IMPLICATIONS FOR COOPERATIVE EXTENSION: Professionals, like teachers, psychologists, therapists and researchers can use this information to understand family and child development, and how physical punishment plays a role in it. Also, and perhaps more critical, prevention and intervention efforts can be used to recognize that reciprocal nature of parents and children in the socialization process. That is, parents need to recognize that their behavior and discipline strategies can be influenced by a difficult and aggressive child. Families would benefit from cooperative extension parenting education programs that focus on proactive (e.g., stopping children’s misbehavior before it happens) and inductive (e.g., identifying more appropriate behaviors and how their children’s behavior can influence other people and relationships) discipline strategies.

Overview: A number of investigations have examined the link between physical discipline and child aggression. However, one limitation is that few investigations have examined reciprocal links between physical discipline and child behavior. That is, little is known whether physical discipline leads to child aggression (i.e., parent effects) or whether child aggression leads to harsh discipline techniques (i.e., child effects). In this longitudinal study, the researchers used two independent samples and found evidence of both parent and child effects.

Method:
Sample & Procedure: The sample of this study consists of two groups of children and adolescents from two longitudinal samples. The first longitudinal study consisted of 562 boys and girls with data collected at ages 6, 7, 8, and 9 years. The second project consisted of 290 boys from somewhat lower-income families with data collected at ages 10, 11, 12, and 15 years old.

In the first project, parents reported on their physical discipline tendencies (e.g., spank with a hand), and the teachers reported on the children’s externalizing (aggressive, delinquent) behaviors. The second study...
physical discipline was based on mother reports, and adolescent antisocial behavior was assessed using adolescent ratings.

**Findings:** In the first study, findings of high levels of physical discipline were related to high levels of externalizing behavior in the following year. Moreover, the results showed that high levels of child externalizing behavior were related to high levels of physical discipline the following year. In other words, the researchers found evidence of parent and child effects (i.e., reciprocal links). In the second study, mother reports of physical discipline was positively related to youth reports of antisocial behaviors the following year. However, youth antisocial behavior was not significantly related to parental discipline the following year. In other words, the researchers found evidence of parent effects but not child effects in the second, older sample.

**Discussion:** In the first sample, the researchers found that both parent and child behaviors were influenced by the other’s behavior (i.e., reciprocal associations). That is, physical discipline lead to increases in externalizing behavior, and externalizing behavior lead to increases in physical discipline. One possible explanation for the findings may be due to the overt nature of externalizing behavior. That is, when younger children are aggressive, it tends to be a bit more overt or obvious. As such, children’s aggressive behavior may have elicited more physical and harsh forms of discipline. It is also possible that there were increases in child externalizing behavior in the face of physical discipline (even after controlling for family socioeconomic status) because children learned to be aggressive by modeling their parents’ behavior. It is also possible that spanking may have increased anger and fear in the children, which in turn, made them less able to regulate their emotions and behavior.

While evidence of parent and child effects were found in the first and younger sample, the analyses from the second sample (consisting of adolescents) demonstrated parent effects, but not child effects. That is, while high levels of physical discipline were related to increases in antisocial behavior, antisocial behavior was not significantly related to increases in physical discipline. One possible reason for these findings could be because antisocial behavior tends to be a bit more covert or beyond the parent’s awareness. Also, parents tend to be less aware of their adolescent’s behavior over time. As such, antisocial behavior may be less likely to elicit physical forms of discipline during adolescence compared to externalizing behavior during childhood. It also should be noted that the second sample consisted of more low-income and single-parent families compared to the first sample. As such, it is possible that some of these parents may have disengaged from their parenting responsibilities.

Ultimately, mild and harsh physical discipline can have a lasting lifelong impact on a child in the form of antisocial and aggressive behaviors. These facts cannot be ignored, but need to be built upon the current literature to further understand the implications of how parent’s choice of discipline techniques may shape the lifelong trajectories of their children.