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Tanzanians oppose physical force against women, see domestic violence as a criminal matter

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 686 | Derick Msafiri

Summary

Four in 10 Tanzanian women have experienced physical violence, and 17% have suffered sexual violence. Only about half of survivors seek assistance. Three in 10 girls experience sexual violence before the age of 18, and more than one in three are married as minors (United Republic of Tanzania, 2016; UNICEF Tanzania, 2011).

While the country's legal framework reflects its commitment to fighting gender-based violence (GBV), including national action plans on violence against women and against children, the World Bank's (2022) Tanzania Gender Based Violence Assessment notes that its laws lack prohibitions against domestic violence and marital rape and that enforcement suffers from weak investigations, under-reporting, and corruption.

In collaboration with United Nations agencies and civil society organisations, the government has undertaken a range of initiatives to address GBV, including the creation of one-stop centres across the country to support women and girls with psychological counselling, health care, and legal services. The police, whose stations have established gender desks, report a decline in GBV cases from 42,414 in 2020 to 29,373 in 2021 (Legal and Human Rights Centre, 2022).

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.

Survey findings show that an overwhelming majority of Tanzanians say it is never justified for a man to use physical force to discipline his wife, and that most citizens say violence against women and girls is not a common occurrence in their community. Even so, gender-based violence (GBV) ranks No. 1 among the most important women's-rights issues that Tanzanians want their government and society to address. A majority consider GBV a criminal matter requiring the involvement of law enforcement rather than a private matter to be handled within the family.

Most citizens say the police are likely to take GBV cases seriously, but many also consider it likely that a woman who reports such violence to the police 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 Tanzania, led by REPOA, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 2,400 Tanzanian adults in September-October 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Tanzania in 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2021.

Key findings

- Tanzanians see gender-based violence (GBV) as the most important women's-rights issue that their government and society must address.
- Eight out of 10 citizens (80%) say violence against women and girls is "not very common" or "not at all common" in their communities.
- More than eight in 10 Tanzanians (83%) say it is "never justified" for a man to use physical force to discipline his wife.
- A majority (59%) of respondents say it is unlikely that a woman who reports GBV to the authorities will be criticised, harassed, or shamed by others in the community, but 40% consider such negative consequences "somewhat" or "very" likely.
 - Most Tanzanians (92%) believe that the police are likely to take cases of GBV seriously.
- Almost two-thirds (64%) of citizens say domestic violence should be treated as a criminal matter rather than as a private matter to be resolved within the family.

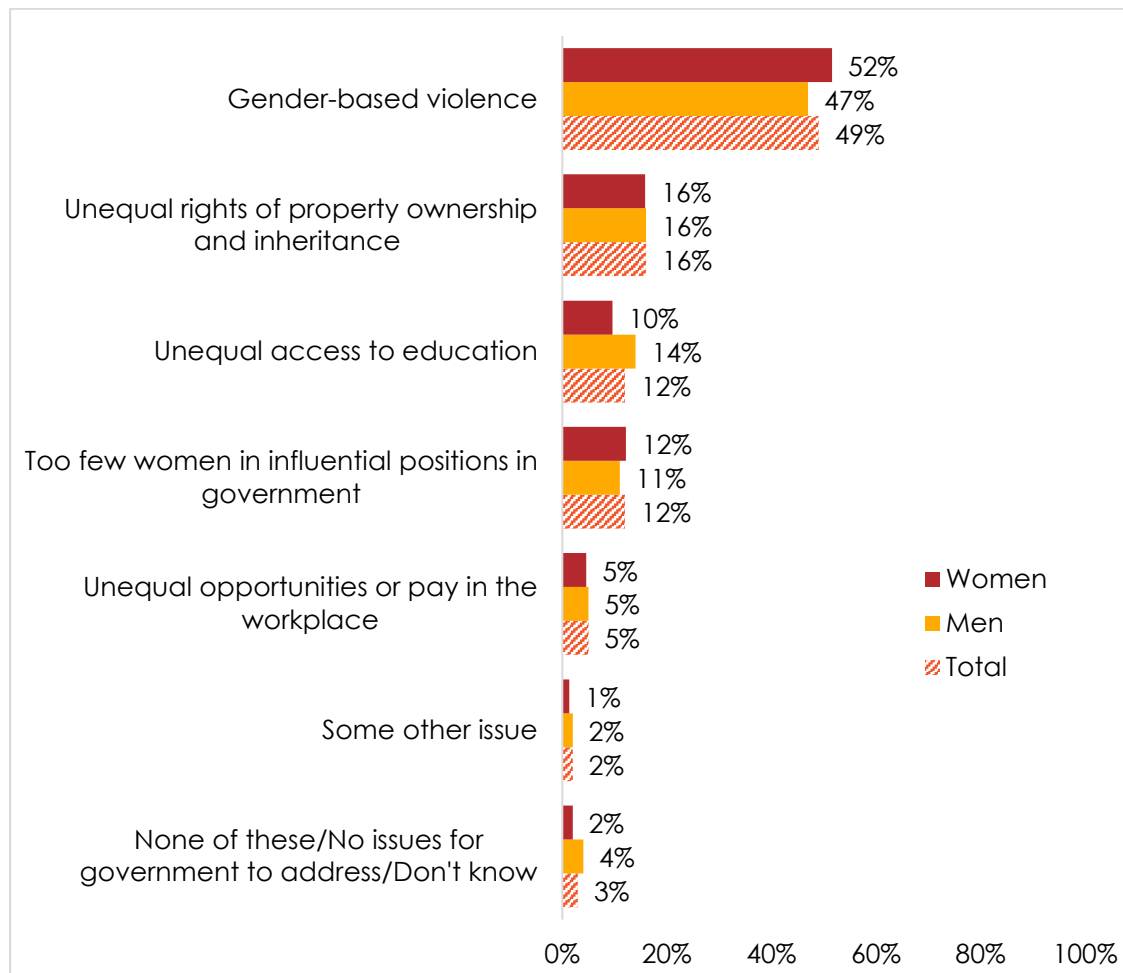
Is gender-based violence (GBV) an important problem in Tanzania?

In Tanzania, about half (49%) of all adults identify gender-based violence as the most important women's-rights issue for the government and society to address. That's more than three times as many as prioritise unequal rights of property ownership and inheritance (16%), too few women in influential positions in government (12%), or unequal access to education (12%). Only one in 20 respondents (5%) cite unequal opportunities or pay in the workplace as the key issue to be addressed (Figure 1).

More women (52%) than men (47%) see GBV as the most important issue requiring the attention of the government and society.

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Figure 1: Most important women’s-rights issue | Tanzania | 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?

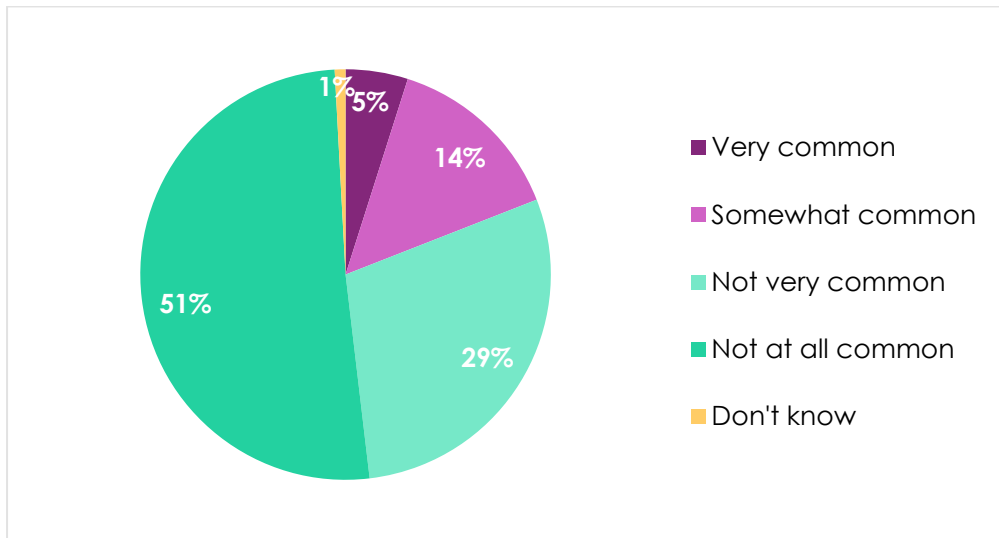
While many Tanzanians see GBV as an important issue to address, only one in five (19%) say violence against women and girls is “somewhat common” or “very common” in their communities. Fully eight in 10 (80%) describe GBV as an infrequent occurrence, including 51% who say it is “not at all common” (Figure 2).

Women (20%) and men (18%) are about equally likely to say that violence against women is a common occurrence (Figure 3). But this perception is considerably more widespread among poor citizens (29% of those experiencing high “lived poverty”¹) than among their better-off counterparts (15%-22%).

Young people (22% of those aged 18-35) are somewhat more likely to report that GBV happens frequently than their elders (13%-18%).

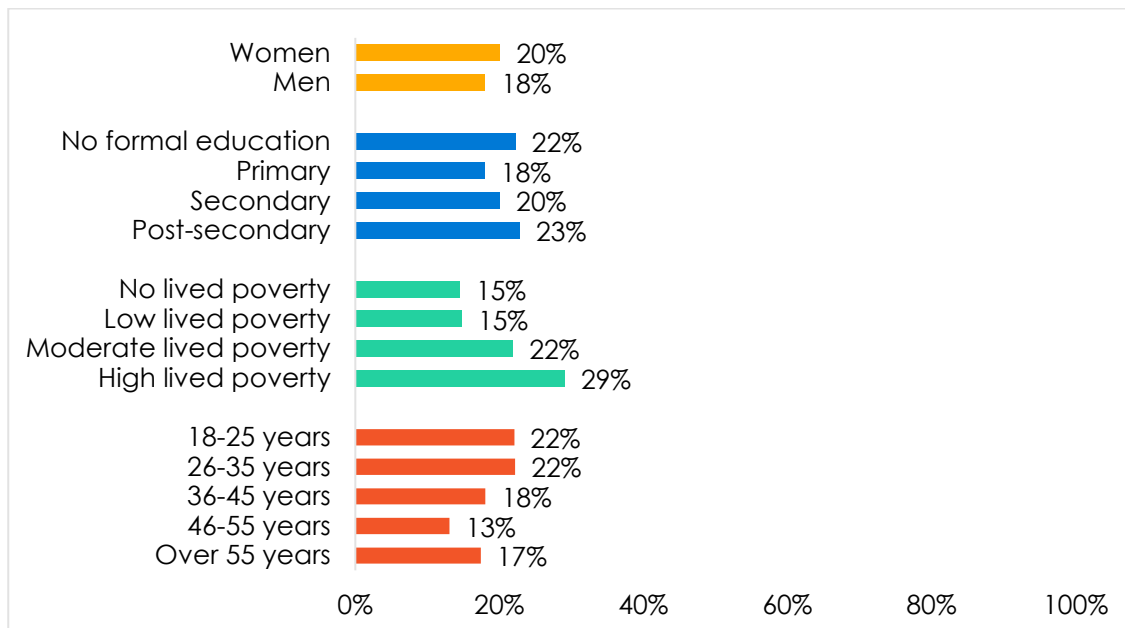
¹ Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty,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

Figure 2: Frequency of GBV | Tanzania | 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 | Tanzania | 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

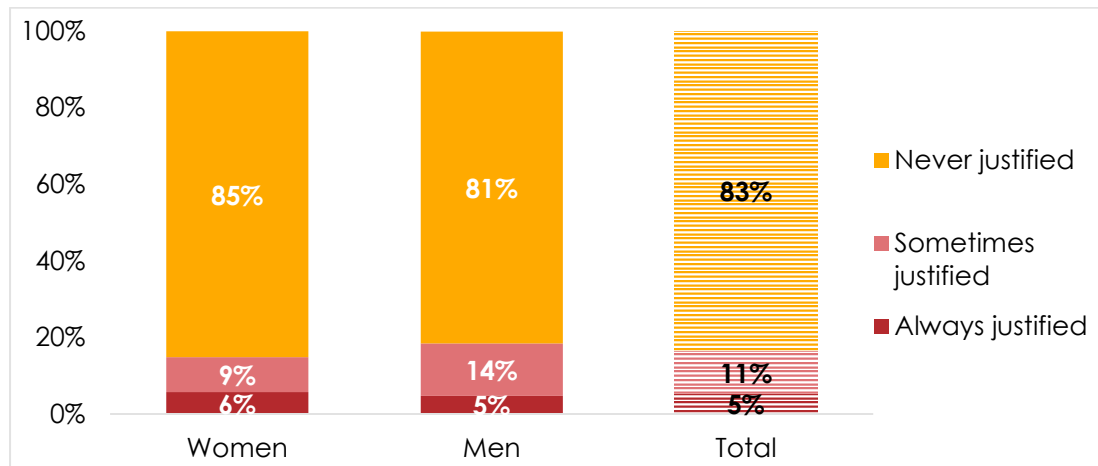
More than eight in 10 Tanzanians (83%) say it is "never justified" for a man to use physical force to discipline his wife, while 17% consider it "sometimes" or "always" justified.² Women

² Due to rounding, percentages for combined categories reported in the text may differ slightly from the sum of sub-categories shown in figures (e.g. 11% "sometimes justified" and 5% "always justified" sum to 17%).

are somewhat more likely than men to rule out physical discipline as “never justified” (85% vs. 81%) (Figure 4).

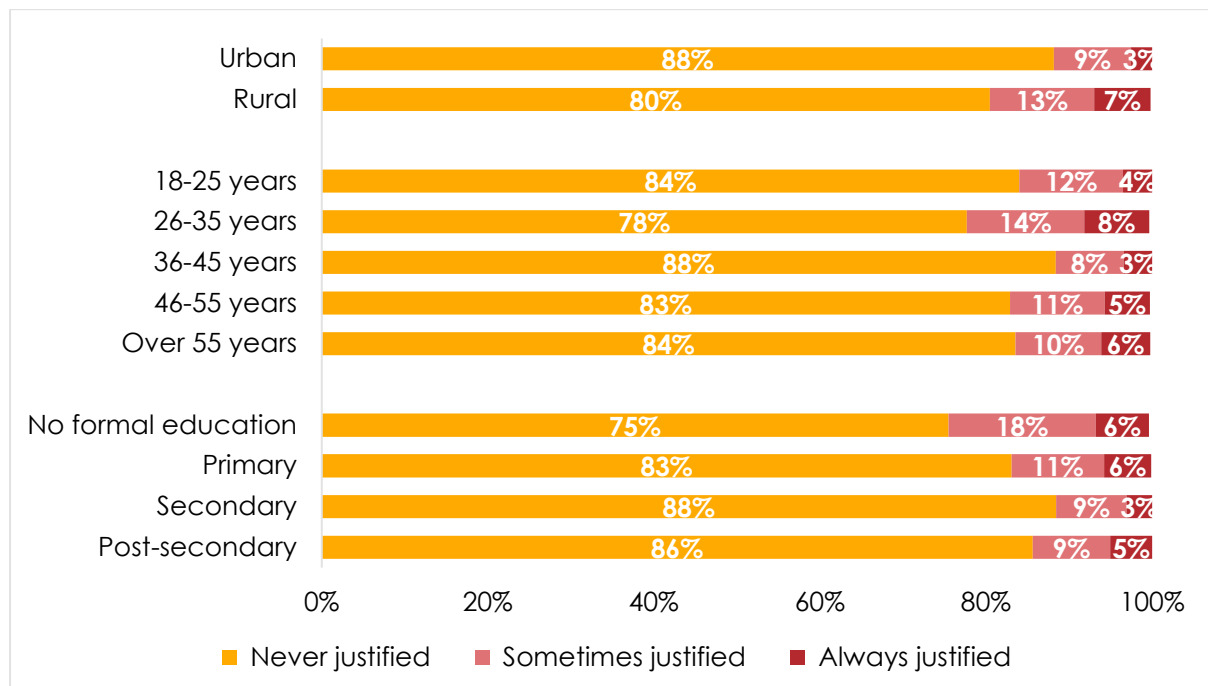
The view that men are never justified in physically disciplining their wives gathers strength as respondents’ education level increases, ranging from 75% of those with no formal schooling to 88% and 86%, respectively, of those with secondary and post-secondary qualifications (Figure 5). Rural residents (80%) are less likely to share this view than urbanites (88%).

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

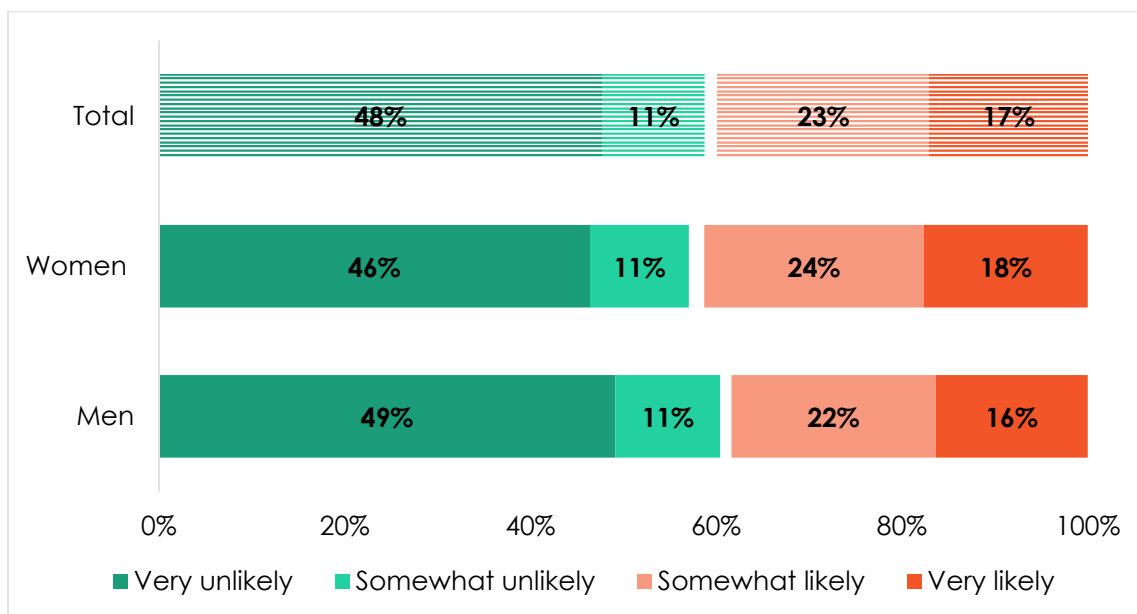
Police and scholars agree that the true extent of GBV is unknown because many attacks on girls and women are never reported. Reasons include fear of the attacker, fear of a negative response by others, or the belief that the authorities won't take the case seriously (Palermo, Bleck, & Peterman, 2014).

Asked whether they think a woman who reports being a victim of rape, domestic violence, or other gender-based violence will be criticised, harassed, or shamed by others in the community, about half (48%) of Tanzanians say this is "very unlikely," while another 11% consider it "somewhat unlikely" (Figure 6). Still, four in 10 (40%) think such responses are "somewhat" or "very" likely – perceptions that may serve as a significant deterrent to reporting GBV.

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

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

| by gender | Tanzania | 2022

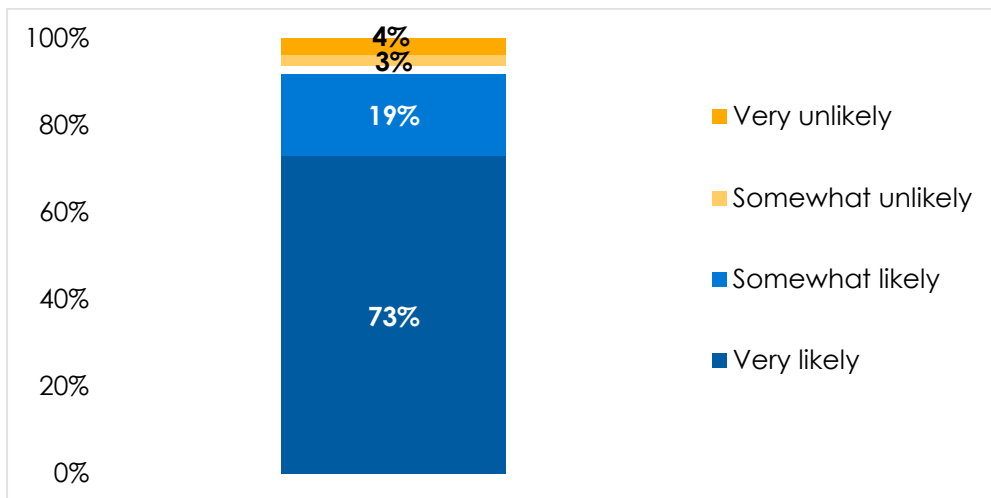


Respondents were asked: *If a woman in your community goes to the police to report being a victim of gender-based violence, for example, to report a rape or report being physically abused by her husband, how likely or unlikely is it that the following things might occur: She will be criticised, harassed,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

While expectations regarding the community's response are somewhat mixed, Tanzanians overwhelmingly believe that the police will respond appropriately to reported cases of GBV: 92% see it as likely that the police will take such reports seriously, including 73% who say it is "very likely" (Figure 7).

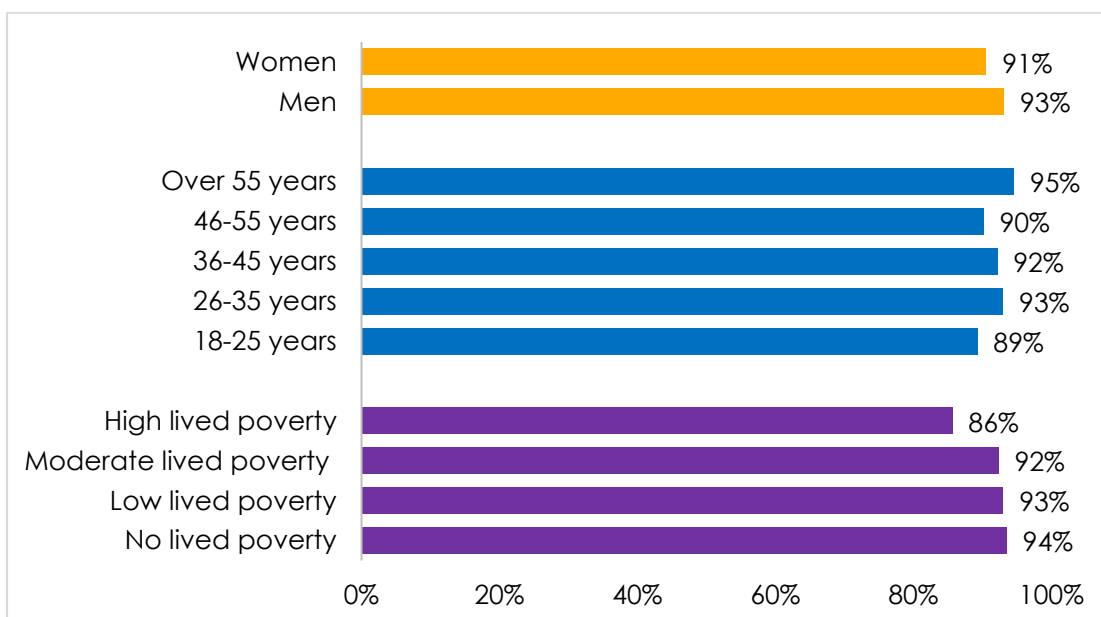
Men (93%) and women (91%) are about equally likely to believe that the police will take GBV cases seriously. Youth (89%) and poor respondents (86%) express somewhat less confidence in the police response than older and economically better-off citizens (Figure 8).

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

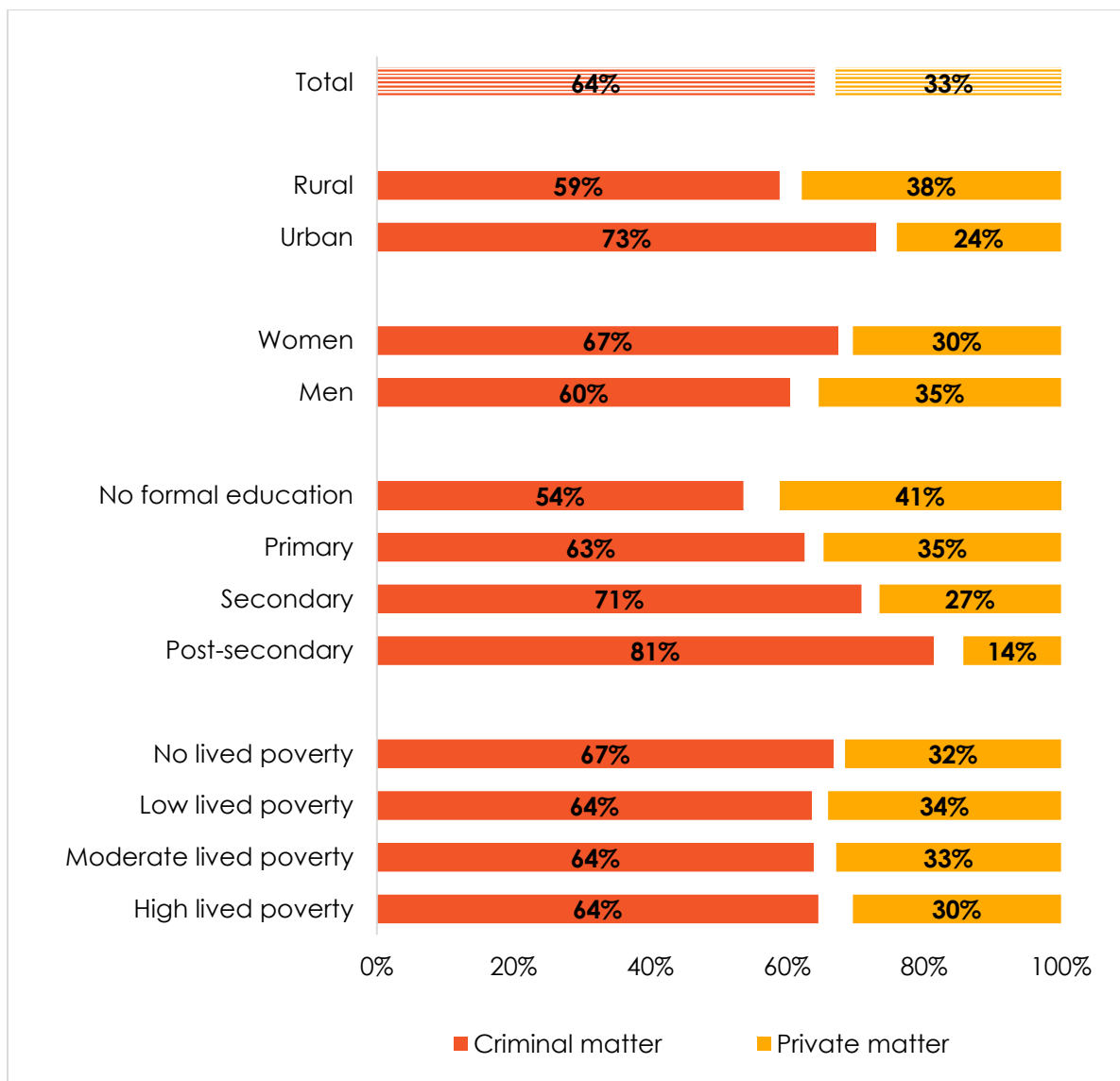
Is domestic violence a criminal or family matter?

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

Almost two-thirds (64%) of Tanzanians say domestic violence is a criminal matter that requires the involvement of law enforcement, including 56% who “strongly agree” with this position. Only one-third (33%) believe domestic violence should be seen as a private matter to be resolved within the family (Figure 9).

Women (67%) and urbanites (73%) are more likely than men (60%) and rural residents (59%) to see domestic violence as a criminal matter. Support for this view increases with respondents’ education level, ranging from 54% of those with no formal schooling to 81% of those with post-secondary education. But views differ little by economic status.

Figure 9: Is domestic violence a criminal or private matter? | by demographic group
 | Tanzania | 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 most Tanzanians say violence against women and girls is not a common occurrence in their communities, they do consider GBV the most important women's-rights issue that their government and society must address. Most citizens believe that the police are likely to take GBV cases seriously and that GBV should be treated as a criminal rather than a family matter.

In contrast to their overwhelming rejection of the use of physical force against women, perceptions that GBV survivors may face stigmatisation if they report to the authorities suggests that activists still have more work to do.

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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.

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