

An Analysis and Response to an editorial “Scotland has banned smacking children – so should everyone else”

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By Jessica Hamzelou

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Mr. Hoff states, “For the benefit of disseminating solid parenting-system science, we felt it important to prepare a response to this editorial. The amount of utterly false information and scientifically debunked claims this opinion piece expresses is astonishing. It is a great disservice to society for people to propagate “anti-spanking” propaganda simply to further their uninformed feelings.”

Respectfully,

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The editorial piece is quoted in this font. [Our responses are in this font](#)

Scotland has banned smacking children – so should everyone else

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By Jessica Hamzelou

Smacking children was outlawed in Scotland this week.

This Headline is [entirely untrue](#). This is simply a proposed Bill that will not see a vote until 2018. We'd note that the sources themselves have false information. For example, they say France has a spanking ban. No, someone tried to slip that in disguised under another bill in January 2017, but when the deceptive tactic was exposed, the ban was ruled procedurally [unconstitutional](#) and reversed three weeks later.

Remarkably, parents in the rest of the UK can still use physical violence to punish or discipline their children...

This is untrue. Violence against children is illegal in all westernized countries. Spanking is a consequence, nothing more and nothing less. Consequences used with loving intent to modify behaviour and improve the child is by definition not violence. In the same way, confinements (time-out, sent to bedroom, grounding) are not "violence of the mind" even though they inflict mental pain to gain effectiveness, and vaccinations are not "stabbing child with sharp weapons" because the intent serves a constructive purpose.

... provided it can be considered "reasonable punishment", a term [not properly defined in law](#). Smacking is allowed in the majority of other nations.

In Canada, based on a 2004 Supreme Court Ruling, we have exceptionally [clear definitions](#) delineating constructive force in child-rearing and discipline vs. harsh and abusive force

Around the world, smacking is common. A [2014 report](#) by UNICEF found that 80 per cent of the world's children are subject to some form of violent punishment at home.

Violence, whether physical, mental, emotional or verbal, has nothing to do with constructive use of consequences. Citing this report is highly deceptive as it intentionally conflates two opposites.

A [survey](#) of just over 4000 adults in the UK, conducted this July, found that the majority – 59 per cent – felt that "smacking should not be banned". Only a fifth of those asked thought the practice should be outlawed. Another [survey](#) of US-based adults found that 76 per cent of men and 65 per cent of women feel that sometimes children need a "good hard spanking".

For those with any shred of doubt, there is no good evidence that smacking will benefit a child.

This opinion is already completely debunked. It comes from a handful of “advocacy” researchers who begin with the premise that “spankings is always bad” and then design methodologically flawed materials to prove their conclusion, The scientific trickery here is similar to 30 years of advocacy research sponsored by the tobacco industry which “proved” ***smoking causes no harms***. Scientists have for years decried the critical flaws with this material which could equally show bathing or reading to children causes the same harms.

Sound science does not begin by working backwards from a conclusion and designing experiments to prove them to support a particular narrative or to assure continued research funding by doing so. It begins with designing experiments which control the maximum variables and objectively observe, with no predetermined conclusion in mind.

Parents might find that children are more obedient if they fear another smack, but this effect is only temporary.

This claim has completely untrue and has been scientifically debunked. The effectiveness of any approach can only be measured by recidivism: at what rate is a behaviour repeated after the application of a particular method. The science is clear that physical discipline is 82% effective in the long term (18% recidivism) in adjusted a particular behaviour. To date, no data has come forth to show a higher effectiveness for any other method.

In the long run, children who are smacked are more likely to misbehave, and to engage in delinquent, criminal or antisocial behaviour. Worse, they are more likely to develop mental illnesses.

All of these statements are scientifically false and have been debunked. Among the overwhelming list of harms observed from spanking bans, we’d highlight a few examples (Sources cited):

Since Sweden’s 1979 spanking ban, by 2010, child-on-child violence UP 2,555%, serious physical assaults on children by parents UP 2,200%, rape of adults UP 700%, rape of children 14 & under UP 7,200%. In 2005, an International Travel Advisory Group warned international families to avoid travel to Sweden due to the ill-behaved and violent Swedish children.

Since New Zealand’s 2007 Spanking Ban, by 2013, serious physical child abuse more than doubled and is now triple Australia’s per-capita rate (more than 80% of Australian parents discipline with spanking, similar to Canada), Children diagnosed with emotional and behavioural problems UP 138%, & hospitalized for mental and behavioural issues UP 71%.

Since Austria’s 1989 spanking, ban, by 2002, youth violent crime rose to 400% of USA (86% of parents spank) per-capita rate, and Austria has the highest school bullying rates of a 26 country study (WHO 2002)

The science isn't even new. Smacking is thought to be the most studied aspect of parental behaviour, with reams of research published since the 1960s. Almost all of it finds that physically punishing children can have disastrous consequences in later life.

This opinion is entirely untrue and repeatedly debunked. There is *NO* sound research which shows spanking, in the limited fashion allowable under Canadian law produces any net negative effect. None, it doesn't exist. There are actually only 4 clinical studies of spanking that have ever been done. FOUR. And they all indicated that spanking was more effective than any other discipline method at enforcing timeout (i.e., a backup to timeout). There is not one clinical study of spanking in real time that supports an anti-spanking perspective.

Had the author of this opinion piece done her homework, she would have easily come across research from at least: Dr. Baumrind (UC Berkeley), Dr. Larzelere (OK State U), Dr. Gunnoe (Calvin C, MI), Jason Fuller (Akron School of Law, OH) & H. Hoff, Iron Gate Research

Dr. Baumrind's decades-long research is universally recognized as the best comprehensive study of parenting on the planet. It concludes,

"We found no evidence for unique detrimental effects of normative physical punishment. A blanket injunction against its use is not warranted by the evidence. In the absence of compelling evidence of harm, parental autonomy and family privacy should be protected."

Dr. Gunnoe's research confirmed,

"that children raised with non-abusive spanking performed better than those who weren't in a whole series of categories, including school grades, an optimistic outlook on life, the willingness to perform volunteer work, and the ambition to attend college ... And they performed no worse than those who weren't spanked in areas like early sexual activity, getting into fights, and becoming depressed"

Whereby she concludes,

"The claims made for not spanking children fail to hold up. They are not consistent with the data"

Iron Gate Research concludes,

"There is a statistically significant link between children raised with positive parenting styles being sanctioned for hitting and bullying other children at school. This suggests that the spectrum of parenting styles that employ moderate spanking as a back-up to other methods produce on-balance, children less inclined to behave violently towards other children than the spectrum of parenting styles which exclude consequences."

Future harm

At least five meta-analyses have been conducted on the effects of smacking, assessing around [200 individual studies overall](#).

This is one of the common tricks used in creating this anti-spanking material, to combine a long list of disparate reports, any, all and each of which have serious methodological issues invalidating them. They do not screen for harmful and abusive treatments, whether physical or otherwise and usually contain confirmation-biased assessments like cross-sectional studies which are useless to link cause and effect in parenting science.

They show that parents who smack their children are unsurprisingly less likely to have a good relationship with them. And children who are spanked are more likely to experience emotional and physical abuse and neglect.

This assertion is utterly false. In every case studied where spanking was banned, serious physical assaults on children **increased, not decreased**. Further, a 2015 study asked adults who grew up under spanking bans what if any, alternatives parents used. The [most commonly reported alternatives](#) were:

“pushing, shoving, shaking and restraining, screaming and verbal put-downs, sarcasm, shaming & humiliation, being intentionally ignored (removal of affection), and withholding food.”

By any definition, these alternatives *ARE* emotional and physical abuse and neglect; and this is what spanking bans, and this editorial promotes.

Again, Dr. Diana Baumrind, universally considered the best parenting system research on the planet, coined the term “Authoritative” parenting. What most call “*loving and firmly guiding*” or “*traditional*” parenting.

Authoritative Parents exhibit these four attributes: highly nurturing (expression of love is tantamount to a healthy home), highly demanding (setting age-appropriate limits) and highly responsive (consistency in enforcing those limits), and **they universally use moderate and occasional spanking as a back-up in a spectrum of other methods**. This produces developmentally better outcomes than **any** other parenting style.

That repeatedly proven observation, alone, debunks all the “anti-spanking” propaganda manufactured by those who are ideologically opposed to solid traditional parenting systems and in favour of imposing their own styles on parents.

These studies also find that smacked children are more likely to go on to be aggressive themselves – initially with their peers, and later with their own children and partners.

These opinions are false and have been debunked. Again, [this study](#) of 18,000 minors showed that children who hit and bullied others were not the recipients of corporal punishments (“CP”), and once so punished, it was 94% effective in the long term (6% recidivism) in stopping aggressive behaviour. *In fact, CP was proven to be more effective in stopping aggressive behaviours like hitting and bullying than any other behaviour type.* A [recent study](#) showed those raised with “Positive” parenting hit and bullied other children at school at a statistically significant rate, mirroring the broad experience in countries like Sweden and Austria.

A [recent study](#) of E.U. countries further debunks the violence with partners claim. As a group, the four Scandinavian countries *were the earliest to ban spanking*, and as a group, *they now exhibit the highest per-capita domestic violence rates*, by the E.U.’s own admission.

People who were smacked as children are also at a higher risk of having low self-esteem, depression or alcohol dependency.

Again, this claim is utterly false and has been debunked. A [recent study](#) has shown there is a direct link between the time that spanking was banned and the increases in societal alcoholism and drug-induced death rates. In fact, the three earliest “spanking ban” countries (Sweden, Norway and Finland) are the most adversely affected by per-capita drug-induced death rates.

Earlier this year, a group of psychiatrists in the US [claimed](#) that spanking was so harmful, it should be considered an “adverse childhood experience”, alongside neglect and having a parent in prison.

This exemplifies why one shouldn’t listen to people who claim things in areas where they have no expertise. The most reliable predictor of adverse outcomes in children is being raised in State / Foster care. In fact, *Children raised in foster care are twenty times more likely to be abused than by their natural parents.*

This alone is a reason to *never* ban normative parental spanking, as it criminalizes most parents and makes them targets for the child “protection” industry to apprehend and vend their children to meet caseload and revenue targets. In 1981, Sweden decided to enforce their 1979 spanking ban. Using these laws, they apprehended 2,644 children (per million country population) vs. a median of 77 for the four surrounding countries (Norway, Finland, Denmark and Germany). That’s 3,400% of median or thirty four times.

Sweden proved: it’s plainly obvious that these laws are designed to enrich a legalized state-run child trafficking industry, and have relatively nothing to do with the genuine safety and welfare of children.

So, how do we get parents to change their minds about smacking, and see it for the dangerous practice it is?

We don't. We teach parents how to use the method properly in a spectrum of approaches as part of a well-rounded, effective and salutary tool kit to raise strong, well-adjusted peaceful children.

Paediatricians can play a role. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Canadian Paediatric Society has already called on doctors to advise their patients against smacking, and the UK's Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health published a [position report](#) back in 2009 stating that smacking "should not be used".

But outright bans send the strongest message. Since Sweden banned smacking in 1979, 52 other states around the world have [followed suit](#).

In fact this is also deceptive. This is a claim the "Global Initiative" website likes to quote, but a lot of what has happened is simply defining laws to differentiate constructive consequences against violence or harsh abusive force. They banned beating, hitting, striking, whipping, belting and so on, but they did **not** ban normative spanking. So what's deceptively labelled a "spanking ban" is clearly not.

One Case in point, Poland banned spanking in 2010 simply to appease the E.U. However, when [cases come to the Courts](#), as long as the force is not clearly injurious and the intent was for the wellbeing and improvement of the child, the laws are consistently ignored.

The UK is [one of only eight countries](#) that haven't committed to outlawing corporal punishment of children.

It's time to change this embarrassing state of affairs, and see smacking for what it is – a damaging practice putting children at unnecessary risk of mental illness and poor health.

The utter lack of research, common sense, rudimentary understanding of family dynamics and myriad false claims exhibited in this propaganda piece is astonishing. Further, the avoidance of any factual science on this subject displays the extreme bias with which this was written, and is unbecoming of a magazine which purports to cover "Science".

We'd say it's time people stop promoting junk "advocacy" research to undermine and hijack what science very clearly tells us are developmentally the best parenting systems.

It's time to halt the continued over-reach of the State into the homes and lives of children and families.

It's time for all countries to adopt clear laws like Canada did in 2004 so everyone can clearly differentiate normative constructive and salutary consequences in child-rearing.

It's time to stop this ideological war on the family.