



Dispatch No. 685 | 15 August 2023

Zambians see gender-based violence as a top priority, though many consider domestic violence a private matter

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 685 | Edward Chibwili

Summary

More than one-third (36%) of Zambian women have experienced physical violence since age 15. One in five women and girls (20%) suffer sexual abuse before age 18, and 39% are married before age 18 (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2019; Republic of Zambia, 2018; Bessa & Malasha, 2020).

The Victim Support Unit of the Zambia police reported a 29% increase in gender-based violence (GBV) cases in the fourth quarter of 2022 compared to the same period in 2021, from 7,920 to 10,241 (Xinhuanews.com, 2023), though many other incidents of GBV go unreported.

Activists point to poverty, women's power disadvantage in relationships, and social acceptance of GBV as key factors leaving many women vulnerable to abusive spouses, workmates, male relatives, and well-off individuals (Care, 2017; USAID, 2010).

To protect women and girls, Zambia has domesticated international and regional conventions on women's rights in national laws and instruments such as the Anti-Human Trafficking Act (2008), the Anti-Gender Based Violence Act (2011), the National Gender Policy (2014), and its National Plan of Action. The World Bank's (2023) Zambia Gender-Based Violence Assessment identifies a variety of GBV prevention and response programmes in the country, including hospital-based and village-led one-stop centres and shelters, counseling services, and fast-track courts. But it notes that these efforts are often under-funded, poorly coordinated, and geographically limited, failing to reach many of the country's GBV survivors.

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

Survey findings show that Zambians see GBV as the most important women's-rights issue that their government and society must address. While most Zambians say it is never justified for a man to use physical force to discipline his wife, a majority say violence against women and girls is common in their communities.

Slim majorities also consider domestic violence a private matter to be handled within the family and think it's likely that a woman who reports GBV to the authorities will 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 conducted 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 Zambia, led by the Institute of Economic and Social Research (INESOR), a research wing of the University of Zambia, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 Zambian adults between 3 August and 7 September 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 have been conducted in Zambia in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2017, and 2020.

Key findings

- Gender-based violence (GBV) tops the list of the most important women's-rights issues that Zambians say their government and society must address.
- Almost half (48%) of citizens say violence against women and girls is a "somewhat common" or "very common" occurrence in their communities.
- Almost three-fourths (72%) of Zambians say it is "never" justified for a man to use physical force to discipline his wife.
- More than half (54%) of Zambians consider it "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 (73%) believe that the police are likely to take cases of GBV seriously.
- Views are divided on whether domestic violence should be referred to the police or handled within the family: 43% say domestic violence should be treated as a criminal matter, but a slim majority (51%) consider it a private matter.

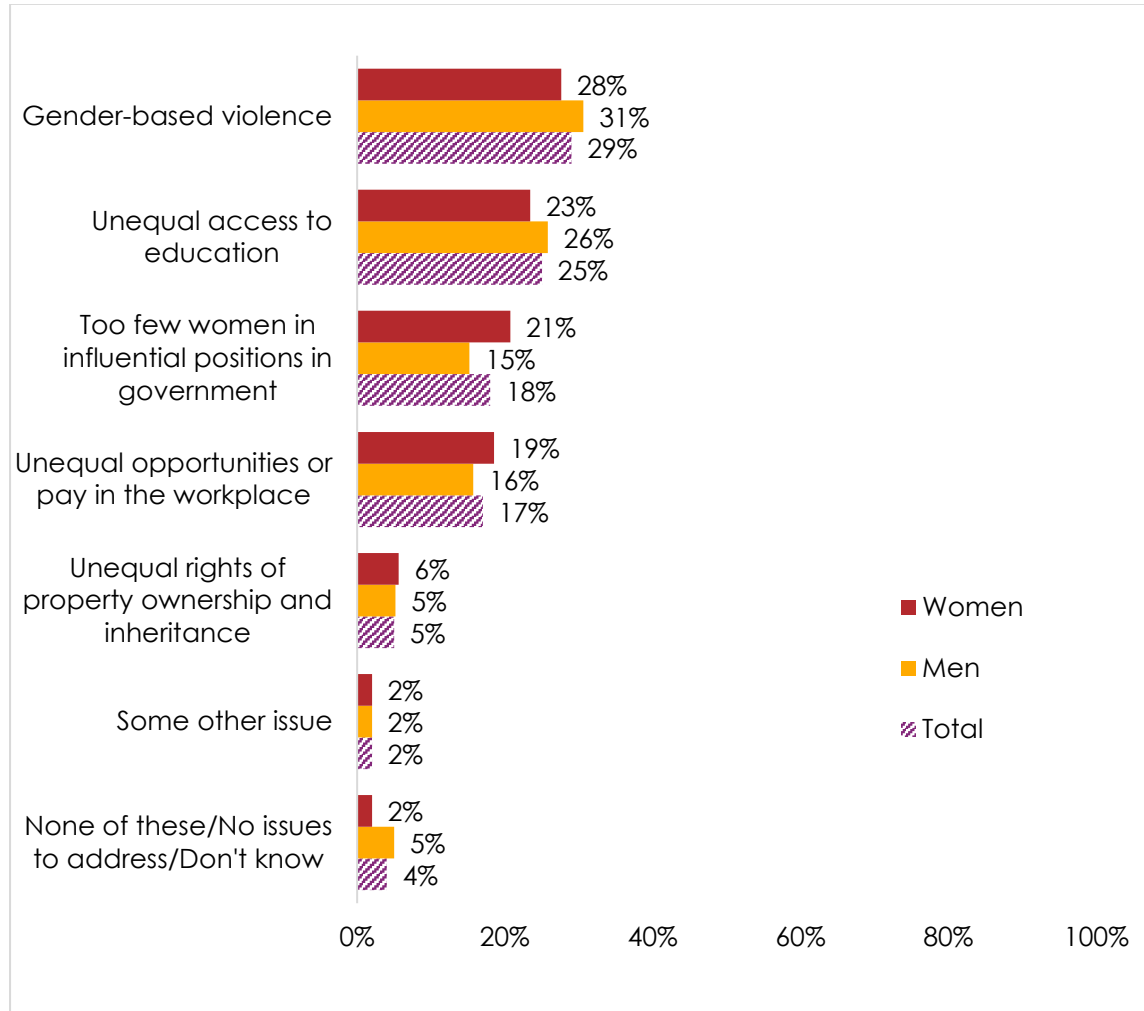
Is gender-based violence (GBV) an important problem in Zambia?

Zambians rank gender-based violence (cited by 29% of respondents) as the most important women's-rights issue for the government and society to address (Figure 1). In second place is unequal access to education (25%), followed by too few women in influential positions in government (18%), unequal opportunities or pay in the workplace (17%), and unequal rights of property ownership and inheritance (5%).

Men and women differ little in their assessments of the most important issue requiring the attention of the government and society.

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

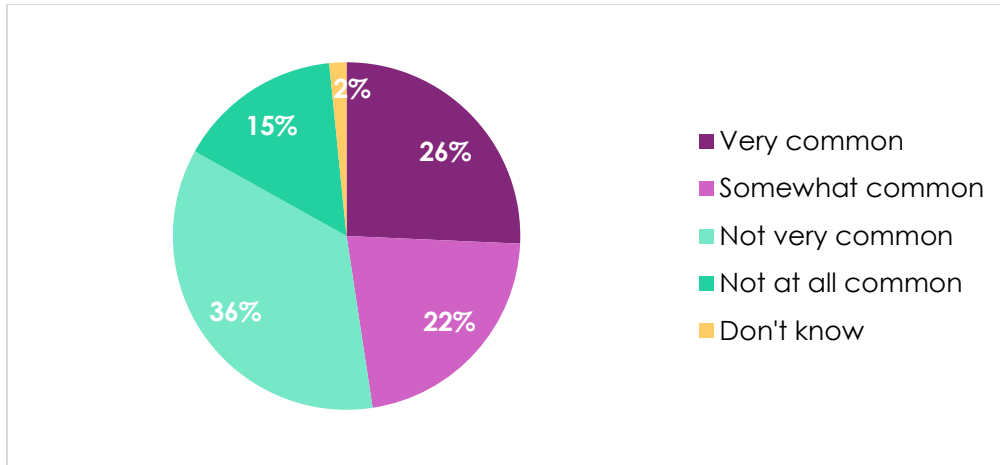
How common is GBV?

One reason that GBV is considered a major issue is probably that almost half of Zambians think it happens frequently: 48% of respondents say violence against women is “somewhat common” (22%) or “very common” (26%) in their communities (Figure 2).

Women (50%) are slightly more likely than men (46%) to say that GBV is a common occurrence (Figure 3). This perception is less widespread among economically well-off citizens (42% of those experiencing low or no “lived poverty”¹), those with post-secondary education (43%), and older respondents (43% of those over age 55).

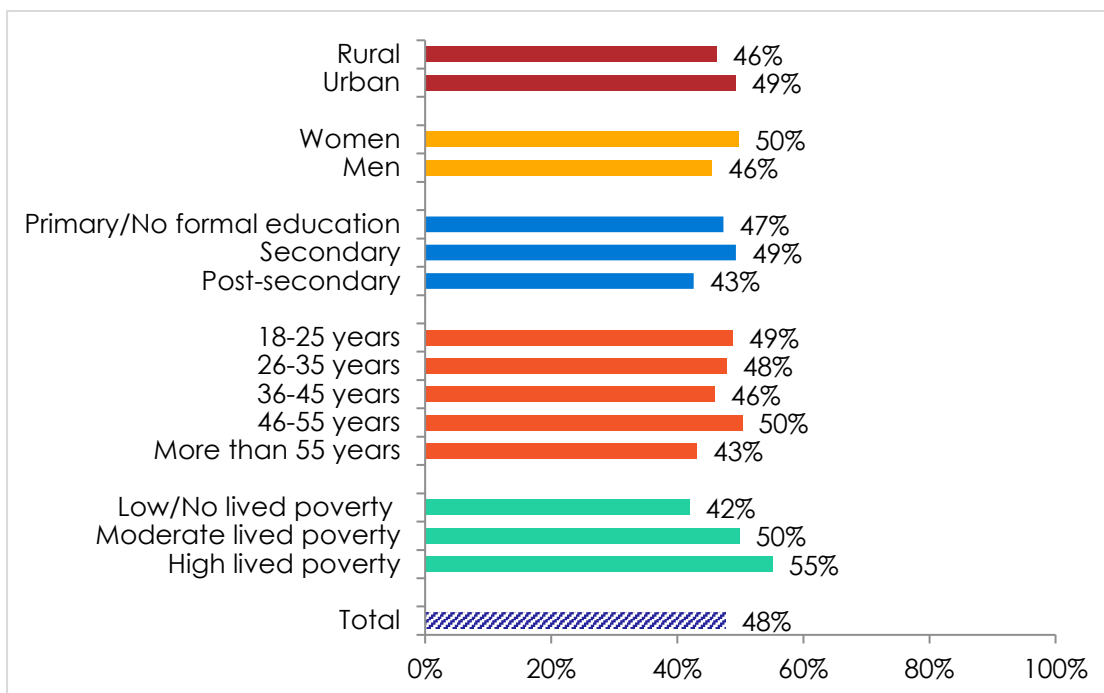
¹ Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty,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

Figure 2: Frequency of GBV | Zambia | 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 | Zambia | 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")

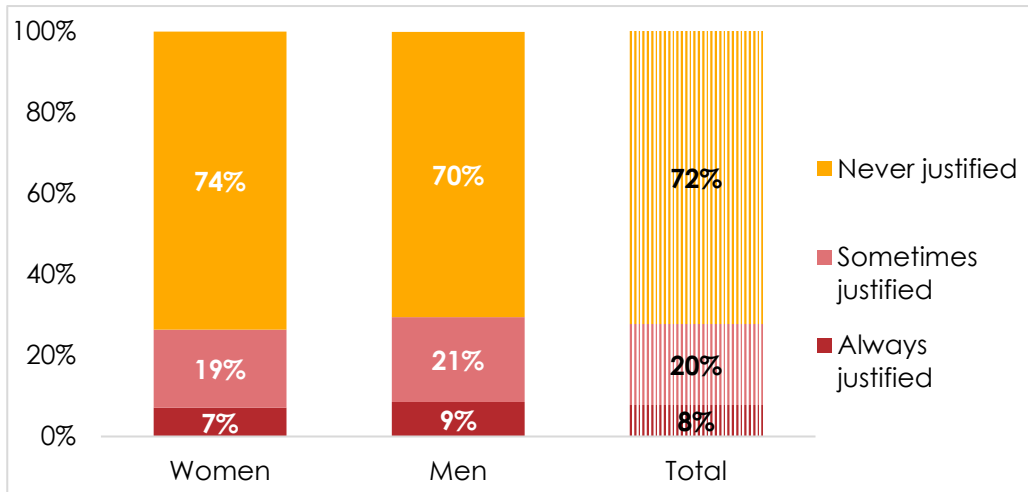
Physical discipline of a spouse

More than seven in 10 Zambians (72%) say it is "never justified" for a man to use physical force to discipline his wife, while 28% consider it "sometimes" or "always" justified. Women are somewhat more likely than men to rule out physical discipline as "never justified," 74% vs. 70% (Figure 4).

The view that men are never justified in physically disciplining their wives gathers strength as respondents' education level rises, ranging from 65% of those with primary schooling or less to

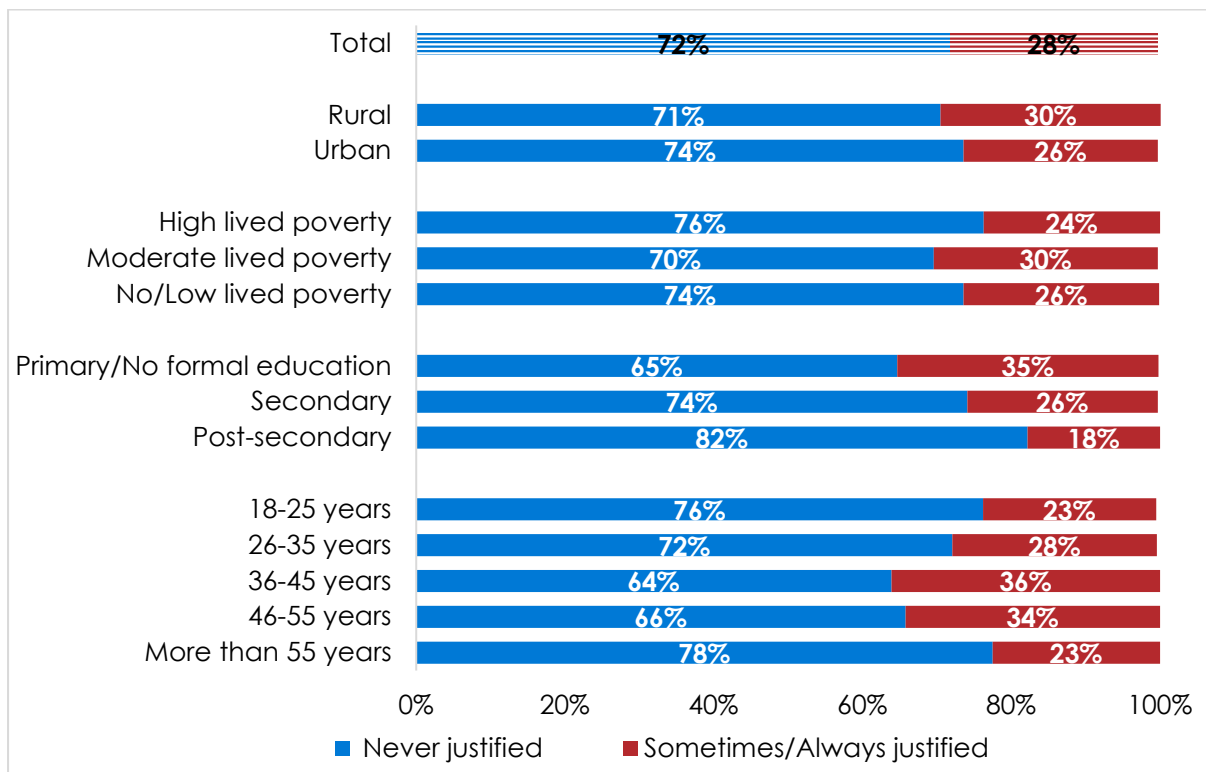
82% of those with post-secondary qualifications (Figure 5). Middle-aged respondents are more accepting of the use of physical force (36%) than the youngest and the oldest respondents (23%).

Figure 4: Is it justified for men to physically discipline their wives? | Zambia | 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 | Zambia | 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?

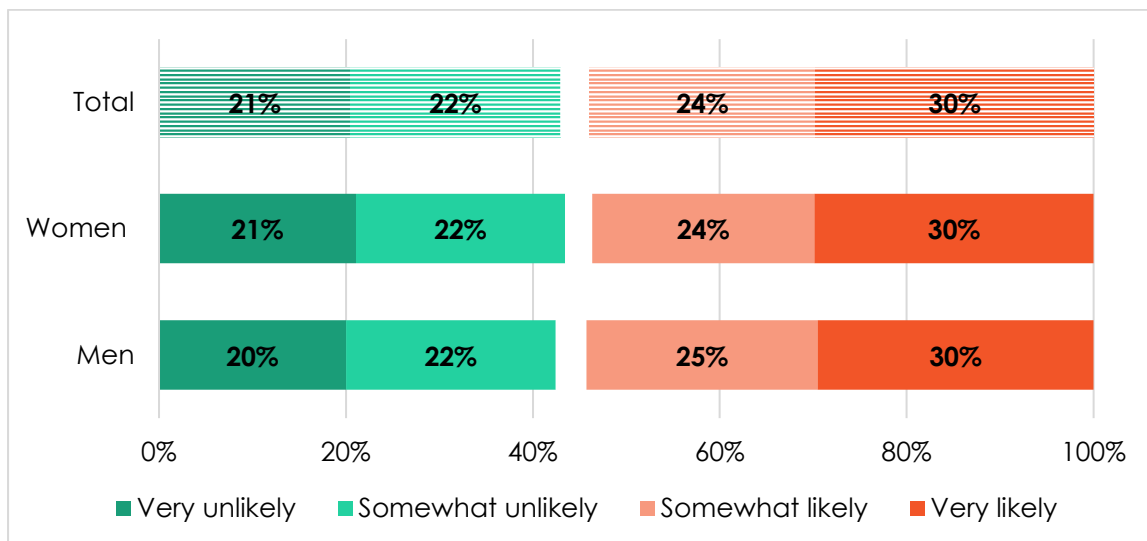
Response to GBV

Activists, researchers, and the police agree that many attacks on women and girls remain unreported, and this makes it difficult to know the actual magnitude of GBV. Fear of the perpetrator, fear of a negative response by others, or the belief that the authorities won't take the case seriously may discourage women and girls from reporting attacks to the relevant authorities and thus hinder a timely, effective response (Palermo, Bleck, & Peterman, 2014).

Asked whether they think 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, more than half (54%) of citizens say this is "somewhat likely" (24%) or "very likely" (30%) (Figure 6). Only 43% see it as "somewhat unlikely" (22%) or "very unlikely" (21%) that GBV victims will suffer such negative responses. These perceptions may serve as a significant deterrent to reporting GBV.

Women and men hold almost identical views on this question, and differences by respondents' age, education level, lived poverty, and urban-rural residency show no clear pattern.

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

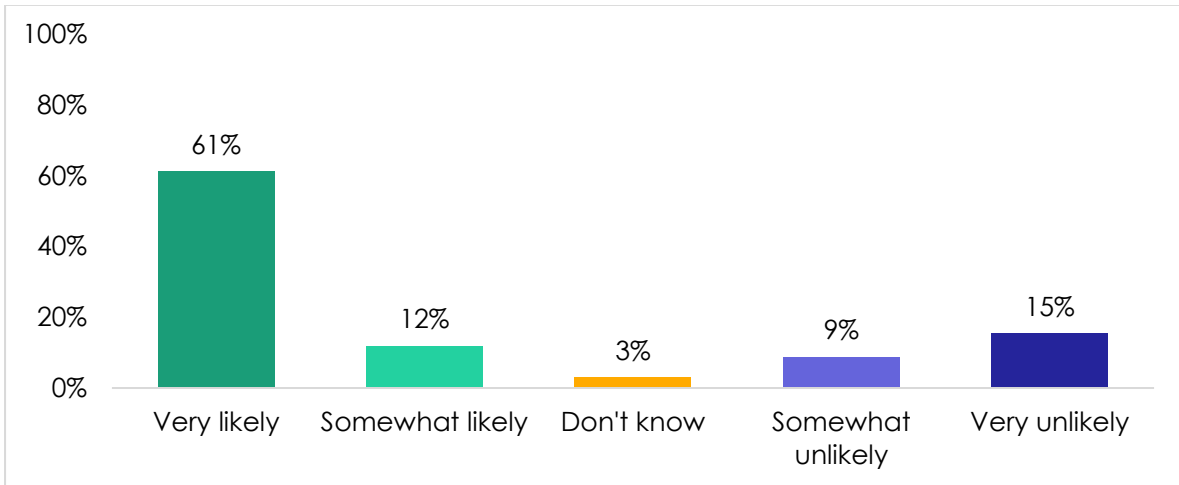


Respondents were asked: *If a woman in your community goes to the police to report being a victim of gender-based violence, for example, to report a rape or report being physically abused by her husband, how likely or unlikely is it that the following things might occur: She will be criticized, harassed,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

While expectations regarding the community's response are discouraging, Zambians overwhelmingly believe that the police will respond appropriately to reported cases of GBV: 73% see it as likely that the police will take such reports seriously, including 61% who say it is "very likely" (Figure 7).

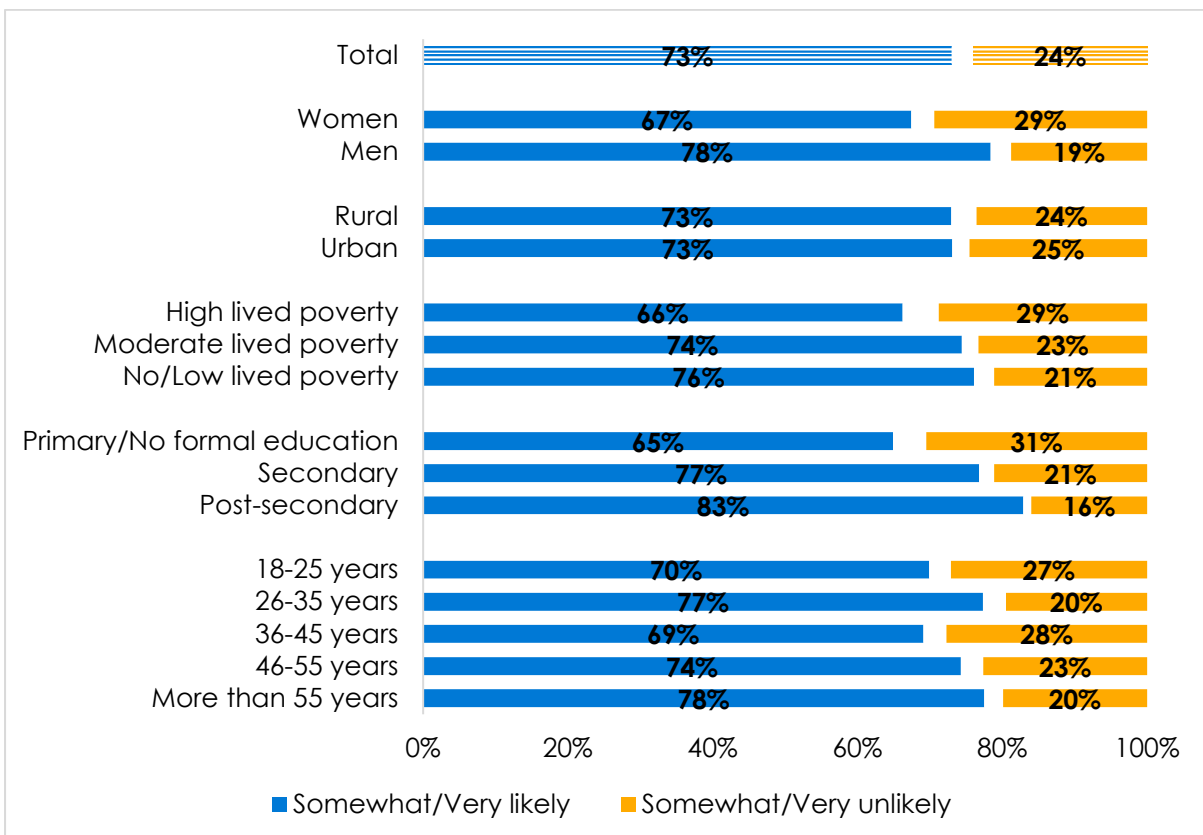
More men (78%) than women (67%) believe that the police will take GBV cases seriously (Figure 8). In contrast, respondents with primary schooling or less (65%) and those experiencing high lived poverty (66%) are less likely to expect a serious police response to GBV than their more educated (77%-83%) and better-off (74%-76%) counterparts.

Figure 7: Do the police take GBV cases seriously? | Zambia | 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: Do the police take GBV cases seriously? | by demographic group | Zambia | 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?*

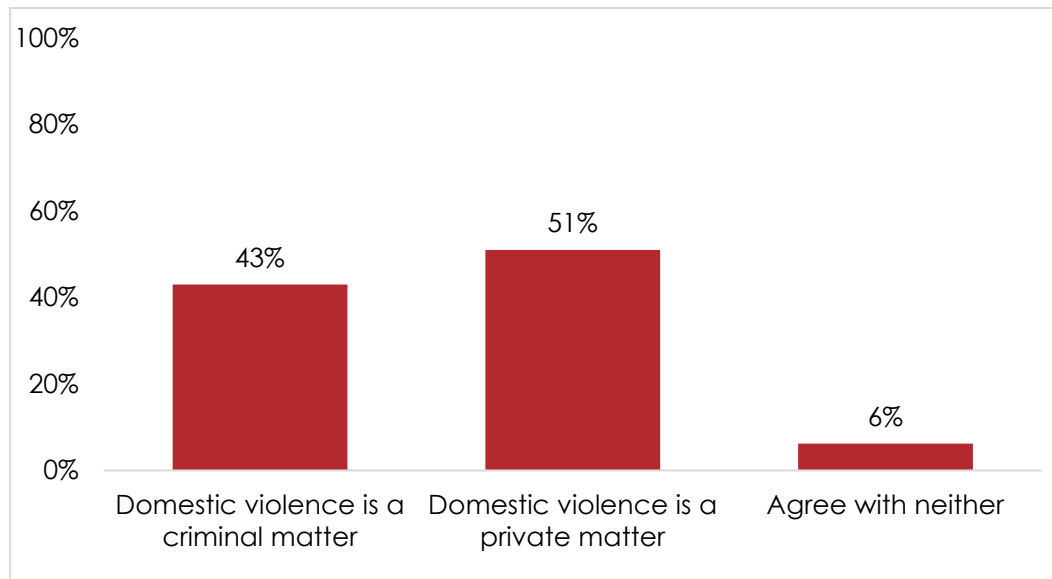
Is domestic violence a criminal or family matter?

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

Views are divided on whether domestic violence should be referred to the police or handled within the family: 43% say domestic violence should be treated as a criminal matter, but a slim majority (51%) consider it a private matter (Figure 9).

Men are more likely than women to see domestic violence as a private matter, 54% vs. 47% (Figure 10). The perception that such violence is a criminal matter is more common among the most educated Zambians (75%), economically better-off citizens (50%), and urban residents (50%) than among their less educated, poorer, and rural counterparts.

Figure 9: Is domestic violence a criminal or private matter? | Zambia | 2022



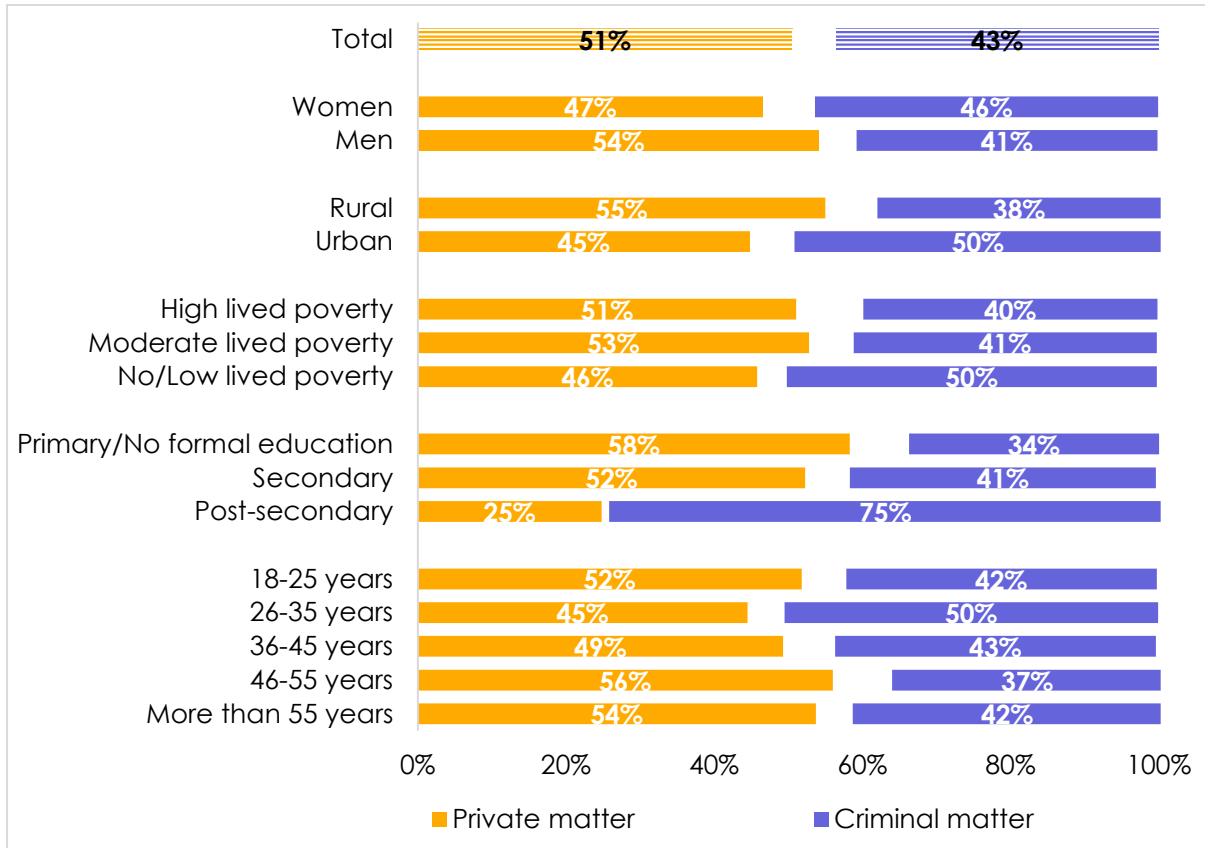
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

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)

Figure 10: Is domestic violence a criminal or private matter? | by demographic group | Zambia | 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

Zambians are aware that gender-based violence (GBV) is a problem in their country, ranking it as the most important women's-rights issue that their government and society must address. Most Zambians reject the use of physical force against women and trust the police to take GBV cases seriously. But almost half describe violence against women and girls as common in their communities. And more than half consider domestic violence a private matter to be handled within the family and think it's likely that a woman who reports GBV to the authorities will be criticised, harassed, or shamed by others in the community. Such perceptions are likely to discourage women and girls from reporting crimes against them, allowing GBV to continue to threaten their safety and well-being.

These findings highlight that in addition to renewed government efforts to combat GBV, strong community-based mechanisms are needed to shift harmful social norms and address sexual and gender-based violence in domestic and public spaces.

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