

# INVESTIGATION OF LONGITUDINAL GROWTH OF PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN IN GREECE



**Stavroula Papadakou**<sup>1,2</sup>, Alexandra Palili<sup>2</sup>, , Konstantina Katopi<sup>2</sup>, Stavroula Gini<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*“Spyros Doxiadis” Diagnostic and Therapeutic Unit for Children, Athens, Greece*

<sup>2</sup>*Asclepieio Voulas General District Hospital, Paediatric Departments, Athens, Greece*

# INTRODUCTION – DEFINITION OF PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT



**Physical punishment is defined as** the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain but not injury, in order to modify its behavior according to the desires of the adult

## **Physical punishment may include:**

- ✓ beating
- ✓ spanking
- ✓ slapping
- ✓ pushing
- ✓ hitting with an object
- ✓ shaking
- ✓ pulling (ear, hair etc)
- ✓ biting
- ✓ imposing uncomfortable positions
- ✓ refusing satisfaction of biological needs, etc.

## **Two main features differentiate physical punishment from physical abuse:**

1. the severity of the act
2. the degree legitimacy-tolerance for the act within the cultural context

# INTRODUCTION – PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT



Characteristic Greek verbal folk expressions reflect the social acceptance of corporal punishment (“spanking”) as a means of education :

- ❖ *Stubborn child: "give him a cane and a rod"; ";et it hungry, so that he learns how to behave"*
- ❖ *"Spanking came from Paradise"*
- ❖ *"You need a lot of spanking"*
- ❖ *"He had the spanking of the Year"*



# INTRODUCTION – PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT AND ITS EFFECTS



- Parents adopt the imposition of corporal punishment as a means of teaching, education and discipline, modification of an undesirable behavior of their children, as exemplification and as a means to teach respect for rules;
- **It is important that although usually physical punishment does not lead to physical abuse, it is a fact that the abuse often starts as corporal punishment**

## **The negative consequences of using corporal punishment:**

- antisocial and delinquent behavior, psychological disorders and aggression, poor school performance.
- the child itself in the future may become a victim of abuse, since it has become “familiarized” with violence, or
- a person who has undergone physical punishment is very likely to use physical force, since this is established as an acceptable way of resolving disputes

# THE SITUATION IN GREECE



Up to 2005 relations between parents and children were governed by the provisions of family law. However, the law contained no explicit prohibition of corporal punishment



the Ombudsman, in his capacity as Children's Ombudsman, to issue a public statement in March 2005 in which it proposed legal regulations to the Ministry of Justice aiming at the amendment of that article



in 2006, Law (**3500/2006, Article 4, "Physical violence against minors"**) was adopted, which criminalized the exercise of any corporal punishment whatsoever onto children, as clearly defined in the Explanatory Memorandum of the relevant law

# OUR RESEARCH OF 2014



**The research aims at providing a comparative study (against a corresponding research of ours conducted in 2001) and investigating the change of attitudes and perceptions with regard to the use of corporal punishment on children, following its legislative abolition in 2006**



# METHODS



- The sample of this cohort study consisted of 300 children that appeared for examination at the outpatient department of our Clinic
- The study was conducted, **with identical methodology as in 2001**, through anonymous questionnaires, which were distributed to the parents by the Pediatrician in the clinic waiting room
- The questionnaire consisted of a total of total of 17 questions about:
  - ✓ *The members that make up the family (age, education, occupation of guardians, number and age of other children in the family).*
  - ✓ *The existence of help at home*
  - ✓ *The kind of physical punishment (a slap "on the cheek or the buttocks" or something more) and the frequency of application*
  - ✓ *The use of the method as "education"*
  - ✓ *The psychological status of parents*
  - ✓ *The compliance or not of the child with the guardian's desire*
  - ✓ *Their opinions on the criminalization of corporal punishment*
  - ✓ *The desire to receive help in the education of their child*
  - ✓ *The contribution of the pediatrician in the latter*

# RESULTS - COMPARISON



2001		2014	
Answered questionnaires	30%	Answered questionnaires	95%
<b>Use of physical punishment</b>	<b>82.85% of parents</b>	<b>Use of physical punishment</b>	<b>27,36% of parents</b>
Not use physical punishment-have help at home	56%	Not use physical punishment-have help at home	51%
Agree with the criminalization of the measure	95%	Agree with the criminalization of the measure	93%
seeking special education in the education of their children	47% (from them, 40% by their pediatrician)	seeking special education in the education of their children	52,63% (from them, 55,78% by their pediatrician)

# DISCUSSION



**1. The results of the study suggest that this time a lot more parents regards to 2001 completed the questionnaire and accepted to talk about the issue of corporal punishment (correspondance 95%)**

- *Probably, this is no a "taboo" matter for many parents, as it was in the past who seem to be filled with psychic stress if they accept that they act likewise*
- *The law of 2006 is very likely to sensitize public opinion as for the modification of existing traditional concepts*



# DISCUSSION



**2. In Greece, adopting legislation on the explicit prohibition of corporal punishment as a necessary and inevitable process of educating children, brought about a major shift in public opinion, since the use of force dropped significantly since 2001.**

**27.36% of parents use corporal punishment in 2014 against 83% in 2001**

- *This context decisively contributes to the protection, promotion and defense of their rights*
- *Reduction can be attributed both to the criminalization of corporal punishment per se and to the public debate and awareness which was triggered on the occasion of the issuance of the law*
- *The deterrent role of the law is very most important of its punitive*

# DISCUSSION



## 3. Noteworthy is the positive contribution of the existence of a supportive person at home

- *it seems that the majority of the parents who do not exercise corporal punishment on their children have help and support at home by some person*
- *this finding probably correlates positively with better management of physical fatigue, with less mental wear, with effective anger management and with maintaining calmness and favorable social interaction*



# DISCUSSION



**4. the majority of parents seem to need more complete-comprehensive information on the issues of children's rights in general and on the use of physical punishment and on the methods of behavior modification and education in particular**

- *Awareness and/or prevention programs could be delivered by professional staff at the community level*
- *The fact that, when asked, 55,78% % of the parents said that they would seek assistance by a Pediatrician, shows that pediatricians have increased responsibility*



# CONCLUSION



**a lot more parents regards to 2001 completed the questionnaire and accepted to talk about the issue of corporal punishment**

**in Greece, adopting legislation on the explicit prohibition of corporal punishment, the use of corporal punishment dropped significantly from 83% in 2001 to 27.36%**

**positive contribution of the existence of a supportive person at home**

**the majority of parents seem to need more complete information on the issues, particularly from the Pediatrician**

# *THANK YOU*

