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## **Sparing the Rod?: Social workers and corporal punishment**

Christopher Omer Brannon

James Oliver Tanghal

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SPARING THE ROD?  
SOCIAL WORKERS AND CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Christopher Omer Brannon  
James Oliver Tanghal  
June 2002

SPARING THE ROD?  
SOCIAL WORKERS AND CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

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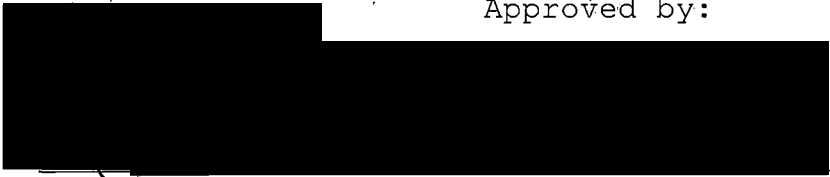
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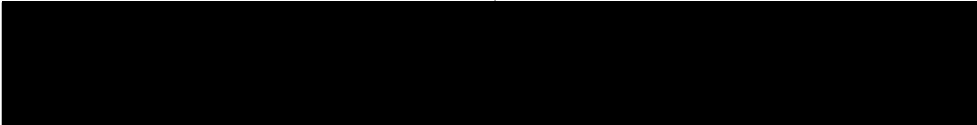
by  
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June 2002

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the thoughts, feelings and attitudes of CSUSB Social Work students toward the use of corporal punishment. Data was collected by means of self-administered questionnaires. The Data was analyzed using quantitative research methods.

Social work students at CSUSB reported using corporal punishment with their own children at a rate and frequency significantly under those reported in the literature for the general population (84 percent to 97 percent of all parents at some time in their children's). Further, respondents felt that it was appropriate for parents to use corporal punishment with their children far less often than statistics would suggest parents actually employ corporal punishment (60 percent of parents who used physical punishment did so at least once a week).

This study gives us a greater understanding regarding how social work students feel about the use of corporal punishment and indicates the need for further study into the dynamics of these shifting opinions.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank Rachel Estrada, M.S.W., L.C.S.W, Dr. Rosemary McCaslin and Chani Beeman for guiding us through this process. To the staff and instructors of the MSW Department, a long overdue thank you for working so hard to make us better social workers. We hope that we will not let you down. And a great many thanks to the students in the Social Work Department for all their support, kindness, and most of all, for filling out the surveys, without which we would have no project. You really came through for us. Thank you.

## DEDICATION

James Tanghal: I would like to praise God for giving me the faith and guidance to see this through. I would like to make a special dedication to Sharon for all of her love and support. Your patience and understanding have truly been a blessing to me. To my family and friends who have helped to sustain me through this incredible journey. To my research partner and fellow trekker Christopher Brannon who will never beat me in any Madden football game. Last but not least, thanks to all of my classmates who have enriched my life and this experience through their joy and unwavering dedication to helping others.

Christopher Brannon: I dedicate this work to Paula, my wife, my best friend, my rock to lean on. I love you. To my mother, Virginia, who has sacrificed so much for me over the years. I am here because of you. To my family for their constant love and support, and my friends for so enriching my life and tolerating my frequent absence these past two years. To my research partner, James Tanghal for helping me to blow off steam via video football. I let you win! To my classmates, who have shown me what it is to be generous, compassionate, amazing human beings. I am honored to count myself among you.

Finally, this is for my unborn son or daughter. I cannot wait to learn what it is you are here to teach me. You're coming into a world that can be beautiful, yet at times, so dark. Your mother and I will guide you through it as best we can, but in the end, you will have to do your part to make the world a better place. Never doubt that you can change the world. Your simple presence changes everything. The lives that you touch, will touch others, and those, others still. Godspeed little-one. I love you.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The contents of Chapter One presents an overview of the project. The problem statement, policy, and practice context are discussed followed by the purpose of the study, context of the problem. Finally, the significance of the project for social work are presented.

#### Problem Statement

For several decades, social scientists and childrearing experts have discussed their misgivings concerning the use of physical punishment on children. Physical, or corporal punishment, as it is also called, is currently being decried as unnecessary, ineffective, perpetuative of a violent culture, and even abusive by many social scientists. Perhaps the most concerning aspect of the use of physical punishment is the intergenerational transmission of violence and abuse. In short, "violence tends to perpetuate itself from one generation to the next, 'like father, like son'" (Barnett, Miller-Perrin, & Perrin, 1997). In this manner, many argue, the use of violence as a method of disciplining children "lays the groundwork for child abuse" (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Indeed, it is clear "that in a significant number

of cases, punishment goes too far and abuse results" (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2000).

Concerns about the physical punishment of children run deep enough that The National Association of Social Workers, the American Academy of Pediatrics Provisional Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect, The National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse, National Parents Anonymous, Inc., and the National Association of School Psychologists, just to name a few, have all released position statements opposing the parental use of physical punishment. Moreover, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Austria have passed laws prohibiting physical punishment of children while England "has launched a parent-focused campaign called End Physical Punishment of Children" (NASW, 2000).

In spite of this, popular support for the physical punishment of children remains extremely high. "Social surveys indicate that physical punishment of children is used by 84 percent to 97 percent of all parents at some time in their children's lives" (Gelles, 1997). Indeed, a study by Kersey (1983) found that 60 percent of parents who used physical punishment did so at least once a week. In general, parental use of physical discipline is considered an acceptable, even necessary tool in the

raising of children, and attempts to convince parents of to end its use is seen as an intrusion into private family affair and, in many cases, it invokes great hostility.

### Policy Context

Currently The United States and the State of California do not have specific laws pertaining to the use of corporal punishment by parents, in-and-of-itself. Section 11165.3 of the California Penal Code addresses "Willful Cruelty or Unjustifiable Punishment of a Child", which is defined as "a situation where any person willfully causes or permits any child to suffer, or inflicts thereon, unjustifiable physical pain or mental suffering". Further, section 11165.4 addresses the "Unlawful Corporal Punishment or Injury" of a child, which is defined only as "a situation where any person willfully inflicts upon any child any cruel or inhuman corporal punishment or injury resulting in a traumatic condition". These sections do not address what constitutes "unjustifiable physical pain" or "cruel or inhuman corporal punishment". In both cases, the implicit assumption is that some forms of corporal punishment are acceptable. It is only when corporal punishment rises to the level of abuse that the law seeks to intervene.

The California Welfare and Institutions Code section 300(a) states that corporal punishment comes within the jurisdiction of the juvenile court only when "the minor has suffered, or there is a substantial risk that the minor will suffer serious physical harm inflicted nonaccidentally upon the minor by the minor's parent or guardian...serious physical harm does not include reasonable and age-appropriate spanking to the buttocks where there is no evidence of serious physical injury". Section 300(i) goes on to address "acts of cruelty by the parent or guardian". The sections do not explicitly address what constitutes "serious physical harm, reasonable spanking, serious physical injury or cruelty". As a result, the line between acceptable corporal punishment and abuse remains hazy, though "reasonable age-appropriate spanking to the buttocks" is explicitly excluded from the definition of abuse and whether or not the corporal punishment causes injury or leaves marks is generally considered to be a reasonable litmus test in determining the appropriateness of the punishment. Again, however, certain methods of corporal punishment have been deemed as acceptable and appropriate. Indeed, it was the intent of the Legislature when drafting this section (300) "that nothing in this section disrupt the family

unnecessarily or intrude inappropriately into family life, prohibit the use of reasonable methods of parental discipline or prescribe a particular method of parenting" (Seiser & Kumli, 1997).

Though it is difficult to determine where to draw the line between corporal punishment and physical abuse, all 50 states outlaw clearly identified physical abuse, but no state regulates parental use of nonabusive corporal punishment. Further, 26 states forbid corporal punishment in schools, 37 states prohibit foster parents from striking children.

Finally, there have been several attempts in recent years, to ban parental spanking. In Wisconsin Bill 799 would have prohibited any parent or guardian from subjecting a child to any corporal punishment defined as "intentional infliction of physical pain as a means of discipline including paddling, spanking, slapping, or the prolonged maintenance of a physically uncomfortable position". The bill never made it out of committee. "More recently, the Governor of Florida vetoed a bill drafted to 'protect children and vulnerable adults from abuse, neglect, and exploitation,' which included some forms of parental spanking of children" (Whipple & Richey, 1997).

In short, however, "throughout the country, it is legal for parents to hit children, provided that the children are not injured or placed at risk of injury" (NASW, 2000).

#### Practice Context

In the 5th edition of Social Work Speaks, National Association of Social Workers Policy Statements 2000-2002 the NASW released an official policy statement entitled "Physical Punishment of Children". The delegate committee found that "it is becoming increasingly clear that physical punishment of children is not an effective way to encourage desirable behavior... It is also clear that in a significant number of cases, punishment goes to far and abuse results" (NASW, 2000, p. 251). They further insist, "physical punishment by adults models aggressive behavior... and that the quintessential hub of the peace movement may well be the early experiences of peace in the family and nonviolent socialization at home" (NASW, 2000, p. 251).

The NASW policy insists, therefore, that "the use of physical force against people, especially children, is a child-rearing practice that is antithetical to the best values of a democratic society and of the social work profession. Thus, NASW opposes the use of physical

punishment in homes, schools, and all other institutions, both public and private where children are cared for and educated" (NASW, 2000, p. 252). They go on to advocate training in nonviolent disciplinary techniques for parents and social workers, and the state that they will actively support the passage of legislation that bans the use of physical punishment.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to develop a survey that would provide professionals with an idea as to the thoughts, feelings, and values that social workers held regarding physical punishment towards a child. Social workers stand in a position to intervene in the intergenerational transmission of violence. By educating clients as to the nature of physical punishment and alternatives to its use, social workers have the opportunity to begin to turn the tide of society's acceptance of violence against its most vulnerable citizens. Social workers, however, did not simply fall out of the sky. Growing up, they were subject to the same socialization processes as the rest of their peer groups. Though education concerning family violence issues may alter their views on physical discipline, resistance

regarding this issue is of such a nature that an alteration of social worker's values regarding physical punishment cannot simply be taken for granted.

So the question becomes then, what are social worker's views concerning physical punishment? What are their views on the appropriateness of punishment methods such as slapping or spanking? How often have they employed such methods with their own children? How likely are they to counsel others to avoid the use of physical punishment?

#### Significance of the Project for Social Work

The significance of the project for social work is that it provides insight into what social workers think about spanking and whether or not these attitudes are consistent with National Association of Social Work (NASW) policy and code of ethics. It is important to understand social worker's views and practices concerning physical punishment as these views will shape the manner in which they approach the subject with clients. It is not reasonable, after all, to assume that a social worker who approves of physical punishment will strenuously advocate for an end to such practices in the course of his or her day simply because the National Association of Social Workers says that he or she should. We must understand how

willing social workers are to educate a client, in no uncertain terms, that spanking or hitting your child is never acceptable. By understanding social worker's values regarding the use of physical punishment on children, we can begin to understand the implications for the educational systems that produce social workers, and the agencies that employ them. Should the social workers demonstrate a willingness to use physical punishment, educational systems such as universities and agencies such as Child Protective Services may need to consider further emphasis on this matter.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Chapter Two consists of a discussion of the relevant literature. Specifically covered are, the historical use of corporal punishment, the social learning and intergenerational transmission of violence theories, current research on attitudes concerning corporal punishment, and the possible deleterious effects of corporal punishment.

#### The Historical Use of Corporal Punishment

The use of physical punishment on children has always been with us. Historical accounts of child abuse go back to the beginnings of recorded history. The history of Western society, in particular, "is one in which children have been subjected to unspeakable cruelties... [In colonial America], children were beaten, mutilated, and maltreated. Such treatment was not only condoned, it was mandated as the most appropriate child-rearing method" (Gelles, 1997).

This "acceptance of corporal punishment for children, prudently used, as a precept of interfamilial

organization" (Costin, Karger, & Stroesz, 1996), has its roots in society's deeply entrenched, religiously influenced value systems. Christianity has played perhaps the defining roll in forming our society's values concerning the use of physical punishment. Indeed, Calvinism has a strict notion of children's innate evil tendencies that must be corrected (Costin, Karger, & Stroesz, 1996). In addition, "Puritan parents in colonial America were instructed by leaders such as Cotton Mather that strict discipline of the child could not begin too early" (Gelles, 1997). This strict discipline typically included physical punishment. In A People's History of the United States, Howard Zinn best summed up the Christian-European attitudes concerning the treatment of children that the puritans brought with them. He quoted the pastor of a pilgrim colony, John Robinson, who "thus advised his parishioners on how to deal with their children: 'And surely there is in all children...a stubbornness, a stoutness of mind arising from natural pride, which must, in the first place, be broken and beaten down; that so the foundation of their education being laid in humility and tractableness, other virtues may, in their time, be built thereon'" (Zinn, 1995).

These values, along with those that allowed a man to have total control over his family without outside interference are the reasons for the almost total lack of laws concerning the use of physical force against children prior to the 1870's. What laws there were actually gave parents a wide discretion in how to use force.

"Stubborn-child laws were passed that permitted parents to put to death unruly children, although it is not clear whether children were actually ever killed" (Gelles, 1997). These values are so deeply entrenched that today parents are still given wide discretion on how to use force insofar as that force does not result in serious harm. As the NASW points out:

legal safeguards that prevent adults from being physically assaulted for infractions of rules are being systematically denied to children. Public employees (the U.S. Navy abolished corporal punishment in 1850) and convicted felons are protected from beatings by the Eight Amendment, which deals with fair and humane punishment and due process. The U.S. Supreme Court specifically refused to extend Eight Amendment rights to children in relation to physical punishment in schools (*Ingraham v. Wright*, 1977) because of the openness of the schools and their supervision by the community... Throughout the country it is legal for parents to hit children, provided that the children are not injured or placed at risk of injury. Schools have this same right in the majority of states. (NASW, 2000)

Human Behavior in the Social Work  
Environment, Theories Guiding  
Conceptualization

The theoretical basis for this project is grounded within the intergenerational transmission of violence hypothesis. Closely related to social learning theory, the intergenerational transmission of violence hypothesis states that violent behavior is learned by children through interactions with others, usually their parents. Garbarino and Gilliam (1980) note that "the notion of intergenerational transmission, the idea that abusing parents were themselves abused as children... is the premier developmental hypothesis in the field of abuse and neglect" (p. 111).

Feshbach (1980) insists that children learn behavior, at least in part, by imitating someone else's behavior. Thus, children learn to be aggressive through observing aggression in their families and the surrounding society. In short, "each generation learns to be violent by being a participant in a violent family" (Straus et al., 1980, p. 121).

Barnett et al. (1997) notes that "there is a substantial body of research showing that growing up in a violent family increases the probability that an individual will be physically or sexually violent as an

adult" (p. 281). Observations by Steele and Pollock in 1968 provided some of the earliest evidence of the intergenerational transmission of violence. They note:

Without exception in our study group of abusing parents, there is a history of having been raised in the same style which they have recreated in the pattern of rearing their own children. Several have experienced severe abuse in the form of physical beating from either mother or father; a few reported "never having had a hand laid on them." All have experienced however, a sense of intense, pervasive, continuous demand from their parents. (p. 111)

They go on to state, however, that their observations were based on clinical interview materials and were not to be thought of as useful for statistical proof.

A study by Hunter and Kilstrom (1979) sought to provide statistical proof for the hypothesis, and as Cathy Spatz Widom (1989) noted, "the findings from this study appear to demonstrate powerful intergenerational transmission effects." The study tested the hypothesis by examining the relationship between the independent variable of self-reported parental history of abuse and neglect, and the dependent variable of abuse or neglect reports that had been substantiated. The researchers found an intergenerational transmission of about 18 percent. However, Widom (1989) notes several methodological

problems with the study, including an over reliance on self-reporting and problems generalizing the findings.

A study by Herrenkohl et al. (1983) found significant support for the hypothesis that "exposure to abusive discipline as a child increases the risk for reliance on severe discipline techniques as a parent" (Herrenkohl et al., 1983, p. 315). The researchers controlled for social desirability, number of children, and income level of parents. They found that 56 percent of those who abused their own children reported having one or more abusive caretakers as a child. Widom (1989) notes, however, that the researchers reliance on retrospective self reports weakens the study (Widom, 1989).

Indeed, in her classic paper, "Does Violence Beget Violence" (1989) Widom insists that "overall, the empirical evidence for the notion that abuse breeds abuse is methodologically problematic and limited by an overdependence on self-report and retrospective data and infrequent use of control groups" (Widom, 1980, p. 318).

She goes on to note, however, that existing studies do suggest that there is a higher likelihood of abuse by parents if they themselves were abused as children.

Kaufman and Zigler (1987) found that about one third of the individuals who are abused or neglected will abuse

their own children, and that two thirds will not (as cited in Widom, 1989, p. 318). The researchers caution us that "being maltreated as a child puts one at risk for becoming abusive, but the path between these two points is far from direct or inevitable" (Kaufman & Zigler, 1987, p. 190).

### Characteristics of People Who Use Corporal Punishment

The use of corporal punishment as an integral component in child rearing and discipline is widely accepted by Americans, in which most believe that when used in moderation, corporal punishment has few, if any, harmful effects (Straus, 1994). The use of physical punishment by parents is common, with Holden, Coleman, and Schmidt (1995) reporting that college-educated respondents spanked their children an average of 2.5 times per week. Therefore it is within this framework that it is appropriate to explore the attitudes, feelings, and beliefs that contribute to the widespread use of spanking.

Giles-Sims and Straus (1995) present descriptive data on frequency and distribution of spanking by mothers in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY). According to the studies findings that originally measured women ages 14-21 in 1979, the correlations among socioeconomic status (SES) and the prevalence and

chronicity of spanking indicate significant relationships between SES and spanking. As SES increases, the prevalence and chronicity of spanking goes down slightly (Giles-Sims & Straus, 1995).

Additionally, the analyses of the NLSY data found that a number of maternal and family characteristics were related to patterns of maternal spanking. Mothers of lower age (25-29 as opposed to 30-34), lower income, lower overall socioeconomic status, and those who were employed less frequently reported higher prevalence and/or chronicity rates of spanking (Giles-Sims & Straus, 1995). The study points out that being an unmarried mother, living in an urban community, living in the south, and being an African American were also associated with increased spanking (Giles-Sims & Straus, 1995). Finally, the research indicated a significant relationship between spanking and access to and control of socioeconomic resources, which may explain how the stress of low incomes and lack of resources to meet the needs of the family influence spanking directly (Giles-Sims & Straus, 1995).

In building upon these aspects, Dietz (2000) evaluates the Social Situational Model of Family Violence through an examination of characteristics associated with the use of ordinary and severe corporal punishment. The

Social Situational Model basically assumes that the use of violence is unevenly distributed within society and that it is related to differential occurrences of stress and to differences in socialization (Gelles & Straus, 1979).

According to the findings of the study, Dietz (2000) states that parents who experience more financial stress; parenting stress, and who have fewer resources, such as education, are more likely to use ordinary and severe corporal punishment in their child-rearing practices. Additionally, those who had been more likely to be socialized into the use of violence were also more likely to use severe corporal punishment (Dietz, 2000).

In terms of race and ethnicity, African American parents within the study were 1.5 times likely as Anglo respondents and respondents referring to a child of six years of age or less were 4 times more likely to use ordinary corporal punishment techniques such as spanking (Dietz, 2000). African American families and respondents from the south were once again identified (Giles-Sims & Strauss, 1995) as being more likely to use corporal punishment as a means of discipline and childrearing. Finally, Dietz (2000) comments that the results of the study support the social situation model for explaining family violence. Moreover, these subsequent findings

suggest that exposure to a stressful environment and subsequent violence increase the likelihood that individuals will be socialized to accept such violence because it encompasses part of the cultural norm.

Jackson and Gyamfi et al., (1998) investigate the effects of depressive symptomatology, parental stress, and instrumental support on maternal spanking among 188 current and former welfare recipients and their preschool children. Based upon the findings, the study concluded that employment reduced the effect of depressive symptoms and parental stress on the frequency of spanking. Finally, the results of the study indicate that the availability of instrumental support such as that of family or friends have moderate effects of depressive symptoms and parental stress on spanking.

#### Deleterious Effects of Spanking

MacMillan et al., (1999) focused upon a probability sample consisting of 9953 residents from Ontario, Canada aged 15 and older. According to the results, the majority of the respondents indicated that they were slapped or spanked, or both, by an adult at some point during their childhood. Among those respondents without a history of physical or sexual abuse during childhood, MacMillan et

al., (1999) states that those who reported being slapped or spanked "often" or "sometimes" had significantly higher lifetime rates of anxiety disorders, alcohol abuse or dependence and one or more externalizing problems as opposed to those who reported as never being slapped or spanked. Moreover, the linear trend analyses showed statistically significant associations between increasing frequency of reported slapping or spanking and increasing rates of lifetime psychiatric disorder (MacMillan et al., 1999). In reference to the Ontario, Canada study, Straus (1999) comments that although evidence suggests that ending spanking will reduce the prevalence of mental health problems and of violence and other crimes, the problem still lies in the fact that most physicians like most patients, believe that spanking is sometimes necessary.

In terms of antisocial behavior, Kirchner (1998) further explored a study conducted by M.A. Straus (1997) on the effects of childhood spanking by parents and the antisocial behavior of children. Kirchner (1998) comments that corporal punishment or spanking is a statistically significant predictor of antisocial behavior, even among children who are spanked as little as only once a week. Spanking is stated as being significantly related to the

Antisocial Behavioral (ASB) score at baseline and two years later (Kirchner, 1998). In addition, the more frequently spanking is used, the longer its negative effects last and the greater the likelihood that behavior problems may arise (Kirchner, 1998).

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

Chapter Three documents the steps used in developing the project. Specifically, the manner in which the study was designed, the population that was sampled, how data was collected, and the steps taken to protect human subjects are described.

#### Study Design

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the thoughts, feelings, and values of social work students at California State University San Bernardino about corporal punishment as a discipline method for children. Additionally, standard demographic information about the population such as age, race, marital status, number of children and questions regarding the respondent's experiences with corporal punishment were sought in order to test whether or not the use of corporal punishment was influenced by or linked to these variables. A self-administered questionnaire was designed to accomplish this goal, as it could be easily distributed to a large population as well as ensuring the protection and anonymity of the human subjects. The findings of this

study are limited to the aforementioned population, and are not generalizable beyond the sample participants.

### Sampling

The sample for this study was drawn from California State University San Bernardino Masters of Social Work students. The Social Work Department's enrollment at the time of this study was 147. A survey was given to all possible participants via personal student mail files. Participants were allowed to take the questionnaires home and return them at their leisure. Upon completion of the survey participants were asked to return the consent form and surveys to the researcher's personal mail files. Of the 147 surveys dispersed, 73 were returned, rendering a percent response rate.

### Data Collection and Instruments

Data was collected by means of self-administered questionnaires. As indicated earlier, data regarding the thoughts, feelings, and values that social work students at California State University San Bernardino department of Social Work had regarding corporal punishment was sought. Participants of this study were given an eight-page questionnaire with a cover letter, consent form and debriefing statement explaining the purpose of the

study and confidentiality concerns. Candidates were informed that their participation in this study was voluntary and that there were no consequences for choosing not to participate. The independent variables included such demographic information as sex, age, ethnicity, the year the respondent expected to graduate from the program, the respondent's socioeconomic status (SES) as a child, current number of children, religious and political beliefs, and their experiences and perceptions of corporal punishment in childhood and adulthood.

The dependent variables involved the respondent's current views regarding corporal punishment. Corporal punishment was defined for the participants as any physical punishment that may include spanking, slapping, swatting, pulling, pinching, etc... Participants were asked how often they employed corporal punishment with their children, how often they felt it was appropriate for parents to employ corporal punishment, and how often they felt that clients could use corporal punishment. All three questions were measured on an ordinal scale ranging from 1, "often" to 4, "never". Respondents were also asked what behaviors they felt might justify the use of corporal punishment. They were instructed to circle all behaviors that might apply from a list of six, which included lying,

stealing, cheating, violence toward others, disobedience, and unsafe behaviors. Finally, respondents were asked if they believed that corporal punishment could lead to serious psychological problems for children in future years.

### Procedures

Researchers obtained permission from the Institutional Review Board and the Chair of the Social Work Department to conduct this study. Data collection occurred over the course of two-weeks in March 2002.

Surveys were placed in student mail files for all social work students. Each survey included a consent form and debriefing statement. Upon completion of the survey, respondents were instructed to return the survey to the researcher's mail files. Upon retrieval, each questionnaire was assigned a number for the purpose of data entry. Only those questionnaires that were complete and marked with consent were included in this study. The data was entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 10.0 (SPSS) for analysis.

### Protection of Human Subjects

In order to protect participants' anonymity, no participant names were placed on the surveys. In place of

names, study participants were asked to mark an empty box with a check mark that indicated they had read the attached informed consent statement (see Appendix A) and were voluntarily participating in the study. In addition, participants were instructed that they could discontinue the survey at any time. The participants received debriefing statements that included the names of the researchers and the advisor with a phone number to contact in the event any concerns or questions arose during the course of the study. The debriefing statement also included the telephone number for the CSUSB Student Counseling Center for participants who wished to speak with a counselor due to any unsettling feelings they may have experienced after completing their survey (see Appendix B).

#### Data Analysis

To better understand social work student's attitudes regarding corporal punishment and test the relationships between the independent and dependent variables, data was tabulated and analyzed using univariate, and bivariate analysis.

Univariate analysis included frequency distribution to describe the various demographic variables such as age,

marital status, and expected graduation year. Bivariate analysis was performed to examine the relationships between two variables. Cross-tabulations utilizing the chi-square test of association measured both the causal and co-relational relationships between various demographic characteristics.

#### Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the current attitudes and beliefs of MSW students towards the use of corporal punishment and how their individual histories and demographics illustrated trends or influenced the use of physical punishment as a discipline technique.

A handwritten mark, possibly a signature or initials, consisting of a large loop with a tail extending downwards and to the left.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

To better understand social work student's attitudes regarding corporal punishment and test the relationships between the independent and dependent variables, data was tabulated and analyzed using univariate, and bivariate analysis.

Univariate analysis included frequency distribution to describe the various demographic variables including sex, age, ethnicity, the year the respondent expected to graduate from the program, the respondent's socioeconomic status (SES) as a child, current number of children, religious and political beliefs, and their experiences and perceptions of corporal punishment in childhood and adulthood. Bivariate analysis was preformed to examine the relationship between two variables. Cross-tabulations utilizing the chi-square test of association in order to measure both the causal and co-relational relationships between various demographic characteristics.

#### Presentation of the Findings

The total number of respondents was 73. The age of respondents ranged from 22 to 56 with the average age

being 35.21 years old, 38.9 percent (n = 28) of respondents were in their twenties, 23.6 percent (n = 18) were in their thirties, 31.9 percent (n = 23) were in their forties, and 5.6 percent (n = 4) were in their fifties. Sixty-one or 83.6 percent of the respondents were female and 16.4 percent (n = 12) of respondents were male. In terms of ethnicity, 63 percent (n = 46) of respondents were Caucasian, 23.3 percent (n = 17) were Hispanic, 9.6 percent (n = 7) identified themselves as Black, and 4.1 percent (n = 3) identified as other. Socioeconomic status was examined and only 4.1 percent (n = 3) of participants identified themselves as upper-class, 16.4 percent (n = 12) identified as lower-class and 79.5 percent (n = 58) identified as middle-class.

In terms of the respondent's undergraduate major, 28.8 percent (n = 21) indicated that their undergraduate major was Sociology, 28.8 percent (n = 21) Psychology, 17.8 percent (n = 13) declared other Social Science, and 11 percent (n = 8) indicated that their undergraduate major was a non social science.

Perspective graduation year was examined and 60.3 percent (n = 44) of respondents indicated that they would graduate in 2002, 32.9 percent (n = 24) expected to graduate in 2003 and 6.8 percent (n = 5) of respondents

expected to graduate in 2004. Forty-one or 56.2 percent of respondents were full time students, while 43.8 percent (n = 32) were part time.

Religious affiliation was examined and 52.1 percent (n = 38) classified themselves as Christians, 24.7 percent (n = 18) identified themselves as Catholic, 1.4 percent (n = 1) with Buddhism, 6.8 percent (n = 5) as other, and 15.1 percent (n = 11) indicated that they had no religious affiliation. When asked if their current religious affiliation was the one that they were raised with, 69.9 percent (n = 51) responded yes, while 30.1 percent (n = 22) responded no. The degree of respondent's faith was assessed with 16.4 percent (n = 12) identifying themselves as very religious, 52.1 percent (n = 38) moderately religious, and 31.5 percent (n = 23) indicated that they were not religious at all.

Respondent's marital status was noted and 50.7 percent (n = 37) were married, 13.7 percent (n = 10) divorced, 1.4 percent indicated that they were widowed (n = 1), and 34.2 percent (n = 25) were single. Respondents were asked to indicate their political view. Only 8.2 percent of respondents identified themselves as conservative (n = 6), while 53.4 percent (n = 39)

identified themselves as moderate and 38.4 percent (n = 28) identified as liberal.

In terms of respondent's childhood socioeconomic status, 6.8 percent of respondent's (n = 5) indicated that they were raised upper-class, 60.3 percent (n = 44) reported middle-class, and 32.9 percent (n = 24) stated that they were raised in a lower-class family. In terms of family structure, 78.1 percent (n = 57) of respondents were raised in a two parent family, 11.0 percent (n = 8) were raised in a divorced family, 8.2 percent (n = 6) in single-parent family, and 2.7 percent (n = 2) indicated that they were raised in an extended family. Respondents indicated how many siblings they had within their home when they themselves were a children. Four or, 5.5 percent indicated that they had no siblings, 24.7 percent (n = 18) had one sibling, and 69.9 percent (n = 51) had two or more siblings.

When asked whether or not either of their parents used or abused intoxicating substances, 35.6 percent (n = 26) percent replied yes while 64.4 (n = 47) replied no. The primary disciplinarian during the respondent's childhood was noted with 41.1 percent (n = 30) of respondents indicating that their mother was their primary disciplinarian, while 42.5 percent (n = 31) indicated

their father, 2.7 percent choose other (n = 2) and 13.7 percent choose both (n = 10).

Respondents were asked to indicate how often corporal punishment was employed within their family when they were children. Findings indicate that 35.6 percent (n = 26) reported experiencing corporal punishment on a daily to weekly basis and the remaining 64.4 percent (n = 47) experienced corporal punishment only rarely (monthly) or never. Of the participants who experienced corporal punishment as children, 43.3 percent (n = 26) felt at that time that the corporal punishment was appropriate and justified, while 56.7 percent (n = 34) did not. Reflecting back, 44.4 percent (n = 28) believed that the corporal punishment they experienced was appropriate and justified, while 55.6 percent (n = 35) did not.

In terms of the respondent's current number of children, 47.9 percent (n = 35) had no children, 13.7 percent (n = 10) had one child, and 38.4 percent (n = 28) had two or more children. Of those respondents who had children, 69.2 percent (n = 27) reported that they were the primary disciplinarian of their children while 30.8 percent (n = 12) were not. For those respondents who had children 7.7 percent (n = 3) reported using corporal punishment with their children on a weekly basis, 38.5

percent (n = 15) on a monthly basis, and 53.8 percent (n = 21) never used corporal punishment with their children. No respondents indicated that they used corporal punishment with their children on a daily basis.

When asked how often respondents felt that it was appropriate for parents to use corporal punishment with their children, 9.6 percent (n = 7) indicated weekly, 58.9 percent (n = 43) monthly, and 31.5 percent (n = 23) stated that it was never acceptable for parents to use corporal punishment with their children. Again, no respondents indicated that corporal punishment was appropriate when employed on a daily basis. Respondents were asked to circle which behaviors might justify the use of corporal punishment. Only 9.6 percent (n = 7) felt that lying might justify corporal punishment while 90.4 percent (n = 66) did not. Eleven or 15.1 percent felt that stealing might justify the use of corporal punishment, while 84.9 percent (n = 62) did not. In regards to cheating, 6.8 percent (n = 5) felt that it might justify the use of corporal punishment, while 93.2 percent (n = 68) did not. Twelve or 16.4 percent of respondents felt that violence toward other might justify the use of corporal punishment, while 83.6 percent (n = 61) did not. Disobedience was reported by 20.5 percent (n = 15) of respondents to be a possible

justification for the use of corporal punishment while 79.5 percent (n = 58) answered in the negative. Forty-five or 61.6 percent of respondents felt that unsafe behaviors might justify the use of corporal punishment while 38.4 percent (n = 28) stated that it did not.

Finally, when asked whether or not they believed that corporal punishment can lead to serious psychological problems in the future, 61.6 percent (n = 44) answered yes while 38.4 percent (n = 28) said no.

Bivariate analysis was preformed to examine the relationship between two variables. Cross-tabulations utilizing the chi-square test of association measured both the causal and co relational relationships between various demographic characteristics and beliefs or attitudes about the implementation of corporal punishment. First, independent variables were cross tabulated with how often participants felt it was appropriate for parents to use corporal punishment with their children.

Fifty-eight or 52.8 percent of participants expected to graduate in 2002 felt that parents should implement corporal punishment only rarely if ever. Eighteen or 25 percent of participates expect to graduate in 2003 and chose rarely and 6.9 percent (n = 5) of participants

graduating in 2004 chose rarely. A Pearson chi-square found significance at the .038 level.

Use of a chi-square yielded a statistically significant relationship between the independent variable concerning the respondent's beliefs whether or not they felt that the corporal punishment they experienced as a child was justified, and how often they felt it was appropriate for parents to use corporal punishment. The relationship between the two was significant at the .009 level. Participants who felt that their childhood experiences with corporal punishment was unjustified were much more likely to choose "never" (n = 16) when responding to the appropriateness of parental use of corporal punishment. On the other hand, those who felt that their childhood experiences with corporal punishment were justified chose "sometimes" at a higher rate (n = 4) and "never" at a considerably lower rate (n = 3).

A .001 significance was found between the independent variable of whether or not corporal punishment could cause damage and the dependent variable of how often it was acceptable for parents to use corporal punishment. While rarely was the most common response, participants who felt that serious psychological problems might arise were much more likely to say that it was never acceptable for

parents to use corporal punishment ( $n = 21$ ) than those who believed that corporal punishment did not cause damage ( $n = 2$ ).

Chi-squares were calculated to assess the relationship between the independent variable of whether or not the participant believe corporal punishment could cause damage and the dependent variable of possible psychological damage found several statistically significant relationships. A .034 significance was found between the sex of the respondent and the dependent variable. There were twice as many males who stated that corporal punishment did not cause damage ( $n = 8$ ) than those who felt it did ( $n = 4$ ). On the other hand, women were much more likely to choose yes ( $n = 39$ ) than no ( $n = 20$ ).

A significant relationship (.027) was found between the dependant variable and whether or not the respondents were full or part time students. Full time students were more likely to say yes ( $n = 29$ ) than no ( $n = 11$ ), while Part time students were more likely to say no ( $n = 17$ ) than yes ( $n = 15$ ). A significant relationship (.035) was also found between the dependant variable and the political views of the respondents. Liberals were much more likely to state that corporal punishment can cause

damage (n = 22) where as conservatives were more likely to believe that no psychological damage would be caused (n = 4) than yes (n = 2).

In addition, respondents who were disciplined primarily by their fathers were more likely to say yes (n = 23) than no (n = 7). Respondents who were disciplined primarily by their mother said yes (n = 17) at a smaller rate and no (n = 13) at a higher rate. The significance was at the .040 level.

Finally, several statistically significant relationships were found between independent variables and what behaviors the respondent felt might justify the use of corporal punishment. A .029 level of significance was found between political views and whether or not stealing might justify the use of corporal punishment. Liberals were much more likely to say no (n = 26) than yes (n = 2) while conservatives were evenly split between yes (n = 3) and no (n = 3).

Further, political views were also related to whether or not the respondents felt that cheating might justify the use of corporal punishment. The relationship was significant at the .027 level. Liberals were much more likely to say no (n = 27) than yes (n = 1). While conservatives were also more likely to say no (n = 4) than

yes ( $n = 2$ ), it was at a lower rate. Political views were also correlated with whether or not disobedience might justify the use of corporal punishment. Again Liberals and Moderates were much more likely to say no ( $n = 25$ ,  $n = 31$ ) than no ( $n = 3$ ,  $n = 8$ ) while Conservatives were more likely to say yes ( $n = 4$ ) than no ( $n = 2$ ). Significance was found at the .009 level.

Finally, religious identification was strongly correlated with whether or not the respondents felt that disobedience might justify the use of corporal punishment. No non-Christian respondent stated that disobedience might justify the use of corporal punishment. While a large number of Christians also answered no ( $n = 24$ ), many ( $n = 14$ ) said that disobedience might justify the use of corporal punishment. A chi-square indicated the relationship to be significant at the .010 level.

### Summary

Chapter Four reviewed the results extracted from the project. Many significant relationships were found between variables. These relationships will be discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

Included in Chapter Five was a presentation of the conclusions gleamed as a result of completing the project. Further, the recommendations extracted from the project are presented. Lastly, the Chapter concludes with a summary.

#### Discussion

The conclusions extracted from the project follows.

1. Few of the standard stressors or variables within the literature that were associated with corporal punishment were found to be significantly related to social work student's attitude toward corporal punishment. Age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, undergraduate major, religious identification or level of belief, political views, marital status, family structure, parental substance abuse, and frequency of corporal punishment experiences as a child were all found to have no relationship with the respondent's belief of how

often it was appropriate to use corporal punishment on a child.

2. Social work students at CSUSB reported using corporal punishment with their own children at a rate and frequency significantly under those reported in the literature for the general population. Further, respondents felt that it was appropriate for parents to use corporal punishment with their children far less often than statistics would suggest parents actually use corporal punishment.
3. The majority of respondents felt that only unsafe behaviors justified the use of corporal punishment.
4. Most social work students (61.1 percent) felt that the use of corporal punishment, even when it did not rise to the level of legal abuse, could cause serious psychological problems in the future.
5. Whether or not the respondents felt that corporal punishment could cause serious psychological problems is strongly correlated with how often the respondent felt it was appropriate to use corporal punishment. In

addition, female respondents were more likely to believe that corporal punishment could cause damage than male respondents.

6. Students who were graduating in 2002 were more likely to believe that corporal punishment should never be used than students who were expecting to graduate in 2003 or 2004. These views may be influenced by the education students receive in graduate school and have, therefor, altered their opinions regarding corporal punishment.
7. Whether or not the respondents felt that the corporal punishment he or she experienced as a child was justified may be a strong predictor regarding how often he or she felts it was appropriate for parents to use corporal punishment with their children.
8. Political views and religious identity were correlated with whether or not certain behaviors justified the use of corporal punishment. Interestingly, a significant minority of Christians felt that disobedience may be a justification for the use of corporal punishment. This is in keeping with the

literature that correlates religious values with corporal punishment.

9. Respondents who were disciplined primarily by their father as opposed to their mother were more likely to believe that corporal punishment can cause serious psychological problems for children in the future. A consideration is that men use corporal punishment more frequently or more severely than women.

#### Limitations

The following limitations apply to the project:

1. The primary limitation of this study relates to sample size. Due to limitations of time and accessibility, the researchers were unable to obtain a larger sample size. As a result, significant findings were limited and in some instances displayed trends due to small cell size.

#### Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

In regards to social work practice and policy, more emphasis regarding corporal punishment is appropriate. Though it is reasonable to believe that a social worker's

graduate education is challenging attitudes regarding corporal punishment, a greater emphasis can be placed on the National Association of Social Worker's position on the use of physical punishment and the possible deleterious affects of corporal punishment may help to further change attitudes on this subject.

In regards to further research, a similar study with a larger sample size could possibly find greater relationships or influences between the variables. In addition, future research could be conducted using social workers as opposed to social work students or a longitudinal study involving students just entering graduate studies and students about to graduate. Further examination of the types of behaviors that individuals feel justify the use of corporal punishment and the differences related to the frequency and style of corporal punishment in addition to gender might be appropriate for further analysis.

### Conclusions

The conclusions extracted from the project follows.

1. Social work students at CSUSB report using corporal punishment with their own children at a rate and frequency significantly under those

reported in the literature for the general population. Further, respondents felt that it was appropriate for parents to use corporal punishment with their children far less often than statistics would suggest parents actually employ corporal punishment.

2. The majority of respondents felt that only unsafe behaviors justify the use of corporal punishment.
3. Most social work students (61.1 percent) felt that the use of corporal punishment, even when it did not rise to the level of legal abuse, can cause serious psychological problems in the future.
4. More research regarding social worker attitudes regarding corporal punishment and emphasis on the subject is warranted.

APPENDIX A  
QUESTIONNAIRE

## Questionnaire

*First, we would like to ask you some questions about who you are.*

- 1) What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) What is your sex? (Please circle one).
  - 0) Male
  - 1) Female
- 3) What is your ethnicity?
  - 1) Black
  - 2) Caucasian
  - 3) Hispanic
  - 4) Native American
  - 5) Asian
  - 6) Pacific Islander
  - 7) Other
- 4) What is your current socio-economic status?
  - 1) Upper-Class
  - 2) Middle-Class
  - 3) Lower-Class
- 5) What was your undergraduate major?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 6) Which University are you currently attending?
  - 1) California State University San Bernardino
  - 2) Loma Linda University
- 7) What year do you expect to receive your MSW?
  - 1) 2002
  - 2) 2003
  - 3) 2004
  - 4) 2005
- 8) Are you a full or part time student?
  - 1) Full Time
  - 2) Part Time

- 9) What religion do you identify with?
- 1) Christianity
  - 2) Catholicism
  - 3) Judaism
  - 4) Muslim
  - 5) Buddhism
  - 6) Other \_\_\_\_\_ (please specify)
  - 7) None
- 10) Is the answer you gave for number nine the same religion in which you were raised?
- 0) Yes
  - 1) No
- 11) If you answered no to question ten, in what religion were you raised?
- 1) Christianity
  - 2) Catholicism
  - 3) Judaism
  - 4) Muslim
  - 5) Buddhism
  - 6) Other \_\_\_\_\_ (please specify)
  - 7) None
- 12) Regarding your religious beliefs, do you consider yourself
- 1) very religious
  - 2) moderately religious
  - 3) not religious at all
- 13) What is your marital status?
- 1) Married
  - 2) Divorced
  - 3) Widowed
  - 4) Single
  - 5) Separated
- 14) Regarding your political views, do you consider yourself
- 1) Conservative
  - 2) Moderate
  - 3) Liberal

*Now we would like to ask you some questions about your childhood. Some of the questions deal with your experiences regarding corporal punishment. Corporal punishment is defined as any physical punishment that may include spanking, slapping, swatting, pulling, pinching, ect...*

- 15) What was your socio-economic status as a child?
  - 1) Upper-Class
  - 2) Middle-Class
  - 3) Lower-Class
- 16) What was the structure of your immediate family growing up?
  - 1) Two parent family
  - 2) Divorced family
  - 3) Single-parent family
  - 4) Extended Family
- 17) How many siblings lived in the home with you as a child?
  - 1) Only child
  - 2) One sibling
  - 3) Two siblings
  - 4) Three siblings
  - 5) Four siblings
  - 6) Over four siblings
- 18) Did either of your parents use intoxicating substances on a regular basis or abuse substances when you were a child?
  - 0) Yes
  - 1) No
- 19) As a child which parent was the disciplinarian?
  - 0) Mother
  - 1) Father
  - 2) Other
- 20) How often did you experience corporal punishment as a child?
  - 1) Often (daily)
  - 2) Sometimes (weekly)
  - 3) Rarely (monthly)
  - 4) Never

- 21) At that time did you believe that the corporal punishment you experienced was appropriate and justified?
- 0) Yes
  - 1) No
- 22) Looking back, do you now believe that the corporal punishment you experienced was appropriate and justified?
- 0) Yes
  - 1) No

*Now we would like to ask you a few questions regarding your current views on corporal punishment.*

- 23) How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_
- 24) Are you the primary disciplinarian of your children?
- 0) Yes
  - 1) No
- 25) How often do you use corporal punishments with your children?
- 1) Often (daily)
  - 2) Sometimes (weekly)
  - 3) Rarely (monthly)
  - 4) Never
- 26) How often do you feel it is appropriate for parents to use corporal punishment with their children?
- 1) Often (daily)
  - 2) Sometimes (weekly)
  - 3) Rarely (monthly)
  - 4) Never
- 27) How often do you feel it is appropriate for your clients to use corporal punishment with their children?
- 1) Often (daily)
  - 2) Sometimes (weekly)
  - 3) Rarely (monthly)
  - 4) Never

28) What are some child behaviors that you feel justifies the use of corporal punishment (circle all that may apply).

- 1) Lying
- 2) Stealing
- 3) Cheating
- 4) Violence toward others
- 5) Disobedience
- 6) Unsafe behaviors (running into the street, playing with the stove etc...)

29) Do you believe that the use of corporal punishment (even when it does not meet the legal definition of abuse) can lead to serious psychological problems in the future?

- 0) Yes
- 1) No

APPENDIX B  
INFORMED CONSENT

APPENDIX C  
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

## **Debriefing Statement**

Thank you for completing this study. Your participation and contribution to this study is greatly appreciated. The results of this study will be reported in group form only. Your individual responses will not be identified in order to preserve anonymity. The findings of this study will be available at Pfau Library during the summer of 2002.

The questions asked in this study are of a personal nature and some participants may have found them to be upsetting. If you feel the need to talk about any emotions or concerns that may have arisen during your participation you may contact the CSUSB Counseling Center at (909) 880-5040. In addition, if you have any questions and/or concerns please feel free to contact Rachel Estrada MSW, LCSW at (909) 736-6660, or Dr. Rosemary McCaslin at (909) 880-5507.

To finish this survey simply place it in the mail folder for second year student, Christopher Brannon, which can be found in the social work student lounge. Thank you for your time and patience.

APPENDIX D  
QUESTIONNAIRE COVER LETTER

Dear Fellow Student,

For those of you that we have not had the pleasure to meet, our names are Christopher Brannon and James Tanghal. We are second year, full time students in the Children, Youth and Family cohort. As you know, second year students are now vigorously working to complete their thesis projects.

Attached to this cover letter you will find a short questionnaire that we hope you will take five or ten minutes to fill out for us.

Originally, our study was designed to target CPS workers in Riverside DPSS. After our request to conduct this study was turned down by Riverside County, we sought permission to conduct it with San Bernardino County CPS. They too, turned us down. Both departments feared potential bad press that may arise from the mildly controversial topic that we are studying.

It is because of these unexpected rejections that that we need your help. We have changed the parameters of the study to survey MSW students, but to reach a suitable sample, we need a rather high response rate. We know how busy you all are, but if could spare the five to ten minutes that it will take to complete this survey, it would greatly help us out, and we would be very grateful. If you choose to participate, please read the debriefing statement for instruction on what to do with the questionnaire once you have completed it. Whatever your decision, we thank you for taking the time to consider our request.

Thank you very much,

Christopher Brannon and James Tanghal

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## ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:

Assigned Leader: Christopher Brannon

Assisted By: James Tanghal

2. Data Entry and Analysis:

Team Effort: Christopher Brannon and  
James Tanghal

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

- a. Introduction and Literature

Team Effort: Christopher Brannon and  
James Tanghal

- b. Methods

Team Effort: Christopher Brannon and  
James Tanghal

- c. Results

Team Effort: Christopher Brannon and  
James Tanghal

- d. Discussion

Team Effort: Christopher Brannon and  
James Tanghal