



# **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) THROUGH THE LENSES OF GEN Z**

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# **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) THROUGH THE LENSES OF GEN Z**

*Young Men's Attitudes Towards Gender-based Violence, Domestic Violence, and Femicide in Kosovo*

**SIT - CENTER FOR COUNSELING, SOCIAL SERVICES AND RESEARCH**

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## Thank you note

For every respondent who agreed to participate in this study, many others politely declined. Hence, a 'Thank you note' is in order for the young people who agreed to participate in the survey, having shown the goodwill to contribute to this otherwise unpleasant topic of gender-based violence. All responses are analyzed at aggregate level, and the aim of this research is our joint mission to reduce any forms of violence in our society. A 'Thank you note' also goes to all participants of the Focus group discussions, those who agreed to interviews, and many more others who supported the completion of this study.

**Author:** SIT

**Prepared by :** Elma Berisha



## LIST of ACRONYMS

**ICK/BIK** – Islamic Community of Kosovo

**DV** – Domestic violence

**Gen Z** – Generation Z

**GBV** – Gender-based violence

**OSCE** – The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

**Oxfam** – Oxford Committee for Famine Relief

**SIT** – Center for Counseling, Social Services and Research

**TFGBV** – Technologically-facilitated gender-based violence

**UNFPA** – United Nations Populations Fund

**UN** – United Nations

**UNDP** – United Nations Development Programme

**UNHCR** – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

06

Introduction

07

Overview of Key Findings

09

Awareness and Knowledge: What counts as violence against women?

11

Gender Attitudes & Perceptions: What leads to violence against women?

12

Gender Roles and Stereotypes

14

What is grounding the youth's ideas of gender stereotypes?

14

Subjective norms versus Social norms

16

Social norms based on Focus Group discussions

19 **Social norms and religion**

21 **Technologically-enabled violence against women**

22 **Sexual Harassment: Reporting is key**

23 **Domestic Violence: The perpetrator is not justified**

25 **Femicide: the worst of all in the safest of places**

28 **Advocacy and Engagement: From attitudes to behavior**

30 **Conclusions & Recommendations**

32 **References**

34 **Appendix: Sample Overview**

## INTRODUCTION

According to a recent UN research (Voices of Youth, 2023), violence against women remains the most widespread form of violence throughout the Western Balkans. As is the case with the whole region, the pace of implementation of gender mainstreaming reforms in the Kosovo context is slow due to impending social legacies. A Riinvest Institute study for the UNDP (2022) has indicated that traditional cultural norms seem to dominate young people's views on the rights and roles of women in society. The latest SIT study titled "Being a Man in Kosovar Society" (2023) revealed social tension among young Kosovar men regarding gender norms. Consequently, data indicate that many young men find themselves in a tensional transition between the rigid traditional gender roles of the past and the more egalitarian gender equality perceptions of today. This study has endeavored to further explore this complex junction between social norms, attitudes, and behavior of young men when it comes to awareness, tendencies, and implications towards gender-based violence.

The study primarily aimed to better understand the attitudes of young men towards gender norms, gender-based violence (GBV), domestic violence (DV), and femicide in Kosovo. Secondly, it aimed to explore the relationship between gender stereotypes and all forms of gender-based violence, including technologically enabled violence against women. Thirdly, it aimed to expose any attitudes of tolerance towards gender-based violence among young men, underlining rationalization beliefs behind it. And, finally, given the current state of social transition of Kosovo men vis-à-vis gender equality, the study aimed to use the findings as a contribution towards building a case for betterment of intervention methods in mitigating and eradicating all forms of gender-based violence.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods has been employed, and the whole research has been completed within the span of six months, starting from March to August 2024. The quantitative survey was designed specifically for Kosovar male youth with flexible age criteria; several responses from females were not included in the analysis. A sample of over 100 young Kosovars participated with over 95% of them qualifying as Generation Z (Gen Z), which in this study is confined to those aged between 15 to 27 years old.<sup>1</sup> In addition, 3 focus group discussions (around 30 participants of both genders) were organized in three different cities, Prishtina, Peja, and Mitrovica. This, along with several sideline interviews, with various representatives of society at large, aiming to elicit a broader understanding of gender roles and the challenges that the male youth are facing vis-à-vis the issues at hand. Key results from the data collected are presented in this brief report, along with recommendations on how to further address gender-based violence in Kosovo.

<sup>1</sup> By standard, Generation Z refers to people born between 1996 and 2010.



## OVERVIEW OF KEY FINDINGS

Patterns of awareness and knowledge of gender-based violence found in the study indicate a clear Gen Z problem of failing to recognize male controlling behaviors towards one's female partner as counting in for violence against women. Results highlight the need for systematic education of Gen Z about what constitutes gender-based violence and signs of relationship abuse.

Traditional gender stereotypes are somewhat prevalent, especially among the non-urban respondents and those aged below 18. A higher tolerance for women leadership in the workplace and public spaces is detected, compared to family household matters, relationships, and private spaces. Still, at the level of attitudes, Gen Z does not seem to explicitly endorse statements reflecting a toxic masculinity backlash against women's emancipation in society.

When comparing Gen Z's subjective norms (personal attitudes on gender) with social norms (gender attitudes Gen Z think their immediate community approves of), there are certain clear discrepancies. These results indicate that when it comes to gender norms, Gen Z does hold themselves, accurately or inaccurately, as more progressive than their social surroundings.

Ten selected gender norms, proven to be associated with gender-based violence in other studies across the world, were specifically tested in this survey, and the data indicate that Gen Z mostly does not endorse them as subjective norms. For instance, only 6% of Gen Z agree with "Women must be submissive to male family members in all aspects of her life". Yet, there is room for concern for other gender norms, indicating higher agreement rates. For instance, 38% of Gen Z agree that: "Men have the right to discipline women for 'incorrect' behavior".

Gen Z thinks that certain forms of technologically facilitated violence against women and girls, such as sexist or hateful language, sexual blackmailing, and doxing are commonplace in the Kosovar context. A great proportion of respondents think that this technologically-enabled violence against women and girls 'happens every day' or 'Sometimes', as opposed to 'Rarely' or 'Never'.





Data clearly sets Gen Z against the sexual harasser and the perpetrator of domestic violence and in support of the reporting victim. However, when it comes to sexual harassment and violence, data also signals a problem with how Gen Z themselves understand consent. At the same time, their understanding of domestic violence betrays residue traces of stereotypical thinking in how women are perceived to contribute to it, through women's exaggeration or flirting.

This study has found some positive patterns of attitudes when it comes to reporting gender-based violence, be it sexual harassment or domestic violence. A significant majority of respondents 75% tend to disagree that "Women who are sexually harassed should sort it out themselves rather than report it"; 88% 'strongly disagree' that there is anything shameful about a woman reporting abuse by her husband outside the family when and if it happens. A majority (69%) seem properly informed about report channels and means.

There are both strengths and weaknesses in the understanding and attitudes of Gen Z in Kosovo towards the phenomena of femicide. On the one hand, they seem to fully recognize the cultural and social nature of the phenomena, as opposed to explaining it away in terms of individual pathology. On the other hand, the culture of victim-blaming is not fully deleted from the mindset of the youth, despite the apparent conscious effort to do so.



## AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE: WHAT COUNTS AS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?

According to UNHCR, Gender-based violence (GBV) is “an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e. gender) differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty. These acts can occur in public or private.”<sup>2</sup> According to the UN Women intimate partner violence is one of the most common forms of violence experienced by women globally, and, on top of other forms of physical violence, it also includes psychological abuse and male controlling behaviors.<sup>3</sup>



**Survey data indicate a clear Gen Z problem of failing to recognize or identify male controlling behaviour towards one’s female partner as violence against women.g behaviour towards female partner as violence against women.**

Out of all dimensions measured in this study with Kosovar male youth, the results about awareness and knowledge of what counts as violence against women are the most alarming ones. Is this an attitudinal problem or simply technical ignorance? This is to be answered at a later point in the context of other information gathered in this study. Needless to say, awareness and knowledge are not the same as holding a condoning attitude towards violent behavior, let alone personally engaging in such behavior. These are three entirely different constructs. Yet, not being aware that a certain behavior is unacceptably violent, could run the risks of potentially normalizing or tolerating it. In addition, other international longitudinal studies<sup>4</sup> have identified having a low level of understanding of violence against women as one of the strongest predictors of attitudes supportive of violence against women.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR Policy on the Prevention of, Risk Mitigation, and Response to Gender-Based Violence, 2020, UNHCR

<sup>3</sup> FAQs: Types of violence against women and girls. UN Women.

<sup>4</sup> Webster et al., 2019. Attitudes towards violence against women and gender equality among people from non-English speaking countries. ANROWS.

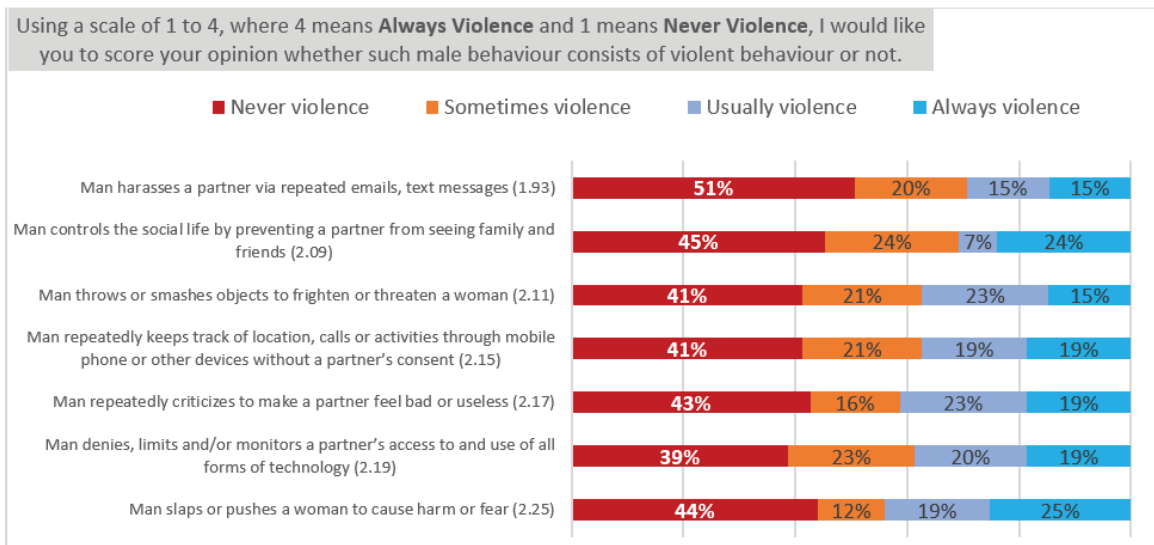


Figure 1: Awareness of gender-based violence

**Note:** In every figure displaying the results, the statement average rate has been given in brackets along with the statement text and % for category responses. For instance, on a scale of 4, the average 2.25 indicates a higher endorsement rate than 1.93.

One could interpret these findings as reflecting the change in social norms, for until a few decades ago gender-based violence was understood only in physical terms. Thanks to relentless efforts of civil society locally and abroad, today there is a broader awareness that GBV may be physical, psychological, sexual or even socio-economic in nature. Regrettably, ratings of statements in this study reflect poorly on this understanding. Even the statements involving clear physical violence are poorly rated: 44% of respondents do not seem to count the case when ‘*Man slaps or pushes a woman to cause harm or fear*’ as violence, while another 12% think that it is only ‘sometimes violence’. Violent behavior such as ‘*Man throws or smashes objects to frighten or threaten a woman*’ counts as ‘Always violence’ only for 15% of respondents, while 41% of them think it is ‘never violence’, and another 21% think it is only ‘sometimes violence’.

When respondents were grouped into two age categories (‘Below 18’ versus ‘18 & Above’) in order to analyze their awareness of what constitutes gender-based violence, better awareness rates were reported among the older respondents (‘18 & Above’) across all statements. That furthermore puts the age group of youngsters (15, 16, 17 years old) into the spotlight for urgent need of systematic education and awareness-raising campaigns about what counts as violence and signs of relationship abuse.



**Gen Z in general, and those aged 17 and below in particular, are in need for systematic education about what constitutes gender-based violence.**



# GENDER ATTITUDES & PERCEPTIONS: WHAT LEADS TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?

Attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs are closely interrelated and oftentimes used interchangeably in social literature, however, they are not synonyms. Attitudes are of three types – cognitive, affective, and behavioral.<sup>5</sup> In sum, attitudes are a very complex phenomenon, as they operate at both conscious and unconscious levels of cognition, and a variety of complex factors such as beliefs, attention, motivation, emotions, past experiences, goals, and expectations can influence them. For example, one who holds family values in high regard (values), and believes that traditional gender roles are the only right way to organize household life (beliefs), may come to perceive the emancipation of women as threatening to these gender roles (perceptions), hence, develop negative attitudes towards any prospects of gender equality (attitudes). In turn, these attitudes may translate into various forms of oppressive behavior towards one's partner, or other female members of the family, with the motivation and rationalization that by doing so one is protecting family and guarding societal values. At times, such sentiment of male hegemony ends up in downright physical violence or even femicide.

There are multiple reasons why studying attitudes is important. First, attitudes are key to influencing and predicting human behavior. Attitudes are often described as a predisposition to act in a certain way. Hence, attitudes are studied to prevent undesirable behavior. Second, attitudes are not permanent and they can be influenced in one way or another. This is another reason why it is important to study and monitor attitudes, nurture the good ones, and modify those with potentially harmful effects at individual and social levels. Attitudes can be changed through education, persuasion, and cognitive restructuring, which involves changing the underlying beliefs and values that support the attitude. For example, instead of associating gender equality with a threat to the family, one can learn to replace that belief with the fact that an educated and fulfilled woman is a safe pillar to a sound family and a prosperous society, while an oppressed and disenfranchised woman cannot possibly play that role.

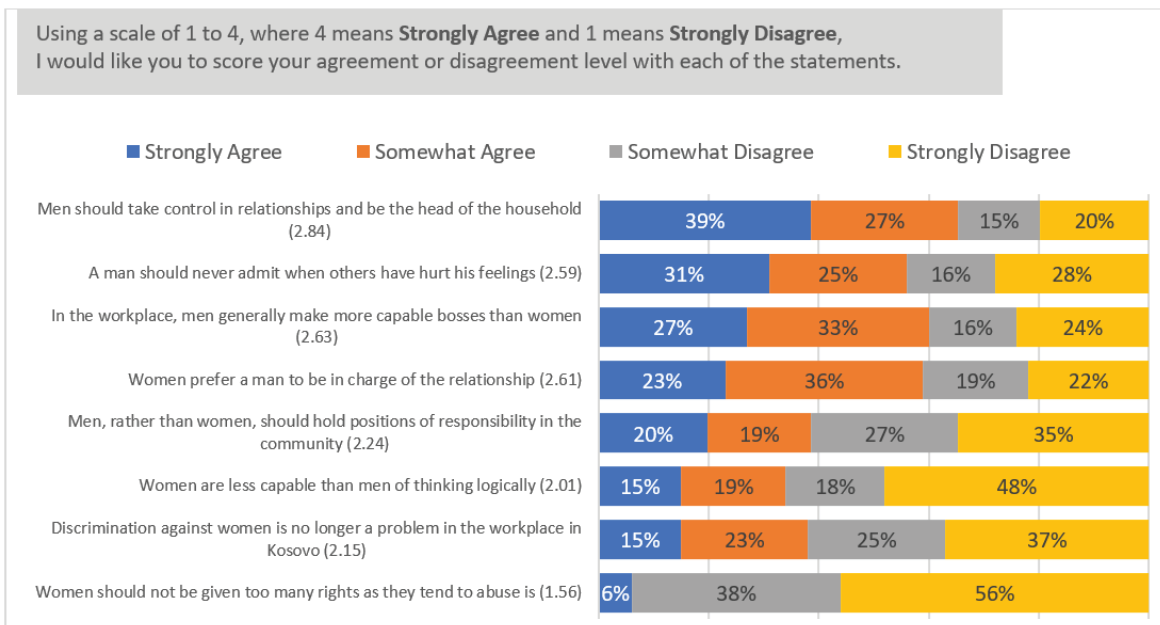
<sup>5</sup> Guthrie Yarwood, M. (2022). Psychology of human emotion: An open access textbook. Pressbooks.



## Gender Roles and Stereotypes

Gender-based violence can also be defined as “traditional attitudes by which women are regarded as subordinate to men. They also include stereotyped roles which perpetuate widespread practices involving violence or coercion, such as family violence and abuse...” (UN Women).<sup>6</sup> In this study, a selected list of general statements on gender roles and stereotypes was given to participants to rate their level of personal endorsement (Fig.2). To begin with a few relatively positive findings, a significant majority of respondents ‘strongly disagree’ (56%) and ‘somewhat disagree’ (38%) that “Women should not be given too many rights as they tend to abuse it”. This is followed by another somewhat positive finding that only 15% of the sample believe that “women are less logical than men”, or that “Discrimination against women is no longer a problem in the workplace in Kosovo”. However, even though the majority of respondents do not see women as ‘less capable than men of thinking logically’, many of them opt for men to be in charge at home, in relationships, in workplaces, and community positions.

As is the case in numerous other countries, the findings indicate a higher tolerance for women’s leadership in the workplace and public spaces, compared to family household matters and private spaces. “Men should take control of the relationships and be the head of households” is endorsed by two-thirds of all respondents (39% strongly agree + 27% somewhat agree). At the same time, two-fifths (20% strongly agree + 19% somewhat agree) hold the view that “Men, rather than women, should hold positions of responsibility in the community”. Nevertheless, the perceptions that men are more capable bosses in workplaces, (public spaces) and that women are the ones who prefer their men to be in charge of the relationship (private spaces), are still predominantly prevalent.

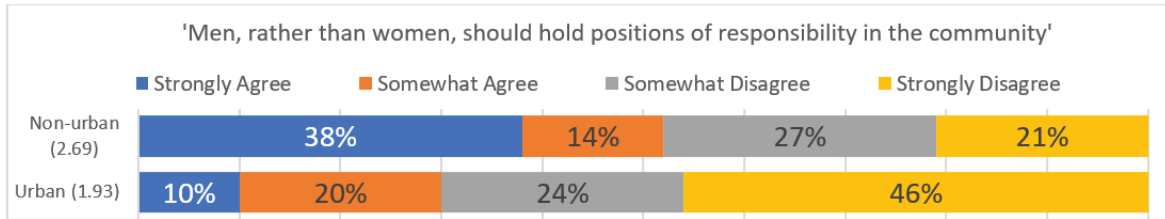


**Figure 2: Attitudes towards traditional gender roles and stereotypes**

<sup>6</sup> General recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. UN Women.



Strong statistical correlation between all statements, bar one, suggests consistency in attitudinal patterns about gender roles and stereotypes. Generally, stronger agreement across all statements from the younger group (below 18), and the respondents from non-urban areas.



**Figure 3: Attitude towards women holding positions of responsibility in the community: Urban versus non-urban differences**

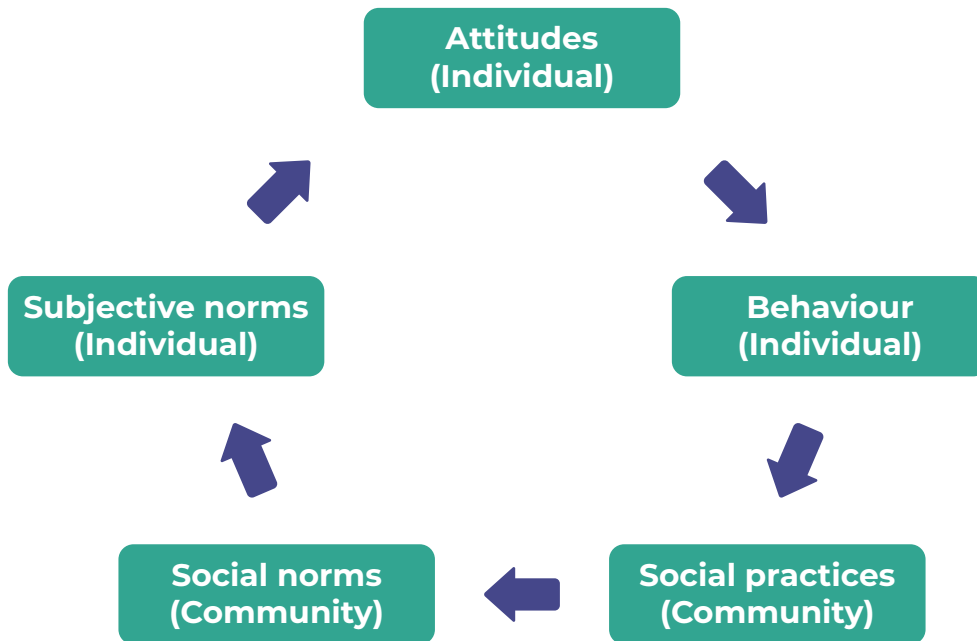


**Although traditional gender stereotypes are widespread, there is no tendency of toxic masculinity backlash among the majority of Gen Z in Kosovo: 56% 'strongly disagree' and 38% 'somewhat disagree' that "women should not be given too many rights as they tend to abuse it".**

# WHAT IS GROUNDING THE YOUTH'S IDEAS OF GENDER STEREOTYPES?

## Subjective norms versus Social norms

While attitudes are individually motivated, social norms are socially motivated. While attitudes operate at individual level, social norms are the beliefs, values, and attitudes held by the majority of a particular group that underline social practices. Naturally, social norms influence individual attitudes and behaviors as individuals do care about the importance others place on them thinking a certain way or performing a given behavior.<sup>7</sup> Subjective norms are some kind of internalization of social norms. Gender norms are social norms that relate specifically to gender differences, roles and expectations. A common gender norm, for example, is that women and girls will and should do the majority of domestic work.<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 4: The recursive influential cycle between individual attitudes and social norms**

Across societies and communities, violence against women and girls is rooted in the widely accepted social norms that too often contribute to gender inequality, male entitlement, and domination and control over the bodies of women, and private and social life. Oxfam International (2018)<sup>9</sup> research from 12 countries across several continents has identified common patterns in the social norms that perpetuate violence against women and girls. These ten gender norms that are shown to be strongly associated with gender-based violence, have been selected as factors to be tested in this survey.

<sup>7</sup> Worthington, A. K. (2021). Persuasion Theory in Action. University of Alaska Anchorage. <https://ua.pressbooks.pub/persuasiontheoryinaction/>

<sup>8</sup> Haider, H. (2017). Changing gender & social norms, attitudes and behaviours. K4D Helpdesk Research Report series. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

<sup>9</sup> Ten harmful beliefs that perpetuate violence against women and girls. Oxfam International. 2018.

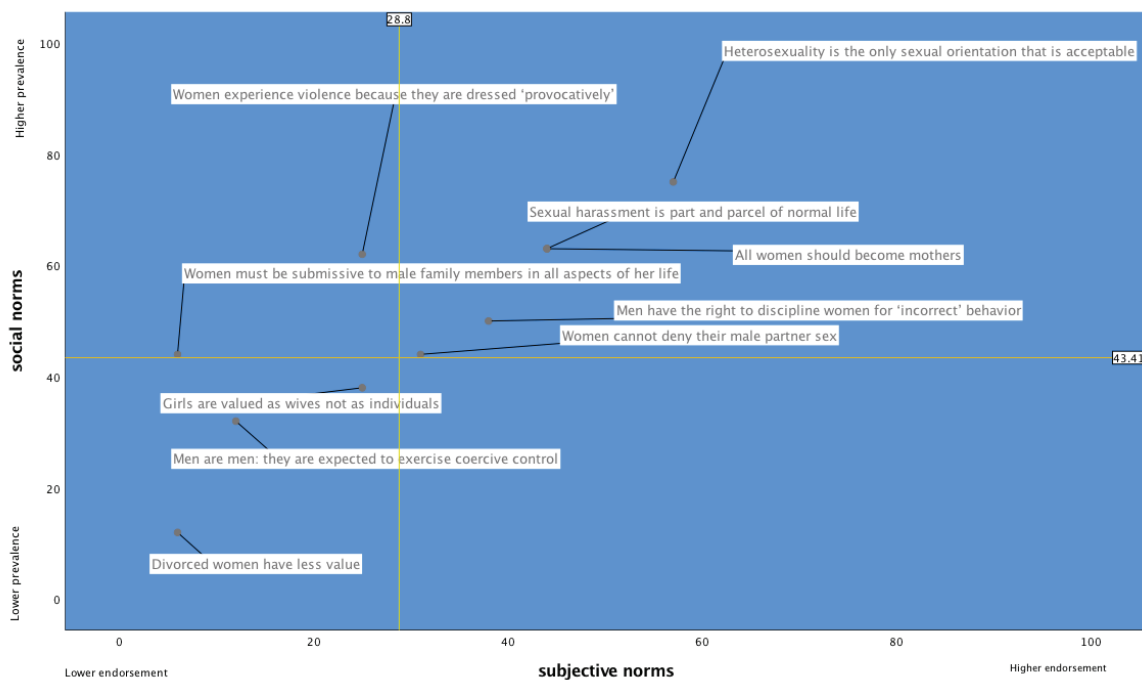


They have been rated in the quantitative survey, both at the individual level as subjective norms, and at the social level as perceived social norms. The matrix (Fig.5) indicates the results: the value assigned in the horizontal axis is the respondents' personal agreement with each of the gender norms, while the values assigned in the vertical axis indicate the respondents' perception of what society approves as acceptable gender norms. The social norms questions were framed with four response options: 'All of the people I know agree', 'Most of the people I know agree', 'Some of the people I know agree', and 'None of the people I know agree'. The rating data was collected separately at two different points during the survey, to more accurately capture spontaneous beliefs and perceptions.



**Ten selected gender norms, proven to be associated with GBV in other studies, were specifically tested in this survey, and the data indicate that Gen Z do not endorse them as subjective norms.**

Generally, the personal endorsement across all gender norms is relatively lower than the projected endorsement of social norms. Respondents' agreement with these gender norms is very low, which is seen as an encouraging finding. This is except for four norms: "Heterosexuality is the only sexual orientation that is acceptable" ('strongly agree' 44% + 'agree' 13%); "Sexual harassment is part and parcel of normal life" ('strongly agree' 13% + 'agree' 31%); "All women should become mothers" ('strongly agree' 25% + 'agree' 19%); and, "Men have the right to discipline women for 'incorrect' behavior" ('strongly agree' 13% + 'agree' 25%).



**Figure 5: The matrix displaying the endorsement of subjective norms versus perceived social norms**  
**Note: Not all questionnaire items were shown to respondents aged 17 and below; particularly the sensitive items on femicide, sexual and domestic violence were only shown for rating for respondents aged 18 and above**





The biggest discrepancy between subject norms and social norms is found for two gender norms: “Women experience violence because they are dressed ‘provocatively’” (subjective norm: 25% vs social norm 62%), and “Women must be submissive to male family members in all aspects of their life” (subjective norm 6% vs social norm 44%). It should be noted that higher endorsement of gender norms at the social level does not reflect the accurate social picture; it reflects only the respondents’ individual perceptions about their social midst or what they think the community approves of. It shows that when it comes to gender norms, Gen Z respondents in this survey do hold themselves, consciously or unconsciously, accurately or inaccurately, as more progressive in comparison to their social surroundings.



**When it comes to gender norms, Gen Z do hold themselves as more progressive than their immediate social surroundings.**

## SOCIAL NORMS BASED ON FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The quantitative survey can shed some light on what attitudes youth hold, but not why they hold them or why they are experiencing cognitive dissonances about them. Qualitative feedback in the focus group discussions does provide further insights, particularly regarding social norms guiding the youth. In the first focus group discussion held in Peja, ten women participated, representing a good mix of professionals in their 40s and 50s. The second group held in Mitrovica consisted of 11 male participants mainly in their 20s, 30s, and 40s, also of mixed ethnic and professional backgrounds. The third group was held on the premises of the Cathedral of Saint Mother Teresa in Prishtina, with participants of mixed gender in their 40s and 50s, to gauge the role of religion in gender norms and prevention of violence. The same topic was discussed on the premises of the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK) in Prishtina, with two high representatives of the Muslim community. The common themes that emerged across all groups are briefly pointed out below:’

- **Awareness and education on GBV: need for education on sexual harassment for both boys and girls at a very early age. Social norms and religion**
- **Hate language problem: the youth need ‘language therapy’ to sanitize their mindset and to insulate their behavior from any GBV tendencies.**



- **Hate language problem: the youth need ‘language therapy’ to sanitize their mindset and to insulate their behavior from any GBV tendencies.**
- **Transitional crisis for young men: Boys are under pressure and confused due to discrepant narratives they hear at home, from peers, in school, in media, etc.**
- **The negative influence of media & technology (video games): local and international popular music media is rife with toxic masculinity rhetoric and visual stimuli that support the sexualization of women.** <sup>10</sup>
- **Finger-pointing at social institutions: relevant institutions are failing to prevent gender-based violence, effectively intervene, and treat the perpetrators.**
- **Gender stereotypes, particularly in the digital world, have become toxic and hard to manage.**
- **Stereotypes and gender norms are difficult to challenge: nevertheless, significant progress is being made.**

*“Leading women in the Mitrovica municipality have proved to be very capable community and administrative leaders, and less corruptible than men...nevertheless, closer to power, women would be as corruptible as men”. (The men’s group)*

*“Yesterday in the UP, 17 faculty deans were nominated and only one of them was a woman. This is even though 70% of the students are girls and the majority of the UP staff is women. That means that men are still given advantageous treatment when it comes to career advancement, positions, and titles”. (The men’s group)*

*“In our society, the dress code is linked to morality, hence regretfully the sexual harasser is at times justified...girls should make a distinction between private and public spaces, and they should have respect for public spaces”. (The men’s group)*

*“Violence is learned! especially if we are exposed to it often”. (The women’s group)*

*“Whether they report sexual harassment or they do not report it, girls are under pressure in both cases. Failure to report it reflects lack of confidence in social institutions”.  
(The women’s group)*

*“Violence against women at times is triggered in the context of extended family, and oftentimes it is elderly women in the family themselves who stimulate it”. (The women’s group)*

<sup>10</sup> Jashari, Fatlum. (2024). You are what you listen to. MY attempt to denormalize violent lyrics in songs. Kosovo 2.0.



*“Key is the consideration of a partner as a human being, as a person in its own right, rather than as something you own or somebody who is obliged to you at all times. Gender norms transition? We are not reflecting on it enough!”. (The Cathedral group)*

*“There is much quota and ego in gender equality: the system is doing lip service to gender equality, not dealing with real grass root issues of gender discrimination, inequality, and all the triggers of gender-based violence. We need education and systematic tackling of the issue...” (The Cathedral group)*

*“To abuse religion, means, to see the other (person or gender) as a means, an instrument, rather than in the sense of equality and coexistence”. (The Cathedral group)*

Much we gained from the qualitative part of the study is that Gen Z quite accurately projects social norms as relatively more regressive vis-à-vis their endorsement of gender norms. During the focus group discussions (in the women’s group) a sentiment of resentment towards the transformation of women’s role in society and at home could not go unnoticed. There was reservation about what “women are trying to do today”, “neglecting family” while “trying to compensate for all the lost years of past discrimination”. In addition, “men are now afraid of marriage or to create family” due to “new freedoms of women”. If not explicitly, implicitly reservation towards the ‘gender equality’ concept is the elephant in the room.

Gender equality is viewed as a ‘nice theory’ but not a ‘must have’. This sentiment seems mostly to be driven by the daily practical arrangements of life at the nucleus family level, but even more importantly, at the household level, where the stereotypical gender roles are inflexibly predefined. In the women’s group, to illustrate their suspicion towards any possibility of transforming gender stereotypes, they also provided examples like “a 6-member household with 5 female members all expecting the single male member to feed them!” Instead of interpreting this as a pointed example of the dire need to change the normative modus operandi, they saw this as a ‘fact’ that ‘change is difficult’.

Nostalgia for the past resurfaced several times in the men’s group, too. They kept comparing gender roles and expectations in the past and today, and their evaluative responses were mixed. While they seem to appreciate the progress: “Women’s rights are inherently a ‘given’, and belong to women: no one should debate whether to ‘give’ it to them nor anyone can take it away’. At the same time, they seem to resent it: “Today women have more rights than men”, expressing appreciation for the moral code of the past, including behavioral control, the sense of respect, guilt, and shame among both genders, that some of them saw as missing in contemporary society.



## Social norms based on religion

What is the role of religious influence on gender norms, and gender stereotypes, and are there any contributing tendencies towards gender-based violence? How can religious narrative be best leveraged to encounter gender-based violence? It is important to note that, as well as having norms that may implicitly support violence against women, the religions from which people derive inspiration also have other norms that protect against this violence. It all depends on the spin of the script and how the actively engaging religious practitioners use it. The problem is the appropriated religious narrative to feed scripts for justifying, excusing, or minimizing violence against women. To discuss these and other related questions an interview was held with the Grand Imam of Kosovo, Vedat ef. Sahiti and the head of the Women's Department at BIK, Mrs. Vaxhide Podvorica – Bunjaku.

The Grand Imam was decisive that no violence whatsoever has any basis in Islamic religion, and that the public should continue to be cautious and selective when receiving religious content, particularly from 'TikTok' preachers of all sorts. Instead of lending an ear to foreign preachers of global influence, which at times seem to have a strong appeal to local audiences, the solution is the local 'institutional portal'. On the BIK premises, during the conversation, it was also discussed how the inflexible gender stereotypes are more of cultural origin rather than religious. They are not healthy for men, too – they make them suppress their true feelings and become insensitive to their own families. How to use religious advice to educate young boys not to become violent? How to unlearn harmful cultural attitudes? The Grand Imam listed a string of institutional activities and organizational collaborations, with OSCE, UNFPA, SIT, local ministries, police departments, and so on, in the mission to educate the public of various age-groupings on the risks and prevention of gender-based violence.

*“We have consistently been, and continue to be vocal against every case of injustice or discrimination, let alone gender-based violence!”*  
*The Grand Imam of Kosovo, Vedat ef. Sahiti*

In addition, the harmful combination of cultural norms that sneak in under religious narrative was discussed. Islamic jurisprudence is very rich and detailed in fine rulings for every social interaction, and there is no basis for any gender-based violence or injustice. There is no basis for honor killings in it, for instance - the tragic phenomenon reflects corrupt cultural customs and mindsets. In turn, a lot of what comes as rigid gender stereotypes and restrictions is cultural rather than religious. Mrs. Vaxhide Podvorica Bunjaku mentioned how religious discourse is being used to unlearn harmful attitudes or cultural habits. For instance, the rampant gender discrimination of children that favors boys over girls. Scripts from religious discourse have been influential in changing this discriminatory attitude, including various prophetic statements on the value of girls' education, girls' good treatment, and other textual evidence explicitly advising



against such gender favoritism. On the question of what to make of the very young children or preschool girls in the Kosovo playgrounds appearing in long head scarves or garments that prevent them from mingling and freely playing, the answer was that there is no religious injunction warranting such behavior; rather, it is a parental ill-advised interpretation of religion. The discussions also highlighted a string of institutional transformations, since the establishment of the Women's Department in BIK, that has provided more room for women's voices and activities, especially in terms of reaching out to wider public education. The 'Train the Trainer' approach has been successfully used with both female theologians and the male imams scattered across the country, to tackle and prevent gender-based violence.

*"When it comes to gender-based violence, I feel like we have failed right at the start – education – we have let children down at these very fragile beginnings. This is why we have been advocating time and again to include educative religious fragments in the school curriculum"*

*The Grand Imam of Kosovo, Vedat ef. Sahiti*

In conversation with Dom Agim Qerkini, the Prishtina Vicar, 'gender equality' and 'forgiveness' were the defining keywords of the whole discourse. "Equality for us is a given, natural, unquestioned...in gender complementarity lies the continuity of life." Similar results emerged during the focus groups (The Cathedral group), and generally, there was no sentiment of unease, suspicion, or reservation towards the concept of gender equality. "Gender equality is part and parcel of the Church's plan program," said one of the female participants in the focus group. "I grew up in Klina, 3km away from the local church, and we have always been treated as equal, girls and boys, during all stages and experiences in our community; from Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, and further into adulthood". "We feel equal since childhood", said another female participant, "I have 5 kids myself, and this is the way we raise our children – equal. The family attends Sunday sermons together, we sit together, we play our part together". "During our pre-marriage counseling session back in 1996" said a male participant, "I was told by the priest: "If you are not able to forgive, then you rather do not marry at all. We were educated in forgiveness, harmony, reconciliation, and love before reciting our sacred matrimonial vows".

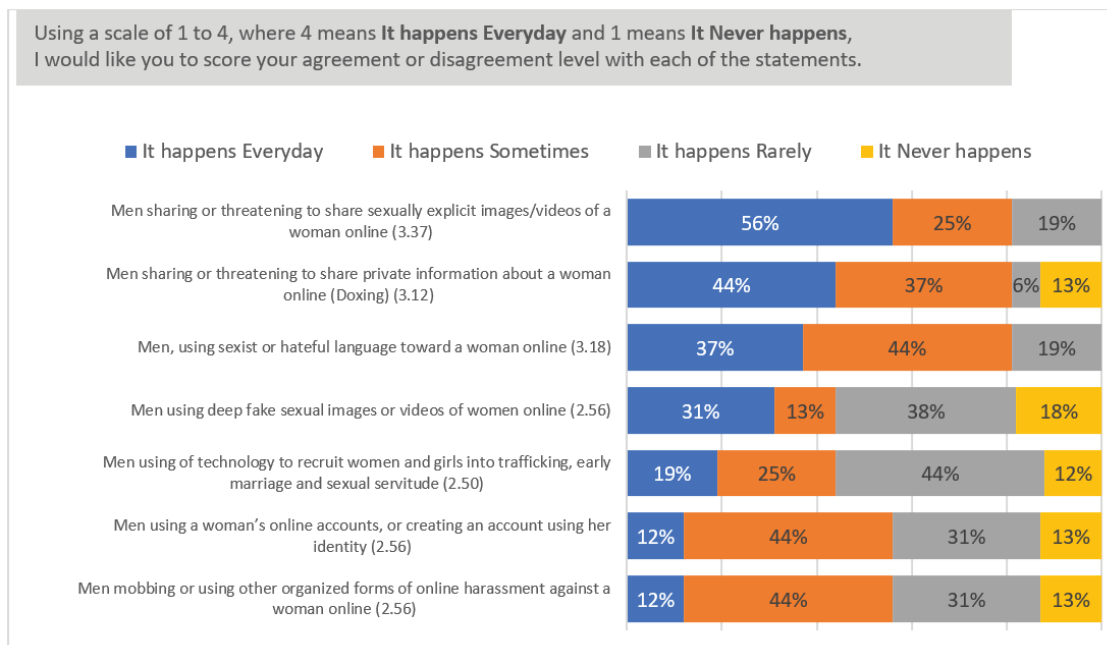
*"All institutions should collaborate to prevent gender-based violence and violence in general. Our conditions today are much better than a few decades ago. Intercommunity communications and connection are better, and outreach to all corners of the community is better now. Before we had to suffice with Sunday sermons, now we have the regular youngster gatherings, catechism with children, and gatherings for all ages; we regularly treat the theme of gender-based violence. Perhaps a few decades ago we used to be focused on rituals, now the focus is more on mindset-building and improvement of community culture."*

*The Vicar of Prishtina, Dom Agim Qerkini*



# TECHNOLOGICALLY-ENABLED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Access to technology and the digital world has contributed to women empowerment across the world in a myriad ways. Yet, UNFPA has timely drawn attention to the fact that technology and online spaces are increasingly becoming unsafe and weaponized against women and girls on the basis of their gender.<sup>11</sup> Globally, 66 percent of women have reported experiencing technologically-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV)—including instances of cyber-harassment and stalking, doxxing, and image-based sexual abuse.<sup>12</sup> In the current quantitative survey, Gen Z respondents have been asked to rate the frequency of technologically-enabled violence against women in the Kosovar context. They have responded to the question ‘How often do you believe women and girls in Kosovo are targeted online through the following behaviors?’ for a selected list of items, as shown in Fig xx, using four response options: ‘It happens Everyday’, ‘It happens Sometimes’, ‘It happens Rarely’, and ‘It Never happens’.



**Figure 6: Gen Z perceived frequency of technologically-enabled violence**

Regretfully, the findings indicate a high prevalence rate of online harassment targeting women and girls. None of the respondents think that ‘It Never happens’ when it comes to ‘Men using sexist or hateful language toward a woman online’, and, ‘Men sharing or threatening to share sexually explicit images/videos of a woman online’. On the contrary, a great proportion of respondents think that these technologically-enabled violence against women do ‘happen Everyday’ or ‘Sometimes’.



**Gen Z think that certain forms of technologically-facilitated violence against women and girls, such as sexist or hateful language, sexual blackmailing and doxxing are commonplace in the Kosovar context.**

<sup>11</sup> Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: A Growing Threat. UNFPA.

<sup>12</sup> Kristine Baekgaard, 2023-2024 Hillary Rodham Clinton Fellow, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT: REPORTING IS KEY

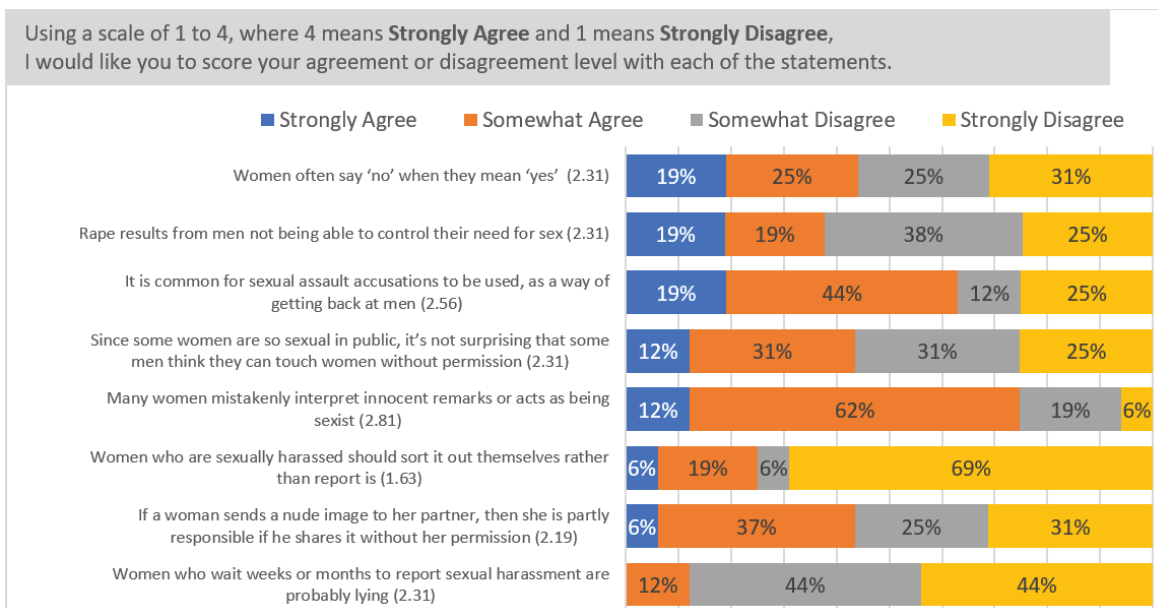
This study has found some positive patterns of attitudes when it comes to reporting gender-based violence, be it sexual harassment or domestic violence. As shown in the chart below (Fig.7), a significant majority of respondents 'strongly disagree' (69%) and 'somewhat disagree' (6%) that "Women who are sexually harassed should sort it out themselves rather than report it". This is followed by an equally important disagreement (44% 'strongly disagree' + 44% 'somewhat disagree') that "Women who wait weeks or months to report sexual harassment are probably lying". This result establishes trust on the side of the victims and clearly sets Gen Z against the harasser. Yet, the results are not as supportive across some other dimensions, ie when women's display of sexuality is factored in. Data indicate a relatively high agreement with statements "Since some women are so sexual in public, it's not surprising that some men think they can touch women without permission" (12%+31%), and "If a woman sends a nude image to her partner, then she is partly responsible if he shares it without her permission" (6%+37%). Nevertheless, this should not be interpreted as if these respondents are justifying such perpetrator behavior. It is an observer interpretation of a victim-perpetrator situation. Still, such discouraging attitudes are found across most of the other dimensions.



**Data clearly sets Gen Z against the sexual harasser and in support of the reporting victim; however, it also signals a problem with how Gen Z themselves understand the consent.**

For instance, an extremely high proportion of respondents (12% 'strongly agree' + 62% 'somewhat agree') agree that "Many women mistakenly interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist". Another high proportion of respondents (19% 'strongly agree' + 44% 'agree') agree that "it is common for sexual assault accusations to be used by women, as a way of getting back at men". Data also signals a serious issue with how consent is interpreted, with an unacceptably high proportion of respondents (19%+25%) holding the view that "Women often say 'no' when they mean 'yes'", and, another high proportion (19%+19%) agreeing that rape is attributed to biological urges.





**Figure 7: Attitudes towards sexual harassment**

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: THE PERPETRATOR IS NOT JUSTIFIED

Intimate partner violence is one of the manifestations of domestic violence. Domestic violence is violence that occurs within the private, domestic sphere,<sup>13</sup> generally between individuals who are related through blood or intimacy. Domestic violence is not confined to women, for example, it also includes child abuse and elderly abuse in the domestic sphere. In line with reporting sexual harassment, the survey findings indicate an encouraging result when it comes to reporting domestic violence. 88% of respondents 'strongly disagree' that there is anything shameful about a woman reporting abuse by her husband outside the family when and if it happens. In turn, only 19% of youngsters have no clue where to go outside for advice or support if domestic violence were to happen. A majority (44%+25%) would know where to seek advice and support about a domestic violence matter.



**Data shows no general tendency among Gen Z to justify the perpetrator of domestic violence, neither to minimize it, nor normalize it in any way.**

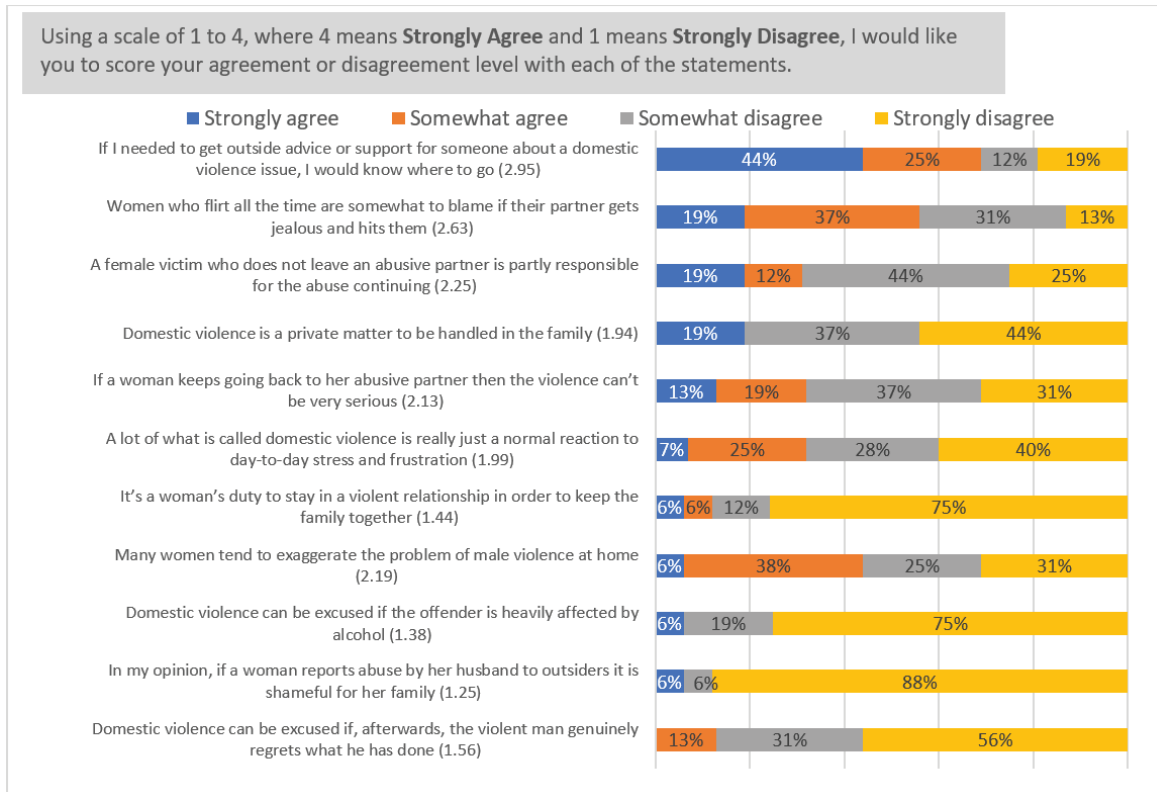
Another encouraging result is that there seems no general tendency among Gen Z to justify the perpetrator of domestic violence. An extremely high proportion of respondents (75% 'strongly disagree' + 19% 'somewhat disagree') disagree that *'Domestic violence can be excused if the offender*

<sup>13</sup> FAQs: Types of violence against women and girls. UN Women.





is heavily affected by alcohol.’ Another high proportion of respondents (56% ‘strongly disagree’ + 31% ‘disagree’) disagree that ‘Domestic violence can be excused if, afterwards, the violent man genuinely regrets what he has done.’ In addition, there is a strong disagreement (75%) with the suggestion that ‘it is the duty of a woman to stay in a violent relationship in order to keep the family together’.



**Figure 8: Attitudes towards domestic violence**

When it comes to a general tendency to minimize the problem of domestic violence, results are mixed. On the one side, there is disagreement (81%) with minimization of domestic violence as a ‘private matter’; disagreement (68%) with regarding domestic violence as “a normal reaction to day-to-day stress and frustration”, and disagreement (68%) with “If a woman keeps going back to her abusive partner then the violence can't be very serious.” Unfortunately, too many (38%+6%) of the Gen Z in this survey sample tend to agree that “Many women tend to exaggerate the problem of male violence at home.” In turn, the negative signal is that there is still some tendency to shift the blame or burden on the side of the victim, with 19% ‘Strongly agreeing’ and 37% ‘Somewhat agreeing’ that a man may be justified to hit a woman if she flirts.



**Even though Gen Z stands tall against any forms of domestic violence, there are still residue traces of stereotypical thinking in how women are perceived in terms of their role played in it, through exaggeration or flirting.**



## FEMICIDE: THE WORST OF ALL IN THE SAFEST OF PLACES

An extensive Global Study on Homicide conducted by United Nations in July 2019<sup>14</sup> focused on the killing of women and girls as a result of gender norms. Despite underreported cases due to desegregated gender data, more than half (58 per cent) of the total of 87,000 women intentionally killed worldwide in 2017, were killed by intimate partners or other family members, someone they would normally expect to trust. Meaning that 137 women across the world are killed by a member of their own family every day, making the home the most likely place for a woman to be killed.



Figure 9: Global femicide figures

The term “femicide” is widely used in relation to the concept of gender-related killing of women and girls. The conventional understanding conveys the idea that hate crimes against women are perpetrated by men simply because of the gender roles assigned to women. One official definition of “femicide” goes as “the misogynous killing of women by men motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, or a sense of ownership over women, rooted in historically unequal power relations between women and men”. Several high profile cases of femicide in Kosovo occurred in 2023, shocking the nation and raising questions about the safety of women in the country. This study gauged the understanding of Gen Z towards the femicide using a mix of survey items combining sub-themes of misogyny, patriarchy, institutional responsibility, cultural influence, tendencies to blame the victim or justify the perpetrator, and more. The results are displayed in the Figure xx below, and indicate both strengths and weakness in the understanding of Gen Z in Kosovo towards the phenomena of femicide.



**There are both strengths and weaknesses in the understanding and attitudes of Gen Z in Kosovo towards the phenomena of femicide.**

For one, Gen Z seem to understand the heavy weight of the matter by putting the blame on the entire social edifice and recognizing the deep-rooted cultural nature of the femicide. The only way forward in preventing this

<sup>14</sup> UNODC, Global Study on Homicide 2019 (Vienna, 2019)

crime is by wholesale social mobilization, way beyond piece-meal tackling it through penalizing single male individuals. Once the act of femicide is perpetrated, any action addressing it is too late already. Instead, the general society, the state and the institutions need to claim responsibility for the ways they allow culture to consciously or unconsciously trigger men towards such a heinous act. Are there exceptional cases of pathological nature on the part of the male individual? Certainly, there are. However, Gen Z thinks that such cases are marginal in comparison to the problem of culture. Only around a third of the sample (6%+29%) tend to put emphasis on individual pathology: *'There is always a justifying explanation: The male perpetrator usually suffers from psychological crisis, mental disorder, alcoholism, childhood trauma, etc.'* While the great majority of the sample (60%+17%) and (47%+35%), respectively, tend to draw attention to changes and reforms needed at the cultural, social, institutional, statehood level.



**Gen Z recognize fully the cultural and social nature of the femicide as opposed to occasional individual pathology.**

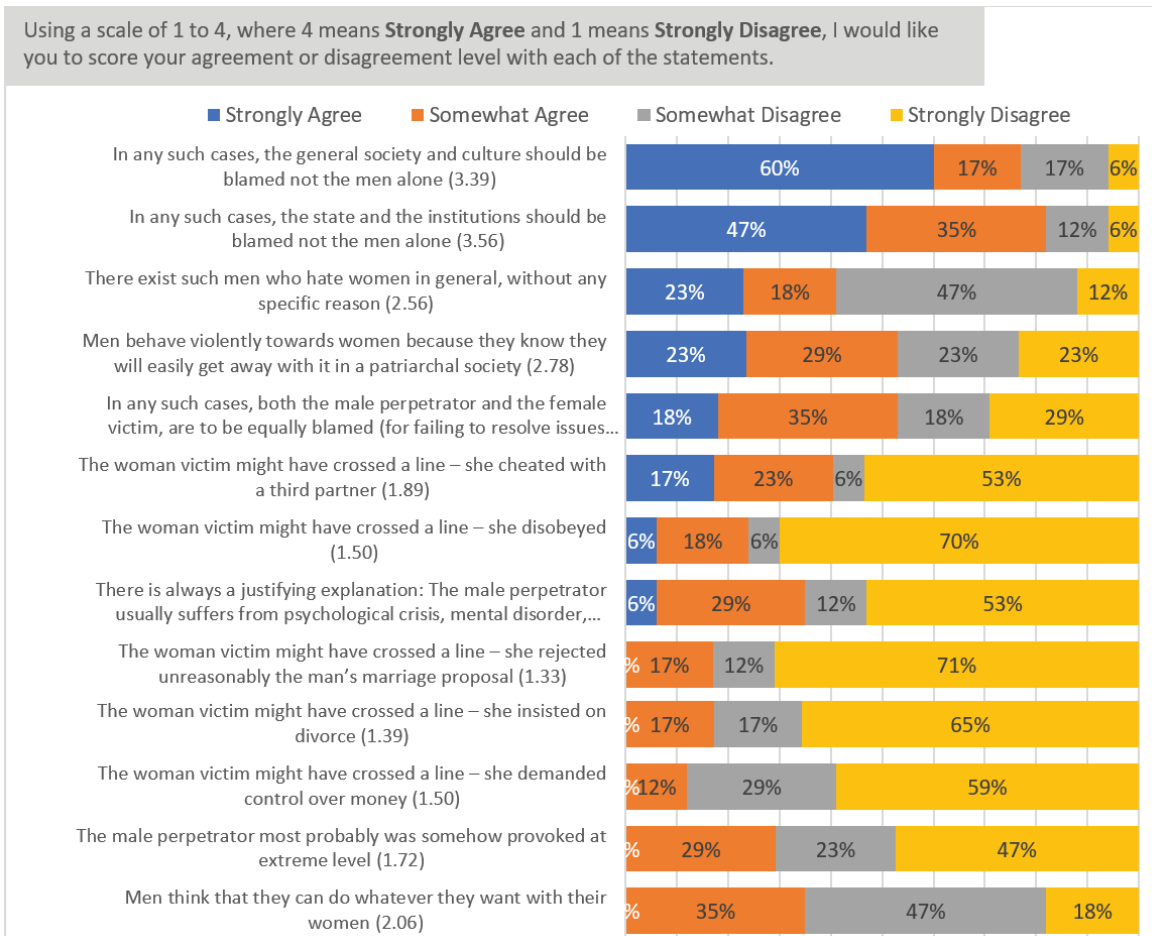


Figure 10: Attitudes towards femicide

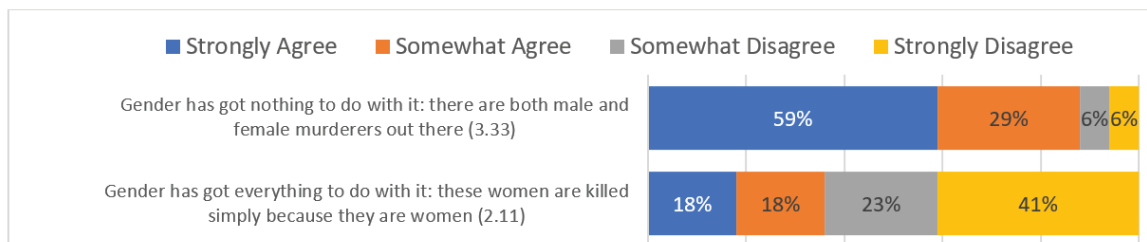


Another encouraging result is that there seems no general tendency among Gen Z to explain or understand femicide by shifting the blame on the woman victim, for various reasons. A great majority of the respondents do not link femicide with the victim’s behavior, be it divorce (65%+17%), relationship rejection (71%+12%), money control (59%+29%), or disobedience (70%+6%). And, although 53% of the sample ‘strongly disagree’, 17% of respondents seem to associate or link femicide with the victim’s behavior of cheating with a third partner, while another 23% could also potentially make that connection. The results of the statements measuring patriarchy and misogyny seem mixed. However, the most negative result in this section of the survey is that an extremely high proportion of respondents (18% ‘strongly agree’ + 35% ‘somewhat agree’) agree that ‘ “In any such cases, both the male perpetrator and the female victim, are to be equally blamed (for failing to resolve issues through non-violent means)”. Regretfully, this indicates that the culture of victim-blaming is not fully deleted from the mindset of the youth, despite the apparent effort to do so.



**Regretfully, the culture of victim-blaming is not fully deleted from the mindset of the youth, despite the apparent conscious effort to do so.**

What does Gen Z think of the gendered nature of the femicide, and are they up to date with the official definition of femicide? The question was put twice in the survey, framed directly and indirectly. The results indicate that only a minor proportion of the sample, namely 12% to 36% are potentially in line with the gendered nature of the problem. The rest of the sample would rather prefer to keep gender out of it.

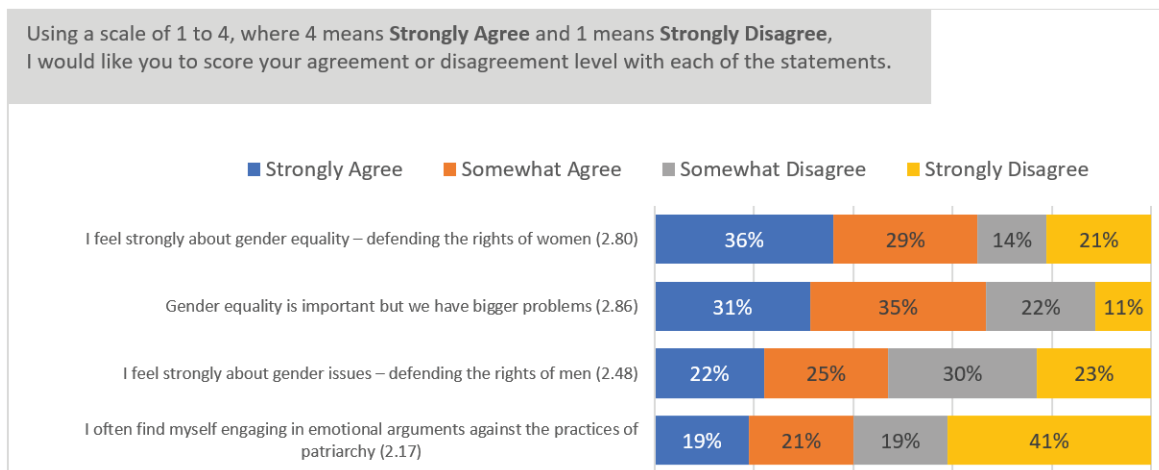


**Figure 11: Attitudes towards the official definition of femicide**



# ADVOCACY AND ENGAGEMENT: FROM ATTITUDES TO BEHAVIOR

Gen Z are not precisely the ideal gender-equality advocates one would want them to be. A clear majority (31%+35%) think that Kosovar society has got bigger problems to grapple with, and another majority (41%+19%) do not find themselves engaging in arguments against the practices of patriarchy. Yet, a greater proportion of them feel strongly and sympathize with defending the rights of women, in comparison to those reporting the same when it comes to defending the rights of men. In this regard, a high proportion of respondents (36% ‘strongly agree’ + 29% ‘somewhat agree’) agree that ‘I feel strongly about gender equality – defending the rights of women’, while relatively fewer report so (22% ‘strongly agree’ + 25% ‘somewhat agree’) for the statement ‘I feel strongly about gender issues – defending the rights of men’. In sum, for a clear majority of Gen Z representatives, one cannot detect explicit signs of toxic masculinity in a backlash tendency to gender equality.

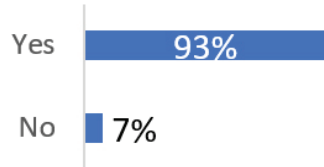


**Figure 12: Tendency to be involved in advocating gender equality**

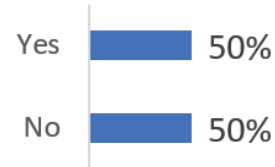
Further probing indicates that Gen Z is less likely to feel uncomfortable about sexist jokes than verbal abuse and disrespect of women; they are significantly less likely to act over a sexist joke, and they are also less likely to say that they would have the support of their friends if they did so.



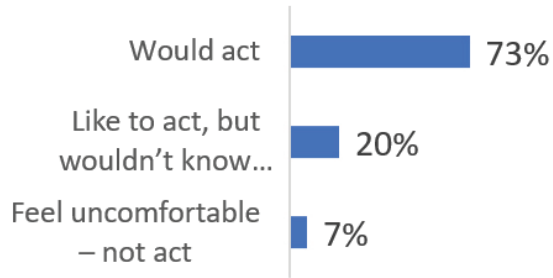
A male friend was insulting or verbally abusing a woman he was in a relationship with. Would you be bothered?



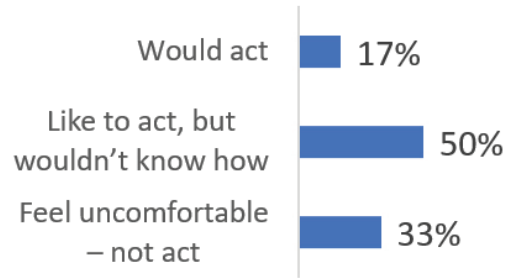
A male friend told a sexist joke about women. Would you be bothered?



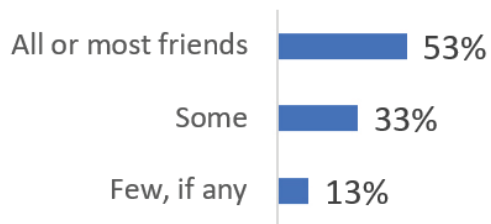
If you were bothered, what would you do?



If you were bothered, what would you do?



If you were to act, do you think you would have the support of your friends?



If you were to act, do you think you would have the support of your friends?

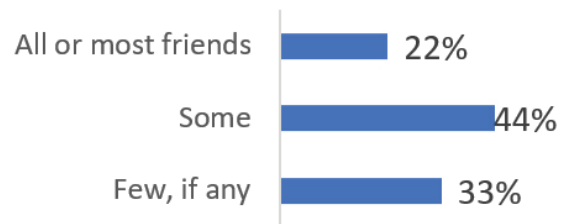


Figure 13: Bystander intention and behavioral intervention



## CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This survey starts with some discouraging findings regarding young people's poor understanding that violence against women involves more than physical violence. Further analysis across sample segments suggests that this lack of knowledge of GBV is mainly technical rather than attitudinal in nature (For instance, low awareness levels of GBV have been equally found across subgroups, including the sub-group of respondents who are highly committed to gender equality, or engaged in debates against the practices of patriarchy). Yet, it should not go without mention that having a low level of understanding of violence against women has been identified as one of the strongest predictors of attitudes supportive of violence against women.<sup>15</sup> This highlights the paramount urgency to improve understanding of gender-based violence and to include building support for gender equality in prevention strategies.

Prevalence of GBV is caused by various factors such as the perpetrator's sense of power, control, and entitlement towards women, gender-based stereotypes that contribute to inequality, drug abuse, cultural norms and traditions about masculinity and femininity, and victim-blaming behaviors by the perpetrator.<sup>16</sup> This study finds no strong tendencies to excuse the harasser or perpetrator and hold women responsible by shifting responsibility for harassment or violence from the perpetrator to the victim. Gen Z clearly establishes trust and support on the part of the victim for reporting of all forms of GBV. This is a positive finding given that other studies have identified the attitude of mistrust towards women's reports of GBV, as part of a toxic masculinity 'backlash'.<sup>17</sup> Regrettably, results also indicate that the culture of victim-blaming is not completely erased from the mindset of the youth, despite the apparent effort to do so.

Further, there remain several areas in which attitudes towards GBV and gender equality are of serious concern in this study. For instance, too many of the Gen Z in this survey sample tend to agree that "Men have the right to discipline women for 'incorrect' behavior" (38%). It should be noted that this and other results need to be viewed in the context of the sample background. Particularly the young age of the respondents (77% of the whole sample were aged below 20) with 70% of them reporting high school as their educational level. This could be also seen that a further education of youth on mutually respectful approaches to gender relations may go a long way in terms of straightening up their attitudes and further commitment to a progressive, egalitarian society. In sum, we need to encourage society to invest less in gendered identities and boundaries and embrace ethical identities less defined by gender.

<sup>15</sup> Webster et al., 2019. Attitudes towards violence against women and gender equality among people from non-English speaking countries. ANROWS.

<sup>16</sup> Facts, FAQs, History, what you need to know about Gender Based Violence. 2024. World Vision International.

<sup>17</sup> Webster et al., 2019. Attitudes towards violence against women and gender equality among people from non-English speaking countries. ANROWS.



Gen Z do not seem to explicitly endorse statements reflecting a toxic masculinity backlash against women's emancipation in society. The term 'toxic masculinity' has emerged in the last decade to describe a set of beliefs and behaviors driven by the idea that 'real' masculinity relies on dominance, violence, emotional illiteracy, sexual entitlement, and hostility to femininity.<sup>18</sup> It is unhealthy for the men and boys who conform to it, for women, and harmful for those around them. For instance, such behavior is best exemplified in the forms of TFGBV reported to be commonplace in the digital space, and involving sexism, misogyny, abuse, etc. Such signs need to be sought in a particular segment, representing only one-fifth of the entire sample: 21% of those who 'strongly disagree' with 'defending the rights of women' despite clear ongoing social conditions and cultural norms that disadvantage women and privilege men. Having attitudes that 'deny gender equality is a problem in society' has been identified as one of the strongest predictors of attitudes supportive of violence against women.<sup>19</sup>

This is a dipstick study that needs to be expanded, deepened, and systematized across comprehensive parameters in the future. It warrants periodical tracking of social norms and attitude monitoring, with better representation of demographics and diversity profiles, as well as better alignment with national indicators pertaining to gender mainstreaming. In combining both prevention and intervention, expert bodies propose an approach that incorporates multiple strategies, implemented across different sectors and settings and targeted to individuals and families, as well as communities, organizations, and society-wide institutions. Where "gender equality is slow, has stalled or is backsliding" – organizations look at social norms, including gender norms.<sup>20</sup> Promoting gender equality is key to reducing violence against women. Research shows that a grass-root approach and wide-range cooperation between social actors is needed, as any approach of engineering social norms change from the outside in will not work.<sup>21</sup>

18 Flood, Michael. (2022). 'Toxic masculinity': what does it mean, where did it come from – and is the term useful or harmful? The Conversation.

19 Webster et al., 2019. Attitudes towards violence against women and gender equality among people from non-English speaking countries. ANROWS.

20 Cookson, T.P., L. Fuentes, M.K. Kuss, and J. Bitterly. 2023. "Social Norms, Gender and Development: A Review of Research and Practice". UN-Women Discussion Paper Series No. 42. New York: UN-Women.

21 Cislighi, B., Heise, L. (2018). Theory and practice of social norms interventions: eight common pitfalls. *Global Health* 14, 83 (2018).





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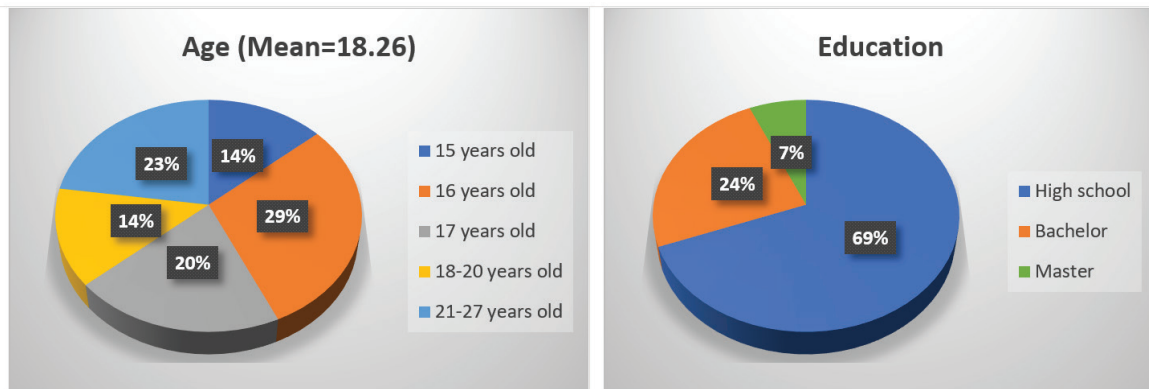
## APPENDIX: SAMPLE OVERVIEW

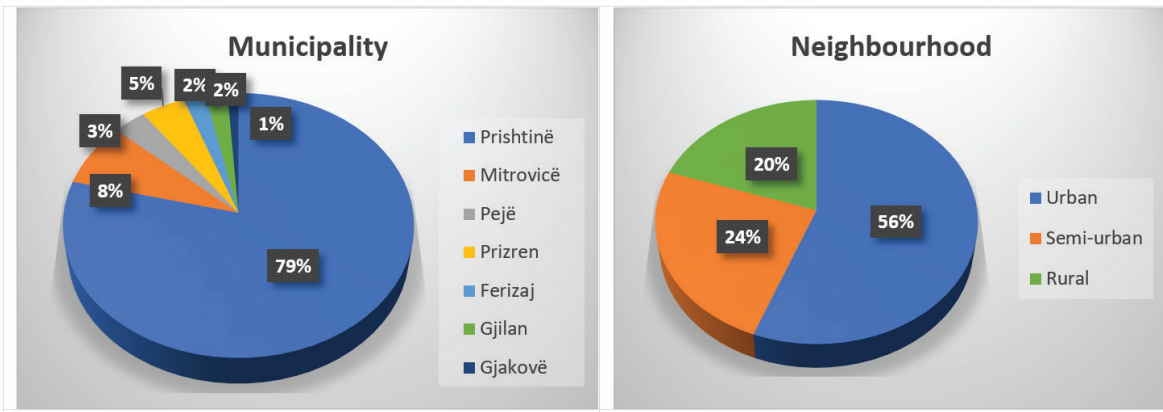
The quantitative data were collected during the survey period from March 15 to August 15.

To qualify as a Gen Z survey, and not allow for the overdue influence of outliers, four responses from male participants aged 37, 38, and 39 were deleted from the final sample of quantitative analysis. Likewise, a few responses submitted by female participants were not included in the final analysis, to maintain this as an exclusive male survey. Another few cases were deleted during the Data Quality process stage, before any analysis, due to technical issues. The quantitative results reported in this study are based on a total of 92 respondents of male gender, aged between 15 and 27.

More specifically, more than three-fourths of the whole sample were aged below 20, with only less than a quarter (23%) being more than 21 years old. Education level reflects the young age, with almost 70% of the sample reporting high school, and only about a quarter having completed the university level. Most of the sample is sourced within the municipality of Prishtina (79%), however, with a good mix of urban, semi-urban, and rural residential backgrounds.

Respondent Profile for Quantitative Surveys (n=92)







**Republika e Kosovës**  
**Republika Kosova-Republic of Kosovo**  
*Qeveria - Vlada - Government*

ZYRA E KRYEMINISTRIT / OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER / URED PREMIJERA  
AGJENCIA PËR BARAZI GJINORE / AGENCIJA ZA RAVNOPRAVNOST POLOVA /  
AGENCY OF GENDER EQUALITY



# **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) THROUGH THE LENSES OF GEN Z**

**OCTOBER 2024**



**Republika e Kosovës**  
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**SIT - Center for Counseling,  
Social Services and Research  
October, 2024**