

Evidence-based paper shows it is time to ban corporal punishment

Corporal punishment should be prohibited nationally and supported by a public health education campaign and greater access to parental supports, according to a new research paper.

The three-tiered strategy to outlaw corporal punishment is outlined in the paper which reviewed laws in Australia allowing the practice, international agreements on children's rights, evidence of its adverse effects, and the outcome of legislative reforms in countries that have implemented bans.

ACU Professor Daryl Higgins, the Director of the Institute of Child Protection Studies, was one of the co-authors of the paper published today in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*.

Professor Higgins said the paper, *Corporal punishment of children in Australia: The evidence-based case for legislative reform*, showed the time for excuses and inaction when it came to prohibiting corporal punishment in Australia was over. Globally 65 countries have implemented bans.

According to the Australian Child Maltreatment Study, of which Professor Higgins was a chief investigator, 61% of those aged between 16-24 experienced four or more incidents of corporal punishment in childhood.

The ACMS research found while 38% of respondents aged 65 or over believed corporal punishment was necessary when raising children, the figure dropped by more than half to 15% for those aged 16-24.

Professor Higgins said while the change in attitude was welcome, the paper published today showed there was a danger in waiting for support for corporal punishment to continue to fall.

"We cannot continue to ignore the conclusive evidence that shows corporal punishment significantly increases the risk of developing serious lifelong mental health disorders, often accompanies experiences of child abuse and neglect, and undermines a child's right to a life without violence," Professor Higgins said.

"It is time to ramp up our efforts to help parents and caregivers use positive parenting techniques rather than outdated and ineffective forms of discipline that do nothing but harm children and breach their right to safety."

The paper argued corporal punishment had life-long detrimental effects on children including reducing trust and connection with those raising them, lowering self-esteem, increasing behavioural and mental health problems, and increasing the risk of substance abuse.

It found in countries that had changed legislation and followed this with public education campaigns and alternative strategies for parents and caregivers, rates of corporal punishment decreased.

The team of 14 leading Australian academics behind the paper called for a whole-of-government approach and the use of regular national parenting surveys to measure the impact of legislative change and monitor child wellbeing and the prevalence of maltreatment.

Professor Higgins' paper co-authors were Professor Sophie Havighurst from the University of Melbourne, Professor Ben Mathews from QUT, Dr Frances Doyle from Western Sydney University, Dr Divna Haslam from QUT, Dr Karl Andriessen from the University of Melbourne, Dr Carmen Cubillo from the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance, Professor Sharon Dawe from Griffith University, Professor David Hawes from the University of Sydney, Adjunct Professor Cynthia Leung from Victoria University, Associate Professor Trevor Mazzucchelli from Curtin University, Associate Professor Alina Morawska from the University of Queensland, Professor Sarah Whittle from the University of Melbourne, and Dr Carys Chainey from the University of Queensland.

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