

Hitting Your Kids Increases Their Risk of Mental Illness

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TIME:

What if we, as a society, could cut down on the incidence of mental illness by backing away from hitting, grabbing or pushing our children?

That's a prospect raised by a new study in *Pediatrics*, which finds that harsh physical punishment increases the risk of mental disorders — even when the punishment doesn't stoop to the level of actual abuse.

What qualifies as appropriate punishment is a hot-button topic among parents. The American Academy of Pediatrics opposes corporal punishment, but studies have shown that up to 80% of parents report that they rely on it to some extent. What constitutes physical punishment is also wide-ranging: everything from a light slap on the hand to an all-out whipping with a belt or a paddle.

“In the general population, there is a belief that physical punishment is O.K. as long as you're not doing it in anger and you're a warm and loving parent,” says Tracie Afifi, the study's author and an assistant professor in the Department of Community Health Sciences at the University of Manitoba in Canada. “But there's no data supporting that.”

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George Holden, a professor of psychology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas who published research last year on the first real-time study of parents physically disciplining their kids, says Afifi's findings fit into a “large constellation” of studies that show children whose parents use physical force are at greater risk for depression and anxiety. “This is yet another study documenting that this practice can result in unintended negative consequences,” says Holden. “Other studies have shown corporal punishment in childhood carries over to adulthood in terms of aggression, so there's no reason why it wouldn't in the area of mental health.”

Read the whole story: [TIME](#)