

A new HSRC study, entitled *Partner Violence, Attitudes to Child Discipline and Use of Corporal Punishment*, discusses the findings of the first national survey done in South Africa to investigate these issues.

The study, which was funded by Save the Children Sweden, constitutes several modules of the 2003 South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS).

The survey of partner violence, which was representative of the population, indicates that nearly 20% of South African men and women,

In accounting for the high levels of partner violence found in the study, it is important to bear in mind the role played by deeply entrenched norms regarding the legitimacy of male power and the use of force. Other studies, conducted by Rachel Jewkes and her colleagues at the Medical Research Council, have shown that a significant proportion of South African women believe that it is appropriate that they obey their male partners because these men have the right to discipline them. Where these beliefs are evident, women are more likely to be assaulted.

severe corporal punishment (beating with a belt, stick or other object). These proportions are lower than non-representative studies conducted elsewhere in Africa, and somewhat lower than figures collected in the US and Britain.

Younger South African parents are less likely to use corporal punishment than older parents, and cultural patterns are evident in the findings that Indian and Asian parents are least likely to smack their children, while black Africans and whites are more likely to beat their children with a stick or similar object.

The research also indicates that the most common age at which children are smacked is three years of age, while four-year olds are most often beaten with an object. This may be because young children are at home more often than older children and therefore have more time to be exposed to parental discipline. Older children are also more likely to resist physical punishment.

Interestingly, more cohabiting and single parents smack their offspring than other groups (in the latter case possibly due to the stresses of the single caregiving role).

The study identifies other common risk factors for partner violence and corporal punishment. These include both partners' endorsement of patriarchal practices and attitudes, authoritarian family functioning, a violent approach to problem solving, low socio-economic status and frequent marital conflict.

Although not the focus of this study, the research raises the controversial question of whether corporal punishment has a bad influence on children. With regard to mild forms of corporal punishment, such as occasional smacking, the evidence is equivocal. While physical punishment of young children does produce short-term compliance, it is clear

that repeated and frequent use of smacking and beatings over extended periods of childrens' early lives, does have negative outcomes on childrens' emotional development.

Ultimately and regardless of the evidence, beating of children is a moral or rights issue. We must ask ourselves: do adults have the right to assault children? Because it is assault. •

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## PARTNER VIOLENCE HIGH IN SOUTH AFRICA, SAYS NEW STUDY

By Andy Dawes



have experienced violent physical assault in their domestic relationships, either as perpetrators, victims, or both. This is almost 25% higher than in the United States.

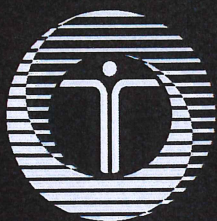
Women are twice as likely to be victims as their male partners and more men, in the lower income brackets, assault their partners than in higher income groups. Another finding is that partner violence is more prevalent in relationships where the partners are cohabiting rather than married. Poorly educated and younger women are most at risk of being involved in a physically abusive relationship.

Regarding intervention in partner abuse, the report suggests that in addition to legal and policy interventions, changing the collective norms, attitudes and behaviour of both men and women is essential. The message is: start young. Challenges to patriarchal and abusive gender relations should feature prominently in the life-orientation programmes of our schools.

Nearly 1 000 parents with children participated in the section on corporal punishment. It showed that 57% of the participants reported using corporal punishment, with 33% using



# HSRC review



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