

The impact of a television current affairs programme on attitudes to physical punishment

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Section 59 Crimes Act 1961

Every parent and every person in the place of a parent of a child is justified in using force by way of correction towards a child, if the force used is reasonable in the circumstances.

Survey aim

- To identify the knowledge and views of a group of tertiary students on physical discipline and the associated law.
- To identify what informs their views
- To ascertain the impact of viewing a current affairs programme.

Respondents

- 18 students – 7 men and 11 women
- Age range 18 - 30
- Mixed ethnicity

Do you believe that physical punishment has any part to play in child discipline?

5 – no

No I believe there are other ways of getting around problems

2 – uncertain

5 – only mild physical discipline acceptable

...a smack on the bottom is the absolute last resort

Others justified in terms of value as child rearing tool

I feel that smacking wouldn't go astray every once in a while.

What informs views?

Own experience

My own parents never hit me.

Understand risks

We need to steer ourselves away from the ideas this affirms – the ideology of violence as teaching

Believed it effective or harmless

It put me back on line.

Not hitting but a little smack on the hand or bum never hurt anyone.

Knowledge of section 59

- 15 – no knowledge at all.
- 1 – confused
- 2 - a little knowledge

Have your views changed after viewing the video?

No change - 17

Increased anxiety about the law.

I believe section 59 should be properly defined.

...it needs clearer definition to protect innocent parents and punish guilty ones.

Significantly increased knowledge of law.

What specific aspect of the video made the biggest impact?

8 students expressed concern for child.

...it breaks my heart seeing a child hurt to that extent.

Some critical of mother

I cannot understand why any woman would let an abusive ex get anywhere near her child

Sympathy for father

...I sympathise with him because I think his punishment was too much.

I think there is an element of discrimination against men.

Other reactions

Only two respondents held father responsible

How can a grown man presume it is “reasonable” to exert violence on his son..

One student believed the discipline was needed

...completely justifies the smacked bottom.

Two supported parents’ rights to discipline child

*I believe the idea of smacking is a parent’s prerogative.
...his right as a parent to discipline his own child. I too am a believer of this.*

Conclusions

- The current affairs programme did not change views of participants.
- Students knowledge of section 59 increased.
- Students affected and distracted by human story

Discussion points

- What would be the outcome of a larger survey and/or of use of a different media form eg print media/opinion piece ?
- Implications of sympathy for father.
- Implications for parent education.