



**Young People's Views on Physical Punishment:
Summary findings from the
Young People in Scotland Survey 2016**

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1 Introduction

This briefing provides a summary of findings from Ipsos MORI Scotland's Young People in Scotland Survey 2016. The Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland commissioned a series of questions including a section on young people's views of physical punishment. These responses will help to provide some evidence on how the Commissioner's office can engage with young people on wider issues around physical punishment.

A total of 1,550 pupils from 50 secondary schools throughout Scotland took part in the survey. The age groups included in the survey were 11-18 year olds in S1 to S6.¹

The survey took place in schools from August 2016 - October 2016. For the first time, this was an online survey.

2 Key findings

Young people were asked their views on physical punishment. This question proved challenging to frame to ensure the language describing physical punishment was appropriate and that young people would understand the nature of the question. The introduction to the questions was as follows:

Some people think that it is ok for parents to smack their children if they have misbehaved. Other people think that smacking is wrong and can be harmful to children. We would like to know what you think about this kind of physical punishment.

Young people were then asked to indicate their level of agreement with a set of statements about physical punishment.

Gender and age showed the strongest relationship with views of physical punishment. There was less variation by other variables such as ethnicity, religion, area of deprivation, urban/rural.

¹ **A note from Ipsos MORI:** When interpreting the findings, it is important to remember that the results are based only on a sample of the Scottish secondary school population, and not on the entire school population. Consequently, results are subject to sampling tolerances, and not all differences between subgroups are therefore significant. Any differences commented on are based on statistical significance.

Data are weighted by gender, year group, urban-rural classification and SIMD classification.

Where percentages do not sum up to 100%, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of don't know/not stated categories, or multiple answers.

2.1 It is ok for parents to smack children if they have misbehaved ...

While 23% of young people agree 'that it is OK for parents to smack children if they have misbehaved', 51% disagree with this statement. In addition, 26% either don't know (5%), have no view either way (19%) or prefer not to say (2%).

Slightly more girls (57% of all girls), than boys (46% of all boys) disagree with the statement.

Responses broken down by age show little variation although the older age groups tend slightly less to be in agreement.

Other characteristics such as ethnicity, religion, deprivation, and urban/rural vary little from the result overall.

2.2 Smacking is harmful to children ...

The majority of young people (62%) think smacking is harmful, only 14% disagreed. The remaining 24% of responses comprised those who don't know (5%), those who neither agree nor disagree (17%) and those who prefer not to say (2%).

There were some age and gender variations:

- Slightly more girls (66%) think this, compared with boys (59%).
- Those amongst the younger age groups were also more likely than the older age groups to agree that smacking is harmful.

2.3 Smacking is a good way to teach children how to behave ...

Over half of survey respondents disagree with this statement (52%), with only 18% agreeing.

However, nearly a third (30%) of young people are less certain about this statement: 22% neither agree nor disagree, 5% don't know and 3% prefer not to say.

There were slight age and gender variations:

- Older age groups tend to be more likely to agree with this statement.
- More girls (57% of all girls) disagree than boys (48%).

2.4 Parents should be helped to find alternatives to smacking ...

This statement encourages a more positive outlook so it is unsurprising that 65% of young people think finding alternatives to smacking is helpful. Only 7% disagree.

However, for 28% of young people there is some uncertainty, with 16% saying they neither agree nor disagree, 10% don't know, and 2% prefer not to say.

There is little variation across variables such as age, gender and urban/rural classification.

2.5 It should be against the law in Scotland to smack a child ...

The legal question around physical punishment provided a range of responses.

- 42% of young people agree it should be against the law to smack a child with girls more likely to agree than boys (46% of all girls, compared with 38% of all boys).
- 25% disagree with the statement.
- A third neither agree or disagree, don't know or prefer not to say (22%, 8% and 3%, respectively).

As noted above, a high proportion of young people (33%) neither agree or disagree, don't know or prefer not to say, rather than simply disagreeing with the statement. This suggests that the legality of smacking is an issue on which young people are less clear and it may, therefore, warrant further investigation.

3. Final comment

Finally, it is useful to sum up the overall key messages which emerge from this survey. Chart 1 sets out a summary of the key responses. Young people were most likely to agree that 'parents should be helped to find alternatives to smacking' and that 'smacking is harmful to children'. This is reinforced by only 18% of young people thinking 'smacking is a good way to teach children how to behave' and 23% who agree 'it is ok for parents to smack their children'.

Chart 1

