Assessment of Parental Discipline in Daily Life

Passini, Christina Moses; Pihet, Sandrine; Favez, Nicolas; Schoebi, Dominik

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Abstract

This study explored, in a community sample of mothers of toddlers, parenting beliefs and values, to gain insight into the parent-child relationship. Next, acceptance of specific effective, ineffective, and controversial discipline practices (DPs), and their actual use in daily life were examined. The correspondence between these three levels was investigated. A mixed-method approach consisting of three different methods was used: 1) parenting beliefs and values were explored with Q-methodology; 2) acceptance of the DPs were assessed with the questionnaire Dimensions of Discipline Inventory; and 3) actual use of those DPs in daily-life incidents of discipline was documented using Ecological Momentary Assessment for ten consecutive days. The results showed that the mothers' parenting beliefs and values reflected a warm positive parent-child relationship. As to acceptance of the DPs, the mothers perceived all but one—planned ignoring—of the effective DPs as being acceptable. However, in daily life, those effective DPs were moderately used when the mothers were faced with their misbehaving child, with the exception of 'explaining rules', which was always manifested. The ineffective—yelling—and controversial—smacking—DPs received low acceptance. Nonetheless, in daily life, 'yelling' was employed as often as 'timeout'. These findings suggest the need for more attention to be paid to specific effective DPs and their implementation conditions in order to promote their use.

Key words:

Parental discipline, toddler, mixed-methods, Q-methodology, Ecological Momentary Assessment

Introduction

Parental discipline practices (DPs) have long been of interest to mental health professionals. Key reasons for this are the fact that the discipline encounter is for children an important learning context of how to control themselves and others (Pettit & Bates, 1989), and that compelling evidence has demonstrated the crucial role of effective DPs in promoting optimal child development (Kendziora & O'Leary, 1993). Consequently, a major aim of many parenting interventions is to prevent and change children's behaviour problems by altering their parents' DPs (Woolfenden, Williams, & Peat, 2001). This task usually consists of encouraging or training effective DPs while discouraging or unlearning those that are ineffective.

Discipline effectiveness has generally been defined in two different ways in the literature. Researchers from the behaviour modification perspective consider DPs that produce response suppression as being effective (Apsche & Axelrod, 1983), while those from a cognitive approach consider effective DPs to be those which promote internalisation—the adoption of values and attitudes of the discipline agent (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Consequently, these two approaches favour different discipline strategies. The behaviour modification viewpoint highlights the use of positive reinforcement, such as praise, following desired behaviour, and the use of negative reinforcement, such as timeout, privilege removal, and planned ignoring, following misbehaviour. On the other hand, the cognitive-oriented perspective emphasises the need to provide a child with rationale for desired behaviour and for ceasing to misbehave. A synthesis of both perspectives can been found in the parenting patterns described by Baumrind (1971), which are mainly based on two dimensions. One is responsiveness, which refers to being emotionally supportive of the child, expressing warmth, and responding favourably to the child's needs and demands. The second is demandingness, which describes parents' intentional promotion of own codes of behaviour, their readiness to confront a misbehaving child and their refusal to back down on their demands as a result of child's coercive acts. The three main patterns proposed by Baumrind are authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. Both authoritarian (high demandingness and low responsiveness) and permissive (high responsiveness and low demandingness) parenting patterns are associated with more adverse child outcomes. Whereas the authoritative parenting pattern (high responsiveness and demandingness) is associated with more optimal child outcomes. In their discipline efforts, authoritative parents moderately use reinforcement techniques—positive and negative—as well as reasoning; authoritarian parents tend to overly rely on negative reinforcement techniques and employ coercive methods such as yelling, shaming, and more severe physical punishment; while permissive parents avoid exerting force or other negative sanctions on their child (Baumrind, 1971; Baumrind, Larzelere, & Owens, 2010). Smacking, a subset of

physical punishment, has been the subject of much controversy. While it is considered as ineffective in the cognitive-developmental approach, the behaviour-modification literature provides mixed support for its effectiveness. Authoritative parents have been reported to use normative smacking, which is mild and non-injurious, to correct child's misbehaviour. Drawing on this literature, this study considers reinforcement techniques and reasoning as effective DPs, and yelling as an ineffective DP. Smacking is treated as a disputable technique.

Examining DPs in parents with toddlers is essential because interactions with young children often involve discipline situations where limits need to be set and sometimes enforced (e.g. Patterson, 1980). Indeed, primary-care health professionals, such as paediatricians, are recommended to counsel parents on child rearing and discipline during routine health visits. To this effect, a conceptual framework has been proposed that considers effective discipline as a system which includes three vital elements: 1) supportive positive parent-child relationship that promotes learning; 2) proactive strategies for fostering desired child behaviours (e.g. positive reinforcement); 3) reactive strategies, including methods for decreasing or eliminating undesired behaviours (e.g., negative reinforcement) and punishment (e.g., verbal reprimand, smacking) (Stein & Perrin, 1998). In other words, within this framework, a comprehensive understanding of parental discipline implies knowledge on the quality of the parent-child relationship and specific DPs used with respect to proactive and reactive strategies.

The literature on discipline, however, is yet to adopt this interesting comprehensive approach. Much of the research in early childhood has focused separately on aspects of these three conceptual elements. Of the specific DPs, smacking has received most of the attention (for detailed discussion, see Gershoff, 2002), whereas data on other specific DPs, especially effective ones, are limited (exceptions include, Blampied & Kahan, 1992; Regalado, Sareen, Inkelas, Wissow, & Halfon, 2004). Some reasons offered for this reduced interest include the absence of accepted standards and the fact that the effectiveness of DPs varies with age (Locke & Prinz, 2002). Adopting a comprehensive approach that focuses on the general parent-child relationship as well as on specific DPs will be a step towards addressing the former point. Moreover, an essential complement to this comprehensive approach includes shedding light on three levels: 1) the parenting beliefs and values which influence the parent-child relationship quality, 2) the general acceptance of the DPs that are recommended or discouraged, and 3) their actual use in daily life.

Parenting beliefs and values

For any description of socialisation to be complete, it needs to include an examination of parents' beliefs about what they and their children are doing (Goodnow, 1988). What parents think their parenting role entails, their thoughts about how a child should act and what they value most with respect to bringing up their child, have been reported to influence their daily behaviour as parents. For instance, Luster, Rhoades, and Haas (1989), who looked at how mothers' beliefs and values influence their discipline behaviour with their infants (9-23 months), showed that, when conformity is valued more than self-direction, more restrictive child behaviour control strategies are favoured. This study, nonetheless, did not examine beliefs regarding specific discipline strategies, and the discipline index (which incorporated a home observation measure) employed was mainly global.

Other studies, however, suggest that beliefs and values are unlikely to be linked with parents' actual behaviour (e.g., Thompson & Pearce, 2001). Mental states underlying behaviour, it is argued, are often not tapped by the assessment of beliefs for the following reasons: 1) people tend to respond in a socially desirable way, and 2) beliefs are not readily accessible (for detailed discussion, see Goodnow, 1988). Nonetheless, the interest of studying parenting beliefs and values is not limited to the possible connection between parenting beliefs and their actions: it would also reveal the intuitive psychology that exists and informs the interpretation of everyday life situations of the target parent population. This is valuable information as parents hold a number of views about children and parenting that are not always in agreement with what child development professionals think (Goodnow, 1988).

Acceptance of DPs

Acceptance of specific discipline practices could be defined as judgments by lay-persons, in this case mothers, of the appropriateness of specific DPs for a particular age-group. This is an extension of the "acceptability of treatment" construct commonly found in the behaviour modification literature (e.g. Blampied & Kahan, 1992; Singh & Katz, 1985). Admittedly, acceptance is likely to be influenced by beliefs. However, the latter goes beyond the former and provides information on the perception of what is conventionally expected (see Singh & Katz, 1985). This information is relevant to primary, secondary or tertiary prevention efforts aiming to support parents in their parenting task or to improve their parenting. These efforts often include recommending specific effective DPs and discouraging ineffective ones. Examples of such programmes are those inspired by the behavioural approach (see Jones, Eyberg, Adams, & Boggs, 1998; Morawska & Sanders, 2011). Acceptance rates may help identify DPs that need to be elaborated upon during prevention or treatment in order to minimize resistance to those programmes.

A mixed-method approach to the study of parental DPs

The use of a mixed-method approach for exploring parental DPs is very promising. There is increasing consensus that mixed-method research strategies provide more complete and reliable information about a phenomenon (see Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Different data-collection methods have specific advantages and limitations as to their use.

Q-methodology. Q-methodology is an approach for the study of individuals' viewpoints. It involves providing participants with the opportunity to draw a synthetic picture of themselves (Brown, 1980) by ranking a selected number of important statements on the subject of interest, in this case, parenting beliefs, values and practices. This is followed by post-sorting interviews where participants are asked to provide the reasoning behind their perspective, thus offering rich information for the understanding of the latter. Indeed, this methodology is particularly suited to exploring parenting beliefs and values as it uncovers what is important, with respect to the statements presented, to parents from their own perspective, in contrast to positioning them on dimensions inspired by researchers' theoretical orientations (e.g. high or low on parental nurturance). The Q-sort technique has been reported to reduce the tendency of participants responding in a socially desirable way (Locke & Prinz, 2002). The Child Rearing Practices Report (CRPR) is a 91-item self-descriptive Q-sort used with parents of children from pre-school age to adolescence. Much evidence indicates that descriptions of child rearing using the CRPR correspond to observed parenting behaviour, and that the items adequately describe theoretical-rooted parenting patterns (i.e., Authoritarian and Authoritative; e.g., Kochanska, Kuczynski, & Radke-Yarrow, 1989). The CRPR has been widely employed to examine different aspects of child rearing. These include continuity and change in parents' child rearing (e.g., Roberts, Block, & Block, 1984), variations between functional and dysfunctional families (e.g., Trickett & Susman, 1988), and child rearing differences of families living in different geographical locations (e.g., Lai, Zhang, & Wang, 2000). However, to our knowledge, no study so far has used the CRPR to examine parenting beliefs and values within the Q-methodology framework. Although the authors who developed this instrument employed the Q-methodology favoured data analytical strategy (i.e. inverted factor analysis) to identify clusters of mothers with similar parenting beliefs and values, there was no mention of having conducted post-sorting interviews (Block, 1965). Inasmuch as DPs are part of a constellation of behaviours guided by parenting beliefs and values, exploration of those beliefs and values, using the CRPR within a Q-methodology framework, has the potential to foster the understanding of parents' acceptance and actual behaviour with respect to specific DPs.

Questionnaires. Survey, using questionnaires, is the most widely used method for the description of parental attitudes towards an issue (Holden & Edwards, 1989). The use of self-report questionnaires is efficient in terms of time and effort, although there are some concerns: individuals are unlikely to recall their experiences accurately when required to give a response that averages the latter over a relatively long lapse of time (Trull & Ebner-Priemer, 2009). Nonetheless, assessing parental acceptance of effective and ineffective DPs, with the aid of a questionnaire, could be informative with respect to knowing parents' perception of those DPs.

Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA). EMA is within a framework which involves the collection of data on behavioural, psychological or physiological phenomena while individuals go about their daily lives (Trull & Ebner-Priemer, 2009). It could be applied using paper diary (Nicholl, 2010), handheld computerised devices (Ebner-Priemer & Trull, 2009) or mobile phones (Courvoisier, Eid, Lischetzke, & Schreiber, 2010). Parental DPs are especially good EMA targets. The high frequency of discipline encounters in childhood reduces the likelihood of accurately remembering behaviour manifested in different discipline situations. Thus, whereas DPs questionnaires that are administered once are likely to measure parents' global perception of DPs, EMA tracks their actual use in the course of testing.

Aims of the study

To date, no study has examined, within a mixed-methods framework, parenting beliefs and values, parental acceptance of effective and ineffective DPs, and their actual use in daily life. This study was designed to fill this gap, focusing on one ineffective DP—yelling, one controversial DP—smacking, and five effective DPs: 'explaining rules', 'timeout', 'removal of privileges' (take away toy/other privilege because of misbehaviour), 'social reinforcement' (praising child for ceasing to misbehave/good behaviour), 'planned ignoring' (deliberately not giving attention to misbehaviour). The following questions were asked regarding our sample of community mothers: 1) Do their parenting beliefs and values reflect an overall positive parent-child relationship? 2) Do these mothers find the target effective DPs highly acceptable and reject ineffective and controversial DPs irrespective of demographic factors such as child's age, sex, presence of siblings and mother's work status? 3) Do mothers frequently use effective DPs and avoid ineffective or disputed DPs when faced with their child's misbehaviour in their daily lives? 4) Is there a connection among mothers' beliefs and values, acceptance of specific DPs, and actual use of the latter in daily life discipline encounters?

Method

Sample

Recruitment of participants took place from January to December 2011 by an announcement describing the study's aims, inclusion and exclusion criteria, placed at Lausanne University Hospital, paediatrician practices and day-care centres. To participate, individuals were required to be mothers of toddlers aged 18-36 months and fluent French speakers. Exclusion criteria included any of the following conditions that increase risk for dysfunctional parenting: issues with the child protection agency; moderate to severe depression or being in treatment for depression; target child was born premature or had any identified developmental disorder. Thirty-five mothers responded to the announcement. A short interview was used to screen for inclusion and exclusion criteria. Once eligibility was ascertained, all 35 mothers provided written consent. However, data for this paper are mainly from 32 mothers who participated in the EMA study. Mothers who participated were between the ages of 23 and 48 years (M = 37, $S.D.$ = 5.51), were mainly Swiss (23 mothers, 72%), with only a few Europeans (9 mothers, 22%) and South Americans (2 mothers, 6%). Mothers were married except for 1 single and 2 divorced mothers. About 80% reported having a university degree, 81% worked at least 3 days a week outside the home. Their toddlers' ages ranged between 18 and 35 months (M = 27, $S.D.$ = 6.24), 41% were males and 61% were the only child. The three mothers who declined participation gave hectic home schedules as the reason for refusing the EMA part of the study.

Procedure

The local ethics committee approved the study protocol. Firstly, the mothers were asked to sort, at home, statements selected from the CRPR Q-sort and complete a back-translated version of the Dimensions of Discipline Inventory (DDI) (Straus & Fauchier, 2007) which served as the questionnaire measure. A week later, the mothers were interviewed concerning their ranking of the Q-sort statements. After which they began with DP daily reports for a period of ten consecutive days. This was the EMA part of the study.

The DDI questions were adapted to EMA use and were implemented on a HP iPAQ personal digital assistant (PDA). The questions could be answered using a stylus on a touch screen. One day before the EMA was started, a 20-minute training session with each participant was held. They practised filling in the questions on the PDA with the experimenter. Next, they received information on sampling procedure and the researcher's phone number in case of technical problems or questions on the procedure. The device was programmed to administer 18 reports overall. Until reporting was done, acoustic reminders prompted participants every 20 minutes from 19:30 to 21:00 during the week and from 11:30 to 12:30; 15:30 to 16:30; and 19:30 to 21:00 at the weekends. Upon completing the study, participants received feedback on the proportion of their use of each DP in daily life and the temperament profile of the target child.

Measures

Assessing parenting beliefs and values using Q-methodology. Forty-nine items, with regard to parenting beliefs and values, were selected from the 91-item CRPR. It is noteworthy that, despite the name of the CRPR, it mainly assesses parenting beliefs and values (see Holden & Edwards, 1989), so the current work has used this instrument for this purpose. The selection of those items was guided by the work of Deković, Janssens, and Gerris (1991) and Kochanska *et al.* (1989) (See Tables 1 and 2, and Appendix for the items selected). Participants were given the French translation of the following written instruction: "In trying to gain more understanding of young children, we would like to know what is important to you as a parent and what kind of methods you use in raising your young child (target child). You are asked to indicate your opinions by sorting through a special set of 49 cards that contain statements about bringing up children". The mothers were then required to sort the cards into five piles: 2 = "totally agree", 1 = "agree a little", 0 = "irrelevant/ambivalent", -1 = "disagree a little", -2 = "totally disagree". The number of required cards in each pile was 7, 10, 15, 10, 7, respectively.

Assessing acceptance of specific DPs using the DDI questionnaire. For the purposes of this paper, only seven items of the DDI were utilised and categorised into effective, ineffective, and controversial DPs for the assessment of mothers' acceptance of the respective DPs. It should be noted that in the instruction of the DDI adapted for this study, a mention was made that the questions concerned children between the ages of 18 and 36 months. The items for effective DPs were: 1) explaining rules to child to prevent a repeat of misbehaviour; 2) timeout; 3) take away toy/other privilege because of misbehaviour; 4) praising child for ceasing to misbehave or for good behaviour (henceforth called 'social reinforcement'); 5) planned ignoring. Items for ineffective and controversial DPs were yelling and smacking (using the open hand to hit the buttocks or extremities), respectively. All the DPs items were examined on a 4-point scale (1 = "never acceptable", 2 = "rarely acceptable", 3 = "usually acceptable", 4 = "always acceptable").

Assessing use of specific DPs using EMA. The rates of maternal actual use of the seven target specific DPs were assessed in daily-life discipline incidents. Mothers reported a well recalled misbehaviour of their toddler that occurred in the course of "the past four hours". They then indicated their DPs in response to the misbehaviour, with the aid of the selected DDI items, anchored on a 100-point slider scale (1 = "not at all" to 100 = "totally") which, due to the heavily negatively skewed ratings, were converted to a binary scale (1 to 9 coded as 1 = "no use"; 10 to 100 coded as "use").

Overview of analyses

The participants' Q-sorts of statements on parenting beliefs and values were analysed using the PQ method 2.11 package (Schmolck & Atkinson, 2002). This statistical application uses an inverted Principal Component Analysis followed by rotation (varimax or judgmental). This uncommon usage of factor analysis is employed in the Q-methodology framework for grouping similar Q-sorts (the rankings across all the statements) and providing typical "sorts" called "factors" (for detailed description of this method, see Brown, 1980). In other words, this kind of analysis enables the identification of "types" or "clusters" of participants based on their rankings of all the given statements. In addition, a presentation of the typical ranking of each statement within a cluster is also produced by the analytical procedure. An interpretation of the results is obtained by inspecting the overall configuration of the statements, with special attention paid to those statements placed at the extremes (most agree and most disagree) and the middle values. Statements placed at the extremes reveal areas of high priority while those in the middle indicate areas that are either of little importance or whose priority are highly dependent on specific situations which makes it hard to rank them. Next, as regards mothers' acceptance of DPs, descriptive statistics were computed for mothers' acceptance of each DP and percentage of actual use of the latter over the course of ten days. In addition, variation as a function of demographic factors was examined. Finally, due to non-normal distributions, nonparametric Spearman correlation coefficient was used to examine, for each DP, the association between acceptance and actual use in daily life. Specifically, Q-methodology was used to examine, by *inverted* factor analysis, the typical parenting beliefs and values that impact the parent-child relationship in this sample. Secondly, we computed the mean of mothers' acceptance of specific DPs as examined by the questionnaire. T-test and ANOVA analyses were used to examine the variation of the average acceptance of those DPs as a function of demographic variables. Thirdly, we computed the median percentage of use of the DPs in the daily-life discipline incidents reported over the course of ten days using Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA). Fourthly and lastly, Spearman's correlation coefficient was computed to estimate the connection between acceptance of each DP (described above) and its actual use in daily life (described above).

Results

Q-methodology

A one-factor solution fit the data best, thus making it unnecessary to rotate factors to clearly demarcate clusters. This means that the Q-sorts of all the mothers who participated in this study loaded on a single factor. In other words, the inverted factor analysis revealed only one cluster: a single typical Q-sort was produced that summarised how all the mothers had ranked the 49 CRPR statements. Following close inspection of the

rankings of the typical Q-sort, this factor was descriptively labelled as the "promotion of a positive emotional tone and child socio-emotional development" factor. Presented in Tables 1 and 2 are the statements placed at extreme and middle (zero) values, their Z-scores (having a mean of zero and a standard deviation of 1), and their position on the original scale used. See Appendix for all other statements. The post-sorting interviews revealed that many of the statements placed in the middle-value were not considered as unimportant or inapplicable. But mothers stated that these statements reflected their beliefs and values for only some situations and so they were difficult to rank. Examining the prioritisation of the statements and the post-sorting interviews, two themes (see below) were identified in the interpretation of the single factor uncovered by Q-methodology. Statement number and ranking are provided in parenthesis.

Responsiveness. Mothers in this study valued providing 'comfort and understanding to a child who is scared or upset' (statement no.11/+2), as emotionally supporting a distressed child would enhance their developing sense of security. They also considered it important to demonstrate their feelings, as reflected in their maximising positive emotion expression such as 'hugging, kissing and holding... child' (statement 18/+2), but they occasionally avoid the communication of negative emotions toward child, such as 'shaming [child] when s/he misbehaves' (statement 73/0). Mothers were also aware of their children's social needs in terms of the 'importance for a child to play...' (statement 87/+2). Overall, these statements suggest that mothers in our sample value promoting their children's socio-emotional wellbeing. These mothers also strongly believed in fostering young children's independence as reflected in their prioritising '…child to be curious, to explore, and to question things' (statement 45/+2), and they were of the opinion that *sometimes* providing a child with opportunities to '...make ...decisions for him/herself' (statement 26/0) was important.

Open communication. Mothers of toddlers in this study valued open communication. They '...respect [their] child's opinions and encourage him/her to express them' (statement 1/+2), even when it is contrary to their views; and they also believed that not '...allow[ing] ...child to say bad things about/his her teachers' (statement 27/0) *sometimes*—in situations where s/he has good reasons to do so—would be arbitrary and disrespectful to child. Perhaps due in part to frequent verbal exchanges between mothers and their children, these mothers *sometimes* 'find it interesting and educational to be with ...child for long periods' (statement 77/0).

INSERT TABLES 1 AND 2 ABOUT HERE

Acceptance of DPs and their actual use in daily life

We assessed compliance with the EMA procedure by computing the number of completed sessions out of the 18 planned sessions. Though only few mothers (28%) completed all scheduled sessions (i.e., 100% compliance), the overall compliance rate was high, with 83% (*SD* = 16) of completed reports on average. There were no missing data within completed EMA sessions. All 32 mothers also provided acceptance ratings and performed the Q-sort. Table 3 shows mothers' average acceptance of each DP and their median percentage of use of the latter over the course of ten days. Looking at each effective DP, it is notable that: 1) 'explaining rules' received the highest acceptance rating—it also had the smallest standard deviations, with its actual use in daily life being maximal; 2) 'social reinforcement' received the second-highest acceptance rate, but was the least used in daily life; 3) 'timeout' acceptance rate was high, but it had the largest standard deviation, meaning there was high variation across the mothers; use in daily life was rather low; 4) 'removal of privileges' received fairly high acceptance rating and was the second most used effective DP in daily life; 5) 'planned ignoring' was the least accepted, and its use in daily life was rather low. With respect to the ineffective DPs, it is noteworthy that the acceptance rate for 'smacking' was, on average, higher than for 'yelling'. However, the latter DP was used more often than the former in daily life.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Demographic factors. A series of *t*-test (for 2-level factors) and ANOVA (for 3-level factors) analyses showed that there were no significant differences in acceptance ratings of the seven DPs as a function of a mother's age (aged $34 \leq Vs \geq 35$), work-time status (2.5 days $\leq$ Vs $\geq$ 3 days), and presence of siblings. Additionally, the analyses indicated that mothers' acceptance ratings of all but one of the target DPs did not vary with toddler's age (18-24 months; 25-29 months; 29-36 months) or sex. However, there was a tendency for mothers to find the use of 'planned ignoring' procedure more acceptable for girls than boys ($t = 2.96$, $df = 33$, $p < .08$), and university-educated mothers were significantly more likely to reject 'smacking' than those without a university degree ($t = 1.81$, $df = 33$, $p < .01$).

Association between acceptance of DPs and behaviour in daily life

The nonparametric correlation between acceptance and daily use of each DP is shown in Table 3. A significant correlation between acceptance of DP and its use in daily life was observed only for 'timeout' and 'smacking'; whereas this association was moderate for the former, it was strong for the latter.

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

Discussion

To date, this is the first study in a community sample of mothers of toddlers that has jointly used Q-methodology, questionnaire and EMA to examine parenting beliefs and values, acceptance of seven specific effective, ineffective, and disputable DPs and their actual use in daily-life discipline incidents.

Parenting beliefs and values

The picture of responsiveness revealed by these mothers Q-sorts is consistent with the authoritative parenting pattern in terms of responsiveness to child's needs and promotion of autonomous self-will (Baumrind, 1971). The 'typical' way of sorting the statements suggests that these mothers listen to their children, were responsive to the latter's socio-emotional needs, and promoted their sense of autonomy. These are some of the main features of authoritative child rearing (Baumrind, 1971). Interestingly, unlike authoritative mothers of preschoolers described by Baumrind et al. (2010), the responsive mothers in our sample did not embrace positive and negative reinforcement strategies, specifically, '...taking away a privilege...' (see Appendix, statement 60/-1) as a consequence of child misbehaviour and providing child with extra privileges when s/he behaves well (see Appendix, statement 61/-1). Although they objected to the view that 'physical punishment... [is] the best way of disciplining' (statement 14/-2), during the interviews many mothers of our sample admitted smacking their child occasionally, indicating they were not strictly against confronting a misbehaving child as is characteristic of the permissive configuration.

That all the mothers who participated in this study shared this point of view, irrespective of demographic factors including, age, nationality, number of children and marital status, is suggestive of decades of influence of child-development and parent-education experts, especially those from the psychodynamic perspective, who have placed strong emphasis on the emotional relationship in parenting, as has often been observed (e.g. Garcia, 2011). Thus, these findings indicate that the parent-child context is loving and secure, a necessary condition for discipline effectiveness (Stein & Perrin, 1998).

Acceptability of effective and ineffective DP

Four out of five effective DPs examined (explaining rules, social reinforcement, timeout, and removal of privileges) received high acceptance ratings. This is a positive message for prevention and parenting interventions that aim to support or teach the use of these strategies. In accordance with prior studies (e.g., Jones *et al.*, 1998), 'social reinforcement' received one of the higher ratings. The fact that 'explaining rules to the child' was, on average, rated highest, points to the importance of communication with the child for these well-functioning mothers, as also observed in the Q-methodology findings. This finding supports the cognitive-oriented perspective that reasoning with child is a crucial discipline response. In addition, these results suggest

that these mothers were more favourable to DPs that are used for increasing positive behaviours than those for decreasing negative ones. This interpretation is in keeping with the Q-methodology results which revealed that mothers were more focused on proactive interaction with child than on strategies that are reactive, that is, for reducing misbehaviours once they have occurred. Nonetheless, it is crucial for professionals working with parents of young children to stress that taking an approach that aims at increasing positive child behaviour, though necessary, is insufficient (see Stein & Perrin, 1998). Indeed, there will be moments when parents will have to deal with misbehaviours, and in such moments 'timeout' and 'removal of privileges' are more effective than 'social reinforcement' (Hobbs, Walle, & Caldwell, 1984; Little & Kelley, 1989) and 'explaining rules' in reducing child noncompliance.

Contrary to the high acceptance of the other effective DPs, 'planned ignoring' was considered "rarely acceptable", especially by mothers of male toddlers who are known to manifest more challenging behaviour. This is surprising because there is empirical evidence of its effectiveness in reducing misbehaviour when successfully implemented (e.g. Hester, Hendrickson, & Gable, 2009). It is possible that the unfavourable rating reflects inadequate knowledge of this technique. Consequently, when this technique is a component of parenting advice or programme, it would be valuable to provide ample information on the necessary conditions for its effectiveness, such as identifying the reinforcing behaviour, contingency, immediacy and consistency (Hester *et al.*, 2009). This is especially relevant for professionals, such as paediatricians, who habitually include discipline advice in their provision of anticipatory guidance to families, and perceive 'planned ignoring' as an acceptable behaviour management technique for dealing with child challenging behaviour (Arndorfer, Allen, & Aliazireh, 1999; Stein & Perrin, 1998).

'Yelling', an ineffective DP, and 'smacking', a controversial DP, were considered "rarely acceptable", with the larger standard deviations of the latter indicating a wide variation of this perception among the mothers. In contrast, the Q-methodology data revealed a consensus of strong opposition to the consideration of physical punishment as the best method for obtaining child compliance. It is likely that 'smacking' was not totally rejected because the mothers did not equate it with *physical punishment*. The referent used may have been the mild and non-injurious smacking used occasionally by Baumrind's authoritative parents. Alternatively, these mothers' perception might reflect a consideration of smacking as recourse for parents when they are out of other child management strategies.

The actual use of effective and ineffective DPs in daily life

'Explaining the rules' was the effective DP most utilised (manifested in all the discipline incidents) by the mothers when faced with their toddlers' misbehaviour in daily life. On the contrary, there was a relatively low use of the other effective DPs. This might be because the misdeeds were mainly minor daily challenges and explaining what was expected of the toddlers sufficed most times. However, there is evidence that explaining the rules is not always effective when used with young children (e.g. Blum, Williams, Friman, & Christophersen, 1995). In fact, it has been reported to induce internalisation of parents' demands only when charged with maternal affection and moralisation: which often occurs when child causes distress to others (Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, & King, 1979). Besides, our empirical data show that, in response to child misbehaviour, these mothers yelled as often as they used some of the effective DPs; this suggests that there is room for increasing the use of the latter.

Correspondence between parenting beliefs, acceptance and use

'Timeout' was less used in daily-life discipline incidents compared to 'removal of privileges', whereas the acceptability ratings showed the opposite pattern. This finding suggests that there might be some practical concerns in implementing 'timeout'. Indeed, the post Q-sort interviews revealed that many mothers question the effectiveness of timeout based on their past experiences. To illustrate, one mother stated that: "I am not so sure timeout is an effective strategy although I use it because I have not found something better. My youngest child (20 months) takes it as a joke... she leaves the corner where she is placed with a smile... I have to force her to stay there and she does not appreciate this... I do not like to do this... I get the impression that she does not understand...".

Regarding 'social reinforcement' (praise), the extremely low rate of its use by mothers in daily-life discipline incidents, compared to their high acceptance of it, is striking. One reason that could explain this discrepancy is cultural unfamiliarity with this DP in French-speaking Switzerland. This idea is supported by the Q-methodology result that showed mothers rather disagreed with this child-rearing practice. Consequently, even when individuals indicate their acceptance of this DP, it may still be necessary to emphasise its modelling and training when there is suspicion that it is not a common cultural practice.

Although half of the sample smacked their child at least once in the course of the ten days of EMA, 'smacking' was rare compared to the other DPs investigated. It should be noted that the acceptance rate for 'smacking' was rather low ("rarely acceptable"), suggesting that, although the mothers did not view physical punishment as the best way to gain child compliance (see Q-methodology result), they did not totally reject it either. Two points underscored by these results are the importance of: 1) understanding why warm mothers who

mostly disapprove of smacking a child, sometimes do so; and 2) putting the use of smacking in perspective by simultaneously considering parents' use of other DPs. Hence, to the extent a parent combines different DPs, singly considering the impact of smacking (or any other DP) on child outcome may provide an incomplete picture: for instance, co-occurring DPs may be responsible for effects attributed to an individual DP.

Lastly, the examination of the association between acceptance, for each DP, and its actual use in daily-life discipline incidents revealed only two significant relations: for 'smacking' and 'timeout'. The strong positive correlation between acceptance of 'smacking' and its actual use in daily life (which also means that the less it is accepted, the less it is used), highlights the importance of anti-smacking campaigns aimed at changing attitudes and suggests that they might be effective. The moderate association between 'timeout' acceptance and daily use, as well as the mostly non-significant associations between the acceptance of the other DPs and their use, indicate that efforts to influence acceptance of effective DPs should involve implementation conditions considerations in order to foster use once acceptance has taken place.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. The convenience sampling procedure employed probably led to a self-selection of participants, with a likely overrepresentation of mothers interested in and aware of child-development issues. Also, the high education level and small size of the sample make it necessary to exercise caution in generalising these findings. In particular, the effect of demographic factors and the correlations between acceptance and daily use of DPs might have been underrated due to our study's limited power. In fact only large effects or correlations could be detected at the significance threshold of $p < .05$. A replication in a larger sample would thus be desirable. Nevertheless, this exploratory study allowed the identification of a number of large size effects with practical implications. Equally important, the participants were all mothers and their parenting beliefs, acceptance of DPs and daily use of these may not reflect those of fathers. Additionally, contrary to the common practice in Q-methodology studies, our sample was homogenous and the child-rearing statements were not derived from the population from which this sample was drawn. The CRPR items were developed over forty years ago and many of the statements (e.g., physical punishment as the best way of disciplining a child; I express affection by hugging, kissing, and holding my child) that were at that time divisive have become the mainstream, at least in a well-functioning and highly educated sample. Thus, the single dominant viewpoint held by mothers in our study probably reflects the fact that there were few conflict-provoking statements. However, this study's use of the CRPR was dictated by the goal to provide first information on the application within the Q-methodology framework of this widely employed child rearing

instrument. Future research following the Q-methodology approach would benefit by using the CRPR in a heterogeneous sample or by generating child-rearing statements in the sample being studied.

Furthermore, the target DPs' acceptability and daily use were measured with single items. Though this method is not standard in the study of parenting, some studies have used it to examine parents' discipline responses in certain conditions (when the focus is on specific discipline techniques; e.g., Regalado et al., 2004). Moreover, the use of single-item measures is common and has been demonstrated to be valid in a number of other research fields such as quality of life (e.g., Zimmerman et al., 2006), self-esteem (e.g., Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001), or readiness to change (e.g., Cook & Perri, 2004). Advantages of using single-item questions include brevity, high cost-effectiveness and reduced participant burden. Because our study aimed to use identical items to assess acceptance and daily use (which implied repeated measurements), efficiency was a major concern. Besides, excepting 'smacking', the interpretation by each mother of the single-item questions was most likely identical for attention was paid to use clear, simple, and concrete language to describe the target DPs. Nonetheless, the controversial DP 'smacking' might be better assessed with a multi-item measure covering its different forms (mild vs. strong; injurious vs. non-injurious).

To summarise, this study was conducted in a community sample of mothers of toddlers, using a mixed-method approach. The findings showed that these mothers espoused a warm parenting view with less focus on reinforcement techniques of child management. They perceived all but one (planned ignoring) of five target effective DPs as being acceptable. However, a look at these mothers behaviour in daily-life discipline incidents showed that they moderately used those effective DPs, with the exception of 'explaining rules', which was always manifested. Although the ineffective and controversial DPs—yelling and smacking—examined received low acceptance rates, 'yelling' was more commonly employed. In fact, it was utilised as often as 'timeout'. These findings suggest that more awareness needs to be raised concerning specific effective DPs and their implementation conditions in order to promote their use.

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Table 1. Statements of the Child Rearing Practices Report (CRPR) that were frequently prioritised by mothers of toddlers ($N = 32$)

No.[a]	Statements[b]	Ranking
	Child-rearing beliefs and values with which I totally agree	
1	I respect my child's opinions and encourage him/her to express them	2
11	I feel a child should be given comfort and understanding when s/he is scared or upset	2
18	I express affection by hugging, kissing, and holding my child	2
40	I joke and play with my child	2
45	I encourage my child to be curious, to explore and question things	2
52	I make sure my child knows that I appreciate what s/he tries to accomplish	2
87	I believe it's very important for a child to play and get plenty of fresh air	2
	Child-rearing beliefs and values with which I totally disagree	
5	I often feel angry with my child	-2
14	I believe physical punishment to be the best way of disciplining	-2
15	I believe that a child should be seen and not heard	-2
32	I feel my child is a bit of a disappointment to me	-2
55	I teach my child to keep control of his/her feelings at all times.	-2
63	I believe that too much affection and tenderness can harm or weaken a child.	-2
69	There is a good deal of conflict between my child and me	-2

[a]The original item number of the CRPR. [b]The statements were selected from the CRPR (Block, 1965). Mothers placed these statements on either 2 or -2 values of the scale: 2 = "totally agree", 1 = "agree a little", 0 = "irrelevant/ambivalent", -1 = "disagree a little", -2 = "totally disagree".

Table 2. Statements of the Child Rearing Practices Report (CRPR) that were frequently classified as irrelevant or sometimes important, and their *Z*-scores ($N = 32$)

No.[a]	Statements[b]	*Z*-score
7	I punish my child by putting him/her off somewhere by himself/herself for a while.	0.15
8	I watch closely what my child eats and when s/he eats.	0.36
17	I think it is good practice for a child to perform in front of others.	-0.30
26	I let my child make many decisions for him/herself	0.44
27	I will not allow my child to say bad things about his/her teachers	-0.27
28	I worry about the bad and sad things that can happen to a child as s/he grows up.	-0.02
29	I teach my child that in one way or another punishment will find him/her when s/he is bad.	-0.42
35	I give up some of my own interests because of my child.	0.02
36	I tend to spoil my child	-0.16
56	I try to keep my child from fighting.	0.12
62	I enjoy having the house full of children	0.09
73	I let my child know how ashamed and disappointed I am when s/he misbehaves.	-0.12
77	I find it interesting and educational to be with my child for long periods	0.42
83	I control my child by warning him/her about the bad things that can happen to him/her.	-0.34
91	I believe it is unwise to let children play a lot by themselves without supervision from grown-ups.	-0.04

[a]The original item number of the Child Rearing Practices Report (CRPR). [b]The statements were selected from the CRPR (Block, 1965). Mothers placed these statements in the middle point of the scale: 2 = "totally agree", 1 = "agree a little", 0 = "irrelevant/ambivalent", -1 = "disagree a little", -2 = "totally disagree".

Table 3. Acceptance rating's mean and standard deviation (*SD*, in parenthesis) for each of the seven DPs, and median percentage of the DPs' usage over the course of ten days ($N = 32$)

DP	Mean (SD)	Median % of use
Effective DP		
Explaining rules	3.88	100%
	(0.34)	
Social reinforcement	3.84	3%
	(0.37)	
Timeout	3.06	19%
	(0.80)	
Removal of privileges	2.91	23%
	(0.69)	
Planned ignoring	1.62	19%
	(0.69)	
Ineffective DP		
Smacking	1.87	3%
	(0.66)	
Yelling	1.63	18%
	(0.49)	

Note. Acceptance scale: 1 = "never acceptable", 2 = "rarely acceptable", 3 = "usually acceptable", 4 = "always acceptable"

Table 4. Nonparametric correlation (Spearman's ρ) between acceptance of specific discipline practices (DPs) and actual use in daily life ($N = 32$)

DPs	***P***
Explaining rule	-.20
Timeout	.36*
Removal of privileges	.09
Social reinforcement	-.09
Planned ignoring	.10
Yelling	.27
Smacking	.72**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Appendix. Statements of the Child Rearing Practices Report (CRPR) with which mothers of toddlers (N = 32) agreed or disagreed a little

No.[a]	Statements[b]	Ranking
	Child-rearing beliefs and values with which I agree a little	
2	I encourage my child always to do his/her best	1
19	I find some of my greatest satisfactions in my child	1
22	I usually take into account my child's preferences in making plans for the family.	1
34	I am easy going and relaxed with my child.	1
39	I trust my child to behave as s/he should, even when I am not with him/her.	1
44	I think one has to let a child take many chances as s/he grows up and tries new things.	1
58	When I am angry with my child, I let him/her know it	1
72	I like to have some time for myself, away from my child	1
75	I encourage my child to be independent of me	1
76	I make sure I know where my child is and what s/he is doing	1
	Child-rearing beliefs and values with which I disagree a little	
6	If my child gets into trouble, I expect him/her to handle the problem mostly by himself/herself.	-1
20	I prefer that my child not try things if there is a chance s/he will fail	-1
33	I expect a great deal of my child	-1
48	I sometimes feel that I am too involved with my child	-1
50	I threaten punishment more often than I actually give it	-1
59	I think a child should be encouraged to do things better than others	-1
60	I punish my child by taking away a privilege s/he otherwise would have had	-1
61	I give my child extra privileges when s/he behaves well	-1
70	I do not allow my child to question my decisions	-1
79	I instruct my child not to get dirty while s/he is playing	-1

[a]The original item number of the CRPR. [b]The statements were selected from the CRPR (Block, 1965). Mothers placed these statements on either 1 or -1 values of the scale: 2 = “totally agree”, 1 = “agree a little”, 0 = “irrelevant/ambivalent”, -1 = “disagree a little”, -2 = “totally disagree”.