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The Attitudes of Parents towards Managing Young Children's Behaviour: Revised Report

National Survey for Wales, 2014–15 – Re-contact
Survey

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National Survey for Wales, 2014-15 – Re-contact Survey

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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. Executive Summary

Introduction

1.1 The report presents findings from research undertaken with parents of children aged six years old or under about their attitudes towards managing young children's behaviour. The fieldwork took place in early November 2015 and involved telephone surveys with 387 parents (or guardians) of young children who had previously taken part in the 2014–15 National Survey for Wales. Parents were asked about their attitudes towards parenting and the physical punishment of children. The survey also asked parents about accessing advice and their views on legislative change.

1.2 The Welsh Government's Programme for Government commits to working towards making the physical punishment of children and young people unacceptable through the promotion of positive alternatives. This survey will serve as a baseline for a campaign which has been launched to promote positive parenting messages to the parents and guardians of young children. The findings will also be used to inform policy development in this area.

Key findings

1.3 Drawing on the results of the survey, the following key findings emerged. It should be noted that the answers to the survey questions record *self-reported* attitudes and behaviours and all results are based on sample data.

Attitudes towards smacking

- 44% of parents reported that they may smack in certain circumstances
- Only 4% of parents are comfortable with the idea, with an additional 40% doing so if nothing else works
- 22% of parents reported that they had smacked their child in the last six months
- 25% of parents indicated that they think that smacking is sometimes necessary

Understanding smacking behaviour

1.4 It is circumstantial factors which appear to best account for reported parental smacking behaviour. In particular:

- the parent smacks as a last resort
- the parent smacks in situations in which they perceive the child to be causing harm to themselves

- the parent smacks in situations in which they perceive the child's behaviour to be out of control

1.5 Some parents also reported that they smack to stop harm coming to other children and as a punishment for naughty behaviour.

1.6 Beneath these circumstantial factors are two key factors relating to the individual parent:

- The parent has not found parenting advice helpful (where they have accessed it)
- The parent finds the child's behaviour embarrassing

1.7 There is also evidence that parents who feel that they sometimes lack the necessary time and energy to care for their children are more likely to report smacking them.

1.8 However, there is insufficient evidence to suggest that:

- the age, gender or marital status of the parent is associated with reporting smacking
- the deprivation level of the area in which the parents live, or their educational attainment, is associated with reporting smacking
- parental satisfaction with their health, relationship or overall life is associated with reporting smacking
- parents' perception of the child's general behaviour is associated with reporting smacking.

Changing smacking behaviour

1.9 19% of respondents who strongly disagreed that smacking is sometimes necessary and 27% of those who somewhat disagreed have not always held this opinion.

1.10 24% of respondents who strongly agreed that smacking is sometimes necessary and 12% of those who somewhat agreed suggested they had been less inclined to agree previously.

1.11 A higher percentage (63%) of parents who reported that they did not smack their children indicated that they had found advice helpful than those who do smack (47%)¹.

Sources of advice

1.12 The most frequent source of advice accessed was friends or relatives, followed by advice from health professionals.

1.13 When asked from where they would like to receive support, more parents wanted to access support from family (52%) and health professionals (38%) than from any other source.

1.14 In the majority of cases (70%) the support accessed had been given face-to-face, with 12% having found advice online and 11% having received personal support over the phone (and a further 2% from helplines).

1.15 When asked how they would ideally like to receive support, face-to-face was by far the most popular option (72%), followed by personal support over the phone (10%).

1.16 Parents reported that not knowing where to look and receiving conflicting advice from different sources were the most common barriers to accessing support.

1.17 Those parents who reported smacking in the last six months are no less likely to have reported using other parenting techniques during that period.

Legislative change

1.18 51% of respondents disagreed that the law should allow parents to smack their children, whilst 34% agreed that it should (with 12% neither agreeing nor disagreeing, or answering 'don't know').

1.19 46% of respondents agreed that there should be a complete ban on hitting children, even as a smack, whilst 43% disagreed that there should be a ban (with 9% neither agreeing nor disagreeing, or answering 'don't know').

¹ This finding only relates to those parents who reported accessing some form of advice or support.

1.20 Under a sixth of parents (13%) who are comfortable with smacking their children and a fifth (19%) of those who smack as a last resort felt that a change in the law would influence their attitude.

Conclusion

1.21 The survey results give a nuanced position of attitudes towards smacking. They suggest that traditional ways of justifying smacking as part of an explicit parenting philosophy may be less important in modern Wales, and the majority of parents reported that they think smacking is unnecessary. Smacking attitudes in this study could not for the most part be explained by neat demographic profiles, and most of the parents who smack appeared to do so reluctantly, and as a last resort. Feelings of embarrassment may be important in such circumstances, as well as concern over harm coming to the child and losing control of situations. The 'noise' created by the multitude of well-meaning but in some ways contradictory sources of advice, which may include friends and family, could be unhelpful to parents. This may be why many parents would ideally like to access advice from health professionals. Attitudes towards smacking can and do change, and there are indications that more people may support legislative change than are against it, although this does not currently represent a majority view.

2. Introduction

2.1 This chapter provides a short overview of the research, states the aims and objectives, and lists the research questions.

Overview

2.2 This research examines parents' attitudes towards managing children's behaviour, with a particular focus on smacking. The research captures the self-reported attitudes of parents and does *not* observe or measure behaviours.

2.3 The research involved re-contacting respondents to the 2014–15 National Survey for Wales who had reported that they were parents of children aged five years and under and agreed to be re-contacted for future work. These children would become aged six years or under by the time the re-contact survey was undertaken. The fieldwork comprised short telephone interviews with respondents about their opinions on physical punishment, methods for managing children's behaviour, sources of advice and information, as well as their views on legislation around smacking. The research took place between October 2015 and February 2016, with the fieldwork undertaken in early November 2015 before the launch of a Welsh Government positive parenting campaign. The results of this survey will be used as a baseline for measuring attitudes and to inform policy development in this area.

Aim and Research Questions

2.4 The aim of the project is to examine attitudes to parenting practices and child discipline for parents with children aged six years and under.

2.5 The research addresses the following questions:

- what are the attitudes of these parents towards physical punishment?
- in what circumstances (if any) do they think that physical punishment is acceptable?
- what (if anything) could influence the attitudes of parents towards physical punishment?
- How do parents of children aged six or under find information and advice about managing their child's behaviour?
- do these parents believe that there should be a law in relation to the physical punishment of children, and would this change the attitudes of parents towards physical punishment?

Section Summary

2.6 The research involved telephone surveys with parents of young children who had taken part in the 2014–15 National Survey for Wales.

2.7 Parents were asked about their attitudes towards parenting and the physical punishment of children. The survey also asked how these views might be influenced, how parents find advice, and their views on legislative change.

3. Context

3.1 This chapter places the study within a research and policy context. A brief introduction is given to relevant literature on child development, parenting strategies and physical punishment before stating the position of the Welsh Government and describing the current positive parenting campaign.

Child development

3.2 Children's early experiences, the bonds they form with their primary care-givers, and their first learning experiences deeply affect their physical, cognitive, emotional and social development (Seccombe, 2004). As they grow older, the development trajectories of children will have a profound influence on the adults that they will become. There is a significant body of research to suggest, for example, that adverse early experiences negatively impact on a range of outcomes later in life, including objective and subjective well-being, educational attainment, and social and emotional competence, and increase the chances of experiencing poverty and social exclusion.² There are a wide range of individual and environmental risk factors that can undermine child development. This includes levels of stress experienced by the primary care-giver, household material deprivation, and a lack of access to good-quality provision, such as child-care (Tomlinson et al., 2008).

3.3 Conversely, there are a number of mediating factors that can protect children from the worst effects of risk factors, including poverty. There is compelling evidence to suggest that the nature and consistency of care given to young children by their primary care-givers can influence early developmental trajectories *independently* of broader influences such as socio-economic status (Rutter, 2003). An overview of the importance of parenting in determining a wide range of outcomes can be found in O'Conner and Scott (2007).

Parenting strategies and physical punishment

3.4 There are a broad range of approaches and strategies to care-giving, and parents may draw on different techniques at different times or stages of a child's development. Drawing on naturalistic observation, researchers have identified four distinct approaches to parenting, including authoritarian, authoritative, permissive and uninvolved (Baumrind, 1967; Maccoby and Martin, 1983).

Figure 3.1: Four primary parenting styles

	High Expectations for Self-Control	Low Expectations for Self-Control
High Levels of Warmth, Support and Sensitivity	Authoritative Respectful of child's opinion whilst maintaining clear boundaries	Permissive Indulgent and affectionate but no clear expectations or boundaries
Low Levels of Warmth, Support and Sensitivity	Authoritarian Strict, punitive discipline with little warmth	Neglectful Emotionally uninvolved or rejecting, no boundary setting

3.5 Each approach incorporates a set of practices and techniques that frame and inform child/care-giver interactions. Further research has suggested that each approach has discernible impacts on child development outcomes. For example, Hockenbury and Hockenbury (2003) have highlighted the poor outcomes of uninvolved parenting styles, where few expectations are placed on a child and care-givers are largely detached. Conversely, high levels of stimulation, emotional and physical warmth and support are linked to increased cognitive and effective development, especially in the early years.

3.6 Often associated with authoritarian parenting styles, the role of physical discipline is complex and highly controversial. A comprehensive meta-analysis of research exploring child development and physical discipline found that it is associated with higher levels of immediate compliance and aggression amongst children, alongside lower levels of moral internalisation and mental health (Gershoff, 2002). However, the picture is nuanced: one study found that the use of smacking was associated with increases in oppositional and defiant behaviours in the context of low levels of emotional support from the care-giver. In cases where there were high levels of emotional support, behaviour outcomes were similar to those parents that used other non-physical disciplinary techniques (McLoyd and Smith, 2008). Understanding the parent's underlying values and belief systems is considered key to predicting physical disciplining behaviour (Benjet and Kazdin, 2003; Ellison et al., 1996). For example, Dittman et al. (2013) found that political conservatism in New Zealand is associated with physical discipline.

3.7 Over the last two decades there has been extensive and significant research indicating a range of adverse and long-lasting consequences associated with the use of physical discipline (Mulvaney and Mebert, 2007; Slade and Wissow, 2004) and, furthermore, that smacking is an ineffective disciplinary strategy, even in the short term (Gershoff, 2010; 2013). Meta-analyses by Gershoff (2010) and Durrant and Ensom (2012) have found significant links between the use of physical discipline and aggressive behaviour in childhood and adulthood (see also studies by Taylor, Manganello, Lee et al., 2010), antisocial behaviour (Grogan-Kaylor, 2004), and long-term cognitive, developmental, mental health and well-being measures (Gershoff, 2013; Smith et al., 2004). The anti-smacking movement also expresses concern over the links between the use of physical discipline and child abuse. A UK study by Jaffee et al. in 2004 found that parents who smack in Wales are more associated with increased odds of abuse towards children than parents who do not use physical discipline.

3.8 However, the systematic review undertaken by Gershoff (2002) also highlights common methodological issues with this type of research, not least the reliance on self-reporting, the difficulty of establishing causal links, and the challenges of adequately capturing the severity and frequency of punishment when inferring links with outcomes. There are also contrary studies that assert that physical discipline leads to short-term compliance, but these are in the minority and tend to argue for the link being moderated by other factors (e.g. Bradley et al., 2001).

Policy context

3.9 The Welsh Government's Programme for Government contains a commitment to making the physical punishment of children and young people unacceptable through the promotion of positive alternatives. Evidence suggests that authoritative parenting (described in Figure 2.1) promotes successful outcomes for children and is more likely to lead to better social, emotional and academic outcomes for children (Sroufe et al., 1990; Daly, 2007; Moretti, 2004; Asmussen et al., 2007; O'Connor and Scott, 2007; Katz and Redmond, 2009; Nixon, 2012). Authoritative parenting is often called 'positive parenting'. As noted above, this parenting style involves high levels of warmth, support and sensitivity, and parents are respectful of a child's opinion whilst maintaining clear boundaries.

3.10 Positive parenting techniques are consistent with the idea that child development, including social and emotional competence and well-being, may be influenced by a broader range of factors than simply the disciplinary approaches used by parents. From this perspective, it is not simply an *absence* of physical punishment that will promote better child

development outcomes, but also the *presence* of alternative behaviour management strategies alongside appropriate emotional, cognitive and physical affection and support.

3.11 To get a better understanding of attitudes towards parenting and managing children's behaviour in Wales, the Welsh Government commissioned two pieces of research to explore current parenting attitudes and practices in Wales: a survey of over 1,000 adults living in Wales (Welsh Government, 2014a), and focus groups with parents (Welsh Government, 2014b).

3.12 Results from the quantitative survey of adults in Wales, which explored attitudes to parenting practices and child discipline, were published in June 2014 ('Managing Children's Behaviour, Attitudes and Practices Baseline Survey 2013'). The aim of the research was to collect data on:

- the methods used by parents in managing their children's behaviour;
- where parents obtain information that informs their practices;
- the attitudes of both parents and non-parents towards physical punishment; and
- the attitudes of both parents and non-parents regarding the law and physical punishment.

3.13 In addition, focus groups were conducted across Wales with parents to explore their attitudes towards parenting and managing children's behaviour. They were also asked about sources of information that informed their practice, and about whether they felt that the government should legislate in this area. This research was published in February 2014 ('Attitudes to Parenting Practices and Child Discipline 2014').

3.14 The findings from these studies were used to inform a national multi-media Positive Parenting campaign, which aims to promote attitudinal change in parents and guardians in relation to the way in which children and young people are brought up and disciplined. The campaign launched on 20 November 2015 and involves a mix of traditional, outdoor, social media and PR channels which have been developed with a media agency and the Welsh Government. It is anticipated that the campaign will run over a period of three years. The first phase will run from November 2015 until the end of March 2016. The long-term aim of the campaign is to help bring about an attitudinal change in the general public concerning the way in which children and young people are brought up and disciplined, by making physical punishment unacceptable.

3.15 The main objectives of the campaign are to:

- create a strong communication message that will encourage parents to find out more information about positive parenting;
- raise awareness of the positive parenting messages delivered through the campaign; and
- increase the number of parents and guardians who are aware of non-physical strategies to manage their child's behaviour and the positive benefits of these.

3.16 The main target audience for the initial phase of the campaign comprises parents and guardians of children aged 0–5 years, from across all backgrounds and all areas of Wales. This is because:

- toddlers and pre-school children are much more likely to be physically punished than other children;
- parents of young children are starting to establish parenting behaviours and may be more ready to accept change; and
- parents of young children already have contact with health visitors, a range of other early years professionals and childcare providers, so it will be easier to engage.

Section summary

3.17 Child development can influence a broad range of outcomes later in life.

3.18 Some parenting styles appear more likely than others to include smacking the child.

3.19 Research on the effectiveness of smacking as a form of discipline is complex, but some studies have recorded an association with aggression in children, antisocial behaviour, and child abuse.

3.20 The Welsh Government's Programme for Government commits to working "to make physical punishment of children and young people unacceptable through the promotion of positive alternatives".

3.21 A campaign has been launched to promote positive parenting messages to the parents and guardians of young children.

4. Method

4.1 This chapter describes the method used for conducting the research, focusing on the design of the questionnaire, the fieldwork, and giving a short explanation of the use of statistical testing. Technical details of the sampling frame and weighting can be found in the Annex (9.1).

Questionnaire design

4.2 The questionnaire was structured as follows:

- Introduction: an explanation of the research, and a confirmation of the respondent's status as a parent or guardian and of their willingness to participate.
- Well-being and Parenting: questions about life satisfaction and the parent-child relationship.
- Attitudes: questions about attitudes towards smacking, the law, parenting techniques, and circumstances for smacking. The questions capture views on physical discipline specifically and parenting more generally.
- Sources of Support: includes questions about the advice and support accessed, its effectiveness, and barriers to access.

4.3 Some questions were used from other Welsh Government surveys to enable comparisons to be made. Whilst the questionnaire tried to cover each research question in sufficient depth to do justice to this complex topic, it was also necessary to keep the length of the questionnaire relatively short to avoid sample bias from non-completion. A full copy of the questionnaire is included in the annex to this report (9.4).

Fieldwork

4.4 The questionnaire was delivered through one-to-one semi-structured telephone interviews which were carried out in early November 2015 (before the launch of the campaign). Each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes. The fieldwork was compliant with the Welsh Language Scheme for the Welsh Government. Respondents were given the option to conduct the survey in either Welsh or English.

4.5 Using the National Survey for Wales list of contacts, 900 individuals were identified who were eligible to take part in the re-contact survey (e.g. they had a child aged six years or under, had supplied a correct phone number, and indicated they were happy to be re-

contacted). From this list, a response rate of 43% was achieved, giving a sample size of 387.

Table 4.1: Sampling frame and fieldwork metrics

Original contact lists from NSW	1,164
No phone numbers	70 (6%)
Wrong numbers	183 (16%)
No children aged six years or under	11 (1%)
Revised sampling frame	900
Completed interviews	387
Response rate	43%
Declined to participate	88 (10%)
Unable to contact	425 (47%)
Total number of calls made	6,101

4.6 Most of the interviews (97%) were carried out in English, with the remainder in Welsh. The research engaged with the same individual who completed the National Survey for Wales in 94% of cases, and with an alternative parent or guardian in the same household in 6% of cases. All of the 387 respondents had at least one child aged six years or under.

Statistical testing in the report

4.7 When discussing relationships between variables the report makes reference to statistical significance. Using results found from a sample to make statements about a larger population is known as statistical inference and it is important to use statistical tests to ensure that there are grounds to make such claims. Statistical significance denotes whether or not an association found in the sample is likely to also be found in the population at large (i.e. amongst all parents of children aged six years and under in Wales). In this report, associations between variables are described as statistically significant if there is less than a 5% probability ($p < .05$) that the relationship found in the sample is due to chance (sampling error).

Section summary

4.8 A questionnaire was designed which included sections on parental well-being, attitudes, and sources of information.

4.9 The fieldwork comprised short interviews in either English or Welsh with parents or guardians of children aged six years or under.

4.10 A response rate of 43% produced 387 completed interviews.

5. Findings: Attitudes towards Smacking

5.1 This chapter presents the results of different survey questions about smacking and, by comparing these answers, makes an estimate as to the likely prevalence of smacking behaviour. The use of physical punishment is a very sensitive topic. As such, the way in which respondents answer questions on the issue may vary depending on how the question is asked. For example, under-reporting may occur due to the pressure to give socially acceptable answers to the interviewers. Some comparisons are made to the 2013 survey (Welsh Government, 2014a), although there are some differences between the studies. Whereas the interviews for this study were performed over the telephone, the 2013 interviews were face-to-face but with respondents entering their answers anonymously into a computer console. The respondents were also different: the 2013 research performed interviews with the general public (including a proportion of parents), whereas this research was with parents of young children³.

Attitudes towards the necessity of smacking

5.2 Respondents were asked how much they agree or disagree that it is sometimes necessary to smack a “naughty” child. Over half of the sample (55%) strongly disagreed that it is sometimes necessary to smack a child, with a further 17% slightly disagreeing. At the other end of the scale, just 4% of respondents strongly agreed that it was sometimes necessary to smack a “naughty” child, with a further 20% slightly agreeing. Overall, therefore, these results would seem to suggest that about a quarter of parents⁴ of young children in Wales (an estimate of 24%) think that it is sometimes necessary to smack a child. It should be noted that this question captures self-reported attitudes which may not be reliable makers of behaviour. Although attitudes towards smacking are likely to be of great relevance to smacking behaviour, they may not entirely explain it.

5.3 A 2013 Welsh Government survey (‘Managing children’s behaviour, attitudes and practices’) indicates that 44% of the general public agreed that it is sometimes necessary to smack a “naughty” child, though no figure is available for parents of young children and there may well be important generational differences. This was also a face-to-face study, whereby respondents entered their answer anonymously into a computer console, thus arguably suffering from less social desirability bias.

³ Some of the 2013 findings are given for ‘parents’ rather than the general public at large, but this relates to parents with children of any age (even grown-up children), whereas this study looks at parents with children aged six years or under.

⁴ The term ‘parents’ referred to during the findings chapters refers to parents and primary guardians of children under six years of age.

Table 5.1: Level of agreement with the statement that smacking is sometimes necessary

How far do you agree or disagree that it is sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child?	n	%
Strongly disagree	213	 55%
Slightly disagree	64	 16%
Neither agree nor disagree	15	 4%
Slightly agree	76	 20%
Strongly agree	18	 5%
Don't know	1	0%

5.4 Another question on the survey asked parents whether in managing their children's behaviour they had smacked them in the last six months. The results from this question show that over three quarters (76%) of respondents reported that they had not smacked their children in the last six months, whilst 22% said that they had. This question was also asked in the 2013 Welsh Government survey ('Managing children's behaviour, attitudes and practices'). The findings suggested that 16% of current parents use smacking as a general form of discipline, although this includes any parent with a child under the age of 18 years.

Table 5.2: Reported smacking behaviour in the last six months

In managing your children's behavior have you [smacked them] in the last six months?	n	%
No	294	 76%
Yes	85	 22%
Not age appropriate	8	 2%
Refused to answer	1	0%

5.5 If attitudes towards smacking did translate directly to smacking behaviour, it would be expected that the parents who smacked in the last six months are the same people as the parents who thought that it was sometimes necessary to smack their children. Indeed, the results would superficially seem to suggest this, as 22% of parents report that they have smacked in the last six months and a similar proportion, 24%, agree that it is sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child. By looking at both variables together in the table below, however, it is apparent that the picture is rather more complex.

5.6 The respondents who reported that they had smacked in the last six months were not necessarily the same people as those who felt that it was sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child. For example, some parents who disagreed that it was necessary to smack had nevertheless reported that they had smacked their child in the last six months (the red

box in the table below). There were also respondents who did not express a firm opinion as to whether or not smacking is sometimes necessary ('neither agree nor disagree') but had smacked in the last six months.

Table 5.3: Table of level of agreement that smacking is necessary and reported smacking behaviour in the last six months (with row percentages)

How much do you agree or disagree that it is sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child?	Smacked children in last six months				Grand Total
	No	Yes	Not age-appropriate	Refused	
Strongly disagree	96%	3%	1%		100%
Slightly disagree	65%	25%	9%		100%
Neither agree nor disagree	68%	32%			100%
Slightly agree	37%	62%		1%	100%
Strongly agree	41%	59%			100%
Don't know	100%				100%
Grand Total	76%	22%	2%	0%	100%

5.7 The table shows that some parents who say that smacking is not necessary nevertheless engage in it. It also shows that some parents who think that smacking is necessary have not done so in the last six months. This may suggest that looking only at the last six months may underestimate the prevalence of smacking. Indeed, the 2013 Welsh Government study ('Managing children's behaviour, attitudes and practices') found that the proportion of parents who reported smacking increased when parents were asked about particular circumstances rather than when asked about their general approach to managing behaviour. Conversely, it may suggest that some parents who think that smacking could sometimes be deemed necessary may not in practice do so, or do so very infrequently. A further complication is that both of these questions above are likely to be quite susceptible to social desirability bias, whereby respondents have a preference for giving an answer that they consider to be socially acceptable.

5.8 To address both of these issues, a question was included in the survey which was designed to provide respondents with a more socially acceptable way in which to express their opinion. The question contained three statements and the respondent could choose the one which came closest to their opinion. One of the options allowed respondents to take a middle position for those who neither were comfortable with smacking nor thought that it is always wrong: 'I don't like the idea of smacking but I will do it if nothing else works.' When presented with this statement along with the other options shown in the table below, 40% of

respondents indicated that they didn't like the idea of smacking but would do it if nothing else worked.

Table 5.4: Choice of statements to describe opinion on smacking children

From this list, which of the following statements comes closest to your personal opinion on smacking your children?	n	%
I think it is always wrong to smack a child and I won't do it	211	55%
I don't like the idea of smacking a child but I will do it if nothing else works	155	40%
I'm comfortable with the idea of smacking a child and will do it when I think it's necessary	17	4%
Don't know	5	1%

5.9 This same question was asked in the 2013 Welsh Government survey ('Managing children's behaviour, attitudes and practices'), although that question was answered by all parents (including those with grown-up children). In that survey, 45% of respondents felt that smacking was always wrong, 37% didn't like the idea of smacking but would do so if nothing else worked, and 16% were comfortable with the idea of smacking. The results therefore approximately concur with the deviation perhaps caused by the older age of children in the 2013 study, as there may be important intergenerational differences in attitudes towards smacking.

5.10 Table 5.5 below shows the results of this question alongside those from the question which asked about smacking behaviour in the last six months. This table shows that the respondents who had smacked in the last six months are now largely accounted for by this more subtle question. Indeed, 46% of those who didn't like the idea of smacking but would do it if nothing else worked had in fact smacked in the last six months alone (the yellow box in the table below). Using this question, only a handful of respondents occupy apparently contradictory positions (the red box in the table below).

Table 5.5: Table of opinions on smacking behaviour and reported smacking behaviour in the last six months

	Smacked children in last six months				
From this list, which of the following statements comes closest to your personal opinion on smacking your children?	No	Yes	Not age-appropriate	Refused	Grand Total
I think it is always wrong to smack a child and I won't do it	98%	1%	1%		100%
I don't like the idea of smacking a child but I will do it if nothing else works	50%	46%	4%		100%
I'm comfortable with the idea of smacking a child and will do it when I think it's necessary	27%	68%		5%	100%
Don't know	100%				100%
Grand Total	76%	22%	2%	0%	100%

5.11 Given that 40% of respondents didn't like the idea of smacking, but would do so if necessary, and a further 4% of respondents were comfortable with the idea, it can be said that an estimated 44% of parents reported that they may smack under some circumstances.

Section summary

5.12 An estimated 44% of parents of young children in Wales may smack in some circumstances.

5.13 Only 4% of parents are comfortable with the idea, with 40% doing so if nothing else works.

5.14 Over a fifth (22%) of parents reported that they had smacked in the last six months.

5.15 About a quarter of parents (24%) indicated that they think that smacking is necessary.

6. Findings: Understanding Smacking Behaviour

6.1 This chapter provides some insight into smacking behaviour by looking at which factors are associated with parents who have suggested that they may smack under certain circumstances. This includes analysis of:

- demographic variables;
- socio-economic variables;
- life-satisfaction variables;
- childcare variables; and
- circumstantial variables.

6.2 The chapter ends by looking at which of these variables are the most critical factors in accounting for smacking behaviour.

Response variable

6.3 At the end of the previous chapter a distinction was made between the survey respondents who indicated that they may sometimes smack and those who indicated that they would never smack. For convenience, the two groups are referred to through this chapter as 'Never smacks' and 'Sometimes smacks', but it should be remembered that these groups are derived from the answers to the survey question rather than observed behaviour.

6.4 Respondents in the 'Never smacks' group indicated that they

- think it is always wrong to smack a child and won't do it.

6.5 Respondents in the 'Sometimes smacks' group indicated that they were

- comfortable with the idea of smacking a child and would do it when necessary;
or
- didn't like the idea of smacking a child but would do so if nothing else worked.

6.6 The split of the respondents between the two groups is summarised in the table below.

Table 6.1: Summary of those who have suggested they sometimes smack and those who have suggested they never smack

Derived response variable	n	%
Never smacks	211	55%
Sometimes smacks	171	44%
NA	5	1%

6.7 The following section explores the attitudes and behaviour of these two ‘groups’ of parents: those who sometimes smack and those who never smack.

Demographics

6.8 To begin with, some basic demographic variables were looked at: age of the parent, gender of the parent, and marital status of the parent.

6.9 Table 6.2 shows the age distribution of the parents in the two response groups (never smacks and sometimes smacks). The two distributions are very similar and statistical testing confirms that the slight differences cannot be considered significant (i.e. they may simply be caused by a random error in the sample). Based on this, it does not therefore seem that the age of the parent or guardian is an important factor in determining smacking behaviour. Note, however, that 89% of the respondents in this study are under 40 years of age and all currently have young children. This study is not therefore designed to detect generational differences in attitudes towards smacking.

Table 6.2: Table of parent/guardian age and whether or not they may sometimes smack

Parent/Guardian age	Never Smacks		Sometimes Smacks	
	n	%	n	%
Under 25	31	15%	16	9%
25-29	46	22%	41	24%
30-34	53	25%	51	30%
35-39	49	23%	33	19%
40 or over	32	15%	31	18%

6.10 Table 6.3 shows the proportion of men and women in the ‘never smacks’ and ‘sometimes smacks’ groups. It is evident that there is very little difference between the gender profiles of the two response groups. Once the demographic breakdown of the survey response is factored in (see Table A1.2), the evidence suggests that men and women are equally likely to smack their children and that gender is not a relevant attribute for explaining smacking behaviour. This was formally confirmed using statistical testing.

Table 6.3: Table of gender of parent/guardian and whether or not they may sometimes smack

	Never smacks		Sometimes smacks	
Gender	n	%	n	%
Female	135	 64%	113	 66%
Male	76	 36%	59	 34%

6.11 Respondents were also asked their marital status. Around half of the respondents were married (52%), whilst most of the other half (42%) had never married or been in a civil partnership. Looking closely at the results, it seems as if those who reported smacking are slightly more likely to be divorced (and slightly less likely to have never been married or in a civil partnership). However, statistical testing suggests that this apparent difference is not significant and may be due to a random error in the sample. These results do not therefore offer strong evidence that marital status is important for understanding smacking behaviour.

Table 6.4: Table of marital status of parent/guardian and whether or not they may sometimes smack

	Never smacks		Sometimes smacks	
Marital Status	n	%	n	%
Divorced	3	 2%	10	 6%
In a registered same-sex civil partnership		0%	1	 0%
Married	115	 55%	86	 50%
Separated, but still legally married	1	 0%	7	 4%
Single, that is never married and never registered a same-sex civil partnership	92	 43%	68	 40%

6.12 In summary, neither the age, gender nor marital status of the parents or guardians seems to explain differences in reported smacking behaviour, according to the survey results.

Socio-economic

6.13 Using variables taken from the National Survey for Wales, the following variables can be examined for those who never smack and sometimes smack:

- the education attainment of the parent; and
- the deprivation level of the area in which the parent lives.

6.14 Table 6.5 gives a summary of the level of education attained for those who never smack and those who sometimes smack. The two distributions appear very similar. The group of respondents who never smack are slightly better educated than the group who sometimes smack, although statistical testing suggests that this is not a significant

difference and may be due to a sampling error. Based on this evidence, there is no reason to believe that those who are better educated are less likely to smack.

Table 6.5: Table of highest qualification of parent/guardian and whether they sometimes smack or never smack

Highest Qualification	Never smacks		Sometimes smacks	
	n	%	n	%
No qualification	11	5%	6	4%
Below National Qualification Framework level 2	24	11%	16	9%
National Qualification Framework level 2	40	19%	27	16%
National Qualification Framework level 3	38	18%	47	27%
National Qualification Framework levels 4-8	95	45%	74	43%

6.15 On the basis of where they live, the National Survey for Wales classifies respondents into one of five categories (known as ‘quintiles’) based on the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD)⁵. The first quintile (Q1) represents the 20% most deprived areas in Wales, whilst the fifth quintile (Q5) represents the 20% least deprived living areas in Wales. The distribution of respondents across these deprivation quintiles is quite similar for the group of parents who never smack and for the group who sometimes smack. There is a slight suggestion of some difference with regard to the two least deprived groups, with those who never smack seemingly more likely to fall into the least deprived quintile (Q5). However, statistical testing suggests that there is no overall significant difference between the two deprivation distributions. These results do not therefore suggest that living in an area of deprivation is an important factor in determining smacking behaviour.

Table 6.6: Table of area deprivation and whether the parent/guardian sometimes smacks or never smacks

WIMD Quintile	Never smacks		Sometimes smacks	
	n	%	n	%
Q1 Most deprived 20%	42	20%	37	22%
Q2	42	20%	37	22%
Q3	36	17%	31	19%
Q4	32	15%	39	24%
Q5 Least deprived 20%	59	28%	21	13%

6.16 In summary, the survey results provide no evidence that the levels of education or the deprivation score of the area in which they live can offer an explanation of differences in reported smacking behaviour.

⁵ The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) is the official measure of deprivation in small areas in Wales. It is a relative measure of concentrations of deprivation at the small area level. WIMD is currently made up of eight separate domains (or types) of deprivation: income; employment; health; education; access to services; community safety; physical environment; and housing. Each domain is compiled from a range of different indicators.

Life satisfaction

6.17 A range of questions were asked about how satisfied the respondents were with their life. There was a generally high degree of correlation between the answers to these questions, suggesting that respondents who were satisfied with one area of their life were more likely to be satisfied with others as well. However, of more interest to this study is whether or not self-reported life satisfaction can reveal anything about smacking behaviour.

6.18 When asked about their overall level of satisfaction with life, most respondents indicated that they were very satisfied, regardless of whether or not they sometimes smack. This proportion is higher (63%) for those who report that they never smack than for those who report that they sometimes smack (58%). However, based on this sample size, statistical testing does not suggest that the finding is significant (i.e. the apparent pattern may be caused by a sampling error).

Table 6.7: Table of parent/guardian reported overall life satisfaction and whether they sometimes smack or never smack

To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied [with your life overall]	Never smacks		Sometimes smacks	
	n	%	n	%
Very dissatisfied	0	0%	0	0%
Fairly dissatisfied	1	0%	6	4%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	7	3%	3	2%
Fairly satisfied	70	33%	62	36%
Very satisfied	134	63%	100	58%

6.19 Respondents also gave their levels of satisfaction with their health. Again, the picture is quite similar to the overall satisfaction question, with an apparent tendency for those who never smack to be more satisfied with their life. But as before, the relationship does not stand up to statistical testing and may be caused by a sampling error.

Table 6.8: Table of parent/guardian reported satisfaction with health and whether they sometimes smack or never smack

To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied [with your health]	Never smacks		Sometimes smacks	
	n	%	n	%
Very dissatisfied	1	1%	7	4%
Fairly dissatisfied	7	3%	2	1%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3	1%	2	1%
Fairly satisfied	69	32%	69	40%
Very satisfied	131	62%	90	53%

6.20 The final example of a satisfaction measure presented here shows how respondents differ in their levels of satisfaction towards their relationship (if applicable). Once again, there do appear to be some differences here, with those who sometimes smack more likely

to say that they were very satisfied with their relationship. However, statistical testing does not find these differences to be significant.

Table 6.9: Table of parent/guardian reported satisfaction with their relationship and whether or not they may sometimes smack

To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied [with your relationship]	Never smacks		Sometimes smacks	
	n	%	n	%
Very dissatisfied	0	0%	2	1%
Fairly dissatisfied	0	0%	0	0%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	6	3%	2	1%
Fairly satisfied	25	12%	19	11%
Very satisfied	136	65%	119	69%
Not applicable	43	20%	30	17%

6.21 Overall, it is difficult to come to firm conclusions from these results. The survey results cannot be said to provide evidence that any aspect of life satisfaction can confidently be associated with smacking behaviour. However, it may be the case that if the questions were repeated in a study with a slightly larger sample size, some of the apparent relationships, though perhaps quite subtle, may indeed turn out to be significant.

Caring for their child

6.22 Respondents were asked how satisfied they were with their children's behaviour. In the sample, the group of parents who suggested that they never smack were slightly more satisfied with their children's behaviour than those who sometimes smack (96% versus 94%). However, statistical testing indicates that this is not be a statistically significant difference, and that there is no evidence that parents' perceptions of their children's behaviour are associated with whether or not they smack.

Table 6.10: Table of parent/guardian reported satisfaction with their children's behaviour and whether they sometimes smack or never smack

To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied [with your children's behaviour]	Never smacks		Sometimes smacks	
	n	%	n	%
Very dissatisfied	0	0%	0	0%
Fairly dissatisfied	1	0%	4	2%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	9	4%	6	3%
Fairly satisfied	71	34%	77	45%
Very satisfied	131	62%	85	49%

6.23 Parents were also asked to what extent they agreed that caring for their children sometimes takes more time and energy than they have to give. The results indicate that those who sometimes smack their children were more likely to strongly agree with this statement, and less likely to strongly disagree. Statistical testing suggests that this finding is generalisable to the population at large ($p < 0.5$). It can therefore be said that those parents and guardians who feel that they sometimes lack the necessary time and energy to care for

their children are more likely to smack them. Note that this is a statistical association and the relationship may not be causal.

Table 6.11: Table of whether parent/guardian feels they have enough time and energy to care for their children and whether they sometimes smack or never smack

	Never smacks		Sometimes smacks	
	n	%	n	%
Caring for my children sometimes takes more time and energy than I have to give				
Strongly disagree	69	 33%	34	 20%
Slightly disagree	36	 17%	35	 21%
Neither agree nor disagree	17	 8%	24	 14%
Slightly agree	65	 31%	39	 23%
Strongly agree	24	 11%	39	 23%

6.24 For another question in the survey, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that their children's behaviour was embarrassing or stressful. Looking at the results, those parents who never smack their children look to be more likely to strongly disagree with this statement. However, statistical testing suggests that there is no significant difference in the answers that the two groups gave to this question. The result, however, is close to the standard 5% significance level, suggesting that a larger sample size could have produced a different result. It is notable that when this question is analysed differently there does seem to be an underlying relationship between parents perceiving their children's behaviour to be embarrassing or stressful and whether or not they smack them. This analysis can be found later in the chapter.

Table 6.12: Table of whether parent/guardian finds their child's behaviour embarrassing and whether or not they may sometimes smack

	Never smacks		Sometimes smacks	
	n	%	n	%
The behaviour of my children is often embarrassing or stressful				
Strongly disagree	125	 59%	87	 51%
Slightly disagree	32	 15%	31	 18%
Neither agree nor disagree	22	 10%	16	 9%
Slightly agree	28	 13%	30	 18%
Strongly agree	5	 2%	8	 5%

6.25 To summarise, there does appear to be some evidence of an association between parents feeling that caring for their child takes more time and energy than they have to give, and a tendency to (reportedly) smack under some circumstances. Note that this finding is concerned with parental perceptions. The survey results do not show that parents who smack are less able to cope with their children's behaviour, and it certainly does not show that smacking is associated with good or bad behaviour in the child. There is, however, some evidence that parents who report feeling as if sometimes they lack the time and energy for child rearing may be more likely to smack, and later in the report it is also shown

that parents who report feeling that their children's behaviour is embarrassing or stressful may also be more likely to smack.

Circumstances which may illicit smacking as a response

6.26 Respondents were asked whether or not they would smack in a range of different circumstances. As with the other tables presented in this chapter, the results are looked at in relation to the two groups: those who have indicated that they never smack and those who have indicated that they may sometimes smack. Recall that one of the options used to form the groups came from a survey question which itself evokes the idea of circumstances (shown in italics below).

6.27 Respondents in the 'Never smacks' group indicated that they

- think it is always wrong to smack a child and won't do it.

6.28 Respondents in the 'Sometimes smacks' group indicated that they were

- comfortable with the idea of smacking a child and would do it when necessary;
or
- didn't like the idea of smacking a child *but would do so if nothing else worked*.

6.29 The frequency with which parents who reported smacking indicated that they didn't like the idea of smacking but would do so if nothing else worked (88% of parents who smack chose this option) has therefore already hinted at the importance of circumstances to smacking.

6.30 To explore this idea further, respondents were asked whether they would smack as a last resort. Those parents who sometimes smack were far more likely to agree with this statement than those who never smack, and the result is comfortably statistically significant. However, with the above discussion in mind, this should be no surprise, and is arguably tautological (i.e. necessarily true). Also of interest is that a third of parents who smack indicate that they would not do so as a last resort. It may be that some parents who smack see it as a proactive or more common decision rather than a last resort, or it could be that the wording used in this question makes agreement more difficult for parents to admit to, hence there being some social desirability bias.

6.31 It also seems paradoxical that 10% of parents who suggested that they have never smacked, not even when 'nothing else works', have nevertheless indicated that they would smack as a last resort. It may be that this is being interpreted as a theoretical question by

some parents who have not encountered situations in real life where they have smacked their children, but can imagine extreme circumstances where they would be prepared to do so as a last resort.

Table 6.13: Table of whether parent/guardian smacks as a last resort and whether or not they never smack or sometimes smack

	Never smacks		Sometimes smacks	
	n	%	n	%
As a last resort				
No	187	89%	60	35%
Yes	20	10%	110	64%
Dont know	2	1%	1	1%
Refused	1	1%		0%

6.32 This survey asked parents, through two questions, about smacking in circumstances in which they felt that a child could come to harm. The first question asked respondents whether they would smack to stop their children doing something harmful to themselves. Those respondents who indicated that they may sometimes smack are far more likely to agree that they would smack in this circumstance than those who reported that they do not smack. This suggests that the circumstance in which the child's safety is at risk is a good example of the 'last resort' that parents had in mind. Statistical testing suggests that this finding is significant and, therefore, generalisable to the population.

Table 6.14: Table of whether parent/guardian smacks to stop child doing something harmful to themselves and whether they sometimes smack or never smack

	Never smacks		Sometimes smacks	
	n	%	n	%
To stop them doing something which is harmful or dangerous to themselves				
No	175	83%	67	39%
Yes	32	15%	103	60%
Dont know	3	2%	1	1%
Not age appropriate	1	1%		0%

6.33 The second question around preventing physical harm concerns other children. Respondents were asked whether they would smack to stop their child doing something harmful to another child. Once again, the results follow the same pattern established by the two previous questions, and the result is statistically significant. Even interpreting the findings conservatively, it can confidently be said that over half of the parents who have indicated that they would smack in some circumstances also say that they would do so to stop harm to a child.

Table 6.15: Table of whether parent/guardian smacks to stop child doing something harmful to another and whether they sometimes smack or never smack

	Never smacks		Sometimes smacks	
	n	%	n	%
To stop them doing something which is harmful or dangerous to another child				
No	179	85%	67	39%
Yes	29	14%	101	59%
Dont know	2	1%	4	2%

6.34 Respondents were then asked whether or not they would smack as a punishment for naughty behaviour. Here the response pattern is notably different from that of the previous questions. Only around a fifth of those parents who are thought to sometimes smack suggested that they do so as a punishment for bad behaviour. It appears that this question may have identified a subgroup within the group of parents who smack. The question also appears to represent an important line in the sand for those parents who do not smack. Whilst a notable minority of parents who do not generally smack could apparently imagine circumstances in which they would smack to prevent harm to a child, they do not (with the exception of 1%) foresee circumstances in which they would smack as a punishment for naughty behaviour. The different response patterns of the two response groups are statistically significant, and therefore generalisable to the population.

Table 6.16: Table of whether parent/guardian smacks as a punishment for naughty behaviour and whether they sometimes smack or never smack

	Never smacks		Sometimes smacks	
	n	%	n	%
As a punishment for naughty behaviour				
No	208	99%	136	79%
Yes	2	1%	32	19%
Dont know		0%	3	2%
Not age appropriate		0%	0	0%
Refused	1	1%		0%

6.35 The final circumstance investigated whether or not parents would smack when a child's behaviour is out of control. The responses to this question are very similar to the 'smacking as a punishment' circumstance previously discussed. Again, around a fifth of those who sometimes smack would do so to stop out-of-control behaviour, whilst very few parents who had previously said that they do not smack appear to consider this a circumstance worth exception. The different response patterns between the two groups are also statistically significant.

Table 6.17: Table of whether parent/guardian smacks when they perceive the child's behaviour to be out of control and whether they sometimes smack or never smack

	Never smacks		Sometimes smacks	
	n	%	n	%
When their behaviour is out of control e.g. they are having a tantrum				
No	206	98%	136	80%
Yes	3	2%	33	19%
Dont know		0%	2	1%
Refused	1	1%		0%

6.36 To summarise, the survey results appear to have identified at least two different types of explanation for smacking. The first concerns circumstances which seem to relate to perceived risk. The examples investigated are smacking to avoid harm coming to the child or to another child. The second type of explanation is given by far fewer people and concerns situations where the child is perceived not to be responding to other techniques. This would seem to include smacking as a punishment and smacking when the child's behaviour is out of control.

Critical factors

6.37 To understand which of the questions discussed are most important for understanding smacking behaviour, some regression analysis was undertaken. This technique allows for the relationships presented above to be considered whilst statistically controlling the other variables. This is particularly relevant here as the analysis presented suggests that some of the explanatory variables (i.e. the survey answers which seem to, in some way, explain smacking behaviour) may be different manifestations of the same underlying explanations. Regression modelling can therefore help to distil the findings down into the critical factors which appear to best account for differences in smacking behaviour.

6.38 A series of logistic regression models was built to explore the factors which best account for the differences between the two groups: parents who indicated that they never smack and parents who indicated that they sometimes smack. The regression coefficients for the most important models are included in the Annex (9.2).

6.39 The statistical modelling implies that the three most important variables for explaining the differences between the two groups are all circumstantial factors:

- smacking to stop harm to the child;
- smacking to stop out-of-control behaviour; and
- smacking as a last resort.

6.40 It is perhaps unsurprising that the model is dominated by circumstantial variables, as the response variable itself in part captures the notion of smacking under particular circumstances, as has been discussed. Perhaps more pertinent are the circumstances which are not statistically significant in the model. For example, 'smacking to stop harm to another child' does not offer any further explanation of smacking behaviour once 'smacking to stop harm to the child' has been taken into account. Similarly, 'smacking as a punishment' does not explain smacking behaviour quite as well as 'smacking to stop out-of-control behaviour'. Whilst it is no surprise that these variables are highly correlated with each other, the model suggests which one of each pair of circumstances best explains the reported attitude towards smacking.

6.41 The dominance of these circumstantial variables in the model dwarfs the impact of the other variables. Although the circumstantial variables reveal much about the context in which smacking occurs, they reveal little about the factors which may lead to the occurrence of these circumstances. To investigate this, another model was created which excluded the circumstantial variables. Despite the removal of these dominant variables, only two other variables are found to be statistically significant:

- finds child's behaviour embarrassing
- has not found parenting advice helpful⁶

6.42 In summary, the regression analysis has indicated that the most useful factors in describing parental smacking behaviour are as follows:

- the parent smacks as a last resort
- the parent smacks in situations in which they perceive the child to be causing harm to themselves
- the parent smacks in situations in which they perceive the child's behaviour to be out of control
- the parent has not found parenting advice helpful (having received it)
- the parent finds the child's behaviour embarrassing

⁶ Refers to respondents who had accessed some advice.

Section summary

6.43 It is circumstantial factors which appear to best account for reported parental smacking behaviour. In particular:

- the parent smacks as a last resort
- the parent smacks in situations in which they perceive the child to be causing harm to themselves
- the parent smacks in situations in which they perceive the child's behaviour to be out of control

6.44 Parents may also report that they smack to stop harm coming to other children and as a punishment for naughty behaviour.

6.45 Beneath these circumstantial factors are two key factors relating to the individual parent:

- the parent has not found parenting advice helpful
- the parent finds the child's behaviour embarrassing.

6.46 There is also evidence that parents who feel that they sometimes lack the necessary time and energy to care for their children are more likely to report smacking them.

6.47 However, there is insufficient evidence that:

- the age, gender or marital status of the parent is associated with reporting smacking
- living in an area of deprivation or the parents' educational attainment status is associated with reporting smacking
- parental satisfaction with their health, relationship or overall life is associated with reporting smacking
- parents' perception of the child's general behaviour is associated with reporting smacking

7. Findings: Changing Smacking Behaviour

7.1 This chapter draws on sample findings to discuss how smacking behaviour and attitudes might be changed. The chapter begins by looking at opinion change in the parents interviewed before describing how parents access, and would like to access, advice and support, and whether parents who may smack may be less likely to use other parenting techniques. The chapter concludes by describing current attitudes towards legislative change.

Current rate of change

7.2 In Chapter 5, results were presented for a survey question which asked respondents how much they agree that it is sometimes necessary to smack a child. Immediately after this question the respondents were asked whether or not their opinion had changed over the years. Overall, 20% of respondents indicated that they had changed their mind. The result shows that parents had changed their mind in both directions: 21% of respondents who now disagree that smacking is necessary have not always held this opinion, and 14% of respondents who now agree that smacking is necessary have at some point changed their mind towards this position. The results therefore suggest a net swing of around 7% towards the attitude that smacking is not sometimes necessary. The 2013 Welsh Government survey ('Managing children's behaviour, attitudes and practices') suggests that 18% of the general public had changed their view to an anti-smacking stance, whereas 6% had become more in favour of smacking over the years.

7.3 These results must be taken with some caution, as recording prior beliefs retrospectively can be problematic. For instance, there may be a reluctance for people to admit that they have changed their mind. Equally, there may have been some difficulty in correctly interpreting the question, as 4% of respondents appear to have given contradictory answers to the two questions. The table below shows the answers to the two questions together.

Table 7.1: Table of attitude towards smacking and whether opinion has changed

	Is this something you have always agreed or disagreed with or have you changed your view on this subject over the years?				
How far do you agree or disagree that it is sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child?	Always agreed	Always disagreed	Changed view over years	Don't know	Grand Total
Strongly disagree	5%	76%	19%		100%
Slightly disagree		73%	27%		100%
Neither agree nor disagree	29%		54%	17%	100%
Slightly agree	88%		12%		100%
Strongly agree	65%	11%	24%		100%
Don't know				100%	100%
Grand Total	25%	51%	22%	2%	100%

7.4 The respondents who indicated that they had changed their mind were then asked to explain, in their own words, why their opinion had changed. The respondents who now agree that it is sometimes necessary to smack a child had often changed their mind to this position when confronted with the practical difficulties of caring for a child. The respondents who now disagree that it is sometimes necessary to smack a child had often suggested that they changed their mind through reflecting on their own experiences of being smacked as a child, because they had now learnt new forms of discipline, or as a consequence of the changing times (i.e. cultural change).

Table 7.2: Respondent explanation of why opinion has changed (coded)⁷

Why has your view on this [smacking] changed over the years?	n
See it differently now that I have a child	44
Was smacked as a child but changed since reflecting on it	24
Have learnt new ways of disciplining child	24
Different times now	10
It depends on circumstances	10
Watching media (e.g. Super Nanny)	4
Don't think smacking works	4
See it as a defeat / felt guilty	3
Seen people go too far	3
Research changed view	1
Government tell us not to do it	1

⁷ This table summarises qualitative answers to an open question. As such, the table can be seen as indicative of the responses, but should not be interpreted as quantitative analysis.

Advice and support

7.5 Survey participants were asked if they had ever sought advice on parenting issues. The results show that the respondents who had indicated that they never smack their children are slightly more likely to have previously sought advice than those who sometimes smack (58% compared to 54%). However, statistical testing suggests that the evidence is not strong enough to confidently generalise this finding.

Table 7.3: Table of whether parent/guardian has sought advice on parenting issues and whether they sometimes smack or never smack

Have you ever sought advice on parenting issues?	Never Smack		Sometimes Smack	
	n	%	n	%
Yes	122	58%	94	54%
No	86	41%	79	46%
Don't know	1	0%	0	0%
Grand Total	209	100%	173	100%

7.6 Respondents were then asked whether the advice or support that they had received had helped to improve their parenting skills or confidence. The answers to these questions differed significantly (on the basis of statistical testing) between parents who smack and those who do not. For example, whereas 65% of parents who suggest that they never smack their children strongly thought that the advice and support had helped 'a lot', only 50% of parents who sometimes smack their children thought the same. This factor was also found to be a statistically significant explanatory variable in one of the regression analyses discussed in Chapter 5.

Table 7.4: Table of whether parent/guardian has found advice helpful and whether they sometimes smack or never smack

To what extent do you think the information or support you received on parenting issues has helped to improve your parenting skills or confidence?	Never smacks		Sometimes smacks	
	n	%	n	%
Not at all	2	2%	1	1%
A little	41	33%	39	42%
A lot	83	65%	47	50%
Not applicable / not trying to improve skills / confidence	1	1%	6	7%
Total (all those who answered the question)	127	100%	94	100%

7.7 Respondents were also asked from where they had received this advice and support, and from where they would like to receive it. The most frequent source of advice which had been accessed was from friends or relatives, followed by advice from health professionals. In both cases, more parents wanted support from these sources than had accessed it.

Table 7.5: Table of the sources of support parents/guardians have accessed and the sources of support they would like to access

Source of support	Support accessed		Support wanted	
	n	%	n	%
Health professional	95	25%	148	38%
Friend or relative	135	35%	201	52%
Nursery, school or childcare provider	25	6%	71	18%
Government or third sector service	30	8%	29	7%
Parenting sessions or groups	20	5%	19	5%
Media	13	3%	5	1%

7.8 In the majority of cases (70%) the support accessed had been given face-to-face, with 12% having found advice online and 11% having accessed personal support over the phone (and a further 2% from helplines). When asked how they would ideally like to access the support, face-to-face is by far the most popular option (72%), followed by personal support over the phone (10%). Slightly more people would like to access leaflets or factsheets than currently do and slightly fewer people would like to access information online than currently do. These findings broadly concur with the 2013 Welsh Government survey ('Managing children's behaviour, attitudes and practices'). Both surveys suggest that face-to-face support is most valued but that leaflets and factsheets may play a greater role, although the questions were asked in slightly different ways, which makes direct comparability difficult.

Table 7.6: Table of the channels through which parents/guardians have accessed and the channels through which they would like to access support

Channel of support	Support accessed		Support wanted	
	n	%	n	%
Face-to-face	291	70%	472	72%
Over the phone	46	11%	68	10%
Leaflets or factsheets	12	3%	59	9%
Email	1	0%	24	4%
TV	2	0%	13	2%
Online	48	12%	3	0%
Books	7	2%	3	0%
Instant messaging	2	0%	3	0%
Text messages	9	2%	1	0%
Telephone helpline	8	2%	0	0%

7.9 When asked to indicate the barriers to accessing support the most frequently selected options were that the parent did not know where to look or felt that they had conflicting advice from different sources. Parents who sometimes smack appear more likely to indicate that conflicting sources of information were a problem than those who never smack. This would seem to be consistent with parents wanting health professionals, who are perhaps seen as a clearly authoritative source, to play a greater role in providing advice, though this speculation goes beyond the evidence. Similarly, the concern with conflicting sources may help to explain why accessing information online seems relatively unpopular, as the Internet

is a relatively open forum in which opinions conflict and deciphering authorship and authority can be more difficult. However, the preference for person-to-person communication may perhaps offer a simpler explanation for the unpopularity of accessing information online.

Table 7.7: Table of barriers to accessing advice and whether the parent/guardian sometimes smacks or never smacks

Barriers	Never smacks		Sometimes smacks	
	n	%	n	%
Don't know where to look	72	 34%	45	 26%
Conflicting advice from different sources/providers	61	 29%	47	 27%
Don't know	38	 18%	46	 27%
Lack of information, advice or services available	32	 15%	28	 16%
Transport / Difficulty getting to services	32	 15%	16	 9%
Other - Fear/Embarrassment/ Denial	20	 10%	22	 13%
Poor quality advice, information or service	23	 11%	9	 5%
Other - No time / lack of out of hours support	6	 3%	5	 3%
Other - Language or cultural barriers	4	 2%	2	 1%
Grand Total	3	 1%	1	 1%

7.10 Respondents were also asked to suggest the parenting issues on which they would most like information and advice. The responses were then categorised and are presented in Table 6.11 below. The most frequently given answer (26% of responses) was that parents wanted help with improving children's behaviour, particularly tantrums. This should perhaps be expected given that the question comes towards the end of a survey largely concerned with behaviour management. However, if the language that the respondents used can offer any additional insight, it is perhaps relevant that far fewer respondents (5% of responses) asked for help with disciplining a child.

Table 7.8: List of issues parents/guardians would most like advice on⁸

What parenting issues would you most like information on?	n
Improving behaviour (especially tantrums)	58
Advice on sleep routines	23
Help after three years (e.g. with education)	21
Help with techniques to help children eat better	19
Advice on learning difficulties, autism, speech, etc.	16
Child development	15
Discipline	12
Toilet training	8
Sibling jealousy/multiple children	8
Local activities	5
Signposting to services	5
Support for parents (especially those who work)	5
Health support and guidance	5
Bullying/cyberbullying	4
Dealing with teenagers	4
Improving body confidence	4
General guidance	5
Advice on how to teach about dangers	5
Mental health support	5
First aid	5
Information for men	5
How to develop attention span	1
Childcare	1
Food intolerances	1

7.11 The provision of advice and support could conceivably be used to change attitudes in a number of different ways. One theory is that an increased awareness and understanding of alternative parenting techniques could lead to a reduction in smacking as a means to manage children's behaviour. Survey respondents were asked which techniques, from a list of options, they have used in the last six months. The results are shown in Table 6.12 below, broken down by whether the respondents had also smacked in the last six months.

⁸ This table summarises qualitative answers to an open question. As such, the table can be seen as indicative of the responses, but should not be interpreted as quantitative analysis.

Table 7.9: Table of parental techniques used in the last six months and whether or not the parent/guardian has smacked in the last six months

In managing your children's behaviour, have you used any of the following techniques in the last six months?	Smacked children in last six months		
	No	Yes	Overall
Creating a diversion when they are doing something wrong	91%	91%	91%
Counting to three	72%	81%	72%
Making them take time out to go to the naughty mat / step	79%	87%	80%
Not talking to them / paying them any attention	57%	63%	57%
Praising good behaviour	99%	99%	99%
Reasoning with them	86%	88%	84%
Rewarding good behaviour	95%	97%	95%
Shouting at them	65%	89%	69%
Telling them off	95%	100%	96%
Stopping them from doing something they like	74%	87%	75%
Developing routines	98%	96%	98%
Setting aside time everyday for play activities	86%	80%	85%
Using my own behaviour to set a good example	96%	97%	96%
Saying no	99%	100%	99%

7.12 The results show that all of the techniques had been used by most of the respondents over the last six months. Those parents who reported smacking do not appear less likely to have reported using other techniques in the last six months than those who did not report smacking and this remains true if the subset of techniques which are associated with 'positive parenting' are analysed. It should be noted, however, that analysis does not consider the frequency or the way in which these techniques have been used within the six-month period. There is, however, some indication that parents who reported smacking their children in the last six months are also more likely to have reported shouting at them.

The law

7.13 Respondents were asked about their opinions towards legislative change around smacking. As the wording of questions can be important for issues such as this, two differently worded questions were used. The first asked whether the law should allow parents to smack their children. Just over half (51%) of respondents disagreed that the law should allow parents to smack their children, whilst 34% agreed that it should. The second question asked whether there should be a complete ban on hitting children, even a smack as a punishment. Forty-six per cent of respondents agreed that there should be a complete ban on hitting children, whilst 43% disagreed.

7.14 Both results suggest that opinion on legislative change is quite divided. The balance of opinion from the two questions seems to lean towards legislative change in this area. For reference, the 2013 Welsh Government study ('Managing children's behaviour, attitudes and practices') found that 33% of the general public disagreed that the law should allow parents to smack their children and just 28% agreed that there should be a complete ban on parents hitting their children. The older-age profile of the respondents in the 2013 study, and that many of the respondents were not current parents, may partially explain the difference in the results from this research.

Table 7.10: Level of agreement amongst parents/guardians that the law should allow parents to smack their children

The law should allow parents to smack their children	n	%
Strongly disagree	148	 38%
Slightly disagree	49	 13%
Neither agree nor disagree	46	 12%
Slightly agree	96	 25%
Strongly agree	34	 9%
Don't know	14	 4%

Table 7.11: Level of agreement amongst parents/guardians that there should be a complete ban on parents hitting their children, even as a smack

There should be a complete ban on parents hitting their children, even smacking as a punishment	n	%
Strongly disagree	61	 16%
Slightly disagree	105	 27%
Neither agree nor disagree	35	 9%
Slightly agree	46	 12%
Strongly agree	131	 34%
Don't know	9	 2%

7.15 Respondents were asked whether or not they felt that a change in the law would influence their attitude towards smacking. The results of this question have been shown together with the survey question which asked respondents what their opinion on smacking is (Table 5.4). Under a fifth of parents who currently smack their children feel that a change in the law would influence their attitude.

Table 7.12: Table of parent/guardian opinions towards smacking and whether they feel a change in the law would change attitudes

	Do you think a change in the law around the use of physical punishment to discipline would change your attitudes towards smacking?			
From this list, which of the following statements comes closest to your personal opinion on smacking your children?	No	Yes	Don't know	Grand Total
I think it is always wrong to smack a child and I won't do it	97%	2%	2%	100%
I don't like the idea of smacking a child but I will do it if nothing else works	79%	19%	3%	100%
I'm comfortable with the idea of smacking a child and will do it when I think it's necessary	84%	13%	3%	100%
Don't know	66%	34%		100%
Grand Total	89%	9%	2%	100%

7.16 In summary, the results show that substantial proportions of people have changed their mind concerning smacking and that good-quality advice may be an important factor in preventing smacking behaviour. Parents would ideally like to access their advice face-to-face from a health professional, but more often it is family members who give the advice and there is some suggestion that parents may struggle to make sense of conflicting information. Parents who smack report using just as broad a range of other techniques as parents who do not smack, suggesting that a lack of awareness of parenting techniques may not be the main reason for smacking. Opinion on legislative change is quite divided. Whilst the balance of opinion seems to lean towards legislative change in this area, those clearly in favour still represented less than half of the respondents.

Section summary

7.17 21% of respondents who disagreed that smacking is necessary have not always held this opinion.

7.18 14% of respondents who agreed that smacking is necessary have at some point changed their mind towards this position.

7.19 A higher percentage (58%) of parents who reported not smacking their children indicated that they had found advice helpful than those who reported smacking (54%)⁹.

7.20 65% of parents who reported that they never smack their children strongly thought that the advice and support they accessed had helped 'a lot', whilst only 50% of parents who do smack their children thought the same.

7.21 The most frequent source of advice which had been accessed was friends or relatives, followed by advice from health professionals.

7.22 Parents particularly wanted to access advice from friends and relatives.

7.23 In the majority of cases (70%) the support accessed had been given face-to-face, with 12% having found advice online and 11% having accessed personal support over the phone (and a further 2% from helplines).

7.24 When asked how they would ideally like to access the support, face-to-face is by far the most popular option (72%), followed by personal support over the phone (10%).

7.25 Parents report that not knowing where to look and receiving conflicting advice from different sources were the most common barriers to accessing support.

7.26 Those parents who have reported smacking are no less likely to report using other parenting techniques in the last six months.

7.27 51% of respondents disagreed that the law should allow parents to smack their children, whilst 34% agreed that it should.

7.28 46% of respondents agreed that there should be a complete ban on hitting children, whilst 43% disagreed that there should be a ban.

7.29 Under a fifth of parents (19%) who currently report smacking their children indicated that a change in the law would influence their attitude.

⁹ This finding only relates to those parents who reported receiving some form of advice or support.

8. Conclusion

Attitudes towards smacking

8.1 This report has presented results from a telephone survey with parents of children aged six years or under. The survey asked parents about their attitudes towards managing children's behaviour, and included questions on smacking. This can be quite a sensitive issue and parents may feel under pressure to give an answer that they consider to be socially acceptable. In addition to this, it must be stressed that the survey findings relate to the self-reported attitudes of parents and not their behaviours.

8.2 Most parents in the survey (56%) indicated that they thought that it was wrong to smack, and their reported behaviour suggests that they do not do it. However, there is a substantial minority of parents (43%) who indicated that they may smack in some circumstances. Whilst only a small number of parents (5%) say that they are comfortable with the idea of smacking, there is a larger segment (38%) who suggest that they would smack if nothing else worked. Around a quarter (24%) of parents hold the opinion that smacking is sometimes necessary, whilst just over a fifth (22%) report that they have smacked in the last six months; however, there is some inconsistency in respondents' answers to these two questions. The results therefore are quite sensitive to the particular question being asked.

Understanding attitudes towards smacking

8.3 Further analysis was undertaken to understand more about the parents who suggested that they may sometimes smack. Parents who report that they smack often indicate that they do so 'as a last resort', when they perceive the child to be causing harm to themselves or when they feel that the child's behaviour is out of control. Parents may also smack to stop harm coming to other children or as a punishment for naughty behaviour, but these two factors seem to be less fundamental for understanding attitudes on smacking. This therefore helps to build a picture of smacking occurring as a last resort in situations in which the parent may perceive an acute risk or where behaviour seems to be getting out of control.

8.4 These circumstances appear to account for smacking behaviour far better than other factors looked at in this research. The gender, age, marital status, educational attainment, life satisfaction of parents, and the deprivation of the area in which they live did not account for different attitudes to smacking. This research does not completely rule out the importance of these factors, as a study with a larger sample size may reveal more

statistically significant relationships. However, it does suggest that it is necessary to go beyond demographic profiles to fully understand attitudes towards smacking.

8.5 Although circumstances remain of central importance, there are two other factors which relate more directly to the parents themselves and may offer further insight. Firstly, parents who sometimes find their child's behaviour embarrassing are more likely to report that they may sometimes smack than those who do not. Secondly, parents who have not found the advice that they accessed helpful are more likely to smack than those who have found the advice accessed helpful. Although this finding only related to those parents who had accessed advice, it may offer some evidence that the type of advice provided is very important. It should, however, be noted that both of these findings are based on statistical associations and may not represent causal relationships. It is also possible that the direction of causation can be counterintuitive. For example, it is conceivable that parents are embarrassed about their child's behaviour because it leads them to smack, rather than vice versa.

Advice on parenting

8.6 The research looked at where and how parents accessed advice. The most widespread source of advice was from friends and relatives. However, many more respondents indicated that they would like to access advice from health professionals than had reported accessing it in the past. When asked to describe the barriers to receiving support, parents typically suggested that they did not know where to look or that they felt that they sometimes accessed conflicting advice. This may also indicate that friends and family, which are currently the most commonly accessed source, may not always provide clear and consistent advice. Respondents also indicated that they would like to access advice face-to-face. It might be conjectured that a health professional represents this clear, personal and authoritative source of advice, although these associations were not specifically explored by the research. Another finding suggests that parents who reported having smacked in the last six months are no less likely to have used other parenting techniques during this period. This might suggest that information provision needs to go beyond simply raising awareness of alternative techniques, although the finding does not determine how well these techniques have been understood by the parents.

8.7 The research also investigated parents' attitudes towards legislative change. The findings showed that opinion is quite divided. Overall, the balance of opinion may favour legislative change in this area, but those in favour of change represent less than half of the parents who completed the survey. Additionally, only a minority of parents who suggested that they may sometimes smack indicated that a change in the law would influence their

attitudes. That being said, asking respondents to predict their future attitudes may not be reliable. The research also suggests that attitudes towards smacking can change. Nineteen per cent of respondents had changed their opinion towards thinking that smacking is not necessary, although 13% of respondents had changed their attitudes in the opposite direction.

Closing remarks

8.8 To summarise, the survey results give quite a nuanced position of attitudes towards smacking. They suggest that traditional ways of explaining smacking as part of an explicit parenting philosophy may be less relevant in modern Wales, and the majority of parents report that they think smacking is unnecessary. Smacking attitudes cannot for the most part be explained by neat demographic profiles, and most parents who smack appear to do so reluctantly, and as a last resort. Feelings of embarrassment may be important in such circumstances, as well as concern over harm coming to the child and losing control of situations. The 'noise' created by the multitude of well-meaning but in some ways contradictory sources of advice, which may include friends and family, could be unhelpful to parents who would ideally like their advice to come from health professionals. Attitudes towards smacking can and do change, and there are indications that more people may support legislative change than are against it, although this does not currently represent a majority.

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Appendix

Sample frame and weighting

Sample frame construction

The sampling frame was constructed from the responses to the National Survey for Wales. The survey covers a wide range of topics, such as local area and safety, public services (e.g. health, education, and transport), and well-being. The survey involves face-to-face interviews with a randomly selected, unclustered sample of over 14,000 people per year aged 16 years and over across Wales (around 600 in each of the 22 local authorities).

The aims of the survey are to help the Welsh Government to:

- monitor trends in the concerns and needs of people in Wales
- assess views and experiences of public services
- provide important elements for an overall well-being indicator framework for Wales
- understand distributional and inequality issues around the survey topics
- target resources to meet needs

The survey has run continuously since January 2012, with three full years of data now available. The third year of results (based on interviews carried out between April 2014 and March 2015) was published in June 2015 and it is these responses which were used to construct the sampling frame for this research.

The sampling frame was composed of a subsample of 1,164 respondents from the 2014–15 National Survey for Wales who fulfilled the following criteria:

- the respondent was a parent or primary guardian of at least one child aged five years or under when they were interviewed for the 2014–15 National Survey for Wales
- the respondent consented to be re-contacted

For more information on the National Survey for Wales, visit www.gov.wales/nationalsurvey.

The research objectives relate to parents (of young children), and the ultimate population of interest concerns parents (of young children) across Wales. There are, however, two ways in which the initial sample may be unrepresentative of this population:

1. The sampling frame may not be representative of the population
 - a) The raw sample data from the National Survey for Wales may not be representative of the population

- b) Those individuals who have agreed to be re-contacted may not be representative of the target group from the National Survey for Wales
- 2. The sample may not be representative of the sampling frame
 - a) Non-response may introduce bias into the sample

Non-response may be related to unobservable variables; however, the sample has been weighted to ensure that it is representative of the population in Wales on key characteristics. Two stages of weighting were used:

- Stage 1: Weights were constructed which matched the sample data to the sampling frame in terms of the area deprivation quintile (based on the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation), tenure, household type, gender and age of respondent.
- Stage 2: The constructed weights were combined with the Individual Adult Weights, as provided with the National Survey for Wales datasets.

The Technical Report of the National Survey for Wales provides further information of the Individual Adult Weights used in Stage 2. A description of Stage 1 weights is given below.

Stage 1 Weights

Selected variables were matched to the National Survey for Wales target group (unweighted) of parents with children aged five years or under. A re-weighted least squares algorithm was used to iteratively estimate the optimal weights based on the selected variables.

Table A1.1: Summary of Stage 1 weights

Derived weights	
Min	0.36
Max	5.28
Average	1

Figure A1.1: Scatter plot of Stage 1 weights by case number

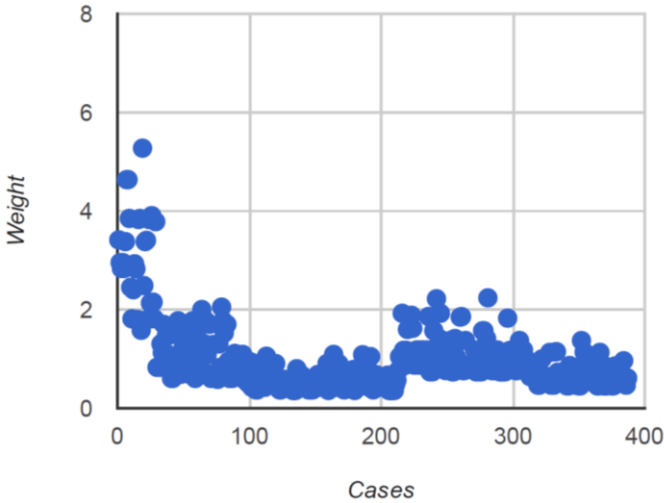


Table A1.2: Variables used for weighting

Deprivation Quintile	NSW Target Group	Sample	Weighted	Load	Fit
Q1	0.22	0.1576	0.22	1.3957	1
Q2	0.23	0.1938	0.23	1.1868	1
Q3	0.22	0.2377	0.22	0.9254	1
Q4	0.19	0.2274	0.19	0.8356	1
Q5	0.14	0.1835	0.14	0.7631	1

Tenure	NSW Target Group	Sample	Weighted	Load	Fit
Owner	0.5	0.6537	0.5	0.7648	1
Private	0.27	0.1938	0.27	1.3932	1
Social	0.23	0.1525	0.23	1.5086	1

Household Type	NSW Target Group	Sample	Weighted	Load	Fit
Single-	0.26	0.1395	0.26	1.8633	1
Two-adult	0.74	0.8605	0.74	0.86	1

Gender	NSW Target Group	Sample	Weighted	Load	Fit
Female	0.67	0.6951	0.67	0.9639	1
Male	0.33	0.3049	0.33	1.0823	1
Respondent Age	NSW Target Group	Sample	Weighted	Load	Fit
<25	0.19	0.1783	0.19	1.0657	1
<30	0.28	0.2558	0.28	1.0945	1
<35	0.13	0.1938	0.13	0.6708	1
<40	0.17	0.2972	0.17	0.5721	1
40+	0.23	0.0749	0.23	3.0693	1

Regression coefficients

The table below shows the results of a model which includes all of the variables which looked as if they might possibly explain differences in smacking behaviour, even if they had not quite been statistically significant according to the chi-squared testing which had been performed. To simplify the model (to reduce the degrees of freedom), categories within these explanatory variables were merged to create binary variables with just two categories. The breakpoints at which categories were merged were designed to show the possible relationship between the variable and smacking behaviour in its most basic and statistically powerful form.

Table A1.3: Regression coefficients of all candidate variables in the model

Coefficients	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
(Intercept)	5.7596	0.8191	7.032	2.04E-12
Very satisfied with health (binary)	-0.2389	0.2939	-0.813	0.41638
Has enough energy to care for children (binary)	-0.2175	0.2943	-0.739	0.45986
Does not find child's behaviour embarrassing (binary)	-0.2174	0.3132	-0.694	0.48756
Satisfied with child's behaviour (binary)	-0.1552	0.3114	-0.498	0.61821
Does not smack to stop harm to other children (binary)	-0.7641	0.392	-1.949	0.05127
Does not smack to stop harm to child (binary)	-1.0977	0.3831	-2.865	0.00417
Does not smack to stop out of control behaviour (binary)	-1.6815	0.617	-2.725	0.00643
Does not smack as a last resort (binary)	-2.2497	0.3206	-7.016	2.28E-12
Does not smack as a punishment (binary)	-1.135	0.5983	-1.897	0.05781
Has found parenting advice very helpful (binary)	-0.1735	0.3122	-0.556	0.57835
Has a higher qualification (binary)	-0.5271	0.2928	-1.8	0.07187

The variables which are not statistically significant can be excluded from the analysis and the model therefore reduces to these three key variables, as shown below.

Table A1.4: Regression coefficients when model is reduced to the significant variables

Coefficients	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
(Intercept)	4.3555	0.6393	6.813	9.57E-12
Does not smack to stop harm to child (binary)	-1.7164	0.2846	-6.031	1.63E-09
Does not smack to stop out of control behaviour (binary)	-2.0532	0.5967	-3.441	0.000579
Does not smack as a last resort (binary)	-2.445	0.2992	-8.172	3.04E-16

A model of smacking behaviour which excludes circumstantial variables can be reduced to one which contains variables describing whether or not a parent finds their child's behaviour embarrassing and whether or not a parent has found advice helpful (which assumes that they have accessed some advice).

Table A1.5: Regression coefficients of significant variables when circumstantial factors are removed from the model

Coefficients	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
(Intercept)	0.2382	0.1658	1.437	0.1507
Does not find child's behaviour embarrassing (binary)	-0.4815	0.209	-2.303	0.0213
Has found parenting advice helpful (binary)	-0.5742	0.2299	-2.498	0.0125

Re-contact survey questionnaire

Introduction

Good morning/afternoon/evening. May I speak to [Name]? Drawn from NWS dataset.

Research Team: Please try to engage the participant named on the sample frame. If this is not possible, even by appointment, please try to engage another parent or guardian in the household.

1. Confirm respondent's name:

1.a RT code – Who is undertaking the interview?

- ☐ Engaged originally named respondent from database
- ☐ Engaged other respondent – name above

My name is (your name) from Wavehill and I am calling on behalf of the Welsh Government. When you kindly contributed to the National Survey for Wales, you stated that you would be happy for us to contact you again.

2. Is this still correct?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No – If the answer is no, then please thank them for their time and end the interview.

If yes:

Thank you. We are currently undertaking a telephone survey exploring parents' views on a range of issues relating to how parents manage their children's behaviour and get information on parenting issues.

We are speaking to parents from across Wales, and the information will be used to inform how the Welsh Government supports parents. Responses to the survey will be summarised in a report, and you will not be identified in any way.

Your responses to our questions will remain completely confidential unless you tell me that you or your child(ren) are at significant risk of harm.

The information you and other parents give us during interviews will be completely anonymised.

The survey should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. You can stop the conversation at any time and skip any questions that you don't want to answer.

3. Are you happy to continue (now or at another time)?

- ☐ Yes – If yes, continue to question 4.
- ☐ No – If the answer is no, then please thank them for their time and end the interview.

4. Can I just ask what your date of birth is?

5. Are you a parent or guardian of one or more children aged six years or under?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know (spontaneous only)
- ☐ Refused – do not read out

6. How many children do you have?

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10
- ☐ Refused – do not read out

7. And what are their ages?

Child 1 _____

Child 2 _____

Child 3 _____

Child 4 _____

Child 5 _____

Child 6 _____

Child 7 _____

Child 8 _____

Child 9 _____

Child 10 _____

8. What is your relationship to these children?

- ☐ Mother
- ☐ Father
- ☐ Female step-parent
- ☐ Male step-parent
- ☐ Female guardian
- ☐ Male guardian
- ☐ Female foster carer
- ☐ Male foster carer
- ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ Refused – do not read out

8.a Specify other

Well-being and Parenting

9. Please tell me to what extent you are satisfied or dissatisfied with the following aspects of your current situation.

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Don't want to answer	Not applicable
My health	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My home	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My relationship (if applicable)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My children's behaviour	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The area I live in	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My life overall	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

The following statements describe feelings about the experience of being a parent. Please think of each of the statements in terms of how your relationship with your child or children typically is.

10. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Refused – do not read out
I feel close to my child(ren)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Caring for my child(ren) sometimes takes more time and energy than I have to give	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Having child(ren) leaves little time and flexibility in my life	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I enjoy spending time with my child(ren)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The behaviour of my child(ren) is often embarrassing or stressful to me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Attitudes

11. How far do you agree or disagree that it is sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child?

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Slightly agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Slightly disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Don't know (spontaneous only)
- ☐ Refused – do not read out

12. Is this something you have always agreed/ disagreed with or have you changed your view on this subject over the years?

- ☐ Always agreed
- ☐ Always disagreed
- ☐ Changed view over years
- ☐ Don't know (spontaneous only)
- ☐ Refused – do not read out

12.a Why has your view changed on this over the years?

13. From this list, which of the following statements comes closest to your personal opinion on smacking your child(ren)?

- ☐ I think it is always wrong to smack a child, and I won't do it
- ☐ I don't like the idea of smacking a child, but I will do it if nothing else works
- ☐ I'm comfortable with the idea of smacking a child and will do it when I think it's necessary
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Refused – do not read out

14. I'm going to read out a couple of statements. Please can you tell me how far do you agree or disagree with each one?

	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Refused – do not read out
The law should allow parents to smack their children	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
There should be a complete ban on parents hitting their children, even a smack as a punishment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

15. Do you think a change in the law around the use of physical punishment to discipline a child would change your attitudes towards smacking?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know (spontaneous only)
- ☐ Refused – do not read out

16. In managing your children's behaviour, have you used any of the following techniques in the last six months?

	Yes	No	Not age-appropriate	Can't remember	Refused – do not read out
Creating a diversion when they are doing something wrong	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
'Counting to 3'	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Making them take 'time out'/go to the 'naughty step' or 'naughty mat'	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Not talking to them/paying them any attention	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Praising good behaviour	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Reasoning with them	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Rewarding good behaviour (e.g. with sweets, stickers, treats)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Shouting at them	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Smacking them	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Telling them off	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Stopping them from doing something they like to do (for example, taking away their toys or games, not allowing them to watch TV)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Developing routines e.g. around meals and sleep times	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Setting aside time everyday for play activities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using my own behaviour to set a good example	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Saying no	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

17. Do you think it is appropriate for a parent to smack a child under any of the following circumstances?

	Yes	No	Not age-appropriate	Don't know	Refused – do not read out
To stop them doing something which is dangerous or harmful to them (for example, running into the road or touching something hot)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
To stop them doing something which is dangerous or harmful to another child	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When their behaviour is out of control, e.g. they are having a tantrum	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
As a last resort	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
As a punishment for naughty behaviour	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Knowledge

18. Have you ever sought advice on parenting issues?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know (spontaneous only)
- ☐ Refused – do not read out

18.a From where did you get this information/support?

- ☐ Health professional
- ☐ Childcare provider
- ☐ Nursery or pre-school
- ☐ School
- ☐ A service provided by Local Authority
- ☐ Family Information Service
- ☐ Local GP surgery
- ☐ Parenting sessions or groups
- ☐ Charity
- ☐ Friend/relative
- ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Refused – do not read out

18.b Specify other

18.c How did you access this support? Open question, prompt, code accordingly

- ☐ Face-to-face
- ☐ Leaflets
- ☐ Factsheets
- ☐ Books
- ☐ Magazines
- ☐ Telephone helpline/advice line
- ☐ TV programmes on parenting
- ☐ Website
- ☐ An e-mail service
- ☐ Discussion in a chatroom/online forum
- ☐ Instant messaging
- ☐ Text messaging
- ☐ Using a mobile application (APP)
- ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ Refused – do not read out

18.d Specify other

19. To what extent do you think the information, advice or support you received on parenting issues has helped to improve your parenting skills or confidence?

- ☐ A lot
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Not applicable / not trying to improve skills / confidence
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Refused – do not read out

20. Ideally, who would you like to receive information and advice on parenting issues from? *Open question, prompt, code accordingly*

- ☐ Health professional
- ☐ Childcare provider
- ☐ Nursery or pre-school
- ☐ School
- ☐ A service provided by Local Authority
- ☐ Family Information Service
- ☐ Local GP surgery
- ☐ Parenting sessions or groups
- ☐ Charity
- ☐ Friend/relative
- ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Refused – do not read out

20.a Specify other

20.b Ideally, how would you like to receive information and advice on parenting issues? *Open question, prompt, code accordingly*

- ☐ Face-to-face
- ☐ Leaflets
- ☐ Factsheets
- ☐ Books
- ☐ Magazines
- ☐ Telephone helpline/advice line
- ☐ TV programmes on parenting
- ☐ Website
- ☐ An e-mail service
- ☐ Discussion in a chatroom/online forum
- ☐ Instant messaging
- ☐ Text messaging
- ☐ Using a mobile application (APP)
- ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ Refused – do not read out

20.c Specify other

21. What barriers do parents experience in finding information and advice on parenting issues?

- ☐ Lack of information, advice or services available
- ☐ Poor quality advice, information or service
- ☐ Cost of information, advice or services
- ☐ Transport / difficult to get to services
- ☐ Don't know where to look
- ☐ Conflicting advice from different sources/providers
- ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ Don't know

21.a Specify other

22. What parenting issues would you most like information and advice on?

That concludes the survey, thank you very much for your time.