Parenting Practices in Liberia: Describing Discipline Behaviors and Relationship Quality

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BACKGROUND
- High rates of violence are associated with conflict-affected and low- and middle-income country settings.
- Child abuse is associated with family stressors.
- Early maltreatment has lasting developmental consequences.
- Stable, responsive caregiving is important in children reaching developmental potential.
- Frequent physical discipline is associated with child adjustment problems, including disruptive behavior.

PROJECT AIM
To describe parenting practices in four densely populated, urban communities in Monrovia, Liberia.

METHODS
**Measures**
- **Discipline Interview: Frequency of behaviors**
  - Parents’ actual use of particular discipline practices
  - 26 items: 9 standard items; 12 locally derived
  - 2 subscales: Harsh (21 items), Non-harsh (5 items)

- **Discipline Interview: Attitudes about strategies**
  - Parents’ attitudes about particular discipline practices
  - 26 items: 9 standard items; 12 locally derived
  - 2 subscales: Harsh (21 items), Non-harsh (5 items)

- **Harsh Parenting Preferences Measure**
  - 12 digital comic strips of child misbehaving
  - Varied on child gender, offense, setting & adults present
  - Participants indicated what they would do in each situation
  - Non-harsh options: Time out, discussion, or ignoring

**RESULTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>N = 813</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean Age (SD)</strong></td>
<td>33.1 (10.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Female</td>
<td>91.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Cohabitating</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Married</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Completed Primary School</td>
<td>9.1</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discipline Interview: Frequency</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harsh Practices (α = .87)</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>1.78 (.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-harsh Practices (α = .51)</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>3.08 (.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discipline Interview: Attitudes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harsh Practices (α = .86)</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>1.81 (.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-harsh Practices (α = .43)</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>3.09 (.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harsh Parenting Preference</td>
<td>0-12</td>
<td>3.86 (3.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAR-Q (α = .73)</td>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>.75 (.35)</td>
</tr>
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**Harsh Practices (Figures 1 & 2)**
- Rare use of harsh practices
- Most frequent: Yelling, spanking, slapping or hitting
- Least frequent: Putting pepper in child’s eyes, withholding food
- Attitudes: Low acceptance of harsh practices
- Specific items show incongruence between behaviors and attitudes

**Non-harsh Practices (Figures 3 & 4)**
- Use of non-harsh practices varied substantially across practices
- Most frequent: Making child apologize, teaching good behavior
- Least frequent: Giving extra chores, distracting
- Attitudes: High acceptance of non-harsh practices

**Harsh Parenting Preference**
- Preferred a harsh discipline practice approximately 4 out of 12 times

**Parent Child Relationship Quality**
- Report high acceptance and warmth; low overall hostility, rejection, neglect

**CONCLUSIONS**
- Results suggest overall low use and low acceptance of harsh discipline strategies.
- Some specific harsh physical and psychological discipline behaviors are common despite low overall scores.
- Use of harsh strategies is often incongruent with attitudes that these behaviors should not be used.
- On a choice-based “preference” measure, with less social desirability concerns, caregivers frequently reported preferring harsh practices.
- Results suggest numerous parenting strengths in this population and potential openness to learning new, non-harsh parenting strategies.

**FUTURE DIRECTIONS**
**Identify Predictors of Parenting Practices**
- Parental Mental Health
- Parenting Knowledge
- Marital Conflict
- Substance Use
- Child and caregiver gender
- Socio-economic variables

**Examine associations between parenting and child well-being**

**Parenting Intervention Development and Evaluation**
- Identify specific targets
- Identify mediators or moderators of change

REFERENCES