

ATTITUDES TOWARDS CORPORAL PUNISHMENT IN SERBIAN PARENTS OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN WITH AND WITHOUT SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DISORDERS

ABSTRACT

Corporal punishment (CP) is not yet legally regulated in Serbia, and it hasn't been a very researched topic, especially in vulnerable families who have children with speech and language disorders (SLD). As worldwide research indicates that children with various developmental disorders are at a higher risk for CP, we hypothesized that parents of children with SLD would have a more positive attitude towards this discipline method compared to parents of typically developing children. Participants were 290 parents (67% female), divided into two groups: parents of children with speech and language disorders (SLDP) and parents of typically developing children (TDP). Two parental groups were matched in terms

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of age, level of education and the number of children. Parents filled out a questionnaire designed to assess their socio-demographic data, experiences with CP during their own childhood, attitude towards CP and beliefs about the necessity of banning CP. The attitude towards CP is slightly more positive in the SLDP. Socio-demographic factors are related to the attitude towards CP, but only within the TDP. Parents who experienced more frequent CP during their own childhood have more positive attitudes towards CP. Less than 50% of parents believe that CP should be prohibited.

INTRODUCTION

Corporal punishment (CP) represents one of the methods parents use to discipline their children. CP is performed to correct or control the child's behavior by inflicting pain but not injuring the child (Straus and Paschall, 2009) and refers to hitting a child's body, most often the buttocks or cheeks (Gershoff, 2002). Parents who use CP see this method as exercising their rights and a good way of using discipline (Karaj, 2009) and they often point out its rapid effectiveness – CP most often stops undesirable activity immediately (Gershoff, 2002).

Although many parents may find it difficult to discipline their children, it can be especially challenging when parenting requires extra time and effort (Brobst, Clopton and Hendrick, 2008). Namely, worldwide research speaks in favor that children with various developmental and physical disabilities are at a greater risk for CP. A number of studies showed that, for example, children with hearing impairment (Knutson, Johnson and Sullivan, 2004), ADHD (Alizadeh, Applequist and Coolidge, 2007), autism spectrum disorders (Kimura and Yamazaki, 2015), intellectual disabilities (Okyere, Aldersey and Lysaght, 2019) or behaviour disorders (Keller and Fox, 2009) get punished more, and younger children get corporally punished more than older children (Kimura and Yamazaki, 2015; Straus and Paschall, 2009).

However, even though they are the most common developmental problems in preschool age (Dockrell, 2001.) and they represent one of the main reasons why parents turn to pediatricians (Harel et al., 1996), there is no research aimed specifically at examining the relationship between CP and speech and language disorders (in further text: SLD). SLD are based on difficulties with comprehension and/or speech production and can occur within specific language impairment, autism spectrum disorders, mixed specific developmental disorders, and other various physical disabilities (ICD-10, 2010).

Although insufficiently examined, the link between speech and language (impairments) and CP seems significant. Namely, some parents state that it is more appropriate to hit a small child, because it does not understand the words, and cannot

comprehend a verbal explanation (Karaj, 2009). Also, in a sample of children with autism spectrum disorders, it has been shown that the age when the child started to speak was associated with severe child maltreatment (Duan et al., 2015), which implies that the lack of speech and communication can lead to harsh discipline. On the other hand, some studies show that adults expect more from children with disorders that are not clearly visible (such as SLD) than from children in whom the disorder is obvious (eg. physical disability), which can lead to higher expectations than it is developmentally appropriate (Westby, 2007). So, we could assume that children who do not understand words and those who don't speak could be at greater risk.

Furthermore, Milner's Social Information Processing (SIP) framework (1993., 2000.) could explain how parents' pre-existing beliefs and values influence their perceptions and responses to their children. These cognitive schemas act as filters across three key stages: first, in interpreting and understanding their children's behaviors and signals; second, in evaluating these behaviors, often with biased or negative attributions; and third, in selecting and implementing responses, influenced by their limited repertoire of parenting strategies. Research consistently demonstrates that parents with entrenched biases are more likely to misinterpret their children's actions and hold unrealistic expectations regarding child development (e.g., Haskett et al., 2006.; McElroy and Rodriguez, 2008.). For example, they may attribute negative intentions to their children's behavior (Azar, Stevenson and Johnson et al., 2012., Azar et al., 2017.) or expect compliance in situations where it may not be developmentally appropriate (Rodriguez, Smith and Silvia, 2016). This misalignment between parental expectations and children's capabilities can strain parent-child relationships and hinder children's emotional and social development. Biased parents often demonstrate deficits in problem-solving skills and may resort to ineffective or harmful parenting techniques due to their limited understanding of child development and appropriate caregiving responses. This can perpetuate cycles of maladaptive parenting and increase the risk of adverse outcomes for children.

When it comes to socio-demographic factors that contribute to the use of CP, previous studies on the general population indicate that CP is used more by mothers (Kim et al., 2014.; Sanapo and Nakamura, 2011), single parents (Mahoney et al., 2000), younger parents (Kimura and Yamazaki, 2015), parents with lower education (UNICEF, 2010), as well as those who have more children (Heilmann, Kelly and Watt, 2015). Parents who express a positive attitude towards CP (Marisavljević, Srna and Tenjović, 2018), as well as those who have been corporally punished during their own childhood (Marisavljević, Srna and Tenjović, 2018; Smojver-Ažić and Jakovčić, 2006), are also more likely to use CP in disciplining their children. We found no research data concerning the relationship between socio-demographic and individual factors within the population of parents of children with SLD.

Even though Serbia ratified the United Nations convention, and has undertaken to ban the CP of children (The Civil Law of the Republic of Serbia, 2015.), CP is not legally regulated yet and research on this topic in our country is scant, or is limited to the general population. Also, despite the mentioned provisions and parental beliefs that CP is not a necessary child discipline method (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF, 2014), as much as 55% of Serbian parents report that they have used CP at least a few times in their child's lifetime (UNICEF, 2010). However, we found no data on vulnerable populations of children and their families.

STUDY PURPOSE, AIMS AND HYPOTHESES

Although the relationship between CP and developmental disorders has been somewhat researched in previous papers, no study in Serbia has been conducted so far to confirm or dispute the mentioned findings, so there is no data on which clinicians in our country could rely on when working with these vulnerable families.

The results of a study conducted in the Balkan countries, specifically in Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, report high percentages of children who screened positive for cognitive, language, sensory, and motor disabilities (Bornstein and Hendricks, 2013.). Meanwhile, data from Croatia reveal that the predominant reasons for child hospitalization include specific mixed developmental disorders, specific developmental disorders of speech and language, and pervasive developmental disorders (Croatian Institute of Public Health, 2022.).

Considering that all of the mentioned conditions include speech and language problems and that the correlation between SLD and CP seems significant, this was the reason for choosing specifically these conditions in our research.

In order to fill in the literature gaps, we decided to conduct the following study, which aimed to examine the attitudes towards CP of parents of children with SLD and to compare them to the attitudes of parents of typically developing children. Based on previous global research indicating that children with SLD face more frequent punishment (Kimura and Yamazaki, 2015; Okyere, Aldersey and Lysaght, 2019), we hypothesize that parents of children with SLD will exhibit more positive attitudes toward CP compared to parents of typically developing children (H1). Also, our study aimed to examine the relationship between parental attitude towards CP and certain socio-demographic characteristics, as well as parental experiences in this discipline method during their own childhood. Based on previous studies in the general population indicating that CP is more commonly used by mothers (Kim et al., 2014; Sanapo and Nakamura, 2011), younger parents (Kimura and Yamazaki, 2015), parents with lower education levels (UNICEF, 2010), and those who have more

children (Heilmann, Kelly, and Watt, 2015), we hypothesize that similar patterns will be observed in our study. Specifically, we expect that more positive attitudes towards CP will be reported by mothers, younger parents, individuals with lower education, and those who have more children (H2). Building on previous research indicating that individuals who experienced corporal punishment during their own childhood are more inclined to use it with their own children (Marisavljević, Srna and Tenjović, 2018; Smojver-Ažić and Jakovčić, 2006), we hypothesize that parents who were corporally punished more frequently during their own childhood will hold more positive attitudes towards CP (H3). Lastly, as the legislation on CP in our country has yet to follow, we wanted to examine the parental opinions on banning CP. Given the absence of existing laws and previous research on this topic in our country, this question is exploratory in nature.

METHODOLOGY

In order to examine the main questions of the research, we used a comparison study of a population-based sample and a clinical sample of parents, which is described in detail in the following section.

Participants and procedure

This research employed a cross-sectional design with a convenience sample, utilizing the paper-pencil method for data collection. Two hundred and ninety respondents, parents of preschool children, participated in our study. Participants were divided into two groups.

The first group consisted of parents of preschool children with speech and language disorders (SLDP in further text) ($N = 97$). Parental age ranged from 21 to 47 years ($M = 34.95$, $SD = 5.28$). Most of these parents were married or cohabitating (97%) and had two children (54%). More than half of the respondents had university or postgraduate education (57%). These parents were recruited within the Institute for Experimental Phonetics and Speech Pathology "Đorđe Kostić" (IEPSP), in Belgrade, Serbia, where their children obtained speech and language therapy. The inclusion criterion in this parental group was the presence of some form of SLD in children, which was determined by data obtained from previous medical documentation and psychiatric assessment. Children were diagnosed with Specific language impairment (SLI), Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and Mixed specific developmental disorders (MSDD), prior to the initiation of treatment within IEPSP. The speech and language assessment and psychological assessment performed by experts employed within

IEPSP confirmed that children's speech and language test results were below average on a wide range of tests used in Serbian clinical practice. Parents were given the questionnaire by IEPSP employees, and they completed it while their children were receiving therapy at the IEPSP. They were assured that their decision (not) to participate would not affect their children's treatment in any way.

The second, control group consisted of parents of typically developing children (TDP in further text) (N = 193). TDPs were recruited within several preschool institutions in the territory of Belgrade, Novi Sad and the municipality of Alibunar, Serbia. Parents were recruited to the control group if they had typically developing children, from which at least one was at preschool age. These parents didn't report any physical or developmental disorders in their children and their children never have had any diagnosis of intellectual, developmental or physical disability. Parents were given the questionnaire by kindergarten teachers, and these were later collected by IEPSP employees.

Mothers and fathers were sampled independently, not as married couples – only one parent completed the questionnaire for each child. The respondents' characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Statistical comparisons indicated non-existent significant differences between the SLDP and the TDP in terms of parental gender ($p > .05$), parental age ($p > .05$), number of children ($p > .05$) and level of education ($p > .05$).

We conducted the study in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and it complied with APA ethical standards. Ethical approval was obtained from the IEPSP's ethics committee prior to data collection, which reviewed and approved the conduction of our study. Parents completed the questionnaire voluntarily and gave written consent. Parents did not receive any payment for participating in the study. The purpose of the research was briefly explained to all respondents and they were given instructions on how to use the questionnaire. Confidentiality of data was guaranteed.

Table 1. Participants' socio-demographic and background characteristics

Variable	TDP N (%)	SLDP N (%)
Parental gender		
Male	59 (31%)	36 (37%)
Female	134 (69%)	61 (63%)
Level of education		
High school graduate	88 (46%)	42 (43%)
University degree/postgraduate	105 (54%)	55 (57%)
Marital status		
Married/Cohabiting	178 (92%)	94 (97%)
Divorced	15 (8%)	3 (3%)
Number of children		
One	55 (29%)	32 (33%)
Two	118 (61%)	52 (54%)
Three	20 (10%)	9 (9%)
Experiences in corporal punishment		
Never	48 (25%)	15 (15%)
Rarely	106 (55%)	58 (60%)
A few times a month	20 (10%)	16 (16%)
A few times a week	10 (5%)	4 (4%)
Almost every day	9 (5%)	1 (1%)

Note. TDP - parents of typically developing children; SLDP - parents of children with speech and language disorders.

Instruments

Attitudes towards corporal punishment of children were measured by a revised questionnaire which represented a translated and adapted version of Holden's questionnaire Attitudes toward spanking-ATS (Holden, Coleman and Schmidt, 1995.), developed for the purposes of this study. Namely, as the subject of the research was the broader concept of corporal punishment, and not just "spanking" (which refers to hitting a child with the hand on the buttocks), in the questionnaire the word "spanking" was replaced by the phrase "corporal punishment". The questionnaire is consisted of 10 items. It measures attitudes toward corporal punishment on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Parents were asked to determine the extent to which they agreed

with certain statements on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 - "strongly disagree" and 5 - "completely agree"). Three items should be reverse-coded. One summary score can be obtained after computing each of the items. Scores range from 10-50. Higher scores reflect a more positive attitude toward corporal punishment. The ATS is correlated with parents' actual use of physical punishment (Chavis et al., 2013.). Parents with higher scores are more likely to use physical punishment to discipline their children (Chavis et al., 2013.). In the questionnaire author's study, median Cronbach's alphas ranged from .89 to .91 for five independent samples of parents, and test-retest correlations over a 3-week period averaged .76 for a sample of 20 mothers (Holden, 2001.). Validity was assessed through the correlation of subjects' scores with their reported weekly rates of spanking ($r = .73$) (Holden, 2001.). The reliability of the questionnaire used in our study was high ($\alpha = .90$).

Respondents were asked to report on different socio-demographic data, for the following variables: gender (male/female), age (number of years), level of education (primary education, high school graduate, university graduate, postgraduate education), marital status (married, cohabitating, divorced, widowed), as well as the number of children (number of children).

To examine the experiences of corporal punishment, parents were asked to determine the frequency of corporal punishment during their own childhood, by opting for one number from 1-5 (1 - "Never", 2 - "Rarely", 3 - "A few times a month", 4 - "A few times a week", 5 - "Almost every day"). The described scale was developed for the purposes of this study.

To examine the beliefs on the necessity of banning corporal punishment, parents were offered a five-point Likert-type scale. Respondents were asked to determine the degree of agreement with the statement "Physical punishment of children should be prohibited", by opting for a number in the range from 1-5, where 1 referred to "I do not agree at all" and 5 referred to "I completely agree".

Statistical methods

To analyze and describe the sample, we used descriptive statistical methods. One-way ANOVA was used to determine differences in attitudes toward corporal punishment between the SLDP and TDP group, between parents with different levels of education, and to explore the relationship between parental attitudes towards corporal punishment and their experiences in corporal punishment.

A two-way ANOVA was used to examine the interaction effects between parental gender and parental group, as well as parental experiences in corporal punishment and parental group, on their attitudes towards corporal punishment. Pearson's

correlation test was used to examine the relationship between parental attitudes towards corporal punishment and parental age, as well as a number of children. Data was analyzed using the SPSS package.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Differences in attitudes towards physical punishment between parents of children with speech and language disorders and parents of typically developing children

In order to determine whether parents of children with speech and language disorders differ from parents of typically developing children in terms of attitudes towards corporal punishment, we used one-way ANOVA. Results indicate that there was a significant difference in attitudes toward corporal punishment between the two parental groups, with relatively small size effects ($F_{(1,288)} = 6.452, p = .012, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .02$). The obtained results suggest that the parental group variable explains only a small proportion of the variance. The average score on the attitude towards corporal punishment questionnaire for parents of typically developing children ($M = 22.34, SD = 8.84$) was lower than the average score for parents of children with speech and language disorders ($M = 25.07, SD = 8.27$).

Previous studies have largely examined the use of corporal punishment (eg. Kimura & Yamazaki, 2015), but not the attitude itself. However, when we take into account that attitude towards corporal punishment is a good predictor of its use (Chavis et al., 2013; Marisavljević, Srna and Tenjović, 2018), we can assume that parents of children with speech and language disorders are therefore more likely to also use this discipline method. The obtained results can be explained by the interaction and cumulative effect of several factors. Namely, the usual parenting styles, skills and approaches that appear to be adequate for children of typical development can often prove to be ineffective. In that sense, raising a child with a developmental disorder can be a significant challenge for mothers and fathers. The ability of parents to establish significant two-way communication with their children has great emotional and practical significance for them, and its absence can be a source of great distress, sadness and frustration (Snow, 2009). Cumulative experiences of stress can affect parental mental health (Whitehead, Dorstyn and Ward, 2015) and their perceptions of parenthood, which could lead to a reduced sense of competence (Preece and Almond, 2008). Furthermore, numerous studies show that reduced self-efficacy, lower self-confidence and parental stress can lead to misinterpretation of the child's

intentions, or lead to evaluating undesirable behavior much more seriously than they would otherwise, which increases the chances of using corporal punishment (Kim et al., 2014.; Knox et al., 2015; Milner, 1993, 2000). Therefore, it is not surprising that children who are called “difficult to raise” are most at risk of being physically punished (Kimura and Yamazaki, 2015). Furthermore, preschool age is associated with a higher chance of corporal punishment (Kimura and Yamazaki, 2015; Straus and Paschall, 2009). When taken together, the combination of children’s younger age and lack of verbal two-way communication probably leads to considering corporal punishment as a good discipline method. However, as parental scores differ only by a few points, and that obtained significant differences have relatively small effect sizes (implying that only a small proportion of the variance in parental attitudes toward corporal punishment can be explained by the parental group variable), we could conclude that our population of parents in general has a moderately positive attitude towards corporal punishment. Having a child with a developmental disorder probably just slightly contributes to parental attitude towards corporal punishment. Such findings could be explained by the fact that beliefs about corporal punishment are deeply ingrained in our culture and tradition and that corporal punishment represents a generally accepted discipline method. One could get the impression that physical punishment represents a common practice that persists over generations in our culture. For example, in the Serbian language, there are sayings such as “He who is not beaten is not taught”, which implies the importance of physical punishment while praising a child gives unwanted results, ie. it spoils children - “He who brags about the child, spoils the child” (Srna and Stevanović, 2010). The full implementation of the Child’s Rights Convention involves not only legal but also social and moral actions with which Serbia still struggles because of many obstacles imposed by the dominant social discourse (Šahović and Savić, 2016).

Relationship between socio-demographic factors and parental attitudes towards corporal punishment

In order to determine whether attitude towards corporal punishment differs when we take into account parental gender, two-way ANOVA was used. It revealed no significant parental group x parental gender interaction for parental attitudes towards corporal punishment ($p > .05$). However, there was a significant main effect for the parental group ($F_{(1,286)} = 7.02, p = .009, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .02$), but not for parental gender ($p > .05$). Once more, the relatively small effect sizes suggest that only a small proportion of the variance in parental attitudes toward corporal punishment can be explained by the parental group variable. No statistically significant differences were

obtained in attitudes towards corporal punishment between mothers and fathers, neither within the TDP group nor the SLDP group. Our results are in accordance with previous studies which indicate that there are small to non-existent differences in attitudes towards corporal punishment between mothers and fathers (f.e. Rajter, Trbus and Pećnik, 2016). The lack of gender differences in attitudes towards corporal punishment further contributes to the hypothesis that beliefs about corporal punishment are deeply ingrained in our culture and tradition and that corporal punishment represents a generally accepted discipline method. Also, this finding implies that campaigns targeted at changing attitudes towards corporal punishment should be equally directed towards men and women. On the other hand, as previous research was mainly focused on the use of corporal punishment, and indicated that mothers use it more (Kim et al., 2014; Sanapo and Nakamura, 2011), we could assume that the parental gender has no effect on the attitudes themselves, but that it potentially affects its application in upbringing. Namely, the simplest explanation may be that mothers probably do not differ from fathers in attitudes towards corporal punishment, but they simply spend more time with their children and are more often put into situations in which they need to discipline their children (Ulman and Strauss, 2000).

Furthermore, we wanted to determine the relationship between parental age and their attitudes towards corporal punishment. Pearson's correlation test indicates that the attitude towards corporal punishment is more positive in younger parents ($r = -.156$, $p = .030$), but only within the TDP group. Similar results were not found within the SLDP group ($p > .05$).

Pearson's correlation test was also used to determine the relationship between parental attitudes towards corporal punishment and the number of children. Results indicate that TDP with more children have more positive attitudes towards corporal punishment ($r = .143$, $p = .048$). On the other hand, a number of children does not correlate with attitudes towards corporal punishment in the SLDP group ($p > .05$).

As previous studies indicated that younger parents (Kimura and Yamazaki, 2015) and those with more children in the family (Heilmann, Kelly and Watt, 2015) apply more corporal punishment, we could say that our results are somewhat consistent with the mentioned studies. Although we have not found explanations for this phenomenon in the literature, we can assume that younger parents potentially lack experience and patience, so they decide to use this fast-acting discipline method, while more frequent use of corporal punishment in families with more children can be explained by higher stress in those parents (Duarte et al., 2005).

Although we originally collected data on the exact level of education, for purposes of conducting the statistical analysis, we divided the parents into two groups. Namely, the first group consisted of parents with high school education, while the second group consisted of parents with university or postgraduate education. A

two-way ANOVA revealed no significant parental group x parental level of education interaction for parental attitudes towards corporal punishment ($p > .05$). However, there was a significant main effect for the parental group ($F_{(1,286)} = 5.77, p = .017$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$), but not for parental level of education ($p > .05$). Furthermore, to better understand the relationship between parental attitudes towards corporal punishment and their level of education, we conducted an one-way ANOVA, on the subsample level. Results indicate that less educated TDP have a more positive attitude toward corporal punishment ($F_{(1,191)} = 5.547, p = .020$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$). The relatively small effect sizes suggest that only a small proportion of the variance in parental attitudes toward corporal punishment can be explained by parental education.

The average score on the attitude towards corporal punishment questionnaire for TDP with university or postgraduate education ($M = 20.98, SD = 7.94$) was lower than the average score for parents with high school education ($M = 23.95, SD = 9.60$). Similar results were not found within the SLDP group ($p > .05$). As previous studies showed that the level of education is associated with the use of corporal punishment (Rajter, Trbus and Pećnik, 2016; UNICEF, 2010), we could say that our results are somewhat consistent with the results published so far. The obtained results could imply a lack of general knowledge about the harmfulness of corporal punishment, or, on the other hand, it may indicate the tendency of more educated parents to give socially desirable answers. However, when we take into account the fact that effect sizes are small and that there are no significant differences within the SLDP group, we could assume that these results also speak in favor of a widespread attitude towards corporal punishment of children regardless of education.

On the other hand, the mentioned correlations and differences concerning parental age, level of education and number of children do not occur within the SLDP group, so it can be assumed that these variables do not play a significant role in forming attitudes towards corporal punishment in this parental group. However, we could say that having a child with SLD is stressful itself, so socio-demographic factors do not make any further contributions.

The effect of marital status on the attitude towards corporal punishment was not analyzed, as the sample consisted of very few divorced and single parents (Table 1).

Relationship between childhood experiences in corporal punishment and attitude toward corporal punishment

To obtain data on their childhood experiences in corporal punishment, parents reported on a five-point type scale whether they were punished “never”, “rarely”, “a few times a month”, “a few times a week”, “almost every day”. However, as only few parents reported that they have been corporally punished „a few times a week“ or „almost every day“ (see Table 1) we decided to group parental responses into three frequency categories: “never punished”, “punished rarely”, “punished several times a month or more often”.

A two-way ANOVA revealed no significant parental group x experiences with corporal punishment interaction for parental attitudes towards corporal punishment ($p > .05$). However, there was a significant main effect for the experiences with corporal punishment, with medium to large effect sizes ($F_{(2,282)} = 15.69$, $p = .000$, partial $\eta^2 = .100$). This implies that a significant proportion of the variance in parental attitudes toward corporal punishment can be explained by parents’ experiences with corporal punishment during their own childhood. More specifically, it appears that experiences in corporal punishment significantly contribute to the formation of attitudes towards using this discipline method.

Furthermore, to better understand the relationship between parental attitudes towards corporal punishment and their experiences with corporal punishment, we conducted one-way ANOVA, on the whole sample level, as well as on the subsample level. One-way ANOVA showed statistically significant differences on the whole sample level ($F_{(2,285)} = 19.31$, $p = .000$, partial $\eta^2 = .119$), as well as on the subsample level (TDP: $F_{(2,190)} = 11.09$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .105$; SLDP: $F_{(2,92)} = 7.38$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .138$). Post-hoc Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score on the Attitudes towards corporal punishment for parents who have „never been punished“ was significantly lower than the score for parents who have been “rarely punished” or “punished a few times a month or more often”. Such results were obtained on the whole sample level as well as on the subsample level (p values ranged from .000 to .010). Descriptive measures are presented in Table 2.

Taken together, presented results suggest that parental experiences in corporal punishment significantly contribute to their attitudes towards corporal punishment. More specifically, our results suggest that if parents have never been corporally punished during their own childhood, they have less positive attitudes towards corporal punishment than those parents who have been corporally punished, regardless of the frequency of corporal punishment. Descriptive measures are presented in detail in Table 2.

Table 2. Attitude toward corporal punishment in terms of previous parental experiences with corporal punishment during their own childhood

	Frequency of corporal punishment	N	M	SD
SLDP				
	Never	15	18.60	5.60
	Rarely	59	25.32	7.53
	A few times a month or more often	21	28.62	9.62
TDP				
	Never	48	17.67	6.05
	Rarely	106	23.21	8.94
	A few times a month or more often	39	25.69	9.35
Whole sample				
	Never	63	17.89	5.91
	Rarely	165	23.97	8.50
	A few times a month or more often	60	26.72	9.47

Note. SLDP - parents of children with speech and language disorders. TDP - parents of typically developing children

Obtained findings confirm the results of previous studies which showed that individuals who were corporally punished during their own childhood have a more positive attitude towards this discipline method (Deater-Deckard et al., 2003). Such results can be explained by the principles of social learning: the child learns to respond to parent-child conflict by corporal punishment through the observation of the parent who uses this method (Bandura, 1977; Muller, Hunter and Stollak, 1995). Also, the childhood experiences of rejection by the primary attachment figure are transferred to the interaction with their own children through the formation of an internal working model, ie. through repeating the patterns of interactions from one's own childhood (Smojver-Ažić and Jakovčić, 2006).

Parental beliefs about the necessity of prohibiting corporal punishment

Two parental groups do not differ in terms of beliefs on prohibiting corporal punishment ($p > .05$). Although parents gave their judgments on a scale from 1 to 5 on the question of whether corporal punishment should be prohibited, we decided

to group them into three categories: parents who think corporal punishment should not be prohibited, parents who are not sure on this topic and parents who think that corporal punishment should be prohibited. Figure 1 shows that about 40% of SLDP and almost 50% of TDP believe that corporal punishment should be prohibited. The fact that around 30% of parents aren't sure about this topic speaks in favor of open opportunities for the influence of child development experts, i.e. their effect on changing beliefs, attitudes, and consequently parental behavior.

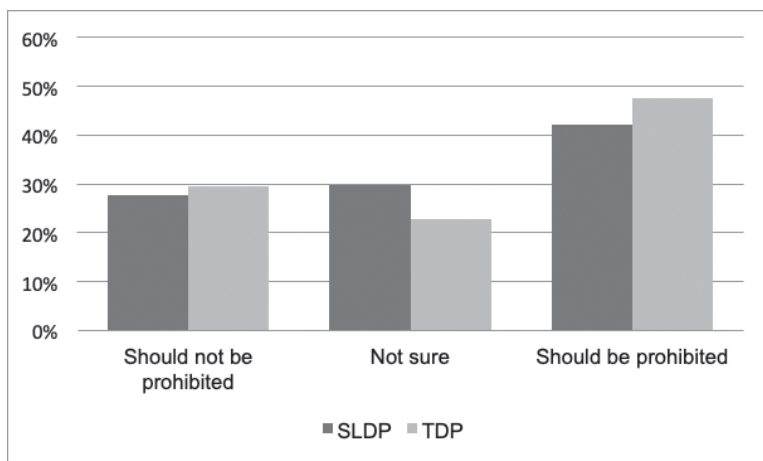


Figure 1. Parental beliefs about the necessity of banning corporal punishment

Research limitations

Our research is limited by the number of parents who took part in the survey, as well as the age of the children, so we are cautious in making generalized conclusions. A larger, more representative sample would certainly give a more complete and broader picture of the attitude towards corporal punishment in our country. Also, it's important to note that our study was conducted using a convenience sample of parents, which may limit the generalizability of our findings to the broader population of parents. The limitation in terms of the sample had the unfavorable consequence that our parents are mostly highly educated, and also, as they pay for the speech therapy treatments for their children we could say that the respondents included in our sample are parents of slightly higher socioeconomic status. The research was deprived of the beliefs and attitudes of lower-educated people from more rural areas, whose children do not have the opportunity to be included in the treatment of SLD. Also, future studies should examine the attitude towards physical punishment in parents of older children. Furthermore, our results present initial

findings about the nature of the phenomenon. Therefore, future studies should employ more complex moderation models to further explore this topic. Although the attitude towards corporal punishment is a good predictor of the use of this method of discipline, further research should take into account the application of corporal punishment within the population of parents of children with SLD, in order to obtain a more accurate and objective picture of corporal punishment within this vulnerable population.

CONCLUSIONS

This research study examined differences in attitudes towards corporal punishment between parents of children with speech and language disorders and parents of typically developing children. The study also examined the effects of socio-demographic factors on attitudes toward corporal punishment, as well as parental beliefs about the necessity of prohibiting corporal punishment. Given that there is no similar previous research on this topic in our country, we believe that the results presented in this paper can contribute to a better understanding of the attitude towards corporal punishment in parents of children with speech and language disorders.

The attitude towards CP is slightly more positive in the SLDP, but when we take into account relatively small effect sizes, we could conclude that our population of parents in general has a moderately positive attitude towards corporal punishment. Campaigns aimed at changing attitudes towards corporal punishment must be targeted at the general population of Serbian parents.

Parental gender does not contribute to their attitude towards corporal punishment. Younger and less educated parents of typically developing children have more positive attitudes towards corporal punishment, but relatively small effect sizes indicate that socio-demographic factors do not significantly contribute to the formation of parental attitudes.

On the other hand, results suggest that parental experiences with corporal punishment significantly contribute to their attitudes towards corporal punishment. More specifically, our results suggest that parents who have been corporally punished, regardless of the frequency of corporal punishment, have more positive attitudes towards corporal punishment. These findings emphasize the importance of creating campaigns to change attitudes towards corporal punishment in order to stop the further repetition of patterns learned during own childhood and their transmission to the individual's own offspring.

Less than 50% of parents believe that CP should be prohibited, but the fact that around 30% of parents aren't sure about this topic speaks in favor of open oppor-

tunities for the influence of child development experts, i.e. their effect on changing beliefs, attitudes, and consequently parental behavior.

The findings of our study contribute to a better understanding of attitudes toward CP among parents of children with SLD. Also, the obtained results can help experts to develop appropriate educational and preventive programs, as well as to help different organizations conduct various campaigns, especially aimed at categories of parents with the highest risk factors. Through the work of experts and organizations, parents of children with SLD will receive appropriate information and the most adequate education about the abilities and limitations of their children. This could potentially affect the change in their attitudes and, consequently, the ways they discipline their children.

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STAVOVI PREMA TJELESNOM KAŽNJAVANJU SRPSKIH RODITELJA DJECE PREDŠKOLSKOG UZRASTA SA I BEZ GOVORNO-JEZIČNIH POREMEĆAJA

SAŽETAK

Tjelesno kažnjavanje (*corporal punishment - CP*) u Srbiji još uvijek nije zakonski regulirano, a nije ni previše istražena tema, posebno u ranjivim obiteljima koje imaju djecu s govorno-jezičnim poremećajima (*speech and language disorders - SLD*). Kako svjetska istraživanja pokazuju da su djeca s različitim razvojnim poremećajima u većem riziku od tjelesnog kažnjavanja, pretpostavili smo da bi roditelji djece sa SLD-om imali pozitivniji stav prema ovoj metodi discipliniranja u usporedbi s roditeljima djece tipičnog razvoja. Sudjelovalo je 290 roditelja (67% žena), podijeljenih u dvije skupine: roditelji djece s govorno-jezičnim poremećajima (SLDP) i roditelji djece tipičnog razvoja (TDP). Uparene su dvije skupine roditelja prema dobi, stupnju obrazovanja i broju djece. Roditelji su ispunjavali upitnik namijenjen procjeni njihovih sociodemografskih podataka, iskustava s CP tijekom vlastitog djetinjstva, stava prema CP i uvjerenja o nužnosti zabrane CP. Stav prema CP nešto je pozitivniji u SLDP-u. Sociodemografski čimbenici povezani su sa stavom prema CP, ali samo unutar TDP-a. Roditelji koji su tijekom vlastitog djetinjstva češće iskusili CP imaju pozitivnije stavove prema CP. Manje od 50% roditelja smatra da bi CP trebalo zabraniti.

Ključne riječi: tjelesno kažnjavanje; stavovi prema tjelesnom kažnjavanju; govorno-jezični poremećaji; roditelji djece s govorno-jezičnim poremećajima



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