



MEASURING THE SHADOW PANDEMIC:

**VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN DURING
COVID-19**

COUNTRY REPORT: NIGERIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violence against women (VAW) is pervasive in Nigeria and has only gotten worse as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic as serious economic challenges and health risks increased throughout the country, unduly burdening women¹ and increasing the vulnerability of those already vulnerable. In addition, indirect impacts of COVID-19 vary in type and severity based on pre-existing factors, including socioeconomic status, environment and vulnerability to other stressors. This research delves into the relationships between measures of VAW and related demographic, behavioural and socioeconomic factors.

This study found that women's baseline feelings of safety in Nigeria, whether inside or outside of their households, have eroded since the onset of COVID-19, with significant negative impacts on their mental and emotional well-being. Among the drivers of these feelings, stressors such as food insecurity and decreased income stood out as having a significant impact not only on experiences of safety (or violence) but also on women's well-being overall.

1 Tan et al. 2021. "https://www.genderandcovid-19.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/PACoo467_Gender-and-Covid-19-Nigerias-Pandemic-Response.pdf" Gender and COVID-19 Project.

1. INTRODUCTION

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Nigeria's last Demographic and Health Survey revealed that 21% of women aged 15–49 had experienced physical violence and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner at least once in their lifetime,² which is below the global estimated average of 27%.³

Since the pandemic began, rapid gender assessments (RGAs) conducted by UN Women using administrative data from police, VAW hotlines and other service-providers suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased risk factors for women and intensified some of the existing forms of VAW.⁴ 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 face multiple forms of discrimination.

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 experiences 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 are collected in line with methodological, safety and ethical standards, without putting women at greater distress and risk of violence, is critical to informing where 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 Nigeria from 17 August–27 September 2021. The survey was conducted with women aged 18 and older who had access to a mobile phone – a population that was estimated to be 86% of the total population of women aged 18 years and older in Nigeria.⁵

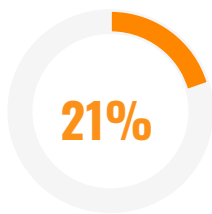
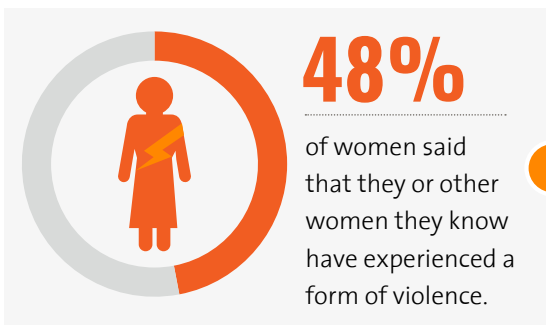
2 National Population Commission and ICF International. 2019. [Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2018](#). p. 446.

3 World Health Organization. 2021. "National Estimates 2000-2018" [Global Database on Violence against Women](#).

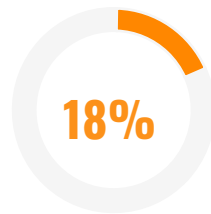
4 UN Women. 2020. [COVID-19 and Ending Violence against Women and Girls](#).

5 GSMA. 2021. [Mobile Gender Gap Report 2021](#).

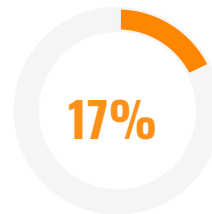
KEY FINDINGS



Verbal Abuse



Sexual Harassment



Physical Violence



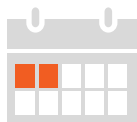
21%

of women feel unsafe in their homes.



39%

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



22%

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



16%

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



53%

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



74%

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



65%

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



25%

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



50%

of women feel unsafe walking alone at night.



21%

of women feel unsafe walking alone during the day.



67%

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

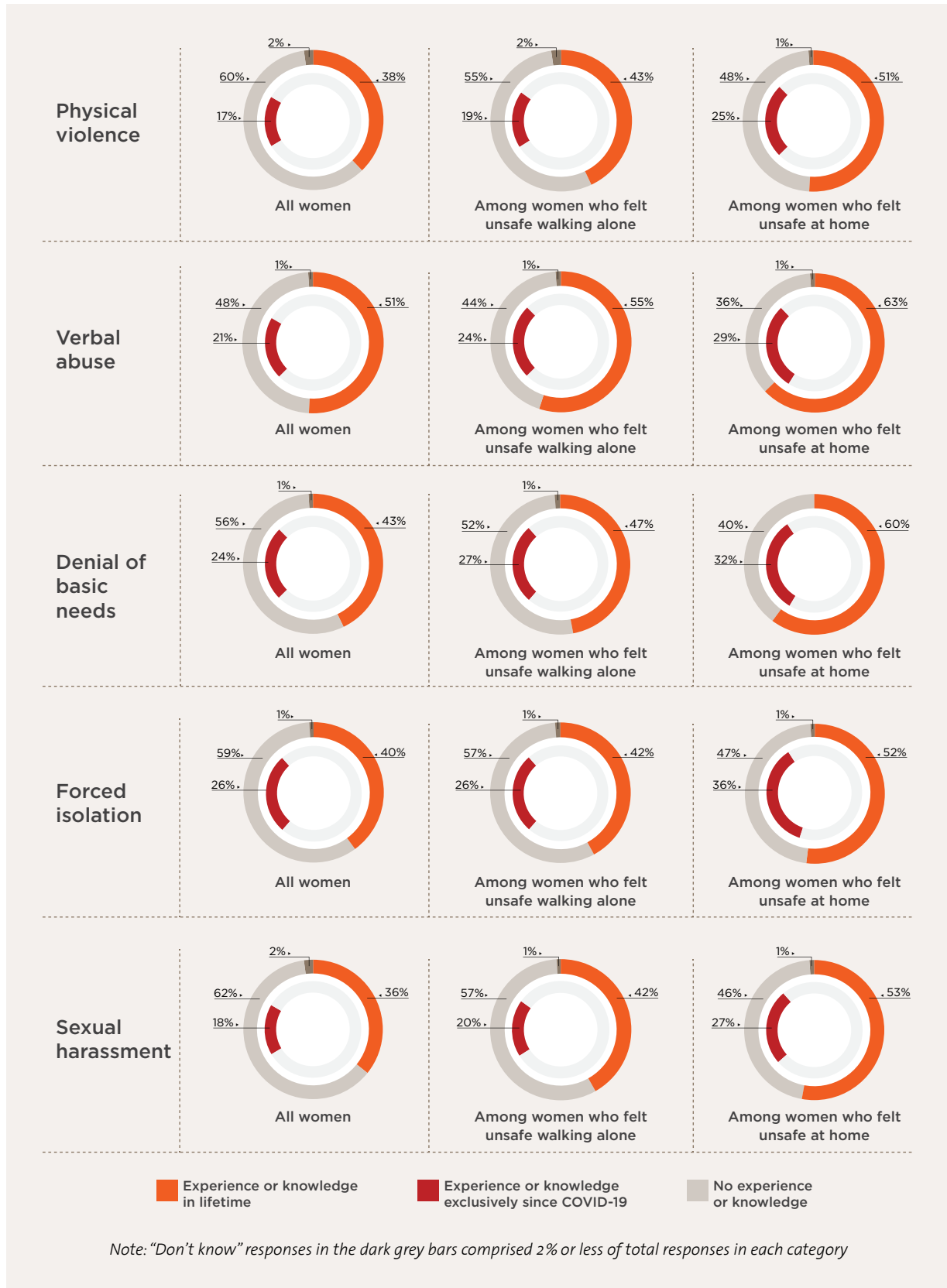
When considering measures of violence against women at the community level, it is important to keep the context of the study in mind. Due to the remote nature of this survey, indirect questions were asked as proxy indicators of VAW, meaning it was not possible to distinguish respondent experiences from those of other women in their community or whether this experience occurred within or outside of the household. Therefore, 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.

Nearly 7 out of 10 women (68%) in Nigeria have experienced or know a woman who has experienced a form of VAW in their lifetime (including physical violence, denial of basic needs, sexual harassment, forced isolation or verbal abuse),⁶ and 22% have experienced VAW only since the onset of the pandemic. Women who reported feeling unsafe in their homes (84%) were more likely to say they had been exposed to VAW compared to those who felt safe (64%), as were women who had felt unsafe walking alone, whether it was during the day or at night (70, compared to 64% of women who had not), suggesting that some women may be reporting their own experiences with VAW.

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 results.

FIGURE 1

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



In addition to personal experiences of safety being associated with experiences or knowledge of VAW, younger women aged 18 to 39 were significantly more likely to say they had experienced or know a woman who has experienced VAW in their lifetime (71, compared to 62% among women aged 40 and older). When looking at experience or knowledge of VAW only since the onset of COVID-19, women aged 60 and older were significantly less likely to have experiences or knowledge of VAW when compared to women under 60 (12 compared to 23%, respectively). In particular, younger women aged 18 to 29 were the most likely to have experienced or know a woman who has experienced forced isolation since the onset of the pandemic (30%), while women aged 60 or older were the most likely to have experiences or knowledge of forced isolation prior to the pandemic (20%), suggesting that lockdown-related measures may be having an impact on results, particularly for younger women.

Women in urban areas were more likely than those in rural areas to have experienced or know someone who has experienced physical violence (39, compared to 31% in rural areas) or verbal abuse (50, compared to 37% in rural areas) in their lifetime. However, women in rural areas were more likely than those in urban areas to have experienced a type of VAW

exclusively since the onset of the pandemic (29 compared to 21%, respectively), suggesting that this group of women may have been hit harder by the impacts of COVID-19.

Economic indicators also appear to be associated with experience or knowledge of VAW, as women who said they are unemployed were more likely than women on average to say they have been exposed to physical violence (51, compared to 38% on average) or verbal abuse (60, compared to 48% on average) in their lifetime. Similarly, women who said their income has decreased over the past year were more likely to have experienced or know a woman who has experienced several forms of VAW exclusively since the onset of COVID-19: physical violence (19, compared to 14% of those who did not experience a drop in income), denial of basic needs (26 compared to 20%, respectively), and forced isolation (29 compared to 21%, respectively).

The impact of economic stress on VAW was also seen in looking at food security data, where women who said they or someone they know have experienced a form of VAW (both in their lifetime and since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic) were more likely to be food insecure (whether moderately or severely) than those who had not.

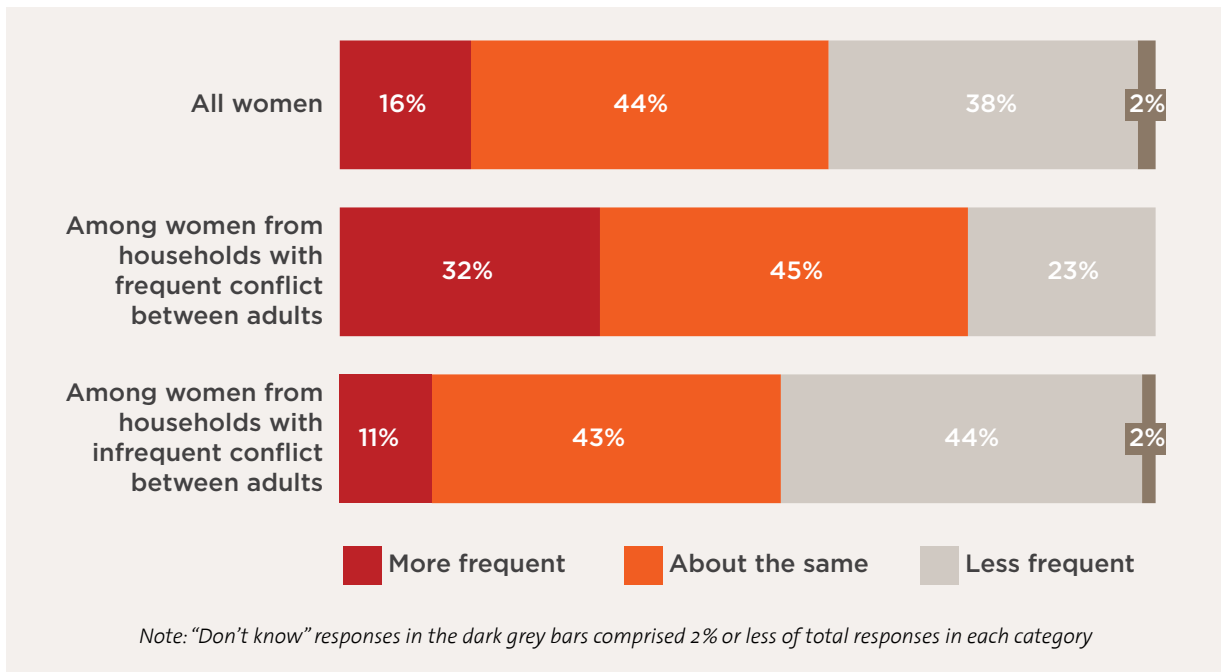
3. FEELINGS OF SAFETY

3.1. Personal safety inside the home

When it comes to safety within the household, 22% of women said that there has been conflict between adults in their household at least weekly over the past six months and 16% said that conflict has become more frequent since the onset of COVID-19. Those who experienced frequent conflict were nearly three times more

likely than those with infrequent household conflict to say that the frequency has increased as a result of the pandemic, suggesting that already existing household tensions have been exacerbated. The impact of the pandemic was felt more positively in other households, with nearly 4 in 10 (38%) saying that conflict has become less frequent as a result of COVID-19.

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

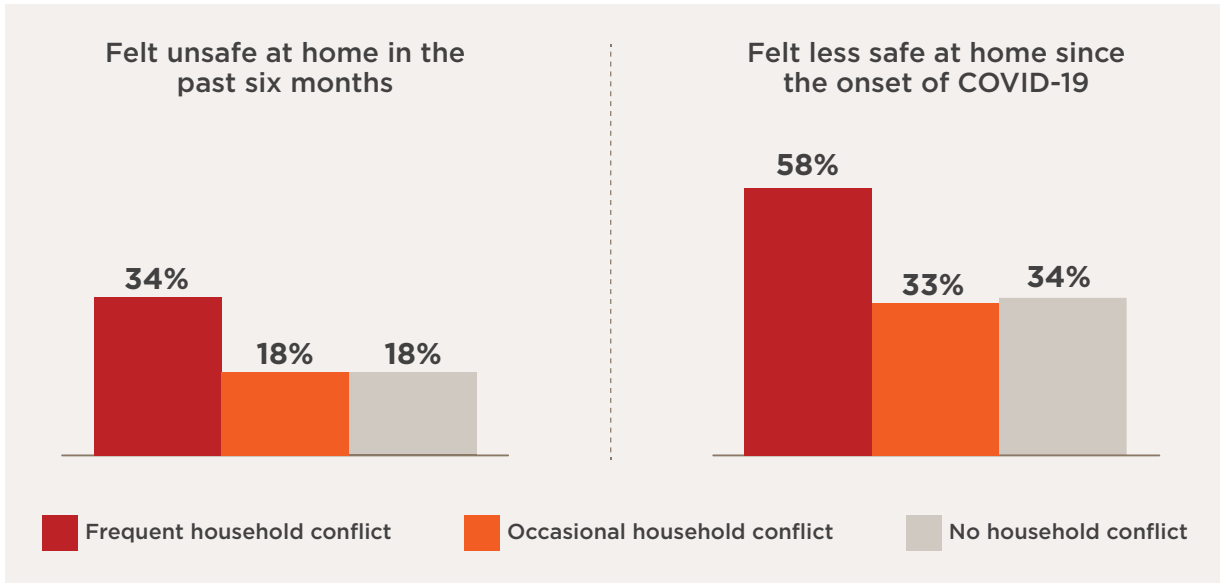


Over a fifth of women (21%) said they have felt unsafe in their household in the last six months, and 39% of all women said that the COVID-19 pandemic has made things worse. Those who felt unsafe in their homes were twice as likely as those who felt safe to say that COVID-19 has made things worse (64 compared to 32%, respectively). Those who experienced frequent conflict (at least weekly) between adults in the household were nearly twice as likely as women who had not

experienced frequent conflict to have felt unsafe in their homes, as were women who reported experiencing or knowing someone who had experienced VAW in their lifetime (27%). Both groups were also significantly more likely to feel that COVID-19 had made things worse. These data points suggest that some of the women in the study are likely reporting their own experiences, and underscore COVID-19's likely exacerbation of already existing domestic safety issues.

FIGURE 3

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



Unemployed women were more likely than those who were employed to report feeling unsafe at home (31 compared to 20%, respectively), and those who felt unsafe were more likely to be severely food insecure – again indicating that economic and financial struggle can significantly impact household dynamics. Additionally, women in rural areas were more likely than those in urban areas to say they have felt unsafe at home (29 compared to 20%, respectively) and to say that their feelings of safety at home have gotten worse since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (17 compared to 12%, respectively).

When asked why they have felt unsafe in their homes, women in Nigeria cited shelter insecurity (such as their home having no locks) and

inability to communicate or reach out for help as the top drivers of this feeling. Alongside an inability to communicate or reach out for help, women who experienced frequent household arguments or conflict were much more likely than those who did not to report substance abuse in the home (25%), verbal abuse (40%), physical violence (29%), another adult having hurt them (38%), or another women having been hurt (39%) as reasons for feeling unsafe in their homes. Women who reported experiencing or knowing someone who had experienced VAW were more likely to experience this than women who did not on almost all prompted drivers, suggesting again that some women were likely reporting their own experiences.

FIGURE 4

Reasons for women feeling unsafe in their homes (among the 21% who reported feeling unsafe)



3.2. Personal safety in public spaces

When out in their communities, the majority of women said they feel safe walking around the areas where they live during the day (79%), but this drops to 48% when asked the same question about walking alone at night, and over 4 out of 10 (43%) said they feel less safe while out at night since the start of COVID-19. Women who said their income had decreased over the past year were more likely than those who did not experience a drop in income to say they felt unsafe (24 compared to 15%, respectively, during the day, and 54 compared to 41%, respectively, at night) and to say that this has gotten worse since the start of COVID-19 (47 compared to 37%, respectively). Nearly 1 in 6 women (59%) who felt unsafe walking alone (whether it was during the day or at night) said

they feel less safe now compared to before COVID-19, as did 26% of women who reported feeling safe walking alone.

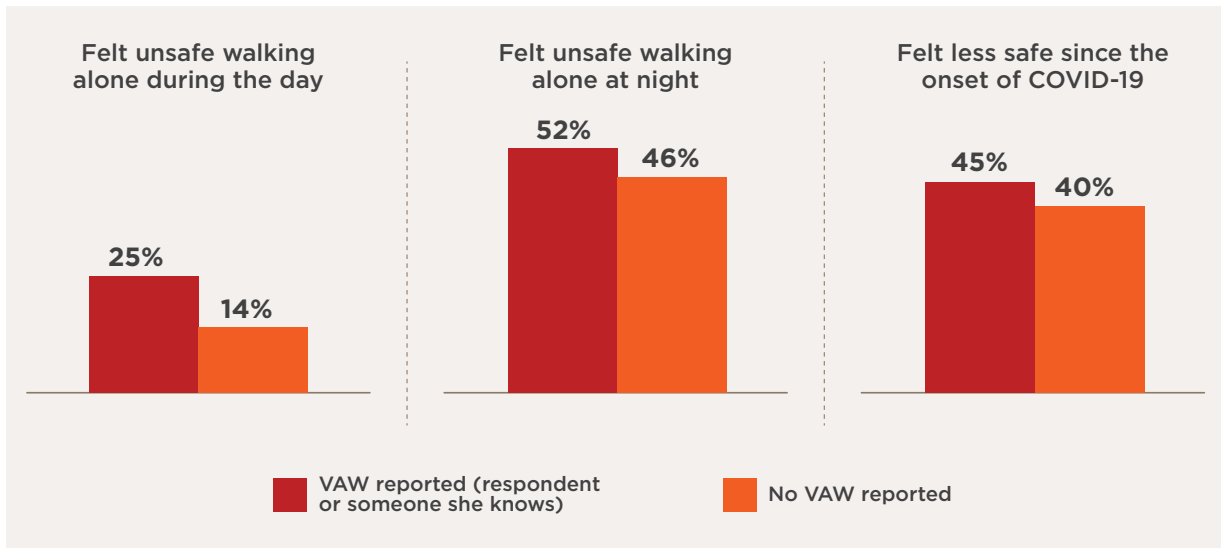
Additionally, women living in rural areas were much more likely than those in urban areas to feel unsafe, whether it was during the day (30 and 20%, respectively) or at night (59 and 49%, respectively), though they were nearly twice as likely to say they feel more safe walking alone since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (32, compared to 19% of women in urban areas), suggesting these numbers may have been even higher pre-pandemic among women living in rural areas.

Women who said that they, or another woman they know, had experienced a type of VAW in their lifetime were also more likely to feel unsafe walking alone, whether it was during the

day or at night, pointing to the broad implications that VAW can have on women's feelings of safety in public. Additionally, women who felt unsafe walking alone (whether it was during the day or at night) were less likely to leave

their house alone daily compared to women who always felt safe walking alone in public (58, compared to 64%), suggesting that feelings of safety may have an impact on women's mobility and access to public spaces.

FIGURE 5
Perceptions of safety while out in public, by experience or knowledge of VAW in a lifetime



The study suggests that feelings of safety in public have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. A decrease of feelings of safety in public since the onset of COVID-19 was particularly pronounced among women who said they were already feeling unsafe walking alone (whether it was during the day or at night), who were more than twice as likely to report feeling less safe since the start of the pandemic than women who did not (59 compared to 26%, respectively), as were women who said VAW was a problem in their

communities (50%). These data points suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing safety issues for women in Nigeria already feeling at risk.

Women who said they were single (48%), unemployed (57%), and/or a student (53%) were all significantly more likely than women on average (43%) to feel less safe alone at night since the start of COVID-19, though none of these groups were more likely than others to feel less safe in public generally.

4. PERCEPTIONS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

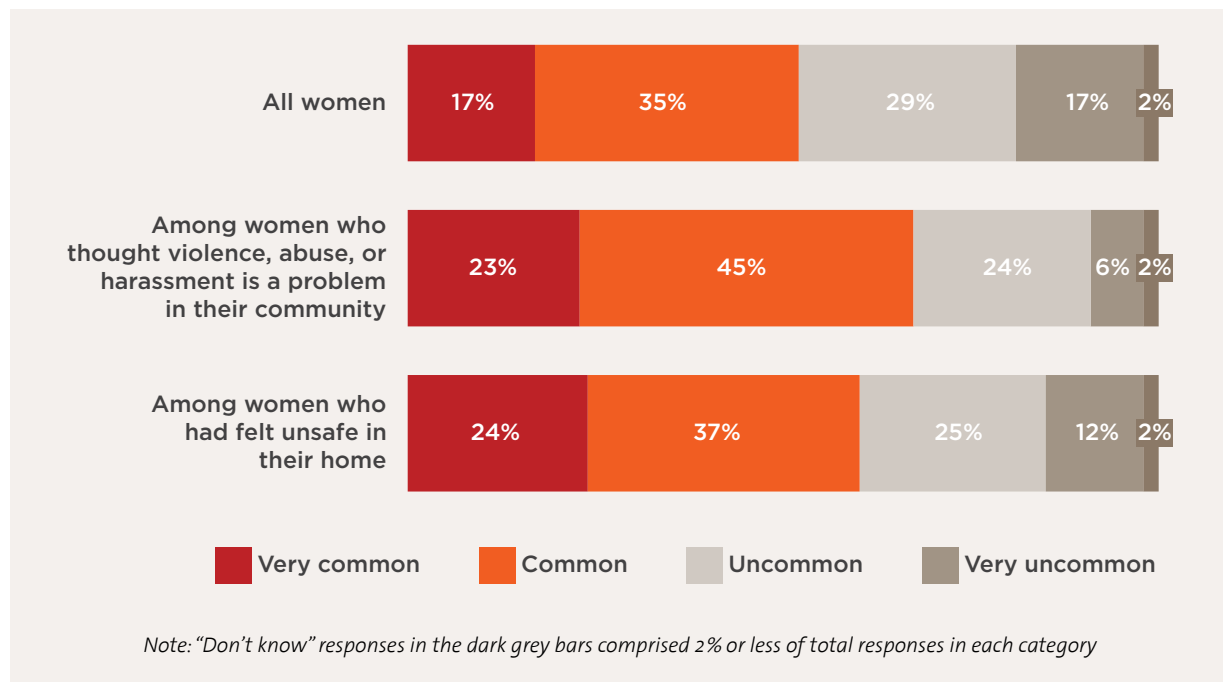
4.1. Women’s perceived safety inside the home

When considering the broader community, more than half (53%) of women said they think that the experience of verbal or physical abuse at the hands of a partner is common for women. Among women who perceived violence, abuse or harassment to be a problem in their community, this number increases to 68%. Nearly three-quarters of women (74%) thought things have gotten worse since the start of the pandemic in terms of women experiencing partner abuse.

Women who were married or lived with a partner and those who had children in the household were both more likely than their

counterparts to say that physical and verbal abuse at the hands of a partner was common for women (55 compared with 49% and 54 compared with 48%, respectively), suggesting that household tensions and dynamics have a significant impact on VAW inside the home. Additionally, women who felt unsafe in their homes (61, compared to 50% of women who felt safe) and women who reported frequent household arguments or conflict (65, compared to 48% who reported infrequent arguments or conflict) were also significantly more likely to perceive partner violence as common in their communities, again suggesting that women’s own experiences colour their thoughts about the community.

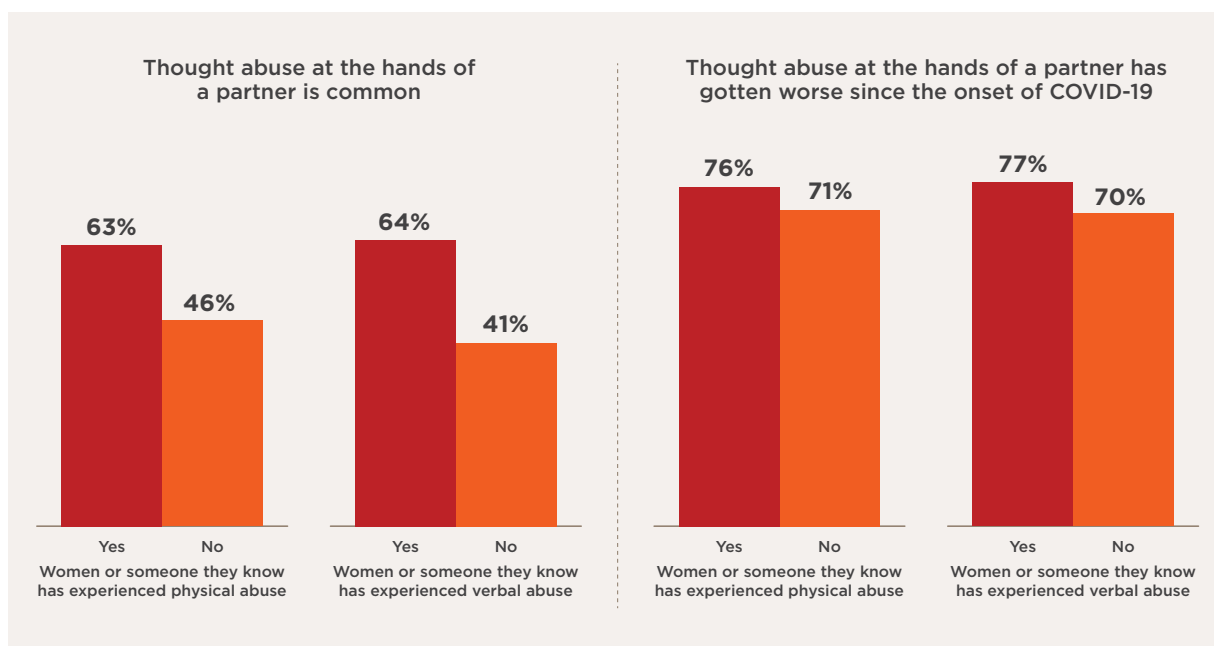
FIGURE 6
Perceptions of partner abuse, by perceptions of safety



Women who reported a decrease in income were also much more likely to think partner abuse was common in their communities than those with unchanged income (55 compared to 45%, respectively) and to perceive an increase since the start of the COVID-19 (78 compared to 66%, respectively). Women who reported that partner abuse was common in their communities were also more likely to be food insecure than those who were not, pointing again to the role that economic, financial and structural factors play as risk factors and drivers of VAW.

Women who reported that they have experienced or know someone who has experienced VAW in their lifetime (59%) were also much more likely than those who have not (37%) to perceive partner abuse as common in their communities, and those who reported physical violence or verbal abuse, in particular, were more likely to say that it had gotten worse since the start of the pandemic. These data bolster the evidence-based theory of the continuum of VAW that crosses public and private spaces, with women who reported safety incidents happening within the home being more likely to think that abuse is common in the community overall.

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



Similar to experiences of violence outside the home, the majority of women (84%) said they believe that women would seek out help if they experienced verbal or physical abuse at the hands of a partner. However, unlike the 29% of women who expected women experiencing public VAW to primarily seek help from the police, just 6% of women expected women experiencing intimate partner violence to first

approach the police, suggesting that domestic violence may be underreported to authorities in comparison with other forms of VAW. In the case of partner violence, women expected women to seek help first from family (37%), followed by primary support from women's shelters, groups, centres and NGOs (30%), though religious leaders were also a common source of primary support (10%).

Women who said they were married or living with a partner and those involved in income-generating activities were less likely than those who were not to expect women to seek help primarily from their families (33% and 34%, respectively) than to draw on other resources. Both married or partnered women and those who generated income said they believe women experiencing abuse at the hands of a partner would most likely go first to women's shelters, centres or NGOs (31 and 32%, respectively), and 11% of married or partnered women thought women would first go to religious leaders. While family support was the most common answer for women who felt unsafe within their homes, they were also much more likely than women who felt safe to expect women to primarily approach community leaders for support (8 compared to 4%, respectively) or go to a health facility first (2 compared to 0%, respectively).

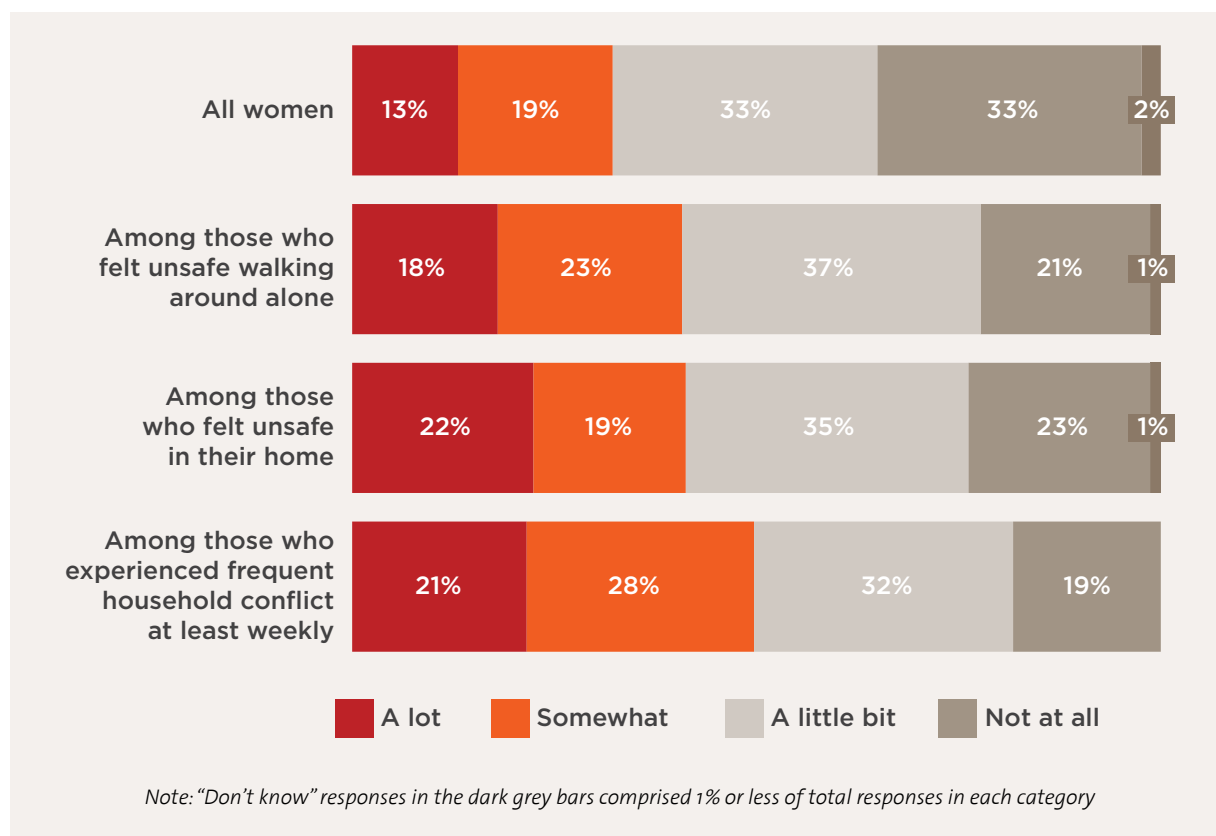
As with experiences in public spaces, reliance on more informal support networks may be driven by low availability or awareness of support available to women. Few women said they knew of support services including access to basic needs (29%), medical support (36%), financial support (14%), or even information about security and crime prevention (37%), suggesting that further work is needed to not only provide resources to women, but to make sure they are aware and able to access them. This was particularly the case for women who said they had felt unsafe at home, who were more likely than those who felt safe to say that services were not available to women in their community. For instance, 71% of women who felt unsafe at home said access to basic needs was not available to women in their community compared to 65% of women who felt safe, and 63% of women who felt unsafe at home said information about security/crime prevention was not available to women in their community compared to 57% of women who felt safe.

4.2. Perceptions of violence against women in the community

When asked about violence, abuse and harassment of women in their community, nearly a third of women (32%) said they believe it is at least somewhat of a problem, and an additional 33% said it is a little bit of a problem. Violence, abuse or the harassment of women in the community was significantly more likely to be perceived as a problem by women who themselves felt unsafe within their homes and those who experienced frequent household arguments or conflict, as well as by women who felt unsafe walking around alone.

lence, abuse or the harassment of women in the community was significantly more likely to be perceived as a problem by women who themselves felt unsafe within their homes and those who experienced frequent household arguments or conflict, as well as by women who felt unsafe walking around alone.

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



Women who were married or living with a partner (35%) were more likely than separated, divorced or widowed women (24%) to perceive violence, abuse or the harassment of women as a major problem in their communities. Additionally, 70% of women who reported decreased income in the past year were more likely to perceive violence, abuse or the harassment of women as a problem, suggesting linkages between economic stress and VAW.

Additionally, a quarter of women (25%) said violence, abuse or the harassment of women had increased in their community since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Women who reported a decrease in income (28%) were more likely to say that these things had increased than those who reported no change in their income, as were those living in rural areas (35, compared to 23% of women living in urban areas).

Those who felt unsafe within their homes (36%) as well as those who felt unsafe walking around alone outside, either during the day or at night (34%) were all much more likely to say that violence, abuse and the harassment of women had increased than those who felt safe within their homes (22%) or safe walking outside (14%). Further, women who said violence, abuse or the harassment of women in their community are a problem were nine times more likely to say things have gotten worse since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (36, compared to 4% among those who did not) emphasizing that the pandemic has had the largest negative impacts on those who were already experiencing or aware of VAW.

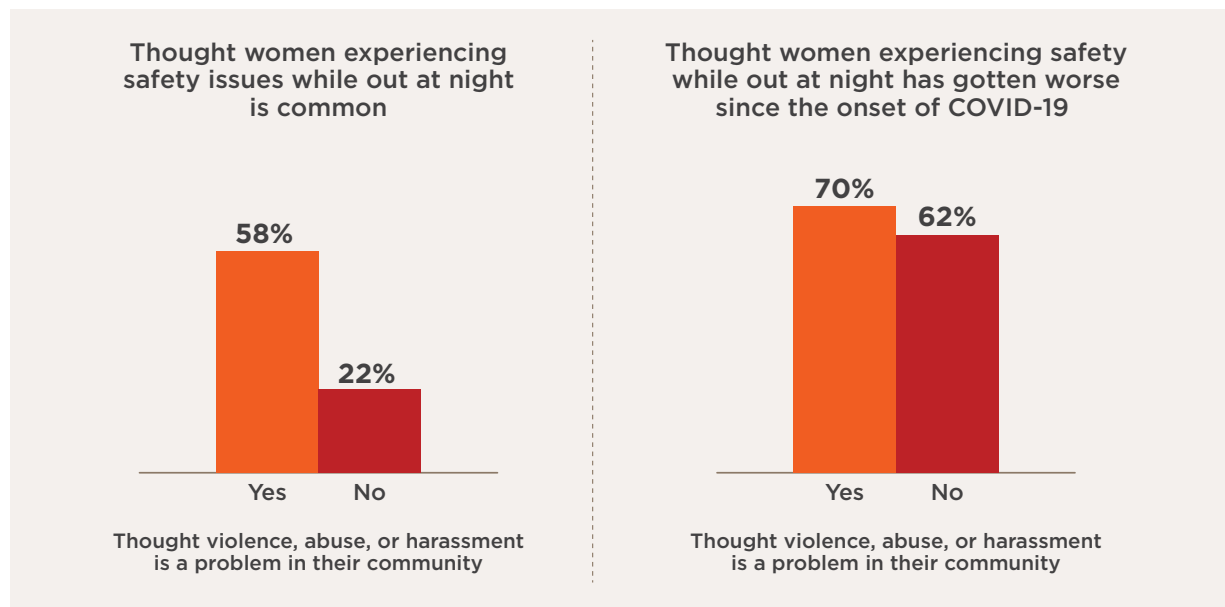
4.3. Women’s perceived safety in public spaces

Women’s perceptions of the safety of women in Nigeria are in line with their perceptions of their own safety in the public spaces. Nearly

half of surveyed women (46%) said they think it is common for women to experience harassment and safety issues in public at night, consistent with 50% of women who said they themselves feel unsafe walking alone at night. In fact, most women who felt unsafe walking at night (60%) reported that harassment and safety issues in public at night were common.

More than two-thirds of women (67%) said harassment and safety issues for women at night have gotten worse since the onset of COVID-19. Women who reported having experienced or knowing another woman who had experienced VAW were more likely to perceive that women experiencing public safety issues at night is common than those who did not (52 compared to 35%, respectively). However, they were no more likely to think that this has gotten worse since the start of the pandemic than women who thought that VAW was a problem in their community.

FIGURE 9
Perceptions of women’s safety in public at night, by perceptions of violence, abuse or the harassment of women in the community



Women in rural areas (52%) were also more likely than women in urban areas (45%) to view public safety issues at night as common. Additionally, women involved in income-generating activities (49%), who were more likely to leave the house on their own on a daily basis, were more likely to perceive public safety issues at night as common than those not involved in these activities (37%), although their thoughts on changes in safety in public spaces since COVID-19 did not differ. Conversely, women in rural areas were more than twice as likely as urban women to say public safety has gotten better (15 compared to 6%, respectively), consistent with findings on women's own experience in public spaces.

The majority of women (83%) expected that women experiencing harassment or abuse in public spaces would seek help, and nearly 3 out of 10 women (29%) said that they expected women would seek help from the police, which aligns with the 33% of women who said that legal support or help in reporting incidents and dealing with police in their communities are available to women in their communities. A fifth of women (20%) believed that they would seek support from family and an equal percentage said they would seek support from women's shelters, centres or NGOs. More than 1 in 10 (13%) said women would approach community leaders.

Women who have experienced or know someone who has experienced VAW (82%) were significantly less likely than those who did not (86%) to believe that women would seek help for such incidents, and were less likely to expect that women would primarily go to the police (26, compared to 34% among women who had no experience or knowledge of VAW) and more likely to say that women would most likely seek help from women's shelters, centres or NGOs (22 compared to 16%, respectively). Women who said they felt unsafe walking

alone at night or during the day were also less likely to expect women to go to the police (25, compared with 32% of women who always felt safe) and more likely to say that women would seek help from helplines first (3 compared to 1%, respectively).

Women with disabilities and those in rural areas said that women were most likely to seek help primarily from family (22 and 28%, respectively) or approach community leaders first (18 and 14%, respectively), suggesting that different sources of support may be available to these groups. Seeking help from family in rural areas is perhaps unsurprising given the low levels of awareness and access women in these areas have to support services. Across all areas of possible support, women living in rural areas of Nigeria were less likely to say that they knew of services than those in urban areas. Just 20% said they had access to legal support, help in reporting incidents, or dealing with police, compared to 36% in urban areas. Similarly, only 25% were aware of information about security or crime prevention, compared to 39% in urban areas, and just 23% said they had access to medical support compared to 39% in urban areas.

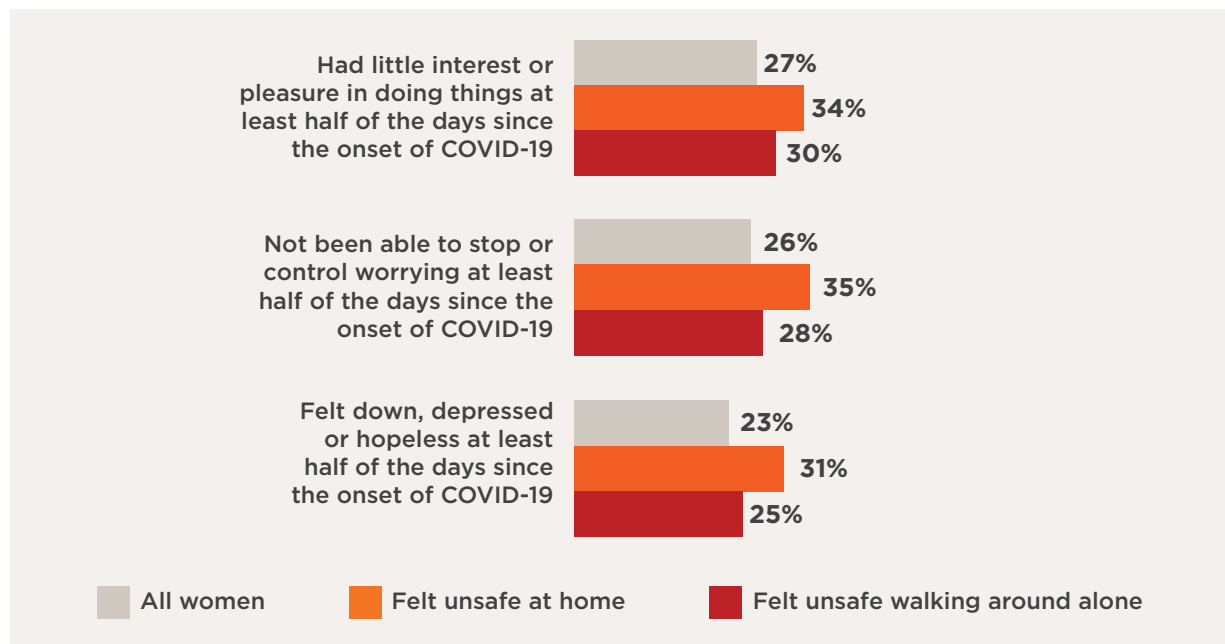
Although it is clear that Nigerian women have an increased sense of anxiety and fear outside of the household, this had not stopped them from engaging in public life. The vast majority of women (95%) said that they have left their house on their own at least once a week in the past month. However, employed women were much more likely to say that they have left their homes alone daily (70, compared to 30% among full-time caregivers), as were women involved in any type of income-generating activity (66, compared to 45% among women who were not). Those who reported decreased household income since the start of the pandemic were more likely to report leaving home by themselves 2–3 days a week.

5. IMPACTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

This study indicates strong relationships between measures of VAW, women’s behaviour and their feelings of mental and emotional well-being. While a substantial proportion of women generally said they experience symptoms of anxiety and depression, women who said they had felt unsafe were more likely to

experience symptoms of anxiety and depression at least half the days since the onset of COVID-19 and to say that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted them negatively. This indicates that impressions and experiences of safety (or lack thereof) may be significantly associated with women’s overall well-being.

FIGURE 10
Measures of mental health, by feelings of safety

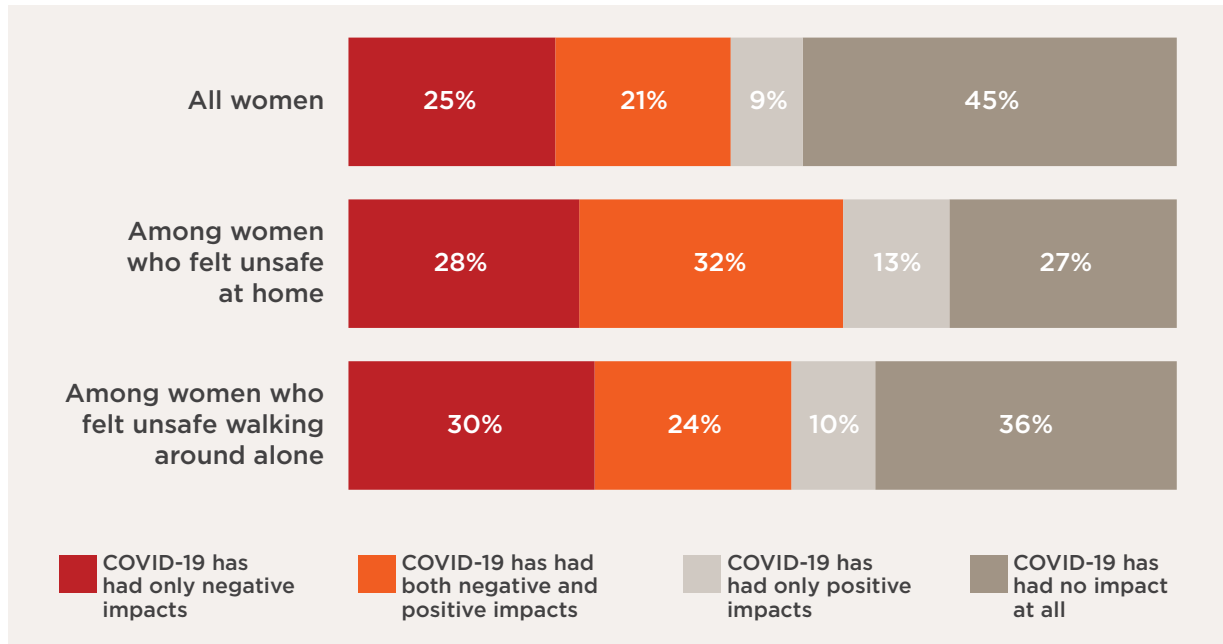


Nearly half of women (46%) said the COVID-19 pandemic has at least some negative impacts on their mental and emotional health. Women reporting exclusively negative mental and emotional health impacts of COVID-19 were also much more likely to be food insecure, whether moderately or severely, and to say that their income had decreased in the past year (31, compared to 14% of those whose income had not decreased). Women who re-

ported experiencing safety issues, whether it was at home or in public spaces, were also more likely to say that the COVID-19 pandemic had an exclusively negative impact on their lives compared to women who had not experienced safety issues. This suggests, as previous reports have found, that the negative impacts of COVID-19 are felt the strongest by those already experiencing hardship, including survivors of VAW.

FIGURE 11

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



The impacts of violence against women in public and private spaces was also observed when analysing women’s socialization patterns. Although the majority of women reported that they have continued to leave the house and socialize, women who felt unsafe in their homes were more likely to report that COVID-19 had limited their interaction with friends and social groups (56%), than women who felt safe

(42%). Women who felt unsafe walking alone during the day or at night (51%) were also more likely than women who felt safe (39%) to report limited social interactions since COVID-19. This pattern was also seen among women who have experienced or know someone who has experienced VAW (51%) compared to those who did not (34%).

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The impacts of COVID-19 on VAW in Nigeria are significant. Women in Nigeria encounter violence in public and in private spaces, at the hands of strangers and of those closest to them. With around 57% of women likely experiencing food insecurity at the time of the study and 65% 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, policy and programmatic interventions require tailoring to the factors driving different experiences of violence. Not only does the type of response that is best-suited to address VAW vary based on the specific experiences of women, but the resources they would seek out vary as well. This study stresses the importance of partnering with existing infrastructure that supports women in vulnerable situations to empower communities, particularly those in rural areas, with the full suite of resources they may need to support women. Considering this, the research supports 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 Nigeria, VAW is pervasive, as women consider partner abuse and feelings of unsafety in public and private spaces common and many have reported these feelings being amplified since the beginning of the pandemic. VAW touches all women in Nigeria and, as such, all ongoing programming and policies – particularly those focused on COVID-19 recovery and relief – should be developed with an eye to the potential impacts and outcomes they could

have on women's experience of violence (and of safety). If initiatives intended to address the economic and social impacts of COVID-19 are not connected to programming seeking to end VAW, women experiencing multiple forms of discrimination could be left even further behind. It is therefore important to go beyond gender mainstreaming to develop multidimensional programmes that are specifically targeted to improve women's feelings of safety and experiences of violence in their day-to-day lives. This is particularly the case for women in rural areas of Nigeria, where the effects of COVID-19 have magnified the vulnerability and safety concerns of women who were already significantly more likely to report experiencing or knowing a woman who has experienced VAW.

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

It is important to recognize that while the majority of women in Nigeria did expect women experiencing violence – whether public or private – to seek help, the avenues through which women were expected to do this tended strongly toward informal sources. This likely means that VAW is underreported to authorities and resources should be dedicated to improving formal support services so that more women feel comfortable seeing help from these resources. However, it is equally important to invest and support both formal and informal structures that women do trust to help them when they are in vulnerable situations. Outside of the family, women facing domestic violence express a preference for women's groups, NGOs or CSOs. There is an opportunity to invest further in these institutions and in making them more accessible and increasing

awareness about them within communities, as a means of creating more secure situations for women experiencing violence.

Centralized resources may not be accessible for all women experiencing violence from a partner or other household member, not only because violence is often considered a private matter but also because of a lack of accessibility and fear of repercussions, particularly for women in rural areas. Along with improvements to formal reporting systems, interventions seeking to work with rural women should also include bolstering the informal institutions and networks that women in Nigeria already use, particularly in more rural areas of the country, by making them accessible in all ways – including linguistically, culturally and geographically. Careful placement of resources in more informal channels, for instance through women’s organizations and religious or community leaders, could further increase the likelihood that women in Nigeria experiencing VAW can and will get the help they need.

3. Support further research that goes beyond understanding VAW prevalence to examine the underlying social norms and behavioural drivers, particularly around breaking taboos and help-seeking behaviours.

The statistics surrounding VAW for women in Nigeria are stark and reveal their unique vulnerabilities, both in their lifetime and particularly since the onset of COVID-19 that have impacted their sense of safety in their homes and in their communities. This research on VAW provides critical insights into the pervasiveness of VAW for women in Nigeria; however, further research focused on the social norms and behavioural drivers that underlie VAW from the perspectives of both women and men is required. This would provide insights into the social and cultural expectations of women in their households and communities and drive a deeper understanding of the “how” and “why” behind VAW and the help-seeking behaviors

that survivors pursue (or forgo). Research that builds a more nuanced understanding of the social and gender norms that underlie VAW in Nigeria would help limit the negative externalities that women can face as the result of well-intended programmatic and policy interventions.

4. Support further research to understand the complexities of VAW data collection for women with disabilities and the responsiveness and sensitivity of current VAW services to disability in Nigeria.

The intersection of gender and disability increases the risk of violence for women and girls living with disabilities, as well as their caregivers. Women and girls living with disabilities are almost twice as likely to experience VAW than women and girls without disabilities in Nigeria.⁷ Many women living with disabilities in Nigeria live in communities disproportionately affected by the negative socio-economic impacts of the pandemic, increasing tensions that provide opportunities for perpetrators to engage in abusive behaviour. Moreover, women and girls living with disabilities often struggle to access information on where to seek help and other life-saving services and resources, a problem which has been highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic by the lack of accessible public service announcements in Nigeria.⁸ During the lockdown, access to disability-friendly information was limited and access to confidential COVID-19 and VAW services was complicated. Statistics surrounding incidence of VAW among women with disability is sparse and requires further robust research, which should also focus on access to VAW services and an assessment of disability-friendly VAW data-collection methodologies.

7 “Respect not abuse: [Reducing violence against women in Nigeria.](#)”

8 UN Women, UNFPA, UNODC and UNICEF. 2020. “[Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria During the Covid-19 Crisis: THE SHADOW PANDEMIC.](#)” 4 May.

7. METHODOLOGY

The survey was fielded via Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing using random-digit dialing to mobile numbers between 17 August and 27 September 2021. The total number of completed interviews was 1,482. During the survey period, daily new infection rates were dropping sharply⁹ as several states had reintroduced work-from-home policies and bars, nightclubs, event centres, and other entertainment venues remained closed. Indoor gatherings remained restricted to 50 people or less, with the requirement for face masks and social distancing measures, and public gatherings

were allowed but restricted. Public transportation was also limited to 50% capacity.¹⁰

The sample was drawn via random-digit dialing among the population with mobile phone numbers, so the sample population is limited to women aged 18 or over with mobile phone access. As the last Nigerian Census took place in 2006, the percentages for each age group from this survey were calculated based on the latest Nigerian population projections from the UN¹¹ and UNFPA.¹²

Age group	Percentage of adult women based on Census data	Percentage of adult women from sample data
18–29	40%	40%
30–39	23%	23.5%
40–49	17%	16.4%
50–59	11%	10.6%
60+	10%	9.5%

9 Reuters COVID-19 Tracker. 2021. [“Nigeria”](#)

10 U.S. Embassy and Consulate in Nigeria. [“COVID-19 Information.”](#)

11 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. 2019. [World Population Prospects 2019.](#)

12 United Nations Population Fund. 2020. [Projected population statistics.](#)

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).

© 2022 UN Women. All rights reserved.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of UN Women, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations.

Produced by the Women Count programme
Editor: Jen Ross
Design: Ouissal Hmazzou



220 East 42nd Street
New York, New York 10017, USA

data.unwomen.org
www.unwomen.org
www.facebook.com/unwomen
www.twitter.com/un_women
www.youtube.com/unwomen
www.flickr.com/unwomen
instagram.com/unwomen