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Public attitudes to physical punishment of children: Wave 6 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 Wales¹ 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 came 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 means 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 promote and support positive parenting through to summer 2021. A multi-media public awareness campaign, which included 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, 2021 and March 2022 on public attitudes towards

¹ As of May 2020, the National Assembly for Wales has been renamed to Senedd Cymru

physical punishment of children including the legislation. The fieldwork for this survey was carried out between 7 and 27 November 2022, around 8 months after legislation came into force. The Welsh Government intends to continue 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 surveys

1.5 Fieldwork for the 2020, 2021 and March 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 March 2022 surveys were completed via an online self-completion method using an online panel². The November 2022 survey was also completed in this way, as will any future waves, as the survey vehicle, the Beaufort Wales Omnibus Survey has permanently moved to this data collection method. 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. Any changes in results, or lack of change 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. More information about the survey method for November 2022 can be found in Annex C.

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

³Section 9.3

1.3 About this report

1.8 The findings outlined in this report are based on research conducted on the 7 – 27 November 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 similar sets of questions asked as part of the November 2018, November 2019, November 2020, November 2021 and March 2022 Beaufort Wales Omnibus surveys. Any amendments (mostly minor) to the questionnaire between waves can be found in Annex B. 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 grade⁴, 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.

1.10 Please note percentages in some graphs and tables in this report, where the respondent can choose one answer only, may not add up to 100% and may total 99% or 101% because of rounding to the nearest whole number. For example, a graph may show three answers - 40%, 33% and 26% (totalling 99%) when the unrounded percentages may be 40.4%, 33.3% and 26.3% respectively.

⁴ Social grade is a classification system based on the occupation of the chief income earner in the household.

1.4 Statistical testing

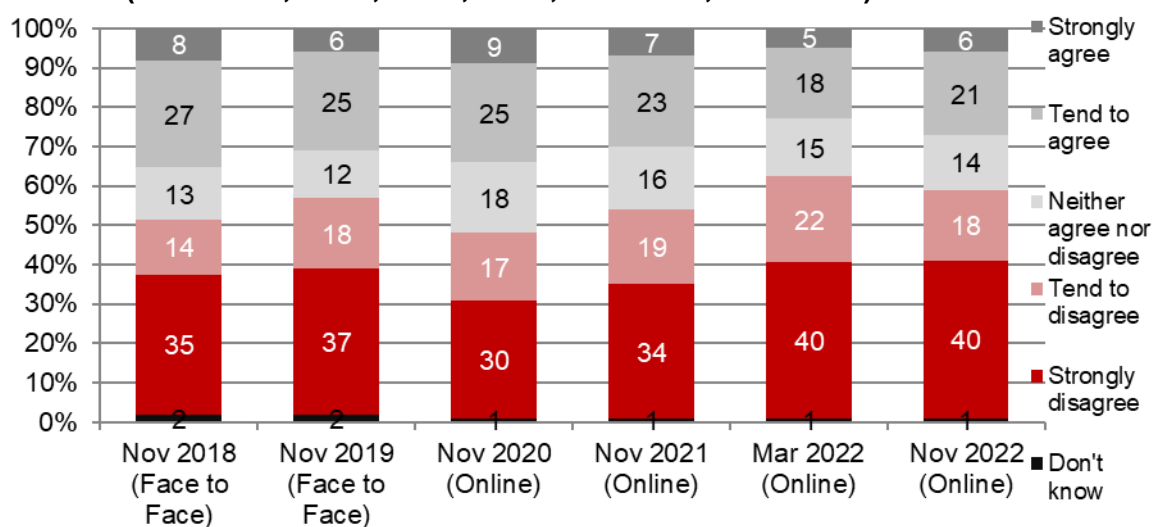
1.11 Throughout this report comparisons are made between different groups of the population (for example, those of different age groups or gender) to understand if they have varying attitudes, behaviours, or knowledge. There are also comparisons between the different years of the survey to explore if 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 are likely to reflect a genuine difference over time or between population groups.

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 six 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 27% agreed and 58% 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 March 2022 survey (23% agreed, 62% disagreed). However, the difference in the pattern of results between the two time periods was not statistically significant.

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

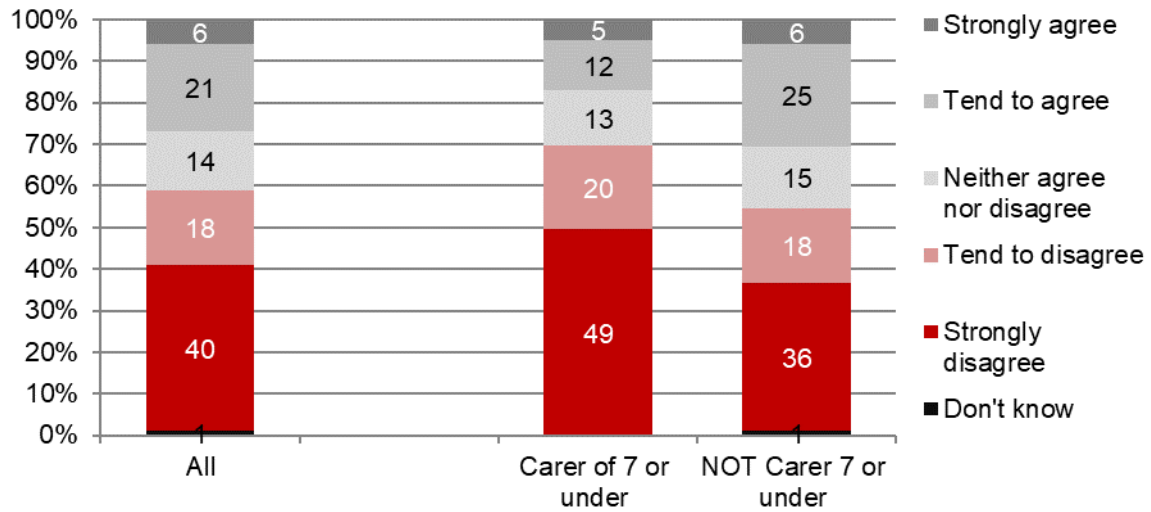


Base: All – 2018 (1,002), 2019 (1,002), 2020 (1,002), 2021 (1,000), Mar 2022 (1,000), Nov 2022 (1,000)

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* – 69% compared with 54% among those who do not have caring responsibilities for those aged seven and under (figure 2.2). This difference is statistically significant. Similar

differences among those who had / did not have caring responsibilities for under 7s were found in March 2022 and other previous waves of the survey.

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 - November 2022)

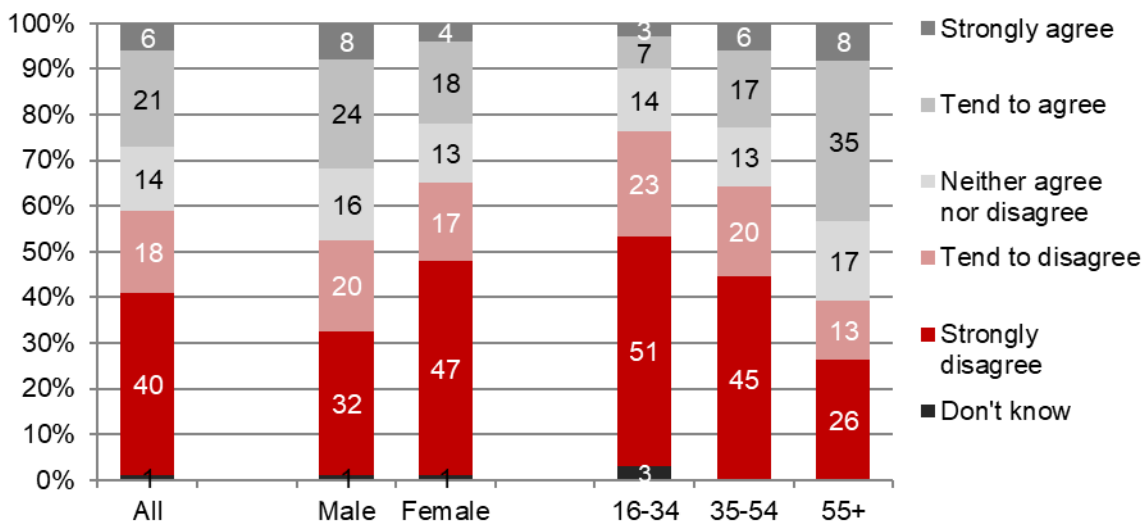


Base: All (1,000), Regular carer of 7 or under (333), Not a regular carer of 7 or under (662)

2.4 As shown in figure 2.3, when we examine this by age of respondent, those in the older age group (55+) were more likely to agree that *it is sometimes necessary to smack a child* – at 43%, this was around four times the number aged 16-34 who held this view (10%). Whilst less pronounced than age, a difference in opinion was also found by gender with 31% of men agreeing with the statement compared with 23% of women. The differences reported by age and gender were statistically significant. Similar differences by age and gender were found in March 2022 and in 2021.

2.5 In November 2022, the proportions of those aged 16-34 and 35-54 agreeing and disagreeing with *it is sometimes necessary to smack a child* are very similar to those observed in March 2022. There is, however, a difference across these time periods in the opinion of those aged 55+. In the latest survey, opinion of whether *it is sometimes necessary to smack a child* was evenly split among this older age group (43% agree, 40% disagree) whereas in March 2022 more were in disagreement (33% agree vs 48% disagree). This difference is statistically significant.

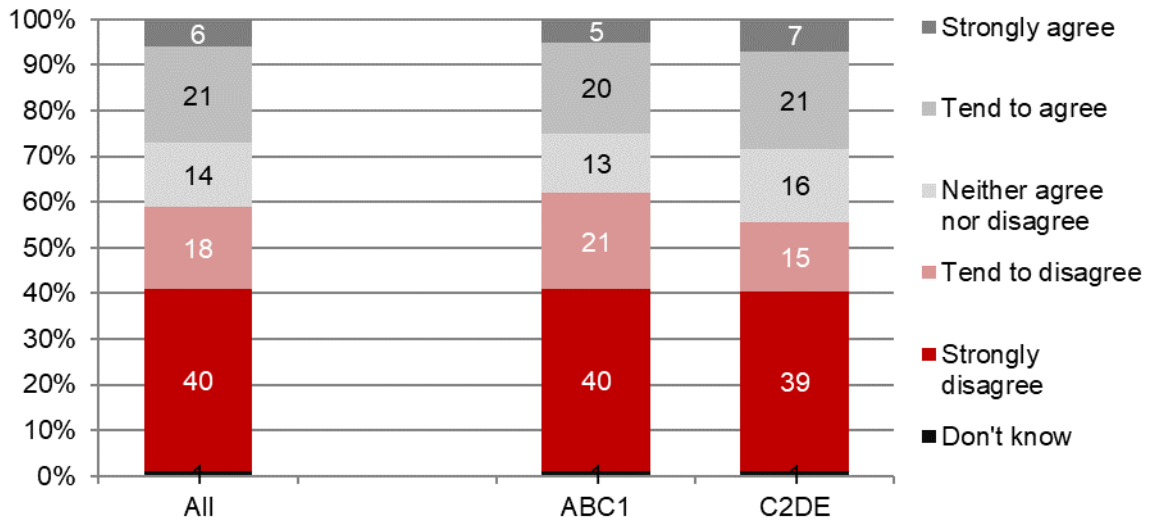
Figure 2.3: Percentage in agreement that ‘it is sometimes necessary to smack a child’ (All and by gender and by age group - November 2022)



Base: All (1,000), Male (405), Female (591), 16-34 (338), 35-54 (382), 55+ (280)

2.6 Figure 2.4 shows findings for the same measure by social grade. The opinions of those in social grades ABC1⁵ were similar to those in social grades C2DE in that any difference was not statistically significant. This consolidates the same finding from 2019, 2020, 2021 and March 2022 surveys.

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



Base: All (1,000), ABC1 (617), C2DE (383)

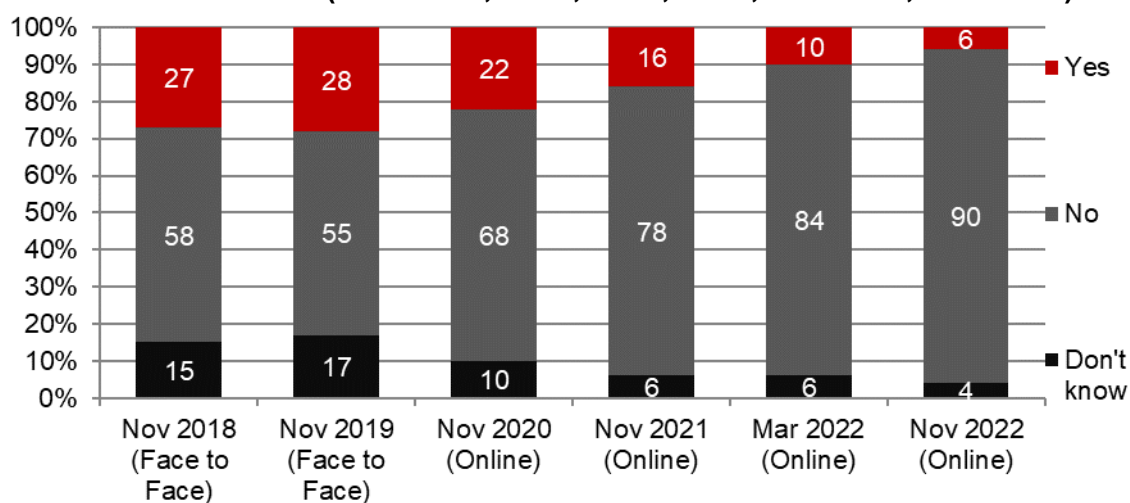
⁵ Definitions of social grades A,B,C1,C2,D,E can be found in Annex E

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 (7 – 27 November 2022), was that parents and adults acting in *loco parentis* (acting with parental responsibility) were not 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 (90%) of people surveyed in November 2022 correctly thought that the law did not allow parents to smack their children. Only 6% thought the law did allow parents to smack and the remaining 4% reported being unsure. As shown in figure 3.1, even prior to the law change a majority of the public believed that the law did not allow parents to smack their children. This proportion has steadily grown over the last 5 years to its highpoint in the most recent survey. The difference in response between the November 2022 survey and March 2022 (84% thought the law did not allow parents to smack their children) is statistically significant.

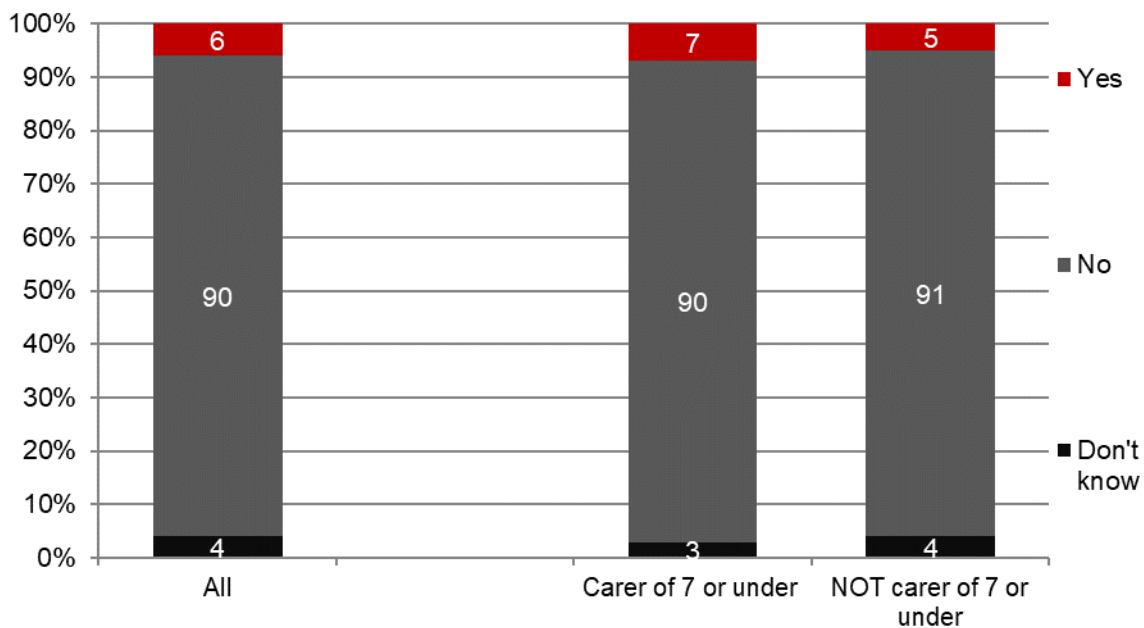
Figure 3.1: Percentage who believe that the law currently allows parents to smack their children (All – 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, Mar 2022, Nov 2022)



Base: All – 2018 (1,002), 2019 (1,002), 2020 (1,002), 2021 (1,000) Mar 2022 (1,000), Nov 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 not allowed (90% and 91% respectively).

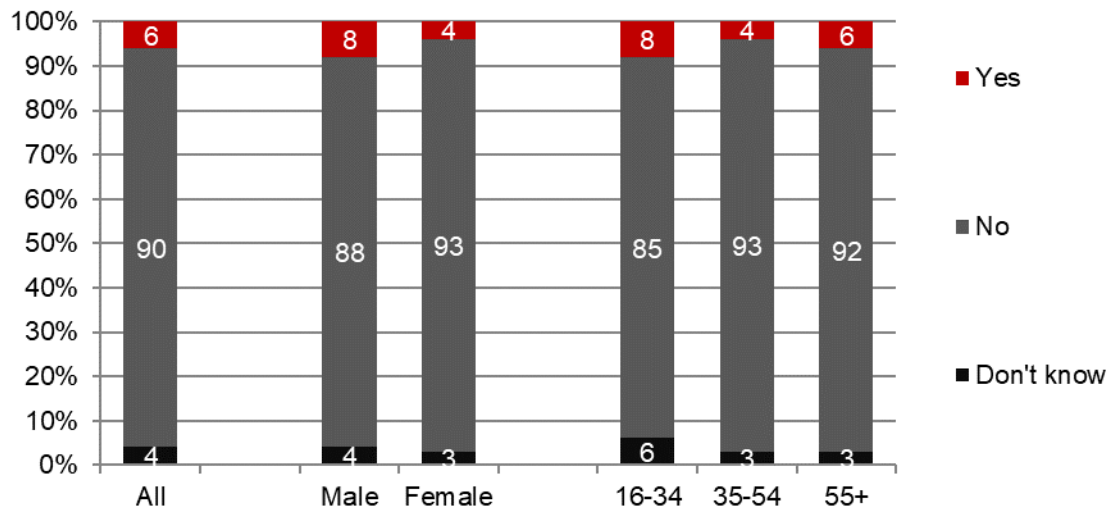
Figure 3.2: Percentage who believe that the law currently allows parents to smack their children (All and by whether regular carer of child aged seven or under - November 2022)



Base: All – Regular carer of 7 or under (333), NOT regular carer of 7 or under (662)

3.4 The vast majority of both men and women and all age groups were aware that the law does not allow parents to smack their children. However, awareness was highest amongst women (93% vs 88% for men) and those aged 35-54 and 55+ (93% and 92% respectively vs 85% for 16-34s). These differences were statistically significant.

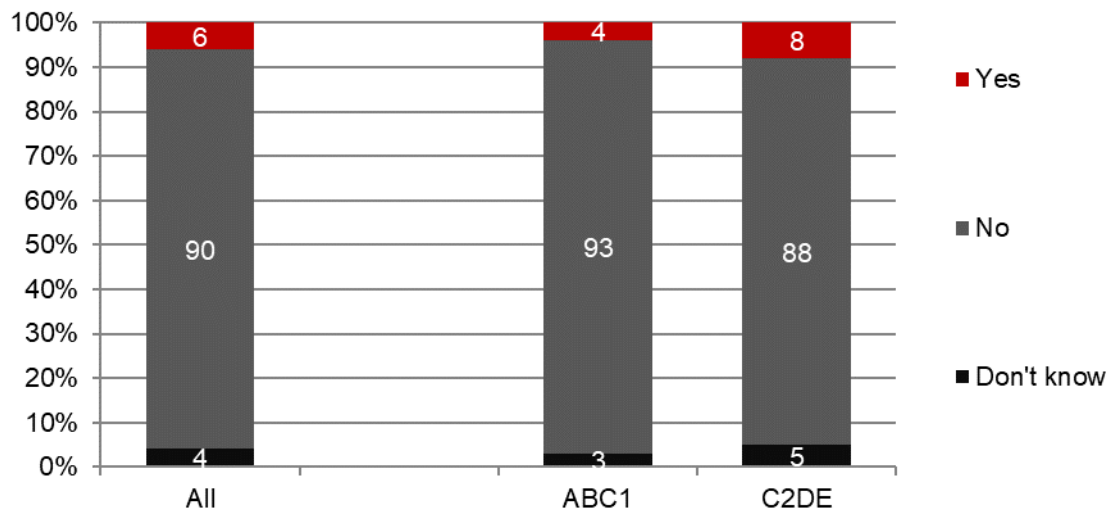
Figure 3.3: Percentage who believe that the law currently allows parents to smack their children (All and by gender and by age group - November 2022)



Base: All (1,000), Male (405), Female (591), 16-34 (338), 35-54 (382), 55+ (280)

3.5 There are similar differences by social grade with 93% of ABC1s aware the law does not allow parents to smack their children compared with 88% of C2DEs. This difference was statistically significant.

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

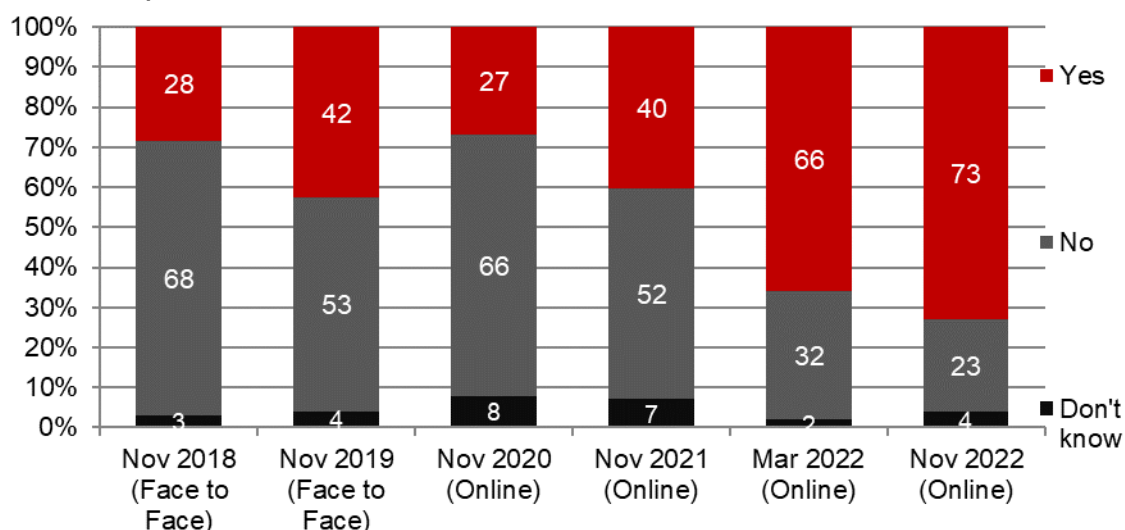


Base: All (1,000), ABC1 (617), C2DE (383)

4. Awareness of changes to legislation

4.1 In the latest survey, approaching three-quarters (73%) of people surveyed reported that they were aware of changes to the law around physical punishment of children in the last year at an unprompted level⁶. This compares to around two-thirds (66%) who were aware in March 2022. This increase in awareness of the change since March 2022 is statistically significant. This continues a trend of increasing awareness of a change in legislation since November 2020 when just over a quarter were aware (27%).

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

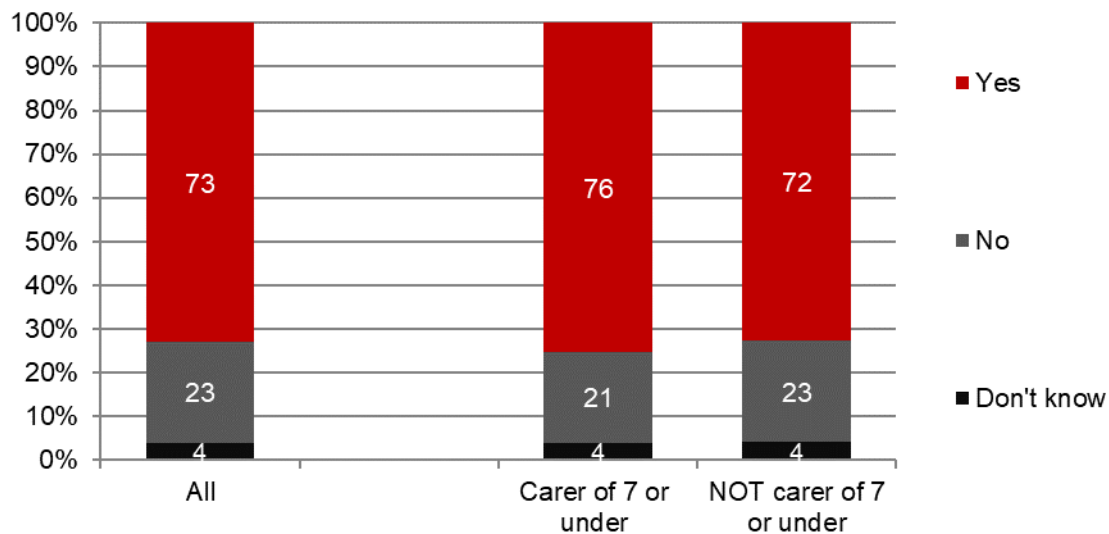


Base: All – 2018 (1,002), 2019 (1,002), 2020 (1,002), 2021 (1,000), Mar 2022 (1,000), Nov 2022 (1,000)

4.2 Awareness of proposed changes to the law around physical punishment of children was slightly higher among carers of children seven and under than those who did not have these responsibilities – 76% vs. 72% (figure 4.2). This difference was not statistically significant. This represents a narrowing of the gap in awareness of legislation change between these two groups as in March 2022 those with caring responsibilities for under 7s were more likely (statistically significant) to be aware of the legislation change than those without these responsibilities (77% vs. 63%).

⁶ 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 in the last year?'. This question was amended slightly in November 2022 to include 'in the last year' now that the new law had been in place for several months.

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

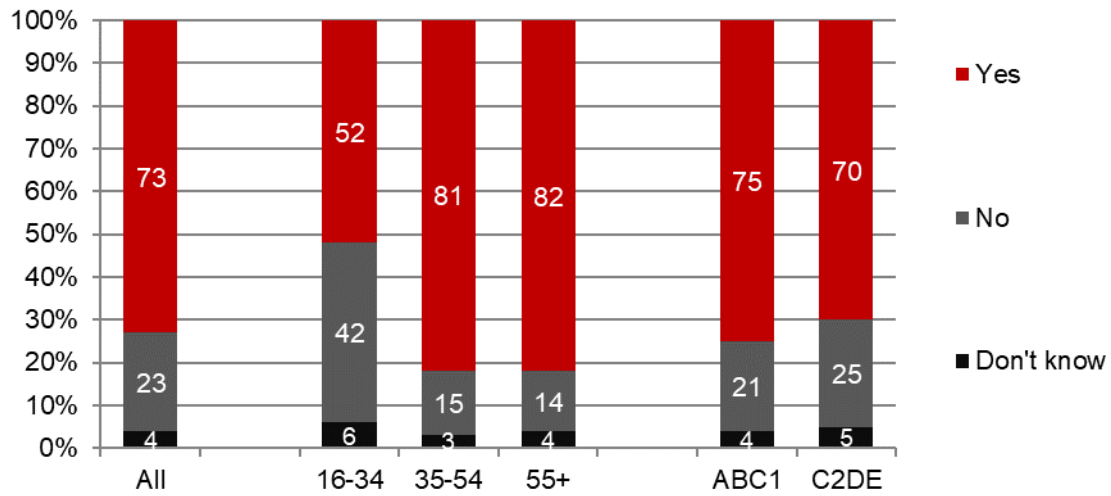


Base: All (1,000), Regular carer of 7 or under (333), Not a regular carer of 7 or under (662)

4.3 As shown in figure 4.3, there is little difference between awareness of the changes in legislation among different social grade groupings (75% ABC1s, 70% C2DEs) and this consolidates the finding from March 2022.

4.4 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+ (52% vs. 81% & 82%). This difference was also statistically significant. Similar differences were also found in March 2022.

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



Base: All (1,000), 16-34 (338), 35-54 (382), 55+ (280), ABC1 (617), C2DE (383)

4.5 Those who reported being aware of changes in legislation (733 respondents) were asked to describe in their own words how they thought the law has changed. 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 (88%) of those aware of a change spontaneously mentioned this.

Table 4.1: Can you tell me how you think the law has changed? - November 2022 [Unprompted]

| Response | Percentage of respondents (Number of respondents) |
|---|--|
| [Complete] ban on smacking \ physical punishment \ it will be illegal | 88 (n.643) |
| Other responses reported by less than 5 per cent of respondents | |
| Good idea \ don't agree with smacking | |
| More strict | |
| No longer can be used as a legal defence | |
| No physical contact at all | |
| Penalties for those who smack children | |
| Stupid law \ government should not be involved \ other negative comment about law | |
| To protect children | |

Base: Those aware of the law change around physical punishment of children – unprompted (733)

(a) Other responses are presented alphabetically

4.6 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 2022 although the proportion stating this has increased over time before levelling off in the last two survey waves (64%,69%,73%,84%, 89% and 88% respectively).

4.7 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 (51% mentioning it). The sources of awareness of the change cited in the November 2022 survey are largely mentioned at similar levels to previous surveys. The main exceptions are increases in mentions for some of the key components of the public awareness campaign launched in recent years – for example, 26% of those aware of the change cited TV advertising as the source of

their awareness in November 2022 compared with 5% in 2020. Similarly, radio advertising was mentioned by 11% in November 2022 compared with 2% in 2020.

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

| Response | Percentage of respondents (Number of respondents) |
|--|--|
| On TV – news \ programme | 51 (n.370) |
| On TV advertising | 26 (n.188) |
| On radio – news \ programme | 16 (n.120) |
| Online website - news item | 15 (n.106) |
| Facebook | 13 (n.96) |
| Social media (excluding Facebook) | 13 (n.91) |
| Radio - advertising | 11 (n.80) |
| National Wales newspaper - news \ article | 10 (n.76) |
| Someone told me (family \ friends) | 10 (n.72) |
| Local newspaper - news \ article | 10 (n.71) |
| National UK newspaper - news \ article | 9 (n.65) |
| Online advertising | 7 (n.50) |
| National Wales newspaper - advertising | 6 (n.47) |
| Someone told me (professional) | 6 (n.47) |
| Other responses reported by less than 5 per cent of respondents | |
| Local newspaper – advertising | |
| Magazine | |
| National UK newspaper - advertising | |
| Online website - other | |

Base: Those aware of changes to the law around physical punishment of children – unprompted (733)

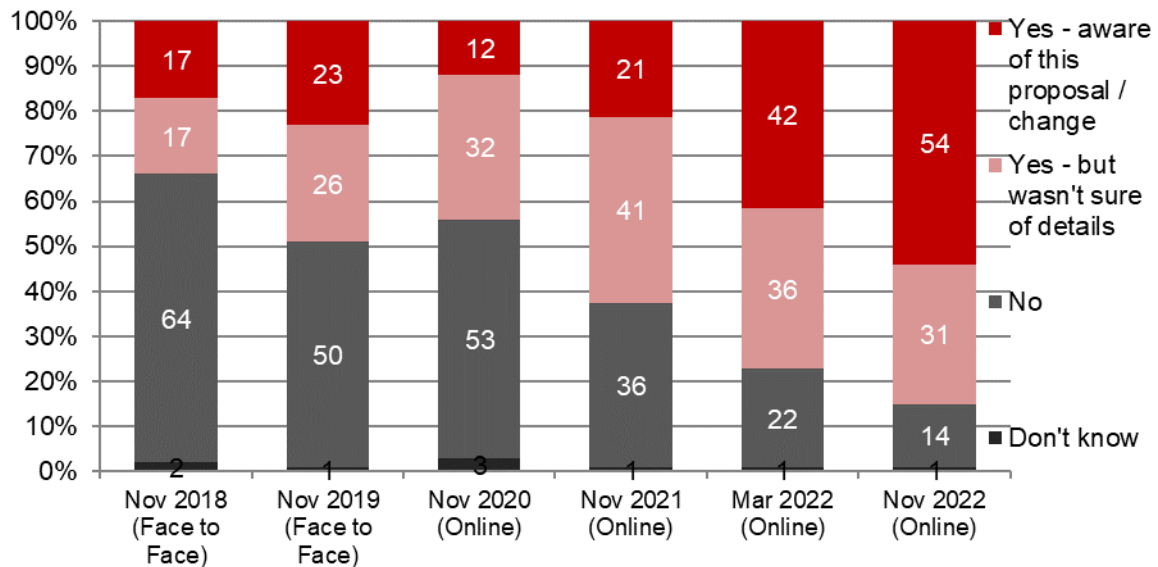
(a) Table may add up to more than 100 per cent as respondents were able to give more than one answer

(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 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 85% knew something about the change consisting of 54% stating they were aware of it and 31% who were aware but not sure about the details.

4.9 This continues the trend of increasing awareness since November 2020 and the difference between the latest finding (85% aware) and the previous survey in March 2022 (78% aware) is statistically significant.

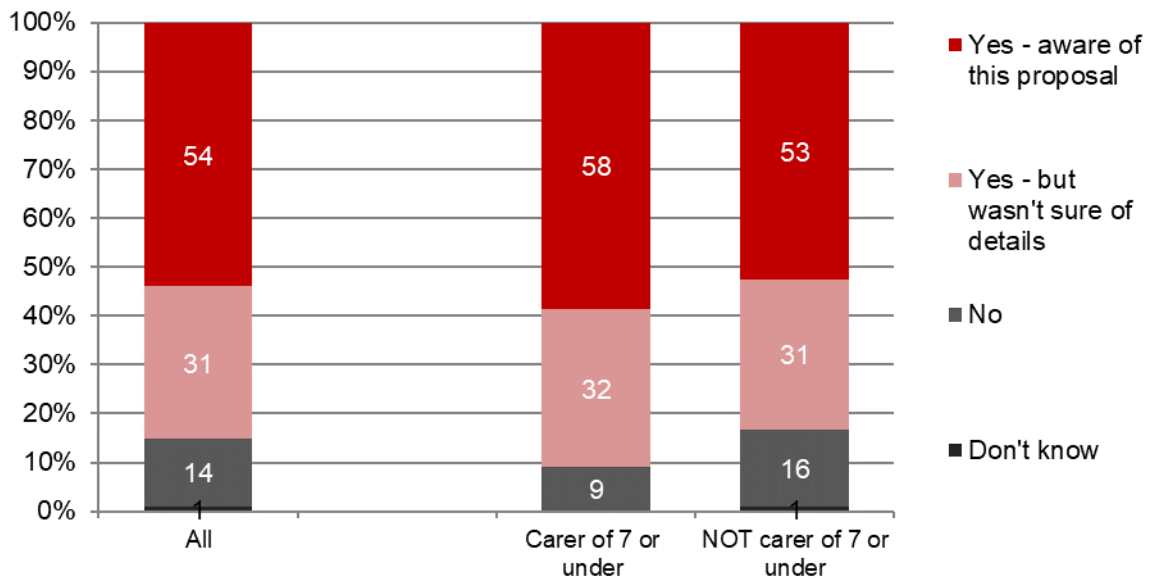
Figure 4.4: Percentage aware of changes in legislation around physical punishment of children [Prompted] (All – 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, Mar 2022, Nov 2022)



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

4.10 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 – 91% compared with 84% (figure 4.5). This difference was statistically significant.

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 - November 2022)

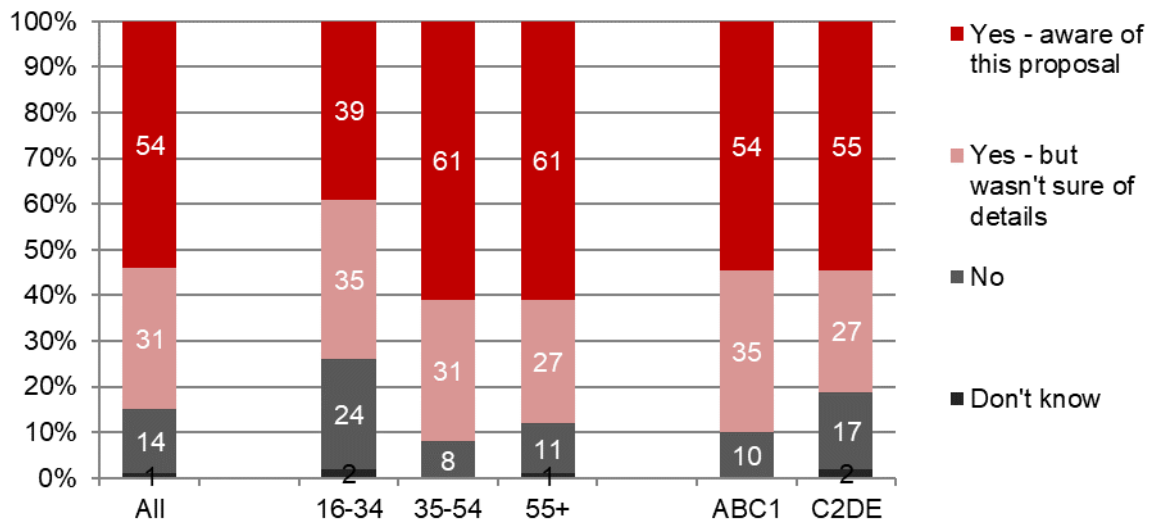


Base: All (1,000), Regular carer of 7 or under (333), Not a regular carer of 7 or under (662)

4.11 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 in comparison with the March 2022 survey (85% to 91% and 75% to 84% respectively). However, it is only the latter group (those without caring responsibilities for under 7s) where this difference over time is statistically significant.

4.12 In terms of age those aged 16-34 were less likely to be aware of the legislation at this prompted level – 74% compared with 92% and 88% for those aged 35-54 and 55+ respectively. Those in social grades ABC1 were more likely, at this prompted level, to be aware of the law change – 89% vs. 81%. These differences were statistically significant.

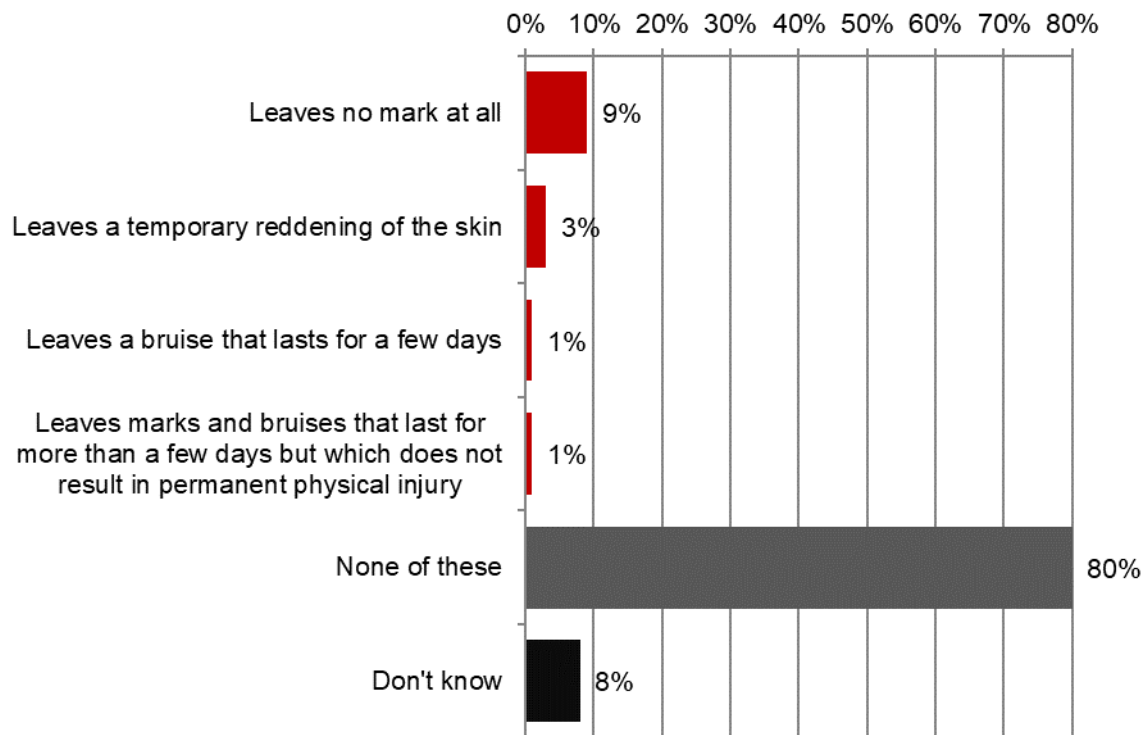
Figure 4.6: Percentage aware of changes in legislation around physical punishment of children [Prompted] (All and by age group and social grade - November 2022)



Base: All (1,000), 16-34 (338), 35-54 (382), 55+ (280), ABC1 (617), C2DE (383)

4.13 Having been informed that there had been a change to the law (Annex D), respondents were asked whether they thought any levels of punishment (shown in figure 4.7) were still allowed. Around 1 in 10 (9%) thought that physical punishment that ‘[left] no mark at all’ on the child would still be allowed. Only very small proportions thought that higher levels of physical punishment such as something that ‘leaves a temporary reddening on the skin (3%), ‘leaves a bruise for a few days’ (1%) or ‘leaves marks and bruises that last for more than a few days but does not result in permanent physical injury’ (1%) would still be allowed. Just under a fifth (19%) reported that they ‘[did not] know’ what level of punishment would be allowed.

Figure 4.7: Percentage who thought that each level of punishment would still be allowed following the law change – November 2022



Base: All – November 2022 (1,000)

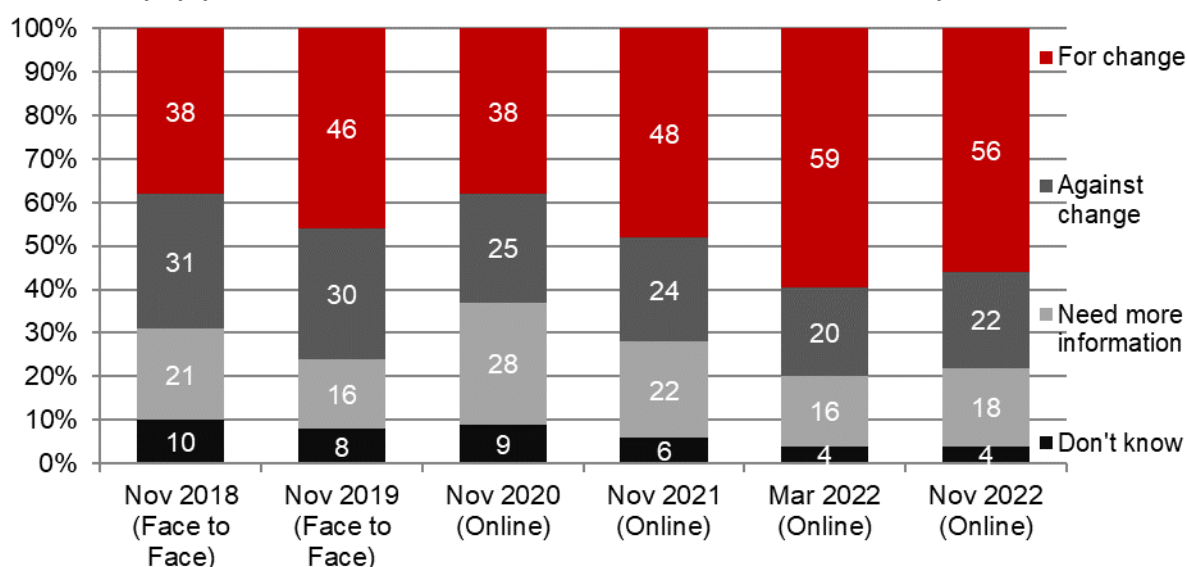
5. Opinion of changes to legislation

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. As shown in figure 5.1, in the latest survey almost 56% were in favour of the removal of the defence of reasonable punishment. This is slightly lower than in March 2022 (59%) but the difference was not statistically significant.

5.2 Whilst opinion has remained relatively unchanged since March 2022, the period prior to this has seen an increase in support for the change from 38% in 2020 to 58% in March 2022. This 20-percentage point increase in support for the change in legislation over this time period is not necessarily mirrored by an equivalent decline in opposition to the change. This (opposition to the change) has remained relatively consistent at around 20-25% of the population over recent years.

5.3 Therefore, the change in support for the legislation over time is mostly because of a decrease in the proportions 'wanting more information / were unsure of their opinion'.

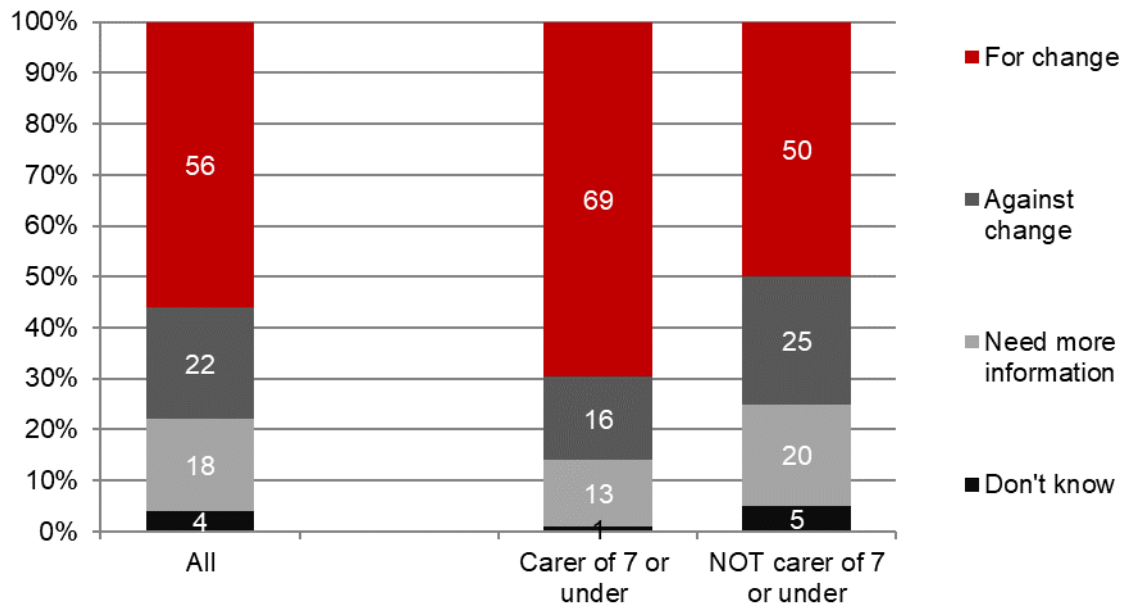
Figure 5.1: Opinion of change in legislation on physical punishment of children (%) (All – 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, Mar 2022, Nov 2022)



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

5.4 Those with caring responsibilities for children aged seven and under were more likely to be in favour of the proposed change (69% in favour, 16% against) compared with those who did not have these responsibilities (50% in favour, 25% against). These differences were statistically significant.

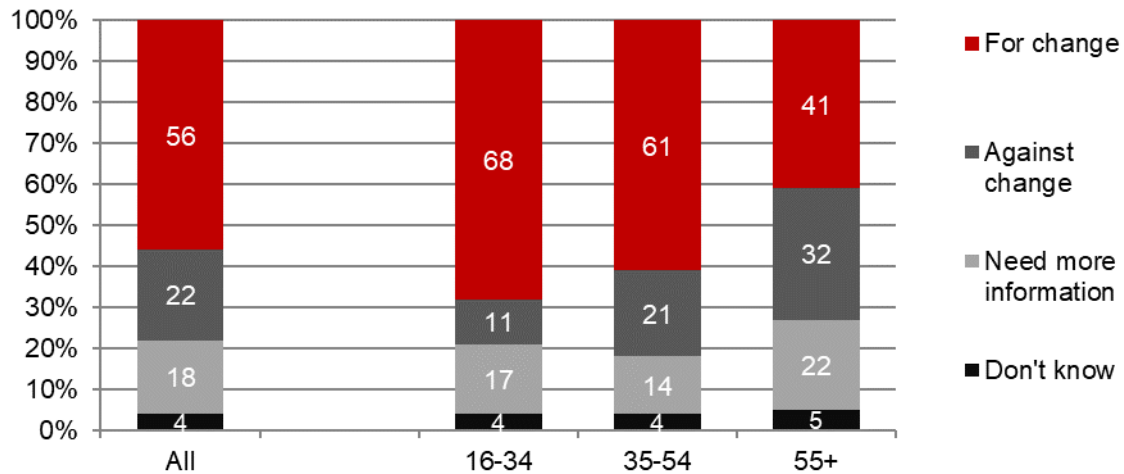
Figure 5.2: Opinion of change in legislation on physical punishment of children (%) (All and by whether regular carer of child aged seven or under - November 2022)



Base: All (1,000), Regular carer of 7 or under (333), Not a regular carer of 7 or under (662)

5.5 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 around two-fifths (41%) in support of the change and approximately 3 in 10 (32%) being against it. These differences by age were statistically significant. Similar differences by age were also found in all previous surveys.

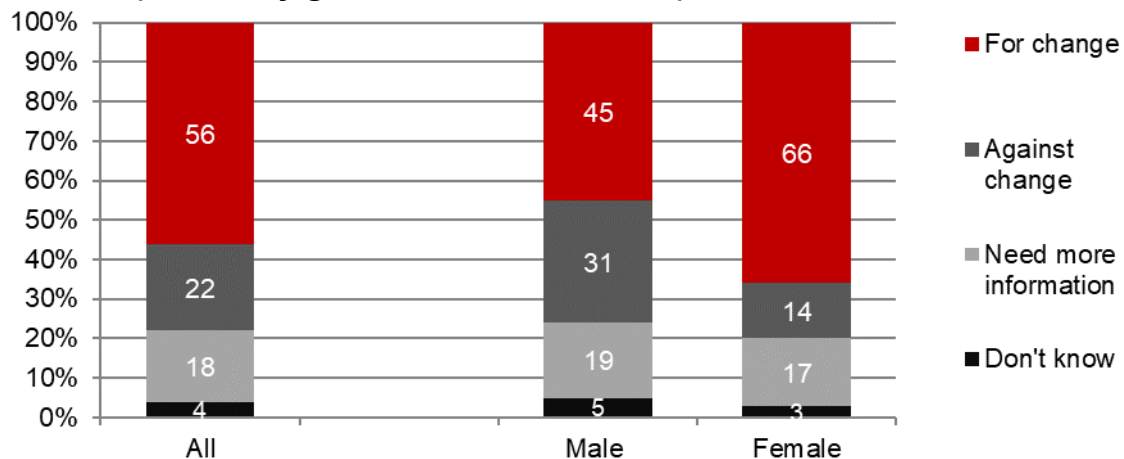
Figure 5.3: Opinion of change in legislation on physical punishment of children (All and by age group - November 2022)



Base: All (1,000), 16-34 (338), 35-54 (382), 55+ (280)

5.6 In the November 2022 survey (as in March 2022, 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 (66%) than against it (14%). Whilst more men were in favour of the change than against it, the gap between the two proportions was narrower (45% in favour, 31% against). These differences by gender are statistically significant.

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



Base: All (1,000), Male (405), Female (591)

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' (46% of those who were for the change). This was also the most frequent response in all previous surveys.

5.8 Some highlighted that '[the change in legislation] would help protect children' (10%), that '[smacking] is harmful to children' (8%), or that 'it's abuse' (9%). Others felt that 'it [didn't] work' (7%), that 'there are [alternatives to] ensure good behaviour' (14%) and that 'it's not a good lesson' (10%).

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? - November 2022 [Unprompted]

| Response | Percentage of respondents (Number of respondents) |
|--|--|
| Don't agree with smacking \ physically punishing children | 46 (n.255) |
| There are other ways of ensuring good behaviour \ discipline | 14 (n.76) |
| It will help protect children | 10 (n.55) |
| It's abuse \ can lead to abuse | 9 (n.51) |
| It's harmful to children | 8 (n.42) |
| It's not a good lesson | 7 (n.41) |
| It doesn't work \ not necessary | 7 (n.39) |
| It encourages violence \ makes violence acceptable | 5 (n.26) |
| 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 | |
| I was hit as a child | |
| Make things clearer \ parents | |
| 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 (556)

(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 (194 respondents), one of the principal reasons for opposing the change included controlling behaviour and discipline. Around two fifths (43%) of those against change thought that 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 \ kids are badly behaved \ no respect these days’ (27%).

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’ (15%).

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? - November 2022 [Unprompted]

| Response | Percentage of respondents (Number of respondents) |
|--|--|
| Needed to control behaviour \ discipline child \ teach respect \ show boundaries | 43 (n.96) |
| There's no discipline these days \ kids are badly behaved \ no respect | 27 (n.60) |
| Doesn't do any harm \ didn't harm me \ my kids | 17 (n.37) |
| Ok if doesn't go too far \ if reasonable punishment | 15 (n.34) |
| Government should not get involved | 8 (n.18) |
| Parent should be allowed to punish child \ should have choice \ make decision | 7 (n.16) |
| OK when child is in danger | 5 (n.11) |
| Other responses reported by less than 5 per cent of respondents | |
| Difficult to police \ enforce \ resource | |
| Each circumstance \ child is different | |
| Not needed | |
| Over the top \ not reasonable | |

Base: Those against the change to the law on physical punishment of children in Wales (194)

(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 (164 respondents) principally either wanted more detail or information on how it would work (24% 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 (18%)
- Definitions \ examples (10%)

5.13 A further reason for wanting more information before they decide was that they wanted to see research / evidence into the impact of smacking (15%). This reason was more prevalent than in previous surveys.

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

| Response | Percentage of respondents (Number of respondents) |
|--|--|
| More detail \ more info \ info on current law \ how it would work | 25 (n.45) |
| What constitutes smacking \ assault, what is allowed vs. not allowed | 18 (n.32) |
| Research \ evidence into impact of smacking | 15 (n.27) |
| Definitions \ examples | 10 (n.18) |
| How it will be policed \ enforced \ resourced | 5 (n.9) |
| Don't know | 14 (n.24) |
| Other responses reported by less than 5 per cent of respondents | |
| Definition of reasonable punishment | |
| Need time to think about it \ 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 (164)

(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 In November 2022, a majority of the public disagree (58%) that 'it is sometimes necessary to smack a child' and this is relatively unchanged from March 2022. 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'.

6.2 With the legislation in place for past 8 months, the proportion of the population who believe that parents can still smack their children had reduced to a very small minority (6%). A slightly higher proportion (9%) however did report that they thought that smacking which did not leave a red mark would be allowed.

6.3 Awareness that there are changes to the law around physical punishment of children continues to grow in the November 2022 survey, eight months after the introduction of the new legislation. When asked at an unprompted level if they were aware of the legislative change around physical punishment of children, three-quarters (73%) said they knew of something. This is almost double the proportion who reported being aware of the change a year ago (40%) 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, 85% report that they have an awareness of this compared with 62% in 2021 and 78% in March 2022. 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.






6.5 The proportion who are in favour of the removal of the defence of reasonable punishment (56%) appears to have stabilised in November 2022 after having increased in the previous two survey waves (March 2022 and November 2021). The increases seen prior to November 2022 were mostly due to fewer reporting that they needed more information or were unsure. The proportion opposed to the change has varied little over recent years – it now stands at 22% compared with 25% in

November 2020. Those who oppose the change are more likely to be men, in the older age groups and without caring responsibilities for the 7s and under.

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 eight years.

Table A1.1: Relevant Previous Welsh Government Research

| Title | Report | Method and sample | Purpose |
|---|---|--|--|
| <p><u>Attitudes to parenting practices and child discipline</u></p> <p>Published: 2014</p> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualitative • 14 focus groups (70 participants) • Parents of children under 18 • In 2013 | <p>To explore parents' views on parenting practice including discipline. The findings were used to inform parenting support.</p> |
| <p><u>Managing children's behaviour, attitudes and practices: Baseline Survey 2013</u></p> <p>Published: 2014</p> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative Omnibus Survey • 1,022 adults (56% ever parents, 27% parents of under 18s) • In 2013 | <p>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.</p> |
| <p><u>Parental attitudes towards managing young children's behaviour 2015</u></p> <p>Published: 2016</p> |  | <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 | <p>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></p> |
| <p><u>Parental attitudes towards managing young children's behaviour 2017</u></p> <p>Published: 2018</p> |  | <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 | <p>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.</p> |
| <p><u>Public attitudes to physical punishment of children: Baseline survey, 2018</u></p> <p>Published: 2019</p> |  | <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 | <p>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</p> |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| | | | and level of support for this change. |
| <p>Public attitudes to physical punishment of children: Wave 2 survey, 2019</p> <p>Published: 2021</p> | | <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 | <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>Public attitudes to physical punishment of children: Wave 3 survey, 2020</p> <p>Published: 2021</p> | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative – online survey • 1,002 members of the general public aged 16+ • Conducted via the Beaufort Wales Omnibus Survey • In 2020 | <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>Public attitudes to physical punishment of children: Wave 4 survey, 2021</p> <p>Published: 2023</p> | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative – online survey • 1,000 members of the general public aged 16+ • Conducted via the Beaufort Wales Omnibus Survey • In 2021 | <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> |
| <p>Public attitudes to physical punishment of children: Wave 5 survey, 2021</p> <p>Published: 2023</p> | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative – online survey • 1,000 members of the general public aged 16+ • Conducted via the Beaufort Wales Omnibus Survey • In March 2022 | <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, 2020 and 2021.</p> |

Annex B – Survey questionnaire

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. Are you aware of any changes to the law around physical punishment of children in the last year?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

IF YES

4. Can you tell me how you think the law has changed? *Please write in*

IF YES

5. How did you become aware of the change to the law around physical punishment of children? *Select all that apply*

- 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 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, has changed. Parents previously were 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. Since 21 March 2022, the defence of reasonable punishment is no longer 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.

ASK ALL

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

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

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

I am in favour of the law change that removes the defence of reasonable punishment
I am against the law change that removes the defence of reasonable punishment
I need more information to decide
Don't know

8. a) Can you tell me why you are in favour of the law change on physical punishment of children in Wales? *Please write in*

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

c) Can you tell me what additional information you need? Please write in

9. Now that there has been a law change, which, if any, of the following do you think are still allowed?

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

None of these

Don't know

Refused

Note on changes to the questionnaire over time:

There were small amendments to the 2020, 2021 and March 2022 surveys in comparison to the 2018 and 2019 surveys. These were:

- 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 (prompted rather than spontaneous) applied at question 3 for 'don't know' and 'refused' responses codes.
- In addition (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.

Finally, and as a result of the legislation coming into force before the most recent survey, the November 2022 survey included some further minor amendments:

- Q3 'Are you aware of any changes to the law around physical punishment of children in the last year?'. This question was amended slightly in November 2022 to include 'in the last year' now that the new law had been in place for several months.
- Q4 changed to how the law 'has changed' rather than 'will change' on previous editions.
- Q6,7,8a/b referred to 'law change' rather 'change to the law'

A more substantive change in November 2022 was that the question about levels of punishment that were allowed which changed from *The law does currently allow parents to physically punish their children (which includes smacking). What level of punishment do you think the law allows?* to *Now that there has been a law change, which, if any, of the following do you think are still allowed?* Given that this is a fundamental change to the question this data is no longer presented as a time series in this report.

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 November 2020, November 2021 and March 2022 surveys from being carried out in its previous manner of face-to-face interviewing at selected sample points throughout Wales. Instead interviews for the November 2020, November 2021 and March 2022 surveys were undertaken online using the Cint online panel exchange platform. The November 2022 survey was also undertaken online as the Omnibus survey moved permanently to an online method.

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 November 2022 survey

In Wales, the law around physical punishment, including smacking, has changed. Parents previously were 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. Since 21 March 2022, the defence of reasonable punishment is no longer 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 classification⁷ used in the analysis

Table A1.2: 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 |

⁷[National Readership Survey definitions: Social Grade](#)

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 |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|
| Gender⁸ | | |
| Male | 405 | 485 |
| Female | 591 | 511 |
| Age | | |
| 16-34 | 338 | 295 |
| 35-54 | 382 | 325 |
| 55+ | 280 | 380 |
| Social grade | | |
| ABC1 | 617 | 520 |
| C2DE | 383 | 480 |
| Carer of child aged 7 or under⁹ | | |
| Yes | 333 | 298 |
| No | 662 | 697 |

⁸ Male and Female total adds up to 996. There were also 4 respondents who answered 'other' or 'prefer not to say'

⁹ Carer of child aged 7 or under total adds up to 995. There were also 5 respondents who answered 'prefer not to say'