

A Brief Tribute to Murray A. Straus

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Murray A. Straus, PhD, fathered the field of family violence research in the 1970s. He was one of the field's most influential and impactful researchers. Born in 1926, Murray passed away in 2016, just weeks before his 90th birthday. The work for which he is most well-known was violence within the family: partner violence and corporal punishment. Murray spent most of his career at the University of New Hampshire, where he founded the Family Research Laboratory.

Murray was the first scholar to reveal that Americans are far more likely to be assaulted or attacked by family members rather than by strangers. He is the creator of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS), which is the most widely used scale, worldwide, to measure partner violence, with well over 1,500 articles published that used or focused on the CTS. Murray's work, and the work of others, has consistently shown that women are just as likely to perpetrate partner aggression in heterosexual relationships as are men. Despite this, women are more likely to be injured as a result of partner violence. Murray believed that turning a blind eye to the role that women play in perpetrating partner aggression puts women at risk for injury. Much of his work, especially in his later years, focused on this area of partner violence.

Murray's work on corporal punishment focused on the prevalence of physical aggression between parents and children, and the potential causes and consequences of this aggression on children's well-being in all areas of life: social, health, mental health, and criminal activity. Murray was especially interested in showing the potential harmful effects of corporal punishment, even within the context of a warm and loving relationship between parents and children. When Murray's work on corporal punishment began in the 1990s, only a few countries banned that practice. Today, 50 countries ban parents from using corporal punishment against children and much of Murray's work is responsible for this change.

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Despite his fame, Murray was warm, engaging, and actively sought feedback on his work from everyone. As a result, he opened himself up to criticism and critique. This was also his foundation for collaboration with other researchers. To him, every partnership was an opportunity to learn. Throughout his life he mentored and/or partnered with thousands of undergraduates, hundreds of graduate students, dozens of postdocs, and countless colleagues. Murray retired from a full professorship at the age of 85, but he was still a highly productive scholar, coming into the office daily until just a few weeks before his death. He was engaged, enthusiastic, and totally committed to life every day, even at the end. Without a doubt, the world is a safer place because of Murray Straus.¹

Author's Note

I came to know Murray A. Straus during a postdoctoral fellowship at the Family Research Laboratory at the University of New Hampshire. Murray was a mentor to me and eventually a trusted friend and colleague. We authored several papers/chapters together, and I worked with him on his last book, *The Primordial Violence: Spanking Children, Psychological Development, Violence, and Crime* (Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2014). My visits with Murray were always rich with advice, wisdom, and history, and I could never spend enough of them with him. I am a professor/department head in the Department of Social Science & Policy Studies at Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Massachusetts. It is my great honor to write this tribute to Murray. His absence is still felt by me daily.

Note

1. To read a full tribute to Murray A. Straus, see Douglas, E. M. (2016). A tribute to Murray A. Straus. *Journal of Family Violence, 31*, 927-930. doi:10.1007/s10896-016-9891-2

