

Children Are Unbeatable! Newsletter England

Issue No. 15 – March 2015 (see [website](#) for previous issues)

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Contents

[Parliament and Government](#)
[Across the world](#)
[Research](#)

Parliament and Government Wales

An amendment to remove the “reasonable punishment” defence was tabled on March 3 to the Welsh Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Bill. Unfortunately the Welsh Labour Government refused to allow Labour AMs a free vote, so it was lost by 36 to 16. Julie Morgan AM (who tabled the cross-party amendment together with Plaid Cymru and Liberal Democrats) and Christine Chapman AM were the only two Labour AMs to defy the whip.

Before the debate, the First Minister stated in answer to an oral question from an AM who is a strong supporter of CAU!: "She and I are not necessarily in different positions over the principle here, but in different positions over the potential implementation. I think it is important first of all for parties to declare in their manifestoes what they plan to do over the defence of reasonable chastisement and secondly of course to have a consultation with the public on how this would work. I think that is the more sensible way. It can be done in a short space of time - no question about that, to take forward a principle which I know many members are keen to move forward with".

The National Assembly has already voted to establish a Committee to look, in the words of the First Minister, at "how" not "whether" removal of the defence should be implemented. It is likely that the work of this Committee will now proceed.

What you can do

This newsletter only goes to CAU! supporters in England – [CAU!-Cymru](#) is separately coordinated – but if any readers have supportive contacts in Wales, please send details to Sara Reid, Coordinator of CAU! –Cymru: sara.reid.cymru@gmail.com .

Westminster

As soon as the election is over CAU! needs to recruit as much parliamentary support as possible.

If you are in contact with any MP in the new parliament please check if they are already a CAU! supporter (see below). If they are not, please ask them to support CAU! Click for the information you need:

- To find out if your [MP is a CAU! supporter](#);
- Suggestions for what to [write to your MP](#)
- For hard copy and online [sign-up forms](#).

[Return to contents](#)

Across the world

Four more countries ban all physical punishment

Nicaragua, Estonia, Andorra and Benin have introduced laws prohibiting all forms of physical punishment, bringing the total number of states with a full ban to 46. Another 47 are committed to taking this step.

European Committee of Social Rights upholds complaints against France

In 2013, the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment (sister organization to Children Are Unbeatable!) submitted collective complaints against seven European countries: Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Ireland, Italy and Slovenia. These are the European countries which have not prohibited physical punishment but which have – unlike the UK – accepted the Council of Europe Social Charter collective complaints procedure.

The European Committee of Social Rights published its [decision](#) on France ahead of the other six. It ruled that France was in violation because it has not clearly prohibited all physical punishment and noted, "there is now a wide consensus at both the European and the international level among human rights bodies that the corporal punishment of children should be expressly and comprehensively prohibited in law". The ruling triggered an extensive media coverage and debate across France. A poll found that 87% of French parents had physically punished their children.

For further information about worldwide progress visit the [Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment](#); to receive its newsletter contact info@endcorporalpunishment.org.

The Pope on smacking

A few weeks after the Pope's remark in relation to freedom of expression and the Charlie Hebdo killings that you must "expect a punch in the face" if you insult his mother, he endorsed smacking children. He is reported as saying, "One time I heard a father in a meeting with married couples say 'I sometimes have to smack my children a bit, but never in the face so as to not humiliate them.' How beautiful. He knows the sense of dignity. He has to punish them but does it justly and moves on." The Pope's Sex Abuse Commission immediately criticised this statement, with UK representative Peter Saunders

saying “You don’t hit kids.” The Commission has set up a subgroup on church teaching on corporal punishment. Various prominent Catholics expressed disagreement and open letters, twitter responses and blogs were published in protest. The Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of the Child pointed out that the Committee recommended the Holy See use its authority to oppose all forms of physical punishment since these clearly violate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

[Return to contents](#)

Research

Mothers suffering domestic violence are more likely to hit their children

There is widespread academic consensus that physical punishment risks both short-term and long-term harm, which means that research is now focusing on what factors encourage or discourage the practice. A [study](#) in Nicaragua helpfully summarises these: factors that increase physical punishment of children include the family’s low socioeconomic status, large families, parental unemployment, young parents, poor maternal mental health, rural residency, parents’ own experience of violence in childhood and adult life; in addition the law, cultural norms and social inequality will affect prevalence of physical punishment. One factor that has been found to decrease physical punishment is education of the mother. This study of over 10,000 mothers examined whether the protective effects of education mitigated against the negative effect of the mother’s exposure to emotional violence by their intimate partners. The study concluded that in a significant number of cases it did not.

Two US studies confirm harmful effects of physical punishment

[Research](#) published in the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* on the impact of parental physical punishment on adolescents aged 12-14 found that physical punishment predicted increased depression and misconduct in the young people at 14-16 years, regardless of levels of paternal warmth or the child’s ethnicity. A longitudinal [study](#) in *Development and Psychopathology* on three-year-olds followed through to kindergarten at five to six years, found that physical punishment, rather than low maternal warmth, was strongly associated in aggressive behaviour towards peers.

Dramatic reduction in Swedish levels of physical punishment

A Swedish [study](#) published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* using data from three cohorts of Swedish adults (1958, 1981, and 2011) found a dramatic decrease in participants reporting having been slapped during childhood after the full ban in 1979. In 1958, after the first attempt to prohibit smacking, 20% of participants said that they were often slapped by their parents; in 1981, the figure was 18% but by 2011 it had decreased to 2%.