

Namibians support equal access to jobs but say more needs to be done to protect women and girls from discrimination and harassment

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 880 | Christiaan Keulder and Lizl Stoman

Summary

Namibia ranks eighth-best out of 146 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index 2024, making it the highest-ranked African country (World Economic Forum, 2024). It shares the No. 1 spot globally for educational attainment and health/survival and ranks 17th for economic participation and opportunity and 21st for political empowerment. But despite its impressive performance, meaningful gender gaps exist in wage equality (ranked 90th), ministerial positions (46th), and number of years with female head of state (17th).

In this election year, public attention in Namibia will be on women's participation in the country's political processes, both as candidates and as voters. After the 2014 National Assembly elections, the ruling SWAPO Party implemented a "zebra-style" party list alternating male and female candidates, which increased the number of women in the National Assembly. Only three of the 10 opposition parties have women MPs, including the largest, the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM), with women in 44% of its 16 parliamentary seats (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2020). These developments have given Namibia gender parity (50% women) in Parliament, with the fifth-highest proportion of women in legislative positions in the world, behind Rwanda, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Mexico (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024).

Although men continue to dominate the leading positions on most party lists, the SWAPO Party has elected Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah as its first female presidential candidate, paving the way for Namibia to possibly have its first woman president. She is joined in the race for State House by four women running as independent candidates – Lisbeth Kaumbi, Rosa Namises, Lydia Kandetu, and Ally Angula (Matheus, 2024).

Despite progress in the political sphere, gender disparities persist in the labour force, with women experiencing significantly lower levels of full-time employment than men (Kalimbo, 2018). The labour force participation rate for women is notably lower than for men, and women are underrepresented in the formal sector. Even controlling for educational attainment and occupation, men continue to earn considerably more than women across most industries.

According to UN Women (2021), Namibia has made great strides in developing legal frameworks to promote, enforce, and monitor gender equality. Yet only about one-third of the indicators needed to monitor the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from a gender perspective are available. As a result, the exact extent of gender disparity in Namibia remains unknown.

The latest Afrobarometer survey in Namibia shows that most citizens support gender-equal opportunity in politics and employment, though some Namibians say it is common for spouses or other family members to be unsupportive of women taking paid employment.

Minorities also report that girls in their communities frequently face discrimination, harassment, and requests for sexual favours from teachers and that women are often sexually harassed in markets, public transport, and other public spaces.

Only half of Namibians say that women and girls who complain about being discriminated against or harassed are likely to be believed, and most say the police and courts should do more to protect them against such treatment.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan 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 10 surveys were launched in January 2024. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Namibia, led by Survey Warehouse, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adult citizens of Namibia in March 2024. 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 Namibia in 1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019, and 2021.

Key findings

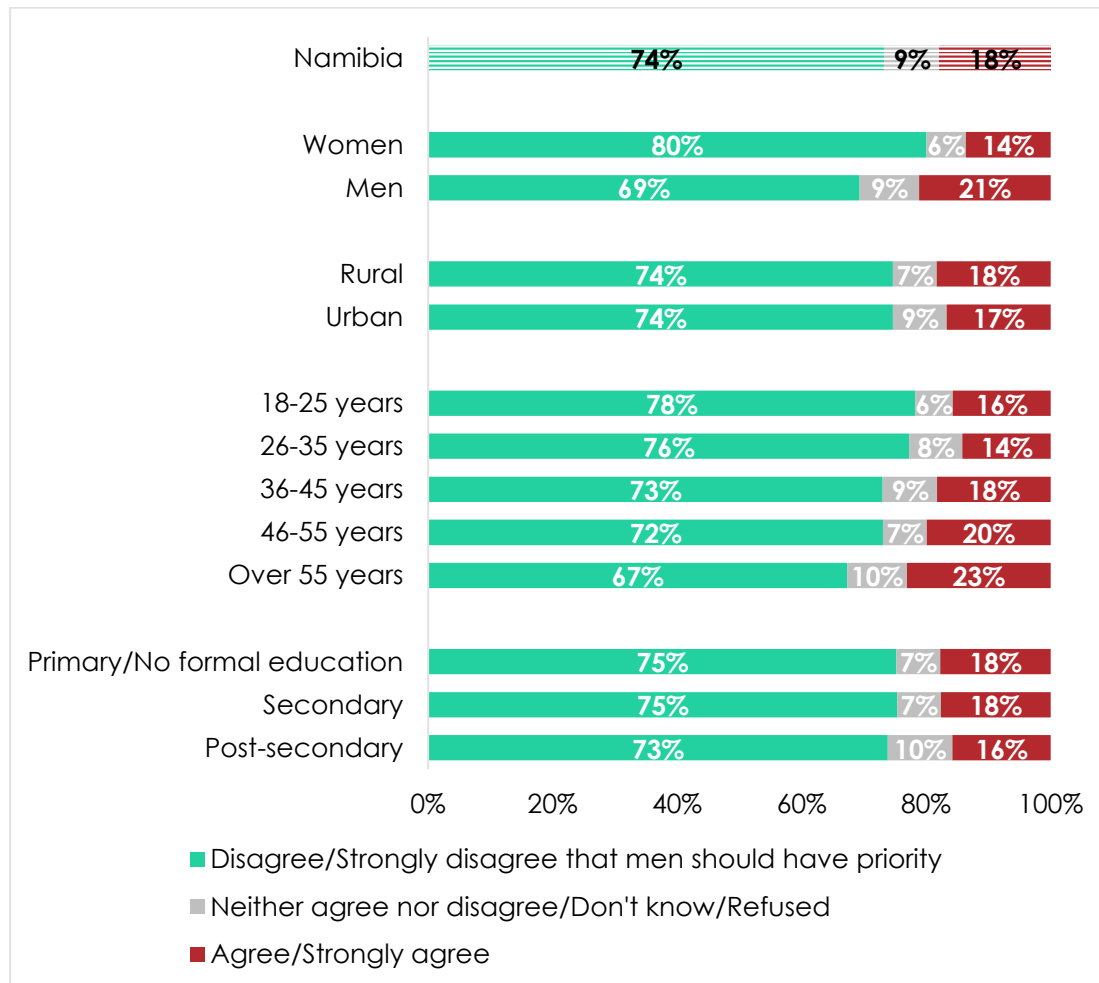
- Three-fourths (74%) of Namibians support equal access to employment opportunities for men and women, even when jobs are scarce. Men are less supportive than women of gender equality in hiring (69% vs. 80%).
- According to respondents, barriers to women's entry and advancement in the workforce include a lack of necessary education and skills (26%), some employers' preference for hiring men (16%), and a lack of remote or flexible work arrangements (12%).
- More than seven in 10 Namibians (72%) say women should have the same chance as men to be elected to public office.
- Minorities report that girls in their communities "often" or "always" face discrimination, harassment, and requests for sexual favours from teachers (26%) and are even prevented from attending school because their families prioritise the education of boys (10%).
- Three in 10 respondents (29%) say that women in their communities are "often" or "always" sexually harassed in public places such as in markets, on the streets, or in public transport.
- Around one-fifth (19%) say women in their communities are "often" or "always" prevented from taking paid employment by their spouses or other family members.
- Almost three-quarters (73%) of Namibians believe that the police and courts need to do more to protect women and girls from discrimination and harassment in schools, workplaces, and other public spaces.
- Only half (49%) of Namibians consider it likely that people in their communities will believe women or girls if they complain about being discriminated against or harassed in schools, workplaces, or other public spaces.

Women and access to jobs

Three-fourths (74%) of Namibians support equal access to jobs for both men and women, rejecting the idea that men should have more rights to employment when jobs are scarce (Figure 1).

Women are more supportive than men of equal access to employment opportunities (80% vs. 69%), while support is equally strong in urban and rural areas. Support for gender equality in hiring declines as respondents' age increases, from 78% among 18- to 25-year-olds to 67% among those over age 55.

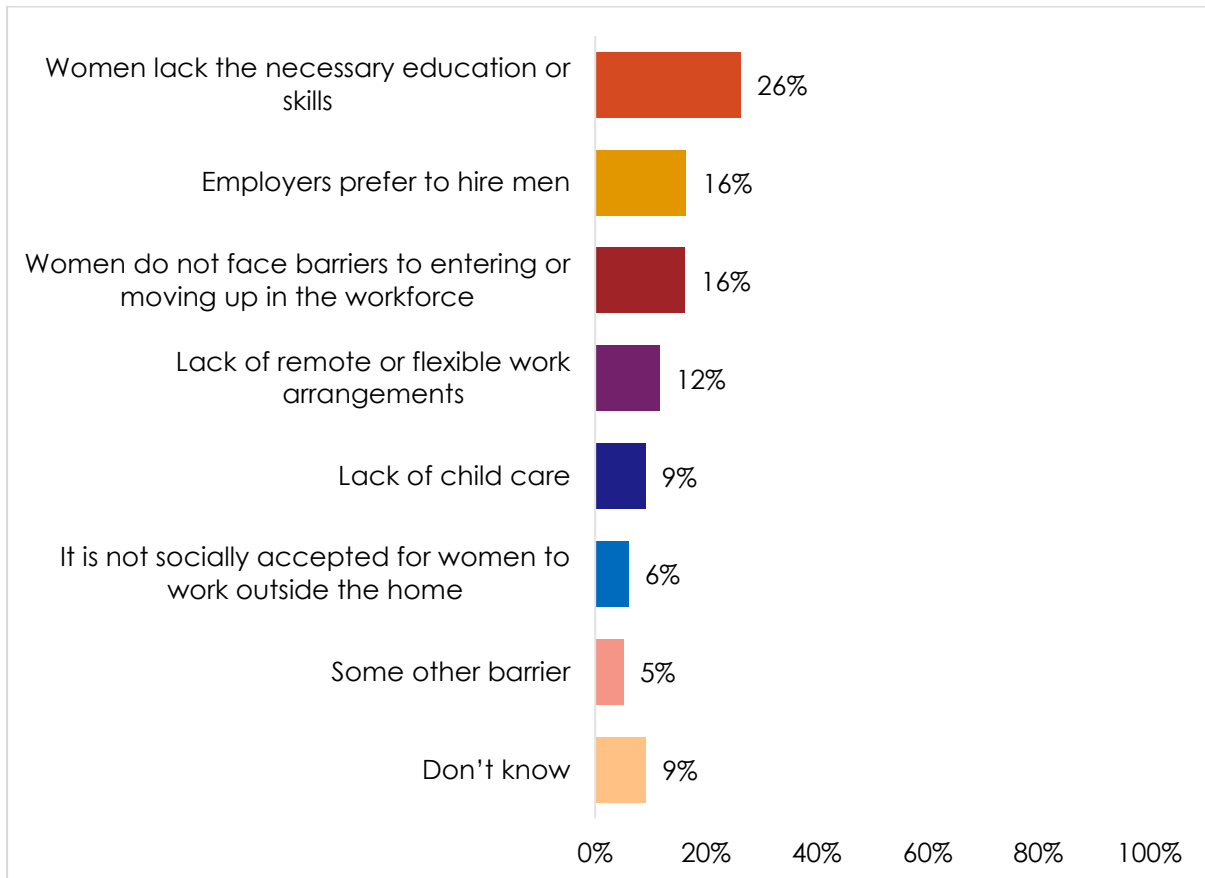
Figure 1: Should men have more right to a job than women? | Namibia | 2024



Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: When jobs are scarce, men should have more rights to a job than a woman.

Regarding barriers to women's employment, about one in four respondents (26%) say women lack the necessary education and skills to enter and advance in the workforce (Figure 2). Others think employers prefer to hire men (16%). Roughly one in 10 blame a lack of remote or flexible work arrangements (12%) or a lack of child care (9%), while 6% say it is not socially acceptable for women to work outside the home.

Figure 2: Barriers to women entering and moving up in the workforce | Namibia
 | 2024



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, which of the following is the main barrier to women entering and moving up in the workforce?*

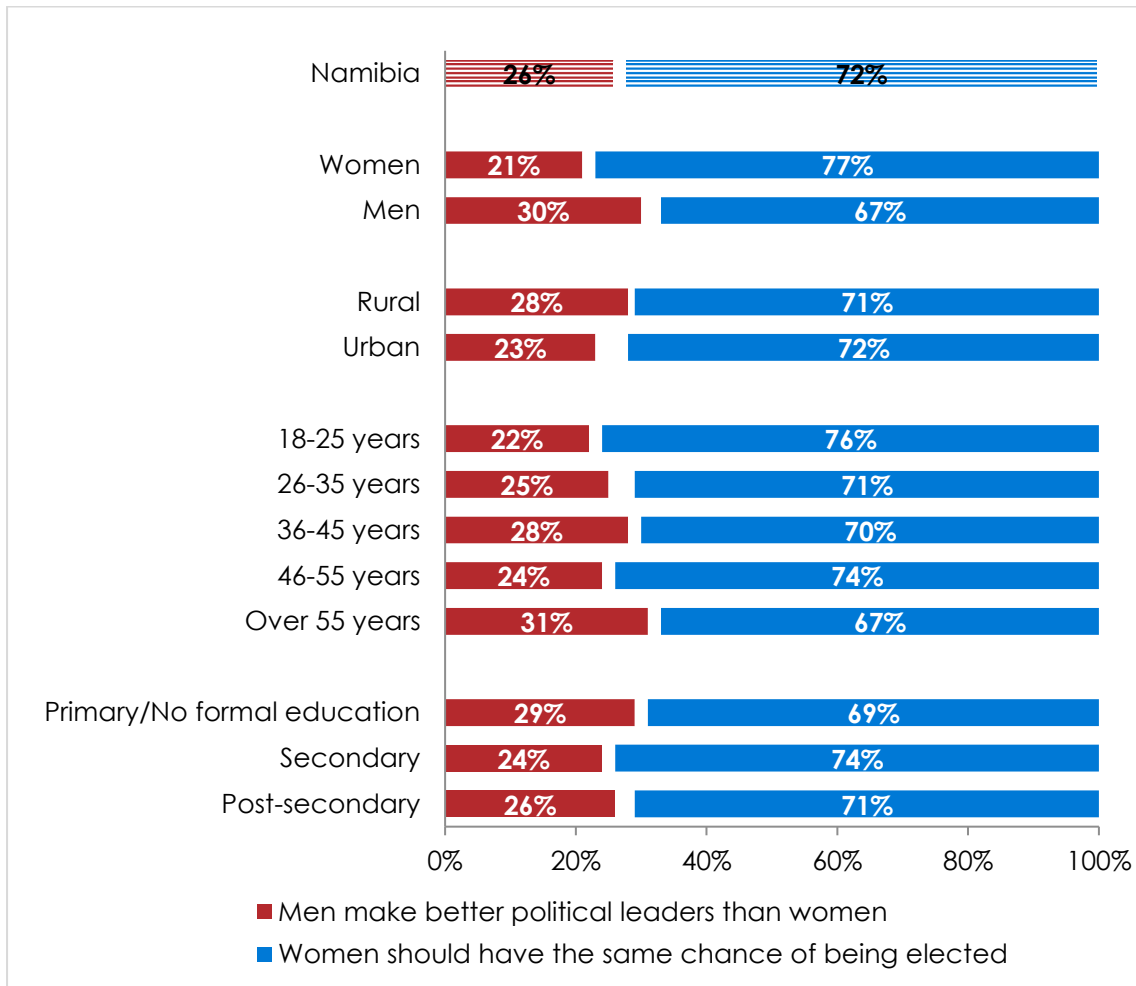
Women as political leaders

More than seven in 10 Namibians (72%) endorse gender equality in politics, while about one in four (26%) think that men make better political leaders than women and should therefore be given priority as candidates for office (Figure 3).

The perception that men are more qualified for political leadership than women is more common among men (30%) and rural residents (28%) than among women (21%) and urbanites (23%). Older respondents (31% among those over age 55) and those with primary education or less (29%) are also more likely to hold this view than their younger and more educated counterparts.

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Figure 3: Women as political leaders | Namibia | 2024



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Men make better political leaders than women, and should be elected rather than women.
 Statement 2: Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.

Gender discrimination and harassment

One in 10 Namibians (10%) say that in their communities, girls are “often” or “always” prevented from attending school because their families prioritise the education of boys, but the overwhelming majority (89%) say this “rarely” or “never” happens (Figure 4).

About one-quarter (26%) believe that girls in their communities “often” or “always” face discrimination, harassment, or requests for sexual favours from teachers.

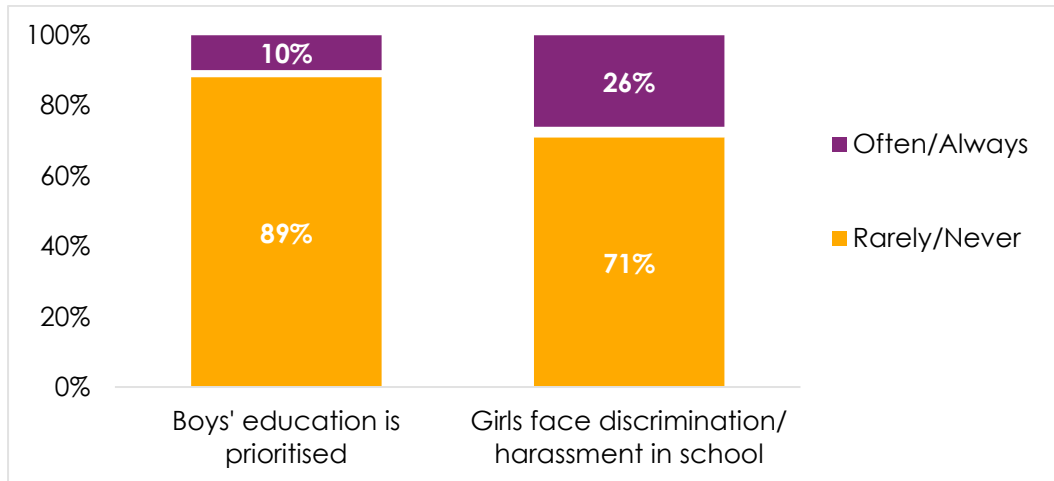
Urban residents are more likely than rural residents to say that families prioritise boys’ education (12% vs. 6%), as are respondents with primary schooling or less (14%) compared to those with more education (5%-9%) (Figure 5).

Similarly, more urban than rural residents see discrimination and harassment of girls in school as a frequent problem (33% vs. 19%). And respondents experiencing high lived poverty¹ (33%)

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 past year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Patel (2022).

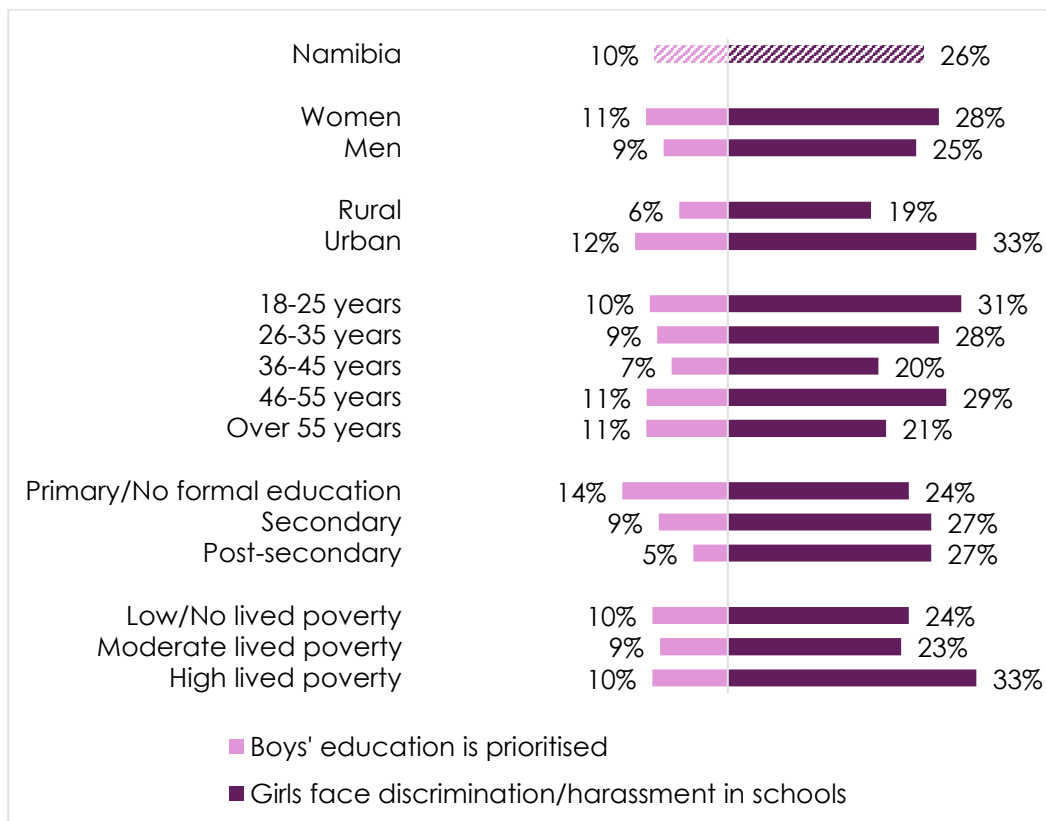
are more likely to say this happens “often” or “always” than their better-off counterparts (23%-24%).

Figure 4: Discrimination and harassment in education | Namibia | 2024



Respondents were asked: How frequently do the following things occur in your community:
 Girls are prevented from attending school because their families prioritise the education of boys?
 Girl students face discrimination, harassment, or requests for sexual favours from their teachers?

Figure 5: Discrimination and harassment in education | by demographic group | Namibia | 2024

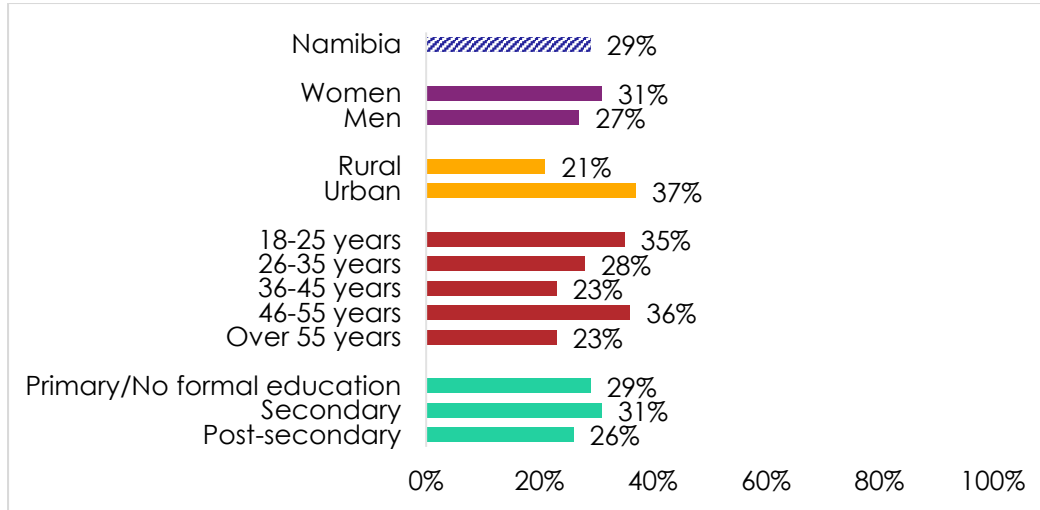


Respondents were asked: How frequently do the following things occur in your community:
 Girls are prevented from attending school because their families prioritise the education of boys?
 Girl students face discrimination, harassment, or requests for sexual favours from their teachers?
 (% who say “often” or “always”)

About three in 10 respondents (29%) say that women in their communities are “often” or “always” sexually harassed in public places such as in markets, on the streets, or in public transport (Figure 6).

Again, considerably more urbanites than rural residents report this problem (37% vs. 21%), and more women than men see sexual harassment as a frequent occurrence (31% vs. 27%).

Figure 6: Sexual harassment of women in public places | Namibia | 2024

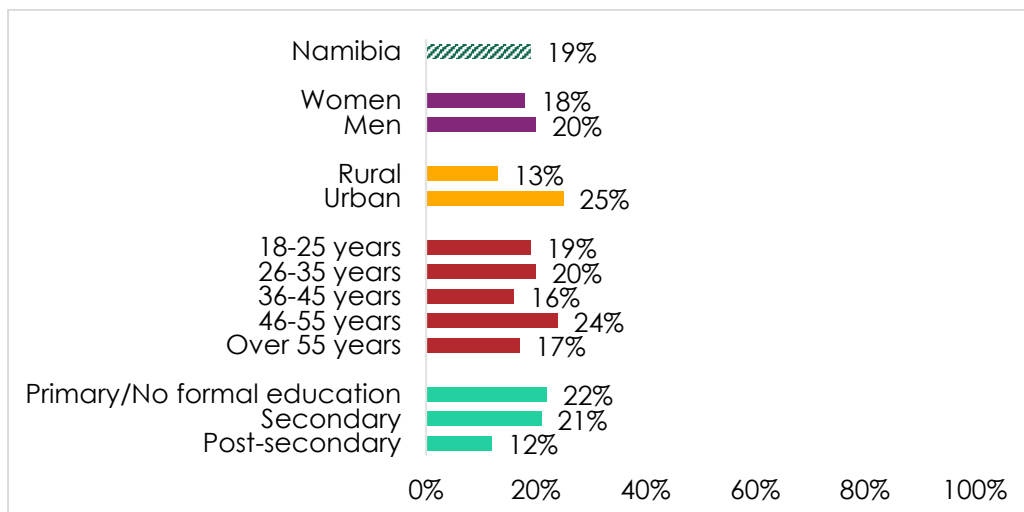


Respondents were asked: How frequently do the following things occur in your community: Women are sexually harassed in public places such as in markets, on the streets, or in public transport? (% who say “often” or “always”)

About one-fifth (19%) of Namibians say women in their communities are “often” or “always” prevented from taking paid employment by their spouses or other family members (Figure 7).

This perception is more prevalent among urbanites than among Namibians living in rural areas (25% vs. 13%). Respondents with post-secondary education (12%) are less likely to see this as a frequent occurrence than those with less schooling (21%-22%).

Figure 7: Women prevented from taking paid employment | Namibia | 2024



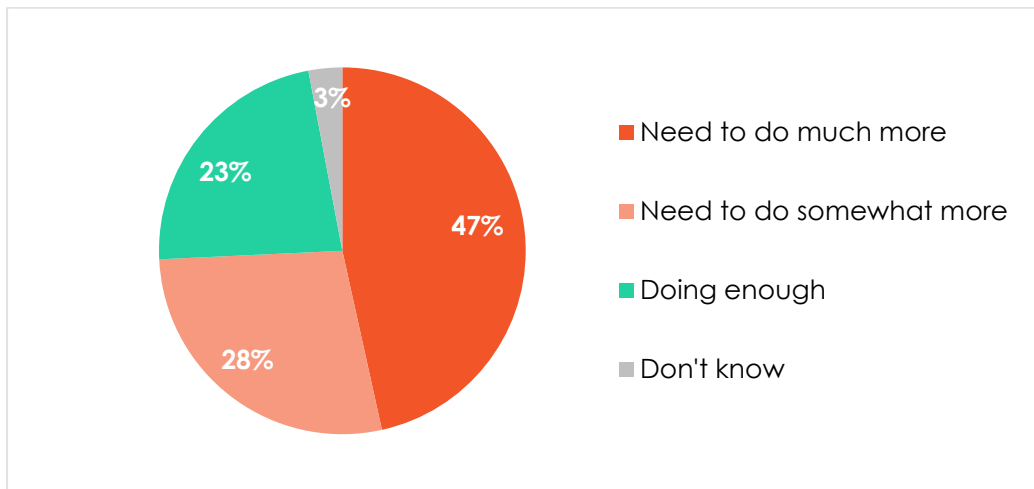
Respondents were asked: How frequently do the following things occur in your community: Women are prevented by their spouses and other family members from taking paid employment? (% who say “often” or “always”)

Protection of women and girls

Nearly three-fourths (73%) of Namibians say the police and the courts in the country need to do more to protect women and girls from discrimination and harassment in schools, workplaces, and public spaces, including almost half (46%) who say they need to be doing “much more” (Figure 8).

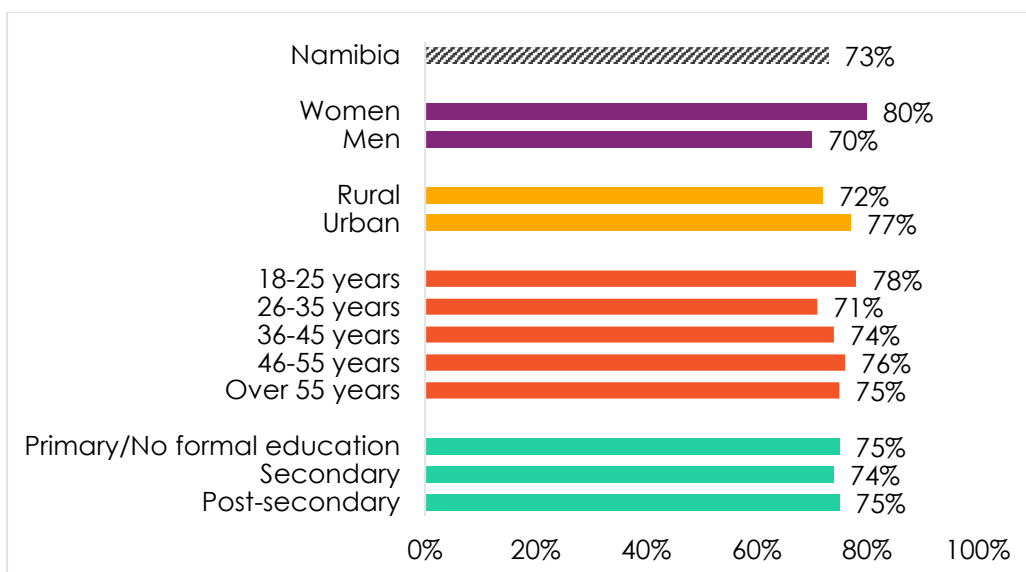
More women (80%) than men (70%) support this view (Figure 9). Citizens who live in urban areas are also more likely than rural residents to favour greater efforts to protect women and girls (77% vs. 72%).

Figure 8: Are the police and courts doing enough to protect women and girls?
 | Namibia | 2024



Respondents were asked: Do you think the police and courts in this country are doing enough to protect women and girls from discrimination and harassment in schools, workplaces, and public spaces, or do they need to do more?

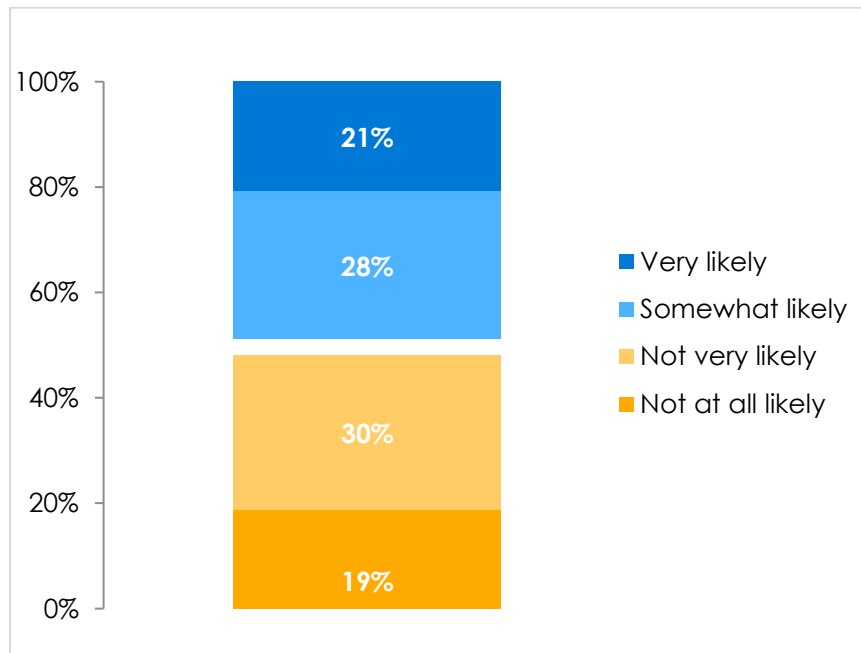
Figure 9: Police and courts need to do more to protect women and girls | Namibia
 | 2024



Respondents were asked: Do you think the police and courts in this country are doing enough to protect women and girls from discrimination and harassment in schools, workplaces, and public spaces, or do they need to do more? (% who say “somewhat more” or “much more”)

Moreover, only about half (49%) of Namibians say it is “somewhat likely” (28%) or “very likely” (21%) in their communities that people will believe women or girls if they complain about being discriminated against or harassed in schools, workplaces, or other public spaces (Figure 10). About the same proportion consider it “not very likely” (30%) or “not at all likely” (19%) that victims will be believed, a factor that may well discourage reporting of such treatment.

Figure 10: Will people believe women and girls if they complain about discrimination or harassment? | Namibia | 2024



Respondents were asked: *In your community, how likely is it that people will believe women or girls if they complain about being discriminated against or harassed in schools, workplaces, or other public spaces?*

Conclusion

The latest Afrobarometer survey findings indicate strong support for gender equality in employment, especially among women and younger Namibians. Barriers persist, however, as respondents cite a lack of appropriate education and skills, some employers' preference for hiring men, and the absence of flexible work arrangements as obstacles for women in the workforce, in addition to family pressures that some citizens say prevent women from taking paid employment.

While a majority of Namibians endorse gender fairness in politics, political leadership remains contentious, with a quarter of citizens believing that men make better leaders and should be given priority at the ballot box. This view is more prevalent among men and in rural areas.

Girls' education is a critical concern. A small but notable percentage of Namibians report that girls are often prevented from attending school due to a familial preference for educating boys. Furthermore, there is a significant concern regarding the safety and treatment of girls in schools, with many respondents highlighting frequent discrimination, harassment, and demands for sexual favours by teachers, especially in urban areas.

The public sphere also poses risks for women, with nearly a third of respondents indicating that women in their communities are often sexually harassed in markets, on the streets, in public transport, and in other public spaces.

The survey reveals a widespread perception that the police and courts need to enhance their efforts to protect women and girls from discrimination and harassment. But this call goes out to all Namibians: Only half of citizens say women and girls are likely to be believed if they report discrimination or harassment, a critical factor in addressing such behaviour.

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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, the University of Cape Town, and the University of Malawi provide technical support to the network.

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