Parents’ use of physical discipline is widely discouraged, due in part to negative outcomes for children. However, studies with African American children have found neutral or positive outcomes, often resulting in the conclusion that these children do not experience negative effects. The outcome variable most often examined in the literature is externalizing behaviors, leaving a gap in understanding how African American children may be experiencing undesirable outcomes in different areas. In addition, there is a paucity of research regarding Latino families, leading to little information being known about how this parenting practice functions in the Latino culture.

In a longitudinal study of low-income African American and Latino preschool-aged children, we examined:

1) Associations between child exposure to physical discipline and child internalizing and externalizing behavior problems when children were age 3½ years
2) Whether maternal parenting sensitivity may moderate associations between physical discipline and behavior problems
3) Similarities and dissimilarities in these associations related to child ethnicity

### Method

**Participants**

- 287 families (54% boys) from the Dallas Preschool Readiness Project
- 46% (n = 131) African American, 54% (n = 156) Latino
- 212 (74%) families below 100% FPL;; African Americans had lower income on average and more variability, M = .72 (SD = .70), M = .88 (SD = .46)

**Measures**

- Physical Discipline – collected at child age 3½ years
- Parenting Practices and Dimensions Questionnaire-Shortened (PSDQ; Touliatos, Purtmuller, & Bruce, 1990) 27 items: 5-point scale. Maternal report.
- 4 items of the PSDQ addressed physical discipline scale: Confirmatory Factor Analysis revealed a strong fit, CFI = .998, RMSEA = .038. Physical discipline score was a sum of these items.

**Child Behavior Problems**

- Internalizing and externalizing behaviors were each regressed on the income-to-needs ratio, physical discipline, and parenting qualities separately by child ethnicity in sequential models. The final models are shown in tables below.
- Harsh/intrusive parenting moderated effects of physical discipline on both externalizing and internalizing behavior problems for African American children, but not Latino children.
- Maternal sensitivity did not significantly modify effects of physical discipline.

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