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Imparting and receiving violence at home in Uruguay

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Abstract

The use of moderate physical violence while raising children is an extended practice, accepted as a disciplinary measure. Nevertheless, there is evidence that these practices during childhood produce negative effects in different areas of adult life. This motivates the analysis of the intergenerational transmission of this conduct. We used the survey *Encuesta de Situaciones Familiares* carried out in 2007 funded by the Research and Innovation National Agency in Uruguay (ANII) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The main purpose of the ESF was to gather information about marriage and divorce, work, fertility, work, child-rearing and children's welfare outcomes, including education, health, and psycho-social development.

In our study for the Uruguayan case, we find that for women, the experience of physical punishment during childhood increases the probability of having similar attitudes when raising one's children. This probability increases when the woman has a positive attitude towards punishment as a disciplinary measure. We do not find similar effects of past experiences in the case of men.

Keywords: violence, household, children, beaten, punishment.

Resumen

El uso de la violencia física moderada, en la crianza de niños, es una práctica extendida y aceptada como una medida disciplinaria. Sin embargo, hay pruebas de que estas prácticas durante la infancia producen efectos negativos en el curso de la vida adulta. Esto motiva el análisis de la transmisión inter-generacional de esta conducta. Se utilizó la Encuesta de Situaciones Familiares realizada en 2007 financiada por la Agencia Nacional de Investigación e Innovación de Uruguay (ANII) y el Fondo de las Naciones Unidas para la Infancia (UNICEF). El propósito principal de la encuesta era reunir información sobre el matrimonio y el divorcio, el trabajo, la fertilidad, el trabajo, la crianza y los resultados de bienestar de la infancia, como la educación, la salud y el desarrollo psicosocial.

En nuestro estudio, para el caso de Uruguay, nos encontramos con que para las mujeres, la experiencia de los castigos físicos durante la niñez aumenta la probabilidad de tener actitudes similares en la crianza de sus propios hijos. Esta probabilidad aumenta cuando la mujer tiene una actitud positiva hacia el castigo como sanción disciplinaria. No encontramos efectos similares de las experiencias del pasado en el caso de los hombres.

Palabras claves: violencia, hogar, niños, golpeado, castigos.

JEL: J12, J13, D0

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1. Introduction

The use of corporal punishment as a form of child discipline has been traditionally legitimate. However, there is a plethora of empirical evidence that points out that physical punishment during childhood is a predictor of a series of negative results such as anxiety and aggressive conducts (Ateah and Durrant, 2005). There is additional evidence that this conduct is transmitted from parents to children (Bandura, 1969, 1973; Gage and Silvestre, 2010; Tajima, 2000, 2002; Graziano et al., 1996; Rodriguez and Sutherland, 1999; Socolar and Stein, 1995). Nevertheless, this phenomenon is not supported by some recent studies, which could be interpreted as a sign of the occurrence of a cultural change (Ateah and Durrant, 2005).

In this paper we study the intergenerational transmission of the use of physical punishment towards children and its legitimation in Uruguay. For this, we use a database which gathers information from couples with children below the age of 21. An antecedent in Uruguay indicates that there is some sort of physical punishment in 59 percent of households with children. Severe physical punishment is accounted for in 15 percent of the households with children (MIDES, 2008).

In our database, 30 percent of the mothers who are in a relationship and 17 percent of their husbands declare that they beat their children when they misbehave or do not obey. These numbers are lower compared to the work done by MIDES (2008), which is surely related to the different ways the questions are structured. The work by MIDES surveyed 22 behaviors associated to the treatment of children, from non-violent conducts to different degrees of violence and negligence. On the contrary, our database comes from a survey which only asks for the frequency the children are beaten when they misbehave.

According to the MIDES (2008) study, shaking or spanking a kid are common practices at home (the positive responses of the respondents related to these method reaches 30 percent). In total, 53.7 percent of respondents declared a moderate mistreatment of children (pinching, 6.9 percent; hitting with the hand over the children's hand, arm or leg, 16.8 percent; spanking the child's behind with the hand, 34.6%; spanking the child's behind with a blunt object, 5.5 percent; shaking, 34.2 percent). The general prevalence of severe and very severe physical punishment reaches 13.8 percent.

The advantage of our database is that it surveys if the adult experienced punishment during childhood, which allows us to study the intergenerational transmission of the conduct. We find evidence of transmission in the case of women but not in men. In addition, a positive attitude towards corporal punishment increases the probability of its use both in the case of women and men. In section 2 we treat transmission and explanatory factors of intergenerational violence, in section 3 we present the data and methodology, in section 4 the results and finally we conclude in section 5.

2. Transmission and explanatory factors of intergenerational violence

Most of the research found a positive relation between reported physical punishment as a child and the use of physical punishment to own child (Gage and Silvestre, 2010; Tajima, 2002, 2000; Rodriguez and Sutherland, 1999; Graziano et al., 1996; Socolar and Stein, 1995). According to social learning theory, aggressive behaviors are transmitted either by learning or imitation. In particular, individuals incorporate the behavior of those they identify with, so those who were punished as children then to use physical punishment during adulthood (Bandura, 1969, 1973).

Some authors found that the effect of child punishment or abuse on current punishment practices is stronger for mothers than for fathers, and sometimes the effect for fathers vanishes (Lukenheimer et al, 2006). However, in a study of mothers, Ateah and Durrant (2005) do not find evidence of intergenerational transmission of child physical punishment. They mention that this finding could be due to spurious reasons, as the difficulty of recalling past experiences or the reluctance of informing violence experience. But they argue that a behavioral change could have interrupted the intergenerational transmission of physical punishment to children. This change would rely in the legal framework and the public campaigns to modify attitudes towards punishment.

Besides, violence is associated to attitudes which are favorable to punishment as a way of applying discipline to children. Moreover articles found that parent attitudes are the best predictors of physical punishment (Ateah and Durrant, 2005; Graziano et al., 1996; Cappa and Khan, 2011).

Note that physical punishment experience and a positive attitude to physical punishment are not uncorrelated. In broad terms, the experience or witness of violence in childhood would legitimize violent behavior in adulthood. Bower and Knutson (1996) give evidence that individuals who were disciplined by the use of physical punishment are more likely to evaluate this disciplinary instrument positively and therefore of using them with their children. Similar results are reported by Buntain-Ricklefs et al. (1994), Rodriguez and Sutherland (1999); Douglas (2006).

Several authors show that intimate partner violence (IPV) and violence against children usually overlap (Gage and Silvestre, 2010; Tajima, 2002, 2000). IPV derives in a deterioration of welfare, stress and frustrations which derive in violence towards children (Conger et al., 1992; Paxson and Waldfogel, 2003; Tang, 2006). Lukenheimer et al (2006) found evidence that marital satisfaction reduces the likelihood of physical punishment in the case of women but not for men.

Many other risk factors of physical punishment have been studied including characteristics of the parents, children and neighborhood. In this paper we are interested in three potential risk factors: gender, education and age. Many studies found that women are more likely than male to engage in physical violence against children which would be related to their higher frequency of contact (Jackson et al. 1999). Most of the evidence indicates that people of older age are less likely to support physical punishment and exert violence towards their children (Tajima, 2002; Douglas, 2006). Evidence about the relation between educational level and physical punishment is not robust. In the review of the literature, Tajima (2002) reports several studies that find that physical punishment is more likely for the highest educational level. However some studies conclude that parents of low educational level are more prone to physical punishment (Cappa and Khan, 2011; Jackson et al., 1999). Buntain-Ricklefs et al. (1994) did not find a significant relation between these variables.

3. Data and methodology

We used the survey *Encuesta de Situaciones Familiares* (ESF for its acronym) carried out in 2007 by a team of the Universidad de la República funded by the Research and Innovation National Agency in Uruguay (ANII) and the United Nations Children's Fund

(UNICEF). The main purpose of the ESF was to gather information about marriage and divorce, work, fertility, work, child-rearing and children's welfare outcomes, including education, health, and psycho-social development.

The database provides information of 1224 women aged 25 to 62, living in the metropolitan area of Montevideo. The survey was carried out through face to face interviews. Only people with children younger than 22 years old were inquired about disciplinary practices. This subsample consists of 826 women. Because of missing values we used a sample of 788 women.

When the woman was married, her husband was also surveyed. Thus, we also worked with 399 married men and 399 married women, separately.

The question that captures whether the individual beats his/her child (or not) is included in a block that inquires about different forms of punishment. Individuals were asked: "When your children behave badly or do not obey after telling them many times to stop, how often do you ...?" Under this, eight possible behaviors were inquired. The order of their appearance did not correspond to a gradation of behaviors under any social norm.¹ As a proxy of physical punishment we used the information reported by the third behavior mentioned: "beat them". The pre-coded answers were "never", "sometimes" and "frequently". We built a variable (*Beat*) that takes values 1, 2 or 3 and increases with the frequency.

In order to analyze the responses we estimated an oprobit model. The independent variables of the model are the following.

Beaten when a child. The survey asks "How often were you beaten as a child to be disciplined?". The possible answers were "never", "rarely", "frequently", "almost always", "always". We built a variable with values 1 to 5 that increases with frequency.

Beating as a disciplinary technique. The survey asks about the agreement or disagreement with a series of statements regarding attitudes and opinions towards motherhood, violence and marriage, among other topics. Pre-coded answers were: "strongly agree", "agree", "not agree nor disagree", "disagree" or "strongly disagree". We used the opinion about the

¹ The categories included: "ground them", "yell at them", "hit them", "forbid them from doing something they like", "take them away from the place they are", "kick them out of the house", "does not get angry at their children", "stop talking to them", "another frequent way of disciplining".

statement “Children have to be beaten to correct their behavior”. We built a variable ranging from 1 to 5 which increases with agreement.

Satisfaction with partner. The interviewee is asked to say if the relationship with his/her partner is “excellent”, “very good”, “good”, “fair” or “bad”. We built a dummy variable that takes value 1 when the marked option was “excellent”, “very good” or “good” and zero in other cases.

Other controls. We control for age, education and religion intensity of the respondent. In the case of education we distinguish three educational levels (up to completed primary school; secondary school, completed or not; tertiary education, completed or not). Religious intensity, a dummy variable that takes value 1 when the individual attends religious services at least once a month, was introduced interacted with attitude to physical punishment.

The description of the data is presented in Table 1. The average values for the total of women surveyed are similar to the sub-sample of married women. Around 70 percent of married women declare that they never beat their children. The proportion is higher among their husbands, reaching 83 percent ($p=0$ for the mean difference test). The percentage of those who declare frequent beating is very low for both genders. These results are consistent with the literature for other countries, both in the proportion and the gender difference.

Around 20 percent of men and women report to have been frequently beaten during childhood, without statistically significant differences between genders. There are also no gender differences regarding the opinion of the use of physical punishment as a disciplinary instrument. Around 15 percent of men and women have an indifferent or favorable opinion regarding its use.

Only 8 percent of women declare to have a regular or bad relationship with her partner. Instead, 26 percent of men make his statement ($p=0$ for the mean difference test).

Lastly, women are younger than their partners and have higher educational levels.

4. Results

We present the results of three different specifications using the total women sample in Table 2. In column 1 we include as independent variables “Beaten when child”, “Young” and dummy variables that capture the level of education. In column 2, we introduce “beating as a disciplinary technique” and in column 3 we add the interactive variable which accounts for the assistance to religious services.

We did not find significant effects of age and education in either of the specifications. In the three models the parameter of the variable which accounts for the intergenerational transmission of the use of physical punishment is positive and significant. In the complete model (column 3), the effect of “Beaten when a child” consists in increasing the probability of beating “sometimes” with respect to beat “never” in 5.2 percentage points (pp), while the passage of beating sometimes to doing it frequently has an effect of 0.7 pp. These results back the idea that the experience of physical punishment during childhood increases the probability of having similar attitudes when raising one's children.

The probability of beating one's own children also increases when the woman has a positive attitude towards physical punishment as a disciplinary instrument. The impact is positive and the marginal effect is 11.9 pp in the passage of beating sometimes with respect to never and 1.6 pp from sometimes to always. The effect of the positive attitude towards physical punishment increases with religious intensity.

In the upper panel of Table 3 we present the estimations for married women. In the estimation of model 3, the effects of “beaten when a child” and “beating as a disciplinary technique” have the same signs and similar magnitudes as for the total of women. However, we do not find statistically significant effects for religious intensity. We do find that younger women have a higher probability of using physical punishment.

In column 4 we present an estimation where we add the satisfaction with their partner as an independent variable. “Beating as a disciplinary technique” still has a positive effect with similar magnitude as for the total of women. The predicted probability of never beating her children is 0.825 when the respondent rejects physical punishment as disciplinary instrument and 0.259 when the woman highly agrees with the technique. The marginal effect of “beaten when a child” also continues to be positive but its value diminishes. Nevertheless, the predicted probability that a woman will not punish her son

drops from 0.774 to 0.469 when “beaten when a child” goes from 1 (never) to 5 (always), with the rest of the variables valued at their average. The results for men appear in the lower panel of table 3. As for their partners, we find that younger men are more likely to use physical punishment and that there are no effects from educational levels or partner satisfactions. As for the opinion about the use of physical punishment as a disciplinary instrument, there is a positive and significant effect. The marginal effect is 9pp going from never beating to doing it sometimes, but it is not significant between sometimes and always. Going from the most unfavorable position to the most favorable one implies a drop of 50pp in the probability of never beating. But, on the contrary of the findings for women, we do not find a significant effect in the variable “beaten when a child” for men. This suggests that men tend not to repeat the patterns of their own childhood with respect to corporal punishment.

5. Conclusion

The use of moderate physical violence while raising children is an extended practice, accepted as a disciplinary measure. Nevertheless, there is evidence that these practices during childhood produce negative effects in different areas of adult life. This motivates the analysis of the intergenerational transmission of this conduct. It is probable, though, that recent legislation and educational campaigns put increasing barriers to the continuity of these practices from generation to generation.

In our study for the Uruguayan case, we find that for women, the experience of physical punishment during childhood increases the probability of having similar attitudes when raising one's children. This probability increases when the woman has a positive attitude towards punishment as a disciplinary measure.

When focusing in married women, we find the same results. We additionally find that young married women have a higher probability of using physical punishment.

However, we do not find similar effects of past experiences in the case of men.

An interesting result for the design of specific policies towards the reduction of the use of physical punishment in children, is that the use of corporal punishment as a disciplinary instrument is related to its approval, both in men and women. This is important as, beyond the effect that the decontrol of parents might have when a child misbehaves, punishment is

backed up by a positive approval of the usefulness of the instrument. This is a key item which allows to point out that the focus of policies (educational, information-related, etc) related to the foundations of this behavior could diminish this type of problems in the household.

Lastly, the quality of the relationship between partners affects women but does not affect men. However, the analysis of this result needs to consider the differences of perception about the quality of the relationship regarding both members of the couple. There is a higher proportion of men which state that the relationship is not good (26 percent of men versus 4 percent of women).

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Table 1: Descriptive statistics (mean)

	Women	Married women	Married men
Beat			
<i>never</i>	70.8	70.3	82.5
<i>sometimes</i>	27.6	28.7	17.3
<i>frequently</i>	1.7	1.1	0.2
Beaten when a child			
<i>never</i>	37.5	39.6	25.1
<i>rarely</i>	37.6	38.1	56.3
<i>frequently</i>	13.1	12.0	12.2
<i>almost always</i>	6.8	5.5	3.4
<i>always</i>	5.0	4.8	2.9
Beating as a disciplinary technique			
<i>strongly disagree</i>	29.9	27.1	24.8
<i>disagree</i>	53.9	57.7	60.2
<i>not agree or disagree</i>	9.4	9.1	10.1
<i>agree</i>	6.0	5.5	4.6
<i>strongly agree</i>	0.8	0.5	0.4
Satisfaction with partner		92.3	74.0
Young	47.7	52.3	38.9
Primary education	21.4	21.8	19.6
Secondary education (omitted)	47.9	45.4	57.2
Tertiary education	30.2	32.2	21.3
Religious intensity	18.3	16.6	8.9

Table 2: Regressions and marginal effects for full sample of women

	(1)	(2)	(3)	Marginal effects for model (3)	
				beat=2	beat=3
<i>young</i>	0.112	0.075	0.096	0.026	0.003
<i>primary education</i>	0.213*	0.168	0.178	0.048	0.006
<i>tertiary education</i>	0.053	0.070	0.082	0.022	0.003
<i>beaten when a child</i>	0.226***	0.194***	0.197***	0.052***	0.007***
<i>beating as a disciplinary tech.</i>		0.469***	0.445***	0.119***	0.016***
<i>beaten * relig intensity</i>			0.113**	0.030**	0.004*
Observations	788	788	788		

Note: * Significant at 10%; ** Significant at 5%; *** Significant at 1%.

Table 3: Regressions and marginal effects for married women and men sample

	Married women				Marginal effects for model (4)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	beat=2	beat=3
<i>young</i>	0.299**	0.228	0.238*	0.232	0.065	0.006
<i>primary education</i>	-0.002	0.015	0.001	-0.019	-0.005	-0.000
<i>tertiary education</i>	0.108	0.115	0.135	0.123	0.035	0.003
<i>beaten when a child</i>	0.241***	0.233***	0.236***	0.224***	0.063***	0.005
<i>beating as a disciplinary tech.</i>		0.436***	0.422***	0.413***	0.117***	0.010**
<i>beaten * relig intensity</i>			0.121	0.102	0.029	0.003
<i>relationship with partner</i>				-0.424	-0.119	-0.011
Observations	399	399	399	399		

	Married Men				Marginal effects for model (4)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	beat=2	beat=3
<i>young</i>	0.295*	0.325*	0.329**	0.355**	0.080**	0.003
<i>primary education</i>	-0.001	0.003	0.003	-0.005	-0.001	-0.000
<i>tertiary education</i>	-0.018	0.021	0.021	0.049	0.011	0.000
<i>beaten when a child</i>	0.124	0.058	0.054	0.029	0.006	0.000
<i>beating as a disciplinary tech.</i>		0.440***	0.425***	0.402***	0.090***	0.003
<i>beaten * relig intensity</i>			0.067	0.080	0.018	0.000
<i>relationship with partner</i>				-0.287	-0.065	-0.002
Observations	399	399	399	399		

Note: * Significant at 10%; ** Significant at 5%; *** Significant at 1%.

Table 4: Predicted probabilities for married women and men, model (4)

	Beat					
	Married women			Married men		
	never	sometimes	frequently	never	sometimes	frequently
Beaten when a child						
<i>never</i>	0.775	0.220	0.006	0.834	0.163	0.003
<i>rarely</i>	0.708	0.282	0.010	0.828	0.170	0.003
<i>frequently</i>	0.633	0.351	0.016	0.821	0.176	0.003
<i>almost always</i>	0.552	0.422	0.026	0.813	0.183	0.003
<i>always</i>	0.469	0.490	0.041	0.806	0.190	0.004
Beating as a disciplinary technique						
<i>strongly disagree</i>	0.825	0.172	0.003	0.914	0.086	0.000
<i>disagree</i>	0.706	0.286	0.008	0.834	0.164	0.002
<i>not agree or disagree</i>	0.559	0.420	0.021	0.719	0.276	0.005
<i>agree</i>	0.402	0.547	0.051	0.574	0.411	0.016
<i>strongly agree</i>	0.260	0.635	0.106	0.418	0.543	0.039