

A Study on Parental Disciplinary Practices and an Awareness Program to Reduce Corporal Punishment and Other Forms of Negative Parental Practices



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ABSTRACT

There is much debate on the efficacy of different methods of disciplining children. Due to its physical and psychological repercussions, some countries have banned parents using forceful disciplining on their children, particularly *physically* forceful disciplining.

The present study was conducted among a community of parents (n=194) living in a suburb in the Colombo district. It aimed to provide information on the prevalence of parental use of corporal punishment and physical abuse on their children, both of which are physically forceful methods of disciplining. Further, the study explored these parents' attitude towards the use of corporal punishment. This research also studied the prevalence of parental use of psychological aggression and non-violent disciplining strategies on their children. Finally, and importantly, this study included an investigative aspect where the study participants were involved in a two hour information-giving cum discussion style program where they were informed of the negative repercussion of physical and psychological disciplining on their children. These parents were informed of techniques of skillful disciplining instead. Pre- and post-intervention data was gathered in order to investigate if there was a change in the parents' use of physical, psychological and non-violent disciplining at post-intervention.

The culturally adapted and validated instrument, Parent-Child Conflict Tactic Scale was used to estimate the prevalence of parental use of physical force, psychological aggression and non-violent discipline on children. A modified version of the Attitude to Corporal Punishment subscale of the validated Psychosocial Questionnaire was used to assess parental attitudes to corporal punishment. Participants were chosen to take part in the study by personally inviting them by the community leaders in that area. Data on the participants' use of various disciplinary methods were collected at pre- and post-intervention, which was held, approximately, six weeks apart.

The results indicated a high prevalence of corporal punishment, psychological aggression, physical abuse as well as non-violent discipline amongst the study sample. Among other findings, the results also showed that parental use of corporal punishment and psychological aggression differed significantly by parents' age and occupational status, but not by parents' gender, ethnicity or religion. Importantly, the results of the intervention study indicated that there was a significant decline in parental use of corporal punishment, physical abuse and psychological aggression at post-intervention. Interestingly, there was also a significant decline in the parents' use of non-violent discipline at post-intervention.

This, the first documented Sri Lankan study on the use of an information-giving program on disciplining and its repercussions, indicates that a straight-forward, time-limited discussion-based approach is useful in reducing parental use of aversive disciplining strategies on their children. It is recommended that further studies, replicating the present research, be done in order to establish these findings.

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The data collection, and more importantly the intervention research phase was completed by the assistance of six persons, the trainers and facilitators. I am thankful for their dedication in realizing our research objectives. I am particularly grateful to Ms Samanmalee Kumari whose enthusiasm and interest greatly impressed me. It was my observation that she went beyond her call of duty in order to realize the study objectives – a quality not common in this day and age.

In my discussions with the trainers and facilitators, I was offered a view on the sentiments of the research participants – parents of a Colombo suburb. I am thankful to them for having agreed to take part in this study.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Objectives

Chapter I. introduces the present study as:

- 1.1 Corporal punishment and physical abuse: A continuum of violence
- 1.2 Corporal punishment: Its dynamics
- 1.3 Psychological aggression: Another aversive disciplinary method
- 1.4 Determining the dynamics of parental disciplining
- 1.5 Awareness programs to minimize parental use of negative disciplinary methods
- 1.6 Justification of the present study
- 1.7 Summary and research objectives

In recent years, there has been a great deal of interest in parenting practices (Baumrind 1996), particularly in parental disciplinary methods (Straus & Stewart 1999). In the domain of parental discipline, corporal punishment, a physically forceful method of discipline, is the most controversial topic (Holden 2002). The controversy is whether corporal punishment is wholly negative (Straus 2001) or whether it is effective under certain conditions (Larzelere 2001a). Though certain professional (Larzelere 2001) and lay persons propose that corporal punishment is effective if used under certain conditions, there is a global awakening to the potential negative outcomes of it as evidenced by several countries taking measures to ban its use (Save the Children 2002).

1.1 Corporal punishment and physical abuse: A continuum of violence

Evidence that most parents regularly use corporal punishment to discipline their children has been reported from many parts of the world (e.g. Yamamoto *et al.* 1999), including Sri Lanka (De Zoysa, Newcombe, & Rajapakse 2008). There is evidence that the experience of such corporal punishment has detrimental psychological and physical outcomes for the child (Gershoff 2002), even when used by loving and supportive parents (Straus *et al.* 1997). Despite the evidence to its detrimental outcomes, as indicated above, many lay persons as well as professionals involved in childcare advocate the use of corporal punishment (De Silva 2001).

Some childcare professionals postulate that corporal punishment and physical abuse lie along a continuum of physical force, where abuse may occur when corporal punishment escalates beyond parental control (e.g. Straus & Yodanis 1994). They believe that corporal punishment is a risk factor for physical abuse. Therefore, they are of the view that both corporal punishment and physical abuse should be legally condemned – as a measure to prevent corporal punishment escalating to physically abusive levels as well as to prevent the occurrence of psychological outcomes of corporal punishment.

1.2 Corporal punishment: Its dynamics

Understanding the psychosocial correlates associated with the use of corporal punishment by parents is crucial to the development of intervention and prevention programs. There is now quite a vast body of information on these correlates and the review of literature in Chapter 2 presents these in detail. Similarly, considerable research on the short- and long-term psychological outcomes of parental corporal punishment (e.g., depression, aggression, drinking problems) has also been documented. Some of these studies show that, though the experience of corporal punishment in itself does not guarantee childhood or adulthood psychological difficulties, it nevertheless is a risk factor for potential problems. The review of literature in Chapter 2 presents these outcomes in detail. Hence, there is an accumulation of evidence which shows that children exposed to such physical force often experience disrupted psychological growth, academic difficulties, behavioral problems, and interpersonal difficulties.

1.3 Psychological aggression: Another negative disciplinary method

Psychological aggression is “a communication intended to cause the child to experience psychological pain. The communicative act may be active or passive or verbal or nonverbal” (Solomon & Serres 1999, p. 339). Examples include name calling or nasty remarks (active, verbal), slamming a door or smashing something (active, nonverbal), or stony silence or ignoring (passive, nonverbal: Vissing *et al.* 1991). Psychological aggression generally involves a psychological or an emotional rejection of the child by verbal or symbolic forms of aggressive behavior or both (Straus & Field 2003). The term psychological aggression is generally used interchangeably with terms such as emotional abuse, emotional maltreatment, psychological maltreatment, psychological abuse, and verbal/symbolic aggression (Vissing *et al.* 1991). Some professionals are of the view that psychological aggression is a precursor to corporal punishment – where, parents when using psychologically aggressive strategies gets increasingly frustrated resulting in a physical expression of violence. I.e. corporal punishment. Hence, in order to prevent corporal punishment, psychological aggression has to be prevented.

There could be great variability in the type and extent of difficulties among children who have experienced psychological aggression. This variability is present because psychological aggression occurs within the broader context of an individual’s life, and hence individual factors and diverse life circumstances influence the presentation of its signs and symptoms. Some of the risk and protective factors associated with parental use of psychological aggression are discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

1.4 Determining the dynamics of parental disciplining

The prevalence and psychosocial correlates associated with parental disciplining should be determined using a practical and scientifically valid method. Such a method should be also used when assessing the impact of an intervention that is done with a view to changing parental use of aversive disciplinary methods. Though an interview is one such method, there are certain disadvantages associated with its use (Kelinger & Lee 1999). Self-administered instruments on the other hand are a more practical and time efficient

method and preserve the confidentiality of the respondents (Kelinger & Lee 1999). Instruments that have been developed based on sound theoretical underpinnings, have shown good psychometric properties in their culture of origin as well as in the culture it is used as present, and have been used extensively in research, could be used. Hence, for the present research program, the instrument Parent Child Conflict Tactic Scale (CTSPC: Straus *et al.*, 1998) was used as it has been used extensively in research, globally as well as in Sri Lanka. It has also validated into Sinhala (De Zoysa, Rajapakse, & Newcombe 2005) and hence is culturally valid to be used with Sinhala speaking adults, such as those in the present study.

As this was a pilot study (1) on the prevalence of parental use of disciplinary methods and (2) an assessment of the effectiveness of an information-giving program aimed at changing aversive disciplinary practices among parents of a selected suburb in Colombo, the information gained from the present study would be predominantly relevant to that group of participants. This is particularly so as the parents in the study was selected via a convenience sampling method. Logistic and time constraints led to this study being conducted solely on this group of f parents. Future studies, moving beyond a pilot study as this study was, should include larger and more representative samples that would ensure generalizability of results across all Sri Lankan parents.

1.5 Awareness programs to minimize parental use of aversive disciplinary methods

A majority of parents use on their children the same disciplinary methods that their parents used on them. This inter-generational phenomenon often leads adults to accept negative disciplinary methods such as corporal punishment and psychological aggression as effective and useful. Breaking this inter-generational transmission is not easy. Information-giving programs are useful in educating parents on the detrimental effects of aversive disciplinary methods. These programs however should not be limited to the repercussions of unhealthy disciplining but it should also impart information on positive disciplining. This added information gives parents disciplinary options once they stop using aversive methods on their children. The present study assessed the effectiveness of such a parental information-giving program that imparted to the study sample information on the detrimental effects of corporal punishment, physical abuse and psychological aggression as well as gave information on alternative healthy disciplinary methods.

1.6 Justification of the present study

At this time of global controversy on the appropriateness of parental use of corporal punishment on children, a country needs reliable culture-specific prevalence data on this matter. With such culture-specific information, policies and programs could be established based on factual data rather than those based on findings from other countries. There is a dearth of Sri Lankan studies on parental use of disciplining and the few that are known have children as the study respondents. Though data obtained from children are useful, it is also important to get information from the perpetrators of aversive disciplining – the parents. Hence, the present study attempted to provide such information on the prevalence and selected psychosocial correlates of parental use of aversive disciplinary methods. The present study also carried out an intervention – an information-giving program on parents on the detrimental effects of aversive disciplining and the importance of alternative healthy disciplining.

One of the most important contributions of this study is that it could inform social policy-makers and designers of child maltreatment preventive programs on the rate of use of aversive disciplinary methods by Sri Lankan parents, and if the use of such methods could be reduced by doing information-giving programs. If the results of this study are favorable to the use of such information-giving programs, then, such programs could be used to educate Sri Lankan parents on the detrimental outcomes of using aversive disciplining their children. The demographic correlates explored in this study would elucidate some of the key determinants of the use of aversive disciplining by Sri Lankan parents. Identification of such correlates unique to a particular culture is important, such that, evidence-based culturally appropriate preventive programs might be formulated. Such prevention can be addressed at three levels: primary, secondary and tertiary (Agathonos-Georgopoulou & Browne 1997). Primary prevention aims at fundamental and multi-factorial changes in society that may prevent the creation of the problem. Secondary prevention concerns the early identification of individuals with characteristics predisposing to the use of aversive disciplining, and would include identifying and working with families at high risk for such violence. Tertiary prevention attempts to solve the problem once it has occurred and includes efforts to intervene and treat families identified as using aversive disciplining on their children.

This study is one of the few Sri Lanka's contribution to the national and international literature on parental use of aversive disciplining on children and the impact of information-giving programs on reducing parental use of aversive disciplinary methods. It is also one of the few non-Western studies on corporal punishment and physical abuse and hence, it will be a contribution to the dearth of such studies from traditional cultures such as Sri Lanka.

1.7 Summary and research objectives

Disciplining is an important aspect of parenting. Most researchers conceptualize physical discipline as a continuum of violence - corporal punishment to physical abuse. Hence, physical abuse is considered to occur as a result of excessive and severe use of corporal punishment. In the same vein, psychological aggression is considered to be a precursor to corporal punishment where excessive and severe use of the former may lead to the latter. Hence, it seems that psychological aggression, corporal punishment and physical abuse are temporally connected. Decades of research on these disciplinary methods have shown that they are associated with negative outcomes for the child. Parental information-giving programs could be used to educate parents on these aspects. The present study, undertaken to fulfill these need had its objectives as:

1. To assess the prevalence of corporal punishment and other aversive disciplinary methods of parents in a Colombo suburb
2. To assess the prevalence of non-violent disciplinary use of parents in a Colombo suburb
3. To assess the association between parental disciplinary methods and selected demographic correlates in the study sample
4. To reduce the use of aversive disciplinary methods and increase the use of healthy disciplinary methods by an educative information-giving program

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

Chapter 2 presents a review of literature on parental disciplining in general, and on use of aversive disciplining in particular. The chapter is presented as:

- 2.1 Parenting practices
- 2.2 Parental disciplinary practices
- 2.3 A historical record of corporal punishment: Globally and in Sri Lanka
- 2.4 The association between corporal punishment and physical abuse
- 2.5 The prevalence of corporal punishment, physical abuse and psychological aggression
- 2.6 Psychosocial correlates of parental use of corporal punishment: Risk and protective factors
- 2.7 Outcomes of parental use of corporal punishment
- 2.8 Psychosocial correlates of parental use of psychological aggression: Risk and protective factors
- 2.9 Outcomes of parental use of psychological aggression
- 2.10 The present research program

2.1 Parenting practices

The family is both the earliest and the most sustained source of social contact for children. Parents teach children social rules and values by telling them what these are and by praising or disciplining them when they conform to or violate socially acceptable standards of speech and behaviour. Parents also modify their children's behaviour in an indirect manner, by serving as models whom the children can identify with or imitate. Further, parents influence their children's self-esteem through attributes they make about their behaviour. This socialisation process therefore, has an impact on the emerging personality of children (Hetherington & Parke 1999).

Most parents have some beliefs about the kind of characteristics they would like to see in their children and the parenting practices that they should use to attain them (Hetherington & Parke 1999). However, there are many paths to inculcate these characteristics and hence, there does not appear to be an only-one parenting formula (Hetherington & Parke 1999). Thus, parenting practices have to be adjusted to the temperament and needs of the individual child, to the demands of the culture in which the family is functioning, and to what is considered as acceptable practice in the culture to which the family belongs.

With regards to discipline, within this domain of parenting, there is a general agreement amongst cultures that very harsh physical force should not be allowed (Bross *et al.* 2000). However, it appears that though there is a consensus among most cultures with

respect to harsh discipline, such agreement is lacking in relation to the use of “minor” physical force (i.e. corporal punishment).

Styles of parenting

Baumrind (1991) has proposed three distinct styles of parenting. *Authoritative* parents are not intrusive and permit their children considerable freedom, within reasonable limits. In general, such a parenting style is associated with children’s healthy self-esteem, adaptability, competence, internalised control, popularity with peers and low levels of antisocial behaviour (Baumrind 1991). In contrast, *authoritarian* parents are rigid, power assertive, harsh and unresponsive to their children. This parenting style is associated with the unhappy, conflicted, and anxiety ridden behaviour often found in children of authoritarian parents (Baumrind 1991). Finally, in spite of the *permissive* parent’s reasonably affectionate relationship with their children, their excessively lax and inconsistent discipline, and encouragement of the free expression of their children’s impulses are associated with the development of uncontrolled, impulsive behaviour in their children (Baumrind 1991). A fourth parenting style - *neglecting* - has also been identified (Hetherington & Parke 1999). This is characterised by parenting where there is little time and effort put into the interaction with the child. Neglectful parenting is associated with a host of physical, intellectual and emotional problems in children (Oates *et al.* 1985). Parent’s beliefs regarding children’s misbehaviour and their knowledge on how to change it will determine their dominant parenting style - with its resultant very different outcomes for the children.

At present, most Western cultures place great value on authoritative parenting (Baumrind 1991). This is in contrast to authoritarian parenting advocated until very recently, where there was a liberal application of corporal punishment. However, in Asia, a more authoritative parenting is still seen. In India for instance, authoritarian parenting style is culturally encouraged and commonly seen (Segal 1995) where children are generally trained to obey their parents and praise is not common as it is believed that it may render the child proud and difficult to control (Poffenberger 1981). Although India comprises a significant portion of the Asian continent, different parenting practices have been reported in other Asian cultures. The Malay community is an example (Nathan & Woon 1981). Close and loving relationships are considered important in the Malay community and form the basis for the care of their children. Hence, in these sparse research reports from Asia, there appears to be a mix of parenting practices within the continent. Studies on the Sri Lankan culture however are minimal.

2.2 Parental disciplinary practices

For many, the word ‘discipline’ refers to punishment intended to decrease misbehavior (Larzelere & Kuhn 1993). However, the word is derived from “discipline”, referring to a system of teaching or instruction (Howard 1996). John B. Watson (Watson 1928, cited in Howard 1996), argued that mothers should avoid being nurturant with their children. However, the importance of parental nurturance made its mark with Benjamin Spock’s “Common sense book of baby and child care” (Spock 1946, cited in Howard 1996). Since then, advice on discipline has changed from Watson’s strict discipline to the

permissiveness of the 1950's and 1960's to today's mixed messages (Farehand & Mckinney 1993).

Two major groups of social scientists have studied parental discipline. The first group, cognitive developmental psychologists, has emphasized moral internalization and autonomy as important goals of discipline (Grusec & Kuczuski 1997). Moral internalization is a process whereby children adopt a set of values as their own. Autonomy refers to the children's growing ability to act independently. The goal of behavioral parent trainers, the second group, has been to improve children's compliance, whilst misbehaviors are reduced (Roberts & Powers 1988). The goals of both these groups are, in fact, complimentary, as non-compliance and defiance is a major risk factor for poor moral internalization (e.g. Kochanska & Thompson 1997).

Physically forceful parental disciplinary practices: Corporal punishment, physical abuse and psychological aggression

A definition of corporal punishment and physical abuse

Physical discipline concerns two methods - corporal punishment and physical abuse. Most researchers view corporal punishment and physical abuse as two points on a continuum of physically forceful acts (Whipple & Richey 1997). Physical abuse is considered as an outcome of increasing frequency and severity of corporal punishment (Straus & Kantor 1994). However, a consensus on the demarcation between corporal punishment and physical abuse is absent in the literature (Whipple & Richey 1997). For instance, in Sri Lanka, the law that *refers* to corporal punishment *implies* physical abuse (Department of Police 1999).

There is no globally accepted definition of either corporal punishment or physical abuse. In such an absence, the present study adopted the following definition of corporal punishment that has guided much research on this topic. Corporal punishment "*is the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain but not injury for the purposes of correction or control of the child's behaviour*" (Straus 1994, p. 4). Corporal punishment therefore includes strategies such as spanking, slapping, pinching, or hitting with objects such as sticks or belts (Straus & Stewart 1999).

As with corporal punishment, in the absence of a globally accepted definition of physical abuse, the present study adopted the definition of the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information (2001). Physical abuse is "*characterised by the infliction of physical injury as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, burning, shaking or otherwise harming a child. The parent or caretaker may not have intended to hurt the child, rather the injury may have resulted from over discipline or physical punishment.*" Physically forceful disciplinary strategies that do not result in significant physical injury are considered corporal punishment, whereas those that risk such injury are conceived as physical abuse.

A definition of psychological aggression

The definition of psychological aggression that guided this research was “*a communication intended to cause the child to experience psychological pain. The communicative act may be active or passive or verbal or nonverbal*” (Solomon & Serres 1999, p. 339). Examples include name calling (active, verbal), smashing something (active, nonverbal), or ignoring (passive, nonverbal: Vissing *et al.* 1991). Psychological aggression generally involves a psychological or an emotional rejection of the child by verbal or symbolic forms of aggressive behavior or both (Straus & Field 2003). Psychological aggression has been shown to be a precursor to the use of corporal punishment (Berkowitz 1993), which in turn could lead to physical abuse (Libby & Bybee 1979, cited in Straus & Runyan 1997).

2.3 A historical record of corporal punishment: Globally and in Sri Lanka

In many parts of the world, parental use of physical force on children has been recorded in literature, art and science and date back to ancient civilizations (Ten Bensele *et al.* 1997). Similarly, for centuries, there have also existed persons who have cared for the well-being of children who have argued against or called for moderation in parental use of corporal punishment (Peisher 1989).

For more than 70 years, psychologists have been investigating the effectiveness of corporal punishment. In the early decades of the 20th century both Thorndike and Skinner claimed that such punishment was ineffective in producing significant and lasting behavioural changes in children (Hall & Lindzey 1991). Instead, these psychologists espoused that children’s behaviour be moulded by rewards for their positive actions. In contrast, the literature during the middle decades propounded that spanking could be a beneficial tool in parenting. However, it asserted so cautiously, advocating its use only in situations where parents assessed its potential benefits and harm (Spock 1946, cited in Howard 1996). Hence, corporal punishment began to be viewed as part of a repertoire of disciplinary methods that was available in appropriate parenting. With time, discipline carried constructive, developmentally appropriate overtones whereas corporal punishment began to hold a negative connotation (Behleheim 1985).

In Sri Lanka, Moldrich (1986) has presented evidence of ancient Sri Lankan kings who has declared laws prohibiting any bodily harm, by way of punishment, to children or adults. For instance, Moldrich (1986) exemplified King Vijayabahu II (1186-1187) and King Vijayabahu III (1232-1236) who were credited for their compassion towards children where children beaten by their parents have been reported to come to King Vijayabahu III and tell him of their woes, with the king then exhorting their parents not to beat the children any longer (Moldrich 1986). With the Portuguese, Dutch and British colonisation of Sri Lanka (1505-1948), certain aspects of ancient Sri Lankan culture, including its parenting practices, was replaced by thought, speech and behaviour practised by these colonial powers. Though these new practices may have been initially thrust on the Sri Lankans by force of law (Moldrich 1986), or by way of violence, with time, it may have pervaded the deeper fabric of Sri Lankan society. Therefore, the use of corporal punishment in parenting, though considered contrary to cultural values in ancient Sri Lanka, may have been accepted as a normative aspect of parenting later on. Today,

corporal punishment still has much relevance in Sri Lanka as it is not unusual for parents (and teachers) to believe that they have the right to use such discipline on children.

2.4 The association between corporal punishment and physical abuse

Corporal punishment has been identified as an important contributor to physical abuse (Durrant & Rose-Krasnor 1995). Empirical findings suggest that corporal punishment lead to physical abuse in two ways: (i) as the severity and frequency of corporal punishment increases, and (ii) through the intergenerational transmission of aggressive problem-solving tactics.

A number of studies have conceptualised physical abuse as being one end of the continuum of physically forceful discipline (Gelles & Straus 1988). From this perspective, most physical abuse strategies are not viewed as acts to injure children, but as acts intended to control children's misbehaviour. Corporal punishment and physical abuse are thus considered closely related, differing only in degree. This position is supported by studies of individuals who have been convicted of child physical abuse (Gil 1970, cited in Gershoff 2002).

Corporal punishment may also lead to physical abuse through the inter-generational transmission of the belief in the need of physical force when parenting. While not all parents who have had adverse childhood experiences become abusive (Dietrich *et al.* 1990), they, nonetheless, are at a higher risk of maltreating their children than are those without such histories.

2.5 The prevalence of corporal punishment, physical abuse and psychological aggression

Mrazek & Haggerty (1994) has described five stages to the scientific approach of any form of health intervention: (i) define the problem and assess prevalence, (ii) review risk and protective factor data, (iii) design, conduct and analyse pilot studies of the preventive intervention programme, (iv) design, conduct and analyse large scale trials of the preventive intervention programme, and (v) facilitate large scale implementation and on-going evaluation of the preventive intervention program in the community. Therefore, before determining the necessity of and/or planning any intervention or prevention programme on parental use of physical force on children, it is important that the prevalence of the phenomena be assessed.

In Sri Lanka, there have been very few studies on corporal punishment and physical abuse. Most are case reports (e.g., Chandrasiri *et al.* 1988). The most detailed study on corporal punishment and physical abuse was by De Zoysa, Newcombe, & Rajapakse, 2008, on 12-year-old Sinhala speaking school children, which reported a high prevalence and frequency of corporal punishment. This study also reported that not only did corporal punishment directly predict a child's maladjustment but that non-parent-to-child violence (i.e., domestic, school, peer, and community violence) significantly impacted this association.

In relation to other countries, a large scale study on a sample of children in grades four through six in China and Korea were surveyed on their exposure to parental (and

other forms of) violence (Kim *et al.* 2000). The past year prevalence of violence in the family was 42.2% of minor violence (i.e. corporal punishment) and 22.6% of severe violence (i.e. physical abuse) in China, and 7.4% of minor and 51.3% of severe violence in Korea. Another Asian study, from Pakistan, indicated that all 4200 children in the study experienced corporal punishment at home (NGO's Coalition on Child Right's NWFP 1999). The only comprehensive study of parental use of corporal punishment on British children found that corporal punishment was inevitable and perceived by parents to be a necessary aspect of day-to-day parenting (Newson & Newson 1980). This longitudinal study revealed that mothers' use of smacking increased as children advanced in years from one- to four-years. However, by 11-years, smacking had decreased considerably. The overall corporal punishment prevalence for American children has been reported as 35% for infants and a peak of 94% at ages three- to four-years (Straus & Stewart 1999). Corporal punishment was more prevalent among African Americans, low socio-economic families, in the South, for boys and, by mothers. The Gallup News Service (1995) reported the prevalence of physical abuse of American children to be at 49 per 1000.

As compared to corporal punishment, fewer studies have been done on psychological aggression. An America study reported an annual prevalence of about 90% for parental psychological aggression toward 12-year-old Americans (Straus & Field 2003). The only known Sri Lankan study on psychological aggression (De Zoysa, Newcombe, Rajapakse 2010) reported an annual prevalence of psychological aggression of 75% on 12-year-old Sinhala speaking children. The experience of psychological aggression was shown to be moderately, but directly and significantly, associated with psychological maladjustment in children. This association was mediated by non-parent to-child violence – the child's knowledge of violence between the parents, experience of teacher violence, exposure to peer violence, and violence in the child's community. The study also indicated that greater the child's experience of non-parent-to-child violence, the greater is his/her own level of hostility and aggression. These findings show that although many Sri Lankan parents use psychological aggression it has negative consequences for their children.

Because the definitions, study methods and participant characteristics of the studies presented in this section vary, comparison of results needs to be done cautiously (Creighton 2004).

2.6 Psychosocial correlates of parental use of corporal punishment: Risk and protective factors

There is great variability in the type and extent of difficulties among children who have experienced corporal punishment (Farber & Egeland 1987). This variability is present because corporal punishment occurs within the broader context of an individual's life and hence individual factors and diverse life circumstances influence the presentation of its signs and symptoms. An understanding of the multitude of risk and protective factors (i.e. correlates) associated with the negative outcomes of corporal punishment is important. It could provide an empirical basis for designing social policies and scientifically informed preventive and intervention parent education programmes.

I) Perpetrator-related factors

Some studies have shown that fathers tend to approve of and use corporal punishment more than mothers (Hart & Robinson 1994) though an American study reported vice versa (Straus & Stewart 1999) and other studies have found no differences in corporal punishment rates between mothers and fathers (Wissow 2001). Younger mothers have reported greater and more frequent use of corporal punishment than older mothers (Wissow, 2001) may be because they lack of experience with children (Gershoff 2002).

Socio Economic Status (SES), operationalized as income, educational level, and/or job status (Hoff-Ginsberg & Tardif 1995), has been negatively associated with parental use of corporal punishment. Several studies have reported that as SES declined, rates of corporal punishment increased (Xu *et al.* 2000). This may be due to increase in parents' psychological distress that economic hardship brings leads them to more frequent use of corporal punishment (Simons *et al.* 1993). Or, it could be because that low SES parents may rely more on corporal punishment because they place an importance on children's immediate compliance. Despite these findings, some studies have found no such association (Mahoney *et al.* 2000) and even contradictory findings within studies (Stolley & Szinovacz 1997). On a related note, in their study, after controlling for age and birth order, Asdigian and Straus (2001) reported that prevalence of parental corporal punishment increased as the number of children increased from one to four or more, suggesting that the emotional and/or economic stress of additional children may lead parents to adopt physically forceful discipline.

Results on parent's ethnicity as a possible determinant of parental use of corporal punishment have been contradictory (Pinderhughes *et al.* 2000), or have found no difference in amongst the ethnic groups studied (e.g., Ellison *et al.* 1985, unpublished observation, cited in Straus & Stewart 1999). In terms of religion, use of corporal punishment has been supported by certain religious affiliations (Kuczynski & Hilderbrant 1997). For example, conservative Protestant affiliation has been associated with more frequent use of corporal punishment (Xu *et al.* 2000). The conservative interpretation of the Bible has been hypothesized to predispose certain followers of these religious affiliations to use aggression in time of personal conflict (Gershoff *et al.* 1999).

Research findings have reported that the experience of corporal punishment in one's childhood increases the risk of such persons using severe physical violence on their own children in adulthood (Straus & Smith 1992) – an intergenerational transmission of violence. Further, parents' temperament has also been shown to predict the likelihood of using corporal punishment on their children. For instance, parents with aggressive tendencies and antisocial behavior tend to report using corporal punishment to a greater extent than do parents without such tendencies (Bank *et al.* 1993). And, several indices of parent's impaired psychological functioning have been associated with an increase in the use of, and positive attitudes to, corporal punishment. Parental experience of negative moods (Holden *et al.* 1995), anxiety or avoidance (Paquette *et al.* 2000), depression and use of legal or illegal drugs (Youssef *et al.* 1998) are some of these indices that have been associated with their use of corporal punishment.

The emotions parents experience during their interactions with their children influence how they react to child misbehaviors (Dix 1991). When parents are highly emotionally aroused (such as anger), they tend to make negative attributions about their children's misbehaviors and to select power assertion, such as corporal punishment, as their response (Pinderhughes *et al.* 2000).

II) Child-related factors

Parents often have different expectations of boys and girls, and as a result, may respond differently to the same misbehavior depending on the gender of the child exhibiting it (Houston 1983). Boys receive more corporal punishment than girls (e.g., Mahoney *et al.* 2000), possibly because they tend to engage in behavior that elicit such discipline (e.g., aggression) more than do girls. It has also been postulated that parents may use corporal punishment more on boys than girls because parents tend to hold gender-based expectations of their children's behavior, such as wanting to toughen up their boys rather than their girls (Ruble & Martin 1998). Contrary to the findings of Lytton and Rumney (1991), studies in India and China have shown that parents tend to favor boys over girls, as males have an elevated status in such traditional societies (Poffenberger 1981).

Parents tend to view corporal punishment as most appropriate for children of pre-school age and least appropriate for infants and for children aged five-years and older (Flynn 1998). Hence, parental use of corporal punishment is negatively associated with the age of the child (Mahoney *et al.* 2000), with corporal punishment use decreasing as a children age into adolescence (Straus & Stewart 1999). Children's age has also been linked with the severity of corporal punishment. Parents have reported using more severe forms of corporal punishment with children between five- and eight-years than with children either younger or older than this age group (Straus & Stewart 1999).

Children's heritable characteristics, with temperament as a key factor, have been thought to reflect the type of parenting they receive (Bell & Chapman 1986). It has been hypothesized that children high in activity level, low in self-regulation, and/or high in aggressive tendencies, may elicit forceful, coercive disciplinary methods from their caregivers (Thyer 1987). However, there has also been some evidence that children's temperament does not elicit differential amounts of corporal punishment (Kendel & Wu 1995). Further, studies have shown that children with developmental disabilities are at a greater risk of experiencing corporal punishment than those without such disabilities (Ammerman *et al.* 1994).

III) Family related factors

As the parent and child are part of a larger family structure, characteristics of the overall family can influence the likelihood of the parent using corporal punishment. Particularly important is the quality of the parent's romantic relationship. Parents in abusive marriages, as compared to those in happy ones, are more likely to use corporal punishment when managing their children (Pinderhughes *et al.* 2000). Marital status itself has been shown to perpetuate corporal punishment. For instance, the stress of single parenthood can make one rely more on corporal punishment (Loeber *et al.* 2000).

However, remarriage alone does not seem to decrease corporal punishment use as there is some evidence that physical discipline is common in stepfamilies (Hashima & Amato 1998).

IV) Social-community-cultural factors

A parenting style, including the use of corporal punishment, is in part determined by the set of parenting beliefs, goals and expectations inherent in one's culture (Greenfield & Suzuki 1998). When corporal punishment is accepted and expected by one's community, parents may feel justified in administering it. Studies have shown that parents living in communities where aggression is frequently encountered tend to use corporal punishment more (Dietz 2000). Hence, those who are socialized in an environment that promotes aggression as a problem solving method would be more likely to use corporal punishment in their parenting role (Dietz 2000).

Availability of social support too has been studied as precursor to use of corporal punishment. Social support is more likely to impact parenting indirectly by, for example, decreasing parental depression and stress (Simons *et al.* 1993). Such a social support network also serves to make parents feel connected to their community and to promote the use of nonviolent discipline (Gabarino & Kostelny 1995). Further, social networks provide parents with assistance such as money or childcare, emotional encouragement, and parenting advice (Cochran & Niego 1995). Few studies support these views (Gabarino & Kostelny 1995).

2.7 Outcomes of parental use of corporal punishment

Most childcare professionals have concluded that corporal punishment is ineffective at best and harmful at worst (American Academy of Pediatrics 1998). The predominant outcomes of corporal punishment are:

I) Psychological, behavioural and interpersonal outcomes of corporal punishment

The primary reason that most parents use corporal punishment is to stop children from misbehaving, immediately (Gershoff 2002). Research has confirmed that corporal punishment is indeed effective in securing such short-term compliance (Newsom *et al.* 1983). Though short-term compliance is often a valid goal for most parents their long-term goal generally would be the hope that the child will continue to comply in the future, and in their absence (Kuczynski 1984). Hence, the development of children's internal control is a more important long-term objective (Grolnick *et al.* 1997). Children's internalisation of morals and values is enhanced by parental disciplinary strategies that use minimal power, provide choice and autonomy, and provide explanations for desirable behaviours (Kuczynski & Hilderbrant 1997). Studies have shown that corporal punishment may not facilitate moral internalisation because it does not teach children the need to behave correctly, does not involve the communication of the effects of children's misbehaviour on others, and because it may teach children the desirability of not getting caught (Grusec 1983).

Harsh punishment (including corporal punishment) has been significantly associated with adolescent's depression symptomatology (McLoyd *et al.* 1994). Coercive disciplinary techniques have also been associated with decreases in children's level of confidence and assertiveness and with increases in feelings of humiliation and helplessness (Lasky 1993). The association between corporal punishment and children's aggression is one of the most studied and debated findings in the literature on parenting (Coie & Dodge 1998). Corporal punishment may predict increases in children's aggression because it models aggression (Avonfreed 1969, cited in Coie & Dodge 1998), promotes hostile attributions which predict violent behaviour (Dishion & Patterson 1999), and because it initiates cycles of coercive behaviour between the child and the parent (Dodge *et al.* 1986). These hypotheses have been validated (Cohen *et al.* 1990). Corporal punishment has also been implicated in the aetiology of criminal and antisocial behaviour (Wilson & Herrnstein 1985). This is because corporal punishment cannot facilitate internalisation of moral values (Lepper 1983). This same process may explain the link between corporal punishment and criminality. McCord's (1997) studies on corporal punishment and criminality has reported that the extent to which the parents were aggressively punitive predicted their children's arrest rate at 17-years and their criminal behaviour as adults. With regards to antisocial behaviour, a study by Straus *et al.*'s (1997) showed that the more corporal punishment children experienced, the greater was their antisocial behaviour subsequent to such discipline.

It has been hypothesized that if corporal punishment is associated with a general tendency towards aggression in adulthood, this may manifest itself in relationships with family members, such as with children, spouse/partner or both. Therefore, such persons would be more likely to resort to aggression and violence during conflicts with their children and spouse. Research findings have supported these hypotheses (Holden *et al.* 1997).

Talking to children has been associated with an increase in the neural connections in the brain and children's cognitive performance (Straus 2001). Therefore, if parents avoided corporal punishment, they would be more likely to engage in verbal methods of behavior control such as explaining and reasoning. This increased verbal interaction would in turn enhance children's cognitive ability (Straus 2001). This theory was substantiated by a study that showed that lesser the corporal punishment experienced, the greater the probability of children having an above average cognitive growth (Straus 2001).

II) Occupational and economic achievement outcomes of corporal punishment

Corporal punishment also appears to have a dampening effect on occupational and economic achievement (Straus & Gimpel 1992). Straus and Gimpel (1992) have explained that experiencing corporal punishment in childhood increases the probability of children becoming alienated, depressed and violent, which in turn may result in their low educational attainment (Straus 1994a). Straus and Mathur's (1995) study substantiated Straus and Gimpel's (1992) explanation. In fact, academic achievement requires a self-directed commitment to learn, but the experience of corporal punishment may teach obedience more than such self-direction (Straus & Mathur 1995).

III) Physical outcome of corporal punishment: Physical abuse

Most child abuse researchers tend to consider corporal punishment and physical abuse on a continuum, such that if the former is administered too severely or frequently it may end in abuse (Vasta 1982). The view of such a continuum is corroborated by research. In a study of parents who revealed that they had physically abused their children, two thirds stated that their abusive acts started out as attempts to change their child's behavior (Kadushin & Martin 1999).

2.8 Psychosocial correlates of parental use of psychological aggression: Protective and risk factors

The following psychosocial correlates of parental use of psychological aggression have been identified:

I) Perpetrator-related factors

Socioeconomic status has been negatively associated with psychological aggression (Sedlak 1997). Possibly, the increase in parent's psychological distress that economic hardship brings may lead to their more frequent use of psychological aggression. It could also be that stress from low SES can compound stress associated with being a parent. In considering the personality and mental health of the perpetrator, a study by Lesnik-Oberstein, Koers, and Cohen (1995) showed that psychologically aggressive mothers have more neurotic and dysthymic symptoms than mothers who were not aggressive. They also had higher social anxiety and lower self-esteem. In considering the experiences in the perpetrator's family of origin, Hemenway, Solnick, and Carter's (1994) study showed that parents who were themselves yelled at by their parents in childhood had a higher tendency to yell at their own children.

II) Child-related factors

Sedlak's research (1997) showed that as a child advances in age he or she is more exposed to psychological aggression. In terms of the child's ethnicity as a possible determinant of parental use of psychological aggression, the results have shown that children described as Other experience more psychological aggression than White, Black or Hispanic children (Sedlak 1997). However, the findings on child's gender and parental use of psychological aggression are equivocal with Sedlak (1997) reporting no association whereas Vissing *et al.* (1991) reporting that boys experience slightly more psychological aggression than girls.

III) Family-related factors

Research on single parent and two-parent families show that family structure is not significantly associated with parental use of psychological aggression (Sedlak 1997). The nature of the parental relationship has also been studied. A study by Lesnik-Oberstein *et al.* (1995) showed that, as compared to psychologically nonaggressive mothers, mothers who were psychologically aggressive reported receiving less affection from their partners

as well as giving less affection in return. The latter also reported greater levels of verbal and physical aggression in their romantic relationships than the former.

IV) Social–community–cultural-related factors

The geographic region of the family is shown to be not significantly associated with parental use of psychological aggression (Sedlak 1997). However, exposure to community violence and the use of psychological aggression have shown unexpected results with children reporting no experience of psychological aggression being more likely to be from a violent community than children from families reporting psychological aggression (Lynch & Cicchetti 1998).

2.9 Outcomes of parental use of psychological aggression

As acts of psychological aggression vary in severity, it could be assumed that acts of higher severity are more associated with psychological pain than acts of lower severity (Straus & Field 2003). However, research has shown that this is not so and that lower severity psychological aggression can lead to psychological pain in the child as do acts of higher severity (Barnett, Manly, & Cicchetti 1993). Other studies on the outcomes of psychological aggression also appear to support the hypothesis that it is associated with psychological and social problems for the child (Ney 1987). However, most research studies on psychological aggression have had limitations, such as not controlling for the presence of physical aggression when measuring psychological aggression (Ney, 1987) and where the instruments had measured diverse negative aspects of parental behavior other than their use of psychological aggression (Gilmartin 1985). A study by Vissing *et al.* (1991), on other hand, which did not have the above limitations and had pure measures of psychological aggression indicated that with each increment of psychological aggression, the greater the children's physical aggression, delinquency, and interpersonal problems.

2.10 The present research program

The above review of literature on corporal punishment and psychological aggression reports its association with a host of negative psychological and physical outcomes for children. This chapter also presented an array of findings and hypotheses on the psychosocial correlates and of parental use of corporal punishment and psychological aggression on their children. The identification of these correlates and outcomes was the result of several research programs conducted over the years in several countries. In the present study, a few such selected correlates, hypothesized to be associated with parental use of aversive disciplining were investigated in the Sri Lankan context. Hence, though these correlates were studied in other countries, it was important that it be studied in the Sri Lankan context too, so as to have country specific data. These correlates were chosen based on the literature review presented in this chapter and the number of correlates chosen was influenced by the need to limit the number of questions (presented to the research participants) to an acceptable limit.

The study assessed the prevalence of corporal punishment, physical abuse, psychological aggression as well as non-violent discipline among a convenience sample of parents. Their use of these disciplinary methods was assessed in relation to the correlates of (1) gender of parent (2) age of parent (3) occupation of parent (4) ethnicity of parent, and (5) religion of parent.

Other than the assessment of prevalence and correlates, an information-giving program on healthy disciplining was conducted on the sample and an assessment was made if this program led to a self-reported decrease in parent's use of aversive disciplining and an increase in their use of non-violent disciplining, over a period of six weeks.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Chapter 3 presents the methodology as:

- 3.1 The study design
- 3.2 The study population
- 3.3 Sample size
- 3.4 Study instruments
- 3.5 Study procedure and data collection
- 3.6 Ethical aspects
- 3.7 Data analysis

3.1 The study design

The study design comprised of two components. The first component used a cross-sectional design to estimate the prevalence of parental use of corporal punishment, physical abuse, psychological aggression and non-violent discipline in a group of parents in selected suburb of the Colombo district. The research also explored selected psychosocial correlates associated with the use of such aversive and non-violent disciplinary methods.

The second component comprised of an interventional study where the research participants attended an information-giving program on healthy parenting and disciplining. This program was conducted on the same day as collecting the above-indicated prevalence data (i.e. Time 1). Thereafter, six weeks from this baseline data collection, post-intervention data was collected, again on these same parents' use of corporal punishment, physical abuse, psychological aggression and non-violent discipline on the same referent child as in the baseline survey.

3.2 The study population

The study population (N=1750: K P G Karunadasa, Personal communication, October 10, 2011) was all parents in a selected suburb in the Colombo district.

The inclusion criterion was:

All parents who were present at a pre-notified community hall on the day of the study.

The exclusion criterion was:

All parents who were not present at a pre-notified community hall on the day of the study.

3.3 Sample size

Logistic and time constraints led to the present study being conducted in one suburb in the Colombo district and on a convenience sample of parents. Parents (n = 194) living in a selected suburb in the Colombo district participated in this study. Of these, at Time 1, twelve parents returned incomplete questionnaires and these were excluded from the analyses. Hence the final sample size at Time 1 was 177 parents.

Though all 194 parents who took part in Time 1 of the study was invited to the Time 2 of the study, 37 parents either did not present at Time 2 or some questionnaires had to be discarded due to incomplete data. Hence, the final sample size at Time 2 was 157 parents.

3.4 Study instruments

A questionnaire that collected selected demographic data on participants age, gender, ethnicity, religion and occupational status was used. Other than this questionnaire two other questionnaires were also used:

The Parent-Child Conflict Tactic Scale [CTSPC: De Zoysa et al. 2005]:

The validated Sinhala version of the CTSPC has three scales and 26 items. Scale items are disciplinary strategies. A respondent indicates if a particular disciplinary strategy never occurred or occurred once, twice, three-five times, six-ten times, 11-20 times, or more than 20 times in the referent period assessed. The referent period may vary (e.g., past month, past year, lifetime), depending on the research objectives. For the present research, a referent period of one month was used. The Sinhala CTSPC include: (i) Nonviolent Discipline (these are disciplinary strategies that are widely used alternatives to corporal punishment. e.g., “explained why something was wrong”); (ii) Physical Assault (at the lower severity level of the Minor Physical Assault sub-scale, the items relate to corporal punishment that has been traditionally used by parents in response to child misbehavior. e.g., “shook you”. Items of higher severity in the Severe Physical Assault and Very Severe Physical Assault sub-scales include indicators of physical abuse. e.g., “grabbed you around the neck and choked you”); and (iii) Psychological Aggression (these are verbal and symbolic acts by the parent intended to cause psychological pain or fear in the child. e.g., “swore or cursed at you”). It has an average testing time of about six to eight minutes. The adaptation, validation, psychometric properties, and scoring of the Sinhala version of the CTSPC is discussed by De Zoysa *et al.* (2005).

Attitude to Corporal Punishment Scale (of the Psychosocial Questionnaire: PSQ):

The PSQ was designed for a large study on child-directed violence and comprises of 66 items assessing select variables that have been shown to be associated with parental use of physical force on children (De Zoysa 2005). The PSQ consists of several scales and its scale of Attitude to Corporal Punishment was used in this present study to assess parental attitude to corporal punishment. This scales presents a short vignette on parental use of corporal punishment on which respondent’s attitudes to punishment are gleaned by way

of four statements (e.g. Anil and Kumari's parents' should hit them when they misbehave) to which there are four response options. The entire PSQ was developed in Sinhala and validated to the Sri Lankan cultural context, and has shown promising psychometric properties (De Zoysa 2005).

3.5 Study procedure and data collection

As indicated in section 3.1 above, the study comprised of two components. In the first component, all parents in the chosen study setting were approached via the community leaders of that area. These community leaders are nominated from within the community itself and are held in respect in their community, hence making them suitable to 'win' the interest of the respondents to attend the program of study. These leaders, from about seven days prior to the commencement of the study, visited the study population and invited them to take part in a program on 'Skilful Parenting: Towards a Happy and a Productive Child'. Again, about two-three days prior to the data collection, these community leaders visited the study population again and asked for the parents' interest to attend the program.

Four trainers and four facilitators took part in the first and second component of the study. These trainers and facilitators attended a training-of-trainers program, prior to the study. This was conducted by the present author, who is a clinical psychologist with specialized knowledge on parental disciplining. At this program, they were instructed on how to present the research questionnaires to the parents (i.e. the first component of the study) as well as how to conduct the information-giving program on parenting in general and disciplining in particular (i.e. the second component of the study). The present author gave them the resource pack, in the Sinhala language, by way of power point slides, that they would use on the day of the awareness program. The resource pack included information on: (1) Disciplining and its myths, (2) Corporal punishment and its unhealthy repercussions, (3) Sri Lankan studies on parental use of corporal punishment and its findings, (4) Corporal punishment and its association with physical abuse, (5) The aversive nature of psychological aggression, (5) Alternative healthy disciplinary strategies. Other than that, background reading material was also been given to them (Samanmalee Kumari, Personal communication, October 5th, 2011). These trainers and facilitators had already completed a three day program on healthy parenting and disciplining prior to the present training-of-trainers program (Samanmalee Kumari, Personal communication, October 5th, 2011), and, they were from professions that work closely with families (such as Child Rights Protection Officers). It was these aspects that allowed the project coordinators to choose these trainers and facilitators and which made it easy for the latter to grasp the concepts in the present study.

Once the parents arrived at the community hall in which the study was to be conducted, their names and addresses were written at the registration desk. They were then guided to one of four halls (which could accommodate a maximum of 50 respondents) and each of these halls were color coded (i.e. red, blue, green, yellow), to their name. This was done in order to assist the ease of data collection at the post-intervention day as the respondent's has to be accurately identified as the same person as that of the pre-intervention day.

Subsequent to serving of refreshments, the instrument package was administered to all parents once the stipulated number was assembled in that particular hall. They were informed of the nature of the study and that confidentiality of answers would be maintained. The administration of the instrument package took about one to one-and-half to two hours. This was an unexpectedly long amount of time – primary reason being that most respondent's though fluent in spoken Sinhala were not fluent in reading Sinhala. This aspect was not envisaged by the study team and was an unexpected revelation on the day of the study. Hence, the trainers and facilitators had to verbally translate the questionnaire from Sinhala to Tamil, which helped the respondents to answer the self-report questionnaire. In one of the four halls, the entire questionnaire package was translated to Tamil while in the remaining three halls, translation was done only when the need arose. The trainers and facilitators were available throughout to clarify any questions. Once the awareness program, subsequent to data collection, was completed, the respondents were thanked, served with snack and transport was provided.

In relation to post-intervention data collection, the same respondents were invited to attend the community hall for a refresher program, six weeks subsequent to the initial program. They were informed of this at Time 1 as well as about 10 days prior to the Time 2 data collection. At this post intervention data collection, at the registration desk, parents' name was checked against their original details gathered at Time 1 and they were allocated the same identification number at this Time 2 as their Time 1 number. A second check, by another group of administrators, that the respondents at Time 2 have the same identification number as their Time 1 was also made. Another third check was also made, at the respondents' allocated hall, to ensure that there is a correct tally in their Time 1 and Time 2 identification numbers. As a further precaution, parents were informed the details (i.e. age and gender) of their referent child on whom they completed the questionnaire at Time 1, as they would need to reflect on this same child at Time 2, too. These stringent procedures ensured that Time 1 and 2 data was collected from the same respondent.

At this post-intervention data collection, subsequent to using the same instrument package as in Time 1, the trainers and facilitators conducted a refresher on topics covered at Time 1. This included time for discussion as well. As at Time 1, respondents were provided with snacks and transport, as an honour for taking part in this activity.

3.6 Ethical aspects

The parents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Their informed consent was assumed by their verbal consent to take part in the study. All respondents were informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time, should they wish to do so.

3.7 Data analysis

Data was entered into the SPSS software package. Double-checking was carried out for ten percent of the data entered. Descriptive and inferential analysis was conducted.

CHAPTER 4

Results

Chapter 4 presents the results as:

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Results: Descriptive and inferential analyses of disciplinary methods
- 4.3 Results: Descriptive analysis of attitude to corporal punishment
- 4.4 Results: The intervention study
- 4.5 Summary of results

4.1 Introduction

An instrument package consisting of a demographic questionnaire, the validated Sinhala version of the CTSPC, and the Attitude to Corporal Punishment subscale of the PSQ was used in this study. Data obtained was used to determine the prevalence of parental use of corporal punishment, physical abuse, psychological aggression and non-violent discipline, including that of its specific disciplinary strategies. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were carried out to determine the dynamics of parental use of various disciplinary methods. This chapter presents these results.

4.2 Results: Descriptive and inferential analyses of disciplinary methods

Parents (n = 194) living in a selected suburb in the Colombo district participated in this study. Of these, seventeen parents returned incomplete questionnaires and these were excluded from the analyses. Hence, the final sample size on which the first component of the research program was based on 177 parents (87.6% females) with a mean age of 39.8 years (range = less than 20 years -70 years; median = 39; SD = 8.864) where 72.2% of the sample were of the Islam religion (13.6% Buddhist; 6.8% Christian; 5.6% Hindu; 1.7% Roman Catholic; 0.6; Not stated) and were of 67.2% Muslim ethnic origin (13% Sinhaleese; 12.4% Sri Lankan Tamil; 5.6% Malay; 0.6% Burgher; 1.1%; Not stated). In terms of occupation, 41.8% held elementary occupations (2.3% associate professionals; 1.1% skilled workers; 40.1% unemployed).

Section 4.2 presents descriptive and inferential analyses of the data obtained. Specifically, Section 4.2.1 presents prevalence rates for the four disciplinary methods assessed by the CTSPC – corporal punishment, physical abuse, psychological aggression and non-violent discipline. The prevalence is that percentage of parents who used at least one disciplinary strategy of a given disciplinary method in a particular referent period (i.e. in the past month). Section 4.2.1 also presents information on the nature of parental use of these four disciplinary methods.

The information presented in section 4.2 was examined in relation to the demographic variables of parent's Religion, parent's Ethnicity, parent's Gender, parent's

Age, and Parent Occupational Status. For these analyses, a re-categorization of the variables of Religion (as Islam vs Non-Islam), Ethnicity (as Moslem vs non-Moslem) and Occupational Status (as Elementary Occupations vs Unemployed vs Rest) was made in order to keep to statistical assumptions (as the original data distribution of cases in these variables exceeded the cell ratio of 1:3) considered appropriate for between-groups analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell 1996).

4.2.1 Disciplinary methods reported by the sample

I) Corporal Punishment

Prevalence rates

The monthly prevalence of corporal punishment in the sample was 76.3%. Additionally, Table 4.2.1 reports the prevalence rates for each of the corporal punishment strategies measured by the Sinhala CTSPC.

Table 4.2.1: The monthly prevalence of corporal punishment strategies

Corporal punishment strategy	Number	(%)
Shook you	71	52.6
Hit on the bottom with something like the handle of a big spoon, broom, cane, a stick or some other hard object.	83	61.5
Spanked on the bottom with bare hand	69	51.1
Slapped on the hand, arm or leg	57	42.2
Being pinched	56	41.5
Slapped on the face, head or ears	30	22.2
Pulled your ear	60	44.4
Hit head with the knuckles	30	22.2
Pulled you hair	16	11.9

N=135

Variations in the monthly frequency of corporal punishment use by parents in relation to selected demographic variables

The monthly frequency of corporal punishment varied significantly according to the parent's age ($r = 0.195$ at $p < 0.01$) where younger the parents used corporal punishment more than older parents. Similarly, the monthly frequency of corporal punishment varied significantly with parent's occupational status where unemployed parents used corporal punishment the most. Furthermore, a Multiple Comparison Post Hoc Test Tukey HSD indicated that the mean difference of corporal punishment of unemployed parents is

significantly more than that of parents with elementary occupations and others occupations, at the 0.05 significance level. There was no significant difference in the monthly frequency of corporal punishment by parents' religion, ethnicity or gender.

II) Physical abuse

Prevalence

The monthly prevalence of physical abuse in the sample was 40.7%. Table 4.3.2 reports the prevalence rates for each of the physical abuse strategies as measured by the CTSPC.

Variations in the monthly frequency of physical abuse use by parents in relation to selected demographic variables

There was no significant difference in the monthly frequency of physical abuse by parents' age, occupational status, religion, ethnicity or gender.

Table 4.2.2: The monthly prevalence of physical abuse strategies

Physical abuse strategy	Number	(%)
Hit with a fist or kicked you hard	20	27.8
Grabbed around the neck and choked	9	12.5
Being beaten up (beaten over and over as hard as possible)	12	16.7
Burned or scalded on purpose	1	1.4
Hit on some part of the body besides the bottom with something like a handle of a big spoon, broom, cane, a stick or some other hard object	50	69.4
Threatened with a axe, pestle or knife	11	15.3
Thrown or knocked down	16	22.2

N=72

III) Psychological aggression

Prevalence

The monthly prevalence of psychological aggression in the sample was 89.3%. Additionally, Table 4.2.3 reports the prevalence rates for each of the psychological aggression strategies measured by the Sinhala CTSPC.

Table 4.2.3: The monthly prevalence of psychological aggression strategies

Psychological aggression strategy	Number	%
Shouted, yelled or screamed at you	127	80.4
Swore or cursed at you	24	15.2

Psychological aggression strategy	Number	%
Said that you would be sent away or kicked out of the house	13	8.2
Threatened to spank or hit you but did not actually do it	106	67.1
Called you dumb or lazy or some other name like that	96	60.8
Compared you to a child whom your parents consider as good and listed out your faults	73	46.2
Listed out your faults in front of others in a way that made you feel ashamed	39	24.7

N=158

Variations in the monthly frequency of psychological aggression use by parents in relation to selected demographic variables

The monthly frequency of corporal punishment varied significantly according to the parent's age ($r=0.244$ at $p < 0.01$) where younger parents used psychological aggression more than older parents. Similarly, the monthly frequency of corporal punishment varied significantly with parent's occupational status where unemployed parents used psychological aggression the most. Furthermore, a Multiple Comparison Post Hoc Test Tukey HSD indicated that the mean difference of psychological aggression of unemployed parents is significantly more than that of parents with elementary occupations and other occupations, at the 0.05 significance level. There was no significant difference in the monthly frequency of corporal punishment by religion, ethnicity or gender.

IV) Non-violent discipline

Prevalence

The monthly prevalence of nonviolent discipline was 79.7%. Table 4.3.4 reports the prevalence rates for each of the non-violent strategies as measured by the CTSPC.

Table 4.2.4: The monthly prevalence of non-violent discipline strategies

Non-violent discipline strategy	Number	(%)
Explained why something was wrong	97	68.8
Gave you something else to do instead of what you were doing wrong	96	68.1
Took away privileges or grounded you	43	30.5

N=141

Variations in the monthly frequency of non-violent discipline use by parents in relation to selected demographic variables

There was no significant difference in the monthly frequency of non-violent discipline by age, occupational status, religion, ethnicity or gender.

4.3 Results: Descriptive analysis of attitude to corporal punishment

The Attitude to Corporal Punishment scale's total scores could range from 1 to 16. Table 4.3.1 reports parents' attitude to corporal punishment. It shows that parents in the study hold attitudes of varying degrees of favourableness towards such discipline.

Table 4.3.1: Parent's attitude to corporal punishment

Scale	Number	(%)
Completely unfavourable – 1	54	30.5
1.01 – 2	45	25.4
2.01 – 3	25	14.1
3.01 - Completely favorable	53	29.9

N=177

Variations in the attitude to corporal punishment in relation to selected demographic variables

The attitude to corporal punishment did not differ significantly by age, occupational status, religion, ethnicity or gender.

4.4 Results: The intervention study

Data of 157 parents in the study sample was analyzed for the results of the intervention study. Though all 194 parents who took part in Time 1 of the study was invited to the Time 2 of the study, 37 parents either did not present at Time 2 or some questionnaires had to be discarded due to incomplete data.

Changes in the use of disciplinary methods from Time 1 to Time 2

The Mean corporal punishment scores declined from 8.10 to 3.06 between Time 1 and Time 2. This corresponded to a statistically significant decline in parental use of corporal punishment from Time 1 to Time 2, at the 0.05 significance level. The Mean physical abuse score declined from 1.78 to 0.89 between Time 1 and Time 2. This corresponded to a statistically significant decline in physical abuse from Time 1 to Time 2, at the 0.05 significance level. The Mean psychological aggression scores declined from 12.8 to 7.11 between Time 1 and Time 2. This corresponded to a statistically significant decline in psychological aggression from Time 1 to Time 2, at the 0.05 significance level. The Mean

non-violent discipline scores declined from 7.66 to 4.51 between Time 1 and Time 2. This corresponded to a statistically significant decline in non-violent discipline from Time 1 to Time 2, at the 0.05 significance level.

Changes in parents attitude to corporal punishment at Time 1 and Time 2

The Mean attitude to corporal punishment scores declined from 9.74 to 8.89 between Time 1 and Time 2 which corresponded to a statistically significant decline in attitude to corporal punishment, at the 0.05 significance level.

4.5 Summary of results

The results showed that, among the aversive disciplinary methods, the most prevalent is psychological aggression, closely followed by corporal punishment. Though physical abuse is used much lesser by the parents, it is still quite high. Interesting, a majority of parents reported the use of non-violent discipline too. The findings also showed that from the demographic variables studied in this research, most were not significantly associated with the use of any of the four disciplinary methods, other than the demographic variables of parent's age and parent's occupational status which was significantly associated with the use of both corporal punishment and psychological aggression.

In relation to the investigative part of the study, the results indicated that there was a significant reduction in parental use of all methods of aversive disciplining (i.e. corporal punishment, physical abuse, psychological aggression) as well as of non-violent disciplining.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Chapter 5 discusses the results as:

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Description of the study sample
- 5.3 Disciplinary methods reported by the sample
- 5.4 Parent's attitude to corporal punishment
- 5.5 Do awareness programs on disciplining children work?: Results from a pilot study

5.1 Introduction

Discipline is one of the most common issues encountered when caring for children (Howard 1996). Ninety percent of paediatricians have reported that they advise families on discipline as part of their routine duties (McCormick 1992, cited in Howard 1996). Corporal punishment, a physically forceful method of discipline, is the most controversial topic in parent-child relationships (Holden 2002). Certain research findings suggest that other than corporal punishment being associated with a host of adverse psychological outcomes for the child (Gershoff 2002), it can also lead to child physical abuse (Durrant & Rose-Krasnor 1995).

An important, but often overlooked aspect of the phenomenon of using physical force as a method of discipline is the influence of a particular cultural context on its practice, experience, and outcomes. Some scholars argue that the outcomes of such physical force may vary across cultural groups due to cultural variations in its acceptance (Deater-Deckard *et al.* 1996). Hence, in attempting to understand the dynamics of physical force as a mode of parental discipline, research should be conducted within that particular country. With such culture-specific information, policies could be established based on accurate data rather than based on uncertain assumptions or findings from other countries. In keeping with its objectives, the present study aimed to provide such data on the prevalence of aversive and non-aversive disciplinary methods among a convenience sample of parents from a suburb in the Colombo district of Sri Lanka. Further, this study also evaluated the effectiveness of a brief parental information-giving program on the use of different disciplinary methods. This type of research is of importance as there is a global awakening to the controversy surrounding the use of physical and psychological force by parents on children (Save the Children 2002).

5.2 Description of the study sample

A majority of parents in the study were females, of Islam faith, of Moslem ethnic origin and the average age was 39 years (see Chapter 3). And, a majority of the sample were in the elementary occupation category. The over-representation of the Moslem ethnic group may be due to the suburb chosen for this study – which had a predominance of this particular ethnic group. Research wise, it would have been more appropriate to have

chosen a study setting that was known to have a more equal distribution all the various ethnic groups.

5.3 Disciplinary methods reported by the sample

5.3.1 Corporal punishment

The study revealed that 76.3% of parents had used some form of corporal punishment on their referent child, in the past one month (see Chapter 3). Parental corporal punishment therefore, appears to be a commonly used method in the study population. A Sri Lankan study on 12-year-old Sinhala speaking school children in the Colombo district, using the same instrument as was used in the present study, indicated that the samples' experience of weekly, monthly and lifetime corporal punishment was 52.3%, 70% and 70% of, respectively (De Zoysa *et al.* 2008). Though it is difficult to compare and contrast these two studies as the study methods and the respondents are very different, yet, there appear to be some congruence in the reported rates of Colombo district's children's experience of corporal punishment and that of the present study.

A study similar to the present one, using the original CTSPC, reported a national annual prevalence of 50% for the use of corporal punishment by parents on American 12-year-olds (Straus & Stewart 1999). It is apparent that Sri Lankan parents use corporal punishment more than their American counterparts. This may be due to the greater acceptance of such discipline in Sri Lanka. Further, unlike in the USA, there is as yet no wide public debate on its potential negative outcomes and consequent legal issues (e.g. Larzelere 2000). Another study using the Conflict Tactics Scale (an instrument similar to the CTPSC and by the same author) in two Asian countries - China and Korea - reported the annual prevalence of corporal punishment in these countries as 42% and 7.4%, respectively (Kim *et al.* 2000). In comparing these prevalence rates with that of the present study, it appears that Sri Lankan parents tend to use more punitive discipline than Chinese or Korean parents. However, it should be cautioned that, though the present study, the American, Chinese and Korean studies used the same or similar instruments, comparison of prevalence rates should be done with prudence as different definitions, study methods and age groups were employed (Creighton 2004).

The most commonly reported corporal punishment strategy in this study was hitting on the bottom with something like the handle of a big spoon, broom, cane, a stick or some other hard object (see Table 4.2.1). In a similar study on 12-year-olds in the Colombo district (De Zoysa *et al.* 2008), the most frequently used technique of corporal punishment was pulling the ear, a technique that would invite less amount of retaliation by children in middle childhood such as 12-year-olds. However, the present study asked parents to reflect on any one of his/her children they wished to, and hence contained disciplinary techniques used on children of various ages. It is possible that the parents in this study have predominantly chosen younger children on whom hitting the bottom is more commonly used than with, say, 12-year-olds.

The present study does not show a significant difference between mothers and fathers in their use of corporal punishment, a finding corroborated by Wissow(2001).

However, some studies have shown that fathers tend to use corporal punishment more than mothers (Hart & Robinson 1994), or vice versa (Straus & Stewart 1999). The greater predominance of mothers in the study (87.6%) may have contributed to this finding and hence larger and more representative studies should investigate this finding further. Younger parents have reported greater and more frequent use of corporal punishment than older parents (Wissow 2001), a finding corroborated by this study. This may be because of their lack of experience with children (Gershoff 2002).

The results indicate that socio-economic class could in be associated with the frequency of corporal punishment used by parents. Previous research has in fact reported that lower and working class parents use corporal punishment more than middle or upper class parents (Najman *et al.* 1994). This finding is similar to the present study results that showed that unemployed parents used corporal punishment more than employed parents. This may be due to an increase in parental stress that economic hardship brings, leading to their more frequent use of corporal punishment (Simons *et al.* 1993). Further, lower socio-economic parents may rely more on corporal punishment because they place an importance on children's immediate compliance. Either because immediate compliance prepares children for the obedience required in low status occupations (Kohn 1977) or, because the consequence for disobedience in their often more dangerous neighborhoods can be severe (Gobarino *et al.* 1997). Therefore, being of lower social class (as indicated by lack of employment), with its consequent economic and emotional stress may lead such parents to use corporal punishment more in child rearing.

The present study did not show a significant difference in the frequency of parental corporal punishment by the child's religious affiliation. Previous studies have shown corporal punishment to be supported by certain religious affiliations (Kuczynski & Hilderbrant 1997). For instance, families with conservative religious beliefs (Xu *et al.* 2000;) such as Protestant affiliation (Gershoff *et al.* 1999) make religious interpretations that justify parental use of corporal punishment. The present study finding of non-significant difference in corporal punishment use by religion may indicate that conservative religious interpretations that promote the use of corporal punishment may not be commonly subscribed to by the Christian, Roman Catholic, Hindu and Islamic communities in Sri Lanka. It is important to be aware that the parents in this study sample were predominantly followers of the Islam faith. Hence, the above interpretations on frequency of corporal punishment and religion should be considered with caution.

Other than the above demographic variables, social, cultural, political and religious issues of Sri Lankan society would need to be also explored in future research when determining the multitude of reasons for the high prevalence of corporal punishment in the country. This is especially so as Sri Lanka is a signatory to the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which abides to protect children from all forms of physical and mental violence while in the care of parents and others. Ryan and Straus (cited in Straus 1994) has shed some light on this apparent contradiction where Sri Lanka, though legally committed to protect its children from corporal punishment still reports a high prevalence of corporal punishment. Ryan and Straus (cited in Straus 1994) has postulated that in societies which are rule driven (as is Sri Lanka), as opposed to those which are more "loosely structured" emphasising initiative and creativity, parents may

control their children with physically forceful means. Further, cross-cultural comparative studies have shown that societies high in conflict and warfare (again, as in Sri Lanka) tend to be high in the use of corporal punishment (Otterbein 1974, cited in Straus 1994). Thus, the impact of its history of conflicts in promoting a sense of normalisation of violence and its patriarchal social structure are some of the issues that need to be explored in future research of this issue in Sri Lanka.

5.3.2 Physical abuse

The study revealed that 40.7% of parents had used some form of physical abuse on their referent child, in the past one month (see Chapter 3). This shows that in the study sample, a considerable percentage of parents use severe physical violence. A Sri Lankan study on 12-year-old Sinhala speaking school children in the Colombo district, using the same instrument as was used in the present study, indicated that the samples' experience of annual and lifetime physical abuse was 37.8% and 41.8%, respectively (De Zoysa *et al.* 2008). Though it is difficult to compare and contrast these two studies as the study methods and the respondents are very different, yet, there appear to be some congruence in the reported rates of Colombo district's children's experience of corporal punishment and that of the present study.

A similar study in the USA reported a national annual prevalence of 2.5% for physical abuse of 12- to 17-year-olds (Straus & Runyan 1997). In Asia, a study on child physical abuse in China and Korea, revealed annual rates of 22.6% and 51.3%, respectively (Kim *et al.* 2000). The physical abuse prevalence rates are much higher in Korea, Sri Lanka and China than in the USA. Studies have shown that poverty (Hunter *et al.* 2000), lack of support and solidarity within a community (Runyan 1998), family policy related to child care arrangements (Krug *et al.* 2002), strength of the social welfare system (Krug *et al.* 2002), social protection and strength of the criminal justice system (Krug *et al.* 2002), and social conflicts and war (Krug *et al.* 2002) are factors associated with parental stress and consequent physical abuse of their children. Thus, in Sri Lanka too, its issues with poverty, dearth of family welfare policies, lack of social protection, and the longstanding ethnic conflict might lead to stress for its people. Such stress, combined with the cultural tolerance of violence in general (Belsky 1984) and corporal punishment in particular (as evidenced by its high prevalence in this study) may account for the high rate of physical abuse (Gelles & Cornell 1990) in Sri Lanka.

By far, the most commonly reported physical abuse strategy was being hit on some part of the body besides the bottom with something like a handle of a big spoon, broom, cane, a stick or some other hard object (see Table 4.2.2). In fact, in the above study by De Zoysa *et al.* (2008) too, this same physical abuse disciplinary technique was the most commonly reported.

Certain child abuse researchers tend to view corporal punishment and physical abuse along a continuum, such that if the former is administered too severely or frequently the outcome can be abuse (Gil 1970, cited in Gershoff 2002). As evidenced by the high prevalence of corporal punishment in this research program, Sri Lankan parents may take their disciplinary encounters to extreme levels, leading to levels that could be

considered abusive. In fact, the high physical abuse prevalence in this study may be due to this possibility.

5.3.3 Psychological aggression

Psychological aggression is a communication (active or passive; verbal or nonverbal) intended to cause psychological pain in a child (Vissing *et al.* 1991). The study revealed that 89.3% of parents had used some form of psychological aggression on their referent child, in the past one month (see Chapter 3). This shows that in the study sample, a majority of parents use psychological aggression and that it is the most frequently used method of disciplining. A Sri Lankan study on 12-year-old Sinhala speaking school children in the Colombo district, using the same instrument as was used in the present study, indicated that the samples' experience of annual and lifetime psychological aggression was 75.4% (De Zoysa *et al.* 2010). Though it is difficult to compare and contrast these two studies as the study methods and the respondents are very different, yet, there appear to be some congruence in the reported rates of Colombo district's children's experience of psychological aggression and that of the present study.

The study revealed that screaming and yelling at the child was the most commonly used psychological aggression strategy, possibly because it would be the easiest to do. And, psychological aggression was used significantly more by younger parents, possibly because they are new to parenting and hence are not aware of positive disciplinary practices. Psychological aggression was also used more significantly by unemployed parents, possibly because of the stress of unemployment leading to the use of aversive disciplinary methods. These findings on psychological aggression are similar to the findings on corporal punishment (see Section 5.3.1).

Previous research has shown that psychologically aggressive strategies such as belittling, such as listing out the child's faults in front of others and using unkind names is associated with a host of psychological problems for children (Straus & Field 2003). It is possible that psychologically aggressive strategies such as comparing the child to another are used with the erroneous belief that it will motivate the children to correct themselves. However, comparing the child with another 'better' child will only foster a sense of unhealthy competitiveness and envy rather than friendly co-operation with others.

Psychological aggression has been shown to be a precursor to the use of corporal punishment (Berkowitz 1993), which in turn could lead to physical abuse (Libby & Bybee 1979, cited in Straus & Runyan 1997). Thus, evidence-based parenting programs need to inform parents of this crucial association and provide parents with alternative nonviolent disciplinary strategies instead – a fact that was explored, albeit in a pilot fashion, in this present study.

5.3.4 Nonviolent discipline

At 79.7% it is encouraging to note that parents in the sample frequently used nonviolent methods of disciplining. A Sri Lankan study on 12-year-old Sinhala speaking school children in the Colombo district, using the same instrument as was used in the present study, indicated that the samples' experience of annual and lifetime nonviolent discipline was 83.6% (De Zoysa 2005). Though it is difficult to compare and contrast these two studies as the study methods and the respondents are very different, yet, there appear to be some congruence in the reported rates of Colombo district's children's experience of nonviolent discipline and that of the present study.

When caregivers explain to children what they had done wrong (i.e. nonviolent discipline; the most frequently used nonviolent strategy in this study), it helps them to identify what aspects of their behavior were deviant. They could then show more acceptable behavior in the future. It also leads to internalization of values (Kuczynski & Hilderbrant 1997) and an increase in cognitive development (Straus 2001).

5.4 Parent's attitude to corporal punishment

Most parents reported varying degrees of favourableness to the use of corporal punishment (see Table 4.3.1). Such support of corporal punishment is to a large extent a reflection of the larger cultural context's acceptance of such discipline (Deater-Deckard & Dodge 1997). Further, it is hypothesised that such strong support for corporal punishment may be due to the parents justifying its use because of their frequent use of such discipline.

The experience of corporal punishment heavily influences one's attitude towards such discipline (Newell 1989). Hence, attitudes may be a result of reflecting on one's experiences. Thus, the high prevalence of corporal punishment in this study may have in turn led to most parents forming a favourable attitude to such discipline (as 69.5% of the parents in this study indicated varying degrees of favourableness towards corporal punishment).

A Sri Lankan study on 12-year-old Sinhala speaking school children in the Colombo district, using the same instrument as was used in the present study, indicated that 98.6% of the sample held varying degrees of favourableness towards the use of corporal punishment (De Zoysa *et al.* 2008). In this context, the high prevalence of corporal punishment reported in this study and children's endorsement of such discipline (De Zoysa *et al.* 2008) is a serious matter of concern as it leads to the intergenerational transmission of corporal punishment as a normative disciplinary method (Flynn 1996) in Sri Lanka.

In this study, parents' attitude to corporal punishment did not vary significantly by parents' gender, age, religion, ethnicity or occupational status. Larger, more representative studies may show such differences, if any, and these should be endeavoured to in the future.

5.5 Do awareness programs on disciplining children work?: Results from an pilot study

The results indicated that there was a significant reduction in parental use of all forms of aversive disciplining (i.e. corporal punishment, physical abuse, psychological aggression) due to the information-giving intervention study conducted. These results are most encouraging, as it shows, albeit preliminarily, that a straight-forward time-limited information-giving activity is indeed useful in assisting parents to reduce their aversive disciplinary strategies. Further, such a program appears effective even when done with large groups of participants, such as the present study that involved nearly 200 parents. Most literature on changing parental disciplinary repertoires recommends a far more involved process than the one conducted in the present study (e.g. Durrant, 2007). However, the present study indicates otherwise. Hence, it seems that even straight-forward time-limited information-giving activities could give favorable results. However, the present author opines that such favorable results could be obtained only if certain conditions are fulfilled – such as, the psychological readiness of parents to be receptive to such information, the parents having had some prior information on disciplining and repercussion of aversive disciplining, and, the extent of emotional arousal that the information-giving activity elicits in the parents. In fact, this latter condition was established in the present program where parents were introduced to the activity, not by stating that the program was on disciplining, but by stating that it was on how to make their children happy and productive. This theme and the resultant discussions that the trainers had with the parents established some emotional arousal and hence psychological receptivity to the contents of the program. Further, the fact that the study participants were personally invited by the community leaders in that area may also have influenced these findings – the fact that they were chosen may have propelled them to make changes in their behaviors which may not have been so if such a selection strategy was not used. Future research should explore this dimension further.

It appears that it is not only parental use of corporal punishment that has reduced from Time 1 to Time 2, but so had parents' attitude towards it. This is an important finding as attitudinal changes are much more significant than behavioral changes. Such attitudinal shifts indicate a deeper-learning of the disciplinary messages that the intervention program has provided.

An interesting finding of the intervention study was that, not only did aversive disciplining reduce at Time 2, but so did non-violent disciplining too. It was however expected that non-violent disciplining would increase at Time 2 as the parents were given information on its various permutations and its usefulness. It is possible that the study participants may have reduced all forms of disciplining by Time 2, including non-violent disciplining. Or, it could be that because information on non-violent disciplining was given nearing the end of the program, parents may have been too tired and/or non-concentrated and could not absorb the information.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions, limitations, and directions for future research

Chapter 6 is presented as:

6.1 Conclusions

6.2 Limitations

6.3 Future research

6.1 Conclusions

The aim of the present program of research was to (i) measure the prevalence of parental use of physical force of aversive and non aversive disciplinary methods – namely, corporal punishment, physical abuse, psychological aggression and non-violent discipline. The study also evaluated (ii) the effectiveness of a brief intervention program designed to impart disciplinary methods to parents. For aim (i) the study sample was 177 parents in a suburb of the Colombo district, and (ii) 157 parents in the same suburb of the Colombo district.

Cross-culturally validated instruments were used in this study. These instruments provided information on parental use of physical force as well as psychological aggression and nonviolent discipline. Data was obtained on monthly prevalence of corporal punishment and physical abuse as well as for its specific strategies. Prevalence rates for psychological aggression and nonviolent discipline were also obtained. Further, the data was analyzed for variations in these disciplinary methods according to selected demographic variables such as parent's gender and religion. The results of this pilot study indicated that the use of aversive disciplinary methods is high among the study participants, as compared to findings from other parts of the world. On a more positive note however, the participants also reported the use of nonviolent discipline to a large extent. Therefore, it appears that parents in this study use both aversive and non aversive disciplinary methods, to somewhat equal extents.

Therefore, one of the most important contributions of this study is that it can inform social policy-makers and designers of child maltreatment preventive programs that the use of aversive disciplinary methods by Sri Lankan parents is very high. It is recommended that policies and programs be focused on educating Sri Lankan parents on the detrimental outcomes of using physical and psychological force when disciplining their children. Furthermore, education on proactive and healthy disciplinary strategies is also recommended.

The psychosocial correlates identified in this study elucidated some of the key determinants of the use of physical and psychological force by Sri Lankan parents. The correlates so identified are consistent with research findings elsewhere in the world. Identification of such correlates unique to a particular culture is important such that evidence-based culturally appropriate preventive programs might be formulated. Such prevention can be addressed at three levels: primary, secondary and tertiary (Agathonos-Georgopoulou & Browne 1997). Based on the present study findings, primary prevention -

which aims at fundamental changes that may prevent the creation of the problem in society - might include the elimination of cultural norms and media influences that legitimize and glorify violence. Secondary prevention - early identification of individuals with characteristics predisposing to violence - might include identifying and working with families such as low socio-economic groups who are at high risk for violence. Tertiary prevention - attempting to solve the problem once it has occurred - might include efforts to intervene and treat families identified as maltreating their children.

The present study also showed that straight-forward time-limited information-giving programs, given to large numbers of participants, are effective in reducing parental use of aversive disciplining. This is indeed a useful finding as such programs could be easily replicated in the country, whereby quickly spreading the message of reducing aversive disciplining and encouraging healthier disciplining.

6.2 Limitations

Despite the contributions of the present study, its limitations should also be acknowledged. One of the main considerations is the difficulty in generalizing the study findings beyond the study sample – it was a small (yet, nearly 10% of the population was involved) convenient sample of a selected suburb in the Colombo district. Future research would need to replicate this study on a nationally representative sample. This would give a broader range of information on the phenomenon of parental use of disciplinary methods in Sri Lanka.

This study relied solely on the parent's report of the phenomenon of parental use of disciplining. They may not have reported all incidents of physical and psychological force used by them – possibly because of reluctance to do so (due to social desirability factors) and/or memory lapses. Further, the interpretations of using physical force may differ from parents, to siblings, to the referent child. Additionally, retrospective self-reports on experiencing and witnessing violence can be subject to distortion. For example, it is difficult to determine if reported incidents of physical and psychological force were labeled as such at the time they occurred or if it was labeled subsequently upon reflection. Having multiple informants may have averted some of these limitations.

Another limitation was that parents were asked to consider any *one* of their children when reporting their use of various disciplinary strategies. Hence, the sample consisted of children whose ages ranged from 1 – 18 years. It is known that, parental use of disciplinary strategies vary with the child's age. Hence, because there was no uniformity of age of the referent child in this study, the prevalence results reported need to be considered with caution. However, this methodology, of asking parents to consider any one of their children is commonly found in other more larger scale studies too (e.g. Gallup Survey in the USA).

The intervention study revealed that parents not only reduced the use of aversive disciplining on their children, but that they reduced the use of non-violent disciplining too. Future programs must ensure that program facilitators emphasize greatly the importance of increasing non-violent disciplining whilst reducing aversive disciplining.

6.3 Future research

Sri Lankan society places much value on the relationship between the nuclear family and the extended family. It is common that, other than biological parents, extended family such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins assist in child rearing (i.e. multiple parenting: Haj-Yahia & Musleh 2002). Future research would benefit from determining the extent to which children experience physical force at the hands of these multiple parents. Likewise, future research could also determine how these multiple caregivers might ease the biological parent's stress of child rearing such that the use of physical force might not be seen to be so necessary in disciplining.

The present study only explored a limited number of variables. Financial concerns, time constraints and the need to keep the study brief enough to ensure respondent interest were the main reasons for limiting the number of variables studied. Future research would need to address these concerns.

In health promotion, repeatability of the message ensures that a persons' newly learned behaviour will get more deeply ingrained in his/her behavioural repertoire. Hence, in the present community too, repeating the program is essential in order to sustain the results obtained. In fact, if and when this program is replicated with other communities, such periodical replication is essential.

It is envisaged that this present research be considered a pilot studying leading to a larger and more representative study exploring the dynamics of parental use of aversive disciplining on their children. Furthermore, it is envisaged that other than exploring the dynamics of aversive disciplining, exploring the effectiveness of awareness rising on positive disciplining be also done within this larger and representative study. Information obtained from such a larger study would undoubtedly be more rigorous and scientifically sound, and may assist the relevant policy making agencies to take a decisive stand on matters pertaining to parental use of aversive disciplining.

The use of parental corporal punishment, in the name of discipline, is the most controversial topic in the domain of parent-child relationships (Holden 2002). Professionals and laypersons debate on its usefulness (De Silva 2001; Straus 2001), but increasing number of countries are now taking a decisive stand against it and legally banning its use by its citizens (Save the Children 2002). These decisions are based on research findings on the multitude of negative outcomes associated with corporal punishment. However, it may be that decision-makers in these countries understand that agreeing to the use of violence by a caregiver to correct a children's misbehaviour is paradoxical. If an adult hitting an adult is considered wrong and legally indefensible, then an adult hitting a child should also be considered improper.

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