

**Survey on public attitudes towards
the physical discipline
of children**

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Ministry of Justice

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Foreword

Section 59 of the Crimes Act 1961 provides a defence to parents charged with various offences relating to physical assaults of their children. The Government is currently considering issues related to section 59, in the context of a work programme to improve New Zealand's compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. To assist this work, it is important to gain an understanding of the views currently held by New Zealanders on the physical discipline of children.

In June 2001, the Ministry of Justice commissioned a stand-alone telephone survey of 1000 adults to ascertain their attitudes towards the use of physical discipline on children. This report contains the results of that survey. The survey complements previous studies that have been done in this area by other government agencies and academic researchers.

The use of physical discipline on children is an issue that generates considerable interest and debate. While the survey was primarily commissioned to inform policy advice to Government, it is also available as a resource to others who have an interest in this issue. The survey findings provide a valuable insight into New Zealanders' current attitudes towards parenting practice and the use of physical discipline.

Belinda Clark
Secretary for Justice

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Executive Summary

Objective

The survey was conducted by the Ministry of Justice to ascertain public attitudes towards the physical discipline of children. This information is to inform ongoing policy work on section 59 of the Crimes Act 1961. Section 59 provides a defence to parents charged with assault against their children. Under section 59, every parent of a child (and every person in the place of the parent of a child) is justified in using force by way of correction towards the child, if the force used is reasonable in the circumstances.

Methodology

This study involved a stand alone, nation-wide, telephone survey of 1000 adults (18 years and over) that included proposed minimum samples of 100 Māori and 100 Pacific peoples. The telephone survey was undertaken by a research company, the National Research Bureau Ltd, during June 2001. The results were analysed and written into the present report by the Ministry of Justice.

The survey questions were grouped into three different aspects of physical discipline, namely: type of punishment; physical severity of punishment; and the acceptability of physical punishment of children of different age groups. These questions sought to find out if the public viewed the physical discipline of children as acceptable at all and, if so, what they considered to be acceptable physical punishment for the purposes of correction.

The response rate to the survey was 59%. The results were further analysed using the following demographic variables; gender, ethnicity, age, parental status and socio-economic status. The demographic results that are reported are significant at the 95% confidence level unless otherwise stated as being significant at the 99% confidence level, which is represented by the p value ($p < 0.01$) in a footnote. A significant result at the 95% confidence level means that we can say with 95% certainty that these results have not occurred by chance. Similarly, for the 99% confidence level we can say with 99% certainty that these results have not occurred by chance.

The margins of error at the 95% and 99% confidence levels associated with a result of 50% of the total survey sample agreeing with a particular statement are approximately $\pm 3.1\%$ and $\pm 4.1\%$ respectively.

Findings

Type of physical punishment

The results showed that 80% of the public agreed that a person parenting a child should be allowed by law to smack the child with an open hand if they are naughty. The use of objects to smack a child and smacking them in the head and neck area drew an overwhelmingly negative response from the public, indicating that only using an open hand was acceptable to most people.

- Fifteen percent agreed with the viewpoint that a person parenting a child should be legally allowed to use objects like a wooden spoon or a belt to punish the child if they are naughty.
- There was negligible agreement (0.4%) with the viewpoint that persons parenting a child should be legally allowed to use heavier objects like a piece of wood or an electric cord to physically discipline a child.
- There was negligible agreement (1.3%) with the viewpoint that persons parenting a child should be legally allowed to smack a child in the head and neck area if they are naughty.
- Other New Zealand studies have asked respondents if they agree with the statement *There are certain circumstances when it is alright for a parent to smack a child*. The results from these studies can only tentatively be compared to the question on smacking with an open hand as they are different questions and different methodologies were used. However, the results are documented in the discussion section of this report.

Severity of physical punishment

The questions on severity of punishment ranged from a smack that left no mark through to physical punishment that required medical attention. The responses indicated that only a smack that left no mark was acceptable to the majority of people (75%). Physical force that left a red mark or bruising that lasts for a few days, marks and bruising that last for more than a few days, and injuries that require medical attention were found to be unacceptable by almost everyone.

- 6% thought it was acceptable to use physical punishment that leaves a red mark that lasts a few days.
- 0.8% thought it was acceptable to use physical punishment that leaves a bruise that lasts a few days.
- 0.8% thought it was acceptable to use physical punishment that leaves marks and bruises that last for more than a few days but doesn't cause permanent injury.
- 0.1% thought it was acceptable to use physical punishment that causes an injury that needs medical attention.

Age groups of children

In regards to the questions on the age groups of children, the results indicate that most respondents view punishing very young and older children as unacceptable. This possibly reflects attitudes towards the maturity of the child in terms of physicality and intellectual development.

- 23% thought it was acceptable to physically discipline children under two years old.
- 62% thought it was acceptable to physically discipline children 2-5 years old.
- 72% thought it was acceptable to physically discipline children 6-10 years old.
- 43% thought it was acceptable to physically discipline children 11-14 years old.
- 16% thought it was acceptable to physically discipline children 15-17 year olds.

Demographic analysis of survey results

Gender

- The response from women and men was very similar for the questions on type and severity of punishment.
- The significant differences were in regards to the age groups of children. Women (26%) found it more acceptable¹ than men (19%) to physically punish children less than two years.
- In regards to the physical discipline of 6-10 and 11-14 year olds, men (76% and 51% respectively) found this more acceptable² than women (67% and 35% respectively).

Ethnicity

- The sample was analysed by the following ethnic groupings: New Zealand European/Other; Māori; and Pacific peoples. A comparison of the statistically significant results by ethnicity showed that those in the NZ European/Other ethnic grouping generally viewed it as more acceptable than either Māori or Pacific peoples to physically discipline children.
- The respondents in the NZ European/Other ethnic grouping (82%) were more likely³ to think that persons parenting a child should be legally allowed to physically discipline the child if they are naughty, than either Māori (73%) or Pacific peoples (69%).

¹ (p<0.01)

² (p<0.01)

³ (p<0.01)

- NZ European/Other respondents (79%) were more likely⁴ to view a smack that left no mark as an acceptable level of physical punishment than either Māori (61%) or Pacific peoples (51%). There was no one ethnic group that viewed punishment that leaves a red mark, bruising or injuries that require medical attention as acceptable more so than the other groups.
- NZ European/Other respondents were more likely⁵ than Māori or Pacific peoples to think that it was acceptable to physically discipline children aged 0-10 years old. The proportion of each ethnic grouping that found it acceptable to physically discipline children aged:
 - under two years old: NZ European/Other (25%); Māori (12%); Pacific peoples (13%);
 - 2-5 years old: NZ European/Other (66%); Māori (44%); Pacific peoples (31%);
 - 6-10 years old: NZ European/Other (74%); Māori (61%); Pacific peoples (59%).
- Pacific peoples (30%) were more likely⁶ to view it as acceptable to discipline older children aged 15-17 years than NZ European/Other respondents (14%). These results suggest that there were different perceptions among ethnic groups about the ages it is appropriate to physically discipline children.
- Pacific peoples (27%) were more likely⁷ to agree that objects such as wooden spoons should be allowed by law to physically punish children than NZ European/Others (15%) or Māori (10%).
- There was no one ethnic group that thought that the use of heavier objects like a piece of wood or an electric cord to physically discipline a child was more acceptable than the other groups.

Parental status

- The sample was analysed by parental status. The proportions of the sample were: currently parenting (53%); those who had previously parented (29%); and those who had never parented (18%), equating to a total of 82% who had parenting experience.
- The results in terms of parental status highlighted that *previous parents* (88%) were more likely⁸ to find smacking with an open hand should be legally allowable than those who were *currently parenting* (78%) or those who had *never parented* (71%).
- *Previous parents* (81%) were also more likely⁹ to agree that smacking that leaves no mark is an acceptable level of punishment than *current parents* (73%).

⁴ (p<0.01)

⁵ (p<0.01)

⁶ (p<0.01)

⁷ (p<0.01)

⁸ (p<0.01)

⁹ (p<0.01)

- *Current parents* (26%) were more likely to find physical discipline of children under two years acceptable than *previous parents* (19%) or those that have *never parented* (17% acceptance).

Age groups of respondents

- The sample was analysed by age groups of respondents: 18-29 years old; 30-39 years old; 40-49 years old; 50-59 years old; and 60 plus years.
- The youngest age group of respondents, those aged 18-29 years, were less likely¹⁰ to agree that smacking with an open hand should be legally allowable than the other age groups.
- Those aged 18-29 years were also less likely¹¹ to agree that a smack that leaves no mark was an acceptable level of punishment than nearly all the other age groups.
- The question was raised whether the lower acceptance of 18-29 year olds was due to the larger proportion of these respondents who had never parented (47%). Further statistical analysis regarding the question on smacking with an open hand was conducted to examine this query. The results showed that those in the 18-29 year old age group who were currently parenting (44% of the 18-29 year olds) were still significantly less likely to agree that smacking with an open hand should be legally allowable to discipline a naughty child.
- The youngest age group maintained a lower acceptance of physical discipline of children across many of the questions, which could be an indication that there is a change in attitude over the generations towards the physical discipline of children becoming less acceptable. However, there was not a consistent drop in agreement from oldest to youngest. Indeed, for some of the results, the 50-59 years and 60+ years had relatively low acceptance compared to the middle groups.
- Those who were 60+ years had the lowest acceptance of physically punishing children aged 15-17 years when compared to the 40-49 year olds.

New Zealand Socio-economic Index (NZSEI) occupational categories

- The sample was analysed by NZSEI occupational categories.
- The results of the survey showed no discernible difference between occupations that had higher or lower NZSEI scores. This suggests that there was no difference in attitudes between people with different socio-economic status towards the physical discipline of children.

¹⁰ (p<0.01)

¹¹ (p<0.01) With the exception of the 30-39 year olds where the statistically significant difference is at the 95% confidence level.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

This survey was conducted by the Ministry of Justice to ascertain public attitudes towards the physical discipline of children. This information is to contribute to ongoing policy work on section 59 of the Crimes Act 1961. Section 59 provides a defence to parents charged with assault of their children. Under section 59, every parent of a child (and every person in the place of the parent of a child) is justified in using force by way of correction towards the child, if the force used is reasonable in the circumstances.

The issue of section 59 primarily arose in the context of a proposed Government-wide work programme to improve New Zealand's compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 (UNCROC). The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has previously recommended that New Zealand review its corporal punishment legislation with the view to banning all forms of corporal punishment against children.

Officials have investigated how other comparable countries, particularly in the European Union, have addressed the issue of compliance with UNCROC and the existence of law similar to section 59. They found that while many European countries are banning physical punishment, a number of Commonwealth countries, such as Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, are either doing nothing or considering placing restrictions in law on when the use of physical punishment was appropriate.

Officials are currently analysing the implications for New Zealand should Parliament (for example, through a Member's Bill) decide to repeal or amend section 59 and what education measures could be undertaken. The findings of this survey will inform officials' advice to government.

1.2 Methodology

The survey aimed to ascertain public attitudes to the physical discipline of children. This study involved a stand alone, nation-wide, telephone survey of 1,000 adults (18 years and over) that was undertaken by the National Research Bureau Ltd during June 2001. The sample was to include proposed minimum samples of 100 Māori and 100 Pacific peoples.

Questions

The survey consisted of closed questions that asked respondents about three different aspects of physical discipline of children. The first area enquired whether respondents agreed or disagreed with various viewpoints on the type of physical punishment a person parenting a

child should be allowed, by law, to carry out for the purposes of punishing a naughty child. The different types of punishment included:

- smacking with an open hand;
- using implements such as a wooden spoon or belt;
- using implements that were *heavier*, such as a piece of wood; and
- smacking a child in the head and neck area.

The second area of questioning asked people whether they viewed different levels of physical punishment as acceptable or unacceptable. The levels included:

- a smack that leaves no mark on the child's skin;
- punishment that leaves a red mark that lasts a few days;
- punishment that leaves a bruise that lasts a few days;
- punishment that leaves marks and bruises that last for more than a few days but doesn't cause a permanent injury; and
- punishment that causes an injury that needs medical attention.

The third area of questioning asked which age groups of children respondents thought people should **not** be allowed to punish physically. The age groups were:

- under 2 years;
- 2 - 5 years;
- 6 - 10 years;
- 11 - 14 years; and
- 15 - 17 years.

Response rate and margin of error

The response rate to the survey was 59%. This is the percentage of people who agreed to participate in the survey out of the total number of people telephoned (approximately 1,700), in order to reach the total survey sample of 1000 respondents.

The survey results were further analysed by demographic variables (see Table 1 below) and all those results that are reported are significant at the 95% confidence level unless otherwise stated as being significant at the 99% confidence level, which is represented by the p value ($p < 0.01$) in a footnote. The 95% confidence level means that we can say with 95% certainty that these results have not occurred by chance. Similarly, for the 99% confidence level we can say there is a 99% certainty that these results have not occurred by chance.

The reported results are based on weighted sample sizes that take into account gender, age and ethnicity to align the sample to the 1996 New Zealand Census population¹². This makes it possible to generalise the findings to the New Zealand population, subject to measurement error, also referred to as margins of error. The margins of error at the 95% and 99%

¹² Refer to Appendix A for the comparative weighting of the sample sizes for gender, age and ethnicity to the 1996 New Zealand Census proportions.

confidence levels associated with a result of 50% of the total survey sample (1000 respondents) agreeing with a particular statement are approximately $\pm 3.1\%$ and $\pm 4.1\%$ respectively (see Appendix D). For example, if 50% of a sample of 1000 agreed with a particular statement, we can say with 95% confidence that between 46.9% and 53.1% of the whole population would agree to the statement.

For all the questions the respondents were given the option to say they *don't know/no idea* or that they would *prefer not to answer*. As the proportion who responded in this way was very low (below 2%) for every question, these responses were not included in the analysis.

Limitations

A short survey of this nature must necessarily be limited in scope. The questions cannot explore every aspect of physical discipline of children. For example, the questions only focused on attitudes, rather than the use of physical punishment.¹³ The attitudes of children themselves would add valuable insight into these issues. However the methodology was considered inappropriate to ask children their views. This would require a different type of study, with face-to-face interviews conducted by specially trained interviewers.¹⁴

The way a question is worded also has an impact on the response. A comparative analysis of some of the questions highlights this point. However, all the questions (apart from the demographic information) in the survey implicitly asked whether it is acceptable to physically discipline children. A respondent who did not agree with the physical discipline of children would have found all the viewpoints unacceptable.

A limitation of self-report surveys is that they are based on what respondents decide to report. There is the possibility that respondents may say what they think is the correct response rather than what they actually think or do.

Telephone surveys are thought to under-represent groups who have lower rates of telephone ownership and to achieve a lower response from Māori and Pacific peoples who tend to prefer face-to-face interviewing. However, approximately 96% of households have a telephone.

The survey findings are divided into three sections relating to each of the three areas of questioning. They are: type of physical punishment; severity of physical punishment; and ages of children.¹⁵

¹³ The Department of Child, Youth and Family has recently (May 2000) conducted a survey on the impact of their *Alternatives to Smacking Campaign* that included questions on practice.

¹⁴ Some consultation with children on this issue has taken place in the context of *The Agenda for Children and Youth Development Strategy* being led by the Ministries of Social Development and Youth Affairs.

¹⁵ A note on the presentation of percentage results. The results over 2% have been rounded to the nearest whole number. However, as a considerable number of results are under 2%, these results are presented at the one decimal point place for the purposes of clarity.

Statistical testing

Statistical analyses were performed on the unweighted data using The Survey System (TSS) software. Chi-square tests were used to assess statistical differences between responses to the questions about the physical discipline of children according to the following demographic variables and groupings:

Table 1.1 Demographic variables and respective groupings

Demographic variable	Grouping	
Gender	Female	
	Male	
Ethnicity	New Zealand European/Other	
	Māori	
	Pacific peoples	
Parental status	Currently parenting	
	Previously parented	
	Never parented	
Age groups	18-29 years	
	30-39 years	
	40-49 years	
	50-59 years	
	60 plus years	NZSEI
New Zealand Socio-economic Index of Occupational Status (NZSEI) of main income earner in the household at the major group level (excluding Armed Forces ¹⁶)	Legislators, Administrators and Managers	57
	Professionals	71
	Technicians and Associate Professionals	58
	Clerks	42
	Service and Sales Workers	36
	Agriculture and Fishery Workers	25
	Trades Workers	47
	Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers	38
	Elementary Occupations	31

The NZSEI occupational status scores attributed to each of the broad occupational categories were calculated by Statistics New Zealand to reflect the education and income of those who practise occupations that fall within these categories. The index assumes that a person's occupation provides a reasonable basis on which to assign them a position on the socio-economic hierarchy. The occupations with higher scores reflect more education and income, which can be taken as a measure of socio-economic status (see Appendix C for further discussion).

In regards to parental status, 53% of the sample were currently parenting and 29% had previously parented, equating to a total of 82% of respondents who had parenting experience. Eighteen percent of the sample had never parented.

¹⁶ The Armed Forces was excluded from the analysis because the sample size of the group, which was four respondents, was considered too small to be representative.

2 Type of physical punishment

2.1 Introduction

The survey asked people to respond to a series of four statements regarding different types of physical discipline of children. Before each statement the respondent was asked ‘Do you agree or disagree with the following viewpoint?’

Q3a “A person parenting a child should be allowed, by law, to smack the child with an open hand if the child is naughty.”

Q3b “A person parenting a child should be allowed, by law, to use things like a wooden spoon or a belt to punish the child if it is naughty.”

Q3c “A person parenting a child should be allowed, by law, to use something heavier like a piece of wood or an electric cord to punish the child if the child is naughty.”

Q3d “A person parenting a child should be allowed, by law, to smack the child on the head or the neck if the child is naughty.”¹⁷

The questions were framed around how section 59 operates currently. The parameters used in this instance were that only a person parenting a child can use this clause as a defence and only if they are physically punishing a child in their care for the purposes of correction. The adjective *naughty* was used in all four statements to signal that the purpose of physical punishment was for disciplining or correcting the child’s behaviour.

The questions were also designed to typify different forms of punishment that have been used to discipline children. The first three statements can be seen to increase in severity. Smacking with an open hand denotes less force than a closed fist or the use of an implement.

There are two questions on implements as we wanted to find out if the public perceived a difference between traditional objects used for physical punishment such as a wooden spoon or belt, and other implements that denote a more severe level of physical punishment. Thus an electric cord and the *heavier* adjective with wood imply other ‘non-traditional’ objects that could cause more pain and injury.

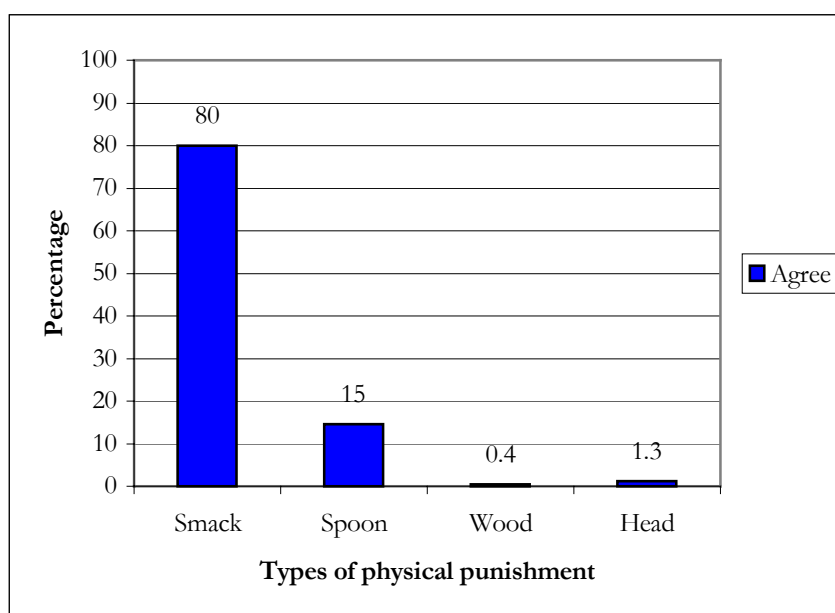
The fourth statement on smacking a child in the head or neck area also denotes a severe level of physical punishment, as this is a very sensitive area of the body.

¹⁷ The four statements are identified in the graphs as *Smack* for Q3a; *Spoon* for Q3b; *Wood* for Q3c and *Head* for Q3d.

2.2 Findings

The total percentage of people who agreed with each statement is shown in Figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1 Percentage of people who agreed that each of the four types of physical discipline should be legally allowable to discipline a child



The second and third statements in question three related to whether the use of implements should be legally allowable or not. The results clearly demonstrate that they are not considered acceptable, with heavier and more damaging implements drawing a response of 99.3% who disagree that the use of such objects should be legally allowable. The difference between the two questions on implements lends weight to the idea that certain implements like the wooden spoon or belt are more acceptable than other types of objects because they have cultural currency among some respondents as traditional objects used for physical punishment.

Analysis of responses to the following statement:

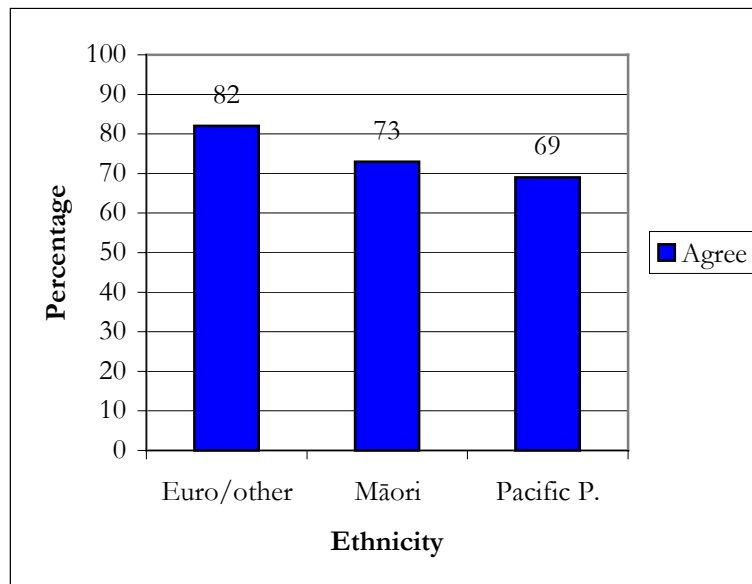
“A person parenting a child should be allowed, by law, to smack the child with an open hand if the child is naughty.”

Smacking with an open hand received the highest agreement, 80%, with 18% disagreeing.¹⁸

¹⁸ The remaining 2% opted for the *don't know* or *prefer not to answer* options.

Similar proportions of women (81%) and men (78%) agreed that smacking with an open hand should be allowed by law. However, a significantly¹⁹ higher percentage of those in the NZ European/Other ethnic grouping (82%) agreed with the statement on smacking than Māori (73%) or Pacific peoples (69%).

Figure 2.2 Percentage of people who agreed with the statement on smacking with an open hand, by ethnicity



With regards to parental status, Figure 2.3 clearly shows that those who have *never parented* were significantly²⁰ less likely to agree than *current* or *previous parents* that smacking a child with an open hand for the purposes of discipline should be legally allowable. Furthermore, there was a 10% difference²¹ in agreement between those who were *current parents* (78%) and those who had *previously parented* (88%).

¹⁹ ($p < 0.01$)

²⁰ ($p < 0.01$)

²¹ ($p < 0.01$)

Figure 2.3 Percentage of respondents who agreed with the statement on smacking with an open hand, by parental status

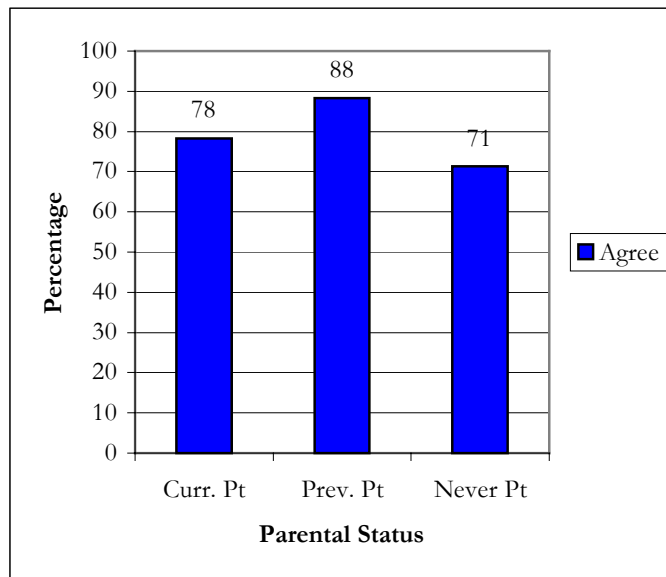
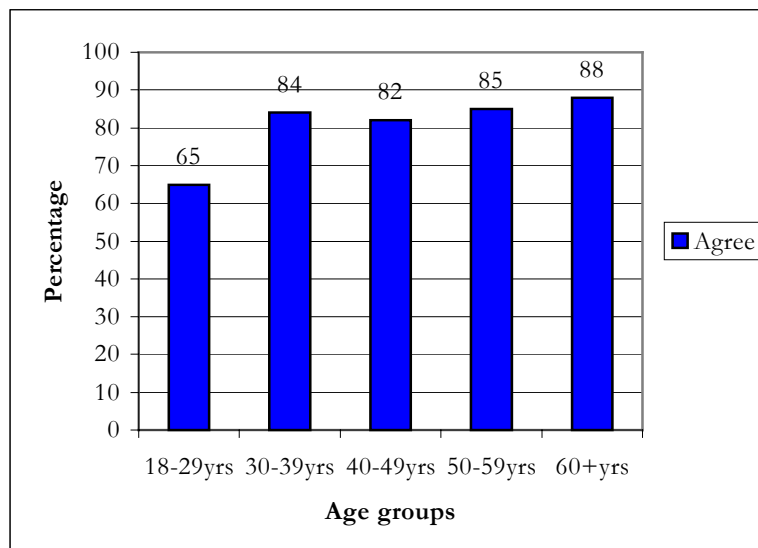


Figure 2.4 illustrates the response to the statement by age groups, and shows the youngest age group is less likely to agree²² than any of the other age groups with the statement on smacking with an open hand.

Figure 2.4 The percentage of respondents who agreed with the statement on smacking with an open hand, by age group

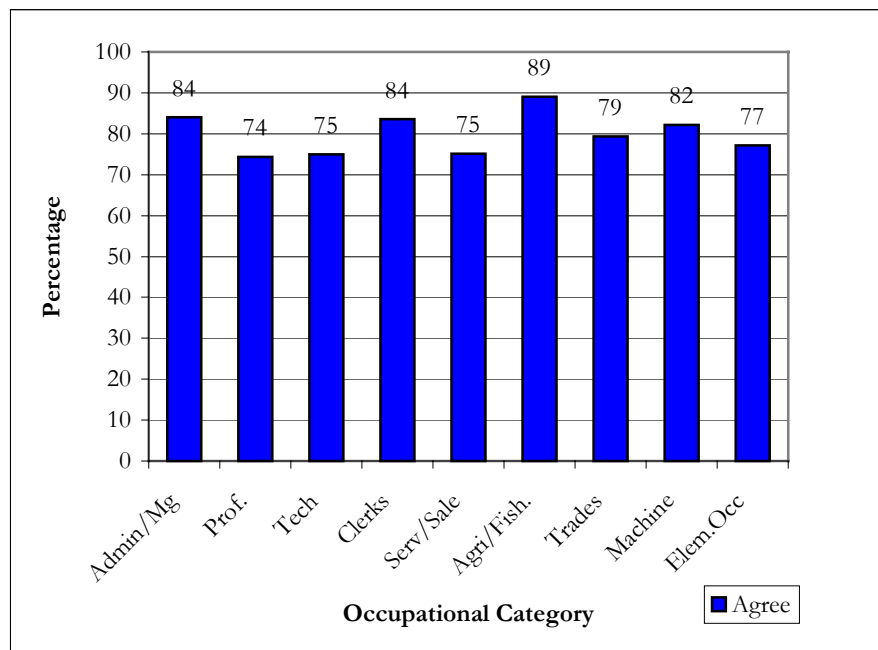


²² ($p < 0.01$)

Responses according to age group broadly equate with responses according to parental status. That is, those in the younger age group of 18-29 years are more likely to have never parented (47%), and both these demographic categories were the least likely to view smacking with an open hand as acceptable. Those in the older age groups, 50-59 years and 60 plus years, were more likely to be previous parents (57% and 73% respectively). Current parents are most likely to be in the 30-39 years (78%) and 40-49 years groups (80%), although it should be noted that 44% of 18-29 year olds in the sample were currently parenting.

Figure 2.5 shows that there was no consistent pattern with regard to occupational categories with high or low NZSEI scores. Respondents in the Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery Workers category had the highest level of agreement with smacking with an open hand. This result was significant²³ when compared to those respondents in households whose main income earner was in the following categories: Professional; Technicians and Associate Professionals; and Service and Sales Workers. Furthermore, the result was also significant when compared to those in the Trades and Elementary occupations.

Figure 2.5 Percentage of respondents who agreed with the statement on smacking with an open hand, by occupational category



²³ ($p < 0.01$)

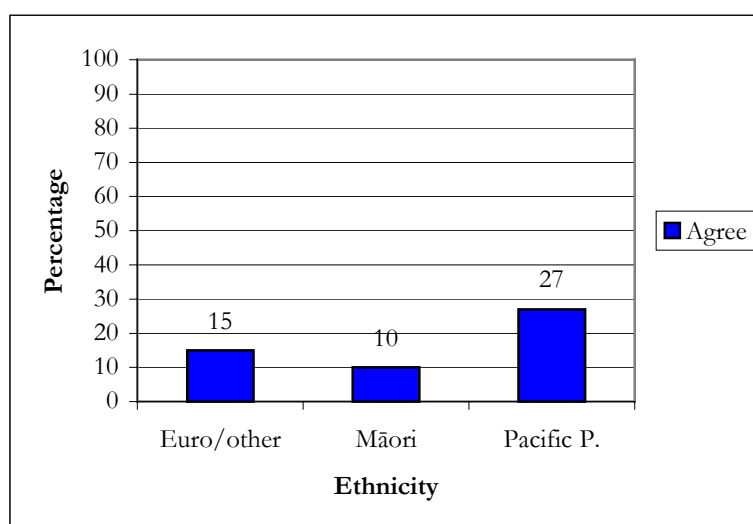
Analysis of responses to the following statement:

“A person parenting a child should be allowed, by law, to use things like a wooden spoon or a belt to punish the child if it is naughty.”

The total proportion of people who agreed with this statement is 15%, which is a dramatic drop from the 80% of respondents who agreed with the viewpoint on smacking with an open hand. The substantial majority of respondents (85%) disagreed with this statement. The following analysis looks at demographic differentiation that is statistically significant.

Similar proportions of men (16%) and women (13%) agreed with this viewpoint. Figure 2.6 shows that Pacific peoples were significantly²⁴ more likely to think that disciplining with a wooden spoon or belt should be legally allowable than the other groups. This result is the opposite to the pattern expressed in the previous statement on smacking with an open hand.

Figure 2.6 Percentage of people who agreed with the statement on using implements such as a wooden spoon and belt, by ethnicity

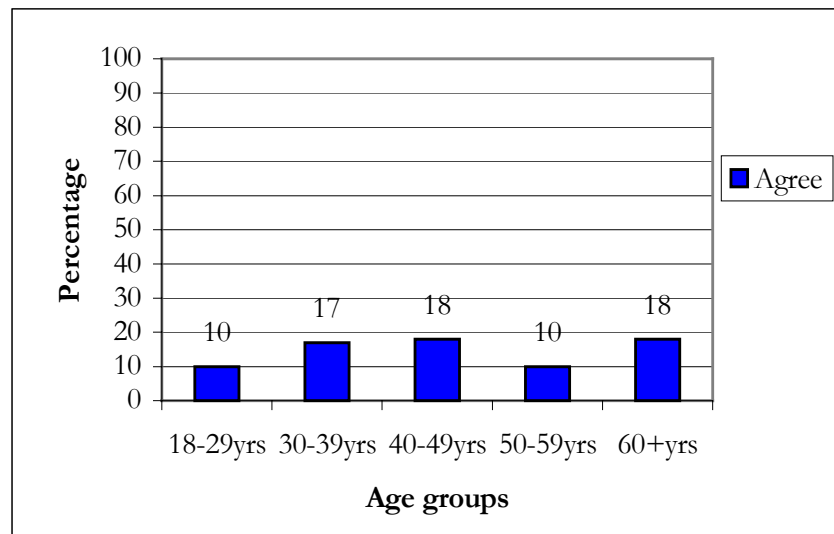


In regards to parental status there was no statistically significant difference between the groups, with 14% of the *never parented* and 15% of the *previous parented* and *currently parenting* groups agreeing that disciplining with a wooden spoon or belt should be legally allowable.

The response pattern by age group to the smacking statement is not reflected in the responses for this statement (see Figure 2.7). Although the younger age group was the least likely to agree that disciplining with a wooden spoon or belt should be legally allowable, they share this result with the 50-59 year olds.

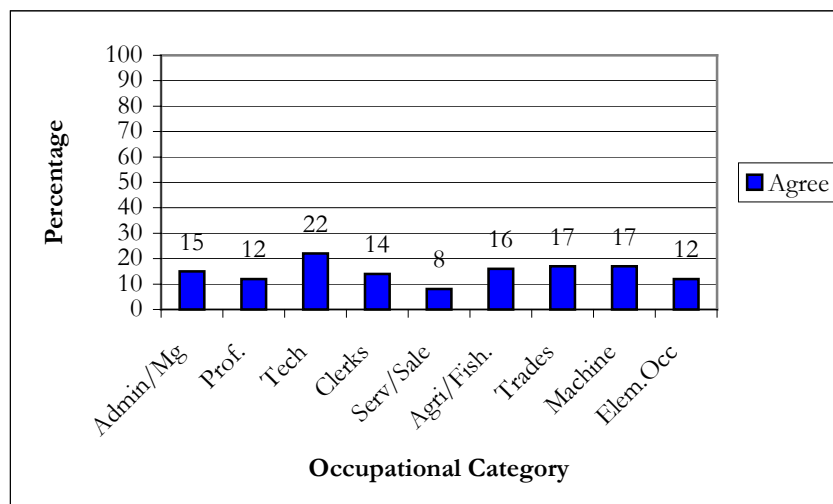
²⁴ (p<0.01)

Figure 2.7 Percentage of people who agreed with the statement regarding the use of implements such as wooden spoons and belts, by age group



There was no consistent pattern with regard to occupational categories with high or low NZSEI scores. Persons in households from the Technicians and Associate Professionals group had the highest level of agreement that the use of implements such as a wooden spoon should be legally allowable. They were more likely to agree than Service and Sales Workers,²⁵ who had the lowest level of agreement (8%), or those in the Professionals households (12%).

Figure 2.8 Percentage of people who agreed with the statement regarding the use of implements such as wooden spoons and belts, by occupational category



²⁵ ($p < 0.01$)

Analysis of responses to the following statement:

“A person parenting a child should be allowed, by law, to use something heavier like a piece of wood or an electric cord to punish the child if the child is naughty.”

The response to this statement was almost unanimous disagreement at 99%. The total percentage of people who agreed with this statement was only 0.4%. Therefore no demographic analysis was undertaken.

Analysis of responses to the following statement:

“A person parenting a child should be allowed, by law, to smack the child on the head or the neck if the child is naughty.”

The total response to this statement was again a nearly unanimous disagreement at 98%. Those in agreement totalled only 1.3%. As with the above statement, no demographic analysis was undertaken.

2.3 Summary

The results clearly indicate the public does not consider using implements or smacking on the head and neck area to be an acceptable form of punishment for children and should not be ‘allowed by law’. However, there is a high level of support for smacking with an open hand for the purposes of discipline to be legally allowable. The demographic analysis showed that:

Gender

- There was no discernible difference between the female and male responses to these questions.

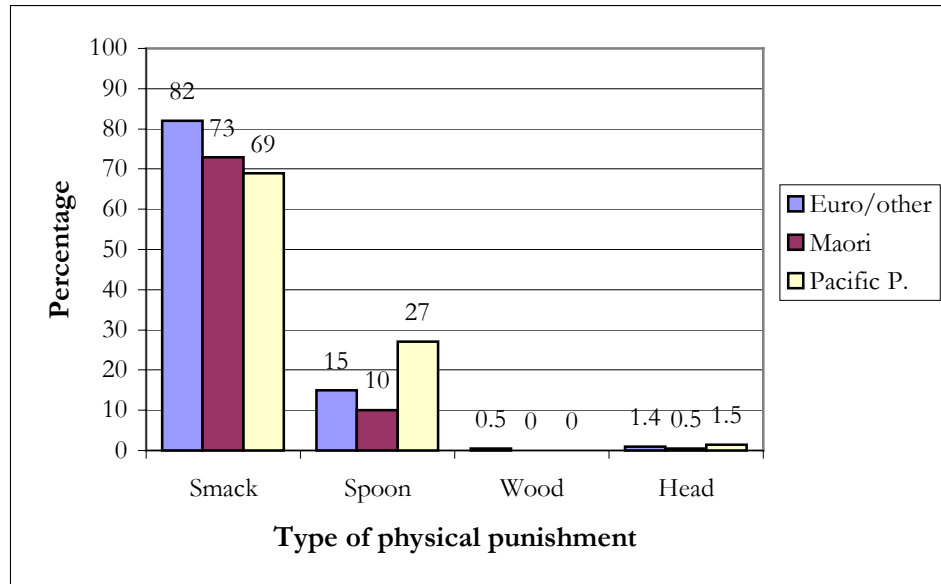
Ethnicity

- Those in the NZ European/Other ethnic grouping were significantly more likely to agree that open hand smacking should be legally allowed as a form of punishment for children when compared to Māori or Pacific peoples²⁶.
- Pacific peoples were the least likely to agree that open hand smacking should be legally allowed.
- Of the low percentage of people who found using implements such as wooden spoons acceptable to discipline children, Pacific peoples were more likely²⁷ to agree to this statement than NZ European/Others or Māori.
- Māori were the least likely to agree that using objects such as wooden spoons to physically discipline children should be legally allowed.

²⁶ (p<0.01)

²⁷ (p<0.01)

Figure 2.9 Percentage of respondents who agreed with the four viewpoints on the type of physical punishment of children that should be legally allowable, by ethnicity



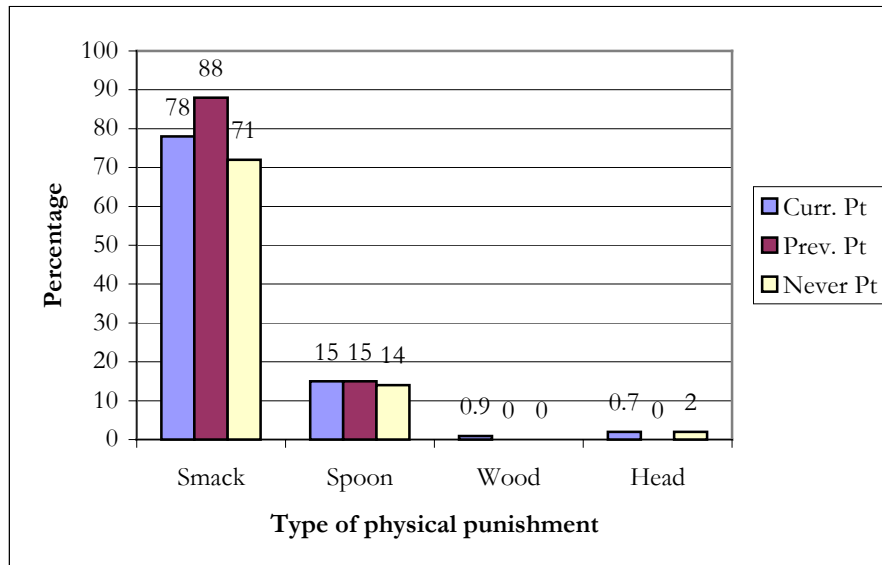
Parental status

- Those who had *never parented* were significantly less likely²⁸ to agree that smacking with an open hand should be legally allowed than those who were *current parents* and particularly those who were *previous parents*.
- *Previous parents* were more likely²⁹ to agree that smacking with an open hand should be legally allowed than those who were *current parents* and those who had *never parented*.

²⁸ (p<0.01)

²⁹ (p<0.01)

Figure 2.10 Percentage of respondents who agreed with each of the four types of physical punishment of children that should be legally allowable, by parental status

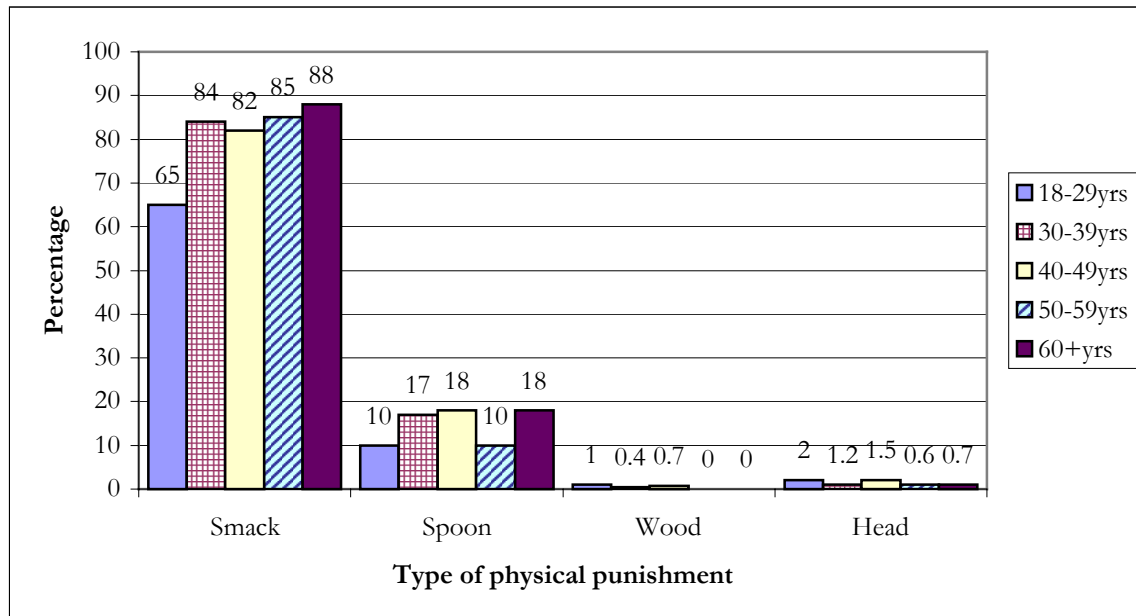


Age groups

- In response to the statement on smacking with an open hand, the youngest age group (18-29 years) are less likely to agree³⁰ than the other age groups.
- The results of the statement on using objects such as a wooden spoon, showed the youngest age group less likely to agree with this statement than those in the 40-49 year old and 60 plus age groups.

³⁰ ($p < 0.01$)

Figure 2.11 Percentage of respondents who agreed with the four viewpoints on the type of physical punishment of children that should be legally allowable, by age group



NZSEI occupational categories

- The analysis did not show any consistent differences between occupations with high NZSEI scores and those with low scores. For example persons from households in the Professional and Elementary Occupations categories were each as likely to agree that the use of objects such as a wooden spoon should be legally allowable (12% agreed).

3 Severity of physical punishment

3.1 Introduction

The second section of the survey asked people about what severity of physical punishment they found acceptable. The respondent was asked ‘Do you think these are acceptable levels of physical punishment for a child? Please say “yes” or “no” for each punishment read out.’ Respondents were also given the choice to say they *don’t know* or *prefer not to answer*.

Q4a “A smack that leaves no mark on the child’s skin?”

Q4b “Where it leaves a red mark that lasts a few days?”

Q4c “Where it leaves a bruise that lasts a few days?”

Q4d “Where the punishment leaves marks and bruises that last for more than a few days but doesn’t cause a permanent injury?”

Q4e “Where the punishment causes an injury that needs medical attention?”³¹

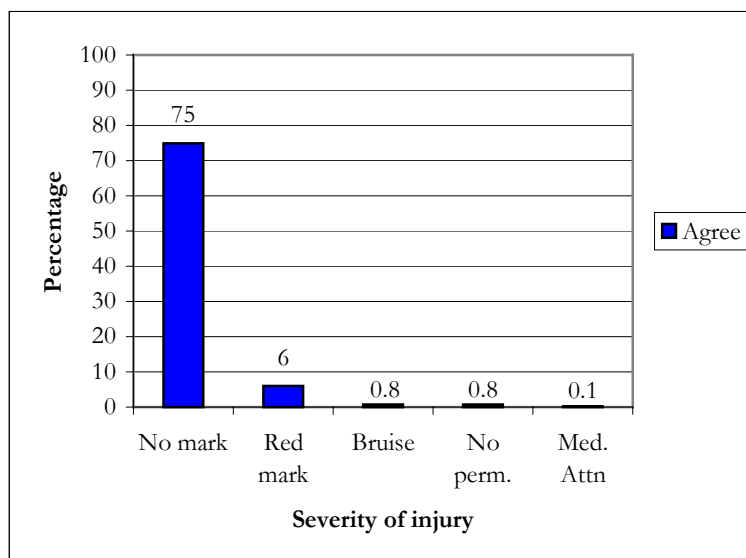
The questions were modelled on an English study (*Protecting Children, Supporting Parents*, 1998) that formed part of a consultation document for the English government on the physical punishment of children. The use of section 59 as a defence largely centres around whether a judge or jury decides the force used was reasonable in the circumstances. Circumstances vary considerably; therefore rather than list multiple scenarios of physically disciplining children for the respondents to reply to, the questions aimed to find out what the public perceived as *reasonable force* in terms of the severity of the physical punishment.

3.2 Findings

The results clearly show that any physical discipline of children that causes marking, bruising, or injury to a child is not considered acceptable. The total percentages of people who agreed with each statement are shown in Figure 3.1.

³¹ The five statements are identified in the graphs as *No Mark* for Q4a; *Red Mark* for Q4b; *Bruise* for Q4c; *No Perm.* for Q4d; and *Med. Attn* for 4Qe.

Figure 3.1 Percentage of people who found each of the five levels of severity of punishment acceptable



Analysis of responses to the following statement:

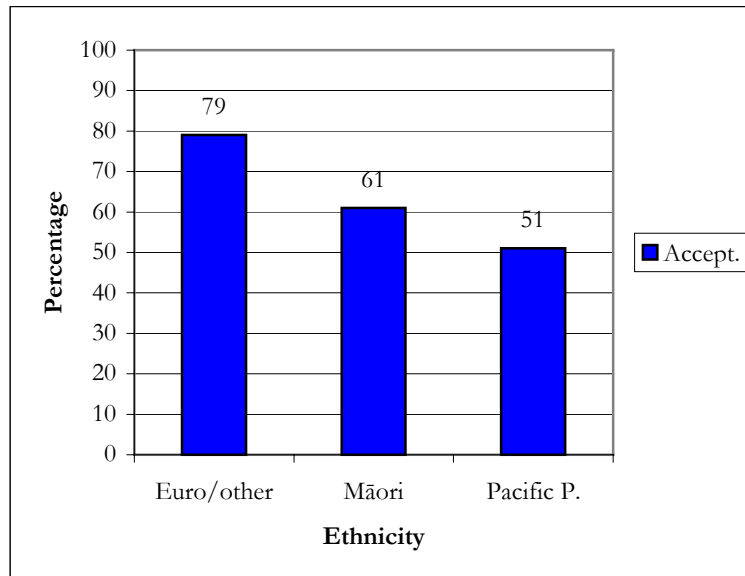
“A smack that leaves no mark on the child’s skin?”

Seventy-five percent of respondents thought that a smack that left no mark was acceptable. In comparison slightly more agreed (80%) that smacking with an open hand should be legally allowable. The drop in agreement may be accounted for by the different emphases of these questions. More agreed physical discipline should be legally allowable, whereas the emphasis on injury in the question, *A smack that leaves no mark on the child’s skin*, may have deterred some people from agreeing.

Women (76% agreed) and men (75% agreed) responded similarly to this question. Those in the NZ European/Other ethnic grouping were much more likely³² to find a smack that leaves no mark acceptable than either Māori or Pacific peoples.

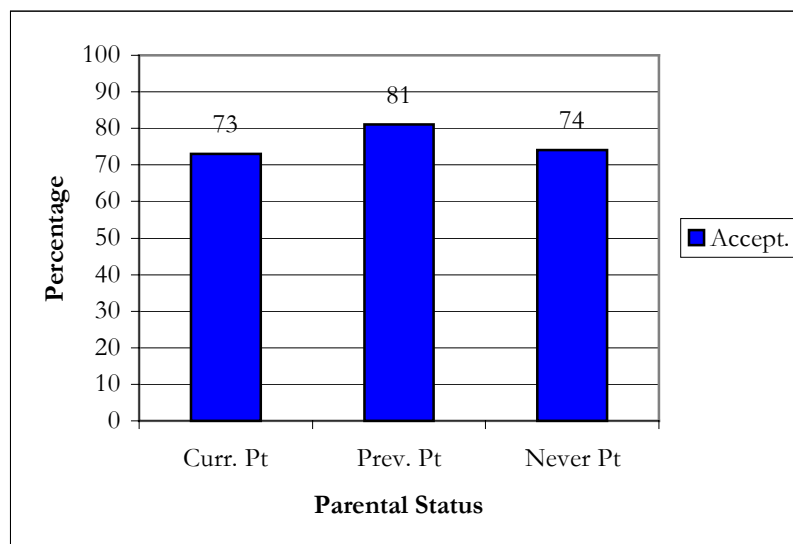
³² (p<0.01)

Figure 3.2 Percentage of people who thought smacking that leaves no mark was acceptable, by ethnicity



In regards to parental status, *previous parents* were more likely³³ to agree that smacking that leaves no mark is an acceptable level of punishment than *current parents*.³⁴

Figure 3.3 Percentage of people who thought smacking that leaves no mark was acceptable, by parental status

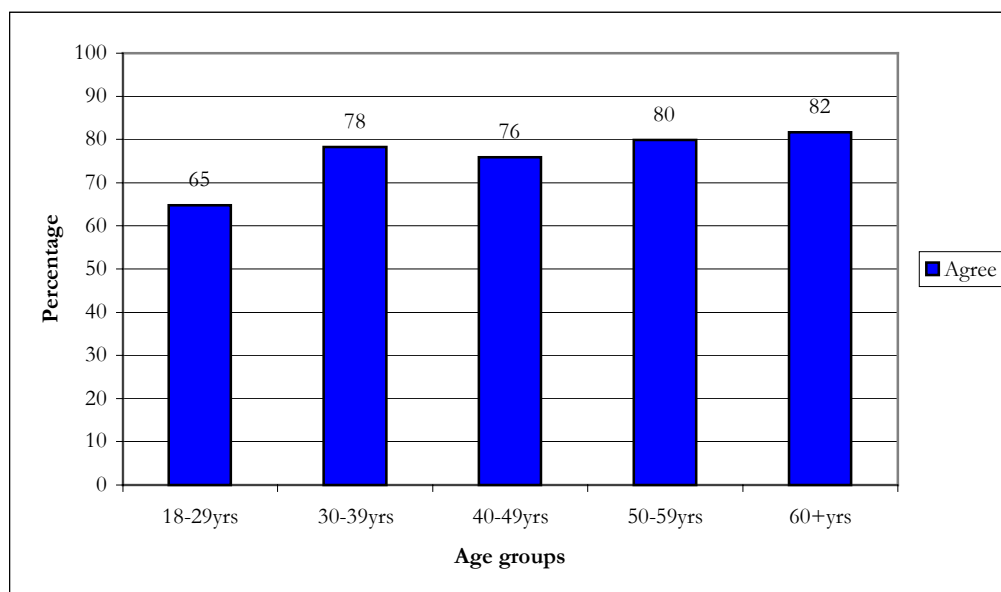


³³ ($p < 0.01$)

³⁴ There was no statistically significant difference between *previous parents* and those who had *never parented*.

Figure 3.4 illustrates the response to the statement by age groups. The results show the youngest age group is less likely to agree³⁵ than all the other age groups, with the exception of the 30-39 year olds, where the statistical significance is at the 95% confidence level.

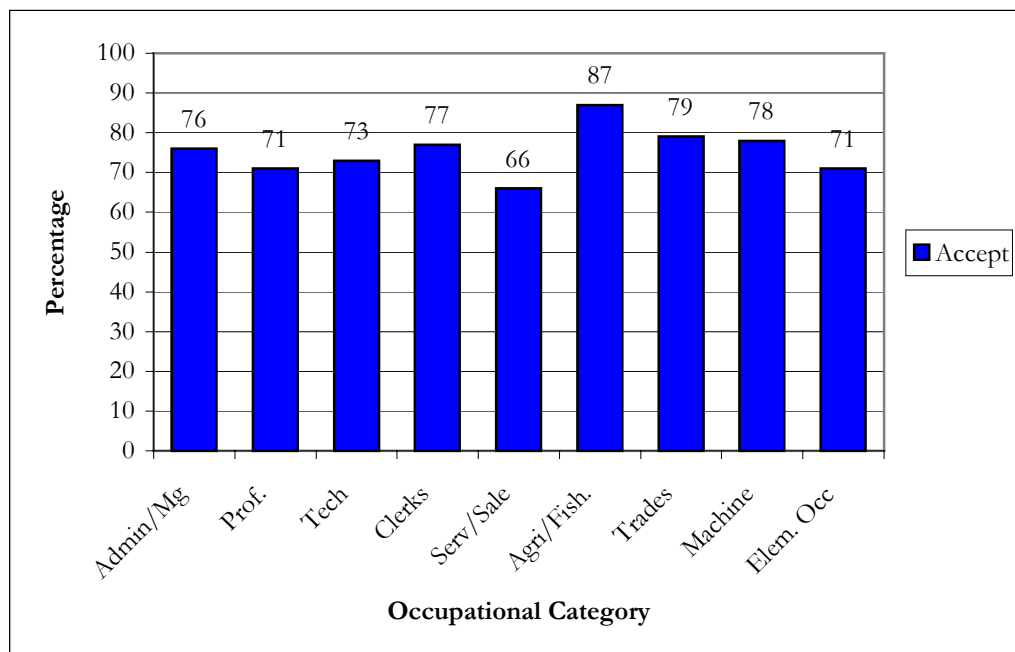
Figure 3.4 Percentage of people who thought smacking that leaves no mark was acceptable, by age group



The analysis showed that respondents in households in the Agricultural and Fishery Workers category had the highest percentage of acceptance (87%). Those in the Service and Sale workers category had the lowest score (66%). It is interesting to note that those in the Professionals households have the same response as those respondents from Elementary Occupations households (72%). These results mirror the pattern for the question regarding the use of objects such as wooden spoons for physically disciplining children. This response reinforces the proposition that there are no discernible patterns among occupational categories with high or low NZSEI scores. This suggests that education and income levels do not influence attitudes towards the physical discipline of children.

³⁵ ($p < 0.01$)

Figure 3.5 Percentage of people who thought smacking that leaves no mark was acceptable, by occupational category



Analysis of responses to the following statements:

“Where it leaves a red mark that lasts a few days?”

“Where it leaves a bruise that lasts a few days?”

“Where the punishment leaves marks and bruises that last for more than a few days but doesn’t cause a permanent injury?”

“Where the punishment causes an injury that needs medical attention?”

The response to all of these statements was a resounding ‘no’, indicating that these levels of physical punishment are **unacceptable** to the vast majority of New Zealanders. Notably less than 1% of people opted for the *don’t know* or *prefer not to answer* options. As would be expected, the low level of acceptance decreased with the severity of injury. Six percent indicated that a red mark that lasts a few days was acceptable, compared with 0.1% who thought that physical punishment that resulted in medical attention being required was acceptable. Therefore, no demographic analysis was undertaken.

3.3 Summary

This series of questions aimed to find out the public's attitudes towards the severity of physical punishment of children. The results clearly indicate that only smacking that leaves no mark is acceptable to the majority of people (75%). Ninety-four percent of people thought smacking that leaves a red mark that lasts a few days was unacceptable. Less than 1% of people thought that physical punishment that left bruises or required medical attention was an acceptable form of physical punishment for a child.

Demographic analyses of the question on *smacking that leaves no mark* showed:

- Women and men responded similarly to this question.
- Those in the NZ European/Other ethnic grouping (79%) were significantly³⁶ more likely to find this an acceptable level of punishment than Māori (61%) or Pacific peoples (51%).
- Respondents who had previously parented children were significantly³⁷ more likely to view this as an acceptable form of physical discipline than those that were currently parenting.
- Those in the 18-29 age group were less likely than the 30-39 year olds, and less likely³⁸ than those 40 and above to find smacking that leaves no mark acceptable.
- There were no differences in response according to a respondent's socio-economic status.

³⁶ (p<0.01)

³⁷ (p<0.01)

³⁸ (p<0.01)

4 Ages of children

4.1 Introduction

The third section of the survey asked people about which age groups of children they found acceptable to physically punish. The respondent was asked ‘Are there any age groups that people should not be allowed to punish physically? Please give your answer for each of these.’ Before each question the respondent was asked ‘Do you think it is acceptable or unacceptable to physically punish a child aged . . .?’ Respondents were also given the choice to say they *don’t know* or *prefer not to answer*.

Q5a “Do you think it is acceptable or unacceptable to physically punish a child aged under two years?”

Q5b “. . . aged two to five years?”

Q5c “. . . aged six to ten years?”

Q5d “. . . aged eleven to fourteen years?”

Q5e “. . . aged fifteen to seventeen years?”

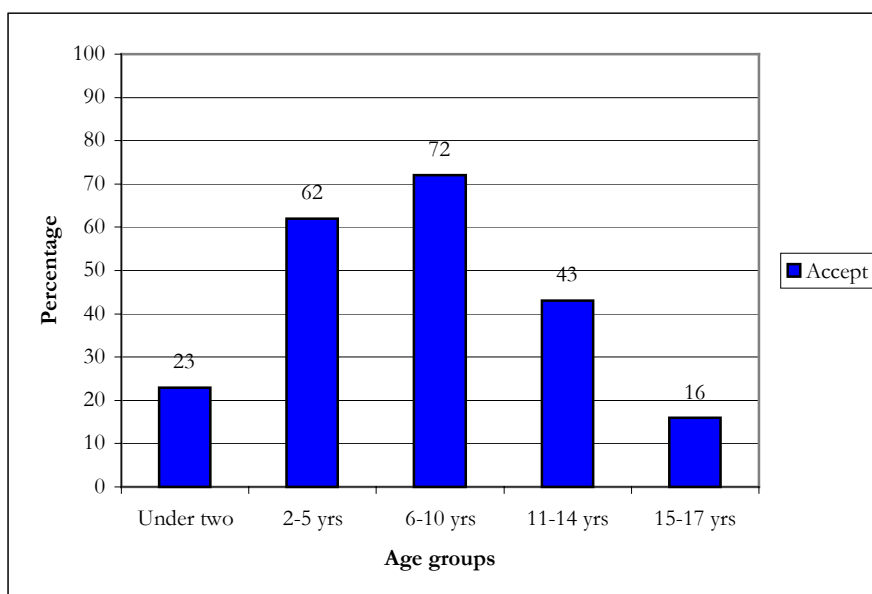
This set of questions aimed to find out public attitudes towards physically punishing children from different age groups. There is some existing research on attitudes to and the practice of physical discipline towards children of different ages, and these survey results will be compared with New Zealand and international studies in the conclusion.

4.2 Findings

The results showed that the physical discipline of children is more accepted for the 2-5 (62%) and 6-10 year olds (72%) followed by the 11-14 year olds (43%). The physical discipline of 15-17 year olds was the least accepted (16%), which suggests the majority of people think that this age group is too old for physical discipline. Nearly a quarter (23%) of respondents thought it was acceptable to physically discipline children aged under two years old.

The total percentages of people who agreed with each statement are shown in Figure 4.1. It should be noted that for all these questions on ages of children, less than 1.5% of the respondents chose the *don’t know* or *prefer not to answer* options.

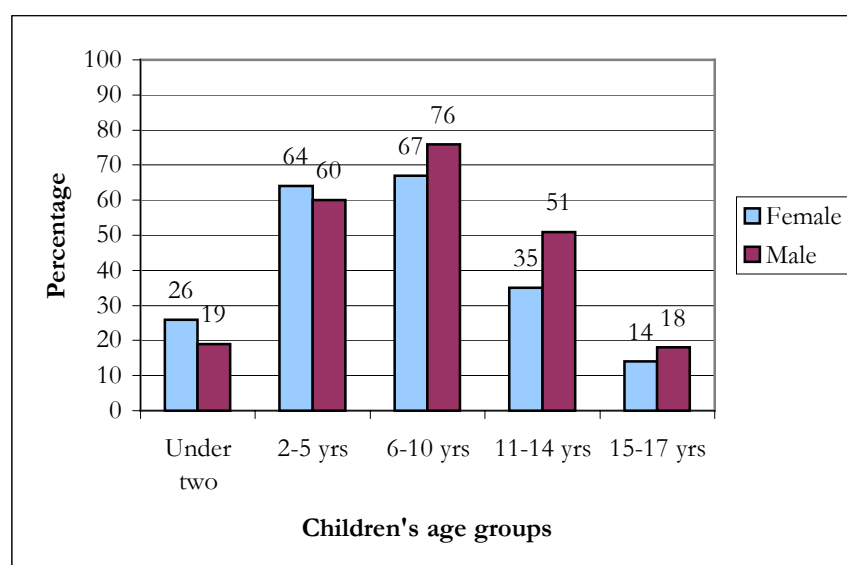
Figure 4.1 Percentage of people who thought it acceptable to physically discipline each of the five age groups



Gender

Women thought it more acceptable³⁹ than men to physically punish a child under two years of age. Conversely men were more likely⁴⁰ than women to find it acceptable to physically punish 6-10 and 11-14 year olds.

Figure 4.2 Percentage of people who agreed that it is acceptable to physically punish children in each of the age groups, by gender



³⁹ ($p < 0.01$)

Ethnicity

Under two years

In regards to ethnicity, those in the NZ European/Other ethnic grouping were approximately twice as likely⁴¹ as Māori and Pacific peoples to indicate that it is acceptable to physically discipline children under two years old.

Two to five years

NZ European/Other respondents were much more likely⁴² than Māori and Pacific peoples to find it acceptable to physically punish children aged 2-5 years. The results showed that persons in the NZ European/Other category were more than twice as likely as Pacific peoples to view this as acceptable.

Six to ten years

The NZ European/Other ethnic grouping were also more likely⁴³ to view it as acceptable to physically discipline 6-10 year olds than Māori or Pacific peoples.

Eleven to fourteen years

There were minimal differences among ethnic groups with regard to the acceptability of physically disciplining 11-14 year olds.

Fifteen to seventeen years

The previous response pattern with regard to children aged 10 and under is reversed for children aged 15-17 years old. Pacific peoples (30%) were twice as likely⁴⁴ to find this acceptable as those in the NZ European/Other ethnic grouping (14%).

The results suggest that there are different perceptions among ethnic groups about the ages it is appropriate to physically discipline children.

⁴⁰ (p<0.01)

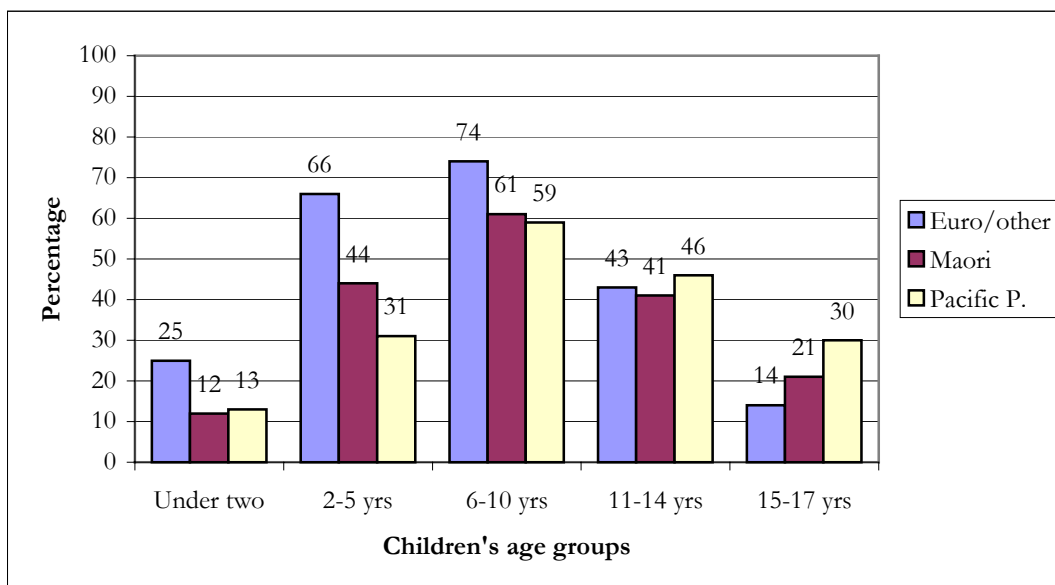
⁴¹ (p<0.01)

⁴² (p<0.01)

⁴³ (p<0.01)

⁴⁴ (p<0.01)

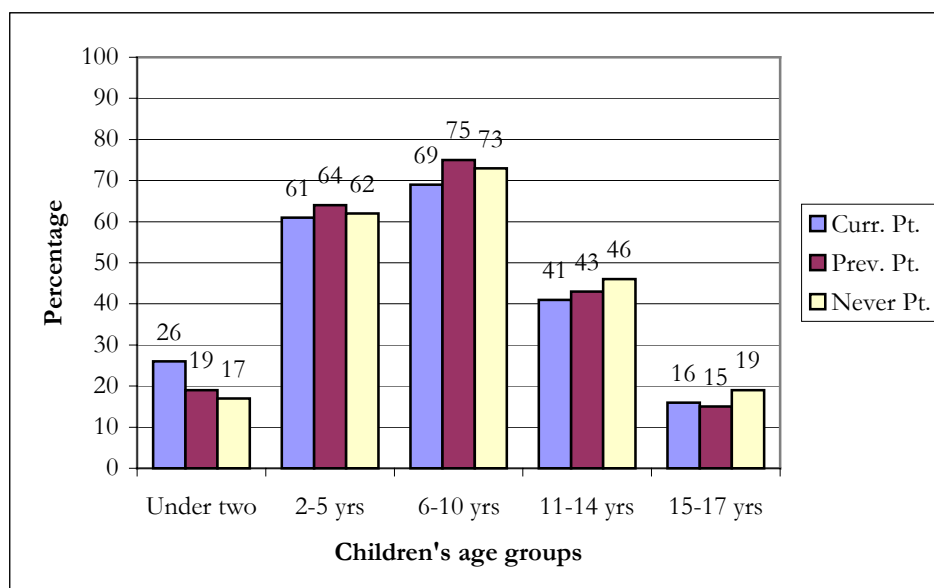
Figure 4.3 Percentage of people who agreed that it is acceptable to physically punish children in each of the age groups, by ethnicity



Parental status

In terms of parental status, *current parents* (26%) are more likely to find physical discipline of children under two acceptable than *previous parents* (19%) or those that have *never parented* (17%). Analyses of the responses regarding the other age groups showed that there were no significant differences.

Figure 4.4 Percentage of people who agreed it is acceptable to physically punish children in each of the age groups, by parental status



Analysis of age of child by age of respondents

Under two years

The results showed some differentiation between the age group of respondents. Those respondents in the 40-49 year old group had the highest percentage (31%) of respondents who agreed. They were much more likely⁴⁵ to find this acceptable in comparison to the 18-29 year olds and 50-59 year olds; and were more likely to agree than those who are 60+ years.

The youngest age group (18-29 years) had the lowest percentage (17%) of respondents who agreed. They were less likely than the 30-39 year olds and 40-49 year olds⁴⁶ to agree physical punishment of under two year olds was acceptable.

Two to five years

In regards to the 2-5 year olds the 18-29 year old respondents were less likely⁴⁷ to find physical punishment acceptable than those in the age groups 30-59 years. They were also significantly less likely to agree than those aged 60 plus years.

Six to ten and eleven to fourteen years

There were no significant differences in responses by age group when asked the acceptability of physically disciplining children in the 6-10 and 11-14 age groups.

Fifteen to seventeen years

The 40-49 year olds had the highest acceptance (21%) of the physical punishment of 15-17 year olds. This was significant⁴⁸ compared with the 60 plus age group who had the lowest percentage (12%) of respondents who viewed this as acceptable. Figure 3.5 below compares the responses by the age groups of respondents.

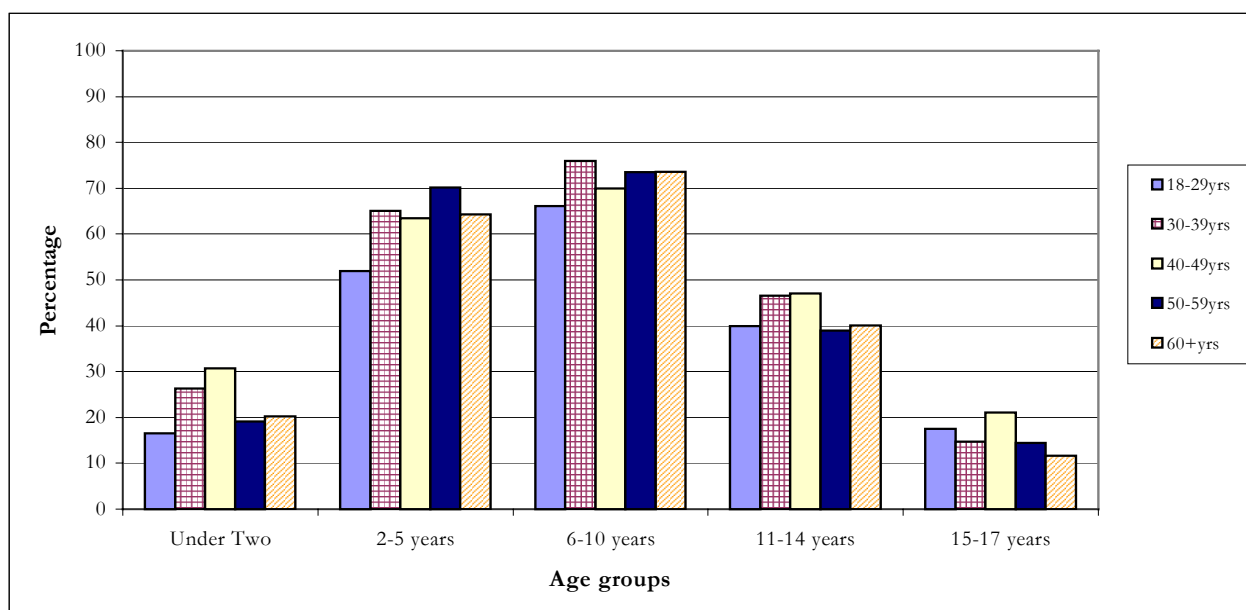
⁴⁵ (p<0.01)

⁴⁶ (p<0.01)

⁴⁷ (p<0.01) significant for both the 30-39 year olds (26% agreed) and 40-49 year olds (31% agreed)

⁴⁸ (p<0.01)

Figure 4.5 Percentage of people who agreed it was acceptable to physically punish children in each of the age groups, by respondents age groups



NZSEI occupational categories

Under two years

People in Elementary occupations were less likely to think that it was acceptable to physically punish under two year olds than persons in households whose main income earner was in the Plant and Machinery Operators, and Agriculture and Fishery workers categories.

Two to five years

Those in the Agriculture and Fishery workers category had the highest percentage (73%) of respondents who thought it was acceptable to physically punish children aged 2-5 years. This was significant when compared to Service and Sale workers⁴⁹ (51%) and Professionals category (60%) and Trades workers (59%).

Furthermore, those in the Sales and Service workers category had the lowest percentage of respondents who agreed. This group were less likely to find physical discipline of children acceptable than those in Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers category (65%) and Legislators, Administrators and Managers (65%). Interestingly, the Professionals and Elementary Occupations category had the same response (60%).

⁴⁹ (p<0.01)

Six to ten years

Persons in Agriculture and Fishery workers were significantly more likely to find it acceptable to physically discipline 6-10 year olds than Professionals and Service and Sale workers categories⁵⁰ and Technicians and Associate Professionals. Sales and Service workers are also less likely⁵¹ to agree than Legislators, Administrators and Managers.

Eleven to fourteen years

Those respondents in the Trades category (51%) were more likely to find the physical discipline of 11-14 years olds acceptable than Professionals (37%) and Technicians and Associate Professionals (38%).

Fifteen to seventeen years

There were no significant differences among the NZSEI occupational categories for this age group.

These findings, including the similarity in response to some of the questions from those in the Professional and Elementary occupations, suggests there is no discernible difference in attitudes between those that could be classified in terms of higher and lower socio-economic groupings.

4.3 Summary

This section examined public attitudes towards the physical disciplining of children of different age groups. The analysis found that on the whole the public does not perceive it as acceptable to physically discipline older children aged 15-17 years, nor was there majority support for disciplining 11-14 year olds. Only a quarter of respondents thought it acceptable to physically discipline children under two years of age. However, nearly three-quarters of the respondents thought it acceptable to physically punish 6-10 year old children. This was followed by children aged 2-5 years, where over half the sample thought this was acceptable.

The demographic analysis showed that:

- Women were more likely⁵² than men to view physical discipline of children under two as acceptable. Conversely men thought it more acceptable⁵³ than women did to physically discipline 6-10 and 11-14 year olds.
- Those in the NZ European/Other ethnic grouping thought it more acceptable⁵⁴ than Māori or Pacific peoples to physically discipline children aged 0-10 years.

⁵⁰ (p<0.01)

⁵¹ (p<0.01)

⁵² (p<0.01)

⁵³ (p<0.01)

- Pacific peoples were more likely⁵⁵ to view it as acceptable to discipline older children aged 15-17 years than NZ European/Other.
- There were no significant differences between Māori and Pacific peoples responses.
- *Current parents* are more likely to find physical discipline of children under two as acceptable than *previous parents* or those that have *never parented*.
- There is no consistent pattern in attitudes by age group of respondents.
- The 18-29 year olds had a significantly lower acceptance of physical discipline of children aged under two and 2-5 year years old.
- The 40-49 year olds had a significantly higher acceptance of physical discipline of children aged under two and those aged fifteen to seventeen.
- The results for occupational categories showed that there are no significant patterns to differentiate respondents with occupations from higher NZSEI scores from those with lower scores.

⁵⁴ (p<0.01)

⁵⁵ (p<0.01)

5 Discussion

The objective of this survey was to examine public attitudes towards the physical discipline of children to inform ongoing policy work on section 59 of the Crimes Act 1961. The survey questions were grouped into three different aspects of physical discipline, namely: type of punishment; physical severity of punishment; and the age groups of children for which it is acceptable/unacceptable to physically punish. These questions sought to find out if the public find it acceptable to physically discipline children and, if so, what they consider acceptable physical punishment for the purposes of correction.

The results showed that 80% of the public agreed that a person parenting a child should be allowed by law to smack them with an open hand if they are naughty. The use of objects to smack a child and smacking them in the head and neck area drew an overwhelmingly negative response from the public, indicating that only using an open hand was acceptable to most people.

The questions on severity of punishment ranged from a smack that left no mark through to physical punishment that required medical attention. The responses indicated that only a smack that left no mark was acceptable to the majority of people (75%). Physical force that left a red mark or bruising that lasts for a few days, marks and bruising that last for more than a few days and injuries that require medical attention were found to be definitely not acceptable by almost everyone.

In regards to the questions on the age groups of children, the results indicate that most respondents view punishing very young and older children as unacceptable. Respondents found it the least acceptable (16%) to physically discipline the oldest age group, those aged 15-17 years. The response was also low for children under two years (23%). However, the majority of respondents viewed it as acceptable to physically punish 6-10 year olds (72%) and 2-5 year olds (62%). The result for the 11-14 year olds was 43% acceptance. Thus levels of acceptance formed a bell shaped pattern where it was found to be least acceptable to physically punish the youngest and oldest age groups. This possibly reflects attitudes towards the maturity of the child in terms of physicality and intellectual development.

The issue of what should be legally allowable for parents in regards to physically disciplining their children and the physical consequences for the child can be examined by comparing two of the survey questions. They are, the question on the acceptability of smacking that does not leave a mark compared with the question regarding the legality of parents smacking with an open hand for the purposes of discipline. The results demonstrated that while the response pattern was similar, there was an almost consistent slight drop in agreement to the statement on smacking that leaves no mark across demographic variables. It is suggested that the different emphases of these two questions, legality and injury, could account for this.

The comparison of the question on smacking with an open hand (80% agreement) with the other questions on the severity of punishment illustrates what degree of force most people mean when they think of smacking with an open hand. The majority of people do not perceive it as acceptable to give a smack with such force as to cause red marks (94% unacceptable), bruises or any form of injury that requires medical attention (99.9% unacceptable).

New Zealand Studies – attitudes towards smacking

There have been several studies done in New Zealand on attitudes to and the practice of physical punishment of children. The results of this survey can only be tentatively compared to some of the findings in these studies as different questions and methodologies were used. A question that has been compared over time across six studies asks respondents how strongly they agree with the following statement:

There are certain circumstances when it is alright for a parent to smack a child.

In New Zealand, Jane Ritchie asked this question in 1981 as part of a wider study on family violence. In that study, 89% of respondents agreed with this statement. The question was again asked in 1993 when the Office of the Commissioner for Children commissioned a study, *Physical Punishment in the Home in New Zealand* (Maxwell 1993). The study involved a telephone survey of 1,000 adults. At that time the response to this statement was 87% agreed (Maxwell 1993, p.6).

The Department of Child, Youth and Family (CYF) has asked this question in various monitors since 1995 and as part of the evaluation of their *Alternatives to Smacking Campaign*. A recent evaluation of this public education campaign was conducted in May 2000. This involved a survey conducted with face-to-face interviews with 610 respondents. The survey found that 56% of respondents agreed that there were certain circumstances when it was all right to smack a child.

The following table summaries the agreement response to this question across most of these studies.

**Table 5.1 Percentage of people who agreed with the statement:
*There are certain circumstances when it is alright for a parent to smack a child***

Year	% that agreed	Commissioning agency and study
1981	89%	Jane Ritchie study
1993	87%	Office of the Commissioner for Children – <i>Physical Punishment in the Home in New Zealand</i>
1995	69%	CYF – first survey in the <i>Breaking the Cycle</i> child abuse monitor series conducted in June 1995
1998	57%	CYF – benchmark survey conducted just prior to the <i>Alternatives to Smacking</i> campaign in June 1998
1998	52%	CYF - evaluation survey conducted after the <i>Alternatives to Smacking</i> television advertisements in November 1998
2000	56%	CYF – evaluation survey conducted after re-run of <i>Alternatives to Smacking</i> television advertisements in May 2000

England - Office for National Statistics Omnibus Survey 1998

In England, the Department of Health included questions in the Office for National Statistics Omnibus Survey (April 1998) to find out people's views on the physical discipline of children.⁵⁶ A random probability sample of approximately 2,000 adults was interviewed. The key findings relevant to the current study are:

- 88% of respondents agreed that it is sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child.
- 9% of respondents agreed that it is sometimes necessary to use things like canes, sticks, belts or slippers to punish a naughty child.
- 60% considered physical punishment that leaves no mark at all to be reasonable from the options presented. 36% would not specify any level of punishment as reasonable.
- Nearly all respondents considered punishment that leaves a red mark or bruising to be unreasonable (96% and over 99% respectively).
- There were no significant differences in the views on smacking held by men and women or by parents in different age groups.
- 13% agreed that parents should be allowed, by law, to smack a naughty child who is less than two years old.
- 53% agreed that parents should be allowed, by law, to smack a naughty child who is over two years old.
- 85% agreed that parents should be allowed, by law, to smack a naughty child who is over five years old.

It should be restated that it is problematic comparing two studies with different methodologies and questions and in this case different countries. However, the results from the English study showed similar patterns to the present study in regards to the acceptability of the type and severity of punishment and the age groups of children. The majority agreed that parents should legally be allowed to smack their children for the purposes of discipline. Over 90% did not think it was acceptable to apply physical discipline with an object or to use

⁵⁶ See *Protecting Children, Supporting Parents – A Consultation Document on the Physical Punishment of Children* for further discussion.

such force as to leave red marks or bruises (96% and over 99% respectively found this unreasonable).

Proportionally fewer respondents (13%) in the English study agreed that *Parents should be allowed, by law, to smack a naughty child who is less than two years old*. The present survey asked respondents *Do you think it is acceptable or unacceptable to physically punish a child aged under two years?* to which 23% responded this was acceptable. The other questions on ages of children in the English study were asked without specified age brackets. However, the higher rate of acceptance for children over two and over five years does reflect the pattern in the present survey.

Demographic analysis

Gender

The response from women and men was very similar for the questions on type and severity of punishment. The significant differences were in regards to the age groups of children. Women (26%) found it more acceptable⁵⁷ than men (19%) to physically punish children less than two years. In regards to the physical discipline of 6-10 and 11-14 year olds, men (76% and 51% respectively) found this more acceptable⁵⁸ than women (67% and 35% respectively).

The Office of the Commissioner for Children report, *Physical Punishment in the Home in New Zealand* (Maxwell 1993), asks questions on the acceptability of physical punishment of teenage children. A comparable finding was that twice as many men as women accepted 'hitting teenagers' in certain circumstances. The term teenagers was not defined by age brackets in the 1993 study. However it can be seen that in the present study men still find it more acceptable than women to physically discipline 11-14 year olds. In the present survey men and women do not significantly differ in their response to physically punishing 15 -17 year old children.

The following table compares the results from the present survey with the 1993 study. Both studies were telephone surveys of 1000 adults.

Table 5.2 Comparison of results (percentage) from 1993 and 2001 regarding acceptability of physically disciplining teenagers, by gender

Study	Question	% of Male respondents acceptable	% of Female respondents acceptable
1993	Mother hit teenage son	34%	16%
1993	Mother hit teenage daughter	30%	16%
1993	Father hit teenage son	28%	15%
1993	Father hit teenage daughter	14%	8%
2001	Physically punish 11-14 year olds	51%	35%
2001	Physically punish 15-17 year olds	18%	14%

⁵⁷ (p<0.01)

⁵⁸ (p<0.01)

Interestingly, Maxwell compares the results of the 1993 study with that of Jane Ritchie's study in 1981, and concludes that from that time there has been a change in the attitudes of both women and men towards hitting (and thrashing) teenagers, with a decrease in acceptability.

Ethnicity

Those of the NZ European/Other ethnic grouping generally viewed it as more acceptable than either Māori or Pacific peoples to physically discipline children. In most of the results Pacific peoples had the lowest acceptance response closely followed by Māori. An exception was, of the low percentage of people who found using implements such as wooden spoons acceptable to discipline children, Pacific peoples (27%) were more likely to agree to this viewpoint than NZ European/Others (15%) or Māori (10%).

The other exception was Pacific peoples also found it more acceptable⁵⁹ than the other groups to discipline their children aged 15-17 years. Māori also had a higher acceptance than NZ European/Other of physically disciplining the eldest age group, whereas the NZ European/Other ethnic grouping was more likely⁶⁰ to find it acceptable to physically punish children under 2 years; 2-5 year; and 6-10 years. There were no significant differences between ethnic groups regarding the physical discipline of 11-14 year olds.

These results suggest that there may be different cultural perspectives on what is a suitable age range to physically discipline children. NZ European/Other respondents thought it much more acceptable to smack children under ten years (particularly those aged 2-10 years) than Māori or Pacific peoples. Conversely, Pacific peoples and Māori find it more acceptable to physically punish children that are aged 15-17 years. This area would benefit from further research.

The Office of the Commissioner for Children report, *Physical Punishment in the Home in New Zealand* (Maxwell 1993), did not find any evidence 'to support the notion of major cultural differences in the use of physical punishment among the main ethnic groups living in New Zealand' (Maxwell 1993, p.7). In regards to respondents' attitudes, the current study shows more acceptance that physical discipline should be allowed by law among the NZ European/Other ethnic grouping than either Māori or Pacific peoples.

The CYF evaluation of their *Alternatives to Smacking Campaign* (May 2000) found that New Zealand Europeans had the highest level of agreement followed by Māori and Pacific peoples to the statement: *There are certain circumstances when it is alright for a parent to smack a child.* The CYF (2000) study noted there has been a downward trend in agreement by both Māori and Pacific peoples to this statement as measured against their previous monitors (studies).

The reported attitudes of Māori and Pacific peoples tends to challenge perceptions that they may have a higher tolerance of harsh physical discipline in comparison to the rest of the population.

⁵⁹ (p<0.01)

⁶⁰ (p<0.01)

Parental status

The results in terms of parental status highlighted that *previous parents* (88% acceptance) were more likely⁶¹ to find smacking with an open hand acceptable than those who were *currently parenting* (78% acceptance) or those who had *never parented* (71% acceptance). *Previous parents* (81% acceptance) were also more likely⁶² to agree that smacking that leaves no mark is an acceptable level of punishment than *current parents* (73% acceptance).

A further statistically significant result was that *current parents* (26% acceptance) were more likely to find physical discipline of children under two years acceptable than *previous parents* (19% acceptance) or those that have *never parented* (17% acceptance).

These responses can be compared to the age groups of respondents, where comparatively more of those in the older age groups, 50 years plus, fall into the *previous parent* category. Those who have *never parented* primarily fall into the younger age group of 18-29 years (see Appendix B for demographic information). Although there is not a consistent decrease in agreement from oldest to youngest, it can be seen that the youngest age group, aged 18-29 years, and those who have *never parented* do have lower acceptance responses to many of the questions.

The response from the 18-29 year olds raised the question of whether there could be a change in attitude over the generations towards the physical discipline of children becoming less acceptable. Further statistical analysis was done to determine whether this age group's responses were mainly due to the comparatively larger proportion of them who had never parented.⁶³ Was parental status a critical determinant of attitudes towards physical discipline of children?

To examine this question the age groups of respondents were analysed by their parental status. The analysis focused on the question of whether a person parenting a child should be legally allowed to smack them with an open hand if the child is naughty. The results showed that those in the 18-29 year old age group who were *currently parenting* were still significantly less likely to agree that smacking with an open hand should be legally allowable to discipline a naughty child.

The CYF evaluation of their *Alternatives to Smacking Campaign* (May 2000) found that non-caregivers had a higher level of agreement than caregivers to the statement: *There are certain circumstances when it is alright for a parent to smack a child*. A tentative contrast can again be drawn with the statement on smacking with an open hand where the converse was found. Those who had *never parented* were less likely to agree⁶⁴ than current or previous parents to this statement. This may be accounted for by the different sampling criteria the CYF survey used, whereby non-caregivers could include previous parents. Thus their non-caregiver group had a higher level of agreement about physical discipline.

⁶¹ (p<0.01)

⁶² (p<0.01)

⁶³ Of those respondents in the 18-29 year old age group 44% were *currently parenting*, 10% were *previous parents*, and 47% had *never parented*.

⁶⁴ (p<0.01)

Age groups

As stated, there was generally a lower acceptance level of physical discipline among the youngest age bracket (18-29 year olds) compared to the other age groups. The statistical analysis on parental status of age groups discussed above suggests that the 18-29 year olds response is not attributable to the fact that a larger proportion of this group has never parented. It has been suggested that this indicates a trend that younger people may be finding it less acceptable to physically discipline children.

There was not a consistent drop in agreement from oldest to youngest. Indeed for some of the results the 50-59 years and 60+ years had relatively low acceptance compared to the middle groups. Those who were 60+ had the lowest acceptance of physically punishing children aged 15-17 years.

An interesting result was that those aged 40-49 years had the highest acceptance response to physically discipline children under two years and those aged 15-17 years. This was significant in comparison to some of the other age brackets. In regards to parental status 80% of the 40-49 year olds were *current parents*; 13% *previous parents* and only 7% *had never parented*. There was no significant difference for this result between 40-49 year olds and 30-39 year olds, who also had a higher proportion of *current parents* (78%).

New Zealand Socio-economic index occupational categories

There was no discernible difference between respondents with different socio-economic status reflected by occupational categories with higher or lower NZSEI scores. This indicates that there was no difference in attitudes between people with different educational levels and income capacity towards the physical discipline of children.

This is in contrast to the 1993 Office of the Commissioner for Children report, *Physical Punishment in the Home in New Zealand* survey which found that those who were more highly educated were the least likely to endorse physical punishment.

This survey contributes towards an investigation of public perceptions of what is currently acceptable parenting practice in terms of physically disciplining children. The respondents expressed a strong desire to retain the legal right for parents to physically discipline their children for the purposes of correction. However, there was an even stronger belief that this physical discipline should not be applied with implements or to the head and neck area, nor should it be of such force to leave marks and bruises. A consideration for the maturity and physicality of a child was also reflected in the results where there was not much support for the physical discipline of older teenage children, or those children under the age of two years.

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Davis, P., McLeod, K., Ransom, M., Ongley, P. 1997. The New Zealand Socioeconomic Index of Occupational Status (NZSEI): Research Report #2. Statistics New Zealand, Wellington.

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Appendix A: Sample description

The proposed sample was 1000 adults aged 18 years and over, including a proposed minimum sample of 100 Māori and 100 Pacific peoples.

Table A.1 The demographic variables, gender, ethnicity and age, that were used for calculating the weighting of the sample based on the New Zealand 1996 Census

Demographic variable	Unweighted Sample		Weighted Sample		Population Census 1996 %
	Number	%	Number	%	
<u>Gender</u>					
Female	625	62.5	519	52	51
Male	375	37.5	481	48	49
<u>Ethnicity</u>					
NZ European/Other	767	77	840	84	85
Māori	139	14	117	12	12
Pacific peoples	94	9	43	4	4
<u>Age</u>					
18-29 years	166	17	246	25	25
30-39 years	232	23	219	22	22
40-49 years	219	22	189	19	19
50-59 years	167	17	132	13	13
60 plus years	213	21	211	21	21

Table A.2 Sample description of the demographic variables, parental status and NZSEI occupational category

Demographic variable	Unweighted Sample		Weighted Sample	
	Number	%	Number	%
Parental Status				
Currently parenting	568	57	525	53
Previously parented	305	31	294	29
Never parented	127	13	181	18
NZSEI Occupational Category				
Legislators, Administrators and Managers	115	12	117	12
Professionals	158	16	155	16
Technicians and Associate Prof.	98	10	99	10
Clerks	80	8	72	7
Service and Sales Workers	98	10	95	10
Agriculture and Fishery Workers	116	12	124	12
Trades Workers	128	13	135	14
Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers	99	10	94	9
Elementary Occupations	89	9	90	9

Appendix B: Additional demographic information

Figure B.1 Percentage of the age groups of the respondents for each parental status

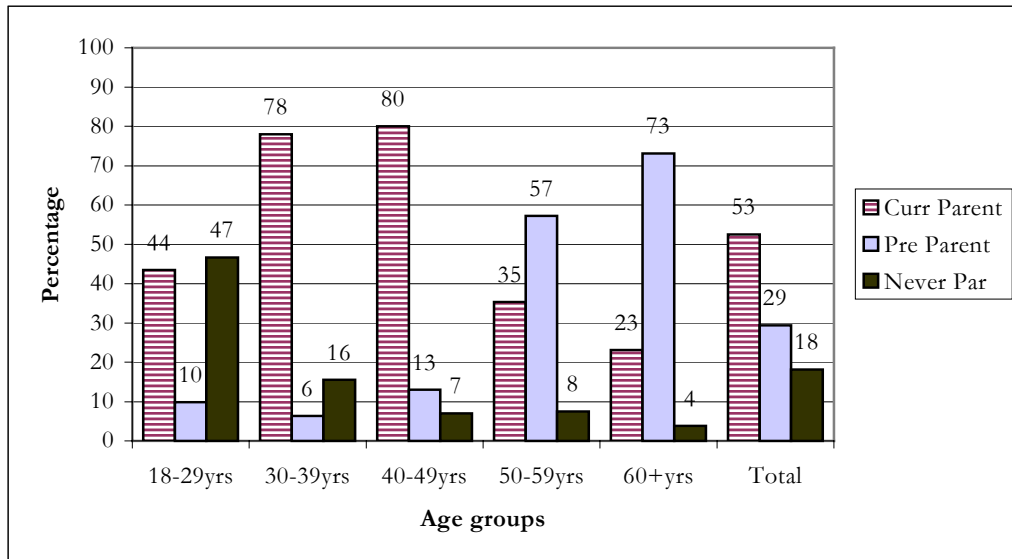


Figure B.2 Percentage of the ethnic groupings of the respondents for each parental status

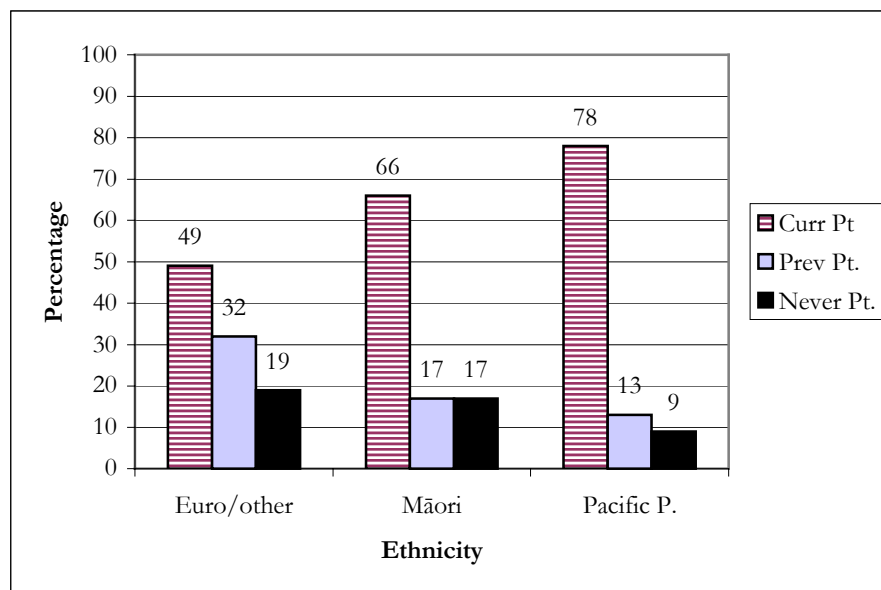
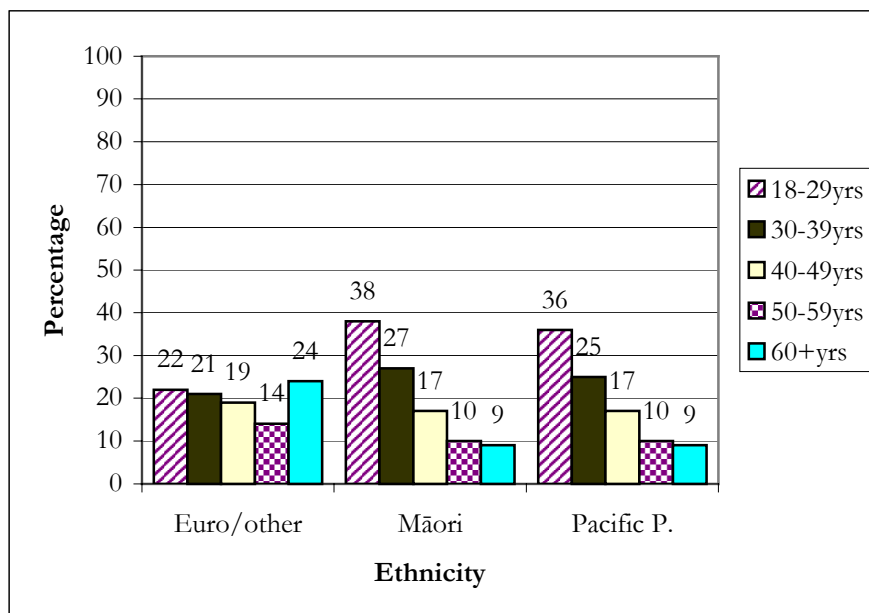


Figure B.3 Percentage of the ethnic groupings of the respondents for each age group



Appendix C: Research and sampling methodology

Questionnaire Development

- The questionnaire was developed by the Ministry of Justice and the Ministries of Social Policy and Youth Affairs and the Department of Child Youth and Family were consulted. A market research company, National Research Bureau Ltd (NRB) prepared a version of the questionnaire that was phrased and set out for interviewing. NRB tested the questionnaire, in a cognitive pilot.

Cognitive Pilot

- This step pre-tested the questionnaire for semantic clarity and comprehension. The procedure for doing this was to administer the questionnaire to a sample of the target people(s), and then to cycle back over the words used, asking what came to mind and what the person thought each question was referring to. This answers the questions:
 - Are they comfortable with the words?
 - Do they correctly interpret them?
 - Do different people interpret the questions the same way?
- The pilot sub-sample was based on personal interviews with:
 - 6 Pacific Island People
 - 6 Māori People
 - 6 Asian People
 - 6 European People
 - 24 TOTAL PRETEST PARTICIPANTS
- Twelve were men and twelve were women. A spread of ages was obtained. All have, or have previously had care of children.

Telephone Survey

- NRB conducted the telephone survey in June 2001. The following outlines the survey methodology and data analysis. NRB supplied the Ministry with the data in table format that was further analysed and written up as the present report.

Sampling

- The sample frame was all households with a (landline) phone as defined within the most recent white page update of the telephone directory.
- In order to re-include people who may not have a listing (missed the publication or withheld number) a version of random digit dialling was used. This means that a randomly chosen phone number was drawn on the basis of every xth number of every yth page, and then a "1" is added to that number to randomize it, yet within the range of active numbers assigned to the residential sector. (This is the Waksberg Adaption for RDD).
- Sampling proceeded by drawing both urban and rural numbers, to the population proportions from Census 1996.
- The Māori sample of 100 minimum emerged naturally as Māori adults are over 12% of the population. However, any shortfall in participation was made up by continuing to sample numbers and determining ethnicity before interviewing.
- The Pacific People minimum of 100 is roughly twice their population proportion for adults. In this case sampling and screening proceeds as before, but this activity was focussed in areas where the Census shows Pacific People to be more prevalent.

Respondent Selection

- The adult aged 18 plus years with the "last birthday" was chosen from all adults normally resident there.

Interviewing and Call Pattern

- Interviews took place on weekday evenings and on weekends, and were administered over the phone by NRB interviewers.
- The call pattern consisted of an initial call, then two further calls at different times on different days to attempt contact, and a fourth call where the respondent is willing to give an appointment time when successfully contacted on the third call.

Response Rate Ethnicity Match

- Interviewing is typically conducted in English. However, New Zealand now contains residents who were either not originally schooled in English as one of their languages or who tend to participate more readily when interacting with an ethnicity matched interviewer.
- NRB's team was briefed to try to identify the ethnicity/language background of those respondents who are either struggling with the questions and/or who appear to have a

different ethnicity/language as a possible source of difficulty. The phone numbers for these were retained with whatever identifying details were obtained, in order that they could be called back by an interviewer with matching ethnicity or language skill.

Analysis and Tabulation

- The data was entered into a survey analysis package, The Survey System (TSS), being concurrently edited for range and logic. At this point post-stratification or "weighting" is applied to rebalance for any differences between the age/gender/ethnicity mix of the achieved sample, and that of the adult population as determined by the 1996 Census.
- Cross tabulations were prepared to show the findings in total, and by age, gender, ethnicity, parent responsibility and socio-economic status determined by NZSEI occupational categories.

Quality Control Features

- NRB observes best practise at each step of the survey. The following quality controls illustrate.
 - i) The questionnaire was cognitively pretested on the main ethnicity target groups.
 - ii) Each NRB interviewer was personally briefed and instructed, face to face, by the NRB Supervisor.
 - iii) Sophisticated RDD sampling was used to provide the best achievable sample frame.
 - iv) Callbacks were made on 10% of each interviewer's work to ensure quality administration of the questionnaire.
 - v) Range and logic checks were run on the data as it is entered.

Privacy of Information and Ethics

- This was achieved by capturing data into electronic form, where each data record contains coded answers but does not contain the name of the respondent, nor the phone number. Thus, the survey data is "anonymised".
- The original questionnaire forms are held securely for a brief period to allow audit, and are then security shredded.
- Informed consent is not practised in relation to sample phone polls. This is because people are giving opinion data about a public issue, rather than personal data about themselves. The equivalent process of "informed consent" in phoned opinion surveys however is the "refused option", ie. each respondent may refuse any question they are not comfortable with, or terminate the interview.

Identification of ethnicity

- People were asked to identify which ethnic groups they belonged too using the Statistics New Zealand criteria. The selection of a respondent's primary ethnicity, where they specified more than one ethnic group, for the purposes of coding followed the following criteria:
 - was coded as Māori, where Māori was one of the ethnic groups given
 - was coded as Pacific person, where Pacific ethnicity was given and another which was not Māori
 - was coded as NZ European/Other where one or more ethnic groups were given that were neither Māori or Pacific peoples.

Identification of socio-economic status

- To obtain information on respondents' socio-economic status the New Zealand Socio-economic Index of Occupational Status (NZSEI) (Davis et al. 1997) developed by Statistics New Zealand was used. The use of occupation as an indicator of socio-economic status is:

premised on a model of the stratification system in which occupation functions as a latent, intermediate variable converting education into income, measuring "the potential of an occupation to convert a person's main resource (education) into a person's main reward (income) (Kunst and Mackenback, 1994, p.38 cited in Davis, McLeod, Ransom and Ongley 1997, p.39).

- The NZSEI assumes that a person's occupation provides a reasonable basis on which to assign them a position on the socio-economic hierarchy.
- Different occupations are allocated scores on a socio-economic index by computing a weighted sum of the average education and income levels observed for their current practice (Davis, et. al. 1997, p.39). The range of scores run from 10-90, for consistency with the International Socio-economic Index. The higher scores represent higher education and income levels and therefore higher socio-economic status. For a full discussion regarding the development of the NZSEI see *The New Zealand Socio-economic Index of Occupational Status Research Report #2* (Davis et al. 1997).
- Respondents were asked to state the occupation of the main income earner in the household. The occupation was classified at the three digit level (minor group) on the NZSEI, which is based on occupational data from the 1991 Census and the NZSCO90. These groupings were further classified to a two digit code (major group), grouping the occupations into ten major groups.
- Occupations at the major group level are presented in the survey findings, with the exception of the Armed Forces, where the sample size was considered too small.

Appendix D: Sampling errors

Table D.1 95% confidence limits for various rates and sample sizes

Estimated prevalence (%)	95% confidence limits					
	n=50	n=100	n=150	n=200	n=500	n=1,000
10	1.7 – 18.3	4.1 – 15.9	5.2 – 14.8	5.8 – 14.2	7.4 – 12.6	8.1 – 11.9
50	36.1 – 63.9	40.2 – 59.8	42.0 – 58.0	43.1 – 56.9	45.6 – 54.4	46.9 – 53.1
80	68.9 – 91.1	72.2 – 87.8	73.6 – 86.4	74.5 – 85.5	76.5 – 83.5	77.5 – 82.5

Table D.2 99% confidence limits for various rates and sample sizes

Estimated prevalence (%)	99% confidence limits					
	n=50	n=100	n=150	n=200	n=500	n=1,000
10	0.0 – 20.9	2.3 – 17.7	3.7 – 16.3	4.5 – 15.5	6.5 – 13.5	7.6 – 12.4
50	31.8 – 68.2	37.1 – 62.9	39.5 – 60.5	40.9 – 59.1	44.2 – 55.8	45.9 – 54.1
80	65.4 – 94.6	69.7 – 90.3	71.6 – 88.4	72.7 – 87.3	75.4 – 84.6	76.7 – 83.3

Appendix E: Questionnaire

01/108

June 2001

NRB

PHYSICAL DISCIPLINE OF CHILDREN STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE

CONTACT AN ADULT, AFTER CHECKING THAT THIS IS A HOME, NOT A BUSINESS.

"Good morning/afternoon/evening. I am Xxx Yyy from NRB, the research company. We are talking to 1000 people, all over New Zealand to ask their opinion on the physical discipline of children.

May I ask if the people in your house are Māori, Pacific Island, or Chinese? "

YES- ASK WHICH "Would you like someone who is _____ [state] to phone you, or are you happy for me to do the interview? (RECORD SPECIFIC ETHNICITY ON SAMPLE SHEET FOR ETHNICITY CALLBACK)

NO -PROCEED



"The person we choose is the one aged 18 years or older, who had the last birthday. Can you put me on to that person? We need only 8 to 9 minutes for the interview. If they are away, or its not convenient now, I can call back. " (OBTAIN SUITABLE CALL BACK TIME IF NEED BE)

Q.1 "Firstly, do you take part in the parenting of a child?" [CIRCLE ONE]



INCLUDES FOSTER PARENT, GRANDPARENT, ELDER SIBLING, RELATIVE, ETC
EXCLUDES CRECHE WORKER, TEACHER, PRE SCHOOL OR BOARDING PROVIDER, ETC.

Q.2 "Did you do so in the past?" [CIRCLE ONE]

Yes-1

No-2

Q.3 "I'll read out a number of viewpoints on the physical discipline of children. Please tell me for each one whether you agree or disagree with that viewpoint."
[READ OUT, THEN CIRCLE REPLY. USE "HELP BOXES" TO RESOLVE QUERIES]

a) "A person parenting a child should be allowed, by law, to smack the child **with an open hand** if the child is naughty." [CIRCLE ONE]

Agree/Yes 1] →

Disagree/No/Never 2

Don't Know/No Idea 3

Prefer not to answer 4

INCLUDES: IF JUSTIFIED,
VERY RARELY, ONLY FOR
ITS OWN GOOD BUT NOT
HARD, IF NOTHING ELSE
WORKS, ONLY CERTAIN
KINDS OF KIDS,
DEPENDING,ETC.

b) "A person parenting a child should be allowed, by law to use things like a wooden spoon or a belt to punish the child if it is naughty."

- Agree/Yes1] →
- Disagree /No/Never2
- Don't Know /No /Never3
- Prefer not to answer4

INCLUDES: IF JUSTIFIED, VERY RARELY, ONLY FOR ITS OWN GOOD BUT NOT HARD, IF NOTHING ELSE WORKS, ONLY CERTAIN KINDS OF KIDS, DEPENDING,ETC.

c) "A person parenting a child should be allowed, by law, to use something heavier like a piece of wood or an electric cord to punish the child if the child is naughty."

- Agree/Yes1] →
- Disagree /No/Never2
- Don't Know /No /Never3
- Prefer not to answer4

INCLUDES: IF JUSTIFIED, VERY RARELY, ONLY FOR ITS OWN GOOD BUT NOT HARD, IF NOTHING ELSE WORKS, ONLY CERTAIN KINDS OF KIDS, DEPENDING,ETC

d) "A person parenting a child should be allowed, by law, to smack the child on the head or neck if the child is naughty."

- Agree/Yes1] →
- Disagree /No/Never2
- Don't Know /No /Never3
- Prefer not to answer4

INCLUDES: IF JUSTIFIED, VERY RARELY, ONLY FOR ITS OWN GOOD BUT NOT HARD, IF NOTHING ELSE WORKS, ONLY CERTAIN KINDS OF KIDS, DEPENDING,ETC

Q.4 " Do you think these are acceptable levels of physical punishment for a child? Please say "yes" or "no" for each punishment as I read it out." [PROMPT: "Is that acceptable or unacceptable?"]

a) "A smack that leaves no mark on the child's skin ?"

- Yes/Acceptable 1
- No/Unacceptable 2
- Don't know/Can't say 3
- Prefer not to answer..... 4

- b) "Where it leaves a red mark that lasts a few days?"
- Yes/Acceptable 1
- No/Unacceptable 2
- Don't know/Can't say 3
- Prefer not to answer..... 4
- c) "Where it leaves a bruise that lasts a few days?"
- Yes/Acceptable 1
- No/Unacceptable 2
- Don't know/Can't say 3
- Prefer not to answer..... 4
- d) "Where the punishment leaves marks and bruises that last for more than a few days but doesn't cause a permanent injury?"
- Yes/Acceptable 1
- No/Unacceptable 2
- Don't know/Can't say 3
- Prefer not to answer..... 4
- e) "Where the punishment causes an injury that needs medical attention?"
- Yes/Acceptable 1
- No/Unacceptable 2
- Don't know/Can't say 3
- Prefer not to answer..... 4

- Q.5 "Are there any age groups that people should **not** be allowed to punish physically? Please give your answer for each of these." [CIRCLE ONE IN EACH CATEGORY]
- a) "Do you think it is acceptable or unacceptable to physically punish a child aged under two years?"
- Yes/Acceptable 1
- No/Unacceptable 2
- Don't know 3
- Can't Say 4
- b) "Do you think it is acceptable or unacceptable to physically punish a child aged two to five years?"
- Yes/Acceptable 1
- No/Unacceptable 2
- Don't know 3
- Can't Say 4
- c) "Do you think it is acceptable or unacceptable to physically punish a child aged six to ten years?"
- Yes/Acceptable 1
- No/Unacceptable 2
- Don't know 3
- Can't Say 4
- d) "Do you think it is acceptable or unacceptable to physically punish a child aged eleven to fourteen years?"
- Yes/Acceptable 1
- No/Unacceptable 2
- Don't know 3
- Can't Say 4

d) "Do you think it is acceptable or unacceptable to physically punish a child aged fifteen to seventeen years?"

- Yes/Acceptable 1
- No/Unacceptable 2
- Don't know 3
- Can't say 4

Q.6 "I'll read out some age groups. Would you please say "stop" when I get to the one that you fit into." [READ OUT AND CIRCLE REPLY]

- "18 to 29 years"1
- "30 to 39 years"2
- "40 to 49 years?"3
- "50 to 59 years?"4
- "60 to 69 years"5
- "70 years or over".....6

DO NOT READ OUT:
Prefer not to answer - 7

Q.7 "What is the occupation of the main income earner in the household? Please be as specific as possible." (PROBE FOR SPECIFIC WORK AND LEVEL]

[IF RETIRED OR BENEFICIARY ASK WHAT THE OCCUPATION WAS BEFORE RETIRING/ GOING ON BENEFIT]

Q.8 RECORD GENDER W ITHOUT ASKING: Female - 1 Male - 2

Q.9 "Which ethnic group do you belong to? Please state which group or groups apply to you." [READ OUT AND CIRCLE ONE OR MORE].

- "European or NZ European"1
- "Māori"2
- "Samoan"3
- "Tongan"4
- "Cook Island Māori"5
- "Nuiean" 6
- "Chinese"7
- "Indian" 8
- "Or another that I haven't mentioned"

[WRITE IN] _____

Q.10 CIRCLE AREA OF INTERVIEW

Northland - 01	Wairarapa - 10
Auckland - 02	Wellington - 11
Waikato, King Country, Thames - 03	Nelson - 12
Bay of Plenty - 04	West Coast - 13
Gisborne - 05	Blenheim - 14
Hawkes Bay - 06	Christchurch - 15
Taranaki - 07	Oamaru/Timaru - 16
Wanganui - 08	Dunedin - 17
Manawatu - 09	Invercargill - 18

CLOSE INTERVIEW; "Thank you for giving your views on this survey. We appreciate your taking part. May I have your initials or name so that my Supervisor can audit this interview?"

RECORD CONTACT NAME OR INITIALS: _____

RECORD PHONE NUMBER HERE: _____

 CERTIFICATION: I hereby certify that this is a true and accurate record of an Interview conducted by me at the time and place specified. TICK WHEN CHECKED:

Interview Sign: _____ Date: _____

Supervisor Sign: _____ Field Check: _____