

**The Effect of Banning Corporal Punishment in Europe:
A Five-Nation Comparison**

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1. Introduction

In 1989, Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child gave children throughout the world the right to be reared without violence. On a national level, 18 European nations have now codified this in their laws. Sweden (1979), Finland (1983), Norway (1987), and Austria (1989) had already banned corporal punishment before the UN convention. These four countries have since been followed by Cyprus (1994), Denmark (1997), Latvia (1998), Croatia (1999), Germany (2000), Iceland (2003), Bulgaria (2003), the Ukraine (2004), Rumania (2005), Hungary (2005), Greece (2006), the Netherlands (2007), Portugal (2007), and Spain (2007). All these nations based their legal regulations on the model of Sweden, the first nation in the world to legally outlaw corporal punishment in family childrearing. Swedish parental rights stipulate, "children may not be subjected to either physical punishment or injurious or humiliating treatment" (chapter 6, § 3, Phrase 2, translated).

Several international studies have claimed that this ban on corporal punishment has helped to reduce violent childrearing in Sweden and exerted a major influence on both the attitudes and behavior of parents (Durrant, 1999, 2005; Edfeldt, 1996; Janson, 2005; Stattin, Janson, Klackenber-Larsson, & Magnusson, 1998). Due to large-scale and nationwide public awareness campaigns, more than 90% of the population was familiar with the law one year after its introduction (Newell, 1980; Ziegert, 1983). In addition, Sweden has not scaled down its campaigns to publicize the harmfulness of corporal punishment and the fact that it is against the law. Various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as Save the Children Sweden (2001) have continued their campaigns on several levels, directing them toward not only parents but also preschool- and school-aged children. In Germany, the change in the law was also publicized, but less intensively (Bussmann, 2000, 2004). However, the percentage of the population familiar with the law is far lower than in Sweden, indicating the need to accompany legal prohibition with intensive information campaigns.

There are many indications that Sweden has the lowest incidence of violence in family childrearing. In 1994, only 50% of Swedish children reported receiving corporal punishment compared with 76% in Germany as late as 2001. Only 3% of Swedish children received resounding slaps on the face and only 1% were beaten severely (Germany in 2001: 9% and 3% respectively). According to the latest studies, approximately 4% of Swedish 11- to 13-year-olds and 7% of young Swedish adults experience corporal punishment (Durrant, 2000; Janson, 2003).

Nonetheless, various studies report a remarkable decline in childrearing violence in other countries as well, even though they have not codified any ban. An international comparison of registered child homicides also casts doubt on the positive effect of the Swedish prohibition (Beckett, 2005). However, such analyses are scarcely suitable for reliably evaluating the effect of banning corporal punishment (Janson, 2005): Not only is any comparison between national statistics inaccurate because of the familiar control- and definition effects, but also child homicides are frequently not a consequence of corporal punishment but reveal a variety of causes that will hardly be influenced by a prohibition of violence (Janson, 2005; Schneider, 2001).

At the same time, doubts have been expressed regarding whether the reduction in violence in Sweden is due to prohibition alone or whether it is not far more the effect of a general change in values and attitudes within society (Beckett, 2005; Lazelere & Johnson, 1999; Roberts, 2000). Hence, 30 years after its introduction, the positive effects of the Swedish prohibition of corporal punishment remain controversial.

2. Methodological Design of the Cross-European Comparison

The effects of prohibiting corporal punishment have been studied in few individual nations, and no study has applied the same instrument across nations. To overcome this deficit, the German Research Foundation is funding a five-nation European comparison study of the effects on families of prohibiting corporal punishment. This line of research was initiated by Detlev Frehsee († 2001) who already carried out parent and youth studies on domestic violence in Germany within a legal context together with the current project manager in 1992, 1994, and 1996 (Frehsee, 1992, 1993; Frehsee & Bussmann, 1996; Frehsee, Horn, & Bussmann, 1996).

This first European comparison study was based on only five nations to reduce time and costs. Austria, France, Germany, Spain, and Sweden were selected to reflect the heterogeneous legal situation in Europe. Differentiation and selection criteria were the codification of a prohibition of violence in family childrearing as well as the implementation of an information and education campaign. Along with Sweden, two other countries in the survey, namely, Austria and Germany, legally prohibited violence in childrearing at the time of the survey. The current regulations in these nations categorically prohibit all forms of childrearing violence through civil law. German law states "Children have a right to be brought up without violence. Corporal punishment, mental cruelty, and other humiliating measures are inadmissible" (§ 1631, Phrase 2 BGB, translated).

Austrian law states "The use of violence and the infliction of physical and mental suffering are inadmissible" (§ 146 a ABGB, translated). Although this prohibition has been law since 1989 in Austria, its introduction was not accompanied by nationwide information campaigns as in Germany (where the prohibition has been in force since 2000). Hence, a comparison between

these two nations allows an investigation of how far information and education campaigns may contribute to an effect of prohibiting violence.

For further comparisons, Spain and France were chosen as two nations that both had no laws prohibiting violence (at the time of the survey) but differed in terms of information campaigns on the harmfulness of corporal punishment. This should permit a comparison of the impact of legal prohibition versus information and educational activities alone. If a prohibition has an impact of its own, be it only reinforcing, findings in these two countries should be characterized by more violence—particularly in terms of approval of corporal punishment as well as its actual frequency and severity—than the other countries mentioned above. Findings will probably be on a similar level to those in Germany in the 1990s before corporal punishment was prohibited (Bussmann, 2000, 2004).

At the time of the survey, the parental right to use corporal punishment was regulated as follows in Spain: "Minors are subject to parental authority. The exercise of this authority must always be oriented toward the well-being of the children in line with their individual personalities . . . They [the parents] may subject their children to reasonable punishment exercised with restraint" (Código Civil, Book VII, Art. 154, translated). However, nationwide campaigns have been publicizing the risks involved in violent parental childrearing behavior since 1998. Accompanied by appeals from Spanish scientists—both pediatricians and psychologists—these aim to generate a problem awareness that will win parents over to a nonviolent childrearing style (Arruabarrena Madariaga & De Paúl Velasco, 1999; Cerezo & Pons-Salvador, 2002). These efforts culminated in the legal reform that has greatly narrowed the parental right to use corporal punishment since the beginning of 2008. Spanish parents now have to "respect physical and mental integrity" (Código civil, Book VII, Art. 154 amended on December 28, 2007, translated). This means that corporal punishment is now banned in Spain as well.

In France, corporal punishment is neither forbidden by law nor have there been any nationwide campaigns highlighting the risks of this type of punishment or the advantages of nonviolent childrearing. The French Civil Code grants parents broad discretionary powers: "Fathers and mothers have the parental authority to protect their child's safety, health, and morals. In this sense, they have the right and the duty to take care of, supervise, and rear their child" (Code Civil, Book 1, Section IX, Art. 371-2). With the exception of child abuse, which is just as punishable in France as in the other nations, no constraints are imposed on how parents rear their children.

We hypothesize that the most nonviolent results will be obtained in Sweden followed by Austria and Germany. Despite the longer prohibition of violence in Austria, results are not expected to be better than those for Germany, because of the weaker education and information campaigns. In

contrast, the worst results are predicted for countries that do not prohibit violence with France taking last place. In the present study, France represents those western industrial nations that have been subject to a general change in values but have not undertaken any comparable efforts to reduce family violence. Hence, the results of the French survey should contrast with Sweden more strongly than other nations and also be further from Sweden than all other nations.

The international comparison was based on face-to-face interviews with 5,000 parents using a standardized questionnaire—a random sample of 1,000 parents in each nation—between October and December 2007 (except in Austria where interviews continued until March 2008). The target population was parents over the age of 25 years living in private homes with at least one child under the age of 18. To reduce bias, only parents with the nationality of the nation in question were surveyed. Slight distribution inequalities in the sample were corrected by weighting data on gender and age composition according to their distribution in the nation concerned.

3. Prevalence of Childrearing Violence

Comparisons of the frequency of childrearing measures applied confirmed the hypothesis that Sweden had a significantly lower level of sanctioning across the entire spectrum of corporal punishments than any of the other nations. In the use of mild corporal punishments, there were marked differences between Sweden and both the nations with legal regulations and those without laws prohibiting violence. As hypothesized, 14.1% of Swedish parents reported giving a "mild slap on the face," whereas percentages were notably higher in Austria (49.9%) and Germany (42.6%) and considerably higher in Spain (54.6%) and France (71.5%). Even more impressive differences between the two groups of nations (with vs. without legal prohibitions) were found for "spanking bottom with hand," a form of sanctioning that lies on the threshold to severe forms of corporal punishment. Whereas 4.1% of respondents in Sweden, 16.0% in Austria, and 16.8% in Germany practiced this kind of punishment, it was applied by more than one half of parents in Spain and France. These findings on France have also been confirmed in a recent French survey (Union des Familles en Europe, 2007).

In the 30 years since its introduction, Swedish parents seem to have internalized the prohibition of corporal punishment. Neither Austria with the second oldest prohibition (1989) nor Germany (2000) with a comparably unequivocally formulated ban have attained such a low level of sanctioning.

Frequency of use of mild and severe corporal punishment (percentages)

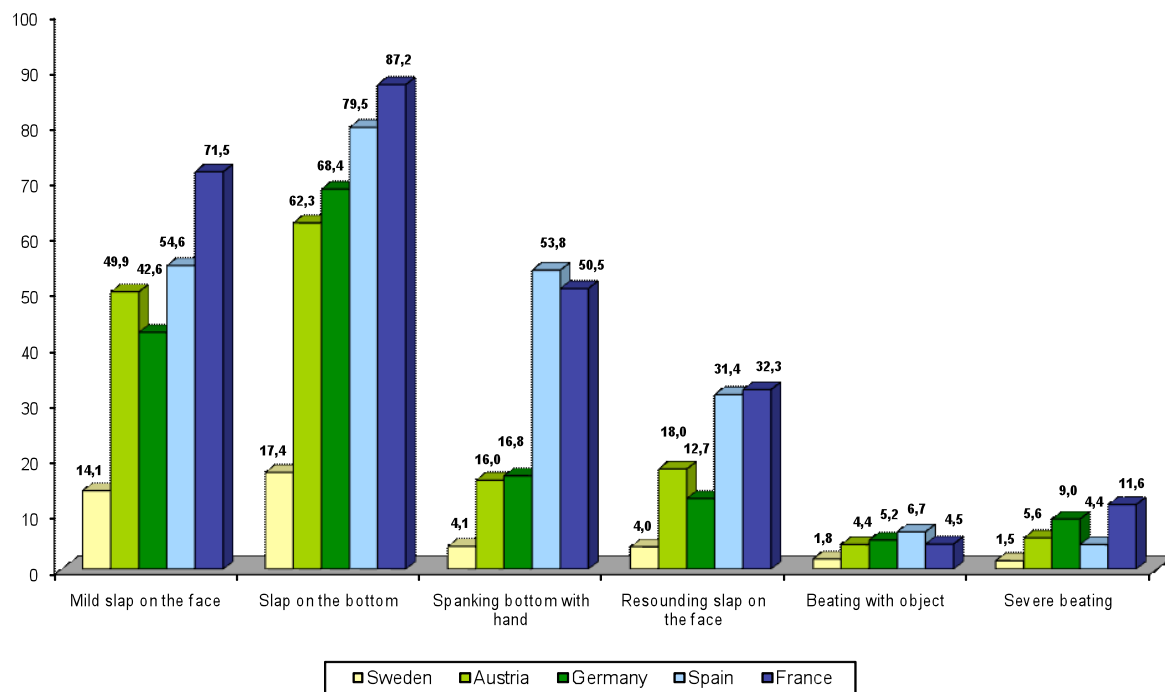


Figure 1

To distinguish between different childrearing styles, we subjected all forms of sanctioning—not only corporal punishments but also not being allowed to watch television, having to stay home, reductions in pocket money, shouting at the child, or ignoring and no longer talking to him or her—to a factor analysis (varimax rotation, principal-components and principal-axis analysis). All childrearing measures loaded on four factors: Prohibitions, Psychological sanctions, Mild corporal punishments, and Severe corporal punishments (see Bussmann, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2005). The following three sanction groups were formed by counting response behaviors rather than being generated on the basis of summative indices:

Nonviolent childrearing. These parents desist from corporal punishment and apply prohibitions and psychological sanctions.

Conventional childrearing. These parents apply all forms of sanctioning apart from severe corporal punishment. Respondents reporting that they had applied sanctions from the domain of severe corporal punishment on only one occasion were also assigned to this conventional group.

Violent childrearing. Alongside the other forms of sanctioning, these parents had used severe corporal punishments (resounding slap on the face, beating with an object, severe beating) on more than one occasion.

The pattern already suggested by the frequencies alone (see Figure 1) was confirmed in these sanction groups. Three-quarters of Swedish parents reared their children nonviolently; one fifth, "conventionally"; and only 3.4% belonged to the group of violent childrearsers. In contrast, the majority of Austrian (55.8%) and German parents (57.9%) preferred to rear their children "conventionally." Although more than one-quarter of the parents in both these nations did not use corporal punishment, approximately 14% of them belonged to the group of violent childrearsers. In contrast, almost one-half of Spanish (47.7%) and French parents (46.7%) practiced this childrearing style.

Sanction groups (percentages)

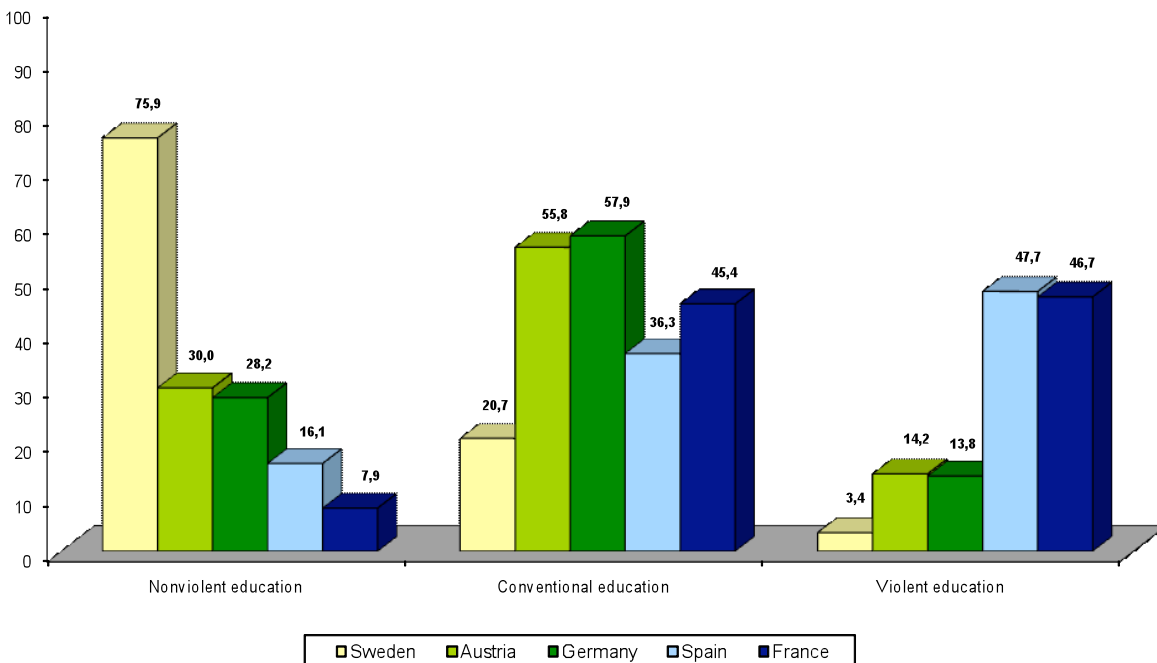


Figure 2

4. Violence Experienced During Own Childhood

Parents were also asked about how they had been sanctioned as children. Comparisons in all five nations revealed that today's parents had been exposed to markedly more violent childrearing measures than the ones they themselves imposed on their children. Nonetheless, at 39.4%, the proportion of Swedish parents who had been reared without violence was on a level that today's childrearsers have yet to attain in either Austria or Germany. The proportion of currently violent childrearsers in Spain and France, that is, in the countries with no prohibitory law, was twice as high as that in the Swedish parent generation.

These differences go beyond the postulated general change in values and point to the success of Sweden's very early ban and the prior discourse on nonviolent childrearing and on the harmfulness of corporal punishment. Even the current generation of Swedish parents was exposed to far less childrearing violence in the 1970s and 1980s than today's children in the other countries. The more than 10% drop in the prevalence of corporal punishment in the childrearing of the Swedish parent generation is unique in the European comparison. It cannot be due just to the introduction of the prohibition in 1979, but must also reflect all the previous legal reforms and public discussions. The penal code defense for caretakers using corporal punishment was already repealed in 1957 (Durrant, 1996), and, after long discussions, the paragraph in civil law permitting mild forms of corporal punishment was also repealed in 1966. As a result, the acceptance of violent childrearing declined in the Swedish population between 1965 and 1971 (Durrant, 1996; Edfeldt, 1996). Legally speaking, it was already inadmissible at this point in time. Therefore, the ban of 1979 only clarified a legal situation that the population had been aware of for many years. Hence, the current generation of Swedish parents grew up during a long drawn out phase in which violent childrearing had been outlawed in society.

These trends are reflected in the following data on the different parent generations. For clarity of presentation, Table 2 depicts only the two groups of parents who reared their children either with or without violence. Sweden showed an increase in nonviolent and a decrease in violent childrearing styles from 1962 to 1967, from 1968 to 1973, and in the parents born since 1979. The first trend could be due to the earlier public discussion on the repeal of the paragraphs permitting mild corporal punishment in 1966. The change after 1979 was, in our opinion, probably a consequence of the codification of the prohibition and the subsequent nationwide information campaigns.

Nonetheless, it has to be pointed out that these are not real times-series data. A time series was only simulated by asking the generations in this cross-sectional study to report their experiences retrospectively and then plotting these retrospective reports as a time series on the basis of age cohorts. Because retrospective recall probably tended to blur these differences, they might well have been stronger if these had been real times-series data based on survey data from the time intervals in question.

Despite this methodological fuzziness (Fiedler, 2004), Sweden reveals a decades-long tradition of broadly nonviolent childrearing. The positive effects can be seen clearly today. In contrast, even at the present time, more children in Austria and Germany receive a "mild slap on the face" more frequently than the current Swedish parent generation had received when they were children.

Table 1. Parental sanctioning style regarding age (percentages)

		Born before 1962 (older than 46)	Born 1962 - 1967 (40 - 45)	Born 1968 - 1973 (35 - 39)	Born 1973 - 1978 (30 - 34)	Born from 1979 (bis 29)
Sweden						
Nonviolent education	Own childhood	33,8	38,3	47,3	44,1	45,3
	today	73,3	75,0	80,1	83,9	89,5
Violent education	Own childhood	24,4	19	15,8	16	14,7
	today	4,4	1,3	2,0	1,2	0,9
Austria:						
Nonviolent education	Own childhood	10,5	15,2	9,2	10,0	7,6
	today	33,8	26,5	26,2	34,2	33,0
Violent education	Own childhood	51,3	46,4	42,7	46,4	44,7
	today	14,5	15,3	15,9	13,8	8,9
Germany:						
Nonviolent education	Own childhood	9,2	9,5	13,2	13,3	14,1
	today	22,4	26,9	31,6	28,4	35,3
Violent education	Own childhood	55,5	54,6	45,1	45,2	38,1
	today	18,8	14,5	8,2	14,1	12,8
Spain:						
Nonviolent education	Own childhood	10,2	10,9	5,9	7,5	4,2
	today	14,3	14,2	14,0	26,9	11,4
Violent education	Own childhood	72,4	65,8	72,6	67,6	76,4
	today	54,4	47,7	46,1	40,3	49,1
France:						
Nonviolent education	Own childhood	5,2	3,1	5,2	2,9	2,8
	today	10,3	6,5	5,8	8,2	9,6
Violent education	Own childhood	72,3	75,5	72,0	68,5	67,6
	today	46,2	49,2	53,1	37,9	41,2

5. Violence in the Parental Partnership

Empirical studies have shown that a violent parental relationship increases the risk of childrearing violence (Lamnek, Lüdke, & Ottermann, 2006; McGuigan & Pratt, 2001). Therefore, parents were also asked whether they were victims or perpetrators of violence in their partnerships.

Severe physical conflicts between partners were markedly less frequent in Sweden compared with the other countries. Conflicts in Sweden were far more frequently verbal. One may nonetheless suppose that the high proportion of this type of conflict behavior is due more to an increased sensitivity to mild forms of violence rather than to an actual shift to (milder) verbal forms of violence (see Figure 3). This is because although actions at the lower threshold to violence (grabbing hard and pushing) are just as frequent in Sweden as in Germany or Austria, explicit acts of violence are far rarer. Therefore, the Swedes have to perceive and report other undesirable conflict behaviors more frequently. Answers on their own use of violence in their partnerships revealed a similar picture (no figure).

Assault in Partnership (percentages)

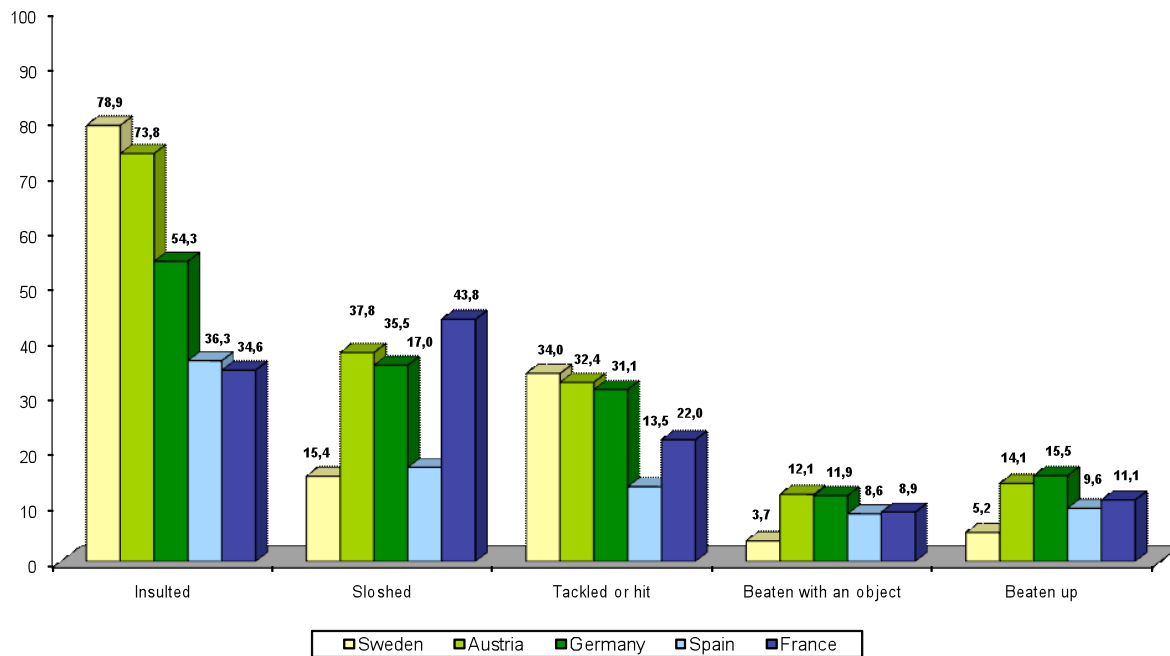


Figure 3

6. Knowledge of the Law and Information Campaigns.

6.1 Awareness of the Legal Situation and Information Campaigns

Almost 90% of the Swedish parents surveyed knew that corporal punishment had been abolished since 1979. Other studies have confirmed that only one year after its introduction, the prohibition was just as well known as in our study due to the large-scale nationwide information measures (Newell, 1980; Ziegert, 1983). Over the years, Sweden has not curtailed its efforts to make people aware of the harmfulness of corporal punishment and the fact that it is prohibited. Various NGOs have been campaigning continuously for many years and on several levels focusing not only on parents but also on preschool- and school-aged children (Janson, 2005; Save the Children Sweden, 2001).

In Austria and Germany, 32% and 31% of respondents were aware of the current legal situation. This rather moderate percentage compared with Sweden indicates not only the need to accompany legal prohibition with intensive information campaigns, but also, and above all, to apply such measures in the long-term. The German government, in contrast to Austria where there were no nationwide information campaigns, launched a nationwide multimedia strategy to advertise the change in the law under the motto "More respect for children." However, this was

limited to the years 2000 and 2002. As a result, there has been no mentionable change in the knowledge about the legal reform. For example, one year after the German ban, only approximately 30% of German parents and almost the same proportion of children and adolescents knew about this new law oriented toward nonviolent childrearing (Bussmann, 2004).

These results indicate that information campaigns certainly have an impact. However, they also suggest that, in line with the Swedish model, continuous campaigns on the risks of parental corporal punishment are needed to anchor the right to nonviolent childrearing and the harmfulness of its alternative in the minds of the population.

In Spain, approximately 38% and in France, approximately 32% of parents had been aware of campaigns to make people aware of the harmfulness of corporal punishment. Considering that the NGO "Save the Children" has been carrying out nationwide information campaigns in Spain since 1998 (Save the Children Spain, 2001), whereas there have not been any nationwide or long-lasting campaigns in France, a larger difference could have been anticipated.

6.2 Beliefs About What Is Legally Admissible

Consistent with the findings so far, only a tiny minority in Sweden still considered corporal punishment to be permissible. A large majority interpreted the legal limits accurately, even in the domain of mild corporal punishment, which had still been taken to be normal and socially acceptable up until the 1980s (Janson, 2005; Stattin, Janson, Klackenber-Larsson, & Magnusson, 1998; Straus, 1980). Even a so-called "slap on the bottom," which is close to the lower threshold and which many legal experts in both Germany and Austria view as being below the significance threshold and therefore still permissible, was considered to be an admissible childrearing measure by only almost 6% of Swedish parents. This shows that Swedish parents viewed the legal prohibition much more strictly than parents in the two other nations with an absolute ban. Their sanctioning behavior was also broadly in line with their relatively strict beliefs about what is legally admissible. Only 17% of Swedish parents reported having given their child a slap on the bottom compared with two-thirds of German or Austrian parents (see Figure 1).

What do parents believe to be permissible according to established law ? (percentages)

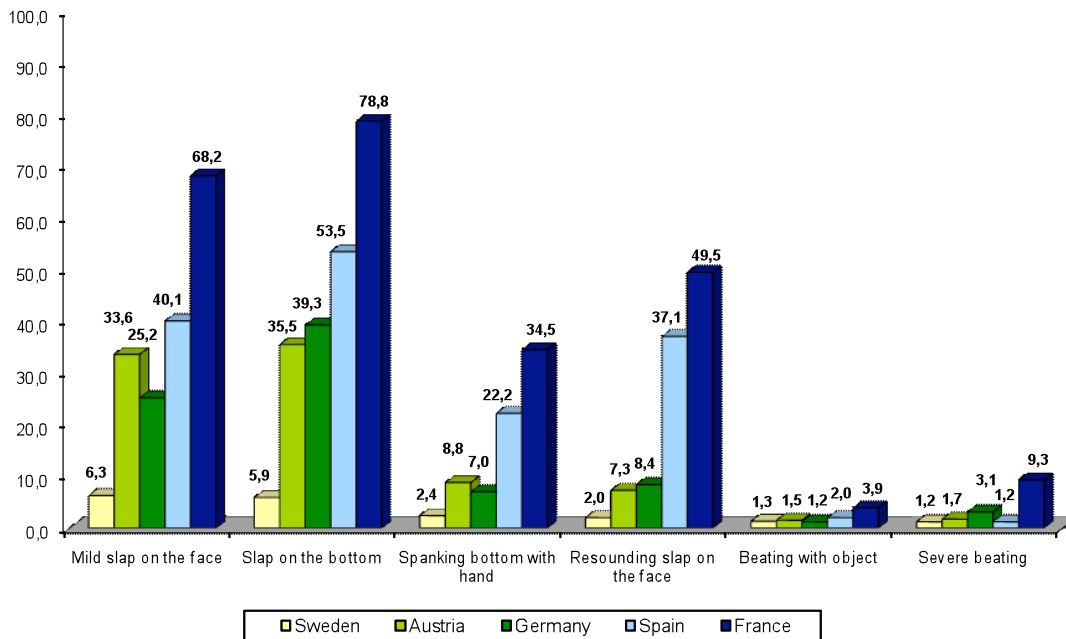


Figure 4

The analysis of mild forms of sanctioning revealed that the old parental right to administer corporal punishment continues to influence behavior in Germany and Austria. The legal reform is much more recent, especially when the early civil law reforms in Sweden at the end of the 1950s are also considered. Evidently, Sweden has a much longer cultural as well as legal tradition of nonviolent childrearing.

Spain and France, two nations that do not prohibit corporal punishment, revealed marked differences in both its mild and severe forms. Although at the time of the survey, the Spanish legal situation imposed no restrictions on the parental right to administer corporal punishment, far fewer Spanish parents considered it to be legally inadmissible than French parents. This may well reflect the public discussions and information campaigns preceding the Spanish legal reform of December 2007 (after the data had been gathered for this study). In contrast, abuse-like forms of sanctioning like a severe beating were thought to be irreconcilable with the law by between 97% and 99% of parents in nearly all countries studied. Only France deviated here: A relatively large minority of 9.3% of French parents considered a "severe beating" to be legally admissible.

A longitudinal study in Germany from 1996 to 2007 has shown how much time is needed to change traditional beliefs about what is right and wrong (Bussmann, 2003, 2005, see Figure 5). The public discussion in Germany, the general shift in values, and the legal reforms are

inextricably intertwined here. For example, a precursor of the absolute prohibition of violence in force since November 2000 was the Prohibition of Maltreatment Act of 1998. The less severe forms of corporal punishment such as a "mild slap on the face" or a "slap on the bottom" reveal a continuous shift in what is believed to be legally admissible. Approval of a "mild slap on the face" has dropped by more than two-thirds since 2003 and a "slap on the bottom" by more than one-half. Therefore, legal prohibition combined with continuous public discussion on nonviolent childrearing can influence beliefs about what is legally admissible over the course of time, as the Swedish findings indicate (see Janson, 2005).

What do German parents believe to be permissible according to established law ?
(percentages)

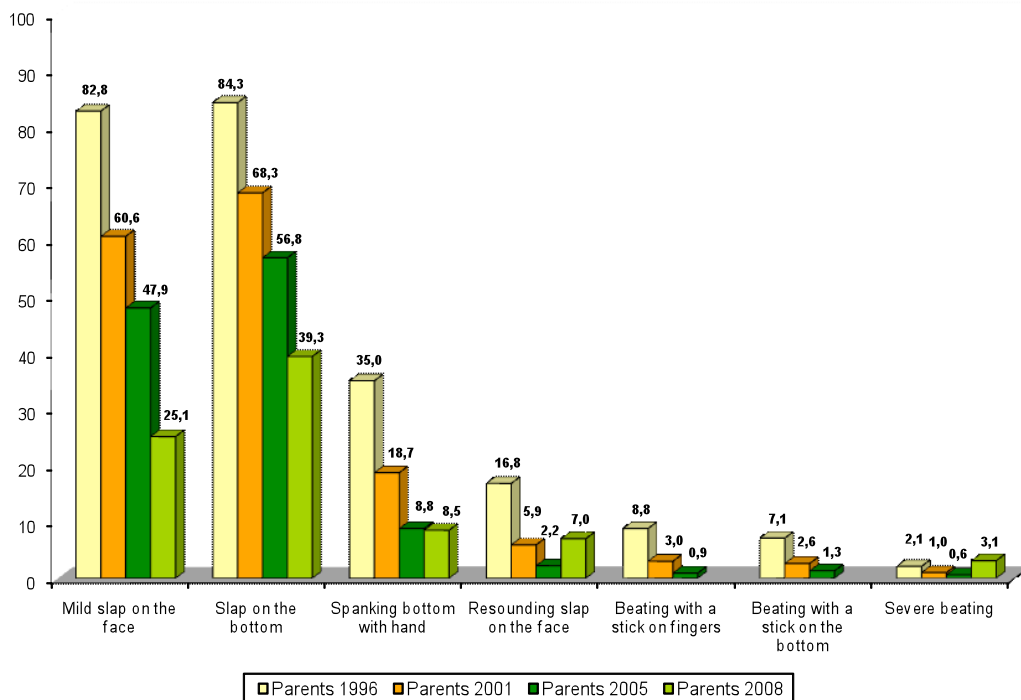


Figure 5

7. Acceptance of the Prohibition of Violence

7.1 Attitudes Toward an Ideal of Nonviolent Childrearing

Despite all the differences between nations in the childrearing measures applied and the appraisal of what is legally permissible, a very large majority of parents in all five nations shared violence-rejecting attitudes and supported the ideal of rearing children without violence. In Sweden, this was even 93.4%. This is an indication for the frequently postulated change toward nonviolent childrearing values in all the nations studied. Nonetheless, between 15% and 20% of the

respondents believed that they would be unable to rear their children in daily life without some form of mild corporal punishment. About 18% of Swedish parents took this view—a similar proportion to the 20.7% of parents who rear their children conventionally (see Figure 2).

The approval of corporal punishment among Spanish parents hardly differed from that of parents in nations in which it is prohibited. In France, in contrast, the proportion of parents who could not imagine rearing children without also resorting to drastic means was twice as high at 43%. As a result, it is not surprising that 53% of French parents were against the abolition of corporal punishment in childrearing (Union des Familles en Europe, 2007). Hence, the major differences between the five nations cannot be attributed to changing values. It is far more the case that changing values have led only to a general decline in the level of violence.

Attitudes Toward an Ideal of Nonviolent Childrearing

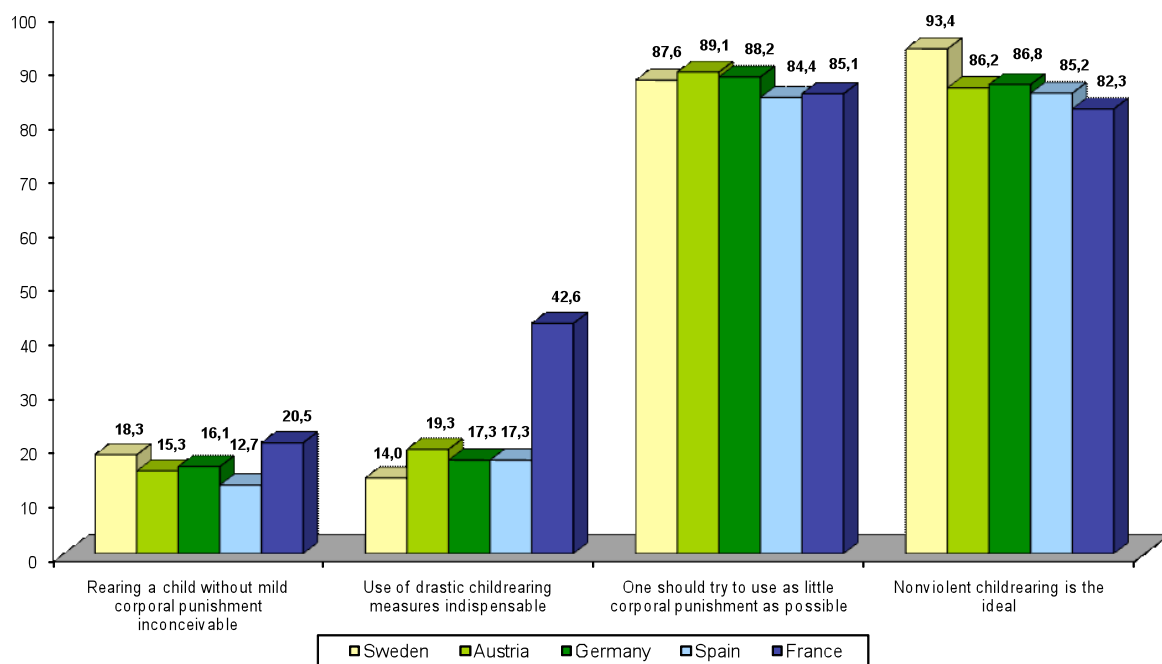


Figure 6

7.2 Attitudes Toward Childrearing Violence

Attitudes were also assessed in a more differentiated way in order to reduce social desirability effects due to the general disapproval of all forms of violence to be observed in society. Regardless of whether or not corporal punishment was prohibited, the majority of parents were in favor of discussing problems rather than using corporal punishment in line with their childrearing

ideal. More than two-thirds of the parents were also aware of the risk that corporal punishment may well lay the foundation for a vicious circle of violence.

A notably large proportion of respondents gave situational reasons for corporal punishment such as occasional helplessness or a lack of alternatives. However, here as well, one can clearly see how Swedish parents differed. They much less frequently accepted justifications for its use. Only 3.8% thought that it was an acceptable way of "shortening the conflict"; only 6.1% as an alternative to the psychological measure of not talking to the child. In Austria and Germany, acceptance of these justifications was much higher at 12.8% and 14.7% respectively. It seems as if a culture of nonviolent childrearing like that in Sweden has yet to establish itself in these two nations.

In light of the previous findings, the markedly higher acceptance of justifications in Spain and France is less surprising. For example, 26.5% of French parents affirmed that "a slap is sometimes the best/quickest way," and 31.2% of Spanish parents agreed with the statement "better a slap than to ignore and no longer talk to the child." Hence, assessing the pros and cons of childrearing violence from the parental perspective reveals a markedly more differentiated picture between the nations. Although parents in all nations strove to rear their children with as little violence as possible, they differed particularly in the ways they justified their own behavior in their minds.

Attitudes toward the use of corporal punishment in childrearing (percentages)

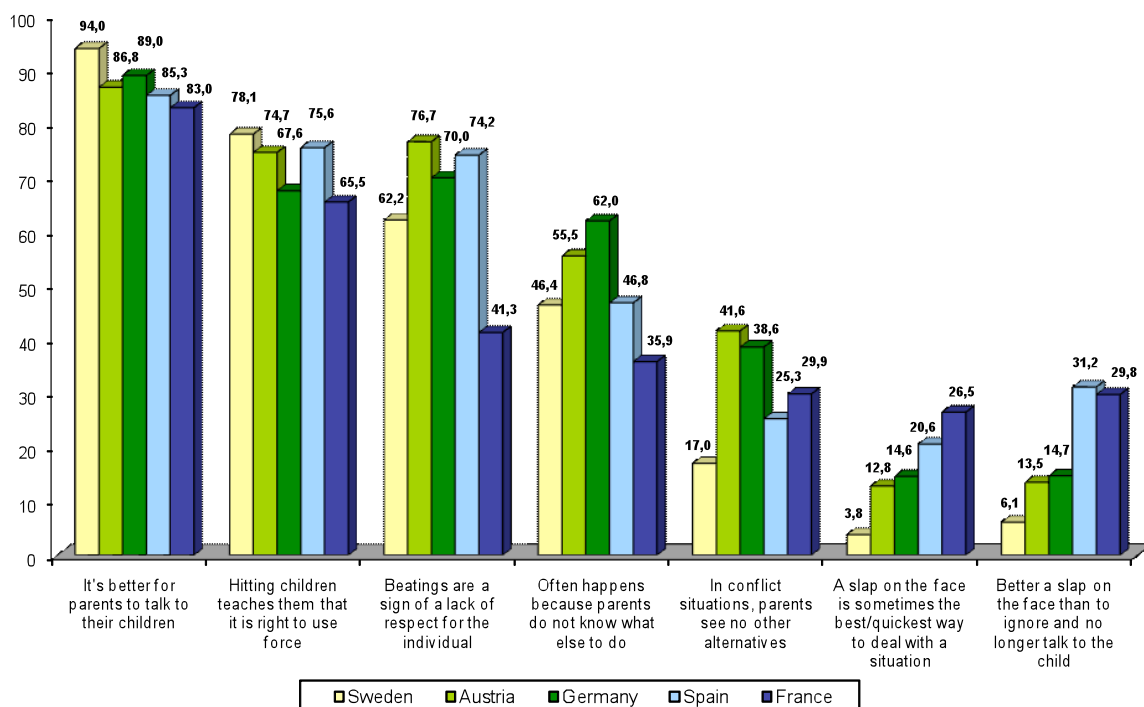


Figure 7

8. Definition of Violence

A further hypothesis derived from previous studies (see, in detail, Busmann, 1996, 2004) was that parents are not aware of the contradiction between their attitude toward nonviolent childrearing and their own use of corporal punishment, simply because they do not define what they do as violence. It is known from criminological research that the concept of violence is not based on pure observation but an attribution (Nedelmann 1997, Neidhardt 1988).

Swedish parents are already more sensitive toward mild corporal punishments like a mild slap on the face or on the bottom than the majority of parents in other nations who do not define this as violence. Hence, Sweden delivers a clear picture: Corporal punishment is rejected consistently on all dimensions. Although parents in other nations basically reject violent childrearing in principle, they less frequently view the violence they use as violence.

Parents consider it to be a case of violence when... (percentages)

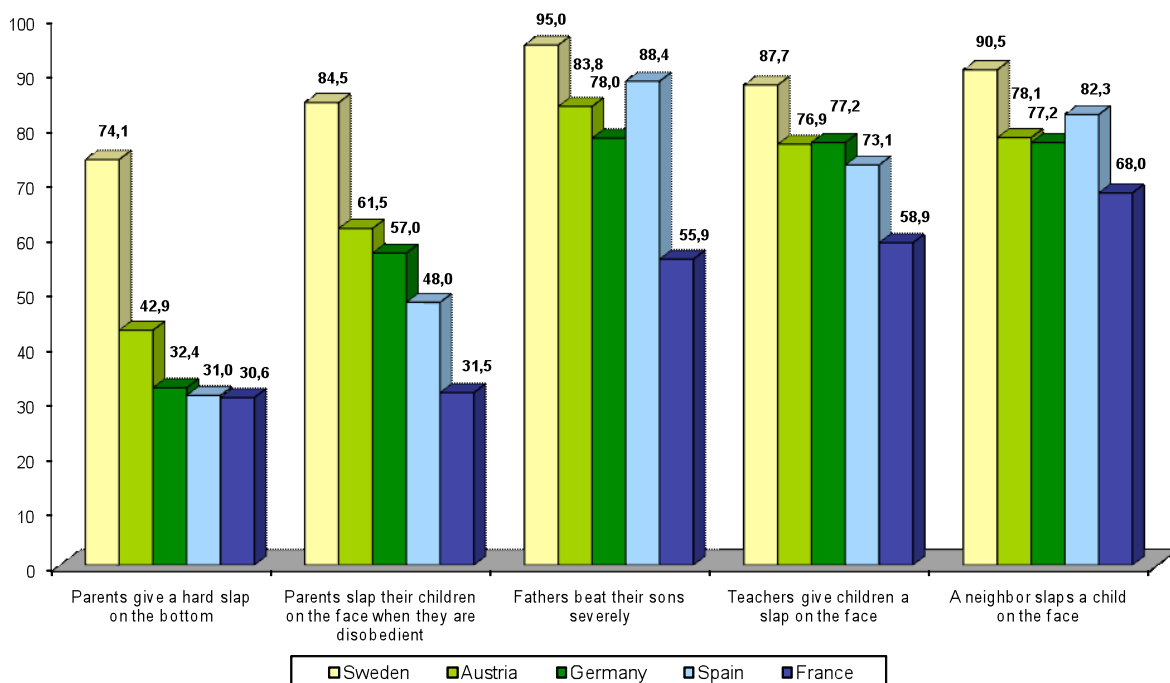


Figure 8

The harmfulness of childrearing violence was denied most strongly in France. Whereas the definition of violence in Spain hardly differed from that in Austria or Germany for corporal punishment either within or outside the family, French parents were far less sensitive to what constitutes childrearing violence. For example, only almost 56% of French parents associated a "severe beating" with the context of violence, and also only almost 59% labeled being slapped by

a teacher (which is not forbidden under French law) as violence. The contrast between France and Spain may well reflect the more intensive information and education campaigns on the harmfulness of childrearing violence in Spain.

The failure to perceive childrearing violence as violence may well explain why parents frequently apply the less severe forms of corporal punishment even though the majority strive to be nonviolent. At the same time, one can suspect that this increased sensitivity is also one reason for the prohibition of corporal punishment, thereby revealing an interaction between attitudes, the sensitivities of parents, and legal reforms. Trends in Spain clearly take this direction, whereas a comparable trend cannot be seen in France.

9. Multivariate Analyses

9.1 Linear Regression Analyses

We also performed regression analyses on the data in nations with a legal prohibition in order to study the influence of beliefs about what is legally admissible compared with other independent variables on the dependent variable sanctioning behavior. To identify the variables influencing the frequency of milder forms of corporal punishment, we entered not only sociodemographic variables such as gender, age, and education but also various childrearing attitude variables such as support for corporal punishment or beliefs about what is legally admissible into the model. We also included own experiences of parental violence and the frequency of violence in the partnership assessed with a short version of the Conflict Tactic Scale (Strauss, Hamby, Finkelhor, Moore, & Runyan, 1998). In this model, the independent variables explained 47% of the variance of the dependent variable "frequency of use of mild corporal punishment."

Because the individual results from Sweden, Austria, and Germany were almost identical, they were entered into the model together. Results showed that sociodemographic variables made either no or hardly any contribution to explaining the frequency of mild corporal punishment. The variables exerting the strongest influence were those already revealing the strongest explanatory power in the bivariate analyses: "approval of corporal punishment," "knowledge on the prohibition of mild corporal punishment," the "definition of physical violence," and "violence experienced during own childhood (mild forms)." Both approval of mild corporal punishment and having experienced the same during one's own childhood facilitated its use on children. The beliefs about what is legally admissible, in contrast, reduced such forms of sanctioning. This confirmed the former indications that legal prohibition—as the example of Sweden shows so impressively—exerts an impact on behavior, as earlier studies have already shown for Germany (Bussmann, 2000, 2004).

Table 2. Linear Regression Analyses (Sweden, Austria, Germany)

	Frequency of corporal punishment			
	mild		severe	
	β	p	β	p
Approval of corporal punishment	.314	.000	.197	.000
Beliefs about what is legally admissible (mild corporal punishment)	-.263	.000	.087	.000
Beliefs about what is legally admissible (severe corporal punishment)	.104	.000	-.214	.000
Violence experienced during own childhood (mild forms)	.221	.000	-.063	.013
Violence experienced during own childhood (severe forms)			.132	.000
Definition of physical violence	-.126	.000		
Definition of maltreatment			-.152	.000
Violence experienced in partnerships	.114	.000	.221	.000
Education	-.077	.000		
Sex (referencegroup women)	-.055	.000		
Age	.045	.001		
Disapproval of corporal punishment	.034	.041		
(Constant)	.908	.000	1.609	.000
Adj. R^2 =	.467		.293	
Number of cases	2802		2854	

Similar patterns also emerged when the "frequency of severe corporal punishment" served as the dependent variable. Once again, the major independent variables were "approval of corporal punishment," beliefs about what is legally admissible (in this case, regarding the "prohibition of severe corporal punishment"), and the "definition of physical violence," and, in this case, also the variable "violence experienced in partnerships."

9.2 Path Analyses

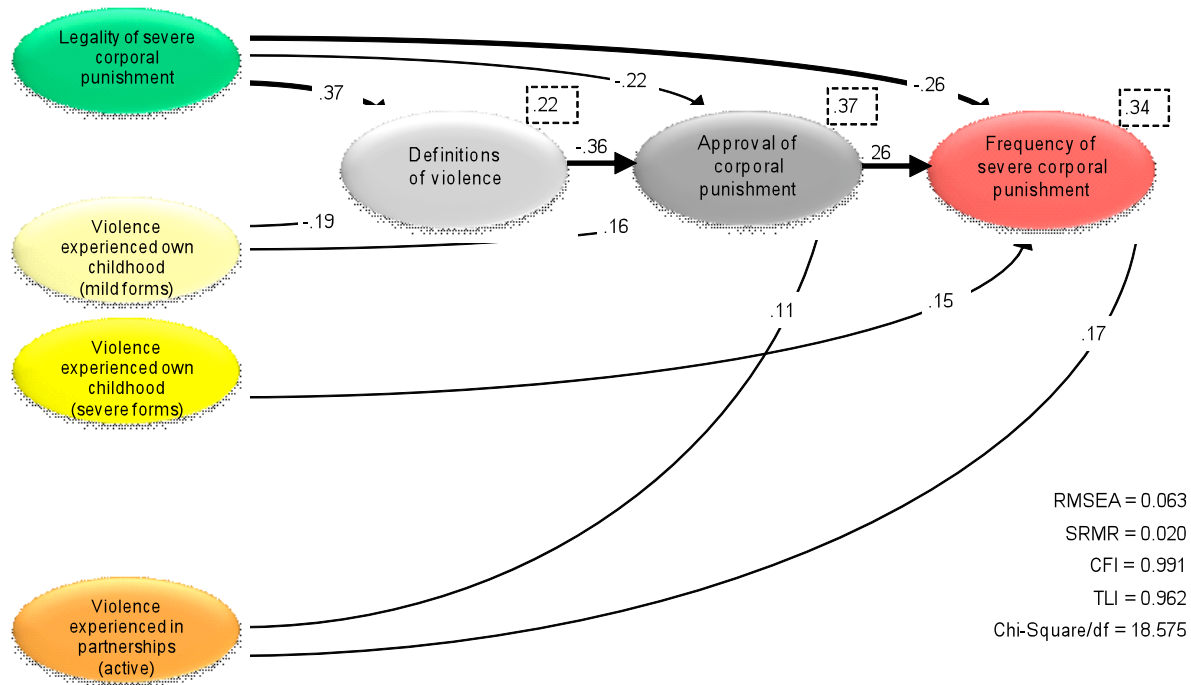
We also performed path analyses to study the postulated effects of the law as a communication medium (see, for more detail, Bussmann, 1996, 2004). This approach predicts that beliefs about what is legally admissible do not just influence behavior directly but also indirectly over the definition of violence and corresponding attitudes (see Figures 7 and 8). Moreover, as in earlier studies, we also entered further competing variables in the model. These included the surveyed

parents' self-reports on violence experienced during their own childhood, knowledge of the law on the general legal status of children, definitions of abuse (see, for details, Bussmann, 1996, 2000, 2004), and the frequency of violence experienced in partnerships.

Various path analyses were computed on either single nations or groups of nations and also differentiating between mild and severe corporal punishment as target variables. Results were very similar, except for the fact that beliefs about what is legally admissible had a much stronger influence on nations in which childrearing violence is prohibited. In the following, we shall report only the most comprehensive variant addressing the parents surveyed in all nations and the most interesting target variable of severe corporal punishment. This most comprehensive model explained 34% of the variance in serious corporal punishment for all nations, indicating that it included at least the most important explanatory variables.

In line with theoretical assumptions, this path analysis for severe corporal punishment showed not only a strong direct relation between beliefs about what is legally admissible and the frequency of corporal punishment but also indirect relations between the model variables "definition of violence" and "approval of corporal punishment." However, strong effects also proceeded indirectly from the definition of violence (-.36) across approval of corporal punishment (.26) to the use of severe childrearing violence. A lack of awareness of whether severe corporal punishment is legally admissible weakened the perception of violence while simultaneously strengthening attitudes approving its use.

Experiencing severe corporal punishment during one's own childhood also had a direct effect on the parents' use of it (.15)—it increased the use of severe corporal punishment, serving as a clear indicator for the "vicious circle of violence" confirmed so frequently in research. In addition, having experienced mild corporal punishment during childhood led to a less accurate definition of violence (-.19) so that fewer events were labeled as violent, and it also strengthened attitudes approving corporal punishment (.16). This underlined the importance of violence experienced during childhood for later parental childrearing behavior. Moreover, violence experienced in partnerships greatly increased the risk of violence in childrearing (.17), and it also impacted on the corresponding attitudes approving it (.11).

Path model severe corporal punishment*Figure 9***10. Summary and Conclusion**

The results of this cross-European comparison indicate that prohibiting corporal punishment does lead to a decline in violence: Parents in nations in which such a law is codified apply less corporal punishment, and their childrearing is shaped more by nonviolent sanctioning behavior compared with countries without such a legal regulation. This can be seen most clearly in Sweden, where childrearing violence already started to be outlawed in the late 1950s with the prohibition in 1979 marking the end of a series of legal reforms. Over generations, regular campaigns have maintained public awareness of the law. Germany and Austria, where laws were passed later and campaigns have been less intensive, reveal a similar trend, but on a lower level.

This comparison between nations and the additional multivariate analyses reveal that there can no longer be any doubt about the violence-reducing effect of a ban on childrearing violence. Its impact is not only direct but also indirect across the definition of violence and the attitude toward childrearing violence. Nonetheless, experienced corporal punishment during one's own childhood and one's own violent behavior in the partnership are passed on to childrearing practice where they compete with the intention of the law. A comparison of the effect sizes of these two dimensions shows that the sizes of the indirect and direct paths of the law are sometimes even markedly higher than the competing influences of the environment. This indicates a continuing

tendency to underestimate the symbolic significance of a legal reform. The law is a communication medium possessing subtle but nonetheless lasting and confirmable effects (Bussmann, 1996, 2004).

Information campaigns alone, in contrast, are less effective, particularly in the domain of mild corporal punishment. In the nations with no codified prohibition at the time of the survey, almost one-half of all families practiced a violent form of childrearing. Nonetheless, more than 80% of parents in all nations strive to rear their children with as little violence as possible regardless of the law.

In addition, a longitudinal comparison with earlier studies in Germany reveals a continuous decline in the approval of childrearing violence. Continuous campaigns and information measures to promote nonviolent childrearing based on the Swedish model could give this trend even more impetus. The numerous communication options in the mass media could be used to spread information on the existing laws—particularly in nations in which a legal reform is new or still only intended.

Except in Sweden, there are still too many parents who can see no alternative forms of sanctioning to corporal punishment, and naturally they tend to use this argument to justify its use. This is particularly the case in Spain and above all in France, that is, for nations without legal regulations. However, both Germany and Austria reveal that prohibition alone cannot prevent a continued marked approval of childrearing violence. In light of the relation between the violence experienced in the parent's own childhood and their own use of corporal punishment in rearing their children, this would seem to be a field with a strong need for information campaigns.

In summary, there are strong empirical indications for a positive effect of a legal ban on violence and that it can break the vicious circle. Further nations need to codify prohibitions of corporal punishment in the rearing of children in order to bring about a further reduction in violence. However, as the Swedish example shows, legal reforms need to be flanked by intensive and long-term information campaigns in order to achieve the strongest impact.

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