

Attitudes toward smacking in a New Zealand probability sample: Psychological and demographic correlates

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This research was conducted following the 2009 citizens-initiated referendum that aimed to overturn the 2007 legislative change that repealed parents' right to use force in the correction or discipline of children. Using a national probability sample of 5,752 New Zealand adults, the study investigated the prevalence and correlates of positive attitudes towards the physical discipline (i.e., smacking) of children. Three distinct items assessing attitudes to use of physical discipline were embedded within a large postal survey. New Zealanders expressed more favourable views toward smacking when responding to items framed in terms of supporting the legal rights of parents. This included the item replicating the 2009 referendum question. However, New Zealanders expressed less favourable attitudes toward smacking when assessed using a more general Likert-style item. Political conservatism, Big-Five personality and low education were the most reliable predictors of physical discipline attitudes. Ethnicity, immigrant status and level of poverty versus affluence were not significantly associated with physical discipline attitudes. Our findings suggest that the way the question was asked could have introduced differences into people's apparent level of support versus opposition toward the use of force to discipline children. The social policy implications of this work are discussed.

Keywords: corporal punishment, smacking, physical discipline, parenting, attitudes, national sample

Parents' right to use physical force (e.g., smacking) as a child discipline strategy is a highly contentious issue around the world, particularly when legislative bans of the physical discipline of children are on a country's political agenda. This has been the case in New Zealand over the past two decades, as increasing national and international pressure have been placed on the government to implement strategies aimed at reducing violence against children (Wood, Hassall, Hook, & Ludbrook, 2008). In 2007, this pressure culminated in the repeal of section 59 of the Crimes Act 1961, which had provided a statutory defence for adults prosecuted for assaulting a child if the assault was for the purpose of parental discipline. The law change meant that New Zealand joined the 33 countries

around the world that have enacted legislation to abolish parental physical discipline (PD) of children (Center for Effective Discipline, 2011).

The change in legislation was not without opposition. Groups opposed to the new "anti-smacking law" as it was popularly termed, argued that the repeal of section 59 was intrusive and took away parental discretion to choose physical punishment as a means of disciplining their child (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2008). The primary argument used to garner public resistance to the change was that the new law criminalised parents, with the implication being that parents could be prosecuted unfairly for smacking their child (Wood et al., 2008). Such arguments were used to promote a petition that generated sufficient support

to force a citizens-initiated referendum about the legislation in August 2009. Consistent with lobby groups' prevailing public message about the criminal implications of the new law, the referendum asked the question, "Should a smack as part of good parental correction be a criminal offence in New Zealand?" Fifty-six percent of eligible voters took part in the referendum, and 87% of responders voted 'no' (Peden, 2009), indicating strong support for parliament to overturn the repeal of section 59. However, the 'Yes-Vote coalition', which generally comprised family and women's organizations and child health and welfare agencies in New Zealand, argued that the result was not an accurate reflection of public attitudes towards physical discipline because the question was ambiguous and leading (The Yes Vote Coalition, 2009).

The outcome of the referendum was non-binding in Parliament and the Prime Minister chose not to revisit the repeal of section 59. However, lobby groups that opposed the change in legislation continue to contend that the results of the referendum were representative and suggested that the vast majority of New Zealanders were against legislative bans on the physical punishment of children (Satherley, 2010). Unfortunately, there is little evidence regarding New Zealanders' attitudes towards the use of physical discipline to accurately evaluate this assertion. One telephone survey of 750 adults that took place one year after the initial law change, but prior to the referendum, suggested that public attitudes towards physical punishment were more divided than the referendum results suggested as 43%

said they firmly supported the legislative ban on physical discipline of children, while 28% were firmly opposed (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2008). Since the time of that survey, however, there has been intense and extensive media coverage of the issue because of the referendum. Further, the survey provided limited information about the profile of individuals who endorse the physical discipline of children. Women were found to be less supportive, but there were inconsistent findings related to ethnicity and age (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2008).

Indeed, very little is known about the impact of ethnicity on the use of PD in New Zealand, let alone the association between ethnicity and general attitudes towards PD. New Zealand is a multi-cultural nation with a unique ethnic make-up. Sixty-eight percent of New Zealanders identify as being of European descent, 15% Māori, 9% Asian, and 6% Pasifika; 23% of New Zealand residents were born overseas (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). As with indigenous groups in other countries, Māori are over-represented in statistics on a number of negative child and family outcomes, including statistics on family violence and child maltreatment (Ministry of Social Development, 2004, 2010). A large-scale national interview-based survey carried out during the time that the repeal of section 59 was enacted found that, after adjusting for age, both Māori and Pasifika boys were more likely to have been physically punished by their primary caregiver in the four weeks before the survey compared to boys in the total population (Ministry of Health, 2008). However, the extent to which these statistics are representative of general attitudes towards the use of physical discipline is not clear.

Internationally, only a handful of studies have examined factors associated with supportive attitudes towards physical punishment of children. A history of being physically disciplined, greater political conservatism, lower levels of religiosity, older age of the respondent's child, and the expression of attitudes that devalue children have been found to be associated with acceptance of PD (Ateah & Parkin, 2002; Gagné, Tourigny, Joly, & Pouliot-Lapointe, 2007; Jackson et al., 1999).

Similar results have been found in the large number of studies that have examined correlates of actual smacking behaviour. It has been found that PD is more likely to be used if parents are younger, less educated, of lower income, are single, Christian, or are stressed or depressed (Berlin et al., 2009; Day, Peterson, & McCracken, 1998; Smith & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Straus & Stewart, 1998; Wissow, 2001; Woodward & Fergusson, 2002). Within New Zealand, retrospective reports of exposure to harsh or severe PD among participants from the Christchurch Health and Development Study were predicted by younger maternal age, maternal family-of-origin use of strict discipline, interparental violence, and elevated levels of child conduct problems (Woodward & Fergusson, 2002).

Findings related to ethnicity have been mixed and have mostly come from American samples. While studies have found that African American parents are more likely to use PD with their children compared to European American (Berlin et al., 2009; Day et al., 1998; Wissow, 2001) and Latino American parents (Berlin et al., 2009; Regalado, Sareen, Inkelas, Wissow, & Halfon, 2004), other studies have found no association between ethnicity and the use of PD (Hemenway, Solnick, & Carter, 1994; Smith & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Straus & Paschall, 2009). Pinderhughes et al. (2000) indicated that associations between ethnicity and physical discipline are better explained by proximal factors related to family hardship and stress, as well as parent attributional and emotional processes. Further work is needed to elucidate the role of ethnicity, particularly in other countries, like New Zealand, with different cultural and political landscapes.

The current study draws on data collected from the 2009 New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study (NZAVS), which was conducted in late 2009 in the months directly following the August referendum. The survey provided a unique opportunity to take a more nuanced approach to examining differences in people's views about the physical punishment of children. It allowed for a comparison among

people's general beliefs, their views on the specific law that repealed the right of parents to use physical force for correction, and their view on the referendum question. Furthermore, the survey allowed for an examination of the impact on levels of endorsement of the language used to ascertain public attitudes towards physical discipline. This study also aimed to identify factors related to the endorsement of PD. This type of information is critical since both individual and societal approval of parental physical punishment are powerful predictors of its use (Ateah & Durrant, 2005; Durrant, Rose-Krasnor, & Broberg, 2003; Vittrup, Holden, & Buck, 2006). We examined the associations between PD attitudes and sociodemographic factors (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, immigrant status, socioeconomic deprivation, religiosity), individual personality and attitudinal factors (political conservatism), and psychological functioning (self-esteem, social support, and life satisfaction).

Method

Sampling procedure

This study analysed data from the 2009 New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study (NZAVS-2009). The NZAVS-2009 contained responses from 6518 participants (complete data for those analyzed here was available for 5752 participants).

The NZAVS-2009 is the first wave of a planned 20-year longitudinal study aiming to track change and stability of various social attitudes and indicators in the New Zealand population. The NZAVS-2009 questionnaire was posted to 40,500 participants from the 2009 New Zealand electoral roll. The publicly available version of the 2009 electoral roll contained 2,986,546 registered voters in NZ. This represented all citizens over 18 years of age who were eligible to vote regardless of whether or not they chose to vote, barring people who had their contact details removed due to specific case-by-case concerns about privacy. The statement of accuracy for the electoral roll was .966, it was therefore estimated that the questionnaire reached a total of $.966 \times 40,500 = 39,123$ participants.

The sample frame for the

NZAVS-2009 was split into 3 parts. Sample Frame 1 constituted a random sample of 25,000 people from the electoral roll conducted in October–November 2009 (4,060 respondents). Sample Frame 2 constituted a second random sample of a further 10,000 people from the electoral roll (sampling without replacement) and was conducted in November 2009 (1,609 respondents). Sample Frame 3 constituted a booster sample of 5,500 people from mesh block area units of NZ that had a high proportion of Māori, Pasifika and Asian peoples (670 respondents). The booster sample thus aimed to oversample people from these ethnic groups and was posted in increments during the November 2009–February 2010 period. A further 175 people responded but did not provide contact details and so could not be matched to a sample frame.

The estimated response rate (adjusting for address accuracy of the electoral roll) for respondents in Sample Frame 1 was 16.8%. The estimated response rate for respondents in Sample Frame 2 was 16.7%. The estimated response rate for respondents in Sample Frame 3 (the booster sample) was 12.5%. The overall estimated response rate for the total sample (including anonymous responses) was 16.6%. In sum, roughly 1.36% of all people registered to vote in NZ were contacted and invited to participate. Roughly 0.23% of all registered voters completed and returned the questionnaire. It was explicitly stated in the information and consent forms that by responding participants were signalling that they were willing to be contacted for up to the next 20 years and invited to complete yearly follow-up questionnaires. The fairly low response rate of 16.6% presumably occurred because people were opting in to a planned 20-year longitudinal study. Despite this low response rate, the proportion of respondents from different ethnic groups closely matched those expected based on 2006 census figures (see below).

Participant details

We limited our analyses to participants for whom complete data were available; 5,752 participants of the full sample of 6518 (the majority of missing data was due to people not reporting their household income).

Participants (3,424 women, 2,328 men) had a mean age of 47.54 ($SD = 15.52$). Seventy five percent of the sample were parents (4,321). Parents had an average of 1.99 children ($SD = 1.68$). Roughly 40% of participants reported that one or more children lived with them at home (2,378), and 44% of the participants (2,555) stated that they were religious (measured by asking ‘do you identify with a religion and/or spiritual group?’). Fifty-five percent of participants were married (3,175) and 15% were unmarried but living together (855). In terms of ethnicity, 4,145 participants identified as New Zealand European/Pākehā (72% of the sample versus 75% of the population according to the 2006 census); 1,000 identified as Māori (17% of the sample versus 14% of the population); 270 identified as Asian (4.7% versus 8.8% of the population); 189 identified as being Pasifika (3.3% versus 6.6% of the population); and 148 were coded as other/unreported.

Median household income was \$NZ 67,500. Mean household income was \$NZ 85,087 ($SD = 70,926$). These figures are slightly higher than population estimates provided by statistics New Zealand in 2006. According to 2006 census figures, the median household income for New Zealanders in 2006 was \$NZ 59,000, roughly \$8000 less than that estimated by the NZAVS three years later (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). In terms of (ordinal-ranked) level of education, 22% (1,243) reported no formal qualification or did not report their level of education, 30% (1,702) reported some high school education, 16% (932) had a diploma or certificate, 23% (1,336) had an undergraduate degree, and 9% (539) had a post-graduate qualification.

Measures

We assessed attitudes toward child discipline using three separate questions, interspersed in different sections of the questionnaire. Participants rated their agreement with the statement “It is OK for parents to use smacking as a way to discipline their children” on a seven point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Participants rated their support to the following policy item “The current anti-smacking bill. (i.e., it being illegal to smack children)” on the same 7-point

scale. Participants also rated their endorsement of the 2009 referendum question “Should a smack as part of good parental correction be a criminal offence in NZ?” which was rated on a continuous scale (1 = definitely NO; 7 = definitely YES). The latter two items were reverse-scored so that a higher rating on all three items indicated more support for the use of physical discipline.

Personality was measured using the Mini-IPIP6 developed by Donnellan et al. (2006) from the International Personality Item Pool and extended by Sibley et al. (2011). The Mini-IPIP6 assesses six broad dimensions of personality using four-item subscales rated from 1 (very inaccurate) to 7 (very accurate). Items were reverse coded where needed and averaged to give overall scale scores. Sample items, and internal reliability estimates for the current sample were as follows: Extraversion ($\alpha = .71$; “Am the life of the party”); Agreeableness ($\alpha = .66$; “Sympathise with others' feelings”); Conscientiousness ($\alpha = .65$; “Get chores done right away”); Neuroticism ($\alpha = .64$; “Have frequent mood swings”); Openness to Experience ($\alpha = .67$; “Have a vivid imagination”); Honesty-Humility ($\alpha = .78$; “Feel entitled to more of everything”). An interpretation of each Mini-IPIP6 factor, including example traits, and likely adaptive benefit and costs is available in Sibley et al. (2011). The Mini-IPIP6 has been validated for use in the New Zealand context, and shows a reliable six-factor structure (Sibley et al., 2011) and acceptable item response properties (Sibley, 2012). Extensive information on New Zealand specific norms for the Mini-IPIP6 are also available (Sibley & Pirie, 2013).

Life satisfaction was assessed using two items from the five-item scale developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985). These two items formed a reliable composite, $\alpha = .76$). An example item is “In most ways my life is close to ideal.” Perceived social support was measured using three items from Cutrona and Russell (1987; $\alpha = .75$). An example item is “There are people I can depend on to help me if I really need it.” Self-esteem was measured using three items from Rosenberg (1965; α

= .70). An example item is “On the whole I am satisfied with myself.” Items assessing life satisfaction, self-esteem, and social support were rated on scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) and averaged to give overall scale scores.

Political orientation was assessed by asking “Please rate how politically conservative versus liberal you see yourself as being.” Participants rated their political orientation on a scale from 1 (extremely liberal) to 7 (extremely conservative).

Participants’ addresses were matched to their meshblock location in order to identify the level of deprivation versus affluence of each participants’ immediate neighbourhood. The percentile NZDep2006 assigns a ranked decile score from 1 (most affluent) to 10 (most impoverished) to each meshblock area (White et al., 2008).

Results

Overview of analyses

We separated our analyses into three parts. We first present an analysis of association among the three measures of PD attitudes. This provided information on the extent to which the three items overlapped in assessing a common core of shared variance in global PD, versus reflecting potentially distinct aspects of PD attitudes. We next present an analysis of the distinction and mean level of support for PD as measured using each of our three questions. This allowed us to examine the extent to which levels of support for PD differed in mean level depending upon the specific question framing, or whether similar mean levels were observed across different question frames. Finally, the third section of the results outlines a series of regression models examining the demographic and psychological factors that predicted variation in support for PD. We conducted comparable regression models for each of our three measures of PD attitudes. These models allowed us to examine similarities and potential differences in the demographic correlates of PD across the three different question frames.

Analysis of similarities and overlap between the three measures of

physical discipline

Support for PD when framed in terms of it being “OK for parents to use smacking” was moderately to strongly positively correlated with support for PD when framed in terms of support versus opposition for Section 59 of the crimes act “the current anti-smacking bill” ($r(5557) = .68, p < .01; R^2 = .46$), and less strongly associated with support for PD when framed as it was in the 2009 referendum, by asking “should a smack as part of good parent correction be a criminal offence...” ($r(5528) = .54, p < .01; R^2 = .29$). Support for PD framed in terms of “the current anti-smacking bill” was also moderately-to-strongly correlated with support framed as it was in the 2009 referendum, by asking “should a smack as part of good parent correction be a criminal offence...” ($r(5574) = .62, p < .01; R^2 = .38$).

These correlations indicate that ratings of support for smacking, as expected, tended to go together across all three measures. However, while these correlations were reasonably strong, when we take R^2 to estimate shared variance between measures, the data indicate that these three measures all shared slightly less than half of their variance. Put another way, this indicates that while ratings on these three items certainly did go together to a reasonable extent, over half of the variance in ratings of the three items did not overlap. The three questions index highly correlated, but reasonably distinct aspects of support for PD. This in turn suggests that the way the question was asked could have introduced differences in people’s responses to a reasonable extent.

Analysis of differences in support for physical discipline depending on question framing

The distribution of responses to the three different items measuring opposition versus support for the use of physical force to discipline children is presented in Table 1. These figures provide an indicator of the extent to which people were supportive of smacking children depending on how the question was asked. When the question was framed in terms of agreement with it being “OK for parents to use smacking,” 10% of people

strongly disagreed and 23% strongly agreed ($M = 4.89, SD = 1.90$). When the question was framed in terms of support versus opposition for Section 59 of the crimes act “the current anti-smacking bill”, 9% strongly supported the bill and 43% strongly opposed it ($M = 5.34, SD = 2.01$). When the question was asked as it was in the 2009 referendum, by asking “should a smack as part of good parent correction be a criminal offence...”, 7% of people rated ‘strongly YES’ and 65% rated a response of ‘strongly NO’ ($M = 5.93, SD = 1.87$).

We compared mean levels of support for smacking across the three items by comparing mean item scores using paired-samples t-tests. Support for smacking was lower when framed in terms of it being “OK for parents to use smacking” than when framed in terms of support versus opposition for Section 59 of the crimes act “the current anti-smacking bill” ($t(5557) = -21.12, p < .001$) or when framed as it was in the 2009 referendum, by asking “should a smack as part of good parent correction be a criminal offence...” ($t(5528) = -42.22, p < .001$). Support for PD when framed in terms of Section 59 of the crimes act “the current anti-smacking bill” was also lower than when framed as it was in the 2009 referendum ($t(5574) = -25.35, p < .001$).

Regression model predicting support for physical discipline

Our third set of analyses used multiple regression to examine the demographic and psychological factors that independently predicted some people being higher in support for the use of physical discipline. For each model, demographic predictors were entered as a block at step 1, and the psychological predictors entered at step 2 to assess the extent to which indicators of personality, wellbeing, and political orientation explained variation in support above and beyond that already explained by demographic factors. Full results of the Step 2 models are presented side-by-side in Table 2. These models present unstandardised (b and se) and standardised parameters (β) along with tests of statistical significance (t -values) and bivariate associations (r) for the Step 2 model.

The demographic model predicting support for PD when framed in terms of

Table 1. Distribution of Responses to Items Assessing Support for Smacking and the Use of Physical Force to Discipline Children.

Response options	It is OK for parents to use smacking as a way to discipline their children. (scored so that a higher score indicated agreement)			The current anti-smacking bill. (i.e., it being illegal to smack children). (scored so that a higher score indicated opposition to bill)			Should a smack as part of good parental correction be a criminal offence in NZ? (scored so that a higher score indicated 'NO')		
	%	Cum. %	n	%	Cum. %	n	%	Cum. %	n
1 -Disagree/Support/YES	9.5	9.5	530	9.4	9.4	525	6.9	6.9	385
2	6.2	15.7	345	5.4	14.8	303	3.8	10.7	214
3	6.2	21.9	344	5.0	19.8	281	3.1	13.8	173
4 -(scale midpoint)	11.8	33.7	656	7.5	27.3	421	4.5	18.3	250
5	19.1	52.8	1060	10.0	37.3	563	4.6	22.9	255
6	24.0	76.8	1332	20.0	57.4	1121	11.8	34.7	658
7 -Agree/Oppose/NO	23.2	100.0	1291	42.6	100.0	2390	65.3	100.0	3640

it being “OK for parents to use smacking” explained 9% of the variance in this measure ($F(18, 5684) = 29.97, p < .001$). The addition of psychological characteristics significantly improved the predictive utility of the model ($\Delta R^2 = .06, \Delta F(10, 5674) = 40.53, p < .001$). This full model explained a total of 15% of the variance in support for PD assessed by the “OK for parents to use smacking” item ($F(28, 5674) = 35.08, p < .001$).

The demographic model predicting support for PD when framed in terms of support versus opposition for Section 59 of the crimes act “the current anti-smacking bill” explained 6% of the variance in this measure ($F(18, 5732) = 19.10, p < .001$). The addition of psychological characteristics improved the predictive utility of the model ($\Delta R^2 = .06, \Delta F(10, 5722) = 35.70, p < .001$). The full model explained a total of 11% of the variance in support for PD ($F(28, 5722) = 25.77, p < .001$).

The demographic model predicting support for PD when framed as it was in the 2009 referendum, by asking “should a smack as part of good parent correction be a criminal offence...” explained 5% of the variance in this measure ($F(18, 5702) = 14.96, p < .001$). The addition of psychological characteristics at Step 2 significantly improved the predictive utility of the model ($\Delta R^2 = .05, \Delta F(10, 5692) = 31.64, p < .001$). The full model containing all predictors explained a total of 10% of the variance ($F(28, 5692) = 21.43, p < .001$).

As shown in Table 2, the three smacking attitude items were predicted by broadly similar factors. The two strongest predictors of PD attitudes were (low) education and political conservatism. These effects were consistent across all three models. For all three models, we did not detect any reliable ethnic group differences in PD attitudes. We also included gender x ethnicity interactions, which examined the extent to which it might only be men of one or more particular ethnic group who would be higher or lower than others in PD attitudes. We failed to detect statistically significant differences at our criteria of $p < .01$ for any such interactions.

These regression models paint an empirical sketch of those who support the use of physical force to discipline children. PD supporters were just as likely to be parents as not, were just as likely to live in wealthy neighbourhoods as in poor neighbourhoods, and just as likely to be Pakeha/European as to be of Māori, Pasifika or Asian ancestry. They were, however, more likely to be male than female, more likely to be religious, and of all demographics considered, more likely to be low in education.

In terms of psychological factors, people who support PD were no more or less likely to be high in Neuroticism or social anxiety, nor were they any more likely to be low in aspects relating to psychological wellbeing, such as self-esteem, experiences of social support or their overall satisfaction with life. However, they were more likely to be extroverted and sociable, and tended to be higher in Conscientiousness, preferring routine and organization in their lives. New Zealanders more supportive of the use of physical force to discipline children were also more likely to be low in Openness to Experience; that is, they were more likely to prefer certainty and to search for

Table 2.
Regression Models Predicting Support for Smacking and the Use of Physical Force to Discipline Children.

	It is OK for parents to use smacking as a way to discipline their children. (scored so that a higher score indicated agreement)			The current anti-smacking bill. (i.e., it being illegal to smack children). (scored so that a higher score indicated opposition to bill)			Should a smack as part of good parental correction be a criminal offence in NZ? (scored so that a higher score indicated 'NO')								
	b	se	β	t	r	b	se	β	t	r	b	se	β	t	r
Constant	4.70	.07				5.15	.08				5.68	.07			
Demographic Factors															
Parental Status (0 non-parent, 1 parent)	-.21	.09	-.05	-2.23	-.01	.07	.10	.01	.69	.04	.08	.09	.02	.90	.07
Gender (0 women, 1 men)	.47	.06	.12	7.84*	.14	.28	.06	.07	4.42*	.09	.18	.06	.05	2.99*	.04
Children Living at Home (0 no, 1 yes)	-.16	.07	-.04	-2.49	-.04	-.15	.07	-.04	-2.07	-.01	-.18	.07	-.05	-2.76*	-.03
Number of Children	.07	.02	.07	3.69*	.05	.04	.02	.04	1.97	.07	.05	.02	.05	2.54	.09
Mesh Block NZ Deprivation Index (centred)	.01	.01	.02	1.26	.02	.01	.01	.01	.80	.01	.01	.01	.01	.91	.01
Age (centered)	-.01	.00	-.08	-4.56*	.00	-.01	.00	-.07	-3.62*	.03	.00	.00	-.01	-.48	.08
Age Squared (centered)	.00	.00	.05	3.41*	.07	.00	.00	.04	2.50	.04	.00	.00	.02	1.64	.05
Relationship (0 single, 1 marital/serious)	-.13	.06	-.03	-2.30	-.03	-.10	.06	-.02	-1.70	-.04	-.03	.06	-.01	-.44	-.02
Religious (0 no, 1 yes)	.19	.05	.05	3.87*	.07	.14	.05	.04	2.70*	.06	.12	.05	.03	2.36	.07
Education (ordinal coded)	-.27	.02	-.18	-13.69*	-.23	-.25	.02	-.16	-11.71*	-.19	-.19	.02	-.13	-9.32*	-.17
Employment (0 unemployed, 1 employed)	-.13	.06	-.03	-2.25	.01	-.16	.06	-.04	-2.57*	.00	-.09	.06	-.02	-1.43	.03
Immigrant (0 no, 1 yes)	.03	.06	.01	.51	-.01	-.05	.07	-.01	-.75	-.03	.00	.06	.00	-.07	-.03
Maori Ethnicity (0 no, 1 yes)	-.02	.08	.00	-.23	.01	-.14	.09	-.03	-1.57	-.01	.12	.08	.02	1.48	.02
Pacific Nations Ethnicity (0 no, 1 yes)	-.20	.17	-.02	-1.20	.02	-.29	.18	-.03	-1.64	.00	-.05	.17	-.01	-.30	-.02
Asian Ethnicity (0 no, 1 yes)	.12	.15	.01	.79	.01	-.03	.16	.00	-.17	-.02	-.03	.15	.00	-.20	-.03
Gender x Maori	-.20	.13	-.03	-1.56	.03	-.11	.14	-.01	-.77	.01	-.29	.13	-.04	-2.21	.00
Gender x Pacific	.05	.24	.00	.21	.04	.14	.26	.01	.54	.02	-.49	.24	-.04	-2.02	-.02
Gender x Asian	-.02	.22	.00	-.09	.02	.06	.24	.00	.26	.00	-.05	.22	.00	-.23	-.01

Personality and Attitudes															
Extraversion (centered)	.08	.02	.05	3.60*	-.01	.10	.02	.06	4.10*	.01	.08	.02	.05	3.47*	.00
Agreeableness (centered)	-.08	.03	-.04	-2.99*	-.12	-.06	.03	-.03	-2.03	-.08	-.01	.03	-.01	-.38	-.04
Conscientiousness (centered)	.09	.02	.05	3.78*	.03	.11	.02	.06	4.27*	.06	.15	.02	.09	6.63*	.10
Neuroticism (centered)	-.01	.03	-.01	-.44	-.01	-.06	.03	-.03	-2.11	-.05	-.05	.03	-.03	-2.00	-.05
Openness to Experience (centered)	-.16	.02	-.09	-6.80*	-.16	-.11	.02	-.06	-4.41*	-.13	-.10	.02	-.06	-4.14*	-.13
Honesty-Humility (centered)	-.10	.02	-.07	-5.47*	-.12	-.04	.02	-.02	-1.72	-.05	-.05	.02	-.04	-2.71*	-.03
Political Conservatism (centered)	.30	.02	.19	14.68*	.24	.34	.02	.21	15.59*	.24	.28	.02	.19	13.86*	.22
Psychological functioning															
Self-Esteem (centered)	-.02	.03	-.01	-.56	-.01	.00	.03	.00	.12	.02	-.03	.03	-.02	-1.20	.02
Social Support (centered)	-.02	.02	-.01	-1.00	-.06	-.04	.03	-.02	-1.51	-.04	.00	.02	.00	.11	-.01
Life Satisfaction (centered)	.05	.03	.03	1.86	.01	.01	.03	.00	.28	.02	.02	.03	.01	.79	.03

Note. Standardised effect sizes $\geq .10$ printed in bold. All three outcome variables were measured on scales from 1 to 7 where a higher score reflects a view of physical discipline as more permissible.

b = unstandardised regression coefficient, se = standard error of b , β standardised regression coefficient, t = t -value of b , r = bivariate correlation of each predictor with the outcome variable.

* $p < .01$.

absolutes, and to be less interested in novelty or thinking for the sake of thinking. They were also likely to be lower in Honesty-Humility, the converse of which relates to being higher in Narcissism and a willingness to exploit others. More than any other predictor that was considered, people supportive of PD were also highly likely to rate themselves as politically conservative and to be right-wing in their political and social attitudes.

Discussion

The present study employed a representative sample of New Zealanders to investigate attitudes towards the physical punishment of children. Specifically, we were interested in comparing rates of endorsement across three items; one that replicated the recent referendum question (“should a smack as part of good parent correction be a criminal offence...”), a second that assessed views on the specific law that criminalised PD in New Zealand (support versus opposition for Section 59 of the crimes act “the current anti-smacking bill”), and one that was designed to assess attitudes more generally without any mention of government legislation or legal ramifications (“It is OK for parents to use smacking...”). It was found that New Zealanders, on average, were fairly opposed to a legal ban on PD, but many did express a personal view that PD is not acceptable. Clearly, the legality, and thus criminal culpability, implied in the referendum question was important in determining an individual’s response. As a society, New Zealanders place a strong emphasis on privacy and protection from intrusion (Rose, 2006). The distribution of responses across the three items indicated that there are some individuals who do not view PD as an acceptable parenting practice, but also do not believe it is something the government has the right to legislate against. It seems then that there are a group of individuals who do not want PD regulated and presumably do not want to lose the privacy to choose how they wish to discipline. Interestingly, there was also a difference between endorsement of lack of support for the anti-smacking bill and the referendum question with participants having a greater “no” endorsement of the referendum question compared to opposition to the repealed section 59. While the reasons for this are unclear, one possible explanation is that the referendum question actually was ambiguous and misleading as the Yes-Vote coalition suggested. The coalition pointed out that the very law that the referendum was addressing was not mentioned in the question, making it less clear for voters to understand what they were actually voting on. Also, the question equated smacking and good parenting which the coalition argued was not accurate based on national and international research. For parents who do not view PD as an acceptable practice, it may be confusing to agree with a statement that implies that smacking is a part of “good parental correction”.

A recent systematic review examining the impact of legislative bans of physical punishment in 24 countries suggested that once a ban against PD has been passed, attitudes of that country’s citizens change over time resulting in an increase in endorsement of the ban (Zolotor & Puzia, 2010). In the case of the present study, the data

were collected relatively soon (two years) after the repeal and immediately following the referendum. It is likely that the attitudes of the citizens were still in the early stages of change, and the referendum is likely to have temporarily bolstered support for the anti-ban stance. The difference between personal views and a lesser agreement with a legal ban may reflect this transition in attitudes that has been found elsewhere.

The present study also provided important information regarding the demographic, personality, attitudinal, and psychological correlates of views on PD. Among the large number of variables assessed, political conservatism and level of education emerged as the strongest and most reliable predictors of pro-PD attitudes. These findings are in line with previous research with parents that has found that greater political conservatism is associated with support for the use of PD (Jackson et al., 1999), while lower education is related to greater likelihood of using physical punishment as a discipline strategy (Day et al., 1998; Jackson et al., 1999; Smith & Brooks-Gunn, 1997).

Parental use of physical punishment with children is an issue that is deeply connected to an individual's underlying values and belief system (Benjet & Kazdin, 2003; Ellison, Bartkowski, & Segal, 1996). The finding that political conservatism was the strongest unique predictor of attitudes to the physical discipline of children is in line with this notion. The core features of political conservatism have been identified as resistance to change and a preference for inequality, which are manifested in traditional views of the family, the treatment of children, and the role of women, as well as an emphasis on deference to authority figures (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). There is a clear connection between this belief system and favourable attitudes towards the PD of children, such as the use of an authoritative parenting style, which is characterised by intrusive and strict control and punitive discipline practices (Peterson, Smirles, & Wentworth, 1997).

Of equal interest in building a picture of individuals who support PD are those factors that did not emerge as unique predictors. Importantly, level of

poverty, immigrant status, and ethnicity were not related to PD attitudes. These factors are often identified as being linked to the use of PD by parents, particularly in the US literature (e.g., Berlin et al., 2009; Day et al., 1998; Smith & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Wissow, 2001). Even New Zealand research indicates that children from Māori and Pasifika families are at higher risk of being physically disciplined by their parents or caregivers (Ministry of Health, 2008), while media messages and public policy often focus on the over-representation of Māori children in statistics on child maltreatment. The present findings challenge this work, possibly because here we assessed attitudes towards physical discipline in the general public rather than actual discipline practices in a sample of parents. In addition, the ethnic and socioeconomic circumstances in New Zealand are not the same as the US where much of the research has been conducted, and so replication is needed to evaluate the extent to which these findings generalise internationally. Nevertheless, the current findings tell us that individuals from certain socioeconomic or ethnic backgrounds are no more or less likely to hold positive attitudes towards PD than individuals who identify with other groups. Instead, it seems that ideological characteristics along with education are more important in determining an individual's view on PD, at least within New Zealand.

The above findings need to be considered in light of several key limitations. Firstly, the focus here was on attitudes towards PD in the general adult population, so no measure was taken of actual use of physical discipline methods among those in the sample who were currently parents. In the Dunedin and Christchurch longitudinal studies, participants reported as young adults that around 80% had experienced physical punishment from their parents at some time during their childhood, and between 4-6% had experienced harsh or severe physical punishment (Fergusson & Lynskey, 1997; Millichamp, Martin, & Langley, 2009). However, updated information on baseline rates of physical discipline practices among the parenting population in New Zealand is needed to

determine whether the 2007 legislation has been effective in actually reducing rates of PD. The study is also limited by the reporting of cross-sectional findings, although the data presented here are from the first phase of a large-scale longitudinal study on trends over time in values and attitudes of New Zealanders. Finally, the response rate to the postal survey was low, potentially limiting the generality of the findings to the broader New Zealand population. However, comparisons to New Zealand census data indicate that the sample was representative on key demographic characteristics such as ethnicity and socio-economic status. Women, however, were over-represented relative to men in the sample.

Implications and directions for future research

The current work provides a starting point for an evaluation of long-term trends in attitudes towards PD following the 2007 law change. This work is an important addition to current international findings that the introduction of legislative bans on PD is associated with declines in public support for PD in many countries, with this attitudinal shift coinciding with a decrease in the prevalence of the use of physical discipline (Zolotor & Puzia, 2010). Further waves of the NZAVS will enable an investigation of whether there are similar declines in support in New Zealand and will provide other countries contemplating similar legislation changes important information regarding the impact of these bans on public attitudes.

One issue for further investigation is the extent to which attitudes towards PD predict actual parental behaviour, and what factors contribute to the translation of beliefs into action. Research that has examined this issue has found that, although the prediction of parental behaviour is complex and involves the consideration of other factors including the child's age, parental cognitive and attributional processes and family stress, parental beliefs about the acceptability of physical discipline is an important predictor of behaviour (Jackson et al., 1999; Pinderhughes et al., 2000). This linkage between attitudes and parental disciplinary behaviour provides an

opportunity for intervention, which is likely to be most effective in producing discernible change in social attitudes if it occurs at a population level (Sanders, 2008). In fact, such work could begin before people transition into parenthood as endorsement of PD has been observed as early as adolescence (Deater-Deckard, Lansford, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 2003) and could be a part of broader anti-violence programs that are often implemented in schools, technical colleges and universities.

The current findings underscore the central importance of the language used to assess public support for legislative reforms. Governments contemplating changes in PD-related legislation should aim to contribute to a balanced public discourse in a way that prevents control of how the issue is framed, and how public opinion is measured, by pro-PD groups. Large-scale campaigns to engender support for changes in PD-related legislation will also need to take into account findings reported here and elsewhere that individuals with lower education or particular ideological characteristics are likely to be more resistant to efforts to shift social attitudes to the PD of children, or more subtly, the right of government to criminalise PD, by tailoring media messages or campaign material to address their concerns. Overall, it is likely that a more inclusive approach will be required to produce population-level attitude and behaviour change.

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