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Sun, February 1, 2004

Spank ruling a hit in poll Canadians back court in discipline debate

By BILL RODGERS, OTTAWA BUREAU CHIEF

OTTAWA -- A Supreme Court of Canada ruling on spanking last week mirrors public opinion on the issue, according to a Sun Media poll. The survey of 1,000 people by SES Research, completed the night before the Friday court decision, shows 64% of those questioned support the parental use of force such as spanking to discipline a child. But a wide 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 Research president Nik Nanos.

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

"Polling clearly indicates that 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."

Only 7% of those questioned supported criminal charges for parents who spank their children. The same number said children should be removed from homes where parents use spanking as corporal punishment, and 5% supported both criminal charges and the removal of children from the home.

The court did apply guidelines for what's acceptable and what's not. It said reasonable force

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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 is considered accurate within 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.



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