

# **Sofia teachers' attitudes toward child abuse**

## **Research report**

Nobody's Children Foundation

2009 - Partners Bulgaria Foundation

2005 - Social Activities and Practices Institute

The report presents findings from a survey conducted in Bulgaria in 2009 within a research programme carried out in seven East European Countries (Bulgaria, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Ukraine) – in comparison with the results of a 2005 study. The research was conducted within the programme called *Childhood without Violence: Toward Better Protection of Children in Eastern Europe*, which has been implemented since 2005 as a five-year project coordinated by the Nobody's Children Foundation and funded by the OAK Foundation. More information is available on [www.fdn.pl](http://www.fdn.pl) and [www.canee.net](http://www.canee.net).

## **Methodology**

The main objective of the surveys 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 surveys sought answers to the following research questions:

- How do the respondents estimate the scale of a wide range of abusive behaviours in the participant countries?
- 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?

The studies comprised two parts:

1. Two omnibus questions asked to a nationwide, representative sample of adults.

In each of the seven countries the same two questions were asked:

- What percentage of children in our country experience corporal punishment (or beating as punishment) in their families?
  - In your opinion, is beating a child as punishment a childrearing method, which:
    - 1) may be used whenever the parent believes it is going to be effective
    - 2) should not be used in general, but is justified in some situations
    - 3) should never be used
    - 4) it's difficult to say
2. A survey of teachers' attitudes toward child abuse; in each participant country the sample consisted of teachers working at primary schools in the capital city.

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 31 items which had been previously used in Polish research programmes concerning child abuse (Sajkowska, Siemaszko, 1998; Fluderska, Sajkowska, 2001).

### **Bulgarians' opinions about the use of corporal punishment of children**

The survey of Bulgarians' attitudes toward the use of corporal punishment of children was conducted in 2005 and in 2009. Information was collected during 'face to face' individual interviews at the locations of respondents' residences respondents were interviewed.

25% of adult Bulgarians believe that corporal punishment is experienced by over 50% of children in Bulgaria. 4 years ago this belief was held by the same percent of the respondents. This means that people in Bulgaria have not observed any significant change in the situation of children.

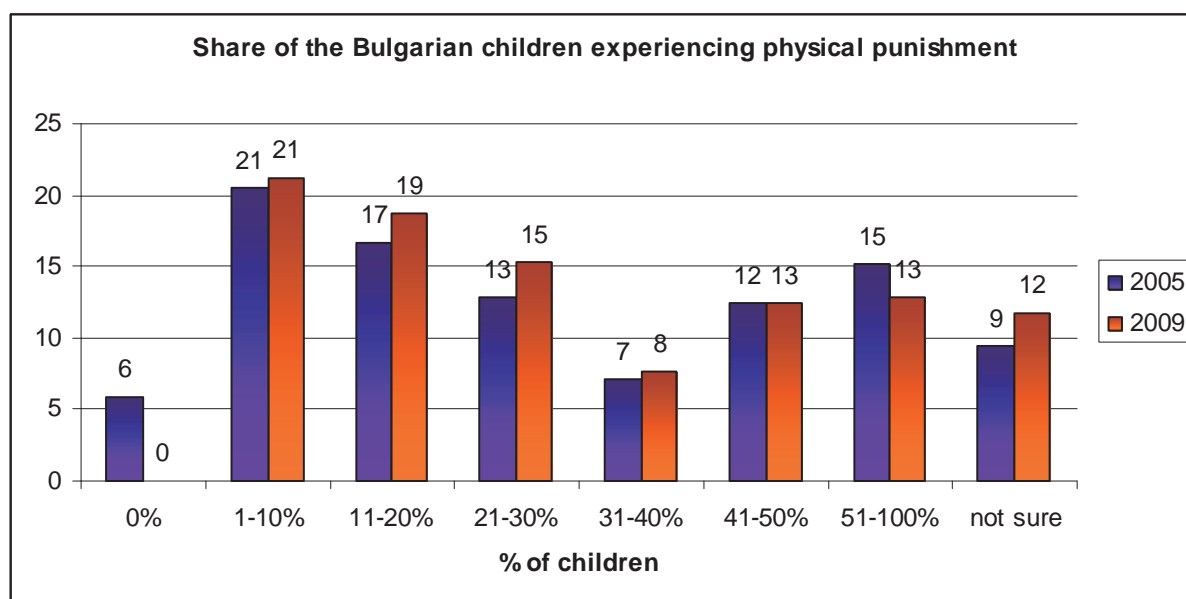


Figure I. *Estimated prevalence of the use of corporal punishment of children in Bulgaria.*

The evaluation of corporal punishment as a child-rearing method changed and corporal punishment is not accepted and remains on almost unchanged level since the 2005 survey. About 35% (38% in 2005) of Bulgarians still think it is justified in some situations but half of the respondents (47% in 2005) believe it should never be used.

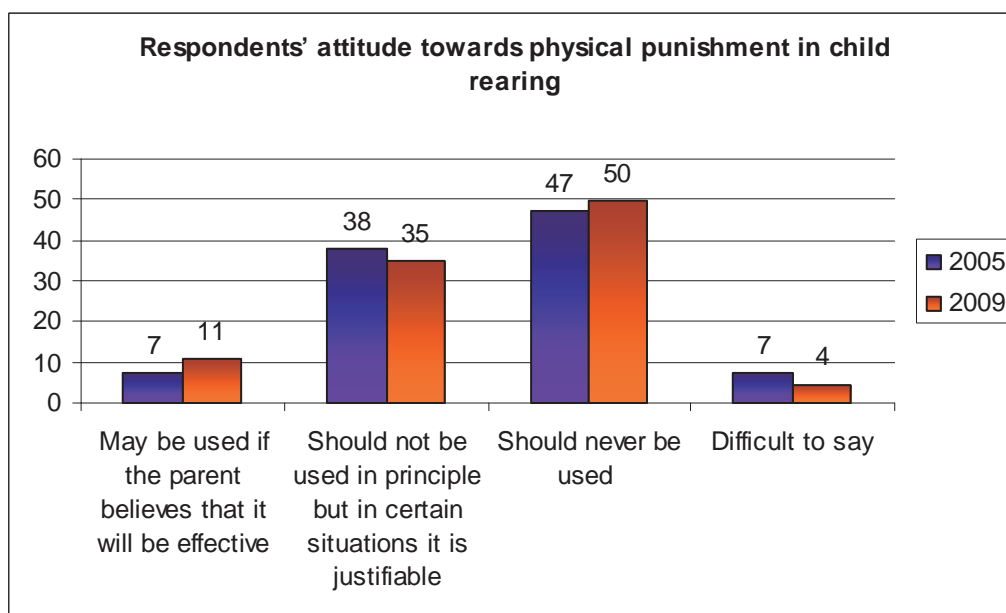


Figure II. *Evaluation of corporal punishment as a child-rearing method.*

The survey of Bulgarians' opinions on the use of corporal punishment of children shows that a large proportion of the general adult population still approves its use in some situations. At the same time, more and more people believe that the prevalence of corporal

punishment is increasing. This may result from the growth of economical and social instability in Bulgaria.

### **Teacher's attitudes toward corporal punishment of children**

#### **The sample**

The 2009 survey was conducted on a sample of 202 teachers. A vast majority of the sample (92%) were women, just as in the 2005 study (95%). Invariably, teachers under 45 constituted the largest subgroup of the respondents (46%).

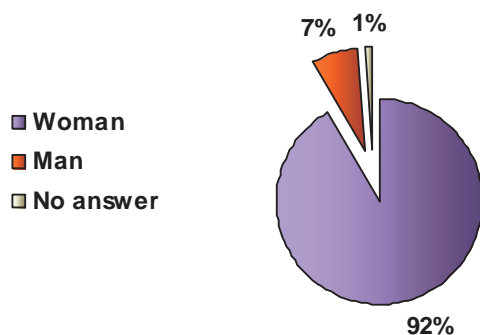


Figure 1. *Respondents by gender*

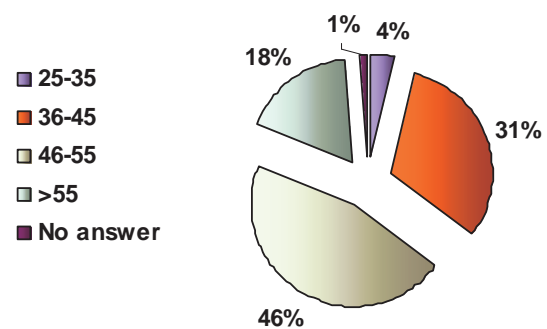


Figure 2. *Respondents by age*

In comparison to the 2005 study, the group of teachers with long professional experience (more than 10 years of teaching) has increased – from 81% to 89%.

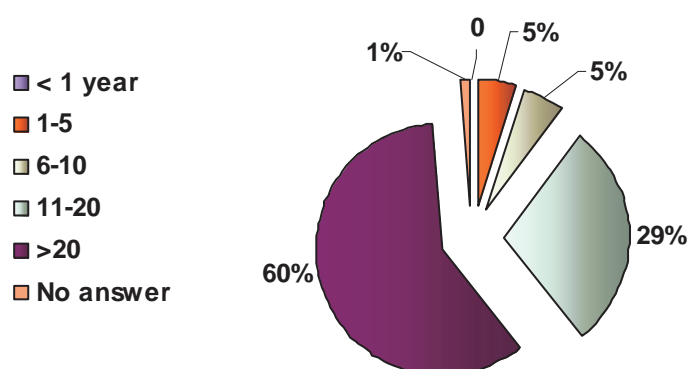


Figure 3. *Years of experience in the current profession*

Most respondents (85%) have their own children, relative to the 2005 survey this group remains unchanged.

80% of the respondents described themselves as religious or deeply religious (increase by 10% in comparison to 2005), 15% as hesitant about religion, and 3% as non-believers; 1% of the teachers did not answer the question.

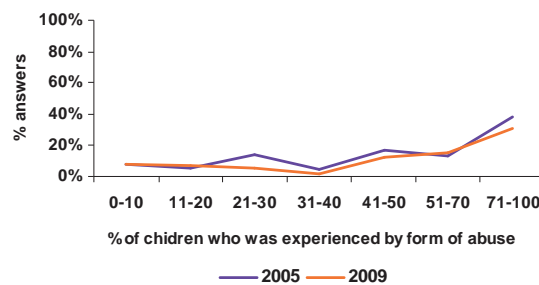
### **Prevalence of child abuse**

How is child abuse perceived by the respondents? Do they see it as a serious social problem? What has changed over the past 4 years? The perceived importance of the child abuse problem has a direct effect on teachers' responses to the phenomenon. A teacher who believes that child abuse is a marginal problem may ignore or underestimate its symptoms and, consequently, fail to help a child who needs help.

In one of the first questions the respondents were asked to estimate the prevalence and dynamics of the child abuse problem. As presented below (Figures 4a – 4h), teachers vary in their opinions about what percentage of children experience abuse. In the past 4 years, their estimations of the prevalence of various forms of child abuse in Bulgaria have changed only slightly.

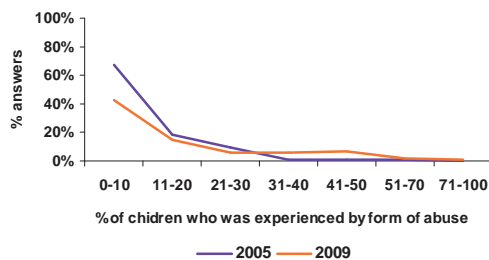
Figures 4. *Estimated prevalence of different forms of child abuse – in percentage terms – with the entire population of children in Bulgaria constituting 100%.*

**4a. Spanking as punishment**

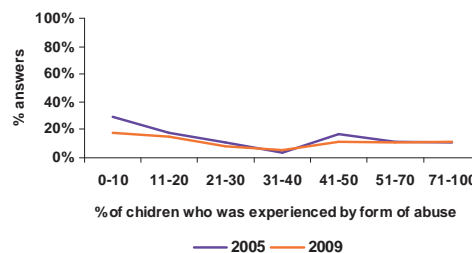


According to the respondents Bulgarian children are most likely to experience spanking as punishment. According to 46% of the respondents more than 50% of Bulgarian children experience this form of abuse (51% in 2005).

**4b. Severe corporal punishment**

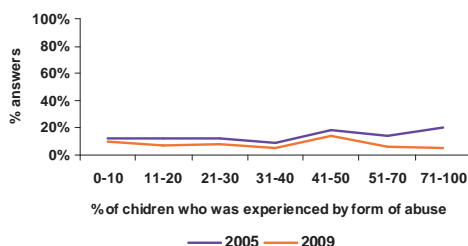


**4c. Slapping in the face**

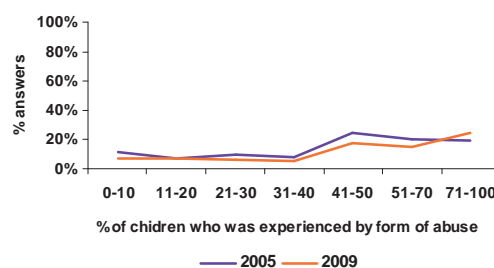


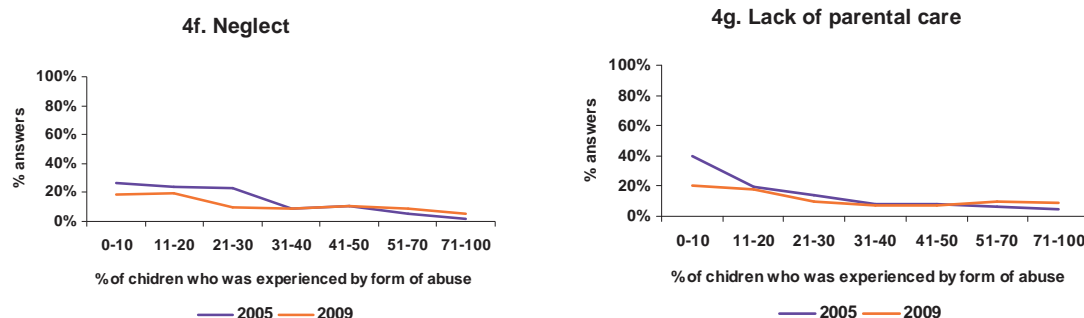
The most optimistic estimations concern the prevalence of severe corporal punishment; the largest proportion of the respondents (50%) believe that this form of abuse is experienced by fewer than 10% of children in Bulgaria. The respondents found it difficult to estimate the prevalence of slapping in the face: for this question their responses were almost evenly distributed along the 0% to 100% scale

**4d. Calling names, verbal humiliation**

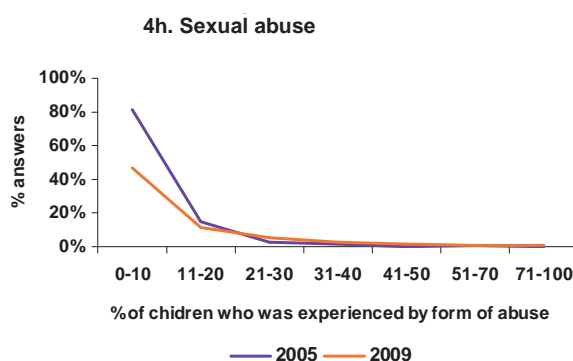


**4e. Lack of interest in the child's problems**





The respondents also found it the difficult to estimate the prevalence of emotional abuse, however they are rather pessimistic about this issue. 40% believe that more than 50% children in Bulgaria experienced lack of interest in their problems. More optimistic estimations concern the prevalence of neglect / lack of parental care about 40% believe that this form of abuse is experienced by fewer than 10% of children in Bulgaria.

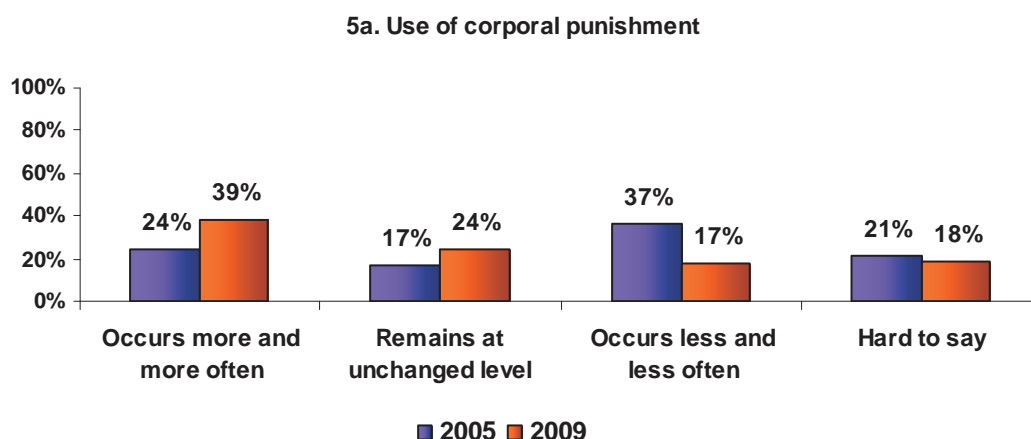


Notably, almost half (about 47%) of the respondents believe that sexual abuse affects less than 10% children in Bulgaria. The percentage of respondents who think this form of abuse is that rare significantly dropped during the past 4 years (81% in 2005).

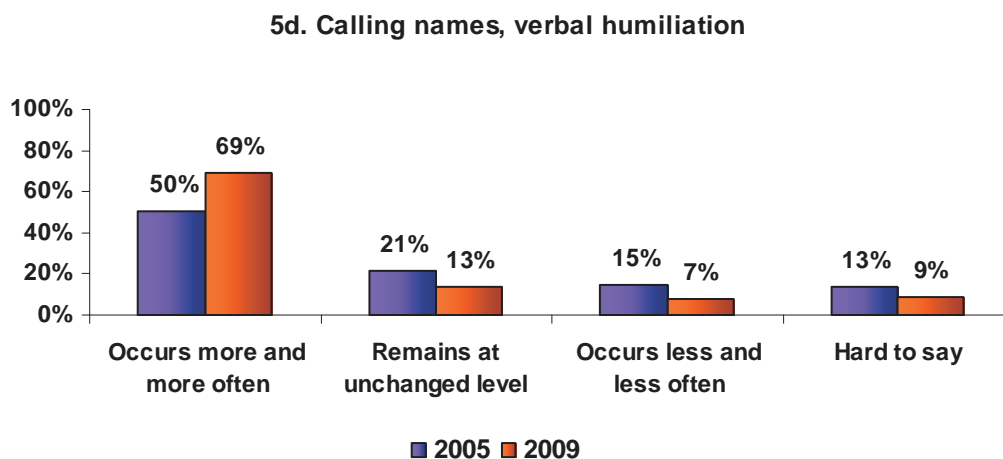
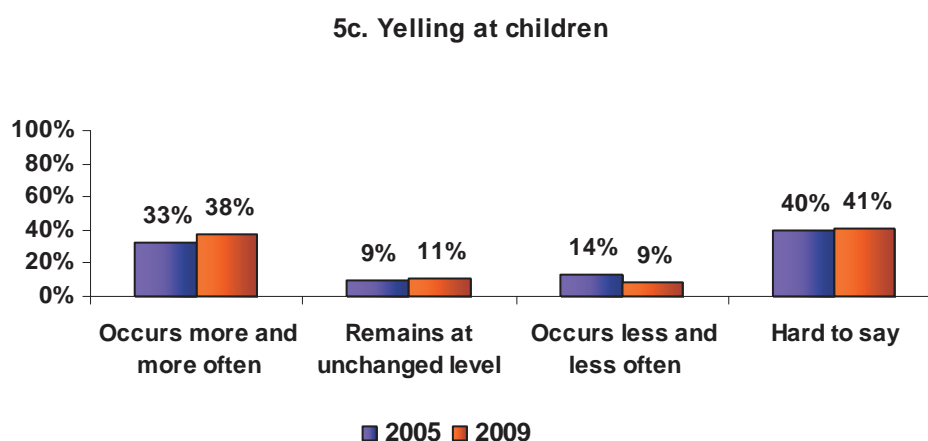
The respondents were also asked to assess the dynamics of child abuse over the past 10 years: is the prevalence of the problem changing? If yes, is the problem – in their opinion – getting more or less prevalent? How has the perceived dynamics changed over the past 4 years?



Figures 5. *Perceived change in parents' behaviour toward children over the past 10 years.*

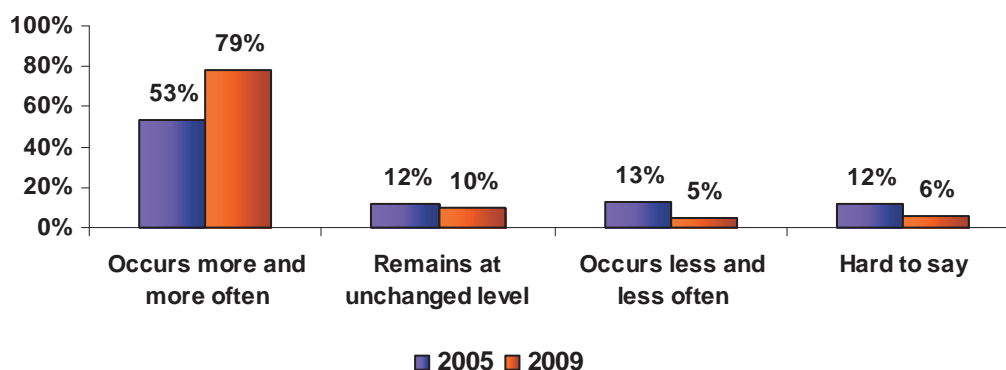


During the past 4 years the proportion of respondents who believe that corporal punishment and neglect of children occur with increasing frequency has grown. Large proportions of respondents observe growing tendencies for the use of corporal punishment (39%) (Figure 5a).

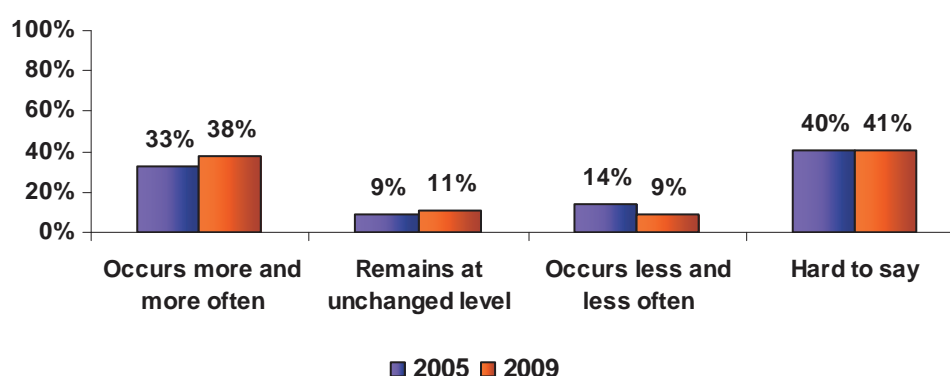


Similar dynamics over the past 4 years was observed in the area of verbal abuse of children (38% and 33%, and 50% and 69% of „Occurs more and more often” responses, respectively; see Figures 5c and 5d).

**5e. Leaving children unattended**



**5f. Sexual abuse**

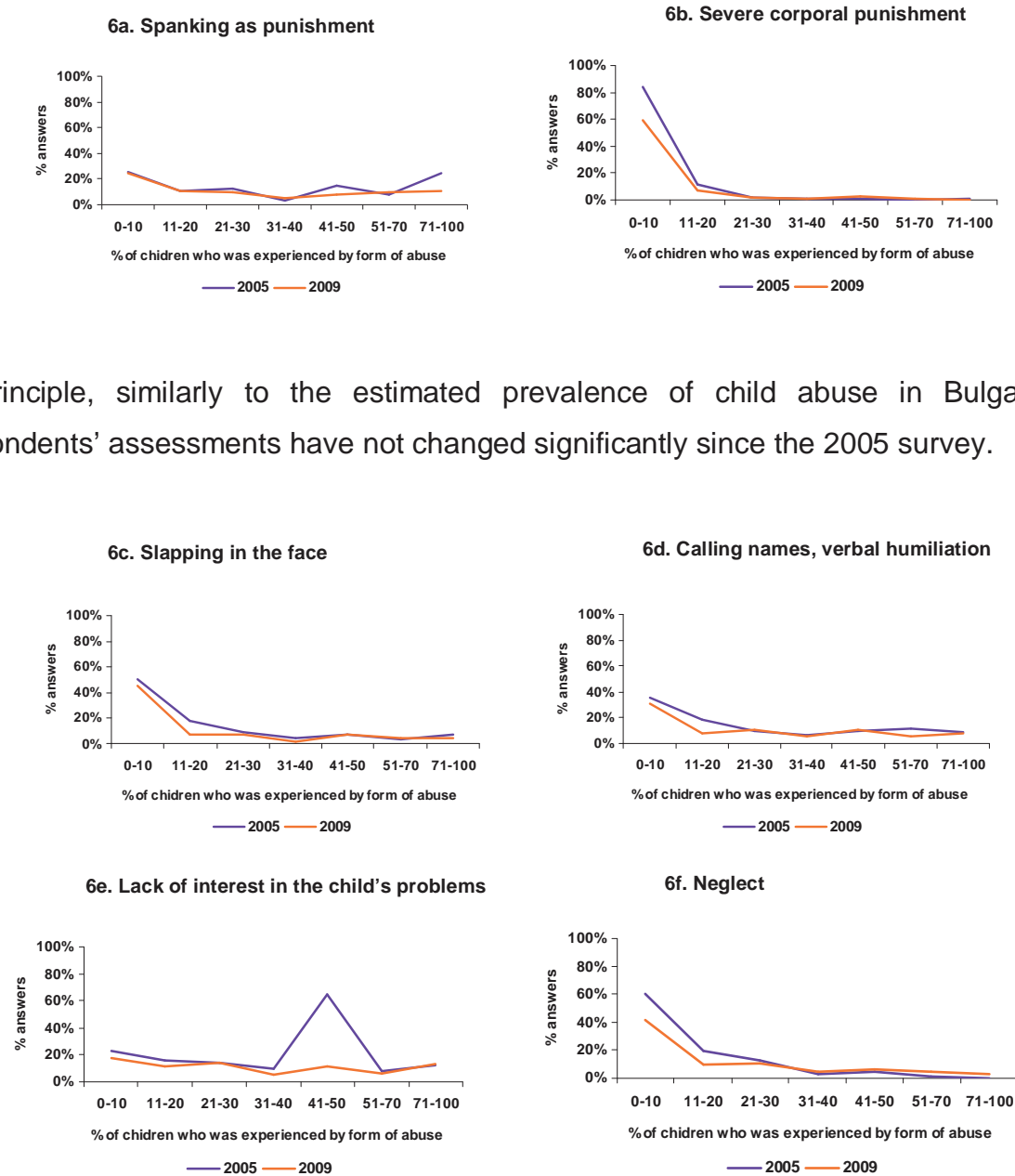


According to the respondents, the major problem is leaving children unattended (79%: „occurs more often”). Sexual abuse according to 38% of respondents „occurs more often”, but 40% of the subjects found it difficult to estimate the prevalence of this form of abuse.

The respondents were also asked to estimate the prevalence of abuse experienced by children attending their schools. Is it the same as in the general child population? If not, what differences have been noticed by the respondents? Is there any relationship between the estimated prevalence of child abuse in Bulgaria and in the schools where the subjects work?

As illustrated by the charts below, the subjects believe that their students rarely experience physical violence, except for calling names and verbal humiliation, which – according to a large proportion of the sample – is experienced by more than half of the children attending their schools.

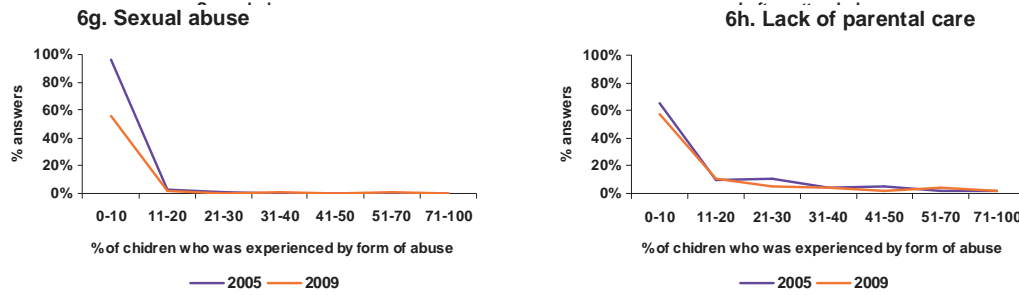
Figures 6. *Estimated prevalence of different forms of child abuse – in percentage terms – with the entire population of children attending the respondent's school constituting 100%.*



In principle, similarly to the estimated prevalence of child abuse in Bulgaria, the respondents' assessments have not changed significantly since the 2005 survey.

The respondents' estimates concerning emotional abuse are distributed quite evenly, which can be seen most clearly on the scale of lack of interest in the child's problems (Figure 6e).

Interestingly, the respondents have had very little contact with such forms of abuse as slapping in the face and neglect.



Although the teachers hardly ever encounter the problem of sexual abuse of children in their school, their estimations changed significantly since the 2005 survey, when practically every teacher denied prevalence of sexual abuse in his school. In 2009 survey only half of the respondents estimated that there is no cases of sexual abuse in their schools.

It is interesting to compare the respondents' estimates concerning the prevalence of child abuse in the general child population and in their schools. Table 1 shows that for each form of abuse, the subjects perceive the situation in their closest environment as much better than in the country as a whole.

Table 1. *Estimated prevalence of various forms of child abuse – the general child population vs. the respondent's school (%)*.

Percentage of children who experience each form of abuse	Country population (mean estimation)		School population (mean estimation)	
	2009	2005	2009	2005
Spanking as punishment	54%	44%	40%	26%
Severe corporal punishment	10%	13%	8%	6%
Slapping in the face	32%	28%	21%	15%
Calling names, verbal humiliation	43%	20%	28%	22%
Lack of interest	46%	42%	55%	28%
Neglect	23%	24%	13%	15%
Sexual abuse	8%	8%	5%	4%
Lack of parental care	22%	25%	14%	12%

The biggest differences in the respondents' estimates have been found for calling names and verbal humiliation (20% in 2005 and 43% in 2009) and spanking (44% in 2005 and 54% in 2009). Notably, according to the subjects, the prevalence of this forms of abuse has increased over the past 4 years.

## **When to intervene?**

Teachers (especially those who work with younger children) have extensive knowledge about child-rearing methods used by parents. In their professional work, teachers have many opportunities to observe behaviours and verbal expressions of both children and their parents.

Teachers' perception of the parent-child relationship is extremely important as it determines whether and when the teacher will be prepared to intervene and help the child. The questionnaire asked the respondents about their opinions on three beliefs concerning child rearing. As illustrated by Figure 7, the proportion of teachers who support views that may justify child abuse, has slightly increased. The largest difference concerns the view that "Tough treatment by parents strengthens the child and ultimately is of benefit to him or her". In the 2009 study 19% of the respondents – i.e., 7% more than in the previous survey – agreed with this statement.

Notably, 91% of the teachers do not agree with the opinion that fear is a prerequisite for obedience.

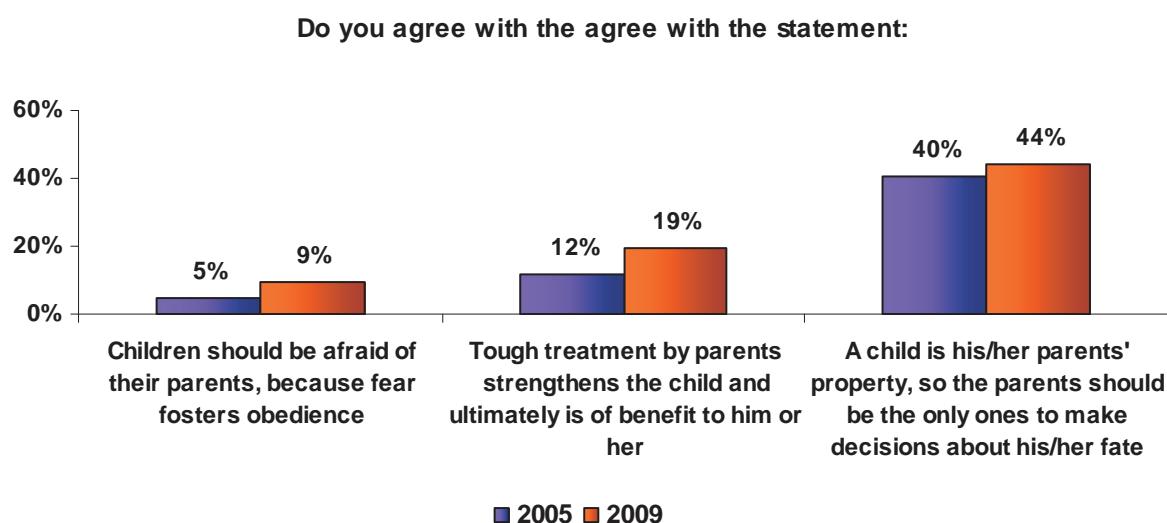


Figure 7. Teachers' opinions on selected views concerning child-rearing. There are many different views about child-rearing. Do you agree with the following statements? The aggregate of „rather yes” and „definitely yes” responses.

The respondents were also asked about situations related to child-rearing, which – in their opinion – justified interventions by third parties (non-family members).

The distribution of responses was very similar in the two studies. Nearly all the teachers in both surveys believed that such an intervention was justified in case of sexual abuse (95% and 93%), when the child is beaten by the belt (92% and 86%) and when is hungry (91%

and 86%). A slightly smaller proportion of respondents (93% and 96%) saw an intervention by a third party as required in other described situations except spanking.

Notably the respondents' attitude toward spanking as punishment is the only one which has positively changed. An increasing number of respondents (30% and 41%) found justified interventions by third parties in such cases.

**Situations seen by respondents as justifying interventions by a third party**

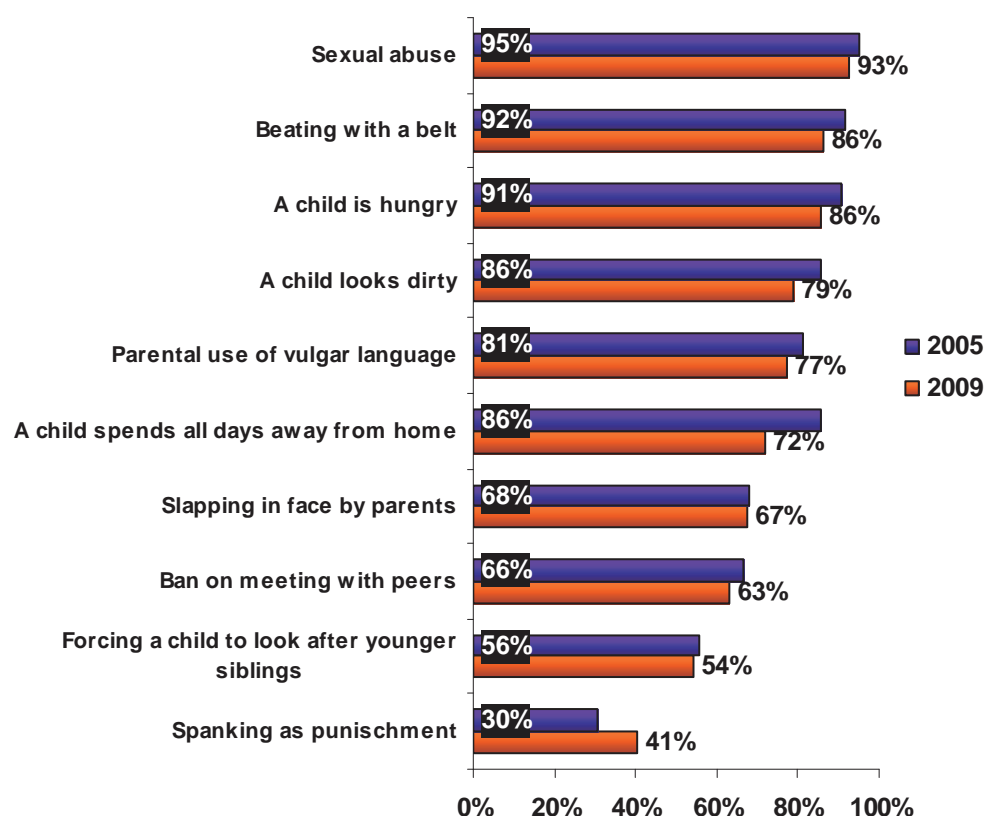


Figure 8. *Situations seen by the respondents as justifying an intervention by a third party (%)*.

### **Is spanking acceptable?**

As illustrated by the chart above, the respondents treat spanking as a form of child abuse. Their responses to further questions about their attitudes toward corporal punishment (giving someone a hiding) fully support this conclusion (see Figures 9 and 10). 82% subjects believe it is humiliating for the child and only 6% express the opposite opinion. Simultaneously, according to three out of four of the respondents, a parent who uses this form o punishment is not good at child rearing; only 4% have the opposite opinion. Attitudes toward corporal punishment has not changed significantly for the past 4 years. In

the light of these findings, the perception of spanking as requiring intervention of a third party seems quite consistent.

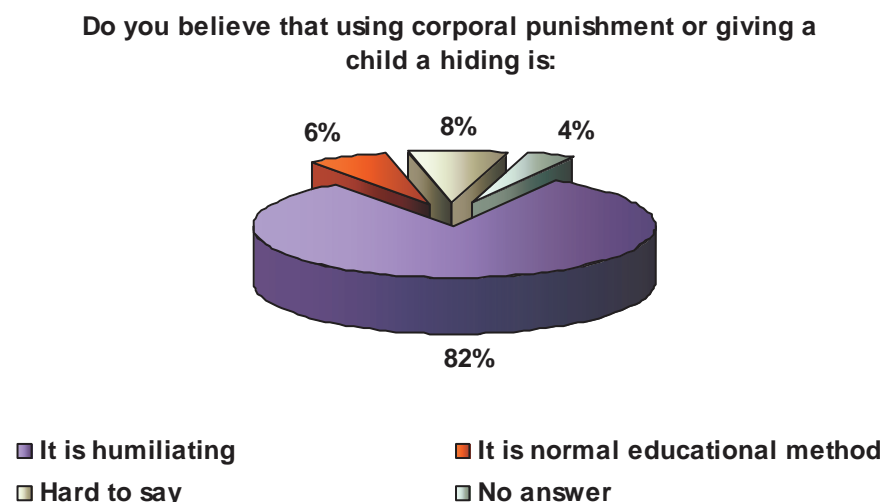


Figure 9. Attitudes toward corporal punishment (giving the child a hiding) in %. Do you think using corporal punishment or giving the child a hiding:

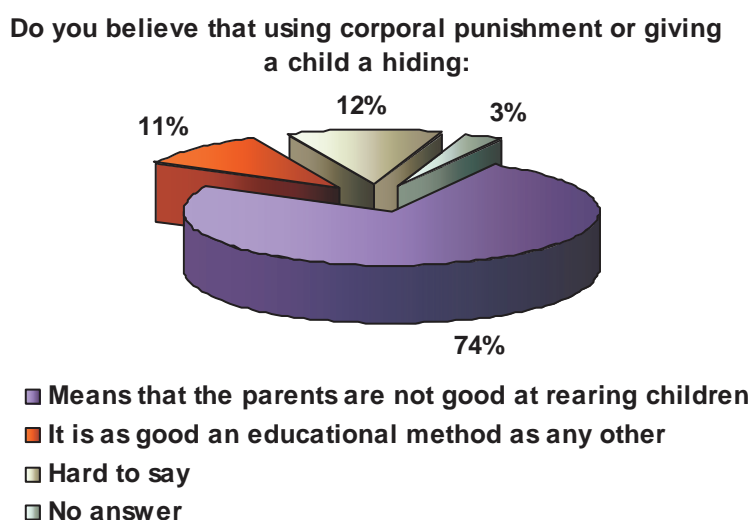


Figure 10. Attitudes toward corporal punishment (giving the child a hiding) in %. Do you think using corporal punishment or giving the child a hiding:

Nonetheless, significant number of respondents (more than 30%) claim they would never punish a child by giving him/her a hiding (Figure 11 and Table 2). This may imply an increasing tendency to regard child rearing without corporal punishment as right and a sign of positive parenting. People tend to see themselves as better than others, which results from the mechanism of rationalization and is observed in most studies.

A significant change has been found in the assessment of situations that justify beating a child according to the respondents. In some cases like petty theft or lying support for corporal punishment has dropped. Invariably, the subjects see giving a hiding as justified

when the child commit petty theft as well as when the child has drunk alcohol, smoked cigarettes or has committed a petty theft.

The general conclusion from the respondents' answers to this questions is optimistic: teachers express negative attitudes toward beating children, regardless of circumstances (at least in the situations listed in the questionnaire).

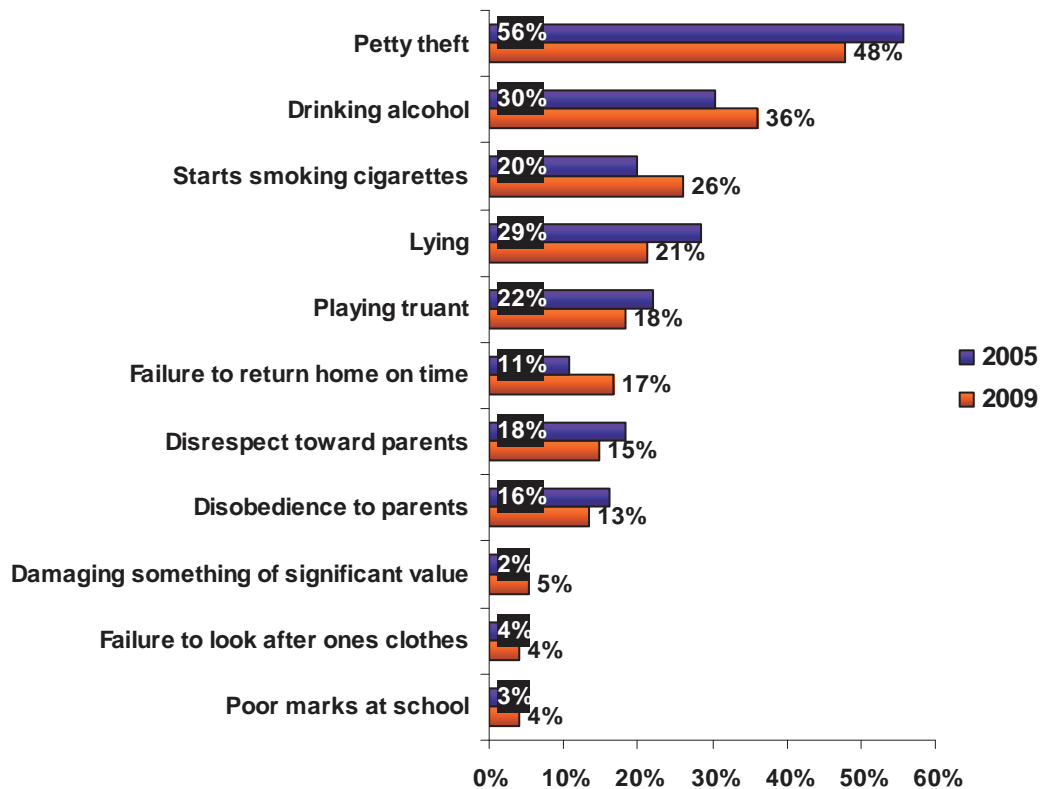


Figure11. In what situations do you regard giving a child a hiding as justified; would you punish the child in this way? Do you believe that a child deserves a hiding when...?

The percentage of respondents who answered "yes".

Table 12. Attitudes toward corporal punishment (giving the child a hiding) in %. In what situations do you regard giving a child a hiding as justified; would you punish the child in this way?

	Yes		No		Hard to say		No answer	
	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009
Poor marks at school	3%	4%	91%	90%	4%	5%	2%	2%
Failure to look after clothes	4%	4%	86%	84%	8%	10%	3%	3%
Damaging something of significant value	2%	5%	88%	85%	7%	6%	3%	4%
Failure to return home on time	11%	17%	76%	71%	10%	9%	4%	3%
Lying	29%	21%	60%	70%	8%	7%	4%	2%
Playing truant	22%	18%	67%	71%	9%	8%	2%	2%
Disobedience to parents	16%	13%	67%	72%	14%	11%	3%	3%
Smoking	20%	26%	63%	61%	16%	10%	1%	3%
Disrespect for parents	18%	15%	68%	72%	11%	10%	3%	3%
Petty theft	56%	48%	31%	38%	11%	11%	2%	4%
Drinking alcohol	30%	36%	54%	49%	15%	13%	1%	3%



## **The teachers' personal experience**

Perceptions of the problem of child abuse are determined by a variety of factors. Most importantly, it is influenced by direct contact with victims of abuse, personal experience, and the picture of the situation presented in the media.

One of the goals of the survey was to find out about teachers' personal experiences related to child abuse. The subjects were asked about their contact with specific cases of abuse, actions they had taken, and the reasons for taking (or not taking) such interventions during the past 12 months.

The teachers were the most likely to deal with neglect and emotional abuse (intimidation, rejection, etc.), and the least likely to encounter cases of sexual abuse, which may be associated both with the fact that the latter is experienced by fewer children (as shown by research evidence), and with the fact that it is more difficult to detect and less likely to be disclosed by the victims. 32% of the respondents had contact with child victims of domestic violence (see Figure 12). As compared to the 2005 survey and 2009 the subjects were more likely to encounter cases of child abuse. On the one hand, the finding is disturbing as it may reflect an increase in the prevalence of child abuse. On the other hand, the result may be seen as quite encouraging, reflecting the teachers' higher awareness and enhanced sensitivity to the problem.

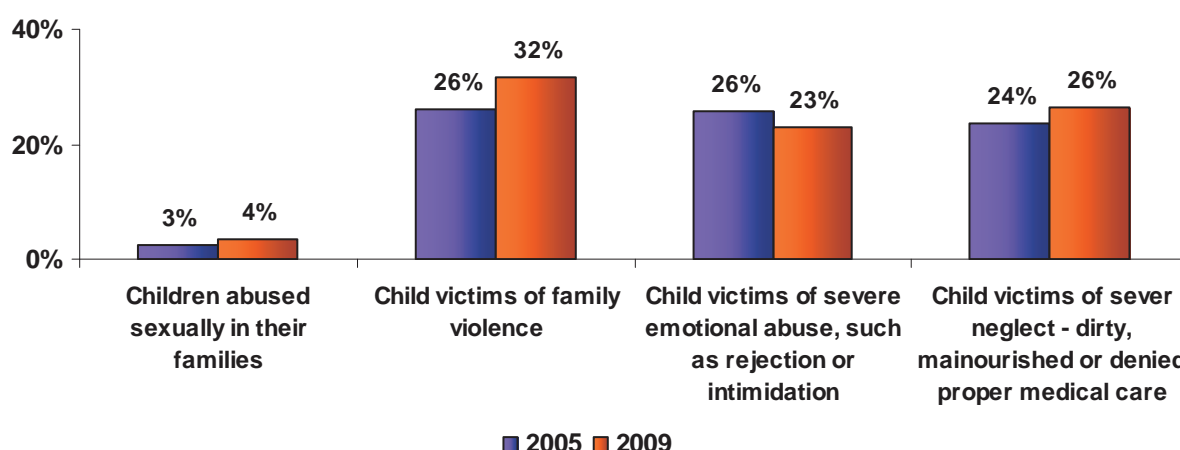


Figure 12. *The percentage of teachers who have encountered cases of child abuse among the students of their schools during the past 12 months.*

Thus, teachers are witnesses to abuse, but does their increased awareness lead to any actions? The respondents' reports are quite ambiguous (Figure 13). Almost half of them

(37%) claim that they always respond to cases to abuse. The only significant change in the second study – as far as this question is concerned – is the percentage of subjects who say they intervene sometimes (a decline from 34% in 2009 down to 24% in 2005). 16% of the respondents admit that they never take any action in response to cases of child abuse (12% in 2005). Of course, this is just a self-report, but a change in attitudes is a prerequisite for a change in behaviour. The percentage of teachers who did not answer the question is relatively high: 13%. This finding may reflect the fact that it is difficult to admit to failing to respond to child abuse.

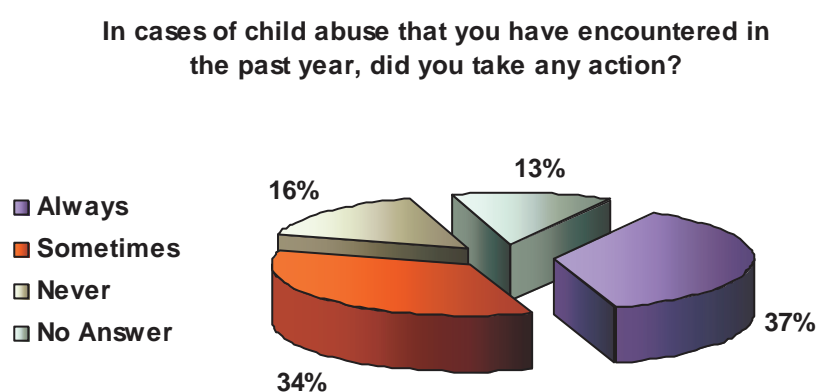


Figure 13. *In cases of child abuse that you have encountered during the past 12 months, did you take any action? (%)*

The teachers who said they intervened „always” or „sometimes”, were asked about the types of actions taken (Figure 14). In most cases, they talked to the parents or the child (more than half of responses) and notified their superiors. However, the percentage of respondents who took such actions has decreased over the past 4 years (e.g., in 2005 64% of the respondents reported to have talked to the parents in such cases, whereas in the 2009 survey the percentage was only 57%).

Notably, teachers are less likely to report cases of child abuse to institutions responsible for dealing with the problems of neglect despite the fact that more than 22% of the respondents have encountered cases of domestic violence, and 3% had contact with sexual abuse. Only exceptions are family courts and health services, although only 9% of teachers report abuse to this service which is the best result anyway.

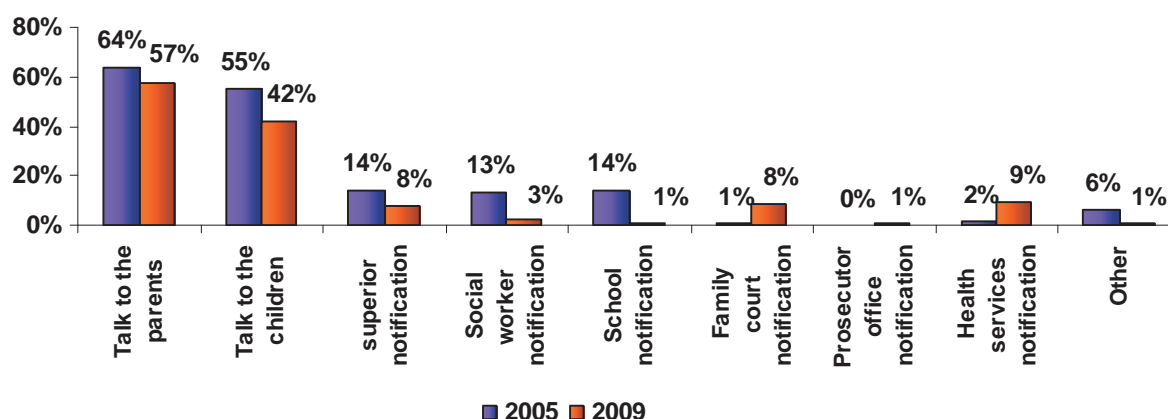


Figure 14. *Types of actions taken by the teachers in response to cases of child abuse.*

In the light of these findings, it seems all the more important to determine why so many teachers (about one fifth of the respondents) fail to respond to child abuse and help the victim. The chart in Figure 15 shows the numbers of respondents who selected each of the answers provided in the questionnaire. In most cases, their inaction resulted from lack of trust in effectiveness of their action (“I didn’t believe my intervention would be effective” and “I didn’t know how to intervene”) and this explanation prevail in 2009 survey (11%, almost twice as much as in 2005). The problem is teachers do not report cases of child abuse to relevant services, so the latter cannot take any action and the vicious circle becomes complete. Another explanation is dispersed responsibility for children’s safety (among parents, teachers, employees of various institutions, and family members); teachers do not see themselves as responsible for taking action in such cases (“There are other appointed services”).

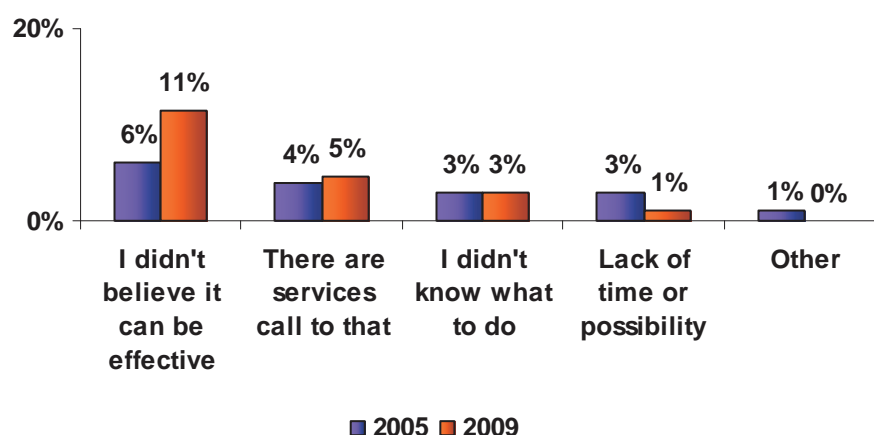


Figure 15. *When you didn't take any action, was it because...*

## Can children be protected from abuse?

The feeling of helplessness, which turned out to be the most frequent reason for failing to take any action in response to child abuse, is associated with the perceived possibility to protect children from abuse. Do teachers fail to react because they think it is impossible to combat the problem effectively? How can abused children be helped according to the respondents?

Given the subjects' responses to the previous questions, the distribution of their answers to the question: "Do you think it is possible to prevent child abuse?", is consistent with previous results. 44% of the respondents believe the problem may be prevented to a large extent. 37% subjects thinks that the problem may be prevented to a small extent, and only 2% answered that it could not be prevented at all.

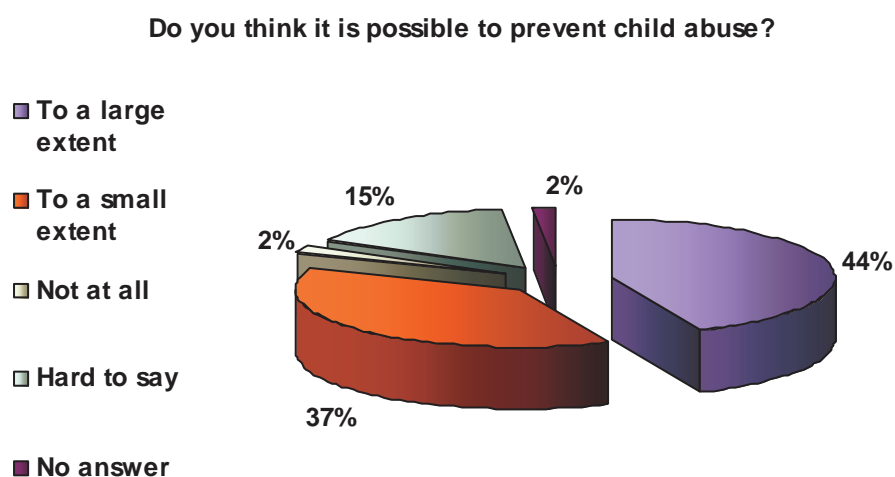


Figure 16. Responses to the question: Do you think it is possible to prevent child abuse? (%)

The law plays a crucial role in the overall system for preventing child abuse, so we asked the respondents about their opinions on the legal regulation of the parent-child relationship.

A vast majority (about 80%) believe that the law should regulate parents' behaviour toward their children (Figure 16). The opposite view was expressed by about 10% of the respondents. This attitude has not changed significantly for the past 4 years.

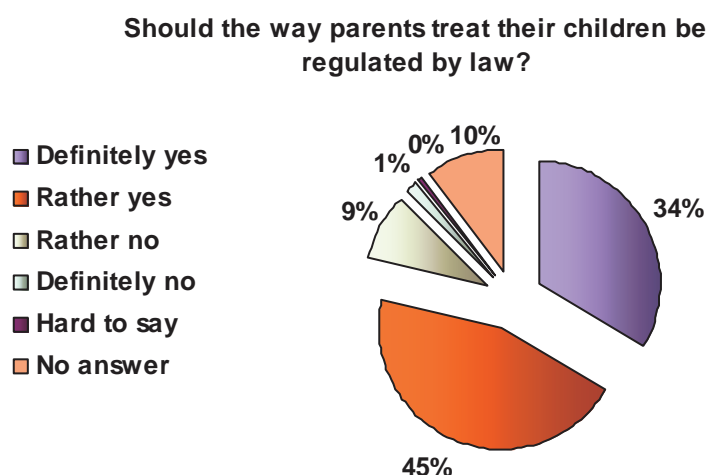


Figure 17. *Should the way parents treat their children be regulated by the law? (%)*

The teachers are equally uncompromising when it comes to the legal ban on the use of corporal punishment of children (Figure 18). It is supported by more than 70% of the respondents (70% in 2005 and 74% in 2009); the opponents of the ban constituted 19% and 13% of the sample, respectively. This means that over the past 4 years the support for the legal ban on corporal punishment of children has slightly decreased.

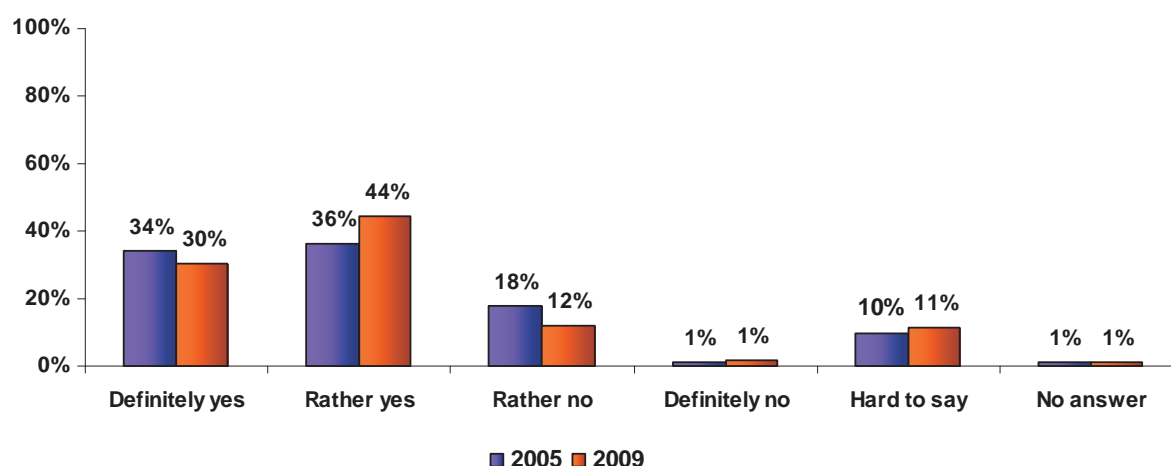


Figure 18. *Do you think that using corporal punishment by parents should be legally banned?*

The subjects were also asked to evaluate institutional services available to child victims of abuse. It is especially important because even the best legal solutions cannot be effectively enforced without efficient institutions.

The respondents did not give a good mark to institutional help services in Bulgaria (Figure 19). 40% of them think that institutional services enable providing real help for children. The group remains practically unchanged since the 2005 survey.

The negative evaluation of institutional help services may be one of the reasons why so few teachers report cases of child abuse to relevant institutions (see Figure 14).

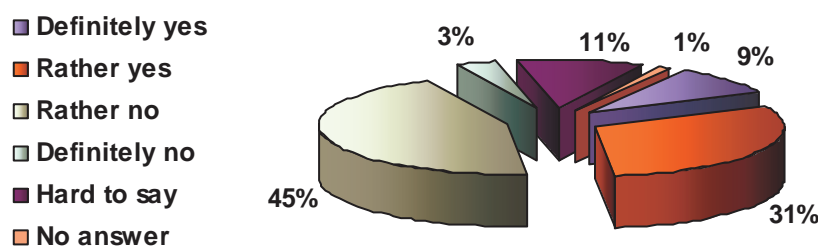


Figure 19. *The assessment of institutional help services available for abused children (the percentage distribution of responses to the question: “Do you believe that the current institutional help services make it possible to provide real help for abused children in our country?”).*

The next research question was: How do teachers evaluate the competences of various institutions responsible for helping children? To find the answer, we asked the respondents about which of the institutions listed in the questionnaire should intervene when parents abuse their children (corporal punishment, sexual abuse, neglect, emotional abuse): see Figures 20, 21, 22, and 23.

For all forms of abuse, except for sexual abuse, the subjects indicate the social service centres as responsible institutions. The percentage of subjects who point to the school as the institution responsible for taking action is significantly lower than the percentage of teachers who intervene in cases of child abuse (Figure 13); this shows that most of the teachers did not feel they should intervene and fail to take action. In the question about sexual abuse the main emphasis was put on law-enforcement institutions (the police, the prosecutor’s office – more than 60% of responses), with many subjects pointing to social service centres, too. The social welfare centre was the most likely to be selected in response to the question about neglect and emotional abuse (yelling, humiliation).

A comparison of the subjects’ indications in the two surveys shows the largest drop for the police (as much as 12% for sexual abuse!). In cases of sexual abuse the percentage has also dropped for all the responsible services except prosecutor office (growth 12%).

In most cases drops have also been observed for the health care clinic and the school (except for emotional abuse in case of the latter two).

The findings imply the largest change in the subjects’ awareness in relation to the use of corporal punishment by parents. In the 2009 survey the teachers were much more likely to point to almost all the institutions (Figure 20).

### Frequent use of corporal punishment

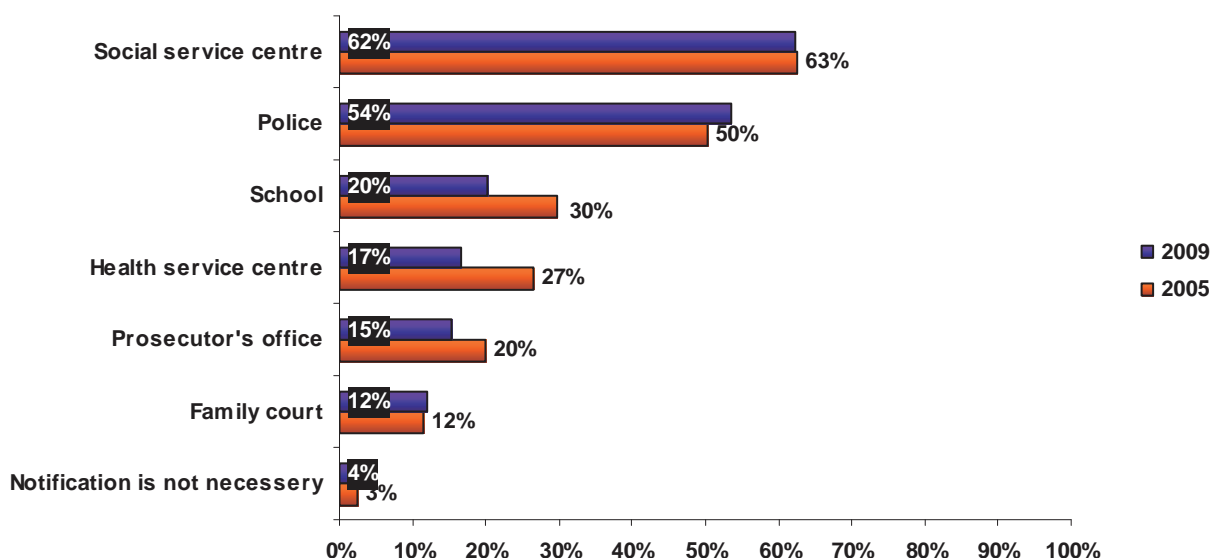


Figure 20. The respondents' opinions (%) on which of the listed institutions should intervene if a child experiences corporal punishment in the family (the subjects were asked to mark all the institutions that should take action).

### A child is forced to sexual practices

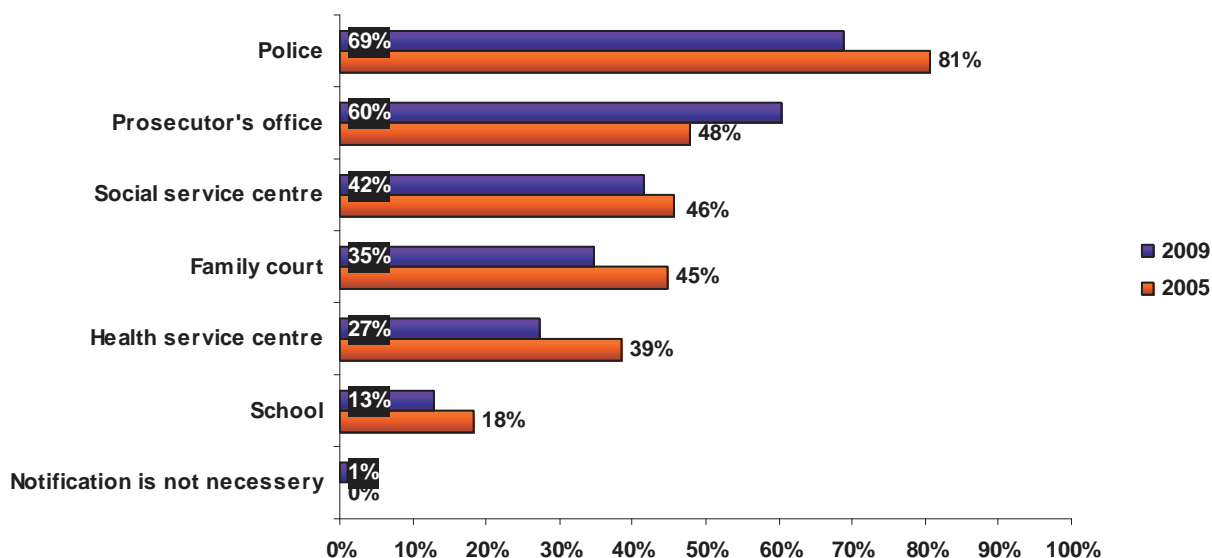


Figure 21. The respondents' opinions (%) on which of the listed institutions should intervene if a child is forced to sexual practices by a family member (the subjects were asked to mark all the institutions that should take action).

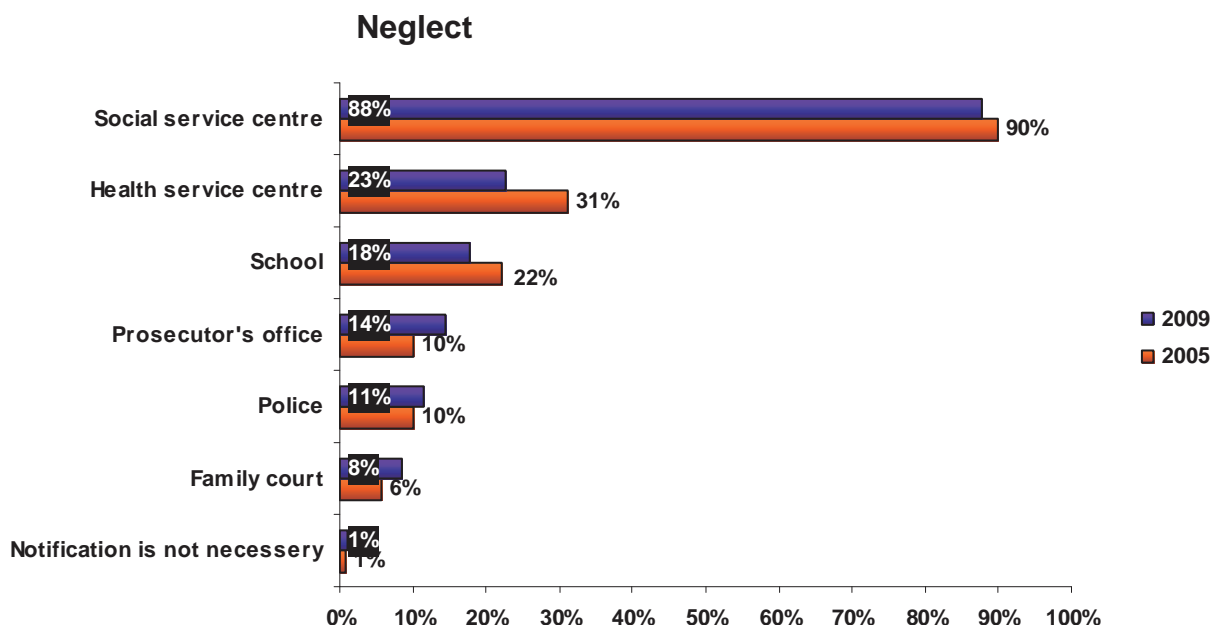


Figure 22. The respondents' opinions (%) on which of the listed institutions should intervene if a child is physically neglected: dirty, hungry, and badly dressed (the subjects were asked to mark all the institutions that should take action).

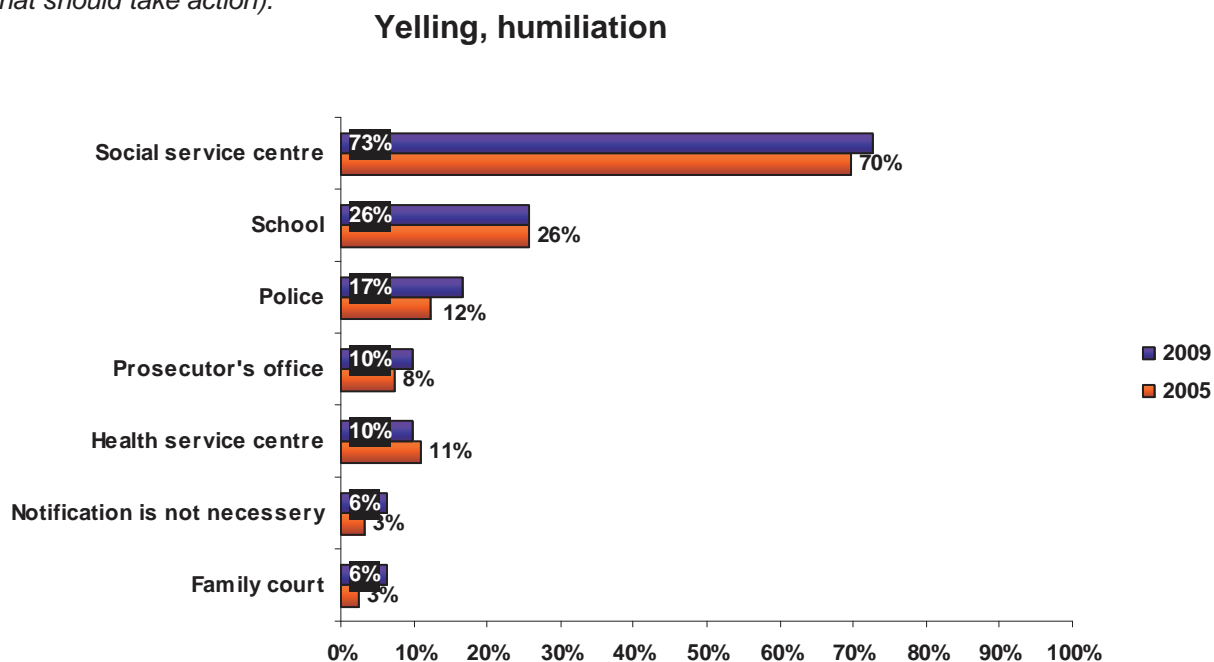


Figure 23. The respondents' opinions (%) on which of the listed institutions should intervene if a child is yelled at, humiliated or rejected by his/her parents (the subjects were asked to mark all the institutions that should take action).

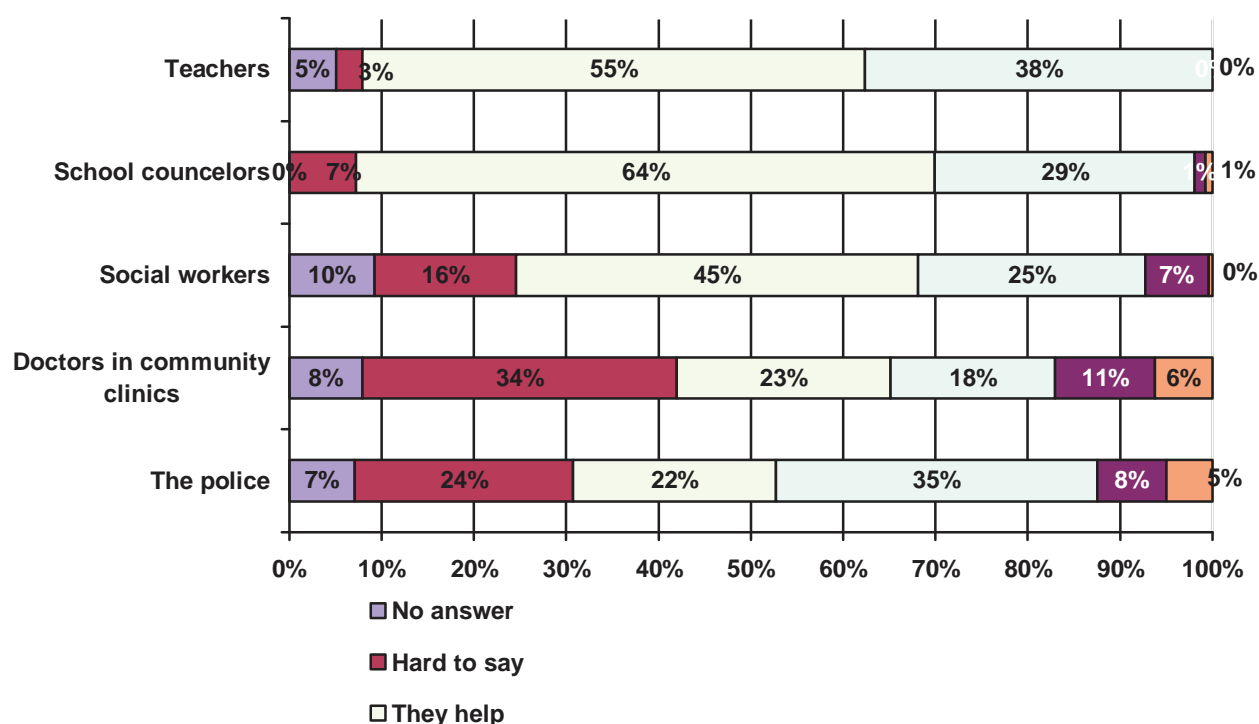


Knowing the respondents' views on the competences and responsibility of each institution, it was worth asking them to evaluate the extent to which these institutions fulfil their tasks. Thus, the teachers were requested to evaluate help services provided by each professional group for children who are maltreated in their families (Figure 24).

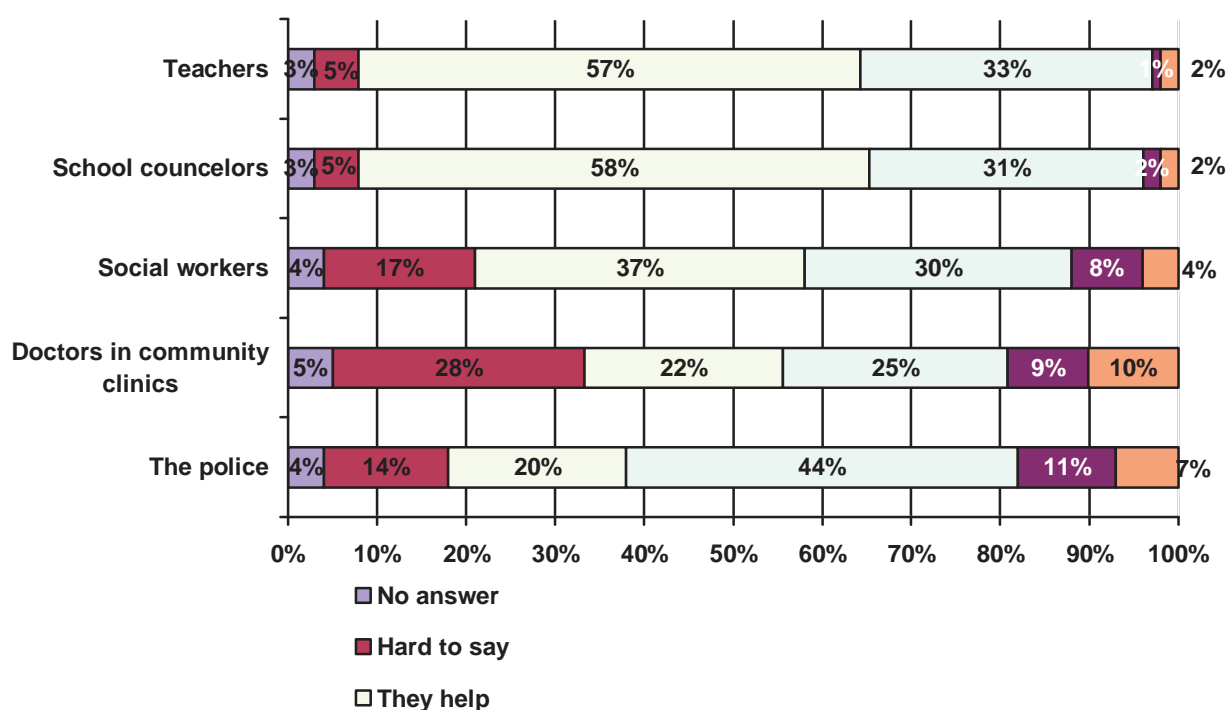
The largest proportion of respondents believes that the professional groups listed in the questionnaire try to help or actually provide help for children. Teachers as well as school counsellors were evaluated the most favourably; about 90% and 89% of the subjects think they try to help or do help, despite their limited potential! It is all the more significant when we consider the fact that teachers have direct contact with these two professional groups. The only professional group that evaluated slightly more positively than in 2005 survey is police (57% and 64% respectively). The subjects are the most critical of health care professionals (physicians) at local clinics (9% of the respondents marked the answer: "They don't help at all, though they have some potential" and 10%: "They don't help at all because they have no potential to help").

These results are practically unchanged in comparison with 2005 survey

So, the respondents appreciate professionals' willingness to help children. How do they assess their knowledge?



2005



**2009**

Figure 24. *The evaluation of help offered by each professional group to children maltreated in their families (%)*.

The evaluation of each professional group's knowledge is related to the assessment of the help services it provides for children. The mutual relationship between knowledge about child abuse and the quality of help provided by professionals is unquestionable and teachers are well aware of it.

Just as in the evaluation of the quality of help provided for children, school counsellors and psychologists are perceived as "top of the class" in identifying cases of child abuse (Tables 3 and 4). Similarly, police officers are given the poorest marks in terms of their knowledge about diagnosing/identifying cases of abuse ("They have no knowledge": from 20% in 2005 to 14% in 2009). The largest negative change has been observed in the respondents' perceptions of teachers and social workers knowledge about child abuse – in the 2009 study less teachers expressed positive opinions about their colleagues' and social workers' knowledge on diagnosing child abuse (evaluating it as "sufficient"; an drop from 42% to 34% and from 47% to 35%), and the percentage of responses: "They have some knowledge, but it's insufficient", has increased (from 42% to 46% and from 29% to 44%).

The teachers' opinion about various professional groups' knowledge about intervention in cases of child abuse has not changed significantly. According to the respondents, school

counsellors and psychologists as well as social workers have sufficient knowledge (53% and 42% from 48% and 41% in 2005 survey); teachers have “some knowledge, but it’s insufficient” (41%), and police as well as physicians working at local clinics are the most likely to be seen as not knowing how to intervene (12% and 7%). The respondents’ opinions about the police left almost unchanged – although today more teachers evaluate their knowledge positively (“They have sufficient knowledge”: 31% in 2009, i.e., 5% more than 4 years ago). The teachers’ responses imply that efforts to reduce child abuse would be the most effective if school counsellors and psychologists cooperated with the social workers, with the first two groups diagnosing or identifying cases of child abuse and the third one helping with interventions.

	Have sufficient knowledge		Have some knowledge, but insufficient		Have no knowledge		It’s difficult to say		No answer	
	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009
Police	20%	14%	32%	40%	17%	20%	27%	23%	4%	3%
Doctors from local clinics	32%	29%	32%	38%	8%	8%	25%	22%	4%	3%
Doctors from hospitals	35%	34%	15%	26%	6%	6%	30%	31%	4%	3%
Social Workers	47%	35%	29%	44%	2%	6%	17%	13%	5%	3%
School counsellors and psychologist	<b>58%</b>	<b>55%</b>	29%	32%	1%	2%	20%	10%	2%	2%
Teachers	42%	34%	42%	46%	4%	7%	9%	11%	3%	2%

Table 3. *The evaluation of various professional groups’ knowledge about diagnosing/identifying cases of child abuse (%)*.

	Have sufficient knowledge		Have some knowledge, but insufficient		Have no knowledge		It’s difficult to say		No answer	
	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009
Police	26%	31%	32%	33%	10%	12%	29%	20%	3%	5%
Doctors from local clinics	21%	21%	<b>41%</b>	<b>41%</b>	11%	7%	28%	28%	3%	3%
Doctors from hospitals	24%	26%	28%	28%	12%	9%	32%	33%	6%	5%
Social Workers	<b>41%</b>	<b>42%</b>	35%	35%	3%	5%	20%	14%	5%	4%
School counsellors and psychologist	<b>48%</b>	<b>53%</b>	31%	31%	2%	1%	12%	13%	4%	2%
Teachers	34%	37%	<b>41%</b>	<b>41%</b>	5%	7%	12%	12%	4%	3%

Table 4. *The evaluation of various professional groups’ knowledge how to intervene in cases of child abuse (%)*.

To complete the picture, the respondents answered several questions about problems related to helping abused children (Table 5).

According to most teachers, it is often the case that investigation and court procedures are too lengthy (63%) and criminal courts' sentences are too lenient (62%), there is lack of possibility to isolate the offender from the victim (44%), and there is lack of possibility to provide treatment for the offender (37%). These findings are very disturbing, especially a negative tendency can be seen – for most of the questions the percentage of the “often” response has increased, by up to 8% (“Inappropriate conditions and procedures of interviewing children”).

Table 5. *The assessment of actions taken in the process of helping abused children. Do you think that in the process of intervention in child abuse cases the following problems occur:*

	Often		Sometimes		Hardly ever		Hard to say		No answer	
	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009
Failure to undertake intervention by the police when a child abuse case has been reported	19%	23%	27%	38%	21%	15%	30%	22%	3%	3%
Withdrawal of the offence notification by the reporting person (despite actual abuse)	17%	24%	33%	34%	4%	6%	42%	33%	5%	4%
Cases are discontinued by prosecutors (despite actual abuse experienced by the child)	19%	22%	20%	27%	8%	9%	48%	38%	5%	4%
Inappropriate conditions and procedures of interviewing children	27%	35%	17%	21%	6%	5%	42%	34%	8%	5%
Lack of possibility to isolate the offender from the victim	37%	44%	21%	21%	9%	7%	27%	24%	6%	5%
Lack of possibility to provide treatment for the offender	34%	37%	13%	18%	7%	7%	37%	32%	9%	5%
Too lenient sentences for perpetrators of child abuse	<b>59%</b>	<b>62%</b>	10%	16%	3%	1%	22%	16%	5%	4%
Failure to execute family courts' decisions	37%	41%	18%	23%	3%	4%	35%	29%	7%	3%
Lengthy investigations and court procedures	<b>60%</b>	<b>63%</b>	12%	12%	1%	2%	22%	20%	5%	3%

### **How to help? Strategies of helping children in the respondents' eyes.**

Questions concerning the policy toward victims and perpetrators of child abuse were an important component of the survey.

The respondents were the most unanimous in their attitudes toward parents suspected of sexual abuse of their children; 81% said that the suspect should be isolated from the family until the case is clarified (Table 6). Simultaneously, only 26% (40% in 2005 survey) of the teachers disagree with the statement that “one should always try to keep the child in the family, regardless of his/her parents' behaviour”.

The subjects also agree – though less unanimously – that many children suffer because of the lack of response to child abuse, and that help offered to children is poorly coordinated, with help institutions rarely cooperating in the process of intervention.

Table 6. *Do you agree with the statement:*

	Definitely yes		Rather yes		Rather no		Definitely no		Hard to say		No answer	
	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009
One should always try to keep the child in the family notwithstanding his/her parents behaviour	5%	26%	30%	36%	<b>40%</b>	26%	15%	8%	8%	4%	3%	1%
Parent suspected of sexual abuse should be isolate from the family to the time the case will be finished	<b>79%</b>	<b>81%</b>	14%	13%	0%	3%	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%	0%
Many children suffering violence in their families because other don't react	29%	<b>41%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>48%</b>	6%	5%	1%	0%	8%	5%	3%	1%
Child protection institutions rarely cooperate with each other	24%	33%	<b>48%</b>	<b>50%</b>	6%	9%	1%	1%	17%	7%	3%	1%

Assessing the policy toward perpetrators of child abuse (Table 5), the teachers has different attitude towards treatment for offenders. It is an important aspect of reducing child abuse, which is recognized by the subjects: Almost half of them believe that child sexual abusers should be provided with treatment but simultaneously proportion of teachers demanding punishment has rapidly grown (from 22% in 2005 to 61% in 2009) with a insignificantly decreasing proportion of respondents supporting combination of treatment and punishment. More teachers emphasized lack of treatment for offenders of physical abuse (Figures 25 and 26).

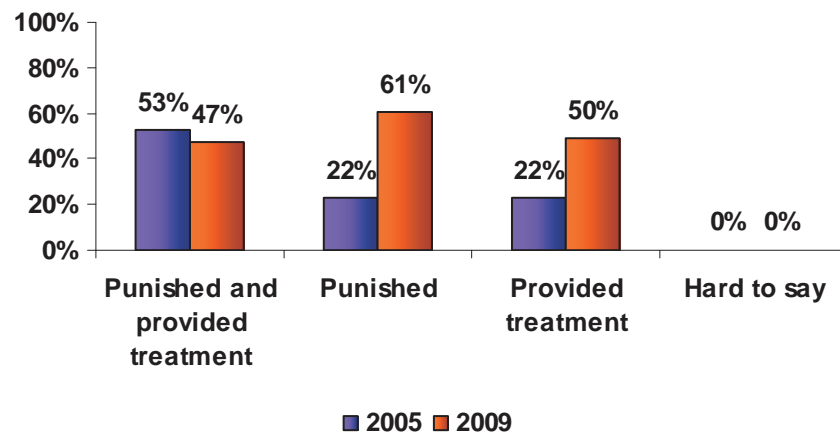


Figure 25. *Supported ways of dealing with fathers who abuse their children sexually.*

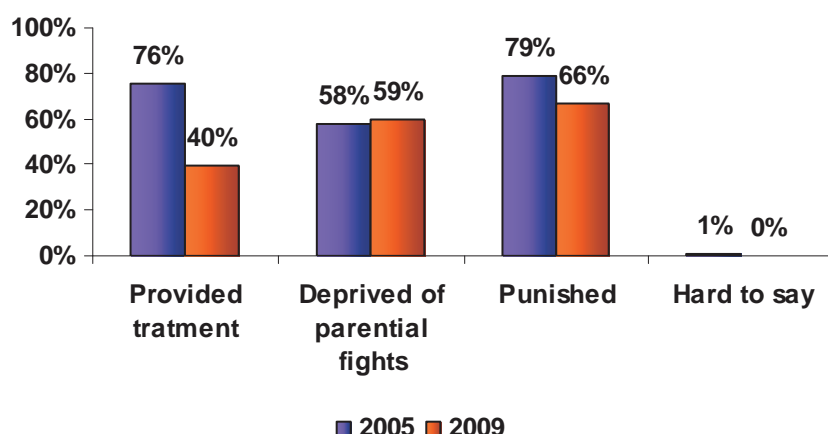


Figure 26. Supported ways of dealing with a parent who is a perpetrator of physical abuse (who has beaten his/her child severely, causing physical injuries).

## Conclusions

- Half of adult Bulgarians believe that the corporal punishment in child rearing should never be used.
- According to teachers, spanking a child as punishment is the most frequent form of child abuse in Bulgaria.
- The number of teachers who think that a child is his/her parents property, so parents are the only ones who can make decisions about the child, remains alarmingly high.
- Vast majority of teachers believe corporal punishment is humiliating for the child and see the use of corporal punishment as a sign that the parents are not good at child rearing.
- 37% of teachers report that they always intervene in cases on child abuse. 16% never takes any action, in most cases due to feeling helpless.
- 44% of teachers believe that the problem of child abuse can be prevented to a large extent.
- Three out of four of teachers supports a legal ban on the use of corporal punishment of children.
- According to a majority of teachers, it is often the case that the investigation and court procedures are too lengthy, criminal courts' sentences are too lenient, there is

lack of possibility to isolate the offender from the victim, and there is lack of possibility to provide treatment for the offender.

- Over the past 4 years the proportion of teachers who support providing treatment for abusive fathers (perpetrators of child sexual abuse) has increased, while the proportion of those who are in favour of only punishing them has dropped.