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Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020: evidence and data synthesis



Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

This document is also available in Welsh.

Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020: evidence and data synthesis.

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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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Glossary

Cafcass Cymru

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service Cymru

CPS

Crown Prosecution Service

FTE

Full-time equivalent

NFA

No further action

Out of court / Out of court disposal/ Out of Court Parenting Support (OOCPS)

Out-of-Court Disposals (OOCs), such as Community Resolutions and Conditional Cautions, offer an alternative to prosecution for less serious offences by focusing on rehabilitation through conditions like attending a course or participating in other interventions. In this report, it refers specifically to Out of Court Parenting Support, which requires parents to engage with parenting support as a condition of resolution.

PIR

Post-implementation review

RCPCH

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

The Act

Refers to the Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020, which makes it illegal for anyone to physically punish a child in Wales by removing the legal defence of “reasonable punishment”.

UNCRC

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. An international human rights treaty that sets out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children. The Act aligns with Article 19 of the UNCRC, which protects children from all forms of violence.

1. Introduction

1.1. International context

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ([UNCRC](#)), ratified in the UK in 1991, is an international human rights treaty that outlines the fundamental rights of every child. Wales was an early leader amongst the UK nations in embedding the UNCRC in domestic law through the [Rights of Children and Young Persons \(Wales\) Measure 2011](#). Article 19 of the UNCRC commits State Parties to take measures to protect children from violence.

To date, 67 countries worldwide have fully prohibited all forms of physical punishment of children, with a further 27 committed to reform, demonstrating a global movement towards stronger legal protections for children ([World Health Organisation, 2025](#)).

International guidance, including from bodies such as [UNICEF](#) and the [Global Initiative to End Corporal Punishment](#) consistently emphasise that legal prohibition is most effective when combined with public education and positive parenting initiatives aimed at changing social norms around discipline.

Overall, the evolving legal landscape internationally reflects a growing consensus that protecting children from physical punishment is both a moral and legal imperative, requiring not only legislative reform but also sustained education and cultural change ([McGuier EA, Kolko DJ, Dubowitz H, 2022](#)).

1.2. Background and context of the legislation in Wales

The Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act (hereafter referred to as ‘the Act’) received Royal Assent in March 2020 and after a 2-year implementation period, came into force on 21 March 2022. This fulfilled a Programme for Government commitment for the Welsh Government.

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 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.

The introduction of the Act represents a significant step in Wales’ commitment to upholding children’s rights under the UNCRC. By making all forms of physical punishment of children illegal in Wales, the Act aligns domestic legislation with international standards and supports the Welsh Government’s wider ambition to ensure that all children have the best start in life. The Act contributes to Wales’ wider legislative and policy commitments, including The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 as well as the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which aims to improve social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing under a sustainable development principle. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 makes the distinction between physical

punishment and child neglect or abuse, and puts in place a strengthened robust and effective partnership approach to safeguarding. Together, this reinforces a rights-based and preventative approach to child rights and welfare and public service delivery.

To support the development of the Act, the Welsh Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) (formerly the Public Policy Institute for Wales) developed possible approaches to legislating against parental physical punishment, emphasising that legal change is most effective when accompanied by clear implementation planning, sustained public education and positive parenting support. The WCPP also emphasised that the exact wording of the law matters; for example, choices about how prosecutions are handled affect both public acceptance and how clearly the law will operate in practice ([Public Policy Institute for Wales, 2018](#)).

The Welsh Government undertook an extensive multi-media public awareness campaign before the legislation came into force to ensure as many people as possible were aware of the change in the law. To support professionals, parents and the public in understanding the change in law, the Welsh Government developed a range of explanatory resources. The Welsh Government [website](#) includes a range of information for members of the public and professionals including leaflets available in a range of languages, short films of the views of professionals, a poster, briefing note and sector-specific fact sheets.

The Welsh Government also worked with partner organisations, such as Children in Wales, to develop resources aimed at helping to support professionals [communicate with children and families](#) about the change in law (Welsh Government, 2025a). Welsh Government has continued to raise awareness of the law and provide information, advice and support for parents about positive alternatives to physical punishment, through the TEULU Cymru communications approach linking to the Parenting: Give it time campaign.

A further key development was the introduction of the Out-of-Court Parenting Support (OOCPS) Scheme. Between April 2022 and March 2025, the Welsh Government provided up to £2.4 million in funding to enable parents to access bespoke parenting support and advice as an alternative to prosecution under the Act, helping to ensure that the response to physical punishment is proportionate and focused on behaviour change rather than criminalisation (Welsh Government, in press). This is delivered through local authority services and sits alongside existing programmes providing parental support such as Flying Start and the Healthy Child Wales Programme. Local authorities often embed out-of-court parenting support workers within existing family support services and establish information hubs to adapt and share resources locally.

1.3. The three-year post implementation review of the legislation in Wales

Under the terms of the Act, Welsh Ministers are required to prepare and publish reports on the effects of the legislative changes both 3 years and 5 years after implementation.

The Welsh Government commissioned Miller Research in March 2025 to undertake a synthesis of evidence and data relating to the Act.

The focus of the post implementation review was agreed between Welsh Ministers and the Children, Young People and Education Committee during the passage of the legislation; it centres on the following key areas:

- impact on public services
- awareness of the law
- attitudes to physical punishment
- stakeholder views and experiences

This report, marking the 3-year post implementation review (PIR), synthesises the available evidence at the 3-year point. This interim review will inform the statutory 5-year post-implementation review, to be undertaken in 2027.

The purpose of this synthesis is to identify, assess, and integrate existing research and data relevant to the implementation of the Act in these areas. This includes evidence produced or commissioned by the Welsh Government, as well as studies undertaken by external researchers and organisations. The review does not seek to assess the impact of the Act on children's developmental or wellbeing outcomes, which remains outside the defined scope. [As with other examples internationally of similar legislation](#), the full impact of the Act will take time to emerge, and it would be inappropriate to conduct an evaluation of the impact of the Act at this stage.

The synthesis draws on a diverse range of data and research sources, including administrative data, survey data, and data captured from interviews and focus groups conducted through research projects. The administrative data includes Out of Court Parenting Support scheme monitoring data, Social Services data (specifically the metrics focused on physical punishment), Crown Prosecutions Services (CPS) case file data on prosecutions and data from Police Forces in Wales, where available.

The survey data includes data about children's knowledge and awareness of physical punishment legislation, data on adult awareness of physical punishment legislation and attitudes towards this legislation in data from 8 waves of the questions included in the Beaufort Wales Omnibus survey, data from the National Survey for Wales, data from the Time to Talk Panel survey run by Public Health Wales (PHW) and qualitative research undertaken with professionals working across education, health, crime and justice, the third sector and social services. These datasets and studies together provide a comprehensive overview of the implementation and early effects of the Act across Wales in line with the areas set out for the 3-year post-implementation review.

This synthesis has been conducted using transparent, systematic, and reproducible methods in accordance with UK Government guidance ([The Green Book](#), [The Magenta Book](#), and [The Aqua Book](#)). This ensured that all stages of analysis met the Welsh Government standards for transparency, reproducibility, and quality assurance. It provides a balanced, evidence-based overview to inform policy and practice, while also identifying any gaps in the data and/or evidence that could be considered as opportunities for further

research, alongside the ongoing data and evidence collection in preparation for the final 5-year post-implementation review.

This report reflects all data and evidence available to the research team at the point of completion of the synthesis (November 2025) for the period of the review (March 2022-March 2025). Some data referenced in the synthesis has been provided by the Welsh Government to the authors for production of the synthesis prior to publication of a full report on these data, which will follow in due course. Where this is the case, it is indicated in the report.

Any additional research or data released subsequently will be incorporated into the statutory 5-year post-implementation review. Dates of publication for the key sources are identified in the methodology section of the report.

1.4. Report structure

This report is organised into the following sections:

- introduction: outlines the purpose, scope, and legislative context of the study
- methodology: describes the approach taken to identify, review, and analyse evidence relating to the Act's implementation and effects
- awareness of the Act: examines levels of awareness and understanding among key groups, including professionals, parents and carers, and children
- attitudes to physical punishment: explores attitudes towards physical punishment, beliefs about its acceptability, and views on the Act
- impact on public services: assesses how the Act has affected public services 3 years after the introduction of the Act, including any changes in referrals, workloads, or service delivery patterns
- stakeholder views and experiences: summarises perspectives from professionals and service providers on how the Act has been implemented in practice
- conclusions: summarises key findings of the synthesis study

2. Methodology

2.1. Literature matrix and analytical framework

This evidence review required the development of a structured literature matrix, which provided a framework for identifying and categorising relevant themes and sub-themes across the sources. The overarching themes included:

- impact on public services
- awareness of the law
- attitudes to physical punishment
- stakeholder views and experiences

Using this framework, 47 literature sources were identified through a ‘snowball’ approach, whereby reference lists within primary sources were reviewed to locate further relevant materials. A broader literature review of academic and grey literature¹ was then undertaken using key search terms. These sources were analysed using Miro mind-mapping software, enabling visual organisation of evidence and identification of cross-cutting themes, which subsequently informed the report’s structure. This synthesis also builds on the evidence that was presented as part of the [Explanatory Memorandum of the Act](#), published in 2020. This involved a comprehensive literature review, which included the legislative competence, policy objectives and purpose of the Act and a review of the public consultation launched in January 2018. The synthesis additionally looks to draw on insights from more recently published sources and data.

2.2. Core data and research evidence

During the course of the synthesis, the Welsh Government provided a comprehensive list of existing data and research evidence, largely drawn from the monitoring and evaluation activities outlined in Section 10 of the Act Explanatory Memorandum (Welsh Government, 2020).

This included:

- [Time to Talk Public Health Wales Survey](#) from February 2024. Between 1 February and 3 March 2024, 1,261 people completed the survey and data was weighted to reflect national population demographics. The findings were published in April 2024
- results of all 8 waves of the questions on Beaufort Wales Omnibus survey [Public attitudes to physical punishment of children surveys](#). The most recent wave of this

Footnotes

[1] Grey literature is material and research produced by organisations outside of the traditional commercial or academic publishing and distribution channels.

research was released in June 2025; however, findings from all 8 waves have been referenced as part of this study

- an internally produced Welsh Government report analysing [Understanding Society survey data, which explores relationships between parenting styles, physical punishment, and child development outcomes](#), including changes between 2012 to 2022 and difference between demographic groups. This was published in June 2025
- [The National Survey for Wales](#) results on public attitudes to physical punishment of children (2019 to 2025). The data is included in the [results viewer](#) published in August 2025
- series of monitoring data for [The Children \(Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment \(Wales\) Act 2020](#): April 2022 to March 2025 - Local Authority Out of Court Parenting Support. The latest release for April 2024 to March 2025 was published in September 2025
- results from the Beaufort Children's Omnibus Survey - [Children's awareness of physical punishment legislation and children's rights](#). Released in September 2025, the findings from this report are based on analysis of 2 waves of survey data conducted with children and young people aged 7 to 18 who reside in Wales
- findings from a qualitative research study, which included 40 semi structured interviews with a range of professionals across health, education, crime and justice, local authorities and the third sector as well as 135 responses to an online survey of professionals. This research explored the ways in which the introduction of the Act has affected the frontline delivery of services with children and families. The research was undertaken by Miller Research in summer 2025 and is due to be published in 2026.
- monitoring data on the number of contacts with social services and the number of assessments completed by social services that relate to physical punishment of children. These metrics were introduced as part of the [Performance and Improvement Framework for Social Services](#) and [Social Services activity](#) have been collected since April 2021, one year before the Act came into force
- monitoring data from the CPS in Wales on the number of cases relating to the Act that are referred to them, as well how many of these cases are charged, and the outcomes of these cases
- monitoring data from Cafcass Cymru on the number of private law applications since April 2020
- outputs of a Welsh Government-designed and -run model to detect cases of physical punishment of children using data from police forces in Wales

Together these data sources provide a robust initial evidence-base spanning attitudinal, behavioural, and institutional perspectives, enabling a comprehensive assessment of early implementation.

2.2.1. Research protocol for wider literature review

In addition to the core data supplied by the Welsh Government, the research team identified, analysed, and synthesised further qualitative and quantitative studies addressing the key themes of the wider synthesis study. This included research on:

- impact on public services
- awareness of the law
- attitudes to physical punishment
- stakeholder views and experiences

Literature searches were conducted across academic databases, government and grey literature (including Welsh Government and non-governmental organisation reports), legal and criminal justice sources (such as the Crown Prosecution Service publications, police reports, and case law databases), as well as mainstream media and policy commentary. Details of search terms can be found in the Annex.

All sources were screened against the following defined inclusion and exclusion criteria:

- inclusion:
 - peer-reviewed studies
 - policy evaluations
 - relevant international case studies
- exclusion:
 - opinion pieces
 - sources without empirical backing

This process ensured that the evidence base reflected the most relevant and credible material available.

2.2.2. Quality assurance

The synthesis adhered to rigorous quality assurance standards to ensure findings were accurate, transparent, and reproducible. In addition to applying pre-determined inclusion and exclusion criteria, each bibliographic entry was screened for publication date, study aims, methodology, outcomes and overall reliability.

Within the synthesis study team, 2 members conducted independent thematic analysis to enhance credibility, with further input from the wider team to refine and consolidate emerging themes. All stages of the process (search strategy, screening, data extraction, and synthesis) were reviewed by a senior member of the study team for accuracy and completeness.

All quantitative data were analysed using Microsoft Excel, and qualitative synthesis was supported through Miro².

Primary findings were tested and refined through a summative workshop with Welsh Government officials, providing an opportunity to discuss insights from the review with officials to inform ongoing work and research.

This structured research protocol enabled the synthesis to be conducted in an unbiased and reproducible manner, providing a clear evidence base for policy and practice and establishing a foundation for the 5-year post-implementation review.

2.3. Limitations

Some limitations of the core data and evidence provided should be noted and include:

- data for the latest year April 2024 to March 2025 is not yet available for the number of contacts and the number of assessments completed by social services that relate to physical punishment of children. A release of this data is planned as per the Government Official Statistics schedule for after publication of this report
- data used to develop the Welsh Government police force model was received from 3 out of 4 police forces in Wales

On the wider literature review several limitations should be noted:

- access constraints: some academic literature may not have been accessible due to subscription barriers or paywalls. The synthesis used free-to-access secondary sources wherever possible
- publication bias: studies with strategically insignificant or null findings are less likely to be published, potentially leading to over-representation of positive results
- granularity of findings: many studies did not disaggregate results by specific demographic group (e.g. age, socio-economic group), limiting the ability to draw conclusions for these populations

Despite these, the search strategy yielded a broad and diverse body of literature meeting the inclusion criteria, which frequently reached saturation, with different search-term combinations returning the same sources. This convergence across studies and searches increases confidence in the validity of the evidence review's findings.

The synthesis reflects all data and evidence available relevant to the implementation period up to the end of March 2025 as made available to the research team. Any subsequent

Footnotes

[2] AI-based analytical tools were not used

updates or new data releases will be incorporated into the statutory 5-year post-implementation review.

3. Findings

3.1. Pre-implementation of the Act findings in Wales

Research conducted by Welsh Government analysts that drew on a large, representative UK cohort survey explored relationships between parenting styles/physical punishment and child development outcomes found that there was an overall decrease in parent-reported use of physical punishment between 2012 and 2022.

The survey captured data on the reported use of 4 different parenting styles. These parenting styles are: authoritarian (harsh, high demands for obedience); uninvolved (low expectations and low warmth); permissive (low expectations and high warmth), and authoritative (high expectations and high warmth) styles. Findings from the research showed that authoritarian and uninvolved parentings styles have more negative implications for child externalising problems³, prosocial behaviour, and conflict with parents, relative to authoritative and permissive styles. The study found that negative effects on child developmental outcomes are stronger and more consistent for mothers adopting an authoritarian or uninvolved parenting style, relative to fathers.

Additionally, higher levels of reported physical punishment are related to poorer child development outcomes. For externalising problems and prosocial behaviour, this effect was only meaningful for mothers. However, physical punishment related to increased child-reported conflict with parents, this was found for both mothers and fathers (Welsh Government, 2025b).

There were some differences in the overall proportion of parents reporting using physical punishment, for example:

- parents from Black or Asian ethnic groups were more likely to report using physical punishment compared to those from White ethnic groups
- parents aged 31 to 40 years were more likely to report using physical punishment compared to those aged 51 or over

This research also highlighted the relationship between authoritative parenting and positive child development outcomes was more apparent for mothers. For fathers, effects were less pronounced and mostly related to permissive parenting. Findings from this study also found that authoritative parenting was much more common in mothers than in fathers (Welsh Government, 2025b).

These findings are useful in highlighting negative effects of physical punishment for a range of child development outcomes and also showing gender biases and prejudices. They also provide further baseline evidence for overall levels of parent-reported physical punishment

Footnotes

[3] The Understanding Society dataset defines child externalising problems as, 'maladaptive behavioural difficulties directed towards an individual's environment'. In the survey, child externalising problems are scored by respondents based on reported conduct problems (e.g., often lies or cheats) and hyperactivity (e.g., restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long).

in the 10 years leading up to the Children in Wales Act. This provides further context to evaluate changes in attitudes following the law change.

This is further reinforced by the findings from the Parental Physical Punishment: Child Outcomes and Attitudes survey, published by Wales Centre for Public Policy in 2018, which suggested that many young people in Wales perceive physical punishment as emotionally distressing and often associate it with expressions of parental anger (Wales Centre for Public Policy, 2018).

Attitudes towards physical punishment appear to be shaped by personal experience: children who have been subjected to it are more likely to view it as acceptable, while those without such experiences tend to reject it outright. This distinction highlights how lived experiences can normalise or challenge perceptions of violence within domestic settings.

Moreover, younger children were found to be more tolerant of physical punishment than their older peers⁴ (Wales Centre for Public Policy, 2018), indicating that exposure at an early age may desensitise children to physical forms of discipline. These findings emphasise the importance of early intervention and education to prevent the internalisation of violent behaviours as acceptable disciplinary practices.

3.2. Awareness of the Act in Wales.

This next section of the report presents findings on awareness of the Act in Wales. The findings are presented by audience group including professionals, the general public, parents/carers, and children.

3.2.1. Awareness and understanding among professionals of the Act in Wales

The primary data source for exploring the awareness and understanding of professionals about the Act in Wales is the qualitative research with professionals working with children and families. This involved 40 interviews with professionals, in which all those interviewed indicated comprehensive levels of awareness of the Act and the rationale behind the change in legislation in Wales (Welsh Government, in press). This research found that professionals from health, education, crime and justice, local authorities, and the third sector organisations had near-universal awareness of the Act and its objectives. However, it is important to note that all professionals invited to be interviewed were aware that they would be discussing the Act and its rationale and impact and therefore had prior knowledge of the focus of the research.

It was noted that a minority of professionals referred to colleagues who they suggested were less familiar with the Act. For example, health professionals who do not work regularly

Footnotes

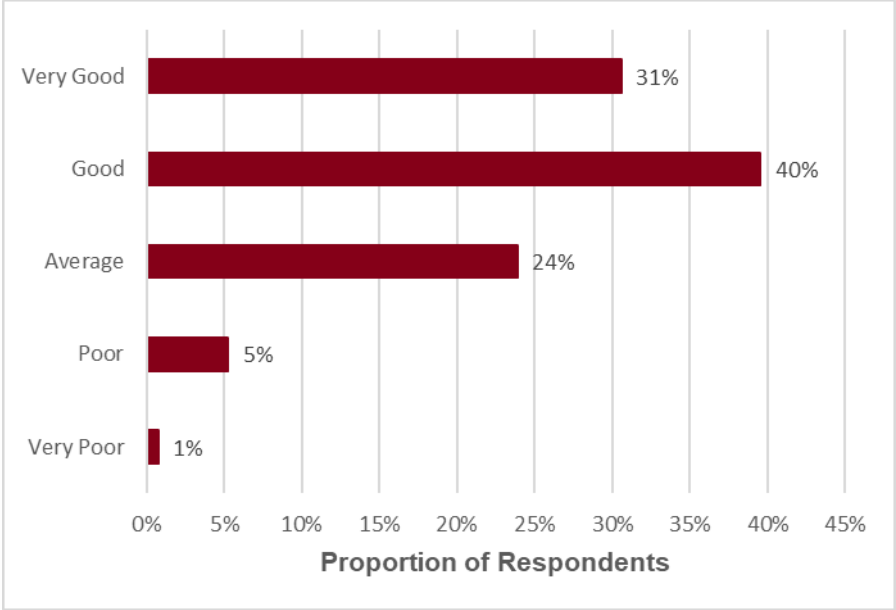
[4] The Wales Centre for Public Policy paper presented findings from 2 studies which both found that younger children were more tolerant of physical punishment. The age ranges differ though, as Sherbert Research (2007) defined younger children as 4 to 8 year olds, and older children as 'tweens' 9 to 12 year olds and teenagers 13 to 16 year olds. The second study by Vittrup and Holden (2010) defined younger children as 6 to 7 year olds and older children as 8 to 10 year olds.

with children may have a more limited awareness of the evidence underpinning the legislation or the reasons for removing the defence of reasonable punishment. However, this view was not widespread amongst professionals engaged in the study, and many emphasised that the Welsh Government’s communication and publicity work had been effective in embedding awareness of the Act across the relevant workforces.

It was also reported that professionals’ awareness of the Act plays a crucial role in supporting the general public’s awareness through the interactions they may have with parents and carers, children and young people. This therefore renders the advice and awareness raising that these professionals may undertake in their roles particularly significant. For many professionals, an understanding of the purpose and implication of the Act was noted to be closely linked with existing work and safeguarding responsibilities, meaning that the Act solidified the messaging and guidance that professionals were already providing to the general public prior to the Act (Welsh Government, in press).

As part of this qualitative study, an online survey was undertaken to supplement the in-depth interviews with professionals. When asked to rate their understanding of the Act, 70% of professionals who participated in the survey reported having a ‘good’ or ‘very good’ understanding of the Act, with just 6% reporting to have a ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ understanding of the Act.

Figure 1: How would you rate your understanding of the Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020? July 2025 to August 2025



Source: Survey of professionals, Qualitative Research with Professionals, Q3.

Base: N134

Description of Figure 1: A bar graph showing how professionals rate their own understanding of the Act. It shows a clear pattern for professionals to say they have a good (40%) or very good (31%) understanding, compared to an average understanding (24%). Just 5% rated their understanding as poor and 1% as very poor.

This therefore demonstrates that although most professionals reported an understanding of the Act, some gaps in awareness remain among health professionals not routinely working with children. This could be improved in future through access to refresher training to ensure that all professionals working with children and families have a concrete understanding of the Act and its implication for their role.

3.2.2. Awareness about the Act among the general public in Wales

There is a wealth of evidence about awareness of the Act in Wales collected to date. The data sources are mostly survey data but also includes some findings from the qualitative research with professionals. The survey data sources include the data collected in the Beaufort Wales Omnibus survey, which includes a time series of data across 8 waves, the National Survey of Wales data that also includes a time series of data, Time to Talk Public Health Panel data and the Beaufort Wales Children's survey with children and young people.

The primary data source used in relation to public awareness of the Act in Wales is the survey of public attitudes to physical punishment of children⁵. This reports the findings from a module of questions that were included in the Beaufort Wales Adult Omnibus Survey beginning in 2018 (baseline survey) and have been repeated annually⁶ since then. There have been 8 waves of the survey, with [the most recent wave undertaken in November 2024](#). Each wave of the survey has involved a representative quota sample of approximately 1,000 adults aged 16 and over across Wales, including both parents/carers and non-parents/non-carers. The survey has used broadly the same questions each year covering attitudes towards physical punishment, awareness of legislation around physical punishment of children and awareness of and opinion on changes to legislation, as well as demographic questions capturing age, gender, region, and social grade⁷.

In all waves of the survey, respondents were asked whether they thought that the law currently allows parents to physically punish their children. Over the 7 years that the survey has been conducted, there has been a general increase in the proportion of respondents who believe that the law does not allow parents to physically punish their children, increasing from 58% in 2018 to 87% in 2024.

Analysis of responses to this question over the 8 waves demonstrate a positive relationship between public awareness campaigns and awareness of the Act. A multi-media public awareness campaign began in June 2021 with digital advertising and television campaigns launched fully in September 2021 and a peak in communications activity between January

Footnotes

[5] The 2018 and 2019 survey were conducted face-to-face; from 2020 onwards, they have been conducted online.

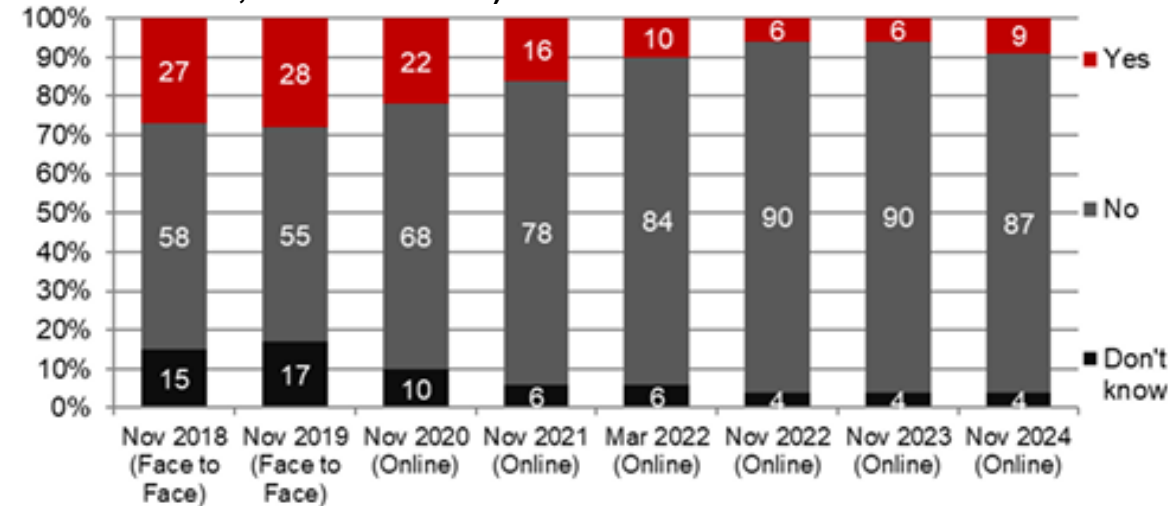
[6] With the exception of 2022, the year the Act came into force, when the survey was conducted in March and November.

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

and March 2022. This matches across to the awareness levels demonstrated in the survey before the Act came into force increasing to a peak awareness level in 2022/23 at 90%.

This trend is depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Percentage who believe that the law currently allows parents to physically punish their children (All- 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, March 2022, November 2022, November 2023, November 2024)



Base: All – 2018 (1,002), 2019 (1,002), 2020 (1,002), 2021 (1,000) Mar 2022 (1,000), Nov 2022 (1,000), Nov 2023 (1,000), Nov 2024 (1,000)

Source: Public attitudes to physical punishment: Beaufort Wales Omnibus survey findings November 2018 to November 2024

Description of Figure 2: This graph shows the percentage of those who believe that the law currently allows parents to physically punish their children. The figure shows a general trend of an increased percentage each year of people who believe the Act does not allow parents to physically punish their children, with the exception of 2024, when there was a slight drop.

This survey data also revealed that younger adults aged 16 to 34, when compared with other age groups, were less likely to report that the law did not allow parents to physically punish their children. In both November 2022 and November 2023, 85% of 16 to 34-year-olds responded that the law did not allow parents to use physical punishment, compared to 93% (2022) and 92% (2023) for those aged 35 to 54, and 92% for those aged 55 and over. This suggests there is a lower level of understanding of the law amongst younger adults and there may be a need to consider approaches that improve clarity for this group, particularly young parents.

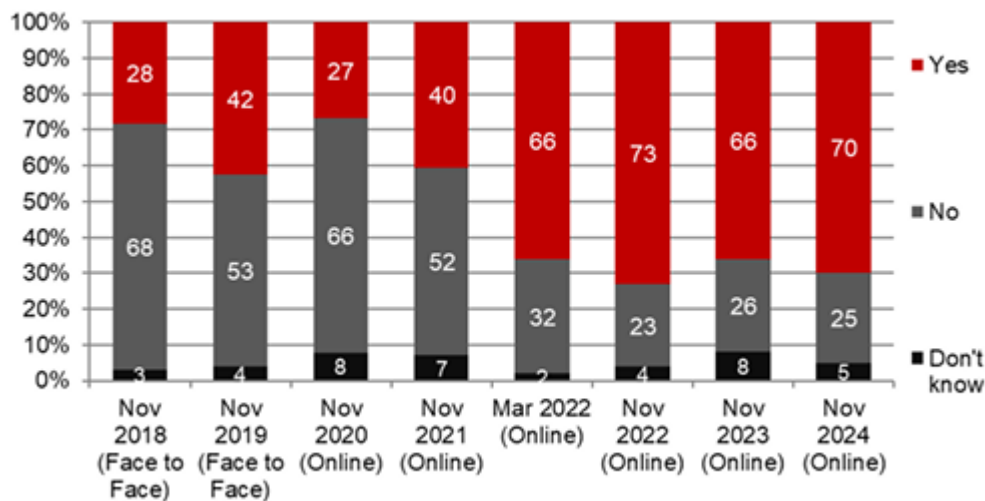
The survey also used social classification to assess awareness of the Act. Within the research, the UK social classification was utilised, which is based on occupation groups, dividing respondents into ABC1 (higher and intermediate professional/non-manual) and C2DE (skilled manual, semi- and unskilled manual and those on lowest incomes). Findings from wave 6 of the survey, undertaken in November 2022, observed that ABC1 respondents reported around 93% prompted awareness of the Act, compared with 88% for C2DE. By November 2023, wave 7, this gap had broadly closed with 90% of all respondents aware the law prohibits physical punishment, suggesting the post-implementation rise in awareness

was distributed across socioeconomic groups. As with the survey findings for 2023, there was not a clear difference in levels of awareness by social grade, with awareness levels among ABC1 and C2DE socio-economic groups being very similar - 84% and 83% respectively (Welsh Government, 2025a).

In addition to being asked about the current law in relation to physical punishment, respondents were also asked “Are you aware of any changes to the law around physical punishment of children in the last few years?”. In 2024, 70% of survey respondents demonstrated unprompted awareness, up from 66% in 2023. However, this remains slightly below the peak of 73% recorded in 2022 (Welsh Government, 2023c; 2024; 2025a). This is demonstrated in Figure 3.

The initial peak may be attributed to the surge of media attention and targeted campaigns that accompanied the Act’s introduction. Whilst awareness remains high, the trend observed in the survey data suggests the awareness in the general population may have lessened over time, emphasising that ongoing approaches to reinforce public awareness would be beneficial.

Figure 3: Percentage aware of change in legislation around physical punishment of children [Unprompted] (All- 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, March 2022, November 2022, 2023, 2024)



Source: Public attitudes to physical punishment: Beaufort Wales Omnibus survey findings November 2018 to November 2024

Base: All – 2018 (1,002), 2019 (1,002), 2020 (1,002), 2021 (1,000), March 2022 (1,000), November 2022 (1,000), November 2023 (1,000), November 2024 (1,000)

Description of Figure 3: This graph shows the percentage of those whose were aware at an unprompted level that the law does not allow parents to physically punish their children. The figure shows a general trend of an increased percentage each year of people who believe the law does not allow parents to physically punish their children at the unprompted level, with the peak level in 2022.

Prompted awareness has remained consistent, with 87% aware of the legal changes when prompted. These figures have remained relatively stable since the Act's introduction, suggesting a consistent level of recognition.

When asked to describe the meaning of the Act, 85% of respondents correctly identified it as a "complete ban on smacking and physical punishment." Other responses included suggestions such as "no physical contact at all" or the belief that "it was already illegal to physically punish children." While the dominant understanding is largely accurate, these misinterpretations reveal some ongoing ambiguity in reported public understanding. Notably, references to a "ban on smacking" have steadily increased over time from 64% in 2018 to a peak of 90% in 2023, before settling at 85% in 2024. This trend indicates that there may be some lack of clarity amongst the public of the precise meaning of the law.

In terms of how the public become aware of the Act, traditional media remains the most influential source. The wave 8 survey found that 53% of respondents cited TV news as their primary source of information, followed by radio news (19%) and television advertising also at 19% (Welsh Government, 2025a). These findings mirror previous years and highlight the continued relevance of broadcast media in reaching the public. These findings mirror previous years and highlight the importance of broadcast media in reaching the public in the early implementation period.

3.2.3. Awareness about the Act among parents and carers in Wales

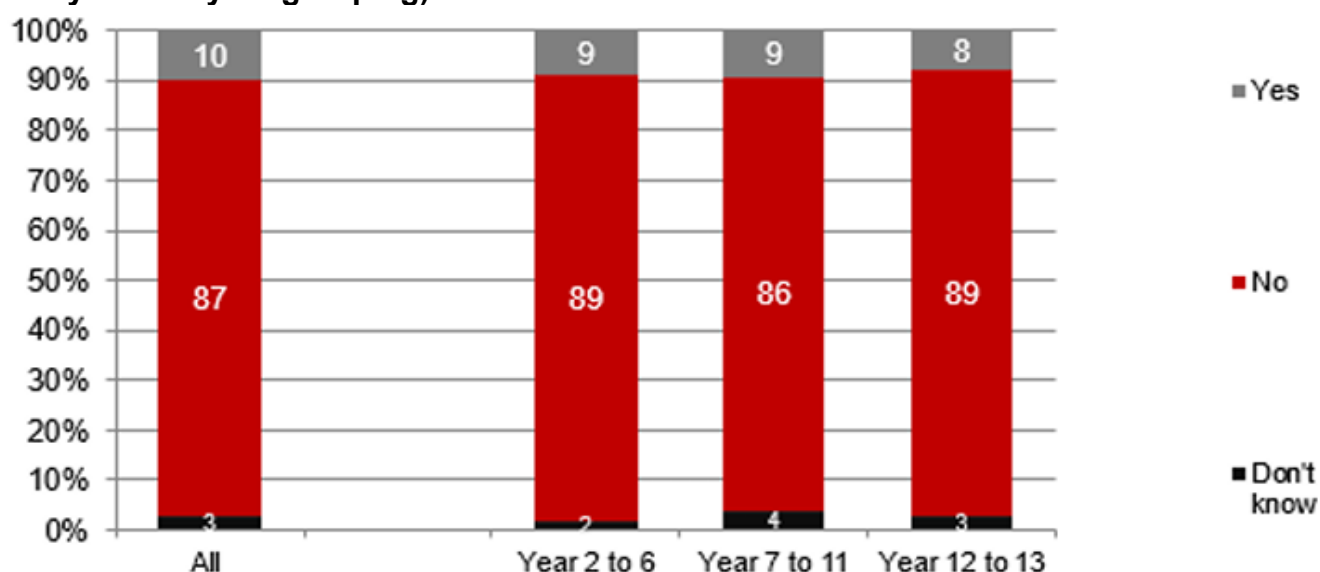
Parental and carer awareness of the legislative change remains high, though understanding amongst the general public as a whole shows some variation. In the most recent wave (November 2024) of the survey of public attitudes to physical punishment of children, awareness was strong amongst parents and carers of younger children, with 87% reporting awareness when prompted, and strong but slightly less so for those without caring responsibilities at 82% (Welsh Government, 2025a) and this has stayed relatively constant since 2022.

Similar findings are echoed in the findings from the [Time to Talk', Public Health Wales Survey](#). This survey found that broadly, 91% of the general public, and 95% of parents surveyed reported that they knew that physical punishment is illegal in Wales.

3.2.4. Awareness amongst children and young people

Children and young people across Wales demonstrate high levels of awareness of the Act and their right to be protected from violence, although the depth of overall understanding tends to differ by age and social group. The primary source of data on this comes from the [children's awareness of physical punishment legislation and children's rights survey findings October 2024 and March 2025 to April 2025](#). Findings from these waves indicate 87% of children correctly knew that parents or carers are not permitted to physically punish them, while 10% thought it was allowed, with 3% being unsure. These results were also consistent across different school year groupings - Years 2 to 6, Year 7 to 11 and Years 12 to 13. In each of these groups, 89%, 86% and 89% respectively thought that physical punishment of children by parents and carers was not allowed. This is demonstrated in Figure 4 (Welsh Government, 2025c).

Figure 4: Opinion on whether parents and other care givers are allowed to physically punish children in Wales, October 2024 and March 2025 to April 2025 (percentage) (all and by school year grouping)



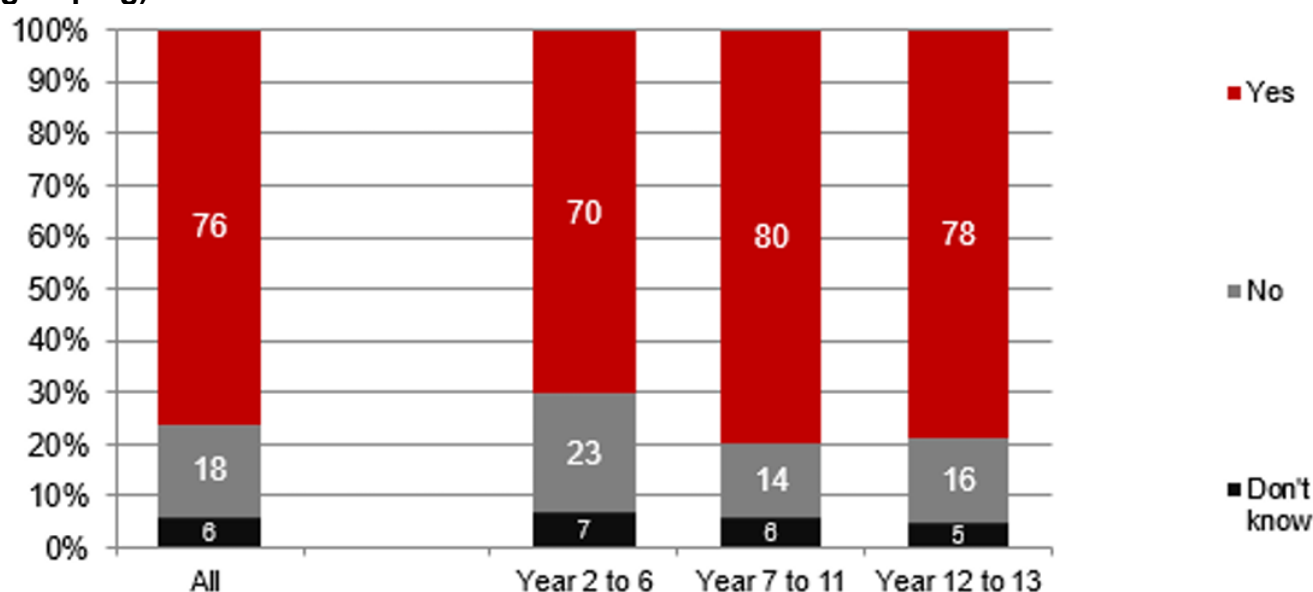
Source: Children's awareness of physical punishment legislation and children's rights: survey findings October 2024 and March 2025 to April 2025

Base: All (888) year 2 to 6 (268), year 7 to 11 (299), year 12 to 13 (188)

Description of Figure 4: This graph shows whether or not respondents believe that parents and other care givers are allowed to physically punish children in Wales. Results are shown at the total sample level and by school year grouping.

Findings from this survey also showed that awareness of the legislation was strong in children; 76% reported that they knew there was a law making all physical punishment illegal, with 18% unaware, and 6% unsure (Welsh Government, 2025c). Awareness of the Act also increased with age, from 70% of those aged in Years 2 to 6 aware of the Act's existence, to 80% in Years 7 to 11. Older schools year groups - both Years 7 to 11 and Years 12 to 13 were more likely to be aware of the Act than those in Years 2 to 6. (80% and 78% versus 70% respectively) (Ibid). This is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Awareness of law that makes it illegal to physically punish children in Wales, October 2024 and March 2025 to April 2025 (percentage) (all and by school year grouping)



Source: Children's awareness of physical punishment legislation and children's rights: survey findings October 2024 and March 2025 to April 2025

Base: All (888), Year 2 to 6 (268), Year 7 to 11 (299), Year 12 to 13 (188)

Description of Figure 5: This graph shows whether or not respondents were aware of the law that makes it illegal to physically punish children in Wales. Results are shown at the total sample level and by school year grouping.

Knowledge of details of the Act followed a similar pattern, with 48% of younger respondents (aged in Years 2 to 6) reporting that they could list a few details of the law, or knew many details about it, compared to 70% of older respondents (aged as in Years 12 to 13) (Welsh Government, 2025c).

When asked how they found out about the Act, responses varied. The most common answer was from teachers and school councils at 57% and from parents (51%), followed by social media (31%) and television (26%) (Welsh Government, 2024). Boys were more likely than girls to cite television (29% vs 23%), and children from higher income households were more likely to learn from the Children's Commissioner than those from lower income households (11% vs less than 5%) (Welsh Government, 2025c).

To conclude, the vast majority (87%) of children and young people aged 7 to 18 surveyed were aware that they are protected from physical punishment from parents or care givers. Around three-quarters (76%) of children and young people were aware that there is a law in place that prevents physical punishment of children by parents and other care givers. This is slightly lower than the proportion who believed parents and other care givers were not allowed to physically punish children (87%), when asked about this without reference to legislation being in place.

3.2.5. Conclusions on awareness of the Act in Wales

Overall, the evidence demonstrates the awareness and understanding of the Act is generally strong amongst professionals, parents and carers, and the general public. Children and young people also seem to generally have a strong level of understanding of the Act.

Levels of awareness vary slightly across professions/sector of work, gender and age, but overall recognition of the Act is widespread, and findings suggest reinforcement through education, professional training and public campaigns will help ensure levels of awareness of the Act remain high.

Based on the currently available data, an opportunity to increase awareness may be to focus some engagement work on certain groups, such as young adults, older people and health care practitioners not routinely working with children.

3.3. Attitudes to physical punishment

Attitudes towards physical punishment of children in Wales and the Act have been monitored prior to and since implementation of the Act. The primary sources of information on this are the Beaufort Wales omnibus survey, the Beaufort Wales Children's omnibus survey, the National Survey for Wales, the Time to Talk Public Health Wales survey, the qualitative work with professionals undertaken by Miller Research and wider literature about attitudes to physical punishment.

3.3.1. Attitudes towards the Act in Wales

Attitudes towards the Act have evolved since the Act's implementation, with varying outcomes depending on age, caring responsibilities and gender. The public attitudes to physical punishment responses from the Beaufort Omnibus Wales survey have been crucial in assessing how attitudes to physical punishment have evolved from November 2018 to November 2024.

Findings from this survey suggest public support for legislation removing the defence of reasonable punishment in Wales has shown modest fluctuations over time, with the most recent wave of the survey showing 55% in favour of the legislation, compared to 38% in 2020. These increases are primarily driven by increases in respondents who are unsure or seeking more information, rather than by a significant rise in outright opposition (Welsh Government, 2025a).

From the same survey, and as found in previous waves, those aged 16 to 54 years were much more likely to be in favour of the Act, rather than against the change in legislation. Among those surveyed who were aged 55 or older, opinion was mixed; two-fifths (45%) were supportive of the change, and around a third (34%) were against it. The most frequently cited reason for support of the Act was opposition to physical punishment, with 41% stating that they "did not agree with smacking or physical punishment of children". (Welsh Government, 2025a).

Also noted in the Time to Talk Public Health Wales panel survey, support for the Act is relatively high, with 62% of all those surveyed and 75% of parents surveyed supporting the removal of the lawful defence for physical punishment (Public Health Wales, 2024).

The qualitative research conducted by Miller Research in 2025 with professionals working with families has some interesting findings about acceptance of the Act. Of those who completed the survey 60% of respondents reported that they had observed “some confusion” among parents regarding the legal change, often linked to cultural and language barriers, limited access to information, and a general lack of awareness of promotional efforts (Welsh Government, in press). Interviews with professionals conducted as part of the same research revealed particular challenges among specific groups, such as:

- older generations (including grandparents) who grew up when physical punishment was widely accepted
- individuals with entrenched beliefs in their right to discipline children as they see fit
- asylum seekers and migrants unfamiliar with the distinct legal framework in Wales

These insights underline the importance of culturally sensitive, multilingual public education efforts that can reach marginalised and diverse communities. Overall, while public opinion appears to be gradually moving towards greater acceptance of the legislation, these findings highlight that lasting cultural change takes time.

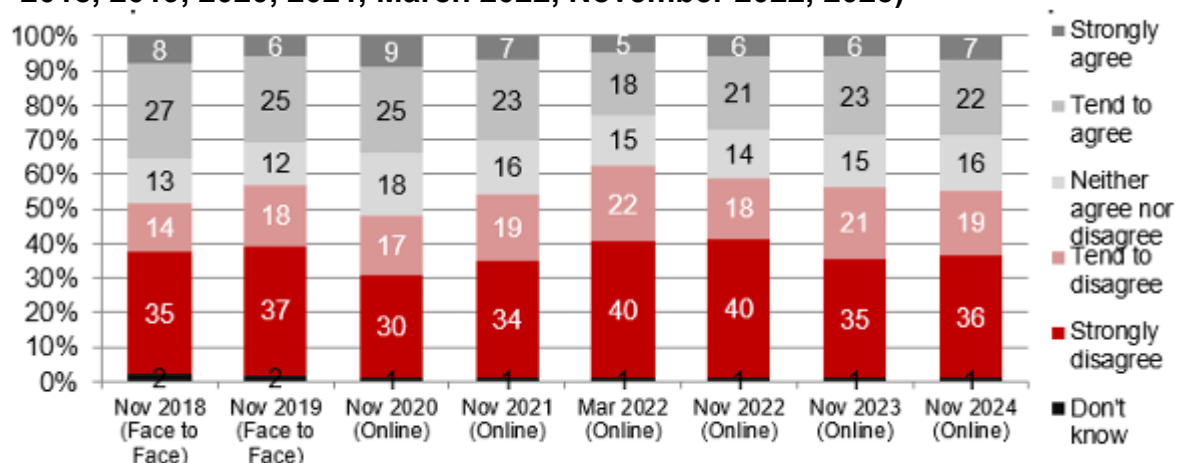
3.3.2. Attitudes towards physical punishment of children in Wales

Public attitudes toward the effectiveness and necessity of physical punishment differ; however, there is a general trend towards disapproval of physical punishment, which has been identified through multiple sources (Welsh Government 2025a, Public Health Wales, 2024).

Looking again to the Beaufort Wales omnibus survey on public attitudes and awareness, all survey respondents were asked the degree to which they agreed or disagreed that it is sometimes necessary to physically punish or “smack” a child. Opinion across the waves of the survey was somewhat split on this, although in each wave more respondents disagreed with this statement than agreed with it. In the latest wave of the survey (November 2024), 29% agreed and 54% disagreed that ‘it is sometimes necessary to smack a child’ (Welsh Government, 2025a).

The difference between the proportions agreeing and disagreeing with the statement almost matches the results of the 2023 survey (29% and 55%). This is narrower than that found in the survey undertaken in March 2022, just before the Act was implemented, where 23% agreed that 'it is sometimes necessary to smack a child' and 62% disagreed with this statement. This is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Percentage in agreement that ‘it is sometimes necessary to smack a child’ (All – 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, March 2022, November 2022, 2023)



Source: Public attitudes to physical punishment: Beaufort Wales Omnibus survey findings November 2018 to November 2024

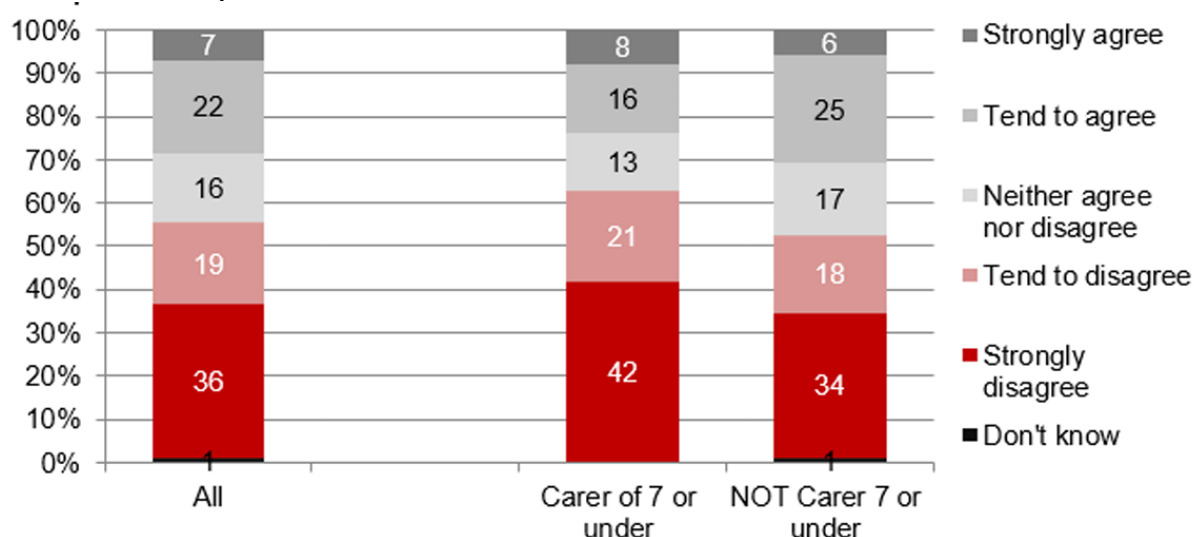
Base: All – 2018 (1,002), 2019 (1,002), 2020 (1,002), 2021 (1,000), March 2022 (1,000), November 2022 (1,000), November 2023 (1,000)

Description of Figure 6: This graph shows the percentage of those who are in agreement that ‘it is sometimes necessary to smack a child’. Results show data from 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, March 2022, November 2022 and 2023.

The role of being a parent or carer also appears to have an impact on attitudes to physical punishment. Findings from the most recent wave, 8, of the survey (November 2024) found those with caring responsibilities for children aged 7 or under, namely parents, guardians or other family members who provide regular care were more likely to disagree with the statement that ‘it is sometimes necessary to “smack” or physically punish a child’. Of those with caring responsibilities for children aged 7 or under, 63% disagreed with this statement, followed by 13% who neither agreed nor disagreed and 24% who agreed that it was sometimes necessary to physically punish a child. Of those without caring responsibilities of a child aged 7 or under, 52% disagreed with the statement, whilst 17% reported that they ‘neither agreed not disagreed’ and 31% agreed with the statement. Similar differences amongst those who have or did not have caring responsibilities for children aged under 7 were also found in previous waves of the survey (Welsh Government, 2025a).

This may indicate that direct caregiving experience, particularly with younger children, enhances awareness of alternative discipline methods or reflects shifting parenting norms within this demographic (Welsh Government, 2025a). These findings are demonstrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Percentage in agreement that ‘it is sometimes necessary to smack (physically punish) a child’. (All and whether regular carer of child aged 7 or under- November 2024)



Source: Public attitudes to physical punishment: Beaufort Wales Omnibus survey findings November 2018 to November 2024

Base: All (1,000), Regular carer of 7 or under (320), Not a regular carer of 7 or under (673)

Description of Figure 7: Shows the percentage in agreement that ‘it is sometimes necessary to physically punish a child’. These are divided into those who are carers of children aged 7 or under, those who are not carers of children aged 7 or under and all responses.

Further findings from this survey revealed that more men than women agreed with the statement that ‘it is sometimes necessary to smack a child’, with 33% of men in agreement compared to 26% of women (Welsh Government, 2025a). This gender gap is also consistent with findings from previous surveys from 2022 and 2023. Similarly, views on physical punishment showed little variation across social grades: 30% of respondents in social grades ABC1 (typically those in managerial and professional roles) and 29% in social grades C2DE (generally those in manual occupations) agreed with the statement. These figures also align with patterns observed in earlier survey waves (Welsh Government, 2025a).

Interestingly, a slight decline in outright opposition to physical punishment has been observed in the physical punishment of children survey since the law’s introduction, with 55% disagreeing with its necessity in November 2023, down from a 62% peak in March 2022 (Welsh Government, 2024). This subtle shift could be attributed to several factors: some individuals might be experiencing confusion about the new legal framework, or it may reflect a natural resistance to rapid cultural change, especially among older adults, but this has not been observed in the analysis reviewed as part of this study. Indeed, as observed across all waves of the survey, older respondents (aged 55 and over) are more likely to support the necessity of physical punishment, highlighting persistent generational

differences that may hinder short to medium term full societal acceptance of the Act. This is consistent with the research undertaken before the Act that cultural change takes time.

These opinions were also similar to those observed in the National Survey for Wales data. Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that it is sometimes necessary to smack a child. This data was collected in 2019 to 2020, 2022 to 2023 and 2024 to 2025. The percentage of people who strongly disagreed with this statement increased from 30% to 40% over this period. Those who tended to disagree remained stable across each wave at around 17 to 20%, as did neutral responses (15 to 17%).

Those who tended to agree with the statement decreased from 25% in 2019 to 20 to 20% in 2024 to 2025, and those who strongly agreed that it is sometimes necessary to smack a child slightly decreased from 9% to 7%.

Additionally, the Time to Talk panel survey published by Public Health Wales examined people's views and reported experiences of different ways of managing children's behaviour. Among parents who responded, the overwhelming majority (86%) perceived physical punishment as ineffective and only 1% rated physical punishment as "very effective" (Public Health Wales, 2024). Only 1 to 2% of respondents reported using physical punishment in the last 12 months. The majority of parents, (64%), reported that they had "never" smacked/slapped a child. These figures indicate a low perceived effectiveness and low recent use of physical punishment as a disciplinary strategy among parents in this sample. Non-physical, positive strategies such as praising and rewarding good behaviour, and reasoning with children received the highest "very effective" ratings. Over 90% of respondents who were parents reported using positive approaches, indicating strong support for evidence-based behaviour management and a shift in public attitudes and social norms away from physical punishment (Public Health Wales, 2024). This consensus reflects a growing recognition of the limited behavioural benefits and potential harms associated with physical discipline, aligning with contemporary child development research that emphasises non-violent parenting strategies.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while awareness and rejection of physical punishment are increasing, pockets of ambivalence and acceptance of physical punishment remain. Therefore, ongoing public education, targeted support for parents, and culturally sensitive interventions could ensure that the legislative change translates into meaningful behavioural and attitudinal change at the community level.

3.3.3. Children's attitudes to physical punishment

Support among children for making physical punishment illegal in Wales is relatively high, with 69% of young people agreeing or strongly agreeing that physical punishment should not be used as a form of discipline. This data was collected as part of a suite of questions included in the School Health Research Network Survey ([Young People's Knowledge, Awareness and Attitudes regarding Children's Rights in Wales, 2023](#)). Notably, gender differences emerge in these attitudes; agreement with the statement 'parents or guardians should not be allowed to physically assault their children as a form of punishment' was significantly higher among girls (76%) compared to boys (61%).

Age also appears to play a role, with support for the legislation increasing steadily from 13% for those in school Year 7, to 18% for those in school Year 11. These findings suggest that as young people mature, their awareness of children's rights and understanding of non-violent forms of discipline becomes more developed (Ibid.).

3.4. Impact on public services

The impact on public services was something considered extensively in developing the legislation. To support public services in implementing the legislation, the Welsh Government worked closely with partners to ensure clear guidance and resources were in place. Professionals continue to follow established safeguarding processes, but significant multi-agency collaboration led to the development of [guidance](#) for police, Youth Offending Teams, and local authorities on administering and referring parents for support through Out of Court Disposals (Welsh Government, 2025d). A dedicated [Practice Guide](#) was published to complement existing safeguarding procedures, offering practitioners additional information on responses under the Act. Key national frameworks, including the [Healthy Child Wales](#) Programme and [Keeping Learners Safe](#) Guidance, were updated so health visitors and schools have appropriate advice. In addition, the Crown Prosecution Service independently updated its Charging Standard to reflect the change in law.

The sources of data that inform this section of findings include the monitoring data about the number of parents being supported by an Out of Court Parenting Support Disposal Scheme, monitoring data from the CPS, monitoring data from Social Services and evidence gathered from the qualitative work with professionals undertaken by Miller Research.

3.4.1. Data on the number of cases where physical punishment has been identified in Wales

Reports of physical punishment can be made to either the police or social services, depending on the circumstances. All such referrals must follow the existing safeguarding procedures and the 'All Wales Practice Guide' to ensure a consistent and coordinated response.

When the police receive a report of physical punishment, they investigate and decide on appropriate action based on evidence and public interest, which may include prosecution, no further action (NFA), or an Out of Court Disposal (OCD). The police will also consider what is in the best interests of the child after multi-agency discussions with social services and other relevant agencies (e.g. schools, childcare settings, health professionals). OCD involve mandatory parenting support referrals, while NFA cases may still lead to signposting to voluntary support, ensuring safeguarding remains central even without formal sanctions.

Published monitoring data about referrals made by the police to out of court parenting support provides information about the reach of the scheme in Wales. In the period April 2022 to March 2025, approximately 365 individuals were referred for out of court parenting support by police staff in Wales. Of the referred individuals, 335 individuals took up the offer of support, of which 310 fully completed the sessions, and some may be ongoing still at the time of writing this report.

Of those who have completed the sessions, 265 of the individuals reported a positive outcome in a post support questionnaire. Figures on the total number of questionnaires completed are not available. This suggests the out of court parenting support is accessible and manageable for the majority of parents who are referred.

During the latest period (April 2024 to March 2025), approximately 110 referrals were made, by police forces in Wales to the OOCPS scheme and approximately 105 parents completed the support (out of all individuals taking up the parenting support including some who partially completed in 2023 to 2024). Of the individuals who completed the support scheme, 95 reported a positive outcome such as improved child behaviour or parental confidence (Welsh Government, 2025e).

Additional data on the number of individuals who received parenting support due to physical punishment being a factor (funded through the OOCPS programme) but who were not referred by the police as part of an OOCPS or diversion scheme between April 2024 and March 2025 is also collected. The latest data for this period shows 265 individuals were referred. This reflects not all referrals to the parenting support provided by out of court parenting support workers come via the police.

The CPS monitors case files to provide data on the number of prosecutions relating to physical punishment of a child. At time of reporting fewer than 5 cases have been taken to CPS for consideration and there have been zero convictions across the whole time period since the implementation of the Act.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 provides the overarching framework for safeguarding children and promoting their well-being and places a statutory duty on professionals to report any child at risk of harm to local authority social services. Physical punishment, when identified, is treated as a safeguarding concern under this Act. Statutory guidance sets out requirements for assessment, intervention and multi-agency cooperation. Once a referral is received, social services conduct an initial assessment to determine risk and decide on appropriate interventions. This may include no further action, additional assessment of the child's care and support needs, immediate protective action, or, where there is reasonable cause to suspect abuse, neglect, or harm and care and support needs, social services may carry out enquiries under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

Evidence gathered from the qualitative research with professionals by Miller Research, found that most referrals to the police service usually come from professionals in other organisations, the highest numbers said to be from social services.

Administrative data has been provided by social services to provide context for understanding the impact of the Act on public services. Data prior to the implementation of the Act should not be compared to data following the Act. This is due to the fact fewer local authorities provided data in 2021-22 and some provided data for 6 months only.

Additionally, caution should be taken when making comparisons between the social services data since implementation of the Act as some local authorities reported changes in how assessments were undertaken and reported between the 2 years.

The number of social services contacts received during the year where physical punishment was a factor and the number of assessments recorded by social services where physical punishment of children was a factor were reported.

In the year following the Act coming into force (2022 to 2023), there were 4,855 contacts to social services recorded where physical punishment of children was a factor. In just under half of these (2,257) physical punishment was recorded as the only factor. The data for 2023 to 2024 shows an increase in this to 5,628 contacts, and 2,848 where physical punishment was recorded as the only factor.

In 2022 to 2023, the first year following the Act coming into force, there were 3,168 assessments recorded by social services where physical punishment of children was a factor. In almost half of these (1,504) physical punishment was recorded as the only factor. The data again shows an increase in this data for 2023 to 2024 (to 3,447 assessments), but a decrease in the number of assessments where physical punishment was the only factor (down to 1,475).

Data from the police force case file management system of case file data of common assault cases on children was provided to the Welsh Government by the police forces in Wales, excluding South Wales police, to estimate the number of recorded cases of physical punishment of a child prior to the implementation of the Act, and then again since implementation of the Act. The outputs of this work have been provided in this report. For the 3 police forces that provided data, the total number of physical punishment cases recorded prior to implementation of the Act in Wales was estimated to be approximately 3,900. Since implementation of the Act in Wales, again for those police forces that provided data, the total number of physical punishment cases recorded was estimated to be approximately 6,200.

The aim of the Act was to protect children's rights whilst adopting an educating and preventative approach which avoids criminalising parents (or those in loco parentis). These data when taken together suggest from a service perspective, the aim of the Act is being realised in practice, in that implementation is acting not to criminalise parents, but to "help, educate and support them in managing behaviours differently" (Duckworth, 2022). Therefore, it should be less likely that there will be parents entering the criminal justice system for violations of the Act, also avoiding a corresponding increase in demand on courts and protection services' resources.

3.4.2. Changes to workload

Findings from the qualitative work with professionals conducted by Miller Research suggests the Act's effect has been uneven across sectors, reflecting the diversity of service responsibilities and referral pathways. The impact of the Act on professional workloads has been inconsistent, varying across and within sectors due to differences in roles, expectations, and existing practices.

Many professionals, particularly in education, health, the CPS, and some local authorities reported no change, attributing this to alignment with existing safeguarding duties. The

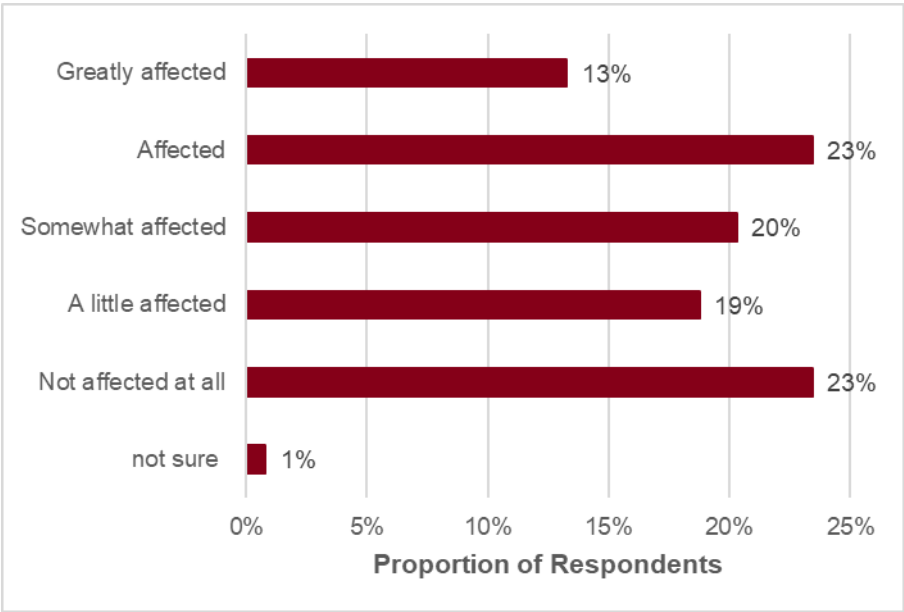
newly appointed parenting support workers were recruited specifically to deliver out of court parenting support and therefore did not have a pre-existing workload for comparison.

Other local authority staff and the police reported some frustration due to lower-than-expected case volumes after the implementation of the Act. These professionals had anticipated a higher number of referrals and adjusted resources accordingly.

For some professionals, particularly in policing and local authorities, the Act was reported to have led to increased workloads due to more time-intensive processes and reclassification of low-level incidents as crimes. However, many reported these changes as manageable, with initial challenges being eased by clearer referral pathways and support structures (Welsh Government, in press).

Within this same qualitative research with professionals, almost a quarter (23%) of survey respondents stated that their workload had not changed, particularly those working in education and health, where safeguarding processes already incorporated similar protections (Ibid.).

Figure 8: To what extent (if at all) has your organisation’s staff workload been affected by the Act coming into force? July 2025 to August 2025



Source: Survey of professionals, Qualitative Research with Professionals, Q16. N=128

Description of Figure 8: A bar graph showing to what extent interviewees think that their organisation’s staff workload has been affected by the Act coming into force. More than one third (36%) of respondents reported that staff workload had been affected (23%) or greatly affected (13%), whilst 39% thought it had been somewhat (20%) or a little affected (19%).

Data provided by Cafcass Cymru on the volume of private family law cases before and since the Act showed the implementation of the Act had not made any discernible difference to the organisation’s workload in terms of cases coming into the family justice system. It is

not yet possible to report on cases where physical punishment is a factor at the time of publication of this report.

The qualitative work with professionals explored the decision-making process relating to whether a case constitutes physical punishment (Welsh Government, in press). Findings indicated that this involves a sequence of judgements by different professionals at different points in the process. Interviewees in the research were clear that thresholds for intervention have not changed as a result of the Act. This means that not all incidents of physical punishment are treated as child protection cases. Factors influencing decisions include the degree of injury sustained, any previous involvement of the family with police or social services, and evidence of violence in the home.

Findings from the same research noted that there is an increasing need for parenting support more generally. Those interviewed working in out of court parenting support services, other local authority professionals, and Cafcass Cymru considered a broader rise in demand for parenting support has been driven by wider social issues like the pandemic and cost-of-living pressures, housing and the wider social policy landscape (Welsh Government, in press) rather than the Act itself.

Local authority managers also described an increased number of Section 47 enquiries (child protection investigations carried out under the Children Act 1989 when there is reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm), even for lower-level cases where it is sometimes ‘unnecessary’, contributing to temporary backlogs (Welsh Government, in press).

Professionals consistently stressed that the focus remains on education and support rather than criminalisation, which has helped to manage workloads by preventing unnecessary escalation of cases and promoting early intervention, in line with the law’s preventative intent (Ibid.). The development of clearer referral pathways, stronger inter-agency collaboration, and improved parenting support capacity has enabled most organisations to manage workload adjustments.

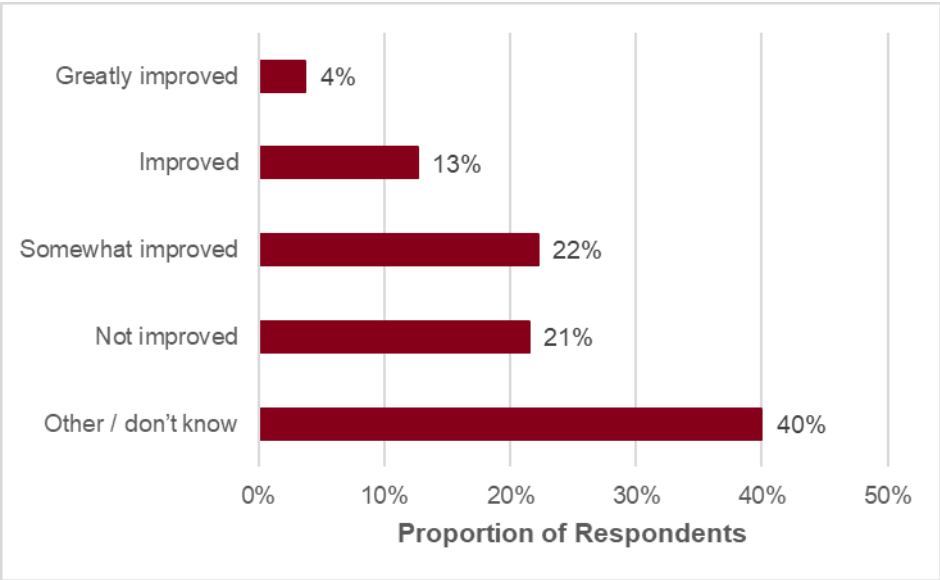
Professionals in the qualitative research also highlighted the value of clear national guidance, strengthened referral pathways, and enhanced parenting support through initiatives such as the Out-of-Court Parenting Support Scheme and the Parenting. Give it Time campaign. Training and resources developed with partners, such as Children in Wales, have also increased practitioner confidence and promoted consistent safeguarding practice across sectors.

3.4.3. Views of professionals working with children and families

The primary source of evidence on professionals’ views of working with children and families is the qualitative study with professionals undertaken by Miller Research (Welsh Government, in press). It found that implementation of the Act has generated several positive effects across public services in Wales. Findings indicate strengthened inter-agency collaboration, greater access to parenting support, and improved professional confidence and resulting capacity to protect children’s rights. As part of the qualitative research, which also included an online survey of professionals, 39% of respondents

reported an improvement in referral pathways between agencies as a result of the Act, whilst just over a fifth (21%) of survey respondents felt that referral pathways had not improved. Notably, the largest proportion of respondents (40%) felt unable to comment on whether the Act has had either a positive or negative impact on referral pathways. This could be down to the fact there are such varied referral routes and inconsistent levels of communication making it difficult to judge the overall effectiveness of the referral pathways.

Figure 9: 2To what extent have referral pathways between agencies improved because of the Act? July 2025 to August 2025



Source: Survey of professionals, Qualitative Research with Professionals Q17. N=135

Description of Figure 9: A bar graph showing to what extent interviewees believed that pathways between agencies have improved because of the Act. Overall, 39% felt that they have improved, with 4% feeling they have improved greatly, 13% that they have improved, and 22% feeling they have improved somewhat.

Interview findings from the same study found that the integration of out of court parenting support within wider parenting services was viewed positively by professionals. It enables local authorities to provide more rounded and flexible support to parents, children and families. However, some professionals reported a decline in the level of collaboration with the police, following an initial surge when the Act was first introduced. Despite the mixed evidence across sectors, professionals provided several examples of positive change since the introduction of the Act. In some areas, processes have become clearer and more consistent, with agencies reporting smoother collaboration and faster decision-making (Welsh Government, in press).

The qualitative research further indicates that professionals view the Act as having enhanced their ability to safeguard children’s rights, with nearly 60% reporting that it had either supported or greatly supported them in protecting children’s right to be free from violence (Welsh Government, in press). Similarly, research from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (2024) which draws on existing international research to review the effects of physical punishment, has also stated that removing the defence of reasonable punishment can help simplify safeguarding decision-making for professionals,

such as healthcare workers, educators, and social workers, and enable them to provide clearer guidance for families.

The majority (59%) of respondents to the online survey that was carried out as part of the qualitative research with professionals reported having experience discussing the Act and its legal changes with parents or caregivers in their current roles (Welsh Government, in press). Interestingly, the professional profiles of those with and without this experience were very similar. Each of the main sectors, including social services, education, health, police, and childcare were represented in both groups (i.e.: those with experience of discussing the Act with parents or caregivers and those without experience). This is likely to reflect the fact that some survey participants held senior roles and may no longer have direct contact with parents and carers, although it is important to note that the online survey did not capture the seniority of respondents (Welsh Government, in press).

Regarding confidence in delivering this message, a slightly smaller majority (57%) of professionals reported that they felt confident or very confident that the Act enabled them or their organisation to give clear, unambiguous advice to parents and carers that all physical punishment is illegal in Wales. One in ten reported feeling unconfident, while 28% described themselves as “somewhat confident” in discussing the Act (Ibid).

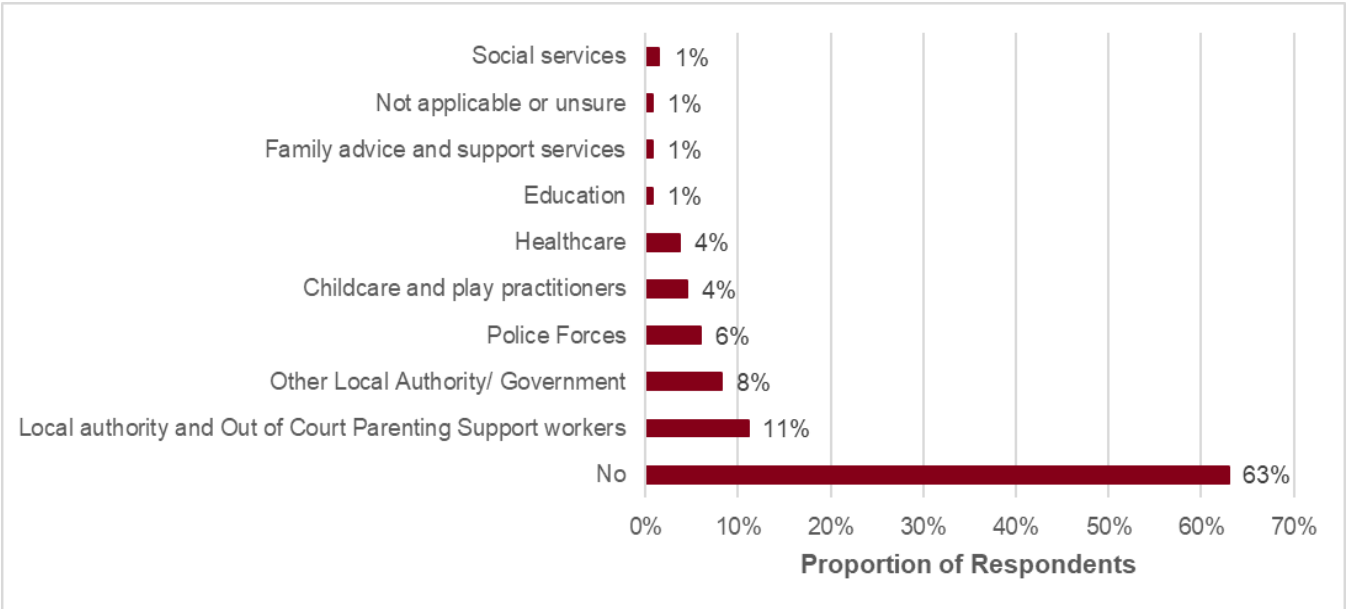
Nonetheless, some challenges persist. Findings from the qualitative research undertaken with professionals found that a minority of professionals continue to report uncertainty in explaining the Act, noting that there are still misconceptions amongst some parents on what constitutes physical punishment. Inconsistent data recording and case categorisation also limit the ability to fully assess system-wide impacts. Finally, language barriers and limited awareness among some minority and migrant communities highlight the ongoing need for accessible, culturally sensitive communication (Welsh Government, in press).

To support professional's understanding of the Act, A Practice Guide, to be used in conjunction with the Wales Safeguarding Procedures, has been published, providing additional information for practitioners about safeguarding responses where a child is affected by physical punishment. The guidance and procedures emphasise the importance of assessing risk, sharing information, documenting concerns, and taking swift action ([Wales Safeguarding Procedures, 2025](#)). The guide states that effective safeguarding arrangements in local authorities should be underpinned by 2 key principles: safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and the importance of following a child-centred approach. This structured approach has strengthened professional confidence and provided clearer guidance for professionals working with children and families (Welsh Government, in press)

However, the same study found that some professionals feel that training and guidance surrounding the Act could be improved. Findings from this study indicated that while many professionals recalled the awareness-raising campaigns directed at the general public, there was less consistent awareness of materials specifically designed for professionals. When asked, are you aware of any training, information or guidance available to people in your profession in response to the Act? (e.g. practice guides, videos, leaflets or courses), 63% of survey respondents were unaware of any materials, guidance or training. Awareness was lowest amongst childcare and play practitioners. Those who reported that

they were aware of materials, guidance or training were almost all out of court parenting support workers or professionals in social services or other local authority or government roles. This is shown in the Figure below.

Figure 10: Are you aware of any training, information or guidance available to people in your profession in response to the Act? (e.g. practice guides, videos, leaflets, courses) July 2025 to August 2025



Source: Source: Survey of professionals, Qualitative Research with Professionals Q6.
N=135

Description of Figure 10: A bar graph showing 63% of professionals are not aware of any training, information or guidance available to people in their profession in response to the Act. The graph separates out responses of those who are aware into the sectors they work in. Local authority and out of court staff are the most likely to be aware (11%) followed by other local authority / Government professionals (8%) and police forces (6%).

Among those familiar with guidance, several professionals (including those working in social services, the criminal justice sector, health and education) referred to resources produced by their own organisations, such as an internal online media pack, which included an introductory training video for staff. Out of court parenting support workers highlighted that the guidance and training opportunities shared by the Welsh Government had been helpful in supporting their work. Health professionals also noted that literature aimed at supporting families had been produced and was considered useful when engaging with parents. One professional commented that the guidance “really helped everybody to understand, that this is not about punishment”, but rather, about supporting and educating parents to parent more effectively (Welsh Government, in press).

Professionals commented that the guidance produced by the Welsh Government in 2022 includes an accessible questions and answers section on what constitutes unlawful physical punishment and embeds concise case vignettes, which model how to explain the law to parents in real conversations (Welsh Government, in press). The document also summarises key research on the harms of physical punishment, and mirrors the tools

professionals state they needed to remove awkwardness and defensiveness in parent discussions (Welsh Government, 2025d). Out-of-court parenting support workers reported that having “black-and-white” legislative language alongside guidance points encouraged more parents to self-refer and attend programmes, while health and education stakeholders appreciate case examples for opening dialogue on positive discipline.

The actionable format of materials, such as the parenting in Wales: guidance on engagement and support (Welsh Government, 2017) and safeguarding guidance (Wales Safeguarding Procedures, 2025) has enabled seamless integration into existing service pathways, supporting both initial engagement and ongoing participation in parenting support. Professionals also reported adopting specific models and approaches to support their own working practices such as the [Signs of safety model](#), [Parenting. Give it time](#) and the [Triple P Programmes](#) (Welsh Government, in press).

Not all professionals, however, were aware of guidance and materials tailored to their role or sector. Some explained guidance and materials were most visible around the time of implementation, but appeared to lessen in subsequent years, with several stating they were “not aware of any follow-up support.” In response, many local authorities developed their own resources, such as leaflets, emails, and internal communications, to ensure staff had the necessary information (Welsh Government, in press).

3.5. Stakeholder views and experiences

This section synthesises evidence from across the literature to summarise stakeholder views and experiences and professional perspectives. Some of this literature was published prior to the implementation of the Act, whilst evidence on views and experiences since implementation of the Act comes from the qualitative work undertaken by Miller Research with professionals in the main (Welsh Government, in press).

A [Community Care](#) article, published prior to the Act, reported anticipated implications for social work practice in Wales from the perspective of social workers, emphasising the change in legal framing, the likelihood of altered referral and recording practices, and the need for clear guidance, training and diversionary supports for parents (Duckworth, 2022).

This viewpoint is consistent with a research article from [Rogers & Thomas \(2022\)](#), which provides evidence of increased child-protection involvement. The research is a synthesis of existing research, legislation and government policy and grey literature. This includes data collected by the Welsh Government Police Liaison Unit on identified offences of Common Assault and Cruelty to Children, where reasonable chastisement was used as a defence or was considered in the decision-making process, alongside comparative data from Scotland and New Zealand. The research emphasised the likely operational consequences for policing and multi-agency partners, notably questions of police discretion, referral pathways, resourcing and the need for non-criminal, diversionary parenting supports (Rogers and Thomas, 2022). It therefore highlighted the issues most pertinent to professional stakeholders working to implement the Act within Wales.

The 2025 qualitative research with professionals conducted by Miller reflected the findings of this earlier research. Specifically, social workers reported that they now contend with a greater volume of time-intensive section 47 enquiries and low-level, non-injury incidents. However, many professionals described the increase as manageable. (Welsh Government, in press). During the same research, professionals shared that processes have been refined and expanded through dedicated funding from the Out of Court Parenting Support Grant enabling local authorities to embed parenting support workers into established family services, helping to streamline case escalations. Some stakeholders believed that police were now able to resolve low level offences swiftly without unnecessary social services involvement due to the removal of the reasonable punishment defence.

Findings again from this same research found that the identification of physical punishment is a process that involves a range of professionals working with children and families. While routes into the system vary, frontline staff in education, health and social care reported that they often play the most significant role in first recognising concerns.

Those interviewed in the research reported challenges in identifying cases of physical punishment, and noted ambiguity can be a problem, particularly where disclosures are made by very young children. Where there is clear evidence of injury, professionals reported that these cases were easier to identify and act upon. Whilst some challenges were noted, most professionals felt confident in the methods used for identifying cases of physical punishment. They highlighted the value of experienced and qualified staff, and the strength of relationships between agencies, as factors that underpin effective practice.

Professionals report that increased engagement with parents on positive behaviour management has helped to shift their focus to addressing root-causes, taking a preventative approach. The Act's removal of any "grey area" surrounding physical punishment has also facilitated this by providing much-needed clarity for both professionals and parents. The Parenting in Wales: Guidance on engagement and support from [Welsh Government in 2017](#) serves as an example of the kind of clear, evidence-based materials that professionals have found to be pivotal in deepening engagement with parents after the Act's introduction.

However, stakeholders highlight the need for induction sessions, refresher training and culturally adapted content for those such as asylum-seekers and refugee families. This reinforces the findings from qualitative interviews with professionals that consistency and targeted support remain critical to embedding the Act into frontline practice (Welsh Government, in press). Welsh Government commissioned Children in Wales to produce e-learning resources to support professionals in implementing the Act and provide advice on communicating with children about the Act. Having these resources available digitally allows them to be woven into existing professional development structures across sectors but greater promotion of them may be required.

4. Conclusions

The evidence reviewed in this report suggests there is a growing recognition of the limited behavioural benefits and potential harms associated with physical discipline, aligning with contemporary child development research that emphasises non-violent parenting strategies.

Three years on from implementation, the Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020 has been embedded largely as intended in supporting the core aim of upholding children's rights whilst adopting an educating and preventative approach that avoids criminalise parents.

4.1. Awareness, understanding and attitudes

Public awareness that physical punishment is illegal has steadily increased and remains stable, indicating that awareness raising campaigns have been successful. Additionally, there are high levels of acknowledgement and understanding of the changes amongst the general public and children and young people.

Evidence from the Beaufort Wales omnibus survey data shows sustained recognition of the law, with prompted awareness consistently strong amongst the general public. However, some survey data suggests that unprompted awareness remains high it is slightly lower in certain groups than in the immediate post-implementation period. The levelling out may suggest ongoing approaches to reinforce public awareness would be beneficial.

Professionals working with children and families report that they would also benefit from 'refresher sessions' to ensure that knowledge and understanding of the Act is maintained regardless of level of seniority or proximity of working with children and families.

Findings also indicate public belief that physical punishment can sometimes be necessary continues to decrease. This trend has been identified in both those with and without caring responsibilities, demonstrating an overall decline in acceptance. There is however still a minority who think that physical punishment is sometimes necessary or who misunderstand the scope of the Act. Research suggests that these opinions are typically held by males, older people and some younger respondents. This suggests there may be value in exploring further the attitudes amongst these groups particularly amongst those who may be caring for children in some capacity.

Further research to support the current evidence base could include more in-depth research with the 16-34 and over 55 age groups and with children and young people to further explore their attitudes and understanding of the Act in Wales and how this is being realised.

4.2. Impacts on public services

Frontline services are reporting that positive parenting techniques and awareness from parents and carers is increasing. This has been greatly aided by the creation of the out of

court parenting support worker role, which has played a key part in working closely with families and providing preventative services to parents. Additionally, this role has mitigated the impact on wider public services through providing an alternative form of support and education and a resolution for parents instead of criminalisation. (Welsh Government, in press).

Most surveyed professionals in the qualitative research by Miller Research (72% of survey respondents) expressed confidence in the referral processes in place (Ibid.). However, for some of the out of court parenting support workers interviewed as part of the research it appeared to be difficult to judge the effectiveness of referral pathways. Interviewees noted how processes varied between different local authorities and due to this variation between areas and organisations across Wales it was therefore recognised that a standard referral process across Wales is unlikely to be possible or appropriate.

This synthesis study has drawn on monitoring data on the number of police referrals to out of court parenting support, CPS data, and social services data that is currently available. Collectively these datasets indicate that where cases of physical punishment of a child have been detected, parents are being offered support rather than being pushed through prosecution routes. This appears to be working well given that the majority of those who are referred by police to the parenting support report positive outcomes in post support questionnaires.

An opportunity for further data collection to support the 5-year post implementation review of the Act would be to ensure data is captured from all police forces in Wales. This would provide a comprehensive national estimate of the number of cases reported to the police where a case of physical punishment has been detected.

Findings from the qualitative research with professionals indicate that for many practitioners, particularly those working in health and education, the Act was deemed to align closely with their existing responsibilities and safeguarding responsibilities and the Act was not considered to have had a significant effect on workload. However, some professionals such as the police, reported an increase in time-consuming processes as a consequence of the Act. This was especially reported to be an issue during the initial period after the Act had been introduced. Nonetheless, these initial challenges have been partially mitigated by clearer multi-agency guidance and more refined referral pathways.

4.3. Stakeholder views and experiences

Professionals report greater clarity and confidence in discussing discipline and children's rights with families. Concise practitioner tools, such as question and answer-style guidance, and clear statements on what the Act covers, have been especially helpful in reducing defensiveness amongst parents and encouraging engagement with support.

Stakeholders also highlight the importance of culturally and linguistically accessible materials, induction for staff who have limited child-facing experience, and regular refreshers to maintain confidence and consistency across sectors.

An opportunity to inform the evidence in this space further could be to explore the feasibility of undertaking research with parents who have been supported by the out of court parenting support schemes to understand the effectiveness of the support from a parental perspective and how this supports behavioural change.

4.4. Concluding summary

Wales has made a clear, rights-based shift away from physical punishment, supported by high public awareness, widely available parenting support, and growing professional confidence.

Overall, the evidence suggests that implementation is progressing well, supported by strong inter-agency collaboration and a clear focus on prevention and education.

There are further research opportunities to support the 5-year post implementation review, which should build on the existing evidence presented in this report. These opportunities include improving the comprehensiveness of available data, and qualitative research with particular groups to understand in more detail how the Act is being realised.

The system is increasingly taking a preventative and proportionate approach, and operational impacts are emerging, as guidance and pathways mature. Modest, practical improvements in communication, workforce support, and data quality, especially around consistency and equity, will aid continued effective implementation of the Act and provide a well-rounded and robust set of data and evidence for the 5-year post implementation review.

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Annex: Wider literature search considerations

Key topic concepts that helped shape the literature search for wider evidence.

Pico (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome) Element and Literature Search Terms

Population:

- Children and Young People
- Parents, Care Givers and Professionals working with children and young people and/or parents

Intervention

- Children Wales Act- abolishment of physical punishment of children and young people

Comparison

- Pre-implementation of the Children Wales Act
- Nations in which the physical punishment of children is not abolished

Outcomes

- Level of physical Punishment of Children and Young People
- Use of positive parenting techniques by parents and care givers
- Attendance to the Out of Court Parenting Support Scheme and post intervention evaluation score of behaviours
- Reports of physical punishment by a parent or care giver to social services, police forces and other agencies (e.g. school)