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Families in development:
Assessing progress, challenges and emerging issues.
Focus on modalities for IYF+30 & parenting education

Session IV
Parenting education: regional and sub-regional perspectives

Parenting Education in Latin America

Rosario Esteinou (CIESAS)

Introduction

Violent disciplining in the home and other forms of violence against children is still a pervasive and unfortunate phenomenon in the world (United Nations Children's Fund, 2014; Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2020; Know Violence in Childhood: A Global Initiative, 2017; Higgins, 2020). In Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries, these practices are not only widespread but often social and culturally legitimated, and lawful and state-authorized. Perpetrators include parents, family members, peers, teachers, caretakers, and law enforcement authorities. Its consequences can be devastating; it can hinder children's social and cognitive development, their health or even result in death. (Pinheiro, 2006; Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2019). Hence, violence against children represents a significant challenge to the world's development and LAC's capacity to achieve the SDG goals in the 2030 Agenda. Violence against children in its different forms and institutions, specifically corporal punishment or violent discipline at home, is still insufficiently debated and researched in the region, and the attention it has brought in research and policy-making has been deeply fragmented and very limited.

In this paper I use available data to analyse, the extent of corporal punishment at home as a parenting disciplining method in LAC countries to provide some insight about the challenges it posits for an understanding of parenting styles or frameworks. To aid our investigation, I contrast this parenting practice with the legal instruments available to protect children; the programmes addressed to corporal punishment in the home or programmes in other settings which may be addressing this issue indirectly as they involve parents and families. In the end, some recommendations are provided.

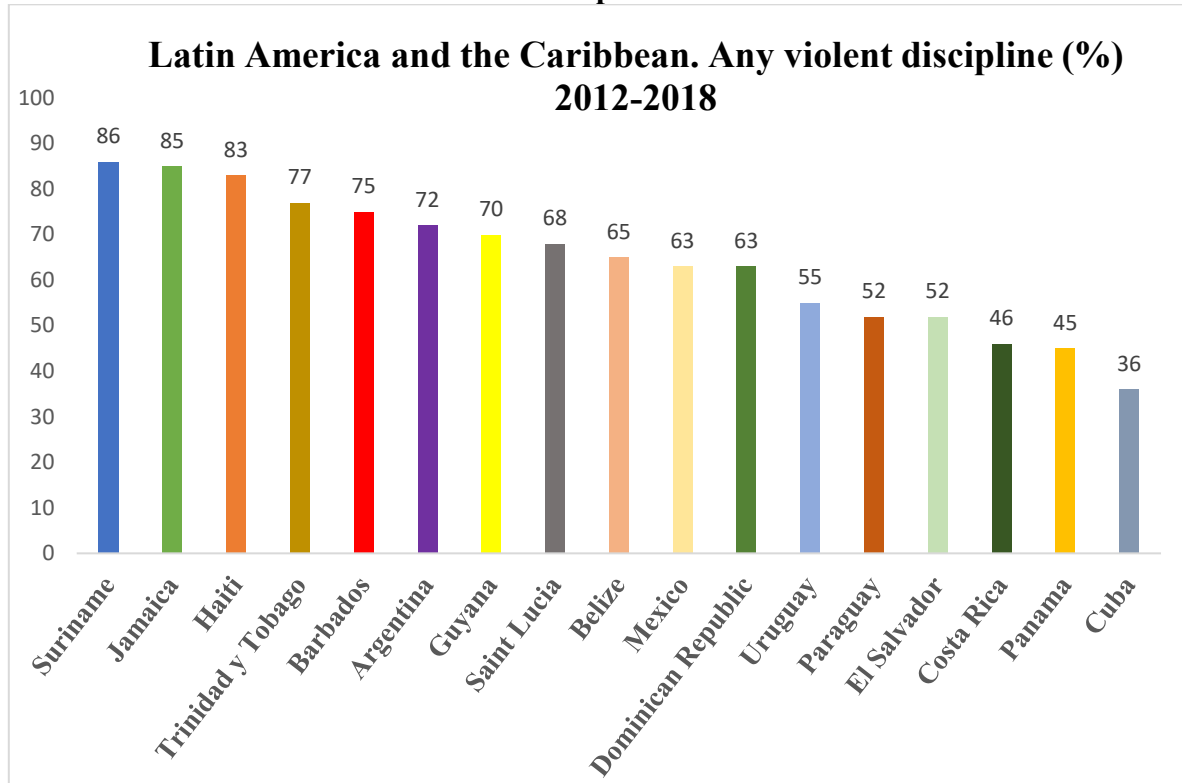**Corporal punishment as a disciplinary method and parenting models.**

Comprehensive information about parenting practices in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) countries is wanting, and many agencies have noted this gap. Know Violence in Childhood (2017) has pointed out that in current data, children from diverse social groups are under-represented, sample sizes are often too small to draw significant conclusions. There is incomplete research showing contradictory findings, and there are missing narratives, as social taboos around reporting violence have stifled the voice of children, and generally parents' views have higher representation than that of children and adolescence. Further limitations were identified by a systematic literature review and analysis of large international data sets by Devries, Merrill, Knight, et al. (2019). They found that much of the available data on violence in LAC did not meet inclusion criteria because it was measured across broad categories of age, with sexes combined, for composite measures of multiple forms of violence (including poly-victimization), or any perpetrator.

Despite this, the study concluded that violence against children is still a concerning challenge in LAC. Following these findings, further data from 2018 indicated that physical and emotional abuse by caregivers was widespread across all ages in children. The former was most common amongst young children occurring against 50-60 per cent of 2 and 3 years old's and declined as age increased, reaching 30 – 40 per cent by age 14 for both girls and boys. In contrast, emotional violence has approximately 40- 55 per cent prevalence for 2-3-year-olds and remained relatively constant as age increased. Patterns of violence against children were similar for boys and girls. Besides, intimate partner violence against girls was prevalent amongst 15-19-year-olds.

The most systematic and comparable data comes from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys gathered by the Unicef (2019) concerning child discipline. Violent discipline is measured through children between 1 to 14 years old who reported experiencing psychological aggression and physical punishment in the past month. Graph 1 shows very high proportions of violent discipline exerted by parents; it is higher than 50 per cent in 14 LAC states and only three reports lower percentages. In all countries, proportions are similar for boys and girls, as can be appreciated in Graph 2.

Although data indicate violent discipline is a common feature in parenting LAC children, some surveys have shown that the majority of the youth population hold strong positive beliefs and confidence in the family as an institution. They value, above all, the affectionate and emotional support, the comprehension and solidarity provided by them, as well as the communication they sustain, especially with their mothers (Cepal & Oij, 2004;). The family is perceived in general as an institution that promotes social cohesion, provides social and economic protection to its members and instils values according to their social and cultural normative standards to children and adolescents (Imjuve, 2011; Oij, Bid, Caf, Pnud, Cepal & Unam, 2013). Regardless of the family arrangement or its living arrangement, parents and tutors remain socially and legally standing figures in charge of developing these tasks.

Graph 1

Latin America and the Caribbean. Any violent discipline (%) 2012-2018
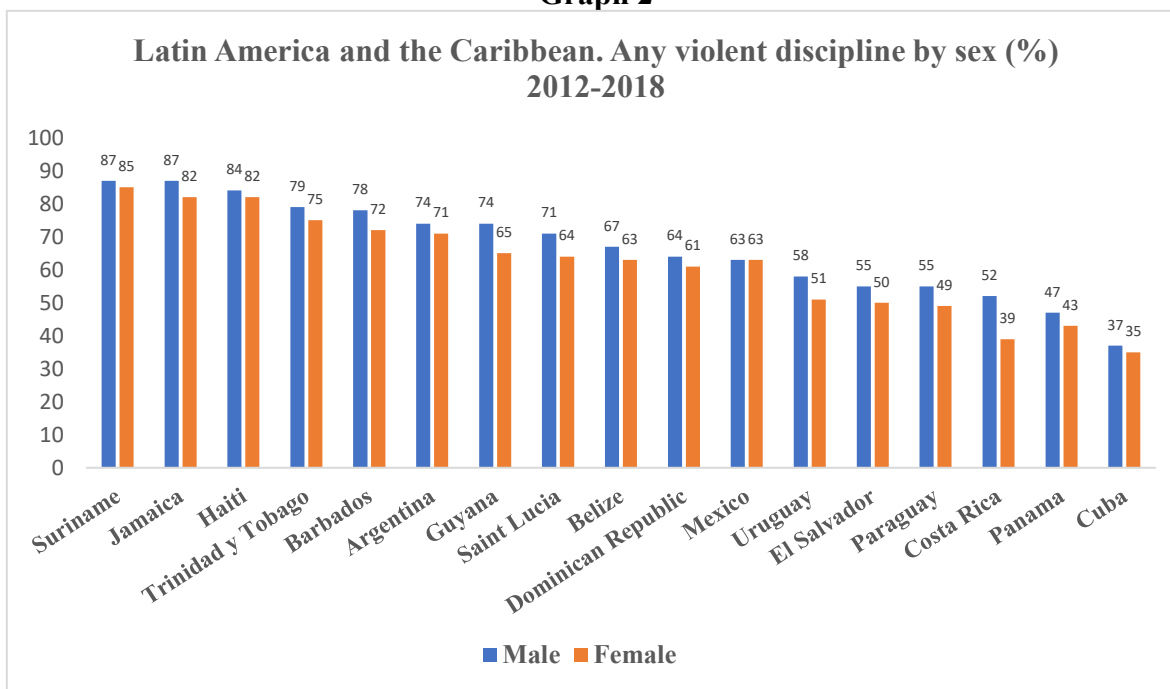

Notes: In Costa Rica, Jamaica, and Trinidad y Tobago, MICS data refer to 2011 and in Suriname to 2010. In Argentina, Barbados, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Suriname, Trinidad y Tobago and Uruguay data differ from the standard definition or refer to only part of a country
Indicator definition: Percentage of children 1–14 years old who experience any violent discipline in the past month.
Source: UNICEF global databases, 2019, based on MICS and Demographic and Health Survey

Graph 2

Latin America and the Caribbean. Any violent discipline by sex (%) 2012-2018

Male data: Suriname 87, Jamaica 87, Haiti 84, Trinidad y Tobago 79, Barbados 78, Argentina 74, Guyana 74, Saint Lucia 71, Belize 67, Dominican Republic 64, Mexico 63, Uruguay 58, El Salvador 55, Paraguay 55, Costa Rica 52, Panama 47, Cuba 37

Female data: Suriname 85, Jamaica 82, Haiti 82, Trinidad y Tobago 75, Barbados 72, Argentina 71, Guyana 65, Saint Lucia 64, Belize 63, Dominican Republic 61, Mexico 63, Uruguay 51, El Salvador 50, Paraguay 49, Costa Rica 39, Panama 43, Cuba 35

■ Male ■ Female

Notes: In Costa Rica, Jamaica, and Trinidad y Tobago, MICS data refer to 2011 and in Suriname to 2010. In Argentina, Barbados, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Suriname, Trinidad y Tobago and Uruguay data differ from the standard definition or refer to only part of a country
Indicator definition: Percentage of children 1–14 years old who experience any violent discipline in the past month.
Source: UNICEF global databases, 2019, based on MICS and Demographic and Health Surveys.

As both violence and support are present in the family, we need to include other considerations to provide a broader understanding of parenting practices in LAC. Two dimensions have been widely documented as grouping relationship variables that influence child and adolescent development: parental control or demandingness and parental support or responsiveness. The first one refers to the level of flexibility used by a parent to set rules and to discipline children parents may use different means, such as corporal punishment, psychological or emotional violence, monitoring, and reasoning. The second one alludes to the care, closeness and affection that a parent or tutor provides or develops towards his/her child; whether it promotes and nurtures the development of warm relationships, positive communication, and supports the development of psychological and emotional autonomy. Many authors have proposed that some balance between control and support is needed in parent-child relationships so that children have a healthy development and well-being, can become part of communities and societies, and cooperation and cohesion will be likely met within the family (Amato & Both, 1997; Maccoby, 2007; Peterson & Bush, 2013). Both dimensions may imply different understandings about what control and support mean, and what combination of the two is best – according to parents' views and social normative and cultural standards – to promote child and adolescent development. What has been called parenting styles result from these different combinations. Also, underlying the views of what "works" best for a specific society there are various social and cultural views of childhood, its nature or character and, hence, the role of socialization or rearing practices and the appropriate methods to be used.

As noted earlier, the high value of the family in LAC has been accompanied by high levels of violence against children and women perpetrated primarily by male figures, specifically fathers and other adult family members. Both come from two cultural mainstream traditions still prevailing today: three hundred years of colonialism (mainly Spanish) and the Mesoamerican and Andean indigenous cultures in many countries of the region left strong patriarchal and gender inequalities that influenced to date legislations and social norms, structuring family relationships upon power hierarchies according to gender and age. Here, women and girls should submit to the authority of male figures, and children should comply with parents and adults' wishes and needs (Esteinou, 2008). Under these cultural traditions, there is a specific understanding of the child as an individual, whose will and behaviour must be mould without the entitlement of rights and that any hard discipline method may be used and is justified to reach that goal, including physical or emotional violence.

How can we understand the interplay between these two influences in a parent-child relationship framework? Can we characterize LAC parenting as authoritarian? These and many other questions arise. As this combination of violent discipline-support has been found in other studies made in Asian societies, such as China and Japan, an prominent international debate has developed over the cross-cultural differences between Western societies - considered as leaning on individualism - and Asian and LAC ones - thought to be grounded on collectivistic belief systems. And both provide essential sources of values, attitudes and expectations about how parenting and family relations must develop.

According to this debate, individualistic societies tend to promote the development of the "independent-self" through beliefs committed with the private-self, individual freedom, autonomous decision-making and achievement goals that highlight the importance of personal attainment based on individual interests. In contrast, collectivistic societies promote the development of the "interdependent-self" through commitment to ideals of cooperation, mutual support, harmonic relationships and the prevalence of group interests over the individual; cultural traditions emphasize stronger family bonds and greater deference or respect to parental authority limiting children's decision-making and the development of autonomy, compared to Western societies (Kagitcibasi, 1996, 2013; Triandis, 1995; Bush & Peterson, 2013; Fuligni, 1998; Tamis-Le Monda, Way, Hughes, et al., 2008).

Research on parenting styles or parenting behaviours and attitudes has been disproportionately abundant in Western societies compared with the efforts made in LAC countries. Among the different parenting styles found in such societies, scholars have found the authoritative one as the most appropriate for children's development. One of the leading positions within this view, represented among others by Diana Baumrind, has provided a synthesis of its corresponding discipline method:

> "The authoritative model of discipline is characterized by use of firm control contingently applied and justified by rational explanation of consistently enforced rules. Authoritative parents endorse the judicious use of aversive consequences, which may include spanking, but in the context of a warm, engaged rational parent-

child relationship. The effects of firm control differ when embedded in an authoritarian versus an authoritative pattern of discipline, that is, when parents are unbalanced versus balanced in their demandingness-responsiveness ratio and when their exercise of control is based on their power to compel obedience rather than on their knowledge of the child's developmental needs." (Baumrind, 1996: 412)

It is thus clear that authoritarian parenting includes high levels of control and, in all likelihood, of corporal and emotional punishment, which will have negative consequences for children's development. However, the authoritative style results challenging as well in its understanding and acceptance of corporal punishment as a disciplining method. Indeed, the use of spanking or other "mild" or "moderate" forms of corporal punishment has had great conceptual and practical consequences. As it is difficult to determine how much or intense may result such forms of corporal punishment under a judicious parent, it is left ambiguous and leaves room for the justification of violence as a disciplining method. This view is controversial and has contributed to its dissemination as parenting practice. The Convention of Children's Rights has addressed this issue by postulating that no form of violent discipline is acceptable. Sweden represents a good example of the good outcomes parenting may yield in child development without the use of violent discipline. From the enactment in 1979 of the *Aga* law, banning corporal punishment and verbal abuse, the levels of violence against children in the home have dramatically decreased.

Research on parenting styles or parenting behaviours and attitudes in LAC societies which would favour collectivistic belief systems have been modest. Further, its characteristics have been proposed more as a conceptual contrast to its individualistic counterpart rather than informed by rigorous and systematic research. The definition or characterization of the inter-dependent-self, cooperation, mutual support, and harmonic relationships remain generic and imply many challenges. Indeed, the widespread role of violent discipline in family life may be a consequence of strong and rigid power hierarchies in the family, rather than a positive trait. Additionally, most LAC countries are embedded in a globalized world, where individualistic values have increasingly influenced social norms and values and may be weakening, questioning, or delegitimizing the collectivistic conceptual view, or may be creating a new form and understanding of collectivism. In this light, although there are high levels of corporal punishment in most LAC countries, it would be inappropriate to define their parenting styles solely as authoritarian. However, available research is not sufficient to draw any conclusions regarding the interplay and embeddedness of these features and its outcomes in parenting practices framework. The only conclusion we can make with some evidence is that there is a prevalence of group's (i. e., parents, family) over the individual's interests (i. e., children). But we need more research on these issues.

Legal protection

Ending violence against children requires the development of a robust institutional framework and coordinated multisectoral and multidimensional initiatives. Among them, legal protection is crucial. An analysis and follow-up of amendments made to legislations of 199 State parties to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) reviewed whether countries have banned corporal punishment against children in all settings (home, alternative care settings, day-care, schools, penal institutions and as a

sentence of crime). This work has been undertaken for several years by the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (2020), and it is aimed to abolish physical discipline and reasonable and moderate chastisement, which violate children's rights in light of alternative non-violent discipline-methods. It claims that in all States, the prohibition of corporal punishment needs to be accompanied by a nationwide campaign that promotes children's right and equips parents and teachers for the use of positive parenting and educational methods.

LAC countries have subscribed the CRC and have incorporated some legislations regarding child protection. However, legal efforts remain insufficient in LAC and worldwide. According to the 2020 report of the organization mentioned above, out of the 199 states parties, only 12 per cent have fully incorporated legal protection from corporal punishment in the home and other settings; 78 per cent implement protection in some setting outside the home; and 10 per cent have no full legal protection in any setting (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2020)

Table (1) shows a comparison of whether LAC countries have fully banned corporal punishment in the home with the proportion of violent discipline used in the countries which have been followed-up. The table also shows the year of enactment or approval of laws banning corporal punishment. And for those committed indicates the year they accepted such commitment and the latest year this was renovated following the recommendations of human rights treaty bodies. Ten countries have fully banned it in all settings, including the home, in their national legislations, and nine countries are committed to prohibited. Additionally, the table indicates whether countries have received recommendations from human rights treaty bodies, especially the Committee of the Rights of the Child (CRC), and whether they are part of the Pathfinder. El Salvador has been committed for many years, but the different Bills made to end corporal punishment have been archived, and the Government has not taken any clear action or made any clear statement to indicate that it intends to pursue law reform. For that reason, it is no longer considered as committed by this organization.

So far, the legal prohibition of corporal punishment in the home shows different outcomes in LAC countries and indicates unfavourable results. Despite having banned corporal punishment, Argentina and Brazil report the highest levels of violent discipline (higher than 70 per cent); Honduras, Paraguay and Uruguay report proportions ranging between 50 to 65 per cent; only Bolivia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Peru present smaller levels of less than 50 per cent. Overall, countries committed to legally banning corporal punishment in the home tend to report lower proportions in the use of violent discipline than those which have prohibited. Those committed, report lower levels than 65 per cent: Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Mexico show proportions between 50 to 65 per cent; and five countries (Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador and Panama) report levels lower than 50 per cent in the use of violent discipline. Although data interpretation is difficult, it suggests that countries which have banned corporal punishment need to enforce their legislation and complement it with other institutional mechanisms.

Table 1. Latin American and Caribbean countries' legal protection against corporal punishment of children and percentage of violent discipline

	Fully protect	Committed to protect	Member of Path	Recommendations by Human Rights Treaty Bodies	Percentage of violent discipline	
Argentina	2016			x	72%	Unicef, 2014
Bolivia*	2014			x	48.7%	Bott et al., 2012
Brazil	2014		x	x	70.5%	Cardia, 2012
Chile		2014-2019		x	44%	Unicef, 2015
Colombia*		2019		x	40% 65%	Cuartas, 2018; Landsford, 2010
Costa Rica	2008			x	46%	Unicef, 2014
Cuba		2020		x	36%	Unicef, 2014
Dominican Republic		2009-2020		x	63% 44%	Unicef, 2014; Uwemedino et al., 2017
Ecuador*		2012-2020		x	44%	Unicef, et al 2012
El Salvador		2009-2020 No longer considered		x	40%	Unicef, 2014
Guatemala		2016-2018		x	52%	Unicef et al., 2014
Honduras	2013		x	x	56%	Bott et al., 2012
Mexico		2011-2020		x	63%	Unicef, Instituto Nacional de Salud Publica, 2016
Nicaragua	2015				34%	Bott et al., 2012
Panama		2010-2015		x	45%	Unicef, 2019
Paraguay	2016		x		61%	Unicef, 2010
Peru	2015		x	x	34%	(parents' use) Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informatica, 2011
Uruguay	2007			x	55%	Unicef, 2014
Venezuela	2007			x	No available data	

Notes: *Customary laws may apply corporal punishment among indigenous children.
Based on data from The Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, Unicef report Hidden in Plain Sight 2014 and other studies

Countries committed legally to prohibit corporal punishment in all settings, including the home, still include in their Civil Codes, family laws or other legislations statements guaranteeing parents the "right to correct" or "sanction their children appropriately and moderately", the "right and duty of parents to guide, educate and correct their children" and allow the use of "reasonable" or "moderate" punishment towards children. As noted earlier, this ambiguity in the definition of "correction" and the use of "moderate", "reasonable" or

similar wording, represents a legal defence of corporal punishment, therefore leaving room for it to be practiced by parents. Most of the recommendations made to LAC countries by the CRC and other human rights treaty bodies have addressed four issues:

1) They urged countries which have banned corporal punishment in the home, to enforce such legal provisions as there are strong concerns regarding the high levels of violent discipline in these countries;
2) Countries committed to banning violent discipline and where appropriate bills are in Congress or under discussion are urged to expedite its adoption; others are encouraged to implement the agreed legal amendments that explicitly prohibit corporal punishment of children in all settings, including the home. And ask the removal of all wording that allows the interpretation of the use of corporal punishment by parents (or any other person) as a permitted disciplining method. Such is the case of Chile, Mexico and Panama, to name some, which state that corporal punishment should be prohibited only when it is "perceived as causing injury", or it is "repeated";
3) Countries where customary law rules indigenous groups, such as Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia (and others not mentioned by the organization, such as Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and Brazil), children are less legally protected. Hence, recommendations urge States to implement measures to protect their rights
4) State parties must conduct public awareness campaigns, provide information and parental guidance, and promote positive, alternative non-violent and participatory forms of discipline for child-rearing to eliminate all forms of corporal punishment.

Table 1 also shows that four States (Brazil, Honduras, Paraguay and Peru) are affiliated to the Pathfinder with the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children. The affiliation commits the Governments to three to five years of accelerated action towards the achievement of Target 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals; and all of them have fully prohibited corporal punishment of children in their legislations, which represents a positive outcome. Another institutional initiative in this line is the Regional Roadmap on Violence against Children regarding the Central American governments of Cuba, Mexico and the Dominican Republic which has been created in 2011. However, results are wanting as prohibition of corporal punishment is still pending.

Programmes for ending violent discipline at home and other programmes which may boost protective factors.

Programmes in LAC aimed at combating violence against children at home are lacking. Efforts have primarily focused on the implementation of national campaigns and in providing attention and support to women and children who are victims of domestic violence. For instance, Jamaica implemented in 2015 the "Break the Silence" campaign to promote reporting of child abuse by adults and resulted in an 18.7 per cent increase in report rates. Mexico provides support to women and children victims of domestic violence through the Centers for Women's Justice (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2018; Gobierno de Mexico, 2018). Other efforts have rather focused on issues such as health and Early Childhood Education (ECE). These initiatives may indirectly have effects on social norms, attitudes and values which favour violent discipline and may play a role in the development

of protective factors (Aracena, Leiva, Undurraga, et al., 2011). Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Chile, Dominican Republic and Cuba have implemented family and community interventions which incorporate families in the planning and management of ECE, with most of them implementing family participation as a fundamental criterion to ensure quality standards (Navarro, 2014).

Also, some countries have developed further parenting programmes as part of their community and family interventions. They differ not only in their goals but also in their potential effects to address some of the underlying structural factors of violence, such as shifting the norms, attitudes and values favouring violent discipline. For example, programmes addressing the prevention and improvement of pre-natal and post-natal health and nutrition, implemented in the Dominican Republic and Guatemala, may have a limited impact on preventing violence at home as they privilege a medical lens. In contrast, programmes focusing on more specific challenges, such as preventing substance abuse, or the promotion of socio-emotional and cognitive development, of skills to encourage autonomy and decision making, or the development of parenting skills, may have a greater influence on changing social norms, attitudes and values as they work on changing behaviours and promote positive parenting and family dynamics. These programmes may contribute – as Know Violence in Childhood (2017), and Higgins (2020) have claimed – to build protective factors and modify the unequal power hierarchies in parent-child and gender relationships. Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay and Cuba have ECE programmes oriented towards this direction.

Although these programmes can potentially trigger changes in behaviours, social norms, attitudes and values against violent discipline, many of them have been poorly designed, often following the inertia of traditions. A study made by Unesco (2004) regarding the participation of families in ECE in LAC, has pointed out important limits and challenges. There are different views about the meaning of participation. One very extended is defined by families providing resources or activities decided only by the teachers, staff leaders or the authorities (e. g., cleaning, cooking). Another limitation is related to the capacity of parents to provide material resources (e. g., money, food, settings, furniture, among others) depending on the needs of the institution or programme.

Traditional orientation in activities addressed to provide families with parenting skills or training persist, despite the social changes that have taken place. Hence, families and ECE centres or schools maintain the same type of traditional relationships. For instance, previous meetings between them lately have been named workshops or parenting schools. Many of these programmes are implemented at inconvenient schedules, usually at night, for parents who work full-time. They provide basic information but fail to engage parents. Parents can also posit some challenges and obstacles. For example, they may delegate all the responsibility of children's education to the programme, childcare centre or school; and they may not be inclined to work closely and in collaboration with the programme or childcare centres. The inverse situation also occurs, the school programme or the community delegate increasingly more responsibilities to parents, such as the economic sustainability of the programme, or the teaching of sensitive issues like sexuality (Unesco, 2004). Therefore, relationships between families and programmes or daycare or school staff may be conflictual and controversial. Although Unesco's study refers mainly to ECE

daycare or school programmes, which do not address specifically violence in the home, all these limits and obstacles may likely be present in programs directly addressing domestic violence and violent discipline. However, the results of this study must be taken cautiously as more updated data is needed.

Although, as noted earlier, ECE initiatives may bring about positive changes, very few impact evaluations have been made regarding such programmes. As many studies have pointed out (Know violence in childhood, 2017; Higgins, 2020; Unesco, 2004), most evidence from low – and middle-income countries is relatively nascent and weak. Ninety-eight per cent of all studies on promising interventions come from Western countries, and more than 95 per cent of all programme evaluations relate to about 12 per cent of the global population, while less than 5 per cent worldwide relating to 90 per cent of the global population (Know violence in childhood, 2017: 65). Also, often programme evaluation is made by the same delivering agency and addresses the programme itself, such as the functioning and staff capacity building rather than its impact.

Conclusion

Violent discipline is very extended in the LAC countries analysed in this paper. Social norms, cultural traditions and some theoretical frameworks seem to have influenced in the legitimization of corporal punishment. Although corporal punishment of children is widely spread, only half of LAC countries have addressed this issue through legal provision to protect children and have legally banned it in the last years. The other half show resistance to prohibiting it, regardless of having implemented other important family and child programmes, such as Chile Crece Contigo. None the less, programmes targeted to end violent discipline are scarce and those implemented aim basically at providing support for children and women who are victims of domestic violence and other potentially beneficial programs have not been appropriately evaluated and show significant limitation in its design and implementation.

Recommendations

1.- As data is scarce, fragmented, and disperse, efforts to build systematic statistics and qualitative information are required in all the region.

2.- As other studies have proposed for Western countries, social policy must focus on the prevention of violence rather than focusing only in vulnerable targeted groups. Programmes promoting positive parenting and other preventive measures that address risk factors are not only more effective in the long run but will also potentially cover whole populations. (Higgins, 2020).

3.- National campaigns and parenting education in schools must be implemented to promote awareness about the importance of using of non-violent discipline methods rather than corporal punishment.

4.- Enforcement of legislation is needed in countries that have legally prohibited corporal

punishment as a discipline method at home, and initiatives to persuade countries to make amendments and laws in that direction must be undertaken.

5.- If implemented, the INSPIRE violence prevention package could have positive effects in LAC countries.

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