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**Parental Perception of Child Physical Abuse: Assessing
Judgments From a Legal Perspective**

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Running Head: PARENTAL PERCEPTION

Parental Perception of Corporal Punishment and Child Physical Abuse:

Assessing Judgements From a Legal Perspective

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements of an Honours Degree in Psychology

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Abstract

The study examined a number of related issues including parents' perceptions of child physical punishment and physical abuse, parents' judgments on the boundaries between these forms of physical actions, and the congruency between parents' perceptions and Canada's legal standards on what is considered appropriate or "reasonable" physical punishment of children. The study aimed to discover whether or not legal standards reflect public opinion on these issues as Canadian courts have indicated. Parents' responses to hypothetical vignettes of child misbehavior and various physical punishment tactics were used to examine their perceptions. Parents rated various discipline tactics that violate the judicial limitations placed on the corporal punishment law in Canada. A total of 185 parents participated in the study, with 116 women and 69 men. Results indicate that parents are unable to distinguish corporal punishment that is legal or physical discipline that is illegal according to the *Criminal Code of Canada*. Although a substantial number of parents rated the disciplines appropriately, a significant subset of parents was unable to do so. These results indicate that parents' lack of awareness of the law may be one explanation for why corporal punishment is a risk factor for charges of physical abuse.

Parental Perception of Corporal Punishment and Child Physical Abuse:
Assessing Judgements From a Legal Perspective

Corporal punishment is the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience physical pain, but not injury, for the purpose of correction or control of the child's behavior (Gershoff, 2002). Corporal punishment of children is legal in Canada, but is illegal in a number of other countries. In protection of persons in authority, Section 43 of the *Criminal Code of Canada* states that “[e]very parent or person standing in the place of a parent is justified in using force by way of correction toward a child... if the force does not exceed what is reasonable under the circumstances” (Department of Justice Canada, 2006). Physical punishment is a normative discipline practice for many parents. Recent studies have found that 70% of Canadian parents have spanked their children, with 25% of mothers spanking their pre-school aged children more than once a week (Durrant, 2000).

Discipline is an unavoidable aspect of parenting. Parents often have questions concerning the limits when using corporal punishment regarding appropriate age, frequency, and severity (Saadeh, Rizzo, & Roberts, 2002). These questions are often left unanswered, due to the fact that it is challenging to study and measure the pain and intensity that may result to the child from corporal punishment. Many parents are interested in gaining more information on appropriate discipline methods, yet even the medical system has failed in this regard. One study reports that 75 % of clinicians failed to discuss discipline approaches with parenting patients, yet 45% of these parents desired information (Schuster, Duan, Regulado, & Klein, 2000). This is largely due to the fact that even pediatricians do not know what leads parents to use various discipline tactics (Barkin, Scheindlin, Edward, Richardson, & Finch, 2007). Studies have found that parent's personal experience with physical punishment in childhood is one factor associated with the

utilisation of physical discipline with their own children; however, the use of discipline practices and physical punishment are shaped by many influences including race, ethnicity, and social class (Horn, 2004; Kelley, 1992; Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). Although much of the research regarding influences on child disciplinary tactics has focused on characteristics of the child or the parent, the laws involving corporal punishment and parents' awareness of such laws are also relevant.

Since the boundaries of corporal punishment are difficult to measure for professionals and parents alike, one serious risk factor of corporal punishment is the possibility of escalation to physical abuse. One study investigating the risk of corporal punishment for physical abuse found that parents who physically abused their children reported two thirds of their abusive incidents began as an attempt to change the child's behavior (Strauss & Stewart, 1999). Further, children and youth are most likely to be killed by members of their own family. Between 1991 and 1999, 88% of child and youth homicides were committed by parents in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2001b). In regard to the risk of a continuum between physical punishment and physical abuse, investigating the boundaries that parents draw between the two seems appropriate.

Parental perception of the boundaries between physical punishment and abuse has received little empirical attention. Worse yet, no studies have been done to investigate if parents are interpreting child protection policies properly, or if they are even aware of them. Assessing the perceptions of parents on what constitutes physical abuse is important because child abuse most often occurs in the family and is mediated by the parent. In a survey of 900 parents, Strauss and Stuart (1999) found that over one fourth of parents reported using an object to hit their children in the name of discipline. The study also found that a third of parents used physical punishment on their 14-year old child. The use of an object and punishment of a child over the

age of 13 are prohibited by the judicial limitations of corporal punishment in Canada (Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth, and the Law v. Canada, 2004). Recent studies such as this demonstrate that parents are inadequate at judging the boundaries between acceptable physical punishment and physical abuse. With Section 43 of the *Criminal Code of Canada* permitting corporal punishment, the legal system is providing parents with vague guidelines for what constitutes physical abuse and “reasonable.”

An estimated 103,297 child abuse cases were substantiated in Canada in 2003, with 28,053 additional suspected cases (Trocmé et al., 2003). These numbers indicate a 125% increase from 1998. Almost a quarter of child abuse cases in 2003 were in the form of physical abuse, with an incidence rate of 5.31 for every 1000 children. These incidence rates underestimate the numbers of children experiencing abuse in Canada, as many cases go unreported and undetected each year (Finkelhor, 1993). Nonetheless, these numbers indicate that child maltreatment is a significant problem in Canada. Based on the large number of parents who violate physical abuse laws in the name of discipline, it is reasonable to assume that parents’ lack of awareness of the legal boundaries for corporal punishment could be contributing to the child abuse rates in Canada.

In addition to the suspected link between corporal punishment and child maltreatment, there is also evidence to suggest that there are long-term negative consequences to corporal punishment. Those opposed to corporal punishment are often concerned with the harmful effects that it may have on the child. Studies have found that children who experience corporal punishment are at an increased risk of future delinquent behaviour such as drug use, crime, and aggressive interactions (Strauss, 1991). Other studies have found an association between corporal punishment in childhood and low self esteem, emotional issues, and violence

perpetration in adolescence (Ohene, Ireland, McNeely, & Borowsky, 2006; Sternberg et al., 1993). A recent meta-analytic study (Gershoff, 2002) combined 88 studies on the impact of mild and moderate corporal punishment such as spanks and slaps not causing physical injury.

Corporal punishment was found to be associated with multiple negative outcomes including increased aggression, delinquency, mental health issues, parent and child relationship problems, and the likelihood of being physically abused. This extensive body of research suggests that corporal punishment can have detrimental consequences to child development, similar to those of physical abuse, and should be used with extreme caution.

Research on the negative developmental outcomes associated with corporal punishment has contributed to the controversy over the use of physical punishment in Canada over the past 20 years (Durrant, Krasnor, & Broberg, 2003). In 1999 and 2004, the law permitting or justifying corporal punishment in Canada was constitutionally challenged in the Supreme Court of Canada, where it was argued that Section 43 violates multiple sections of the Charter of Rights and Freedom. The courts were provided information regarding the possible harm caused to the child through physical punishment, but have repeatedly ruled to uphold the law that remains relatively unchanged since its implementation in 1892 (Durrant et al., 2003).

Parenting strategies are strongly influenced by cultural norms and expectations (Medora, Wilson, & Larson, 2001). Acceptance for corporal punishment of children is reinforced by the legal guidelines of Section 43 of the *Criminal Code of Canada* that allows parents to slap, spank, shake, or kick a child in their care, as long as the force is “reasonable under the circumstances” (Cohen, 2005). What is considered “reasonable” is one aspect of this law that is most ambiguous, causing courts to determine certain cases of physically inflicted bruises, nosebleeds and chipped teeth of children acceptable in the past (Cohen, 2005). Other countries that have stricter laws

against child physical abuse, such as Sweden and Germany, have banned the use of corporal punishment (Bussman, 2004). Laws that are more direct leave less room for parents to vaguely interpret what is appropriate punishment. Studies have found that changes to the laws banning the use of corporal punishment have led to a significant decrease in the use of severe physical abuse, slaps in the face, spanking, and other violent disciplinary tactics (Bussman, 2004).

Previous studies have found that professionals rate poorly on identifying child abuse and distinguishing what is reasonable, but no studies have been applied to parents. The perception of teachers and other professionals who work with or who will eventually be working with children have been examined to determine their knowledge and understanding of child maltreatment (Smith, 2006). Smith found that university students in the teaching program had low confidence and consistency in their knowledge and ratings of child abuse. A similar study by Portwood, Grady, and Dutton (2000) assessed law enforcement officers' perceptions of child maltreatment. Even officers had a difficult time identifying certain characteristics of child maltreatment that were more ambiguous. Teachers have also indicated an insufficient ability in perceiving signs of child abuse, creating a difficulty and limitation in reporting abuse (Hinson & Fossey, 2000; Lombard, Michalak, & Pearlman, 1986). Such studies on perception of abuse have been useful in assessing reporting ability and would also be useful in assessing parents' ability to discriminate between legal and illegal discipline. Assessing parents' judgements of the boundaries between physical punishment and abuse is important considering that 40% of mothers in one American study feared hurting their children through their physical punishment methods (Straus, 2001).

Perceptions and attitudes often predict behaviour. Studies have indicated that parents' attitudes towards corporal punishment are significantly correlated with their disciplinary behaviour (Vittrup, Holden, & Buck, 2006). One study indicated that parents who approve of

physical punishment have an abuse rate that was 5 times greater than parents who do not approve of such discipline methods (Moore & Straus, 1987). Therefore, parents who indicated positive attitudes towards corporal punishment and more severe forms of physical abuse are also more likely to perpetrate these types of aggressive behaviour on their children. Assuming that legal standards of child protection aim to maximize optimal development and discipline of the child, comparing legal standards to parents' physical abuse opinions should reveal whether or not parents have appropriate beliefs regarding what is acceptable physical punishment that influence their disciplinary behaviours.

Research is needed to determine if there is an association between current laws and parents' perceptions of what constitutes physical abuse. If it is found that they differ significantly, it may indicate that the laws on physical punishment of children do not reflect public opinion as the courts have stated (Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth, and the Law v. Canada, 2004). Limited past research indicates that there is reason to believe that corporal punishment laws in Canada are out of synchrony with parental beliefs. One study indicated that the majority of mothers sampled from Canada did not demonstrate support for the use of physical punishment (Durrant et al., 2003). Parents indicated feelings of guilt and regret through the use of physical punishment, and only half of Canadian mothers sampled indicated that they feel it is a parents' right to use physical force.

One questionable aspect of child discipline is whether parents are able to distinguish the boundaries between physical punishment and physical abuse effectively in order to protect their child from harm and avoid legal infringement. It is possible that some parents who violate the laws in place that limit corporal punishment and cross the line into physical abuse may not be aware of the laws that distinguish such boundaries. A discrepancy between parents' ratings of

physical abuse and legal judicial limitations would be relevant for assisting in the development of abuse prevention programs. If parents indicate that they are not aware of certain illegal physical discipline tactics, the delivery of illegal discipline information could lower abuse rates in Canada.

In summary, the present study aims to investigate parents' awareness of the laws that distinguish physical punishment from abuse. The purpose of this study is to determine parents' perceptions of reasonable physical discipline to discover how congruent their beliefs are with legal standards. The main hypothesis is that parents will rate poorly in distinguishing between what is "reasonable" physical discipline under the law and discipline that risks criminal sanction. Parents are expected to overestimate the acts as physical abuse, considering punishment that is legal in Canada to be abuse, or underestimate the act as examples of appropriate punishment as opposed to illegal punishments. The hypothesis was partly based on previous research demonstrating that a significant number of parents violate legal boundaries when disciplining a child. One implication of this hypothesis is that current laws pertaining to corporal punishment and Section 43 do not adequately reflect public opinion, as the courts have indicated.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from recreation centers during public swim hours and hockey tournaments. Booths were set up to inform parents about the study and to distribute the questionnaire among parents who qualified to participate. Parents who were interested in participating were told that the study was completely voluntary, and would take approximately 10 min to complete. Participants completed the questionnaire while waiting for their children to complete their various recreational activities.

Participants included in the study were a convenience sample of 185 parents. Of this sample, 116 participants were female and 69 were male. The age range of participants was 21 to 65 years, with a median age of 42. Male participants were slightly older than the females on average. The participants of the sample were predominantly Caucasian ($n = 164$). Only 18% of participants indicated weekly religious attendance; 71.5% indicated that they did not go to church at all, and 10.5% were missing data. Out of the 185 participants, 79% were married 10.3% were divorced, 6.5 % were single, and 3.8% were common-law. For educational attainment, 44.1% of participants indicated high school or less and 55.4% indicated college, university, or post graduate education; these figures are higher than those of Canadians in general (Statistics Canada, 2001a). The median income of participants was \$80,000, which is higher than the annual income for two-parent families with children in Canada in 2005 (Statistics Canada, 2007).

Parents with children from 1 to 18 years of age were included so that the sample contained a wide range of experience with disciplining children. Participants were selected with children in this age group so that the results would be more representative of current parents. Parents were not included if they had children outside of this age group or if their were under the age of 19. The mean age of child that was currently being raised by participants was 12.31 ($SD = 6.44$). The highest number of children that participants had was 5 ($n = 2$), but 71.5% of the sample had 2 children or less. Of the participants in the sample, 17.2% had female children, 29% had males, and 52.7% had both male and female children.

Procedure

Participants were required to fill out a consent form that provided details about the study, and reminded them that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time

(see Appendix B). Following the signing of the consent form, participants completed a questionnaire in pencil and paper format that examined their perception of abuse and physical punishment, to allow for a comparison with current legal guidelines in Canada involving acceptable physical punishment (see Appendix A). All participants in the study were given the same format of the questionnaire. A demographic sheet was attached at the end of the questionnaire to provide details about the participant and enable an assessment of the representativeness of the sample (see Appendix B). The demographic sheet required information about the participant such as sex, age, income, religious attendance, and ethnicity. The demographic sheet also asked for details regarding the participant's child or children, such as age, gender, and number of children. Upon completion of the study, all participants were asked to seal their questionnaire and demographic sheet in an envelope to assure that no names would be associated with the information provided.

At the beginning of the questionnaire, Section 43 of the *Criminal Code* was written out for parents to read, so that all parents would have the same understanding of the general law regarding corporal punishment in Canada and results could be attributed to their interpretation of what is "reasonable" under this law. Participants were asked to rate 10 different physical discipline tactics corresponding to five separate hypothetical vignettes of child misbehaviour. Each question was rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 = *not physical abuse* to 7 = *yes, physical abuse*. The discipline tactic questions incorporated a specific legally sanctioned physically abusive or nonabusive act and were counterbalanced for order effects. The vignettes all contained scenarios where the gender of the child being disciplined was held constant as male. All vignettes used the term "parent" instead of "mother" or "father" to describe the administrator of the discipline so that the gender of the parent would not influence the ratings

that participants made. The legal judicial limitations implemented in the vignettes were laid down by the Supreme Court of Canada in 2004 to specify guidelines for “reasonable” use of force when disciplining a child. The legal limitations implemented were as follows:

- The child must be between the ages of 2 and 13.
- The physical punishment must be for correctional purposes and cannot be motivated by anger or frustration.
- The child must also be capable of benefiting from such correction, which requires the capacity to learn. This excludes children with various disabilities and under the age of 2.
- The use of an object to inflict the physical punishment is never permitted.
- The punishment cannot cause lasting harm, either physically or emotionally.
- The punishment cannot degrade a child or be cruel or inhumane.
- Striking the child above the neck is never permitted.

(Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth, and the Law v. Canada, 2004)

All parents who participated in the study were eligible to enter a draw for prizes for themselves and their children (see Appendix B for a description of the prizes). Parents who took part in the study but did not wish to complete it were still eligible to enter in the draw, to avoid any undue pressure that the prize incentive could have created. Out of the 200 questionnaires that were completed, 15 were discarded due to missing data or an indication on the demographic sheet that disqualified certain participants from the study. The data that were collected for the research project will be kept in the Psychology Department’s locked storage facility for at least 5 years after completion of the research project.

The researcher recognizes that reading even minimal amounts of physical discipline or abuse of a child, though hypothetical, may be emotionally distressing to some individuals. The questionnaire provided in the study was designed to include the least amount of violence necessary to investigate parents’ perceptions, in order to protect the most sensitive participants. Prior to the study, all potential participants were fully informed of the nature of the study so that they could decline if these issues were disturbing to them. Though the subject matter of this

study could not be framed positively, the scenarios were presented in a hypothetical manner and the questionnaire did not ask how the participants would react personally. The vignettes were designed this way to protect the participants from intrusive questions that could possibly invade their privacy and increase problems with social desirability bias.

Since the vignettes had not been used in prior research, a pilot study was conducted to assess the adequacy and validity of the measures. Face and content validity were verified through the pilot study conducted with 11 undergraduate university students. Pilot study participants were solicited from the Research Methods and Statistics course, Psychology 372. Participants were told that the study was completely voluntary, but that they would be rewarded with credit for participation. Participants in the pilot study were asked to report the clarity of each vignette, and vignettes that were problematic were removed from the questionnaire according to the level of agreement among raters. Participants in the pilot study were asked to indicate which aspects of the vignette they used in determining their rating. There were two parts to the pilot study. Part one required that the participants fill out their answers to the pilot questionnaire, indicating their opinions of clarity and any problems identified in the questionnaire. Part two of the pilot study consisted of a focus group, where the researcher went through the questionnaire with the participants asking them how they felt specifically about each of the questions. The participants were encouraged to openly discuss with the group their views and opinions on the questions, allowing the researcher the opportunity to obtain oral feedback, and address the issues that were problematic in the pilot study. Vignettes that received average ratings on the child's misbehavior were selected from the pilot study to control for the severity of the misbehavior.

Results

To analyse the results, mean ratings of abuse were used for each parent, separating ratings of legally sanctioned vignettes from illegally sanctioned vignettes. Parametric and nonparametric statistical tests were both used in data analysis. The statistics that were used were *t* tests, binomial tests, and chi-squares. Single sample *t* tests were conducted to determine whether parents could accurately identify abusive and nonabusive discipline as the law specifies. The effect size measure that was used was Cohen's *d* (see Table 1 and Table 2). Binomial tests were conducted on the dichotomized variable of interest, which was whether or not the parents considered the discipline to be abusive; this was done in order to make the analysis clearer (see Table 3 and Table 4). Chi square tests of independence were used to assess whether the demographic variables had any relationship to the dependant variables (see Table 5 and Table 6). As stated in the introduction, parents were expected to be incongruent with the law in their ratings in two ways. Parents were expected to overestimate the acts as physical abuse, considering punishment that is legal in Canada to be abuse, or underestimate the seriousness of the punishment in the illegal punishments.

Results were analysed using SPSS 15.0, with an alpha level of .05, unless otherwise specified. The 7-point Likert-type scale was recoded so that ratings of 1 through 4 were categorized as *not abuse* and recoded as 0, and ratings 5 through 7 were categorized as *abuse* and recoded as 1. The scale was recoded to more clearly identify whether the parent felt that the act was abusive or not independent of their level of confidence in their judgment. Parental mean ratings were then compared with expected values reflecting the *legality* (0) or *illegality* (1) of the portrayed acts. This was done in order to determine whether parent's ratings were congruent with Canadian law. An analysis was conducted for each vignette to examine the overall mean ratings

of illegal and legal discipline tactics (a through j). An analysis was also conducted across the vignettes so that the means of specific behaviours could be examined.

Appropriate Aged Child

Vignette number 1 contained a 9-year old child, which does not violate the age limit in Canada for corporal punishment. The analysis of the overall summed ratings of the eight illegal discipline tactics used on a child of appropriate age for corporal punishment found that parents were inaccurate in rating illegal discipline as physical abuse ($M = .77$, $SD = .27$), $t(185) = 11.36$, $p < .001$, $d = .84$. Parents were also inaccurate at identifying the legally sanctioned discipline for an appropriate aged child ($M = .41$, $SD = .44$), $t(185) = 12.62$, $p < .001$, $d = .93$. A binomial analysis was conducted to determine if parents could accurately identify the illegal punishments on an appropriate aged child. A one-tailed z -approximation revealed that the proportion of parents who identified the illegal disciplines as abuse was .87, significantly different than the hypothesized value of .99, $p < .001$. A binomial analysis was also conducted to determine if parents could accurately identify corporal punishment that is legal. A one-tailed z -approximation test determined that the proportion of parents who did not identify that a spank on the bottom or a slap on the arm was acceptable physical punishment was .30. The observed proportion of .30 differed significantly from our hypothesized value of .01, $p < .001$.

Vignette numbers 3 and 4 contained a child who also met the appropriate age restriction for corporal punishment. These vignettes were used to examine whether or not parents were aware that there are no frequency restrictions on corporal punishment in Canada. Results indicate that parents were not accurate in their ratings of the legal physical discipline concerning the frequency of corporal punishment within 1 week ($M = .78$, $SD = .41$), $t(184) = 25.83$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.91$, nor were they accurate in their ratings of the legal physical discipline concerning the

frequency of corporal punishment within 1 day ($M = .8, SD = .40$), $t(183) = 27.43, p < .001, d = 2.03$. A one-tailed, z -approximation test supported these findings, indicating that the proportion of parents who found frequent corporal punishment abusive was .84, significantly different than the hypothesized value of .01, $p < .001$.

Child out of the Age Limit

Vignette number 2 contained a 14-year old child, which violates the age limit for the use of corporal punishment in Canada. Physical punishment is not legal for a child under the age of 2 or over the age of 13. The overall summed analysis of the 10 illegal physical discipline tactics indicate that parents were unable to recognize that the discipline tactics had crossed the line into physical abuse ($M = .67, SD = .33$), $t(182) = 13.87, p < .001, d = 1.03$. A one-tailed, z -approximation test was conducted on the illegal discipline tactics for a child over the age of 13. Results indicate that the proportion of parents who found these acts illegal was .77, which is significantly different than the hypothesized value of .99, $p < .001$.

Child with an Inability to Learn

Corporal punishment is illegal in Canada if the child is unable to learn from the correctional discipline. Vignette number 5 consisted of a child with a learning disability. The overall analysis indicates that parents were poor at distinguishing that physical punishment is illegal on a child with a learning disability ($M = .76, SD = .27$), $t(182) = 12.05, p < .001, d = .89$. Further analysis was conducted using a binomial test. A one-tailed z -approximation revealed that the proportion of parents who find corporal punishment and other discipline tactics illegal for a child with an inability to learn is .86, which differs significantly from the hypothesized value of .99, $p < .001$.

Use of an Object

To examine whether or not parents were aware that the use of an object for physical discipline is illegal, object-related disciplines were collapsed across the vignettes. Overall, the data indicate that parents were not accurate in determining that the use of an object is in fact physical abuse for less severe objects such as a wooden spoon or a twig ($M = .66$, $SD = .38$), $t(182) = 11.86$, $p < .001$, $d = .88$, as well as for the belt (i.e., a more severe object) ($M = .86$, $SD = .27$), $t(184) = 7.24$, $p < .001$, $d = .53$. A one-tailed, z -approximation test revealed that the proportion of parents who felt that a wooden spoon or twig (i.e., less severe object) was physically abusive was .71. The proportion of parents who felt the use of a belt to administer physical discipline was abusive was .89. These proportions are significantly different than the hypothesized value of .99, $p < .001$ but clearly the vast majority of parents recognize that using a belt is illegal.

Causing Lasting Physical or Mental Harm

To determine whether or not parents were aware that causing any lasting physical or mental harm is considered physical abuse, questions examining physical and mental harm infliction were collapsed across vignettes. Results indicate that parents were not congruent with the law in rating less severe physical harm (i.e., minor bruising) as abuse ($M = .70$, $SD = .39$), $t(183) = 10.35$, $p < .001$, $d = .77$. A one-tailed z -approximation test indicated that the proportion of parents who found corporal punishment leaving minor bruising to be abusive was .73, with a hypothesized value of .99, $p < .001$. Parents were also incongruent with the law in rating more severe physical harm (i.e., serious bruising) as abuse ($M = .90$, $SD = .24$), $t(183) = 5.7$, $p < .001$, $d = .42$. A one-tailed, z -approximation indicated that the proportion of parents who found serious lasting harm abusive was .94, with a hypothesized value of .99, $p < .001$. In addition, parents were incongruent with the law in defining mental harm accurately as physical abuse ($M = .89$,

$SD = .27$), $t(182) = 5.46$, $p < .001$, $d = .40$. A one-tailed, z -approximation test revealed that the proportion of parents who found lasting mental harm abusive was .91, with a hypothesized value of .99, $p < .001$. These results indicate that a relatively small proportion of parents were not able to accurately identify that physical discipline becomes physical abuse when it causes lasting harm to the child.

Above the Neck

Variations of physical punishment were used to examine whether or not parents could identify that it is illegal to hit a child above the neck, including a slap across the face or on the back of the child's head. Parents were not congruent with the law in rating a slap across the face as abuse ($M = .81$, $SD = .32$), $t(183) = 7.88$, $p < .001$, $d = .58$, nor were they accurate in rating a slap on the back of the head as abuse ($M = .72$, $SD = .4$), $t(184) = 9.53$, $p < .001$, $d = .70$. A one-tailed z -approximation revealed that the proportion of parents who found a slap across the face to be abusive was .85, and the proportion of parents who felt that a slap on the back of the head was abusive was .76; the hypothesized value was .99, $p < .001$.

Out of Anger or Frustration

According to Canadian laws, corporal punishment is meant to be used for correctional purposes only and cannot be done out of anger or frustration towards the child. Results indicate that parents cannot accurately identify that corporal punishment is considered abusive if committed out of anger or frustration ($M = .63$, $SD = .42$), $t(184) = 12.18$, $p < .001$, $d = .90$. Results of a one-tailed, z -approximation test indicate that the proportion of parents who found it abusive to administer corporal punishment out of anger or frustration was .68, significantly different than the hypothesized value of .99, $p < .001$.

Demographic Analysis

Contingency chi squares were used to evaluate whether or not certain demographic variables were related to parents' ratings of the physical discipline tactics. As displayed in Table 5, a significant relationship was found for gender. Men were more accepting of a number of illegal discipline tactics than women. A significant relationship was also found for religious attendance (Table 6). Out of the participants who attended church once or more a week, 33.3% felt that the use of a belt to hit an appropriate aged child for corporal punishment was not abuse. Out of the participants who did not indicate any religious attendance, only 13.3% found that the belt was not abuse, $\chi^2 (1, N = 173) = 7.14, p < .011$. Lastly, a significant relationship was found for age of parent, with parents over the age of 35 being less approving of legal physical punishment in the form of a spank on the bottom than parents under the age of 35. Legal corporal punishment in the form of a spank on the bottom was found to be abusive by 25% of parents under the age of 35, whereas 41% of parents over the age of 35 found it abusive, $\chi^2 (1, N = 184) = 3.41, p < .046$. No significant differences were found for education, income, or experience level of parenting.

Discussion

There has been an increased level of concern about the use of corporal punishment, partly due to the substantial amount of evidence that links this disciplinary tactic to negative childhood outcomes (Gershoff, 2002; Ohene et al., 2006; Sternberg et al., 1993; Strauss, 1991). Due to the legality of corporal punishment in Canada and the significant risk factor it creates for physical abuse, there could be a relationship between inappropriate corporal punishment and the increase in physical abuse cases in recent years (Trocmé et al., 2003). This study was designed to investigate parents' judgments of the boundaries between physical punishment and abuse, so that a comparison could be made between parental opinions and existing legal standards. Parents' perceptions are important because, in contrast to other countries, Canadian laws give a greater

amount of discretion to the parent in determining a “reasonable” level of corporal punishment when disciplining their child (Cohen, 2005).

Overall, the present analysis found that parents are not able to distinguish between illegal and legal physical discipline, which indicates that parents hold divergent opinions from the law when judging “reasonable” discipline tactics that could be harmful to the child. Though more parents than not were able to recognize that the illegal disciplines were abusive, a significant proportion of parents did not rate the illegal punishments as abuse. A higher level of agreement with the law was found on the discipline tactics that were more severe, such as the use of a belt or a punishment that left severe bruising on the child. The harsher ratings found for the more severe discipline tactics may be partially attributed to a tendency for parents to underreport the acceptability of these behaviours through the survey research method (Graziano & Namaste, 1990). Parents were least accurate on physical punishments that were less severe but illegal in Canada, such as the use of a less severe object (i.e., the wooden spoon or twig), the administration of corporal punishment out of anger or frustration, or hitting the child on the back of the head. Parents were most accurate in rating the disciplines congruent with the law when physical abuse was more obvious, or blatant. Binomial analyses revealed that parents were most accurate in rating physical discipline as abusive when it caused lasting mental harm to the child. Parents were least accurate in rating corporal punishment done out of anger or frustration as abusive. More parents found that a slap across the face was abusive than a slap on the back of the head, which confirms that parents were rating the severity of the act, rather than indicating that they were aware of the laws on corporal punishment. The results confirm the hypothesis that parents cannot accurately distinguish between physical punishment that is legal in Canada and punishment that risks criminal sanction.

Results indicate that many parents were unable to determine that any form of corporal punishment is illegal on a child that is over the age of 13. A similar proportion of parents rated physical punishment on an appropriate age child either legal or illegal consistent with how they rated the discipline tactics with a child of an inappropriate age. Child protection agencies report that 38% of the substantiated cases of inappropriate punishment were acts committed on adolescents in 1998 (Trocmé & Durrant, 2003). These results may indicate why a substantial proportion of adolescents also receive physical punishment. The present study did not include an evaluation of the legal age restriction for children under the age of 2 years; however, parents' lack of awareness of the age limitation found in the study is likely to contribute to the high rate of children under the age of 2 who receive corporal punishment in Canada (Clément, Bouchard, Jetté, & Laferrière, 2000).

Generally, parents believed that the frequency with which corporal punishment is used is an important factor in determining whether or not it is physical abuse. The majority of parents felt that when corporal punishment was used too often on the child, within one day or a week time span, that it was no longer appropriate and rated these acts as abuse. There are no laws in Canada that regulate the frequency of corporal punishment. Thus, frequency of physical punishment is left to the discretion of the parent. Our results examining the appropriateness of frequent corporal punishment indicate that frequency is one aspect of corporal punishment that may benefit from having legal restriction. Research indicates that spanking frequency with children under or over the age of 2 years is significantly and positively associated with child behaviour problems at school age (Slade & Wissow, 2004). Children who were spanked five times in a week had a $4.2 \times$ greater risk of behaviour problems 4 years later.

Chi square analysis found a significant relationship between parents' ratings and gender. Men were significantly more likely to rate various illegal disciplines as acceptable and "not abuse." Similar numbers of men and women have been found to be the perpetrators of child physical abuse and corporal punishment (Straus & Stuart, 1999); however, past research indicates that a higher proportion of fathers than mothers report the use of severe physical discipline (Nobes, Smith, Upton, & Heverin, 1999). Our results indicate that more men than women demonstrate acceptance for more severe forms of physical discipline, which could explain why men are also more likely to use these discipline tactics.

These findings contribute to the growing amount of evidence that corporal punishment is a risk factor for physical abuse. In a critique of Gershoff's (2002) meta-analysis on the negative outcomes of corporal punishment to the child, Baumrind, Cowan, and Larzelere (2002) argued that the high degree of association between corporal punishment and physical abuse cannot be described as a causal relation, and that the association between the two is not evidence that mild or moderate corporal punishment is a risk factor for abuse. Baumrind et al. (2002) indicate that the risk factor of corporal punishment for abuse can more likely be attributed to certain personality characteristics of the parent, such as aggression, hyperactiveness, or the need for control. The present findings indicate support that corporal punishment may be a risk factor for physical abuse as Gershoff (2002) had found, even at moderate levels. Corporal punishment may be a predictor for physical abuse, given the tendency of parents to miscategorize physical abuse in the name of corporal punishment. Our results indicate that a large number of parents found it difficult to determine the legal boundaries between corporal punishment and physical abuse, suggesting that there is a risky continuum between these two physical actions for many parents that cannot be explained by personality traits.

We believe that this research has a clear application to physical abuse prevention. Our results have identified the limitations of parents' knowledge of the law as it relates to acceptable physical discipline and illegal physical abuse. We see this as a risk factor for child physical abuse and believe that attention must be directed at this deficiency by focussing on primary prevention strategies. Research has demonstrated the importance of abuse prevention in lowering the rates of child abuse (Crossen-Tower, 2002). Because physical abuse and neglect are most often home based, early prevention efforts have focused on educating parents about how to deal with children in nonabusive ways (Crossen-Tower, 2002). Our results suggest that parents could benefit from receiving more information regarding the legal boundaries when disciplining a child through physical means, in order to increase intervention and prevention of child physical abuse.

The present analysis is consistent with past research which has found that medical professionals, law enforcement, and teachers need to become more aware of the relevant judicial limitations and specific legal guidelines regarding corporal punishment (Portwood et al., 2000; Schuster et al., 2000; & Smith, 2006). If professionals were more aware of the legal boundaries concerning corporal punishment, a more suitable knowledge base would exist that parents could rely on when choosing discipline tactics for their child. In a study on the educational needs of parents, 91% felt that more information on discipline should be made available on a wide scale (Ateah, 2003). Many parents use corporal punishment based on their belief of its appropriateness and effectiveness (Grogan-Kaylor & Otis, 2007). This suggests that if parents were provided with information on the boundaries of corporal punishment or effective alternative discipline tactics, they would be less likely to cross the line into physical abuse when disciplining their child.

While it is clear that something must be done to improve parents' awareness of the laws involving corporal punishment, the legal system continues to rely on the assumption that corporal punishment laws are based on public opinion (Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and the Law v. Canada, 2004). The results of our study could be beneficial to the courts since it provides preliminary evidence that parents' and the legal conceptualizations concerning reasonable physical discipline do not match. Such findings indicate a need for legal revision since the Courts have asserted that their standards are a reflection of a consensus view of what is appropriate and acceptable physical discipline of a child. Though recent repeal cases against Section 43 of the *Criminal Code* have led to increased restrictions on the law through judicial limitations (i.e., Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and the Law v. Canada, 2004), this study indicates that parents are not aware of the law's revisions that specify the boundaries between what is legal and what is illegal in corporal discipline.

The study is consistent with other research that indicates that the Supreme Court of Canada's judicial limitations for Section 43 are out of synchrony with public opinion. A national public opinion poll in 2003 found that 51% of Canadians believed that parents should not be allowed to use physical force as a disciplinary measure. Eighty percent of Canadians in this poll indicated that they would support the removal of Section 43 if research demonstrated that it would decrease child abuse. Many parents who participated in the present study indicated that they found even legal corporal punishment to be abusive.

Parents' ratings were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale; it was intended that this scale would allow parents to indicate their confidence level in identifying a discipline as abusive or not abusive. However, a specific, direct question asking parents to report how confident they were that their ratings reflected discipline that is actually legal in Canada did not correlate with the

accuracy of their ratings on the legal ($r = .089$) and illegal ($r = -.001$) disciplines. This suggests that the rating scale was not a reflection of confidence level. It appears that parents may have rated the disciplines in terms of their perceived severity of the act, and not how sure they were that it was abuse or not abuse. For this reason, our analysis included the parallel approach of using a binomial measure. Further, in an attempt to dichotomize the variable of interest (i.e., whether or not parents felt that the discipline was abusive), the 7-point Likert-type scale was recoded into 0 and 1; 1 to 4 was considered *not abuse* (0), and 5 to 7 was considered a rating of *abuse* (1). An 8-point scale would have been preferred for the analysis so that the scale could have been divided equally in binomial analysis.

One variable that was under investigation was whether or not parents could properly determine the legal age limits for disciplining a child. The age limit deemed appropriate in Canada for physical punishment is over the age of 2 years but under the age of 13. The age of the children in the vignettes of the questionnaire may very well have influenced parents' ratings, even when the age was not the primary variable of interest because most of the children in the vignettes were older (i.e., over the age of 8). Studies are lacking on discipline choices for older children, so it is difficult to know whether or not parents would have rated these vignettes differently dependent on the age of the child, even though they do not violate the age limitation in Canada (Barkin et al., 2007).

In an attempt to control for gender bias that could result from sex differences in socialization, all of the children in the vignettes were boys. This control may have influenced parents to be less likely to identify a discipline as abuse since physical punishment is generally more accepted with boys than girls (Shor, 2006). Our decision to use boys in all of the vignettes was based on this knowledge. We were attempting to protect against any gender bias associated

with physical discipline of girls, and to increase our confidence that parents' ratings were due to the discipline chosen and not the gender of the child. Research (Graziano & Namaste, 1990) indicates that boys are spanked more than girls; however, the difference found is relatively small. Such findings suggest that gender differences should not be a significant problem for the results, but further research may benefit from both sexes of the child being included in the analysis. Another gender control in the vignettes was for the discipliner. The term "parent" was used instead of mother or father, so that it would remain gender neutral.

One limitation to the generalizability of the study is the representativeness of the sample. The majority of participants were married, Caucasian, and indicated a high income and education level. Research on the physical abuse of children indicates that higher abuse rates occur among lower income parents (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Research also indicates higher child abuse rates among single parents and stepparents (Bolton & MacEachron, 1986). Based on this evidence, the participants of this study may have inflated the ratings of abuse. The study would have benefited from having more single participants, more participants in the lower income bracket, as well as lower levels of education. Since the parents were all obtained from recreational facilities, the sample may not be representative of the general parent population. It is likely that this particular sample is biased in that a specific type of parent is likely to attend recreational facilities with his or her children. Consequently, the demographics of this sample limit the generalizability of the results, but in a way that makes our findings even more impressive. Moreover, this sample, given the relatively high income and education levels, are the least likely to be abusive, according to the stress theory (Giles-Sims, Straus, & Sugarman, 1995). We believe that this group would be better informed, more socially aware, and more child focussed than a more random, representative sample.

It is possible that parents' judgement of acceptable physical punishment may change with the amount of experience they have with parenting; however, a study on the discipline attitudes of mothers found that positive attitudes towards spanking shows stability over time (Vittrup, Holden, & Buck, 2006). Other research by Straus (2001) indicates that older parents are less likely to spank their children than younger parents, even when the age of the child is controlled for. Only a minority of parents were under the age of 25 in our sample ($n = 2$), which research indicates is the age group of parents most likely to use spanking. Our chi square analysis still found a significant relationship for age, consistent with past research by Strauss (2001). Parents who were over 35 were less approving of legal corporal punishment in the form of a spank to the bottom. Approximately 78% of the participants in the study were over the age of 35, with 43% over the age of 40. The study would have been more representative had a larger number of young parents been included in the sample.

Chi square analysis found a significant relationship between parents' ratings and gender. Men were significantly more likely to rate various illegal disciplines as acceptable and "not abuse." Similar number of men and women have been found to be the perpetrators of child physical abuse and corporal punishment (Straus & Stuart, 1999); however, past research indicates that a higher proportion of fathers than mothers report the use of severe physical discipline (Nobes, Smith, Upton, & Heverin, 1999). Our results indicate that more men than women found the more severe forms of physical discipline as acceptable, which could explain why men are also more likely to use these discipline tactics. Future research could benefit from including a sample that has a more equal proportion of men and women; the predominance of women in the sample may have limited the generalizability of the results since women tended to rate the illegal disciplines more harshly.

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Appendix A
Questionnaire

PLEASE READ ALL OF THE INFORMATION ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES:

Section 43 of the Criminal Code of Canada states:

“Every parent or person standing in the place of a parent is justified in using force by way of correction toward a child, as the case may be, who is under his care, if the force does not exceed what is reasonable under the circumstances.”

Please read the following situations carefully and rate the questions that follow. There is no right or wrong response, the questions are provided to obtain your opinion and interpretation. Rate these situations so that they are a true and honest reflection of your beliefs regarding physical punishment of children and what is reasonable.

Rate the parents discipline method as either abusive or not abusive **IN YOUR OPINION** on the 7 point scale:

1 = NOT physical abuse

7 = YES physical abuse.

*remember that a rating of physical abuse would indicate that criminal charges should be faced by the parent.

1. **9-year old Sam was watching television when his sister and her friends entered into the living room to play house. Sam became annoyed with how loud they were being and yelled at his little sister Tina to get out, but Tina wouldn't listen. Sam slapped his little sister in the face and punched her in the back, causing Tina to cry with pain. Sam's parent:**

a.) slaps Sam across the face in order to correct his behavior.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

not physical abuse

physical abuse

b.) gives Sam a slap to the arm with an open hand to correct his behavior, leaving minor bruising.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse yes physical abuse

c.) gives Sam a spanking on his bottom with an open hand to correct his behaviour.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse yes physical abuse

d.) slaps Sam on the back of the head in order to correct his behavior.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse yes physical abuse

e.) slaps Sam on the bottom with a wooden spoon in order to correct his behavior.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse **yes physical abuse**

f.) uses a belt to strike Sam on the bottom to correct his behavior.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse **yes physical abuse**

g.) gives Sam a slap to the arm with an open hand to correct his behavior.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse **yes physical abuse**

h.) pins Sam against the wall shaking him to correct his behavior, causing Sam to have nightmares that night of the incident.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse yes physical abuse

i.) gives Sam a spanking on the bottom with an open hand out of anger and frustration.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse yes physical abuse

j.) gives Sam a slap to the arm with an open hand, leaving serious bruises.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse yes physical abuse

2. 14-year old Todd wishes he could drive like his older sister. Everyone in the family has a car but him. One night he decides to steal his mother’s car and pick up his friend Jake for a spin. When he is backing out of the driveway he smashes into a telephone pole, totalling the vehicle. His parent came outside to find Todd in the smashed car. Todd’s parent:

a.) slaps Todd on the bottom with a wooden spoon in order to correct his behavior.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

not physical abuse **yes physical abuse**

b.) gives Todd a spanking on the bottom with an open hand out of anger and frustration.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

not physical abuse **yes physical abuse**

c.) gives Todd a slap to the arm with an open hand to correct his behavior, leaving minor bruising.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse **yes physical abuse**

d.) gives Todd a slap across the face in order to correct his behavior.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse **yes physical abuse**

e.) pins Todd up against the wall shaking him to correct his behavior, causing Todd to have nightmares that night of the incident.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse **yes physical abuse**

f.) gives Todd a spanking on his bottom to correct his behaviour.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse yes physical abuse

g.) uses a belt to strike Todd on the bottom to correct his behavior.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse yes physical abuse

h.) gives Todd a slap to the arm with an open hand to correct his behavior, leaving serious bruises.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse yes physical abuse

i.) slaps Todd on the back of the head in order to correct his behavior.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse yes physical abuse

j.) gives Todd a slap to the arm with an open hand to correct his behavior.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse yes physical abuse

3. It is common for 7-year old John to be spanked (on the bottom with an open hand) up to 13 times in a week by his parents, who are trying to correct his misbehaviour.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse yes physical abuse

4. 5-year old Angelo is spanked (on the bottom with an open hand) 6 times in one day by his parents, who are trying to correct his misbehaviour.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

not physical abuse yes physical abuse

5. 8 year old Mike has attention deficit disorder (ADD) causing him to be easily distracted and have difficulty with his school work. On the playground, Mike is playing with a soccer ball. A boy named James came over to play with Mike, and a conflict started. Mike punches James in the stomach and kicks sand in his face. Mikes parent:

a.) spansks Mike on the bottom with an open hand to correct his behavior.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

not physical abuse yes physical abuse

b) gives Mike a slap to the arm with an open hand, leaving minor bruising.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse **yes physical abuse**

c) Uses a belt to strike Mike on the bottom to correct his behavior.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse **yes physical abuse**

d.) gives Mike a slap across the face to correct his behavior.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse **yes physical abuse**

e.) slaps Mike on the back of the head to correct his behavior.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse **yes physical abuse**

f.) gives Mike a slap to the arm with an open hand to correct his behavior.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse **yes physical abuse**

g.) spans Mike on the bottom with an open hand out of anger and frustration.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse **yes physical abuse**

h.) pins Mike up against the wall shaking him to correct his behavior, causing Mike to have nightmares that night.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse **yes physical abuse**

i) swats Mike on the bottom with a nearby twig to correct his behavior.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse **yes physical abuse**

j.) Slaps Mike on the arm with an open hand, leaving serious bruises.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not physical abuse **yes physical abuse**

1. Is the seriousness of a child's misbehaviour an important factor in deciding whether or not to use physical punishment under the circumstance?

- a.) Yes, it is definitely a relevant in choosing the appropriate discipline for the child.
- b) No, it is definitely not relevant in choosing an appropriate discipline for the child.
- c) I'm not sure.

2. Is bodily harm caused to the child by the parent a factor in how you determine the appropriateness of the discipline method used?

- a. yes
- b. no
- c. I'm not sure.

3. How confident are you that your ratings reflect discipline that is actually legal in Canada?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

not at all confident **very confident**

Appendix B
Demographic Sheet

1. YOUR AGE: _____

2. YOUR GENDER: (male or female)_____

3. Number of children-(how many children do you have that you are raising) _____

4. Age of each of your children- (please list)_____

5. Gender of your child/children- (please list)_____

6. Marital Status- (single, divorced, married) _____

7. Level of Education- (did not graduate high school, graduated high school, graduated university, graduated college, graduated masters program, graduated PHD program)_____

8. Religious Involvement- (how many times do you attend church per week)
_____/week

9. Please indicate your family income- (your average annual income for your household)
\$ _____

10. Ethnicity- Please put a check mark beside family origin:

- Asian - Indian
- Asian - Pakistani
- Asian - Bangladeshi
- Caribbean
- African
- Chinese
- Caucasian
- White Irish
- Mixed White and Black Caribbean
- Mixed White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Unknown??
- other:_____

Appendix C
Subject Consent Form



Parental Perception of Child Physical Abuse:
Assessing Parental Judgements from a Legal Perspective.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jan Cioe, Ph.D., R.Psych
Psychology department
University of British Columbia
(250) 807-9360

Co-Investigator: Carly Robertson
Psychology Department
University of British Columbia
(250) 469-1446

My name is Carly Robertson and I am a student in the Psychology Honours program at the University of British Columbia Okanagan. You are invited to participate in an ongoing research project being conducted through the Psychology Department. This study aims to investigate parents' perceptions and judgments of what they consider acceptable physical punishment of children as opposed to physical abuse. The completion of this study is a requirement for an honours degree in psychology, and is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Jan Cioe.

If you are a parent over the age of 19, with a child or children between the ages of 1 and 18, you are eligible to participate in the study. The results of this study will be confidential; no names or identification are required from participants. The study is designed to ensure that there is no way to associate the responses with a particular individual. This study ensures anonymity and only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the data collected for the study. Data will be stored and secured in a locked cabinet for the duration of the study. Data will be kept for five years and will be used for public presentation and possibly multiple publications. Upon completion of the study, findings will be posted on Dr. Jan Cioe's website at UBCO. There will also be a public presentation of the results in April, which anyone can attend.

The purpose of the study is to gain information on the perceptions that parents hold that guide their determinations in distinguishing between appropriate physical discipline and physical abuse of children. The study requires the perceptions of parents because of their experiences in dealing with children. If you choose to participate in the study, you will be asked to fill out a short questionnaire and demographic sheet that will provide scenarios for you to decide whether or not the punishment constitutes abuse. This study does not ask personal questions about how you discipline your own child; it only requires that you judge the scenarios. The study should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The results of all completed questionnaires will be integrated to determine the general perception of parents on these scenarios.

Upon completion of the study you will be eligible to enter a draw for a chance to win movie cinema passes or a Scandia Golf and Games party for your child and 5 of their friends.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. At any time during the study, you are free to stop your participation without penalty. You are free to withdraw from the study even after completion of the questionnaire, and it will not be included in the results of the study. However, after submitting your questionnaire you will not be able to withdraw; since your identification is not provided there will be no way for us to determine which questionnaire you provided. If you feel that reading any scenarios that contain violence against children may be distressing to you, please refrain from participating in this study. The scenarios that you are about to read are not real and were created to learn about the opinions of parents.

If you have any further questions you may contact the researcher Carly Robertson (250-469-1446), or Dr. Jan Cioe, the project supervisor (250-807-8732). IF YOU HAVE ANY CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS OR TREATMENT AS A PARTICIPANT IN THIS STUDY, YOU MAY CONTACT THE RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION LINE AT (604) 822-8598.

Signing this consent form indicates that you have read and understood the information above, that you agree to the uses of the data, and that you are now willing to participate.

X _____
Printed name of Subject:

X _____
Signature of Subject:

X _____
Date:

Signature of Principal Investigator:

Date:

Signature of Co-Investigator:

Date:

Appendix D

Recreational Facility Information and Consent Form



Recreational Facility Information and Consent Form

Parental Perception of Child Physical Abuse: Assessing Parental Judgements from a Legal Perspective

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jan Cioe, Ph.D., R.Psych
Psychology department
University of British Columbia
(250) 807-9360

Co-Investigator: Carly Robertson
Psychology Department
University of British Columbia
(250) 469-1446

Date:

Dear (name of recreational head):

I am a student at the University of British Columbia Okanagan completing my honours degree in psychology. I am conducting a study to assess parents' abilities to distinguish the appropriate boundaries between physical abuse and physical punishment of children. The purpose of this study is to examine whether parents' beliefs and judgments accurately reflect legal standards, or if there is incongruence in ratings of abuse. The study is being conducted under a supervising professor, Dr. Jan Cioe.

As the head of (name of recreational facility), we seeking your permission to recruit participants through your recreational facility; we are also approaching other recreational facilities within Kelowna. The research methodology chosen for this study will remain unobtrusive and completely voluntary. Your facilities involvement in this study will be minimal. Our plan is to recruit parents of children attending recreational activities. This time has been chosen for optimal exposure to a large number of possible participants for the study, without having to approach parents that are disinterested or violate privacy. For optimal recruitment, we would ask that an advertisement of the study be attached to the bulletin boards around your facility to notify parents of the important research that is being conducted. This advertisement will give parents an opportunity to consider whether or not they wish to participate. We will also need a table located somewhere in your recreational center where interested parents can make contact with us.

Parents interested in the study will be given the option of completing the questionnaire while waiting for their children to finish their recreational activities. This should provide an opportune

time that parents can participate without cutting into their daily schedules. Parents can also choose to complete the study at a time that is convenient for them; questionnaires may be taken away and mailed in or the parent may complete the survey online. The pen and paper questionnaire should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. The questionnaire will provide different physically abusive and non-abusive scenarios and ask parents to rate these situations. The scenarios contain a minimal amount of explicit detail and are designed to remain unharmed to even its most sensitive readers. A sample of the questionnaire can be provided to you upon request if you wish to review it.

All parents over the age of 19, with children between the age of 1 and 18 are eligible to participate. Participation is completely voluntary and volunteers are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Responses to the questionnaire will remain confidential; no names or identification of participants will be indicated on the questionnaire. As an incentive, parents who participate in the study are eligible to enter their name, or child's name, in a draw for a Scandia golf and games party with five friends, or, if they have children from an older age group, free cinema passes. Data that are collected from this study will form part of an undergraduate thesis, which will be catalogued in our library and available for public access. The study may also be submitted for publication in psychological journals to contribute to scientific progress in the area of child abuse.

If you have any further questions you may contact the researcher Carly Robertson (250-469-1446), or Dr. Jan Cioe, the project supervisor (250-807-8732). **IF YOU HAVE ANY CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS OR TREATMENT AS A PARTICIPANT IN THIS STUDY, YOU MAY CONTACT THE RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION LINE AT (604) 822-8598.**

Thank you for taking the time to consider our request. If you are willing to allow us to use your facility, please complete the attached consent form. We hope that your recreation center is interested in taking part in the progression of scientific research in our community!

I have read, understood, and agree that (name of recreational facility) be used to obtain parent participants during allocated times, and that an advertisement concerning the details of the study be presented on the bulletins informing parents of the research.

Printed Name of Head of Institution: _____

Signature of Head of Institution: _____

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____

Signature of Co-Investigator: _____

Appendix E

Notification Advertisement
(Attachment for recreational center bulletin boards)



Dear Parents:

You are invited to participate in an ongoing research project being conducted through the University of British Columbia Okanagan Psychology Department. This study aims to investigate parents' perceptions and judgments of what they consider acceptable physical punishment of children as opposed to physical abuse. Your participation in this study is important and will contribute to the progression of scientific evidence right in your community! If you are a parent over the age of 19, with a child or children between the ages of 1 and 18, you are eligible to participate in the study.

The results of the study will be strictly confidential, and no names or identities will be revealed or required. As a bonus to taking part in the study, **all parents who participate have the chance of winning some great prizes, such as movie cinema passes or a Scandia Golf and Games party for your child and five of their friends!** Participating is simple and should only take about 10 minutes of your time. The study only asks that you fill out a short questionnaire. There are three ways that you can participate. First, a booth will be set up at (recreational center) where you can pick up and fill out the questionnaire while waiting for your child to finish their activities. Second, you can take a questionnaire with an already stamped and addressed envelop home with you to complete later. Lastly, a website has been set up for you to fill out the short questionnaire right from home. At the end of the questionnaire on the website, a telephone number will be provided that you can call to enter your or your child's name in the draw for prizes!

Remember, your participation is greatly appreciated, but entirely voluntary. If you have any questions regarding the study or wish to participate but are unsure how, you may contact the researcher Carly Robertson (250-469-1446), or Dr. Jan Cioe, the project supervisor (250-807-8732). **IF YOU HAVE ANY CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS OR TREATMENT AS A PARTICIPANT IN THIS STUDY, YOU MAY CONTACT THE RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION LINE AT (604) 822-8598.**

Thank you!

Appendix F

Pitch to Parents

Hi, my name is Carly Robertson and I am a fourth year psychology major who is working on completion of my honours thesis. To do this I am conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr. Jan Cioe and Dr. Michael Woodworth. You are invited to participate in an ongoing research project being conducted through the Psychology Department. This study aims to investigate parents' perceptions and judgments of what they consider acceptable physical punishment of children as opposed to physical abuse. If you are a parent over the age of 19, with a child or children between the ages of 1 and 18, you are eligible to participate in the study. The results of the study will be strictly confidential, and no names or identities will be revealed or required. As a bonus to taking part in the study, all parents who participate have the chance of winning some great prizes, such as movie cinema passes or a Scandia Golf and Games party for your child and five of their friends! Participating is simple and should only take about 10 minutes of your time. The study only asks that you fill out a short questionnaire and demographic sheet. There are three ways that you can participate. First, you can fill out the questionnaire while waiting for your child to finish their recreational activity. Second, you can take a questionnaire with a stamped self-addressed envelop away with you to complete later. Lastly, a website has been set up for you to fill out the short questionnaire right from home. At the end of the questionnaire on the website, a telephone number will be provided that you can call to enter your or your child's name in the draw for prizes! If you fill it out right now, you can enter your name or your child's name in the draw box right here. Remember, participation is completely voluntary. You may also withdraw from this study at ANY time without penalty.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to what my study is about!

Appendix G

Tables

Table 1

Grouped means and t values for illegal discipline

Illegal Discipline tactic	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
Appropriate aged child	.77	.27	185	-11.36	-.84
Child out of age limit	.67	.33	182	-13.87	-1.03
Child with an Inability to learn	.76	.27	182	-12.05	-.89
Use of an object- Wooden spoon/twig	.66	.38	182	-11.87	-.88
Use of an object- Belt	.86	.27	184	-7.24	-.53
Lasting harm-minor bruising	.70	.39	183	-10.35	-.77
Lasting harm-serious bruising	.90	.24	183	-5.70	-.42
Lasting mental harm	.89	.27	182	-5.46	-.40
Out of anger/frustration	.63	.42	184	-12.18	-.90
Above neck-slap across face	.81	.32	183	-7.88	-.58
Above neck-slap on the back of the head	.72	.40	184	-9.53	-.70

Table 2
Grouped means and t values for legal discipline

Legal Discipline tactic	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
Spank on the bottom/slap to the arm	.41	.44	185	12.62	.93
Frequent corporal punishment within one week	.78	.41	184	25.83	1.91
Frequent corporal punishment within one day	.80	.40	183	27.43	2.03

Table 3

binomial tests for illegal discipline

Illegal discipline tactic	Observed Proportion		Test Proportion	<i>p</i>
	Abuse	Not abuse		
Appropriate aged child	.87	.13	.99	<.001
<i>N</i>	161	24		
Child out of age limit	.77	.23	.99	<.001
<i>N</i>	140	43		
Child with an Inability to learn	.86	.14	.99	<.001
<i>N</i>	157	26		
Use of an object- Wooden spoon/twig	.71	.29	.99	<.001
<i>N</i>	130	54		
Use of an object- Belt	.89	.11	.99	<.001
<i>N</i>	165	20		
Lasting harm-minor bruising	.73	.27	.99	<.001
<i>N</i>	134	50		
Lasting harm serious	.94	.06	.99	<.001
<i>N</i>	173	11		
Lasting mental harm	.91	.09	.99	<.001

<i>N</i>	167	16		
Out of anger/frustration	.68	.32	.99	<.001
<i>N</i>	126	58		
Above neck-slap across face	.85	.15	.99	<.001
<i>N</i>	156	28		
Above neck-slap on the back of the head	.76	.24	.99	<.001
<i>N</i>	140	45		

Table 4 *binomial tests for legal discipline*

legal discipline tactic	Observed Proportion		Test Proportion	<i>p</i>
	Abuse	Not abuse		
Spank on the bottom/Slap on the Arm	.40	.60	.01	<.001
<i>N</i>	74	112		
Frequent corporal punishment	.84	.16	.01	<.001
<i>N</i>	154	30		

Table 5

Chi square values for gender

Discipline tactic	Gender- <i>P</i> who rated “ <i>not abuse</i> ”		χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>p</i>
	Male	Female				
<i>appropriate aged child</i>						
Slap on the back of the head	37.7%	25%	3.33	1	185	.049
Wooden spoon	46.4%	33%	3.25	1	184	.05
Belt	27.5%	8.6%	11.71	1	185	.001
Serious bruising	11.6%	2.6%	6.28	1	185	.016
Minor bruising	47.1%	27.6%	7.17	1	184	.006
<i>Child out of age limit</i>						
Spank on the bottom (illegal)			6.9	1	185	.006
Slap on the back of the head	39.1%	24.1%	4.66	1	185	.024
Use of a Wooden spoon	53.6%	37.9%	4.33	1	185	.027
Slap on the arm (illegal)	34.8%	19.8%	6.06	1	185	.01
<i>Frequent corporal punishment within one day</i>	27.5%	14.8%	4.46	1	184	.029
<i>Child with learning disability</i>						
Minor Bruising	34.8%	19.8%	5.11	1	185	.019
Spank on the bottom (illegal)	60.9%	41.7%	6.32	1	184	.009
Slap on the back of the head	33.3%	19.8%	4.22	1	185	.031
Use of a twig	29%	13.9%	6.23	1	184	.011
Use of a belt	14.5%	5.2%	4.76	1	185	.03
Slap on the arm (illegal)	58%	41.4%	4.78	1	185	.021

Table 6

Chi square values for religious attendance and age of parent

<i>P</i> who rated “ <i>not abuse</i> ”						
discipline tactic	Church attendance		χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>p</i>
	Once or more/week	No church attendance				
Use of Belt	33.3%	13.3%	7.14	1	173	.011
Age of Parent						
	> age 35	< age 35				
Spank on the bottom (legal)	59%	75%	3.41	1	184	.046