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## Comparing disciplinary methods used by mothers in Palestine and Qatar

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores child disciplinary methods used by parents in Qatar and Palestine. In this study ICAST-P, an internationally recognized tool, was used with mothers reporting on one of their children up to their 12th birthday. It questions about disciplinary methods: nonviolent; physical: moderate and severe; and psychological methods that had been used in the previous year on the index child in the family. A comparative national cross-sectional household survey of mothers aged 25–50 years old was conducted in both Qatar and Palestine, both Arabic Muslim states, but with very different socio-economic and political contexts that place Qataris in a much more advantageous position. Our results show that the 1299 Palestinian mothers interviewed were younger, had more children and less education compared to the 1018 Qatari mothers. Fewer mothers from Palestine were working. The index child in Palestine tended to be younger with 60% being under 5 years, while 73.7% of Qatari children were over 5 years of age. Severe physical disciplinary methods were reported significantly more often, in Palestine, e.g. Kicking the child (P value < 0.001), using hand or pillow to prevent breathing (P value < 0.001) and hitting child with object or fist (P value < 0.001). Moderate as well as psychological disciplinary methods were also significantly higher among Palestinian mothers (P value < 0.001). Our results suggest that challenging circumstances that Palestinian mothers experience, as compared to their Qatari peers, are associated with greater prevalence of the harsher forms of discipline. Our findings have policy implications and preventative strategies for child maltreatment in both countries.

### 1. Introduction

The terms discipline and punishment are often used interchangeably when applied to children. As defined by several professional organizations: (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013; Canadian Paediatric Society, 2004) child discipline is intended to teach what is acceptable and appropriate behavior, while eliminating undesirable behaviors, with the aim of promoting self-discipline, so that

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children can grow into responsible and social adults. Conversely, according to the AAP (1998), “Punishment is defined as the application of a negative stimulus to reduce or eliminate a behavior. There are two types typically used with children: punishment involving verbal reprimands and disapproval and punishment involving physical pain, as in corporal punishment.” The United Nations Children’s Fund’s (UNICEF) considers both physical punishment and psychological aggression to be violent forms of discipline (UNICEF, 2016).

Research has depicted that corporal punishment is pervasive around the world (Zolotor & Puzia, 2010). In a recent survey of parents of young children, 30% of them admitted to using spanking (Zero To Three, 2016). In Jamaica, an average of 60% of mothers believe in corporal punishment (Smith & Mosby, 2003), whereas in Latin America, 30% of parents hit their children (Lopez Stewart et al., 2000). A survey was conducted in Egypt and 37% of children reported that their parents disciplined them physically (Youssef, Attia, & Kamel, 1998b; Youssef, Attia, & Kamel, 1998a).

Factors that have been reported to be associated with greater use of physical punishment include cultural acceptance of the practice (Gershoff, 2008; Runyan et al., 2010), political stressors (Haj-Yahia & Abdo-Kaloti, 2003; Haj-Yahia & Ben-Arieh, 2000), rural setting (Alyahri & Goodman, 2008; Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002), larger family size (Alyahri & Goodman, 2008; Haj-Yahia & Abdo-Kaloti, 2003; Halileh & Saleh, 2010), family’s economic disadvantage (Alyahri & Goodman, 2008; Krug et al., 2002), parental belief in physical punishment (Alyahri & Goodman, 2008; Ateah & Durrant, 2005), parental experience of such treatment in childhood (Gershoff, 2008), younger parental age (Gershoff, 2008; Straus, 2003), lower parental education (Alyahri & Goodman, 2008; Halileh & Saleh, 2010), child’s male gender (Haj-Yahia & Ben-Arieh, 2000; Halileh & Saleh, 2010) or younger age (Youssef et al., 1998b; Youssef et al., 1998a).

This paper explores child disciplinary methods used by parents with their children under 12 years of age in Qatar and Palestine. It is part of a wider study to determine and compare the nature, extent and determinants of child discipline ranging from positive to abusive practices in the two countries. The main purpose of the study was to conduct a comparison between 2 Arab countries that share a common language and religion, but are different in their socioeconomic background and political context. Qatar is a sovereign country enjoying peace and prosperity, while Palestine is occupied and subject to frequent violence. The cultural similarity between these 2 populations living in very different contexts offers a rare opportunity to try and uncover some of the underlying factors that affect the kind of discipline used by mothers on their children.

Although both countries are Arabic-speaking and predominantly Muslim, there are significant contrasts between them. The population of Palestine is almost double that of Qatar (4.4 vs. 2.4 million), and is comprised almost entirely of Palestinians, while Qataris comprise only 12% of the country’s population, which consists mainly of expatriates (Snoj, 2014). The population of Palestine is younger with almost 3 times the percentage of youth under 15 (40% vs. 14%), with a birth rate approximately 3 times that of Qatar’s (31 vs. 11/1000 population) and a death rate 4 times higher (4 vs. 1/1000 population) (Population Reference Bureau, 2014). Qatar’s Gross National Income (GNI) per capita based on purchasing power parity (GNI PPP, which uses purchasing power parity rates (PPP) to convert GNI to international dollars) is a staggering 26 times higher than that of Palestine at US dollars (USD) 133,850 versus 5080 (Population Reference Bureau, 2015). Palestinians live under Israeli military occupation and experience a high level of exposure to chronic and protracted political violence whereas Qataris enjoy peace and stability (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2016) Both countries have ratified the Convention of the Right of the Child (CRC), Qatar in 1995 (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1995) and Palestine in 2014 (Colville, 2014) which recognizes a child’s right to be protected from violence.

The United Nations Children’s Fund’s (UNICEF) report, Child Disciplinary Methods at Home (UNICEF, 2010), describes the findings from 35 low and middle-income countries where either the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) or the Demographic and Health Survey had been administered. It reveals that three-quarters of children 2–14 years old had experienced violent discipline while only 20% experienced non-violent discipline. The rates of physical punishment in the Arab countries that participated, which included Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, occupied Palestine, Syria and Yemen, were between 62% and 83% with Palestine ranking the highest. Another study, supported by UNICEF and carried out by the Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics in 2014, showed high rates of violent discipline and low rates of non-violent discipline, with non-violent discipline at 6% and any physical punishment at 73%, which includes severe discipline at 23% (Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, 2015).

A study of 97 male adolescents 15–19 years of age in the Gaza strip revealed high rates of physical and emotional maltreatment. The most frequently reported physical abuse items were: being pinched, beaten or injured by an adult leading to injury in 36.5%; while the most frequently reported emotional abuse item was being shouted at by fathers and teachers (42.3%) (Thabet et al., 2004). In the occupied Palestinian territory a study of 58 governmental, non-profit and private sector institutions providing services for abused and neglected children showed that 77% of these institutions reported that physical abuse was the most frequent type of maltreatment they managed, followed by psychological abuse at 70%. Child neglect was managed moderately frequently by 41%, while 29% said they managed it frequently or rarely. According to 73% of them they rarely took care of sexual abuse (Halileh & Abdullah, 2009). The Qatar Foundation on Child and Woman Protection (QFCWP) was reported as providing support, care and protection to 17 child victims of abuse and violence in 2008 (Child Rights International Network, 2010). A recent report states the QFCWP sheltered 1638 children from domestic violence between 2004 and 2010 (Toumi, 2011). In a survey reported in 2009 on 2787 female students at Qatar University, 57% of the sample reported having experienced violence in their childhood (Al-Ghanim, 2009). The most common (62%) type of violence reported was beating, followed by humiliation, degradation, verbal abuse and finally sexual harassment at 21%. In 2012, the first survey in the State of Qatar was accomplished in collaboration with the Supreme Council for Health and Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community, using the MICS. The result showed non-violent discipline was at 36.6% for Qataris and 41.4% for non-Qataris, and any violent discipline at 53.7% for Qatari and 47.5% for non-Qataris. Those who believe that children need to be physically punished were at 14.9% for Qataris and 13.5% for non-Qataris

(Ministry of Development & Planning Statistics in Qatar, 2012).

When the World Report on Violence Against Children drew attention to the extent of the ongoing violence against children it advised that tools be developed to collect data on the extent of the violence in a variety of settings including the home (Pinheiro, 2006a). In response, the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) developed the ISPCAN Child Abuse Screening Tools (ICASTs). They were designed to include both disciplinary actions considered to be most common and those perceived as most harmful (Dunne et al., 2009; ISPCAN, 2006). Our current wider study used two of the ICAST tools, one for Parents (ICAST-P) and a Retrospective version (ICAST-R) for young adults aged 18–24 years. This paper will focus on the results from the survey of mothers using the ICAST-P, comparing results between Qatar and Palestine.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Instrument

ICAST-P is intended for use with parents or other caregivers of children from birth up to their 18th birthday. In this study, it was used with mothers only reporting on their children up to their 12th birthday. The instrument collects information about the respondent and any other regular caregivers' use of disciplinary method: non-violent; physical, including moderate and severe; and psychological methods that had been used in the previous year on the index child in the family (Runyan, Dunne, & Zolotor, 2009). The original English ICAST-P consists of 47 "stem" questions, 35 are followed by "leaf" questions (Runyan et al., 2009). General demographic information is collected in 7 questions, followed by the questions on the discipline used, by whom and how frequently. Parents are also asked about the use of positive discipline and in an open question for their ideas on successful methods. In their publication Runyan et al. (2009) make it clear that they intended the ICAST to be used to provide comparative data from communities and that it is for individual researchers to define for themselves those acts which might be considered harsh or abusive.

This study used the original version of the ICAST-P, which is no longer available and has undergone some minor modifications. The instrument was translated into Arabic, with slightly different versions produced in Qatar and Palestine, based on the different country dialects. It was back translated into English to ensure that the meaning had remained the same as the original in both countries, and to correct any inconsistencies.

The first phase of the research study used focus groups and individual interviews to validate and contextualize the ICAST-P by exploring with communities and professionals their views on the cultural relevance of the instrument, including what they considered accepted disciplinary methods and those that are not acceptable, as well as ensuring clarity of the language. The participants of the focus groups were selected from communities similar to those in which the ICAST study was conducted. Focus groups, one with 10 mothers and another with 9 selected professionals in Qatar, and one with 10 mothers in Palestine, were conducted. Individual interviews were carried out with 10 different mothers from the focus groups in each context. Based on the responses received from these groups and interviews, the questionnaires were modified at each site, while retaining the original meaning and intent of the instrument. The second phase was a pilot study involving 50 mothers in both Qatar and Palestine to test the acceptability of the questionnaire and feasibility of its administration. This resulted in further modifications to suit each context.

As a result of the first 2 phases, the two sexual abuse questions that were part of the original questionnaire were omitted in Palestine because of contextual considerations, but remained in the Qatar version. The Palestinian version added a short separate section with questions relevant to the context for the West Bank, namely related to exposure to political violence, which will be reported in a separate paper. The questions related to neglect were omitted from this paper, as all 3 questions pertaining to this domain could have been confounded in Palestine by the restrictions on movement, and/or injuries and access problems resulting from political violence, rendering comparison between the 2 settings invalid.

### 2.2. Sampling

A comparative national cross-sectional household survey was conducted in both Qatar and Palestine, using representative samples of Qataris living in Qatar, and Palestinians living in the West Bank. This was based on the 2010 census in Qatar and the 2007 census projections in the West Bank/Palestine. A sample of mothers aged 25 years to their 50th birthday for Qatar and Palestine each was drawn from the sampling frame. One of her children, up to the child's 12th birthday, was then randomly selected using the Kish Table Method. This method was not rigorously applied in Qatar due to the difficulty in recruiting subjects and having Qatari mothers comply with this methodology.

A total of 1173 Qatari mothers were invited, and 1018 agreed to participate and were interviewed face-to-face. The response rate of the Qatar study was 88%; the refusal rate was 8% and absence rate 4%. In the West Bank, the study sample was selected using a stratified multistage cluster sampling method. A probability proportional to the size of communities in the West Bank was chosen with a total of 1299 mothers interviewed. The response rate for Palestine was 94.4%; refusal rate was 3.6%, and absence rate was 2%. Data was collected during November and December 2014 in Palestine and during January and February of 2015 in Qatar.

### 2.3. Ethics/Human subject protection

The Joint-Institutional Review Board in Qatar, and the Institute of Community and Public Health Research Ethics Committee, at Birzeit University, approved the study. Both institutions obtained assurance from The Supreme Council of Health in Qatar. Verbal consent was obtained from the participants following a detailed explanation of the purpose of the study, its importance and possible

**Table 1**  
Internal consistency.

Discipline	Overall	Qatar	Palestine	Runyan et al.
Non-Violent	0.71	0.75	0.68	0.77
Moderate Physical	0.82	0.74	0.80	0.86
Severe Physical	0.33	0.52	0.27	0.81
Psychological	0.74	0.65	0.71	0.77

harm resulting from participation, and lists of institutions providing services in the areas of child protection or psychosocial/care, were provided to all participants. Confidentiality was guaranteed by excluding any personal identifiers in the data set, and making the anonymized data accessible to team members only.

#### 2.4. Analyses

Sample characteristics were summarized using frequency distributions (Table 1). Then comparative analysis of sociodemographic variables, reports of child physical or developmental difficulties (challenges), and disciplinary actions by parents, between Qatar and Palestine were conducted and tested using Chi-square and Fisher's exact tests in the bivariate analysis. The disciplinary methods were grouped into: non-violent, moderate physical, severe physical and psychological methods, in line with the sub-scales developed and piloted in the original draft instrument (Dunne et al., 2009). Given the differences noted between the Qatari and Palestinian populations in maternal educational level, family income, children's ages and other factors, multivariate logistic regression analyses were conducted producing odds ratios adjusted for respondent's age, marital status, number of children, index child's age, index child's gender, mother's education, father's education, mother's work status, father's work status, and reports of the index child suffering from any physical or developmental challenges. Unadjusted and adjusted odds ratios were estimated along with their respective 95% confidence intervals. Significance was defined at  $P \leq 0.05$ . Analyses were completed using IBM-SPSS version 23.0.

Responses of the primary "stem" questions were compared, but the follow-up "leaf questions" regarding frequency, severity and perpetrator information were not analyzed/compared in this paper in order to keep it concise.

#### 2.5. Internal consistency

A comparison was made between the results of Cronbach Alpha in this study for Qatar and Palestine and those obtained by Runyan et al. (Runyan et al., 2009) in their field testing of the ICAST-P in six countries, looking at non-violent, moderate physical, severe physical and psychological discipline.

Table 1 Internal consistency about here

The table measures the reliability, i.e., internal consistency of Cronbach Alpha for each type of discipline.

### 3. Results

The basic demographic characteristics of the mothers in the 2 countries are given in Table 1. They demonstrate significant differences between the Qatari and Palestinian samples, except for the gender of the index child. The table shows that Palestinian mothers were younger, had more children and less education compared to Qatari mothers. Fewer mothers from Palestine were working at 9.5% compared to 49.6% of Qatari mothers, with 87.3% of Palestinian mothers identifying themselves as housewives and only 3.2% describing themselves as being unemployed despite seeking employment, as compared to 35.8% and 14.6% in these categories respectively in Qatar. Conversely, more Palestinian fathers were working at 92.4% compared to Qatari fathers at 88.1%. The index child in Palestine tended to be younger with the majority being under 5 years of age, while 73.7% of Qatari children were over 5 years of age. In addition, more Palestinian children were reported to have one or more physical or developmental challenge at 9.0% compared to Qataris at 5.9%. Finally, Qatari mothers reported having significantly more domestic help (both male and female live-ins) with only 6.8% reporting having no female domestic and 35.6% no male domestic help, compared to Palestinian mothers reporting having no live-in domestic help at all.

Table 2: Comparison of the sociodemographics characteristic among Qatar and Palestine about here

The data in Table 2 indicate there were significant differences between Qatar and Palestine in the disciplinary methods reported.

Table 3: Discipline methods during the past year about here

**Non-violent discipline:** 97.7% of Qatari mothers and 99.1% Palestinian mothers used at least one non-violent method. Upon comparing each question, there were no significant differences between the two samples in their responses (using adjusted odds ratios as mentioned above) on the use of the following methods: explaining why something was wrong at 95.6% in Qatar compared to Palestine at 96.8%, and giving the child something else to do at 68.5% in Qatar compared to Palestine at 76.2% (See Table 2). As for asking the child to start or stop doing something (aOR = 0.236; 95% CI 0.147–0.377) it was practiced less in Qatar at 85.3% compared to Palestine at 95.8%, while taking away privileges or money, forbidding something the child liked or prohibiting the child from leaving the home (aOR = 2.302; 95% CI 1.767–3.000) was practiced more in Qatar at 55.2% compared to Palestine at 30.5%.

**Moderate Physical Discipline:** 55.1% of Qatari mothers and 83.0% Palestinian mothers reported using at least one moderate

**Table 2**  
Comparison of the sociodemographics characteristic among Qatar and Palestine.

	Qatar N = 1018		Palestine N = 1299		P-value
	No	%	No	%	
<b>Responder's Age in Years</b>					
Missing	183	18.0	4	0.3	0.000*
25-29	174	17.1	305	23.6	
30-34	173	17.0	363	27.9	
35-39	191	18.8	315	24.2	
40-44	164	16.1	201	15.5	
45-49	133	13.1	111	8.5	
<b>Current Marital Status</b>					
Not Married	73	7.2	27	2.1	0.000*
Currently Married	942	92.8	1272	97.9	
<b>Number of Children</b>					
1	95	9.3	66	5.1	0.000*
2	167	16.4	157	12.1	
3	192	18.9	268	20.6	
4	184	18.1	286	22.0	
5	165	16.2	249	19.2	
6	125	12.3	135	10.4	
≥7	90	8.8	138	10.6	
<b>Index Child's Gender</b>					
Male	569	55.9	680	52.3	0.089
Female	449	44.1	619	47.7	
<b>Index Child's Age</b>					
0-1 years	24	2.5	229	17.6	0.000*
2-5 years	226	23.8	552	42.5	
6-12 years	701	73.7	518	39.9	
<b>Education Attained by Mother</b>					
Low education (none to 5 yrs.)	28	2.8	35	2.7	0.000*
Primary school (6 yrs.)	79	7.8	211	16.2	
Preparatory school (9 yrs.)	131	12.9	474	36.5	
Secondary school (12 yrs.)	323	31.8	245	18.9	
Post-secondary diploma/Vocational	89	8.8	86	6.6	
College/university degree and above	367	36.1	248	19.1	
<b>Education Attained by Father</b>					
Low education (none to 5 yrs.)	30	2.9	42	3.2	0.000*
Primary school (6 yrs.)	43	4.2	217	16.7	
Preparatory school (9 yrs.)	97	9.5	508	39.1	
Secondary school (12 yrs.)	274	26.9	230	17.7	
Post-secondary diploma/Vocational	123	12.1	91	7.0	
College/university degree and above	451	44.3	202	15.6	
<b>Mother's Work Status</b>					
Currently working	505	49.6	124	9.5	0.000*
Housewife	364	35.8	1134	87.3	
Currently not working	149	14.6	41	3.2	
<b>Father's Work Status</b>					
Currently working	896	88.1	1183	92.4	0.000*
Currently not working	121	11.9	97	7.6	
<b>Child with No Physical/Developmental Challenges</b>					
Yes	958	94.1	1182	91.0	0.005*
No	60	5.9	117	9.0	

\* Significant at  $P \leq 0.05$ .

physical discipline method. From the 11 disciplinary methods, Palestinian mothers had two times the odds (adjusted) for 10 of them. Only forcing the child to kneel in a manner resulting in pain had no significant differences between the two samples (aOR = 1.706; 95% CI 0.827–3.518), at 3.7% in Qatar compared to 2.7% in Palestine.

**Severe physical discipline:** 4.9% of Qatari mothers and 20.5% Palestinian mothers reported using at least one severe physical discipline method. But this result needs to be viewed with caution given the small numbers of mothers in the sample who admitted using some of these methods

Upon comparing each question, there were no significant differences between the two samples when asked about shaking the child of less than 2 years old (aOR = 0.817; 95% CI 0.130–5.145) practiced at 23.1% in Qatar compared to 30.8% in Palestine; choking the child or squeezing his/her neck with the hands (aOR = 0.270; 95% CI 0.070–1.040) practiced at 0.5% in Qatar compared to 1.8% in Palestine; burning, scalding or branding the child (aOR = 0.514; 95% CI 0.072–3.672) practiced at 0.3% in Qatar and 0.9% in Palestine; and threatening the child with a knife or gun (aOR = 7.085; 95% CI 0.267–188.350) practiced at 0.2% in Qatar compared to 0.3% in Palestine. The remaining three disciplinary methods (kicking a child, attempting suffocation and beating them over

**Table 3**  
Discipline methods during the past year.

Method	Qatar			Palestine			aOR <sup>b</sup>	95% CI <sup>c</sup>	P-value
	N <sup>a</sup>	Yes	%	N <sup>a</sup>	Yes	%			
<b>Non-Violent Discipline</b>									
Explained why something was wrong	947	905	95.6	1192	1154	96.8	0.608	0.310–1.191	0.147
Told child to start or stop doing something	947	808	85.3	1209	1158	95.8	0.236	0.147–0.377	0.000 <sup>*</sup>
Gave child something else to do	950	651	68.5	1233	939	76.2	0.767	0.580–1.014	0.062
Took away privilege, or money, forbade something child liked, or prohibited child from leaving home.	938	518	55.2	1170	357	30.5	2.302	1.767–3.000	0.000 <sup>*</sup>
Used at least one of the non-violent discipline method	929	908	97.7	1143	1133	99.1	0.382	0.179–0.814	0.010 <sup>*</sup>
<b>Moderate Physical Discipline</b>									
Shook child (> 2 years)	921	223	24.2	1068	454	42.5	0.432	0.325–0.573	0.000 <sup>*</sup>
Spanked child on bottom with bare hand	947	245	25.9	1259	750	59.6	0.192	0.145–0.253	0.000 <sup>*</sup>
Hit child on buttocks with an object such as shoe, stick, broom, cane, or belt	945	139	14.7	1227	363	29.6	0.541	0.389–0.753	0.000 <sup>*</sup>
Hit elsewhere (not buttocks) with an object, stick, broom, cane/belt	945	140	14.8	1235	289	23.4	0.541	0.385–0.760	0.000 <sup>*</sup>
Twisted child ear	945	239	25.3	1252	444	35.5	0.567	0.429–0.749	0.000 <sup>*</sup>
Pulled child's hair	928	110	11.9	1238	277	22.4	0.458	0.321–0.652	0.000 <sup>*</sup>
Forced child to kneel in a manner that result in pain	904	33	3.7	1173	32	2.7	1.706	0.827–3.518	0.148
Put chili pepper, or spicy food in mouth	942	24	2.5	1224	102	8.3	0.384	0.203–0.728	0.003 <sup>*</sup>
Pinched child	947	205	21.6	1257	557	44.3	0.295	0.222–0.393	0.000 <sup>*</sup>
Hit child on head with knuckles	954	83	8.7	1243	190	15.3	0.440	0.294–0.658	0.000 <sup>*</sup>
Slapped on face or back of head	946	95	10.0	1248	473	37.9	0.168	0.119–0.237	0.000 <sup>*</sup>
Used at least one of the moderate physical discipline methods	902	497	55.1	1154	958	83.0	0.251	0.205–0.307	0.000 <sup>*</sup>
<b>Psychological Discipline</b>									
Threatened to leave or abandon child	908	118	13.0	1187	341	28.7	0.397	0.285–0.554	0.000 <sup>*</sup>
Shouted, yelled	954	663	69.5	1273	1180	92.7	0.143	0.099–0.206	0.000 <sup>*</sup>
Threaten to invoke ghosts or spirits	908	44	4.8	1191	257	21.6	0.278	0.174–0.447	0.000 <sup>*</sup>
Cursed child (son of ...)	928	152	16.4	1264	586	46.4	0.227	0.168–0.307	0.000 <sup>*</sup>
Threatened to send away	904	8	0.9	1176	76	6.5	0.055	0.018–0.164	0.000 <sup>*</sup>
Locked out of the house	905	8	0.9	1178	67	5.7	0.103	0.038–0.277	0.000 <sup>*</sup>
Insulted by calling child dumb	921	267	29.0	1218	548	45.0	0.307	0.232–0.407	0.000 <sup>*</sup>
Refused to speak to child	935	402	43.0	1182	549	46.4	0.740	0.571–0.958	0.022 <sup>*</sup>
Withheld a food meal as punishment	944	30	3.2	1228	24	2.0	0.651	0.278–1.528	0.324
Used public humiliation	903	97	10.7	1195	288	24.1	0.301	0.209–0.435	0.000 <sup>*</sup>
Used at least one of the psychological discipline methods	896	696	77.7	1128	1097	97.3	0.098	0.067–0.145	0.000 <sup>*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Total number of participants who answered the question.

<sup>b</sup> Odds ratios were adjusted (aOR) for respondent's age, marital status, number of children, index child's age and gender, mother's education, father's education, mother's working status, father's working status and physical or developmental challenges among children.

<sup>c</sup> Confidence interval.

\* Significant at  $P \leq 0.05$ .

and over) were practiced significantly more in Palestine.

**Psychological discipline:** 77.7% of Qatari mothers and 97.3% Palestinian mothers reported using at least one psychological discipline method. Upon comparing each question, nine disciplinary methods were reported to be practiced more in Palestine with varying degrees of frequency. There was no significant difference between the two samples when asked about withholding a food meal as punishment (aOR = 0.651; 95% CI 0.278–1.528), practiced at 3.2% in Qatar compared to 2.0% in Palestine.

#### 4. Discussion

Ours is the first extensive survey of child discipline in Qatar where mothers report types of discipline used on their children, and that compares those findings with Palestine, another Arabic-speaking predominantly Muslim country that is living with a very different set of socioeconomic and political circumstances

Looking at the use of child discipline as reported by the mothers in both countries, Palestinian mothers used more violent discipline than Qatari mothers. Three of the severe physical disciplinary methods were reported significantly less often in Qatar, viz. kicking the child, using hand or pillow to prevent breathing and hitting child with object or fist, with approximately 4 times less frequency in Qatar than Palestine. Methods practiced with regards to moderate physical discipline were also higher in Palestine compared to Qatar by a factor of 2–4. Similarly, psychological disciplinary methods were significantly higher among Palestinian than Qatari mothers in 9 out of 10 of these methods listed in the survey. This finding of a lower rate of use of violent discipline in Qatar is reinforced by the results in the portion of our larger study that administered ICAST-R to young adults aged 18 to 24 years in Qatar and Palestine, where Qatari young adults reported lower rates of such experiences during their childhood compared to their Palestinian peers (Eldeeb et al., 2016).

As reported in the results we found striking demographic differences between the two country samples. The Palestinian mothers were younger, with more children and a lower education level than Qatari mother; factors that are known to be associated with the

use of more aggressive discipline (Alyahri & Goodman, 2008; Gershoff, 2008; Haj-Yahia & Abdo-Kaloti, 2003; Halileh & Saleh, 2010 & Straus, 2003). However, our multivariate analyses, which adjusted for such demographic differences, still showed that the Qatari mothers were less likely to use the violent forms of discipline. This suggests that there were other factors influencing the extent and nature of the discipline used by the mothers in the two countries. The two outstanding differences between the two countries are the socioeconomic status of the population and the level of background violence they experience, factors that are interrelated (Krug et al., 2002; Pinheiro, 2006b). As indicated in the Introduction, the Gross National Income (GNI) per capita in Qatar is 26 times that of Palestine and Qatar was rated as the most peaceful country in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and ranked 34th in the world out of 163 nations, while Palestine was 15th out of 20 in the MENA region and 148th in the world (IEP 2016). Palestinians are routinely exposed to conflict, the threat of displacement and denial of access to livelihoods and essential services (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2017), while Qataris are safe and secure. These differences because of their nature and magnitude will have had considerable influence - positive and negative - on the lives of the majority of families in our study. There is evidence from the literature of an association between socioeconomic stress and community violence and the increased use of violence towards children (Krug et al., 2002; Pinheiro, 2006b). Disadvantaged communities with residential instability and higher rates of poverty have higher rates of child maltreatment (Breyer & McPhee, 2015). Children who experience violence are more likely to display aggressive behaviors (Foster & Brooks-Gunn, 2011; Margolin & Gordis, 2000), which is more likely to result in disciplinary actions by their parents. Mothers who live in distressed communities with a higher level of, insecurity are more likely to use physical violence against their children (Kim & McGuire-Jack, 2015). Our finding of the increased use of violent discipline by Palestinian mothers further support these associations, though the determinant(s) for this cannot be specifically identified from this study.

The tool we used did not allow for an exploration of the impact of stressors or experiences of trauma on individual mothers and families. There is clearly room for further research to understand why apparently privileged mothers sometime use violent discipline and why other mothers despite adverse circumstance do not.

Among the reported disciplinary actions was “shook the child under 2 years”; a practice known to be dangerous and that can lead to intracranial bleeding, in the entity known as Abusive Head Trauma (Case, Graham, Handy, Jentzen, & Monteleone, 2001; Spies & Klevens, 2016). Out of 13 mothers with children below 2 years in Qatar, 3 mothers (23.1%) reported shaking their children whereas in Palestine 60 out of 195 (30.8%) reported having shaken a child below 2 years.

The results revealed comparable Cronbach Alphas for non-violent, moderate physical and psychological discipline between Qatar and Palestine, but not for severe physical. The Alpha for the severe discipline scale is too low to be taken seriously as a scale describing the phenomenon, at 0.52 for Qatar, and 0.27 for Palestine in contrast to the 0.81 reported by Runyan et al. This may also be related to the age of the children, up to 18 years in the Runyan study and up to 12 years in Palestine and Qatar, as the instrument is sensitive to age and gender. However it should not prevent acknowledging that in both countries there are children experiencing severe life threatening discipline.

On a more positive note a high proportion of mothers in both countries reported the use of non-violent discipline. Palestinian mothers tell their children to start or stop doing something more often than Qatari mothers. However Qatari mothers tend to take away privileges from their children more than Palestinian mothers. This could be due to higher economic and social status of families in Qatar. In both countries mothers explained to their children why something was wrong and gave their children something else to do to distract their attention. The ICAST questionnaires were designed primarily to identify disciplinary methods that, though common, could be damaging and therefore they do not explore in any depth methods of non-violent discipline that parents find effective. Comments were made in the focus group discussions in our study about the need to focus more research on positive approaches.

In 24 countries where corporal punishment has been banned and popular support for this practice has decreased, the use of this disciplinary method has decreased (Zolotor & Puzia, 2010). The results of this study suggest the need for preventative strategies appropriate to the local context. These could include modifying cultural acceptance and parental belief in the benefits of physical punishment, as well as raising awareness of the harmful consequences of physical punishment (Gershoff, 2008), and especially those associated with severe punishment, such as shaking (Lind et al., 2016). Such strategies include the need for parental guidance, for promoting methods that are non-violent, effective and culturally appropriate, and for supporting parents in using non-violent child rearing methods and providing additional protection for children and families with identified risk factors. Specifically, a campaign regarding shaking infants and young children, such as the ones described in the literature (Dias et al., 2005 & Ornstein, Fitzpatrick, Hatchette, Woolcott, & Dodds, 2016), is recommended in both countries.

Studies have shown that there has been decrease in prevalence of child maltreatment in countries with increased recognition and public response to the problem (Runyan, 2013). While health care providers need to acknowledge, understand, and respect how context and culture affect various aspects of child rearing, discipline and child protection at the individual, caregiver, family/community, and societal levels, they must also hold at their core the integrity of the principles of universal rights for children (Kolhatkar & Berkowitz, 2014).

Providing parenting classes is recommended in both countries since both are culturally inclined to use physical punishment to correct undesired behaviors in their children. Such classes might reduce the incidence of harsh discipline and encourage parents to establish a relationship of mutual respect with their children, which is more likely to foster the desired behaviors in the children (Ahmann, 2002). There is substantial evidence that offering support and education to parents can reduce their use of physical punishment and children's externalizing behavior (Durrant & Ensom, 2012). Programs have been devised that are behaviorally based and teach parents to observe their child's behavior, communicate clearly to them and apply consistent consequences for undesirable behaviors. Research evaluating these programs has exhibited positive effects on the competence, efficacy and mental health of the

parents as well as on the behaviors of the child (Dretzke et al., 2009; McCart, Priester, Davies, & Azen, 2006).

The wider significance of our study is that it provides governmental and non-governmental bodies in both jurisdictions with evidence that aids in the formulation of laws, policies and programs for both the primary prevention of child abuse and neglect and for intervention in cases of suspected abuse. The results would also be relevant to the development of educational curricula for professionals and for the production of public awareness campaigns to advocate positive discipline. These complementary approaches are intended to promote the well-being and safety of children in order to maximize their chances of growing up in a non-violent environment so as to become socially-adjusted, productive adults and parents.

#### 4.1. Limitations

The study has a number of limitations. It is cross-sectional in nature and can only reveal associations, not causation. Reporting child maltreatment is challenging in both our study settings. Reporting abuse, especially by a family member, is generally seen as socially unacceptable and exposes the family to a variety of negative pressures from extended family members and the community aside from legal sanctions. Qatar lacks legislation specific to child abuse or child protection, while in Palestine there are regulations developed to address child abuse and neglect, but some are irregularly implemented and others not implemented at all. In Palestine, although several non-governmental and some governmental organizations, do address child protection, a child protection system has yet to be fully developed. In Qatar, the governmental and non-governmental child protection system is also incompletely developed (Eldeeb et al., 2016).

Despite the Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics (MDPS) being experienced in conducting surveys and having access to the general Qatari population; the fieldworks had difficulty recruiting from the households approached. The difficulty seemed to be related to the fact that the small Qatari population is recruited for a number of surveys, leading to survey fatigue, as well as the culturally sensitive nature of the survey topic. In order to enlist the required number of subjects the fieldworkers sometimes circumvented some of the study's stipulated methodology, e.g., by not always using the Kish table meticulously to select the subject who should receive the questionnaire. Limiting our sample to the more privileged stratum of the population in Qatar, i.e., the Qataris, likely accentuated the difference in the privilege status between the sampled populations in Qatar, where the nationals are from the minority, and Palestine where Palestinians are the overwhelming majority. Including the less privileged expatriates in Qatar, whose composition varies remarkably from time to time, would have introduced yet a different bias and further compromised the validity of the results (Eldeeb et al., 2016).

Our 2 population samples differed in a number of ways, as indicated above. We compensated for those differences through the multivariate analyses used. The younger children in the Palestinian sample compared to those in the Qatari sample could have influenced the reported methods of discipline used by their mothers, and might have affected the higher number of reported shaking of infants. The small number of children who were subjected to the severe discipline methods also limits the extent to which any conclusions may be reached about the determinants of such forms of discipline. Indeed, our overall analysis of the determinants of all violent discipline did not allow us to disentangle the influences of the two interconnected associated factors of low socioeconomic status and background violence on the increased use of physical discipline by Palestinian mothers; suggesting an area for further study. This would be helpful not only to this region but to other regions of the world with similar challenges.

Additionally, despite the fieldworkers in both study settings being specifically trained using the ICAST questionnaires, conducting the survey and child protection, there remains an unconscious influence of cultural factors in having two different agencies involved in the study settings, reflecting a potential source of bias. (Eldeeb et al., 2016)

## 5. Conclusion

Our study is the first study to compare the nature, extent and determinants of child discipline between Qatar and Palestine. Despite its limitations our study provides valuable data. It suggests that in the more challenging context of Palestine as compared to Qatar the violent forms of discipline would be more prevalent. Qatari mothers are more likely to use positive disciplinary methods than Palestinian mothers and make less use of physical or psychological discipline.

Our results have policy implications for improving conditions in which families raise their children, and in the environments in which children grow up, including their neighborhoods, communities and schools. Preventative strategies appropriate to each local context are the next step. Despite the differences in perception of “normative” acts in Qatar and Palestine, the CRC is based on a child's rights to grow up in safety. Although taking social and cultural norms into account is important, it is essential to address social and cultural acceptance and parental and community beliefs surrounding the benefits of physical and emotional punishment and improve current child protection systems. Resolving the matter may need to be decided in each context individually, but further research needs to provide data on the outcomes of various forms of discipline and determine those that have positive or negative impacts. Providing educational curricula for professionals and public awareness campaigns making parents aware that physical and emotional punishment may be detrimental to the well-being and safety of children and advocating for positive discipline is a logical outcome of this study. The wider significance of such a study is that it can provide governmental and non-governmental bodies in both jurisdictions with evidence that will aid the formulation of laws, policies and programs for both the primary prevention of child maltreatment and for intervention in cases of suspected abuse. (Eldeeb et al., 2016).



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