



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Parents' use of physical and verbal punishment: cross-sectional study in underprivileged neighborhoods^{☆,☆☆}

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KEYWORDS

Child rearing;
Parenting;
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Abstract

Objective: To estimate the past-year prevalence of parental use of verbal and physical discipline in an urban sample.

Method: A cross-sectional study was conducted in two underprivileged neighborhoods with nearly 80,000 inhabitants. Complex sampling was used. The households were selected by applying two-stage probabilistic sampling with stratification. A total of 401 households (sample error = 0.1) were selected by maximizing the variance ($p = 0.5$). The cluster sampling indicated 33 census units (sample error = 0.05). The Brazilian Portuguese version of the WorldSAFE Core Questionnaire was used to assess parental use of moderate verbal discipline, harsh verbal discipline, moderate physical discipline, and harsh physical discipline. This questionnaire asks how often mothers (respondent) and/or their husband or partner use specific disciplinary tactics.

Results: The mean age of children and adolescents was 9 years (SD: 4.5). The prevalence of harsh verbal discipline was approximately 37% (28.3% [95% CI: 23.4–33.3%] for more than three times). The prevalence of harsh physical discipline was approximately 30% (21.8% [CI: 18.2–25.4%] for more than three times). Boys had higher odds of receiving harsh physical discipline [OR: 1.56, $p < 0.05$]. Children and adolescents with learning problems and developmental delays had higher odds of being exposed to harsh discipline than their peers without these problems. Children and adolescents with chronic health conditions (e.g., asthma) had lower odds of receiving harsh physical discipline (OR: 0.4; $p < 0.05$).

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Educação infantil;
Parentalidade;
Disciplina;
Áreas de Pobreza

Conclusions: Parental abuse was embedded within CA rearing practices in these two underprivileged neighborhoods.

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Uso de disciplina física e verbal pelos pais: estudo transversal em bairros vulneráveis**Resumo**

Objetivo: Estimar prevalência no último ano de Crianças e Adolescentes (CA) expostos a disciplinas físicas e verbais pelos pais e mães.

Metodologia: Estudo transversal conduzido em dois bairros vulneráveis que possuem aproximadamente 80.000 habitantes. Amostragem complexa foi utilizada. As casas foram selecionadas por amostragem probabilística em duas fases. O número de 401 casas (erro amostral = 0.1) foi definido pela variância maximizada ($p = 0.5$). A amostragem por cluster permitiu obter o total de 33 cluster selecionados (erro amostral = 0.05). Usamos a versão brasileira do *WorldSAFE Core Questionnaire* para identificar Disciplinas Verbais Moderadas (MVD), Disciplinas Verbais Severas (HVD), Disciplinas Físicas Moderadas (MPD) e Disciplinas Físicas Severas (HPD). O questionário pergunta a frequência que as mães (respondentes) e seus maridos/companheiros utilizaram táticas disciplinares específicas.

Resultados: A média de idade das CA foi de 9 anos (DP: 4.5). A prevalência de HVD foi de aproximadamente 37% (sendo 28.3% [95% CI: 23.4–33.3%] expostas a mais de três vezes no último ano). A prevalência HPD foi de aproximadamente 30% (sendo 21.8% [CI: 18.2–25.4%] expostas mais de três vezes). Meninos tem maior chance de HPD [OR: 1.56, $p < 0.05$]. CA com problemas de aprendizagem e atrasos no desenvolvimento apresentam maior chance quando comparado com seus pares sem problemas. CA com problema crônico de saúde tiveram chance menor de HPD (OR: 0.4; $p < 0.05$).

Conclusões: Abuso paterno e materno está contido nas práticas cotidianas de educação nestes dois bairros vulneráveis.

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Introduction

Child and adolescent (CA) protection has been greatly enhanced in the past century. After the 1924 Declaration of the Rights of the Child, a number of other actions followed, aiming to ensure the safe and healthy development of CAs at the international level.¹ In Brazil, especially after the 1980s, many policies and regulations were implemented to guarantee the protection of CAs.² These efforts were guided by the Statute of the Child and Adolescent, which indicates that family, community, and public authorities must ensure CA rights.

However, parental use of harsh physical and verbal discipline when raising CAs remains a global challenge across different social classes, cultures, languages, religions, and ethnicities.³ In a series of meta-analyses on the global prevalence of child maltreatment, the prevalence of physical abuse alone was estimated to be 22.6% (85% CI: 20.3–25.1) from self-reported accounts and 0.3% (85% CI: 0.1–1.2) from informant responses.⁴ Despite the efforts to reduce the number, severity, and consequences of parental abuse, a large number of CAs continue to be exposed to this abuse, especially among low-income families. Low income has been strongly associated with parental abuse (i.e., CAs living in families with limited economic resources are at higher risk of harsh discipline). However, it is not fully clear why and

how these factors are associated.⁵ Additionally, CAs who are maltreated miss more school days than their peers who are not, and thus school performance might emerge as a sentinel event associated with parental abuse.⁶

Most studies on this topic have been conducted in Europe and in North America, and research from low- and middle-income countries, including Brazil, is lacking.^{4,7} Thus, studies that measure the extent of parental abuse in underprivileged regions are needed. In this article, the authors focused on the past-year prevalence of parental use of moderate and harsh verbal and physical discipline in an urban population. The study also investigated whether school performance and mothers' perceptions of CA health are associated with any type of discipline.

Methods**Design and sampling**

This was a cross-sectional study in the surroundings of the federal capital of Brazil, Brasília. Two underprivileged neighborhoods in the city of Ceilândia were studied. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE]), these two neighborhoods have nearly 80,000 inhabitants and

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