



Dispatch No. 684 | 11 August 2023

## Mozambicans reject violence against women, consider domestic violence a criminal matter

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**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 684 | Margaret Eduonoo**

### Summary

About one-third of Mozambican women experience physical violence, and about half are married before age 18, one of the world's highest rates of child marriage, according to the most recent Demographic and Health Survey (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2013). Risks of rape, sexual exploitation, and other gender-based violence (GBV) are particularly high for women and girls displaced by insurgencies in the country's northern provinces (Spotlight Initiative, 2021; Africanews, 2020; Care, 2020).

Even women who speak out against GBV are not safe: According to the Observatorio da Mulher (Women's Observatory), women protesting peacefully as part of the 16 Days of Activism to End Violence Against Women campaign were manhandled and arrested by police officers (Human Rights Watch, 2023). In another high-profile case, human-rights activist Josina Machel, daughter of former President Samora Machel and rights advocate Graça Machel, lost an eye in an alleged GBV assault (Amnesty International, 2020).

But many cases of GBV are never reported, for reasons ranging from fear of the attacker or of societal rejection to the belief that the authorities won't take the case seriously, a preference for going through informal channels such as traditional leaders or family members, a lack of literacy skills or information on justice and support systems, and social norms accepting violence as a way of life (Amnesty International, 2021; UNICEF, 2021; Palermo, Bleck, & Peterman, 2014).

The government, international partners, and other non-governmental organisations work to operationalise the country's legal framework for preventing and punishing GBV and providing care services to survivors, but implementation remains a challenge (UN Women, 2023; Spotlight Initiative, 2021; Jethá, Keygnaert, Martins, Sidat, & Roelens, 2021; Gamariel, 2022).

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 questionnaire to explore Mozambicans' experiences and perceptions of gender-based violence.

Findings show that gender-based violence outranks inequality in the workplace, in education, and in property ownership as an issue that Mozambicans want their government and society to address.

Majorities say that men are "never justified" in using physical force to discipline their wives, that the police take GBV cases seriously, and that domestic violence is a criminal matter rather than a private matter to be resolved within the family.

But more than half of citizens also say that GBV is a common occurrence in their community and that women who report such crimes to the authorities 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. Nine rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 42 countries since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Mozambique, led by Ipsos Mozambique, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,120 adult Mozambicans in October-November 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Mozambique in 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2018, and 2021.

## Key findings

- Gender-based violence (GBV) joins women's under-representation in positions of power as the most pressing women's-rights issues that Mozambicans say their government and society must address.
- More than half (51%) of citizens say violence against women is a "somewhat common" or "very common" occurrence in their community.
- A majority (55%) of Mozambicans say it is "never" justified for a man to use physical force to discipline his wife, while 44% think it is "sometimes" or "always" justified.
- More than half (52%) of respondents consider it "somewhat" or "very" likely that a woman will be criticised or harassed if she reports gender-based violence to the authorities. Only 20% say this is "very unlikely."
  - But most (68%) believe that the police are likely to take GBV cases seriously.
- More than two-thirds (68%) of Mozambicans 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 Mozambique?

Gender-based violence (cited by 23% of respondents) and a dearth of women in influential government positions (21%) top the list of the most important women's-rights issues that Mozambicans say their government and society must address (Figure 1).

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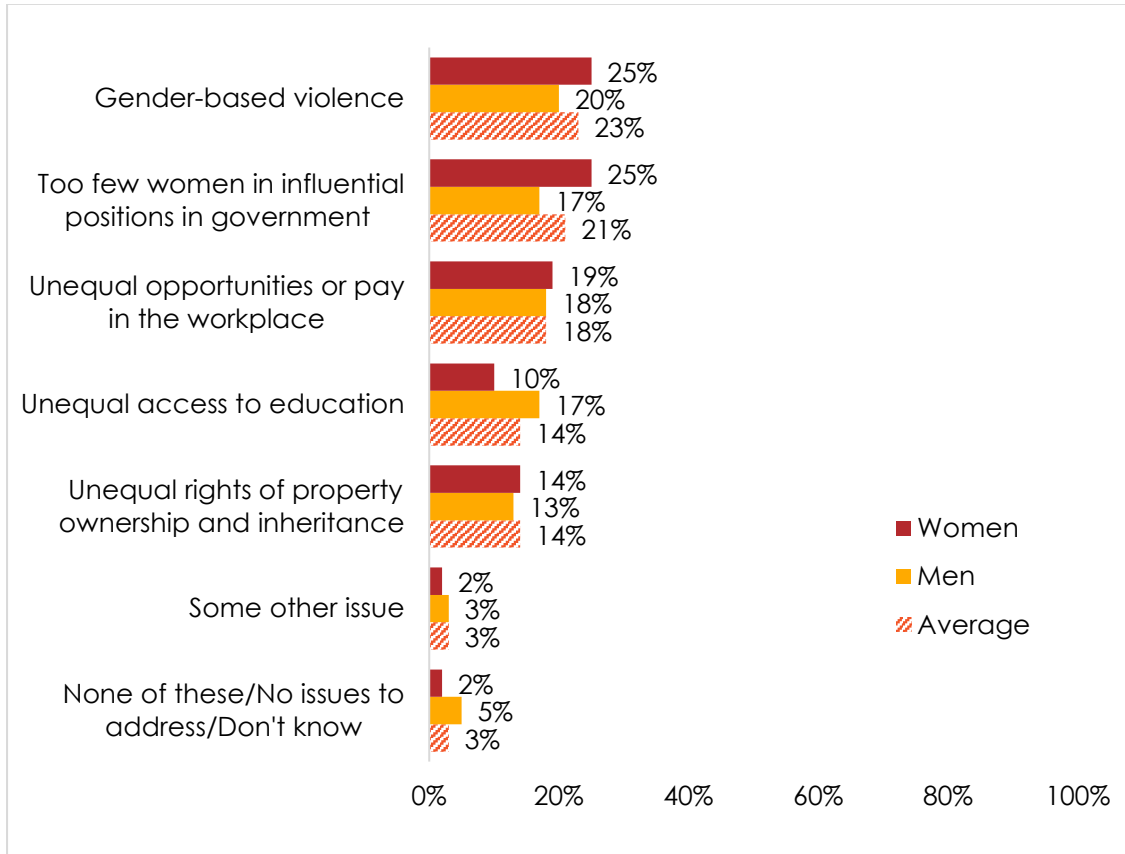
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Somewhat fewer citizens prioritise unequal opportunities or pay in the workplace (18%), unequal access to education (14%), and unequal rights of property ownership and inheritance (14%) as key issues to be addressed.

More women (25%) than men (20%) identify GBV as the most important issue requiring attention.

**Figure 1: Most important women’s-rights issue | by gender | Mozambique | 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?

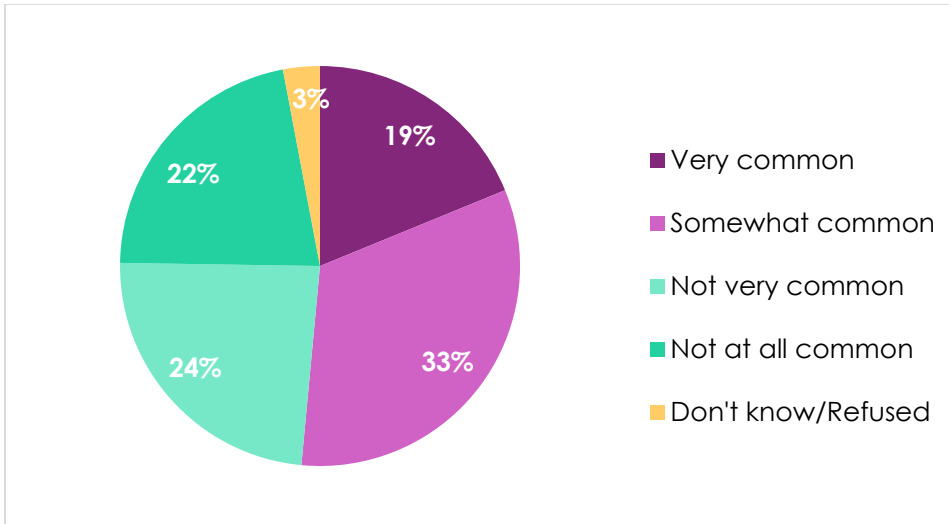
More than half (51%) of Mozambicans say that violence against women is “somewhat common” (33%) or “very common” (19%) in their community,<sup>1</sup> while 46% describe it as “not very” or “not at all” common (Figure 2).

Women (53%) are slightly more likely than men (49%) to say that GBV is a common occurrence, as are rural residents (56%) compared to their urban counterparts (44%) (Figure 3). Perceptions that GBV is frequent are more common among poor respondents (60% of those experiencing high lived poverty,<sup>2</sup> vs. 43% of those with low or no lived poverty) and among less educated citizens (58% of those with no formal schooling, vs. 46% of those with secondary or post-secondary qualifications).

<sup>1</sup> Due to rounding, percentages for combined categories may differ slightly from the sum of sub-categories (e.g. 33% “somewhat common” and 19% “very common” sum to 51%).

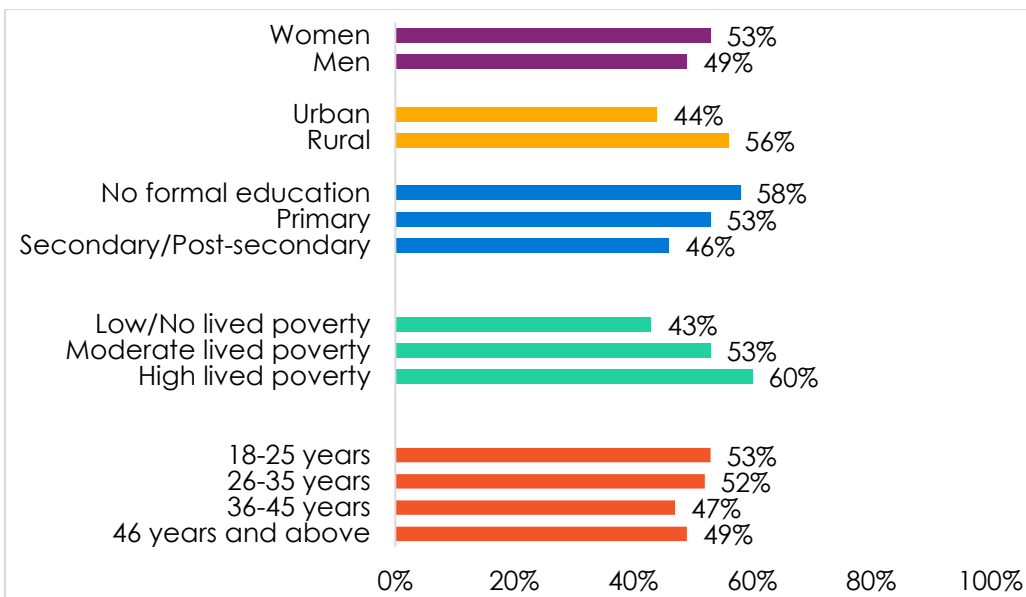
<sup>2</sup> Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Patel (2022).

**Figure 2: Frequency of GBV | Mozambique | 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 | Mozambique | 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")

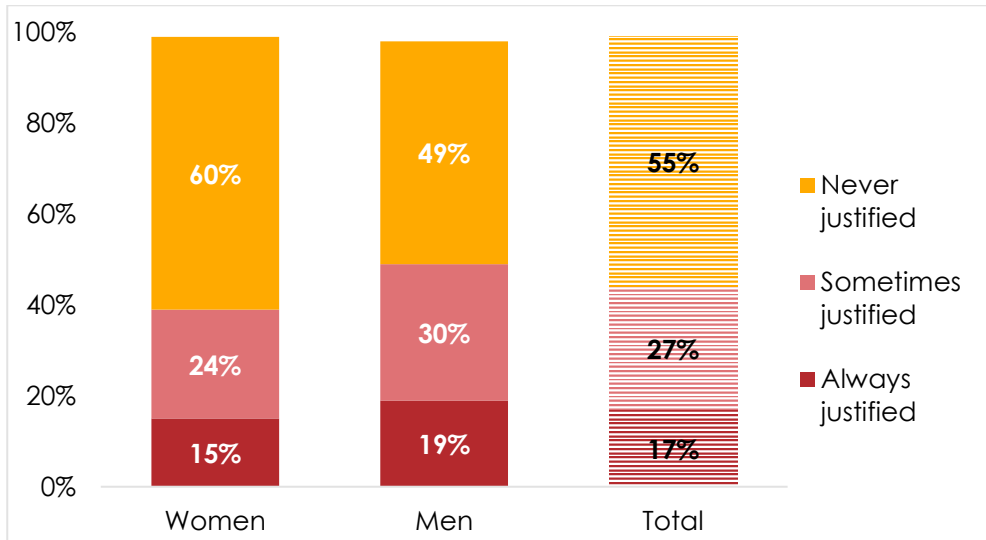
### Physical discipline of a spouse

A majority (55%) of Mozambicans say it is "never justified" for a man to use physical force to discipline his wife, but 44% consider it "sometimes" or "always" justified (Figure 4). Women are more likely than men to rule out physical discipline as "never justified" (60% vs. 49%).

The opinion that men are never justified in physically disciplining their wives is more prevalent in urban than in rural communities (65% vs. 48%), and among more educated citizens (59%) compared to those with less schooling (51%-54%) (Figure 5).

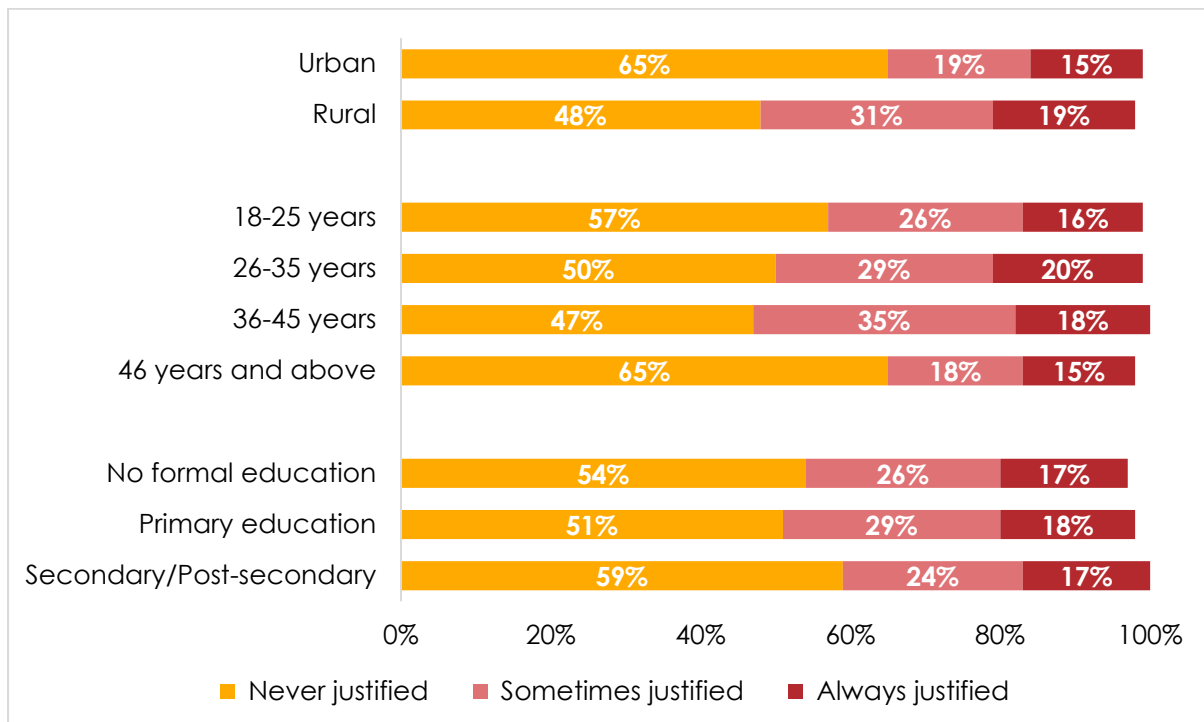
Respondents aged 36-45 are least likely to reject the use of physical force (47%), while older citizens are most opposed to it (65%).

**Figure 4: Is it justified for men to physically discipline their wives? | Mozambique | 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: Is it justified for men to physically discipline their wives? | by demographic group | Mozambique | 2022**



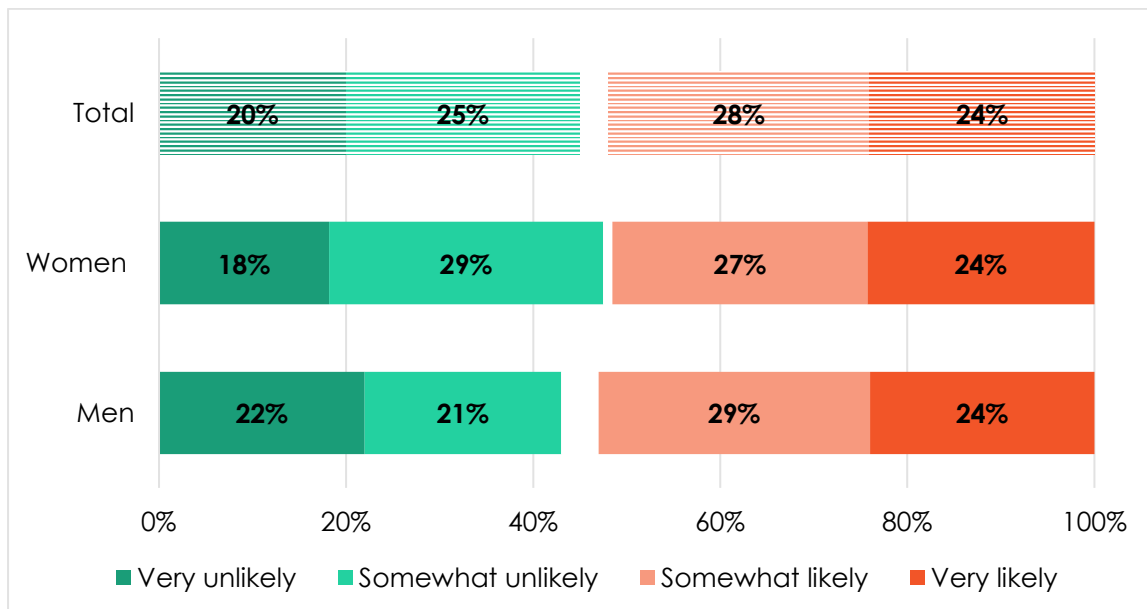
**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following actions, please tell me whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never be justified: For a man to use physical discipline on his wife if she has done something he doesn't like or thinks is wrong?

## Response to GBV

Addressing gender-based violence is made more difficult by under-reporting and a lack of reliable data (Health Policy Watch, 2023). Asked if a woman who reports being a victim of rape, domestic violence, or other gender-based violence will be criticised, harassed, or shamed by others in the community, only two in 10 Mozambicans (20%) say this is “very unlikely” (Figure 6). While another 25% consider it “somewhat unlikely,” more than half (52%) say it is “somewhat” or “very” likely.

Women and men differ little in their expectations regarding such negative consequences – expectations that may serve as a significant deterrent to reporting GBV.

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



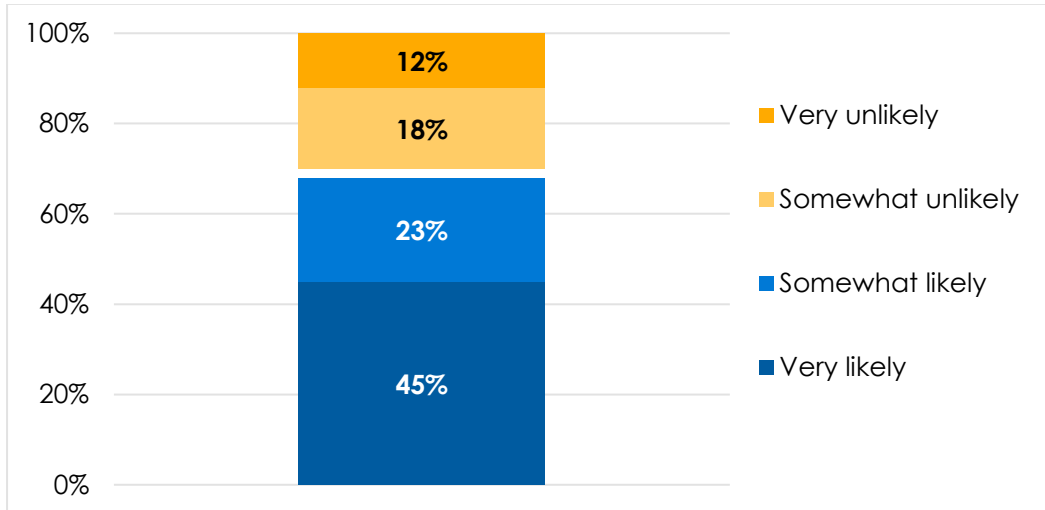
**Respondents were asked:** *If a woman in your community goes to the police to report being a victim of gender-based violence, for example, to report a rape or report being physically abused by her husband, how likely or unlikely is it that the following things might occur: She will be criticised, harassed,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

While views on likely community responses are mixed, most Mozambicans believe that the police will respond appropriately to reported cases of GBV: 68% say it is likely that the police will take such reports seriously, including 45% who say it is “very likely” (Figure 7).

Men are more likely than women to believe that the police will take GBV cases seriously (71% vs. 65%), as are urbanites compared to rural residents (77% vs. 64%) (Figure 8).

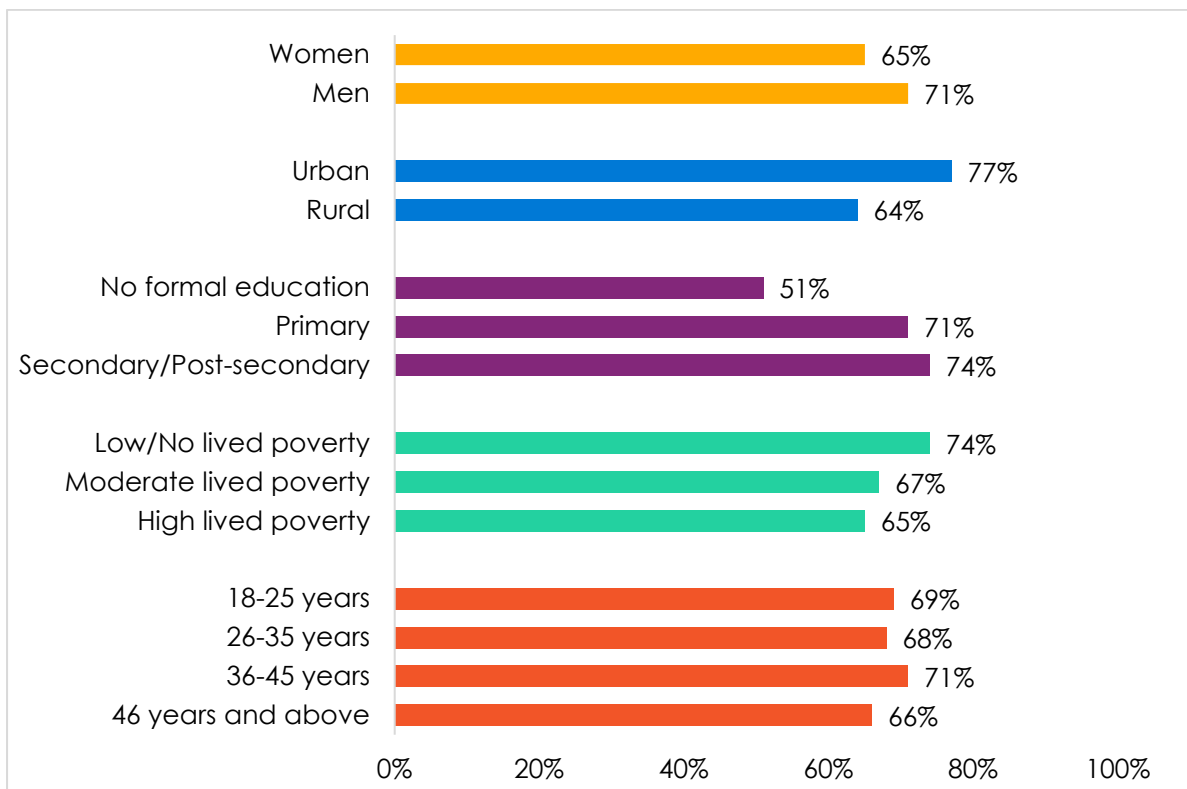
Citizens with no formal schooling (51%) and those experiencing high lived poverty (65%) express less confidence in the police response than their more educated and better-off counterparts.

**Figure 7: Do the police take GBV cases seriously?** | Mozambique | 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 | Mozambique | 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")*

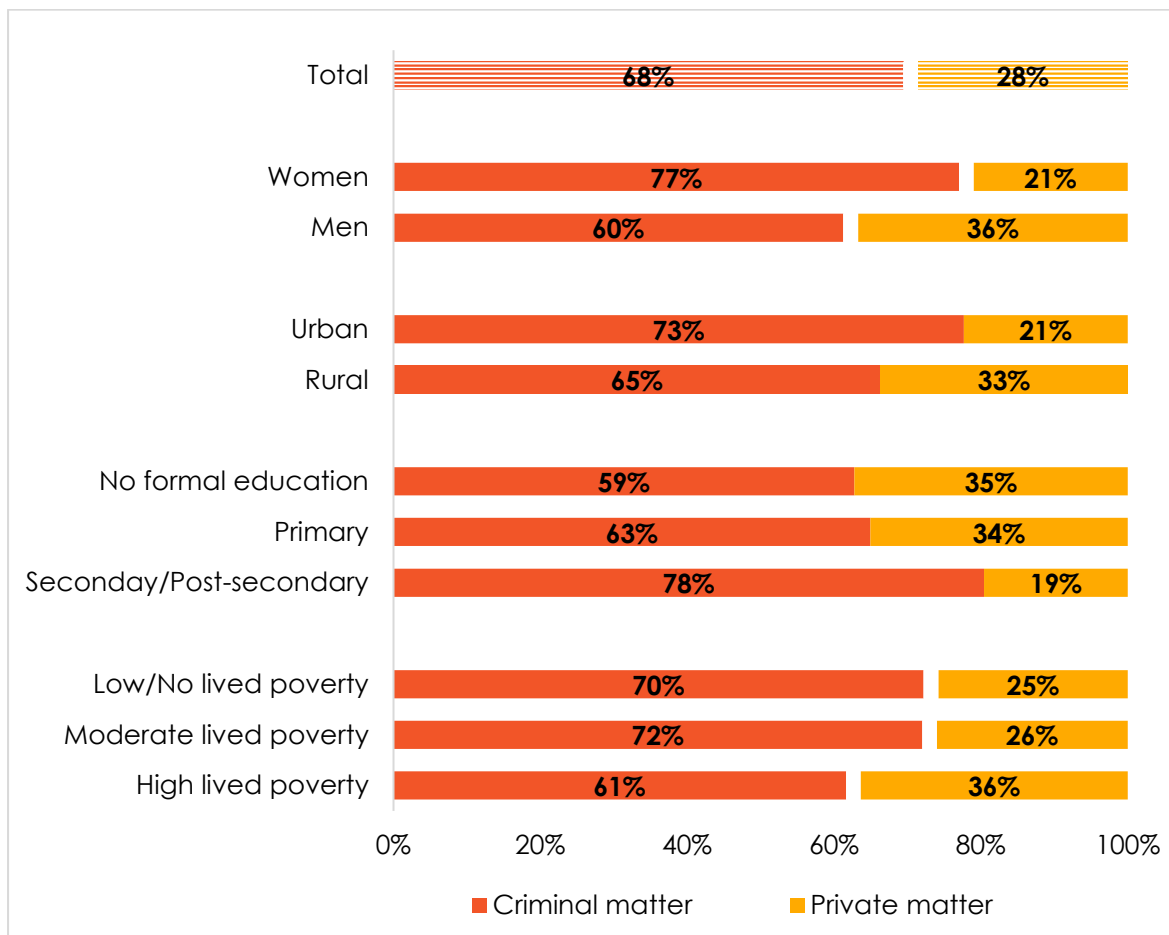
### Is domestic violence a criminal or family matter?

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 Mozambicans see domestic violence as a criminal matter or a private matter?

More than two-thirds (68%) of Mozambicans say domestic violence is a criminal matter requiring law enforcement involvement. Only 28% believe domestic violence should be seen as a private matter to be resolved within the family (Figure 9).

More women than men see domestic violence as a criminal matter (77% vs. 60%), a view that is more widely shared in cities than in rural areas (73% vs. 65%. Poor citizens are less likely to consider domestic violence a criminal matter (61%, vs. 70%-72% of better-off respondents), as are those with no formal schooling (59%, compared to 78% of those with secondary or post-secondary qualifications).

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

A majority of Mozambicans reject the use of physical force against women, see domestic violence as a criminal matter, and believe that the police are likely to take GBV cases seriously. These views provide some support for ongoing anti-violence efforts, which are clearly needed if activists hope to reduce the perceived frequency of GBV and the stigmatisation of survivors who report it.

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