

Moroccans condemn domestic violence, but many see it as a private matter to handle within the family

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 739 | Mhammed Abderebbi and Maame Akua Amoah Twum

Summary

In his message for International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (25 November), United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres described gender-based violence (GBV) as “a horrific violation of human rights, a public health crisis, and a major obstacle to sustainable development” (United Nations, 2023).

In Morocco, the 2019 National Survey on Violence Against Women and Men found that 57% of women, totalling more than 7.6 million, had experienced some form of violence during the preceding 12 months (High Commission for Planning, 2019a). While this reflects a 6-percentage-point decrease compared to a decade earlier (High Commission for Planning for Planning, 2019b), GBV remains a pressing issue in Morocco. The National Human Rights Council (2022) has argued that the spread of stereotypes and violent imagery via digital media is contributing to an “explicit normalisation” of violence against women.

Morocco has implemented institutional, legal, and advocacy measures to combat GBV, including a national strategy for the fight against violence against women (2002) and legislative reforms to the penal code, labour code, and family law. But activists say these measures fall short of international standards and continue to leave girls and women vulnerable to physical and sexual violence, sexual exploitation, marital rape, child marriage, and other forms of GBV – and most cases are never reported to the authorities (Advocates for Human Rights & Mobilising for Rights Associates, 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.

Although a majority of Moroccans say GBV is not a common occurrence in their community, it ranks second among the most important women's-rights issues that citizens say their government and society must address. Most Moroccans say men are never justified in using physical force to discipline their wives. But while most think the police take GBV cases seriously, more than half say victims of GBV are likely to face criticism, harassment, or shaming by others in the community if they report such crimes. And half consider domestic violence a private matter to be resolved within the family.

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 survey rounds in up to 42 countries have been completed 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 Morocco, led by Global for Survey and Consulting (GSC), interviewed 1,200 adult citizens in 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. Previous surveys were conducted in Morocco in 2013, 2015, 2018, and 2021.

Key findings

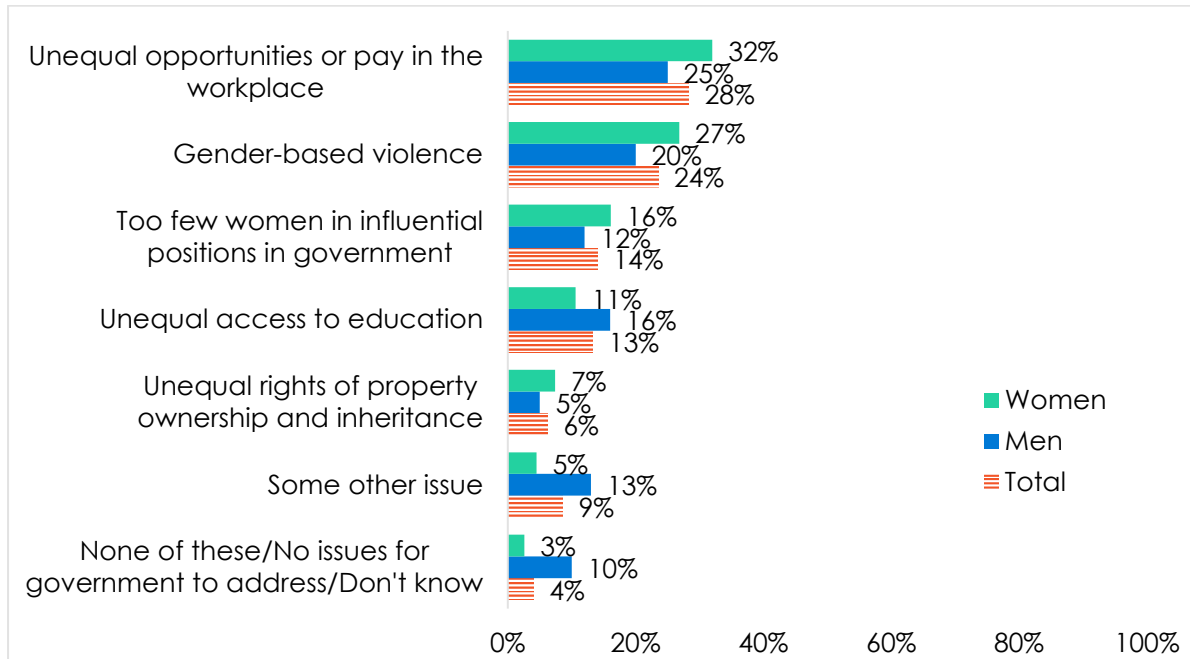
- Gender-based violence (GBV) ranks second among the most important women's-rights issues that Moroccans want their government and society to address.
- More than two-thirds (68%) of citizens say violence against women is "not very common" or "not at all common" in their community, but 31% – including 36% of women – disagree.
- Three-quarters (76%) of citizens say it is "never" justified for a man to use physical force to discipline his wife. Women are more likely than men to see the use of physical force as never justified (84% vs. 67%).
- About half (51%) of Moroccans consider it likely that victims of GBV will be criticised, harassed, or shamed by others in the community if they report these crimes to the authorities.
 - But a large majority (83%) believe that the police are likely to take cases of GBV seriously.
- About half (51%) of respondents say domestic violence should be treated as a private matter to be resolved within the family, while 48% see it as a criminal matter that must involve law enforcement agencies.

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

In Morocco, gender-based violence ranks second among the most important problems related to women's rights that citizens think the government and society must address, trailing unequal opportunities or pay in the workplace (Figure 1). Women are more likely than men to see GBV as a top priority (27% vs. 20%).

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Figure 1: Most important women’s-rights issue | by gender | Morocco | 2022

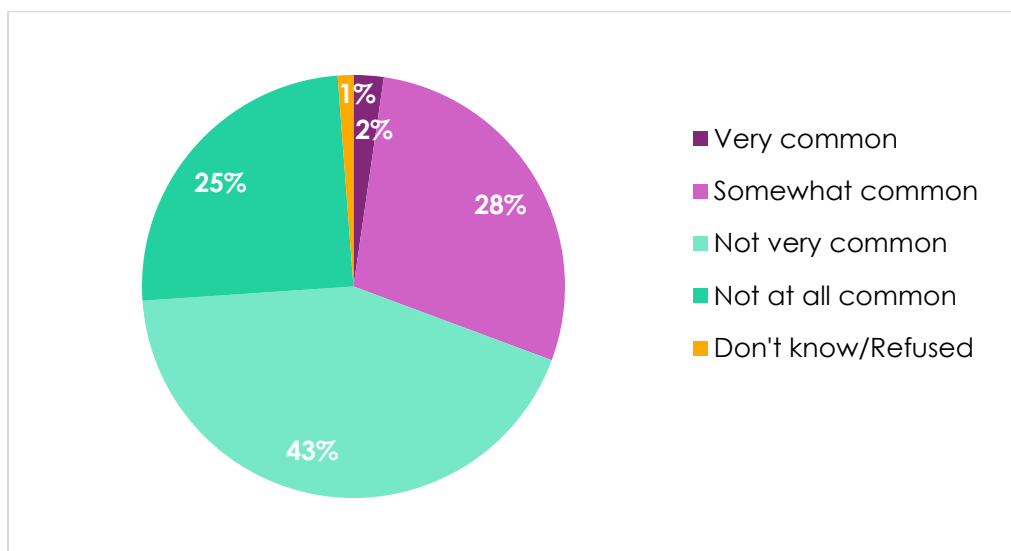


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, which of the following issues related to women's rights and equality do you think is the most important for our government and society to address?

How common is GBV?

A majority (68%) of respondents say violence against women is “not very common” or “not at all common” in their community. But 31% describe it as “somewhat” or “very” common (Figure 2).¹

Figure 2: Frequency of GBV | Morocco | 2022

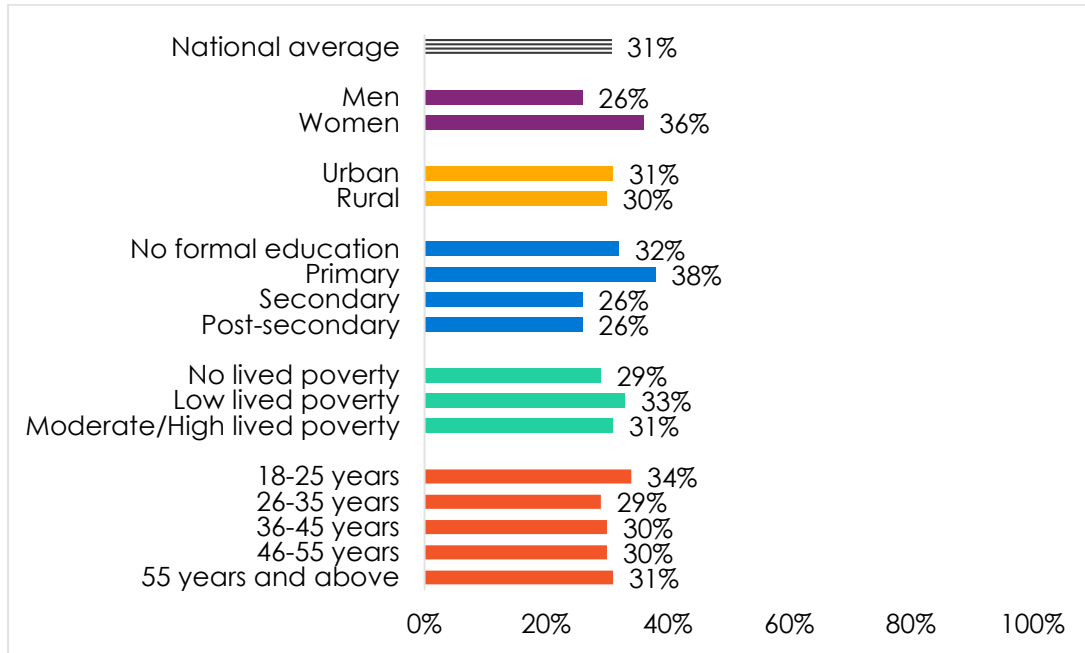


Respondents were asked: In this area, how common do you think it is for men to use violence against women and girls in the home or the community?

¹ 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. 28% “somewhat common” and 2% “very common” sum to 31%).

Women (36%) are more likely than men (26%) to say that violence against women is a common occurrence (Figure 3). This perception is equally common in rural and urban areas but more widespread among the less educated (32%-38%) and the youth (34%).

Figure 3: GBV perceived as somewhat/very common | by demographic group | Morocco | 2022

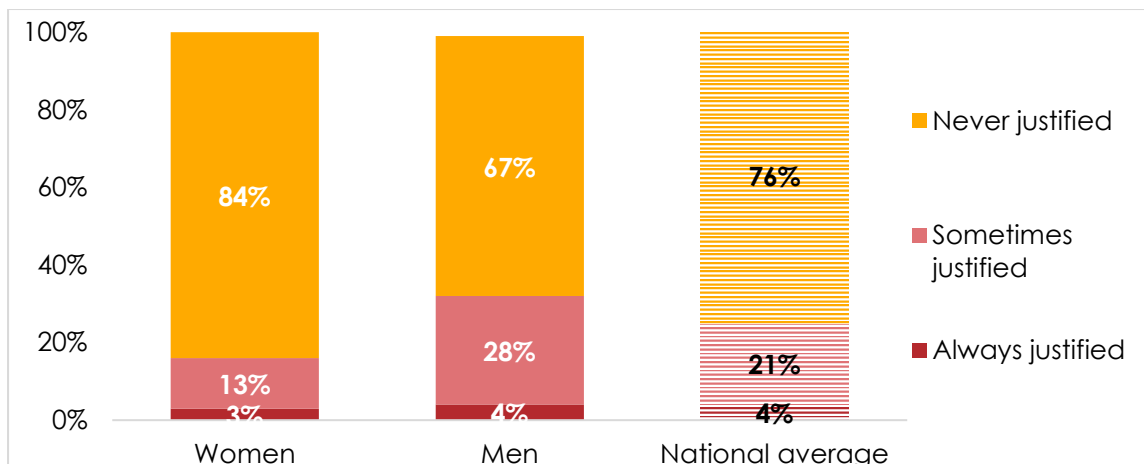


Respondents were asked: In this area, how common do you think it is for men to use violence against women and girls in the home or the community? (% who say "somewhat common" or "very common")

Physical discipline of a spouse

Three-quarters (76%) of Moroccans say it is "never justified" for a man to use physical force to discipline his wife, while about a quarter consider it "sometimes" (21%) or "always" (4%) justified. Twice as many men as women see the use of physical force as justified (32% vs. 16%) (Figure 4).

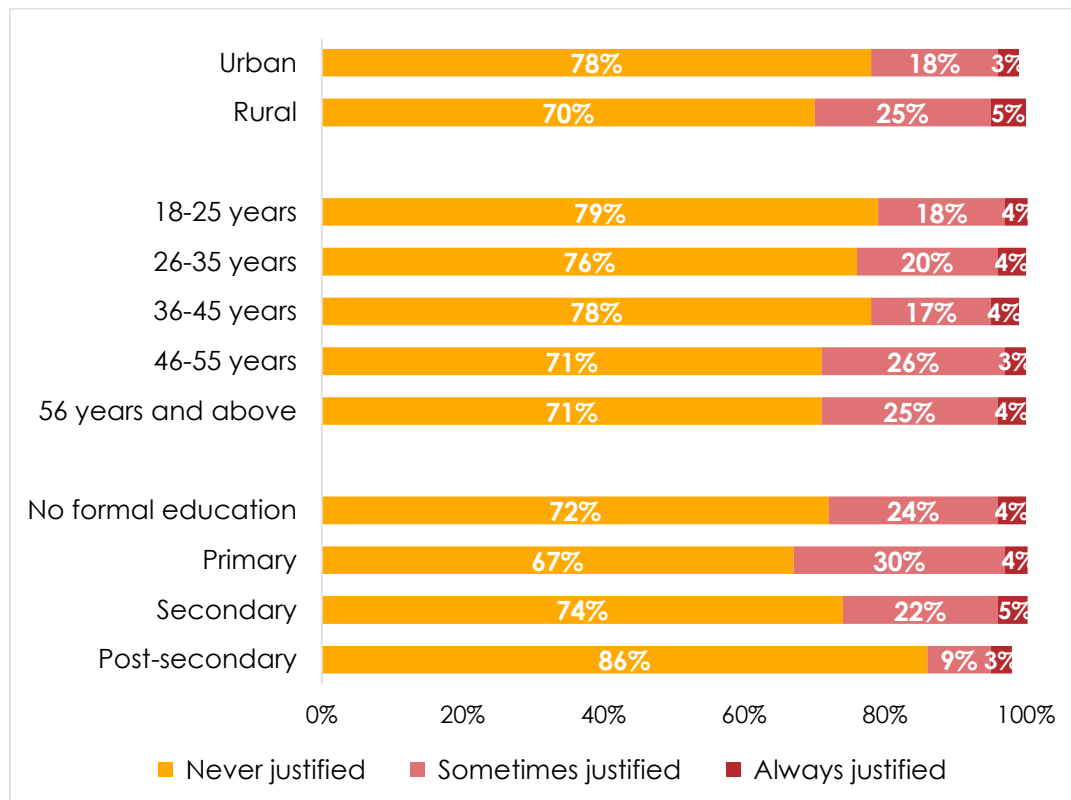
Figure 4: Is it justified for men to physically discipline their wives? | Morocco | 2022



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?

The view that men are never justified in physically disciplining their wives is more widely held in cities (78%) than in rural areas (70%) (Figure 5). The youngest adults (79%) are more likely than older folks (71%) to reject the use of physical force against women, as are citizens with post-secondary education (86%) compared to less educated respondents (67%-74%).

Figure 5: Is it justified for men to physically discipline their wives? | by demographic group | Morocco | 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, and the belief that the authorities won't take the case seriously (Palermo, Bleck, & Peterman, 2014).

In Morocco, about half (51%) of respondents consider it likely that 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, including 15% who say this is "very likely" (Figure 6). Fewer than half (48%) see it as "somewhat" or "very" unlikely. Men and women hold similar views on this issue.

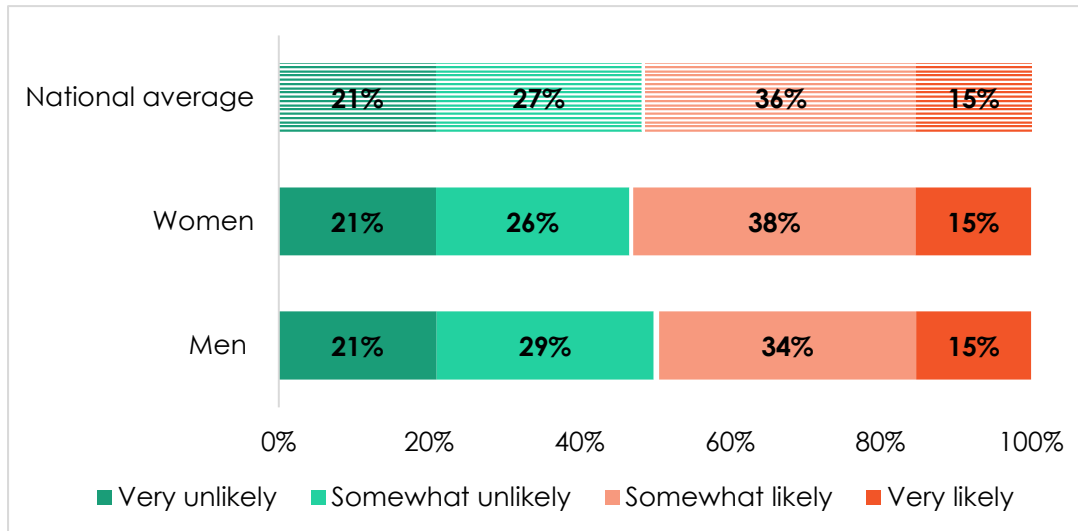
On a positive note, most Moroccans believe that the police will take reported cases of GBV seriously: 83% see this as likely, including 45% who say it is "very likely" (Figure 7).

Confidence in the police response is equally strong among women and men and gathers strength as respondents' education level rises, ranging from 74% of those with no formal schooling to 88% of those with post-secondary qualifications (Figure 8). Economically well-off

citizens (88%) express significantly more faith in the police response than those experiencing moderate or high levels of lived poverty (75%).²

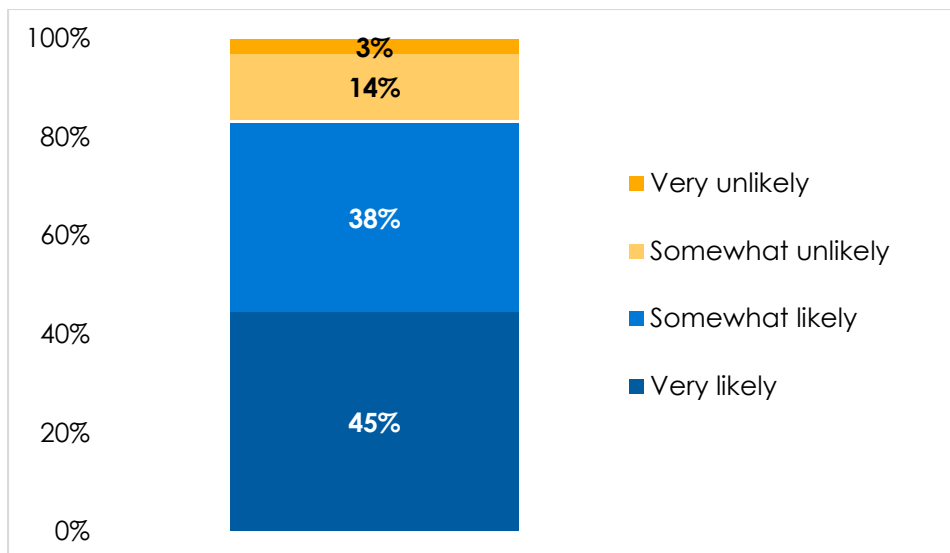
Figure 6: Will a woman be criticised, harassed, or shamed for reporting GBV?

| by gender | Morocco | 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?*

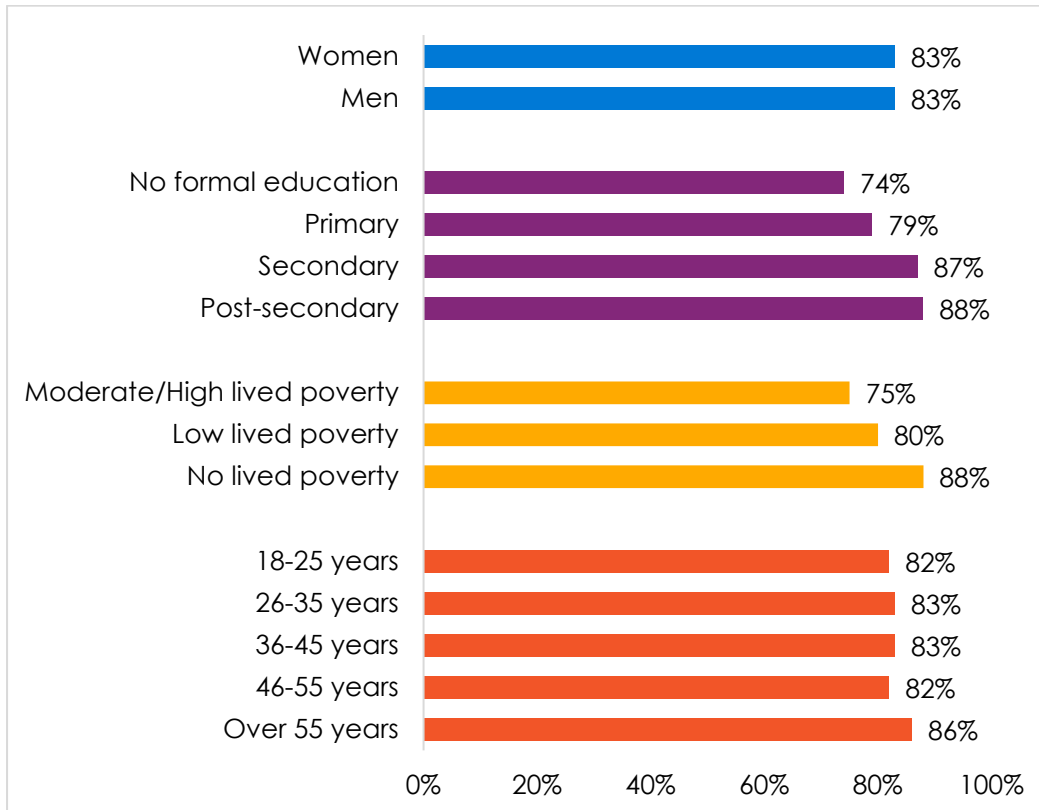
Figure 7: Will the police take GBV cases seriously? | Morocco | 2022



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?*

² 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 8: Police will take GBV cases seriously | by demographic group | Morocco
 | 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")*

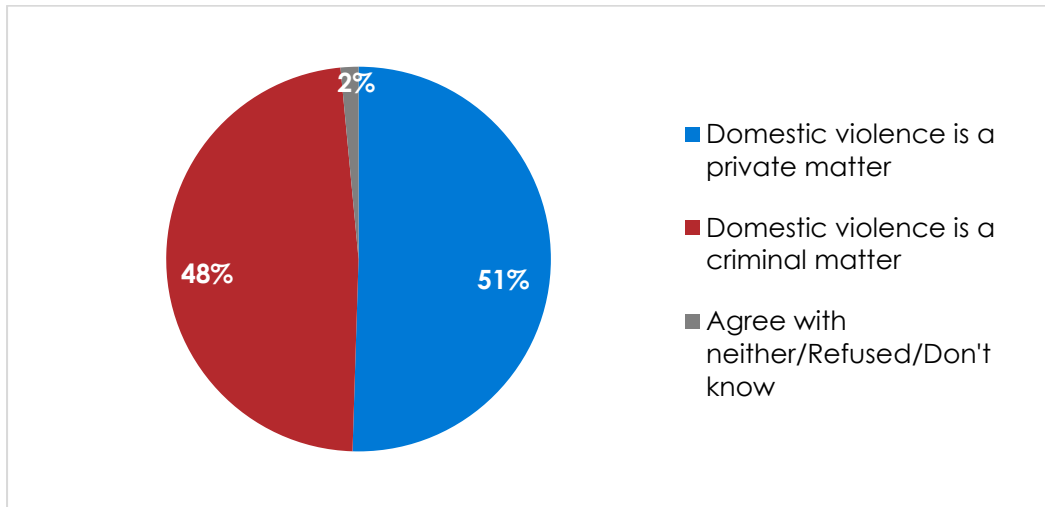
Is domestic violence a criminal or family matter?

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

About half (51%) of respondents say domestic violence is a private matter that needs to be resolved within the family. But almost as many (48%) believe that domestic violence is a criminal matter that requires the involvement of law enforcement (Figure 9).

More men than women see domestic violence as a private matter (61% vs. 40%). Support for this view is also stronger among citizens with no formal schooling (64%), those experiencing moderate/high lived poverty (63%), and rural residents (58%) than among their counterparts (Figure 10).

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



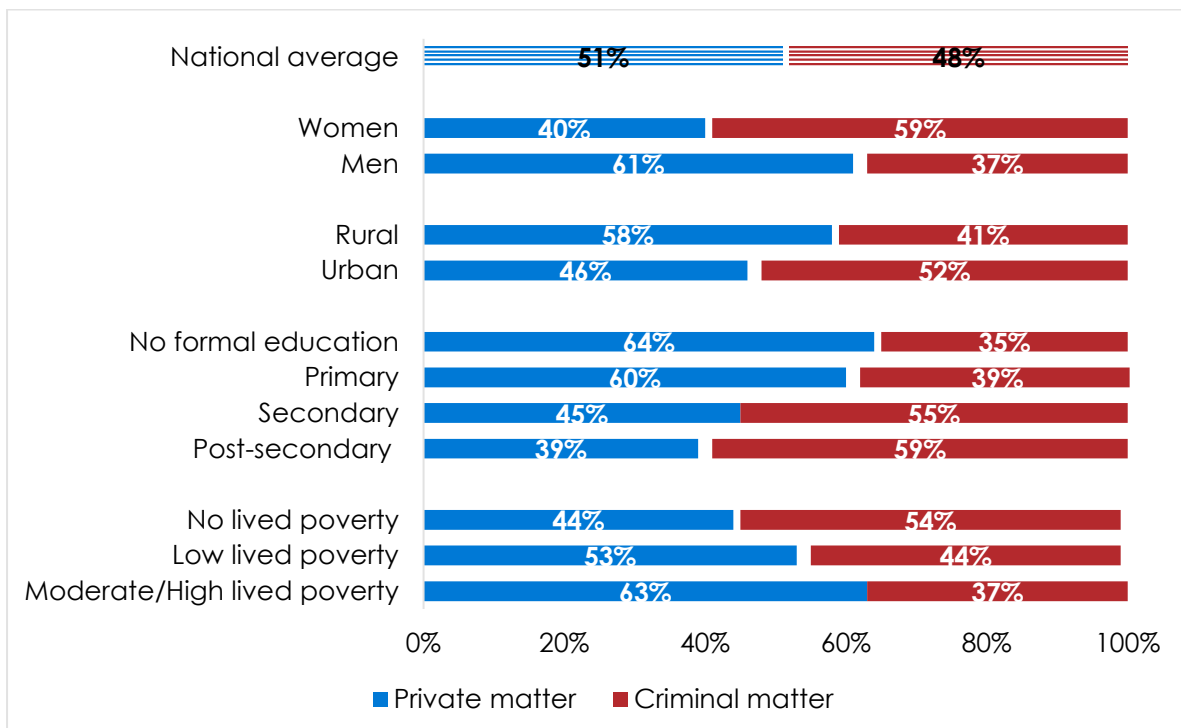
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

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 | Morocco | 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

Survey findings show that gender-based violence (GBV) is a pressing concern in Morocco, with citizens ranking it as an important women's-rights issue for the government and society to address. While many perceive GBV as uncommon, a significant proportion, especially among women, disagree.

Most believe the use of physical force by men against their spouses is unjustifiable, but many also see domestic violence as a private matter that needs to be handled within the family rather than as a criminal issue. While confidence is high that the police will take GBV cases seriously, many citizens think victims who report such crimes will suffer backlash from the community.

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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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