

27 September 2006

Dear Editor

Re: Joanne Black's article, 'Hands Off', published Sept 23 – 29

Joanne Black's article ("Hands Off", Sept 23-29) repeatedly raised the prospect of parents being criminalised by the repealing of the current "reasonable force" defence, but didn't once comment on the impact of smacking on children.

It was disappointing that Joanne Black did not seek comment from psychologists, who, as experts in human behaviour, family systems, learning theory, and mental health (amongst other things), are knowledgeable about the effects of using force on children. As clinical psychologists, we commonly see evidence in children and adults of the adverse effects of using physical pain to punish and teach.

In our parliamentary submission supporting the repeal of Section 59, we referenced several robust psychological studies whose findings include the following:

1) Physical punishment causes long-term, adverse effects (such as, aggression, inability to tell right from wrong, low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, alcohol abuse, and low academic achievement). This can be true even of mild physical punishment (not all children who are smacked will suffer ill effects, in the same way that not everyone with high blood pressure has a heart attack... but smacking increases the risk of long-term damage).

2) Physical punishment inflicts pain on children for no good reason. There is *no* evidence that smacking produces long-term, positive changes in children's behaviour. And there is *no* evidence that pain is a more effective disciplinary technique than other strategies such as "time-out" and good behaviour reinforcement. Even the oft-repeated myth that corporal punishment is the most successful way to produce an immediate shift in behaviour is just that - a myth.

Inflicting physical pain as a way of teaching children how to behave increases the risk of adverse psychological effects, and teaches that violence is an acceptable strategy for resolving conflict.

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On behalf of the New Zealand College of Clinical Psychologists (NZCCP)