

# Understanding the Effects of Corporal Punishment on Children, Families and Communities and Implications for Legal Reform in Canada



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POLICY BENCH

Fraser Mustard Institute for  
Human Development

# Policy Bench

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# Executive Summary

**Overview of Issue:** Researchers and public health organizations have called for stronger legal action against corporal punishment of children in Canada; however, the issue remains controversial. In particular, there are concerns around the potential impact of bans on corporal punishment for different communities. Therefore, any future policy change related to corporal punishment in Canada must be based on careful consideration and research to understand how to maximize the benefits for children without causing further harm to families of different backgrounds and communities or placing undue burden on child-serving systems and services.

**Background:** At least 67 countries around the world have fully prohibited corporal punishment of children. However, in Canada, Section 43 of the *Criminal Code* currently allows for the use of reasonable physical force – including corporal punishment – against children under certain conditions. This means that children are the only group of citizens in the country who are not fully protected from physical violence by parents, caregivers, and educators – despite growing evidence that has led to a shift away from physical punishment of children towards alternative approaches to discipline.

**Objective:** This report provides a summary of the literature on corporal punishment; its effects on children, families and communities; and the implications for legislation. The aim is to inform ongoing efforts to reform laws around corporal punishment in Canada in ways that promote optimal outcomes for children and families.

**Key Findings:** Overall, findings from the available literature indicate that a legal prohibition on corporal punishment in Canada would be supported from both an evidence-based approach and a child-rights approach. First, experts assert that the balance of evidence on the effects of corporal punishment on children clearly demonstrates its potential harms, with studies showing associations between corporal punishment and multiple adverse outcomes and no clear evidence showing benefits for children’s development or behaviour. Moreover, evidence does not support corporal punishment as being any more effective compared to alternative discipline methods. Data from studies in other countries also demonstrates that national bans on corporal punishment can be implemented successfully; however, the effectiveness of such laws may be enhanced by additional measures and strategies, including: building awareness through public education campaigns; providing families with access to parenting supports and services; engagement with different racial, ethnic and cultural communities; and monitoring and evaluation of the impact of these strategies.

**Implications:** Canada’s allowance of the use of physical force against children under the *Criminal Code* is in conflict with national and international recommendations and obligations – which have established that a complete ban on corporal punishment both inside and outside the home is necessary to fully protect children from violence. However, given the complexity of the issue and the challenges Canada has faced to date in reforming legislation around corporal punishment, it is necessary to consider additional strategies to ensure that legal reform is both acceptable and effective across different cultural groups and communities.

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# Understanding the Effects of Corporal Punishment on Children, Families and Communities and Implications for Legal Reform in Canada

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 What is the Issue?

Global progress towards ending all forms of physical punishment of children continues to grow – 67 countries have fully prohibited corporal punishment in all settings<sup>1</sup> and several other jurisdictions have publicly committed to law reform to achieve a complete ban (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2024; see Section 5.4 for details). However, children and youth are the only group of citizens in Canada who are not fully protected from physical violence by parents, caregivers and teachers, as section 43 of the *Criminal Code* still allows for the use of ‘reasonable’ physical force - including corporal punishment - against children in certain conditions for disciplinary purposes. Accordingly, corporal punishment remains a complicated and nuanced issue in the Canadian legal and social landscape, even at a time when both research and practice worldwide are increasingly moving away from physical punishment of children towards alternative approaches to discipline.

According to Canadian researchers Durrant & Ensom (2006; 2017), several factors have led to a “global shift” in perspectives on physical punishment of children, making this a prominent public health issue. These forces include: a) a growing body of research showing the risks associated with physical punishment; b) greater integration of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) into legal and policy frameworks; and c) the increase in law reforms to prohibit corporal punishment worldwide (Durrant & Ensom, 2017). Along with these changes, there has also been a stronger focus on promoting nonviolent parenting models and strategies to optimize children’s development (Durrant & Ensom, 2017).

As a result of these converging factors, many researchers and organizations have called for stronger action against corporal punishment in Canada. There have been several attempts to repeal section 43 entirely through various bills introduced in Parliament, including two recent bills (C-273 and S-251; see footnotes) introduced in 2022.<sup>2</sup> However, to date, these efforts have not been successful and Canadian children and youth remain at risk of harm through physical punishment at home and school.

### 1.2 Why is the Issue Important?

The issue of corporal punishment is important because of its breadth and depth, as legal reform would affect not only children and families but also teachers and educators, child welfare workers and other professionals, and judicial or law enforcement officials. Moreover, some experts have stated that the issue is not just about child health and well-being but encompasses human rights more broadly. According to Durrant & Ensom (2017), “the global debate has moved beyond academic discussions of outcomes and causality to discussions of life span outcomes, societal impact, ethics, law and human rights. This new context for examining physical punishment has propelled legal, policy and attitudinal changes worldwide.” (pp. 22-23).

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<sup>1</sup> As of September 2024

<sup>2</sup> At the time of this report, [Bills C-273](#) and [S-251](#) were still under consideration in the House of Commons and Senate, respectively.

According to some researchers, there are two key reasons why corporal punishment is often characterized as a problematic issue. From a child rights perspective, corporal punishment is considered a violation of human rights and dignity (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2019a). For instance, the UN CRC, the primary human rights instrument for children which more countries have ratified (196)<sup>3</sup> than any other human rights treaty, clearly identifies “The right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment” (Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 8, 2006). Second, there is growing concern and awareness of the negative outcomes associated with corporal punishment for children, especially considering their physical and psychological vulnerability. In particular, scientific advances on child development have shown that early childhood is a critical period for the development of brain structures as well as cognitive, social, and emotional skills that lay the foundation for lifelong growth, health and well-being (e.g. Cuartas, 2024). According to Cuartas (2024, pg. 77), “there is scientific agreement that parenting behaviors (e.g. interactions, stimulation, discipline) provide fundamental inputs for children to achieve their development potential.”



However, despite these concerns, the issue remains controversial for several reasons. First, there is still debate within the literature on the specific consequences of corporal punishment. For example, in a recent paper, Cuartas (2024) notes there are conflicting arguments around the developmental impacts of corporal punishment in early childhood. Much of this debate can be linked to the challenges of studying the effects of corporal punishment using rigorous scientific methods, given the ethical limitations of conducting such research (as discussed in Section 10.1 - Limitations of the Literature). In addition, many of the findings of meta-analyses and systematic reviews have not been consistent, with some reviews showing clear negative impacts of corporal punishment while others have found mixed results or have highlighted questions around the validity of existing studies (Cuartas, 2024). There has also been a lack of clarity around the role of societal norms and beliefs, particularly within certain cultural communities. For example, research has explored whether the consequences of parenting behaviours such as corporal punishment differ depending on how normative the practice is within a particular setting, such as social, cultural or religious contexts, or if the effects can be considered universal (Cuartas, 2024). Specifically, some researchers have proposed that individuals from Black communities as well as those with more conservative religious beliefs may be more likely to perceive corporal punishment as an appropriate and effective response to their children’s behaviour problems – commonly referred to as the “spare the rod” view of childrearing (Grogan-Kaylor & Otis, 2006; Gershoff et al., 1999) (see Section 4.3 for further discussion).

Another reason why the issue is controversial relates to concerns around the potential impact of bans on corporal punishment, particularly for communities that already experience discrimination and inequitable treatment within the criminal justice and child welfare systems, such as those from

<sup>3</sup> The United States remains the only UN member state that has not yet ratified the UN CRC (source: <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/frequently-asked-questions>)

racialized and Indigenous populations. According to McGuier et al. (2022, p.25), “there are justifiable concerns that bans are likely to be inequitably enforced, resulting in more punitive consequences for parents of color and widening already problematic disparities.” These concerns highlight the need to consider ways of protecting children from violence while still respecting parents’ cultural values around discipline and ensuring that parents from Black or other racialized communities will not be subject to excess or unfair scrutiny by systems that have struggled to understand and address the role of historical and structural factors in family violence (Patton et al., 2021)

For these reasons, it is essential that any future policy change is based on careful consideration and research to assess: a) the consequences of corporal punishment on children from different population groups; and b) the effects of banning corporal punishment on systems and on families from different communities, and how such a law can be equitably implemented and enforced without placing undue burden on systems such as the child protection system.



## 2.0 Aims and Objectives

### 2.1 Overview and Scope

This report was developed to provide an overview and synthesis of the available literature relevant to the use of corporal punishment against children in Canada. First, an overview of the current context around corporal punishment is provided from various perspectives. This includes definitions and views of the practice of corporal punishment and the factors that influence its use from a social and cultural perspective, as well as a brief history of legislation around corporal punishment to understand the issue from a legal perspective. The status of corporal punishment laws in Canada is then examined from a global policy perspective to consider how Canada compares to international guidelines and obligations, as well as positions from key groups – including health organizations, researchers, and the public. The following section examines some of the main arguments for and against legal bans on corporal punishment, along with any evidence to support these arguments. Evidence from legislation and policy reforms in other jurisdictions is also included to generate insights that could inform future policy in Canada. Finally, implications of the findings for research, policy and practice are discussed.

### 2.2 Objectives

The primary aim of this policy brief is to understand the effects of corporal punishment on children, families and communities and the implications of these effects for legal reform. By providing an objective summary and analysis of the literature on corporal punishment, this report aims to inform ongoing efforts to reform the laws around corporal punishment in Canada in ways that promote optimal outcomes for children and families.

More specific objectives include:

- To explore the practice of corporal punishment in different communities and contexts in Canada, including factors associated with its use
- To summarize the history and current status of laws around corporal punishment in Canada, in comparison to other jurisdictions
- To consider the arguments for and against corporal punishment bans and to understand the issue from various perspectives (i.e. human rights perspective, public health perspective, child welfare, communities)
- To synthesize the available evidence that may support or counter common arguments around the issue; and identify gaps and remaining questions from the available literature
- To consider the implications of repealing section 43 in Canada from a community-informed lens, including potential strategies that could mitigate any associated negative consequences of legislative reform (i.e. educational campaigns; child welfare reform)

## 3.0 Research Questions and Methods

### 3.1 Research Questions

Given the multiple objectives listed above, the following research questions were used to guide the literature search for this brief:

- What is the current state of evidence around the effects of corporal punishment on children and the impact of alternative methods of discipline?
- What are the barriers and challenges for legislative reform of corporal punishment laws in Canada?
- What lessons can be learned from other jurisdictions that have implemented bans on corporal punishment?
- What are the implications of repealing section 43 for families and for professionals (including child welfare workers and educators) and what factors must be considered first?
  - What would the implications of repeal be for different communities and populations, including religious communities and those who are already overrepresented in the child welfare system?

Considered together, these questions form the overarching inquiry of how to repeal section 43 in a good way – that is, to maximize the benefits for children without causing further harm to children and families of different backgrounds and communities.

### 3.2 Methods

The scope of this report was developed based on discussions with child rights groups and experts on the issue, which informed the research questions and objectives. A scan of the literature was conducted in 2024 to determine the breadth of information available and to identify and synthesize literature relevant to the issue of corporal punishment in Canada.

Various search engines, research portals, and institution-specific websites were utilized for the collection of relevant data. Two main sources of data sources were selected: 1) peer-reviewed journals found in electronic databases; and 2) internet-based grey literature, including published



reports, websites of relevant organizations or groups; working papers; presentations or webinars; and government publications and legislation.

**Search keywords:** Corporal punishment; Canada; section 43; ban; repeal; legislation; policy; legal reform; children; Black communities; Indigenous; child welfare

Sources were included in the literature review if they were found to contain variables of interest and keywords relevant to the research question and objectives. A hand search of reference lists from relevant studies was also used to supplement searches. Data sources were limited to those published in English. In addition, in order to gather the most current information, the search was largely focused on data sources published after the year 2004 – following the Supreme Court decision that refined the legal criteria for the use of corporal punishment. However, some sources published prior to 2000 were also included where they provided relevant background or evidence. Finally, the search was focused on results specific to the Canadian context; however, given the importance of the issue on a global scale, sources from other jurisdictions where laws on corporal punishment differ from Canada were also included to provide a comparative context.

## 4.0 Background

In order to develop informed policy recommendations, it is important to understand the use of corporal punishment in Canada, including who practices it, when and in what contexts, and why. This section provides some context to better understand and address these questions.

### 4.1 Prevalence of Corporal Punishment in Canada

Globally, violence against children has been found to be widespread in homes, schools, and communities. Reports from UNICEF indicate that over 1 in 4 caregivers believe physical punishment is necessary to properly raise children, and approximately 250 million (about 6 in 10) young children (aged 2 to 4 years) experience physical punishment on a regular basis (UNICEF, 2017). However, prevalence estimates of corporal punishment within the literature can vary widely across countries, ranging from 19% to 63% depending on factors such as the country or jurisdiction, the child's age, and the definition or type of physical punishment (Afifi et al., 2022). Estimates also vary depending on the methods used to assess or measure corporal punishment and the source of the data, such as self-report methods by either parents or youth, or administrative data.

Data on the use of corporal punishment against children in Canada is limited. According to Fréchette & Romano (2015), there have not been any nationally representative studies in Canada that have followed the same cohort longitudinally, using the same methods - meaning that we do not have a complete or accurate picture of how social norms and practice of corporal punishment may have changed over time. It is also important to note that rates of using or experiencing corporal punishment are likely to be underestimated in survey data, as they may be affected by recall bias or social desirability bias (Fréchette & Romano, 2015; See also Section 10.1, Limitations). However, some estimates have been reported in provincial or national surveys. For example:

- Cross-sectional data from the Canadian National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) indicate that the prevalence and frequency of corporal punishment decreased over a 14-year period from 1994-2008. However, in 2008, about 25% of Canadian parents still reported using corporal punishment against children aged 2-11 years old, with higher rates for younger children (aged 2-5 years). (Fréchette & Romano, 2015)

- Data from the 2008 Canadian Incidence Study (CIS) showed that about three-quarters (74%) of all cases of substantiated physical abuse and one-quarter (27%) of substantiated emotional maltreatment cases were considered to have occurred in a context of punishment (an estimated rate of 2.3 cases of substantiated punitive physical abuse per 1,000 children in Canada) (Jud & Trocmé, 2013). In contrast to the findings from the NLSCY, the use of punitive violence was found to increase with age, based on the number of cases of substantiated punitive violence in 2008.<sup>4</sup>
- A survey of over 4,000 parents in Québec in 2012 revealed that over one-third of children (34.7%) experienced corporal punishment<sup>5</sup> at least once in the past year, most commonly in the form of slapping (Clément & Chamberland, 2014). The prevalence of corporal punishment in Quebec in 2012 was much lower than in previous years – for example, surveys from 1999 and 2004 showed that 47.7% and 42.9% of children, respectively, were subjected to corporal punishment.
- In Ontario, data from the 2014 Ontario Child Health Study have been used to estimate the lifetime prevalence of experiencing slapping or spanking among both parents/caregivers and children/youth. Findings indicate that almost half of adults (46%) and almost one in five (18%) youth aged 14-17 years reported experiencing slapping/spanking three or more times.<sup>6</sup> (Afifi et al., 2019).
- In an online survey<sup>7</sup> of a representative national sample conducted in 2023, 61% of Canadians reported that they were physically disciplined by a parent or guardian as children, and 22% said they were physically disciplined at school (Canseco, 2023).

## 4.2 Defining Corporal Punishment

Defining corporal punishment is important from a legal perspective in countries such as Canada, where legal criteria have been established to attempt to differentiate harmful from harmless acts of physical force (Durrant et al., 2009). For instance, it is necessary to identify and distinguish forms of physical *punishment* - which are permitted under section 43 of the *Criminal Code*, from physical *abuse* – which is not protected under the *Criminal Code* or provincial and territorial legislation.

Some definitions of corporal punishment are provided in Table 1. However, according to researchers from the Coalition on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth, there is no clear distinction between physical punishment and physical abuse, and previous attempts to distinguish them have not been successful (Durrant et al., 2004). Indeed, most definitions of these terms are not mutually exclusive, meaning that acts of corporal punishment may meet the criteria for physical abuse, and some forms of physical abuse may also meet the definition of physical punishment (Freer, 2020). Defining corporal punishment in relation to other types of abuse is also challenging because of differences in social norms and beliefs around discipline and what is considered acceptable or appropriate in different countries and cultures (Freer, 2020). According to Freer (2020, pg. 2), this

<sup>4</sup> The number of cases ranged from an estimated 1,255 substantiated cases of punitive violence involving children under 4 to 6 years, 140 involving youth between the ages of 12 to 15 years.

<sup>5</sup> The overall prevalence of corporal punishment in this study was defined as at least one of the practices described in four items: slapping on the hand, leg or arm; spanking; pinching; and shaking the child.

<sup>6</sup> Responses for adults were based on experiences before the age of 16.

<sup>7</sup> The survey used a sample size of 1,000 Canadian adults over the age of 18. The *data was statistically weighted according to Canadian census figures for age, gender and region.*

“inability to clearly distinguish physical abuse and corporal punishment remains a controversy without a current solution.”

**Table 1: Attempts to delineate the concept of corporal punishment**

What is corporal punishment?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporal punishment, also called physical punishment, is defined by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006, part III) as “any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light”.</li> <li>• Corporal punishment may be understood in terms of its intended aim, which is to change a child’s behaviour. For example, the <i>Joint Statement</i> defines physical punishment as “an action intended to cause physical discomfort or pain to correct a child’s behaviour, to ‘teach a lesson’, or deter the child from repeating the behaviour.” (Durrant et al., 2004, pg. 1).</li> </ul>
What does corporal punishment include?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• According to the UN CRC, corporal punishment may include both physical actions (i.e. hitting or spanking a child with a hand or object, kicking, shaking, biting, pulling hair, burning, forced ingestion) or non-physical forms of punishment (i.e. threatening, scaring, humiliating or ridiculing a child). (World Health Organization, 2021)</li> </ul>
What is not considered corporal punishment?
<p>Corporal or physical punishment is different from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Physical discipline</i>, which “encompasses a wide range of philosophies and methods properly aimed at protecting, socializing and guiding children toward self-control, independence, and respect for oneself and others” (Durrant et al., 2004, pg. 2)</li> <li>• <i>Self-defence</i>, which is meant to protect oneself from harm rather than correcting a child’s behaviour (Durrant et al., 2004)</li> <li>• Protective <i>physical restraint</i>, in which external control is applied to protect a child or other individuals from physical harm, such as pulling a child away from a hot stove or oncoming traffic, or holding a child who is hurting another child. (Durrant et al., 2004)</li> </ul>

The lack of clarity around what constitutes abuse versus punishment has also been demonstrated by research studies, which have shown that most incidents of physical abuse against children actually emerged out of disciplinary action or were intended as punishment (Durrant & Ensom, 2006). In their review of twenty-five years of physical punishment research, Durrant & Ensom (2017, pg. 22) stated that the “empirical evidence of the falsity of the punishment vs. abuse dichotomy is accumulating”, with repeated studies using Canadian data showing that the majority of substantiated physical abuse cases (about 75%) occurred during episodes of physical punishment.

Ultimately, experts have argued that the best way to avoid this confusion around how to define abusive from nonabusive forms of punishment in the law is to prohibit **all forms** of physical punishment of children in **all settings**, as some countries have done (see Section 5.4 for the global status of bans). Researchers such as Freer (2020) have stated that by providing equal protection to children from all forms of physical abuse and corporal punishment, any definitional confusion is simplified and the distinction between the two terms becomes immaterial.

### 4.3 Factors Associated with Corporal Punishment

The use of corporal punishment on children has been described as the convergence of multiple interacting factors occurring at different levels within a complex ecology – including policies and laws, culture and community level factors, and societal norms, values, and attitudes (McGuier et al., 2022; Freer, 2020). As described by Frechette & Romano (2015), characteristics of the child, parents and family, as well as the socio-cultural context in which families live and evolve can influence the use of corporal punishment in two ways: a) through behaviours during parent-child interactions; and b) through parental beliefs, goals and expectations around child-rearing.

#### 4.3.1 Parent and family level factors

Some research studies have examined factors associated with the use of corporal punishment by parents to try to understand why some parents may be more likely to use physical punishment on their children than others. Some of these findings are summarized below; however, it should be noted that these studies were based on cross-sectional data, therefore, it is not possible to determine causal associations or mechanisms from the findings.

- At the global level, data from the 2009 and 2017 rounds of the UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys was used to examine predictors of parental spanking across 65 countries (Ward et al., 2021). Results indicated that the greatest risk factor for spanking was caregiver belief that children need physical punishment to be raised properly. Other risk factors for spanking included a higher number of people living in the household and living in an urban community; while protective factors against spanking included the child being female or older age, higher household wealth, and higher education level of the head of household.
- In Canada, data from the Canadian Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (1994-2008) was used to examine sociodemographic characteristics associated with corporal punishment (Frechette & Romano, 2015). Multivariate analyses showed that the following factors each distinguished parents who used corporal punishment from those who did not: child sex, caregiver age, employment status, family structure, household size, immigration status, ethnicity and religion.
  - Overall, boys were more likely to experience corporal punishment than girls; and parents from larger households were more likely to report using corporal punishment.
  - However, variability was observed across child age groups. For example, some variables (lower caregiver age, employment, immigration status) were significantly associated with corporal punishment only among younger age groups of children. In addition, caregivers of Black ethnicity were more likely to use corporal punishment for children aged 2-5 years, while East Asian caregivers were more likely to use corporal punishment for children aged 10-11 years.

With respect to religion, some research has attempted to differentiate between the potential role of religious *affiliation* and *religiosity* (i.e., the extent to which one participates in religious practices and beliefs) (Frechette & Romano, 2015). First, past research from the US has shown an association between religious affiliation and the use of corporal punishment. Specifically, parents from conservative Protestant backgrounds are more likely to use corporal punishment as a disciplinary method than other religious affiliations, such as Catholic (Grogan-Kaylor & Otis, 2006; Taylor et al., 2010). This same finding has also been observed in Canada using data from the Canadian National

Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (Frechette & Romano, 2015). However, the Canadian study by Frechette & Romano (2015) also found a negative association between religiosity and the likelihood of corporal punishment use. This finding supports the view that religiosity can actually have positive effects on parent-child relationships, and may have a stronger impact on parenting than religious affiliation (Pearce & Axinn, 1998).

Other studies from Canada have focused on the role of parents' own experiences of violence or abuse as children as a risk factor for the use of physical punishment. This research builds on the theory of *intergenerational transmission of violence*, which proposes that individuals who experienced violence or maltreatment themselves in childhood are more likely to continue that cycle with their own children (Afifi et al., 2022). This hypothesis has been supported by research showing that those who were spanked as children are more likely to have positive beliefs or attitudes about physical punishment, and these beliefs are associated with a greater likelihood of their own children being spanked; although this pattern is not seen among all parents who experienced spanking or violence as children (Afifi et al., 2022).

- In Ontario, Afifi et al. (2019) aimed to go beyond looking at parental sociodemographic factors and examined the role of parental childhood experiences as well as parent mental health, substance use, and family characteristics in relation to the likelihood of spanking. The researchers used data from the 2014 Ontario Child Health Study<sup>8</sup> to assess whether these parental factors were associated with the likelihood of youth self-reports of being slapped or spanked. Results showed that parent reports of being slapped/spanked as a child, as well as being bullied, experiencing sexual or emotional abuse, and being exposed to physical IPV were all associated with increased odds of youth reports of being slapped/spanked. However, unexpectedly, parent reports of experiencing physical abuse in childhood were associated with lower odds of youth reporting slapping/spanking. Other parent characteristics that were associated with youth reports of slapping/spanking included greater marital conflict, lower levels of mental health functioning and emotional well-being, and parent alcohol use. These findings suggest that creating healthier home environments may be an important strategy to prevent or reduce the use of physical violence such as slapping or spanking against children and youth.
- A similar study by Afifi et al. (2022) looked at whether parents' own history of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) was associated with the likelihood of reporting their child being spanked. Using data from the 2017-18 Well-Being and Experiences Study (WE Study)<sup>9</sup> of parents and adolescents across Canada, the study found that parental history of ACEs may be an important factor in understanding and preventing corporal punishment of children. Specifically, the results showed that a parent's history of physical abuse, emotional abuse, spanking, and household mental illness<sup>10</sup> during childhood was associated with a greater likelihood of their own child being spanked.

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<sup>8</sup> A provincially representative sample of households with children aged 4-17 years. Survey questions were asked to one randomly selected child living in each household as well as the person in the household most knowledgeable about the child.

<sup>9</sup> The sample for this study included 1000 pairs of matched parents/caregivers and adolescents aged 14-17 years.

<sup>10</sup> Household mental illness was assessed by asking whether a parent or other adult living in the home ever had mental health issues like depression or anxiety.

Interestingly, these two studies showed conflicting results around the potential influence of childhood experiences of physical abuse on the likelihood of spanking. The contrasting results on the role of parent experiences of physical abuse in these two studies warrants further research to identify possible mechanisms underlying this relationship. For instance, it may be the case that childhood experiences of physical abuse leads to tolerance and continued use of violence against one's own children (as observed in Afifi et al., 2022). On the other hand, it may be that exposure to physical abuse as a child leads to greater avoidance of physical violence so that their own children do not share the same experience (consistent with Afifi et al., 2019).

Finally, based on an extensive review of existing research, the *Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth* (originally published in 2004) summarized evidence on risk factors for the use of physical punishment by parents (Durrant et al., 2004). The most powerful predictor was found to be parent beliefs or approval of physical punishment. Other factors that increase the likelihood of physical punishment by parents include anger in response to conflict with a child, parent depression, relationship stress and parenting stress, experiences of physical punishment themselves as a child or adolescent, and greater number of children in the family. The evidence on other risk factors, including parent gender, education level, age, and economic stress, was found to be mixed or inconsistent,

#### 4.3.2 Cultural factors

Some researchers have focused on the role of the broader social and cultural context in which families live and propose that both the use of corporal punishment as well as its impacts on children may depend on the context in which it is used and the meaning that both parents and children take



from it (Lansford et al; 2005). According to Adjei et al. (2017), cultural and racial beliefs and traditions can shape parenting practices, and these differences in parenting practices across cultures must be considered when construing the meaning of 'effective parenting' in a society.

According to the *cultural normativeness perspective*, the effects of corporal punishment on children may vary depending on how prevalent and acceptable the practice is within a particular population group (Deater-Deckard

& Dodge, 1997). For instance, when physical punishment is more normative or socially acceptable in a particular context or society, both parents and children may perceive it as more "just" or less threatening, which could mitigate its harmful effects on child outcomes (Cuartas, 2024; Lansford, 2010). In contrast, when physical punishment is used in a situation in which such behaviour is perceived to be inappropriate or unacceptable, there may be more adverse effects on the child. An alternative view to the cultural normativeness hypothesis suggests that corporal punishment is equally harmful to all children, indicating that its effects are universal (Lansford et al).

According to Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor (2016), very few studies have attempted to directly assess cultural norms as a possible moderator of the relation between corporal punishment and child outcomes. As a proxy for culture, some research has examined the role of race or ethnicity as a

moderator of this association (Lansford et al.).<sup>11</sup> In particular, studies have examined reasons why Black parents tend to sanction the use of corporal punishment more than parents of White or other ethnic backgrounds (Patton et al., 2021). Some scholars such as Patton (2021; 2022) have linked physical punishment of children in Black families to the legacy of slavery, which has been passed on through generations. According to Patton (2022), the use of corporal punishment in Black communities is not a cultural tradition or predisposition but is the result of racial trauma and stress from centuries of slavery, racism and discrimination – historical factors that continue to leave children in Black communities more vulnerable to family and community and structural violence. Similarly, Indigenous peoples in countries such as Canada and Australia have a shared history of trauma from the legacy of colonialism, residential schools and separation of children from families, which, combined with ongoing discrimination and inequities, contribute to intergenerational family violence (Havighurst et al., 2023).

Other research has explored the role of current experiences of racism and discrimination on Black parenting styles. For example, findings from a qualitative study conducted in 2015-16 examining Black parents' perspectives on raising children in three Canadian cities showed that parenting styles are often a response to Black realities in Canada (Adjei et al., 2017). Participants in the study described how they try to prepare their children with the tools and skills to deal with racist and discriminatory practices in life and to interact with people in authority positions. In this way, parenting styles that may be perceived by others as 'authoritarian' are actually a reflection of parental love and the desire to protect their children from the "harsh reality of the world of racism and discrimination" (p. 483). Other scholars note that harsher disciplinary methods among Black families may be a way of fostering the necessary skills and focus in children that can help them overcome barriers to educational and employment success (Thomas & Dettlaff, 2011). As summarized by Antwi-Boasiako et al., "Black families may consequently use corporal punishment not as a way of harming their children, but as a method of correcting their behaviour, teaching them to be respectful, and helping them make the right choices" (2021, p. 3).

In other words, the ongoing effects of institutionalized racism, rooted in the history of slavery and colonization, have contributed to the development of coping mechanisms or strategies among Black and Indigenous families, including parenting strategies that aim to protect their children and help them survive and thrive in a society in which they will face many challenges, including discrimination and denial of opportunities as well as threats to their personal safety (Thomas & Dettlaff, 2011).

Further discussion of the how the roots of cultural trauma intersect with systemic and structural racism and discrimination to influence Black parenting behaviours in the context of corporal punishment and the child welfare system can be found in Section 6.8.

It should also be noted that this is a complex issue and that any observations around beliefs and use of corporal punishment in Black and Indigenous communities may not apply to all parents or families within these communities. Furthermore, although the term "Indigenous" is used as a collective term for all Indigenous peoples and identities, it is important to note that Indigenous

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<sup>11</sup> As discussed by Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor (2016), there is debate within the literature as to whether race is a true marker of culture. Some scholars argue that race in itself does not connote a particular culture and using race to define culture does not capture the diversity of cultural beliefs within a racial group. However, others note that in practice, a shared race often means shared histories and experiences that may function similarly to the way culture shapes behaviour and parenting practices.

peoples are not a homogeneous group – Indigenous Peoples of Canada are a diverse population with distinct histories, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. We also recognize that due to this rich diversity, the impacts of historical events and policies on behaviours and outcomes associated with corporal punishment, as discussed in this report, may differ for First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, as well as for Black Canadians with roots in Africa, the Caribbean, and regions of the African diaspora.

## 5.0 Legislative Overview

### 5.1 History and Status of Corporal Punishment Legislation in Canada

In Canada, corporal punishment is currently<sup>12</sup> allowed under section 43 of the *Criminal Code*<sup>13</sup>, which makes children the only group of citizens in Canadian society who can be legally subjected to physical violence without criminal sanction. Specifically, section 43 excludes reasonable physical force taken against children by their parents, caregivers, and teachers from the crime of assault, and reads as follows:

***“Every schoolteacher, parent or person standing in the place of a parent is justified in using force by way of correction towards a pupil or child as the case may be, who is under his care, if the force does not exceed what is reasonable under the circumstances.”***

This section protects persons ‘of authority’ from ‘necessary’ action taken in respect of child rearing and has traditionally offered a full defense to parents and teachers acting in a disciplinary capacity to respond to their wards’ negative behavior. The defense to corporal punishment first appeared in the *Criminal Code* in 1892, and has remained virtually unchanged since, despite various reform proposals and legislative attempts to abolish section 43 (Mason & Barnett, 2023; Bernstein et al., 2020).<sup>14</sup>

The most notable attempt occurred in 2004, when the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) decided the case *Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and the Law v Canada (Attorney General)*,<sup>15</sup> in which the Court attempted to clarify section 43. The issue in this case was the constitutionality of Parliament’s decision to carve out a sphere wherein children’s parents and teachers may use minor corrective force without facing criminal sanction.

The Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and the Law (CFCYL) claimed section 43’s exemption violates children’s rights under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*,<sup>16</sup> including the following:



<sup>12</sup> As of June 2024

<sup>13</sup> Criminal Code, RSC 1985, c C-46, s 43, <<https://canlii.ca/t/7vf2#sec43>>

<sup>14</sup> According to Bernstein et al. (2020), a total of 17 bills to repeal section 43 were introduced in the House of Commons (8 bills) and Senate (9 bills) between 1989 and 2015, but all were opposed by government.

<sup>15</sup> Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and the Law v. Canada (Attorney General), 2004 SCC 4 (CanLII), [2004] 1 SCR 76, <<https://canlii.ca/t/1g990>> [CFCYL]

<sup>16</sup> The Constitution Act, 1982, Schedule B to the Canada Act 1982 (UK), 1982, c 11, <<https://canlii.ca/t/ldsx>>



- s7 **right to life liberty and security of the person**, because in failing to give procedural protections to children, it was argued that the provision failed to further the best interests of the child and was both overbroad and vague.
- s12 **right to protection against cruel and unusual punishment/treatment**, when considering corporal punishment as a cruelty.
- s15(1) the **right to equality and non-discrimination**, by denying children the same legal protection as adults against assaults.

Ultimately, the SCC upheld the constitutionality of the provision in a majority decision. However, the Court recognized the section 43 defense as written needed clarification to demarcate its scope. The SCC did so by outlining the criteria for what is considered ‘reasonable force’ (Durrant et al., 2017a). Specifically, the SCC determined:<sup>17</sup>

- Corporal punishment must be “by way of correction”; intended for educative/corrective purposes. Punishment cannot be motivated by anger, frustration, or a caregiver’s abusive personality.
- The child must be capable of understanding and learning from the correction; thus corporal punishment is only acceptable for children between 2-12 years of age.
- Force must be “reasonable under the circumstances”, meaning force can only be ‘transitory and trifling’, cause little or no pain and does not leave marks on the child.
- Strikes to the head and strikes involving objects (e.g., rulers/belts...) are never defensible.
- Punishment cannot cause physical injury, be degrading, inhumane or harmful.

In addition to the above criteria, the majority concluded based on contemporary social consensus, that corrective force used in schools under appropriate circumstances, such as to remove children from classrooms or secure compliance with instruction is reasonable; however, the use of corporal punishment by teachers is not acceptable.<sup>18</sup>

## 5.2 Views on Section 43 and the 2004 SCC Decision

The *CFCYL* decision remains controversial among scholars and advocates in Canada. One point of contention is that the text of section 43 has not been amended to reflect the 2004 SCC case’s decision, meaning the defense’s limitations are situated in precedential case law alone (McMahon, 2024). This has led to questions regarding the efficacy of the provision, and the applicability of the decision going forward.

The argument remains that the domestic law violates the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, arguably yielding the provision constitutionally untenable (Milne, 2024). As stated by a dissenting judge in the case, a child is meant to be guaranteed equal protection of the law under the Charter, but section 43 denies children protection against the use of physical force that would be considered criminal assault if used against an adult.<sup>19</sup> According to the judge:

<sup>17</sup> Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and the Law v. Canada (Attorney General), 2004 SCC 4 (CanLII), [2004] 1 SCR 76, at para 24, <<https://canlii.ca/t/1g990#par24>>, retrieved on 2024-05-09

<sup>18</sup> Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and the Law v. Canada (Attorney General), 2004 SCC 4 (CanLII), [2004] 1 SCR 76, at para 38, <<https://canlii.ca/t/1g990#par38>>, retrieved on 2024-05-09

<sup>19</sup> Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and the Law v. Canada (Attorney General), 2004 SCC 4 (CanLII), [2004] 1 SCR 76, at para 71 <<https://canlii.ca/t/1g990>> [*CFCYL*]

*“By denying children the protection of the criminal law against the infliction of physical force that would be criminal assault if used against an adult, s. 43 of the Criminal Code infringes children’s equality rights guaranteed by s. 15(1) of the Charter. To deny protection against physical force to children at the hands of their parents and teachers is not only disrespectful of a child’s dignity but turns the child, for the purpose of the Criminal Code, into a second class citizen. Such marginalization is destructive of dignity from any perspective, including that of a child. Protection of physical integrity against the use of unlawful force is a fundamental value that is applicable to all.”*

Scholars also contend that section 43 creates confusion in Canada’s messaging on the use of force against children by allowing it in some but not all circumstances (e.g. Milne, 2024). For instance, the decision disapproves of the use of corporal punishment by teachers, but without formalizing this decision through legislation, provinces have been left to independently regulate the use of corporal punishment in schools. This means that policies around corporal punishment in schools vary across provinces and territories, and sometimes across different school boards within the same province. In addition, the application of the 2004 SCC decision and section 43’s application to private schools remains unclear, as private schools are generally considered to be independent and may not be subject to the same standards and regulations as public schools (McMahon, 2024; Ministry of Education, 2015).

The following example provided by Bernstein et al. (2020) illustrates the contradictions among laws in various jurisdictions and settings in Canada, including child protection systems, demonstrating that children’s rights to protection from corporal punishment vary depending on both where they live and who is punishing them:

*“a provincial/territorial child welfare authority could conclude that a child is at risk in her family and apprehend her. Police could lay a charge of criminal assault, but the parents could invoke the section 43 defence, even though their child has been apprehended based on risk to the child’s welfare. If this child is then placed in foster care in Ontario, her foster parents would be forbidden from using corporal punishment, even though, if they did use it, section 43 could protect them from criminal charges. However, those same foster parents could physically punish their biological children, as this is not prohibited by provincial/territorial laws. If the child was subsequently adopted, her adoptive parents would be allowed to corporally punish her.” (pg. 22-23)*

Finally, scholars agree the SCC decision and guidelines, along with the lack of legislative modification, remain somewhat subjective and open to interpretation, raising question such as how a parent would know the court’s distinction between reasonable and unreasonable corrective force, and how a child would ever be able to use the law to protect themselves in such situations (Milne, 2024; McMahon, 2024; Locher-Lo, 2018). Studies conducted among Canadian parents following the SCC decision suggest that the public’s knowledge of the case and the changes to the interpretation of the law was indeed limited:

- Findings from focus groups with 34 participants<sup>20</sup> held 18 months after the SCC decision showed that a minority of participants (33%) were even aware of the decision, and only 15% of all participants were able to provide any accurate information on how the law had

<sup>20</sup> The study involved four focus groups held in urban and rural settings, consisting of university students and mothers.

changed (Watkinson, 2009). According to the study authors, this lack of knowledge of the limits on corporal punishment may not only place parents at risk of prosecution but could also place children at greater risk of assault if parents are not aware of the legal limitations.

- Similarly, a national survey<sup>21</sup> conducted by Toronto Public Health in 2006 revealed that two-thirds of respondents were not aware of the SCC decision, and among those who did know about the decision, less than one in five were aware of the legal limitations placed on the use of corporal punishment.

Outside of Canada, the 2004 SCC decision has also been critiqued by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC). In its 2022 report, the Committee stated it is “gravely concerned” that corporal punishment continues to be condoned by law in Canada. The CRC urged Canada to repeal section 43 so as to remove the allowance for the use of ‘reasonable’ force, and explicitly prohibit all forms of violence against children of all ages (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2012).

### *Limitation vs Abolition Position*

Views on corporal punishment legislation and law reform in Canada can be summarized by two different perspectives in the literature (Durrant et al., 2017a):

- The **limitation position** assumes that incidents of corporal punishment that fall within certain limits or boundaries are permissible, as the child is not at risk in these conditions. In effect, this stance is intended to protect children from maltreatment by distinguishing abusive from non-abusive force. The limitation position is reflected in the SCC’s 2004 decision, which set out the criteria in which punishment of children is legally permitted.
- The **abolition position** assumes that total prohibition of all forms of physical punishment is the only way to protect children from harm. Proponents of this view argue that deploying arbitrary criteria that protect some, but not all children not only violates children’s universal right to protection, but may also counteract child protection goals. For instance, attempts to define what reasonable or ‘non-abusive’ force is may contribute to maltreatment by allowing *some* forms of physical force.

## 5.3 Sub-National Legislation

Section 43 is enumerated within the *Criminal Code*, meaning it applies to all of Canada’s provinces and territories. However, individual provinces and territories have also enacted their own laws and policies to protect children from violence and abuse in certain settings within their jurisdiction, such as foster homes, childcare settings, and schools. These laws are meant to allow authorities (i.e. child protection authorities) to take action in cases where a child is in need of protection from harm.<sup>22</sup>

Under the current *Criminal Code* provisions, legislation across the provinces remains inconsistent, as summarized below (see Appendix A for further information on sub-national legislation) (Riordan-Raaflaub, 2007).

- **Childcare:** Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Ontario, and Manitoba have regulations prohibiting the use of corporal punishment in childcare programs.

<sup>21</sup> The survey was conducted by telephone interviews of 2,451 adult respondents.

<sup>22</sup> Levasseur, M. Petition to the House of Commons Assembled. E-4265. 2023.  
<https://www.ourcommons.ca/petitions/en/Petition/Details?Petition=e-4265>

- **Foster care:** Newfoundland, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and Yukon have regulations prohibiting the use of corporal punishment in the child welfare system, specifically within foster care.
- **Schools:** All provinces have legal prohibitions against the use of corporal punishment by teachers - except Manitoba and Alberta, where many school boards have policies that discourage the use of corporal punishment in schools, but it is not formally prohibited.

## 5.4 Global Context

Comparisons between Canada’s legislative status on corporal punishment and other countries and jurisdictions can be used to assess Canada’s progress and position on a global scale.

Sweden was the first country to achieve full prohibition of corporal punishment of children in 1979 (see Section 8.1 for further discussion of Sweden’s ban). As of the time of this report, 67 states around the world have prohibited corporal punishment in all settings,<sup>23</sup> while at least 26 other states have committed to law reform to achieve a full legal ban.<sup>24</sup> Together, these statistics illustrate that significant progress in banning corporal punishment has been made, but there is still room for improvement - only 14% of the world’s children are fully protected in law from corporal punishment, and children in Canada are excluded from the 14%. There is also considerable variation in laws across settings at the international level, with a greater number of states banning corporal punishment in schools and childcare settings than in the home. In 63 states, corporal punishment has not been fully prohibited in schools, in 16 states corporal punishment is not fully prohibited in any setting (including as criminal sentences), and governments of 105 states are currently not committed to corporal punishment law reform.<sup>25</sup> In summary, 76% of all children are only protected in some settings, and 10% of children are not protected at all.

## 6.0 Key Guidelines, Obligations and Positions on Corporal Punishment

This section reviews Canada’s legal position on corporal punishment in the context of national and international guidelines and recommendations.

### 6.1 National Obligations

Canada has an obligation to end all allowances of corporal punishment under the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s (TRC) Calls to Action. In 2015, Prime Minister Trudeau accepted the TRC’s report and committed to implementing every Call to Action, including call number six which reads “We call upon the Government of Canada to repeal section 43 of the Criminal Code of Canada”.<sup>26</sup> This call is responsive to the history of violence against Indigenous children, specifically considering the use of corporal punishment in residential schools, and the contemporary realization of its long-lasting consequences on the mental, physical, and spiritual health and well-being of First Nations, Métis and Inuit children. In response to the TRC report and

<sup>23</sup> Includes home, school, childcare, foster care settings.

<sup>24</sup> As of June 2024. See website for End Corporal Punishment for latest updates on global progress towards prohibiting all corporal punishment <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/wp-content/uploads/legality-tables/Global-progress-table-commitment.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> See End Corporal Punishment website for details <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/countdown/>

<sup>26</sup> See Government of Canada’s progress in responding to the TRC Calls to Action, <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1524495412051/1557511602225>

Canada's legacy of intergenerational harm caused to Indigenous peoples, many advocates - including faith leaders across the country<sup>27</sup> - have called on the Canadian government to fulfill their commitment to implementing Call to Action #6.

## 6.2 International Obligations

At the global level, Canada has obligations to end violence against children as a signatory to international human rights treaties. This section discusses some of Canada's obligations relevant to ending violence against children more broadly, as well as those specific to corporal punishment. However, under the "abolition position" (see Section 5,2), ending all forms of physical violence against children (inclusive of corporal punishment) is still considered necessary to fully protect children from harm.

The **United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**, the primary human rights instrument for children, came into force in 1990 and was ratified by Canada in 1991<sup>28</sup>. The Convention is based on the concept that children are deserving of the same human rights as adults, while also recognizing they need special protection under the law because of their unique vulnerabilities. Relevant articles of the UNCRC with respect to corporal punishment include:



- Article 19: *(1) States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child...."*
- Article 28(2): *States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.*
- Article 37: *State Parties shall ensure that: (a) No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. Neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release shall be imposed for offences committed by persons below eighteen years of age....*

Furthermore, the General Comment no.8 adopted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006) explicitly consolidates the Committee's position on corporal punishment of children and confirms the obligation on state parties to protect children from all forms of violence. The Committee views eliminating violent and humiliating punishment of children as an immediate and unqualified obligation of states party to the Convention, and explicitly recommends law reform and

<sup>27</sup> For example, a group of Canadian theologians, clergy, social scientists and public health experts signed a statement in 2021 calling for repeal of section 43 – a *Christian Theological Statement in Support of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action #6* ([https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/8aaf80\\_693f3b0cd61146c1b7cf98dfb19522d9.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/8aaf80_693f3b0cd61146c1b7cf98dfb19522d9.pdf))

<sup>28</sup> Ratification of the CRC implies that the State party will adhere to the norms set out in the CRC in its own domestic law. (see [Overview - The Convention on the Rights of the Child - Topics in Family Law: A Collection of Articles \(justice.gc.ca\)](https://www.justice.gc.ca/overviews/eng/150313/150313-eng.html))

other necessary measures to achieve this (see below). Canada's maintenance of section 43 therein puts it in conflict with the Convention.

- Specifically, the Committee notes that the Convention requires the removal of any legal provisions that allow some form of violence against children.
- However, the repeal of existing defences is not enough; the Committee further states that explicit prohibition of corporal punishment in legislation is also required.
- The Committee's position is that criminal law on assault should clearly cover all forms of corporal punishment in all settings (including the home), guaranteeing children equal protection under the law as adults.

Canada's defensible allowance of corporal punishment also infringes international human rights law under the United Nations (UN) *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)*<sup>29</sup>, which Canada ratified on December 10<sup>th</sup> 1948 and therein became bound to implement. Articles 1, 5 and 25 are in contention with section 43:

- Article 1: *all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights*
- Article 5: *no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment*
- Article 25: *motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance.*

The United Nations **2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, adopted in 2015, are a series of integrated calls to action to establish peace and prosperity for all people and the planet by 2030.<sup>30</sup> As a UN member state, Canada is obligated to pursue these goals through concrete action (e.g. programs and policies) (Government of Canada, 2024). Specifically, SDG 16 focuses on achieving peace, justice and strong institutions. One of the targets under this goal (16.2) is a commitment to *end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children by 2030.*

The *Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children*, launched in 2016 by the UN Secretary-General, is the only global entity focused solely on achieving SDG 16.2. Critical initiatives of the *End Violence* partnership include advocacy for full and comprehensive law reform to prohibit corporal punishment, raising awareness about the issue, monitoring laws throughout the world, and promoting action and implementation of reform. Canada became a "Pathfinding Country" (Pathfinder) to the Global Partnership in 2018, thereby agreeing to accelerate domestic actions to end violence against children over a period of three to five years (Government of Canada, 2023). Some of the obligations accompanying this role are to eliminate all laws permitting physical punishment against children, to alter the norms maintaining violence against children, and to support parents and caregivers (Durrant, 2024). According to the *Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children*, pathfinding governments that have not yet prohibited all forms of corporal punishment must urgently work towards law reform in order to achieve the SDG targets. Therefore, Canada still has gaps to fill in their journey on the roadmap to end violence against children.

<sup>29</sup> [Universal Declaration of Human Rights | United Nations](#)

<sup>30</sup> [Sustainable Development Goals | United Nations Development Programme \(undp.org\)](#)

### Policy Spotlight: Canada’s Role as a Pathfinder

As part of Canada’s efforts as a pathfinding country, it has published a roadmap in support of its plan to end violence against children. The roadmap, developed by Canada’s Public Health Agency, “incorporates a human rights perspective and considers the multiple factors that influence violence at the individual, family, community and society levels.” (Government of Canada, 2023). In addition to providing an overview of the issue of violence against children and youth as well as existing legislation, policies and programs relevant to the issue, the roadmap proposes the following five “Opportunities for Action”, responsive to the established causes, contributors, and impacts of such violence.

1. Strengthen Indigenous child and family services
2. Expand multi-sector partner engagement
3. Equip professionals and service providers to recognize and respond safely to violence against children
4. Strengthen the evidence about “what works” and mobilize knowledge
5. Enhance data and monitoring

These five opportunities, and the roadmap more holistically, are intended to act as a guide for Canada to focus its efforts and resources on areas most in need, and those where the greatest benefit will be actualized. The roadmap intends to move Canada towards the goal of eliminating all forms of violence against children, and supports its leadership role in acting as a model for other countries.

## 6.3 Statements from Key Health Bodies and Professional Organizations

### Canada

The *Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth*, initiated by the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario in 2004, is endorsed by many professional health authorities and distinguished Canadians: the initial 138 endorsers from the first edition have now grown to 697 endorsements to date.<sup>31</sup> The statement provides an overview of the research evidence on the developmental outcomes associated with the use of physical punishment and provides several recommendations for action. Based on the available evidence, the *Joint Statement* concludes that “physical punishment of children and youth plays no useful role in their upbringing and poses only risks to their development” (Durrant et al., 2004, p. vii). Accordingly, the document calls for the development of alternative approaches to discipline, as well as an increase in public awareness and parent education to communicate messages on the risk of physical punishment. It also suggests the need for ongoing data collection to monitor public attitudes on the use of physical punishment, and finally, calls for an amendment to the *Criminal Code* of Canada to recognize children’s equal right to physical integrity and dignity.

Prominent organizations that have endorsed the *Joint Statement* include the **Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA)**, the **Canadian Pediatric Society (CPS)** and the **Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA)** (among others).

<sup>31</sup> See CHEO [website](#) for updates

- The OHPA adopted a position paper and resolutions on physical punishment of children in 2004, maintaining its 1997 resolution that violence is a public health issue (OHPA, 2004). This paper reaffirms the OPHA's endorsement of the *Joint Statement* and commitment to the national advocacy effort to repeal section 43 of the *Criminal Code*. In doing so, the OPHA resolved to advocate for education initiatives to inform caregivers of the potential negative consequences of physical punishment, and instruct on various forms of positive discipline. The OPHA also resolved to advocate for organizations to develop clear positions on the use of physical punishment on children and youth.
- The CPS published an endorsing statement recognizing that physical punishment can hurt children physically and emotionally, and thus should never be used (Canadian Pediatric Society, 2020). In addition, the CPS has published a position statement on how clinicians can support positive parenting, which states that “at no time should parents use physical punishment” and that violent disciplinary methods are detrimental to both parent and child health and well-being (Canadian Pediatric Society, 2019).

The **Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC)** is a national umbrella group of individuals and organizations across Canada whose aim is to promote the rights of children in accordance with the UN CRC. The CCRC has called upon the government of Canada to repeal section 43 as an essential step to preventing violence against children, noting that prohibiting corporal punishment would be consistent with Canada's duties under the UN CRC and with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Call to Action #6 (Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, 2022).

The **Canadian Psychological Association (CPA)** published a policy statement on physical punishment of children and youth in 2004, in which they maintain the position that physical punishment is consistently proven as an ineffective and potentially harmful method of behavioral management in children.<sup>32</sup> The CPA recommends the following strategies to reduce physical punishment: educational campaigns to communicate the potential physical and psychological harms, and to increase public knowledge on child development; and evidence-based programs for parenting skill development.

### USA

The **American Academy of Pediatrics' (AAP)** updated its policy statement on corporal punishment in 2018 based on recent evidence of the harms of corporal punishment for children. The policy statement recommends that parents and caregivers do not use any form of corporal punishment (i.e. spanking, hitting, slapping, threatening, humiliating) and provides guidance to pediatricians on educating parents about alternative, healthy forms of discipline (Sege et al., 2018).

The **American Psychological Association (APA)** published its first resolution on physical discipline by parents in 2019, concluding that physical discipline is not effective in changing children's behaviour and that that any benefits do not outweigh the harms in the long term (APA, 2019). The resolution recommends that parents use alternative forms of discipline that are associated with more positive outcomes for children. The APA also recommends activities such as competency based public awareness and outreach to educate the public on the effects of corporal

<sup>32</sup> See [Policy & Position Statements - Canadian Psychological Association \(cpa.ca\)](https://www.cpa.ca/policy-position-statements)



punishment and offer suggestions for alternate disciplinary techniques, while maintaining sensitivity to cultural differences in child rearing theologies.

### *Global*

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** advocates for the prohibition and prevention of corporal punishment internationally. WHO responds to corporal punishment with the INSPIRE Technical Package, an evidence-based package to support countries in implementing strategies and interventions that have been shown to reduce violence against children (WHO, 2021). This includes: implementation and enforcement of laws to prohibit physical punishment, programs to change attitudes and social norms, offering parent/caregiver support through information and skill-building programming, and increasing access to support services (WHO, 2016). WHO also engages in monitoring practices to mark countries' progress in implementing legislation as well as programs that help reduce corporal punishment, and advocates for increased international support for investment in evidence-based prevention and response efforts.

### *Summary*

Considering these international human rights guidelines, position statements and authoritative opinions, it is clear that Canada's maintenance of section 43 is inconsistent with global guidelines and obligations that Canada follows and is signatory to. At both the national and international level, there is a consistent recommendation for firm regulatory prohibition of corporal punishment by legislators as well as education and support services for caregivers to learn the impacts and risks associated with corporal punishment.

## **7.0 Key Arguments and Evidence around Corporal Punishment**

As discussed in Section 1, corporal punishment remains a controversial issue in Canada and other countries, which has made it challenging to implement policies to ban corporal punishment in the home and other settings. This section reviews some of the arguments that have been raised against laws to prohibit corporal punishment and examines any available evidence to address these arguments. As noted by Havighurst et al. (2023), it is essential to understand these arguments and concerns to gain insight into what is needed for policy change.

### **7.1 Argument 1: Corporal punishment is not harmful and may be beneficial for children**

One of the critical issues underlying decisions to legally ban corporal punishment is whether it harms children and in what ways. Supporters of corporal punishment argue that some forms (i.e. milder forms such as spanking) in some circumstances (i.e. when used for corrective purposes, in calm and controlled conditions) may not be harmful – or may even be beneficial for children. In contrast, experts on the issue argue that the research landscape has evolved, with evidence increasingly showing consistent harms associated with corporal punishment and no benefits.

In terms of beneficial effects of corporal punishment, the only potential benefit demonstrated in the literature is a short-term increase in compliance. For example, studies have found that corporal punishment is more effective than other discipline strategies (or no discipline) in promoting immediate compliance from children (e.g. Gershoff, 2002; Larzelere & Kuhn). However, as noted by Gershoff (2002; 2010), the ultimate aim of parent discipline is not just to gain immediate

compliance, but to promote long-term compliance in children through internalization of moral values and norms. Therefore, evidence on the long-term effects of corporal punishment on child compliance and behaviour may be more informative. The same meta-analysis by Gershoff (2002) that showed a positive association between corporal punishment and immediate compliance also showed a negative association overall with children’s moral internalization (which the researchers operationalized as long-term compliance). Moreover, according to Gershoff, the studies used to calculate the mean effect size for immediate compliance in this meta-analysis were not consistent – as two of the five studies found that corporal punishment was associated with *decreased* short-term compliance.

Other studies used to support the view that corporal punishment is not harmful have found either a small or no relationship between corporal punishment and negative child outcomes. However, according to Freer (2020), this lack of negative effects is an exception within the literature. Moreover, even when corporal punishment has not been found to be strongly associated with negative outcomes, this does not mean that it is better or more effective than other disciplinary techniques. Indeed, a meta-analysis comparing the effects of physical punishment and alternative discipline tactics found that with the exception of one study, “customary”<sup>33</sup> physical punishment was neither worse nor better than any alternative tactic in its effect size with any outcome (i.e., child compliance, antisocial behaviour, conscience or resistance to temptation, and positive behaviours).

On the other side of the argument around harms of corporal punishment, evidence from the literature shows multiple adverse effects on children overall, including both short-term and longer-term impacts. In brief, corporal punishment has been linked to: poorer physical and mental health; impaired cognitive and socio-emotional development; lower educational outcomes; increased aggression, violence, and anti-social behaviour; and impaired relationships with parents in childhood; as well as greater tolerance of violence, higher likelihood of violence in relationships, and poorer adjustment in adulthood. (WHO, 2021; Durrant et al., 2004; Havighurst et al., 2023). As



summarized by Durrant & Ensom (2017), “All these findings are consistent with the rapidly growing body of literature on the impact of adverse childhood experiences on neurological, cognitive, emotional and social development, and on physical health....no study has found physical punishment to have a long-term positive effect, and the vast majority have found negative effects” (pg. 22). Some of the key studies that provide the empirical evidence on the harms of corporal punishment are summarized in Appendix B.

Importantly, studies that have controlled for the impact of physical *abuse* show that corporal punishment in itself has a unique association with negative outcomes among children and adults, independent of the effects of physical abuse (Havighurst et al, 2023). For example, a meta-analyses

<sup>33</sup> Customary physical punishment was defined as typical or ordinary parental usage, without emphasizing its severity or predominance; and was differentiated in this study from conditional spanking and overly severe physical punishment.

of studies that reported separate effect sizes for spanking and physical abuse showed that each is associated with detrimental child outcomes, with overall effect sizes that are similar in magnitude and direction (mean effect size of  $d=.25$  for spanking; and  $d=.38$  for physical abuse) (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016).

However, as discussed in Section 4.2, there is a complex relationship between physical abuse and corporal punishment, making it difficult to distinguish between them. As discussed below, research has shown that children who experience physical punishment are at greater risk of physical abuse, meaning that behaviour that begins as milder punishment can escalate into abuse (Gershoff, 2024). For example:

- A study involving participants at a Canadian university found that students who reported being spanked in childhood were almost 60 times more likely to also report experiencing physical abuse as children compared to those who were not spanked (Frechette et al., 2015). Higher frequency of spanking in this study was associated with greater odds of experiencing physical abuse; however, findings showed that even occasional or infrequent spanking was still associated with a higher likelihood of experiencing physical abuse. These results indicate that any amount of spanking may increase the risk of physical abuse; however, the cross-sectional and retrospective nature of the study means that conclusions about the causal role of spanking cannot be made.
- Data from the 2003 Canadian Incidence Study also revealed that the majority of substantiated cases of physical abuse (75%) occurred in the context of punishment; whereas only 1-13% of cases of other types of maltreatment (i.e. emotional maltreatment, neglect, sexual abuse, and exposure to domestic violence) involved punishment (Durrant et al., 2006).

This association between physical punishment and abuse has been described as the result of a complex array of factors within the family context. As discussed by Durrant (2008), punishment does not typically occur as an isolated incident under controlled conditions; rather its effects can depend on a mix of child-related, parent-related, and family-related factors within that particular moment or context – the combination of which might contribute to an escalation of the punishment into more severe forms of violence.

Finally, some evidence suggests that corporal punishment can even impact brain development in children that may be long-lasting. Previous research has shown that physical abuse of children is associated with disruptions to brain development, particularly in regions of the brain associated with socio-emotional functioning and stress regulation (e.g. Pollock et al., 2022). These findings are important as smaller volumes of these brain areas has been associated with a range of mental disorders starting in adolescence. Studies have also suggested that exposure to corporal punishment affects the developing brain in a similar way. For example:

- A population-based study from the Netherlands (Delaney et al., 2021) found that childhood experiences of physical attack and corporal punishment by a parent were both associated with smaller global and white matter brain volumes in preadolescence.
- A community-based study from Australia that examined the association between parenting behaviours and structural brain changes in children during the transition to adolescence (ages 8 to 13 years) found similar results (Whittle et al., 2022). In this study, harsh or inconsistent discipline by parents (including corporal punishment) was associated with

greater reductions in surface area of certain brain regions (i.e. the parietal and temporal cortex) that may affect the development of sensorimotor and social functioning.

- In the US, the effects of harsh corporal punishment (involving the use of an object for disciplining a child) on brain structure have also been examined among a sample of young adults with a history of exposure to harsh corporal punishment, compared to those with no history of abuse or harsh corporal punishment (Tomoda et al, 2009). Findings showed that chronic exposure to harsh corporal punishment was associated with a marked decrease in gray matter volume in regions of the brain associated with social cognition, such as self-knowledge and person perception. However, the authors note that these findings do not necessarily extend to milder or less frequent experiences of corporal punishment.

Together, these findings demonstrate growing evidence that changes to the brain may be one mechanism linking parenting behaviours such as physical discipline to child outcomes such as mental health.

## 7.2 Argument 2: Banning corporal punishment goes against parents' rights

Many politicians and members of the public believe that parenting is a private role and that parents have the right to control or choose how they raise and discipline their children without interference from the government (Havighurst et al., 2023; Zolotor & Puzia, 2010). Indeed, research conducted by the city of Toronto indicates that parents' belief in their right to use spanking when they think it is necessary is one of the most difficult beliefs to change (McKeown, 2006). In a survey of parents conducted before and after a major public health campaign was implemented in 2004 to raise awareness of the risks of physical punishment, a majority of parents agreed they have a right to spank their child, with no change observed from 2004 (62% agreed) to 2005 (61% agreed), showing the predominance of support for parental rights in society (McKeown, 2006).

However, others have noted that the idea of *parental* rights must be considered in relation to respect for *child* rights and autonomy, as children also have the right to equal protection from violence or assault as adults do. Furthermore, the UN CRC emphasizes that children may require even *greater* protection (not less) than adults from all forms of violence specifically because of their unique developmental needs and vulnerabilities (see General Comment 8, para. 21). While the UN CRC does state that parents have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of children (Article 18), it also states that parents must act in the best interests of the child. This can be interpreted as meaning that parents' rights must not override those of their children (Havighurst et al., 2023). The UN CRC has further clarified Article 18 in the 2006 General Comment which specifies that corporal punishment goes against a child's best interests:

*“interpretation of a child's best interests must be consistent with the whole Convention, including the obligation to protect children from all forms of violence and the requirement to give due weight to the child's views; it cannot be used to justify practices, including corporal punishment and other forms of cruel or degrading punishment, which conflict with the child's human dignity and right to physical integrity.” (para. 26)*

Ultimately, policymakers need to follow the principle of justice and consider the balance of rights for both parents and children, as well as the benefits and risks of laws on corporal punishment for both groups. According to some researchers, this consideration may depend on the value that is placed on children in a society (Zolotor & Puzia, 2010).

### 7.3 Argument 3: The public would not support a ban on corporal punishment

Despite the growth of legislative bans around the world, the practice of corporal punishment in the home remains widely accepted in many places (Havigurst et al., 2023). Many parents continue to endorse the use of physical punishment and believe that it is an effective form of discipline or that it will benefit the child in the long term. Therefore, one argument against the repeal of section 43 in Canada is that society is not ready for legal reform, and thus a ban against corporal punishment would not be supported by the public.

As mentioned in Section 4.3, research has found caregiver beliefs about physical punishment to be the strongest predictor of spanking across 65 countries – over and above several other contextual factors. Specifically, the study by Ward et al. (2021) showed that parents or caregivers who believed that children need physical punishment to be raised properly (31% of respondents) were over 2.5 times more likely to spank their child. These findings show that attitudes and beliefs about physical punishment are powerful predictors of actual behaviour among parents.

However, studies from Canada have shown that many Canadians are already in favour of repealing section 43. Moreover, evidence indicates that support for a ban would likely increase further if more people were aware of the harms of physical punishment, and if the implications of the legislation were made more clear. For example:

- In 2003, prior to the Supreme Court decision, a national survey of Canadians was conducted by Toronto Public Health to assess attitudes around repealing section 43 (see McKeown, 2006). Findings from the survey showed that the majority of Canadians were in favour of repeal, with a higher percentage supporting repeal for teachers (69%) than for parents (51%). Support was also higher overall among women, younger adults, and people from Quebec. Importantly, support for repeal increased when participants were asked to consider three qualifications to accompany the legislation change: 1) the development of guidelines to prevent prosecutions of minor slaps or spanks (72% would support repeal); 2) research to demonstrate that physical punishment is ineffective and potentially harmful (72% would support); and 3) research to show that repealing section 43 would decrease child abuse (80% would support). (Durrant et al., 2004, pg. 12). These findings indicate that the more information people have around the issue, the more they tend to support bans against corporal punishment (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, n.d.(a))
- A similar study that used questionnaire items adapted from the Toronto Public Health survey examined changes in attitudes towards section 43 among a sample of 212 undergraduate students in Canada in 2010-2011 (Romano et al., 2013). Results showed that initial attitudes towards section 43 were divided, as 37.7% of participants agreed the legal allowance for physical punishment should be ended, while 39% disagreed. However, when participants were presented with information about corporal punishment (i.e. information about child abuse; information about the harms of physical punishment; and information about alternative disciplinary practices), support for ending section 43 was much stronger. Specifically, individual-level change scores indicated that 71% of participants had less favorable attitudes toward section 43 following information about child abuse and following information about alternate disciplinary methods; and 75% had less favorable attitudes following information about the potential negative effects of corporal punishment. The researchers note that even greater attitude change could be expected following broader

public education efforts, given the changes that were observed from providing brief information to participants in this study.

- Another Canadian study examined the relationship between attitudes towards spanking and knowledge and attitudes around children’s rights among a sample of 329 students (Gallitto et al, 2021). Results showed a negative association between attitudes towards children’s rights and spanking, such that more favorable attitudes towards children’s rights predicted less favorable spanking attitudes. Moreover, knowledge of children’s rights moderated this relationship, meaning that the effects of attitudes towards children’s rights on attitudes towards spanking was stronger for those with more knowledge of children’s rights. These findings suggest that efforts to improve the public’s knowledge around children’s rights could help to change beliefs around the use of corporal punishment.

Based on these findings as well as the growing number of professional organizations in Canada that have endorsed the *Joint Statement*, some experts argue that the government would actually have strong support for legislative reform around section 43 and that Canada has fallen behind public opinion (Durrant et al., 2021). Moreover, according to the End Corporal Punishment<sup>34</sup> group, most other countries have prohibited corporal punishment ahead of public opinion, and public attitudes have since changed to support the legislation (see Section 8 for more discussion around the impact of bans in other countries) – showing the potential for policies to lead the way forward, rather than public opinion (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, n.d.(a)). Indeed, experts have pointed towards other prior examples of legislative change (such as requiring seatbelts to be worn in cars and banning smoking in public places) to show that laws can be quite effective in changing people’s behaviour and that public support follows law reform (van Turnhout, 2023).

#### 7.4 Argument 4: A ban on corporal punishment would be difficult to enforce

Some critics of legislative reform in Canada argue that a legal ban on corporal punishment in the home would not be enforceable. As described by Havighurst et al., (2023), some of the proposed reasons for this argument include:

- a) Not enough resources for law enforcement officials to take on this added responsibility;
- b) It would be difficult to observe parental discipline behaviours that take place in private;
- c) Complaints made against parents or caregivers would be time consuming and challenging to investigate.

In contrast, supports of legislative reform argue that its primary purpose must be the prevention of violence against children in the first place by setting clear standards, rather than using resources to investigate incidents *after* they occur (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, n.d.(a)).

As noted in Section 5.3, current legislation at the provincial/territorial level around corporal punishment in schools, childcare facilities and foster care is inconsistent. Therefore, one benefit of implementing a ban on corporal punishment at the national level would be to help standardize the

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<sup>34</sup> End Corporal Punishment is the new name for the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment, which was launched in 2001 and has been hosted by the World Health Organization in collaboration with a multi-partner Steering Committee since 2023. The group works to support progress towards universal prohibition and elimination of corporal punishment of children through a wide range of activities (see [website](#) for more information).

law across the country, as federal law would remain paramount over any provincial or territorial discrepancies (Mason & Barnett, 2023; Locher-Lo, 2018). Greater legal consistency may help to reduce confusion around the legality of acts of corporal punishment in different settings, which may also make the law easier to enforce. However, as discussed in Section 9.2 (Implications), it is important for legal prohibitions to be implemented along with training and guidance for all those involved in the protection of children (e.g. social services, educators, health professionals, law enforcement) to ensure they understand the law and how to implement and enforce it, as well as resources and support to avoid overwhelming these systems further (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2009; Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2019b). Another key element of legal reform is establishing systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to measure progress and identify any gaps in enforcement.

### 7.5 Argument 5: Corporal punishment should still be allowed under some conditions

Under the “limitation position” (see Section 5.2), the Supreme Court of Canada set out criteria to define non-abusive or ‘reasonable’ force against a child (see Section 5.1, pg. 12). It was assumed that if physical punishment falls within these limits, the child is not at risk, thereby protecting children from maltreatment while also protecting adults from prosecution (Durrant et al., 2017a).

Supporters of this position argue that physical force against a child can be reasonable under specific circumstances, such as a parent disciplining a child or correcting their behaviour using minor force, when the child is capable of understanding and learning from the use of force against them.

However, critics have presented several arguments against this justification for setting limits on the use of physical force against children, including the following:

- a) Protecting some children and not others in the law based on age violates the universal right to protection from harm and undermines child protection efforts by allowing physical force against children (Durrant et al., 2017a).
- b) Continuing to legally allow corporal punishment in some circumstances undermines public education messages around protecting children from violence (Durrant & Ensom, 2006).
- c) All forms of physical force against children fall on the same continuum of violence, with the same outcome of harm to children (regardless of the intent), rendering legal definitions of abusive vs. non-abusive force meaningless (e.g. Spare the Kids, 2017).
- d) Including conditions for when corporal punishment is allowed by law actually creates more confusion for both professionals and members of the general public regarding what actions are and are not allowed as ‘reasonable’.
- e) Further adding to this confusion, there is limited guidance on how to apply the Supreme Court criteria – specifically, whether each limit is to be applied individually, or whether the criteria should be considered in combination (i.e. do all of the limits or just one need to be breached to determine that force was unreasonable?) (Durrant et al., 2009).

The box below presents some of the findings from the literature around this issue.

**Research Spotlight: How well do the legal criteria for corporal punishment in Canada align with actual cases of child physical maltreatment?**

Durrant et al. (2009) examined the criteria for “reasonable” force set out by the Supreme Court of Canada (see Section 5.1) and applied them to a nationally representative sample of actual physical maltreatment cases in Canada to assess the utility of the legal criteria in distinguishing between harmful and harmless use of force. The researchers reasoned that if the legal criteria can effectively identify cases of unreasonable force, there should be consistency between those criteria and the characteristics of substantiated cases of child physical maltreatment, as determined by child welfare authorities. After examining data on child maltreatment investigations from the 2003 Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS), the study found that *each* of the Supreme Court’s criteria for reasonable or non-abusive force actually characterized the majority of substantiated cases of child physical abuse. In addition, in a majority of substantiated cases (54%), spanking was found to be typically used as a form of discipline in the home, while a minority of cases of substantiated maltreatment could be defined by any of the legal criteria for unreasonable force. These findings indicate that many incidents of child physical abuse are not being captured under the existing legislation, as most substantiated cases of child physical maltreatment were more likely to be characterized by the use of spanking in the home than by each of the Court’s criteria for defining unreasonable force.

A subsequent study (Durrant et al., 2017a) followed the same methods with a more recent dataset to determine whether these findings could be replicated. Using provincial child welfare data from Ontario collected in 2013, the results were very similar to those reported by Durrant et al. (2009) with the 2003 Canadian wide incidence data. Specifically, more than three quarters (79.6%) of cases of substantiated child physical maltreatment occurred in the context of corrective intent, and more than one-quarter (28.4%) of substantiated cases did not exceed any of the court’s limits on reasonable force. According to the study authors, these findings reinforce the conclusion that Canada’s criteria for identifying “reasonable” use of force against children are “arbitrary and not based in the realities of children’s lives or the nature of maltreatment” (pg. 43).

## 7.6 Argument 6: A ban on corporal punishment would negatively impact parents

A common argument against the repeal of section 43 and its allowance for corporal punishment by parents and caregivers is that this change could lead to more parents being criminalized for minor offences that would have been considered as incidents of “reasonable force” under the current legislation. Not only would this outcome put added strain on justice system resources, but it could also harm families as a whole (Havighurst et al., 2023).

However, others argue that there are several measures in place through both the UN CRC and Canada’s own legal system that would help ensure that a ban on corporal punishment does not significantly increase the number of prosecutions against parents. These include:



- UN CRC: General Comment 8 notes that the *de minimis principle*<sup>35</sup>, which states that the law should not concern itself with trivial matters, already applies in cases of minor assaults on adults and would also apply in cases of minor assaults on children.
  - This same principle applies in Canada, where minor acts by adults that fall under the definition of assault in the *Criminal Code* are not given a criminal charge except in exceptional circumstances (Milne, 2024).
  - Under this principle, all reports of violence against children should still be properly investigated, but not all cases of corporal punishment that are investigated by authorities would result in prosecution (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2019b).
  - The Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006) has also noted that “the principles of equal protection of children and adults from assault, including within the family, does not mean that all cases of corporal punishment of children by their parents that come to light should lead to prosecution of parents” (para 40). Rather, a decision to prosecute parents must be taken with great care and should only proceed when doing so would be: a) necessary to protect the child; and b) in the best interests of the child (para 41).
- In Canada, there are other defenses under common law and in the *Criminal Code* besides section 43 that would still be available if section 43 was repealed (see Milne, 2004 for details). These include:
  - The *defence of necessity* – under common law, an act may be excused if the harm done by breaking the law is less than the harm that would be caused by obeying the law, and there is no other reasonable alternative (see Asper Center brief, pg. 4)
  - The *defence of person* (Criminal Code, s.34) – under which parents would be permitted to use reasonable force to control children if the child poses a threat to the parent or others
  - The *defence of property* (Criminal Code, s.35) – under which parents would be permitted to use reasonable force to control children if the child poses a threat to property (of which the parent is in peaceable possession)

Finally, legal experts reason that besides these principles and other available legal provisions, the addition of common sense and prosecutorial discretion provide even more layers of protection against prosecution for minor or non-abusive cases of physical force against children (Milne, 2024; Mason & Barnett, 2023). Furthermore, as noted by the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (2021; 2019b), the primary purpose of legal prohibition is not to punish parents and caregivers, but to keep children safe. When the goal is to prioritize children’s best interests, it does not necessarily follow that parents would be severely punished, imprisoned, or otherwise separated from their children. Instead, the CRC recognizes that parents should be offered supportive or educational interventions rather than punitive ones, to promote keeping families together and safe. As summarized in the guide to effective law reform published by the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (2019b, pg. 9):

*“the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child gives the child the right to have his or her best interests assessed and taken into account as a primary consideration in all actions or decisions that concern him or her. Given a child’s dependency, prosecuting a parent and/or separating a*

<sup>35</sup> This principle has also been called the principle of *de minimis non curat lex*, which roughly translates as meaning that the law does not concern itself with trifles. d

*child from a parent are only likely to be determined as being in the best interests of a child in extreme cases where the safety and health of the child are at risk.”*

### 7.7 Argument 7: A ban on corporal punishment would negatively impact teachers

Besides the potential consequences of a ban on corporal punishment for parents, teachers and educators have also expressed concern that repealing section 43 may have unintended consequences for those working in a school environment.

Teachers’ associations and unions argue that that use of physical force towards children under the care and supervision of teachers and education workers is sometimes necessary in cases where intervention is required to maintain the safety and security of both students and teachers.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, by removing the allowance for the use of reasonable force by teachers without any additional legislation or amendments, teachers note they may be less likely to physically intervene in situations involving students out of fear of being criminalized and charged with assault – which could ultimately cause greater harm to students. Rather than a full prohibition on physical punishment, teachers’ groups have advocated for replacement language to be added elsewhere in the *Criminal Code* that would still provide protection for students and teachers when physical force is used that is considered reasonable in the circumstances, as defined by the 2004 SCC decision – that is, minor corrective force of a transitory or trifling nature (see conditions listed in Section 5.1, page 12). This would include using force to control or restrain a student for the purpose of protecting a child’s safety or preventing the child from harming themselves or others. The SCC decision also determined that while teachers cannot use force against children as punishment, they may use reasonable force in situations such as removing a child from the classroom or to secure compliance with instructions.

In contrast to this view, proponents of bans on corporal punishment in school settings argue that providing a safe educational space is critical for children’s development, health, and opportunities for participation in society. Moreover, schools can act as a protective barrier for children who may



experience violence in other settings, such as the home or in the community. Some scholars further argue that allowing corporal punishment to take place in schools can actually undermine the benefits of education. According to the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (2023), eliminating physical punishment in schools is “an essential measure for upholding children’s rights to education, protection and development, and for maximizing our collective investment in education” (pg. 2).

While there is less research examining the impact of corporal punishment in schools compared to the use of corporal punishment by parents, some research supports the argument that it can actually interfere with students’ learning. For example, in a summary of the available research, Gershoff (2017) concluded that there is no evidence that

<sup>36</sup> For example, several teachers associations submitted briefs for consideration to the House of Commons, regarding Bill C-273 to repeal s.43 (available at <https://www.ourcommons.ca/committees/en/IUST/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=12636759>)

corporal punishment in schools enhances or promotes learning in the classroom. More recently, a meta-analytic review synthesized evidence on the effects of school corporal punishment and found that it is positively associated with both internalizing and externalizing behaviour problems among children, and negatively associated with school performance (Visser et al., 2022). As described by Visser et al. (2022), corporal punishment by teachers may impair the teacher-student relationship, which can interfere with student's ability to be engaged with academic tasks, leading to decreased performance. In summary, research shows that the negative effects of corporal punishment in schools appears to be consistent with those found for parents (Gershoff, 2017).

Finally, some research suggests that children who are already marginalized (e.g. based on their sexual orientation, gender, race, immigrant status, disabilities, and those from low-income backgrounds or neighbourhoods) may be more likely to be subject to corporal punishment and physical restraint in schools (Gershoff, 2017; Gage et al., 2022). This is particularly concerning as the intersection of existing vulnerabilities with disparities in the experience of violence in schools can increase the risk of negative outcomes for these students even further (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2023).

Besides corporal punishment, the use of physical restraint by teachers and its impact on children and youth has also been a focus in the literature. Educational staff may be trained in the use of physical restraint, including techniques such as de-escalation, holding, and other physical ways to restrict the freedom of movement of a student (Hodgkiss & Harding, 2023; Bartlett & Ellis, 2021). While the use of restraint is generally meant to prevent harm to a student or other staff only when necessary, some evidence from countries such as Canada and the UK suggests that it has become overused and extended to other purposes, such as preventing disruptive behaviour (Hodgkiss & Harding, 2023; Sapiets, 2020). For example, a recent policy analysis of physical restraint, seclusion and time-out rooms in educational settings in Canada found that the most common antecedents to the use of physical restraint in schools were behaviours such as non-compliance and disruption (Bartlett & Ellis, 2021). According to these Canadian researchers, the use of physical restraint for subjective or non-protective purposes is an infringement on students' basic human rights as outlined in the UN CRC. In addition to the risk of inappropriate use of restraint, evidence also suggests that children can experience significant emotional and physical harm from some forms of physical restraint (Hodgkiss & Harding, 2023; Cramer et al., 2024). Overall, there is limited evidence to support the effectiveness of restraint as an intervention for children or adults (Cramer et al., 2024).

In the U.S., guidance from the Department of Education (2012) states that physical restraint "should not be used except in situations where the child's behavior poses imminent danger of serious physical harm to self or others and restraint and seclusion should be avoided to the greatest extent possible without endangering the safety of students and staff" (pg. 2). The resource document also recommends that teachers and school staff should be regularly trained on the use of alternatives to physical restraint, such as positive behavioural interventions and supports. However, in Canada, policies around physical restraint across jurisdictions are either inconsistent or non-existent, highlighting the need for stronger regulatory guidance to support the safety of all students, including clear conditions in which restraint might be appropriate in educational settings (Bartlett & Ellis, 2021).

## 7.8 Argument 8: A ban on corporal punishment would negatively impact certain communities

Finally, another concern over the potential negative consequences of legal reform for parents and caregivers is that a full legal ban on the use of corporal punishment against children would affect some parents more than others – particularly those from Black and Indigenous communities. As noted in Section 4.3.2, this argument stems from historical and ongoing experiences of discrimination and inequities for people in these communities, which has increased fears of prosecution and further marginalization if section 43 is repealed.

These fears are reasonable given the clear overrepresentation of Black and Indigenous children and families in both the criminal justice and child welfare systems in Canada. In particular, findings from the Ontario and Canadian Incidence Studies have shown higher rates of investigations for physical abuse among Black families. For example:

- In Ontario, the overall rate of child welfare investigations for White families almost doubled between 1998 and 2003, but the incidence of investigations nearly *quadrupled* for Black families over the same period. (Antwi-Boasiako et al., 2020). Analyses of OIS data from 1993 to 2013 have also shown that rates of investigations for physical abuse and for exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV) were higher over time for Black families than White families (Antwi-Boasiako et al., 2021).
- Data from the 2003 CIS showed that incidents of physical abuse were more likely to be investigated and substantiated by the child welfare system for children from visible minority groups (Black, Asian, Indigenous) compared to Caucasian children (Lavergne et al., 2008).

Researchers have offered several possible explanations for the disproportionate rate of investigations of physical abuse among Black families:

- According to Antwi-Boasiako et al. (2021), the following factors may be associated with higher rates of reporting and substantiation of physical abuse among Black families in Ontario: a) structural factors such as higher financial stress, poverty, employment discrimination and lack of affordable housing may increase the likelihood of using corporal punishment or experiencing IPV for some Black families; b) cultural factors such as differences in norms, values, and parenting practices may be related to differences in the use of corporal punishment in Black families; c) oversurveillance and bias among professionals and the public may lead to higher rates of reporting incidents among Black families to child welfare authorities. This includes biased decision-making tools used in Ontario (such as the Risk Assessment Model) that do not consider cultural differences.
- Findings from the 2003 CIS also showed that cases of physical abuse involving children of visible minorities were most often connected to corporal punishment, suggesting that the use of physical violence in these families may be associated with cultural differences in disciplinary methods and child-rearing practices. According to Lavergne et al. (2008), there may be a disconnect in perceptions of corporal punishment and abuse between members of these communities and professionals who make the decisions around reporting and substantiating cases of maltreatment. These cultural differences between service users and providers, along with socioeconomic differences, ultimately affect rates of over- or under-reporting within the child protection system (Adjei et al., 2017). For instance, in some cultures, values of parental devotion, respect and obedience are associated with greater

acceptance of corporal punishment as a disciplinary method; however, this same practice is increasingly viewed as an unacceptable parenting practice by others. According to Thomas & Dettlaff (2011), without an understanding of the cultural context underlying these disciplinary practices, it may be easier for an outside observer to confuse physical discipline with child abuse.

- Moreover, even if corporal punishment is more normative in some cultures, researchers have noted that the law in Canada – including the 2004 Supreme Court decision – does not recognize this.<sup>37</sup> As a result, Black parents may be more likely to be reported for incidents of corporal punishment than White parents because mandated reporters (i.e. health care professionals, social workers, educators, and other members of the community) are likely to view the practice as inappropriate or ‘abhorrent’ within Canadian society (Antwi-Boasiako et al., 2021; Adjei et al., 2017).

The following quote by Adjei et al. (2017) further describes this disconnect and its implications:

*“Our study as well as past studies suggest significant challenges among visible minority immigrant parents, who feel that their abilities to maintain their parental rights are often undermined by child welfare practitioners and policy makers who often fail to recognize and respect cultural variations in child rearing and caregiving practices, especially among visible minority immigrant parents.... when child protection workers disregard the cultural and racial factors that influence prototypical parenting standards in Canada, they undermine the efficacy, function, and overall quality of parenting practices that do not comply with Western socialization touchstones” (pp. 463-464)*

Besides cultural differences in the **use** of physical punishment, research has also examined potential differences in the **impact** of corporal punishment across cultures. As discussed in Section 4.3.2, proponents of the *cultural normativeness perspective* argue that the effects of corporal punishment can vary depending on the cultural context, and that physical punishment can have beneficial effects on children in some cultures where it is more normative.

Evidence from various studies in the US has shown that corporal punishment as a disciplinary practice does appear to be more common and acceptable among Black families compared to White families (Antwi-Boasiako et al., 2021; Klevens et al., 2019). For example, data from the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (NESARC) collected in 2004-05 was used to examine reported experiences of harsh physical punishment according to age cohort. Results showed that while the overall prevalence of harsh physical punishment has been decreasing over time, this trend was not observed equally across racial groups – the decrease was only observed among White participants, with little change among Black participants (Taillieu et al., 2014). However, other research that has examined social norms found more similarities than differences between racial groups (Black, White, and Latino) both in their own use of corporal punishment as well as perceptions of use by others in their community (Klevens et al., 2019).

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<sup>37</sup> The Court’s decision has been described by Antwi-Boasiako et al. as ‘colour-blind’. Researchers such as Adjei et al. (2017) have also explained how ‘colour-blind’ laws and policies shape the everyday lives and experiences of Black people. According to these researchers, this approach “essentially ignores the social realities of Blacks inequitable experiences within relationships and systems and structures of powers” and instead “constructs an alternative form of oppression that manifests as institutionalized racism in slightly more subtle and indirect ways” (pg. 484).

In terms of the impacts of corporal punishment on children, there have been mixed findings in the literature on the role of race or culture:

- Some studies have found results that support the cultural normativeness theory. For example, findings from early studies comparing European American to African American children and adolescents showed that spanking appeared to be associated with greater externalizing problems among White children than Black children (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor., 2016; Deater-Deckard et al., 1996; Lansford et al., 2004). A systematic review of seven longitudinal studies found that in each study, non-abusive physical punishment was associated with either positive or neutral outcomes for African-American children (Horn et al., 2004). However, this study used a broad definition of physical punishment that included methods other than spanking (i.e. use of objects); and some researchers suggest that harsher methods may vary more in acceptability across racial/ethnic groups, which may affect results across studies (Gershoff et al., 2012).
- Another challenge against early studies that suggest the effects of corporal punishment vary by culture has come from researchers such as Durrant (2008), who note that most of those studies focus on externalizing behaviour as the outcome; however, a broader range of outcomes should be considered to assess the overall impact of corporal punishment on child adjustment and well-being. Indeed, some studies that have examined other outcomes such as mental health, intellectual development, and attachment have shown more consistency in their relationship with corporal punishment across cultural groups (Durrant, 2008).
- Finally, a longitudinal study across eight countries that have been shown to vary in the level of authoritarian beliefs around parenting examined the association between corporal punishment and child adjustment (measured by both mother- and child-reported aggression and anxiety). Results indicated that corporal punishment was associated with less adverse effects on child adjustment in more authoritarian countries<sup>38</sup>; however, across all countries, there was still an overall association between corporal punishment and subsequent child adjustment problems, even after controlling for prior child behaviour problems. In other words, even if the adverse effects of corporal punishment are stronger in some countries than in others; the overall effects of corporal punishment are still harmful regardless of country (Lansford et al., 2014).

In line with this finding, research increasingly shows that physical punishment is associated with negative outcomes for children across countries and communities, regardless of the race or cultural background of parents and families. For example:

- In a large nationally representative sample of kindergarten children and their families (n=11,044), Gershoff et al. (2012) examined racial/ethnic differences in the association between spanking and children's externalizing behaviours in third grade.<sup>39</sup> Longitudinal analyses showed that spanking was significantly associated with increased child externalizing problems in third grade; and child externalizing also predicted more spanking

<sup>38</sup> Countries considered to be more authoritarian included Colombia, Jordan, Kenya, Philippines, and African-Americans in the United States; countries considered to be less authoritarian included China, Naples, Italy, Thailand, and European-Americans or Latin Americans in the United States.

<sup>39</sup> Spanking was assessed by asking mothers whether they had ever spanked the child and how often in the past week. Externalizing behaviour was assessed by asking teachers to rate the child's behaviour.

over time – indicating a cycle of negative responses. Moreover, the model with the best fit was one in which all paths were set to be equal across race/ethnic groups, meaning that the associations between spanking and externalizing behaviour did not differ by race/ethnicity.

- Results from a meta-analysis of five studies (contributing six effect sizes) from the United States also showed that spanking is associated with detrimental outcomes<sup>40</sup> for children aged 5-14 years, with no significant differences in this association for White and Black children (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016). Specifically, among the six subsamples of Black families, four effect sizes showed a positive association with detrimental child outcomes, while two effect sizes did not significantly differ from zero. Importantly, none of the studies showed positive outcomes associated with spanking for Black children, even though the majority of studies reported a higher frequency of spanking among Black families. The authors concluded:
  - *“These results suggest that, although there are differences between racial groups in how often parents spank, there are no differences between Black and White families in the way in which spanking is related to child behavioral and mental health problems. In other words, frequency in usage of spanking is a culture-specific behavior, but there is equifinality in the linkages of spanking with children’s outcomes, which indicates culture-common processes.”* (pg. 8)
- Internationally, studies from LMICs also contradict the cultural normativeness perspective, demonstrating that spanking is associated with various negative developmental outcomes regardless of how normative spanking is within countries (e.g. Grogan-Kaylor et al., 2021; Pace et al., 2019). According to Cuartas (2024), these findings suggest there may be universal mechanisms linking spanking to child outcomes.

Together, these findings suggest that cultural beliefs and acceptance of physical discipline may affect parents’ use of corporal punishment in the home, but these same beliefs do not necessarily protect children from its harms (Taillieu et al., 2014).

Beyond these research findings, others argue that the question of whether the acceptability of corporal punishment might vary by culture is irrelevant from a human rights perspective. As discussed by Durrant (2008), a human rights view sees corporal punishment of children from any culture as a violation of their fundamental rights, and all children are entitled to the same level of protection from violence. According to this view, “From a rights perspective, the issue is not whether a particular culture equates physical punishment with discipline or whether statistical analyses produce different values for different groups of children. The issue is one of equality, respect, and dignity for all children.” (Durrant, 2008, pg. 62).

## 8.0 Evidence on Alternative Approaches

Supporters of legal bans on corporal punishment argue that alternative approaches to disciplining children can be more effective and more beneficial for child development, and that these approaches can be taught to parents and families. This section reviews some of these alternative approaches and any evidence of their effectiveness in reducing physical punishment by parents.

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<sup>40</sup> Outcomes across studies included depressive symptoms, externalizing behaviour problems, dating violence, experiences of physical abuse, and antisocial behaviour.

Given that parenting practices and behaviours are known to be an important factor in child development, a range of parenting education and support programs have been developed to improve parenting strategies as well as child outcomes (Doyle et al., 2022). In a review of the literature on evidence-based parenting supports (EBSPs)<sup>41</sup>, Doyle et al. (2022) concluded that research has clearly established EBSPs to lead to positive effects on parent behaviour, child behaviour, and family relationships (see Table 2 for a summary). Results from multi-level meta-analyses (e.g., Van Aar et al., 2017; Mingeback et al., 2018) have also demonstrated that parenting interventions are effective in reducing disruptive child behaviours and externalizing behaviour problems, with many interventions showing sustained effects – providing more support for alternative methods of responding to children’s negative behaviour that do not include the use of corporal punishment. Moreover, evidence has shown EBSPs to be effective in both high-income and low- and middle-income countries. However, despite this strong evidence base, the availability of these supports remains limited as few policies exist to enable broader access to EBSPs for families at a population level (Doyle et al., 2022).

**Table 2: Summary of benefits of evidence-based parenting supports** (source: Doyle et al., 2022)

Benefits for parents/caregivers	Benefits for children and youth
Improved well-being and mental health	Improved well-being and mental health
Positive relationships with child	Improved physical health, diet, and exercise
Enhanced skills, knowledge and confidence	Improved skills and competencies
Realistic expectations of self and child	Better academic attainment

Other studies and reviews have reported on the effects of parenting programs and supports aimed specifically at preventing or reducing the use of physical punishment by changing parent attitudes or behavior. As discussed earlier in this report, parent and family-level factors – including parent beliefs, attitudes, and previous experiences (i.e. adverse childhood experiences) – can be risk factors for the use of corporal punishment on children. Therefore, researchers such as Ward et al. (2021) have argued that parenting interventions that target parent attitudes and behaviours are a critical strategy for reducing violence against children. Another important strategy is to target community-level factors that increase the risk of corporal punishment through broader population-based public education campaigns (Ward et al., 2021).

A comprehensive overview of a range of these programs was provided by Gershoff et al. (2017), who aimed to describe examples of promising approaches that have had some degree of success in reducing physical punishment. The researchers categorized existing strategies into three types that primarily differ in the size of their target population (see Table 3). While these approaches offer several avenues for changing parent attitudes and behaviours, the authors noted that gaps still remain in our knowledge of how to best prevent physical punishment of children and that continuing evaluation of these approaches is needed. Further details on these programs and their evaluations is provided in Appendix C.

Similarly, in a brief overview of prevention and intervention programs, McGuier et al. (2022) also found that evidence for some parenting supports (such as the “No Hit Zones” program) is limited,

<sup>41</sup> Evidence-based parenting supports refers to those that have been empirically evaluated to be effective in significantly changing outcomes for parents and/or children.



while evidence for other programs (such as home visiting programs) has been mixed in terms of their effects on physical punishment. The authors note that the effectiveness and reach of programs can also depend on the context, including the social norms around corporal punishment in a community. For example, communities in which physical punishment is more acceptable may be less likely to implement programs designed to reduce its use.

**Table 3: Summary of promising interventions to reduce or prevent physical punishment** (as summarized by Gershoff et al., 2017).

Type	Target Population	Description	Examples
<b>Indicated Intervention</b>	Parents who have already maltreated children in the past or are at substantial risk of doing so	Intensive intervention to teach appropriate parenting strategies and skills; either one-on-one or in groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent Child Interaction Therapy</li> <li>• Incredible Years program</li> <li>• Nurturing Parenting Program</li> </ul>
<b>Selective Intervention</b>	Subgroups with a collectively higher than average risk of physical punishment; including current parents, pre-parents <sup>42</sup> , and professionals who work with families	Education about the risks of physical punishment and alternative strategies; includes early intervention strategies for parents and educational strategies for professionals who may be able to advise or influence parents' attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Screening by primary care providers</li> <li>• Motivational interviewing</li> <li>• Home visiting programs</li> <li>• Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting program</li> <li>• Head Start program</li> <li>• Online interventions</li> </ul>
<b>Universal Prevention</b>	All parents and children in the population, regardless of risk level	Efforts to change attitudes or social norms around physical punishment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public education campaigns</li> <li>• Research summaries (e.g. Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth)</li> <li>• Legal prohibition</li> </ul>

One parenting program that has been a focus in the literature on corporal punishment is *Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting* (PDEP) – a universal primary prevention program that offers a series of interactive exercises for parents along with guided group discussion, and is delivered by program facilitators through schools, community agencies and health agencies (Durrant et al., 2014; Durrant et al., 2017b). **Positive discipline**<sup>43</sup> refers to a child-rights focused approach to parenting built on a set of principles to guide parents in non-violent, respectful, solution-focused interactions with their children (Durrant, 2016; Durrant, n.d.). This approach is not meant to change children's behaviour, but to change parents' views of their own role - shifting their attitudes around discipline away from coercion, control and punishment towards more respectful and collaborative problem

<sup>42</sup> Pre-parents are defined as individuals who are about to become parents for the first time

<sup>43</sup> Note: the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children uses the term 'positive parenting' rather than 'positive discipline' due to the association between discipline and punishment, rather than guidance and teaching.

solving and mentorship (Durrant, 2020). The overall goal of the PDEP program is to help parents build the necessary knowledge and skills to foster healthy development in their children in the long term (Durrant et al., 2017b). Specific objectives of the PDEP intervention are to: reduce approval of physical punishment; normalize parent-child conflict; and strengthen parenting self-efficacy (Durrant et al., 2014). Some evidence on the impact of PDEP is summarized below:

- An evaluation of the program conducted among participants<sup>44</sup> in Canada showed that it was effective in achieving its short-term objectives (Durrant et al., 2014). Pre-post surveys showed that by the end of the program, parents were significantly less supportive of physical punishment, less likely to view typical parent-child behaviour as conflict, and more likely to believe they have the skills to be good parents.
- A study across 13 countries that vary in their level of social development<sup>45</sup> was also conducted to assess the relevance, adaptability and universality of the program using a post-intervention parent questionnaire (Durrant et al., 2017b). Results showed high levels of satisfaction with the program overall – at least 95% of parents across all countries reported being “mostly” or “very” satisfied with the program, and at least 90% of parents said they would recommend the program to other parents. Most parents also believed PDEP to have a positive impact on their parenting, with the majority agreeing the program will help them understand their child’s feelings (94%), communicate better with their children (93%), and build stronger relationships with their children (96%). However, there were some differences according to country level of development. Parents in the low development category were most satisfied with the program, and parents in both low and medium development categories were more likely to recommend the program than those in the high development category. According to the researchers, these findings show that the PDEP program is perceived to be beneficial across countries, and may be even more valuable in countries where additional parenting resources are less available.

## 9.0 Lessons Learned from Other Countries

As mentioned in Section 5.4, a total of 66 countries have now prohibited corporal punishment of children in all settings, beginning with Sweden in 1979. This section reviews some examples of approaches to legal reform taken in selected countries as well as some of the research that has been conducted to examine the effects of these laws both within and across countries.

### 9.1 Country Examples

#### *Sweden*

As Sweden was the first country to explicitly ban corporal punishment, much of the literature on national bans has focused on evaluating the impact of Sweden’s law on public attitudes and behaviours over time. Sweden’s law was meant to protect children from violence through a preventive strategy that involved several components: a) raising awareness that corporal

<sup>44</sup> Participants were 321 parents in 14 cities in Canada who participated in the program from 2012-13.

<sup>45</sup> Countries were categorized by level of social development according to the Inequality-Adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI) – which is based on the distribution of indicators such as life expectancy, years of school, and gross national income per capita. Higher values of the IHDI indicate a higher level of development across the population.

punishment is not an acceptable or effective discipline strategy by implementing a national public education campaign along with the ban; b) providing support to families through alternative parenting strategies; and c) providing supportive measures to child welfare workers to allow them to intervene early and help keep families together (Durrant, 2024). The objectives of this approach were to change attitudes around the use of corporal punishment; to set clear guidelines for parents and professionals; and to promote earlier intervention (Durrant, 1999).

Findings from the literature indicate that since Sweden's ban was implemented, public support for corporal punishment has declined and remained low. Data from national opinion polls show that prior to the ban (in 1965), over half (53%) of adults in Sweden were supportive of corporal punishment, but support decreased to 26% by 1981 and to only 11% in 1996, and has remained largely unchanged since (Durrant, 1999; Zolotor & Puzia, 2010; Havighurst et al., 2023). However, some researchers suggest that public support for corporal punishment was already declining prior to the law, and that the law itself did not accelerate this trend (Roberts, 2000). Given the difficulties in establishing the causal effects of the ban on attitudes, other outcomes of the law should also be examined. A key concern is the impact of the law on the use of corporal punishment, and evidence from cross-sectional studies shows a dramatic decrease in experiences of corporal punishment (including the prevalence, frequency, and harshness) after the ban (Durrant & Janson, 2005; Durrant, 1999). The rate of reported assaults against children also increased following the ban, which was expected because of the public information campaign to raise awareness about violence against children. Importantly, however, there was no change in the rate of prosecution of child physical assault cases since the 1980s, and no increase in long-term placements of children in out-of-home care.

According to researchers (e.g. Durrant & Janson, 2005; Durrant, 1999), this data indicates that the legal ban along with the education campaign was effective in meeting its goals – namely, reducing support for corporal punishment, encouraging early identification of children at risk without increasing criminalization of parents, and reducing rates of actual violence against children. Other experts have also noted that the availability of other social services and supports in Sweden may have contributed to the observed shift in attitudes towards and use of corporal punishment, as substantial reform to expand the welfare system also occurred around the same time as the 1979 ban (Leviner, 2013).

Further evidence on the impact of Sweden's law in comparison to other countries is provided in Section 8.2 below.

### *Finland*

Finland was the second country to fully prohibit corporal punishment in 1983, allowing further examination of the long-term impact of such a law. In one study, cross-sectional survey data from 2011 (28 years after the ban) was used to examine trends in self-reported experiences of physical punishment according to age cohort. Overall, respondents who were born before the law were significantly more likely to report experiencing physical punishment<sup>46</sup> compared to those born after the law was implemented. The percentage of children who were never exposed to physical punishment also increased following the law (except for the measure of ear pulling) – 25% of those born after the law had never been exposed to any of the types of physical punishment, compared to

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<sup>46</sup> As measured by a combined variable representing four types of physical punishment: having their hair pulled, ear pulled, being slapped, or beaten with an object.

20% of those born before the law. Importantly, the data also indicated that there was no consistent decrease in physical punishment in the decades prior to the law, which suggests that the legal ban was necessary and that the observed decline in physical punishment after the law would not have occurred naturally (Österman et al., 2014)

### *New Zealand*

Similar to Canada, New Zealand’s legislation offered a defence to parents who used “reasonable” physical force against their children for the purposes of correction up until 2007, when this section of the law was repealed, making physical punishment of children illegal. A new provision was also added to the law to specify that police have discretion not to prosecute minor complaints about the use of force against a child by a parent or caregiver.<sup>47</sup>

Data from police reports following the legislative change provide insights into whether there was any impact of the law on prosecution of parents and referrals to social services. In the three years following legal reform, there was an overall increase in the number of reports of child assault and minor acts of physical discipline incidents, but police responses remained consistent and there were relatively few prosecutions of these minor incidents. Moreover, the majority of incidents of ‘smacking’ and minor acts of physical discipline that police attended to were referred to child protection services or to other support services. These findings indicate that police did make use of their discretion not to prosecute for these minor cases and that parents were offered support where appropriate (Wood, 2013). According to the Assistant Commissioner, “initial fears that ‘good parents’ would be criminalized continues to be proven wrong” (New Zealand Police, 2013).

## 9.2 Cross-Country Studies

While the impact of legal bans cannot be studied using controlled study designs, it is possible to use natural experiments to compare the effects of legislation in countries with bans to countries without bans (Havighurst et al., 2023).

One such study by Bussmann et al. (2011) applied a cross-sectional analysis in five countries to compare the effects of legislative change as well as education campaigns around corporal punishment. Approximately 1,000 parents were surveyed in each of five countries – three in which corporal punishment was legally prohibited (Austria, Germany, and Sweden), and two in which no ban was in place (France and Spain). The countries also differed in whether educational campaigns about the harms of corporal punishment were in place, allowing further comparison of the impact of legal prohibition alone relative to the effects of public information campaigns. For instance, Austria had a legal ban in place but no accompanying campaign, while Spain had a campaign for several years but no legal ban. As shown in Table 4, parents in countries without legal bans were more likely to report physically punishing their children or using a ‘mild slap on the face’ than parents in countries with bans, with the lowest proportion of either form of physical force found in Sweden – where the ban had been in place the longest. Parents’ knowledge of the existing legal prohibition was also highest in Sweden (90%) compared to the other countries with bans (32% in Austria and 31% in Germany). According to the study authors, this finding shows the lasting impact of Sweden’s nationwide information campaign that accompanied its ban, along with continuous follow-up efforts to educate the public on both the harms and legal status of corporal punishment. As discussed in Section 8.1, these efforts “appear to have been extremely effective in altering the

<sup>47</sup> See New Zealand legislation, Crimes (Substituted Section 58) Amendment Act 2007 at <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2007/0018/latest/DLM407671.html>

social climate with regard to corporal punishment” in Sweden, such that the use of corporal punishment has now become non-normative among today’s generations compared to previous decades (Durrant, 1999, pg. 444).

**Table 4: Cross-country findings on corporal punishment, by legal status and educational campaigns** (Source: data from Bussman et al., 2011)

	Country (Year of ban)	Educational campaign(s)	% of parents who reported giving children a mild slap on the face	% of parents who reported spanking their child with their hand
<b>Countries with a legal ban</b>	Sweden (1979)	Yes – long-term	14.1%	4.1%
	Austria (1989)	No	49.9%	16.0%
	Germany (2000)	Yes – short-term	42.6%	16.8%
<b>Countries without a ban</b>	Spain	Yes	54.6%	53.8%
	France	No	71.5%	50.5%

Overall, the results from this cross-country study demonstrate that both legal prohibition and information campaigns help to reduce physical punishment of children, but that neither strategy on its own is sufficient for behaviour change – bans were most effective when accompanied by educational campaigns (Bussmann et al., 2011). Further analyses<sup>48</sup> showed that not only is prohibiting corporal punishment associated with declines in actual violence against children, but that legal bans also have an indirect effect on parent behaviour through influencing parents’ definitions of violence and their approval of corporal punishment.

A systematic review from 2010 examined the impacts of laws banning corporal punishment in 24 countries where bans were in place at the time of the study (Zolotor & Puzia, 2010). Findings showed positive impacts of a ban on attitudes and behaviours related to corporal punishment. Overall, studies included in the review showed decreases in public support for corporal punishment in countries that banned corporal punishment (demonstrated by longitudinal studies showing a decrease within a country following a ban; and by comparison studies showing lower support in countries with bans than in countries without bans). Studies have also shown a near universal decline in the use of corporal punishment after a ban (or in comparison to countries without bans). However, findings were more inconsistent around the effects of legal bans on general attitudes towards childrearing, such as beliefs around obedience and discipline. It is also important to note that in most countries (including Sweden), support for corporal punishment was already declining prior to the ban, making it difficult to isolate the effect of the ban itself. The researchers suggest that legal bans are more likely to be passed in countries with pre-existing public support for such a ban, and the implementation of a ban will then reinforce these attitudes, leading to continuing decline.

The majority of countries included in the studies above have been European countries; however, a study by Lansford et al. (2017) included a more diverse range of low- and middle-income countries to explore changes in beliefs and behaviour related to corporal punishment from 2005-06 (time 1)

<sup>48</sup> Additional analyses included regression analyses to examined predictors of corporal punishment and path analyses to examine the relationships among these predictors.

to 2008-13 (time 2). Specifically, the study looked at rates of corporal punishment and caregiver beliefs about the necessity of corporal punishment in four countries with complete bans on corporal punishment by time 2 (Albania, Macedonia, Togo, and Ukraine) and four countries without bans (Central African Republic, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, and Sierra Leone). Results showed wide variation in beliefs and reported use of corporal punishment across countries, and there were no consistent patterns observed based on whether and when countries had implemented bans on corporal punishment. For example, beliefs and use of corporal punishment decreased between times 1 and 2 in Ukraine (where a ban was implemented in 2004) but not in Togo (where a ban was implemented in 2007). Even in countries without bans, some showed decreases in the use of corporal punishment between times 1 and 2 while others showed increases. These findings suggest that changes in beliefs and behaviour related to corporal punishment may vary not only as a function of the presence of legal bans, but also in response to unique country level characteristics, such as the presence of media campaigns and parenting interventions, the legal consequences associated with the ban, and the presence of other risk factors for child health and well-being.

Finally, an ecological study across 88 countries used data from school-based health surveys to assess the association between national bans on corporal punishment and youth violence (Elgar et al., 2018). Results showed that prohibitions on corporal punishment were associated with less violence among adolescents aged 13-17 overall, although the findings cannot be used to determine whether the ban itself led to changes in behaviour or whether lower rates of violence reflect a broader social climate against violence. Specifically, countries that had full bans on corporal punishment (in homes and schools; 30 countries) had 31% lower prevalence of frequent physical fighting<sup>49</sup> in males at age 13 and 42% less fighting in females compared to countries with no bans (20 countries). Partial bans (in schools but not in homes) were associated with lower prevalence of fighting in females, but not in males; suggesting that comprehensive bans are more effective.

## 10.0 Implications of the Findings

### 10.1 Implications for Policy

As shown in Section 8, data from monitoring and evaluation studies in other countries demonstrates that national prohibitions on corporal punishment can be implemented successfully; however, the effectiveness of such laws may depend on other factors, including the prevailing social norms and the availability of additional information and parenting supports.

Bans appear to be most successful in countries where public support for corporal punishment is already declining, and evidence shows that legal reform can reinforce negative attitudes towards physical punishment, thereby strengthening pre-existing trends and contributing to an ongoing decrease in support. Survey data from Canada shows that the majority of Canadians are already supportive of a ban on corporal punishment, and evidence suggests that support would be even higher if the public was well informed about the issue and the purpose of such a law (see Section 6.3).

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<sup>49</sup> Frequent physical fighting was defined as 4 or more episodes in the past year.

However, the literature also suggests that implementing a new law to prohibit corporal punishment will likely not be successful in changing attitudes and behaviours unless the law is accompanied by the following additional measures:

*a) Public education campaigns and strategies*

Several researchers contend that legislation on its own is not sufficient; awareness around children's rights as well as the reasons for prohibiting corporal punishment must also be raised through public education (e.g. Locher-Lo, 2018). In general, research shows that awareness and policy change are interdependent – building awareness around public health and safety issues can lead to greater support for policy implementation, and policy changes can then further increase awareness and lead to behaviour change (McGuier et al., 2022).

Mass media campaigns represent one approach that may be effective at changing social norms around corporal punishment at the population level. However, based on evidence around the use of mass media campaigns in other areas of public health (i.e. nutrition, smoking), some researchers suggest that campaign messages should be tested first to identify more effective messages. In addition, the message source or messenger may have an impact on the effectiveness of the message in changing norms and behaviour. For example, some research suggests that campaigns should involve trusted sources of information about physical discipline, such as health professionals, teachers, academics or religious leaders (e.g. McGuier et al., 2022). In contrast, other researchers suggest that messages that come from the community might be more impactful, particularly for members of different racial and ethnic groups (Klevens et al., 2019).

Durrant & Ensom (2006) suggest that educational strategies can be incorporated into existing programs and services, including schools, health and social services. For example, information about child development can be provided in school settings; information about the risks of physical punishment can be given to parents in neonatal/pediatric units of hospitals; and educational programs for medical students should include information about the research on physical punishment. Other researchers agree that information on corporal punishment and alternative approaches should not only be disseminated through mass media, but should also be integrated into school curricula (Locher-Lo, 2018). This idea is also supported by studies showing that even brief exposure to research and information on the negative effects of corporal punishment can be sufficient to change attitudes around the use of corporal punishment. According to Holden et al. (2014), providing brief summaries of research through educational programs for students or through parenting interventions can be a simple and cost-effective way of supporting prevention efforts by reducing positive attitudes towards corporal punishment.

*b) Access to supports and services for families*

In addition to understanding the rationale for legislative change, parents must also be provided with access to and knowledge of alternative parenting strategies that take a non-violent approach to disciplining children. The Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (n.d.(b)) states that the promotion of positive, non-violent parenting strategies should not be an alternative to law reform; rather, a full legal prohibition on all forms of corporal punishment along with the promotion of positive discipline are both necessary from a human rights perspective.

However, there is some disagreement within the literature as to whether educational parenting strategies should be provided to all parents or should be targeted mainly at high-risk parents. For instance, researchers such as Doyle et al. (2022) and Havighurst et al. (2023) recommend that

supports are proportionate to the level of need, with more intensive supports made available for families at risk of maltreatment or corporal punishment; while others argue that education and support should be provided to all parents through universally available parenting programs across the country (Durrant & Ensom, 2006; Durrant et al., 2004). According to Durrant & Ensom (2006), the biggest predictor of the use of corporal punishment is not individual factors within parents but approval of its use, which stems from cultural beliefs and social norms. Therefore, it is important for public education campaigns to reach the entire population rather than only specific segments or groups, as approval “will only be effectively reduced through a process of de-legitimizing physical punishment across society as a whole” (Durrant & Ensom, 2006, pg. 3).

Another strategy for enhancing the reach and uptake of parenting programs targeting physical punishment could be to integrate them into service initiatives that tend to be more easily accepted. For example, health care systems and organizations that are already committed to providing comprehensive care that addresses social determinants of health may be more open to implementing programs targeting physical punishment (McGuier et al., 2022). However, it is also possible that bundling programs for physical punishment with other initiatives could weaken the focus on physical punishment (McGuier et al., 2022).

### *c) Engagement with different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups*

Evidence on differences in social norms and beliefs around the use of physical punishment across cultures, as well as a lack of awareness of these cultural differences on the part of service providers and policymakers, demonstrates the need for greater engagement with these communities to enhance the effectiveness of laws around corporal punishment. Community engagement is also essential to inform strategies and mechanisms for equitable implementation, enforcement and monitoring of laws around corporal punishment – for example, to ensure the law is not disproportionately applied to certain groups (i.e. Black and Indigenous families) (see Section 9.3 for further discussion). As noted by researchers in Australia, any proposed legislative change “needs to be accompanied by significant engagement with different ethnic and religious communities to ensure those affected are supported to understand the adverse effects of corporal punishment and find alternative parenting strategies” (Havighurst et al., 2023, pg. 4).

## **10.2 Implications for Service Providers**

Physicians and other health professionals play an important role in the prevention of corporal punishment, especially since they are viewed as credible sources of information on population health issues. As discussed by Durrant & Ensom (2017), physicians can urge the government to prohibit corporal punishment of children and can engage with other professionals to send a clear message about corporal punishment at a population level. Physicians can also educate parents and families about the research on physical punishment to better understand its risks and provide them with resources to support alternative parenting strategies. One example of how professionals can influence parent attitudes and behaviours is through the use of language. As discussed by McGuier et al. (2022), the way that acts of physical punishment are labelled and defined can affect perceptions around how acceptable these acts are. Therefore, professionals could use stronger terms such as “hitting” or “violence” rather than more acceptable terms such as “spanking” to encourage parents to reexamine their use of physical punishment.



However, in order for health professionals and other service providers working with children and families to fulfill their role in the prevention of corporal punishment effectively, they must be provided with clear guidance and support. Besides health providers, teachers, daycare and other child care providers, and social workers should all learn how to recognize and respond to violence against children appropriately (Locher-Lo, 2018). As an example, guidance may come from clear position statements on physical punishment by key child- and family-serving organizations in Canada, such as those mentioned in Section 6.3. Education can also come from professional training and development programs, which should include training on effective methods for raising and socializing children (Durrant et al., 2004). In addition to guidance and training, service providers would need sufficient support and resources to allow them to fulfill these responsibilities without placing undue burden on system resources and capacity.

#### Policy Spotlight: Safe to Learn

One example of guidance for teachers at the global level is the “Safe to Learn” initiative led by 16 partners working to end violence in schools (including the Global Affairs Canada). The Safe to Learn [Call to Action](#) calls on countries to implement policies that protect children from all forms of violence in schools, including corporal punishment (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2023).

The initiative’s [Programmatic Framework](#) acts as a tool offering resources and guidance to support the implementation of this call to action. Specially, Benchmark 1.2 aims for “explicit prohibition of corporal punishment in schools, and policies are in place to support positive discipline and classroom management”. Some of the measures recommended by the framework to meet this benchmark include policies to equip teachers with positive disciplinary methods and non-violent classroom management techniques. Importantly, the framework notes that school-based policies and laws should be accompanied by preventive efforts to promote more positive social norms and equality to help make schools a safe space for all children to learn.

Finally, child welfare and child well-being organizations also play an important role in ensuring that legal reform does not cause additional harm to children and families. According to Durrant & Ensom (2006), “child welfare intervention should be proactive and educational, aimed at reducing the need for placing children in care and reducing the need for criminal prosecution of parents. To achieve this goal, child welfare services eligibility/intervention and investigative protocols must be reviewed and sufficiently resourced do facilitate early supportive and preventive services” (pg. 4).

### 10.3 Implications for Parents, Families and Communities

As discussed throughout this report, there are important implications of legal reform around corporal punishment for families from racial, ethnic or other marginalized communities in Canada that must be considered.

As noted in Section 4.3.2, past experiences have shown the potential negative effects of policies that contribute to racial and ethnic inequities. For example, the damaging effects of discriminatory policies in areas such as housing, child welfare and criminal justice can be seen in the disproportionately higher rates of family violence in Black and Indigenous populations, including greater risk of physical aggression towards children (McGuier et al., 2022). Therefore, researchers such as McGuier et al. (2022) note that preventing physical violence by parents requires several key

steps from a policy perspective: first, acknowledging the ongoing impacts of historical policies; next, advocating for the removal of inequitable policies and practices; and finally, committed investment in meeting the needs of members of these communities.

As discussed in Section 6.8, some scholars caution that the repeal of section 43 in Canada could lead to greater inequities and criminalization of parents from marginalized communities – especially given the disproportionate rate of surveillance and reporting of Black and Indigenous families to child welfare authorities (e.g. Havighurst, 2023). Therefore, alternative approaches to prevention and intervention in cases of corporal punishment in these communities are essential to prevent further discrimination and harm. Some examples of alternative strategies to avoid prosecution include: referring families to culturally appropriate community-based services (e.g. parenting supports); providing economic support to low-income families to reduce financial stress; efforts to promote awareness on the harms of corporal punishment; involving Black and Indigenous community leaders in educational efforts; and ensuring that mandated reporters and law enforcement officers are educated and informed in culturally appropriate response strategies (Antwi-Boasiako et al., 2020; 2021; Thomas & Dettlaff, 2011).

Besides policymakers, service providers must also be aware of their own biases and discrimination when working with children and families from marginalized communities. As discussed by researchers such as Antwi-Boasiako et al. (2021), child welfare workers need to understand the historical and current experiences of Black and Indigenous families and how these experiences might affect their beliefs and behaviour in order to address the root causes of behaviours that may place them at risk of child welfare involvement, such as corporal punishment. While a better understanding of the realities and experiences of people in these communities can help enhance the effectiveness of services, some researchers note that reaching an appropriate balance between ensuring child safety and maintaining parent's rights to raise their children in culturally sanctioned spaces will remain a complex and difficult task for child protective services (Adjei et al., 2017).

Another important consideration is the use of decision-making tools by child welfare workers to assess the level of risk of family violence or maltreatment. As mentioned in Section 6.8, existing tools in Ontario may not be accurate for Black and Indigenous families as they don't reflect cultural factors that can either enhance or reduce risk. Therefore, if corporal punishment is prohibited, some scholars suggest that new approaches to risk assessment may be needed, which can be developed through community engagement and co-design of tools that better account for culture (Antwi-Boasiako et al., 2021; Adjei et al., 2017).

## 11.0 Limitations and Future Research Needs

While experts now agree that the overall evidence is 'clear and compelling' that corporal punishment of children and youth poses significant risks to their development with no benefit (Durrant et al., 2004), there are still some remaining gaps within the literature which future research could help to address to further strengthen the evidence base around the issue, as discussed below.

### 11.1 Limitations of the Literature

As discussed in Section 4.2, one of the major challenges in understanding and addressing corporal punishment is the lack of clear distinction between physical punishment and physical abuse, which

is important when determining whether acts of physical force meet the legal criteria for what is considered ‘reasonable’ in the circumstances, and for making decisions in child welfare investigations. Perceptions of corporal punishment can also differ depending on the family, community, culture, and several other factors such as those discussed in Section 4.3, making it difficult to compare and interpret research on this issue.

Next, there are substantial challenges with conducting scientific research to study the effects of corporal punishment, as well as the impact of laws prohibiting corporal punishment. As noted by Durrant & Ensom (2016), there are few randomized controlled studies examining outcomes associated with physical punishment because it would be unethical to assign children to conditions in which they would be subject to potential harm. Similarly, countries cannot be randomly assigned to implement laws banning corporal punishment, making it difficult to rigorously evaluate such laws (Gershoff et al., 2017). As a result, much of the literature on the effects of corporal punishment is correlational in nature. While some scholars have critiqued existing research methods for this reason, other researchers argue that the literature does meet accepted criteria for establishing causal effects, as new methodological approaches have been designed to address some of the limitations of previous research (Carmel & Kutcher, 2024). For example, Durrant & Ensom (2016) discuss how research has evolved by developing prospective study designs with increasingly sophisticated statistical models to show the causal effects of physical punishment on various child outcomes. Gershoff (2024) also asserts that “rigorous statistical methods have been used that increase our confidence in the conclusion that physical punishment causes harm to children” (pg. 3). This includes evidence from propensity score matching studies; methods to control for potential confounding variables; experimental studies evaluating parenting interventions; and longitudinal studies evaluating pre-to post-policy changes.

Another limitation of the literature is that many studies rely on self-reports of attitudes, experiences, and behaviours related to corporal punishment, which may be subject to different forms of bias. For example, parents may under-report their use of physical punishment due to social desirability bias; or adults may inaccurately or selectively recall memories of their childhood experiences of corporal punishment (i.e., recall bias) (Gershoff et al., 2017; Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016). According to Gershoff et al. (2017), the perspectives and experiences of children themselves have largely been neglected from the literature thus far, as many studies have been conducted among samples of university students or parents.

## 11.2 Future Research

To overcome some of the limitations of the available literature, there is a need for more research to better understand the impacts of corporal punishment and to build the evidence base for interventions to prevent or reduce corporal punishment of children.

In particular, scholars have noted two principal areas in which there is still some disagreement in the literature – namely, the magnitude of the association between corporal punishment and negative child outcomes; and whether these outcomes are actually caused by corporal punishment (Carter-Davies & Bristow, 2018). Therefore, continuous research is needed to strengthen our understanding of how corporal punishment affects children and to clarify the exact magnitude of this relationship as well as to identify children at higher risk of harm (Locher-Lo, 2018). For example, while some studies have found differences in the effects of corporal punishment for boys and girls and for children of different age groups, the nature of any gender and age differences is still not well understood (e.g. Elgar et al., 2018).

As discussed in Section 4.3, there are also some conflicting findings around the role of parental factors, such as parents' own childhood histories (i.e. ACEs) on the likelihood of using corporal punishment against their own children; and the role of religion and culture. Given that parenting behaviours have such a significant impact on children's overall development and future behaviours, a better understanding of the reasons why parents use corporal punishment would be important for promoting more positive developmental trajectories.

Other specific areas for further research noted in the literature include:

- More **longitudinal studies** would help to establish the strength and direction of the long-term effects of corporal punishment (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016)
- More research on **culturally relevant approaches** and interventions to support Black, Indigenous and other racialized parents and families to care for their children in non-violent ways.
- Research to understand possible **neural mechanisms** underlying the association between corporal punishment as a form of violence and child outcomes. For example, according to Delaney et al. (2021), a better understanding of how the brain changes in response to specific types of violence could provide insights into appropriate interventions to help improve outcomes for children experiencing violence.
- Greater efforts to evaluate **parenting programs**, with a focus on their impact on parent-child aggression as an outcome. According to McGuier et al. (2022), many broad parenting programs have reported benefits in the literature, but there is limited evidence on interventions to reduce or prevent physical punishment specifically. Similarly, Ward et al. (2021) note that some findings from the literature show promise for promoting non-violent methods of parenting, but more rigorous research including randomized controlled trials is needed to establish evidence of effectiveness. Evaluation of key outcomes of interventions and other supports will be critical for their sustainability. More research on how positive discipline can be taught and applied in schools would also be valuable.
- The inclusion of more refined measures of respondents' **religious beliefs** in studies examining the role of parent's beliefs and attitudes on the use of corporal punishment. Several researchers have noted that religiosity is a multidimensional concept, and one that appears to have a distinct relationship with corporal punishment compared to religious affiliation (Pearce & Axinn, 1998; Grogan-Kaylor & Otis, 2006). However, detailed information on religion is often missing from study samples.
- Comprehensive **monitoring and evaluation** of the impact of legal bans on corporal punishment to mitigate unintended negative consequences and maximize benefits (McGuier et al., 2022). This should include monitoring of whether policies widen or narrow racial and ethnic inequities.

## 12.0 Summary and Conclusion

Overall, based on the available literature, most researchers and experts on the issue agree that a legal prohibition on corporal punishment against children in Canada would be supported from both an evidence-based approach and a child rights approach (Havighurst et al., 2023). From the first perspective, experts assert that the balance of evidence on the effects of corporal punishment on children clearly demonstrates its potential harms, with studies showing associations between corporal punishment and multiple adverse outcomes and no clear evidence showing benefits for

children's development or behaviour (e.g. Carter-Davies & Bristow, 2018). Moreover, the evidence does not support corporal punishment as being any more effective compared to alternative discipline methods. According to van Turnhout (2023), a full prohibition on corporal punishment would help change the narrative from one in which the child is assumed to be in the wrong and deserving of punishment by adults, to one in which an adult who uses corporal punishment is wrong and must be held accountable for their actions.

In sum, Canada's current allowance of the use of physical force against children under section 43 of the *Criminal Code* is in conflict with both the overall state of research evidence as well as with national and international recommendations and obligations. However, given the complexity of the issue and the challenges Canada has faced to date in reforming legislation around corporal punishment, it is necessary to consider additional strategies to ensure that future legal reform is both acceptable and effective across different cultural groups and communities. Many scholars argue for a multi-tiered, whole-of-government approach to change Canada's stance on corporal punishment, involving the following elements:

- Legislation to prohibit corporal punishment of children along with law enforcement approaches that include alternatives to prosecution;
- Public education campaigns to raise awareness of the harms of violence against children and the benefits of alternative discipline approaches;
- Accessible parenting supports, such as culturally appropriate parenting programs and community-based services; and
- Monitoring and evaluation of the impact of these strategies.

While attitudes and behaviours can be difficult to modify, especially in communities where corporal punishment is more socially acceptable, evidence from other jurisdictions shows that norms around corporal punishment can change following a policy change, provided the public is well informed of the reasons behind the change – highlighting the importance of educational efforts by the government. According to researchers like Durrant & Ensom (2017, pg. 23)– “Evidence is emerging that the combination of law reform and public education is more effective than either strategy alone in changing parental attitudes and behaviors.” In other words, legislative change will not be as effective without comprehensive and sustained public education and parenting support strategies; just as promoting positive discipline strategies without law reform is not sufficient to ensure that children have equal protection from physical punishment under the law (e.g. Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2009, pg. 26).

In addition, experts note that the messaging around corporal punishment should be clear and unambiguous; otherwise, the boundary between physical punishment and abuse will remain open to interpretation, causing continuing confusion for families and service providers. For example, rather than specifying conditions in which physical force against children is considered reasonable, as Canada's legislation currently does, a clearer message would be that physical punishment of any kind against children and youth of any age is not legally or socially acceptable (Durrant, 2024). As shown in this report, evidence from the literature also supports a comprehensive ban. For example, studies from Canada have demonstrated that the Supreme Court criteria for reasonable force fail to capture most cases of actual physical abuse of children (Durrant et al., 2017a); and international data suggests that bans in some settings but not others are associated with higher rates of violence among youth (Elgar et al., 2018).

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## Appendix A: Relevant Corporal Punishment Legislation Across Canada

"CP" = corporal punishment

\*The table indicates where current legislation in each province/territory specifies additional prohibitions on corporal punishment in various settings. Where additional legislation is not specified, the federal legislation applies.

Jurisdiction	Parents/Foster Care/Childcare	Teachers / Schools
<b>Canada (Federal)</b>	<p><i>Criminal Code, s43 → every schoolteacher, parent or person standing in the place of the parent is justified in using force by way of correction towards a pupil or child, as the case may be, who is under his care, if the force does not exceed what is reasonable under the circumstances</i></p> <p>As of 2004 (<i>Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and the Law v Canada</i> case), s43 is constitutionally valid, but with limitations:<sup>50</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'by way of correction' means intended for educative/corrective purposes, parents cannot be motivated by anger, frustration or abusive personality.</li> <li>• Against children between 2-12 means child must be capable of learning from correction.</li> <li>• 'reasonable under the circumstances' means only force that is transitory and trifling in nature is acceptable</li> <li>• No strikes to head are permitted.</li> <li>• Punishment cannot involve objects (rulers/belts).</li> <li>• Punishment cannot cause physical injury.</li> <li>• Punishment cannot be degrading, inhuman or harmful.</li> </ul>	<p>According to <i>Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and the Law v Canada (2004)</i> teachers are not permitted to use corporal punishment. However:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corrective force to remove children from classrooms or secure compliance with construction is acceptable (para 38).<sup>51</sup></li> <li>• S43 applies to protect teachers who use reasonable, corrective force to restrain/remove child in appropriate circumstances.</li> </ul>
<b>Alberta</b>	<p><i>Residential facilities licensing regulation (s9a)</i><sup>52</sup> → corporal punishment prohibited in foster care</p>	<p>No legal prohibition but policy in many school boards states corporal punishment should not be used</p>

<sup>50</sup>Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and the Law v. Canada (Attorney General), 2004 SCC 4 (CanLII), [2004] 1 SCR 76, at para 40, <<https://canlii.ca/t/1g990#par40>>

<sup>51</sup>Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and the Law v. Canada (Attorney General), 2004 SCC 4 (CanLII), [2004] 1 SCR 76, at para 38, <<https://canlii.ca/t/1g990#par38>>

<sup>52</sup> [Alta Reg 161/2004 | Residential Facilities Licensing Regulation | CanLII](#)



<b>British Columbia</b>	<i>Child, family, and community service act (s70(1)(e))</i> <sup>53</sup> → corporal punishment prohibited in foster care	<i>School Act 1996</i> <sup>54</sup> → corporal punishment is prohibited by law in state schools
<b>Manitoba</b>	<i>Foster homes licensing regulation, Manitoba regulation 18/99 (s20(a))</i> <sup>55</sup> → corporal punishment prohibited in foster care  <i>Child Care Regulation – community child care standards (s11(1))</i> <sup>56</sup> and <i>27(1)</i> <sup>57</sup> → license holder (caregiver) cannot permit, practice or inflict any form of physical punishment...to any child in attendance at the child care center	No legal prohibition but policy in many school boards states corporal punishment should not be used  - S96(1) of Public Schools Act detail duties of teacher, only mention to maintain order and discipline in the school, no mention of CP <sup>58</sup>
<b>New Brunswick</b>	<i>Early Childhood Services Act 2010 (s28.2(1))</i> → corporal punishment not permitted in early childhood services (daycare inclusive) <sup>59</sup>	<i>Schools Act 1990 (s70(2))</i> <sup>60</sup> → corporal punishment is prohibited by law in state schools
<b>Newfoundland</b>	<i>Child care regulations under child care act 2017 (20(d))</i> <sup>61</sup> → full prohibition of CP in child care service  <i>Children, Youth and Families Regulations 2019</i> <sup>62</sup> , under the <i>Children, Youth and Families Act</i> → licensees <sup>63</sup> may not use any form of discipline that uses aggressive or assaultive behaviours or that violates a child/youth's right to proper care, protection, safety or security	<i>Schools Act 1997 (s42)</i> <sup>64</sup> → corporal punishment is prohibited by law in state schools
<b>North West Territories</b>		<i>Northwest territories and Nunavut education act 1995 (s34(3))</i> <sup>65</sup> →

<sup>53</sup> Child, Family and Community Service Act, RSBC 1996, c 46, s 70, <<https://canlii.ca/t/84dv#sec70>>, retrieved on 2024-05-09

<sup>54</sup> School Act, RSBC 1996, c 412, s 76, <<https://canlii.ca/t/84c4#sec76>>, retrieved on 2024-05-09

<sup>55</sup> [Foster Homes Licensing Regulation, M.R. 18/99 \(gov.mb.ca\)](https://www.gov.mb.ca/child-care/child-care-regulations/child-care-regulations-18-99)

<sup>56</sup> Child Care Regulation, Man Reg 62/86, s 11, <<https://canlii.ca/t/8fpb#sec11>>

<sup>57</sup> Child Care Regulation, Man Reg 62/86, s 27, <<https://canlii.ca/t/8fpb#sec27>>

<sup>58</sup> The Public Schools Act, CCSM c P250, s 96, <<https://canlii.ca/t/8ghf#sec96>>

<sup>59</sup> Early Childhood Services Act, SNB 2010, c E-0.5, s 28.2, <<https://canlii.ca/t/8mzv#sec28.2>>

<sup>60</sup> Schools Act, SNB 1990, c S-5.1, <<https://canlii.ca/t/546j2>> retrieved on 2024-05-09

<sup>61</sup> [NLR 39/17 - Child Care Regulations under the Child Care Act \(assembly.nl.ca\)](https://www.assembly.nl.ca/legislation/2017/39/nlr-39-17)

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.canlii.org/en/nl/laws/regu/nlr-38-19/latest/nlr-38-19.html>

<sup>63</sup> Licensee is a person who holds an agency license, a family-based placement provider license, or a residential placement provider licence

<sup>64</sup> [SNL 1997 CHAPTER S-12.2 - SCHOOLS ACT, 1997 \(assembly.nl.ca\)](https://www.assembly.nl.ca/legislation/1997/12-2/snl-1997-chapter-s-12-2)

<sup>65</sup> An Act to Amend the Education Act, SNWT 2013, c 18, <https://canlii.ca/t/55v0g> (original = Education Act, SNWT 1995, c 28)

		corporal punishment is prohibited by law in state schools
<b>Nova Scotia</b>	<i>Early Learning and Child Care Act Regulations 19(1)(a)</i> → corporal punishment prohibited in day care <sup>66</sup>	<i>Education Act 1989</i> <sup>67</sup> → corporal punishment is prohibited by law in state schools  <a href="#">s.3(zg)(vii) (p.7)</a> <sup>68</sup> = definition of unacceptable behaviors includes 'physical violence'
<b>Nunavut</b>		<i>Nunavut Education Act (s72)</i> <sup>69</sup> → corporal punishment is prohibited by law in state schools
<b>Ontario</b>	<i>Child, Youth and Family Services Act (2017)</i> → no service provider/foster parent shall inflict corporal punishment on child/young person nor permit corporal punishment to be inflicted on child/young person in course of the provision of a service to them <sup>70</sup>  *Corporal punishment is prohibited in provincially licensed childcare programs and foster homes, and for all children receiving services from a child protection agency or other service provider licensed or approved by the province <sup>71</sup>	<i>Education Act 2009</i> <sup>72</sup> → corporal punishment is prohibited by law in state schools  Reg. 209/09, 2009 <sup>73</sup> → s23(1) amended to add that corporal punishment is not authorized and a pupil is not required to accept corporal punishment
<b>PEI</b>	<i>Early Learning and Child Care Act Regulations s15(1)(c<sup>74</sup>)</i> → physical punishment prohibited in child care centers	<i>Education Act (current to 2024) (s50(1))</i> <sup>75</sup> → corporal punishment is prohibited by law in state schools

<sup>66</sup> [https://novascotia.ca/coms/families/provider/ccmanual/A-Main\\_Regs\\_Section\\_.pdf](https://novascotia.ca/coms/families/provider/ccmanual/A-Main_Regs_Section_.pdf)

<sup>67</sup> <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Canada.pdf> pg.4

<sup>68</sup> Education Act, SNS 2018, c 1, Sch A, <https://canlii.ca/t/567gt>

<sup>69</sup> Education Act, SNU 2008, c 15, s72 <<https://canlii.ca/t/55vp4>>

<sup>70</sup> Child youth and family services act 2017, c. 14, Sched. 1, s. 3; 2018, c. 17, Sched. 34, s. 6 (1).

<sup>71</sup> Joint statement on physical punishment of children and youth [p.11](#)

<sup>72</sup> <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Canada.pdf>

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/r09206>

<sup>74</sup> [Early Learning and Child Care Act Regulations \(princeedwardisland.ca\)](#)

<sup>75</sup> [Education Act \(princeedwardisland.ca\)](#)

<b>Quebec</b>	Corporal punishment prohibited in foster care, not prohibited in daycare in Quebec <sup>76</sup>	<i>Education Act 1997</i> <sup>77</sup> → corporal punishment is prohibited by law in state schools <sup>78</sup>
<b>Saskatchewan</b>	CP prohibited for use in foster care <sup>79</sup>	<i>Education Act 2005 Amendment (to s.150 (added) s150(4))</i> <sup>80</sup> → corporal punishment is prohibited by law in state schools
<b>Yukon</b>	<i>Child and family services act 2008 (s88(1)(a))</i> <sup>81</sup> → corporal punishment prohibited in foster care	<i>Education Act 2002 (s36)</i> <sup>82</sup> → corporal punishment is prohibited by law in state schools

<sup>76</sup> <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Canada.pdf>

<sup>77</sup> [Country report \(endcorporalpunishment.org\)](https://endcorporalpunishment.org)

<sup>78</sup> Between 2012 and 2013 the provision saying codes of conduct may include disciplinary measures other than [corporal punishment was revised](#). The provision now includes physical violence as unacceptable behaviour

<sup>79</sup> Saskatchewan foster families association 3<sup>rd</sup> edition handbook p.16  
<https://www.sffa.sk.ca/files/pdfs/SFFA-Handbook-3rd-Edition-2021-09-28.pdf>

<sup>80</sup> [SS 1995, c E-0.2 | The Education Act, 1995 | CanLII](#)

<sup>81</sup> Child and Family Services Act, SY 2008, c 1, <<https://canlii.ca/t/55p6p>>

<sup>82</sup> Education Act, RSY 2002, c 61, <<https://canlii.ca/t/568k5>>

## Appendix B: Key Research Studies and Findings on the Impacts of Corporal Punishment

Citation	Study Design	Sources/ Inclusion Criteria	Aims	Outcomes Measured	Key Findings
Afifi, T. O., Mota, N. P., Dasiewicz, P., MacMillan, H. L., & Sareen, J. (2012). Physical punishment and mental disorders: Results from a nationally representative US sample. <i>Pediatrics (Evanston)</i> , 130(2), 184–192.	Representative survey data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Data were from the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions, collected between 2004 -2005</li> <li>- Representative US adult population sample (20+ years old)</li> </ul>	Aim of the study was to show the association between harsh physical punishment (in the absence of more severe child maltreatment) and mental disorders in adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- anxiety disorders</li> <li>- alcohol and drug abuse/dependence</li> <li>- several personality disorders</li> </ul>	Findings support position that harsh physical punishment independent of child maltreatment is related to mental disorders in a general population sample
Cuartas, J. (2021). Corporal punishment and early childhood development in 49 low- and middle-income countries. <i>Child Abuse &amp; Neglect</i> , 120, 105205–105205.	Pooled analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Data from 69 population-based surveys collected between 2009 and 2020 from the UNICEF Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (MICS) were combined, culminating representation from 49 countries.</li> <li>- Surveys concerned children aged 36-59 months.</li> </ul>	To assess the association between corporal punishment and young children’s development in low- and middle-income countries.	<p>Measured the association between corporal punishment and the odds of being developmentally on track on the ECDI subdomains:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social-emotional</li> <li>- Learning</li> <li>- Literacy/numeracy</li> <li>- Physical</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Found children exposed to corporal punishment were 24-38% less likely to be developmentally on track than children who were not exposed; with little variation across countries.</li> <li>- Corporal punishment was not associated with any positive developmental outcome in any country</li> <li>- All forms of CP were negatively associated with child developmental</li> </ul>

					<p>outcomes, with a stronger effect for harsher forms of CP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Challenges in social-emotional development may drive the association between child development and corporal punishment.</li> </ul>
<p>Cuartas, J. (2023). Corporal Punishment and Child Development in Low- and-Middle-Income Countries: Progress, Challenges, and Directions. <i>Child Psychiatry and Human Development</i>, 54(6), 1607–1623.</p>	<p>Rapid review</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review considered quantitative studies examining the association between exposure to corporal punishment and social-emotional and cognitive outcomes</li> <li>- Studies published between 2000 and October 2020</li> <li>- 42+ studies of children under 18 living in 64 LMICs included</li> </ul>	<p>To discuss main findings from the literature on the association between corporal punishment and child cognitive and social-emotional developmental outcomes in LMICs.</p> <p>To assess the strength of evidence, concerning issues of internal and external validity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social-emotional outcomes (i.e. executive function, regulatory skills and behaviours)</li> <li>- Cognitive development (i.e. sensorimotor skills, object relatedness, concept formation, memory, language, literacy, academic achievement)</li> </ul>	<p>Overall, the reviewed studies show associations between corporal punishment and negative cognitive and social-emotional outcomes. There is no evidence that corporal punishment may relate to any positive developmental outcome in LMICs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- However, issues of internal and external validity were common in the literature</li> </ul>
<p>Cuartas, J. (2024). Estimating the Association Between Spanking</p>	<p>Pooled analysis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Data from 4 longitudinal studies conducted in Bhutan, Cambodia,</li> </ul>	<p>To use more internally valid methods to assess the links between</p>	<p>Assessed developmental outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- numeracy skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Spanking relates to an array of negative cognitive, social-emotional and motor</li> </ul>

and Early Childhood Development Using Between- and Within-Child Analyses. <i>Psychology of Violence</i> , 14(2), 77-86.		<p>Ethiopia and Rwanda</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- focused on preschool-age children</li> </ul>	spanking and developmental outcomes in four low- and middle-income countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- literacy skills</li> <li>- social-emotional skills</li> <li>- motor skills</li> </ul>	<p>outcomes, with effect sizes ranging from -0.11 to -0.24.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Spanking was not related to any positive developmental outcome in any site.</li> </ul>
Ferguson, C. J. (2013). Spanking, corporal punishment and negative long-term outcomes: A meta-analytic review of longitudinal studies. <i>Clinical Psychology Review</i> , 33(1), 196-208.	Meta-analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Studies with longitudinal design; excluded studies focusing on severe child abuse</li> <li>- 45 studies (including 6 doctoral dissertations) met criteria, providing 111 effect sizes</li> </ul>	Aimed to address some gaps in the literature regarding the impact of spanking and corporal punishment on long-term outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Externalizing behavior</li> <li>- Internalizing behavior</li> <li>- Low cognitive performance</li> </ul>	<p>Effect sizes for negative outcomes were found to be trivial to small, but still statistically significant. No benefits of spanking were found.</p> <p>Conclusion: The impact of spanking and corporal punishment on long-term negative outcomes evaluated in this analysis were minimal.</p>
Gershoff, E. T. (2002). Corporal Punishment by Parents and Associated Child Behaviors and Experiences: A Meta-Analytic and Theoretical Review. <i>Psychological Bulletin</i> , 128(4), 539-579.	Meta-analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All articles that examined associations between parental corporal punishment and child outcomes through June 2001</li> <li>- 88 studies (including 8 dissertations) met criteria and were included in</li> </ul>	To synthesize current empirical evidence and theoretical explanations for associations between parental corporal punishment and 11 child behaviors and experiences	<p>Outcomes measured in childhood:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Immediate compliance</li> <li>- moral internalization</li> <li>- aggression,</li> <li>- delinquent and antisocial behavior,</li> <li>- quality of parent-child relationship</li> <li>- mental health</li> </ul>	<p>Effect sizes were found to be medium in size and consistent across studies.</p> <p>Largest effect sizes found for immediate compliance and physical abuse</p> <p>Parental corporal punishment is strongly associated with a range of child behaviors and experiences, including short term, long term,</p>

		analyses, for a total of 117 effect sizes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- victim of physical abuse</li> </ul> <p>Measured in adulthood:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- aggression</li> <li>- criminal and antisocial behavior</li> <li>- mental health</li> <li>- adult abuse of own child or spouse</li> </ul>	individual, relationship level, direct and indirect constructs.
Gershoff, E. T. (2010). More harm than good: a summary of scientific research on the intended and unintended effects of corporal punishment on children. <i>Law and Contemporary Problems</i> , 73(2), 31-56.	Literature review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Literature on 100s of research studies in the fields of psychology, medicine, sociology, social work and education.</li> <li>- Heavily relies on the results of two empirical meta-analyses.</li> </ul>	To summarize the current state of knowledge about intended and unintended effects of corporal punishment on children.	<p>Intended effects of CP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- short term compliance</li> <li>- long term compliance</li> <li>- reduced long-term aggressive and antisocial behavior</li> </ul> <p>Unintended effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- physical injury and abuse</li> <li>- mental health problems</li> <li>- eroded quality of parent-child relationship</li> <li>- reduced cognitive ability</li> <li>- increased adult aggressive and antisocial behavior</li> </ul>	<p>Two clear conclusions: 1) corporal punishment is no better than other forms of discipline at gaining child compliance. 2) CP is not predictive of any intended positive outcomes for children and is significantly predictive of a range of negative consequences</p> <p>The question of culture's role in placating the impacts of corporal punishment is not supported by the literature; negative outcomes associated with corporal punishment challenge</p>

					the notion that the practice is 'good' for children in cultures where it is normative.
Gershoff, E. T., & Grogan-Kaylor, A. (2016). Spanking and Child Outcomes: Old Controversies and New Meta-Analyses. <i>Journal of Family Psychology, 30</i> (4), 453-469	Meta-Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- sources published before June 1<sup>st</sup> 2014, that reported an association between parents' spanking and child outcomes of interest</li> <li>- 75 studies met criteria (39 of which had not been included in previous meta-analyses), providing 111 effect sizes</li> </ul>	<p>The aim of this study was to conduct a new set of meta-analysis to address the unresolved debates:</p> <p>whether spanking has been confounded with harsher forms of physical punishment in research, and whether or not spanking has only been linked with negative child outcomes in cross-sectional or methodologically weak studies.</p>	<p>Childhood outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Immediate defiance</li> <li>- Low moral internalization</li> <li>- Child aggression</li> <li>- Child antisocial behavior</li> <li>- Child externalizing behavior problems</li> <li>- Child internalizing behavior problems</li> <li>- Child mental health problems</li> <li>- Child alcohol or substance abuse</li> <li>- Negative parent-child relationship</li> <li>- Impaired cognitive ability</li> <li>- Low self-esteem</li> <li>- Low self-regulation</li> <li>- Victim of physical abuse</li> </ul> <p>Outcomes in adulthood:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adult antisocial behavior</li> <li>- Adult mental health problems</li> </ul>	<p>Spanking was found to be associated with increased risk of 13 out of 17 examined outcomes in both childhood and adulthood.</p> <p>No evidence that spanking is associated with improved child behavior; instead findings support the conclusion that spanking is associated with increased risk of detrimental outcomes.</p>



				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adult alcohol or substance abuse</li> <li>- Adult support for physical punishment</li> </ul>	
<p>Heekes, S.-L., Kruger, C. B., Lester, S. N., &amp; Ward, C. L. (2022). A Systematic Review of Corporal Punishment in Schools: Global Prevalence and Correlates. <i>Trauma, Violence, &amp; Abuse</i>, 23(1), 52–72.</p>	Systematic Review	<p>Searched for studies on school + corporal punishment</p> <p>Inclusion criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Peer reviewed</li> <li>- Published in English between 1980 and July 2017</li> <li>- Quantitative in design</li> </ul> <p>53 studies included</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All cross-sectional surveys</li> <li>- Majority in Americas (22 studies); 19 in African states, 4 in South East Asia, 3 in Eastern Mediterranean region and Western Pacific region, one study in Europe.</li> </ul>	To document what is known about the prevalence and correlates of school corporal punishment around the world, and to map this against whether a ban is in place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prevalence of school corporal punishment (CP)</li> <li>- Legal status of CP in schools</li> <li>- Consequences associated with CP (health and behavioural problems; academic performance)</li> <li>- Correlates that may function as risk or protective factors (individual level, home level, school level)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Corporal punishment in schools remained widespread, even where it was legally banned</li> <li>- CP is associated with serious deficits in children’s ability to learn, mental and physical health and the likelihood of their committing violent acts; which may continue into later life</li> <li>- Boys, minority students, lower SES, and those living in regions where corporal punishment is favored are at greater risk.</li> <li>- Teachers who have experienced or perpetrated other forms of violence are more likely to use CP</li> </ul>
<p>Heilmann, A., Mehay, A., Watt, R. G., Kelly, Y., Durrant, J. E., van Turnhout, J., &amp;</p>	Narrative review	<p>Inclusion criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Peer reviewed studies published</li> </ul>	Summarize findings of 69 prospective longitudinal studies to inform	<p>Outcomes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Externalizing behaviors</li> </ul>	<p>7 key themes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Physical punishment consistently predicts increases in child</li> </ol>

<p>Gershoff, E. T. (2021). Physical punishment and child outcomes: a narrative review of prospective studies. <i>The Lancet (British Edition)</i>, 398 (10297), 355–364.</p>		<p>from Jan 2002 onwards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assessed 1+ outcomes measured in childhood (up to 18 years old)</li> <li>- Measured physical punishment by a parent/ parental figure (not teachers)</li> <li>- Included only parent behaviors that fit operationalization of physical punishment</li> <li>- Reported empirical findings from quantitative prospective designs that adjusted for initial levels of outcomes under study</li> </ul>	<p>practitioners and policy makers about outcomes of physical punishment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internalizing behaviors</li> <li>- Total behavior problems</li> <li>- Pro-social behavior or social competence</li> <li>- Inattention or ADHD symptoms</li> <li>- Cognitive abilities</li> <li>- Interpersonal relationships</li> <li>- Stress reactivity</li> <li>- Involvement with CPS</li> </ul>	<p>behavior problems over time</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Physical punishment is not associated with positive outcomes over time</li> <li>3. Physical punishment increases the risk of involvement with CPS</li> <li>4. The only evidence of children eliciting physical punishment is for externalizing behaviors</li> <li>5. Physical punishment predicts worsening behavior over time in quasi-experimental studies</li> <li>6. Associations between physical punishment and detrimental child outcomes are robust across child and parent characteristics</li> <li>7. There is some evidence of a dose-response relationship</li> </ol> <p><b>Conclusion:</b> physical punishment is harmful to</p>
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					children and policy remedies are warranted.
Larzelere, R. E., & Kuhn, B. R. (2005). Comparing Child Outcomes of Physical Punishment and Alternative Disciplinary Tactics: A Meta-Analysis. <i>Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review</i> , 8(1), 1-37.	Meta-Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Research studies selected from two previous reviews - Gershoff (2002) and Larzelere (2000)</li> <li>- Total of 26 studies included</li> </ul> <p>Additional criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- study investigated 1+ recommended alternative disciplinary tactics as well as physical punishment</li> <li>- children had to average less than 13 years old at the time of discipline</li> </ul>	To reduce confounds in previous literature by analyzing differences in effect sizes between physical punishment and alternative discipline techniques	<p>Outcomes measured:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- compliance</li> <li>- antisocial behavior</li> <li>- conscience</li> <li>- mental health</li> <li>- positive behavior and affect</li> </ul>	<p>Effects of physical punishment depended on the type:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- conditional physical punishment was more strongly associated with reductions in noncompliance and antisocial behaviour compared to most alternative discipline methods</li> <li>- customary physical punishment was no better or worse than other methods</li> <li>- effect sizes favored alternative methods only in comparison with overly severe forms of physical punishment</li> </ul> <p>Conclusion: physical punishment does not enhance positive development, but may inhibit inappropriate behaviour. Most other forms of discipline had similar effects as physical punishment, except with overly severe physical</p>

					punishment, which was associated with worse outcomes
Pan, Q., Chen, S., & Qu, Y. (2024). Corporal punishment and violent behavior spectrum: a meta-analytic review. <i>Frontiers in Psychology, 15</i> , 1323784–1323784.	Meta-analysis	<p>Inclusion criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Studies published in English between 1950 and 2023</li> <li>- studies involved participants from general population (criminal offenders included)</li> <li>- empirical studies that report effect sizes</li> <li>- published articles, conference abstracts, unpublished dissertations eligible.</li> </ul> <p>35 studies included, with 144 effect sizes</p>	Aim is to respond to prior research's inconsistent findings on whether corporal punishment precedes various forms of violent behavior.	<p>Violent Behavior Spectrum (VBS) type categorized based on severity as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- anti-social behavior</li> <li>- aggressive behavior</li> <li>- violence</li> <li>- criminal behavior</li> </ul>	Overall effect size showed a small but significant positive relationship between corporal punishment and Violent Behavior Spectrum behaviors; punishment severity influenced the strength of the association.
Visser, L. N., van der Put, C. E., & Assink, M. (2022). The Association between School Corporal Punishment and	Meta-analysis	<p>Inclusion criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Published in English</li> <li>- Peer reviewed or (non-) governmental research report</li> </ul>	To synthesize previous primary studies on the associations between school corporal punishment (SCP)	<p>Outcomes of interest:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- internalizing behavior problems</li> <li>- externalizing behavior problems</li> </ul>	Significant positive association was found between SCP and internalizing and externalizing behaviour problems; significant negative association

<p>Child Developmental Outcomes: A Meta-Analytic Review. <i>Children (Basel)</i>, 9(3), 383.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Had to compare children exposed with those not exposed to school corporal punishment</li> <li>- Examine min 1 out of 3 outcomes of interest</li> <li>- Studies had to report at least one correlation/sufficient statistical information to calculate at min 1 correlation</li> <li>- Quantitative, with cross sectional or longitudinal design</li> </ul>	<p>and three developmental outcomes: internalizing problems, externalizing problems, and school performance.</p> <p>Also aimed to study how these associations are moderated by sample and study characteristics.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- school performance</li> </ul> <p>Also examined role of sample characteristics (e.g. sex, age) and study characteristics (e.g. study design)</p>	<p>found between SCP and school performance.</p> <p>Conclusion: School corporal punishment is a risk factor for externalizing behavior, internalizing behavior, and reduced school performance of children.</p>
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## Appendix C: Summary and Evaluations of Parenting Programs for Physical Punishment

\*See Table 3 in Section 7 of this report for description of each category (indicated, selective, universal).

\*\*Note: Information in this table is from Gershoff et al. (2018) except where noted.

Gershoff, E. T., Lee, S. J., & Durrant, J. E. (2017). Promising intervention strategies to reduce parents' use of physical punishment. *Child abuse & neglect*, 71, 9–23.

Name of Program	Country (if applicable)	Description of Program	Target Population	Evaluations/ Evidence of Effects
<b>Indicated Programs</b>				
<a href="#">Parent-child interaction Therapy (PCIT)</a>	Implemented and researched in 11 countries (4 continents)	PCIT involves individual parent coaching which aims to reduce negative parent-child interactions. Participation includes active discouragement of physical punishment, teaching age-appropriate and nonviolent discipline strategies and reinforcing behaviors or praising children's cooperative behavior.	Targeted towards parents involved in the child welfare system, originally designed for parents with children with behavioral problems.  PCIT is suitable for multiple settings, including child welfare and clinical setting.	Participation in PCIT has been associated with reduced repeated referrals to child protective services, along with demonstrated reductions in harsh parenting.
<a href="#">Incredible Years</a>	Has been implemented in several countries worldwide and different cultural groups	Group-based program focused on reducing disruptive and aggressive behavior in children. IY incorporates interventions at the child, parent and teacher levels. IY deploys a skill-building approach to promote positive parent-child interactions and limit parenting behaviors like physical punishment. IY teaches positive discipline practices, stress management, methods of strengthening children's prosocial and social skills and child-directed play.	Targeted towards parents involved in the child welfare system, originally designed for parents with children with behavioral problems. Suitable for multiple settings including child welfare and clinical settings.	IY is shown to reduce physical punishment and enhance parent-child interactions. This leads to reductions in behavioral problems.

<a href="#">Nurturing Parenting Program</a>	Internationally implemented, including USA, England, Australia, Germany, Mexico, New Zealand, Singapore, South Africa, and Canada	NPP is a family centered program (for parents with their infants and toddlers) intended to forge nurturing parenting skills, and therein prevent child neglect and abuse. The focus of NPP is strongly on modifying parental beliefs about, and use of physical punishment.	Targeted towards parents involved in the child welfare system, conducive to multiple settings, including child welfare and community based settings.	Participation shown to reduce parents' approval of physical punishment, which are encouraging findings considering parents' attitudes are a primary predictor of physical punishment.
<b>Selective Prevention Programs</b>				
<a href="#">Safe Environment for Every Kid (SEEK)</a>	Developed in the US; has been implemented and evaluated in Sweden, with pilot projects in other countries	Designed to support pediatricians in guiding parents away from physical punishment. SEEK screens parents for maltreatment risk factors, and those who are screened positive receive individualized intervention by a social worker who connects the family to appropriate social services.	Targeted towards parents with children under 5years old, suitable for pediatric primary care setting as it helps providers guide parents to deploy positive discipline and avoid physical punishment. Provides practical, evidence-based approach to help primary care professionals address targeted psychosocial risk factors for child maltreatment in families.	Demonstrated reductions in occurrence of physical punishment as well as child welfare involvement <sup>iiiiii</sup>  Research evidence also shows cost savings and benefits for primary care professionals. <sup>iv</sup>
<a href="#">Adults and Children Together Against Violence (ACT)</a>	Developed in the US by the APA; has been implemented in various countries throughout Latin	Educational program teaches parents about nonviolent discipline, child development, anger management and social problem-solving skills, with the specific focus of reducing physical punishment.	Targeted towards parents, irrespective of children's age, suitable for multiple community-based and school settings.	Demonstrated reductions in occurrence of physical punishment.

	America, Europe and Asia			
Chicago Parent Program	USA	12-session program facilitates parent groups that use video and homework assignments. These assignments translate the importance of praise and encouragement, routines, limit-setting, and problem solving.	Targeted towards low-income parents, irrespective of children's age, suitable for early childhood education settings.	Initial and subsequent RCT evaluation demonstrated reduced use of physical punishment <sup>v vi</sup>
<a href="#">Early Head Start &amp; Head Start</a>	United States	Free, federally funded programs to promote school readiness  EHS provides support for and education to parents through home visits and early childhood education for children.  Head Start provides quality preschool	EHS is targeted towards low-income pregnant women and families with infants and toddlers (up to age 3)  Head Start is targeted towards 3 and 4 year olds living in low-income families	RCT demonstrated reductions in occurrence of physical punishment for those in EHS group.  Head Start has been found to limit children's aggression over time and therein reduce the use of physical punishment at home.
<a href="#">Nurse-Family Partnership</a>	<a href="#">Implemented in 8 Countries:</a> United States, England, Australia, Canada, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Norway, Bulgaria	Program pairs expecting mothers with a public health nurse to receive ongoing home visitation throughout pregnancy, infancy, and until the child is 2 years old. The partnership aims to promote and teach positive health and development behaviors between a mother and her baby.	Targeted towards low-income mothers, suitable for home visitation settings.	Demonstrated reductions in physical punishment.



<a href="#">Healthy Families</a>	38 states within the USA	Home visiting program to support expectant families and new parents. It is designed to facilitate mother-child attachment and offers connections for families to other professionals to help mitigate the challenges of early family life.	Targeted towards low-income mothers irrespective of children's age, suitable for home visitation settings.	A study of Healthy Families New York showed reduction in physical punishment and increases in positive parenting skills.
<a href="#">Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV)</a>	USA (all 50 states)	Evidence-based home visiting program to improve health and well-being for young children and families and prevent harm to children. Programs promote positive parenting, maternal and child health, child development and school readiness.	Targeted towards families, at-risk pregnant women and parents of young children (up to kindergarten age) <sup>vii</sup> , framed for at home visit setting.	Many of the models identified as effective and shown to significantly reduce use of physical punishment. Other programs have little evidence of their effectiveness. <sup>viii</sup>
Cognitive Retraining (add-on to home visitation program)		Home visitors work to shift parents' causal appraisal for caregiving challenges and support problem solving solutions.  Aims to limit parents' misattributions for conflict with their children, simultaneously developing strong attributions of success to their own parenting efficacy.	Targeted towards low-income mothers irrespective of children's age, suitable for home visitation settings.	Strong demonstration of reductions in physical punishment and "harsh discipline".
<a href="#">Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting</a>	Implemented in 30+ countries	Group-based parenting program hosts an 8-week curriculum, aiming to shift parents response to their children's behaviour; by understanding the underlying cause of parent-child conflicts, teaching about children's rights and development, and coaching on implementation of non-punitive problem-solving strategies.	Targeted towards parents, irrespective of children's age, suitable for community agencies settings.  Also for future parents and those who support parents, such as educators and support workers.	Non-experimental studies demonstrate reductions in parents' approval of physical punishment.

Selective Prevention Approaches				
Motivational Interviewing	n/a	<p>Clinical technique to change parent attitudes and behaviours around corporal punishment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- allows clients to articulate their beliefs about change, including hesitations surrounding the potential benefits of physical punishment, while encouraging statements that communicate their motivation to change behavior.</li> </ul>	Targeted towards parents of children under five (5) years old. Can be used by professionals who work with parents.	One (1) quasi-experimental study demonstrated reductions in approval of and intentions to engage in physical punishment. <sup>ix</sup>
<a href="#">Baby Books Project</a>	USA	Incorporates effective parenting and child development information into baby books. The project incorporates messages that discourage physical punishment and encourage non-punitive behavioral management strategies.	Targeted towards low-income mothers, irrespective of children's age, suitable for psychoeducation settings.	RCT demonstrates reductions in approval of physical punishment. <sup>x</sup>
Brief Online Education	n/a	Various forms exist, including slide presentations or research summaries that can be read online. These intervention programs are easy to distribute and scale up to reach broad audiences. An example includes slides presented on rotation in a doctor's office waiting room.	Targeted towards parents and college students, suitable for online psychoeducation settings (technology supported program), also in pediatric primary care	Multiple experimental/quasi-experimental studies with parents and college students have demonstrated reductions in approval of physical punishment.
<a href="#">Play Nicely</a>	Available online for free (widely accessible), originated in USA	Brief interactive media intervention delivered to parents through a computer in primary care settings. The program illustrates common parent-child conflict scenarios and encourages parents to select the best response from various options, encouraging discussions about healthy discipline strategies.	Targeted towards parents of children under five (5) years old, suitable for pediatric primary care settings.	Demonstrated reductions in approval, endorsement and intention to engage in physical punishment.

Video Interaction Project <sup>83</sup>	USA	Video-based intervention where parents are videotaped interacting with their children, after which the video is reviewed by a trained interventionist with the parent to identify positive and responsive parent behaviors. No specific focus is placed on physical punishment.	Targeted towards parents of children under five (5) years old, suitable for pediatric primary care settings.	Evaluation <sup>xi</sup> found parents reported less frequent use of physical punishment when part of the group with the video interaction compared to those who received handouts with developmental information or regular pediatric care.
Education for medical professionals	n/a	Aimed at reducing professional approval for the use of physical punishment on youth, and increasing likelihood they will discourage it among patients. Programs include presentations of research on physical punishment and alternate response/resolution pathways, and presentations on the risks associated with physical punishment.	Targeted towards nurses and medical residents, suitable for medical and health care settings.	Demonstrated reductions in approval of physical punishment.
<b>Universal Prevention Approaches</b>				
Public education campaigns	N/a	Brief public messaging campaigns to discourage physical punishment and encourage replacement behaviors. These include video/audio service announcements on radio, TV and the internet, written billboards and posters, or direct mailings.	Targeted towards the general public, suitable for community based programming.	A pre/post evaluation of an educational campaign in Canada found increased knowledge of the harms linked to physical punishment, but no change in prevalence of physical punishment. <sup>xii</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Now known as PlayReadVIP (<https://www.playreadvip.org/>)

Research summaries	n/a	Aim is to summarize research on physical punishment for non-researchers (i.e. general public/professionals working with children/family). Function of the document is to disseminate research findings, promote awareness and discussion at organizations' executive levels, and make visible the extent of professional consensus on the issue.	Targeted towards professionals, suitable for online program settings.	Two (2) major research reviews have been widely cited and have received 100s of endorsements from professional and community organizations.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In Canada: <i>Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth</i></li> <li>- In US: <i>Report on Physical Punishment in the United States: What Research Tells Us About Its Effects on Children</i></li> </ul>
Bans on physical punishment	International	Legal prohibitions on the use of physical punishment with associated punishment and repercussions.	Targeted towards the general public.	Correlational and pre-/post-ban studies demonstrated decreases in approval of physical punishment and incidence of physical punishment.
<a href="#">No Hit Zones</a>	Originated in Ohio, now dispersed throughout the US	Program aims to alter the broader context in which physical punishment takes place by clearly demarcating areas as "no hit zones". The goal is to create environments that change the norms of physical punishment, promote effective parenting techniques, and train staff in intervention and de-escalation skills when witnessing incidents of physical	Targeted towards the general public to promote effective parenting techniques and train staff to intervene and deescalate situations when witnessing forms of physical violence. NHZ	Various studies identify NHZ's success. Specifically, staff with an intervention strategy and a brief education on the harms of spanking are more likely to

		<p>violence. The program offers various strategies to influence attitudes, norms and behaviors, like staff training, signage and outreach activities.</p>	<p>is suitable for homes, schools, hospitals, religious institutions and communities, and requires organizations to develop policies and procedures surrounding physical punishment in accordance with this framework.</p>	<p>intervene when witnessing physical violence against children.<sup>xiii</sup> Studies have also found NHZ's were effective in changing discipline attitudes among both parents and staff.</p>
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<sup>i</sup> McGuier, E. A., Kolko, D. J., & Dubowitz, H. (2022). Public policy and parent-child aggression: Considerations for reducing and preventing physical punishment and abuse. *Aggression and violent behavior*, 65, 101635. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2021.101635>

<sup>ii</sup> Dubowitz H, Feigelman S, Lane W, & Kim J (2009). Pediatric primary care to help prevent child maltreatment: The Safe Environment for Every Kid (SEEK) model. *Pediatrics*, 123(3), 858–864. 10.1542/peds.2008-1376 [PubMed: 19255014]

<sup>iii</sup> Dubowitz H, Lane WG, Semiatin JN, & Magder LS (2012). The SEEK model of pediatric primary care: Can child maltreatment be prevented in a low-risk population? *Academic Pediatrics*, 12(4), 259–268. 10.1016/j.acap.2012.03.005 [PubMed: 22658954]

<sup>iv</sup> [Research Evidence – SEEK \(seekwellbeing.org\)](#)

<sup>v</sup> Gross, D., Garvey, C., Julion, W., Fogg, L., Tucker, S., & Mokros, H. (2009). Efficacy of the Chicago parent program with low-income African American and Latino parents of young children. *Prevention science : the official journal of the Society for Prevention Research*, 10(1), 54–65.

<sup>vi</sup> Breitenstein, S. M., Gross, D., Fogg, L., Ridge, A., Garvey, C., Julion, W., & Tucker, S. (2012). The Chicago Parent Program: comparing 1-year outcomes for African American and Latino parents of young children. *Research in nursing & health*, 35(5), 475–489.

<sup>vii</sup> The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (2023). Program Brief. <https://mchb.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/mchb/about-us/program-brief.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> McGuier, E. A., Kolko, D. J., & Dubowitz, H. (2022). Public policy and parent-child aggression: Considerations for reducing and preventing physical punishment and abuse. *Aggression and violent behavior*, 65, 101635. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2021.101635>

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<sup>x</sup> Reich, S. M., Penner, E. K., Duncan, G. J., & Auger, A. (2012). Using baby books to change new mothers' attitudes about corporal punishment. *Child abuse & neglect*, 36(2), 108–117.

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<sup>xii</sup> McKeown D. Toronto: City of Toronto: 2006. Early Child Development Family Abuse Prevention Project Actions to Prevent Physical Punishment of Children: Staff Report. Retrieved from: <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2006/agendas/committees/hl/hl060410/it003.pdf>.

<sup>xiii</sup> Gershoff, E. T., Font, S. A., Taylor, C. A., Garza, A. B., Olson-Dorff, D., & Foster, R. H. (2018). A Short-Term Evaluation of a Hospital No Hit Zone Policy to Increase Bystander Intervention in Cases of Parent-to-Child Violence. *Children and youth services review*, 94, 155–162.