DEFACTO CONSULTANCY

# Research on the Attitudes and Perceptions of Violence Against Women and Girls in Families and Intimate Relationships

2025

OSCE Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Mission to Montenegro

Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography

Woman's Safe House

# Content



**DeFacto Consultancy**
**Piperska bb., Zain Park A17, Podgorica/Montenegro**
**www.defacto.me**

# Key findings

## Citizens recognize violence, but still tolerate it 1

The majority of citizens of Montenegro recognize violence against women as a serious social problem, but part of the population still views it as a private family matter or justifies it under certain circumstances. Clear gender differences exist in perception — women see violence as much more widespread and serious than men do.

## Violence is most often understood as physical 2

Physical violence is still the most commonly recognized form of violence, while psychological, economic, sexual, and digital violence are less noticed. This confirms the notion that the public understands visible forms of violence better, while hidden forms remain insufficiently recognized and therefore often unaddressed.

## Patriarchal patterns and limited understanding of violence 3

Although most citizens condemn physical violence against women, deeply rooted gender stereotypes and the tendency to shift responsibility onto the victim show that zero tolerance for violence has not yet been achieved.

## The family as the highest risk environment 4

Three-quarters of respondents state that, in their view, violence most often occurs within the family, indicating that it happens precisely in the space that should be the safest for women.

## Reactions of the environment – willingness but also passivity 5

More than half of those who know of a case of violence claim to have referred the victim to institutions, while a third rely on informal support networks. However, a significant number do not react appropriately or advise silence, indicating the presence of passivity and social tolerance toward violence.

## Although highly prevalent, violence against women remains hidden 6

Every fifth woman in this research reports having experienced some form of violence, which, given the methodological limitations, suggests that the real percentage is significantly higher. More than half of those who experienced violence say they did not seek help from anyone.

## Institutions are the first choice, but trust in them is low 7

Respondents have so-called “functional trust” in institutions — they believe violence should be reported to them because it is the “right thing to do,” not because they trust the system to act effectively.

## Fear and economic dependence are the biggest barriers to reporting violence 8

The most commonly recognized barriers to reporting violence are fear of losing children, family breakdown, economic dependence, and shame. Traditional norms and distrust in institutions further complicate women’s decision to seek help.

## Public awareness 9

Most citizens know where to report violence, but differences exist by education level and personal experience. Women who have experienced violence and highly educated respondents show a higher level of awareness about protection mechanisms than others.

## Trust in institutions and the NGO sector 10

Although institutions still play a central role in the perception of victim protection, trust in them remains limited. Citizens also recognize the role of non-governmental organizations, safe houses, and SOS hotlines, confirming the importance of a partnership approach between the state and the civil sector.

## Youth and violence 11

Young people in Montenegro show a relatively high level of awareness about the existence and seriousness of violence against women, but also some uncertainty about how to respond. Although they clearly condemn violence, many are unsure whom to turn to if they witness or notice it, indicating insufficient knowledge of existing protection and support mechanisms. At the same time, a significant number of respondents believe that penalties for violence against women are too mild or non-existent, which further reinforces the perception of institutional ineffectiveness in addressing this issue.

# Introduction

**Violence against women and girls** is one of the most widespread and severe violations of human rights in modern society. At the same time, it represents one of the key challenges on the path toward achieving gender equality and building a just and inclusive society. Regardless of borders, culture, or social system, violence against women remains a universal problem that endangers the safety, dignity, and freedom of women and girls, leaving deep and long-term consequences for families, communities, and society as a whole. According to data from the United Nations and the World Health Organization, violence against women and girls has reached the proportions of a global pandemic. It is estimated that nearly one in three women over the age of 15 has experienced physical and/or sexual violence in her lifetime, either by an intimate partner or another person.[1]

Violence against women stems from long-standing inequality between women and men and from the unequal distribution of social, political, and economic power in favour of men. As stated in the preamble of the Istanbul Convention, violence against women is "a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to the domination of men over women and discrimination against women, preventing their full advancement."[2] Violence against women and girls represents one of the most striking indicators of inequality and one of the gravest violations of human rights in the modern era. It is a form of discrimination that causes — or has the potential to cause — physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm to women.[3] Women who have survived violence face a range of long-term consequences that go far beyond the immediate act itself. In addition to physical injuries, they often develop anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder, which affect their daily functioning, ability to work, and family relationships. Many experience social isolation — either because they are stigmatized by their surroundings or because they withdraw from public and professional life. Violence also has serious health consequences, including an increased risk of chronic illnesses, unintended pregnancies, complications in reproductive health, sexually transmitted infections, and HIV. These effects are further compounded by the lack of adequate institutional support, ineffective protection, and victims' limited trust in the system — leaving many women trapped in a cycle of violence, fear, and silence.

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[1] https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-ending-violence-against-women#83915 World Health Organization. *Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018*. Geneva: WHO; 2021. ISBN 978 92 4 002225 6. Available at: https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240022256

[2] Council of Europe (2011). Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). Istanbul, 11 May 2011. Council of Europe Treaty Series – No. 210. Available at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/210

[3] European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). *Combating violence against women.* Vilnius: EIGE; 2023. Available at: https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence

Despite the existence of well-developed international and national legislative and strategic frameworks — including the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention and numerous national strategies for the prevention of violence[4] — this phenomenon remains deeply rooted in social norms and gender stereotypes.

Accurately identifying this phenomenon as ***violence against women and girls***, rather than merely a "marital problem" or a disagreement between partners, is essential because it removes it from the private sphere and clearly defines it as a public issue. In doing so, it creates space for the development of policies, programs, and services specifically aimed at protecting victims and responding to their real needs.

Violence against women and girls manifests in various forms — physical, psychological, economic, sexual, and digital — and often remains invisible and unreported due to a lack of recognition that it is violence, stigma, fear, or distrust in institutions. In this context, understanding citizens' perceptions of violence against women represents an important first step toward developing effective policies for prevention, protection, and victim support. Public attitudes directly influence how violence is recognized, reported, and sanctioned, as well as how supported and encouraged victims feel to seek help.

This report aims to provide insight into the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of citizens of Montenegro regarding violence against women and girls, particularly within family and intimate relationships. Through the analysis of public opinion survey results, the report explores how violence is perceived and to what extent it is justified, which social and cultural norms underpin it, and how much citizens trust institutions and protection mechanisms. In addition, the report seeks to identify the main barriers to reporting violence, factors influencing bystander reactions, and differences in perception among various social groups. The findings are intended to contribute to the creation of more effective public policies, prevention programs, and support systems for victims of violence in Montenegro.

The data presented in this report were collected through a survey conducted using the CAPI method (Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing), meaning interviews were carried out face-to-face with the use of computers or tablets for recording responses. The sample, designed to be representative of the Montenegrin population, included 1,008 respondents. The research was conducted between August 18th and September 1st, 2025.

[4] In 2025, Montenegro adopted the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2026–2029, which sets as its sixth operational goal the reduction of the prevalence of gender-based violence against women by the end of 2029, while simultaneously ensuring full protection and support for victims of violence. The strategy is available at the following link: https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/7d1807f5-b4b2-4e7d-9391-546701d7eb2b

The report is structured to address four key research questions:

- How familiar are citizens with the concept of violence against women and girls, which forms of violence do they most commonly associate with this term, in what contexts do they recognize it, and from which value framework do their perceptions and attitudes toward violence arise? – ***recognition of and attitudes towards violence?***
- How do citizens assess the frequency, prevalence, and different forms of manifestation of violence against women? – ***perception of the prevalence of violence?***
- To what extent do citizens recognise violence in their surroundings, and how many of them have personal experience with it – ***experience with violence?***
- How do citizens view responsibility for violence, to whom do they attribute it, to what extent do they justify or reject violence, how much do they trust institutions, and what obstacles do they recognise when it comes to reporting or leaving abusive relationships – ***societal responses to violence?***

The report presents respondents' answers to all the questions asked, with a detailed breakdown of results by gender, age group, region, level of education, household income, and prior experience with violence – wherever the differences were found to be statistically significant.

The analysis of these data provides insight not only into general trends but also into how perceptions and experiences differ among various social groups, which is crucial for understanding the broader picture of violence against women.

This research offers a comprehensive overview of the level of awareness, attitudes, and perceptions of Montenegrin citizens regarding violence against women, its forms, prevalence, and social responses. In doing so, it establishes a solid analytical foundation for a deeper understanding of this complex phenomenon and for identifying key areas where the system of protection, support, and prevention needs to be further strengthened.

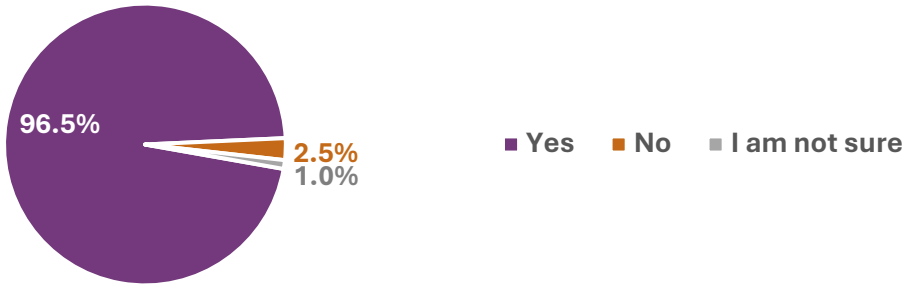
# Recognition and attitudes towards violence against women and girls

> „The power to name is the power to give voice to a social phenomenon or experience - and to have it legitimated.“ (Naranch, 1997)

The naming of social phenomena plays a crucial role in how they are understood and addressed. As Laurie Naranch points out, “the power to name is the power to give voice to a social phenomenon or experience – and to have it legitimated.” The very act of recognising and naming violence makes it *visible*, allowing what was once denied, minimised, or considered a “private matter” to be acknowledged as a social and political issue. Giving the correct name to the phenomenon of violence against women is essential because — as Naranch notes — the power to name is the power to define how a problem is understood, and thus how it is solved.[5] The use of the term “violence against women” differs from seemingly neutral expressions such as “domestic” or “marital violence”, as it explicitly highlights the gendered nature of the phenomenon and the fact that women and girls are disproportionately more often victims of violence. This, in turn, underscores the structural dimension of gender inequality that enables and sustains it.[6] For these reasons, the first part of the research focuses on how citizens of Montenegro understand, recognise, and define the concept of violence against women and girls — because the way society names violence determines the boundaries of its visibility, as well as the possibilities for its elimination.

Almost all respondents included in the survey have heard of the term violence against women and girls (96.5%). There are no statistically significant differences in this regard by gender, age, or household income. Minor differences exist by region — respondents from the central part of the country are more likely to have heard the term (98.4%) compared to those from the south (95.8%) or the north (93.8%).

*Graph 1 Have you previously heard the term "violence against women and girls"?*



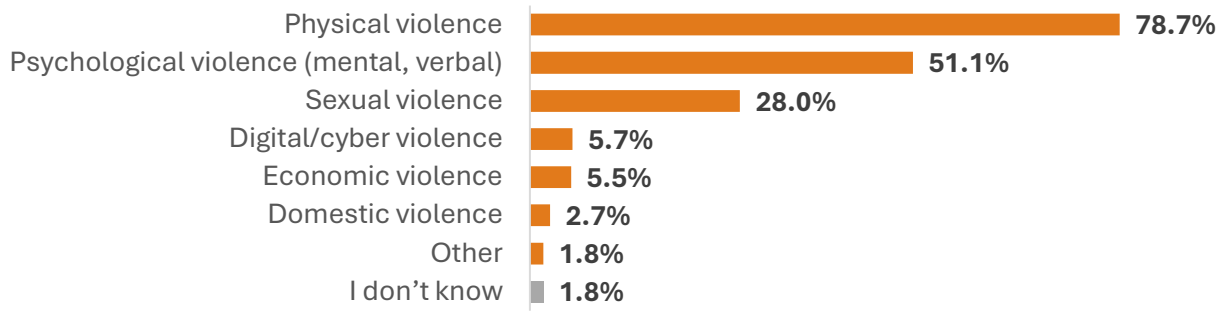

[5] Laurie Naranch, “Naming and Framing the Issues: Demanding Full Citizenship for Women,” in Feminists Negotiate the State: The Politics of Domestic Violence, edited by Cynthia R. Daniels (1997), pages 21-34.
[6] Nixon, K. (2007). *The Power to Name: Conceptualizing Domestic Violence as “Violence Against Women”*. Currents: New Scholarship in the Human Services, 6 (1). Available at: https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/currents/article/view/15915

This shows that the term is, at least nominally, widely present and recognised in public discourse. However, the question remains as to what citizens actually understand by this term, as there may be significant differences in interpretation. To explore this, respondents were asked an open-ended question in which they could, in their own words, explain what the expression "violence against women and girls" means to them. This question format was chosen to avoid leading or suggesting answers and to obtain the most authentic and spontaneous views of the respondents. The results show that the majority of respondents primarily associate the term violence against women with physical violence — as many as 78.7% of citizens spontaneously mentioned this dimension. Psychological violence is recognised by every second person (51.1%), while less than a third (28%) identify sexual violence. Other forms of violence against women, such as digital (5.7%), economic (5.5%), and domestic violence (2.7%), are mentioned far less frequently. This distribution of responses indicates that public perception of violence against women remains narrow and predominantly limited to physical violence, while more subtle and structural forms — economic, digital, and psychological — remain insufficiently recognised.

**The majority of citizens (78.7%) associate the concept of violence against women exclusively with physical violence. Every second person (51.1%) recognises psychological violence, while less than a third (28%) mention sexual violence. Other forms — digital, economic, and domestic — are recognised far less frequently.)**

Statistically significant differences in the understanding of violence between men and women exist only in relation to economic violence. Specifically, this form of violence is recognised by 7.3% of women and 3.7% of men. This finding suggests that women have a more developed awareness of the subtler forms of control and dependence, likely due to personal or indirect experience, whereas men are less likely to perceive economic violence as a problem — a view that can be linked to traditional gender norms which do not associate family economic relations with violence.

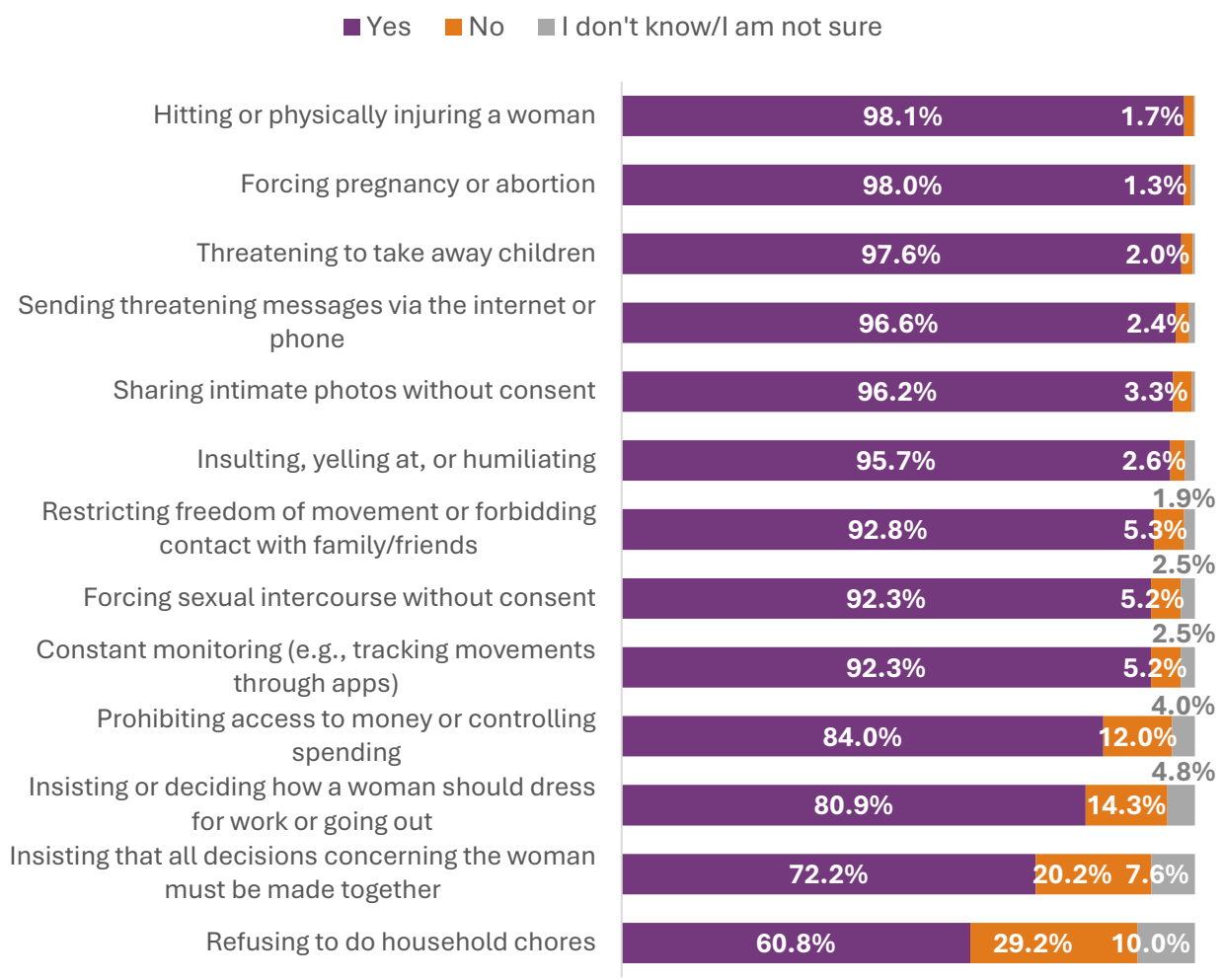
*Graph 2 When you hear the term violence against women and girls, what types of violence come to mind? List all types of violence that come to mind.*



After the open-ended question, respondents were also asked a “closed” question with a predefined list of behaviours, where they were instructed to mark which of these they considered to be violence against women. Since each of the listed behaviours represents a form of violence, it is particularly important to analyse which ones respondents did not recognise as such.

The data shown in the chart below indicate that behaviours without a physical manifestation are less often perceived as violence. One in five respondents does not recognise violence in situations where all decisions concerning a woman are made jointly, which in fact conceals a form of control and restriction of autonomy. More than one in ten respondents see no problem in determining how a woman should dress, nor in prohibiting access to money or controlling her spending. These findings clearly indicate that public awareness of non-physical forms of violence remains limited. While physical and explicit forms of aggression are widely accepted as violence, behaviours involving control, restriction of autonomy, and economic dependence are often normalised and perceived as part of “*family dynamics*”.

*Graph 3 Which of the following behaviours would you consider violence against women?*



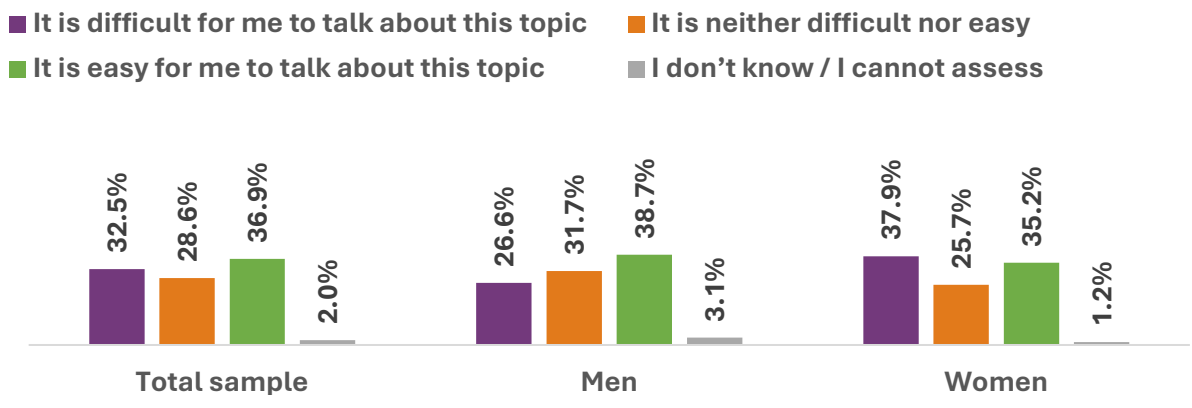
Men are less likely than women to recognise non-physical behaviours as forms of violence, which points to gender differences in understanding the boundaries of acceptable behaviour within intimate relationships. These patterns suggest the existence of deeply rooted social norms that downplay the seriousness of control and restriction directed at women. The most pronounced gap in perception is observed regarding the refusal to perform household chores — a third of men (33.4%) believe this is not a form of violence, compared to a quarter of women (25.3%). Differences are also evident when it comes to insisting on or determining how a woman should dress for work or social occasions (18.4% of men and 10.4% of women do not consider this violence), denying access to money or controlling spending (15.7% of men and 8.5% of women), restricting freedom of movement or forbidding contact with family (6.3% of men and 4.1% of women), constant monitoring (7.4% of men and 3.3% of women), and threatening to take away children (3.3% of men and 0.8% of women).

These findings show that men more often normalise patterns of behaviour that restrict women's autonomy, reflecting the enduring influence of patriarchal values and traditional gender roles in defining intimate relationships. Although the lack of recognition of violence is more pronounced among men, the results also reveal its presence among women, particularly in relation to traditional gender roles and financial dependence, indicating a deep internalisation of gender stereotypes within the broader social context.

The existence of stigma surrounding the topic of violence against women is confirmed by the fact that almost one-third of respondents find it very or somewhat difficult to talk about this issue. Women are slightly more likely than men to express discomfort when discussing violence against women (37.9% compared to 26.6%), which may be linked to personal experiences, empathy, or greater sensitivity to the topic.

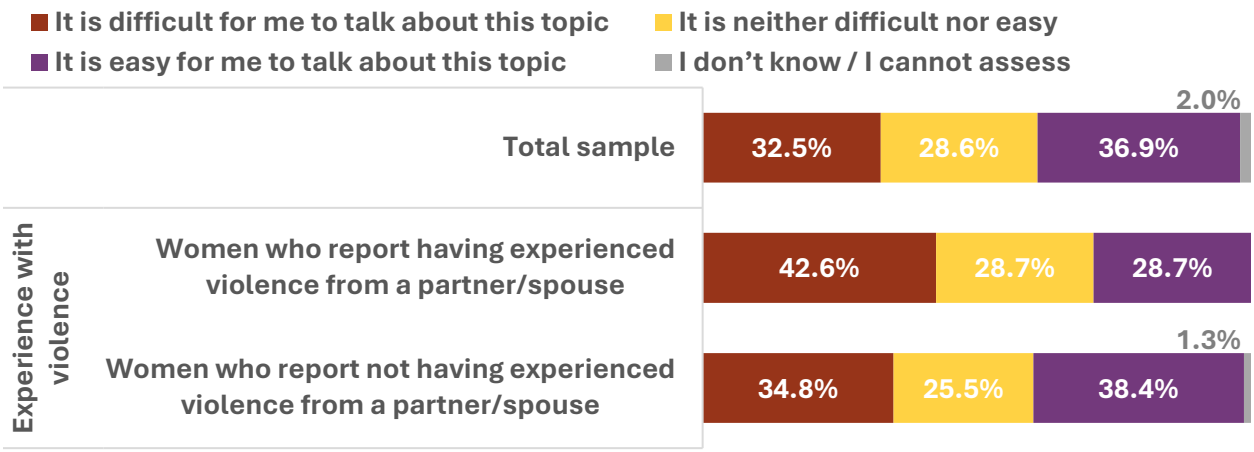
Conversely, men more often report a neutral stance — saying it is "neither difficult nor easy" to talk about violence (31.7% compared to 25.7%) — which may indicate indifference, emotional distance, or lower engagement with the issue. In addition, a higher percentage of men than women say it is easy for them to talk about violence (38.7% compared to 35.2%).

*Graph 4 On a scale from 1 to 5, how easy is it for you to talk about the topic of violence against women?*



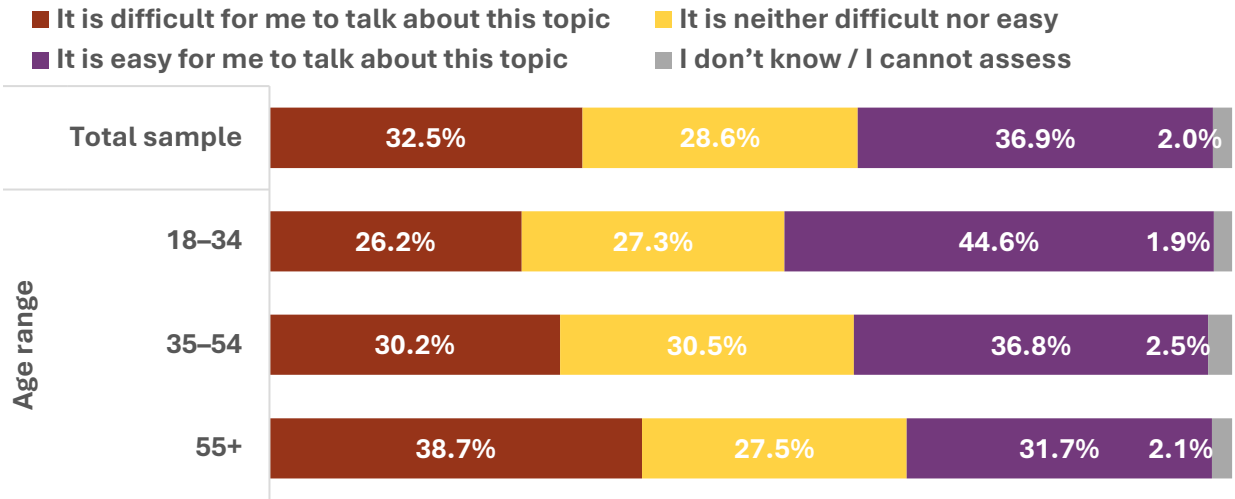
A particularly important finding relates to women who have themselves experienced violence — a significantly higher proportion of them find it difficult to talk about the topic (42.6%), while only 28.7% say it is easy for them to do so. In contrast, among women who have not had personal experience of violence, 38.4% report that it is easy to talk about it. This indicates that personal experience of violence continues to carry a strong sense of discomfort, stigma, and emotional burden.

*Graph 5 How easy is it for you to talk about the topic of violence against women? According to personal experience with violence*

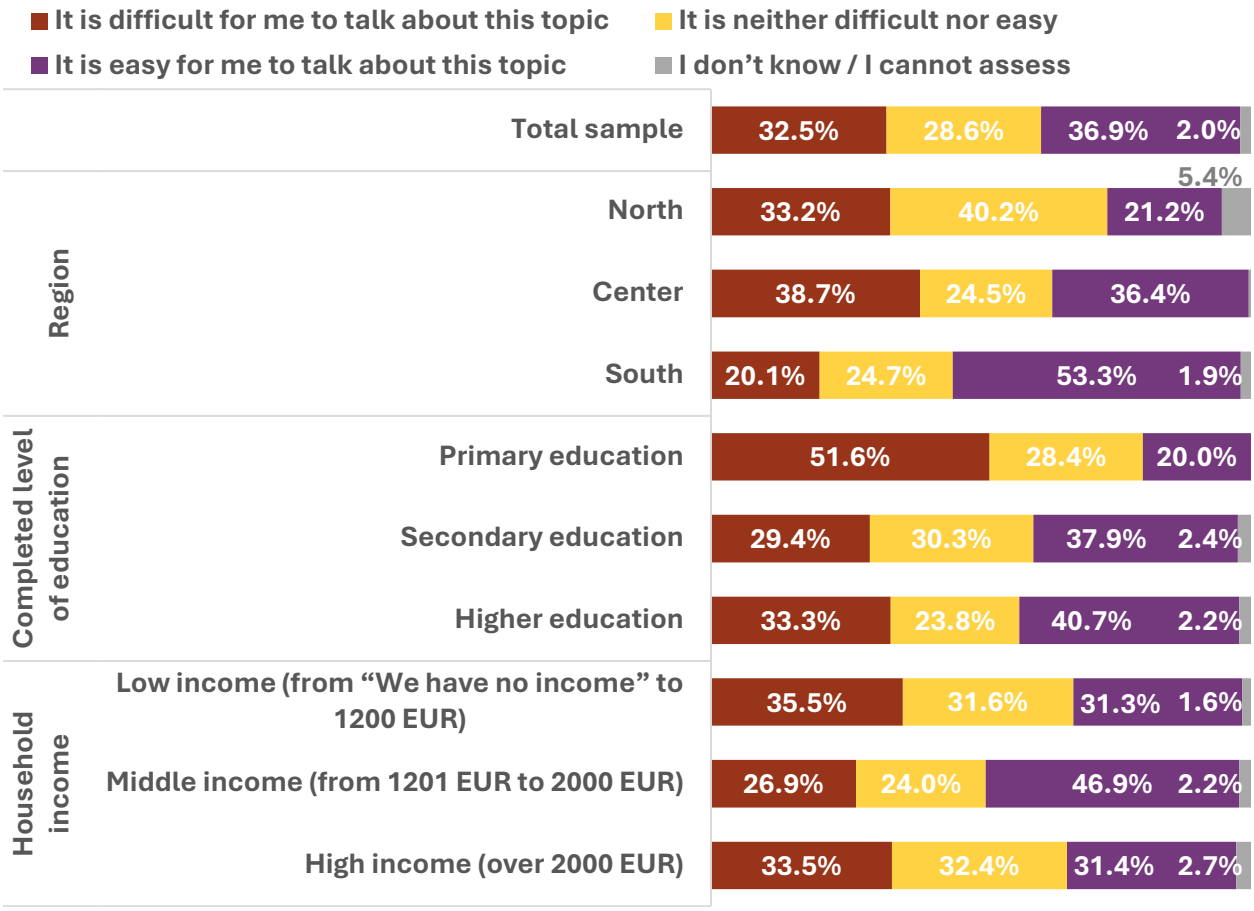



Analysis by group shows that the willingness to discuss violence against women is linked to age, region, education, and income. The youngest respondents (18–34) are the most open to this topic, while the oldest (55+) most often express discomfort. Regionally, the south of the country shows the greatest openness. Education and income also play a role: respondents with lower education and income levels are more likely to find this topic difficult to talk about.

*Graph 6 How easy is it for you to talk about the topic of violence against women? According to age range*



*Graph 7 How easy is it for you to talk about the topic of violence against women? By region, level of education, and household income*



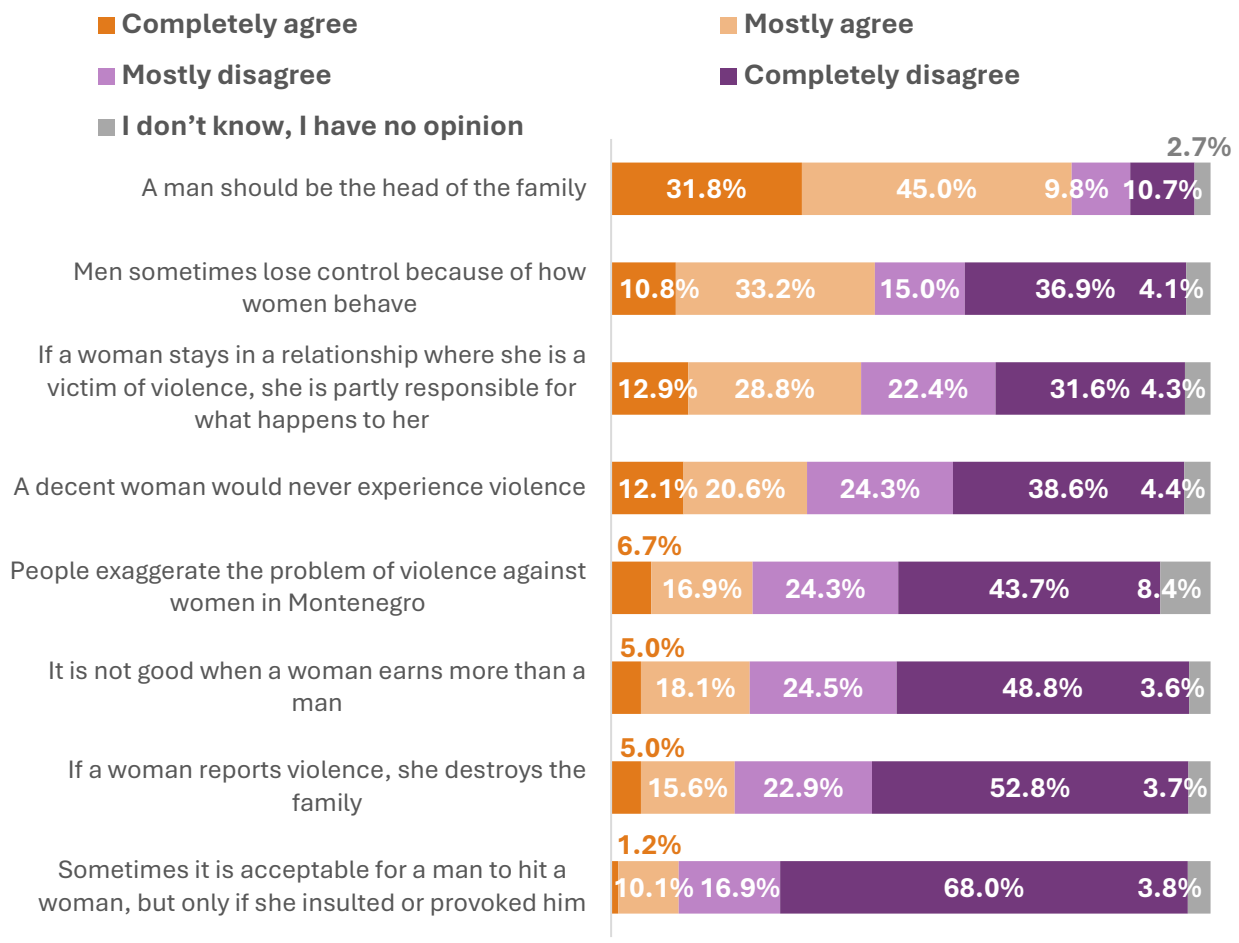

Understanding and attitudes toward violence cannot be viewed separately from the broader social context in which they are formed. They are deeply rooted in values and norms stemming from a patriarchal culture, in which women are often perceived as less valuable or subordinate. The findings of this research confirm that such a culture remains strongly present in Montenegro. Almost three-quarters of respondents (76.8%) agree with the statement that "a man should be the head of the family," indicating a deeply ingrained perception of family hierarchy and patterns that can normalise unequal power relations between men and women — and thus increase tolerance towards violence.

**"A man should be the head of the family" – 76.8% of respondents agree**

A similar pattern is evident in attitudes that normalise male violence or shift responsibility onto women. As many as 44% of respondents to some extent justify men who "lose control because of women's behaviour," while more than 40% believe that a woman is at least partially responsible if she remains in a relationship in which she suffers violence. These results point to an alarmingly high level of internalisation of gender stereotypes and victim-blaming, which represents a serious obstacle to both the prevention and reporting of violence.

The majority of citizens reject extreme forms of justification for violence — as many as 68% of respondents "completely disagree" with the statement that it is sometimes acceptable for a man to hit a woman, while only 11% express any level of agreement with it. Nevertheless, the very fact that one in ten citizens still partly justifies such behaviour indicates that full zero tolerance for violence has not yet been achieved. The majority of respondents do not share the view that "*the problem of violence against women in Montenegro is exaggerated*" — as many as 68% disagree with this statement, indicating a certain level of awareness of the seriousness of the issue. On the other hand, gender stereotypes remain pronounced in economic and family matters: 23% of respondents disapprove of a woman earning more than a man, while 20% believe that reporting violence "destroys the family" — highlighting a strong moral dilemma between protecting the victim and preserving the family unit. This data reveals that traditional and patriarchal attitudes, which justify male dominance and place responsibility for violence on women, remain strongly present in Montenegro. Such patterns pose a profound barrier to the prevention and reporting of violence, as they normalise inequality and reinforce social tolerance of violence against women.

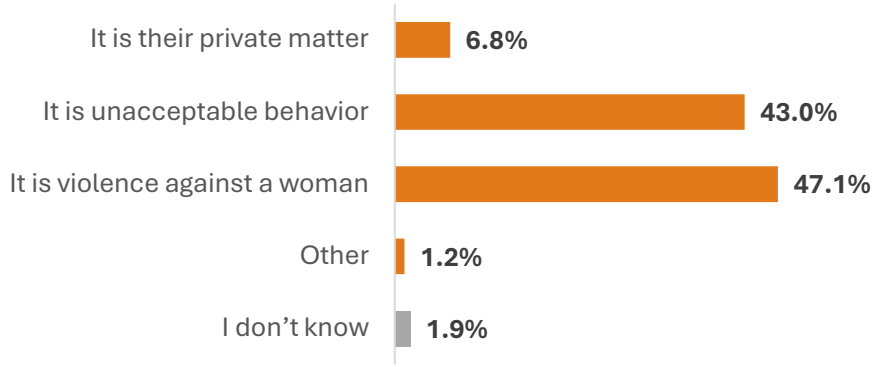
*Graph 8 To what extent do you agree with the following statements:*



In addition to examining values, respondents were presented with a hypothetical scenario that, judging by anecdotal evidence, unfortunately occurs quite often. They were asked to imagine a situation in which a man shouts at and threatens his partner in public, and to describe how they would characterise this behaviour. Almost half of respondents (47.1%) clearly recognise such behaviour as violence against a woman, which represents an important indicator of growing awareness of different forms of violence, not just physical. An additional 43% of respondents describe the situation as unacceptable behaviour, which, although it carries moral condemnation, means that a significant portion of citizens still do not equate such forms of behaviour with the concept of violence itself, but rather see them as socially inappropriate, though not necessarily violent. This perspective points to a gradual but still insufficient shift in the understanding of violence, where verbal, psychological, or economic abuse is not yet fully recognised as a serious form of harm requiring an institutional response.

A total of 6.8% of respondents consider it to be "a private matter," reflecting the lingering influence of patriarchal views that see intimate relationships as beyond the scope of social or institutional intervention. Although this represents a minority, it remains a significant finding, as it indicates that part of the population still does not perceive violence against women as a social problem, but rather as a private domestic issue.

*Graph 9 Imagine a man shouting at and threatening his partner in public. How would you describe this situation?*

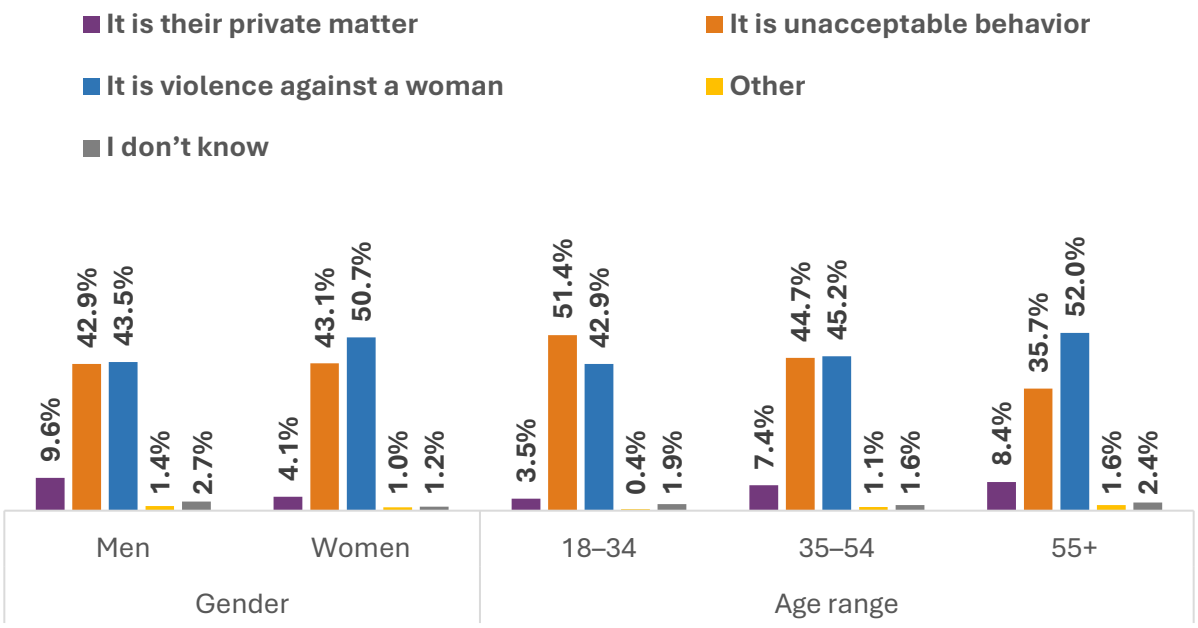



Among the answers categorised as "other" were explanations that provide deeper insight into how intimate relationships are perceived: "You need to know the circumstances that led to it — maybe he was provoked to do it," "It might be something temporary, bad mood or a bad day," "There may be a reason for his behaviour," "We don't know if he's in good health or if he was irritated by some improper behaviour," "I wouldn't call that violence — not every argument or quarrel is violence," "We don't know why he's doing it, we can't judge him just for raising his voice — maybe she behaved inappropriately," and "She probably did something wrong and annoyed him, so he couldn't control himself."

**"She probably did something wrong and annoyed him, so he couldn't control himself."**

The results show clear differences in the perception of violence depending on the respondent's gender and age. Women, in a slightly higher proportion (50.7%) than men (43.5%), recognise a situation in which a man shouts at and threatens his partner in public as violence against women, while almost twice as many men (9.6%) as women (4.1%) consider it to be a private matter. These findings indicate that women show greater sensitivity towards violence and are more inclined to recognise and label it as such, whereas men more often maintain distance and justify it through the idea of "family privacy." When it comes to age differences, younger respondents (18–34) most often describe such behaviour as unacceptable (51.4%). Respondents of middle age (35–54) hold a balanced view between the two categories, while the oldest group (55+) most frequently (52%) recognise the situation as violence, although some of them (8.4%) still consider it a private matter.

*Graph 10 Imagine a man shouting at and threatening his partner in public. How would you describe this situation? According to gender and age*




These responses reveal deeply rooted patterns of rationalising and justifying violence that still persist within parts of the population. What all these explanations have in common is an attempt to shift the responsibility for violent behaviour away from the perpetrator and onto the circumstances or the victim herself - whether through the idea that the man was "provoked", "annoyed", or "had a bad day". Such attitudes show that violence is often viewed through the lens of individual emotions and situational factors, rather than as a structural and socially unacceptable act of power and control. Moreover, expressions such as "perhaps not every quarrel is violence" or "we cannot condemn him if he raised his voice" reflect blurred boundaries between conflict and violence, which contributes to the normalisation of aggressive behaviour in intimate relationships.

# Perception of the prevalence of violence and personal experience with violence

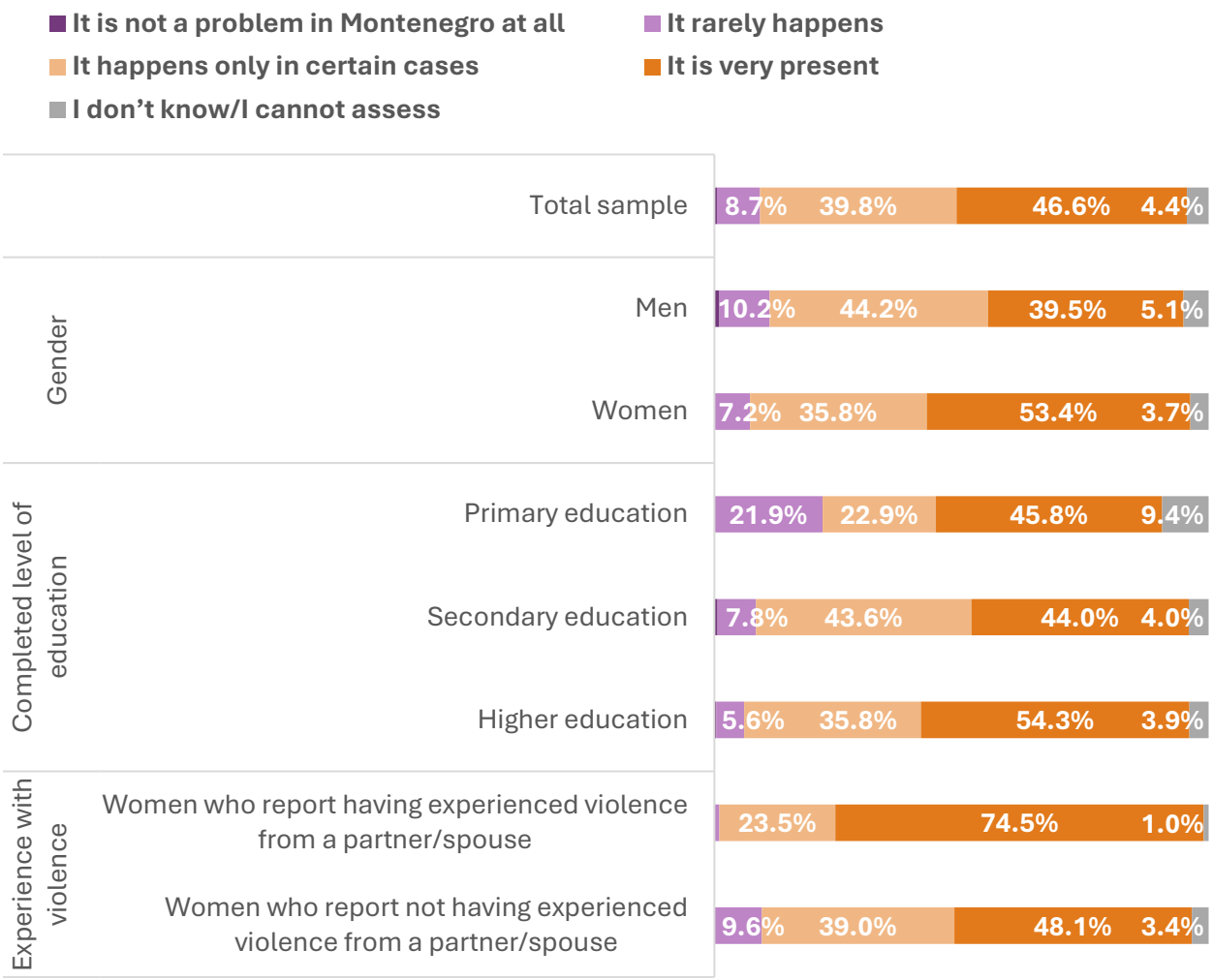
The research results show that the majority of citizens of Montenegro **recognise violence against women as a serious and widespread social problem**, but also that there are significant differences in perception depending on gender, level of education, region, and personal experience. These differences indicate that the understanding of violence is not merely a matter of individual opinion, but also of the broader social context and lived experience.

The greatest gap in perception is visible between men and women: more than half of women (53%) believe that violence is very widespread, while only about 40% of men share that view. Men are much more likely to "downplay" the seriousness of the problem, assessing that violence against women occurs only occasionally or rarely. This difference suggests that women – probably due to greater exposure and personal experience – have a more developed awareness of the prevalence and seriousness of the issue.

Education has also proven to be an important factor in the perception of violence. Among highly educated respondents, more than half (54%) believe that violence against women is very widespread, while among those with only primary education, opinions that violence occurs rarely (22%) or only occasionally are more common. These findings suggest that a higher level of education contributes to a better understanding of violence as a social and systemic problem, rather than as a private family matter. This could also be linked to the fact that people with lower levels of education find it harder to talk about this topic. Namely, 90% of those with primary education said that it is very or mostly difficult for them to talk about violence against women, compared to 59.7% of those with secondary education and 57.1% of those with higher education.

The research also confirmed that personal experience is strongly related to perceptions of how widespread violence is. Women who have personally experienced violence are almost twice as likely as others (75% compared to 48%) to believe that it is very widespread. This confirms that violence is often not fully recognised until it is experienced directly, which further underlines the importance of education and awareness-raising among those who are not personally affected but whose attitudes and reactions shape social norms and levels of tolerance.

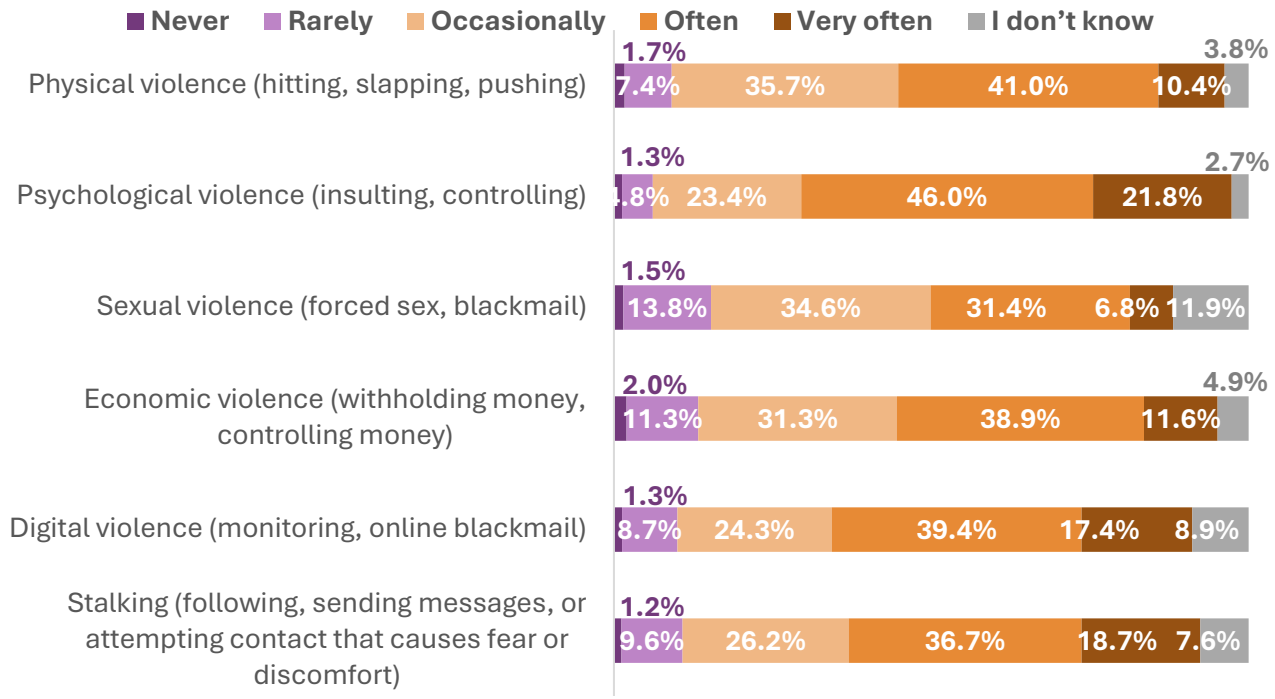
*Graph 11 In your opinion, how present is the problem of violence against women in Montenegrin society today? According to gender, completed level of education and personal experience with violence*




In addition to physical violence, it is important for society to recognise the various forms of violence that occur against women, as violence is not limited to physical assault. It also includes psychological humiliation, economic deprivation, sexual harassment, digital surveillance, and threats. When violence is reduced solely to physical injury, many victims remain invisible and unsupported, while control, intimidation, and humiliation become normalised as "private problems" or "marital disputes."

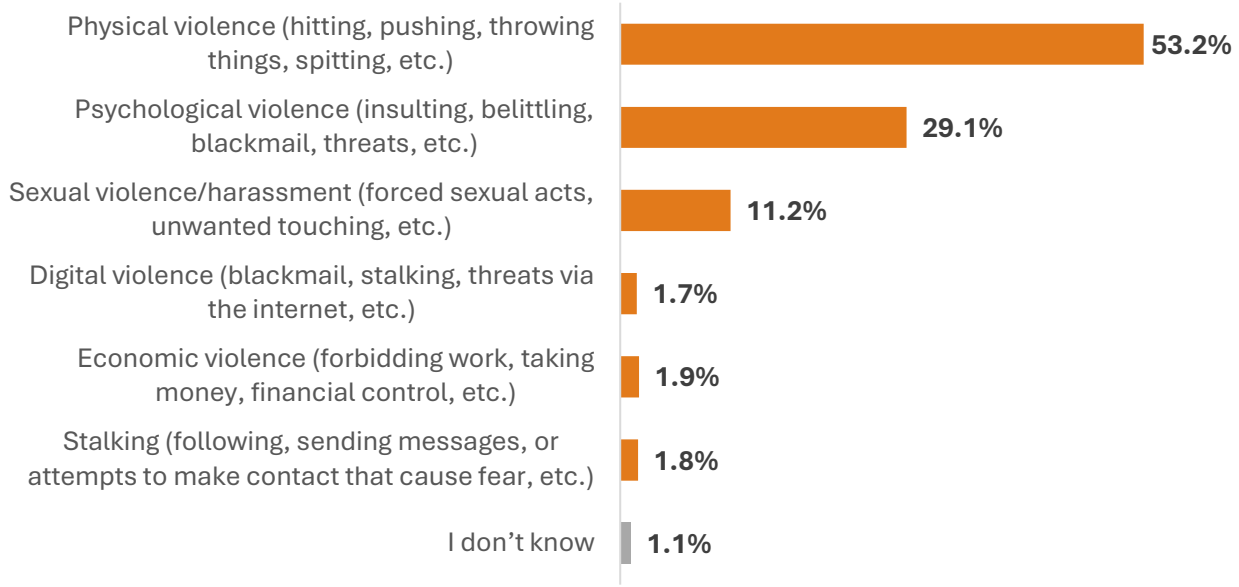
Data show that citizens of Montenegro perceive violence against women as widespread, though they assess the frequency of its forms differently. The most visible is psychological violence – almost half of respondents (46%) consider it frequent, and another 22% believe it is very frequent. Physical violence is also recognised: 41% see it as frequent, 10% as very frequent, and almost no one denies its existence. Sexual violence, however, remains less visible – one third perceive it as occasional, 31% as frequent, while as many as 12% say they do not know how to assess it.

*Graph 12 How often do you think women in Montenegro experience the following forms of violence?*




When asked which form of violence against women respondents consider the most serious for women in Montenegro, more than half (53.2%) identified physical violence, while psychological violence ranked second (29.1%). This indicates that a portion of the population also recognises verbal humiliation, blackmail, and threats as very serious forms of abuse.

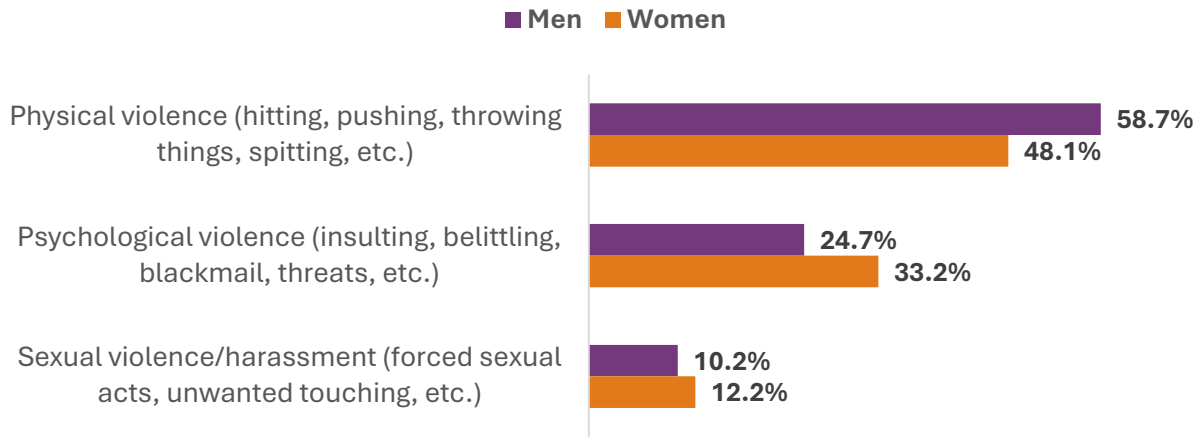
*Graph 13 Which of the following forms of violence do you consider the most serious for women in Montenegro?*



Men are significantly more likely than women to identify physical violence as the most serious form of violence against women in Montenegro (58.7% compared to 48.1%), confirming that men tend to associate violence mainly with visible injuries and physical aggression. While women also widely recognise physical violence, they are more likely than men to highlight psychological violence (33.2% compared with 24.7%) and sexual violence (12.2% compared with 10.2%) as particularly serious forms.

This difference suggests that women – likely due to personal experience and greater exposure to non-physical forms of abuse – have a broader understanding of violence, recognising the harm caused by verbal humiliation, threats, and sexual coercion. Men, on the other hand, are more inclined to perceive violence through the traditional image of a physical attack, highlighting why education on psychological, sexual, and economic violence is particularly important.

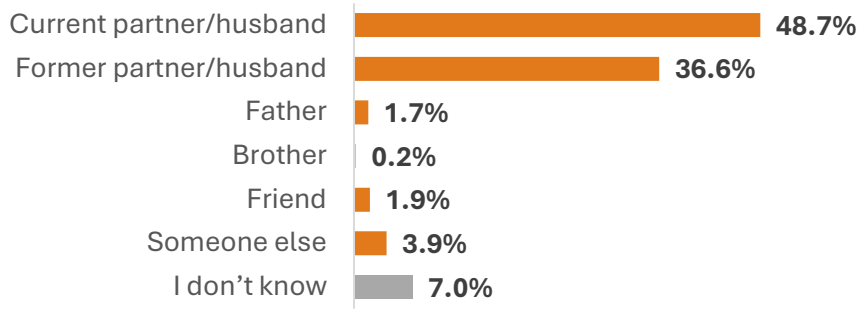
*Graph 14 Which of the following forms of violence do you consider the most serious for women in Montenegro? According to gender*




Respondents most often identified current and former partners as the perpetrators of violence against women within the family, which aligns with MONSTAT data.[7] Nearly half (48.7%) named a current partner or husband, while an additional 36.6% pointed to a former partner. These findings confirm that violence against women most frequently occurs within close, intimate relationships (over 85%), where the perpetrators are trusted individuals rather than "strangers." Such a perception reflects a well-developed awareness of the true nature and patterns of violence, consistent with international research showing that violence in intimate partnerships is the most widespread form of gender-based violence globally.

[7] Statistical Office of Montenegro (MONSTAT) – Release No. 163/2022: "Survey on the Living Conditions and Safety of Women (EU-GBV) – 2021." Available at: https://www.monstat.org/uploads/files/demografija/gbv/Saop%C5%A1tenje%20gbv%2025%2011%202022.pdf

*Graph 15 In your opinion, who are the most frequent perpetrators of violence in family and emotional relationships?*




It is also important to understand the broader value frameworks and social attitudes that underlie the acceptance, justification, or minimisation of the seriousness of violence against women. Violence rarely occurs in isolation – it is rooted in social norms, gender stereotypes, and power dynamics that define what is considered "normal" or "acceptable" within intimate relationships.

The following set of statements in the research explores precisely these deeply ingrained norms and beliefs – from whether violence is viewed as a "private matter" that society should not interfere with, to attitudes about gender roles that assign men authority and control, and women obedience and subordination. It also covers perceptions of trust in the system, that is, citizens' beliefs about whether perpetrators of violence are adequately sanctioned and whether institutions provide sufficient support to victims.

The analysis of these attitudes provides a deeper understanding of the social roots of violence – it reveals not only how people define violence, but also how they justify, tolerate, or downplay its existence. Such findings are crucial, as they highlight the starting points for changing social norms, without which it is difficult to achieve genuine prevention and reduction of violence against women.

The majority of citizens clearly condemn violence and support punishing perpetrators – as many as 60% completely agree, and a further 19% somewhat agree, that abusers must be sanctioned. Likewise, a large majority reject the idea that a man has the right to insult or silence a woman – over 80%.

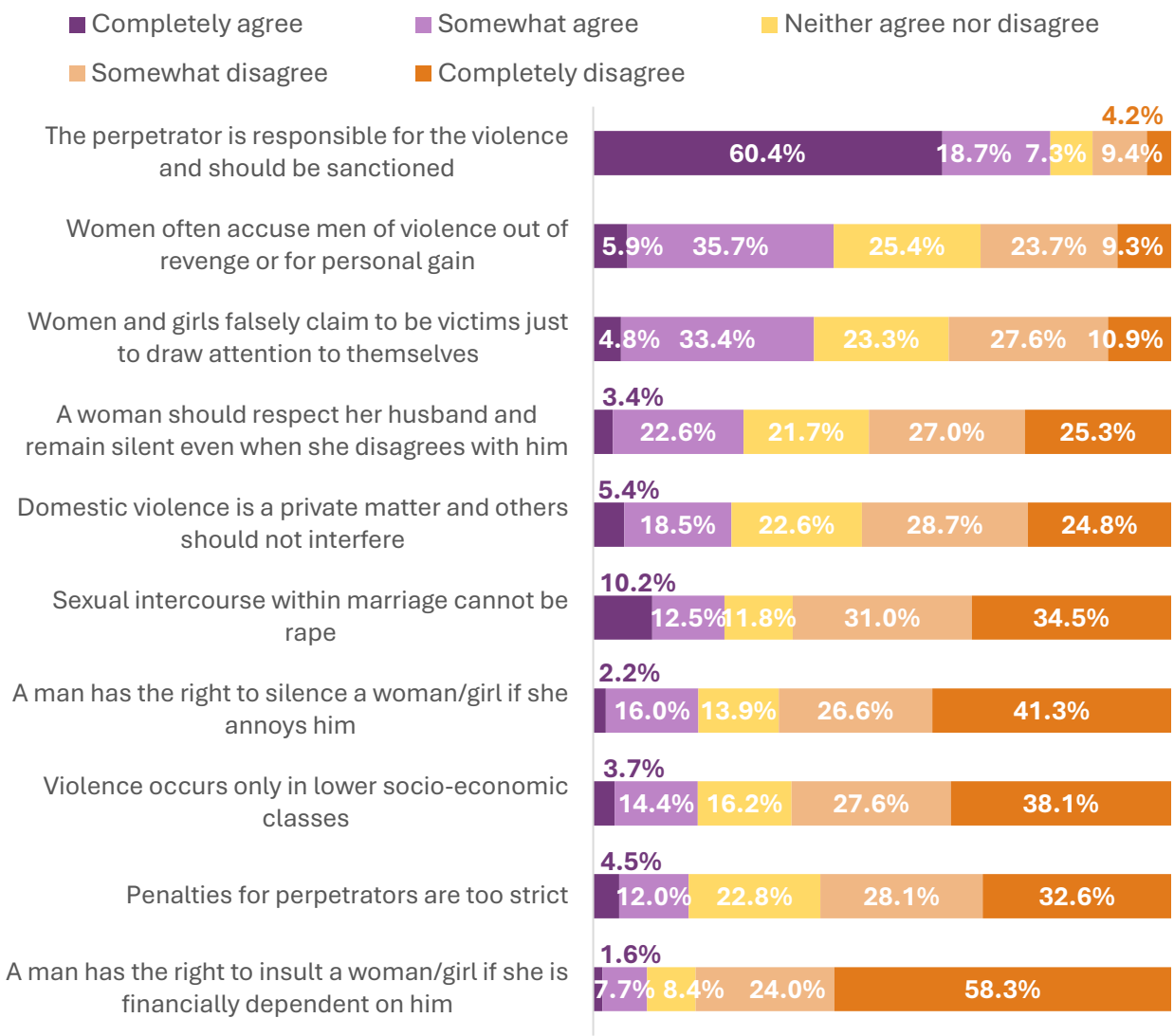
However, the persistence of myths that undermine trust in victims is concerning. Around 40% believe that women sometimes accuse men out of revenge or personal gain, and a similar proportion think that women report violence merely to attract attention. A quarter still regard domestic violence as a private matter, and a considerable share remain undecided.

The research findings show that although most citizens recognise marital rape as a form of sexual violence, it is concerning that almost a quarter of respondents (22.7%) believe that "sexual intercourse within marriage cannot be rape." This attitude reflects the persistence of

traditional and patriarchal beliefs in which marriage is still viewed through the notion of a "marital duty," rather than the concept of free and informed consent. Such views contribute to the normalisation of violence within intimate relationships and make it harder for these issues to be publicly acknowledged.

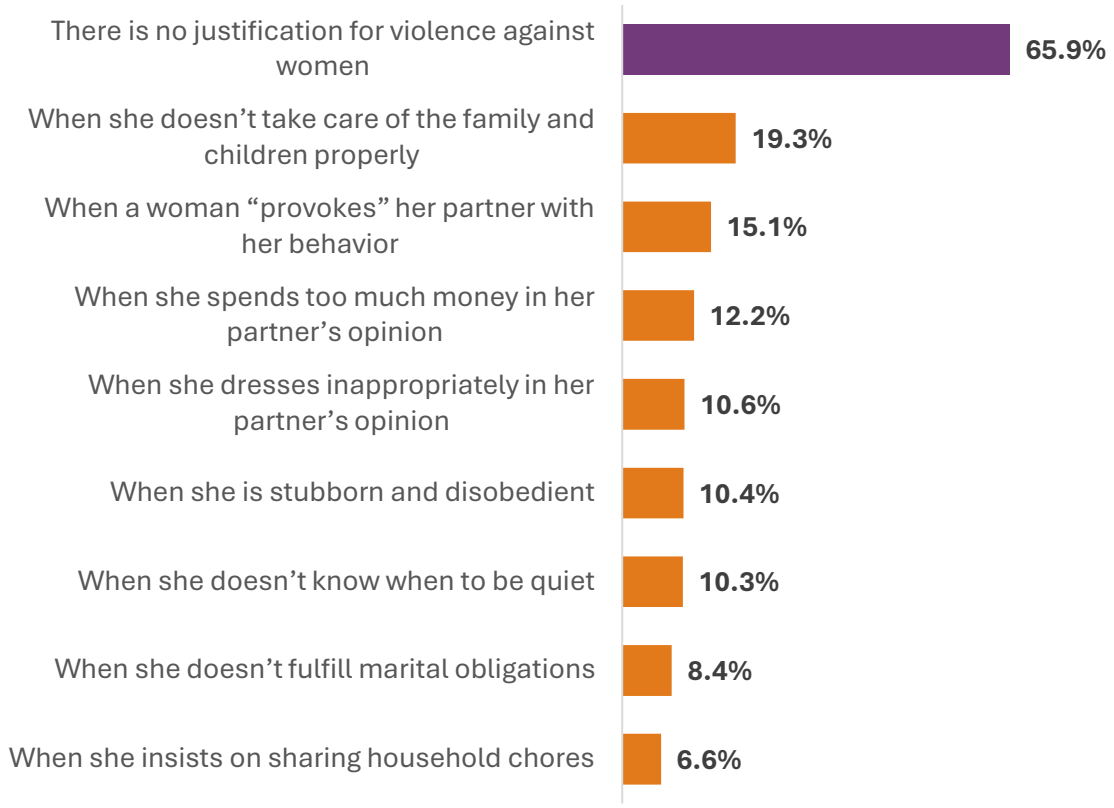
These findings demonstrate that, while the majority of people openly reject violence, stereotypes about false accusations and the idea that family conflicts are private matters remain deeply rooted. This weakens support for victims and underscores the importance of building greater trust in what victims say. Otherwise, such attitudes within society can lead to a greater relativisation of violence, and even to its justification. Currently, most citizens reject any justification for violence against women, yet a smaller but still significant portion of the population continues to find excuses for violence in certain situations.

*Graph 16 How much do you agree with the following statements?*



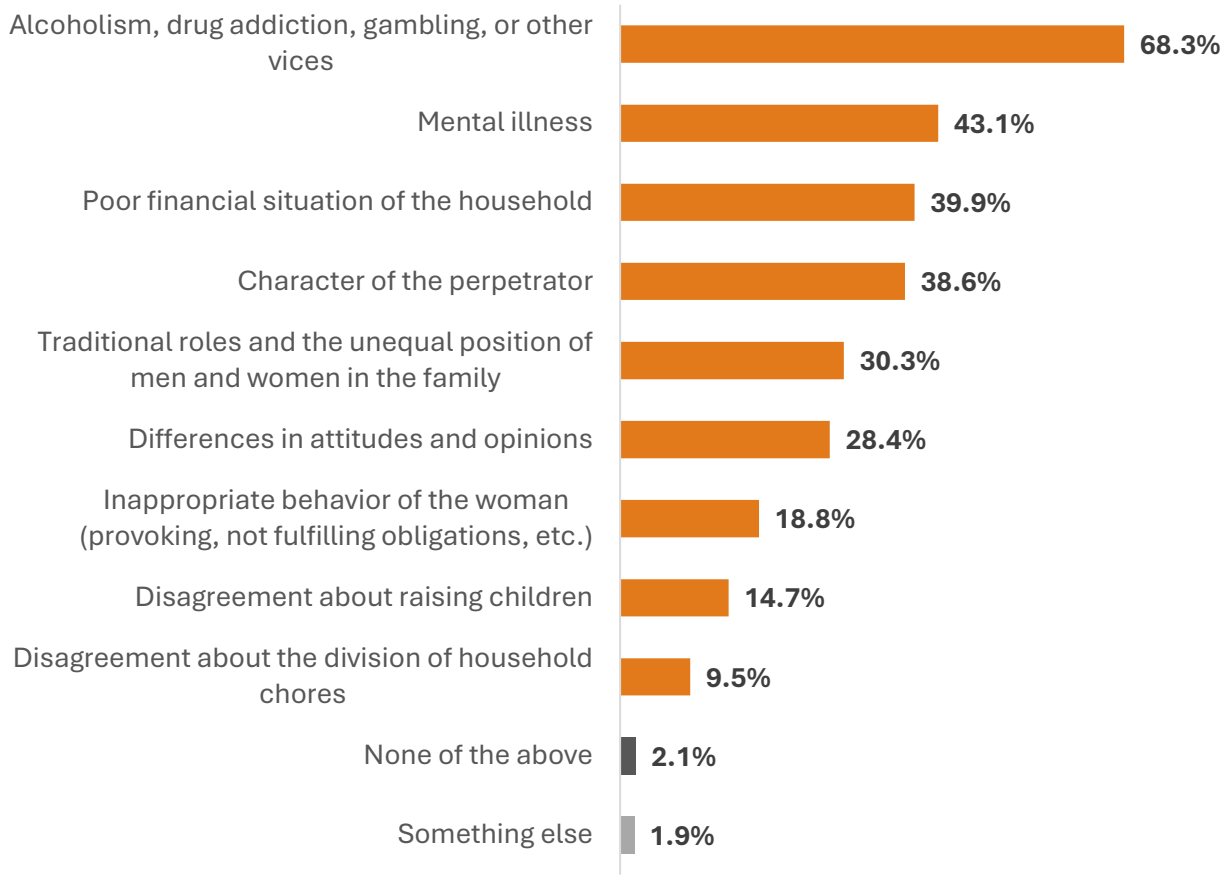
It is encouraging that the largest share of respondents say there is no justification for violence – 63% of men and 68% of women agree with this statement. However, it is concerning that almost a quarter of men and one fifth of women still identify certain situations in which they could "understand" violence. The most commonly mentioned reasons include when a woman "does not take care of the family and children" or "provokes her partner with her behaviour." Some respondents also justify violence when a woman spends too much money, is "stubborn," or "does not know when to keep quiet." Patriarchal norms thus continue to legitimise male aggression in situations perceived as violations of traditional female roles.

*Graph 17 What would you say — does any of the following sometimes justify violence against women?*




After examining the situations in which citizens sometimes justify violence, the next question goes a step further by analysing what the public perceives as the main causes of violence within families and intimate relationships. This approach is important because it reveals how society explains violence – whether it is linked to personal or family problems, economic difficulties, or mental health issues, or whether it is recognised as a consequence of deeply rooted gender roles and inequalities. Understanding these perceptions makes it possible to identify the dominant narratives that contribute to the normalisation and justification of violence, reducing it to a "private problem" instead of recognising it as a systemic, social, and gender-based phenomenon.

*Graph 18 In your opinion, what are the THREE main reasons from the list below why violence occurs in families and partner relationships?*




The data show that citizens most often explain domestic and intimate partner violence through the personal problems and vices of the perpetrators, while gender norms and social factors are also recognised by a significant share of respondents. These responses indicate that violence is still frequently viewed as a result of individual weaknesses or family difficulties. However, almost one in three Montenegrin citizens (30%) identify traditional gender relations and women's unequal position as causes of violence – an important finding given that gender inequality is recognised in research as one of the main risk factors. At the same time, nearly one fifth (19%) still believe that "inappropriate behaviour by women" can be a cause, and in open-ended responses, participants often mention "marital infidelity," "female provocation," or "a woman's sharp tongue." These views reflect a lingering tendency to shift responsibility from the perpetrator to the victim.

**"A woman's tongue can lead to domestic violence...women are made to speak, while a man is made to keep silent about it."**

In addition to identifying who citizens of Montenegro believe is most often the perpetrator of violence, it is also important to understand perceptions of who is most frequently the victim. This is significant because it shows whether the public recognises that certain life circumstances – such as poverty, disability, youth, or belonging to minority communities – increase the risk of violence. Combating violence against women must, as a fundamental precondition, involve citizens' awareness and understanding of inequality and the specific situations in which women may find themselves. The following question allowed for multiple responses, which is why the total percentage presented in the chart exceeds 100%.

The data show that citizens most often associate violence against women with life circumstances that increase dependency and vulnerability, though some still believe that "any woman can be a victim."

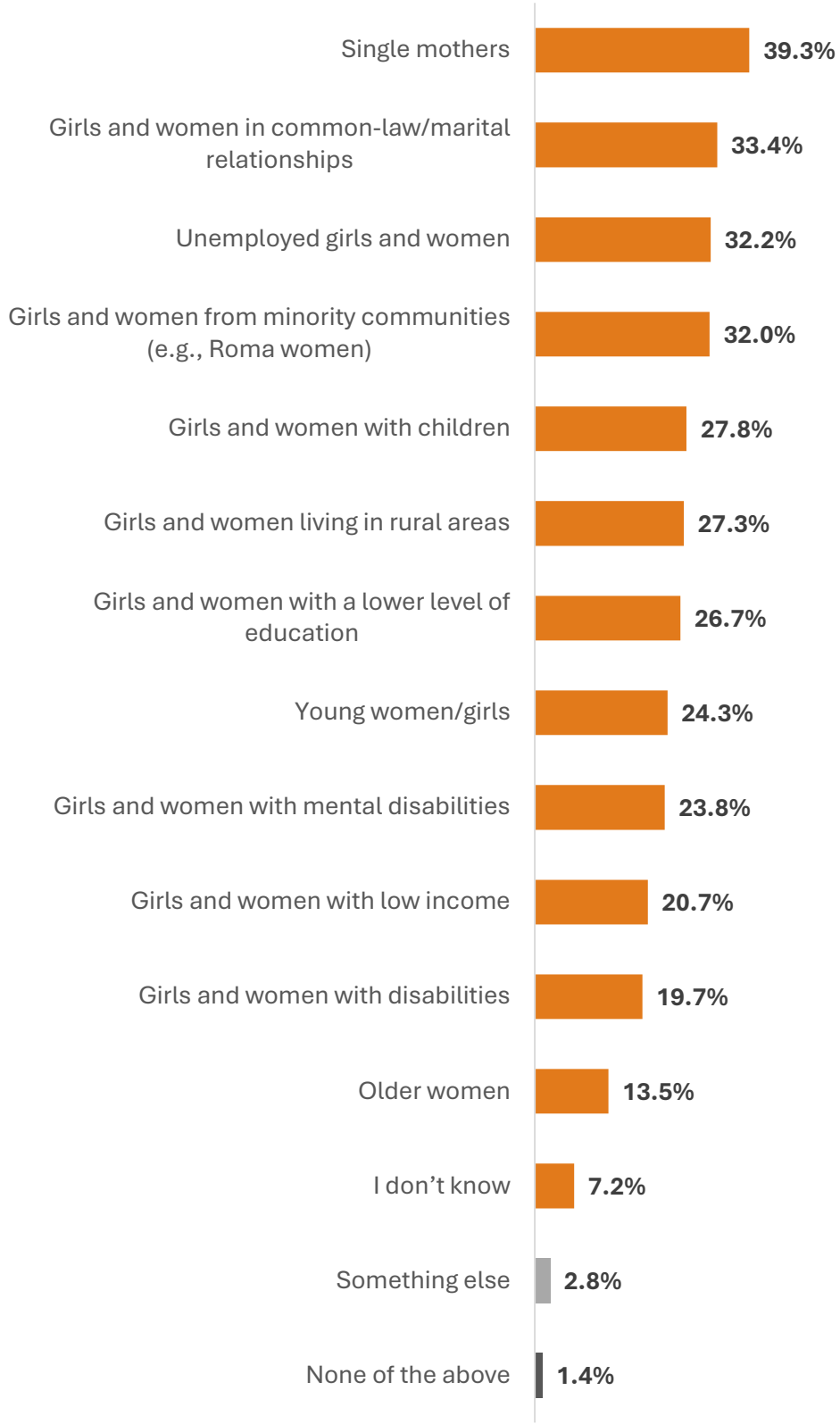
The largest share of respondents identify single mothers as being at risk (39%), followed by women in marital or cohabiting relationships (33%), unemployed women (32%), and women from minority communities (32%). Women with children (28%), as well as those living in rural areas or with lower levels of education (around 27%), are also frequently mentioned. Young women, women with mental health difficulties, and those with low incomes are recognised as vulnerable, but to a lesser extent. The elderly are least often perceived as being at risk (13%), even though research indicates that they too are frequently victims.

Open-ended responses reveal two main trends: some participants emphasise that "violence can happen to any woman," while others still place blame on women themselves, referring to a "lack of sense," "provocation," or "immorality." These attitudes demonstrate that part of the population still fails to understand structural risk factors and continues to engage in victim-blaming.

**"Without distinction, all women can find themselves in that situation."**

When this data is viewed according to gender, there are no major differences between men and women in most responses. However, in some cases, a distinct gender perspective can be observed. Men are significantly more likely than women to see single mothers as the most vulnerable group (43.5% of men compared to 35.3% of women). This may suggest that men tend to associate violence more with material hardship and single parenthood than women do. Women, on the other hand, are more likely than men to recognise women with mental health difficulties as a high-risk group (26.6% compared with 20.9%), which likely stems from a greater understanding of the vulnerabilities linked to mental health.

*Graph 19 Which women, in your opinion, are at the greatest risk of experiencing violence? (Multiple answers possible)*



## Statements from male and female respondents in response to the question which women are most at risk of experiencing violence

"All women experience violence; they just don't report it." (Female respondent)

"Those who have no common sense. Everything could be avoided if they used their heads and don't provoke men." (Female respondents)

"Women who are unfaithful, who lie to their partner and family..." (Male respondent)

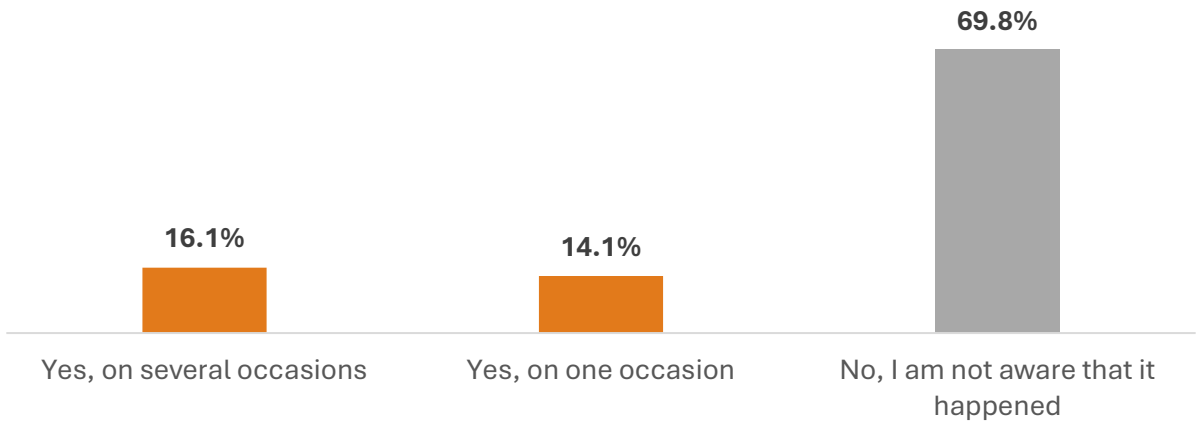
"Women without formed attitudes and character." (Male respondent)

# Experience with violence against women and girls

This section of the report focuses on the concrete experiences of citizens with violence against women and girls. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, questions were introduced gradually – starting from experiences with violence against women in one's surroundings to personal experiences of violence, which are presented in a separate subsection.

When asked whether they personally know a woman who has experienced violence or have witnessed such violence themselves, almost one third of respondents answered affirmatively.

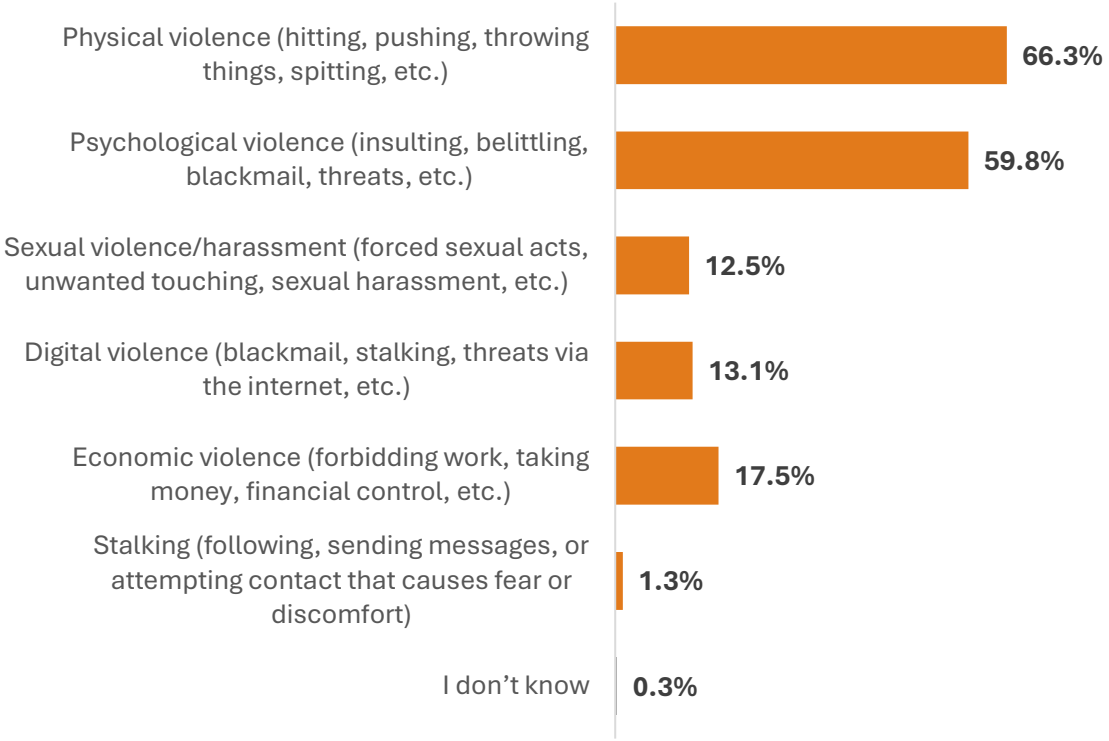
*Graph 20 Do you personally know any woman from your surroundings (a family member, friend, colleague) or have you witnessed any form of violence?*




Among respondents who reported knowing of cases of violence against women, the most commonly recognised forms were physical violence (66.3%) and psychological violence (59.8%). These findings confirm that visible, overt, and more easily identifiable forms of violence remain dominant in the public understanding of the issue. In contrast, economic, sexual, digital violence and stalking are much less frequently noticed and/or reported by respondents, indicating a limited understanding of the broader spectrum of violence and the existence of a "hierarchy of seriousness" in how its forms are perceived.

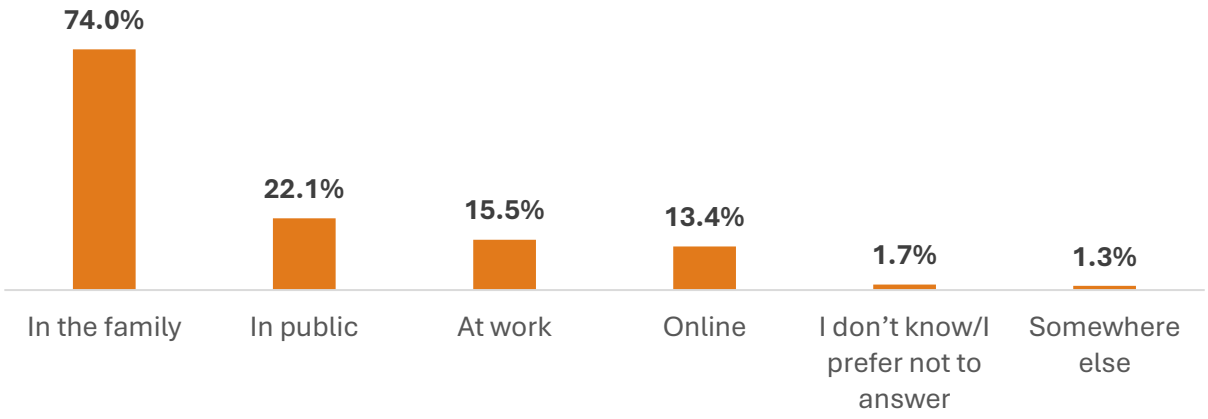
This pattern of recognition can be explained by the fact that physical and psychological violence are the most visible and most frequently discussed in public discourse, while other forms of violence, particularly digital, economic, and sexual, are still perceived as private, hidden, or less serious. This creates the risk that many victims remain invisible, without help or institutional support, because their experiences are not recognised as violence.

*Graph 21 Respondents who stated that they know of a case of violence against women in their surroundings: Please indicate what type of violence that person experienced. (N=304)*




In addition, responses to the question about where the woman experienced violence once again highlight that it most often happens in the very place where women are most vulnerable – yet should feel the safest – within their own family. Three quarters of respondents stated that the case they referred to took place in the family setting. In addition, one fifth said it occurred in public, 15.5% at work, and 13.4% in the digital sphere.

*Graph 22 Respondents who stated that they know of a case of violence against women in their surroundings: Could you tell us where that woman experienced the violence? (Multiple answers possible) (N=304)*

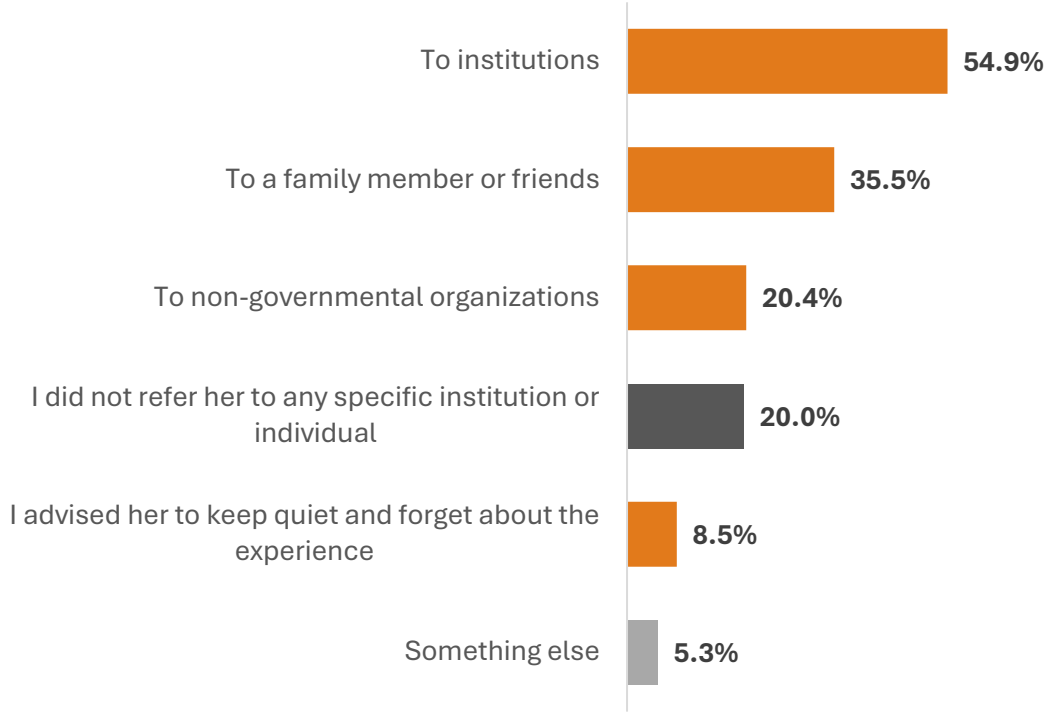


More than half of the respondents who know of a case of violence against women said they reacted by referring the victim to the relevant institutions (54.9%), while a significant share (35.5%) relied on informal support networks such as family members or friends. One in five stated that they referred the victim to a non-governmental organisation. These findings suggest that a considerable proportion of citizens do recognise the community's responsibility and are willing to take action.

However, it is concerning that almost a third of respondents said they neither referred the victim to any institution nor provided concrete help, but instead advised her to keep quiet.

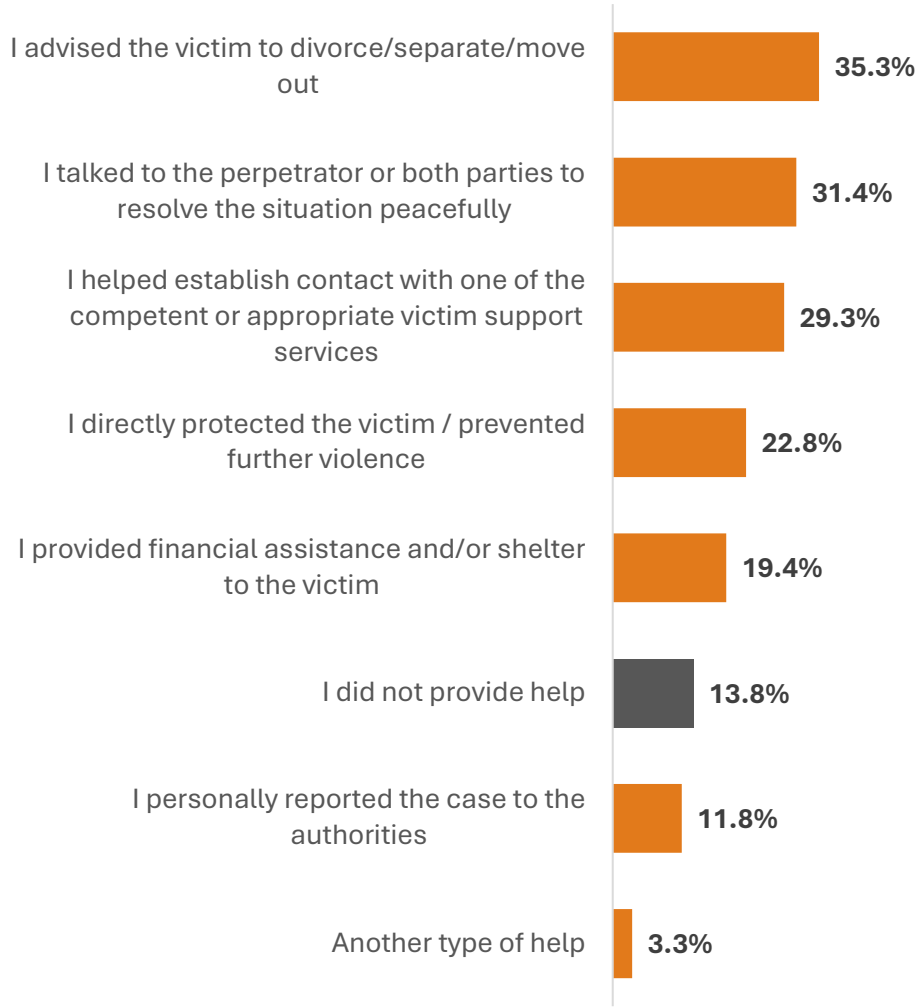
This data indicates that, although there is general awareness among citizens of the need to respond, social norms, fear of "interfering," and a lack of trust in institutions still limit the willingness to take active steps in cases of violence against women.

*Graph 23 Respondents who stated that they know of a case of violence against women in their surroundings: Did you refer the person from your surroundings who experienced violence to any institution or individual who could help her? (N=304)*




When asked whether they had tried to help a victim of violence in any way, more than one third of respondents (35.3%) said they had advised the victim to end the relationship with the perpetrator either through divorce, separation, or moving away. Similarly, one third (31.4%) stated that they had spoken with the perpetrator or with both parties in an attempt to resolve the conflict peacefully. Almost one third of respondents (29.3%) reported providing assistance to the victim in establishing contact with the relevant institutions or services, while only one in ten said they had personally reported the case to the authorities.

*Graph 24 Respondents who stated that they know of a case of violence against women in their surroundings: Did you try to help the victim of violence in any way? Please specify what concrete actions you took to assist that person. (N=304)*

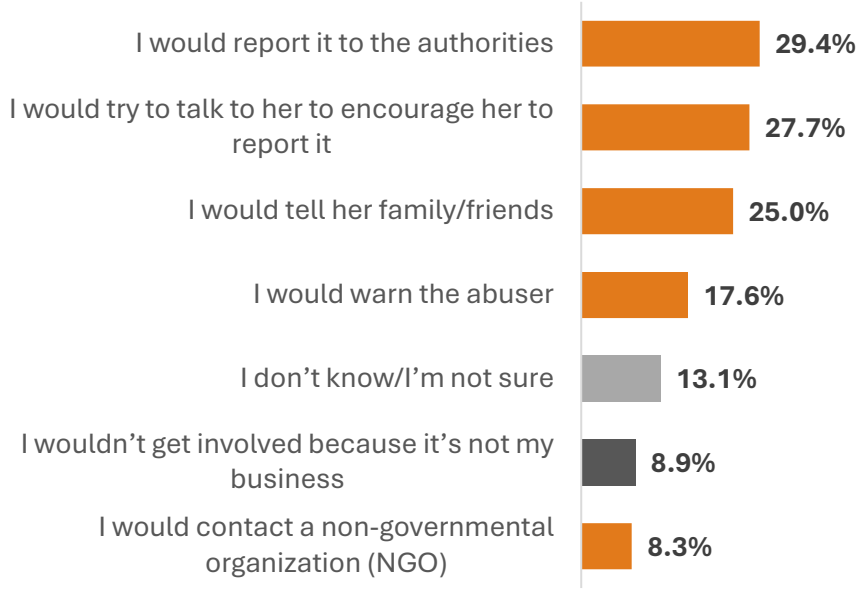



One in ten respondents said they did not provide any form of help, most commonly explaining that they felt unable to assist (50.1%), that it was an "internal matter" they should not interfere in (17.7%), that nothing could be done (9.9%), or that they were afraid their involvement might worsen the victim's situation (7.7%). An additional 9.4% selected "other," giving reasons that reflect their personal doubts and limitations. Among these were a lack of knowledge or confidence about how to act ("I didn't know how to handle it"), fear and a sense of personal vulnerability ("I was afraid, I'm too young"), as well as the perception of insufficient closeness to the victim ("we weren't close enough").

In addition to respondents who had direct experience with violence (either knowing a woman who was a victim or having witnessed violence), those without such experience were placed in a hypothetical scenario and asked: "Imagine that you saw or found out that a woman in your surroundings had experienced violence from her partner. How would you react?"

The majority of respondents stated that if they found out a woman in their surroundings had experienced intimate partner violence, they would respond by involving the relevant institutions or encouraging the victim to do so herself. Such responses indicate that a significant proportion of citizens recognise violence as a serious social problem and have confidence in institutional protection mechanisms. A quarter of respondents (25%) said they would turn to the victim's family or friends, likely with the intention of offering support or protection, while 17.6% reported that they would react directly towards the perpetrator—by warning or confronting him about his behaviour. However, one in eight respondents (13.1%) said they would not know how to react, and 8.9% believed that they should not interfere because it is "not their business." These findings suggest the presence of a certain level of passivity and social tolerance towards violence, as well as an underdeveloped sense of personal and collective responsibility for protecting victims.

*Graph 25 Imagine that you saw or found out that a woman in your surroundings had experienced violence from her partner. How would you react? (N=703)*



# Personal experiences with violence against women and girls

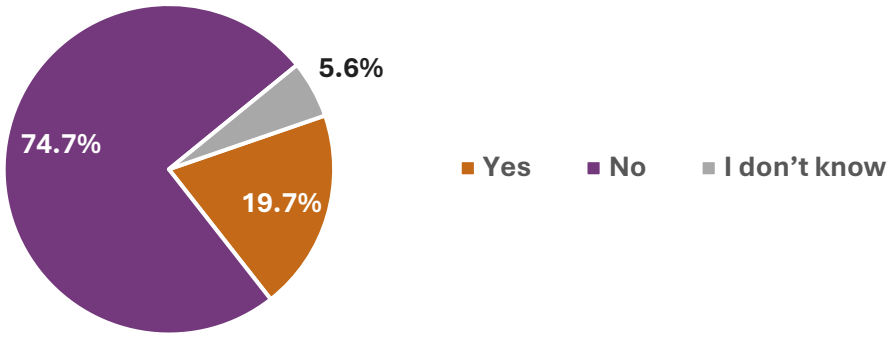
In addition to hypothetical scenarios, female respondents were also asked a direct question about their personal experiences of violence – whether they had ever experienced any form of violence from a partner or spouse. This question carries particular research value, as it provides insight into actual exposure to violence rather than merely perceptions of it. However, this is an extremely sensitive topic that entails a range of methodological limitations. Talking about violence can evoke discomfort, fear, or retraumatisation, leading some respondents to choose not to disclose their experiences, even under conditions of complete anonymity. Stigma, feelings of shame, and distrust in the system further reduce women's willingness to speak openly about violence.

It is important to emphasise that this study was not designed as a specialised victimological survey with a large and purposefully selected sample that would allow precise measurement of the prevalence of violence. Its aim was to map citizens' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences within a broader social context. Therefore, data on personal experiences of violence should be interpreted as indicative rather than as an exact measure of how widespread violence against women is.

Finally, as shown earlier in the report, varying understandings of the very concept of "violence" may lead to underestimating its true extent – while some women recognise certain forms of control, humiliation, or economic deprivation as violence, others still perceive them as a "normal" or "private" part of intimate relationships. For this reason, and to ensure greater privacy and honesty in responses, interviewers were instructed to allow female respondents to complete this section of the questionnaire independently on a tablet.

Despite these limitations, the proportion of women who directly stated that they had experienced some form of violence from a partner or spouse remains alarmingly high – one in five women. An additional 5.6% were unsure or did not know how to respond to this question, which may indicate uncertainty about whether certain behaviours constitute violence, as well as discomfort in admitting to having been subjected to it.

*Graph 26 Please tell us, have you ever experienced any form of violence from a partner or spouse? (N=518)*

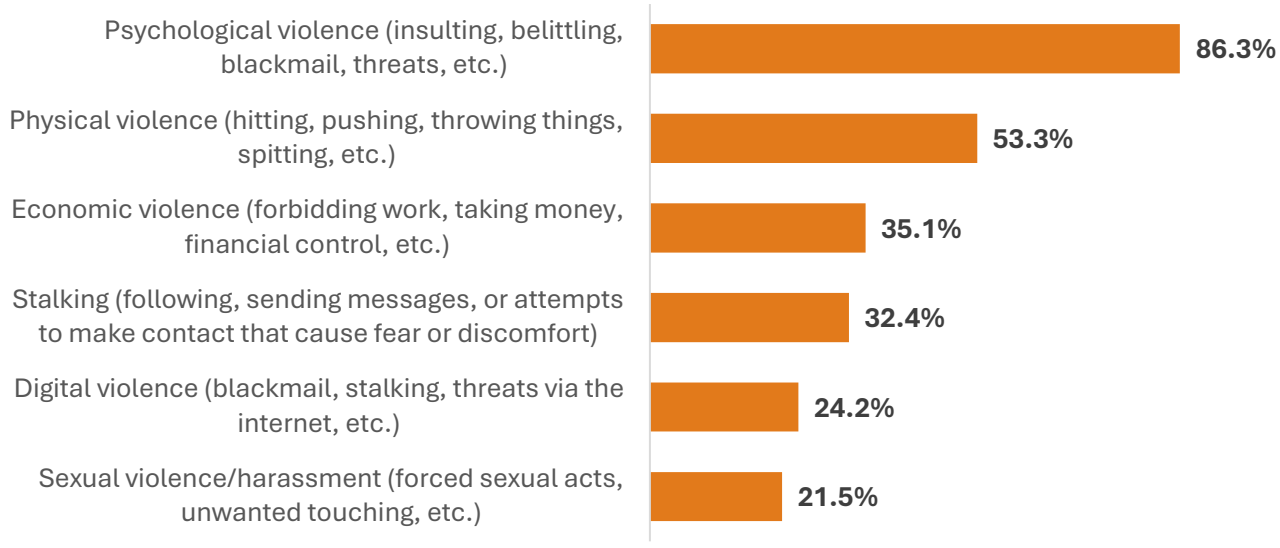


The next set of questions was asked only to those female respondents who stated that they had personally experienced some form of violence. As the data is further broken down into more specific experiences, the number of respondents becomes smaller; nevertheless, the results provide valuable insight into patterns of behaviour and the ways victims respond. Due to the relatively small number of responses (N=98, and considerably fewer in some subgroups), these findings are not presented graphically but are instead analysed descriptively, with the aim of highlighting their qualitative significance rather than their statistical representativeness.

More than two thirds of women who reported experiencing violence said they had suffered some form of psychological violence (86.3%), while over half (53.3%) had experienced physical violence. Sexual violence was reported by one in five women (21.5%), while economic violence (35.1%) and stalking (32.4%) were also common experiences. This points to the wide spectrum of violence women face – ranging from direct physical and sexual assaults to more subtle, but equally harmful, forms of control and intimidation.

These findings are extremely concerning for at least two reasons. First, given the methodological limitations of the study and the well-documented tendency for violence to be underreported, it is very likely that the real prevalence of these forms of abuse is even higher than the figures presented here. Second, the results reveal a major gap between women's actual experiences and public perceptions of violence, as it remains largely understood in society as physical assault, while psychological, economic, sexual, and digital violence are still insufficiently recognised. The findings indicate that violence against women in Montenegro is deeply widespread and multidimensional, and that women face ongoing patterns of control, humiliation, and endangerment that society often fails to recognise as violence.

*Graph 27 If yes, please tell us whether ANY of the following has EVER happened to you from a partner or spouse? (N=102)*



The data shows that more than half of the women (58.6%) who experienced violence did not seek help from anyone, while only one third (36.5%) said they had sought support. Those who did reach out for help most often turned to family (57.9%) and friends (52.7%), indicating that victims still primarily rely on their personal support networks, while institutions remain a secondary option.

Only one third of victims (35%) contacted one of the relevant institutions, while a smaller number reported seeking help from professionals such as doctors or psychologists (15.4%), and even fewer from lawyers (6.8%).

The most common reasons for not reporting violence were that they resolved the problem themselves (28.9%), feared the family would fall apart (14.3%), or were afraid of being judged by others (13.2%). This shows that women often take on the burden of resolving violence alone, within a social context that encourages silence, endurance, and maintaining family "peace" at any cost.

A significant number of victims believed the incident was not serious enough (9.7%) or held the view that relationship and marital problems should be dealt with within the couple or family. This attitude is reflected in open-ended responses such as "every marriage has disagreements" or "I don't think there's anyone in a relationship or marriage who hasn't experienced some form of violence."

**"I don't think there's anyone in a relationship or marriage who hasn't experienced some form of violence."**

**"I handled everything on my own" (response to the question: Whom did you turn to for help?)**

Victims of violence were also asked how their relationship with the abusive partner ended, and the responses reveal a wide range of ways of coping. The most common outcome was ending the relationship, divorce, or permanently leaving the household, while a smaller number of victims reported temporarily leaving or that the perpetrator had left the home. However, a significant share—almost one third—remained in the relationship or marriage even after the violence occurred, possibly due to emotional attachment, economic dependence, or the hope that the situation might improve.

# Societal response to violence

To understand how functional and accessible the system for protecting women from violence in Montenegro is - according to citizens' perceptions—it is important to examine not only how many people recognise violence, but also what prevents them from reporting it, how much they trust institutions, and how they view social responsibility.

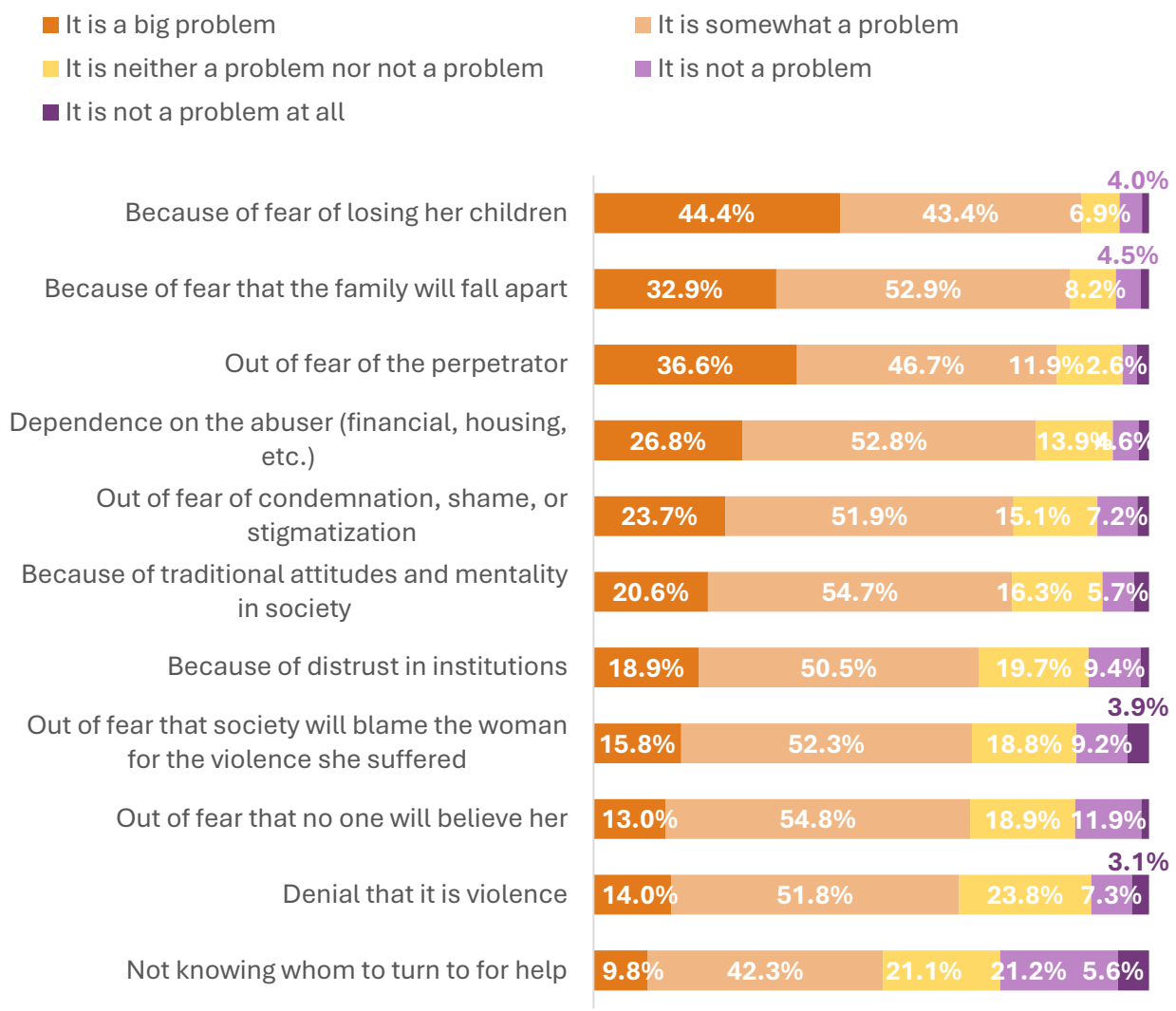
This section explores exactly those barriers and attitudes. The questions address the reasons why women remain silent about violence, perceptions of social and personal responsibility to respond, trust in institutions and the judicial system, and citizens' awareness of where to turn for help and how to support a victim. By analysing these responses, we can better understand how deep the existing barriers are—whether they stem from fear and stigma, lack of information, distrust in the state, or a weak system of sanctions—and where the most effort is needed to make reporting violence safer and more accessible.

The first step in this area was to determine what citizens consider the main reasons why women do not report violence. The collected data helps identify the critical points where the support system must become stronger and more accessible.

The most commonly recognised barrier to reporting violence is fear of losing custody of children, cited by more than two thirds of respondents as a major or partial problem. Fear of family breakdown is recognised by around four fifths of respondents (one third see it as a major problem and just over half as a partial one), showing that maintaining family unity remains a powerful social norm. Nearly three quarters of citizens consider economic and housing dependence on the perpetrator an important obstacle, while roughly the same share recognise shame and fear of social judgment as factors that discourage women from reporting violence. Although somewhat less frequently mentioned, about two thirds of respondents also point to traditional attitudes, cultural mentality, and distrust in institutions as significant barriers.

These findings indicate that citizens believe women in Montenegro are most constrained by fear and family circumstances, while social norms and lack of trust in the system further complicate the decision to report violence.

*Graph 28 To what extent do you think the following factors prevent women from reporting violence?*




This question also prompted a number of additional comments. It is not common in public opinion research for open-ended questions to receive a large number of responses. However, almost one in ten respondents provided further answers when asked whether there are other reasons that prevent women from reporting violence.

**"What will the neighbours say?"**

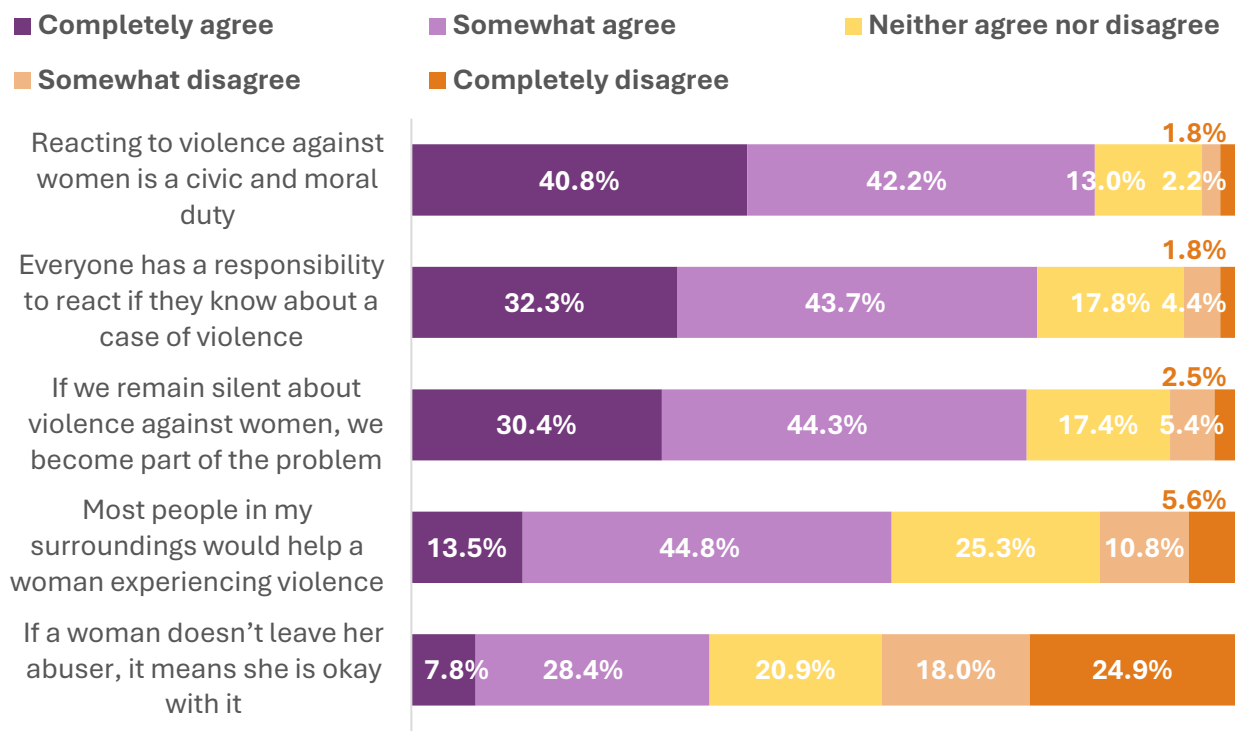
The most frequently mentioned reasons include emotional attachment and love for the abuser, as well as habit and hope that the partner will change ("she loves him, they've been together for years, they have children"). Fear of judgment and stigma is also common ("what will the neighbours say," "shame in front of parents and children"), as well as distrust in institutions and the experience that reporting often does not lead to protection. Some responses point to pressure from others to stay silent or the perpetrator's promises that it will not happen again. A few respondents believe that women sometimes "get used to" violence or downplay its seriousness ("she thinks it was just a momentary misunderstanding").

All these statements show that, alongside formal barriers (such as insufficient protection and lack of information), there is a complex web of emotional, familial, and economic factors, as well as social norms that discourage women from reporting violence. After identifying the main reasons that most often prevent women from seeking help, it is equally important to look at citizens' broader attitudes toward social responsibility and responses to violence.

The data reveals that a large majority of citizens recognise violence against women as a social problem and view responding to it as a moral obligation. As many as 83% of respondents fully or partly agree that taking action is a civic and moral duty, and nearly as many (76%) believe that everyone has a responsibility to act if they know violence is occurring. Similarly, three quarters (74%) agree that staying silent about violence equals complicity.

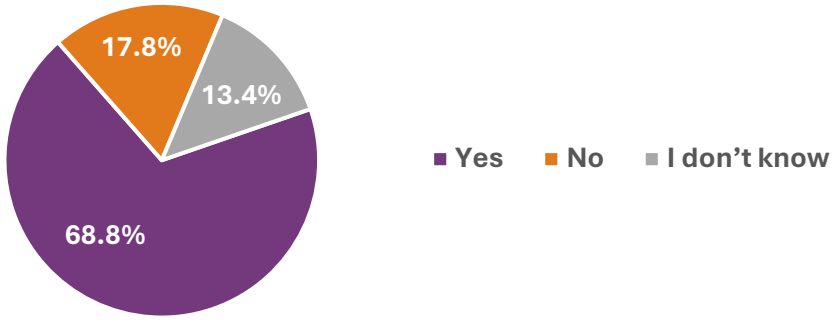
However, confidence in the willingness of those around them to offer support is significantly lower: only 58% believe that "most people in their surroundings would help a woman who is a victim of violence," while a quarter (25%) are uncertain, and 16% think help would not come. Particularly concerning is that more than a third of respondents (36%) at least partly agree with the statement that "if a woman doesn't leave her abuser, it means she accepts it," revealing deeply rooted prejudices and a lack of understanding of the complex dynamics of abuse.

*Graph 29 How much do you agree with the following statements?*



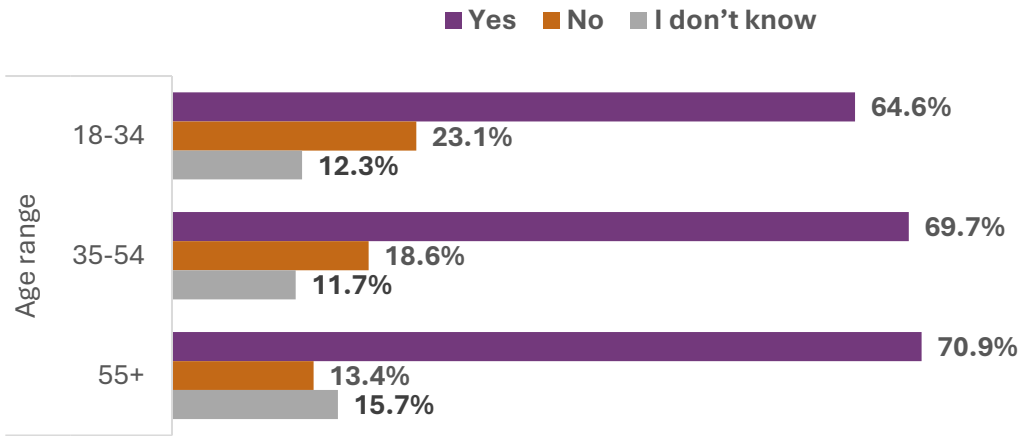
Two thirds of citizens say they believe they would know how to provide concrete help to someone experiencing violence. This result appears encouraging, as it suggests a relatively high sense of willingness to support victims, yet it also highlights a significant need to improve knowledge and provide practical guidance on how to assist victims of violence effectively. It is important to note, however, that in public opinion research it is common for people to declare that they would know what to do, even though in a real situation they might not react or would feel uncertain about how to respond. Therefore, these findings should be viewed with some caution and understood as an indicator of potential willingness, rather than as evidence of actual capacity to take action. This should also be kept in mind when analysing responses to the following question.

*Graph 30 Do you think you would know what exactly to do to help a person experiencing violence?*




Although most respondents believe they would know how to help someone experiencing violence, there are clear generational differences. The youngest group (18–34) shows the least confidence, with 64.6% saying they would know what to do, while 23.1% admit they would not. Confidence increases among those of middle age (35–54), where 69.7% say they would know how to react, and is highest among those aged 55 and over (70.9%). However, older respondents are also more likely to choose the "don't know" option (15.7%), suggesting that while they may have more life experience, they are not always certain about the specific steps they should take to help.

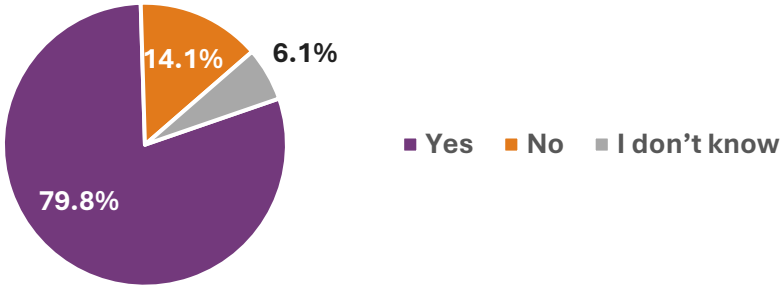
*Graph 31 Do you think you would know what exactly to do to help a person experiencing violence? According to age range*



The vast majority of respondents stated that they know where violence against women can be reported in Montenegro – nearly four out of five people (79.8%) said they were aware of this information, while one in seven (14%) admitted they did not know, and a smaller share (around 6%) were uncertain.

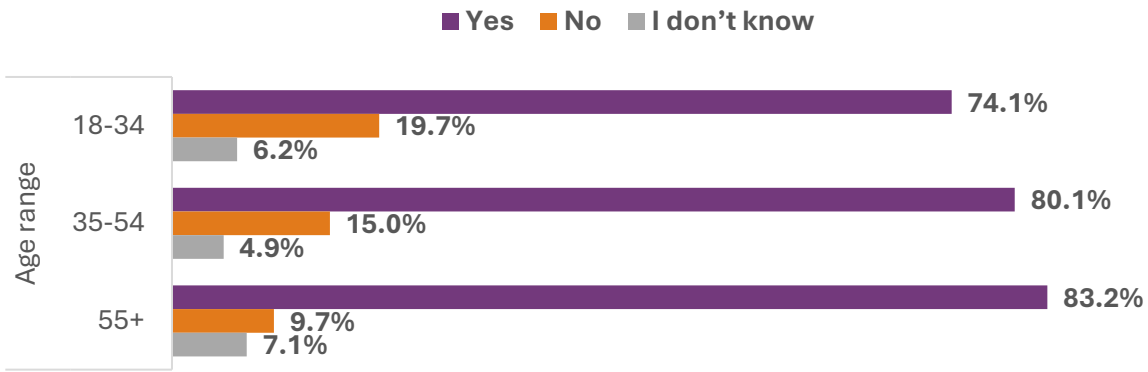
However, differences are visible among certain groups. Almost nine out of ten women who have personally experienced violence (88%) know where they can report it, compared to about three quarters (77%) of those who have not had such an experience. This result is expected, as direct experience with violence often means that women have had to seek information or help. The level of education also has a clear influence. Among those with only primary education, awareness is lower (around two thirds know where violence can be reported), whereas among those with secondary and higher education, the proportion increases to about four out of five people.

*Graph 32 Do you know where in Montenegro violence against women can be reported?*




Analysis by age group shows that awareness of where violence against women can be reported in Montenegro increases with age. The least informed are young people aged 18–34, of whom 74.1% know where they would report violence. This share rises among those of middle age (35–54) to 80.1%, and is highest among respondents aged 55 and over (83.2%). At the same time, younger respondents are more likely than others to say they do not know (19.7%), indicating a need for greater education and more accessible information about protection mechanisms.

*Graph 33 Do you know where in Montenegro violence against women can be reported? According to age range*

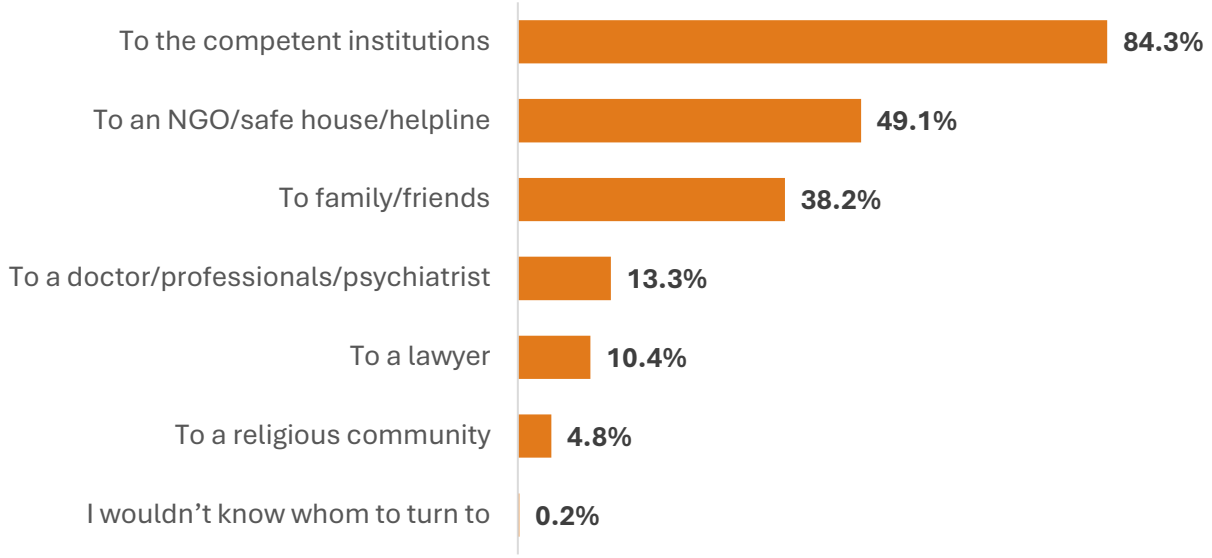


To better understand how concrete citizens' knowledge about reporting violence actually is, respondents who said they knew where to report it (N=803) were asked a follow-up question specifying exactly where they would do so. They were given multiple options and allowed to select more than one answer.

The majority of citizens (84.3%) said they would turn to relevant institutions, primarily the police, centres for social work, or the prosecutor's office, indicating that the institutional system is still perceived as the main and most reliable channel for protecting victims. At the same time, almost half of respondents (49.1%) said they would contact non-governmental organisations, safe houses, or SOS hotlines, confirming that the role of the civil sector in combating violence against women has become visible and recognised.

These findings suggest that citizens in Montenegro have specific expectations of institutional protection mechanisms, while also recognising the complementary role of NGOs as more accessible, trustworthy, and often more efficient channels of support for victims.

*Graph 34 If you know, where would you report a case of violence against a woman? (Multiple answers possible) (N=803)*

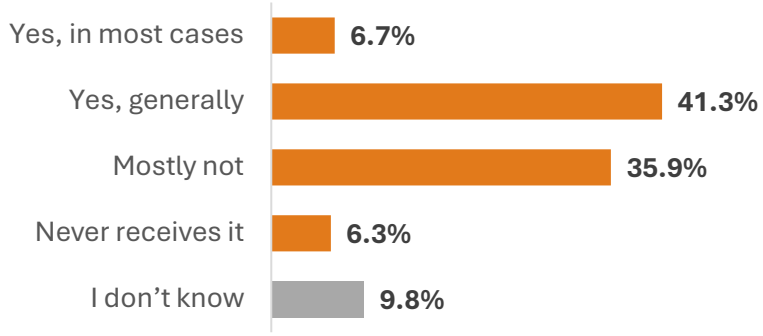



Although more than two thirds of citizens would turn to the relevant institutions to report a case of violence against women, this does not mean they fully trust that the system will adequately protect the victim or respond appropriately. Perceptions of institutional support for women who report violence are divided and reveal a significant degree of mistrust. Fewer than half of respondents believe that victims of violence in Montenegro receive adequate support from institutions when they report abuse. The majority of citizens believe that some form of support exists, but at the same time consider it insufficiently effective. These results point to a complex dynamic between trust and expectations. Although trust in institutions is not high, citizens still perceive them as the primary and formally responsible channel of protection. This suggests that their willingness to report violence relies more on social

norms, a sense of duty, and the formal role of the state than on personal experience of the system's reliability. In other words, people often distinguish between what one should do and what one truly believes – they see institutions as a necessary, but not necessarily safe or effective, means of protection.

This gap between formal and actual trust indicates the existence of so-called functional trust – citizens act in accordance with the system's rules, yet without genuine confidence in its effectiveness. To change this, trust must be strengthened through visible results, transparent procedures, and better communication between institutions and citizens. Only then will reporting violence become not only socially desirable, but also emotionally and practically justified from the perspective of those seeking protection.

*Graph 35 Do you think that women in Montenegro receive adequate support from institutions when they report violence?*

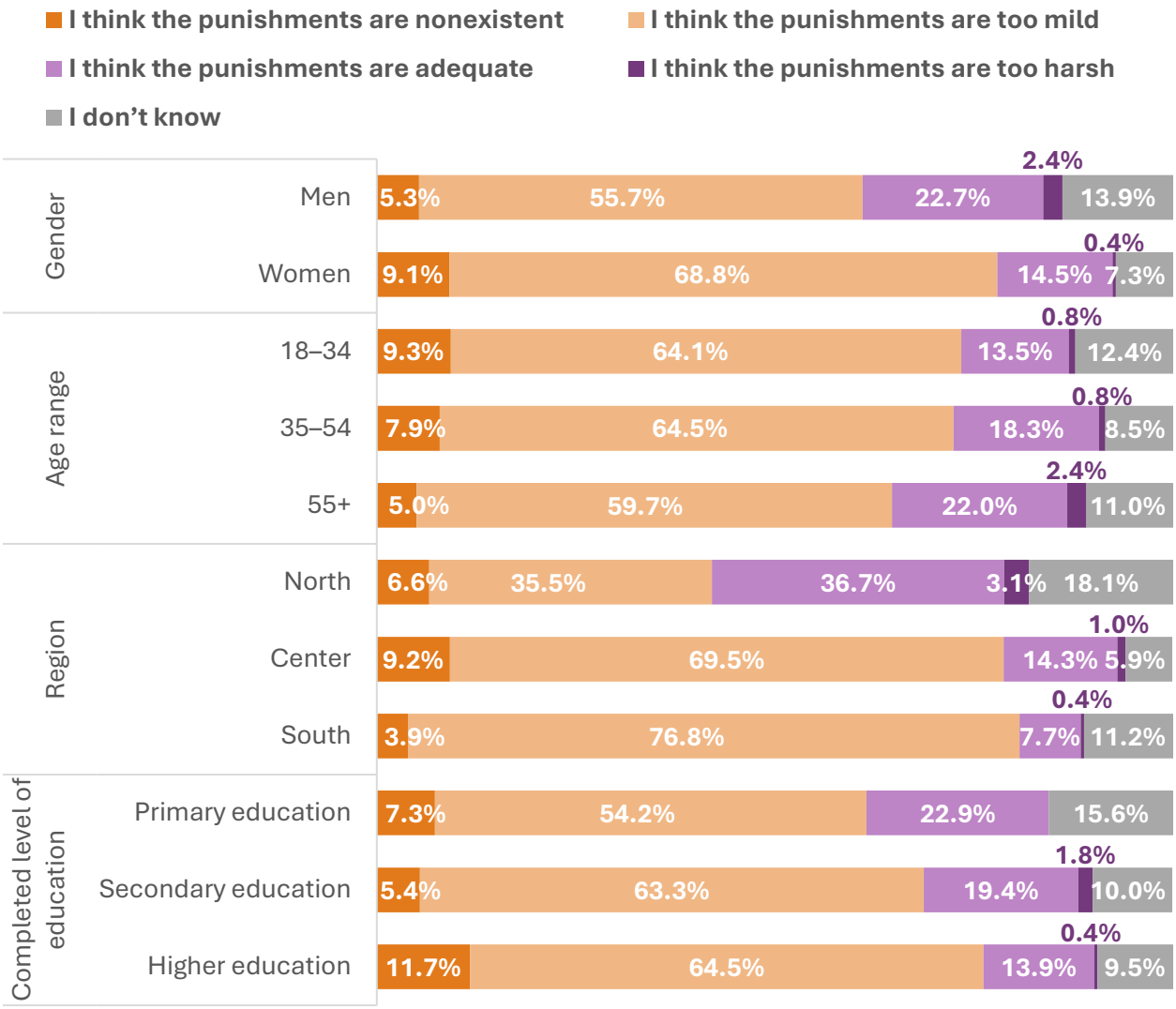



After examining trust in institutional support for victims, it is logical to turn to the perception of penal policy. The sense that the state protects women from violence depends not only on the availability of assistance, but also on citizens' belief that perpetrators are punished fairly and with sufficient severity. If the penalties appear too lenient or inconsistent, this can further discourage women from reporting violence and weaken public confidence in the protection system. Therefore, it is important to consider how citizens assess the adequacy of punishments for violence against women.

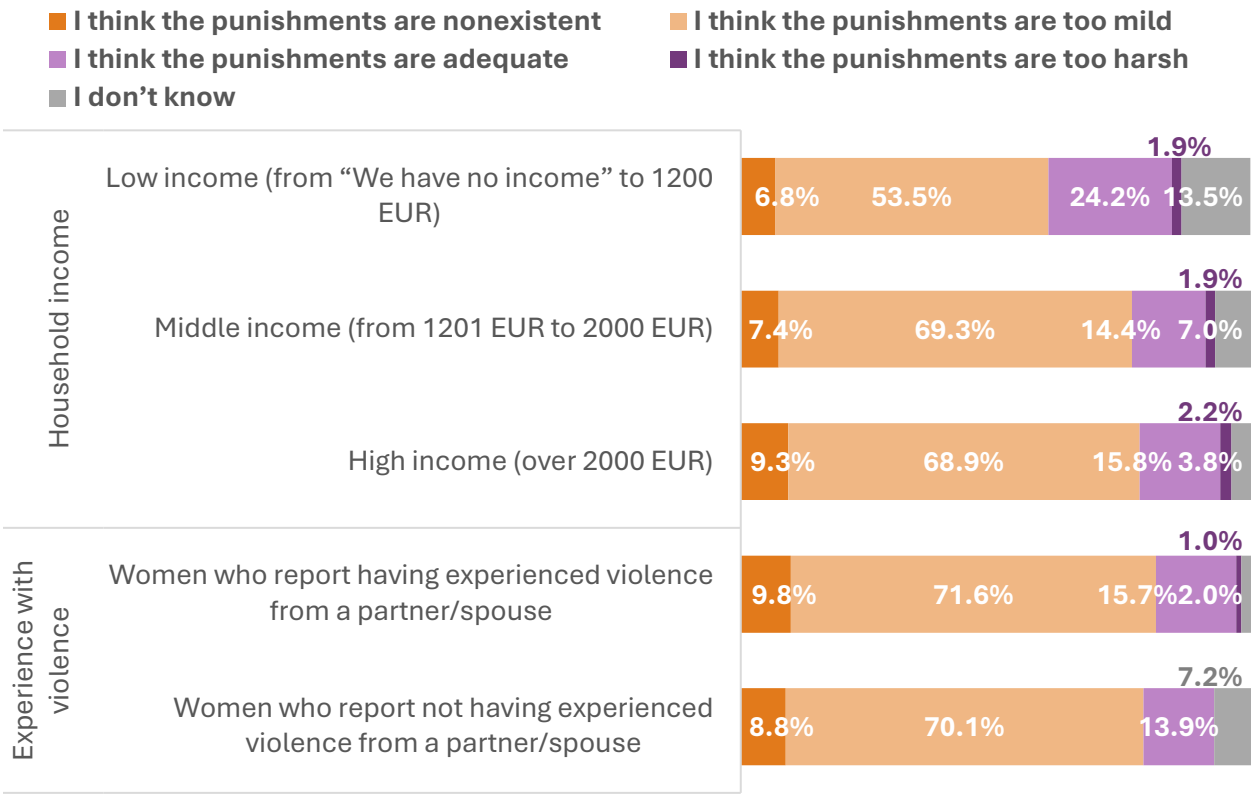
The majority of citizens believe that penalties for violence against women are not strict enough – as many as 62.6% say the punishments are too lenient, while a smaller proportion believes they are adequate (18.4%). A further 7.2% go even further, claiming that punishments practically do not exist. The differences between men and women are quite pronounced when it comes to perceptions of penal policy. Women are significantly more critical – almost 69% of them say the punishments are too lenient, compared to 55.7% of men. Regional differences are also considerable. In the north of the country, perceptions differ from the rest of Montenegro, as punishments are seen as much more adequate than in the south or central regions.

Women who have personally experienced violence are the most critical of penal policy – as many as 71.6% say the punishments are too lenient, while only 15.7% consider them adequate. This confirms that direct experience of violence leads to greater scepticism regarding the effectiveness of penal measures.

*Graph 36 Do you think that the punishments for violence against women are adequate? According to gender, age range, region and completed level of education*



*Graph 37 Do you think that the punishments for violence against women are adequate? According to monthly household income and personal experience with violence*



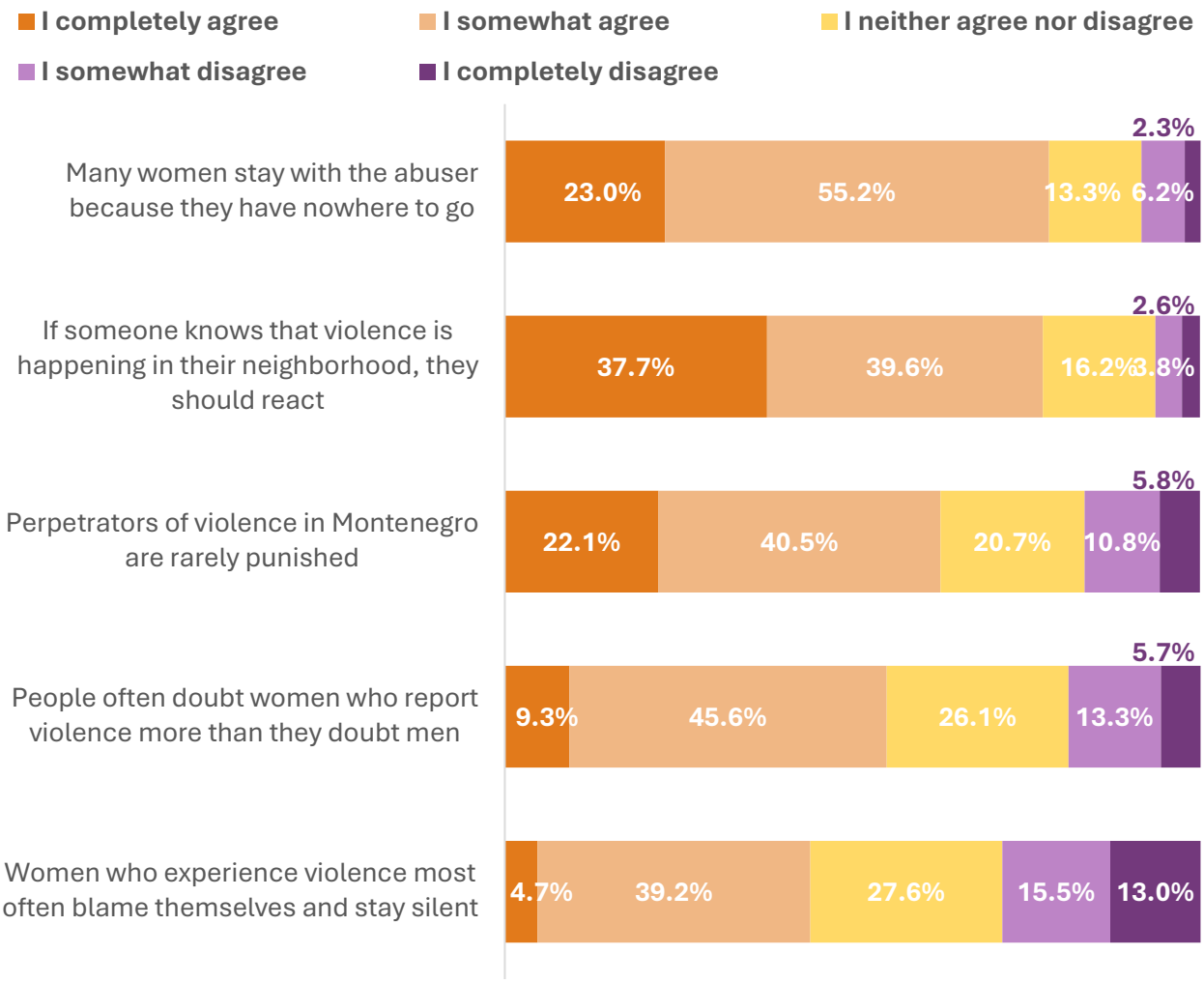

The final group of questions aimed to assess how respondents perceive the reasons why women remain in abusive relationships, the community's willingness to intervene, trust in the punishment of perpetrators, as well as social prejudices towards victims.

This perspective is important as it reveals the extent to which citizens understand the structural barriers to leaving an abusive relationship (such as the lack of a safe place to go or economic dependence), how they view the responsibility of the community, and the degree to which stigmatisation and mistrust towards women who report violence are present. These attitudes directly influence whether victims will seek help and how ready society is to protect them.

The majority of citizens in Montenegro show a high level of understanding of the problem of violence against women, but also express significant distrust in the institutional response. Three quarters of respondents believe that women remain with the abuser because they have nowhere else to go, and almost the same proportion think it is the community's duty to act if it knows about the violence. At the same time, two thirds believe that perpetrators of violence are rarely punished, which indicates a low level of trust in the judicial system. Half

of respondents recognise that society often doubts women who report violence, while a significant number believe that victims frequently blame themselves.

*Graph 38 To what extent do you agree with the following statements?*




Respondents recognise the existence of structural barriers that make it difficult for women to leave abusive relationships – primarily the lack of a safe place to go and economic dependence on the abuser. At the same time, most respondents see the community as responsible for taking action, while simultaneously expressing doubt in the institutional response and the punishment of perpetrators. This attitude points to a certain ambivalence – citizens understand the causes and seriousness of the problem, yet do not believe that the system can effectively protect victims. This, in turn, deepens the sense of helplessness and helps to sustain the cycle of violence.

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OSCE Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Mission to Montenegro

Ministry of
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Woman's Safe House