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# **The Abolition of the Parental Right to Corporal Punishment in Sweden, Germany and other European Countries**

A Model for the United States and other  
Democracies?

Christian Pfeiffer

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**A Model for the United States and other Democracies?\***

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## **1. The history leading up to the abolition of the parental right to corporal punishment in Sweden, Germany and other European countries**

Let me introduce the topic with two quotes. The first is from the year 1978, when a foreign female author was awarded Germany's highest civilian honor, the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade. The author began her acceptance speech with the following little story:

*“One day a small boy had done something for which his mother felt he deserved a sound thrashing – for the first time in his life. He was now told to go and find a stick in the garden and bring it to his mother. After some time the son came back crying and said: “I couldn't find a stick, but here is a rock; you can throw that at me.” The mother then began to cry, for suddenly she saw everything through the eyes of the child. She took her son in her arms. She then put the rock on a shelf in the kitchen. It stayed there as a constant reminder of the promise that she made to herself at that moment: Never violence!”*

The second quote is from a church parenting guide disseminated in Germany starting in 2008:

*“When the time comes to apply the rod, take a deep breath, relax, and pray, “Lord, make this a blessing to my child.... The child should be able to anticipate the coming rod by your utterly calm and controlled spirit....*

*If you have to sit on him to spank him, then do not hesitate. And hold him there until he has surrendered. Prove that you are bigger, tougher, more patiently enduring, and are unmoved by his wailing. Hold the resisting child in a helpless position for several minutes, or until he is totally surrendered.... As the child gets older, the licks must become more forceful if the experience is going to be effective in purging his rebellion. A general rule is to continue the disciplinary action until the child has surrendered.”*

The first quote is from Astrid Lindgren, the world famous children's book author from Sweden. The second quote is from the book *To Train Up a Child*, by the American Pastor Michael Pearl and his wife Debi. The German edition of this book sold 4,000 copies in our country between 2008 and 2010. However, on the request of the German Child Protection Association, printing and purchasing the book were eventually banned by the Federal Department for Media Harmful to Young Persons.

It's obvious, then, that the child-rearing position taken by Astrid Lindgren won out in Germany, as it has done in 17 other European countries. But how did this come about? For almost all European countries, the original position taken centuries ago was the same as that of Pastor Michael Pearl, a clear message the Bible conveys: *“He who spares his rod hates his son; but he who loves him disciplines him promptly.”* (Proverbs 13:24). Accordingly, a verse from medieval times in France gives the following advice: *“It is better to beat your child when it is small than to see it hang as an adult.”* The underlying belief in the innate depravity and original sin of human beings has spawned statements such as this by many religions over the millennia regarding the raising of children. The expression *“beating the devil out of children”* has thereby become a programmatic axiom that has exerted great power. So how can it be explained that,

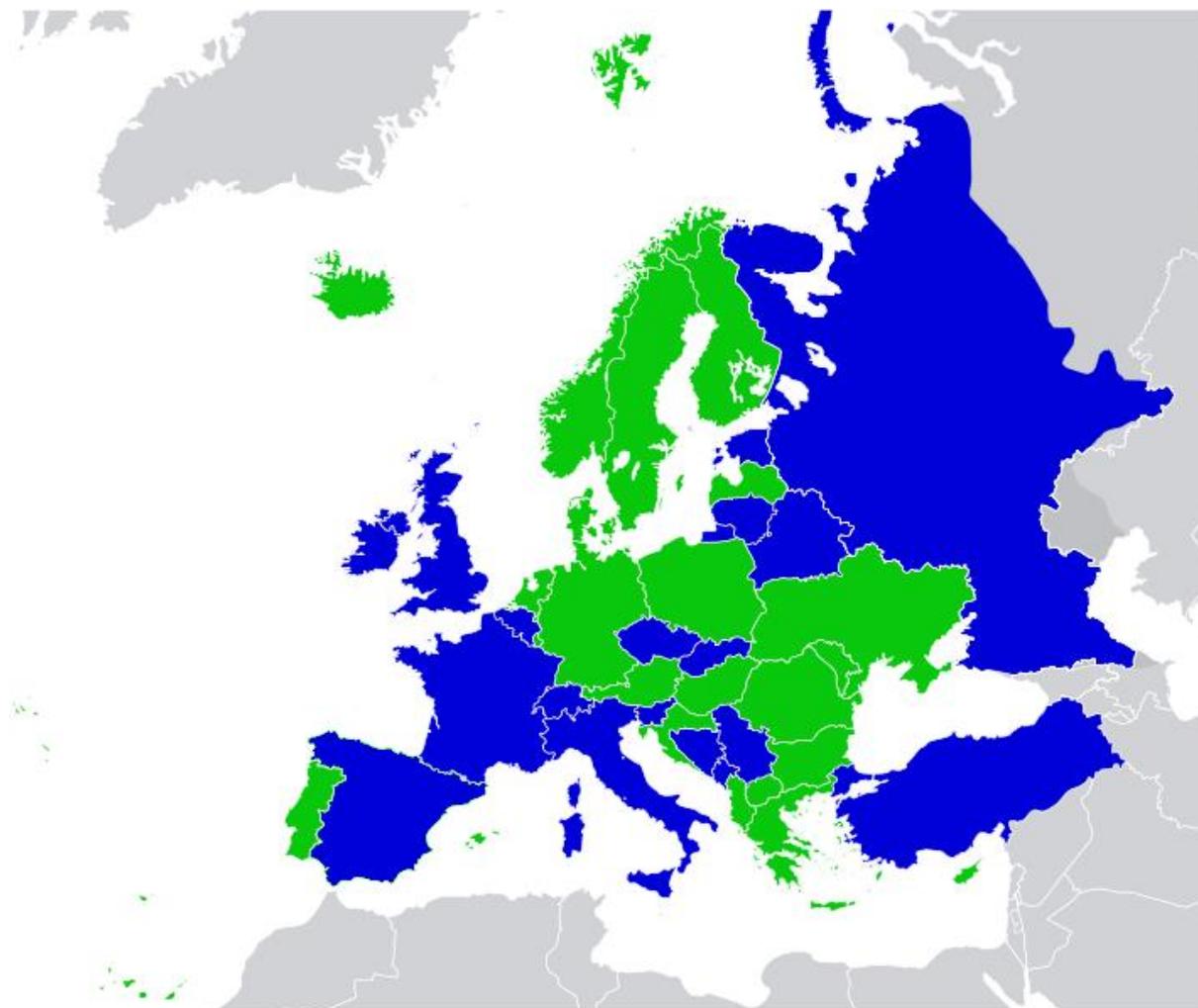
especially in Europe, an entirely different practice of raising children has now developed? Steven Pinker provides a very convincing answer to this question in his brilliant book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (2011). His historical analysis shows clearly that it was not until the Age of Enlightenment that a new view of the raising of children heralded a step-by-step change in the pedagogical core beliefs. One example of this is provided by the French philosopher and humanist Michel de Montaigne, who in 1662 wrote: “*My experience is that the use of the rod makes a child cowardly and more than ever maliciously obstinate.*” Three decades later, in 1692, in his work, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, the English philosopher John Locke spoke out against the concept of innate depravity that is to be controlled with beatings, writing: “*Children are like white paper or wax that one can shape and form positively and negatively.*” And seventy years later, Jean Jacques Rousseau countered the Christian concept of original sin with that of child innocence. Children were to have the opportunity to develop their creativity and learn step-by-step from their own experiences within the framework of a non-violent upbringing.

But this meant that the philosophers ran far ahead of the prevailing spirit of their times. It took another 200 years until, in 1979, their message could be politically implemented in an entire country through the legal abolition of the parental right to corporal punishment, which is what finally happened in Sweden. There, Astrid Lindgren had campaigned for decades for the loving and non-violent raising of children. She thus became one of the social forces for reform.

One year after her acceptance speech that I quoted in my introduction, she achieved her great goal. On July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1979 Sweden became the first country in the world to prohibit all forms of beating of children by their parents. Since then, the exact formulation of Paragraph 6, Section 1 of the Swedish Children and Parents Code states: “*Children are entitled to care, security and a good upbringing. Children shall be treated with respect for their person and individuality and may not be subjected to corporal punishment or any other humiliating treatment.*”

Once this standard had taken effect, the milk industry played an important part in quickly getting the legal message known in the farthest corners of Sweden. In July and August 1979, the wording of this new provision of the Children and Parents Code could be found on every milk bottle and milk carton in Sweden. There was also a large-scale information campaign by the government and the associations that had committed themselves to the reform, which ran on television and radio, and in the main daily papers. It was supplemented by the largest flyer campaign that Sweden had ever experienced. An advertising agency developed the text of the flyer together with child psychologists and educators. The Ministry of Justice saw to it that it reached all kindergartens, schools, social services organizations and local administrations in the country. All this led to a dream result two years later when a representative survey in 1981 found that 90 percent of Sweden’s adults were aware of the legal prohibition of beating children (Ewerlöf/Sverne 1999; Maiorino, 2003).

**Fig. 1: The abolition of the parental right to corporal punishment**



Legality of corporal punishment in Europe  
■ Corporal punishment prohibited in schools and the home  
■ Corporal punishment prohibited in schools only

The first countries to follow the Swedish role model were two neighboring countries in northern Europe: Finland (1984) and Norway (1987). Denmark followed in 1997. Germany passed a corresponding law in November 2000. Today, as can be seen in Figure 1, 18 of 47 countries in Europe have abolished the parental right to corporal punishment entirely; and at last count in January of this year, a total of 37 countries worldwide have done the same.

In order to understand this development, it is worthwhile to look more carefully at those countries, such as Germany, who did not carry out the corresponding reform until the end of the 1990's or later. The history leading up to this legislative process differs somewhat from that of Sweden and its two neighboring northern European countries, whose focus was more on fundamental theoretical and philosophical arguments concerning the right way to raise children. In contrast, in Germany and the other countries that came later, the results of empirical research played an increasingly important role. In these countries, a culture of social scientific research

had developed, supported by psychological, sociological and criminological university professorships and research institutes. The arguments for and against the abolition of the parental right to corporal punishment were finally examined based on carefully collected empirical data. These then became the basis for the legal policy demands.

An example of this was the Commission on Violence appointed by the German Federal Government in 1987, of which I was a member. This interdisciplinary team of 36 people, consisting of scientists and practitioners, had been given a clear mandate by the Federal Government: Over the course of three years, we were to develop political recommendations for the prevention and combating of violent crime. The recommendations from eight subgroups were submitted to the whole Commission for a vote, and in January 1990 they elected to include a pioneering decision: By a large majority, the Commission on Violence recommended that the Federal Government abolish the parental right to corporal punishment in Germany without substitution.

As justification, we criminologists offered empirical evidence, as did the developmental psychologists, the psychiatrists and the sociologists. According to everyone's findings, beating children negatively influences the development of their personality and promotes their aggressiveness and violence. Based on the model of its parents, the child learns to use violence to solve conflicts and assert its own wishes. Therefore, an important contribution toward breaking this "cycle of violence" would be to abolish the parental right to corporal punishment (Schwind/Baumann, 1990).

But this majority decision by the Commission on Violence represented only an initial success. We were not yet able to convince the conservative Federal Government, or the public, with our appeals. We quickly learned that it does not suffice to conduct good research. To achieve our aims we needed a two-pronged strategy: On one hand we needed new studies concerning the effects of beating children, and on the other hand we needed to do active public relations work in the mass media regarding the research findings.

Over the next ten years we advanced both these strategies with great commitment and dedication. In addition to the active research work, we wrote newspaper articles of our own, participated in talk shows and saw to it that our insights became known to a greater audience through public lectures and numerous interviews. All this effort eventually paid off. After the opposition won the elections, the new Federal Government (consisting of Social Democrats and Greens) finally gave us the chance in April 2000 to become politically effective. During a large hearing in the Bundestag, we were able to testify extensively regarding the effects of beating children and present our arguments that the parental right to corporal punishment should be abolished.

At that time, the findings of the first German victim survey proved to be very important. This survey was carried out in 1992 by the Criminological Research Institute of Lower Saxony, or KFN, which I am heading. It had started with a small symposium a year earlier, to which we invited Wesley Skogan and Jim Lynch from the United States, Pat Mayhew from England and Edzard Fattah from Canada. These experts taught us how to examine the difficult issues around inner family violence and sexual abuse with the help of a drop-off questionnaire. The insights we gained in this way have turned out to be truly ground-breaking.

For example, based on a sub-sample of 3,241 16- to 59-year olds from this victim survey, Peter Wetzels found in 1997 that scarcely-loved children and children who were beaten often were three to four times more at risk of becoming victims of sexual abuse compared to the group of children who were raised in a loving and non-violent way. In short, those who do not get enough parental love tend to be in danger of seeking affection from the wrong persons who exploit the situation. In contrast, those who are able to develop a strong feeling of self-worth as a result of being raised in a loving and non-violent way are only very seldom sexually abused.

In addition, Wetzels discovered a special feature regarding the perpetrators of different abuse constellations. Children who are scarcely loved and are often beaten are especially frequently victims of perpetrators who come from the immediate social environment of the family. Apparently the perpetrators are able to recognize the psychological state of such children and use the fact that they are known to the child to exploit its emotional needs for their own goals. Wetzels was also able to show that for women, inner family experiences of violence and abuse during childhood constitute a great stress factor throughout their lives. Later, in their marriages or partnerships, such women were three to four times more often victims of physical or sexual violence by their men. It seems men, who like to assert their dominance in marriage with violence, seek out women who have a weakly developed self-esteem as a result of very difficult childhood experiences (Wetzels, 1997).

At the Bundestag hearing, there were also broadly based insights presented from national and international family violence research. They show that not only severe beatings, but also the frequent use of light corporal punishment results in substantial development risks for the children concerned (Widom, 1998; Willems et al, 1994; Smith/Thornberry, 1995; Böttger, 1998; Frehsee, 1998). Representative school surveys proved to be very productive in this area. They have the advantage that one can use the survey instrument to ascertain both the experiences of being raised as a child and adolescent in the parental home, and their own experiences as victims or their self-reported violence as perpetrators (Pfeiffer et al., 1998).

Finally, during the hearing in the German Bundestag, one of the findings of research into aging was received with great interest. Parents who had raised their children with little love and much beating, and who lived with their children when they grew old, were at high risk of being treated very badly. At the time I formulated it as follows: In old age, everyone receives what he or she deserves. Or, seen from the other side: Love pays off (Pfeiffer, 1999).

At the time, the clear-cut findings of the empirical research greatly impressed the policy-makers, and on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2000, the German Bundestag abolished the parental right to corporal punishment entirely. Since then, Article 1631, Section 2 of the German Civil Code has the following wording: “*Children have a right to an upbringing without violence. Physical punishments, psychological injuries and other degrading measures are prohibited.*”

This gives rise to three questions:

- Do parents let themselves be influenced in their parenting behavior by the legal abolition of the right to corporal punishment?
- What are the results when inner-family violence against children decreases substantially in a country?
- Can our European experiences provide insights and inspiration for how a gradual abolition of the parental right to corporal punishment in the United States and other democratic countries could succeed?

## **2. The influence of the abolition of the parental right to corporal punishment on parenting behavior**

The effects of the Swedish reform have been studied by both Joan E. Durrant and Kai Bussmann. They individually arrived at the same conclusion that the aims of the legislation were largely attained (Durrant, 1999; Bussmann, 2013). They also both came to the conclusion that the cause of the reduction in physical violence against children could not solely be attributed to the new legislation. Other influencing factors, such as supporting social policy measures, obviously played an important role. But in particular, both studies clearly indicate that Sweden at the time succeeded not only in making practically all parents aware of the new standard, but thanks to the wide public debate on this issue, the great majority of the parents also became convinced of the correctness of this reform and the underlying concepts regarding the raising of children.

In addition, Bussmann was able to carry out an empirical survey in 2007 in Austria and Germany as well, and he included Spain and France – examining two countries that had abolished the parental right to corporal punishment in only a limited way or not at all. It is not surprising that his data show great differences regarding the way the parents raise their children. Whereas in Sweden only four percent of the surveyed parents practiced the corporal punishment of “spanking with the hand,” in Austria and Germany it was 16 and 17 percent respectively. In contrast, in Spain it was 53 percent and in France 51 percent.

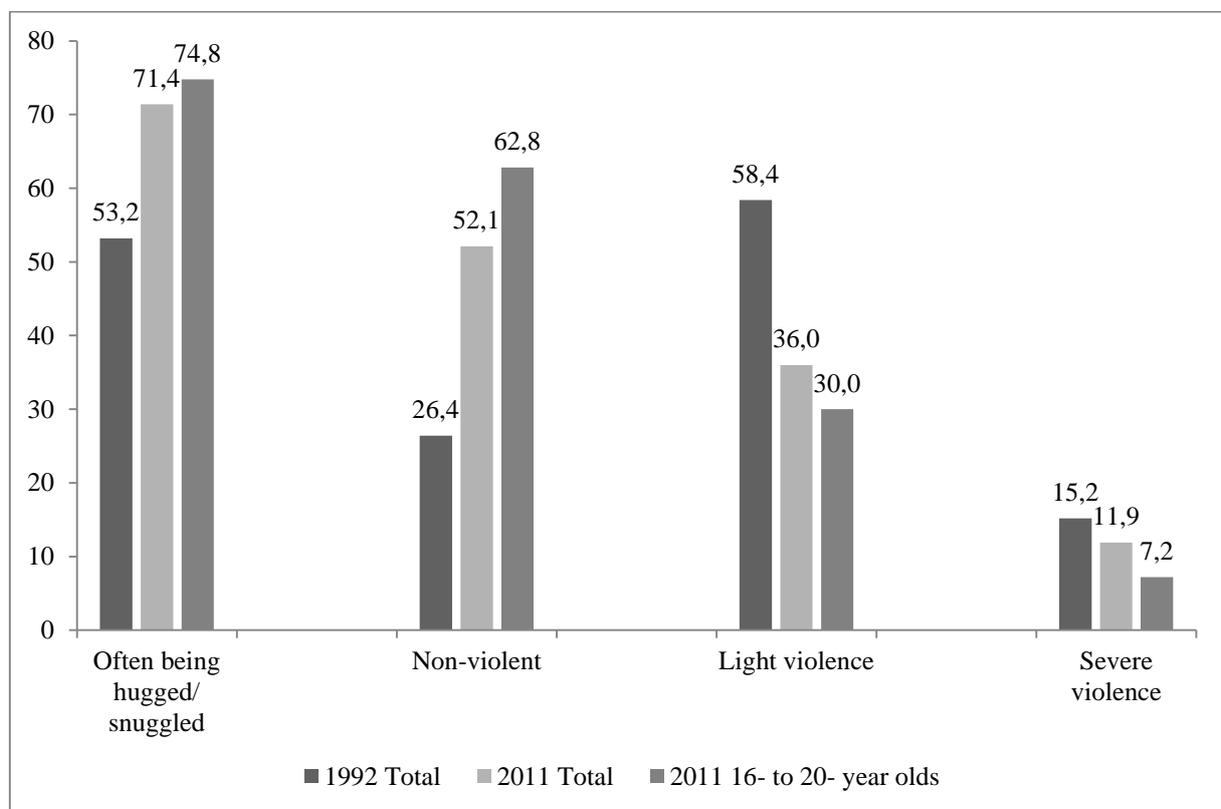
Regarding the level of awareness of the new standard, Bussmann also found in Germany (Bussmann, 2004) that one year after it became law, only 30 percent of the population was aware of the prohibition of the parental right to corporal punishment. At the time, the government had neglected to carry out a countrywide information campaign modeled on the Swedish one. During the following ten years, the government was largely passive as well. And yet in 2011, within the framework of a national victim survey by KFN, it was shown that by then 58.9 percent of parents were aware of the legal prohibition of corporal punishment (Hellmann, 2014).

One possible explanation for this is that during the ten intervening years, more than 40 research projects were carried out regarding youth violence, right-wing extremism among youths and other youth topics. During these studies data regarding parenting behavior were almost always

collected. Since youth violence was an important topic for the media, the scientists often had the opportunity to draw attention to the negative effects of parental beatings in interviews, newspaper articles of their own and television talk shows. And of course these opportunities were often used to spread the important message that since the year 2000 there was a law in Germany prohibiting corporal punishment.

The following diagram allows for an initial assessment of the change in the parental behavior culture in Germany that occurred between 1992 and 2011. The underlying data comes from two nationwide representative victim surveys the KFN conducted during those two years (Wetzels, 1997; Hellmann, 2014; Stadler et al., 2012).

**Fig. 2: The development of parental care and parental violence 1992-2011 (16- to 40-year olds, only German respondents, in %, N: 1992 = 2.087, N: 2011= 9.165; 16- to 20-year olds = 2.583)**



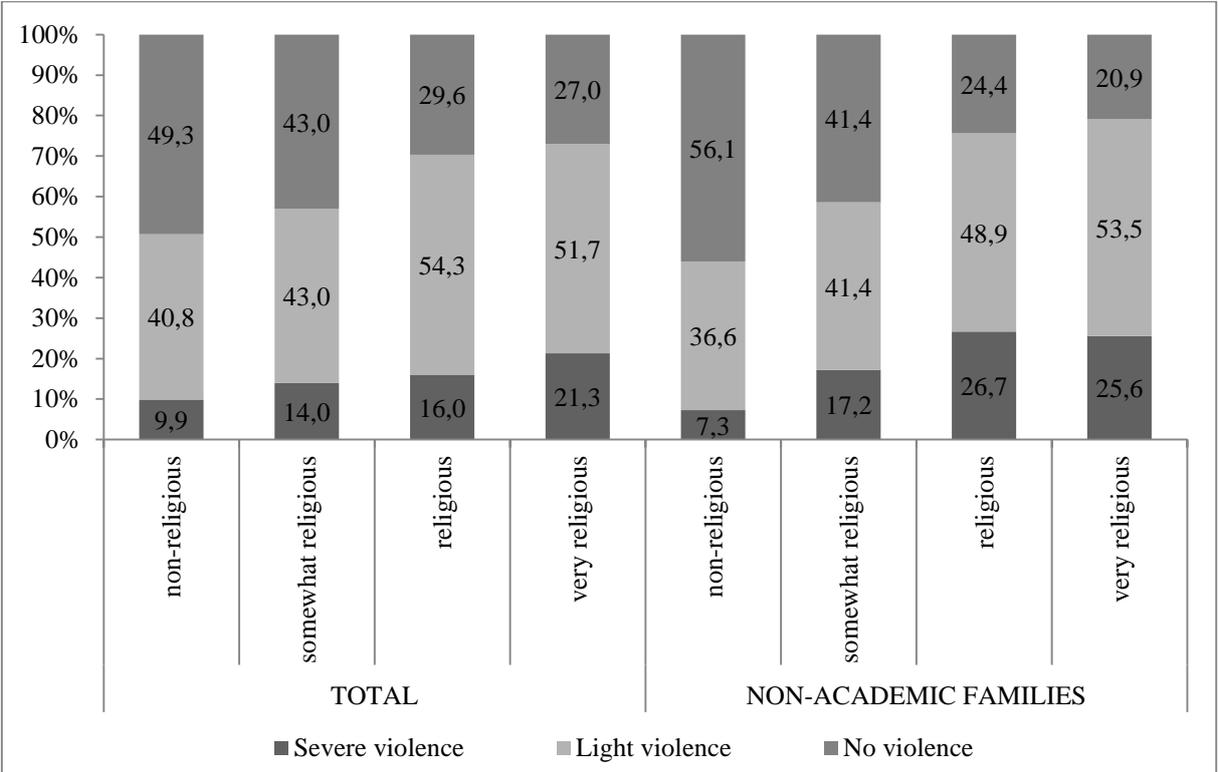
During the course of the 19 years, the percentage of those who were raised entirely non-violently during childhood almost doubled from 26.4 percent to 52.1 percent. In parallel, the percentage of those who reported having very loving parents increased substantially (frequent hugging/cuddling rose from 53.2 percent to 71.4 percent). Conversely, the light beating of children (slap in the face, light spanking) declined by almost 40 percent during those 19 years; and the percentage of those subjected to severe violence declined from 15.2 percent to 11.9 percent.

The relatively large overall number of survey participants (N=9,165) in 2011 made it possible to differentiate between the age groups of the respondents. It turned out that those between 16 and 20 years of age had profited even more from the change in the parenting culture than the totality of the respondents (loving parents 74.4%, raised non-violently 62.8%, light violence 30% and severe violence 7.2%) (Baier et al., 2013; Hellmann, 2014).

But what was the cause of this significant change in the culture of parenting? As did Durrant and Bussmann, we, too, saw one reason in the legal prohibition of corporal punishment, to the extent that people were aware of it. In addition, however, a second factor of significant importance was probably that a growing public debate, which began already in the 1990s, was held about why it was necessary to pass this law and about the effects of parents beating their children. It is quite possible that this publicly held pro- and contra-debate influenced parenting behavior even more strongly than the simple passing of the new legal norm.

At the same time, however, we became aware of the limits to such educational initiatives. In 2007/2008 KFN conducted a large national school survey with almost 45,000 ninth graders. Thanks to the great number of respondents, we were able to differentiate using smaller groups in the population, based on the religiousness of the parents. The conclusion was that some groups apparently cannot be reached or can be reached only in a very limited way through such educational messages. A clear connection could be established for both Muslims and Protestant free church Christians: The more religious the parents from such communities, the more they beat their children. For the Muslims, however, this finding was less pronounced than for the Protestants. Regarding the latter our analysis yielded the results that can be seen in Figure 3, whereby the connection was especially significant for non-academic families:

**Fig. 3: Parental violence during childhood based on religiousness (only Protestant free church youths) in %; KFN student survey 2007/2008, N = 515**



According to this, at 56.1 percent, the share of children who were raised non-violently was highest for non-religious parents. As the religiousness increases, being raised non-violently decreases to 20.9 percent (highly religious parents). Furthermore, there was a clear finding regarding severe violence: Whereas only 7.3 percent of non-religious parents from non-academic

families beat their children severely, this percentage rose for religious and very religious parents to 26.7 and 25.6 percent respectively. There was a corresponding finding within the framework of the victim survey mentioned from 2011. For Protestant free church Christians, but not for Catholics and Protestant Christians, it was confirmed that religious and very religious parents beat their children substantially more often than non-religious or only slightly religious parents (Pfeiffer/Baier, 2013).

Overall, for Germany, these findings do not have a significant influence, since only 0.7 percent of the population belongs to evangelical churches. But this may prove to be very different in the United States. Considering the great regional differences in terms of the percentage of evangelical Christians in the general population, one hypothesis obviously comes to mind: The greater the influence of evangelical churches in a state, the more violent the raising of children can be expected to be. Here, another issue needs to be taken into consideration. In 19 U.S. states, primarily in the South, teachers are still permitted to publicly beat their students with a so-called “paddle.” A question that arises is if there is a connection between this and the basic religious orientation of the population in those states?

### **3. What effect have the changes that occurred in Germany had on parenting behavior?**

While we agree with the traditional criminological viewpoint that seeks to clarify how violent criminality and other forms of deviant behavior among young people have developed, we are also interested in how other aspects of this issue impacted their lives. So instead of looking only at how crime statistics changed due to the decline in violent parenting and increased care from the children’s parents, we also looked at things like the message that is being given to the children by parents who use violence as a way to raise their children.

First, I would like to present the hypotheses that we explored. We thus assume that parents who beat their children convey a clear message: The stronger ones may, and should, assert themselves using violence. On one hand this can promote the wish to dominate and control those who are weaker. On the other hand, children who are beaten and are scarcely-loved develop low self-esteem. The resulting basic insecurity may contribute considerably to their feeling threatened by strangers who look different. But this can promote racism, xenophobia and right-wing extremism in them.

It should further be noted that children who are raised in this way suffer greatly from feelings of helplessness. This can contribute to them later wanting to own a firearm. A gun can give them the feeling of power and fighting strength which stabilizes their poor self-esteem. One other thing appears plausible: Whoever grows up in constant fear of being beaten by their parents probably later assumes there is a threat of violence from their fellow men. They therefore tend to plead for harsh deterrents against evil, including capital punishment.

Finally, we should take into consideration what modern brain research has to say in this regard. Parental corporal punishment must thus be categorized as a severe environmental stressor,

which can bring forth a number of physiological and neurobiological changes and in the medium to long term contributes to measurable anomalies in relevant areas of the brain. This affects functional areas of the brain such as the hippocampus and the amygdala, which are seen to play a decisive role in the regulation of stress and emotions (Dedovic et al., 2009; Whittle et al., 2013).

In addition, a recent meta-analysis of the effects of beating children found that throughout a large number of studies structural anomalies could be found in the paralimbic system and the ventral attention system (Lim et al., 2014). The paralimbic system is said to play an important role especially for the self-regulation of social-emotional behavior (Dolan, 2007; Bonelli/Cummings, 2007). In its turn the ventral attention system is seen to be jointly responsible for cognitive control processes, general information processing and attention control (Rubia et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2012). In view of these findings, it can be assumed that frequent beatings by the parents on one hand impairs the emotional self-control and the communicative competence of the children involved, especially in conflict situations and on the other hand has a negative effect on their school performance.

Furthermore, we assume that children who grow up under non-violent, loving circumstances develop a stable self-esteem and are therefore more willing to take on positive challenges. Whoever experiences self-efficacy during childhood and adolescence, and then also receives recognition, will tend to develop the ability to deal with critical phases in life and rarely be burdened by thoughts of suicide. As a result, we expect that such children will later in life seldom be at risk of fleeing reality through frequent alcohol and cannabis consumption and that they therefore will less often be in danger of addiction and will have a higher degree of satisfaction with life overall. In addition, it is reasonable to assume that if a child experiences being secure and loved by its parents, it will tend to develop interpersonal trust, so it approaches views and behaviors that appear foreign and unfamiliar with tolerance and curiosity rather than with rejection and hostility.

In the autumn of 2013 the KFN conducted a representative survey with almost 10,000 students in ninth grade, which provided the opportunity to systematically check these assumptions. The initial bivariate data evaluation has already resulted in highly interesting findings. The following is an initial workshop report, which will be followed later by multivariate analyses.

As a first check of the hypotheses, we created two extreme groups. Group A consists of youths who during their childhood were raised in a loving and non-violent way by their parents. Group B consists of those who experienced severe violence and little care. In addition, regarding one of the aspects, the results from a representative survey with adults from the year 2010 will be used. Here, too, the data made it possible to create these two extreme groups.

First, it came as no surprise that there was a clear connection between a violent style of parenting with little care on one hand, and violence or other forms of youth delinquency (damage to property, shoplifting) on the part of the young person concerned on the other. Particularly striking was the finding that children who were frequently beaten and were scarcely-loved later

became repeat perpetrators of violence almost six times more often than those who were raised in a non-violent and loving way.

In this regard, KFN had already carried out comprehensive studies. The largest one was KFN's nationwide student survey mentioned above from the years 2007/2008, in which 44,610 ninth-graders participated. A path analysis, which also incorporated other influencing factors, clearly confirmed the strong influence that massive corporal punishment by parents has on the emergence of careers of violence. In addition, the multivariate study shows that the beating of children by their parents also promotes other stress factors, such as alcohol consumption, a high number of delinquent friends, the use of media with violent content and the acceptance of norms of masculinity that legitimize violence (Baier et al., 2009).

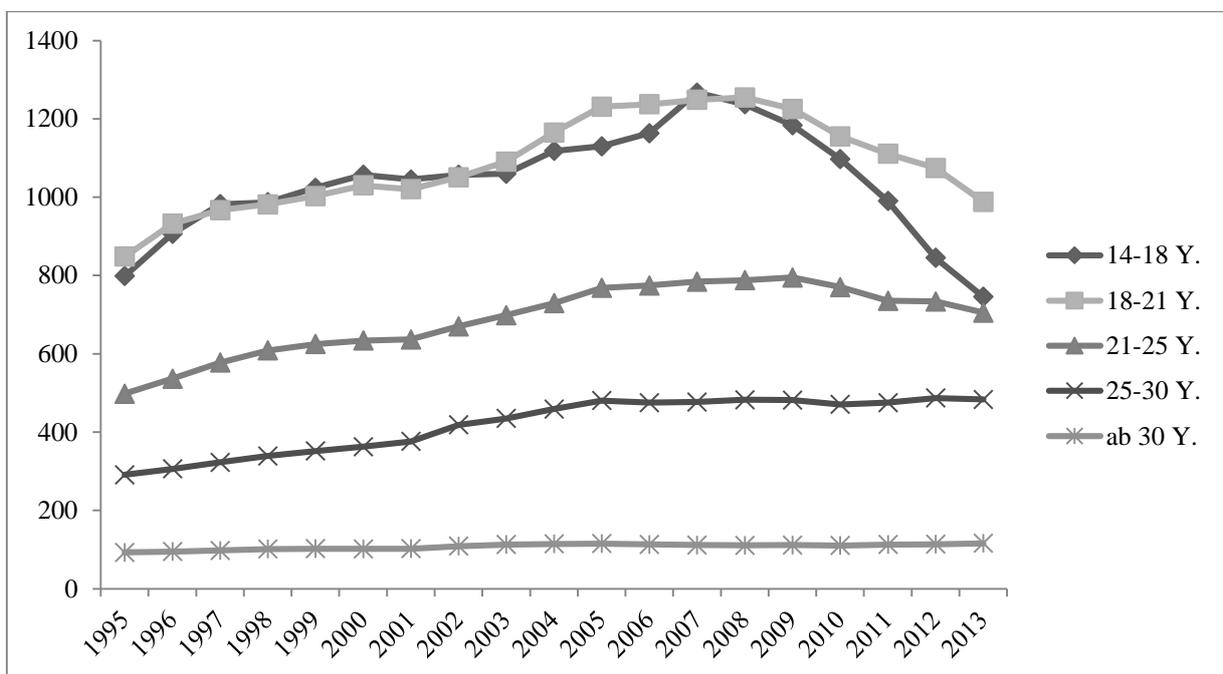
**Table 1: Comparison of extreme groups regarding the connection between different parenting behavior patterns and the attitudes and conduct of young people from Lower Saxony; Data base: Student survey 2013 of N = 9,512 ninth graders; in % or means**

	<b>Group A</b> No violence during childhood and ado- lescence, high level of care during childhood (N = 1,750)	<b>Group B</b> Severe violence dur- ing childhood and adolescence, low level of care during childhood (N = 142)	<b>Significance</b>
Repeat violent criminal offender	1.0	5.8	***
Act of violence in the last 12 months	3.9	19,7	***
Property damage in the last 12 months	3.3	14.4	***
Shoplifting in the last 12 months	2.4	13.3	***
Repeat truant	2.3	14.5	***
School repeater	9.9	24.1	***
Average grades (German, mathe- matics, history, biology)	2.9	3.3	***
Repeated consumption of marijuana per month	1.8	14.8	***
Binge drinking in the last 30 days	20.3	36.4	***
Compulsively playing computer ga- mes	1.7	5.7	n.s.
Suicidal thoughts (at least some- times)	4.6	48.0	***
Very high level of life satisfaction	61.5	11.1	***
High level of tolerance	77.8	61.7	***
Low level of tolerance	1.2	9.0	***
High level of interpersonal trust	34.0	10.5	***
Low level of interpersonal trust	13.4	38.3	***
Right wing extremism (only Ger- man responders)	1.0	7.0	**
Pro-capital punishment	14.3	31.5	**
Carrying knife, brass knuckles or club	13.4	31.0	**
Desire to own a firearm Adults	5.1	11.8	***

\*\*\* p < .001, \*\* p < .01, n.s. = not significant for p < .05

In view of these findings, the change in the raising of children depicted in Fig. 2 should result in a substantial reduction in the violent crime rate for the age groups that profited from the increasing reduction in parental beatings since the middle of the 1990s. These are especially the children and youths of today and, within certain limitations, the 18- to 20-year olds. More limited effects or no effects at all could be expected within the older age groups, since parenting changed only slowly during the 1970s and 1980s (Baier et al., 2013). The following figure shows that the police-registered violent crimes for the different age groups actually developed correspondingly. The data regarding children is not included, since in Germany children are not of the age of criminal responsibility until they are 14 years old and therefore most of their victims refrain from filing a report already for this reason.

**Fig. 4: Development of the number of persons, per 100,000 of each age group, suspected of violent offenses in Germany from 1995 to 2013, according to the Police Crime Statistics**



Since 2007 the number of youths per 100,000 registered by the police as violent crime suspects declined by 41.2 percent. For the 18- to 21-year olds and the 21- to 25-year olds the reduction, at 20.9 percent and 10.1 percent respectively, was already substantially lower. The data for the two older groups even show a slight increase in the rate of violent crime (25- to 30-year olds: +1.4% ; for those above 30-years old: +3.9%). This confirms the hypothesis. A clear decline in violence could only be found for the two age groups who were able to profit from the strong changes in the parenting culture. The dark field surveys that KFN repeatedly conducted in different cities and counties also show that this decline actually began earlier and went hand in hand with a substantial increase in the willingness to report incidents (Baier et al., 2009). At least in these areas, the positive trend is thus in reality even more pronounced than what is shown in the police data.

In addition, both trends are impressively confirmed by data collected nationwide regarding violence at schools. They are especially interesting from a criminological point of view because in this area there is actually no dark field, since the costs that arise for medical attention due to

acts of violence at schools are paid in their entirety by municipal insurers. Their statistics confirm that from 1997 onward, there was a decrease of 37.8 percent in medical emergency treatments at school per 10,000 students. When the victims of school violence had to be taken to hospital, the decrease was even greater, at 56.3 percent.

It is also interesting to note the results for the two extreme groups in regards to school performance. During the six months before the survey, youths in group B were 6.3 times more likely than those in group A to be multiple truants (truancy for five days or more). They also had to repeat class 2.4 times more often and had considerably worse grades.

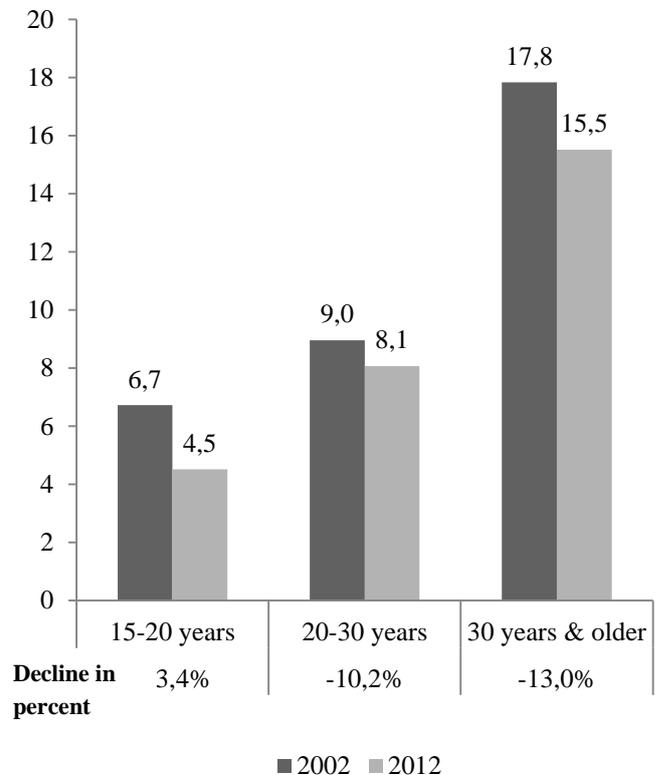
In view of the changes in the parenting practice, the question arises if longitudinal data regarding the development of the students also document a positive trend. An important indicator confirms this assumption, based on data from the Federal Statistics Office. Since the year 2000, the number of students who have abandoned their studies without any diploma declined from 86,601 to 46,578. Based on the total number of school graduations, this constitutes a decline from 9.3 percent to 4.7 percent. This confirms that also regarding school performance, the changes in parenting practice results in a substantial reduction in the number of youths with massive behavior problems. The findings of brain research mentioned above could possibly explain these results.

A corresponding trend can be found when examining Table 1 regarding the data concerning serious thoughts of suicide among the surveyed youths, together with the suicide statistics of the Federal Statistics Office. Here we find the greatest difference by far between the two extreme groups. Children in group B, who were often beaten and scarcely loved, later, as youths, get into a crisis accompanied by serious thoughts of suicide 10.4 times more often than those in group A (B: 48.0% vs. A: 4.6%). This fits with the finding that children who have been brought up non-violently and lovingly later, as 15-year olds, state that they are very satisfied with life 5.5 times more often than group B (A: 61.5% vs. B: 11.1%). In view of this clear trend regarding parenting behavior, which is shown in Figure 2 – more love, less violence – one would expect that especially the suicide rates among young people would decrease significantly. This is precisely confirmed by Figure 6 below. Figure 5 on the left again illustrates the data from the comparison of the extreme groups.

**Fig. 5: Life satisfaction and thoughts of suicide for two extreme groups of youths. Student survey 2013 in Lower Saxony (N=9.512), in %**



**Fig. 6: Decline in suicides per 100,000 inhabitants for three age groups. Federal Republic of Germany, 2002 and 2012, Federal Statistical Office, in %**



During the ten years between 2002 and 2012, the number of registered suicides per 100,000 inhabitants among 15- to 20-year olds in Germany decreased by 33.4 percent. For 21- to 30-year olds and those above 30 years old, the decrease was only 10.2 percent and 13.0 percent respectively. The decline is thus especially pronounced within the age group that profited most from the change in the parenting culture.

One of the outstanding findings of the KFN victim survey of the year 1992 was the strong connection between very conflict-ridden parenting behavior and the frequency of sexual abuse (Wetzels, 1997). In view of the great changes that have occurred in the parenting style, one hypothesis is that the frequency of sexual child abuse must have decreased all the more markedly the more drastically those surveyed had been affected by the change in the parenting culture during their childhood. To test this hypothesis, we differentiated between three age groups in both representative surveys: the 16- to 20-year olds, whose childhood occurred only five to ten years earlier; the 21- to 30-year olds, for whom any experiences of abuse occurred during the 1990's; and the 31- to 40-year olds, who experienced their childhood primarily during the 1980's. For all three groups, in 1992 as well as in 2011, we determined the percentage that had been sexually abused during childhood. In addition, we asked if they (or other persons) reported what they had been subjected to.

**Fig. 7: Development of the prevalence of sexual abuse with physical contact by age group (1992 vs. 2011) (only 16- to 40-year old Germans surveyed; 1992: N = 2,059; 2011: N = 9,124), in %**

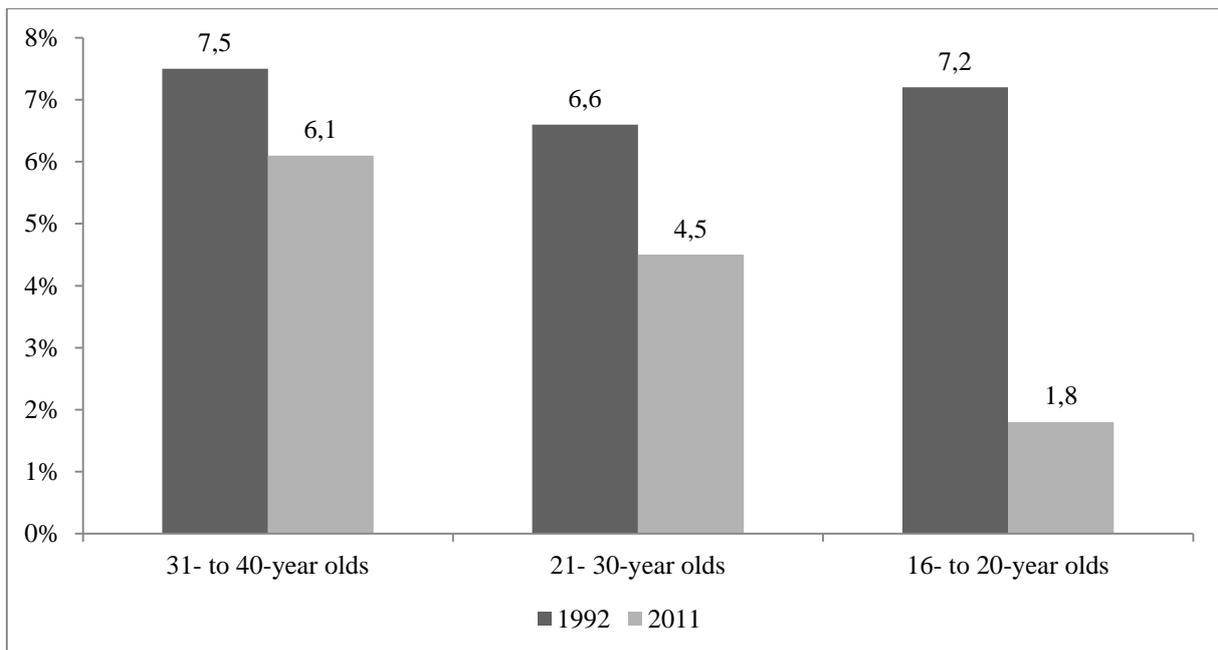
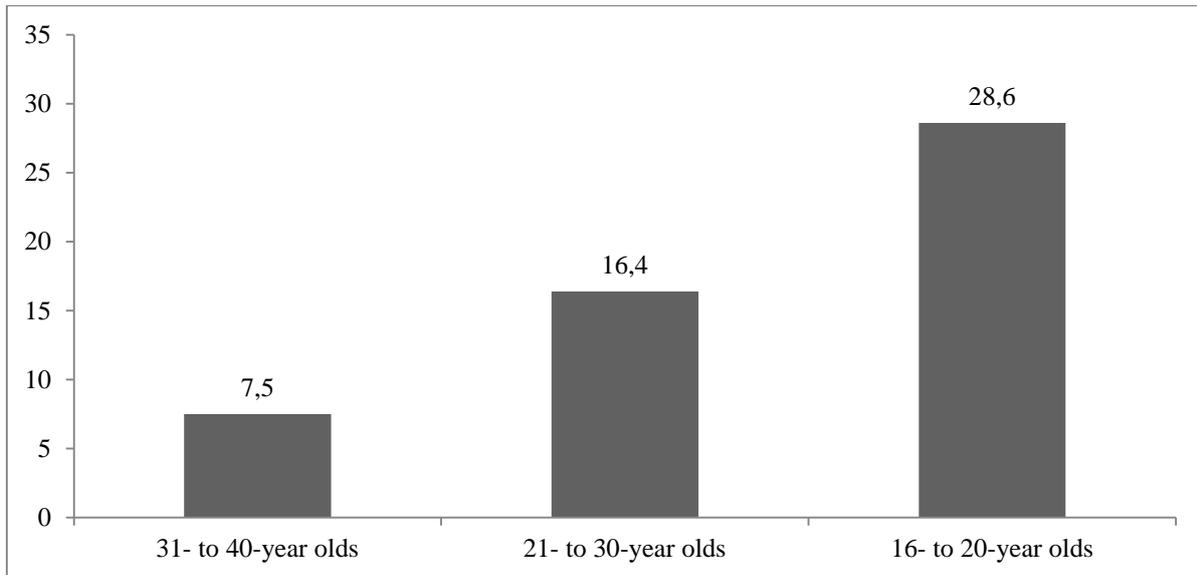


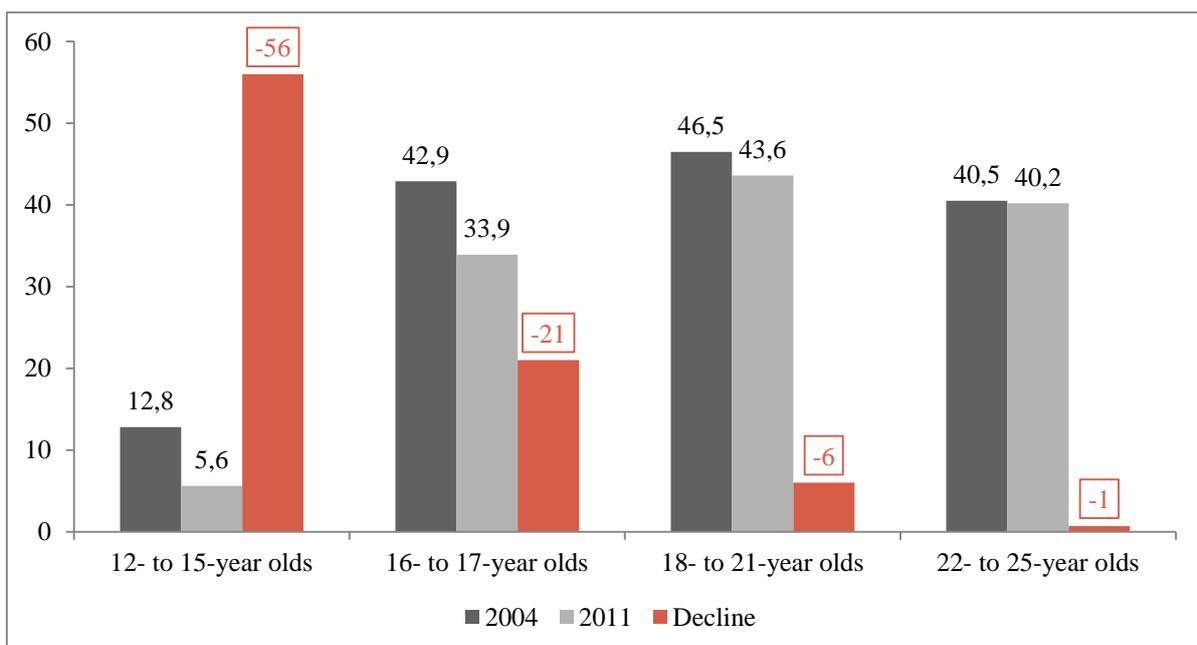
Figure 7 shows small deviations in terms of the frequency of abuse for the three age groups for the year 1992. The survey in the year 2011, on the other hand, showed that the risk of being abused in childhood declined more drastically the younger the surveyed persons were (31- to 40-year olds: - 18.6%; 21- to 30-year olds: - 31.8%; and 16- to 20-year olds: - 75%). We see this as further evidence of the positive effects of the change in the parenting culture that is documented in Figure 2. Assuming that those subjected to abuse today have a greater self-esteem than in the past, this would have contributed to an increase in the willingness to report the abuse when comparing the three age groups. The figure below confirms the hypothesis. For the 31- to 40-year olds, the survey data from the year 2011 show a reporting frequency of abuse of 7.5%. For the 21- to 30-year olds the corresponding number was 16.4% and for the 16- to 20-year olds it was 28.6%. This increase of 3.8 times in the rate of reporting could also have contributed to the decline in the frequency of abuse. After all, the perpetrator's risk of being caught increased substantially.

**Fig. 8: The rate of reporting after sexual abuse of children with body contact for three age groups in the KFN victim survey of the year 2011, in % (N = 9,124)**



It should finally be noted how alcohol consumption among children and youths has developed in Germany. Table 8 shows that children who were beaten much and scarcely loved were involved in so-called “binge drinking” during the 30 days before the survey 80 percent more often than the opposite group. Since we also here can assume that the parenting style plays a role in this, the decrease in parental corporal punishment should have a positive effect – the stronger the more the age groups are affected by the change in parenting, i.e. the younger those surveyed were. Figure 9 confirms this in an impressive way.

**Fig. 9: “Binge-Drinking” for different age groups in Germany, 2004 to 2011, Federal Center for Health Education (2012), in %**



As could be expected, the decline in binge drinking is strongest at -56 percent for the 12- to 15-year olds. As could also be expected, the next are the 16- to 17-year olds, for whom binge drinking has declined by a fifth. In the two older age groups, however, we find only a marginal decrease by 6 and 0.7 percent respectively. In the same publication by the Federal Center for Health Education there is also a corresponding trend regarding the use of cannabis. The comparison between the extreme groups had already showed that youths in Group B consumed cannabis eight times more frequently than those in Group A. It could therefore be expected that the change in the parenting culture would have a positive effect here, too. This is precisely confirmed by the data from the time period 2004 to 2011. The consumption of cannabis by 12- to 17-year olds declined by more than half, from 15.1 percent to 6.7 percent. For those between the ages of 18 and 20, however, the decline was only from 43 to 39.2 percent.

Altogether there are thus seven pieces of evidence to support the thesis that parallel with the change in the parenting style, there are positive developments among the youths concerned: 1) the decline in youth violence, 2) the decrease in the rate of school leavers, 3) the decrease in the number of suicides among young people, 4) the decrease in the frequency of sexual child abuse, 5) the increase in the willingness of the victims to report abuse, 6) the decline – only among children and youths – in the use of alcohol and 7) cannabis.

However, this does not lead to the conclusion that we are dealing with a monocausal development. We interpret these positive changes as also being the result of other influencing factors, in addition to the change in the parenting behavior. The decrease in youth violence and in the number of school leavers, for example, can also be attributed to the fact that the integration in schools of socially marginalized German youths and young immigrants has improved substantially during the past 10 to 15 years, and that youth unemployment has decreased significantly. This applies as well to the decrease in the number of suicides among young people. The decline in the risk of abuse can also be related to the fact that the government and society have substantially expanded the prevention measures against abuse as well as the therapy of registered and potential perpetrators. Finally, the strong decline in alcohol and drug consumption is probably especially connected to the prevention measures that are constantly occurring in schools.

We also used the student survey we conducted in 2013 in Lower Saxony to examine the attitudes toward capital punishment, weapons ownership, and extreme right-wing positions. Questions regarding interpersonal trust and tolerance were also included. A comparison of the extreme groups regarding these topics, which greatly affect politics, almost without exception also yielded highly significant results. It showed that the quality of interpersonal trust, which is important for coexistence in a community, was three times more strongly developed in Group A than in Group B (34.0% vs. 10.5%), whereas the latter proved to be seven times more intolerant than Group A (9.0% vs. 1.2%).

This fits the findings of an international study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, from the year 2008. In this study, a random sample of young people in 20 European countries was surveyed regarding these two personal characteristics. The highest values by far for tolerance and interpersonal trust were found in the four Scandinavian countries (Van Damme, 2012). This is not surprising. Three of them (Sweden, Finland and Norway)

were the first countries worldwide to abolish the parental right to corporal punishment between 1979 and 1987. Denmark followed soon thereafter.

It is also not surprising that in the comparison of the extreme groups in Table 1, right-wing extremism and the approval of capital punishment occurs much more often in Group B than in Group A. Furthermore, when it comes to carrying weapons (knives, brass knuckles or clubs) there was a highly significant difference between the two extreme groups (A: 13.4% vs. B: 31.0%). The same is true of yet another finding in Table 1, which concerned the desire to own a firearm. We also used a nationwide representative survey of adults to compare the extreme groups in regards to weapons ownership. The result showed that the respondents from Group B (11.8%) expressed a desire to own a firearm more than twice as often as those of Group A (5.1%) (Baier et al., 2011).

#### **4. What can the United States and other democratic countries learn from the countries that have abolished the parental right to corporal punishment?**

The first answer to this question is: lots of patience. As an example, the first well-founded calls for the abolition of the parental right to corporal punishment in Germany were made as early as the beginning of the 1980s. Ten years later we in the Federal Government's Commission on Violence thought we had almost reached our goal. After all, we had just submitted a clear recommendation to the policy-makers, which was supported by a great majority and was based on clear research findings. And yet it took another 10 years until we scored an initial success and now, 14 years later, Germany can gradually harvest the fruits of this political decision.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the initial situation in the United States is much harder than it was in Germany around the turn of the millennium. For us already then the radical proponents of an authoritarian parenting style of the kind that can be found in some evangelical communities constituted only a small minority. In contrast, in the United States, especially in the South, there are probably states in which the majority of the population today regard the use of the rod or the "paddle" by parents and teachers as indispensable.

In 2008 Human Rights Watch published the findings of a study showing that, in the United States during the school year 2006/2007, more than 200,000 students, mostly in southern states, were beaten with a "paddle" by their teachers.<sup>1</sup> According to this report, this is permitted in 19 states. Furthermore, an overview study by Gershoff in 2010 showed that only 15 percent of American children are raised non-violently by their parents (Gershoff, 2010). In addition, based on a study by Straus, 70 percent of American parents agreed with the statement: "It is sometimes necessary to discipline a child with a good hard spanking" (Straus, 2010). Any form of awareness-raising work in this area is made even more difficult when pastors, especially from evangelical churches, openly advocate this kind of parenting. In his book, *Shepherding a Child's*

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<sup>1</sup> [www.aclu.org/human-rights-racial-justice/violent-education-corporal-punishment-children-us-public-schools](http://www.aclu.org/human-rights-racial-justice/violent-education-corporal-punishment-children-us-public-schools)

*Heart*, published in 1995, *Tedd Tripp* provides an example: “By definition, the rod is a parental exercise. ... The use of the rod is an act of faith. God has mandated its use.”

And yet, it is specifically from these regional differences that obviously exist in the United States in regards to raising children that a great opportunity arises to generate movement in this discussion. In reality, a natural experiment is taking place in the 50 states. One only needs to find a way to collect the necessary data nationwide, or at least in 10 to 15 carefully selected states. In Germany and other European countries representative student surveys regarding these topics have proven to be very successful. For this it would be indispensable for the survey instrument to contain the necessary questions regarding parenting patterns and the beating of students by teachers at school. Should this succeed, great regional differences would probably show up in a comparison between the states. Based on this, differentiated analyses could then be carried out regarding the effects of the diverging parenting cultures. It can, however, be assumed that parents’ associations and school authorities in many of the states would oppose a survey instrument that contained the questions necessary for this. Should this be the case, the alternative would be to conduct a representative survey of 18- to 20-year olds. This would, however, be associated with significantly higher costs.

As soon as it has become possible, in one way or another, to collect regional data concerning parenting behavior and the behavior of teachers, the next step would be to publicly present, in the form of maps, what the regional differences are regarding beating children and parental care. Thereafter, corresponding maps, for example concerning the extent of tolerance, interpersonal trust or racism could be created. It would also be conceivable to make a regional comparison of satisfaction in life and suicide tendencies among youths. And finally hard facts are needed: maps of youth crime, prison occupancy, capital punishment, firearm ownership, killings with firearms and sexual abuse of children.

The results can be predicted. The areas that would attract attention due to problematic findings would be those where children are beaten especially often by their parents or their teachers and where they receive little care at home. The connections would be transparent for everyone to see. The result could be an open discussion that would make people aware of the central importance that the culture of raising children has for the inner peace of a country.

In this regard, one could focus on two theses: First, raising children non-violently promotes “walking tall.” Second, raising children lovingly promotes empathy. When both come together we have a good basis for democracy and a fair social state. But the data could also provide cause for a further thesis: Those who love authoritarian structures must ensure that parents discipline their children with physical violence, for this promotes obedience and submissiveness toward authority. Finally, a fourth thesis could be discussed: People who are beaten tend to develop strong enemy stereotypes and react aggressively to everything that is alien to them. Those who want a race of offensive warriors must therefore advocate the beating of children.

There is another important question that is currently attracting great attention, especially in the United States: Why are there such great differences when it comes to the use of incarceration, both when seen in an international comparison and when comparing the 50 U.S. states with each other? A book recently published in the United States, *The Growth of Incarceration in the*

*United States – Exploring Causes and Consequences* (Travis et al., 2014) provides interesting information in this regard. In an international comparison, the five countries with the lowest rates of incarceration have long ago abolished the parental right to corporal punishment (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Germany). In contrast, in the upper end of the overview table there are 12 countries that either still have the parental right to corporal punishment or who have abolished it only recently.

But a comparison within the United States also shows substantial differences. Although no current up-to-date data is available regarding parenting practices, as an alternative one can draw on the insights published by the Center for Effective Discipline in 2008 regarding the frequency of teachers beating students in the school year 2005/6. It can be assumed that in those states in which the teachers are permitted to use corporal punishment, the majority of the parents also see the beating of children as a correct parenting method and act accordingly. This at least seems to be indicated by the above mentioned survey of parents by Straus, according to which a large majority welcomed “a good hard spanking” of children. If the parents in these states had been of a different opinion there would have been massive protests against the right to corporal punishment by teachers. The majority of parents would see to it that it was abolished.

It should further be noted that beating by teachers constitutes a public act. All the children in the class see the chastisement and will probably afterwards talk to other children about the incidence. Since the majority of them can be assumed to have had corresponding experiences in their families, these children will have received a clear message during the course of their socialization, a message that has been passed on for many generations: Painful, harsh punishment is necessary to control people’s behavior. In other words: Repression is taught there systematically. In addition, there are the psychological effects of corporal punishment for those immediately involved, which were reported above: personal insecurity, feelings of helplessness and suppressed aggression. All this contributes to the development of an increased need for punishment among the victims of corporal punishment themselves.

In view of these initial considerations it makes sense to test the following hypothesis: *The more repressive children were raised in the 50 U.S. states during the past decades, the higher is the need for punishment and the more severely will penal law be applied.* There are two pieces of information available from the study by the “Center for Effective Discipline” quoted above that can be seen as indicators for the extent of the repression that is practiced against children: First, in what year the right to corporal punishment by teachers was abolished by the 31 states that have so far taken this step and second, to what extent the right to corporal punishment by teachers was used in the other 19 states during the school year 2005/2006. In this sense, the 50 states can be subdivided into five groups:

- Group 1 consists of nine states that abolished the right to corporal punishment by teachers already between 1976 and 1985.<sup>2</sup> This supports the assumption that parents there beat their children least as compared to the other states. In these states, there are thus probably largely European conditions in regards to the socialization of children;

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<sup>2</sup> These are, chronologically: New Jersey, Massachusetts, Hawaii, Maine, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire and New York.

- Group 2 consists of 11 states, where teachers have been prohibited from any beating of children as a result of a campaign that was run between 1986 and 1989<sup>3</sup>;
- Group 3 consists of 12 states in which the right to corporal punishment by teachers was abolished between 1990 and 2011;<sup>4</sup>
- Group 4 consists of eight states in which teachers' right to corporal punishment still exists, but in which, according to the school survey from the year 2005/2006, a maximum of 0.2 percent of the students were actually beaten;<sup>5</sup>
- Group 5 consists of six states, where the teachers may also beat their students, but have practiced this toward only 0.4 to 1.5 percent of the students;<sup>6</sup>
- Finally, Group 6 consist of the five states in which teachers' right to corporal punishment are used most, according to the data from the study that was quoted (between 1.7 and 7.5 % of the students).<sup>7</sup>

In regards to the severity of punishments in the 50 states, two indicators are used – on one hand the number of prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants in the year 2012,<sup>8</sup> and on the other hand the number of executions that were carried out.<sup>9</sup> Figure 10 presents the six groups of U.S. states in terms of how they use incarceration. Figure 11 repeats the analysis in regards to executions per 10 million inhabitants. Additionally figure 12 presents the number of registered killings with firearms for these six groups.

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<sup>3</sup> California, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Alaska, Connecticut, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Oregon and Virginia.

<sup>4</sup> South Dakota, Montana, Utah, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, Washington, West Virginia, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Mexico and Ohio.

<sup>5</sup> South Carolina, Arizona, Idaho, Colorado, Indiana, Wyoming, North Carolina and Kansas.

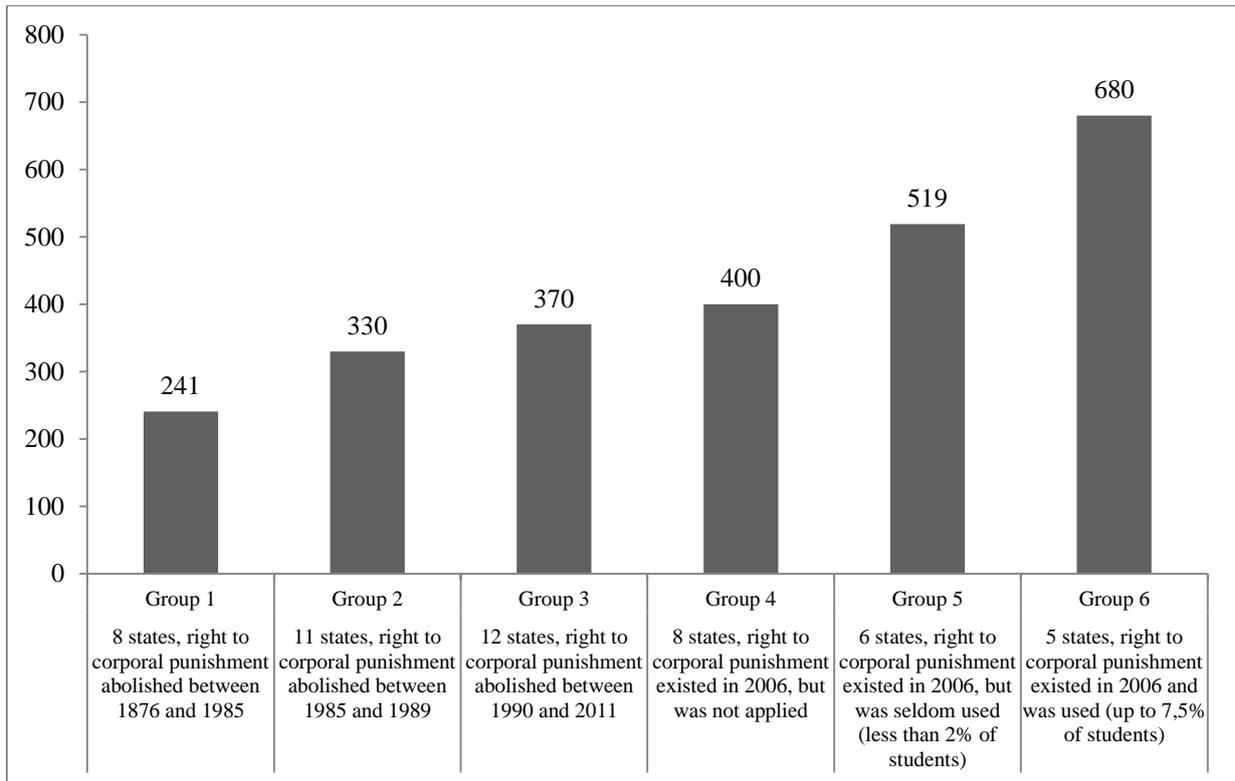
<sup>6</sup> Texas, Georgia, Missouri, Florida, Kentucky and Tennessee.

<sup>7</sup> Louisiana, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Alabama and Arkansas.

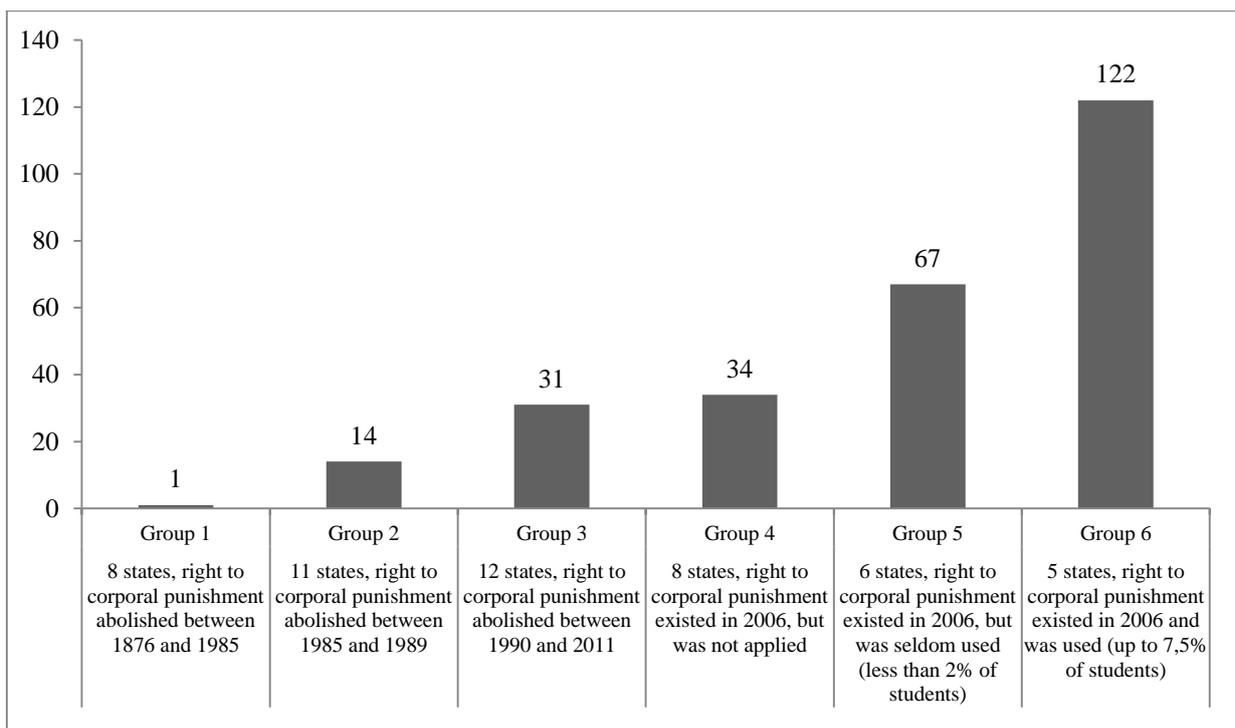
<sup>8</sup> [www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p12ac.pdf](http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p12ac.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/node/5741](http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/node/5741)

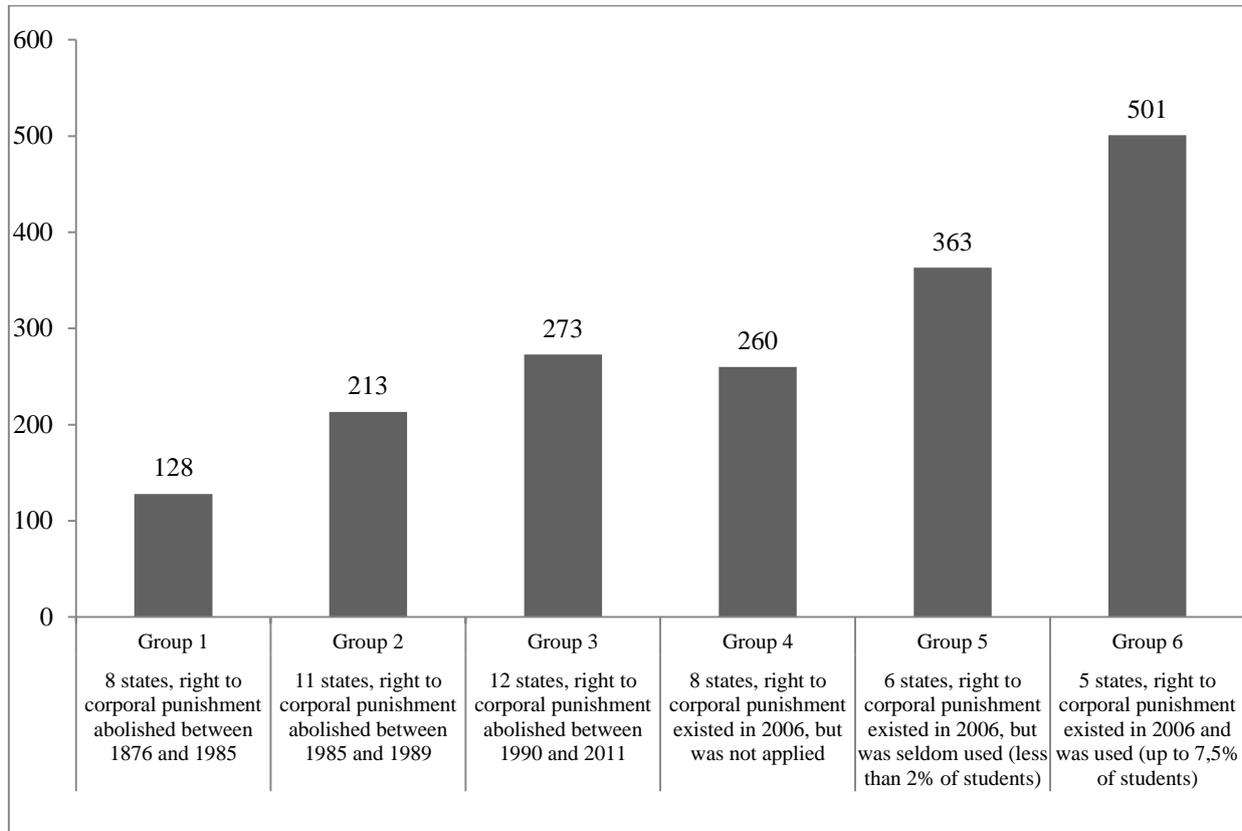
**Fig. 10: Number of prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants and the right to corporal punishment by teachers as indicators of a repressive way of raising children for six groups of U.S. states**



**Fig.11: Number of executions carried out per 10 million inhabitants (1976-2013) and the right to corporal punishment by teachers as indicators of a repressive way of raising children for six groups of U.S. states**



**Fig. 12: The number of registered killings with firearms per 10 million inhabitants in the United States in the year 2012 and teachers' right to corporal punishment as an indicator of a repressive way of raising children for six groups of U.S. states<sup>10</sup>**



That analysis of the data confirms the hypothesis formulated above in a surprisingly impressive way. The earlier the U.S. states have abolished the right to corporal punishment by teachers, the less they use incarceration and the less frequently they impose the death penalty. In other words: *The more repressive children were raised in a U.S. state during the past decades, the more severe is the level of the state's punishment.* The number of prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants in Group 6 thus exceeds those in Group 1 by a factor of 2.8. Furthermore, there were 122 times more executions per 10 million inhabitants for the five states in Group 1 than in Group 6.

It is obvious that these two data analyses only can represent an initial approach to the issues that are discussed here. If, for example, on the basis of a nationally representative survey from all 50 U.S. states, data were provided regarding how today 18- to 25-year olds, in comparison to 48- to 55-year olds, experienced their childhood in terms of the parental care that they received and the corporal punishment they were subjected to, then it would be much easier to clarify the influence of raising children on attitudes and actions. In addition, in such a study it would then be possible to include other factors, that are of central importance for the level of punishment in the 50 U.S. states: Some examples of this could be any regional problems due to violent crime and especially premeditated murder or other serious criminal offences, such as

<sup>10</sup> The corresponding numbers for Alabama (Group 6), Florida (Group 5) and Illinois (Group 3) were missing in the statistics for 2012 or else they were incompletely specified. These three states could therefore not be included in the evaluation.

drug trafficking or burglaries. There are also regional particularities of criminal law. But all these factors have one thing in common: They are influenced by what the people have experienced in the 50 U.S. states during their childhood and youth in the family as well as at school, in terms of corporal punishment or loving care.

If science succeeds in providing basic insights regarding these major issues in society, it will play the role of the yeast in the dough. It could promote a supportive process of discussion that ultimately leads to a fundamental change in the culture of raising children. These considerations should not, however, give rise to the illusion that such a discussion will immediately have political consequences, but it could facilitate the introduction of a process of change. The initial question would be in which states, based on the assessment of experts, policy-makers would most likely be so impressed by the facts that they would put a discussion about the abolition of the parental right to corporal punishment on the agenda.

If then four to five states should emerge, the next step could consist of choosing two of them that could, on one hand, have a strong impact on other states and, on the other hand, provide favorable conditions for launching a campaign in terms of important political personalities, the media culture and possible sponsors. These two states should also be as different as possible in terms of their social structure. The third step would be to raise the necessary funds for a campaign in these two states and for science to support the process of discussion through regional data analyses.

From my point of view, the state of New York could fulfill all these prerequisites. Personally, I would welcome the choice of New York, because I can make an offer to possible cooperation partners in this state. Next year I will end my work as Director of the Criminological Research Institute of Lower Saxony. In February 2015 I am planning to take up a guest professorship at the John Jay College in New York for at least four months. During this time I want to try first of all to discover the groups of scientists, organizations and perhaps politicians who are already working for the abolition of the parental right to corporal punishment. I would like to participate in this effort and perhaps I will be able to make a small contribution to bring us closer to this common goal.

During my professional life, I have had the opportunity to gather many experiences. I thus learned how to advance social and political campaigns. One example: In 1995 in New York, I had gotten to know the concept of the Community Foundation, which really excited me. 18 months later, in Hanover, I was able to found the first German Community Foundation. Since then I have invested much effort to support the establishment of the 330 such foundations that exist in Germany today. From the year 2000 to 2003 I was Minister of Justice in the state of Lower Saxony. I thereby learned, step by step, how to prepare issues politically so that they are taken seriously and goals can be realized. And finally I was able to gather a broad range of experiences regarding fundraising within my various areas of activity.

From May 22 to 24, 2014, a symposium was held in Chicago, which was organized by the Loyola University and the US Alliance to End the Hitting of Children, concerning the following topic: "Creating a Non-Violent Future: Children's Rights and Advances in Protection from Corporal Punishment." I was invited as one of several keynote speakers to report about the abolition

of the right to corporal punishment in Germany. 80 participants from the United States and other countries had come together to jointly discuss how to advance the abolition of the parental right to corporal punishment in the United States. My suggestion to initially attempt to realize this goal in the state of New York met with very positive resonance. The event increased my confidence that the forces are coming together in the United States. It also became clear that the initiators of the symposium are striving to establish an international partnership for their great goal. They wish to learn from the experiences of other countries. This is encouraging when it comes to developing further ideas for how to tackle the joint goal of abolishing the parental right to corporal punishment, initially in one or two U.S. states.

This collaboration could become a model for international cooperation. It makes sense, parallel with the efforts in the United States and in Europe, to seek out two to three countries each in Asia and South America that have not yet abolished the parental right to corporal punishment and that provide favorable framework conditions for including them in an international campaign to achieve this goal. In the beginning the initial situation, in terms of the parenting culture in the families and the educational culture, must be determined through empirical studies. In parallel, partners must be found who have committed themselves to abolishing the rights of parents and teachers to corporal punishment. If individual countries should enact the corresponding laws, the next goal would be to include their neighboring countries in the international campaign. In this way an international movement could arise step by step that would be connected through the slogan of the Chicago symposium: “Creating a Non-Violent Future.”

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