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KiriLi Stauch
Illinois Wesleyan University

Charles Spingwood, Faculty Advisor
Illinois Wesleyan University

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A Comparison of United States and Chinese Societal Views on Corporal Punishment

KiriLi N. Stauch

Department of Sociology & Anthropology, Illinois Wesleyan University



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Introduction

The primary goal of this research was to compare how cultural norms impact societal attitudes towards the use of corporal punishment in public and private settings in China and the United States. Specifically, the ways in which cultural and historical factors shaped the use of corporal punishment in each of these two societies was emphasized.



Discussion

1. Age, socioeconomic class, punishment during childhood, and education all influenced a parent's use of corporal punishment. "Generation around 30's different parenting style, probably more active and innovative different methods." (Female Chinese Student).
2. Corporal punishment was found to be more publicized in the United States than in China. "Rare cases in paper about physical punishment (in China). Not talked about a lot in public. Families keep this kind of thing to themselves. No one to report to." (Male Chinese Student)
3. Boys were viewed as receiving harsher corporal punishments, more frequently, than girls. "Father was the corporal punisher. He spanked, slapped, and used the belt." (United States middle-aged adult male)
4. Societal gender roles, traditions, patrilineal family structure, and parental pressure to succeed impacted the usage of corporal punishment. "Certain word for a girl that isn't married around 30's, 'left girl.' A girl who is left behind." (Female Chinese student)

Research Questions

- 1) What factors impact whether a parent uses corporal punishment?
- 2) Is corporal punishment publicized (newspapers, conversation, videos, TV shows)?
- 3) Is corporal punishment gendered?
- 4) What cultural aspects (religion, customs, social pressures) impact the usage of corporal punishment (social and private)?



Corporal Punishment Laws in the United States

2011: New Mexico became last state (of 31) to abolish corporal punishment

Presently: 19 states allow corporal punishment :
Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Wyoming

Source: *The Washington Post*, 2014

Corporal Punishment Laws in China

1989: Central Registrar for Child Abuse and Neglect Opened

1983: Child Protection Unit of the Social Welfare Department setup & inter-departmental working group formed to review and clarify child abuse procedures

1981: Social Welfare Department Issued guidelines of procedures for handling child abuse cases

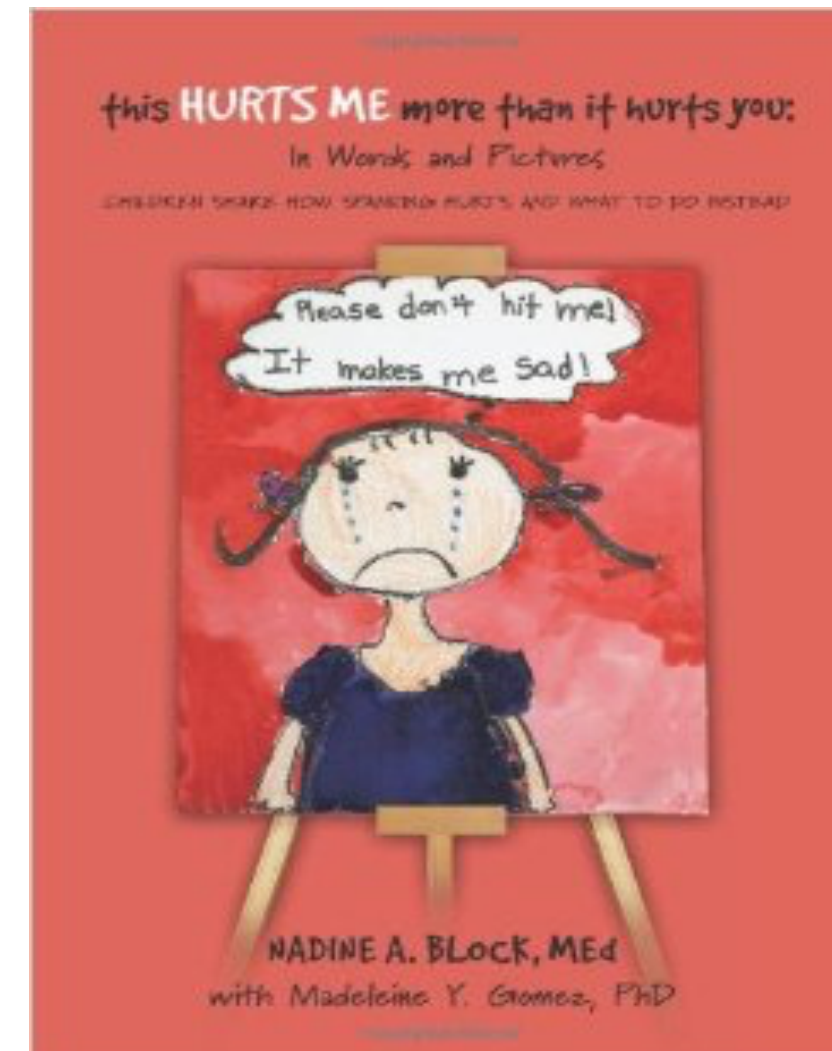
1979: Social Welfare Department prepared report with study of child abuse in Hong Kong

1978: Voluntary organization Against Child Abuse formed

Source: O'Brian & Lau, 1995

Methods

A total of nine individuals (Chinese International students: N=5, Female: N=3) from a Midwestern liberal arts school and U.S. citizens (N=5, Female college students: N=2, Adult Married Couple: N=2, Middle aged professor: N=1) participated in ethnographic qualitative interviews. The interviews were conducted by fellow anthropology student, Meridith Beird, myself, or both of us. In addition, academic literature, popular books, and public media supplemented the ethnographic data.



"Chinese people think US parents are soft. They think giving gold stars has no point. U.S. praises kids a lot. Achievements mean more (in China), because not every little thing is praised."

Female Chinese
International Student

Most parents will choose to talk to kids if they do something. Some probably will make parents angry and then they might hurt children."

Female Chinese
International Student

"Instilling huge sense of pressure from childhood that the child has to get into a good school. Permeates the culture and seen as a given. Bring dishonor on their family if they do not do well."

Female Chinese
International Student

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