

# The Effects of Perception and Childhood History on the Likelihood of Using Corporal Punishment on Children in southwest Nigeria

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## .ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** Despite its prohibition in some countries, corporal punishment persists globally, with parents using it for preventive, corrective, or punitive reasons. However, factors contributing to its persistent use in many developing countries lack comprehensive understanding. This study explores some of these factors—perceptions of physical abuse, childhood history of corporal punishment, and perceived efficacy—associated with the corporal punishment of children in Nigeria, practiced in diverse settings such as home, school, and community.

**Method:** A cross-sectional design was used to obtain a sample of 187 respondents from southwest Nigeria who participated in a survey exploring their perceptions, childhood history of corporal punishment, and likelihood of using such methods on children. They consist of 65.8% males ( $n = 123$ ) and 34.2% females ( $n=64$ ) with an average age of 26.60 years ( $SD = 5.91$ ). Descriptive analysis was used to describe the demographic characteristics, and multiple regression analysis was used to examine the associations.

**Results:** The results reveal that the majority of respondents ( $n = 174$ , 93%) had experienced corporal punishment during their childhood and perceived it as effective in modifying a child's behavior ( $n = 139$ , 74.3%). Weaker perceptions of physically abusive behaviors, a history of childhood corporal punishment, and support for the efficacy of such punishment were all correlated with an increased likelihood of using corporal punishment on children, although the positive and negative correlations were low.

**Conclusion:** Findings emphasize the role of perceptions and childhood experiences in understanding parental use of corporal punishment. Addressing misconceptions about its effectiveness can reveal negative impacts, discourage use, and break the cycle of intergenerational transmission. The influence of weaker perceptions and support for corporal punishment suggests intervention potential, including parental awareness campaigns and educational programs to promote alternative disciplinary strategies for managing children's behavior.

*Keywords: corporal punishment, physical abuse, parenting, disciplinary practices.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In many countries, corporal punishment, involving the use of physical force like hitting with hands or objects, remains a prevalent method of disciplining children [1,2]. Although some countries (e.g., Mauritius, South Africa, Zambia) in Africa prohibit corporal punishment, others (e.g., Botswana, Nigeria, Tanzania) continued its use to discipline children. Parents resort to it to prevent misbehavior, punish disobedience, or correct defiant actions. The reasons behind parents opting for corporal punishment often stem from perceptions that children misbehave intentionally and concerns about overindulgence [3]. In Nigeria, corporal punishment is the favored disciplinary measure, persisting across various settings such as homes, schools, and communities [4]. Its prevalence is attributed to the intertwined influences of religion, cultural values, and practices. While laws surrounding corporal punishment vary globally [5], Nigeria stands among the 69 countries where it remains legal, with a prevalence rate ranging from 80% to 91% [6]. The report of a study in the US put the prevalent use of corporal punishment lower: “the rate was 49% in the past year for children ages 0–9, 23% for youth 10–17 and 37% overall” [7, p. 1991].

Corporal punishment remains the default disciplinary measure in Nigeria, and limited awareness of alternative disciplinary techniques contributes to the belief that corporal punishment enhances parental respect and teaches appropriate behavior [8]. Some parents even justify its use by invoking Biblical verses, although interpretations of such verses vary. Some argue that sparing the rod spoils the child (Proverbs 13:24), while others claim the opposite [9]. Despite the increasing knowledge of the prevalence of corporal punishment, information about factors associated with its use is primarily derived from developed regions of the world. Knowledge associated with perceptions and childhood experiences influencing its use is particularly sparse in regions where corporal punishment is used in multiple settings (home, school, and community). Using social learning theory, the purpose of the present study is to determine the role of the perception of physical abuse, perceived efficacy of corporal punishment, and childhood history of corporal punishment in the likelihood of using corporal punishment on children in southwest Nigeria.

### 1.1 Risk Factors for Corporal Punishment

Several risk factors influence parental engagement in corporal punishment and increase a child's vulnerability to such disciplinary measures. Childhood history and support for corporal punishment during one's upbringing significantly shape justifications, endorsements, and parental use of corporal punishment [10,11,12,13,14, 15]. A mother's history of abuse has been linked to the likelihood of her abusing her own child [16, 17, 18]. However, not all parents who experienced corporal punishment during childhood resort to using it on their own children.

Parents' beliefs about children's behavior and the perceived efficacy of corporal punishment play a crucial role in shaping narratives surrounding its use [15]. Interestingly, some parents spank their children despite doubting its effectiveness [8]. Religion also influences attitudes towards corporal punishment [15,19,20]. Studies among medical professionals revealed a strong endorsement of spanking by those identifying as religious [21]. While certain Old Testament verses seemingly support corporal punishment (Proverbs 13:24; Proverbs 22:15; Proverbs 23:13-14; Proverbs 29:15), New Testament verses suggest that specific parenting practices may provoke negative reactions in children (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21).

The gender of the child and parents serves as a risk factor for corporal punishment, with boys experiencing it more frequently than girls [2]. Among Arab mothers, having boys and “lower perceived self-efficacy” for disciplining children correlated with increased corporal

punishment [22, p. 1073]. Studies indicate that mothers tend to use “corporal punishment more frequently than fathers” [23,24, p. 266], although one study implicated fathers in physical abuse [25] and being male was implicated in endorsement of spanking [21,26]. In a recent study of corporal punishment among teachers in Nigeria, having more children, using corporal punishment on own children, and frequent use of corporal punishment by colleagues were risk factors for corporal punishment of students; the more teachers used corporal punishment on their own children, the more they used corporal punishment on students in school [4]. Recent research implicates maternal spirituality, poverty status, and demographic factors as additional risk factors for corporal punishment [27,28]. Maternal stress, disagreements with a spouse about disciplinary practices, parental frustration, anger, and stress are associated with corporal punishment, often used as an emotional response rather than a disciplined approach for addressing children's misbehavior [22, 29].

## **1.2 Effects and Consequences of Corporal Punishment**

Beyond violating human rights standards and causing physical injuries, studies indicate that corporal punishment and physical abuse have psychological and behavioral effects on children. These effects encompass educational consequences such as poor academic performance, truancy, and dropout, mental health implications like depression and anxiety, and behavioral outcomes including physical aggression [21, 30]. Corporal punishment has been linked to increased aggressive behaviors in children and a heightened tendency for interpersonal violence in adulthood [29]. The risk of aggression and behavioral problems is higher when both parents employ corporal punishment, irrespective of the frequency of spanking [31, 32].

Results from a meta-analytic and literature review suggest that spanking is detrimental to children's well-being and developmental outcomes [33,34,35,36,37], although a different review indicates minimal effects on "externalizing, internalizing behaviors, and low cognitive performance" [38, p. 196]. However, the effects of corporal punishment are not universally negative; factors related to parents, children, and behavior can mitigate these effects, with parental warmth playing a significant role [39]. Parental warmth moderates the impact of harsh parenting on children's externalizing problems [39], attachment acts as a mediator for the association between "power assertive discipline" and "internalizing problems" [40, p. 34], and children's perception and interpretation of parental behavior help mitigate the negative effects of "coercive authority assertion and critical comparison and shaming" [41, p. 262, 33]. Notably, parental warmth, in the context of corporal punishment, was associated with favorable attitudes toward corporal punishment. However, childhood experiences of corporal punishment, coupled with parental impulsiveness, were linked to less favorable attitudes toward corporal punishment [42]. Despite these moderating factors, one study suggests that "maternal warmth does not counteract the negative consequences of the use of spanking" [43, p. 2017].

## **1.3 Parenting Disciplinary Practices in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, parents employ various disciplinary practices, including moral suasion, verbal warnings, time-outs, painful physical restraints and postures, and physical discipline. While both men and women use corporal punishment, its use by men tends to be more frequent and severe, often resulting in physical injuries to children compared to its use by women [4, 44]. Men typically use objects like sticks, belts, or horsewhips for discipline, while women predominantly use their bare hands. The use of bare hands is generally not considered physical abuse, as it rarely results in injury to children.

Despite Nigeria being a signatory to the Child Rights Act 2003 and recognizing corporal punishment as a violation of human rights standards, it still receives legal backing in Nigeria [45]. The practice is strongly supported by the major religions—traditional religion, Christianity, and Islam—although some resistance exists, especially in the private school system.

#### **1.4 Social Learning Theory and Corporal Punishment**

Social learning theory offers a practical perspective for understanding and explaining why parents use and hold favorable views about corporal punishment, perceive it to be necessary and effective, and resist support for alternative disciplinary strategies. Social learning theory posits that “most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions, this coded information serves as a guide for action” (46, p. 22). People observe behaviors, engage in cognitive processing of observations, and respond through imitation. The cognitive or mediational processes following observation entail attention (i.e., the extent to which the behavior is noticed), retention (i.e., the extent to which memory of the behavior is retained), reproduction (i.e., the ability to perform or recreate the behavior), and motivation (i.e., the will to carry out the behavior given the reinforcement, rewards, punishment, or determined value or significance of the behavior) [47,48]. Social learning theory helps to understand the impacts of childhood history on parental use of corporal punishment and the intergenerational transmission of corporal punishment [49].

In general, the social learning hypothesis sheds light on how people come to accept and maintain the use of physical punishment through observational learning. It suggests that childhood experiences of corporal punishment may influence the perceptions of corporal punishment and physical abuse, which in turn may influence the use of corporal punishment on children. Individuals watch, use cognitive processes to analyze information, and mimic actions based on motivation, attention, retention, and reproduction. The theory offers a framework for analyzing the effects of taught behaviors, cognitive processes, and prior experiences on parenting practices in the context of physical punishment, which aids in understanding how these elements affect the use of corporal punishment on children.

#### **1.4 The Present Study**

The present study aims to determine the role of perception of physical abuse, perceived efficacy of corporal punishment, and childhood history of corporal punishment on the likelihood of using corporal punishment on children in southwest Nigeria. Empirical knowledge about perceptions and the use of corporal punishment is still in its infancy in Nigeria. Aligned with the above review, the study poses research questions examining factors associated with the likelihood of using corporal punishment on children. The research questions are as follows:

1. Does an association exist between the perception of physical abuse and the probability of using corporal punishment on children in Nigeria?
2. Is there a correlation between a history of childhood corporal punishment and the inclination to use corporal punishment on children in Nigeria?
3. Does a relationship exist between the perceived effectiveness of corporal punishment and the likelihood of its use on children in Nigeria?

## **2. MATERIAL AND METHODS**

### **2.1 Procedure**

This cross-sectional study sought verbal and electronic (email) responses from participants in three southwestern regions of Nigeria, inviting them to complete an anonymous online survey. The chosen regions, characterized by a population ranging from 5 million to 17 million, were selected due to their geographical proximity, similar ethnicity (predominantly Yorubas), ease of access to respondents, and diversity in religious backgrounds (traditional religion, Christianity, and Islam). In Nigeria, different ethnic groups inhabit different regions of the country: the southwest is predominantly inhabited by Yorubas, the southeast by Igbos, and the North by Hausas. The study focused on the general population in the southwest, with an inclusion criterion of respondents aged 18 years and above. Research assistants were enlisted to explain the study, recruit potential respondents, and distribute the survey link. They visited both private and public offices, shared the link with potential respondents, and also collaborated with Internet café operators in each region to supervise participant recruitment. Internet café operators were reimbursed the cost of 1 hour's access to the Internet (N100 or 27 cents) for each respondent completing the survey at their facilities.

University students from two institutions in the regions were also included in the study. The survey link was shared with students in classrooms, and other respondents were encouraged to share it within their networks. An electronic consent form was posted online, and respondents were required to affirm their consent before completing the survey. The consent form outlined the study's purpose, questionnaire content, survey anonymity, duration, estimated completion time, and additional information to aid respondents in making an informed decision about participation. Preliminary efforts in study development and implementation involved soliciting feedback from scholars and pilot testing with 30 respondents. The pilot test was implemented in the survey region to ensure the clarity of the questionnaire and single-item measures, deemed clear by expert judgment, and to detect any problems that might arise during data collection. No unforeseeable problems were identified during pilot testing. Additional information about the study can be obtained from a previous publication [44]. Institutional Review Board approval for the study was granted by Westfield State University, USA.

## 2.2 Sample

The sample (N = 187) comprised 65.8% males (n = 123) and 34.2% females (n = 64). The majority (82.4%, n = 154) were unmarried, with most identifying their ethnic background as Yoruba (78.6%, n = 147). Respondents had an average age of 26.60 years (SD = 5.91). Half of the respondents (n = 95, 50.8%) self-identified as non-students, while 49.2% (n = 92) identified as students. Slightly over half (n = 97, 51.9%) reported having a bachelor's degree or above as their educational background. The majority reported having no children (n = 156, 83.4%).

## 2.3 Measures

In addition to responding to questions on demographic characteristics, respondents completed questions on the measures described below.

**Demographic characteristics of respondents** included age (reported in the year of birth), gender (male vs female), educational background (high school, ordinary national diploma, bachelor/higher national diploma, master/post-graduate, master of philosophy, and doctorate), current occupation (working with the government, working with a private organization, self-employed, unemployed, and student), and ethnic background (Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa).

**Perception of physical abuse** is a 5-item measure of the perception of physically abusive behaviors against children [50]. The scale was preceded by a question (“Do you think the following can be regarded as physical abuse?”) to gain information about the respondent’s perception of the behaviors. Examples of the items are “inflicting injury or physical pains on a child from punching, kicking, or pushing; strangling or choking a child so tight that the child could not breathe.” Response choices ranged from absolutely not physical abuse = 1 to absolutely physical abuse = 7. Cronbach’s alpha was .84 in a previous study [50] and .72 in the present study.

**Corporal punishment of children** was operationalized with a question: “How likely are you to use corporal punishment (spanking, hitting, punching, or slapping, etc.) in disciplining your child/children?” Response choices were extremely unlikely = 1, most unlikely = 2, slightly unlikely = 3, neither likely nor unlikely = 4, slightly likely = 5, most likely = 6, and extremely likely = 7. This item was developed for the study and deemed to be clear by expert judgment and respondents during pilot survey.

**Perceived efficacy of corporal punishment** was operationalized with a question: “Do you think corporal punishment is effective in changing a child’s behavior?” Response choices ranged from no = 1, don’t know = 2, maybe = 3, to yes = 4. This item was developed for the study and deemed to be clear by expert judgment and respondents during pilot survey.

**Childhood history of corporal punishment** measured the extent to which respondents had experienced corporal punishment during childhood and was operationalized with a question: “If you reflect back on your childhood (before you reached the age of 18 years old), how frequently did your parent/guardian use corporal punishment to discipline you?” Response choices were extremely infrequent/no experience = 1, moderately infrequent = 2, slightly infrequent = 3, neither frequent nor infrequent = 4, slightly frequent = 5, moderately frequent = 6, and extremely frequent = 7. This item was developed for the study and deemed to be clear by expert judgment and respondents during pilot survey.

## 2.4 Data Analysis

Demographic characteristics (e.g., marital status, ethnic background) were dichotomized for analysis and interpretation. Perceived efficacy of corporal punishment was recoded as either “No/I don’t know” or “Yes/Maybe” for both descriptive and parametric analysis. Similarly, responses regarding childhood history of corporal punishment were dichotomized into “Extremely frequent to moderately infrequent” and “Extremely infrequent/no experience” for both descriptive and parametric analysis.

Descriptive analysis was used to examine demographic characteristics and perceptions. Bivariate correlation was conducted to provide an overview of how each independent variable (i.e., perception of physical abuse, perceived efficacy of corporal punishment, and childhood history of corporal punishment) relates to the dependent variable (i.e., corporal punishment of children), determine the strength of the correlation, and assess the linearity of the relationship. This preliminary exercise helps determine how the independent variables (i.e., predictors) may collectively influence the dependent variable (i.e., outcome variable).

Multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the effects among demographic characteristics, perception of physical abuse, childhood history of corporal punishment, perceived efficacy of corporal punishment, and corporal punishment of children. Variables were entered into the analyses using simultaneous entry. From a sample of 202 participants, listwise deletion was applied to 15 cases with missing data on the predictors, resulting in a total of 187 cases for analysis. SPSS 25™ [51] was used to perform the analyses.

### 3. RESULTS

Descriptive and parametric analyses provided meaningful information about prevalence, differences, and associations among the examined variables. The majority ( $n = 174$ , 93%) reported a childhood history of corporal punishment at some degree of frequency, and they also believed that corporal punishment is effective in changing a child's behavior ( $n = 139$ , 74.3%).

#### 3.1 Bivariate Correlations

Significant relationships among the examined variables were noted. Corporal punishment of children correlated significantly positively with the perceived efficacy of corporal punishment ( $r = .233$ ,  $P < .001$ ) and childhood history of corporal punishment ( $r = .219$ ,  $P < .001$ ) and significantly negatively with the perception of physical abuse ( $r = -.243$ ,  $P < .001$ ). As indicated, the correlations were relatively low. The correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) is a statistical technique that describes the extent of the relation between the variables (whether they are related and how strong they are related) and ranges from -1.0 to +1.0. The  $P$ -value ( $P$ ) is a statistical result that helps determine the significance of reported results in comparison with the null hypothesis. With its value ranging between 0 and 1, it helps provide support for the acceptance of research hypothesis.

#### 3.2 Model Predictive of Corporal Punishment of Children

The overall model for determining the associations among demographic characteristics, corporal punishment of children, perception of physical abuse, childhood history of corporal punishment, perceived efficacy of corporal punishment, and corporal punishment of children was significant,  $F(8, 186) = 4.649$ ,  $P < .001$ . The final model accounted for 17% (adjusted  $R^2 = .136$ ) of the variance in corporal punishment of children, suggesting that the model can address approximately 13.6% of the effects attributed to the independent variables on the dependent variable. Lower perception of physical abuse ( $\beta = -.24$ ,  $P = .001$ ), higher childhood history of corporal punishment ( $\beta = .19$ ,  $P = .006$ ), and higher perceived efficacy of corporal punishment ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $P = .002$ ) were associated with higher likelihood of using corporal punishment on children (Research Questions 1-3) (Table 1).

**Table 1. Results of Factors Predictive of Corporal Punishment of Children**

Variable	$\beta$	t	Sig.	95.0% C.I.	
				LB	UB
Age	.02	.19	.851	-.05	.06
Gender <sup>a</sup>	.03	.38	.705	-.39	.58
Marital status <sup>b</sup>	-.07	-.75	.453	-1.03	.46
Occupational background	-.04	-.52	.603	-.65	.38
Educational background <sup>d</sup>	.13	1.77	.078	-.05	.89
Perception of physical abuse	-.24	-3.48	.001	-.66	-.18
Childhood history of corporal punishment	.19	2.76	.006	.05	.31
Perceived efficacy of corporal punishment	.22	3.16	.002	.13	.57

Note: CI = Confidence interval; LB = Lower bound; UB = Upper bound.

<sup>a</sup>Female = 1, male = 0. <sup>b</sup>Single (never married) = 1, Married and others (divorced, widowed) = 0.  
<sup>c</sup>Employed/unemployed = 1, student = 0. <sup>d</sup>Less than bachelor degree = 1, Bachelor degree or higher = 0.

## **4. DISCUSSION**

Corporal punishment remains controversial due to its physical and mental health consequences. The present study examined perceptions and the likelihood of using corporal punishment on children among a sample of respondents in Nigeria, finding that the majority reported a childhood history of corporal punishment and believed in the efficacy of corporal punishment in changing a child's behavior.

### **4.1 Perception of Physical Abuse and Corporal Punishment of Children**

The association between corporal punishment on children and the perception of physical abuse in this study highlights potential risks of corporal punishment for physical abuse and brings focus to the physically abusive nature of corporal punishment: Those who were less likely to use corporal punishment on their children perhaps recognized the physically abusive behaviors as physical abuse. This finding is somewhat similar to what was found among Spanish adults by [52]: "those who believe in the necessity of using corporal punishment as a parenting practice perceive that child physical abuse is less widespread in society" [p. 1058]. Although not everyone would regard corporal or physical punishment as physical abuse, regrettably, many people fail to recognize the physically abusive risks and nature of corporal punishment and are therefore predisposed to its use [8,15,18].

It is not surprising that those who recognize physically abusive behaviors as physical abuse are less predisposed to using corporal punishment on children when one considers the parental motivation for using corporal punishment and the negative connotation associated with physical abuse. Physical abuse evokes negative connotation and suggests a lack of parental love and affection, which is contrary to what parents try to demonstrate through corporal punishment. As a result, those who recognize the thin line between corporal punishment and physical abuse may be encouraged to refrain from using corporal punishment. Similarly, given the realization that individuals have different childhood experiences of corporal punishment, it is possible that those who had negative childhood experiences of corporal punishment may develop some negative perceptions of it and be discouraged from using it. In general, the finding suggests that efforts aimed at reducing attitudes toward corporal punishment and increasing the adoption of alternative disciplinary strategies must include knowledge of the risk of corporal punishment for physical abuse if they are to be successful.

### **4.2 Childhood History of Corporal Punishment and Corporal Punishment of Children**

It is not surprising that the childhood history of corporal punishment was associated with the likelihood of using corporal punishment on children. Empirically speaking, the finding is consistent with past studies that found childhood history of corporal punishment and false assumptions about the efficacy of corporal punishment to contribute to endorsement and use of corporal punishment and physical abuse [10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18]. The finding is also consistent with a previous study regarding the effects of childhood history of abusive behaviors on the perception of abusive behaviors in Nigeria [53]. From examining abusive behaviors among the respondents, the least behavior perceived to be abusive was those experienced during childhood: "using corporal punishment as the only form of discipline" [53,

p. 73]. In the study, the experience of abusive behaviors during childhood was perceived to be risk factors for the perception of abusive behaviors. In another study among teachers in Nigeria, it was found that the more teachers used corporal punishment on their children, the more they used corporal punishment on students in school [4], thereby suggesting the transportability of corporal punishment across settings: Those who use corporal punishment on their children at home may be easily predisposed to using it on students in school.

Some explanations may be tenable for the reasons childhood history of corporal punishment may have predisposed respondents to the likelihood of using corporal punishment on children. In Nigeria, many people are socialized into corporal punishment from childhood, and many lack knowledge about alternative disciplinary practices or the efficacy of those practices. Many adults attribute their preference for corporal punishment to the realization that they turned out good because of or despite their childhood history of corporal punishment. Moreover, many people are genuinely concerned about the effects of negative behaviors on their children's future and survival, thereby resorting to corporal punishment as an effective mechanism for guiding them in the right direction. The use of corporal punishment is therefore predicated partly on the concern for or fear of the future of children.

Altogether, findings indicate that childhood history of corporal punishment constitutes a risk factor for the use of corporal punishment [14], and the risk is particularly greater when those who experienced corporal punishment during childhood did not define the experience as physically abusive [11], thereby increasing intergenerational transmission of corporal punishment. Nevertheless, it is possible that differences in the nature and severity of childhood history of corporal punishment may be instrumental to differences in the depth and pervasiveness of pro-corporal punishment values and beliefs fueling the preference for corporal punishment.

#### **4.3 Perceived Efficacy of Corporal Punishment and Corporal Punishment of Children**

Findings further suggest that those who perceive corporal punishment as effective are more likely to endorse the use of corporal punishment on children. Among possible explanations for this finding include religion and childhood history of corporal punishment (as previously discussed), especially given the limited empirical knowledge about the efficacy of corporal punishment and alternative disciplinary strategies in the region. Religion shapes perceptions of corporal punishment in Nigeria, and many draw inspiration about its efficacy from, for example, the Old Testament of the Bible. Although Biblical verses (e.g., Proverbs 3:11-12; 13:24; 19:18; 20:30; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15, 17) supportive of corporal punishment have been subject to multiple interpretations, the majority are drawn from the Old Testament, indicative of prescriptions for Judaism rather than of Christianity. While the tenets of the Old Testament might support corporal punishment, the tenets of the New Testament warn parents from provoking their children to anger (Ephesians 6:4) and discouragement (Colossians 3:21), two behavioral problems that have been associated with corporal punishment (e.g., physical aggression and discouragement from school attendance) [54,55,56].

It is possible that a progressive interpretation of the Bible highlighting the preeminence of the New Testament over the Old Testament for Christians (1 Corinthians 11:25; Hebrew 8:7; Jeremiah 31:31-32; Matthew 26:28) and emphasizing the lack of absence of corporal punishment in the New Testament might temper religious justifications for the use of corporal punishment and discourage parents from considering corporal punishment as the first choice for disciplining their children; however, many people remain fascinated by the Old Testament

and may resist any attempts to classify corporal punishment as ineffective for disciplining and raising children.

Altogether, it may be inferred from the findings that those who recognize long-term negative effects of corporal punishment on children, reject beliefs supportive of corporal punishment of children, and shun the efficacy of corporal punishment in raising children are more likely to perceive corporal punishment as physically abusive behavior and may be receptive to alternative forms of disciplinary practices. Those who do not endorse corporal punishment of their own children are more likely to hold the same perception and be receptive to alternative disciplinary practices. Similarly, the findings provide clarification on the pervasive use of corporal punishment, suggesting that, to change attitudes and beliefs supportive of corporal punishment in the region, critical efforts may focus on heightening sensitivity to physical abuse, dispelling myths about the efficacy of corporal punishment, and understanding childhood history of corporal punishment as a risk factor for corporal punishment of children.

#### **4.4 Strengths and Limitations**

This study has strengths as well as limitations. The major strength relates to its being the first known study to examine perceptions and beliefs in relation to corporal punishment and the possibility of its use in disciplining children in the region. The preliminary knowledge generated could lay the foundation for future large-scale studies and inform interventions to alter perceptions and beliefs supportive of corporal punishment. The knowledge could also aid in developing interventions designed to garner support for its alternative disciplinary strategies. Similarly, the relevance of social learning theory in understanding the effects of perception of physical abuse, perceived efficacy of corporal punishment, and childhood history of corporal punishment on corporal punishment of children is supported by the findings. The theory enriches the study by emphasizing how past experiences contribute to perceptions and parental practices, thereby facilitating a holistic exploration of factors influencing corporal punishment.

While the study has notable strengths, certain limitations should be acknowledged. As a cross-sectional study, the potential for socially desirable responses calls for caution in interpreting the findings. Additionally, assuming a causal relationship between the examined independent and dependent variables is not warranted. Unfortunately, data collection was confined to a limited coverage area in three southwestern regions of the country, limiting the generalizability of findings. Moreover, the online data collection method excluded respondents without internet access and those in rural areas. However, some respondents without personal internet access completed the survey through arrangements with internet operators.

#### **4.5. Implications of Findings**

The unique findings of this study provide insights for effective interventions aimed at altering perceptions of corporal punishment and reducing its likelihood of use on children in Nigeria. The association between respondents' perceived efficacy of corporal punishment and endorsement of corporal punishment underscores the urgency for interventions addressing its pervasive use in society. Despite the moderating effect of parental warmth on the relationship between corporal punishment and negative mental health outcomes, discouraging parental corporal punishment is recommended [57]. A negative association between corporal punishment and the perception of physical abuse suggests the feasibility of interventions translating corporal punishment into perceptions of physical abuse.

Efforts should concentrate on discouraging corporal punishment and providing effective alternative approaches to prevent its use. Providing empirical evidence of the efficacy of alternative disciplinary strategies compared to corporal punishment is crucial. Familiarizing individuals with the consequences of corporal punishment and offering parent education and training on different disciplinary measures can motivate parents to adopt alternative approaches. Tailoring parenting interventions to the type and nature of children's misbehaviors, rather than relying on universal strategies, is advisable [58]. Intervention may focus on milder forms of physical disciplinary practices, such as spanking or slapping on the hand [59].

Information dissemination and raising awareness are vital components of effective interventions. Providing parents with information about corporal punishment can alter pro-spanking attitudes [57]. Time-limited and focused awareness programs can be instrumental in changing attitudes toward physical discipline [60]. Exploring empirically-based approaches for changing attitudes toward physical discipline will enhance parental awareness, competence, and confidence in alternative disciplinary strategies [61].

Professionals working with children should undergo training to identify their needs and advocate for alternatives to corporal punishment. Studies have shown that professionals are receptive to educating parents on alternatives to physical discipline and committed to changing social norms that foster corporal punishment [62]. Similar studies in Nigeria can identify professional perspectives on corporal punishment, alter favorable perceptions, and build support for alternative disciplinary strategies. Individual, group, and media-based programs, as well as parent-focused and selective prevention programs, can reduce approval of corporal punishment, reshape perceptions, and expose individuals to less abusive disciplinary practices [63].

The impact of religion should not be ignored in altering beliefs supportive of corporal punishment. While religion influences its use, improving socioeconomic conditions can moderate its effects and accelerate the implementation of Child Right Acts/Convention on the Rights of the Child regarding the abolition of corporal punishment. Interventions focusing on a progressive interpretation of religious beliefs can achieve better results than those ignoring its extremities. Empirically-based interventions and progressive interpretations of the Bible have the potential to reduce pro-spanking attitudes and behaviors among conservative Christians [64]. For example, an intervention comparing college students exposed to no intervention (control group), empirical intervention, and religious intervention noted less favorable attitudes toward spanking in the religious intervention group [65].

#### **4.6 Contribution to Knowledge**

This preliminary study generates knowledge about associations rather than providing prevalence reports, which are common in the region, regarding corporal punishment. The present findings contribute to knowledge by highlighting how beliefs, perceptions about corporal punishment, physical abuse, and childhood history of corporal punishment influence the likelihood of its use on children. This realization helps identify mechanisms that may be targeted to alter beliefs and perceptions supporting corporal punishment. It also aids in formulating policies and interventions to protect vulnerable children in society.

#### **4.7 Recommendations for future research**

Future studies may consider the moderating role of maternal or parental warmth on the relationship between (i) perception of physical abuse, (ii) childhood history of corporal punishment, and (iii) perceived efficacy of corporal punishment, and the likelihood of using

corporal punishment on children in Nigeria. Similar studies may explore the extent to which maternal or parental warmth mediates the relationship between these three variables and the likelihood of using corporal punishment. Additionally, future studies may investigate the effects of cultural practices and religious views and beliefs not only on the perception of physical abuse and perceived efficacy of corporal punishment but also on the likelihood of using corporal punishment on children.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, perceptions and beliefs are critical to understanding corporal punishment and the likelihood of its use on children. Interventions that take cognizance of the effects of religion, perceptions, and childhood history of corporal punishment might alter false assumptions about its efficacy, stem the tide of its intergenerational transmission, and increase support for alternative disciplinary strategies.

### Consent

As per international standards or university standards, respondents' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

### COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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