



MEASURING THE SHADOW PANDEMIC:

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN DURING COVID-19

COUNTRY REPORT: MOROCCO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COVID-19 has imposed serious economic challenges and health risks, disproportionately impacting women in Morocco.¹ Since female labour force participation in the country is low and most women who work are concentrated in the informal sector, women in Morocco were rendered particularly vulnerable to economic shocks. Congruently, the downstream impacts of COVID-19 vary in type and severity based on pre-existing factors, including socioeconomic status and risks due to other stressors. This research delves into the relationships between measures of violence against women (VAW) and underlying demographic, behavioural and socioeconomic factors.

This study found that baseline feelings of safety in Morocco, whether inside or outside their households, had significant negative impacts on women's mental and emotional well-being. Among the factors associated with these feelings, external stressors such as food insecurity and loss of income stood out as having a significant impact not only on experiences of safety (or violence) but also on women's well-being overall, as did lack of reliance on institutions and their support for women who have experienced violence.

¹ UN Volunteers. 2020. "[Assessing and addressing the gender impact of COVID-19 in Morocco.](#)" 28 July.

1. INTRODUCTION

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Morocco's High Commission for Planning (HCP) in 2019, found that 22% of women aged 15–74 have experienced physical violence and/or sexual violence in the past year.²

Since the pandemic began, rapid gender assessments (RGAs) conducted by UN Women using administrative data from police, VAW hotlines and other service providers suggested an increase in reported cases of violence against women and girls. Measures implemented to limit the spread of the pandemic, such as lockdowns and curfews, have had an impact on VAW risk factors, especially for women and girls who faced multiple forms of discrimination. In Morocco, NGOs have reported assistance requests from women that spanned from help in reporting violence to requests for shelter or housing assistance, and resources needed to manage the impacts of the pandemic.³

Within this context, UN Women commissioned Ipsos to conduct an RGA survey on the impact of COVID-19 on women's well-being and safety in 13 countries across regions. In adapting the surveying methodology to be feasible in the COVID-19 context, proxy measures on experience of VAW were used to collect data on sensitive topics to reduce the risk

to the respondents, and thus may not be directly comparable to other studies conducted before the pandemic.

Having reliable data that were collected in line with methodological, safety, and ethical standards, without putting women at greater distress and risk of violence, was critical to informing how policies and programmes can respond to the UN's system-wide efforts to scale up actions to address VAW in the context of COVID-19.

This report details the findings of the survey in Morocco between 18 August and 22 September 2021. The survey was conducted with 1,214 women aged 18 and older who had access to a mobile phone. Mobile phone penetration in Morocco is estimated at 134%,⁴ meaning that many people have more than one mobile phone number registered in their name. In 2017, the last year for which data are available, 94% of women in Morocco had a mobile phone.⁵ To ensure a representative sample, quotas were set on age (18–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60+) and region (first-level administrative division).

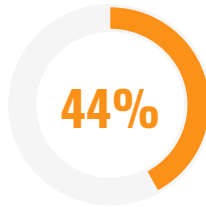
2 National Survey on Violence Against Women results in ONU Femmes Maroc. 2020. "[Premiers résultats de l'enquête nationale sur la violence à l'encontre des femmes réalisée en 2019 par le Haut-Commissariat au Plan.](#)" UN Women and Morocco High Commission for Planning.

3 ONU Femmes Maroc. 2020. "[Violences faites aux femmes et aux filles en temps de crise – l'expérience du confinement au Maroc.](#)" ; "[Impact of COVID-19 on Violence Against Women in Morocco.](#)"

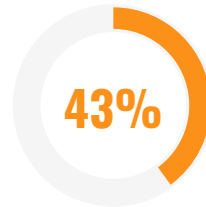
4 Calculations made using 2020 World Bank data.

5 [UN Women: Morocco](#)

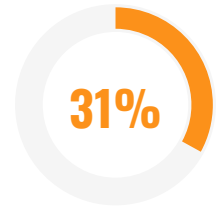
KEY FINDINGS



Verbal Abuse



Denied Basic Needs



Forced Isolation



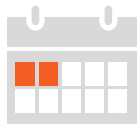
16%

of women feel unsafe in their homes.



23%

said this has gotten worse as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.



20%

of women live in households with conflict among adults at least weekly.



30%

said conflict between adults has become more frequent as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.



55%

of women think that the experience of verbal or physical abuse at the hands of a partner is common for women in their community.



68%

said this has gotten worse as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.



53%

of women think that physical harm, abuse and harassment are a problem for women in their community.



21%

of women think physical harm, abuse, and harassment has gotten worse since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.



34%

of women feel unsafe walking alone at night.



13%

of women feel unsafe walking alone during the day.



45%

of women think that it is common for women to be harassed in public.



2. EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

2.1. Proxy measures of violence against women in the community

When considering measures of violence against women at the community level, it is important to keep the context of the study in mind. Due to the remote nature of this survey, indirect questions were asked as proxy indicators of VAW, meaning it was not possible to distinguish respondent experiences from those of other women in their community or to distinguish whether this experience occurred within or outside of the household. While data from this study should not be interpreted as prevalence data, it nevertheless provides critical information on the impact of COVID-19 on women's perception of well-being and safety.

About 4 out of 5 women in Morocco (78%) said that they, or another woman they know, have experienced a form of VAW (such as violence, denial of basic needs, sexual harassment, restrictions or verbal abuse) in their lifetime.⁶ Verbal abuse, denial of basic needs and forced isolation were among the most common forms of VAW reported, with 43% of women reporting experience or knowledge of denial of basic needs, 44% of women reporting experience or knowledge of verbal abuse in their lifetime, and 31% of women reporting experience or knowledge of forced isolation. Women in rural areas were significantly more likely than women in urban areas to report experience or knowledge of denial of basic needs

(60 compared to 39%, respectively) and forced isolation (39% compared to 29%, respectively, in their lifetime than women in urban areas, while women in urban areas were significantly more likely than women in rural areas to report experience or knowledge of verbal abuse in their lifetime (46 compared to 33%, respectively). Since the start of the pandemic, verbal abuse (35%), denial of basic needs (35%) and forced isolation (28%) were also the most commonly reported forms of VAW among all women.

Women who felt unsafe at home were significantly more likely than women who felt safe to report experiencing or knowing someone who had experienced the denial of basic needs since COVID-19 (58 compared to 30%, respectively), verbal abuse (41 compared to 33%, respectively), and forced isolation (42 compared to 26%, respectively) since the start of the pandemic. Additionally, women who felt unsafe walking outside alone, during the day or night, were significantly more likely than those who felt safe to have experienced or to know someone who had experienced a denial of basic needs (48 compared to 25%, respectively) and forced isolation (41 compared to 21%, respectively) since the start of COVID-19. This was also true for those who experienced frequent conflict in their homes compared those who experienced infrequent conflict (54 compared to 28%, respectively, for denial of basic needs, and 38 compared to 25%, respectively, for forced isolation).

⁶ Cognitive testing of this question revealed that for many women forced isolation and denial of basic needs were influenced by COVID-19 related measures and economic stress. The results from this study suggest that women may bear a disproportionate burden when it comes to COVID-19 effects, however it is important to keep the overall context in mind when interpreting study results.

Women who reported decreased income due to the pandemic were significantly more likely than women experiencing unchanged income (40 compared to 16%, respectively) to report experiencing or knowing someone who had experienced verbal abuse since the onset of the pandemic. Women living in urban areas were also significantly more likely than women in rural areas to report experiencing or knowing someone who experienced verbal abuse since the start of COVID-19 (38 compared to 22%, respectively).

Conversely, women in rural areas were significantly more likely than women in urban areas to report denial of basic needs (48 compared to 31%, respectively) and forced isolation (36 compared to 26%, respectively) since COVID-19. This suggests that assistance may be

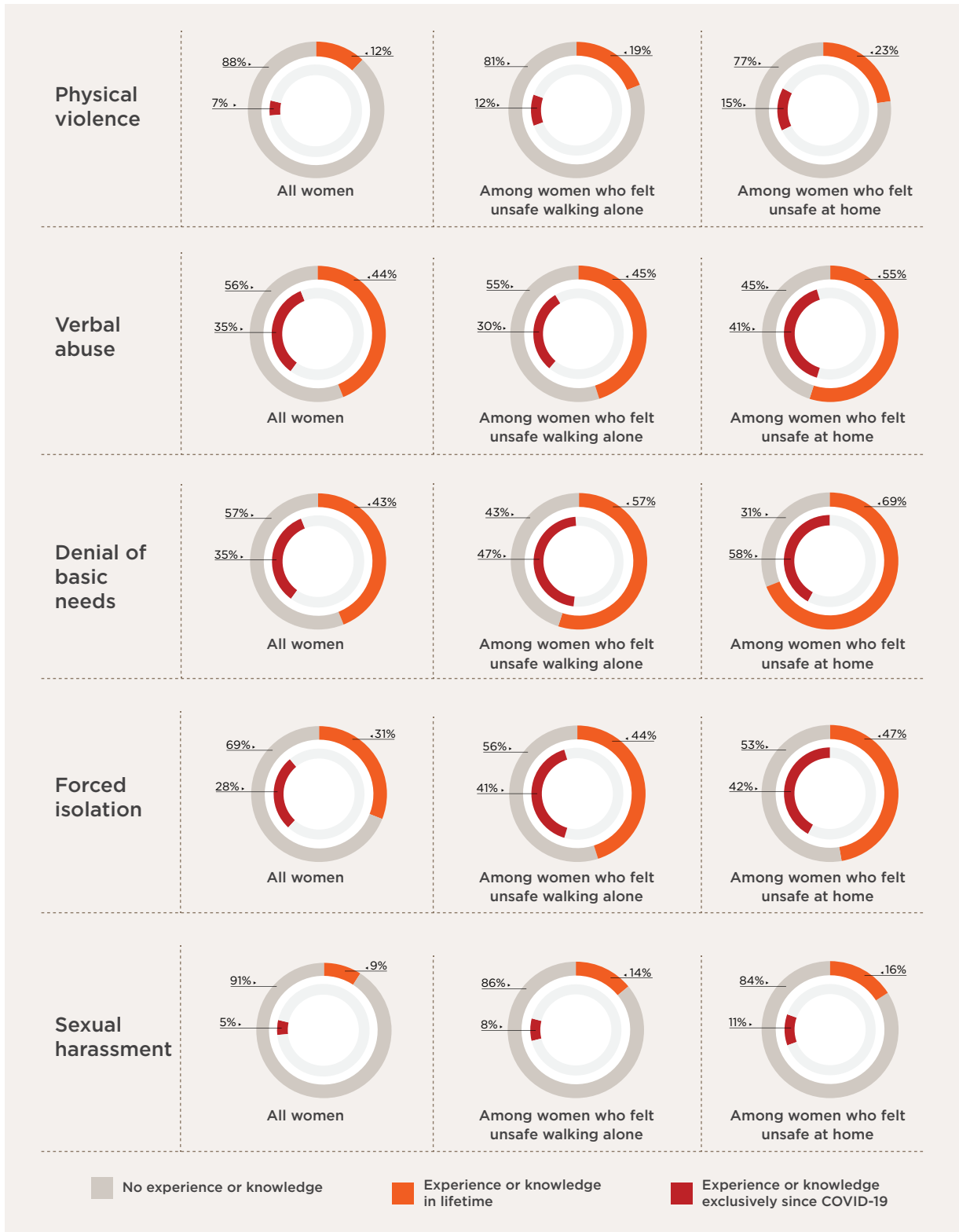
more sparse or more slowly rolled out in rural areas than in urban ones.

Women with disabilities were also significantly more likely to report experiencing verbal abuse than women without disabilities (51 compared to 30%, respectively), as were women living with partners compared to single women (37 compared to 29%, respectively) since COVID-19.

Additionally, women who were food insecure were also more likely than those who were not to experience or know someone who had experienced a denial of basic needs (62 compared to 16%, respectively) and forced isolation (52 compared to 14%, respectively) since the start of the pandemic, highlighting again the association of financial and economic struggle with VAW.

FIGURE 1

Experience or knowledge of specific forms of VAW, over a lifetime and since COVID-19



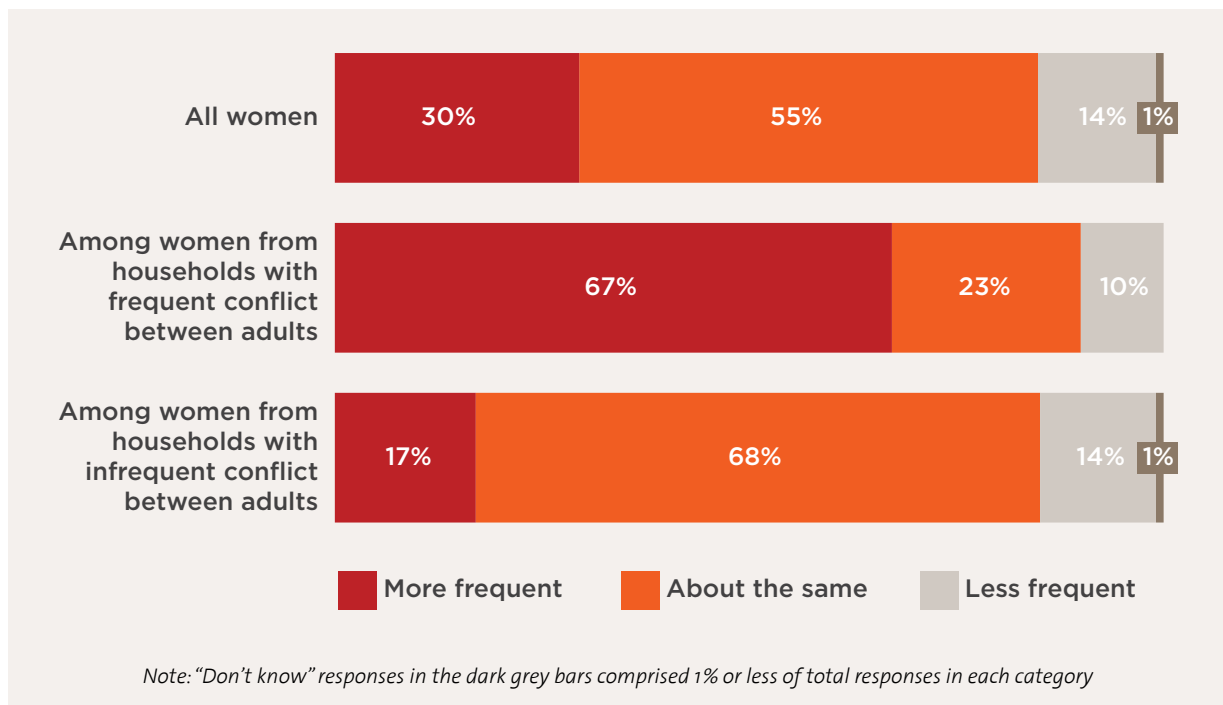
3. FEELINGS OF SAFETY

3.1. Personal safety inside the home

When it comes to safety within the household, 20% of women said that there has been conflict between adults in their household at least weekly over the past six months. Three in 10 (30%) said that conflict has become more frequent since the onset of COVID-19. Those

who experienced frequent household conflict were nearly four times as likely as those who experienced infrequent conflict (67 compared to 17%, respectively) to say that the frequency has increased as a result of the pandemic, suggesting that existing household tensions have been exacerbated.

FIGURE 2
Changes in frequency of household conflict as a result of COVID-19



Nearly 1 in 5 women (16%) said that they have felt unsafe in their household in the last six months. Those who experienced frequent conflict (at least weekly) between adults in the household were five times as likely as those with infrequent conflict to have felt unsafe in their homes (40 compared to 8%, among women who said that they experience household conflict infrequently). Additionally, women who said that they or another woman they know had experienced physical violence since

COVID-19 were more than twice as likely to have felt unsafe as those who did not (34, compared to 14%, respectively).

Women with children in the household (18%), as well as women whose income decreased during the pandemic (18%) and who generated income (20%), were also more likely to report feeling unsafe at home than women who did not have children in the household (13%), had stable income (9%) or did not generate income for the household (15%). Women who felt un-

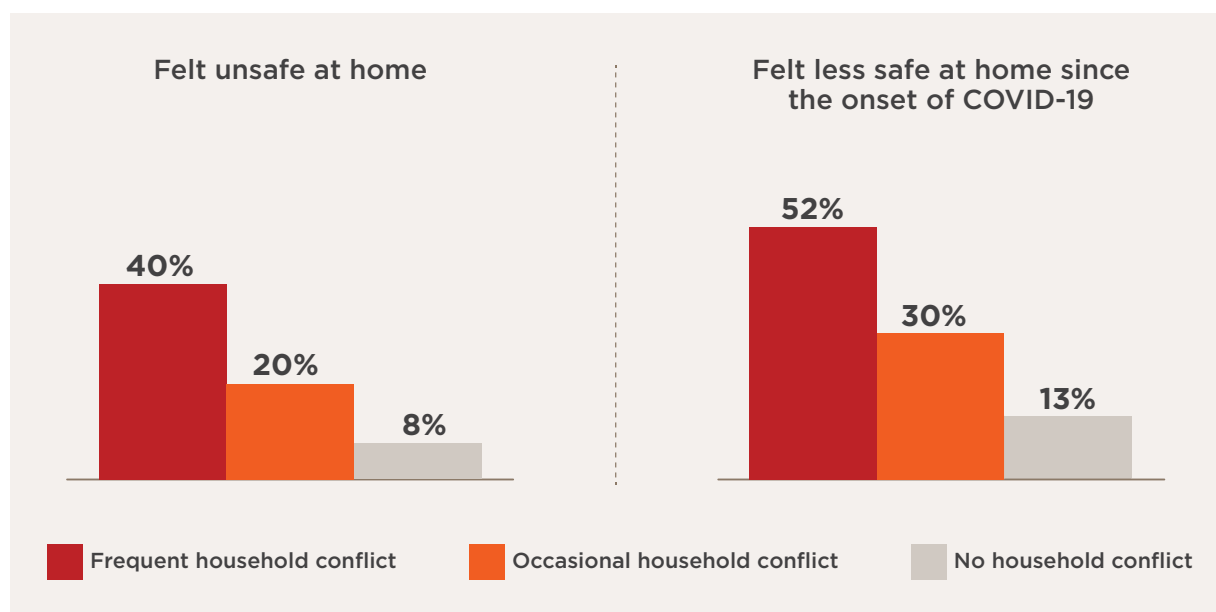
safe at home were three times as likely as those who did not to be severely food insecure (19 compared to 6%) – indicating the influence of economic stressors on women’s sense of stability and safety in the home.

For nearly a quarter of women (23%), the COVID-19 pandemic has made things worse in terms of how safe they feel in their home.

Among women who said that they already felt unsafe this number increased over threefold to 72%. And for those who said that they or another woman they know had experienced physical violence in their lifetime it increased by 38%, reinforcing the point that the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified existing vulnerabilities and safety issues for women in Morocco.

FIGURE 3

Perceptions of women’s safety in the household, by frequency of household conflict

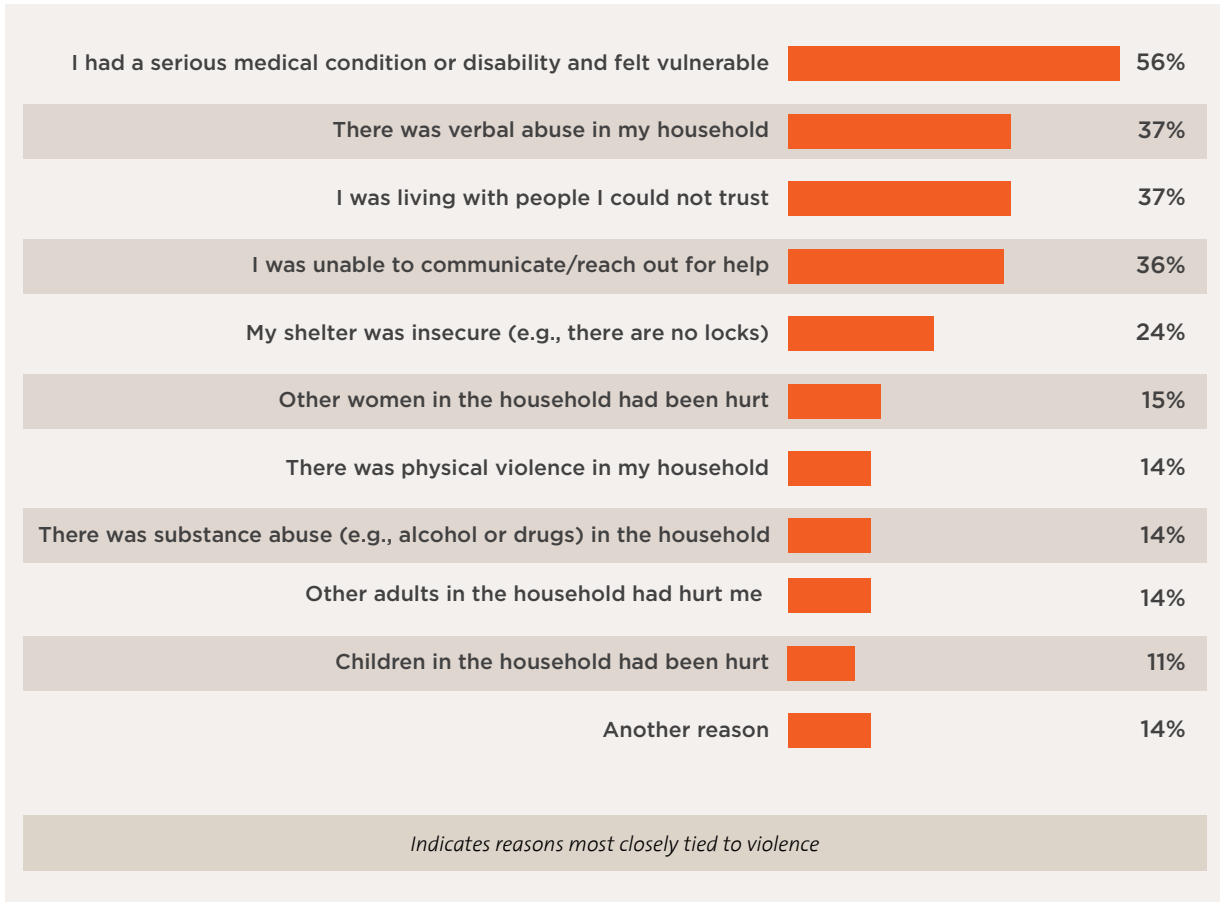


When asked why they have felt unsafe in their homes, women most often cited serious medical conditions or disabilities increasing vulnerability (56%), verbal abuse (37%), lack of trust in household members (37%) and inability to communicate or reach out for help (36%, with a much higher 60% for women in rural areas). This suggests that a key to supporting women

is to develop ways to reach out to more vulnerable and less-connected populations, including women who may be medically vulnerable and unable to leave their homes on their own and women who are isolated both physically and in terms of communication technology, especially after COVID-19 lockdown precautions.

FIGURE 4

Reasons for women feeling unsafe in their homes (among the 16% who reported feeling unsafe)



3.2. Personal safety in public spaces

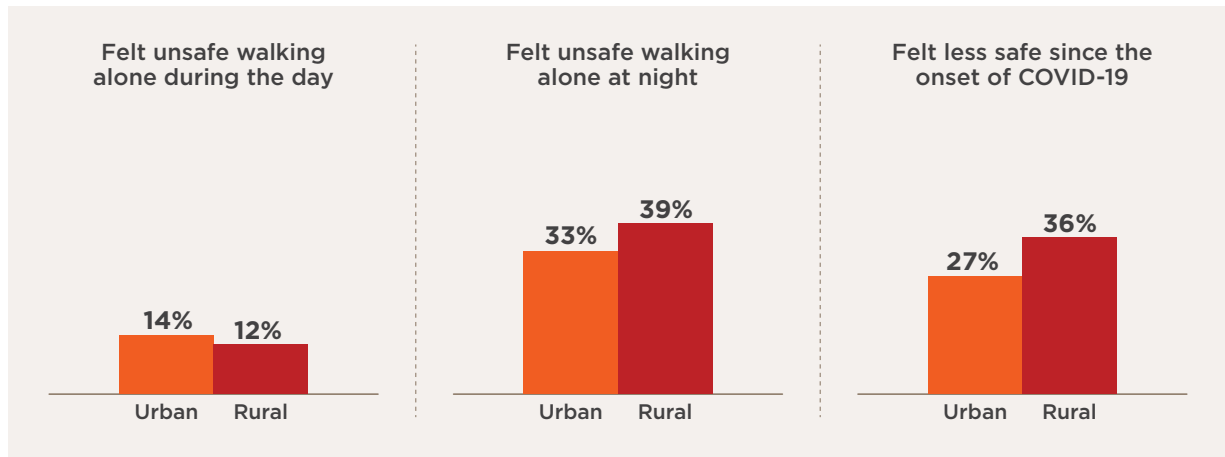
When out in their communities, the majority of women said that they feel safe walking alone during the day (87%), but this drops to just 54% when asked about walking alone at night. Moreover, nearly 1 in 3 (29%) said that they feel less safe while out at night since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Perceptions of safety differed by age and location. Younger women aged 18–39 were more

likely than women 40 and older to say they feel unsafe when walking alone at night (47% for age 18–39 and 21% for age 40 and older) and less safe since the onset of COVID-19 (37% for age 18–39 and 21% for age 40 and older). Across urban and rural areas, women were equally affected by safety concerns walking alone during the day; however, a larger proportion of women in rural areas reported feeling unsafe at night (39, compared to 33% for urban areas) and less safe since the start of the pandemic (36 compared to 27%, for urban areas).

FIGURE 5

Perceptions of safety while out in public, by location (urban and rural)



4. PERCEPTIONS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

4.1. Women’s perceived safety inside the home

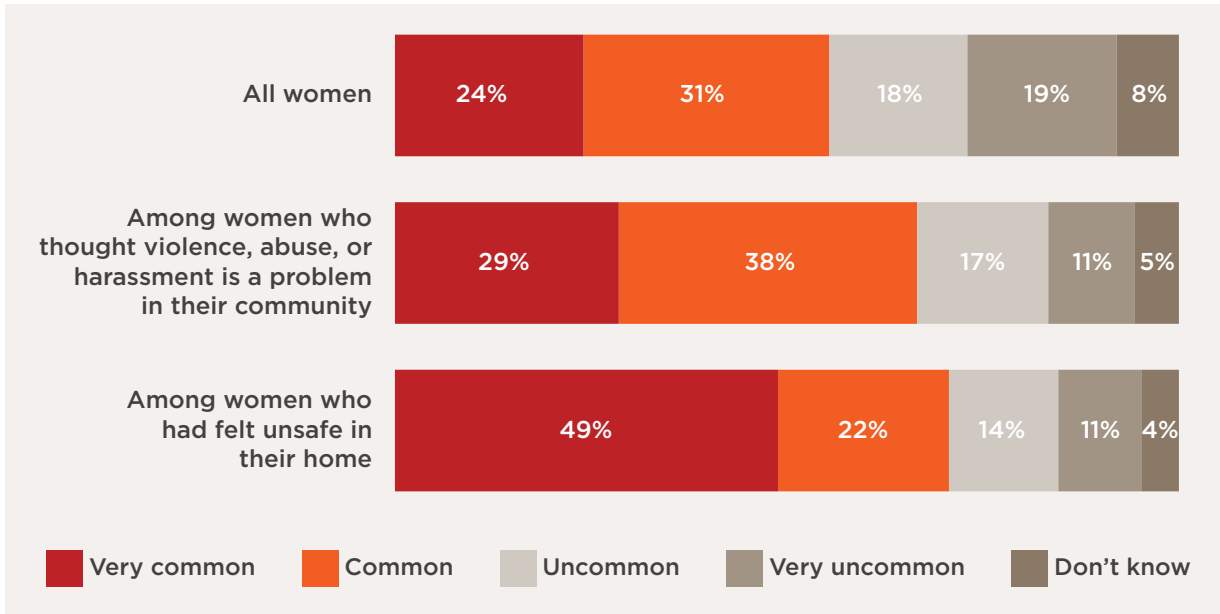
When considering the perception of experience, over half (55%) of women believe the experience of verbal or physical abuse at the hands of a partner is common for women. Women aged 50 and older were significantly more likely to think this was common (65, compared to 50% of women under 50 years of age), as were women in urban areas (57, compared to 45% in rural areas).

Similar to patterns around safety in public spaces, personal experience of safety issues inside the home appears to be associated with women’s perceptions of the safety of other women in the community within their homes. Among women who have felt unsafe in their own home, 71% said that they thought the experience of verbal or physical abuse at the hands of a partner is common, compared

to 52% among those who felt safe in their homes, and among women who experienced frequent conflict in their households this number was 67%, compared to 52% among those who experienced infrequent conflict. Notably, women who reported experiencing or knowing someone who experienced VAW in their lifetime were more likely to think that partner abuse was a common occurrence in their communities. These data points suggest that women may be including their own experiences when reporting on the experiences of women in their community, as well as bolstering the evidence-based theory that women include their own experience when reporting on community measures.

Women who viewed partner abuse as very common were also more likely to be food insecure than those who did not, which highlights the significance of economic security on women’s broader sense of safety as well.

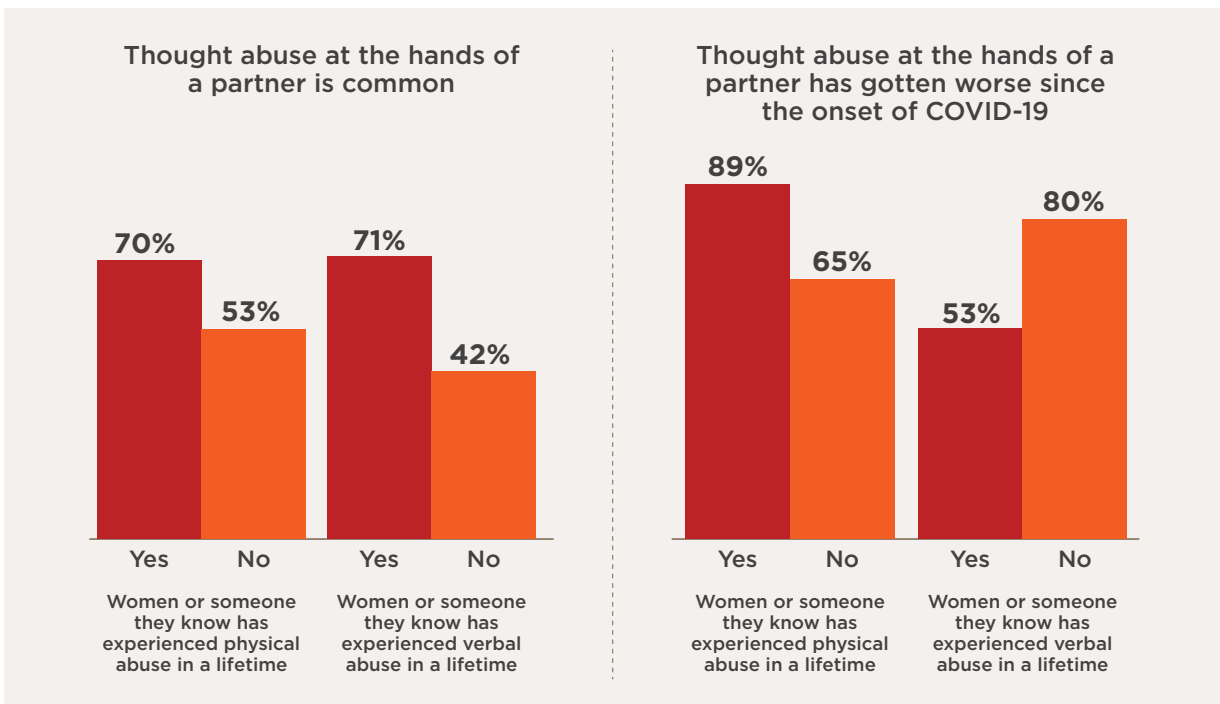
FIGURE 6
Perceptions of partner abuse, by experience of safety



Two-thirds of women (68%) thought women’s experiences of physical and verbal abuse at the hands of a partner have worsened since the start of the pandemic. Similar to the perception of safety in public spaces, younger women (85% of women under the age of 40, compared

to 51% of women over 40) and those in rural areas (78, compared with 66% of women in urban areas) were more likely than older women and those in urban areas to say partner abuse has gotten worse since the onset of COVID-19.

FIGURE 7
Perceptions of partner violence, by experience or knowledge of VAW in lifetime



Similar to experiences of violence outside the home, a vast majority of women (84%) said that they believe that women would seek out help if they experienced verbal or physical abuse at the hands of a partner. However, 58% of women said that they would primarily seek support from family and only 9% said that they would primarily seek help from the police. These findings corroborate existing data on VAW reporting from the national prevalence survey⁷ and indicate that domestic violence is likely underreported to authorities. Women are more likely to suggest women's centres, NGOs or safehouses as alternatives to reporting to the police (22%), pointing towards better trust and access to community services

Women who said that they or another woman they know had experienced physical violence in their lifetime were more likely than women who did not (18 compared to 6%, respectively) to first seek help from NGOs and safehouses and less likely than those who did not (48 compared to 59%, respectively) to rely primarily on family. However, those experiencing verbal abuse reported the opposite – indicating that verbal abuse may be particularly underreported. Women who said that they or another woman they know had experienced verbal abuse were less likely to know of any resources dedicated to women in their communities, further implying that isolation of these groups is likely.

Although the majority of women reported that they have continued to leave the house and socialize, 6 in 10 women (63%) said that COVID-19 has limited their interactions with friends and social groups. The impacts of violence against

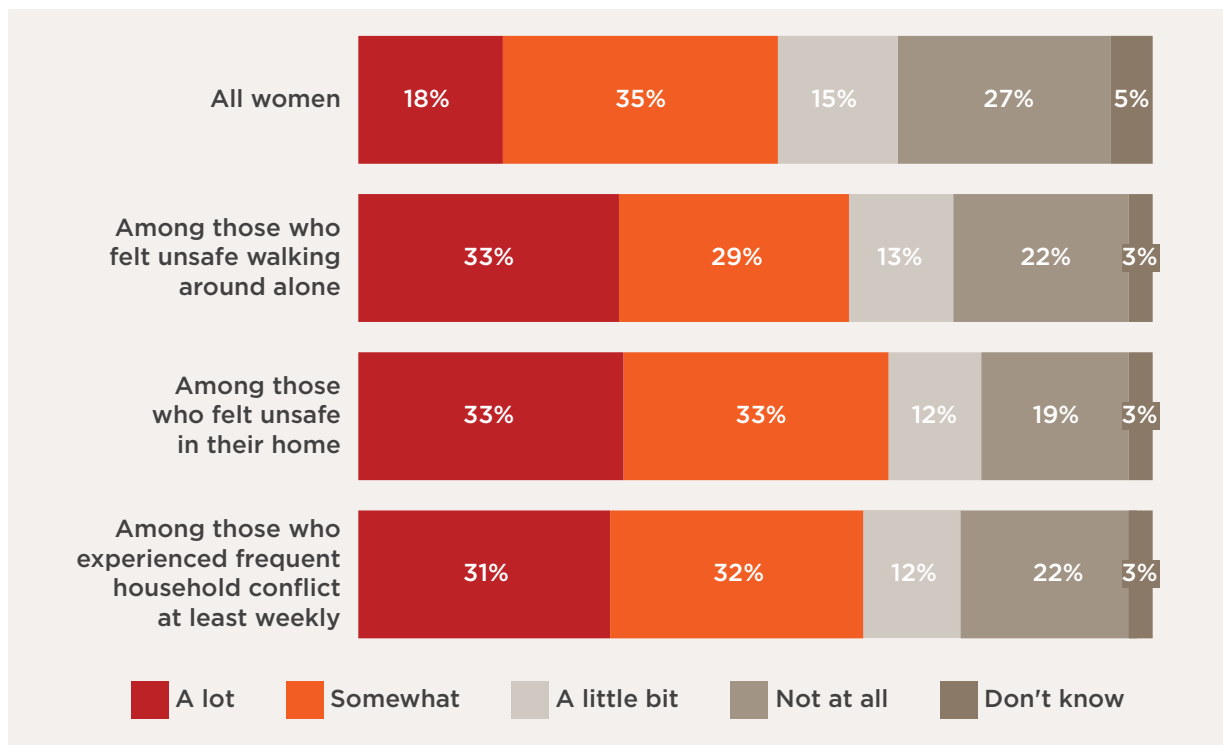
women in public and private were also observed when analysing women's socialization and movement patterns. Women who said that they or another woman they know have experienced physical violence or sexual harassment since COVID-19 were far more likely to say that the pandemic has limited their interaction with friends and social groups (86 compared to 60% of women who said that neither they nor someone they know had experienced physical violence, and 83 compared to 61% for women who said that neither they nor someone they know had experienced sexual harassment).

4.2. Perceptions of violence against women in the community

When asked about violence, abuse or the harassment of women, more than half (53%) of women said that they believe these issues are at least somewhat of a problem in their communities and an additional 15% said that they are a little bit of a problem. Violence, abuse or the harassment of women in the community were more likely to be perceived as a problem by women who live in urban areas compared to women who live in rural areas (56 compared to 40%, respectively). Women who have experienced a decrease in household income since the pandemic were also more likely to report perceiving a problem compared to those who reported unchanged income (57 compared to 40%, respectively), as well as women aged 50 and older (63%) particularly when compared to those under 50 years old (48%).

Women who felt unsafe walking alone outside, day or night, were significantly more likely to perceive violence, abuse or the harassment of women as a problem in their communities compared to women who felt safe (62, compared to 50%, respectively), as were women who felt unsafe in their homes compared to women who felt safe (67, compared to 50%, respectively).

7 The [National Survey on Violence Against Women \(2019\)](#): [UN Women and Morocco High Commission for Planning found that](#): "In all contexts, only 10.4% of victims (7.5% in the marital context and 11.3% in the non-marital context) have taken legal action or filed a complaint with the competent authorities (gendarmierie, judiciary, local authority) after having been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence: 13% in the case of physical violence and only 3% in the case of sexual violence. These percentages are respectively 7% and 2% in the marital context and 22% and 3% in extra-marital contexts. As a result, sexual violence is less reported than physical violence."

FIGURE 8**Extent to which violence, abuse or the harassment of women are a problem in the community**

Additionally, 1 in 5 women (21%) said that violence, abuse or the harassment of women in their community have increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and 53% said that they have stayed the same. Women under the age of 50 were more than twice as likely to say violence, abuse or the harassment of women have increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (24%) compared with women aged 50 and over (12%). Among women who reported feeling unsafe while out alone, 32% said that conditions in their communities have worsened since the start of the pandemic. Comparatively, among women who reported feeling safe, only 13% (nearly three times fewer) felt that conditions in their communities had worsened since the start of the pandemic.

4.3. Women's perceived safety in public spaces

When considering the perceived experiences of women in the community more broadly,

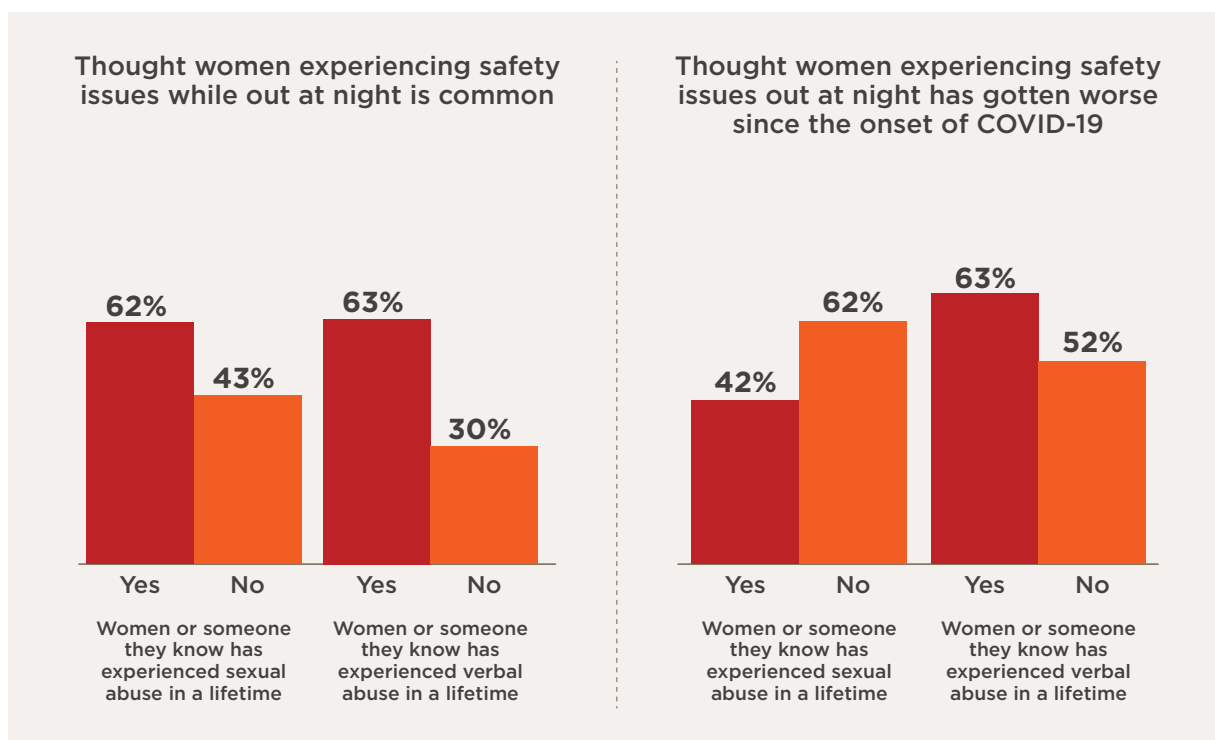
almost half (45%) of respondents said that they think it is common for women to experience harassment and safety issues in public at night – slightly higher than the 34% of women who personally feel unsafe at night. Women aged 50 and older were significantly more likely than women younger than 50 to think it is common for women to experience harassment and safety issues in public at night (61 compared to 38%, respectively). Urban women were significantly more likely than woman in rural areas to think public harassment and safety issues were common at night (49 compared to 28%, respectively). Those who said that they generate income for their household were also significantly more likely than those who did not to consider public harassment and safety issues common at night (52 compared to 42%, respectively). This may be due to increased exposure to these types of incidents at night among women in urban areas and/or those involved in income-generating activities.

While less likely to perceive women experiencing safety issues at night as common, younger women and those in rural areas are each more likely to say that safety issues at night have gotten worse since the COVID-19 pandemic. When asked how issues of safety for women out at night have changed since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, women under the age of 50 were more likely than women over the age of 50 to say that things have gotten worse (62 compared to 36%, respectively). Women living in rural areas were also more likely to perceive safety at night to have gotten worse since the COVID-19 pandemic compared to women in urban areas and to the overall population of women (63 compared to 51 and 54%, respectively).

Women who reported experiences or knowledge in a lifetime of verbal abuse or sexual harassment were almost twice as likely as those who did not to say that women experiencing

safety issues while out at night is common, particularly women who reported experiences or knowledge of verbal abuse compared to those who did not (63 compared to 30%, respectively) or sexual harassment (62 compared to 43%, respectively). Women with knowledge or experience of verbal abuse in their lifetime were more likely to perceive that it had gotten worse since the pandemic than those who did not (69 compared to 52%, respectively), while those with knowledge or experience of sexual abuse were less likely to say it had gotten worse than those who had not (42 compared to 62%, respectively). However, when looking at experience or knowledge in a lifetime of any type of VAW, overall, women were nearly equally as likely to think that experiencing safety issues while out at night has gotten worse since the onset of COVID-19 (53% for those who had experiences or knowledge of any type of VAW, compared to 56% for those who did not).

FIGURE 9
Perception of women’s safety in public at night, by experience or knowledge of VAW in a lifetime



A large majority of women (87%) expected that women experiencing harassment or abuse in public spaces would seek help. Among these women, half (50%) said that they expected women would primarily seek help from the police, while 30% said that they would primarily seek help from family. These results are consistent with the findings that nearly half of women in Morocco (46%) said help in reporting VAW incidents or dealing with police was available to women in their community.

More than half of women (54%) who said that they or another woman they know have experienced violence, abuse or harassment in their lifetime said that they thought women experiencing such incidents in public spaces would primarily seek help from the police, as compared to 35% of women who did not, suggesting that women with greater exposure to VAW may be more inclined to seek out official channels to address VAW when it happens in

public spaces. Correspondingly, women who said that neither themselves or other women they know had experienced a form of VAW in their lifetime were significantly more likely to suggest women would primarily seek family support (39%) than women who did report knowledge or experience of VAW (28%).

While one in three women (34%) reported feeling unsafe when out at night alone and slightly more than 1 in 10 (13%) felt unsafe during the day, the majority of women (79%) said that they have left their house by themselves at least once a week. Those in rural areas were less likely to say they have left their home by themselves at least once a week (61%). Women who report being in income-generating activities were more likely to leave the house daily than those not involved in income-generating activities (65, versus 36% leaving the home daily respectively).

5. IMPACTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

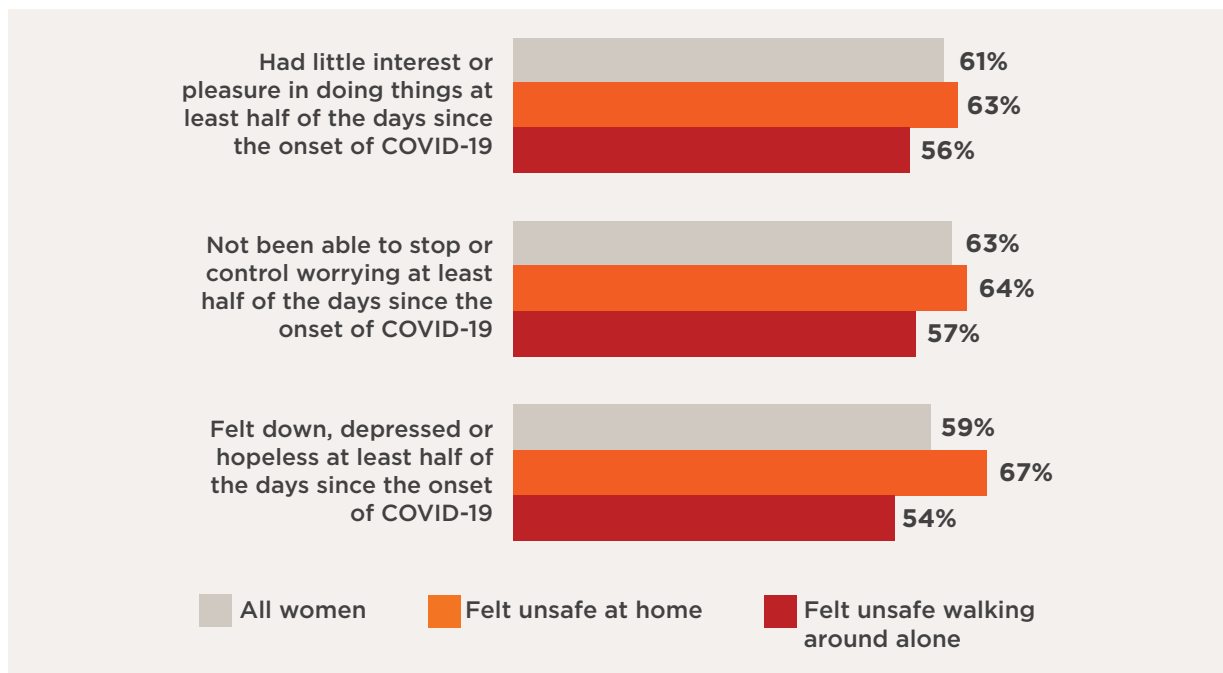
This study indicates strong relationships between measures of VAW, changes in women’s behaviours and their feelings of mental health, suggesting that impressions and experience of safety (or lack thereof) may be associated with women’s mental and emotional health. Women who said that they had felt unsafe at home were more likely than those who felt safe to report feeling down, depressed or hopeless at least half the time (67 compared to 58%, respectively) and to say that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted them exclusively negatively (62 compared to 53%, respectively).

In addition to experiences of safety issues being strongly associated with mental and emotional well-being, women who were living with partners were significantly more likely to report experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety than women who were single:

- Two in three (66%) of partnered women reported not being able to stop or control worrying at least half the time compared to 51% of single women.
- 64% of partnered women compared to 49% of single women reported having little interest or pleasure in doing things at least half the time.
- 63% of partnered women compared to 48% of single women reported feeling down, depressed or hopeless at least half the time).

Women who lived in urban areas were more likely to report experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety compared to those who did not, as were those who had lower education levels compared to those who had higher education levels, as were those who said that they have a disability compared to those who did not.

FIGURE 10
Measures of mental health, by feelings of safety

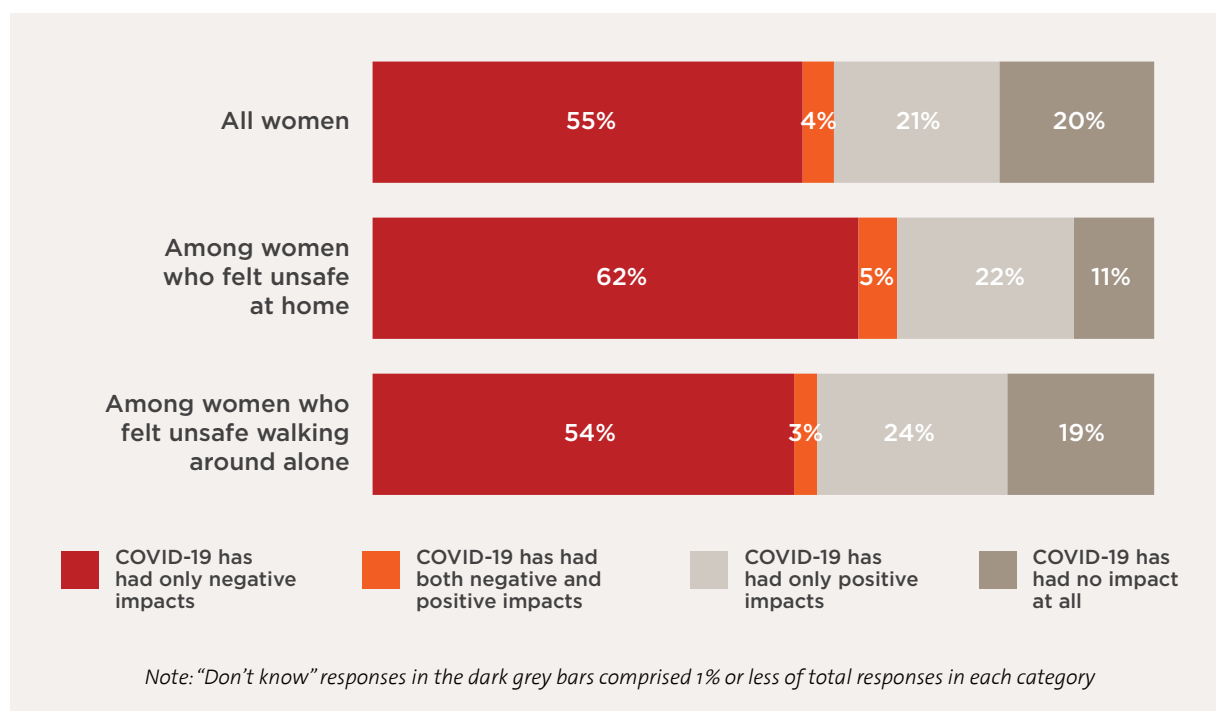


Overall, 55% of women in Morocco said that the COVID-19 pandemic has had an exclusively negative impact on their mental and emotional well-being. Among women who said that they are another woman they know had experienced VAW in their lifetime this increased to 60% (compared to 37% among women who have not experienced or know another woman who had experienced VAW) and for women who felt unsafe in their own home this was 62% compared to 53% among those who felt safe.

Women who reported having a disability were more likely to report exclusively negative effects from the pandemic compared to women without disabilities (69 compared to 51%, re-

spectively) as were women who experienced a decrease in income since the pandemic compared to women who experienced unchanged income (61 compared and 31%, respectively). Additionally, women who said the pandemic impacted their mental health negatively were four times more likely to be severely food insecure compared to those who said that COVID-19 had no impact on their mental health at all (9 compared to 2%, respectively). These data indicate the potential influences of external stressors such as pre-existing conditions and financial issues as important associations with mental health and suggesting, as previous reports had found, that the negative impacts of COVID-19 are felt the strongest by those already experiencing hardship.

FIGURE 11
Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health, by feelings of safety

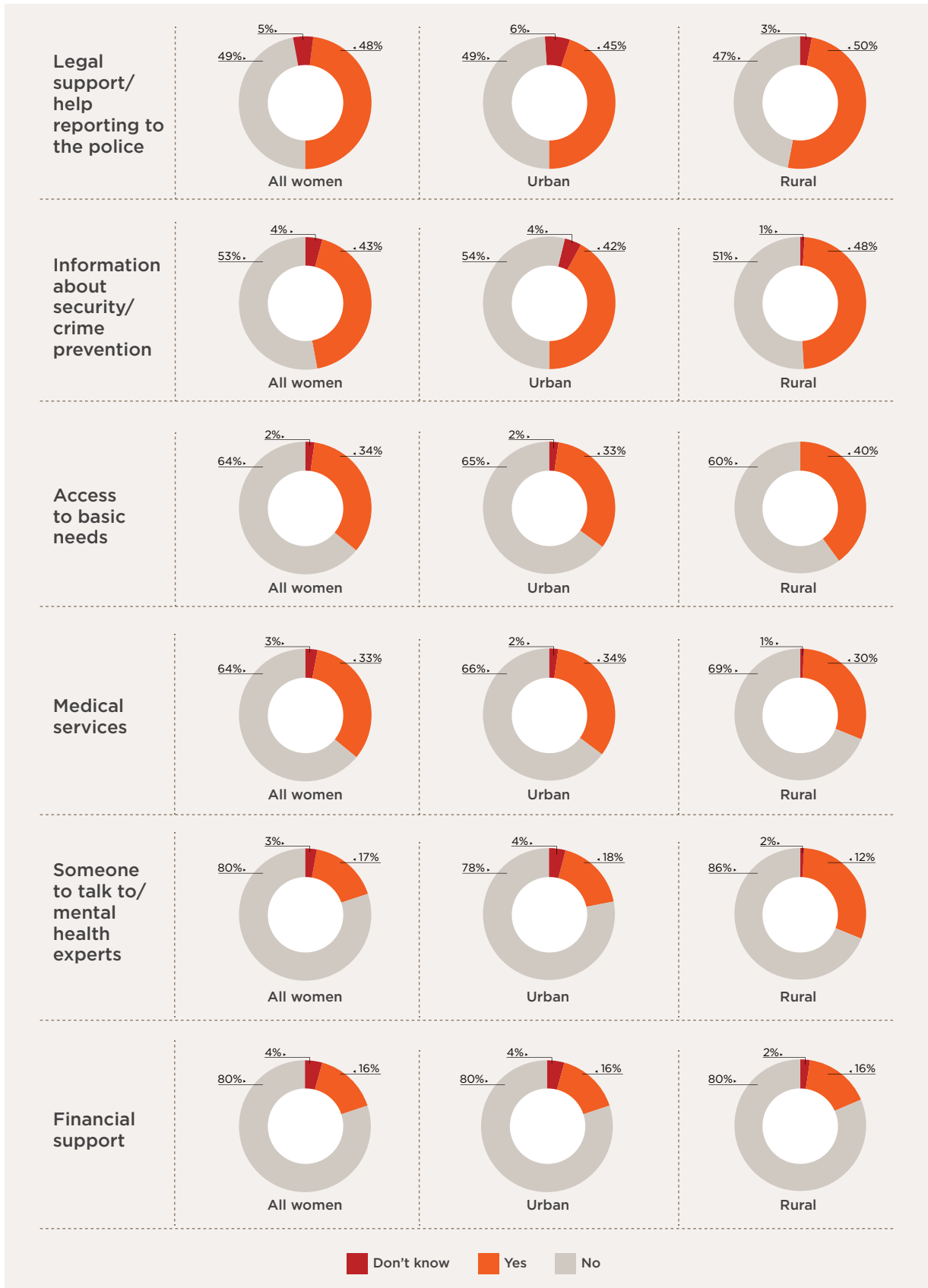


Most women (80%) said that resources like professional mental health experts were not available as support services for women in their community, and among women who said that they or another woman they know

had experienced verbal abuse in their lifetime this increased to 87%. Numbers were equally high among women in rural areas (86%) and those living with disabilities (87%).

FIGURE 12

Awareness of community help/support services, by location (urban and rural)



Results from this study also show that women are willing to seek help when they face VAW in Morocco; however, the majority of women are unaware of resources that may be available should they find themselves in an unsafe and vulnerable situation. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, women in this study remain reluctant to report VAW to official authorities and express preferences to report to other entities, including NGOs, shelters or family members. The same findings were reported by the HCP national survey on violence against women, which revealed that only 10.4% of women have initiated a legal action or filed a complaint to

the authorities (Gendarmerie Royale, judiciary or a local authority) after having experienced physical and/or sexual violence, all contexts included. The proportion is 13% in case of physical violence and only 3% in the case of sexual violence. Moreover, most women (57.8%) reported that they were not aware of the existence of Law 103-13 on combating violence against women. The data show that regardless of their sociodemographic characteristics, women are much better informed about non-governmental associations (62.3%) than about State structures (40.7%).⁸

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The impacts of COVID-19 on VAW in Morocco are significant. Since the pandemic, women in Morocco have encountered violence in public and in private spheres, at the hands of strangers and of those closest to them. What's more, with around 36% of women likely experiencing food insecurity at the time of the study and 75% saying they had lost income (mostly due to the COVID-19 pandemic), external stressors that can increase the risk of VAW are on the rise.

As a result of the intersectionality of VAW socioeconomic conditions, and women's mental and emotional well-being, policy and programmatic interventions will need to be tailored to address the factors driving various forms of VAW as well as its multi-faceted effects. In addition, the resources made available to women experiencing VAW need to be tailored to their specific contexts and needs. The findings of this study reinforced the importance of partnering with existing infrastructure that supports women in vulnerable situations to empower communities with the full suite of resources they may need to support women.

Considering the above, the findings of this study support three recommendations:

1. Interventions that are meant to address VAW should consider how policy interventions in other areas may alleviate some of the root causes of VAW, including through fully integrating VAW measures in post-COVID-19 recovery plans as an opportunity to build back better.

In Morocco, women's perception of safety inside their own homes and their emotional and mental well-being have been impacted by the pandemic. Throughout the country, women consider partner abuse and feelings of unsafety in public spaces as common and a majority experience frequent conflict in the household. In fact, according to the National Prevalence study conducted by the HCP in 2019, 54% of women consider that the conjugal context is where VAW is most prevalent, compared to 28% for public spaces. Moreover, 75% of women consider that violence has increased in public spaces within the past five years, while the

⁸ UN Women and Morocco High Commission for Planning. 2019. National Survey on Violence Against Women.

proportion is 69% for the conjugal context.⁹ Just before the onset of the pandemic, Morocco adopted the National Programme Attamkine for Women and Girls' Economic Empowerment by 2030, which fully integrates ERAW measures in both public and private spaces as part of the overall strategic framework. In addition, a dedicated National Strategy to ERAW was adopted in 2021 to reinforce these coordinated efforts and support women across the country. While these policies provide a strong base to support women in Morocco, it is recommended that they are further adjusted to respond to the increased vulnerabilities of women and girls since the pandemic, especially for women working in the informal economy. This type of integrated approach, which directly connects women's economic empowerment to measures against VAW, can help address VAW root causes, including financial stressors caused by COVID-19, in conjunction with improving women's emotional and mental well-being and eliminating some of the factors that make VAW more likely to occur.

2. Enhance the response and provision of essential services by authorities and civil society and improve trust in order to boost reporting and bolster women's confidence and feelings of safety.

This study revealed that surveyed women remain reluctant to report VAW to official authorities and express preferences to report to other entities, including NGOs, shelters, or family members, which suggests that there is more confidence in civil society options than in institutional services. This could be due to the fact that the institutional response in Morocco is fairly recent and was only recently regulated by the adoption of Law 103.13 in 2018, while CSOs have been active in operating services for survivors of violence for several decades. Policing, judicial and social services systems should focus on raising the awareness of women, and communities more broadly, on the ser-

vices that are available and ensure that these services are responding to survivors' needs by conducting regular quality evaluations and efficiency assessments. These interventions, coupled with policies focusing on reducing women's vulnerability, could further help establish trust and credibility within the formal institutionalized system.

Along with improvements to formal reporting systems, interventions seeking to help women vulnerable to VAW should also include bolstering the informal institutions and networks that women in Morocco already use. Centralized resources may not be accessible for all women experiencing violence from a partner or other household member, not only because violence in the home is often considered a private matter but also because of a lack of accessibility and fear of repercussions. Careful placement of resources in more informal channels where women already feel comfortable reporting (i.e., through civil society organizations and community leaders who are trained in how to handle reporting of VAW), could further increase the likelihood that women in Morocco experiencing VAW can and will get the help they need. To this end, it is critical to provide NGOs and other civil society organizations focused on ERAW and supporting survivors with harmonized tools and government support to achieve their objectives.

3. Sensitivity around intra-household conflict as well as traditional roles and norms in Morocco require programmatic interventions that aim to shift harmful social norms while conducting further research on how gender norms may silence VAW survivors.

While this study provides insight into the prevalence and attitudes surrounding VAW, further research that delves into the underlying behavioural drivers and social/gender norms that are the root causes of VAW in Morocco is needed. In particular, in-depth qualitative research can unpack the "how" and "why" behind the attitudes and behaviours that surround VAW and the reporting process and be

⁹ UN Women and Morocco High Commission for Planning. 2019. National Survey on Violence Against Women.

used to build a more thorough framework to understand the experience of VAW for women in Morocco and develop programming to end it.

As part of these efforts, it is critical to undertake programming focused on destigmatizing VAW in order to encourage women to take up the resources that are available to them. VAW remains a taboo topic in Morocco that women are not comfortable discussing and have conflicting feelings about. Indeed, as revealed by the HCP 2019 survey, 48% of women perceive domestic violence as a private experience that should not be revealed to others. This type of educational programming is most impactful

when paired with initiatives that seek to improve or eliminate environmental stressors that are root causes of VAW, particularly in light of the findings from this study that link shifting dynamics within the household and relational stress between family members to downstream effects on women's safety and their general well-being. Therefore, programmatic interventions that target intra-household relationships and norms, address masculinities and impact of women's economic empowerment on household relations should be considered to jointly resolve conflicts, bolster women's well-being and improve women's safety within the home.

7. METHODOLOGY

The survey was fielded via Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing using random-digit dialing with mobile numbers between 18 August and 22 September 2021. The total number of completed interviews was 1,214. During the survey period, Morocco was in the middle of a spike in weekly reported new COVID-19 cases, although this spike did drop towards the end of the study.¹⁰ A night-time curfew was implemented before the study, going into effect on 3 August 2021 and the Government extended the country's Health State of Emergency until 31 October.¹¹

The sample was drawn via random-digit dialing among the population of mobile phone numbers, so the sample population is limited to women aged 18 or over with mobile phone access. Women over age 60 were also specifically targeted with an existing database to ensure adequate coverage of this age group. However, the percentages for each age group from this survey match the percentages for each age group from Morocco's Census data.¹²

Age group	Percentage of adult women based on Census data	Percentage of adult women from sample data
18–29	28%	30%
30–39	22%	23%
40–49	19%	20%
50–59	15%	15%
60+	17%	12%

¹⁰ Reuters. 2021. "Morocco." <https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/countries-and-territories/morocco/>

¹¹ <https://ma.usembassy.gov/category/alert/>

¹² High Commission for Planning (Morocco). 2014. https://www.hcp.ma/Projections-de-la-population-totale-du-Maroc-par-age-simple-et-sexe-2014-2050_a2209.html, <http://rgphentableaux.hcp.ma/Default1/>

DEFINITIONS

Community: A term referencing the geographic area in which the respondent lives.

Food insecurity: This study used the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)'s formulation to measure food insecurity, with an eight-statement battery. These data can be used to establish estimates of the proportion of the sample who were moderately or severely food insecure, which can also be disaggregated by other variables of interest through the use of the FAO Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) module. Any references in the report to prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity represent estimates of the prevalence and should be interpreted as such.

Partnered: A term referring to women who were married or living/cohabiting with a partner.

Violence against women: Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or was likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

Felt unsafe walking alone: Refers to women who indicated that they felt “not very safe” or “not safe at all” walking alone outside during the day (at question Co2) or during the night (at question Co3).

Experienced or knew someone who had experienced VAW: Refers to women who indicated that they, or another woman they knew, had experienced any form of VAW. “Since COVID-19” is added to indicate women who indicated that these incidents had only been occurring since the start of the pandemic.

Experienced frequent conflict: Refers to respondents who indicated that they experienced conflict or arguments in their homes at least once a week during the last six months (at question C19).

Experienced infrequent conflict: Refers to respondents who indicated that they experienced conflict or arguments in their homes “once or twice” or “never” during the last six months (at question C19).

Violence, abuse or the harassment of women are a problem the community: Refers to respondents who indicated that physical harm, abuse or the harassment of women are “a lot”, “somewhat”, or “a little bit” of a problem where they live (at question Co7).

Violence, abuse or the harassment of women are not a problem the community: Refers to respondents who indicated that physical harm, abuse or the harassment of women are “not at all” a problem where they live (at question Co7).

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