

Cultural Influences On CPD, Aggression, And Obedience In India

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Abstract:

This study investigates how experiences of childhood physical discipline (CPD) influence later aggression and obedience to authority among adolescents and young adults within Indian cultural and social contexts.

The research applied a mixed-methods correlational design, including both quantitative questionnaires and qualitative content analysis. Respondents were asked to complete the Buss–Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) to evaluate aggression, the F-Scale to measure obedience to authority, and an open-ended questionnaire about their childhood experiences with physical discipline. Qualitative responses were coded on five dimensions: frequency, severity, duration, emotional impact, and escalation, yielding an overall CPD intensity score. Then, CPD intensity was measured against aggression or obedience through correlational analyses.

The findings indicated a moderate positive correlation between CPD intensity and aggression, indicating that higher levels of CPD intensity among subjects tended to correspond with higher levels of aggression, as measured by the BPAQ.

Yet, the correlation between CPD intensity and obedience-as measured with the F-Scale-is very weak and statistically not significant, hence physical discipline did not predict obedience reliably.

The emotional impact of CPD also evidenced a moderate level of correlation with the scores on aggression, further supporting the link that negative experiences in CPD translate to aggressive behavior.

These findings imply that physical discipline in childhood is not an effective means of promoting obedience but, instead, is associated with increased aggression, as indicated by the results of several global studies. This supports the idea that CPD may damage emotional regulation and behavioral development rather than produce compliance to authority.

These findings, within the cultural context of India, where CPD is a socially accepted behavior, bring into question the belief that harsh discipline produces obedient children; instead, the evidence suggests that CPD may be deleterious to children's emotional well-being and result in more aggressive behaviors, with little positive impact on obedience or long-term behavioral obedience.

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I. Introduction:

Physical Discipline is defined as “any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light.” (*Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006*). Despite already being a heavily researched manner of discipline, pertaining to its effectiveness and long-term effects on children, it is still a common and frequently used form. Physical discipline is a widely accepted social norm in India, where studies indicate that surveys report that anywhere from 65% to over 75% of parents admitted to physically disciplining their children in various contexts. (*Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2007; Save the Children, 2018*). Child Physical Discipline (CPD) is undoubtedly prevalent as a practice in India - Despite its dire consequences.

Furthermore, studies have also indicated that aggression and aggressive behaviors have a strong correlation to those that have experienced CPD. Aggression is defined as “any behavior directed toward another individual that is carried out with the proximate (immediate) intent to cause harm” (*Anderson & Bushman, 2002, p. 28*).

Discipline is “a constructive, proactive approach focusing on teaching children how to make better choices and understand the natural consequences of their actions. The goal is internal change, where individuals develop the capacity for self-management and adherence to rules and social norms” (*American Academy of Pediatrics, 2021*) Adherence can be inferred as obedience. Obedience is defined as “behavior in compliance with a direct command, often one issued by a person in a position of authority” (*APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.*). Inherently, the primary purpose of implementing discipline is to foster obedience.

The aim of this research paper is to investigate the relationship within the cultural and social contexts of India of these three variables: **CPD, Aggression, and Obedience**.

To illustrate the complex and culturally moderated outcomes of physical discipline, consider two case studies involving children from different cultural contexts: The first case examines a child reared in a collectivist Indian household where obedience and respect for authority constitute key Societal values (Chaudhary 2013; Kakar 2012; Verma & Triandis 1999). The second case addresses a child from a cultural background like most Western or Nordic nations, in which corporal punishment is culturally discouraged and legally restricted (Durrant 1999; Gershoff et al. 2010). Together, these two cases suggest how the cultural expectations of parenting, parental socialization goals, and normative beliefs mediate children's emotional and behavioral reactions to CPD, a finding constant in cross-cultural studies. (Deater-Deckard et al. 2003; Lansford et al. 2005).

According to the WHO (World Health Organization), Children who have been physically punished tend to exhibit high hormonal reactivity to stress, overloaded biological systems, including the nervous, cardiovascular and nutritional systems, and changes in brain structure and function. (WHO, 2025).

To elaborate further, the links between CPD/Corporal punishment and negative side effects i.e. direct physical harm, mental ill-health, (including behavioral and anxiety disorders), impaired cognitive and socio-emotional development, damage to education, poor moral internalization and increased antisocial behavior, Increased aggression, and criminality, have been demonstrated and verified by a large body of research. (WHO 2025)

Another study has shown that when corporal punishment is more widely accepted within a cultural group, the connection between a child's personal experience of such punishment and their aggressive behavior tends to weaken. (Lansford, 2010) This finding may seem contradictory to other studies that show a higher acceptance of corporal punishment correlates with increased levels of violence in society. This would suggest a weak link between the variables in question - **CPD, Aggression, and Obedience**.

To summarize the results of these studies pertaining to CPD, we can conclude that CPD is in fact ineffective as a form of discipline. Furthermore, it has been proven to have strong links to multiple negative traits and side effects observed within children, indicating that CPD is a harmful method as well. The objective of this research study is to examine the consistency of these relationships and links in Indian cultural and social environments in relation to findings observed on a global scale.

The research question therefore is *"How does the experience of physical punishment during childhood affect obedience to authority and aggression levels in adolescence and early adulthood among Indian populations?"*.

Theoretically, Individuals who faced physical punishment may display lower obedience to authority due to resentment, while simultaneously exhibiting higher levels of aggression as a form of rebellion. This has been observed in the F-scale results indicated that poor relationships with the participant's fathers were associated with a greater likelihood of prejudiced attitudes and a strong preference for order and conformity. (Adorno et al., 1950). Additionally, existing research utilizing the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) indicates that individuals who experienced physical discipline during childhood tend to score higher on measures of aggression, suggesting a correlation between early punitive experiences and later aggressive behaviors (Buss & Perry, 1992).

However, it is also possible that the effects of physical punishment on obedience and aggression may vary significantly based on contextual factors such as family dynamics, community norms, or individual temperament, especially when accounting for dynamics within Indian households.

Introduction of the Study Design

The current study aims to investigate the impact of physical punishment during childhood on obedience to authority and levels of aggression at adolescence or early adulthood. The study will use a mixed-methods approach, in which quantitative self-report questionnaires are integrated with an online questionnaire methodology for qualitative insights, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between childhood experiences and behavioral outcomes.

Type of Study

This research adopts a quantitative correlational design with self-report questionnaires, namely the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) and F-Scale, combined with qualitative data through open-ended questionnaire questions. Such an approach permits nuanced exploration into the research question, capturing measurable traits along with personal experiences with CPD.

Sampling

The study will use, foremost, a volunteer sampling method whereby the participants will self-respond through recruitment advertisements, such as social media posts or university bulletin boards. This will ensure the willingness of the participants to discuss sensitive topics. Opportunistic sampling may also be used in gathering

participants from persons readily available to the researchers. The sample size will be 14 participants in total. The gender ratio will be based on availability, comprising two Males, and Twelve females, and the sample will be sourced from one age bracket and one cultural background. In its simplest form, non-probability sampling is less time-consuming and cheaper but may introduce bias and lead to a lack of diversity, subsequently reducing generalizability of findings.

Data Collection Methods

Self-report questionnaires: Participants will be asked to complete Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire, assessing their aggression based on physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility levels by answering its 29 items on a 5-point Likert scale. Participants would then be asked to fill out the F-Scale in order to assess traits of the authoritarian personality regarding submission to authority and obedience.

Online Open-Ended Questionnaire: After these quantitative measures, participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire that includes open-ended questions related to their experiences of physical punishment during childhood. The responses will be analyzed thematically and by content, which will provide an overall intensity score reflecting the severity of the physical punishment experienced assessing five categories - *Frequency, Severity, Duration, Emotional Impact, and aggression involved/Escalation.*

Procedure

The study is designed to be remote and online, in which participants go about the tasks whenever they feel comfortable in their selected environment. The following steps outline the procedure:

- 1) **Consent and Instructions:** First, participants will be taken to an online portal where the purpose of the study will be explained to them, along with their rights to confidentiality and withdrawal. After this, informed consent will be obtained electronically before proceeding.
- 2) **Completion of questionnaires:** Participants will complete the BPAQ and F-Scale questionnaires online, providing data regarding the levels of aggression or obedience.
- 3) **Online Questionnaire:** The participants will further provide qualitative data in response to open-ended questions about their childhood experiences. Responses will be evaluated to provide an intensity score
- 4) **Debriefing:** Immediately after completion, participants will be given a digital debriefing statement which will disclose the real purposes of the study, reminding them of their rights regarding data withdrawal and privacy.

Hypothesis

Directional Alternative Hypothesis: Participants who score higher on the overall intensity scores from the content analysis of the questionnaire responses will also score higher on the BPAQ and F-Scale, showing more aggression and obedience.

Null Hypothesis: The overall intensity scores should not have any relation with the obtained questionnaire scores of aggressions and obedience.

Co-Variables:

Variable 1: Overall intensity score based on content analysis of open-ended questionnaire responses (Interval).

Variable 2: BPAQ Scores (Interval).

Variable 3: F-Scale Scores (Interval).

Ethical Considerations

Privacy and Confidentiality: Participant responses will be collected using an online secure platform, and at all points in time, the data will be anonymized. Role numbers will be assigned without linking any identifiable information to the data.

Informed Consent: An elaborate digital consent form will be reviewed and clear instructions given to participants before they provide electronic consent. They may not be fully aware, however, of the study's exact hypotheses until the digital debriefing.

Deception: The exact purpose of the experiment will be explained in the online debriefing to reduce demand characteristics, which may affect the results.

Withdrawal from Investigation: Participants will be informed of their right to close the browser or terminate participation at any time throughout the study without penalty.

Protection from Harm: The online platform will provide links to counseling resources and support services in case participants feel distress while reflecting on their past experiences.

Apparatus

The consent form, BPAQ, F-Scale, open-ended questionnaire, and debriefing information will be hosted on a secure online survey platform, such as Google Forms or SurveyMonkey. Participants will access the study platform using their own personal computers, tablets, or smartphones.

II. Methodology:

Study 1

Research Design

Our study utilized a quantitative and qualitative correlational research design, in order to understand the relationship between Childhood CPD (CPD) and Obedience, As well As, CPD and Aggression. This was particularly to be studied within Indian cultures and populations, as CPD is a common type of discipline here. Our study did not pursue any means to demonstrate causality, but rather a foundation to explore the direction and trends between 3 prominently occurring variables - CPD, Aggression and Obedience

Our independent variable here was the intensity score for CPD, this variable operationalized through the use of the questionnaire assessing 5 factors pertaining to CPD - *Frequency, Severity, Duration, Emotional Impact, and aggression involved/Escalation*. These categories were scored on a scale from 1-5 based on the responses from the participants during the questionnaire. The dependent variables were assessed using the BPAQ (buss-perry-aggression-questionnaire) for Aggression, and the F-Scale for Obedience. Their aggression and obedience scores were obtained from these questionnaires.

The CPD Scores (IV) were a naturally occurring variable, (alongside the BPAQ and F-scale scores [DVs]), therefore the independent variable was not manipulated in any way, and was simply measured through the aforementioned questionnaire. This further demonstrates the correlational nature of the study.

Apparatus

Participants were instructed to engage with and complete all three questionnaires via an online survey, following the presentation of a consent form and instructions in the following order: BPAQ, F-Scale, and then the CPD Questionnaire. Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from the entire online survey via the instructions and debriefing. As mentioned earlier, All the three questionnaires were scored according to their individual guidelines. The CPD Score was derived from the long qualitative responses provided by the participants, which were subsequently scored and coded based on the previously mentioned five factors by two researchers/raters. Participants could take as much as time as they wanted in all 3 sections of the Online survey that was conducted, as those that completed the surveys and all 3 sections are the only responses that were included in this study.

Participants:

A total of 14 responses were collected, 12 females, 2 Males, all culturally Indian. The researcher utilized Volunteer Sampling as this was the cheapest and least Time-Consuming option at the time. The Mean Age was 17.8, with the age range being from 15-25.

Procedure:

Volunteers were provided with an online link to participate in the survey. The survey commenced with a consent form outlining their rights and securing their consent. After they had consented to their participation, they were shown the instructions of the study, detailing what they had to do, and their rights. This entailed their right to withdraw and their right to privacy (Participants were reassured that their responses would not be linked to their names). Participants were informed that there were no incorrect or correct answers and were encouraged to choose the most relevant and honest answer possible. They were made aware that the aim of the study was not revealed to them, yet.

The Participants were then asked to Complete the buss-perry-aggression-questionnaire (BPAQ). Upon Completion the Participants were then asked to complete the F-Scale Questionnaire, followed by Qualitative Long Answer Questions pertaining to CPD. Upon completion of the 3 sections, participants were debriefed, where the aim of the study was revealed to them, and they were reminded of their rights once more.

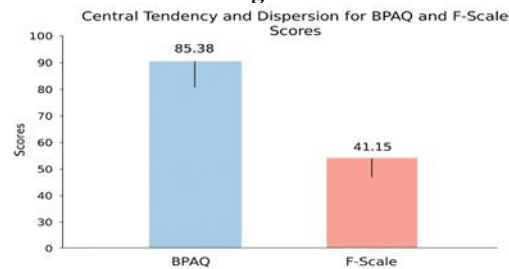
The duration of participation was not regulated; participants had continuous access to the online survey for the entire period it was available to the public, allowing them to complete it at their own pace.

III. Results:

Study 1

Our study was conducted in order to investigate the relationship between CPD (Childhood Physical Discipline) and Aggression, as well as, CPD and Obedience - And if there is a relationship at all.

Figure 1.1



(fig 1.4 shows a Bar graph reflecting the central tendency and dispersion of both BPAQ and F-scale Scores of all 14 participants)

In the context of the BPAQ we found the value of (\bar{x}) to be 83.36 and the (σ) to be 7.08. The mode was calculated to be 89 whilst the median was calculated as 85.5

Figure 1.2



(fig 1.2 shows a bar graph reflecting the BPAQ scores of all 14 participants)

Furthermore, in the context of the F-scale we found the (\bar{x}) to be 42.29 and the (σ) to be 3.87. The mode was calculated to be 39 whilst the median was calculated as 42.

Figure 1.3

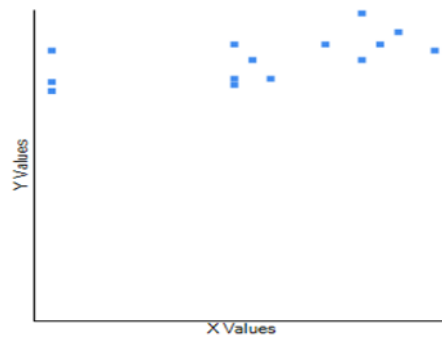


(fig 1.3 shows a bar graph reflecting the F-Scale scores of all 14 participants)

We made use of the Pearson R correlational test.

According to which a moderate positive correlation was observed, as observed in fig 1.4, (value of $R = 0.5975$) between the BPAQ (aggression) and CPD (intensity scores).

Figure 1.4

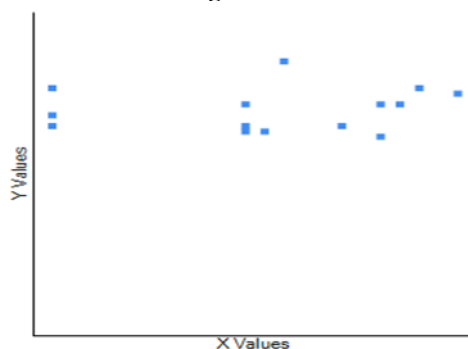


(fig 1.4 shows a scatter graph reflecting the BPAQ scores of all 14 participants on the Y axis against the CPD scores on the X axis)

The P-Value is **0.02**. The result is **significant** at $p < .05$.

For the F-scale scores, although a slight positive correlation is noted, as observed in fig 1.5, (value of $R = 0.1284$) between obedience and physical discipline (intensity scores) the relationship between the variables is weak.

Figure 1.5

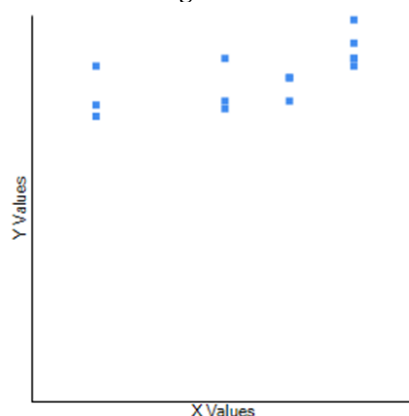


(fig 1.5 shows a scatter graph reflecting the F-Scale scores of all 14 participants on the Y axis against the CPD scores on the X axis)

The P-Value is **0.66**. The result is **not significant** at $p < .05$.

The BPAQ scores were once more plotted against emotional impact scores of all 14 participants and a moderate positive correlation was observed, as shown in fig 1.6 (value of $R = 0.6289$), therefore indicating a relationship of moderate strength.

Figure 1.6



(fig 1.6 shows a scatter graph reflecting the BPAQ scores of all 14 participants on the Y axis against the Emotional impact scores of CPD on the x-axis)

The P-Value is **0.02**. The result is **significant** at $p < .05$.

The degrees of freedom (df) value are **12** for both questionnaires.

Participants who achieved higher scores on the BPAQ demonstrated a tendency towards elevated CPD scores, as illustrated in Figure 1.4. Conversely, no significant trend was identified between F-Scale Scores and CPD Scores, with the correlation between the two being negligible and only exhibiting a minimal positive relationship.

There was a moderately positive correlation between BPAQ scores measuring aggression, plotted against emotional impact scores of CPD of all 14 participants.

IV. Discussion:

Preluding Statement

This Chapter summarizes the participants responses regarding CPD, Aggression and Obedience This discussion will cover various interpretations of the results and address problems and questions such as the following:

- 1) Is Physical Discipline a necessary medium of discipline.
- 2) Are there any other side effects pertaining to Physical Discipline
- 3) Is Childhood Physical Discipline a major contributing factor to Aggression during adolescence and adulthood.

Conclusively, In the first study we conducted (Study 1) Participants who had higher BPAQ scores tended to exhibit higher CPD Scores. The Dispersion of BPAQ Scores hovered around the mean and remained relatively consistent amongst participants, suggesting that there is not much variation with Aggression. All this would suggest that there is in fact a correlation between CPD and Aggression, and those who have experienced more intense forms of CPD tend to be more aggressive.

However, study 1 also dictated that there was a very weak, therefore inconclusive correlation between CPD scores and Obedience Scores (using the F-Scale). Participants who scored higher in the questionnaire assessing CPD only reflected slight increases in their F-Scale scores. This suggests that CPD does not have a strong relationship with Obedience in an individual's adolescence and adulthood.

Lastly, the strongest relationship observed was between BPAQ scores and emotional impact scores (pertaining to CPD) with a moderately positive correlation.

Consequently, this partially aligns with the directional, alternative hypothesis; participants who have a higher overall CPD score will have higher scores in the questionnaires assessing aggression and obedience. Participants did score higher in the BPAQ but not the F-Scale questionnaire, therefore this does not entirely align with the study's hypothesis.

Regarding obedience, this study provides a clearer insight into the relationship between obedience and CPD, indicating that the relationship is weak, if there is a relationship at all. Instead, the results of the study coincide with obedience not being influenced by CPD but rather it being a learned behavior through different means.

This is reflected in several studies - Research conducted by Philip Zimbardo in the Stanford prison experiment (1971), which demonstrated how situational factors and assigned roles can influence behavior, including obedience to authority figures (*Zimbardo, 1971*) This supports the contention that obedience is learned, rather than it being an inherently present trait.

Subsequently, this would suggest that theories such as Social Learning Theory (SLT) (*Bandura, 1977*), Operant Conditioning (*Skinner, 1953*) and Classical Conditioning (*Pavlov, 1927*) would be good explanations for why individuals exhibit obedient behaviors.

To Elaborate, carrying out CPD would be utilizing a form of Operant conditioning in order to achieve obedience, and accordingly, desirable behavior. More specifically, CPD would be an undesirable consequence, in order to decrease misbehavior in children. This would be positive punishment. Children would be less likely to misbehave, if their actions were met with consequences like corporal punishment. However, as observed throughout the results, this is not the case - Obedience was not influenced by CPD scores, suggesting that perhaps, Obedience cannot be acquired through operant conditioning, particularly through the application of punishment.

This would then raise the question as to whether CPD is an effective, or even necessary medium of discipline, if obedience is not achieved, and if misbehavior (due to lack of emotional regulation and self-control) is only catalyzed.

Physical discipline does not improve behavior and can lead to emotional, behavioral and academic problems over time, even after race, gender and family socioeconomic status have been statistically controlled (*Glicksman, E. (2019, May 1)*)

This contention is supported when we observe the relationship between the participants' BPAQ scores and their correlation with CPD scores - Witnessing that Aggression scores slightly increased as CPD scores increased. We can infer that aggression reflects poor self-control and emotional regulation. Accordingly, it is implied that CPD does not affect obedience, yet it does affect aggression, albeit a weak positive correlation.

This conclusion is further supported by what was observed between emotional impact scores (of CPD) and BPAQ scores. Participant responses that indicated a larger emotional impact regarding their experiences with CPD, tended to score higher in the BPAQ. This aligns with the findings of another research and is also logically consistent. Participants, influenced by the enduring impact of CPD, exhibited increased emotional vulnerability, which in turn affected their ability to regulate emotions and exercise self-control.

It has been found prior to this research that corporal punishment is associated with increased aggression and antisocial behavior in children. The meta-analysis review highlighted that children who experience physical punishment are more likely to exhibit aggressive behavior and engage in criminal activity later in life. (*Gershoff, E. T. 2002*)

In Addition to this, Research evidence (Holden, Coleman, & Schmidt, 1995; Holden et al., 2014) indicates that parents hit children most often for mundane actions (e.g., taking someone's toy, picking their nose), and only rarely for serious moral transgressions (e.g., lying, stealing).

Yet again, not only does this not effectively decrease child temperament, but it fails to make them obedient. This would suggest that CPD is not effective as a form of discipline, where repercussions and consequences of corporal punishment outweigh its benefits (if there are any).

Due to the vastly negative impacts CPD can impose on children, as exhibited by study 1, These findings suggest that stricter protection laws and legislation surrounding children should be imposed, and existing laws should be strictly enforced. Child protection services in India could benefit by holding initiatives for awareness in order to dismantle the normalization of CPD, and spread awareness about its effects.

Although, it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions as the relationships between all the variables investigated are so weak - some of them appear to have no correlation whatsoever.

It must be reinstated that the links between CPD/Corporal punishment and negative side effects have been demonstrated and verified by a large body of research. (*WHO 2025*) Despite this being a consistent finding, why is CPD so prevalent in India? Does this phenomenon have to do with its literacy rates, cultural and religious norms or is it something else entirely?

Additionally, the method used to calculate the CPD scores was not standardized and was devised by ourselves. The participants' qualitative responses were scored on a scale of 1 to 5 by two independent researchers for five aforementioned categories: *frequency, severity, duration, emotional impact, and aggression or escalation*. However, because these scoring procedures were developed specifically for this study and do not have established norms, they cannot be regarded as a standardized and/or widely validated measure of the intensity of CPD. This reduces comparability with the results of other studies. With findings from another research. It would be advisable for future research and recreation that different methods are used in order to quantify and properly evaluate CPD and its intensity.

Subsequently, A sample size of only 14 participants would not be enough to draw any definitive conclusions regarding the relationships between these variables. The study lacks generalizability, in terms of both gender and sample size. With only two male participants, the sample demonstrated a substantial gender imbalance (2:12). Furthermore, a total sample size of 14 individuals is insufficient to represent the broader Indian population, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings. Recreations of this study should consider utilizing larger sample sizes along with a proportionate ratio of males and females, from different Indian states.

Researchers in the future should also take into account that participants may be subject to desirability bias in all the questionnaires, especially the long answer questions assessing the intensity of CPD, as these experiences and questions could be perceived as invasive, personal, and uncomfortable to answer, therefore participants may not want to disclose this information or may be dishonest with their responses. This also subjects them to slight psychological harm, something that can be improved through the phrasing of questions in the future, to achieve more detailed, and valid responses.

Finally, Although the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) and the F-Scale Questionnaire are recognized instruments for assessing aggression and obedience, they may exhibit limitations in terms of temporal validity. These tools may not adequately reflect the nuances of these constructs in contemporary populations. Furthermore, their reliance on closed-ended questions restricts the ability to gather comprehensive and nuanced insights, potentially leading to a misrepresentation of these variables among participants according to current standards of measurement, as these tools were devised in 1947, and 1992 respectively.

In conclusion, although this study provides a partial response to the research question, it prompts further inquiry into the continued prevalence of CPD as a disciplinary method, despite its established ineffectiveness and potential harm over the years. Future investigations should take this issue into account, alongside their respective research methodologies.

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