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# Public attitudes to physical punishment of children: Wave 4 survey, 2021

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# Public attitudes to physical punishment of children: Wave 4 survey, 2021

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

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background and objectives

1.1 The Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Bill was introduced to the National Assembly for Wales<sup>1</sup> on 25 March 2019. On 20 March 2020 the Bill received Royal Assent and became the Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020. The Act will come into force on 21 March 2022.

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

1.3 Section 2 of the Act requires Welsh Ministers to promote public awareness of the law change before it comes into force in March 2022. The Welsh Government is committed to raising public awareness of the change in the law. Its planned public awareness raising campaign was reviewed as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, to focus on stakeholder engagement, work with specific audiences and promoting and supporting positive parenting through to summer 2021. A multi-media public awareness campaign, which includes advertising and public relations, started softly in June 2021 with digital advertising, and launched fully in September 2021, six months before commencement. The biggest burst of communications activity is between January-March 2022, in the immediate run-up to commencement of the law change. Awareness raising is planned to continue for some years following commencement to embed awareness among the public in Wales.

1.4 The objective of this research was to build on previous waves of research conducted in 2018, 2019 and 2020 on public attitudes towards physical punishment

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

of children including the legislation. The fieldwork for this survey was carried out in November 2021 ahead of the change in the law in March 2022. The Welsh Government intends to repeat these questions at regular intervals to track public awareness and opinion as the public awareness campaign progresses over a number of years.

## **1.2 Note on changes to data collection for the 2020 and 2021 survey**

1.5 Fieldwork for the 2020 and 2021 surveys were conducted during the Covid-19 public health crisis. Given the restrictions in place during this time, it was not possible to undertake the survey in the same way as the previous waves. In 2018 and 2019, the research used an in-home face-to-face interviewer administered approach.

1.6 The 2020 and 2021 surveys were completed via an online self-completion method using an online panel<sup>2</sup>. Whilst both the online and the previous face-to-face surveys are designed to produce representative samples of the adult (aged 16+) population in Wales, it is possible that the change of mode could have some impact on results. For example, some respondents may answer differently when there is not an interviewer present, and some previously unprompted questions need to be framed differently when there is no interviewer present to code answers. Whilst it is difficult to be definitive about this, evidence suggests that effects tend to be larger for questions that ask about values and behaviour, with smaller effects for more factual information<sup>3</sup>. Any lack of change in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a lack of change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode. Any changes in results from waves before the mode change and the current wave should be interpreted with caution; a change could be wholly, partly or not at all due to the change in mode. For any future waves of research, the survey will continue to be undertaken via online self-completion as the survey vehicle, the Beaufort Wales Omnibus Survey has

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

<sup>3</sup> [Cabinet Office \(2019\). Community life survey: investigating the viability of moving from a face-to-face to an online/postal mode: evidence from a series of methodological studies 2012-2015](#), Section 9.3

permanently moved to this data collection method. More information about the survey method for 2021 can be found in Annex C.

### **1.3 About this report**

1.7 The findings outlined in this report are based on research conducted on the November 2021 Beaufort Wales Omnibus survey, which interviewed a representative quota sample of 1,000 adults aged 16+ across Wales. This includes both parents/guardians and non-parents/guardians. Findings from this survey are frequently compared in this report to almost identical sets of questions<sup>4</sup> asked as part of the November 2018, November 2019 and November 2020 Beaufort Wales Omnibus surveys. Each Wales Omnibus survey is conducted with separate samples of Welsh adults 16+ which are matched in terms of demographics such as age, gender, region and social grade, although (as noted in the previous section) the 2020 and 2021 survey were undertaken via online self-completion rather than the interviewer administered face-to-face approach used in 2018 and 2019. This work forms part of a suite of parenting research undertaken by the Welsh Government since 2013. A table of reports can be found at Annex A.

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

### **1.4 Statistical testing**

1.9 Throughout this report comparisons are made between different groups of the population (for example, those of different age groups or gender) to understand if

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<sup>4</sup> The only small amendments to the 2020 and 2021 surveys were that questions 4, 6, 7 and 8 no longer said 'proposed changes' as they had in 2018 and 2019 because they reflected the Bill receiving Royal Assent in March 2020. In addition, in 2020 and 2021 at question 1, '*don't know*' was a prompted response code rather than only being spontaneously recorded in 2018/2019 reflecting the change in mode from face-to-face to online. The same applied at question 3 for '*don't know*' and '*refused*' responses codes. Finally (and again reflecting the change to online), at question 6 respondents were prompted with a list of sources of awareness in 2020 and 2021 whereas in 2018/2019 this list was unprompted.



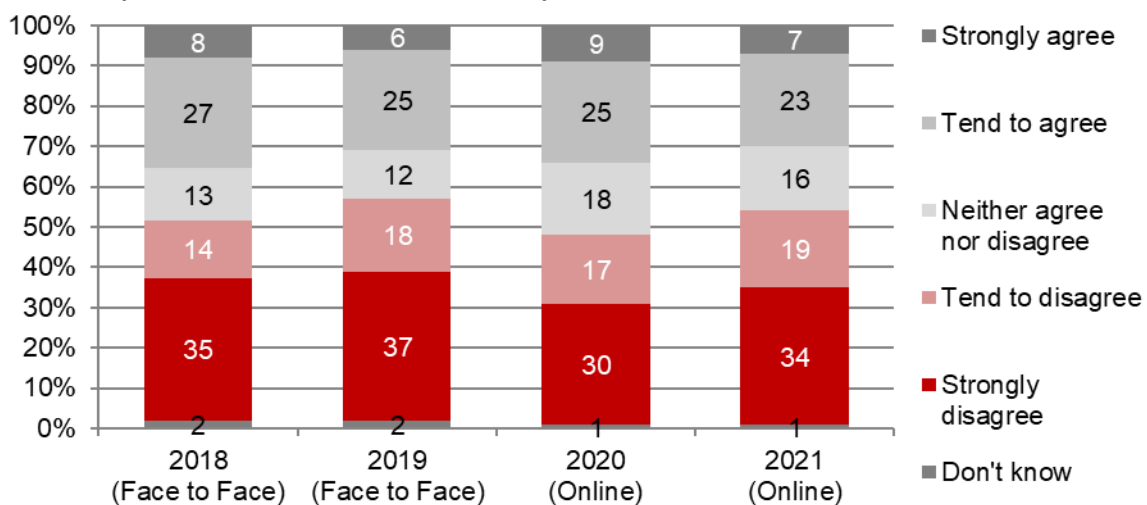
they have varying attitudes, behaviours or knowledge. There are also comparisons between the different years of the survey to explore if there have been changes over time. The report uses statistical testing to compare results between groups of the population and also to compare results over time. When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

## 2. Attitudes towards smacking

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

2.2 In the latest survey 30% agreed and 53% disagreed that *it is sometimes necessary to smack a child*. The difference between the proportions agreeing and disagreeing with the statement is wider than existed at the 2020 survey (34% agreed, 47% disagreed). This difference between 2020 and 2021 is statistically significant i.e. the finding can be generalised to the wider population. Overall, the proportions agreeing and disagreeing with the statement in 2021 are similar to findings in 2019.

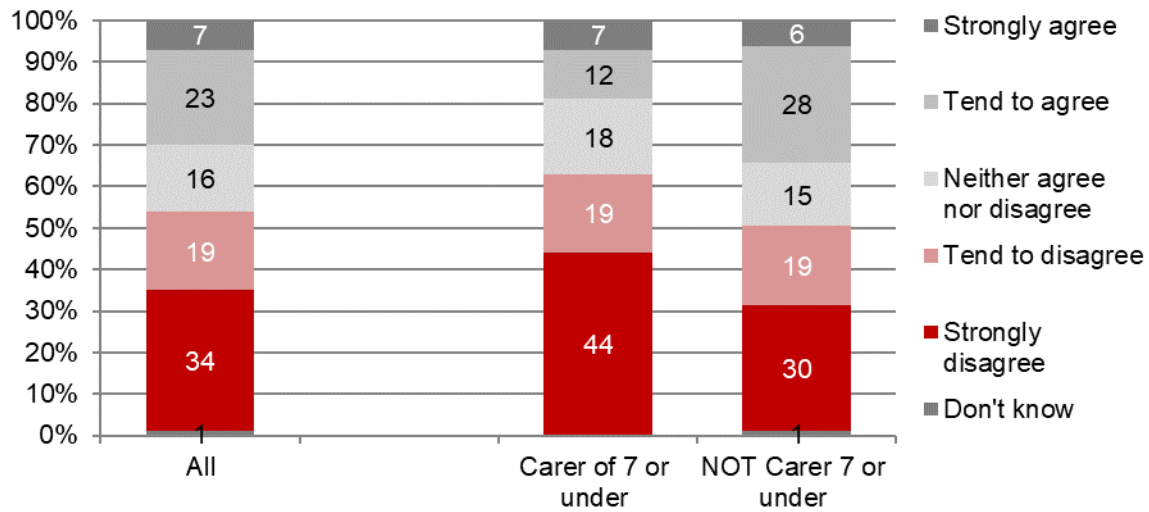
**Figure 2.1: Percentage in agreement that ‘it is sometimes necessary to smack a child’ (All – 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021)**



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

2.3 Those who have caring responsibilities for children aged seven or under, namely parents, guardians or other family members who provide regular care, were more likely to disagree that *it is sometimes necessary to smack a child* – 63% compared with 49% among those who do not have caring responsibilities for those aged seven and under (figure 2.2). This difference is statistically significant and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population.

**Figure 2.2: Percentage in agreement that ‘it is sometimes necessary to smack a child’ (All and whether regular carer of child aged seven or under - 2021)**

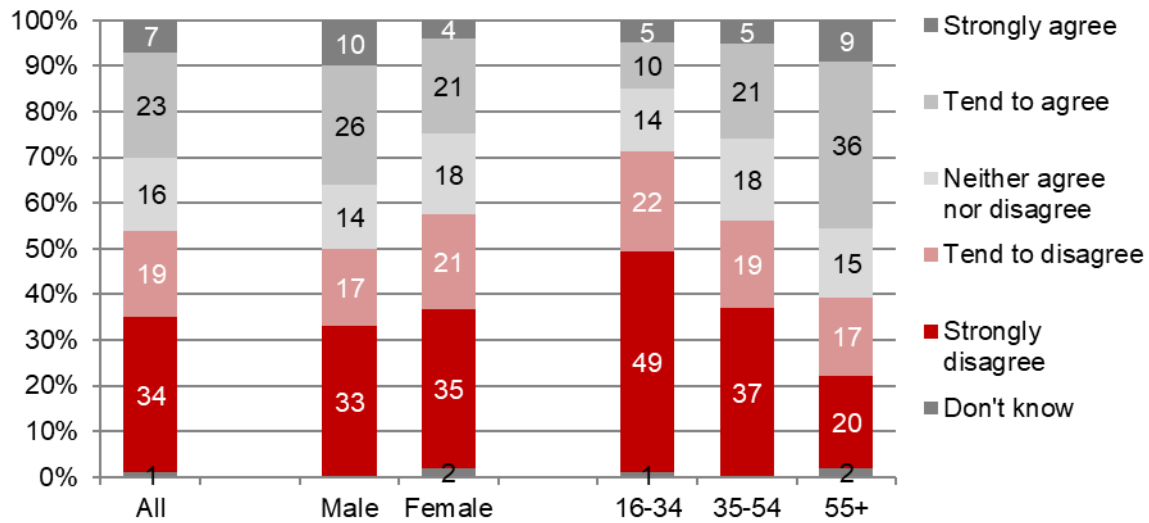


Base: All (1,000), Regular carer of 7 or under (316), Not a regular carer of 7 or under (681)

2.4 As shown in figure 2.3, when we examine this by age of respondent, we find that those in the older age group (55+) were more likely to agree that *it is sometimes necessary to smack a child* – at 46%<sup>5</sup> this was more than three times the number of 16-34s who held this view (14%). Whilst less pronounced than age, a difference in opinion was also found by gender with 36% of men agreeing with the statement compared with 25% of women. The differences reported by age and gender were statistically significant and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population.

<sup>5</sup> Total is 46% rather than 45% (9% + 36% as shown in figure 2.3) as percentages are 9.2% and 36.4% = 45.6%.

**Figure 2.3: Percentage in agreement that ‘it is sometimes necessary to smack a child’ (All and by gender and by age group - 2021)**



Base: All (1,000), Male (383), Female (613), 16-34 (342), 35-54 (338), 55+ (320)

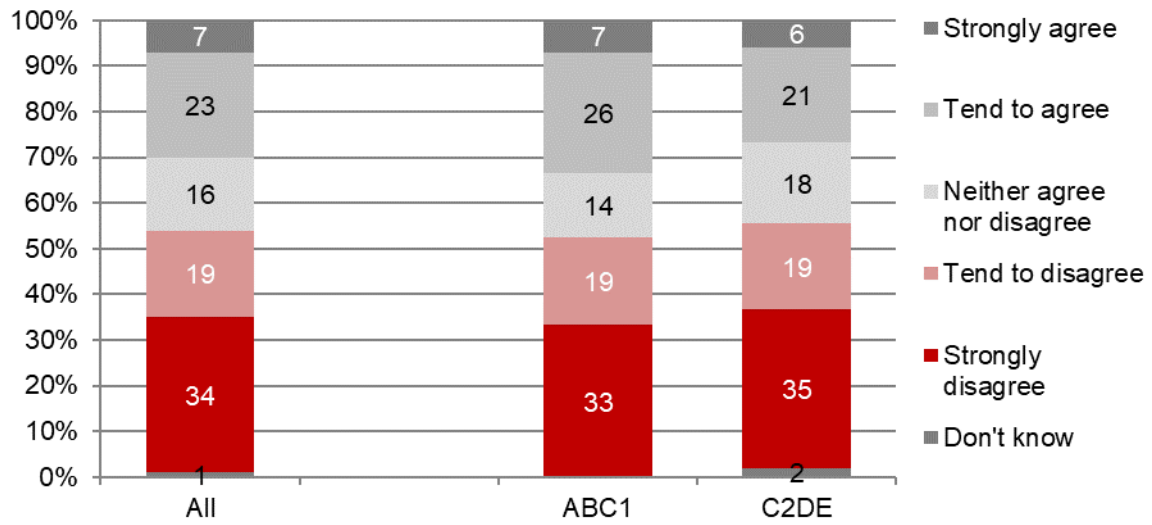
2.5 Differences in agreement with this statement by age group (confirmed as statistically significant) were also found in the 2018, 2019 and 2020 surveys. The older the respondent the more likely they were to agree that ‘it is sometimes necessary to smack a child’. The difference in agreement by gender was also found in 2020, but was not present in the earlier surveys of 2018 and 2019.

2.6 Figure 2.4 shows findings for the same measure by social grade<sup>6</sup>. Opinion of those in social grades ABC1<sup>7</sup> was similar to those in social grades C2DE. This consolidates the same finding from 2019 and 2020 surveys.

<sup>6</sup> Social grade is a classification system based on the occupation of the chief income earner in the household.

<sup>7</sup> Definitions of social grades A,B,C1,C2,D,E can be found in Annex E

**Figure 2.4: Percentage in agreement that ‘it is sometimes necessary to smack a child’ (All and by social grade - 2021)**



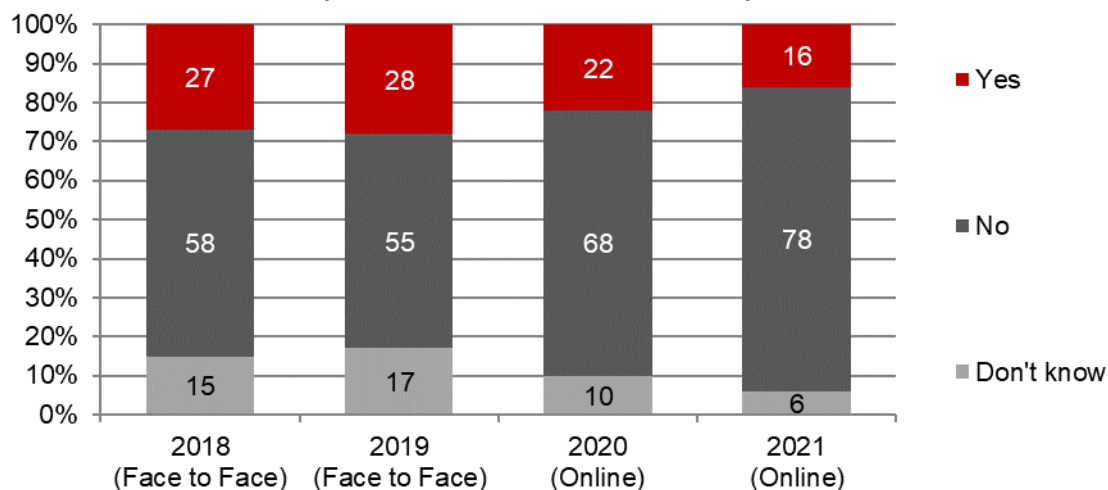
Base: All (1,000), ABC1 (575), C2DE (425)

### 3. Knowledge of current legislation

3.1 The legal situation regarding smacking or other physical punishment of children in Wales at the time of this survey (November 2021), was that parents and adults acting in *loco parentis* (acting with parental responsibility) were able to use the defence of reasonable punishment against a charge of common assault. Parents who physically punish their children cannot use the reasonable punishment defence for charges of cruelty, wounding or assaults occasioning actual or grievous bodily harm. The Crown Prosecution Service guidance clarifies that “although any injury that is more than 'transient or trifling' can be classified as actual bodily harm, the appropriate charge will be one of Common Assault where no injury or injuries which are not serious occur”.

3.2 Just over three-quarters (78%) of people surveyed in 2021 thought that the law did not allow parents to smack their children. A total of 16% thought the law did allow parents to smack and the remaining 6% reported being unsure. These proportions are different to the 2020 survey in that more now believe smacking isn't allowed and consequently fewer believe it is allowed or are unsure. This difference in response between 2021 and 2020 surveys is statistically significant and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population. This change represents a continuation of the pattern of increasing belief that smacking is not allowed when comparing the 2020 findings with previous surveys.

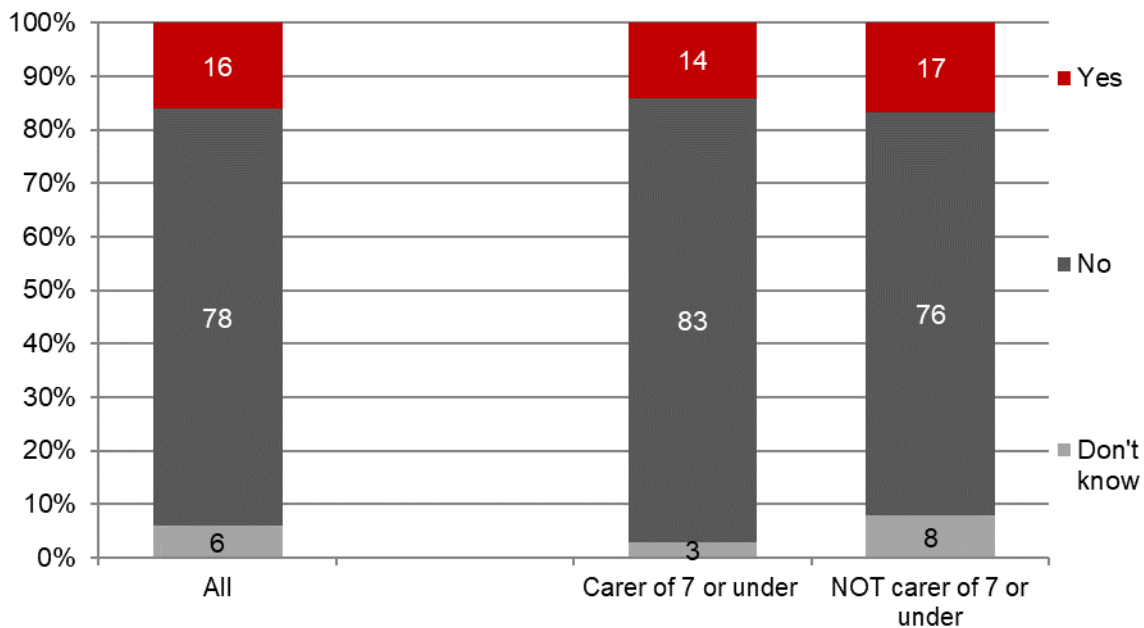
**Figure 3.1: Percentage who believe that the law currently allows parents to smack their children (All – 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021)**



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

3.3 Knowledge of the law on smacking shows few differences by whether an individual is a carer of children aged seven or under or not. Similar proportions of each group thought smacking was currently allowed (14% and 17% respectively).

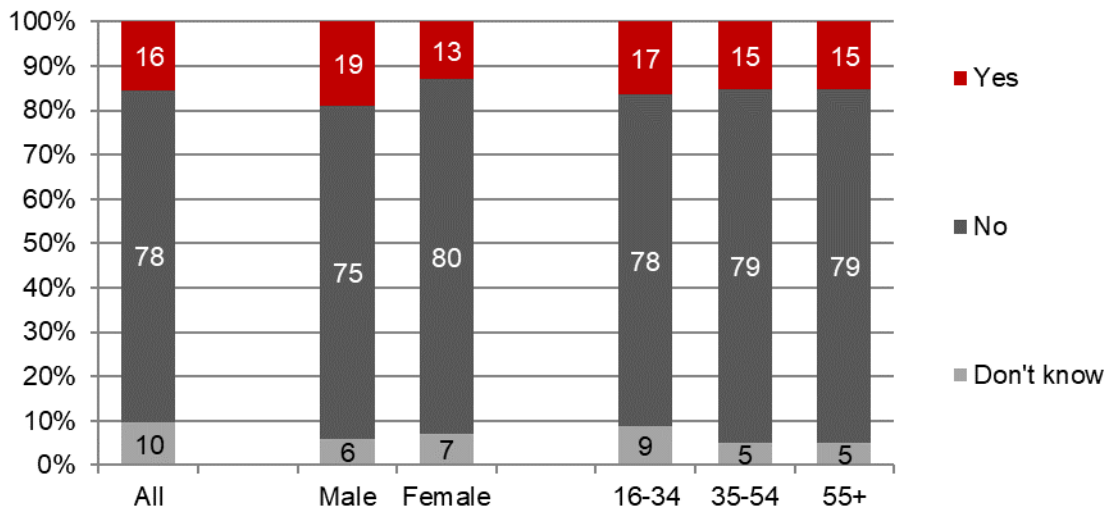
**Figure 3.2: Percentage who believe that the law currently allows parents to smack their children (All and by whether regular carer of child aged seven or under - 2021)**



*Base: All – Regular carer of 7 or under (316), NOT regular carer of 7 or under (681)*

3.4 Awareness of whether smacking was allowed or not varied little by age group as shown in figure 3.3. However, the gap was slightly greater by gender (19% of men believed smacking was allowed compared with 13% of women), and this difference was statistically significant and therefore can be generalised to the wider population

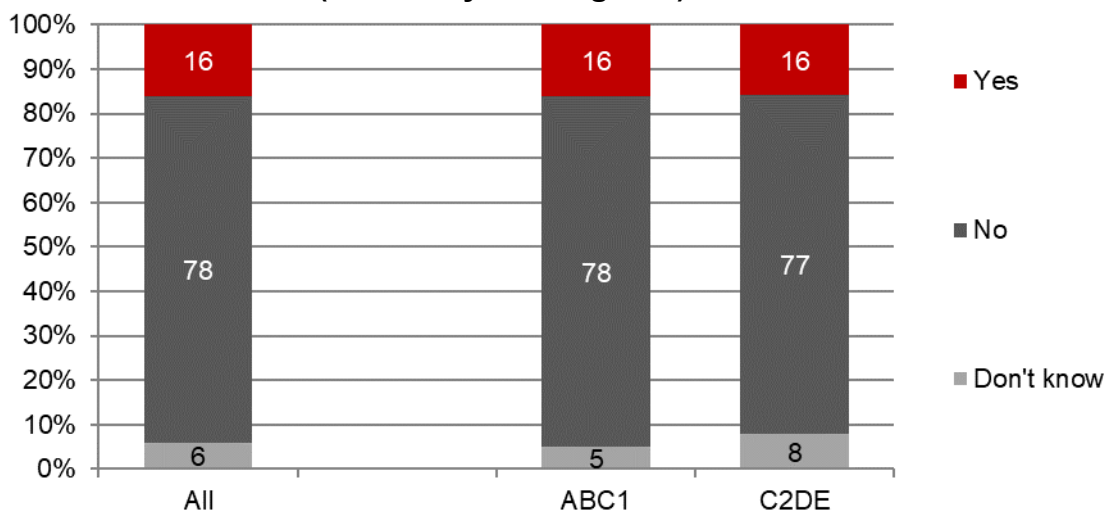
**Figure 3.3: Percentage who believe that the law currently allows parents to smack their children (All and by gender and by age group - 2021)**



Base: All (1,000), Male (383), Female (613), 16-34 (342), 35-54 (338), 55+ (320)

3.5 Knowledge of the law on smacking shows little difference by different social grade. Around 1 in 6 of each group (ABC1s and C2DEs), as shown in figure 3.4, believe the law allows parents to smack their children.

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



Base: All (1,000), ABC1 (575), C2DE (425)

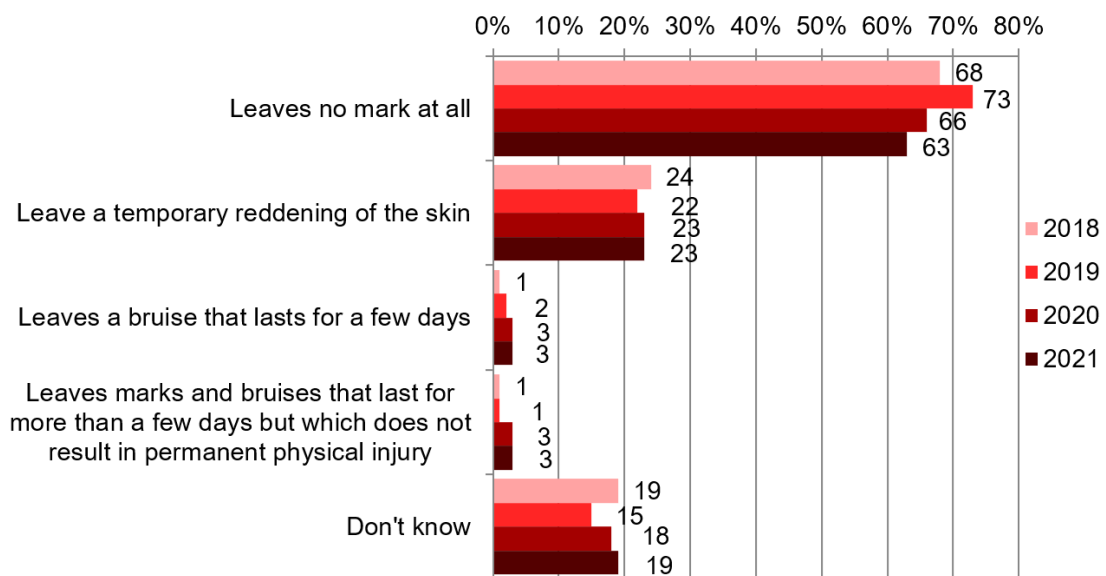
3.6 Individuals were then informed that the law currently does allow parents to smack or physically discipline their children and questioned respondents on the level of punishment they felt the law allowed. The options they were given can be found in



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

3.7 Around two-thirds (63%) thought that punishment which left no mark at all on the child would be allowed in law. Far fewer (23%) thought that leaving a temporary reddening of the skin would be allowed. Only a very small proportion thought that higher levels of physical punishment such as something that leaves a bruise for a few days (3%) or leaves marks or bruises that last for more than a few days but does not result in permanent physical injury (3%) would be allowed in law. Just under a fifth (19%) reported that they did not know what level of punishment would be allowed. The findings were similar to those found in all previous surveys.

**Figure 3.5: Percentage who thought that each level of punishment was currently allowed in law – 2021**

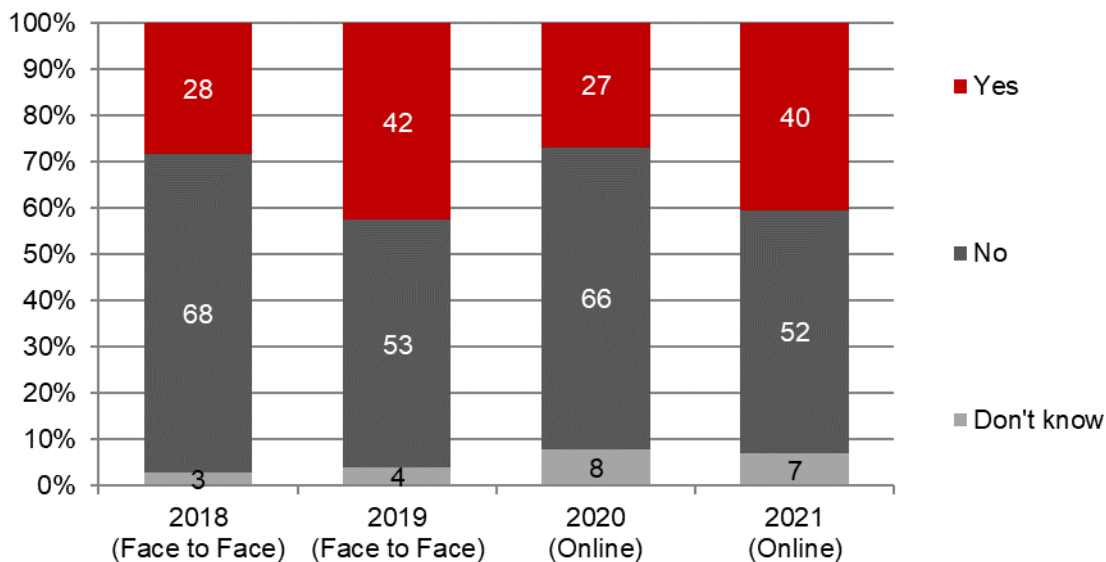


Base: All - 2018 (1,002), 2019 (1,002), 2020 (1,002), 2021 (1,000)

## 4. Awareness of changes to legislation

4.1 In the latest survey, two-fifths (40%) of people reported that they were aware of changes to the law around physical punishment of children at an unprompted level<sup>8</sup>. This compared to an equivalent figure of 27% in the 2020 survey who were aware of the changes. This increase since 2020 in awareness of the change is statistically significant and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population. Levels of unprompted awareness were very similar to those recorded in the 2019 survey.

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

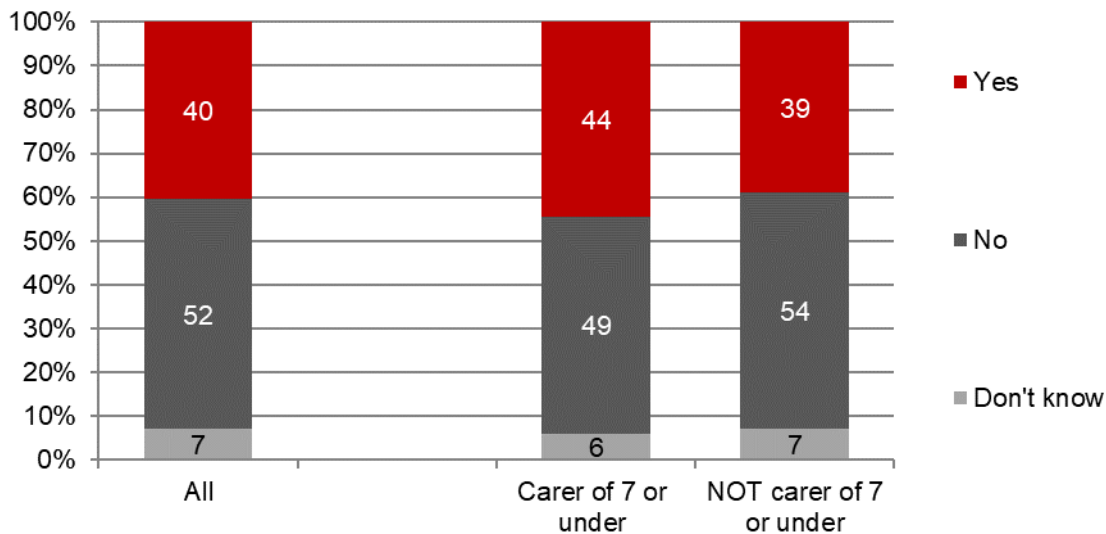


*Base: All – 2018 (1,002), 2019 (1,002), 2020 (1,002), 2021 (1,000)*

4.2 Awareness of proposed changes to the law around physical punishment of children was slightly higher among carers of children seven and under than those who did not have these responsibilities – 44% vs. 39% (figure 4.2). However, this difference is not statistically significant and therefore the finding cannot be generalised to the wider population.

<sup>8</sup> Respondents were not given any details of potential changes at this point and were asked - 'Are you aware of any changes to the law around physical punishment of children?'

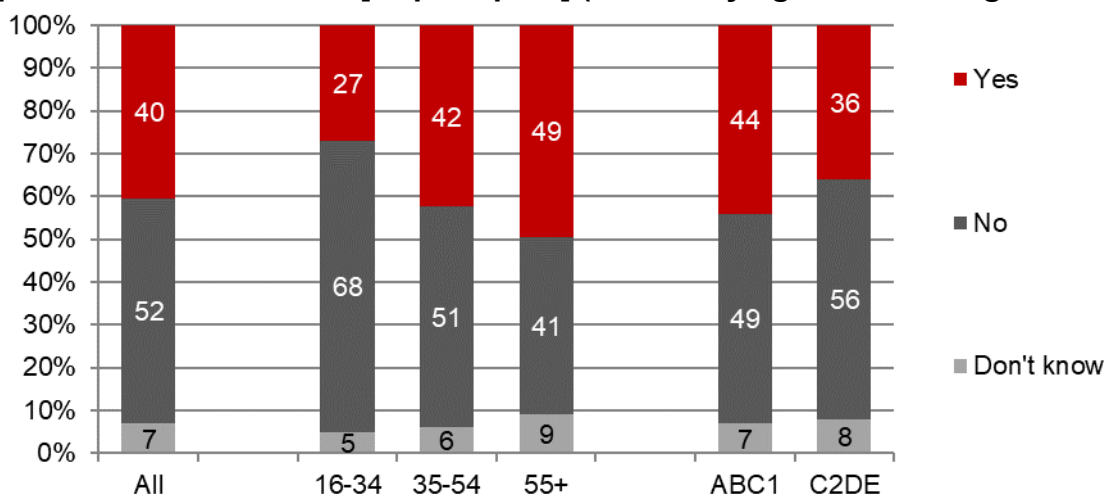
**Figure 4.2: Percentage aware of proposed changes in legislation around physical punishment of children [Unprompted] (All and by whether regular carer of child aged seven or under - 2021)**



*Base: All (1,000), Regular carer of 7 or under (316), Not a regular carer of 7 or under (681)*

4.3 As shown in figure 4.3, those in social grades C2DE (36%) were less likely to be aware of the change than those in social grades ABC1 (44%). This difference was statistically significant and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population. Younger respondents aged 16-34 were less likely to be aware of the change in legislation than those in the older age groups, aged 35-54 and 55+ (27% vs. 42% & 49%). This difference was also statistically significant and therefore can be generalised to the wider population.

**Figure 4.3: Percentage aware of changes in legislation around physical punishment of children [Unprompted] (All and by age and social grade - 2021)**



*Base: All (1,000), 16-34 (342), 35-54 (338), 55+ (320), ABC1 (575), C2DE (425)*

4.4 Higher levels of unprompted awareness of the change were reported in all age groups and all social grade groupings in 2021 compared with 2020. All of these differences, with the exception of 16-34s, were statistically significant and therefore the findings can be generalised to the wider population.

4.5 Those who reported being aware of changes in legislation (393 respondents) were asked to describe in their own words how they thought the law would change. Their responses were then grouped into themes and are shown in table 4.1. By far the most frequent response was that smacking would be [completely] banned \ it will be illegal. The vast majority (84%) of those aware of a change spontaneously mentioned this.

**Table 4.1: Can you tell me how you think the law will change? - 2021**  
[Unprompted]

Response	Percentage of respondents (Number of respondents)
[Complete] ban on smacking \ physical punishment \ it will be illegal	84 (n.342)
<b>Other responses reported by less than 5 per cent of respondents</b>	
Change is being discussed (unspecific)	
Good idea \ don't agree with smacking	
No longer can be used as a legal defence	
No physical contact at all	
Penalties for those who smack children	
Thought it was already illegal to smack	

*Base: Those aware of changes to the law around physical punishment of children – unprompted (393)*

*(a) Other responses are presented alphabetically*

4.6 Responses to this question were similar to those found in the 2018, 2019 and 2020 surveys when *smacking would be [completely] banned \ it will be illegal* was also by far the most frequently mentioned answer (73%, 69% and 64% of those aware of changes respectively).

4.7 Those who reported being aware of the changes in legislation were also asked to state how they had become aware of the change (table 4.2). Seeing something on a TV news \ programme was the most frequent response with approaching half (45%) of those aware of the change reporting this as their source. This was followed by being made aware through the news / on programmes via

other methods – online news item (16%) and radio news / programme (11%). TV advertising (13%), word of mouth from family and friends (11%) and National Wales newspaper - news \ article (11%) were mentioned as change awareness sources by similar proportions.

4.8 The sources of awareness of the change cited in the 2021 survey are largely mentioned at similar levels to previous surveys. TV news programme was also the most frequently cited source in 2020 (41%). The main exceptions are increases in mentions in 2021 for TV advertising - 13% of those aware in 2021 compared with 5% in 2020, and National Wales newspaper news / article - 11% in 2021 compared with 5% in 2020.

**Table 4.2: How did you become aware of the change to the law around physical punishment of children? - 2021**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents (Number of respondents)</b>
On TV – news \ programme	45 (n.180)
Online website - news item	16 (n.65)
On TV advertising	13 (n.51)
On radio – news \ programme	11 (n.45)
Someone told me (family \ friends)	11 (n.44)
National Wales newspaper - news \ article	11 (n.43)
Facebook	9 (n.38)
Social media (excluding Facebook)	8 (n.32)
National UK newspaper - news \ article	8 (n.32)
National Wales newspaper - advertising	5 (n.22)
Local newspaper - news \ article	5 (n.20)
Radio - advertising	5 (n.19)
<b>Other responses reported by less than 5 per cent of respondents</b>	
Local newspaper - advertising	
Magazine	
National UK newspaper - advertising	
Online website - other	
Someone told me (professional)	

*Base: Those aware of changes to the law around physical punishment of children – unprompted (393)*

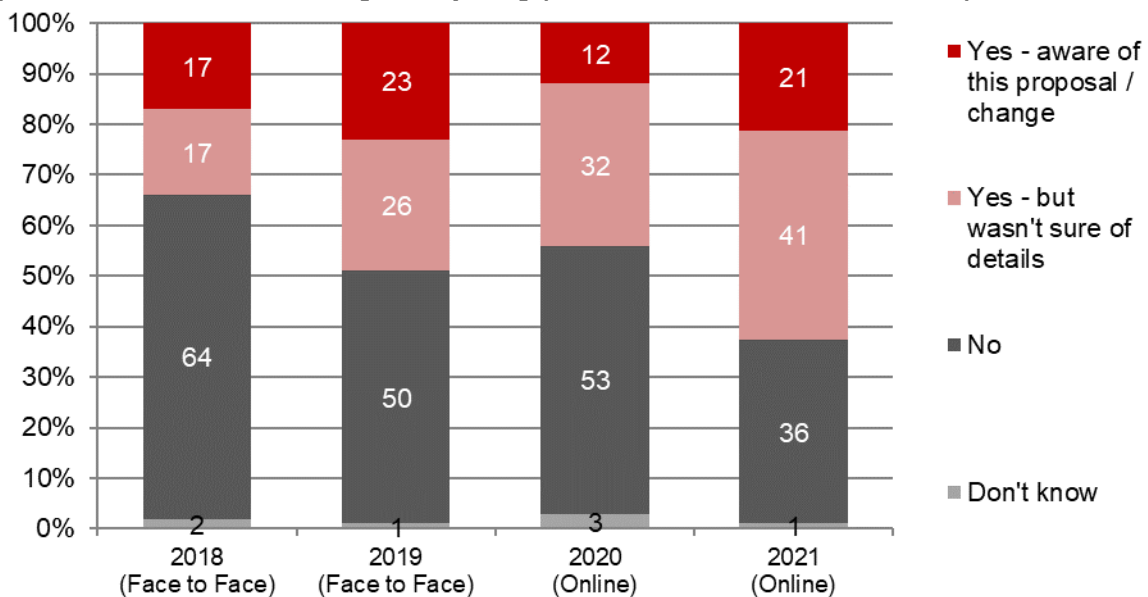
*(a) Table may add up to more than 100 per cent as respondents were able to give more than one answer*

*(b) Other responses are presented alphabetically*

4.9 After being asked their awareness at an unprompted level, respondents were then presented with a description of the legislative change (which can be found in Annex D) and were asked if they had seen or heard anything about this. At this prompted level, more respondents reported that they were aware of the legislation than had done so on an unprompted basis (see figure 4.1). A total of 63% knew something about the change consisting of 21% stating they were aware of it and a larger group (41%) who were aware but not sure about the details.

4.10 This represents an increase in prompted awareness compared with the 2020 survey when 44% knew something – see figure 4.4. This difference is statistically significant and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population. The level of prompted awareness recorded in 2021 was the largest of any across all survey years.

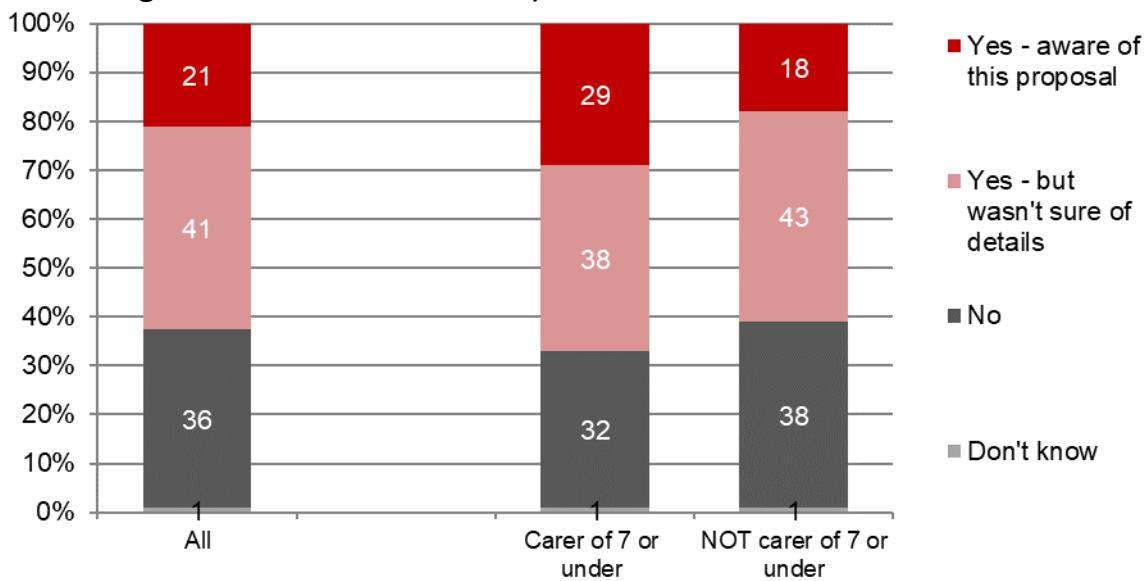
**Figure 4.4: Percentage aware of changes in legislation around physical punishment of children [Prompted] (All – 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021)**



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

4.11 At this prompted level those with caring responsibilities for children aged seven and under were more likely to be aware of the legislation than those without these responsibilities – 67% compared with 61% (figure 4.5). However, this difference was not statistically significant and therefore cannot be generalised to the wider population.

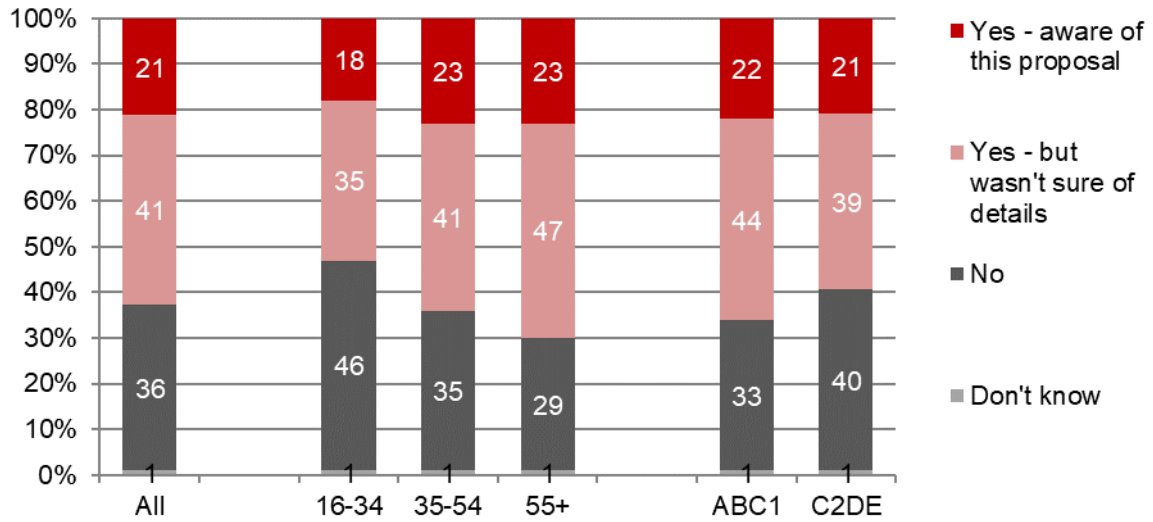
**Figure 4.5: Percentage aware of proposed changes in legislation around physical punishment of children [Prompted] (All and by whether regular carer of child aged seven or under - 2021)**



*Base: All (1,000), Regular carer of 7 or under (316), Not a regular carer of 7 or under (681)*

4.12 As with unprompted awareness, those in social grades ABC1 were more likely to be aware of the legislative change when prompted with a description of it than those in social grades C2DE – 66% vs. 59%. In terms of age, there are also some differences recorded with awareness increasing with increasing age – 52% among 16-34s, 70% among those aged 55+. These differences were statistically significant and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population.

**Figure 4.6: Percentage aware of changes in legislation around physical punishment of children [Prompted] (All and by age group and social grade - 2021)**



Base: All (1,000), 16-34 (342), 35-54 (338), 55+ (320), ABC1 (575), C2DE (425)

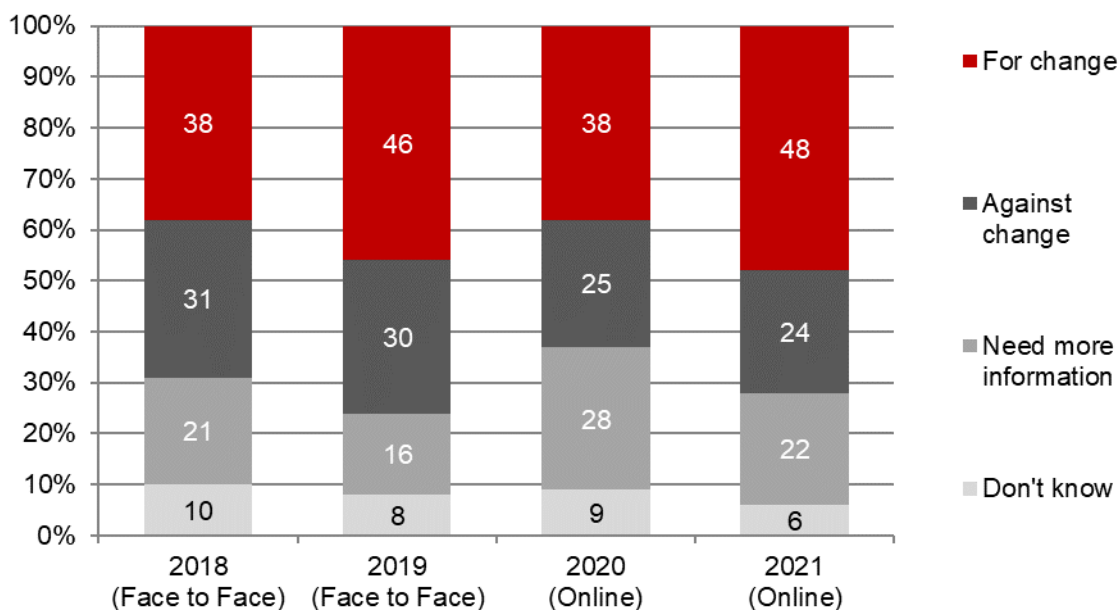


## 5. Opinion of changes to legislation

5.1 Having been shown the description of the change, respondents were asked whether they were in favour of the removal of the defence of reasonable punishment, against it or needed more information to decide. Overall, approaching half (48%) were in favour of the removal of the defence of reasonable punishment. This was twice as many as were against the change (24%) with remaining 28% either requiring more information to make a decision (22%) or being unsure of their opinion (6%).

5.2 As shown in figure 5.1, the proportion in favour of the removal of the defence of reasonable punishment has increased in comparison with 2020 (2020 – 38%, 2021– 48%). However, the proportion opposing the change has remained largely unchanged (2020 – 25%, 2021 – 24%). This reflects that less respondents now (than in 2020) claim to need more information / don't know (2020 – 28%, 2021 – 22%). These differences between opinion in 2020 and 2021 on the legislative change were statistically significant and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population.

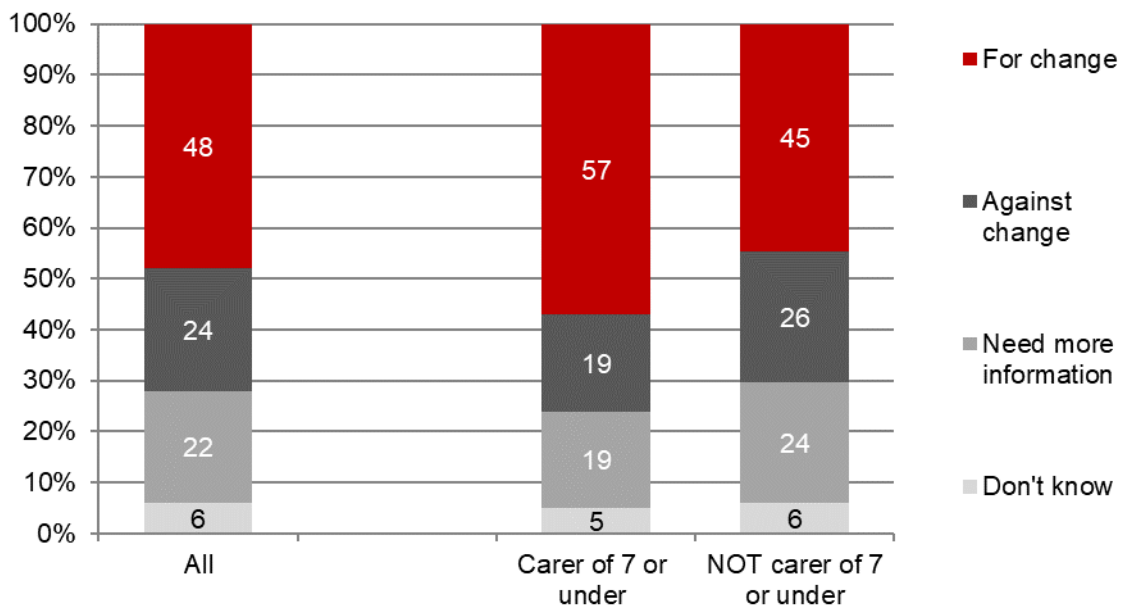
**Figure 5.1: Opinion of change in legislation on physical punishment of children (%) (All – 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021)**



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

5.3 Those with caring responsibilities for children aged seven and under were more likely to be in favour of the proposed change (57% in favour, 19% against) compared with those who did not have these responsibilities (45% in favour, 26% against). These differences were statistically significant and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population.

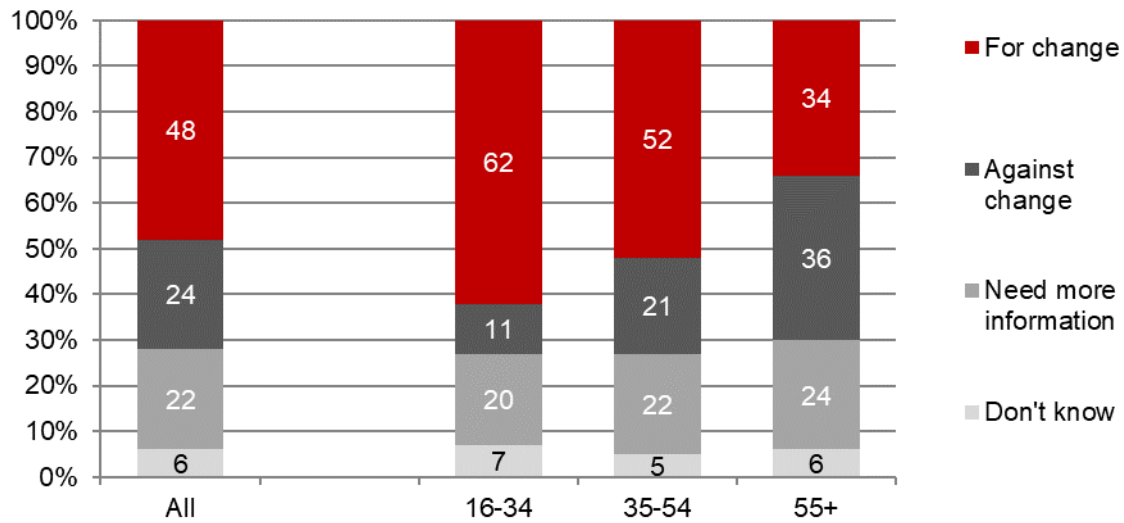
**Figure 5.2: Opinion of proposed change in legislation on physical punishment of children (%) (All and by whether regular carer of child aged seven or under - 2021)**



*Base: All (1,000), Regular carer of 7 or under (316), Not a regular carer of 7 or under (681)*

5.4 Differences in opinion were also found by age. In both the 16-34 and 35-54 age groups, respondents were much more likely to be *for* rather than *against* the change, as shown in figure 5.3. However, among those aged 55+ slightly more opposed the change than were for it. These differences by age were statistically significant and therefore the finding can be generalised to the wider population. Similar differences by age were also found in the 2018, 2019 and 2020 surveys.

**Figure 5.3: Opinion of change in legislation on physical punishment of children (All and by age group - 2021)**

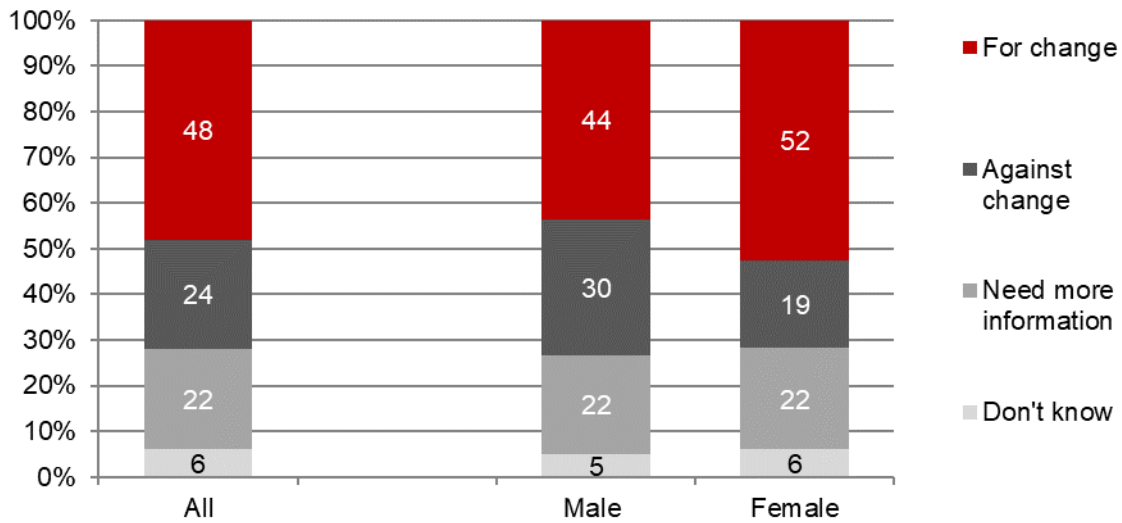


*Base: All (1,000), 16-34 (342), 35-54 (338), 55+ (320)*

5.5 When comparing opinion of the three age groups over time, all three record increases in the proportions in favour of the change compared with 2020 with +10 percentage points for 16-34s, +11 percentage points for 35-54s and +9 percentage points for those aged 55+. These differences are statistically significant and therefore can be generalised to the wider population.

5.6 In the 2021 survey (as in 2020), differences were also found by gender in terms of opinion of the legislative change. Women were much more likely to be in favour of the change (52%) than against it (19%). Whilst more men were in favour of the change than against it the gap between the two proportions was narrower – 44% in favour, 30% against. These differences by gender are statistically significant and therefore can be generalised to the wider population.

**Figure 5.4: Opinion of change in legislation on physical punishment of children (All, and by gender - 2021)**



*Base: All (1,000), Male (383), Female (613)*

5.7 Respondents were asked to explain their reasons for their opinion on the legislative change. Again, this was in their own words and responses have been grouped into common themes. Table 5.1 shows the reasons that were stated for being in favour of the change (511 respondents). The most frequent response was that they '[did] not agree with smacking or physical punishment of children' (42% of those who were for the change). This was also the most frequent response in the 2018, 2019 and 2020 surveys (40%, 38% and 38% respectively). Others highlighted that 'there [were] other ways of ensuring good behaviour' (17%), that 'it's not a good lesson \ encourages violence' (10%), and that 'it doesn't work', (7%), as well as responses which focussed on the harm done to children such as 'it's abuse / can lead to abuse', (10%), and 'it's harmful to children' (8%).

**Table 5.1: Can you tell me why you are in favour of the change to the law on physical punishment of children in Wales? - 2021 [Unprompted]**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents (Number of respondents)</b>
Don't agree with smacking \ physically punishing children	42 (n.203)
There are other ways of ensuring good behaviour \ discipline	17 (n.84)
It's abuse \ can lead to abuse	10 (n.48)
It's not a good lesson \ encourages violence	10 (n.48)
It will help protect children	10 (n.48)
It's harmful to children	8 (n.39)
Make things clearer \ parents know where stand	7 (n.36)
It doesn't work \ not necessary	7 (n.35)
Some parents go too far	6 (n.30)
<b>Other responses reported by less than 5 per cent of respondents</b>	
A tap is ok \ a little smack \ ok if don't go too far	
I was hit as a child	
It's needed	
Never smacked my kids	

*Base: Those in favour of change to the law on physical punishment of children in Wales (511)*

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

*(b) Other responses are presented alphabetically*

5.8 Of those against the change in legislation (214 respondents), one of the principal reasons for opposing the change included controlling behaviour and discipline. Around two fifths (40%) of those against the change thought that the current situation was 'needed to control behaviour \ discipline child \ teach respect \ show boundaries'. Others commented on the broader lack of discipline in society – 'there's no discipline \ respect these days \ kids are badly behaved' (20%).

5.9 Others reflected on their own experiences saying that they were against the change because 'doesn't do any harm \ didn't harm me \ my kids' (13%). Some qualified their opposition to the change saying that they would be against it as long as the punishment remains 'doesn't go too far \ reasonable punishment' (24%).

5.10 Outside of the reasons discussed in paragraphs 5.7, 5.8 and 5.9, the other main theme in terms of reasons for opposing the change centred on who should be responsible for disciplining children. Of those against the legislative change, 13% reported that this was because they thought ‘parents should be allowed to punish their child \ should have choice \ make the decision’ and 6% said it was because they thought ‘government should not get involved’. A full list of answers can be found in table 5.2.

**Table 5.2: Can you tell me why you are against the change to the law on physical punishment of children in Wales? - 2021 [Unprompted]**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents (Number of respondents)</b>
Needed to control behaviour \ discipline child \ teach respect \ show boundaries	40 (n.96)
Ok if doesn't go too far \ if reasonable punishment	24 (n.57)
There's no discipline these days \ kids are badly behaved \ no respect	20 (n.48)
Doesn't do any harm \ didn't harm me \ my kids	13 (n.32)
Parents should be allowed to punish child \ should have choice \ make decision	13 (n.31)
Government should not get involved	6 (n.15)
<b>Other responses reported by less than 5 per cent of respondents</b>	
Difficult to police \ enforce \ resource	
Each circumstance \ child is different	
Law is fine at moment	
Not needed	
OK when child is in danger	
Over the top \ not reasonable	
Shouldn't be criminalised	
Use as last resort	

*Base: Those against the change to the law on physical punishment of children in Wales (214)*

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

*(b) Other responses are presented alphabetically*

5.11 Those who needed more information before deciding (219 respondents) principally either wanted more detail or information on how it would work (29% of those needing more information) or specifically would like greater clarity around definitions that were part of the legislation:

- What constitutes smacking \ assault, what is allowed vs. not allowed (21%)
- Definitions \ examples (13%)
- Definition of reasonable punishment (7%)

5.12 The only other reason mentioned by more than 5% of those needing more information was to have additional information about ‘how it will be policed \ enforced \ resourced’ (6%).

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

**Table 5.3: Can you tell me what additional information you need? - 2021 [Unprompted]**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents (Number of respondents)</b>
More detail \ more info \ how it would work	29 (n.65)
What constitutes smacking \ assault, what is allowed vs. not allowed	21 (n.46)
Definitions \ examples	13 (n.28)
Definition of reasonable punishment	7 (n.15)
How it will be policed \ enforced \ resourced	6 (n.12)
Don't know	15 (n.34)
<b>Other responses reported by less than 5 per cent of respondents</b>	
Info on current law	
Need more time to think about it	
Punishment \ charges for parents	
Research \ evidence into impact of smacking	
Safeguarding \ protection for parents	

*Base: Those who need more information to decide if they are for or against change to the law on physical punishment of children in Wales (219)*

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

*(b) Other responses are presented alphabetically*

## 6. Conclusions

6.1 Views remain, to a certain extent, mixed on whether 'it is sometimes necessary to smack a child' but the public were more likely to disagree (53%) with the statement than agree with it (30%). This difference between the proportions agreeing and disagreeing has widened in comparison to the 2020 survey (47% disagreed, 34% agreed). Balance of opinion remains related to age of respondent, with those aged over 55 being much more likely to agree that 'it is sometimes necessary to smack a child' than those aged 16-34 (46% vs. 14%).

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

6.3 When asked at an unprompted level if they were aware of the legislative change around physical punishment of children, two-fifths (40%) said they knew of something. This was higher than the level recorded in 2020 (27%) but very similar to the level recorded in the 2019 survey (42%).

6.4 There has also been an increase in prompted awareness of the legislative change. When provided with a description about the change, 63% report that they have an awareness of this compared with 44% in 2020. Indeed, the level of awareness recorded in the latest survey is significantly in advance of those in any other survey. Differences in awareness of the change continue to be apparent by age (older respondents, aged 55+ were more aware) and by social grade (ABC1s were more likely to be aware).

6.5 There has also been some change in opinion of the removal of the defence of reasonable punishment. The proportion of those who were in favour of the legislative change has risen from 38% in 2020 to 48% in 2021. However, this change does not reflect a decrease in opposition to the legislative change. Around a quarter of the



population still oppose the change (24% in 2021 compared with 25% in 2020). This opposition to the change is most likely to come from the older age group in which slightly more were against (36%) rather than for (34%) the change.

6.6 For those in favour of the legislative change, reasons included 'not agreeing with physically punishing children', that 'there [were] other ways of ensuring good behaviour', that 'it's not a good lesson' \encourages violence', that '[removal] will help protect children', and that 'it's abuse \can lead to abuse'.

6.7 The most frequent reasons provided by those who were against the legislative change were that the current status is 'needed to control behaviour \ discipline children', that 'it hasn't done [them] or [their] kids any harm', and that it's 'ok [as long as things] don't go too far'.

## Annex A - Welsh Government Social Research on parenting

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

**Table A1.7: Relevant Previous Welsh Government Research**

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

<p><a href="#"><u>Public attitudes to physical punishment of children: Wave 2 survey, 2019</u></a></p> <p><b>Published: 2021</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantitative – face-to-face survey</li> <li>• 1,002 members of the general public aged 16+</li> <li>• Conducted via the Beaufort Wales Omnibus Survey</li> <li>• In 2019</li> </ul>	<p>Survey among the Welsh general public to examine attitudes towards physical punishment of children, awareness of proposed changes in legislation to remove the defence of reasonable punishment and level of support for this change, building on the baseline survey conducted in 2018</p>
<p><a href="#"><u>Public attitudes to physical punishment of children: Wave 3 survey, 2020</u></a></p> <p><b>Published: 2021</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantitative – online survey</li> <li>• 1,002 members of the general public aged 16+</li> <li>• Conducted via the Beaufort Wales Omnibus Survey</li> <li>• In 2020</li> </ul>	<p>Survey among the Welsh general public to examine attitudes towards physical punishment of children, awareness of proposed changes in legislation to remove the defence of reasonable punishment and level of support for this change, building on the surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019.</p>

## Annex B – Survey questionnaire

This section is about physical punishment which includes smacking

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

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

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

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

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

**Physical punishment that:**

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

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

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

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

OPEN ENDED

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

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

In Wales, the law around physical punishment, including smacking, is changing. Parents are currently able to use the defence of reasonable punishment against a charge of common assault, but not against more serious charges of, for example, actual bodily harm. From 21 March 2022, the defence of reasonable punishment will no longer be available in Wales to parents, carers and guardians, and those acting in loco parentis facing a charge of assault and battery against a child in their care. Where the police find sufficient evidence for a realistic prospect of conviction they will have to consider whether it is in the public interest to charge.

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

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

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

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

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

OPEN ENDED

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

OPEN ENDED

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

OPEN ENDED

## **Annex C – Research Method**

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

A1.14 The Omnibus sample is designed to be representative of the adult population resident in Wales aged 16 and over. The COVID-19 public health crisis prevented the 2021 and 2020 surveys from being carried out in its previous manner of face-to-face interviewing at selected sample points throughout Wales. Instead interviews for the November 2021 and 2020 surveys were undertaken online using the Cint online panel exchange platform.

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

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

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

## **Proportional quota sampling**

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

## **Chi-square analysis**

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



## **Annex D – Description of change in legislation presented to respondents in November 2021 survey**

In Wales, the law around physical punishment, including smacking, is changing. Parents are currently able to use the defence of reasonable punishment against a charge of common assault, but not against more serious charges of, for example, actual bodily harm. From 21 March 2022, the defence of reasonable punishment will no longer be available in Wales to parents, carers and guardians, and those acting in loco parentis facing a charge of assault and battery against a child in their care. Where the police find sufficient evidence for a realistic prospect of conviction they will have to consider whether it is in the public interest to charge.

## Annex E – Definition of social grades

Table A1.8, below, provides a definition of the social grade classification<sup>9</sup> used in the analysis

**Table A1.8: Social grade definitions**

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

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<sup>9</sup>[National Readership Survey definitions](#)

## Annex F – Sub-sample sizes

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

**Table A1.9: Sub-group sample sizes**

Sub-sample	Unweighted sample	Weighted sample
<b>Gender<sup>10</sup></b>		
Male	383	483
Female	613	513
<b>Age</b>		
16-34	342	296
35-54	338	325
55+	320	379
<b>Social grade</b>		
ABC1	575	520
C2DE	425	480
<b>Carer of child aged 7 or under<sup>11</sup></b>		
Yes	316	288
No	681	710

<sup>10</sup> Male and Female total adds up to 996. There were also 4 respondents who answered 'other' or 'prefer not to say'

<sup>11</sup> Carer of child aged 7 or under total adds up to 997. There were also 3 respondents who answered 'prefer not to say'