# What do Mexican adolescents think about the maltreatment they get at home?



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ggression to children has been documented since ancient Rome and Greece, but at that time it wasn't seen as bad and concerning as it is nowadays. This could explain the widespread accepted use of violence as raising practices (Sánchez, 2009).

International research has shown that maltreated children may tend to become maltreating parents. Although there is no direct evidence of it, there are related factors that are very important to know.

This transmission has been explained by the creation of a hostile personality as a result of the maltreatment suffered, generating a positive attitude toward physical punishment (Moreno, 2005; Benavides-Delgado & Miranda, 2007).

It may be hard to understand why a person with child maltreatment history can repeat this behavior with his or her own kids, however there 's a high rate of physically maltreated adults with a positive attitude toward using physical punishment based methods; in fact people that had been severely maltreated during childhood, but are not aware of it, have difficulties accepting "beating a child" as physical abuse (Benavides-Delgado & Miranda, 2007).

Several authors have referred that physically abused children not only generate more aggressive solutions in the face of conflict, but also view aggression as an effective way to meet their social and instrumental goals. (Cullerton-Sen, et. al., 2008)

Preliminary research suggests that maltreated children exhibit significantly higher levels of relational aggression that non maltreated peers. (Rogosch & Cicchetti, 2005 at Cullerton-Sen, et. al., 2008).

These tendencies may have a strong impact on children's perception of violence as a raising or relational technique.

### OBJETIVE

To analyze the maltreated adolescents' perception of the use of violence as raising techniques and establish differences with non maltreated adolescents.

#### METHOD

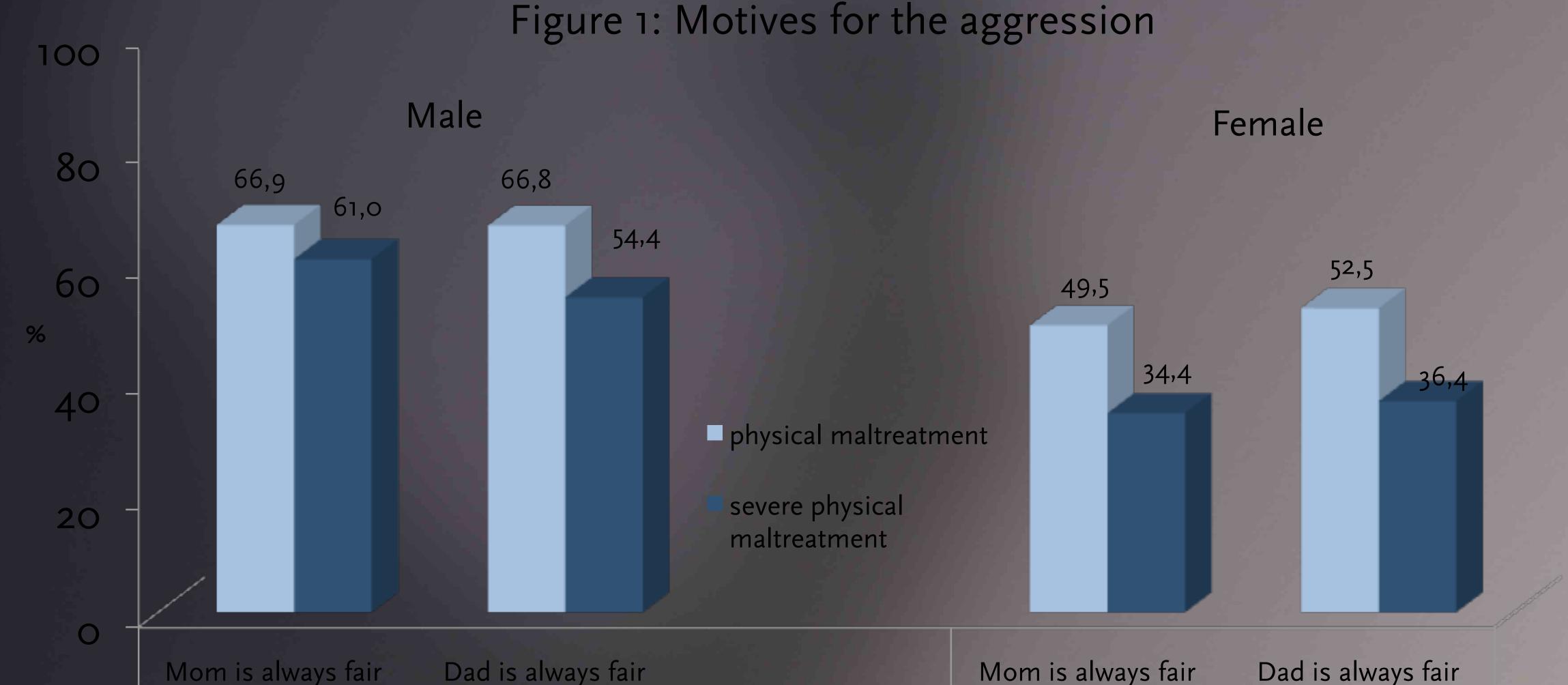
We used data from a cross-sectional survey made in 2006

(Villatoro et al, 2006), with a 5852 7th to 10th grade students' random sample at four states of the country. It used a stratified (by state), two staged (by school) and clustered design (by groups). The sample's accuracy was 95% and it had a 20% non-response rate. 3 groups were used: non-maltreated, physically maltreated and severly physical maltreated adolescents. For the analysis we grouped 6 items as "violence perception" and we used previously validated indicators.

## RESULTS

The analyses were made with chi-square statistics significant at 0.01, with Bonferroni corrections, to detect the differences among groups.

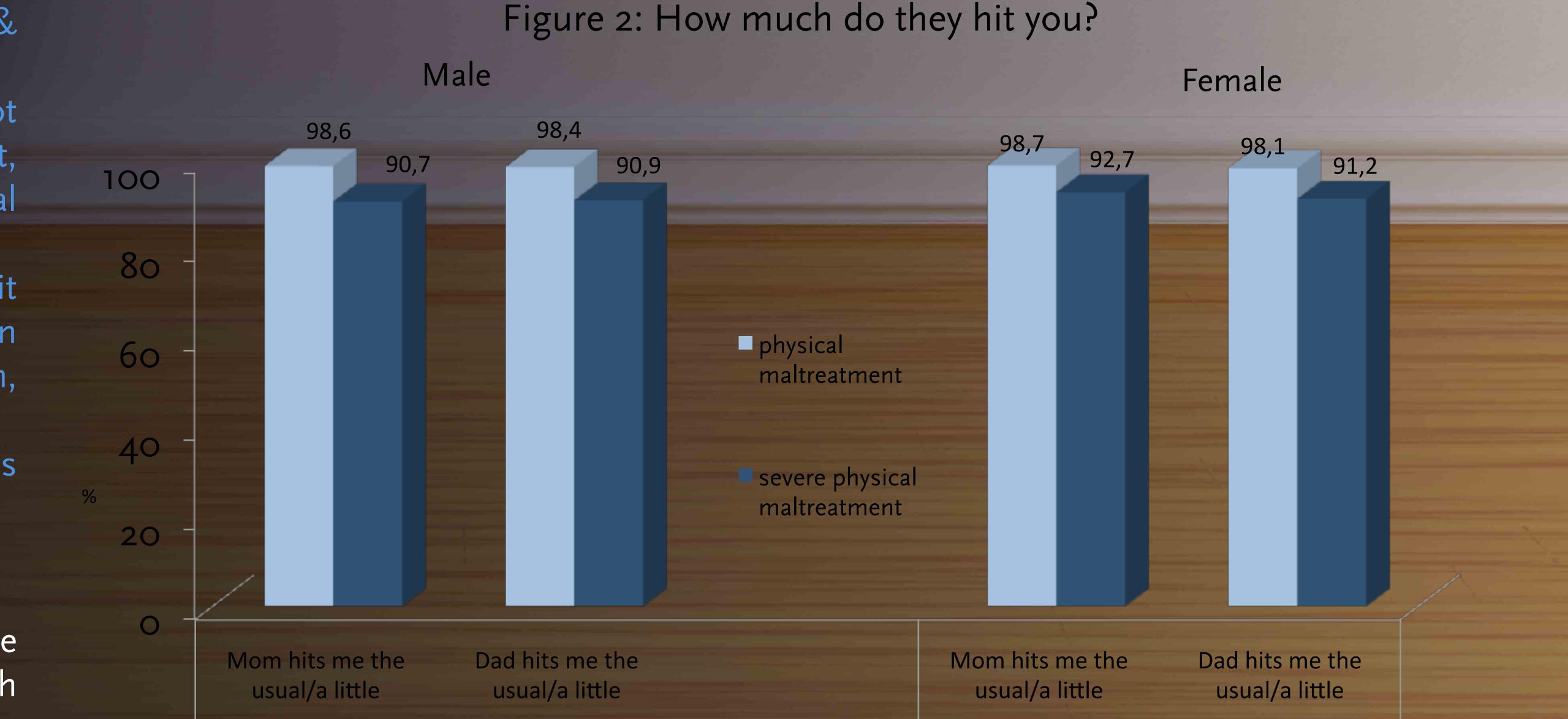
The first analysis involved two groups: physical maltreatment and severe physical maltreatment adolescent. They were asked about how fair are the motives their parents have for hitting them (Figure 1) and also they were asked to qualify the degree of violence they receive (Figure 2).



The only indicator that didn't show significant differences, was among maltreated men and what they think about the reason mom has for hitting them; for "mom is always fair" both groups are above 60%. For women are lower, around 30%

We can see that almost half of the students accept the violence they receive; over 50% of the men consider their parents' motives for hitting them as "always fair". Women sense more the violence as unfair; except when it comes from the father, they consider it as more fair (52.5% for physical maltreatment and 36.4% for severe physical maltreatment) than when it comes from the mother (49.5% and 34.4% respectively).

Nine of every ten adolescents consider they are hit "a little or the usual" even when they are severely maltreated. A trend also appeared; mom 's aggressions are seen less severe, but statistics show that is the mother who's more violent.

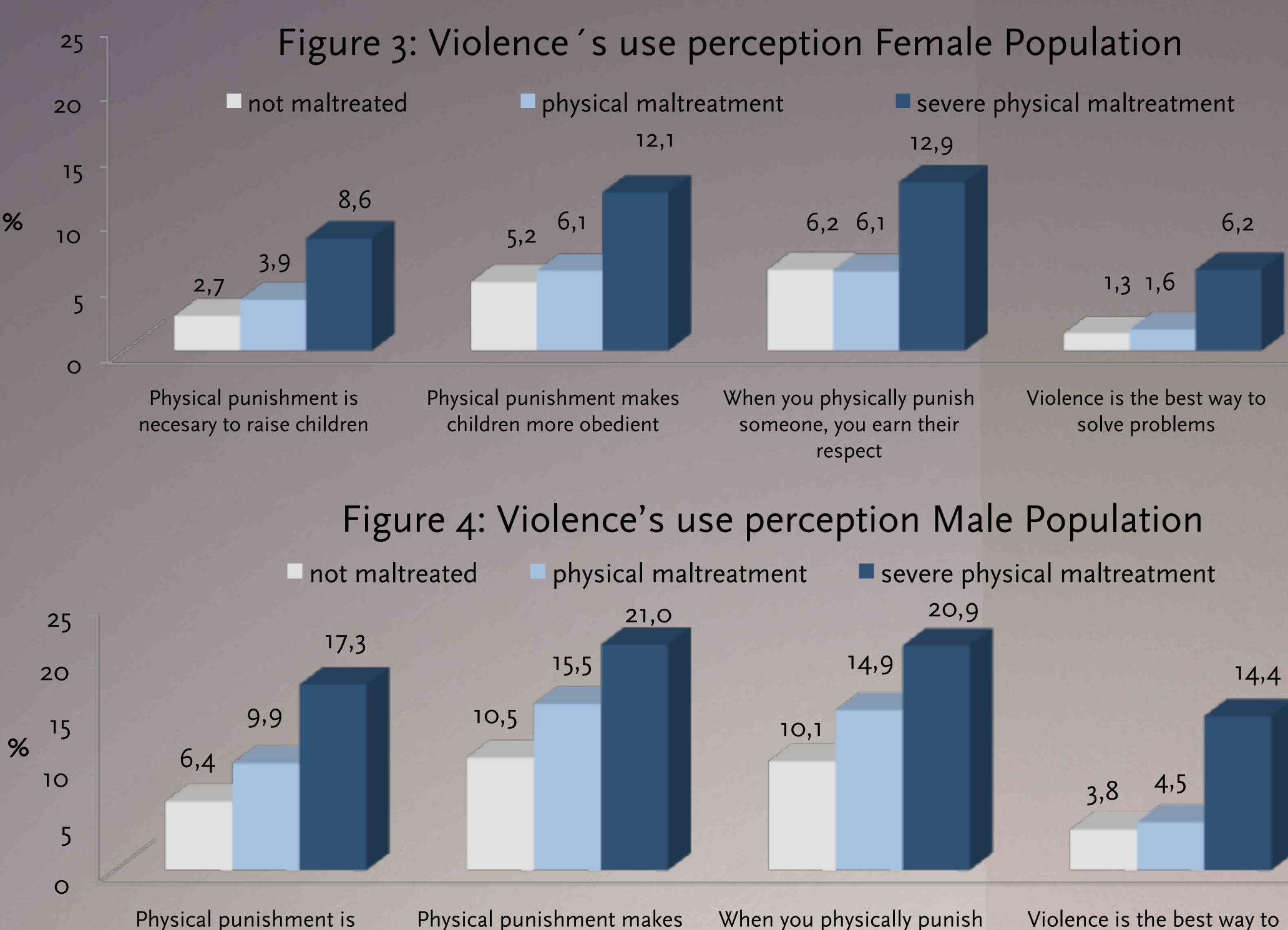


These figures change drastically when violence is suggested as a way of problems resolution; we can observe this on figure 3 and 4. The students were asked about the use of physical punishment as a way to raise children, whether if it makes kids more obedient, if it 's a way

Dad is always fair



to earn respect and if it is the best way to solve problems. At all the indicators we studied, we found significant differences between adolescents who are severely maltreated and those who are not.



# DISCUSSION

necesary to raise children

These results agree with several authors as Sánchez (2009) and Westby (2007) about the creation of a positive attitude toward violence in adolescents that had been maltreated. They highlight the importance of the maltreatment's perception and its influence on the acceptance of violent as a raising practice.

This positive attitude is reflected in the acceptance of these violent habits, not only for raising children, but also as a strategy for conflict resolution in everyday situations, the fact that adolescents qualify the aggression they receive as "little " and "fair" may translate into "useful" and may increase the possibility to use it later toward their peers, couple or their own children particularly among men, the results clearly show that they believe more on physical punishment as a valid way to solve problems. An area that needs further exploration is that there seems to be a difference in the meaning of violence for Mexican adolescents as a way to raise children and as a way to solve problems. These can also be related to research that highlights that to become aggressors; maltreated children must meet other characteristics, that this relation is not direct (Dixon & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2009).

Finally, from these results, we can target specific intervention areas regarding the violence perception and acceptance. On one hand, work with boys due to their higher violence acceptance over girls, and the meaning that this may carry for their identity. And on the other hand, to provide adolescents with assertive and emphatic problem solutions strategies that constitute an alternative, so that violent means become the worst way to face life events.

It is vital to break with this violence acceptance/reproduction cycle to improve and change our social and familiar experiences.

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