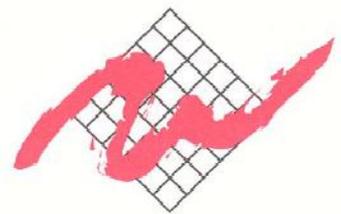


# The Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) Project

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

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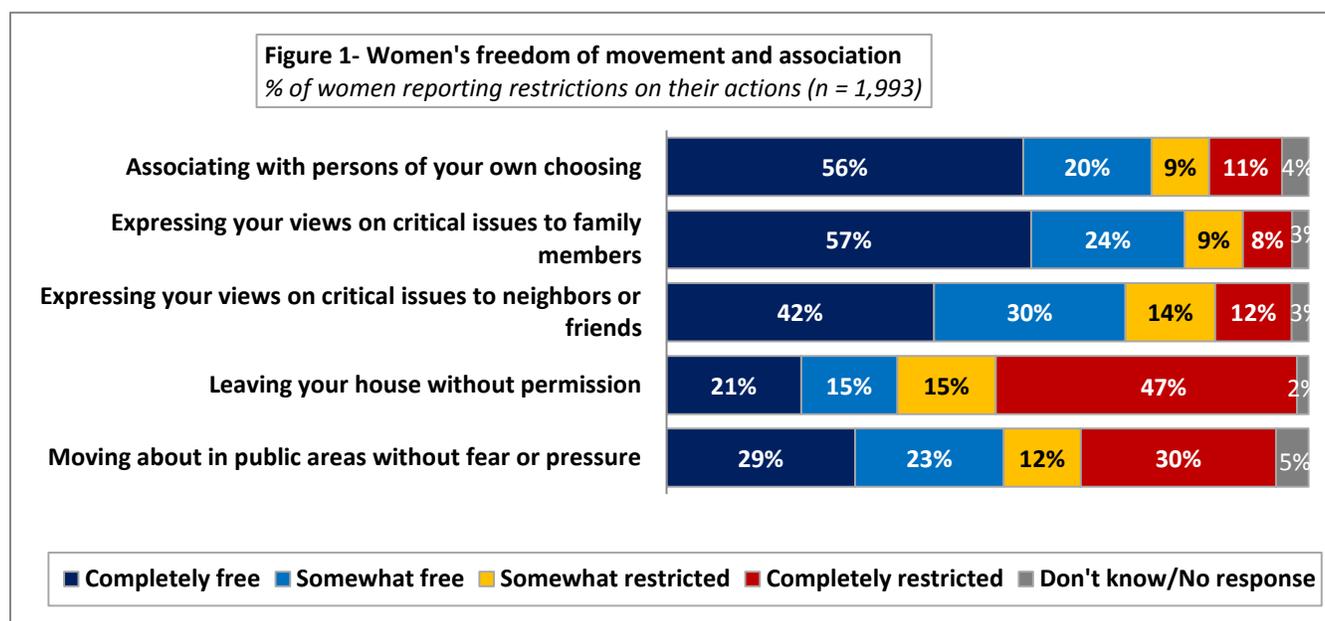


## WOMEN'S FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT, AND FREEDOM FROM HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE

This topic brief presents the main findings from the SWMENA survey on 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.<sup>1</sup> In this brief, harassment is considered along with violence because a lack of safety and dignity limits women in every sphere of activity—from achieving an educational degree, to holding political office.

### 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 Yemen 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 only slightly over one-half of women in Yemen (56%) feel completely free to associate with persons of their own choosing, and one-fifth of women (20%) feel somewhat free to do so. Another one-fifth of women feel either somewhat (9%) or completely (11%) restricted in their choices of association.

<sup>1</sup> During June and July 2010, the SWMENA survey collected data from 1,993 women and 508 men in Yemen. The survey is designed to assess how women in Yemen view themselves as members of society, the economy and the polity. Data was weighted appropriately for computing percentages, although labels in figures and tables show the unweighted number of cases in the sample.

- Almost the same number of women report freedom concerning their abilities to express themselves on views critical to family members. Twenty-four percent of women said that they are somewhat free and slightly fewer are somewhat restricted (9%) in this area of activity.
- More than half (52%) of Yemeni women say they feel completely or somewhat free to move about in public areas without fear or pressure. At the same time, 42% of women feel at least somewhat (12%) or completely (30%) restricted to move about as they might in public areas, without fear or pressure from others.
- In addition, approximately half of all Yemeni women report being completely restricted from leaving their house without permission (47%) and another 15% say they are somewhat restricted. Conversely, about one-third (36%) say they feel completely or somewhat free to leave the house without permission.
- It might help to understand that ‘associating with persons of own choosing’ takes place within certain culturally-appropriate settings, and does not translate exactly to what one may perceive as ‘freedom of association.’ For example, this association may be within households, schools, workplaces, etc., but not necessarily in all public atmospheres.

The survey asked respondents who said they felt somewhat or completely restricted in moving about in public areas why they felt this way. Open-ended responses were coded into categories.

The top three most frequently cited reasons are shown in Table 1. Eighty percent of women gave one of these three reasons.

Table 1 – Reasons women feel restricted moving about in public areas <i>% out of those who feel restricted; top three ranked from highest to lowest according to citations by female respondents</i>	Women (n=947)
Husband or parents opposition to my going out	60%
Annoyances in the street	14%
I’m afraid to come late at home	6%

“Husband or parents opposition to my going out” was cited by almost two-thirds of all women (60%), while annoyances on the street (14%) was cited much less frequently.

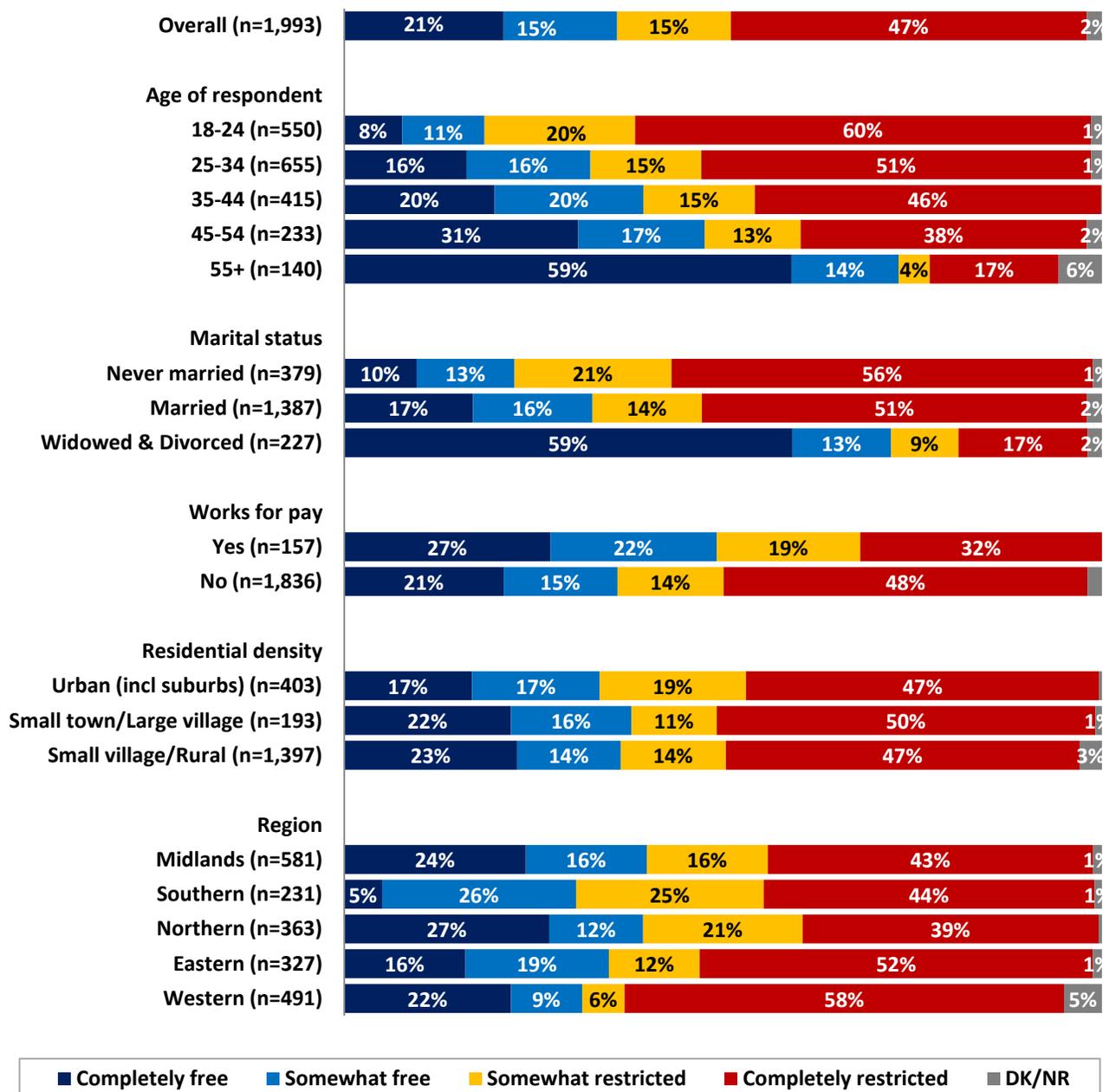
Figure 2 shows that there are significant differences in freedom of mobility among women by marital status, age, educational attainment, work status and region.

- Married and single women are more than two or three times as likely as formerly married women to feel somewhat or completely restricted from leaving the house without permission: only 33% of married women and 23% of single women feel somewhat or completely free in leaving the house without permission, compared to 72% who are widowed or divorced.
- 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 55 and older are more than seven times as likely as women ages 18-24 to feel completely free to leave the house (59% and 8% respectively). In fact,



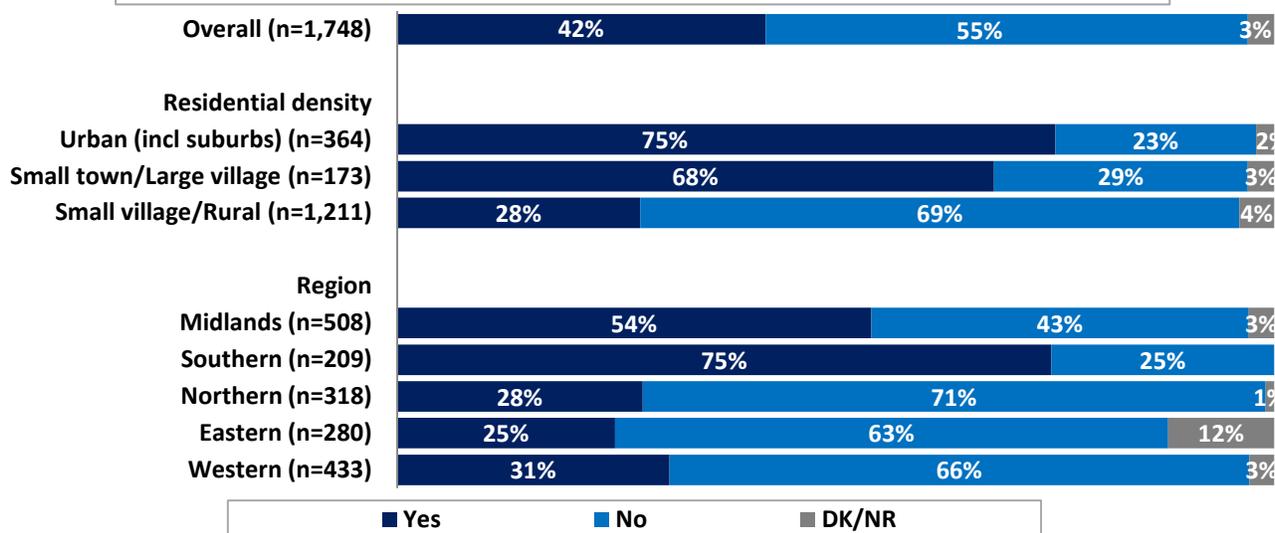
women ages 55 and older in Yemen are almost twice as likely as women between 45 and 54 years of age (59% and 31% respectively) to report that they feel completely free to leave the house without permission.

**Figure 2 - Women's freedom to leave the house**  
% by age, marital status, educational level, work status, residential density, and region



- Women in Yemen who work for pay are more likely than women who do not work to report feeling free to leave the house without permission. Almost half of women who work for pay said they feel completely or somewhat free to leave the house (49%) compared with one-third of women who do not work for pay who say that they feel completely or somewhat free to leave the house without permission (35%).
- Roughly the inverse appears among women who say they are completely restricted: half who do not work (48%) compared with roughly one-third of women who are employed (32%).
- Interestingly, whether a woman lives in an urban or rural area or a certain region of Yemen does not seem to affect significantly whether she will report feeling freedom to leave the house without permission.

**Figure 3 - "Do some women in your area talk about experiencing annoyances or harassment on behalf of men when they go to markets or in public places and places of work?"**  
% of women under 50 (n=1,748)

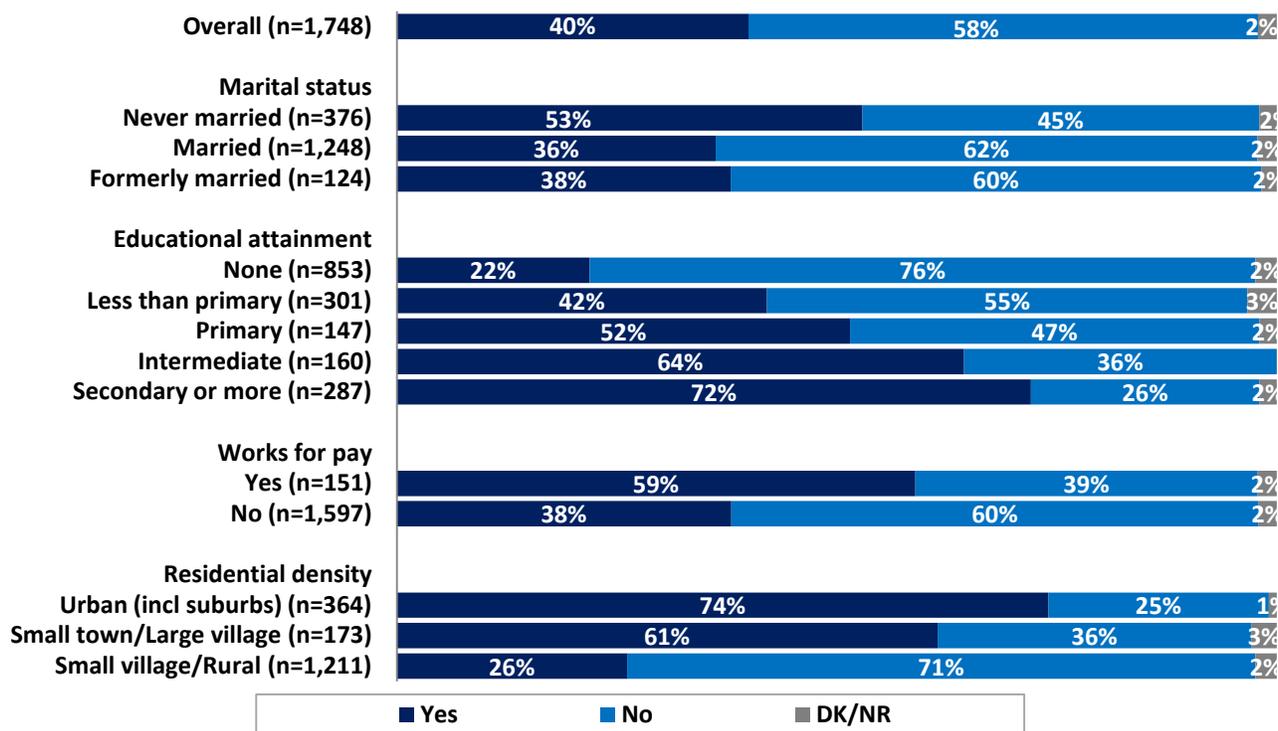


Survey respondents in Yemen were asked about experiences of women in public spaces (local markets, walking down the street, etc.). Specifically, women under 50 years old were asked whether men made “unwanted/sexually suggestive noises, comments or gestures.” Figure 3 shows that, when in public areas and places of work, just over half of all women under age 50 say they do not hear of women experiencing men making unwanted/sexually comments or gestures toward them.

- At the same time, such harassment is perceived as prevalent for Yemeni women, particularly those not living in rural areas or small villages. Three-fourths of respondents in urban areas (75%) and over two-thirds in small towns or large villages (68%) have heard that women experience harassment in public or at work.
- The percentage of women under 50 years old that report having heard of harassment in rural areas and small villages is much smaller (28%) than in more densely populated zones; nevertheless, the percentage is significant, at nearly a third reporting having heard women suffer such obstacles.

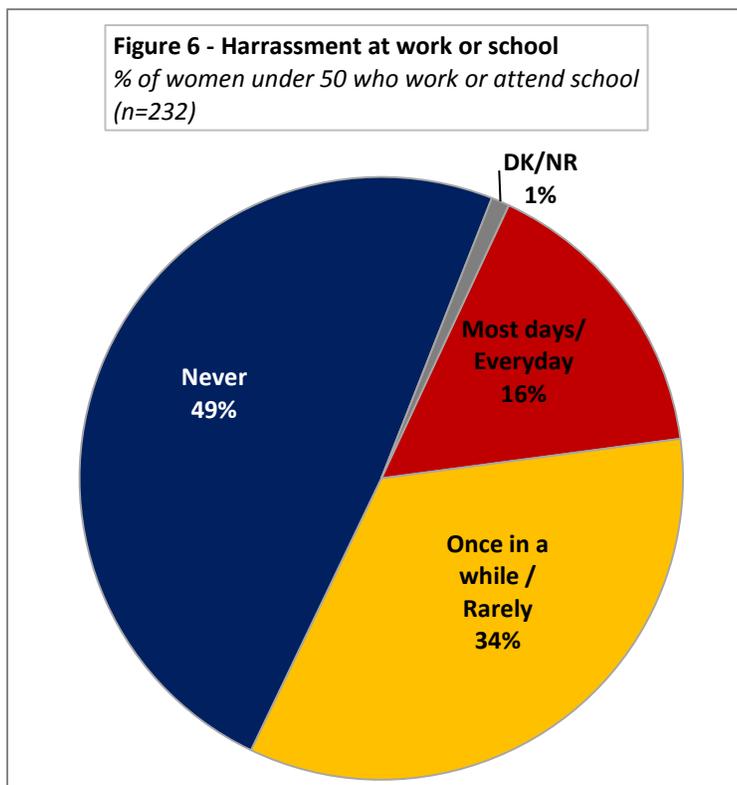
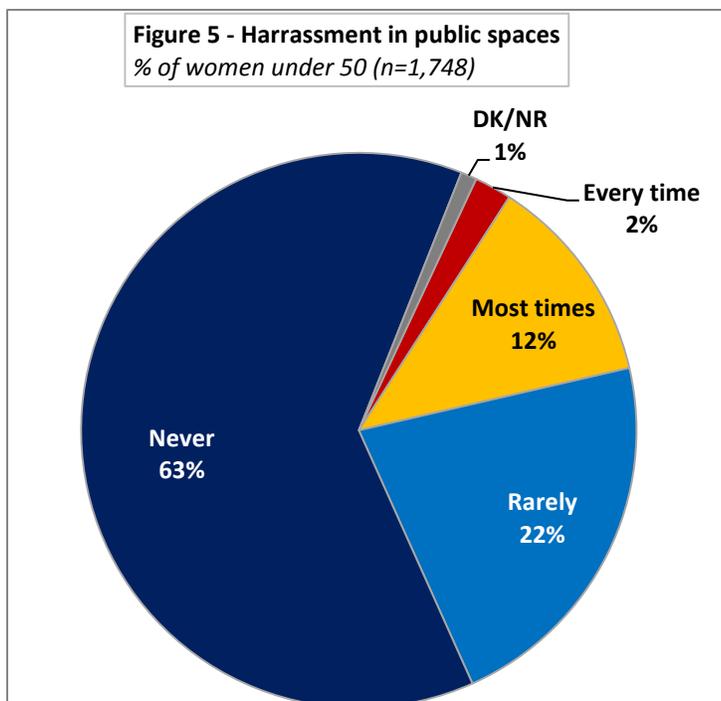
- The Southern region (Aden, Al-Dhale, Abyan, Lahj) and Western (Al-Hodeidah, Hajjah, Al-Mahweet, and Raimah) has the widest range between percentages of those who report harassment and those who do not, with three-fourths of respondents saying they hear of harassment against women at work or in public places (75%) and one-fourth saying they do not (25%).
- The Eastern region (Mareb, Shabwah, Albaida, Hadramout, Almaharah) reports almost the inverse of the experiences of women in the Southern region: 25% say they hear of harassment and 63% say they do not.
- Meanwhile, the Northern (Sana'a Governorate, Amran, Dhamar, Al-Jawf, Sa'dah) and Western (Al-Hodeidah, Hajjah, Al-Mahweet, and Raimah) regions are roughly similar in the percentages that report harassment of women: 28% and 31% respectively, in comparison to 71% and 66% respectively in those regions who say that they do not hear about harassment in public places and at work (Figure 3).

**Figure 4 - "Did any of the women you know, whether one of your relatives or friends, talk about being subject to annoyances or harassment by men through saying something to her when she was on the street, in the market, or at her place of work, etc.?"**  
% of



Yemeni women under 50 were asked about whether their friends and relatives are verbally harassed by men when in the street, the market, at work, or in transit. Slightly more women report that they have not heard their friends or relatives speak about harassment – over half (58%) of Yemeni women. Figure 4 demonstrates that education, working for pay and size of place greatly impact whether women’s friends and relatives talk about being harassed by men.

- Women with more education are far more likely than women with no education to have friends who speak to them about experiencing harassment. More than three-quarters of women (76%) with no education state that the women they know are not harassed in the street, while inversely, almost three-quarters (72%) of women with a secondary education or higher report that their friends or relatives *are* harassed by men.
- Similarly, there is an inverse relationship between size of place and women’s friend’s harassment. Women in denser, urban areas are more likely than women in small towns or rural areas to state that their friends or relatives are harassed in the street. Almost three-quarters of urban women report that their friends or relatives experience harassment, while only 26% of rural women report the same.



- Compared to other factors, marital status seems to make less of a difference in reports of harassment. While slightly over half (53%) of single women state that other women they know experience harassment, fewer married and formerly married women report that their friends and relatives are harassed (36% and 38% respectively).

Figure 5 shows the relative percentages among women under age 50 who report experiencing harassment in public. Although the majority (63%) of all women in those age categories report never receiving unwelcome comments or gestures from men in public, 14% of women say they always or most times experience this limitation. An additional 22% say they face harassment on occasion if rarely.

Of women under 50 who work or study, only a little less than half (49%) report never experiencing harassment while attending work or school. Figure 6 indicates that women are more likely to experience harassment in the workplace or at school than women in public places. Sixteen percent of women experience harassment most days or every day. Over a third of women (34%) report being harassed only once in a while or rarely.

## Women and Violence

The SWMENA survey asked Yemeni respondents questions to assess their personal experiences of domestic violence, as well as their beliefs regarding domestic violence and its acceptability.

Married Yemeni women were asked about how they and their husbands resolve conflicts or disagreements in their marriage. A minority of women (2%) report that disagreements lead to tensions and violence. A significant majority of women – over 50% – state that they resolve their marital conflicts through rational dialogue. Nineteen percent of women report that disagreements in most cases lead to tensions involving yelling and insults, and 18% of women report that they go to their parent's house as a result of conflict (Figure 7).

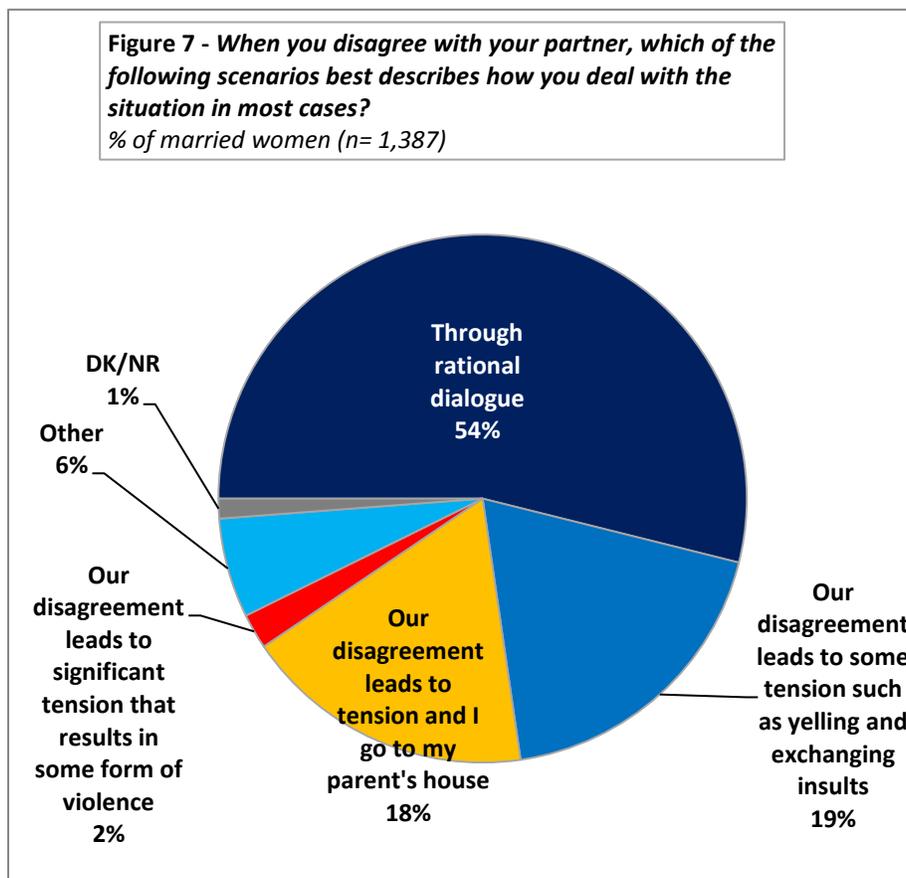
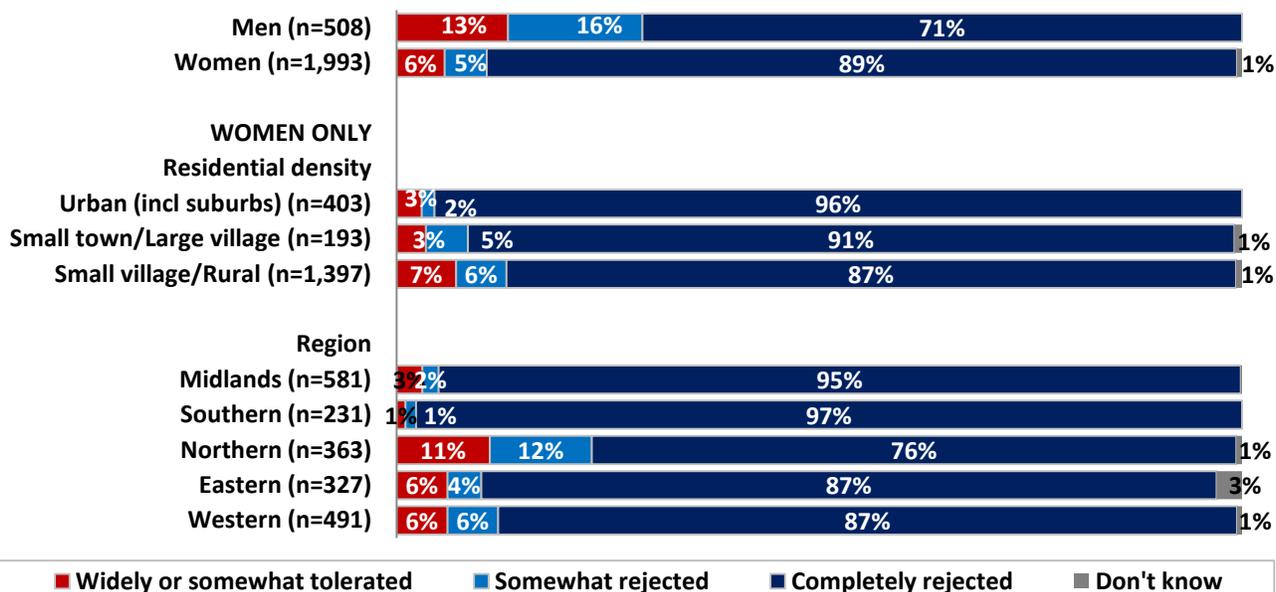


Figure 8 demonstrates that Yemeni men and women find that violence toward women by their husbands largely intolerable. Overall, women report that domestic violence is completely rejected at higher rates than do men (89% and 71% respectively). Only 6% of women report that domestic violence is widely or somewhat tolerated within their families or tribe, while 13% of men state that violence is widely or somewhat tolerated.

Women's responses remained similar across both urban and rural areas, as well as all regions.

**Figure 8 - Family or tribe's attitudes toward domestic violence**  
% by gender, and women by residential density and region



- Urban women were slightly more likely than rural women to state that domestic violence is completely rejected among their family or tribe. An overwhelming majority (87%) of rural women still report that violence is intolerable.
- One-fifth of women (23%) in the Northern region (Sana'a Governorate, Amran, Dhamar, Al-Jawf, and Sa'dah) report that violence among their family or tribe is widely or somewhat tolerated or somewhat rejected; this region has the lowest percentage of women who report that domestic violence is completely rejected (76%).
- The Southern region (Aden, Al-Dhale, Abyan, and Lahj) has the highest percentage of women stating that domestic violence is completely rejected by their family or tribe (97%).

Yemeni respondents were asked about situations that may lead husbands to resort to domestic violence. Table 2 shows the top ten responses that women listed as causes. Women and men most commonly cited the wife doing or saying something wrong that merits punishment. Over a third of women (36%) and almost a third of men (32%) report that such an incident may lead to domestic violence. Almost one-fifth of each gender report a lack of communication or understanding as a potential cause of violence. Only 8% of men and women believe that a women's infidelity could lead to domestic violence. Very few women and men cite low education, or intellectual levels and religious reasons as causes that may lead to domestic violence – 5% of women and 11% of men report low educational levels, and 2% of women and men state that a lack of readiness for marriage could cause violence.

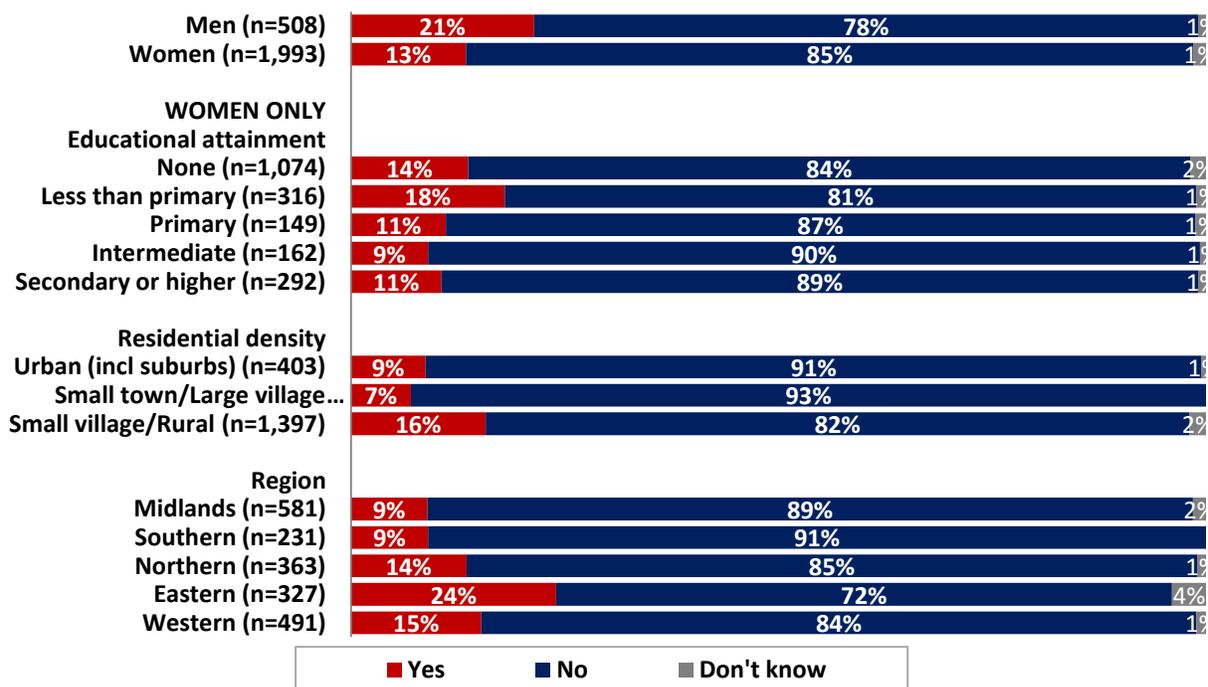
When asked about their personal beliefs regarding the acceptability of domestic violence in certain situations, respondents strongly indicated that it is not acceptable for husbands to beat their wives. Overall, neither men nor women find that domestic violence is ever acceptable, and this remains true across education, size of place and all regions (Figure 9).

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. Multiple responses per respondent.	Women (n=1,993)	Men (n=508)
Because the wife did something wrong/ said something and needs to be punished	36%	32%
Because of lack of communication/understanding between spouses	19%	17%
Other (Some other reason)	13%	12%
Because the husband suffers from a mental condition/psychological problem	13%	20%
Don't know	11%	2%
Because poverty/difficult financial situation/unemployment	9%	12%
Because the husband drinks too much/is a drug addict	8%	9%
Because the woman is unfaithful with her husband	8%	8%
Because of low educational levels/intellectual levels	5%	11%
Because of a lack of preparation/readiness for married life	2%	2%

- More women than men state that domestic violence is not acceptable (85% and 78% respectively). A little more than one-fifth of men still say that it is acceptable for women to be beaten by their husbands in certain situations.
- Slightly more women with less than a primary school education state that domestic violence is acceptable in certain situations, about one in five (18%).
- Across all education levels, between 80 and 90% of women do not believe that it is acceptable for husbands to beat their wives in certain situations.
- Rural women are almost twice as likely as urban women to state that domestic violence is acceptable in certain situations (16% vs. 9%).
- Almost one-quarter (24%) of women in the Eastern region (Mareb, Shabwah, Albaida, Hadramout, Almaharah) state that domestic violence is acceptable in certain situations; the highest percentage out of all regions.
- Across all regions however, women were overwhelmingly likely to report that domestic violence is not acceptable. With the exception of the Eastern region, between 84% and 91% of women do not believe that domestic violence is acceptable.

**Figure 9 - "Do you personally believe it is acceptable for women to be beaten by their husbands in certain situations?"**

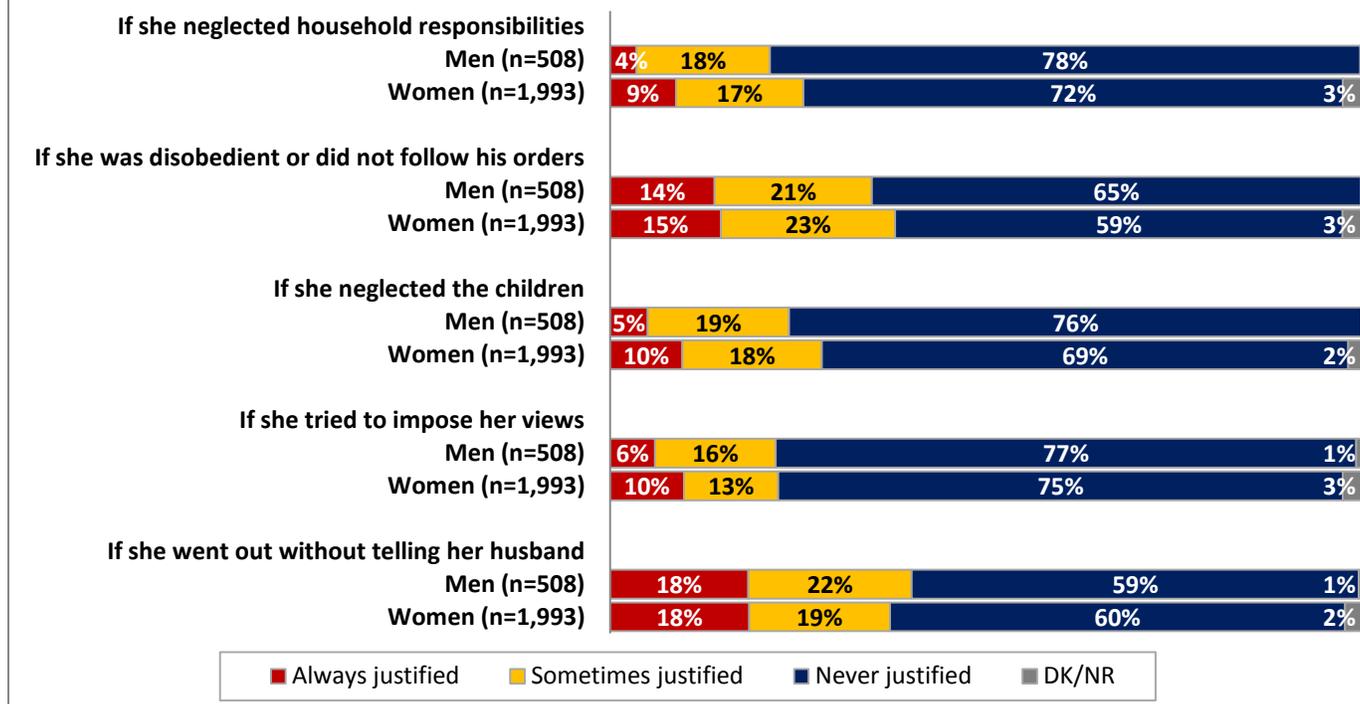
*% by gender, educational attainment, residential density, and region*



Despite the overwhelming stated belief that domestic violence is never acceptable, when asked if it is justified for a women’s husband to beat her in specific situations, fewer respondents indicated that domestic violence is never justified. Figure 10 indicates that women are slightly more likely than men to state that it is always justified for women to be beaten by their husbands. Nine percent of women believe it is justified if a woman neglected her household duties vs. 4% of men, and one in ten women think that it is justified if a woman neglected her children, vs. 5% of men.

Overall, the majority of women and men believe that it is never justified for a woman to be beaten by her husband. No less than 59% of either gender responded that domestic violence is never justified. Since almost half of Yemeni women report that they cannot leave the house without permission (Figure 1), perhaps it is not surprising that men and women find this to be the situation in which it is most justified for women to be beaten by their husbands. Forty percent of men and 37% of women report that it is always or sometimes justified for a man to beat his wife if she leaves the house without permission. Similarly, 22% of men and 26% of women state that domestic violence is always or sometimes justified if a woman neglects her household responsibilities (Figure 10).

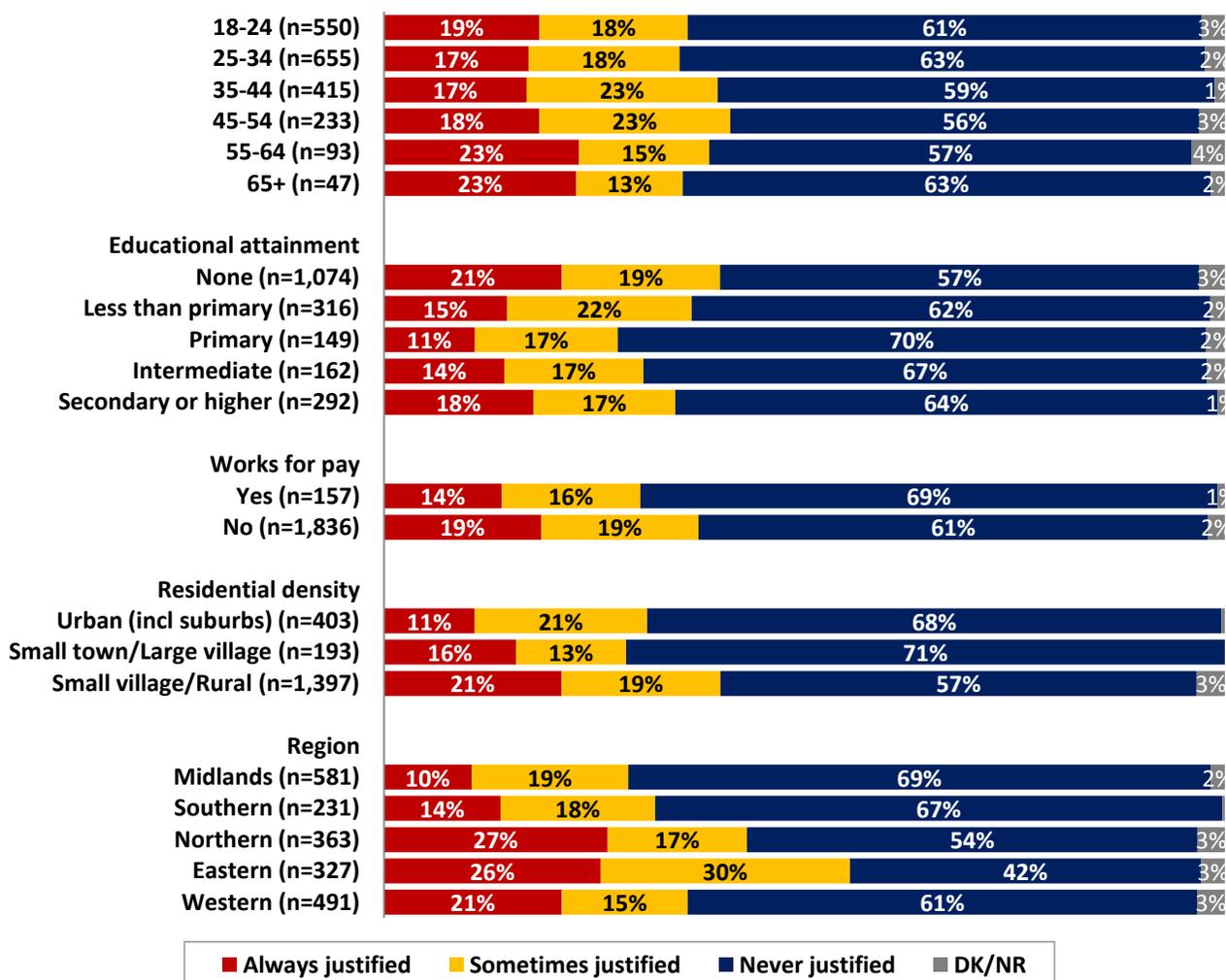
**Figure 10- Is it justified for women to be beaten by their husbands?**  
% by gender



Respondents report that domestic violence is always or sometimes justified most frequently when “she went out without telling her husband.” Responses varied slightly by education, working for pay, density of residential area and region. Although women still tend to report that domestic violence is never justified, even if a woman leaves the house without permission, up to 56% of women (those in the Eastern region) report that it is always or sometimes justified for a man to beat his wife in this situation.

- Women over 55 were more likely than younger women to state that domestic violence is always justified if a woman leaves the house without permission. Almost a quarter of women (23%) responded that it is always justified.
- Women with no education were the most likely to report that it is always justified for women to be beaten by their husbands if they go out without permission (21%). Interestingly, women with a secondary degree or higher were the second most likely to state that domestic violence is always justified (18%).
- Women who work for pay were slightly more likely than women who do not work for pay to report that domestic violence is never justified (69% vs. 61%).

**Figure 11 - "If she went out without telling her husband."**  
 % of women (n=1,993)



- More than one-fifth of rural women believe that it is always justified for a man to beat his wife if she went out without telling him. Only 11% of urban women state that it is always justified.
- Women in the Eastern region were the most likely out of all women to report that domestic violence is always or sometimes justified if a woman goes out without telling her husband. More than one-quarter of women (26%) believe that it is always justified, and three in ten women (30%) state that it is sometimes justified. Only 42% state that it is never justified.
- In contrast, almost seven in ten women in the Midlands region (69%) say that domestic violence is never justified in this situation.