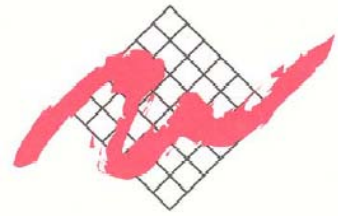
The Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) Project

Focus on Morocco | Freedom of Movement, & Freedom from Harassment & Violence Topic Brief

A project by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) with funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)



WOMEN'S FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT, AND FREEDOM FROM HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE

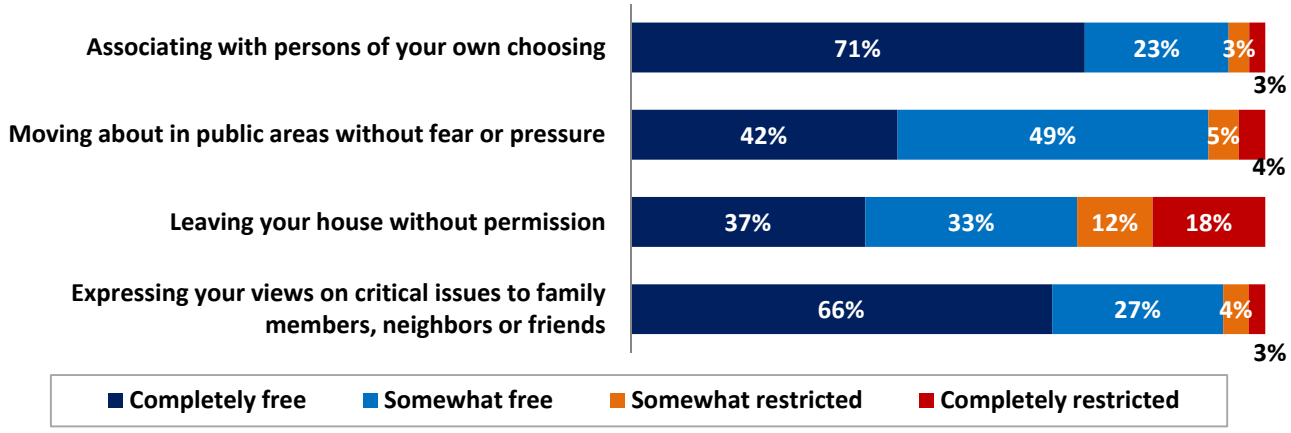
This topic brief presents key findings from the SWMENA survey in Morocco. One portion of the survey examined the extent to which women enjoyed freedom of movement without pressures from family or society, attitudes towards violence against women, and the degree to which domestic violence is tolerated or rejected by society.[1]

Women in Public Spaces

Women's ability to move freely and safely in public spaces supports their ability to fully participate in the civic, political, and economic life of their communities. The SWMENA survey asked women in Morocco how free or restricted they felt in associating with persons of their own choosing; expressing their views on critical issues to family members, neighbors or friends; leaving their house without permission; and moving about in public areas without fear or pressure.

- Figure 1 shows that nearly three-quarters of women in Morocco (71%) feel completely free to associate with persons of their own choosing and close to one-quarter of women (23%) feel somewhat free to do so. Six percent of women feel somewhat or completely restricted in their choices of association.
- More than nine in ten women (91%) feel somewhat or completely free moving about in public areas without fear or pressure. However, 9% feel at least somewhat restricted in moving about in public areas.
- The majority of women feel completely free (66%) in expressing their views on critical issues to family members, neighbors or friends, whereas more than a quarter feel somewhat free (27%) in doing so. Seven percent feel somewhat or completely restricted in expressing themselves.

Figure 1- Women's freedom of movement and association
% of women reporting restrictions on their actions (n = 2,000)



[1] From December 2009 through January 2010, the SWMENA survey was disseminated to 2,000 women and 500 men in Morocco. The survey is designed to assess how women in Morocco view themselves as members of society, the economy and the polity.

- Three in ten women feel at least somewhat restricted in leaving their house without permission. Nearly four in ten women (37%) feel completely free to leave the house without permission. Women older than 55, however, are significantly more likely to feel completely free to leave their house compared to women ages 18-24 (54% vs. 23%).

Figure 2 shows that there are significant differences in freedom of mobility among women by marital status, age, work status and income adequacy.[2]

- Married and single women are more than three times as likely as formerly married women to feel somewhat or completely restricted from leaving the house without permission: nine in ten women (90%) who were formerly married felt somewhat or completely free in leaving the house without permission, compared to 68% of married women and 64% of single women.

- Younger women are much more likely than older women to report restrictions on their freedom to leave the house, suggesting that this freedom increases with age: women ages 65 and older are more than twice as likely as women ages 18-24 to feel completely free leaving the house (55% and 23% respectively).
- Women working for pay are more likely than women not working for pay to feel completely or somewhat free in leaving the house without permission. Almost half of women working for pay (49%) felt completely free leaving the house without permission, compared to a little more than one-third of women who did not work for pay (36%).

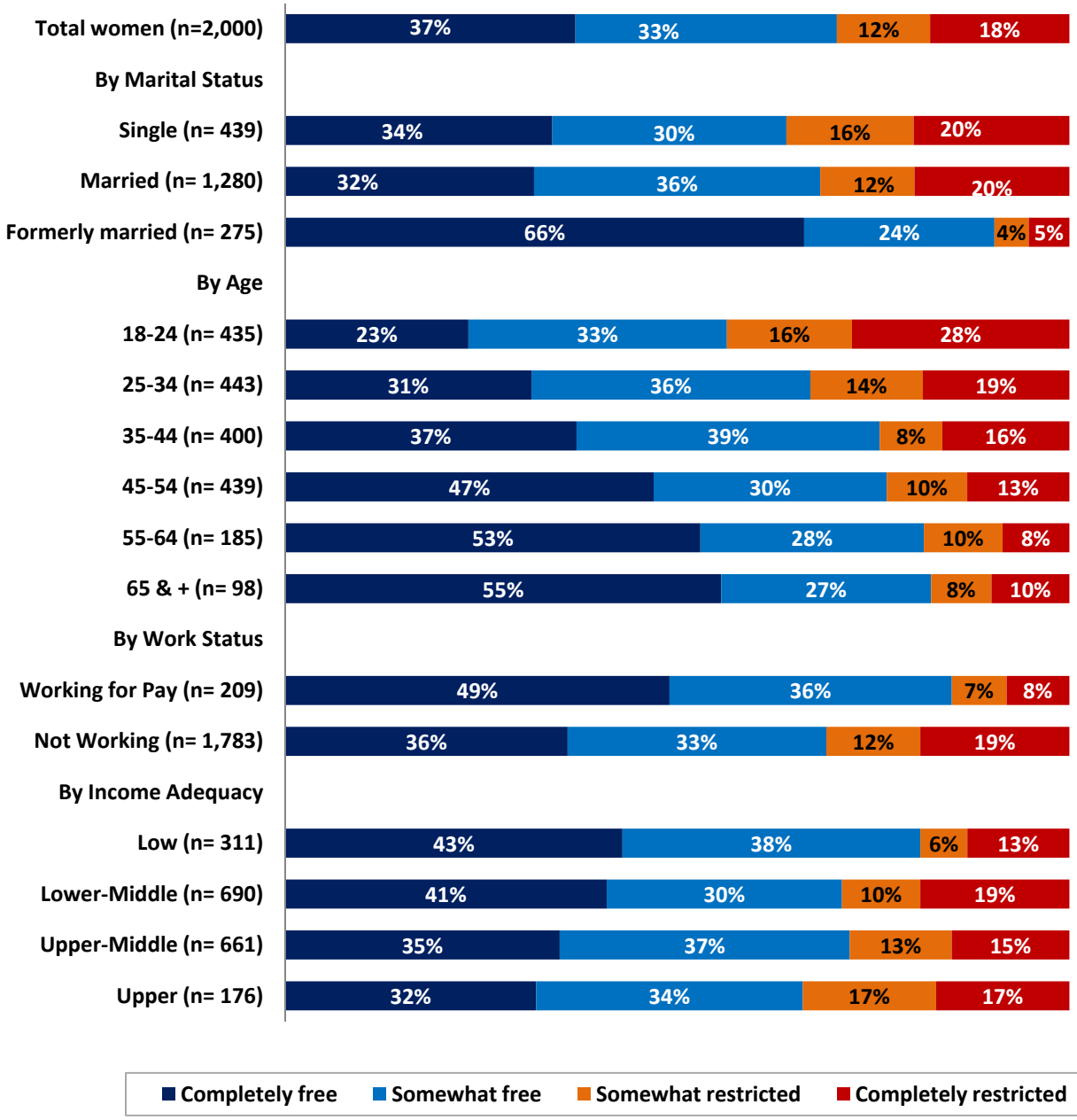
- Almost two in ten women not working for pay (19%) feel completely restricted leaving the house without permission, more than twice the rate of women working for pay at 8%.

- Women at lower levels of income adequacy are more likely than their wealthier counterparts to feel completely or somewhat free in leaving the house without permission.

- More than one-third of upper-income women (34%) felt completely or somewhat restricted leaving the house without permission, compared to 19% of low-income women.

[2] "Income Adequacy" was determined by responses to the following question, "Tell me the answer which best reflects the current financial situation of your family/ household." Women were categorized as low-income if they responded with "We do not have enough money" or "We have enough money for food," as lower-middle-income if they responded with "We have enough money for well-balanced meals;" as upper-middle-income if they responded with "We have enough money for food and clothes; we can save some;" and as upper-income if they responded with "We can afford some expensive things" or "We can afford anything we want."

Figure 2 - Women's freedom to leave the house
% by marital status and age



The survey asked respondents who felt somewhat or completely restricted in moving about in public areas why they felt this way. Open-ended responses were coded into categories. Up to three reasons could be provided by a single respondent. The top five most frequently cited reasons are shown in Table 1.

- "I have to get permission from my husband" along with "our tradition does not permit a woman to go out alone" were the most frequent responses (25%), and "[There is a] lack of security here" was almost as frequent (21%).

- "It is a religious obligation" was cited only three times.

Table 1 – Reasons women feel restricted moving about in public areas *% out of those who feel restricted; top five ranked from highest to lowest according to citations by female respondents*	**Women (n=175)**
I have to get permission from my husband	25%
Our tradition does not permit a woman to go out alone	25%
There is a lack of security here	21%
My parents won't let me go out alone	16%
Don't know/ Refuse	7%
It is a religious obligation	1%

The survey respondents were asked about their experiences in public spaces (local markets, walking down the street, etc.). Specifically, women were asked how frequently men made "unwanted/sexually suggestive noises, comments or gestures" and how often men "touched, pinched or made otherwise unwelcome physical contact." Generally, unwanted physical contact is much less frequent than harassing comments and noises.

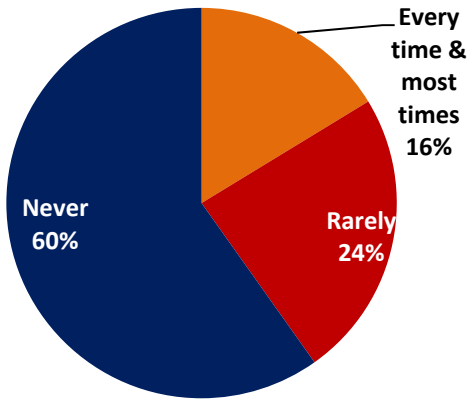
- Figure 3 shows that when in public areas, three in five women say they never experience men making unwanted/sexually comments or gestures toward them. Almost one quarter of women (24%) say that men rarely make unwelcome/sexual comments.

- One in six women (16%), however, experience harassment every time or most times they are in public spaces.
- Figure 4 shows that only 3% of women experience unwanted touching more than rarely.

- Almost seven in eight women (86%) never experience unwanted physical contact in public.

Figure 5 shows that there are also discrepancies among the experiences of single, married and formerly married women. Single women are far more likely to receive unwanted/sexual comments and experience unwelcome physical contact.

Figure 3 -Harrassment in public spaces
% of women reporting unwanted/sexually suggestive noises, comments, or gestures (n= 2,000)



- Slightly less than nine in ten formerly married women (88%) and 87% of married women rarely or never experience men making unwanted/sexual comments, compared to 67% of single women.

- Single women are more likely than both married and formerly married women to hear unwelcome comments most, or every time they are in public spaces (10% for single women vs. 1% and 2% respectively).

- One in ten single women report being touched, pinched, or experiencing unwelcome physical contact most or every time they go out. Married and formerly married women rarely or never experience unwanted physical contact (91% and 92%).

Figure 4 - Unwanted physical contact in public spaces
% of women reporting unwanted physical contact in public spaces (n= 2,000)

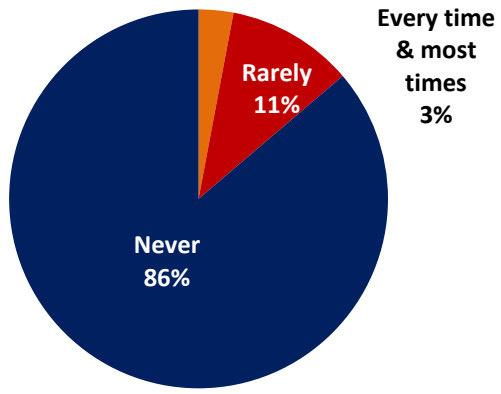


Figure 5 - Women's harrassment and unwanted physical contact
% by marital status

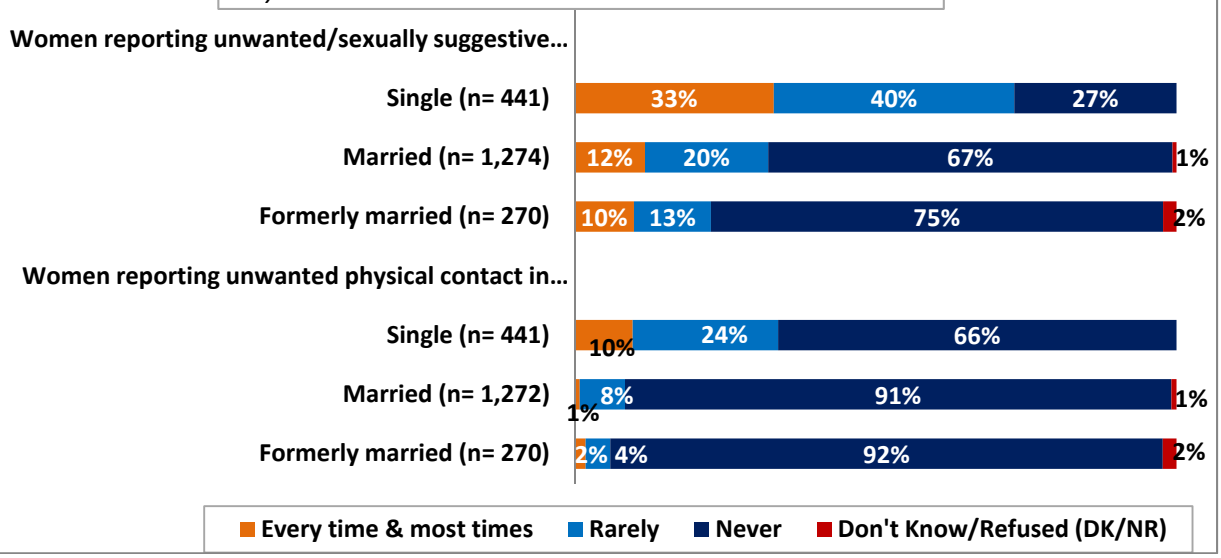
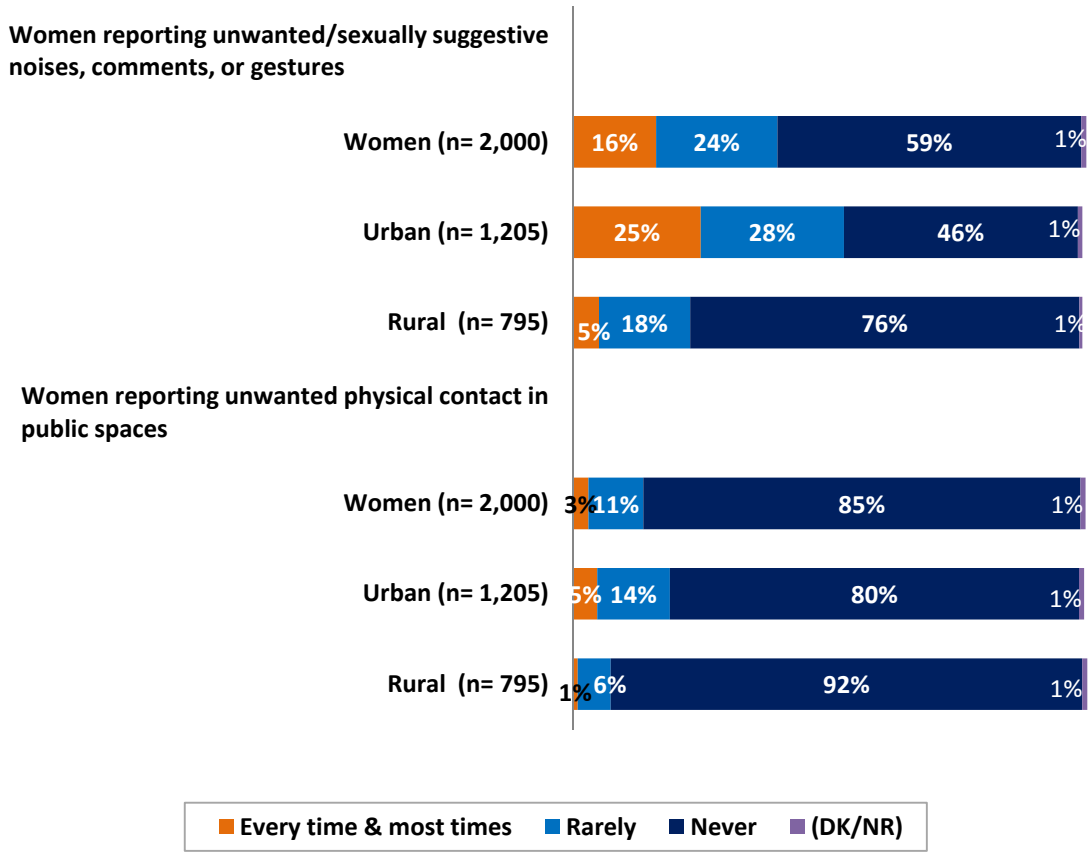


Figure 6 shows that women in urban areas are more likely than women in rural areas to receive unwanted/sexual comments and experience unwelcome physical contact. This is not surprising, given that urban areas tend to be more congested than rural areas.

- Nearly one-quarter of women in urban areas experience harassing comments and noises most or every time they go out, compared to 5% of women in rural areas.

- Ninety-four percent of women in rural areas rarely or never experience unwanted/sexual comments, compared to only three-quarters (74%) of women in urban areas.
- Women in urban areas are five times more likely than women in rural areas to be touched or pinched most or every time they are outside (5% and 1%).

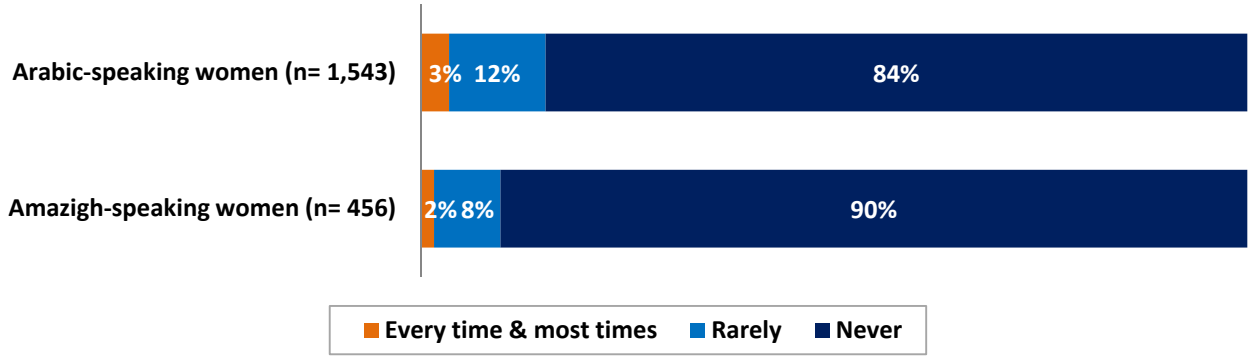
Figure 6 - Women's harrassment and unwanted physical contact
% of urban/rural women reporting sexual harrassment and physical contact in public spaces



Some differences appear between Arabic and Amazigh speakers in experiences of harassment in public places (Figure 7). Amazigh-speaking women are less likely than Arabic-speaking women to experience men making unwanted/sexual comments. This trend may be related to the fact that Amazigh-speaking women are more likely than Arabic-speaking women to live in rural areas where harassment is less pervasive *according to the survey results*. In Morocco, 64% of Amazigh-speaking women live in rural areas, compared to 39% of Arabic-speaking women.

- Nine in ten Amazigh-speaking women never experience men making unwanted/sexual comments, compared to slightly more than eight in ten Arabic-speaking women (84%).

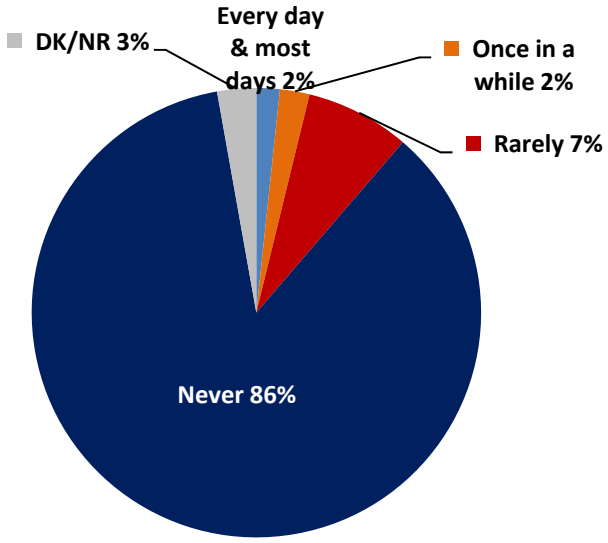
Figure 7 - Women's harrassment in public spaces
% of women by language spoken at home



The workplace is one specific public setting included in the survey where Moroccan women might experience harassment. Survey respondents were asked, "When you are at work, how often would you say that men make unwelcome physical contact, noises, comments, or gestures toward you or other women?"

- Figure 8 show that 2% of women experience sexual harassment at work either every day or most days. This includes verbal and physical harassment.
- Two percent report they are subjected to these sorts of behaviors by men once in a while and 7% said they rarely experience such harassment.
- Fortunately, more than eight in ten women (86%) have never experienced harassment at work.

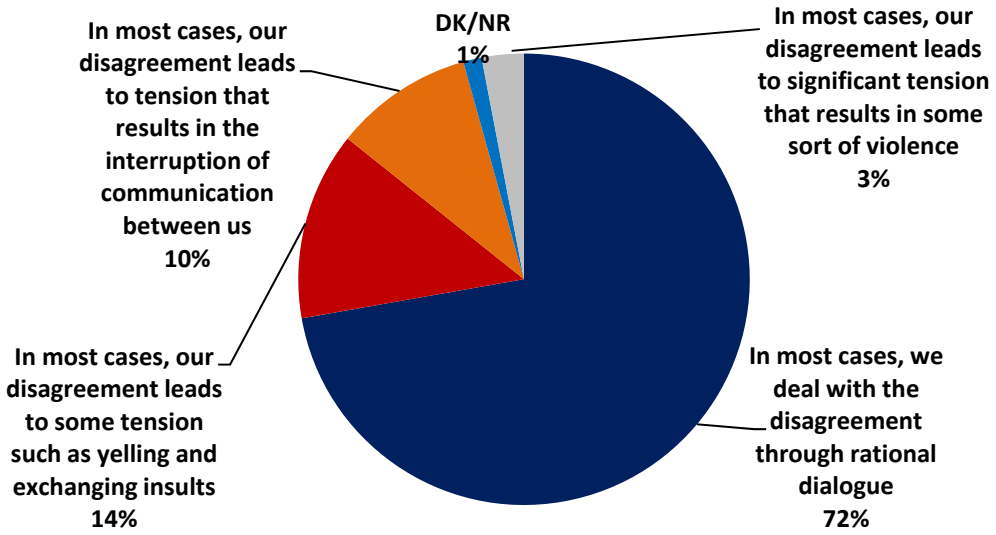
Figure 8 - Sexual harrassment at work
% of women experiencing or witnessing unwelcome physical contact, gestures, or noises directed towards women at work by men (n=981)



Women in Private Spaces

The SWMENA survey asked about experience with marital conflict and attitudes towards domestic violence in Morocco.

Figure 9 - Disagreements among married respondents
% of women reporting on conflict resolution (n= 1,310)



Married survey respondents were asked about how they resolved disagreements in their household.[3]

- Figure 9 shows that nearly three-quarters of respondents (72%) say they solve problems through rational dialogue, 14% of respondents said that their disagreements lead to yelling and insults, and 10% said that their disagreements lead to an interruption in communication.

- Three percent of respondents reported that their disagreements escalated to violence.

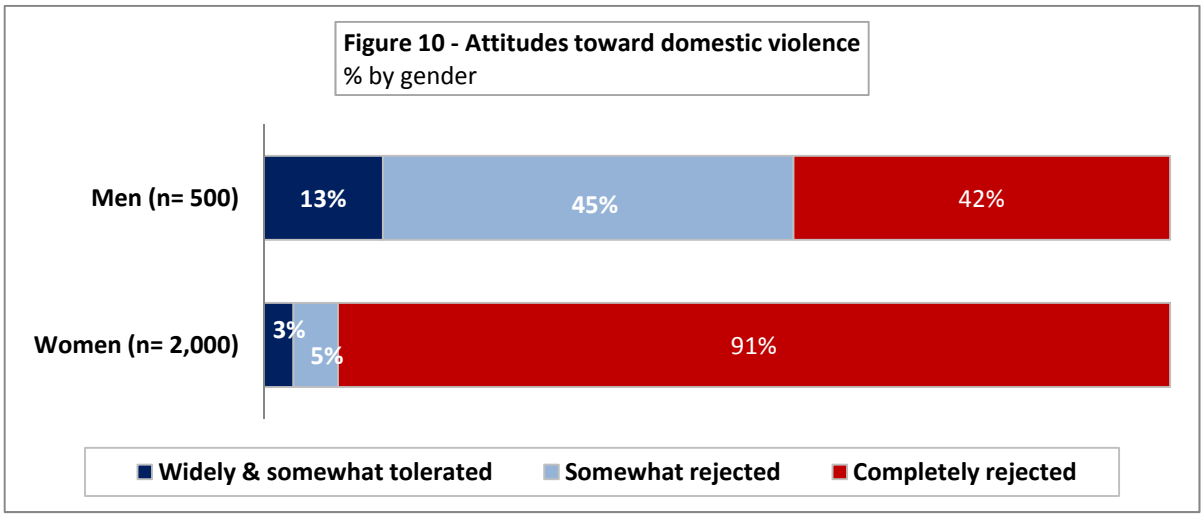
Women and men were asked, "To what extent would you say that domestic violence or the physical abuse of wives on behalf of their husbands is generally tolerated or rejected by people in your neighborhood/area?"

Figure 10 shows that there are large differences in attitudes toward domestic violence by gender.

- The overwhelming majority of women feel that domestic violence is completely rejected (91%), while less than half of men share this sentiment (42%).

[3] Specifically, married women were asked, "Married life is not without problems and disagreements, when you disagree with your partner over a certain issue, which of the following scenarios best describes how you deal with the situation?"

- Moroccan men are four times as likely as Moroccan women to claim that domestic violence is widely or somewhat tolerated (13% vs. 3%), and nine times as likely to claim that domestic violence is somewhat rejected (45% vs. 5%).



The survey asked respondents to provide the reasons that explain why a husband might physically abuse his wife, and open-ended responses were coded into categories. Up to five reasons could be provided by a single respondent. The top ten most frequently cited reasons by women and men are shown in Table 2.

- Overall, women and men provide different reasons for domestic violence and at different frequencies. Women indicate a lack of understanding and communication between spouses as the primary reason for domestic violence, whereas this was the second most frequent reason cited by men (45% of women and 36% of men). Nearly one half (46%) of men indicated that it was because the wife did something wrong or needs to be punished, as the primary reason for domestic violence, compared to 36% of women.

- Twice as many women as men (22% of women and 10% of men) cite drinking and drug addiction as a reason why a husband might physically abuse his wife.

- Twice as many men as women (18% of men and 9% of women) indicate low education/intellectual levels as a reason why a husband might physically abuse his wife.

Table 2 – Reported causes that may lead to domestic violence *% out of respondents; top ten ranked from highest to lowest according to citations by female respondents*	**Women (n=2,000)**	**Men (n=500)**
Because of lack of communication/understanding between spouses	45%	36%
Because the wife did something wrong/ deserves it/ needs to be punished	36%	46%
Because the husband drinks too much	22%	10%
Because of poverty	20%	20%
Because the husband suffers from a mental condition/psychological problem	12%	4%
Because of low education	9%	18%
Because of a lack of preparation for married life	5%	4%
Don't know	3%	4%
Because of cultural reasons/ accepted in certain communities or traditions/ some people are raised this way	2%	0%
Lack of trust	2%	5%
Because of religious reasons	1%	1%

Three in ten Moroccan men report that they personally find it acceptable for a husband to beat his wife, whereas less than one in ten Moroccan women (9%) share this sentiment (Figure 11).

In addition to asking a general question about whether respondents found it personally acceptable for a husband to beat his wife, the survey asked if respondents found such behaviors justified when framed in terms of six specific situations:

- If she neglected household responsibilities
- If she was disobedient or did not follow his orders
- If she neglected the children
- If she tried to impose her views
- If she went out without telling her husband
- If she refused sex

Figure 11 - "Do you personally believe it is acceptable for women to be beaten by their husbands in certain situations?"
% by gender

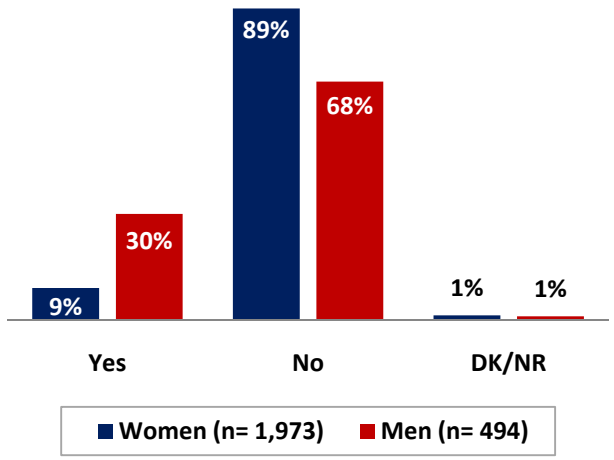
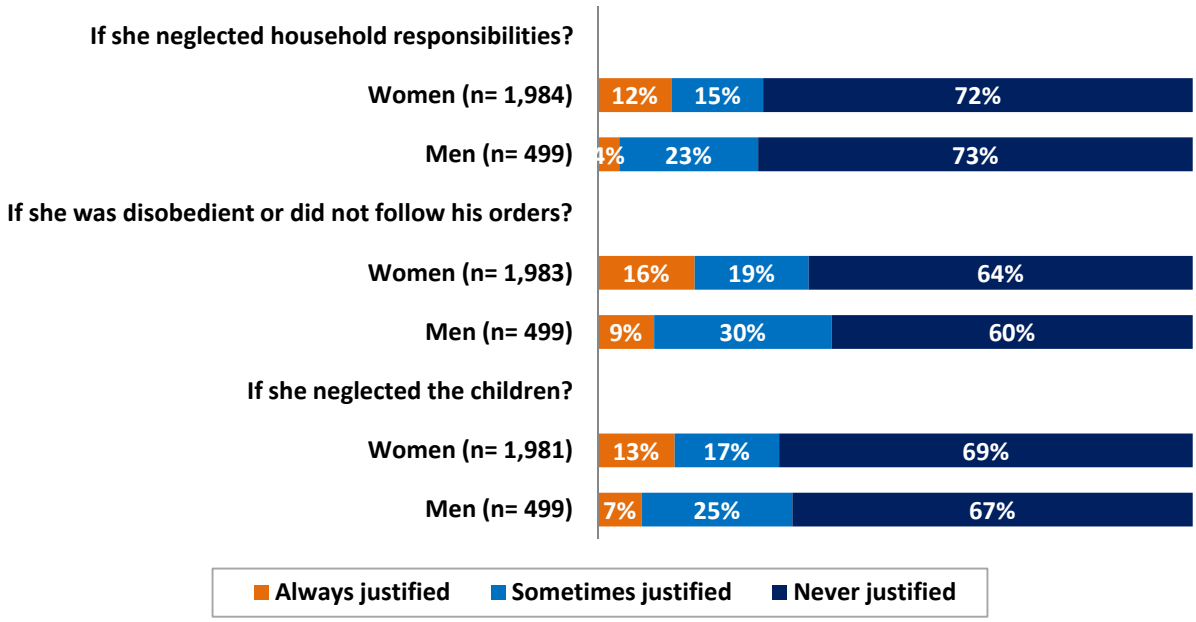


Figure 12 shows three of these reasons by gender. The pattern is similar for the other three reasons offered by the interviewer. Interestingly, when respondents are asked the same question within the context of a specific situation, women and men are more likely to justify domestic violence.

Figure 12 - "For each of these types of situations, please tell me if you think it is always justified, sometimes justified or never justified for women to be beaten by their husbands."
% by gender



- Domestic violence is most accepted when a women "is disobedient or did not follow [her husband's] orders" and "if she went out without telling her husband." Over one-third of respondents said that domestic violence is sometimes or always justified in these events.

- Nearly three in ten women (27%) and men (27%) agreed that it is sometimes or always justified for a man to beat his wife if she neglects her household responsibilities.

- Thirty percent of women and 32% of men said it was somewhat or always justified for women to be beaten if they neglected their children.

Figure 13 - "For each of these types of situations, please tell me if you think it is always justified, sometimes justified or never justified for women to be beaten by their husbands."
% by education

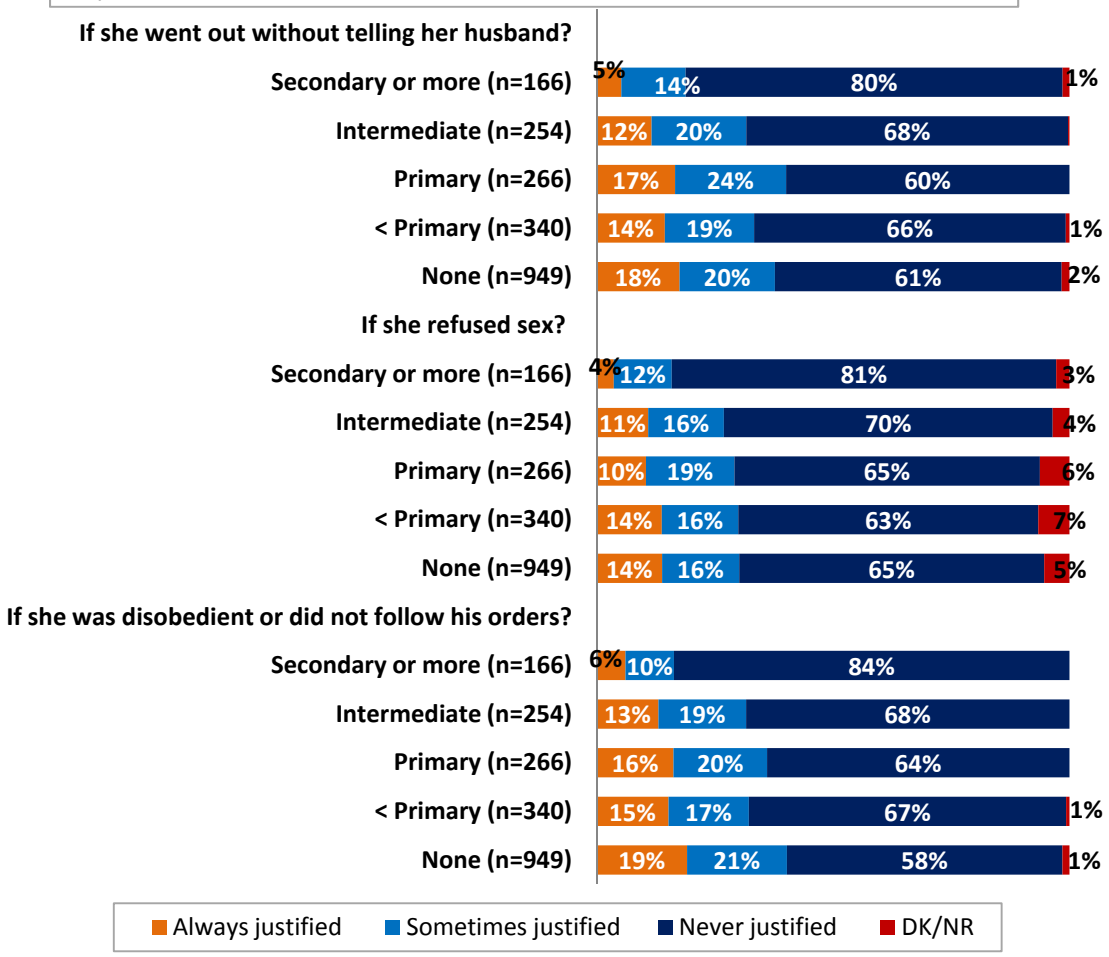


Figure 13 shows three of these reasons for women who responded by educational attainment. The pattern is similar for the other three reasons offered by the interviewer.

- In each case, women with more education report less acceptance of domestic violence for the justification offered.
- At the lowest level—no education—30% to 40% of women think a husband beating his wife is always or sometimes justified by the reason given.
- The percentage always or sometimes accepting the justification offered declines to 4% to 6% among women with a secondary degree or higher.