We Are Different And We Are Similar

Universals, Commonality, Diversity and Variation In Parenting and Child Development

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1 Acknowledgements

- Collaborators:

  - Professor Julie Ma
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- Members of the *Global Families Project*
- IPUMS
- NICHD

2 The Scope of the Issue

- UNICEF considers children globally to be in crisis: political violence, climate change, and poverty affect many children (UNICEF 2024a, 2024b).
- In this time of crisis, parenting is one crucial area of focus.
- According to UNICEF data, $\frac{1}{3}$ of children are subject to physical punishment (Ward et al. 2023); $\frac{2}{3}$ to some form of violent punishment (UNICEF 2024a).
- In a review of 50 years of literature on physical punishment, Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor (2016) connect physical punishment to poor mental health outcomes, and other poor outcomes over the life course. Ward et al. (2023) examines the relationship of multiple forms of parental discipline to child outcomes.

3 Are We Similar? Are We Different?

4 Both Universals and Variation Are Important

"Despite the incredible diversity existing among and within human cultures, there are many phenomena that occur regularly in all known societies. These commonalities, or universals, while deriving in part from human nature, may also have specific social, cultural, and systemic sources. We need to develop a working understanding of these

(a) positive parenting
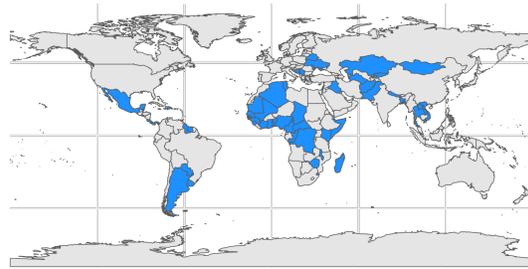
(a) countries in MICS data

universals so that we might advance legitimate, empirically based human science set on creating knowledge that is politically relevant to fostering real solutions to the problems that complicate human co-existence in the Age of the Anthropocene." (Antweiler 2016)

5 Highlighting Commonalities May Promote Intergroup Attitudes And Solidarity

"Hanel et al. (2019) cite research suggesting that 'highlighting similarities between groups improves interpersonal and intergroup attitudes.' Others have argued that 'build[ing] bonds of commonality across our differences' might be an impetus for social transformation (Hunt-Hendrix and Taylor 2024)."

6 The Argument Of This Presentation

- Families, parents and children experience an incredible diversity of circumstances.
- Parents engage in parenting behaviors with consequent diversity, though with some surprising similarities.
- The associations of parenting with child outcomes are surprisingly consistent.

7 Data

MICS data collected by UNICEF from Low and Middle Income Countries (LMIC) around the world. $N = 224,632$ families; $N_{countries} = 60$
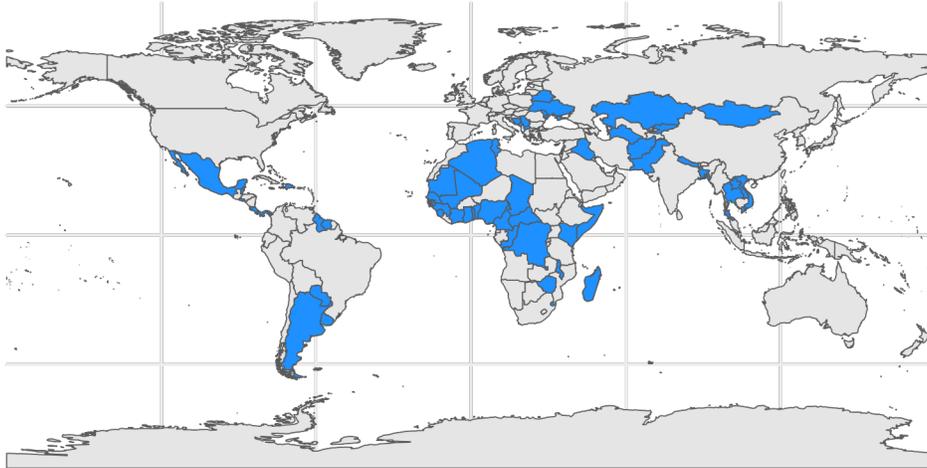
Figure 3: countries in UNICEF MICS Data

8 Sources of Variation In The Study of Parenting And Child Outcomes

9 The Equation

$$\text{outcome} = \beta_0 + \Sigma\beta\text{parenting} + \Sigma\beta\text{covariates} + u_{0j} + \Sigma u_{kj} \times \text{parenting}$$

baseline — β_0

linear or dichotomous outcome — outcome

parenting — $\Sigma\beta$parenting

covariates — $\Sigma\beta$covariates

country level variation in outcome — u_{0j}

country level variation in associations — $\Sigma u_{kj} \times$ parenting

Figure 5: annotated equation

10 Parenting Behaviors Vary *Somewhat* Across Countries

Verbal reasoning (78%) and shouting (64%) are the most common parental discipline behaviors toward young children.
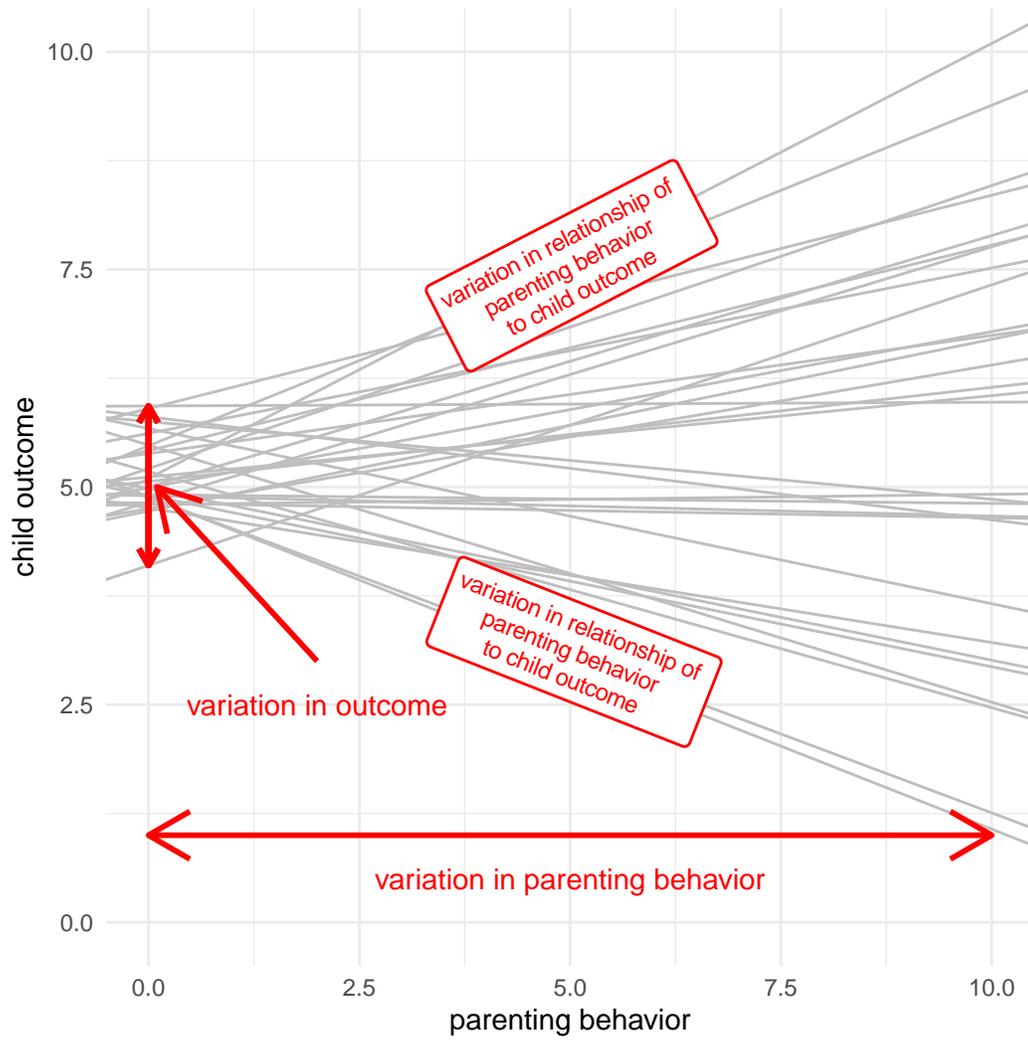
Figure 4: Sources of Variation In The Study of Parenting And Child Outcomes

11 The *Maximal Model* Approach

- Hypothetically, one might imagine that there could be group level unobserved factors which affect many regression slopes–i.e. the relationship between multiple predictors (e.g. x_1, x_2, x_3, etc.) and outcome variable y.
- Arguably, were one to ignore these unobserved factors in statistical estimation, they would show up either in an error term (e_i or u_0), or in the regression coefficients (β).
- The above could lead to statistical bias and a substantive mis-estimation of important effects. Thus, there is a conceptual argument for including as many random effects— i.e. random slopes—in a statistical model as possible (Barr et al. 2013; Frank 2018).
- There is also a substantive reason: We might be interested in the *sizes* of *all* the random slopes!

12 Relationship of Parenting And Child Outcomes

Maximal Model of Parenting and Child Aggression Outcome

	aggress	
child aggression		
Sex of randomly selected child	-0.023	**
Age of randomly selected child	0.000	
Selected child shouted at	0.036	**
Selected child called dumb/lazy/names	0.054	**
Selected child shaken	0.039	**
Selected child spanked	0.023	**
Selected child hit/slapped on hand/arm/leg	0.033	**
Selected child hit with belt/brush/stick/etc	0.035	**
Selected child hit/slapped on face/head/ears	0.044	**
Selected child beat as hard as one could	0.026	**
Selected child's privileges taken away	0.007	
Selected child - explained why behavior wrong	-0.014	*
Selected child given something else to do	0.004	
Intercept	0.325	**
country		
var(d_psych_shout)	0.001	
var(d_psych_names)	0.001	
var(d_phys_shook)	0.001	
var(d_phys_spank)	0.001	
var(d_phys_hitslap)	0.001	
var(d_phys_hitobject)	0.001	

	aggress
var(d_phys_hitface)	0.002
var(d_phys_beathard)	0.002
var(d_nvd_privileges)	0.001
var(d_nvd_explained)	0.001
var(d_nvd_gave)	0.001
var(_cons)	0.012
Residual	
var(e)	0.217
Number of observations	224632

** p<.01, * p<.05

13 The Relationship of Parenting And Child Outcomes Shows Little Variation Across Countries
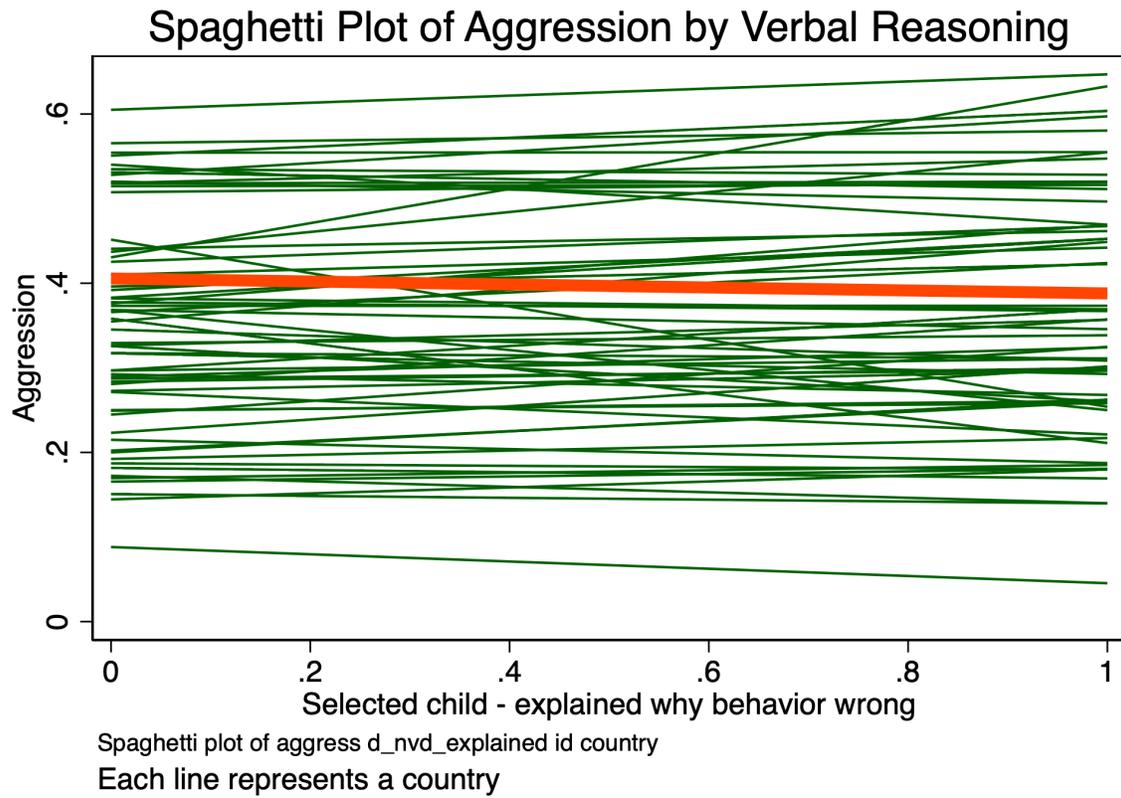
13.1 A Standard Spaghetti Plot

Spaghetti Plot of Aggression by Verbal Reasoning

Spaghetti plot of aggress d_nvd_explained id country
Each line represents a country

Figure 6: a standard 'spaghetti' plot

13.2 A Modified Spaghetti Plot

A 'Slope Only' Spaghetti Plot

All Significant Associations of Verbal Reasoning
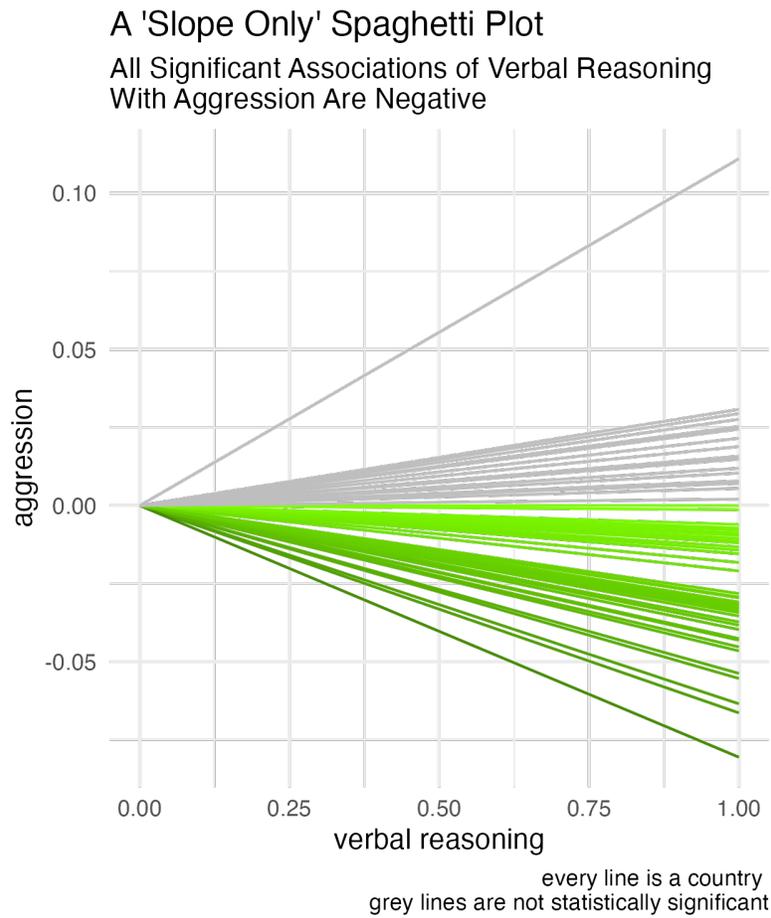With Aggression Are Negative

Figure 7: modified spaghetti plot

14 Quantifying Diversity and Commonality in the Relationship of Parenting To Child Outcomes

1. Regression slopes–when statistically significant–are all in the same direction, and of at least somewhat similar magnitude.
2. The actual values of the $\mathrm{var}(u_{kj})$ or $\mathrm{range}(u_{kj})$ are small.

15 Implications

> "My conception of the universal is that of a universal enriched by all that is particular, a universal enriched by every particular: the deepening and coexistence of all particulars." (Césaire 1956)

- Associations of parental discipline with child outcomes are very consistent across countries.
- This may be helpful to international organizations (e.g. UNICEF, WHO) that are developing programs or interventions that are to be applied in multiple cultural settings.
- While cultural tailoring will always be necessary to some degree; child development research can inform the foundations of widely applicable interventions.

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