

Childhood without abuse - towards better child protection system in Eastern Europe.

Professionals' attitudes toward child abuse

Research report

Nobody's Children Foundation

Centre Against Abuse "Dardedze"

This report presents findings from studies conducted in Latvia in 2005, within a comparative research project carried out in seven East European countries (Bulgaria, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Ukraine). The studies were part of the programme *Childhood without Violence. Toward Better Protection of Children in Eastern Europe*, which has been implemented since 2005 as a five-year project. The programme is coordinated by the Nobody's Children Foundation and financed by the OAK Foundation. More details about the programme are available at www.canee.net.

Methodology

The main objective of the studies was to assess public attitudes, especially those held by professionals working with children, toward the problem of child abuse, as well as professionals' experience in undertaking interventions in such cases and their evaluation of the effectiveness of child protection systems in their countries.

The studies sought answers to the following research questions:

- How do the respondents estimate the prevalence of a wide range of abusive behaviours in their country?
- How do they evaluate the dynamics of various aspects of child abuse?
- What is the level of social acceptance of controlling parents' behaviours toward their children?
- What are the respondents' self-reported attitudes toward parental use of corporal punishment of children?
- How do they evaluate various professional groups' sensitivity and competence in the area of child protection?

In each of the participating countries the respondents were teachers working at capital-city primary schools. In each capital city ten schools were selected from different districts, using the layered random sampling method. The respondents were

teachers working at each of the selected schools. They filled self-administered questionnaires individually and then returned the set of completed questionnaires from their school to the programme coordinator.

Developed by Monika Sajkowska, the questionnaire consisted of 87 items which had been previously used in Polish research programmes concerning child abuse (Sajkowska, Siemaszko, 1998; Fluderska, Sajkowska, 2001).

The sample

The Latvian sample consisted of 152 teachers working at primary schools in the capital city. A vast majority of the respondents (89%) were females. The largest group of the participants were under the age of 35.

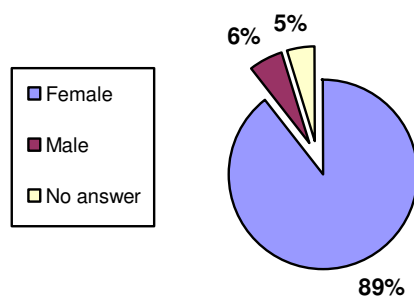


Figure 1. Respondents by gender

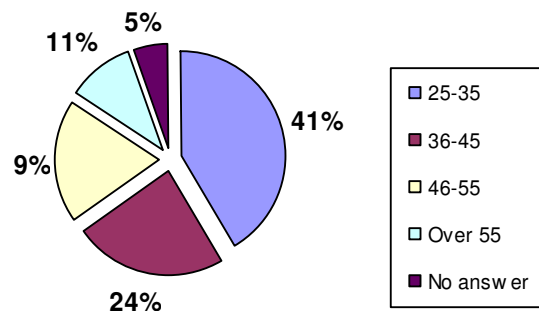


Figure 2. Respondents by age

The respondents' young age was related to the fact that the highest proportion of the sample were teachers with long work experience: 68 % had worked as teachers for more than 6 years.

Most respondents (67.8%) had their own children.

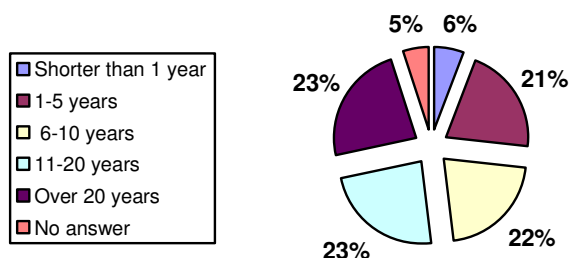


Figure 3. *Respondents' work experience as teachers.*

59.2% of the participants described themselves as believers or deep believers, 19,1% as hesitant, 13,8% as non-believers, and 7,9% did not provide any answer to the question concerning their attitudes to religion.

How many children experience abuse?

Do the respondents believe that child abuse is prevalent in their country? Perceived prevalence of the problem may exert significant influence on behaviour. A teacher who sees child abuse as a marginal problem may overlook cases of violence against children, fail to notice symptoms of abuse, and, consequently, fail to provide help for a child in need.

In the opening items in the questionnaire the respondents were asked to estimate the prevalence and dynamics of child abuse. As shown in the following charts (figures 4, 5, and 6), they varied significantly in their perceptions concerning the proportion of abused children. The participants were most consistent in their assessments of the prevalence of sexual abuse. Most of them (58.8%) thought this form of abuse was rare, i.e. affected less than 10% of children in their country.

Teachers participating in the study perceive emotional abuse as the problem affecting the highest number of children. According to the respondents, apart from lack of interest shown by adults, children are likely to experience active forms of emotional abuse, such as calling names and verbal humiliation; more than half of the participants estimate that this form of abuse is experienced by more than 60% of children in Latvia.

In participants opinion the problem of physical abuse is also serious – 26,9% of children are victims of severe corporal punishment (e.g., leaving bruises and injuries), most of children in Latvia (53,3%) is spanking by parents. Teachers estimate that more than 30% children in Latvia experience neglect - lack of proper care of the child's hygiene, clothing, and nutrition.

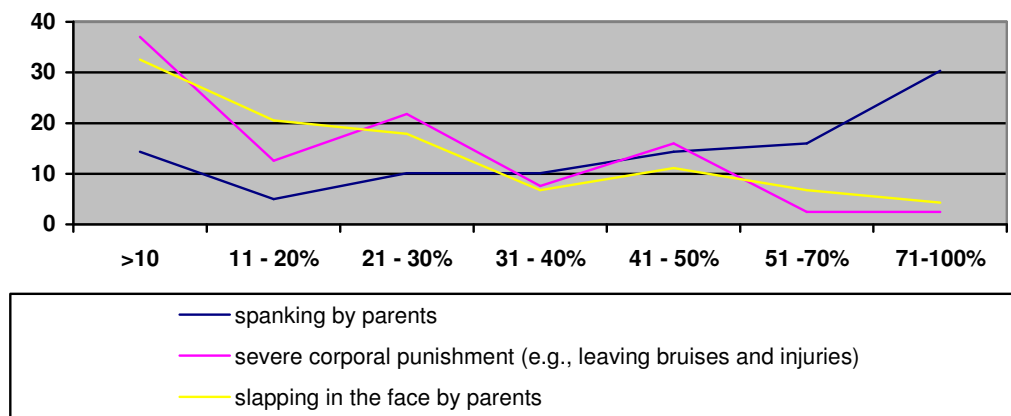


Figure 4. Perceived prevalence of various forms of child abuse, in percentage terms, where 100% is the general population of children in Latvia.

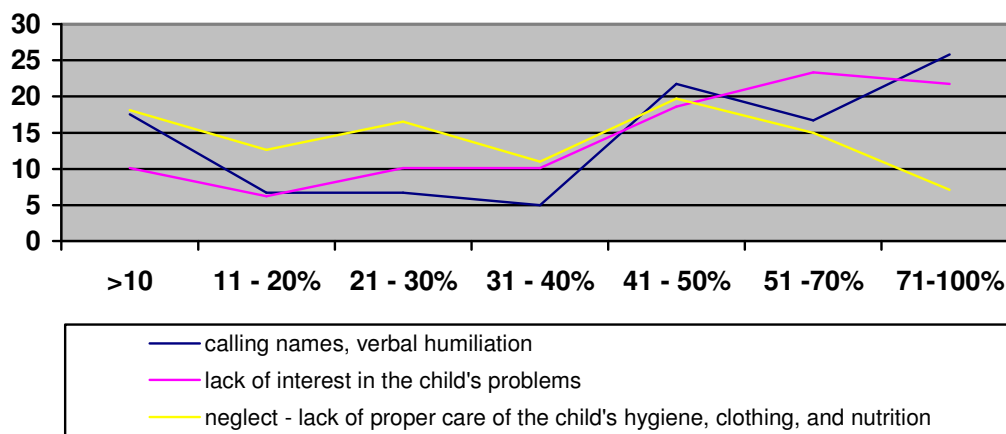


Figure 5. Perceived prevalence of various forms of child abuse, in percentage terms, where 100% is the general population of children in Latvia.

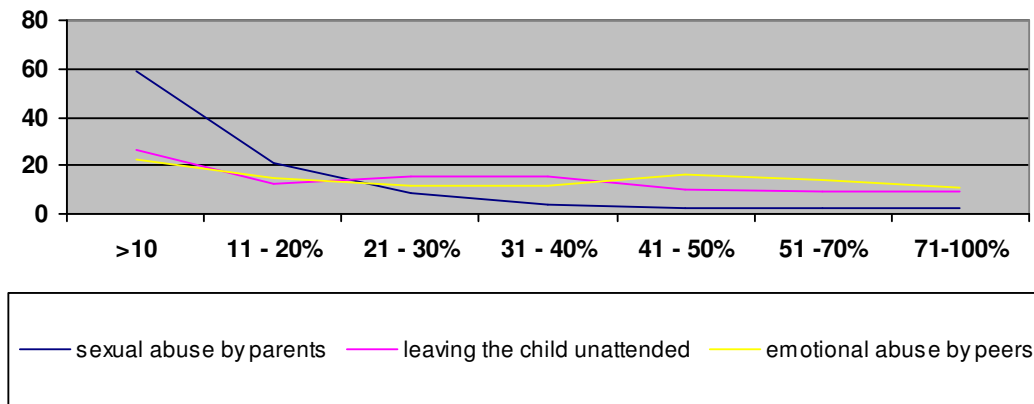


Figure 6. *Perceived prevalence of various forms of child abuse, in percentage terms, where 100% is the general population of children in Latvia.*

The respondents were also asked to assess the **dynamics** of the child abuse problem in the past 10 years. Is the prevalence of child abuse changing? If yes, is the problem growing or decreasing?

According to the respondents, in the last 10 years there has been an increase in the prevalence of children's loneliness, especially the problem of leaving children unattended (see Figure 7). Similar opinions were expressed with regard to other behaviours being a sign of emotional abuse of children, such as yelling, using crude language, and humiliating children.

Interestingly, only corporal punishment was assessed as occurring less frequently today than ten years ago. Such opinions may result from a discussion that accompanied the introduction of the amended family code. Being in force since 1998, the amended code legally bans using corporal punishment of children. Notably, the respondents think that corporal punishment is experienced by more than 50% of children in Latvia (see Figure 1 and Table 2), and yet perceive their prevalence as decreasing.

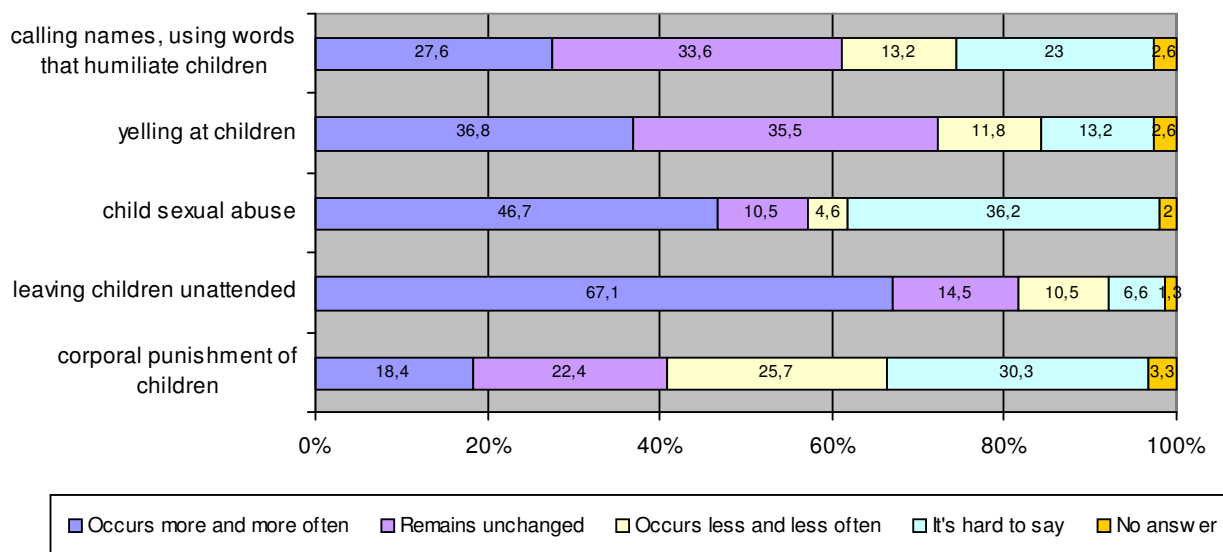


Figure 7. Do you think that in the past 10 years parents' behaviours toward children have changed with regard to:

The study also sought information about how the respondents perceived the prevalence of child abuse in their closest environment – in the schools where they work.

Is the prevalence of child abuse – as perceived by teachers participating in the study – the same in the national population of children and in the schools where they work? If not, what differences do they notice? Is there any relationship between their assessments of the prevalence of abuse in the country as a whole and in their schools?

The respondents' assessments of the prevalence of various forms of child abuse differ depending on whether they concern the students attending the participants' schools or the general (national) population of children. Most respondents believe that abuse is experienced by only a tiny percentage (less than 10%) of students in their schools (Figures 5, 6, 7). This is true for all abuse forms included in the questionnaire. The only distinction has been found for the assessments of how many students experience neglect: lack of interest in the child's problems, or lack of care of the child's hygiene clothing, and nutrition. Most of the of the respondents believe these forms of abuse are experienced by more than 30% of their students (see Figure 9).

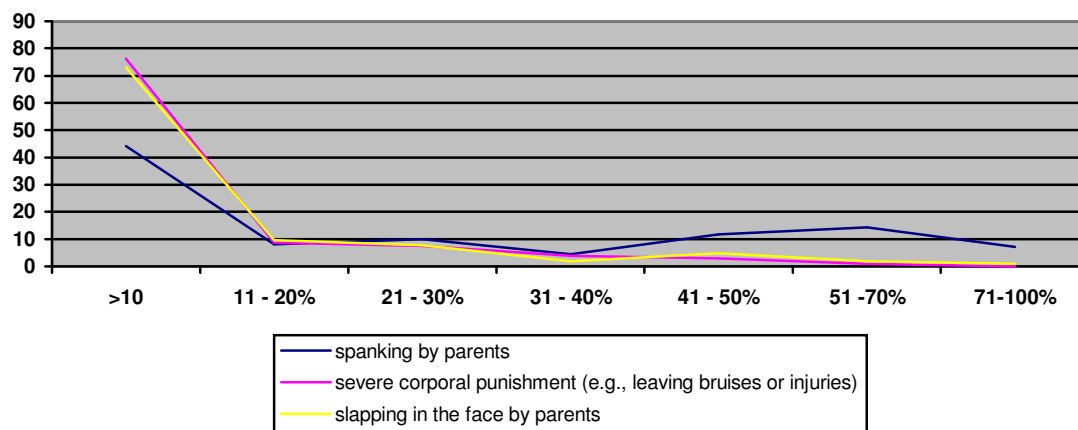


Figure 8. *Perceived prevalence of various forms of child abuse, in percentage terms, where 100% is the population of students attending the respondent's school.*

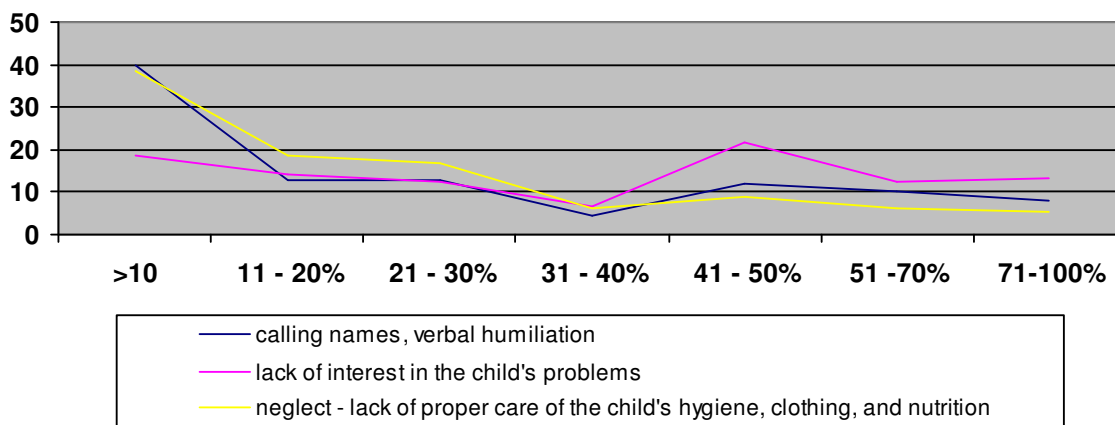


Figure 9. *Perceived prevalence of various forms of child abuse, in percentage terms, where 100% is the population of students attending the respondent's school.*

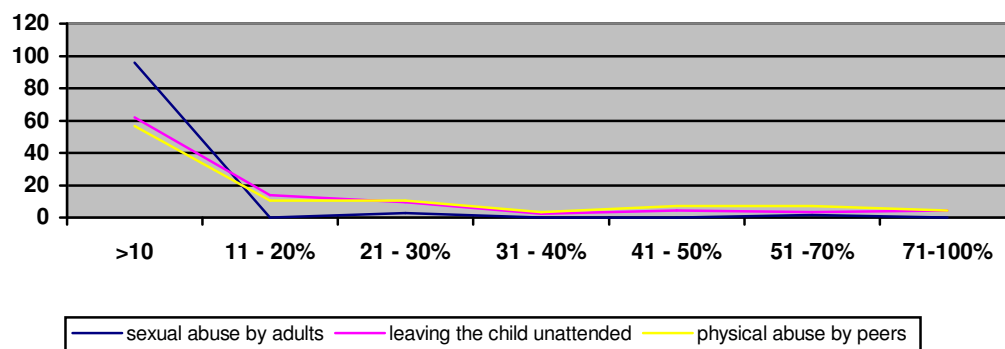


Figure 10. *Perceived prevalence of various forms of child abuse, in percentage terms, where 100% is the population of students attending the respondent's school.*

By comparing the respondents' perceptions concerning the prevalence of child abuse in their countries and among children attending their schools, it becomes visible that they consistently evaluate the situation in their closest environment as better than in the country as a whole. The participants think that their students also experience abuse but – in their opinion – the prevalence of the problem is at least twice lower than in the national population (see Table 1).

This is true for most of abuse forms included in the questionnaire. The only distinction has been found for the assessments of how many students experience neglect: lack of interest in the child's problems, or lack of care of the child's hygiene clothing, and nutrition. Most of the respondents believe these forms of abuse are experienced 30% of their students.

Table 1. *Perceived prevalence of various forms of child abuse – national child population in Latvia vs. the respondent's school (%)*.

Percentage of children experiencing various forms of abuse:	national population (mean estimations)	school population (mean estimations)
spanking by parents	53,3	26,3
severe corporal punishment (e.g., leaving bruises, injuries, etc.)	26,3	10,4
slapping in the face by parents	27,8	12,7
calling names, verbal humiliation	51,1	29,1
lack of interest in the child's problems	51,5	40,7
neglect – lack of care of the child's hygiene, clothing, and nutrition	38,5	25,9
sexual abuse by parents	16,8	3,6
leaving the child unattended	34,9	17,7

When to intervene?

Teachers, especially those working with younger children, have extensive knowledge about child-rearing methods used by parents. Due to their professional role, teachers have many opportunities to observe behaviours and verbal expressions, both of children and their parents. The way teachers perceive parent–child relationships is extremely important, as it determines whether and when they are prepared to intervene and provide help for children.

In the questionnaire the respondents were asked about their views on child rearing. As shown in Figure 11, teachers vary in their assessments of a range of opinions on this issue. It should be emphasized that more than 50% of the participants disagree with statements that would justify child abuse. They are most likely to reject the opinion that instilling fear is a good method of making children obedient – more than 94,8% of the respondents disagree with this statement.

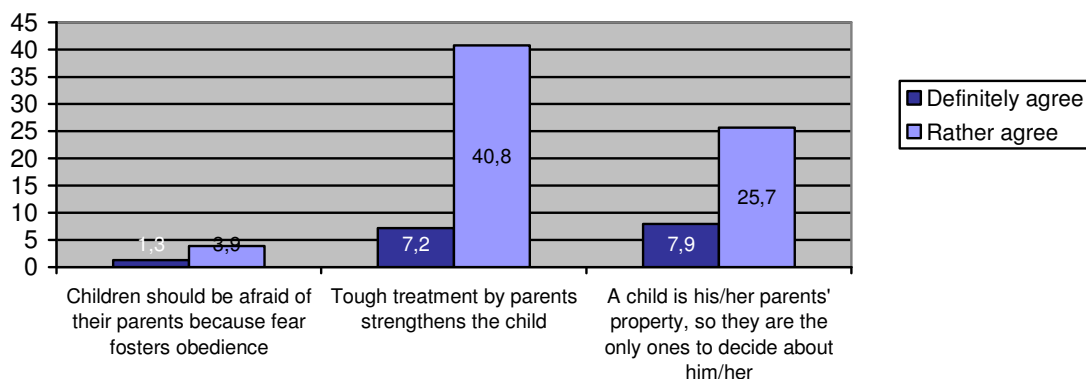


Figure 11. *Teachers' opinions about selected views concerning child rearing. There are many different views about child rearing. Do you agree with the following statements?*

The respondents were also asked about child-rearing circumstances under which they would perceive third parties' interventions as justified.

Teachers participating in the study have clear opinions on which parental behaviours – notwithstanding the motive – cannot be tolerated. This concerns both legally banned acts (such as sexual abuse) and behaviours which, though not illegal, may have a negative effect on the child's development (e.g., forced to permanently look after younger siblings).

The respondents are unanimous in their judgments that sexual abuse cannot be tolerated and requires immediate, resolute interventions from people in the child's environment, including strangers. This opinion is shared by as many as 96,7% of the participants (!). The respondents also agree that third parties should intervene when a child's fundamental physical needs are not satisfied: when the child is hungry (93,7% of the respondents) or dirty (80,1%). Moreover, the participants consistently believe that such an intervention is justified when parents abuse their child physically (80% of the sample perceived such circumstances as requiring intervention).

It should be emphasized, however, that even though using physical violence is illegal in Latvia, only 80% of the sample (and not nearly 100%, as in the case of sexual abuse) believe that third parties' interventions are legitimate in such situations. This may be related to the fact that the legal ban on beating children has been in force for a relatively short time, but also, regrettably, may reflect the universality of corporal punishment of children and a common perception that beating children is not an abusive behavior. The fact which can confirm this hypothesis is that only 19,7% of respondents think that interventions are legitimate when a parent are spanking their child (!).

The respondents are also likely to believe that other people should intervene when parents do not look after their children (86,2%). More than 80% of the respondents think that such interventions are also justified when parents' use crude language with their child or child is forced to permanently look after younger siblings

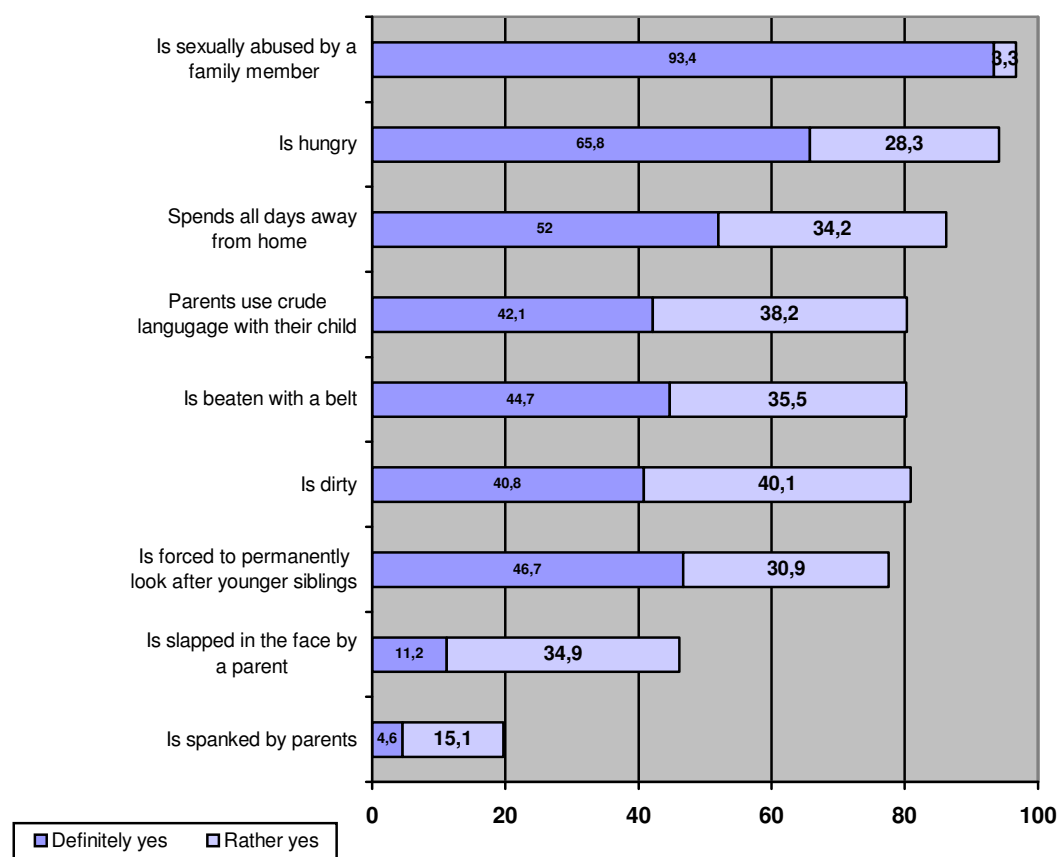


Figure 12. *Situations in which the respondents perceive third parties' or strangers' interventions as justified (%)*.

Is spanking acceptable?

As shown in Figure 12, most respondents (80,3%) think that seeing a child being spanked by parents isn't a sufficient reason for third parties to intervene. This belief is opposite to the teachers' view that corporal punishment should not be treated as a regular child-rearing measure: 55% of the respondents think that such forms of punishment humiliate children and 50% believe that they reflect parents' child-rearing incompetence (see Figures 13 and 14). Notably, 11% of the participants share the opinion that corporal punishment is as good an educational measure as any other (Figure 14).

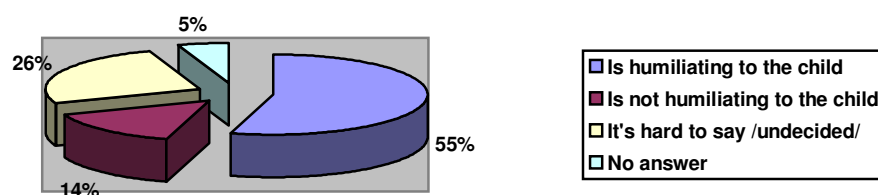


Figure 13. Attitudes toward corporal punishment (or giving a child a hiding), in percentage terms. Do you think using corporal punishment of children, or giving a child a hiding...

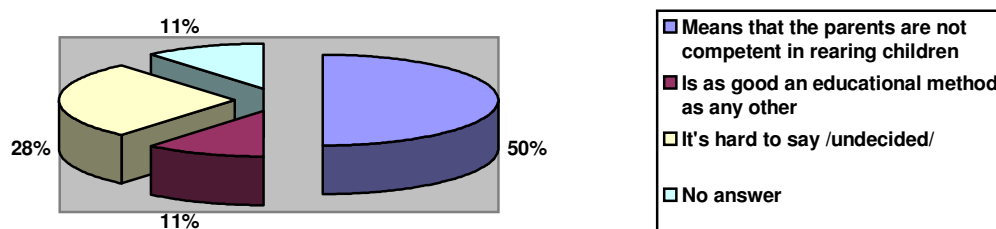


Figure 14. Attitudes toward corporal punishment (or giving a child a hiding), in percentage terms. Do you think using corporal punishment of children, or giving a child a hiding...

The respondents' opinions, however, lack consistency. Despite the above mentioned statements, the participants believe that there are situations when a parent is entitled to use corporal punishment (see Figure 15). Forty percent of the teachers participating in the study would perceive giving a child a hiding as justified if the child committed a petty theft. Similarly, according to the respondents substance use (e.g., drinking alcohol or smoking cigarettes) is a sufficient reason to use corporal

punishment. Almost 20% of the participants see corporal punishment as justified when the child shows disrespect toward parents, or does not obey parents (see Table 2).

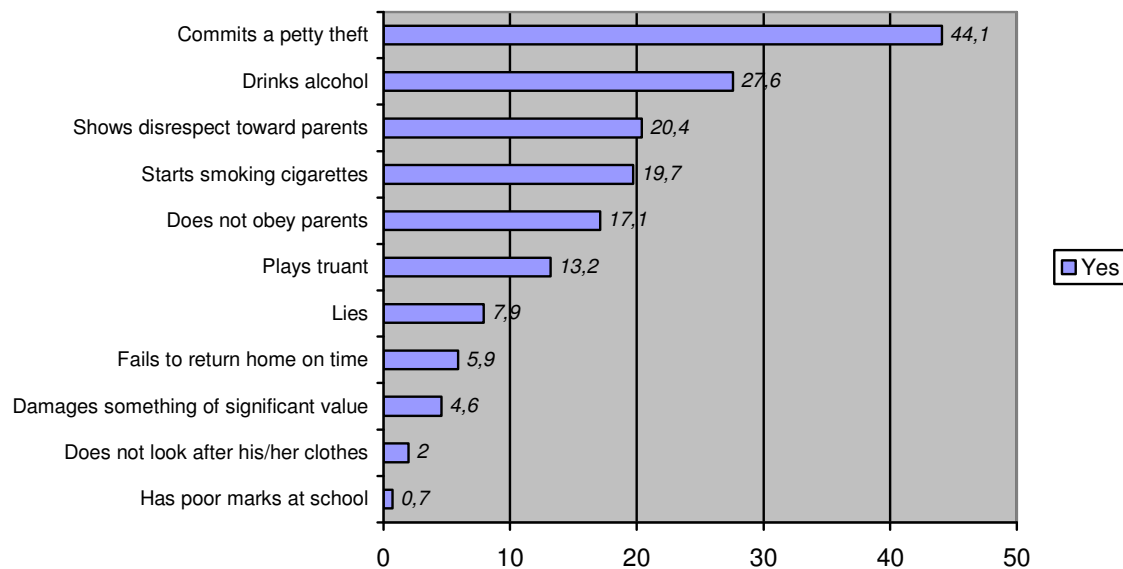


Figure 15. *In what situations do you consider beating a child justified or would use this form of punishment yourself? Do you think a child deserves a hiding if he or she ...*
Percentage of teachers who chose the "yes" answer.

Table 2. *Attitudes toward corporal punishment (or giving a child a hiding), in percentage terms. In what situations do you consider beating a child justified or would use this form of punishment yourself?*

Most people at least once in their lives got a hiding from their parents or caregivers. In what situations do you consider beating a child justified or would use this form of punishment yourself? Do you think a child deserves a hiding if he or she ...	Yes	No	It's hard to say	No answer	
Lies	7,9%	67,1%	22,4%	2,6%	100%
Fails to return home on time	5,9%	69,7%	21,7%	2,6%	100%
Has poor marks at school	0,7%	84,2%	12,5%	2,6%	100%
Plays truant	13,2%	63,8%	19,1%	3,9%	100%
Shows disrespect toward parents	20,4%	54,6%	23%	2%	100%
Damages something of significant value	4,6%	79,6%	13,8%	2%	100%
Does not look after clothes	2%	84,2%	11,8%	2%	100%
Does not obey parents	17,1%	54,6%	26,4%	2%	100%
Starts smoking cigarettes	19,7%	55,9%	22,4%	2%	100%
Drinks alcohol	27,6%	46,7%	23,7%	2%	100%
Commits a petty theft	44,1%	32,2%	21,7%	2%	100%

Respondents' personal experience

The way of perceiving the problem of child abuse depends on many factors, including knowledge about the realities of children's life in Latvia, media coverage of child abuse, and the respondents' personal experience (whether they have contact with abused children).

The questionnaire was designed not only to collect teachers' views and opinions on child abuse, but also gather information on their personal experience related to this problem. Thus, the respondents were asked whether they had encountered cases of abused children. If yes, what kind of abuse was it? When confronted with child abuse, did they intervene? If yes, what kind of intervention was it? If not, why did they decide not to intervene? All those questions concerned the teacher's experience in the past year.

The collected data suggest that in their work teachers are most likely to encounter cases of emotional neglect. Such experiences were reported by more than 30% of the respondents. 29% teachers met with children who experience severely neglect. A slightly lower proportion – but still over 20% – had contact with child victims of domestic violence. Five percent of the respondents encountered children who had been sexually abused (see Figure 16).

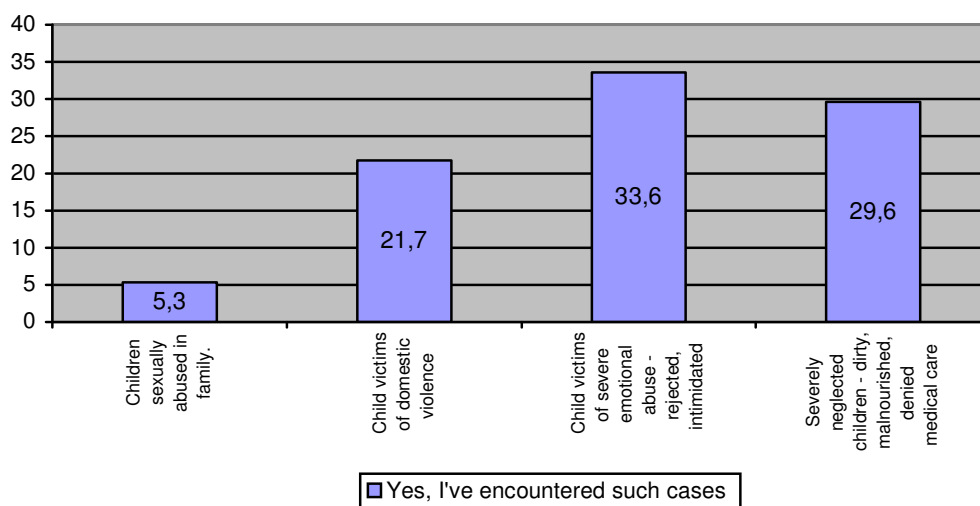


Figure 16. Percentage of teachers who, in the year preceding the study, encountered cases of child abuse among students attending their schools.

By comparing Figure 16 with the respondents' earlier perceptions of the prevalence of child abuse in their schools (Figures 8, 9, 10), we may conclude that teachers estimate the scale of child abuse basing on their personal experience. According to the respondents, children are most likely to be emotionally abused, neglected, and physically abused in their families – this is what follows from teachers' personal experience. As the respondents have been least likely to have contact with cases of sexual abuse, they estimate that this form of abuse affects the lowest proportion of children in their environment. Such perceptions are consistent with research findings which show that sexual abuse – as compared to other forms of child maltreatment – is less frequent, more difficult to “detect” by persons with no sufficient knowledge about symptoms of sexual abuse, and less likely to be disclosed by abused children themselves.

A person who is able to notice a sexually abused child in his/her environment, is expected to undertake action to help the child. This is even more true for persons who professionally work with children and are often referred to as “educators”.

As shown in Figure 12, teachers participating in the study see intervention as necessary when parents' behaviour toward their child is abusive. However, asked about their experience in intervening, the respondents admit that they do not undertake action in every single case (Figure 17). A relatively low proportion of the participants (22%) report that they intervene whenever they have contact with an abused child. Thirty two percent of the teachers say they decide to act “sometimes”.

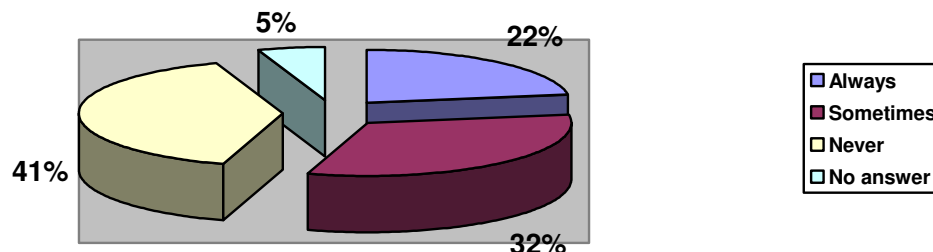


Figure 17. In cases of child abuse that you have encountered in the past year, did you take any action? (%).

Among the teachers who report taking action (both groups: those who intervene „always” and those who respond to abuse „sometimes”), the most

frequently chosen intervention measures are actions targeted directly at the child victim or at the abusive parent. Such interventions usually involve talking to the parents (61,5%) and to the child (51,6% - see Figure 18). Many teachers (almost 60%) decided to report cases of child abuse to social worker. A relatively high proportion of the participants (44%) report that they notified a health care facility.

Teachers were relatively unlikely to report that the information about child abuse went beyond the teacher–parent/s–child triangle, at least not on their initiative. Some respondents (37.1%) said that they had reported cases of child abuse to their superiors.

Surprisingly, only 5 - 11% of the respondents noted that their interventions involved reporting the case to the law enforcement institutions(!). This is especially disturbing considering the fact that 5.3% said they had encountered cases of child sexual abuse! Moreover, a significant proportion of the respondents had contact with child victims of physical violence, which is illegal in Latvia. This makes the low percentage of cases reported to law enforcement institutions even more alarming.

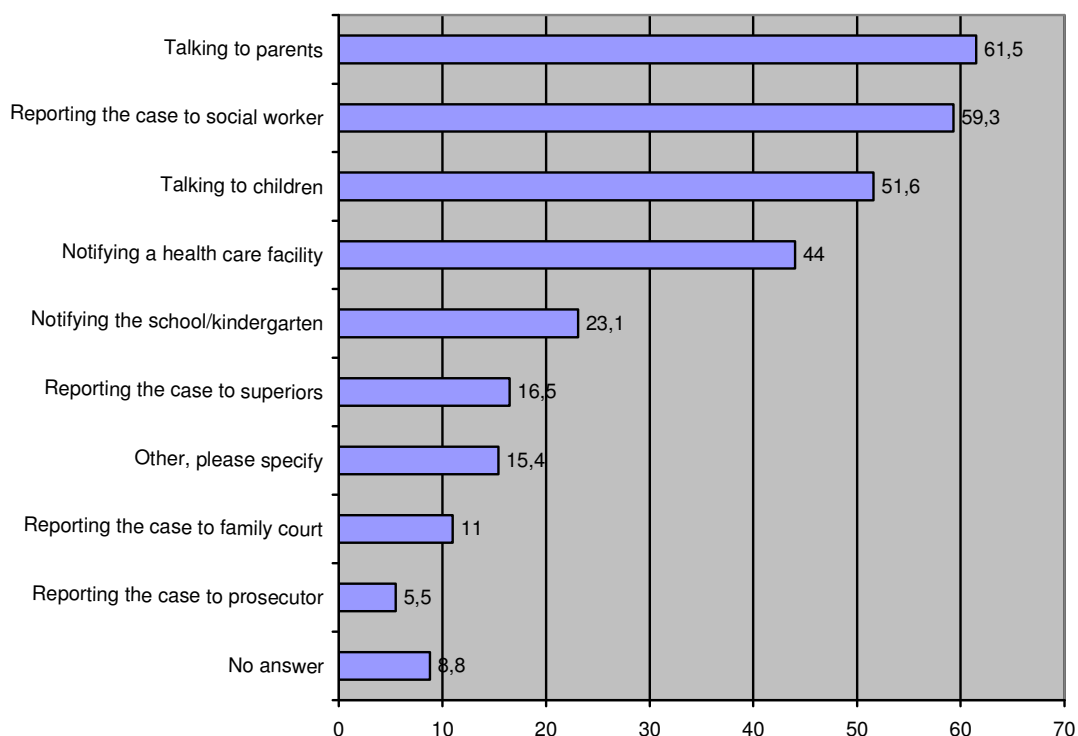


Figure 18. *Types of actions undertaken by teachers when confronted with cases of child abuse.*

We should not ignore the alarming fact that as many as 41% of the respondents reported to have failed to intervene despite knowing that a child was a victim of abuse!

The respondents who reported that they intervened sometimes or never, were asked about their reasons for not trying to help abused children. As shown in Figure 19, a majority of them would not or could not explain why they did not intervene. Those of the respondents, who provided an answer, were most likely to mention one of two reasons: their feeling of incompetence in the area of helping children, and their belief that such an intervention would not really help the child.

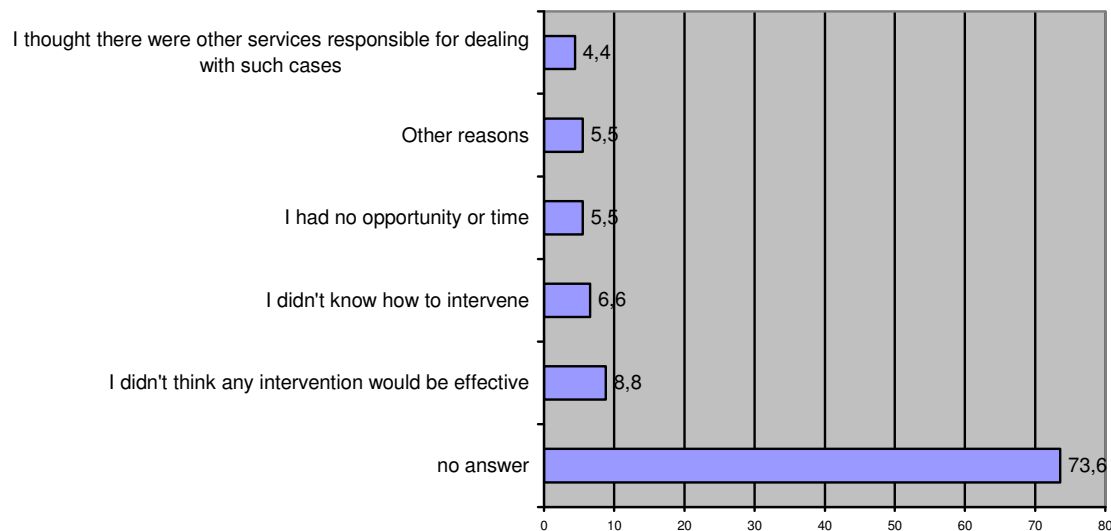


Figure 19. *In situations when you did not undertake any action, what were the most frequent reasons of your decision not to intervene? (%)*, N=97

Can children be protected from abuse?

The problem of undertaking or failing to undertake action is related to the way teachers perceive the problem of child abuse. Do they believe this problem can be effectively reduced? How do they perceive the potential to provide effective help for abused children in Latvia? Do they think that the state should control – through legal regulations – the ways parents treat their children?

The respondents were asked to assess institutional help services available to abused children in Latvia. They could express their opinions on the work of several professional groups responsible for child protection. At the same time, they evaluated the level of professional knowledge displayed by these groups.

The respondents vary in their opinions about the extent to which child abuse can be effectively prevented. Although only 2% responded that nothing could be done to prevent the problem, 45% believe that prevention can be effective only to a limited degree. Twenty six percent of the teachers perceive child abuse as highly preventable (see Figure 20). The belief that child abuse may be effectively reduced is crucial to confronting with the problem successfully. If a teacher does not believe that an abused child may be helped, he/she cannot be expected to undertake any action to actually help such a child.

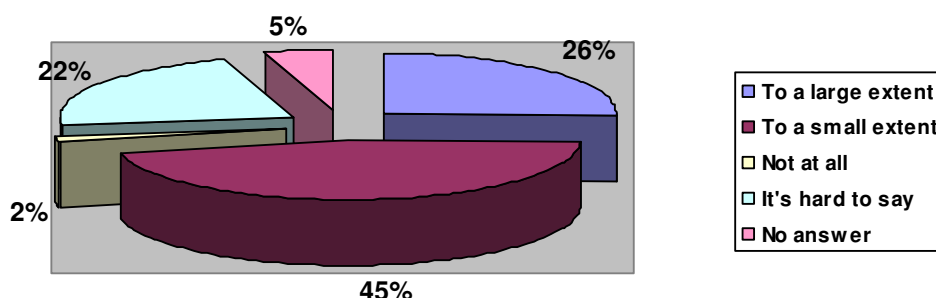


Figure 20. Answers to the question: Do you think child abuse can be prevented?(%)

One method of preventing child abuse is through legal regulations, i.e., making various forms of child abuse criminal offences. Enacting laws to protect children is a solution applied in many countries, primarily with regard to behaviours related to child sexual abuse, physical violence, and – less frequently – corporal punishment of children. Many European countries have introduced (or attempted to introduce) regulations concerning the use of corporal punishment in the past ten to twenty years. In each case such legislative initiatives triggered broad public debates on the extent to which the state should interfere in the parent–child relationship. Views expressed during such discussions vary tremendously and depend on many different factors. How is the problem perceived by Latvian teachers?

A vast majority of the respondents support the general statement that the way parents treat their children should be regulated by law, and believe that if this can help fight child abuse, such legal measures should be applied.

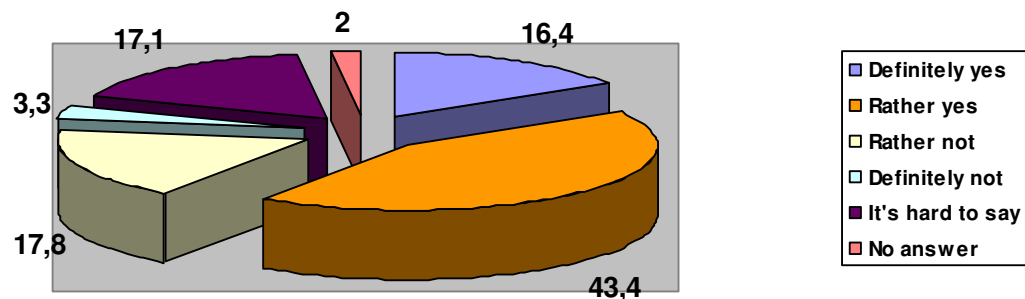


Figure 21. *In your opinion, should the way parents treat their children be regulated by law?(%)*

The participants' answers, however, are not as consistent, when it comes to a specific aspect of such legal regulations – i.e., whether the law should regulate the use of corporal punishment of children (see Figure 22). Almost fifty percent of the respondents still support the idea of imposing a legal ban on corporal punishment, at the same time, however, a higher proportion (as compared to responses concerning general legislation) definitely oppose making such forms of punishment illegal.

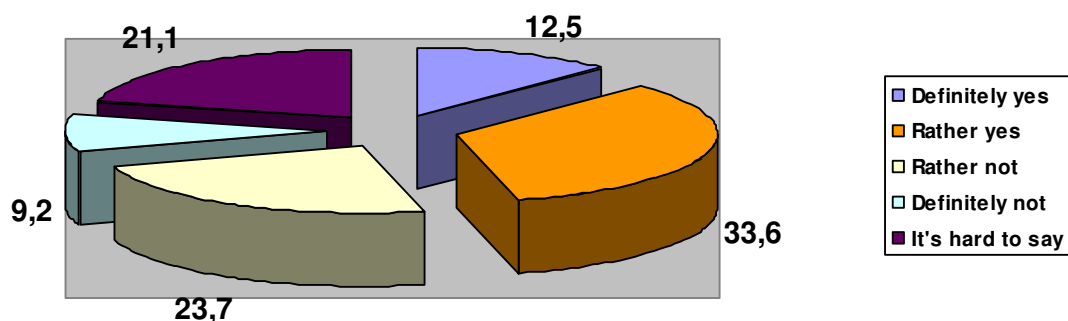


Figure 22. *In your opinion, should corporal punishment of children be legally banned? (%)*

Nevertheless, even the best legal regulations are not enough to reduce child abuse effectively. Apart from a clear definition of how a child may not be treated, it is

crucial to provide available and effective services and institutions, able to respond to any information suggesting that a child may be a victim of abuse.

The respondents were asked to evaluate help services available to abused children in Latvia. Their assessments are optimistic: more than half of the participants (64.5%) believe that the available services ensure that child victims are offered genuine, effective help.

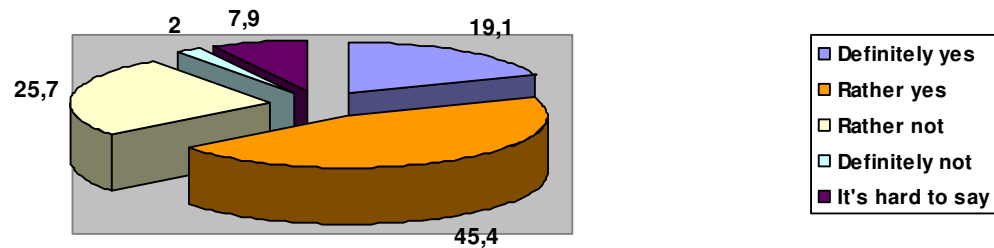


Figure 23. Assessment of the existing institutional help services for abused children. (percentages of answers to the question: In your opinion, do available help services enable providing real help for abused children?)

When asked to specify which institutions should intervene when a child is a victim of abuse, the respondents were most likely to expect such reactions from health care centers and social services – especially in cases of physical violence, emotional abuse, and neglect (Figures 24, 26, 27). Only with regard to child sexual abuse the respondents were most likely to answer that such an intervention should be undertaken by the police and other law-enforcement institutions, but – in respondent's opinion - health and social services still have important role in the intervention in this kind cases (Figure 25).

The participants believe that the largest number of institutions should be involved in interventions undertaken in response to behaviours that violate the Latvian law, i.e., sexual offences and corporal punishment. According to the respondents, these forms of abuse require intervention by law-enforcement institutions, social services, and health care institutions.

As far as emotional abuse and neglect are concerned, teachers participating in the study think that interventions by social services should be accompanied by adequate actions undertaken by the school or kindergarten and health care centers.

Only a small percentage of the respondents (less than 10%) believe that emotional abuse and neglect require interventions by the police. It is worth paying attention to the fact that there were persons who believed that no institutions needed to be notified about cases of corporal punishment, physical violence and emotional abuse (see Figure 24 and 27).

Such a distribution of responsibility among institutions is consistent with the respondents' personal experience (see Figure 18), they are most likely to report undertaking interventions which involve not only themselves, but also health and social services institutions.

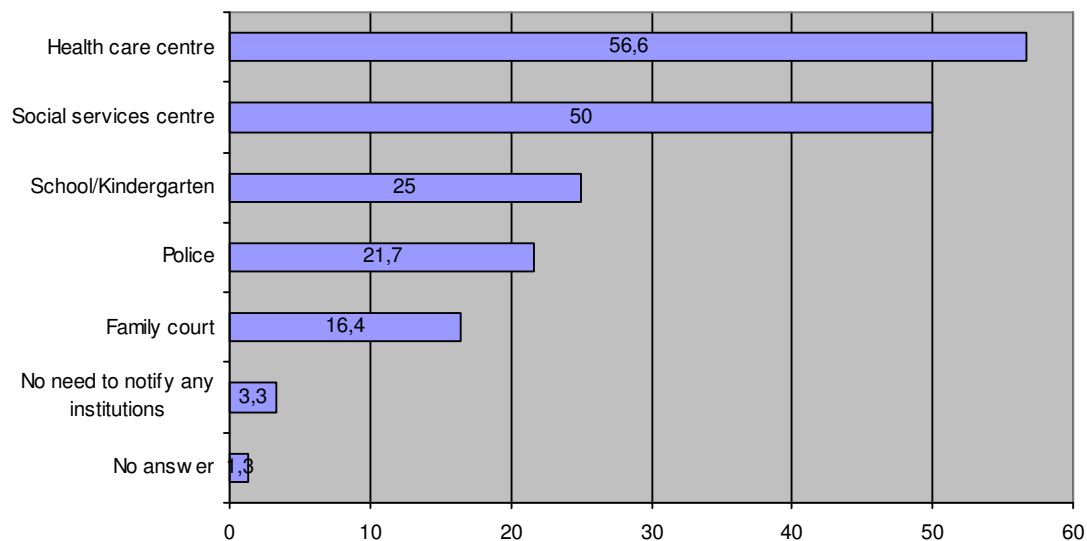


Figure 24. Respondents' opinions (%) on which institutions should intervene when physical punishment is used against a child in the family (the participants were asked to tick all institutions that, in their opinion, should take some action in such cases).

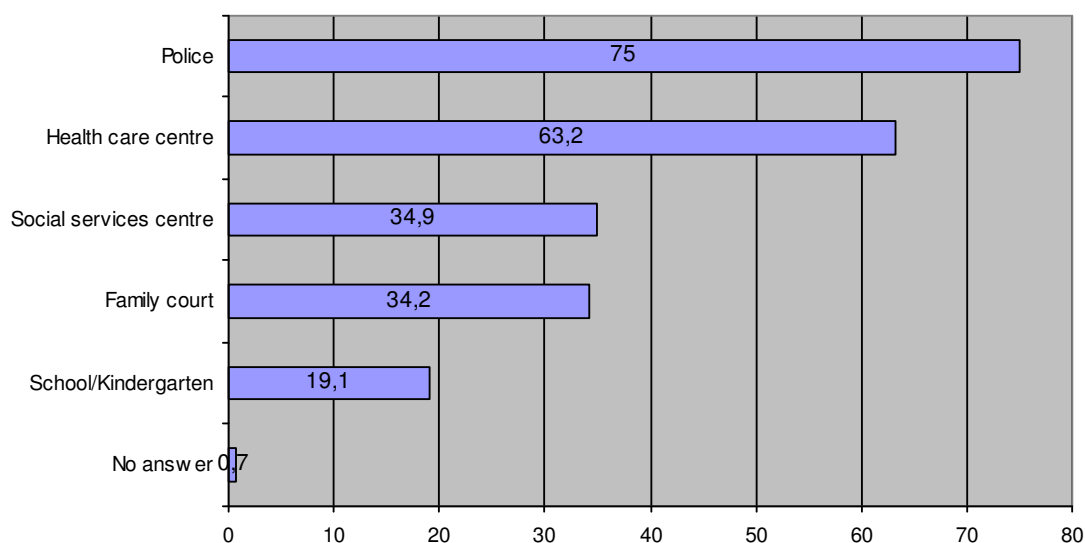


Figure 25. Respondents' opinions (%) on which institutions should intervene when a child is forced to sexual practices by a family member (the participants were asked to tick all institutions that, in their opinion, should take some action in such cases).

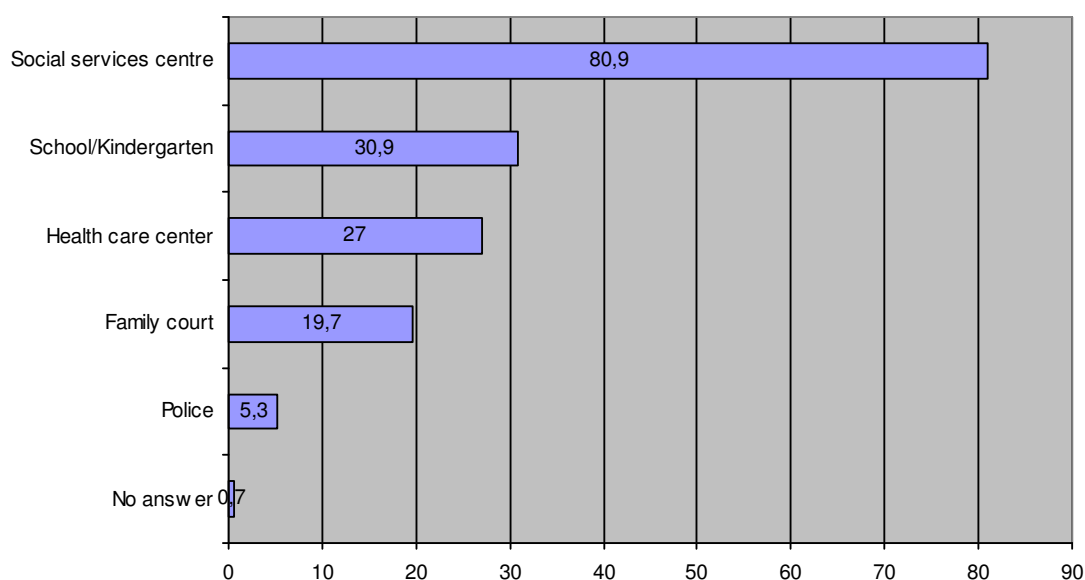


Figure 26. Respondents' opinions (%) on which institutions should intervene when a child is neglected – dirty, hungry, or inappropriately dressed (the participants were asked to tick all institutions that, in their opinion, should take some action in such cases).

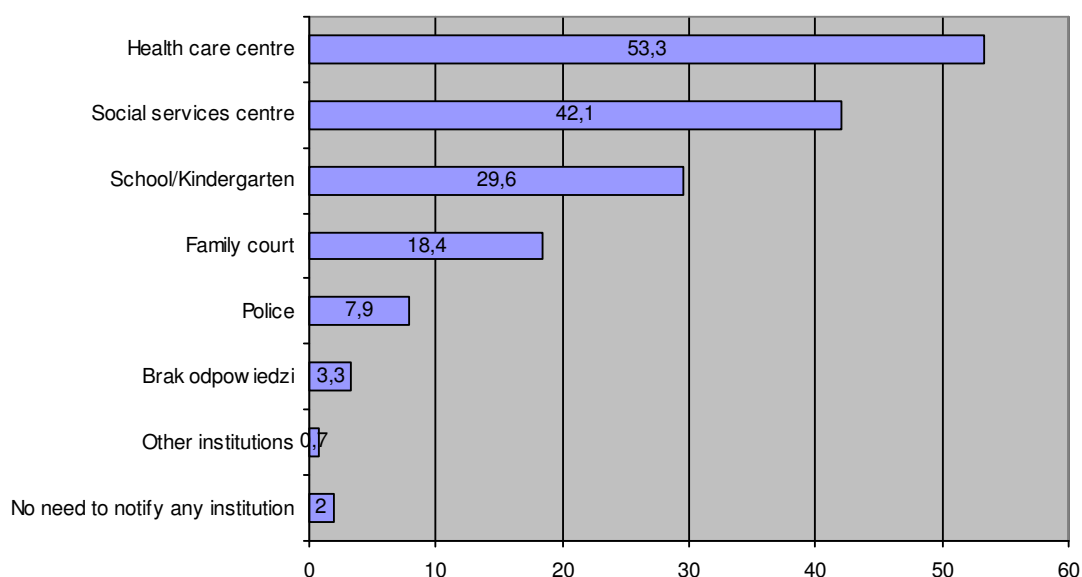


Figure 27. Respondents' opinions (%) on which institutions should intervene when parents yell at a child, humiliate and reject him/her (the participants were asked to tick all institutions that, in their opinion, should take some action in such cases).

The respondents were asked to evaluate the competence of various professional responsible for protecting children. How they perceptions the competence and engagement in helping abused children of policemen, social workers, doctors in local community, teachers?

Asked about the scope of competence of various professional groups responsible for protecting children, the respondents assess that these groups' capabilities are too limited to provide effective help for abused children (see Figure 28). Teachers participating in the study think that it is the lack of competence that prevents police officers, social workers, doctors or teachers from helping children. The respondents' attribute the highest level of effectiveness to activities undertaken by representatives of their own professional group (teachers), by school counsellors and psychologists, and by social workers. Such perceptions may result from the fact that the participants have the most extensive knowledge about these professionals groups' activities (as we can see in Figure 18, teachers are most likely to report undertaking interventions which involve not only themselves, but also social services institutions).

The participants were most critical about the work of policemen and health care professionals in community clinics. Teachers participating in the study believe that policemen and doctors could provide better help for abused children if they fully exercised their existing powers.

But it should be highlighted that the respondents are generally optimistic in evaluate the competence of different professional groups responsible for protecting children. Teachers think that most teachers, social workers, policemen, doctors provided good protection for children.

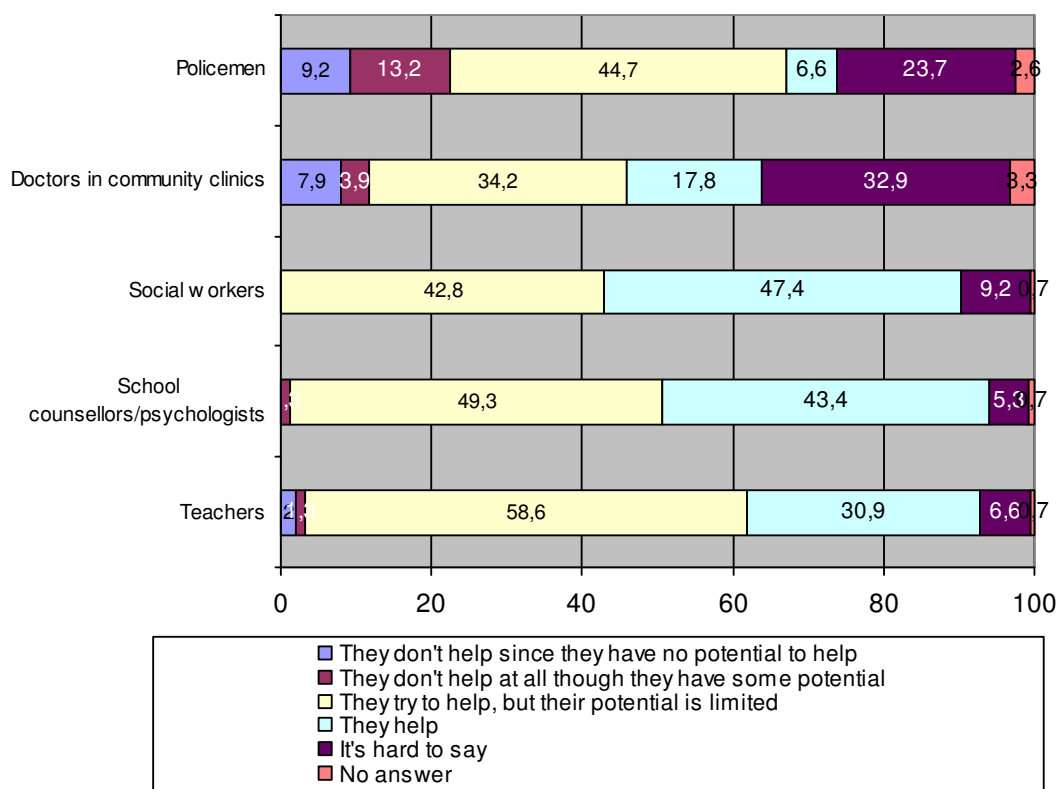


Figure 28. Evaluations of help offered by various professional groups to children maltreated in families (%).

As shown in Figure 28, judgments concerning actions undertaken by representatives of various professional groups depend not only on their scope of competence, but also on their level on engagement in helping abused children. Engagement in helping victims of child abuse may be related to the level of knowledge about the problem (e.g., on how abuse affects children's development). This relationship may also work

in the opposite direction – lack of knowledge or insufficient knowledge about child abuse may lead to low levels of engagement in fighting this problem.

The respondents are divided when they evaluate knowledge of all professional groups listed in the questionnaire about the problem of child abuse – insufficient both to diagnose such cases and to undertake effective interventions (Figures 29 and 30). Teachers believe that most of professionals groups listed in questionnaire have knowledge about the problem, but almost 40% of responders think that this knowledge is insufficient. Teachers evaluated that social workers and school consellers have the best competence

These assessments are especially disturbing in relation to the level of knowledge displayed by teachers (the respondents' own professional group) and by school counsellors/psychologists, because – as follows from the participants' earlier reports – these are the groups that are most likely to undertake interventions. Therefore, it seems necessary to provide these professional groups with more extensive information on the problem of child abuse.

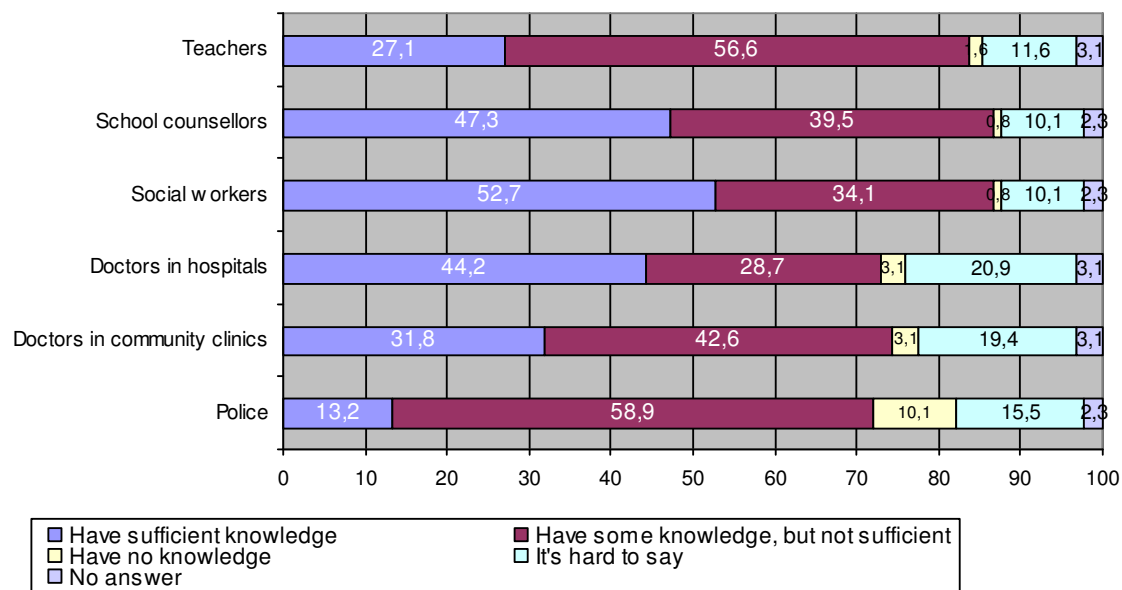


Figure 29. *Evaluations of various professional groups' knowledge related to diagnosing cases of child abuse (%)*.

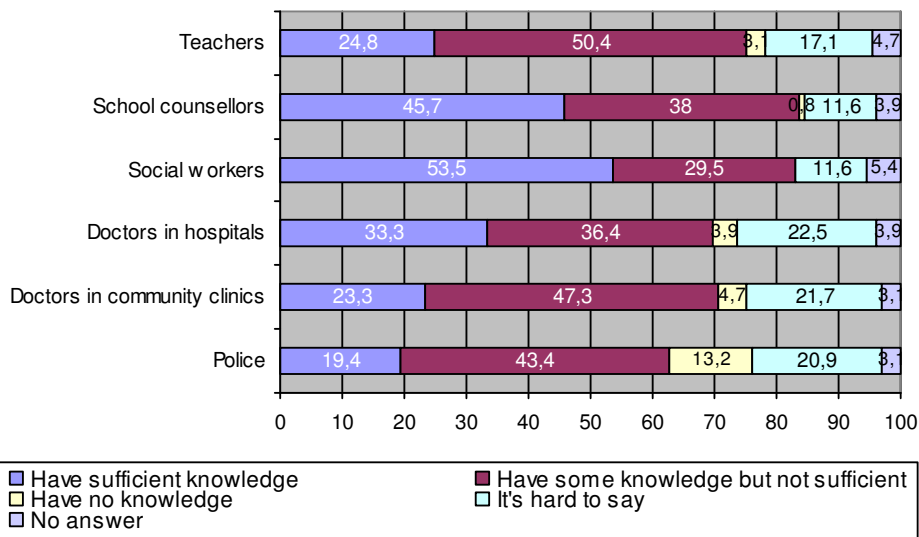


Figure 30. *Evaluations of various professional groups' knowledge related to intervening in cases of child abuse (%)*.

Asked about the quality of interventions in cases of child abuse, the respondents pointed to a lack of effective strategies of dealing with child abusers as the major problem in this area. Nearly half of the respondents believe that all too often it is not possible to isolate the offender from his/her victim, court sentences are too lenient, and no therapeutic support is offered to the abuser. As a result, the respondents are highly sceptical about the effectiveness of efforts to reduce child abuse in Latvia (see Table 3).

Moreover, nearly 40% of the sample think that there are too many cases when the investigation and court procedures take too much time, are carried out under conditions unfavourable for the child (e.g., no possibility to isolate the offender from the child victim), and may lead to secondary traumatization (e.g., interviewing children in child-unfriendly settings).

Furthermore, half of the respondents perceived lack of cooperation among institutions responsible for protecting children, which additionally impedes the effectiveness of child protection efforts (see Table 4).

Table 3. *Evaluations of activities undertaken to protect abused children.*

In your opinion, do the following problems occur in the process of intervention in cases of child maltreatment in families?	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	It's hard to say	No answer	Total
Failure to undertake intervention by the police when child abuse has been reported	21,1%	35,5%	6,6%	34,2%	2,6%	100%
Withdrawal of the report on criminal offence by the reporting person (despite actual abuse experienced by the child)	15,1%	34,2%	3,3%	43,4%	3,9%	100%
Cases are discontinued by prosecutors (despite actual abuse experienced by the child)	4,6%	19,1%	7,2%	65,1%	3,9%	100%
Inappropriate conditions and procedures of interviewing children	17,1%	22,4%	4,6%	51,3%	4,6%	100%
Lack of possibility to isolate the offender from the victim	42,1%	20,4%	3,9%	28,3%	5,3%	100%
Lack of possibility to provide treatment for the offender	23,7%	19,1%	7,9%	44,1%	5,3%	100%
Too lenient sentences	52,6%	15,1%	0,7%	25,7%	5,9%	100%
Failure to execute family courts' sentences	19,1%	24,3%	3,9%	46,1%	6,6%	100%
Lengthy investigation and court procedures	45,4%	12,5%	2%	33,6%	6,6%	100%

How to help? Help strategies in respondents' eyes

The study also sought information about the respondents' opinions on public policies toward victims of child abuse and abusers.

The respondents strongly oppose the view that keeping the child in the family should always be treated as the highest-priority goal, for they believe there are cases when the child must be separated from the family to be effectively protected. It is especially true in situations when a parent is suspected of abusing the child sexually.

Table 4. *Do you agree with the statement:*

Do you agree with the statement:	Definitely agree	Rather agree	Rather disagree	Definitely disagree	It's hard to say	No answer	Total
One should always try to keep the child in the family, notwithstanding his/her parents' behaviour?	0,7%	9,9%	45,4%	30,3%	13,2%	0,7%	100%
A parent suspected of sexually abusing his/her child should be isolated from the family until the case is investigated and resolved.	70,4%	21,7%	0,7%	2%	4,6%	0,7%	100%
Many children suffer violence and abuse in their families, because other people don't react to their maltreatment.	18,4%	55,3%	7,9%	-	17,1%	1,3%	100%
Child protection services rarely cooperate with each other; instead, they often undertake uncoordinated actions.	11,8%	39,5%	14,5%	1,3%	31,6%	1,3%	100%

Assessing policies toward child abusers (see Table 3), the respondents pointed to a lack of therapeutic services. Treatment of abusers is an important component of efforts to reduce child abuse, recognized also by the respondents – more than 30% of the sample perceive therapy as equally important as punishment. This applies both to child sexual abusers and to offenders responsible for using physical violence against children (see Figures 31 and 32).

It is interesting to compare the distributions of responses to questions about punishing a parent who has sexually abused his/her child and a parent guilty of using physical violence against his/her child (see Figures 31 and 32). The respondents are more strictly for parent, who sexual abused their child - respondents are nearly unanimous in their opinion that punishment and deprivation of parental rights are the most adequate strategy toward child sexual abusers, they are more likely to suggest punishment and therapy as the best solution (better than punishment) in cases of physical violence.

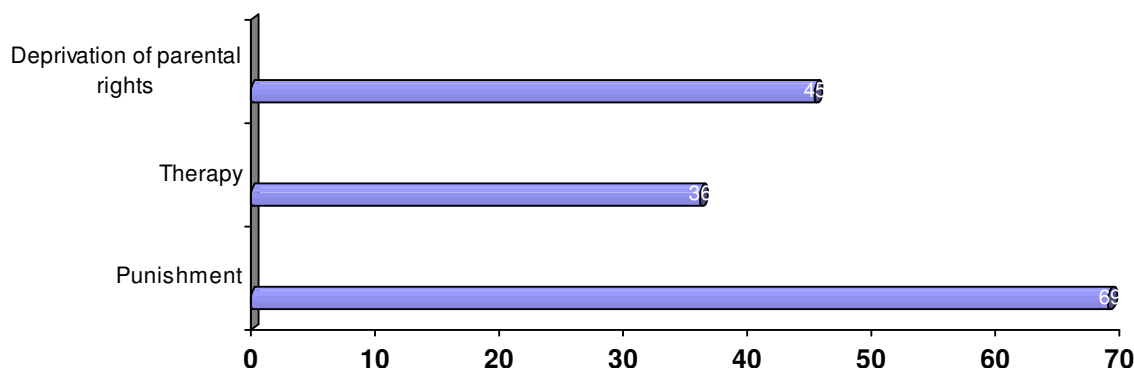


Figure 31. *Suggested strategies of dealing with a father who has sexually abused his child.*

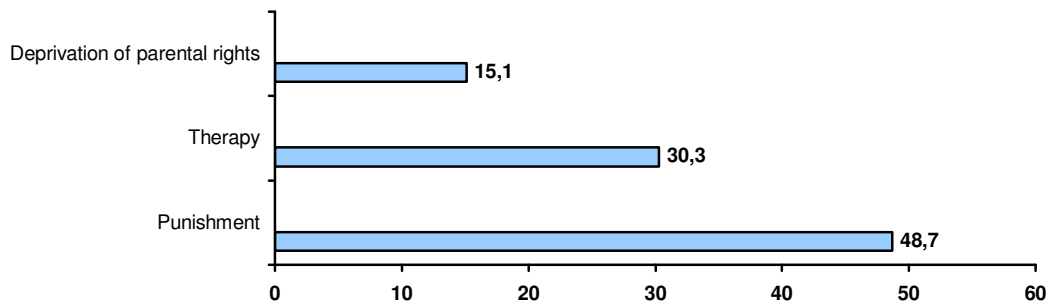


Figure 32. *Suggested strategies of dealing with a parent who has used physical violence against his/her child (i.e., has beaten the child severely, leading to injuries).*

Conclusions

To sum up:

- Teachers participating in the study perceive emotional abuse as the problem affecting the highest number of children. According to the respondents, apart from lack of interest shown by adults, children are likely to experience active forms of emotional abuse, such as calling names and verbal humiliation; more than half of the participants estimate that this form of abuse is experienced by more than 60% of children in Latvia.
- According to the respondents, in the past decade there has been an increase in the prevalence of children's loneliness, especially the problem of leaving children unattended.
- The respondents are optimistic about the situation in their school, as compared to the national population of children. According to the participants, their student are twice less likely to experience abuse than Latvian children in general.
- The participants support the idea that some aspects of the parent–child relationship should be regulated by law. In Latvia beating children has been legally banned since 1998, but only 46% teachers support a legal ban on corporal punishment of children.
- The respondents, however, are inconsistent in opposing corporal punishment. Although they consider corporal punishment a poor child-rearing method, they

also believe beating children is justified in certain situations (e.g., when a child commits a petty theft or starts using substances), and they don't think that intervention is needed when parents are spanking child.

- More than half of the participants (64.5%) believe that the available services ensure then child victims are offered genuine, effective help and the competence of various professional groups responsible for protecting children is sufficient.
- The respondents suggest that both teachers and other members of school personnel, as well as representatives of health care services, and social services, law enforcement, have too limited knowledge about child abuse.
- The respondents evaluate that help services are available to abused children in their country – they point to a lack of cooperation among child protection institutions, lengthy court procedures, and ineffective public policy toward child abusers as the fundamental problems requiring immediate improvement.
- The participants call for improving the policy toward child sexual abusers – through ensuring that the abuser is isolated from the victim, passing harsh sentences, and making treatment services available to sexual offenders.