



In Seychelles, gender-based violence tops the list of women's-rights issues to be addressed

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 657 | Anne Okello

Summary

According to the 2016 Seychelles Gender-Based Violence National Baseline Study, about four in 10 Seychellois women have experienced physical violence by intimate partners, and more than one in four have suffered sexual violence (Gender Secretariat, 2016; Seychelles Nation, 2016). The study found that women are also disproportionately affected by psychological and economic forms of gender-based violence (GBV). A study by the Commonwealth Secretariat (2019) estimated that violence against women and girls costs Seychelles 1.2% of its gross domestic product.

The government's measures against GBV have ranged from ratification of key international human-rights treaties to GBV-focused training for legislators to 16 Days of Activism and other campaigns (Nicette, 2022; Joubert-Lawen, 2022; National Assembly of Seychelles, 2022). A Domestic Violence Act passed in 2020 outlaws sexual, physical, verbal, emotional, economic, and psychological abuse and strengthens the role of the police, the judiciary, and medical personnel in ensuring that victims of GBV do not retract their complaints (Seychelles Nation, 2020).

Yet weaknesses remain. In its 2020 human-rights report, the U.S. State Department (2020) listed a lack of accountability for GBV among Seychelles' most significant human-rights issues, saying the government failed to prioritise domestic violence cases and to enforce relevant laws effectively.

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 (2021/2023) questionnaire to explore Africans' perceptions of gender-based violence.

In Seychelles, citizens say that gender-based violence is the most important women's-rights issue that the government and the country must address. Most citizens oppose the use of physical force against women, consider GBV a criminal matter, and believe that the police take 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 being completed in 2023. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

In Afrobarometer's first survey in Seychelles, a team led by the Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adult Seychellois in December 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

Key findings

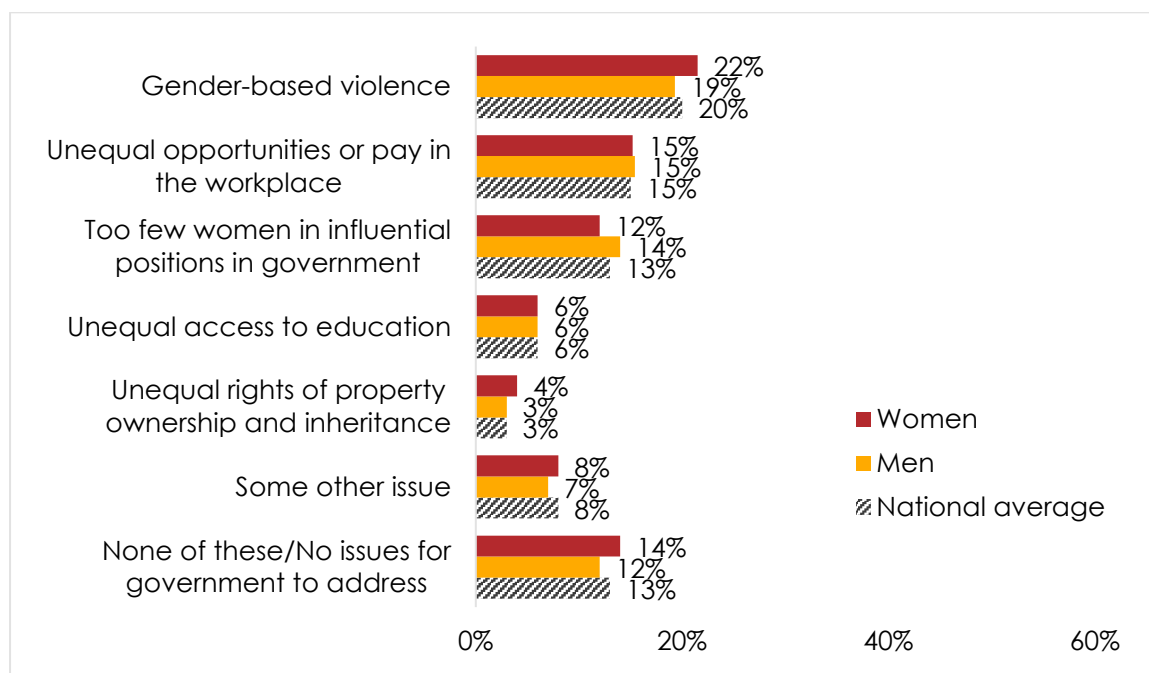
- Gender-based violence (GBV) tops the list of the most important women's-rights issues that Seychellois think their government and society must address.
- A majority (60%) of citizens say violence against women and girls is "not very common" or "not at all common" in their community, but 28% disagree with that assessment.
- More than nine in 10 Seychellois (91%) say it is "never" justified for a man to physically discipline his wife.
- One-quarter (25%) of respondents consider it likely that a woman will be criticised or harassed if she reports GBV to the authorities, while 63% say this is unlikely.
 - Most citizens (72%) say the police are likely to take cases of GBV seriously.
- Seychellois overwhelmingly (82%) say domestic violence should be treated as a criminal matter rather than as a private matter to be resolved within the family.

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

In Seychelles, gender-based violence (cited by 20% by respondents) outranks unequal pay in the workplace (15%) and too few women in influential positions in government (13%) as the most important women-rights issue that citizens want their government and society to address (Figure 1).

GBV ranks well ahead of unequal access to education (6%) and unequal rights of property ownership and inheritance (3%) as priorities. Women and men hold similar views on priorities when it comes to women's rights.

Figure 1: Most important women's-rights issue | by gender | Seychelles | 2022



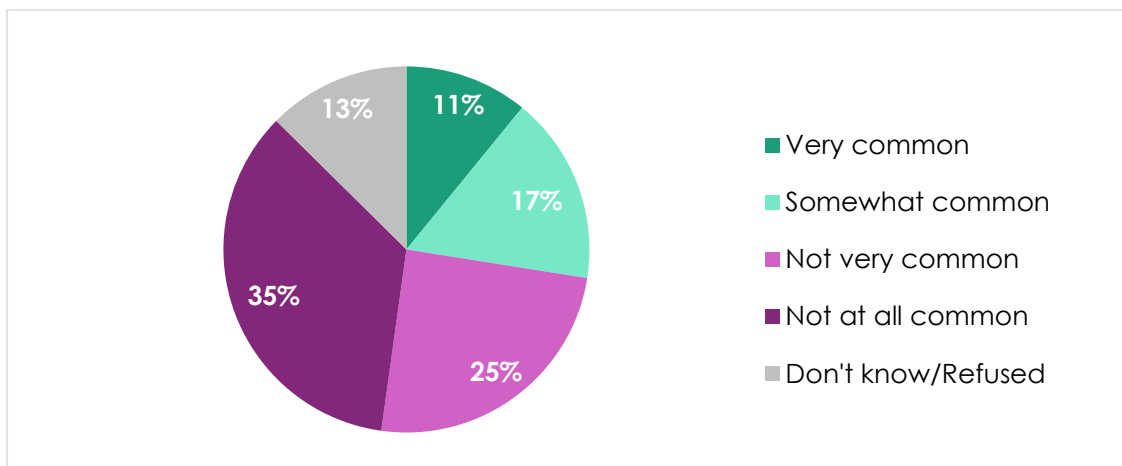
Respondents were asked: In your opinion, which of the following issues related to women's rights and equality do you think is the most important for our government and society to address?

How common is GBV?

Six in 10 Seychellois (60%) say gender-based violence is an infrequent occurrence in their community, but more than one in four describe it as “somewhat common” (17%) or “very common” (11%) (Figure 2).

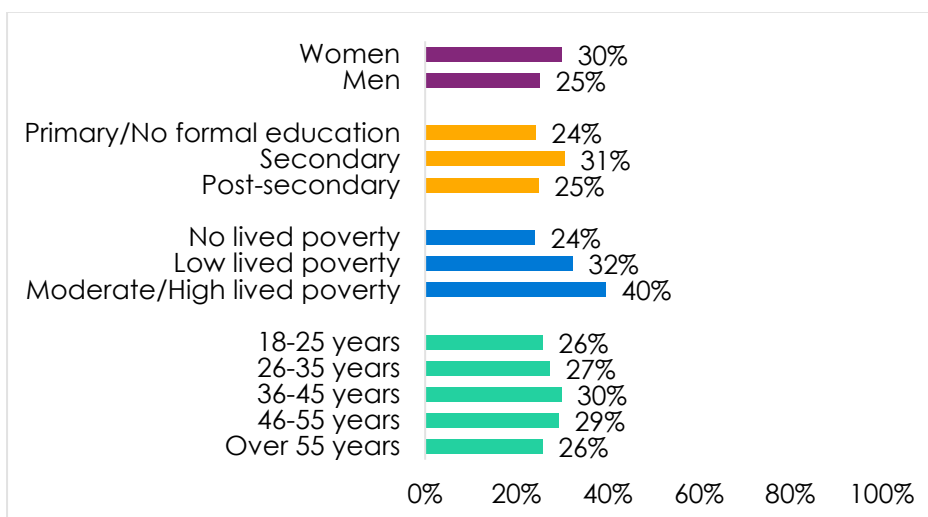
Women are somewhat more likely than men to say that violence against women is a common occurrence (30% vs. 25%) (Figure 3). This perception is also more widespread among poor citizens (40% of those experiencing moderate or high lived poverty) compared to citizens experiencing no lived poverty (24%).¹

Figure 2: Frequency of GBV | Seychelles | 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 somewhat/very common | by demographic group | Seychelles | 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”)

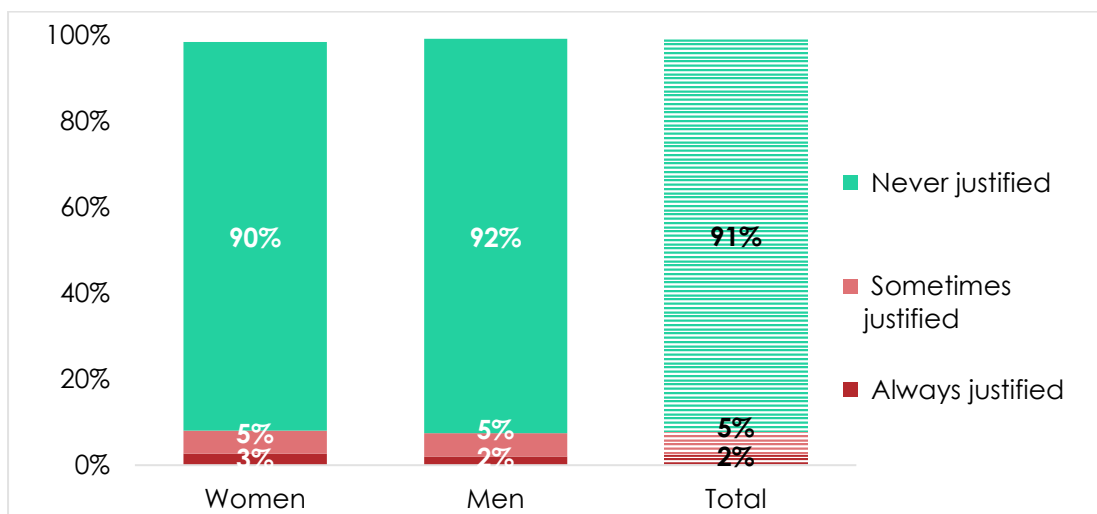
¹ Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes & Patel (2022).

Physical discipline of a spouse

More than nine in 10 Seychellois (91%) – including 92% of men – say it is “never justified” for a man to physically discipline his wife, while fewer than one in 10 consider it “sometimes” (5%) or “always” (2%) justified (Figure 4).

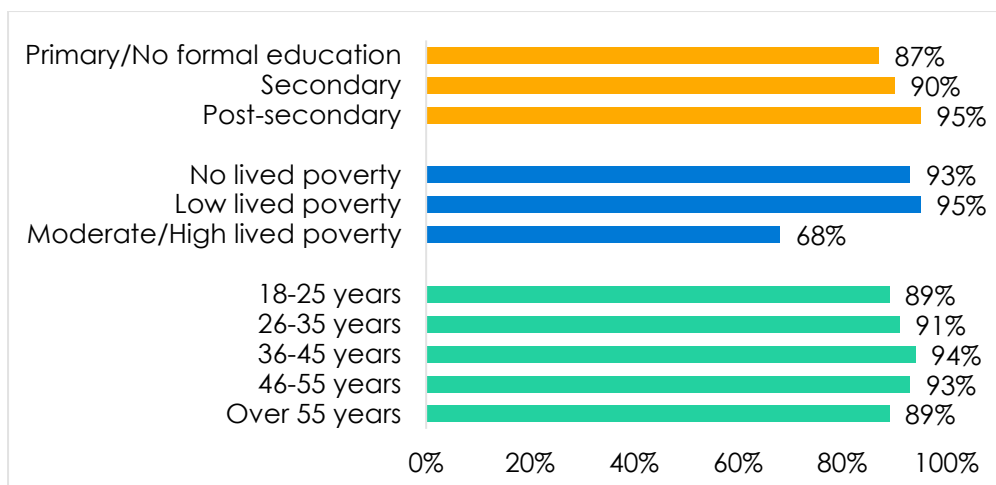
The view that men are never justified in physically disciplining their wives is consistently strong across age groups but is less widespread among poor respondents (68%) than among their better-off counterparts (93%-95%) (Figure 5). It gathers strength as respondents' education level rises, ranging from 87% of those with primary education or no formal schooling to 95% of those with post-secondary qualifications.

Figure 4: Is it justified for men to physically discipline their wives? | by gender
 | Seychelles | 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 | Seychelles | 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

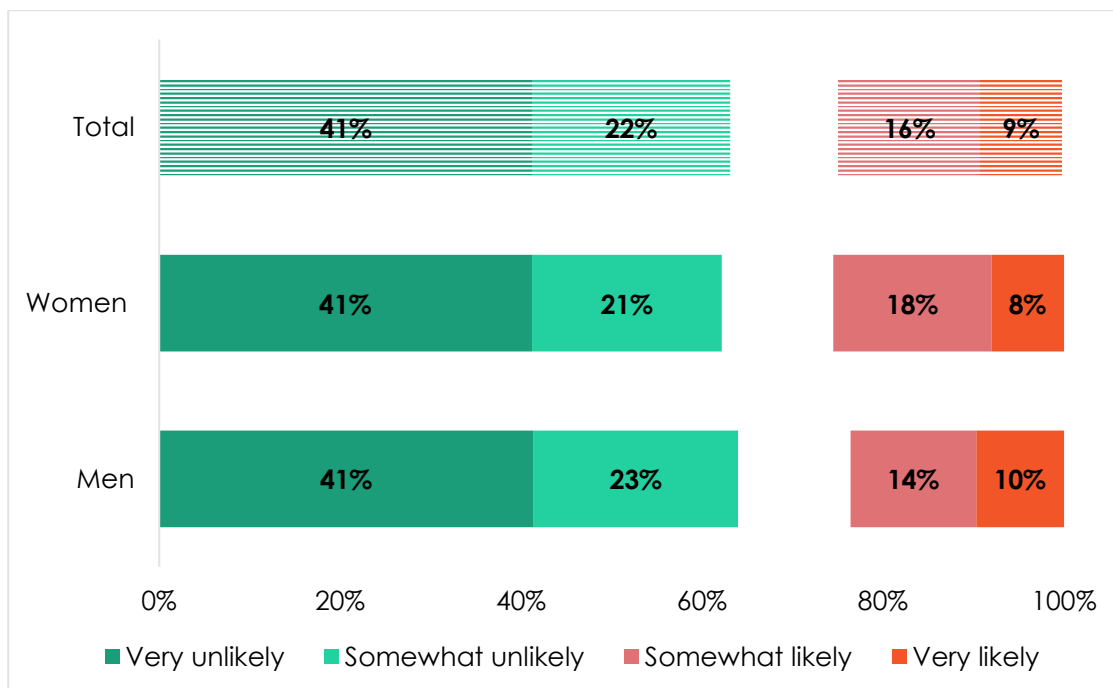
Police and scholars agree that the true extent of GBV is unknown because many attacks on girls and women are never reported. Reasons include fear of the attacker, fear of a negative response by others, or the belief that the authorities won't take the case seriously (Palermo, Bleck, & Peterman, 2014).

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, four in 10 Seychellois (41%) say this is "very unlikely," while another 22% consider it "somewhat unlikely." (Figure 6). One in four (25%) say it is "somewhat" (16%) or "very" (9%) likely.

Women and men hold almost identical views on this question.

Figure 6: Will a woman be criticised, harassed, or shamed for reporting GBV?

| by gender | Seychelles | 2022

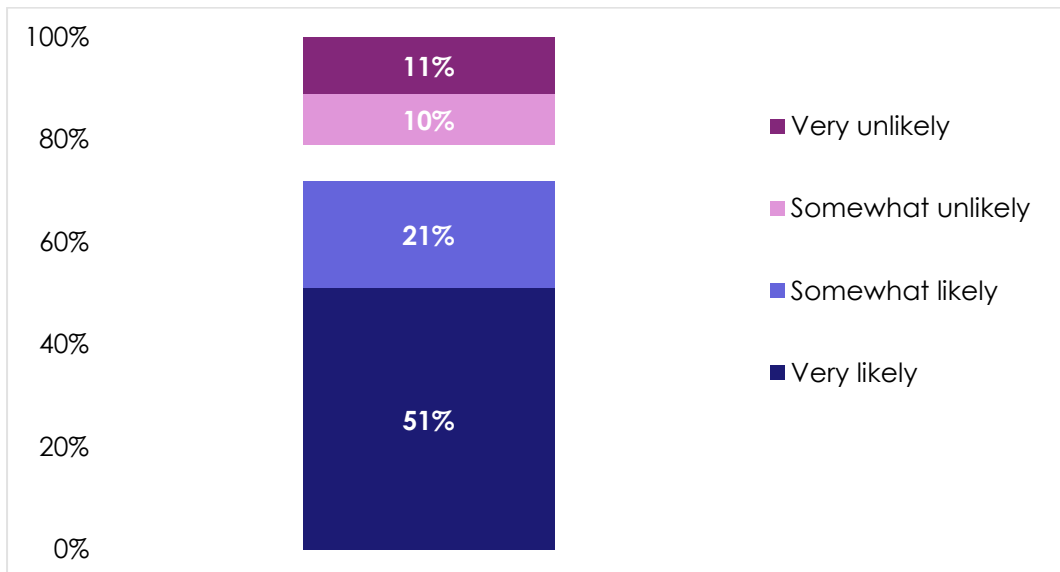


Respondents were asked: *If a woman in your community goes to the police to report being a victim of gender-based violence, for example, to report a rape or report being physically abused by her husband, how likely or unlikely is it that the following things might occur: She will be criticised, harassed,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

Most Seychellois also believe that the police will take reported cases of GBV seriously: 72% see this as likely, including 51% who say it is "very likely" (Figure 7).

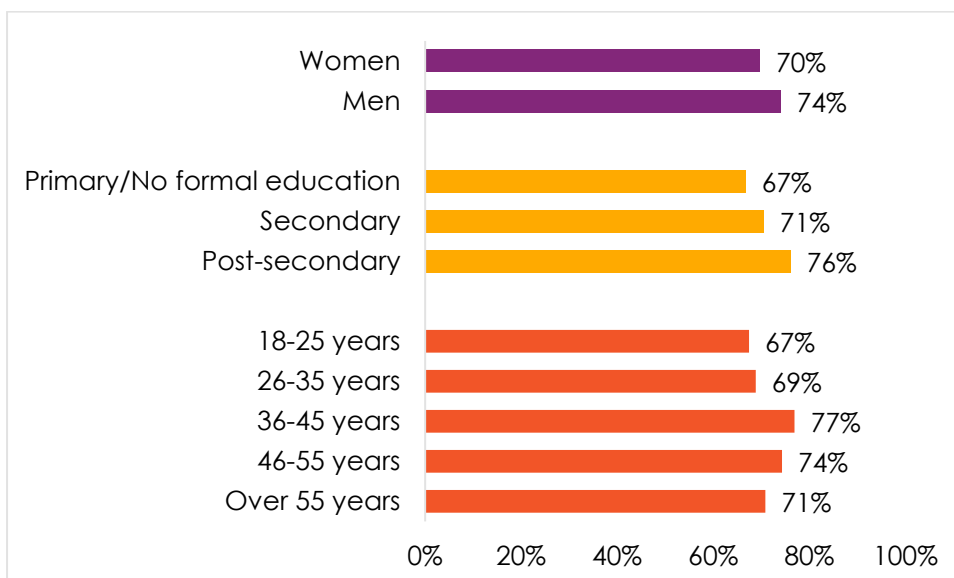
Slightly more men (74%) than women (70%) expect that the police will take GBV cases seriously (Figure 8). Less educated citizens (67%) express less confidence in the police response than those with secondary (71%) or post-secondary education (76%). Among age groups, 18- to 25-year-olds are least likely to think the police will take such cases seriously (67%).

Figure 7: Do the police take GBV cases seriously? | Seychelles | 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 somewhat/very likely to take GBV cases seriously | by demographic group | Seychelles | 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?

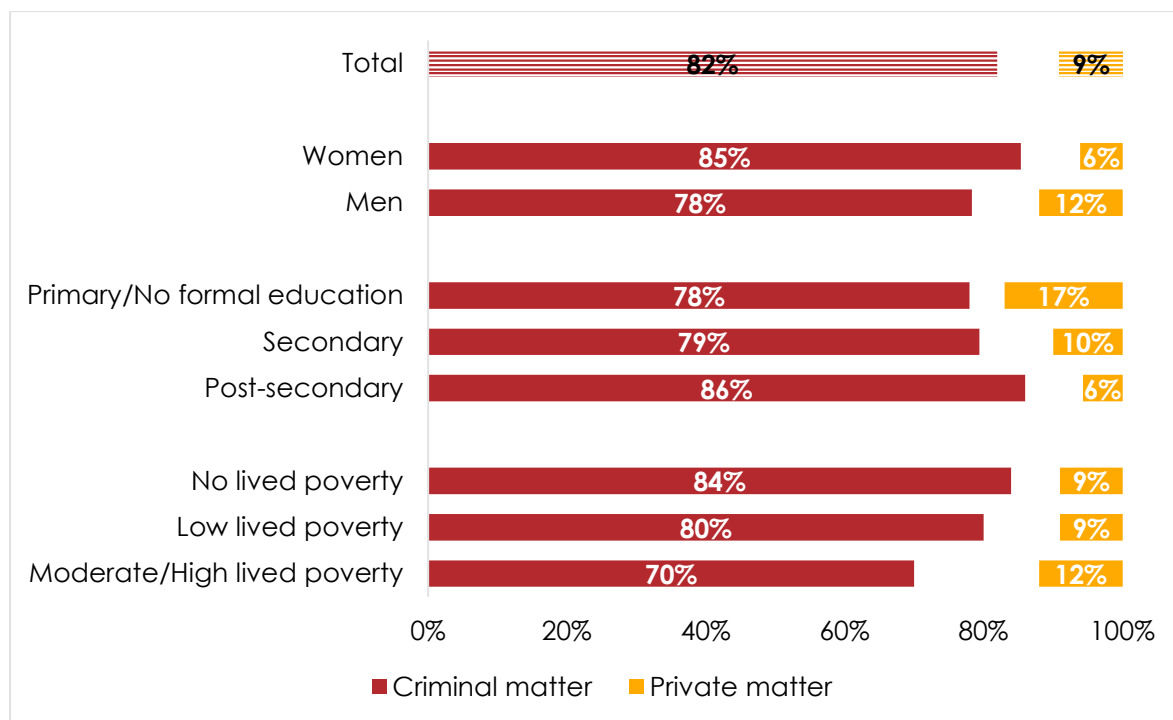
Domestic violence is the most common form of GBV. Even though the perpetrators may be known, many domestic-violence cases go unreported or unresolved, and most present

victims and families with complex, wrenching decisions. Do Seychellois see domestic violence as a criminal matter or a private matter?

By a 9-to-1 ratio, Seychellois say domestic violence is a criminal matter that requires the involvement of law enforcement: 82% of respondents share this view, including 55% who feel “strongly” about it (Figure 9). Only 9% believe domestic violence should be seen as a private matter to be resolved within the family.

Women are more likely than men to see domestic violence as a criminal matter, 85% vs. 78%. Support for this view is consistently high, regardless of respondents’ level of education, ranging from 78% of those with primary or no formal schooling to 86% of those with post-secondary qualifications. Poor respondents (70% of those experiencing moderate or high lived poverty) are less likely to share this attitude than citizens experiencing low (80%) or no lived poverty (84%).

Figure 9: Is domestic violence a criminal or private matter? | by demographic group | Seychelles | 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

Seychellois see gender-based violence as the most important women’s-rights issue that their government and society must address, even if a majority say violence against women and girls is not a common occurrence in their community.

Citizens overwhelmingly reject the use of physical force against women. Most express confidence that the police take GBV cases seriously, and they consider it unlikely that a woman reporting such violence will be criticised, harassed, or shamed by others in the

community. A large majority also say that GBV should be treated as a criminal matter rather than a private matter to be resolved within the family.

While violence against women and girls remains a challenge for Seychelles, these attitudes suggest a strong popular foundation for continued anti-GBV efforts by the government, civil society, and the media.

References

- Commonwealth Secretariat. (2019). The economic cost of violence against women and girls: A study of Seychelles.
- Gender Secretariat. (2016). Seychelles GBV national baseline study.
- Joubert-Lawen, R. (2022). 16 days of activism against gender-based violence campaign kicks off in Seychelles. Seychelles News Agency. 26 November.
- Mattes, R., & Patel, J. (2022). Lived poverty resurgent. Afrobarometer Policy Paper 84.
- National Assembly of Seychelles. (2022). The women's caucus highlight severity of gender based violence in commemoration of the international day of the elimination of violence against women. 25 November.
- Nicette, J. (2022). Seychelles' parliamentarians work to improve laws to curb sexual and gender-based violence. Seychelles New Agency. 10 March.
- Palermo, T., Bleck, J., & Peterman, A. (2014). Tip of the iceberg: Reporting and gender-based violence in developing countries. American Journal of Epidemiology, 179(5), 602-612.
- Seychelles Nation. (2016). Key findings of the gender-based violence national baseline study in Seychelles. 2 December.
- Seychelles Nation (2020). President Faure assents to domestic violence act 2020.
- U.S. Department of State (2020). Seychelles 2020 human rights report.

Anne Okello is Afrobarometer's assistant project manager for East Africa, based at the Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi. Email: aokello@afrobarometer.org.

Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

Financial support for Afrobarometer is provided by Sweden via the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) via the U.S. Institute of Peace, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Open Society Foundations - Africa, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the European Union, the National Endowment for Democracy, the Mastercard Foundation, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the University of California San Diego, the Global Centre for Pluralism, the World Bank Group, Freedom House, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda, GIZ, and Humanity United.

Donations help Afrobarometer give voice to African citizens. Please consider making a contribution (at www.afrobarometer.org) or contact Felix Biga (felixbiga@afrobarometer.org) or Runyararo Munetsi (runyararo@afrobarometer.org) to discuss institutional funding. Follow our releases on #VoicesAfrica.



Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 657 | 23 June 2023