Maggie Wright, MD, MPH

Today’s piece was prepared by Maggie Wright, MD, MPH, based on a New York Times story The Connection Between Spanking and Aggression

<http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/06/27/the-connections-between-spanking-and-aggression/?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FChildren%20and%20Youth&_r=0>

This news story is written by Perri Klass, MD, a well-known pediatrician, and describes research on the relationship between spanking and aggressive behavior in children. While many Americans were spanked as children, there is a growing body of evidence suggesting negative long-term impacts of the practice. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends against corporal punishment, citing its ineffectiveness and potential to disrupt parent-child trust and invite a child to act aggressively toward others.

Dr. Klass describes several studies linking corporal punishment and aggression. The article describes the results of a recent survey-based study finding that at least 1 in 5 parents used some form of corporal punishment frequently, that 30 percent of those parents did so despite regretting it, and that 69 percent of parents would use more positive strategies if they knew them. The article also delves into research at Rutgers on the “bidirectional” nature of spanking, which suggests that the form of discipline a family uses shapes both the child and the parent, and posits a feedback loop of spanking leading to aggressive behavior and more spanking. A series of studies on the phenomenon found both increased aggression and poorer cognitive outcomes for children who had been spanked frequently. The article also briefly mentions research on a possible genetic predisposition toward aggression, while reminding the reader that interactions between genetics and environment are complex and plastic. She brings up the health care professional’s responsibility to help parents replace these practices with something more effective, and that disciplinary practices tend to develop during a child’s infancy.

This article draws on generally accepted scientific views on corporal punishment and clearly explains a variety of scientific studies. However, the article is written in an editorial style and the author clearly articulates an opinion on how to interpret the available evidence.

**RESOURCES ON DISCIPLINE:**

American Academy of Pediatrics: Disciplining Your Child

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Disciplining-Your-Child.aspx>

Center for Effective Discipline

<http://www.gundersenhealth.org/ncptc/center-for-effective-discipline>

And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!