

Warsaw teachers' attitudes toward child abuse

Research report



Nobody's Children Foundation

The report presents findings from a survey conducted in Poland in 2009 within a research programme carried out in seven East European Countries (Bulgaria, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Bulgaria) – 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).

Poles' opinions about the use of corporal punishment of children

The survey of Poles' attitudes toward the use of corporal punishment of children was conducted by TNS OBOP – at the Nobody's Children Foundation's request – in December 2005 and May 2009,

Alarmingly, more than half of adult Poles (64% in 2009) believe that corporal punishment is experienced by over 30% of children in Poland. However, 4 years ago this belief was held by as many as 75% of the Polish sample! This means that people in Poland have observed some improvement of the situation of children.

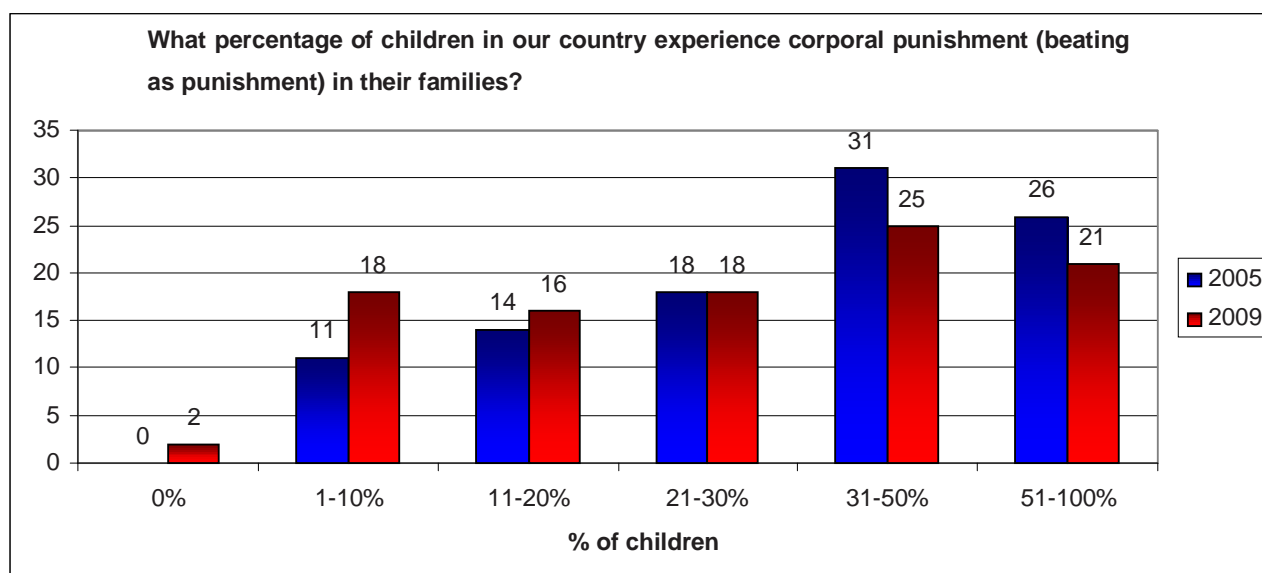


Figure I. Estimated prevalence of the use of corporal punishment of children in Poland.

Unfortunately, the evaluation of corporal punishment as a child-rearing method has not changed significantly. About 50% of Poles still think it is justified in some situations and only 38% (in 2009) believe it should never be used.

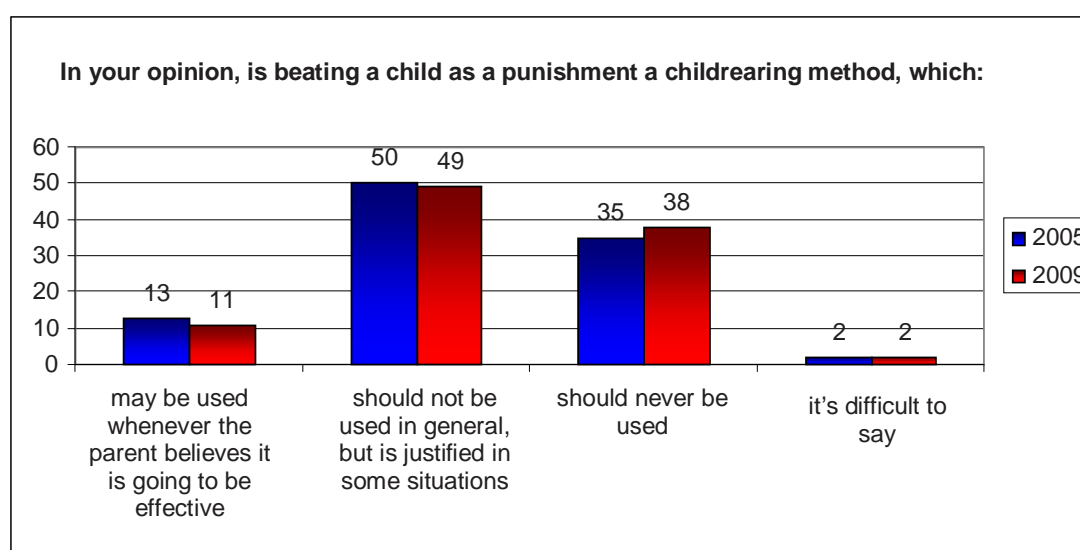


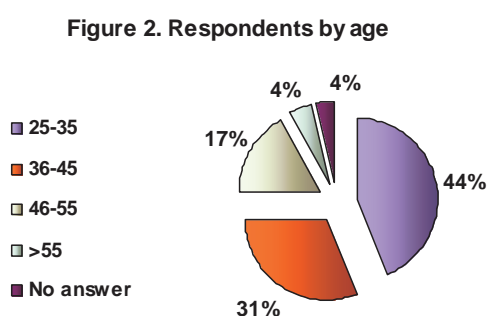
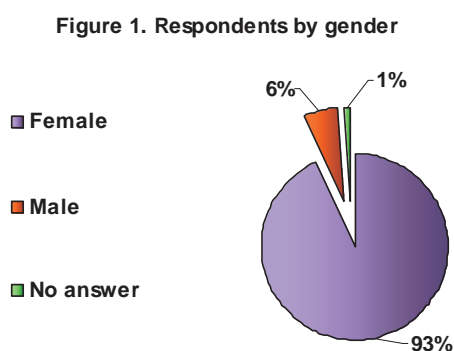
Figure II. Evaluation of corporal punishment as a child-rearing method (%)

The survey of Poles' 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 decreasing. This may result from the fact that the list of situations in which beating a child as punishment is seen as acceptable has become shorter.

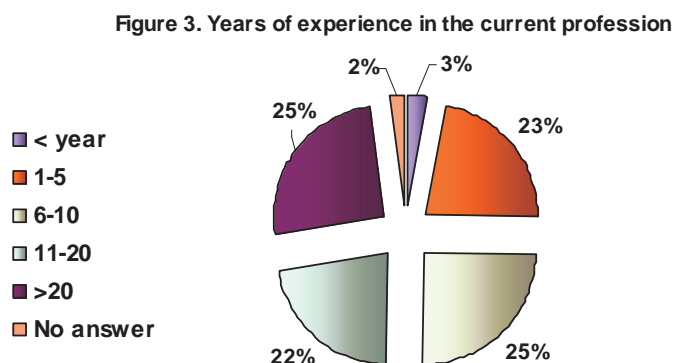
Teacher's attitudes toward corporal punishment of children

The sample

The 2009 survey was conducted on a sample of 189 teachers working at Warsaw schools. A vast majority of the sample (93%) were women, just as in the 2005 study (85%). Invariably, teachers under 45 constituted the largest subgroup of the respondents (75%).



In comparison to the 2005 study, the group of teachers with long professional experience (more than 10 years of teaching) has slightly decreased – from 52% to 47%. Nearly three out of four respondents reported to have worked as teachers for more than 5 years.



Most respondents (58.2%) have their own children, although relative to the 2005 survey this group has decreased by 9%.

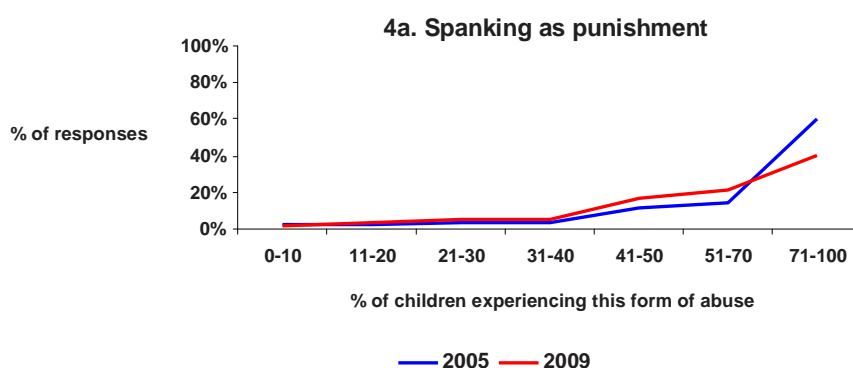
76.2% of the respondents described themselves as religious or deeply religious (a slight decline in comparison to 2005), 7.9% as hesitant about religion, and 5.8% as non-believers; 11.1% of the teachers (i.e., almost 7% more than in 2005) did not answer the question.

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.

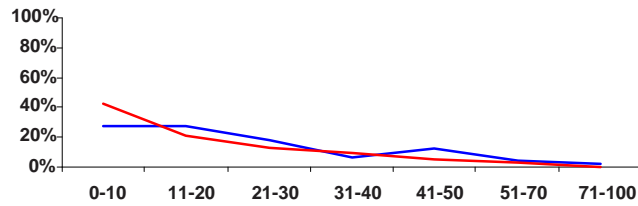
In one of the first questions the respondents were asked to estimate the prevalence and dynamics of the child abuse problem. As presented below (Figures 4a – 4h), teachers vary in their opinions about what percentage of children experience abuse. In the past 4 years, their estimations of the prevalence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

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

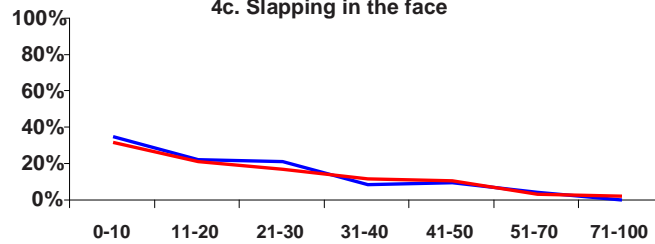


According to the respondents Polish children are most likely to experience spanking as punishment (more than 60% in 2005 and more than 40% in 2009 believe that this form of abuse is experienced by over 70% of children in our country!).

4b. Severe corporal punishment

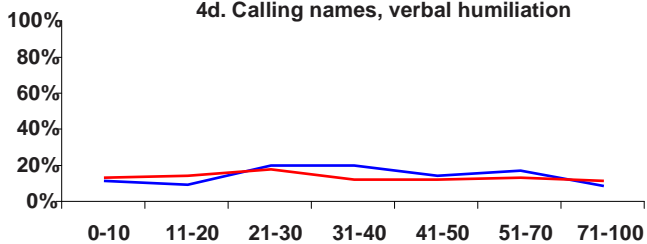


4c. Slapping in the face

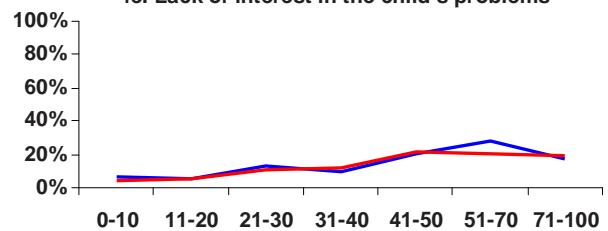


The most optimistic estimations concern the prevalence of severe corporal punishment and slapping in the face; the largest proportion of the respondents (40%) believe that this form of abuse is experienced by fewer than 10% of children in Poland.

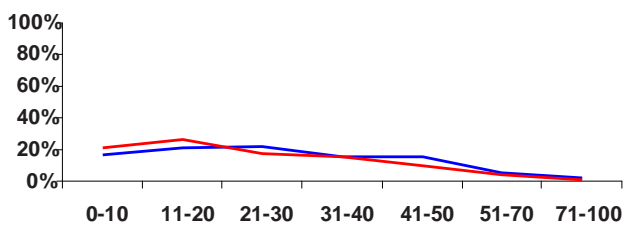
4d. Calling names, verbal humiliation



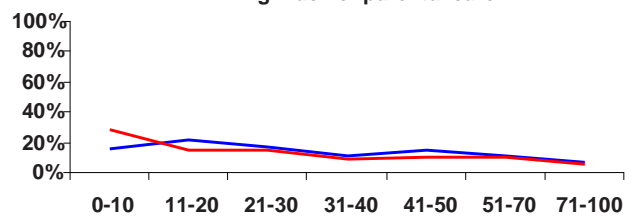
4e. Lack of interest in the child's problems



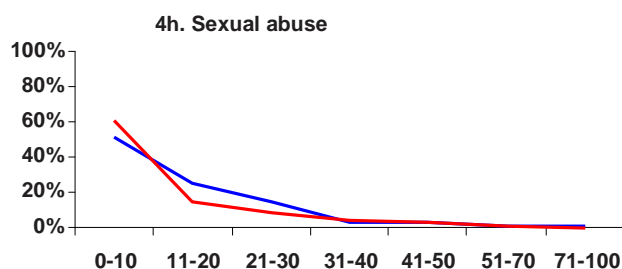
4f. Neglect



4g. Lack of parental care



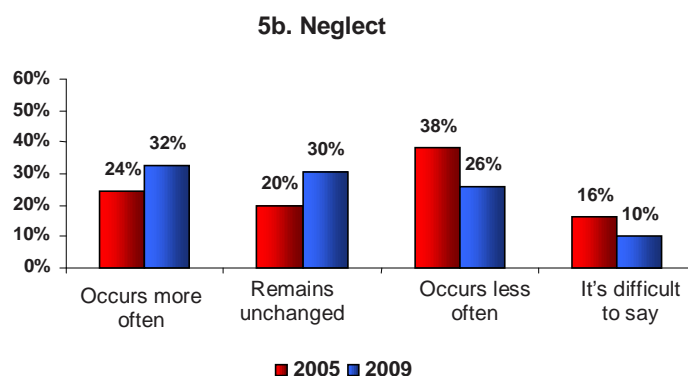
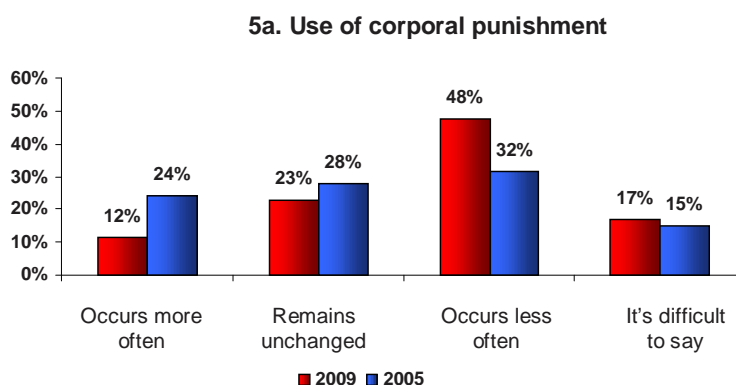
The respondents found it the most difficult to estimate the prevalence of emotional abuse and neglect / lack of parental care: for these questions their responses were almost evenly distributed along the 0% to 100% scale.



Notably, almost half of the respondents believe that sexual abuse affects more than 10% children in Poland. The percentage of respondents who think this form of abuse is experienced by 10–30% of children has slightly increased during the past 4 years.

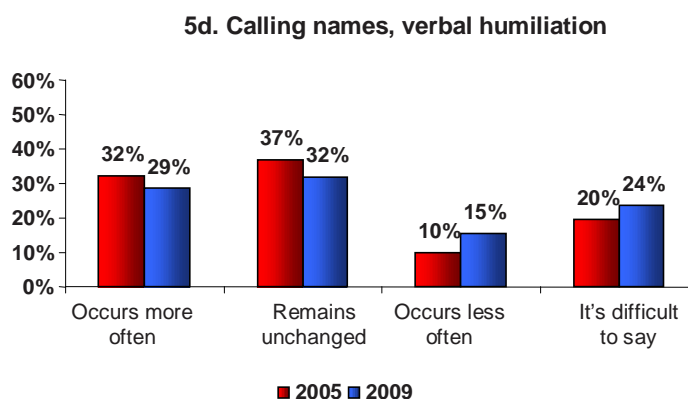
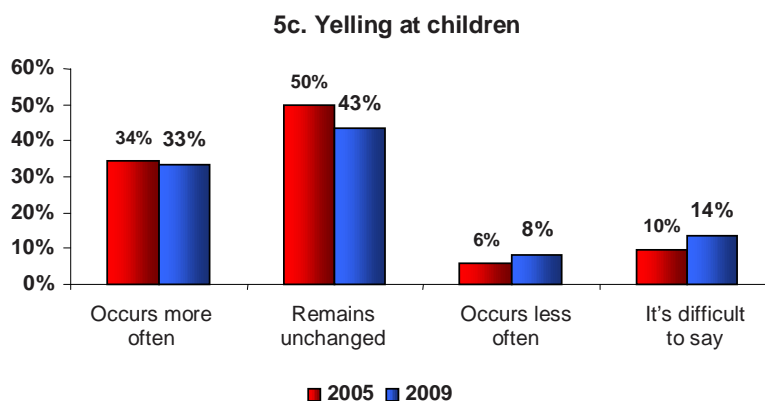
The respondents were also asked to assess the dynamics of child abuse over the past 10 years: is the prevalence of the problem changing? If yes, is the problem – in their opinion – getting more or less prevalent? How has the perceived dynamics changed over the past 4 years?

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

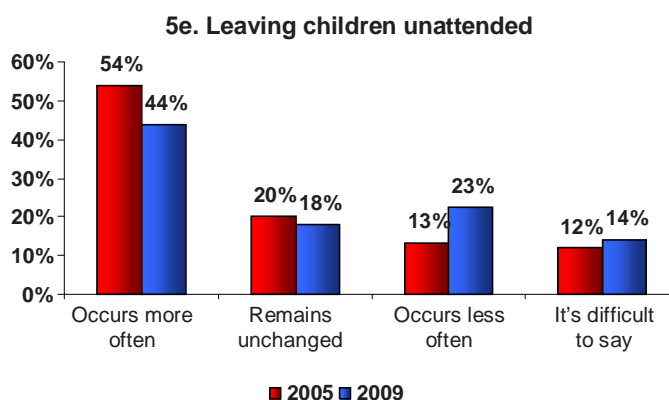


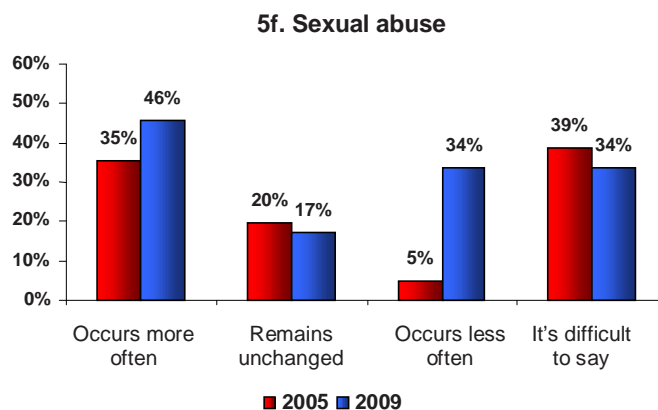
During the past 4 years the proportion of respondents who believe that corporal punishment and neglect of children occur with increasing frequency has grown, which is consistent with the tendency shown in a previous chart (Figure 4a): a decline (from 60% to

40%) in a percentage of respondents who think that spanking as punishment is experienced by over 70% of children in Poland. Nevertheless, large proportions of respondents observe declining tendencies for the use of corporal punishment (32%) and neglect (26%) (Figures 5a and 5b).



The weakest dynamics over the past 10 years was observed in the area of verbal abuse of children (43% and 32% of „Remains unchanged” responses, respectively; see Figures 5c and 5d). Simultaneously, the respondents’ estimations concerning this form of abuse, as compared to 2005, are slightly more optimistic; there are more responses: „Occurs less often”.



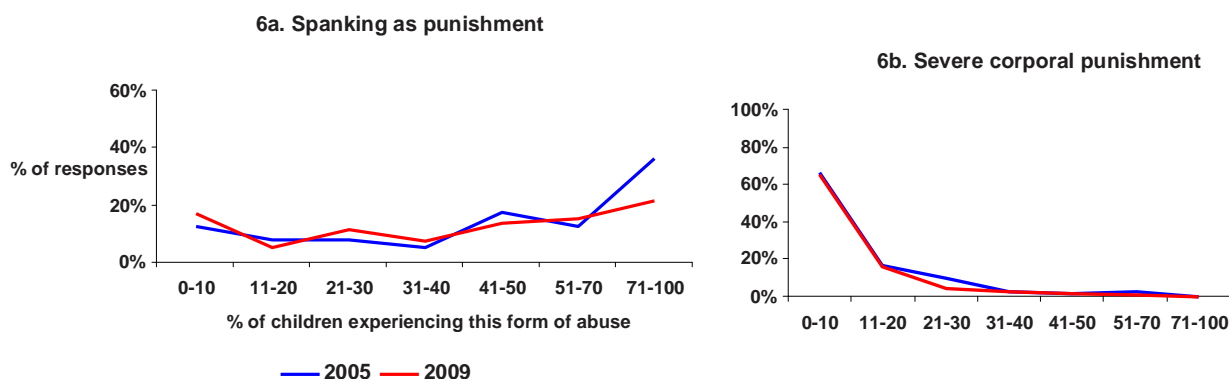


According to the respondents, the major problems – and ones that are still growing – include leaving children unattended (44%: „occurs more often”) and sexual abuse (46%: „occurs more often”), although in the latter case more than one third of the subjects found it difficult to estimate the prevalence of this form of abuse.

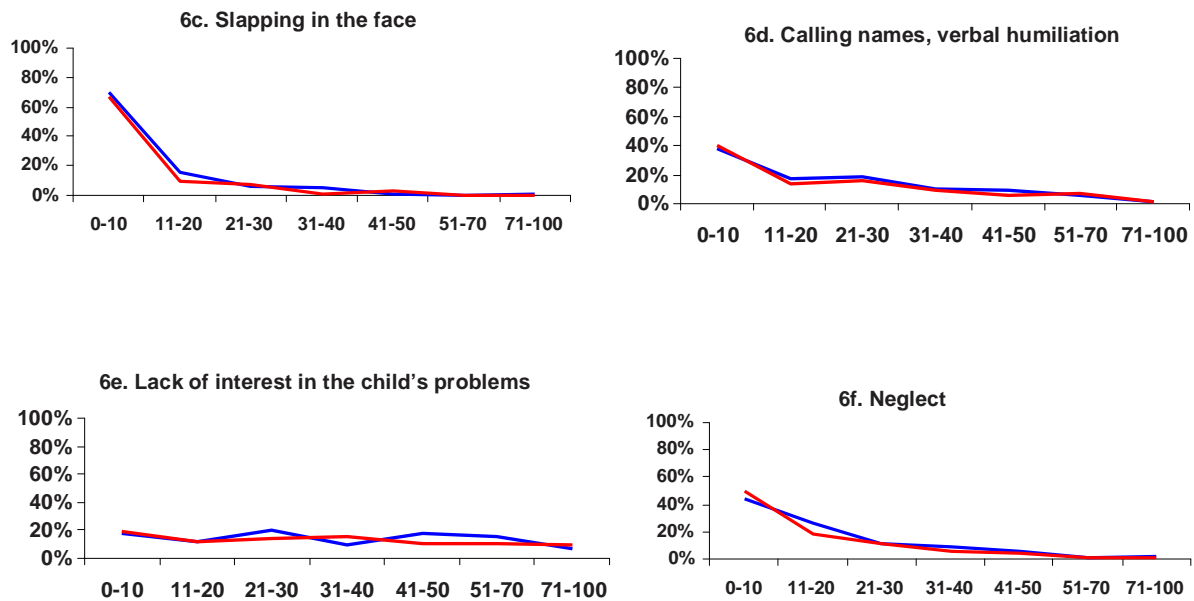
The respondents were also asked to estimate the prevalence of abuse experienced by children attending their schools. Is it the same as in the general child population? If not, what differences have been noticed by the respondents? Is there any relationship between the estimated prevalence of child abuse in Poland 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 spanking, which – according to a large proportion of the sample – is experienced by more than half of the children attending their schools. However, even in this case the previously found declining tendency was confirmed – from 49% in 2005 down to 38% in 2009.

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%.*



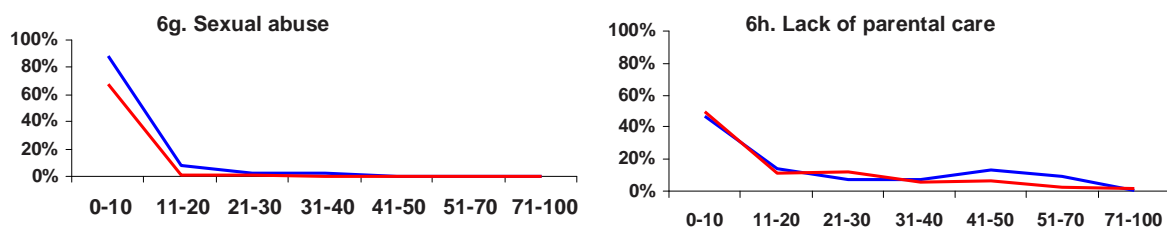
In principle, similarly to the estimated prevalence of child abuse in Poland, the respondents' assessments have not changed significantly since the 2005 survey.



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, calling names and verbal humiliation, and neglect.



Similarly, the teachers hardly ever encounter the problem of sexual abuse of children.

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 (average estimates)		School population (average estimates)	
	2005	2009	2005	2009
Spanking as punishment	72%	61%	55%	40%
Severe corporal punishment	26%	21%	13%	9%
Slapping in the face	24%	17%	12%	9%
Calling names, verbal humiliation	41%	36%	25%	19%
Lack of interest	52%	48%	37%	31%
Neglect	32%	24%	20%	14%
Sexual abuse	17%	11%	5%	4%
Lack of parental care	36%	28%	24%	16%

The biggest differences in the respondents' estimates have been found for spanking (17% in 2005 and 21% in 2009). Notably, according to the subjects, the prevalence of this form of abuse has decreased significantly over the past 4 years.

The teachers made similar estimations of country–school differences in the prevalence of child sexual abuse (the difference was 12% in 2005 and 7% in 2009) and slapping in the face (12% in 2005 and 8% in 2009). At the same time, the subjects perceive these two forms of child abuse as the least frequent ones.

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 decreased. Although this change has been found for all three beliefs, 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

only 7% of the respondents – i.e., 50% less than in the previous survey – agreed with this statement.

Notably, more than 90% of the teachers do not agree with the opinion that fear is a prerequisite for obedience.

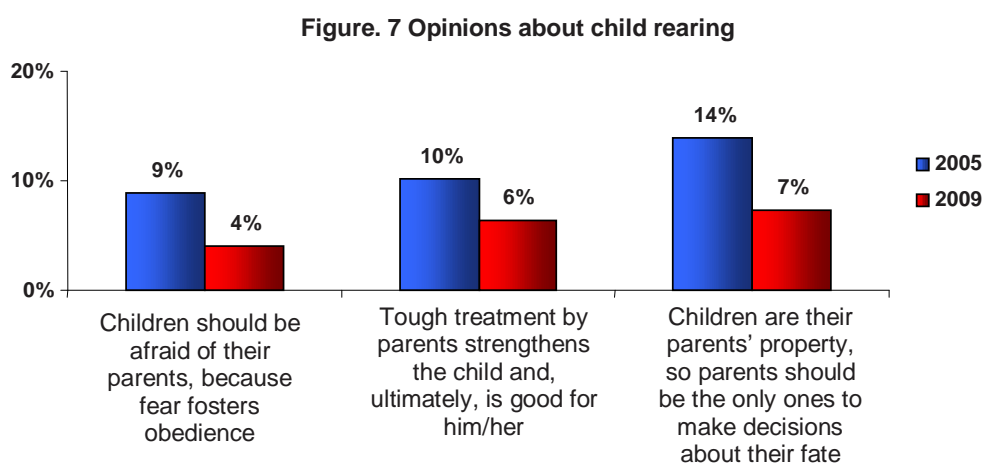


Figure 7. Teachers' opinions on selected views concerning child-rearing. There are many different views about child-rearing. Do you agree with the following statements? The aggregate of „rather yes” and „definitely yes” responses (%).

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 (98% and 99%) and when a child is hungry (97% and 99%). A slightly smaller proportion of respondents (93% and 96%) saw an intervention by a third party as required when a parent slapped his/her child in the face or used vulgar language with the child, as well as when a child looks dirty or spends all days away from home.

The perception of beating a child with a belt has changed significantly during the past 4 years. The group of teachers who see such behaviour as requiring intervention has grown by 18%, up to 97% in the 2009 study.

The respondents were not as unanimous in their assessments of such parental behaviours as grounding the child (imposing a ban on meetings with peers; 83% and 80%, respectively) and forcing the child to take care of younger siblings (84% and 79%).

The respondents' attitudes toward spanking as punishment are completely different. Only 36% (2009) believe that third parties should intervene in such cases; at the same time, the

teachers estimate that more than a half of children in Poland experience this form of abuse (see Table 1). This is a very pessimistic finding which, unfortunately, has been confirmed by the results of other studies; 49% of adult Poles thinks that beating a child “as punishment” may be justified (Figure I). However, the 2009 survey has revealed a positive trend: the percentage of teachers who regard a third party’s intervention in response to a child being spanked as punishment as justified has grown by 16% since 2005.



Situations seen by respondents as justifying interventions by a third party

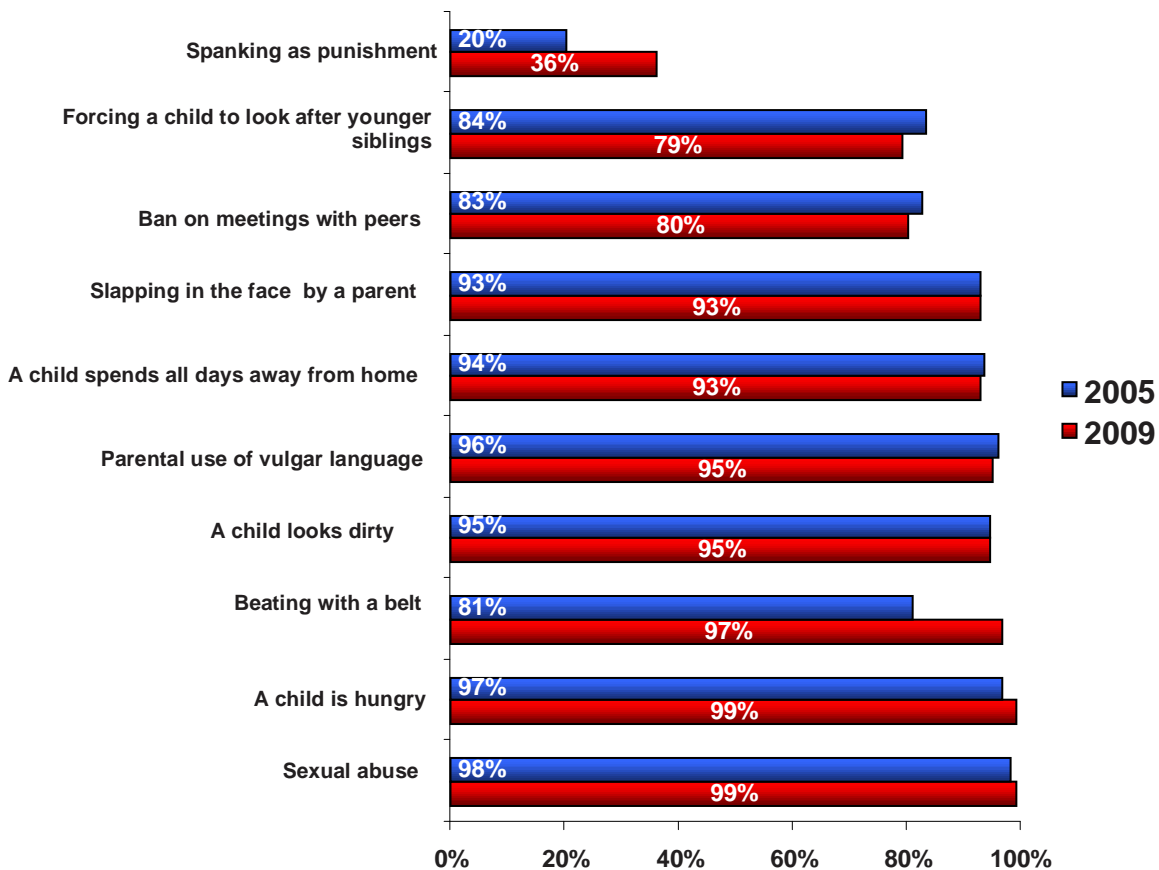


Figure 8. *Situations seen by the respondents as justifying an intervention by a third party (%)*.

Is spanking acceptable?

As illustrated by the chart above, the respondents treat spanking differently than other forms of child abuse. One could conclude that teachers accept this form of punishment of children. However, their responses to further questions about their attitudes toward corporal punishment (giving someone a hiding) do not support this conclusion (see Figures 9 and 10). Three out of four subjects believe it is humiliating for the child and only 7% express the opposite opinion. Simultaneously, according to more than 70% of the

respondents, a parent who uses this form of punishment is not good at child rearing; only 5% 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 not requiring any intervention of a third party seems quite inconsistent.

Perhaps the respondents have been influenced by the public debate about spanking in Poland and by opinions expressed by well-known personalities – including politicians – who spoke about the alleged beneficial effects of spanking and ironically criticised the opponents of this form of punishment.

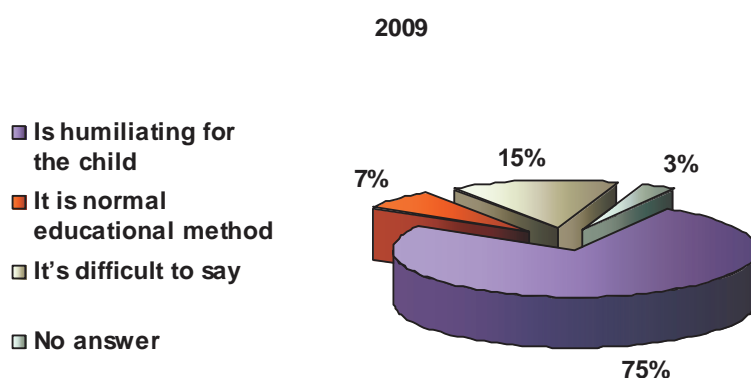


Figure 9. Attitudes toward corporal punishment (giving the child a hiding) in %. Do you think using corporal punishment or giving the child a hiding:

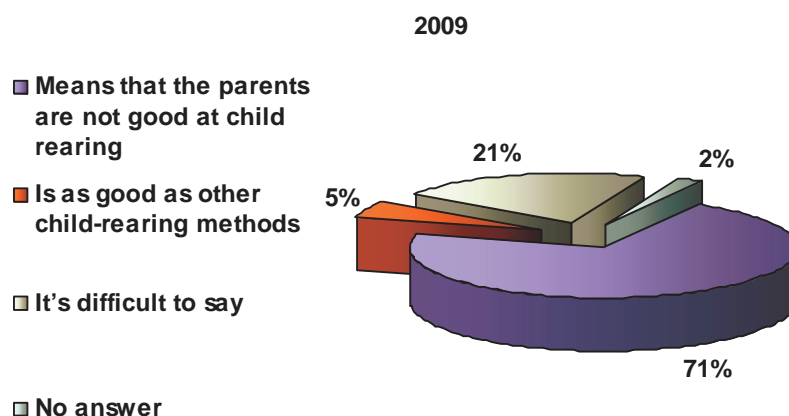


Figure 10. Attitudes toward corporal punishment (giving the child a hiding) in %. Do you think using corporal punishment or giving the child a hiding:

Nonetheless, most respondents (more than 60%) 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 most cases support for corporal punishment has dropped by more than 50%. Invariably, the subjects see giving a hiding as justified when the child has drunk alcohol (22% and 11%, respectively) or has committed a petty theft (20% and 10%). “Disrespect for parents” was rated disturbingly high, too (15% and 8%). The general conclusion from the respondents’ answers to this questions, however, is optimistic: teachers express negative attitudes toward beating children, regardless of circumstances (at least in the situations listed in the questionnaire). Perhaps some important circumstances that are seen as a justification for beating a child were missing in the questionnaire, because in comparison to the general population of Poles, where 50% of the subjects think there may be situations in which beating is justified (Figure II), teachers present themselves in a surprisingly positive light.

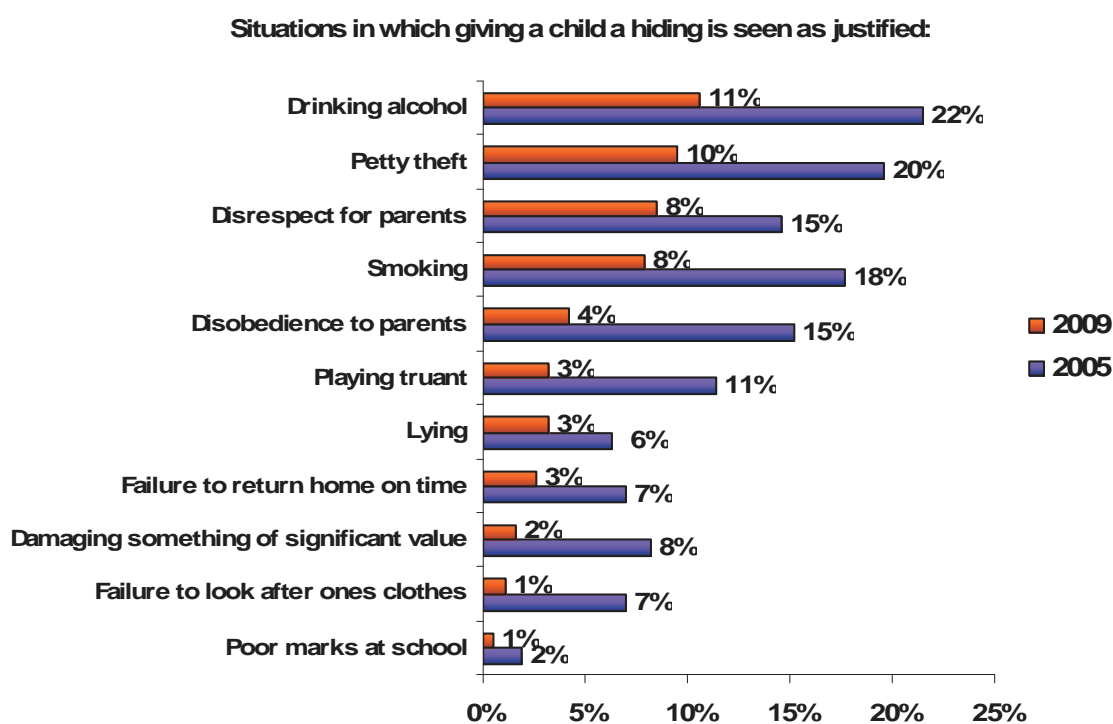


Figure11. *In what situations do you regard giving a child a hiding as justified; would you punish the child in this way? Do you believe that a child deserves a hiding when...? The percentage of respondents who answered “yes”.*

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		It's difficult to say	
	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009
Poor marks at school	2%	1%	89%	93%	9%	6%
Failure to look after clothes	7%	1%	83%	90%	9%	9%
Damaging something of significant value	8%	2%	82%	90%	9%	8%
Failure to return home on time	7%	3%	77%	89%	15%	8%
Lying	6%	3%	78%	90%	15%	6%
Playing truant	11%	3%	73%	86%	14%	11%
Disobedience to parents	15%	4%	67%	79%	17%	16%
Smoking	18%	8%	63%	82%	19%	10%
Disrespect for parents	15%	8%	70%	81%	15%	10%
Petty theft	20%	10%	62%	79%	18%	11%
Drinking alcohol	22%	11%	59%	79%	18%	10%

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. One third of the respondents had contact with child victims of domestic violence (see Figure 12). As compared to the 2005 survey, in the late 2008 and early 2009 the subjects were more likely to encounter cases of child abuse (an increase from 44% to 54%). On the one hand, the finding is quite disturbing as it may reflect an increase in the prevalence of child abuse. On the other hand, the result may be seen as encouraging, reflecting the teachers' higher awareness and enhanced sensitivity to the problem.

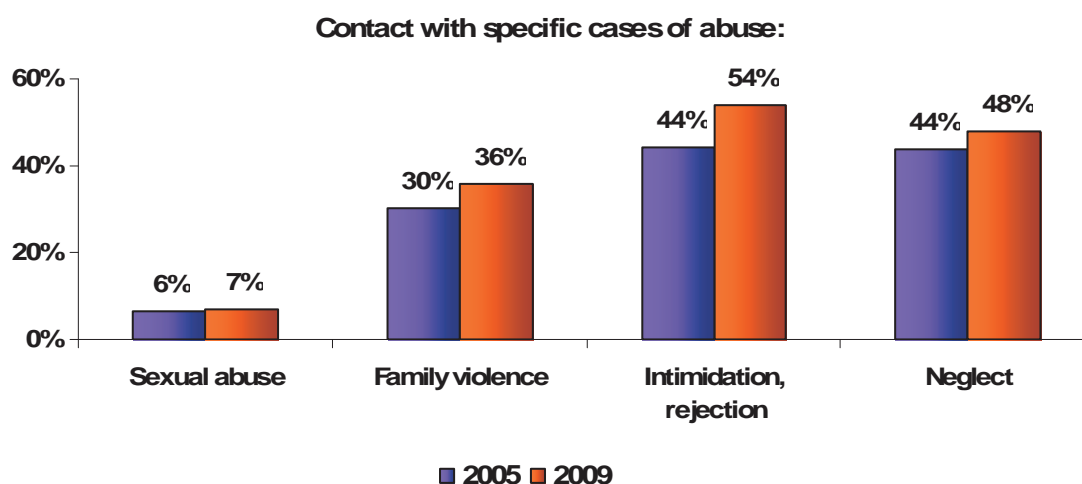


Figure 12. *The percentage of teachers who have encountered cases of child abuse among the students of their schools during the past 12 months.*

This increase in personal contact with specific cases of abuse is interesting when compared with the estimated prevalence of various forms of abuse in the national child population and in the respondents' schools, which remains unchanged (Figures 4 and 6) or, if anything, seems more optimistic than 4 years ago (Table 1).

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 (45%) claim that they always respond to cases to abuse, and about 20% say they intervene sometimes. The only change in the second study – as far as this question is concerned – is the percentage of subjects who admit that they never take any action in response to cases of child abuse (a decline from 23% in 2005 down to 14% in 2009). 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 alarmingly high: 21%. This finding may reflect the fact that it is difficult to admit to failing to respond to child abuse.

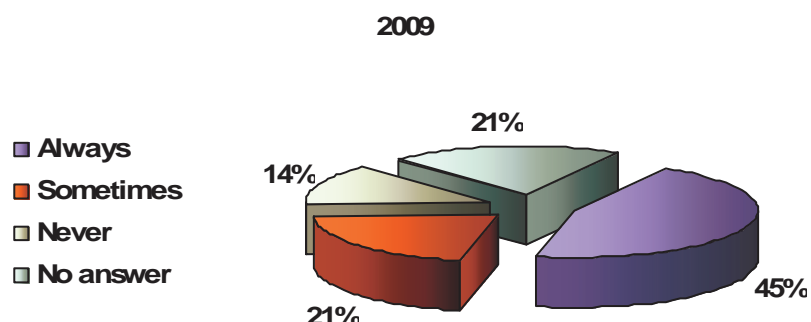


Figure 13. In cases of child abuse that you have encountered during the past 12 months, did you take any action? (%)

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 significantly over the past 4 years (e.g., in 2005 74% of the respondents reported to have talked to the parents in such cases, whereas in the 2009 survey the percentage was only 57%).

Alarmingly, teachers are less and less likely to report cases of child abuse to institutions responsible for dealing with the problem (to social welfare centres:19% and 13%, respectively; to the school: 16% and 12%; to the family court: 6% and 7%; and to the prosecutor’s office: 2% and 3%), despite the fact that more than 30% of the respondents have encountered cases of domestic violence, and 7% had contact with sexual abuse. According to the Polish penal code, both forms of abuse are punishable offences.

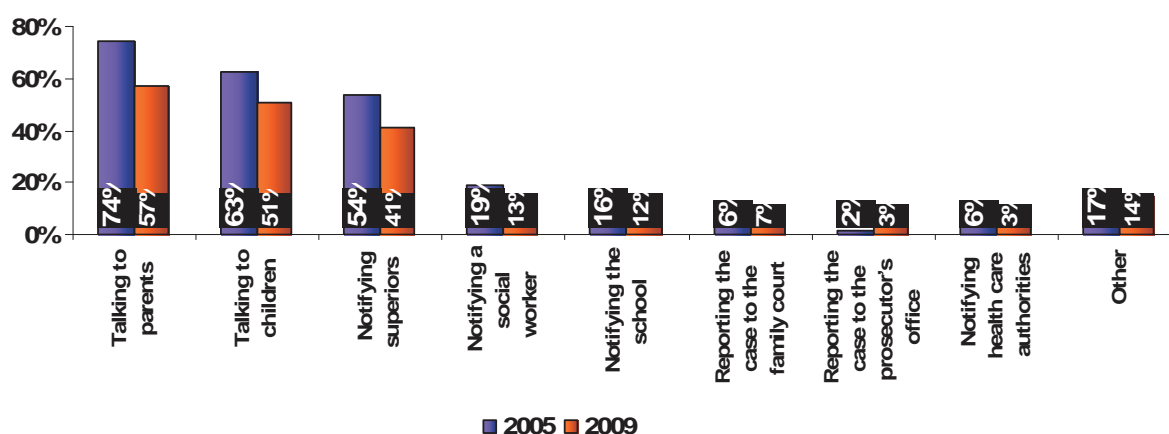


Figure 14. Types of actions taken by the teachers in response to cases of child abuse.

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 feeling helpless (“I didn’t believe my intervention would be effective” and “I didn’t know how to intervene”). Another reason 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”). 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 self-reported reason for failing to take action was lack of time or opportunity.

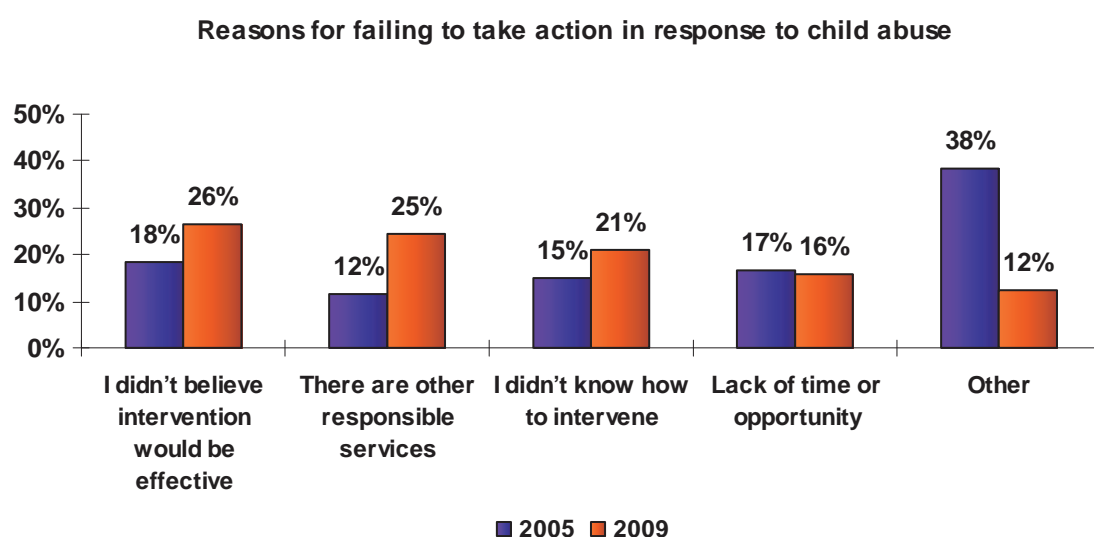


Figure 15. *When you didn't take any action, was it because... (%)*

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?”, comes as a surprise.

More than 60% of the respondents believe the problem may be prevented to a large extent! One out of four subjects thinks that the problem may be prevented to a small extent, and none of the teachers answered that it could not be prevented at all! The belief that it is possible to fight with child abuse effectively is a prerequisite for reducing the problem; however, the belief alone is not enough, and – as illustrated by the previous charts – there is little more for the time being.

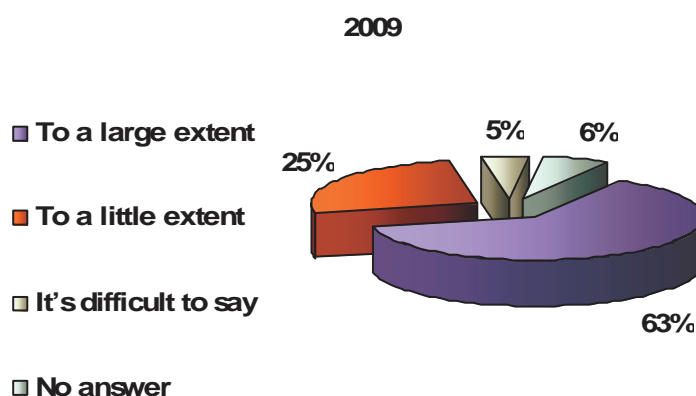


Figure 16. Responses to the question: Do you think it is possible to prevent child abuse? (%)

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 (over 70%) believe that the law should regulate parents' behaviour toward their children (Figure 16). The opposite view was expressed by about 14% of the respondents. This attitudes has not changed significantly for the past 4 years.

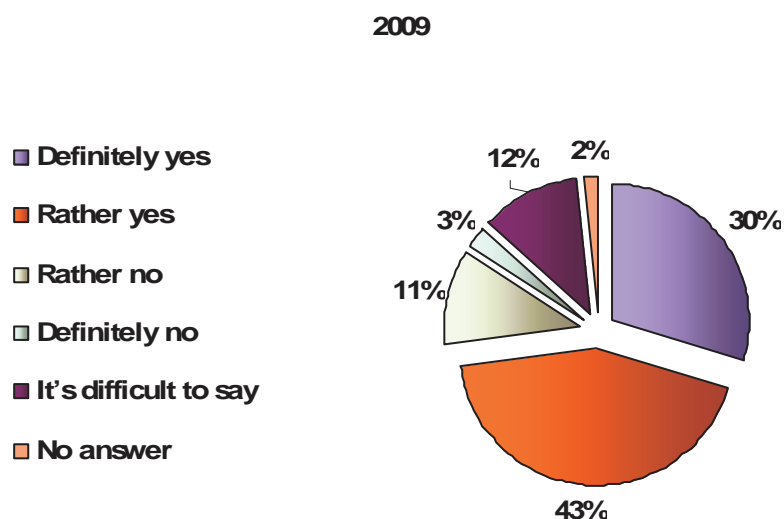


Figure 17. *Should the way parents treat their children be regulated by the law? (%)*

The teachers are less uncompromising when it comes to the legal ban on the use of corporal punishment of children (Figure 18). It is supported by about 60% of the respondents (59% in 2005 and 68% in 2009); the opponents of the ban constituted 24% and 20% of the sample, respectively. This means that over the past 4 years the support for the legal ban on corporal punishment of children has increased.

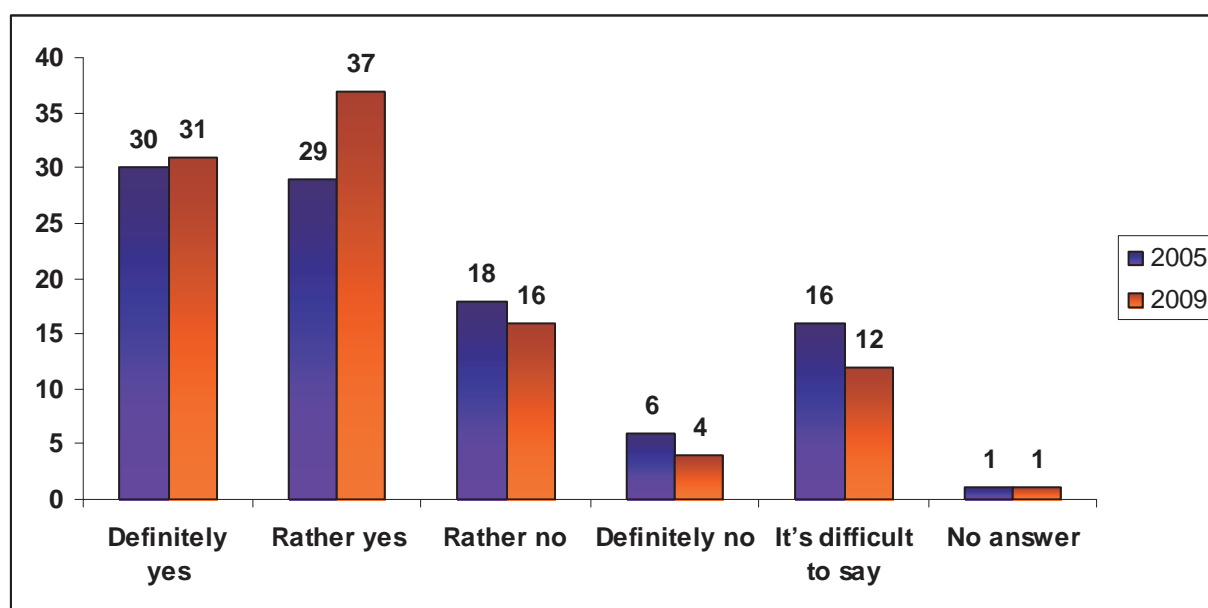


Figure 18. *Do you think that using corporal punishment by parents should be legally banned? (%)*

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 Poland (Figure 19). Only 39% think that institutional services enable providing real help for children. The only encouraging thing is the fact that the group has increased by more than 11% 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).

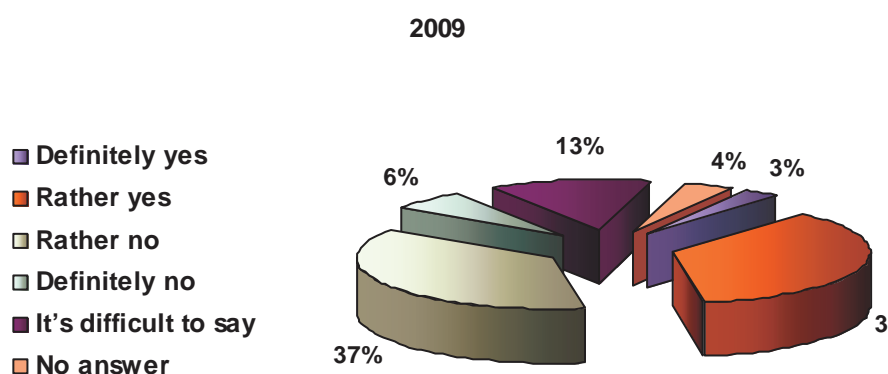


Figure 19. *The assessment of institutional help services available for abused children (the percentage distribution of responses to the question: “Do you believe that the current institutional help services make it possible to provide real help for abused children in our country?”).*

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 school and kindergarten as responsible institutions; notably, the percentage of respondents who point to these institutions has grown over the past 4 years. It is very significant in a sample of teachers – they see themselves as responsible for intervention! The percentage of subjects who point to the school as the institution responsible for taking action is slightly higher than the percentage of teachers who intervene in cases of child abuse (Figure 13); this shows that some teachers know they should intervene and yet 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, and the family court – more than 70% of responses), with many subjects pointing to health care clinics, too. The social welfare centre was the most likely to be selected in response to the question about neglect, although in this case the number of indications has dropped by 10% relative to the previous survey.

A comparison of the subjects’ indications in the two surveys shows the largest growth for the police (as much as 22% for corporal punishment!). In most cases (except for emotional abuse) the percentage has also grown for the family court, whereas drops have been

observed for the health care clinic, the prosecutor's office, and the social welfare centre (except for corporal punishment 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 (except for the health care clinic) and the percentage differences are significant (Figure 20). This is probably a result of a broad public debate on the use of corporal punishment in Poland and social campaigns promoting child-rearing without violence.

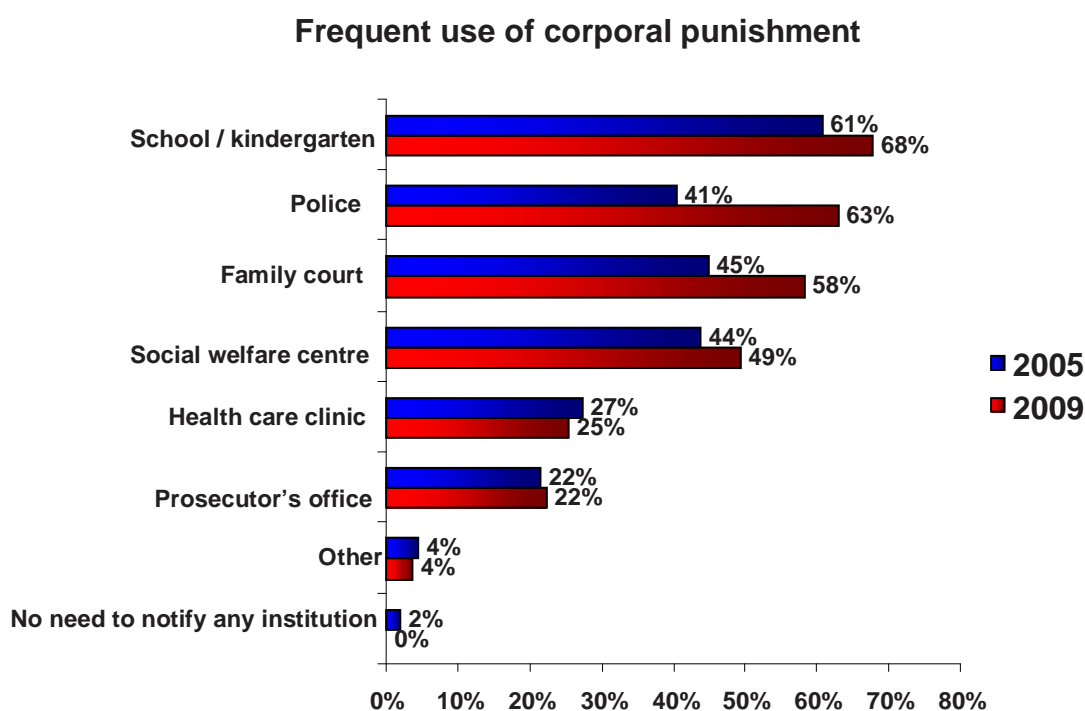


Figure 20. *The respondents' opinions (%) on which of the listed institutions should intervene if a child experiences corporal punishment in the family (the subjects were asked to mark all the institutions that should take action).*

A child is forced to sexual practices

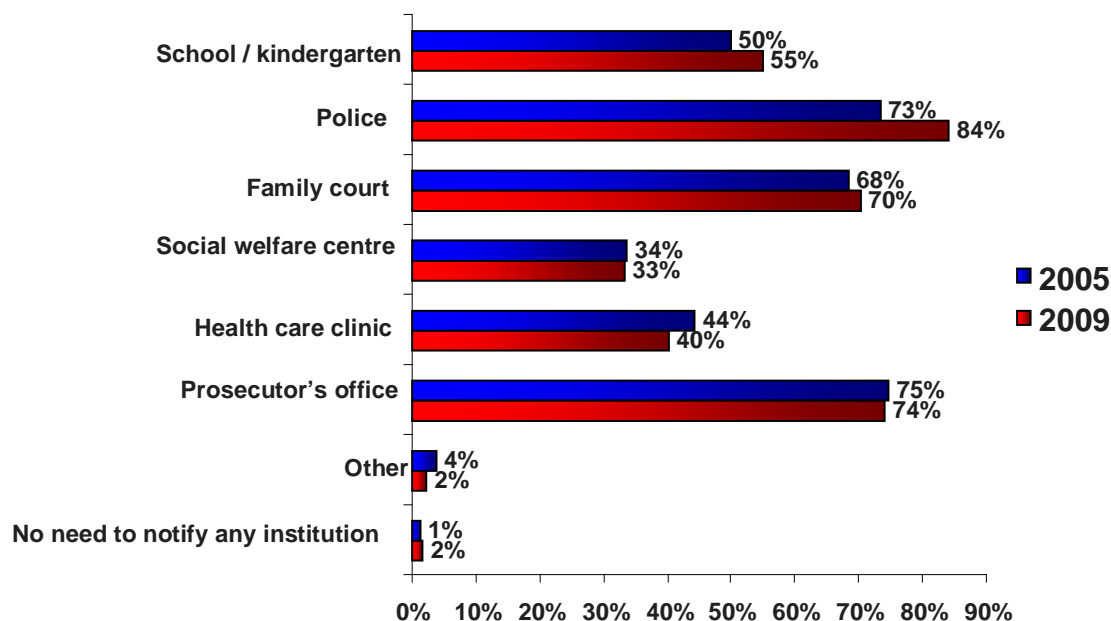


Figure 21. The respondents' opinions (%) on which of the listed institutions should intervene if a child is forced to sexual practices by a family member (the subjects were asked to mark all the institutions that should take action).

Neglect

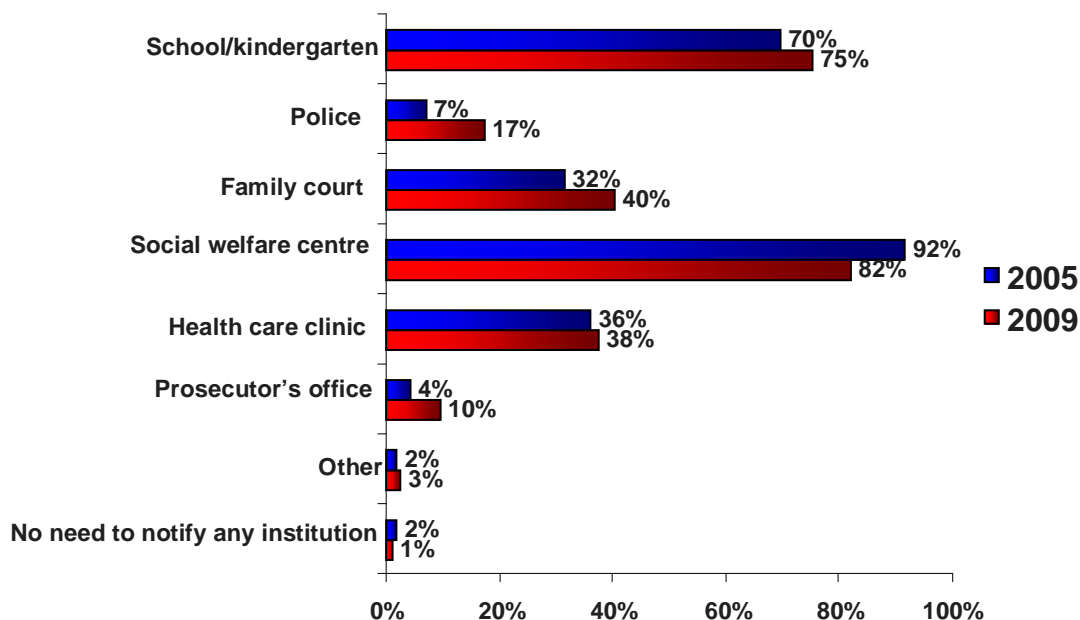


Figure 22. The respondents' opinions (%) on which of the listed institutions should intervene if a child is physically neglected: dirty, hungry, and badly dressed (the subjects were asked to mark all the institutions that should take action).

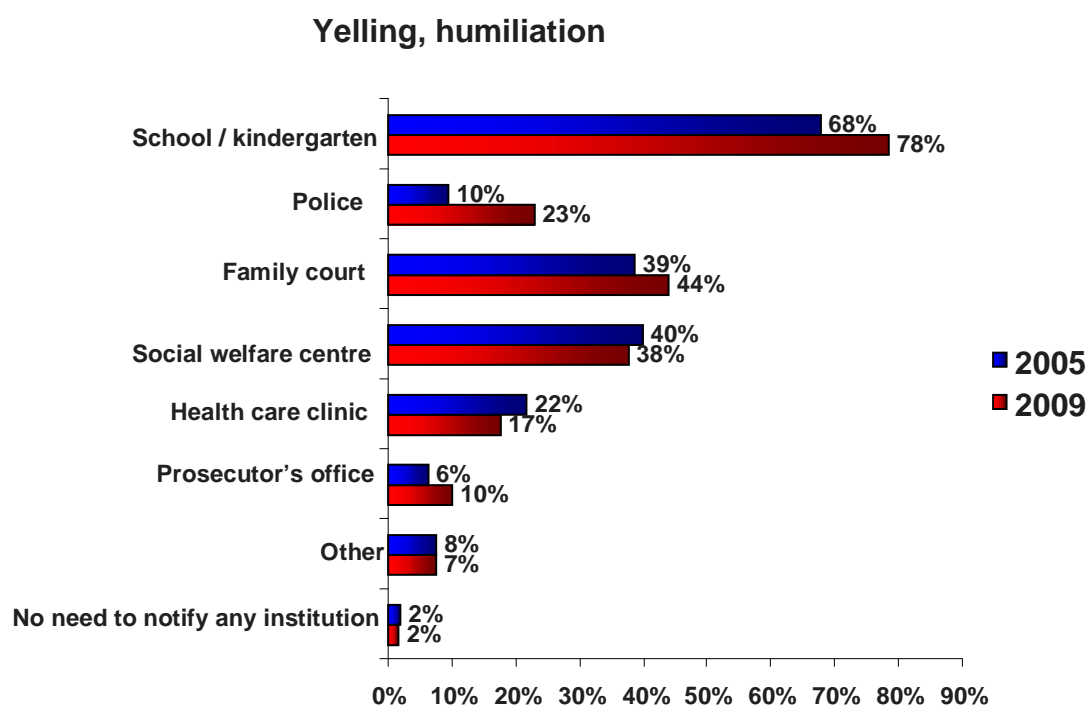


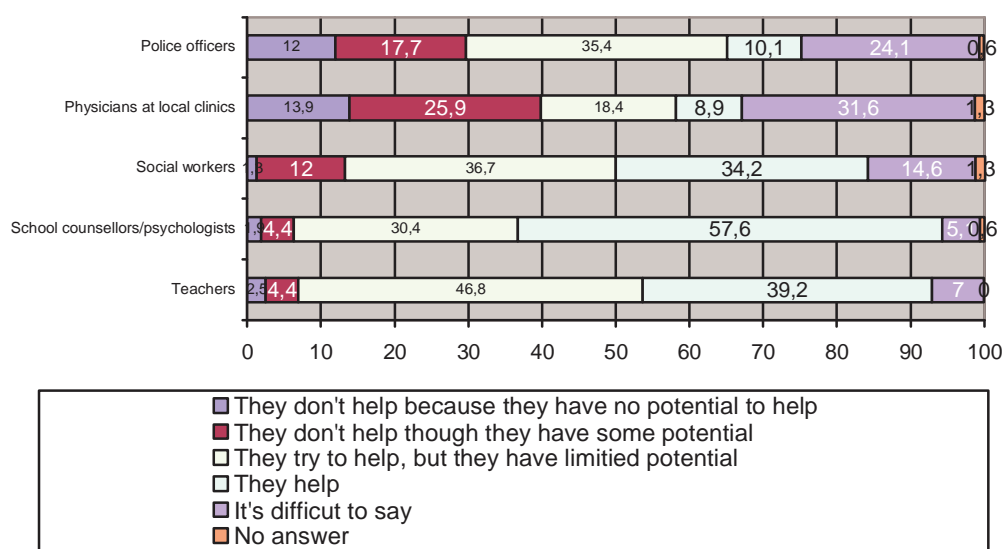
Figure 23. The respondents' opinions (%) on which of the listed institutions should intervene if a child is yelled at, humiliated or rejected by his/her parents (the subjects were asked to mark all the institutions that should take action).

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).

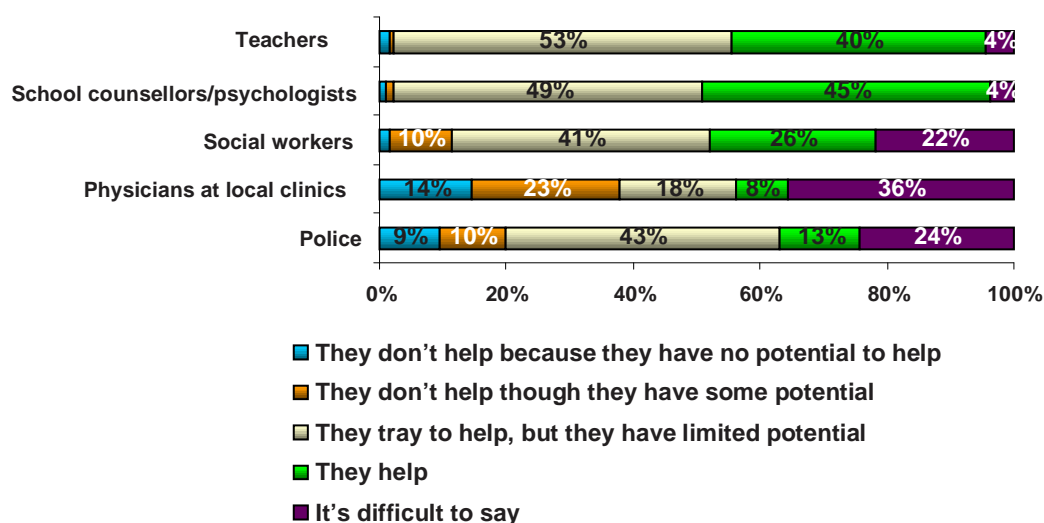
The largest proportion of respondents believe that the professional groups listed in the questionnaire try to help or actually provide help for children. School counsellors and psychologists were evaluated the most favourably; about 90% of the subjects think they try to help or do help, despite their limited potential! Notably, however, in comparison to the 2005 survey, in 2009 the respondents were more likely to say that school counsellors and psychologists try to help (from 58% in 2005 up to 49% in 2009) and less likely to respond that they actually help (from 58% down to 45%). It is all the more significant when we consider the fact that teachers have direct contact with these two professional groups. Two other professional groups that are evaluated positively are teachers themselves (the largest percentage of responses: "They try to help though their potential is limited"; an increase from 47% to 53%) and social workers. The subjects are the most critical of health

care professionals (physicians) at local clinics (23% of the respondents marked the answer: “They don’t help at all, though they have some potential” – a 14% decrease in comparison with the previous survey) and the police. When evaluating these two professional groups, many subjects marked the response: “They don’t help at all because they have no potential to help”.

Notably, the percentage of the answer: „They try to help though their potential is limited”, has grown for nearly all professional groups (except for physicians, who are evaluated at the same level as in 2005). 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 and physicians at local clinics are given the poorest marks in terms of their knowledge about diagnosing/identifying cases of abuse ("They have no knowledge": from 10% in 2005 to 17% in 2009). However, the largest positive change has been observed in the respondents' perceptions of police officers' knowledge about child abuse – in the 2009 study more teachers expressed positive opinions about the police's knowledge on diagnosing child abuse (evaluating it as "sufficient"; an increase from 6% to 13%), and the percentage of responses: "They have some knowledge, but it's insufficient", has dropped significantly (from 60% to 49%). 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" (63% and 61%).

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 have sufficient knowledge (50%); teachers have "some knowledge, but it's insufficient" (56%), and physicians working at local clinics are the most likely to be seen as not knowing how to intervene (13%). The respondents' opinions about the police have changed significantly – today many more teachers evaluate their knowledge positively ("They have sufficient knowledge": 40% in 2009, i.e., 11% more than 4 years ago); also, fewer subjects selected the answer: "They have no knowledge" (5%). The teachers' responses imply that efforts to reduce child abuse would be the most effective if school counsellors and psychologists cooperated with the police, 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	
	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009
The police	6%	13%	60%	49%	13%	17%	17%	14%
Physicians at local clinics	21%	15%	44%	42%	10%	12%	21%	22%
Physicians at hospitals	31%	26%	38%	39%	6%	7%	22%	19%
Social workers	35%	38%	45%	41%	4%	5%	13%	10%
School counsellors and psychologists	56%	49%	35%	42%	0%	1%	6%	2%
Teachers	28%	26%	63%	61%	0%	3%	5%	3%

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	
	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009
The police	29%	40%	51%	32%	6%	5%	10%	13%
Physicians at local clinics	18%	18%	44%	39%	11%	13%	23%	20%
Physicians at hospitals	24%	24%	41%	34%	9%	12%	22%	20%
Social workers	39%	41%	40%	37%	4%	3%	13%	9%
School counsellors and psychologists	49%	50%	38%	35%	0%	1%	8%	3%
Teachers	27%	26%	57%	56%	3%	3%	9%	4%

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 the investigation and court proceedings are lengthy (67%), criminal courts' sentences are too lenient (55%), and family courts' rulings fail to be executed (43%). Alarming many respondents think that it is often impossible to isolate the victim from the perpetrator (50%) and to provide treatment for the offender (39%). These findings are very disturbing, however a positive tendency can be seen – for all the questions the percentage of the “often” response has declined significantly, by up to 15% (“It’s impossible to provide treatment for the offender”). 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		It's difficult to say	
	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009
Failure to undertake intervention by the police when a child abuse case has been reported.	15%	9%	41%	38%	13%	19%	30%	30%
Withdrawal of the offence notification by the reporting person (despite actual abuse).	30%	29%	40%	40%	5%	5%	23%	23%
Cases are discontinued by prosecutors (despite actual abuse).	23%	16%	39%	33%	10%	7%	27%	41%
Inappropriate conditions and procedures of interviewing children	36%	25%	30%	31%	3%	6%	29%	35%
Lack of possibility to isolate the offender from the victim	63%	50%	17%	18%	4%	3%	15%	25%
Lack of possibility to provide treatment for the offender	54%	39%	25%	26%	4%	6%	16%	25%
Too lenient sentences for perpetrators of child abuse.	69%	55%	20%	23%	0%	1%	11%	17%
Failure to execute family courts' decisions.	53%	43%	26%	29%	1%	3%	19%	21%
Lengthy investigations and court proceedings.	72%	67%	15%	15%	1%	2%	11%	13%

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; more than 90% said that the suspect should be isolated from the family until the case is clarified (Table 6). Simultaneously, about 70% 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		It's difficult to say	
	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009
One should always try to keep the child in the family, regardless of his/her parents' behaviour.	6%	3%	11%	12%	34%	40%	35%	30%	14%	14%
A parent suspected of abusing his/her child sexually should be isolated from the family until the case is clarified.	77%	70%	17%	21%	1%	1%	1%	6%	4%	1%
Many children suffer from violence and abuse because people do not respond.	49%	47%	40%	37%	4%	5%	0%	2%	7%	7%
Institutions that help children rarely cooperate with each other and their efforts are often uncoordinated.	27%	28%	47%	41%	6%	12%	0%	2%	19%	16%

Assessing the policy toward perpetrators of child abuse (Table 5), the teachers emphasized lack of treatment for offenders. It is an important aspect of reducing child abuse, which is recognized by the subjects: the majority of them believe that the abusive father should be not only punished, but also provided with treatment (Figures 25 and 26). Only 14% of the respondents think that abusive father should be only punished, whereas punishment and treatment are supported by 81%!

As far as child sexual abusers are concerned, during the past 4 years the percentage of respondents who support treatment has grown (from 80% up to 85%), while the proportion of those who support punishment has decreased (from 86% down to 68%). This means that the respondents regard fathers who sexually abuse their children as people who need help rather than as offenders! One should also remember about the significant growth of the percentage of teachers who support depriving such abusive fathers of their parental rights (from 60% to 82%), i.e., improving the victim's safety.

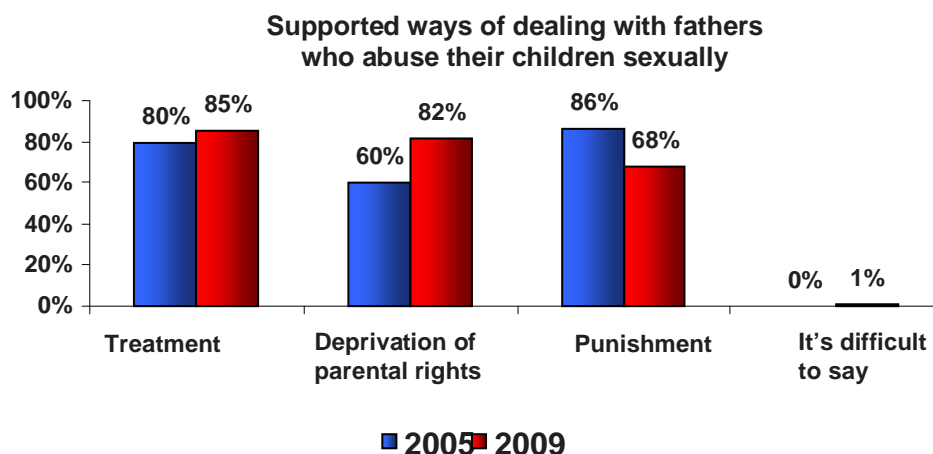


Figure 25. *Supported ways of dealing with fathers who abuse their children sexually.*

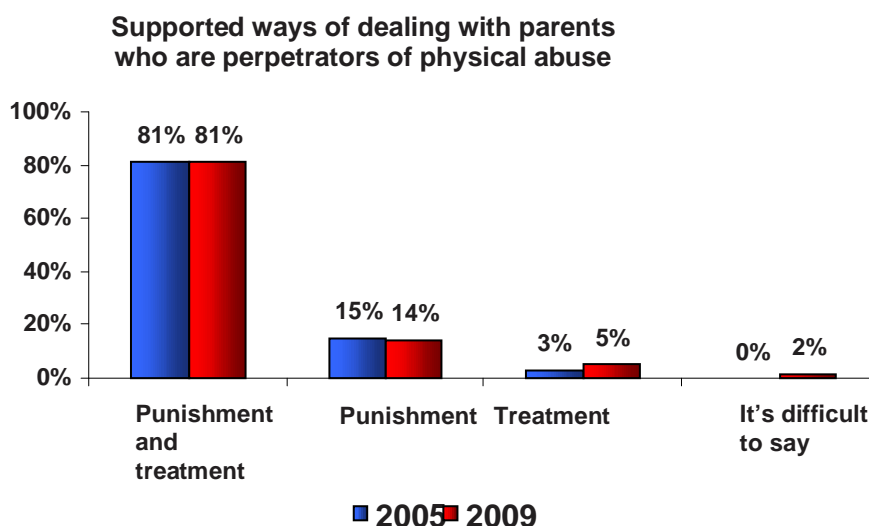


Figure 26. *Supported ways of dealing with a parent who is a perpetrators of physical abuse (who has beaten his/her child severely, causing physical injuries).*

Conclusions

- Half of adult Poles 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 Poland.
- 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 decreasing.

- 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.
- Over the past 4 years teachers' approval for giving a child a hiding when he/she causes child-rearing problems, has dropped twofold.
- Less than 50% of teachers report that they always intervene in cases on child abuse. Almost one out of five never takes any action, in most cases due to the feeling of helplessness.
- Two thirds of teachers believe that the problem of child abuse can be prevented to a large extent.
- 60% 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, although those who believe that the existing services make it possible to provide real, effective help, are still a minority.
- Almost all teachers think that school counsellors and psychologists help or try to help children, despite their limited potential. Help provided by physicians at local clinics and the police has been evaluated the least positively.
- According to a majority of teachers, it is often the case that the investigation and court proceedings are lengthy, sentences are too lenient, and family courts' decisions are not properly executed.
- 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.

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