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**‘A helping hand?’:
Young people’s perceptions of adults’
use of physical force in disciplinary
relationships with children.**

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Abstract

‘A helping hand?’: Young people’s perceptions of adults’ use of physical force in disciplinary relationships with children.

Physical discipline of children is currently a subject of major debate within and beyond the UK. Mainly in relation to children’s disciplinary relationships with teachers and parents, this topic is repeatedly the subject of high profile parliamentary and media debates, campaigns, legal cases and international political pressure. However, the perceptions of those in the social position to receive such physical discipline have rarely been included in the legal and political debates or in research studies. When young people’s views have been sought it has been on issues and in terms determined by adults.

This thesis specifically aims to address this gap in the research literature and to inform the debates on physical discipline by highlighting the issues of particular importance to young people. This is in line with recent legal, political and scientific shifts towards valuing the voices of children on all matters affecting them. Adopting a broadly interpretivist methodological approach, and drawing on the new ‘sociology of childhood’ paradigm, the study is grounded in the young people’s own perceptions. It elicits their views at an abstract level and examines perceptions thematically in relation to their underlying frameworks of reference. The fieldwork involved focused interviews and focus groups with 227 participants aged 11-12 and 14-16 years from schools in central Scotland. In addition, the adult debates and interviews with 25 carers are analysed to further illuminate distinctive features of the young people’s perceptions. Themes emanating from the young participants are organised into three dominant areas: purposes and immediate effectiveness of acts

of physical force; concerns and contingencies surrounding acts of physical force; and relationships, rights and power.

Young participants perceived the use of physical force as legitimate for certain disciplinary purposes. These are grouped in four main categories: to communicate with the child; to teach appropriate behaviour for the future; to restrain or remove the child; and to enforce overall adult control in specific situations. The term 'punishment' was associated by young participants solely with retribution, which they rejected as an illegitimate purpose for physical force. The widely perceived immediate effectiveness of physical discipline was seen as dependent upon the influence of certain contextual conditions, such as the child's personality and peer influence. Perceived effectiveness did not imply support for physical discipline. There was a strong theme of unease with its use but a lack of confidence in finding any alternatives.

Contextual concerns about the application and short term negative effects of physical discipline are analysed as containing six dominant themes: whether the acts fulfilled legitimate purposes; avoidance of pain or injury; the extent of adult control of actions; the degree of embarrassment and humiliation; the precise bodily target of force; and the appropriate age of the child. The study found that these reservations led to participants introducing relatively fixed contingencies that physical discipline would have to meet in order for it to be considered acceptable. It is noted that the terms *child abuse* and *violence* were reserved by young participants for acts with specific characteristics which mark them as particularly unacceptable. *Child abuse* referred to acts without a legitimate purpose which focused on the needs of the adult rather than the child. *Violence* referred to acts in

which the adult does not observe an appropriate limit to the force. Concerns about the longer term implications of physical discipline are identified as focused on the risks of: these fixed contingencies being broken by the adult; lasting physical or psychological damage; damage to the disciplinary relationship; and the child copying the behaviour inappropriately. Conversely, it is found that there was a subsidiary theme of concern that children *not* receiving physical discipline would grow up spoilt and wild with negative implications for wider society.

The rights of adults to physically discipline children were assessed by young participants according to perceptions about the particular relationship and the constituents' social roles. Parental rights were presented by participants as exceptional because of a parents responsibility for a child's moral development and peculiar intimacy with a child. Parental delegation of rights to other adults, including teachers, was rejected by young participants because these relationships lack this intimacy. However, the study reveals a theme of resilient frustration at the 'unfairness' of one-sided rights surrounding all physical discipline. Moreover, it is found that young participants analysed acts of physical discipline as manifestations of a power imbalance in the adult-child relationship. Although young participants noted that adults can take advantage of their position, they also presented children as active agents who find strategies to challenge this power imbalance. A substantial body of opinion considered that the risks outweighed the rights of adults and necessitated a legal ban on all physical discipline, although participants were concerned with practical problems which might be caused by a gap between legal and attitudinal change in society.

Overall, the study identifies two dominant discourses underlying young participants' perceptions of physical discipline: *developmentalism*, which portrays childhood as a natural progression towards competency; and *rights*, which stresses the fixed entitlements and responsibilities for active agents and social actors irrespective of competency. These two discourses are accommodated in the young participants' model of a dynamic power balance between active social actors in the disciplinary relationship. The perceptions of young people presented in this study form a competent and sophisticated interpretation and critique of adults' use of physical discipline.

Moreover, the study identifies substantial differences between the young participants' perceptions and the views expressed by the carers interviewed and actors in the wider legal, political and research debates. These differences highlight peculiar features in young people's perceptions. For example, young participants stressed the purpose of physical discipline for moral development, whereas both carers and the adult debates have focused on social development and obedience to adult authority. The contingencies which young participants placed on disciplinary acts were less flexible than carers' across different situations. Young participants' rejection of parental rights to delegate disciplinary rights was not shared by carers or featured in the adult debates. Carers did not share young participants' concerns with the imbalance of rights and power in disciplinary relationships with physical force. The study concludes by underlining the implications for policy, practice and research on physical discipline that are presented by the distinct perspectives of young people.

Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Key to transcripts</i>	<i>x</i>
<i>Glossary of Scottish terms</i>	<i>xi</i>
PART ONE BACKGROUND TO RESEARCH	1
1 Introduction	1
Physical force as a current area of major concern	1
The legal and political debates on physical force in discipline	3
Position of physical force in discipline as a cultural phenomenon	15
Key issues in the adult political and legal debates	19
This study	29
Chapter summary and outline of remaining chapters	35
2 Review of research literature	41
Introduction	41
Effects of physical force on mental well-being and long-term behaviour	43
Prevalence of physical force	50
Attitudes and perceptions	57
Chapter summary	71
3 Methodological theory and methods	73
Introduction	73
Cultural adult-centrism	76
The legacy of developmentalism	77
Reasons for listening to children	80
The generation gap and abstract ideas	92
Overall research method and approach	95

Power and risks in the research relationship	102
Access to the sample	106
Data collection - the conduct of fieldwork	115
The research relationships	117
Arrangement of the field	127
Eliciting data in interviews	131
Recording and analysis of data	138
Chapter Summary	144
PART B	ANALYSIS
	150
4 Purposes and effectiveness of acts of physical force	152
Legitimised purposes for physical force	153
Contextual differences for the perceived purposes of acts of physical force	173
Rejection of physical force as punishment	174
Rejection of all purposes of physical force on children	177
Effective achievement of particular purposes	179
Conditions on effectiveness	184
Obstacles to effectiveness	188
Effective alternatives	192
Chapter Summary	197
5 Concerns and contingencies surrounding acts of physical force	201
Short term concerns and contingencies surrounding acts of physical force	202
Acts fulfilling a legitimate purpose	203
Avoidance of pain or injury	213
Limited force and adult control of actions	219
Concerns about embarrassment and humiliation	222
Concerns surrounding the bodily target for force	225

Concerns surrounding appropriate age of child	227
Particular categories of unacceptability	237
Longer term concerns	247
Risk of short term contingencies being broken	248
Risk of long term damage to the child	256
Risk of long-term damage to the disciplinary relationship	260
Risk of transmission of physical force	264
Long term benefits as a qualification	277
Chapter Summary	279
6 Relationships, rights and power	284
The demarcation of roles and rights	285
Unfairness and human rights	301
Outside agencies, risk and legal change	308
Physical force as an imbalance of power	315
Physical force as an abuse of power	320
Children's challenges to the power imbalance	327
External challenges to the power imbalance	335
Concerns surrounding challenges to adult power	341
Cultural shifts in acceptance of physical force	344
Chapter Summary	350
7 Comparison with carers' perceptions of physical discipline of children	355
Purposes and effectiveness of physical force	355
Micro-situational conditions and parental pressure	367
Responsibility and control	377
Chapter Summary	388
8 Comparison with previous research and the adult debates	392
Purposes for acts of physical force in disciplinary relationships	392
Immediate effectiveness of acts of physical force	399
Short term concerns and contingencies	401

Longer term concerns	411
Roles & rights in the disciplinary relationship	417
Power in the disciplinary relationship	422
Chapter Summary	426
9 Conclusions - summary and implications	432
Summary of young participants' perceptions	432
Dominant discourses	446
Reinterpretations of terms utilised for research	453
Methodological implications of this research	461
<i>Appendices</i>	468
<i>Breakdown of sample of young participants</i>	468
<i>Letter to carers</i>	469
<i>Interview stimuli</i>	470
<i>Bibliography of cited works</i>	471

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Key to transcripts

NH	Researcher
YM	Young male participant (followed by interview participant number)
YF	Young female participant (followed by interview participant number)
CM	Male carer (followed by interview participant number)
CF	Female carer (followed by interview participant number)
[]	Background information
...	Pause
(...)	Material edited out
-----	Transcription from a different discussion follows
[14-16] or [11-12]	Age group of participants

Note: Interview participants are numbered in order of appearance in the thesis.

Glossary of Scottish terms in the transcripts

<u>Scottish Term</u>	<u>Closest English equivalent</u>
dinnae	do not
greetin'	crying
~nae	~ not
skelp	hit
telt	told

PART A BACKGROUND

Chapter One Introduction

Physical force as a current area of major concern

The use of physical force by adults in disciplinary relationships with children is currently a subject of major debate in the UK, Europe and beyond. Commentators have noted not only a large 'international controversy' on this topic in the scientific research community (Rohner et al., 1996:842), but also 'considerable disagreement and debate' on an international scale in legal and political arenas (Overton, 1993:73). In essence, the subject of physical force in discipline has important implications for children now, for their longer term development and for the future of society as a whole. The subject has been presented as a significant 'social problem', both because of these implications and because any consideration of such acts concerns and questions widespread social policies and practices in adult-child disciplinary relationships and in institutions (Loseke, 1991:163).

Consequently, issues and concerns regarding physical force in disciplining children, together with the possibility of restricting such actions, have been 'firmly placed on the political agenda in many countries in recent years' (Overton, 1993:76). Indeed, debate over the appropriateness of such disciplinary acts even continues long after

legal restriction or abolition has been imposed (Sanden, 1996:5) with, for instance, 'strong feelings' still surrounding the issue of corporal punishment in UK state schools years after it was outlawed (Department of Education & Science, 1989:98). Clearly, in addition to the policy dimension of this debate, it must be recognised that physical discipline is a 'very emotive subject' (EPOCH, 1991a:3; Fox Harding, 1991:8; Evans & Fargason Jr., 1998:357) which questions the personal practices of discussants, those close to them and even the memories of their childhood.

However, the perceptions or wishes of young people have rarely been included in the legal, political or research debates (Willow & Hyder, 1998:1; Karp, 1999:7). When young people's views have been sought it has tended to be on issues and in terms determined by adults. In contrast, this thesis specifically aims to inform these debates by highlighting the issues of particular importance to those still in the social and legal position to receive such acts of physical discipline. This first chapter introduces the existing controversial political and legal debates, outlining the arenas featuring this subject and the issues determined as important by the adults involved. In addition, it outlines how this study informs these debates of the issues of importance to young people, with perceptions examined in relation to their underlying frameworks of reference.

The legal and political debates on physical force in discipline

Although the subject of physical discipline is described by commentators as 'currently a key issue in child protection' (Cloke, 1997:276) and contrasted with the consensual disapproval of other concerns like sexual abuse (Overton, 1993:73), this description fails to capture the diversity of fields and arenas contributing to this debate. However, these arenas can be analysed as being consistent in their general exclusion of young people from the legal and political debates on physical force. Ironically, those who are in the social position to receive this disciplinary force are rarely included and involved in the widespread consideration of such acts. Indeed, concentrating on the UK, it is possible to cite a catalogue of *adult dominated* controversy, passionate challenges and rigorous defences of physical force against children in all forms of disciplinary relationships.

First considering the legal arena, there has been a procession of cases in recent years which have centred on adults' use of physical force in disciplining children. However, only one side of this inter-generational relationship is involved in the decision making process surrounding the legitimacy of such acts. Young people are excluded from such judgements and are rarely invited for comments or reaction to such cases. Even in recent cases actually brought to court, at least in legal terms, by the young person (eg. A vs. United Kingdom European Court case, 1998), their involvement has been restricted to testimony. Judgements are made by adults from arguments given by adults, within a legal system controlled by adults, referring to laws formed and passed by adults. There is no exploration of

what issues are of importance to the young people themselves in a matter which fundamentally affects them.

Such legal cases have consistently fuelled the wider debates by producing headlines in national newspapers, leader columns, statements by politicians and even parliamentary challenges to legislation. Cases containing one of three key characteristics usually secure substantial media interest. First, the media focus on cases where legal decisions appear to challenge or contradict blatantly their understanding of cultural acceptance. This may either feature the prosecution of acts that challenge normative practice, such a 'slap' over the head (The Guardian, 6/9/96:2) or cases where adults have been cleared of particularly severe 'punitive assaults' (The Times, 24/9/98:4 provides a list of popular cases). Second, the media focus on statements by judges which challenge professional discourse on physical punishment. Examples include judges calling for corporal punishment to be available to courts (The Independent, 17/12/94:2), blaming the ban in schools for juvenile crime (The Times, 8/3/97:1) and commenting that the world has gone mad if a mother cannot slipper her child (The Times, 20/04/93).

Third, the media focus on a number of recent court cases that have forced or questioned changes in legislation in relation to an adult's right to physically discipline a child. Legal decisions on local authority interpretation of the Children Act 1989 regarding the right of childminder Anne Davis to smack children in her charge (Davies vs. Sutton Council, 1994) were featured heavily in the media at every stage from the Magistrates Court (cf. The Times, 9/7/93:2) to the High Court

(cf. The Times, 17/3/94:1). However, the legal cases most influential on the UK policy debate have been decided in European courts. In the 1980s, legislation banning corporal punishment in state schools (Education Act, 1986) was prompted by the UK losing a number of such cases in Europe (e.g. Campbell and Cosans vs. United Kingdom, 1982). It should be noted, however, that these cases did not essentially actively involve the young people punished, but were brought by their parents because the school's actions breached those adults' philosophical convictions. In contrast, some cases in the 1990s have focused on whether the child has been 'subjected to torture or to inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment' in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights Article 3. Whilst a 1993 European Court case found that these rights had not been breached by a private school 'slipperping' (Costello-Roberts vs. United Kingdom; cited Barton, 1993), in September 1998 a European Court ruled that UK legislation did not protect a child against a caning by his stepfather (A vs. United Kingdom, 1998). This latter case has already had a substantial effect on refuelling the debates on physical discipline, with front page headlines (cf. The Guardian) and editorials in at least four national newspapers on 24th September 1998 (The Express; The Mirror; The Times; Daily Mail). It has prompted the Opposition Leader, William Hague, to reject all 'nanny state' interference in parenting (The Mirror, 24/9/98:7). In addition, the legal obligation on the Government to 'grapple with the difficulties of drawing the line between acceptable and unacceptable punishments' (The Guardian, 24/9/98) will ensure that the topic is kept in the public eye and on the political agenda. It is perhaps indicative of both the extent of these difficulties and the depth of controversy surrounding physical discipline that the Government's consultation

paper (announced Department of Health, 1997) has, at time of writing, taken over eighteen months to produce.

However, the above European court cases do not constitute the only international pressure on policy in the UK. Political focus on this topic has also been ensured by calls for legal revision in relation to international obligations, agreements and recommendations (The Times, 24/9/98:4). In Europe, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has been particularly vocal in its condemnation of the use of physical force by adults on children as discipline. Both in 1985 and 1990, the Committee which includes delegates from the UK stressed the 'general contempt' with which they held physical punishment and recommended action which would lead towards a total ban in the home (Creighton & Russell, 1995:4; Ortega et al., 1997:14).

Beyond Europe, most pressure on the UK Government has been felt in relation to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child formulated in 1989 and ratified by 147 countries, including the UK in December 1991. Although physical discipline is not referred to specifically in the Convention, such acts are often related to Articles 19 and 37 which condemn 'violence, injury or abuse' and 'cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment'. The UN Committee responsible for overseeing the implementation of this convention has repeatedly asserted that the use of physical punishment is incompatible with these Articles (UNICEF, 1997:6). Indeed, members and officials have actively pursued this position at international seminars dedicated to ending physical punishment of children (Pais, 1996; Karp, 1997; Karp,

1999). Furthermore, the Committee has specifically criticised the UK for not taking enough action to restrict or abolish all physical force used by adults against children. However, the failure of the Convention itself to condemn physical discipline explicitly has ensured that any inference linking such acts with the negative descriptors in Articles 19 and 37 has been a focus of the legal and political debates. It should be noted that, despite Article 12 of the Convention promoting the perspectives of children, discussions on whether physical discipline can be related to 'violence', 'abuse' or the other terms have generally been conducted by adults without reference to whether young people themselves concur with such definitions.

The debates within the UK on physical discipline have been further fuelled by similar calls for Government-led legal changes made by successive reports by committees, commissions and other policy groups. The National Commission of Inquiry into the Prevention of Child Abuse, for instance, recommended repealing the defence of reasonable chastisement in cases of physical force in the home (1996). The Gulbenkian Commission Report (1995) made a comparable recommendation. Specifically in Scotland, a widely publicised Report on Family Law also recommended legal changes to restrict parental use of force in discipline (Scottish Law Commission, 1992). It has not been lost on campaigners against physical punishment that the discussions prompted by publication of these reports compare to controversy following similar reports in other countries which have led to governments banning such acts (Newell, 1995:223).

These campaigners have themselves made substantial representations to commissions and committees. Such contributions are part of an organised movement against the use of physical force in discipline which has grown dramatically since the 1980s and heightened public controversy on this topic. The constant stream of publicity, legal challenges and political lobbying led by STOPP (Society of Teachers Opposed to Physical Punishment) is widely acknowledged as playing an influential role in the abolition of corporal punishment in state schools. Likewise, the group's reincarnation as the more widely focused EPOCH (End Physical Punishment of Children) continues to be prolific in maintaining this topic on the political agenda. Formed in 1989, this pressure group has spread over the last decade from the UK to an 'EPOCH World-wide' movement, which includes branches from New Zealand to South Africa. With the effective public exposure in the media of activities, like *No Smacking Week* (cf. *The Times*, 16/12/91:3), EPOCH has become the epicentre of organised socio-political challenge on this topic. In January 1999, for instance, EPOCH was integral to the launch of an alliance of more than 200 UK organisations seeking equal rights against assault for children under the banner of 'Children are unbeatable!' (Ceefax Teletext, 7/1/99:121). The range of organisations in this alliance, from several Royal Colleges to Crime Concern and Scope, demonstrates both the breadth of interest at the present time in this topic and the effective integration of the 'anti-physical discipline' campaign. Several charities, such as the NSPCC, the National Children's Bureau, Barnardo's and Save the Children have begun to prioritise their concerns about physical discipline within their own policy, campaigning and

research work. Likewise, professional bodies have also featured this topic more dominantly in recent years, with activities like the National Childminding Association's 'We're Backing No Smacking Campaign' (Cloke, 1997:279). Internationally, by 1996 EPOCH could cite more than 60 independent overseas organisations, from Chile to Taiwan, who supported its aim to end all physical punishment by education and legal reform (EPOCH Worldwide, 1996). In addition, the pressure group has facilitated a series of widely attended international seminars, including London (1992), Dublin (1996) and Barcelona (1997), that have specifically focused on formulating an end to the use of physical discipline within and beyond the UK.

Once again, however, it must be noted that organised campaigns have generally been co-ordinated and promoted by adults rather than children. The above EPOCH seminars have been typical of this characteristic in that, apart from a press session, they have been organised and exclusively attended by adult interested parties. Some campaigners have recognised that they have not involved the thoughts of young people themselves enough in the public debate¹. Peter Newell, the EPOCH Director, recently reflected on the absence of young people's views from this debate as 'a voice that we too have neglected in this campaign' (Newell, 1997). Indeed, there is recent evidence that campaigners are beginning to seek and utilise the voices of children in their work. For instance, young representatives from the group Article 12 were invited to speak at the recent formal launch seminar

¹ A notable past exception to this absence was the National Union of School Students whose objections to school corporal punishment were cited in the late 1970s and early 1980s (cf. British Psychological Society, 1980:43).

for the 'Children are unbeatable!' campaign (2/3/99). In addition, Save the Children and the National Children's Bureau last year carried out a 'consultation' with 70 children aged 4 to 7 years to find out what they thought of smacking and how they thought it could best be stopped (Willow & Hyder, 1998). Although the exercise was carried out and utilised according to the political agendas of the adults involved it was, nevertheless, a rare attempt to influence policy by featuring the views of children. When calling for abolition of all physical punishment, the adult campaigners cited young children's belief that smacking was like other types of hitting and less effective than other discipline (Ceefax Teletext, 11/1/99:111).

The significance of the political challenge to physical force and the resulting controversy can also be measured, conversely, by the recent development of campaigns against such abolition. Groups such as 'Families for Discipline' and the 'Conservative Families Campaign' have provided comments for the media in opposition to abolition whenever the topic is featured (cf. The Times, 13/11/92 for a typical example). The controversy is so heated that campaigners opposing legal reform have produced material designed specifically to attack both the aims and personnel behind the campaigns to end physical discipline (cf. Burrows, 1998; Davis, 1997 [chapter 4]). Campaigners for and against the use of physical force in various adult-child disciplinary relationships are commonly used together by the media to create popularised 'expert' debate programmes which present a microcosm of the broader legal, political and research controversy (cf. GMTV, 17/6/98).

Furthermore, the media have repeatedly capitalised upon the strength of feeling in the public at large surrounding physical discipline through the regular use of the topic for studio participation programmes on network television (e.g. 'Words with Wark', 9/1/95; 'Kilroy', 26/5/99), national radio 'phone-ins' (e.g. 5-Live, 30/10/97) and 'live opinion polls' on teletext services. Similarly, newspapers have invited people to ring them to give their memories and views on the use of physical punishment (e.g. Daily Record, 31/10/96:2) and included commissioned opinion polls on who should be allowed to smack children as part of large features on this topic (e.g. Scotland on Sunday, 26/3/95). Nevertheless, like the 'expert' arenas, these 'public' media debates tend to be focused on the views and opinions of adults. With the occasional exception of an illustrative 'vox' with a child, these programmes are usually void of any involvement by young people. Likewise, although the public controversy surrounding this topic is large enough to have a dedicated Internet 'newsgroup' ('alt.parenting.spanking'), discussions in this forum are, as its title suggests, only centred around the concerns and responses from just one side of the adult-child disciplinary relationship. When public debates involving children have taken place, they have tended to be relatively tokenistic with interest focused on the novelty of 'child politics' rather than any review in depth of the issues raised. The most prominent of these debates were two children's summits in South Africa in the 1990s, reported as calling for an end to all corporal punishment (Newell, 1995:224) and a 1979 conference of 200 UK young people, attended by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, that rejected the abolition of parental physical discipline (Treseder, 1997:207).

The level of interest by the general public in physical discipline has been matched consistently in UK parliamentary proceedings (Scottish Law Commission, 1992:20). In recent years, several Bills before the UK Parliament have prompted lengthy consideration of the legal position of physical force in disciplinary relationships. For instance, there was a concerted attempt to incorporate the Scottish Law Commission's recommendations restricting these rights through an Opposition Amendment to the Children Bill (Scotland) 1995. The House of Lords also saw a number of debates in 1996 on whether to ban physical discipline in all nurseries (cf. Hansard, 17/6/96:136-139; 9/7/96:242-245; 15/7/96:669-675), and such acts again became a focus in both Houses with the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (Section 131).

Regular suggestions by politicians that physical force should be supported have consistently been given media prominence. An attempt by Conservative back-benchers in the 1996-97 session (Hansard, 11/11/96:62) to reintroduce corporal punishment in state schools not only made the popular press, but even resulted in letters from 'appalled' professionals being published in the British Medical Journal (Wynne, 1997). In addition, repeated declarations of support for physical discipline made by Government Ministers have kept the media spotlight on this topic. As well as the then Health Secretary Virginia Bottomley telling the 1994 Conservative Party Conference that she was in favour of parental smacking (Cloke, 1997:279), there was a trend by Education Secretaries in the Major Conservative Government to state their regret at the demise of corporal punishment. Both John Patten in 1993 (cited Newell, 1995:217) and Gillian Shepherd in 1996 secured renewed public

attention on the topic by speaking positively about school physical discipline on national radio. In particular, Shepherd's suggestion that she was in favour of returning the cane to state schools commanded the front page of several national newspapers, prompted leader articles as well as features from columnists (cf. Joan Burnie Column, Daily Record, 1/11/96). Furthermore, this is a prime example of how comments on one form of physical force, with one instrument in one disciplinary context can again flare the flames of debate surrounding this whole topic from a policeman's clip around the ear to parental use of smacking.² Again, these sound-bites and debates are played according to the issues and concerns determined by the adult politicians and voters, reported in the media by adult journalists and commentators. The political debates have never taken the opportunity to feature the voices of the young people who would be directly affected by such changes in legislation.

Similar media attention was given to an independent school which actually reintroduced corporal punishment (before it was banned), to much controversy and 'fierce criticism from politicians and educationalists' (Electronic Telegraph, 13/5/96). Likewise, the reprimand and subsequent claim for constructive dismissal surrounding a teacher who instructed a young victim of playground bullies to strike them with a ruler could again be said to have 'sparked a national debate about corporal punishment' (The Guardian, 27/2/97:4). The Department for Education and Employment's attempt to clear up confusion surrounding teachers' use of

² See, for example, the range of physical discipline articles on the front page of The Express newspaper two days after Gillian Shepherd's comments (31/10/96).

physical force in schools (Circular 10/98) itself produced headline media interest at both draft (cf. Daily Telegraph, 16/1/98:1) and final publication stages (cf. The Guardian, 28/7/98:10). The guidelines issued to schools that teachers should be able to hold, push, pull or even slap pupils in certain circumstances (although not as a 'punishment') against unruly behaviour were actually opposed by some unions representing those teachers (Daily Telegraph, 16/1/98:1).

Arguably the best illustration of the near obsessive level of public and media interest in this topic is the furore caused when personalities admit to having smacked their children when they were younger. It became headline news when Tony Blair, then 'prospective Prime Minister', admitted to a parenting magazine that, regretfully, he had smacked his children (Daily Record, 7/6/96). In addition, the media have carried out almost McCarthy-esque investigations on other adult personalities from broadcasters to novelists on whether they have ever hit, or sympathised with those who hit, their children (cf. Sunday Telegraph, 27/10/96:11). Again, this is a typical example of how the focus of political and media interest in the legal and political debates is around the experiences and views of parents and other adults rather than young people. Discussions concentrated on the pressures, concerns and regrets of those imparting rather than the alternative perspectives of those facing such discipline.

In contrast, this thesis aims to inform these political and legal arenas by providing a research platform for the voices of young people on physical force in disciplinary relationships with adults. This study will introduce the perspectives of those in the

social position to receive such acts to the wider social policy controversy. It is intended that this research will begin to fill the gap in our awareness of this topic, created by the dominance in the arenas outlined above of representation from actors on just one side of the adult-child disciplinary relationship.

Position of physical force in discipline as a cultural phenomenon

It should, however, be noted that any major legal and political concern surrounding physical force in disciplinary relationships between adults and children is a relatively modern phenomenon. Although the use of physical force against children per se came to the political fore during the 1960s and 1970s following the public discovery of the 'battered baby (later 'child') syndrome' (Parton, 1985; Nelson, 1984), specific concern over the role of force as part of disciplinary relations is more recent. Less than two decades ago, even the now outlawed practice of corporal punishment in schools was not thought by commentators to be an issue that 'captured the attention or support of the public at large' (British Psychological Society, 1980:41). It was considered that the UK was particularly slow to consider this topic, urged by a minority to follow the interest being shown in some other countries (Brimblecombe, F., Chair to The Children's Committee, 1981: Introduction). Even at the start of the 1990s, once school physical discipline had been abolished, commentators reported that the subject of such acts in other contexts aroused 'very little interest at all' (Milne, 1990:16) in UK public or professional discourses.³

³ See ISPPCC (1992) for a historical review of professional discourses concerning physical discipline.

Consequently, although some have periodically raised this topic over a longer period of time, the current controversy surrounding the use of physical force in disciplinary relationships has been described as a 'new wave of alarm' in research and legal and political arenas (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993:131).

It is an alarm which concerns a set of practices that can be seen as historically and culturally established both within and beyond the UK. Writers have been able to chart a long history of physical force in discipline (cf. Hyman, 1990; De Mause, 1974), analysed as related to a widespread traditional view of children as parents' property, and treated as the parent and other adult authority figures see fit (Fine & Holt, 1983:85). Furthermore, this position of physical discipline of children as historically 'deeply rooted' in 'cultural beliefs and norms' is noted as 'still very much ingrained in our western culture' (Ortega et al., 1997:11). Whilst there has been a 'steady decline in the severity and ubiquity' of physical discipline more widely in society (British Psychological Society, 1980:10), children have seen a less than reliable movement away from such acts. Although Creighton & Russell cite a gradual abolition of corporal punishment in schools and, spearheaded by the Scandinavians⁴, in domestic homes in some countries (1995:4), there is a very mixed picture across the world (Newell, 1995).

In schools and child care institutions, physical discipline is outlawed throughout Western Europe and in some countries in all continents, including China, Botswana

⁴ For the historical background to the abolition of all physical discipline in these individual countries see, for example, Merrick (1986) [Denmark], Invarsen (1999) [Denmark] & Radda Barnen (1994) [Sweden].

and New Zealand (UNICEF, 1997:10), yet continues to exist and be regularly administered in many others, including the USA (some States). A similar position exists regarding physical discipline in the home environment. Although physical discipline is effectively outlawed in this context in nine European countries⁵, and there is evidence that parental attitudes and behaviour have changed in the wake of such legal reform (Newell, 1995:220-221), such restrictions are atypical when analysed cross-nationally (EPOCH Worldwide, 1997). Information gathered by researchers and pressure groups indicates continued high levels of both legal allowance and actual use of physical force in parental discipline in western countries (ISPC, 1992; Straus, 1998 [U.S.]) and more widely in all continents of the world (Newell, 1995).

The legal position in the UK has allowed parents the flexible defence of 'moderate and reasonable punishment' against charges of assault. This position was established in common law over 125 years ago when Chief Justice Cockburn judged that both parents (and their delegates): 'By the law of England...may for the purpose of correcting what is evil in the child, inflict moderate and reasonable corporal punishment' (R v Hopley, 1860; cited cf. Barton, 1993; The Times, 24/9/98:4). This position was underlined by legislation in the 1930s that specifically ensured the protection of parents' and teachers' rights to physically chastise children (Children and Young Persons Act 1933 [England and Wales]; Children and Young Persons [Scotland] Act 1937). Although this defence has generally been

⁵ Sweden [1979], Finland [1983], Denmark [1986], Norway [1987], Austria [1989], Cyprus [1994], Latvia [1998], Croatia [1999] and Italy [arguably, through case law] (see Newell, 1995; EPOCH Worldwide, 1996c; EPOCH Worldwide, 1997; EPOCH, 1998).

removed in schools (Education Act 1996 [state funded schools]; School Standards and Framework Act 1998 [all schools]⁶) and professional child care situations (Children Act 1989 [England and Wales]), parents are still permitted to use physical discipline. In addition, the present UK Government has given repeated 'assurances' that this legal right to physically discipline per se will not be challenged by any legislative changes forced by European Court rulings (Department of Health, 1997 & 1998).

The UK legal distinction between physical discipline given by parents and that given by others is broadly reflected in recent reports of adult attitudes and practices. Even before the most recent legislation restricting corporal punishment in privately funded schools, representatives of these institutions stated that there were just one or two schools throughout the United Kingdom (Electronic Telegraph, 13/5/96:2) still adopting such practices. There have been recent indications from opinion polls (cf. Scotland on Sunday, 26/3/95) that the widespread public acceptance of corporal punishment in schools reported in the early 1980s (reviewed in British Psychological Society, 1980) has been reversed, at least among adults. In conflict with this, however, is the strong core support for 'bringing back the belt' reported in media induced debates and letter features (cf. Daily Record, 31/10/96). Regarding parental discipline, UK studies from the 1960s (cf. Newson & Newson, 1963, 1968), 1970s (Newson & Newson, 1976) and more recently in the 1990s (Nobes & Smith, 1997) have shown little change from consistently frequent use of physical force

⁶ Further legislation is necessary to extend a ban on corporal punishment in privately funded schools in Scotland and Northern Ireland (EPOCH, 1998).

(Creighton & Russell, 1995:14). Described as a 'national habit' (EPOCH, 1991a:6), the widespread acceptance of physical force in the home (Overton, 1993:75-76) is underlined by the same recent newspaper polls rejecting use in schools (cf. Scotland on Sunday, 26/3/95).

Given this legal, political and cultural depth and history to the use of physical force in discipline, it is perhaps not surprising that the serious challenges in recent years have resulted in so much (adult) debate and controversy. These challenges have brought into question a previously accepted cornerstone of child care and education practice, policy and legislation which has directly affected almost all children within our society. The challenges and responses to them within the debates broach issues of consequence not just for these children but, also for children not physically disciplined, for future generations and for society as a whole.

Key issues in the adult political and legal debates

It is possible to review the adult political and legal debates in terms of a number of key issues within the expressed concerns, demands and arguments across arenas. It is useful to present a brief outline of these issues to highlight the nature of the adult debates and, thus, provide contextualisation for the young people's perceptions with which this study is primarily concerned. For the purposes of this analysis, these issues can be crudely categorised as: semantics; child protection; religion and morality; tradition vs. progress; effects on personal behaviour; rights;

and more general societal concerns. It is important to note at this point, however, that neither these adult issues, nor their categorisation, should be inferred as determining the fieldwork, analysis or presentation of what the young people themselves had to say. As Chapter Three notes in more detail, the examination of young people's perceptions in this study was grounded in the concerns of respondents rather than dictated by the pre-existing agenda of the adult debates.

Semantics - The battle of normalisation v concern

Given the dominance of legal and legislative arenas in the controversy surrounding this topic it is unsurprising that consideration of the precise terms and definitions given to acts of physical force should be prominent in the content of adult debates. Various terms have been used, challenged and defended in a battle over the conceptual framework for the legal and political agenda. Proponents of physical force have consistently objected to abolitionists' representation of such acts in culturally negative terms which highlight and dramatise their concerns:

'It is not about beating, thrashing, flogging or any of the other emotive phrases so beloved of those who oppose corporal punishment. New clause 5 is about discipline in schools and caning.' (Pawsey, House of Commons, Education Bill Debate, 1997 [28/1/97]:215)

'The emotive talk of cruelty to children perpetuated by adults is an exaggeration.'
(Pawsey; House of Commons, Education Bill [Lords] Debate, 1986 [22/7/86]:230)

Conversely, proponents of physical force themselves utilise terms which normalise or trivialise acts, displacing wider concerns and distancing the acts from images of bad child care with reference like an 'ordinary' or 'careful smack' (Scottish Law Commission, 1992:27-28)

This semantic battle is well illustrated by debate surrounding the association of physical discipline with the term 'violence'. Labelling all acts of physical force on children as 'violence' (cf. Newell, 1995:222; Reitman, 1988:6) has enabled abolitionists to relate lawful physical discipline to more extreme images on a continuum of 'violence' that includes 'serious physical and sexual abuse, pornography and prostitution, the murder of street children and the effects of armed conflict' (Newell, 1995:215). Proponents of physical force have argued vehemently that such an association is 'not helpful' (Greenway; House of Commons, Education Bill [Lords] Debate, 1986 [22/7/86]:237; see also Scottish Law Commission, 1992:27&29). Moreover, the term 'violence', like 'abuse' and 'inhuman' is given specific emphasis in the debate because of legal references in, for instance, the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Scottish Law Commission, 1992:27).

Child Protection: physical and mental

A second issue dominant in the debates surrounds perceived dangers for the individual child in the use of physical force in discipline. Psychologists and pressure groups, in particular, have tended to make representations in legal and political arenas which stress negative effects on children's physical and mental state in the immediate and longer term. On physical danger, opponents of physical force have generally tried not to alienate adults by suggesting that their culturally accepted behaviour is damaging per se but have emphasised the constant danger of accidental injury (cf. Newell, 1995:225; Leach, P. submission to Scottish Law Commission, 1992:21-2). Essentially, concern is built upon concepts of children's inherent 'greater physical vulnerability' (Newell, 1995:216) to injury and the consequential necessity to abolish physical discipline in order to 'protect potentially weak and vulnerable members of society' (European Commission on Human Rights, 1982 cited Newell, 1995:220). For instance, countries not providing legal 'protection' are highlighted as neglectful by their omission in the EPOCH briefing, 'How seven million European children are protected from physical punishment' (1991b). In addition, a number of psychologists have presented within legal and political arenas a picture of psycho-social damage induced by such physical discipline (cf. Leach, P. submission to Scottish Law Commission, 1992:22).

Proponents of physical discipline have tended to counter child protection concerns by forging a clear distinction between some dangerous practices and ordinary 'safe' actions that would 'not do a child any harm' (Scottish Law Commission, 1992:26-30;

also Department of Health, 1994). Second, they have consistently portrayed such 'safe' physical discipline as sole alternatives to non-physical methods perceived as damaging, such as expulsion from school or psychological belittling (cf. Rosemond, 1994:211-212; Bruinvels, House of Commons, Education Bill [Lords] Debate, 1986 [22/7/86]:257).

Effects on personal behaviour

Debates surrounding the practical application of physical discipline have not only considered the dangers involved, but also actually questioned the assumptions of effectiveness of this culturally embedded practice. Opponents argue, for instance, that the ineffectiveness of physical discipline is demonstrated by a parent's continued need to use such acts (EPOCH WORLDWIDE, 1996:12; EPOCH, 1991a:5). Psychologists have presented the debates with a picture of worsening behaviour, associated with the transfer or modelling of aggression within the physical discipline (Straus, 1996; Welsh, 1985). In contrast, supporters of such acts have argued that physical force is necessary as the only effective discipline in certain situations (Cloke, 1997:279). This argument was, for instance, particularly prominent in the high-profile legal case surrounding a child minder's right to smack her charge (The Times, 7/7/93:3). Likewise, politicians debating abolition in schools strongly equated such a move with a liberal shift from discipline per se without effective alternatives to fulfil the deterrent purpose (Pawsey and others; House of Commons, Education Bill [Lords] Debate, 1986 [22/7/86]:228).

Religion and morality

The relationship between physical discipline and both religious teaching and morality has also been a recurrent issue in the debates. Primarily, both have been introduced in relation to conservative Protestant arguments that physical force is the biblically-ordained response (Scottish Law Commission, 1992:24&27) to disobedience. Indeed, it is seen as the adult's duty under God (Scottish Law Commission, 1992:24) to use physical force to shape a child's will towards obedience and respect for authority and morality (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993:133; cf. Dobson 1970 & 1976). Arguments for physical force (particularly when advocating the use of implements) are often made with reference to the line by King Solomon (Proverbs 13:24) that: 'he that spareth the rod hateth his son, he that loveth him, chasteneth him' (cf. Greenway; House of Commons, Education Bill [Lords] Debate, 1986 [22/7/86] :238). Indeed, 'newsgroups' on the Internet have spent months discussing the meaning and importance of this extract in relation to others in the Bible. In general, opponents' critiques of conservative Protestant arguments have concentrated on reinterpreting this phrase as referring to a metaphoric rod of guidance (cf. Carey, 1994; Hyman, 1990:33). Abolitionists have also emphasised that the New Testament opposes physical punishments and violent acts, such as stoning (Cashmore and De Haas, 1995:9-10; cf. Hyman, 1990:33).

On a wider moral front, the use of physical force in child care has been described as 'morally wrong' because it is a breach of human rights (EPOCH, 1991a:9). There is even the implication that in certain situations, even when legal at the time, the use of physical force may be the manifestation of a deeper or supernatural wrong in society, described as 'evil' (Reitman, 1988:6).

History and traditional place vs. progress

Both proponents and opponents of physical force have featured in their arguments the concept of physical force as a British tradition. Supporters of such acts have emphasised their historical role in our institutions and the formation of the British character (cf. Lord Beloff; House of Lords, Education Bill [Lords] Debate, 1986 [17/4/86]:792). Consequently, challenges to legislation on physical discipline from the European courts have prompted isolationist concerns of attacks on the British heritage of corporal punishment:

'There is a British way of doing things, a British tradition, and that is lost if we listen to everything that is said by the European Court.' (Bruinvels; House of Commons, Education Bill [Lords] Debate, 1986 [22/7/86]:258)

Opponents have conversely portrayed physical punishment as a tradition that brings shame to Britain. Commentaries such as Gibson's book 'The English Vice' (1978) draw attention to the disdain from other countries for a British obsession,

implied as psycho-sexual, with such acts. Furthermore, it is argued that any such tradition is a cruel relic of an unenlightened age (Lord Ritchie [on school discipline], House of Lords Education Bill [Lords] Debate, 1986 [17/4/86]:797) with no place in today's civilised society (Swedish Department of Justice, 1979:4). A movement away from such acts is demanded as part of wider cultural progress that involves better recognition for the care (Hyman, 1988:14) and rights of children (Sutherland; representation to Scottish Law Commission, 1992:24). Indeed, the abolition of physical force is often portrayed as a natural and inevitable final step in a progressive and linear reformatory process towards physical integrity for all (EPOCH, 1991a:8; Newell, 1986:22).

Rights

The issue of rights has been portrayed by some commentators as the sole concern of abolitionist campaigners like the pressure group EPOCH. They are presented as only relating such acts to an injustice in the rights of people to physical integrity because: 'giving attention to other issues may be seen to imply that if physical punishment does work or is not harmful, then it would be acceptable' (Cashmore and De Haas. 1995:76). Whilst this is an oversimplification of the complex set of arguments forwarded by such campaigners that covers all the issues presented here, it does underline the great importance placed in the adult debates on rights. The campaigners' perspective has actually been more accurately portrayed by Peter Newell, the Director of EPOCH, who stated that: 'While the basic human

rights argument provides the moral imperative for fully respecting children's right to physical integrity, there are plenty of supporting arguments' (1995:224). Much of the campaigners' literature, such as Newell's book 'Children are people too' (1989), can be seen to reflect this assessment of rights as a headline issue, underpinned by wider concerns.

Nevertheless, the subject of physical discipline is represented by campaigners and commentators as an important focus in the overall consideration of the rights of adults and children. Indeed, Peter Newell's chapter, 'Respecting children's right to physical integrity' (1995), was published as part of a wider reaching 'The handbook of children's rights', and Lorraine Fox-Harding cited the campaign for abolition as a practical example of the wider 'children's rights perspective' in child care policy (1991). The defeated amendment to the 1995 Children (Scotland) Bill that attempted to restrict physical discipline, for instance, was presented by its Labour proposers as an 'opportunity to assert the rights of children' (Maria Fyfe, reported Scotland on Sunday, 8/1/95). In contrast, such restrictions are presented by some in the adult debates as undue infringements on the rights of adults. Relating to Fox Harding's 'laissez faire and patriarchy' perspective (1991), this call is for the 'patriarchal right' of parents to bring up their children the way they want without interference (Scottish Law Commission, 1992:20). Campaigners have repeatedly claimed that these arguments are upheld by the European Convention on Human Rights' support for 'family life' and the 'philosophical rights of parents' (cf. BBC

News Online, 1/2/99).⁷

State of institutions and society

The last issue dominant in political and legal debates surrounds the implications of using or refraining from the use of physical discipline on the state of the institutions and society in which discipline takes place. In particular, opponents to restrictions on physical force present them as forcing an uncomfortable revolution in the family unit where children take control (Greenway; House of Commons, Education Bill [Lords] Debate, 1986 [22/7/86]:239). Commentators have noted that a perceived reduction in physical discipline is seen as having already destroyed parental control in the family and a wider breakdown in behaviour that even threatened society as a whole (Cloke, 1997:278-279; Maurer et al., 1987:1). It is argued that any greater restriction on physical force would further undermine adult control, institutions and wider society (Scottish Law Commission, 1992:27; cf. Patten; House of Commons, Education Bill [Lords] Debate, 1986 [22/7/86]:273). Moreover, conservative groups have argued that abolitionists are actively seeking to subvert the authority of ordinary parents in the family unit (Conservative Families Campaign, cited *The Times*, 13/11/92:16), presenting the retention of physical discipline as a key issue in the fight against the decline in the moral order of society (Overton, 1993; *The Times*, 26/10/96:1).

⁷ A legal challenge on this basis by a group of Swedish parents was rejected by the European Courts in 1982 (Newell, 1995:220).

In direct contrast, those opposing physical force in disciplinary relationships refer to a macro-cultural rejection of such acts, in favour of 'positive and non-violent discipline' as releasing 'the potential for reducing levels of all kinds of violence in societies' (cf. Children's Rights Development Unit, 1995:19; EPOCH, 1991a:3). In support of this claim, they cite various commissions from around the world which have prioritised the ending of physical punishment of children to prevent interpersonal violence (cf. Newell, 1995:215). Such arguments build upon the micro-behavioural contention that aggression from the disciplinary act is transmitted through modelling or copying adult behaviour, with acceptance of physical force in their own child care then legitimising violence within their wider lives (Key [on physical punishment in schools]; House of Commons, Education Bill [Lords] Debate, 1986 [22/7/86]:247).

This study

Overview

Although it has been possible here and elsewhere (cf. Overton, 1993; ISPPC, 1992; Evans & Fargason Jr., 1998) to outline professional and public discourses on this topic, there has been little opportunity to review the key issues for those in the social position to actually receive physical discipline. Their exclusion from legal, political and media arenas has resulted in our inability to assess the extent to which the areas of importance for young people concur or differ from those presented

above. It is far from clear whether young people share the same concerns and agenda as those who influence and make policy which affects, and even purports to protect, them and their interests. Interested parties within the debate have not been able to refer to arguments which young people themselves would consider relevant to this topic and the themes which underlie their acceptance or rejection of such disciplinary acts. Indeed, the debates give no clue as to whether young people draw on the same conceptual frameworks as relevant adults, or even similarly define and understand key terms used in professional discourse, policy and practice (e.g. 'child abuse').

This thesis aims to address the gap in our knowledge of views on adults' use of physical discipline that has been created by the absence of young people in the political and legal debates reviewed above. The study provides a detailed examination of the perspectives held by actors in the social position to receive such acts. First, the dominant themes in young people's perceptions of this topic are examined comprehensively in relation to their underlying frameworks of reference. Second, the adult debates and perceptions of carers are analysed according to these themes to further illuminate distinctive features of the young people's perceptions.

In accordance with a broadly interpretivist methodology, the investigation is grounded in the issues of importance constructed and communicated by the young people themselves. The analysis is shaped according to these issues rather than determined by political questions, hypotheses or wider agendas from the adult

political, legal or research debates. Furthermore, the study is substantively concerned with these perceptions as valid interpretations in themselves, rather than for any use in the measurement of the actual practice of physical force, or for consideration of child development outcomes. Neither is the research focused on the past processes by which these perceptions have formed or become crystallised. Consequently, although participants sometimes referred to experiences when discussing issues, this study is not concerned with investigating any relationship between these reports and the views of young people. Indeed, the methodological design of this study places the research beyond the process of merely recounting or commenting on personal experiences and instead specifically seeks to elicit perceptions surrounding this topic on a more abstract level.

However, the interpretivist methodology and abstract conceptual focus of this study do not condemn the research to the corridors of academia. Although the aim is to examine in-depth constructions rather than simple, measurable and citable surface views it is still hoped that this research will impact on the wider social policy debates. It is intended that the findings may inform those responsible for the formation, implementation and review of disciplinary policy and practice of the perspectives of young people on this topic. Researchers, campaigners, commentators and policy makers in arenas ranging from the media to child protection services may be made aware of the dominant issues of concern to young people. Moreover, the revelation of young people's perceptions will make it possible to highlight important differences in beliefs and concerns between this group and adults within and beyond the legal and political debate. Hopefully, this

will then contribute to general reflection on the use of physical force by all those involved in the policy formulation, practice or consideration of disciplinary relationships with children.

It should be noted at this point that the study does not feature consideration of the use of physical force on children in penal systems. Although it is recognised that physical force is still very much an issue in some juvenile penal systems (Newell, 1995:218), participants did not mention this in discussions and no particular effort was made to draw on their views in these areas. Discussions and findings concentrated on physical force in disciplinary relationships that were voiced as of interest and concern to the young people. These tended to focus mainly on child-parent and child-teacher disciplinary relationships in the home and in educational settings.

Definitions

Reflecting the interpretivist framework for this study, there was a deliberate attempt to limit the extent to which terms were pre-determined or defined by the researcher. Although some prescribed focus was necessitated by the broad research interests, the understanding and definition of terms were left conspicuously open to interpretation during the design and fieldwork stages of this study. Specific descriptive terms like 'punishment', 'child abuse' and 'violence' were, where possible, actively avoided by the researcher. Conversely, the spontaneous use of

these terms by young participants in the context of particular discussions did, in itself, produce revealing findings in subsequent analysis.

The declared research interests of this study necessitates an explanation of the following key phrases: 'physical force in disciplinary relationships', 'children' and 'young people'. First, it has been noted that previous definitions of the term 'discipline' have varied extensively in research literature (Socolar et al., 1997:758). On the one hand this presents the problem of little common cultural understanding and guidance of what 'discipline' actually means. On the other hand, using this term provides the research with enough flexibility to accommodate participants' differing interpretations of the purpose for physical force. Thus, the key concept of 'discipline', and its relationship with 'physical force', has been defined and considered as loosely as possible. The phrase 'physical force in a disciplinary relationship' is considered to describe *physical force imposed by an adult in relation to guiding the child's specific or general behaviour in the short or longer term*. It is intended that such a broad understanding avoids researcher assumptions about either the specific intentions of the adult involved or precise contextual conditions surrounding such acts. It should also be noted that physical force used in this way is sometimes abbreviated for simplicity within the text of the thesis as 'physical discipline'. Occasionally, the terms 'physical punishment' or 'corporal punishment' are used in the Background and Conclusions sections to this thesis to reflect the wording of authors, policy or legislation under discussion. Although these terms are usually treated in the adult debates as similar or synonymous with 'physical

discipline', caution should be taken to refer back to the original text for precise definitions.

Second, the terms 'children' and 'young people' in this study are defined as *social actors who are under the legal control of adult specifically because of a juvenile status in society*. These social actors do not generally carry the same societal expectations of legal and social roles and responsibilities as adults. It was considered that this definition better reflects both the importance of adult-child social relationships and the cultural construction of childhood (James & Prout, 1997) than definitions based solely on a fixed chronological age (e.g. the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child's concern with 'every human being below 18'). It should be noted that, for reasons of clarity only, the term 'young people' is usually reserved in this thesis (and its title) to describe those presenting their perceptions, whereas 'children' is usually used to describe those being discussed by participants as subject to discipline. This presentational difference is not used to distinguish any age difference, to imply in any way that children are not valid people, or to suggest that those labelled accordingly in the thesis do not share the same social roles and position in reality.

Although these broad terms and definitions were used within the design of this study by the researcher, they were never explicitly outlined or imposed on the respondents. Their active influence on the fieldwork extended only to the guidance they provided for the researcher to focus discussion on the general research interests of the study. For instance, the stimuli presented to participants, which

included vignettes and quotations, was designed to elicit responses from young people that produced discussion loosely focused in accordance with these broad definitions.

Chapter summary and outline of remaining chapters

This chapter has presented adults' use of physical force in disciplinary relationships with children as a subject of current major international debate. Within the UK, it was possible to cite a catalogue of recent controversy surrounding physical force in various adult dominated political and legal arenas. However, for each of the legal and political arenas outlined, the chapter noted a dominance of representation from actors on just one side of the adult-child disciplinary relationship. It was stated that this study introduces the perspectives of young people on this topic to the wider social policy controversy.

The first adult dominated arena of debate on physical discipline noted in this chapter was the court system, in which several cases challenging cultural norms, professional discourse and common understanding of legislation have received high levels of media and public interest. Indeed, recent European legal judgements have forced a current Government review of UK legislation in this area. In addition, the Government was noted as facing calls for legislative revision in relation to international obligations, agreements and recommendations such as the United

Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Similar calls to restrict physical force have been made by various committees, commissions and policy groups.

The political and legal debates have been further fuelled by an organised movement of campaigning against physical discipline centred around pressure groups such as STOPP and EPOCH, and involving other charities, professional bodies and children's rights groups. The significance of this challenge to physical discipline was also indicated by the recent development of backlash campaigns and attacks against abolitionists. It was noted that both campaign groups and the wider adult public have been involved in high-profile media debates on physical force in newspapers, on radio, on television and even on the Internet. The chapter also cited the repeated focus on physical discipline of children in various disciplinary relationships by UK politicians in and outside parliament. However, it was noted that this major concern with physical discipline of children is a relatively modern phenomenon which challenges a set of practices historically and culturally established within and beyond the UK.

The chapter then reviewed the adult debates by outlining a number of key issues within arguments featured across the above arenas. First, it was noted that the dominance of legal and legislative arenas was reflected in a semantic battle over terms to establish the conceptual framework for the legal and political agenda. Acts of physical discipline have been dramatised or normalised according to chosen terms, with particular attention paid to descriptors such as 'violence'. Second, the debate has featured child protection issues surrounding dangers of physical and

mental harm from physical force in discipline. Concern was noted as built upon concepts of children's inherent greater physical vulnerability requiring particular protection. Third, the debates have raised concerns about the necessity and effectiveness of physical discipline on the behaviour of the individual child. Opponents have argued that such practices are both ineffective and actually result in a picture of worsening behaviour in the long term because of modelling adult aggression. In contrast, supporters of such acts have stressed their necessity in the absence of effective alternatives.

A fourth recurrent issue in the controversy over physical discipline was noted as stemming from both religious and moral arguments. The debate has considered whether such acts are a biblically-ordained response to disobedience or a morally wrong breach of human rights. Fifth, physical discipline has been argued as a British tradition, either to be protected or shamed by in the face of international challenges. The sixth dominant issue, that of the rights of those in disciplinary relationships, has been particularly prominent from both abolitionists and retentionists. Whilst the former stress physical integrity as relevant to both children's rights and human rights, the latter stress the need to protect against infringements on adults' rights to rear or teach children. The last dominant issue outlined surrounds how the question of physical discipline affects the state of institutions and wider society. Restrictions on such acts are either presented as producing a breakdown in behaviour which destabilises society or, in contrast, as promoting a less violent society.

The chapter concluded by outlining how this study informs the adult debates of issues of importance to young people, with perceptions examined in relation to their underlying frameworks of reference. This research was noted as being substantively focused on, and grounded in, the interpretations of those in the social position actually to receive such acts of physical discipline rather than determined by questions in the adult debates. In addition, these perceptions are valued in themselves and for their contribution to the wider debates rather than to help understand their relationship with actual behaviour, how they were formed or their consequences for future development. In line with this broadly interpretivist methodology, it was noted that pre-determined terms were deliberately restricted during project design and fieldwork, with the researcher actively avoiding some terms altogether. The exploration of other terms necessitated by declared research interests was used as guidance for the researcher loosely to focus fieldwork discussion rather than imposed on respondents.

Outline of remaining chapters

The presentation of this thesis is organised into two sections: Background and Analysis. The two remaining chapters (Chapters Two and Three) in this first section introducing the research project review the literature that has explored issues in relation to adult use of physical force on children and detail the methods and methodology involved in this study. Following the review of the controversial political and legal debates as adult dominated, Chapter Two examines the

dominant features of previous literature with reference to the extent to which it has addressed the perspectives of young people. Empirical studies are examined within three broad areas of focus: the effects of physical force; the rates of prevalence of actual physical force; and participant attitudes towards physical force.

Chapter Three reviews the methodological influences, research considerations and fieldwork procedures which informed this study. The chapter explores interrelating cultural and methodological obstacles which have fostered a reluctance to listen to children, then places this research within a 'new paradigm' that values their active participation. The chapter reviews the procedures adopted to gather young people's perceptions within legal, ethical and practical constraints associated with risk and power in the research relationship. Lastly, this chapter outlines the sample.

The chapters in the Analysis section (Chapters Four to Eight) are determined by the dominant areas of concern in the discussions with young participants. Chapter Four examines perceptions surrounding the purposes that adult use of physical force on children might serve and the immediate effectiveness of such actions. Chapter Five concentrates on the concerns that participants expressed surrounding the practical application of physical discipline. This considers both the short term concerns about the immediate context of any disciplinary act and longer term concerns surrounding implications beyond the individual disciplinary episode. Chapter Six places these acts within perceptions of the wider adult-child disciplinary relationship, with reference to relevant roles, rights and associated power. Chapter

Seven attempts to further illuminate young people's perceptions by comparing them with the major themes in discussions with carer participants. Chapter Eight examines the ways in which the young people's perceptions compare to the dominant issues and ideas in the adult legal, political and research debates. In order to further examine the themes revealed in the analysis section, this discussion chapter highlights concurrence and difference between the concerns and definitions expressed by young people and those evident in the adult arenas.

The concluding chapter (Chapter Nine) first summarises the dominant themes in young participants' perceptions. Second, the implications of the research are explored, in relation both to its relevance to social policy concerns surrounding physical discipline and wider methodological issues when involving young people.

Introduction

This chapter presents a thematic review of research literature that has explored issues in relation to adult use of physical force on children. The review identifies both the dominant substantive concerns and the methodological features of this literature. Attention is drawn to the extent to which empirical research studies have addressed the perspectives of, particularly young, participants.

There has been a significant research base established in the past thirty years that has empirically focused on the individuals involved in acts of physical force on children. Fostered in the 1970s, mainly by developmental social psychologists in the United States (Straus, 1979), this research has been described as a 'tradition of "family violence" research' (Kurz, 1991:155). Whilst this term does not reflect the interest of research into physical discipline of children in contexts outside the home (cf. Anderson & Payne, 1994), it does indicate the dominant focus on parental acts of force (cf. Catron & Masters, 1993; Gough & Reavey, 1997; Graziano & Namaste, 1990; Newson & Newson, 1976; Newson & Newson, 1989).

Research on physical force on children has consistently and closely shadowed the political and legal agenda. Whilst some studies have been concerned with more extreme forms of inter-personal physical force against children (cf. Kotch et al.,

1993; McLain et al., 1993), a large and increasing body of research deals with acts commonly more politically contentious in terms of social acceptance. Like the debate in media, legal and political arenas, social research has concentrated on acts of physical force on the border of cultural legitimacy. Specifically, there has been a growth of research internationally (although still dominantly from the United States) to match the debates surrounding legal acts described as 'physical' or 'corporal punishment' in child care and education (cf. Coontz & Martin, 1988 [US]; Fergusson & Lynskey, 1997 [New Zealand]; Flynn, 1994 [US]; Gough & Reavey, 1997[UK]; Graziano et al., 1991 [US]; Kelder et al., 1991[US]; Rohner et al., 1991[West Indies]; Vargas et al., 1995 [Chile]).

Moreover, the work of researchers has been related to the legal and political debates to such a close extent that it is impossible to separate completely many pieces of research from campaigning material. It is particularly important when reviewing research into physical force that ideological influences and political intentions are borne in mind. Straus complains, with justification, that some academics are unable to separate appropriately writing on physical force in a 'scientific mode' and an 'advocacy mode' supportive of physical force (Straus, 1991b:180). Ironically, Straus has overtly utilised his own research to advocate that 'corporal punishment' should be abolished (cf. Straus, 1994; Straus, 1997). Conversely, the abolitionist pressure group EPOCH has a 'research and education' charity whose publications include a paper by British child care psychologists Newson & Newson on the prevalence of physical punishment (1989). Indeed, Irwin Hyman has reflected on the relationship between research on physical force and

the wider legal and political debates by referring to studies in this field as 'advocacy research' (1988; see also Evans & Fargason Jr., 1998).

This consistent relationship with the wider legal and political debates has produced empirical research studies on physical force in discipline which can be analysed within three broad areas of focus: the effects of physical force; the rates of prevalence of actual physical force and the attitudes of participants towards physical force. The divisions between these foci are, however, deliberately simplified and somewhat crude for the purposes of this analysis. These foci should not be interpreted as mutually exclusive. In addition, it should be noted that secondary analysis of these empirical studies has often further breached these divisions.

The effects of physical force on mental well-being and long-term behaviour

Overall, the research agenda on adult physical force on children has, since the early 1970s, been dominated by psychological studies surrounding the possible effects of such acts. Developmental social psychologists have produced a significant body of studies designed to establish any causal relationship between receiving physical force in childhood and a large variety of, mostly negative, emotional and behavioural outcomes⁸. It is important to note for this study that these quasi-experimental positivist projects have been highly structured towards the

⁸ See 'Beating the Devil' (Straus, 1990) for an extensive archive of U.S. outcome studies.

concerns of the psychologist (in relation to the legal and political debates) rather than the concerns of participants in the adult-child relationship themselves. The causal hypothesis has been dictated by the psychologist and wider contemporary political concerns rather than the perceptions of either the adults or children involved. Consequently, the body of research in this area has begun to appear as a scientific microcosm of the wider legal and political debates, with a development of 'sides' of researchers maintaining negative and positive outcomes of either particular or general acts of physical force on children. Indeed, more recent studies from psychologists have explicitly reviewed research literature on the effects of physical force in terms of two opposing sides (cf. Carlson, 1991).

This focus of research in particular has been characterised by the 'research advocacy' approach outlined above. Psychologists have tended to explore hypotheses whilst overtly aware of implications of their 'taking sides' for the consequential claims of certain groups in the political debate. There has been a clear theme of scientifically 'proving' views in this debate by, first, presenting evidence to support or refute ideas about the effects of forms of physical force and, second, concluding for or against both its use and political-legal justification (cf. Larzelere, 1994; Straus, 1994; Straus, 1991a; Welsh, 1985).

Psychological studies have considered concerns about the effects of adult physical force against children on both the internal state of the child's mental well-being and externally observed patterns of behaviour. It has been argued that, although the emotional effects of physical force are difficult to calculate, there is: 'an extensive

literature associating parental physical punishment...with a wide range of personality disorders and neuroses in adult life' (P. Leach, submission to Scottish Law Commission, 1992:22). As with many aspects of negative outcomes from physical force, Murray Straus has played a leading role in empirically highlighting later psychological problems for the recipient of physical force in childhood disciplinary relationships. It is argued that, while holding constant the effects of other variables, the use of this force leads to a greater risk of depression, contemplating suicide and alcoholism (Straus & Kaufman Kantor, 1992). Fergusson & Lynskey (1997) concur that the risk of suicide attempts and alcohol abuse amongst adults is increased by physical force received from parents, but argue that this is not affected by mild or occasional use of physical force. However, it should be noted that such studies, particularly considering less severe physical force, tend to concentrate on long-term outcomes on mental well-being in adulthood, rather than any effects felt in childhood. Like wider social science research, childhood is only emphasised here as a vulnerable developmental stage towards adulthood. Limited research has seen an attempt to consider the psychological effects on children as a valid outcome in itself. Only a few studies of the 'extensive literature' treat children as social actors by attempting to focus on repercussions for mental well-being felt during childhood. Rohner et al. (1991), for example, conclude that the use of physical force by parents has a negative effect on the 'psychological adjustment' of children between the ages of 9 and 16. In common with Fergusson & Lynskey (above), the effect is less noticeable for 'low level' physical punishments in child care.

Rohner et al.'s study was also rather exceptional, not just amongst research on mental well-being but wider effects on recipients of physical force, because researchers actually engaged the children in fieldwork as participants in order to assess these effects. Studies which focus on the childhood period tend not to ask the children about their activities, but use official records or ask parents about a child's state and behaviour (cf. Newson & Newson, 1989:19-24; Straus, Sugarman & Giles-Simes, 1997; Gunnoe & Mariner, 1997).

Despite Leach's suggestion above that outcomes in respect of emotional states of well-being are difficult to calculate, at least for less severe physical force, she has assessed research as associating 'love and pain, anger and submission' during acts of physical punishment in child care with the various personality disorders in later life (submission to Scottish Law Commission, 1992:22). In addition, Welsh has argued that his studies suggest that it is the 'fear and anger' occurring 'when a child is spanked' that are the stimulus for behavioural difficulties whilst still under juvenile jurisdiction. He has stated that these emotions are displaced outside the home in aggression towards society (1985:27). It has been suggested that this emotional upset is, in 'fact', related to a chemical imbalance caused by receiving physical force which can affect a person's impulse control and lead to negative behavioural outcomes in, amongst other activities, educational achievement and driving (Maurer & Wallerstein, 1987).

A significant proportion of research into physical force on children has utilised quasi-experimental design to try to address concerns about outcomes affecting

child and youth behaviour. Consistent with a number of UK Government Reports that have cited poor pupil behaviour as associated with past physical punishments (cited British Psychological Society, 1980:12; Department of Education & Science, 1989:99), there is a catalogue of studies indicating that physical force in some form is a precursor to delinquency in childhood or adult life. Studies have also indicated that youth 'troublesomeness', 'delinquency' and 'anti-social behaviour', as defined by the researcher rather than the researched, are positively related to frequency and severity of physical force received by the child (Newson & Newson, 1989; Straus, Sugarman & Giles-Simes, 1997; Gunnoe & Mariner, 1997). Links have also been made between parental physical force to cause pain and later criminal activity, including spousal violence (Straus, 1991a). Other studies limit the relationship with criminal activity to 'harsher' parental acts (cited McCord, 1991:168). There is more research consensus surrounding negative effects of 'severe' rather than 'mild' physical force. Presenting his 'belt theory' that virtually all male delinquents have been struck by an implement, Welsh concluded that: 'It is now apparent that SSP [severe parental punishment] is probably the most significant precursor to delinquency that we have been able to discover' (1985:26).

In common with the term 'anti-social behaviour', however, it should be noted that the definitions of 'severe', 'mild', 'harsh' and 'frequent' physical force and 'physical' and 'corporal punishment' within these quasi-experimental designs are invariably pre-determined by the researcher rather than grounded in a consideration of the perceptions of those actually involved in the adult-child relationship.

Within the broad research area of 'anti-social' behaviour as an outcome from physical discipline, studies have particularly concentrated on violent and aggressive behaviour by children and adults. The Gulbenkian Report on *Children and Violence* noted that, internationally, all the various recent commissions on violence reviewing research have identified 'physical punishment' as a contributing factor (1995:50). It also cited a number of studies around the world which found that such acts positively relate to aggression by children (1995:51). Other studies consistent with such findings have been cited elsewhere (Straus, 1997; Scottish Law Commission, 1992:22). Again, 'severe' physical force is distinguished in some studies when highlighting a relationship with aggression in children (Gulbenkian Report, 1995:51).

The majority of empirical studies investigating physical discipline as a possible cause of later violence by recipients base hypotheses on explanations of learned behaviour. Referred to as 'intergenerational transmission theory', this is founded upon the assertions of 'family violence experts' that 'violence begets violence'. Children will learn and, at some time, copy such acts from the adult role models in their disciplinary relationships (Carlson, 1991:19). Such an assertion relies upon the acts of force from both generations being related to each other, both perceived as degrees of 'violence'. Once again, this relationship tends to be established by the researcher rather than according to any perceptions of the researched (cf. Straus, 1991a:136). Those forwarding this theory point to evidence suggesting that patterns of physical force against children are perpetuated through generations (Cashmore & de Haas, 1995:74). Such studies may emphasise that this

transmission is greater when the physical force is more frequent (cf. Hemingway et al., 1994) or severe (cf. Freedman, 1975 cited Kelder et al., 1991). It may then be argued that this learning of at least some degree of interpersonal physical force, whether or not that act per se is perceived as legitimate, provides the foundation for the recipient to behave in other ways defined as aggressive or violent. Thus, the increased level of general aggression and violence observed in those who received acts of physical force is the result of a 'cultural spillover' of behaviour learned in disciplinary relationships into other areas of social interaction:

'violence in one sphere of life tends to engender violence in other spheres, and...this carry-over process transcends the bounds between legitimate and criminal use of force.' (Straus, 1991a:137)

It should be noted that there have been a number of criticisms made about the theories on intergenerational transmission and cultural spillover of physical force (Kelder et al., 1991; Kurtz, 1991; Loseke, 1991). Indeed, proponents have acknowledged that, as yet, evidence for is far from definitive and that the theories still need investigation as an explanation for wider violence in those receiving physical force (Straus, 1991b:188)

Again, neither these general theories, nor specific hypotheses, on behavioural outcomes tend to be influenced by the perceptions or concerns of those involved in the adult-child relationship. Both parties act as subjects rather than participants in

the quasi-experiments that are designed by researchers and informed by the wider debates rather than by the concerns of adults or children themselves.

Prevalence of physical force

In common with the quasi-experimental studies calculating long-term outcomes of physical discipline on children, studies of the prevalence of such acts are not primarily concerned with adding the opinions of the researched to any wider debate. Indicators tend to be determined by the researcher and the adult debates rather than the perceptions of the researched. Such studies are, however, more likely to involve those in the adult-child relationship as active participants during fieldwork and provide the possibility to examine their own accounts of experiences.

Given these possibilities, it is important to note that in the main, research on patterns and prevalence has limited such engagement during fieldwork to the involvement of *adult* participants (Cashmore & de Haas, 1995:55; Graziano & Namaste, 1990:453). In the UK, where 'little attention' has been paid to prevalence research (Cashmore & de Haas, 1995:59), the most influential studies of patterns of child care involving physical force have been from Newson & Newson's interviews with Nottingham parents in the 1960s and 1970s (cf. 1963, 1968, 1976, 1989). This longitudinal research project asked parents about the methods of 'physical punishment' they currently employed and indicated widespread use of physical force in some form. Prevalence and frequency did vary with the age of the child,

with 62% of children aged one year reported as being smacked, rising to 75% and 41% smacked least once a week at ages four and seven years respectively, before falling to 18% at aged 11 years (for summary see Newson & Newson, 1989). In addition, the Newsons found parental claims that 'hardly anyone was never smacking their four-year-old' (1989:5) and that 22% of seven year olds had been hit with an implement (1976). The significance of class differences in parental behaviour varied at the different ages. A more recent study carried out between 1991 and 1994 by a team from the Institute of Education, again focused primarily on calculating prevalence from the 'testimony of parents' to confirm widespread use of physical force (Nobes & Smith, 1997). The survey found that 99% of children had received physical punishment by either their mother or father at some time, with 21% of both these groups having inflicted punishments rated, again by the researchers, as severe.

However, in common with research on long-term outcomes of physical force on children, research of prevalence has been dominated by studies from the United States (Cashmore & de Haas, 1995:60). Again, studies like the oft cited (cf. Flynn, 1994:315; Cashmore & de Haas, 1985:60; Straus, 1991a:136) National Family Violence Surveys focused on interviews with parents rather than the children. These surveys found that, both in 1975 and 1985, about 90% of parents of children between two and six years used 'physical punishment' (cited Cashmore & de Haas, 1995:60). These findings of widespread use concurred with a 'classic' (Straus, 1991a:136; Cashmore & de Haas:60) study from the mid-1950s when, again,

researchers used mothers to estimate 99% employment of 'physical punishment' in families (Sears, Maccoby & Levin, 1957).

Remarkably, even when researchers have sought accounts of experiences from those receiving physical force, there has been a preference towards asking adults to recall their past childhood rather than asking current children themselves. For instance, one of the main UK based studies in recent years to focus on childhood experiences of physical force in child rearing actually surveyed adults about their past (Creighton & Russell, 1995). Ironically, despite being entitled 'Voices from childhood' the study does not attempt to provide the opportunity for those within this culturally defined stage to voice their experiences. Indeed, the research is more accurately described within the text as collecting 'memories of childhood' from when children, 'in many respects..., lived in a different world from that of children today' (Creighton & Russell, 1995:1). In contrast to this present study, such research may voice past childhoods, but does not explore the contemporary voices of children. It is acknowledged here that a later study in the same NSPCC research series (Ghate & Daniels, 1997) did actually ask young people limited closed questions about their experiences of physical force.

Nevertheless, this widespread preference to research recipient experiences through adult recall rather than by asking children themselves prevails despite acknowledged problems with such a method. Certainly, Creighton & Russell showed a lack of faith in their own results using this approach when they commented on an inconsistency with findings from other studies that, 'This is

probably more a function of age and memory than genuine differences' (1995:24). Likewise, Hemingway et al. noted in criticism of their own study, which compared adults' reports of the physical force they use in child rearing and received as children, that:

'Adults may not remember clearly the discipline they received as children, many decades ago....Parents may also suffer from 'retrospective recall bias'...might be more likely to remember similar discipline [to their actions as parents] in their own childhoods.' (1994:1018)

There have been a very limited number of studies which have tried to assess patterns and prevalence of physical force as experienced by children by asking children themselves. In 1977, for instance, the Scottish Council for Research in Education calculated that 36% of males and 8% of girls had been belted in secondary schools (years S1, S3 and S4) over the previous fortnight from the pupil's own accounts (Pollock et al., 1977). In New Zealand, Ritchie et al. found that children's reports suggested that at least some pupils were being physically punished more than teachers were prepared to admit (1980 cited Ritchie & Ritchie, 1981:40-41).

Regarding physical force in the home, Ghate & Daniels (1997) asked a question on disciplinary tactics used by parents in their recent survey of UK young people aged between 8 and 15 years old. Overall, 18% of children reported that they had been smacked or slapped by their parents. In Sweden an incidence-attitudinal survey of

young people aged 13-15 years carried out since the abolition of physical punishment indicated that 34% had been hit by their mother and 35% had been hit by their father before their teen years (Sanden, 1996). In Australia, Amato (1987 cited Cashmore & de Haas, 1995:55) asked primary and secondary students if their parents 'hit' them. Rates varied somewhat according to the child's age and the sex of both the imparter and recipient. Males reported being hit more than females, the older age group was hit less than the younger age group and the father replaced the mother as the main imparter of physical force by the older age group. One other study in Australia used the accounts of 4-14 year old children as part of a study calculating prevalence rates (97% reported having been 'smacked'). The difference in 'perceptions' between children and adults was again highlighted when 46% of children reported being hit with implements, compared to 12% of adults indicating such acts occurred (Duke & Aitchison, 1993 cited Cashmore & de Haas, 1995:56). It is unclear whether such differences arise from adults' reluctance to admit certain acts (Graziano & Namaste, 1990:453) or differences in groups' perceptions and understanding of either terms used in the research and physical force more generally. In common with the quasi-experimental studies of outcomes of physical force, it appears that the categories and definitions of physical force in such prevalence studies have been determined by the researchers rather than according to the perceptions of the researched (cf. Gulbenkian Report, 1995:256-258; Knutson & Selner, 1994 [on 'PP scores']; Straus, 1991b [on Conflict Tactics Scales]). There is a clear necessity for research to explore these groups' understandings and perceptions of physical force in order to inform such prevalence studies.

Some studies, mainly from the United States, attempt a compromise between their reluctance to rely upon children's own accounts and the problems of memory problems and bias in recalling events 'several decades ago'. There is a trend for researchers to utilise college students to report incidence rates, thereby securing the halfway-house perceptions of 'young adults not long removed from childhood' (Graziano & Namaste, 1990:453). For instance, Kelder et al.'s psychology students, with a mean age of 18.7 years, produce prevalence rates of 8.3% receiving no 'physical punishment', but 7.1% recalling acts categorised by the researchers (rather than the researched) as receiving 'abusive physical punishment' (1991). Graziano & Namaste found that 93% of their psychology students reported being 'spanked', with 64% reporting 'mild' to 'moderate pain' (1990). Graziano et al. used university students from India and the US, finding similarly widespread use of at least some form of physical force in child care in both countries, although the US students had been punished more 'harshly' (1991). Deley found that American students reported having received 'corporal punishment' more frequently than Swedish students (1988 cited Flynn, 1994:315). Knutson & Selner found that there were no systematic changes in experiences reported by their psychology students over a 10 year period (1994). Other studies using students to point to widespread use of 'ordinary corporal punishment' are cited by Graziano & Namaste (1990:459)

However, studies utilising 'adult children' must be critically questioned over the influence on respondents' perceptions effected by both intervening time and

differing roles and responsibilities of these participants since being in a position to potentially receive disciplinary force as children (Cashmore & de Haas, 1995:55). Even if details could be recounted, an older person might have a different perspective on acts of physical force from that held at a time closer to when they actually received that force. They may be 'not long from childhood', but have since encountered different life experiences, different cultural and wider influences and taken on different social roles from which to perceive the physical force. They would view the situation from a different social and, according to Kelder, personal developmental stage in their life:

'Thus, the temporal distance between the events that occurred in childhood in childhood and adolescence and the time of the experiment may limit the reliability of the findings. The extent to which subjects' reports of childhood events were influenced or distorted by maturation and life experiences is not known.' (Kelder et al., 1991:443)

In addition to straight-forward calculations of prevalence, this variance in perspectives seems particularly important when considering recipients' attitudes and opinions, either towards specific reported acts or the use of physical force on children in a more abstract sense. With relevance for the present study, this suggests that it is necessary actually to involve young people if we wish to examine the perceptions of those in the social position to receive acts of physical force in disciplinary relationships with adults.

Attitudes and perceptions

Although less common than prevalence surveys of disciplinary practice (Cashmore & de Haas, 1995:61), some studies have focused on participants' attitudes to adults' use of physical force on children. Again, however, by far the majority of studies have concentrated on adults rather than children, even when the views of recipients of physical force are sought. When considering UK research on corporal punishment in schools, the Children's Committee concluded almost two decades ago that:

'Whilst teachers and adults often express and publicise their opinions on the subject of corporal punishment, the views of the children themselves are rarely elicited.' (1981:4)

This gap in the research literature has changed little since then, either for research on schools or in relation to wider contexts. Carlson commented a decade later that children have 'seldom been queried about their views' on physical force used in the disciplinary relationship (1991:20). Even in an age of 'children's rights' literature advocating 'listening to children' on matters affecting them, research studies have largely ignored this group when assessing views on physical force used on them. Some authors, even those writing from a children's rights perspective, do seem unaware of this imbalance in the literature. For instance, Cloke's chapter about 'children, policy, research and practice in children's rights' in a book about

children's participation, uses 'physical chastisement' as an example of an area where Government policy 'is disregarding the research' (1997:276-281). He seems oblivious to the irony that, despite the focus of his book and chapter, the research he has chosen to illustrate his argument explicitly excludes the participation and perceptions of children. In short, studies have systematically failed to explore the perspectives of half of the adult-child disciplinary relationship.

The Scottish Law Commission, for instance, failed to include the views of anyone under 15 in their 'public opinion survey' on 'corporal punishment' (1992:28). This despite recommending elsewhere in the same Report that:

'...there should be a presumption that a child of the age of 12 or more has sufficient maturity to express a reasonable view, but this should not carry any implication that the views of a child under that age are not worthy of consideration.' (1992:19)

This gap in the research appears to have persisted for two main reasons. First, there has been a lack of confidence in the research, and wider, community that children would be able to consider, formulate or communicate their thoughts. Any research with children would be less valid because of a lack of development, either cognitively or experientially in the participants. Researchers have considered that children would, for instance, 'make less articulated judgements about the appropriateness or severity of punishment' (Catron & Masters, 1993:1816) than adults. These theoretical assumptions are explored in more detail in the next chapter.

The second reason for the gap in research of children's perceptions of physical force used by adults against them is that studies eliciting views on this topic tend not to have been interested in perceptions per se, nor to add new perspectives to wider legal and political debates, but sought to use them for a further purpose for which the collection of data from adults was specifically suited. This secondary purpose of the research dictates that the participants must occupy adult social roles, even if the researchers also wish attitudes to be informed by being in the position to receive physical force as children. Pertinent examples of research with such secondary purposes are studies that elicit adults' attitudes in order to calculate likely actual behavioural patterns of such acts (Creighton & Russell, 1995:7). Researchers have targeted adults because they are in the social position to determine and carry out these particular acts. Similarly, attitudes towards specific acts of physical force may be sought as some form of explanation for the adult behaviour, sometimes to accompany and support prevalence studies (cf. Newson & Newson, 1963, 1968, 1976). Researchers attempt to examine attitudes and views which might directly inform such acts by interviewing those fulfilling the social role of the adult in the disciplinary relationship. Although not always highly structured, interview schedules with this secondary purpose are usually related to specific personal relationships involving the participant, or even specific instances during that relationship, rather than physical discipline on a more abstract or general level.

In addition, researchers have deliberately sought those who have been, but are no longer, children in the legal and social position of being open to receiving physical

force in order to assess if there is any effect of past acts on attitudes (cf. Graziano & Namaste, 1990; Creighton & Russell, 1995:55; Vargas et al., 1995:1081). Again, attitudes towards physical force are elicited by researchers, but not for their own sake or to add the perspectives of recipients to the wider legal and political debates. They are elicited in order to complete what is, essentially, converse outcome research, often related to theories of social learning and 'intergenerational transmission' (see above) (Kelder et al, 1991:433-434). Such acts are often carried out on college students and, by their very nature, are usually combined with research on prevalence rates through adult recall (cf. Graziano & Namaste, 1990; Kelder et al., 1991; Deley, 1988 cited Flynn, 1994:315). As such, like wider research on prevalence rates and quasi-experiments outlined above, fieldwork is usually highly structured and quantifiable with terms and definitions pre-determined by the researchers rather than a more abstract consideration of physical force grounded in the perspectives of participants.

However, even research that elicits adults' attitudes on physical discipline for their own sake, rather than a secondary purpose for which adults are exclusively suited, tends not to attempt to add their perspectives to wider legal and political debates on this topic in any meaningful sense. The research does not try to explore the adults' understanding or definitions of terms or events, nor examine the concepts and arguments which underlie their attitudes. Conversely, rather than utilise perceptions to inform the shape of the adult debates, attitudinal research tends to be, like other studies on physical discipline, determined by the pre-existing concerns and definitions of these debates. Again, the research tends to be highly

structured around closed questions which can be quantified to produce a summary of opinion on these pre-existing political concerns. Such research studies are typified by 'opinion poll' style surveys commissioned by parties in the legal and political debates which are characterised by a lack of qualitative depth to any investigation of the participants' answers (cf. Scotland on Sunday, 26/03/95:1; Harrison Market Research, 1993 cited Cashmore & de Haas, 1995:56; MORI, 1999). Data collection usually consists of a restricted multiple choice list of pre-coded reasons to support or qualify the participants' original answer.

In the UK, the most important example of such a political poll was the study of adult 'public opinion' on parental punishment commissioned by the Scottish Law Commission (1992:31). The research was not intended to be an exploration of 'public opinion' (read 'adult opinion') on physical force per se, or an exploration of deeper perceptions, but to provide answers to very specific questions raised by the existing legal and political debate. Adults answers were limited to 'lawful', 'unlawful' or 'don't know' for two descriptions of parental physical force on three ages of children. The answers were quantified and presented in a neat 6x3 matrix, only broken down further into respondents' ages, without any exploration of understanding or arguments underlying results. A more recent poll commissioned by the 'Children are unbeatable!' campaign (MORI, 1999) followed a similar methodological pattern, assessing the percentage of adults who would support legal change. A similar assessment of adult opinion for the legal debate in Canada was made on the basis of five questions on attitude and experience with a choice of up to five answers each (Durrant, 1994). In Ireland, attitudes towards the legality

and appropriateness of 'physical punishment' are quantified through an annual closed questionnaire (cf. ISPC/IMS, 1995). In the United States, much has been made of a series of studies finding that a large, but decreasing number of adults agree that 'it is sometimes necessary to discipline a child with a good, hard spanking' (National Opinion Research Center cited cf. Flynn, 1994:314; Straus, 1997). However, the studies do not explore the adults' understandings or definitions of such actions, nor any intentions or conditions placed upon them, nor arguments underlying support for them.

It is particularly common for studies to be highly structured in this way in order to provide easily quantifiable and comparable data, often supplementary to surveys of prevalence. For instance, surveys have been completed to compare changes or shifts in attitudes across time. Studies in Sweden assessed attitudes to physical force (together with questions on actual behaviour) before and after the introduction of a 'no corporal punishment' law (Sanden, 1996). Answers to questions on principled acceptance and supplementary issues of when and why to use such force were restricted to closed pre-defined categories, such as 'Yes, Doubtful or No' to 'if the child is destructive, despite warnings'. There was no opportunity for the participant to expand on these answers or categories. Perhaps the bulk of such structured studies on adults' attitudes to physical force have compared across cultural or geographical boundaries. Cross-nationally, quantitative studies have been carried out comparing attitudes towards physical force, together with behaviour, of college students in the United States and India (Graziano et al., 1991), and the United States and Sweden (Deley, 1988 cited Flynn, 1994:315).

Closed quantitative studies across regions in the US have highlighted differences in attitude influenced by religious beliefs (cf. Flynn, 1994). Wiehe's attitudinal study of students from different Christian denominations is an example of a study which used closed four and five point scales for participants to record responses to pre-determined statements and opinions on adult physical force on children (1990). Again, this pre-determined framework for answers meant that respondents were not given the opportunity to provide their own perceptions, according to their own definitions, in order to add their own perspectives to wider debates. Similar closed quantitative methods have been used to compare the 'perceptions' of adults defined as 'abusive', 'potentially abusive' and a control group towards 'spanking' (Kelley et al., 1990). Respondents were asked to rate parental actions on a seven point Likert scale, or choose one of four pre-defined parental reactions to child misbehaviour. A clear example of an interview schedule typically designed to elicit attitudes by asking adults to rate the justification of pre-defined punitive measures is provided by Creighton & Russell (1995:71).

In rare studies of adults' attitudes which have allowed open responses to a highly structured schedule, answers have generally been tightly coded to allow quantification and comparison between, say, genders (Coontz & Martin, 1988). Such 'open' comments from respondents were typically permitted through additional space at the end of a questionnaire to record further observations (Payne, 1989:391; Creighton & Russell, 1995:82). Again, the analytical objective has not been to allow these qualitative comments to inform the research or introduce the adults' perspectives to the wider debates, but to illustrate quantitative

findings to questions pre-determined and structured by the researcher. One notable exception to this stress on structured quantitative studies of adults' attitudes was a discourse analysis of parental rationales for physical punishment of children (Gough & Reavey, 1997). Although largely concerned with linguistic cues rather than the parents' substantive comments on physical force, the study did take a relatively open, rather than structured, approach in interviews. Whilst the study focused tightly on the justifications, purposes or 'rationales' for *their* using parental physical force, rather than any wider issues, contexts or consideration of such adult force in general, the study did offer the opportunity for participants to explore their own perceptions and definitions.

However, no studies have provided such a qualitative concentration on young people's own words, expressions or perceptions regarding physical force against children. A restricted number of studies have included a focus on the attitudes of young people still in the adult-child disciplinary relationship but, in common with most research on adults' attitudes, emphasis has not been placed on exploring or adding the children's perspectives to the wider debates. Like the adult attitudinal studies, a large proportion of research which has touched on children's views of physical force against them has been focused on using any findings for a secondary purpose rather than examining them for their own sake or to give a voice to children in the wider debates. For instance, studies have included children's opinions, primarily as a supplement to examining adult accounts and attitudes, and even in order to check parents' reports (Vargas et al, 1995). The subsidiary nature of the children's views was illustrated well by Vargas' study on parental physical

force, which did include limited findings from Chilean children [7th and 8th grade], but which failed to mention the contribution of children alongside parents in the title to the study. In the early 1990s, a research project led by Marjorie Smith included interviews with 205 children aged between 7 and 11 alongside a larger examination of parental behaviour and attitudes (Smith, M.A. & Heverin, A.L., 1995). Reflecting a research emphasis on developmental social psychology, the findings suggested that young children are more likely to suggest physical punishment as a response to various situations if they have received such acts themselves. The research did not, however, consistently explore the acceptability of physical force to young people, nor issues of importance which underlie that assessment.

Other attitudinal studies by developmental social psychologists have used children's attitudes on physical force primarily as a topic for some other psychological assessment, again necessitating measured responses to pre-determined questions rather than a qualitative exploration of the children's perceptions. For instance, Catron & Masters' study entitled 'Mothers' and children's [4-5 years and 11-12 years] conceptualisations of corporal punishment' was primarily concerned with mapping a developmental path for the children's considerations rather than exploring the considerations as valid in themselves (1993). Findings from this study stated that pre-school children offered broad acceptability for severe corporal punishment, whereas the judgements of older children (aged 11-12 years) were 'transitional' towards the greater discrimination presented by adults. However, the children's ability to express their opinions on

corporal punishment in the home was restricted to reference to a series of scales presented by the researcher.

Likewise, a 'Likert-like' scale was presented to children [9-16 year old] in the West Indies by Rohner et al. for responses to a series of statements and questions on 'physical punishment' in the home (1991). However, this information was only collected in order to judge the relationship between attitudes to physical force and 'psychological adjustment'. The study found that youths 'tend on average to agree' with a wider cultural belief in the value of corporal punishment in child care, without having a significant effect on their psychological adjustment. Similar studies have examined whether 'emotionally disturbed' children [7-12 years] were more likely to endorse 'physical punishment' than 'normal' children (Carlson, 1991). Carlson found that, although very few children recommended 'physical punishment', the tendency was greater from emotionally disturbed respondents. In addition, those who endorsed such acts were more likely to recommend aggressive problem solving more generally.

Even the little research that has addressed children's attitudes and opinions for their own sake has not attempted to explore perceptions in order to shape wider adult debates. They have not been grounded in the children's own perceptions, but dictated by pre-existing questions and concerns in these adult debates. The studies have tended not to allow children a more abstract consideration of physical force and establish issues and priorities important to them, but focus clearly on specific adult determined research questions about specific acts in specific contexts

and settings. In addition, studies have tended to match the trend in research on adults' attitudes towards highly structured data collection through closed questions. Again, they have tended to concentrate on a poll or measurement of acceptance towards certain acts rather than a qualitative exploration of reasons or argument underlying attitudes (cf. Central Union for Child Welfare, 1981 cited Sariola, 1992:27 [Finland - 15 to 16 years]; ISPCC/NSPCC/IMS, 1996 [Ireland - 8 to 15 years]). For instance, the investigation of acceptance of physical force in Ghate & Daniel's survey (1997) of 8-15 year olds growing up in the UK in the 1990s was restricted to two closed questions on perceived effectiveness and acceptability of various disciplinary methods. Only 11% of children felt that slapping or smacking was effective, that number falling to 7% amongst the older 12-15 year old category of respondents. Moreover, only 14% of children aged 12-15 considered that such acts were acceptable on a child of their own age.

In New Zealand, Ritchie & Ritchie (1980 cited Ritchie & Ritchie, 1981:28-30) restricted interaction and exploration of children's [12 and 13 years] ideas on adult use of physical force in the home to a 'pencil and paper multiple-choice form'. The majority of the sample stated that they considered that physical discipline *used by their parents* had been 'fair' but ineffective. A Swedish incidence-attitudinal survey of whether young people [13 to 15 years] were 'inclined to' parental physical force matched the adult poll it accompanied by restricting participants' participation to choosing limited and pre-defined answer categories (Sanden, 1996). The survey showed 70% of young people opposed to all 'physical punishment' of children, although only 47% rejected its necessity in some child rearing situations.

Circumstances where 'the child puts itself in danger, despite warnings' was the most accepted situation for physical punishment.

Children's definitions, arguments and explanations were not explored beyond a further series of closed supplementary questions regarding appropriate circumstances. Indeed, the tendency for researchers to pre-define terms such as 'physical punishment', 'mild' and 'moderate' in closed questions, recognised above for other research on this topic, persisted when attempting to elicit the attitudes of children. Researchers have failed to consider the children's own perceptions as alternative definitions and understanding of these terms and wider issues from a very different perspective.

Ironically, the project that has come closest to considering children's own definitions and perspectives on this topic conspicuously avoided labelling itself as research. Aware of the underlying campaigning or advocacy purpose for their study and concerned with a lack of academic methodological rigour, Willow & Hyder consistently define their recent book, 'It hurts you inside' (1998), as a 'consultation exercise'. Nevertheless, Willow & Hyder did seek the views of 76 children aged five to seven years, in group discussions, on: what a smack is; how children felt when smacked; why, when and where children are smacked; and what could stop smacking. The main findings were that 'children said': smacking was 'hitting'; smacking hurts; smacking was wrong; children respond negatively to being smacked; smacking usually occurs indoors by parents because children have been

naughty; and children do not smack adults because they are scared of retaliation. It is, however, often unclear in this consultation to what extent the children's views should be interpreted as either personalised experience or general observations; as their own opinions or assessments of adults' justifications; as intentions for their parenting or policy recommendations. In addition, it should be noted that although the study purported to give children 'the opportunity to express their views about smacking', the precise issues discussed were tightly defined by the concerns of the adult researchers and informed by the adult legal and political debates. The direct influence of these debates was most poignant when the overt campaigning role of the research prompted the researchers to ask the children, 'How can we stop children being smacked?'

Recent research on the use of force outside the home has been restricted to a small number of studies in the Caribbean, clearly limiting children's [10 to 11 years old] consideration to physical force in school. Anderson & Payne (1994) found that the large majority of children brought up in a school system where corporal punishment is permitted approved of such acts. Again, the opportunity for children to present their own perceptions of adult use of physical force was restricted to 'yes/no' answers and to indicating preferences for a list of punitive strategies pre-determined by the researcher. Like this research team's similar study with adults (Payne, 1989), the only qualitative depth to the study was provided by comments in a space for further observations and could not be explored further in any interactive sense. Comments were generally only used to support and illustrate quantitative findings rather than to provide alternative perspectives on wider issues. There

have been no significant UK based studies which have included a focus on young people's attitudes towards physical force in schools since a legal ban in state institutions. However, research carried out before legal bans tended to restrict any depth of analysis to whether and for what offences such acts were deemed appropriate (British Psychological Society, 1980:42). The responses were typically limited to a restricted list of determined misdemeanours pre-defined by the researcher. Although, Pollock et al. ([Scotland], 1977) questioned the arguments young people would use to support their views on school corporal punishment, their investigation was limited to quantifying respondents' agreement with pre-determined closed lists of adult arguments. Young people were not allowed the opportunity to explain or justify their points further and no attempt was made to ground the research in the respondents' own frameworks of concern. The researchers found that although 67% of secondary school pupils agreed with 'the belt' being used by teachers because it was needed for misbehaviour and control, and was an effective deterrent, 52% would favour a better system if available, amid concerns about injustice and misuse.

Again, the lists and categories in these acceptance studies were generally determined by the adult researchers, rather than constituting any attempt to account for or explore any alternative definitions or understanding which the children bring to the topic of adult use of physical force. Even when an attempt to present the views of children has been made, the research questions have generally been framed around the terms and concerns of adults rather the young people themselves.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has considered the existing research literature relating to issues concerned with adult use of physical force on children. The review has been characterised by the influence of wider legal and political concerns on empirical research studies. The substantive and methodological features of empirical research have been determined by the close relationship between researchers and the political debates rather than by the perspectives of those actually involved in the adult-child relationship. This relationship has been demonstrated in the dominance of psychological studies on the [negative] effects of physical force in childhood, which has been characterised by 'proving' concerns in the debate. Even studies relating the experiences and views of participants have been tightly focused on issues emanating from legal and political spheres rather than open attempts to add the different perspectives of adults and young people to the nature of this debate.

These legal and political concerns have also been reflected in a methodological as well as substantive determinism in empirical research. Studies on outcomes, prevalence and attitudes have all tended to be highly structured. Theories, hypotheses and terms used in fieldwork have been invariably determined and defined by the researcher rather than as a consideration or interpretation of the perceptions of participants. Studies have been characterised by a lack of qualitative depth, with participants restricted to limited responses to closed questions. In general, research has not tried to examine the concepts and arguments which underlie the views of participants.

Research on patterns of prevalence and on attitudes towards adult physical force on children has been dominated by fieldwork involving adults rather than young people. Even when researchers have sought accounts of experiences or attitudes of recipients towards physical force, there has been a preference towards adult recall rather than asking those still occupying the social roles of children. This research imbalance appears to exist both because of the introduction of secondary purposes for which adult data is deemed more suitable, and because of a lack of confidence in the ability of children to formulate and communicate their thoughts on relevant issues. There is a distinct absence of research literature that has attempted to elicit young people's own perspective, perceptions and arguments on adult use of physical force on children. Any research that has involved young people has tended not to be grounded in their own perceptions, but determined by concerns in the adult legal, political and research debates.

This study addresses the noted absence of research literature exploring young people's own perceptions of physical discipline on children. The next chapter reviews the approach taken during the study to elicit and interpret the data within young people's own frameworks of reference rather than according to the specific concerns of adults. The chapter describes the methodological concerns that influenced the study, and procedures adopted during fieldwork and the analysis of data.

Introduction

In their consideration of theories and research literature investigating childhood, James et al noted the necessary interrelationship between the different elements of approach to research which lead to the nature of the overall project design:

'problems, theories and methods in social science are interrelated and cannot easily be separated out'. (James et al, 1998:169)

In accordance with this observation, this chapter reviews the methodological influences, research considerations and fieldwork and analysis procedures which informed this study. The approach adopted was specifically designed to reveal the perspectives of those in the social, legal and cultural position to receive physical force. Following a broadly interpretivist methodology and in accordance with the theoretical aims of the emerging paradigm of the 'sociology of childhood', the strategy sought to ground the research in the perceptions of the young people as social actors. As such, the research aimed to elicit, explore and interpret the data within the young people's own frameworks of concerns about physical discipline rather than according to the specific concerns of adults (e.g. the researcher, politicians, professionals, parents etc.). Consequently, the main objective of the fieldwork and analysis was to tap into perceptions on physical discipline at an

abstract level rather than simply recording experiences or answers to pre-determined adult questions.

It should be noted that the methodological approach and procedures are informed to a great extent by the study, *"Seen and Heard": An examination of methods for collecting data from young people*' (Hazel, 1995). This earlier piece of research, completed as a dissertation for my M.Sc. in Applied Social Research, was designed as a methodological pilot for this present thesis. Reflecting the focus of this current project on issues at an abstract level, the pilot utilised consideration of 'right and wrong' to examine the particular problems encountered when eliciting the perceptions of young people in social research.

It is, perhaps, not surprising that the previous chapters highlighted a distinct lack of opportunities, either in social research or in the wider socio-political debates, for young people to voice their perceptions on adult use of physical force when disciplining children. Commentators have noted that the voices of the young are ignored more generally in our western culture (Lansdown, 1997:34; Williamson & Butler, 1997:63). Translated into the process of policy formulation, 'the very idea of children participating in the development of policy, in setting priorities, in determining their own futures, can cause considerable consternation' (Save the Children, 1995:26). In addition, despite substantial research interest in children, it has been recognised that this cultural avoidance of young people's perspectives has also been reflected widely in social research:

'children have been written about from many perspectives, and for a multitude of purposes. Rarely have they been asked to speak for themselves.' (Davis, 1982 cited Ball, 1985:47)

The neglect of young people's perspectives in policy formulation, social research and our wider culture should not be viewed as accidental. It is possible to cite interrelating cultural and methodological obstacles which have fostered reluctance in adults listening to children in both contexts. As a result, there has not been a universal acceptance of any necessity or value in listening to children when adults have considered policy and action in relation to their lives:

'Listening to children values the views of children, but is not achieved easily, or accepted universally.' (Cloke & Davies, 1987:xvi)

Furthermore, even when it is claimed that their views have been listened to, the 'research' questions have generally been framed around the terms and concerns of adults rather than the young people themselves (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998:341). This chapter will explore these 'obstacles' and outline the contrasting methodology and methods adopted in this study in order to reveal the perceptions of young people on this topic, grounded at an abstract level in their own frameworks of concern.

Cultural adult-centrism

A primary cultural influence on the reluctance to involve the voice of young people in research, policy or decisions in their everyday lives has been a type of 'adult-centric' belief that adults already know what is best for them. Any reference to the children themselves in consultation is deemed unnecessary. It has been argued that this assumption of knowledge on the part of adults is a left-over and 'resilient' form of 'ethnocentrism' (Butler & Williamson, 1994:35).

This adult-centrism is built upon a disregard for intergenerational cultural dynamism, typified by the view presented to children that 'we were young once, you know'. This attitude stresses the continuities between 'childhoods' over time and, indeed, contradicts the stress on differences highlighted by adult's moral panics over the morals and behaviour of 'the young people of today'. There exists an underlying belief that there is no necessity to ask children their opinions because our own personal history gives us the necessary insight into childhood:

'We have all been there, seen it and done that.' (Butler & Williamson, 1994:35)

Butler & Williamson and others have noted that this reference to our own personal history is combined with a paternalistic notion of intuitively knowing our own children both on an individual and societal level. This understanding extends to knowing what children want and need better than they know themselves:

'Because all adults have been children once, and because they are felt to understand the "real" needs of children better than the children themselves, the notion of asking children their views directly is rarely entertained and usually seen as unnecessary.' (Save the Children, 1995:18)

On a personal and professional level, then, adults have considered themselves the experts in what is best for children, negating any requirement to heed the voices of young people themselves. Recent commentators have termed this:

'professional arrogance, particularly for those professionals defined as experts in certain areas of practice, whose opinions are considered to reflect children's requirements.' (Cloke & Davies, 1997:xvii)

The legacy of developmentalism

However, the implication of a degree of incompetence in young people which is contained in a belief that 'adults know children better than they know themselves' is not an isolated concept within our culture. Such an impression owes much to the legacy of 'developmentalism', which presents the now 'common sense' view of cognitive deficiency and irrationality in children. This inherent incompetence, present to a chronologically determined degree until adulthood (Joseph, 1997:2; Save the Children, 1995:19), would produce invalid interpretations of the world and

thus negate any attempts to seek the perceptions of young people on issues affecting them.

These ideas are largely grounded in 'scientific' theoretical assumptions of the Piagetian school of developmental social psychology, which stressed egocentricity and a number of other cognitive deficiencies prior to full adult status in humans (for reviews see Pollard, 1987:96-97; Gittins, 1998:25; James et al, 1998:17). This model of childhood was centred upon a natural and linear progression through a determined series of stages of competence towards the goal of adulthood. Such determinism was informed by, and consistent with, the positivist proposition that 'the child', as homogeneously described by Piaget (Richards, 1986 cited Prout & James, 1997b:20), is an object of research in respect of which it is possible to unveil fixed truths (Mayall, 1986:43; Woodhead, 1999:8).

In a step towards their cultural integration, this social psychological model informed functionalist accounts of childhood in sociology from the 1950s (Prout & James, 1990:12). Researchers have noted the integral relationship between developmentalist theory and the central ideas of 'socialisation', as:

'interlinked concepts, indeed components of the same package. Socialisation theory justifies its model of adult-child relationship in part through reliance on the notion of developmental stages...' (Mayall, 1996:45)

Again, young people in socialisation theory are viewed as lesser adults, on a progressive route towards the same goal of mature adulthood (Mayall, 1994:2). As passive, asocial and acultural receivers of adult directed social learning and conditioning, children only 'acquire personhood' (Tonkin, 1982 cited Prout & James, 1997b:12-13) when they complete this process of 'social programming' upon reaching adulthood:

'...children are to be seen as a defective form of adult, social only in their future potential but not in their present being.' (James et al, 1998:6)

Consequently, research which looks at children's attitudes and interactions from the perspective of developmentalism or socialisation would be primarily concerned with their importance as indicators of future adult behaviour and in generating a diagnosis for remedial action (James et al, 1998:25). This offers an explanation for the preoccupation in the research reviewed in the previous chapter with physical force on children, and any consideration of their attitudes towards such force, only as a precursor to later behavioural and psychological outcomes. Their perceptions were not valued in themselves. Until adulthood, children viewed from this methodological perspective retain the essential characteristic of immature incompetence that would problematise and invalidate any attempt to ascertain their perceptions or integrate them into the socio-political sphere:

'...it is argued that children's opinions are not to be trusted because children are not really capable of forming opinions, and their views are so easily influenced by others.' (Cloe & Davies, 1997:xvii)

Consequently, not being fully 'grown up' has implications for young people in the biological, social and political senses. Within wider society, without the recognition of full competence, young people are not viewed as political citizens (Cloe & Davies, 1997:xiv). The political voice of children is replaced by the protective and oppressive control of adults, so that, 'children remain recipients of adult actions, rather than participants in decision-making.' (Cloe & Davies, 1997:xv). As a recent paper from Save the Children concluded, given this developmental model 'it is perhaps hardly surprising therefore that children have become marginalised from policy debates and have come to be seen largely as shadowy dependants of their parents' (1995:19).

Reasons for listening to children

Political reasons

Whilst developmentalism is too deeply entrenched in our society to readily locate in the 'dustbin of history' as James et al have argued (1998:9), there is no doubt that there has been a shift in both political and methodological approaches to childhood and children over the recent past. These powerful ideologies have been

challenged as both conceptually flawed and oppressive (Mayall, 1994:3). Politically, there has been a significant call for children, as members of a structurally vulnerable group, to have more of an active voice rather than the vicious circle of powerlessness that characterises their passivity from adult protection (Cloke & Davies, 1997:xv). The development of giving 'greater weight to what children say' (Harding, 1991:194) has formed one of the central elements in a push for adults to give greater human rights to children (Cloke & Davies, 1997:xvi). It can be viewed as part of wider 'children's rights and child liberation perspective' (Harding, 1991). Perhaps too disparate to be described as a consolidated movement, this general approach promotes a varying range of 'individual rights' for children, including their own voice in a micro and macro context in matters concerning them (Freeman, 1983; Morrow & Richards, 1996:91).

New impetus has been given to this shift in the state of children's views and perceptions with a number of recent legal and political innovations. In particular, the Children Act 1989 in England and Wales and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 have been cited by commentators as significant advances towards ensuring that children 'participate more actively in decisions affecting their lives' and in challenging any 'established adult and professional views, practices and prejudices' that may oppose this (Cloke & Davis, 1997:xiv). Article 12 of the UN Convention, whilst still containing the developmentalist condition of weighing views in accordance with 'the age and maturity of the child', states that:

'States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child...'
(Article 12 [1])

It has been argued that 'all matters affecting the child' should be read in a macro sense of listening to broad issues that affect their lives as children rather than just decisions that affect individuals (Lansdown, 1997:32). In addition, the Convention prompted the UK Government to establish the Children's Rights Development Centre to guide its implementation. In Scotland, children have had their right to be consulted in cases of adoption or when in care established in legislation over the past over the past 30 years (Social Work Act 1968; Children Act 1975). Nevertheless, the extension of this provision to cover numerous other proceedings and services has been described as a 'revolutionary aspect' of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (Tisdall, 1997:88).

These political moves have been reflected by various charities who have taken up the call to listen to children in their policies and campaigns (Ross, 1996:91; cf. NSPCC position in Forward to Butler & Williamson, 1994). In addition, recent court cases in the United Kingdom have emphasised the child's right to have their beliefs and views taken seriously. In particular, the Lord Denning judgement, again subject to developmentalist concerns, focused on 'the child's right to make his own decisions when he reached a sufficient understanding and intelligence to be capable of making up his own mind.' (Gillick v West Norfolk and Wisbech AHA, 1986:112 cited Newell, 1989:101).

Theoretical reasons

These 'revolutionary' shifts towards the involvement of the voices of young people in political matters which affect them have been matched by methodological and theoretical innovations in the research community:

'The research enterprise on children and childhood over the last 25 years has included some striking challenges to received wisdom within both psychology and sociology.' (Mayall, 1996:42)

The challenges to which Mayall refers stem largely from recent social psychological research which has contested Piagetian developmentalist work. These studies have suggested that children demonstrate cognitive capabilities from a young age and show remarkable competence in understanding and communicating their views (La Greca, 1990:4; Siegal, 1991 cited Alderson, 1994:57). Indeed, they assert that the reported failings of children are more to do with Piaget and his followers being unable to appreciate the child's position and viewpoint as subjects in their experiments, ironic given his theories on the child's egocentrism (Alderson, 1994:58). Essentially, developmental research in this tradition has failed to appreciate the social perspectives of children, missing the point that children have 'considerable social understanding...in social situations which are meaningful to them' (Pollard, 1987:97).

Simultaneously, social theory has witnessed a 'radical opposition' (James et al, 1998:173) to the passivity of children central to concepts of socialisation. Although James et al collectively term this new model as 'The Sociological Child' (1998), this is something of a misnomer. The biologically determined homogenous 'child' is replaced with the heterogeneity of various social constructions of childhood. The concept of a fixed biological or social progression through childhood to competency in adulthood is rejected (cf. Woodhead, 1999). Within a 'new paradigm' of the Sociology of Childhood (James & Prout, 1990 & 1997), children are considered competent social actors in the present rather than 'beings in the process of becoming such' (James & Prout, 1997:ix).

As social actors, children are shaping as well as being shaped by their interactions, circumstances and surroundings and are considered valid interpreters of each of these. Observed differences between age groups are not as a result of levels of chronologically pre-determined incompetence. There is no 'shortfall of competence, reason or significance' (James et al, 1998:207) attached to any natural biological process that would exclude children's voices from research. Instead, these differences reflect both life experiences and expectations of adults and children of differing ages according to their relative cultural roles and positions. In turn, these expectations may be influenced by the cultural legacy of developmentalist ideology noted above. The perceived role of children as social actors in society, and their position in research, following this methodological shift is well summarised by Mayall:

'as interactive agents who engage with people, institutions, ideologies to forge a place for themselves in social worlds, and who, by demonstrating interactive skills, propose themselves as worthy of inclusion [in research studies] both as individuals and as a social group alongside adult individuals and groups.' (1994:7)

In the most comprehensive review to date, James, Jenks and Prout (1998) identify four methodological approaches to children within research studies that adhere to this view of children as social actors. In summary, '*the social structural child*' is a competent social actor with universal characteristics related to the institutional nature of societies (rather than to biological determinism); '*the socially constructed child*' stresses the differences in the view of children across societies, based on the varying nature of culturally defined discourses (rather than upon biological determinism); '*the minority group child*' is defined by the powerlessness of children's social roles relative to adults in an adult controlled society (social position determined by power relations rather than biological determinism); and '*the tribal child*' stresses their differences from adults as characteristics of autonomous views and cultures (rather than of biologically determined incompetence).

This current research study is positioned methodologically within this broad 'new paradigm'. In accordance with James et al's intention not to create a 'separatist typology' (1998:206), the project does not fall neatly into any one of the four cited approaches. For the purposes of this analysis, the methodological approach to this study can be seen as most closely aligned to defining elements of 'the tribal child' and 'the minority group child'. Both lay particular stress on the importance of the

child's own view and giving voice to their own perspectives in research (James et al, 1998:185). Children are given an active role as participants in data collection, their voices valued as competent and useful:

'Children are not understood as 'cultural dopes'; theorists [and I as a researcher] do not begin from the premise that they have only a misguided, mythological, superficial or irrational understanding of the rules of social life.' (James et al, 1998:29)

In line with 'the tribal child', this study is approached on the assumption that a young person's view comes from a different cultural perspective to that of an adult. Researchers have emphasised differences from adulthood, and the subsequent interest for the researcher, not as a developmental deficiency, but almost in an anthropological sense as an 'independent and authentic *culture of childhood*' (emphasis in original; Ball, 1985:47). However, I do not agree with the polar extreme of a completely separate culture, or cultures, for children suggested by the ideal of 'tribal child' methodology. These separate 'social worlds' (James et al, 1998:28) or cultures do not account for the relationship and dealings between adults and children that is part of the children's social experience (Mayall, 1986:161). The experience of children is not as independent from adults as Ball's above quotation implies. Children do not live in the 'Lord of the Flies' isolation that the term 'the tribal child' suggests, but interrelate with adults; a point noted by James & Prout (1997:xiii-xiv) and recognised by the 'minority group child' approach. Methodological adherence to 'tribal' separation would be particularly inappropriate

for this study, which focuses on young people's perceptions of the adult-child relationship. Such contradictions were evident in Butler & Williamson's 1994 study that was substantively concerned with children's perspectives on relations with social workers and others in the adult-determined professional world, yet methodologically described their need to enter the children's 'social world' (1994:36). Reflecting elements of both these methodological approaches, it is necessary to acknowledge that whilst our concern with children's interactions with adults means that they do not exist in a separate social world, the researcher must be aware of a level of cultural unfamiliarity with the young people:

'...it is crucial to consider...the culture of childhood situated within, rather than outside, the world of adults.' (James & Prout, 1997c:244)

'Researchers have pointed to the need to study children not as a strange tribe but as a social group with interests in the larger society they belong to.' (Mayall, 1996:60)

Indeed, it is this relationship, or a manifestation of it that should be recognised as the substantive focus of this project. The project is concerned with the perspectives of young people with certain shared roles on their relationships with the adult controlled world in which they interact. In common with the minority group child approach (James et al, 1998:184), substantively less emphasis is placed on social

lives with other children, and more on collecting their perspectives on a shared activity between children and adults. In common with other studies from this approach (cf. Bluebond-Langner, 1978 cited James et al, 1998:184), this research looks at situations in which children are apparently subject to adult action without being party to any decision about its appropriateness.

It is useful to relate back to 'subculture theory', popular in the past for describing the varying levels of separation between groups of youths and adults in society (James et al, 1998:215-216). The degree of separateness is informed by shared social experiences and shared social role, different from adults but in the same world. Structural influence on this separateness is stressed rather more than 'the tribal child' approach as these shared social roles and experiences are defined, in part, by their 'minority' status as children in relation to adults. However, I would pull back from the opposite extremity identified with the ideal 'minority group child' approach; that children's differences from adults identifies them as a timeless homogenous group, ignoring internal diversity (James et al, 1998:31):

'...it is necessary to recognize intra-structural divisions and relations within the context of inter-structural analysis.' (Scruton, 1997:20)

This concept of shared roles and experiences would take account of such intra-structural differences. It would allow us to think, for instance, of similarly aged children as having some commonality in roles and relationships with others. Although any commonality is not based on a shared level of cognitive development

per se, children may well share expectations of age related competence from adults (partly because of the legacy of developmentalism):

'Such heterogeneous sub-cultures would consist of members with shared responses and roles, adopted in order to deal with the changing expectations of adults and other children to their behaviour and communication.' (Hazel, 1995:4)

It should be noted that I do not associate this project with the politicised nature of 'Critical' research suggested by 'the minority group child'. There is no moral agenda in my substantive focus on the disciplinary relationship to uncover victimisation which 'deprives some people of freedom in order to give it to others' (Oakley, 1994 cited James et al, 1998:31). This piece of research does not set out to change opinions of physical force because it is thought as part of the structurally discriminatory society. Literature already exists that sets out such arguments very clearly (cf. Newell, 1989; Ritchie & Ritchie, 1981). The study is not a piece of 'advocacy research' for previously established adult socio-political positions, as noted of studies in the review of literature on physical force. I would, however, welcome the consideration and influence within this socio-political debate of what the young people themselves have voiced in this study. It is, perhaps, this latter point which reveals the extent of my political impetus for this study. It is political in that, in common with much recent childhood research, it has a dominant interest to hear the voice of the child on activities that intimately concern them but which are, at least in appearance, determined and sanctioned by an adult controlled society. My aim is not to explore my personal views on adults' use of physical force on

children, but to uncover the perceptions of those who occupy the social and cultural position open to such physical force. This research, with its focus on the uncovering the understanding, definitions and communications of young people themselves can be summed up as broadly appropriate to the 'interpretivist' movement. As Prout & James note, this interest in seeking the perspectives of children follows the more established interpretivist tradition of providing the opportunity to hear from low status groups in social settings (1997b:15). My position in relation to this project and the young people involved perhaps best relates to two summaries by Mayall. In relation to methodological stance:

'The standpoint here is to conceptualize children as agents, with specific angles, as a social group, on the institutions and adult groups they interact with.' (Mayall, 1996:2)

Consequently, in relation to implications for social policy:

'Research can usefully show the wide range of children's varying needs, and ways in which adult-defined 'best interests' complement or conflict with children's views of their own rights and needs.' (Mayall, 1994:49).

Indeed, it has been recognised that young people can, when given the opportunity, offer significant insight and participate meaningfully in debates on important issues that concern them (Mayall, 1986:161-162; Save the Children, 1995:26; Thomas & O'Kane, 1998:345). This has been recognised with far greater speed in other

fields. Some commentators have noted that market researchers already harness this insight for use in the commercial sector as an accepted and valued part of product research (Cloke & Davis, 1997:xvii; Save the Children, 1995:18). Likewise, this study does not treat young people as objects of developmental interest or curiosities in an anthropological freak show, but as social actors with sophisticated perspectives (Butler & Williamson, 1994:35), that, if allowed to be heard, can offer a real contribution to social policies in the world around them:

'Thus, we can and should take account of children not in some superficial sense as actors, but...as moral interpreters of the worlds they engage with, capable of participating in shared decisions on important topics...' (Mayall, 1994:8).

It should also be noted that positioning of this study methodologically within the new Sociology of Childhood does not imply an attempt to address all of the theoretical foci of this paradigm. For instance, the study's specific concern is with young people's perceptions per se (see pages 30-31) and, consequently, it does not engage the paradigm's broader interest in charting children's own involvement in the process of social construction by which these ideas (and conceptions of childhood more widely) are negotiated and crystallised.

The generation gap and abstract ideas

It is necessary to realise that the different perspectives offered by young people constitute a double edged sword for social researchers. Whilst this 'cultural' difference between generations justifies our need to seek the perceptions of young people, it also creates significant problems in addition to the involvement of adult participants. The researcher cannot assume a commonality or shared understanding across the cultural divide, or 'generation gap'. As such, the researcher needs to adopt a position of relative cultural 'strangeness' to the degree that we should be wary of our taken-for-granted adult assumptions and understandings (Williamson & Butler, 1997:62). These cultural differences mean that researchers have to be aware of language, values and concepts of a different, though not deficient, cultural position:

'The researcher is not necessarily any more an expert on children than he or she might be on nuclear physicists and should not behave or expect to be treated as such.' (Butler & Williamson, 1994:36)

In reality, however, the situation is even more complex than this quotation may suggest. The problem is that, unlike someone with aspirations to be a nuclear physicist, adult researchers have already been children. Consequently, they are even more likely to fall into the (adult-centric) trap of thinking that they know children, their views and how to communicate with them. Researchers must make every effort to ensure that they are listening to young people on their own different

'cultural turf' (Butler & Williamson, 1994:34). For instance, researchers need to be aware that terms they use may be more culture-specific to adults and that, conversely, meanings behind terms young people use may be less familiar to the researcher than face value may suggest. This would seem particularly important in an area of discussion like physical force and corporal punishment where it is acknowledged by psychologists investigating this field that there are no clear definitions and language is ambiguous, even amongst adult groups (Straus, 1996b:58-60). Twenty-five years ago, Newson & Newson warned of potential misunderstandings and confused findings because of ambiguities in parental definitions of physical force (1963:197).

Again, children's terms and language should not be interpreted as underdeveloped adult language. This belief would severely underestimate the sophistication in the children's use of terms, observable in playground chat, even if this underestimation does present the opportunity of a cheap pun:

'If they want to be understood by children, adults need to express themselves simply and clearly and to use concepts which are familiar to their listeners. In other words adults need to get down to the child's level and in many instances that may mean quite literally getting down on your hands and knees...' (Cloke, 1997:269)

In addition to the need to 'bracket' my assumptions in consideration of differences in language and patterns of conversations, it was necessary to ensure that my previous knowledge of the dominant adult debates on aspects of physical discipline

did not prevent me from hearing the young person's perspective. The perceptions from young people would have to be viewed as a separate and valid interpretation of the phenomenon of adult use of physical force against children rather than as a variation or comment on issues pre-determined by the adult debates. The research would add new perspectives with frameworks of concern to the existing debates rather than be tailored by the questions and concerns in those debates.

Moreover, in order to elicit, explore and interpret data within the young people's own frameworks of concerns it was necessary to tap into perceptions at an abstract level. As such, the research methods were not designed to elicit details of the young people's experiences or their attitudes towards those specific experiences per se. This research attempted to move one stage further than listening to the voices of children as 'competent reporters of their experience' (Mayall, 1996:12). This interest is, of course, in direct challenge to the Piagetian idea that full capacity to think and communicate hypothetically and in abstract terms only comes with adulthood (Gittins, 1998:25). In addition, this research attempts to dig conceptually deeper than the shallow level of adult determined opinion polls by examining the abstract arguments and concepts underlying surface views. This will counter claims that the opinions from young people are invalid because they are two-dimensional, directly influenced by others, repetition of what they have heard or just trying to please the interviewer (Mayall, 1994:11).

Overall research method and approach

This chapter continues with a review of the procedural considerations and decisions adopted in order to tap into the young people's perceptions at an abstract level. It is important to consider the procedures that sought to bridge the above generation gap and gain insight into young people's perceptions, interpretations and constructions within their own frameworks of concerns. It is clear that achieving such a task is not simply a matter of adjusting methods and procedures used in social research with adults 'down to size' (Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 1994:76). In addition to the fieldwork problems faced with adults, the social researcher encounters additional layers of legal, ethical and practical considerations and constraints when involving young people as participants (Stanley & Sieber, 1992a:1). Following an outline of the overall method of data collection and demographic characteristics of the respondents, the chapter proceeds to review the active negotiation between these considerations and constraints and the need to elicit effective data that characterised the fieldwork. The chapter notes that following a process of seeking access, consent and assent from various interested parties, the data collection procedures aimed to produce the clearest flow of data whilst limiting any risk to participants. These procedures during the conduct of fieldwork are considered in three main categories:

- The research relationships - including the image of the researcher, the experience for the researched, confidentiality, and the relationships between the researched;

- The arrangement of the field - including location;
- Eliciting data in interviews - featuring the stimuli used for discussion.

Researchers have warned that adopting a particular methodological position, such as my interpretive attempt to uncover young people's perceptions, should not dictate narrowly the research methods to be employed in a project (Finch, 1986:9-10). Ideally, it has been argued, both the overall methodological perspective and the empirical research question should inform which method we select from our 'toolbox' (Bryman, 1984:107). Nevertheless, it is clear that some research methods are more suitable than others when seeking answers to questions through particular epistemological approaches. It is no coincidence that, historically, qualitative research methods have been closely associated with interpretivist methodology, or that some commentators have even treated the terms 'phenomenological' and 'qualitative' as synonymous in relation to methods of data collection (cf. Bell & Newby, 1977).

It would seem appropriate for a project which seeks direction and determination from the children's own voices to look towards methods of data collection that will provide enough scope and flexibility to allow those voices to be heard. Such flexibility would be less likely using pre-coded quantitative methods, such as closed questionnaires. In order to allow correlatory analysis, such quantitative methods tend to be highly standardised and tightly structured around pre-conceived

concerns oriented and determined by the researcher rather than the participants (Bryman, 1984:78). Participant input would be literally on the adult researcher's 'terms', with no attempt to find the child's cultural turf. In contrast, qualitative methods would provide more of an open opportunity for the participants to present their own definitions and agenda of relevant issues from their own cultural perspective, less pre-empted and restricted by the prescriptive power of the adult researcher. By allowing the freedom to express their own perspectives in their own self-determined words, qualitative methods would both allow young people a more direct voice in data collection (Prout & James, 1997b:8) and allow the researcher more of an insight into their different cultural concerns and social constructions (Butler & Williamson, 1994:36).

The advantages and disadvantages of using the various qualitative methods to access the perspectives of young people on relatively abstract topics have been examined elsewhere (Hazel, 1995). In summary, focused interviews and focus groups were found to be the most appropriate methods for such an interpretive exercise. Interviews have been described as 'critical' for obtaining information and obtaining a working rapport with children (La Greca, 1990:4). Indeed, it is clear that interviews have been adopted as central to seeking views or accounts from children in far wider spheres than the confines of social research (Breakwell, 1990:90). These particular methods are flexible enough to permit and accommodate the cultural differences between the adult researcher and young participants. In the same way, they are able to cope with the dynamic nature of these cultures, their differences and their changing terms of reference (Butler & Williamson, 1994:37). A

tightly structured questionnaire within these sessions would be clearly inappropriate to respond to the ideas and considerations of the young people. As such, the framework for inquiry in the fieldwork sessions broadly covered the overall topic, with stimuli from the researcher intended to allow, but not compel, exploration of some areas and contexts which the topic suggested.

The fieldwork for this project utilised both focused interviews and focus groups. Carers were only interviewed individually or in pairs whilst the perspectives of young people were sought using interviews with one, two or three participants and focus groups. Although many of the interviews contained more than one participant, they are distinguished from focus groups (for the purposes of this review) according to the degree of interaction between the participants. In accordance with established definitions (Gibbs, 1997:1), the interviews were mainly an interaction between each participant and the researcher, whilst the focus groups saw the participants urged to primarily discuss matters amongst themselves with my limited involvement. Although there was no attempt to deliberately determine the gender make-up of each focus group, no single gender group sessions occurred.

Subjects

The study involved young participants from nine secondary schools spread across four local authority areas in the Forth-Clyde valley region of Scotland. The study

did not attempt to contain a statistically representative sample. The sample was not a probability sample and no attempt was made to find the 'statistically average' young person or Scottish schoolchild with 'statistically average' perceptions. The schools were selected on the bases of covering a range of diverse geographical areas, but within relatively easy reach of my fieldwork base by car. The schools involved served both semi-rural and more urban districts and attracted pupils of a wide 'educational ability' within the comprehensive system. Politically, the schools' locales were represented by Members of Parliament from more than one Party. None of the schools aligned to any particular religious denomination, other than that required by law (Education [Scotland] Act, 1980).

In total, 227 young participants were involved in the study. Of these, 73 were involved in interviews of up to three people each and 154 took part in 15 focus groups. Focus groups involved from 6 to 14 participants, with the majority of groups featuring between 8 and 12 young people (see Appendix 1). In addition, carers of 17 of these participants (25 carers in total) were interviewed singly or in pairs (as arranged).

The fieldwork was conducted over a five month period from December 1996 to April 1997, with the sessions involving young participants held in the two months either side of the Christmas holidays. Adult participants were interviewed in March and April after all the sessions with young people were completed. Sessions with carers took place in their own homes, whilst sessions with young people occurred in set locations in schools (see Arrangement of Field below). The length of sessions

varied to some extent according to the flow of data achieved and arrangements made during negotiations for access to the school and pupils within. Although one school restricted interviews with individual young participants to 10 minutes, sessions both with young people and adults usually lasted between 20 and 30 minutes.

Sessions with young people involved participants from two different age categories in almost equal numbers: 11-12 years and 14-16 years. These ages were not chosen for developmental reasons because of chronological estimations of competency (James et al, 1998:174). They were chosen, after careful consideration, for a variety of reasons. First, for convenience of access negotiations, both age groups are found in the same secondary schools. Second, the secondary schools which cater for these ages are taken from a wider catchment area than would primary schools with younger children. As such, sessions with these participants present a better opportunity to cover a range of social, economic, geographic and political backgrounds. This younger age group was the same age as participants involved in my previous studies exploring how to bridge the cultural generation gap in fieldwork. In addition, evidence suggests that at this age physical force is still a regular feature [at least once a month] of 40% of parents-child disciplinary relationships (Newson & Newson, 1989). Although there is also some evidence that physical force is still used in some disciplinary relationships with the older age group (Graziano & Namaste, 1990 [US]; Ritchie & Ritchie, 1981 [New Zealand]; Riley & Shaw, 1985 [UK] cited Creighton & Russell, 1995:13), these participants were chosen primarily because they are on the cusp of legal and social

change in their relationships with adults. They are at a transition point in these relations in terms of control and responsibility. As such, the project does not involve these two ages in discussions on physical force in order to compare developmental abilities (cf. Catron & Masters, 1993), but to reflect slightly different social roles or 'social structural space' (James et al, 1998:178) and resultant perspectives. Although not determined in the research design, according to contact teachers none of the young participants had children themselves.

Although there was a fairly even spread of males and females amongst the young participants, gender was not a sampling variable. Any apparent gender differences were noted during analysis. In contrast, interviews with carers reflected a gender imbalance towards females in those who agreed to take part in the study. This may be indicative of a division in child care and disciplinary roles in relation to children of these ages. There was also no statistical measurement for class, although schools involved had catchment areas covering geographical areas of affluence and relative poverty. Studies are unclear as to the difference class makes in attitudes towards, and experience of, physical force on children. Creighton & Russell reported no clear class differences in adults' experience of receiving physical force (1995), but results from the Newson & Newson studies have been more variable (1963, 1968, 1989).

Children were not questioned about their race or ethnicity and no children referred to cultural differences per se or religious beliefs. However, it should be noted that Newson & Newson (1989:2) have referred to Asian and Afro-Caribbean children in

the UK being smacked significantly less than 'indigenous children', which may indicate some influence of ethnicity on perceptions of physical force.

Power and risks in the research relationship

Integral to the fieldwork design of this study were considerations of power and risk in the research relationship. In short, although similar issues of power exist with research involving adults (Oakley, 1994:26) and needed to be considered for interviews with carers, their pertinence is intensified with an exaggerated power differential between the adult researcher and young participants (Morrow & Richards, 1996). Consideration was necessarily given to the potential problems and repercussions in terms of production of data and risk to young people resulting from this power differential.

In accordance with wider ideas about developmentalism in research and wider society, discussion of power differences in the research relationship have tended to concentrate on children's lack of competence. Children's power in the research relationship is restricted if they do not have the cognitive ability to make or communicate decisions about participation in the research (Thompson, 1992:38-39; Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 1994:53). Given the methodological position of this research it is clear that I would contest the idea of a power imbalance based on psychological incompetence as culturally misinformed and scientifically flawed. Instead, I would support the view that a power imbalance is more likely to result

from a combination of a child's tendency towards physical disadvantage, situational inexperience and structural vulnerability (Mayall, 1994:34-35). My physical power advantage was clearly more apparent when conducting fieldwork with young people than with sessions carried out with carers. As a relatively fit male researcher in my mid-twenties it would have been very clear to the young people during this project that I could have called upon a significant size and (apparent) strength differential to force home a physical power advantage. Forcing such an advantage with the carers would quite obviously have been significantly less feasible.

It was also likely that both I and the other adults engaged as participants in the fieldwork would have had rather more experience in research relationships than any of the young people. Although participants were not questioned about such experience, I would suggest that the widespread existence of opinion polls, market research and social surveys in our culture would produce a certain level of experiential familiarity amongst adults of the procedures, rights and mutual expectations in research studies. However, the general limitation of these projects to the adult population (partly due to the methodological and procedural concerns outlined in this chapter) would restrict all experience of similar social situations amongst the young participants and leave them particularly vulnerable to manipulation by the researcher.

Particularly influential on any power imbalance between the adult researcher and young participant would be their wider structural vulnerability within our culture. In general, such a vulnerability would be informed by the restricted position occupied

by young people in the socio-political hierarchy. Of course, it may be that this hierarchical position is, itself, partly determined by a cultural acceptance of children's relative inabilities presented by commentators above. Social rights corresponding to this position are typically limited by those above in this age-influenced hierarchy and controlled by adult dominated familial and extra-familial organisations (Thompson, 1992:39). In association, young people's legal rights are restricted by their adult-defined status as 'minors' or 'children' (Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 1994:53). As such, young people begin their relationship with an adult researcher from a position of relative social and legal powerlessness, structurally informed by generalised adult authority:

'they are institutionalised into accepting the authority of others, which makes them vulnerable to the manipulatory power of adult researchers.' (Hazel, 1995:17)

The presence of this increased power differential when conducting research with young people and the corresponding manipulatory capabilities of the researcher suggests a necessary degree of concern with the 'risks' facing young participants. Discussions of risk to research participants have in the past, however, been largely concentrated in the biological, and particularly medical, sciences. Despite some recognition that the concept of risk in research can stretch beyond the physical to include psychological and social risk (Macklin, 1992:93), social research has been slow to address such issues. Concerns surrounding risk have only begun to command attention in the last 30 years, and have been largely restricted to the clichéd debate over the simplified polarisation of 'covert' and 'overt' methods

(Burgess, 1985:139). Any particularity surrounding increased risks to young people from this emphasised power imbalance has, until recently⁹, been virtually invisible in such discussions. Butler and Williamson noted recently that the Code of Ethics of the British Sociological Association, evolved since the late 1960s, makes no explicit mention of children (1994:42), despite the particular concerns which their research involvement might invoke.

It is unclear how far there has been a deliberate policy on the part of researchers to hide from questions of risk to children, or even avoid research involving children altogether, rather than consider problems and potential solutions. Certainly, the increased 'ethical' problems encountered when researching with children has been given as a main reason why studies on attitudes to physical force have employed college students rather than younger people (Graziano & Namaste, 1990:453). There is no set formula or quasi-economic 'cost-benefit analysis' to calculate the risk of each research project (Reynolds, 1979:47), including this study, to each young participant. First, there is no clear definition of what constitutes a risk to a child, or 'risk-inviting' behaviour. I have argued elsewhere (Hazel, 1995:18) that United States Governmental advice that children being researched should face no greater risks than encountered in everyday life is ambiguous and leaves children open to abuse. Second, even if a way of categorising risk inviting behaviour was possible it would be impossible to calculate or measure in advance possible effects like embarrassment or boredom or confusion (Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 1994:51).

⁹ Recent exceptions are a set of guidelines on ethics for social researchers working with children in a booklet prepared for the charity Barnardo's (Alderson, 1995), and a 1996 special edition of *Children & Society* (vol. 10, no. 2).

My conclusion from the methodological study (Hazel, 1995) that informed and influenced the procedures for this project, was that the researcher can only limit risks to young participants through a combination of factors. First, it was necessary to approach each participant with renewed caution, aware that the sensitivity of the substantive topic and the fieldwork experience would vary amongst the young people involved. Second, the potentially negative effects of any power differential could be reduced both by accepting the requirement for a complex web of protective measures involving adults before fieldwork participation, and by adopting certain procedures during fieldwork sessions themselves.

Access to the sample

Negotiations with gatekeepers

The first layer of resistance for young people against risks in the research relationship was provided by the adult 'gatekeepers'. Each research situation involving young people introduces a different combination of adults legally responsible for children, forming a network of protection. Conversely, each 'gatekeeper' within this network is a potential source of frustration for the researcher wishing to access a sample of young people (Cloke & Davies, 1997:xvii).

The participants in this study were accessed through schools. This path of access has sometimes been portrayed as attractively convenient for social researchers, summarised by James et al:

'They house a ready-made and easily accessible population with whom a range of techniques can be deftly employed.' (James et al, 1998:176)

I would concur that the institutionalised structure of their school lives presents children as collective and relatively captive research populations for long periods (Rae & Fournier, 1986 cited Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 1994:48). However, to describe such populations as 'easily accessible' fails to acknowledge the power of the official gatekeepers who exert control over these institutions and others with substantial protective influence over young people within. It fails to mention the complex and delicate procedures undertaken in order to negotiate and secure the co-operation of these gatekeepers. It is important to realise that it is necessary to negotiate with a string of people, rather than just one key decision maker (Delamont, 1992:79), each charged with a degree of responsibility for the protection of potential participants in the school setting. The negotiations for this study required seeking a 'hierarchy of consent' (Dingwall, 1981 cited Hargreaves, 1987:21) in both local authorities and schools before reaching carers and then the young people. Each level of the hierarchy required a different approach and new set of diplomatic relations before I could pass on to the next.

Despite previous associations with some of the schools during my pilot for this project, I decided that it would be inappropriate to try and pre-empt or bypass local authorities by applying to these established contacts directly. In addition to my concern that councils discovering such attempts to circumvent their authority might be less enthusiastic about the research, past experience has taught me that the lack of disposable time for school staff means that contacts are less than willing to hold even informal discussions with researchers if council access has yet to be definitely secured. As such, I adopted a 'top down' approach towards the overall process of access negotiation, first applying in writing to the 'Director of Education' (or equivalent) of four local authorities for permission to contact the headteachers of secondary schools in their geographical area.

In the letters, I specifically named a number of preferred schools in each area in case the local authority officials wanted to confer with headteachers on the feasibility of access. I also tried to limit the necessity for officials to seek further clarification on procedural issues by assuring that the research was designed to cause minimum disruption and that I would arrange details with each school according to individual requirements. As with every stage of the process seeking access and consent, I gave a rough area that fieldwork sessions were likely to cover, depending upon determination by the participants themselves. To allay fears of intrusion, I made it clear that participants would not be questioned on their personal experiences. I also stressed that all participants would be recorded anonymously and research data would be treated confidentially. Despite general concern over school security since the shooting tragedy in local Dunblane just prior

to seeking permission from local authorities, there were significantly less difficulties at this stage of the access negotiations than for the methodological pilot the previous year. My impression is that I suffered peculiar difficulties during this previous study because of impending local government reorganisation.

The majority of time for access negotiations for this project was taken on making contact and fieldwork arrangements with each of the individual schools. From the 21 schools cleared for approach by local authorities, I initially wrote to 10 schools (keeping the other 11 in reserve) asking for a meeting to discuss the possible involvement of pupils from their school. I heard back from three schools, receiving two offers of meetings and one rejection. Follow-up phone calls received one more rejection, but established positive contact with the remaining six schools. In common with the experience of other researchers (Butler & Williamson, 1994:44), the two schools that rejected my application for a meeting (both from the same local authority) cited internal commitments. They were replaced with two other schools from the same area, taken from my reserve list. One of these two reserve schools reacted positively to my application, whilst the other failed to respond to a number of follow-up phone calls and was dropped from my fieldwork plans. The frustration at such a lack of response has been well recorded by Butler & Williamson (1994:31). The speed with which details were negotiated and confirmed with each of the remaining nine schools varied greatly. This process was certainly quicker in schools where I had carried out research in the past. If my previous contact still worked in these schools, access was negotiated swiftly over the telephone with no requirement for face to face meetings or materials to be sent for clarification.

Requests for clarification about what would be asked in the fieldwork sessions did present me with something of a dilemma. Although I wanted to allay any fears of asking offensive or intrusive questions, providing too much detail was difficult in a project where discussions would be broadly focused rather than structured (Butler & Williamson, 1994:28). I provided a list of possible topics which the young people might address, based on issues raised in the adult debates, whilst also explaining that the discussions would be largely directed by the interests of the individual participants.

It was found to be essential in meetings to stress my empathy with pressures on the school's time and my willingness to be flexible about when and how much fieldwork would take place. As documented by Butler & Williamson, it was important to show that I did not expect them to make arrangements solely at my convenience:

'the fact that we understood the context of their work, that their workplaces were not a laboratory for us to conduct our 'research', put them at ease.' (1994:39)

In some of the schools I was required to negotiate with both an initial contact member of the management team and a form or subject teacher in whose class time the fieldwork was proposed to take place. Each has the power to decide that the project posed too great a risk of disruption to either the participants or the rest of their school peers. The methodological pilot to this project made the accurate

prediction that some individual teachers would be less happy about letting students from their classes than the management contact (Hazel, 1995:25). As such, contacts would sometimes deliberately choose to request the assistance of subject teachers with a history of acting favourably towards research. In practice, my offer of flexibility meant fitting fieldwork sessions around school exams, school holidays, school trips etc. Additionally, the research design could accommodate any requirement by a school to restrict its involvement to just one of the two age categories, or to either group or individual sessions.

The methodological pilot for this study had taught that the negotiating process could require a substantial amount of time (Hazel, 1995:22). Even given the existing associations made during the pilot, the negotiations to involve the young people in nine schools for this study took nine months, from March to December 1996. The time period was not helped by the interruption of the school summer holidays when staff tended to be less available. Negotiations with institutions both in the pilot and this study fulfilled Butler & Williamson's warning that 'one must anticipate substantial difficulties in securing access to groups or to individual children' (1994:44). It should be noted, however, that these time delays rarely predicted the eventual level of support from a particular institution.

Participation permission and assent

Once access to a body of pupils was secured in each school through this long process of institutional negotiations, it was necessary to broach the next layer of

adult protection in the form of 'parental permission'. The extent to which it is legally necessary to obtain such parental consent is unclear. The Denning court judgement (*Gillick v West Norfolk and Wisbech AHA*, 1986:AC112) may suggest that young people who have 'reached a sufficient understanding and intelligence' should be allowed to make an independent choice on such matters. However, I would have been uncomfortable proceeding without protection of a carer's agreement in case of complaints over fieldwork. I also doubt whether institutional access would have been granted without a commitment to expressed permission from carers. Only in participants over the age of 16, and only after the schools involved indicated that it was in line with their own procedures, was the need for parental permission sometimes waived.

It was not my intention, however, to exclude younger people from the process of participation in decision making altogether. To adopt a procedure of overall parental 'consent' for the child's involvement may have resulted in children actually participating against their own wishes. This infringement on the child's right to a voice in matters which affect them would have been incompatible with the wider methodological commitments of this study. As such, I adopted the increasingly popular parallel procedure of 'permission and assent' (Tymchuk, 1992:128) for which an initial permission for involvement from the parent is followed by the condition of affirmative agreement from the young person. In effect, either the child or the parent has the ability to negate participation.

In contrast to the lengthy interactive process of negotiation with the local authority and school contacts, the act of seeking permission from carers was limited to a single letter requiring the adult's signature on a tear-off strip (see Appendix 2). In order to show carers that I had the support and confidence of the schools in my research, I asked my contact teachers to either add their signature to my letter or provide an separate covering letter. In common with the pilot for this study all schools complied with varying preference. The permission slip also provided the opportunity for carers to indicate if they would be willing to personally take part in a follow-up interview.

Consent forms were given out to classes of students by teachers and the children asked to return them to the teacher as soon as possible with the parent indicating whether they 'do' or 'do not' give their permission for the child to take part in the research. This method of distribution was considered more convenient than sending letters through the post, although it did mean losing some control over procedures to the school. On one occasion fieldwork was severely delayed because the teacher only realised that he had forgotten to hand out permission letters as I arrived at the school to collect in returned slips. It also made it virtually impossible to make any sort of judgement about positive response rates. It was clear, however, from the large numbers of replies that the proposed fieldwork was received very well. Some previous research studies have construed a failure to return a permission slip as tacit parental permission for the child's participation (Butler & Williamson, 1997:74). Again, for my own protection in case of complaint, I only considered the participation of individual young people if the slip had been

completed affirmatively and returned to the school. Such an 'opt-in' approach also carries the advantage that a young person who feels unhappy actually voicing a reluctance to participate can simply and anonymously 'lose' the letter or slip between the school and home.

'Assent' from each young person was secured immediately prior to the beginning of each fieldwork session. Participants were also informed that they could end their involvement at any time and for any reason, from feeling uncomfortable to boredom. As with other elements of the fieldwork, I was careful during the application for assent to avoid terms which I believed may be unfamiliar to the children. I was aware, however, of various social pressures on children to agree to participate (Weithorn & Scherer, 1994:161; Thompson, 1992:59). For instance, given the lack of control over decision making that young people commonly carry, particularly in a large educational institution, potential participants may not accept they have a real choice in this context. Students used to conformity in schools may feel under pressure to participate following agreement by teachers and parents, possibly through fear of sanction (James et al, 1998:187). This pressure was increased by teachers warning pupils to be helpful and co-operative towards me. In addition, the methodological pilot for this study indicated that students may be reluctant to decline participation and return to class in case the teacher thought they were sent back because of misbehaviour. I tried to counter these pressures by presenting the research as just one choice from a wider agenda approved by teachers and parents. As such, the children may alternatively and positively choose to 'get on with their classwork'. I tried to depersonalise that choice by

reassuring them that, although I wanted to hear what they had to say, I did not mind if they had other things to do. In group situations I tried to avoid any peer impression that a refusal would show cowardice by offering it in terms of a positive 'taking up your right to refuse'. It is not clear how effective my efforts to allow free choice proved. Only one young person took up her right not to participate from the beginning of an individual session, indicating that she had been absent from school the previous week and was anxious to catch up in her science class. One other participant looked anxious to be elsewhere during an individual interview and, upon my enquiry, told me that she had to be away early. The low refusal rate may have been because of social pressures, because they would not have passed on the parental permission slip if they did not want to take part or simply because young people 'are often only too eager to talk' if they believe someone is genuinely interested in what they have to say (Butler & Williamson, 1994:46).

Data collection - the conduct of fieldwork

Physical access to participants would not necessarily translate into social access to participants' views (Davis, 1998:329). Achieving physical access to the participants involved in this project was followed by the task of trying to win the social confidence and ease of participants enough to allow the free flow of effective data on my abstract area of research interest. Moreover, it was clear that this process would be far more complicated in relation to the young participants than the adults in this study. The cultural divide, or 'generation gap', which commands much of the

methodological incentive behind this study also means that it is more complex for researchers to 'reach' young participants and uncover their perceptions. I was effectively attempting to overturn conventional adult-child relations (Fine & Glassner, 1979; cited Pollard, 1987:101) by seeking the perceptions of a social group accustomed to, and partly defined by, adult reluctance to listen seriously to their free opinions:

'But it is hardly surprising that it is often difficult to elicit views and opinions from children and young people – to get them to express their views. Most children and young people are not accustomed to being encouraged to articulate their opinions in an open and honest way; they consider them to be unimportant to anyone but themselves, a view confirmed by adults around them in their everyday lives.' (Butler & Williamson, 1994:37-38)

Researchers have analysed fieldwork procedures as a combination of situational and technical factors which may increase or decrease this flow of data across the 'generation gap'. The intention is to arrange and manipulate these factors, within the peculiar constraints of working with young people, to obtain the clearest reception of data. Factors which increase communication on the focused topic are exploited and those which block communication are minimised (Rich, 1968:25). For the purposes of this review, these factors have been grouped as surrounding the relationships between the researcher and researched, the arrangement of the field and the active elicitation of participant information. These groups are not mutually exclusive but interrelate to effect the overall fieldwork management strategy aimed

at producing the clearest flow of data on the substantive topic whilst maintaining a commitment to limiting any risk to participants. Again, these factors were examined in the methodological pilot in consideration for this study (Hazel, 1995).

The research relationships

The image of the researcher

Given the relatively brief period of time in which to interact with the young participants, building any sort of relationship which would be conducive to the free flow of uninhibited information was difficult (Measor, 1985:62). As such, it was crucial that the most effective 'atmosphere' or rapport was established as soon as possible. It was primarily important to consider and attempt to manipulate positively factors relevant to the participants' 'first impressions' of the researcher.

When establishing my 'image' for the participants, I deliberately did not try to create the impression that I shared the same cultural influences and perspectives as the young participants. It is my belief that young people are perfectly capable of spotting a 'phoney' adult trying to be accepted as a young person. This perception of incompetent deceit would not project a positive or clear role for the researcher and make the relationship unstable and uncomfortable:

'We are not suggesting, however, that you attempt to 'go native'. It is doubtful whether you could produce a very convincing performance either in terms of dress, pose or vocabulary. Age, inevitably, unavoidably, creates its barriers and divisions and no child or young person wants to talk to anyone who is patently falsely projecting too youthful an image or persona or self-consciously letting fly with street *argot*.' (Butler & Williamson, 1994:39)

In essence, there is a fine line between my methodological intention to bridge the cultures between those involved in fieldwork and trying to deny that differences, of which children are only too aware, exist. I do not consider that it is necessary to pretend to be a child in order to project an interest in what children have to say. Indeed, this interest may be more convincing and useful coming from a researcher who is inquisitive in his ignorance as an adult. As researchers have noted, this image makes it easier to ask clarification on points which may seem obvious to the young person (James et al, 1998:183). In short, I would argue that it is more effective to go naïve than go native.

As Butler and Williamson suggest, one area which distinguishes adults from children is dress. I considered that my dress and appearance would send clear signals to participants about me and our relationship (Delamont, 1992:85). The need to respect children's fashion consciousness (Cloke & Davies, 1997:xvii), without trying to copy their youth fashions and wearing inappropriate clothes for their expectations of adult dress in a relatively formal context, led me to choose a modern suit with a 'designer' tie.

However, given the relative lack of concern given to children's views by adults in their everyday lives, I considered it important to data flow to try and avoid the impression that the fieldwork was to be another of these traditional adult-child relationships. Essentially, whilst my identity as an adult could not be denied, I did not want to be identified with the 'adult team' (Ball, 1985:50) which has demonstrated to young people a general lack of interest in their voice in their everyday lives. In the school context where this fieldwork took place, this 'adult team' is the teaching staff. As such, I was at pains to ensure that I did not present myself as a teacher. I pointed out at the start of each session that I was not a teacher, but was a researcher from Stirling University. I also made it clear that my study was particularly interested in what they, as young people, had to say. I tried to avoid being introduced by the teacher or being associated in any other way with the same authority relationship.

The negative effect on data flow which this association can bring was made clear during a group session which had to take place in a classroom laid out in the traditional rows, with me sitting at the front of the 'class' (see below). I could clearly perceive an 'us and them' situation develop which was not present during any other fieldwork session. In this situation, the 'pupils' were distracted, unenthusiastic, disruptive and failed to engage effectively with either me or the research in general. Overall, however, the type of disruption reported by others conducting research with children (cf. Breakwell, 1990:91) was rare. If such disruption occurred, or if a group's enthusiasm was running out of control, the situation was usually calmed if

the participants were informed that the tape recorder could only pick up what one person had to say if others were relatively quiet.

I considered that participants would engage more with the fieldwork if I communicated my own enthusiasm about the project and the part which the participants played in it. I attempted to project this enthusiasm in the introduction to the research and when asking individual questions seeking views from the young people. In addition, whilst not attempting to present myself as a comedian, I attempted to ease the atmosphere by giving impression that I was prepared to be 'a good laugh' through positive responses to the participants' humour (Butler & Williamson, 1994:46).

It should be noted here that my gender did not appear to present any particular difficulties in relation to the flow of data from participants. Although it has been argued that young female participants may not be prepared to discuss certain matters, such as sex or personal health, with male researchers (Measor, 1985:74; Ball, 1985:32), there was no evidence during the fieldwork that females were less willing than males to discuss this current topic matter with me.

A positive experience for the researched

There were certain actions which I made to empower and relax the participants as soon as they entered the field. The aim was to help distinguish the interview from the repressive 'traditional adult-child relationship' (above) by creating an

atmosphere of voluntarism, free choice for the young people and a focus on the importance of their voice. Immediately, I offered participants the choice of whether to leave the door open or closed and, relative to a position I had already manipulated for myself, a choice of seats in the same vicinity. I also asked them, before the formal introductions and assent confirmation, if they were happy coming along. This was followed with a description of the purpose for the fieldwork and request for assent. These early questions allowed the participant to get used to interaction between with me before elicitation for the purposes of data collection (Hazel, 1995:46).

With the young participants in this study at a stage in their careers when they were dependent upon the educational labelling of adults, it was essential that they should not feel that they were being academically judged during the fieldwork. I was particularly concerned that the young participants should not be presented with any anxiety caused by a belief that they might 'fail', or be seen to fail, an element of the fieldwork. In terms of 'risk' to the participant, such a false belief could conceivably lead to a range of negative effects from an immediate lowering of self esteem to more persistent labelling and resultant underachievement. Moreover, conducting fieldwork in the school environment where the young participants would be forced to face tests and examinations regularly may increase the likelihood of any such impressions. As such, I took pains to stress at the beginning of every session of data collection that no element of the fieldwork constituted a test and that there were no 'right' or 'wrong' answers to anything I might ask. I used this as an

opportunity to reassure the participants that I was interested in, and valued, what they had to say, no matter what views they gave.

In addition, I attempted to ensure that no fieldwork session ended on a note which may have left participants feeling negative about their 'performance'. In particular, I avoided giving the impression that I ended the session because of a 'poor' comment by a participant or because they were unable to complete a task asked of them. I did not want to give the impression of ending the session out of resignation, sending a message of 'thanks for nothing' or 'well, if you can't even answer that, we should just forget the whole thing'. Applying a technique established in the methodological pilot for this study (1985:19), I would always conclude sessions that had proved difficult to elicit a flow of data with a question similar to one already proved relatively successful with that particular participant or with reference back to previous views elicited. Even if this only produced a single word answer identical to before, it would represent a positive contribution (as oppose to a silence or an 'I dunno') for which I could sincerely thank the participant.

Actions by external actors, like contact teachers, can often help dictate a positive atmosphere in fieldwork sessions. For instance, one contact who was particularly keen to see the interviews run smoothly and in a relaxed atmosphere provided crisps and cans of drink for all participants (and coffee and biscuits for me).

Confidentiality and anonymity

If young people were to feel secure enough with the researcher to ensure a flow of information, it was essential that issues surrounding confidentiality were addressed early in the research relationship. Therefore, in addition to any comments that the participant may have read on the parental permission letter, I explained at the beginning of every fieldwork session that data would be recorded anonymously and treated confidentially. This acted as another early assertion of the overall rights of the young person in the research relationship (Boggs & Eyberg, 1990:102). Again, to limit any misunderstanding over this important assurance due to young participants' cultural unfamiliarity with these terms I also explained the situation in terms of their names not going on the tape and nobody but me having access to those tapes.

Ethical questions regarding any moral right of parents or the schools to access the data from a young person in their charge, for whatever reason, were addressed by agreeing with all parties during access negotiations that the data would be recorded anonymously. However, I was very aware that these promises of confidentiality and anonymity placed me in a difficult situation if, during the course of the fieldwork, any of the young people disclosed that they were in a dangerous or abusive situation:

'Researchers must be prepared to resolve ethical dilemmas that may arise if evidence of maltreatment is uncovered during the course of data collection.'
(Kinard, 1994:652)

The possibility of this occurrence caused me a great deal of consternation when planning fieldwork procedures. Other researchers have noted the lack of professional guidance when researchers are faced with such 'uncomfortable' information in the field (Butler & Williamson, 1994:42). Some commentators have argued that the researcher primarily occupies the social role of adult and must ultimately carry out corresponding responsibilities, which may mean breaching confidences:

'Researchers need to recognise their moral obligation as adults to protect children at risk even when this may mean losing access to, or the trust of, the children concerned if they do intervene.' (Morrow & Richards, 1996:98)

The dilemma is not, however, such a simple equation between moral obligation to protection and selfish interest in the future of the research. In this particular project, with short one-off interviews, there was not such a premium on maintaining access to, or trust of, a child for future fieldwork. Instead, I was mindful that the obligation recognised by Morrow and Richards may well be met by another *moral obligation* to respect this 'trust' and privacy of the child as the human rights of an individual. I have yet to find an entirely satisfactory solution to this dilemma. In this project, I endeavoured to broker a compromise in my fieldwork procedures which respected

both the security and wider rights of the young person. Thankfully, this was never tested to the extreme by such disclosures although I was aware that a discussion of physical force on children may plausibly enter such realms. I decided to provide participants with the means to seek professional help with any dangerous situation, without forcing the issue or breaching confidentiality by passing on information to these professionals myself. In practice, I ensured that I brought to each fieldwork session a selection of appropriate professional contacts and 'help-line' numbers (such as *Childline*) as well as some tissues to ease the discomfort of a participant in case of a tearful breakdown. I did not feel that I was qualified to offer quasi-counselling by entering into discussion about abusive experiences (cf. Butler & Williamson, 1994:33), nor did I have the resources available to directly offer the services of others (cf. Creighton & Russell, 1995:17). In my one experience of such a disclosure in previous research, as an undergraduate, I provided the same level of support and encouraged the participant to seek help. I also ensured that the participant had enough time to visibly recover from a few tears before leaving the immediate research environment.

With regards to future fieldwork, I would only feel comfortable forwarding such disclosed details if that qualification to confidentiality was declared at every stage of access negotiations with official gatekeepers, carers and the young people themselves. I remain concerned, however, about the message such a declaration sends about the relative importance of a child's right to privacy and confidentiality.

Relationship between the researched

Researchers have suggested that the power imbalance between adult researcher and young participant that may inhibit a flow of data can be reduced by the shared support in a group situation (Hood et al. cited James et al, 1998:190). However, if there are problems establishing a rapport between the researcher and participant in such a brief time period, it is even more difficult to encourage spontaneous interaction in a relaxed atmosphere between all the participants in a group situation (Hazel, 1995:42). This problem was eased by arranging with contacts that groups were made up of pupils who knew each other from the same school class. In this situation, where they could gain support and confidence from their friends in the group, participants were indeed more willing to pursue conflicting opinions in sessions.

However, I was aware that the introduction of other people, particularly those they know, into the research environment may well increase the 'social vulnerability' of young participants. As such, it was noted that fear of failure or 'showing themselves up' may increase in group sessions, raising the risk to self-esteem. It was particularly important try to avoid relating to participants in any way which might embarrass them in front of their peers. Although the differences between adult and child cultures may have meant that I fall into such a trap unawares, I did adjust my interaction in such group situations to err on the side of caution.

I laid great stress on adopting the skills of group management to ensure that individuals were not stifled by others dominant in the group sessions (Butler & Williamson, 1994:30-33; Frey & Fontana, 1993:34). Such participants were encouraged into the discussion at every possible opportunity. Although past researchers have noted that mixed gender groups are dominated by males (Spender, 1980 cited Ball, 1985:31), this was not in evidence in this study. As in the methodological pilot for this study, either gender tended to be dominated when they were underrepresented in the group and males tended to require the most encouragement when numbers were equal.

Arrangement of the field

Whilst consideration was given to the location and layout of fieldwork involving the adult participants, most of my concern and control again related to the interviews with young people. Once more, it is the exaggerated power relationship between adult researcher and young person that enhances any general requirement to carefully manipulate the field to ensure that the participant feels safe and comfortable. In particular, it was felt essential that the chosen settings for interviews delicately balanced the privacy necessary for confidential data collection and the public openness necessary to assure personal safety to all involved (Hazel, 1995:35). On the one hand, confidentiality was required if the young person was to feel comfortable enough to provide uninhibited information. In particular, the close presence of any adults might induce fear of repercussions for their comments.

However, the 'intimacy' recommended for confidential data exchange (Breakwell, 1990:93) may well lead to the participant feeling at risk from the researcher and isolated from external protection. In an age when 'abuse' of vulnerable children is very much in focus, such a fieldwork situation would both make the participant too uneasy to provide a flow of data and lay the researcher open to post hoc accusations by the participant. As such, the field also had to be arranged to offer both the participants and myself as researcher enough personal space and external protection.

According to these conditions, locations within the schools were sought which would provide a reasonable degree of audible privacy whilst ensuring that physical activity was visibly public (Hazel, 1996). Eventual locations varied rather between schools but each came close enough to this description to satisfy my basic concerns that the overall fieldwork setting should not induce fear of risk in those involved nor act as an inhibiting factor on data flow. Three schools provided classrooms or class laboratories with windows onto busy corridors or other used rooms. In two schools, interviews were held in small preparatory rooms off classrooms in use, each visible through large windows. Two other schools provided space in the corner of libraries in use. The remaining two schools provided meeting rooms immediately off busy corridors. As one of these meeting rooms had no window for 'visual protection', I was forced to compromise audible privacy to a small degree by keeping the door ajar with a chair.

Over the period of fieldwork in schools, my only problems regarding maintaining this balance between 'public visibility and audible privacy' occurred in the library locations. In one school, a member of library staff commented to me during a break about the topic of an overheard interview. In the other library, another pupil actually interrupted the interview to make a brief statement on his feelings about the topic. Although the participant at the time did not seem bothered by this particular interruption, it was evident to me (particularly during transcription) that the young people spoke at a significantly lower volume level in the library situations. In order to limit both distraction for the young participants and the spread of their voice, I subsequently guided them to sit faced away from any other activity in the library.

Within each location, general steps were taken to ensure that the field was arranged in a way that would maximise feelings of personal safety and, thus, encourage the comfortable exchange of data. Creating a personal space for all involved was considered of primary importance. In interview sessions, I tried to utilise a table between myself and the participants to separate and define this space. This table had the additional uses of bearing my microphone and providing a surface for participants to place materials and rest their arms, which seemed to help relax participants (Hazel, 1995:36). In one location no high table was available. In this case I created this personal space by placing a storage box bearing the microphone on the floor between our two low soft chairs. Whilst the use of a separator might not encourage informal rapport, I considered that this would be countered by the peace of mind gained from such defined personal space.

Additional measures included drawing up any open blinds on windows to maximise the visibility of interviews from outside, and ensuring that the participant sat closest to the door and means of escape. In addition, apart from the exception noted above, young people were also given the choice between leaving the door slightly open, which might make them feel closer to outside protection, or closed, which might increase perceptions of privacy. Most participants chose to close the door.

Arrangement of the field during group sessions varied to a degree depending upon the number of participants and placement of fixed furniture in the room. Wherever possible, the risk of participants feeling disassociated from proceedings was minimised by forming a tight circle in which each had visual contact with me and all others. This also meant that each participant was within audible reach of the wide-angle microphone. The one group occasion that produced very little useful data was mainly due to poor room arrangement. I was unable to rearrange the furniture from the usual classroom rows, forcing the focus group into the feel of a school lesson, complete with whispering at the back.

Much rearrangement of the field setting was virtually impossible in interviews with adults, which took place in the participants' own homes. Fieldwork always took place in the 'living' part of the house, such as the utility kitchen or lounge, and was always chosen by the participant. Given that I was 'on their patch', ensuring they set the field to their own standards of personal safety was largely in their hands. However, I was still keen to secure a degree of personal space for the comfort of

both the participant and me. As such, I would request a piece of furniture be placed between us on the pretext, though not without practical foundation, that I had a surface on which to place my microphone directly in front of the participant. If no piece was available I would still utilise the microphone to ensure enough distance between us by explaining that the microphone should not be too close to the participant, thereby widening the area of the field setting. In addition, I would occasionally use my briefcase to assist in defining my personal space. The importance of this personal space was brought home to me during one interview when a combination of factors had foiled my attempts to institute the above safeguards. One male interviewee leant across from one end of a sofa to the other and struck me painfully on the arm to demonstrate what he meant by 'belting' his child.

Eliciting data in interviews

Reflecting my methodological concerns surrounding the 'generation gap' in terms of reference between researcher and young people, it was necessary to consider in detail ways to actively initiate and encourage discussion on a relatively abstract topic. Other social researchers have continued to state that a limited capacity for operational thought means that some children in this project's lower age category of subjects would not be capable of responding to such abstract enquiry (Dziuba-Leatherman et al., 1997:44). I would contend, however, that given our cultural generation-gap it is unsurprising that children cannot relate to abstractions created

by the adult, using adult terms and adult frames of reference. It is no more possible to ask children to 'think the unthinkable' (Butler & Williamson, 1994:37) than it is adults. However, children much lower than this age consistently demonstrate in everyday life that, given the right stimulation, they have the ability to produce imaginative responses in play (Pollard, 1987:99) based around self-determined abstract or hypothetical situations. Children themselves use stimuli such as a dressing-up outfit, or the latest feature film, to produce an imaginative response in a hypothetical role-playing situation. Consequently, I do not consider that young people's responses are tied to their actual physical experiences. If, however, researchers are to encourage participants to explore pre-determined topics in abstract or hypothetical terms, it is their responsibility to provide appropriate stimuli to which young people can relate and respond positively.

Whilst shared cultural turf enabled interviews with other adults to be based primarily around direct questions delivered on this abstract level, a variety of specific stimuli was needed in sessions with young participants.¹⁰ There was little guidance, though, on the development of such stimuli. Despite a recognition of the necessity to refine qualitative interviewing techniques to take account of differences between adults and children (James et al, 1998:188), there has been little relevant methodological research (Williamson & Butler, 1997:61). The fieldwork for this study relied heavily on techniques explored and developed in my previous research (Hazel, 1995; Hazel, 1996). This research had shown that it was possible to elicit

¹⁰ It should be noted, however, that within discussions adults were actually found to rely more heavily on direct personal experiences than young participants. One may speculate how far this reflects the particular success of stimuli adopted with the young people, or carers' peculiar anxiety about the appropriateness of their own parenting behaviour.

responses from young people on an abstract level using certain stimuli. Essentially, it was found to be necessary to adopt an appropriate concrete medium or stimulus to which abstract concepts can be initially anchored, but which allows the young participant to 'weigh anchor' and discuss the concepts on a purely abstract level when they feel comfortable doing so. Stimuli found to be successful 'anchors' in this previous research were then refined and adapted further as appropriate for the substantive focus of this project.

Not all stimuli were used with all participants. Indeed, some participants needed very little stimulus to focus their discussions on abstract considerations of physical force from one particular angle or another. The following techniques represent the toolbox of elicitation stimuli which were used depending upon their situational requirement.

The choice of initial stimuli was considered pivotal to the fieldwork. It was important to allow the participants the opportunity of exploring issues surrounding physical force without dictating the precise angle from which the topic was approached. The stimuli should not pre-empt the participants' own agenda of issues or frameworks of concern. In particular, it was critical to choose an approach which would minimise the risk of imparting any terms or assumptions early on that might create immediate (generational) misunderstandings or influence the rest of the session too narrowly within an adult framework of concerns:

'We placed a premium on ensuring that in our interviews with children we did not import, uncritically, notions derived from an adult perspective or to draw the framework too tightly.' (Williamson & Butler, 1997:69)

In phenomenological terms, it was particularly important at this stage to 'bracket' my own ideas and assumptions about physical force against children as much as possible, both in my stimulation and reception of information from participants. It quickly became clear that the researcher had to tread especially carefully when broaching this specific topic with participants because of significant variation in the understanding and implications of terms used to describe such adult acts of force. It was decided not to introduce the topic of physical force directly but to utilise vignettes in order to present an adult-child relationship situation which might prompt the participants themselves to introduce aspects of physical force (see Appendix 3). Discussions about the way the adult vignette characters had acted, or failed to act, in relation to the children would invariably mean that the young person touched upon issues surrounding physical force. I would then follow this lead, focusing on the participants' own terms. Asking the participant if they would like to read the written vignette aloud also acts to break the ice and allow the young person to gain confidence from speaking.

Vignettes, or scenarios, have been used previously by researchers as prompts when 'young people were unable to grasp an abstract situation' (Butler & Williamson, 1994:34). Whilst this reactive description ironically blames the researcher's failure to bridge the generation gap on the subjects' failings, it does

highlight the useful stimulation provided by the concrete examples of actors and their behaviour in the vignettes. Participants could use vignettes as prompts to move towards abstraction by discussing the appropriateness of hypothetical motives and intentions of characters. The willingness of participants to solve problems presented hypothetically during fieldwork (Hazel, 1996) allowed me to explore participants' concerns about physical force in more detail by verbally adding situational conditions and difficulties to the vignette actors' situations. The vignette stimuli were adapted for use in both the interviews and focus groups.

Similar to these written vignettes, young people were also asked to imagine what they would do about a problematic situation involving a child and adult if they were in a familiar role, like a judge or a teacher. This form of hypothetical role-exploration (as opposed to physical role-play) provided a concrete platform from which to explore the abstract definitions and understanding which the young people bring to each imagined situation.

Although the success of these techniques was built upon participants' empathy for the characters, it is understandable that hypothetical situations that were personalised to include the participants themselves would produce even stronger reactions. Effective examples of this were elicitation stimuli that asked the participant how they would feel if were to find themselves in a certain situation in the future. Setting the hypothetical situation in the future added a sense of realistic possibility to sharpen their concerns. For instance, participants were asked how they would feel if they arrived back at their school next August to find that the belt

had been brought back into the classroom. An exploration of why they thought they had these 'feelings' or emotions towards the situation would lead onto a more abstract discussion of supporting arguments.

Discussion was stimulated further by occasionally adopting a 'devil's advocate' approach in fieldwork sessions. As long as the participant's confidence had been established, light-hearted confrontation of views expressed by the young person regarding a specific situation could stimulate supporting arguments on a more abstract level. This approach proved particularly useful in group sessions where support from peers meant that participants were slightly more confident in their own opinions. Indeed, I deliberately built upon the success of constructive confrontation in groups by encouraging debates between participants on apparent differences of opinion. These situations produced particularly rich data when I moved the microphone among the participants similar to the current audience participation shows on television, like *Kilroy*, *Oprah* and *Jerry Springer*. The young people seemed to relate with ease and good humour to this adaptation of a familiar form of popular culture, successfully exploring their own ideas and definitions. 'Hand votes' were sometimes taken in this situation which, whilst not forming any part of my qualitative analysis, helped maintain the focus of all participants in group situations.

Phrases and quotations were also used as stimuli in fieldwork sessions (see Appendix 3). Particularly controversial statements by players in the legal and political debates on physical force in child care were used to provoke strong

reactions by the participants. The reasons and concepts behind these strong reactions were then explored in discussion.

The most successful task with which to end the fieldwork sessions was for the participants to try and summarise what they felt was their main argument behind their view on the physical force. Again, the task was usually phrased with an element of role-play, with the participant asked to imagine themselves in a Parliamentary debate on physical force. This task invariably produced useful and succinct abstract data. Coming at the end of the session, the pattern of focusing on the abstract consideration of relevant issues had been well established. Reviewing the discussions meant that the young people were more comfortable and confident about their ideas (an appropriate positive state to end a session). In addition, the implied requirement to condense their overall views, which had already been detailed with any specific information, ensured that the answers were restricted to more generalised and abstract terms. During analysis, these summaries were considered together with the earlier detailed arguments to limit any contextual misunderstanding.

In addition, the careful use of various prompts and reassurances helped to encourage participants to explore their abstract considerations further. Prompts included, for instance, neutral acknowledgements to the child's comments or repeating part of the child's last statement to show interest and encourage elaboration (Boggs & Eyberg, 1990:89-90).

Recording and analysis of data

A cassette tape recorder with external microphone was employed to record data during the fieldwork sessions with both adults and young people. There was no evidence during this fieldwork or the methodological pilot that participants were inhibited (Delamont, 1992:110) or distracted (Butler & Williamson, 1994:38) by the recorder. I tried to limit any distraction, where possible, by only having the microphone on view.

The use of a tape recorder freed me from noting down the participants' comments, allowing me to ease data flow by maintaining eye contact (Breakwell, 1990:93) and concentrate on other tasks (Woods, 1986:81), like listening carefully in preparation for my response. As noted previously (Hazel, 1995:54), tape recording the fieldwork sessions also provided additional protection for the researcher against any accusations of malpractice.

Even given the intention of this project to investigate the perspectives of young people on adult use of physical force on children, it is still necessary to mediate and report the children's views. Commentators have warned that presenting the unmediated reports of children can appear tokenistic (Williamson & Butler, 1997:68) and the recent use of children's quotations to illustrate a brief investigation of physical punishment (Gulbenkian Commission, 1995) did provide some evidence to support this view.

However, as with every other stage of the study, attempts were made to ensure that the results of the analysis were grounded in the young people's perspectives rather than the researcher or the pre-existing adult debates. I made a series of procedural decisions to try and ensure that these pre-existing ideas were 'bracketed' and that the analysis was informed by what the young people had to say. First, I made a deliberate attempt to escape the influence of literature and the debate on physical force by travelling abroad with the data for initial analysis. Second, I decided not to use a computer package to help with the analysis in order to reduce any risk of early coding based on pre-existing adult themes. Third, I analysed the data from young people before reviewing carers' perceptions. Fourth, the analysis and presentation is based heavily on verbatim quotation, with all audio-taped fieldwork sessions transcribed in full. The analysis section of the final thesis was constructed directly from the thematic compilation of the data.

The process of this construction through data analysis encompasses the following six main stages. This method was necessary to ensure a balance between the grounding of the final analysis in the perceptions of the participants and the in-depth interpretive examination by the researcher:

- 1) **Familiarisation** - an early overview of the data was gained by skimming through all the paper transcripts. This provided a contextualisation for later stages of analysis, allowing me to gain a feel for the material as a whole and

crudely review the broad range of issues covered. Familiarisation began towards the end of the fieldwork period.

- 2) **In-depth annotation** - each paper transcript was examined in detail and any perceptions expressed by the respondents were annotated. Apparent emerging themes were noted separately and constantly reviewed.

- 3) **Identifying dominant thematic areas** - the above annotations and notes on emerging themes were sifted for any patterns of perceptions. These patterns were collated into several broad thematic areas interpreted as dominant in discussions. These dominant thematic areas identified were: purposes and effectiveness of acts of physical force; concerns and contingencies surrounding acts; and overall rights and power in disciplinary relationships.

- 4) **Compiling a thematic folder** - a paper folder was divided and organised into sections according to the broad dominant thematic areas. An additional section concerned researcher observations about contextual issues, such as young people's awareness of adult debates, rather than the participants' substantive concerns. The transcripts and previous annotations were then thoroughly reviewed and parts relevant to each of these dominant thematic areas were referenced in the corresponding folder section. References consisted of a one or two line summary of quotation, discursive context, a demographic code and researcher annotation. Multiple referencing was

permitted for parts of the transcript that were relevant to more than one thematic area.

The 'relevant' parts of the transcripts were identified for each thematic area according to the annotations on the transcripts and key indicator terms for discussions. I indicate throughout the analysis chapters the type of terms in the transcripts that were used as indicators towards these interpretations. For instance, in consideration of 'power' in disciplinary relationships, I state terms which I interpreted as indicating the participants' own analysis of relations in terms of 'power' and the 'abuses of power' (e.g. 'abusing their right' and 'taking advantage of their authority'), and I note down the key terms which I interpreted as relating more indirectly to 'manifestations of power' (e.g. 'helpless', 'defenceless' and 'control of').

As themes (such as 'abuses of power' and 'manifestations of power' above) within these broad thematic areas became apparent, relevant references were placed onto separate pages in the appropriate folder section. Previously filed references within the same section were constantly revised, with regard to transcripts, in order to assess how they related to these new themes. When existing references were relevant, they were then moved onto the pages representing the new themes. As this analytical process is developed, these themes might be noted as containing their own thematic divisions, which were again placed on separate pages, creating layers within the broad dominant thematic areas.

Reviewing the references within these layers allowed the researcher to note the relationship between ideas and arguments, the relative dominance of particular arguments and any division or consistency according to gender or age group. The themes were examined for agreement and differences between the participants' arguments, and patterns of underlying perceptions which informed the nature of these arguments.

- 5) **Forming the chapter skeletons** - word processor documents were created for each of the main sections in the thematic paper file. These documents formed the basis for the analysis chapters in the final thesis. The additional researcher observations about contextual issues were later included either in this methods chapter or as researcher annotations in the analysis chapters. The sections in the thematic file were transferred to these new documents. The parts of the transcripts referred to in these sections were also copied verbatim into these documents. This part of the analysis process also gave me the opportunity to review the original transcript quotations and confirm my interpretations within their discursive contexts.

- 6) **Refinement and critique** - these documents were refined to form the analysis chapters in this thesis. They were then sifted to ensure the presence of quotations which most appropriately illustrated the analytical

point. My critical interpretations were then added to the text to compare and link the quotations.

It should be noted that any indications in the text of the strength or importance given to issues in discussions should not be taken as any attempt to quantify or measure perceptions. These are only as a guide to the reader of my own interpretations of any consensual, dominant or subsidiary themes emerging from the data. It is the concepts and ideas, and the depth and range of these ideas, which is of principal concern in the analysis of this study. In a particular social group, the number of people who use a particular abstract argument about a particular issue does not make it any more real or convincing for the individuals or the group. The research is intended to show a range of issues and concerns surrounding adult use of physical force on children. As such, any generalisation of findings should be heuristic in nature, rather than relying on inferential statistics (Dobash & Dobash, 1979:259).

However, not being able to relate to such views, or perceptions not corresponding to memory from childhood should not, alone, be grounds for an adult discounting this examination of young people's perspectives of physical force on children (Butler & Williamson, 1994:6). Any criticisms of the study must be considered in relation to the cited methodological principle of respecting young people's perspectives as valid in their own right.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed the methodological influences, research considerations and procedures adopted during the fieldwork and analysis of this study. It has outlined how the broadly interpretivist methodology informed methods which sought to ground research in the perceptual frameworks of the young people as social actors rather than the specific concerns of adults. The main fieldwork and analytical objective was to tap into perceptions at an abstract level rather than simply recording experiences or answers to adult questions.

The chapter noted that the previous lack of opportunities for young people to voice their perceptions on this topic in either social research or the socio-political arenas is reflected more widely in research and western culture. Interrelating cultural and methodological obstacles have fostered a reluctance in adults listening to children or, at best, restricted communication within the terms and concerns of adults. First, an 'adult-centrism' has seen adults believe that they already know what children think. This has consisted of both the adult belief that personal history gives us the necessary insight into childhood and the paternalistic notion of intuitively knowing our own children's views and wishes. Second, Piagetian developmental psychology has left a 'common sense' view of inherent cognitive deficiency and irrationality in children. Incorporated into later functionalist theories of 'socialisation', competent personhood is only acquired in adulthood following a process or social programming as passive children. In line with the dominance of outcome studies in research on this topic, children have generally been treated as

subjects indicating future adult behaviour. Immature incompetence would problematise and invalidate their views as individuals occupying their particular social position.

However, recent socio-political and theoretical shifts were noted as giving cause to challenge these ideologies and begin to value the perceptions of young people in research and wider society. Politically, a growing influence of 'children's rights' has widely featured calls for giving greater weight to what children say in policy and practice. Particular impetus was given by calls in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Children's Acts in the UK to involve children more actively in decisions affecting their lives. This has been read as including the necessity to consider the voices of children on broad macro issues that affect their lives. Such calls have been underlined by policies adopted by charities and UK court judgements.

Theoretically, Piagetian ideas of biologically determined homogenous development to adulthood have seen substantial critical challenges by social psychologists. First, social psychological research has suggested cognitive and communicative competence from a young age. Second, social theory has witnessed the emergence of conceptions of childhood, and our cultural view of children, as socially constructed. Ideas of the biologically determined homogenous child, distinguished by passive progression to competent adulthood is rejected. Methodologically positioned within interpretivism, this 'new paradigm' of the 'Sociology of Childhood' views children as competent social actors in the present.

This present study was positioned methodologically within this new paradigm. Particular stress is laid on the importance of seeking young people's own perceptions as active and competent interpretations. The project is concerned with the perspectives of young people with certain shared roles on their relationships with the adult controlled world in which they interact. The perspectives offered by young people in the social position to receive physical discipline are considered different from, though not deficient to, those of adults. Broadly interpretivist, the focus is on uncovering the abstract concepts, definitions and arguments that underlie the views on physical force. The research aims to relate this methodological position to a topic with social policy implications by eliciting the young people's perspectives to inform the wider debates on physical discipline.

However, it was necessary to recognise that the distinct social position and perspectives of young people creates various problems of cultural unfamiliarity for the adult researcher. The cultural divide, or generation gap, between researcher and researched means that shared understanding cannot be assumed (Davis, 1998). The researcher needed to adopt a position of relative cultural strangeness, respecting the participants' own frameworks of reference by phenomenologically bracketing adult assumptions about language, definitions and dominant issues on this topic. This was seen as particularly important given, first, the adult-centric tendency for adults to refer to their own childhood and, second, the acknowledged ambiguities in definitions within this topic.

The overall method of data collection adopted consisted of focused interviews and focus groups. These qualitative methods were considered to be the most appropriate to the interpretive task of seeking young people's perceptions at an abstract level. The fieldwork was conducted over a five month period from December 1996 to April 1997 with 227 young people aged 11-12 and 14-16 years. The sample was not a normative or probability sample. Interviews with one, two or three young participants and focus groups (mixed gender) were utilised. The study involved 227 young participants from nine co-educational comprehensive Secondary schools spread across four local authority areas in the Forth-Clyde valley region of Scotland. In addition, 25 carers were interviewed singularly or in pairs. All sessions were tape-recorded.

It was noted that particular consideration was necessarily taken of the particular power relationship in conducting research with young participants. Procedures were adopted which negotiated the balance between the need to elicit effective data and the legal, ethical and practical constraints that limited any risk to young participants. The chapter noted that following a process of seeking access, consent and assent from various interested parties, the data collection procedures could be divided into three main categories. First, this section of the chapter reviewed operational decisions relating to research relationships, including the image of the researcher, the quality of the experience for the researched, confidentiality and the relationship between the researched. Second, considerations concerning the physical arrangement of the field were noted, including the factors for deciding the precise location of fieldwork sessions and

arrangement of personal space for participants. Third, this section outlined the techniques used to elicit data during discussions with participants. Particular attention was drawn to a variety of stimuli utilised to initiate and encourage discussion on this relatively abstract topic. These included vignettes, 'role-exploration', 'constructive confrontation' and quotations.

Analysis of the data focused on the identification of key issues and themes grounded in the young people's own perceptions rather than by the adult researcher or the pre-existing adult debates on this topic. The chapter outlined various procedural decisions made to 'bracket' these adult influences. The analysis section of the final thesis was constructed directly from the thematic compilation of the data, through a process encompassing six main stages: familiarisation with the data; in-depth annotation of the transcripts and noting emerging themes; identifying dominant thematic areas; compiling a thematic folder; forming the chapter skeletons; and refinement and critique. This final stage examined concerns, underlying concepts and definitions in detail and added the researchers' critical interpretations.

Having outlined how this study addresses the relative absence of young people's perceptions in both the legal and political debates and research on adults' use of physical force in disciplinary relationships with children, the thesis proceeds to the Analysis Section. The first three chapters in this next section are determined by the dominant thematic areas of concern in the discussions with young participants. The fourth chapter compares the young participants' perceptions with the views

expressed by carers in this study. The final chapter in the section compares the perceptions with previous research and discourse in the adult debates.

The next chapter examines the purposes which young perceive the adult use of physical discipline on children might serve and considerations on the immediate effectiveness of such actions.

PART B ANALYSIS

The second part of this thesis presents the study's analysis and conclusions. The next three chapters (Chapters Four, Five and Six) provide an in-depth thematic report of the discussions with young participants on physical discipline. Chapter Four focuses on young participants' perceptions of the purposes which might legitimise physical force in discipline, any conditions or problems with these purposes and how effective the force would be at achieving the purposes. Chapter Five focuses on the concerns which young participants held regarding the use of physical force in practice, both in the short term where they introduce contextual contingencies on acts and in the longer term surrounding implications for the child and society beyond the disciplinary episode. Chapter Six analyses the importance with which young participants regarded aspects of the wider disciplinary relationship when assessing the acceptability of physical force, with particular reference to the adult's social roles, rights and associated power. The *order* in which these dominant thematic areas are introduced is not meant to represent the relative importance which young participants placed on the issues, nor does it necessarily reproduce the order in which the issues were broached during the discussions. Instead, the order was chosen simply for presentation purposes. Given the dominant thematic areas, it represents the easiest way in which to read the young participants' complex narratives: the reasons for physical force, followed by worries about the effect of such force, with these considerations then contextualised in wider relationship issues.

The following two chapters (Chapters Seven and Eight) aim to illuminate the young participants' perceptions further by comparing them to the views expressed by adults. Chapter Seven analyses the similarities and differences between young participants' perceptions and the major themes in interviews with carer participants. Likewise, Chapter Eight discusses how the themes from young participants' relate to issues and perspectives in the adult legal, political and research debates.

Chapter Nine presents the study's conclusions. It first summarises briefly the major themes revealed in the young people's perceptions, followed by an examination of discourses which may underlie these themes. Lastly, the chapter suggests the implications of this research for social policy relating to physical discipline and wider research involving young people.

Chapter Four Purposes and effectiveness of acts of physical force

This chapter examines young participants' perceptions of the purposes that adult use of physical force on children might serve and the immediate effectiveness of such actions. First, the chapter explores different purposes that participants argued could legitimise physical force, followed by a review of additional considerations and concerns surrounding them. Second, the chapter focuses on participants' perceptions of the positive effectiveness of such acts and any conditions to effectiveness voiced by the participants. Lastly, concerns about physical force producing obstacles to its own effectiveness and the possibility of any suitable alternatives are examined.

It should be noted that the young participants did not tend to analyse 'purpose' or 'effect' as specific or separate topics of conversation. Indeed, only rarely did participants employ the terms 'purpose', 'reason' or 'effectiveness' in their discussions. These are concepts derived from my analysis of the dominant themes within the data. They are collective terms employed to describe a set of ideas from participants which I interpret as loosely related to perceptions of intentions behind physical force and how well physical force achieves those intentions. Various phrases and terms used by participants were employed during analysis as possible indicators of reference to 'purpose' or 'immediate effectiveness'. For instance, phrases which could indicate perceptions relating to either collective term included: '[force] will [intention/positive effect]' and '[force] would [intention/positive effect]'. Participants' phrases which could indicate reference to intention or 'purpose'

included: '[force] just so that the child would [intention]' and '[force] would just be to make sure that [intention]'. References to intentions might also be indicated by the use of a verb infinitive, for example: '[force] just to [intention]'. In addition, phrases which could indicate reference to immediate effectiveness included: 'if [force], then [positive effect]' and 'if [force], the child [positive effect]'.

Legitimised purposes for physical force

Perceptions of the purposes and intentions behind the use of physical force on children were a dominant feature of discussions with young people, whether or not they formed a defence or critique of such acts. For some participants, physical force could serve a legitimate purpose, generally either in child care or educational contexts. In the interests of analysis, these purposes can be seen to fall into four main categories: perceiving physical force as immediate communication to the child; as a teaching tool for future behaviour; as a means of restraining or restricting the child and as a way of enforcing overall adult control in a situation.

Physical force as immediate communication

A smack was seen widely by young participants as occupying a legitimate role as a tool of communication for an adult when dealing with a child. Great stress was laid on the use of physical force as a gesture to the child, as an indication of the carer's

negative view of an action by the child. Particularly relevant to the early years in the home, a 'smack' or 'tap' with the open palm was seen as the best way of defining for the child that their behaviour is 'bad', 'naughty' or inappropriate:

YM1 I might just smack his hand or something just to let him know that he'd been naughty...

[11-12]

In general, participants who mentioned this purpose were clear and strong in their view that the physical force was not meant to represent communication through pain. Instead, the force would amount to more of a *symbolic gesture* of communication:

YF2 Umm...I'd just smack them on the bum or something, not hard, not meant to hurt them. Just so that they know that it's wrong.

[14-16]

NH Does it matter if it [smack] is more than once?

YF3 Yes, because then it would get really painful, and the object isn't to put pain on them, but to show them what's wrong, what they've done wrong.

[14-16]

There was a subsidiary belief that such a 'smack' could carry more complex messages than just what was 'right' and 'wrong' behaviour. The purpose of the physical force may extend to showing the carer's deeper concerns about the contextual inappropriateness of the child's behaviour in certain situations:

YF4 ...not really hit, just like to tell them so they know not to be doing it, that it's wrong and they are disturbing other people.

[14-16]

Essentially, the dominant argument behind using physical force for the purposes of communication was that it was the only way for an adult to let the young child understand their wishes. Younger children were perceived as able to understand the significance of a smack in relation to their immediate actions before they attain the same ability to comprehend verbal communication. As such, the physical force serves a legitimate purpose of communication when verbal understanding is not available:

YF5 A young child doesn't really know. When you tell it to stop it's not really gonna know, but a smack it can react to.

[14-16]

YF6 They don't understand what they are doing. They don't understand the words.

[14-16]

However, some participants indicated that even when children do develop this level of verbal understanding, physical force may still serve a purpose in reinforcing such a verbal message from a parent. The force was seen to add a physical and visual dimension to the message. In doing so, participants argued that the parent tries to distinguish their reaction to the child's misdemeanour from normal conversation. The physical force signifies a case of particular wrongdoing.

YF7 They won't listen to you if you just tell them. You've got to do something to show them it is wrong what they are doing.

[11-12]

YM8 It's something that is really really rare and when a child gets it they know that they have really done something really wrong.

[14-16]

The child might not be aware of the significance of just the verbal communication, either because they deliberately try to shut out the carer's remonstrations or because they do not realise the parent's seriousness. The physical force is considered to provide that extra clarity and focus awareness. However, the physical act need not occur at precisely the same time as the verbal

communication, but may follow a little later when the child's continued misbehaviour indicates this lack of clarity:

YF9 You should like get the child and give it a stiff word and if it continues then maybe a little smack, and it would make it understand a bit clearer the point you're trying to get across.

[14-16]

The idea that the physical force can be employed to communicate the seriousness of a situation was also felt by some to be relevant to the school setting. When used occasionally in place of the more everyday sanctions of 'punishment exercises' and detentions, physical force would highlight a particularly severe breach of code:

NH What about in schools with, say, the belt?

YM10 Possibly it should be there for extreme cases, to let you know that you have done something really wrong.

[14-16]

In addition, participants considered that the legitimacy of using physical force as communication would increase if parents needed to stop a child's behaviour quickly. The employment of physical force is not only to communicate wrong doing, but to actually stop the behaviour in the immediate context as soon as possible. Once again, this may or may not follow previous attempts to stop the inappropriate behaviour through verbal or other non-physical communication:

YM11 [A smack could be used] so that they would know that they were doing something wrong and stop it.

[14-16]

Again, the major argument supporting the use of physical force to stop behaviour immediately related to lack of verbal understanding in the child. If the child is deemed too young to understand verbal communication, physical force may be the only way to get the message across to the child quickly enough to stop the behaviour:

YM12 If they were really misbehaving then ya would have to give them a small smack and that, because it would be the only way they would understand they were doing something wrong and stop. If, like, it was someone wee.

[11-12]

The above participant stressed that only a 'small smack' was necessary as a gesture. This reflects the general view surrounding this physical communication that the act should not hurt the child, but follow the minimalist line of 'just enough' to communicate the need to stop the behaviour:

YF13 I'd tell him to stop it, and if he didnae I'd smack him. But I wouldn't do it that hard like he started to cry. Just to let it know that he was doing wrong.

[11-12]

Although any injury or permanent hurt was ruled out by every young person (see Chapter Five), there was a limited voice suggesting that a small amount of pain may sometimes be necessary and legitimate in order to stop the behaviour and transmit displeasure. If any pain was seen as needed, however, it would again be primarily communicative and would certainly not imply a desire for retribution. It was just enough to attract the child's concentration, 'register' the communication and stop the misbehaviour:

YM14 It should cause a small amount of pain and that's enough. A short sharp shock to tell them that it's wrong and to stop what they are doing.

[14-16]

Those participants who followed this line often drew their arguments in relation to the animal kingdom. They noted how animal young followed instructions on a behavioural level of responding to physical sensation. If children were unable to communicate well enough and quickly enough verbally, again because of limited development of human understanding, then they would also be able to respond to this physical sensation or pain:

YM15 Like in nature, most animals hit their child. Like mammals would hit their young to discipline them. They know that they are doing something wrong at the time because they are hit and they feel a little pain when they are doing something wrong. It is basically the same with humans except it is on a higher conscious level. But there is still that animal part of the human brain that understands pain when you are doing something wrong.

However, even allowing just this small amount of pain to fulfil this purpose was uncomfortable for the young participants. They were torn between ideas of care, fairness and the belief that effective communication can only be registered with a degree of pain:

YF16 You have got to do something, like that's quick, to stop it. So that they will realise (...) 'cos children don't have the mentality to realise. But if there was another way of doing it, then I would definitely be for that. (...) I don't see it as fair, but I don't see any other way myself. I think if it is gonna hurt the child...well, it is gonna have to hurt the child to a certain degree if it's gonna stop...I don't know.

[11-12]

Shock was expressed as an important and necessary characteristic of physical communication more widely than pain. Indeed, when this shock factor was present to attract the attention of the child, pain or hurt for the child was not considered necessary to stop misbehaviour. Shock was seen by participants as the key to stopping the behaviour:

YF17 Just something to show them that you're angry and you want them to stop it cos it's not the way you're supposed to behave. (...)

NH Is that meant to hurt or give any pain?

YF17 No, just to give them a bit of a shock.

[11-12]

Physical force as a teaching tool

The second dominant theme in purposes of physical force, closely related to using physical force for the purpose of communicating about present behaviour, is the justification of sending a message about future behaviour. Not only should children interpret from the force that what they are doing is inappropriate, but that it would be wrong to do it again in the future. Participants considered that physical force can be used legitimately in response to an action not for the sake of dealing with or for retribution of that past misbehaviour, but as a teaching tool to shape the future behaviour of the child. Associated with an agenda of moral education in the home, the force was seen as an aid for the parent in helping the child establish what behaviour should be considered 'right' or 'wrong' in the future:

YF18 It teaches you the lesson that you have done something wrong and that you shouldn't do it again.

[11-12]

The physical force was widely presented as an aid to improving the speed at which young people learn their moral lessons and take their experiences out into the

world. The carer's act will establish personal rules to follow in the future which will guard against making the same mistakes again:

YF19 It's to sort of like learn them from their mistakes, so they know not to do it again and if they see one of their friends they will probably tell the kid, 'You've not to do that, it's wrong.'

[14-16]

As with communicating messages about the present situation, this prescription for the future is seen as particularly relevant to the younger child. This may either be based upon the same arguments relating to limited cognitive development, or because of their limited *experience* of distinguishing 'right' from 'wrong':

YF20 For very young children, and up to the age of the beginning of primary school it's still basic discipline, teaching them to do right from wrong.

[14-16]

Again, even if a degree of understanding is conceded, some participants identified a role and purpose of physical force focused much more on its reinforcement and practical application for future behaviour. The purpose of the smack may be to ensure that children 'take the message in' and will bear it in mind for future behaviour. The physical force may be meant to ensure that the young person will remember the teaching next time they are faced with the situation:

YM21 If he keeps on going on with it you have to give him something. Like (...) when I'm in trouble I never remember that [my father] told me that and me dad says, 'Well, I'll just have to give you something that will remind ya.'

[11-12]

Alternatively, it may be felt that the child would not take a non-physical message seriously enough for it to be reflected in future behaviour. Some young people argued that the message may be ignored and the misbehaviour will be repeated in the future:

YM22 If you have a problem child and you tell them, they'll say, 'Aye, aye', wait five minutes and then do it again.

[14-16]

YF23 Yeah, but they think they can do that again because you've not done nothing. I dinnae think that it's that bad, a slap, just a wee smack.

[14-16]

The participants sometimes provided anecdotal evidence to portray a reliance on non-physical intervention alone as liberalist or woefully inadequate in enforcing firm discipline. The purpose of physical force would be to add much needed weight and a sense of seriousness to these verbal prescriptions for future behaviour:

YF24 My neighbour has a son and he is about three years old and she never hit him yet and he's a wee...I willnae even say it, but he's really really annoying. And all she says is, 'Stop doing this' and 'You shouldnae do that', and he'll just do it again and again.

[14-16]

As with general communication about the event, pain is not seen as necessary to make the child understand the parental teaching:

YF4 Just smacking them enough to know not to do it again.

[14-16]

YF25 Your are not supposed to really hurt them, just supposed to say like don't do it again. I think that's why a lot of parents do it.

[11-12]

A popular supplementary element to this teaching purpose of physical force was specifically to associate the child's misbehaviour with future negative consequences. The physical force in child care intrinsically contains a threat to the child of further negative consequences if the behaviour is repeated. Young people were very keen to suggest that if the physical force was to teach or refer to future events, it was a 'warning' rather than a 'punishment'. Again, this seems to reflect a

reluctance to encompass retribution for a past event, but focuses clearly on the future:

YF26 It would just be to make sure that they don't do it again. I wouldn't call it a punishment.

YM27 No, I would call it a warning or something like that.

[11-12]

NH Is it a punishment?

YM28 I don't think it's a punishment. It's just like...

YF29 A warning not to do it ever again. Like, if you do you get it done again.

[11-12]

The threat may be intended to imply future physical force, in the same vein as the 'warning', if they re-offend or suggest a rather more vague set of consequences directly from the carer. However, even if the physical force used is intended to demonstrate that future behaviour will initiate the same disciplinary response, these acts are not perceived as retribution for the past event. Both the initial act and subsequent acts are designed to focus upon teaching for the future. The second physical response immediately acts as a

reinforcement for the first message, a new 'warning' for the future, rather than an end in itself. The purpose is never to make the child sorry, regret or pay for their past actions:

YF30 Making the child know that it's wrong to do it and they will get hit or whatever for doing it and then they would know not to do it again.

[14-16]

Again, concurrent with the absence of retribution in intentions, the physical force is seen as more of a gesture towards negative consequences that will hurt the child rather than the child having to bear any painful consequences in reality:

YM31 It should just be like a warning, like, 'Don't do that.' It's just like, 'Don't do that again. If you do you will get that again.' But it shouldn't be like inflicting pain on them.

[14-16]

As part of this demonstration of painful consequences, some young participants argued that physical force was particularly necessary when warning the child against a situation which the carer considered particularly dangerous. As such, the carer is able to help the child avoid future hazardous 'mistakes' by instituting a safe, early and painless warning. A 'smack' was seen as a legitimate protective gesture to symbolise the future pain that the misbehaviour could bring on the child:

YM11 People think, 'If I smack him then he won't do it again, he'll think twice about doing it again.' If a mother catches her child playing with bleach then her instant reaction is to grab them and smack them and tell them not to do it again, so they know that they won't go near bleach again.

[14-16]

The gesture was seen as appropriate to a caring relationship, teaching a valuable lesson to benefit the child later in the wider world; 'saving' the child from the dangers of a lack of experience:

YF32 If they are endangering themselves...if a child reaches out to a fire or something, a quick slap across the wrists will stop them doing it again.

NH Is that a punishment?

YF32 No, I think that is saving them from themselves really.

[14-16]

As with the other 'warnings' highlighted above, participants considered that physical force could reinforce verbal communication when words are felt by the parent to be unclear or not being taken seriously. Participants commonly mentioned the valuable purpose that a 'smack' may serve when a young child is confronted with a fire:

YM33 Aye, maybe a fire. If a child's going near that and it keeps going near it, and you say, 'Don't do that', and it keeps doing it...so then you smack it to teach it that you don't do that at all...never.

[14-16]

Physical force to restrain or remove the child

Unlike every other purpose presented by participants as legitimising physical force, restraint or removal was not considered to entail the adult sending a message to the child about behaviour. In itself, the action was not designed to persuade or teach a child to change behaviour in a situation. That responsibility was removed from the child. Participants focused on two subsidiary purposes for an adult to apply physical force to restrain or remove a child. First, the young people highlighted situations where force may be used to prevent or block physically the child from misbehaving, or from getting into a situation where such misbehaviour may be likely. Although this may follow a misdemeanour, the carer's action is intended as a means of restriction in the present rather than a punishment for past behaviour or a warning for the future. This particular purpose is not particularly to define or communicate the behaviour as wrong for the child, but to prevent any opportunity for the child to misbehave. As such, young participants saw this purpose of physical force as particularly relevant to a parent with a child away from the home where misbehaviour may disturb other people:

YF34 I'd hold on to them.

NH Is that fair on the child?

YF34 I think so, because it is kind of creating a nuisance of itself and if you kept it by your side, would stop it.

NH Is that a punishment?

YF34 No, I don't think it is. It is just stopping it from making a noise. Controlling them physically.

[14-16]

Second, physical force could be used to restrain a child from a position of danger. It should be noted that using physical force to remove a child from danger was viewed exceptionally. Unlike the other purposes, this decision to use force would be based entirely on the grounds of child safety in the immediate situation. The physical force was not seen as being 'on' the child, but 'on behalf' of the child, forcing the appropriate and safe action that a child would do if capable of looking after himself or herself. These differences were enough to provide consensual support from young participants for the use of physical force to protect in such circumstances, even if the particular participants strongly dismissed the legitimacy of the purposes for force 'on' the child:

YF35 When my brother was wee and he was near the fire my mum would just drag him away, and she had to get a fireguard. She had to lift him away. That was OK, 'cos if he went near the fire he would have burnt his hand.

NH Was that a punishment?

YF35 Nah, she was just lifting him away so he wouldnae burn his hand

[11-12]

YM36 It is about to do something where they are about to hurt themselves and you grab them really fast, you might hurt them then but you don't really mean it. You are trying to protect them really. It is more of a protection than a punishment.

[14-16]

Although, such an action was not, in itself, intended to send any form of message to the child, it could be combined with another purpose listed by young people. The action could, for instance, be followed by a 'smack' to warn that such behaviour carries negative consequences, or extend the use of force beyond the time when the child has reached safety. Such an incident would alter the purpose from solely removing the child from danger, and so lose participants' consensus of support for the adult's intention.

Physical force to enforce general control in a situation

Some discussions emphasised explicitly the use of physical force primarily for purposes of enforcing adult control within a situation. On these occasions, the primary purpose was not seen as communicating or teaching the child that a specific behaviour is inappropriate (like the above purposes), but to insist on compliance with the adult's overall control in a particular situation. The physical force would serve the purpose of bringing, restoring or maintaining general order to that situation. It should be noted that this purpose does not require the adult to actively restrain the child from misbehaviour. An act of physical discipline would *symbolically demonstrate* to the child that he or she must abide by the social rules of adult control appropriate to that particular situation.

This purpose was referred to particularly in relation to the context of educational institutions. Indeed, more effective control of the class was the overwhelmingly dominant purpose for those participants who voiced support for a return of the belt to schools in Scotland. Primarily, it was believed that the numbers of children commonly involved in an educational setting require a strong degree of order if the programme is to function effectively. Some young participants argued that physical discipline may support a teacher in their perceived responsibility to control class proceedings.

NH Should teachers be allowed to hit with the belt?

YM37 Aye, they should bring it back, 'cos then folks wouldnae be shouting across the class and everything

[11-12]

YF38 Because at school there's more people in the school and they can't just keep on going at the same pupil when there's other people needing attention. So there's other people needing attention, rather than that one person.

[11-12]

Young participants were quick to insist that control was necessary in order to protect the interests of other pupils, and that the use of physical force would effectively serve this purpose. The physical force is more about control for the development of the other pupils than a lesson in appropriate behaviour for the child concerned:

YM39 If pupils are disturbing the class and disturbing the teacher then they should be disciplined for it, as it is the other pupils in the class who are losing out because of bad behaviour. If they get hit with the belt then they won't be disturbing the class.

[14-16]

Contextual differences for the perceived purposes of acts of physical force

It is clear from this analysis that the young participants were keen to stress the importance of contextual differences between various settings, and the relationships which characterise them, when assessing the purposes and need for physical force. The differences were manifested, for instance, in terms of appropriate control and formality for each setting:

YM40 At school you are expected to behave and go along with the rules.

YM11 There are a set of rules which you have to obey, but it's more laid back at home.

[14-16]

Precisely because of these differences in context, it followed for young participants that there are very different disciplinary purposes for physical force in different settings. In turn, the purposes that were stressed determined that certain *acts* of physical force were seen as more appropriate in one setting than another. Particular acts were considered appropriate to particular purposes which were perceived as appropriate for particular settings. This led, for instance, to a position where a proportion of participants supported the use of the 'belt' at school, whilst rejecting its use in the home. Primarily, this is because the belt was seen as a tool to establish control over the child, a purpose apparently viewed as inappropriate to domestic child care. At home it was not seen as vital to maintain order so that others will not be disturbed:

NH But why did you say that it was right to belt at school, but wrong in the home?

YF41 People get taught in school, but at home they are just living under their parents' roof...but in school they are disturbing the class.

[14-16]

Rejection of physical force as punishment

This analysis of the purposes voiced by participants reveals that they did not generally refer to purposes that they considered legitimate as 'physical punishment'. Indeed, the suggestion that the force may be legitimised as a punishment was rarely accepted for any child care situation. Although not voiced explicitly in these terms by the young people themselves, the concept of 'punishment' was related to retribution for past events, whereas legitimate purposes of such acts were intended to communicate messages for the present or future. In itself, this 'punishment' as retribution would not be concerned with current or future development of the child:

YM42 I probably would give him a nip, ya know. (...) If it was something to do with danger, just to make sure that he realised that there was something wrong and he shouldn't do it.

NH So, is that as a punishment?

YM42 No, I wouldn't say it was a punishment. I think it's to show them that it's wrong and this is what's gonna happen to ya if ya do that again, ya know. I think that's all that would be.

[14-16]

This concern with the past is incompatible with the concern of young participants' 'legitimate purposes' for a children's development and nurture. Punishment as retribution is not focused on either child care in the present nor education for the future. Participants sometimes felt torn between the awareness that acts of physical force seen as acceptable may have been traditionally described as 'punishment', and yet feeling uncomfortable with the implications which such a concept holds for them:

NH So would you say that it was discipline, or punishment, or control or what?

YM43 I think that it's more like keeping the kid under your control because it is disturbing other shoppers and that's not really fair. The kid is doing wrong and you give it a smack, but a punishment would be like...I suppose it is a punishment really because if you smack the kid because it has done something wrong then it is a punishment... but it is really control.

[14-16]

The act of physical force described in the extract above does follow a child's misbehaviour, and so suggests to the participant that the act is a punitive response. However, the past act does not remain the main focus for the carer, who is concerned for the present and future behaviour of the child. The respondent draws the conversation back to the future, and away from punishment as retribution for the past. If physical force were to be used for retribution, and thus as punishment, it would need to ensure that the child paid for their act through the deliberate infliction of some form of pain or harm:

YF44 Well, a punishment seems like a harsh thing to do, but I don't think that a smack is a bad thing, (...) just to stop you from misbehaving. It's not really to be painful or hurting you in any way.

[14-16]

In addition, the idea of retribution at a young age can be seen as inconsistent with the young people's acceptance with the ideology of childhood innocence. To pay a child back for a misdemeanour is perceived to require a degree of intent or awareness by the child of the inappropriateness of their action. However, children were considered by participants to be too young to fulfil such requirements. To punish for a misdemeanour would be according the young child an undue amount of personal responsibility:

NH Why especially not young children?

YM45 'Cos children are innocent.

YF46 They don't know what they are doing.

[11-12]

Rejection of all purposes of physical force on children

The acceptance of the use of physical force on children in principle depended specifically upon a perception that it could fulfil at least one of the 'legitimate' purposes. Young participants did not accept that children should be smacked because they have behaved inappropriately per se, but only if there is a legitimate child care purpose behind the force. If none of the purposes discussed above were recognised as valid in any circumstances, then all physical force was usually perceived as 'retributive punishment', and often described as child abuse or violence:

YM47 Violence isn't the solution anyway. The children wouldn't understand it. You have to talk to them and tell them what they have done wrong. (...) Nah, it's a punishment.

[14-16]

Indeed, it was particularly common to find that young people who had referred to the use of physical force on children as 'violence', later argued that the acts could not be considered legitimate forms of 'communication' for the future and were, therefore, more punitive in nature:

NH Would you smack them as well?

YF48 No, because it influences them to use violence over other people as well.

(...)

YF48 It must be a punishment. A warning would be like giving them a verbal...

[11-12]

Once this argument establishes physical force as 'violent', young people were able to oppose such acts as part of a wider principled rejection of all cultural violence:

YM49 I don't believe in it. (...) I think that you have got to communicate with them.

(...) I think that there is too much violence in the world as it is.

[14-16]

When smacking was perceived as violent in this way, some young participants then drew on more extreme images associated with wider violence in order to reinforce their opposition to physical force:

YM49 I just think that you don't have to resort to violence to control people. (...) It is sort of like medieval...it is sort of like medieval torture sort of thing. Ooh, I do not agree with that at all. (...) It is just like quite gruesome in a way...horrible thought.

Overall, those who rejected the idea that physical force served legitimate purposes felt that it was not being implemented with the child's development as the prime consideration. Indeed, they considered that the reason that people use physical force on children may not have much to do with deliberate purpose at all. Rather than carrying out a planned act of child care or education, they are more likely to either be simply accepting and adopting an established cultural pattern, or responding to their own feelings and needs:

YM50 There's a lot of people (...) who are quick tempered or something and who hit their children automatically.

[14-16]

Effective achievement of particular purposes

Young participants' overall view on the use of physical force on children in disciplinary relationships included perceived effectiveness. Views were often supported either with empirical observations from their own childhood or from watching the care of younger children, or with tales from contemporaries. Positive views on the effectiveness of physical force in child care related closely to the perceived purposes proposed by the young people. The acceptability of using physical force depended upon whether the actions were likely to achieve the type of immediate objective outlined. For instance, a particularly dominant theme when

assessing the effectiveness of a smack in practice was whether it fulfilled the purpose (outlined above) of immediate communication to stop misbehaviour. Some participants argued that effectiveness of fulfilling this purpose quickly is consistently demonstrated when parents smack their children in public:

YM40 It is effective. 'Cos if you see a mother smacking a child they stop straight away. So at that point it's effective.

[14-16]

Participants suggested that physical force was particularly effective at stopping behaviour because of a certain degree of intrinsic shock value. It was argued that this 'short, sharp shock', outlined above as central to this purpose, would pull the child up fast and stop the misbehaviour. The following passage outlines this effect, and also demonstrates that a participant's belief in the effectiveness does not always indicate their support for the use of physical discipline in practice. Perceived effectiveness was not the sole determinant of the degree of participants' personal acceptance of physical discipline:

YF51 Sometimes you get so mad at them that a smack does work because they go up to their room and, I don't know, it's sort of the shock of it that sort of shut them up sometimes, I suppose. But I don't think that it's really right.

[11-12]

Regarding schools, participants focused on the degree to which physical force would ensure overall adult control and regulation in a particular situation where

learning was disrupted. However, the current ban on school physical discipline (in general) meant that young participants were not usually able to frame their arguments around incidents they had witnessed directly. Instead, they focused mostly on tales of the past heard from adults and on inverse calculations from the non-physical management of discipline in schools today. There was a strong tendency to cite a dissatisfaction with present circumstances in their own and other schools as a background to arguing that physical force was missed:

YF52 'Cos, sometimes they can't control them and they're talking and you're trying to do something and you tell them to stop and they just keep talking, and have a riot and that. (...)

YM53 I think we should bring it [belt] back.

YF52 I think it would control them.

[11-12]

Indeed those arguments citing the effectiveness of physical force in schools included favourable comparisons with present disciplinary tools, which were seen as ineffectual for control. Apparently drawing on media messages and stories from older people, some participants recounted an almost 'golden age' view of school discipline in 'old times'. To return schools to that golden age and restore the inherent order, it would be necessary to reintroduce the belt or cane:

YF54 Detentions aren't really the way. School punishments at the moment are not working.

NH But would the belt solve that problem?

YF54 It used to do ages ago. Years ago when it was in schools it used to always work when people would get hit on the hands or whatever by a belt. They would never do it again. (...) I've heard it from people who live about me. When I tell them stories about school and they says, 'I was hit by the belt and I've never done that again', and whatever. And you've seen it in T.V. programmes about old times.

[14-16]

Although it was stated occasionally that seeing one or two classmates being hit would usually ensure a child's appropriate behaviour in a particular situation, young participants stressed the effectiveness of having already tasted the act himself or herself. The idea was that pupils would not want to misbehave once they knew what the belt was like. The pupil would understand negative consequences when receiving the force, the memory of which would curb his or her inappropriate behaviour in the future. According to the argument, using physical force on particular individuals would ensure that they would be brought back into line quickly on that occasion and on similar occasions in the future. In particular, this would be an effectual means of limiting that pupil's negative influence on the education of others in the school:

YF55 If they get hit with it once and realise how sore it is, they won't do it again.
So maybe one out of ten might get the belt a couple of times.

[11-12]

YM11 If you have got a pupil who was constantly misbehaving in class and the teachers say, 'Right then, out in front of the class'...rap on the knuckles, and say, 'You misbehave again and you'll get that'. If they were going to do something wrong then it would make them think. They'd suddenly remember what happened to them and they would know better than to do that because they will be the one to get belted again. It would be a good deterrent I think.

[14-16]

Although not necessarily supportive, young participants were clear that the belt or cane would achieve its effectiveness in ensuring control because it induced fear. The class would behave according to the teacher's wishes because they would be afraid of the physical consequences of stepping out of line:

YM56 It would stop people from doing it because they would be afraid of it.

[11-12]

YM57 Just the thought of getting hit with the belt or whatever would be enough to put some people off talking to each other in class.

[14-16]

Conditions on effectiveness

Quite apart from any overriding argument of principle affecting views on physical force, young participants were clear that the effectiveness of acts of physical force must be considered on a micro level. Within this context, the young people proposed various conditions which would affect the success of using physical force. A pivotal condition on its effectiveness either in the home or in an educational setting was felt to be the personality of the individual child concerned. It was considered that physical force would 'work' with some children, yet might have no effect on the behaviour of others:

YM58 It does work sometimes 'cos some children don't like getting hit (...), [but] some children just take it and do it again. They really don't care.

[11-12]

As a consequence of these individual-level differences in reaction, a parent's judgement on whether physical force has a positive effect on his or her child has a bearing on how acceptable it is perceived to be for such acts to be employed in that particular family:

NH Should parents use physical force in discipline?

YM59 It just depends how the parent wants to bring up the child. If they think it's effective to their child. Like, I'm sure a boy in this school wouldnae...if they were punished in the same way as me, they might not react the same. If they got hit they might stop doing whatever they are doing. But I think I'm worse when I get hit. If they got grounded it wouldn't really bother them and they'd do it again.

[14-16]

The different responses from children to physical punishment was seen to have particular significance when considering how to deal with disruptive pupils in school. Although the young people acknowledged that physical force was considered by some people as the tough discipline policy needed to tackle disruptive children, it was widely noted that these were the very pupils who were least likely to be affected. Ironically, those pupils who are the 'hardest' or 'toughest' trouble makers are most likely to be able to withstand such an intervention by teachers:

YF19 I think that some of them, perhaps the weaker ones amongst them, might actually think better of it, but some people, whatever it is, they are just going to behave badly. That's like a fact, because some people just don't get deterred.

[14-16]

Drawing upon observations of their own class dynamics, participants argued that peer influence would have an influence on the effectiveness of physical force in schools. Unlike the private acts between a carer and child in the home, the reaction of these 'tougher' pupils to physical discipline in school would be affected directly by their relationships with their classmates:

NH Do you think that it would control bad behaviour in schools?

YF60 No, because some people go around dressed like groups that are really rough and they'll just laugh at them and say, like, it's just a wee hit.

[11-12]

Indeed, some participants suggested that the use of physical force may actually be counter-productive because the pupils may find that being on the receiving end of such an act increases their 'tough' reputation, brings them attention and may increase their peer status:

YM61 And some people will probably just do it to act smart and that, in front of their friends and that.

[11-12]

More specifically, some pupils related this counter-productive reaction to machismo amongst male pupils. Physical force would only serve to bolster the macho credentials of the individual pupils and pander to the overall value of machismo amongst peers, causing wider trouble and disruption in schools:

YF62 People could, like boys more I think probably, they might see that as being macho and do it anyway to, like, show off to their mates and stuff. So that could be a problem, 'cos it might not affect them saying, 'I can take it anyway, so I'm just gonna be annoying all the time'.

[14-16]

Allied to the individualism of each child is the idea that each child's response to physical force changes with time. Participants noted that the older the child grows, the less effective a smack from their parent would be. The young participants did not explore, however, whether an increase in severity of the physical act to match the increase in age would achieve the parent's desired effect. Essentially, the participants were indicating that the physical act may no longer be received simply as an accepted message of behavioural instruction from an adult to a child. The reception would be affected by either the older child's indignation or a simple lack of compliance:

YM63 I don't think any parent should attempt to smack someone of my age 'cos, well they might but I know it wouldn't affect them. If my mum smacked me, I'd be... Well, I wouldn't be worried about it. So I don't think it would make much difference to anybody of my age.

[14-16]

Another condition voiced in some discussions as affecting the effectiveness of physical discipline in whatever setting was the frequency of its use. Young people

considered that any effectiveness would be reduced the more physical force was used against a child in a relationship. Practically, the child would get used to the act. Again, the participants did not generally explore whether increased severity would solve this indifference, but were essentially commenting that the same physical force would begin to project a weakened message to the child:

YM64 If you keep on getting smacked you get used to it, and it willnae bother you.

[11-12]

This trade-off between frequency and effectiveness was particularly important to young people who saw the main purpose of such an act as stopping misbehaviour immediately. This purpose relies on the shock value of an *unusual* response from the adult:

YF65 Smacking doesn't work if you do it all the time, because it doesn't shock the child.

[14-16]

Obstacles to effectiveness

Young participants also suggested that physical discipline might produce obstacles to its own effectiveness. Quite apart from any principled reservations, some participants were worried that receiving physical force would cause the child

additional practical difficulties with behaving appropriately. Such perceived problems were enough to persuade some participants that physical discipline should not be used. In the school situation, for instance, it was common for the participants to comment that directing physical force to children's hands would make it difficult for them to proceed appropriately with their school work. This may either be because they were generally upset or because it was uncomfortable for them to write with a painful hand:

YM66 If you get hit with the belt you couldnae go back and write. It would be sore.

YM12 Aye, it's sore.

[11-12]

Empathy with problems caused by feeling pain from receiving physical force, demonstrated here, was limited to the concerns expressed by the younger group of participants aged between 11 and 12. These younger participants repeatedly referred to practical difficulties resulting from feelings of physical 'soreness' for the child. Younger participants also placed a stronger emphasis on the impact of emotional upset on the effectiveness of any act of physical force. They expressed concern that the disciplinary message from the adult may be lost in this emotional upset, actually making matters worse:

YM27 And another reason, if you do hit them they'll probably burst out crying for the next four hours.

Moreover, participants felt that this crying and emotional upset for the child may cause further behavioural problems in the disciplinary situation. The immediate discomfort from physical force may prompt the child to react in a way which causes the adult further practical difficulties. This behavioural reaction from the child may not involve any deliberate intent to cause more problems, but may be the result of personal emotional turmoil:

YF28 You see all these mums in Tesco's and everything smacking them, but that just makes things worse I think.

NH Do you think so? In what way?

YF52 'Cos they just think...if they end up greetin', they run off in the supermarket and sometimes they just get lost.

Alternatively, warned participants, physical discipline may be counter-productive because it may produce a deliberate adverse reaction by the child. The child might, as a separate and active agent, respond to physical force in a way which goes against the behavioural pattern desired by the adult. The adult changed the mood of the child to one which does not facilitate co-operation and heightens tension within the situation. The following extract suggests that 'anger' from the school

pupil after receiving physical force would not be compatible with the purpose of restoring calm control in the classroom:

YF34 It might make them more angry with actually being hit, rather than calming them down and making them stop it.

[14-16]

Likewise regarding the parent-child relationship, physical force may cause more problems for the adult because it could prompt the child to deliberately accentuate the original inappropriate behaviour as a defiant response. Participants often chose to illustrate this point with recollections from their own childhood, still clear about the defiance which the act produced in their disciplinary relationships. In the following extract the participant recalls his own response, emphasising the child as a separate agent:

NH You didn't mention smacking as an answer.

YM50 I dinnae think that works. If I was ever smacked, I used to get even worse.

I suppose because I didnae like getting smacked.

[14-16]

Concerns with practical obstacles to effective discipline caused by physical force were sometimes specific to particular misdemeanours. For instance, some participants provided a micro level focus on appropriate response to a child hitting

another child. The participants implied that physical force in such situations produces a confused disciplinary message:

YF51 That's because that's telling them off for hitting someone, and then hitting them back. That would really confuse a young child if you think about it.

[11-12]

Effective alternatives

In common with discussions that touched on 'purposes', perceived effectiveness of physical force did not necessarily mean participants' support for its use in practice. There was a significant body of opinion which stated that although physical force in child care may be effective under certain conditions, it was not an essential tool in raising and educating a child. Some participants, mainly in the older age group, stressed the possibility of other methods of discipline being just as effective as physical force. Wider concerns with using physical discipline meant that participants often underlined the importance of adults finding these alternative methods of discipline:

YF16 Well, in schools, I'm sure there must be another way around it than give people the cane and stuff. It would deter me and it would work if that sort of thing was brought back. And if there has been a mistake and done something wrong, you can't really justify something after that. It is all mucked up.

[11-12]

YM67 You could find other ways (...) that could be just as effective as smacking them.

[14-16]

Indeed, any positive effectiveness was often seen by this body of participants as relating less to the actual act of physical force, and more to do with the overall 'firm' stance of the parents or educators. The most important element for ensuring the appropriate behaviour was not the inclusion of force, but the avoidance of adult permissiveness in child care. Discipline was not always equated with physical force:

YF68 I think that you can be really firm with them and really strict, but you don't necessarily need to hit [smack] them.

[14-16]

YM69 Ya don't have to hit 'em. Ya just gotta be strict. Ya don't need to hit 'em, just a firm word. Just keep 'em in line sort of thing. There's no reason to hit 'em.

[14-16]

Moreover, some participants argued that physical force may actually be less effective than other methods because the use of smacking to stop or communicate will fail to resolve the underlying problem. The act would fail to get to the root of what is wrong, or effect any longer term change in behaviour because it does not give the child a full explanation. The act of physical force may be perceived as too transient to address the situation fully, with less contemplation by both the adult and child:

YF70 It's not really solving anything. But if ya do something, and they know they're doing wrong and they're missing out on something, then it's gonna give 'em a lesson that's worthwhile. They're gonna remember it more than smacking because, I mean, they'll end up knowing why ya did it. And if ya explain it to them, just sit down and tell them.

[14-16]

There was the opinion that our cultural impressions and expectations of children underestimated their level of understanding a verbal explanation. This view seemed to emphasise children as a capable agents and directly countered the purpose of physical force as a necessary mode of communication:

YF3 I don't think that you should really smack them or whatever. I think that there are much better ways you could do it, like trying talking to them and making them understand, because they probably understand a lot more than you think.

Withdrawing a treat or privilege to show a child that they are 'missing out on something', as mentioned by YF70 (above), was commonly suggested by participants as a way of effectively supporting an adult's disciplinary explanation. Again presented as more favourable than physical force, suggestions for such actions included taking away sweets, not buying a magazine and not being allowed to watch television.

In the school setting, some young people countered claims that physical force would curb the behaviour of the most disruptive pupils, by arguing that alternative disciplinary procedures are already in place to deal with those situations. Furthermore, the tougher and more disruptive pupils would be able to ride the transient effect of physical force in a way which would be impossible with some of these other measures:

YF71 But again, in extreme cases, you get suspended for it. It should be effective because then you have really learnt your lesson. The belt...you just get a wallop, a bruise and it goes away in a few days...

[14-16]

In relation to less extreme cases, young participants indicated that detentions may affect pupils more positively than physical force. Such methods may become particularly effective in communicating messages about their behaviour to older

pupils. According to some participants, there comes an age when losing freedom is more dramatic to a child than receiving physical force:

YF4 Hitting them may not get through if they are that age that think, 'You are gonna hit me and it's gonna hurt for an hour'. Whereas, if they have got to stay back, they are losing their free time.

[14-16]

For other participants, however, no measure replaces the effects of physical force, either in the home or educational settings. Nothing else will ensure the same effect on the child's behaviour. Particularly in relation to stopping bad behaviour immediately, the purpose most commonly singled out to illustrate the effectiveness of physical force, some participants did not see any practical alternative available:

YM42 Skelp 'em. It's the only thing you can do to stop 'em.

[14-16]

YF34 It sounds quite bad, but how else are you going to stop them from being bad?

[14-16]

As implied in this last extract, there was a strong and recurring theme in discussions that participants were uncomfortable with the idea of using physical

force, but could find no effective disciplinary alternative. Again, the older age group of participants in particular expressed a concern from the position of potential carer that they would not use physical force on their children if they were presented with an effective alternative:

YF20 If there is an alternative, I don't think they should. But I can't see what that would be.

[14-16]

For some young people, there is a recognition that alternative methods of curbing inappropriate behaviour of young people may exist. This is, however, tempered by the belief that these other means would be harder to manage. According to their concerns, it would be possible to find an effective alternative to physical force, but it would make the adult carer's life much more difficult:

NH Is it possible to bring up a child without any form of smacking?

YM72 Yes. It would probably be harder, but it would be possible.

[14-16]

Chapter Summary

This chapter has utilised the broad analytical categories of 'purposes' and 'immediate effectiveness' to examine the dominant themes in discussions

broaching the intent behind physical force and how well it achieves its purpose. The chapter began by exploring the purposes that some young participants considered legitimise the role of physical force, generally either in domestic child care or education. Purposes were presented in this analysis in four main categories: to communicate with the child; to teach appropriate behaviour for the future; to restrain or remove the child and to enforce overall adult control in a situation.

First, some participants argued that physical force could occupy a legitimate role as a tool of communication, either just to indicate to the child that behaviour is inappropriate or to transmit the adult's wish that the misbehaviour is stopped quickly. This physical communication would be adopted because the child was considered too young for verbal understanding, to reinforce the seriousness of a verbal communication or to ensure the child reacts quickly. Second, physical force was perceived by some participants as a useful tool to teach a child that their behaviour would also be 'wrong' in the future. Again, lack of verbal understanding and reinforcement of seriousness were presented as supporting the necessity of physical force in fulfilling this purpose. Both these first two categories of purpose focus on sending a strong message to the child about particular acts of misbehaviour. In contrast, the third category of purpose deemed legitimate by young participants replaces this messaging role with direct restraint from misbehaviour. This might occur either to restrict children from committing various acts of misbehaviour or to remove children from a situation in which they might

endanger themselves. This latter reason, perceived as based on safety grounds alone, received consensual support from participants.

These first three categories of purpose were generally focused on the carer-child familial relationship. In contrast, the last category, which replaced a concentration on particular acts of child behaviour with a concern to ensure overall adult control in a particular situation, was reserved for schools. Some participants argued that physical force would be useful to maintain order perceived as necessary in a school classroom. This relationship between contextual setting and purpose resulted in certain types of physical force (e.g. the belt), considered more effective at fulfilling certain purposes (e.g. control through fear), being perceived as more appropriate to certain settings (e.g. school).

In general, any legitimate role for physical force concentrated on influencing the child's behaviour in the present or future. Conversely, purposes centred on 'making the child pay' for the past misbehaviour were not deemed legitimate. Participants reserved the term 'punishment' for such retributive intent, which was generally presented as inappropriate to the use of physical force in child care or education. When participants rejected all purposes of physical discipline as illegitimate, such acts were presented as this 'retributive punishment', violent and even abusive.

Consideration of the effectiveness of physical discipline focused on the degree to which participants felt these 'legitimate' purposes would be achieved. In domestic disciplinary relationships, participants stressed the particular effectiveness of

physical force in immediately stopping misbehaviour. In the school context, some participants cited tales from previous generations and current indiscipline to support the return of the 'belt' to control disruptive pupils. However, the individual personalities of children and peer influence were thought to incite different reactions to physical force, including further misbehaviour. In addition, it was perceived that the force may produce obstacles to its own effectiveness inducing, for instance, emotional or physical discomfort in the child that would prevent them from behaving appropriately. Finally, it was noted that perceived effectiveness did not necessarily imply support for the use of physical force, nor belief that it was essential in achieving disciplinary aims. There was some reference to other disciplinary methods that might actually better resolve any underlying difficulties for the child. However, a strong and reoccurring theme was that although participants were uncomfortable with the use of physical force, they could not see an effective alternative to stopping bad behaviour.

The purposes and the immediate behavioural effects associated with adults' use of physical force in discipline, explored in this chapter, were certainly not the only issues relevant to participants' perceptions of adults' use of physical force in discipline. It is now necessary to focus on the second dominant thematic area in discussions, which surrounded the wider reservations held and contingencies placed upon the practical application of such physical force. The next chapter reviews discussions broaching the actual procedures and implications of such acts within the thematic categories of short-term and longer-term concerns.

Chapter Five Concerns and contingencies surrounding acts of physical force

This chapter concentrates on the concerns that young participants expressed about possible negative effects on children of acts of physical discipline in practice. Although participants may have considered that there were 'legitimate' purposes for the use of physical force in principle, and that such acts may be relatively effective in achieving these purposes in the short term, reservations about the actual procedures and implications of such acts were prevalent in discussions. For the purposes of the analysis presented in this chapter, participants' exploration of these concerns are divided into two main categories of discursive themes: short term concerns and longer term concerns. First, the themes contained in the category of *short term* concerns focus on the immediate context of any actual disciplinary act. The themes in the second category of *longer term* concerns feature perceived implications beyond such an individual disciplinary episode.

As with the previous chapter, it should be noted that various phrases and terms used by participants have been employed in my analysis as indicators of thematic reference to the collective categories of short and longer term concerns. For instance, participants' phrases relating to either category of concern included rejections of a particular act followed by a critique, such as 'you shouldn't / can't do [act] because [concern]', and statements of impropriety in which the act may be described as 'not right' explained by a particular concern. Short term concerns were most commonly indicated by references to limitations on acts, describing acts as

'over the top' or 'just enough', or as 'depending' on particular contingencies, such as '[acceptability of act] would have to depend upon [contingency] because [concern]'. Longer term concerns were often indicated with reference to lasting negative effects on a child, such as 'they'll end up / grow up [negative effect]' and '[act] would affect them because [concern]', or beyond individual disciplinary relationships, such as 'a lot of children would get [negative effect]'.

Short term concerns and contingencies surrounding acts of physical force

In general, any recognition of legitimacy given to the use of physical force per se in the discipline of children was subject to reservations covering each individual incident. Acceptance in principle did not necessitate approval of the actual use of physical force in each child care situation. Participants did not offer a blanket acceptance of all acts of physical force in all situations. Instead, the acceptance of the use of an act of physical force was dominated in discussions by a *dependence* upon circumstantial conditions, phrased in this analysis as 'contingencies':

YM11 It would have to depend upon the circumstances, I don't know.

[14-16]

YF13 There's no really any other way that a parent can discipline their child without hitting them, but I still don't think it's right. (...) I don't think smacking should be illegal, but if they go too far and won't stop hitting their children, I think it should.

[11-12]

Each participant placed certain contingencies which acts of physical force would have to meet for that young person to consider them acceptable. Although the short term concerns and contingencies seemed to vary between participants, they were based around certain common themes. This section on *short term concerns* explores these themes or patterns of concerns and how they informed the contextual contingencies placed upon acts of physical force. It should be noted, however, that these themes are divided under headings in a necessarily crude way for the purposes of analysis and presentation. As will become apparent, in practice these divisions would be permeable, with disparate concerns influencing one another and thus inter-linking these themes.

Acts fulfilling a 'legitimate purpose'

The most dominant contingency stated by the young participants was that any act of physical force must be employed for a legitimate purpose, corresponding with those outlined in the previous chapter (Chapter Four):

YF54 Well, it depends on what they're doing because some kids might deserve it, but I don't really agree that kids should be hit. (...)

YM33 'Cos you can't just go about battering your kid's for no reason unless there's just cause, like to teach them, I suppose.

NH So it is OK to batter if there is a cause?

YM33 Not batter it...a smack or that.

[14-16]

The use of the word 'deserve' (above) was common in discussions. However, the contingency that children should clearly deserve physical discipline did not imply that they should be called to account for their misdemeanours. The term was used more widely than a 'just deserts model', and almost as a synonym for 'needed'. The act would not be 'deserved' unless it was 'needed' to fulfil one or more of the child care goals or purposes seen as legitimising physical force. Young people expressed a belief that teachers (if permitted) would show a particular tendency to use physical discipline when not strictly necessary to fulfil a 'legitimate purpose'. This view again seemed to draw mainly upon tales from previous generations of schoolchildren, which recounted instances of physical discipline not being appropriate to the needs of the pupils:

YF13 (...) Some people got it even if they didn't really need it in the olden days so I don't really think they should bring it back.

In particular, participants described situations where physical force was used as an inappropriate tool for teaching educational subjects, rather than to teach or control behaviour:

YM27 This teacher said to me that they tell you their four times table and that, and if you get a word wrong they just hit you with the belt, eh?

YM58 It's not fair that.

Participants noted that the worst scenario of flouting the contingency for physical force to fulfil a legitimate purpose would be if the adult's action was taken to get back at the child deliberately for a deed committed. Whether carried out in the home or school settings, this would be beyond even retribution and closer to retaliation:

YM72 But not to go over the top, (...) doing it not to teach the child a lesson but to get back at them. That is over the top.

In addition, for an act to be seen as 'deserved' or needed, young people were concerned that a misdemeanour must have actually taken place. This does not imply that the child is personally accountable for that incident, but that it would be

inappropriate for the physical force unless it was preceded by a misdemeanour. Indeed, a misdemeanour must have taken place for the physical force to be consistent with any of the purposes proposed by some as legitimate. In order to ensure that the action followed the misbehaviour, one contingency stated by young people was that the adult must be sure that the child receiving the physical force was, in fact, the same child who had actually committed the offence. Participants referred, for instance, to familial situations where siblings would blame each other and the parent may 'unfairly' smack the wrong child:

YF73 I'd probably use smacking only if it was just one child, because it's not fair if there's two children. I wouldn't know who to blame. It would be like how some people hang people and then find out it wasn't them.

[11-12]

This was seen as a particular concern in the context of schools, where the greater numbers of children would increase the likelihood of using physical force on the wrong person:

YM74 Sometimes it's not that child's fault because sometimes they blame it on each other and you don't know which one's fault it is and some people get blamed for doing nothing wrong because the teacher thinks it's a person but it's not. And if they were to belt that person then it wouldn't be fair because they wouldn't have done anything wrong.

[11-12]

Only when the teacher knew definitely, and perhaps provided proof that the student was the same child misbehaving would the contingency for the use of physical force be met:

YF4 If the teacher knew for definite, yeah, it would be alright. But if they were just guessing (...) it's not really fair. It really depends on whether the teacher knew for definite.

[14-16]

YF34 They might not be doing too much or they might get wrongly accused for doing something that they didn't do

NH What if they were caught in the act?

YF34 That would be different because you have proof that they did it.

[14-16]

Contingencies relating to seriousness

The above extract urging the provision of proof before using physical force not only refers to a child accused of 'something they didn't do', perhaps through a case of mistaken identity, but also refers to the child who 'might not be doing too much'.

Following closely from concerns surrounding deserving above, young participants widely insisted that any misdemeanour preceding physical force must be of a certain significance. In order to warrant action by the adult, the child's behaviour must be serious enough to 'need' correction. It should not just be an example of everyday childlike behaviour, but must be significantly inappropriate to the circumstantial expectations:

YM28 It depends what the child does. If it's really bad I suppose, but not if it's just a wee stupid thing. If it is just a wee thing that he's done, I don't think they should be allowed to smack their children.

[11-12]

One frequently cited example of the circumstances in which it would not be appropriate to respond to the child's behaviour with physical force would be if the wrongdoing was accidental. Participants presented the contingency that physical force should not be used in response to an accident because this, in itself, would not indicate misbehaviour significant enough to need to be addressed or curbed by the adult:

YF26 It wouldn't be right to the child because they hadn't done a lot. If they did something real bad you could give them a skelp, but you wouldn't give them a skelp for spilling their tea.

[11-12]

The use of implements and the corresponding additional force imparted on the child was perceived to increase the importance of this contingency. Consequently, much of the discussion of how serious misdemeanours would have to be to induce physical discipline was centred on the school situation, where participants assumed that many authorised acts would involve implements. Participants were keen to stress that implements should only be used in response to a particularly bad incident, or to ensure control in a serious or dangerous situation:

YF75 If they've done a really bad thing the belt might be better because then they might stop doing it. But only for bad things, not for talking or that.

YF76 You've got to have something really bad or something.

NH So you think you would bring back the belt for something bad?

YF76 Only something really, really bad.

[11-12]

However, the tales from previous generations told of implements being used for trivial offences, as a standard response to misbehaviour rather than to demonstrate particular severity or re-establish control:

YM77 I don't think the teachers should be allowed to cane them or whatever, because when it was introduced before it was done for a lot of trivial things. Like a lot of kids didn't really deserve it, it was too harsh.

YF78 My dad got it done [hit with a belt] for, like, stupid things like talking.

[14-16]

Indeed, some participants stretched contingencies relating to seriousness to insist that, whether involving implements or not, physical force should not be a primary disciplinary tool for common misbehaviour, but should be reserved for occasions when the adults want to stress particular severity. The young people argued that physical force should not be used to point out wrongdoing, only as an indicator of the extreme severity of wrongdoing:

NH Do you think that you will end up smacking your children at all?

YF3 If I had to, maybe, yeah. But not just for every little thing they do (...). It probably depends how serious the thing they've done wrong is. (...) If they had stolen something, I might smack them for that, maybe. But you'd have to explain to them why it was wrong really, because they have to learn.

[14-16]

As indicated by the reference to parental explanations in the above extract, the contingency of seriousness in this context restricts physical force to only underlining particularly important disciplinary messages. In effect, this contingency states that

physical force would only be supported for this purpose if it related to misdemeanours of an exceptional nature. For such occasions, young people were reluctant to dismiss the option of physical force, even if they were not happy with the idea of physical force in child care per se. The participants were not always able to envisage a situation serious enough to prompt them to accept the employment of physical force, but felt compelled to keep it in reserve just in case it was needed to demonstrate the appalling nature of a misdemeanour. The following extract demonstrates the tense combination of unwillingness to endorse the application of physical force and reluctance to relinquish this disciplinary option, pushing the scenario in which it might be employed by parents to the extremity of their imagined spectrum of severe misbehaviour:

YF38 Not unless they've done really something really really terrible.

NH Like...?

YF38 Killed someone...For no reason.

[11-12]

Likewise, a few participants were not able to predict a situation in a school setting severe enough for them to accept the use of physical force, but were reluctant to rule out the possibility of such action just in case. Those participants did stress that the situation may only be serious enough if pushed to the extremes of anarchy, with students completely out of control:

YM61 If they were going to use it, it would have to be in a really severe case like the students running up and down the classroom, wrecking the place.

NH In that case, it would be OK?

YM61 Well, I'd have to think about it, but only in cases like that, and not in other cases like talking in the classroom. That would be just a bit too severe.

NH But you're not against it in principle?

YM61 Well, only for total anarchy, or something like that, maybe.

[11-12]

Following the theme of selectivity in deciding which misdemeanours merit intervention involving physical force, young people stressed the importance of restricting the frequency of such acts. The greater the frequency, the less acceptable each additional act of physical force. Smacking too often would not only reduce any effectiveness (see Chapter Four), but also point to a dysfunctional disciplinary relationship. An adult smacking frequently should review the level of severity in misbehaviour at which they intervene with physical force:

YF79 I dunno, it depends how bad it is really. I mean, on occasion a smack's not gonna do any harm, but not like every night sort of thing. 'Cos if somebody's doing really big smacks nearly every night then there must be something wrong.

The young participants suspected that the school setting has produced some of the worst cases of overuse of physical force. Again, participants produced evidence from tales told by parents and other adults to support their impression that acts of physical force in school had breached standards of acceptability:

YF54 My mum got it about a hundred times at school

[14-16]

Avoidance of pain or injury

It was particularly common for participants to introduce certain concerns, and set contingencies, relating to the amount of pain or injury inflicted on a child through physical discipline. Concerns which centred around the concept of 'pain' per se, rather than necessarily tied in with injury to the child, were almost exclusively cited by the younger aged group of participants. Just as they were more aware of emotional upset in the child leading to obstacles to effectiveness (see Chapter Four), the younger age group of participants demonstrated particular empathy with the child's *physical* feelings. This difference is very apparent from the distinctive ways the age groups employed the term, 'hurt'. Although both age groups used the word 'hurt' to describe unacceptable suffering, only the younger participants tended to employ it to illustrate the child's feelings of pain as well as the extent of the

child's injuries. For these younger participants the extent of 'pain' was even a reason to rule out smacking or striking in favour of other physical methods:

YF55 Yeah, OK to put them in a different room of something like that.

NH But if the child didn't want to go, wouldn't you still have to use force to make them?

YF55 Well, it wouldn't hurt as much to go get lifted up and say, 'Stay in that room'.

[11-12]

Moreover, discussion surrounding the extent of pain received by the child was the only time when any participants came close to differentiating between the genders of those involved in the disciplinary relationship. Whilst no young person went as far as suggesting that an act of physical force from a male carer would be unacceptable whilst an equivalent act from a female would be, a few did express concern that a male could inflict more pain. Whatever contingencies young participants saw as appropriate on levels of pain, the strength of male carers means that these adults need to be relatively more careful when employing physical force on children:

YF18 Well, sometimes the father is stronger and it would hurt more if he hit a child.

[11-12]

Concerns surrounding pain were also a common reason for young participants to reject the use of implements against children. As with other concerns surrounding pain, it was the younger age group which stressed that employing an instrument when striking a child would make it unacceptably sore. As such, these participants calculated that the adult's hand was relatively more suitable when physical force was to be used against the child:

YF80 If they had a belt or a slipper or anything hitting you, that would be a lot sorer than a hand or something. (...)

YM81 Hitting children with the likes of slippers or something, I think that's going a little too far. 'Cos if you have got a leather belt and you are gonna be hit, that must be sore, isn't it?

[11-12]

YF25 'Cos some of the slippers, they've got that plastic backing and when...even just a small that, that still hurts me. That's really sore, and you shouldn't put a lot of pain on the kid for doing something wrong.

[11-12]

The above quotation illustrates that the pain inflicted from physical force may still be very immediate and real to some of the younger participants. This may go some way towards explaining why it was far more common for the 11-12 year age group

than the 14-16 year olds to empathise with and express the feelings of the child in the disciplinary relationship. Moreover, when speculating on the feelings of pupils receiving acts of physical force at school, discussions with this younger group encompassed a sense of immediacy from the knowledge that the reintroduction of the belt into Scottish schools, as had been debated recently in the media, would leave them in the firing line for the next three or four years:

YF82 I don't think the belt should be brought back because my mum says that she couldnae write because her hand kept on shaking and it was sore. And I wouldnae like to be hurt with a belt because I'd feel that it was sore, because when you see it on old programmes and that it looks sore because you can see the mark they've did.

[11-12]

Injury was a clear concern to young participants, not just as the visible incarnation of pain, but in its own right. Contingencies imposed by the young participants demonstrated a particularly low tolerance of injury when considering the acceptability of acts of physical force against children. Indeed, many voiced condemnation of acts which would produce even the first visible sign of injury, which was generally cited as red marks or bruising. Whether occurring in the home environment or at school, any act of physical discipline was deemed unacceptable, 'if it damages the child. If he had bruises or cuts or anything' [YF48, 11-12]. In general, any injury suggested to participants that the adult's action was both painful and dangerous to the child, and breached child care and educational ethics. Any act resulting in injury was perceived as unnecessary for any purpose that legitimised

physical force and, consequently, as exceeding the associated contingency above ('acts fulfilling a legitimate purpose'):

NH So, would you say a tap on the hand was as far as you would go?

YF82 No, maybe I'd hit her a bit harder, but not to, like, bruise her. Just so she knows she's doing something wrong.

NH You think it would be wrong to bruise?

YF82 Uh huh.

[11-12]

Like concerns surrounding 'pain', young people specifically cited worries about injuries when rejecting the use of implements for physical force against children. Participants described the greater injuries which they felt implements were likely to cause children, and which made such acts seem unacceptable:

NH What about at school? (...) Do you think that they should bring back the belt?

YF25 No, no, no, no, no. It's so dreadful, I can't imagine.

YF48 It causes swelling and that on the hands.

YF25 It's horrible.

[11-12]

Again, tales from adults about the 'olden days' at school help to form a catalogue of horror from which young people provide illustrations of the type of injuries which can be caused by implements being used in a disciplinary situation:

YF29 My mum got hit, with a ruler over the knuckles and they broke her hand. It was the first time they done it and she had to go to hospital.

[11-12]

It is clear from my analysis that the belt and other implements previously employed in Scottish schools have become the protagonists in legends of notoriety amongst young people, fostered by former generations of pupils. Furthermore, the participants provided evidence that such notoriety is encouraged by teachers, whether to create an impression of control, authority or just awe in the children at school. The effect seems to be a reaffirmation of the wider concerns cited by young people surrounding pain and injury caused by implements. Demonstrations similar to the following were recollected by young people on a number of occasions:

YM37 I mean if other things can stop them I think it's much better using those, because our teacher did a demonstration at school and she put chalk on the table and she hit with the belt, not that strongly, and it snapped, split up. So, it would be pretty sore.

[11-12]

Limited force and adult control of actions

Young participants were keen to stress that, for any one act by an adult, the physical force used should be kept to the minimum needed to fulfil its purpose. Even if the need for physical force per se was acknowledged by participants, using any more force than is absolutely necessary would be unacceptable. Again, this emphasises the close relationship between the acceptability of the act and fulfilling the purposes perceived as legitimate. It was seen as the adult's responsibility to judge what level of force is appropriate to the child's needs:

YM50 To an extent, if just a wee smack to say don't do that, (...) I think that's alright. But if they are really bashing them about, I think that's really bad.

[14-16]

YM63 You've got to know how hard to hit. Just enough to get the message.

[14-16]

Participants assessed that adults could only make such a judgement if they were in complete control of their own behaviour. The adult must be capable of limiting their own behaviour and be fully able to direct their own actions, unaffected by anger or other strong emotion. Repeated strikes at a child within one episode, and 'lashing out' in an uncoordinated manner were both condemned as a failure to constrain force:

YF25 I've seen some people in the supermarket when the little boy has been running up and down and the parent just totally lashed out at him...was hitting him and just totally took a whack at him. I thought that was very wrong.

[11-12]

When an adult 'takes a whack', the act is deemed as breaching the boundaries of constraint. The above use of the phrase 'just totally' captures the concern expressed by participants that adults should hold back from employing full force on a child. Applying such force in an unrestrained manner is perceived as more akin to beating the child up than anything resembling 'legitimate child care'. The intent to apply such full force to the child may be demonstrated by the choice of action made by the adult. The use of a closed fist, for instance, suggested to participants that the adult was not trying to hold back from imparting maximum force. A single smack with an open hand would indicate a more controlled response by a parent, and more appropriate to achieving the intentions in line with the purposes perceived as legitimate:

YM11 I think a parent would be within their rights if they didn't stop after a verbal warning. If it was a small...but not a full fledged punch, just smacking the kid once to shut it up.

[14-16]

Certain methods of imparting force would allow the adult relatively less ability to ensure that they used only enough force to fulfil the child care purpose. For instance, some participants argued that adults would be unable to control the physical movements involved in shaking a child and, therefore, judge the amount of force transmitted to the child as appropriate. Together with the increased risk of pain and injury associated with this lack of control, this concern led some participants to place contingencies on the method of applying force on young people:

YF24 You can't control yourself shaking, but ya can control yourself when you're using your hand.

[14-16]

Employing an implement was also rejected by participants on the grounds that the act would not allow the same amount of control over the level of force imparted as smacking with a hand. As such, there was far more chance of the adult going too far, or to an injurious extent. The only qualification to this view was from participants who felt that 'teacher-training' in the art of inflicting physical force may offer them greater expertise in controlling the use of an implement:

YM11 You can't control the outcome of it. You could actually do this kid some permanent harm. Like, taking the belt to them... The teacher might be able to measure, 'cos I have seen one of my teachers use the belt, not on a pupil, but he has actually been trained to use it properly. The way he used it was amazing, he could actually control what he did exactly.

YM39 Parents wouldn't be able to do that, and hurt them more than they intended to.

[14-16]

Concerns about embarrassment and humiliation

In addition to concerns surrounding the bodily impact of physical force, there was a subsidiary concern in discussions to limit any negative psychological influences on children which might accompany any such act. As such, participants voiced concerns about using physical force in certain situations, or involving certain procedures which they analysed as having an unnecessary negative psychological impact on the child. Such a concern existed surrounding situations that might cause embarrassment or humiliation, unnecessary to the legitimate communicative or teaching purpose behind the act. Falling within this category were concerns voiced about any procedure which involves the ritualistic removal of the child's clothes. Participants objected to the perceived practice of taking down the trousers or underwear on the grounds that this causes unnecessary distress to the child. Explaining why she opposed this practice, one participant commented:

YF65 I think it becomes more humiliating for a little kid if ya did that.

[14-16]

It was clear that such views were sometimes based upon personal memories from early childhood, recounting incidents which seemed to make a particularly strong impression in the minds of participants:

YF83 If I was gonna give 'em a smack, I wouldn't do it in a shop. No, my mum used to do that to me when I was wee, and show my bare bum off, and it was kinda embarrassing.

[11-12]

The above statement introduces the extra dimension of in smacking in public which was felt to intensify the humiliation for the child of having clothes removed before the application of physical force. However, it was a common contingency from participants that a child should not be on the receiving end of physical force in a public setting, irrespective of what the child was wearing. If the child was old enough to be socially aware of others around them, any such act undertaken in front of those not intimately involved in the disciplinary relationship would add unnecessarily to the embarrassment caused to the child:

YF84 I think I wouldn't embarrass them or anything. I wouldn't hit them in public. I don't think that's fair. The kids would probably get all embarrassed if they were old enough.

[11-12]

Participants expressed the belief that a decision to employ physical force in public is likely to be made more as a result of the adult's reaction to the presence of

others than for the needs of the child. The adult would not be acting solely to fulfil one of the purposes perceived as legitimate, but would be publicly performing to satisfy the expectations they perceive others will have of them or the disciplinary relationship. A parent, for instance, may be embarrassed themselves because they feel that the child's misbehaviour reflects badly on them and so uses physical force to demonstrate to others that they are able to ensure appropriate behaviour from the child. This situation would have more to do with transmitting messages to other adults than messages to the child for the sake of their development or safety:

YF20 The mother would want to be seen to be doing something. She wouldn't want people to feel she was an irresponsible mother and she would want people to see she was taking action on that.

[14-16]

The concern to avoid the unnecessary embarrassment brought about by receiving physical force in public was particularly pertinent when discussing the school setting. A child might suffer in this way either because the act occurs in front of others in the classroom, or if the child believed that any other students or staff were aware of the occurrence, thereby making it public knowledge. Such concerns meant those participants who were not against the idea of physical force being used in school per se sometimes made it a condition that the act would be offered some privacy:

YF79 As long as it wasn't done in front of the whole class, like if it wasn't broadcast kind of thing. 'Cos it would humiliate ya if it was in front of the whole class.

[14-16]

Concerns surrounding the bodily target for force

The area on the child's body targeted for the physical force was also strongly featured in the concerns expressed by young participants. Some areas on the body were considered more appropriate to receive physical force than others. Although the precise areas that were mentioned as acceptable varied between participants, they were generally restricted to the child's bottom or limbs. In the main, these concerns were a compound of worries about the relative risks of hurt or damage to the child. Areas were chosen because they were perceived from the participants' analysis to have enough feeling to receive the appropriate messages from adults, without being too sore or dangerous for the child. This again relates to the participants' concern that 'pain' or injury should not be the intention or purpose of any act of physical force against a child:

NH So why is it only OK to hit on the hand then?

YF85 'Cos it isn't that sore.

[11-12]

There was particular and widespread concern amongst young people that adults should avoid targeting the child's face or head region when employing physical force in child care. This was mainly related to perceptions that impact in this area is more likely to cause actual injury to the child:

YF30 I wouldnae hit them on the head. You can do more damage on the face than what you can to like a smack on the bum.

[14-16]

Participants presented medical scenarios to support their arguments. They explained the importance of avoiding anywhere near the brain because it represented an area particularly susceptible to serious lasting damage:

YM86 Well, hitting 'em anywhere like up near the top of his body should be illegal. 'Cos if they hit them hard on the head it could give them brain damage...it could do anything to them.

[11-12]

In addition, there was a subsidiary theme that avoiding the head depersonalised the action, making the act of physical force more comfortable for those involved. Smacking the child around the head would be perceived as too close to attacking the essence or personality of the child. The adult wanting to communicate with their child, rather than smacking the child per se, would look to a slightly more

indirect agent, like a limb or the bottom. These 'objects' would have enough distance from the centre of the child, or the 'subject', and depersonalise the action:

YF16 I think that if people started smacking them around the head...the head is the person, so I wouldn't want to smack them on the head.

[11-12]

Concerns surrounding appropriate age of child

Young participants stressed that physical force should only be used on children if they are of an 'appropriate age'. Participants created such contingencies based on a number of concerns, which they felt were affected in some way by the age of the child. Although participants presented various chronological ages below which using physical force on a child would be unacceptable, there was a general consensus that such a limit per se should exist. Indeed, similarities across participants in ideas about both physical and mental development in children meant that there were patterns of agreement over the reasons for this lower age demarcation. The physically fragile underdevelopment of younger children, for instance, was a common line taken when explaining why there is be a lower age level of acceptability. In any one act of physical force, the participants calculated that this fragility brought with it a greater chance of pain and injury, outlined above as a concern amongst the young people:

YF44 When you are younger, you are more likely to get really hurt.

[14-16]

Whether or not a particular chronological age was cited, this concern translates to the contingency that an adult should not begin to employ physical force until the child is old enough not to get hurt by that act:

YF4 If you hit a really, really young person they are gonna scream no matter what. It is really gonna hurt them because they are so fragile. Whereas, when they get older, they are not as fragile. You are able to smack them without them getting really hurt.

[14-16]

Arguments connecting injury and physical development sometimes resembled lay paediatrics, introducing worries concerning the formation of bones:

YF54 If you had a baby and you hit it, it would hurt it more, because it's bones aren't as hard as yours.

[11-12]

The above extract is an example of the consensual view that no physical force would be acceptable if used against a 'baby'. Again, chronological figures differed in defining such an age precisely, but there was agreement that such a stage of development existed. The age at which physical force would be acceptable must be at some point beyond the stage of 'babyhood'. As well as immediately

observable damage from hitting a baby, participants assessed that using physical force at this stage could adversely affect the child's later development; the individual's developmental potential:

YM50 If they're a wee baby, not walking or anything, no. If they were a wee toddler just about to go to school, maybe just a wee tap, nothing serious. But not touch a baby. (...) It could harm the child when they're growing up. I don't think they would understand, and I don't think it would be effective anyway.

[14-16]

In addition to physical consequences, the above statement implies that an act would not be acceptable below a certain age because a child would not be able to understand or interpret the adult's disciplinary message correctly. Participants commonly argued that younger children would not have developed the ability to translate adults' actions into a message about appropriate behaviour. Children would not understand that they were receiving the force because they were doing wrong. Consequently, the adult's action is not fulfilling its communicative and teaching purposes:

YM53 'Cos when their older, they can understand why they're hitting ya, but when you're young ya just think that they are hitting ya for the sake of it.

[11-12]

Initially, it may appear that the view of physical force as unacceptable when the child cannot understand that they are doing wrong is inconsistent with the previously stated purpose of smacking in order to learn what behaviour is inappropriate for the future. It is clear from my analysis, however, that there is a subtle differentiation in the young participants' argument between first understanding the concepts of 'right and wrong' per se and then learning what behaviour is associated with each concept. A child must be able to differentiate between the concepts of right and wrong *before* physical force is used. Only once this conceptual understanding is established may physical force be used to help the child distinguish between which of his or her actions fit with each concept. Below a certain age, a lack of grasp on these concepts would make it impossible for the child to follow what behaviour is meant to be right and what is meant to be wrong. Physical force at this earlier stage would not be able to fulfil any legitimate purpose. As such, developmentalist ideas of cognitive ability are effectively used to provide reasons both for using physical force at a certain age, and for finding such acts unacceptable at a younger age:

YF52 'Cos it's like, they're bigger, and they understand differently from what they did when they're wee.

[11-12]

In addition to knowing the conceptual difference between right and wrong, children are seen as unable even to recognise that they are engaged in different activities until they are 'bigger'. According to this subsidiary argument, the child has not

developed the sense of retrospective analysis needed to distinguish between each act in their day. As such, the younger child does not understand the actions that they are doing any more than the responses that adults are giving, let alone developed the ability to categorise them. It would be unacceptable, for instance, to smack:

YF82 A wee baby in a pram (...) because they dinnae really ken what they are doing.

[11-12]

Having introduced this element of cognitive development in assessing the legitimacy of using physical force, young participants tried to give estimates for the chronological age at which it would be appropriate to try and start teaching young people right and wrong behaviour using physical force:

YF87 Maybe about one and a half, 'cos when they get to about two they should start to be learning how he's supposed to behave. He's got to learn at that age and you wouldn't have to teach them when they are older.

YF88 I'd say maybe one, one and a half or two. Like, 'cos they should really be learning about that age what's right and what's wrong. They should be able to take it in better, learn what to do and what not to do.

YF87 That age about two.

[11-12]

There existed a subsidiary concern amongst young participants that the difficulty in assessing this transition in precise chronological ages means that parents may be misjudging the child's level of understanding, and thus applying physical force unacceptably:

YF4 Probably younger than that, maybe one, but I wouldn't say younger than that because they don't know any different. They are too young to understand what's right and wrong. Even though you are trying to teach them, they are too young to really know.

[14-16]

In addition to a lower age limit of acceptability, young participants were keen to suggest that there comes a time when it is no longer acceptable to be using physical force on a child. Although any attempt to tie this time to a chronological age presented a wide range of estimates, from 8 to 16 years, there was a consensus that the child would reach a stage of development where such an act would usually be inappropriate. When an upper age was stated, it was calculated primarily on the basis that the child's level of verbal understanding determines any necessity to communicate and teach physically as redundant and inapplicable. The child would possess enough independence of thought not to need to be told when one behaviour is right and another is wrong, and certainly be able to appreciate the difference without the adult needing to resort to the 'helping hand' of physical guidance:

YM89 They are kind of coming into the stage of becoming an adult so they should be able to decide for themselves what's wrong and what's right.

[11-12]

YM86 I don't think I would hit him if he was about ten or upwards or something, 'cos it's really...they get too big and stuff, and they've got to learn themselves what's right and what's wrong.

[11-12]

By the time the child reaches this upper age, the principles of behaviour have been established and experience has allowed more considered discussion of specific incidents of inappropriate behaviour. Participants assessed that physical force is no longer needed to provide direct and simple instruction because the child can appreciate and discuss behaviour within its wider conceptual framework:

YM90 I feel that it is younger children who are hit because they are still learning. I don't think older children are hit as much. Older children would have learned what is right and wrong and they can really talk about it.

[14-16]

As the above extract implies, smacking is generally only considered to be appropriate before there is enough common understanding established between

the carer and child about behaviour to enable verbal communication and analysis. Understanding of the wider conceptual framework allows the child to understand or appreciate the adult's view of their behaviour without physical force to underline or demonstrate it:

YF91 Say about eight, because they learn then that they can understand their parents more. They kind of learn the viewpoint of their mum themselves.

[14-16]

Thus, according to this line of participant argument, once the child has reached the age when they are old enough to communicate verbally, understand the adult's perspective, and demonstrate the independent ability to identify inappropriate behaviour there is less legitimate reason for physical force. Indeed, participants suggested that the use of physical force beyond this point was more likely to reflect the anger or hurt of parents than any need from the child. This situation would be unacceptable to young people:

YM92 It's mostly anger at that age. If you've got a catapult and you hurt a car's window, and you run back to yer house and the man tells your parents. The parent might slap you on the face, 'cos you should know by then and it's mostly anger. The more angry she is the more harder she'll hit.

[11-12]

As implied when discussing the use of physical discipline to underline serious misbehaviour and to prevent anarchy in school, some young participants did

identify exceptional circumstances where force may still be acceptable at an older age. Age and development alone may indicate that physical force would be inappropriate, but the importance of this contingency may be diminished if the events are seen to be serious enough. However, even if it was deemed that an older child did *need* physical force in this way, some young participants commented that the act was likely to raise other concerns. Participants calculated that in order to effectively underline the seriousness of a situation by making an impression on someone older and bigger, the physical force would have to be harder. As such, the act would have more chance of breaking other contingencies on acceptability, such as not causing injury or pain:

YM63 'Cos to get a message through to them at our age you...you'd seriously have to beat them whereas with wee kids you just need to give them a wee smack.

[14-16]

In addition to physical damage, some participants argued that adults should consider that the older the child becomes, the greater the significance of any emotional or mental impact from an act of physical force. Although difficult to calculate, an older child might be more likely to be humiliated or embarrassed in a way which is harmful to their psychological development:

YF16 I'd say it's a bit humiliating over the age of four. For the child it's sort of like...it's then past the stage of 'I'm getting hurt', to 'I'm getting embarrassed' stage as well, so that makes it even worse for the child.

Even accepting that exceptional situations may justify physical discipline past the stage of verbal understanding (together with the additional concerns above), participants insisted that there would still come a time in a child's life when all use would be unacceptable. They considered that there must be an age limit beyond which physical force would be inappropriate to any possible child care or educational purposes. Eventually, if children continue to behave badly, they pass the age where more formal external agencies replace parents' use of force to discipline:

NH So would smacking be OK at 15 or 16 then?

YF4 They are getting older. They know what they are doing, even if they do wrong. Probably not [OK], because they have gotta learn for themselves when they start getting older. Because their parents aren't gonna be there for them all the time. They are able to leave home, get their flat or whatever. You are able to get taken by the police if you did something really bad.

[14-16]

The developmental transition to independence means that the young person is fully responsible for their actions and consequences of their actions, as these 16 year old females explained:

YF93 They can hit me if they want to, but they would just throw me out. Alright, they used to hit me when I was younger, but now it is just, 'Go'.

YF93 You know it [appropriate behaviour]. You've been told before and you are not going to change.

[14-16]

Particular categories of unacceptability

Although all physical force which breaks the contingencies set by each young participant was considered unacceptable, it did not necessarily follow that such adult acts were also thought of as 'abusive' or 'violent'. It is clear from this analysis that these two terms were generally restricted to labelling actions which the participants felt were particularly bad, set aside as categories of exceptional impropriety. However, the terms were not treated as synonymous, nor did they simply mark different levels on a linear barometer of severity. Each of these two categories reflected peculiar defining characteristics. In effect, the categories represented the breaching of particular combinations of the contingencies listed above.

Child Abuse

Descriptions of injuries featured heavily when participants entered into discussions about 'child abuse'. Both mental and physical damage were noted as expected results from an abusive action, and young participants commonly cited examples of such. Indeed, for many, the damage observed as an outcome of such incidents clearly demonstrates the abuse:

YF65 I think that smacking is also something that is mixed up with child abuse too much. Reasonable smacking is not child abuse. If the child is not mentally scarred and is not suffering any severe physical problems from smacking.

[14-16]

Participants were clear that injury is a visible sign for professionals to identify, diagnose or measure abuse in some way. Professional agencies can clearly see that abuse is taking place. Without these observable characteristics such an analysis would not be possible:

YF94 Probably when you can actually start seeing the marks for like a long period of time on the body, and the child would probably be drawn inwards.

[14-16]

YF34 There would have to be enough so that you can see it, like it produce actually broken bones or something like that. That they have had to go into

hospital or something like that, and you'd have see what they did that made them do that to hit them.

[14-16]

However, these identifiable injurious characteristics of abuse were not usually the defining characteristics for young participants. Injury and visible affliction are more symptoms or results which point to underlying abuse than their defining features. Indeed, although injury is often a sign of abuse, the injury per se was not enough to categorise it as such. Not all actions which break the contingencies of acceptability surrounding injury were considered 'child abuse', and not all occasions of abuse necessarily result in injury. Although injury may be necessary in order to identify abuse in a medical or legal context, the root definition of child abuse had more to do with the reasons behind the injury. Before defining an action as abuse, whether or not it includes injury, participants perceived that one would need to investigate circumstances surrounding the act, including details of what prompted the action:

NH What is abuse then?

YF34 Hitting them for the wrong reasons. Like not doing anything bad and them hitting them really hard, sort of like physically damaging them.

[14-16]

As this extract suggests, central to the delineation of child abuse was not the injury, nor even the adult's physical action, but that *the child's needs were not the reason for the physical force*. The child is not the parent's main concern when carrying out

an abusive act. Injury and associated effects result from, and are indicators of, this lack of concern. They are simply aids in what participants acknowledge is a difficult process – distinguishing abusive acts for the wrong or no reason from disciplinary acts applied in the interests of the child:

YF51 The difficult thing is drawing a line between child abuse and smacking for discipline.

[11-12]

The young participants' understanding of 'child abuse', therefore, was closely connected to their concerns that all acts should relate to purposes of physical force perceived as legitimate. The contingency that physical force should only be used to fulfil one of these purposes is integral to defining an abusive act. Thus, as noted in Chapter Four, participants who saw no legitimate purpose for physical discipline sometimes described all such acts as 'child abuse'. Moreover, if the act is not centrally concerned with the child's interests, or takes place for the wrong reasons, participants often concluded that the root and determining feature of abuse must have more to do with the characteristics or behavioural patterns of the *adult*:

YF95 If the child was getting hit for no reason at all and had alcoholic parents or something and they were just hitting em and hitting em, then that's child abuse and that's unacceptable.

[14-16]

In above extract, for instance, the participant suggested that the parents' behaviour was fuelled more by alcoholism than the child's interests. As a result, the parents adopted the behavioural pattern of repeated hitting. Indeed, participants commonly pointed to both repeated hitting within one incident and regular hitting over a period of time as a sign that a parent has lost sight of any legitimate child care purpose. Frequent hitting on a regular basis indicates that the physical acts may have more to do with the adult's lower threshold of anger and control than the needs of the child. As such, participants often considered that such acts would be abusive:

YM49 Umm, when the child is constantly hit for anything. Like they just do a slight thing that annoys them and, you know, they are constantly getting hit.

[14-16]

Whatever the stimulus for the angry parent employing physical force, the child is targeted as a release for the adult's own feelings in an abusive situation. The adult is satisfying their own needs, not the needs of the child. When the adult is smacking frequently because they are rattled and angered easily as a result of external pressures, they are venting their frustration on the child rather than fulfilling the needs of the child. This, for young participants, underlies an act of 'child abuse':

YF96 If ya do it for just nothing then it is [child abuse], and ya do it 'cos you're angry and just take it out on them. That'll be child abuse.

[11-12]

NH So what is child abuse then?

YF3 Continuous. If the child's not done anything particularly wrong, it's just if the mum or dad gets annoyed with them, and smacks them. Even if the child is doing something slightly annoying, that is like taking your own problems out on the child.

[14-16]

As such, young people consider acts of child abuse to be more to do with relieving or curing something in the parent than for the child. The act stems not from the need to teach the child, communicate or to help them develop, but to help the parent for their own sake. A number of participants suggested the example of a child unfortunately placed close to a parent at the end of a taxing day's work when the domestic setting becomes the focus of the parent's bad moods. The parent's needs and behaviour are at the centre of incidents which young people considered examples of 'abuse':

YF24 If it is repeatedly without a reason then it is abuse. (...) Not because they have done anything wrong, just because she has had a bad day at work.

[14-16]

Ultimately, the worst acts of child abuse were considered to be those which, in addition to the needs of the child not being at the centre of the act, there is a premeditated intention to hurt the child. This is less to do with the parent losing control in the heat of the moment, and more of a deliberate intention to cause some harm to the child. Again, as this does not conform to any purpose or goal of child care legitimising physical force (see Chapter Four), participants reasoned that it must be considered an action, at least in part, to satisfy a psychological, emotional or cultural desire in the parent. Moreover, some participants expressed the belief that all use of implements in the home must fit into this category. Participants perceived that the action is child abuse because the parent makes a deliberate choice to pick up and use an object which he or she knows will cause pain or damage beyond the purposes of child care. As such, using implements must be evidence of a deliberate intention within the parent to harm the child rather than as an element of child care embracing legitimate purposes for physical force. This element of intent was made clear, for instance, in this group discussion about what distinguishes acts of child abuse:

YF24 That's something different because it's not a hand. That's like a weapon.

YM97 The belt's obviously gonna be harder because you are just gonna swing it like that [indicates arc of a belt's swing].

YF24 There's no way you can hit the same with a belt as you can with the hand.

YF98 If you hit with a belt...I know if you like hit a child you decide to do it, but if you hit with a belt, like, it is just like you decide to pick up the belt to injure the child. They have chosen to use that weapon.

YF24 They went somewhere to pick up a belt and hit them.

YM98 It's like it's not just a quick punishment, it's not like a quick smack.

[14-16]

An apparent irony in discussions was that participants who pointed to the use of implements in the home as 'abusive' sometimes accepted their use in school. The differences between perceived legitimate purposes in the home and school setting meant that the two may induce different contingencies. Although young participants concluded that parents choosing to use an implement marked an abusive intention to move beyond legitimate purposes compatible with child care ideology, this was not necessarily the case in schools. Some of the same participants saw certain merit in 'bringing back the belt' because they believed that such an act may fulfil the purpose of 'control', more appropriate to the school setting. An implement may ensure a greater fear factor than just a hand, and thereby has more chance of securing group conformity of behaviour in a particular situation. Clearly, such a purpose is not applicable to the home setting, suggesting a motive outside of child care needs and resulting in such an act being deemed 'child abuse'. Indeed, when young participants referred to 'child abuse', they were usually describing a situation existing in the domestic sphere and involving parents, with illegal use of physical force outside the home usually described as an 'assault'.

Violence

As noted when considering possible purposes for physical force in child care, those who rejected all such acts outright commonly referred to them as 'violent'. For those who accepted at least one purpose as legitimate, contingent characteristics had to be considered before an act could be described as violent:

YF52 It's [smacking] a sort of violence, but it's no exactly true. It's just like smacking them on the...it's not like bruises or anything.

[11-12]

As the above statement suggests, participants referred to injuries incurred by the child when trying to delineate acts of violence from other examples of physical force. However, akin to discussions of 'child abuse', the injuries were usually cited more as a symptom or indicator of 'violence' than the defining feature of the term. In acts of violence, it would be expected that injuries would be a likely result of the process involved:

NH Is all smacking violence then?

YF99 No, I don't think it's violence unless you go too far, like really beating someone up or hurting them really badly.

As implied in this extract, both 'violence' and injury to the child were essentially bound up with the amount of force used in the adult's actions. Violence, as referred to by the participants, related more specifically to the employment of too much force than is necessary to fulfil the purposes perceived as legitimate. The defining characteristics of violence are centred around the adult's *failure to limit the force of action* to this appropriate degree:

YF100 Tapping them, like, on the hand, I don't find that really violent. But if you start giving your child a whack, I think that's a bit too...

[11-12]

YM39 [Violence is] when you are doing it at full force.

YM11 If your mate is in a fight down the pub and then comes home and uses the same force on someone else, then I think that would be wrong. If parents think that I am going to make him hurt so that he doesn't do that again, they have that in their mind that I am going to hurt.

[14-16]

As this latter extract shows, the extra force may (like child abuse) be associated with a deliberate attempt to injure or hurt the child. However, violence is not always

considered 'child abuse'. Unless a participant rejects all physical force, it is possible that the adult may be seen to employ such an action for one of the purposes perceived as acceptable in response to *concerns for the child* (thus not child abuse), but goes 'too far' (thus violence). Only when the excessive amount of force used stems, at least in part, from a loss of concern with the child can the act of violence also be considered 'child abuse'.

Longer term concerns

In addition to worries centred specifically on the acceptability of individual episodes, participants expressed concern about the broader implications of physical force, whether in the home or elsewhere. Participants were clear that such events could not be considered in isolation, and raised issues surrounding both the long term effects of the use of physical force in each disciplinary relationship and the consequences for wider practice throughout a society. Again, the precise nature of concerns varied amongst the young people, as did the relative importance attached to them. Nevertheless, there were clear themes within these concerns about the implications of physical force which extend beyond the individual acts. The remaining sections in this chapter explore these themes. It is clear from this analysis that the worries voiced by participants surrounding the longer term consequences of physical force were not usually bound to a straightforward causal relationship. Participants did not tend to argue that using physical force would *necessarily* have a certain consequence for any one child. Instead, the relationship

between acceptance and consequences was typically characterised by a sense of *risk*. Participants were concerned that acceptance of physical force laid children, as well as wider society, open or at risk to potential problems. Moreover, young participants considered that the more widespread and common the occurrence of physical force, the greater the chance of problems arising.

Risk of short term contingencies being broken

These concerns are typified by doubts held by young participants as to whether acts of physical force would fall consistently within boundaries of acceptability. Participants commonly felt that the contingencies they had identified as necessary for any act of physical force to be acceptable were unlikely to be met on every occasion. There was a strong risk that these short-term criteria would be breached at some point, either over a period of time in one disciplinary relationship or across a number of such relationships. Thus, the participants were concerned that they could not ensure that all acts of physical force would adhere to these contingencies. In particular, young participants concluded that there is a very real risk that physical force will be used at one point or another when a child does not 'need' it for the purposes deemed as appropriate for such acts. The adult's actions would not be 'deserved', and the child would be smacked mistakenly when he or she had not done anything to merit it. The existence of such a risk even led some participants to question whether it was not safer for parents to avoid 'smacking' children altogether:

NH So, is it OK for parents to smack then?

YF13 I don't think so.

NH Why not?

YF13 Well, sometimes they... somebody does something and it wasn't them, like it was a big sister or something and they'd still get smacked for it.

[11-12]

The risk of using physical force mistakenly or inconsistently was perceived as particularly high in schools, for the reasons outlined under short term concerns (above). This concern was a dominant theme when discussing any reintroduction of 'corporal punishment' into state schools. Again, this chance of unjustly blaming and then hitting a child in school led to participants rejecting its legalisation:

NH What about the suggestion of bringing back the belt in schools?

YF62 No, I don't really agree with that because, I mean, that's not very fair on the person to be hit. I mean, you could get someone who is perfectly innocent being hit and that's not fair.

[14-16]

Although any sort of disciplinary response in school that was applied mistakenly would be wrong, young participants considered that the stakes in this risk of injustice would be raised by making pupils suffer the particularly unpleasant experience of physical force. For the same reasons that physical discipline was considered particularly effective as a method of adult control in a classroom (see Chapter Four), the misdirected act was seen as especially serious if it involved such force. It was considered unreasonable to expect that over the long term, this risk will never actualise through teacher error:

YM72 It isn't very fair because once done it's done. There isn't any negotiation. You can't unhit somebody . It has got to be done. (...) A lot of children would be physically hurt and mentally hurt for something which was maybe not a very serious thing or for something which they perhaps weren't actually guilty of doing.

[14-16]

Moreover, participants pointed to the uncertainty for students which would result from teachers having differing views about when to resort to physical force. They assessed that there was a risk that some teachers might 'belt' for behaviour which others felt was reasonable or trivial. As such, widespread use was likely to break the young people's contingencies relating to the necessary seriousness of children's behaviour. Only with the introduction of close and proper guidelines on when to employ physical force did some participants feel that this risk might be reduced:

YM92 The teachers wouldn't be consistent with their punishment. They wouldn't know how bad ya have to be to get it.

[14-16]

YM11 It should happen [reintroduce belt], but there should be proper guidelines on when and where to use it, so that the teachers all have the same idea of what is worthy of the belt and what is not. Like, somebody shouting at them or somebody actually needing the belt.

[14-16]

However, other participants felt that even with the introduction of clear guidelines, the existence of an option to use physical force would leave open the risk of inappropriate implementation. Decisions on when to employ such acts may be more dependent on the teacher's individual temperament and mood at the time than as the child's behaviour:

YF100 No, that's ridiculous. If the teacher's, like, in a foul mood or something, and they just do, like, a little thing or something, and the child gets whacked, then that's wrong.

[11-12]

In addition, whether at school or in a domestic situation, there is always the risk that the adult could 'go too far' in any one disciplinary episode. Young participants were aware that they cannot ensure that adults will always use an appropriate amount of force according to perceived legitimate purposes. In each episode, there is a risk that the response will not be judged correctly, and that the adult's failure to control their actions may result unacceptably in pain or injury to the child:

YM21 I don't think it's that much right, because they could hurt the children, 'cos they don't know their own strength.

[11-12]

If the use of physical force is accepted within a disciplinary relationship, young people acknowledged that it only needs one parental action to over-step the mark for injury to be the result:

YM27 Aye, but if you hit them, you could hit them so bad one day that you throw them down the stairs and that...and they will get bruised, and the teacher will see it and that.

[11-12]

Some participants noted specifically that a risk of damage to the child exists irrespective of whether this was the adult's intention. There may be unintentional damage to the child caused by the combination of physical force and unforeseen micro-situational circumstances. These participants argued that adults could not always be sure that factors additional to the basic degree of force would not cause

damage to a child. Various factors were suggested which supported the concern that, over a number of disciplinary incidents, there was always the risk of such 'accidental' damage. For instance, a parent might hurt the child unintentionally if they smack forgetting that they have something in their hand, or if they scrape the child against an object when forcibly grabbing or restraining :

YM101 But they could get accidentally injured if someone is wearing a big engagement ring.

[14-16]

YM102 I think that's [grabbing the child] just as bad [as smacking] because you could cut or scrape them.

YM103 You could pull them out of their sockets or something.

[11-12]

Participants were also widely concerned that they could not ensure against *anger* influencing acts of physical force. As such, there is always the risk that emotions will blur an adult's judgement of appropriate physical force. Perceived as a particular risk in the domestic situation, some participants argued that the vulnerability of parents to lose their temper with children increased the chances of an act to go too far at one time or another, and for injury to be the result:

YF94 People say a tap would stop them from doing it, but again, where does it stop? You can be angry sometimes and that tap might turn into a punch in the end.

[14-16]

YF71 No, sorry, I still don't think that's right [smacking]. You know what it's like, you get your temper up and if you hit a child...you could hit a child and realise you can't stop. There's been so many cases that, like, parents killed their child because of physical violence. I mean one smack can lead to so much. One smack could really hurt their head, their skull.

[14-16]

According to participants' analysis, the risk that an adult might let their actions drift beyond the bounds of acceptability is increased because physical force may escalate over a disciplinary life-span. The concern was that employing an 'acceptable' smack when the child is young might provide an easy transition to more forceful, and less acceptable responses over a period of time. As such, some young people argue that any sort of physical force used in the short term places the child at risk of receiving unacceptable physical force in the longer term:

YM58 It might lead to other things that could even go further than just a smack or whatever. It could go further like child beating and that. That's why I would never hit a child. I don't agree with that at all.

[11-12]

The bottom line, according to the assessment of some participants, is that all the time children are facing physical force in child care they are at risk from adults overstepping the bounds of acceptability. In practice, they are always vulnerable to adults going 'too far' or 'over the top'. Conditions for acceptability may be understood and acknowledged, but in the long term and over a wide scale young people cannot trust adults to adhere to them:

YM104 Well, I think that it's something that you should be able to have the right to do. But there's a lot of parents who probably couldn't be trusted in that way and they would take it too far, which is unfortunate.

[14-16]

Moreover, participants argued that there will always be some adults who will not even attempt to restrict physical force on children within acceptable boundaries. As long as adults have the right to use physical force on children, young people feel that a percentage of adults will always abuse the situation:

YF94 There are people that are gonna abuse a law that says that you can still smack your children to a certain extent, and that's always gonna be a problem. There's always gonna be people that take it too far.

Consequently, the risk of these contingencies not being met universally was enough to persuade some of the young people that all physical force should be avoided. Only when no smacking is employed can young people be sure that adults will never go 'over the top' in such incidents. Only when adults avoid using physical force altogether can they avoid the risk of 'going too far' when judging an appropriate limit:

YF85 If you just don't smack anyone, then you don't have to make a line.

[11-12]

Risk of long term damage to the child

There was a strong theme of concern in discussions that children may suffer long term harm from receiving physical force in discipline. Not only was there a risk that physical force might cause pain and injury in the short term, thereby breaching the stated contingencies to acceptability, but that damage may be experienced in one form or another well beyond the disciplinary moment. This damage may or may not be attributed to one particular incident, but would have a lasting or permanent effect on the child. The most visible form which these long term effects could take would be physical scars of incidents which used excessive force. With the possibility already established that any act of physical discipline could, for one

reason or another, result in injury, some participants feared that there was always the risk of visible scarring. These participants usually noted, however, that as certain acts were perceived as more likely to impart excessive or injurious force, they also represented a greater risk of generating lasting damage. In particular, the use of implements in either a domestic or educational setting was isolated as creating a greater chance of longer term physical injury to the child:

NH So why would that [a parent using a belt] be so bad?

YM57 It just is. It could really hurt a wean that. It could leave scars and everything.

[14-16]

However, even more dominant in discussions than this theme of lasting physical damage were concerns about the long term psychological health of children who receive physical discipline. According to participants, there was a real risk that at some point in the child's life, there would be negative psychological repercussions from facing physical force of one kind or another within disciplinary relationships. The damage may or may not stem from one particular incident and the adult may or may not have actually broken short term contingencies of acceptability. Although such repercussions were a common theme amongst the concerns of participants, the extent and form of possible damage outlined did vary across a spectrum of emotional and psychological harm. For some participants, even the negative memories of childhood incidents involving physical force offered a good deal of

concern. These participants suggested that adults should avoid providing children with experiences involving physical force which they remember in a negative way:

YF71 He says that a smack is fine as long as it doesn't leave any physical damage, bruising or anything. You're still gonna remember that my mum hurt me for that. And that's not gonna be a very nice thought. It's not something you want to look back on, when you got walloped in Asda. It's not something you want to remember.

[14-16]

A few participants went on to suggest that these negative memories, whatever the severity of the adult action, are something of an unfair burden to place on an individual. Whether the physical force used by an adult is remembered as shocking, embarrassing, or regretted for any other reason it may be taken forward from the disciplinary relationship by the child as a sort of emotional baggage:

YF54 They're going to have to grow up with this thing of being hit around when they were younger or whatever.

[14-16]

Moreover, there was a suggestion from some participants that these memories could have more worrying psychological consequences. It was argued that these negative recollections of physical force in childhood might disturb the mental health of an older person in some way:

Y111 So why are you so against it [smacking] then?

Y11105 Because it isn't the right way to discipline them, because you'd have bad memories of it and it would affect 'em and that

[14-16]

Even if the memories of such incidents do not last as long as adulthood, participants suggested on a number of occasions that many children who receive physical discipline tend to show signs of being 'mentally disturbed' in some way. Evidence from their everyday observations indicated to some participants that physical force can sometimes make the child nervous of the actions of other people around them. Social interaction with others could be adversely affected, with the children being nervous or flinching in non-disciplinary situations.

Y11105 They dinnae feel safe around people if they are hit. Every time someone hits their hand, total scared. Mentally disturb them

[14-16]

The possibility of long-term negative psycho-sexual effects from receiving physical discipline was alluded to on just one occasion during fieldwork for this study. One member of a group involving the older age of participants implied that the popularity of some forms of sexual behaviour may have been induced by the previous use of physical force in schools. Experiences of receiving the belt in Scottish schools was perceived by at least this participant as having possible negative psycho-sexual effects on individuals. Moreover, quiet intimations of agreement from other

members of the group indicated that this line of thought might not be entirely absent more widely in the perceptions of young people of this age:

YM107 See how it's affected all our parents now, like they are all into bondage and things like that from the belt. [murmurs of agreement, a few giggles]

NH Do you mean that as a good or a bad thing or what?

YM107 Bad.

[14-16]

Risk of long-term damage to the disciplinary relationship

In addition to concerns that a child might individually experience some form of lasting damage from a disciplinary relationship involving physical force, there was a strong theme of anxiety that the relationship itself would suffer over the long term. Although physical force was thought to affect different relationships across various settings in different ways, participants considered that all such relationships risked being damaged by such disciplinary acts. Regarding educational settings, participants described repeatedly how the employment of physical force could adversely affect their relationship with individual teachers, the school and the education system as a whole. In particular, it was argued that using such methods of discipline or

control were likely to turn healthy respect into unhealthy fear as a primary characteristic of the relationship:

YM72 It might just actually make people hate school or hate the teacher who was doing it, whereas all they are trying to do is keep order in their class.

[14-16]

In turn, the altered nature of the relationship between pupils and teaching staff would risk spoiling any enthusiasm for education. Any type of regime which would include such methods of discipline would, according to some participants, repel schoolchildren from pursuing their educational potential. Pupils would want to leave as soon as they could in order to avoid prolonged exposure to that kind of disciplinary measure, thereby damaging their own educational chances:

YM108 They'd really hate school and wanting to leave as soon as they can. They might not want to stay till fifth and sixth [year]. They'll just leave as soon as they can.

[14-16]

Likewise, there was a subsidiary argument in discussions that the state of relationships in the domestic setting could also suffer negative effects from the inclusion of physical force. Again, the creation of fear from the use or threat of physical force was cited as a primary cause of problems, acting as

a barrier between parents and children. Participants commonly employed phrases such as:

YF109 It just makes them scared of you.

[11-12]

Essentially, any such barrier to the relationship was perceived as posing a threat to the propinquity of the family. Some participants were concerned that the family will not be able to function appropriately as a loving place of solace from the dangers and attacks of the outside world, because of the presence of fear within from physical force. As such, any disciplinary actions which may lead the child to feel estranged from the adult are even more worrying in the 'protective' family home situation than at school. Although discussions suggested that the involvement of *any* physical force could pose a threat to relationships, participants more commonly pointed to such negative effects when the disciplinary acts being considered were more severe or breached the contingencies of acceptance:

NH So why is it [use of the belt] O.K. at school, but not at home?

YF110 Because they are your parents and you'll never like them and that means folk running away and that. The person who gets it all the time wouldn't want to go to school or go home.

[11-12]

In a subsidiary argument, some participants related the damage caused in the relationship to the type of negative psychological consequences described in the above section. There was felt to be a risk that emotional tension in a disciplinary relationship which included the extended use of physical force could induce extreme stress in the child. The following extract sums up the frustration, central to the build-up behind such a reaction, expressed by a number of participants:

NH So if you had to sum up your argument against smacking to somebody, what would it be?

YM69 Think what you're doing to the child, ya know. If you're gonna hit it you're just gonna make the child hate ya even more, and it's just gonna gradually build up until the child bursts and just can't stand it any more, and do something that they'll regret.

[14-16]

In addition, some participants were concerned that any such barrier of fear or 'hatred' between adult and child may continue beyond the years of any active disciplinary relationship. Participants argued that, in the longer term, relations may never recover because the child would remember the childhood incidents involving physical force. Such incidents would remain a barrier between the agents, either unconsciously or actively in the form of a grudge:

YM77 The child could remember it [incident of smacking] all their life and bear a grudge for it as long as the parents are around really.

[14-16]

Risk of transmission of physical force

The most consistent theme underlying young participants' concerns over the use of physical force in child care surrounded the belief that such acts might be copied inappropriately at some time by the recipient. Discussions strongly featured anxiety that the child might exhibit anti-social behaviour involving physical force as a direct result of disciplinary experiences in their childhood. According to these arguments, the child would copy the pattern of behaviour experienced from adults disciplining them, and repeat it in an inappropriate situation. Participants described circumstances whereby the transmission of physical force is evident whilst still in childhood, when older or more specifically when the recipients are themselves adults in a disciplinary relationship.

Exhibiting behaviour during childhood

There was a dominant argument suggesting that if children were exposed to physical force being employed against them, there would be an increased likelihood that they would themselves use a similar pattern of behaviour at some

time before the end of their childhood. In effect, it was argued that the child might understand the adult's actions as an approval for such behaviour without appreciating the disciplinary context required to legitimise the action. The child would fail to make the distinction between using force for 'legitimate' child care or educational purposes in that disciplinary relationship and in other interpersonal relationships:

YF111 Then they may think it's right if somebody else annoys them that they just go and hit them. But it may not be right because it might just be another wee bairn they hit. But they says that, 'My mum hits me so that's alright'. But it's no, if you ken what I mean.

[14-16]

As such, the young participants' analysis suggested a lack of ability in (particularly) younger children to differentiate between social contexts. Children are presented as internalising and copying these acts as a behavioural pattern blind to the social context:

YF112 You shouldn't hit any children, 'cos they'll end up hitting folk, 'cos they see you doing it so they are going to think that you can hit folk, so they are going to hit you.

[14-16]

YF109 It's telling them that it's OK to hit people, but when they are older, they more or less know a bit better.

[11-12]

As the above extract suggests, some participants considered that this copying without understanding would be less likely once a child has reached school age. Contrary to this, however, others estimated that the increased understanding at this age would maintain or actually raise the chance of transmission of behaviour. As children become more aware of interpersonal relations, they may repeat behaviour that they recognise as advantageous for adults in forcing their wishes and aims:

YF80 But if they are older and you hit them (...) they are aware now and if you are hitting them they think, 'Oh, our parents hit us, that means that we can hit anyone else we want to'. So at both stages [of understanding] it means that you shouldn't hit them [for different reasons cited]. It's just causing more harm.

[11-12]

YF113 Teaching people that if you are strong enough and can hit people enough you can get whatever you want.

[14-16]

The risk of such a reaction could only be increased, estimated some participants, by 'corporal punishment' being reintroduced into state schools. The school would be reinforcing the belief that physical force in inter-personal relations could be justified by the perpetrator:

YF114 They'll think, 'Well, if the teachers can do it to me, then I can do it to other people', and then they'll start hitting everyone.

[11-12]

Exhibiting behaviour beyond childhood

This intergenerational transmission of physical force was also widely considered to be evident in the behaviour of the recipient beyond childhood. Exposure to such patterns of behaviour could result in a person applying interpersonal physical force generally throughout his or her life. Moreover, participants recognised that the repercussions for the child of repeating such behaviour would increase as he or she entered adulthood. As an adult, the recipient may find that repeating this type of behaviour results in being charged with assault or other violent crimes:

YF84 If you do that to somebody, you tell them that's O.K. But it's just O.K. while they are little to hit somebody else. But once you get bigger, you are still telling them that it's OK to hit someone, and they are gonna go out and do it and maybe end up in prison for assault.

[11-12]

If participants rejected all physical force as violence, it followed that they tended to see the transmission of behavioural patterns involving physical force as reinforcing violent tendencies. There was an anxiety amongst these participants that children may mature displaying violence or similar anti-social behaviour. Indeed, the physical discipline was sometimes seen as a burden on the child's social development, unfairly jeopardising his or her chances of avoiding longer-term delinquency. The idea of burdening the child for the future mirrors participants' concerns (outlined above) that there could be psychological 'baggage' leftover from such incidents which affects the child in later life :

YM50 I think I'd be tempted [to use physical force], but I don't think that it's fair.

They are just small and it might affect them in older life and they will think that that's alright, and they might hit their friends. (...) The way they grow up, they might be more violent. That's not fair.

[14-16]

YF52 They're gonna grow up wild if they're gonna get smacked, 'cos then they'll just think that violence has gotta be that way. But it doesn't really solve everything. So, they are just as well telling them off and everything.

[11-12]

Moreover, a few participants related this link between exposure to physical discipline and later anti-social behaviour to the wider society, implying that the transmission will occur on a more macro level. Such acts effect a cultural acceptance of violence, and the burden of transmission is shared by society. The following extract explores this line of argument, specifically predicting the cultural effect of reintroducing physical force into state schools. It is a useful encapsulation of the common pattern in discussions of acknowledging the effectiveness of physical force in the short term, but pointing specifically towards possible longer term and wider repercussions:

YF94 If that sort of thing happened at our school, bringing back the cane and stuff, I could see it working, but does that make it O.K. then to have, like, physical violence? Is that like allowing other people to take that example? Well, teachers are allowed to bring back that sort of violence for school, so is it O.K. for children to start, like, hitting children and caning them, and then it goes on from there, like? Where does it stop? Are we going to have a place where society accepts violence, or are we going to completely get rid of that sort of thing and find another method?

[14-16]

Exhibiting behaviour during parenthood

There was a dominant concern amongst participants that people who receive physical force during childhood may repeat that pattern of behaviour against their

own children in ways that then place this next generation at risk of short or long term harm. Participants expressed a fear that future generations might suffer because of the actions of adults today. Their theory drew upon an impression that children will tend to base their parental behaviour generally on their memories of the way they were treated by their own parents. Even if new ideas are introduced from outside, the previous generation's behaviour remains a yardstick and reference point for normality in uncertain parental situations:

NH And do you think that you would smack your child?

YF115 Yeah, because you just copy your parents. Whatever they do to you, you're gonna do to your child, 'cos you think that's right at the time.

[14-16]

As such, acceptance and employment of physical force would continue down the generations as an heirloom of parental behaviour passed on from parent to child. Participants noted the difficulty in breaking this cycle, interrupting and disturbing an attitude of acceptance:

YF76 But if you hit them, they'll end up thinking it's alright to hit folk, and when they grow up they'll just end up hitting their kids and it will just go on.

[11-12]

YM105 You've done the wrong attitude to them as well. If you hit them, then they think that's O.K., and they carry it on down and down through generations.

[14-16]

When participants did not oppose all forms of domestic physical discipline, the passing down of such parenting methods was not necessarily problematic in itself. As long as the methods transmitted were in accordance with short term contextual contingencies, the discipline and the transmission may well be acceptable:

YF9 I suppose it's just gonna carry on. I mean, if I smack my children, he'd think when he's older that's alright. But as long as it's not really hurting, then I don't really see the problem with it.

[14-16]

Nevertheless, there was a general acceptance that even if the parent abides by these contingencies, there is still a risk that the next generation might not be quite so 'careful'. If a general acceptance of physical force rather than detailed methods is transmitted, some participants assessed that there is a chance that the next generations may have slightly different ideas of appropriate limits and behaviour in child care. There is no guarantee that the same wider child care standards will be passed down with a general acceptance of physical discipline or broad behavioural patterns:

YM28 The child or whatever could see that as alright, so they could do that to their children.

NH What if they [the first generation parents] don't hit them that hard, does it matter?

YM28 It's just the same because they will think that that is OK to hit their children, and maybe they will hit their children that bad that they have to go into hospital. So, I think it could, like, get passed down.

[11-12]

Young participants noted that the parent-child relationship is not alone in its influence on the way that successive generations discipline children. Participants stated that teachers' interpersonal behaviour towards pupils will inform the way that those pupils act towards children in their care when they reach adulthood. For instance, the argument was occasionally made that if pupils were accustomed to the belt in school, they might be more inclined to accept this method of discipline and transmit it to the home setting when they become parents. Indeed, as influential institutions in people's lives, the activities of schools might even be seen to offer State approval for such acts. Returning officially sanctioned physical force to state schools, argued participants, would set a bad example to pupils on how adults should behave with children:

YF94 People are confused on what is acceptable, and a school is supposed to be a place of respect, a place where you think something is supposed to be

right. And people look up to their teachers and if you see your teacher actually doing this to other people, when you grow up you might think it's OK to go around and beat people up.

[14-16]

Some participants were careful to point out, however, that the individual nature of children means that some may react to physical force from adults in a manner quite different from the predicted transmission of behavioural patterns. Indeed, it is possible that the child's experiences may actually repel her or him from employing the same methods as parents. As such, the child the child was perceived as an active agent who may break away from any inter-generational cycle:

YF44 It doesn't always work like that because there are some folk who get hit and think, 'There is no way I'm ever gonna do that to my kids'.

[14-16]

Rejection of behavioural transmission as determined

It should be reiterated here that like any long term effect of physical force in childhood, the transmission of behavioural patterns was viewed by participants as a matter of relative risk rather than a universal causal relationship. Indeed, participants who were themselves smacked when they were younger were keen to point out that they were not caught in an automatic process through transmission towards delinquency and violence. Participants argued that this risk would be

affected by overall circumstances surrounding childhood and the individual response of the child as an active individual. Transmission was not a simple case of determined socialisation:

YF78 I know my mum smacked me when I was little but it doesn't make me go around slapping people, it just made me know that if I done anything wrong then I'd get smacked so I don't do it.

[14-16]

Any acknowledgement of transmission of negative behaviour as universal would not only have meant accepting that they had been harmed (if they had received physical discipline), but that their own parents may have been responsible for causing them long term damage. Rejecting such determinism did not imply that they believed that physical force *could not* be harmful or should be accepted per se, but that one should take account of the relativity of risk:

YM67 That could do more harm than good though, a lot of the time. It could affect them a lot.

YM43 I was hit, not violently or anything, but I was hit and I'm alright.

[14-16]

Participants discussed contexts and contingencies which they considered would influence the degree of behavioural transmission. Participants argued widely that other features in the child's disciplinary relationships might increase or decrease

the risk of repeating physical force inappropriately. In particular, there was a subsidiary body of opinion which believed that these negative effects would be reduced as long as the physical force was both limited and *a/ways* linked clearly for the child with their misbehaviour. If that was the case over a period of time, the child might be less likely to infer that all sorts of physical force were acceptable. Transmission of physical force from the disciplinary relationship during or after childhood was seen as particularly likely if the child was exposed to severe physical force. The excessive force might confuse the child's sense of a proportionate or reasonable response to a situation:

YF48 Well, if you were to hit them hard, they may take their anger out on other kids, or just think it's O.K. to beat up other kids.

YF25 I don't really think that a tap would have that effect really. I don't think that by just tapping someone they are gonna go around beating up his friends. It depends how hard it was. If it was really violent then it might.

[11-12]

Some participants warned that people may underestimate the degree of harm that physical discipline could have caused them. Participants suggested that people may not be fully aware of all the effects of physical force on themselves, particularly when these are psychological like behavioural transmission. For instance, they warned that younger people who have not had children themselves may not yet realise the effect that generational transmission will have on their own disciplinary style:

NH If somebody said it didn't do them any harm, what would you say?

YM105 How do they know that? They don't know how their personal life's gonna span. They don't know what's gonna happen when they have their kids, when their kids have kids

[14-16]

Participants occasionally argued that older people who dismiss any negative psychological impact on themselves of physical discipline may not have recognised the effects because they were temporary or subtle. People who believed that they were not harmed may not have been aware of repercussions themselves, or may have forgotten negative consequences:

NH But if they say that it didn't do them any harm, why not smack?

YF116 It never done them any good either, really.

YM40 It doesnae mean it did them any good.

YF116 It could have done them harm, but they grew out of it.

[14-16]

Long term benefits as a qualification

Participants' perceptions of the long term effects of physical force against children were not, however, restricted to negative consequences. Although not typically the explicit focus of discussion, participants did comment on the long term benefits which might come from using physical force to fulfil the purposes outlined as legitimate (see Chapter Four). In general, long term benefits appear to have been assumed and taken as read from these understood purposes of physical force. If, for instance, one purpose of physical force was expressed as teaching right from wrong behaviour, the benefits towards appropriate long term behaviour was often implicit. Consequently, long term benefits were generally only mentioned explicitly to counterbalance negative concerns about physical force raised in discussions. The participants would state that refraining from physical discipline because of these concerns might forego individual and societal benefits from such acts. In particular, some participants suggested that children would grow up wild or spoilt without the disciplinary effectiveness of physical force. This was not to imply that children were wild at the start of their lives and needed that devil beaten out of them in a Puritan sense, but that if physical force is absent children will not benefit from proper teaching of behaviour. Consequently, it is this spoilt behaviour which would then be transmitted intergenerationally, leading to societal anarchy in the future:

YM47 If they don't get smacked they might become spoilt and they might become, you know, with their children and they might act the same way [spoilt]. I don't want people who have been spoilt.

[14-16]

The importance of this counterbalance to individual participants' long term concerns about physical discipline depended upon whether they considered physical force to be the sole form of effective guidance for children. If no effective alternatives were accepted (as noted in Chapter 4), physical force was treated as synonymous with discipline to prevent this wild future behaviour. Again, however, participants were reluctant generally to present a picture of a deterministic relationship between discipline and future behaviour. Participants who had never been physically disciplined inversely applied the 'it never did me any harm' defence by noting that they did not appear to be turning into anarchic individuals. They argued that they had not missed any of the behavioural benefits associated with physical discipline, and they had avoided exposure to any of the short or long term risks explored earlier in this chapter:

YF116 I wasnae smacked and I dinnae bully folk. And if you hit someone, it dinnae always stop.

[14-16]

Chapter summary

This chapter focused on concerns that young participants held about possible effects of acts of physical discipline on children. Although participants may have considered that there were purposes for adult physical force on children that could be considered legitimate, they still expressed reservations regarding their application in practice. For the purposes of this analysis, the concerns were divided into two main categories: short term, concentrating on the actual disciplinary act and immediate context; and longer term, containing worries about implications for the child, and wider society, beyond the individual disciplinary episode. In both these categories, key themes emanating from discussions with young participants were examined.

First, short term concerns were analysed in relation to contextual contingencies which participants assigned to acts of physical force. These contingencies would have to be met within each individual episode for the participants to find the force acceptable. The most dominant theme within this short term category focused on whether the force was clearly needed or 'deserved' according to the participants' perceptions of legitimate purposes. Contingencies stated that a misdemeanour must have occurred to indicate such a need and that the discipline is directed at the appropriate child. Participants also argued that physical force should not be used in response to trivial or accidental undesirable behaviour from the child. The misdemeanour must be serious enough to 'need' correction, rather than everyday childlike behaviour. Allied to the selection of force according to seriousness,

participants expressed concerns that the frequency of these acts should be limited by the adult.

Concerns relating specifically to the child's feeling of pain were exclusively cited by the younger age group, whereas both groups demonstrated a low tolerance of injury resulting from disciplinary episodes. Another dominant theme stressed that this physical force should be limited to the minimum necessary to fulfil its 'legitimate' purpose. Certain actions were condemned because they indicated a lack of restraint from full force (e.g. using a closed fist), whilst others were considered to make it more difficult to judge an appropriate limit to the force (e.g. shaking). Participants also presented contingencies relating to the precise bodily target of any act, with striking the buttocks or limbs considered more acceptable than a child's more vulnerable face or head region. Short term contingencies surrounding the bodily impact of physical force in discipline were supplemented by concerns to limit any negative psychological effects on the child. In particular, some participants argued that unnecessary humiliation or embarrassment for the child should be avoided by, for instance, not removing the child's clothes or applying the disciplinary act in public. This latter contingency raised further misgivings surrounding the use of physical force in the relatively public setting of a school. The chapter also noted that a number of these concerns relating to both physical and psychological effects informed a group of age related contingencies. Lower age-limits were presented by participants, based mainly upon concerns about pain and injury to more fragile younger children and a perception that they would be less able to interpret the adults' disciplinary message. Conversely, an

upper age-limit tended to relate both to concerns over a propensity to psychological damage, and the lack of a communicative purpose for the force.

Analysis of the discussions presented the terms *child abuse* and *violence* as relating to specific categories of these short term concerns which marked acts as exceptionally unacceptable. Relating mainly to contingencies surrounding the fulfilment of 'legitimate' purposes, *child abuse* specifically described acts which failed to focus on the needs of the child, but were centred on relieving (sometimes deliberately) the needs of the adult (usually parent). Relating mainly to contingencies surrounding adult control of force, *violence* specifically described acts in which force was not restrained to the level required to fulfil the 'legitimate' purposes. Neither definition was necessarily centred on degree of injury, nor represented different points on a simple barometer of severity or unacceptability.

Longer term concerns noted in this chapter surrounded perceived implications of physical force for the child, and wider society, which extended beyond an individual disciplinary episode. In general, these concerns were found to be characterised by 'risk', rather than fixed and determined consequences. However, the risks led some participants to argue, through practical rather than principled concern, that all physical force in discipline should be avoided. This element of risk was clearly noted in the first major theme in this category; that adults could not be guaranteed to meet the 'short term contingencies' over a period of time or across all disciplinary relationships. There was a common belief that these criteria could always be breached at some point, whether mistakenly, unintentionally or deliberately. The

second major theme of longer term concerns was the risk of damage to the child lasting beyond the immediate disciplinary episode. Although participants noted the risk of lasting physical damage, there was a greater concern with the potential for long term psychological effects. Concerns ranged across a spectrum of emotional and psychological harm from negative memories of childhood to more serious mental or sexual 'disturbance'. The third major theme focused on the risk of long-term damage to the disciplinary relationship itself, mainly through the negative influence of fear. Such fear was considered to have the potential to hurt the child's educational chances in school, or drive a lasting wedge between parent and child at home.

The fourth and most consistent theme in discussions broaching longer term implications of physical force featured the risk of the recipient copying the adult action inappropriately. This transmission of behavioural patterns may be exhibited in interpersonal relations during childhood or later in adulthood. Furthermore, the chapter identified a dominant view that recipients of physical force in childhood are more likely to repeat that behaviour with their own children, carrying the same risks. Any such risk of transmission would be reinforced by corporal punishment in schools, and influenced by other contextual factors.

It was noted that some discussions also raised concerns about the longer term implications of not employing physical force in disciplining children. When physical force was considered the only effective discipline, some participants considered

that its absence from childhood would mean children growing up wild and undisciplined with negative implications for wider society.

Whilst young participants stressed the purposes and impact of disciplinary acts when assessing the acceptability of physical force, these were not considered in isolation. The intentions and concerns surrounding such events were viewed within the context of the wider disciplinary relationships. As such, it is now necessary to focus on the third dominant thematic area in discussions, which surrounded the interaction between such acts of physical force and roles, rights and power within adult-child disciplinary relationships.

Participants widely insisted that the complexities of different adult-child disciplinary relationships must be appreciated when judging the acceptability of physical force. The *relationship* between the adult and child, the *roles* each (particularly the adult) is expected to adopt, the *rights* which are associated with these roles and perceptions of resulting *power* all influenced participants' analysis of such disciplinary practices. This chapter concentrates on the participants' perceptions of this interaction between the physical discipline and the status of the wider disciplinary relationship between the parties involved.

Although participants often actually used the words 'relationships', 'roles', 'rights' and 'power', some other terms and phrases were again harnessed in my analysis as indicators of thematic reference to this broad topic area. For instance, participants' assignation of tasks and responsibilities to particular parties in the relationship based on their relative position was more generally employed as an indication of discussing *roles*. *Rights* were often indicated by references to legality or permission, such as 'allowed to', and the balance of expectations assigned to relative status, such as 'fairness'. *Power* was indicated by references to a manifestation of relative imbalance in the relationship, such as 'control of', 'helpless' or 'defenceless towards'; references to abuses of this imbalance, like 'abusing their right' and 'taking advantage of their authority'; and references to challenges to this imbalance, such as 'getting back at'.

The demarcation of roles and rights

The rights appropriate to different roles in disciplinary relationships with adults was a major theme in discussions. One participant illustrated the common contention that the role of the adult is vitally important to assessing the acceptability of an act of physical discipline with reference to her recollection of the Davis vs. Sutton Council court case (see Chapter One). She noted that the act of discipline in that case was less acceptable, specifically because the adult occupied the role of 'nanny' [sic] rather than parent:

YF51 I read a court case a while ago, well ages ago actually, about the nanny, when she smacked children. That may have been the right thing to do at the time, but since she wasn't related to the children, they saw it as abuse. So it depends who you are and what your relationship is to the children and what you have done.

[11-12]

Even when participants felt that an act complied with short term contextual contingencies, as above, such an act might be deemed inappropriate if an adult's role was not deemed to carry the *right* to apply such actions. Conversely, some participants explicitly supported the right of certain adults to use physical force despite harbouring concerns of risks to the child. Moreover, even if those participants anticipated that they themselves would not choose to employ physical

force in that role, they often still expressed support for the overall right of other people in the same role to administer physical force:

YM50 Personally I wouldn't, but I would say it's alright for other people if they want to do it. They could do it, but I wouldn't.

[14-16]

In particular, there was a common theme that only the role of parents could carry any right to administer physical punishment. This relied fundamentally on participants' perceptions of a peculiar and special relationship between parent and child that differed from the child's association with the school or any other agency. Consequently, any right to use physical force on a child would be restricted to the child's parents or, sometimes, another close blood relative. There was a tendency, particularly amongst the older age group of participants, to express this peculiar parental right as a type of possession or ownership of children. The child was seen as belonging to the parents in a way that could never describe his or her relationship with any other agent. Most frequently contrasted with teachers, parents would have more right to smack because the child belonged to them and not the school:

YF116 The parent should have the right because it's their child.

[14-16]

YM106 First of all, teachers don't own the children and they can't [shouldn't] hit the children if they're not their own. They haven't got the right to, have they? They've not got the right to hit other people's children, have they?

[14-16]

The teachers' lack of ownership of 'the parents' child' would generally override considerations of the degree of effectiveness anticipated from any act of physical force. As such, it would not be the teacher's place to effect this discipline on a child belonging to another, irrespective of any perceived positive behavioural outcome:

NH So should teachers be allowed to 'hit' again then?

YM108 In a way it would be better [effective], but then in another way they should leave that to the parents to do 'cos it's the parents' child, and they should bring the child up the way they want the child brought up instead of the teachers hitting them or whatever.

[14-16]

However, two related themes suggest that the expressed 'right of ownership' did not imply a simple acceptance of a natural authority of parents over their children. The right was perceived as stemming specifically from parents' peculiar responsibility for, and intimacy with, *their* children. First, any parental right to use physical discipline on their child is tied to a responsibility to the child for moral development. Second, the right was underlined by an intimacy with their child seen

as peculiar to this particular relationship. Both elements relate to a perceived closeness of the parent-child tie seen as inherent in a relationship which proceeds from 'bringing you into this world' through 'bringing you up'. Having a child and raising that child through the early years of his or her life was seen as entailing a responsibility for their moral development and an intimacy in terms of knowledge and emotion which sets parents as primary carers apart from other agents when considering a legitimate right to decide a method of ensuring discipline:

YF73 The teacher never brought you up, but the parent did, and the parents were responsible for bringing you into this world as well, and they're not.

[11-12]

In the first and foremost of these two themes, this parental right is related to the perceived responsibility to ensure the moral and disciplined development of a child. Deciding the methods of discipline to be employed was perceived as part of that responsibility. Parents should have the right to raise the child and fulfil their responsibility to that child as best they can, using the tools they see as necessary:

YM72 It is the parent's responsibility to see that the child learns things, learns how to read and that but also how to behave in the world. And if it is necessary to hit them reasonably, then it is necessary, and if it helps.

[14-16]

Like ideas of 'ownership' (above), it only tended to be the older age group of participants who linked a parental right to physical discipline with their responsibility

for moral development. Conversely, it was this age group who stressed that a lack of responsibility for moral development held by teachers means that they should have no right to use physical force on a child. As they considered that it is not the school's job to teach this moral discipline, then teachers would have no right to employ physical force for this purpose:

NH But surely you need school discipline.

YF94 I think it's more your parent's job to tell you what's right and wrong and not the school's job.

[14-16]

The teacher's 'job', or role, was felt to be firmly restricted to teaching academic rather than moral lessons. According to participants, when teachers get involved in the application of physical force to redirect behavioural development they are interfering with parental role of the moral upbringing of the child. No participant argued that teachers should use physical force as part of any role in the moral development of children. In fact, as noted in Chapter Four, those participants who did register some support for physical force in schools proposed its use as a method of ensuring overall adult control in a situation rather than a tool for teaching right and wrong. Even so, even this use was rejected by participants if they felt it would, in some way, interfere with parental responsibilities or effect moral control rather than just maintain general order. Teachers would be interrupting the parental responsibility and right to raise children according to their own sense of discipline, whether or not this would itself include physical force:

YF3 You shouldn't smack them at school because they are not their parents, they are just there to teach them. Parents have got moral control over the children and teachers haven't. (...) If the teacher smacks the child and the parents are against smacking and don't smack at all, that would be wrong because teachers are putting his or her own influences on the children.

[14-16]

Participants widely indicated that the parental responsibility for moral development would give parents as primary carers the right to intervene and reject any attempted interference of this sort from schools. The parent should have the right to refuse the school permission to use physical force on their child:

NH Say it was the school policy to use the belt for really bad things. Should parents still have the right to refuse it on the child?

YM108 Yea, 'cos it's their child, not the school's child.

[14-16]

Indeed, some participants specifically predicted that giving teachers the legal authority to use physical force for any reason would cause conflict between parents and schools. Actions by schools would meet with complaints from parents, whether regarding the use of physical force in the school per se or because of different views on each specific incident:

YM106 If every teacher hit a child, right, someone's child, then that child's parent would come down and kick fuck out of the other guy, the teacher who hit the child.

[14-16]

YM39 Parents may disagree [if the school physically punished the child].

YM11 You could have parents coming in and complaining. (...) The parent may have a different opinion of it and think it wasn't so bad and didn't deserve that, so the parent may be in complaining and that would cause problems.

[14-16]

Empathising with parents in such a conflict, participants in the older age group of young people expressed indignation at teachers interfering in this moral development. They highlighted the particular anxiety that reintroducing physical discipline into schools would cause parents who do not agree with the use of physical force on their child in any context:

YF116 If I had kids, I wouldnae let them go to school and get hit. If I dinnae hit my children and somebody else was to come along and hit them, I wouldnae like that.

[14-16]

Some participants were aware of the legal action between parents and school authorities which pre-empted the ban in state schools and cited these events as a practical reason why re-introducing a ban would be inappropriate. Thus, the participants were able to cite some legal support for their stress on the parental right to determine discipline for their child:

YF70 If they thought it [the belt in schools] was good they'd have kept it on but they never, so it's obvious that there was something wrong with that idea, that they had to get rid of it. I mean, parents were objecting to it, so if they're just gonna do it again, we're just gonna have all the hassle again. I mean, the teachers are gonna get it, and the councils and the Government...

[14-16]

The belief amongst participants that parents control moral development was so strong that some participants suggested that when teachers felt that physical discipline was needed parents should be called into school. If physical force was deemed necessary for whatever reason, it was the parents place to come in and take the decision whether to administer it . As such, young participants identified a clear demarcation of roles and rights along the lines of adult responsibility in the lives of children:

YM117 Fair enough, they teach in the school, but they shouldnae hit you for something. If ya need to be hit, then your Mum and Dad can do it and not the teachers.

YF118 They get paid to just teach ya, not hit ya.

YM117 Exactly.

YF118 They should inform your parents what you're doing and they'll deal with it, not the teachers.

[14-16]

The second theme in arguments supporting the right of parents to choose to use physical force on their children focused on the perceived 'intimacy' of this adult-child relationship. This intimacy was perceived to set the parental relationship apart from the child's associations with all other agents, allowing a greater amount of trust by participants of the parents' appropriate use of such a right. According to this theme, the intimate state of the parental relationship suggests that parents should be trusted with the right to use physical force in the upbringing of their child. In contrast to other relationships, it was inconceivable to some participants that a mother (more usually referred to than a father in this context) could betray this trust and use this right inappropriately. As such, the trust entailed in the right to employ physical force is one of the defining features of the parental relationship, distinguishing it in nature from, say, the teacher-pupil relationship:

NH So what is the difference between the parents smacking and the teachers smacking?

YF52 Well, it's your mum! She'll not exactly get a cane out and smack you or anything.

[11-12]

Some participants argued that the child would understand and appreciate this unique level of trust. Drawing on their own childhood, they stated that even if the parent employed physical force, the child would feel emotionally confident that they would never be hurt:

YF94 I'd always know that my mum would never hurt me. (...) I don't actually think that when mum did that to me [used physical force] it was meant to harm me.

[14-16]

Participants' confidence in the intimacy that defines this unique relationship is supported by two subsidiary beliefs: that the parental relationship carries a 'natural' emotional attachment; and that a special relationship is built up over the early emotional development of the child. First, participants considered that a parent's natural love would ensure that a child's interests would be at the heart of the relationship. Parents could be trusted with physical discipline because this natural love would protect the child. It should be noted that even if there was a recognition

that extremely violent interpersonal relations exist within households participants argued that a real mother could never be involved in such actions against her child:

YF13 I've seen this advert on the telly with a husband beating up his wife and she had all these cuts an bruises on her face, and she broke her leg. Well, I don't think a mother would hit a child that hard.

[11-12]

The 'mother' in such discussions did not, however, necessarily refer to the biological parent. Participants were clearly aware that biological and legal parents could and do abuse their children. Rather, it is clear from my analysis that the term was used to describe the *role* of mother characterised by care and love for the child. This was a 'real' mother because she fulfilled the appropriate role of a loving carer who would never be abusive. Although the parental love and resulting intimacy is portrayed as natural, that does not necessarily mean that the blood parent will display these characteristics. There was no suggestion that this intimacy came about through any biological process, but that it described the characteristics of the particular role of the loving primary carer. In effect, whether a person is seen as filling a familial role depends upon behavioural relationships rather than biological or legal title. Indeed, there was no guarantee that the biological parent or legal carer, if responsible for the child, would fulfil this intimate role. However, participants felt that the parental intimacy which would normally accompany the parental role allowed trust to be placed in the adult to apply physical force appropriately.

Second, it is clear from analysis that many participants associated this intimacy with the peculiar familiarity between the parent or primary carer and child during their early years of development. This familiarity results in a special relationship or bond unique during childhood and unique to childhood. It is a relationship built up in the home and which places the parent in the best position to undertake responsibility for the moral development of the child, including the methods of discipline. The parent was perceived as knowing better than anyone what is best for 'their' child, and the child knows and trusts the disciplinarian well enough to accept and even understand through this bond the purpose of any physical force. The carer in the parental role knows what is right for the child in a particular situation because they know both the case history and the personality of the child better than anyone. They are better placed than other agents to be able to judge when to apply any right to use physical force:

NH What if a neighbour hits you?

YM119No, they don't know exactly what's right for the child, they don't live with the child.

[14-16]

Participants perceived that teachers in the school context would not understand a child's intimate needs and peculiarities as well as a parent or primary carer. It is the parent who goes through the trials of early life with the child in a personal way, understanding the child better with each good and bad shared experience:

YM120 It's the parents that go through your highs and lows. It's the parents that are there when you're sad. It's the parents that do everything for ya. (...)

YF121 'Cos it's more personal with your Mum and Dad.

YM120 Ah huh, I mean you're with your parents all the time and say you're at school five days a week but the rest of the time...every night you're home and during the holidays and you've got a more closer relationship with your parents than with the school. I mean, your parents know you better than the school, than the teachers.

[14-16]

Conversely, this subsidiary theme of intimacy through shared early years also focused on *the child knowing the carer* and understanding the terms of the relationship which has built up between them. According to this assessment from respondents, the child knows that this is a special relationship of trust, unlike any other, in which the parent would only use physical force for a 'loving' purpose. The child would only feel comfortable with the parent using physical force because of the unique trust built up from shared experiences. Children were perceived within this theme as being able to distinguish a 'loving smack' in this relationship from other acts of physical force. The acts are understood as part of the dependent parental relationship in one's childhood, and not mirrored in other situations. As such, the special 'loving' smack was as one of the elements peculiar to the parental relationship:

YF94 The smacking on the bum thing only ever happens with children. I think a lot of children realise that it is their special thing for when they have done something wrong. (...) It's sort of an area for childhood. They will be, 'Oh well, that was the child thing'. You don't go around smacking people on the bum. (...) Maybe it's just me, but I see that as a child thing.

[14-16]

Participants argued that, in contrast, the child would not be able to understand a smack coming from somebody outside this special bond. The child would not be able to relate to this act within the context of the experiential trust of the parental relationship. Indeed, there was the suggestion that physical discipline by anyone else might be a dangerous interruption to their moral and emotional development. The act coming from a person without the same level of familiarity would damage a sense of continuity seen as necessary for stable development:

YF111 No, cos it's a change for their lifestyle to have somebody else.

[14-16]

Participants noted that this discontinuity would still be effected if the parent allowed a babysitter or a close friend the freedom to use physical force on the child in a temporary situation. The right to smack should not be transferable in this way because the adult is not party to the special relationship understood by the child. The physical force would not carry the same messages of a peculiar act of moral discipline and communication within a loving relationship. The child would be

confused, resulting in a greater likelihood of long term problems like the transmission of physical force to other relationships:

YM119 You have to look at it from the child's point of view, not from the person whose going to do the hitting. If the mother says, 'If he's bad, just hit him', and that's not very fair on the child is it, because the child doesn't know where it is coming from. I can hit anyone I want to then. If the parent does it to the child, they think, 'That was my Mum that did it'.

[14-16]

However, some participants argued that the same special relationship may be built up with a stable childminder because they are taking a 'maternal' role. The right to use physical force may be transferred in this case as the child minder would be fulfilling or sharing the role of primary carer, spending enough time with the child for the experiential trust to be created. In addition, the childminder would be taking over the job of moral teacher as a sort of surrogate parent with appropriate responsibilities. The parents would, however, still retain executive and primary responsibility for decisions affecting the child's development:

NH What about a child minder? Would that be OK?

YF44 That's OK, 'cos the child minder is doing the job of the mother during the day, teaching them right from wrong. If that's the way they want to teach them right from wrong and it's OK with the mother.

[14-16]

In contrast, there was a strong theme in discussions that the school teacher could never assume the intimacy of a parental role because of a much lower level of personal contact, experience and mutual understanding. A teacher could not attain this special bond with so many pupils in a class and the child would not develop the same level of trust or understanding in the teacher's actions:

NH What about when they go up to primary?

YF23 I don't think that that's right, because there's going to be a whole class. Some parents will be having different views about it. And if they [the child] see the teacher hitting another kid they're gonna get upset.

[14-16]

YM31 There are totally different stereotypes, like your parents and that you can talk to them. People say that you can talk to your teachers, but naebody does. See, they are totally different from your parents.

[14-16]

As such, some participants explicitly expressed that without this shared intimacy, physical force administered by the school teacher carries as little right or legitimacy as an assault from any other unrelated adult. Like that other adult, the teacher

does not share a close mutual understanding with the child over such actions and should not interfere with the child's body, whatever the intended purpose:

YF80 That's more or less taking the cane to somebody who's just walked past you. It's like saying that if you do something wrong then anybody's allowed to hit you, and that's not right.

[11-12]

Thus, the extent of support for the right of particular adults to employ physical force depended upon whether they were seen as responsible for moral development of the child and the state of intimacy in their relationship. The latter consists of both a natural attachment associated with certain adult roles and a mutual trust and understanding built upon shared experiences in the child's early life. Each of these results in the adult in the role of parent or carer being most likely to receive support for the right to use physical force on the child.

Unfairness and human rights

There was, however, a resilient theme of disquiet amongst participants at the imbalance of rights in a relationship where any one party is permitted to use physical force against the other. Even given the responsibility for moral development or the intimacy in some disciplinary relationships, there was a substantial theme which featured the 'unfairness' of a situation where a one-way

flow of rights means that only one side of the relationship is allowed to use physical force:

YF52 I don't think it's fair to smack children.

NH What do you mean by it's not fair to?

YF52 We can't hit them, so why should they be allowed to hit us?

[11-12]

Indeed, the 'one way' physical manifestation of these rights was commonly cited as a reason against reintroducing the right of teachers to employ physical force in schools. Such a right, participants analysed, would restructure the state of the relationship between teacher and pupil on an unfair basis, where only one party would have legal support for hitting. Conversely, it was seen as unfair that only pupils in this relationship would be without recompense from receiving physical force:

YF82 It's just not fair because it's just unfair that they are hitting us with belts because if we hit them with a belt it would be a different story. We'd probably, our mums and dads would probably be took to court, but it's alright for them to hit us with a belt and I dinnae think that's true that they should hit us with the belt.

[11-12]

Likewise, participants widely expressed their resentment at the unequal legal and social rights during domestic physical discipline. Although they noted that children do find some ways to challenge this situation (explored later in this chapter), there was a frustration at the law and wider society as being on the parents' side. If children questioned the unfairness of the situation on a micro level they would just incur greater measures against them, so, 'the mother will just end up turning round and saying that's cheeky' [YFv, 11-12]. Participants described a 'no win' situation:

YF51 Say if we hit our mums and dads, we would be absolutely dead. But they sort of get away with it for us, you know.

[11-12]

YF122 I mean, they're not allowed to hurt their parents 'cos they'd get a row for doing that, but the parents are allowed to hit the children and I don't think that's fair.

[11-12]

Participants also expressed a sense of ironic inconsistency in relationships which did presently permit the adult to use physical force. They noted that not only is the right of parents to hit children matched by an absence of the child's right to hit back, but that those adults would also disapprove of the child hitting anyone else. There was a marked call amongst participants for this inconsistency and unfairness to be

corrected by withdrawing the parental right to hit rather than holding one rule for one and another for another:

YM40 But I still don't believe that you should be allowed to hit your kids. They should be brought up to do things right, and if they do things wrong you should tackle it in a different way. Your mum and dad would be angry if you lifted your hands to somebody else, so why should your mum and dad lift their hands to you, sort of thing?

[14-16]

The inconsistency and unfairness which affronted these participants was particularly highlighted within a subsidiary theme that compared rights during physical discipline to a fixed yardstick of a 'human right', irrespective of cultural definitions of a role or relationship. The sense of unfairness was stressed when some participants argued that nobody has the right to hit you, because you are a human being. It was reasoned that parents oppose children hitting others because it goes against their rights as humans, so parents using physical force on children would also breach those same rights. It was clear to young participants that children are isolated as the only group lacking the cultural and legal protection appropriate to upholding those human rights:

YM72 A child is still a human being. I mean, if it is wrong to go down the street and punch somebody that's annoying you, it's wrong for a parent to hurt you.

[14-16]

YF54 If you see someone like an adult or someone doing something wrong, you wouldnae go up and hit them for it. So it's not fair, 'cos a child is a person too.

[14-16]

For some participants, this human right against physical force was absolute, rejecting developmentalist arguments for the necessity of smacking as a learning tool. All adult acts of physical force on children were considered excessive and, therefore, were seen as an interpersonal act of violence:

YF71 I don't think that any human's got the right to raise their hands to a child or any adult. I just don't think that any human has the right to physically hurt another human. I think there's enough goes on, like emotional hurt and mental hurt, that I just don't think that physical violence is needed in any situation at all.

[14-16]

As the above quotation demonstrates, arguments against this imbalance of rights in adult-child relationships not only concentrated specifically on the human rights of the receiver, but were commonly framed in terms of the moral appropriateness of, and restrictions, to the rights of the imparter. Participants focused on whether any individual, including those with the responsibility for the discipline of children, should

morally hold the right to use physical force in an interpersonal relationship. It was more common for young people to phrase comments primarily around the appropriateness of someone's right to hit than a person's right not to have their 'physical integrity' violated, as is a feature of the wider legal debate (e.g. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 19). Even so, this phrasing did not imply that the relationship with children's rights was ignored, but that attention was given primarily to the actions, or how to restrict the actions, of the dominant party. Children's rights as a construction was used to support the primary focus on restricting the rights of the adult. For example, participants sometimes led by condemning the action of the dominant adult, but justified that restriction on rights in relation to the child, commenting, 'Hitting...it's that I don't think it's right. Children have rights as well' [YF122, 11-12].

A few participants countered and modified the 'human rights' argument by asserting that any right should be on an 'opt-in' basis, requiring the child's intervention in actually rejecting the force before the parent's actions are challenged. This variation allies any previously fixed rights to the child's ability to understand and voice their objection when they have reached an 'appropriate' level of development. These participants did not suggest that the child would have to make the correct or mature decision in the eyes of the adult, but would only be able to engage their rights in practice if they have developed the cognitive skills to enable them to know their own minds and communicate a considered view:

NH What if the child doesn't want to be smacked? Should they have the right?

YM40 If the child is old enough to answer, like, back and know their own mind.
Like if my mum was to hit me now, I would expect them to listen to me. I
guess we would expect them to listen to us at this age.

[14-16]

In addition, some participants were quick to reinforce the existing relationship whenever it is suggested that parental rights violate a principle or fixed human right held by the child. Some participants were rather more reluctant than others to nullify the parental rights which allow physical force, particularly if they felt that nothing else could reinforce the seriousness of a disciplinary situation. Although these participants might recognise the children's rights argument as valid, they were uncomfortable with such a wholesale restriction, in all circumstances, to the way parents approach discipline:

YM58 I don't think that anybody should be allowed to hit. Any child or any parents.

YM123Aye, but some parents see it differently. Cos, what if it was a different
matter, what if it was something more serious.

[11-12]

Outside agencies, risk and legal change

Allied to the reinforcement of the traditional parent-child relationship in response to challenges on the grounds of children's rights was a more common unease at allowing external agencies to intervene overtly in the family. Despite perceptions of unfairness in the disciplinary situation, there was a common theme amongst participants that external intervention should be limited. If it was the parent's responsibility to ensure the moral development of the child, they should generally be left to fulfil this role without interference from outside the family. As might be expected from their more consistent empathy with the position of parents, the older age group of participants were more inclined to insist on the sanctity of the family in the task of child discipline:

NH What would you say if somebody came up and spoke to you about you smacking them?

YM11 I'd probably say it's my child, I'll bring it up the way I see fit.

[14-16]

However, it is clear from the analysis that participants concerned about external interference rarely adopted this absolute position. The extent of external involvement accepted was usually relative to the particular short term contingencies on physical discipline forwarded by participants (see Chapter Five). There was a reluctance to interfere with the carer-child relationship only until it is deemed really

necessary for the positive welfare of the child or in response to an action which cannot be considered 'child care':

YM40 I think [a person concerned about physical force] should just leave the lady to deal with her problems herself. If it was really bad, you would obviously say something for the child's sake, but I don't think you should interfere in the way the woman wants to bring up her child.

[14-16]

There was particular reluctance to any *state* or *government* agency interference in the actions of carers disciplining their children, especially when parental actions were considered unlikely to cause long term damage to the child. The sensitive nature of this state-family relationship in participants' perceptions is clear in my analysis of discussions that considered a change to the legal position on physical force:

YF20 Overall, I don't think it [physical force] is a good idea, but I don't think they should bring in laws to ban it. I think it should be the parents' decision. I don't think it's up to the government to dictate what goes on in other people's homes to that extent. When the child doesn't suffer any long term harm from being smacked once or twice over a period of five years.

[14-16]

Some participants pointed to the existing legal position as already ensuring that the state could intervene if the child was really at risk of harm. As such, these

participants perceived no need for any new law which might increase state interference in the responsibility for moral development:

YM40 It should just be common sense. There shouldnae have to be a law about no hitting people. There are laws for if somebody gets battered.

[14-16]

There was, however, a significant body of opinion which considered that even with existing legislation, the overall longer term risks to children generally meant that the legal right to use physical force on a child should be removed from the disciplinary relationship. This position did not necessarily argue that use of physical force was wrong in principle, nor that there were no legitimate purposes for such acts. The position stated that, on balance, the long term risks to children outweighed considerations of the roles and rights of any adults in employing physical force in disciplinary relationships. It was argued that for so long as there is no law banning physical force in child care, society fails those children who have been hurt because such a risk was allowed to exist:

YF38 It shouldn't be allowed. It's not fair on the kids who get hurt, 'cos then they go through, like pain and other people don't know how sore it is.

[11-12]

Thus, the only way to ensure that no long term risk exists from allowing physical force, and from adults abusing the law by pushing the boundaries of acceptability of such acts, is to draw the level of acceptability at no physical force. According to

this view, only when there is a clear definite line dictating that *no* physical force is permitted will adults not find themselves pushing too far; there will be no uncertain boundaries to test:

YM104 I think that it shouldn't be necessary really to make it illegal, but in reality there's people who are going to abuse the rules. Then maybe it would be easier to say, 'Right, we'll make it illegal'. And then it's just not going to happen.

[14-16]

It was clearly easier for participants to argue for a ban in response to risk if they did not place much value on the other considerations in this equation. If the participant did not feel that physical force was really necessary to fulfil a legitimate purpose in child care, or laid less stress on relevant parental rights they were more likely to argue that on balance the legal position was not worth the long term risks associated with such actions:

YF71 I just don't think there's...coming from a background from seeing physical violence, I just don't think it's [any physical force] needed at all. I see the emotional hurt and the physical hurt and it scars you for life, it does. Whether a child at any age, I just don't think that it's needed at all. That's what you were given the ability to speak for, I think. You just sit down and talk it over.

[14-16]

Thus, when alternatives to physical force were felt to exist for the moral development of the child, a legal position banning all such acts was more acceptable to participants. Indeed, a few participants commented that the removal of the adult's right to use physical force in the disciplinary relationship would force parents to look for the alternative felt to present children with less long-term risk:

YF100 I would think that it [smacking] shouldn't be allowed. I don't think that... I said that children shouldn't be smacked. I don't think that hitting them is actually the way to solve the problems like that, so you can do, like, lots of ways of controlling without having to get abusive or anything.

[11-12]

YM72 It might mean that parents would have to work harder at other ways of teaching their child right from wrong, how to behave.

[14-16]

According to this view, forcing adults to look for alternatives would ensure that 'positive parenting' techniques are more widely considered. The combination of a clear legal position and discovery of such new techniques would provide the platform for change in parents' attitudes and the wider disciplinary culture:

NH What if the parent believed that smacking was the best way?

YM77 I think that it should really be made illegal so that would probably change the parents' views, so that they can use more constructive ways.

[14-16]

However, some participants were rather more sceptical that attitudes would actually follow legal change, and expressed concern that this difference between the law and attitudes could bring a number of practical problems. This group felt that legal change at this time would face a number of possible difficulties in practice because it would be so out of step with current parental behaviour and cultural acceptance of parental rights. One popular concern, which assumed adoption into criminal rather than civil law, was that there would be an impractical number of parents imprisoned as a result of this law because adults would not be able to adjust their established patterns of behaviour quick enough:

YF52 If they banned it, if they banned parents hitting them, then they'd have all these folk in jail.

[11-12]

Alternatively, some from this group feared that the effect of such widespread practice would be that the state would be completely unable to enforce the implementation of such a law. This would be made even more difficult by the very private nature of family life. Again, assuming criminal law, the state would be unable to check up if parents were abiding by the legal change because of restricted access to homes:

NH Should it be made illegal?

YM69 Na, I don't think it would do any good 'cos ya not gonna be able to monitor everybody's house all the time to see when an adult hits a child. I mean, ya not gonna be able to be there every minute so I don't think it would do any good.

[14-16]

These participants felt that the law would have limited effect on parental activity or attitudes. Adults would still continue to use physical force because acceptance of such actions is so ingrained into everyday activity. There was the implication that the activity is so subsumed in our culture that employing physical force on a child has become an almost automatic or reflex behavioural pattern. Practical problems would exist in enforcing the law because parents would not be able to stop this activity even if they did not intend to use such acts in the moral discipline of their child. Such a change in behaviour, if desired, would not be altered just by implementing a law but only by a wider change in the accepted roles and behaviour in disciplinary relationships:

YM124 People would still do it. How would you see it up?

YF44 It's just a spur of the moment thing, like that's just the thing you do.

[14-16]

Physical force as an imbalance of power

Young participants' perceptions of physical discipline can be usefully analysed in terms of the state of power within the adult-child relationship. Indeed, participants themselves used ideas of power and powerlessness as a framework to understand and discuss adult-child relations. Roles, rights and relationships were regularly commented on either by specifically referring to the term 'power' or by describing the constituents and manifestations of such power. Thus, when the perceived unfairness of rights relating to physical discipline was framed in terms of power, participants described the frustration of children being placed in a relatively powerless position from where they are unable to protect themselves from such adult actions. Even if the child feels that the physical force is 'needless' and unjustified, they do not have the power to stop the acts of physical force against them:

YF122 It dinnae do much harm, but it's just the principle, you ken. You couldnae do anything back. They're helpless. I mean, they couldn't really hit them or anything like that, so they're just stuck in this position. It may not have been your fault, I mean, you just get blamed for everything and they can't do anything about it, 'cos they're too young.

[11-12]

The physical force on children by adults was often presented by young participants as a manifestation of an imbalance of power within the relationship. According to participants, this power may be derived from a number of factors in the relationship

including socio-legal, physical and communicative differences between parties. The combination of factors results in the adults holding a controlling influence on the roles performed within the disciplinary relationship. The power balance shifts with the changing vulnerability and dependency of each child and ends 'when you've left the house' [YF125, 11-12] on becoming an adult:

YM126 At high school and that they've got control of you, but see when you're over that and left home they cannae [use physical force] because it's up to you what you want to do.

[11-12]

The source of power most widely referred to by participants was derived from the physical size ratio between adults and children. Children may be physically powerless to oppose the use of physical force by adults because of differences in relative size and strength. Participants indicated that adults are prepared to 'smack' because they know that children cannot physically 'defend themselves' [YF127, 11-12]. Some participants argued that the vulnerability of a child's position as a result of this imbalance of physical power means that all physical force within the disciplinary relationship should be considered unacceptable:

NH But is it OK if someone smacks their child?

YM77 Not really, I don't think. No, because the child can't defend himself at all. I suppose it could be classed as ageism really, because the adults are so

much bigger and powerful, the children just can't do anything about it really.

So, I don't think it's right at all.

[14-16]

The consideration of power in the relationship provides another dimension to the interpretation of short-term contingencies expressed by participants in relation to acts of physical force. Such contingencies can be analysed, and were indeed sometimes voiced explicitly, as restrictions to the adult-child power imbalance. The contingencies are intended to reduce the potential dangers to the child which exist when the degree of imbalance is too great. Contextual contingencies would help to limit or redress the imbalance of power to the extent that there is less risk of negative effects on the child. For instance, lower age restrictions to the acceptance of physical force may be explained as regulating the increased physical power imbalance between adults and younger children:

NH Is there any age at which you shouldn't smack?

YM128 Very young because they cannae really defend themselves as much as older folk can.

[14-16]

The reluctance to perceive the use of an implement as acceptable in an act of physical force can also be seen as a concern about increasing the imbalance of physical power between the adult and child. The child is viewed as facing an

increased risk of damage from implements due to the greater degree of vulnerability which results from the adult reinforcing their position of physical power:

YM21 Well, I wouldnae take a slipper or I wouldnae take anything. I dinnae think they should do that. Well, I dinnae see why...that's a child that's defenceless against you anyway, so what's it meant to do to defend itself against someone who's hitting it with a slipper or something like that.

[11-12]

In addition to physical differences, the imbalance of power which manifests itself in acts of physical force is seen as being derived from a lack of communicative power for children. In the same way that a perceived lack of cognitive ability to communicate was voiced as a reason for physical force being a necessary child care tool, a child cannot verbalise any objection to such acts on adult terms. Any physical power imbalance would be worsened by the child's lack of communicative power. Again, the younger the child the less able they are to defend itself verbally and thus, the greater the power imbalance. Using physical force against an infant would be less acceptable than an older child because the infant would not even have developed the verbal power to beg the adult to stop. As such, contingencies relating to the development of the child may also be seen as attempts to redress concerns relating to differences in communicative power:

YF129 When you hit a baby, if you hit a baby they can't really do anything about it.

(...) They can't say, you can't do this to me.

Participants noted that these power differences within the relationship are reinforced socio-structurally within our society. For instance, it was argued that the difference in rights outlined above translates into parental legal and social power that can be manifested in physical force, and a lack of legal and social power for children to protect themselves against such acts. The inconsistency of rights recognised by young people means that children are relatively powerless to 'get something done' if parents use their physical power to hit them:

YM130 You get done for assault if you hit someone else, yet you cannae get something done against them.

Consideration of the adult-child relationship in terms of power allowed young participants to add a socio-structural dimension to their previously stated concerns about the intergenerational transmission of behavioural characteristics. Children would not only be seen as copying the psycho-behavioural traits of their carers when using physical force in interpersonal relations, but demonstrating the manifestations of accepting the wider power imbalance. Participants suggested that it is the power imbalance in the relationship that is passed on to children for their own parenthood, together with an acceptance that this imbalance means that one party can use physical force on the other. Suggesting more of a cultural acceptance than any psychological determinism, it is not the precise behavioural

pattern which is transmitted, but the state of a power relationship which gives parents the ability to ensure that their children have to suffer 'what they had to get':

YF38 They'll think that if they're kids do wrong, that they'll be able to hit them and give them what they had to get. (...) Because, the mother thinks that if they got it, they should have the right to hit their kid.

[11-12]

Physical force as an abuse of power

Participants recognised that the existence of a power imbalance always provides the opportunity for adults to commit specific acts that would take advantage of it. Adults can take advantage of the children's lack of power or 'defencelessness', whether by deliberately harming them or simply not ensuring all the short term contextual contingencies are met. Using physical force unacceptably or inappropriately was often portrayed as the adult not being able to handle this power imbalance, as going 'power crazy' [YM21, 11-12].

Participants indicated that there was a particularly delicate balance of power between school teachers and pupils. They argued that power within this particular adult-child relationship would be particularly open and sensitive to abuse at this time. It was suggested that returning the legal right to use 'corporal punishment' to teachers would shift this power balance towards teachers and, in turn, effect abuses of this right and power. Teachers would not be able to handle the power,

and the means to manifest this power, which reinstating the right to utilise corporal punishment would offer them. Participants felt that teachers are already pushing the boundaries of acceptability in their use of existing power in relationships with pupils, showing signs of abusing their position. The right to use physical force beyond existing socio-legal boundaries would further upset this power relationship, causing an imbalance too great to offer children protection against such abuse. Such distrust of teachers being able to handle such power was a common theme in discussions about school discipline, with participants commenting that teachers would 'abuse it and belt people for very little reason' [YF20, 14-16]. It was felt that teachers would not limit such actions to legitimate purposes and situations, but would use physical force 'all the time' [YF131, 14-16] in their relationships with children:

YM117 Some teachers would just do it for nothing, like if somebody dropped a pencil they would just go 'aagh' [hitting action].

[14-16]

On the evidence of incidents witnessed by participants, like the one described in the following extract, the young people predicted clearly that teachers would commit acts which abused the power imbalance created by reintroducing corporal punishment. Teachers would feel that they have even more power over pupils and be given the opportunity to abuse that power on a greater degree than at present.

YM132 And down in England, they're meant to be using the cane now, and I don't think they should bring that back.

YM58 Cos we've got a friend that had Sellotape stuck over his mouth. (...) I just think that it might give the teachers the idea that they've got more power.

[11-12]

Like most of the views expressed on physical force in schools, ideas about abuse of power were also supported by anecdotal evidence from previous generations of school pupils. Related stories underlined fears that, on past form, teachers would abuse the shift in the balance of power gained from the legal right to use physical force by hitting without legitimate purpose:

YM58 My mum was there at school when the belt was there and from what I've heard they were just given...'cos teachers might have more power and they'll just do it for no reason whatsoever.

[11-12]

There was particular concern amongst participants that some teachers would use physical force for the illegitimate reason that they simply did not like the pupil concerned. Teachers would be able to abuse the power imbalance by satisfying their own dislike for the pupil rather than for the sake of the pupil's education or for appropriate control within the school:

NH Do you think that bringing back the belt would help solve some of these disciplinary problems?

YF17 I don't think it does, 'cos some teachers might abuse it and give it for the slightest wee thing or just give it to someone that they don't like.

YF96 Take advantage of the situation.

[11-12]

Again, the participants seemed to base their view that the teachers would abuse their relative power in this way on their interpretations of existing school relations:

YM90 Some of the teachers don't like the pupils and...

YM133Aye

YM90 And would hit them all the time for no reason.

[14-16]

Picking on a pupil from dislike is a clear example of teachers using any shift of power from the right to use physical force in order for their own benefit or relief rather than in the interests of the children (or student body). Other forms of self-gratification which participants felt that teachers would attempt to gain from such an imbalance of power generally either involved taking out their annoyance and anger on pupils or even taking some pleasure in the child's suffering. Basing his objection to the belt on evidence of present child-teacher relationships, one participant suggested:

YM66 Teachers pick on you for no reason. They think it's funny that you're greetin'.

[11-12]

Some participants suggested that, if such a right was reintroduced, the imbalance of power could be held in check and such abuses avoided by instituting employment regulations which would lay down clear guidelines on when and for what reasons teacher could apply physical force. It was felt that guidelines could make clear to teachers purposes seen as legitimate for using such force, making it more difficult to push the boundaries of their rights and abuse their power:

YM36 Some teachers might abuse it, like. Teachers would have to have a set way, like 'If the child does this you can belt him'. But the child has to be a certain behaviour thing, because some teachers would be hitting for whatever and would be hitting every kid in the class and that, and hitting them really hard.

[14-16]

However, discussions about such guidelines revealed that participants considered that the socio-legal power which teachers hold in the running of schools would still result in the adults being able to extend their power to permit unacceptable acts of physical force. The teachers would be able to play around the rules because they would always have the socio-legal power to be able to define the child's behaviour in ways that ensure physical force would be allowed under the guidelines. The

teachers would have more socio-legal power than the child if ever such an act was considered:

YM105 It doesn't matter who does it, they're still getting hit because teachers could exaggerate it. Like, they could do something and the teacher could exaggerate and they could say that warrants getting the belt.

[14-16]

Indeed, a few participants indicated that this playing around the rules would not only come from individual teachers, but from school staff collectively. Teachers would conspire and support each other in ways that allowed them to stretch the boundaries of their power in relation to children. The collective socio-legal power held by the staff network would allow teachers to 'gang up' on pupils, thereby supporting or covering for abuses of power:

YF110 If the pupil went to their guidance teacher, the guidance teacher would end up telling the teacher and the pupil would get hit even more, or something probably.

[11-12]

In a subsidiary theme, some participants stated clearly that greater use of physical force by teachers would mean that relationships within schools would be based on principles inappropriate to education. Participants commented that the imbalance of power caused by this change would result in relationships based upon fear, seen

as improper and inapt to school learning. They felt that if the classroom relationship was to be educationally productive, conformity should not be demanded unilaterally through using power and authority to create fear, but should be achieved through building mutual respect. Corporal punishment would amount to the teachers forcing their will on the pupils rather than teaching the pupils self-control and self-discipline:

YF134 There's enough bullying in the school without teachers picking on the pupils as well, because I feel that the teachers expect respect from a pupil, but the pupils dinnae get it from a teacher. So why should they have the opportunity and authority to do so. Discipline's gonna be drawn by fear for the kids. They are gonna be like behaving because they are scared.

YF135 You are only gonna act good because you are scared and it shouldn't be like that.

[14-16]

Indeed, young participants argued that such is the ideology of mutual respect and consideration underlying educational practice that hitting would actually lose respect for the teacher in the long run, irrespective of the fear created by abusing the imbalance of power:

YM102 But you should give your teacher respect, and she'd break that respect if she's allowed to punish ya totally.

[11-12]

Children's challenges to the power imbalance

Young participants were quick to recognise that some children challenge the power imbalance which allows the use of physical force in certain disciplinary relationships. There was a dominant theme that stressed children not as passive recipients in a one-way power relationship, but as finding ways to react to adults' manifestations of this power. Participants suggested that beyond an infant's complete dependency and position of powerlessness, children would seek to respond to physical force from adults by attempting to redress the power imbalance in a number of ways. The strategies adopted would depend both upon the situation in which each act takes place and the relative levels of power within the particular relationship. For instance, the relative levels of physical power between the adult and child might determine the possibility of an act of physical discipline provoking an immediate and direct physical response from the child. The combined balance of all types of power within the relationship might be against the child, but some degree of physical power still presents an opportunity to 'hit back' (literally) at a situation seen as unfair. Even if the child's reaction provokes further manifestations of the parent's relative power over the child, the child has shown that they are not completely powerless:

YM101 The child can't really defend itself, so I don't think it's that fair to them.

YF24 Some children hit back.

YM136I used to swear at my mum and hit her back.

[14-16]

Participants recognised that the greater their level of physical power in size and strength relative to the adult, the more capable and inclined the child will be to hit back in this way. Moreover, the balance of physical power within the relationship shifts with the child's development and increases the likelihood of a challenge on those terms. Some participants stressed that, despite other forms of adult power, the shift in physical power that accompanies a child's growth in size means that acts of physical discipline will always eventually be met by challenges of this nature:

YM89 It would get to the stage that they would start getting annoyed with it an' turn around and hit their parents back.

[11-12]

Participants were clear that adults using physical force would have to judge changes in the physical power balance very carefully, ensuring that they do not overestimate their relative power as the child gets older:

YF62 Well, once you're getting into ya teens, then you [adult] might get a smack back. If you smacked a kid, if they thought it was like really malicious, they might take offence and hit ya back.

[14-16]

Indeed, participants regularly recounted anecdotal evidence to suggest that they are aware of older children who demonstrate direct physical challenges to parents. These were not interpreted by participants as exceptional relationships, but as illustrating a common situation in families when the children oppose parental power in the teenage years. As such, the application of physical force as discipline tended to be seen as impractical with older children:

YF88 Ya cannae really see that when you reach 14 and that. They get too old and end up like... My friend, right, he's really wicked and that to his mum and he just turns around and he'd end up hitting her back and that, and a lot of teenagers do that now.

[11-12]

Like general discussions about physical force as a manifestation of the adult-child power imbalance, discussions surrounding physical challenges from children were not restricted to the home situation. References to 'hitting back' were particularly common during consideration of physical discipline in schools. Participants calculated that giving teachers the right to use physical force may provide them socio-legal power against young people, but that the shift in this form of power would be out of step with the physical power of older pupils. Combined with a speculated lack of cultural acceptance of such acts amongst schoolchildren, participants predicted that some pupils would challenge any manifestation of this shift in the power balance directly and physically:

YM137 Some people that I know, if they got the belt they'd just hit the teacher back.

[14-16]

Once again, participants suggested that if adults were to be given the right to use corporal punishment in this situation they would have to carefully judge shifts in the balance of physical power as the child develops in size and strength. Older children would be more likely to challenge the power physically, giving teachers concern for their own protection:

YM103 It's a bit dangerous bringing the cane back because...like a third year, you know how they can be quite tall, say a teacher was caning them and they just get infuriated, they would just around and punch the teacher or something. If they were stronger than the teacher.

[11-12]

However, direct challenges to the adult-child power imbalance were not seen as restricted to physical reactions but may be shown to adults in other forms of interpersonal confrontation. Swearing or laughing at parents, for example, were also viewed as acts that reaffirm the child's active rather than passive state in the power relationship. In addition, laughing back at the application of physical force would be a symbolic way of belittling the adult's level of power:

YM123 You get some children who would just laugh at their parents.

[11-12]

Participants argued that if the imbalance of power is too great to allow any form of a direct confrontation or create too much risk of further physical discipline, children would use more subtle strategies to negotiate and form a challenge within the relationship. Participants noted that there are alternative ways that children find to cope with incidents of physical force and attempt to redress an imbalance of power. Children might be passive at the time of receiving physical force but would 'rebel' at a later time and in ways which were less likely to force a confrontation and further acts of physical force. As such, when the overall balance of power is against them, children use what power they feel they do hold. Participants provided the example of children having the power to alter their own moods in relation to parents and other adults. Although the child would avoid direct confrontation by remaining polite, they would demonstrate unwillingness to provide full co-operation with the adult by 'sulking' or altering normal warm close relations. The child is able to show that they still have control over their mind and spirit and offer protest at the adult's act of physical force:

YF34 I know that it really annoyed my sister when she got hit. She was disgusted. It stopped her being cheeky, but it changed her mood and she started sulking.

[14-16]

Some participants indicated that subtle challenges to the power imbalance that avoided confrontation would also be a feature of the disciplinary relationship in the school situation if teachers were to use 'corporal punishment'. Children may have

to bow to socio-legal and physical power by passively accepting physical force from the teacher at the time, but anger and frustration as an active agent in the relationship would provide the basis for a later challenge. The pupils would utilise strategies that help them to regain a sense of power at a later time. Participants predicted that the pupils would aim to play the school system in such a way that enabled them to attack the teachers' power base and advance their power position, but without getting them into further disciplinary trouble:

YM72 If the idea is to punish them for what they have done it somehow gets back at them, but it might not deter other people and it might just make the child very angry at the teacher and the school and be determined to get back at that teacher and do something bad in the future. Misbehaving and doing niggly things that the teacher couldn't actually punish them for.

[14-16]

Alternatively, children might challenge the adult power at home or school by deliberately repeating the offence for which they were physically disciplined, at a time when their actions might not be detected or would be less likely to lead to confrontation. Irrespective of whether the child had 'learnt' the specific lesson being taught by the adult, the child demonstrates control and power over their own behaviour:

NH Well, would it have been better to smack?

YM138Na, because it would have made me worse. I would have kept on smoking.

YM139No, 'cos you would be angry with your mum and try to get back at her.

YF140 'Cos that's what I'd do if she hit me. Or I'd run away.

[11-12]

This latter suggestion of running away was a particularly strong theme in discussions with participants. It was felt that this action would act as the ultimate sanction or gesture by which children could show their displeasure at parental acts of physical force. The following exchange highlights the defiance and sense of empowerment felt to be inherent in the act of running away. Even if the action stops at packing bags in response to the use of physical force, the child has regained a sense of control and power over their life:

YF83 I was to be in for a quarter to nine the other night and I went in at nine o'clock and she started hitting me.

YM64 Who?

YF83 My mum. I was totally raging and I ran out and I was going to run away and I packed my bags and everything.

NH One of you said before that that might happen.

YF83 I've run away before for it.

YM64 Aye, so have I...but I ran out of money so had to come home.

YM141 I was gonna too.

YF142 My wee sister packed her bags too.

[11-12]

Similarly, playing truant from school or legitimately leaving school at the earliest opportunity were considered to be the ultimate sanctions that pupils hold over their school. As such, participants suggested that pupils would respond to what they saw as teachers abusing an imbalance of power by adopting these measures and help redress the balance of power:

YF70 Well, if there's a teacher that doesn't like you and she was picking on ya, if it was me I'd bunk school so I wouldn't have to go to her class.

NH What if it was the Rector giving the belt?

YF70 If a teacher sent me to the Rector then I wouldn't go. I'd just run away...unless they actually walk ya down. If they just dump me at the office and go away and leave me, then it's easy enough to leave. I mean, this school is actually quite easy, ya get classes and things like that and it's dead easy; ya just sign and walk out.

As a subsidiary theme, participants also proposed that children's frustrations from a power imbalance might be released in various forms of 'rebellious' behaviour outwith the situational confines of this disciplinary relationship. If the power imbalance in school, for instance, is so great that no challenge is possible there, the child may reassert their own sense of power by 'misbehaving' in situations outside of school where there is less direct control or adult surveillance over their lives. Although it may still carry risks for the child, the child is able to reassert their position in the adult-child power relationship without necessarily directly confronting the particular adults involved:

YF75 They will rebel out of school because you have got to behave when you are in school. So, they are gonna go, like, breaking windows. They will probably throw stones at the windows.

[11-12]

External challenges to the power imbalance

Discussions about the balance of power in various adult-child disciplinary relationships were not restricted to consideration of the determining role played by those directly involved in an act of physical force. As references to socio-legal power might suggest, participants commonly acknowledged the influence of outside agencies on the relative power of adults and children. This influence may be direct, in the form of active agency intervention, or indirect so that the threat of active

interference affects the way in which adults and children interact. The state and other agencies were widely seen as restricting the present imbalance of power between parents and children by regulating interactions to a certain extent. Participants felt that parents are forced to be careful of their behaviour in a disciplinary situation because of concerns about these outside agencies. This concern might be great enough to deter parents from using any physical force in such situations:

NH Should you smack them?

YF60 If you smack them too hard then it could really hurt them and they could get bruises and stuff. Then if people [who] notice the bruises start to wonder what's going on and they start questioning them and their mums, and they'll think that...

YF114 End up going to court.

[11-12]

YM97 You can do more damage and you'd get the social work onto you if they wander in with big bruises.

[14-16]

As the above extract suggests, social workers constituted the main set of agents which participants felt would have a bearing on the state of the disciplinary relationship. In addition, the role of teachers in the lives of children and the possible involvement of police was discussed by participants. Participants implied that the degree of physical force by adults on children would not only depend upon practical concerns for the development of the child, but would also be affected by the power of these outside agencies to impact upon their lives:

YM37 I just wouldn't hit my weans. (...) 'Cos your weans could go to school with bruises and the teachers could call the police and that. Just skelping them is OK, but not hitting them and giving them bruises and everything. Maybe hit them, but not too hard. (...) You should only hit them with your hand, because if you hit them with anything else, it would give them bruises.

[11-12]

Moreover, some participants argued that there has been a shift in the relative influence of these outside agencies in recent years. There was a view that parents have to be more careful about their behaviour in the disciplinary relationship now than in the past because of a shift in socio-legal power from parents to these outside agencies. When considering the need for parents to be careful when using physical force against their children in a disciplinary situation, one participant commented:

YM50 Well, I think that society has changed. Like, say social workers, if they find out that you have been abusing your child you could have them taken away.

The influence of these agencies was considered more important for younger children, when the power imbalance between adults and children was felt to be at its greatest. At such times, when the child is relatively defenceless, the influence of these outside agencies may be the only check on the power of the parents and protection from the manifestations of this power. Even when formal agencies do not come into regular contact with the child, others can utilise them to challenge parents abusing this power on behalf of young children:

YF110 Their grandparent could phone the police or something, or phone Childline.

[11-12]

Moreover, there was a strong emphasis in discussions on the empowerment that these external agencies can bring to the children themselves as they get slightly older. The existence of the agencies allows children greater opportunity to challenge this power imbalance and any abusive manifestations within:

YF109 It's up to whoever's being smacked really. They can do something about it, like phone the social workers or Childline, because there is some people who you can phone.

[11-12]

As these last two extracts suggest, the charity telephone help-line Childline was seen to hold a particular place of importance in providing an accessible mechanism

with which to challenge adult power over children. Participants consistently referred to the possibility of seeking help from Childline, even in preference to seeking assistance from friends or family. In general, participants indicated that these outside agencies, and Childline in particular, created an impression amongst children that they could rely upon their support in challenges against adults:

YM143 They couldnae bring the belt back into school anyway, 'cos my cousins say you could phone Childline and tell them they're hitting ya, like, it's just like somebody else hitting ya.

[11-12]

However, some participants expressed concern that using external agencies to empower themselves did not offer children complete control over any challenge to adult power. Any utilisation of these agencies risked repercussions for the adult-child relationship which went beyond simply restricting physical discipline. Participants argued that children would know that involving outside agencies would risk damaging their relationship with the adult and negative effects for either or both parties. The young people often related these concerns with reference to the possibility of a legal ban on physical discipline by parents. First, participants speculated that children would not want to utilise external agencies to enforce the shift in socio-legal power because of possible negative effects on those close to them:

YF52 It wouldn't be nice if you were getting your mum and dad done for hitting you. They could end up just losing their temper wi you and they would end

up hitting you. So, I don't think that you should put a law against it.

[11-12]

Second, some participants commented that children would be unwilling to use the potential empowerment of such agencies because they would be scared of the negative effects which such actions might have on them. Even if children knew that a ban on parental physical discipline was introduced, they would be afraid to refer to outside agencies if parents held a large physical power advantage over them:

YM49 I don't think that making it illegal would stop it. I don't think that younger children, if they were hit, would go and tell someone, 'Oh, I was hit'. I don't think they would have the courage to do that. I think maybe they would be a bit frightened of their mum and they wouldn't speak up.

[14-16]

Moreover, there was limited speculation that parents would be aware that children would be disinclined to seek support from outside agencies for the above reasons. They concluded that parents would know that children were unlikely to request interference from outside agencies, particularly at a younger age when the power balance is at its most potent. Consequently, participants argued that parents would be less likely to change their use of physical discipline if they felt that the shift in socio-legal power from a ban was more theoretical than real:

YM77 If it is made illegal, I don't think a lot of people will stop it, because I think that parents would think that their children wouldn't tell on them.

[14-16]

Concerns surrounding challenges to adult power

In the same way that some participants were uncomfortable with the wholesale removal of parental rights to use physical force, there was also a significant degree of reticence in some quarters to any challenge to the perceived wider adult-child power [im]balance. A more conservative response, which supported the power imbalance in which physical force was allowed, stated that children should accept the unequal power relationship and live within its adult-defined rules. According to these participants, the best way for children to avoid the manifestations of this power imbalance, in the home or the school, would be to behave in a way which limits any requirement for the adult to utilise their power in the form of physical force. For instance, if children stop misbehaving when they are told to, and make sure that they do not repeat behaviour that they know upsets their parents, there would be less need to employ physical force. The onus was placed on children to ensure that they do not perform acts of misbehaviour that are likely to result in a smack. Children have the power to determine whether they receive physical discipline, but only by behaving according to adults wishes rather than trying to oppose or redefine the relationship themselves:

YF13 Well, if they have been brought up in a strict environment they will know not to do wrong and if they do, well, they will get smacked. But they should know if they get smacked or not.

[11-12]

YF96 You wouldn't have any reason to worry if you had no reason to be given it.

[11-12]

Indeed, some participants believed that parents would be unable to fulfil their responsibility for moral development if there was a shift in the power imbalance which meant they could not use physical discipline in child care. Parents would not be able to teach appropriate behaviour properly if they did not possess this degree of relative power in the relationship. Without this power, parents could not force children to act and develop in the way that they feel is necessary. There was a belief amongst some participants that children would simply misuse the power shift to ensure that they behaved to their own desire, without worrying that the parent's wishes would be reinforced physically:

YF95 Then children wouldn't really mind about their mum. They would do whatever they wanted if they know they're not gonna get smacked.

[14-16]

It was asserted by a few participants in the older age group that children are already taking advantage of situations where parents are disinclined to use physical force. As such, children would certainly misuse any changes to power which allowed greater resistance to such acts. In contrast to a kind of 'golden age' which surrounded the earlier days of their own childhood, older participants were already suggesting that 'children of today' are less capable of handling such power sensibly:

YF24 See if you made this into a child's right, and lots of children found out this, they would think, Ooh, I can do this and do that and get away with anything'. (...). Children are getting a lot different to what we were. Children are just swearing at you and stuff, with fags in your house. Children have changed a lot since we were wee.

[14-16]

To a few participants, any further challenge which threatened to upset this power imbalance was simply unthinkable. They considered that this state of imbalance is so ingrained in the adult-parent power relationship that a radical shift, such as allowing a child the socio-legal power to reject physical force, was inconceivable. Banning physical force would change the whole nature of the relationship, attacking its purpose of teaching moral development. Such a shift would allow children the contradictory power to attack parents for fulfilling their parental role. This fundamentally challenged these participants' perceptions of roles in the disciplinary relationship:

NH Should it [use of physical force] be illegal?

YM106 No, not that far. (...) No it's not right, is it? You tap your child to try and tell them what's right, just hit them on the backside or something and then he goes in a mood and sues you for just tapping him on the back and telling him what's right and wrong.

NH But an adult could sue. Why shouldn't a child?

YM106 'Cos it's a fucking child. It's only a wee fucking boy, a wee boy. It's a child! You can't sue your parents. Come on now. They brought you into the world, they are just teaching you right from wrong.

[14-16]

Cultural shifts in acceptance of physical force

There was a popular theme in discussions, most common with the older group of participants, that a cultural shift in the state of disciplinary relationships was already underway. Participants argued that both the roles and power of actors within disciplinary relationships had altered significantly over the recent past in relation to physical force. In particular, participants expressed the belief that removing the right for teachers to physically punish had acted as a catalyst to changes in cultural attitudes towards both the place of physical force and the role of actors in all adult-

child relationships. In the school situation, participants suggested that the change in the role of teachers since the ban means that, even if the ban were to be lifted, the use of physical force would be seen as completely inappropriate. The relationship between teacher and pupil before the ban was contrasted to school culture today, in which the use of physical force to bring adult control to a situation seems less feasible:

YM63 Well, nowadays it's different to when they had the belt. It's just that these times people are not actually more violent, but you don't have as much respect for a teacher.

NH We're only talking ten years. You think it's changed in that time?

YM63 Aye, I do.

NH Less respect for teachers?

YM63 Well, not respect, but...I don't know how ya say it, but I wouldn't think that if people hit me with a belt I should listen to them, or if someone hit me with a belt I'd just get really annoyed with 'em and hate them more. No, I don't think the belt would...

[14-16]

NH But what about those who say that getting hit with the belt didn't do me any harm?

YM69 But that was then, this is now. It was a different society whenever they were hit. It was an older fashion. The belt used to be back then and it's not now, 'cos it was banned. I think that speaks for itself, so I don't think children are gonna expect to be belted. I think they expected it to happen in the last generation, ya know, when our parents were kids. They don't expect to be belted now and I don't think they would want to be hit at home either.

[14-16]

As this last extract suggests, participants argued that changes in the legal position, actual use and attitudes towards teachers using physical force have all influenced the cultural acceptance of such acts in other adult-child relationships beyond the school gates. On an individual level, pupils who have not seen the belt in school would be less likely to accept the use of that implement in any interpersonal relationship. Moreover, such a change would lead them to question the use of physical force per se within disciplinary relationships:

YM144 Say my parents smacked children and then when they [children] went to school they were given the belt and things, when they have children themselves when they are older they are gonna think that it is an alright discipline to smack them. But because now the belt's been taken away, us, when we grow up and have kids, maybe we will think, 'Well, we weren't given the belt and we weren't hit much, we weren't hit that bad when we

were children', when we are older. So maybe it will get better 'cos attitudes are changing, 'cos the belt has been taken away from the school.

[14-16]

On a more macro-cultural scale, it was felt that the school could effect changes from the position of an important institution within society, affecting lives of both children and carers. Consequently, the situation within the school may effectively sway the cultural construction and acceptance of particular actions across wider social contexts and relationships. For instance, it was stated that the removal of the belt at school has directly affected cultural, or 'social', tolerance of the use of implements in the home:

YM11 Well, if it's not used in school anymore, I think socially people would object to it [in the home]. People would say, 'That guy is hitting that kid with a belt and that is wrong'. If it was brought back into school people would say, 'Well, if the school is allowed to do it then it should be allowed to happen at home'.

NH So, it is only abuse if it doesn't happen in school? The school dictates what is child abuse?

YM11 No, what I am saying is people's attitudes towards child abuse changes. If it was accepted at school, then it would be socially acceptable. But since it is not used and the school is meant to be one of the best institutions in the whole world, pupils think that it [the belt] must do some good. But as it's not used, people think, 'My God, he's abusing his child by belting him'.

However, legal change in schools was not seen as the only factor behind shifting attitudes and expectations of physical force within disciplinary relationships. Participants noted that recent shifts seem to be an extension of a much longer-term trend away from such acts, both within and between successive generations:

YM144 More people have been saying smacking is bad in the last few years. My mum used to smack me if I'd been bad, but my wee brother, I've never seen my mum hit my wee brother.

[14-16]

YM105 My mum smacked me as well. Times have changed. Today it's not expected. Like, when we were wee it was O.K., but nowadays...

YF78 Ya keep getting all this about how ya shouldn't smack a child and everything, but when I was wee my mum used to do it all the time. I mean, when my dad was wee, my gran used to hit him with a slipper, but now if anybody done that it would be assault or something.

[14-16]

Indeed, participants suggested that recent shifts are part of a progression towards 'fairness' and individual rights in society. Reversing this shift by, for instance,

reinstating corporal punishment into schools would fly in the face of this development towards fairness:

YF112 There is no need to bring it back now, because society has all changed. It's getting fairer and the way we decide things and it's just a bit stupid to bring it back when everything else is against it.

[14-16]

However, within participants' discussions, any analysis of changes based on considerations of rights was consistently tempered with concerns about the immediate behaviour and future development of children. Participants regularly returned to the possible effects on children's long-term development of society's changing attitudes and expectations towards the conduct of roles within disciplinary relationships. If the purpose of physical force in the home, for instance, is not retribution for past acts but communication in the present for future moral development then any changes must be evaluated later on the success of this development. In a restatement of concerns about such moral development, it was argued that the implications of changes in roles, power and behaviour within disciplinary relationships now and in the past will only become more apparent in the future:

YM145I don't think there are many mothers who will smack their children today.

YF146 That's 'cos society has changed.

NH Is it better not to smack or is society going the wrong way?

YM145 We'll be able to see in a few years when my wee brother's my age.

[14-16]

Chapter summary

This chapter has reviewed participants' perceptions of the interaction between the status of adult-child relationships and acceptability of using physical force in discipline. It was noted that young participants widely insisted that issues regarding acts of physical force must be considered within the context of wider disciplinary relationships. The chapter has examined perceptions of this interaction in relation to both the rights associated with each role in the disciplinary relationship and the resulting power balance.

The first section in the chapter highlighted the major theme of a demarcation of rights to use physical discipline according to the precise social roles of actors in different disciplinary relationships. Primarily, any demarcation centred on a common empathy for the exceptional right of parents to physical discipline, supported by two main beliefs: that of parental responsibility for their child's moral development; and the peculiar intimacy of a parent with their child. First, the responsibility of parents, rather than schools or any other agency, to teach moral discipline led participants to present parents as having the right to choose how and

when their child is disciplined. Second, the unique intimacy of the parental relationship, gained either 'naturally' from taking the parental (usually maternal) role or through shared (early) experiences and privy knowledge, enables a greater amount of trust by participants in parents' appropriate use of such a right.

The second section in the chapter reviewed the resilient disquiet and frustration in discussions at the 'unfairness' of any relationship that allowed a one way flow of rights to use physical force against another. This unfairness, sometimes related to a breach of children's 'human rights', was often cited as a reason to withdraw the right of anyone to use such physical force over another. However, the next section in the chapter noted that despite the unfairness of this rights imbalance, there was a dominant unease (especially from the older group of participants) with allowing external agencies (particularly state agencies) to interfere overtly in families where children were in little danger of long term harm. This unease was associated with the perceived need to allow parents the freedom to fulfil their responsibilities for moral development of the child. Nevertheless, a significant body of opinion considered that, on balance, the long term risks to children outweighed considerations of the roles and rights of any adults, and required a legal ban. It was noted, however, that some participants were concerned that a gap between legal and attitudinal change would cause significant practical problems in policing widespread illegal physical force.

The chapter went on to consider perceptions surrounding power within the adult-child disciplinary relationship involving physical force. It was noted that participants

themselves often referred to the relationship in terms of 'power'. Acts of disciplinary physical force were perceived as manifestations of an imbalance of power in the relationship, derived from a combination of factors including physical, communicative and (as above) socio-legal differences between parties. This combination was considered to shift with the changing vulnerability and dependency of each child, with short-term contingencies viewed as redressing the degree of this imbalance to reduce the risks of negative effects on the child. Participants recognised situations where adults abuse this power imbalance to benefit themselves. The balance of power between teachers and pupils was perceived as particularly delicate and sensitive to abuse at this time, which would be upset by lifting the ban on physical punishment. Teachers would be unable to handle this power and abuses would follow.

However, the chapter featured the acknowledgement that children are not passive recipients in a one-way power relationship, but find strategies to challenge this power imbalance and react to its manifestations. Depending upon the relative levels of power, a disciplinary act of physical force might provoke the child's immediate and direct response by physically 'hitting back', or swearing / laughing to belittle the adult's power. With greater power imbalances, participants argued that children use less confrontational and more subtle strategies, such as sulking, to form a challenge. Consideration of the ultimate 'option' of running away from home or school (truancy) encapsulates these challenges as a defiant reassertion of a sense of empowerment and self-control. The next section highlighted participants' acknowledgement that outside agencies influence the balance of power in adult-

child disciplinary relationships, both in the form of direct interference between adult and child and the threat of such active interference. The state and other agencies (particularly social workers) were widely seen as regulating the power imbalance and its manifestations. It was noted that participants perceived an increase in the relative influence of these outside agencies in recent years, considered especially important for children's empowerment (e.g. Childline) to challenge abusive manifestations. However, there was concern that parents would be aware that even with a ban on all disciplinary physical force, children would refrain from seeking outside help for fear of two main consequences: negative effects on the family after relinquishing complete control of the challenge; and fear of suffering personal reprisals from the adults with a large physical power advantage.

Presenting a more conservative form of children's empowerment, some participants argued that children should best avoid physical force by behaving well rather than finding ways to challenge the adult power. These participants tended to argue that adults would be unable to fulfil their responsibilities without this power and that there is already evidence that children cannot sensibly handle such a shift in power. Indeed, there was a strong perception more widely that, culturally, both the roles and power of actors in all types of disciplinary relationships had altered significantly over the recent past. Although the removal of teachers' rights to physically punish was seen as one catalyst, participants noted a longer-term trend away from such acts, perhaps as part of a progression towards 'fairness' in society. Participants suggested that such a trend must be considered in tandem with practical concerns about the immediate and future development of children.

This chapter formed the last of three chapters that analysed the dominant themes in discussions with the young participants in this study. For the purposes of this analysis, the chapters grouped themes concerning physical force in discipline into three substantive discursive topics: purposes and immediate behavioural effects; practical concerns and contingencies; and the interaction with relationships, rights and power in the wider disciplinary relationship. The next chapter is intended to add to this analysis by relating the major themes in discussions with *carer participants*, and highlighting areas of strong commonality or difference with the perceptions of *young participants*.

Chapter Seven Comparison with carers' perceptions of physical force of children

This chapter explores carer participants'¹ perceptions of the employment by adults of physical force in disciplinary relationships with children. The account is not intended to be an exhaustive review of discussions. Arguments are examined in neither the depth nor comprehensiveness of the previous chapters on the perceptions of young participants. Instead, the carers' perceptions are analysed particularly in relation to the concerns expressed by the young participants. Major themes in discussions with carers are compared with the accounts of young people and areas of strong commonality or difference are highlighted. These comparisons are intended to further illuminate the state, nature and specificity of concerns held by young people on adults' use of physical force on children.

Purposes and effectiveness of physical force

In common with young participants, carers' ideas about the cognitive and psychological development of children were dominant in their consideration of the purposes for using physical force. Concerns from both carers and young participants generally centred around the need for physical force *because* of the present stage of child development and *to ensure* appropriate development of the child in the future.

¹ See Chapter Three for details of the carers sample.

Carers laid particular stress on physical force as a necessary method of communication in certain child care situations because young children had yet to develop the cognitive skills to allow verbal communication or reasoning. Like young participants, it was common for adults to present weak and failed attempts at reasoning with a child as the only alternative to using firm physical force to communicate the carer's wishes. They recounted tales from their own experience which linked such parenting behaviour with child misbehaviour, thereby establishing the consequence of failure to employ physical force as continued misbehaviour:

CF1 There was a friend of mine, when her child was four and she bit another little girl hard, left a mark and drew blood. And the mother reasoned with this four year old, saying, 'That wasn't very nice, and you do love so and so don't you, that hurts.' But the child didn't have any idea what the parent was talking about and just went on and did it to another child. And I think it is important to realise that the child...just gets an idea of what they are doing wrong. I think it's very difficult to reason with a young child.

Carers stressed a preference for using verbal communication with their children, but stated that this simply was not possible until they had reached a certain stage of development. Although dangerous situations were never isolated as the only legitimate reason to use physical force, as some young people did, these circumstances were utilised by carers to emphasise the necessity to take this action for effective and efficient communication with young children. Once children had grasped their communication skills, however, there was less reason to use physical

force. Adults argued that the tone of their voice would render physical force less necessary as a form of communication:

CF2 I must admit when she was a toddler when she put her hands in the fire a short tap was enough to make her realise. At that age I didn't see any harm in that but once you can communicate, I mean just get to say 'No' and by the tone of your voice they knew they weren't allowed to touch things.

Like young people, carers' perceptions of a greater necessity to discipline children physically in their early years were related to beliefs about their development of abilities to communicate. Carers argued that there was only a valid practical alternative to smacking as a means of communication when children were old enough to have developed the ability to understand parents' wishes transmitted verbally:

NH You suggested that that might change with age?

CF1 Yes, because I found that when they're younger they...I don't know whether it's right or wrong, but very often Peter and I would give them a smack, but we wouldn't do that now that they are getting older.

NH Why is that?

CF1 Because I think that there are other ways that you can discipline them now. It is harder to reason with very small children, but when they are getting

older they are more open to reason, so I find that I don't need to give them a smack.

In line with the arguments of young participants, carers translated views of what purposes of force were legitimate into micro-contextual conditions concerning when such acts are acceptable. When carer participants focused on communication as the purpose of physical force, it was considered less appropriate or acceptable for an adult to take such actions against an older child who has developed the skills to understand verbal reasoning:

CF3 We wouldn't hit Tracy. She's a young lady and that and I don't think you should hit her.

NH Why should being a 'young lady' make any difference?

CF3 Well, she's not a child any more and you should be able to come across and say to her and make her understand. Be able to say, 'Look Tracy, I dinnae think...'

Mirroring discussions with young people, carers played down any necessity for an association between physical force and pain or injury in the disciplinary relationship. The physical force did not need to actually result in these negative implications for the child in order to effectively communicate or 'express' the adult's point. As such, the physical force was viewed as more of a limited and symbolic gesture without the intention of pain or injury:

CM4 I mean sometimes as they're going through the door I'd give em a smack on the backside. That's a thing I did, but it's not a kicking if you take the point of view. You're ushering them out, you are really expressing your disapproval but that's about as much as it gets to. (...) More a gesture if you're doing something like that, rather than the principle of hurting. You're not kicking as a gesture of distaste or disapproval, 'You're doing wrong and don't do it again. On your way onto your room', so to speak. (...) As I say I think it's mostly a gesture rather than violent discipline.

The views of some carers concurred with the subsidiary theme from young participants that physical force would be used legitimately as a form of communication by means of shocking the child to attention. It is an adult's unexpected action rather than any pain which shocks a child and provides for immediate communication. However, this line of argument from carers differed from the young participants' to the extent that it stressed 'shocking' the child in relation to a particular practical necessity in specific situations. Rather than just used to generally attract attention, as related by the young participants, the carers stressed the practical application of physical force to shock a child out of a 'temper tantrum':

NH Can you explain why you think it is appropriate for a temper tantrum?

CF5 Because I think it's a shock. It could then start a conversation, start a reasoning. (...) It could stop the tantrum and start a reasoning process.

In common with young participants, carers also stressed the use of physical force as a tool for teaching appropriate behaviour for the future. Moreover, like young participants, carers commonly contrasted this 'legitimate teaching for the *future*' with 'illegitimate punishment' as retribution for *past* events. Punishment, in this retributive sense, was not conducive to the concentration of child care on future development. Instead, the carers' developmentalist approach related the purposes of physical force in terms of education for the future:

CF1 Probably not as a punishment, but just as a way of showing a child that that is not what they are meant to be doing. I'd like to see that it was more of a learning exercise.

When physical force was felt to be necessary to aid this 'learning', such a purpose was often strong enough to counter any argument that it is a child's right not to be hit. Despite rights claims, physical force was sometimes seen as necessary in practice:

NH Some pressure groups use the phrase, 'Hitting is wrong and children are people too'...

CM4 I think, you know, that people had better step back and take a constructive look at things which I suppose this argument is trying to do. But you've gotta realise that juniors have gotta lot of learning to do, you know. It's part of the learning process.

There was, however, a significant difference of emphasis between arguments from the young participants and adults when presenting physical force in this educational role. The most dominant theme amongst carers was to stress the teaching of *social* rules. Carers perceived that physical discipline must be used at an early age to teach these broad social rules if they are to take their place as 'a person in the society' when they begin to fly the parental nest:

NH: With a slightly older age you would take a different approach?

CF6 Yes, when they are able to rationalise and understand the obvious difference between right and wrong and, indeed, the rules that have been laid down for the social behaviour you expect from them as a person in the society. As such [however], even though they are five or six or that they still have to live within a set of rules and when they step outside of that then discussion first and then if it still prevails then I think a smack at that stage can be beneficial to them. I can't remember it doing me any harm as such.

According to this argument, the intention behind using physical force is not just to ensure that children will be able to identify particular right and wrong behaviour, but that this process will teach them to conform more generally to adult social rules. Conversely, the carers' concentration on social development points up an absence of this theme in discussions with young people (see, for instance, the quotations from young participants on pages 161-162). Young participants discussing physical discipline as a teaching tool rarely focused beyond the individual, effectively

emphasising the personal moral development of each child. It should be noted that it is difficult for an interpretivist study to analyse, and 'prove' the importance of, an absence in young people's discussions, particularly when such an absence only became apparent when analysing the carers' arguments. Further empirical research would be necessary to test the full implications of this 'absence'. Nevertheless, the sheer contrast with the heavy stress in carers' arguments on the development of social conformity necessitates my recognition of young participants' distinct concentration on teaching for personal moral development.

Furthermore, regarding the home, young participants focused on communicating and teaching the parental view on individual acts of child behaviour rather than explicitly ensuring general conformity. Likewise, although some young participants legitimised physical force for 'control' in classrooms, it was only to managing classroom activity in specific situations to allow curricular education. Thus, discussions with the young people did not feature the teaching of wider social rules to produce controlled citizens which was so dominant in carers' arguments, for example:

CF6 I mean what we're talking about is trying to get them to do something and have a mental regime... it's impregnated in the mind as it were, the rules that they've got to abide by [as they grow up].

Reference to the preparation of a 'mental regime' present Foucaudian images of moulding future docile bodies that conform to authority in society. Indeed, there was a subsidiary theme in carers' arguments, completely absent in discussions with

young participants, that explicitly stressed 'shaping the will' of the child in this way. According to some carers the child should be physically forced to curb their own will to the wishes of the authority adult:

CM7 Basically, you're forcing them to submit.

This argument stresses that obedience to parents will ensure conformity to wider authority seen as necessary for individuals to operate appropriately in society. It was seen as particularly important for the adult in the disciplinary relationship to meet any deliberate misbehaviour or defiance to this authority head on and physically force the child to bow to this obedience. This line of argument mirrors very closely teachings by religious campaigners on family discipline from the USA. Indeed, although religious support or implications for the use of physical force were not explored by young participants, one carer related this line of argument to advice given by James Dobson, one of the best known Christian authors on child discipline:

CF1 I don't know if you Frank Dobson [sic]? He's a psychologist in America I think.

NH Yes, does he write Christian texts?

CF1 Yes, I saw some of his videos, but the thing that really stuck in my mind was breaking the will without breaking the spirit, and I think that's very important. You try and get rid of this will power for rebelling against authority and trying

out things because someone said you shouldn't. You want to try and break that without crushing them as people.

However, ideas based around child development were used by some carers to argue that physical force was either unnecessary or ineffective for any purpose at any time in a child's life. These carers argued that if a child had developed enough to reason then any purpose could be served verbally and render physical force unnecessary. If, on the other hand, the child had not developed this reasoning ability, physical force would be no more successful at forwarding the adult intention than verbal communication because of the child's lack of ability to associate the 'smack' with their own actions. This precise line of argument was not present in discussions with the young participants. Although some young participants argued that there were *alternatives* to using physical force on young children, generally they stressed that there was a time between babies appreciating these physical actions and later verbal reasoning when smacking would be effective. Carers cited their own experiences of failing to make a young child understand as revealing the ineffectiveness of physical discipline:

NH So, does smacking work?

CF5 Well, no it didn't. He knew that he didn't like it, but he didn't fully understand. It stopped him for a while, but he'd just get up and do something else equally appalling.

On the whole, however, carers were less likely than young participants to discuss whether an act of physical force 'worked' generally, but stressed the heterogeneity of each disciplinary relationship. Whilst young people also gave credence to the micro-level influences on effectiveness, these individual differences dominated carers' discussions. In particular, carers concentrated on the individual nature of each child and how this would affect any reaction to disciplinary measures. They stressed that physical force may work for one child but might have some negative effect on the next. Moreover, it was argued that for some children and not others physical force may be the only effective measure to fulfil legitimate purposes. As such, some carers expressed concern that a universal law banning physical force would be inappropriate to the heterogeneous nature of child-parent relationships. This subsidiary argument stressed the need for flexibility to ensure that every child had disciplinary measures appropriate to her or him:

CF8 Not every child needs a smack. Maybe a firm voice would be enough, or a case of depriving. But in a lot of cases it does not work. In some cases it might work. (...) If that's the only thing that's going to work because you have got that sort of child and it's the only thing that works with your child, and you're not allowed to do it, then it could really ruin them.

This heterogeneity was more usually presented in argument, however, to counter assumptions of physical discipline's universal effectiveness. A popular theme of discussion concerned the peculiar causes behind each act of misbehaviour. It was argued that adopting physical force rather than verbal reasoning would fail to reveal

the underlying cause or problem and any positive effects would be superficial and short term:

NH Why wouldn't it be best to smack?

CF2 Because it doesn't really get ya the means to the end. I feel...it doesnae work. I talk to them and discuss why they're doing things wrong is the better way of going but sometimes your temper gets that frayed.

These concerns were stressed with particular strength in relation to the school situation where carers were concerned that physical force would not be applied with concern to an individual child's background or longer-term reactions. It was considered possible that applying physical force in this situation would exacerbate any problems and, perhaps, lead to further behavioural difficulties:

CF6 I think I would be arguing against [the belt returning] really because, um... (...) It's more likely to have a detrimental effect. It's much better to actually talk to somebody and discuss why something's going wrong and why their behaviour is the way it is rather than reacting to the behaviour and physically assaulting them as such like giving them something like the belt.

Like some young participants, carers gave the example of pupils who seek attention through physical discipline as individuals for whom these acts would fail to address the underlying problems. It was seen as particularly important for teachers to discover the individual social situation outside school which might be causing any

perceived behavioural difficulties or preventing effective teaching. Whereas young participants tended to stress the psychological characteristics of the child and their interactions within the school setting, carers focused on social relations in the home as influencing school behaviour and the effectiveness of teacher response. Carers highlighted the individual pressures and difficulties which might lie in the child's background and their relationship with parents. Only investigating and understanding these, rather than reacting to the symptomatic inappropriate behaviour, was seen as effective:

CF6 Again it depends on the type of pupils as well. I mean if you get pupils that want to learn then minor type punishment like the letters we discussed are effective but when you get people that don't want to learn, don't want to be at school, then it's very difficult to know how to achieve teaching with people like that. Maybe the only thing they understand is punishment and maybe that's wrong, well it is wrong. You'd probably have to go back into their social background and find out what's actually happening at the parent-child level and why misbehaviour is being manifested at the school which is resulting in all the potential punishment to correct it.

Micro-situational conditions and parental pressure

In common with young participants, carers felt that not only did micro-level differences influence the effectiveness of physical force, but also the perceived acceptability of its employment. Both groups emphasised the importance of

contextual factors when assessing the acceptability of acts of physical force in the disciplinary relationship. Again, these factors reflected a number of concerns and were manifested in different contingencies which participants placed upon such acts, ranging from the precise bodily target to resulting pain and injury:

CF9 There is a big difference between a quick smack on the leg and someone having the belt taken to them or being hit around the head or that sort of thing. (...) If it is a quick smack that doesn't leave a mark or anything, I can't see it as a crime.

There were no particular areas of short term concerns that revealed substantive differences of argument between carers and young participants. However, there was a clear difference between the groups regarding the degree to which contingencies for acceptability were expected to be applied in all disciplinary situations. Whilst young participants described *fixed* contingencies which would exist across all disciplinary occasions, adults stressed that any conditions must be *flexible* and be subject to individual circumstances. Carers argued that conditions could not even be fixed as firm principles by individual parents because they need to respond to each situation differently and pragmatically:

CF10 Every situation is different. You can't really go and say that this is what we believe. It depends on what the situation is at the time. You weigh up each situation.

This requirement to take account of varying parental pressures in the disciplinary relationship was one of the most prominent themes in discussions with carers.

Whilst young participants (usually from the older age group) recognised these pressures, they did not consider that they could legitimately affect contingencies on acceptability. However, carers felt that principled views, fixed ideas and consistent patterns of child care relating to physical force would and should all be curtailed by practical pressures on parents. Carers repeatedly noted that the understandable pressures of parenting would alter the actual application of any contingencies they imposed on their own parenthood. In particular, carers argued that the contingency stating that physical force should only be used when completely necessary to fulfil a legitimate purpose, stressed by young participants, would be difficult to abide by in every situation. They argued that pressures encountered in everyday parenting would render them liable to smack even when the parents' own objective calculation might identify this as not absolutely needed for the child. Focus was placed on the frustration which primary carers were said to feel in difficult child care situations.

CF1 Yes, well, lots of times when I think back now [to] when I have smacked them, it's been because I haven't known what else to do, because a two year old can wind you up to the limit and beyond. And you wonder then if you're actually giving them a smack because you are angry and it's just a way of getting out your anger, or whether it's because you think that you're disciplining your child. It's very easy to hit out at a child in anger. (...) You can analyse it afterwards that the child has wound you up so much that your reaction has been to lash out. You can look back and you know that. (...) Nine out of ten parents would have hit their child in anger.

The retrospective view that acts of physical force were influenced by parental frustration and anger was a recurring theme in carers' perceptions. Like young participants, carers were concerned about these feelings influencing disciplinary episodes and generally viewed them as unacceptable. However, carers were generally more understanding than young participants about such feelings being present, widely acknowledging them as a regrettable consequence of situational pressures on parents. Whereas young participants readily regarded parents hitting from anger as relieving their own feelings rather than caring for the child, and therefore guilty of 'abusing' that child, carers stressed the difficulty of avoiding such actions. Carers recognised the influence of anger as inappropriate to such situations and conceded that they had personally been wrong to use physical force, but argued that, 'it's very easy to hit out at a child in anger' as a 'normal' reaction to pressure. Indeed, it was common for carers to note that they would personally prefer not to use physical force but that such pressures had led them to employ such actions:

CF2 It [intention not to smack] hasn't always worked and on occasions I have lost my temper and used my hands.

NH So would you only use your hands if you lost your temper?

CF2 Yes, because personally I don't really like, you know, lifting my hand or anything. I'd rather do it verbally than give them a smack. It's only if I've really lost my temper.

Despite the general recognition that parental pressures meant that no fixed condition against smacking in anger could exist, and that such feelings were understandable in certain situations, carers did describe the guilt which surrounded such actions. Carers still felt that the influence of such anger was wrong and described feeling sorry after these incidents:

CF11 I've hit him twice. He was quite young really. I think it was more because I was angry and tired and impatient than anything else (...) I said I was sorry and I was. It wasn't because he was bad. I hit him out of anger more than anything else.

CF12 I smacked him across the bottom and I felt guilty, because I felt that I had lost control and I don't like that at all.

As this latter extract indicates, feelings of regret are associated with a belief that, as carers, they really should have been 'in control' of the child care situation. Even though loss of such control is felt to be an understandable and normal consequence of parental pressures in certain circumstances, there is still a very clear belief that this is a failure in their responsibility. In common with young people, carers saw this loss of control as allowing the introduction of other unacceptable features into the disciplinary relationship. Carers employing physical

force in anger not only run the risk of hitting when not necessary, but not being able to apply or direct this force 'appropriately':

CF1 What I think is unacceptable, but I won't say that I've never done it, is any form of hitting, or shaking, or smacking that is done out of anger. Because if you're not in control of your feelings, it tends to be that you don't know where to draw the line. Whereas if you smack a child once on the hand and you are in control and you can back off, I consider that acceptable.

Pain from physical force, for instance, was an element of physical force that carers felt adults in the disciplinary relationship should be able to control. Although they concurred with the concern of young participants (mainly 11-12 year olds) with pain, carers were less absolute with their contingencies on this issue. Views on acceptable levels of pain varied. Furthermore, there was an evident theme that carers believed the adult in the disciplinary relationship could control the level of pain imparted to a fine degree. Although not retributive in intent, pain could be limited to the precise level felt necessary to communicate the adult's disciplinary message:

NH So, the idea wouldn't be to cause pain?

CF6 No, not excruciating pain. Pain that maybe lasts about a second or so just enough to make them think, 'Oh I shouldn't really have done that. I've received a slap for that'.

Although young people argued that adults should be able to control themselves enough to ensure that they only used force enough to ensure they fulfilled the disciplinary purpose, they did not indicate that parents would be able to relate this force to a precise degree of pain. Young people did not mirror the confidence from some carers that, in practice, parents would be able to judge the point at which pain was unacceptable when, for instance, 'the hand that was doing it was actually receiving a certain amount of pain as well' [CF6].

In common with young people, carers distinguished acts described as 'violence' and 'child abuse' from unacceptable physical discipline more generally. Moreover, neither group viewed violent or abusive acts as defined simply by the degree of physical force or severity of injury involved. Carers shared the consistent theme from young participants that 'violent acts' of physical force were those in which the adult had lost control and the force was not limited. However, the carers' accounts differed by specifying that violence would be force beyond that received from an *everyday* and *understandable* loss of control and temper already described as resulting from parental pressures. Loss of restraint to an everyday degree would not result in the sort of excesses which carers would describe as violent. There was a dominant theme which suggested that losing control to a violent degree was an isolated problem restricted to peculiar individuals. Only certain individuals would have such an incapacity to control their feelings and actions that violent force would be imparted on children:

CF13 I think it takes a certain type of person.

CM4 Absolutely but ... if we take this out of reality and put it into percentage, take the U.K. or that, your percentage of situations where this happens is going to be an extremely small percentage... possibly people that have actually been abused in a way themselves... They don't have the values, and if they get wound up so much and they lose their temper and have lost their control they take it too far and create violence. But I mean, just pat them on the backside on the way through the door but it is more of a gesture rather than the violence of a backside kick.

As the above extract indicates, adults who would employ violence against children are viewed as unusual and differing from the norm in society. Although carers recognise that they personally might hit when angry, they presented themselves as capable of preventing a complete loss of control and resulting violence. Adults who are violent to children are seen as having individualised psychological or social problems. It is important to note that the pathologised view that violence is unusual and abnormal contrasts strongly with arguments from young people that there are a 'lot' of parents who would take physical force too far and that such a progression from acceptable force would be easy.

This difference between the groups is mirrored when considering what actions would constitute 'child abuse'. Whilst definitions of child abuse from young participants extended to include any parental actions which were centred on satisfying the adult rather than caring for the child, carers' definitions were more specific. As noted previously, the young participants' definition could include

actions due to adult anger, but which carers viewed as understandable given parental pressures. Consequently, like 'violence', carers' definitions of 'child abuse' were limited to actions beyond 'the norm'. Specifically, carers described 'child abuse' as individuals causing harm or injury to a child deliberately. Acts which were imparted in the heat of the moment during 'normal' parenting relations were not considered abusive. Again, whilst young participants' definitions saw an easy progression to child abuse with any adult capable of acting in anger, the parental definition restricted the problem to pathological abnormalities. As such, it was easier for carers to resist suggestions that child abuse is possible in any disciplinary relationship using everyday methods of physical force on children. Calls to limit legal rights to use physical force because of dangers of reaching abusive levels were rejected because such abusive acts were not related to normal child care by ordinary parents:

CF11 I think there's too much interference in people's lives. Parents don't kill their children by spanking them. Not to the extent of step-fathers or live-in lovers. And it is mostly babies when you see abuse, when they can't stand the crying, not spanking.

Like young participants, some carers stated that 'abuse' was typified by the 'deliberate' procedures associated with the use of implements in the disciplinary relationship:

CF12 It's one thing to be so angry that you actually hit them with your hand, but to actually go and get something to hit them with, that seems worse somehow.

Smacking to me is a last resort that I've got so angry and I don't know how to deal with it anymore, 'Right that's it', smack and back into the bedroom. It's almost like a crime of passion sort of thing, but if I was so angry at them that I thought, 'Right you're going to get it', and went upstairs to the wardrobe and got a slipper...I think that's bad. That's, like, abuse.

NH So, are you saying that parents using the belt is wrong?

CF2 Yes, that could be then child abuse, I feel using something that's solid I mean it's not gonna be instantaneous, it's gonna be a punishment, and when smacking becomes a punishment I think it's being child abuse... deliberate harm. 'I'm gonna take a slap at you', and such and such is not a... I mean if you're gonna be using a belt, you're gonna think about using a belt it's not gonna be an instantaneous quick smack is it, 'cos of the situation.

In common with young participants, the strongest theme that coloured concerns about long term negative effects was that children might copy the force inappropriately in other interpersonal relationships. However, once again, carers viewed this transmission as only emanating from peculiar relationships. Although there was a strong body of opinion among young participants that transmission was a risk from any relationship with physical force, carers saw this process as restricted to parent-child relationships which were already pathological in nature.

Such transmission would only be the result of violence or abuse characterising the existing disciplinary relationship, rather than the use of physical force per se:

NH So can all smacking lead to children to hit others?

CF9 Only something that is regular and instils fear can lead to violence.

NH What is the danger there?

CF9 Well, I think that if children are led to expect that things are solved by violence and they are always punished by it, then they too will use violence on others. It is very common in schools to find that bullies have been bullied or are suffering physical abuse at home, sort of thing.

Responsibility and control

Carers mirrored young participants' perceptions that parental rights to use physical force on children stem from their primary responsibility for child development. As such, the demarcation of roles between parents and other agents in the child's life were clear with regard to discipline. Parents alone were said to be responsible for the social development of their child and, therefore, responsible for the employment of any discipline which might affect this development. Like young participants, carers considered that parents should always retain overall control of discipline in the child's life. It was felt that other people can offer advice to the parent on how to

discipline, but the parent must be able to retain control of the disciplinary relationship and, therefore, have the right to decide what physical force is to be employed:

CF6 The first contact should be the parents of the child because those children are your responsibility as such, they're nobody else's. I mean anybody's welcome to give me what they consider advice in terms of bringing up the child but it's then up to me to decide if I then take that advice on board and use it.

The need to retain control has clear implications for both the relationship between family and outside agencies and legal restrictions on parental rights. Irrespective of whether they personally thought that physical force was appropriate to the disciplinary relationship, carers shared young participants' strong reluctance to interference from outside agencies. Likewise, carers also claimed that parents' more intimate love and knowledge of what was best for the child supported their role to control and decide methods of discipline free from such interference. Indeed, adult participants demonstrated a resentment towards the loss of parental control over discipline that was felt to result from such interference:

CF5 I think a parent knows their own child better than anyone else and when you do have outside influences, (...) sometimes you think, 'No, you're on the wrong track here because I know the child better'.

Moreover, a parent's superior knowledge of his or her child's developmental needs was the strongest theme in arguments against returning physical punishments to school. Although carers voiced general arguments that 'school is not a place for discipline, it is a place for learning' [CM14], many discussions were dominated by specific concerns that school physical force would mean ceding parental control over discipline to adults with less knowledge and stake in a child's best interests. Carers alluded to the parental frustration that would result from a loss of disciplinary control. If physical force were to be employed against a child, carer participants were clear that parents should be in control of the situation. Parents would have to be involved in that decision:

CF6 I would prefer before they did they [teachers] would actually have a word with me because again I do think that it's a parental responsibility to guide the child. The teachers have a difficult enough job to educate them without trying to get them to behave properly, but a lot of people do send their children to school wishing that the school actually bring them into line in terms of their behaviour which I think is...you know. There's a hundred percent responsibility on parents to make sure that they know what their children are doing and they're living within a proper set of guidelines which is acceptable to society at large.

It is important to note that, as indicated in the above extract, physical punishment at school was seen as slightly more acceptable if parents still retained control over the disciplinary decision. As such, physical force at school was seen as more of an issue of parental rights to control their child's development than any child's rights.

As long as permission from the parents was received and, thus, parents retained their right to determine discipline, physical force given by others was considered to be more acceptable. This acceptance of physical discipline delegated by parents also held for adult-child relationships outside school with, for instance, neighbours or babysitters. The concept of delegating rights to smack was quite incompatible with young participants' concern with intimacy and knowledge from both sides of the disciplinary relationship. Young participants stressed the importance of the adult's familiarity to the child, urging consideration of 'the child's point of view' in the relationship. However, such an argument was absent from discussions with carers, who only stressed the position and control of the parents:

NH Should a neighbour have the right to smack another parent's child if he or she is being naughty in the neighbour's garden? Say, walking all over flowers to get to a football or something?

CF11 No, I would have suggested to the next door neighbour that that she should have first of all come and spoken to me so that I could take some action and instructed the child what not to do. You know, not to kick the ball into her garden and not to trample the flowers. I would say it in front of the neighbour. I'd say, 'Now look, the next time you do that Mrs so and so may well smack you and I will not be too concerned'...as long as it's not too severe.

Carers were more concerned with the relationship between the parent and whoever was to impart physical force, than the child's feelings towards either party. In direct

contrast to strong opinions from young participants, carers viewed smacking from a babysitter or parental friend as acceptable providing the parents trusted and gave permission to the other adult. Carers did not share the young participants' concerns that the child would not understand why a temporary 'smacker' who lacked this mutual intimacy and trust was involved. The important issue to carers was that the parent knew and trusted the other adult, maintaining control over who smacks the child:

NH Back to the home situation, would it be fine if a babysitter smacked a child?

CF6 Yes, well obviously you would pick a babysitter. Hopefully it's somebody that you know and you know their behaviour. They probably have children themselves so you know how they react with their own children that's why you asked them to baby-sit in the first place. So I would feel that if the child had been smacked they had been an obvious cause or reason to actually do it, so I would be quite happy.

However, the carers' primary concern with securing parental control over who imparts physical force should not imply that, once permission had been granted, all were completely happy with other adults imparting physical force. Some carers voiced the worry that the lack of intimacy between the other adult and child also makes adult abuse of any power imbalance in the disciplinary relationship more likely:

CF11 You could have the wrong person looking after them and they could go over the score because there are child minders and people who like to have the power over people and they might not love the child. They probably wouldn't love and care for them as much as the parent.

Like young participants, carers commonly referred to the particular risk of teachers abusing a power relationship which involved physical force. Again like young participants, the adults recalled past abuses by teachers when presenting their concerns about any return to physical punishment in schools:

CF8 My age group had the belt at school and was, at that time, abused. So that would be a danger of bringing back the belt in schools.

However, carers did not generally express concerns with the power imbalance itself in all relationships involving physical force. Whereas young participants discussed the unfairness of inconsistent rights and frustrations leading to relative powerlessness, carers generally found this situation acceptable and appropriate. There was a strong theme amongst carers that held the 'inconsistency' between adults' and children's rights to physical integrity as a perfectly acceptable feature of differences in citizenship status. As age is a defining qualification in citizenship, so the right to physical integrity should not necessarily be engaged in childhood any more than the right to drive a car or get married:

CM4 It's part of growing up.

CF13 Why can't ya get married until ya sixteen and why can't ya vote until ya eighteen that's my point of view.

CM4 Well why aren't you allowed to drive a car until you're seventeen.

CF13 Exactly, I mean there has got to be a time.

Although some young participants did argue that rights should vary with age, this was more dependent on the child developing the ability to know and voice these rights than a lack of citizenship preventing rights. In contrast, carers suggested that even if the child could voice their opinion on physical force, psychological and social immaturity would invalidate their judgement. Children have not developed sufficiently to cope with such rights:

CM4 Of course adults have already matured and, I mean, if they're equal why are they [children's rights campaigners] fighting the cause for children, why can't they do it themselves. Because they're not mature enough, they don't have the perception, they don't have the psychology. So one side of the coin there, they [children's rights campaigners] actually contradict themselves slightly. They say give 'em the vote, if you give 'em the vote what are they gonna do with it. They haven't developed, that's no disrespect to children but they havenae developed the thinking powers. They're still kids. I mean you don't see adults playing with wee cars on the floor because it's a different phase of living.

Carers' arguments also gave more prominence than young participants' to the inappropriateness of children's rights in practice. Carers argued that ideas about children's rights may be fine in principle, but were not really practical in everyday parent-child relations. Again, such arguments stressed the necessity for situational flexibility given parental pressures during child care rather than firm and fixed rights to physical integrity:

CF6 Rights are fine, but I think you've got to experience the pressures a child can put you under... You've just got to say well look, this isn't quite right if you do it again you're going to get a smack and that's it. They then play you up to the level where you do have to give them a small smack and I think that is acceptable. And to some extent the child thinks it's acceptable as well because some of them do try your patience as such. But it is up to the parent to control his or her temper as well because it can become a pressure situation.

Carers' argued that particular pressures on parents would render abiding by children's rights less likely. Fixed rights would not, for instance, be able to take account of environmental influences, such as single parenthood, on the propensity to cope with child care without resorting to physical force. According to carers, these practical restrictions to fixed rights should be taken into account if consideration is to be given to legal reinforcement:

CM15 When you are talking about a single parent mother with a kid who is running around scatty, you can't use the psychological approach on the child. So, that is why I think she should be allowed to smack her child.

However, in common with young participants, carers noted that there have already been shifts in roles, expectations of rights and the balance of power in disciplinary relationships over recent years. It was argued that cultural attitudes have changed dramatically towards the possibility of teachers having the right to use physical force. Some adult participants commented on how short a period it had taken to see shifts away from parental support for physical punishment in schools:

CF3 In our day, now we're not going back long, but look how much it's changed...attitudes have changed and everything. It has changed, eh? Because if we went home and told our mums we'd had the belt...

CM16 We didnae go home and tell 'em.

CF3 Well, this is it 'cos you'd ken your mum'd kill you, eh?

Participants maintained that such a shift in attitudes towards teacher roles had been accentuated by pupils becoming more aware of their rights in school disciplinary relationships. Reflecting carers' concerns about practical difficulties which accompany changes in disciplinary rights, it was felt that teaching had become more difficult as a result of these shifts. Teachers have to be more careful because of the shift in power to pupils:

CF2 Because teaching has got a lot harder in the last few years because....and kids are now more aware of their rights than what they did say twenty or thirty years ago so they know their rights and they turn round to the teacher and say you can't do that, you're not allowed to do that, you're not allowed to do this. They'll argue the toss, I've seen it.

Moreover, the suggestion that children are taking advantage of this shift in power was a stronger theme in discussions with carers than with young participants. According to these carers, children were misusing their awareness of restrictions on teachers' socio-legal power by becoming out of control in schools. The shift in power means that teachers are unable to enforce discipline in the classroom:

CM17 I think they've taken the power away from teachers. I think the teachers should be able to enforce whatever standards of discipline, but they have taken away that power. They've allowed certain elements of the younger generation to have power because they now know that the teachers are not allowed to hit them. They can use that to their advantage in certain situations.

Carers concurred with observations from young participants that there had been a shift in recent years in the relative influence of outside agencies on disciplinary relationships in the home. Carers shared the view that parental power is more restricted because adults are more careful when using physical force for fear of interference from these agencies:

CF18 With the other two, the older boys, I never ever thought that they would go to school and someone would think, 'Oh, he's getting hit at home'. Whereas with the younger one, it has definitely been at the back of my mind that they would think that we had done something. It's been a big issue for the past couple of years and you always think that you don't want them to think we've hit them or what.

CM15 With his generation on, you're more concerned about the secret police coming to your door, you know, and dragging you away or dragging him away. It's quite hard really and we never had that with the older children because we didn't know that sort of thing went on.

Like the school setting, some carers laid great stress on perceptions that children were taking advantage of these restrictions on parental power. Children were accused of misusing the power to introduce these agencies into the parent-child relationship as threats against parents, rendering discipline harder:

CF8 The problem now is that the children know that the law is on their side, and they have got you over a barrel. Your children are now saying to you, 'Ha, ha, ha, you cannae hit me, I can get a social worker, I can get you done and I can get the police'. Now, you can just be giving 'em a row for something and this is the sort of thing they are throwing back at you.

CF19 That's right. Children are abusing the system because they know the law and a lot of children will misuse it and threaten their parents.

CF8 My son has threatened me with social workers and he has threatened me with the police just because he gets a row.

In common with some 14-16 year old participants, carers feared that banning physical force against children altogether in the home would increase any misuse of rights by children and extend these care difficulties. The power held by children in disciplinary relationships would mean that parents would lose all control over the social and moral development of their children. Arguments by carers drew attention to a perceived uneasy compromise between children's rights in discipline and concerns with the development of children to adulthood:

CM14 You can imagine the situation where the child would decide it's alright to walk around the house and put its feet everywhere and turn around to the parent and say to the parent, 'I can do that because you cannae touch me'. The object in all this is to have decent adults at the end of the day. The only thing I see is the protecting the children and having that under the law.

Chapter summary

This chapter has explored the perceptions of carer participants on the employment by adults of physical force against children. Major themes have been examined and areas of strong commonality and difference with accounts from young

participants have been highlighted. Purposes for physical force perceived as legitimate were dominated by ideas surrounding child development in discussions with both carers and young participants. Lack of cognitive development was understood to make physical force necessary for communication in child care situations and such acts were also required to ensure appropriate behavioural development in the future. However, whilst young participants concentrated on the moral development of the self, carers focused on the child's social development. Physical force was seen by carers as a tool to help discipline children in preparation for wider social rules. Young participants proposed parental 'smacking' to communicate adult views on individual acts of child behaviour, but carers explored physically forcing obedience to the overall authority of adults and to teach wider social conformity in the future. It was noted that this line of argument from carers was associated with certain religious teachings, which was absent from young participants' accounts. Both groups played down any necessary association between disciplinary physical force and pain or injury. Physical force was seen as more of a symbolic gesture for present communication or future learning than a retributive action for a past misdemeanour.

Micro-level influences on the effectiveness and consequences of physical force was given more credence in carers' discussions, highlighting the heterogeneity of children. Both groups emphasised the importance of contextual factors when assessing the acceptability of each act of physical force. However, there was much more fluidity to carers' conditions of acceptability across situations. Whilst young participants presented fairly fixed contingencies, adults stressed that these needed

to be flexible to accommodate 'normal' parental pressures. In addition, carers were more confident than young participants that physical force could be applied to a precise degree.

Carers did not share the theme amongst young participants that loss of control and relief of parental frustration in actions of physical force constituted violence and child abuse, although such incidents were still regretted as understandable but inappropriate application of such force. 'Violence' was described by carers as force beyond that received from this 'understandable' loss of control, and 'child abuse' was defined as a deliberate and calculated harm of children. Although both groups of participants agreed that these terms were not just applicable to the most severe or injurious acts, carers isolated them from everyday physical force in child care as descriptions of the peculiar actions of pathological individuals.

Carers mirrored the perceptions of young participants that parental rights to use physical force stem from their primary responsibility for child care. The necessity for parents to retain overall executive control of decisions relating to discipline was acknowledged by both groups. Teachers, like other outside agencies, were not felt appropriate to make decisions on the application of physical force because they did not share the primary carer's intimate knowledge of the child's best interests. However, the stress laid by young participants on the necessity of the child's intimacy with the imparter of physical force was not shared by carers. Carers focused on the parent's relationship with whoever imparted the force, allowing the delegation of parental disciplinary rights to other adults.

Although carers were concerned about adults abusing power differences in the disciplinary relationship, they did not generally share the theme of concern amongst young participants with the imbalance of rights and power per se. This situation was seen as appropriate to children's limited level of citizenship and an inability to cope with rights. Movement towards children's rights in relation to physical force was seen as impractical and unappreciative of parental pressures. Like young participants, carers recognised power shifts in disciplinary relationships over recent years. Some members of both groups highlighted evidence of children taking advantage of these shifts, with carers suggesting that further restrictions on rights to use physical force would mean parents lose all control over the behavioural development of their children.

The next chapter continues the comparison between young people's and adults' perceptions of disciplinary force by relating the dominant themes from participants to the wider legal, political and research debates. This comparison highlights areas of concurrence and difference in issues raised in order to further illuminate the young participants' perceptions.

Chapter Eight Comparison with previous research and the adult debates

This chapter examines the ways in which the young participants' perceptions of the use of physical force in disciplinary relationships compare to dominant ideas in the adult legal, political and research debates. The discussion highlights the similarities and differences in the issues raised, and the varying ways in which these have been addressed, specifically in order to shed further light on the young people's perceptions. This comparison is organised according to the collective areas of interest evident from the young participants, with points from the analysis chapters dealing with each area (Chapters Four, Five and Six) leading the discussion.

Purposes for acts of physical force in disciplinary relationships

The theme from young participants of physical force for the purpose of immediate communication, without any longer term intentions, has rarely been noted or explored in the adult debates². Although Newson & Newson noted that parents sometimes seem to use physical force 'merely...to communicate with him at a non-verbal level', the researchers still argued that parents took these actions for the purposes of the child's development in the 'long run' (1963:108). This is indicative of the wider failure of these debates to mirror the importance presented by young people on the immediate situational management behind intentions or purposes of

² See Friedman & Schonberg (1996:858) for an exceptional note on 'spanking to get the child's attention'.

physical force.

The adult discourses usually relate physical discipline to teaching for future behaviour, similar to the second purpose stressed by young participants. As a neat summary of legal and political arguments around this purpose of a 'teaching tool for the future', The British Psychological Society used the analogy of child inoculations, unpleasant now but 'for your own good' with benefits in the future (1980:16-17). For instance, in a Local Authority Circular (1994:2), the Department of Health specifically noted the teaching consideration of parents in applying physical force. However, this document also underlines a key difference between 'teaching for the future' in the legal and political discourses and arguments from the young participants. Physical force is presented within this Government document, and more widely, as a kind of last resort when the parent has not been able to teach through 'other powers of persuasion' (1994:2). Other researchers have argued the importance of adults viewing and representing actually hitting the child as a 'last resort' (Davis, 1996:301). This representation does not tally with the focus by young participants on physical force as a necessary and everyday form of communication and teaching tool. Indeed, the concept of trying other 'powers of persuasion' before using physical force was not really present in the young participants' arguments. This finding may offer some support to the occasional suggestion by researchers that the oft presented 'backup-model' of physical force as a last resort is inaccurate (at least as far as young people's perceptions) (ISPC, 1992:23), and that such actions may deliberately be 'frequently the first method of discipline selected by a parent' (Welsh, 1985:26).

A second major difference between young participants and the adult debates regarding the teaching purpose of physical force mirrors findings in Chapter Seven, when comparing with carers' arguments. Again, whilst young participants stressed the advancement of the child's personal morality in knowing right from wrong behaviour, the adult perceptions tend to stress the aim of teaching the child to mix with wider society. Young people's perceptions of 'personal development' conflict with this adult tendency to assume that discipline is part of 'social development' or socialisation process: 'ensuring that the child has imprinted on its mind as well as its body the norms of behaviour *that society expects of it*' [my emphasis] (Milne, 1990:16; see also Socolar et al., 1997).

It should be noted that Newson & Newson do, at one point, analyse the teaching purpose described by their sample of mothers as 'moral training', seemingly closer to the personal rather than social preparation presented by young participants in this study (1963:108). However, given that supporting quotations chosen do not actually distinguish between teaching personal morality and social rules, the Newsons may not have intended the reference to 'morality' to be read with quite so much specificity. Certainly, later analysis by the same research team accords more with social training: 'Mothers generally in fact have in common *the aim that the sanctions they impose should result in a socialised child...*' [emphasis in original] (1976:99).

When considering physical force for the purpose of restraint from a particular behaviour, young participants distinguished between restriction from bad behaviour and removal from danger, only the latter receiving consensual support. In contrast, the use of direct restraint to prevent either type of behaviour has generally not been featured controversially in the adult debates. Both restraint from danger and from bad behaviour tend to be consensually accepted in the adult debates and set apart from other forms of physical discipline. Presumably seen as typically less aggressive than acts associated with other purposes, this purpose is even featured by campaigners of 'physical punishment' as positive discipline. When restraint per se has been controversial it has usually been related to another purpose, such as retribution (e.g. 'pin-down' in Staffordshire children's homes).

Young participants limited their fourth purpose, that of controlling symbolically through physical force, to the school setting and only to regain or maintain order in specific situations. These limitations are absent in the adult discourses. First, although the adult debates have stressed general control as the main argument for corporal punishment in schools (cf. British Psychological Society, 1980:14; Overton, 1993:77; Reitman, 1988:7; Children's Committee, 1981; Scottish Education Department, 1977:51), they have also pointed to parental control through physical force as 'part of caring' (Health Secretary, reported *The Times*, 13/8/94:1). Second, the adult debates have often stressed the positive effects of physical force beyond the particular immediate disciplinary situations, stressing general respect and order derived from just possessing physical force as a deterrent (cf. Pawsey; House of Commons, Education Bill [Lords] Debate, 1986 [22/7/86]:229).

These two main differences regarding 'control' combine with the above adult emphasis on social rather than personal development to form a popular theme in the adult debates: the employment of physical force by parents to ensure socialised obedience to the authority of adults now and in the future. Entirely absent from discussions with young participants, this purpose stresses the curbing of defiance in the child to ensure general obedience in the short term to parents (and teachers) and in the longer term to other authority figures in society. In previous research, Newson & Newson reported that parents stressed the need to curb defiance in order to shape the child's will towards deference because: 'he's [sic] got to learn who is the master' from a young age (1963:111). Indeed, the Newsoms analyse their parents' view of smacking episodes precisely as a battle of wills to ensure the child submits to the authority of the adult beyond the immediate conflict (1976:108). This idea of a battle of wills towards ensuring obedience is featured heavily by pro-smacking writers and campaigners who cite the need to overcome 'deliberate defiance' in children as one of the main reasons for smacking children (cf. Anne Davis, *Families for Discipline*, cited *Scotland on Sunday*, 26/03/95:1; Dobson, 1978).

Consideration of research from other studies suggests that this difference in referring to obedience may be a real change over generations rather than a reflection of distinct social positions. Payne reported that younger Barbadian *adults* were less inclined than their older compatriots to refer to socialised obedience as a goal in child care (1989:399). Declining religious influence may be a reason for

such a cultural shift. References to religious teaching on this issue, which has often stressed the theme of obedience to parents and wider authority as the will of God (Gordon, 1981), were conspicuously absent from discussions with young participants. Certainly, evidence from other research (mainly North American) indicates that religious teaching about physical punishment has an important influence on parents' attitudes and behaviour towards discipline (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993; Wiehe, 1990). It is perhaps significant that the biblical derivative 'spare the rod and spoil the child' which 'is still commonly accepted as a truism' by sections of society today (Sigler, 1989:26) was not mentioned by any young person. Indeed, I stopped using this 'truism' as a 'phrase stimulus' because the participants said that they had not heard it before and did not know what it meant. It should be noted, however, that no firm conclusions can be made regarding the relative absence of conservative religious belief as an influence on young people's perceptions. Religious beliefs were not assessed during the sampling nor the fieldwork stages of this research. Further research would be necessary to test such a hypothesis.

The absence of retribution in discussions with young participants as a purpose of physical force contrasts sharply with many arguments expressed within the adult debates which see such acts as appropriate 'justice' for wrongdoing. According to these arguments, the adult act is not primarily to produce any positive effect on the child, but because everyone must pay their dues in the society if they do something wrong. Fine & Holt noted that talking in terms of corporal punishment for 'judicial use' by parents gathers a 'positive and sympathetic response' within our culture (1983:85). Regarding school, the Children's Committee summarised corporal

punishment arguments as: 'Beyond any question of effectiveness, corporal punishment should be seen as an act of retribution which symbolises social disapproval of wrongdoing' (1981:3). Young participants' restriction of the term 'punishment' to acts that were 'illegitimately' retributive in intent has not been mirrored in the adult debates (cf. Cashmore & de Haas, 1995:3). The term 'physical punishment' is treated in the adult debates as synonymous with all uses of physical force to discipline a child. Whilst evident in discussions with carers in this study, this distinction has also been missing from past studies of parental attitudes to physical force, where respondents were reported as accepting punishment of their children 'at its face value' (Newson & Newson, 1963:106). However, young participants' specificity of the term 'punishment' appears to mirror the legal shift made in Sweden exactly half a century ago, when a parent's right to physically 'punish' was amended to a right to 'reprimand' following a discussion on limiting physical force in discipline (Newell, 1995:218). It is again unclear from this present research 'snapshot' of young people's perceptions whether this difference from the adult debates reflects contrasting social positions or, as concordance with carers suggests, a real temporal shift in a particular cultural population (similar to the Swedish legal change).

A further purpose or intent voiced by adults which is clearly rejected by young people is the use of physical force in disciplinary relationships as a method of relief or release for the adult. In common with retributive intent, this purpose was rejected by young participants as not primarily in the interests of, nor for the needs of, the child. Whilst catharsis did not feature explicitly in discussions with carers in

this study, this is in contrast to recent research findings by Gough & Reavey who noted that adults in their sample framed their discussions of physical force: 'with reference to the alleviation of parental needs rather than those of children' (Gough & Reavey, 1997:426). Young people's omission of catharsis as a legitimate purpose may have particular relevance for opponents of physical discipline whose assertion that such actions are usually only introduced to relieve parental feelings of frustration (cf. EPOCH, 1991a:4) is supported by some research (cf. Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964 cited Carey, 1994:1008; Newson & Newson, 1968:409).

Immediate effectiveness of acts of physical force

Young participants' dominant belief in the effectiveness of physical force in achieving at least one of these purposes deemed legitimate mirrors previous research with a slightly older college sample in the United States which indicated that two-thirds (69%) considered 'spanking' an effective procedure for discipline (Graziano & Namaste, 1990). Like young participants, those psychologists who are generally supportive of physical discipline concede that the characteristics of the child are important when making an assessment of effectiveness on a micro scale:

'relatively non-aggressive children are likely to desist from the undesirable behaviour while aggressive children may persist in or even increase such behaviour when punished.' (Schaffer; cited Scottish Law Commission, 1992:22)

Some commentators in the adult debates share the concerns expressed by young participants and carers that the use of physical force can actually increase 'misbehaviour' (cf. Lord Ritchie [on school discipline]; House of Lords Education Bill Debate, 1986 [17/4/86]:793). In particular, the belief that the 'toughest' and most disruptive pupils in school might increase their 'local hero' reputation through receiving physical punishment has been commented on recently by those in education (The Scotsman, 30/10/96:7). However, this commentary contrasts sharply with calls for physical force to be used specifically on this group, heard both in recent 'moral panics' about child behaviour (cf. Phil Gallie MP, Daily Record 30/10/1996) and from teachers before abolition in state schools (Department of Education & Science, 1989:260). Concerns expressed by the youngest participants that 'side-effects' from physical force (e.g. pain or upset) would hinder effectiveness did not feature widely in the adult legal, political or scientific discourses.

Young participants' lack of confidence in the effectiveness of disciplinary alternatives to physical force in the home mirrors studies with adults in the Caribbean (Payne, 1989) and in England (Newson & Newson, 1989). However, unlike the adults in these previous studies, the young participants here present themselves as uncomfortable with using physical force and *open* to effective alternatives if they were available. Previous studies have also found that younger people (college students) would welcome other methods of discipline (Graziano et al, 1991:5). This would seem to suggest that the stress laid by opponents of physical force on promoting 'positive discipline' (cf. EPOCH Worldwide, 1996b:20; Leach, 1989) could be effectively targeted at younger people.

Short term concerns and contingencies

The short term concerns and contextual contingencies on physical force expressed by young participants are consistent with previous studies that have asked respondents to rate the appropriateness of discipline featured in vignettes. These studies have suggested that pupils deemed 'corporal punishment' acceptable or unacceptable depending upon the child's misdemeanour and context in which it was administered, both in education (Anderson & Payne, 1994) and in the home (Kelder et al, 1991:441). Creighton & Russell noted that adults also rate the acceptability of an act 'depending upon a whole range of factors' (1995:28). In policy, local educational authorities laid down similar sets of contingencies for corporal punishment in schools prior to its outright ban. Like discussions with young participants, these contingencies were found to be varied but with common themes such as only targeting particular areas of the child's body and maintenance of privacy (British Psychological Society, 1980:16). In the same way, recent government guidelines on the use of physical force in schools stressed the particular contexts in which such acts would be acceptable (Department for Education & Employment, 1998).

The relatively fixed nature of young participants' contingencies across disciplinary episodes contrasts with the situational and environmental flexibility in adults' perceptions reported in previous studies. Although Newson & Newson noted that

mothers held 'taboos' about where they would draw the line in their own parent-child relationships (1968:422), these were always flexible and constantly changing, with stressful circumstances leaving parents 'pushed by the demands of the moment' (1976:99). Similarly, Creighton & Russell found that most adults had a 'pragmatic viewpoint', believing that it was 'perfectly understandable that parents are *driven* to smack their children' in certain circumstances (1995:36 [my emphasis]).

Young participants' requirement that misbehaviour must be serious enough to establish the 'child's need' for physical force embellishes evidence from research employing closed vignettes which indicates that children's acceptance of physical force depends upon conceptual distinctions between classes of misbehaviour (Catron & Masters, 1993). Researchers have reported that children themselves may feel that certain types of behaviour, such as physical aggression, are less trivial and need the use of physical force, perhaps to underline their seriousness (Carlson, 1991:20). Young participants' concern that physical force in schools should be limited to addressing the most serious situations mirrors the reported view from Barbadian pupils (Anderson & Payne, 1994:384).

Views of 'pain' from physical discipline expressed in the adult debates differ from the younger age group of participants (11-12; this was not a feature for the older age group) in three related ways. First, the adults in the debates have implied that the pain could be limited and controlled to an acceptable degree rather than being necessarily unacceptable per se. For instance, the Scottish Law Commission

(1992) recommended that 'pain or discomfort' should only be illegal when 'lasting for more than a very short time' (1992:33). Second, some commentators have trivialised the pain possible from disciplinary force, stating that the feelings from such actions did not amount to 'real pain' (Maurer, 1977 cited British Psychological Society, 1980:14-15). Third, the contrast is even greater with some campaigners who accepted pain as a positive ingredient which teaches children (Lynette Burrows cited *The Times*, 7/7/93:3), and write that spanking must hurt if it is to have any influence (Gordon, 1981). In contrast to consideration of pain, commentators in the political and legal arenas have generally shared the young participants' low tolerance of injury resulting from disciplinary episodes. However, whereas young participants' contingencies surrounding injury tended to be absolute with no amount acceptable, restrictions are often discussed by adults in terms of degrees of injury. One notable exception is the Scottish Law Commission (1992) which, like the young people, argued against any level of injury being acceptable in child care.

The adult debates mirror the young participants' concern that the amount of force imparted should be controlled and limited, although, like consideration of pain, adult commentators imply a greater degree of possible precision. A typical example is the Department of Health's guidelines to childminders, which talks in terms of giving 'a gentle smack' (1994:2). However, young participants were more sceptical than the Department (and those in the adult debate more generally) that this control and restraint could be ensured on a wide-scale. Contingencies suggested by young participants on the precise bodily target of any act reflects a consistent theme in the legal and political discourses from both supporters and opponents of physical force

in disciplinary relationships per se. For instance, the Scottish Law Commission argued that the precise area on a child's body struck by an adult may be enough to distinguish 'good and bad' physical punishment (1992:30). Reflecting this view, recent legislative proposals in Germany specifically distinguished between a smack on the bottom and a slap in the face, suggesting that the latter should be outlawed (cited Creighton & Russell, 1995:5).

Some researchers have shared the particular concern shown by young participants with disciplinary practices which are thought to enhance degradation, such as 'the baring or partial baring of the child's buttocks' (Newson & Newson, 1976:101). The adult legal and political debates have featured the question of 'humiliation' and 'degradation' from acts of physical force, specifically in relation to the wording of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 37 and the European Convention on Human Rights, Article 3 (see Chapter One; Newell, 1995:215). Young people's contingency that acts of physical force should not take place in public raised particular concern about damaging humiliation from disciplinary episodes in school. This echoes the view of the National Union of School Students, in 1980, that such episodes are 'degrading' and 'harm[s] the self-esteem of the school students who receive it' (British Psychological Society, 1980:43), the Newsom Report (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1963:69) and prominent politicians (Alex Salmond cited *The Scotsman*, 30/10/96; Radice; House of Commons Education Bill [Lords] Debate, 1986 [22/7/86]:231).

Age related contingencies voiced by young participants correspond to previous indications that age is a consideration both for psychologists (Socolar et al, 1997:759) and the wider adult population (Scottish Law Commission, 1992) when assessing the appropriateness of physical discipline. The variance in the precise age limits applied to physical force also mirrors adult opinion in research and professional discourse. For instance, some commentators prescribe an age range from 2 to 6 years old (Larzelere, 1994:204), whereas some social services departments have stated that they see a parent's right to physically discipline as: 'conditional on the child's age (i.e. not a baby and not beyond the mid teenage years...)' (EPOCH, 1990:8 [Southern Health and Social Services Board, Northern Ireland]). It should be noted that such views from participants and the adult debates would apparently render physical discipline of babies by a substantial proportion of parents (Socolar & Stein, 1995 [U.S.]; Newson & Newson, 1963:195, 1989:1 [UK]) unacceptable.

The lower age limits in young participants' discussions were largely based on perceptions of a child's ability to interpret the adult's disciplinary message. However, it appears that the distinction in young participants' arguments that the child should be smacked to indicate right and wrong *behaviour*, only if already able to understand the *moral concepts* of right and wrong has not always been appreciated in research or political and legal discourse. For instance, Newson & Newson summarised the purpose of smacking as simply teaching the moral 'difference between right and wrong', but supporting extracts from mothers' interviews only referred to teaching children which specific *behaviour* fits this

category of 'wrong' (1963:108). Nor is the difference made explicit in Department of Health guidelines to local authorities for childminders which just refer to teaching 'right from wrong' (1994:2). Given the effect of this distinction on the acceptability of physical force for young people, more consideration, precision and clarity is necessary both in research and guidance to carers. The upper age-limits suggested by young participants were noted as relating to a point where the communicative purposes of physical force were perceived as redundant through advanced verbal understanding. The balance indicated by some participants between this point and the residual purpose of underlining the seriousness of some misdemeanours may, if shared by adults, throw more light on why physical discipline is common for all ages, but reduced between childhood and adolescence (Newson & Newson, 1989:14; Graziano & Namaste, 1990:452).

The 'sex equality' in treatment for male and female children expressed by participants contrasts with a much less clear picture in previous research and the legal and political discourses. Arguments over fairness and equality did play a part in political discussions about corporal punishment in schools (British Psychological Society, 1980:49). However, contrary to discussions with young participants, this generally took place under the assumption that using physical punishment on girls was 'especially deplorable' (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1963:69) or more necessary in order to control boys (Professional Association of Teachers Survey, 1976 cited British Psychological Society, 1980:48-49). Likewise, previous surveys on attitudes towards home discipline have differed from this present research by indicating that physical discipline is seen as more appropriate for male

than female children by both adult and young respondents (Cashmore & de Haas, 1995:73). This inequality appears to be borne out in practice with retrospective recall (Creighton & Russell, 1995:35) and incidence studies showing that at four (Newson & Newson, 1968:424) and at seven years old (Newson & Newson, 1989:8-9) boys are significantly more likely to experience smacking every week. The inequality is increased for the receipt of force with implements by the age of 7 years (Newson & Newson, 1989:10-11). The change from previous limited studies with young participants suggests a real cultural shift to be further explored with populations of both adults and young people.

Particular categories of unacceptability

The clear establishment by young participants of *child abuse* and *violence* as distinct categories of particularly serious concern contrasts sharply with a lack of clarity surrounding the use of these terms within research, legal and political discourses (Joseph, 1997:11). The only discernible patterns of usage for these words in the adult arenas has been to either employ them to describe *all acts* of physical force (cf. Coontz & Martin, 1988; Straus, 1994), or to distinguish *all 'unacceptable' acts* from those deemed (by the commentator) legitimate along a linear measure of severity (cf. Sigler, 1989:25-26; ISPPCC, 1992:23; Berger et al., 1988).

Young participants' specific definition of child abuse as acts which do not centrally concern the child's needs (according to 'legitimate purposes') varies from commentaries in the adult debate which state (Straus, 1994), or imply by comparing smacking to '*serious physical child abuse*' (EPOCH, 1991a:9; my emphasis), that all physical discipline is necessarily 'child abuse'. Equally incompatible is the more usual use of the phrase 'child abuse', partly shared by carers, to distinguish acts on the basis of severity of disciplinary action and level of injury (cf. Kelder et al., 1991; Giovannoni, 1989). Researchers have stated that this usage is based on definitions in law (Kelder et al., 1991:436) and social work (EPOCH, 1990:8). The young participants' definitions differed by stressing the contextual factor of 'purpose' rather than the visible physical effects on the child. Young participants' definition of child abuse permits a much wider inclusion of physical force from 'normal, emotional adults' than would the pathological distinction that child abuse is only committed by specific 'sick' adults as generally established in the adult discourses (ISPC, 1992:9). The medicalised model sees 'child abusers' as different in kind from 'ordinary' parents, connected to the mental illness of 'them' and leaving the 'normal us' with little to fear. However, in the perceptions of child abuse from young participants, any adult may be an abuser if he/she gives regard to, or fails to control, his/her own feelings rather than the needs of the child.

Young participants' view of child abuse as self-centred adult relief is reminiscent of one of the distinctions between legal and illegal behaviour made by an early English court judgement that stated that the law would only interfere: 'if it be administered for the gratification of passion or of rage' (Chief Justice Cockburn,

1860; cited Pannick, 1992). Young participants did not indicate the subtle discrimination between adult anger and such rage which some proponents have suggested make it possible to use physical force whilst angry without negative influence of a rage (cf. Rosemond, 1994:212). Young participants' labelling cathartic acts of frustration or anger as 'child abuse' also contrasts with adults in previous research who considered that such acts are legitimate (Gough & Reavey, 1997) or that 'it did no real harm' (Creighton & Russell, 1995:55). It differs from implications from previous researchers' normalisation of the use of physical force for parental release as behaviour from 'almost any mother' (Newson & Newson, 1976:100). In addition, government literature accompanying the Swedish ban on physical discipline seemed closer to this tolerant position towards hitting in anger than that of the young participants or the Cockburn court judgement:

'It won't matter much if you should occasionally lose your temper and happen to strike your child a blow in the heat of the moment as long as you can afterwards admit it was a stupid thing to do rather than rationalise and try to make out that the child needed it.' (Swedish Department of Justice, 1979:5)

According to previous research, although parents accept the legitimacy of physical force for relief, in practice such acts are usually accompanied by feelings of guilt (cf. Newson & Newson, 1976:98-99; Jones et al., 1987:97; Newson & Newson, 1976:98; EPOCH Worldwide, 1996b:16) or personal failure (Newson & Newson, 1976:108). Even Tony Blair, whilst 'prospective Prime Minister', commented to the media that he had smacked his children but then regretted it (Daily Record, 7/6/96).

Nevertheless, this wider reflection on physical force in anger as 'regrettable, but accepted as normal and a legitimate purpose' is still fundamentally different from the young people's perception of 'understandable, but unacceptable and still constituting child abuse'.

Young participants' perception that physical force intended to cause pain that is committed when the adult is *calm* constitutes a worse form of child abuse than hitting in the heat of the moment mirrored George Bernard Shaw's dictum that 'a blow [to a child] in cold blood neither can nor should be forgiven' (cited Newson & Newson, 1968:420). Such acts of physical force were 'neither unacceptable nor understandable' to young participants. The psychological, emotional or cultural desire in the parent which young participants perceived as underlying such calm acts was akin to the association with sadism stressed by some opponents of physical force (Hyman, 1990:35; Morris, 1997). Young participants' inclusion of hitting with implements in this category because it was perceived as deliberately harmful reflects Newson & Newson's commentary that this constitutes a 'further dimension' of more 'formal and deliberate' use (1968:414; 1976:101).

Like 'child abuse', young participants' definition of the term violence, specifically as an act in which the adult does not observe an appropriate limit of force, also contrasts with its use in either the research or legal and political debates. All use of physical force in discipline is widely, though not universally (see Chapter One), assumed and portrayed within these arenas as interpersonal 'violence'. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's perception of all such acts as a form of

violence (Karp, 1997; Karp, 1999) is commonly shared by researchers and politicians (cf. ISPPC, 1992:4; Carlson, 1991:19). As such, acts of physical discipline have either been described as discreet types of violence (cf. Straus & Gelles, 1988; Graziano et al., 1991; Gelles, 1997) or as shades within a continuous spectrum of violence (cf. Payne, 1989; Graziano & Namaste, 1990; Hemenway et al, 1994; Newell, 1995:222; UNICEF, 1997):

'All action intended to cause a child physical pain - from a 'little smack' to a fatal beating - is on one continuum of violence.' (EPOCH, 1990:3)

Longer term concerns

Concepts of risk, which characterised young participants' longer term concerns, have also been emphasised in the adult debates to defend theories of behavioural outcomes against criticisms of determinism. Straus has repeatedly compared negative effects of physical discipline with the risks associated with smoking (cf. 1991b:184-6; 1996a:837), whilst Welsh prefers an analogy which replaces the child with a fine watch: 'sometimes a good whack can make it work temporarily, but it has the *potential* to permanently damage the fine mechanism.' (1997:2 [my emphasis]).

The conclusion from some participants that the risk of short term contingencies not being met means that all physical force is best avoided concurs with some recent recommendations from researchers (cf. Fergusson & Lynskey, 1997:628).

However, it contrasts with the persistent emphasis in the legal and political debate on the 'safe smack' which 'did not do a child any harm' (Scottish Law Commission, 1992:26-30; also Department of Health, 1994). Participants' particular concern that implements increase various long term risks provides more depth to findings in previous research studies that neither young people (Carlson, 1991) nor adults (Creighton & Russell, 1995; Scottish Law Commission, 1992) find hitting with implements acceptable in disciplining children. This perception contrasts strongly with both the extensive actual use of implements reported in the home in the recent past (Newson & Newson, 1989:11) and court judgements in England (cf. Times 20/4/93) and Scotland (cf. B v Harris, 1990 cited Barton, 1992:1262) that have prompted newspaper headlines that 'It's OK to belt your kids' (Barton, 1992:1262). It is now apparent, however, that the UK Government has been forced by the European courts to adopt a position effectively closer to that of young participants where all use of implements must be avoided altogether to ensure against the risks of negative physical effects on the child (Department of Health, 1997).

The relative emphasis in discussions with young participants on long term psychological effects rather than such physical effects has been noted recently as also characterising the adult debates (IPPR, 1998). The long term 'risk of suffering some form of mental harm' from physical discipline per se has been listed as a primary concern to governments when legislating against all such acts (cf. Swedish Department of Justice, 1979). As a whole, the range of possible psychological damage cited by participants is strikingly similar to the concerns stated by psychologists who oppose the use of physical force in child care, who cite:

'an extensive literature associating parental physical punishment - especially its juxtaposition of love and pain, anger and submission - with a wide range of personality disorders and neuroses in adult life.' (Leach, P. submission to Scottish Law Commission, 1992:22).

The idealised picture from participants of a childhood leaving no bad memories of physical discipline is reminiscent of the wording of the Finnish legislation outlawing physical discipline, which declares that a childhood should exist in 'a spirit of understanding, security and love' (Finland: Child Custody and Rights of Access Act, 1983; cited EPOCH, 1991b:2). The concern by young participants about more severe psychological effects can be seen to be shared both by schoolchildren overseas, who have alluded to a 'debilitating anxiety' from receiving physical force (Anderson & Payne, 1994:378), and psychologists focusing on children's feeling of rejection after physical discipline (cf. Rohner et al., 1991). Straus has also argued that such discipline increases the risk of severe psychological problems such as suicidal depression and alcoholism in later life (1994:200). The subsidiary suggestion in the data from young participants of a link between physical discipline and a negative psycho-sexual preference in adults has been featured much more boldly in the adult debates. Authors over a number of years have suggested that 'corporal punishment' as a child, whether in the school or home setting, may cause psychological or even moral damage by inducing a tendency towards sado-masochistic fetishism. Both psychological (cf. British Psychological Society, 1980:40) and legal (cf. Barton, 1992:1263; Newell, 1989:48-49) commentaries cite

Krafft-Ebing's comments at the end of the last century that such dangers mean that corporal punishment should be avoided by parents, teachers and nurses. More recently, Gibson has written an extensive volume charting the psycho-sexual dangers of physical discipline (1978).

Suggestions by young participants that there is a risk of long term damage to the child's relationship with adults and institutions imparting physical force has been reported previously by young people. Students in schools retaining corporal punishment have referred to the effects of corporal punishment as 'desires for revenge' (Anderson & Payne, 1994:378 [West Indies]) and a more general 'dislike of the teacher, dislike of the subject, and dislike of the school' (Raven, 1976 [Ireland] cited British Psychological Society, 1980:42-43). Regarding the home, government literature appending Sweden's legislation against parental rights to physical discipline concurred with young participants' concerns that hitting would 'destroy a feeling of kinship and mutual understanding' (cf. Swedish Department of Justice, 1979). As with school discipline, there is some evidence from research to support such a concern. A 'sizeable minority' of college students surveyed by Graziano & Namaste reported at least some degree of resentment towards their parents for having hit them (1990:461).

Young participants' concerns that recipients of the physical discipline might copy the adults' action in less culturally appropriate situations strongly resembled the 'cultural spillover theory' forwarded extensively by Straus (cf.1991a; 1996a) and examined in Chapter Two. For instance, physical punishment has been linked to

violence against partners in later life (cf. Carlson, 1991; Welsh, 1997; Straus, 1991a). Whilst researchers have noted that links between parents use of physical force and later aggression are difficult to prove and neither 'consistent nor conclusive' (Carlson, 1991:19), risks from such a relationship were certainly a theme of concern for the young people. The pervasiveness of this issue amongst participants suggests that Loseke's assertion that such theories have achieved a 'taken-for-granted status' of acceptance among the general population in the United States (1991:162-163) can be equally applied to the United Kingdom, at least as far as young people. Such ideas have also been featured in the legal and political debates. For instance, the Elton Report on discipline in schools emphasised ideas of 'modelling' when concluding that pupils' physical aggression and wider misbehaviour at school was more likely if physical force was used in the home (Department of Education & Science, 1989:134-136).

The presentation by young participants of acceptance of physical force being passed down generations of parents through sequential childhood disciplinary experiences echoes concepts of normalisation to violence through exposure (Kelder et al, 1991:434) and 'cycles of violence' featured widely in adult debates. The converse point made by some young participants that a few children may reject physical force specifically because they received such acts as a child has been asserted in previous research (Kelder et al., 1991). In addition, both young participants and researchers have suggested that transmission may depend upon contextual factors. Whilst not supporting any use of physical force in discipline, Welsh's 'Belt Theory of Juvenile Delinquency' and others suggest that it is the

severity of physical force which leads to greater degrees of delinquency and violence in later life (Welsh, 1997 & 1985; Maurer & Wallerstein, 1987; Fergusson & Lynskey, 1997; Fine & Holt, 1983:85).

Rejection of theories about intergenerational transmission and other longer term risks specifically because they do not equate with personal experience has been much more of a feature in the adult debates than in discussions with young participants. This may reflect an inference by adults of criticism towards their own child care behaviour in addition to commentary on discipline they received as a child. It is apparent in the adult debates that commentators feel it necessary to refer to their own role as carer to answer a perceived charge of failing their children, together with deeper implications of child abuse:

'As I said, I spanked them. They're fine thank you. They're achievement oriented, but not compulsively so. They're responsible, but do not take life too seriously...'
(Rosemond, 1994:213)

The fear from some young participants that children and society will be spoiled without physical discipline has been persistently mirrored by conservative commentators in the adult political debate (Overton, 1993). However, these adult views differ from young participants' discussions when suggesting explicitly that such a breakdown in society has already begun because of an existing lack of physical discipline. For instance, politicians have suggested that 'since this country began frowning on physical punishment, many children do not understand what

discipline is (Scottish National Party Official cited Scotland on Sunday, 8/1/95:5). Given that research consistently points to physical discipline as still being very widespread in carer-child relationships (cf. Newson & Newson, 1989; Nobes & Smith, 1997), this difference appears to reflect a lesser tendency by young people towards what Creighton & Russell describe as adults' universal and historical tendency to lament the deteriorating behaviour of the young (1995:17).

Roles & rights in the disciplinary relationship

Young participants' framing of physical force within the context of roles, rights and power in disciplinary relationships mirrored the dominance of rights issues in the legal and political debates. It also suggests a need for greater exploration of such concerns in a research debate dominated by studies of incidence and effects (see Chapter Two). Young participants' complex discussions regarding the relationship between roles, rights and power may offer more depth to the blanket suggestion in previous research (with mothers) that the acceptability of physical punishment was affected by who was the discipline agent (Catron & Masters, 1993).

The expression by some participants of the parental relationship as a type of ownership of children is reminiscent of many social commentaries by campaigners and researchers associating physical discipline with the cultural view of children as property or possessions of parents to do with them what they will (cf. Fine & Holt, 1983:85; Cloke, 1997:269; Newell, 1995:215). However, analysis noted that young

participants generally presented the disciplinary relationship as determined by parental responsibility to and intimacy with their children as active actors rather than based upon natural patriarchal rights over a subordinate. Framing these parental rights to smack in terms of responsibility for moral upbringing is conspicuously in line with the language of the recent Children Acts. The Children (Scotland) Act is clear that parental rights are derived only from their responsibilities to the child (Creighton & Russell, 1995:3-4).

However, young participants' proposition that it is the parents' job to teach right and wrong *rather* than the teachers' contrasts sharply with the moral curriculum in schools. These perceptions also differ from research involving young people in the West Indies which identified acceptance of physical force in schools as a 'ritual of authority' (Anderson & Payne, 1994:384). It is possible, however, that the demarcation of responsibility found in this present study may help to explain recent surveys of U.S. adults that show a relatively large approval of physical discipline by parents compared with teachers (cf. Graziano & Namaste, 1990; Hyman 1990). This also concurs with recent poll of adults in Scotland which similarly distinguished between parents and all others when considering who should be allowed to smack a child (Scotland on Sunday, 26/3/95:1). The belief by young participants that teachers' encroachment on these parental responsibilities would actually cause conflict between the two adult parties can be seen as a fairly accurate commentary on the European court cases, and underlying arguments of 'parental disciplinary rights', which led to the ban in state schools. It is a potential for conflict that has been identified recently by young people elsewhere (Anderson & Payne, 1994:384

[West Indies]), yet differs from commentaries generally before the ban (British Psychological Society, 1980:43).

The second characteristic of the parental relationship that young participants distinguished as supporting parents' right to use physical discipline was a perceived peculiar intimacy. Although not featured as strongly as by participants, commentators within legal and political arenas who support this parental right have often underlined their claims with references to the intimacy of this relationship (Scottish Law Commission, 1992:24&30). For instance, the Scottish Law Commission consistently highlighted a 'safe' smack within a 'loving' or 'affectionate' relationship (1992:30), and the then Health Minister, Paul Boateng, was reported as stressing the 'loving environment' of the parental smack (The Mirror, 24/9/98:7). Like the young participants in this study, some commentators and researchers have suggested that this intimacy is partly due to a parent's more 'extensive historical knowledge of the child' (cf. Coontz & Martin, 1988:80). However, whilst these previous commentaries have generally contrasted the intimate knowledge of mothers with fathers, young participants here only distinguished between family and external agents. The exceptional support by some young participants for child minders to have the right to smack appears closer to newspaper reports that the last Government considered this group as 'direct substitutes for parental supervision' (The Times, 13/8/94:1) than the later Department of Health statement that childminders should not normally smack because their 'relationship with the child is more detached than that of a parent' (Department of Health, 1994:2).

Young participants' emphasis on a *child's own sense* of familiarity and intimacy, which precludes other adults any rights to physical discipline even if trusted by the child's parents, is a departure from much of the previous adult argument. It contrasts sharply with the theme, found in the debates and research with adults, of *parental delegation* of rights. For instance, mothers in a recent study indicated that they would approve of baby-sitters and teachers administering physical force if they had previously given their permission (Catron & Masters, 1993:1826). Young participants' rejection of parental delegation, when combined with the emphasis clear demarcation of rights according to responsibility, challenges the principle of *in loco parentis*, oft cited in the adult debates. This legal postulate implies that parents delegate their roles and rights (including disciplinary) to another adult when a child is left in that adult's charge. Concordance with this principle has been a major feature of arguments from proponents of teachers using physical discipline, both before (Children's Committee, 1981:2) and after the ban in state schools.

These perceptions from participants of disciplinary demarcation add more depth to some research findings that people believe discipline is solely the caretaker's business and that others should not get involved (Davis, 1996:300). However, young people do appear to apply slightly more contingencies (see Chapter Five) on parents for this freedom from interference than recent suggestions from the Conservative Party Leader, William Hague, that courts should not rule on 'what people can do with their own children in their own home' (The Mirror, 24/9/98:7), or comments from an SNP official that: 'Parents know what is best for their children, it is in their nature...The government shouldn't interfere' (Scotland on Sunday,

8/1/95:5). In relation to a legal change banning all *disciplinary physical force*, the view from some young participants that there were sufficient laws to intervene when these contingencies were broken was similar to the declared position by the last Conservative government. Conversely, the argument from young participants that a ban would force people to look for and develop alternative methods of discipline has been implied in the legal and political discourses by opponents of physical discipline (cf. EPOCH, 1991a:3).

The disquiet voiced by young participants with the 'unfairness' of one-way rights to physical force mirrors the issues of inequity in rights which dominate adult legal and political arguments against physical discipline. Campaigners have argued in similar terms to the young people that it should be seen as 'no more acceptable to hit a child than anyone else' (EPOCH, 1991a:8) and that a ban on domestic physical discipline would simply bring children's rights into line with 'the rest of us' (EPOCH, 1991a:2; The Times, 15/6/98:1). Lawyers in the recent European Court case outlined their aim as trying to achieve a recognition that children should be afforded the same legal rights as adults (The Times, 15/6/98:2). Likewise, this legal inequality was given occasionally as a principal reason why corporal punishment should be banned in state schools (Bright; House of Commons Education Bill [Lords] Debate, 1986 [22/7/86]:234). The specific subsidiary theme from young participants of *human rights* echoes both legal premise of cases taken to Europe under the Convention of Human Rights and the wider campaign against physical discipline presented explicitly as part of a drive for 'fundamental human rights' for

children around the world (Children's Rights Development Unit, 1995:19; EPOCH Worldwide, 1996b:3; EPOCH, 1991a:9).

It was noted in analysis that young participants' consideration of rights was actually more usually framed in terms of the inappropriateness of anyone's right to hit than a child's human right not to be hit. This semantic emphasis is not too unfamiliar in the legal and political discourses on 'physical punishment'. Indeed, the principal EPOCH slogan, 'Hitting people is wrong, and children are people too', focuses primarily on the adult's act of 'hitting' being wrong in itself before introducing the child. Overall, however, the young participants' tendency towards negating the rights of the hitter rather than underlining the rights of the recipient meant that they were less inclined than many in the adult debates (cf. Children's Rights Development Unit, 1995:19; Pannick, 1992) to focus on the 'physical integrity' of the child. One may speculate on the extent to which this also represents a more general lack of belief or recognition in their own rights to 'physical integrity', with related policy implications for young people's perceptions of sexual abuse.

Power in the disciplinary relationship

The adult debates rarely dissect disciplinary relationships involving physical force quite as explicitly in terms of power as the young participants' analysis of a 'power

imbalance'³. However, the adult discourses do refer to concepts similar to the causes which young participants identified as underlying a power imbalance, such as 'the very fact of their physical weakness, immaturity, lack of knowledge and experience' (Lansdown, 1997:23). As such, both young people and the adult debates consider relative strengths within a framework of child developmentalism. However, it should be noted that whereas the adult debates tend to focus on relative weakness as 'vulnerability' in need of child protection (cf. European Commission on Human Rights cited Newell, 1995:220; UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: Preamble; EPOCH, 1991a:7), young participants referred more to redressing an imbalance of power by limiting adult power or shifting the balance towards children who remain active agents themselves.

Concerns presented by participants regarding teachers abusing of this power imbalance contrast sharply with the defence of the teaching profession within debates on the abolition of corporal punishment. Politicians rebuffed any implication that teachers were capable of such abuses as 'outrageous' (cf. Lord Beloff; House of Lords, Education Bill [Lords] Debate, 1986 [17/4/86]:792). Only recently have commentators voiced the possibility that a return to corporal punishment in schools would pose 'the danger that it would be abused in a minority of cases' (National Association of Head Teachers, *The Times*, 30/10/96). It should be noted that the concerns of participants that a return to 'the belt' would result in

³ See letter to *British Medical Journal* (Wynne, 1997) and *Children are unbeatable!* (1999:4) for exceptional examples of adult debate referring explicitly to relative power in the disciplinary relationship.

fearful teacher-child relationships inappropriate to educational principles echoes the National Union of School Students almost 20 years previously:

'For a school to be happy and successful there must be a friendship and respect between these two sectors [pupils and teachers] which is simply not possible when one hits the other.' (submission to British Psychological Society, 1980:43)

Previous research on disciplinary relationships involving physical force has focused more on the strategies of adults rather than the children's challenges to such actions highlighted by young participants. For instance, Newson & Newson commented that 'controlling the child's behaviour thus often becomes a game in which parents try to choose strategies appropriate to what they see to be at stake...' (1976:108). The main exception is the occasional commentary which shares young participants' recognition that the child might physically hit back, either as infants (Newson & Newson, 1963:111) or (usually anecdotally recounted) when older and bigger (Morris, 1997). In addition, the adult debates have occasionally referred to children's indirect challenges, notably a newspaper leader has stated that corporal punishment 'just makes kids even more determined to flout authority' (The Star, 30/10/96), and the Elton Report which highlighted 'the commitment to retaliation that caning could evoke' (Department of Education & Science, 1989:260). Young participants' emphasis on these challenges both at school and in the home seem to suggest a concurrence with the assertion by psychologists Durrant & Rose-Krasnor that: 'Spanking leads to feelings of powerlessness in

children. Children who are hit often try to make themselves feel more powerful by doing "risky things" (1995:3).

Adult commentators have reflected participants' claims that children in recent years are becoming more assertive in the areas of child 'protection' (cf. Joseph, 1997:17). Moreover, the adult legal and political debates have shared the analysis from participants that society has culturally progressed since the ban on corporal punishment in state schools. Reintroduction of teachers' rights to use physical discipline is presented within this debate as a retrograde step (cf. Independent Leader, 30/10/96:15; Alex Salmond, *The Scotsman*, 30/10/96:7; Scottish Council of Independent Schools, *The Scotsman*, 30/10/96:7). Young participants' analysis that a cultural movement away from physical discipline reflects a greater 'fairness' in society embellishes the assertion in adult debates that less severity in fewer disciplinary relationships is a 'natural historic development' (cf. Newell, 1985; Swedish Department of Justice, 1979:4; Children's Committee, 1981:3). Furthermore, young participants' emphasis on the current dynamism in disciplinary relationships seems to support the prediction from the Children's Committee that: '...the abolition of corporal punishment in schools and residential institutions would mark a significant transformation in the way that society regards and treats children' (Children's Committee, 1981:13).

Chapter summary

This chapter has compared the young people's perceptions of the use of physical force in disciplinary relationships with dominant themes from previous research on this topic and from the adult legal, political and research discourses. Organised and led according to participants' dominant thematic areas, the discussion has further illuminated the issues and arguments raised by young people by showing concurrence and difference with the adult debates.

When considering purposes, this chapter observed that the role of physical force as a tool of immediate communication without wider intention, which was so dominant in discussions with young participants has rarely been explored in the adult debates. This was noted as indicative of the greater tendency by young participants to highlight purposes for immediate situational management in the present. Both participants and the debate featured the purpose of teaching for future behaviour, although the emphasis from young people on learning the difference between right and wrong behaviour for personal moral advancement differed from the stress laid by the adult debates on social development and responsibility. The chapter also noted that the presentation by participants of physical discipline as a primary teaching tool for such purposes does not tally with the common representation within adult debates of such acts as a 'last resort'.

The use of physical force for the purpose of restraining children was considered more controversial by young participants than in the adult debates. Whilst

participants tended to distinguish between restraint from bad behaviour and from dangerous behaviour, there has been more consensual acceptance of both in the legal and political debates. The purpose of physical force to control children symbolically, rather than continued bodily restraint, differed between young participants and adult debates in two ways. First, adults did not share the opinion that this form of control was only appropriate to the school situation and, second, that any control should be limited to maintaining order in an immediate situation rather than more general conformity in the relationship. These two differences, and the distinction in the use of physical force for teaching, resulted in an absence from young participants of the popular purpose from adults to ensure the socialised obedience to the authority of adults now and in the future. Further categories of purpose for physical force present in the adult debates but absent from discussions with young participants were for justice or retribution (including pain) and for relief or release of parental frustration.

Although, young participants' qualifications on the effectiveness of physical force according to the personality of the child and context are mirrored in the adult discourses, concerns in discussions that 'side-effects' from such acts would make it harder to fulfil these purposes have not featured more widely. Previous research has reflected both young participants' concern about a lack of disciplinary alternatives to physical force and an openness to other methods.

Short term contingencies arising from young people's concerns about such acts were found in previous research and the legal and political discourses. The most

dominant contingency in discussions with young participants that the acts should always fulfil a 'legitimate' purpose relating to a real need in the child, whilst evident in previous research with children, was not found to be as emphasised in the adult debates. Likewise, the adult debates have failed to reflect the younger group of participants' concern with pain. Although injury was of concern to all groups, adults tended to discuss this issue in terms of degree rather than young people's absolute contingency. In addition, all groups stressed the necessity for adults to control and restrain the amount of force given, and limit such force to certain parts of the child's body. Young participants' concerns and contingencies regarding psychological consequences of physical force were reminiscent of arguments on 'humiliation' and 'degradation' within the political and legal arena. Research both on adults' attitudes to physical discipline and on outcomes has reflected young participants' focus on the inclusion of age in short term concerns. Although varying slightly in precise emphasis, each has particularly stressed the importance of children's understanding of the disciplinary message. The clear view of young participants that neither the gender of the adult nor child plays a role contrasts with a mixed picture in previous research and the adult debates, which have generally shown a greater acceptance of such acts for male children.

The particular categorisation of the terms 'child abuse' and 'violence' found in discussions with young participants was not repeated in the adult debates. In contrast to the specifications by young participants, the adult debates tend to use the terms either to describe all physical discipline (more usually 'violence') or as a threshold of severity or injury. However, the perspectives do usually agree that a

deliberate intention to cause pain or injury constitutes serious child abuse. The model of child abusers and violent adults as pathologically abnormal, presented by adults, does not tally with young participants' inclusion of anyone who fails to control their own feelings (including anger) or force respectively.

The emphasis on 'risk' in young participants' longer-term concerns about physical discipline was found to be mirrored in the adult debates. However, the dominant concern for young people with risk of short term contingencies not being met does not appear compatible with the repeated presentation of the 'safe smack' in the legal and political arenas. There is a greater consensus, however, that the use of implements presents too great a risk of negative effects. It was noted that both young participants and the adult debates tended to stress lasting psychological damage more than lasting physical damage to a child from the use of physical discipline. Both emphasised a range of lasting emotional and psychological problems from anxiety to psycho-sexual disorders. The adult discourses, and supporting research, also mirror the concern from young participants that the use of physical force risks damage to disciplinary relationships. Young participants' concern that the recipient of physical force may copy the action inappropriately in childhood or later adulthood was noted as reflecting the 'cultural spillover theory' in the research debate. Conversely, both young participants and adults in the debates have warned of long term 'delinquency' from *not* using physical discipline, although adults have more commonly asserted that such fears have already begun to come to fruition.

The importance of roles, rights and power to young participants is mirrored by the dominance of rights issues in the legal and political discourses. Stress by young participants on parental rights emanating from responsibilities is consistent with recent legal moves. Parental rights due to intimacy with the child is also presented, albeit in less depth, in the adult debates. Young people's rejection of the delegation of parental disciplinary rights to others (including teachers) contrasts with previous legal and political argument based on '*in loco parentis*'. Young participants' disquiet at the 'unfairness' of physical force by adults on children is also widely presented as an issue of inequality in the adult debates. The resistance by some young participants to interference in the family from external agencies, if contingencies are being met, is also dominant in arguments by proponents of physical discipline in the legal and political debates.

Although the adult debates rarely share the young participants' explicit dissection of relationships involving physical force as a literal power imbalance, they do use concepts of relative weakness similar to the causes for this imbalance identified by young participants. However, whilst young participants refer to redressing the balance of power with the children remaining agents, the legal and political discourses generally argue in terms of vulnerable children requiring protection. In the same way, the legal and political debates rarely reflect the young people's recognition of micro-level challenges to adults' use of physical force. In addition, the adult debates fail to share young participants concerns with adult 'abuse of power'. Some commentators in the adult debate have been found to share young participants' observations that children are becoming more assertive in child

'protection' and that roles and relationships regarding physical discipline have changed over time.

It is now necessary to consider the implications of this research on the young people's perceptions of adults' use of physical force in disciplinary relationships with children. In the final chapter in this thesis, the findings from the study will be summarised and considered both in terms of their methodological implications for research and their utility in social policy and practice.

This study has examined the young people's perceptions of adults' use of physical force in disciplinary relationships with children. This thesis has specifically aimed to inform legal and political debates on this topic by highlighting the issues of particular importance to young people. Adopting a broadly interpretivist methodological approach, the study has elicited views at an abstract level, and examined perceptions thematically in relation to their underlying frameworks of reference.

Summary of young participants' perceptions

The analysis chapters in this thesis were framed according to broad thematic areas directly arising from the discussions with young participants, rather than necessarily abiding by patterns in the adult debates. These thematic areas were divided, albeit crudely, into chapters covering: purposes and immediate effectiveness of acts of physical force; concerns and contingencies surrounding acts of physical force; and relationships, rights and power.

The first analysis chapter (Chapter Four) focused on the thematic area covering the reasons and intentions deemed as legitimising the role of physical discipline. The analysis produced four main categories: to communicate with the child; to teach appropriate behaviour for the future; to restrain or remove the child and to enforce general control in the disciplinary relationship.

A purpose rejected by young participants was physical force as retribution. In contrast to the focus for this purpose on receiving 'justice' for a past event, all the purposes deemed 'legitimate' by young people concentrated clearly on influencing the child's behaviour directly or indirectly in the present or future. Participants reserved the term 'punishment' for such retributive intent. Combined with the developmental concern that a child is generally too young to be held fully accountable for behaviour, this restriction to the present and future needs of the child rather than retribution is reminiscent of key principles of the Children's Hearings system in Scotland. In accordance with this rejection of children 'paying' or suffering for their past misbehaviour, any intention of causing pain through the use of the physical force was played down by young participants proposing different purposes.

From this analysis, it is possible to formulate and present these purposes more clearly as a six-fold nominal typology of themes surrounding the perceptions of purposes for adults' use of physical force in disciplinary relationships with children.

This typology is presented in *Table 1*. The themes and purposes in light type are those not considered legitimate by the young participants, but featured extensively in arguments by carers or in the adult debates.

	Theme	Purpose / Intent
1	Communicative	To communicate immediately: a) To indicate that behaviour is inappropriate b) To stop behaviour quickly
2	Educational	To teach for the future: a) To identify inappropriate behaviour for the future b) To shape the will of the child
3	Regulatory	To control (without direct restraint): a) In a particular situation b) In general within and beyond the relationship
4	Restrictive	To physically restrain behaviour: a) To restrain from misbehaviour b) To restrain or remove from danger
5	Retributive	To ensure payment for past misbehaviour
6	Cathartic	To satisfy the carer: a) To relieve emotion b) To remove irritation of child's behaviour

Table 1 Typology of purposes for physical force in disciplinary relationships

Whilst no previous research has attempted to chart the purposes of physical force as perceived by young people in the social position to receive such acts, this typology can be compared crudely to a limited number of studies that have explored why parents use physical discipline. Although these studies have not presented an analysis focused specifically on purposes or intentions, the closest to the subject of my typology is a classification of general parental discourse around physical discipline by Gough and Reavey (1997). The three classifications in that

study which can be related to purposes of discipline are *educational use*, *relief for the parent* and *general power and control*. The classification of 'educational use' corresponds to type 2 in my typology of purposes presented by young participants. In contrast, 'relief for the parent' (type 6) and 'general disciplinary control' (type 3b) were both rejected for parents by the young people in this study.

This typology of purposes is currently being incorporated within the theoretical and methodological frameworks for investigating disciplinary incidents in an E.S.R.C.-funded national survey of 'Parents, Children and Discipline'.⁴ Given the absence of previous typologies of intent or purpose, the above model could be utilised widely in future studies investigating factors underlying disciplinary and wider parenting strategies.

Young people's consideration of the positive effects of physical force in the short term was found to focus on the degree to which participants felt these 'legitimate' purposes would be achieved. However, the generally perceived effectiveness (particularly for communication) of physical discipline was seen as dependent upon the influence of certain contextual conditions, such as the child's personality and peer influence. The youngest age group of participants also showed concerns that 'side-effects' from physical force, such as hurt or discomfort, might make it harder for the act's purpose to be fulfilled.

⁴ This study is being conducted by Deborah Ghate and myself at the Policy Research Bureau, Susan J. Creighton at the N.S.P.C.C. and Julia Field at the National Centre for Social Research (S.C.P.R.) as part of the E.S.R.C. 'Violence' programme.

It was stressed in this study that any purpose or effectiveness of physical force perceived by young participants did not necessarily mean overall support for its use, nor imply that it was considered essential to fulfilling the intended purposes within wider disciplinary aims. Particularly for schools, participants presented disciplinary measures which, although they might not be as effective at generating fear, would be preferred alternatives to employing physical force in ensuring the maintenance of order in a particular situation. However, a strong and recurring theme in relation to carer-child disciplinary relationships, was that although participants were uneasy with the use of physical force, they could not identify any other effective way to stop bad behaviour.

Concerns and contingencies surrounding acts of physical force

Short term concerns and contingencies

Although young people recognised legitimate purposes and qualified effectiveness in adults using physical force in disciplinary relationships with children, they still expressed strong and varied reservations regarding its application in practice. In this study, themes running through these concerns were divided into the categories of short term, surrounding the actual disciplinary act and immediate context; and longer term, focusing on implications for the child and others beyond the individual disciplinary episode.

In the short term, the uneasy balance between the lack of effective alternatives fulfilling the purposes of disciplinary force and concerns about its practical application led to participants introducing relatively fixed contextual contingencies on such acts. If these acts cannot be avoided or made illegal, these contingencies would always have to be met for an individual episode to be considered acceptable. The most popular theme within these short-term concerns and contingencies focused on whether the acts fulfilled purposes deemed as 'legitimate' in child care or education. In particular, young participants stated that the force should not be used as a reaction to trivial or accidental behaviour from the child. Although concerns relating specifically to the child's feeling of pain were exclusively cited by the younger age group of participants, both groups of young people rejected force which led to any injury.

Young participants were also found to stress that adults should ensure that physical force is controlled and limited by the adult to the minimum necessary to fulfil its 'legitimate' purpose. Additional contingencies surrounding the precise bodily target of any act reflected a number of the concerns above, particularly that restriction to the limbs or buttocks would be less injurious than targeting the child's more vulnerable face or head region.

In addition to concerns surrounding short term *physical* effects of physical discipline, this study found that young participants voiced contingencies to limit negative psychological effects. In particular, acts causing unnecessary humiliation

should be avoided by, for instance, not removing the child's clothes or applying the disciplinary act in public.

Concerns about both negative physical and psychological short term effects also, in turn, informed a group of age related concerns and contingencies that led participants to present (varying) lower and upper age limits to the application of disciplinary force. Lower age limits reflected concerns about the particular vulnerability to pain and injury of younger children and the perception that they would be less able to interpret the adults' disciplinary message. Upper age-limits from young participants were analysed as relating to concerns over psychological damage and a point where legitimate communicative purposes are made redundant with advanced verbal understanding.

Neither the gender of the adult nor child in the disciplinary relationship played an important role in the concerns of the young participants in this study. Indeed, it was stressed that 'sex equality' demanded no differences in treatment between male and female children.

The analysis in this study clearly established that the terms *child abuse* and *violence* were reserved by young participants for particular categories of concern, with specific characteristics marking them as exceptionally unacceptable. They are not synonymous with 'unacceptable' acts, or a linear measure of severity or injury, but constitute distinct subsets breaching particular combinations of the contingencies. Young people distinguished 'child abuse' specifically as acts in

which concern for the child's needs are not central according to purposes deemed as legitimate for physical force in a disciplinary relationship. Such acts were usually perceived as relating more to the inappropriate needs and characteristics of the adult than the child, including anger, frustration and other forms of catharsis. Participants' overall tendency to restrict labelling of acts as 'child abuse' to the carer-child relationship appears to demonstrate a particular emphasis on the primacy of the child's needs within the family. In short, 'child physical abuse' becomes the betrayal and antithesis of this accepted family-centred child care ideology. The term 'violence' was used specifically by young participants to refer to an act in which the adult does not observe an appropriate limit to the force. Participants considered acts to be violent when force was not controlled to a minimum level necessary to fulfil the purposes perceived as legitimate. Unlike perceptions of 'child abuse', the purpose or intent for the act per se may be perceived as legitimate, but the adult has employed more force than is necessary to fulfil this purpose.

Longer term concerns

Longer term concerns, which focused on perceived implications for the child and wider society extending beyond an individual disciplinary episode, were strongly represented in discussions with young people. Analysis noted that such concerns were characterised by a sense of 'risk', increased if acts of physical force are more common or widespread.

The first theme of concern was that adults could not be guaranteed always to meet 'short term contingencies'. These criteria for acceptability *could* always be breached at some point, whether unintentionally or deliberately over a period of time or across all disciplinary relationships. Indeed, it led some young participants to argue that, specifically for these practical rather than principled reasons, all physical discipline should be avoided. The second theme in longer term concerns concentrated on the risk of physical damage to the child lasting beyond the immediately disciplinary episode. It was considered that the use of implements would present too much of a risk, most explicitly in relation to scarring from injuries.

However, in common with the political and legal debates, longer-term psychological effects were featured to a greater extent than physical effects. In addition to concerns about effects on the disciplinary relationship per se, psychological effects were analysed thematically in terms of psychological damage and intergenerational transmission of behavioural patterns. Concerns about accumulated psychological damage focused on a range of emotional and psycho-pathological harm from negative memories of childhood to serious mental or sexual 'disturbance'. The concern about negative memories of childhood again presents an ideological picture of childhood as a time of safety and innocence, which should not be stained by unpleasantness associated with receiving physical force.

The most consistent theme in discussions of long term effects with both carers and participants was the risk of the child copying the physical disciplinary action inappropriately either in childhood, in later adolescence and adulthood or

specifically in parenthood. The analysis section also drew attention to concerns raised explicitly in some discussions that not employing physical force in disciplinary relationships would lead to children being spoilt and wild, with negative implications for wider society. Such fears should be taken in conjunction with the lack of confidence in alternative measures cited above.

Relationships, rights and power

Roles & rights in the disciplinary relationship

The dominance in discussions of the perceived roles, rights and power of those involved in the disciplinary relationship introduced an important additional dimension to the consideration of the acceptance and appropriateness of individual acts. Issues regarding such acts were found to be contextualised by participants within the broader status of the adult-child relationship.

The demarcation of rights in the disciplinary relationship according to precise social roles could even override concerns and contingencies when assessing the legitimacy of a disciplinary act. This demarcation was centred on constructions of the special nature of parent-child relationships. Sometimes expressed as 'parental ownership', exceptional rights for parents were not based on a natural 'patriarchy' over passive subordinates, but on a relationship defined and distinguished by the responsibility and intimacy of parents to and for *their* children as active actors. The

demarcation of rights according to responsibility conversely reveals young people's definition of the role of teachers as not responsible for the child's disciplinary development. The intimacy which distinguishes parent-child relationships is perceived as either gained 'naturally' through taking the parental (usually maternal) role or through shared (early) experiences and privy knowledge. Neither would be possible in the impersonal school (the use of physical force in the penal system was not even mentioned by participants). The 'natural' intimacy from taking the parental role, whether or not the biological parent, is tied to the familial ideology of loving care which states that any abusive parent is not a 'real mother'. Likewise, acts of physical discipline help define the uniqueness of both the parental relationship and childhood in general for some young people, with the 'safe' and intimate parental smack reserved for these areas, somewhat akin to the 'safe' parental kiss goodnight. Contrasting with the legal concept of *in loco parentis*, participants rejected parental delegation of rights to others because of a perceived lack of intimacy between child and other adult.

The analysis section also revealed a theme of resilient disquiet and frustration within discussions at the 'unfairness' of the one-way flow of rights surrounding physical force in disciplinary relationships between adults and children. Despite this disquiet, there was some resistance to external (especially state) agencies interfering overtly in parents' responsibilities if they are abiding by short-term contingencies and without danger of harm to the child.

A substantial body of opinion considered that long term risks still outweighed the rights of any adults and necessitated a legal ban on all physical force in disciplinary relationships with children. Given this consideration, some participants were concerned that a gap between legal and attitudinal change would cause significant problems in policing widespread illegal physical force so ingrained into everyday activity.

Power in the disciplinary relationship

A further dominant theme in discussions with young participants was the 'power' within the adult-child disciplinary relationship involving physical force. Young participants perceived adult acts of physical discipline as manifestations of a power imbalance between the parties derived from socio-legal rights, as well as physical and communicative differences.

Participants were noted as analysing adults taking advantage of a power imbalance to benefit themselves to the detriment of the child (like home 'child abuse') as 'abuses of power'. The disciplinary relationship in schools was considered to be a particularly sensitive power balance at present, which would result in such abuses if upset by lifting the ban on physical discipline. However, participants did not perceive children as passive recipients of power solely determined by, or protected by, adults. Children were featured as active agents finding strategies to both influence this power imbalance and challenge its physical manifestations. Strategies suggested included physically striking back, repeating the misbehaviour,

wider delinquency and, as the ultimate attempt to reassert control and power over their lives, running away from home or school (truancy).

In addition to children's own strategies, young participants and carers highlighted outside agencies as influencing the balance of power and its physical manifestation. Agencies that can be directly utilised by children (e.g. Childline) were seen as particularly important to the empowerment of children if adults have abused their own power advantage. However, particularly in relation to a ban on all physical discipline, participants considered that children would refrain from seeking such outside help for fear of losing control of their challenge to the force and suffering personal reprisals from adults.

Some participants were concerned that children would take advantage of any shift in power following withdrawal of rights to physically discipline. There was a widespread perception from young participants that both the balance of power in all types of adult-child disciplinary relationships had already altered substantially over the recent past. There was a clear implication from young participants that roles within adult-child disciplinary relationships are presently in a dynamic state with actors negotiating shifting expectations of acceptable behaviour. Nevertheless, it was stressed that such a trend should be tempered or directed with regard to practical concerns about the immediate and future development of children.

Overall analysis

This study suggests, that young people employ a range of complex constructions and arguments to form their views on physical force in discipline. This range stresses the context and characteristics of both individual disciplinary acts and the wider adult-child relationship⁵. Participants have presented their views as supported by a series of contextual concerns, contingencies, legitimising reasons and comments on disciplinary relationships. Few of these elements have been explored in the limited research with young people on this topic (see Chapter Two).

Indeed, it is possible to model the concerns and issues assessed by participants as essentially a contextual cost-benefit analysis, or more accurately an acceptance-resistance analysis of physical force in discipline. *Table 2* (below) represents this model of 'acceptance-resistance analysis' crudely according to the issues featured in this study. In each of the thematic areas dominating the perceptions of young people, issues and themes can be shown as exhibiting factors that positively and negatively influenced acceptance. The combination of factors across these themes that is drawn upon by each young person would effectively determine their overall acceptance of such acts. Discussions with the young participants would be coloured accordingly. Although not every young person will necessarily draw heavily on factors from every thematic area, overall perceptions can be represented as the sum of the analysis in this model.

⁵ This concurs with research perspectives which have stressed the importance of context in interpersonal violence and conflict (cf. Dobash & Dobash, 1979:27; Kurz, 1991:156), rather than those which have concentrated primarily on the severity of the violent action (cf. Straus, 1991b).

Acceptance Factors	Thematic Area	Resistance Factors
Legitimate purposes	Purposes	Viewed as cathartic or retributive
Effective; No alternative	Immediate effectiveness	Superficial or ineffective; conditions to effectiveness; Alternatives
Contingencies allay concerns	Short term concerns	Short term negative effects; concerns about appropriate context
Necessary to avoid personal and societal delinquency; negative effects restricted to peculiar acts	Long term concerns	Risks of contingencies not met; negative effects over time
Parents' responsibility; familial intimacy	Roles and rights	Unfairness; human rights

Table 2 Acceptance - Resistance Analysis of discussions on physical force

Dominant discourses

The themes identified during analysis as underlying young people's perceptions of physical force in disciplinary relationships generally appear to be dominated by two cultural discourses, which can be crudely defined by the terms *developmentalism* and *rights*. The discourse of 'developmentalism' refers to cultural beliefs loosely reliant on the acceptance of Piaget-esque ideas of 'child development'. Within this discourse, views are determined by a belief that childhood represents a natural and fixed chronological progression towards becoming an adult which incorporates prior stages of incompetency, lack of understanding and inability. In contrast, the

discourse of 'rights', though not necessarily 'children's rights', tends to stress the fixed expectations of entitlements and responsibilities for an active agent and social actor, ideally irrespective of competency. The analysis of discussions highlighted concerns and arguments which can be seen to draw heavily and repeatedly upon conceptualisations informed by these discourses.

The discourse of developmentalism

First, developmentalist concerns can be considered to dominate young people's perceptions of the purposes of employing physical force in discipline. For instance, when considering the communicative and educational purposes, participants considered physical force as necessary to bridge a communication gap with young children forced by the limited capacity for verbal understanding and reasoning caused by cognitive deficiency. It is precisely these developmentalist ideas of needing to use physical force because of cognitive deficiency which forms the basis for the differences of legitimacy in purpose between the use of physical force on children and on other adults. Commentators have long argued that this distinction is 'anomalous' (Lady Wooton, House of Lords, cited Project No Spank, 1997; Straus, 1991:149; Karp, 1999:6), or noted that the 'stock rationalisations' for hitting children and wives are interchangeable. However, for young people, developmental concepts set physical force in child care apart from 'wife beating' or hitting other adults. Adults, it is argued, will already have developed both the ability to understand the ideas and verbal communications concerning what is wrong

behaviour. Coupled with the experiential knowledge necessary to be aware of socially acceptable behaviour, the purposes of using physical force to teach the young child are deemed invalid when applied to adults.

In addition, developmentalist discourse informed concerns and contingencies about the practical application of physical force. For instance, the developmentalist influence on perceptions of legitimate purpose, noted above, introduces contextual contingencies about when it is appropriate to use physical force. More directly, analysis of discussions noted concerns about the perceived appropriateness of physical force according to the developmental age of the child. Age limits to physical force were informed by perceptions of both the physical and psychological fragility of children at different stages of development and perceptions of progressive understanding of the disciplinary message. Such concerns appear consistent with the Department of Health's developmentalist guidance that:

'The age, stage of development, and the understanding of the child are also important factors.' (1994:3)

Furthermore, issues and concepts surrounding the development of children can be seen to underlie many of the longer-term concerns of young people. For instance, participants featured the risk that the use of physical force when the child is developing will result in mental health problems in adulthood. In addition, consideration of the intergenerational transmission of behaviour patterns featured the risk of children developing patterns of inappropriate behaviour as they grow up.

The discourse of rights

The underlying discourse of rights can be observed throughout the themes identified from the young participants' discussions. In particular, there were consistent references to the treatment and understanding of children as active and competent agents in the disciplinary relationship. Such an approach was more dominant in perceptions from young participants than has been evident from the carers, previous research or in the adult debates. For instance, young participants stressed that the effectiveness of acts of physical force was qualified by the peer relationships formed by that child. Consideration of long term concerns as 'risk' rather than determined was, in part, due to the perception of children as active agents who hold some influence over the effect of such acts. Intergenerational transmission of behavioural patterns, for instance, was perceived as dependent upon the particular child's reaction to acts of disciplinary force.

The discourse of rights is, unsurprisingly, observed most clearly in consideration of roles and disciplinary relationships. The chapter which concentrated on these issues (Chapter Six) featured concerns about the relative rights of different adults to use physical discipline, inequality in relation to the child's (human) rights and the influence of external agencies on these rights. In addition, there were concerns about the impact of these rights on the power balance between those in the disciplinary relationship. Participants' discussions of power again highlighted

children as social actors, actively challenging power imbalances by adopting various 'resistance' strategies. Children were not viewed as simply objects of discipline. This contrasts with the tendency of researchers previously to frame the power relationship solely from the perspective of adults' manipulation of children's behaviour. Indeed, the young participants have provided a perspective that has been specifically highlighted recently as missing from accounts of power in disciplinary relationships:

'In general, there is a missing discourse of child rights wherein young people are accorded a voice, a position which allows for discussion of and resistance to the methods of punishment favored by parents...PPC [Physical punishment of children] is designated as the domain of the supreme and sovereign parent – one-way traffic which refuses to take on board, which drowns out the subjectivity of the child. Clearly a child-centred discourse is required to inform this common sense on PPC to facilitate negotiation and the co-production of more satisfactory practices.'
(Gough & Reavey, 1997:428)

It is possible to observe tensions between the two discourses of developmentalism and rights.⁶ Such tensions were visible, for instance, in discussions considering a child's right to refuse physical punishment which some participants suggested should be dependent upon the developing capability to voice such a refusal. This represents a compromise between the polar positions of the fixed necessity of adult responsibility, associated with the developmentally determined incapability of children, and consideration of the child's rights which may conflict with this.

Similar compromises may be found in the adult debates over recent years, where rights are qualified 'in accordance with the age and maturity of the child' (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12[1]; also Social Work [Scotland] Act, 1968, s20; Scottish Law Commission, 1992:18; Children [Scotland] Act, 1995). Fox Harding has drawn attention to the incompatibility between these two as approaches in child care policy. She notes that stressing children's own strengths and abilities in the rights approach does not marry with the vulnerability and immaturity of children needing protection (Fox Harding, 1991:155).

⁶ Young participants' discourses are, in a number of ways, reminiscent of Foucauldian discourses. Based on wider 'fields of knowledge', they underlie acceptance and resistance to these power relations and their manifestations in physical force (Foucault, 1977:27). In addition, the power relationship described by young people is 'polymorphous', involving a web of relations including children's own actions (McHoul & Grace, 1995:64 & 87). Further research is necessary to explore this Foucauldian analysis and consider any historical specificity to the dominant discourses and tensions between them.

The coexistence of these two approaches in the young people's perceptions is possible, albeit with some tension and concern, because of the way they frame the power relationship in terms of a dynamic balance between adults and children. Although both parties are seen as legitimate social actors, complying with ideas of rights, it is recognised that the balance of, for instance, physical power will shift over time with the child's development, affecting relative power in the disciplinary relationship. Outside parties, like social workers, can help to maintain this balance and prevent unacceptable physical force.

It is important to note that this role for external agencies is not one of protecting passive children, but regulating a balance between legitimate and active parties with rights. Young people emphasise the use of these agencies as supporting the child's independent strength. As such, participants focused on children's strategies to challenge the manifestations of imbalances of power, with external agencies operating as resources for children to actively utilise rather than the agencies taking the lead in protection. Indeed, there was concern that children should be allowed to maintain control of the process of complaint against abuse, with participants' support for services perceived as allowing the retention of control (e.g. Childline) and greater suspicion of those perceived as taking control (e.g. social workers). This approach to child protection services should be noted as rather a different view from policy debates which have tended to de-emphasise the active involvement or control by the children. Joseph noted that in the Department of Health report '*Working Together*', the section entitled 'Parent and Child involvement', 'the focus is

exclusively on parental and adult involvement, with no mention of how children themselves might be informed about or involved in their own protection' (Joseph, 1997:16).

Reinterpretations of terms utilised for research

Criticism has been made in this study and previously (cf. Kurz, 1991:157) that some researchers have imposed their own definitions of terms and behaviour in relation to physical force in adult's disciplinary relationship with children rather than addressing the point of view of the actors. Findings in this study suggest that the specificity of such terms in the understanding of those involved in the disciplinary relationship is contrary to some of these researcher determined definitions. Without awareness of this specificity and a sensitivity to the cultural understanding of respondents it is possible that researchers may have misinterpreted data.

Punishment

The British Psychological Society noted in 1980 that references to corporal punishment by pupils, teachers, research workers, administrators and regulations may differ in meaning (British Psychological Society, 1980:16). Specifically, the term 'punishment' was presented as 'question begging' with 'thornier theoretical issues'. Despite these sentiments having been reflected in more recent literature

reviews on the physical discipline of children (cf. Cashmore & de Haas, 1995), research and the political and legal debates have consistently referred to this term without thoroughly exploring its interpretation by those involved in the adult-child disciplinary episodes it apparently describes. This study suggests that there is not a common understanding of this term between adult, young people and the wider debates.

The particular use by young participants of the term 'punishment' to describe acts with a specifically retributive purpose, deemed illegitimate for physical force, has scientific and political implications within the adult debates. Such arenas have tended to use the term 'physical' or 'corporal punishment' to describe variations on a theme of all physical discipline. As soon as we recognise that the definition of an event as punishment relies on contextual purpose rather than physical action from parent on child, there are implications for terms used in debate, campaigns and research. These campaigns, such as EPOCH, aim to end all use actions of physical force in discipline but tend to voice their focus as ending all physical 'punishment' of children. This research study would suggest that young people would support campaigners' call against 'physical punishment' (inferred as retribution), but might still agree with smacking a child (in certain contexts).

In addition, much research attempting to examine episodes of physical discipline continue to centre around the concept of punishment, with the same assumption of describing all physical discipline. Indeed, the difference in perception of this term may help to explain the apparently contradictory findings from some studies which

find that young adults consider certain milder acts of physical discipline appropriate, yet tend not to endorse 'pro-punishment' statements (cf. Graziano et al., 1991). Such apparently baffling contradictions highlight the problems associated with collecting data on this area in closed questionnaires rather than more interactive methods. This study suggests that researchers, particularly when utilising such closed quantifiable methods, will need to investigate the perceptions of the sample population on the term 'punishment' before its incorporation into their theoretical frameworks and data collection tools.

Child Abuse

It has been noted in this study and elsewhere (ISPPC, 1992) that the distinction in research between 'physical discipline' and 'physical abuse' has generally been defined by researchers rather than participants. Indeed both in research and policy, this distinction has relied on measuring (often implicitly) the degree of injury to the child or severity of action according to likely injury. For instance, the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS), which has been adopted widely in research as a measure of incidence (cf. Berger et al., 1988; Knutson & Selner, 1994:156), mainly distinguishes according to severity of action. However, this study uncovers a contextual definition more closely linked to purpose than straight forward measure of injurious outcome in the child. Although young participants recognised an outcome association with injury, 'child abuse' was determined by concern for the child's needs failing to be central to an act according to legitimate purposes. This

finding may go some way towards explaining the apparent discrepancy uncovered in studies that highlight adults who suffered severe or injurious physical force as children not classifying their experiences as abusive (cf. Hemenway et al, 1994; Berger et al, 1988; Rausch & Knutson, 1991; Knutson & Selner, 1994). As a result of such studies, Knutson & Selner concluded:

'Thus, it seems likely that other factors must be considered in attempting to understand why severely punished and even injured young adults generally fail to view their experiences as abusive.' (1994:164)

According to this current study, respondents' perceptions of whether or not legitimate purposes underlie physical force may be one of Knutson & Selner's 'factors'. Some existing research has suggested that respondents perceiving that they 'deserved' severe physical force were less likely to label themselves as abused (cf. Rausch & Knutson, 1991; Kelder et al., 1991). However, the term 'deserved' itself, and respondents perceptions of it, has also not been explored by the researchers. It tends to have been interpreted by researchers as referring to a justification of retributive punishment, as in the phrase 'just desserts'. This study suggests, however, that this interpretation may again represent a difference in understanding from respondents. Participants in this study presented the term 'deserving' less as a justification of retribution (rejected by my participants) and more as an acceptance that the child *needed* the physical force because of a legitimate disciplinary purpose. As physical abuse was also judged by participants in terms of whether or not an act of force has a legitimate disciplinary purpose, it

follows that people who felt that they 'deserved' the physical force were less likely to think that they were abused. This could be the case irrespective of the degree of injury received (as reported by Rausch & Knutson, 1991). It is possible that respondents could acknowledge that their parents used unacceptably severe physical force, but would not label it abusive if they felt that it related to a legitimate disciplinary purpose. Future research is necessary to test the hypothesis that perceptions of whether parents' acts fulfilled legitimate child care purposes is a significant 'factor' in the 'failure' of respondents who have suffered injury to report it as abusive.

Consequently, the Conflicts Tactics Scale and other such barometers of severity may be valid for measuring action, degree of force and even unacceptable behaviour, but not for measuring abuse as interpreted by young people. Researchers wishing to tap into respondents' perceptions would need to include an assessment of the purpose behind parental action rather than just concentrating on the action per se. In addition, the study would support professionals who have moved beyond basing labels of physical abuse on established medical definitions (ISPC, 1992:10), in order to look at other contextual factors. This shift would appear to accommodate the concerns of those actually in the social position of receiving such abuse. Future research would be necessary to assess whether non-physical 'disciplinary' acts would also be considered 'child abuse' if they were perceived as fulfilling the needs of the adult rather than the child.

Importance for researchers' consideration of violence

In a similar way to considerations of the terms 'punishment' and 'child abuse', this study has noted a difference between young people and the adult debates in interpretation of the term 'violence'. Young participants' use of the term specifically with reference to acts in which 'the adult does not control actions to observe an appropriate limit of force' was contrasted with the treatment of *all* acts of physical discipline as violent in the scientific, legal and political debates.

Unlike the other terms examined above, some researchers do imply that they are aware that their broad definition of violence is not shared by others. For example, Gelles acknowledges that some people object to 'commonplace slaps, pushes, shoves, and spankings' being called 'violent' (1997:14). In addition, commentators in the political and legal debates who oppose physical discipline acknowledge but dismiss criticisms of their use of the word violence as typically 'in line with the hypocrisy and double standards that still characterise many adults' attitudes to violence directed at children' (Newell, 1995:222; see also Children's Rights Development Unit, 1995:19; Karp, 1999:3). However, it is clear from this research that these criticisms cannot be simply dismissed as the peculiar and biased view of those who are doing the hitting, but are also present in the perceptions and understanding of those in the social position to receive such force. Researchers

and commentators are required to be sensitive to the specific contextual conditions which determine the distinct categorisation of an act as violent.

Categorisation of physical force in discipline

Indeed, this treatment of both child abuse and violence is indicative of young people's tendency to interpret acts of physical force in disciplinary relationships in terms of distinct categories according to contextual factors, rather than placing them on a linear continuum of force. Such a way of distinguishing acts brings into question more traditional measures of violence, abuse, acceptability and legality of actions by degrees of severity. For young people, the acceptability and legitimacy of such acts are not judged on the basis of 'moderate and reasonable', or any other cut off points on a scale, but categorised according to a range of contingencies.

Essentially, rather than using a scaled measurement to distinguish these descriptions of physical force, young people utilise the type of sub-set categorisation represented in the Venn Diagram in *Figure 1* (below). The particular categorisation of each act depends upon perceptions of what contingencies were broken. According to this analysis, young participants categorised acts of physical force according to relatively distinct judgements about, for example, whether the act broke the contingency of causing pain, failed to fulfil a legitimate child care purpose or carried a risk of long term damage.

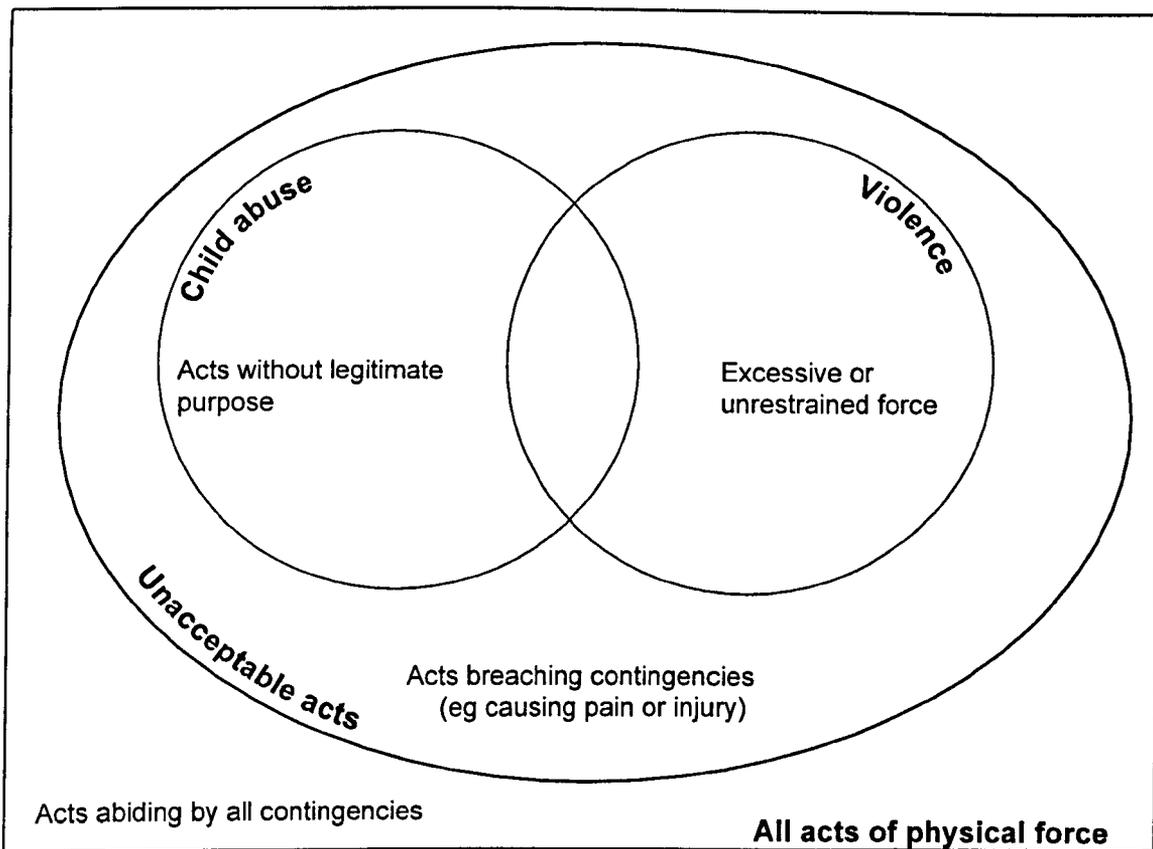


Figure 1 Young people's categorisation of acts of physical discipline

This categorisation contrasts with legal decisions in this country (and beyond) which try to decide how far an act has travelled along a scale of increasing unreasonableness. Making legal judgements along such a scale has been criticised as ambiguous and dangerously open to interpretation (West German Commission cited EPOCH, 1991b:1; EPOCH, 1991a:9; Karp, 1999:4). It has been said to cause confusion for judges (Scottish Law Commission, 1992:29), medical professionals (Ludwig, 1987 cited Evans & Fargason Jr., 1998), the adult carer (National Association of Social Workers in Education submission to Scottish Law Commission, 1992:24) and the general public (British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering submission to Scottish Law Commission, 1992:24). If the law on physical

force is to be based upon child protection (rather than complete abolition according to human rights principles), then reformulating legal distinctions according to the types of conditional categories presented by the young people may actually present a clearer position for all parties concerned. Certainly such benefits appear to have influenced the Scottish Law Commission's 1992 decision to use such contingencies, namely the use of implements and injury, in their recommendations for clear legal change in Family Law dealing with parent-child disciplinary relationships.

Methodological implications of this research

As a consequence of the overall neglect of social actors' contextual understanding in research on physical discipline, this study is arguably the most comprehensive examination of the perceptions of *either party* involved in the disciplinary relationship. As such, although qualified by the observation of differences in discourses between adults and children, this study may be valuable for suggesting heuristic explanations for previously reported views more generally in our culture. For instance, discussion above offered definitions made by young people as clues to the reasons for an apparent discrepancy in adult's labelling of acts as abusive. In addition, the dominant themes highlighted in this study may be useful for informing the theoretical framework and methods of future investigations on this topic involving either young people or adults.

However, the primary value of this study lies in its peculiarity as an interpretative investigation into young people's perceptions of physical discipline. It is the relative exclusion of this social group from adult debates that underpins the importance of focusing on their perceptions in this study. This research begins to inform these wider debates of the relevant issues, concerns and underlying arguments according to those in the social position to receive physical discipline.

More generally, this study demonstrates clearly that research in the social sciences can effectively tap into the perceptions of young people on both sociological and social policy issues directly relevant to their lives. The broad methodological approach of the new paradigm of the 'sociology of childhood' can be applied to such issues to include the voices of children as social actors where they may have been excluded in the past.

First, researchers have noted a reluctance to explore adult-child social relations with children directly in terms of abstract sociological concepts such as power. For instance, Kitzinger has noted a reluctance to discuss power with children in relation to addressing sexual abuse by adults, partly because it is thought that they may not grasp such abstract concepts. As a result:

'children are systematically denied a language of power and their experiences of powerlessness are obscured.' (Kitzinger, 1997:182)

Conversely, this study has shown that young people *already* hold a critical interpretation of their social position directly in terms of power and the manifestations of power. The study has revealed that young people present a complex model of a dynamic power balance: affected by types of relative power (e.g. socio-legal and physical power); influenced by child development; effecting negative manifestations (e.g. abuses and injury); and mediated by external forces (e.g. state welfare agencies).

Kitzinger suggests that when adults do find ways of talking to children about power, they are capable of working with power as a concept and may be used as a 'tool' to make sense of their world (Kitzinger, 1997:183). This thesis suggests that researchers can tap young people's sophisticated use of this 'tool' in their analysis of situations which are intimately relevant to children's lives. Such an analysis from those involved in the social situation can provide a valuable dimension to sociological explorations of the adult-child power relationship.

Second, the methodology chapter in this thesis noted that some commentators have asserted that children are keen to voice their views on policy issues, and this study has shown that researchers can elicit and examine underlying arguments on a level deeper than simply reporting experiences. In short, young people have something to say about the issues which profoundly affect those in their social role, and social researchers can aid their inclusion into the wider policy debates. This is a substantial shift from previous research on topics such as physical discipline, which has largely disregarded young people as not interested in relevant issues.

Social scientists commonly introduce papers on 'physical punishment' with reference to current concern for a host of interested parties, but have consistently failed to include the young people receiving such acts. Typical is the editorial in a special edition of the *Archive of Paediatric Adolescent Medicine* which asserts that: 'Controversies about how to discipline children are of concern to parents, other adults who care for children, clinicians, and policy makers' (Socolar et al, 1997:758). In contrast, young people in this study have shown that they are aware of the current controversies, that they are concerned about various issues surrounding the use of physical force and that they analyse social changes.

The contribution which young people can make to the wider policy debates can be seen as real and substantial, with this research demonstrating a perceptive questioning and social analysis of adult-child relationships. It is clear from this study that the suggestion that young people would just copy what they have heard from adults and provide no real or reliable information, as cited in the methodology chapter, is mistaken. The previous two chapters (Chapters Seven and Eight), which compared the perceptions of young people first with carers in this study and then with the adult debates, presented both substantial similarities and differences in arguments. Consequently, the perceptions of young people can be seen to represent challenging contributions to the debate. The revelation of the perspective of those actually in the social position to receive physical discipline is a valuable balance to the dominance of professional discourses in shaping the policies and practice on this topic (ISPCC, 1992). Indeed, highlighting the similarities and differences between the perceptions of young people and the political and legal

debates allows adult professionals, commentators and policy makers to question their own assumptions, definitions and distinctions.

The complex critiques of disciplinary relationships and social change from participants are more than a simple rejection of physical discipline from self-interested recipients, or acceptance as passive subjects. Their regard for purposes, concerns and the surrounding state of the disciplinary relationship is more balanced than this dichotomous position dominantly portrayed by previous studies (Cashmore & de Haas, 1995:81). First, participants did not just institute a blanket rejection of physical force because it negatively affected those in their social position. This does concur with recent research findings that children are 'not unconditionally averse to such treatment' (Anderson & Payne, 1994:377), and surveys with school pupils before corporal punishment was banned showing some support for such acts (cf. Raven, 1976 [Ireland] cited British Psychological Society, 1981:42; Pollock et al., 1977 [Scotland]). Equally, critiques and concerns within discussions did not indicate the blanket 'concur[ance] with the correctness of the aggressive behaviour directed at them' (Graziano & Namaste, 1990:460). Indeed, the full and complex analysis of acceptability within disciplinary relationships uncovered in this study substantially expands somewhat reticent admissions from previous researchers that some young people (the age of participants in this study) have a '*growing appraisal*' of adults 'having *some* limitations to the scope of their legitimate authority' (Catron & Masters, 1993:1824 [my emphasis]). Instead, the critical balance found in discussions with young participants in this study is much closer to the comments made by the Scottish Law Commission that:

'...a young person may be perfectly capable of balancing his or her immediate wishes and feelings against long term considerations and the interests of others and coming to a considered view as to what is the right course of action in the circumstances.' (1992:18)

The capability and complexity of such an analysis has important practical implications for child care and protection services. Given the increased importance of the child's voice in such proceedings following the Children Acts, it is essential for professionals to recognise that young people do draw on this full and complex analysis of contextual concerns when assessing the acceptability and legitimacy of acts of physical force. Conversely, it cannot be assumed that young people will share the same understanding or usage as adults of key terms such as 'violence' or 'child abuse'. Similar to the implications for researchers of misinterpreting these terms, not appreciating such differences could, for example, feasibly result in comments from a young person that they have not suffered physical abuse, arising out of their contextual analysis, being incorrectly inferred in the protection or legal arenas as a statement that no injury had occurred. In previous research, the extent of such differences and misinterpretations has tended to be framed as a failure on the part of the child to distinguish appropriate from inappropriate discipline according to adult determined definitions and issues, for instance,:

'In addition to theoretical ramifications, there are also implications for children's capability to learn to discriminate abusive treatment from nonabusive, societally acceptable punishment.' (Catron & Masters, 1993:1827)

The findings from this study, however, suggest that young people's particular discriminations are more accurately represented as distinct but equally legitimate interpretations from those in the social position to receive physical force. Ultimately, the perceptions of young people presented in this study form a competent and sophisticated commentary on adults' use of such force in their disciplinary relationships with children.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Breakdown of sample of young participants

Breakdown of young participants by age group and method

Age	Method	Number of participants
11-12	Interviews	37
	Groups	74
	Both methods	111
14-16	Interviews	36
	Groups	80
	Both methods	116
Both age groups	Interviews	73
	Groups	154
	Both Methods	227

Breakdown of groups by size

Group size	Number of groups	Total number of participants
6	1	6
7	1	7
8	3	24
10	2	20
11	1	11
12	6	72
14	1	14
Total		154



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22 January 1997

Dear Parent / Guardian

Stirling University Study: Attitudes to Discipline

The Department of Applied Social Science at the University of Stirling is currently conducting research on various topics relating to children and young people. Many of these projects attempt to give particular credence and importance to what young people themselves have to say on various issues of importance in their lives.

As a research student at the University, I am currently undertaking a piece of research concerned with what young people think about ideas on behaviour and discipline.

_____ High School, and _____ Council, have kindly given their full support and co-operation for this project, which we hope will help shape policy ideas for child care and education in Scotland.

I am writing to request permission for your son/daughter to take part in this research at _____ High School. Your child would be involved in a short discussion on ideas of 'behaviour and discipline'. Questions will not be asked on personal experiences. All responses will be recorded anonymously and research data will be treated confidentially.

I would be grateful if you would complete the slip below and return it to the school office as soon as possible. A copy of the research findings and conclusions will be available at the school for comment.

Thank you in advance for your co-operation.

Yours faithfully,

N. Hazel
Researcher

✂ - - - - -
Dear Mr Hazel,

CHILD'S NAME AND CLASS _____

1 I agree/do not agree* to my son/daughter taking part in a University of Stirling study on ideas about discipline. I understand that the research, supported by my child's school, will take place within school hours.

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

2. In addition, I would/would not* be prepared to take part in a short interview to help gauge parental views on this subject.

CONTACT TELEPHONE NUMBER : _____

* Please delete as appropriate.

APPENDIX 3

Interview stimuli

Vignettes

- 1 Whilst you are shopping in Asda in _____, you spot a child with her/his⁷ parent. The child seems to be bored and is starting to behave. The child is running up and down the aisle making noises, and then starts to bang his parent's trolley.

- 2 Tom and Alison are brother and sister living near _____. During the school half term holidays they decide to play a game of Connect Four in their bedroom. Their parents are downstairs talking. Halfway through the game, one of the children decide that they are likely to lose and so tip out the pieces all over the floor. The other child gets annoyed at not being allowed to win and they start to argue. In the end, one hits the other. The child who was hit goes downstairs to tell their parents.

- 3 Susan/Davie¹ is a pupil in S2⁸ at a High School near _____. He is quite a large boy and has recently started picking on some of the smaller pupils in S1. He gets the pupils during lunchtime and after school. Although he has always had fights he has never really been involved in bullying before now.

Phrases and quotations

- 1 Hitting people is wrong and children are people too.

- 2 Spare the rod and spoil the child.

- 3 It never did me any harm.

- 4 The world is going mad if a parent can't slipper their own child.

- 5 Buttocks were designed especially for smacking.

⁷ Present the child's sex to match the sex of respondent. The sex of the child is alternated with every interview if they involve respondents of both sexes.

⁸ Present the child's school year to match the age of the respondent.

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