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Poll mirrors Supreme Court spanking stand

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OTTAWA -- A Supreme Court of Canada ruling on spanking mirrors public opinion on the issue, a SES/Sun Media poll suggests. The survey of 1,000 people, completed the night before the Friday court decision, shows 64 per cent of those questioned support the parental use of force such as spanking to discipline a child. A majority oppose physical force being used by others.

"Although Canadians support a parent's right to spank their children, a clear majority are opposed to the use of physical force such as spanking among teachers or caregivers," said SES president Nik Nanos.

The high court ruling bars teachers from using force as a corrective measure.

Support for spanking as a reasonable measure was highest in the West at 71 per cent and Ontario at 62 per cent. The lowest support was in Quebec at 47 per cent.

"Polling clearly indicates Canadians are very uncomfortable regarding the courts getting between a parent and a child," Nanos said. "Canadians generally believe parents know best when it comes to what is appropriate discipline."

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Only seven per cent of those questioned supported criminal charges against parents who spank their children. The same number said children should be removed from homes where parents use spanking as a form of corporal punishment and five per cent supported both criminal charges and the removal of children from the home. One-fifth, or 20 per cent, said they weren't sure.

The court did apply guidelines for what's acceptable and what's not. It said reasonable force under the circumstances, such as spanking with an open hand, by parents of children aged two to 12 was okay. It ruled that any punishment that causes physical harm, such as slaps or blows to the head, is prohibited.

The poll was conducted Jan. 26 to Jan. 29. It is considered accurate within 3.1 percentage points, plus or minus, 19 times out of 20.

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