

# **MOTIVATION FOR CHANGE IN THE DISCIPLINE OF CHILDREN**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Since becoming the first English speaking country to legislate against the physical discipline of children in 2007, there has been much debate in New Zealand for and against the parental practice of smacking. For some it has meant a welcome amendment to legislation that protects the human rights of children, for others it raises fears that parents can be criminalised for smacking their children and that the rights of parents to discipline their child, as they see fit, are being eroded. Working for an organisation that fully supports the Amendment to Section 59 of the Crimes Act, 1961 and that promotes the human rights of children; the motivating factors that encourage a parent to stop the practice of physically disciplining their child became of interest to the researcher for this thesis. Ten participants, who had used physical discipline and who had made a decision to stop the practice, were recruited to take part in a qualitative study. The data collected was analysed through a thematic analysis process using five motivational contexts found in previous research on the topic. The five contexts were experiential, relational, biographical, regulatory and ideological (Davis, 1999). The findings of the research for this thesis concur with the previous research and add further information about the motivating factors. The findings also identify the strategies that parents have found useful to achieve success in their endeavour to change their disciplinary practice. Furthermore the importance of and the distinction between the human rights of the child and parental rights have been highlighted.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

### Development of research topic

Since the repeal of Section 59 of the Crimes Act, 1961 in New Zealand, there has been much debate about the value and effectiveness of the corporal punishment of children. For some it has meant a welcome Amendment that protects the human rights of children; arguably, the most vulnerable members of society. For others it raises fears that parents can be criminalised for smacking their children and that the rights of parents to discipline their child, as they see fit, are being eroded.

One of the researcher's areas of employment is within an organisation working with families. The organisation carries a zero tolerance for violence and its slogan is 'children come first.' As part of the researcher's role within the organisation a parenting course was developed and facilitated from a social constructivist perspective, with the emphasis on recognising the expertise of the participants. It was apparent that some of the parents attending the group had done so because they wanted to find alternative disciplinary measures to smacking.

Following a literature search that provided evidence for and against the use of smacking or spanking as a means of punishment (Larzelere, Sather, Schneider, Larson, & Pike, 1998; Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005; Pettit, Bates, & Dodge, 1997; Roberts, 2000; Rodriguez & Sutherland, 1999; Smith, 2006; Thompson, Raynor, Cornah, Stevenson, & Sonunga-Barke, 2002; Walsh, 2002; Whipple & Richey, 1997; Whitney, Tajima, Herrenkohl, & Huang, 2006; Wood, Hassall, & Hook, 2008) and having observed in the parenting groups and in family work that parents do take steps to achieve non-physical discipline, it was noticed that very little research had been published that explored the motivating factors that supported parents to make the decision to stop smacking. Consequently the following questions emerged, on which the research for this thesis was based:

When parents who smack make a decision to not smack, what factors motivate the decision and what strategies are useful in supporting success?

The purpose of the research for this thesis is to inform organisations and practitioners who work with families, strategies to motivate and action change in parental disciplinary practice in order to promote the use of non-physical discipline.

A further literature search revealed a paper written in 1999 and published in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (Davis, 1999). In this paper Davis agreed that there was very little information available about the cessation of corporal punishment or, as defined in his study, spanking. Through semi-structured interviews of 22 parents who had been recruited through the print media, Davis analysed and divided the data into five contexts in which the cessation of corporal punishment took place. These contexts were: experiential, ideological, regulatory, relational and biographical. Davis concluded that the cessation of hitting, slapping and spanking within these contexts brought forward new meanings and beliefs about corporal punishment that “...turn old beliefs into excuses and defined non-spanking as progress” (Davis, 1999, p. 506). Davis also reported that his study held the responsibility of evaluating strategies used, to achieve success in the cessation of physical discipline.

To further the research of Davis (1999) the research for this thesis presents a qualitative study in a New Zealand context. The research has taken an epistemological position of interpretism where there is an understanding that the meaning that individuals make of their lives, is in a context of their lived experience, conditions and the historical context in which they live (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). This understanding includes the lived experience of the researcher who in this case used non-physical discipline with her children as they were growing up and has a commitment to upholding the human rights of the child by promoting non-physical disciplinary practice in parenting.

Following the approval of the research proposal by the Massey University Ethics Committee, ten participants were recruited through the organisation in which the researcher is employed. The data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The findings of the data were both explanatory and formerly evaluative (Alston & Bowles, 2003; Babbie, 2007; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The explanatory findings included data that explained how the decision to not smack was reached and

identified the motivating factors. The formatively evaluative findings included data that identified the strategies that participants used, to succeed in their efforts to use non-physical discipline in their parenting practice. These findings provide useful information for the improvement of parenting programmes and the development of further research. The following section of this chapter outlines the contents of each chapter in sequence.

### **Chapter contents**

Given the proliferation of literature on this topic in New Zealand, a great deal of focus was required by the researcher, to resist the temptation of becoming embroiled in the debate about the legislation on child discipline. It does however, have a place in this thesis to contextualise the topic. The literature review chapter begins with a section on the various definitions of physical discipline. This clarifies that the research for this thesis is not to further report on the physical abuse of children, but to explore the sub-abusive practice of smacking or spanking. Following this, the literature review contextualises this study by reporting on the debate, followed by the prevalence of and attitudes toward the physical discipline of children in an international and New Zealand context.

The prevalence and attitudes section of the literature review is followed by a section on the legislation for child discipline, specifically with a focus on the Amendment to Section 59 of the Crimes Act, 1961, which was passed in New Zealand in 2009, removing the use of force by way of correction being used as a defence against child abuse. This section also briefly reports on the role of religion in legislation historically and internationally, details the countries that have legislated against physical discipline world-wide and reports on the outcome of the national referendum (2009) held in New Zealand, on the change of the child discipline law.

A review of the motivation to change follows the legislation section and explores some theory on motivating factors for changing behaviour and the process for the implementation of the change. Finally in the Literature Review chapter, the section on the motivation to change is followed by a section on previous research that has reported findings on the motivation to stop the practice of child physical discipline.

One of these studies provides a framework on which to base the thematic analysis for the data gathered from the research for this thesis.

The methodology chapter follows the literature review and includes the ethical considerations and the research design. The appendices at the end of this thesis includes the documents used in the process of conducting the research and the findings from the data collected are detailed in the chapter following the methodology chapter.

The findings chapter is broken down into sections that follow the semi-structured questions in the interview. This chapter starts with some of the sample demographics and then details each participant's response to being asked about the physical discipline they had used on their children, the context in which the physical discipline arose and the discipline they had received as a child. It then moves on to the motivation to change section of the findings, which details the participants responses to being asked about the change in their use of physical discipline under the categories experiential, regulatory, ideological, relational and biographical identified by Davis (1999). These categories are discussed in fuller detail in the previous research section of chapter two.

To further the research of Davis (1999) questions were also asked about the beliefs participants held about physical discipline before and after the decision to stop using physical discipline was made. This not only gave data on their before and after beliefs, but also brought forward some comments about intergenerational changes in attitudes and beliefs that are outlined in the section following. There was some data collected on the Amendment to Section 59 legislation, however the interviews took place prior to the national referendum in August 2009, consequently no data was collected on this. There was however, data collected on the participants responses to the idea of others physically disciplining their child and this is detailed in the section prior to the useful strategies for achieving success section. The summary of the findings is the final section of the findings chapter.

In the final chapter, the discussion section analyses and discusses the findings in the context of previous research and the emergent themes and potential areas for future research are detailed in the conclusion.

Finally in this introduction it is important to mention the use of language in the writing up of the research for this thesis. In the writing up of the findings it was necessary to use gender neutral language to protect the confidentiality of the sole male participant. Initially the gender neutral language used was 'her/his' and 's/he'. On reading and reviewing this use of gender neutral language it proved difficult and distracting for the reader and was consequently changed to 'they' and 'their'. Also throughout this thesis the phrase 'to not smack' is used, rather than the phrase 'not to smack'. The split infinity 'to not smack' is used intentionally, to externalise the behaviour (Bird, 2004; Morgan 2000) and define the act of 'not smacking' as a conscious activity rather than a passive non-activity, as all the participants had made the decision to not smack at some point in their parenting practice.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

In reviewing the literature for the topic of the physical discipline of children, it became apparent to the researcher that there is a wide variety of titles and definitions used to describe the practice. Because of this and the lack of clear distinction between the act of physical discipline and abuse, the literature review for this thesis begins with the various definitions and titles given to this disciplinary practice.

There is also a wide variety of opinion about the benefits and harm of the physical discipline of children. Consequently the definition of physical punishment is followed by the debate about the physical discipline of children and the impact it has on the child and family relationships, in an international and New Zealand context.

To provide a wide sociological and historical context to the study, the debate about the appropriateness of physical discipline is followed by historical and recent literature regarding the prevalence of, and attitudes toward, the physical discipline of children, in an international and New Zealand context.

Because of the current debate about the Amendment to Section 59 of the Crimes Act, 1961, unique to New Zealand, the literature review for this research has also included a section on legislation regarding the physical discipline of children internationally and in New Zealand. This includes the Amendment to Section 59 of the Crimes Act, 1961 in New Zealand and the subsequent results of the national referendum that took place in August 2009.

Finally, because this study aims to explore and explain the motivation that parents have to change from the physical to non-physical discipline of their children, this literature review comments on the models of motivation and a model of the process of change. It also details previous research that has studied the topic.

## Definitions of Smacking

In the research of literature for this study the terms used for smacking a child have varied. The commonly used term in New Zealand is the term 'physical discipline' or 'physical punishment' (Carswell, 2001; Dobbs, 2007; Dodds, 2005; Durrant, 2006; Marshall & Marshall, 1997; Millichamp, Martin, & Langley, 2006; Ritchie & Ritchie, 1981; Smith, Gollop, Taylor, & Marshall, 2005; Smith & Lawrence, 2009). The terms 'physical punishment' and 'physical discipline' are also used in the United States along with 'spanking', 'smacking', 'paddling' and more widely, 'corporal punishment' (Baron, 2005; Combs-Orme & Cain, 2008; Davis, 1999; Donnelly & Straus, 2005; Giles-Sims, Straus, & Sugarman, 1995; Gracia & Herrero, 2008; Ispa & Halgunseth, 2004; Straus & Stewart, 1999; Zolotor, Theodore, Chang, Berkoff, & Runyan, 2008). All of these terms are also used in Britain, Europe and other parts of the world (Alyahri & Goodman, 2008; Ben-Arieh & Haj-Yahia, 2008; Benjet & Kazdin, 2003; Brownlie & Anderson, 2006; Janis-Norton, 2005; Nobes, Smith, Upton, & Heverin, 1999; Roberts, 2000; Taylor, 2003; Thompson, et al., 2002).

It is argued that using the term 'physical discipline' or 'spanking' presents 'corporal punishment' in a more positive light. For example, Straus & Stewart (1994) propose that the terms physical discipline and punishment suggest legality of violent acts. There is also some debate in the literature about the difference in meanings of the terms 'discipline' and 'punishment'. Holden argues that 'discipline' is not the same as 'punishment' and that "Discipline is guidance of children's moral, emotional and physical development, enabling children to take responsibility for themselves when they are older" (Holden, 2002 as cited in Smith, Gollop, Taylor, & Marshall, 2004, p. 10). Wissow (2002) agrees by saying that 'discipline is the process of teaching children the values and normative behaviours of their society (as cited in Smith, et al., 2005).

On the other hand according to Ritchie and Ritchie (1981) ".....when speaking of children most New Zealanders use the word 'discipline' to mean 'physical assault' of a kind which, were it to occur between adults, would be criminal" (p. ix).

Throughout the literature, the varying degrees of severity of physical discipline can be placed on a continuum. This continuum starts at the lower end with a light smack,



considered to be appropriate discipline by many parents, to ensure the development of their children. The continuum ends at the higher end with severe, sometimes fatal, injury. Identifying the line between an abusive and subabusive parental act of discipline has proved complex and no agreement has been reached among researchers (Whitney, et al., 2006) although according to Graziano (1994) even though subabusive violence such as smacking does not come under the common definition of abuse, it is violence nevertheless.

Straus and Gelles use the definition of 'minor violence' to describe grabbing or shoving and slapping or spanking. They also define 'corporal punishment' as "...a legally permissible violent act carried out as part of the parenting role" (Straus & Gelles, 1990 as cited in Whipple & Richey, 1997, p. 434). Another definition from Straus is that 'corporal punishment' is "...the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain, but not injury, for purposes of correction or control of the child's behaviour" (Straus & Stewart, 1994, p. 4). Later, in 2008, Straus described 'corporal punishment' as 'primordial violence' as it is the first experience of violence that a child has and it teaches the child that violence is socially acceptable (Straus, 2008).

Although the generic terms used in the literature to describe physical discipline are varied, they are consistent with the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, a United Nations committee set up to monitor the rights of the child. It defines corporal or physical punishment as:

...any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light. Most involves hitting ('smacking', 'slapping', 'spanking') children, with the hand or with an implement - a whip, stick, belt, shoe, wooden shoe, etc (Committee on the Rights of the Child as cited in Wood, et al., 2008, p. 54).

The above definition by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child is the definition that the researcher has used for this thesis. The terms most commonly used are 'physical' and/or 'corporal' when used with the words 'discipline' and/or 'punishment'. These terms cover other generic terms such as 'smacking', 'spanking',

'paddling' etc. Terms used in the literature review generally correspond with the language used in the individual pieces of literature reviewed.

Finally, in this section, children have also had a voice in literature about how they define 'physical discipline'. According to a 7 year old girl "A smack is parents trying to hit you, but instead of calling it a hit they call it a smack" (As cited in Pritchard, 2006, p. 2).

The terms used to define the physical discipline of children are varied and controversial with no agreement about the difference between abusive and non-abusive practice. The complexities of this are further demonstrated in the debate about its appropriateness, consequently the following section explores the literature on the debate about the physical discipline of children, in an international and New Zealand context.

## **The Debate**

International literature on the effects of the physical discipline of children is prolific with less evidence for its effectiveness and more evidence for the negative effect it has on children and family relationships. Frequent use of corporal punishment has been linked to aggressive behaviour and problems such as delinquency, child abuse perpetuated by the child as an adult (Strassburg et al., 1994 as cited in Holden, Thompson, Zamborano, & Marshall, 1997; Straus & Stewart, 1994; Foglia, 1997; Swinford et al., 2000 as cited in Walsh, 2002) and resentment toward parents (Graziano & Namaste, 1990 as cited in Holden, et al., 1997). Other research suggests that the effects of corporal punishment are small and have a different impact at different ages (Deater-Deckard et al., 1996; Larzelere, 1996 as cited in Walsh, 2002).

Straus, a much cited social scientist, has been a major contributor to publishing research that validates the detrimental impact of corporal punishment. Since 1974 Straus has written about violence in the family and the correlation between the corporal punishment of children and the subsequent anti-social behaviour, depression and suicide of the child in adulthood (Donnelly & Straus, 2005; Straus, 2008; Straus &

Stewart, 1994, 1999). This is supported by a study which reported on the relationship between corporal punishment and mental health issues (Good, 1999).

According to Straus and Stewart (1994) "...ending corporal punishment is one of the most important steps to achieving a less violent world" (p. xiv). He compared the hitting of children to the hitting of spouses, proposing that legally, the only difference between them, in the United States, is that hitting a child remains legal, whereas hitting a spouse is now illegal. He also identified the similarities between the corporal punishment of children and other acts of violence reporting that both are intentional and both cause pain. Despite this the corporal punishment of children is not seen to cause injury, unlike other acts of violence (Straus & Stewart, 1994).

In a 1994 United States study, Graziano called for research into the use of what was described as sub-abusive violence, otherwise defined as smacking or spanking. The study reported that, in the United States, physical discipline at the lower end of the continuum of physical violence toward children was generally accepted as an appropriate way to be a good parent. He also reported that there were at least five reasons why the sub-abusive or socially acceptable levels of physical discipline needed to be studied, as well as the abusive. The first reason he gave was that because the corporal punishment of children was part of an American tradition, supported by religious convictions, the practice remained prevalent. Secondly more research was needed in order to understand the incongruence between the parental act of nurturing and protecting and the act of inflicting pain on the child. The third reason he gave was that sub-abusive violence could lead to abusive violence and the fourth was that sub-abusive violence taught children violent behaviours. The fifth reason for needing to study the sub-abusive discipline of children was the humanitarian argument of children's rights, because sub-abusive violence caused unnecessary pain and distress to children (Graziano, 1994).

Unintended consequences are reported as long term effects of corporal punishment in the United States. According to McCord (1996) corporal punishment can teach children to modify behaviour to avoid being caught. When this occurs the opportunity for discussion and reasoning is reduced. Consequently the child has little understanding of

why the behaviour needed to change (McCord, 1996 as cited in Smith, et al., 2005). Without this opportunity for reasoning and discussion, when physical punishment is used, children are less likely to internalise the values that parents want to instil through these disciplinary measures. Furthermore, a study observing 42 mothers with their preschool children showed "...where mothers talked with children about feelings and the importance of moral values, children were more likely to show early signs of conscience development" (Laible, 2000 as cited in Smith, et al., 2005, p. 15).

Cognitive development and its relationship with corporal punishment has also been studied internationally, with results that support the notion that physical discipline has a negative impact on cognitive development and academic achievement (Straus, 2001; Cherian, 1994; Smith, 1997; Shummow, 1998; Jester, 1999; Straus & Paschall n.d. as cited in Smith, et al., 2005). In a study that explored the relationship between verbal aggression and children's academic achievement; the results showed that verbal aggression also had a negative impact on their cognitive development (Smith, 1997 as cited in Smith, et al., 2005).

There is also evidence to support a strong link between corporal punishment and the short and long term impact on mental health, particularly depression, low self esteem and suicidal ideation (Lansford & Dodge, 2008; Fergusson, 1997; Frias-Armenta, 2002; Gershoff, 2002a; Heaven, 2001; MacMillen, 1999; Straus, 1999; all as cited in Smith, et al., 2005; Zolotor, et al., 2008). As well as the link to the long term impact on mental health, the long term impact on violent behaviour has also been studied. A study of 68 Universities in 32 countries found that nationally, where there was a higher rate of corporal punishment, there was a higher percentage of students who had been physically violent toward their partner in the previous year (Douglas & Straus, 2006; Gamez-Gaudix & Straus, 2008 as cited in Straus, 2008).

In New Zealand, in 2004, research exploring the use of child physical discipline was summarised in a report by the Office of the Children's Commissioner and the University of Otago Children's Issues Centre (Smith, et al., 2004). In the discussion about whether physical discipline should be one of the tools in a family discipline kit, the research concluded that it had not been proved that physical discipline was

effective in achieving compliance from a child. It further reported that the negative effects of physical discipline, when severe and frequent, were well evidenced. However the agreement had not been reached about where to draw the line between moderate and severe physical discipline. Because of this, the report recommended that physical discipline should not be one of the tools for discipline in a family tool kit. It also recommended that as physical punishment was a health risk, alternatives to physical discipline should be promoted (Smith, et al., 2004).

Two New Zealand studies have explored physical discipline from the perspective of the recipients. The first study was a longitudinal study undertaken in Christchurch. The purpose of the study was to explore the subsequent social behaviour of 1265 children to the age of 18 years; in relation to their reports of physical discipline. The results showed that children who had been the recipients of regular physical punishment were twice as likely to be the perpetrators of violent behaviour compared with their counterparts who had rarely or never been physically disciplined (Fergusson & Linskey, 1997 as cited in Smith, et al., 2005).

The second study (Dobbs, 2007) came out of the Children's Issues Centre at the University of Otago. This study explored children's views of family discipline and possible implications for policymakers. The data, which had been collected in 2004, represented the views of 80 children with the aim of examining the meaning of physical discipline from the children's perspective. The children did not consider it to be an effective parenting technique, and reported that it was not generally used as a last resort but as a first resort and was usually delivered in anger. This paper concluded that families can become desensitised to the use of violence and that children who are raised in families that use physical discipline are more likely to be abused. It also concluded that parents are more likely to use physical discipline because they believe it is the only form of discipline available to them (Dobbs, 2007).

Research that reports positive outcomes for physical punishment is much less common than the research that reports negative outcomes. In a comprehensive analysis of 92 different studies on the effect of physical discipline, it was reported that the sole desirable outcome identified was the link between physical discipline and compliance.

The link was to short term compliance only and mostly with children who had 'problem behaviour' and it did not change behaviour in the long term (Combs-Orme & Cain, 2008; Gershoff, 2002 as cited in Smith, et al., 2004, p.14). Smith, et al. (2004) also reported on the findings of another researcher who challenged the Gershoff study and re-analysed the studies she used for her analysis. Reducing the number of studies to 16, the findings showed that six of the studies showed positive outcomes for physical discipline. The positive outcomes were less fighting and aggression and, in one case, a positive effect on parental affection (Larzelere, 2000 as cited in Smith et al., 2004, p.14).

In summary, the debate about the negative and positive outcomes of physical punishment is well researched and reported. There are few studies that support its use and an overwhelming amount of research that has found negative outcomes for the practice of physically disciplining children, both in New Zealand and internationally. The possible negative outcomes of physical discipline identified in this literature review are aggressive behaviour, delinquency, child abuse, lowered cognitive development, lowered academic achievement, lowered self esteem, depression, suicidal ideation and violent behaviour in adulthood. The evidence to support the use of physical discipline reports that it is a useful tool to regain control of children and that the positive outcome in changing a child's behaviour is short term. There is no clear definition of the line that separates physical discipline that has no negative impact, from physical abuse. The two sides of the debate position themselves either in the parent's rights position of having control of their children or the human rights of the child position where the child has an equal right to protection from harm, as does an adult.

Alongside the debate about the impact and effectiveness of physical discipline is the actual parental practice of disciplining children. The following section of this chapter explores the research literature that reports on the prevalence and attitudes toward physical discipline in an international and New Zealand context.

### **Prevalence and attitudes internationally**

Generally parents studied in international research have reduced their support for the use of physical discipline. The following is a summary of the research from the United

Kingdom and the United States with a brief reference to Western Europe, Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

In England, in 1998, the Department of Health interviewed a random sample of 2,000 adults to gather information on people's views on physical discipline. Of the participants, 88% agreed that it is sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child, 9% agreed that it is sometimes necessary to use an implement like a cane, belt or slipper. Thirteen percent agreed that it should be legally allowable to smack a naughty child under the age of two, 53% at over the age of two and 85% at over the age of five (Office for National Statistics Omnibus Survey, 1998 as cited in Carswell, 2001).

The following year in Britain there was a study of both mothers and fathers and their use of physical punishment. The researchers organised interviews with 465 parents from 366 two-parent families to explore the prevalence of physical discipline of children by fathers compared to mothers. The physical discipline was categorised into four areas, 'smacking', 'physical restraint', 'punishment by example' to teach children consequences and 'ingestion' such as washing the child's mouth with soap and water (Nobes, et al., 1999). The majority of the parents had used one of these forms of physical punishment at some time. Approximately a quarter of both the mothers and the fathers administered physical punishment at least weekly. Of the total number interviewed 6.6% of mothers and 8.7% of fathers had never used physical discipline on their children. There was no noticeable difference in terms of gender of the parent in either the prevalence or type of physical discipline used. The study does show, however the high prevalence of physical discipline administered in Britain in 1999 by either parent.

Also in Britain, a survey of 11,600 adults reported that 74% of them had been subjected to punching, kicking or choking by their parents when they were children. In the same study out of a sample of children from two-parent families, only 35% of the children said that they had been severely punished (Elliman, 2000 as cited in Baron, 2005), suggesting a decline in prevalence of severe abuse between generations.

A similar decline was reported in 2002, when 67 mothers were interviewed about their style of parenting. The results showed that physical punishment was administered by

37% of the mothers and 42% used reasoning (Thompson, et al., 2002). This decline was partly attributed to the lower number of parents interviewed than previous research cited for Britain.

In Scotland however, a study of parent's views of physical discipline showed that the use of physical punishment was widespread even though it had been argued that those in favour of smacking were fewer, as the anti-smacking campaigns took effect (Anderson et al., as cited in Brownlie & Anderson, 2006). To address this incongruence Brownlie (2006) conducted a study to explore the view of parents regarding physical discipline from the perspective of the human rights of the child rather than child parent relationships. Some conclusions were drawn from the data that suggested that the use of physical discipline was more likely to be a form of retribution than a form of punishment for the child's own good.

The important point to appreciate here is that with a handful of possible exceptions, most parents who smack do not do so out of a positive conviction that the practice is 'for the good of the child' but out of a sense that they have run out of other options for regaining control (Brownlie & Anderson, 2006, p. 485).

The article also reported that smacking, which embodies power and control, is often used when the parent feels the least control. One third of the participating parents in the 2002 survey said that they felt annoyed at the child '...for making me have to smack them' (Brownlie & Anderson, 2006, p. 486). Other research with children supports Brownlie's findings and has shown that children state that smacking is usually delivered when the parent is angry or bad-tempered and the smack is seen as an act of vengeance. This anger and frustration that drives the smacking to regain power and control, the blame that is placed on the child for the physical discipline and the feeling of guilt they experience after smacking is similar to the experience of a perpetrator of domestic violence (Dobash and Dobash, 1992 as cited in Brownlie & Anderson, 2006).

In an attempt to highlight the responsibility that health professionals have in the safety of children, attitudes toward physical discipline were studied with the medical profession who work with children. In Leeds, England 87 paediatricians participated in



a survey (Slade & Tapping, 2008) which asked them about their attitudes toward and their use of physical discipline, with their own children. Almost 50% of the paediatricians thought that smacking was effective, over 50% thought that smacking did not have a negative impact on the child and almost 70% did not identify smacking as child abuse. The paediatricians who were most likely to smack their children were those that had rarely been smacked themselves and the least likely were those who had been smacked often. The findings discussed concerns about people in positions of power and advice giving to parents, like paediatricians, who used or believed in the effectiveness of physical discipline. The study proposed that paediatricians with these beliefs would be unlikely to challenge parents on the practice of physical discipline and the issue would not be fully explored with parents who reported using it (Hemenway, 1994 as cited in Slade & Tapping, 2008). Furthermore, cases of suspected abuse would likely be overlooked by the paediatricians as they would accept the parental behaviour as normal parental discipline. They concluded that better training for paediatricians was required, particularly on alternative forms of discipline, so that they could encourage parents to not smack and minimise the controversy that paediatricians experience about physical discipline (Slade & Tapping, 2008).

The research of both children and parents in Britain has shown that the physical discipline of children has reduced but remains widespread. The results of research in the United States are similar. A survey of college students in 1990 reported that 93% of participants had been spanked as children (Graziano & Namaste, 1990 as cited in Whipple & Richey, 1997). In 1994, a survey of adults found that 80% reported being smacked in childhood (Hemenway et al., 1994 as cited in Whipple & Richey, 1997). Another study from the United States in 1995 interviewed a probability sampling of 991 American parents. It reported that 94% of parents used corporal punishment to discipline their child at ages three and four years. This corporal punishment included slaps on the hand or leg, spanking on the buttocks, pinching, shaking, hitting on the buttocks with a belt or paddle, and slapping in the face (Straus & Stewart, 1999). A more recent study reported a decrease in prevalence from 94% (Straus & Mathur, 1996 as cited in Benjet & Kazdin, 2003) to 61% of parents and 62% of the adult population in 2002 (Yankelovich, 2000 as cited in Benjet & Kazdin, 2003).

Attitudes and beliefs in the United States have also been studied and a national survey conducted in 2000 found that over 60% of Americans thought that spanking was appropriate discipline for children (Civitas, 2000 as cited in Combs-Orme & Cain, 2008). More recently figures from the National Opinion Research Centre (NORC) in the United States show that the belief that it is sometimes necessary to physically discipline a child, is held by 71.7% of adults (Davis, 2006 as cited in Ellison & Bradshaw, 2009). These findings suggest that, similar to the United Kingdom, there has been a marked decrease in the belief that corporal punishment is appropriate for children; from 94% of adults surveyed in the 1990s to 60% to 70% of adults surveyed in the mid 2000s.

Moving to Europe one of the most recent studies from Western Europe was a national probability study in Spain in 2008. This study showed that of the 1303 respondents, 56.3% believed in the necessity of corporal punishment. Those who believed that physical discipline was necessary also believed that child physical abuse was less prevalent in society than research had shown. The study concluded that:

If beliefs about the necessity of corporal punishment for child rearing are related to perceptions of child maltreatment as a social problem, challenging these beliefs through public education may contribute to an increase in public awareness and concern for the well-being of children, which may in turn lead to greater acceptance of public education efforts and support for prevention initiatives (Gracia & Herrero, 2008, p. 1061).

In Eastern Europe; a Croatian study was undertaken to measure the prevalence of physical discipline, in 2007. Croatia legislatively abolished all forms of corporal punishment used on children, in 1999 (Smith, et al., 2005). The 587 participants were children aged eight to fifteen years. They completed a questionnaire of five questions concerning their attitude to physical punishment or spanking. The questionnaire was anonymous and the children completed it without adult assistance. The children defined 'spanks' as 'belting' by 36% of the children, 'smacking' by 32%, 'on the bottom' by 23% and 'beating with objects' by 23%. The incidence of 'spanking' was reported to occur every day by 3% of the children, weekly by 22%, once in a few months by 57% and never by 18%. Younger children reported being physically punished more often

than the older children. Overall, out of the 587 children surveyed, 71.8% believed that all children are physically punished at some time (Vlasis-Cicvaric, Prpic, Boban, & Korotaj, 2007).

From the Middle East, an Arabian study of 1,196 Yemeni 7-10 year olds found that harsh corporal punishment was very common in Yemen. The study found that despite the fact that only 30% of caregivers approved of physical discipline, over half reported having spanked their child. They concluded that parents would need programmes that not only focus on alternatives to corporal punishment but also on parental attitudes such as changing the belief that corporal punishment is necessary to facilitate normal development in their child (Alyahri & Goodman, 2008). In Israel, a study to determine generational differences in attitude toward corporal punishment showed that the use of corporal punishment had declined and that adolescents were less supportive of corporal punishment than older generations. From these findings the researchers suggest that public education campaigns directed at the adolescent age group could reduce the use of corporal punishment in Israel (Ben-Arieh & Haj-Yahia, 2008).

In Sweden there has been a dramatic reduction in the prevalence of physical punishment since the 1950s, when a study concluded that practically all children born in the 1950s had been struck by their mother by the age of four (Stattin et al., 1995 as cited in Durrant, 2006). In 1965 half of the Swedish population believed that physical punishment was necessary in the discipline of children and by 1979 this had decreased to 26% (SIFO, 1981 as cited in Durrant, 2006). By the early 1980s only a third of children born at that time had been struck by their mothers (Statistics Sweden, 1996 as cited in Durrant, 2006) and by the late 1980s only 14% had been struck (Janson, 2001 as cited in Durrant, 2006). In 2000, remarkable by world standards, 92% of Swedish parents reported that they had not struck their children for the year prior to the study (Durrant, 2000 as cited in Durrant, 2006).

Attitudes toward physical discipline also changed over this period of time in Sweden. In 1965 half of the population believed that physical discipline was necessary as part of childrearing. By 1979 this belief had decreased to 26% (SIFO, 1981 as cited in Durrant, 2006). This was further reduced to only 11% of the population being 'positively

inclined' toward even mild forms of physical punishment in the mid 1990s (Statistics Sweden, 1996 as cited in Durrant, 2006). Motivation for such dramatic shifts in attitude toward and prevalence in physical discipline is explored in the 'Motivation for change' section of this chapter.

In summary of this section, the research of both children and parents in Britain has shown that the physical discipline of children has reduced but remains widespread. A significant proportion of parents attributed using physical discipline to the behaviour of the child, and one researcher drew comparisons with this and domestic violence, where the perpetrator blames the victim. In the US there has been a decline in the use of physical discipline since 1990, whilst in Eastern Europe a higher proportion of children reported that they had been physically disciplined than those studied in the United Kingdom or the United States, in 2007. Legislation change has appeared to considerably reduce the incidence of corporal punishment in Sweden where, as early as 1996, only a small proportion of the population were in support of mild forms of physical discipline. The interventions used by Sweden leading up to the legislation change have been significant factors in the reduction and are discussed later in this chapter in the 'motivation for change' section.

More recently a change to child discipline legislation has occurred in New Zealand, consequently there is a significant amount of literature on the topic. The following section summarises the prevalence and attitudes of the physical discipline of children, in New Zealand.

### **Prevalence and attitudes in New Zealand**

This section traces the historical changes, public attitudes toward, and prevalence of the physical discipline of children in New Zealand, from the 1960s through to 2009. The process of change has been well documented since the debate about the benefits and harm of physical discipline began, in New Zealand, leading up to the introduction of the Amendment to Section 59 of the Crimes Act, 1961, in 2007. The change in legislation stirred up national debate both then, and in the subsequent referendum, regarding the law change, in 2009 (see 'Legislation' section of this chapter).

Ritchie and Ritchie have been researching the topic of the physical discipline of children in New Zealand, since the 1960s. More recently the Children's Issues Centre at the University of Otago, along with the Children's Commissioner, has been prolific in the study of the topic, reporting on detailed summaries of research, both in New Zealand and Internationally. The following details the findings from these and other New Zealand studies and identifies any changes that have occurred over time.

In a 1963 survey of child rearing practices, Ritchie and Ritchie questioned the use of discipline and control of children and concluded that physical punishment was the most prevalent form of discipline of young children and for many the only form of punishment, in New Zealand. The participants in the study were mothers and they reported that they did not use or try alternative forms of discipline to that of physical punishment; they regarded positive reward techniques as bribery and often expected that good behaviour would be adequate reward for the child. From this study it was concluded that mothers considered physical discipline to be a 'moral obligation' and that it was the correct way to parent. It was a time when "The first principle of parenting was 'spare the rod and spoil the child', not 'suffer the little children to come to me'" (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1981, p. 27). Because of these beliefs about physical discipline, Ritchie and Ritchie suggested that the participants in the survey were keen to represent themselves in the best possible light and could have overstated their involvement with physical discipline to prove how responsible they were as mothers (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1981).

Fifteen years later in 1977 the study was repeated, this time to include fathers and findings showed that physical punishment continued to be the primary form of discipline used by parents. The percentage of mothers who never used physical discipline rose from one percent to ten percent. However the number of mothers who used physical discipline weekly or more rose from 35% to 55%, despite the fact that their belief in the effectiveness of physical punishment had dropped from 41% in the 1963 study to 14% in the 1977 study (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1981). Because fathers were included in this study it was possible to compare the attitudes and prevalence of physical discipline on the basis of gender. The fathers appeared to use the same

amount of physical discipline as the mothers, however when the amount was compared with the time each spent with the child, the fathers were using physical discipline more frequently on a pro rata basis. Fathers also felt more 'morally justified' in the use of physical punishment with 50% believing that they were doing the right thing compared to 29% of the mothers. The mothers were more likely to be emotionally affected by disciplining a four year old child than the fathers (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1981).

In the same study the parents were asked to give the reason(s) why they smacked their children. The most common reason was to administer punishment for 'disobedience', supporting the belief that the parents' authority should remain unchallenged. The second most common reason was to teach their children how they should behave. The next most common reason was that the parent felt that the child was being disrespectful, again challenging parental authority. Mothers were more likely to smack through anger and fathers reported that they were more likely to use physical discipline as a last resort. Only mothers identified the use of smacking to prevent their children coming to harm (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1981).

In 1981 Ritchie and Ritchie found that in a sample of parents who had children in a primary school in New Zealand 89% of mothers and 96% of fathers agreed with the statement 'that in certain circumstances it is all right for a parent to smack a child' (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1981). In 1993 The Office of the Commissioner for Children commissioned a report '*Physical Punishment in the Home in New Zealand*'. The research that the report was based on was a telephone survey of one thousand adults. It asked questions about the attitudes and beliefs of the adults toward the physical discipline of children. The results showed that 87% of the respondents agreed that it was acceptable to physically discipline a child (Maxwell 1993 as cited in Carswell, 2001). This percentage was lower in 1995, in a survey by Child Youth and Family which found that 69% agreed that it was acceptable. In a further survey by Child Youth and Family in 1998, prior to an 'Alternatives to smacking' television advertising campaign in June of that year, it was found that 57% of adults surveyed agreed that it was all right for a parent to smack a child. In the same year 52% agreed in the evaluation survey

after the 'Alternatives to smacking campaign' (Colmar Brunton Research 1998 as cited in Carswell, 2001). This percentage rose slightly however in 2000 to 56%, when Child Youth and Family evaluated a re-run of the 'Alternatives to smacking campaign' (Colmar Brunton Research, 2000 as cited in Carswell, 2001).

In 2001 the Ministry of Justice funded another survey similar to the one in 1993, by conducting a telephone survey with another 1000 adults. In this survey adults were asked to respond to the place of legislation in the practice of the physical punishment of children. It found that 80% of the public agreed that a person parenting a child should be allowed by law to smack a child with the open hand when they were naughty. Also in the 2001 survey, 15% agreed that they should be legally allowed to use objects such as a wooden spoon to discipline. The majority of people (75%) indicated that only a smack that left no mark was acceptable and only 6% agreed that it was acceptable to leave a red mark that lasted for a few days. These findings cannot be compared with the 1993 study as the questions were less specific in that study (Carswell, 2001).

Ethnicity was also analysed in the 2001 study and those in the category for the New Zealand European/Others group were found to view physical discipline as more acceptable than Māori or Pacific peoples. Pacific peoples had the lowest acceptance of physically disciplining children with two exceptions. Firstly, in the category of using implements such as wooden spoons 27% were more likely to agree that it was acceptable compared to 15% of the New Zealand European/Others group and 10% of Māori. The second exception was that Pacific peoples found it more acceptable to physically discipline the eldest age group of 15 to 17 years compared to New Zealand European/Others participants who found it significantly more acceptable to physically discipline younger children, particularly in the 2 to 10 years age group, than either Pacific peoples or Māori. The 1993 study reported that they found no evidence "...to support the notion of major cultural differences in the use of physical punishment among the main ethnic groups living in New Zealand" (Maxwell 1993, as cited in Carswell, 2001, p. 35).

Both the 1993 and the 2001 telephone surveys asked questions focused on the occupational categories of the respondents. The 1993 survey results for this category found that the more highly educated participants were the least likely to find physical discipline acceptable (Maxwell, 1993 as cited in Carswell, 2001). However it was found that there was no significant difference within the occupational categories in the 2001 survey.

Overall, the 2001 study found that the respondents strongly supported the retention of parental rights to physically discipline a child. They also expressed a lack of acceptability for using implements to deliver the physical punishment and for leaving marks or bruises. There was less support for the use of physical discipline with teenage children and with children less than two years of age (Carswell, 2001).

The recipients of physical discipline have been given a voice in some studies in New Zealand. For example in 2006 a study published in the New Zealand Medical Journal investigated the prevalence of physical discipline by interviewing 962 adults born in Dunedin, New Zealand. The participants were 26 years old at the time of the interviews and were children in the 1980s. Of the 962 participants, 80% reported receiving physical punishment at some time in their childhood, of these 29% identified being smacked, 45% identified being hit with an object and 6% reported extreme physical punishment (Millichamp, et al., 2006).

Another article published in 2007 in the Social Policy Journal of New Zealand, reported the findings of a 2004 study in which data had been collected from 80 children asking them their views on the physical discipline of children (Dobbs, 2007). Dobbs reported that the majority of children had an expectation that physical discipline was used in most families and often as a first resort. She also reported the prevalence of smacking or belting on the head and face of the child, the use of implements and the child being made to ingest mustard, dispelling the myth that physical discipline involves only gentle taps and that it cannot be compared with abuse (Dobbs, 2007).

Returning to the study of adults, in 2009 a paper from the Families Commission Research Seminar presented findings from a research project where data was gathered from 100 families in New Zealand (Smith & Lawrence, 2009). The purpose of the



research was to explore the beliefs that New Zealand families with preschool children had about disciplining their children. It also explored the disciplinary measures used in the family, the influences that had an impact on the disciplinary practices and the support that parents had received with their parenting practices.

The research had a multimethod approach using interviews, parent diaries and a daily parenting scale. The findings presented in connection to the use of physical discipline suggested a shift away from the belief in the effectiveness of physical discipline compared to the data gathered on attitudes toward effectiveness in the 1960s. Prevalence of the use of physical discipline in this study showed that 41% of participants had smacked their children at some time, although over the two weeks that the diary was completed for the study only 3% of the participants had used physical discipline, suggesting that its use was infrequent. Only 9% of the participants thought that smacking was effective with almost no examples of effectiveness reported. In summary of the study the researchers found that the participants showed no enthusiasm for physical punishment and had more enthusiasm for more positive parenting methods such as 'rewards, praise and reasoning' (Smith & Lawrence, 2009).

To summarise this section it appears that over the past thirty years beliefs and attitudes have changed about the physical discipline of children in New Zealand. They have changed from the belief in the 1960s that physical discipline was the standard, most effective form of discipline to the present day where the rate of belief in its effectiveness has dramatically dropped. Whereas in the 1960s it was considered to be 'good parenting' and the expected norm, in 2009 it is considered to be the least effective and more 'positive' ways of parenting are favoured by parents. Despite this, in practice the use of physical discipline has continued to be used by parents, as a way to discipline, with a rate of 41% of parents reporting the use of physical discipline in the most recent study (Smith & Lawrence, 2009). Furthermore, as shown in the next section on the Amendment to Section 59 of the Crimes Act, 1961, despite the lessening of the acceptability of physical discipline, the belief in parental rights in relationship to the physical discipline of children remains well supported.

## **Legislation**

This section of the literature review explores the literature regarding legislation on the corporal punishment of children internationally and in New Zealand. Given the current debate in New Zealand (2009), this section includes a summary of the introduction of the Amendment to Section 59 of the Crimes Act, 1961 legislation. It also includes a brief literature review of the role that religion has played in the physical discipline of children, due to the impact that religion has had on legislation and the role that fundamentalist religion has taken in New Zealand over the Amendment to Section 59. Following the role of religion, the outcome of the child discipline referendum (2009) in New Zealand is detailed and this section ends with a list of all countries that have legislated to completely abolish corporal punishment as of September 2009.

### **International legislation**

Studies in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, in the 1960s, found almost unanimous approval for the use of corporal punishment. Following the banning of corporal punishment in Sweden in 1979; in Finland in 1984; in Denmark in 1986 and in Norway in 1987, surveys showed that there was a dramatic reduction of support for corporal punishment in these countries (Straus & Stewart, 1994).

In the United Kingdom, until 2004, the law upheld the rights of the parent to use 'reasonable chastisement' on their children. In 2004 the law was slightly amended to continue to uphold the rights of the parent to use physical discipline with the proviso that it did not leave a mark. This amendment was criticised by some because they believed that parents who had darker skin would be able to smack harder without leaving a mark (Janis-Norton, 2005).

In the United States corporal punishment remains legal in schools and in family homes. Every state exempts hitting a child, for the purposes of correction or control, from the crime of assault. This exemption is with the proviso that it is limited to 'reasonable force' (Gershoff & Bitensky, 2007; Straus & Mathur, 1996).

In Australia, a child remains the only member of society who can legally be disciplined by physical punishment (Saunders & Goddard, 2008). The attitude of the judiciary

system toward the physical discipline of children was highlighted in 2003, when a magistrate reportedly stated that a father was 'well motivated' in the discipline of his son but had 'gone a little too far' on this occasion. The occasion that the magistrate was referring to was the forty minute beating of the boy with a hose pipe. The magistrate reportedly criticised social workers for informing children of their rights and no criminal conviction was made. If the victim of the beating had been an animal it would have incurred a fine of up to \$50,000 and up to five years in jail (Armstrong, 2003 as cited in Saunders & Goddard, 2008).

Given that the research for this thesis took place in New Zealand and because New Zealand has changed legislation to protect children from physical discipline, the following section is a summary of the process of change to New Zealand's child discipline law.

### **New Zealand legislation**

In New Zealand the introduction of the repeal to Section 59 of the Crimes Act, 1961, which had previously provided parents with a defence to severely physically discipline their children, brought forward a range of arguments; for and against the repeal and for and against the use of physical discipline. The following is part of Section 59 of the Crimes Act (1961) titled 'Domestic Discipline', in force after legislation ending corporal punishment in schools and prior to the Amendment of Section 59 in 2007.

(1) Every parent [of a child and, subject to subsection (3) of this section, every person in the place of the parent of a child is justified in using force by way of correction towards the child], if the force used is reasonable in the circumstances.

(2) The reasonableness of the force used is a question of fact.

(3) Nothing in subsection (1) of this section justifies the use of force towards a child in contravention of section 139A of the Education Act (Crimes Act, 1961).

Arguments for the repeal were that it would remove the legal defence that parents used to defend themselves from the charges of assault of their children. It would also

ensure that the assault of a child would have equal standards for prosecution and determination of guilt, as would prosecution for the assault of an adult.

Apart from the above practical reasons for the Amendment of Section 59 there were value based arguments that Section 59, without the Amendment, supported the use of force against children and suggested that physical discipline was socially acceptable as part of good parenting. It also argued that the Amendment would uphold the human rights of a child to “.....a life free of the threat of pain, humiliation or injury” (Wood, et al., 2008, p. 27). Furthermore without the Amendment, Section 59 denied equal legal protection to children and failed to recognise that physical discipline is painful and can be dangerous.

On the contrary, those against the Amendment to Section 59 argued that if the law was repealed it would deny parents the right to discipline their children as they saw fit. It would consequently remove an effective way of disciplining their children and make parents vulnerable to prosecution for lightly smacking them (Wood, et al., 2008). Similarly, it was argued that parents would need to be able to physically punish the children in their care, in order to teach them how to behave. These arguments were expounded despite the evidence that physical discipline increased the likelihood of challenging behaviour and that children experienced it as anger from their parents, not as a caring teachable moment (Dobbs, 2007; Dodds, 2005; Leach, 1999; Millichamp, et al., 2006; Pritchard, 2006; Smith, et al., 2005; Vlais-Cicvaric, et al., 2007). Also, the argument that parents should be able to physically discipline their children in order to be effective, would require a clear definition of ‘safe levels of hitting’ to ensure the distinction between physical punishment and physical abuse. According to an in-depth study on the physical discipline of children, no such definition has been available or possible (Smith, et al., 2004).

Historically, Section 59 was included in the Crimes Act in 1961 and was a continuation of the common law principle of the Criminal Code enacted in 1893, an import of the colonists of New Zealand. Section 59 effectively protected the rights of the parent to discipline their child, using force if necessary. It was often used to defend a parent who had physically abused their child, allowing the parent to escape conviction (Hill, 2001

as cited in Wood, et al., 2008, p. 39). Because of this, supporters of the human rights of children lobbied for an Amendment to Section 59, as a preventative measure. One hundred and fourteen years after the Criminal Code was enacted, the Amendment Bill to Section 59 of the Crimes Act was passed on the 16<sup>th</sup> May 2007. Wood, et al. (2008) mapped the milestones of the reform and the following is a summary.

In the 1960s the Playcentre movement played a significant role in the reform, when they questioned the use of physical discipline and consequently promoted non physical discipline. Also in the 1960s the Justice Department reported that corporal punishment was ineffective and unsuitable as a means of punishing juvenile offenders (Department of Justice, 1968 as cited in Wood, et al., 2008). In the 1970s the United Nations adopted the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in which “....no person shall be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1976 as cited in Wood, et al., 2008, p. 33). This was later ratified by New Zealand in 1978. In 1979 Sweden was the first country in the world to legislate against the use of corporal punishment and in the same year, in New Zealand, Ritchie and Ritchie argued for the repeal of Section 59 of the Criminal Act. In 1980 the New Zealand Committee for Children was established opposing the use of corporal punishment and in 1981 corporal punishment came under scrutiny by Ritchie and Ritchie when their book *‘Spare the Rod’* was published.

Also in 1980 the *‘Campaign Against Violence in Education’* (CAVE) aimed at ending corporal punishment in schools was established. This group, along with other advocates, advocated for the abolition of corporal punishment in schools and generated heated public debate. The then Prime Minister and Minister of Education, David Lange, proposed the abolition of corporal punishment in a number of school reforms. The Education Act, 1989 however, failed to include the abolition of corporal punishment and in some cases increased the incidence of corporal punishment because the by-laws that had placed restrictions on the use of corporal punishment in the previous Act had been revoked, with the expectation that the 1989 Act would ban corporal punishment altogether. With these restrictions removed and with no ban on corporal punishment one principal, opposed to any repeal, introduced the caning of

girls at their school. In 1990 an Amendment to the Education Act was passed which included private schools, early childhood centres as well as state schools. This Amendment excluded teachers from the people listed in Section 59 of the Crimes Act who could apply reasonable force for the purpose of correction, thus effectively stopping the use of corporal punishment in educational facilities (Wood, et al., 2008).

By 1989 the newly appointed Commissioner for Children advocated for the Amendment to Section 59 of the Crimes Act and in the same year the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) was adopted by the United Nations convention. This was signed by New Zealand in 1990.

By 1991 corporal punishment in the Department of Social Welfare's foster homes was no longer permissible and in 1993 New Zealand ratified UNCROC in which it stated, in Article 19 that "...the state ...takes all appropriate legislative....measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence...' while in the care of parents and others" (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as cited in Wood, et al., 2008, p. 35).

In 1997 End Physical Punishment of Children (EPOCH) was established in New Zealand and UNCROC recommended to the New Zealand Government that Section 59 of the Crimes Act be reviewed, ensuring the banning of violence toward children. In the same year a story featured in a national newspaper the '*New Zealand Herald*' highlighted the ill treatment of children. Later that year a private citizen promoted a video advocating 'safe smacking' by using an instrument. Media discussion and protest ensued (Wood, et al., 2008).

Throughout 2000 and 2001 a number of publications, reports and books highlighted the Section 59 debate and the '*Hawkes Bay Today*' newspaper reported on the acquittal of a parent who used Section 59 as a defence for hitting a child with a stick, causing bruising (Hill, 2001 as cited in Wood, et al., 2008, p. 39). The International Save the Children Alliance formalised their opposition to the corporal punishment of children and Barnardos New Zealand made a commitment to advocate for the repeal of Section 59 (Wood, et al., 2008).

During 2002 more voices spoke out against Section 59 and called for its repeal. These included Auckland church leaders, Save the Children New Zealand and the United Nations Children's Fund New Zealand. A number of non-governmental organisations published *'Making it Happen'*, recommending the repeal of Section 59 (UNICEF as cited in Wood, et al., 2008, p. 40) in 2002 and the following year saw the advent of the funding and development of media campaigns and programmes that promoted alternatives to physical discipline.

In 2004 the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Helen Clarke, expressed personal support for the repeal of Section 59 and in 2005 the New Zealand Human Rights Commission recommended that Section 59 of the Crimes Act be repealed. In June of that year the Royal New Zealand Plunket Society also called on the Government to repeal Section 59 and in that same month Sue Bradford, a Green Party MP, drew the repeal of Section 59 as her Members Bill (Wood, et al., 2008). Throughout 2005, 2006 and 2007 New Zealand became embroiled in the debate about a parent's right to discipline their child and the bill for the repeal of Section 59, with the promotion of the media, became commonly known as the 'anti-smacking' bill. The repeal was opposed by protest marches and rallies backed up by a visit to New Zealand by an American academic who promoted the mild physical discipline of children, as part of parenting (Wood, et al., 2008).

Meanwhile the repeal was gaining formalised support from the Parliamentary Leader of the Opposition, the Māori Party and a group of church leaders. On May 16<sup>th</sup> 2007 the Bill had near unanimous support from Government and on June 21<sup>st</sup> 2007 the Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act 2007 came into force (Wood, et al., 2008). The following is the wording for the Amendment:

#### 59 Parental control

(1) Every parent of a child and every person in the place of a parent of the child is justified in using force if the force used is reasonable in the circumstances and is for the purpose of—

(a) preventing or minimising harm to the child or another person; or

(b) preventing the child from engaging or continuing to engage in conduct that amounts to a criminal offence; or

(c) preventing the child from engaging or continuing to engage in offensive or disruptive behaviour; or

(d) performing the normal daily tasks that are incidental to good care and parenting.

(2) Nothing in subsection (1) or in any rule of common law justifies the use of force for the purpose of correction.

(3) Subsection (2) prevails over subsection (1).

(4) To avoid doubt, it is affirmed that the Police have the discretion not to prosecute complaints against a parent of a child or person in the place of a parent of a child in relation to an offence involving the use of force against a child, where the offence is considered to be so inconsequential that there is no public interest in proceeding with a prosecution (Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act 2007).

Since then, those opposing the repeal have lobbied successfully to have a national referendum with the goal of reverting Section 59 back to its original wording. Some of those who oppose the repeal believe that they are being deprived of a coping strategy for socialising their children (Brownlie & Anderson, 2006). Others uphold the rights of the parent to discipline their child and promote the idea that parents will be criminalised for smacking their children, if the Amendment to Section 59 remains. This is despite the fact that the Amendment allows for the discretionary power of the police to not prosecute a parent for using physical discipline where it is thought to be inconsequential and the lack of any such prosecutions since the law changed (Morris-Travers, 2008).

The question asked by the referendum “Should a smack as part of good parental correction, be a criminal offence in New Zealand?” (Morris-Travers, 2008, p. 9) was criticised for being misleading, especially for those who supported the Amendment. To answer the question with a positive would imply that the respondent was not a good parent and to respond with a negative would provide evidence that the law should revert to its original wording, allowing Section 59 to be used as a defence for the physical abuse of children.

Amongst those who opposed the new law were those who were motivated through their beliefs in the literal translation of the bible ‘spare the rod, spoil the child’. The following section of this chapter gives some background to the history of parental



rights from a fundamentalist religious perspective and the role it has played in child discipline legislation.

### **The role of religion**

Historically religion has been used in the western world to justify the use of corporal punishment. According to Greven, "Protestant evangelicals, fundamentalists and Pentecostals have further condoned the use of childhood corporal punishment as a way of instilling divine obedience in children" (Greven, 1990, 1992 as cited in Good, 1999, p. 39). Davis (1999) outlined the "widespread commitment to a spare-the-rod ideology" that prevailed in the United States and referred to research that showed evidence that this commitment is especially demonstrated by "southern males and fundamentalist Protestants"(Ellison & Sherkat, 1993; Flynn, 1994 as cited in Davis, 1999, p. 492). Straus and Stewart (1994) came to the same conclusion when they put forward the idea that the strong willed child was the modern version of original sin.

In Canada religion proved a strong motivator to support corporal punishment. In 2001, a religious sect called the Church of God left Canada and successfully entered the United States as refugees, seeking political asylum on the grounds of religious persecution. Members of the Church of God claimed that they could not follow the work of God in Canada and 'use the rod of correction'. Their interpretation of the Bible forbade them to strike a child with their hand; consequently they were required to use the biblical rod (cane) to discipline their children. As Canadian law forbids caning they proceeded with their request for political asylum in the United States (Kay, 2001 as cited in Baron, 2005).

In New Zealand the idea that children were 'the modern version of original sin' (Straus & Stewart, 1994) was upheld by Reverend Graham Capill, the leader of the Christian Heritage Party in New Zealand. In 1993 he claimed "Nobody has to teach [children] to be bad. It's part of their nature right from the beginning" (Varnham, 1993 as cited in Wood, et al., 2008, p. 100). The Reverend Capill and his political party became strong supporters of Section 59 in its original state and expounded an extreme voice in the debate. The Reverend Graham Capill became less reverent when he was convicted of the sexual abuse of children in 2005, after which the Christian Heritage Party was

disbanded (Wood, et al., 2008). Some of the more moderate voices from a religious perspective did not quote the Bible as evidence for their argument to retain the original Section 59. They joined other voices that upheld parental rights and the effectiveness of physical discipline.

Not all religions promoted the retention of Section 59. Catholic, Methodist and Anglican churches vociferously advocated for the Amendment to Section 59 and upheld the human rights of the child by promoting a 'Yes' vote in the referendum. The more fundamentalist religious groups such as 'Focus on the Family' and 'Crosspower Ministry' upheld the rights of the parent by promoting a 'No' vote (Collins, 2009). The following section of this chapter reports on the outcome of the referendum.

### **Referendum Outcome**

The outcome of the referendum to the question 'Should a smack as part of good parental correction, be a criminal offence in New Zealand?' heavily favoured a 'No' vote. The total number of valid votes was 1,682,717, with the 'No' vote taking 1,470,755 or 87.4 % of the vote and the 'Yes' vote taking 201,541 or 11.98 % of the vote (NZPA, 2009). Prime Minister John Key responded to the results by asserting that there was strong evidence that the law change had been working well and reassured 'No' voters that no parent had been prosecuted or criminalised for delivering a 'light smack' since the law changed. He also stated that if it was shown that parents were criminalised for inconsequential smacking then the law would be changed (Young, 2009a). Coincidentally, less than a week after the referendum, a measure legalising smacking was drawn from a ballot of private members' Bills in Parliament, by Act MP John Boscawen, with its first reading in September 2009. Prime Minister John Key stopped the bill from going beyond its first reading, not wanting to re-open the debate and again consume Parliament's time (Young, 2009b). As of September 2009 the Amendment to Section 59 of the Crimes Act, 1961 remains law, effectively preventing the law from being used as a defence for the physical abuse of children and consequently upholding the human rights of the child. This legislation maintains New Zealand's position in the global arena of the human rights of children. The following

details all other countries that have banned the corporal punishment of children as of September 2009.

By 2005 13 countries had banned all corporal punishment of children. The move to do this started in Scandinavian countries with Sweden in 1979, Denmark in 1986, Finland in 1983 and Norway in 1987. Scandinavia was followed by Austria in 1989, Cyprus in 1994, Latvia in 1998 and Croatia in 1999. Israel abolished corporal punishment in 2000 along with Germany. Iceland followed in 2003, Ukraine and Romania in 2004 (Smith, et al., 2005). Hungary also introduced the abolishment of all corporal punishment to children in 2005 with Greece following in 2006. In 2007 Venezuela, New Zealand, Uruguay, the Netherlands, Spain and Portugal changed legislation to abolish all corporal punishment of children and in 2008 they were followed by the Republic of Moldova and Costa Rica (States with full prohibition, n.d.).

Legislation banning corporal punishment or physical discipline is one way to protect children and allows for the prosecution of parents, for hitting their children. Another approach to this issue and the central focus of the research for this thesis is the motivation that encourages parents to change their parenting practice from physical to non-physical disciplinary measures. The following section for this literature review, reports on the motivation of human behaviour, the process of change and previous literature that has reported on motivating factors that bring about change in parental child disciplinary practice.

### **Motivation for change**

Human motivation can be described from two perspectives. Firstly when a behaviour is autonomous and in accord with oneself and secondly when a behaviour is controlled by external influences (Deci & Flaste, 1995). Another term for these two perspectives on motivation is intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Cameron & Pierce, 2002; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Higgins & Sorrentino, 1990; Reeve, 2001). These terms can be employed to understand the most effective motivation for change in the behaviour of adults and can run parallel with the most effective way of disciplining children. For example children can be intrinsically motivated by understanding the benefits of changing their behaviour through reasoning, or they can be extrinsically motivated by physical

discipline and the avoidance of pain. One of the ways to determine effectiveness can at times be assessed by long term or short term outcomes. Intrinsic motivation is more likely to achieve long term change because of the intrinsic, self autonomous decision to change, rather than the short term compliance achieved by the extrinsic motivation of actual or threatened physical discipline (Deci & Flaste, 1995).

Similarly adults are more likely to be motivated to change by the intrinsic motivation of experience, education and discussion, rather than the controlling, extrinsic motivation of threat or legislation (Deci & Flaste, 1995). Contrary to this, at first glance it would seem that legislation has proved to be the motivating factor for Scandinavian countries to change parental attitudes on the practice of physical discipline (see section on legislation in this chapter). On further investigation however, the motivation to change in Scandinavian countries started with the intrinsic motivation of explanation and discussion through parental education, prior to the law change (Durrant, 2006).

According to a report summarising the findings of research on the topic of physical discipline, parents who attempt to change from using physical discipline to non-physical discipline by attending parental education that is based on 'experts' who advise parents on the best way to parent, are the least likely to be successful. The more successful parent education has used the intrinsic value of discussion and explanation, facilitating the expertise of the participants rather than installing information (Smith, et al., 2005).

Following the motivation to change is the change process itself. For the purposes of understanding the variation of putting the change into practice, the research for this thesis has used the transtheoretical model of change which positions change into six stages (Miller & Rollnick, 2002; Prochaska & Norcross, 2003; Prochaska, Norcross, & Diclemente, 1994). The transtheoretical model was chosen because of the researcher's familiarity with the model having worked in the alcohol and other drug addiction field for a number of years, where it is used within the context of motivational interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 2002), and because it has been used successfully in many areas of psychology and health to understand change in behaviour (Biehal, 2006; Britt, Hudson, & Blampied, 2004; Cunningham, Selby, & Faulkner, 2007; Freeman & Rees, 2008;

Jackson, Asimakopoulou, & Scammell, 2007; Kristjansson, Ullen, & Helgason, 2004; Murphy, Rosen, Cameron, & Thompson, 2002; Prochaska, et al., 1994; Rau, Ehlebracht-Konig, & Petermann, 2008; Soler, Trujols, Pascual, Portella, Barrachina, Campins et al., 2008; Thijs, 2007; Tierney & McCabe, 2005).

The six stages of change identified by the transtheoretical model are precontemplation, contemplation, preparation or determination, action, maintenance and relapse or recycle. Precontemplation is the stage in the change process where a person does not consider their behaviour to be problematic. Contemplation is the stage where a person starts to notice the impact of their behaviour on others or themselves and considers making a decision to change their behaviour. Preparation or determination is the stage where the decision has been made to change the behaviour and resources and ways to change are explored to make the change. Action is the stage where the ways to change the behaviour is put into practice and maintenance is the stage where the change in behaviour is maintained. Relapse, or as Prochaska prefers to name it, recycling, is the stage where the old behaviour returns and the process of change restarts (Miller & Rollnick, 2002; Prochaska & Norcross, 2003; Prochaska, et al., 1994).

The transtheoretical model of change also recognises that the process of change is a spiral model and challenges the belief that change occurs in a linear fashion. In their experience of working with people using the transtheoretical approach Prochaska, Diclemente and Norcross (1994) found that linear progression was a rare phenomenon. Mostly people return to the old behaviour and on average people in the process of change recycle several times before they exit the process and fully integrate the new behaviour.

For the purposes of this study none of the participants were in the precontemplative or contemplative stages of change toward physically disciplining their child. Part of the criteria to be part of the study was that the participant had made the decision to make the change to non-physical discipline and so was positioned in the determination, action, maintenance and recycling stages. Some of the participants had exited the

cycle and the findings of these stages of change are detailed in the 'Discussion and Conclusion' chapter.

The transtheoretical model of change provides structure for the process of changing parental disciplinary practice from physical to non-physical. Previous research has also provided structure for the analysis of the data collected, about the motivational factors in making the decision to change. The following section of this chapter reports on previous research found on changing physical to non-physical disciplinary practice.

### **Previous research**

At the conceptualisation point of this research, the researcher found only a small amount of literature that had researched the motivation to stop physical discipline. As the proposal for the research progressed however, more literature was sourced and the following is a summary of that literature.

A 1997 United States study examined the bidirectional influences on 108 mothers of three year old children and their attitudes to corporal punishment before and after becoming mothers, by interviewing them about three areas. Firstly, the mothers were asked about their recollections, of their parents' attitudes toward corporal punishment, secondly about their own attitudes before and after becoming mothers and thirdly about the influence of others such as partners, friends and media on their attitude toward corporal punishment. Since becoming a mother, 66% of the mothers reported that their attitudes had changed. Of this 66%, 36% reported that they had become less in favour of corporal punishment and 30% reported that they had become more in favour of corporal punishment. The remaining 34% of the total reported no change in attitude. Of the mothers who became less favourable of corporal punishment the motivating factors were, in order of most reported to least reported; the child's reaction to corporal punishment, their husband's attitude to corporal punishment, their friend's attitudes, the media, and seeing other children physically disciplined. This group of mothers also believed that their children experienced more negative effects from physical punishment and that it was less effective than other forms of discipline in gaining compliance. They also recalled the negative effects they had experienced as children when they were physically disciplined.

The mothers who had become more in favour of corporal punishment since becoming mothers rationalised that they needed to use physical punishment in order to get their children's attention, their children were more strong-willed and therefore needed to be physically disciplined and that other methods of discipline had been ineffective. They also reported that seeing other children out of control influenced them to be more in favour of physical discipline. Reading the Bible was another influence on the mothers to become more in favour of corporal punishment. The majority of the mothers who were more in favour of physical discipline, thought that the child's adverse reaction to being 'spanked', such as crying, lessened the likelihood of using corporal punishment, despite being more in favour of using it. The study concluded that women's attitudes toward corporal punishment changed in a bidirectional way when they became mothers. Of the mothers that changed their attitude toward physical punishment on becoming a parent, half changed to being less in favour of corporal punishment and half became more in favour (Holden, et al., 1997).

According to a longitudinal study in the United States, parent education could be a motivational intervention to change the practice of physical to non-physical discipline. The researcher recruited and interviewed parents when their children were aged 16 months and again when their children were aged 36 months. The study found that the developmental age of the child, as they began to assert themselves, was 36 months. This was the age at which the parent was more likely to discipline their child with a negative demeanour and use physical discipline because of the child's wilfulness. The study suggested that if the parent was aware of child development and that wilfulness was to be expected at this age, that their expectations of the child would be realistic and that they would be more likely to have a positive regard for their child, thus reducing the likelihood of disciplining with a negative demeanour and using physical discipline (Socolar, Savage & Evans, 2007).

In New Zealand a 2006 Dunedin study found that parents generally use only one or two methods of discipline. This being the case, educational interventions on alternatives to physical discipline could be effective in changing disciplinary behaviour from a physical form of discipline to a non-physical form of discipline, by giving the

parent more alternatives. In the same study it was found that many of the participants, who had received non-physical discipline such as grounding as a child, reported that this alternative to physical discipline had more impact than the physical punishment that they received. The study asserted that "...the potent nature and aversive qualities of privilege loss make it a more effective punisher in behavioural terms" (Millichamp, et al., 2006, p. 23).

In the United States, Davis (1999) reported that there had been very little information available about the cessation of corporal punishment or, as defined in his study, of spanking. Through semi-structured interviews of 22 parents who had been recruited through the print media, Davis (1999) analysed the data gathered into five contexts in which the cessation of corporal punishment took place. These contexts were:

- **Experiential** motivation to stop the practice of physical punishment which included the experiences the parent had had as a result of smacking their child. For example how they felt when they smacked the child and the concern they felt about the way their child responded to the physical discipline.
- **Ideological** motivation to stop the practice of physical punishment which included a change from the belief in parental rights and power and control to the consideration of children's rights and the belief that children are smaller more vulnerable members of society.
- **Regulatory** motivation to stop the practice of physical punishment which included the belief, by the parent, that smacking was a punishable activity. They may have been informed that physical punishment of their child could result in prosecution or a withdrawal of services.
- **Relational** motivation to stop the practice of physical punishment which included the response to pressure and expectations from friends and family who disagreed with its use.
- **Biographical** motivation to stop the practice of physical punishment which included the memories and feelings parents held about their own childhood experiences of physical discipline (pp.497 - pp.505).

Davis (1999) concluded that the cessation of hitting, slapping and spanking within these contexts brought forward new meanings and beliefs about corporal punishment that "...turn old beliefs into excuses and defined non-spanking as progress" (p. 506).



His study also concluded that further study be encouraged to establish whether the newer meanings of smacking, such as seeing it as an act of violence, a disturbing experience, a troublesome issue and a punishable activity, came before or after the spanking stopped. As well as this he concluded that professionals held a responsibility for evaluating interventions used to achieve success in the cessation of physical discipline.

If parents are supposed to stop slapping and spanking their children to improve the quality of their children's lives and reduce the likelihood of further aggression ..., parent trainers and public educators as well as policy makers should know what parents say helped them to stop (Davis, 1999, p. 508).

In New Zealand, Wood and Russell (2001) presented a paper at the Fourth Child and Family Conference in 2001. Thirty parents replied to a newspaper advertisement requesting that parents, who had made a decision to not smack, be part of a study to identify the motivating factors for this decision. Of the 30 participants it was known that 16 had smacked their child at some time and that nine had never smacked. Sixteen of the participants had made the decision to not smack prior to the birth of their first child, three when they were a child, nine during the first year of becoming a parent and five during the years of raising children. Participants had had more than one motivating factor and in total there were 69 responses to the 14 categories of reasons for not smacking.

The major motivation was the effect that physical punishment had had on them as children (15) and as a direct consequence of their own upbringing whether in a non-physical punishment household or a household where physical discipline was administered (11). Nine identified that they had made the decision not to smack because hitting felt unfair or wrong, seven because of the ineffectiveness of smacking and five because the alternatives to smacking felt better and more appropriate. Three of the respondents related motivation to each of the following: the influence of reading a book, not trusting themselves when angry, having special needs children and that they had learnt alternatives while undergoing teacher-training. Two respondents

related motivation to the following: religious beliefs, not wanting the children to be afraid of them, the child not needing a smack, challenge of the use of physical discipline by the other parent and following personal development.

A third of the participants found it easy to avoid smacking. The rest of the participants reported that the general stresses of parenting had had the most impact on their ability to avoid physical punishment. Other influences on the ability to avoid physical punishment were the characteristics of a particular child, feeling in a minority and difficulty finding useful alternatives. The reasons given for avoiding smacking with ease were mostly related to the child's 'lovely temperament', the strength of the parents' beliefs and having good information on alternatives to physical punishment that were effective.

Alternatives to physical discipline used by the respondents were communication by explaining, discussion and reasoning, giving praise, time out for both the parent and the child, withdrawal of privileges and modelling good behaviour. The paper concluded that:

If we want to influence parental attitudes we need to know how it is formed.....it is important to understand better why it is that some parents remain convinced that smacking is useful and valuable and what would help parents cope with stress and anger in less violent ways (Wood & Russell, 2001, p. 8).

In conclusion of this section and chapter, there is relatively little previous research on the motivation to stop the use of physical discipline on children compared to the research and reporting of the impact that physical discipline has on both the recipient and the perpetrator. The research that is available provides a framework in which the findings to this study can be analysed (Davis, 1999) and an understanding of the importance of motivation and useful interventions to promote change. The following chapter describes the theory, method and design used in the research for this thesis.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

The ontological position of research is 'what we believe is possible to know about the world' (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 19). There are a number of ontological assumptions in research theory and this research draws on the position of subtle realism. This position accepts that the social world exists apart from individuals with their subjective understandings of the world. These subjective understandings can only be reached through the individual's interpretations of them. The aim of the research is to capture as full a picture of the diverse reality of the topic as possible, through these individual interpretations (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

The epistemological position of the research is the stance that identifies how it is possible to know about the world. The two epistemological positions are positivism and interpretism. Generally, positivism overarches the modernist theories of research and Interpretism overarches the post modern theories. In social work research the epistemological position often taken is the Interpretist approach because positivism comes from the natural sciences and is focused on proving or disproving a hypothesis based on the study of subjects. It is a deductive process of gaining knowledge and requires a researcher to maintain complete neutrality throughout the research process to ensure that the study undertaken is value free (Davidson & Tolich, 2003; de Vos, 2002; Flick, 2007; Payne, 2005; Prasad, 2005).

**Positivism** sees social science as an organized method for combining deductive logic with precise empirical observations of individual behavior in order to discover and confirm a set of probabilistic causal laws that can be used to predict general patterns of human activity (Davidson & Tolich, 2003, p. 26).

On the other hand, the interpretive way of viewing the world holds that the meaning that individuals make of their lives, occurs within a context of their lived experience, conditions and the historical context in which they live (Davidson & Tolich, 2003; de Vos, 2002; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

**The interpretive approach** is the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds (Davidson & Tolich, 2003, p. 26).

The purpose of this research was to understand and describe parents' experience of making a decision for change in their use of physical punishment. The definitions of their situations were created by their human interactions not by a set of prescribed rules that could be discovered. Also in the process of identifying the relevant methodology for this research, the researcher's own positioning in a social context needed to be taken into consideration, as the importance of the complexity of the subject and the data was understood by the researcher through her own experience of parenting and working with others and their experience of parenting, coupled with the social and political contexts of the topic.

A qualitative approach was taken for this research for the following reasons:

- A qualitative method is "..... a naturalistic, interpretive approach concerned with understanding the meanings which people attach to phenomena (actions, decisions, beliefs, values etc.) within their social world" (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 3).
- The qualitative approaches adhere to the interpretive philosophy and enable the researcher to understand more about social reality (Alston & Bowles, 2003).
- Qualitative methods allow for the exploration of areas in depth, whereas quantitative methods are mostly used when researching a number of areas in less depth (Davidson & Tolich, 2003).
- The diversity of the lived experience of the participants also identifies qualitative research as a more appropriate method given that qualitative research celebrates diversity and difference whereas quantitative methods look for consensus and the norm of the data (Davidson & Tolich, 2003).

Within this qualitative method, the post modern, social constructionist theory supports the approach of this research because it takes a critical stance toward taken-for-granted knowledge and understanding and maintains that knowledge is built on historical and cultural contexts which are supported by social contexts (Burr, 1995 as cited in Rapley, 2007).

The questions for this study were both explanatory, how was the decision to not smack reached? What were the motivating factors? (Babbie, 2007; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; de Vos, 2002; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003) and formatively evaluative, what has been successful in supporting the achievement of non-violent discipline? These findings will provide information to improve parenting programmes (de Vos, 2002; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The findings are also exploratory regarding the new meaning participants make about the act of corporal punishment, as well as the timing of the new meaning (Davis, 1999).

## **Research Design**

### **Sampling**

Sampling can be divided into two main types; probability and non-probability samplings (Alston & Bowles, 2003; Davidson & Tolich, 2003; de Vos, 2002; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Probability samplings are those that have a known relationship to the population being studied and are usually used in quantitative research. Non-probability samplings are generally used in qualitative, exploratory research and do not set out to represent the population being studied. There are a number of approaches to sampling within the non-probability category and for this research a purposive, otherwise known as purposeful, sampling was chosen for a particular purpose and to give insights into a particular issue (Alston & Bowles, 2003; Davidson & Tolich, 2003; de Vos, 2002; Flick, 2007; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The sample consisted of ten participants to allow for some diversity and to be manageable within the constraints of the time frame and the large amount of data collected through the in depth interviews.

The participants were recruited through the organisation in which the researcher was employed. The organisation's Research Manager, the Specialist Advisor and the Unit Manager agreed to the recruitment of the client group on approval from the Massey University Ethics Committee. The search was at a regional level, however if sufficient participants had not been identified regionally, it was planned to move outward to a North Island search and finally a national search. Another possibility, if there were limited numbers of participants, would have been to use a snowball sampling where participants already recruited would be asked if they knew of others who have made a similar decision (Alston & Bowles, 2003; Babbie, 2007; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). This proved unnecessary when ten participants were recruited from the Northern region, mainly in the Auckland area.

There was also interest generated among members of staff in the organisation who had heard about the proposed research and had experienced the decision making process for themselves. On approaching the researcher with expressions of interest, staff members were eligible for recruitment on the condition that they did not directly report to the researcher's position of Team Leader.

Consent was sought from and given by the organisation, to seek expressions of interest through a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) handed out at parenting groups and programmes in the northern region. Anonymity of the questionnaires was kept wherever possible although for those interested in becoming part of the study this was not possible given the need to know names and contact details of participants to organise interviews. Confidentiality was maintained by the following process:

In the first instance, parenting group facilitators were asked to hand out a short questionnaire seeking expressions of interest, to all group participants (see Appendix 1). In this way none of the group participants were identified to the group or staff, as a person that had used physical discipline. The questionnaire included statements that informed the group participant that answering the questionnaire was voluntary and that the service they received from the organisation would not differ whether they completed the questionnaire or not. It also stated that the questionnaire was anonymous unless they agreed to participate further with a follow up contact from the

researcher, in which case their details would be confidential to the researcher. On completion the group participants placed the questionnaire into an envelope which they then sealed and handed to the group facilitator. The group facilitator forwarded the questionnaires to the researcher, unopened.

The people who filled in the questionnaire and who expressed an interest in participating in the study were contacted by the researcher. The researcher verbally gave them information about the purpose of the study, the context and methodology of the study and how the information would be used. The potential participants were also informed about the confidentiality of the research and assurance was given that their participation was completely voluntary. To support the latter, it was also clearly stated that not taking part in the study would not affect the service provided by the organisation if they were a current client. Nor would the information gathered be available to any other worker apart from the researcher and their research supervisor, unless there was a safety risk.

The criteria for participation were identified as follows:-

- That the participant gave informed consent to participate.
- That the participant was or had been the primary day to day carer of the child.
- That the participant had either carried out or supported the delivery of physical punishment.
- That the participant had made a decision to stop the delivery of physical punishment.
- That there were no minimum or maximum criteria of physical punishment, i.e. any form of physical punishment.
- That the participant was not a current client or supervisee of the researcher.
- That the participant was not currently being investigated by Child, Youth and Family Services.
- That for the purposes of this project it would be necessary for the participants to have a reasonable command of the English language. From a practical point of view the inclusion of interpreters would be expensive and the use of a family member or friend could be unreliable and would add further potential for breaking confidentiality.

Criteria that excluded families that had children who were currently monitored or involved with Child Youth and Family Services (CYFS) was identified for two reasons.

Firstly the potential for boundary and role confusion by the family and by CYFS and secondly the conflict of interest in the event of a disclosure of current care and protection issues or concerns. Historical involvement with CYFS however, would produce useful data in the regulatory context of decision making (Davis, 1999), where parents had made the decision because they had been told that they must by a statutory agency such as CYFS.

### **The Interviews**

Because the sampling was purposive with a number of criteria, the overall sample size was smaller than if the data was collected in paired interview or focus group discussions. The data was collected by individual in-depth interviews which, in the context of constructivism, were that of the 'traveller metaphor' identified by Kvale. In this metaphor the interviewer/researcher 'journeys' with the interviewee:

The traveller ...asks questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of their lived world, and converses with them in the original Latin meaning of conversation as 'wandering together with' (Kvale 1996 as cited in Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 139).

It was estimated that the sampling size would be ten individual interviews. Individual interviews were chosen as a collection method for three reasons. Firstly, the sensitive nature of the topic was more likely to be discussed openly on a 1-1 basis and secondly, the geographical distance of the northern region of the organisation, from which the participants were recruited, would make it difficult to coordinate groups. Thirdly, the in depth interviews allowed for the description of the context of the lived experience of the participants, in relation to the research phenomenon (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

To some extent the interviews had a heuristic approach where the interviewer collaborated with the interviewee, sharing and reflecting on each other's experience of the phenomenon and its context. Also the researcher utilised a feminist approach, flattening the hierarchy between the interviewer and interviewee by interviewing in a conversational way so that the process became one of collaboration (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).



In-depth interviews have a continuum of structure ranging from no structure to having a number of topics that need to be covered (Alston & Bowles, 2003). In this study the researcher had a loose structure of how she expected the interview to unfold and a prompt of the questions that needed to be answered was taken to each interview (see Appendix 5). This ensured that data was collected that would determine the motivation, the contextual influences and some evaluation of the strategies used by the participants, to achieve their desired outcome of effective, non violent discipline.

As questions can be designed to elicit information that we want to hear, all the interviews were conducted by one researcher to ensure consistency. Subsequently the differences were minimised in the information gathered; either by the way that the questions were asked or by the direction the interview was facilitated. Also, the researcher had a clear picture of the purpose of the research and, as no other interviewers were to be involved, there were no training requirements.

The aim of the interview was to see the phenomenon through the eyes of the participant using their own language and making sure that, through exploration, the participant's meaning was understood. As the researcher was trained and experienced in narrative ways of communicating (Bird, 2004; Morgan, 2000) she was aware of the possibility of interpreting meaning from her own discourse and consequently vigilant about ensuring the participant's meaning was understood.

All interviews were recorded with a digital recorder. This allowed the researcher to focus on the process of the interview and the conversation with the participant, rather than attempting to gather data during the interview by writing notes (Alston & Bowles, 2003). Consent to record was included in the consent form (see Appendix 3) prior to the interview.

The interviews were organised by the researcher who directly contacted the potential participants who had expressed interest. A time and place that was most convenient for the interviewee was made to meet. Some of the participants preferred the interview to take place in their home, especially those with children at home. Others chose their workplace and two participants found it more convenient to attend the interview at the researcher's home. Both of the latter were known to pose no risk to

the researcher. There were two requests to have the interview in a public place such as a park or café. The researcher did not agree to this because of the risk to confidentiality, the possible distractions of being in a public place and the nature of the information being discussed.

Prior to the interview the Information Sheet (see Appendix 2) was posted to each participant and a follow up phone call was made by the researcher, to confirm the participant's continued interest in the research, to verify their fit with the criteria and to confirm the appointment time and venue.

For the first interviewee the list of questions (see Appendix 6) was posted out along with the information sheet. The feedback from this first participant was that having read the first two questions, they preferred to wait until the interview before viewing the remainder. They preferred to do this because it had stirred emotions that they would prefer to talk through at the interview, rather than prolong the process and deliberate on the questions beforehand. Given this feedback the researcher decided to withhold the questions prior to the remaining interviews and consequently received more spontaneous responses than would have occurred if the participants had deliberated over the questions beforehand. This also meant that the researcher may have gathered less information than if the participants had had time to consider their responses, however it was decided that the question of emotional wellbeing of the participant outweighed the advantage of gaining more information.

The first participant also gave feedback after their interview that the question of the participants' response to people other than themselves administering physical discipline to their children, needed to be asked. They found it frustrating not to be asked and felt strongly about the issue. Subsequently all participants were asked how they would have responded if someone else other than the parent were to physically discipline their child.

All interviews began with a process of engagement, confirmation that they had read and agreed with the information sheet (see Appendix 2) and an outline of the interview process. Prior to starting the interview the participant was also given the consent form (see Appendix 3) which they agreed to and signed and the interviewer

verbally outlined the boundaries of confidentiality and safety from the information sheet.

The first request of the interview 'Tell me about the time physical punishment was used in your household' generated a conversation that gave information about most of the other questions. The list of questions taken to the interview was not asked in the order that they had appeared on the question sheet (see Appendix 6), it was used at the end of the interview, as a prompt, to ensure all topics had been covered. The aim of the in-depth interview was to view the responses from the eyes of the participant; consequently the structure of the interview was less important than understanding the reality of the participant's experience and including the words that they had used (Alston & Bowles, 2003). In this study the question that most regularly had to be asked, separately from the conversational style of the interview, was the question that asked about any impact that the Amendment to Section 59 of the Crimes Act might have had on their decision. In all probability this was due to the fact that the participants had made the decision prior to the Amendment and therefore it was not relevant in their decision making process. The responses they did make to this question, when asked, can be found in chapter four.

At the end of each interview the participant was asked if there was anything that they would like to add before stopping the recorder. When the recorder was stopped the researcher asked for feedback about the process of the interview and ensured that the participant was not distressed as a result of the exploration. Most of the participants reported that through the process of the interview they had gained some insight into the process of change they had experienced in their beliefs about physical punishment. None of the participants requested further intervention as a result of the emotions evoked in the interview although throughout the interviews feelings of guilt, remorse and sadness were often mentioned.

At the end of one of the interviews it was discovered that the recorder had stopped recording and the participant generously offered to redo the interview, which was subsequently done. Another interview, when transcribed had stopped recording during the interview, however there was enough information in the transcript to

proceed without the necessity of a repeat interview. As a result of these two mishaps the researcher gained more information on the mechanics of the recorder and further mishaps were avoided.

### **The Data**

The raw data collected was transcribed (see Appendix 7). It was rich in content and large in quantity and the researcher managed this by familiarising herself with it and identifying the themes that emerged. This was done with the awareness of the previously mentioned themes that emerged in the 1999 Davis study (see previous research section in chapter two) and the identification of any further themes in the New Zealand context. By colour coding the themes a thematic framework was developed to label the transcribed data. In summarising the data; steps were taken to ensure that the main expressions used by the participants were kept as much as possible to their own language, that minimum interpretation was made so that the original expression did not get lost and no material was dismissed as irrelevant, as the meaning of it may not have been made clear at that point (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The thematic framework was cross referenced with the questions and desired outcomes of the study.

The explanation of the phenomenon was developed by using explicit reasons and accounts gathered from the in-depth interviews. The explanations were both dispositional and situational. The dispositional explanations came from the aspirations of the participant in achieving a non-violent disciplinary style of parenting in the contexts of experiential and ideological, as described by Davis (1999). The situational explanations were those that position themselves in a social construct (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003), for example the Amendment to Section 59 or the reporting of abuse to CYFS as in the regulatory, relational and biographical contexts, again described by Davis (1999) (see the previous research section in chapter two).

Given that the research for this thesis involved human participants who would be talking about complex, sensitive issues concerning their disciplinary practice with their children, ethical issues arose as the design developed. The following section of this chapter discusses the ethical considerations in the research for this thesis.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Thinking about ethical implications is never just a bureaucratic or organisational requirement or hurdle. It is essential that anyone who wants to conduct research has **respect** for those people they are researching and demonstrates this with their actions throughout the life of the project (Rapley, 2007, p. 5, emphasis original).

All research raises ethical considerations when it involves human participants (Alston & Bowles, 2003; Babbie, 2007; Barnardos, 2008; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Davidson & Tolich, 2003; de Vos, 2002; Elliott, 2005; MUHEC, 2006; Payne, 2005; Rapley, 2007; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). By its very nature qualitative research, involving the in-depth, semi-structured interview, about topics that are value based and emotionally charged can raise unpredictable issues of safety and confidentiality. With this in mind the importance of anticipating issues and maintaining respectfulness toward the participants in this research was paramount and a thorough process for producing the information was the foundation for informed consent. According to Alston and Bowles there are five ethical concerns for research. These are “Autonomy or self-determination which includes informed consent and confidentiality, Non-maleficence (not doing harm), Beneficence (doing good), Justice (are the purposes just?) and making a positive contribution to knowledge” (Alston & Bowles, 2003, p. 21). The ethical principles outlined in the Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct also include the avoidance of unnecessary deception, avoidance of conflict of interest, social and cultural sensitivity and respect for persons as well as those mentioned above (MUHEC, 2006).

Given the nature of the phenomenon, one of the primary ethical considerations for this research was the intention of ‘causing no harm’. Gauld (2001) describes the most common harms that can occur in qualitative research as emotional upset when a participant describes past events, the risk of exposure when information is traceable to the participant, misinterpreting the information gathered, possible inappropriate or illegal behaviour by the participant and the possibility of criminal or aggressive behaviour by the interviewer. In this study these considerations applied to a number of

areas including the implementation of the project in the recruitment process, the interview process and the subsequent results of the project and dissemination of the results (Babbie, 2007; de Vos, 2002; Elliott, 2005; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

In considering 'doing no harm' in the research for this thesis the following issues were identified. Firstly, the topic itself is one that raises ethical issues and values concerning the physical punishment of children. For the participants, the responsibility and primary care and love for the children lie with them. For some, discussing the phenomenon of making a decision to not use physical punishment brought forward feelings of guilt, sadness and other emotions, having used physical punishment in the past. As well as this, the implications of criminality through the Amendment to Section 59 of the Crimes Act, 1961, where it has become a criminal offence to use physical punishment against children as a form of discipline, also could have evoked feelings of guilt. Secondly, an ethical consideration of potential harm could have been identified if, during the course of the study, physical punishment continued or restarted, in which case the safety of the child would have been at risk. To minimize this risk, the criteria in the recruitment phase excluded families that had children who were currently monitored or involved with Child Youth and Family Services (CYFS). This minimised the potential for boundary and role confusion between CYFS and the family and any potential conflicts of interest. Consequently for this study a robust confidentiality and safety process was developed, especially in the area of care and protection of the child and domestic/family violence. Confidentiality information prior to the start of the interview had a safety clause which stated that information shared with the researcher would remain confidential unless serious risk or harm to any party was identified, in which case the participant would be informed of any actions to be taken to ensure safety, unless by doing so it would endanger anyone further. In those circumstances the concerns would be reported directly to the relevant services. This information was included in the Information sheet (see Appendix 2).

To ensure autonomy or self determination, the participants were fully informed of the implications of participating through the introduction of a thorough information sheet (see Appendix 2) and consent form (see Appendix 3). These included the above

mentioned confidentiality statement and outlined circumstances where confidentiality would not be kept, such as the risk to safety. They also included the statement that the process was voluntary and that the participant could choose to cease participation at any time. The information sheet included information about the purpose of the study, the context of the study and how the data would be used. In addition to this, it included information that names would be coded and not stored with the data and that data would be stored in a secure place (Alston & Bowles, 2003; Babbie, 2007; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Consent to interview and to tape was part of the informed consent form (see Appendix 3). Once the interviews were transcribed, the participants were given their transcripts to read in order to give feedback, to ensure accuracy of information and to give their consent to proceed.

Ethnicity was not included in the criteria for recruitment selection nor was ethnicity data collected as a basis for analysis (MUHEC, 2006). The ethnicity of the participants was unknown until recruitment was complete and a sample of predominantly New Zealand European/Pakeha was recruited. If cultural issues had emerged from the collected data this could have suggested further research with the identified culture in a future study. However as the sample was small and was a non-probability sample, where the sample was not a true reflection of the population being studied (Alston & Bowles, 2003; Davidson & Tolich, 2003; de Vos, 2002; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003), no generalisations could be made on the basis of culture. Cultural sensitivity by the researcher was demonstrated at all times (ANZASW, 2008). Where the ethnicity of the participant was different to the researcher, consultation with appropriate members of the ethnic group would have been sought if appropriate and necessary, without the disclosure of the participants name or any other identifying information. This however proved unnecessary in the context of the interviews.

Apart from the ethical considerations for the recruitment, confidentiality and safety of the participants, this project also needed to consider the ethical issues associated with the researcher's employment within the organisation from which the participants were recruited. The organisation's research manager, the specialist advisor and the unit

manager agreed to the recruitment of the client group. The organisation had not experienced a research project for study purposes from an employee prior to this study, therefore there were no precedents set regarding roles and boundaries. This was clarified in a memorandum of understanding (Barnardos, 2008) (see Appendix 4).

Communication and collaboration with the organisation's Research Manager was ongoing throughout the project's process. It did not include data content or the identities of the participants; it did however, ensure that roles and boundaries were clear between the organisation and the researcher. As the phenomenon of making a decision to not smack is fully supported by the organisation, the results of the research were not in any way in conflict with the organisation's values and principles.

The memorandum of understanding between the researcher and the organisation included a statement of clarity about the ownership of the project and the responsibility of the researcher to obtain consent from the participants to take part in the study. It also included the organisation's requirement that the researcher provide a written report at the conclusion of the study, that would not include any information that was commercially sensitive, or that would allow the research participants or their children, or any staff members to be identified (Barnardos, 2008) (see Appendix 4).

The research proposal was submitted to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) and subsequently approved (see Appendix 5). Following this the research study commenced corresponding to the process detailed in this chapter. The following chapter details the findings of the research from the transcribed interviews.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Findings

This chapter details the findings of the thematic analysis of the ten in-depth interviews conducted for the research in this thesis (see the interviews section of chapter three). It first describes the demographics of the participants in age, gender and ethnicity. Because only one male participant was interviewed, the findings have been documented in a gender neutral way to support his confidentiality. The demographics section also includes the partner status of the participants and details whether the participant was speaking from a current parenting perspective, with children living at home at the time of the interview, or from a retrospective position with adult children.

In order to put the findings in context for the reader; the demographics section is followed by the section 'Type, context and biography of physical discipline'. This section details the responses the respondents made to the questions about the type and severity of the physical discipline they used on their children, the context in which the discipline occurred and the participant's own experience of physical discipline as a child. This section ends with a summary of the prevalence of the use of implements to administer physical discipline that were reported in the interviews.

The section 'Type, context and biography of physical discipline' is followed by the section 'Motivation to not smack', detailing the motivation to stop using physical discipline. In this section the researcher has made the distinction between those parents who were responding to the questions retrospectively as a parent, with adult children and those who were currently parenting with children at home. The parents who were speaking retrospectively had the benefit of hindsight and were in a position of being able to talk about their experience at a time when they were no longer living in the context of parental stress or under pressure from society to be a 'good parent'. Consequently the researcher believed it was important to distinguish the two in the writing up of the findings. 'The motivation to not smack' section is arranged under five categories previously identified in the findings of Davis (1999), (see previous research section in chapter two). The categories are experiential, regulatory, ideological,

relational and biographical. A description of each category is given under each heading. Following the 'Motivation to not smack' section is the section 'Beliefs held about physical discipline before and after the decision '. This section relates to the discussion in Davis' article calling for more research on the point at which parents change their beliefs from one of sanctioning physical discipline to one of believing physical discipline to be abusive (Davis, 1999). Alongside the beliefs and attitudes held by the participants this section briefly reports on the intergenerational changes of attitude toward physical discipline as well as the comparisons that two participants have had the opportunity to make, when they have used physical discipline on one or more children and not used it on others. The latter gives some insight into the possible outcomes of physical discipline and non-physical discipline within one family environment.

With a focus on the New Zealand context of the physical discipline of children, the next section 'Amendment to Section 59', details the responses of the participants when asked about their thoughts on the changing of Section 59 of the Crimes Act, 1961 (see Section 59 in the legislation section of chapter two). At the time of the interviews the national referendum on the law change had not been approved, consequently no questions were asked on the topic. The process and outcome of the referendum is outlined in the legislation section of the chapter two. Following the participants' views on the Amendment to Section 59 is a section about their views on the physical discipline of their children by people other than themselves, in order to further determine whether smacking was viewed as a parental right.

The section on 'Useful strategies for achieving success' details the range of alternative disciplinary strategies that the participants employed in their bid to stop the use of physical discipline and the source from which the strategies came. This information also relates to the discussion in the Davis (1999) paper where he proposed that in order to assist parents in their desire to stop the use of physical discipline, it is important to know the strategies that parents have successfully used. The discussion and conclusion to these findings can be found in the following chapter, chapter five.

## **Demographics of the research sample**

The demographics reported on for the ten participants in this study include age groups, gender, ethnicity and partnership status. The demographics also include whether the participant had children at home at the time of the interviews or whether the participant had adult children and spoke retrospectively about their parenting practices.

Of the ten participants one was in the 25-30 year age group, two were in the 30-35 year age group, one in the 35-40, two in the 40-45, two in the 45-50 and two were over 60 years of age. All participants were women with the exception of one man. Eight participants identified themselves as New Zealand European/Pakeha, one participant identified as Māori and one identified as 'other'.

All of the participants were interviewed from different families. Seven of the participants had raised or were raising the children with partners and three of the participants as sole parents. Most of the participants had involvement with close and extended family although relationships were not always described as helpful.

Of the ten participants four spoke of the changes they made retrospectively, five spoke of their current parenting practice and one spoke from both perspectives having children living at home as well as adult children.

In order to put the findings in context for the reader, the following section details the type and severity of the participants' physical disciplinary practice. It also includes the participants' own experience of physical discipline as a child.

## **Type, context and biography of physical discipline**

The frequency and severity of the physical punishment that the participants reported using on their children varied widely from a 'one off' smack to frequent, severe beatings. The following is a summary of the findings of the frequency and severity of the physical punishment from the thematic analysis and includes the contexts in which the discipline took place. The participants' own experience of receiving physical discipline as a child is also included in this section.

The mildest form of physical discipline reported was an incident when the parent hurt their son at a time when they felt stressed. The parent hurt the child as he went through a doorway when the child was three to four years of age. The incident occurred in the context of frustration and anger when the parent was in a hurry. In the interview the parent said:

*“I was very patient with them but it just happened once, and I regretted it for the rest of my life.”*

As a child, this participant witnessed their siblings receiving physical discipline from their mother in the form of regular ‘beatings’ with an open hand or with a wooden spoon. Occasionally the participant also received the same punishment. At the age of 4–5 years they remembered making a decision to not smack their children when they became a parent.

Another participant reported that they had used smacking with the open hand to discipline their child from the time he was a toddler. They described a context of their own anger and ‘being pushed to the limit’ when the physical discipline occurred. This participant had used smacking to discipline their child (eight years of age) within the six months prior to the interview. They reported that smacking had been used no more than five times in the child’s life. Smacking was always with an open hand and they described one occasion as follows:

*“And I actually pulled down his pants and I smacked his bottom with my hand, and I got a sore hand but I felt that it needed to be something which gave him note.”*

As a child they had no recollection of being physically punished but described being ‘very controlled’ by both parents. They recalled their older brother being hit and reported that in hindsight they realised that they had been controlled with the threat of physical discipline rather than by receiving it.

One participant reported that they continued to use physical force with their sons occasionally. They reported that their use of smacking on the hand or ‘backside’ of the child, from the age of two onwards lessened as the three children got older. The oldest at the time of the interview was 16 years of age. They also reported that generally the youngest child had received less physical discipline than the two older children. The

smacking had been used to teach the children not to do things and to assert their authority over the three boys. They also reported that they had left the relationship with the other biological parent of the children because of the other parents abuse toward the children, by being 'heavy-handed' and hitting 'around the head'.

This participant reported that as a child they were smacked on the 'backside' and the legs by both their parents. They also reported that the other parent who had been 'heavy-handed' was brought up 'in that sort of situation', suggesting that the 'abusive' parent had been abused as a child.

Another participant with two children reported that they had smacked mainly their oldest child (six years of age at the time of the interview) approximately 'half a dozen' times with an open hand on the hand or leg:

*"I've smacked her when she's just out of control, just like panicking herself and getting upset about nothing, like screaming and crying and I'll just smack her on the leg and she's like oooohh, and it just snaps her out of it."*

As a child this participant was physically disciplined from the age of six to their early teens:

*"I remember getting smacked and I remember going [saying] 'it doesn't hurt'. I remember Mum; it must have hurt using her hand so she'd use her jandal to smack our bums."*

This participant was also slapped across the face by their mother.

Another participant had a large age gap between their first child and their youngest child and spoke from a retrospective and current perspective. This participant reported that they had used physical discipline with their two oldest adult children but never with the third oldest, now 18 years of age. They first used physical discipline when the children were babies with a light slap to stop them biting when breast feeding. Physical discipline had been used 'only a couple of times' with their youngest child (eight years). They described the physical discipline of their adult children as:

*"I never ever smacked them on the head, ever.....I'd smack them and I would only smack them once but it would be on their bottom or on their arm, and then I would apologise afterwards."*

In this household the physical discipline occurred in a context of frustration and lack of support:

*"....but every time I gave a smack I knew at the time that it was my frustration. It was because I didn't know how to deal with it any other way."*

This participant also reported that the older children had received physical discipline from their other parent and this had involved 'hitting':

*"[They] would occasionally hit them on the head but I used to go absolutely mental which caused arguments so [they] would hit them on the hand or on the shoulder or something."*

As a child this participant described being smacked by their mother and being threatened by their mother to 'wait 'til your father gets home', although their father never used physical punishment toward them. They also reported witnessing physical discipline at school where children were disciplined by using a slipper. They reported that this had a detrimental impact on them:

*"When I went to school you actually got physical punishment at school. You got the slipper. I know people that did and the trauma from afterwards was awful, so seeing someone else that's been hit is horrible for me, in general for anybody."*

Another participant also talked about the use of physical discipline delivered in a context of anger:

*"When you're tired and you've had enough and the child is just getting to you, especially when they're younger and they're doing the tantrums and you can't reason with them, you can't talk to them, that's when we would lose our temper and lash out."*

This participant remembered smacking the child on the 'bum' on three occasions when the child was between the ages of two and three. They remembered smacking him hard enough to cause imprints of their rings on the child's buttocks.

As a child this participant had received regular and severe physical punishment and was often the scapegoat for the misbehaviour of their siblings:

*"We were brought up with the wooden spoon. [On] average once a fortnight or month. I remember ....she got the wooden spoon out and she smacked me so hard on the bum that it snapped. And then I got in*

*bigger trouble because I had broken the wooden spoon....the white hot pain that shot through my body I still remember that."*

This participant also remembered the violence between their male siblings which they often witnessed:

*"He was curled up in the foetal position on the ground, He was under ten, and my brother xxxxxxxx... was kicking him because xxxxxxxx had gone into his room."*

Another participant described how they delivered physical discipline to their children. The discipline was always in a context of anger and 'getting to a boiling point'.

When asked about the way the physical discipline was administered the participant replied:

*"....Usually on the bum... on the leg or the bum... Although once.....I got really angry I pulled her hair to grab her...."*

This participant described their own discipline as a child as predominantly, being smacked by their parents and grandparents. They were also threatened with the use of a leather strap which they recalled receiving once:

*"Yes, I can remember because once we'd been particularly naughty, once we had a leather strap.....which was horrendous, really awful, really hurt."*

They remembered being smacked from the age of three by their grandmother.

One of the participants, who had participated with a retrospective view, as their children were adults, had this to say about the physical discipline of their children:

*"We used physical discipline on our first three children when they were little.....from when they were about two years old."*

When asked about the type of physical discipline they responded:

*"A smack on the legs, bottom.....With the third child we actually used a wooden spoon."*

The third child had raised particular resentment for this parent as the child persisted in going to the parent's room throughout the night. In an attempt to remedy the situation a line was drawn between the child's bedroom and the parent's bedroom, by placing a wooden spoon on the floor. If the child crossed the line he was hit with the wooden spoon by the parent, on his way back to his bedroom. This physical discipline

took place in a complex context of loneliness, lack of support, tiredness and a belief that physical discipline would eventually work.

As a child this participant remembered their home as a 'very tense place' where their mother administered physical punishment to the girls and their father 'dealt to' the boys. They reported that their compliance was motivated by avoiding physical punishment rather than receiving it:

*"I avoided it well because I was compliant but I observed my siblings... my sisters being hit by my mother with a wooden spoon."*

One of the participants remembered physically disciplining their child only twice, once for misbehaviour and once to push them aside and out of their path. Both of these incidents were severe and occurred when the child was between five and eight years of age. One of the incidents of discipline involved hitting the child on the open palm with a stick, which broke on impact. The other incident involved pushing the child out of the way with such force that he was knocked from one room to another:

*"And I mean he went from like the kitchen to the front door without touching the ground. That's how hard I hit him. And he was really scared to come anywhere near me after that."*

This parent had been physically disciplined as a child and when asked what kind of discipline they had had, they responded by saying:

*"Oh, it was the iron cord and it was not the cord, it was the buckle end of the cord, or the belt."*

This participant went on to say that from the ages of at least eight to fourteen:

*"...he'd [father] turn around and ask us what punishment we thought we should get and I'd say "ok what do I feel like today the iron cord, no that hurts, no, stick hurts, the strap will do". Go get the strap, and bang he would go get the strap, take his belt off, and he would put buckle and then push it together and then you knew it was going to hurt, and it was a thick belt, and it was in places where it really hurt. Like the back of the legs was a beauty and if you run to get away it was around the feet so that you didn't get away."*

They later said

*"My dad, he gave me the cane, he took the end of my finger right off there by hitting with the cane, and that's a scar for life."*



This participant went on to say that their father 'was not a violent man.'

Another participant described physical punishment of their now adult children in the context of religious belief. This participant also described feelings of exasperation and frustration with the children's behaviour which would prompt them to threaten the child with the other parent's return home. When asked what type of physical discipline was used they responded by saying:

*"There was a lot of smacking with the hand but we did use a wooden spoon perhaps because we considered that they needed such a punishment, but my [wife/husband] used a cord, at least two or three times."*

This participant reported that the discipline was used on the children from the time they could crawl to approximately 12 years of age.

This participant received no physical discipline as a child:

*"I wasn't disciplined by my mother or father in the way of being smacked. Neither of them smacked me. I had a very warm, nurturing relationship with my father and with my mother....."*

Finally in this section of the findings, the high prevalence of the use of an instrument in the delivery of physical punishment was noticeable to the researcher. Only one participant reported that they had neither received nor delivered physical discipline with an instrument. Six participants reported that they had been physically disciplined as a child with an instrument. Three of these were with wooden spoons, one with a jandal, two with a leather strap or belt and one with the Bakelite end of an iron cord. Two of those who had received physical punishment with an instrument as a child had also delivered physical punishment using a stick or a wooden spoon. Of the three participants that did not report receiving physical punishment with an instrument as a child, one reported that they had used a wooden spoon and a 'cord'. One participant threatened with a ruler and one witnessed the use of a slipper to deliver physical punishment at school.

For some of the participants the actual incident of physically disciplining their child gave them the motivation to stop smacking. Consequently more detail of the severity

of the physical discipline administered is described in the following section that explores the motivation to not smack, under the sub-heading ‘Experiential Motivation’.

### Motivation to not smack

The results of the thematic analysis of the research for this thesis were consistent with the five contexts identified by Davis in his study of 22 parents, who said that they had stopped or tried to stop the use of physical discipline (Davis, 1999). These contexts are experiential, regulatory, ideological, relational and biographical. The findings for these contexts or categories are indicated under the relevant headings in this section of the chapter and under each heading is an explanation of each category. As most of the participants identified more than one context, the following table shows the contexts for each participant.

Table 4.1: Motivational context in relation to each participant

Motivational Context	Participants									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Experiential	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*
Regulatory	*							*		
Ideological	*		*	*	*	*	*			*
Relational	*	*	*	*						
Biographical			*	*	*					*

With this table as an overview the data for each context is detailed under the following sub-headings.

#### Experiential Motivation

The experiential category of the motivation to stop physical punishment includes the experiences the participant had as a result of smacking their child and the concern they felt at their child’s response.

In the findings for this research the experiential motivation fitted into three sub-categories through which the participants were motivated. Firstly the emotional impact on themselves and the child, for causing pain and the poor role modelling of hitting, secondly the fear of losing control and seriously harming the child and thirdly the ineffectiveness of the intervention to stop the child's unwanted behaviour.

Out of the ten interviews nine of the participants were motivated to stop the use of physical discipline by an experience or experiences of administering it. Of those nine, five of the participants were currently parenting and four spoke retrospectively. One of the participants who spoke from a current parenting role also spoke retrospectively, with an age gap of over 10 years between the youngest and second to youngest child.

Of those that were currently parenting all had other motivation as well as experiential. One participant reported that all three sub categories of; ineffectiveness, poor role modelling and not wanting to lose control, outlined at the beginning of this section, were the reasons for stopping the use of physical discipline. When asked to talk further about their beliefs about poor role modelling, their response described the motivation both from the ineffectiveness of the practice and their concern for poor role modelling reasons:

*"Yes, it's not working..... And [it means] I've just smacked her, telling her not to smack. That's just teaching her to smack."*

In terms of ineffectiveness one participant reported that they did find the use of physical discipline effective however this was only in the short term and would not work repetitively. They also said

*"I did hit xxxxx when he was a toddler, he just hit me back so I could just see it was going to be futile unless I kept hitting harder and harder and I didn't want to do that."*

One participant talked about ineffectiveness in relation to the size and age of their children:

*"I think as the boys got older I could see that it was turning into a war zone and I'm talking about seven and I probably didn't do it after that because my kids are very tall anyway."*

Three of the participants who were currently parenting described incidents of administering physical discipline that had had an emotional impact on them, motivating them to practise alternative ways of disciplining their children:

*".....Although once, once, I got really angry,.....and this was the turning point, actually, I got really angry.....and she was just really naughty.....and I pulled her hair to grab her,.....and even now I feel guilty about that and that's really bad behaviour on my part.....That was the turning point because I thought 'this is terrible'."*

When asked how they administered physical discipline another participant said:

*"With an open hand and I remember smacking him so hard that the imprints of my rings were left on his buttocks.....and that shocked me into thinking, 'Oh no!'"*

All four participants that spoke retrospectively also identified other motivating factors. One participant exclusively spoke of the fear of losing control and seriously physically harming the child. This participant had physically punished their child by hitting him with a stick that broke with the force. When asked if they didn't feel so good about hurting the child they responded by saying:

*"Oh, no, I was actually scared that I was going to hurt the kids.....I used to feel scared of the kids and I was only scared that I was going to hurt them."*

When further asked if they were worried about losing their temper they responded:

*"No, I think it was I just don't know my own strength.....and being such a little kid [five-eight years old] and by hitting him with the amount of force that I did hit him and I broke the stick. To me it didn't seem as though it was too excessive but when the stick broke I thought [pause] well that was quite a heavy stick. I still have it here today."*

Another participant who also spoke retrospectively described an incident of physical punishment that motivated change:

*"There is a moment that sits in my memory banks and will never go away,.....I smacked, hit my daughter and bruises came up on her leg and that was one of those moments of 'I have to find a different way to do this'."*

The same participant described an episode of physical punishment in an effort to stop the child from entering the parents' bedroom at night that also motivated change:

*".....we told him if he walked over the wooden spoon that was on the kitchen floor that we would use it and smack him all the way back to his bedroom. And we did that. And it's horrifying, it's horrifying!"*

Another participant, speaking retrospectively, described two incidents that alerted the participant that physical discipline could be a problem:

*".....I did think the two occasions when my daughter was smacked prolonged and very severely.....that there was a problem with that, definitely a problem with that,.....that my [wife/husband] had .....lost control of themselves .....in their smacking of her."*

The participant went on to describe the experience and the impact it had on them:

*"....I was more concerned about being found out by someone at school about that there'd been a bruise on her bottom, but I think there was an element of feeling for her, as well; the fact that she was bruised and that it was quite a severe, abusive hiding that she had had."*

Another participant who reported only one incident of hurting their child and spoke retrospectively, described the motivation to ensure that it would not happen again:

*"It was something I did and I didn't want to have this guilty feeling and bad feelings because I didn't believe they should be punished. They are kids."*

The majority of the participants reported that they had experienced significant moments of physically disciplining their child that had impacted on their decision to stop its practice. The following section reports on the regulatory motivators that impacted on the participants' decision.

### **Regulatory Motivation**

Regulatory motivation (Davis, 1999) for stopping the use of physical discipline of their children includes the belief, by the parent, that smacking is a punishable activity. They may have been informed that physical punishment of their child may result in prosecution or a withdrawal of services.

Of the ten participants, two talked about the regulatory factors which motivated them to stop physical discipline. One spoke retrospectively and the other spoke from a current parenting context. The retrospective participant identified the regulatory motivation alongside other motivation and described the following:

*"I was encouraged with much enthusiasm to attend Playcentre.....So it's a rule, if you go to Playcentre you cannot smack your children or any other child during the session"*

The participant who spoke from a current parenting context identified the regulatory motivation as the sole motivation for stopping the use of physical discipline even though their beliefs and attitudes did not agree with the regulation. When asked how physical discipline fitted with their work with children they responded by saying:

*"Well you just know you can't do that."*

When asked if they were told not to do it and to find other ways they replied:

*"Yes definitely. But I mean its hard work. And I'll tell you what, that is why the job's not getting done properly."*

Only two participants reported a regulatory motivation in their decision to stop practising physical discipline. The following section reports on the ideological motivation that encouraged participants to stop smacking their children.

### **Ideological Motivation**

Ideological reasons (Davis, 1999) for the stopping of smacking include; changes from the belief in parental rights and power and control to consideration of children's rights and the belief that children are smaller more vulnerable members of society.

Seven of the ten participants identified ideological factors that motivated them to cease using physical discipline. Four were speaking from a current parenting perspective and three were speaking retrospectively. All seven participants who were motivated by ideological reasoning also identified other motivating factors.

One of the participants who had a 14 year age gap between their oldest and youngest child spoke from both a retrospective and current parenting perspective. This participant had identified the importance of role modelling behaviour with their child and when asked to speak further about it they responded with their beliefs about children's rights:

*"..If you're at work and you do something wrong at work your boss doesn't come in and smack you, does he? He just doesn't do it. You have a respectful conversation, hopefully, and there's no reason why you can't treat children like that. You can't demand respect, you have*

*to earn it and I want her to respect me so I need to respect her, so it's as simple as that."*

At the end of the interview they used a similar metaphor to stress their beliefs about children's rights:

*"Think about how you would feel if somebody was smacking you because you've just dropped a plate or taken something you shouldn't have done."*

Another participant, currently parenting young children, had the following to say from an ideological perspective:

*"Like you wouldn't hit a friend, so it's that respect for your children, as a person, it was all of that, respecting them."*

Of the three participants who were speaking from a retrospective perspective and who mentioned ideological beliefs, one talked about not wanting to hurt the child from a fear of going 'too far' which although fits into the experiential context also suggests an ideological context of not wanting to hurt the child, one expressed a belief that they had no right to smack other people's children from a parental rights perspective and one talked about children's rights as an ideological motivation to not smack.

The following section reports on the findings on the relational motivation to stop the practice of physical discipline.

### **Relational Motivation**

Relational motivation (Davis, 1999) to stop physical discipline includes the motivation that participants identified when family and friends disagreed with the participants' use of physical discipline.

Four participants in this study identified that part of the motivation to stop the use of physical discipline came from the feedback from family or friends who did not agree with or approve of the physical discipline that the participant was using on their children. One participant described the encouragement of a friend to attend Playcentre where physical discipline was not allowed. Although at the time the participant initially resisted the regulatory motivation of the Playcentre, in hindsight they realised that the introduction was significant in changing their beliefs about physical discipline:

*“It [physical discipline] stopped as I learnt several things. I was encouraged with much enthusiasm to attend Playcentre.....I went along to Playcentre and I noticed very quickly the support around not smacking.”*

Also from a retrospective perspective another participant described how they were influenced by a partner following an incident of physical punishment:

*“After that [physical punishment] I sat down and spoke with my partner asked [them] if [they] thought it was severe and [they] said yes. And I thought about it for a while and then I started to get scared of the kids. [I was] scared that I was going to hurt them.”*

Of the two participants currently parenting, both described their own learning in relation to their partners’ use of discipline and the way they could now identify some of the partners’ use of discipline as inappropriate:

*“But what I have noticed is, since doing that parenting course, is that I really notice when my [husband/wife] uses.....physical things like drag her off our little baby, things like that.....I really don’t like it.”*

Another participant said:

*“My [husband/wife] was a smacker.....[they] would walk in, [they] would smack them and [they] would go off and do something and all of a sudden it clicked one day, what the hell are you doing?.....[they’re] not even having a conversation with them.”*

The relational motivation to stop the practice of physical discipline was experienced by four of the participants. An equal number of participants reported that their own experience of physical discipline as a child had an impact on their decision to stop the practice with their children. This is detailed in the following section.

### **Biographical Motivation**

Biographical reasons (Davis, 1999) for the cessation of physical discipline include the experiences the participants had when they were physically disciplined as a child, and the memories and feelings that they have carried with them about this.

All of the participants were asked about the discipline they received as a child. Their experiences varied from no physical discipline to severe physical discipline. Of the ten participants, four identified that their own experiences as a child had a direct impact on their decision to stop using physical discipline. Two of these participants were



speaking from a retrospective perspective, one of whom had described a particularly severe upbringing by their own parents. When asked if this had had an impact on their decision to not use physical discipline they said:

*“I was thinking about my own upbringing and I’m thinking to myself well I’m not going to punish him, I’m going to explain everything to him.”*

They went on to say:

*“I think it was the fact that it was my flesh and blood.....the fact that I’d made something and I wasn’t going to destroy it, like what they had done, I wanted to be different.”*

Another participant who spoke from a retrospective perspective also described severe physical punishment in their own home life, although they reported that the physical discipline that they received was not as severe as their siblings. When asked how they felt after being punished with ‘the wooden spoon’ they responded by saying:

*“I felt very, very sad.....I didn’t like it, and that’s when I actually decided that I’m not going to, from my childhood my mum was a good example for me and I never, ever wanted to be like her, and I decided from very early childhood that this is not the person I am going to be. I am going to be a very caring mum and I’m going to be understanding, not beating or hitting my children.....”*

A participant who was currently parenting had the following to say about an incident of administering physical discipline:

*“.....I remember thinking I do not want to be like my parents and I don’t want my son to have the same fear that I had.....”*

This participant also described the impact that childhood physical discipline had had on a sibling:

*“She said to me she remembers smacks and things like that and she doesn’t want to do that to her children.”*

Not all participants who had experienced physical punishment as children were motivated to change their disciplinary style because of their childhood experience. The summary of the levels of physical punishment experienced by the participants when they were growing up is reported in more detail in the ‘Type, context and biography of physical discipline’ section of this chapter. This summary demonstrates that only one of the ten participants had not been physically disciplined as a child.

The five contexts for the motivation to change child disciplinary practice for each participant is summarised in table 4.2 showing the contexts identified for each participant, at the beginning of this section on the motivation to not smack.

The following section reports on the beliefs held by the participants both before and after they had made the decision to not smack their children.

### **Beliefs held about physical discipline**

Davis (1999) concluded that the cessation of hitting, slapping and spanking within the experiential, regulatory, ideological, relational and biographical contexts, brought forward new meanings and beliefs about corporal punishment that: "...turn old beliefs into excuses and defined non-spanking as progress" (Davis, 1999, p. 506). He also concluded that more research was required to determine at what point those beliefs changed. In the interviews for the research for this thesis the participants were asked what beliefs they had about physical discipline before and after making the decision to stop. Although some of the participants could identify defining moments when a decision to stop the use of physical discipline occurred, they all described their change in beliefs about the physical discipline of children, as a process rather than an event.

The following details the findings for the participants' beliefs before and after making the decision to stop the use of physical discipline. At the end of this section is a table giving an overview of the beliefs that participants reported having had, before and after making the decision to stop the use of physical discipline.

The one participant, whose sole reason to stop using physical discipline with their children was regulatory, stated that their beliefs about physical discipline remained the same even though their practice had changed. When asked about their beliefs at the time of the interview they replied:

*"My beliefs in smacking, I think it is a good thing in the right place.  
Definitely."*

Three of the participants stated that they had never believed that it was right to use physical discipline. They reported that they had always believed that physical discipline

was unnecessary, two of them having received physical discipline as a child. One responded by saying:

*"...it was not something that I believed I should be doing.....I didn't believe they should be punished. They are kids."*

Similarly in this group of participants, when asked how their beliefs had changed since making the decision to not smack one participant said:

*"I can't say that they've ever been any different, really. No, I've never been really pro-smacking. I never have."*

When asked about children's rights, this participant drew parallels between children's rights and women's rights:

*".....it has always been the strong and the most powerful [who] have the most rights and that which was less powerful had the least rights..... children do need to have rights."*

One of the participants who had changed their beliefs about physically disciplining their children, reported that prior to making the decision to stop the use of physical discipline that they and their partner firmly believed the teachings of the fundamentalist church to which they belonged:

*"...we felt from the teachings of the church that that was the right thing to do, was to smack your children.....one book stated that before the age of two that we needed to break the child's spirit and that's what [we] set out to do."*

When asked about their beliefs now they said:

*"That it's abusive and that there are far more effective and more powerful strategies for disciplining our children than smacking."*

They went on to say:

*"I think when I was hitting my children I thought that that was good parenting and.....that was part of my love for them.....now I think a child has a right to their [parents] love and wants some nurturance from their parents. That's what I thought I was giving them back then."*

Another participant reported that their beliefs were based on family norms prior to the process of changing their disciplinary practice. When asked what their beliefs about physical discipline had been they replied:

*"...it was the only way to manage children. That there was no other way, and that's how I had been disciplined, so there was a really strong sense that that was the only way I should do it, so that's what you learnt."*

When this participant was asked if they had always thought that the physical discipline of children was a problem they responded by saying:

*"No, I totally believed in it."*

When asked what this participant now believed about the physical discipline of children they replied:

*"It's just not ok. ...in terms of human development, we are so far behind. These babies will nurture our planet if we nurture them in the right way. That's what I believe."*

One participant talked about the change they have noticed in societal beliefs:

*"Thirteen years ago, if you didn't smack your child you were a bad mother.....now if you have a child that has a tantrum in public and you smack them....you will get people saying how terrible , what a terrible mum."*

This participant also talked about the change in their beliefs since making the decision to stop using physical discipline. When asked about their beliefs prior to the decision they recalled:

*"Nothing wrong with a smack.....we were smacked, there's nothing wrong with us but with maturity comes doubt. Could we have been better if we had [n't]?"*

Their beliefs at the time of the interview were mentioned when they stressed the importance of the human rights of the child in relation to their parenting:

*"...not taking it personally if he is grumpy or angry, but also recognising that children are human beings and they have the right to be angry, they have the right to be tired."*

One participant was very clear about the difference between their beliefs before and after the decision. This participant also attributed prior beliefs to family norms:

*"...my mother brought me up to believe a good hiding's not going to do anybody any harm."*

When asked what beliefs they now had, they replied:

*"I believe that smacking is totally, it's abhorrent, it's totally unnecessary and it teaches nothing."*

Another noticeable theme about beliefs and attitudes from the interviews was the reference some participants made to the intergenerational changes in attitudes to the physical discipline of children, which had taken place within the family. These participants described the changes that their parents had made in their attitude to physical discipline since becoming grandparents. This included some grandparents who had severely disciplined the participants as children and who changed their approach to physical discipline with their grandchildren.

One participant spoke of the physical discipline that they had witnessed their siblings receiving, from their mother and who had described their mother as someone who gave the children a 'beating'. Later in the interview they had this to say about their mother as a grandparent:

*"She is actually a wonderful grandmother."*

Another participant talked about the different views their mother had on physical discipline since becoming a grandmother. They attributed the change to:

*"Probably just going through having three kids experiencing your mistakes and learning from them.....Probably realised smacking kids didn't make a difference."*

One participant who had received regular physical discipline as a child from their mother was asked what support they had had in making the decision to stop their own use of physical discipline with their own child. They replied:

*"Even Mum, talking to her and saying about memories of growing up...and now when she's not defensive about it, she's more likely to step up and support."*

They also attributed this change to becoming grandparents:

*"It's also because it's her mokos though, her grandchildren, it's different."*

This participant also described the change in their father's attitudes:

*"...things we would have got hidings for, and I mean literal beatings, [he says] 'Oh don't growl [at] him he's so young, he's only little.'"*

Another participant found it difficult to tell their parents that they had made a decision to not smack because of their parents' expectations that physical discipline would be the standard form of discipline with their children and to not do so would be a negative commentary on their parents' parenting practice.

*"That was one of the biggest issues for me, how do I do this differently when my parents are observing me doing this differently and when I was always a compliant [daughter/son]."*

When this participant did tell their father that they no longer smacked the children he gave them permission to 'try a different way'. This participant attributed this to an incident of physical discipline that they believe was a defining moment for their father:

*"..I [am] aware of an incident ....after I'd left home, with my younger sister which involved quite serious physical abuse....I think that may have been his incident that created insight for him, that moment."*

Two of the participants had become estranged from their parents and had no recent indicators of how their parents viewed physical discipline at the time of the interviews. To summarise the changes in beliefs about physical discipline that the participants reported, the following table gives an overview of the change in beliefs that the participants identified.

Table 4.2 Change in beliefs

<b>Change in beliefs about physical discipline</b>	<b>No. of participants</b>
Always has and continues to believe smacking ok	1
Used to believe smacking ok through family culture and no longer believes so	3
Used to believe smacking ok through religion and no longer believes so	1
Never believed smacking ok	5

With their change in beliefs, two participants had used physical discipline on some children in their household and not on others, giving these parents some insight into any difference in outcome for their children. This is explored in the following section.

### **Comparisons within households**

One participant was asked about the comparison between the children they did and did not smack. They replied:

*“...that’s the thing that I find really upsetting because there’s such a difference and while the [physically disciplined] older children are still amazing people their opportunities to be adventurous and take risks have come so much later in their life, so I feel sad about that.”*

This participant goes on to say:

*“...when I see my [non-physically disciplined] children who are so comfortable with who they are....the opportunities that gives them in life....And thank god I learnt it when I did, for them.”*

Another participant who had the opportunity to compare reported that not physically disciplining one of their children had the opposite outcome to the previous participant:

*“He’s the one [non-physically disciplined] that’s the most outruly [sic] out of the three of them. He’s the one that’s probably the most disobedient, the one that’s most defiant.....and probably the one that’s cheekiest too.....I know they all have different personalities...but just a level of respect, it’s not there, not the same as I have with the other boys.”*

The opposite outcomes reported by these two participants related to the beliefs they held about the physical discipline of children at the time of the interviews. The participant who reported a positive difference with the children, who were not physically disciplined, had stopped using physical discipline when they no longer believed that physical discipline was appropriate. On the other hand, the participant who reported a negative difference with the child, who was not physically disciplined, continued to believe that physical discipline was appropriate in some circumstances.

Given that these beliefs included the parental right to physically discipline a child and because of the challenge that legislation had made on parental rights (see section on Section 59 in chapter two) the following section reports on the impact that the

Amendment to Section 59 in 2007 had on the participants' decision to stop using physical discipline on their children.

### **Amendment to Section 59**

Because of the political climate about the Amendment to Section 59 of the Crimes Act, 1961 in New Zealand (see section on Section 59 in chapter two) one of the questions in the interview asked the participants what views they held about the Amendment and whether it was a motivating factor in their decision to stop the use of physical discipline on their children.

The two participants who supported the Amendment to Section 59 of the Crimes Act, 1961 spoke retrospectively as they had made the decision to stop the use of physical discipline, prior to the change in the law, and now had adult children.

When asked whether the Amendment to Section 59 had made a difference in their decision making process one of these participants replied:

*"No it's not going to fit with me because it had already happened. However, I think it's a fantastic step forward for New Zealand and for our children in New Zealand."*

The other participant, when asked what difference the Amendment might have made if it had become law prior to their decision, said:

*"....so it might have shifted me to that place earlier. Because....I smacked my children in public and if I had known that [it] could have ended me up [prosecuted], yes most certainly."*

The participant, who had reported that they continued to believe that physical discipline was necessary, reported that although they thought the Amendment was:

*"An absolute load of rubbish because it hasn't stopped anyone from killing their children."*

They went on to say:

*"I suppose it made me think twice about it because you've heard people, if you're out on the streets and you're disciplining your children, reporting you and you're up for assault. I suppose those consequences made me think twice about it, but I certainly don't think it does kids any justice.....It's not tight enough boundaries....Kids are unruly, they're outspoken, they have no respect, they have no manners, nothing."*



The remaining seven participants reported that the Amendment to Section 59 had made no difference. One of the participants in this group reported that they had two views on it:

*".....I have two views on that. I don't think anybody has got the right to take punishment away from the parents.....The other one is that I don't like the idea of striking a child."*

Another participant in this group also expressed two views. When asked if the Amendment to Section 59 had any impact on their decision making they replied:

*"No. None whatsoever. I think that it's a good thing.....but on the same hand no law will stop me smacking my child if I feel it's necessary."*

Also in this group, one participant talked about their confusion on the topic of the Amendment to Section 59:

*"...like I said before it is the parent's right, but then some parents don't have the right to have children because of the way they treat them, so it's a bit confusing."*

One of these participants commented on how the Amendment to Section 59 had made a beneficial difference in their work with parents. This participant had a clear understanding that the Amendment stopped parents from using Section 59 as a defence for child abuse. When asked if the law change would have made an impact on their decision making if it had been introduced prior to making their decision they replied:

*"No. That needed to come from me, it needed to come from my innate parenting abilities rather than an external person saying you are a bad person because you smack your child."*

At the time of the interviews the referendum calling for a review of the Amendment to Section 59 of the Crimes Act, 1961 had not been officially sanctioned and was not asked about in the interviews (see the end section in chapter two for the outcome of the referendum).

Continuing with the findings that supported parental rights, such as those for the Amendment to Section 59, the next section reports on the participants' responses to being asked about how they viewed other people physically disciplining their children.

## Physical discipline by others

The first participant interviewed talked about the strong response that they had had to thoughts about another person physically disciplining their child. The idea of this had evoked anger and consequently participants were asked a question on this topic.

When discussing the physical discipline of their children by others, most of the participants expressed anger either at the thought of this happening or in recounting an event when it had actually happened. These responses were partly driven by a desire to protect their child and partly by a belief that physical discipline is a parental right only.

One participant described their anger when their partner (not the other biological parent) slapped their son:

*"And I said to [them] ....don't you ever touch my son like that again. It was OK for me to smack him but it was not OK for anybody else to smack him."*

One participant believed that most people knew that physically disciplining someone else's child was unacceptable:

*"..I wouldn't like it at all but I think everybody knows you don't hit someone else's child, especially you don't hit someone else's child."*

Another participant described their feelings when their sister smacked their child:

*"My sister did smack my children but I went mental. I went absolutely mental. Because, I mean they're my kids and I felt guilty about doing it and I certainly didn't want anybody else doing it but it was my job to protect them and nobody has the right to do that."*

A participant found themselves in a difficult position when a friend hurt their son:

*"...she didn't smack him but she pushed him out, physically forced him, and also apparently squeezed him, he told me afterwards."*

When asked if they thought it was alright for their friend to do this, they replied:

*"No, I was quite angry about it."*

Another participant who had stopped the use of physical discipline for regulatory reasons only, believed that it was acceptable for others to physically discipline their children provided it was justified and reasonable. This participant also believed that

corporal punishment should be allowed in schools and attributed 'the way schools are now' to its absence.

Apart from the different motivations to stop the use of physical discipline and the beliefs about parental rights, all the participants in the research for this thesis had made the decision to stop the practice. Throughout the interviews participants alluded to, or directly reported on, the strategies that they had found useful to support them in no longer using physical discipline on their children. The following section details these strategies.

### **Strategies for achieving success**

Davis (1999) concluded that his study should explore the evaluation of interventions used to achieve success in the cessation of physical discipline.

If parents are supposed to stop slapping and spanking their children to improve the quality of their children's lives and reduce the likelihood of further aggression ..., parent trainers and public educators as well as policy makers should know what parents say helped them to stop (Davis, 1999, p. 508).

With this in mind, the interviews for the research for this thesis included questions that explored the interventions used by the participants, to achieve success in stopping the practice of physical discipline. The findings identified that learning about alternative ways of disciplining their children and ways in which the participants gained support for putting the alternative strategies into practice, were helpful in supporting them to achieve their goal of non-physical discipline.

Most of the participants had attended a parenting group/course from which they learnt non-physical ways to discipline their children and gained support for putting the strategies into practice. The high attendance of a parenting group/course by the participants was expected in this research, given the recruitment process for this sampling, through parenting groups/courses (see section on research design in chapter three). Tables 4.3 and 4.4 at the end of this section give an overview to these findings.

One of the participants reported the following about attending a parenting group/course, demonstrating the importance of understanding child development through sharing experiences with other group members:

*“Yes, the group, it was just great how we all shared stories and I realised that my daughter wasn’t a little demon, she was just being a normal kid.”*

This participant went on to say:

*“What I think the main thing [is] as well as the sharing with other parents, was just to really make me, throughout that course, and even now, I was really conscious about what I was saying to her [their daughter].”*

Contributing in parenting groups/courses was also reported as useful in gaining support for practising non-physical discipline. When asked about the parenting group/course one participant responded by saying:

*“Yes. I contribute quite a lot. I come up with ideas, with things that I used to do, like when I didn’t smack.....I just need to share that with other people, it was just fantastic. Parenting courses are really wonderful, they really are.”*

Another participant who had read a parenting book had this to say about wanting to attend a parenting group/course:

*“I had bought a book ‘Of course I love you now go to your room’...but then I needed to talk to someone to get the help [have a] conversation rather than just reading a book.”*

This participant subsequently attended a parenting group/course and the specific strategies they learnt are detailed later in this section.

Another participant had attended a parenting group to support their adult son to gain custody of his child. When parenting their own children their strategy was to distance themselves from the children as it was this participant who was motivated to stop the use of physical discipline by their fear of not knowing their own strength:

*“I started moving the kids further and further away from me because I was concerned that I would really hurt them.”*

Apart from the support to learn about and use alternative strategies to physical discipline (see table 4.3 at the end of this section), the participants also identified

alternative strategies that they found effective (see table 4.4 at the end of this section). One of the most common alternative strategies to physical discipline reported was 'time out'. This included time out for the participant in order to reduce stress, as well as time out for the child. The following are comments made by participants on the 'time out' strategy:

*"One of the things I've picked up since I started doing the course is that I send her to the bedroom.....and she'll go in and might [just] walk around the table and come back out again but it seems to have done something because she's not as loud."*

Another participant talked about the value of the introduction of 'time out':

*"The magic 1, 2, 3...show her fingers of 1, 2, 3 and time out because it really works."*

A participant who used 'time out' for themselves as well as the children had this to say:

*"I did a lot of time out with my elder son, he was a challenging boy, and sometimes I actually did [it] myself, I went to a room and closed the door."*

Elaborating on the 'time out' for themselves this participant went on to say:

*"...gave myself a time out and I knew that if I wanted to scream it's OK, so I went into my car and then I screamed and I cried... because I didn't want to be so angry and hurting my children."*

One participant talked about 'time out' as a last resort:

*"...Like another one I used with XXXXXXXX was 'time out'. I used it for what I call utter defiance .....I only use 'time out' ...if a child is utterly non-compliant or defiant."*

Another participant talked about the value of learning about the three parenting styles of authoritative, authoritarian and permissive:

*"...the other big thing is the three different styles of parenting, sergeant-major, backbone and jellyfish. And then making the decision on the course, of really wanting to be a backbone parent and seeing when I flipped into a sergeant-major, with that situation of pulling her hair. And then even times when I might have been a jellyfish, perhaps let her get away with it to keep the peace and then in the course saying 'that's not really loving your child or good for your child, you do need to discipline your child to love her and bring her up right'. So we're going to be backbone parents."*

One participant had this to say about more effective discipline than physical discipline:

*“There’s just better ways around it than smacking. It [smacking] doesn’t make much of an effective difference at all. Not even when it comes to the dangerous things that she’s trying to do. I’m better off just calmly being beside her, telling her what she’s doing is wrong and this is what’s going to happen if it goes wrong.”*

Another participant learnt strategies by attending Playcentre and observing alternative strategies in a different environment to the home. They gave the following example of what they learnt through observation:

*“...things like deferring a child from an inappropriate area of play or behaviour to somewhere else...”*

Similarly, another participant identified distraction as a useful strategy to stop unwanted behaviour from a child in their care, without using physical discipline:

*“...I was pulling her out of the situation and giving her the time out and all the rest of it, but what has worked is putting her into a situation to distract her mind.”*

This participant also described non-physical disciplinary strategies with their own children:

*I’ve done charts and stuff like that....They went off really well at the start and then, yes, it probably gave the children an incentive to do chores....around the house without having to be asked.”*

Participants reported that parenting books and magazines were useful to identify alternative strategies to physical discipline. The books were either read prior to joining a parenting group/course or recommended in the group/course. Some books that participants identified were not specifically about parenting. For instance one participant had this to say about self-development as part of changing their parenting practice:

*“...‘Feel the fear and do it anyway’...all of those sort of [books], my self journey....making that conscious decision to say ‘I will respect my child and I will expect him to respect me.’”*

One book in particular, about the language of love, was prominent in the participants’ responses to the topic of strategies to successfully stop the use of physical discipline.

One participant talked about this in detail:

*"...And I realised that my 'love language' was touch. I didn't get that [as a child] .....So when I was a teenager I ....looked for my 'love language' in totally inappropriate ways....I thought, 'I got screwed up but I can't screw my son up' and his 'love language' is touch as well. So every night ....even now at 13....we have that little five minute hug and I'll say....'off to bed' and off he trots to bed. If we don't do that he's diabolical to get to bed."*

One participant who facilitated parenting groups/courses had successfully used the strategies at home. The strategies were described as follows:

*"...focussing on their successful, positive behaviour big time...every single thing that they do that is an OK behaviour.....one on one times where I sat with him [child]...watching him playing 'Playstation' games....20 minutes at a time....and that went on...week after week....It certainly brought about a big change in his behaviour."*

This participant went on to describe other strategies:

*"One of the other strategies I used big time was the token system...like a reward system....and he [child] got very upset about me doing that ....I paid no attention to him. He started to throw rocks and stones onto our roof from outside. The minute he came inside and the first thing he did which was acceptable behaviour, I acknowledged and rewarded him with a token. And from that minute that I gave it to him I never had any problems again with him accepting the system that I was on. But his behaviour changed over that period of six months in a most incredible fashion."*

One participant highlighted the perspective of children's rights when they said:

*"...So things like.....giving children choices, certainly limited choices but choices nonetheless, so that they had some sense of power over what they were doing."*

Another participant spoke about the usefulness of being reassured that how they were disciplining their child was good enough without using physical discipline. First of all they described how it used to be:

*"...being a single parent of an only child and ...it's kind of insecurity about my parenting and having people ...make comment about lack of discipline and that kind of thing."*

Later in the interview they described the difference it made, when a social worker worked with them in the home:

*“...having xxxxx there watching me discipline xxxxxxxx and telling me that what I was doing was right. Finally there was someone backing me up. Instead of all these other people who were telling me that I’ve got a terrible child that he needs a smack, and totally undermining anything that you do.”*

One participant talked about the value of their professional qualification as part of learning non-physical strategies to discipline children:

*“....doing my Diploma in Teaching, three years of intensive study shows you that there are other ways to discipline and to change.”*

Finally in this section, one of the participants talked about the value of support through like-minded friends and celebrities:

*“....like that lady who plays Sheryl on ‘Outrageous Fortune’, she says she’s chosen not to smack and uses other tools....she’s been in the Women’s Weekly.....So all that sort of reading reinforces what I think.”*

Another participant gained support to non-physically discipline their children from the media, from a different perspective:

*“....seeing all those horrible people in the news and in the papers doing what they’re doing to their kids, it makes me not want to do it even more.”*

To summarise the findings for the strategies that supported success in changing parental disciplinary practice from physical to non-physical discipline, the two tables on the following page detail the sources of information and support in table 4.3 and the strategies reportedly used by each participant in table 4.4. The impact of these strategies on the children are not analysed or assessed by the research for this thesis (see section on limitations of this research in chapter five).



Table 4.3 Source of information and support

Source of information and support	Participants									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Attended and/or facilitated parenting group	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Parenting books/magazine and television			*	*	*					*
Professional training				*				*		

Table 4.4 Useful strategies for achieving success

Strategies used	Participants									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Time Out			*	*	*	*		*	*	
Diversion	*							*		
Listening & reasoning/one on one time	*					*	*	*	*	
Understanding parenting styles			*							
Understanding child development	*		*							
Ignoring unwanted behaviour/rewards			*			*		*		
Self care (parent)							*		*	*
Withdrawal from children		*								
Social Work support other than parenting group										*

Finally, the following section summarises the findings for all the sections in this chapter.

## **Summary of findings**

The findings for this research are summarised in the same sequence as the previous section. The chapter following this section will discuss the findings in the context of the previous research reviewed in chapter two.

### **Type, context and biography of physical discipline**

Only three of the participants had used smacking because they believed it to be ‘good parenting’. The remaining seven attributed their use of physical discipline to their feelings of frustration and anger. Two of these participants had used physical discipline after making the decision to stop and the remaining five of these participants had always believed that physical discipline was unacceptable. The degrees of severity of the physical discipline that the participants used on their children varied from a light smack to hitting with an implement and causing bruising.

All participants had received varying degrees of physical discipline as a child with the exception of one participant who had received none. Four of the participants reported that it was these incidents as a child that had motivated them to stop the use of physical discipline on their own children.

When reporting on the physical discipline the participants had received as a child and the physical discipline the participants had used on their children, there was a high prevalence of the use of an instrument to administer the physical punishment. Only one participant reported that they had neither received nor delivered physical discipline with an instrument. Six participants reported that they had been physically disciplined as a child with an instrument. Three of these were with wooden spoons, one with a jandal, two with a leather strap or belt and one with the Bakelite end of an iron cord. Two of those that had received physical punishment with an instrument as a child had also delivered physical punishment using a stick and a wooden spoon. Of the three participants that did not report receiving physical punishment with an instrument as a child, one reported that they had used a wooden spoon and a ‘cord’.

One participant threatened with a ruler and one witnessed the use of a slipper to deliver physical punishment at school.

### **Motivation to not smack**

Most of the participants attributed their motivation to more than one of the five categories identified by Davis (1999) (see previous research section of chapter three). A table detailing the motivations for each participant can be found at the beginning of the section on motivating factors in this chapter. Nine of the participants were motivated to stop the use of physical discipline by the effect that physically disciplining their child had had on themselves or their child. These effects included the guilt the participant felt at causing their child harm, witnessing the distress of their child, the ineffectiveness of the physical discipline and a fear of 'going too far' and seriously injuring their child. Two participants were motivated by regulatory factors where they were subjected to rules to not use physical discipline; otherwise they would have had to forfeit their employment or involvement in an Association. For one of the latter participants no other motivation was given apart from the regulatory. Seven participants were motivated by ideological factors where the human rights of the child were considered and four were motivated by relational factors where the participant had been challenged by someone about their use of physical discipline. Four of the participants were motivated by biographical factors where they had reported that the physical discipline they had received or witnessed as a child had motivated them to make the decision to not use physical discipline as part of their parental discipline.

### **Beliefs held about physical discipline**

One of the participants continued to believe that physical discipline had a place in child disciplinary practices and was motivated by the regulatory category alone. Five participants had always believed that it was inappropriate to physically discipline a child and four used to believe it was appropriate and had made a decision to change.

From an intergenerational perspective four participants reported that their parents had had a change in attitude toward physical discipline since becoming grandparents

and had become less favourable of using physical discipline on their grandchildren than they had been with their children.

### **Comparisons within households**

Two of the participants were in a position to comment on the difference they noticed between the children they had physically disciplined and those that they had not. One of these participants reported negative effects for the physically disciplined children who were less adventurous and less sure of themselves than the children they had not physically disciplined. The other participant who had physically disciplined some children and not others reported negative effects for the non-physically disciplined child who, they reported, was less respectful. The difference these two participants noticed directly related to the beliefs they held about physical discipline. The participant who continued to believe that physical discipline was appropriate in some circumstances reported that not using physical discipline had had a negative effect on their child, whereas the participant, who no longer believed that physical discipline was appropriate, reported negative consequences for the children they had physically disciplined.

### **Amendment to Section 59**

Legislation had little or no bearing on the decision to stop physical discipline for all the participants. They had either made their decision to stop the use of physical discipline prior to the Amendment to Section 59 of the child discipline legislation, or reported confusion about the purpose of the Amendment and reported on their views about parental rights, rather than the aim of the Amendment to stop Section 59 being used as a defence for child abuse.

### **Physical discipline by others**

The findings for this section also supported parental rights in the views of eight participants who reported that they did not approve of others physically disciplining their children even when they were physically disciplining their children themselves. Two participants made reference to corporal punishment in schools as an acceptable practice.

### **Strategies for achieving success**

Not all of the participants had been successful in stopping their use of physical discipline from the time that they made their decision to stop. Some had continued to smack after the decision had been made, although remained clear in their decision to want to stop. The times when physical discipline did occur, after the decision was made, were in a context of their frustration and anger with their child, rather than a decision to use the physical discipline as a way to teach their child.

Participants reported a number of strategies for achieving success in their endeavour to stop the use of physical discipline. They also reported the source of the strategies and the source of the support they used to put the strategies into practice. The tables at the end of the findings section on strategies for achieving success give an overview on the source of information and support in table 4.3 and the strategies used in table 4.4. The strategies used are those reported by each participant as being effective and useful. The research for this thesis does not evaluate, assess or comment on the impact the strategies have had on the children that received them.

The above summary concludes this chapter on the findings of the research for this thesis. The following chapter discusses the findings and discusses them in the context of previous research detailed in chapter two, outlines the limitations of the study and comments on further studies that could add to the understanding of the motivation that stops parents using physical discipline.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Conclusion**

This chapter discusses the findings from the research for this thesis and discusses them in the context of previous research. It also identifies new themes that have emerged, outlines the limitations of the research for this thesis and comments on future research that could make a contribution in understanding the motivation to stop the practice of physical child discipline.

#### **Discussion of findings**

This section of the chapter discusses the findings from the research for this thesis in the context of previous literature under the same sub-headings as the previous chapter.

#### **Type, context and biography of physical discipline**

Given that all participants in the research for this thesis had used physical discipline as a parenting practice, these findings concur with the findings of previous research both internationally and in New Zealand that the physical discipline of children has been a socially acceptable form of discipline in many parts of the world since the 1960s (Baron, 2005; Carswell, 2001; Dobbs, 2007; Graziano, 1994; Ritchie & Ritchie, 1981; Smith et al., 2004, 2005; Straus & Stewart, 1999). The degrees of severity of the physical discipline that the participants used on their children in the research for this thesis varied, from a light smack to hitting them with an implement and causing bruising. With the exception of one participant, who had used regular and sustained physical punishment on their children and received none as a child, the degrees of severity that the respondents received as a child were generally more severe than the severity that they practised. This also concurs with previous research that suggests that the severity of physical discipline used by parents has declined, since more information and education is available about the impact that physical discipline has had on children (Davis, 2006 as cited in Ellison & Bradshaw, 2009; Durrant, 2006; Elliman as cited in Baron, 2005; Smith & Lawrence, 2009; Thompson et al., 2002).

Only one participant in this study reported that they had neither used an implement nor received physical discipline with an implement as a child. This was the participant who continued to believe that physical punishment was acceptable in some circumstances. This could suggest that having experienced less severe physical discipline as a child, this participant perceived physical discipline to be more acceptable as a form of discipline.

### **Motivation to not smack**

The findings for the five motivational contexts in this study are consistent with the findings of the Davis (1999) study, although the research for this thesis was on a smaller scale and the Davis (1999) study did not identify a prevalence rating for each category, as in this study.

The most common motivation to stop the use of physical discipline in this study was the experiential motivation where nine participants were motivated to discontinue its use because of the effects that using physical discipline had on them, and/or their children. These effects included the ineffectiveness of the method of discipline and how they and/or their children felt at the time that the physical discipline took place, alongside the belief that physical discipline provided poor role modelling and the fear of losing control with their children. The experiential motivation to stop the practice of physically disciplining children can be correlated with attitudes and beliefs and the subsequent polarisation that parents experienced between the human rights of the child and parental rights. The emotional impact of physically hurting their children and the fear of seriously injuring them was positioned in the belief of human rights for children. Ineffectiveness of the intervention however was directly related to the belief in the rights of the parent to discipline their child effectively.

The second most common motivation to stop the use of physical punishment was the ideological motivation where seven participants considered the human rights of the child and viewed the child as a vulnerable member of society with no voice. This view lessened when the participants were asked for their views about the Amendment to Section 59 of the Crimes Act, 1961. Only three of the participants supported the



Amendment and the remaining seven were either confused by what it meant or voiced an opinion about parental rights over the human rights of children.

Four participants partly attributed stopping the use of physical discipline to relational motivation where friends and/or family had encouraged them to change their disciplinary practice. Two of these participants spoke about how they identified significant others' use of physical discipline as inappropriate since making the decision to stop physical discipline themselves.

Four of the nine participants in the research for this thesis, who had received or were controlled by the threat of physical punishment to varying degrees as children, reported that this was a factor in their motivation to discontinue the use of physical discipline on their own children. This biographical motivation was the most common motivation in the findings of the Wood & Russell, 2001 study in New Zealand, where out of 69 responses to the 14 categories of reasons to not smack, 26 were related to the participants' own experience of physical discipline as a child.

The least common motivation to stop the use of physical discipline was the regulatory motivation where two participants were motivated to stop physically disciplining their children because of rules. One of these participants had no other motivation apart from regulatory and the other was introduced to the idea of discontinuing through regulatory circumstances, alongside other types of motivation.

Similar to the Wood & Russell, 2007 study, most of the participants identified more than one motivational context. To provide an overview, a table of the context of each participant's motivation can be found in the summary of findings section in the previous chapter (see table 4.1).

A significant number of participants attributed their use of physical discipline to their feelings of frustration and anger. This supports the responses children made in a New Zealand study (Dobbs, 2007) when they stated that they were usually physically disciplined in a context of anger and/or frustration. Also concurring with the Dobbs, 2007 study, were the participants in the research for this thesis, who talked about their lack of knowledge about alternatives to physical discipline at the time of

administering it. The Dobbs study found that parents are more likely to use physical discipline because they believe it is the only form of discipline available to them at the time (Dobbs, 2007). These findings also concur with those of Brownlie and Anderson (2006) who reported that most parents do not use physical discipline because they believe it is for the good of the child, but because they know of no other forms of discipline to control the child's behaviour.

Not all the parents had been successful in stopping the use of physical discipline on their children, after they had made the decision to stop. The transtheoretical model of change (see the motivation to change section in chapter two) provides explanation for the continued use of physical discipline, post decision; where some parents were moving to and from the determination, action and recycling stages, before exiting the cycle.

### **Beliefs held about physical discipline before and after the decision**

Of the participants who had used smacking because they believed that it was 'good parenting', two had changed their beliefs and one continued to believe that physical discipline was necessary to discipline children, even though they had discontinued its use. Interestingly one of the participants who had changed their beliefs had initially learnt that physical discipline was 'good parenting' from the religion they belonged to, prior to the change. This participant was the only participant to have had no experience of physical discipline in their childhood. Given the evidence that shows the correlation between physical discipline as a child and the subsequent use of physical discipline as a parent (Strassburg et al., 1994 as cited in Holden, et al., 1997; Straus & Stewart, 1994; Foglia, 1997; Swinford et al., 2000 as cited in Walsh, 2002), together with the parenting beliefs of fundamental religions and its influence on legislation (see the section on the role of religion in chapter two) this participant's contribution to the study, supports the literature that reports on the serious impact that certain religions can have on a parent's disciplinary practice (Davis, 1999; Greven 1990, 1992 as cited in Good, 1999; Straus & Stewart, 1994).

Out of the ten participants, one continued to believe that physical punishment had its place in the discipline of children and had stopped its practice through regulatory

motivation alone. Five participants had always believed that physical discipline was inappropriate and had used this form of discipline in the context of anger and frustration. Of the four participants who had believed that the physical discipline of children was appropriate, three had learnt their beliefs through family culture and one had learnt them through fundamentalist religion. Of the four participants that did report that their beliefs had changed during the course of their parenting, three of them said that there was a defining moment when they physically disciplined their child and consequently felt guilt and/or fear. A table of the participants change in beliefs can be found in the summary of findings section in the previous chapter (see table 4.2).

### **Comparisons within households**

From an intergenerational perspective, Davis (1999) commented on intergenerational change in the conclusion of his article. He made the distinction between the participants in his study who had made “a concerted effort to stop hitting, slapping and spanking” (p. 506) to those that had ‘drifted away’ from the practice as their children had got older. No data was available however, that indicated the impact that a change in disciplinary practice had had on the participants parents’ beliefs. In the thematic analysis for the research for this thesis the following themes emerged on this topic. Of the six participants who continued to have a relationship with their own parents, four remarked on their parents’ decrease in the belief that physical discipline was necessary, since becoming grandparents. This could possibly be attributed to the lessened responsibility, lowered social pressure and the reduction of every day stress grandparents had in the raising of their grandchildren, although two of the participants who were grandparents; were either directly or indirectly involved with their grandchildren, on a day to day basis.

Two of the participants were in a position to comment on the difference they noticed between children they had physically disciplined and those whom they had not. The difference they noticed directly related to the beliefs that they held. The participant, who had changed their beliefs about physical discipline to that of it being unacceptable, talked about the lack of adventure they noticed with the adult children

they had physically disciplined as opposed to those they had not. The participant whose beliefs remained the same and continued to believe that physical punishment was appropriate in some circumstances, remarked on the lack of respect they felt from the son who had not been physically disciplined.

### **Amendment to Section 59**

Legislation had little or no bearing on the decision to stop the practice of physical discipline for any of the participants in this study for two reasons. Firstly, for most participants the Amendment to Section 59 of the Crimes Act, 1961 occurred after they had made the decision to stop. Secondly, in discussing the topic, the participants who understood the change of law to be 'anti-smacking' became focused on the rights of the parent; although three of these participants also voiced the conflict they felt between the human rights of the child and the rights of the parent. Three of the participants who were working with parents and had a clear understanding of the Amendment to Section 59 supported it, and remained focused on the human rights of the child. One of these participants also reported that the Amendment had proved useful in their work with parents; although for them it had been an important part of the process to reach their own decision to stop smacking. These findings are consistent with the literature that reported on the legislative change in Scandinavian countries where parenting education was introduced prior to the legislation that banned physical discipline in these countries (Durrant, 2006).

### **Physical discipline by others**

Most of the parents disapproved of others physically disciplining their children, whether by other family members, step parents or professionals such as teachers. The exceptions to this were the views of one participant who believed that corporal punishment in schools was necessary and another speaking retrospectively and accepting that it had happened in schools. It is interesting to note here that the participants talked about this issue from a parental rights perspective, where the parent was the only person who could physically discipline their child and not from a perspective that upheld the human rights of the child.

### **Strategies for achieving success**

All the participants were aware of and reported the strategies that they had found useful to assist them in stopping the use of physical discipline. As the participants were either working in the area of parenting or recruited from parenting groups, the expectation that attending parenting groups was high on the list of activities that assisted parents to not smack, was substantiated. The participants who had attended a parenting group had had their children's behaviour normalised by hearing about the experiences of other parents and from learning about child development. With this understanding they felt more in control of their levels of anger and frustration and focused more readily on the needs of their child.

Learning alternative disciplinary strategies also made an important contribution to following through on the decision to not smack and concurs with previous New Zealand research that has identified similar strategies (Pritchard, 2006; Smith et al. 2005; Wood & Russell, 2001). These alternative disciplinary strategies included talking with the children and explaining why the behaviour needed to change, diverting attention by introducing an activity that the child liked, ignoring unwanted behaviour and praising good behaviour, giving the child choices, reward charts, support from family, other parents and professionals and 'time out' either for the child or the parent. The importance of self care for the parent to reduce stressors in the home was also mentioned. One participant talked about the support they felt when they read articles or watched televised endorsement for non-physical discipline, especially when this involved celebrities.

Of further interest were the three participants who, after the interview, reported to the researcher that the process of the interview provided insight into the changes they and their family had undergone, changes that they had not previously realised. This feedback concurs with previous research that promotes and highlights the value of parents talking about their experiences in groups that facilitate the expertise of the participants, rather than parent education programmes that are facilitated by experts, telling parents what they should do (Smith, et al., 2005).

Having discussed the findings for the research for this thesis, the following section details the limitations of the research for this thesis and the conclusions that can be drawn from the findings, with suggestions for further research to provide more insight into the motivating factors that support parents to stop the practice of physical child discipline.

### **Limitations of the research**

The size of the sample was a clear limitation to this study. Because of its small size no generalisations could be drawn from gender or culture and no data on socio-economic status was gathered. All the participants were self selected and those who had attended parenting courses and who had voluntarily made the decision to not use physical discipline on their children were over represented.

The strategies that the participants reported to be useful in supporting them to achieve success in their efforts to stop the use of physical discipline were reported from the participants' perspective only. No data was collected from the participants' children to evaluate the impact of these strategies on the children themselves.

### **Suggestions for future research**

Given the limitations of the low number of participants, the findings of this study can provide useful information on which to base survey questions for the gathering of quantitative data on attitudes and beliefs about the physical discipline of children on a larger scale. This could subsequently provide expressions of interest and the recruitment of a larger sampling for a qualitative study where themes could emerge from cultural, gender, socio-economic and age differences in the general population. This could also include a qualitative study to identify themes from the impact that religious differences have on child physical discipline.

The research for this thesis concurred with previous studies that provided evidence for the negative impact that physical punishment has on children from the outset. It did not intend to add further evidence to this debate. However, given the findings of this research, from participants who had physically disciplined some children and not others, the debate about the impact of physical discipline could be further informed

by conducting a study comparing outcomes between adults who were physically disciplined as a child and those who were not, especially those who grew up in the same household.

Although the participants in this study stated that they had made the decision to stop the use of physical discipline with their children, not all participants had been successful. Some had continued to smack after the decision had been made, although they remained clear in their decision to want to stop. A longitudinal study mapping this process of change with a transtheoretical model of change framework (see section on motivation for change in chapter two) would be useful to parents and people working with parents, to normalise the process of change. This would provide encouragement for parents to remain with the decision to not smack, rather than the discouragement that the disappointment of self perceived failure can bring. These findings also raise the question about what distinguishes between those parents who have exited the cycle of change and those who have not, inviting further study to identify the distinctions.

It was also evident in the research for this thesis that when the post decision smacking occurred it was in a context of anger and frustration, not in a context of rational decision making to identify the type of discipline to use. This was demonstrated also by the change in attitude the grandparents had when they were relieved of the parental responsibilities and stress. To prevent the practice of physically disciplining children, more research is needed to identify strategies at all levels, from government to community to individual families, on alleviating parental stress.

This research has also demonstrated that a number of motivational factors to stop using physical discipline occur simultaneously and are not limited to one alone. In addition to this, the motivational contexts have been rated to show which had the most and least impact on the decision to stop smacking. More research with a larger sampling would add weight to these findings and provide more information to people who work with parents and those concerned with the human rights of children, to facilitate the cessation of the physical discipline of children.

The impact of legislation on the participants to make decisions about their practice of physical discipline was negligible. Most of the parents interviewed described the Amendment to Section 59 legislation as 'anti-smacking' rather than a child discipline law that removed a legal defence for child abuse. It may have been this lack of understanding that encouraged the participants to focus on parental rights when discussing the topic, whereas those who were more familiar with the Amendment and its intent were focused on the human rights of the child. Furthermore, whilst the findings for this research concur with that of Davis (1999), out of the three sub categories in the experiential context for motivating change that were identified in this study; two were concerned with the human rights of the child and the third was concerned with parental rights. This highlights the conflict between parental rights and the human rights of the child that parents struggle within their day to day parenting.

Although the outcome of the national referendum has not impacted on the Amendment to Section 59 at the time of writing this thesis, a study to identify effective ways to promote the human rights of the child in the legislative change rather than the parental rights perspective, would be useful in promoting and retaining the Amendment through public opinion.

Having identified the limitations of this research and the areas for future research, the following section draws conclusions from the findings for the research for this thesis and details the contribution this research can make in the area of child discipline.

## **Conclusion**

The research for this thesis supports previous research that suggests that the prevalence and severity of child physical discipline in New Zealand is declining. It was interesting and disturbing to discover the high prevalence of the use of an instrument in child physical disciplinary practice in the findings for this research; however it was also evident that the practice of using an instrument had lessened between generations.

Generally alternative disciplinary strategies to physical discipline were used by most of the participants and were identified in this study to include talking with the child and



explaining to the child why the behaviour needed to change, diverting attention by introducing an activity that the child liked, ignoring unwanted behaviour and praising good behaviour, giving the child choices, reward charts, support from family, other parents and professionals and 'time out' either for the child or the parent. It also identified the value of social constructivist approaches to parenting programmes as opposed to 'expert' advice giving. This has implications for organisations that deliver parenting programmes and for the training institutions that are responsible for the education of professionals who work with families.

The research for this thesis also places the process of changing parental disciplinary practice within the transtheoretical model of change and proposes that practitioners who have an understanding of this model of change, could have a better understanding of the process that the parent experiences. With this understanding they could have the information and insight necessary to raise the parent's awareness of the cyclic process of change and encourage the parent to continue in their endeavour to find and implement alternatives to physical discipline. The understanding of the process of change through the transtheoretical model also has implications for training institutions that provide training to any profession that works with parents and children, to include this theory in the curriculum.

From the findings of the research for this thesis, reducing family stressors and opportunities for parental self care also proved important in the process of change. Anger and frustration, on the part of the parent, was the usual context in which the use of physical discipline took place, despite having made the decision to stop. These findings have implications for practitioners who work with families; to work in the context of the families lived experience, especially the practitioners who work with families from an institutional organisation where the socio-economic context is not visible to the practitioner. Not visiting the family in their community and home context could lead to unrealistic expectations on what could motivate and maintain parents in their goal of non-physical discipline, and consequently contribute to anger and frustration rather than alleviate it.

The findings for the research for this thesis also provide evidence for the importance of the role of the extended family in the discipline of children. Grandparents played a significant role in the families of some of the participants for this research, whether it was as a grandparent who physically disciplined as a parent, a grandparent whose beliefs initially made it difficult for the participant to stop the use of physical discipline or as an advocate for the child. These findings can be useful to organisations that work with families, especially those that have the grandparent as the focus of the service, to gain credibility for the role of the grandparent. These findings also highlight the importance of training and education for grandparents, in alternative ways to discipline children, other than physical discipline.

The research for this thesis set out to explore the questions; when parents who smack make a decision to not smack, what factors motivate the decision and what strategies are useful in supporting success? The findings of this research add to previous research on the motivation to stop the practice of child physical discipline and confirm anecdotal knowledge and experience of the researcher and social workers working in the area of parenting, where sub-abusive physical discipline occurs. Although the findings cannot be generalised they can inform and make a contribution to future research and for policy development in New Zealand, particularly in the area of legislation for child discipline. The findings also inform practitioners about the strategies that parents have found helpful in changing their parenting practice to not use physical discipline and provide evidence for the process of change that parents undergo, once the decision has been made to stop. Given previous research on the effects of physical discipline that shows overwhelming evidence for the negative effects that it has on children and family relationships, the implications of the findings for this research are important to support further research, to inform practitioners in their work with families and to promote the use of non-physical discipline as a preferred alternative for child discipline.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Expressions of interest Questionnaire

#### Questionnaire

##### Motivation for Change in the Discipline of Children

This questionnaire is part of a post graduate study into methods of child discipline. Answering this questionnaire is optional and responses to questions 1-3 are anonymous. The service you receive from Barnardos will not be affected whether you choose to complete or not complete this questionnaire.

If you choose to complete the questionnaire please answer the questions below and place the completed form in the envelope provided.

- 1) Has a smack ever been used to discipline a child in your household?  
**Yes**       **No**       (Please tick appropriate box)
  
- 2) Has there been a decision made to not use smacking as a form of discipline in your household?  
**Yes**       **No**       (Please tick appropriate box)
  
- 3) If the answer to both these questions is yes, would you be willing to participate in a face to face interview as part of a confidential post graduate study exploring the motivation to change methods of child discipline?  
**Yes**       **No**       (Please tick appropriate box)
  
- 4) If the answer to question 3 is yes, please write your first name and a contact number in the space provided and the researcher will contact you with more information.

First name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact numbers: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your time

Sharon Madgeskind

This research has approval from Massey University Ethics Committee





## **Motivation for Change in the Discipline of Children**

### **INFORMATION SHEET**

Dear

My name is Sharon Madgeskind and I am an enrolled student for the Masters degree of Social Work with Massey University, Albany. I also work as a Team Leader for the Child and Family Services for Barnardos on the North Shore of Auckland.

I am sending you this information sheet because you have expressed interest in being a participant in this study which is the subject for the thesis toward my Masters Degree in Social Work.

The purpose of the research study is to gain understanding of the motivation for day to day carers of children, to stop using physical punishment as a form of discipline. It is also to identify the strategies and interventions that were useful in achieving success.

This information sheet is being forwarded to all the participants of Barnardos programmes or parenting groups in the Northern region of New Zealand who have expressed interest and who fit the following criteria to participate in the study:

- You are (or have been), a day to day carer of a child/ren and have used physical punishment to discipline your child.
- You have made a decision to not use physical punishment to discipline your child.

Staff members of Barnardos who are aware of the study are also included as potential participants if they also fit the criteria.

Potential participants who are currently undergoing investigation by Child Youth and Family services will be excluded, as will any potential participants who are currently clients of the researcher or members of staff at Barnardos who directly report to the researcher.

The number of participants to be recruited for the project is ten. Ten participants will provide enough information to identify some common themes in the information collected and this amount of data will be manageable within the year time frame, for the study to be completed.

For some participants; recalling times where physical punishment has taken place either by their parents or by themselves as parents may evoke feelings that are uncomfortable. Because of this potential, a list of resources will be available to access free counselling and other resources that may be helpful. At no time will the service provided by Barnardos be affected by your participation in this study.

If you agree to take part in this research, I would need to meet and interview you about the changes you have made to the disciplining of your child. The meeting would be organised at a time and place convenient to you and would take up to 2 hours.

The research is strictly confidential and information shared with the researcher will remain confidential, unless serious risk of harm to any party is identified. If this is the case, I will discuss the concerns with you and inform you of any actions to be taken. If I believe that discussing this with you would endanger anyone further, I may need to report my concerns directly to the relevant services in accordance with the Family Violence Policy of Barnardos.

All identifying information, such as names, etc., will be removed and the data, including interview recordings, will be coded for the purposes of confidentiality. Data will be stored in a secure place and the codes will not be stored with the data collected. The recordings will be transcribed and made available to you, to ensure validity of your comments. You will be asked to check these transcripts, make changes if you like, and sign a document which states that you are happy for me to use them.

At the conclusion of the study the findings will be submitted to Massey University Albany in the form of a thesis. A summary of the findings will be available to you at your request. The findings will be available to Barnardos and other organisations to inform their parenting group practice. None of the findings will have identifiable information included.

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Decline to answer any particular question;
- Ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview;
- Withdraw from the study up until you have returned the signed transcription release;
- Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher, and
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

I will contact you in the next week to make a time to meet with you and answer any questions you may have if you are still interested in participating in the study.

In the meantime please feel free to contact me at either of the phone numbers or email address below:

Or my research supervisor at Massey University, Albany.

Regards

Sharon Madgeskind (Researcher)

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 09\_/001\_. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Denise Wilson, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x9070, email [humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz).

## ***Motivation for Change in the Discipline of Children***

### **PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

**This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years**

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary.

I understand that I can withdraw any information up until I have returned the signed consent to release the transcripts.

I agree to the interview being audio taped.

I understand that my participation in this study is confidential and that no material that could identify me will be used in any reports on this study.

I consent to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Signature:**

**Date:**

.....

**Full Name - printed**

.....

Sharon Madgeskind

Researcher

If you would like a copy of the summary of the results of the study please provide an email or postal address below.





## Appendix 4: Memorandum of Understanding



### Memorandum of Understanding

The following outlines the agreement between Barnardos and Sharon Madgeskind regarding the research study 'Motivation for Change in the Discipline of Children'. This research will be written as the thesis towards an MSW degree.

The objectives of the study are to identify factors that motivate parents to change the style of discipline from physical to non-physical means and to identify interventions used to achieve success.

The general terms and conditions for this research are set out in Barnardos' guidelines for research.

In addition:

1. Barnardos agrees to facilitate access to potential research participants on the understanding that no information will be obtained from potential participants for research purposes, prior to ethical approval from Massey University;
2. It is the responsibility of Sharon Madgeskind to obtain informed consent from all participants of the research study;
3. On completion of the project, Sharon Madgeskind agrees to provide a copy of the final report to Barnardos New Zealand. This written report will not include any information that is commercially sensitive, or that would allow the research participants or their children, or any staff members to be identified.
4. Sharon Madgeskind agrees to give a presentation of the research findings to Barnardos Strategic Leadership Team and/or the National Practice Team, if requested, at a time and venue that is mutually convenient.

Signed

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jill Outhred, Manager

31.03/2009

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Sharon Madgeskind

3.103/2009

Barnardos New Zealand



Appendix 5: MUHEC letter of approval



**Massey University**  
AUCKLAND

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT  
TO THE VICE-CHANCELLOR  
(Research Ethics)  
Private Bag 102 904  
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12 March 2009

Sharon Madgeskind  
c/- Ms B Staniforth  
College of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Massey University  
Albany

Dear Sharon

**HUMAN ETHICS APPROVAL APPLICATION – MUHECN 09/001**  
**“Motivatio for Change in the Discipline of Children”**

Thank you for your application. It has been fully considered, and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern.

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, a reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Dr Denise Wilson  
Chair  
Human Ethics Committee: Northern

cc: Ms B Staniforth  
College of Humanities and Social Sciences





## Appendix 6: Interview Schedule

### Interview Schedule for the 'Motivation for change in the discipline of children' study

Tell me about the time when physical discipline was used with the children in your household?

What beliefs did you have about physical discipline at that time?

Where did those beliefs come from/what kind of discipline did you receive from your family?

When did you first notice that the use of physical discipline could be a problem /what was happening at the time?

What can you tell me about the decision making process from the time that you first noticed physical discipline could be a problem, to being determined to action a change to non physical discipline?

What/who influenced the decision to change or not change?

*(What impact, if any, did the Amendment to Section 59 have on the decision making process?)*

How did you go about making the change once the decision was made?

What/who do you think was useful to support the change?

What do you do differently now that the change has been made?

What difference do you think it has made to the children and your relationship with the children?

What supports you to maintain the change?

What beliefs do you have now about the physical discipline of children?

## Motivation for Change in the Discipline of Children

### TRANSCRIBER'S CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I ..... (Full Name - printed) agree to transcribe the recordings provided to me.

I agree to keep confidential all the information provided to me.

I will not make any copies of the transcripts or keep any record of them, other than those required for the project.

**Signature:**

**Date:**

.....

.....