

Coalition on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth

To: Endorsers of the *Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth*

From: Pamela Mountenay Cain, Chair, Coalition on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth
Dennise Albrecht, Joint Statement Secretariat, Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario

Date: July 26, 2011

Re: Updates on Canadian and international developments

Memo content provided by Ron Ensom and Joan Durrant

Global Progress toward Protecting Children from Physical Punishment

The international response to physical punishment of children continues to gain momentum at regional, national, and community levels. Activities span legal, research, education, human rights, and advocacy initiatives. The most comprehensive source of information about international activities is the [Global Initiative to End Corporal Punishment of Children](#).

The first international conference on physical punishment of children was held in June 2011 in Dallas, Texas. The [Global Summit on Ending Corporal Punishment and Promoting Positive Discipline](#) brought together 130 people—activists, researchers, educators, lawyers, policy makers, youth leaders—from 22 countries. Presentations, discussions, the conference resolution, and plans are posted on the Global Summit website. Progress on plans will be reported on the website. The Canadian *Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth* was seen as a model national initiative. Planning is under way for a second Global Summit in two years, possibly in Africa or India. This first Global Summit will likely be regarded, one day, as a milestone in global progress toward ending physical punishment of children.

The Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children, Marta Santos Pais, has submitted her [second annual report](#) to the UN Human Rights Council. It highlights the recent prohibition of physical punishment of children in all settings in three more countries and high level regional commitments to pursue law reform. It calls for increased efforts to protect children from all forms of violence in law and, in countries which have achieved law reform, further efforts to narrow the gap between law and practice. The [Special Representative's website](#) has just been launched.

Thirty countries have now banned physical punishment of children in all settings including homes and schools. Since our last Memo, Liechtenstein, Poland, Tunisia, Kenya, and South Sudan have taken this major step to protect their young citizens. Nations that prohibit physical punishment of children in schools (108) outnumber those that still permit it (89). With India's recent prohibition, more than 60% of the world's children are now protected in law from physical punishment in their schools.

[*Global Pathways to Abolishing Physical Punishment: Realizing Children's Rights*](#) (Joan Durrant & Anne Smith) was recently published. It describes the international movement to redefine physical punishment as violence and a violation of children's rights. It will serve as a sourcebook for scholars and advocates around the world who are interested in the many dimensions of physical punishment and its elimination.

A Global Information Network on Physical Punishment has been launched. It facilitates the sharing of research articles, news items, interviews, and related information about physical punishment of children and its elimination. If you would like to join this information sharing network, send an email to [GINPP](#).

Repeal of Section 43 of Canada's Criminal Code

In March 2010, Sen. Hervieux-Payette tabled another private member's bill to repeal section 43 of the *Criminal Code*. The bill, [S-204](#), died at second reading when the recent federal election was called. It was the senator's fifth bill to repeal or amend s. 43. Her first three bills, S-21 (2004), S-207 (2006), S-209 (2007), and this most recent bill were identical at tabling and sought simple repeal of s. 43 with a one-year delay before coming into force to permit public education. Her fourth bill, also named S-207, was tabled with the same amended wording given Bill S-209 at committee review. None of these bills reached the House of Commons. All five died at various stages of reading in the Senate due to election calls and prorogations of Parliament. Bill S-204 is the 12th private member's bill to repeal or amend s. 43 since 1994. Six were tabled in the House of Commons and six in the Senate. The governments of the day—Liberal and Conservative—have opposed every bill ([Repeal 43 Committee](#)).

Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children Report

This November, the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC) will present a report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in preparation for the Committee's next official review, in June 2012, of Canada's implementation of the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Canada submitted its last report ([canadas-third-and-fourth-report-on-crc](#)) in 2009. A major focus of the CCRC report is violence against children in the family, schools, community, and sport ([working-document-free-from-violence-summary](#)). It recommends that Canada, "Adopt federal legislation to prohibit all forms of violence against children, including repeal of section 43 of the *Criminal Code*, amend provincial laws to prohibit the use of force for correction in all settings, and invest in helping parents and other authorities use more effective forms of discipline, based on evidence-based research." All three territories and eight provinces prohibit the use of physical punishment in their schools. Canada will have met a key obligation of the *Convention* if/when Alberta and Manitoba pass legislation to prohibit physical punishment in their schools.

Research

The Coalition continues to monitor research on physical punishment. Peer reviewed studies published since publication of the *Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth* in 2004 consistently reinforce and extend the findings of the research it summarized. Research published on physical punishment since publication of the *Joint Statement* will be reviewed in its forthcoming second edition. The following summaries of a few studies reflect some of the important research published since our last Memo.

Intergenerational cycle of violence (Simons & Wurtele, 2010): Children frequently spanked by parents who experienced similar spanking during childhood and perceive its use as acceptable, in turn, advocate spanking as a disciplinary method and prefer aggressive conflict resolution strategies with siblings and peers. The authors call this a generational “side effect” of spanking. They advise practitioners to encourage parents to avoid using physical punishment, and note that this could lead to a change in the attitudes and behaviours of the next generation of parents.

Physical punishment of children and intimate partner violence (Taylor et al, 2010): The most prevalent patterns studied of co-occurrence of intimate partner aggression or violence (IPAV) and physical punishment involved both parents as aggressors toward each other (bilateral IPAV) or toward their young child. The presence of bilateral IPAV essentially doubled the odds that one or both parents would use physical punishment. The authors note that despite the American Academy of Pediatrics’ recommendations against the use of physical punishment, its use remains common in the USA. They advise prevention efforts to take account of patterns of co-occurring aggression in families, given that adult victims of IPAV—including even minor aggression between parents—have increased odds of using physical punishment with their children.

Parents’ norms, expectations and attitudes toward physical punishment (Taylor et al, 2011): Having a positive attitude toward the use of physical punishment is a strong predictor of its use and thus an important target for its reduction. This attitude was examined using the “theory of planned behavior,” which suggests that parents’ perception of social norms and expectations regarding physical punishment shapes their attitudes and behaviour. A survey of parents revealed that the strongest predictors of positive attitudes toward use of physical punishment were, in order of power, their perceptions of: (1) its approval by professionals, (2) the norms of its use, (3) its approval by family and friends, and (4) the positive and negative expected outcomes of its use. The authors discuss the need for targeted efforts to shift the messaging of professionals who influence parents’ use of physical punishment; and for universal efforts, such as public education, to educate parents and the general public about the high risk/benefit ratio for using physical punishment and the effectiveness of non-physical forms of child discipline.

International studies of child disciplinary practices in the home:

A 2010 [UNICEF study](#) examined child disciplinary practices in a range of 33 low- and middle-income countries comprising about 10% of the total population of children in developing countries. Non-violent practices were the most common form of discipline used with over 90% of children. However, violent disciplinary practices were also extremely common. On average, three in four children between ages 2 and 14 were subjected to some kind of violent discipline. While almost three in four experienced psychological aggression, about half were subjected to physical punishment, the most severe forms of which (hitting the head, ears, face, or hitting hard and repeatedly) were less common and felt by about 17% of children. For the most part, households employed a combination of violent and non-violent disciplinary practices, reflecting caregivers’ motivation to control children’s behaviour by any means. Households used only non-violent disciplinary methods with about 20% of children, but the prevalence of purely non-violent discipline ranged from a low of 4% (Cameroon, Yemen) to a high of 57% (Bosnia, Herzegovina). Physical punishment was not considered necessary by most caregivers. Less than one quarter of mothers/primary caregivers believed physical punishment was a necessary part of raising children in half of the countries surveyed. In only two countries did a majority consider physical punishment necessary. In about half, there was no difference in the prevalence of violent discipline between boys and girls. The analysis suggests that promoting broad changes in

attitudes and norms regarding the need for physical punishment in child rearing can help reduce levels of violent discipline. Given that a majority of mothers and primary caregivers in most countries already reject physical punishment in theory, if not in practice, a comprehensive strategy is needed to prevent violence against children. Such a strategy would include two key actions: (1) ensuring legal prohibition of all forms of violence against children in all settings, including within the home, and provision of support for effective enforcement measures; and (2) development of national strategies to address violence against children in all its forms, supported by quality services for the protection, recovery, and reintegration of children, and by child-sensitive counselling and reporting and complaint mechanisms.

Another international study (Runyan et al, 2010) surveyed variations in harsh child discipline by parents in 19 communities in Brazil, Chile, Egypt, India, Philippines, and the United States. Physical and verbal punishments of children were found to be common in these representative high-, middle-, and low-income communities around the world. The forms and rates of punishment varied among countries and communities within countries. Nearly all parents used non-violent discipline and verbal or psychological punishment. Physical punishment was also used in at least 55% of the families. There was a wide range across communities in rates of spanking by hand and use of objects. Extremely harsh methods of physical punishment, such as burning or smothering, were rare in all countries. Twenty percent of parents in nine communities admitted shaking children younger than two years of age.

In tracking the continuing stream of research on physical punishment, one is struck not only by the consistency of the scope and nature of its personal and societal harm but by the consistency and strength of calls to action by researchers. In journals where caution has been historically exercised about the general applicability of specific findings and need for action, there is now a consistent and clarion call to action. The studies summarized above are typical of this evolution.

Canadian Joint Statement Update

More than 400 organizations representing most sectors of the Canadian community have endorsed the *Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth* to date. Many organizations disseminate its information to their constituencies and networks and reference it in their education and advocacy.

Education and sport leaders are finding the *Joint Statement* valuable. The education and sport/recreation sectors directly touch and influence almost all of the children and most parents in Canada. The *Joint Statement* has been studied, cited, disseminated, and endorsed by national coaching and sport organizations; and by public and Catholic and English and French school boards in eight provinces and one territory, the Nunavut Department of Education, and private schools. We hope to more fully engage these sectors, and would appreciate your bringing the *Joint Statement* to the attention of any sport/recreation organizations, school boards, and private schools you know.

For information and to download the *Joint Statement* and related documents, see www.cheo.on.ca/en/physicalpunishment. If you would like a printed copy of the *Joint Statement*, or have questions about the national initiative it supports, email jointstatement@cheo.on.ca, or fax 613-738-4866, or call 613-737-2393 #4106.