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Public attitudes to physical punishment of children: Wave 3 survey, 2020

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Public attitudes to physical punishment of children: Wave 3 survey, 2020

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and objectives

1.1 The Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Bill was introduced to the National Assembly for Wales¹ on 25 March 2019. On the 20 March 2020 the Bill received Royal Assent and became the Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020. The Act will come into force on 21 March 2022.

1.2 The overarching objective of the legislation is to help protect children's rights by prohibiting the use of physical punishment against children, through the removal of the defence of reasonable punishment. This would mean that the defence is no longer available within the territory of Wales to parents or those acting in *loco parentis* (acting with parental responsibility), as a defence to a charge of common assault and battery on a child in their care.

1.3 Section 2 of the Act requires Welsh Ministers to promote public awareness of the law change before it comes into force in March 2022. The Welsh Government is committed to raising public awareness of the change in the law. Its planned public awareness raising campaign was reviewed as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, to focus on stakeholder engagement, work with specific audiences and promoting and supporting positive parenting through to summer 2021. A multi-media public awareness campaign, which will include advertising and public relations, will then follow through to commencement in March 2022. Awareness raising is planned to continue for some years following commencement to embed awareness among the public in Wales.

1.4 The objective of this research was to build on previous waves of research conducted in 2018 and 2019 on public attitudes towards physical punishment of children including the legislation. The fieldwork for this survey was carried out in November 2020. The Welsh Government intends to repeat these questions at

¹ As of May 2020 the National Assembly for Wales was renamed Senedd Cymru [Senedd and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2020 \(gov.wales\)](#)

regular intervals to track public awareness and opinion as the public awareness campaign progresses over a number of years.

1.2 Note on changes to data collection for the 2020 survey

1.5 Fieldwork for this survey was conducted in November 2020 during the Covid-19 public health crisis. Given the restrictions in place during this time it was not possible to undertake the survey in the same way as the previous waves in 2018 and 2019 which used an in-home face-to-face interviewer administered approach.

1.6 The 2020 survey was completed via an online self-completion method using an online panel². Whilst both the online and the previous face-to-face surveys are designed to produce representative samples of the adult (aged 16+) population in Wales, it is possible that the change of mode could have some impact on results. For example, some respondents may answer differently when there is not an interviewer present, and some previously unprompted questions need to be framed differently when there is no interviewer present to code answers. Whilst it is difficult to be definitive about this, evidence suggests that effects tend to be larger for questions that ask about values and behaviour, with smaller effects for more factual information³. Therefore any changes in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode. This issue will be kept under review for future data collections and subsequent reporting. More information about the survey method for 2020 can be found in Annex D.

1.7 For the 2018 and 2019 surveys, the subgroup in each survey who had regular caring responsibilities for any child aged 7 or under were identified, allowing examination of differences in opinions and behaviour in the subgroup in the two surveys. For the 2020 survey, data to allow analysis of responses according to whether the survey respondent had regular caring responsibilities for any child aged 7 or under was not available. Data on whether or not the survey respondent lived in a household with children aged 6 or under was available, but this is not directly

² An online panel is a group of research participants who have signed up to be periodically contacted to complete surveys online.

³[Investigating the viability of moving from a face-to-face to an online/postal mode: evidence from a series of methodological studies 2012-2015 \(section 9.3\)](#)

comparable and therefore the analysis on the basis of that data can be found at Annex A. It is intended to re-introduce the subgroup definition used for the 2018 and 2019 surveys for the planned 2021 survey.

1.3 About this report

1.8 The findings outlined in this report are based on research conducted on the November 2020 Beaufort Wales Omnibus survey which interviewed a representative quota sample of 1,002 adults aged 16+ across Wales. This includes both parents/guardians and non-parents/guardians. Findings from this survey are frequently compared in this report to almost identical sets of questions⁴ asked as part of the November 2018 and November 2019 Beaufort Wales Omnibus surveys. Each Wales Omnibus survey is conducted with separate samples of Welsh adults 16+ which are matched in terms of demographics such as age, gender, region and social grade, although as noted in the previous section the 2020 survey was undertaken via online self-completion rather than the interviewer administered face-to-face approach used in previous waves. This work forms part of a suite of parenting research undertaken by the Welsh Government since 2013. A table of reports can be found at Annex B.

1.9 The questionnaire for this survey comprised a series of questions about attitudes towards smacking, awareness of legislation around physical punishment of children and awareness and opinion of changes to legislation. Demographic questions were also included as standard in the Wales Omnibus survey. The questionnaire was available in Welsh or English at the participant's choice and can be found in Annex C of this document.

⁴ The only small amendments were that questions 4, 6, 7 and 8 no longer said 'proposed changes' as they had in 2018 and 2019 because they reflected the Bill receiving Royal Assent in March 2020. In addition, in 2020 at question 1, 'don't know' was a prompted response code rather than only being spontaneously recorded in 2018/2019 reflecting the change in mode from face-to-face to online. The same applied at question 3 for 'don't know' and 'refused' responses codes. Finally, and again reflecting the change to online, at question 6 respondents were prompted with a list of sources of awareness whereas in 2018/2019 this list was unprompted.

1.4 Statistical testing

1.10 Throughout this report comparisons are made between different groups of the population (for example, those of different age groups or gender) to understand if they have varying attitudes, behaviours or knowledge. There are also comparisons between the different years of the survey to explore if there have been changes over time. The report uses statistical testing to compare results between groups of the population and also to compare results over time. When a difference between two groups or two time periods is described as 'significant' in this report, this means that the probability of obtaining the finding by chance is less than one in 20 and therefore it can be generalised to the wider population.

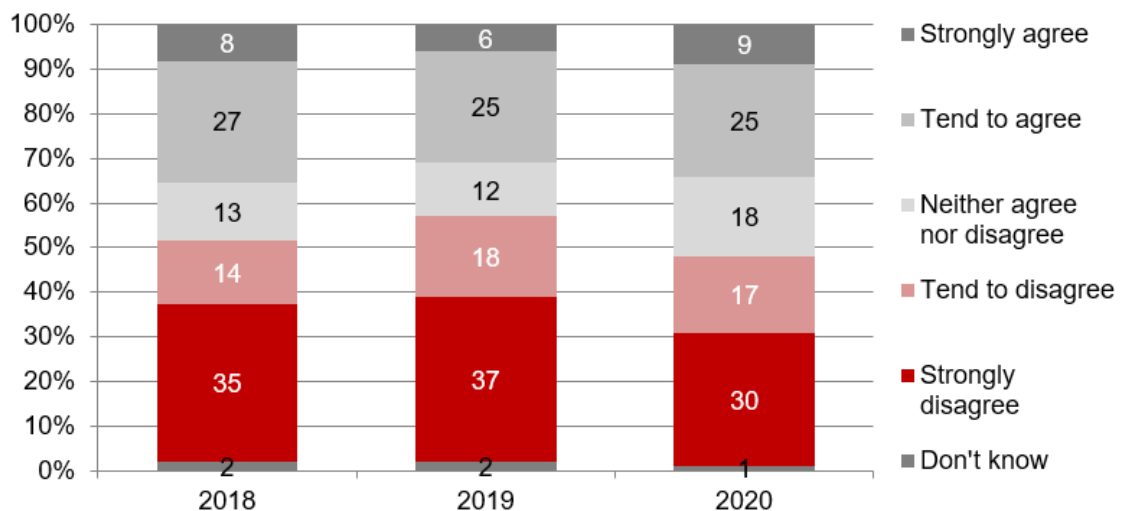
1.11 More information on the survey methodology is included in Annex D.

2. Attitudes towards smacking

2.1 All respondents were asked the degree to which they agreed or disagreed that *it is sometimes necessary to smack a child*. Opinion across the three waves of the survey, to a certain extent, was split on this, although in each wave more respondents disagreed with this statement than agreed with it⁵.

2.2 In the latest survey 34% agreed and 47% disagreed that *it is sometimes necessary to smack a child*. The difference between the proportions agreeing and disagreeing with the statement is narrower than existed at the 2019 survey (31% agreed, 55% disagreed). This difference between 2019 and 2020 was confirmed by statistical testing and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population. Overall, the proportions agreeing and disagreeing with the statement in 2020 are similar to the baseline survey in 2018⁶.

Figure 2.1: Percentage in agreement that ‘it is sometimes necessary to smack a child’ (All – 2018, 2019, 2020)



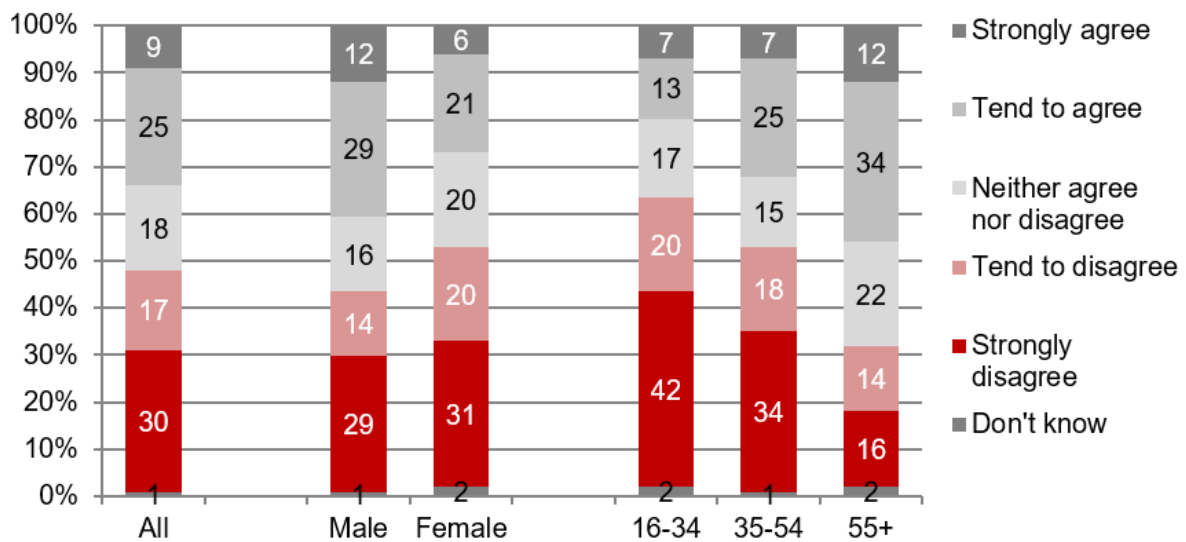
Base: All – 2018 (1,002), 2019 (1,002), 2020 (1,002)

⁵ Any lack of change in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a lack of change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

⁶ Any changes in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

2.5 As shown in figure 2.2, when we examine this by age of respondent, we find that those in the older age group (55+) were more likely to agree that *it is sometimes necessary to smack a child* – at 47%⁷ this was approaching 2.5 times the number of 16-34s who held this view (20%). Whilst less pronounced than age, a difference in opinion was also found by gender with 41% of men agreeing with the statement compared with 27% of women. The differences reported by age and gender were confirmed by statistical testing and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population.

Figure 2.2: Percentage in agreement that ‘it is sometimes necessary to smack a child’ (All and by gender and by age group)



Base: All (1,002), Male (369), Female (630), 16-34 (364), 35-54 (357), 55+ (281)

2.6 Differences in agreement with this statement by age group (confirmed by statistical testing) were also found in the 2018 and 2019 surveys with again the older the respondent the more likely they were to agree that ‘it is sometimes necessary to smack a child’⁸. Such differences were not found by gender to be statistically significant in the 2018 and 2019 surveys⁹.

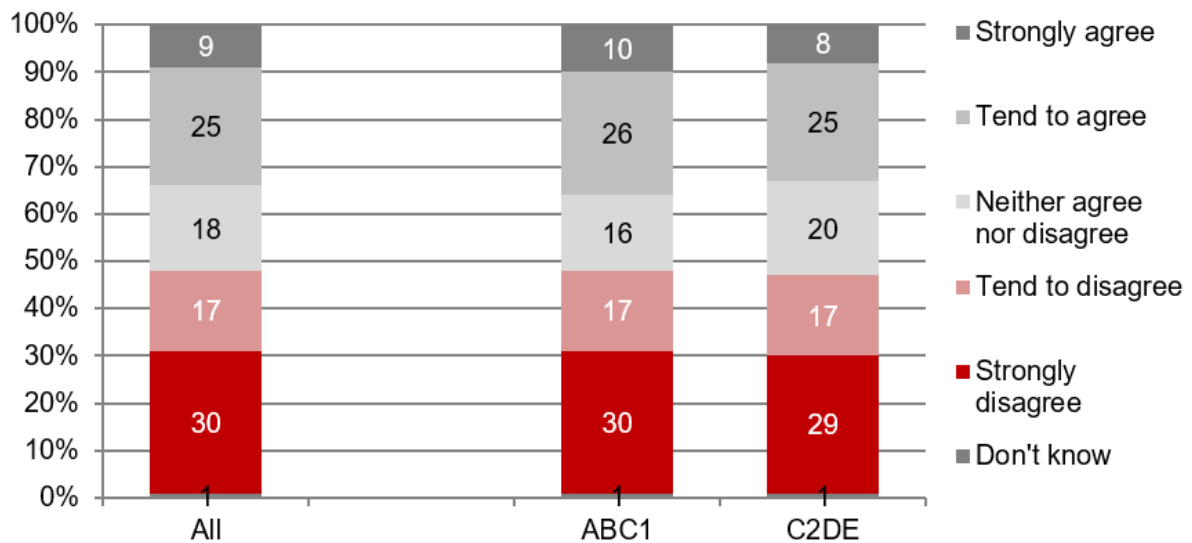
⁷ Total is 47% rather than 46% (12% + 34% as shown in Figure 2.2) as percentages are 12.48% and 34.44% = 46.92%.

⁸ Any lack of change in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a lack of change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

⁹ Any changes in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

2.7 Figure 2.3 shows findings for the same measure by social grade¹⁰. Opinion of those in social grades ABC1¹¹ was similar to those in social grades C2DE. This consolidates the same finding from 2019¹², but was in contrast to baseline survey in 2018¹³ when the survey found that ABC1s were less likely to agree that *it's sometimes necessary to smack a child*.

Figure 2.3: Percentage in agreement that 'it is sometimes necessary to smack a child' (All and by social grade)



Base: All (1,002), ABC1 (554), C2DE (448)

¹⁰ Social grade is a classification system based on the occupation of the chief income earner in the household.

¹¹ Definitions of social grades A,B,C1,C2,D,E can be found in Annex F

¹² Any lack of change in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a lack of change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

¹³ Any changes in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

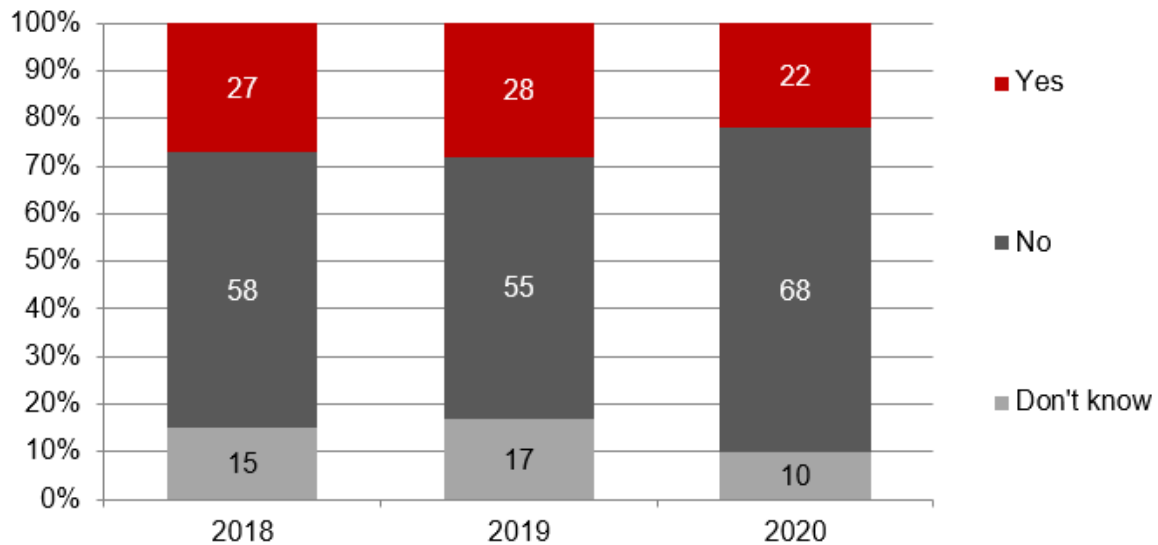
3. Knowledge of current legislation

3.1 The current legal situation regarding smacking or other physical punishment of children in Wales, is that parents and adults acting in *loco parentis* (acting with parental responsibility) are able to rely on the defence of reasonable punishment against a charge of common assault. Parents who physically punish their children cannot use the reasonable punishment defence for charges of cruelty, wounding or assaults occasioning actual or grievous bodily harm. The Crown Prosecution Service guidance clarifies that “although any injury that is more than 'transient or trifling' can be classified as actual bodily harm, the appropriate charge will be one of Common Assault where no injury or injuries which are not serious occur”.

3.2 Around two-thirds (68%) of people surveyed in 2020 thought that the law did not allow parents to smack their children. Approaching a fifth (22%) thought the law did allow parents to smack and the remaining 10% reported being unsure. These proportions are different to the 2019 and 2018 surveys in that more now believe smacking isn't allowed and consequently fewer believe it is allowed or are unsure. This difference in response between 2020 and 2018/2019 surveys is confirmed by statistical testing and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population¹⁴.

¹⁴ Any changes in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

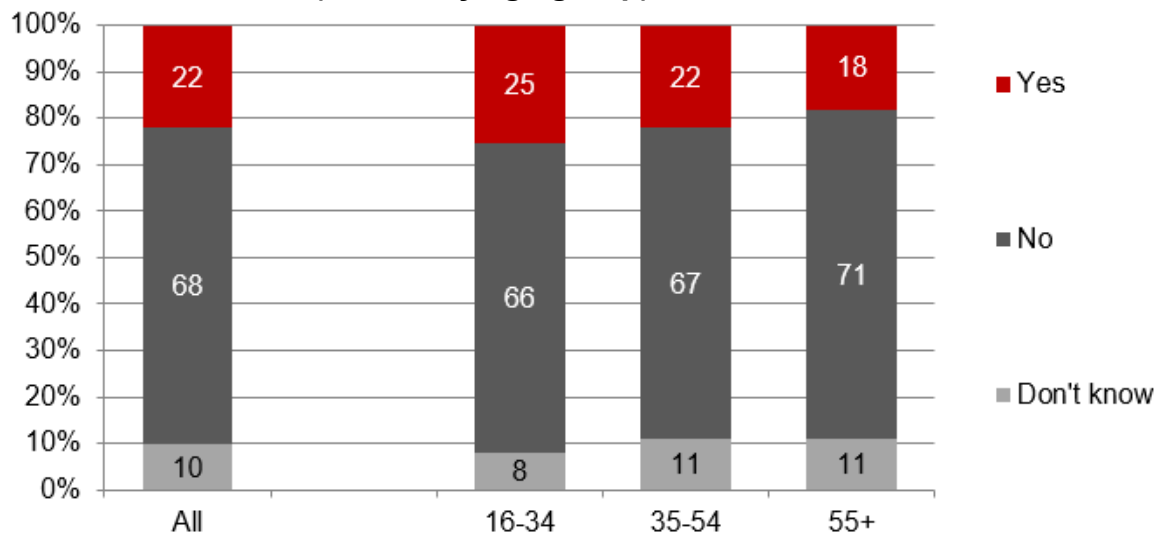
Figure 3.1: Percentage who believe that the law currently allows parents to smack their children (All – 2018, 2019, 2020)



Base: All – 2018 (1,002), 2019 (1,002), 2020 (1,002)

3.3 Those aged 16-34 were most likely to believe that smacking was allowed (25%), although were still in the minority. However, any differences by age were not confirmed by statistical testing and therefore cannot be generalised to the wider population.

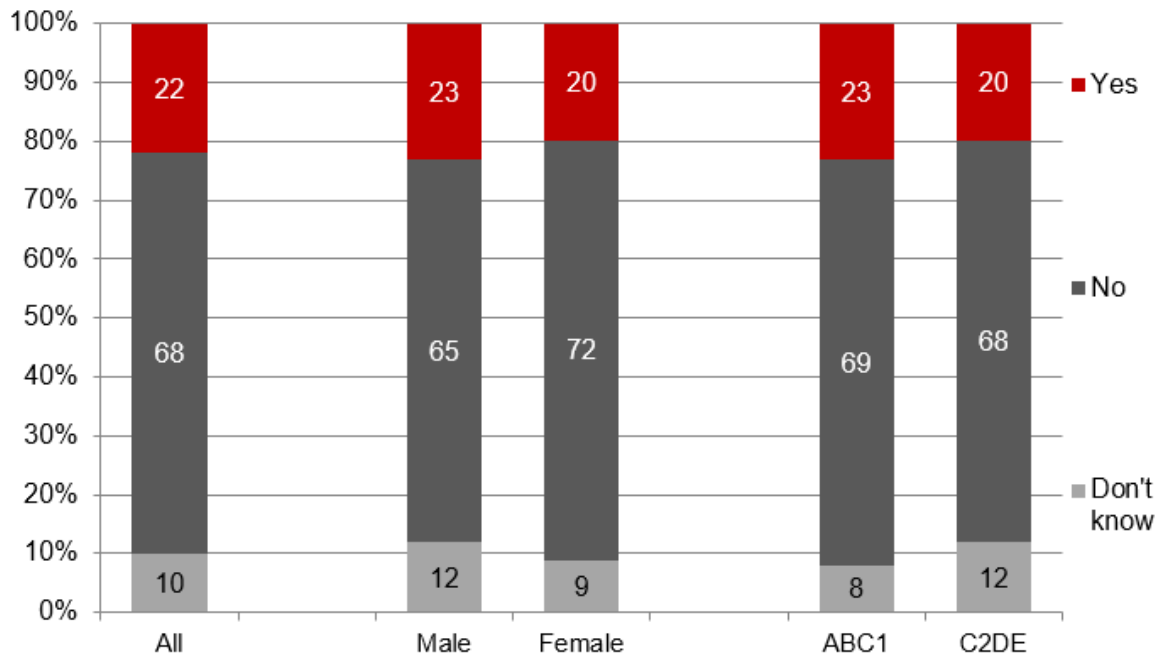
Figure 3.2: Percentage who believe that the law currently allows parents to smack their children (All and by age group)



Base: All (1,002), 16-34 (364), 35-54 (357), 55+ (281)

3.4 Knowledge of the law on smacking shows few differences by different social grades or gender. Around a fifth of each group, as shown in figure 3.3, believe the law allows parents to smack their children.

Figure 3.3: Percentage who believe that the law currently allows parents to smack their children (All and by gender and by social grade)

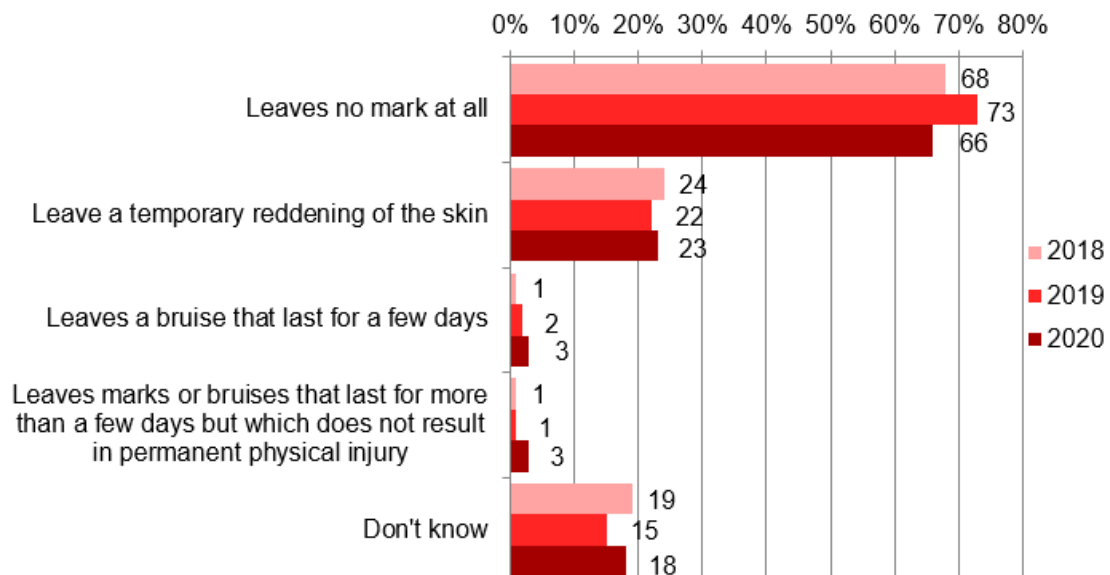


Base: All (1,002), Male (369), Female (630), ABC1 (554), C2DE (448)

3.5 Individuals were then informed that the law currently does allow parents to smack or physically discipline their children and questioned respondents on the level of punishment they felt the law allowed. The options they were given can be found in figure 3.4 together with the proportion of people who thought each level was allowed (respondents could choose more than one option).

3.6 Around two-thirds (66%) thought punishment that left no mark at all on the child would be allowed in law. Far fewer (23%) thought that leaving a temporary reddening of the skin would be allowed. Only a very small proportion thought that higher levels of physical punishment such as something that leaves a bruise for a few days (3%) or leaves marks or bruises that last for more than a few days but does not result in permanent physical injury (3%) would be allowed in law. Just under a fifth (18%) reported that they did not know what level of punishment would be allowed. The findings were similar to those found in both the 2018 and 2019 surveys¹⁵.

Figure 3.4: Percentage who thought that each level of punishment was currently allowed in law



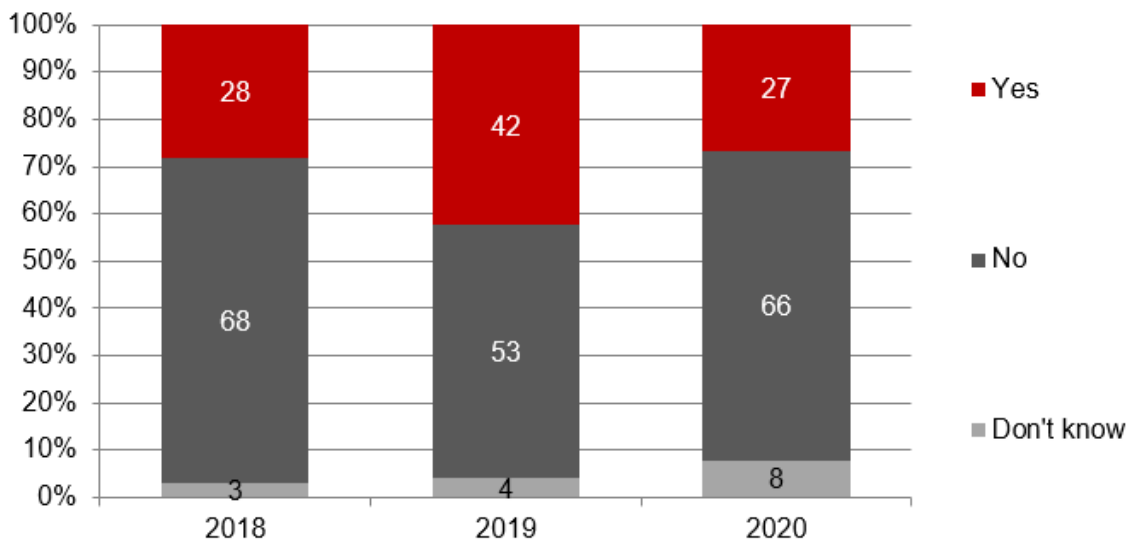
Base: All - 2018 (1,002), 2019 (1,002), 2020 (1,002)

¹⁵ Any lack of change in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a lack of change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

4. Awareness of changes to legislation

4.1 In the latest survey, just over a quarter (27%) of people reported that they were aware of changes to the law around physical punishment of children at an unprompted level¹⁶. This compared to an equivalent figure of 42% in the 2019 survey who were aware of the changes. This decrease since 2019 in awareness of the change is confirmed by statistical testing and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population. Levels of unprompted awareness were very similar to those recorded in the baseline survey in 2018¹⁷.

Figure 4.1: Percentage aware of changes in legislation around physical punishment of children [Unprompted] (All – 2018, 2019, 2020)



Base: All – 2018 (1,002), 2019 (1,002), 2020 (1,002)

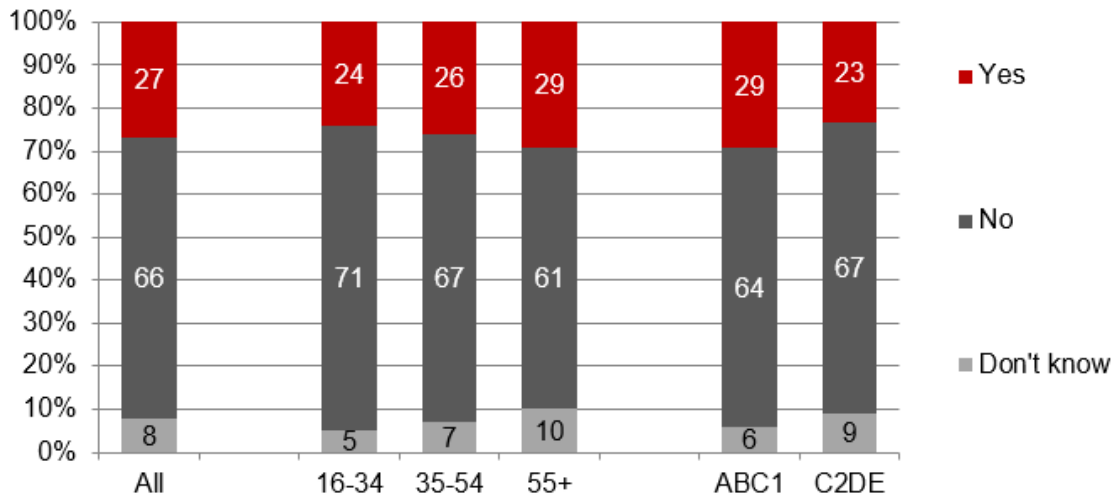
4.2 As shown in figure 4.2, those in social grades C2DE (23%) were less likely to be aware of the change than those in social grades ABC1 (29%). This difference was confirmed by statistical testing and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population. Younger respondents aged 16-34 were less likely to be aware of the change in legislation than those in the older age group, aged 55+ (24% vs.

¹⁶ Respondents were not given any details of potential changes at this point and were asked - 'Are you aware of any changes to the law around physical punishment of children?'

¹⁷ Any changes in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

29%). However, this difference was not confirmed by statistically testing and therefore cannot be generalised to the wider population.

Figure 4.2: Percentage aware of changes in legislation around physical punishment of children [Unprompted] (All and by age and social grade)



Base: All (1,002), 16-34 (364), 35-54 (357), 55+ (281), ABC1 (554), C2DE (448)

4.3 Lower levels of unprompted awareness of the change were reported in all age groups and all social grade groupings in 2020 compared with 2019, with the exception of 16-34s whose awareness level remained consistent at 24%¹⁸. For the remaining groups the differences recorded were confirmed by statistical testing and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population.

4.4 Those who reported being aware of changes in legislation (261 respondents) were asked to describe in their own words how they thought the law would change. Their responses were then grouped into themes and are shown in table 4.1. By far the most frequent response was that smacking would be [completely] banned \ it will be illegal. Around two-thirds (64%) of those aware of a change spontaneously mentioned this. One in ten (10%) made reference to smacking being banned in the context of the recent law change in Scotland. A total of 11% who had previously said they were aware of a change could not name what that change would be.

¹⁸ Any changes in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

Table 4.1: Can you tell me how you think the law will change? [Unprompted]

Response	Percentage of respondents (Number of respondents)
[Complete] ban on smacking \ physical punishment \ it will be illegal	64 (n.171)
Just changed law in Scotland \ now banned in Scotland	10 (n.28)
Don't know	11 (n.30)
Other responses reported by less than 5 per cent of respondents	
Change is being discussed (unspecific)	
Good idea \ don't agree with smacking	
No longer can be used as a legal defence	
No physical contact at all	
Penalties for those who smack children	
Saw \ heard something about it (unspecific)	
Thought it was already illegal to smack	

Base: Those aware of changes to the law around physical punishment of children – unprompted (261)

(a) Table may add up to more than 100 per cent as respondents were able to give more than one answer

(b) Other responses are presented alphabetically

4.5 Responses to this question were similar to those found in the 2018 and 2019 survey when *smacking would be [completely] banned \ it will be illegal* was also by far the most frequently mentioned answer (73% and 69% of those aware of changes respectively)¹⁹.

4.6 Those who reported being aware of the changes in legislation were also asked to state how they had become aware of the change (table 4.2). Seeing something on a TV news / programme was the most frequent response with four in ten (41%) of those aware of change reporting this as their source. This was followed by being aware through the news / on programmes via other methods – online news item (15%) and radio news / programme (15%). Word of mouth via family and friends was mentioned as a source of awareness of the change by a similar proportion (14%).

¹⁹ Any lack of change in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a lack of change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

4.7 The sources of awareness of the change cited in the 2020 survey are largely mentioned at similar levels to previous surveys²⁰. The main exception is that TV news / programme, whilst still being the most frequently cited answer was mentioned by 41% of those aware of the change in 2020 compared with 50% in 2018 and 60% in 2019²¹.

Table 4.2: How did you become aware of the change to the law around physical punishment of children?

Response	Percentage of respondents (Number of respondents)
On TV – news \ programme	41 (n.108)
On radio – news \ programme	15 (n.41)
Online website - news item	15 (n.39)
Someone told me (family \ friends)	14 (n.38)
Facebook	10 (n.25)
Social media (excluding Facebook)	7 (n.20)
National UK newspaper - news \ article	8 (n.21)
Online website - other	7 (n.20)
On TV advertising	5 (n.13)
National Wales newspaper - news \ article	5 (n.12)
Don't know	7 (n.20)
Other responses reported by less than 5 per cent of respondents	
Local newspaper - advertising	
Local newspaper - news \ article	
Magazine	
National Wales newspaper - advertising	
National UK newspaper - advertising	
Radio - advertising	
Someone told me (professional)	

Base: Those aware of changes to the law around physical punishment of children – unprompted (261)

(a) Table may add up to more than 100 per cent as respondents were able to give more than one answer

(b) Other responses are presented alphabetically

4.8 After being asked their awareness at an unprompted level, respondents were then presented with a description of the legislative change (which can be found in

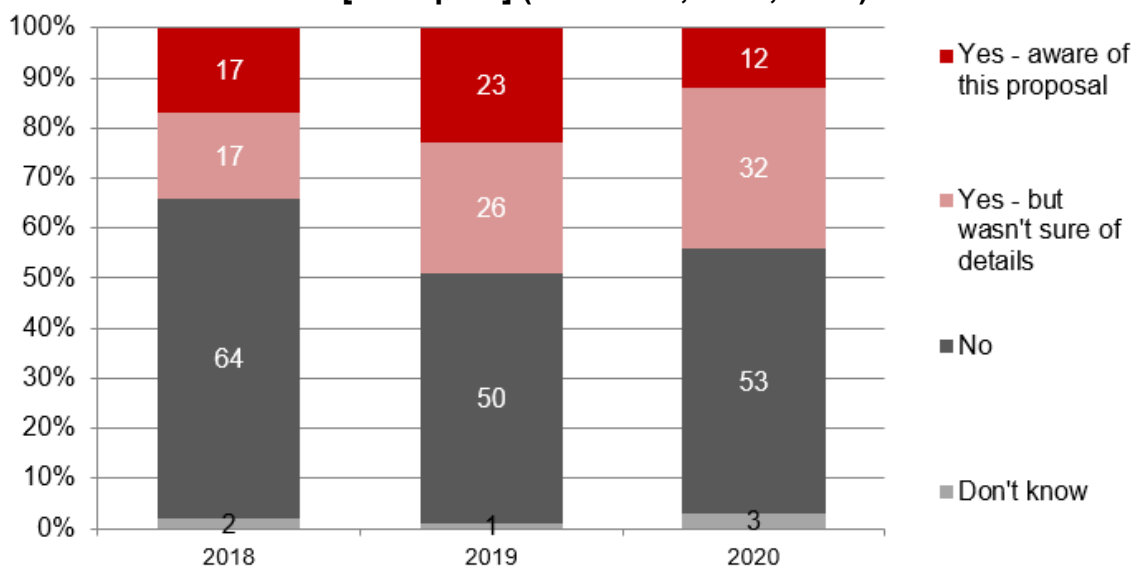
²⁰ Any lack of change in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a lack of change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

²¹ Any changes in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

Annex E) and were asked if they had seen or heard anything about this. At this prompted level, more respondents reported that they were aware of the legislation than had done so on an unprompted basis (see figure 4.1). A total of 44% knew something about the change consisting of 12% stating they were aware of it and a larger group (32%) who were aware but not sure about the details.

4.9 This represents a decrease in prompted awareness compared with the 2019 survey when 49% knew something – see figure 4.3²². This difference is confirmed by statistical testing and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population. However, the 2020 level of prompted awareness of the change in legislation remains higher than that recorded in the baseline survey of 2018 (34%) and this difference is also confirmed by statistical testing and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population.

Figure 4.3: Percentage aware of changes in legislation around physical punishment of children [Prompted] (All – 2018, 2019, 2020)



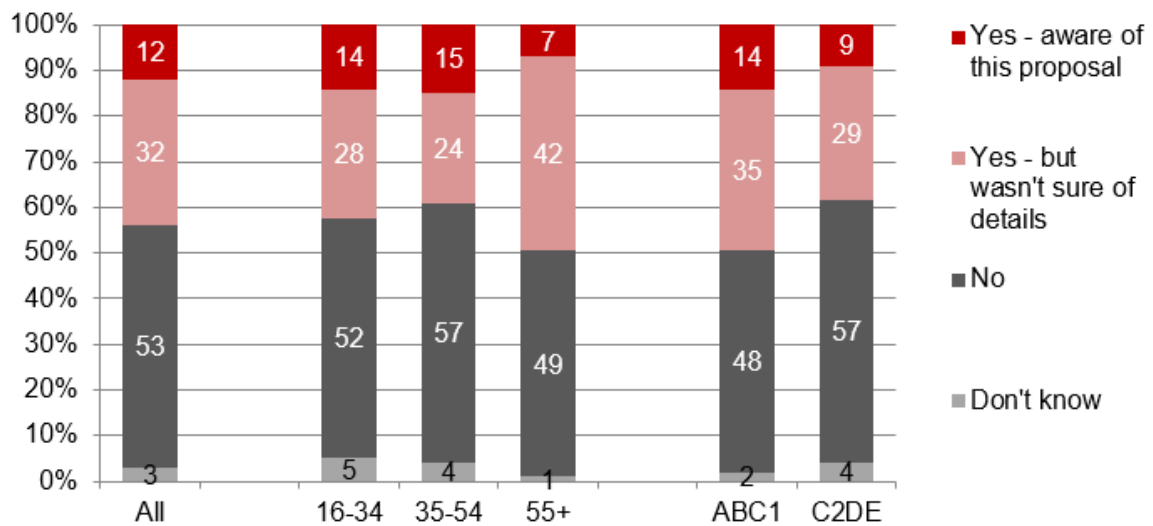
Base: All – 2018 (1,002), 2019 (1,002), 2020 (1,002)

4.10 As with unprompted awareness, those in social grade ABC1 were more likely to be aware of the legislative change when prompted with a description of it than those in social grade C2DE – 49% vs. 38%. In terms of age, there are also some differences recorded with a higher proportion of those aged 55+ aware of the change

²² Any changes in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

(49%) than those in younger age groups as shown in figure 4.4. These differences were confirmed by statistical testing and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population.

Figure 4.4: Percentage aware of changes in legislation around physical punishment of children [Prompted] (All and by age group and social grade)



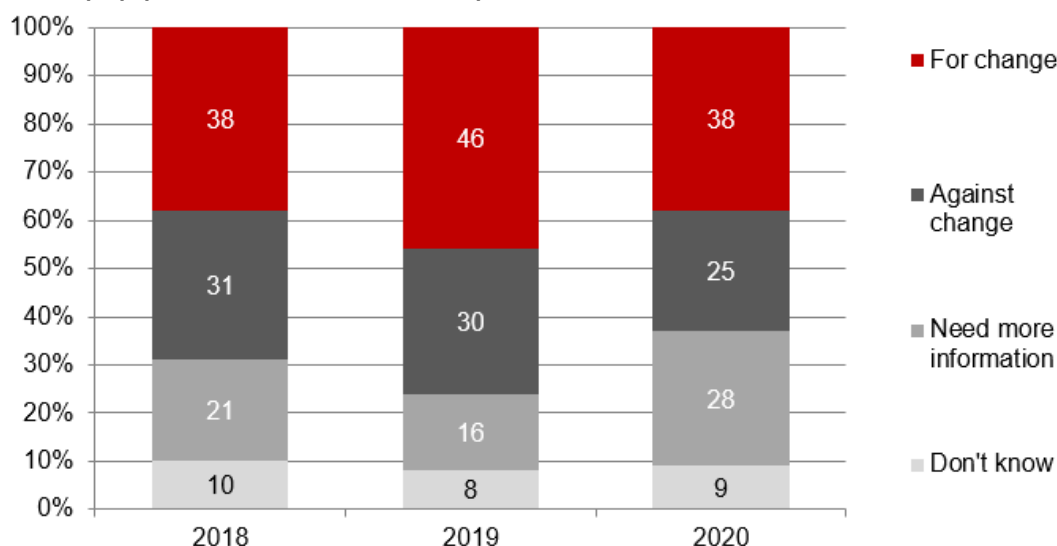
Base: All (1,002), 16-34 (364), 35-54 (357), 55+ (281), ABC1 (554), C2DE (448)

5. Opinion of changes to legislation

5.1 Having been shown the description of the change, respondents were asked whether they were in favour of the removal of the defence of reasonable punishment, against it or needed more information to decide. Overall, there was mixed opinion but more were in favour of the change (38%) than against it (25%). Just over a third (37%) reported that they needed more information or didn't know yet.

5.2 As shown in figure 5.1, the proportion in favour of the removal of the defence of reasonable punishment has decreased in comparison with 2019 (2019 – 46%, 2020 – 38%) and is now at the same level as the baseline survey in 2018. However, the proportions opposing the change has also decreased (2019 – 30%, 2020 – 25%). This reflects that more respondents now claim to need more information / don't know (2019 – 24%, 2020 – 37%). These differences between opinion in 2019 and 2020 on the legislative change were confirmed by statistical testing and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population²³.

Figure 5.1: Opinion of change in legislation on physical punishment of children (%) (All – 2018, 2019, 2020)

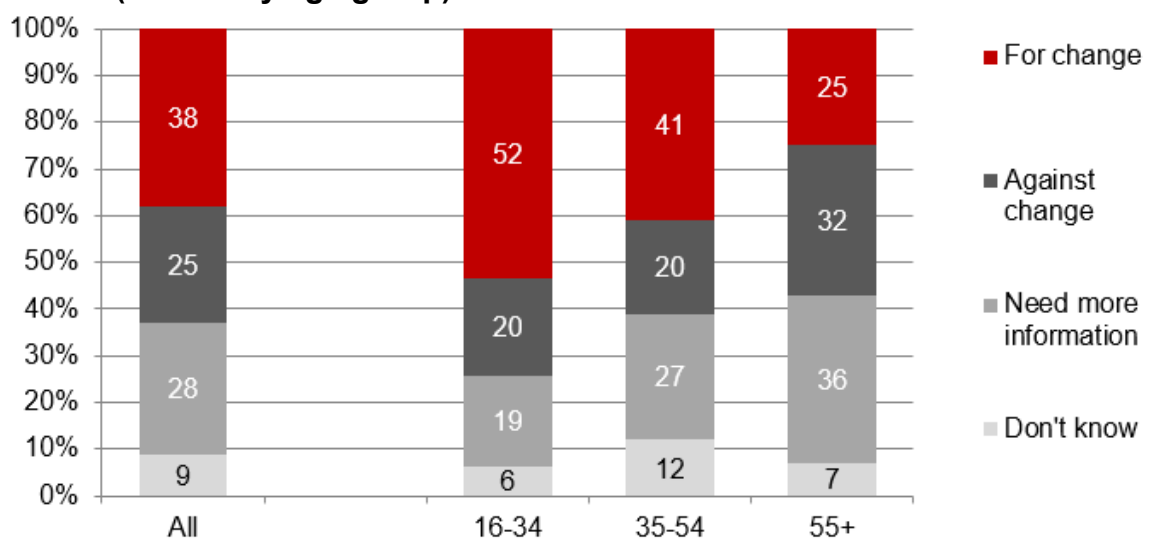


Base: All - 2018 (1,002), 2019 (1,002), 2020 (1,002)

²³ Any changes in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

5.3 Differences in opinion were also found by age. In both the 16-34 and 35-54 age groups, respondents were more likely to be *for* rather than *against* the change, as shown in figure 5.2. However, among those aged 55+ opinion slightly more opposed the change than were for it. These differences by age were confirmed by statistical testing and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population. Similar differences by age were also found in the 2018 and 2019 surveys²⁴.

Figure 5.2: Opinion of change in legislation on physical punishment of children (All and by age group)



Base: All (1,002), 16-34 (364), 35-54 (357), 55+ (281)

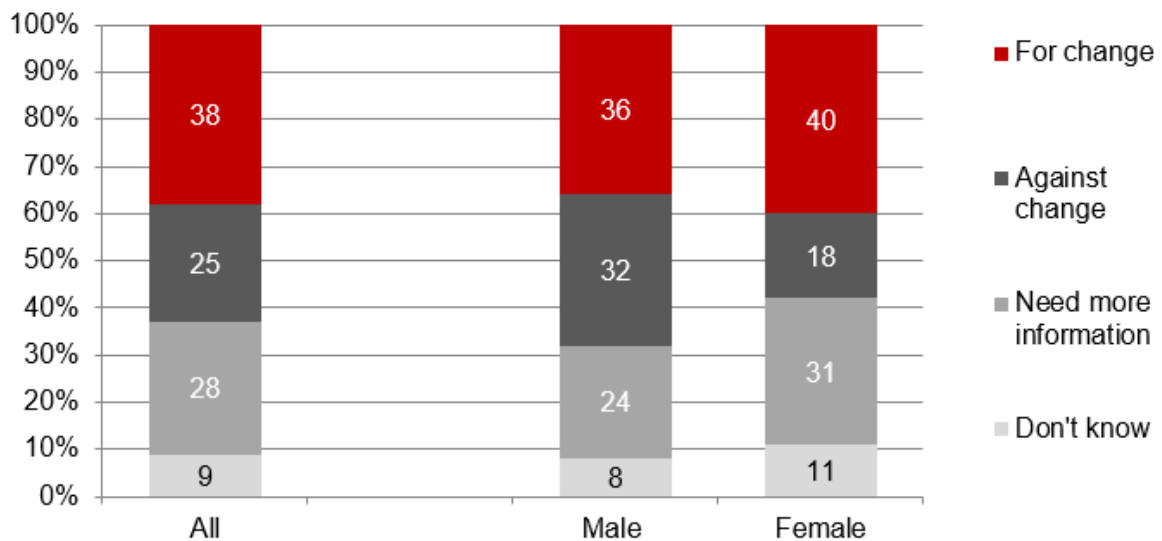
5.4 When comparing opinion of the three age groups over time, differences are more pronounced among the 35-54 and 55+ age groups. In comparison to 2019, both of these age groups record decreases in both the proportions for and against the legislative change and considerable increases in the number who say they need more information or 'don't know' (+16 percentage points among 35-54s, +20 percentage points among 55+)²⁵. These differences are confirmed by statistical testing and therefore can be generalised to the wider population.

²⁴ Any lack of change in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a lack of change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

²⁵ Any changes in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

5.5 In the 2020 survey, differences were also found by gender in terms of opinion of the legislative change. Whereas the proportions in favour of the change were similar (36% male vs. 40% female), men were more likely than women to say they were against the change (32% vs. 18%) and consequently less likely to need more information or be undecided as shown in figure 5.3. These differences are confirmed by statistical testing and therefore can be generalised to the wider population and represent a change from previous surveys where such differences in opinion by gender were not recorded²⁶.

Figure 5.3: Opinion of change in legislation on physical punishment of children (All and by gender)



Base: All (1,002), Male (369), Female (630)

5.6 Respondents were asked to explain their reasons for their opinion on the legislative change. Again, this was in their own words and responses have been grouped into common themes. Table 5.1 shows the reasons that were stated for being in favour of the change (417 respondents). The most frequent response was that they did not agree with smacking or physical punishment of children (38% of those who were for the change). This was also the most frequent response in the 2018 and 2019 surveys (40% and 38% respectively)²⁷. Others highlighted that there were other ways of ensuring good behaviour (17%) that it is not a good lesson and

²⁶ Any changes in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

²⁷ Any lack of change in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a lack of change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

encourages violence (8%) and that it doesn't work (6%) as well as responses which focussed on the harm done to children such as it's abuse / can lead to abuse (10%) and it's harmful to children (5%).

Table 5.1: Can you tell me why you are in favour of the change to the law on physical punishment of children in Wales? [Unprompted]

Response	Percentage of respondents (Number of respondents)
Don't agree with smacking \ physically punishing children	38 (n.145)
There are other ways of ensuring good behaviour \ discipline	17 (n.63)
It's abuse \ can lead to abuse	10 (n.37)
It's not a good lesson \ encourages violence	8 (n.33)
It will help protect children	6 (n.24)
I was hit as a child	6 (n.23)
It doesn't work \ not necessary	6 (n.24)
It's harmful to children	5 (n.20)
Don't know	5 (n.19)
Other responses reported by less than 5 per cent of respondents	
A tap is ok \ a little smack \ ok if don't go too far	
It's needed	
Make things clearer \ parents know where stand	
Never smacked my kids	
Some parents go too far	

Base: Those in favour of change to the law on physical punishment of children in Wales (417)

(a) Table may add up to more than 100 per cent as respondents were able to give more than one answer

(b) Other responses are presented alphabetically

5.7 Of those against the change in legislation (217 respondents), one of the principal reasons for opposing the change included controlling behaviour and discipline. Around a quarter (26%) of those against change thought the current situation was needed to control behaviour / discipline child / teach respect / show boundaries. Others commented on the broader lack of discipline in society – there's no discipline / respect these days / kids are badly behaved (12%).

5.8 Others reflected on their own experiences saying that they were against the change because doesn't do any harm \ didn't harm me \ my kids (22%). Some qualified their opposition to the change saying that they would be against it as long as the punishment remains reasonable and doesn't go too far.

5.9 Outside of the reasons discussed in paragraph 5.7 and 5.8, the other main theme in terms of reasons for opposing the change centred on who should be responsible for disciplining children. Of those against the legislative change, 9% reported that this was because they thought parents should be allowed to make the decision to punish their child or not and 7% said it was because they thought government should not get involved. A full list of answers can be found in table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Can you tell me why you are against the change to the law on physical punishment of children in Wales? [Unprompted]

Response	Percentage of respondents (Number of respondents)
Needed to control behaviour \ discipline child \ teach respect \ show boundaries	26 (n.65)
Doesn't do any harm \ didn't harm me \ my kids	22 (n.54)
Ok if doesn't go too far \ if reasonable punishment	13 (n.33)
There's no discipline these days \ kids are badly behaved \ no respect	12 (n.30)
Parent should be allowed to punish child \ should have choice \ make decision	9 (n.21)
Government should not get involved	7 (n.17)
Don't know	7 (n.17)
Other responses reported by less than 5 per cent of respondents	
Difficult to police \ enforce \ resource	
Each circumstance \ child is different	
Law is fine at moment	
Not needed	
OK when child is in danger	
Over the top \ not reasonable	
Shouldn't be criminalised	
Use as last resort	

Base: Those against the change to the law on physical punishment of children in Wales (217)

(a) Table may add up to more than 100 per cent as respondents were able to give more than one answer

(b) Other responses are presented alphabetically

5.10 Those who needed more information before deciding (276 respondents) principally either wanted more detail or information on how it would work (36% of those needing more information) or specifically would like greater clarity around definitions that were part of the legislation:

- Definition of reasonable punishment (14%)
- What constitutes smacking \ assault, what is allowed vs. not allowed (13%)
- Definitions \ examples (8%)

5.11 The only other reason mentioned by more than 5% of those needing more information was that they would like to see some research / evidence into the impact of smacking (7%).

5.12 These responses are very similar to those received in the 2018 and 2019 surveys²⁸.

²⁸ Any lack of change in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a lack of change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

Table 5.3: Can you tell me what additional information you need?

[Unprompted]

Response	Percentage of respondents (Number of respondents)
More detail \ more info \ how it would work	36 (n.100)
Definition of reasonable punishment	14 (n.38)
What constitutes smacking \ assault, what is allowed vs. not allowed	13 (n.36)
Definitions \ examples	8 (n.22)
Research \ evidence into impact of smacking	7 (n.18)
Don't know	11 (n.30)
Other responses reported by less than 5 per cent of respondents	
How it will be policed \ enforced \ resourced	
Info on current law	
Need more time to think about it	
Punishment \ charges for parents	
Safeguarding \ protection for parents	

Base: Those who need more information to decide if they are for or against change to the law on physical punishment of children in Wales (276)

(a) Table may add up to more than 100 per cent as respondents were able to give more than one answer

(b) Other responses are presented alphabetically

6. Conclusions

6.1 As explained in section 1.2, any changes in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode. This issue will be kept under review for future data collections and subsequent reporting.

6.2 Views remain mixed on whether ‘it is sometimes necessary to smack a child’ but the public were more likely to disagree (47%) with the statement than agree with it (34%). This difference between the proportions agreeing and disagreeing has narrowed in comparison to the 2019 survey (31% disagreed, 55% agreed) and is now closer to levels recorded in the baseline survey of 2018. Balance of opinion remains related to age of respondent with those aged over 55 being much more likely to agree that ‘it is sometimes necessary to smack a child’ than those aged 16-34 (47% vs. 20%).

6.3 Across all three surveys (2018, 2019, 2020) there appears to be a degree of misunderstanding around the current status of legislation around smacking, with only a minority thinking that this is allowed. This minority was even smaller in the 2020 survey (22%) compared with 27% and 28% respectively in the 2018 and 2019 surveys. The degree of misunderstanding is relatively consistent across different demographic groups (age, gender, social grade).

6.4 When asked at an unprompted level if they were aware of the legislative change around physical punishment of children, just over a quarter (27%) said they knew of something. This is very similar to the level recorded in 2018 but lower than the 2019 survey (42%). Previous surveys in 2018 and 2019 have shown that the main sources of unprompted awareness of the legislative change have been news content and programmes which is the same for this report but fewer people reported it as a reason for becoming aware of the legislative change. As such, the domination of news output by Covid-19 before and during the fieldwork for this survey may have contributed to the drop in unprompted awareness, particularly as at the time there was no paid for public facing communications about the law change

6.5 There has also been a decrease in prompted awareness of the legislative change, although not to the same extent as with unprompted awareness. When prompted with what the change may entail, 44% report that they have any awareness of this compared with 49% in 2019. However, the current level of prompted awareness remains higher than the baseline survey of 2018 (34%). Differences in awareness of the change were apparent by age (older respondents, aged 55+ were more aware) and by social grade (ABC1s were more likely to be aware).

6.6 There has also been some change in opinion of the removal of the defence of reasonable punishment. The proportion who were in favour of the legislative change has fallen from 46% in 2019 to 38% in 2020. However, this change does not reflect an increase in opposition to the legislative change as this has also decreased over time (from 30% in 2019 to 25% in 2020). Instead there has been an increase in those who feel they need more information or are undecided (from 24% in 2019 to 37% in 2020) and this coincides with decreased awareness of the legislative change that the survey has recorded. Younger respondents were more likely to be in favour of the legislative change.

6.7 The most frequent reasons provided by those who were against the legislative change were that the current status is needed to control / discipline children, that it hasn't done them or their kids any harm and that it's ok as long as things don't go too far. For those in favour of the legislative change, reasons included not agreeing with physically punishing children, that there were other ways of ensuring good behaviour and that it's abuse or can lead to abuse.

6.8 The increased proportion of the public in this survey who were undecided on the matter wanted more information on how it would work and greater clarity around definitions that were part of the legislation. This should be taken into account when raising awareness of the change in the law through the public communications campaign which is due to start later this year.

Annex A – Analysis of those who live / do not live in households with children aged 6 or under

A1.1 As mentioned in section 1.2 previous reports in 2018 and 2019 featured analysis of survey data among those who had caring responsibilities for a child aged 7 or under and those who did not have these responsibilities in order to examine differences among those likely to be most affected by legislative change. This definition was not available for the 2020 survey although it was possible to examine findings among those who live in households with a child aged 6 or under and those who do not.

A1.2 Given this change in definition and that previous reports have presented findings based on the ‘caring for a child 7 or under’ definition, analysis among those with or without responsibilities for young children is not included in the main body of the report. Instead this Annex examines results by these groups using the ‘live in household with child aged 6 or under’ definition on the 5 main measures covered by the survey, namely:

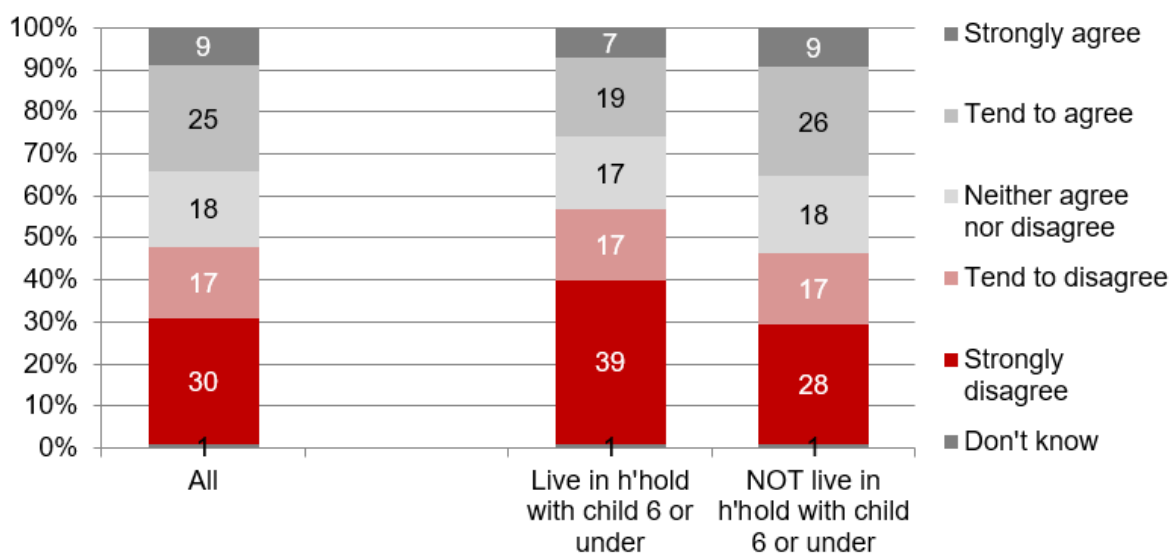
- Level of agreement with ‘it’s sometimes necessary to smack a child’
- Knowledge of the current law on smacking
- Unprompted awareness of the legislative change around physical punishment of children
- Prompted awareness of the legislative change around physical punishment of children
- Opinion of the legislative change around physical punishment of children

A1.3 Where comparisons are made to 2018 and 2019, survey data from these years has been re-analysed so that findings from these surveys are also based on whether respondents live / do not live in households with child aged 6 or under.

Level of agreement with 'it's sometimes necessary to smack a child'

A1.4 Those who live in households where there is a child aged 6 or under were less likely to agree that *it is sometimes necessary to smack a child* – 26% compared with 35% among those who do not live in households with a child 6 or under (figure A1.1). This difference is confirmed by statistical testing and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population.

Figure A1.1: Percentage in agreement that 'it is sometimes necessary to smack a child' (All and whether live in household with a child 6 or under)



Base: All (1,002), Live in household with child 6 or under (172), Do not live in household with child 6 or under (830)

A1.5 The above difference in agreeing with 'it is sometimes necessary to smack a child' between those living or not living with a child 6 or under in their household was also found in 2018 (27% agree vs. 37% agree) and 2019 (15% agree vs. 33% agree respectively)²⁹.

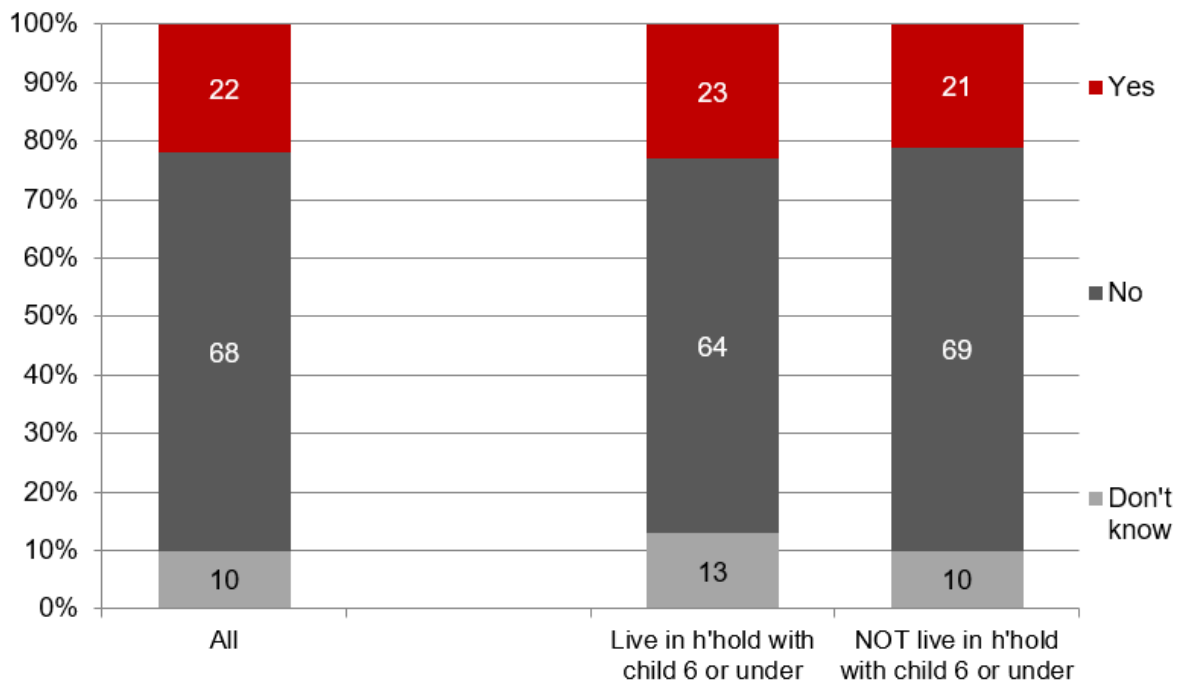
Knowledge of the current law on smacking

A1.6 Knowledge of the current law on smacking shows little difference by whether or not an individual lives in a household with a child 6 or under. Around a fifth of each

²⁹ Any lack of change in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a lack of change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

group, as shown in figure A1.2, believe the law allows parents to smack their children.

Figure A1.2: Percentage who believe that the law currently allows parents to smack their children (All and by whether live in household with child 6 or under)



Base: All (1,002), Live in household with child 6 or under (172), Do not live in household with child 6 or under (830)

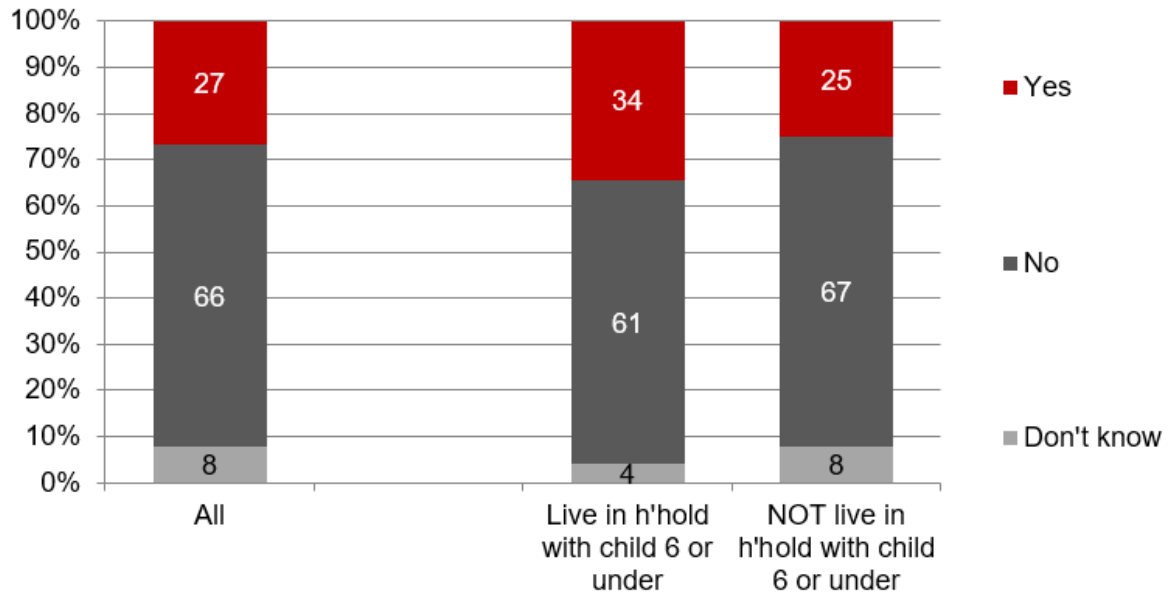
Unprompted awareness of the legislative change around physical punishment of children

A1.7 Overall, just over a quarter (27%) of people reported that they were aware of changes to the law around physical punishment of children at an unprompted level³⁰. Awareness of legislative change was higher among those who live in households with a child 6 or under compared to those who do not live in these households – 34% vs. 25% (figure A1.3). This difference was confirmed by statistical testing and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population. This represents a change from the previous surveys where statistically significant differences between the two groups were not recorded (2018 – 26% among those in households with a

³⁰ Respondents were not given any details of potential changes at this point and were asked - 'Are you aware of any changes to the law around physical punishment of children?'

child 6 or under vs 29% among those not in households with a child 6 or under, 2019 – 36% vs. 43%)³¹.

Figure A1.3: Percentage aware of changes in legislation around physical punishment of children [Unprompted] (All and by whether live in household with a child aged 6 or under)



Base: All (1,002), Live in household with child 6 or under (172), Do not live in household with child 6 or under (830)

Prompted awareness of the legislative change around physical punishment of children

A1.8 After being asked their awareness at an unprompted level, respondents were then presented with a description of the legislative change (which can be found in Annex E) and were asked if they had seen or heard anything about this.

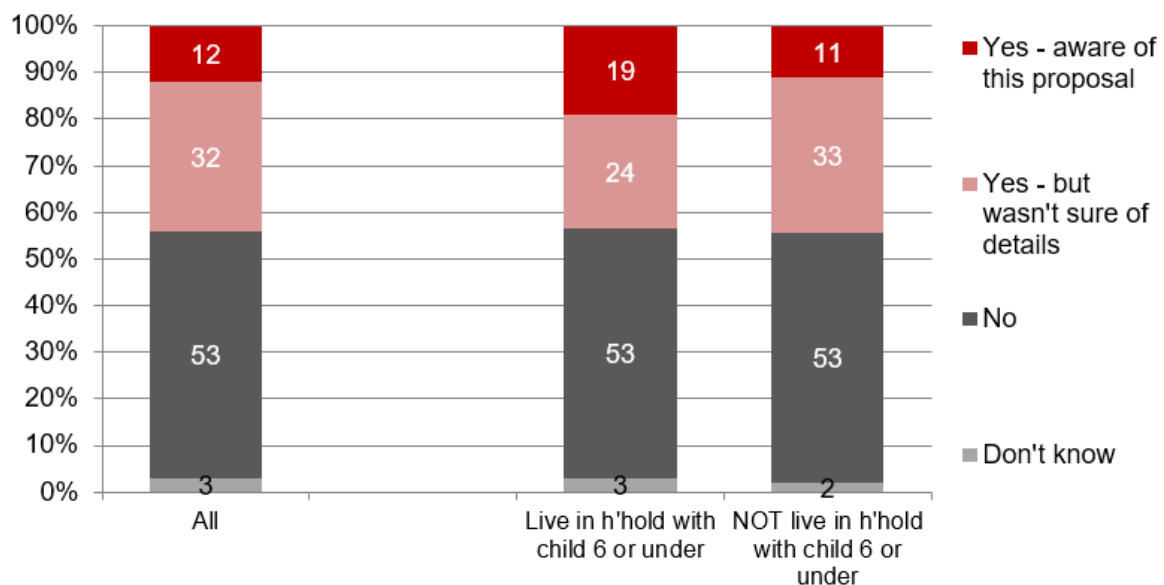
A1.9 If we consider the proportion saying that they are aware overall (i.e. either answering *Yes – aware of this proposal* or *Yes – but wasn't sure of details*) there is no difference between those living in households with a child 6 or under and those who do not live with children under 6 – 44%³² of each group reported being aware of the change.

³¹ Any changes in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

³² Total is 44% rather than 43% for those living in households with children under 6 (19% + 24% as shown in Figure A1.4) as percentages are 19.17% and 24.43% = 43.60%

A1.10 However, when we consider the proportion who are more certain in their view (i.e. only those who answer *Yes – aware of this proposal*) those living with children 6 or under were more likely to report this – 19% compared with 11% among those who do not live with children 6 or under. The difference in pattern of response between the two groups is confirmed by statistical testing and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population.

Figure A1.4: Percentage aware of changes in legislation around physical punishment of children [Prompted] (All and by whether live in household with a child aged 6 or under)

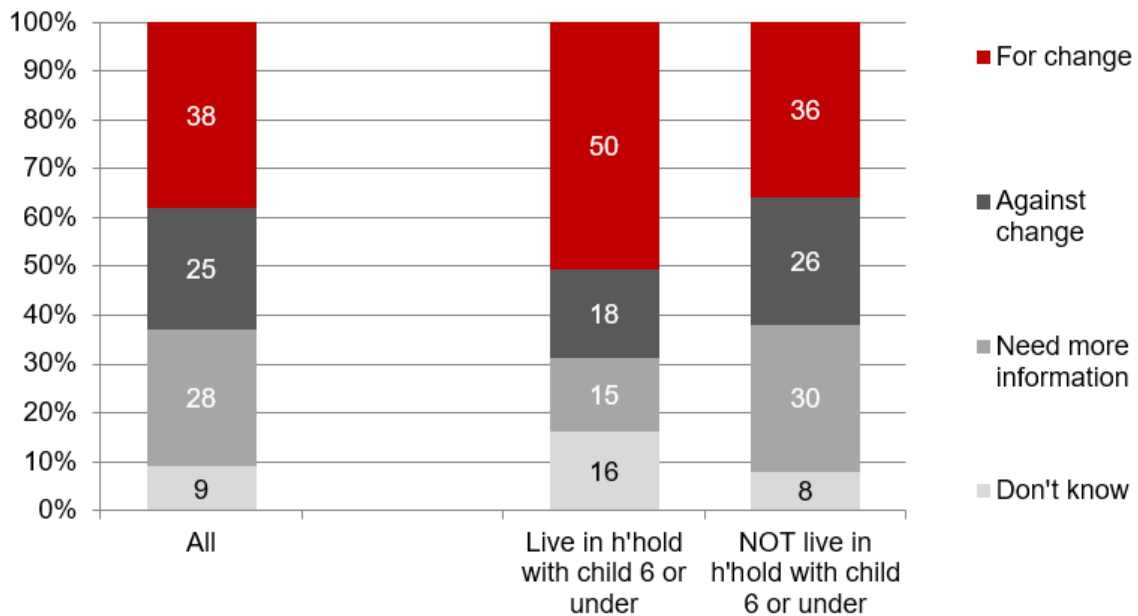


Base: All (1,002), Live in household with child 6 or under (172), Do not live in household with child 6 or under (830)

Opinion of the legislative change around physical punishment of children

A1.11 Those living in households with a child 6 or under were more likely to be in favour of the legislative change around physical punishment of children (50% in favour, 18% against) compared with those who did not live in these households (36% in favour, 26% against). These differences were confirmed by statistical testing and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population.

Figure A1.5: Opinion of change in legislation on physical punishment of children (%) (All and by whether live in household with child aged 6 or under)

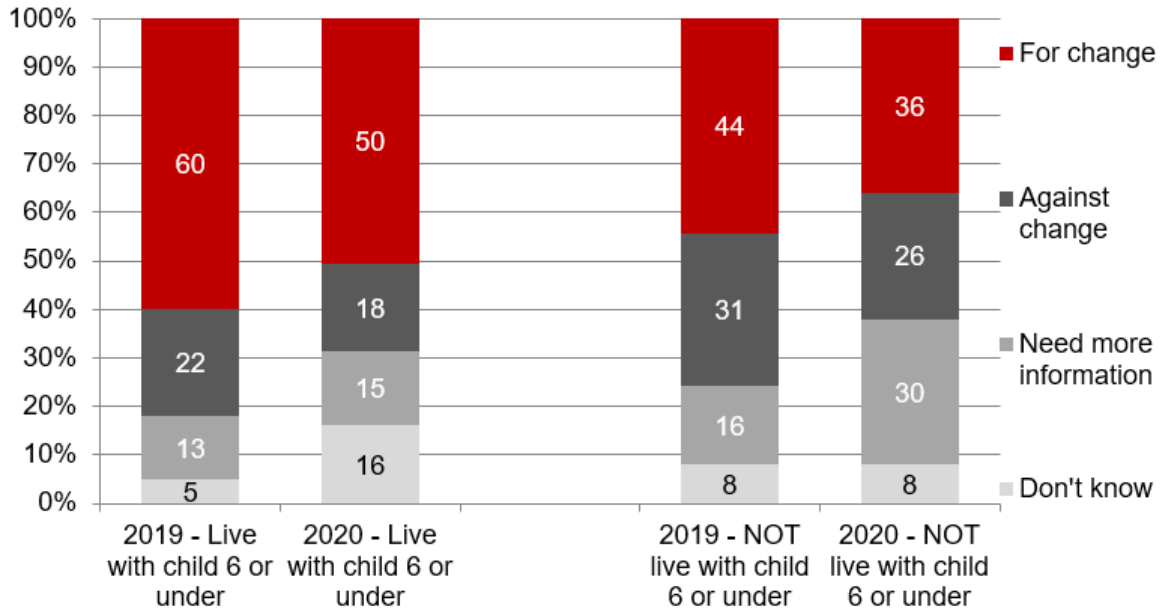


Base: All (1,002), Live in household with child 6 or under (172), Do not live in household with child 6 or under (830)

A1.12 As shown in Figure A1.6 both those living in households with children aged 6 or under and those who are not, record decreases over time in the proportions in favour of the legislative change. However, only the difference over time among those not living with children 6 or under (2019 – 44%, 2020– 36%) is confirmed by statistical testing and therefore can be generalised to the wider population³³. Furthermore, this change was not a result of an increase in those opposing the change (both groups also record small decreases in opposition to the change) but reflect the increase in those who now require more information or are undecided.

³³ Any changes in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode.

Figure A1.6: Opinion of change in legislation on physical punishment of children (%) (By whether live in household with child aged 6 or under over time – 2019, 2020)



Annex B - Welsh Government Social Research on parenting

The Table below sets out the Government Social Research publications on parenting commissioned by the Welsh Government over the past seven years.

Table A1.7: Relevant Previous Welsh Government Research

Title	Method and sample	Purpose
Attitudes to parenting practices and child discipline Published: 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualitative • 14 focus groups (70 participants) • Parents of children under 18 • In 2013 	To explore parents' views on parenting practice including discipline. The findings were used to inform parenting support.
Managing children's behaviour, attitudes and practices: Baseline Survey 2013 Published: 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative Omnibus Survey • 1,022 adults (56% ever parents, 27% parents of under 18s) • In 2013 	To collect data on attitudes of the public (including parents and non-parents) towards parenting practices including discipline. The findings were used to inform parenting support.
Parental attitudes towards managing young children's behaviour 2015 Published: 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative – telephone survey • 387 parents/guardians of children under 7 years old • Using National Survey for Wales re-contact list • In 2015 	To gauge the attitudes of parents with young children on parenting and managing children's behaviour. Fieldwork undertaken prior to Launch of parenting support campaign <i>Parenting. Give it time</i>
Parental attitudes towards managing young children's behaviour 2017 Published: 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative – telephone survey • 269 parents/guardians of children under 7 years old • Using National Survey for Wales re-contact survey • In 2017 	To gauge the attitudes of parents with young children on parenting and managing children's behaviour. This survey was broadly a repeat of previous research undertaken in 2015 and helped inform the preparatory work for the proposal to prohibit physical punishment.
Public attitudes to physical punishment of children: Baseline survey, 2018 Published: 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative – face-to-face survey • 1,002 members of the general public aged 16+ • Conducted via the Beaufort Wales Omnibus Survey • In 2018 	Baseline survey among the Welsh general public to examine attitudes towards physical punishment of children, awareness of proposed changes in legislation to remove the defence of reasonable punishment and level of support for this change.
Public attitudes to physical punishment of children: Wave 2 survey, 2019 Published: 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative – face-to-face survey • 1,002 members of the general public aged 16+ • Conducted via the Beaufort Wales Omnibus Survey • In 2019 	Survey among the Welsh general public to examine attitudes towards physical punishment of children, awareness of proposed changes in legislation to remove the defence of reasonable punishment and level of support for this change, building on the baseline survey conducted in 2018

Annex C – Survey questionnaire

This section is about physical punishment which includes smacking

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that it is sometimes necessary to smack a child?

- Strongly agree
- Tend to agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

2. Do you think the law allows parents to smack their children?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

3. The law does currently allow parents to physically punish their children (which includes smacking). What level of punishment do you think the law allows? Choose as many as you think are relevant.

Physical punishment that:

- Leaves no mark at all on the child
- Leaves a temporary reddening of the skin
- Leaves a bruise that lasts for a few days
- Leaves marks and bruises that last for more than a few days but which does not result in permanent physical injury
- Don't know
- Refused

4. Are you aware of any changes to the law around physical punishment of children?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

5. Can you tell me how you think the law will change?

6. How did you become aware of the change to the law around physical punishment of children?

- On TV – news / programme
- On TV □ advertising
- On the radio – news / programme
- On the radio – advertising
- In a local newspaper – news / article
- In a local newspaper – advertising
- In a national Wales newspaper – news / article
- In a national Wales newspaper – advertising
- In a national UK newspaper – news / article
- In a national UK newspaper – advertising
- Online website – news item
- Online website – other
- Social media (excluding Facebook)
- Facebook
- In a magazine
- Someone told me (professional)
- Someone told me (family/ friend)

In Wales, the law around physical punishment, including smacking, is changing. Parents are currently able to use the defence of reasonable punishment against a charge of common assault, but not against more serious charges of, for example, actual bodily harm. From March 2022, the defence of reasonable punishment will no longer be available in Wales to parents, carers and guardians, and those acting in *loco parentis* facing a charge of assault and battery against a child in their care. Where the police find sufficient evidence for a realistic prospect of conviction they will have to consider whether it is in the public interest to charge.

7. Before today, have you seen or heard anything about this change in the law at all?

- Yes I am aware of the change
- Yes – but I wasn't sure of the details
- No
- Don't know

8. Which of these statements about the change to the law around physical punishment of children in Wales best reflects your view?

- I am in favour of changing the law to remove the defence of reasonable punishment
- I am against changing the law to remove the defence of reasonable punishment
- I need more information to decide
- Don't know

9. a) Can you tell me why you are in favour of the change to the law on physical punishment of children in Wales?

OPEN ENDED

b) Can you tell me why you are against the change to the law on physical punishment of children in Wales?

OPEN ENDED

c) Can you tell me what additional information you need?

OPEN ENDED

Annex D – Research Method

A1.13 This research was conducted via the Beaufort Wales Omnibus Survey. Omnibus surveys are a well-established method of conducting market and social research. As their name implies, they enable a group of users to share the same survey vehicle, achieving the benefit of lower costs.

A1.14 The Omnibus sample is designed to be representative of the adult population resident in Wales aged 16 and over. The COVID-19 public health crisis prevented the survey from being carried out in its usual manner of face-to-face interviewing at selected sample points throughout Wales. Instead interviews for the November 2020 survey were undertaken online using the Cint online panel exchange platform.

A1.15 The Cint platform and its products comply with various codes of conduct and guidelines such as European Society for Opinion and Market Research (ESOMAR) and Market Research Society (MRS) standards. Cint also complies with ISO 20252. Multiple data quality checks are built into the Cint system including GEO IP check and CAPTCHA at registration, unique respondent identification and fraudulent behaviour checks. In addition, Beaufort builds in its own quality control questions and measures within the survey and excludes respondents who fail these checks.

A1.16 The survey was subject to interlocking demographic quota controls of age within gender. A further separate quota control was set on social grade and interviews were undertaken with residents of every local authority in Wales.

A1.17 At the analysis stage, the data is weighted by age group within gender within Local Authority grouping as well as social grade to give each cell its correct incidence within the Wales total derived from the results of the 2011 Census. Figures in this report are presented to the nearest whole percentage.

Proportional quota sampling

A1.18 When survey data are tested for statistical significance, an assumption is made that the achieved sample represents a random sample of the relevant population. However, as the Wales Omnibus Survey uses proportional quota sampling (not random sampling), genuine statistical significance cannot, strictly speaking, be established. Therefore, when a difference between two sub-groups is described as being 'significant' in this report, this refers to a pseudo-statistically significant difference at the 95 per cent confidence level. This means that, if the survey did use a random sample, the probability of obtaining the finding by chance would be less than one in 20.

Chi-square analysis

A1.19 The chi-square test has been used in the analysis to determine whether an observed relationship between two categorical variables in the sample is likely to reflect a genuine association in the population (i.e. the total adult population resident in Wales aged 16 years and over).

Annex E – Description of change in legislation presented to respondents in November 2020 survey

In Wales, the law around physical punishment, including smacking, is changing. Parents are currently able to use the defence of reasonable punishment against a charge of common assault, but not against more serious charges of, for example, actual bodily harm. From March 2022, the defence of reasonable punishment will no longer be available in Wales to parents, carers and guardians, and those acting in *loco parentis* facing a charge of assault and battery against a child in their care. Where the police find sufficient evidence for a realistic prospect of conviction they will have to consider whether it is in the public interest to charge.

Annex F – Definition of social grades

Table A1.8, below, provides a definition of the social grade classification³⁴ used in the analysis

Table A1.8: Social grade definitions

Social grade	Definition
ABC1	
A	High managerial, administrative or professional
B	Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional
C1	Supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative or professional
C2DE	
C2	Skilled manual workers
D	Semi and unskilled manual worker
E	State pensioners, casual or lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only

³⁴[National Readership Survey definitions](#)

Annex G – Sub-sample sizes

Table A1.9, below, shows the number of respondents for each sub-sample used in the analysis. The numbers of respondents are given for the unweighted and weighted samples.

Table A1.9: Sub-group sample sizes

Sub-sample	Unweighted sample	Weighted sample
Gender³⁵		
Male	369	484
Female	630	515
Age		
16-34	364	299
35-54	357	324
55+	281	379
Social grade		
ABC1	554	521
C2DE	448	481
Live in household with child aged 6 or under		
Yes	172	144
No	830	858

³⁵ Male and Female total adds up to 999. There were also 3 respondents who answered 'other' or 'prefer not to say'