

# NO HARM IN SMACKING

**The Independent (London)**

**January 27, 2000, Thursday**

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Sir: The notion advanced by a slew of Western, liberal child-raising authorities, including Peter Saunders (letter, 22 January, that a couple of well-placed swats on the rear of one's child irreparably harms him or her is a myth.)

Anti-smacking crusaders have consistently relied upon inconclusive studies to make sweeping over-generalisations about the dangers of smacking. In 1998, even the American Academy of Pediatrics toned down its blanket injunction against smacking, though it still takes a dim view of the practice

In fact, an AAP conference on corporal punishment in 1996 concluded that, in certain circumstances, smacking, or "spanking", may be an effective backup to other forms of discipline. "There's no evidence that a child who is spanked moderately is going to grow up to be a criminal or antisocial or violent," said S Kenneth Schonberg, a paediatrics professor co-chairing the meeting.

In fact, the reverse may be true: a few studies suggest that, when used appropriately, spanking makes small children less likely to fight with others and more likely to obey their parents. No study demonstrates that spanking a child leads to abuse - indeed, it may be the other way around. Parents who end up abusing their children may misuse all forms of discipline, including spanking.

Contrary to Mr Saunders' assertions, Sweden hasn't borne out the spanking prohibitionists' fears, either. After Sweden outlawed spanking by parents in 1979, reports of serious child abuse actually increased by more than 400 per cent over 10 years, although the actual number of reports - 583 cases in 1994 - was still quite small.

Sweden's experience does not prove that banning spanking creates more child abuse, but it does suggest that outlawing the practice may do little to lower the rate of child abuse and instead deprive parents of an effective and common disciplining procedure.

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