

2002

## Research Proposal: Is corporal punishment as effective as positive reinforcement?

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### Recommended Citation

Deakin, Aaron (2002) "Research Proposal: Is corporal punishment as effective as positive reinforcement?," *Undergraduate Psychology Research Methods Journal*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.  
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Is corporal punishment as effective as positive reinforcement?

Aaron Deakin

Research today has revealed various methods for behavior change and behavior change strategies. A question that leaves many researchers turning their heads is, what is the most effective and efficient way to change aggressive delinquent and violent behaviors. Is punishment as effective as positive reinforcement? This is interesting because in an image concerned society, people may be more apt to model behaviors that are rewarded positively rather than to behave appropriately from being punished. My hypothesis is that positive reinforcement will be more effective than corporal punishment. “Most family and pediatricians favor the use of corporal punishment and pediatricians agree that children should be punished corporally if they misbehave. However former research has found that parents who frequently use corporal punishment have more behavior problems with their children than those who do not” (Brenner 1998 as cited in Abraham).

## Method

### Participants

There will be 12 people participating in this study of whether punishment is more effective than positive reinforcement. These participants will be undergraduate students from Lindenwood University and will be selected randomly from the researcher conducting the study. The researcher will conduct experimental sessions.

### Materials

There will be 12 different copies of the Stroop effect exam: (Reading the color inside the word.) A timer will be needed. A box of candy will be involved. A pen to record results. A small shock machine will be needed.

### Procedure

After gaining informed consent from the participants, the participant will be brought into a room with only the researcher. The participant will be given a Stroop effect exam and be told to complete it. Prior to entering the room the participants will have been told that the goal of the study is to try to complete the exam as quick as possible with no mistakes. The participant will have the option of withdrawing from the experiment at any time if they feel uncomfortable which will be in the consent form. When in the room, the researcher will tell the participant that they cannot leave until they complete two Stroop exams as quickly as possible and under two different conditions without errors. If an error is made a new exam is given randomly and they are told to start again.

The first exam the participant will be pinched mildly after each mistake and be given a new exam. The participants overall time until completion will be recorded along with the number of trials taken to complete the exam without error. The number of errors is basically the number of trials because they must start a new exam after each error therefore starting a new trial.

The second condition, the researcher will tell the participant they will be rewarded by candies at the end of the exam. They will be told that the less errors they make, the more candy they will receive. They too will receive a new random exam after each error.

The overall time and trial number will be recorded in this condition until the exam is completed without error.

This is a within subjects design so counterbalancing will be used to avoid order effects. The people would be divided into two groups because there are two conditions.

### Implications

My hypothesis is that positive reinforcement is more effective than punishment. In my experiment I predict that participants will complete the Stroop exam quicker and with fewer trials when they are being positively reinforced rather than when they are in fear of punishment. If my hypothesis were not supported I would accept the null, meaning there would be no significant difference between punishment and positive reinforcement. I would use a paired t-test to test for differences between the two groups in this experiment because it deals with a within subjects design. I believe my results could be highly valuable to society. If my hypothesis is correct, we see that positively reinforcing something may be the way to change behavior. Physically punishing someone may seem more effective in short term, but it may be no more affective than positive reinforcement. Parenting styles may change over time from results of a study like this. We may also be able to understand why some children or even adults are more disciplined than others.

### Reference

Andero, Abraham A; Stewart Allen. (2002). Issue of Corporal Punishment: Re-Examined. Journal of Instructional Psychology, 29, 90-97