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# Public attitudes to physical punishment of children: Wave 5 survey, March 2022

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# Public attitudes to physical punishment of children: Wave 5 survey, 2022

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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 Wales<sup>1</sup> on 25 March 2019. On 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 includes advertising and public relations, started softly in June 2021 with digital advertising, and launched fully in September 2021, six months before commencement. The biggest burst of communications activity took place between January-March 2022, in the immediate run-up to commencement of the law change. 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, 2019, 2020 and 2021 on public attitudes towards physical

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

punishment of children including the legislation. The fieldwork for this survey was carried out between 28 February – 20 March 2022, immediately before the new legislation came into force. The Welsh Government intends to repeat these questions at 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, 2021 and 2022 survey**

1.5 Fieldwork for the 2020, 2021 and 2022 surveys were conducted 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, the research used an in-home face-to-face interviewer administered approach.

1.6 The 2020, 2021 and 2022 surveys were completed via an online self-completion method using an online panel<sup>2</sup>. 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 information<sup>3</sup>. 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. 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. For any future waves of research, the survey will continue to be undertaken via online self-completion as the survey vehicle, the Beaufort Wales

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

<sup>3</sup> [Cabinet Office \(2019\). Community life survey: 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

Omnibus Survey has permanently moved to this data collection method. More information about the survey method for 2022 can be found in Annex C.

### **1.3 About this report**

1.8 The findings outlined in this report are based on research conducted on the 28 February – 20 March 2022 Beaufort Wales Omnibus survey, which interviewed a representative quota sample of 1,000 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 questions<sup>4</sup> asked as part of the November 2018, November 2019, November 2020, and November 2021 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, 2021 and 2022 surveys were undertaken via online self-completion rather than the interviewer administered face-to-face approach used in 2018 and 2019. 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 A.

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 B of this document.

### **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

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<sup>4</sup> The only small amendments to the 2020, 2021 and 2022 surveys 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, 2021 and 2022 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 in 2020, 2021 and 2022 whereas in 2018/2019 this list was unprompted.



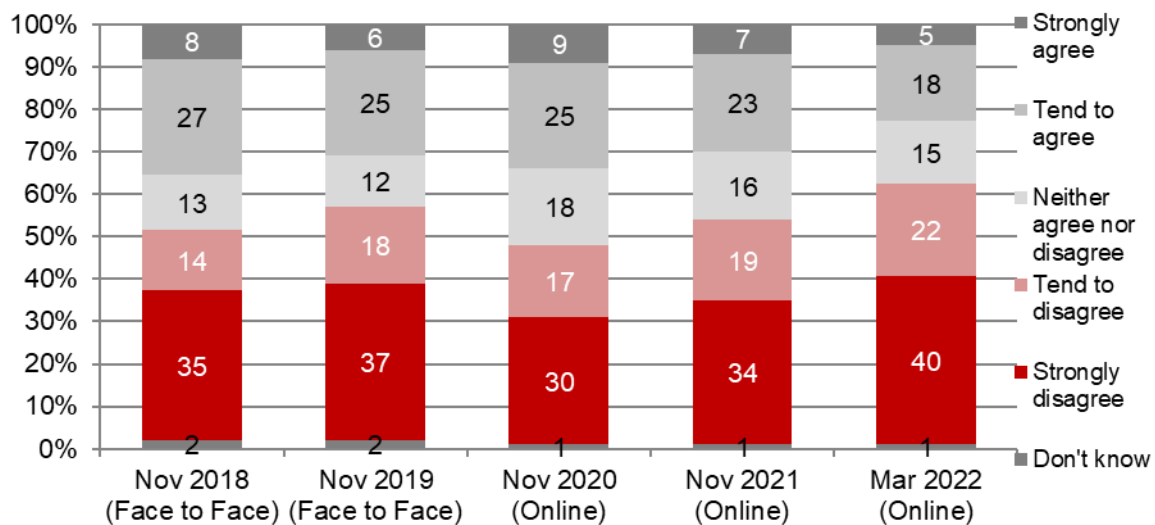
they have varying attitudes, behaviours, or knowledge. There are also comparisons between the different years of the survey to explore if there have been changes over time. The report uses statistical testing to compare results between groups of the population and also to compare results over time. When 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.

## 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 five 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 it.

2.2 In the latest survey 23% agreed and 62% disagreed that *it is sometimes necessary to smack a child*. The difference between the proportions agreeing and disagreeing with the statement is wider than existed at the 2021 survey (30% agreed, 53% disagreed) and indeed wider than any other survey period. This difference between 2021 and 2022 was statistically significant and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population.

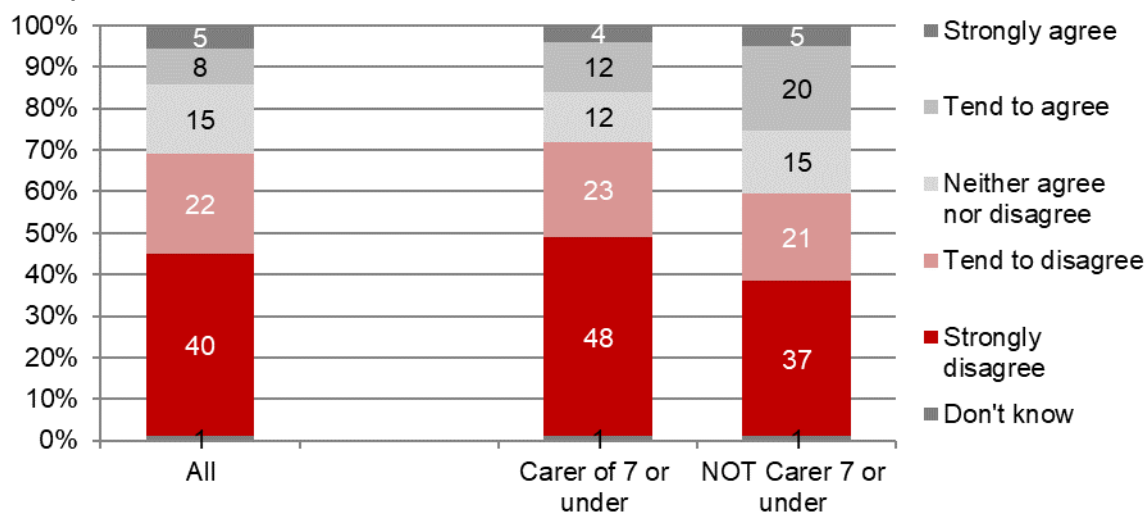
**Figure 2.1: Percentage in agreement that ‘it is sometimes necessary to smack a child’ (All – 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022)**



Base: All – 2018 (1,002), 2019 (1,002), 2020 (1,002), 2021 (1,000), 2022 (1,000)

2.3 Those who have caring responsibilities for children aged seven or under, namely parents, guardians or other family members who provide regular care, were more likely to disagree that *it is sometimes necessary to smack a child* – 71% compared with 58% among those who do not have caring responsibilities for those aged seven and under (figure 2.2). This difference is statistically significant 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 whether regular carer of child aged seven or under - March 2022)**

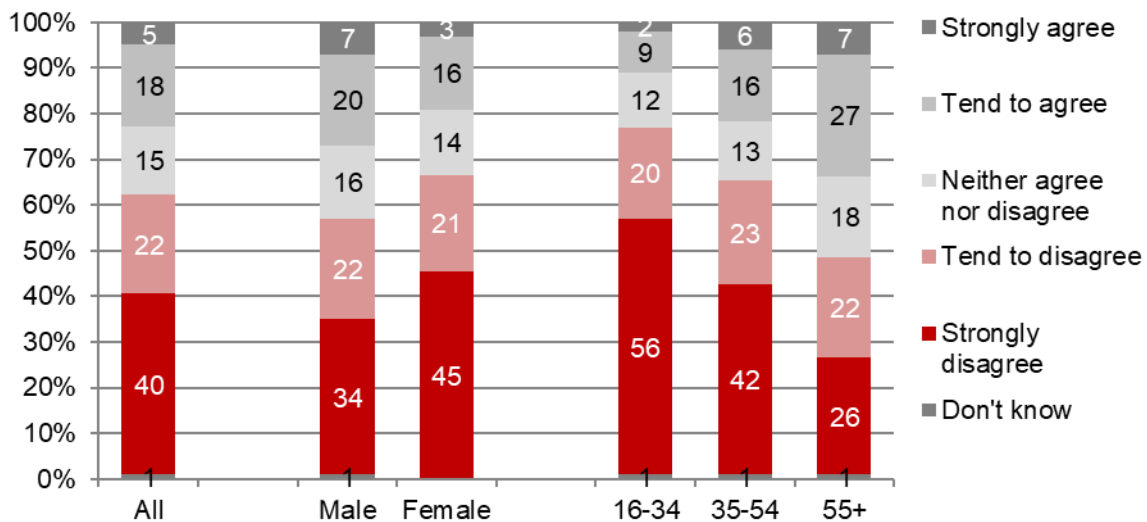


*Base: All (1,000), Regular carer of 7 or under (285), Not a regular carer of 7 or under (711)*

2.4 Whilst both those with caring responsibilities for those aged seven and under, and those without report increases in the proportions disagreeing that *it is sometimes necessary to smack a child* in comparison with 2021 (63% vs 71% and 49% vs 58% respectively) it is only the latter group (non-carers of 7s and under) where this difference is statistically significant and therefore generalisable to the wider population.

2.5 As shown in figure 2.3, 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 34% this was around three times the number of 16-34s who held this view (11%). Whilst less pronounced than age, a difference in opinion was also found by gender with 27% of men agreeing with the statement compared with 19% of women. The differences reported by age and gender were statistically significant and therefore the findings can be generalised to the wider population. Similar differences by age and gender were found in 2021.

**Figure 2.3: Percentage in agreement that ‘it is sometimes necessary to smack a child’ (All and by gender and by age group - March 2022)**

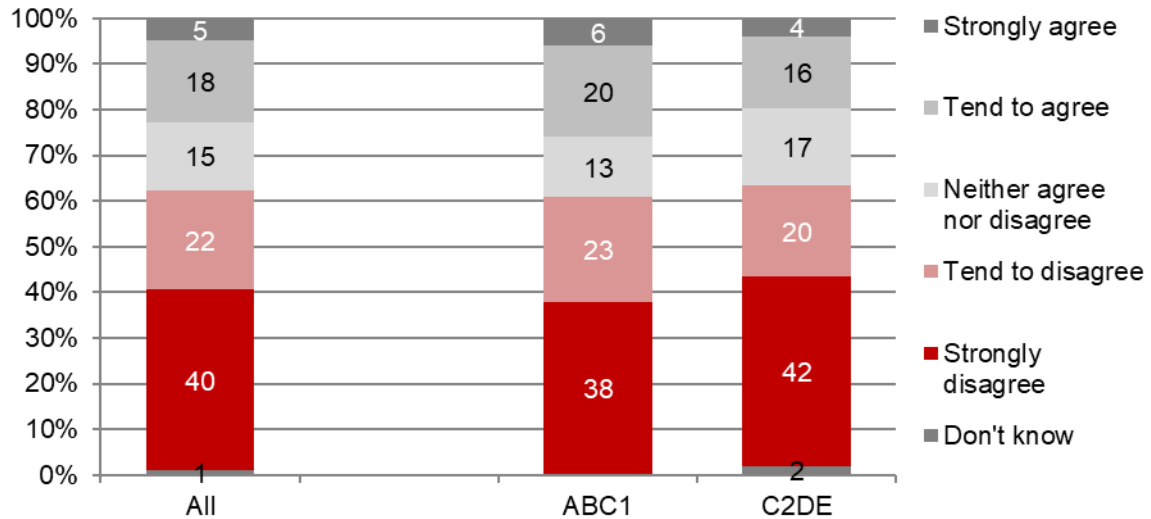


Base: All (1,000), Male (422), Female (575), 16-34 (370), 35-54 (364), 55+ (266)

2.6 In comparison to 2021, all age groups and both men and women have fewer who agree that *it is sometimes necessary to smack a child*. Other than 16-34s, differences in all groups between 2021 and 2022 were statistically significant and therefore the findings can be generalised to the wider population.

2.7 Figure 2.4 shows findings for the same measure by social grade<sup>5</sup>. The opinions of those in social grades ABC1<sup>6</sup> were similar to those in social grades C2DE. This consolidates the same finding from 2019, 2020 and 2021 surveys.

**Figure 2.4: Percentage in agreement that ‘it is sometimes necessary to smack a child’ (All and by social grade - March 2022)**



Base: All (1,000), ABC1 (607), C2DE (393)

<sup>5</sup> Social grade is a classification system based on the occupation of the chief income earner in the household.

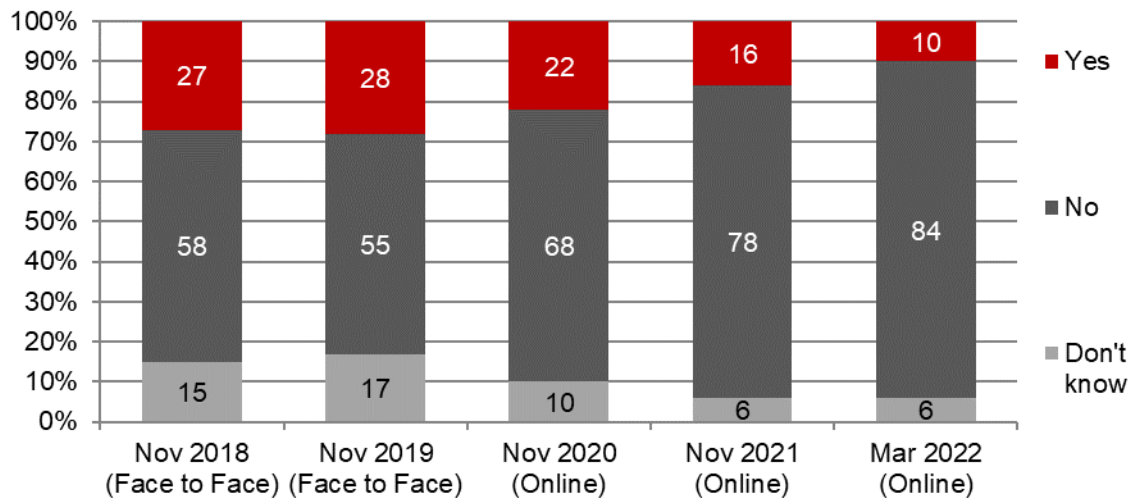
<sup>6</sup> Definitions of social grades A,B,C1,C2,D,E can be found in Annex E

### **3. Knowledge of current legislation**

3.1 The legal situation regarding smacking or other physical punishment of children in Wales at the time of this survey (28 February – 20 March 2022), was that parents and adults acting in *loco parentis* (acting with parental responsibility) were able to use 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 A total of (84%) of people surveyed in 2022 thought that the law did not allow parents to smack their children. Only 1 in 10 (10%) thought the law did allow parents to smack and the remaining 6% reported being unsure. Those ‘correctly’ believing (at the time of asking) that the law allowed parents to smack their children have always been in the minority across the five survey periods, but the most recent survey (undertaken up to the last day before the law changed) records the lowest proportion who held this view. Even in comparison to the November 2021 survey fewer now believe smacking is allowed (10% vs.16%). This difference in response between 2022 and 2021 surveys is statistically significant and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population.

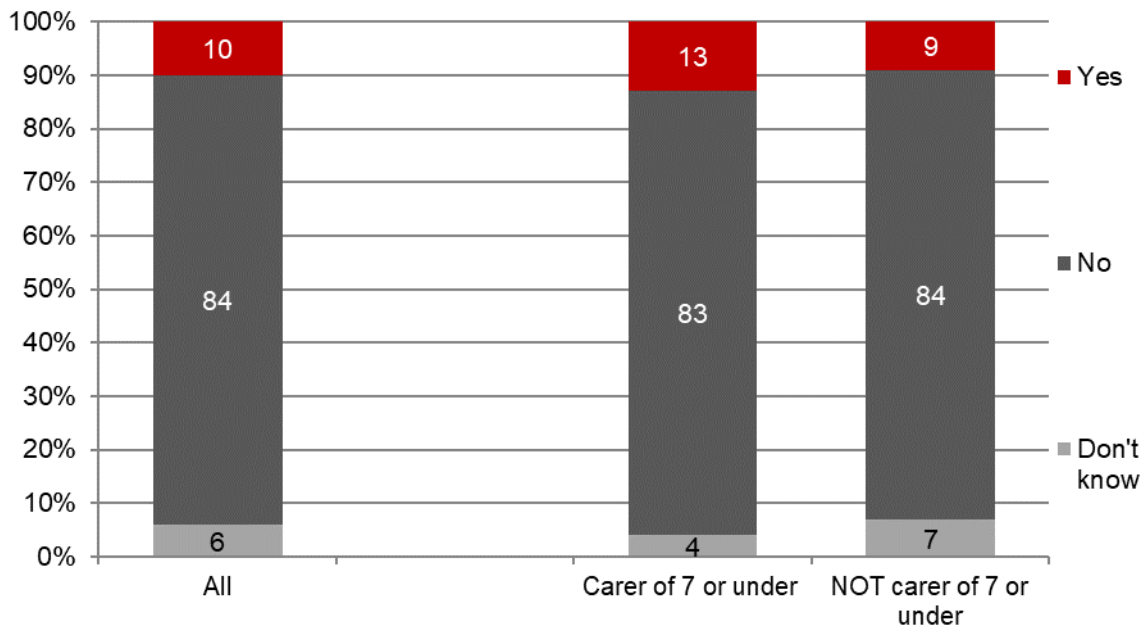
**Figure 3.1: Percentage who believe that the law currently allows parents to smack their children (All – 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022)**



Base: All – 2018 (1,002), 2019 (1,002), 2020 (1,002), 2021 (1,000) 2022 (1,000)

3.3 Knowledge of the law on smacking shows few differences by whether an individual is a carer of children aged seven or under or not. Similar proportions of each group thought smacking was currently allowed (13% and 9% respectively).

**Figure 3.2: Percentage who believe that the law currently allows parents to smack their children (All and by whether regular carer of child aged seven or under - March 2022)**

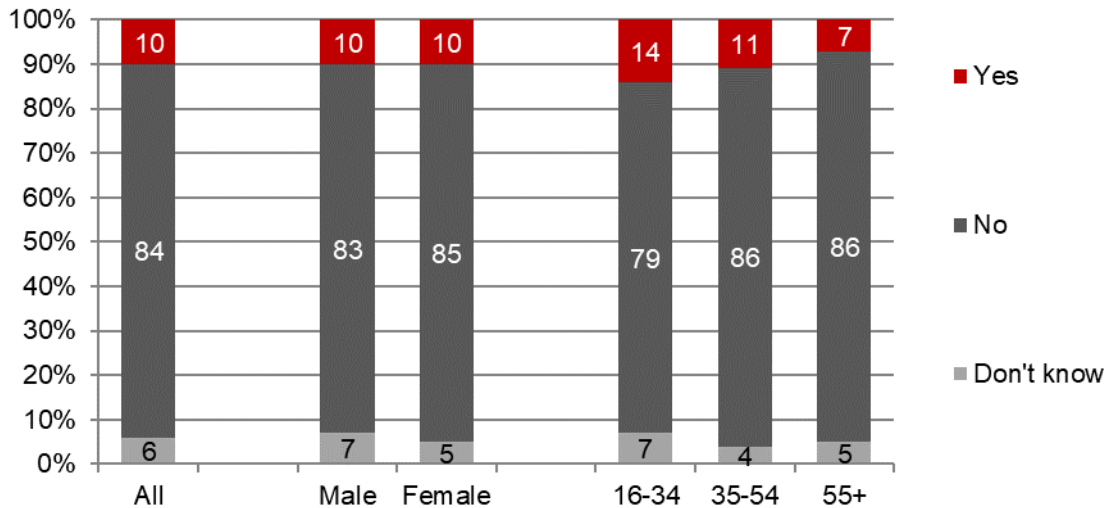


Base: All – Regular carer of 7 or under (285), NOT regular carer of 7 or under (711)

3.4 Awareness of whether smacking was allowed or not did not vary by gender as shown in figure 3.3. However, the gap was slightly greater by age (14% of those

aged 16-34 believed smacking was allowed compared with 7% of those aged 55+), and this difference was statistically significant and therefore can be generalised to the wider population

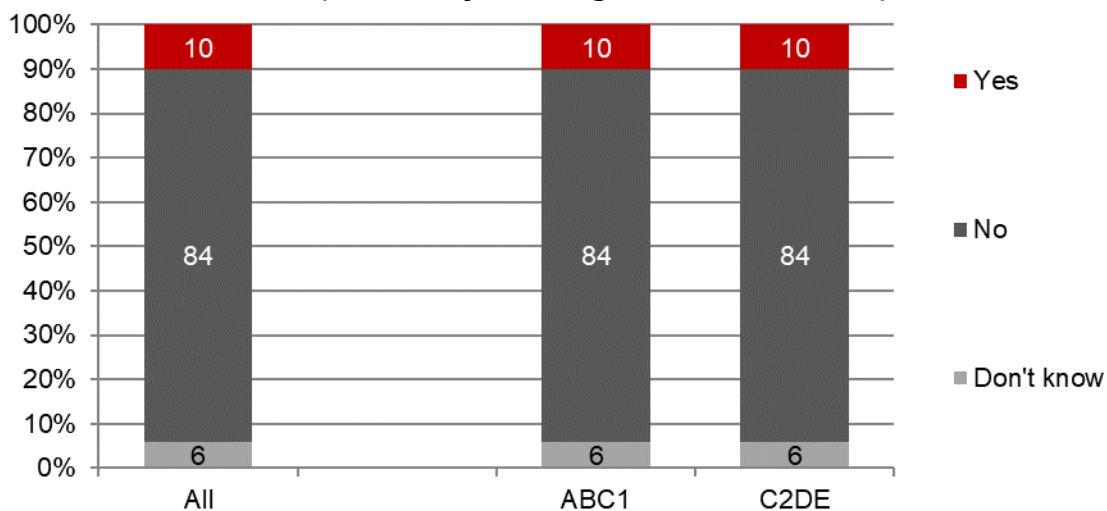
**Figure 3.3: Percentage who believe that the law currently allows parents to smack their children (All and by gender and by age group - March 2022)**



Base: All (1,000), Male (422), Female (575), 16-34 (370), 35-54 (364), 55+ (266)

3.5 Knowledge of the law on smacking shows no difference by different social grade. One in ten of each group (ABC1s and C2DEs), as shown in figure 3.4, believe the law allows parents to smack their children.

**Figure 3.4: Percentage who believe that the law currently allows parents to smack their children (All and by social grade - March 2022)**



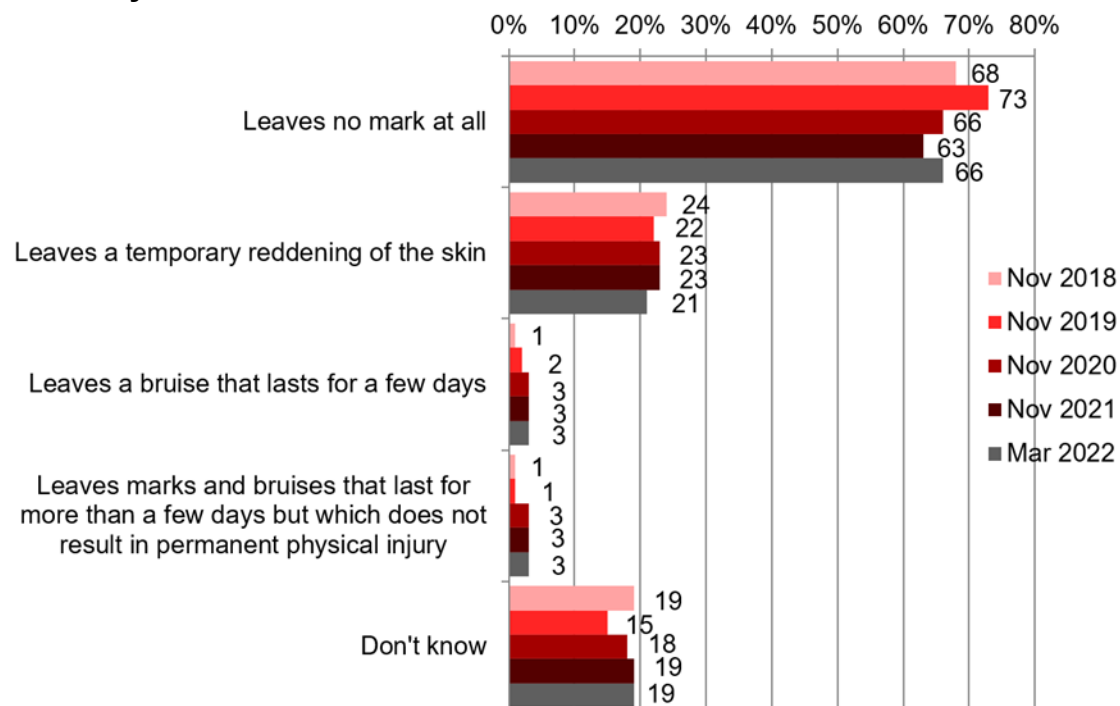
Base: All (1,000), ABC1 (607), C2DE (393)



3.6 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 3.5 together with the proportion of people who thought each level was allowed (respondents could choose more than one option).

3.7 Around two-thirds (66%) thought that punishment which left no mark at all on the child would be allowed in law. Far fewer (21%) 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 (19%) reported that they did not know what level of punishment would be allowed. The findings were similar to those found in all previous surveys.

**Figure 3.5: Percentage who thought that each level of punishment was currently allowed in law**

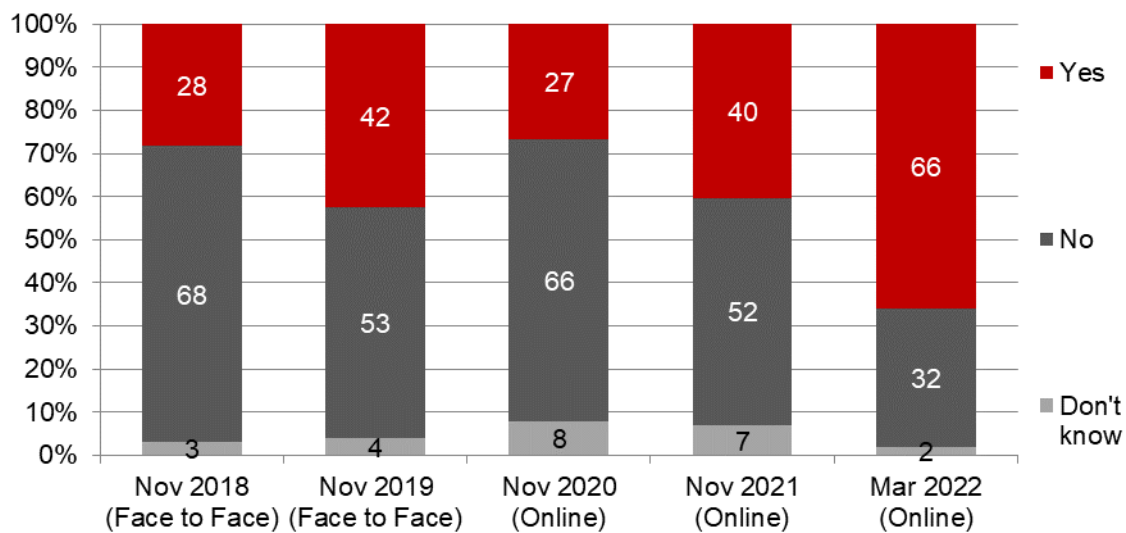


Base: All - 2018 (1,002), 2019 (1,002), 2020 (1,002), 2021 (1,000), 2022 (1,000)

## 4. Awareness of changes to legislation

4.1 In the latest survey, two-thirds (66%) of people reported that they were aware of changes to the law around physical punishment of children at an unprompted level<sup>7</sup>. This represents a considerable change compared to the 2021 survey in which 40% were aware of the changes. This increase since 2021 in awareness of the change is statistically significant and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population.

**Figure 4.1: Percentage aware of changes in legislation around physical punishment of children [Unprompted] (All – 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022)**

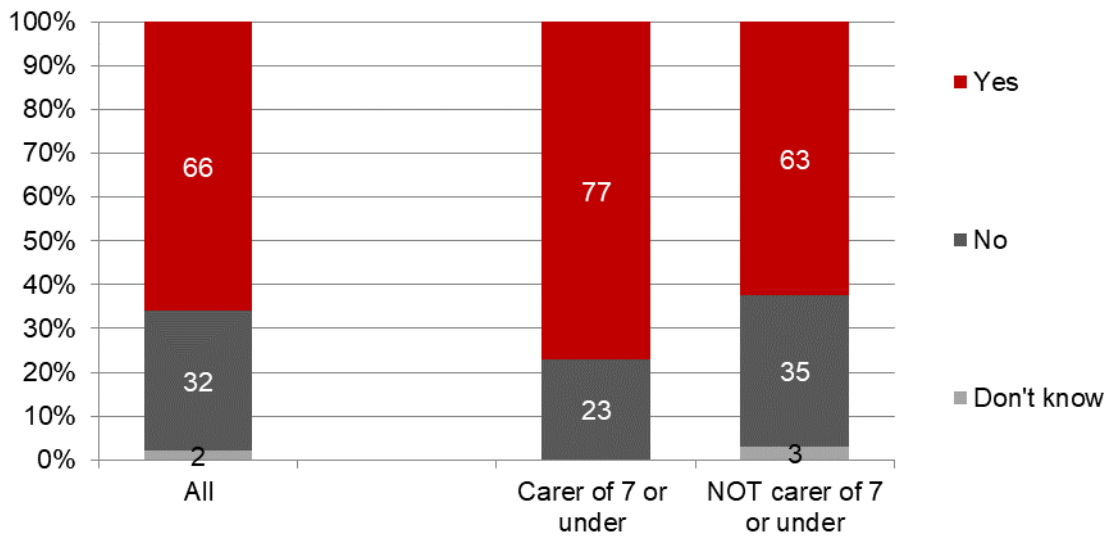


*Base: All – 2018 (1,002), 2019 (1,002), 2020 (1,002), 2021 (1,000), 2022 (1,000)*

4.2 Awareness of proposed changes to the law around physical punishment of children was higher among carers of children seven and under than those who did not have these responsibilities – 77% vs. 63% (figure 4.2). This difference is statistically significant and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population.

<sup>7</sup> 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?'

**Figure 4.2: Percentage aware of proposed changes in legislation around physical punishment of children [Unprompted] (All and by whether regular carer of child aged seven or under - March 2022)**



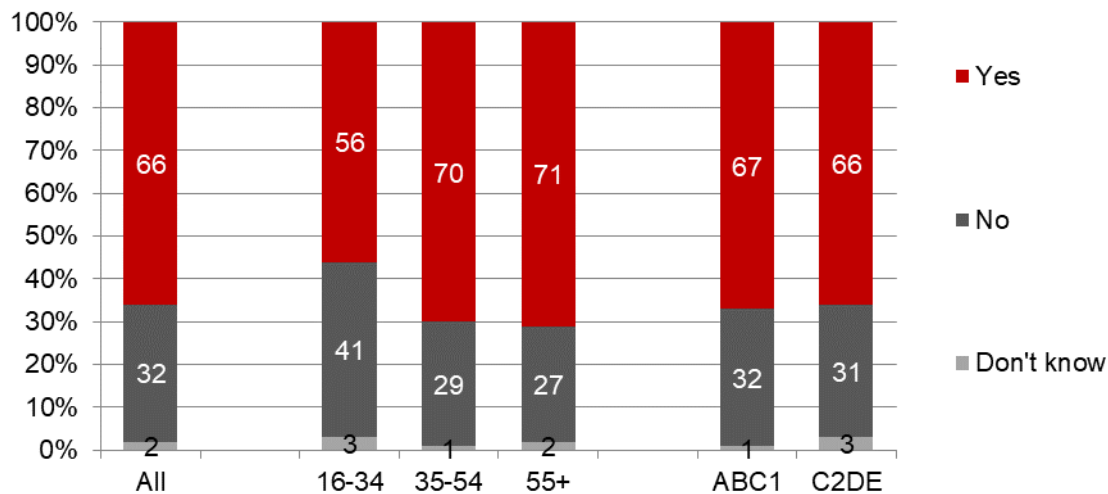
*Base: All (1,000), Regular carer of 7 or under (285), Not a regular carer of 7 or under (711)*

4.3 The proportion of those aware of changes in legislation among both those who have caring responsibilities for those aged 7 and under and those without these responsibilities has increased considerably in comparison with the 2021 survey (44% to 77% and 39% to 63% respectively). These differences over time are statistically significant and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population.

4.4 As shown in figure 4.3, there is little difference between awareness of the changes in legislation among different social grade groupings. This contrasts with the 2021 survey where those in social grades C2DE (36%) were less likely to be aware of the change than those in social grades ABC1 (44%).

4.5 Younger respondents aged 16-34 were less likely to be aware of the change in legislation than those in the older age groups, aged 35-54 and 55+ (56% vs. 70% & 71%). This difference was also statistically significant and therefore can be generalised to the wider population.

**Figure 4.3: Percentage aware of changes in legislation around physical punishment of children [Unprompted] (All and by age and social grade - March 2022)**



Base: All (1,000), 16-34 (370), 35-54 (364), 55+ (266), ABC1 (607), C2DE (393)

4.6 Higher levels of unprompted awareness of the change were reported in all age groups and all social grade groupings in 2022 compared with 2021. All of these differences were statistically significant and therefore the findings can be generalised to the wider population.

4.7 Those who reported being aware of changes in legislation (668 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 / physical punishment would be [completely] banned / it will be illegal’. The vast majority (89%) of those aware of a change spontaneously mentioned this.

**Table 4.1: Can you tell me how you think the law will change? - March 2022**  
**[Unprompted]**

Response	Percentage of respondents (Number of respondents)
[Complete] ban on smacking \ physical punishment \ it will be illegal	89 (n.589)
<b>Other responses reported by less than 5 per cent of respondents</b>	
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 something \ heard about it (unspecific)	
Thought it was already illegal to smack	

*Base: Those aware of changes to the law around physical punishment of children – unprompted (668)*

*(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 Response to this question was similar to that found in previous surveys in that *smacking would be [completely] banned \ it will be illegal* was also by far the most frequently mentioned from 2018 to 2021 although the proportion stating this has increased over time (64%,69%,73%,84% and 89% respectively)

4.9 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). In the latest survey, TV news \ programme continues to be the most frequently cited source of awareness (40% mentioning it). The sources of awareness of the change cited in the 2022 survey are largely mentioned at similar levels to previous surveys. The main exceptions are increases in mentions in 2022 for TV advertising - 22% of those aware in 2021 compared with 13% in 2020, and Facebook - 15% in 2022 compared with 9% in 2021.

**Table 4.2: How did you become aware of the change to the law around physical punishment of children? - March 2022**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents (Number of respondents)</b>
On TV – news \ programme	40 (n.266)
On TV advertising	22 (n.51)
Facebook	15 (n.99)
Online website - news item	15 (n.98)
On radio – news \ programme	12 (n.78)
Social media (excluding Facebook)	12 (n.78)
Someone told me (family \ friends)	11 (n.76)
Radio - advertising	9 (n.62)
National Wales newspaper - news \ article	9 (n.59)
National Wales newspaper - advertising	6 (n.43)
Leaflet through door	6 (n.38)
Local newspaper - news \ article	5 (n.33)
National UK newspaper - news \ article	5 (n.30)
<b>Other responses reported by less than 5 per cent of respondents</b>	
Local newspaper – advertising	
Magazine	
National UK newspaper - advertising	
Online website - other	
Someone told me (professional)	

*Base: Those aware of changes to the law around physical punishment of children – unprompted (668)*

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

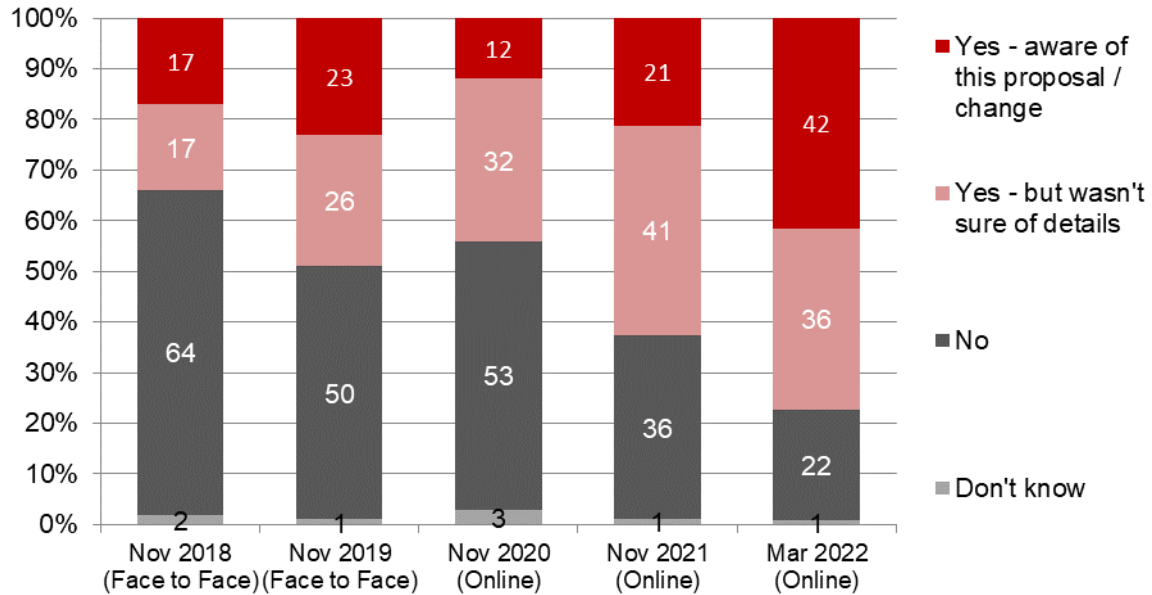
*(b) Other responses are presented alphabetically*

4.10 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 D) 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 78% knew something about the change consisting of 42% stating they were aware of it and a similar proportion (36%) who were aware but not sure about the details.

4.11 This represents an increase in prompted awareness compared with the 2021 survey when 63% knew something. In particular, the difference between those aware of the proposal (without the caveat of not being aware of the details) doubles

between 2021 (21%) and 2022 (42%). This difference is statistically significant and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population.

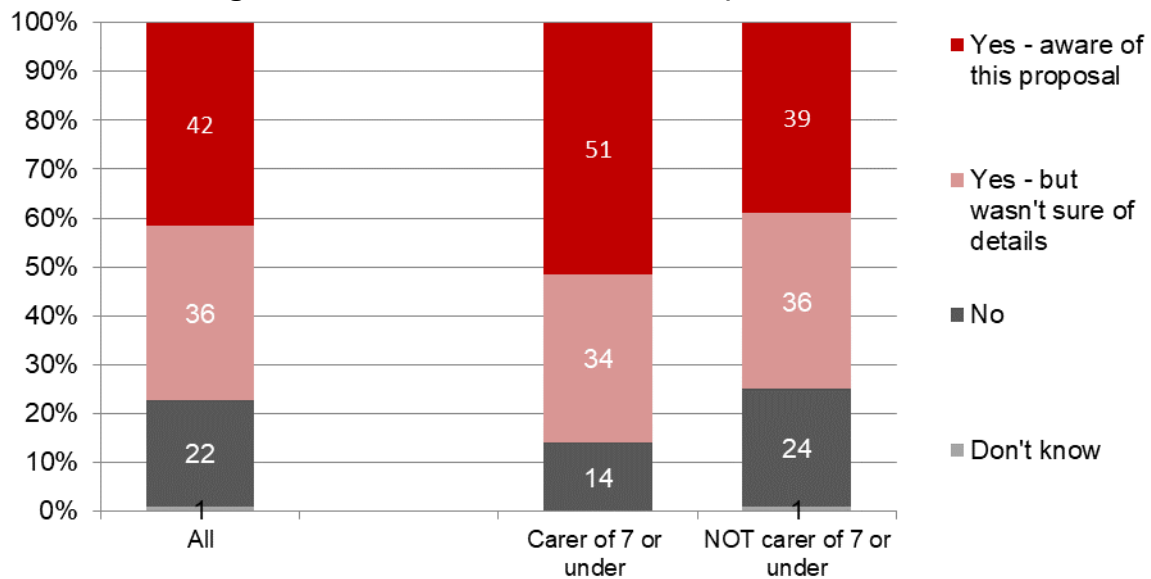
**Figure 4.4: Percentage aware of changes in legislation around physical punishment of children [Prompted] (All – 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022)**



Base: All – 2018 (1,002), 2019 (1,002), 2020 (1,002), 2021 (1,000), 2022 (1,000)

4.12 At this prompted level those with caring responsibilities for children aged seven and under were more likely to be aware of the legislation than those without these responsibilities – 85% compared with 75% (figure 4.5). This difference was statistically significant and therefore can be generalised to the wider population.

**Figure 4.5: Percentage aware of proposed changes in legislation around physical punishment of children [Prompted] (All, and by whether a regular carer of child aged seven or under - March 2022)**



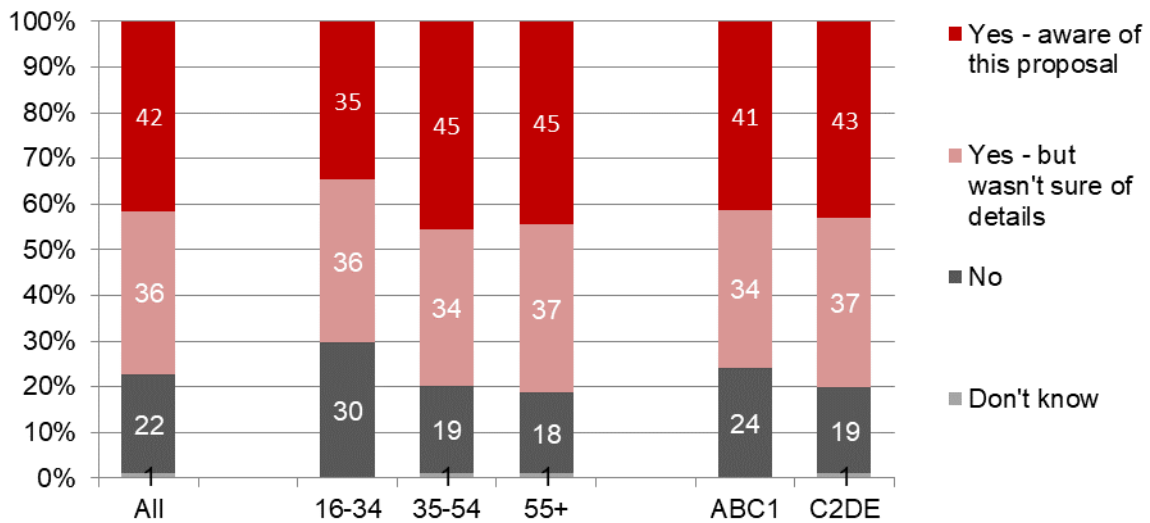
*Base: All (1,000), Regular carer of 7 or under (285), Not a regular carer of 7 or under (711)*

4.13 The proportion of those aware of changes in legislation at this prompted level among both those who have caring responsibilities for those aged 7 and under and those without these responsibilities has increased considerably in comparison with the 2021 survey (67% to 85% and 61% to 75% respectively). These differences over time are statistically significant and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population.

4.14 As with unprompted awareness, there was little difference in awareness of the legislation by social grade grouping when prompted with a description of it. In terms of age (and also mirroring the unprompted awareness findings), those aged 16-34 were less likely to be aware of the legislation at this prompted level – 71% compared with 79% and 82% for those aged 35-54 and 55+ respectively. This difference was statistically significant and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population.



**Figure 4.6: Percentage aware of changes in legislation around physical punishment of children [Prompted] (All and by age group and social grade - March 2022)**



Base: All (1,000), 16-34 (370), 35-54 (364), 55+ (266), ABC1 (607), C2DE (393)

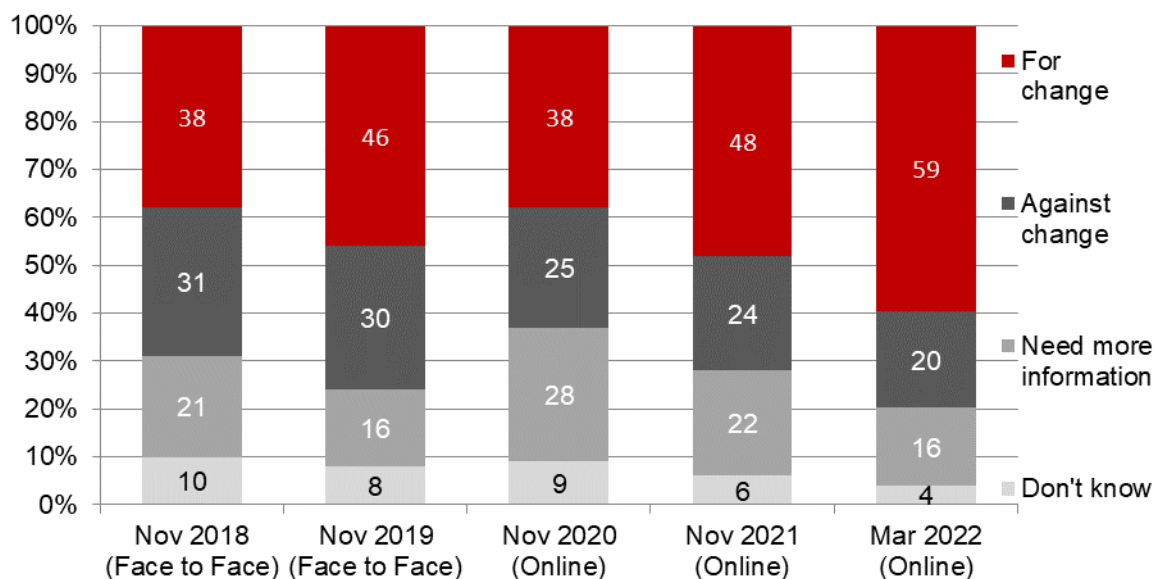
4.15 Higher levels of prompted awareness of the change in legislation were reported in all age groups and all social grade groupings in 2022 compared with 2021. All of these differences were statistically significant and therefore the findings can be generalised to the wider population.

## 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.

5.2 As shown in figure 5.1, in the latest survey almost 6 in 10 (59%) were in favour of the removal of the defence of reasonable punishment. This has increased in comparison with 2021 (48%) and support is at its highest level since survey measurements began. Whilst there has been a 20-percentage point increase in support for the change in legislation over the past three surveys (2020,2021,2022) the proportion opposing the change in the equivalent period has not changed a great deal (2020 – 25%, 2021 – 24%, 2022 – 20%). Therefore, the change in support for the legislation over the last three years is mostly because of a decrease in the proportions 'wanting more information / were unsure of their opinion'. These differences in opinion on legislative change between 2021 and 2022 were statistically significant and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population.

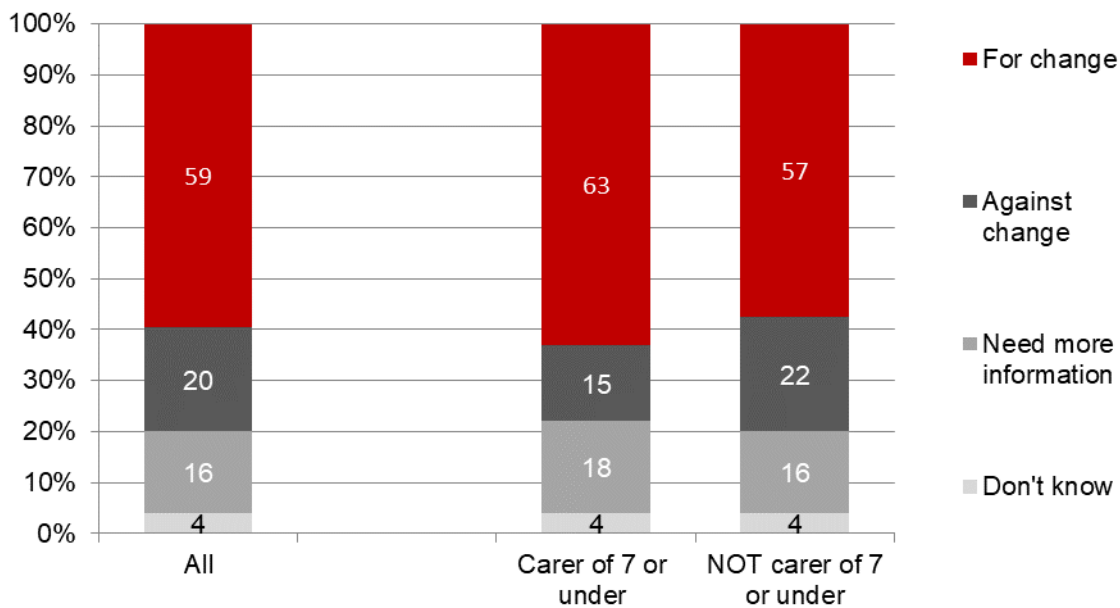
**Figure 5.1: Opinion of change in legislation on physical punishment of children (%) (All – 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022)**



Base: All - 2018 (1,002), 2019 (1,002), 2020 (1,002), 2021 (1,000), 2022 (1,000)

5.3 Those with caring responsibilities for children aged seven and under were more likely to be in favour of the proposed change (63% in favour, 15% against) compared with those who did not have these responsibilities (57% in favour, 22% against). However, these differences were not statistically significant and therefore the finding cannot be generalised to the wider population.

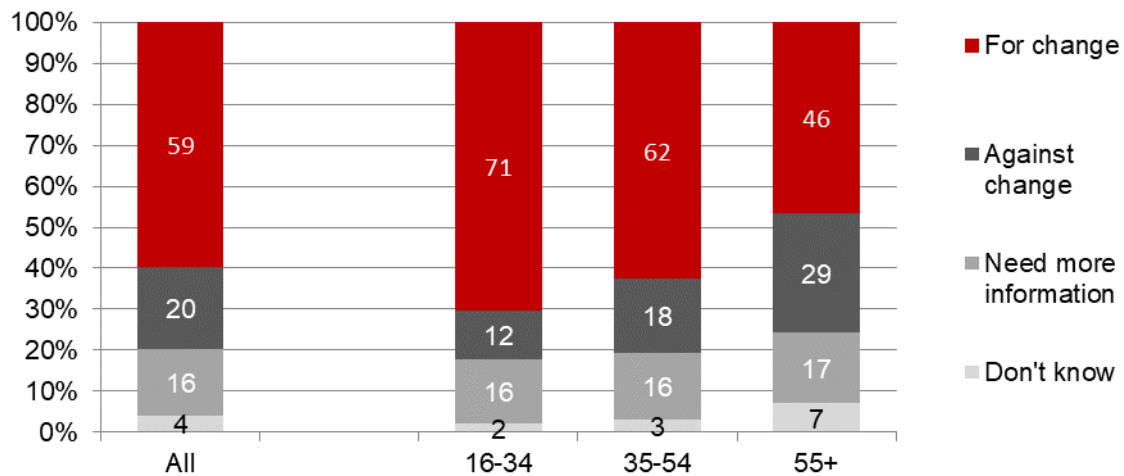
**Figure 5.2: Opinion of proposed change in legislation on physical punishment of children (%) (All and by whether regular carer of child aged seven or under - March 2022)**



*Base: All (1,000), Regular carer of 7 or under (285), Not a regular carer of 7 or under (711)*

5.4 Differences in opinion were also found by age. In both the 16-34 and 35-54 age groups, respondents were much more likely to be *for* rather than *against* the change in legislation, as shown in figure 5.3. However, among those aged 55+ opinion was slightly more mixed with just under half (46%) in support of the change and approximately 3 in 10 (29%) being against it. These differences by age were statistically significant and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population. Similar differences by age were also found in the 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 surveys.

**Figure 5.3: Opinion of change in legislation on physical punishment of children (All and by age group - March 2022)**

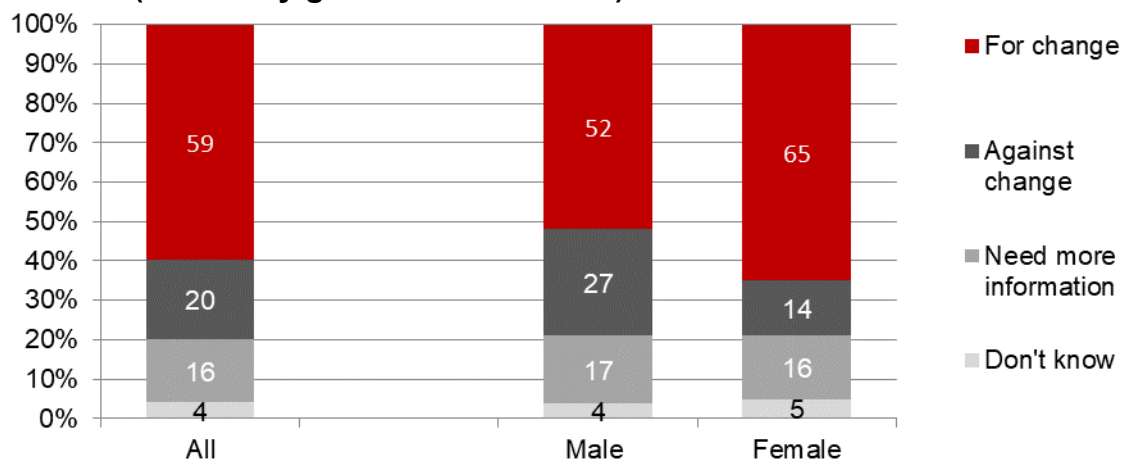


Base: All (1,000), 16-34 (370), 35-54 (364), 55+ (266)

5.5 When comparing opinion of the three age groups over time, all three record increases in the proportions in favour of the change compared with 2021 with +9 percentage points for 16-34s, +10 percentage points for 35-54s and +12 percentage points for those aged 55+. These differences are statistically significant and therefore can be generalised to the wider population.

5.6 In the 2022 survey (as in 2020 and 2021), differences in opinion of the legislative change were also found by gender. Women were much more likely to be in favour of the change (65%) than against it (14%). Whilst more men were in favour of the change than against it, the gap between the two proportions was narrower (52% in favour, 27% against). These differences by gender are statistically significant and therefore can be generalised to the wider population.

**Figure 5.4: Opinion of change in legislation on physical punishment of children (All and by gender - March 2022)**



*Base: All (1,000), Male (422), Female (575)*

5.7 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 (619 respondents). The most frequent response was that they '[did] not agree with smacking or physical punishment of children' (54% of those who were for the change). This was also the most frequent response in the 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 surveys (42%, 40%, 38% and 38% respectively).

5.8 Some highlighted that '[the change in legislation] would help protect children' (12%) or that '[smacking] is harmful to children' (10%), 'it's abuse' (10%) or that 'some parents go too far' (6%). Others felt that 'it [didn't] work' (5%), that 'there are [alternatives to] ensure good behaviour' (12%) and that 'it's not a good lesson' (7%).

**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? - March 2022 [Unprompted]**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents (Number of respondents)</b>
Don't agree with smacking \ physically punishing children	54 (n.316)
There are other ways of ensuring good behaviour \ discipline	12 (n.71)
It will help protect children	12 (n.71)
It's abuse \ can lead to abuse	10 (n.57)
It's harmful to children	10 (n.56)
It's not a good lesson \ encourages violence	7 (n.42)
Some parents go too far	6 (n.33)
It doesn't work \ not necessary	5 (n.27)
<b>Other responses reported by less than 5 per cent of respondents</b>	
A tap is ok \ a little smack \ ok if don't go too far	
I was hit as a child	
Make things clearer \ parents	
Never smacked my kids	

*Base: Those in favour of change to the law on physical punishment of children in Wales (619)*

*(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*

5.9 Of those against the change in legislation (178 respondents), one of the principal reasons for opposing the change included controlling behaviour and discipline. Around two fifths (43%) of those against change thought the current situation was 'needed to control behaviour \ discipline child \ teach respect \ show boundaries'. Some commented on the broader lack of discipline in society – 'there's no discipline \ respect these days \ kids are badly behaved' (19%).

5.10 Others reflected on their own experiences saying that they were against the change because smacking 'doesn't do any harm \ didn't harm me \ my kids' (17%). Some qualified their opposition to the change saying that they would be against it as long as the 'punishment remains reasonable \ doesn't go too far' (21%).

5.11 These reasons and the proportions stating them (among those against of the change in legislation) reflect results found in previous surveys.

**Table 5.2: Can you tell me why you are against the change to the law on physical punishment of children in Wales? - March 2022 [Unprompted]**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents (Number of respondents)</b>
Needed to control behaviour \ discipline child \ teach respect \ show boundaries	43 (n.87)
Ok if doesn't go too far \ if reasonable punishment	21 (n.43)
There's no discipline these days \ kids are badly behaved \ no respect	19 (n.39)
Doesn't do any harm \ didn't harm me \ my kids	17 (n.34)
Parent should be allowed to punish child \ should have choice \ make decision	7 (n.14)
OK when change is in danger	6 (n.11)
<b>Other responses reported by less than 5 per cent of respondents</b>	
Difficult to police \ enforce \ resource	
Each circumstance \ child is different	
Government should not get involved	
Law is fine at moment	
Not needed	
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 (178)*

*(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*

5.12 Those who needed more information before deciding (162 respondents) principally either wanted more detail or information on how it would work (34% of those needing more information) or specifically would like greater clarity around definitions that were part of the legislation:

- What constitutes smacking \ assault, what is allowed vs. not allowed (10%)
- Definitions \ examples (13%)
- Definition of reasonable punishment (13%)

5.13 These responses are similar to those received in the previous surveys.

**Table 5.3: Can you tell me what additional information you need? - March 2022**  
**[Unprompted]**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents (Number of respondents)</b>
More detail \ more info \ how it would work	34 (n.56)
What constitutes smacking \ assault, what is allowed vs. not allowed	10 (n.17)
Definitions \ examples	13 (n.21)
Definition of reasonable punishment	13 (n.21)
Punishment \ charges for parents	7 (n.11)
Safeguarding \ protection for parents	5 (n.9)
Don't know	13 (n.21)
<b>Other responses reported by less than 5 per cent of respondents</b>	
How it will be policed \ enforced \ resourced	
Info on current law	
Research \ evidence into impact of smacking	

*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 (162)*

*(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 Whilst there is a degree of mixed opinion on whether 'it is sometimes necessary to smack a child', the public were less likely to agree with this statement that at any time in the past five years (23% agree). Opinion remains related to age with those aged over 55 being much more likely to agree that 'it is sometimes necessary to smack a child'. However, even among this group there are fewer who agree with the statement than disagree with it.

6.2 Across all five surveys (2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022) there appears to be a degree of misunderstanding around the status of the legislation at the time of the surveying, with only a minority thinking that this is allowed. As we move closer to the legislation coming into force this minority becomes even smaller. In the 2022 survey, conducted just before the new legislation came into force, 10% thought smacking was allowed compared with 27%, 28%, 22% and 16% respectively in the 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 surveys.

6.3 The 2022 survey, conducted after and during significant communication activity, reports a step-change in awareness of the change in legislation around physical punishment of children. When asked at an unprompted level if they were aware of the legislative change around physical punishment of children, two-thirds (66%) said they knew of something. This compares to 40% in 2021 and is the highest level of unprompted awareness recorded across the last five years.

6.4 Similarly, increases were found in prompted awareness of the change in legislation. When provided with a description of the change, 78% report that they have an awareness of this compared with 62% in 2021. Some differences in levels of awareness remain, with those without caring responsibilities for sevens and under, and those aged 16-34 being less aware of the change. However, relative to 2021, increases in awareness are found in 2022 for all age groups, all social grade groupings, and whether or not there are caring responsibilities for those aged seven and under.

6.5 There has also been some change in opinion on the removal of the defence of reasonable punishment. The proportion of those who were in favour of the legislative change has risen from 48% in 2021 to 59% in 2022. This continues the upward trend from 2020, when 38% were in favour. However, over this period the proportion opposed to the change has not varied greatly (2020 – 25%, 2021 – 24%, 2022 – 20%). The increase in support in the last three years is mostly due to fewer reporting that they need more information or that they are unsure. This suggests that there is now an increased public awareness of the legislation.

## Annex A - 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 A1.1: Relevant Previous Welsh Government Research**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Method and sample</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
<a href="#">Attitudes to parenting practices and child discipline</a>  <b>Published: 2014</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative</li> <li>• 14 focus groups (70 participants)</li> <li>• Parents of children under 18</li> <li>• In 2013</li> </ul>	To explore parents' views on parenting practice including discipline. The findings were used to inform parenting support.
<a href="#">Managing children's behaviour, attitudes and practices: Baseline Survey 2013</a>  <b>Published: 2014</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantitative Omnibus Survey</li> <li>• 1,022 adults (56% ever parents, 27% parents of under 18s)</li> <li>• In 2013</li> </ul>	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.
<a href="#">Parental attitudes towards managing young children's behaviour 2015</a>  <b>Published: 2016</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantitative – telephone survey</li> <li>• 387 parents/guardians of children under 7 years old</li> <li>• Using National Survey for Wales re-contact list</li> <li>• In 2015</li> </ul>	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>
<a href="#">Parental attitudes towards managing young children's behaviour 2017</a>  <b>Published: 2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantitative – telephone survey</li> <li>• 269 parents/guardians of children under 7 years old</li> <li>• Using National Survey for Wales re-contact survey</li> <li>• In 2017</li> </ul>	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.
<a href="#">Public attitudes to physical punishment of children: Baseline survey, 2018</a>  <b>Published: 2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantitative – face-to-face survey</li> <li>• 1,002 members of the general public aged 16+</li> <li>• Conducted via the Beaufort Wales Omnibus Survey</li> <li>• In 2018</li> </ul>	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.

<p><a href="#"><u>Public attitudes to physical punishment of children: Wave 2 survey, 2019</u></a></p> <p><b>Published: 2021</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantitative – face-to-face survey</li> <li>• 1,002 members of the general public aged 16+</li> <li>• Conducted via the Beaufort Wales Omnibus Survey</li> <li>• In 2019</li> </ul>	<p>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</p>
<p><a href="#"><u>Public attitudes to physical punishment of children: Wave 3 survey, 2020</u></a></p> <p><b>Published: 2021</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantitative – online survey</li> <li>• 1,002 members of the general public aged 16+</li> <li>• Conducted via the Beaufort Wales Omnibus Survey</li> <li>• In 2020</li> </ul>	<p>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 surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019.</p>
<p><b>Public attitudes to physical punishment of children: Wave 4 survey, 2021</b></p> <p><b>Published: 2022</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantitative – online survey</li> <li>• 1,000 members of the general public aged 16+</li> <li>• Conducted via the Beaufort Wales Omnibus Survey</li> <li>• In 2021</li> </ul>	<p>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 surveys conducted in 2018, 2019 and 2020.</p>

## Annex B – 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?**

OPEN ENDED

**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)
- Other (please specify)

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 21 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 C – 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 March 2022, November 2020 and November 2021 surveys from being carried out in its previous manner of face-to-face interviewing at selected sample points throughout Wales. Instead interviews for the March 2022, November 2020 and November 2021 surveys 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 or more 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 D – Description of change in legislation presented to respondents in March 2022 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 21 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 E – Definition of social grades

Table A1.2, below, provides a definition of the social grade classification<sup>8</sup> used in the analysis

**Table A1.2: Social grade definitions**

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

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<sup>8</sup> [National Readership Survey definitions](#)

## Annex F – Sub-sample sizes

Table A1.3, 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 A1.3: Sub-group sample sizes**

Sub-sample	Unweighted sample	Weighted sample
<b>Gender<sup>9</sup></b>		
Male	422	486
Female	575	511
<b>Age</b>		
16-34	370	293
35-54	364	326
55+	266	381
<b>Social grade</b>		
ABC1	607	520
C2DE	393	480
<b>Carer of child aged 7 or under<sup>10</sup></b>		
Yes	285	262
No	711	733

<sup>9</sup> Male and Female total adds up to 997. There were also 3 respondents who answered 'other' or 'prefer not to say'

<sup>10</sup> Carer of child aged 7 or under total adds up to 996. There were also 4 respondents who answered 'prefer not to say'