

Corporal Punishment and Physical Discipline in the Caribbean: Human rights and cultural practices

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Abstract

For several decades, social scientists have pointed to family violence as a significant predictor of interpersonal violence and violent crime (Pinheiro, 2006a, 2006b). Nonetheless, young children's exposure to and experience of violence within their families is widespread in many regions, including the Caribbean. This review aims to document the effects of corporal punishment, to review its prevalence in the Caribbean region through a sociocultural lens, to suggest associations between corporal punishment and past and current interpersonal violence, and to discuss obstacles and signs of change regarding the adoption of child rights throughout the region. The literature reviewed includes prevalence of corporal punishment, effects of corporal punishment, corporal punishment and subsequent violence, Caribbean studies, international studies, and recommendations for prevention and health promotion to reduce ineffective and harmful discipline practices. Results of the review indicate gaps between what is known about corporal punishment and how people behave, including signs of emerging ambivalence in the region. In addition to arguments based on international child rights and the effects of corporal punishment on child health outcomes, arguments for abolishing corporal punishment can also be based on the Caribbean's history and cultural legacy of liberation. We conclude that corporal punishment is family violence and a precursor to social violence in the Caribbean. An interdisciplinary approach to public education, evidence-based strategies for reducing poor child outcomes, and the adoption of a human rights perspective on corporal punishment is needed.

Key words: Corporal Punishment, Physical Discipline, Caribbean, Culture, Child Rights, Human Rights

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