

**Rotten kid or forgotten kid?
On child disciplining in Punjab**



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A cursory look at the aggregated cross-country data for twelve countries from different regions on the prevalence of various methods of child discipline from the most recently commissioned Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) hints at a declining trend of the use of violent disciplinary practices by caregivers as we progressively move towards richer countries. Similarly, it can be observed that in richer

discipline children. A similar trend can be observed if intra-regional data is analysed. This very crude and elementary illustration is line with the Weinberg (2001) model.

In order to explore the factors associated with the use of different methods of child discipline, individual level analysis grounded in microeconomic theory is necessitated, since by

Country/ Region	GDP/capita*	Any violent discipline	Only non-violent discipline	Attitude towards physical punishment
Nepal	\$691.7	81.7%	13.2%	35.2%
Bangladesh	\$830.2	82.3%	12.2%	33.3%
Sindh (Pakistan)	\$1,357.8 [‡]	81.3%	8.0%	36.6%
Punjab (Pakistan)	\$1,357.8 [‡]	80.7%	6.1%	34.2%
Moldova	\$1,787.8	75.6%	21.6%	15.1%
Vietnam	\$2,015.0	68.4%	27.2%	14.6%
Sudan	\$2,081.2	63.9%	21.6%	29.7%
Ukraine	\$2,928.9	61.2%	33.5%	11.2%
Mongolia	\$4,146.9	49.3%	38.0%	17.4%
Argentina	\$14,480.7	72.4%	21.7%	3.7%
Uruguay	\$16,879.4	54.6%	34.4%	2.3%
Qatar	\$94,407.3	49.9%	39.6%	13.9%

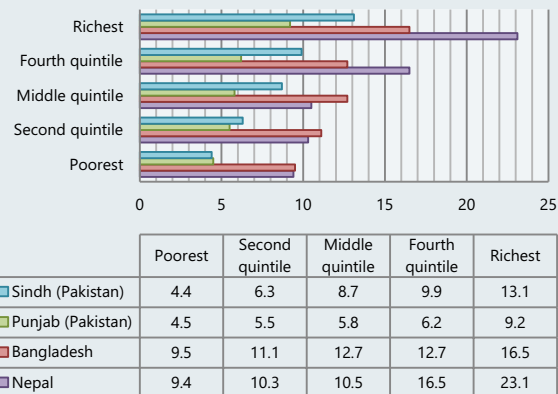
*For the year corresponding to the MICS survey

‡ Only national estimate was available

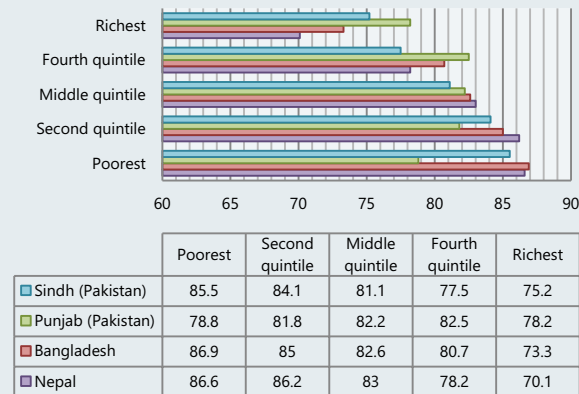
GDP/capita data from United Nations Statistics Division

Child discipline methods data from United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Percentage of children age 1-14 years who experienced only non-violent discipline



Percentage of children age 1-14 years who experienced violent discipline (any method)



countries, non-violent discipline methods are relatively more pervasive and caregivers in these countries are less likely to demonstrate acceptability for corporal punishment in order to

aggregating data, meaningful variation is lost and analysis performed using aggregated data can at best be described as ad-hoc.

Existing research has highlighted many individual level and economy-wide debilitating effects of the use of violent practices employed by caregivers to discipline children. For a child, consequences of constant exposure to punitive disciplining methods can range from the more apparent physical injuries to the less conspicuous emotional, psychological and mental scars which are more dangerous and long-lasting than any physical injury. Maltreatment of children, in the long term, badly affects their personality development. As grown-ups, such children are likely to experience difficulties in interpersonal relationships, acquisition of education, and at workplace. Such children are also more susceptible to violence and criminal behaviour. If such practices are pervasive and are socially condoned, then at the economy-wide level, deficiencies in the personal development and skills formation of a sizeable segment of the workforce can result in productivity losses. Apart from that, mentally and psychologically deformed children and youth are a source of burden on public resources in the form of transfer payments and provision of welfare, health, special education and rehabilitation services. Additionally, there is an increased pressure on the criminal justice system resulting from increased violence and crimes committed by some of the individuals who were invariably subjected to violence and physical punishment in their childhood and adolescence (see Lindo & Schaller, 2014).

The purpose of this study was to shed light on the factors associated with different child disciplinary practices employed by mothers, including attitude towards corporal punishment, acceptance of spousal violence, and social acceptability of the use of punitive methods to discipline children, to name a few. It also looked at how changes in the (optimal¹) family size affect the disciplining behaviour of mothers. Furthermore, an attempt was made to explore the factors associated with mothers' attitude towards the acceptability of physical punishment to discipline children. To resolve the identification problem created by the existence of unobservable factors affecting the regressand and the key regressors of the model, a novel workaround was suggested to obtain reliable parameter estimates.

¹ In the case of this study, a family is considered to be optimally sized if: (1) the last born child was desired and not unwanted, and (2) No more children are desired (based on self-reported data obtained from eligible women)

The need for this research was felt, primarily, due to two reasons: Firstly, this subject has been studied very little in the context of Pakistan, in general, and Punjab, in particular. Inclusion of a new module on child discipline in the fifth round of MICS presented an opportunity to take up this question and study it in detail. Secondly, as alluded to above, consequences of sustained use of physically violent and psychologically aggressive means of child discipline are severe, which badly affect children's personality development. This, in extreme cases, may make these children to cause harm to the society and, at the very least, such children may cease to be productive members of the society.

The availability of data on relevant variables in the MICS 2014 dataset pertaining to various child-specific, parental, household, and community level characteristics made it possible to control for a variety of observables which, according to the literature reviewed, are associated with the act of caregivers to discipline children through various methods. Child-specific controls included child's age, gender, educational progression (i.e. whether right age for grade or not), and the type of educational institution attended (private v public). Parental characteristics included parents' age, their age difference, their education and employment statuses, mother's age at marriage, and her age when she first gave birth. Importantly, various preferences of the mother of the child in question elicited by this survey were also controlled for which included her attitude towards physical punishment of children and towards domestic violence. Household characteristics included the type of family (nuclear v joint), father's presence in the household (or lack of it), whether the child has any step-mother(s) or not, number of younger siblings of the child in question, number of his/her siblings who have died, gender of the last born sibling, and the pre-computed wealth index of the household. Community specific characteristics included the type of region (rural v urban), and social acceptability of corporal punishment (computed at the cluster level).

The set of regressands used for the purpose of this study were included in the MICS 2014 questionnaire for the first time (in the case of Punjab, Pakistan) and were adapted from the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) developed by Straus et al. (1998). These questions were asked regarding a child aged 1-14 years selected at random from the list of eligible children. Each

respondent was asked about his/her knowledge of the child in question being subject to different forms of physical violence, psychological aggression, or other non-violent ways of disciplining during the preceding month. For the purpose of this analysis, sample was restricted only to that set of respondents and children in which the respondent was the biological mother of the child selected for the module on child discipline. Logistic regression technique was employed to estimate the direction and magnitude of various associative factors with mothers' child disciplining practices.

Ignoring the identification problem, results of the baseline model² showed that children whose fathers had higher level of education were less likely to be disciplined in violent ways by their mothers. Mothers hailing from progressively affluent families were more likely to use non-violent methods to discipline their children³; however, those living in urban areas were more likely to rely on physical punishment to discipline their children. Mothers from clusters where there was high social acceptability of punitive methods of child discipline were found to be more than twice as much likely to be violent towards their children than mothers from areas where there was low social acceptability of corporal punishment. Not surprisingly, acceptability of the need to physically punish children to discipline them significantly affected mothers' actual conduct of employing an aggressive disciplining method.

The problem which was feared to be plaguing parameter estimates of the baseline model can be explained using the microeconomic theory of fertility, most notably posited by Gary S. Becker⁴. According to this theory, the equilibrium level of fertility, and hence child worth, are determined through marginal analysis whereby a well-defined household objective function is maximised subject to time, resource and other constraints. In the context of the present study, by including families characterised by off-equilibrium fertility levels in the sample, effect of characteristics not controlled for in the regression could be incorrectly attributed to some of the control variables. Putting it differently, in two observably identical families (including the

dimension of parity), various unobserved characteristics (e.g. parental preferences) would vary across the two families if one is optimally sized and the other is not. As long as differences in unobservables are systematic across such families and these unobservable characteristics are statistically correlated with any control variable(s), parameter estimates obtained without addressing this issue will be biased and inconsistent. Estimation results obtained from the restricted sample revealed that children from nuclear families were less likely to be subject to violent ways of disciplining. Once again, it was shown that progressively higher levels of family wealth were associated with a greater likelihood of children experiencing non-violent disciplining methods. Just as it was observed in the case of the baseline model, social acceptability of physical punishment as a child disciplining device increased the likelihood of the child being psychologically abused. The most important result obtained from the restricted sample regression was that as long as a family is optimally sized, holding all else constant, any change in parity does not affect mothers' disciplining behaviour.

Finally, factors associated with mothers' attitude towards physically punishing children were explored. Here, it was also tested as to whether or not mothers from optimally sized families differed in terms of their acceptability of aggressive disciplining methods from those who were from families which were sub-optimal in size. It was found that mothers from optimally sized families were less likely to agree to the necessity of physically punishing children to discipline them. Most of the findings from the determinants of mothers' attitude towards the use of physical punishment corroborate with those determining their actual conduct.

References

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² Similar to Trang and Duc (2014)

³ In accordance with the predictions of the Weinberg (2001) model and the cross- and intra-regional data presented above

⁴ Becker, G. (1981). *A Treatise on the Family* Harvard University Press. Cambridge, MA, 30.