

**JUST WHO DO WE THINK CHILDREN ARE?  
NEW ZEALANDERS' ATTITUDES ABOUT CHILDREN, CHILDHOOD AND  
PARENTING: AN ANALYSIS OF SUBMISSIONS ON THE BILL TO REPEAL  
SECTION 59 OF THE CRIMES ACT 1961**

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**Abstract**

A research project analysed a sample of the submissions to Parliament in 2006 on the Bill to repeal section 59 of the Crimes Act 1961. S.59 had provided a defence to parents accused of assaulting their children, the defence being that they used force for the purpose of correction. The project examined two particular contrasting social viewpoints of children -- children as "human beings" and as "human becomings" -- and whether these two viewpoints were implicated in people's views on the use of physical punishment. The research hypothesis was that people who advocate the use of physical punishment are more likely to conceptualise childhood as a phase of development, where the child is on his/her way to becoming an adult, unable to reason and in need of constant guidance from adults; in other words, that children are human becomings. Alongside this, we hypothesised that people who see childhood as a complete state in its own right, and see children as fully developed at whichever age and stage they are in, having full human rights and contributing to society -- the human beings view -- are more likely to reject physical punishment. We found that submitters expressing a view of children as human beings were more likely to oppose physical punishment and support repeal, whereas people who saw children as human becomings favoured physical punishment and opposed the Bill. There were also gender and location differences among the submitters. Lessons for parent education include the need to examine and address people's deepest beliefs and attitudes about children and childhood.

**INTRODUCTION**

This paper first describes two particular contrasting views of children and childhood. It then describes a research project that used the case of physical punishment of children to explore New Zealanders' views about children, childhood, and the roles, rights and responsibilities of parents and children. The research team analysed a sample of 170 written submissions (about one-tenth of the total submissions) sent to the New Zealand Parliament's Justice and Electoral Select Committee in 2006 on the Bill to repeal Section 59 of the Crimes Act. Both quantitative and qualitative results are presented. The concluding discussion includes the implications of the findings for children's human rights and for non-violent parenting education programmes.

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**<sup>1</sup> Acknowledgements**

The research team acknowledges Save the Children New Zealand, which funded the research, and thanks the Parliamentary Library and the Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand, which provided access to the submissions.

Until 2007, Section 59 of the Crimes Act 1961 stated, under the heading “Domestic discipline”:

Every parent of a child and ... every person in the place of the parent of a child is justified in using force by way of correction towards the child, if the force used is reasonable in the circumstances.

Section 59 thus provided a defence for parents charged with assaulting their children; the defence was that they were using reasonable force for the purpose of correction.

## TWO VIEWS OF CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD

Over the past 20 years, as part of debates within the social sciences about the nature of childhood, sociological theorists have developed social constructionist views of the child (Waksler 1991, Corsaro 1997, James and Prout 1997, Qvortrup 1994). In viewing childhood as a social construction, earlier views of the child became open to challenge and new views began to develop.

Earlier predominant ideas of children as on the way to adulthood had focused on their socialisation into an adult world, or their development -- both physical and psychological -- into adults. Socialisation is something that happens *to* the child; generally an adult-directed process whereby the child is shaped and guided to become a well-adjusted member of adult society. In the developmental view, the growing child is understood in terms of progress in acquiring emotional and cognitive skills and knowledge. In this view, children need to be “reared, raised etc. if they are to become adults just like us, if they are to support the world we’ve made, if they are to ‘outgrow’ or ‘get over’ their childish behaviour” (Waksler 1991:64).

The development of social constructionist views of children challenged accepted frameworks and ideas about what children are, one of the outcomes being a new focus on children as “social actors”:

Childhood is recognised as a structural form and children are social agents who contribute to the reproduction of childhood and society through their negotiations with adults and through their creative production of a series of peer cultures with other children. (Corsaro 1997:43)

In this view, children are already fully developed human beings, who have rights, who can and do make decisions about their lives, and who contribute to society. Qvortrup further argues that if children are indeed social actors, like adults, then the relationship between adults and children is most likely not regulated philosophically, but by power and interests (Qvortrup 1994). The two divergent views were pithily summarised by Qvortrup as follows:

children are “human beings” whose status as children *now* is just as important as their future adulthood; who are active social beings, engaged in everyday real life, and requiring the same respect that adults receive  
children are “human becomings”, where the key aspect of children is that they are not yet competent, not yet able to reason, not yet knowledgeable, and in need of constant guidance from adults. (Qvortrup 1994:4).

Looking at these issues using the case of physical punishment is instructive. In their review of the literature on physical punishment, Phillips and Alderson found two underlying reasons for

the apparent anomaly whereby, in spite of evidence that smacking is unnecessary and dangerous, it is “widely practised and accepted in Britain”. These reasons were beliefs that children are human beings rather than full human beings, and support for parents’ rights over children’s human rights (Phillips and Alderson 2003:282). Views of children as human beings and as human beings appear to co-exist within New Zealand. We wondered how they might affect people’s support for, or opposition to, the use of physical punishment here.

## POLICY ABOUT CHILDREN

Increasing acceptance of new views of childhood and concerns about the consequences of children’s relative powerlessness have led to such international developments as the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC), and, within New Zealand, the 2002 Whole Child Approach (Ministry of Social Development 2002b), the Agenda for Children (Ministry of Social Development 2002a) and the Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa (Ministry of Youth Affairs 2002).

In the Ministers’ foreword to the 2002 Agenda for Children (Agenda), they wrote: “We need to treat children as respected citizens who can contribute to society now and not just as ‘adults in the making’”(Ministry of Social Development 2002a:2). This view, and the Agenda’s promotion of the “whole child” approach, constitutes “a new view of children and childhood”. The view is reflected in research and policy that emphasises:

... the need to consider children as social actors, stakeholders with participation rights, and not just passive dependants [and which] argues children’s voices, views and rights need to be ... central to policy and research conceptions of children. (Smithies and Bidrose 2000:51)

While the new view of children may have currency with some policy makers and child welfare practitioners, it is by no means universally or even widely held among these groups, nor among New Zealand’s communities.

The different ways of viewing children have implications for how children should be raised and what sorts of rights children should have within society. In the developing adult view of childhood, where children are seen as on the road to adulthood, their status as children *now* is less important than what they *will become* in the future. Viewing children as social actors and childhood as a structural form has implications for the roles and relationships of parents and children. Here, adults are no longer seen as all-knowing and all-powerful, and children are no longer viewed as incompetent, ignorant and unable or unwilling to reason, or in need of constant adult guidance in their development towards becoming complete human adults.

## RESEARCHING NEW ZEALANDERS’ VIEWS OF CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD

Our research made use of a body of original material that became available in 2006, and which provided a convenient sample for analysis. This was the large number of written submissions (over 1,700) received up to 28 February 2006 by the Justice and Electoral Select Committee of the New Zealand Parliament on the Crimes (Abolition of Force as a Justification for Child Discipline) Amendment Bill. The Bill’s intention was to repeal Section 59 of the Crimes Act. (The full research report is Debski et al. 2007.)

We developed a hypothesis which we would test by examining the submissions using Qvortup’s (1994) summary terms as a framework. Our research hypothesis was that people who advocate the use of physical punishment are likely to conceptualise childhood as a phase

of development, where the child is on his/her way to becoming an adult; in other words, children are “human becomings”. The logic of this view is that since children are less than adult, not yet competent and reasonable human beings, or even in some cases, sinful, then adults can assume a right and a duty not only to guide but also to chastise if necessary, as the child is unable to be reasoned with and is in need of correction.

We also hypothesised that, on the other hand, people who see childhood as a complete state in its own right are more likely to reject physical punishment. In this view children's competencies are valued and children are viewed as able to understand others' perspectives and to respond in sensitive and reasoned ways to others, according to their abilities. A children's rights perspective fits within this view, since here children are perceived as full and complete "human beings", who therefore command the same human rights as any other people. Of course children always need care and nurturance appropriate to their development.

One of the key principles for government policy and practice as outlined in the Agenda is that policies and practices should be consistent with the UNCROC. At the time of the research, although New Zealand was a signatory of UNCROC, and although the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child had twice recommended the repeal of Section 59, in 1997 and 2003 (Global Initiative to End all Corporal Punishment of Children<sup>2</sup>), it remained in force. The Bill for repeal was a member's, not a government, Bill.

## METHODS

We accessed details of 1,716 written submissions using the collections available at the Parliamentary Library, and from the Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand office (the Bill's sponsor was Sue Bradford, Green Party Member of Parliament). Some submissions were very brief; others were much longer or included many pages of supplementary material.<sup>3</sup> We examined all of the submissions available to us and noted whether they were from organisations or individuals/families, and whether they supported or opposed the Bill: 164 of the submissions were either duplicates, unclear about their position on the Bill, missing, or otherwise unusable. Table 1 lists the details of the remaining 1,552 submissions.

**Table 1 Submissions supporting and opposing the Bill to repeal Section 59: Crimes (Abolition of Force as a Justification for Child Discipline) Amendment Bill**

Type of submitter	Support the Bill	Oppose the Bill	Total
<b>Organisations</b>	185	25	210
<b>Individuals</b>	194	1,148	1,342
<b>Total</b>	379	1,173	1,552

Taking four groups (organisations in support, organisations opposed, individuals in support and individuals opposed to the Bill), we generated a random sample within each group, yielding 150 individual/family submissions (75 opposed to and 75 in support of the Bill) and

<sup>2</sup> *Global Initiative to End all Corporal Punishment of Children*. Global progress: New Zealand. [www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/frame.html](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/frame.html) Accessed 2 October 2007.

<sup>3</sup> The report by the Justice and Electoral Select Committee noted that it had received “1,718 submissions on the bill. The majority (1,471) came from individuals. Of these, 385 submitters identified themselves as parents or caregivers, and 76 as children or young people. We received 247 submissions from organisations.” (Parliament: Justice and Electoral Select Committee 2006:2).

20 organisation submissions (10 opposed to and 10 in support of the Bill). Thus we examined 170 submissions (comprising 526 pages) in detail for the study. This sample represented approximately one-tenth of the total submissions, and the number of individual and organisational submissions in the sample reflected their proportions in the total submissions. We reported both quantitative and qualitative analyses of the material.

A list of categories was developed for the analysis from the literature, from a scan of the submissions and from discussion within the team, and then tested and refined over a period of weeks. Data extracted from the submissions, where they were present, included:

- type of submitter -- individual or organisation
- position on the Bill -- support or oppose
- support or oppose physical punishment of children
- demographic details (gender, age and life stage, city or region, etc.)
- submitter's perspective (as a parent, a professional, etc.)
- views about :
  - nature of children
  - nature of parenthood
  - rights and responsibilities of children, parents and government.

Within the category on the nature of children, the researchers looked at whether submitters wrote of children as:

- bad, wilful, sinful, naughty and disrespectful, or as good, intelligent, eager to learn and knowledgeable
- able to be reasoned with and explained to or not; having cognitive ability or not
- having the status of “object” or “subject”: children are seen as objects if, for example, they “need training”, “can’t think for themselves”, “don’t know right from wrong”, “need to be controlled”, etc.; and are seen as subjects if they “can reason”, “know right from wrong”, “can learn” or if “parents can explain things to children”.

## FINDINGS

Many submitters did not give information on topics we were interested in. Even basic demographic information was not always available (e.g. if submissions were sent by email without a physical address we could not identify the submitter's region).

Although submitters clearly either supported or opposed the Bill, most did not comment on the nature of children. Thirteen wrote that children are bad, wilful, and sinful; six submitters thought that children were good and intelligent. For nine submitters children did not have cognitive ability and could not be reasoned with, whereas 13 submitters thought that children had cognitive ability and could be reasoned with.

In 41 submissions, using the categories listed above, children were considered as human beings whereas in 50 submissions they were considered as human beings. Although this total of 91 submissions is only slightly more than half the total number of submissions analysed (170), there was a very distinct difference in the support or opposition to the Bill among these submitters.

**Table 2 Submitter's position on the Crimes (Abolition of Force as a Justification for Child Discipline) Amendment Bill and their view on children's status**

<b>View of children</b>	<b>Support the Bill</b>	<b>Oppose the Bill</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Human becomings</b>	2 (5%)	39 (95%)	41
<b>Human beings</b>	48 (96%)	2 (4%)	50
<b>No mention / unclear</b>	35 (44%)	44 (56%)	79
<b>Total</b>	85	85	170

Note: Pearson Chi-Square, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) 0.000.

Analysis of the submissions was in the nature of a secondary analysis since submitters were not specifically addressing the question of how they viewed childhood. For this reason, particular care was taken in grouping the submissions into human beings or human becomings categories. We categorised statements from submitters that described children as active agents into the beings category, and developing / unable to reason into the becomings category. Because of the potential to over-emphasise the fit between submitters' meanings and our categories, the research team repeatedly discussed the meanings implied in submissions and addressed this challenge by treating the material conservatively, confining allocation to different categories on the basis of certain specific trigger words.

As can be seen in Table 2, for those 91 submissions indicating views of children as either human becomings or human beings, the results support our hypothesis. Those people who saw children as human becomings were more likely to oppose the Bill and support physical punishment, and those who saw children as human beings were more likely to support the Bill and oppose physical punishment.

Some submitters also conceptualised children as either innately bad or as innocent. Those who saw children as innately bad were likely to support physical punishment; those who viewed the child as innocent saw the need for the child to be protected. This was also reflected in views on parenting practices, with some believing that parents need to have their authority backed up with force, while others saw the need for parents to protect children and model good behaviour to them. Submitters who supported repeal of Section 59 were more likely to discuss children's rights and those who opposed repeal were more likely to discuss parents' rights.

Below are quotations selected to indicate submitters' diverse views. Some spoke of the essential nature of children:

"We believe that every child is born with a sinful (rebellious) nature, and that one of the duties of the parent is to curb rebellious expressions by the child."

"Small children are not deliberately naughty."

"Children by nature lack the wisdom and self-control needed to survive and prosper in this life, and in the life to come. In fact, they naturally tend to the opposite."

"Children are children because they haven't yet learned how they ought to behave."

"To allow children the 'dignity of risk' to express themselves and challenge boundaries, including boundaries of behaviour, is a natural part of growing up for all children. Disabled children are more likely to be denied that dignity of risk."

Some submitters discussed how children learn appropriate behaviour through physical punishment:

“Children, from being smacked, will learn boundaries. They will learn these boundaries if they have rules set when they are young.”

“It is a fact that children need physical/corporal discipline for the purpose of correction and training.”

“Children need to be forced to do the right thing again and again so that it becomes habitual.”

Others spoke of children learning appropriate behaviour by imitating their parents:

“Children model themselves on us as parents.”

“Children learn mostly from example, so if they are hit, they will hit others.”

There were contrasting views about the use of force in child-rearing:

“If you cannot use force, you cannot back up your authority.”

“Use of reasonable force is at times necessary to discipline children and is mandated by God.”

“Physical punishment either teaches children to use violence to solve problems or in some cases, like mine, destroys the child's feelings of self-worth for a very long time.”

“Every parent has had the right since time began to smack their children and bring them up to mind.”

Some submitters opposed to physical punishment reflected on their own childhoods in support of their opposition to physical punishment. They discussed the great harm it had caused to them and their family relationships. The reflections of this group sometimes described how they had felt as children when being hit by their parents.

“[After the smacking] all I knew was that I'd been assaulted by someone who had total control of my life.”

“The more lasting pain was emotional; it destroyed my relationship with my mother permanently and resulted in loss of confidence and self-esteem which has affected me all my life.”

Some submitters discussed rights:

“Children have the right to be protected from physical abuse as much as adults.”

“Children today do not need more rights. They need more respect for authority and realise consequences for their actions.”

“Our children deserve the same rights currently afforded to adults and animals in New Zealand.”

There were gender differences in the individual/couple submissions, with more women than men in our sample: women (82), men (39), couples/families (21) and gender unknown (8). The majority of women submitters in our sample supported repeal (53 out of 82), and the majority of men opposed repeal (25 out of 39).

There were differences in view between people from cities and those from rural areas (as indicated by an RD -- Rural Delivery -- address). For example, of 34 submitters from

Auckland, 19 supported the Bill; of 29 from Wellington, 23 supported it. Of 17 with RD addresses, however, 13 were opposed to the Bill.

## DISCUSSION

### Implications of the Findings

There are implications from our findings for organisations and people who work with families and children. Numerous government and non-government agencies, such as the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) and End Physical Punishment of Children (EPOCH New Zealand<sup>4</sup>) and their staff or supporters have long had an interest in reducing family violence, including the use of physical punishment and smacking of children. The research relates to an area of social and family life in which a profound social and cultural change is sought. Generations of accepted practice in childrearing across all groups were challenged by the proposed changes to Section 59.

The law change of 2007, the Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act, removed the old Section 59 but introduced new provisions relating to restraint and other use of force with children. However, there is now no defence for the use of force *for the purpose of correction*, and, as can be seen in the numbers of submitters opposing the Bill (Table 1), there were many citizens who objected even to this change.

### A Focus on Children's Rights

One of the implications of our findings is the importance of promoting views of childhood as a state of being rather than a state of becoming. If children continue to be viewed as in a state of becoming, they may be more vulnerable to abuse and also to treatment that is less respectful than that which is available to adults. Promoting the view of children as human beings in the wider society (not just to parents) has the potential to bring about more respect for children generally, and to increase social pressures on parents to treat their children respectfully.

When children are viewed as full human beings they are more likely to command the same respect as adults. In their discussion of human rights, Geiringer and Palmer (2007) note the interaction of rights and needs, and how the language of rights adds power to the moral or legal obligations others have to the needs of a rights-bearer. Waksler (1991) describes how the view of the child as developing into something implies that children are lacking (e.g. in language ability or maturity), have less experience, and are less serious, less important etc. than adults. Such a view of children as less than adult has implications for how parents might treat children and how they might interpret children's behaviour, and for the sorts of parenting techniques they might find appropriate.

In past decades the women's movement addressed similar issues when women were viewed as "other", or seen as aberrant when the male was considered (by men *and* women) as the norm. If parents consider adult as the norm for human, then children may be seen as an aberrant other.

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<sup>4</sup> EPOCH New Zealand, [www.epochnz.org.nz/](http://www.epochnz.org.nz/). Accessed 1 October 2007.

The ideas of rights figured in the findings. Those who supported the repeal of Section 59 were more likely to consider children's rights, and those who opposed repeal were more likely to mention parents' rights. Many child- and family-support agencies advocate for children's right to live free from violence and abuse, in accordance with UNCROC. They see physical punishment and the law that provided an excuse for hitting children as part of the spectrum of violence inflicted on children.

The Agenda for Children (MSD 2002a) noted that "the concept of 'children's rights'" is not well understood. For example, children's participation rights are often seen as undermining parents' power (MSD 2002a:14). However, children's and parents' rights are not necessarily in conflict (Commissioner for Children 1999). Our findings suggest that the promotion of children's rights to equal treatment with adults is likely to develop alongside a view of children as complete human beings who, like adults, develop and shape both childhood and the wider society.

### A Focus on Deeply Held Ideas and Beliefs

The Ministry of Health's (MoH) *Family Violence Intervention Guidelines on Child and Partner Abuse* (2002) lists "high risk indicators associated with child abuse". These include family factors such as "parent administers harsh or unusual punishment", and "Caregiver's perceptions of child" such as "'bad', 'naughty', 'manipulative', 'difficult'". Some submitters saw children as innately bad or as sinful. Others viewed children as innocents. These views of children clearly have implications for the promotion of non-physical child-rearing, and for abuse. There is a certain perverse logic, if one views a child as naturally naughty, in the belief that he/she deserves to be smacked. However, a view of the child as both exploring and actively and creatively contributing to the development of the social world leads logically and easily to quite different parenting approaches.

A key question is how far the law change and any subsequent education and social marketing might change people's attitudes and behaviour. There is some evidence from longitudinal studies in Sweden following the 1979 ban on the use of corporal punishment there (Durrant 2000, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs [Sweden] 2001) that the law change, combined with a public education campaign, was effective in reducing Swedes' commitment to physical punishment.

There are many models and theories about how behavioural changes occur, or whether changes in attitude precede changes in behaviour, including social cognitive or learning theory, the health belief model, theory of reasoned action, theory of planned behaviour, among others (Elder et al. 1999). These models and theories arise from the literature on behavioural change, health promotion and social marketing. Fanslow, in her report on key issues and directions for family violence work, suggests that to make advances in preventing family violence, one of the tasks for research is to "unpack core beliefs that can underpin violent behaviour" and "help to work through conceptual issues" (Fanslow 2005:86). Fanslow discusses the community readiness model, which identifies stages of community preparedness for change in terms of social marketing. This "provides a framework for assessing the social contexts in which individual behavior takes place and measuring changes in readiness related to community-wide efforts" (Kelly et al. 2003:411--2).

Nine stages of community readiness are listed:

- no awareness

- denial/resistance
- vague awareness
- pre-planning
- preparation
- initiation
- stabilisation
- confirmation/expansion
- high level of community ownership.

Findings from our research suggest that while many of the submissions reviewed showed that their authors were aware of and concerned about child abuse, those opposed to repeal of Section 59 considered physical punishment was entirely distinct from and did not in any way lead to child abuse. Many considered physical punishment as absolutely necessary in child-rearing. We suggest that submitters who see no connection between physical punishment and child abuse could be considered in the no awareness or denial/resistance stages. Kelly et al. suggest strategies to address denial/resistance and no or vague awareness, including “interpersonal contacts and media advocacy to build awareness, legitimacy and a core group of supporters within the community” (Kelly et al. 2003:417).

Currently, government and non-government parent education programmes support positive parenting approaches (e.g. Strategies with Kids -- Information for Parents, or SKIP<sup>5</sup>). These explicitly or implicitly emphasise alternatives to physical punishment and encourage parents to avoid smacking or hitting children. The programmes generally aim to persuade parents to use alternative methods in the belief that they work well in terms of creating a happy family life and well-disciplined children. They also aim to change attitudes in the community as a whole to support positive parenting. In general, parenting programmes assume that parents want to find new ways of disciplining children. While the positive parenting approach might work well with such parents, there is a group of parents and community members who hold strongly to the view that children need to be physically disciplined. In order to shift the attitudes of this group, we need to understand more about why people hold the views they do, and whether they are amenable to new information about non-violent approaches in parenting. For those parents currently reluctant to forgo physical punishment, a different approach developed from an understanding of these deeper attitudes may be needed.

In their review of parenting programmes for the Families Commission, Kerslake Hendricks and Balakrishnan (2005) covered geographical communities and different types of parenting programmes, but not communities of interest such as religious groups in which parenting is promoted that involves or requires physical punishment. They note, however, that “[p]arenting programmes in isolation cannot address well-established patterns of inappropriate parenting” (Kerslake Hendricks and Balakrishnan 2005:4). We suggest that the active promotion in society of a view of the active, creative, contributing child would make a major contribution to changing the place children have in society, as well as to the patterns of parenting.

### A Focus on Gender Differences

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<sup>5</sup> MSD, Family and Community Services. *SKIP -- Strategies with Kids: Information for Parents*. [www.familyservices.govt.nz/info-for-families/skip/index.html](http://www.familyservices.govt.nz/info-for-families/skip/index.html). [Accessed 1 October 2007]

The significant gender differences in the findings showed that women were more likely than men to support repeal of Section 59 and to oppose physical punishment. This is particularly interesting in view of the fact that women are the primary caregivers of children in most families. In her research with children about discipline, Dobbs (2007) noted children's report that fathers and male household members hit them more often, even though fathers spent less time looking after the children. Smith and her colleagues in their extensive review of research reported that "males are more likely than females to hold favourable attitudes towards physical punishment" (Smith et al. 2005:25).

We support Dobbs's call for further research on gender, and we also call for increased action by organisations working with families to address men's beliefs about children and child-rearing, and to advance positive, non-physical parenting skills for men. In view of the gender differences we found in people's support of physical punishment, we also suggest that gender-specific approaches are needed for strategies that address denial/resistance, no or vague awareness, and non-violent parenting in general.

### A Focus on What Physical Punishment Feels Like

We suggest that reflection on one's own childhood, particularly on the feelings of being a child, might be an illuminating process for taking people into the world of the child. It is easy as adults to impose an adult interpretation on our own upbringing, such as, "It never did me any harm" and "I probably deserved it". However, finding the child's feelings in this reflection is more likely to encourage parents to understand the world from children's point of view, and lead to greater respect for and understanding of children.

### CONCLUSION

The research reported here used a convenience sample of submissions to a Parliamentary Select Committee to provide information on New Zealanders' attitudes about children, childhood and parenting. Qvortup's (1994) summary terms for two contrasting views of children provided a framework for analysing the submissions. Of the submissions able to be classified, this exploratory research found a connection between submitters' view of children as human beings and approval of physical punishment. Submitters opposed to physical punishment were more likely to be classed as holding a human beings view of children.

A key limitation of the research was the nature of the sample. People self-select into writing a submission, and it may be that only people with particularly strong beliefs will go to the trouble of doing so. Note that many more individuals submitted in opposition to the law change than in favour.

Nonetheless, the study revealed some significant areas for future consideration in policy, research and practical parenting education. Deeply held beliefs and attitudes that support the use of physical punishment of children may be hard to change. Some of the themes that emerged suggest that a focus on men's attitudes, a focus on what it feels like to be a child, and a focus on children's human rights may support a change to positive parenting.

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