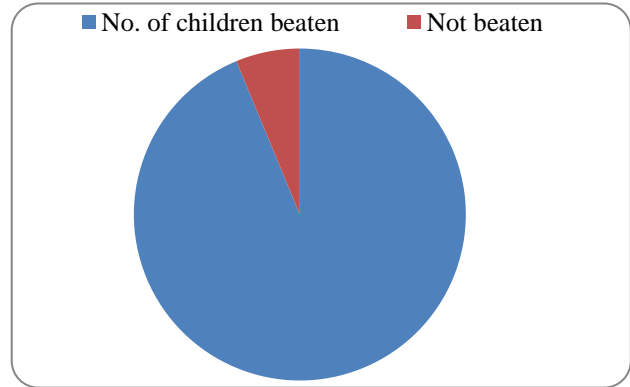
|       | Female      | Male        | Total       |
|-------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Yes   | 96 (91.4%)  | 129 (95.6%) | 225 (93.8%) |
| No    | 9 (8.6%)    | 6 (4.4%)    | 15 (6.2%)   |
| Total | 105 (43.8%) | 135 (56.2%) | 240 (100%)  |

It was noticed that 53 (23.5%) of children were beaten by both parents (Table 2, Figure 2). Physical assault of children by the parents varied from hand to belt as a mode of punishment. 86.3% (194) of parents beat the child with hand, 6.2% (14) with stick, 4.8% (11) with hand and stick, 2.3% (5) with broom stick, 0.4% (1) with belt (Table 3, Figure 3).

Part of the body selected by parents to punish the child varied. Back of the body 86.2% (194), legs 9.3% (21), anywhere in the body, 4.4% (10) (Table 4, Figure 4).

Reasons given by the parents for punishment were disobedience 77.3% (174), 12% (27) for not studying, 10.7% (24) for not eating (Table 5, Figure 5).

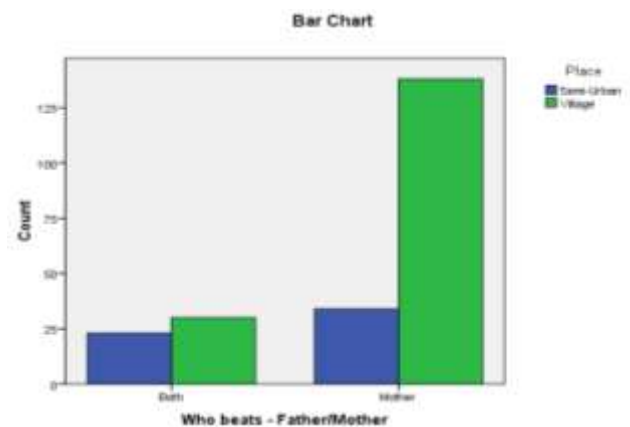
In our study 2.7% (6) of parents used heated iron rods for punishment (Table 6, Figure 6).



**Figure 1: Whether beats the child: yes/no.**

**Table 2: Who beats the child: father/mother.**

| Who beats      | Place      |         |        |
|----------------|------------|---------|--------|
|                | Semi-Urban | Village | Total  |
| <b>Both</b>    |            |         |        |
| Count          | 23         | 30      | 53     |
| % Within place | 40.4%      | 17.9%   | 23.6%  |
| % of Total     | 10.2%      | 13.3%   | 23.6%  |
| <b>Mother</b>  |            |         |        |
| Count          | 34         | 138     | 172    |
| % Within place | 59.6%      | 82.1%   | 76.4%  |
| % Total        | 15.1%      | 61.3%   | 76.4%  |
| <b>Father</b>  |            |         |        |
| Count          | 57         | 168     | 225    |
| % Within place | 100.0%     | 100.0%  | 100.0% |
| % of total     | 25.3%      | 74.7%   | 100.0% |



**Figure 2: Who beats the child: father/mother.**

**Table 3: Mode of beating.**

|                  |                |                | Place      |         |       |
|------------------|----------------|----------------|------------|---------|-------|
|                  |                |                | Semi-Urban | Village | Total |
| Modes of beating | Belt           | Count          | 1          | 0       | 1     |
|                  |                | % within place | 1.8%       | 0.0%    | 0.4%  |
|                  |                | % of total     | 0.4%       | 0.0%    | 0.4%  |
|                  | Brom stick     | Count          | 2          | 3       | 5     |
|                  |                | % within place | 3.5%       | 1.8%    | 2.2%  |
|                  |                | % of total     | 0.9%       | 1.3%    | 2.2%  |
|                  | Hand           | Count          | 50         | 144     | 194   |
|                  |                | % within place | 87.7%      | 85.6%   | 86.3% |
|                  |                | % of total     | 22.3%      | 64.0%   | 86.3% |
|                  | Hand and stick | Count          | 1          | 10      | 11    |
|                  |                | % within place | 1.9%       | 6.0%    | 4.9%  |
|                  |                | % of total     | 0.5%       | 4.4%    | 4.9%  |
|                  | Stick          | Count          | 3          | 11      | 14    |
|                  |                | % within place | 5.3%       | 6.5%    | 6.2%  |
|                  |                | % of total     | 1.3%       | 4.9%    | 6.2%  |
| Total            | Count          | 57             | 168        | 225     |       |
|                  | % within place | 100%           | 100%       | 100%    |       |

Chi Square-5.183; p=0.259 (Not significant).

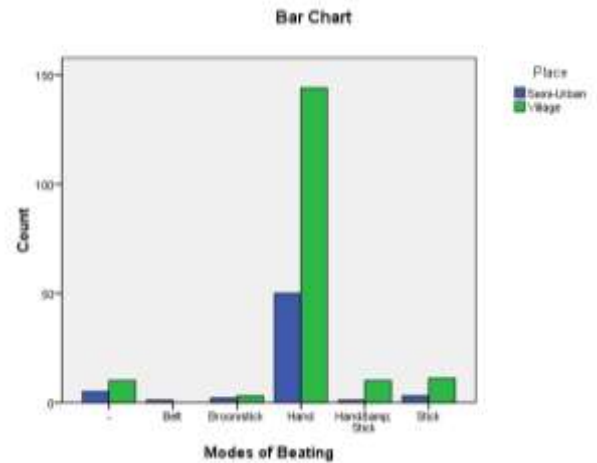
**Table 4: Part of the body beaten.**

| Part of the body beaten |                | Place      |         |        |
|-------------------------|----------------|------------|---------|--------|
|                         |                | Semi urban | Village | Total  |
| Back                    | Count          | 47         | 147     | 194    |
|                         | % within place | 82.5%      | 87.5%   | 86.2%  |
|                         | % of total     | 20.9%      | 65.3%   | 86.2%  |
| Anywhere in body        | Count          | 4          | 6       | 10     |
|                         | % within place | 7.0%       | 3.6%    | 4.4%   |
|                         | % of total     | 1.8%       | 2.7%    | 4.4%   |
| Leg                     | Count          | 6          | 15      | 21     |
|                         | % within place | 10.5%      | 8.9%    | 9.3%   |
|                         | % of total     | 2.7%       | 6.7%    | 9.3%   |
| Total                   | Count          | 57         | 168     | 225    |
|                         | % within place | 100.0%     | 100.0%  | 100.0% |
|                         | % of total     | 25.3%      | 74.7%   | 100.0% |

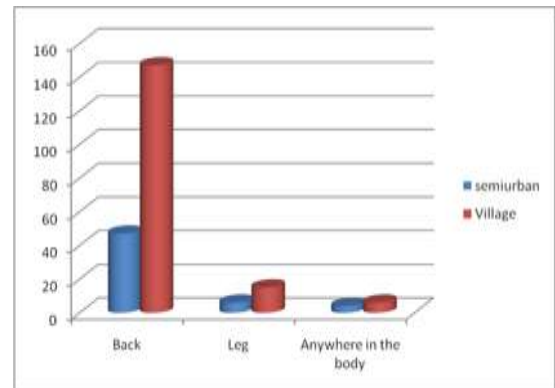
Chi Square-1.379; p=0.502 (Not significant).

Apart from physical assault the children were psychological aggression by means of shouting 49% (110), threatening 12.9% (29), 38.2% by both ways (Table 7, Figure 7).

99% (223) of parents advised their children following physical assault for not repeating their fault thereafter. 1% (2) of parents did not give any advice (Table 8).



**Figure 3: Modes of beating.**



**Figure 4: Part of the body beaten.**

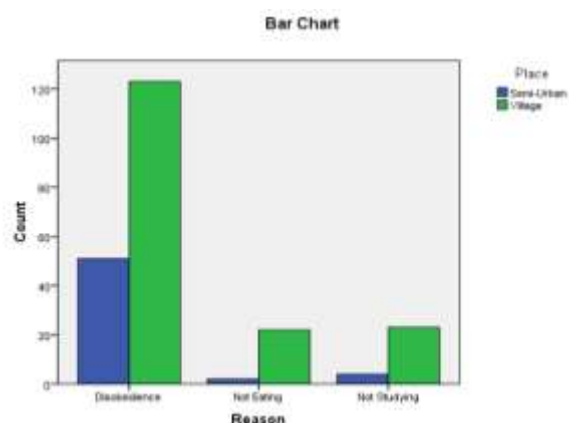


Figure 5: Reason for beating.

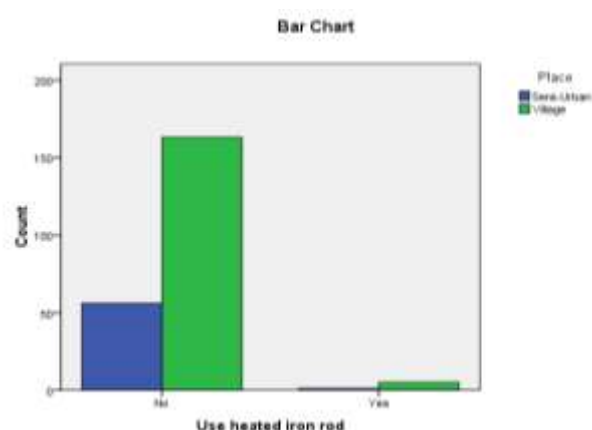


Figure 6: Used heated iron rod.

Table 5: Reason for beating.

|         |                | Place          |         |       |       |
|---------|----------------|----------------|---------|-------|-------|
|         |                | Semi-urban     | Village | Total |       |
| Reasons | Disobedience   | Count          | 51      | 123   | 174   |
|         |                | % within place | 89.5%   | 73.2% | 77.3% |
|         |                | % of total     | 22.7%   | 54.7% | 77.3% |
|         | Not eating     | Count          | 2       | 22    | 24    |
|         |                | % within place | 3.5%    | 13.1% | 10.7% |
|         |                | % of total     | 0.9%    | 9.8%  | 10.7% |
|         | Not studying   | Count          | 4       | 23    | 27    |
|         |                | % within place | 7.0%    | 13.7% | 12.0% |
|         |                | % of total     | 1.8%    | 10.2% | 12.0% |
| Total   | Count          | 57             | 168     | 225   |       |
|         | % within place | 100%           | 100%    | 100%  |       |
|         | % of total     | 25.3%          | 74.7%   | 100%  |       |

Chi square =6.701;P= 0.035 (significant).

Table 6: Used heated iron rod.

|                      |                | Place          |         |        |       |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------|---------|--------|-------|
|                      |                | Semi-urban     | Village | Total  |       |
| Used heated iron rod | No             | Count          | 56      | 163    | 219   |
|                      |                | % within place | 98.2%   | 97.0%  | 97.3% |
|                      |                | % of total     | 24.9%   | 72.4%  | 97.3% |
|                      | Yes            | Count          | 1       | 5      | 6     |
|                      |                | % within place | 1.8%    | 3.0%   | 2.7%  |
|                      |                | % of total     | 0.4%    | 2.2%   | 2.7%  |
| Total                | Count          | 57             | 168     | 225    |       |
|                      | % within place | 100.0%         | 100.0%  | 100.0% |       |
|                      | % of total     | 25.3%          | 74.7%   | 100.0% |       |

Chi square = 0.245; p = 0.621 (not significant).

Analyzing the parents' age groups 10.7% (24) belongs to 20-25 years, 50.2 % (113) of mothers belongs to 26-30 years. 27.1% (61) belongs to 31-35 years, 12% (27) belongs to 36-40 years (Table 9, Figure 8).

Among the child gender analysis 57.3% (129) were boys and 42.7% (96) were girls (Table 1). Another observation

made from our study was 74.7% (168) belongs to village remaining 25.3% (57) from semi urban area (Table 10, Figure 9).

Out of 240 total children 92.5% (222) of children belonged to 4-12 years age group, 7.5% (18) belonged to 1-3 age groups.

**Table 7: Psychological aggression.**

|                       |                | Place          |         |        |       |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|---------|--------|-------|
|                       |                | Semi-urban     | Village | Total  |       |
| Shouting/ threatening | Both           | Count          | 20      | 66     | 86    |
|                       |                | % within place | 35.1%   | 39.3%  | 38.2% |
|                       |                | % of Total     | 8.9%    | 29.3%  | 38.2% |
|                       | Threatening    | Count          | 8       | 21     | 29    |
|                       |                | % within place | 14.0%   | 12.5%  | 12.9% |
|                       |                | % of Total     | 3.6%    | 9.3%   | 12.9% |
|                       | Shouting       | Count          | 29      | 81     | 110   |
|                       |                | % within place | 50.9%   | 48.2%  | 48.9% |
|                       |                | % of total     | 12.9%   | 36.0%  | 48.9% |
| Total                 | Count          | 57             | 168     | 225    |       |
|                       | % within place | 100.0%         | 100.0%  | 100.0% |       |
|                       | % of total     | 25.3%          | 74.7%   | 100.0% |       |

Chi square=0.336; p= 0.845 (not significant).

**Table 8: Advice: yes/no.**

|                 |                | Place          |         |        |       |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|---------|--------|-------|
|                 |                | Semi-Urban     | Village | Total  |       |
| Advice - Yes/No | No             | Count          | 0       | 2      | 2     |
|                 |                | % within place | 0.0%    | 1.2%   | .9%   |
|                 |                | % of total     | 0.0%    | .9%    | .9%   |
|                 | Yes            | Count          | 57      | 166    | 223   |
|                 |                | % within place | 100.0%  | 98.8%  | 99.1% |
|                 |                | % of total     | 25.3%   | 73.8%  | 99.1% |
| Total           | Count          | 57             | 168     | 225    |       |
|                 | % within place | 100.0%         | 100.0%  | 100.0% |       |
|                 | % of total     | 25.3%          | 74.7%   | 100.0% |       |

Chi square= 0.685; p= 0.408 (not significant); Age of parents

**Table 9: Age of parents.**

|                |                | Place          |         |        |       |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------|--------|-------|
| Years          |                | Semi-urban     | Village | Total  |       |
| Age of parents | 20-25          | Count          | 7       | 17     | 24    |
|                |                | % within place | 12.3%   | 10.1%  | 10.7% |
|                |                | % of Total     | 3.1%    | 7.6%   | 10.7% |
|                | 26-30          | Count          | 28      | 85     | 113   |
|                |                | % within place | 49.1%   | 50.6%  | 50.2% |
|                |                | % of total     | 12.4%   | 37.8%  | 50.2% |
|                | 31-35          | Count          | 14      | 47     | 61    |
|                |                | % within place | 24.6%   | 28.0%  | 27.1% |
|                |                | % of Total     | 6.2%    | 20.9%  | 27.1% |
|                | 36-40          | Count          | 8       | 19     | 27    |
|                |                | % within place | 14.0%   | 11.3%  | 12.0% |
|                |                | % of total     | 3.6%    | 8.4%   | 12.0% |
| Total          | Count          | 57             | 168     | 225    |       |
|                | % within place | 100.0%         | 100.0%  | 100.0% |       |

Chi square = 0.635 p= 0.885(not significant)

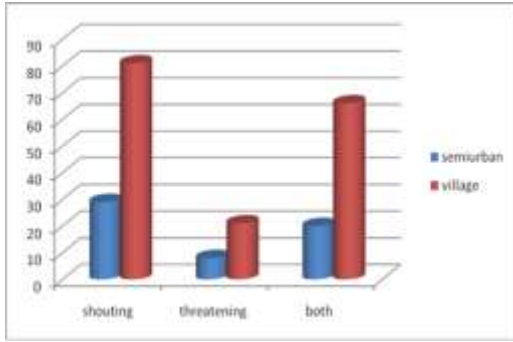


Figure 7: Psychological aggression.

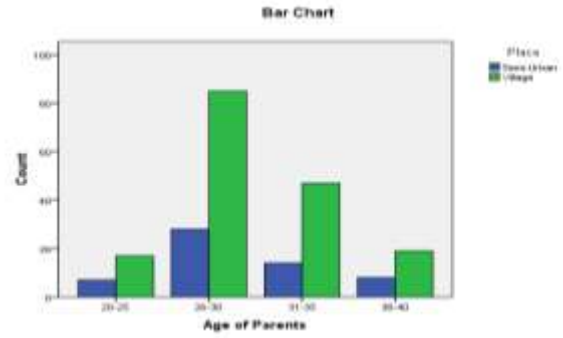


Figure 8: Age of parents.

Table 10: Whether beats the child.

|                         |       | Place          |         |        |        |
|-------------------------|-------|----------------|---------|--------|--------|
|                         |       | Semi-urban     | Village | Total  |        |
| Whether beats the child | Yes   | Count          | 57      | 168    | 225    |
|                         |       | % within place | 100.0%  | 100.0% | 100.0% |
|                         |       | % of total     | 25.3%   | 74.7%  | 100.0% |
| Total                   | Total | Count          | 57      | 168    | 225    |
|                         |       | % within place | 100.0%  | 100.0% | 100.0% |
|                         |       | % of total     | 25.3%   | 74.7%  | 100.0% |

Table 11: Demography.

| Variable                             | Number (%)  |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| Whether beats the child              |             |
| Yes                                  | 225 (94%)   |
| No                                   | 15 (6%)     |
| Reason for punishment                |             |
| Disobedience                         | 174 (77.3%) |
| Not Studying                         | 27 (12%)    |
| Not Eating                           | 24 (10.7%)  |
| Mode of beating                      |             |
| With Hand                            | 194 (86.3%) |
| With stick                           | 14 (6.2%)   |
| Hand and stick                       | 11 (4.9%)   |
| Broom stick                          | 5 (2.2%)    |
| Belt                                 | 1 (0.4%)    |
| Part of body was beaten              |             |
| Back of the body                     | 194 (86.3%) |
| Legs                                 | 21 (9.3%)   |
| Anywhere in the body                 | 10 (4.4%)   |
| Used Heated iron rods for punishment | 6 (2.7%)    |
| Psychological aggression             |             |
| Shouting                             | 110 (48.9%) |
| Threatening                          | 29 (12.9%)  |
| Both was                             | 86 (38.2%)  |
| Advice given or not                  |             |
| Yes                                  | 223 (99%)   |
| No                                   | 2 (1%)      |

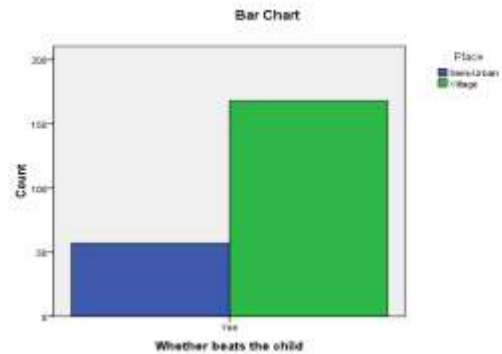


Figure 9: Whether beats the child.

Table 11A: Demography.

|                        |             |
|------------------------|-------------|
| Mother's age ( years ) |             |
| 20-25                  | 24 (10.7%)  |
| 26-30                  | 113 (50.2%) |
| 31-35                  | 61 (27.1%)  |
| 36-40                  | 27 (12%)    |
| Sex of the child       |             |
| Male                   | 129 (57.3%) |
| Female                 | 96 (42.7%)  |
| Place of residence     |             |
| Village                | 168 (74.7%) |
| Semi-urban             | 57 (25.3%)  |

## DISCUSSION

From this study it was evident that domestic corporal punishment is highly prevalent. Boys were more common victim of corporal punishment. Physical assault of children varied from hand to belt. Severe form of punishment like using heated iron rods was observed in our study. Psychological aggression was also as prevalent as physical assault. Our study reveals domestic corporal punishment was more common among village group than semi urban group. Probable reason for this could be that our hospital caters more to the village population. Dayton j study reveals the adult usually hits various parts of the child's body with hand, yardsticks, belt or other objects expected to cause pain and fear.<sup>4</sup> Our study also reveals 86% of parents beat the child with hand. One more study 16 years back segal reports that wide spread use of corporal punishment present in Indian setup.<sup>3</sup> In our study in spite of high prevalence of domestic corporal punishment, it was noted that parents advised their children only after inflicting punishment (99%), which should not be the case. Parents should advice their children without being violent. Hence all the parents should be encouraged in positive parenting practices and they should be counselled about the benefits of nonviolent discipline based on scientific evidence.

## CONCLUSION

Our study can be regarded as an eye opener for high level of prevalence of domestic corporal punishment in our region. A larger multicentre study is needed to assess the prevalence and profile of corporal punishment in our state as well as our country. This will help in implementing new schemes directed to reduce the corporal punishment and promote positive parenting practices.

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