



COMPARATIVE REPORT THE PROBLEM OF CHILD ABUSE

Nobody's Children Foundation 2010

1. ABOUT THE SURVEY

Research goals

The survey was conducted within a project financed by the OAK Foundation, “Childhood without Abuse: Toward a Better Child Protection System in Eastern Europe”.

The goal of the survey was to assess attitudes toward child abuse in the participating countries. Exactly the same measurement is going to be repeated in 2013 to provide an objective evaluation of the change that will have occurred during the project. Thus, the current survey should be seen as a diagnosis of the status quo, while the follow-up study will illustrate the change that will be made within the next three years. The following organizations take part in the project: Children Support Centre in Lithuania (Paramos vaikams centras), Centre Against Abuse "Dardedze" in Latvia (Centrs Dardedze), Social Activities and Practices Institute in Bulgaria (Институт по социални дейности и практики /ИСДП/), Child Well-Being Fund (CWF) Ukraine ((Український фонд «Благополуччя дітей») in Ukraine, National Centre for Child Abuse Prevention in Moldova (Centrul National de Prevenire a Abuzului Fata de Copii) , and Nobody's Children Foundation (NCF) in Poland (Fundacja Dzieci Niczyje).

A similar survey was conducted in the same countries in 2005. When developing this report, we used the 2005 findings in reference to the question: “In your opinion, is beating a child as punishment a childrearing method...?”, which was asked in both studies: in 2005 and 2010¹.

To achieve the above mentioned goal, the following research questions were formulated:

- How do the respondents estimate the dynamics of various aspects of child abuse?
- What are the respondents’ self-reported attitudes toward parental use of physical punishment of children?
- What are their attitudes toward a legal ban on beating children?
- How do parents punish their children?
- What institutions in the broadly understood field of child protection provide help for abused children?

1 The complete report from the 2005 study is available on:

http://canee.net/bulgaria/problem_of_child_abuse_in_central_and_eastern_europe_in_2005_2009

Sample

The survey was conducted on representative random samples. The samples varied across the participating countries, depending on local conditions. Sample sizes ranged from N=500 to N=1000. Statistical errors varied depending on the sample size. The details of samples sizes and statistical errors in each of the participating countries are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample size and statistical error in participating countries.

Country	Sample size	Statistical error
Bulgaria	N=497	+/- 4.40%
Latvia	N=526	+/- 4.27%
Lithuania	N=520	+/- 4,30%
Moldova	N=500	+/- 4.38%
Poland	N=1000	+/- 3.10%
Ukraine	N=1000	+/- 3.10%

Respondents

Random selection ensured adequate representation of all social and demographic groups in each of the national samples. In each case, the structure of the sample reflects the social and demographic structure of the participating country. In all the countries except for Bulgaria the survey was conducted on a sample drawn from the population of people over 15 (15+). In Bulgaria it was conducted among people over 18 (18+).

Methodology

The survey was conducted by use of personal interviewing. In all the participant countries interviewers met with the respondents (individually), asked them questions, and recorded their answers. In Poland the questionnaire was filled in a notebook (CAPI – Computer-assisted Personal Interview), while in the other countries the interviewers used the PAPI (Paper and Pencil Interviewing) technique.

The survey was conducted within an OMNIBUS study carried out in all the participating countries. This means that the set of questions about child abuse were asked among blocks of questions concerning other fields.

The collected data were entered in a computer programme (SPSS) for statistical analysis. A separate set of data and a separate SPSS file were created for each country.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of 8 closed-ended questions (including one filtering question). It was translated to national languages and verified by partner organizations in all the participating countries. In some countries the questionnaire was prepared in two language versions – in two

most commonly spoken languages. In Lithuania interviewers used the Lithuanian and Russian versions of the questionnaire; in Latvia – Latvian and Russian; in Ukraine – Ukrainian and Russian, and in Moldova – Romanian.

Time frame

The survey was conducted between 15 August and 15 September 2010 by the GfK Institute.

2. MAIN FINDINGS

Social perception of child abuse

- Nearly half of respondents in Moldova and Poland believe that the use of physical punishment of children is becoming less and less frequent in their societies. In contrast, one third of Bulgarian and Ukrainian respondents report that the prevalence of physical punishment of children in their countries is growing.
- More than half of Latvians (64%), Lithuanians (61%) and Bulgarians (59%) think that cases of children who are left unattended are becoming more and more frequent.
- In most countries the prevailing opinion is that sexual abuse of children is becoming increasingly frequent. This belief was expressed by 57% of the Lithuanian sample, 44% of Bulgarians, 43% of Poles, and 42% of Latvians.
- Moldova is the only country where the largest group of respondents believe that cases of child sexual abuse are becoming less and less frequent.

Approval of physical punishment of children

- The largest proportion of opponents of the use of physical punishment of children was found in Bulgaria (56%).
- Comparing to the 2005 study, social approval of beating children whenever their parents see it as an effective disciplinary measure has dropped in Latvia and Ukraine, and has remained unchanged in Bulgaria and Poland (notably, these countries have introduced a legal ban on corporal punishment of children). In the remaining two countries (Moldova and Lithuania) the proportions of respondents who think that parents may beat their children whenever they consider it effective have increased as compared to the 2005 study.
- Comparing to the 2005 survey, acceptance of the use of physical punishment in justified cases has dropped in Ukraine (from 44% to 40%), while in Moldova and Lithuania social approval of beating children in such situations has increased.

- In Bulgaria the percentage of people who think parents should never beat their children has increased from 47% in 2005 to 56% in 2010. In the remaining countries this percentage has either remained unchanged or decreased (in Lithuania from 40% to 33%, and in Moldova from 37% to 31%).

Legal ban on physical punishment of children

- The highest proportions of people who believe that the use of physical punishment of children should be forbidden by law have been found in Bulgaria (66%), where such a ban was introduced in 2000; in Moldova (55%), where the ban was imposed in 2008; and in Poland (53%), where physical punishment of children has been illegal since 2010.
- The highest proportion of opponents of the legal ban on physical punishment of children has been found in Latvia (52%), where such a law has been in force since 1998. The lowest proportions of opponents have been found in Bulgaria, Ukraine (where the ban was imposed in 2004) and in Poland.
- One third of the Ukrainian sample think that slapping a child across the face should be forbidden by law. The same proportion of Ukrainian respondents support a legal ban on spanking/smacking.
- In Moldova slapping a child across the face is accepted by more people than hitting a child with a hand.

Using physical punishment against respondents' own children

- 90% of Polish parents have never slapped their children across the face. In Moldova the same was reported by 50% of the sample. In Latvia 82% of parents claim they have never slapped their child across the face, while 54% report they have never spanked their children.
- In Ukraine and Moldova about 10% of parents admit to having hit their child in such a way that it left marks on his/her body. In reality, the proportion may be even higher as some of the respondents may have been reluctant to admit to beating their children so severely – an act that is evaluated as very negative (beating your child heavily) or even forbidden by law (at least in some countries).

Institutional support for abused children

- In most countries (except for Poland and Bulgaria) abused children, according to the respondents, may seek help primarily at social service institutions. In Poland social services were the fourth on the list – after the police, the justice system, and educational institutions.

- In all the participating countries except for Bulgaria the lowest percentages of respondents pointed to NGOs as institutions providing help for children who are abused in their families. In Bulgaria only educational institutions were chosen less frequently.

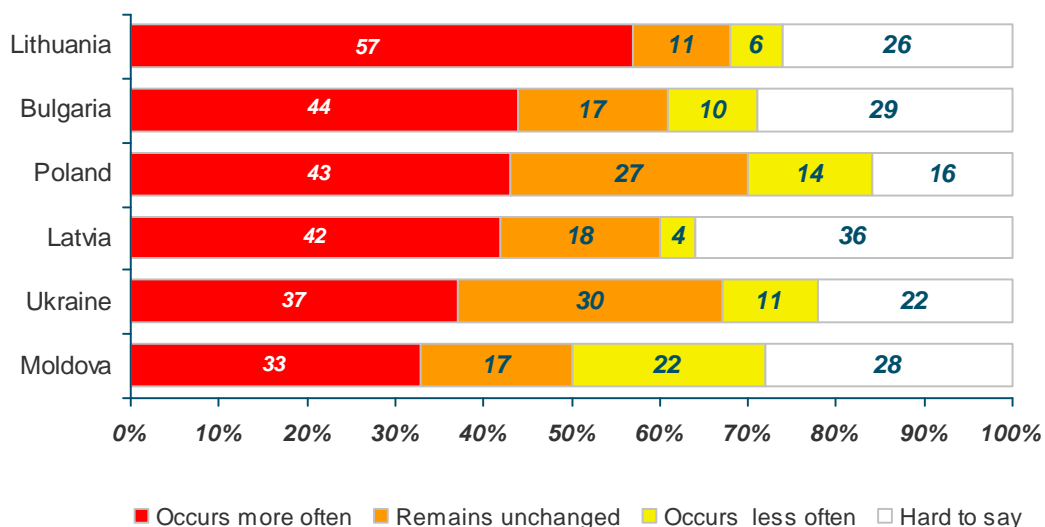
3. RESULTS

Physical punishment

The respondents were asked whether such phenomena as child sexual abuse, physical punishment of children, yelling at children, name calling, verbal humiliation, and leaving a child unattended have become more frequent, less frequent, or occurred with unchanged frequency during the past 10 years.

They were also asked if they consider beating a child as punishment a child-rearing method that a) may be used whenever the parent believes it is going to be effective; b) should never be used; or c) should not be used in general, but is justified in some situations. The same question was asked in the 2005 survey conducted in the same countries, which makes it possible to see how people’s attitudes toward physical punishment of children have changed during the past 5 years. The respondents perceive physical punishment of children – out of the array of phenomena presented to them in the survey – as occurring less and less frequently. This view was expressed by 28% of the entire sample. It may result from the fact that in almost all the participating countries (except for Lithuania) the use of physical punishment of children is forbidden by law. Perhaps this is the reason why respondents see physical punishment as decreasingly prevalent in their countries. The chart in Figure 1 shows the detailed distribution of their answers.

Figure 1. Perception of child sexual abuse in 2010, data in %

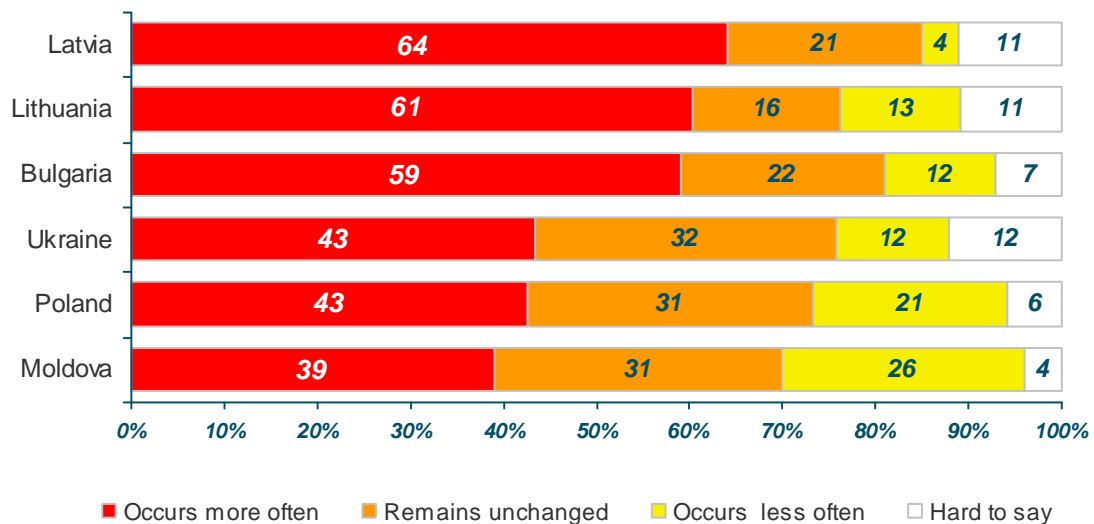


One should bear in mind, however, that these are self-reported beliefs. Thus, the collected data do not tell us whether physical punishment of children has really become more or less frequent than 10 years ago.

Let us pass on to respondents' answers to the question concerning their level of approval of physical punishment of children. Generally, a similar pattern has been found: In most countries (except of Bulgaria and Ukraine) the prevailing opinion is that parents should not beat their children, however there are situations when the use of physical punishment is justified, while the proportion of people who support physical punishment whenever parents see it as effective, is the lowest in all the societies. Bulgaria is the only country where the prevailing view is that physical punishment of children should never be used. In the remaining societies the opponents of physical punishment of children constitute from about 30% to 40% of the sample.

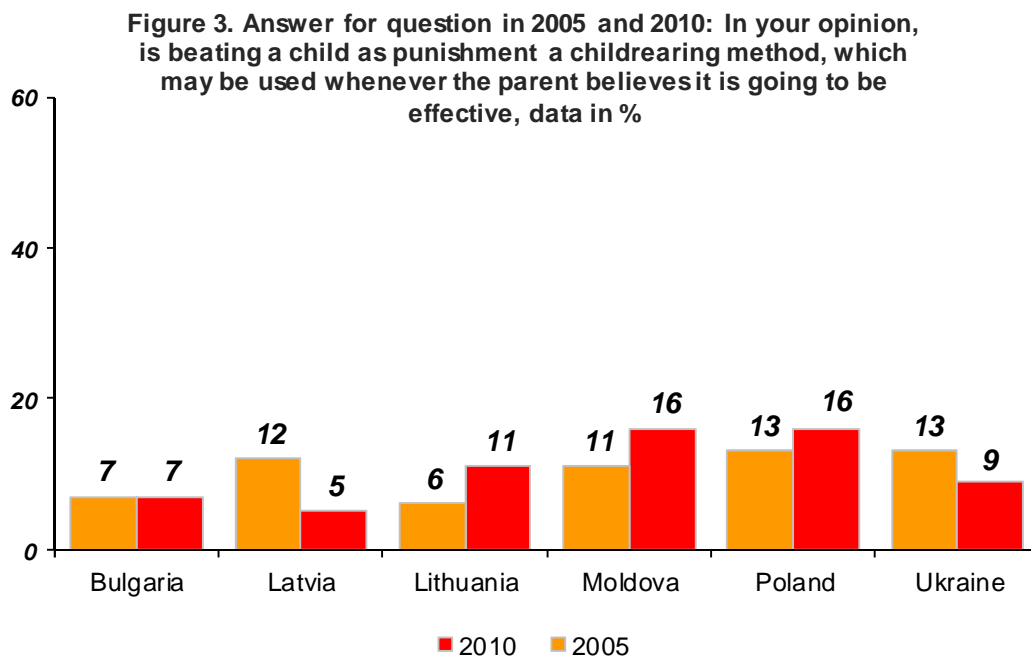
Lithuanians, Latvians, and Moldovans are the most likely to justify the use of physical punishment. Moldova is also the country with the largest proportion of people who support beating children whenever their parents see it as necessary (16%). The lowest proportion of such responses was found in Latvia (5%). The detailed distribution of respondents' answers is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Perception of leaving children unattended in 2010, data in %



The question about the level of approval of physical punishment of children is the only one that was also asked in the 2005 survey. Thus, we may compare how people's opinions on this issue have changed during the past 5 years.

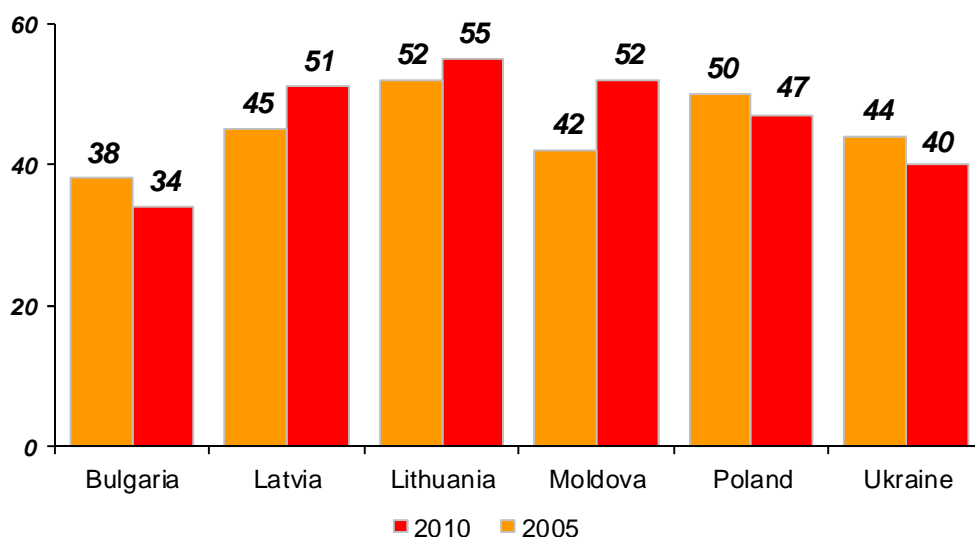
In Lithuania and Moldova the proportions of those who believe that beating children is a childrearing method that may be used whenever the parent sees it as effective, have grown. In Poland the change, though visible in the chart, is insignificant. In Latvia and Ukraine the proportions of people supporting this view has dropped by 7% and 4%, respectively. In Bulgaria and Poland the percentage of respondents who believe parents may beat their children whenever they think it is necessary, has not changed during the past 5 years. The chart in Figure 3 illustrates the detailed distribution of responses.



In all the participating countries the largest proportions of respondents think that in general parents should not beat their children, but some situations justify such behaviour. In Moldova and Latvia the proportions of people supporting this view have grown by 10% and 6%, respectively. By contrast, in Ukraine the percentage of people who see beating as a justified childrearing method has dropped by 4%

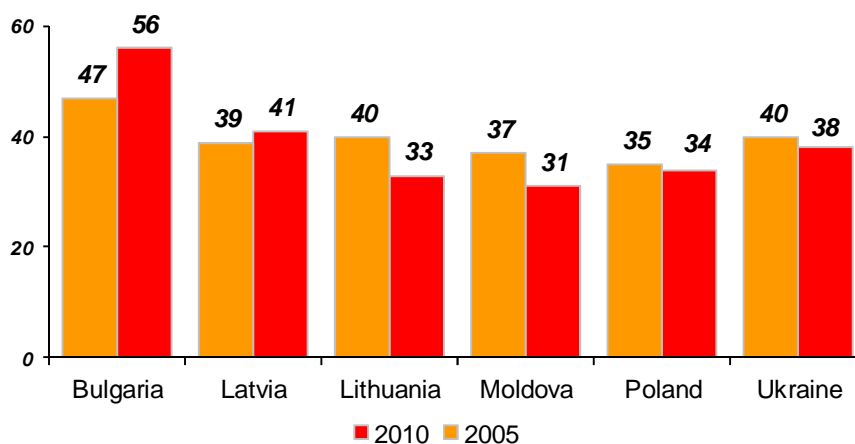
No significant differences were found in the remaining countries. The details are illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Answer for question in 2005 and 2010: In your opinion, is beating a child as punishment a childrearing method, which should not be used in general, but is justified in some situations, data in %

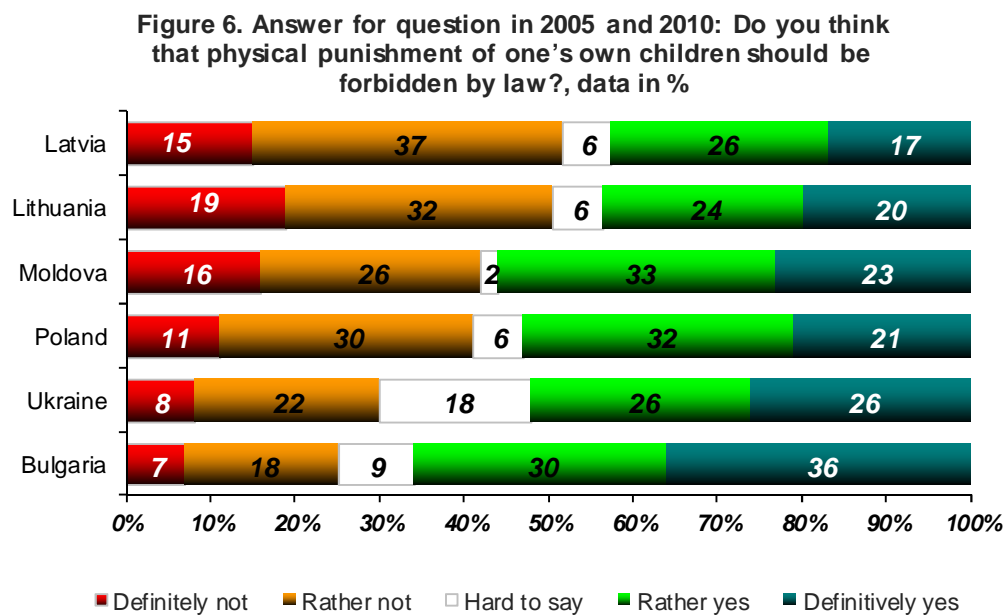


Bulgarian respondents are the most likely to believe that parents should never beat their children as punishment. Moreover, the proportion of Bulgarians supporting this view has grown by 11%, as compared to 2005. In the remaining countries the percentages of people expressing this opinion have remained unchanged (no significant differences in Poland, Ukraine, and Latvia) or have decreased since 2005 (by 6% in Moldova and by 7% in Lithuania). The details are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Answer for question in 2005 and 2010: In your opinion, is beating a child as punishment a childrearing method, which should never be used, data in %



Given the above findings, respondents' attitudes toward a legal ban on physical punishment of children may seem surprising. Lithuania and Latvia are the only countries where there are more opponents than supporters of such a ban: 52% in Latvia and 51% in Lithuania. In the remaining countries most respondents support such a law: 66% in Bulgaria, 56% in Moldova, 53% in Poland, and 52% in Ukraine. We should add here that in all the countries (except for Lithuania) such a ban has already been in force – in some of them it was introduced several years ago and in others just recently (e.g., in Poland it was imposed just 2 months before the survey). The details are shown in Figure 6.



These results suggest some polarization of the studied societies in terms of their attitudes toward a legal ban on beating children and the use of physical punishment of children. Some societies are against beating as a childrearing method and believe that physical punishment should be forbidden by law. Others accept (in most cases under certain conditions) beating children as a childrearing method and oppose the idea of banning corporal punishment.

It is hard to find a single demographic variable that would account for differences in people's attitudes toward a legal ban on beating children or their level of approval of physical punishment as a childrearing method. In each country the situation looks different in specific demographic groups. For example, in Bulgaria a legal ban on physical punishment is more likely to be supported by people ages 15–29, living in small towns, and having secondary-school education; in Latvia – by people with primary-school and college/university education and those living in big cities; in Moldova education is the variable that accounts for differences in attitudes (the higher education, the more people are convinced that physical punishment should be forbidden by law); in Poland the ban is supported by people ages 15-29 (other demographic variables turn insignificant); while in Ukraine – by individuals in the 18-29 age group, living in big cities, and

having primary-school education. Therefore, the demographic analysis should be conducted for each country separately.

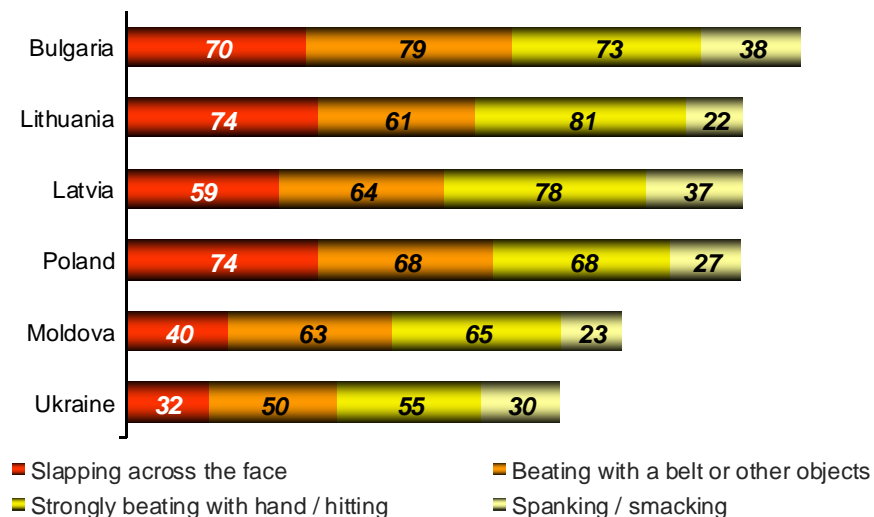
To learn more about social approval of the use of physical punishment of children, especially spanking, the respondents were asked to choose – from a range of different forms of corporal punishment – the ones, which, in their opinion, should be forbidden by law. The respondents were asked to consider the following forms of punishment: beating with a belt or another object, slapping across the face, beating strongly with a hand / hitting, and spanking/smacking.

The lowest level of support for a legal ban on spanking was found in Lithuania where only 22% of the sample think that this form of punishment should be forbidden by law. The largest proportion of supporters of such a ban was found in Bulgaria – 38%.

It is very interesting to compare opinions about beating a child with a belt and slapping a child across the face. In Latvia, Ukraine, and Moldova more people support a legal ban on beating a child with a hand or belt than a ban on slapping a child across the face. In Moldova 65% of the respondents think that beating a child strongly with a hand should be forbidden by law, while 40% support a legal ban on slapping a child across the face. In Ukraine the percentages are 55% and 32%, in Lithuania 81% and 74%, and in Latvia 78% and 59% , respectively. Some cultural factor may play a role here, leading to the belief that slapping a child across the face is not particularly reprehensible.

The detailed pattern of responses is illustrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Percentage of people who in 2010 approve legal ban on forms of corporal punishment of children, data in %



Apart from their attitudes toward imposing a legal ban on selected forms of punishment, respondents who have their own children were asked if they had ever used such kinds of punishment as: slapping a child across the face, beating a child with a belt, name calling, criticizing, beating with a hand, a ban on meetings, a ban on equipment/devices, spanking, and raising one's voice.

When analyzing their answers, one should bear in mind that the respondents spoke to a stranger, an unfamiliar interviewer, with whom it was uneasy for them to talk about their private life, even though they were assured about full confidentiality and anonymity of the survey. Thus, one may assume that some respondents may have concealed the fact of using some forms of physical punishment, feeling ashamed or wanting to come out well in the interviewer's eyes. This phenomenon has been described in social sciences as the social desirability effect, in which the subject subconsciously tries to meet the researcher's expectations (as perceived by the subject), or the interviewer effect, in which the respondent wants to please the interviewer, come out well and present himself in a positive light. Therefore, when questions asked by the interviewer are difficult, personal or uncomfortable (which can be definitely said of questions about beating children), the respondent's answers may be fundamentally different from his or her actual behaviour.

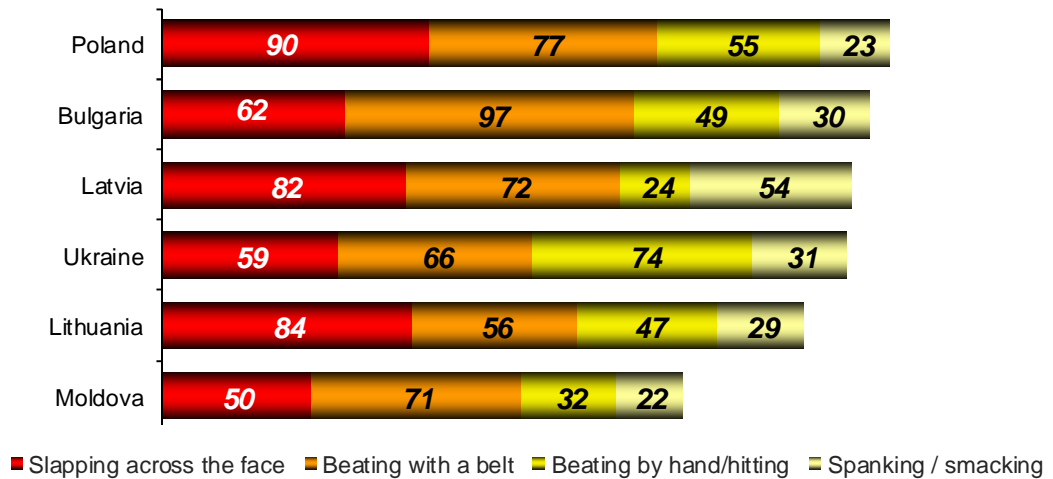
We may safely conclude that in all the countries in the study children are beaten, at least to some extent. Because we did not ask the respondents about the time of such incidents, we cannot be sure whether the situations reported by them occurred before or after the introduction of the ban on beating children. This observation does not apply to Lithuania, where the use of physical punishment is not forbidden by law, and to Poland, where the introduction of such a ban coincided with the survey. Nevertheless, beating children as a childrearing method appears quite a widespread practice. Although in some of the countries parents are not very likely to use such forms of punishment as slapping a child across the face (Poland) or beating with a belt (Bulgaria), other kinds of physical punishment (beating with a hand, spanking) are used quite often.

Answers to the question about parents' past behaviour towards their children reflect various patterns of behaviour. For example, in Latvia as much as 54% of parents said they had never spanked their child. At the same time, however, only 24% reported they had never hit their child with a hand. In Bulgaria 62% of parents said they had never slapped their child across the face (which means that 38% have used this form of punishment), and 97% reported they had never beaten their child with a belt or another object. This means that in Bulgaria slapping a child across the face is more common than beating with a belt. These patterns of behaviour may be accounted for by cultural factors.

A similar tendency can be seen in Poland and Lithuania – the largest proportion of parents have never slapped their child across the face (90% in Poland, 84% in Lithuania); a slightly smaller group have never hit their child with a belt (77% and 56%, respectively); and about half of them have never hit their child with a hand (55% and 47%). About 1/4 of Polish parents and 1/3 of

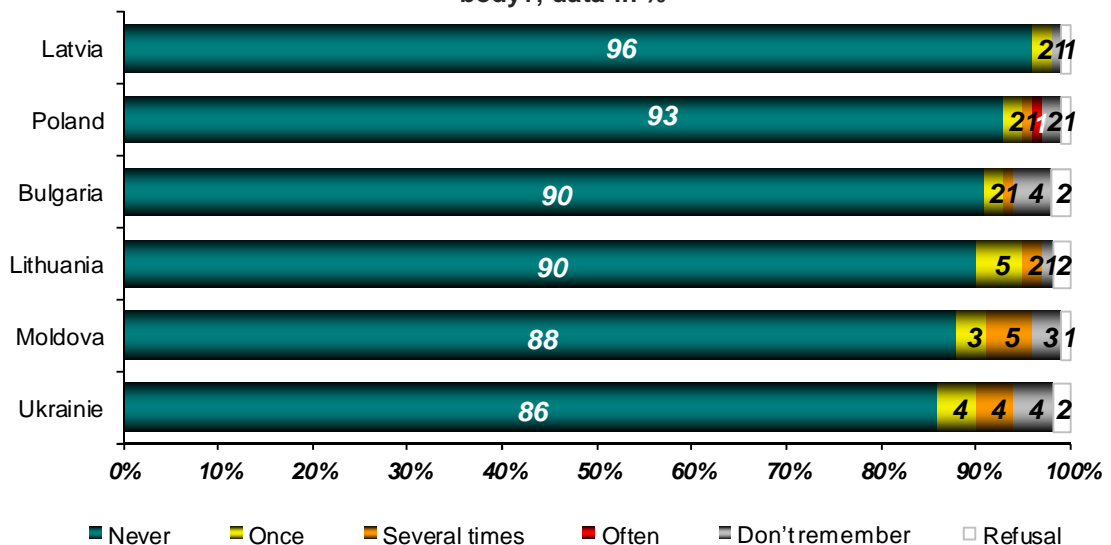
parents in Lithuania have never spanked their child. Details of the forms of physical punishment used by parents in each country are shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Percentage of people who have admitted in 2010 that they have never used specific forms of punishment, data in %



Forms of beating that left marks on the child's body (such as bruises or scratches) make a separate category of physical punishment. Such behaviour against their children was reported by 8% of parents in Ukraine and Moldova, 7% in Lithuania, 3% in Poland and Bulgaria, and 2% in Latvia. This means that children are still exposed to severe physical punishment that goes far beyond reprimanding and results in bodily injuries. The details are shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Answer for question in 2010 (parents only): Did you ever hit your child in a way that left marks (bruises, scratches) on his/her body?, data in %

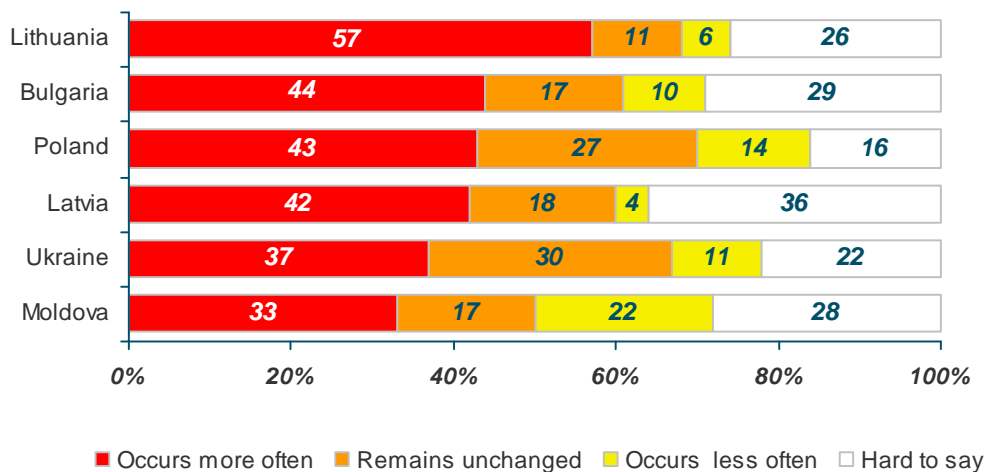


Change in behaviour toward children in terms of childrearing, care, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse

Apart from questions concerning the use of physical punishment, the survey (as mentioned earlier in the report) asked about the dynamics of other parental behaviours, such as lack of parental care, child sexual abuse, name calling and verbal humiliation.

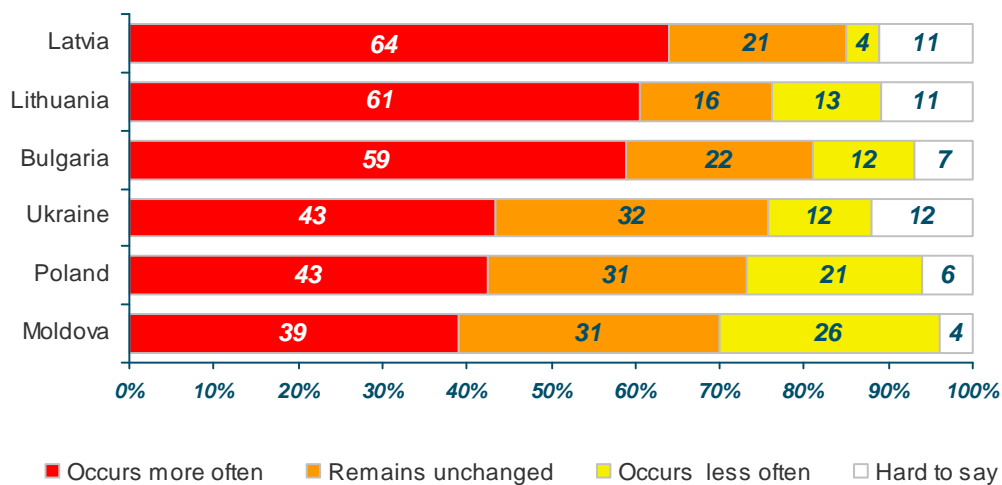
When analyzing the respondents' answers to questions about whether these behaviours toward children have become more frequent, less frequent or remain at the same level, one can easily notice a relatively large number of the "hard to say / I don't know" responses to the question concerning child sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is a secret and „silent" form of abuse, with both the abuser and the victim trying to keep the event secret. While other forms of abuse (such as physical punishment) may be overt and parents sometimes admit that they lost their temper and beat the child up, the fact of sexual abuse is usually concealed. This appears to be well understood by the respondents who often admitted they could not answer the questions about child sexual abuse (notably, the interviewer did not read out the "I don't know / hard to say" answer, so the respondents did not choose this option from the range of possible answers). This may be a result of media reports about cases of child sexual abuse where the offenders were "ordinary citizens" living in "respectable families", authority figures (e.g., a senior family member or a coach), or highly respected public figures (such as a local priest or teacher). These media reports may also contribute to the respondents' belief that child sexual abuse occurs more and more frequently. The distribution of answers to the question about child sexual abuse is illustrated in figure 10.

Figure 10. Perception of child sexual abuse in 2010, data in %



In all the participating countries people see the problem of neglect (leaving children unattended, without parental care) as occurring more and more frequently. Presumably, the problem of leaving children unattended is a sign of our times. Twenty years ago children playing in the courtyard without supervision or waiting outside for their parents to return from work, were not considered an alarming view. Today, when a child is involved in an accident, the media often report that they were left unattended, which may make an impression that the number of children deprived of proper parental care is growing. The details are shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11. Perception of leaving children unattended in 2010, data in %



Institutional support for abused children

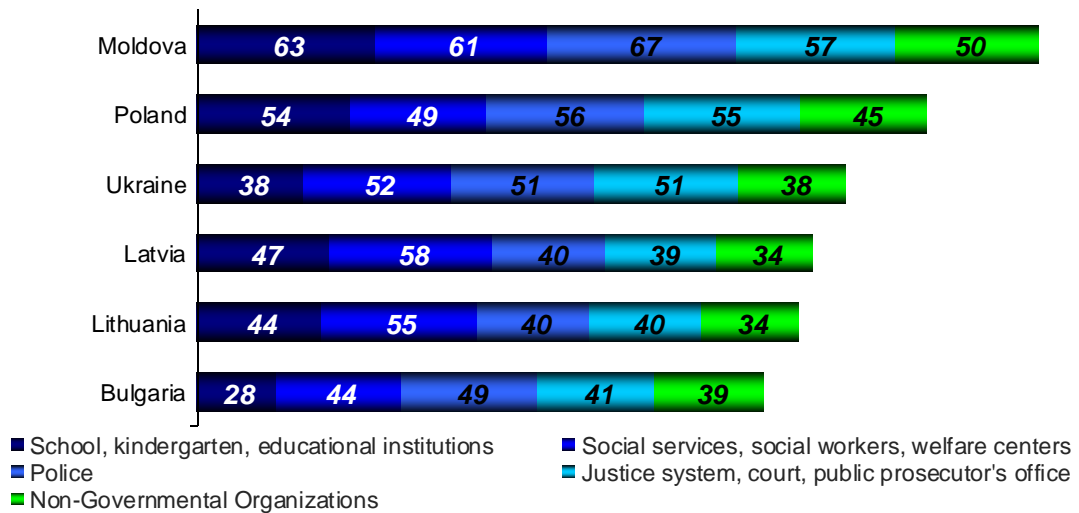
Abused children should be able to obtain help and support from social service institutions and the justice system. The respondents were asked about whether abused children in their country may count on help from selected institutions. From an array of institutions that provide help for abused children, Poles, Bulgarians and Moldovans were the most likely to point to the police. In the remaining countries social service institutions came on the top of the list.

Perhaps in the countries where the police was the respondents' first choice, people perceive help for abused children in terms of direct interventions. This may result from the fact that in such cases the police acts on a short-term basis and is able to stop abuse immediately, which leads to the belief that the police can help quickly and effectively.

A relatively low position of NGOs may reflect the fact that in many places (such as small towns and villages) the 3rd sector institutions are still at an early stage of development, and therefore are not perceived as leaders in providing effective help for abused children. It should be noted however that the proportions of respondents who pointed to NGOs were still substantial – e.g.,

50% in Moldova, and 45% in Poland – which suggests that they have already become important players on the helping market.

Figure 12. Top 2 Boxes - institutions which provide support for abused children in 2010, data in %



As mentioned earlier in the report, the goal of the 2010 survey was to assess the situation at the beginning of the project “Childhood without Abuse: Toward a Better Child Protection System in Eastern Europe”. A follow-up study in 2013 will give us a more complete picture of the situation in the presented research areas, as it will not only provide us with follow-up assessment (after the completion of the project), but also show us the dynamics of processes occurring in each of the societies and the change that will have taken place during the next 3 years.