



## The development and piloting of the ISPCAN Child Abuse Screening Tool—Parent version (ICAST-P)<sup>☆</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Child maltreatment is a problem that has longer recognition in the northern hemisphere and in high-income countries. Recent work has highlighted the nearly universal nature of the problem in other countries but demonstrated the lack of comparability of studies because of the variations in definitions and measures used. The International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect has developed instrumentation that may be used with cross-cultural and cross-national benchmarking by local investigators.

**Design and sampling:** The instrument design began with a team of expert in Brisbane in 2004. A large bank of questions were subjected to two rounds of Delphi review to develop the fielded version of the instrument. Convenience samples included approximately 120 parent respondents with children under the age of 18 in each of six countries (697 total).

**Results:** This paper presents an instrument that measures parental behaviors directed at children and reports data from pilot work in 6 countries and 7 languages. Patterns of response revealed few missing values and distributions of responses that generally were similar in the six countries. Subscales performed well in terms of internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha in very good range (0.77–0.88) with the exception of the neglect and sex abuse subscales. Results varied by child age and gender in expected directions but with large variations among the samples. About 15% of children were shaken, 24% hit on the buttocks with an object, and 37% were spanked. Reports of choking and smothering were made by 2% of parents.

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These pilot data demonstrate that the instrument is well tolerated and captures variations in, and potentially harmful forms of child discipline.

**Practice implications:** The ISPCAN Child Abuse Screening Tool – Parent Version (ICAST-P) has been developed as a survey instrument to be administered to parents for the assessment of child maltreatment in a multi-national and multi-cultural context. It was developed with broad input from international experts and subjected to Delphi review, translation, and pilot testing in six countries. The results of the Delphi study and pilot testing are presented. This study demonstrates that a single instrument can be used in a broad range of cultures and languages with low rates of missing data and moderate to high internal consistency.

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The problem of child abuse and neglect has been recognized formally in the western medical literature since 1860 (Roche, Fortin, Labbé, Brown, & Chadwick, 2005) but the modern era of recognition has usually been traced to the publication of “The Battered Child Syndrome” in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1962 (Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegemueller, & Silver, 1962). Extensive research in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and other European countries have documented the epidemiology, risk and protective factors, consequences, and even patterns or syndromes of maltreatment (Runyan, Wattam, Ikeda, Hassan, & Ramiro, 2002). The report of the UN Secretary General, the World Report on Violence Against Children, provided evidence that the issue is a problem for children in all parts the world (Pinheiro, 2006). Nevertheless, the majority of the world’s countries have no data on the occurrence of child abuse and have no official mechanisms for receiving and responding to reports of child abuse or neglect (ISPCAN, 2006). The paucity of data on the occurrence and consequences of child abuse and neglect contribute to the lack of knowledge among both lay people and professionals in all parts of the world. It is essential for progress in this field that good data be collected globally.

In 1996, the UN Secretary-General called for the creation of a global study on children and violence that would address violence against children in homes and schools in a manner similar to an earlier UN study of war on children. The onset of this study was delayed until 2002 when Professor Paulo Pinheiro of Brazil was appointed the Independent Expert and a Secretariat for the study was established in Geneva. The Secretary-General established a non-governmental organizations advisory board the study. The Secretary-General’s report recommends addressing the need for more research and better data on the extent and nature of child maltreatment in all nations. The report called for improvements in measurement and expanded efforts at surveillance to assess the extent of the problem and to monitor the impact of changes in policies and services for children (Pinheiro, 2006). The International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) agreed to take on this recommendation and help develop a set of standard instruments that could assess the epidemiology of maltreatment of children.

With UNICEF support, ISPCAN organized an international meeting in Brisbane in 2004. Experts from 31 countries participated in a workshop to develop internationally valid instruments. The assembled experts determined that a complement of three instruments were needed: an instrument that could be used to survey parents about disciplinary behaviors directed at their own children in the past year that would assess incidence; a retrospective survey of young adults about their childhood to establish lifetime prevalence; and a third instrument to be completed by mature children to report the incidence of harsh treatment or maltreatment in either homes or institutions. The three instruments were called the ISPCAN Child Abuse Screening Tools and named the P for parent form, the CI and CH for the “child-institutional” and “child-home” forms, and the R for “youth retrospective” forms. At the conclusion of the workshop, three working groups of investigators used email communication to modify and improve the three instruments drafted at the Brisbane meeting. This paper addresses the development and pilot results of the instrument developed to be administered to parents, the ICAST-P.

## Methods

The Brisbane workshop attendees developing the parent instrument explicitly agreed not to develop new definitions of abuse or neglect that would be applied in all countries. These experts recognized that differences in language, culture, and history might alter the perspective in different parts of the globe about which parental acts might be regarded as abusive or neglectful. Instead, the attendees chose to focus on asking about the frequencies of parent behaviors; in this they modeled their effort on the approach taken by Murray Straus and colleagues who developed the Conflict Tactic Scales (Straus, Hamby, Finkelhor, Moore, & Runyan, 1998). Attendees at the conference were encouraged to bring survey questions that they were familiar with or which had been used in their own countries. The conference participants did not seek to develop an exhaustive list of all possible forms of discipline but to focus on forms of discipline perceived to be most common in their countries or approaches that they perceived as carrying a high risk of harm for the children.

The draft instruments were then sent out to experts around the world for two rounds of a Delphi procedure in which input and modifications were requested (Edmunds, Haines, & Blair, 2005; Hackett, Masson, & Phillips, 2006). The experts involved in this Delphi procedure explicitly were selected, in large measure, from the southern hemisphere and non-western countries so that the final instruments could be said to be relevant to as many countries as possible. Candidate experts were identified by: (1) reviewing the authors from outside the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand who had published in the international journal *Child Abuse & Neglect* between 2003 and 2005, (2) examining the list of ISPCAN faculty who lived

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