

In Angola, gender-based violence is seen as the top challenge to women's rights

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 586 | Cecília Kitombe and Carlos Pacatolo

Summary

Gender-based violence (GBV) threatens the health, well-being, and lives of women throughout Angolan society. The most recent Multiple Indicator and Health Survey reports that 32% of Angolan women have suffered physical violence since the age of 15; 8% will be victims of sexual violence at some point in their lives; and 34% have been victims of physical or sexual violence perpetrated by their husbands or partners (Instituto Nacional de Estatística (2017).

The Angolan government has ratified international conventions and instruments to combat GBV, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (United Nations, 1979) and the Maputo Protocol (African Union, 2003), and the country's laws against domestic violence and National Policy on Equality and Gender Equity seek to protect women against violence.

But despite these normative and legal instruments, there are still major challenges in the fight against GBV, both in society's appreciation of the need to combat it and the government's commitment to decisive action for its elimination. In his State of the Nation address in October, President João Lourenço (2022) called for stronger penalties to reduce domestic violence in the country.

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 (2021/2022) questionnaire to explore Africans' experiences and perceptions of gender-based violence.

Angolans consider gender-based violence the most important women's-rights issue that the government and society must address. A majority of citizens say GBV is a common reality in their communities and should be treated as a criminal matter, rather than a private matter to be resolved within the family. Citizens express confidence that the police take reported GBV cases seriously.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Eight rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 39 countries since 1999, and Round 9 surveys are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Angola, led by Ovilongwa – Estudos de Opinião Pública, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 adult Angolans in February-March 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. A previous survey was conducted in Angola in 2019.

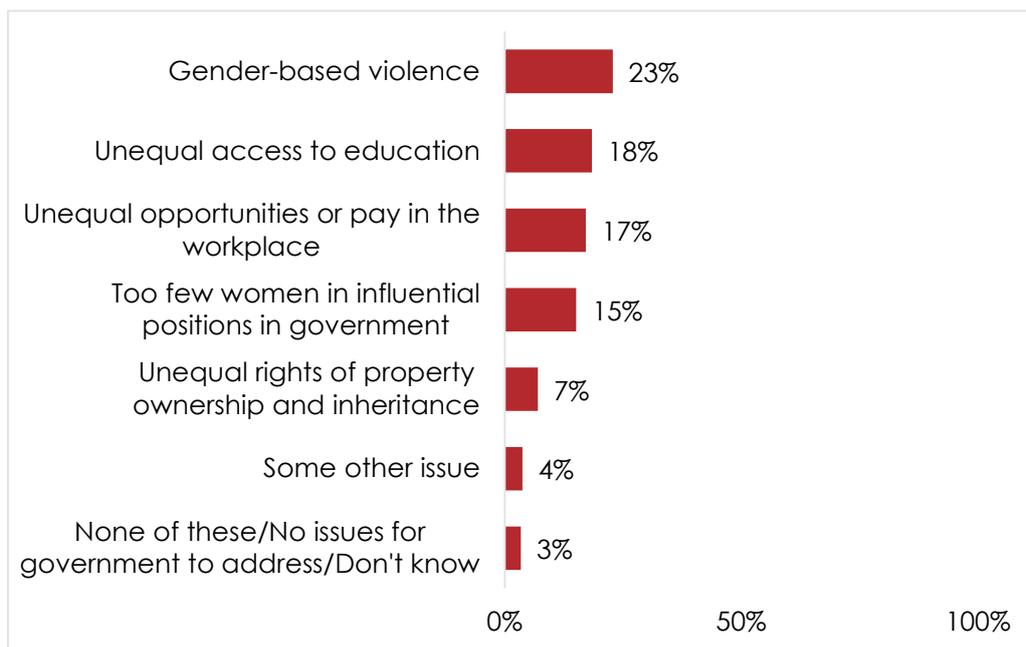
Key findings

- GBV tops the list of women's-rights issues that Angolans say the government and society must address.
- A majority (62%) of Angolans say violence against women and girls is “very common” (27%) or “somewhat common” (35%) in their community.
- More than two-thirds (69%) of citizens say it is “never” justified for a man to use physical force to discipline his wife. Three in 10 consider it “sometimes” (20%) or “always” (9%) justified.
 - Rejection of GBV is particularly common among the most educated citizens (83%), urban residents (76%), and women (73%).
- About half (49%) of Angolans consider it “somewhat likely” or “very likely” that a woman who reports GBV will be criticised, harassed, or shamed by members of the community.
 - But a majority (59%) of citizens believe that the police are likely to take reports of GBV seriously.
- Two-thirds (67%) of Angolans say domestic violence should be treated as a criminal matter, rather than a private matter to be resolved within the family.

Is gender-based violence (GBV) an important problem in Angola?

In Angola, GBV tops the list of important women's-rights issues that citizens say the government and society must address. Nearly one-quarter (23%) of survey respondents cite GBV as the main challenge in the fight for women's rights, followed by unequal access to education (18%), unequal opportunities or pay in the workplace (17%), too few women in influential positions in government (15%), and unequal rights of property ownership and inheritance (7%) (Figure 1).

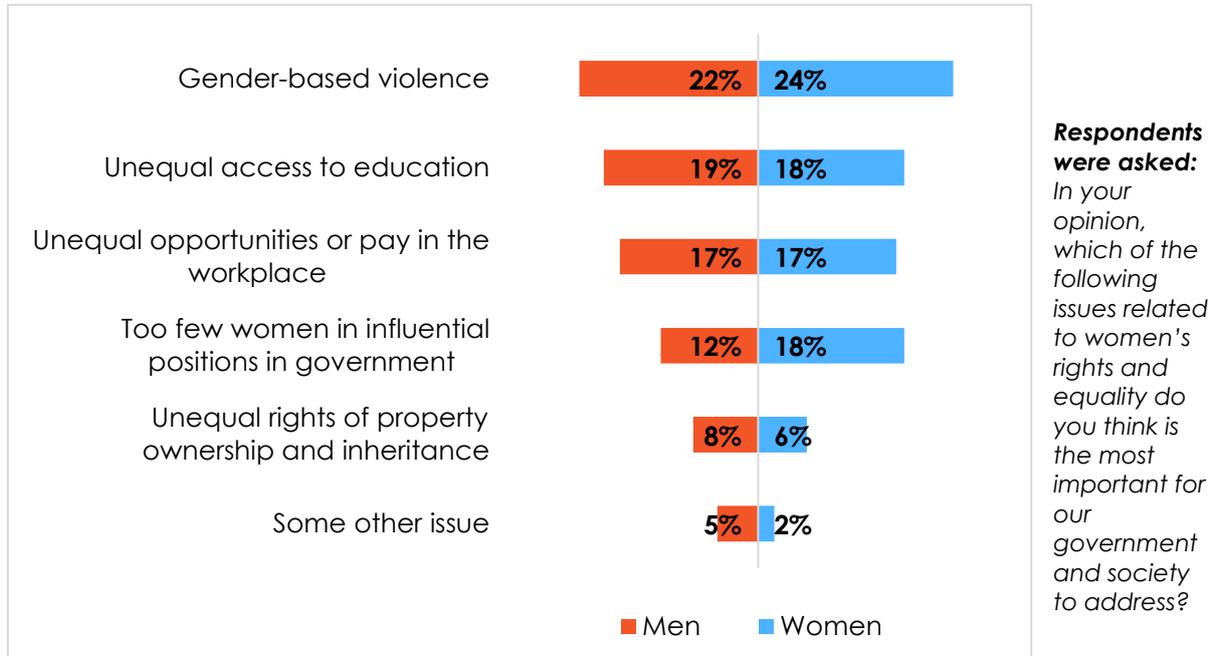
Figure 1: Most important women's-rights issue | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked:
In your opinion, which of the following issues related to women's rights and equality do you think is the most important for our government and society to address?

Men and women hold almost identical views on the most important women's-rights issues except that men are less likely than women to cite the lack of women in influential government positions as a priority (12% vs. 18%) (Figure 2).

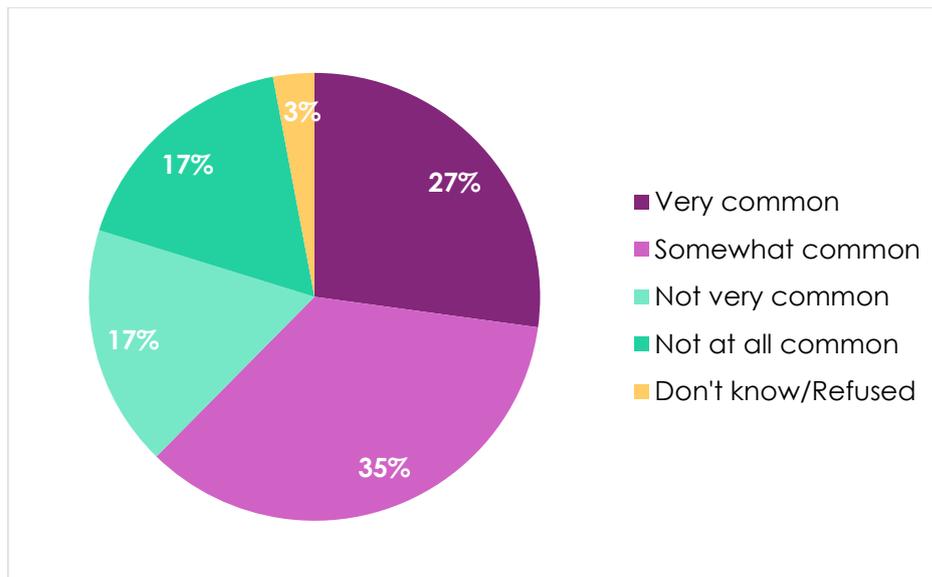
Figure 2: Most important women's-rights issue | by gender | Angola | 2022



How common is GBV?

One reason that GBV is considered a major issue is probably that many Angolans think it happens frequently: 62% of respondents say violence against women and girls is "somewhat common" (35%) or "very common" (27%) in their community (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Frequency of GBV | Angola | 2022

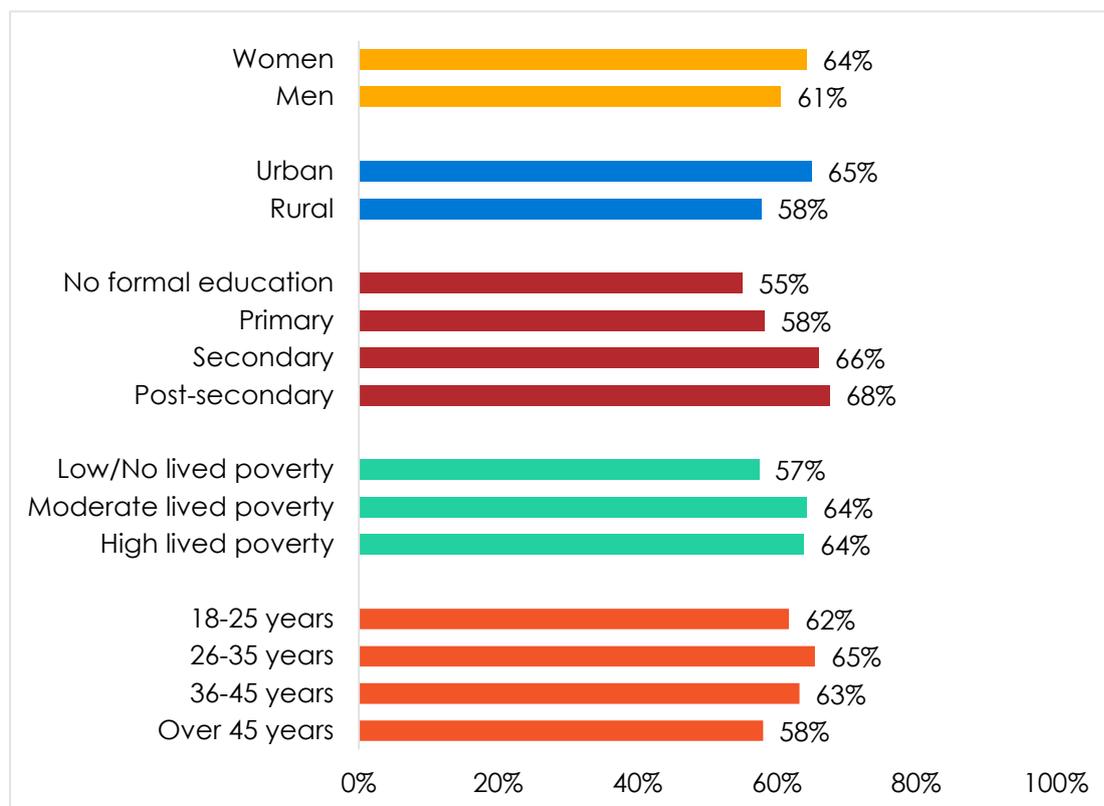


Respondents were asked: In this area, how common do you think it is for men to use violence against women and girls in the home or the community?

The perception that violence against women and girls is a common occurrence is shared by majorities of both women and men (64% vs. 61%) and is more widespread in cities (65%) than in rural areas (58%) (Figure 4). This view increases with respondents' education level (ranging from 55% among those with no formal schooling to 68% among those with post-secondary education) and with respondents' experience of lived poverty¹ (ranging from 57% among the economically better off to 64% among those experiencing moderate or high lived poverty).

Older respondents (58%) are less likely to report that GBV happens frequently.

Figure 4: GBV a somewhat/very frequent occurrence | by demographic group
 | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: In this area, how common do you think it is for men to use violence against women and girls in the home or the community? (% who say "somewhat common" or "very common")

Physical discipline of a spouse

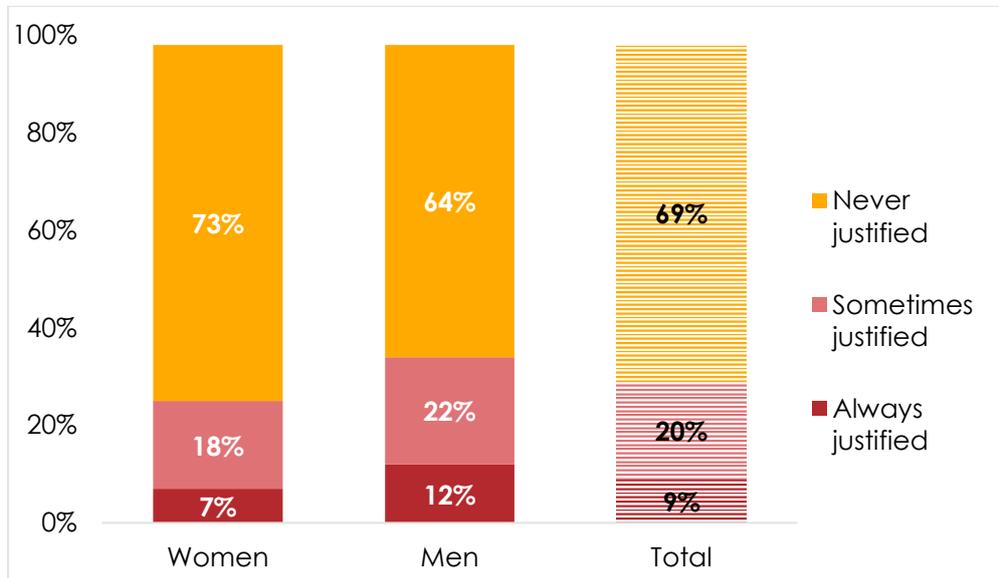
About seven in 10 Angolans (69%) say it is "never justified" for a man to use physical force to discipline his wife. Three in 10 consider it "sometimes" (20%) or "always" (9%) justified. Women are more likely than men to rule out physical discipline as "never justified," 73% vs. 64% (Figure 5).

The view that men are never justified in physically disciplining their wives is more common among urbanites (76%) than their rural counterparts (55%), and grows significantly with

¹ Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes (2020).

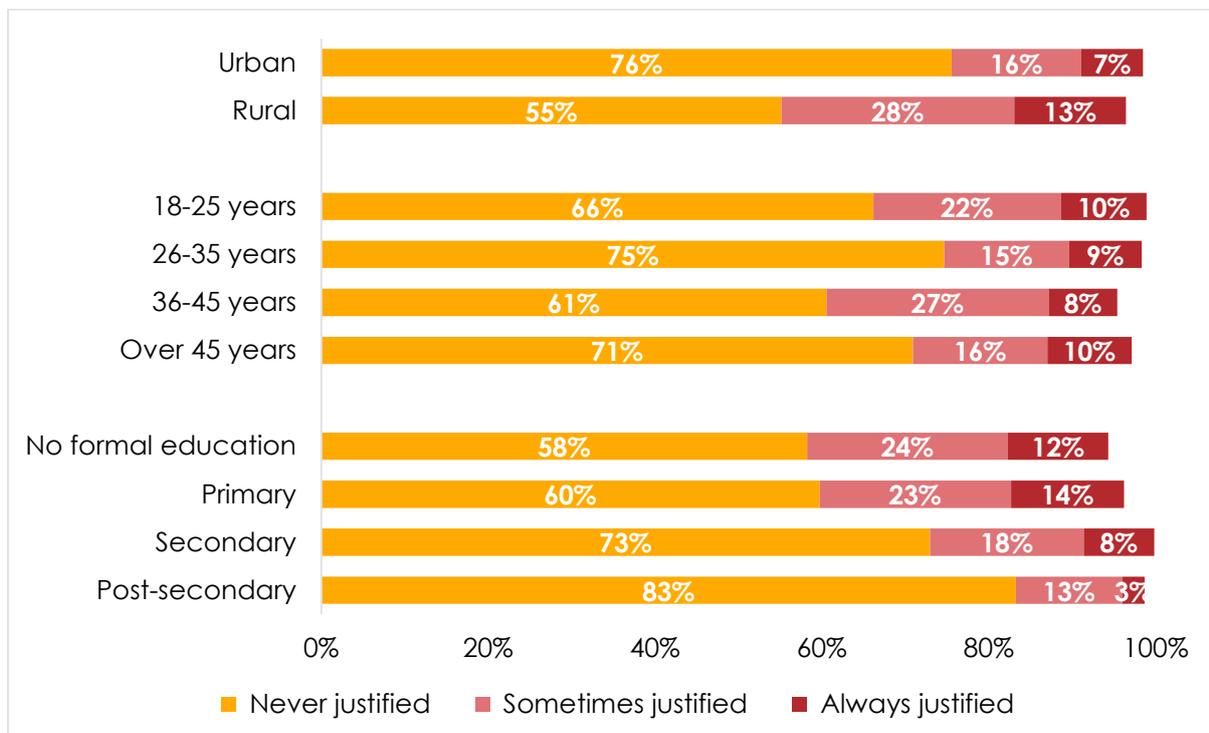
respondents' education level, ranging from 58% of those with no formal schooling to 83% of those with post-secondary qualifications (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Is it justified for men to physically discipline their wives? | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: For each of the following actions, please tell me whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never be justified: For a man to use physical discipline on his wife if she has done something he doesn't like or thinks is wrong?

Figure 6: Is it justified for men to physically discipline their wives? | by demographic group | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: For each of the following actions, please tell me whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never be justified: For a man to use physical discipline on his wife if she has done something he doesn't like or thinks is wrong?

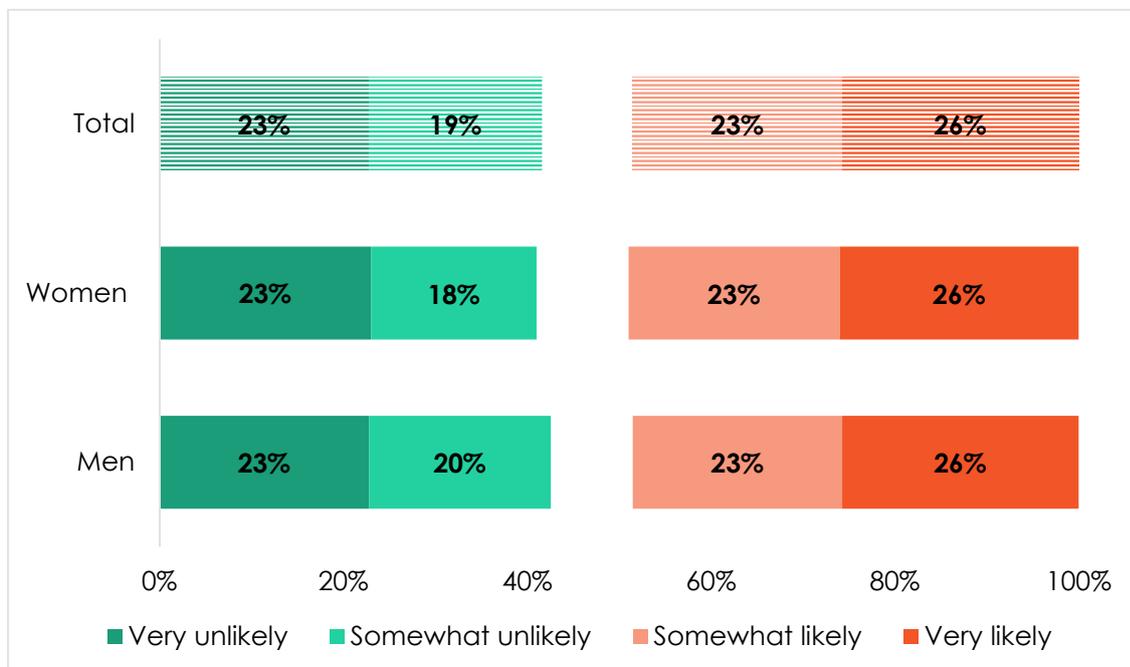
Response to GBV

Police and scholars agree that the true extent of GBV is unknown because many attacks on girls and women are never reported. Reasons include fear of the attacker, fear of a negative response by others, and the belief that the authorities won't take the case seriously (Palermo, Bleck, & Peterman, 2014).

Asked whether they think a woman who reports being a victim of rape, domestic violence, or other GBV will be criticised, harassed, or shamed by others in the community, fewer than a quarter (23%) of Angolans say this is "very unlikely" (Figure 7). While another 19% consider it "somewhat unlikely," about half (49%) say it is "somewhat" (23%) or "very" (26%) likely.

The possibility of facing criticism, harassment, or shaming would likely make it even more difficult for a GBV survivor to report such a crime to the authorities.

Figure 7: Will a woman be criticised, harassed, or shamed for reporting GBV?
 | by gender | Angola | 2022

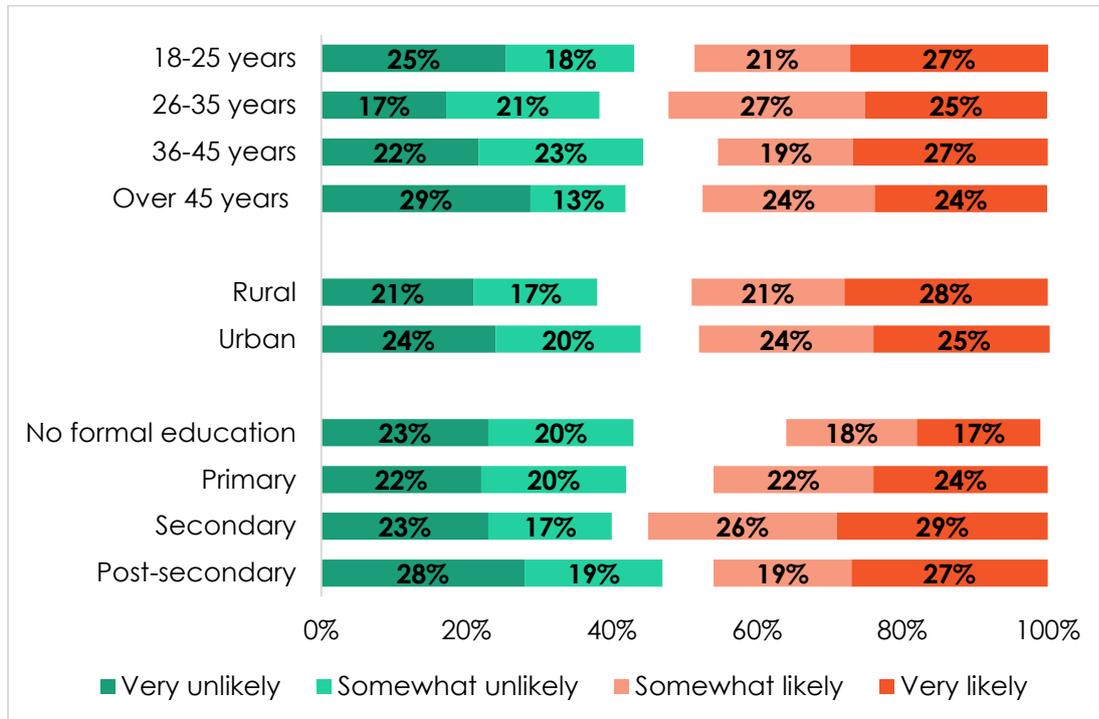


Respondents were asked: *If a woman in your community goes to the police to report being a victim of gender-based violence, for example, to report a rape or report being physically abused by her husband, how likely or unlikely is it that the following things might occur: She will be criticized, harassed, or shamed by others in the community?*

The perception that such negative consequences are unlikely to occur is somewhat more common in cities (44%) than in rural areas (38%) and among citizens with post-secondary education (47%) than among those with less schooling (40%-43%) (Figure 8).

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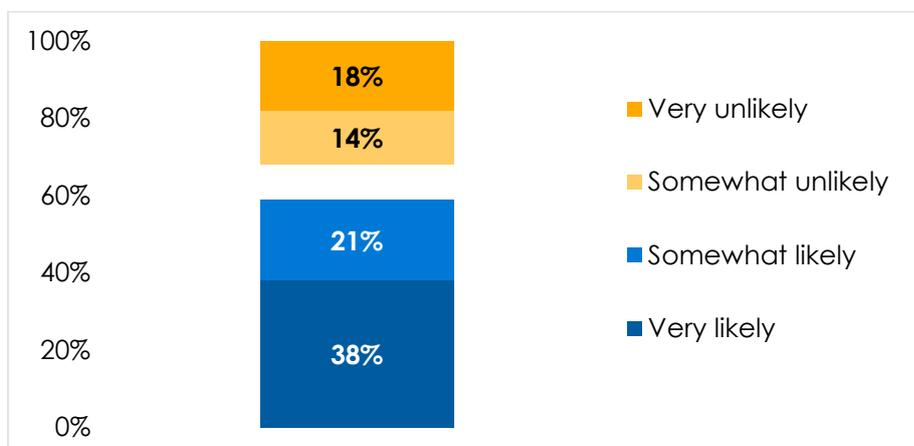
Figure 8: Will a woman be criticised, harassed, or shamed for reporting GBV?
 | by demographic group | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: *If a woman in your community goes to the police to report being a victim of gender-based violence, for example, to report a rape or report being physically abused by her husband, how likely or unlikely is it that the following things might occur: She will be criticised, harassed, or shamed by others in the community?*

Despite mixed expectations about the community's response, a majority (59%) of Angolans believe that the police will take reported cases of GBV seriously. Still, about one-third (32%) of citizens consider this unlikely (Figure 9).

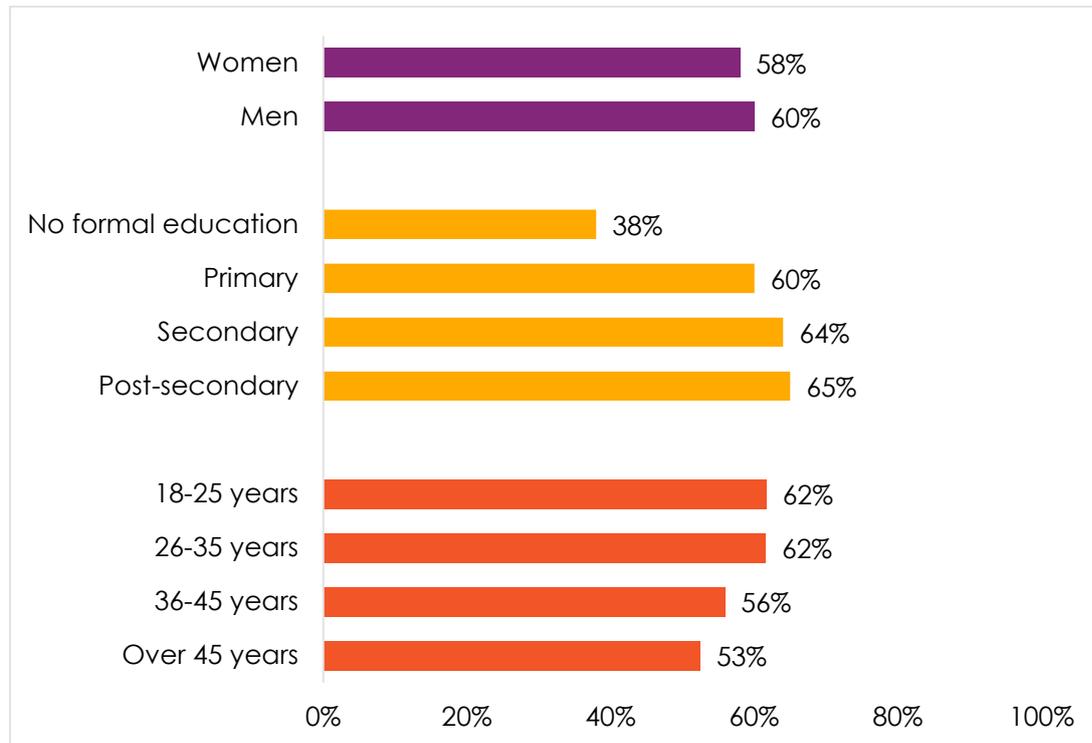
Figure 9: Will the police take GBV cases seriously? | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: *If a woman in your community goes to the police to report being a victim of gender-based violence, for example, to report a rape or report being physically abused by her husband, how likely or unlikely is it that the following things might occur: Her case will be taken seriously by the police?*

While women and men hold similar views on this question, citizens with no formal schooling are far less likely to express confidence in the police response (38%) than their counterparts with at least a primary education (60%-65%) (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Police take GBV cases seriously | by demographic group | Angola
 | 2022



Respondents were asked: *If a woman in your community goes to the police to report being a victim of gender-based violence, for example, to report a rape or report being physically abused by her husband, how likely or unlikely is it that the following things might occur: Her case will be taken seriously by the police? (% who say “somewhat likely” or “very likely”)*

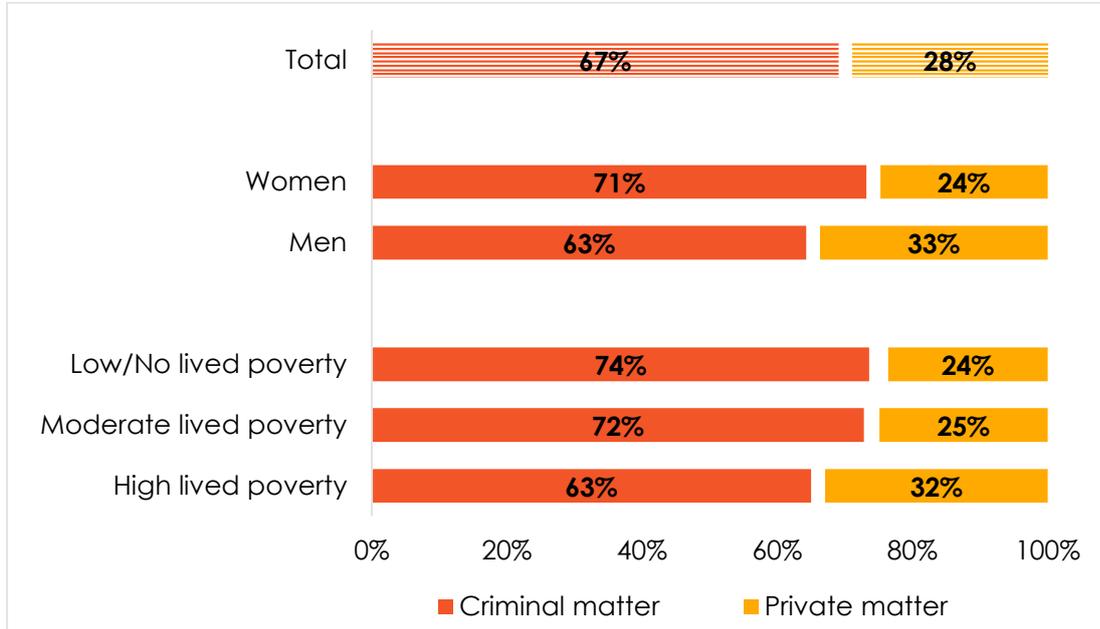
Is domestic violence a criminal or family matter?

One common form of GBV is domestic violence. Even though the perpetrators may be known, many domestic-violence cases go unreported or unresolved, and often present victims and families with complex, wrenching decisions. Do Angolans see domestic violence as a criminal matter or a private matter?

Two-thirds (67%) of Angolans say domestic violence is a criminal matter that requires the involvement of law enforcement, while 28% consider it a private matter that needs to be handled within the family (Figure 11).

Women are more likely than men to see domestic violence as a criminal matter, 71% vs. 63%. The poorest respondents are less likely to agree that domestic violence is a criminal matter (63%, vs. 72%-74%) of their better-off counterparts.

Figure 11: Is domestic violence a criminal or private matter? | by gender and lived poverty | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: Domestic violence is a private matter that needs to be handled and resolved within the family.

Statement 2: Domestic violence is a criminal matter whose full resolution requires the involvement of law enforcement agencies.

(% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

Conclusion

Angolans consider gender-based violence a serious problem that needs urgent attention by their government and society. Not only do citizens say it is a common occurrence, but many also believe that a woman who reports being a victim of GBV will be criticised, harassed, or shamed by others in the community.

Citizens' attitudes provide a solid basis for action against GBV: Most say that the use of physical force against women is never justified, that domestic violence is a criminal matter that requires the involvement of law enforcement agencies, and that the police are likely to take cases of GBV seriously.

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