

Riga teachers' attitudes toward child abuse

Research report

Nobody's Children Foundation
Center Against Abuse "Dardedze"

The report presents findings from a survey conducted in Latvia 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 and 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).

Latvians' opinions about the use of corporal punishment of children

The survey of Latvians' attitudes toward the use of corporal punishment of children was conducted in 2005 and in 2009 by Research Centre SKDS. Information was collected during 'face to face' individual interviews at the locations of respondents' residences. 1015 in 2005 and 1501 in 2009 respondents were interviewed.

About half of adult Latvians (48% in 2009) believe that corporal punishment is experienced by over 40% of children in Latvia. 4 years ago this belief was held by about the same percent of the Latvian sample (46%) This means that people in Latvia have not observed significant change of the situation of children.

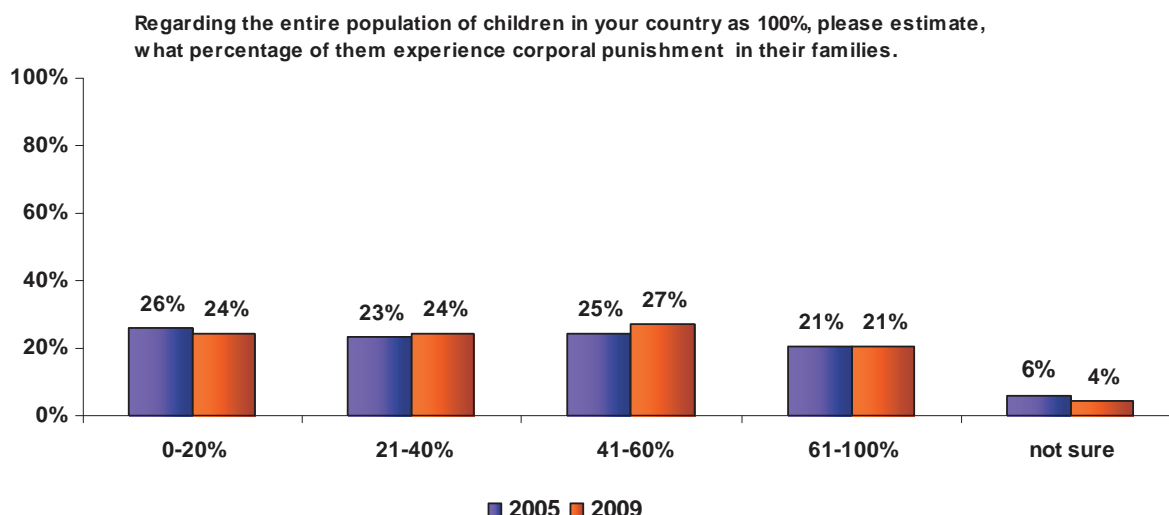


Figure I. *Estimated prevalence of the use of corporal punishment of children in Latvia.*

Unfortunately, the evaluation of corporal punishment as a child-rearing method changed and corporal punishment is now wider accepted yet change is not significant. About half (45% in 2005) of Latvians still think it is justified in some situations and 39% (39% in 2005) believe it should never be used.

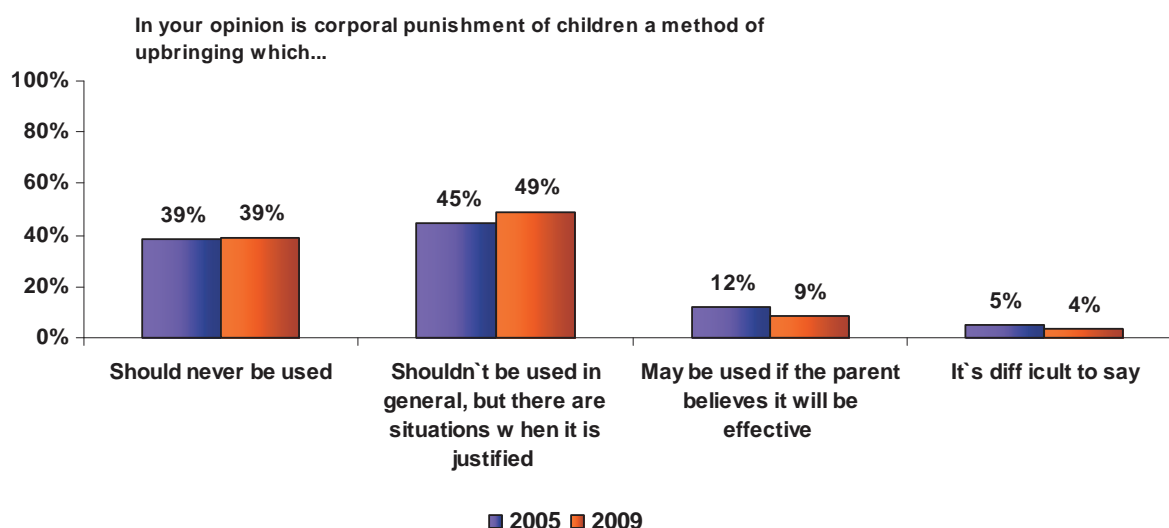


Figure II. *Evaluation of corporal punishment as a child-rearing method.*

The survey of Latvians' 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 Latvia.

Teacher's attitudes toward corporal punishment of children

The sample

The 2009 survey was conducted on a sample of 214 teachers. A vast majority of the sample (92%) were women, just as in the 2005 study (89%). Invariably, teachers under 45 constituted the largest subgroup of the respondents (65%).

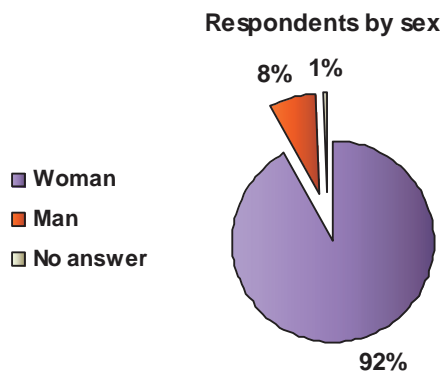


Figure 1. *Respondents by gender*

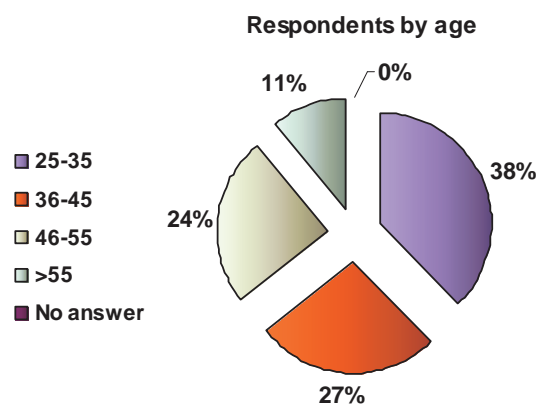


Figure 2. *Respondents by age*

In comparison to the 2005 study, the group of teachers with long professional experience (more than 10 years of teaching) has increased – from 46% to 57%. Nearly two out of three respondents reported to have worked as teachers for more than 5 years.

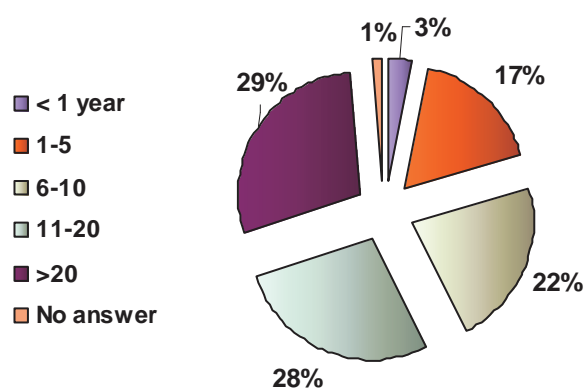


Figure 3. *Years of experience in the current profession*

Most respondents (74%) have their own children, relative to the 2005 survey this group has increased by 6%.

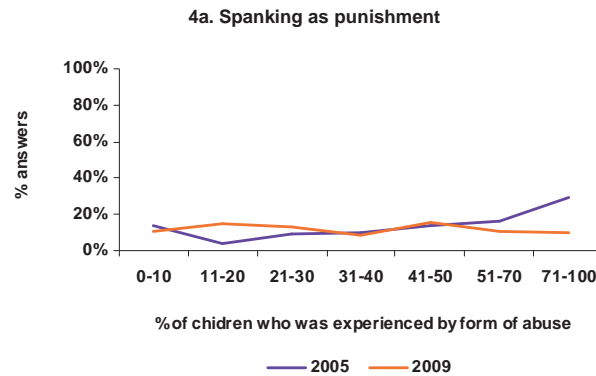
61% of the respondents described themselves as religious or deeply religious (a slight decline in comparison to 2005), 21% as hesitant about religion, and 17% as non-believers; 2% of the teachers did not answer the question.

Prevalence of child abuse

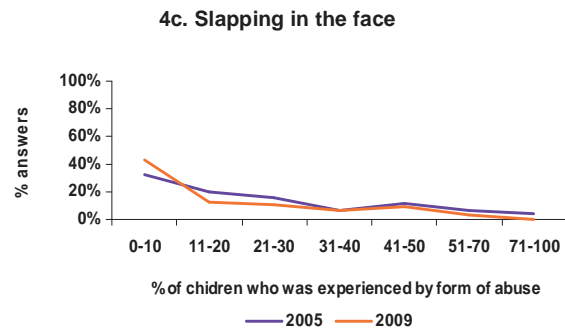
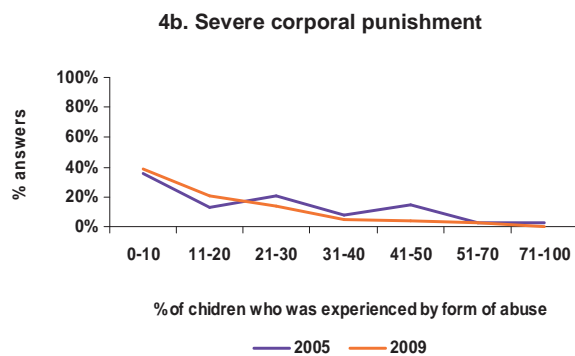
How is child abuse perceived by the respondents? Do they see it as a serious social problem? What has changed over the past 4 years? The perceived importance of the child abuse problem has a direct effect on teachers' responses to the phenomenon. A teacher who believes that child abuse is a marginal 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 Latvia have changed only slightly.

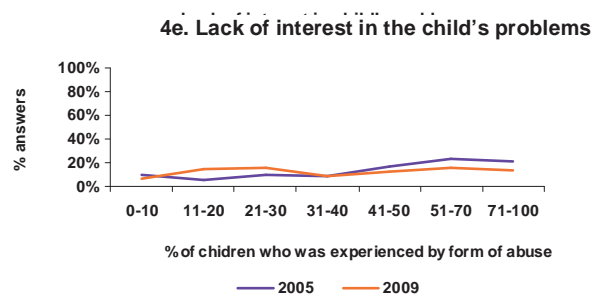
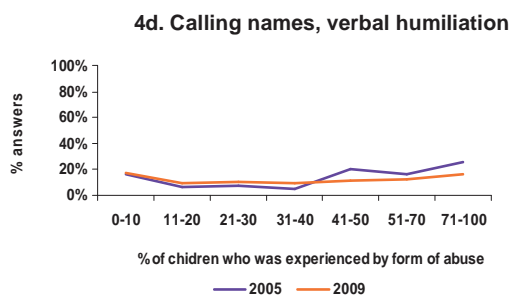
Figures 4. *Estimated prevalence of different forms of child abuse – in percentage terms – with the entire population of children in Latvia constituting 100%.*

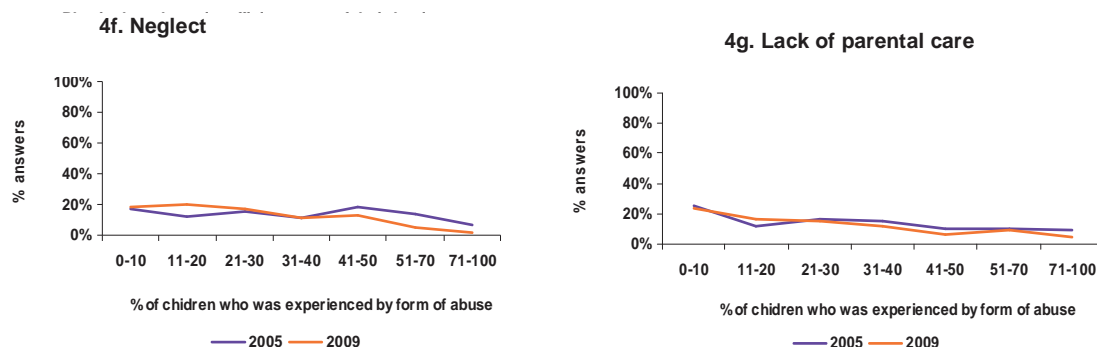


The respondents found it the most difficult to estimate the prevalence of spanking as punishment in Latvia. According to 10% of the respondents less than 10% of Latvian children experience this form of abuse (14% in 2005).

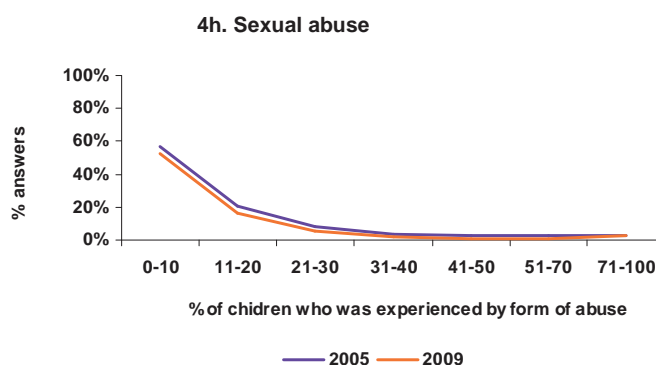


The most optimistic estimations concern the prevalence of severe corporal punishment and slapping in the face; the largest proportion of the respondents believe that this form of abuse is experienced by fewer than 10% of children in Latvia.





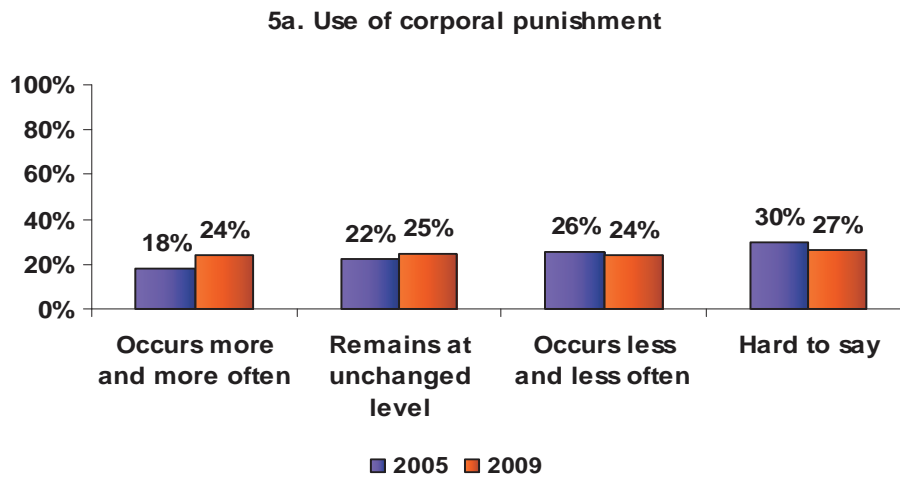
The respondents found it the most difficult to estimate the prevalence of emotional abuse: for these questions their responses were almost evenly distributed along the 0% to 100% scale.



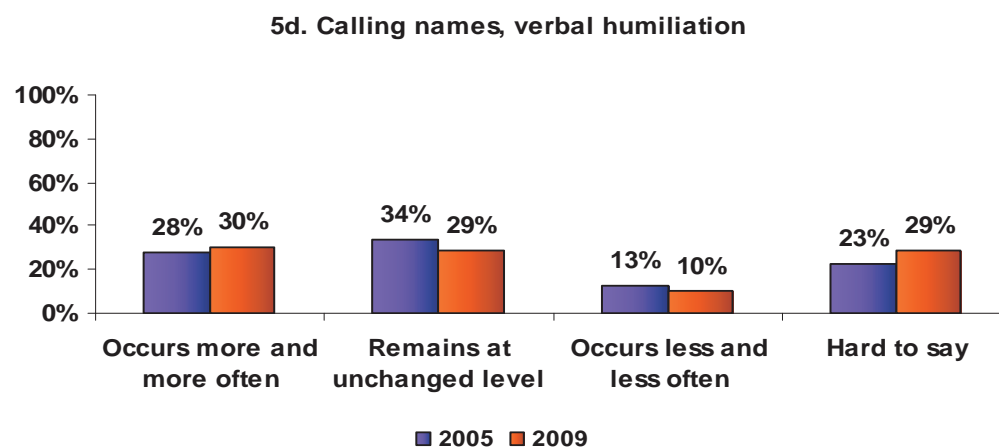
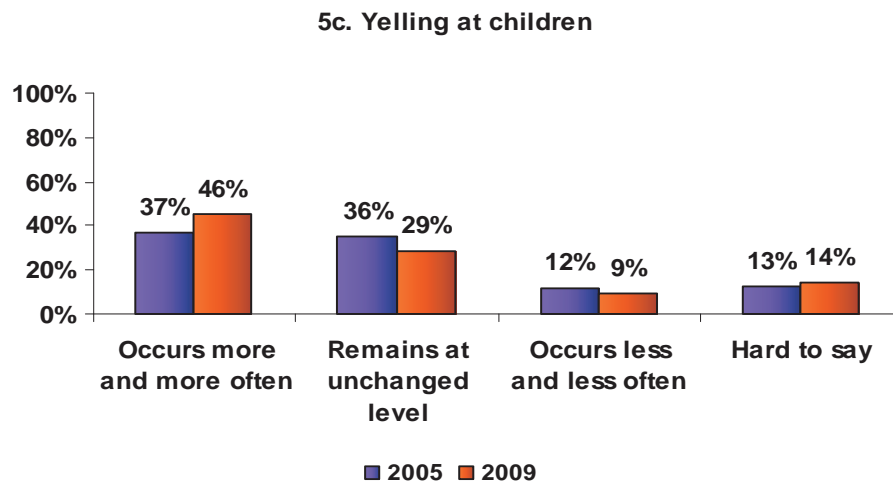
Notably, vast majority (about 70%) of the respondents believe that sexual abuse affects less than 10% children in Latvia. The percentage of respondents who think this form of abuse is that rare left unchanged during the past 4 years.

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.*

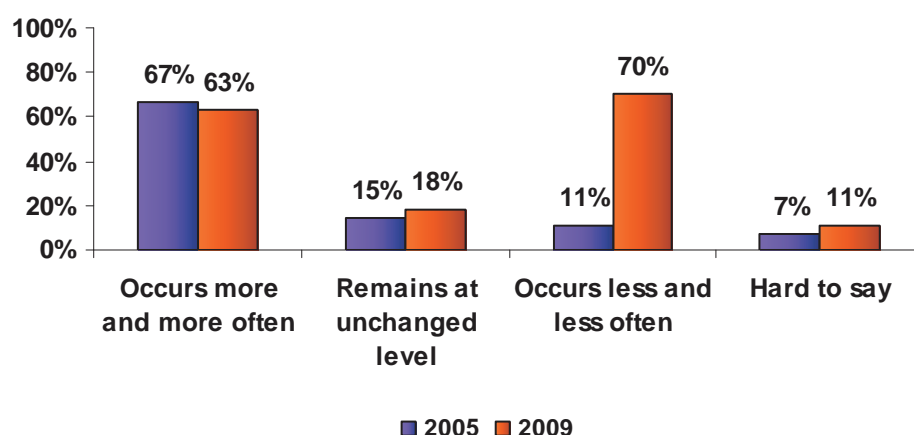


During the past 4 years the proportion of respondents who believe that corporal punishment and neglect of children occur with increasing frequency has slightly grown, though this is not significant change. Nevertheless, large proportions of respondents observe declining tendencies for the use of corporal punishment (24%) (Figure 5a).

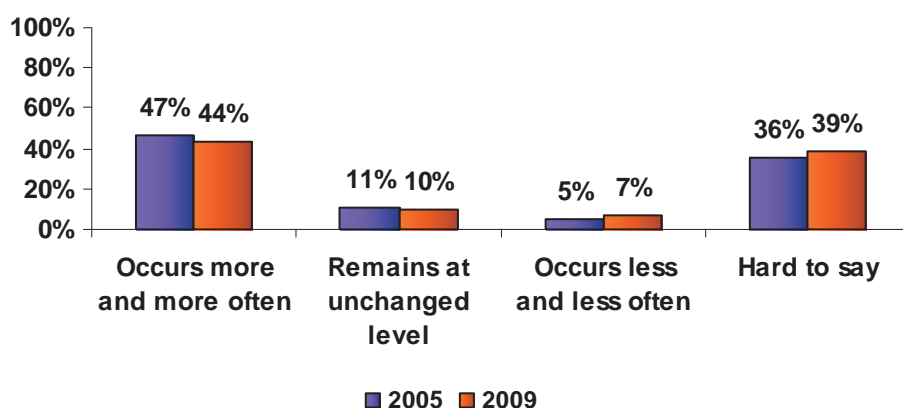


Similar dynamics over the past 4 years was observed in the area of verbal abuse of children (29% of „Remains unchanged” responses, for both forms of verbal abuse; see Figures 5c and 5d).

5e. Leaving children unattended



5f. Sexual abuse



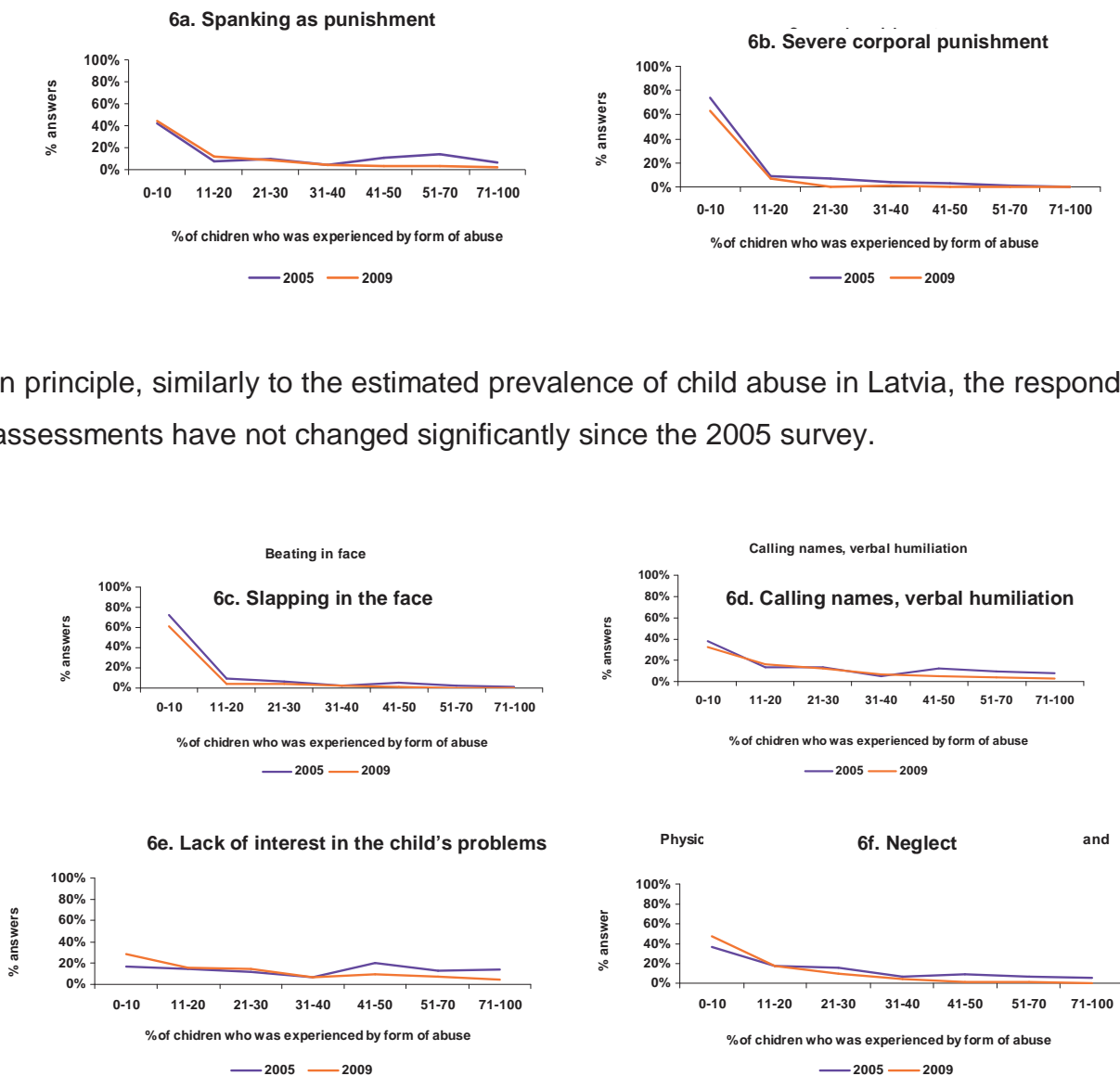
According to the respondents, the major problem is leaving children unattended (63%: „occurs more often”). Sexual abuse according to 44% of respondents „occurs more often”, but 39% of the subjects found it difficult to estimate the prevalence of this form of abuse.

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 Latvia 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%.*

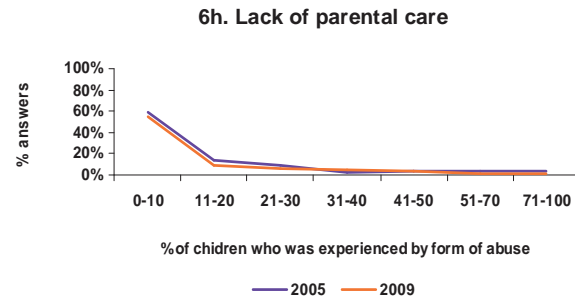
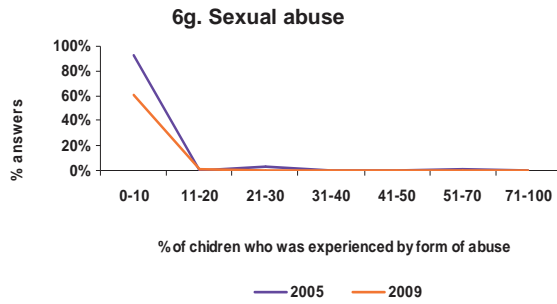


In principle, similarly to the estimated prevalence of child abuse in Latvia, the respondents' assessments have not changed significantly since the 2005 survey.

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).

Notably, however, even in this case 40% of the subjects believe that this form of abuse is experienced by more than 40% of their students.

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	49%	31%	28%	13%
Severe corporal punishment	23%	14%	10%	5%
Slapping in the face	24%	15%	12%	7%
Calling names, verbal humiliation	47%	34%	27%	17%
Lack of interest	48%	36%	37%	22%
Neglect	35%	22%	23%	11%
Sexual abuse	15%	9%	6%	4%
Lack of parental care	31%	23%	16%	12%

The biggest differences in the respondents' estimates have been found for spanking (31% in 2005 and 49% in 2009), calling names and verbal humiliation (34% in 2005 and 47% in 2009), lack of interest (36% in 2005 and 48% in 2009) and lack of parental care (23% in 2005 and 31% in 2009). Notably, according to the subjects, the prevalence of this forms of abuse has increased significantly 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 "children are their parents' property, so parents should be the only ones to make decisions about their fate". In the 2009 study 45% of the respondents – i.e., 11% more than in the previous survey – agreed with this statement.

Notably, 93% of the teachers – as many as in the previous survey – do not agree with the opinion that fear is a prerequisite for obedience.

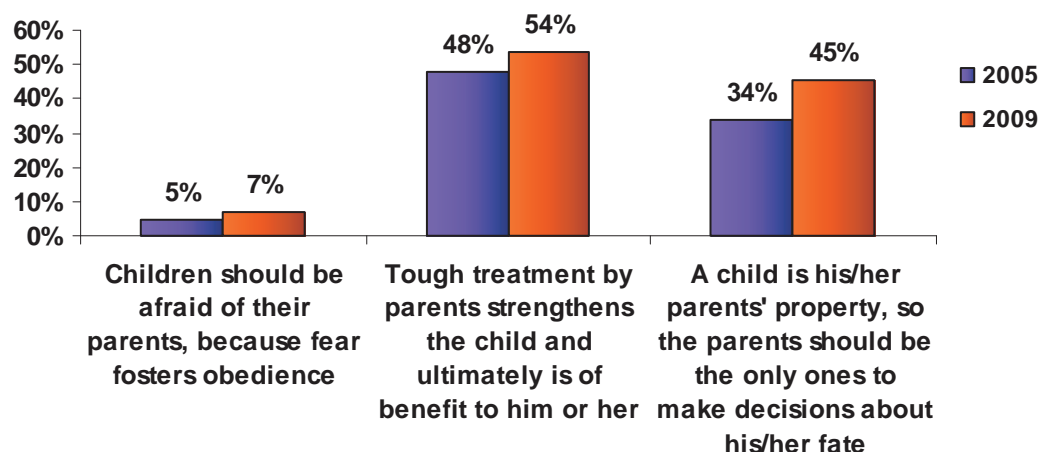


Figure 7. Teachers' opinions on selected views concerning child-rearing. There are many different views about child-rearing. Do you agree with the following statements? The aggregate of „rather yes” and „definitely yes” responses.

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 (97%

and 95%) and when a child is hungry (96% and 92%). A slightly smaller proportion of respondents (94%) saw an intervention by a third party as required when a parent never allowed a child to meet with peers or beat a child with a belt

The respondents were not as unanimous in their assessments of such parental behaviours as beating the child in face (only 43% and 50%, respectively) and ban on meeting with peers (59% and 45%).

Notably the respondents' attitudes toward spanking as punishment are completely different. Only a small number of respondents (20% and 22%) found justified interventions by third parties in such cases.

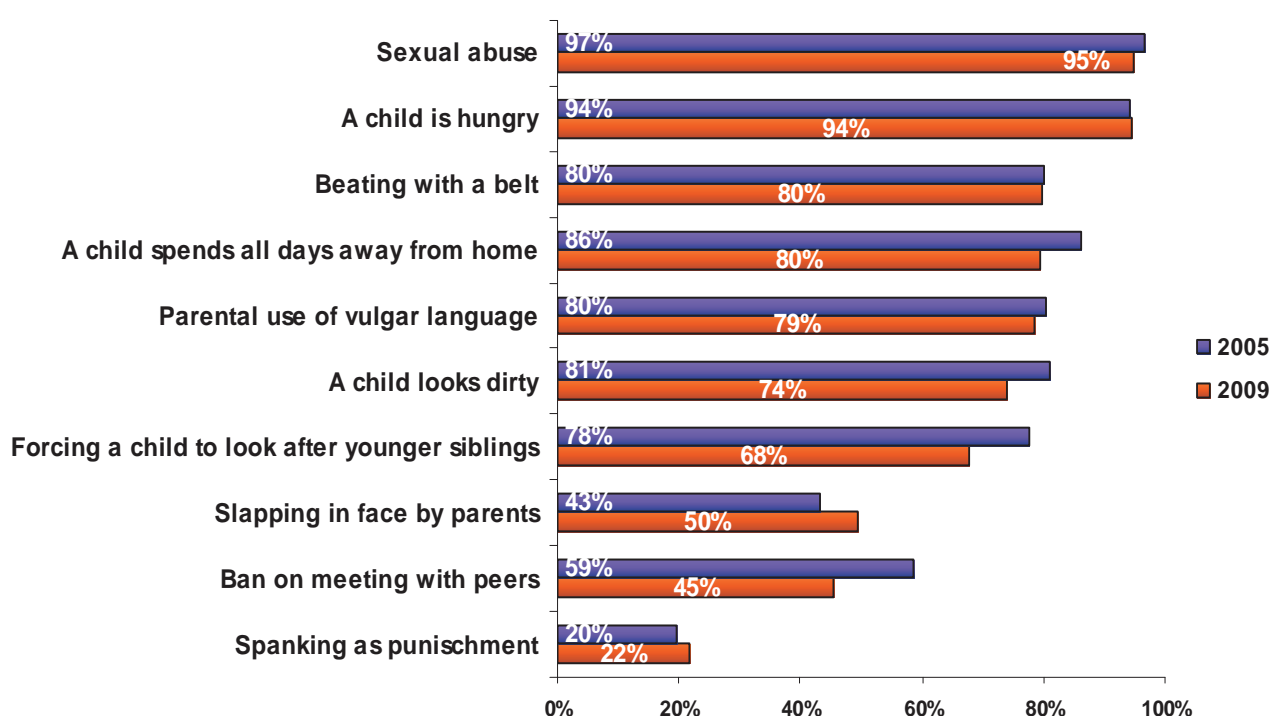


Figure 8. Situations seen by the respondents as justifying an intervention by a third party (%).

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). More than half of subjects believe it is humiliating for the child but alarmingly as much as 16% express the opposite opinion and for 29% is hard to say. Simultaneously, according to 44% of the respondents, a parent who uses this form o punishment is not good at child rearing; but again 9% have the opposite opinion and for 30% of respondents is hard to

say. Attitudes toward corporal punishment has not changed significantly for the past 4 years. In the light of these findings, the perception of spanking as not requiring intervention of a third party seems quite consistent.

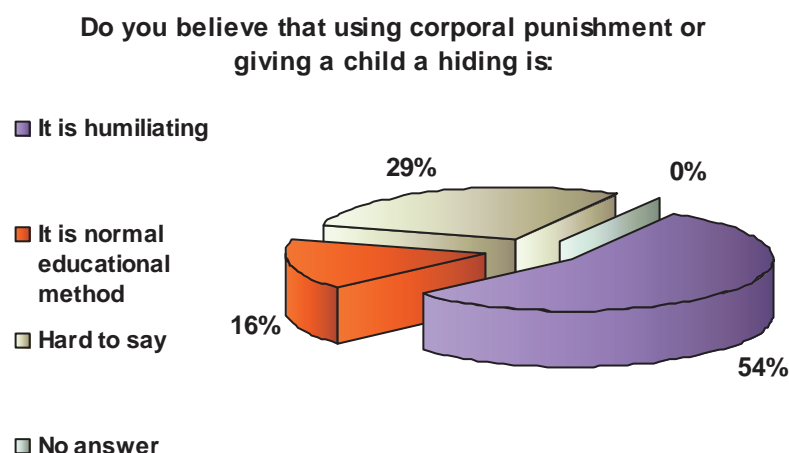


Figure 9. Attitudes toward corporal punishment (giving the child a hiding) in %. Do you think using corporal punishment or giving the child a hiding:

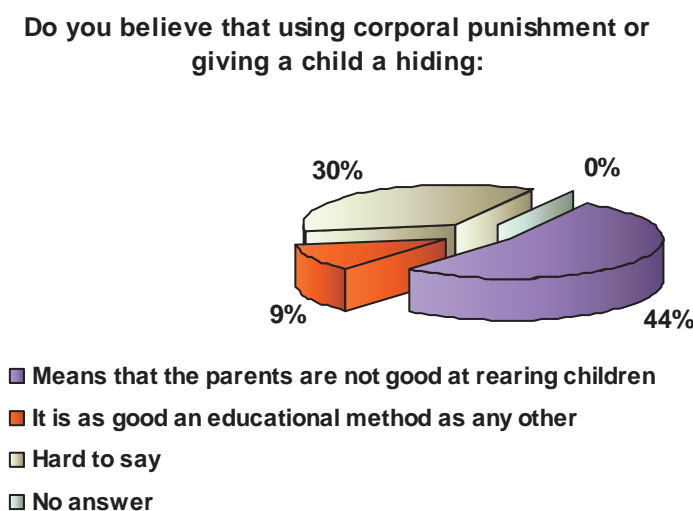


Figure 10. Attitudes toward corporal punishment (giving the child a hiding) in %. Do you think using corporal punishment or giving the child a hiding:

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 drinking alcohol

support for corporal punishment has slightly dropped. Invariably, the subjects see giving a hiding as justified when the child has committed petty theft, drunk alcohol, show disrespect toward parents, smoked cigarettes or playing truant.

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).

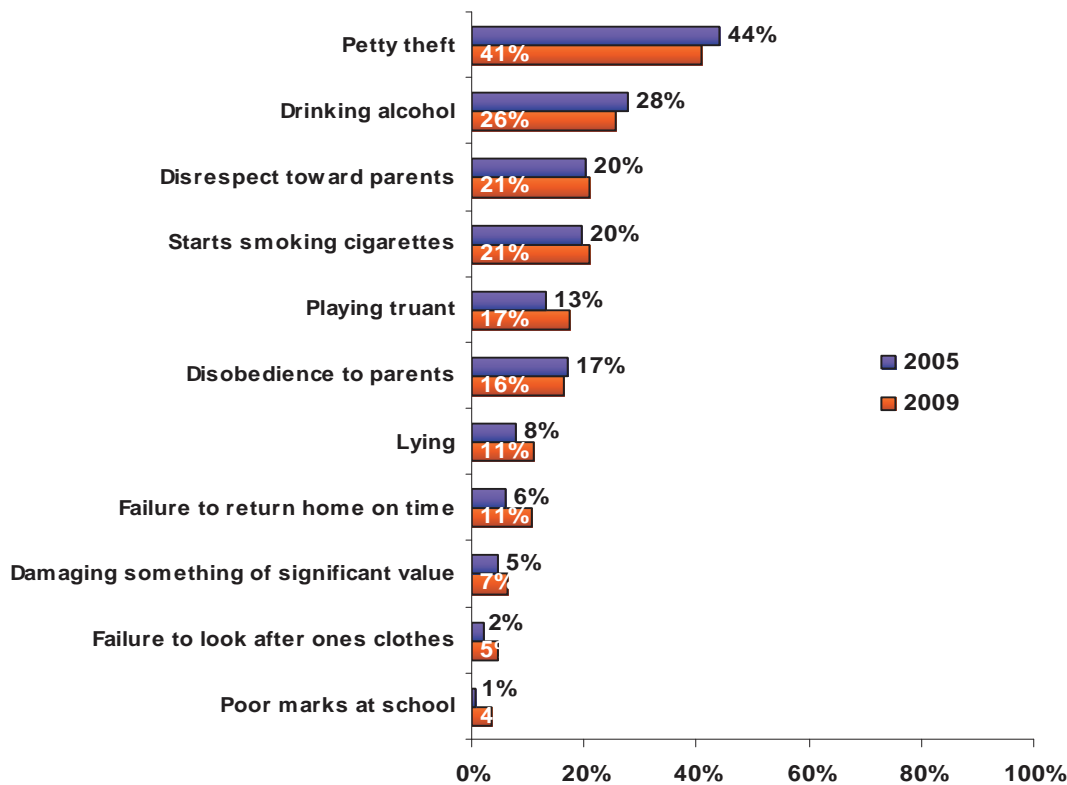


Figure11. *In what situations do you regard giving a child a hiding as justified; would you punish the child in this way? Do you believe that a child deserves a hiding when...?*

The percentage of respondents who answered "yes".

Table 2. *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	8%	11%	67%	60%	22%	28%	3%	1%
Failure to look after clothes	6%	11%	70%	68%	22%	20%	3%	1%
Damaging something of significant value	1%	4%	84%	86%	13%	10%	3%	1%
Failure to return home on time	13%	17%	64%	61%	19%	20%	4%	1%
Lying	20%	21%	55%	52%	23%	25%	2%	2%
Playing truant	5%	7%	80%	72%	14%	20%	2%	2%
Disobedience to parents	2%	5%	84%	83%	12%	11%	2%	1%
Smoking	17%	16%	55%	58%	26%	24%	2%	1%
Disrespect for parents	20%	21%	56%	49%	22%	30%	2%	1%
Petty theft	28%	26%	47%	43%	24%	31%	2%	1%
Drinking alcohol	44%	41%	32%	28%	22%	30%	2%	1%

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. 21% 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 less likely to encounter cases of child abuse. On the one hand, the finding is encouraging as it may reflect an decrease in the prevalence of child abuse. On the other hand, the result may be seen as quite disturbing, reflecting the teachers' lower awareness and enhanced sensitivity to the problem.

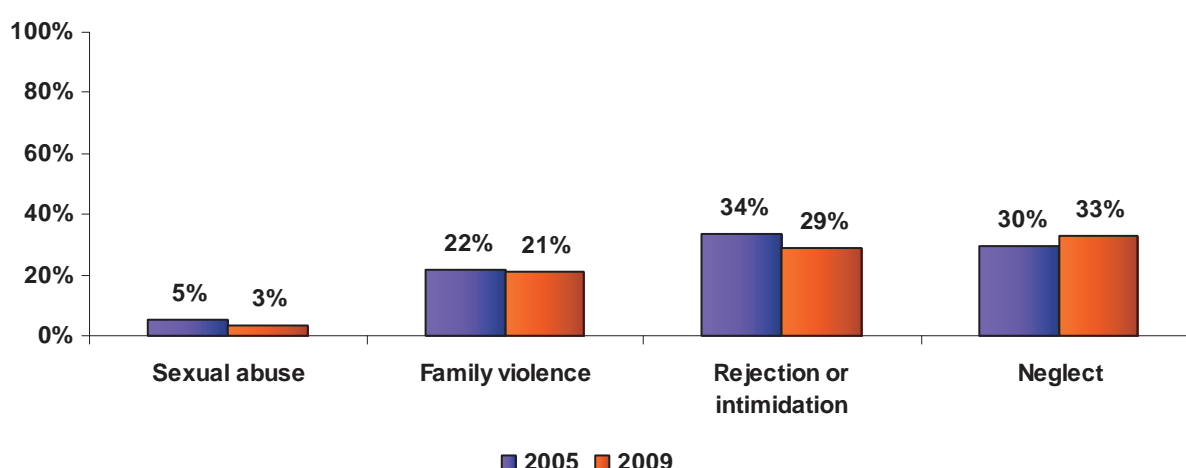


Figure 12. *The percentage of teachers who have encountered cases of child abuse among the students of their schools during the past 12 months.*

Thus, teachers are witnesses to abuse, but does their increased awareness lead to any actions? The respondents' reports are quite ambiguous (Figure 13). Quarter of them claim that they always respond to cases to abuse, and about the same proportion say they intervene sometimes. The most alarming is the percentage of subjects who admit that they never take any action in response to cases of child abuse (41%). Of course, this is just a self-report, but a change in attitudes is a prerequisite for a change in behaviour.

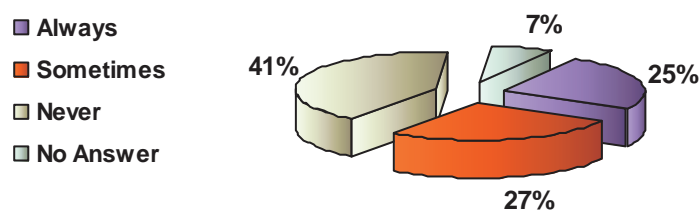


Figure 13. *In cases of child abuse that you have encountered during the past 12 months, did you take any action? (%)*

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 30% of responses). However, the percentage of respondents who took such actions has decreased dramatically over the past 4 years (e.g., in 2005 62% of the respondents reported to have talked to the parents in such cases, whereas in the 2009 survey the percentage was only 37%).

Notably, teachers are less and less likely to report cases of child abuse to all institutions responsible for dealing with the problems of neglect, despite the fact that 21% of the respondents have encountered cases of domestic violence, and 3% had contact with sexual abuse. According to the Latvian penal code, both forms of abuse are punishable offences.

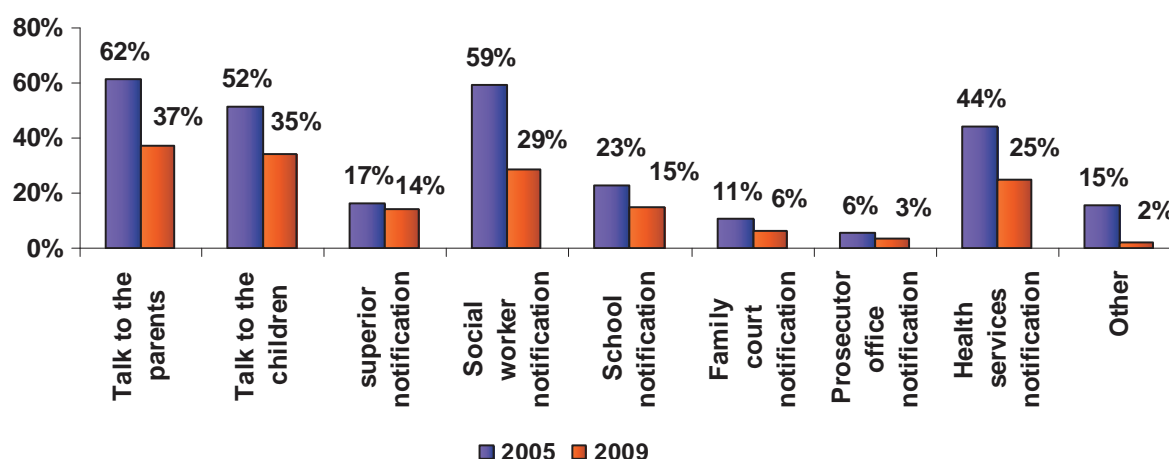


Figure 14. *Types of actions taken by the teachers in response to cases of child abuse.*

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 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"). Another reason is feeling helpless ("I didn't know what to do" and "I didn't believe my intervention would be effective"). 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. Alarming as compared to the 2005 survey and 2009 the subjects more often reported, that they didn't know how to intervene (21% and 34% respectively) On the other hand as compared to the 2005 survey and 2009 only few subjects reported lack of time or opportunity as a reason of their inaction (18% and 11%).

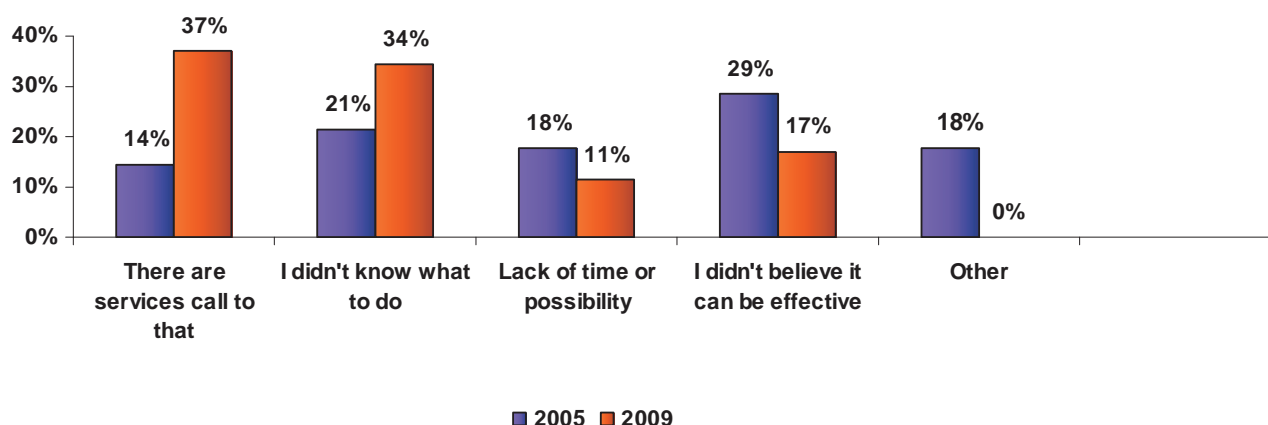


Figure 15. *When you didn't take any action, was it because...*

Can children be protected from abuse?

The feeling of helplessness, which turned out to be the second 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. 23% of the respondents believe the problem may be prevented to a large extent. 45% subjects thinks that the problem may be prevented to a small extent, and only 3% answered that it could not be prevented at all.

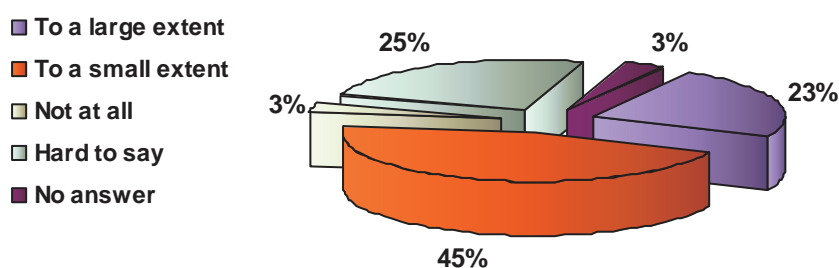


Figure 16. *Responses to the question: Do you think it is possible to prevent child abuse? (%)*

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 majority (over 60) believe that the law should regulate parents' behaviour toward their children (Figure 16). The opposite view was expressed by about 2% of the respondents. This attitudes has not changed significantly for the past 4 years.

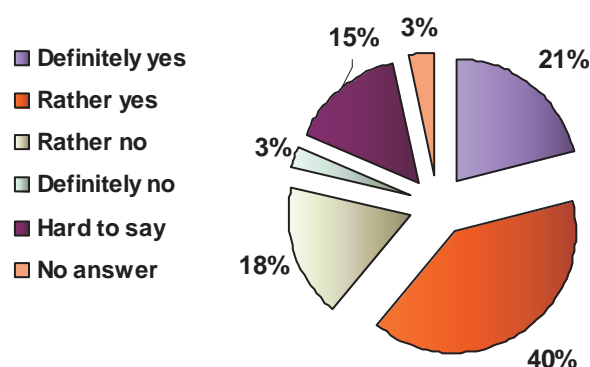


Figure 17. *Should the way parents treat their children be regulated by the law? (%)*

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 about half the respondents (47% in 2005 and 53% in 2009); the opponents of the ban constituted 17% and 15% 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.

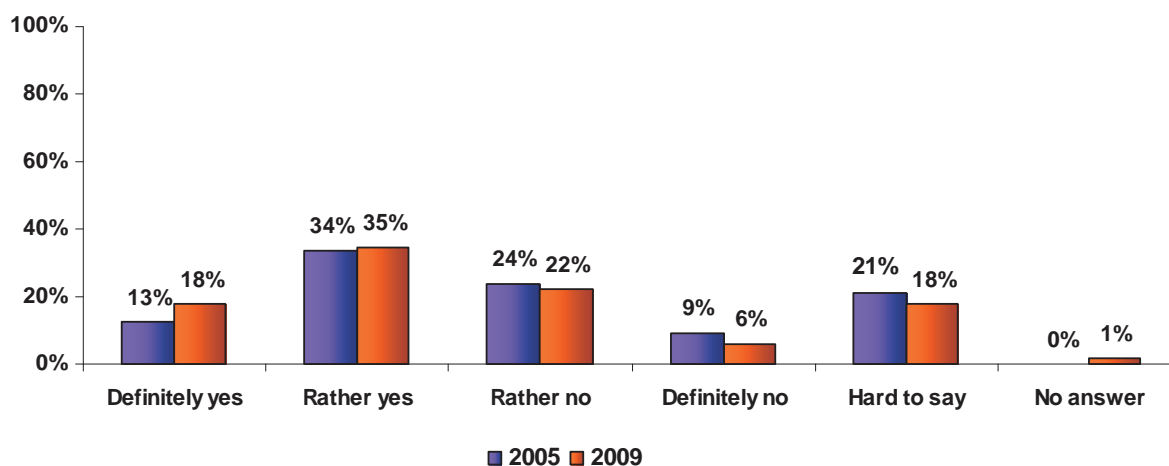


Figure 18. *Do you think that using corporal punishment by parents should be legally banned?*

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 Latvia (Figure 19). Almost three out of four of them think that institutional services enable providing real help for children. The group has not significantly changed since the 2005 survey.

These results are inconsistent with previous findings and did not explain reasons why so few teachers report cases of child abuse to relevant institutions (see Figure 14).

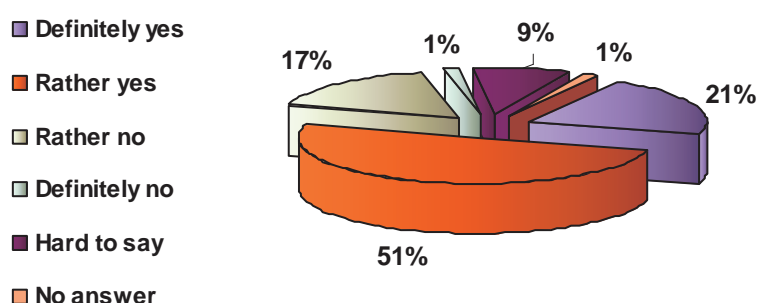


Figure 19. *The assessment of institutional help services available for abused children (the percentage distribution of responses to the question: “Do you believe that the current institutional help services make it possible to provide real help for abused children in our country?”).*

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. Notably the second indicated was health service centres (for corporal punishment indicated as first in 2009 survey - 57%). In the question about sexual abuse the main emphasis was put on law-enforcement institutions (the police, the prosecutor's office – more than 50% 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 that it remains almost unchanged in most cases. Only for neglect the percentage has dropped for the social service centres, drops have also been observed for the police.

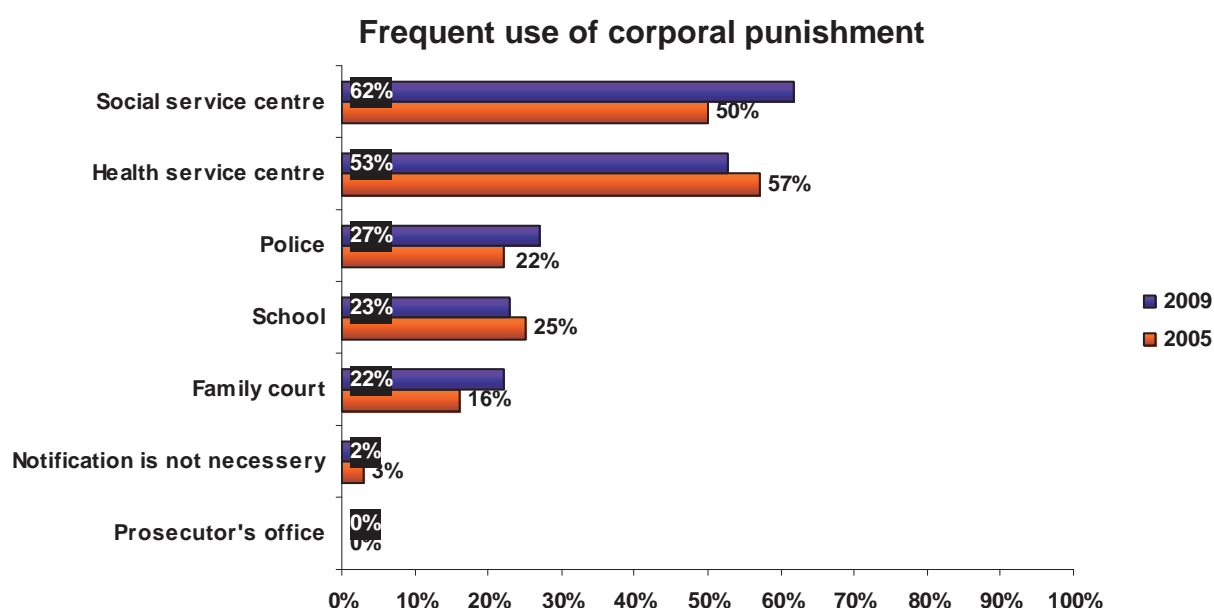


Figure 20. The respondents' opinions (%) on which of the listed institutions should intervene if a child experiences corporal punishment in the family (the subjects were asked to mark all the institutions that should take action).

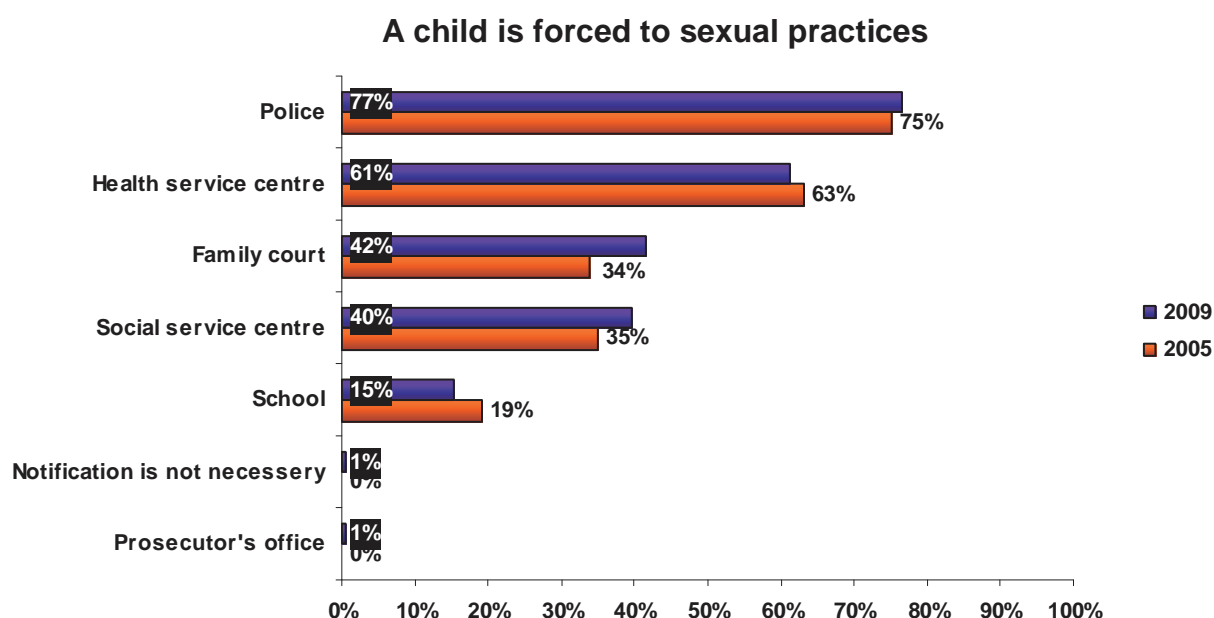


Figure 21. The respondents' opinions (%) on which of the listed institutions should intervene if a child is forced to sexual practices by a family member (the subjects were asked to mark all the institutions that should take action).

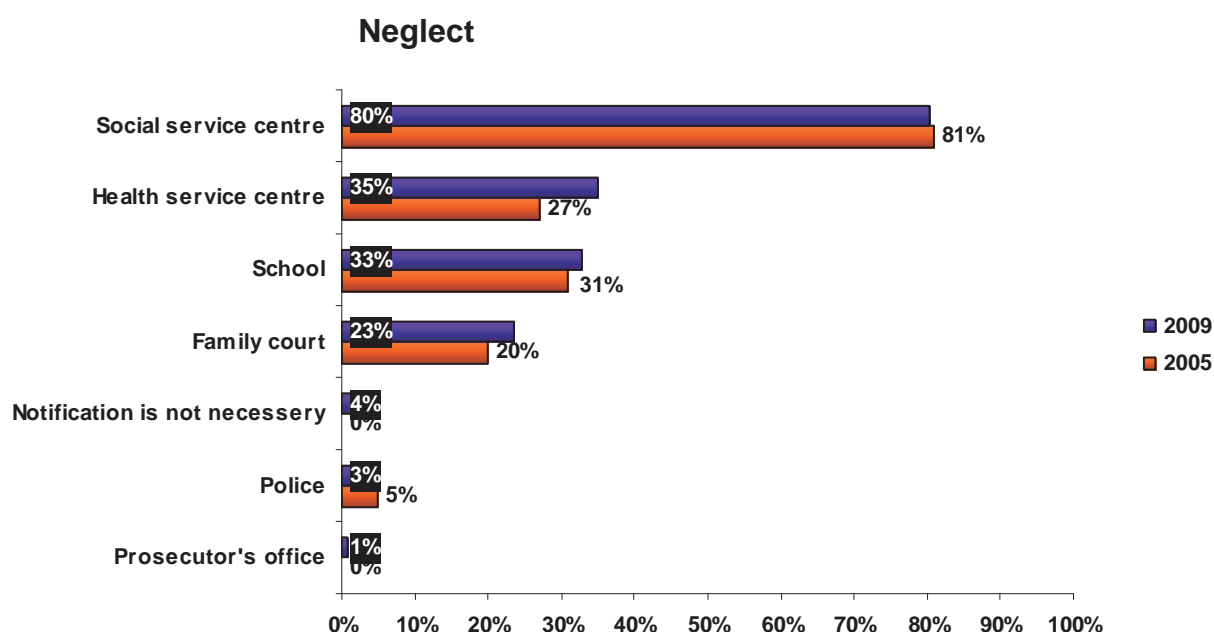


Figure 22. *The respondents' opinions (%) on which of the listed institutions should intervene if a child is physically neglected: dirty, hungry, and badly dressed (the subjects were asked to mark all the institutions that should take action).*

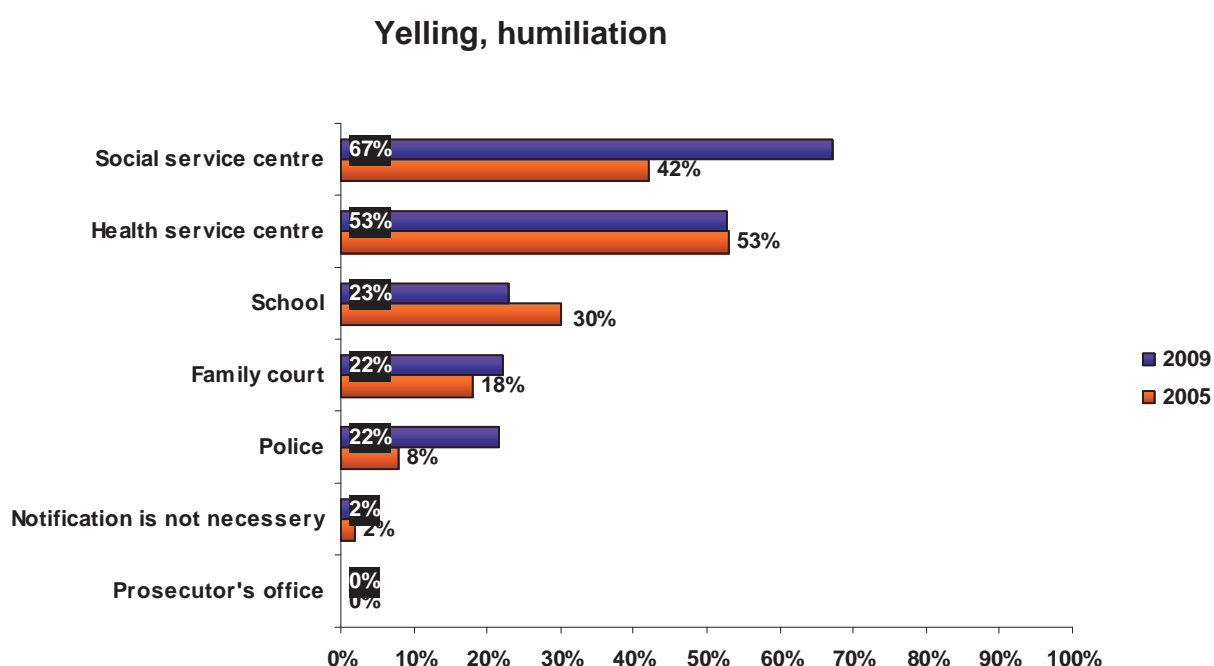


Figure 23. *The respondents' opinions (%) on which of the listed institutions should intervene if a child is yelled at, humiliated or rejected by his/her parents (the subjects were asked to mark all the institutions that should take action).*

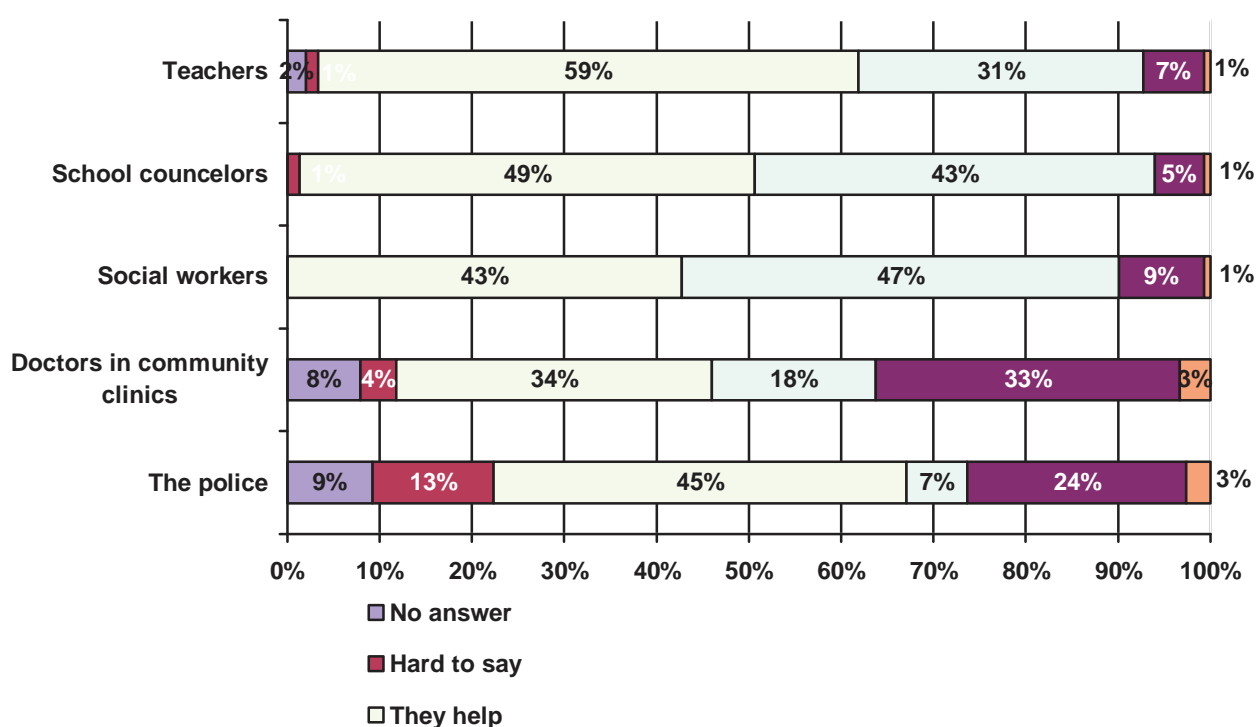
Knowing the respondents' views on the competences and responsibility of each institution, it was worth asking them to evaluate the extent to which these institutions fulfil their tasks.

Thus, the teachers were requested to evaluate help services provided by each professional group for children who are maltreated in their families (Figure 24).

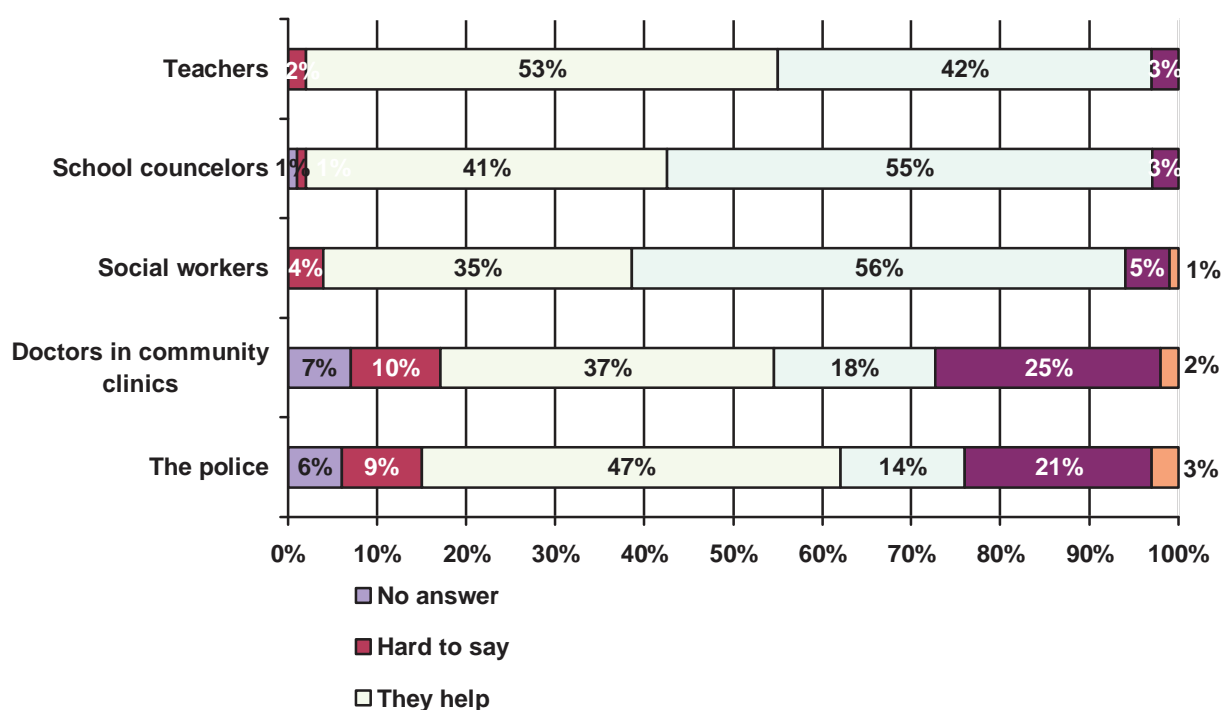
The largest proportion of respondents believe that the professional groups listed in the questionnaire try to help or actually provide help for children. Teachers as well as school counsellors and social workers were evaluated the most favourably; about 90%, 92% and 90% (95%, 96% and 91% in 2005) of 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 former professional groups. The subjects are the most critical of health care professionals (physicians) at local clinics and police (25% and 21% of the respondents marked the answer: “They don’t help at all, though they have some potential”). Only few subjects marked the response: “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.

Doctors from hospitals, social workers and school counsellors and psychologists are perceived as "top of the class" in identifying cases of child abuse (Tables 3 and 4). Doctors from local clinics and police officers are given the poorest marks in terms of their knowledge about diagnosing/identifying cases of abuse ("They have no knowledge": from 3% in 2005 to 6% in 2009 and from 10% in 2005 to 3% in 2009). The largest positive change has been observed in the respondents' perceptions of physicians' at hospitals knowledge about child abuse – in the 2009 study more teachers expressed positive opinions about the doctor's knowledge on diagnosing child abuse (evaluating it as "sufficient"; an increase from 44% to 62%). Just like in the previous survey, the teachers evaluated themselves quite leniently, though without over-optimism; the most frequent response to the question concerning their colleagues' knowledge about identifying child abuse was: "They have some knowledge, but it's insufficient" (57%).

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 (51% and 58% from 54% and 46% in 2005 survey); teachers have "some knowledge, but it's insufficient" (53%), and physicians working at hospitals are the most likely to be seen as not knowing how to intervene (3%). The respondents' opinions about the police left almost unchanged – although today more teachers evaluate their knowledge positively ("They have sufficient knowledge": 28% in 2009, i.e., 3% 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	13%	32%	59%	44%	10%	3%	16%	19%	2%	2%
Doctors from local clinics	32%	46%	43%	32%	3%	6%	19%	15%	3%	2%
Doctors from hospitals	44%	62%	29%	20%	3%	3%	21%	13%	3%	1%
Social Workers	53%	61%	34%	24%	1%	2%	10%	12%	2%	1%
School counsellors and psychologist	47%	54%	40%	36%	1%	1%	10%	8%	2%	1%
Teachers	27%	30%	57%	57%	2%	2%	12%	11%	3%	1%

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	19%	43%	43%	34%	13%	2%	21%	20%	3%	2%
Doctors from local clinics	23%	31%	47%	41%	5%	3%	22%	22%	3%	3%
Doctors from hospitals	33%	45%	36%	28%	4%	2%	23%	22%	4%	3%
Social Workers	54%	58%	30%	25%	0%	1%	12%	12%	5%	3%
School counsellors and psychologist	46%	51%	38%	38%	1%	1%	12%	9%	4%	2%
Teachers	25%	28%	50%	53%	3%	3%	17%	13%	5%	2%

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 criminal courts' sentences are too lenient (40%), investigations and court procedures are too long (38%) and there is lack of possibility to isolate the offender from the victim (32%). These findings are disturbing, however a positive tendency can be seen – for most of the questions the percentage of the “often” response has declined, by up to 13% (“Too lenient sentences for perpetrators of child abuse”).

The assessment of the remaining situations listed in the questionnaire, associated mainly with reporting the offence and with interviewing procedures, is somewhat better (most often, the respondents selected the “sometimes” response). Notably, however, a large group of subjects found it difficult to evaluate these situations.

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	21%	15%	36%	37%	7%	13%	34%	33%	3%	1%
Withdrawal of the offence notification by the reporting person (despite actual abuse)	15%	16%	34%	33%	3%	7%	43%	43%	4%	2%
Cases are discontinued by prosecutors (despite actual abuse experienced by the child)	5%	5%	19%	13%	7%	8%	65%	72%	4%	2%
Inappropriate conditions and procedures of interviewing children	17%	14%	22%	21%	5%	6%	51%	55%	5%	4%
Lack of possibility to isolate the offender from the victim	42%	32%	20%	23%	4%	6%	28%	36%	5%	2%
Lack of possibility to provide treatment for the offender	24%	21%	19%	21%	8%	7%	44%	49%	5%	3%
Too lenient sentences for perpetrators of child abuse	53%	40%	15%	19%	1%	2%	26%	36%	6%	3%
Failure to execute family courts' decisions	19%	18%	24%	15%	4%	4%	46%	59%	7%	3%
Lengthy investigations and court procedures	45%	38%	13%	17%	2%	1%	34%	41%	7%	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; 73% said that the suspect should be isolated from the family until the case is clarified (Table 6). Simultaneously, about 99% 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	1%	1%	10%	19%	46%	44%	30%	21%	13%	16%	1%	0%
Parent suspected of sexual abuse should be isolate from the family to the time the case will be finished	70%	73%	22%	18%	1%	1%	2%	2%	5%	6%	1%	0%
Many children suffering violence in their families because other don't react	18%	12%	55%	47%	8%	13%	0%	1%	17%	26%	1%	1%
Child protection institutions rarely cooperate with each other	12%	8%	40%	33%	15%	18%	1%	3%	32%	37%	1%	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: the majority of them (72%) believe that the abusive father should be punished. The teachers emphasized lack of treatment for offenders of physical abuse (Figures 25 and 26). Only 35% of the respondents think that abusive father should be only punished, whereas punishment and treatment are supported by only 27%.

As far as child sexual abusers are concerned, during the past 4 years the percentage of respondents who support treatment remind almost unchanged (from 30% to 34%), while the proportion of those who support punishment has increased (from 49% up to 66%). This means that the respondents regard fathers who sexually abuse their children as people who need help rather than as offenders!

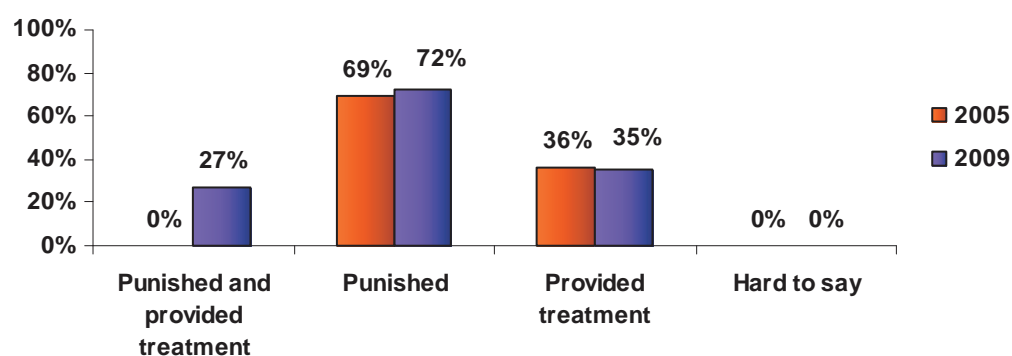


Figure 25. *Supported ways of dealing with fathers who abuse their children sexually.*

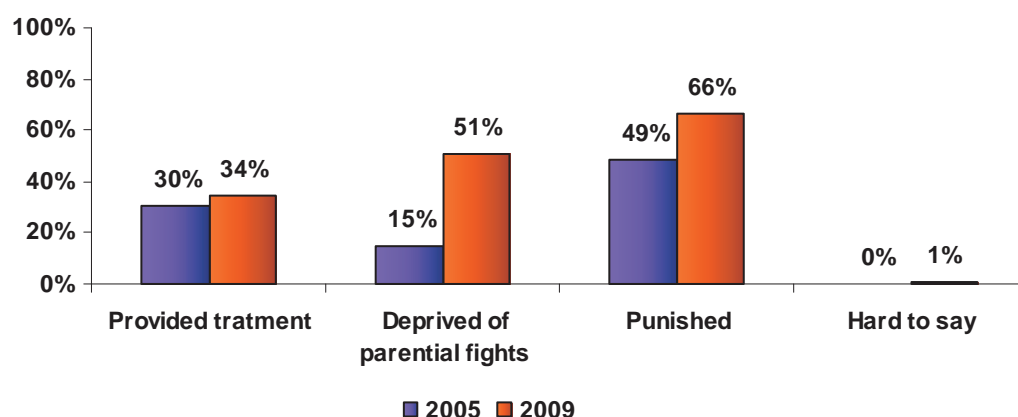


Figure 26. Supported ways of dealing with a parent who is a perpetrator of physical abuse (who has beaten his/her child severely, causing physical injuries).

Conclusions

- Half of adult Latvians believe that the use of corporal punishment is justified in some situations.
- According to teachers, spanking a child as punishment is the most frequent form of child abuse in Latvia.
- 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, is increasing.
- Most 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.
- Almost half of teachers admitted that they never take any action in cases of child abuse, in most cases due to dispersed responsibility for children's safety and the lack of knowledge how to help. Only 25 % of teachers report that they always intervene in cases on child abuse and majority of these interventions did not involve services.
- Two thirds of teachers believe that the problem of child abuse can be prevented to a large extent.
- More than half of teachers supports a legal ban on the use of corporal punishment of children.
- Teachers express increasingly positive opinions about institutional help for abused children.

- The number of teachers thinking that social workers, school counsellors and psychologists help or try to help children, despite their limited potential, has significantly dropped. Help provided by social service centres and physicians at local clinics has been evaluated the least positively.
- According to a majority of teachers, it is often the case that the investigation and court proceedings are too long, sentences are too lenient, and there is lack of possibility to isolate the offender from the victim.
- Over the past 4 years the proportion of teachers who support providing treatment for abusive fathers (perpetrators of child sexual abuse), and the proportion of those who are in favour of only punishing them has significantly increased.