

Experience of Parental Corporal Punishment in Childhood and Adolescence and its Effect on Punitiveness

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Abstract The family, as the primary instance of socialization, plays a key role in nurturing values and attitudes. Based on this notion, this paper looks at how parental corporal punishment in childhood and adolescence, as an expression of a strict, authoritarian upbringing, can influence punitiveness later in life. The results of a representative German sample using multivariate analyses show that individuals who were physically punished or abused by their parents during childhood or adolescence are more punitive than non-victims of parental violence. Based on these findings, the question of whether changing parenting styles might have implications at the macro-level of punitiveness is addressed.

Keywords Parental violence · Corporal punishment · Upbringing · Punitiveness

The role of parental corporal punishment in children's and adolescents' later-life behavior has been well analyzed in a range of different studies. Research has shown that the experience of violence in childhood increases the likelihood of aggression, delinquent, and antisocial behavior and violence in adolescence (Baier et al. 2009; Gershoff 2002a; Smith and Thornberry 1995; Wilmers et al. 2002) and also leads to long-term consequences such as depression or low self-esteem (e.g., Allen and Tarnowski 1989; Gross and Keller 1992). As the main environment for inter-generational transfer of standards and values, the family shapes children's characters as they develop (Schönpflug 2001). The transfer of stable

attitudes and values in everyday interactions occurs through social learning processes (Pinquart and Silbereisen 2004; Schönpflug 2001).

Based on the assumed significance of family upbringing for the development of fundamental attitudes and dispositions, the question of whether socialization in a particularly strict and violence-prone family environment also shapes later attitudes toward punishment arises. Punitiveness, or the longing for severe sanctions, is a multi-layered and a somewhat imprecise concept in which judicial, macro and micro levels must be separated (Kury et al. 2004). At the micro level, punitiveness means the need for punishment in individuals. Attitudes are understood as individual standpoints on general social phenomena, or as an evaluation disposition. Consequently, punitiveness at the individual level represents an attitude to punishment that shows evidence of a tendency to prefer stricter and retribitional sanctions over milder ones, when dealing with transgressions (Lautmann and Klimke 2004).

Corporal punishment against children and adolescents is still widely used in the United States. At the same time, it is the most punitive country among the Western democracies (Hyman 1995). Although the Fourth National Incidence Study (NIS-4) documented a 19 % decline in the total number of maltreated children since NIS-3 in 1993, in the 2005–2006 study year there were still 553,300 children abused in the United States, with most of these abused children (58 %) experiencing physical abuse (Sedlak et al. 2010). Also, other studies point out a high percentage of parents using physical violence against pre-school children and 1–2-year olds (Socolar et al. 2007; Straus et al. 2006). A new study examined the data of the use of corporal punishment by parents from four cross-sectional population surveys, and showed that parents report an overall reduction in the use of spanking or slapping of 3- to 11-year old children from 1995 to 2002 (Zolotor et al. 2011). However, nearly 80 % of pre-school-

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aged children were still spanked or slapped without a marked change since 1975 (Zolotor et al. 2011).

Corporal punishment has not only been associated with outcomes such as aggression, antisocial and delinquent behavior, and mental illness (Gershoff 2002a), but also with own infant spanking or attitudes that value corporal punishment (Chung et al. 2009). Yet, the effects of physical punishment on more general attitudes to punishment have hardly been investigated.

How Upbringing Influences Attitudes

Attitudes are usually defined as a tendency to responding favorably or unfavorably to certain objects, persons, or situations (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). They result from stable values acquired in the course of socialization, which are communicated by parenting behavior. By exercising violence, parents express that they themselves tolerate the use of violence. Parents communicate to their children a punitive value set that can be characterized by terms such as authoritarian, revengeful, strict, repressive, and dominance-oriented (Lautmann and Klimke 2004). Parents whose parenting style is non-violent show that they reject the use of severe punishments on principle. Their parenting style is not repressive nor based on violence, but discursive via the power of better argumentation. This parenting style can also be described as liberal, reconciliatory, flexible, permissive, and empathy-oriented (Lautmann and Klimke 2004).

Little empirical research has been done to date on the relationship between violent victimization by parents and punitive attitudes. MacIntyre and Cantrell (1995) could not confirm a relationship between corporal punishment and violent and aggressive attitudes. However, the authors assumed that this may have been related to the sample of college students, because the averages achieved with the scales used were significantly below those of other samples. Gabriel and Greve (1996) linked the relationship between the experience of parental violence and punitiveness and found that non-victims are more punitive than people who were either mildly or severely punished in their childhood and youth. However, the findings by Gabriel and Greve (1996) are subject to two points: firstly, the analysis did not control for third variables; secondly, the punitiveness indicator differed considerably from the measure used in this paper. Gabriel and Greve (1996) used an average based on various case portrayals and variants as indicator. In a comparison of the two analyses, these differences in measurements of punitiveness (index of case portrayals versus punitiveness scale) are of key importance because, statistical objections aside, they take in the differing aspects of attitudes to punitiveness (for a discussion on these different ways of measuring punitiveness, see Suhling et al. 2005). Our separate analyses of each fictitious

case reanalyzing the data of Gabriel and Greve and using multivariate models provided mixed, partly significant, partly non-significant, results in respect of the relationship between experience of parental violence and punitiveness.

The two studies by MacIntyre and Cantrell (1995) and Gabriel and Greve (1996) provide the only empirical findings on the relationship between violent victimization by parents and punitive attitudes. So far, the greatest focus of research on the consequences of corporal punishment in childhood and adolescence on later life is explained by the inter-generational transmission of corporal punishment framed by the ideas of social learning theory (Bandura 1977). Adults who were subject to severe physical discipline as children are often violent toward their spouse and children as adults (Chung et al. 2009; Muller et al. 1995; Simons et al. 1995; Straus and Smith 1990). It was argued that physical punishment teaches children that it is legitimate and necessary to hit those you love. Children who grow up in violent families are taught a negative example that restricts their opportunity to develop models for more constructive conflict resolution (Wetzels 1997). They are shown that acting violently towards their loved ones is normal and that disciplining by means of physical punishment is an appropriate way by which to shape a person's behavior. Simons et al. (1995) called this perspective underlying the transmission of domestic violence the "family roles perspective" and compared it with the "antisocial behavior trait perspective," which suggests that antisocial behavior represents a general antisocial orientation that develops in response to inept parenting practices. Consequently, it was also reported that abusive parenting increases the probability that an individual will engage in violent crime (Straus et al. 2006).

In other studies conducted in the US, people who had committed acts of violence were the biggest supporters of the death penalty (Cochran and Chamlin 2000; Stevens 1992). In an intercultural study of students from Germany, America, and Turkey, a relationship was identified between those who committed violent delinquency and their greater preference towards the death penalty (Kempe 2008). Further, the results of a number of studies indicate that acceptance of violence increases relative to the severity of violent victimization within the family. The acceptance of violence goes hand in hand with dwindling self-esteem and lesser ability to empathize (Pfeiffer et al. 1999; Wilmers et al. 2002). Studies show that the best predictor for the acceptance of the use of corporal punishment is the amount of corporal punishment received as a child (Bower-Russa et al. 2001; Deather-Deckard et al. 2003; Graziano et al. 1992; Graziano and Namaste 1990). Moreover, such attitudes that value corporal punishment showed stability over time and were found to be associated with later use of corporal punishment (Pinderhughes et al. 2000; Vittrup et al. 2006). These

empirical findings prove the importance of experienced parenting styles for developed attitudes that accept punishment as necessary later on.

However, experience of violence in later life, including in a familial context, is not seen to have the same influence. Adults have already developed relatively stable attitudes that cannot be modified to the same extent as children's attitudes can when they experience violence. Therefore, it is plausible that victimization is an extremely weak predictor of punitiveness. It was expected that direct and indirect victims of violence would have more punitive attitudes in order to satisfy their need for revenge. However, the associated empirical findings do not support this hypothesis of a direct relationship (Langworthy and Whitehead 1986; Van Kesteren 2009). Studies show no relationship or only a marginal or even an inverse relationship (Kury et al. 1992). In multivariate studies in North America, victim status has no significant effect on punitiveness (Cullen et al. 1985; Hartnagel and Templeton 2008; Rich and Sampson 1990).

Together, these findings suggest that the experience of parental violence during childhood and adolescence can lead to an attitude toward punishment that shows a tendency to prefer stricter and harsher sanctions over milder ones. In comparison to children brought up by non-violent parents, abused children see punishment as an appropriate means to shape behavior.

Existing Findings on Determinants of Punitiveness and Objectives

Other determinants, in addition to experience of parental violence in childhood, are also thought to influence punitiveness. There is not one single factor that drives punitiveness. In order to assess the net effect of victimization experience in childhood and adolescence on the longing for more severe sanctions, one has to control for the other determinants.

Research has shown that fear of crime is a very stable predictor of punitiveness (Hartnagel and Templeton 2008; Kühnrich and Kania 2005; Langworthy and Whitehead 1986). When looked at from an instrumental perspective, fear of crime leads to an increased need for punishment because people want to protect themselves and others and reduce the risk of victimization. Under the assumption that stricter sentences actually prevent crime, stricter punishments are called for on utilitarian grounds (Hartnagel and Templeton 2008; Tyler and Boeckman 1997).

If fear of crime is to be used as a predictor for punitiveness, it is important during operationalization to differentiate between the various facets of the term. It appears wise to differentiate between general social concerns on the one hand and individual fear of crime on the other. Individual fear can be divided into personal fear of victimization (affective

component), personal risk perception (cognitive component), and actual prevention measures (conative component) (Skogan 1993). Empirical studies show that personal fear of crime has a positive influence on punitiveness (Kühnrich and Kania 2005; Langworthy and Whitehead 1986; Pfeiffer et al. 2005; Windzio et al. 2007). Society-related fear of crime or concern can be illustrated by respondents' subjective assessment of crime trends (Skogan 1993). The subjective assessment of crime trends is particularly influenced by the media (Hanslmaier and Kemme 2011; Pfeiffer et al. 2005; Windzio et al. 2007). In this regard, empirical studies also show that the presumed increase in the frequency of offenses (i.e., perceived crime level) has a positive influence on punitiveness (Pfeiffer et al. 2005; Wilmers et al. 2002).

Apart from this instrumental perspective, it is also claimed that punitiveness is far less influenced by perceptions or experience of crime (Tyler and Boeckman 1997) and can be better understood as a person's disposition. According to these assumptions, the deciding factors in attitudes to punishment are social identity, attribution patterns, and norms and values (see Carroll et al. 1987; Cullen et al. 1985; Skitka and Tetlock 1993). This theoretical basis explains how experience of violence in childhood impacts personal attitudes towards the development of specific values during the course of socialization.

It has been analyzed in a series of studies that individual punitiveness is also dependent on dispositions and values. It was apparent that conservatives are more punitive than liberals (Feather 1996; Peterson et al. 1993). Peterson et al. (1993) also showed that authoritarianism goes hand in hand with the attitude that parents have the right to discipline their children. For Kury and Obergfell-Fuchs (2008), who operationalized conservatism via the retention of traditions and moral standards, this variable proved to be the key predictor in explaining property crime-related punitiveness. Tyler and Boeckman (1997) found that stable social values, identified via authoritarianism, dogmatism, and liberalism, have a greater influence on punitiveness than strongly fluctuating social circumstances or judgements and concerns about current crime levels.

Apart from the above-mentioned factors, previous studies have also revealed links with socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, education, and punitiveness, which were included as control variables in the model of this study. Age has proven to be an influential and positive predictor of punitiveness (see Pfeiffer et al. 2005; Windzio et al. 2007), although there is also empirical evidence of a negative effect (Kühnrich and Kania 2005). When controlled with other relevant covariates, women appear to be less punitive than men (Kühnrich and Kania 2005; Langworthy and Whitehead 1986; Pfeiffer et al. 2005). Results from various studies showed that people with higher-level education are less punitive than those with poor education (see Hartnagel and

Templeton 2008; Pfeiffer et al. 2005; Windzio et al. 2007). Also, because the data used in the analysis were collected only a few years after German reunification, there is another aspect that must be taken into account. At the time, people in eastern Germany were more punitive than those in the west (Kreuzer et al. 1993; Kury et al. 1992).

This study looks at the theoretical positions developed above and makes the following assumptions:

- (a) People who enjoyed a non-violent upbringing are more likely to favor abolition of the right to administer corporal punishment. This can be an indicator for the intergenerational transmission of parenting styles (Bower-Russa et al. 2001; Deather-Deckard et al. 2003; Graziano et al. 1992; Graziano and Namaste 1990).
- (b) A positive relationship is expected between a violent upbringing and punitiveness. The key here is the long-term attitude-shaping experience of violence as a dominant part of an individual's own upbringing.
- (c) Violent victimization in a familial context in the past 5 years has no effect on punitiveness. As opposed to a violent upbringing, later experience of domestic violence does not influence punitiveness because it does not destabilize established values.

Method

Data and Variables

The basis for the empirical analysis was a nationwide, representative victim survey conducted by the Criminological Research Institute of Lower Saxony (KFN) on behalf of the Federal German Ministry for Family Affairs and Senior Citizens (BMFuS) in 1992. There are several reasons why it is unproblematic to work with data from the 1990s in this study. First, the claimed relationship was never investigated. The available data are so far the only representative data collection in which both punitiveness and experience of parental violence during childhood and adolescence were analyzed (Bilsky et al. 1992). Second, for a theoretically founded relationship, the point of data collection plays a minimal role if the relationship is assumed to be relatively stable over time. Deather-Deckard et al.'s (2003) findings suggest the first longitudinal evidence for the linkage of exposure to corporal punishment and the development of accepting attitudes toward the use of this discipline over time. Furthermore, Graziano et al. (1992) found remarkably similar punishment experiences and levels of acceptance in two groups of students who grew up in divergent cultures (United States and India).

The current data were collected 20 years ago. In the meantime, Germany has changed after reunification and a new law

regarding the abolition of the right to administer corporal punishment was adopted. The Act Condemning Violence in Education dated November 2, 2000 contains a new version of Article 1631 of the German Civil Code (BGB), codifying the right of each and every child to enjoy non-violent upbringing. At the same time, the use of corporal punishment is declining. Independent of all these changes, we assume an intergenerational transmission process associating parental violence and punitiveness.

The analyses are based on 2,650 randomly sampled persons aged between 16 and 59 who answered questions on punitiveness and parental violence. Face-to-face interviews were used to capture the main part of the variables (e.g., punitiveness, fear of crime), whereas the experience of parental violence was surveyed subsequent to the oral interview in writing using the sealed envelope technique (a modified drop-off technique).

The sample is part of a bigger survey that comprised the answers from 15,771 persons covering a broad spectrum of aspects concerning victimization experience and perceptions of crime. The study comprised different modules, so that not everybody had to answer questions on punitiveness and/or parental violence. Each combination of modules was answered by a representative sample of persons 16 years and older and an additional sample for elderly persons 60 years and older.

The drop-off questionnaire was answered by 6,198 persons out of the representative sample with 69.6 % of them participating in the oral interview ($N=4,315$). Despite the sensitive topic (victimization in close social relationships), 98.1 % of the participants of the oral interview were willing to fill out the drop-off module. Due to organizational problems in 230 cases, the drop-off questionnaire was not available, so that only 4,085 persons were asked to complete it after the interview. Within the questionnaire, only the respondents younger than 60 were asked questions on parental violence (2,650 persons). The sample is representative for persons between 16 and 59 years (Wetzels et al. 1994a, 1994b).

Punitiveness Punitiveness is a complex, multidimensional construct that can be measured in a variety of ways. Specific aspects are looked at in each case. In this study, the general need for punishment was surveyed using six statements, which were assessed on a scale ranging from 0 (*do not agree at all*) to 6 (*fully agree*; see Table 1). The scale shows a satisfactory Cronbach's α of 0.84 ($M=4.16$; $SD=1.16$).

The scale comprises the punishment goals retribution, incapacitation, deterrence and reinforcement of public trust in law and order. People with a high score on this scale call for severe and harsh sanctions for perpetrators. The motive of retribution has a greater weighting than the rationalizing aspect of making amends (see Lautmann and Klimke 2004).

Table 1 Items in the punitiveness scale

1. Those who harm others must be punished.
2. The only way to stop many offenders from committing repeat offences is to use harsher sentences as a deterrent.
3. Harsher sentences are necessary to deter others from committing an offence.
4. If the only outcome is to make good the damage and talk to the victim, then most offenders will be encouraged to commit further offences.
5. Punishment is necessary to reinforce public trust in law and order.
6. Prison sentences make sense because they take offenders out of circulation for long periods.

Attitudes Towards the Right to Administer Corporal Punishment A further aspect linked to the research question posed in this paper involves attitudes towards the right to administer corporal punishment. The attitude on this topic may be used as an indicator for the inter-generational transmission of values. Respondents were asked to give their opinion on parents’ right to administer corporal punishment.

Victimization Experience The operationalization of victims’ experiences of violence committed by their own parents during childhood and adolescence follows Straus’s (1990) conflict tactics scale (CTS), which is used in the US to survey family violence (Table 2).

Using six items to measure the frequency of the experience of parental violence, respondents were divided into four victimization categories (see Wetzels 1997; Wilmers et al. 2002). People who have not experienced any of the six forms of violence of differing severity were classed as “non-victims.” Respondents who had only experienced milder forms of physical punishment with a frequency of *sometimes* were classed as “mildly punished.” “Severely punished” individuals have experienced medium-severity violence or frequent to very frequent milder violence. We agree with Gershoff (2002b) that corporal punishment can turn into abuse under certain conditions. It is difficult to determine where the line between punishment and abuse is to be drawn. “Abused” victims were categorized as those who were victims of both severe violence categories (Items 5 and 6).

Apart from parental violence in childhood, data were also gathered on the prevalence of victimization in the past 5 years perpetrated by family or household members. With the same scale on the CTS for childhood and adolescence, a dummy variable of family violence experienced as adults was constructed.

A problem arises regarding younger respondents, as the periods referenced for the experience of violence in childhood and adolescence and for the experience of victimization at the hands of family or household members in the last 5 years may overlap. To ensure that the answers for the two questions did not refer to the same period, people below the age of 25 were

Table 2 Categories of parental victimization in childhood and adolescence

	My parents/guardians have...				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Frequently
1. Thrown something at me	NV	MP	MP	SP	SP
2. Grabbed me or pushed me	NV	MP	MP	SP	SP
3. Slapped me	NV	MP	MP	SP	SP
4. Hit me or tried to hit with something	NV	SP	SP	SP	SP
5. Punched me with their fist, kicked me or bit me	NV	A	A	A	A
6. Beaten me, battered me	NV	A	A	A	A

NV non-victim; *MP* mildly punished; *SP* severely punished; *A* abused

excluded. Hence, experience of victimization in the past 5 years refers to events after the age of 20—a time that does not commonly belong to childhood or adolescence.

Demographic Variables Alongside the traditional socio-demographic variables of age and gender, respondents’ place of residence was also asked for. Educational level was operationalized via the number of years of education received.

Conservatism and Liberalism To measure attitudes regarding conservatism and liberalism, respondents’ party preferences were used as a proxy. The party preference distinguishes between six political groups that can be ordered from left to right in the following manner: post-socialists (PDS), green party (Bündnis90/Die Grünen), social democrats (SPD), liberal democrats (FDP), conservatives (CDU/CSU) and far-right parties (e.g., Republikaner). In addition, people who refused to answer or who answered with *don’t know* or preferred other parties than the above mentioned were coded as “else.” Although they may be a heterogeneous group regarding conservatism and liberalism, excluding them would lead to a high number of missing values, as almost one third belongs to this group.

Fear of Crime To identify the differing facets of fear of crime a set of different indicators was used. General social concern about crime was captured by the assessment of crime trends in the past 2 years separately for eastern and western Germany. The answers for the two indicators were averaged to get a measure for the whole country. The strongly right-skewed distribution made it necessary to use a dummy coding for the analyses, which produced a reference category involving individuals who believed that there had been a “less-than-strong” increase in crime.

The affective, cognitive, and conative components of fear of crime were measured using multi-item scales. The conative fear of crime was operationalized via the frequency of behavioral changes and avoidance strategies in response to fear. A factor analysis showed the extraction of only one factor and the exclusion of one item. The index was derived by averaging seven items. The scale shows a satisfactory Cronbach's α of 0.85 ($M=2.59$; $SD=1.01$).

The personal fear of crime scale was formed from the average of the products "frequency of fear of becoming a victim of a certain crime" (affective component), and "assessment of the likelihood of actually becoming a victim of a certain crime in the next 12 months" (cognitive component). Based on the results of a factor analysis and theoretical assumptions, a single factor solution was chosen. This scale also shows a satisfactory Cronbach's α of 0.88 ($M=3.22$; $SD=2.59$).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Demographics The respondents were on average 36 years old; 51 % were females and 49 % were males. Around a third (31 %) lived in the eastern part of Germany, the rest came from the western part. On average the respondents spent 10.24 years at school (see Table 3).

Domestic Violence In the sample, 10 % of the respondents were either abused or severely punished in their childhood and adolescent years. The majority (55 %) had experienced only mild punishment. Men suffered significantly more frequently from domestic violence during childhood and adolescence, especially regarding the experience of severe punishment and abuse (see Table 4). In an east-west comparison, the new German states (former East Germany) showed a higher rate of mild punishment (+12 %), but fewer people who were abused in their childhood and youth.

A comparison of those in the 16–35 and 36–59 age groups shows constancy in the abuse rate, while the proportion of younger people who experienced severe/mild punishment is lower. Compared with domestic violence during childhood and adolescence, domestic violence during the last 5 years happens less often: In the sample 13 % of respondents 25 years and older were victims of domestic violence on at least one occasion in the past 5 years.

Covariates of Punitiveness: Bivariate Relationships

Attitudes Towards the Right to Administer Corporal Punishment Before looking at the link between the experience of parental violence and the attitude towards the right to

administer corporal punishment, a brief overview on the relationships with socio-demographic variables is given. Differences of attitudes towards the right to administer corporal punishment are evident in relation to age, gender, education and east/west location. More than a quarter of younger respondents (16 to 35 year-olds) called for complete abolition of parental right to administer corporal punishment, yet only 20 % of the 36 to 59 age group did so. Other significant differences can be seen relative to gender, east/west location and education. Women, people in western Germany, and educated individuals far more frequently called for the abolition of the parental right to administer corporal punishment (see Table 5).

A cross-tabulation of the categories of experience of parental violence with attitudes to the right to administer corporal punishment reveals significant differences between the groups. A third of respondents who were neither punished nor abused called for the abolishment of parents' right to administer corporal punishment. Among respondents with experience of parental violence, only between 13 % (severe punishment) and 22 % (mild punishment) wanted to change the (then) existing law.

Punitiveness Turning the focus on punitiveness, clear (significant) differences between socio-demographic groups become apparent. Men are on average more punitive than women, respondents aged between 16 and 35 are less punitive than older respondents in the 36–59 age group, while well-educated people are less punitive than those who received less than 12 years of education. These results are consistent with the findings of the studies described earlier (see Table 6). Significant differences were also evident with regard to place of residence: People in eastern Germany are on average more than 0.5 scale points more punitive than those in the west.

Fundamental convictions in terms of liberalism and conservatism also influence punitiveness. Dividing respondents into groups according to their party preferences also revealed significant differences in average punitiveness. The differences on the dichotomized punitiveness variable are significant ($\chi^2 49.12$, $N=2,463$, $df=6$; $p<0.001$). It is evident that supporters of conservative parties are more punitive than people with liberal or left wing tendencies (see Table 7).

In addition, relationships are also revealed between fear of crime and the need for punishment. Personal and conative fear of crime correlates significantly with punitiveness. The same applies to society-related concerns operationalized as assumed trends in crime (see Table 8). Avoidance is thus linked to personal fear of crime, while the assumed trends in crime correlate less with the other dimensions of fear.

A comparison of punitiveness in the various victimization categories of violence experienced in childhood and

Table 3 Overview of independent variables

Variable	Description	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
Violence (Categories)						
Non-victim	Dummy variables	2,619	0.25	0.44	0	1
Mildly punished		2,619	0.55	0.50	0	1
Severely punished		2,619	0.10	0.31	0	1
Abused		2,619	0.10	0.29	0	1
Victimization within the family (domestic violence)	Dummy Victim in last 5 years=1 Non-victim=0	2,625	0.17	0.37	0	1
Socio-demography						
Age	Age in years	2,650	36.01	11.81	15	59
Gender	Dummy variable ♀=1 ♂=0	2,650	0.51	0.50	0	1
Place of abode East/West	Dummy variable East=1 West=0	2,650	0.31	0.46	0	1
Years of education	School education in years	2,598	10.24	1.53	7	13
Fear of crime						
Crime trends	Dummy Strong increase=1 Less than strong increase=0	2,518	0.54	0.50	0	1
Personal fear of crime	Example: “I’m afraid of being robbed” Cronbach’s $\alpha=0.88$	2,485	3.22	2.59	1	20
Ln(Personal fear of crime)	Logarithm transformation of fear of crime	2,485	0.90	0.72	0	3
Conative fear of crime	Example: “I avoid carrying large amounts of money with me” Cronbach’s $\alpha=0.85$	2,581	2.59	1.01	1	5
Conative fear of crime (Dummy)	Dummy Avoidance always/often =1 Never/rarely/sometimes=0	2,581	0.11	0.31	0	1
Party preference (from left to right)						
Post-socialists (PDS)		2,636	0.02	0.15	0	1
Green Party (Bündnis90/Grüne)		2,636	0.08	0.27	0	1
Social Democrats (SPD)		2,636	0.28	0.45	0	1
Liberal Democrats (FDP)	Dummy variables	2,636	0.06	0.24	0	1
Conservatives (CDU/CSU)		2,636	0.24	0.43	0	1
Far right parties (e.g. Republikaner, NPD)		2,636	0.01	0.11	0	1
Else (other parties/refusal/do not know)		2,636	0.31	0.46	0	1
Attitude towards the right to administer corporal punishment		1,633			Should not be allowed on principle	23.1 %
					Should be allowed with exceptions	57.6 %
					Retain the law as stands	19.3 %

adolescence highlights clear differences. With increasing severity of the violence experienced, average punitiveness grows. A significant relationship was found between dichotomized punitiveness and victim status (χ^2 31.09, $N=2,451$, $df=3$; $p<0.001$). Figure 1 gives an overview of punitiveness relative to age. Apart from the effect of parental victimization, clear age-related effects are also evident.

Victimization within family relationships in the past 5 years appears, however, to have no influence on punitiveness. A *t*-

test revealed no significant differences in punitiveness between victims and non-victims.

Multivariate Analyses: Models

The punitiveness variable was not normally distributed and showed bimodal patterns. This fact hindered the application of OLS-Regression. As the aim of the present contribution was to explain high punitiveness, the dependent variable was

Table 4 Parental victimization by socio-demographic status

	Non-victim	Mildly punished	Severely punished	Abused	<i>N</i>	<i>Chi</i> ²	<i>df</i>
16 to 35 years	27.6 %	53.8 %	8.8 %	9.8 %	1,382		
36 to 59 years	22.7 %	55.9 %	12.2 %	9.2 %	1,237	14.44**	3
Men	22.2 %	55.0 %	12.4 %	10.5 %	1,279		
Women	28.3 %	54.6 %	8.5 %	8.6 %	1,340	21.36***	3
West	28.0 %	51.1 %	10.0 %	10.8 %	1,803		
East	19.4 %	62.9 %	11.2 %	6.6 %	816	41.78***	3

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, ns $p > 0.05$

transformed into a binary variable ($N=2,476$; $M=0.34$; $SD=0.47$) that divides the high punitive group from the non- or medium-punitive group, in which the cutting point was the 66th percentile.¹ Consequently the binary logit model estimates the impact of the independent variables on the chance of being among the most punitive third of respondents (Long and Freese 2003).

For the multivariate analyses, three models were calculated in which additional blocks of variables were entered stepwise (see Table 9). Model 1 contains socio-demographic variables, fear of crime indicators, and party preference as an indicator of liberal or conservative values. Model 2 includes the additional categories of parental victimization in childhood and adolescence; while Model 3 adds the factor of domestic victimization in the past 5 years. Although childhood experience of violence significantly improved the model, domestic victimization in the past 5 years provided no significant improvement (likelihood-ratio test).

Concerning the socio-demographic factors, age has no significant influence on punitiveness, but the direction of the coefficients indicates a positive effect. The chance of women belonging to the most punitive third of respondents is only a little more than half as great as the chance of men. A higher level of education also reduces punitiveness. The odds of reporting high punitive attitudes of respondents in eastern Germany are twice as large as those for respondents in the west.

The various indicators of fear of crime also have a significant influence on punitiveness. Individuals who report strong avoidance behavior have a 1.7 times greater chance of belonging to the most punitive third group when compared with the reference group without strong avoidance behavior. Personal fear of crime, which represents the affective and cognitive components, and perceived crime trends also have positive effects on punitiveness.

The degree of punitiveness among respondents also differs in relation to their party preferences. Only supporters of far-

right parties are more punitive than those who lean towards the conservative Union of CDU/CSU (reference category). Proponents of the liberals (FDP), the social democrats (SPD), the post-socialists (PDS) and the green party are significantly less punitive than Union supporters. These findings support the theory that punitiveness is influenced by fundamental values, such as those reflected in a person's party preference. Respondents that stated no preference or preferred another party ("else") seem to have the same punitiveness level than the conservatives, as no significant differences towards the reference category is found.

Further, the models illustrate that people who were victims of parental violence during childhood and adolescence are more punitive than non-victims. The group of mildly punished individuals had a 1.4 times greater chance of belonging to the most punitive third when compared with the group of non-victims. Even if the odds ratios seem to confirm the assumption that punitiveness increases in relation to increased severity of the violence experienced, the differences between mildly punished, severely punished, and abused categories are not significant, as shown by the confidence intervals. A key role in this regard is no doubt played by the vast differences in population sizes within the violence categories.

Discussion

The present study showed that respondents who have never experienced parental violence called for the abolishment of parents' right to administer corporal punishment (hypothesis 1). Primarily, the younger age group that was less punished by their parents favored the abolishment, while the older age group preferred to leave existing laws untouched. This can be seen as an indicator for the inter-generational transmission of values.

The bi- and multivariate relationships between punitiveness and socio-demographic variables (age, sex, education) are in line with other studies, which conclude that women, more educated persons, and younger persons are less punitive. However, the impact of age is not supported by the multivariate models. Respondents from the eastern part of Germany are more punitive than respondents from the western part.

¹ Alternatively an ordered logit model was estimated with three groups based on the empirical distribution with cutting points on the 33rd and 66th percentile. In those ordered logit models, the assumption of parallel regression was violated for some variables (Long and Freese 2003). Therefore a binary logit model was chosen.

Table 5 Attitudes towards the right to administer corporal punishment by socio-demographic status

	Should not be allowed on principle	Should be allowed with exceptions	Retain the law as stands	<i>N</i>	<i>Chi</i> ²	<i>df</i>
16 to 35 years	26.0 %	56.5 %	17.5 %	841		
36 to 59 years	20.1 %	58.7 %	21.2 %	792	9.57**	2
Men	20.6 %	57.2 %	22.2 %	787		
Women	25.5 %	57.9 %	16.5 %	846	11.19**	2
West	28.0 %	53.5 %	18.5 %	893		
East	17.3 %	62.4 %	20.3 %	740	26.26***	2
Low Education ^a	21.5 %	56.9 %	21.5 %	1,226		
High Education	28.1 %	59.9 %	12.0 %	384	19.81***	2
Non-Victim	32.5 %	53.3 %	14.2 %	394		
Mildly Punished	21.5 %	58.1 %	20.3 %	915		
Severely Punished	12.9 %	63.2 %	23.9 %	163		
Abused	18.8 %	59.7 %	21.5 %	144	34.84***	6

^a Low Education less than 12 years of schooling/High Education 12 or more years of schooling
 *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, ns $p > 0.05$

This can be explained partly by using socialization theory arguments and partly by the greater fear of crime in eastern Germany. In addition, the breakdown of rules and the anomic situation after the reunification may have evoked in the eastern part of Germany the wish to restore order by harsh sanctions (Durkheim 1966). The different facets of fear of crime are related to punitiveness: Personal or society-related fears in respect of crime and avoidance appear to go hand in hand with greater punitiveness in the bivariate and in the multivariate models. In addition, punitiveness differs by party preference, where supporters of leftist and liberal parties are less punitive than supporters of conservative or right wing parties.

The results confirm the assumption that the experience of parental punishment influences punitiveness (hypothesis 2). The analyses show that people that have experienced parental corporal punishment are more punitive than non-victims. However, it is necessary to delineate between violent victimization in childhood and adolescence as a component of parents' child-rearing styles, and later experience of domestic violence in adulthood. Violent victimization in a familial context in the past 5 years has no significant impact on punitiveness neither in the bivariate nor in the multivariate analyses (hypothesis 3). This can be seen as an initial indication that, as explained in the studies mentioned earlier, it is not the experience of victimization as such that influences general

punitiveness. In contrast to the apparent long-term effects of experience in childhood and adolescence, becoming a victim in later life seems unable to erode an ingrained, well-developed disposition. This relates to research showing that becoming a victim has no effect on punitiveness (Cullen et al. 1985; Hartnagel and Templeton 2008; Rich and Sampson 1990). Further research is needed to explain why respondents with experience of victimization during the past 5 years are even less punitive than non-victims.

Our results reveal evidence that punitiveness is an attitude that is partly set up in childhood and develops to be a relatively stable social value. Results from clinical psychology show that physically abused children have the same symptoms as people who suffer from “learned helplessness” (Allen and Tarnowski 1989), which in later life, can result in less self-esteem, increased aggression, and anger at the injustice suffered. It has already been shown that anger has a significant effect on punitiveness (Goldberg et al. 1999; Lerner et al. 1998). Therefore, the relationship between parental violence and punitiveness could be moderated by the level of anger or aggression. Goldberg and colleagues believe “that anger increased future punitiveness because of the accompanying salient belief that justice had failed and must be restored” (1999, pp. 791–792). A challenge for further research will be to characterize the mechanism through which parental

Table 6 Punitiveness by socio-demographic status: *T*-test on mean differences

	16 to 35 years	36 to 59 years	Men	Women	West	East	Low education	High education
Punitiveness (<i>Mean</i>)	4.06	4.28	4.24	4.09	4.00	4.54	4.29	3.76
<i>N</i>	1,303	1,173	1,223	1,253	1,727	749	1,839	587
<i>T</i>	4.62***	3.05***	11.51***	9.29***				
<i>df</i>	2474	2474	1603.80	925.80				

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, ns $p > 0.05$

Table 7 Party preferences and punitiveness (from left to right)

Party or parties	Punitiveness (degree of severity)		Dummy for punitiveness	
	Mean	SD	% very punitive	N
Post-socialists (<i>PDS</i>)	3.98	1.24	31.9 %	47
Green party (<i>Bündnis90/Die Grünen</i>)	3.54	1.45	22.7 %	198
Social democrats (<i>SPD</i>)	4.10	1.09	30.8 %	695
Liberal democrats (<i>FDP</i>)	3.91	1.15	22.7 %	154
Conservatives (<i>CDU/CSU</i>)	4.36	1.01	38.1 %	599
Far right parties (e.g. <i>Republikaner</i>)	5.10	1.09	67.6 %	34
Else (<i>other parties/refusal/do not know</i>)	4.26	1.16	37.6 %	736
Total	4.16	1.16	34.0 %	2,463

violence influences social values and attributional patterns of individuals. As clinical researchers pointed out, there are similar influences of psychological as well as physical maltreatment (Gross and Keller 1992). One limitation of the study is the investigation of variables regarding only physical maltreatment. Another interesting question in this context could be whether psychological maltreatment and rigid education have a similar impact on punitiveness. Another limitation of this paper concerns the methodology. It should be taken into account that self-reported studies lead to a certain underreporting of victimization experiences, particularly if intimate questions are asked. Data should, therefore, be validated.

In light of our findings, the question arises as to how punitiveness develops in society if domestic violence against children is gradually on the decline. This is occasioned by the fact that the parental right to administer corporal punishment has been abolished in several EU states. Sweden was the first to do so in 1979 and its Scandinavian neighbors followed suit in the 1980s. Germany fell in line on January 1, 2000. In total, some 19 European countries have adopted similar policies. Parallel to this legislation, a shift in values has occurred towards non-violent parenting, and child-rearing practices within families have changed accordingly (Baier 2008; Baier et al. 2009; Bussman et al. 2008). For example, a longitudinal analysis of representative surveys in Germany revealed that

the number of children who enjoyed a completely non-violent upbringing from birth until the age of 13 rose from 41 % to 52 % during the period 1998 and 2005/2006. For 13 and 14 year-olds, the rate increased from 57 % to 67 % (Baier 2008). Also, following the change in the law, more juveniles and parents experience and strive for a non-violent upbringing as a realizable goal ideal (Bussman et al. 2008).

Should this trend stabilize further, the findings outlined in this paper allow the assumption that non-violent upbringing will gradually prove to be a factor in lowering punitiveness within society. In an international comparison, it can also be expected that countries that have abolished the parental right to administer corporal punishment will benefit two-fold in the medium term. Firstly, the abolishment of the parental right to administer corporal punishment will have a preventive effect on juvenile delinquency, particularly on juvenile violence because careers in violence are fostered to a great extent by parental violence (Baier et al. 2009; Smith and Thornberry 1995; Wilmers et al. 2002). Secondly, due to their more tempered sentencing practices, countries without the parental right to administer corporal punishment will set themselves apart from those that have left this right fully intact.

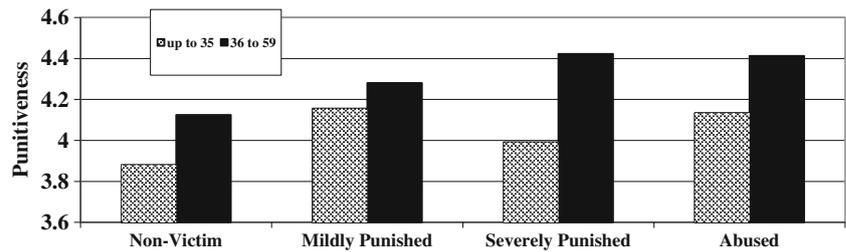
There are already signs of both of these trends happening. A longitudinal analysis on self-reported violence among 14–16 year-olds in eight German towns and districts shows that juvenile violence has largely declined, commensurate with the above-reported reduction in domestic violence against children and adolescents (Baier 2008). Throughout Germany, statistics published by municipal social insurance funds show a significant drop in violence in schools from 1997 to 2007 (Baier 2008). Furthermore, in an international comparison of prison inmate numbers, a growing discrepancy is evident between the Scandinavian countries that were the first to abolish the parental right to administer corporal punishment and other countries, such as England and the US, which have not yet been able to decide on such a step. In 19 US states, legislation is in place that allows corporal punishment in schools. According to a Department of Education study, more than 220,000 school children were subjected to corporal

Table 8 Correlation matrix for punitiveness and fear of crime variables

	Punitiveness (Severity of punishment)	Personal fear of crime	Conative fear of crime
Personal Fear of Crime	0.12***		
Conative Fear of Crime	0.15***	0.52***	
Assumed Trends in Crime	0.09***	0.17***	0.19***

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, ns $p > 0.05$

Fig. 1 Punitiveness by age and experience of parental violence



punishment in school year 2005–2006 (The Center for Effective Discipline 2009).

The differences shown in international studies regarding punitiveness in different countries must also be considered (Kühnrich and Kania 2005; Van Kesteren 2009). More than half of the respondents in England and Wales (51 %), and in Northern Ireland (53 %), just under half (49 %) in Scotland, and 40 % in the US, see a prison sentence as a suitable sanction if someone who has been prosecuted for breaking into a property repeats the offense. In Finland, only 15 % of respondents think this way, in Denmark 18 % and in Germany

19 % (Van Kesteren 2009). These great divergences can partly be due to the fact that, at least for younger adults in these countries, the development of their personal punitiveness has been shaped by their parents’ child-rearing styles. However, this does not negate the influence of other factors such as mass media and cultural or religious tradition (see, for example, Savelsberg 2000). It is worthy of note that the nations classified here as extremely punitive are characterized by a more repressive child-rearing culture.

The present study should be considered as a preliminary step in the investigation of long-term effects of violent

Table 9 Punitiveness dependent variable (Severity Dimension) binary logit model

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Odds ratios	<i>p</i>	Odds ratios	<i>p</i>	Odds ratios	<i>p</i>
Age	1.01**	0.005	1.01*	0.011	1.01*	0.042
Male (Ref.)						
Female	0.66***	0.000	0.69***	0.000	0.69***	0.000
Years of Education	0.82***	0.000	0.82***	0.000	0.82***	0.000
West (Ref.)						
East	2.10***	0.000	2.07***	0.000	2.07***	0.000
No increase in crime (Ref.)						
Increase in crime	1.34**	0.003	1.34**	0.003	1.34**	0.003
Ln(Personal fear of crime)	1.30***	0.000	1.29**	0.001	1.13***	0.000
Low conative fear of crime (Ref.)						
High conative fear of crime	1.50**	0.01	1.51**	0.009	1.49*	0.011
Union (Ref.)						
PDS	0.49*	0.043	0.46*	0.026	0.45*	0.023
Bündnis90/Die Grünen	0.57**	0.009	0.55**	0.004	0.56**	0.006
SPD	0.71**	0.008	0.69**	0.005	0.69**	0.004
FDP	0.46**	0.001	0.44***	0.000	0.43***	0.000
Far right	2.78*	0.010	2.66*	0.015	2.81*	0.010
Else	0.96 ns	0.717	0.92 ns	0.564	0.94 ns	0.601
Non-Victim (Childhood/Adolescence) (Ref.)						
Mildly Punished			1.38**	0.007	1.44**	0.002
Severely Punished			1.80**	0.001	1.96***	0.000
Abused			1.46*	0.042	1.62*	0.011
No Victimization last 5 years (Ref.)						
Victimization					0.71*	0.012
Constant	1.95 ns	0.113	1.44 ns	0.408	1.33	0.594
N	2,228		2,228	2,228		
Cox-Snell R ²	0.098		0.104	0.106		

****p*<0.001, ***p*<0.01, **p*<0.05, ns *p*>0.05

education on relatively stable attitudes such as punitiveness in later life. The inter-generational transmission model and social learning theory provide an informative theoretical basis. In a second step the question of whether differences in the degree of repressive educational culture influence the societal punitiveness on a macro-level arises. Then, the impact of the abolishment of corporal punishment may be taken into account for a less retributive and punitive society.

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