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## Batswana see gender-based violence as a priority for government and societal action

**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 594 | Keneilwe Mooketsane, Wilford Molefe, Mir Muhtadi Faiaz, Namratha Rao, and Anita Raj**

### Summary

Botswana lacks official statistics on gender-based violence (GBV) (UN Women, 2023), as its national demographic survey does not include measures of partner violence or sexual violence against women (Statistics Botswana, 2018). The 2017 Botswana National Relationship Study found that 37% of women had experienced GBV, including 28% during the previous 12 months (Republic of Botswana, 2018). The smaller 2011 Gender Based Violence Indicator Study placed the estimate of lifetime GBV victims almost twice as high (67% of women), and reported that almost one in four women had suffered sexual harassment at school or work, on public transport, or in the context of health services (Machisa & van Dorp, 2012). The World Population Review (2023) cites Botswana as having the highest incidence of rape in the world, at 92.93 per 100,000 people. These rates are likely conservative estimates, as victimisation by GBV is often under-reported due to stigmatisation.

Botswana is a signatory to international conventions that promote the rights and well-being of women and the elimination of GBV, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. The country's Constitution provides for equal rights and non-discrimination, and a number of policies have been developed to address GBV. The Domestic Violence Act of 2008 recommends safety shelters to assist victims of GBV, but there are only five safety shelters in the country, run by two nongovernmental organisations.

Some high-profile incidents have tested the government's commitment to ending GBV. In 2018, for example, citizen petitions failed to persuade President Mokgweetsi Masisi to relieve Magang Ngaka Ngaka of his duties as minister of Nationality, Immigration and Gender Affairs – responsible for anti-GBV efforts – despite the minister's violent public brawl with his wife (Change.org, 2018).

More recently, the government has highlighted its commitment to the fight against GBV through policy statements, legal reviews, and implementation of tougher penalties for sexual offences (Republic of Botswana, 2018). Botswana signed on to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), whose SDG5 calls for gender equality and empowerment and the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls. According to the Republic of Botswana's (2022) Voluntary National Review report, the nation has developed protocols and service standards for prevention and management of GBV for health care providers, a handbook and training curriculum for the police on effective responses to GBV, and GBV training of traditional leaders, police, social workers, and teachers. In November 2020, the government launched 25 GBV courts to ensure trained legal counsel and judges to manage these cases and ensure timely justice for victims of GBV.

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 (2021/2023) questionnaire to explore Africans' experiences and perceptions of gender-based violence. (For survey findings on gender equality, see Mooketsane, Molefe, Faiaz, & Raj, 2023.)

Findings show that Batswana view GBV as the most important women's-rights issue that the government and society must address, overwhelmingly reject the use of physical force to discipline women, consider domestic violence a criminal matter rather than a family affair, are confident that the police treat reported GBV cases seriously.

However, many report that violence against women and girls is a common occurrence and that women who report GBV crimes are likely to be criticised, harassed, or shamed by others in the community.

### **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 Botswana, led by Star Awards, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 adult Batswana in July-August 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Surveys conducted in Botswana previously took place in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2019.

### **Key findings**

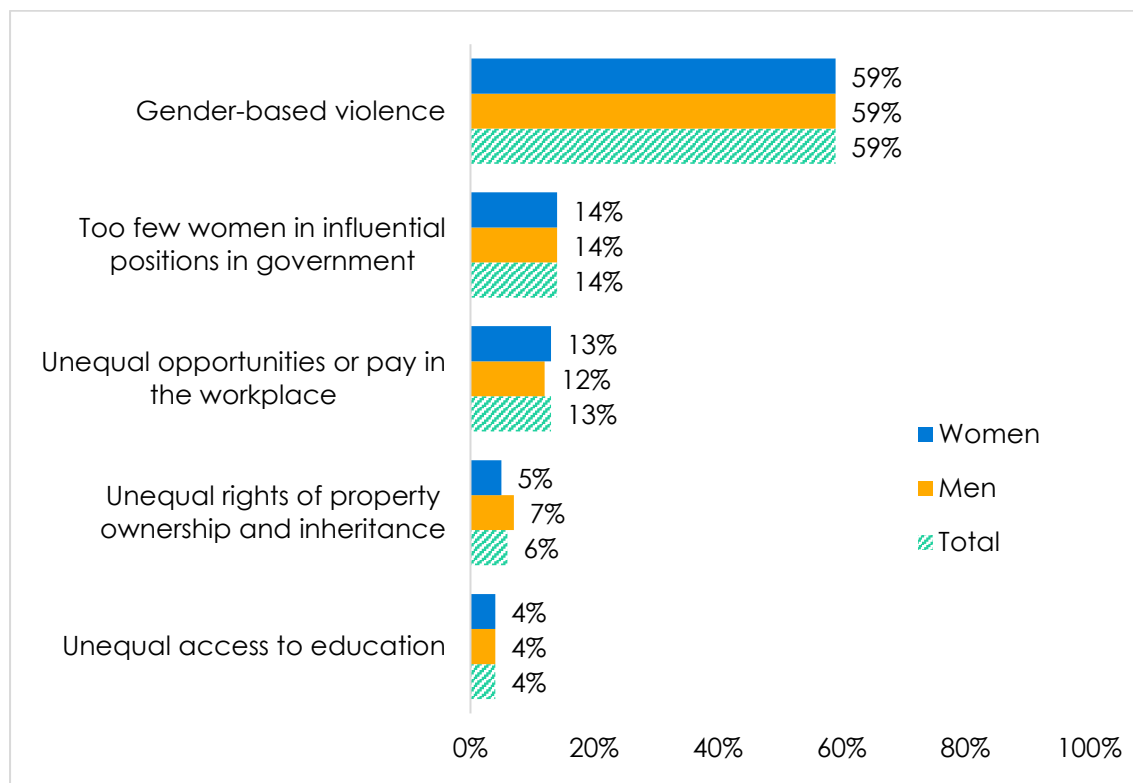
- Six in 10 Batswana (59%) consider gender-based violence (GBV) the most important women's-rights issue that the government and society must address.
- Half (50%) of citizens say violence against women and girls is common in their community, including 23% who say it is "very common."
- Nine out of 10 Batswana (90%) say it is "never" justified for a man to use physical force to discipline his wife.
- More than four in 10 respondents (42%) say it is "somewhat likely" or "very likely" that a woman who reports being a victim of GBV will be criticised, harassed, or shamed by others in the community.
  - But most citizens (84%) consider it likely that police will take reports of GBV seriously.
- More than eight in 10 Batswana (85%) say GBV is a criminal matter that requires law enforcement involvement, while only 14% see it as a private matter to be resolved within the family.

### **Is gender-based violence (GBV) an important problem in Botswana?**

A majority (59%) of men and women in Botswana say gender-based violence is the most important women's-rights issue for the government and society to address (Figure 1). Far fewer prioritise the issues of too few women in influential positions in government (14%),

unequal opportunities or pay in the workplace (13%), unequal rights of property ownership and inheritance (6%), and unequal access to education (4%). Women and men hold almost identical views on what constitute the most important issues related to women's rights and equality.

**Figure 1: Most important women's rights issue | by gender | Botswana | 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?

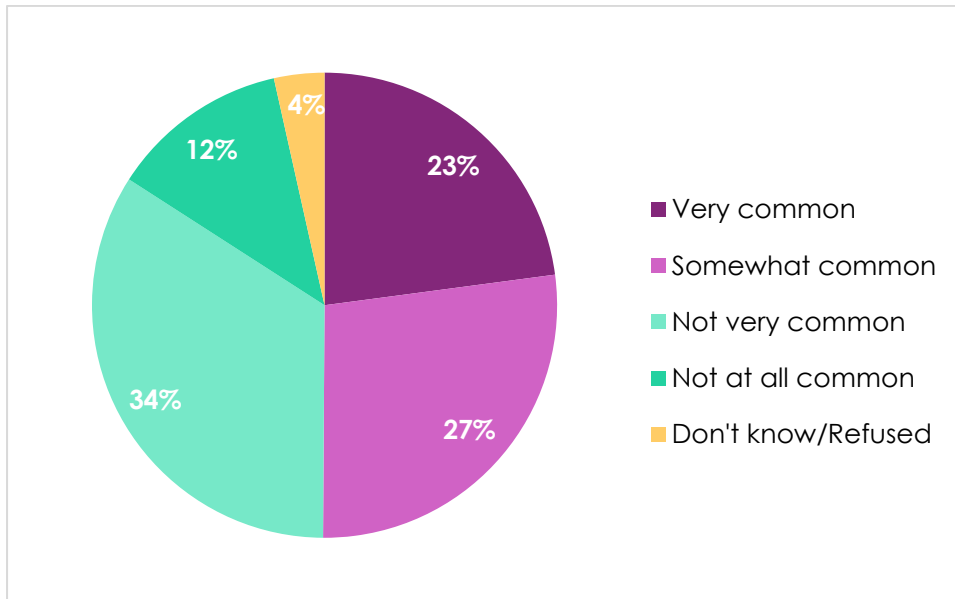
### How common is GBV?

When respondents are asked how common they think it is for men to use violence against women and girls in the home or the community, fully half (50%) describe it as "somewhat common" (27%) or "very common" (23%) (Figure 2). Only one in eight (12%) say violence against women and girls is "not at all common" in their community.

Women (52%) and urban residents (54%) are somewhat more likely than men (48%) and rural residents (49%) to say that violence against women is a common occurrence (Figure 3). This perception is less widespread among economically well-off<sup>1</sup> respondents (43%), those with no formal education (42%), and those over age 45 (43%-46%).

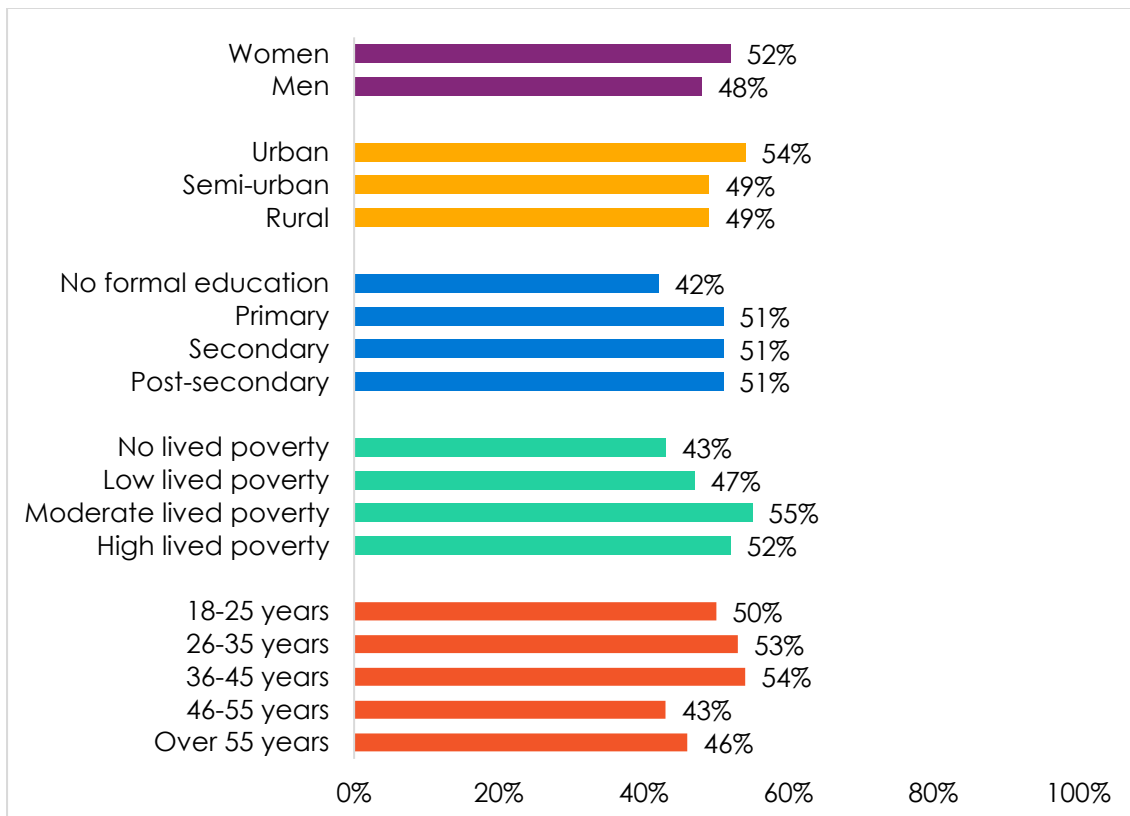
<sup>1</sup> Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on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

**Figure 2: Frequency of GBV | Botswana | 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?

**Figure 3: GBV is somewhat/very common | by demographic group | Botswana | 2022**



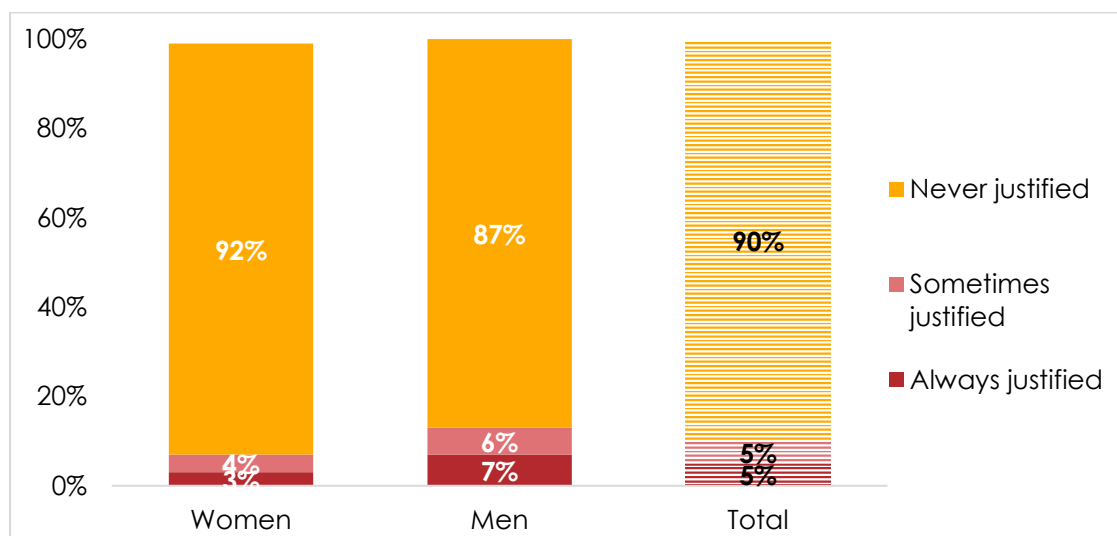
**Respondents were asked:** In this area, how common do you think it is for men to use violence against women and girls in the home or the community? (% who say "somewhat common" or "very common")

### Physical discipline of a spouse

Batswana overwhelmingly (90%) say it is “never justified” for a man to use physical force to discipline his wife. Only one in 10 (10%) consider it “sometimes” or “always” justified (Figure 4).

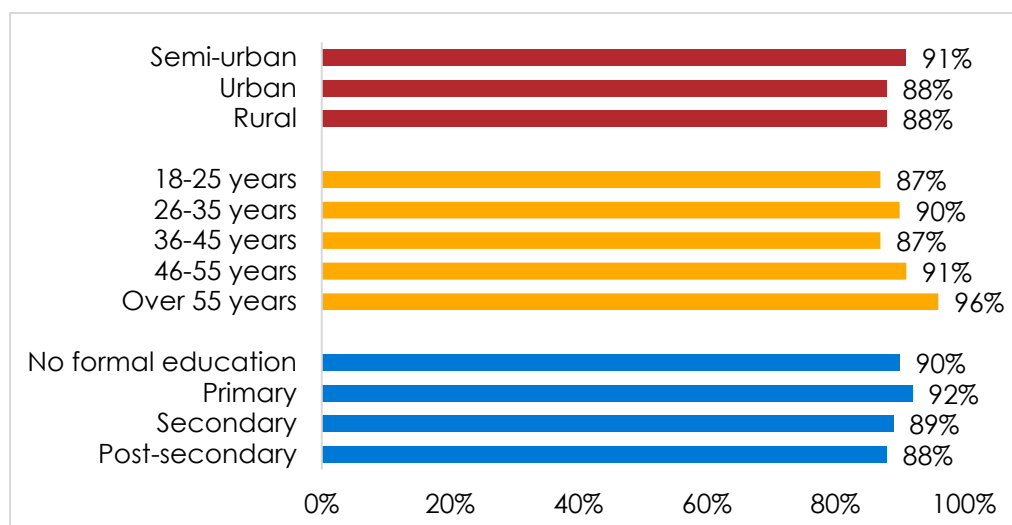
Men are somewhat less likely than women to categorically reject the use of physical force against women (87% vs. 92%). Opposition is fairly consistent across education levels and age groups, though particularly strong among the oldest respondents (96% of age 56 and up) (Figure 5).

**Figure 4: Is it justified for men to physically discipline their wives? | Botswana | 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 5: Never justified for men to physically discipline their wives | by demographic group | Botswana | 2022**



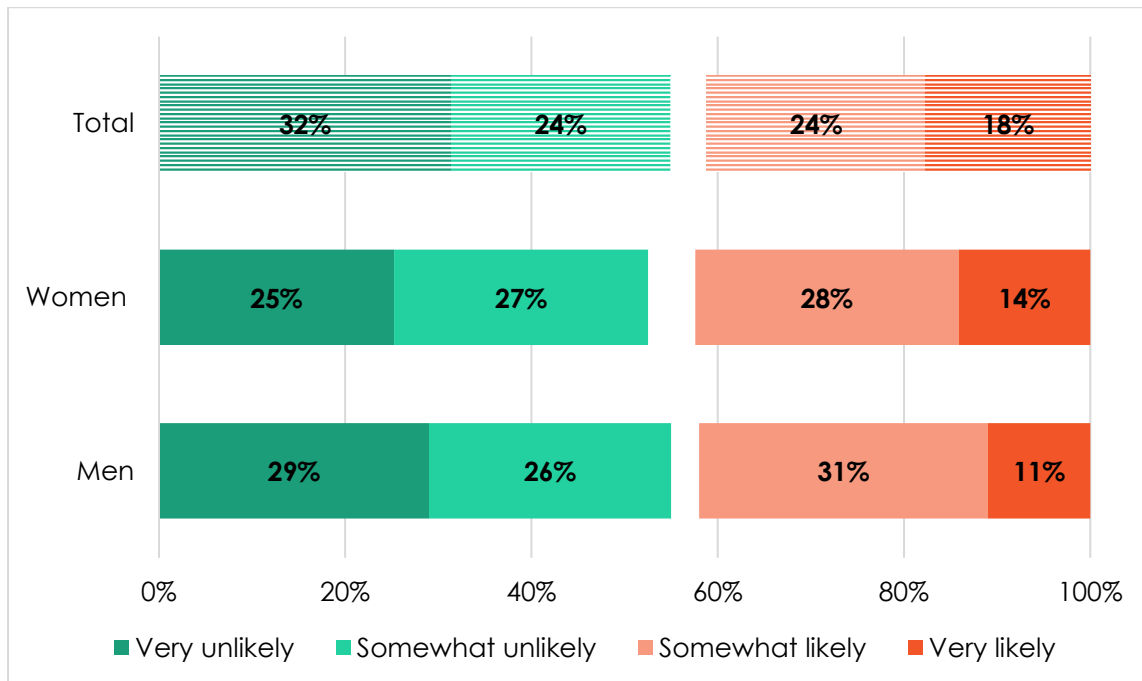
**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following actions, please tell me whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never be justified: For a man to use physical discipline on his wife if she has done something he doesn't like or thinks is wrong? (% who say “never justified”)

## 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, or the belief that the authorities won't take the case seriously (Palermo, Bleck, & Peterman, 2014).

In Botswana, more than four in 10 citizens (42%) say it is "somewhat likely" or "very likely" that 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. While a majority (56%) consider this at least "somewhat" unlikely, only one-third (32%) say it is "very unlikely." Women are slightly less likely than men to consider such negative responses "very unlikely" (25% vs. 29%) (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Will a woman be criticised, harassed, or shamed for reporting GBV?**  
 | by gender | Botswana | 2022

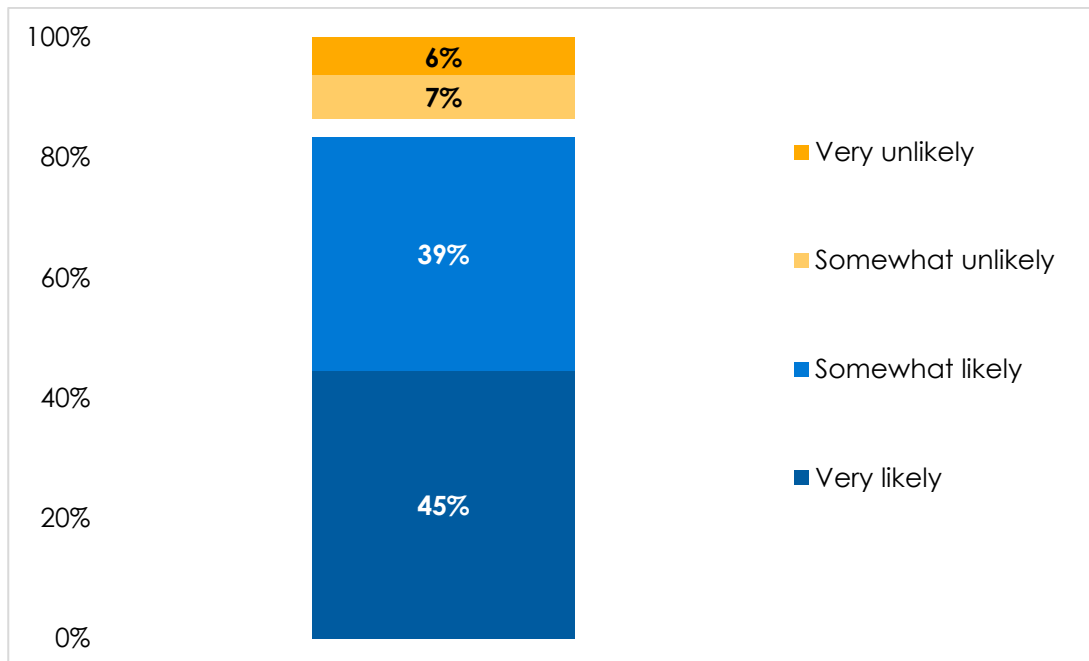


**Respondents were asked:** *If a woman in your community goes to the police to report being a victim of gender-based violence, for example, to report a rape or report being physically abused by her husband, how likely or unlikely is it that the following things might occur: She will be criticised, harassed,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

While expectations regarding the community's response are mixed, a large majority (84%) of Botswana trust the police to treat GBV cases with seriousness, including 45% who see this as "very likely" (Figure 7). Only 13% think it is unlikely that the police will treat such reports seriously.

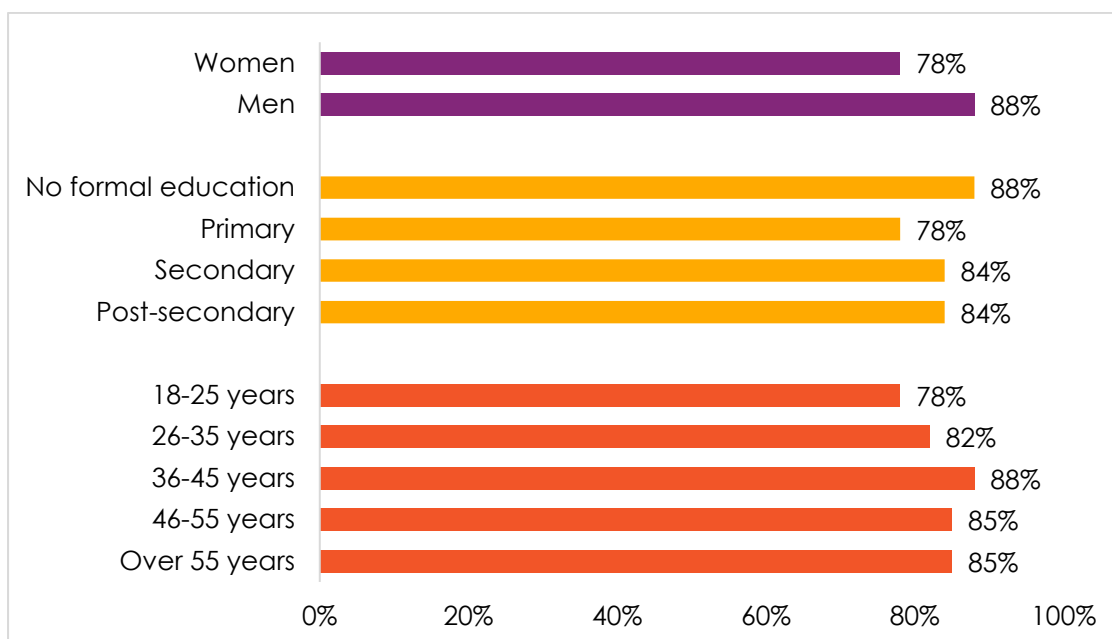
Women (78%) and the youngest respondents (78%) express somewhat less confidence than men (88%) and older citizens (82%-88%) in the police response (Figure 8).

**Figure 7: Do the police take GBV cases seriously?** | Botswana | 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?*

**Figure 8: Police likely to take GBV cases seriously** | by demographic group | Botswana | 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")*

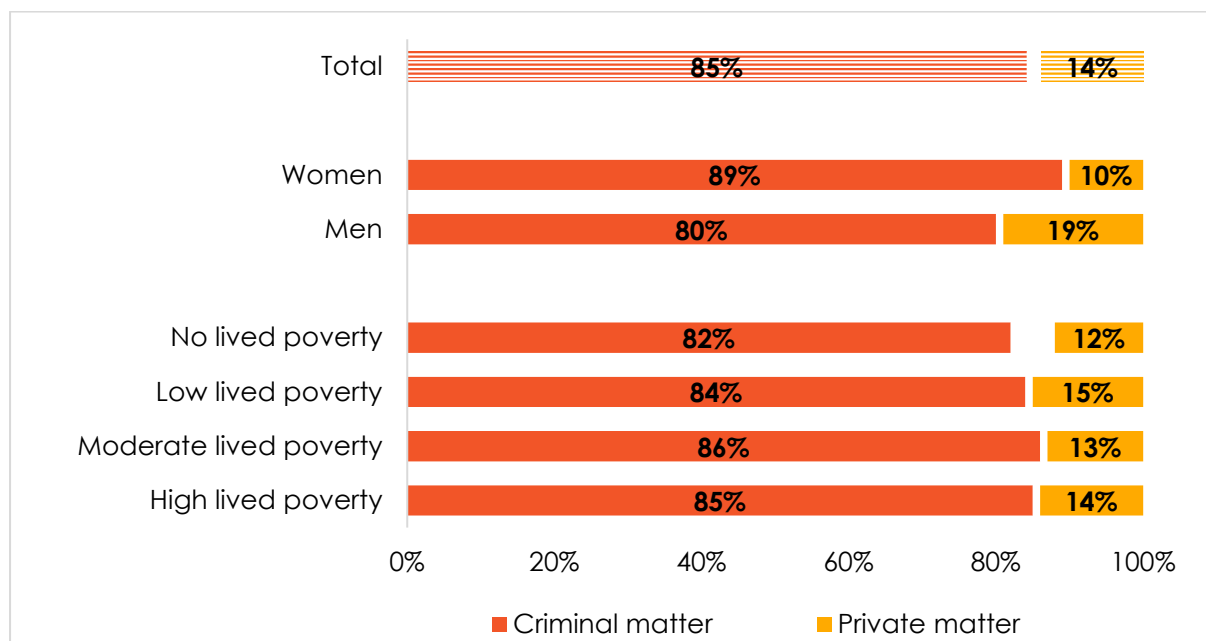
## Is domestic violence a criminal or family matter?

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

An overwhelming majority (85%) of citizens consider domestic violence a criminal matter that requires the involvement of law enforcement agencies as opposed to a private matter that should be handled within the family (Figure 9).

Men are somewhat less likely than women to see domestic violence as a criminal affair (80% vs. 89%), but views vary little by economic status.

**Figure 9: Is domestic violence a criminal or private matter? | by gender and lived poverty | Botswana | 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

While Botswana continues to lack official statistics on GBV, survey findings show clearly that its people recognise violence against women and girls as a top priority for government and societal to address. Citizen attitudes appear to offer a solid basis for action: Most reject the use of physical force against women, consider GBV a criminal matter, and are confident that the police do take issues of GBV seriously.

Nonetheless, substantial numbers of Batswana report that women are likely to be criticised, harassed, or shamed if they report a case of GBV. These findings suggest that while norms may be changing in terms of people recognising the unacceptability of GBV, there remains



an assumption that norms of GBV acceptability persist. These can prevent women from reporting GBV crimes and using the newly configured criminal courts focused on GBV cases. Awareness campaigns that oppose GBV and support criminalisation of these abuses may be important to help move the needle on intervention efforts.

While these findings are important, it is also critical to ensure that we have accurate statistics on the prevalence of GBV in Botswana to help track progress on this issue. Demographic surveys should include GBV experiences as part of its work to ensure that this SDG5 target – elimination of GBV – can actually be monitored in this country.

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