

# The Disciplinary Practices of African American Fathers: A Closer Look

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Over the last thirty years, the disciplinary behaviors of American parents has garnered much attention among social workers and social scientists. The core of this discussion has converged around the discovery that physical discipline continues to be widely practiced among parents. For example, Berger et al. (1988) studied parental use of physical punishment in disciplining children. Participants, 4,695 middle class college freshman, completed a questionnaire that assessed their childhood disciplinary experiences. The race and ethnicity of the participants were not identified. Results revealed that 80 percent of the respondents described being spanked; far fewer respondents described experiencing physical abuse. Having been struck by objects such as paddles, coat hangers, or switches was also a common experience among the sample grouping. Berger et al. (1988) concluded that the use of physical punishment was widespread and not restricted to groups identified on the basis of clinical service or social deviance.

Straus and Donnelly (1993) investigated physical punishment of adolescents by American parents. Participants were from a nationally representative sample of 6,002 parents who participated in the National Family Violence Survey. Subjects were asked about their current use of physical punishment on their children. Results indicated that 50 percent of the respondents reported spanking or slapping their children. Straus and Donnelly (1993)

*There has been a growing recognition by family, school, and mental health counselors of the importance of taking into account cultural factors in interpreting the parenting practices of African Americans. Current research has discovered that the disciplinary practices of African American parents are diversified and that the use of physical discipline is context specific or used as a last resort (Denby and Alford, 1996). This article examines the disciplinary techniques of African American fathers.*