



# Finns' attitudes to parenting and the use of corporal punishment 2017



LASTENSUOJELUN KESKUSLIITTO  
CENTRAL UNION FOR CHILD WELFARE

# Finns' attitudes to parenting and the use of corporal punishment 2017

- Summary

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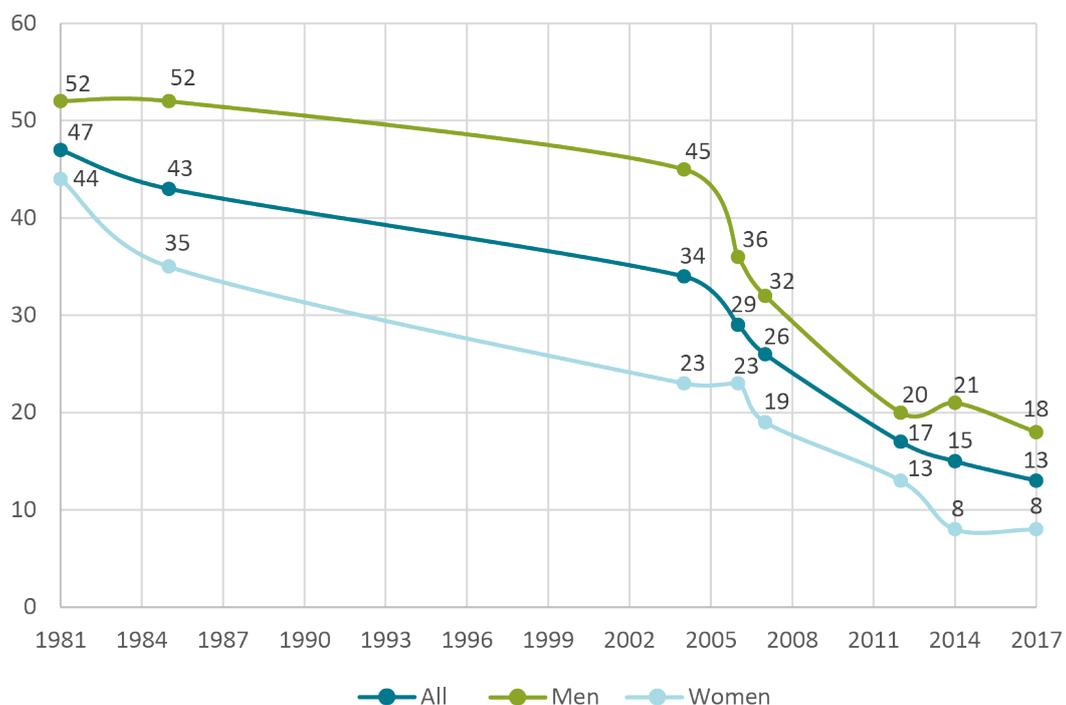
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Corporal punishment of children was outlawed in Finland in 1984. The range of corporal punishment of children and the development of related attitudes have been monitored in Finland since the 1980s. The Central Union for Child Welfare carried out a survey on Finns' parenting attitudes and methods. The results were published in September 2017 in the publication *Piiskasta jäähypenkkiin* (From the cane to the “naughty bench”), which also compared the results with those of earlier studies.

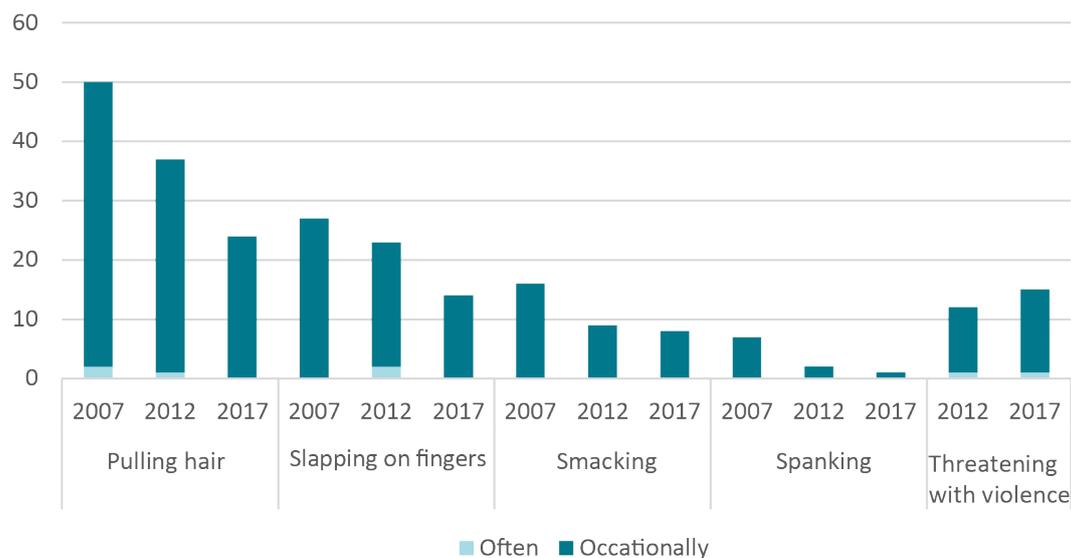
In 2017, 95 per cent of Finns knew that physical punishment of children was banned by law. Awareness of the illegality of the practice does not mean that attitudes follow, but a clear majority of Finns do not approve of corporal punishment even in exceptional circumstances. The development of attitudes has been very positive: before the ban on corporal punishment, approximately 50 per cent of Finns thought that physical discipline practices were acceptable, while in 2017 this figure had dropped to 13 per cent. Women's attitudes to corporal punishment were more negative than men's. From a child's point of view, it is important to note that parents with children approve of corporal punishment far less often than other respondents do. Men who live alone have the most approving attitude to corporal punishment.



*Answers to the question 'Physical punishment of children is, at least in exceptional circumstances, an acceptable method of disciplining' and % of respondents who somewhat or strongly agreed in 1981, 1985, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2012, 2014 and 2017.*

Not all Finns consider hair pulling or flicking at a child's head corporal punishment. Despite the widespread condemnation of corporal punishment and violence, 28 per cent of Finns still somewhat or strongly agree with the statement 'Pulling a child's hair or flicking at his or her head is acceptable in exceptional circumstances.' The proportion of people who agree with this statement, however, has dropped by more than 10 per cent in five years.

Regardless of the change in attitudes, Finnish parents still resort to corporal punishment of their children. Some 41 per cent of parents who responded to the questionnaire admitted that they had resorted to some form of corporal punishment (hair pulling, slapping fingers, spanking, threatening with violence) of their children. The actual figure may be higher since quite a large proportion of the parents could not or did not want to answer the question. The use of corporal punishment has decreased significantly in ten years. In 2007, approximately half of the respondents admitted to pulling their child's hair at least occasionally, while in 2017, only 24 per cent admitted to doing so. In addition, spanking as a means of disciplining children is almost never used by Finnish parents nowadays.



*Answers to the question 'Have you ever disciplined your children by pulling their hair? Slapping them on the fingers? Smacking them? Spanking them? Threatening with violence?' and % of respondents who had done so often or occasionally in 2007, 2012 and 2017 (threatening violence was not included in 2007).*

According to the survey, women are more likely to resort to all of these forms of corporal punishment than men. For example, 12 per cent of women and 5 per cent of men admitted to having slapped their child at least occasionally. This despite the fact that women's attitudes towards punishment are significantly more disapproving. Some differences can be explained by the larger proportion of men than women who did not answer the question or neither agreed or disagreed.

Although the actual use of corporal punishment is now less common, threatening with violence has become more widespread. According to the survey, however, Finns have a very negative attitude towards threatening with violence and find it more harmful to the child than, for example, hair pulling. What the respondents found particularly detrimental was children being sniped at, belittled, intimidated or subjected to domestic violence. Approximately half of the respondents accepted yelling at a child as a method of disciplining, and a third thought it is acceptable to tell the child to sit in a room alone to calm down. The so-called "naughty bench" is now used more often as a means of disciplining children, and this may have contributed to the diminished use of corporal punishment. It must be pointed out that leaving children alone to deal with

their emotions is also harmful.

The survey also shows that corporal punishment forms an intergenerational pattern because violent childhood experiences of a parent increase the likelihood of that person resorting to violence when dealing with his or her own children. Childhood experiences of corporal punishment have an impact on attitude, which has a clear connection to the use of physical punishment. Some 57 per cent of the respondents had been physically punished as children. Those who had been subject to corporal punishment were twice as likely to accept it as a method of disciplining children as those who had not. Some 78 per cent of the parents who accept corporal punishment had used some form of corporal punishment when disciplining their own children.

Despite the trend of condemning corporal punishment, there is an unquestionable need for continuous efforts to influence attitudes as well as communication so that awareness of everyone's absolute right to have a childhood free of violence reaches all Finns and is put into practice. More needs to be done to increase people's awareness of the benefits of supportive parenting instead of using corporal punishment and to ensure that parents have access to all necessary support as early as possible. The clearly expressed goal must be to ensure that no child in Finland is a victim of corporal punishment.

### Implementation of the survey

One-to-one interviews with 1009 Finns aged between 15 and 79 years were conducted for the survey by Taloustutkimus Oy. The sample was obtained from quota sampling, with quotas representing the nationwide distribution of age, gender, province and municipality, excluding the Åland Islands. The respondents' replies have been weighted to represent the population of Finland as a whole. The results of the survey can be generalised across the population in Finland with a margin of error of  $\pm 2.8$  percentage points.

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