

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Parental practices of disciplining children: Implications for intervention

Missaye Mulatie

Gondar University, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Department of Psychology, Ethiopia.

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**The main purpose of this work is to assess parental practice of disciplining children. Of the total 350 students, 95 students were selected through simple random sampling technique. Data were collected using questionnaire having eighteen items that are intended to measure parents' disciplining methods. The result showed that parents used non-aggressive child disciplining technique more than psychologically aggressive disciplining and physical punishment to discipline their children. There was no significant mean difference in the use of non-aggressive techniques, psychologically aggressive method and physical punishment to discipline male and female children. Similarly, there was no significant mean difference in the use of non-aggressive techniques, psychologically aggressive method and physical punishment between educated and illiterate parents. Finally, there was no significant mean difference in using the three child disciplining techniques (non-aggressive, physical punishment and psychologically aggressive) among the different caregivers (both parents, mother only, father only and grandparents).**

**Key terms:** Non-aggressive child disciplining, physical punishment, child disciplining, psychologically aggressive disciplining.

## INTRODUCTION

Disciplining children is one of the most important but hardest tasks of parents. Nevertheless, most parents are not aware of how to discipline our children effectively. Unfortunately, most parents use discipline methods that are familiar but not effective (Gershoff, 2008; Santrock, 1998).

Child rearing is a business which costs time and resources. It is imperative to support parents in their child rearing practices since effective child rearing requires knowledge and skills. So, endeavors towards non-violent parenting behaviors are essential for creating and implementing effective prevention efforts (UNICEF, 2010).

The most commonly indicated dimensions of parenting

in disciplining children include non-aggressive child disciplining technique, psychologically aggressive disciplining and physical punishment. The most common forms of physical punishment reported were slapping a child on the bottom or on the hands, legs or arms, and shaking, grabbing or pushing a child. Psychologically aggressive strategies were not used frequently with children. Psychologically aggressive strategies included threatening to smack or hit a child (reported by 25% of parents) and calling a child stupid or lazy (reported by approximately 20% of parents). Love-withdrawal strategies were the least common behaviours reported by parents within this category of psychologically aggressive responses

E-mail: [mulate2002@yahoo.com](mailto:mulate2002@yahoo.com).

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**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of respondents.

Variables		N	Percent
sex	Male	47	50
	Female	47	50
Type of care giver	Mother and Father	62	66
	mother only	18	19.1
	father only	8	8.5
	grandparent	6	6.4
	Relative	-	-
Care givers' educational level	Illiterate	38	40.4
	Literate	58	59.6
Students' grade	Grade 5	39	41.5
	Grade 6	55	58.5

(Halpenny et al., 2009; Lakshmi and Arora, 2006).

However, there is little available information in Ethiopia about the prevalence of different parental disciplines. Though the researcher does not have universal knowledge, it is hard to find sufficient local studies specifically related to disciplining methods. There are abundant researches on parenting styles. Nevertheless, none of the previous studies have shown the specific discipline methods employed by parents. This, undoubtedly, necessitates a study. Bearing this in mind, this study assessed parental practices of disciplining children in Makisegnit Primary Schools, Northern Gondar Zone of Ethiopia. To this end, the following questions were stated:

1. What types of parenting discipline strategies do parents use?
2. Is there significant difference in use of discipline strategies across gender?
3. Is there difference in use of discipline strategies across educational level of parents?
4. What intervention measures should be taken for an effective discipline?

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Research design

In assessing parental practices of disciplining children, quantitative survey design was employed. It uses descriptive survey research type for its purpose in describing parental practices of disciplining children.

### Participants and sampling

Out of the total 350 students who were attending Makisegnit Primary school, 94 participants were selected using simple random sampling technique. The rationale to use this technique is that it is best suited for homogeneous and finite population. Simple random technique is also appropriate to give equal chance of being selected to all parents.

## Instruments

Data were collected using questionnaire. It contains eighteen items that are intended to measure parents' disciplining methods that are broadly classified under the non-aggressive discipline strategies, psychologically aggressive discipline strategies and physical punishment. The main reason to collect data through questionnaire is to make participants free to give their responses without perceived fear of criticisms. Regarding construction of the tool, questions were adapted from Children's Research Centre, Trinity College. In order to check reliability and validity of the items, pilot study was conducted. The total number of the items was 30 using Likert format (always, often, sometimes, rarely, never). The content validity was found good by two psychology experts and the reliability index was found to be 0.76. This enables us to measure the construct with minor modifications in the wording of some items

## Administration

First of all, orientation was given to assistant data collectors on how to handle and administer questionnaires. The participants were also assured of the anonymity of their responses as their names are not solicited. Finally, the questionnaires were distributed to respondents in their home.

## Analysis

Data were computed using SPSS version 16. Percentages and mean were used for demographic variables. One way ANOVA was used to check whether significant difference in child disciplining techniques exists among both parents, only mother, only father, grandparent and relatives. Moreover, independent sample t-test was computed to check mean difference in child disciplining across sex, educational level of parents. Alpha value of 0.05 was determined for all significant tests.

## RESULTS

Half (50%) of the participants were male children and the rest half were females. Besides, 41.5% of that respondent were attending grade 5 while 58.5% of the participants were grade 6. Regarding type of caregiver, most (66%) were reared by their mother and father. The rest 19.1, 8.55 and 6.4% of the participants were reared by mother only, father only, and grandparents, respectively. More than half (58.5%) of the respondents' caregivers/parents/ were literate, whereas 40.4% of the participants caregivers (parents) were not educated (Table 1).

As shown in Table 2, the score of non-aggressive child disciplining technique by discussing issue calmly, making child take time-out, giving chore, and distracting child in some way (mean=5.46, SD=3.05) was higher than that of psychologically aggressive disciplining technique by refusing to talk to child, calling child stupid or lazy, threatening to smack or hit child, shouting and yelling (mean=5.03, SD=3.67). But the use of physical punishment to discipline children include slapping on the bottom, the hands, arms, legs, face, head or ear, kicking or knocking children down; throwing something at child that could hurt and hitting child with something like a

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics on parenting practices of disciplining children.

Disciplining techniques	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Non-aggressive	94	5.46	3.05
Psychologically aggressive	94	5.03	3.67
Physical punishment	94	4.84	4.16

**Table 3.** Disciplining techniques used by parents across gender of children.

Disciplining techniques	Gender	N	Mean	Standard deviation	df	t	p-value
Non-aggressive	Male	47	5.48	2.70	92	0.067	0.94
	Female	47	5.44	3.39			
Psychologically aggressive	Male	47	5.23	2.97	92	0.531	0.59
	Female	47	4.82	4.29			
Physical punishment	Male	47	4.46	3.50	92	0.866	0.38
	Female	47	5.21	4.74			

slipper, belt, instrument was the least (mean =4.84, SD= 4.26).

The table shows that there was no significant mean difference in using non-aggressive techniques ( $t=0.067$ ,  $p=0.94$ ), psychologically aggressive method ( $t=0.531$ ,  $p=0.59$ ), and physical punishment ( $t=0.866$ ,  $p=0.38$ ), to discipline male and female children. Though not significant, as compared to female children (mean = 5.44, SD= 3.39), parents used a non aggressive type of disciplining technique (discussing issue calmly, making child take time-out, giving chore, distracting child in some way) to correct behavior of male children (mean =5.48, SD=2.70). Similarly, parents used more psychologically aggressive disciplining technique (refusing to talk to child, calling child stupid or lazy, threatening to smack or hit child, shouting and yelling) on their male children (mean=5.23; SD= 2.97) than their female children (mean= 4.82, SD=4.29). However, parents applied physical punishment (slapping on the bottom, hands, arms, legs, face, head or ear, kicking or knocking child down, throwing something at child that could hurt and hitting child with something like a slipper, belt, instrument) to discipline their male children (mean= 5.21, SD= 4.74) as compared to female children (mean= 4.46, SD=3.50).

There was no significant mean difference in use of non-aggressive techniques ( $t=0.49$ ,  $p=0.62$ ), psychologically aggressive method ( $t=0.38$ ,  $p=0.70$ ), and physical punishment ( $t=0.29$ ,  $p=0.76$ ) between educated and illiterate parents or caregivers (Table 4).

As indicated in Table 6, there was no significant mean difference ( $F(3, 90)=0.55$ ,  $p=0.649$ ) in using non-aggressive disciplining technique among the different caregivers (both parents, mother only, father only and grandparents). Similarly, there was no significant mean

difference ( $F(3,90)=0.24$ ,  $p=0.866$ ) in the use of psychologically aggressive technique and physical punishment ( $F(3,90)=1.18$ ,  $p=0.320$ ) among these four caregivers. Though not significant, the mean score of using a non aggressive discipline technique by a mother only (mean= 6.16) was highest. In the case of using psychologically aggressive and physical punishment, the mean score of both mother and father type of parents was the highest (Table 5).

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study showed that most (66%) were reared by their mother and father. The rest 19.1, 8.55 and 6.4% of the participants were reared by mother only, father only, and grandparents respectively. Besides, more than half (58.5%) of the children's caregivers/ parents/ were educated; whereas 40.4% of the participants caregivers (parents) were not educated.

As compared to using psychologically aggressive disciplining technique (mean=5.03, SD=3.67) and physical punishment (mean =4.84, SD= 4.26), parents were using non-aggressive child disciplining technique (mean=5.46, SD=3.05) (Table 3). This is in line with the previous studies (Halpenny et al., 2009) which indicated that the use of physical punishment as a discipline strategy was low according to the self-report data collected from parents. This study further showed that the vast majority of these parents indicated that they had 'never' used any physical punishment as a discipline strategy in the past year. Less severe forms of physical punishment, such as smacking a child on the bottom, hand or leg, were highlighted slightly more frequently by parents.

**Table 4.** Disciplining techniques used by parents across educational status of parents or caregivers.

Disciplining techniques	Educational status of caregivers	N	Mean	Standard deviation	df	t	p-value
Non-aggressive	Illiterate	38	5.65	2.62	92	0.49	0.62
	Literate	56	5.33	2.33			
Psychologically aggressive	Illiterate	38	5.21	3.29	92	0.38	0.70
	Literate	56	4.91	3.92			
Physical punishment	Illiterate	38	4.68	2.88	92	0.29	0.76
	Literate	56	4.94	4.86			

**Table 5.** Descriptive statistics on parenting practices of disciplining children by type of caregiver/parent.

Disciplining techniques	Type of care giver	Mean	Standard Deviation
Non aggressive	Mother and Father	5.33	3.00
	mother only	6.16	3.65
	father only	3.55	2.55
	grandparent	2.34	2.34
Psychologically aggressive	Mother and Father	4.00	0.50
	mother only	2.94	0.69
	father only	3.49	1.23
	grandparent	2.63	1.07
Physical punishment	Mother and Father	5.14	4.65
	mother only	4.66	2.70
	father only	5.12	2.47
	grandparent	1.82	3.54

**Table 6.** One way ANOVA on parenting practices of disciplining children among various type of caregiver/ parent.

Disciplining techniques	Sources of variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean squares	F	P-value
Non-aggressive	Between groups	15.642	3	5.214	0.551	0.649
	Within groups	851.762	90	9.464		
	Total	867.404	93			
Psychologically aggressive	Between groups	10.105	3	3.368	0.243	0.866
	Within groups	1276.779	90	13.856		
	Total	1256.904	93			
Physical punishment	Between groups	61.205	3	20.402	1.185	0.320
	Within groups	1549.402	90	17.216		
	Total	1610.606	93			

There was no significant mean difference in using non-aggressive techniques ( $t=0.067$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), psychologically aggressive method ( $t=0.531$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), and physical

punishment ( $t=0.866$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) across children. This also agrees with a study of Halpenny et al. (2009) which showed that the use of psychologically aggressive

discipline strategies appears to be equally distributed across child gender, with no significant differences evident for using these strategies with boys or girls. But, as compared to female children (mean = 5.44, SD= 3.39), parents used a non aggressive type of disciplining technique (discussing issue calmly, making child take time-out, giving chore, distracting child in some way) to correct behavior of male children (mean =5.48, SD=2.70). Similarly, parents used more psychologically aggressive disciplining technique (refusing to talk to child, calling child stupid or lazy, threatening to smack or hit child, shouting and yelling) to their male children(mean=5.23, SD= 2.97) than on their male children (mean= 4.82, SD=4.29). However, parents applied physical punishment (slapping child on the bottom, hands, arms, legs, face, head or ear, kicking or knocking child down, throwing something at child that could hurt and hitting child with something like a slipper, belt, instrument) to discipline their male children (mean= 5.21, SD= 4.74) as compared to female children (mean= 4.46, SD=3.50).

There was no significant mean difference in use of non-aggressive techniques ( $t=0.49$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), psychologically aggressive method ( $t=0.38$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), and physical punishment ( $t=0.29$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) between educated and illiterate parents or caregivers. Halpenny et al. (2009) further found no effect of social class or educational level was evident in the parental use of physical punishment. Neither were effects by gender of parent or child recorded. There was no significant mean difference ( $F(3, 90) = 0.55$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) in using non-aggressive disciplining technique among the different caregivers (both parents, mother only, father only and grandparents). Similarly, there was no significant mean difference ( $F(3,90)= 0.24$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) in use of psychologically aggressive technique and physical punishment ( $F(3,90)= 1.18$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) among these four caregivers.

### Conflict of Interests

The author(s) have not declared any conflict of interests.

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