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THE INFLUENCE  
OF SCHOOL  
CORPORAL PUNISHMENTS  
ON CRIME

— by —

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**THE INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL  
CORPORAL PUNISHMENTS ON CRIME  
A STATISTICAL STUDY**

by Adah Maurer and James S. Wallerstein

There are still some pundits, although a dwindling number, who attribute our "alarming" crime and delinquency to the decline of corporal punishment in school and home. (1)

On the continent of Europe, where school corporal punishments have been universally abolished, the rates of crime and juvenile delinquency are much lower than here. (2) But the pundits are comparing us not with Europe but with the America of the 19th Century.

There are no reliable statistics on the extent of crime a hundred or a hundred and fifty years ago. From all reports, however, crime was extensive; especially violent crime and crimes among the young. (3) The good citizens of 19th Century America were also alarmed. They looked back to the "good old days" of simple rural life, before the growth of the cities. The crowded and crime-ridden Eastern cities were contrasted unfavorably with the "wide open spaces" of the West—the West of Jesse James and Billy the Kid!

Nor was "school discipline" better in the heyday of the birch and cane. An account of English "public schools" describes numerous riots that occurred in the last century. Not only the police, but even the army, was called out to quell the disorders. (4)

But if corporal punishments in childhood do not curb crime and delinquency, is the opposite true? Do school and home beatings bring about violence and lawlessness later in life?

Many studies have indicated that this *is* true. Violent criminals were often abused and beaten in early youth. (5)

Corporal punishment, the Friedmans found, "stimulates mistrust, anger and the wish to retaliate." School beatings "undermine the teacher's ability to provide an environment conducive to learning."

They conclude, "There is a direct relationship between severe corporal punishments in early childhood and delinquency later in the life cycle." (6)

Young male drivers who had oppressive school experiences were inclined toward "speeding, recklessness, lawlessness and defiance of authority." (7)

Do delinquents grow from "lack of discipline" or from too much discipline? Dr. Alan Button reports, "This, it now appears, is the wrong question. We should be asking about the sequence. Parents of delinquents, 100% of them, report physical beatings in the first six to ten years of a child's life, but rarely thereafter. They 'wash their hands' of the kids, because 'nothing' works." (8)

Early childhood beatings bring about adult aggression and violence. Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and Napoleon, all suffered from severe boyhood floggings. (9)

Guy Burgess, a diplomat high in the British foreign office, became a Russian spy. Burgess was believed to have become a convert to communism. But a biography of his life suggests a different reason for his betrayal. His shame and anger at being caned in school. (10)

The child psychologist Robert Geiser finds, "Violence in the physical abuse of children is linked to adult violence."

A survey of Auburn, New York State, prison inmates, all of whom were incarcerated for violent crimes, revealed that 95 percent of them had been abused as children. (11)

The *Philadelphia Birth Cohort* study of eighteen year olds found "for identical offenses, those punished severely were more likely to be in prison than those who were punished lightly, or not at all." (12)

Charles Manson was a shy and gentle youth until sent to an institution where he was beaten unmercifully after repeated attempts to run away. (13)

Far from deterring misbehavior, school floggings tend to increase it. High corporal punishment schools were also high in vandalism. (14)

An interesting table was prepared by Dr. Adah Maurer on the basis of research, questionnaires and interviews by Alan Button, Ralph Welsh, Hobart Banks and others. (15)

TABLE ONE  
THE AFTERMATH OF PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT (Ages One to Ten)

	Never	Rare	Moderate	Severe	Extreme
Violent Inmates San Quentin	0	0	0	0	100%
Juvenile Delinquents	0	2%	3%	31%	64%
High School Drop-outs	0	7%	23%	69%	0
College Freshmen	2%	23%	40%	33%	0
Professionals	5%	40%	36%	17%	0

**Extreme** implies need for medical attention

**Severe** means the use of an instrument: Strap, Paddle, Cane

**Moderate** includes open hands slaps and "spanks"

Indeed, Dr. Ralph Welsh proposed "*The belt theory of juvenile delinquency*". The more a kid is beaten in early youth, the more likely he (or she) is to become a lawbreaker. (16)

In a letter of Chief Justice Burger, protesting the Supreme Court decision in *Ingraham v. Wright*, the noted psychologist declares: "The single most important correlate of juvenile delinquency is severe parental punishment". (17)

### The Statistical Relationship of Corporal Punishment and Crime

All conclusions based upon interviews and questionnaires are somewhat subjective and less convincing than objective statistics. It occurred to the authors to compare the crime rates in each State with the reported corporal punishments in the public schools.

In a previous study, the authors demonstrated a high correlation between high school drop-outs and the extent of corporal punishment. In general, where corporal punishments were high, fewer pupils would remain in school and receive their high school diplomas. (18)

The current study compares the crime and corporal punishment rates in the fifty States. The crime rates are based upon the number of prison admissions in the respective States, per ten thousand adult population in 1981, according to the *Bureau of Justice* statistics. (19) "Adult population" means all persons eighteen years of age and over.

Incidents of corporal punishment in each State are based on reports to the *Office of Civil Rights* (20) for the school year 1980 to 1981.

The coefficient of correlation between prison admissions and school corporal punishments turns out to be remarkably high:

$$r = 0.66$$

This is even higher than the correlation previously found (18) between corporal punishments and school drop-outs:

$$r = 0.54$$

It can hardly be denied that corporal punishment is a factor aggravating lawlessness and criminality.

Our survey bears out the conclusions of *The European Example: When people stopped hitting kids, things became better.*

#### Summary and Conclusion

A comparison of school corporal punishments in the fifty States with the crime rate as measured by prison admissions in the respective States showed a high correlation between crime and school beatings:

$$r = 0.66$$

The harmfulness of school corporal punishment is again confirmed. Although educational resources are now limited and school budgets curtailed, there is one educational improvement that can be undertaken without costing a penny: the end of corporal punishment in the schools.

**TABLE TWO: RELATION OF SCHOOL CORPORAL PUNISHMENTS TO PRISON ADMISSIONS IN THE FIFTY STATES**

STATE	School Corporal Punishments per 1,000 pupils	Prison Admissions per 10,000 adults
North Carolina	59.9	17.66
Georgia	96.0	17.23
Nevada	21.2	15.37
Maryland	5.5	15.22
South Carolina	63.9	15.02
Alabama	93.4	14.45
Alaska	15.8	13.98
Texas	95.1	13.38
Delaware	29.2	12.91
Florida	119.0	12.71
Mississippi	109.2	12.56
Tennessee	106.4	11.43
Oklahoma	93.3	11.39
Arizona	30.6	11.34
Ohio	47.1	10.86
Arkansas	125.5	10.69
Indiana	41.0	10.52
Kentucky	66.2	9.43
Louisiana	50.7	9.21
Idaho	7.6	9.17
Wyoming	11.2	8.71
Illinois	12.6	8.34
Oregon	5.3	8.18
Virginia	18.4	8.09

STATE	School Corporal Punishments per 1,000 pupils	Prison Admissions per 10,000 adults
Missouri	40.5	8.00
Kansas	12.7	7.91
California	3.6	7.83
Vermont	0.4	7.59
Montana	3.9	7.26
South Dakota	0.6	7.19
New York	0.6	6.94
Nebraska	1.9	6.93
Colorado	5.9	6.77
Michigan	9.1	6.41
New Jersey	0.0	6.35
Connecticut	0.6	6.28
Iowa	3.0	5.85
Wisconsin	0.9	5.53
Utah	0.6	5.43
West Virginia	53.5	5.40
Washington	18.9	5.37
Maine	0.0	4.94
New Mexico	57.3	4.26
Pennsylvania	13.1	3.85
North Dakota	0.7	3.85
Rhode Island	0.0	3.63
New Hampshire	0.0	3.60
Massachusetts	0.0	3.46
Hawaii	0.0	2.83
Minnesota	3.9	2.81

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