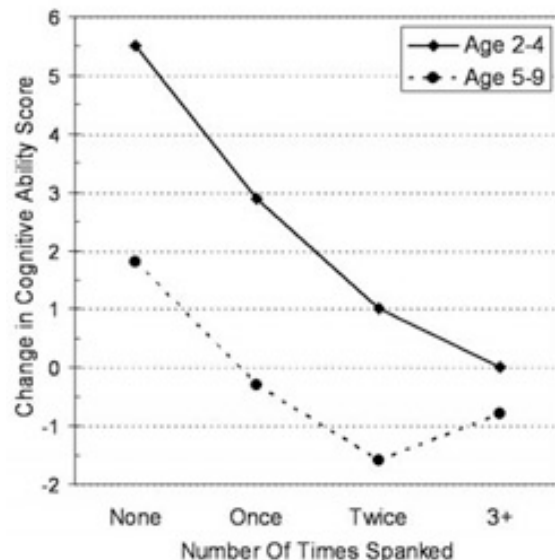


# Lower IQ's measured in spanked children

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Courtesy University of New Hampshire  
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Children who are spanked have lower IQs worldwide, according to new research.

An investigator for the study acknowledged that at least part of this effect is due not to spanking itself, but to socioeconomic status: wealthier families both spank less and manage to raise higher-IQ children, though the first doesn't necessarily cause the second.



American children who were spanked had a lower cognitive ability score four years later, researchers say. (Courtesy Murray Straus)

Nonetheless, the researcher, the University of New Hampshire's Murray Straus, said at least part of the explanation for the findings is that the stress of corporal punishment affects brain function. This stress eventually produces fearful, easily startled children, Straus said; these factors in turn are associated with lower IQ, the most widespread measure of general intelligence.

Straus is calling for laws against spanking. Twenty-four nations have already passed such laws, though enforcement varies, said Straus, whose findings were presented Sept. 25 at the International Conference on Violence, Abuse and Trauma in San Diego.

Straus found that children in the United States who were spanked had lower IQs four years later than non-spanked youths.

Straus and Mallie Paschall of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation in Calverton, Md., also studied what they called nationally representative samples of 806

children ages 2 to 4, and 704 ages 5 to 9. Both groups were retested four years later.

IQs of non-spanked children in the first group were five points higher four years later than the IQs of those who were spanked, the scientists found. IQs of children in the second age group who weren't spanked were 2.8 points higher four years later than their non-spanked peers.

IQ is defined as a person's mental age divided by their actual age, times 100. Thus the average IQ is 100. Scientists often label people with scores above 130 as gifted; those below 70, as retarded.

"The more spanking, the slower the development of the child's mental ability. But even small amounts of spanking made a difference," Straus said. The researchers also found a lower national average IQ in nations where spanking is more prevalent. His analysis indicates the strongest link between corporal punishment and IQ was for those whose parents continued to use corporal punishment even when they were teenagers.

Corporal punishment has been decreasing worldwide, which may signal future gains in IQ, Straus predicted. "Some of the 24 nations that prohibit corporal punishment by parents have made vigorous efforts to inform the public and assist parents in managing their children. In others little has been done to implement the prohibition," Straus said.

"Nevertheless, there is evidence that attitudes favoring corporal punishment and actual use of corporal punishment have been declining even in nations that have done little to implement the law and in nations which have not prohibited corporal punishment."

The findings are also to appear in the *Journal of Maltreatment, Aggression and Trauma*.