



Public Polling Result

Views on Physical and Humiliating Punishment of Children in Hong Kong



Save the Children
救助兒童會



Contents

04 Executive Summary

06 Background

12 Results of Polling

23 Discussion

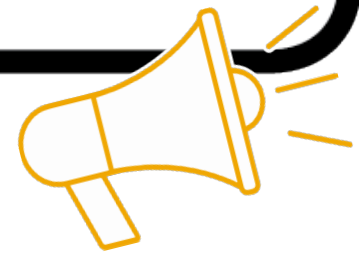
25 Recommendations

28 Looking Forward

29 Acknowledgements



Executive Summary



Research Objective

The objective of this study was to learn about the view of the adult public in Hong Kong towards corporal punishment.

The study also sought to gain insights into public awareness of physical and humiliating punishment in Hong Kong and support for mechanisms for the early identification of child abuse cases.

Methodology

The data were collected by the Centre for Communication and Public Opinion Survey, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, via phone call with random sampling. It successfully reached 1008 respondents.

Findings

83% of respondents support the government legislating a mandatory reporting mechanism to require professionals who have regular contact

with children to report suspected child abuse and neglect cases. The result revealed a consensus in the community in supporting the establishment of a mandatory reporting mechanism for the early identification of child abuse.

The polling result shows that 62% of respondents agree that corporal punishment is not an effective way of parenting/disciplining children (管教), while 20% feel neutral and 18% disagree.

Only 23% of respondents would always act upon a potential child abuse case on the street – a child being beaten, slapped or verbally humiliated. The major reasons for non-action are that they do not want to intervene in other families' internal affairs, they think that the incident is not serious, and they are not sure if it is a child abuse case.

64% of respondents strongly support or support the legislation in prohibiting any form of corporal punishment towards children in all settings.

The survey also reveals the need to conduct publicity activities to educate the public on the importance of positive parenting and the role of a bystander in suspected child abuse.

Recommendations from Save the Children Hong Kong

With a general consensus for the legislation of Mandatory Reporting Requirement, the legislators should take the chance to kick-start the legislation process with public support as soon as possible. They should continue considering stakeholders including children and their concerns and suggestions in the process.

Together with the reporting mechanism, the government and civil society should develop sufficient supporting services for both children and families, and make sure the best interest of the child is prioritised in the process.

There is still a portion of people thinking that corporal punishment is effective in parenting and that parents could decide whether they use corporal punishment. Positive parenting needs to be reinforced by various education programmes or campaigns.

Public education programmes, including psychological first aid, on potential actions if witnessing child abuse should be conducted.

Conclusion

The government should start the mandatory reporting requirement legislative process as soon as possible in order to demonstrate its determination in child protection.

The Mandatory Reporting Requirement is one of the significant steps in child protection. Nonetheless, the government, child-facing institutions, and parents need to continue the conversation on developing an environment and culture that prioritises the best interest of the child, especially in preventing harm to children.





Background

Topics Covered

- ✓ Overview and Work of Save the Children Hong Kong
- ✓ Overview of children's rights in Hong Kong related to child abuse cases and child protection
- ✓ Background of the polling
- ✓ Methodology

Overview and Work of Save the Children Hong Kong



Save the Children believes every child deserves a future. In Hong Kong and around the world, we do whatever it takes – every day and in times of crisis – so children can fulfil their rights to a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm.

Established in 2009, Save the Children Hong Kong is part of the Save the Children global movement which is made up of 30 member organisations and operates in almost 120 countries. With over 100 years of expertise, we are the world's first and leading independent children's organisation – transforming lives and the future we share.

Our domestic programmes focus on protecting children from violence and building their resilience, by promoting positive parenting, enhancing children's mental well-being, and supporting child-facing organisations to ensure that their operations are child-safe.



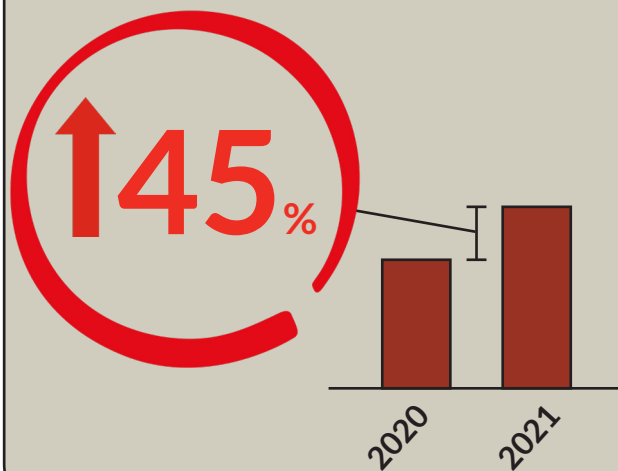
Overview of children's rights in Hong Kong Related to child abuse cases and child protection



The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted children, families, and the community. **The physical, mental and psychosocial well-being of our children has been threatened.**

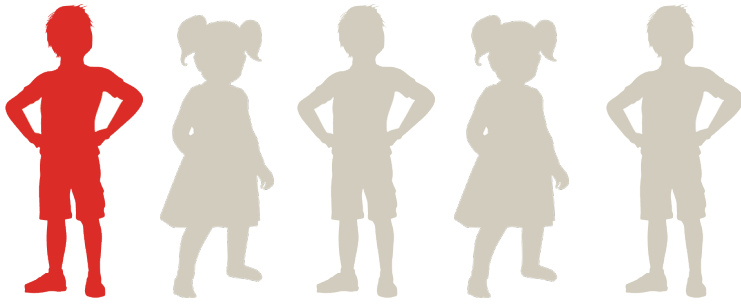


Child abuse cases



According to the Child Protection Registry Statistical Report 2020 and 2021*, the number of child abuse cases reported in Hong Kong has increased by 45%, of which 52% increase in physical harm/abuse, 43% increase in sexual abuse, and 37% increase in neglect from 2020 to 2021. 60% of the perpetrators are parents. 50% of abuse cases are related to the lack of parenting skills and 52% are related to the lack of support system.





Young Voices research 2021*

1 out of 5 youth

- Often or always worried about experiencing violence from an adult
- Does not know where to seek help when facing violence

46% of them indicate they worry about being punished by their parents.



There were some serious and extreme child abuse cases that **caused death or serious injuries** to children in recent years. These cases led to public outcry and raised serious concerns over protecting children from violence.



The Ombudsman reviewed the existing measures and proposed a mandatory reporting system for child abuse in 2019. The government including the working group has conducted consultations in 2021 and 2022, and promised to take forward at full steam the setting up of a mandatory reporting mechanism for suspected child abuse cases in the first half of 2023.

* [Young Voices: Insights from Young People in Hong Kong](#), by Save the Children Hong Kong.

Background of the polling



香港中文大學 傳播與民意調查中心
Centre for Communication and Public Opinion Survey
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

In light of the recent child abuse cases and upcoming legislative proposals on the Mandatory Reporting Requirement, Save the Children Hong Kong has commissioned the Centre for Communication and Public Opinion Survey, the Chinese University of Hong Kong to conduct public polling in October 2022 on the views towards physical and humiliating punishment and mandatory reporting legislation.



Methodology



- The Polling on View on Physical and Humiliating Punishment and proposed legislation of Mandatory Reporting Requirement for suspected child abuse cases is conducted by the Centre for Communication and Public Opinion Survey, the Chinese University of Hong Kong.
- Responses were collected by phone calls with random sampling from 15 September to 7 October 2022. 10 questions were asked.
- Targeted respondents include Hong Kong citizens, aged 18 or above, who are Cantonese-speaking.
- The number of respondents in this polling is 1008, the result was weighted for gender, age and education level. Among the respondents, 64.7% of them have children.



Results of Polling



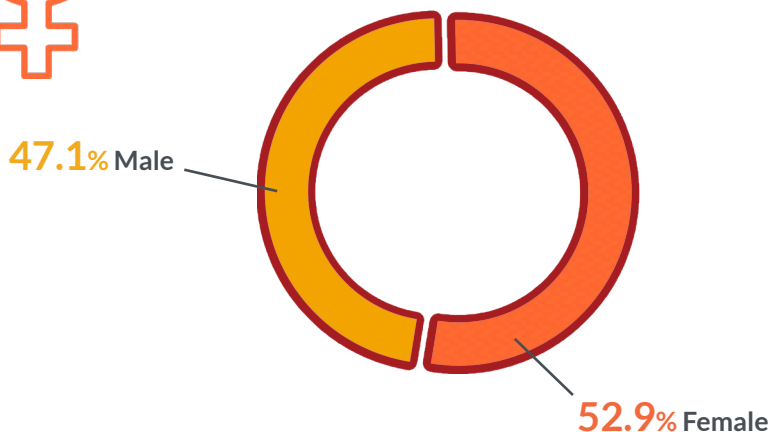
Topics Covered

- Demographic Information of Respondents
- Results of the survey on physical and humiliating punishment

Demographic Information of Respondents

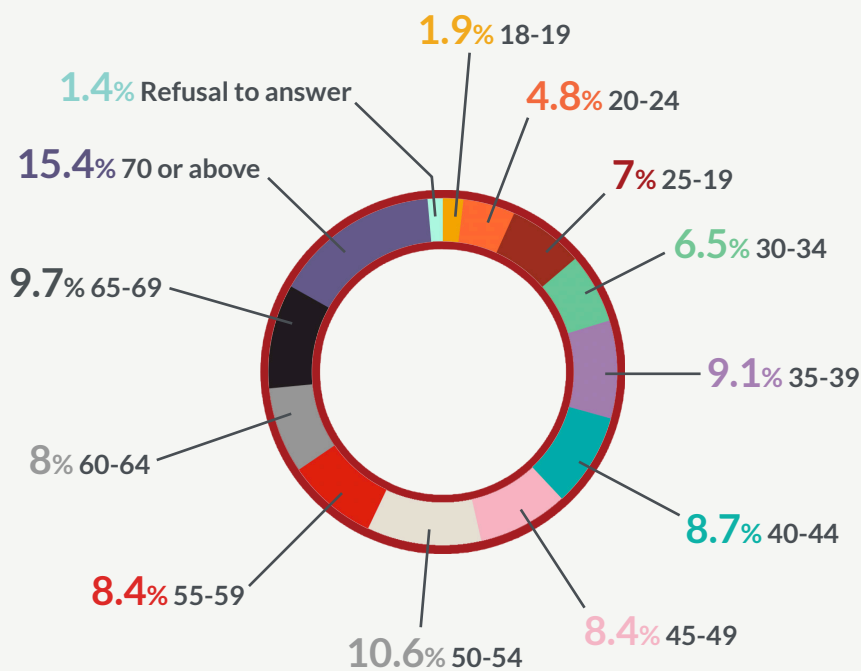


Gender *



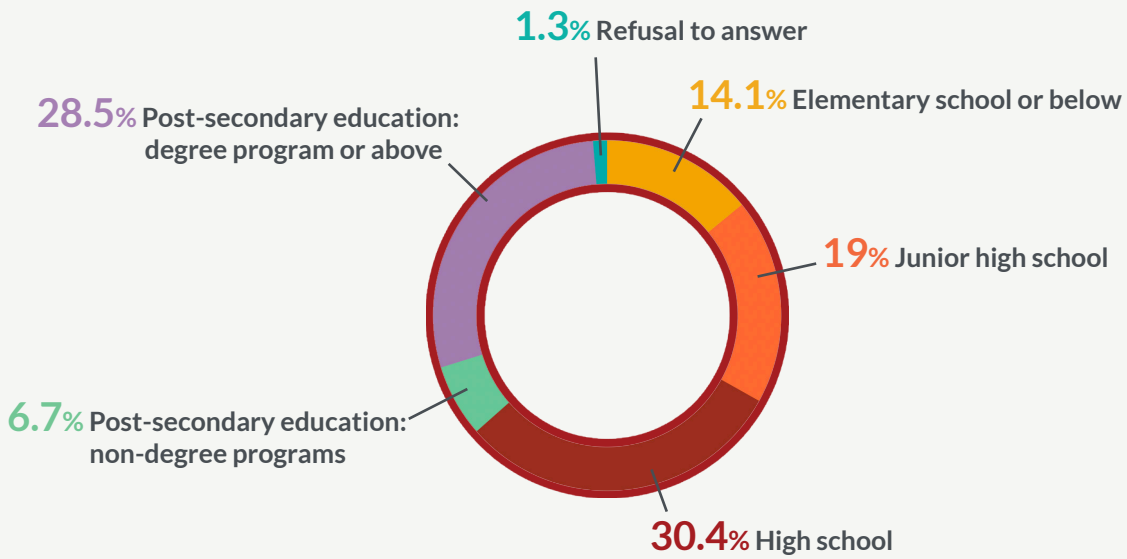
No significant differences were found in the results from respondents of different gender, ages, living districts, educational background, or whether they have children.

Age *

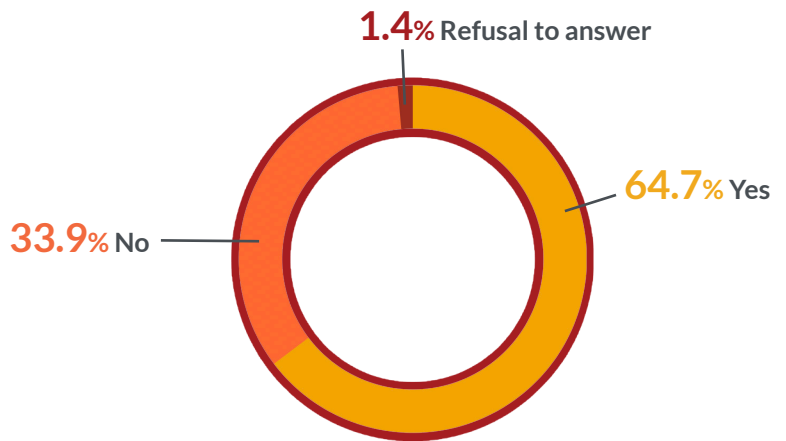


* Distribution after weighting

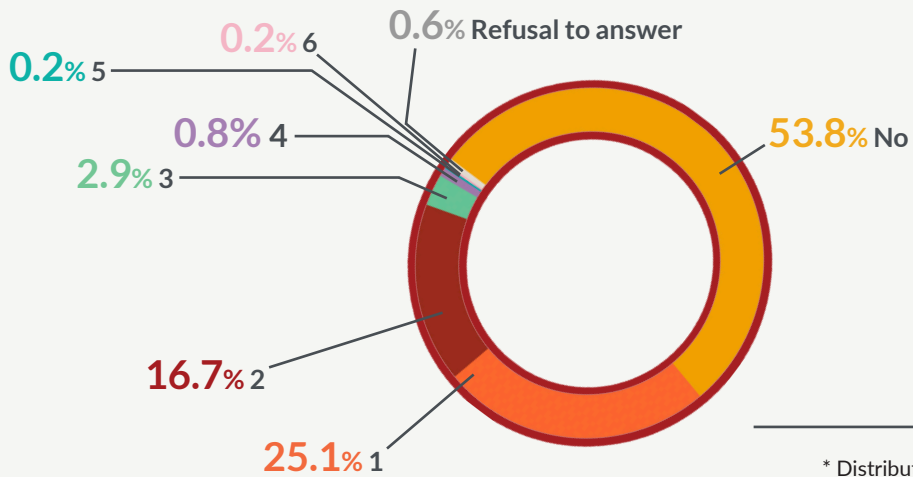
Educational Background *



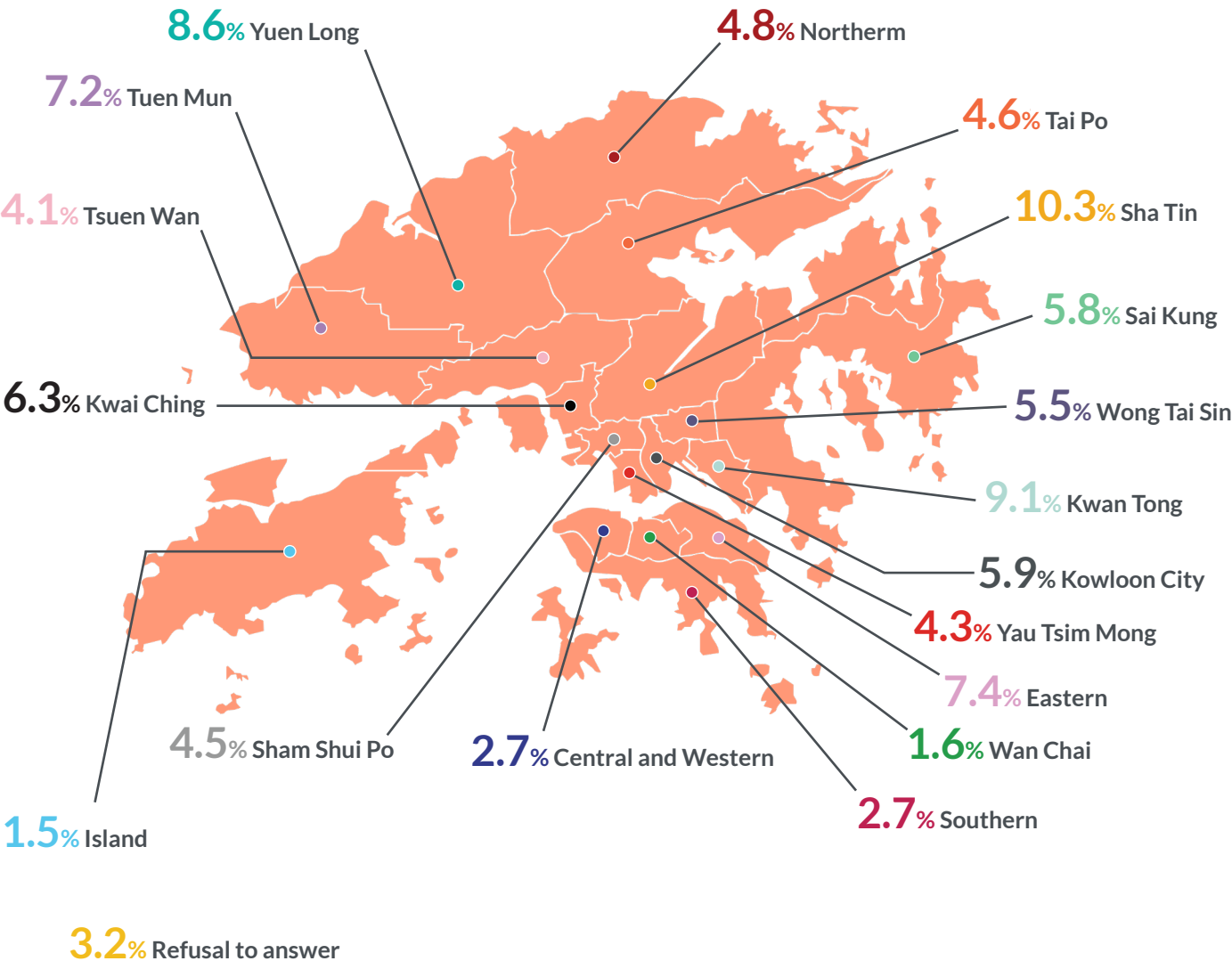
Whether they have child/children



How many children aged 18 or under

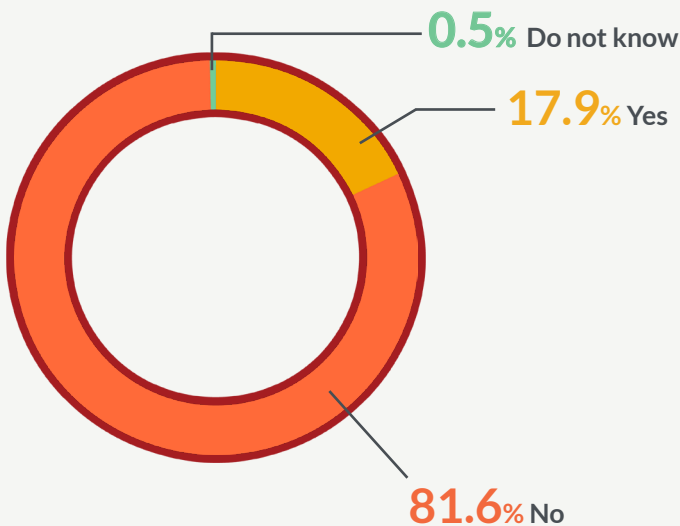


Area of Residence



Survey results

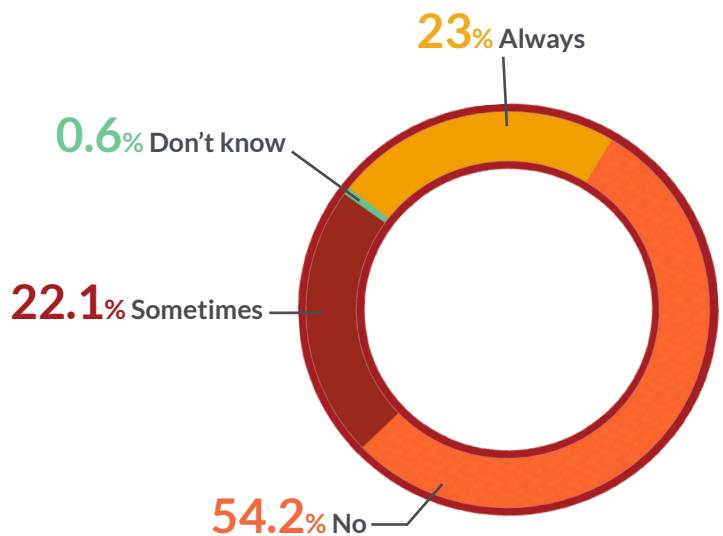
Q1 In the past year, have you ever seen a child being beaten, slapped or verbally humiliated by a parent or carer?

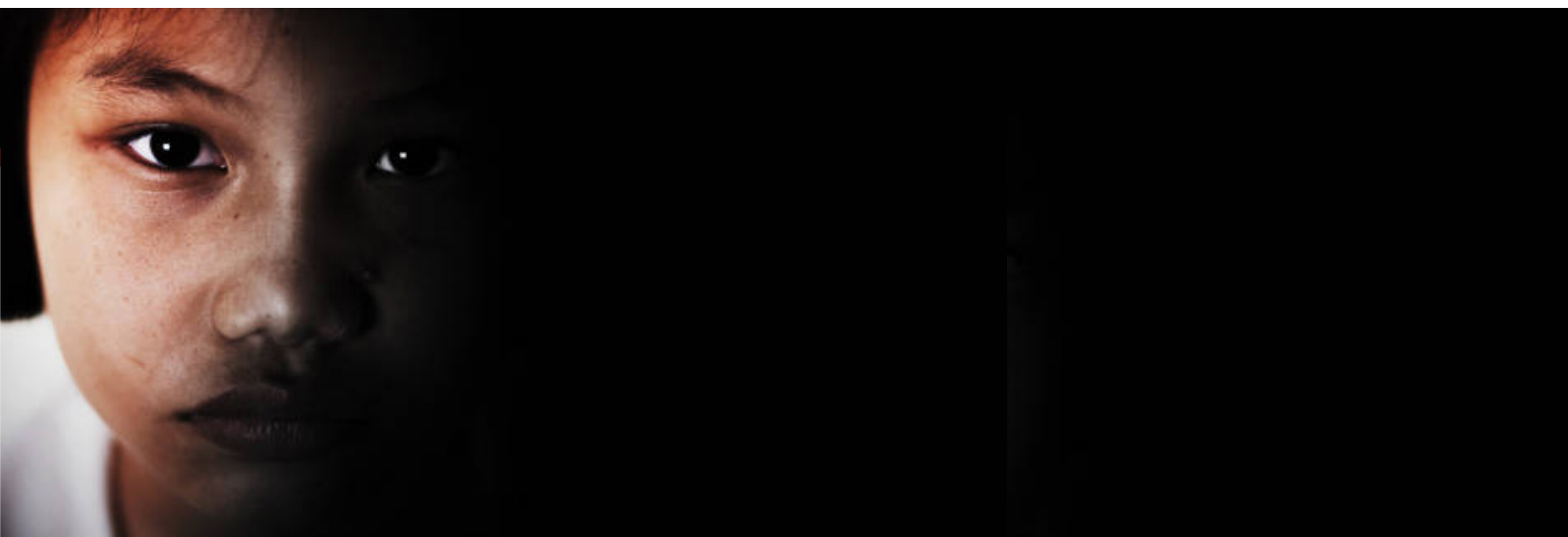


A majority of respondents says they did not witness children being beaten, slapped or verbally humiliated in the past year. Only 18% of respondents says they did witness such physical or humiliating punishment towards a child.

Q2 Have you taken any action after witnessing a child being beaten or verbally humiliated by a parent or carer, such as comforting the child who has been beaten and verbally humiliated, or trying to dissuade the beating and scolding behavior?

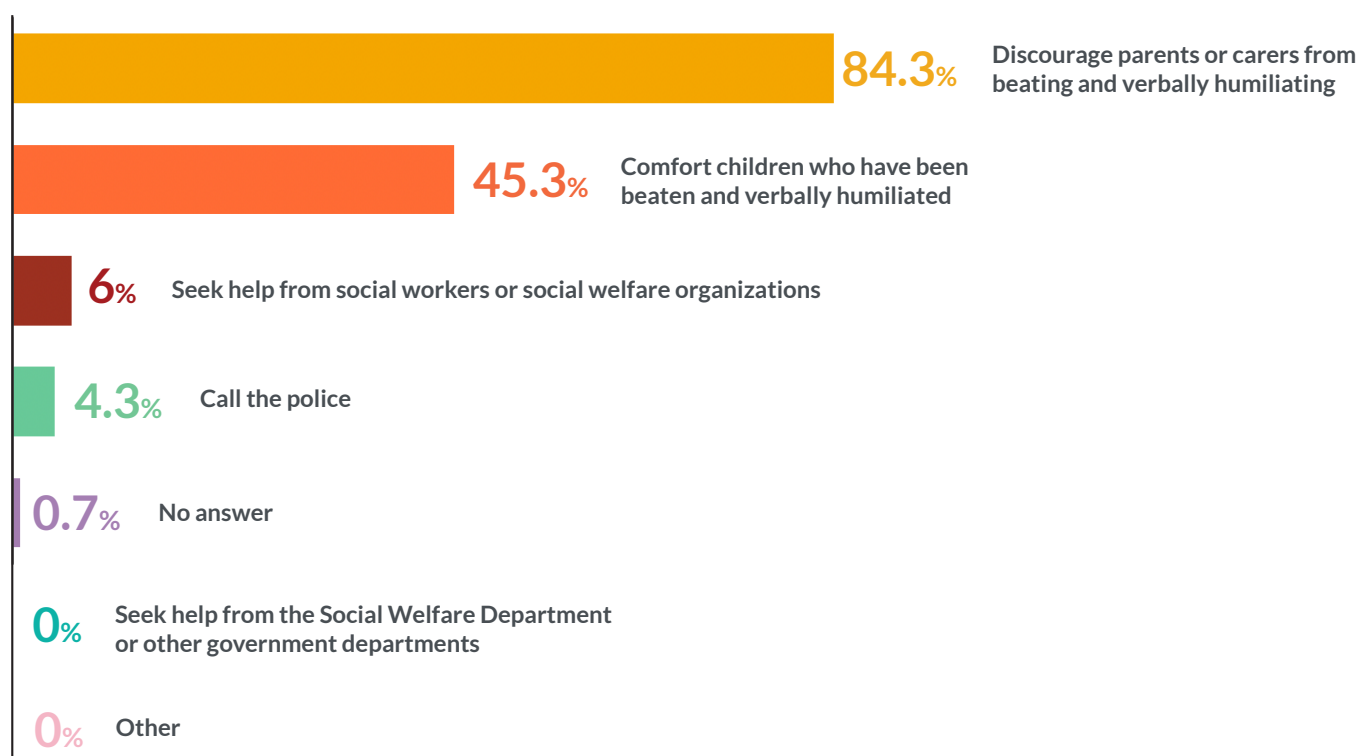
Among those who have witnessed beating or verbal humiliation by a parent or carer, 23% have always taken actions including comforting the children, and discouraging parents or carers from this kind of behaviour.

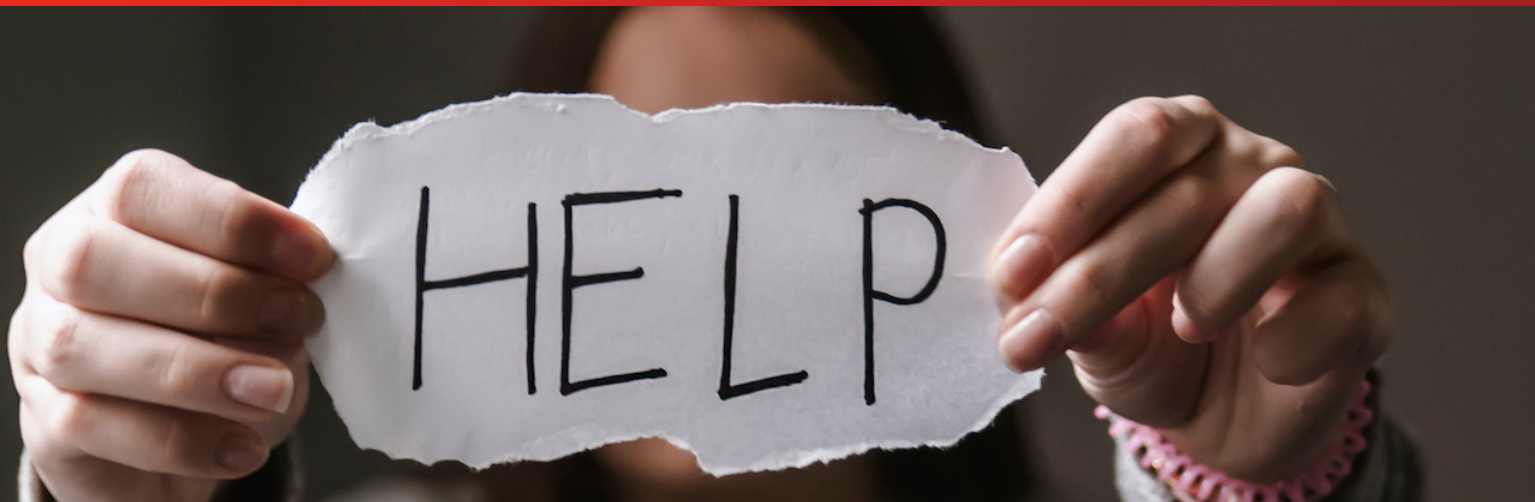




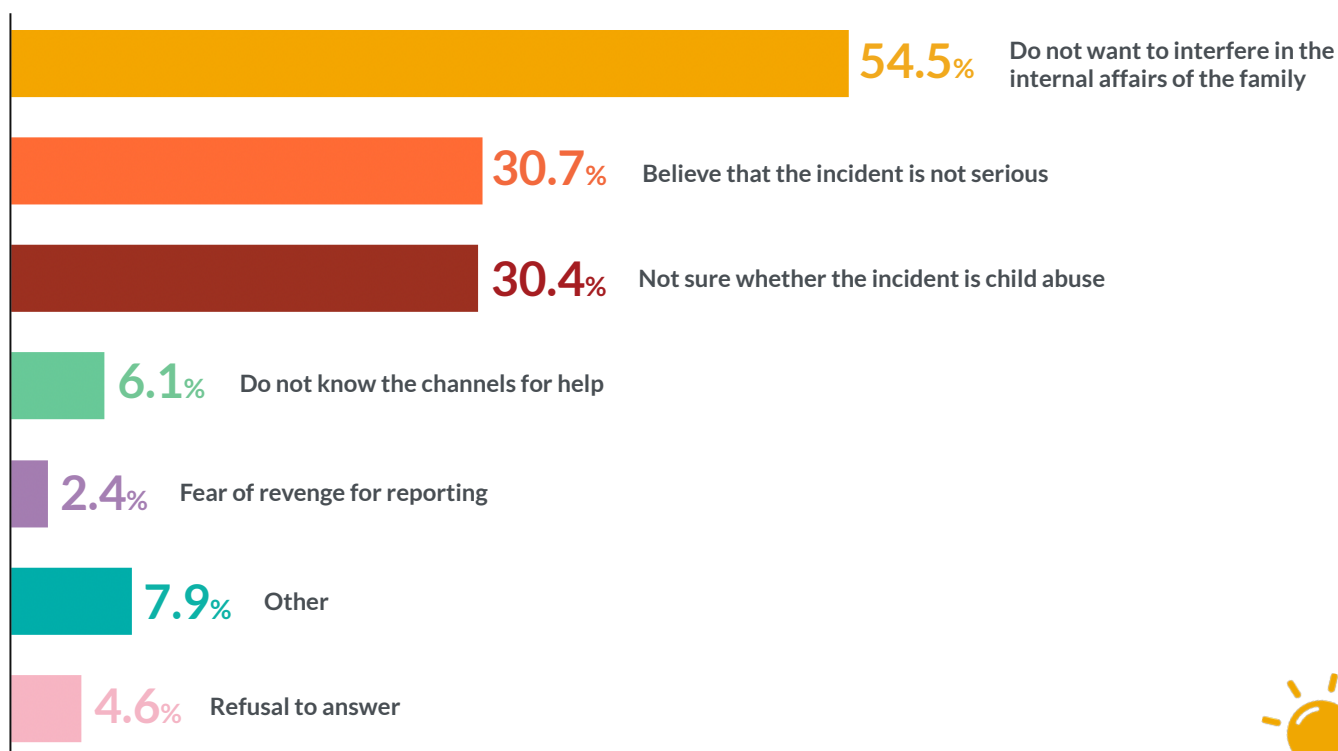
Q3a

When you saw a child being beaten or verbally humiliated by a parent or carer, what action did you take at that time?





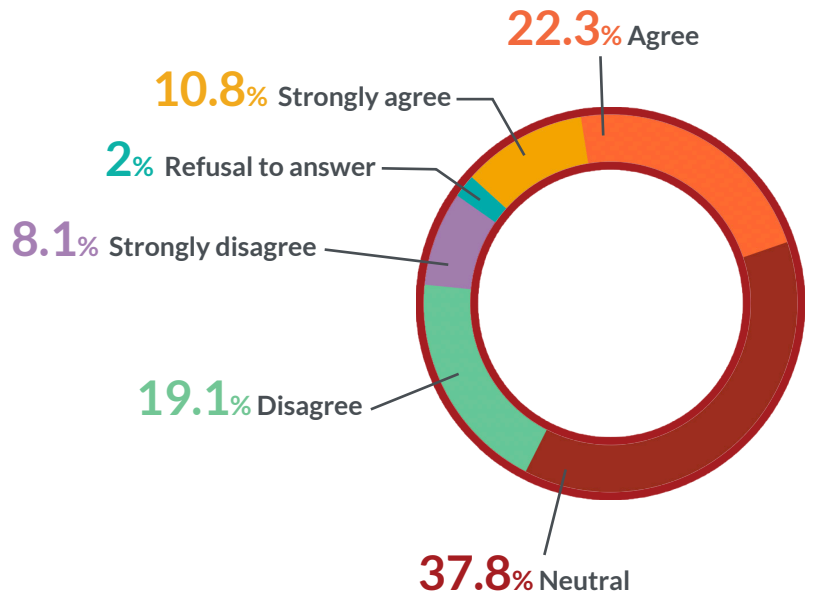
Q3b Witnessing a child being beaten or verbally humiliated by a parent or carer, what is(are) the reason(s) for only taking action sometimes/no action?



Over half of the respondents in Hong Kong who take no action when they see a child being beaten, slapped or verbally abused, do so because they do not want to intervene in other families' affairs. 31% do not think the issue was serious, and a further 30% do not know if this is child abuse.

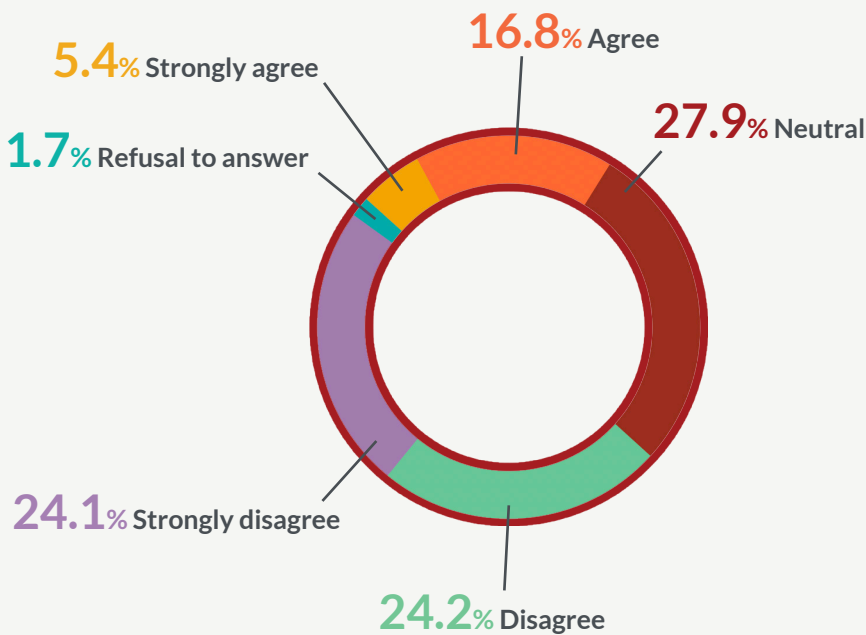
Q4 “Disciplining children is an internal matter of the family, and outsiders should not interfere”, to what degree do you agree with the statement?

One-third of the population thinks that parenting or disciplining children (管教) is a family’s internal affair, and external people should not intervene. This is also the major reason for their lack of action when they witness suspected child abuse. However, one in four adults disagree that parenting or discipline is an internal family matter.



Q5 “Parents have the right to decide whether to discipline their children by corporal punishment”, to what degree do you agree with the statement?

Half of the respondents do not agree that parents should have the right to decide whether they use corporal punishment for parenting (48%), 22% of respondents agree, yet 27% remain neutral.

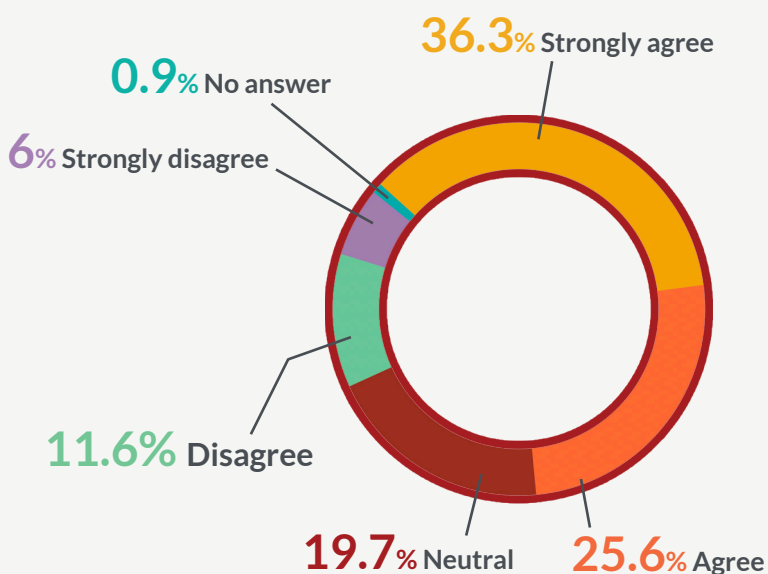


Q6

“Corporal punishment of children is not an effective form of discipline”, to what degree do you agree with the statement?



Two-third of respondents agree that corporal punishment is not an effective way of parenting, while 20% feel neutral and 17% disagree.

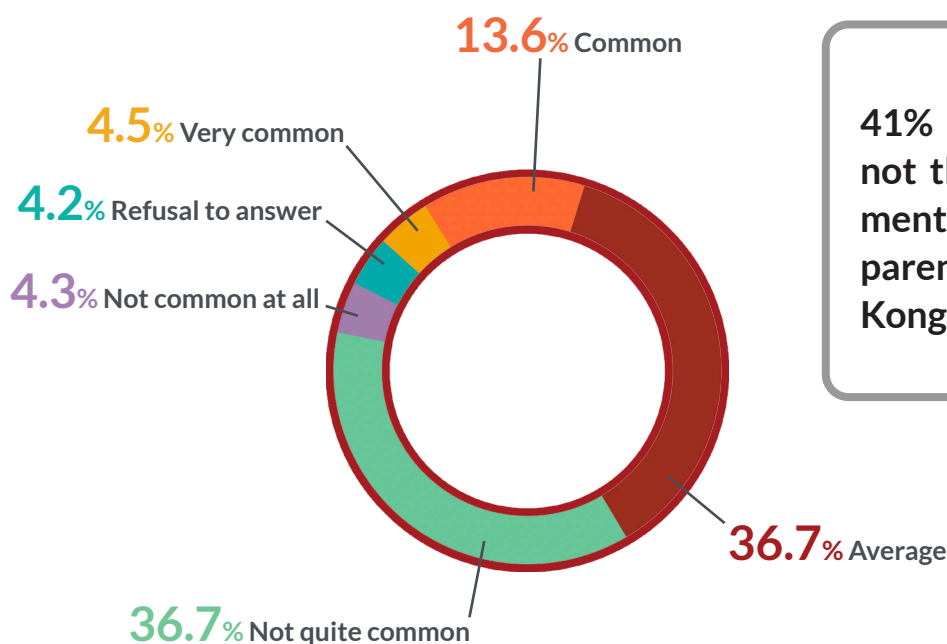


Q7

Overall, do you think corporal punishment of children by parents or carers in Hong Kong families is common?



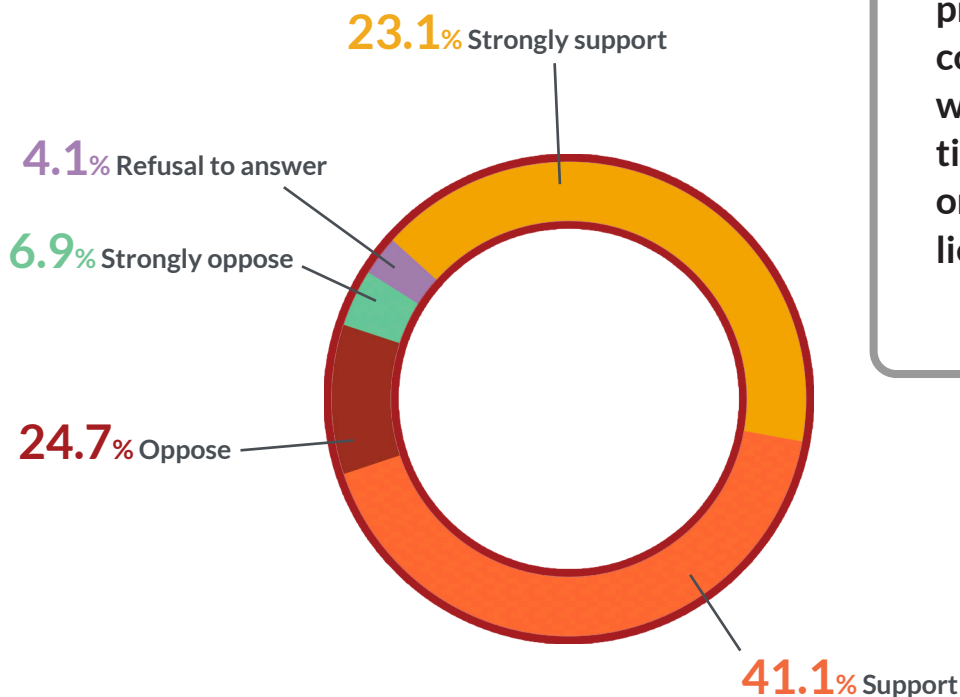
41% of respondents do not think corporal punishment is commonly used by parents or carers in Hong Kong.





Q8 Hong Kong's current legislation prohibits corporal punishment of children in schools, institutions, children's centres and other public places, but does not include prohibiting parents or carers from inflicting corporal punishment on children at home.

Do you support that Hong Kong should enact legislation as soon as possible to prohibit corporal punishment of children in all settings, including in the family?



64% of respondents support the legislation in prohibiting any form of corporal punishment towards children in all settings including in schools, organisations and families.





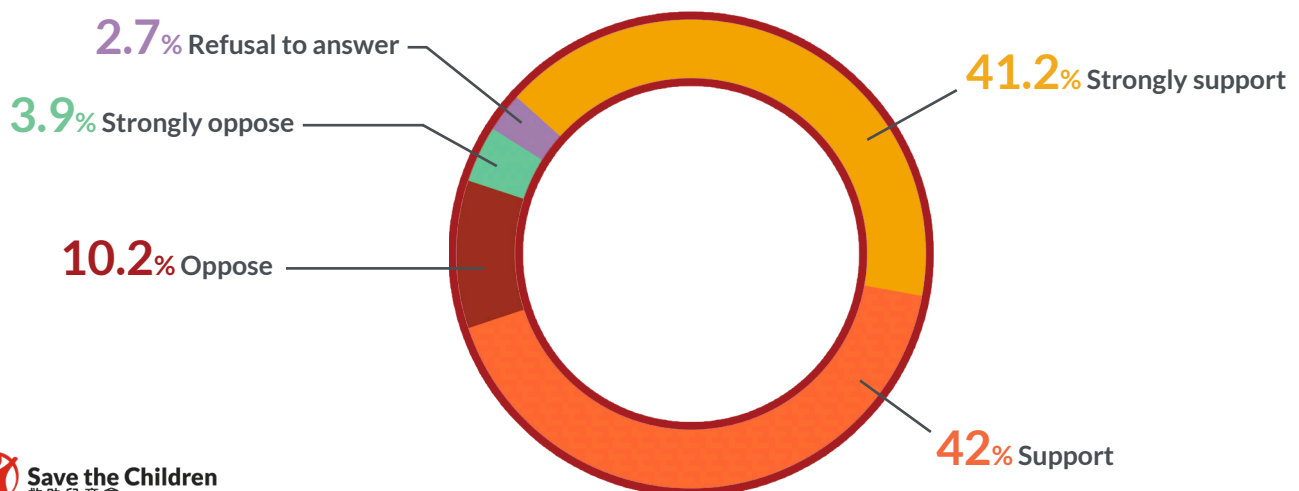
Q9

In the 2021 Policy Address, the Government announced that it would establish a mandatory reporting mechanism for child abuse, requiring professionals with regular contact with children to report suspected child abuse and neglect cases, and plans to introduce the relevant bill into the Legislative Council in 2023.

Do you support legislation to establish mandatory reporting mechanisms for child abuse?



83% of respondents support the government legislating a mandatory reporting mechanism to monitor professionals who have regular contact with children to report suspected child abuse or neglect cases.





Discussion

The majority of respondents are not acting upon children being beaten or verbally humiliated severely by a parent or carer.

Major reasons include

- ①  Not wanting to intervene in other families' affairs
- ②  Thinking that these punishments were not serious
- ③  Not sure if these shall be considered as child abuse



Traditional thinking about parenting/disciplining children (管教) as an internal family affair potentially delays the identification of child abuse cases, which could lead to serious violence and harm to child victims. Public education is needed, including clearly defining physical and humiliating punishment as child abuse, providing positive parenting to eliminate all violence against children and supporting and encouraging bystanders to take a role in tackling child abuse they witness. The public should understand that it is no longer a family affair when parents inflict physical or emotional harm on children.





- Some respondents may not agree with corporal punishment, but, most of them would not act when they witness other adults beating, slapping or verbally humiliating their children. The results indicate that they are unlikely to feel able to intervene or report what they see to the authorities, especially those adults who think parenting/disciplining children (管教) is an internal family affair.
- Almost half of the respondents think that corporal punishment from parents or carers is not common nowadays in Hong Kong. However, other research indicated the opposite. A survey from Against Child Abuse in 2019* found that around half of child respondents encountered corporal punishment from their parents. “Young Voices: Insights from Young People in Hong Kong, by Save the Children Hong Kong” * in 2021 from Save the Children Hong Kong

also found that 37% of youth worried about being kicked out of their homes by their parents in the past one year. This shows that the public - including parents - may not see corporal punishment of children as serious or harmful, although children do experience it this way.

- The majority of respondents support the legislation on Mandatory Reporting Requirements; they expect professionals who have regular contact with children to report suspected child abuse. This means that there is public support and an enabling environment for the government to push the legislation process forward.

* [A Questionnaire Survey on the Experience of Corporal Punishment in Children and Parents Give Children a Warm and Non-violent Childhood](#), by Against Child Abuse.

* [Young Voices: Insights from Young People in Hong Kong](#), by Save the Children Hong Kong.



Recommendations



Topics Covered

- Government
- Civil Society Organisations

Government

- With the supportive public opinion towards the legislation revealed in the study, the legislation process on mandatory reporting should start as soon as possible.
- The best interest of the child should be the basic principles for all the mandatory reporting related measures and supporting services. Special channels should also be set up to ensure children's voices are heard in the legislative process.
- The government should also mandate organisations having frequent contact with children to set up Child Safeguarding policies in order to support mandated reporters to uphold their responsibilities and to better streamline any cooperation that may be needed between the organisation and the local authorities in case of an investigation.
- While the government and legislators work on the details of the mandatory reporting, they should continue to organize and attend stakeholder meetings and forums, and solicit and consider suggestions from key stakeholders working with children to strengthen the proposed legislation and implementation mechanisms.



Civil Society Organisations



- Civil society organisations should continue the conversation with the government on how to best legislate the mandatory reporting mechanism with implementation guidelines and measures, and develop supporting services for children and families to be available following implementation of the legislation.
- Organisations should establish internal safeguarding policies, standards, and measures to prevent harm to children and ensure alignment with the government's mandatory reporting handling mechanism.
- Organisations should also take this as an educational opportunity to reinforce positive parenting in carers and parents, and to prevent any form of physical and humiliating punishment of children. Public education, including psychological first aid, on the potential action for bystanders who witness child abuse, is needed.



Looking Forward



- After a series of child abuse cases revealed in the past few years, there is a strong public consensus for the legislation requiring child-facing professionals to report suspected child abuse cases.
- The proposed mandatory reporting legislation indicates the government's strong determination for the early identification of potential child abuse cases. However, the Mandatory Reporting Requirement is only one of the possible steps which can be taken to strengthen child protection measures.
- The government should further study and introduce a new offence of failure to protect a child or vulnerable person where the child's or vulnerable person's death or serious harm results from an unlawful act or neglect, which would impose a legal responsibility on carers to speak up for any victims of child abuse.
- Public awareness and understanding of non-violent communication in parenting are vital for children's healthy growth and development. The government and civil society should work together on educating child-facing professionals and the public on how to create a safe environment by eliminating all forms of corporal punishment including physical and humiliating punishment against children in all settings.
- This polling result is based on ten questions via telephone survey, and questions are related to physical and humiliating punishment, corporal punishment and the Mandatory Reporting Requirement legislation. To further promote and strategise positive parenting education, more in-depth research on the efficiency of and needs for parenting skills is needed. Also, this polling reflects only adults' views on corporal punishment and the legislation, further research should also capture children's view on the topics, since they are child rights issues.



Acknowledgements



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