


# The Bahamian Justification for Using Corporal Punishment Within the Home: A Christian Habit?

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## Abstract

Corporal punishment is a common means of disciplining children in Bahamian homes. Previous studies in The Bahamas have linked the justification for its use with religious beliefs. An Internet survey employing a snowball sampling method resulted in 1,570 persons participating in a study designed to focus on the association between biblical influence and attitudes toward corporal punishment; namely, is there an association with biblical influence in the lives of participants and their attitudes towards corporal punishment of children? This study found that those most influenced by biblically-based teachings were most likely to support the use of corporal punishment on their children. The results show that while overall belief in the Lord God of the Bible is associated with the use of corporal punishment, there is divergence between Christians to the extent corporal punishment is justified by the biblical texts, as well as how much participants' lives were modelled on biblical precepts (specifically, the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes). The divergence of opinions within the Christian population, which represents over 90% of the population of The Bahamas, indicates that attempts by the State to regulate the practice of corporal punishment will need to be promoted by pastors to make messages on nonviolent discipline of children acceptable to Christians in The Bahamas.

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## Introduction

It is commonly understood that The Bahamas is a Christian nation (Allen, 2009). This sentiment arises from the word Christian occurring in the preamble of the nation's constitution (Bahamas Independence Order, 1973), and it reflects that Christianity is still the dominant religion in the country (accounting for 95% of the population) with Baptists at 34.9% being the most common faith community (Bahamas Department of Statistics, 2012). The influence of leaders of Christian groups, notably the Bahamas Christian Council, has been evident in

various matters affecting the governance of the country, such as issues associated with marriage (Benjamin & LeGrand, 2012) and gambling (Virgil, 2014). There is still a clear association between church and state, which is manifested in elected government officials referring to the Christian God in speeches in the House of Assembly (Wells, 2021). The influence of biblically-based teachings is also evident in the views expressed by Members of Parliament in the House of Assembly, for example in relation to gender norms ("MICAL MP Suggests", 2018).

An increasing body of research from within The Bahamas has demonstrated that the use of corporal punishment (that is, hitting a child with an object or hand) in the home to discipline or punish children remains common (Fielding et al., 2016). While the use of corporal punishment is permitted in schools, its use is typically regulated (Johnson, 2016). Although reports of excessive punishment are still reported in the media (Fielding & Ballance, 2019), the use of corporal punishment at home is unregulated and seems to result in about 4% of children being abused through its excessive use (Brennen et al., 2010). While 4% may appear a small percentage, it translates to thousands of children. Brennen et al. (2010) have shown that abuse in the Bahamian context should be viewed as being close to grievous bodily harm, and so requiring medical treatment. The official number of child abuse cases in the 12 months ending February 2021 was 382 (Cartwright-Carroll, 2021), which suggests the figure is now higher than that reported in Plumridge & Fielding (2009). A study by Carroll et al. (2016) indicated that corporal punishment of children can start at a young age and continue into their adolescence. This is illustrated by a six-month old child being abused by corporal punishment (McKenzie, 2008). Given that many children are hit with an object, their risk of abuse is elevated beyond being spanked or slapped (Zolotor et al., 2008). We should also note that in a comparative study of college students in the United States and The Bahamas, Bahamian students were subject to more corporal punishment than their American peers (Fielding et al., 2015). Studies on violence in The Bahamas (Fielding et al., 2016; Fielding & Ballance, 2021b) suggest that corporal punishment is part of the domestic landscape in which Bahamian children are reared, which is consistent with studies from the Caribbean region (Landon et al., 2017).

It should be noted that the use of corporal punishment takes place with limited appreciation as to the long-term harm corporal punishment can inflict on the child. Despite the evidence from within and outside of the country about the potential and actual negative long-term effects of corporal punishment (Gershoff, 2010; Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016; Fielding et al., 2016), there is still support for the untestable statement, “I got beat as a child and I turned out all right”—a justification which arises in casual conversation on corporal punishment. Such attitudes ignore that fact that children in The Bahamas suffer abuse as a result of excessive discipline (Fielding et al., 2016). As Fielding and Ballance (2021b) indicated, the lack of knowledge of the negative impacts of corporal punishment means that many people are using corporal punishment without adequate understanding of the potential harm they may be inflicting. Some of these long-term effects in Bahamian college students have been noted by Roth et al. (2020). The impact of abuse on young Bahamian boys has been described by Knowles (1999). We also recognize that as the child grows up, the use of corporal punishment decreases, but being shouted at does not diminish. So in focusing on corporal punishment, we are aware that this study is omitting what may be other means by which children might be abused (Plumridge & Fielding, 2009).

Otterbein and Otterbein (1973) demonstrated that the use of corporal punishment was associated with a belief of the parents in a deity. Subsequent research has also demonstrated that biblical texts, and biblical misquotations, are used to justify the use of corporal punishment in The Bahamas. Qualitative data arising from Fielding and Ballance (2019) indicate that the Bible is still used by caregivers to support the use of corporal punishment (Fielding & Ballance, 2021a). While this justification is not unique

to The Bahamas, the fact that *sola scriptura*-orientated Christian denominations dominate the Bahamian Christian population (Bahamas Department of Statistics, 2012) suggests that the biblical justification may also be expected to be common, as has been found in the United States by Richardson et al. (1994). A Baptist's biblically-based argument in support of corporal punishment is given by Naselli (2013). Even in traditional denominations, influential Christian leaders such as Pope Francis (2015) have supported corporal punishment under certain circumstances, but it should be noted that physical abuse within the home, particularly of women, is condemned (Pullella, 2021). Fielding & Ballance (2019) identified the role of pastors in influencing gender norms in Bahamian society, in particular in reinforcing traditional views of women which seem increasingly out of step with modern society, such as "a woman's place is in the home." Biblical arguments concerning corporal punishment have been expressed by pastors in the press (Cunningham, 2020). Given that pastors can play an important role in influencing the opinions of their congregations (Fielding & Ballance, 2019), and engage in educational activities such as Sunday school, we note that unlike other aspects of education which are subject to government oversight, the educational qualifications of pastors and others in religious education appears to be unregulated. The limited data available on the education of pastors in The Bahamas suggests that the educational level of pastors might not be accepted by the secular educational system (Fielding, 2019).

Therefore, given the influence of biblically-based teachings, and the results from other studies in The Bahamas (Fielding & Ballance, 2021b) which point to the Bible being used to support corporal punishment of children, this study was undertaken to examine the linkage between attitudes

towards corporal punishment and the influence of the Bible in the lives of participants. While studies such as Fielding & Ballance (2021b) indicate that the Bible is quoted as justification for using corporal punishment, participants in that study misquoted the Bible (in particular, Proverbs 13:24, "Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them", International Bible Society, 1973), and so possibly demonstrated a superficial acquaintance with the Bible. Nonetheless, previous studies and articles in the press indicate that biblical influences may be an important underpinning for the use of corporal punishment (Corporal Punishment, 2019). Further, a divine approval of corporal punishment would be expected to be associated with an unwillingness to accept state intervention in regulating corporal punishment. It is hypothesized that the greater the influence of the Bible in the lives of respondents, the greater the support for using corporal punishment to discipline children.

## Method

Unlike some other communities, The Bahamas religious landscape is dominated by Christian denominations. Previous work on examining Christian belief has focused on creedal belief, rather than how biblical teachings influence actions (Van der Slik, 1994). Other scales which have examined beliefs and attitudes result in an expansive list of questions (Biaggi, 2018) which we considered inappropriate for an Internet-based study in COVID-19 times. Therefore, a survey was devised which focused on the precepts and commands in the Bible. Two sets of precepts contained in the Bible, namely, the Ten Commandments and Beatitudes, were chosen to provide a mix of actions, arising from both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, which Christians should follow if they are to put their beliefs into

practice (see Appendix). In addition to following the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes have long been considered to guide the spirituality of the Christian (Grove Munson, 1978), and so adherence to these precepts were taken to indicate that the Bible was used as a guide as to how respondents lived and so informed their attitudes. To find language to convey the meanings of the Ten Commandments and Beatitudes to a population which typically has a high school education (Bahamas Department of Statistics, 2012), the wording in the survey with respect to these precepts was based on the text of *Catholicism for Dummies* (Trigilio & Brighenti, 2017). In addition, respondents were asked about their religious affiliation and their attitudes to corporal punishment of children and violence in the home.

The target population was adult (aged 18 or over) Bahamian citizens living in The Bahamas. In the fall of 2021, an Internet-based study was undertaken in which university students used their social media contacts to initiate a snowball sample. Although a convenience sample can result in a biased sample compared to the general population, as this study is focused on linkages within the sample, it is conjectured that this bias should not invalidate any linkages which may exist between biblical influences and attitudes. The study was approved by University of The Bahamas' Institutional Review Board.

## Results

A total of 1,738 persons entered the survey. After cleaning the data to remove participants who were not part of the target population, 1,570 respondents were retained in the analysis. Therefore, this number is the maximum sample size for any question, as participants were free to leave any question unanswered. Most of the respondents were female (68%) and the modal age group was

18-24 (45.9%). Never married was the modal marital status (59.3% of 1,254 respondents) and 42.8% (of 1,254 respondents) did not care for children under 14 or were not parents. Most participants believed in the Lord God of the Bible (91.8% of 1,524 respondents), and 84.8% (of 1,570 respondents) identified with a Christian denomination. Of 1,295 respondents, 58.8% thought that it would be in the best interests of their child to be disciplined using corporal punishment, and 9.6% indicated that they would use an object to inflict the punishment.

## Experiences of Corporal Punishment

All participants were asked about their personal experiences of corporal punishment when a child. As a child only 12.1% (of 1,302 respondents) were not disciplined by the use of corporal punishment and 66.2% were disciplined using an object. While many participants felt that corporal punishment had been beneficial for them not only in the short term and in their adult life, others indicated that it had had a negative impact upon them, and that they needed assistance as a result of the physical and psychological injuries they received (Table 1). It should be noted that those who did not feel that they turned out all right, were more likely to feel that they were abused as a result of their corporal punishment than those who felt that they had turned out all right ( $\chi^2(1, N = 1,003) = 137, p < .001$ ). We also found that 3.8% of 1,124 respondents had to seek help for both mental and physical injuries arising from their punishment, which suggests that there is a group which was subject to multiple harmful events. Further, there was a significant difference between the age of the respondents and their perception that their corporal punishment was abusive, with younger participants being more likely to feel that they were abused than older participants ( $\chi^2(8, N = 1,114) = 25.2, p = .001$ ). The childhood corporal punishment experiences

of participants demonstrate that boys are more likely than girls to be hit with an object (15.6% of 405 boys and 9.2% of 881 girls,  $\chi^2(3, N = 1,286) = 18.3, p < .001$ ), so putting proportionately more boys than girls at risk of being abused.

### Attitudes of Respondents on Corporal Punishment and Violence

Respondents mainly agreed that everyone should be able to live without fear of violence; however, most respondents still thought that it was acceptable for children to be physically punished (see, for example, Table 2). This may reflect the fact that respondents did not tend to view corporal punishment as violence. Further, there was relatively little support for outlawing the use of corporal punishment.

**Table 1**

*Percentages of Respondents Indicating the Consequences of their Childhood Experiences of Corporal Punishment.*

When a child, I experienced corporal punishment and:	Agree	Disagree	Cannot recall	N =
It had a positive impact on me	62.7	27.8	9.5	1,124
"I turned out all right"	78.1	15.9	6	1,127
I would consider it was abuse	24.5	67.9	7.5	1,126
I had to get treatment for my physical injuries	6.2	86.1	7.6	1,125
I had to get treatment for my mental injuries	10.9	81.7	7.4	1,126

**Table 2**

*Percentages of Respondents Indicating their Agreement to Aspects of Violence and Corporal Punishment.*

Respondents' attitude	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N =
Everyone should live without fear of violence	41.5	41.8	13.6	3.2	1,231
It is acceptable for children to be physically punished by their parents	15.6	51	22.6	10.9	1,228
Corporal punishment is violence	11.7	23.7	55.7	8.9	1,231
It should be illegal for parents to use corporal punishment on children	8.9	17.7	54.1	19.3	1,218
Only adults should live without fear of violence	4.6	5.5	51.5	38.4	1,233

### Christian vs Non-Christian Perceptions

The sense of belonging to a particular faith community by participants allowed respondents to be divided into Christian and non-Christian groups. This permitted a simple comparison of the differences

between those who can be expected to be influenced by different perspectives. As shown in Table 3, respondents who identified with Christian and non-Christian backgrounds had contrasting views on every item except one; both groups agreed in a similar way that everyone should live without fear of violence (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Percentages of Respondents, within Christian Background, Indicating their Agreement to Aspects of Violence and Corporal Punishment by Christian Background.*

Respondents' attitude	Background	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N =
Everyone should live without fear of violence§	Christian	41.1	42.4	13.4	3.1	1,194
	Non-Christian	39.9	41.3	14.5	4.3	
It is acceptable for children to be physically punished by their parents	Christian	16.5	52.2	21.5	9.8	1,194
	Non-Christian	9.5	48.2	24.8	17.5	
Corporal punishment is violence	Christian	9.9	22.3	58.5	9.3	1,192
	Non-Christian	20.2	31.9	39	8	
It should be illegal for parents to use corporal punishment on children	Christian	7.6	17.15	55	20.3	1,186
	Non-Christian	17.7	20.4	47.4	14.6	
Only adults should live without fear of violence	Christian	4.8	5.6	52.5	37.1	1,196
	Non-Christian	2.9	5.8	47.1	44.2	

Note:  $\chi^2 p < .001$  for each item except §,  $p = .86$

### Biblical Influences

Of 1,524 respondents, 91.8% believed in “the existence of the Lord God of the Bible”. Given that this group included some respondents from non-Christian sects, only those respondents ( $N = 1,331$ ) who identified with a Christian sect were retained for examining the linkages between Bible-based influences and corporal punishment and violence which we report below.

Only 20.7% (of 1,133 respondents) reported having read the Bible by themselves, which suggests that the Bible was not a text which

they studied privately or at all. Given that most respondents claimed to be familiar with the contents of the Bible (95.3% of 1,135 respondents), their knowledge can be assumed to have come from educational settings such as school, Sunday school, church and/or within the home. Respondents provided some marked differences in their level of agreement regarding various opinions about the Bible and its messages. Overall, while respondents generally agreed that the Bible was a good guide as to how to bring up children (92.2% of 1,138, agreeing) and how we should treat one another (96.8% of 1,139 participants), there was less

agreement as to whether or not the Bible justified the use of corporal punishment on children (58.5% of 1,056 participants agreeing) as seen in Table 4. We note that respondents who disagreed (either *Strongly*

*disagreed*, or *Disagreed*) that corporal punishment was violence were most likely to agree (strongly or otherwise) that the Bible supported corporal punishment ( $\chi^2(9, N = 1,190) = 172, p < .001$ ).

**Table 4**

*Percentages of Respondents Indicating their Agreement to Aspects of The Bible.*

Aspect of the Bible	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N =
Respondent is familiar with the contents/teachings of the Bible	37.2	58.1	3.9	.8	1,135
Respondent interprets the Bible exactly as written (literally)	11.9	38.2	43.7	6.1	1,125
The Bible needs an expert to explain what it really says	12.7	28	46.9	12.4	1,130
Respondent's life reflects the teachings in the Bible	17.1	55.1	26.6	1.2	1,133
As a guide to living with each other, the Bible is out of date	11.7	18.1	41.5	28.7	1,131
The Bible is a good guide as to how to bring up children today	61.7	30.5	7.3	.5	1,138
The Bible is a good guide as to how we should treat each other	68.4	28.4	3.1	.2	1,139
Respondent loves his/her neighbour as myself	32.5	57.5	9.3	.7	1,137
Respondent thinks that the Bible justifies using violence in general	5.6	25	54.8	14.7	1,057
Respondent thinks that the Bible justifies using corporal punishment to discipline children	15.7	42.8	35.2	6.3	1,056

### **Associations between Living the Teachings of the Bible and Attitudes towards Corporal Punishment and Violence**

Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the questions relating to the Ten Commandments and Beatitudes (TCB) was .90 indicating good reliability. These questions were used to make a scale to indicate how closely respondents' thought their lives were guided by the TCB. Answers to these questions resulted in a minimum TCB score of 22, indicating that they

followed these teachings *Almost all of the time*, and a maximum value of 88, indicating that respondents *Rarely* followed these teachings. Overall, the TCB was  $M = 37.3$ ,  $SEM = .3$  from 960 respondents.

While we wish to focus on overall associations, we note that the TCB means were significantly different for males and females, and between the age groups ( $p < .001$ ). Therefore, when we analyse the TCB scores, we use sex and age as covariates so as to account for these sex and age effects. Due

to the small number of respondents, namely four, who did not identify as male or female, this group was omitted as their small sample size would result in poorly defined results.

As a check on the interpretation of the TCB scores, the mean scores were found to be associated with how respondents thought their lives reflected the teachings in the Bible (see Table 5).

**Table 5**

*Mean TCB Scores by Extent Respondent's Life Reflects the Teachings in The Bible, Adjusted for Age and Sex by Analysis of Covariance.*

Respondent's life reflects the teachings in the Bible	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Strongly agree	29.1	0.61
Agree	36.5	0.32
Disagree	43.5	0.5
Strongly disagree	45.6	2.16

Analysis of covariance,  $F_{3,935} = 1,14.7$ ,  $p < .001$

For some of the statements, the level of agreement was associated with a consistent (linear) trend of TCB scores and attitudes, suggesting that biblical influences are simply associated with attitudes. However, there are also polarized views expressed by those who have similar TCB scores, indicating that the

extent to which respondents' lives were based on the TCB are not always simply associated with their attitudes as there was a statistically significant quadratic relationship between level of agreement and TCB scores (see Table 6).

**Table 6**

*Mean TCB Scores by Extent Respondents Agree with Various Statements, Adjusted for Age and Sex by Analysis of Covariance*

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Corporal punishment is violence	37	39.7	36.8	33.9	9.80	< .001
It is acceptable for children to be physically punished by their parents	33.3	37.5	39.5	36.9	14.65	< .001
The Bible justifies using violence in general	34.6	39.5	37.6	31.8	25.66	< .001
The Bible justifies using corporal punishment to discipline children	33	37.4	39.4	34	20.84	< .001
It should be illegal for parents to use corporal punishment on children	36	38.8	37.5	35.6	4.41	.004

Note: Significant quadratic relationships between level of agreement and TCB scores,  $p < .05$ , for each statement.



Respondents who interpreted the Bible literally were more likely to follow the TCBs in their lives than those who did not, Table 7. A linear regression confirms the relational

nature between TCB score and level of agreement. This observation is important given that the Bible is a collection of books in varying literary styles.

**Table 7**  
*Mean TCB Scores by Extent Respondents Interpret The Bible Literally, Adjusted for Age and Sex by Analysis of Covariance.*

Respondent interprets the Bible literally	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Strongly agree	28.3	.74
Agree	35.4	.41
Disagree	40.1	.38
Strongly disagree	43.4	1.01

Note: Analysis of covariance,  $F_{3,932} = 140.7, p < .001$

The influence of the literal interpretation of the Bible can be seen in attitudes considered in this study (see Table 8). The key aspect being that those who interpret the Bible literally agreed that the Bible supports the use of corporal punishment. This suggests that

how respondents are taught biblically-based teachings is associated with their agreement on the use of corporal punishment and their reluctance for corporal punishment to be regulated in the home.

**Table 8**  
*Association of the Literal Interpretation of The Bible with Agreement of Statements Relating to Corporal Punishment by Percentage of Respondents*

Respondents agreeing/strongly agreeing with these statements:	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	<i>p</i> =
The Bible justifies using corporal punishment to discipline children	71.7%	60.2%	55.6%	47.8%	< .001
The Bible justifies using violence in general	37%	31.5%	27%	41.8%	< .001
Corporal punishment is violence	34.2%	28.4%	33.5%	46.4%	< .001
It should be illegal for parents to use corporal punishment on children	33.9%	26.4%	20.8%	30.4%	< .001

**Discussion**

We note the method used to recruit participants was open to bias. This bias was demonstrated in the demographics of the

respondents not reflecting those of the adult population in The Bahamas. However, Internet-based samples do allow relatively large samples to be obtained, and the use of non-face-to-face data collection methods are

necessary during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these limitations, it is conjectured that the linkages within this study are robust enough for us to make useful inferences which inform our appreciation as to why corporal punishment is an accepted and acceptable part of the Bahamian child-rearing landscape.

This study reminds us that corporal punishment to discipline children is a commonly-used method to modify their behaviour. Consequently, these findings repeat those in the 1960s study from Andros that belief in a supernatural being was linked to the justification to use corporal punishment on children (Otterbein & Otterbein, 1973). Its use is of greater concern with the rearing of boys than girls, due to the fact that boys are at a higher risk of being abused through being hit with an object; it is this normality of discipline which borders on abuse, due to common use of objects, as described in Fielding and Ballance (2021b), which we can assume informs, knowingly or otherwise, the views of respondents. This is exemplified by the attitude that “I was beaten as a child and I turned out all right,” although this is an untestable viewpoint, and the observation made by Fielding and Ballance (2021b) that people who were not knowledgeable about the long-term effects of corporal punishment still use it. However, we note that the attitude, “I was beaten as a child and I turned out all right” was not associated with the group of participants who thought that they were abused through corporal punishment. This may suggest that further research is required to objectively assess the prevalence of child abuse arising from excessive punishment, rather than relying on self-reports. The results of our study again indicate that some 4% of children probably suffered severe abuse as they required assistance for their mental and physical harm, a figure consistent with other research (Fielding et al., 2016). The implications of

child abuse on child development are well known (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2014). Although participants agreed that everyone has a right to live without fear of violence, this attitude does not seem to apply to children because participants did not view corporal punishment as a form of violence.

Participants indicated that they did not support making corporal punishment illegal. This view seems in tension with the fact that exposure to corporal punishment as a child is linked to a life of victimisation, including workplace bullying (Fielding, 2020). The use of corporal punishment has also been linked to macrosocial effects beyond the individual, as corporal punishment has a negative association with innovation, and so, ultimately, on national development (Fielding & Ballance, 2019). Further, Fielding and Ballance (2021b) have demonstrated that many parents do not display much knowledge of the long-term harm to which they expose their children through using corporal punishment. Moreover, Fielding and Ballance (2021b) found that in The Bahamas there is considerable disagreement as to whether anyone has the right to tell a parent how to raise their children, a matter raised by policymakers (Cartwright-Carroll, 2021). This suggests that participants feel that society should not intrude upon what happens in the home. However, media reports of child abuse (Maycock, 2021) which can even result in death, suggest that this attitude is not without risk to children (Davis, 2021).

In general, there were clear divisions between those who professed to identify with Christian or non-Christian groups, except for the right to freedom from the fear of violence, which is regarded as a universal freedom (de Silva de Alwis & Klugman, 2015). Although this agreement and the disagreements between these groups should not be ignored,

given that most participants emerged from a Christian background, we focused on this group as the Christian group outnumbers all other groups in The Bahamas.

Within the group of participants who suggested that their lives were guided by Christian teachings, respondents demonstrated a clear association between their attitudes towards corporal punishment which were associated with the extent to which the Bible informed their lives as indicated by their TCB scores (Table 6). The mean TCB scores show the complexity of biblical relationships and the attitudes of respondents towards corporal punishment. Despite the associations between the TCB scores of respondents and respondents' support for various statements attributed to the Bible, the TCB scores associated with the level of agreement with various statements (Table 6) showed a quadratic relationship, indicating closer TCB scores between those who strongly agreed and strongly disagreed with these statements. Consequently, within this group of what might be called biblically-observant participants, there was considerable disagreement. This suggests that attempts to influence the attitudes of Christians will require different messages to appeal to Christians whose lives are more and less aligned with the TCBs.

Of note was that while participants claimed to be familiar with the contents of the Bible, only a minority of them had read it by themselves. This was despite the fact that participants did not seem to feel that they needed help with reading the Bible. There was divergence as to how the Bible should be read, literally or otherwise. This finding is reflected, to some extent, in the literature on reading the Bible (Dolch & Dolch, 1938) or between scholars themselves (Friedman, 1991). If participants have read the Bible for themselves, without awareness of its literary genres, they risk misinterpreting its meaning.

An example of not reading/misreading the Bible is the attribution, "Spare the rod and spoil the child", which does not appear in the Bible, but is used to justify corporal punishment (Fielding & Ballance, 2021b). What does seem to be clear is that participants who tended to read the Bible literally have lower TCB scores, which suggests a stronger influence of biblical teachings on their lives, than those who did not read the Bible literally. The relationship between a literal reading of the Bible and agreement with various aspects of violence and corporal punishment demonstrates that how the Bible is interpreted is associated with participants' attitudes. This suggests that the role of pastors, whose teaching role is rooted in the Bible, would be influential in encouraging, or otherwise, the use of corporal punishment.

It is apparent that the results from this study support the conjecture that those who live their lives more closely aligned with the TCBs are more supportive of corporal punishment than others. As such, this study supports the findings of Fielding and Ballance (2021a, 2021b) which noted the role that pastors can play in forming attitudes (Fielding & Ballance, 2020); so any successful attempt to encourage residents of The Bahamas to change their outlook towards the use of corporal punishment can be expected to benefit from the support of pastors from a diverse group of Christian denominations.

Given that parents associated with conservative Christian denominations are more likely to support the use of corporal punishment (Ellison et al., 1996), resistance might be encountered to curtailing its use. This is despite the fact that exposure of children to violence and abuse can elevate their risk of becoming criminals, as has been demonstrated in the United States by Herrenkohl et al. (2017), in The Bahamas

(Fielding et al., 2016) and Jamaica (Smith, 2016). In Jamaica, another “deeply religious country” (Loop Caribbean News, 2021), the government has indicated that the negative aspects of corporal punishment are such that it plans to outlaw corporal punishment, even in the face of opposition from faith-based communities (Loop Caribbean News, 2021). Our study indicates a similar potential conflict between the State and Christian communities in The Bahamas can be expected.

Future research could be focused on pastors to examine their private experiences of corporal punishment and how they discuss corporal punishment of children with their congregations. However, what is apparent is that unless children are better protected, whether through education, alternative parenting practices or through regulation, children, particularly boys, can be expected to suffer as a result of harsh discipline, which will be detrimental to themselves and to society.

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## Appendix

### *Statements related to the Ten Commandments and Beatitudes.*

A supernatural deity (a god) is the most important focus of my life  
I do not blaspheme or disrespect the name of the supernatural deity I worship  
I have a day set aside to worship the supernatural deity I honour  
I show respect, obey and care for my parents  
I shall not murder any human being  
I do/will not have sex with someone else's spouse or a spouse cheating on their partner  
I do/will not have sex with any unmarried person  
I do/will not engage in pornography  
I do/will not engage in homosexual activity  
I do/will not engage in masturbation  
I do not take someone else's property or cheat anyone  
I do not lie  
I avoid intentional desire and longing for sex with someone else's wife/husband or fiancée  
I avoid wanting to or taking someone else's property  
I acknowledge my need and utter dependence upon the supernatural deity I worship  
I embrace my sufferings as they make me become more compassionate to others in pain  
I choose other ways to resolve conflicts without resorting to violence  
I seek to solve injustices  
I seek to be forgiving, kind, compassionate  
I single-mindedly see the supernatural deity I worship first in all situations  
I work for unity and understanding between those who disagree with each other  
I seek to do what is right, even when it is hard (such as standing up to someone who is acting like a bully)