

Spare the Rod, Calm the Child

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Children who are spanked early in life are more likely to develop aggressive behavior, even when you account for possible confounding factors, according to a new study co-authored by researchers in the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.



Catherine Taylor, an assistant professor of community health sciences, says frequently spanking children at age 3 increases the odds of higher levels of aggression at age 5. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

The study, "Mothers' Spanking of 3-Year-Old Children and Subsequent Risk of Children's Aggressive Behavior," will appear in the May issue of *Pediatrics*.

"Toddlers that are spanked more frequently at age 3 are at increased risk for being more aggressive at age 5," says Catherine Taylor, assistant professor of community health sciences and lead author of the study. "We found this to be true even after taking into account other factors that might have explained this association such as the parents' level of stress, depression, use of drugs or alcohol and the presence of other aggression within the family."

Signs of aggression included behaviors such as arguing, screaming, cruelty, bullying, destroying things, fighting and frequently threatening others.

Study authors asked nearly 2,500 mothers how often they spanked their 3-year-old child in the past month. Almost half of the mothers reported no spanking in the previous month, while 27.9 percent reported spanking one or two times and 26.5 percent reported spanking more than twice.

"There are ways to discipline children effectively that do not involve hitting them and that can actually lower their risk for being more aggressive," Taylor says.

"Parents don't have to rely on spanking to get the results that they want. If they avoid spanking but instead use effective, non-physical types of discipline, their child has a better chance of being healthier and behaving better later."

The [study](#) is co-authored Janet C. Rice, associate professor of biostatistics, and researchers at other institutions.