

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN PUBLIC SPACES IN SKOPJE



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Gender-based Violence In Public Spaces In Skopje

a Scoping Study

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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is one of the most widespread violations of human rights. It can include physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse, and it cuts across boundaries of age, race, culture, wealth and geography. It takes place in the home, on the streets, in schools, and in the workplace. It has many manifestations -from the most prevalent forms of domestic and sexual violence, sexual harassment and stalking to harmful practices, so-called honor killings and other types of femicide. Women's and girls' access to public space is commonly impeded by fear of crime and victimization. Street harassment and various forms of violence – as well as threats thereof - are universal issues which negatively impact women's right to the use of public space. Sexual harassment and violence against women and girls (VAWG) occurs in public space in diverse settings. It limits their access to essential services, cultural and recreational opportunities, and negatively impacts their health and well-being. The under-recognition of VAWG in public spaces is reinforced by the universal gap in specific, comparable and systematically collected data and the limited capacity of local governments, Civil Society Organizations and other stakeholders to produce it. Also, where public space is inadequate, poorly designed, or privatized, the city becomes increasingly segregated and lines are drawn based on religion, ethnicity, gender and economic status.¹ On the other hand, public space can serve to generate equality. Well-designed and maintained public spaces help lower rates of crime and violence and make space for formal and informal social, cultural and economic activities that contribute to improving trust and safety.

The protection of women's physical and psychological integrity is being envisaged at international level, including protection against any form of violence and harassment which stands for significant violation of basic human rights and dignity. For that purpose, the international community adopted many treaties proposing concrete answers, solutions and recommendations through its legislation such as UN's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)² and its Optional Protocol, Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention hereafter)³. The recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals recognize Elimination of Violence against Women as key to development of women and society as a whole, through the Goal 5.3. Moreover, Goal 11 reflects the growing attention to public space and safety of women. Target 11.7 sets the requirement "to provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green

and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities”. In turn, this target (SDG11.7) has two specific indicators: 1) The average share of the built-up area of cities that is open space for public use, and; 2) Proportion of women subjected to physical or sexual harassment in the last 12 months by perpetrator and place of occurrence.⁴ In many parts of the world, including in North Macedonia, adequate data on cities’ safety from gender perspective is lacking. In 2012, a first attempt was done to assess the existence and scope of gender based violence and discrimination against women in public urban spaces in the city of Skopje.⁵

Objectives

The study represents a replication of the first Scoping Study carried out in 2012 in the Municipalities of Centar and Chair, by using a slightly modified methodology⁶. The aim of the replication of the study is to assess the trends and changes in the manifestation of violence and the perceptions of safety in public spaces on behalf of women and girls, especially following the changes in the urban infrastructure of the city of Skopje since 2012.

The Scoping study is intended to collect information that will inform the design of future UN Women projects or interventions to improve women’s and girls’ safety from gender based violence and discrimination when using public spaces. It will also assist central and local stakeholders to increase prevention of violence and increase safety and use of public/open spaces by women.

The objectives of the scoping study are to:

- ◆ Understand the specific local manifestations of violence against women and girls in particular public spaces in the two locations/municipalities in the city of Skopje and perception of public safety and concrete risk factors;
- ◆ Analyze local development policies, plans and relevant initiatives related to elimination of violence and discrimination against women and girls;
- ◆ Identify and assess relevant existing services and ongoing interventions pertaining to eliminating gender based discrimination and violence against women;
- ◆ Identify and ascertain position and priorities of significant stakeholders (e.g. police, social workers, local services providers etc.);
- ◆ Identify and clarify views of intended beneficiary groups;
- ◆ Provide data that can assist stakeholders in increasing the prevention of violence against women and public safety.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Violence against women is widely recognized and defined in international legally binding instruments. The United Nations defines violence against women as ‘any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.’ Furthermore, Article 3 of the Council of Europe’s Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) ⁷ restates these definitions. Therefore, this study uses as its base the already accepted definitions of violence against women in various UN definitions, most specifically:

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, general recommendation No. 19⁸: *Gender-based violence against women is “violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman, or violence that affects women disproportionately. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty.”*

“Gender-based violence, which impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of human rights and fundamental freedoms under general international law or under human rights conventions, is discrimination within the meaning of article 1 of the Convention.”

General Assembly resolution 48/104: Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, article 1⁹: *Violence against women “means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”*

General Assembly resolution 58/147 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence against Women¹⁰: *Recognizes that “domestic violence can include economic deprivation and isolation and that such conduct may cause imminent harm to the safety, health or well-being of women.”*

Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating VAW and DV (Istanbul Convention), Art. 3¹¹: *Violence against women” is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.*

The UN Secretary-General’s In-Depth study on all forms of violence against women examined violence against women using a classification of various forms of violence¹², one of which will be the focus of this research. Gender-based violence differs from other types of violence in that the victim’s gender is the primary motive for the act of violence. In other words, “gender-based violence refers to any harm that is perpetrated against a woman and that is both the cause and the result of unequal power relations based on perceived differences between women and men that lead to women’s subordinate status in both the private and public spheres. This type of violence is deeply rooted in the social and cultural structures, norms and values that govern society, and is often perpetuated by a culture of denial and silence.¹³”

Special consideration should also be given to perceived violence and our understanding of this concept. Although a common understanding of “fear of violence” was used in early research, the complexity of the phenomena and the demand for sensitivity to different experiences, issues and theorizing was discussed in various studies¹⁴, suggesting that “fear of violence” has indistinct meaning, as do reactions to sexual assault, rape, or humiliation. Owing to these criticisms, the national surveys of North American and European countries have been improved with more sensitive and specific questioning about a wide range of criminal events.

While there is no accepted definition of fear of crime, there is growing evidence that it is not a fixed trait where some people have it and others do not, but rather ‘transitory and situational’¹⁵. In other words, we all move in and out of shades of fear, influenced by our own experiences and by spatial, social and temporal situations^{16,17,18}. This has implications both for theorizing fear and assessing its extent.

Experiences of Violence and Perceived Risk of Violence

While researching violence against women, it is important to generate data and explore both women’s experiences of violence, as well as their perceptions of the threat of violence, as manifested in the fear of violence. Personal safety and security rest more on images and ideas of potential threats than on statistical risks¹⁹; however, some researchers^{20,21} argue that it is questionable to compare ‘objective’ risk and subjective fear. The fact that this feeling involves at least two dimensions was gradually brought to light by

sociological studies: on the one hand, the way people refer to lack of safety in public spaces, on the other, fear for one's safety.

Fear and feeling unsafe in the local environment is one factor that can limit everyday independent mobility²². Taking a gender perspective on this issue allows for an understanding of the differences between women and men regarding fear disclosure and fear expression, as well as their ideas regarding public spaces. Women are generally more likely to report than men, whether in public spaces^{23,24,25}, or in general^{26,27}. Fear of crime has been theorized as contributing to the restriction of women's freedom and access to public spaces by socializing them from childhood and determining the way they behave and dress, the people they meet and the places they visit^{28,29,30}. Both women and men describe women as more fearful and vulnerable in public spaces^{31,32} (Day, 2001; Mehta and Bondi, 1999). Women's fear and perceived vulnerability in public spaces is strongly tied to the fear of rape, which is reinforced through experiences of sexual harassment^{33,34,35}. Riger, Gordon and Labailly (1978)³⁶ showed that women perceive themselves as more vulnerable, weaker and slower on foot than men.

The image of women as vulnerable in public spaces is a reflection of unequal, gendered power relations and at the same time reinforces such unequal power relations. Seeing women as vulnerable is also instrumental when constructing the opposite image - masculine stereotypes of men as strong, fearless and possible protectors or potential perpetrators^{37,38,39}. The view of men as fearless makes it less socially acceptable for boys to admit feeling scared or insecure, but may also contribute to making them actually more fearless than girls. Women and girls, on the other hand, are expected to be afraid and take precautions, to the extent that acting confidently or boldly in a public space can even be considered 'indecent' or careless for a woman^{40,41}. Many women refuse to let these norms guide their lives and move boldly in public space, but if a fearless woman is victimized, some may claim she partly has herself to blame.

Violence and space

Smith (1987) first demonstrated the connection between fear of crime and spatial organization of social relations. The development of a methodological understanding in this field mirrored broader methodological debates in human geography. The physical environment is the most common dimension of space that has been researched, mainly in human geography^{42,43,44,45}, due to the well documented spatial element of people's fears^{46,47,48}.

Several studies done in the 1980s and 1990s sought to explain the real origins of these fears. The literature suggests that these views and perceptions of public spaces are influenced by a variety of different issues⁴⁹, in addition to their own experiences⁵⁰. People commonly report fear of violence in particular environments, which research has shown are typically dark, isolated, and poorly maintained places⁵¹, where the poor design of sub-

ways, housing and streets is often implicated directly. Researchers have also sought to examine the impact of visible social controls (or lack thereof) upon fear in different environments, such as litter, vandalism, youths hanging around^{52,53} and street lighting^{54,55,56,57}. In addition, a growing number of studies have examined people's reactions to 'natural' or 'semi-natural' environments and highlighted the existence of fear of attack in woodland, parks and other green spaces^{58,59}. Furthermore, the literature suggests that parents, but also peers, school and media can have a strong influence on the perception of safety^{60,61}.

Pain (1997)⁶² argues that the social construction of fear and violence is manifested in the socio-gendered division of space. Gordon and Riger (1989)⁶³ analyzed the tactics used by women to reconcile moving about in open space and their fears for doing so, and concluded that women take precautions to avoid acts of violence or harassment in public spaces^{64,65}. Thus, women are much more likely than men to develop avoidance or self-exclusion strategies with regard to public spaces.

CONTEXT ANALYSIS

In Republic of North Macedonia, violence against women in all its manifestations remains an area of great concern. In contrast to positive legal changes and progress made in the area of domestic violence prevention and protection, other types of violence against women remain underestimated and insufficiently recognized, resulting in very sparse reporting and inadequate treatment. Violence against women and girls in public spaces, such as rape, street sexual harassment, street verbal harassment and threats, and other forms of gender-based violence, including stalking have yet to receive significant policy and public attention, and adequate responses in the environments where they occur.

Sexual violence is prohibited under existing legislation in Republic of North Macedonia. The Criminal Code⁶⁶ criminalizes rape, and under a 2004 Amendment it also specifically criminalizes "statutory rape with misuse of position". However, the general definition of rape is restrictive when measured against contemporary standards and trends in prosecuting rape, such as those set in the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (see, for ex., *M.C. v. Bulgaria*) and the Istanbul Convention⁶⁷, including domestic violence. According to the Criminal Code, a person commits rape if "by the use of force or threat to directly attack upon the life or body of another or upon the life or body of someone close to that person, forces her or him to intercourse."⁶⁸ In practice, the strict requirements of proof of penetration and active resistance render the legal treatment of rape ineffective.⁶⁹

Sexual harassment is sanctioned by the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination⁷⁰, Labor Relations Law⁷¹ and Law on Protection from harassment at the work place⁷². The definition of sexual harassment in the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination⁷³ fully corresponds with the definition of sexual harassment in the

Article 40 of the Istanbul Convention⁷⁴. Sexual harassment is also sanctioned with Article 9 of the Labor Relations Law, it is specifically sanctioned as a form of discrimination. In the case of discrimination, the burden of proving that discrimination or harassment did not occur falls on the accused person/people. Sexual harassment is prohibited with Article 3 of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, and is defined in Article 4 as “every verbal, nonverbal or physical behavior of sexual character that represents [...] damage to personal dignity, especially when it causes intimidation, repulsiveness, degradation, humiliation or offensive behavior.”⁷⁵

Stalking is regulated in the Macedonian legislation since 2014 with the adoption of the Law on prevention, combating and protection against domestic violence⁷⁶. However, at present there is no separate incrimination of stalking in the Macedonian Criminal Code⁷⁷ that corresponds with the definition of Article 34 of the Istanbul Convention⁷⁸. The act of execution can be partially brought under the Criminal act section 144 - Endangering the safety, but only in cases of serious threat or its repetition.

Official statistics on violence against women and girls in public spaces are available from police records and reports produced by the Sector for analysis and research within the Ministry of Interior. These are grouped according to the type of crime committed. However, these records show only the reported cases and do not represent an actual measurement of women’s experiences of violence and their perceptions of safety when using public spaces in their communities.

In 2012, the first scoping study produced⁷⁹ provided initial insights into the awareness of the existence and the extent of this phenomenon and delivered important recommendations for further actions by all relevant stakeholders. Based on the feedback from more than 800 respondents, the study findings showed that a) there is low public awareness, understanding and recognition of gender based violence, which does not correspond to the actual extent of the violence experienced by women, b) women considered “being a woman” (38.5%) and “being alone” (35.9%) to be the most important risk factors, c) more than a third of the female respondents are always or sometimes afraid to go out alone during the day and almost 60% reported being afraid to go out alone at night; d) One in two women (54.2%) is afraid of going to certain neighbourhoods or streets, and a little under half of respondents (45.3%) are afraid of using desolate public spaces. Further, the study revealed that woman’s perceptions of safety is impacted by the physical appearance of the urban environment, so better maintained, wide, well-lit urban spaces make women feel safer, and they have an increased feeling of safety during the day compared to night-time.

Since 2012, Skopje has faced urban expansion and changes in the overall infrastructure of the city area. For this purpose, UN Women commissioned a replication of the comprehensive study conducted in 2012, to provide information about the extent and different dimensions of violence women face in public spaces in 2017.

The study will focus primarily on women's and girl's perceptions of safety and the impact this has on their lives, as well as the forms of violence they experience. The new assessment will provide data that will be used by UN Women to strengthen partnership with national and local stakeholders, particularly the city of Skopje and municipalities of Centar and Chair to increase prevention of violence against women, but also public safety and use of open spaces by women and girls.

Methodology

Methodological principles

having in mind that creating a methodology is a complex process concerned with establishing connections between epistemology (questions about what can be known, and the interrelationship between knowledge, experiences and reality); theory (ideas about how things work); ontology (categorization and classification of these ideas and how they fit together); as well as reflections on validity, ethics and accountability of the knowledge that is produced (including the choice of method for data collection), in this part of the document we will provide short description of the principles which have informed the research design.⁸⁰

The first principle is that feminist research focuses on gender and gender inequality^{81,82,83}. Moving the focus from violence against women to 'gender based violence' broadened the perspectives in research, since gender violence is not confined to violence against women, thus recognizing violence against children, young people or lgbtiq+ people. Additionally, while the research is focused on issues that are gendered (violence, rape, sexual assault, harassment, carried out primarily by men), other concepts are also equally prominent – such as age, ethnicity and culture.

The second principle is the purposeful decrease of the standard academic distinction between the researcher and the 'researched'^{84,85,86}. In an attempt to minimize power imbalance between researcher and 'subject' not only that all researchers were women, but special attention was provided in the design of the data collection methods in order to allow participant's active involvement in development of research tools, data collection and interpretation. This will allow acknowledging, respecting and explaining differences between respondents, or between respondents and researcher. In order to do this, the methodology allows for women's knowledge to be valued, and treats women and girls as key sources of information/informants by encouraging them to express their thoughts, emotions, and experiences. Additionally, the differences between needs and experiences of women depending on their culture, age, ethnic background, sexual orientation and ability were taken into account.

The third principle is reflexivity that requires an open acknowledgement by the researcher of her assumptions, beliefs, sympathies and biases^{87,88} (Bergen, 1993; Ramazanogly and Holland, 2002). Therefore, special focus was provided to consider the power relations on the research process, the ethical judgments made and accountability for the knowledge produced. This principle also encompasses the emotional and physical well-being of the researcher and the 'researched'. While the participant has already suffered emotional and/or physical harm and may suffer further as a result of the research (the so called re-victimization), for the researcher while researching gender violence there is a very strong potential for her to suffer emotional pain, fear, anger, being overwhelmed, feeling powerless, before, after and during the research process^{89, 90}.

Methodological foundation

The research design is based on the following main resources:

- Ellsberg, M. C., Heise, L., & World Health Organization. (2005). Researching violence against women: practical guidelines for researchers and activists. Retrieved from <https://urlzs.com/eGjKm>.
- Women in Cities International (2011). Tools for Gathering Information about Women's Safety and Inclusion in Cities. Retrieved from <https://urlzs.com/LyrPX>
- Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women, Canada (2012). Assessing Violence against Women: A Statistical Profile. Retrieved from <https://urlzs.com/unzWe>
- Euromed Gender Equality Programme (2010). Gender-based Violence, Methodological Protocol: Harmonized Methodology and Concepts to conduct GBV Surveys.
- United Nations. (July 6, 2006). In-depth study on all forms of violence against women, Report of the Secretary-General. General Assembly, A/61/122. Retrieved from <https://urlzs.com/ZzFPC>

Secondary data

Analysis of Existing Data

Secondary data analysis was conducted on all available data on gender violence, currently collected in the Republic of North Macedonia by government institutions, law enforcement agencies and victim-oriented organizations, including but not limited to the Ministry of Interior Analysis and Reports; Juvenile Justice Council Reports, State Statis-

tics Bureau Reports (crime reports 2012-2017), Public Prosecution Office and Criminal Court in Skopje Data. Additionally, data gathered by the Ombudsman (mainly for children but also for woman in closed facilities (prisons, hospitals), the Social Service Centers Data, Institute for Public Health, Municipalities of Center and Chair, and women's organization working on prevention and fighting VAW.⁹¹

Legal Framework Content Analysis

In order to re-assess the legal and institutional environment for fighting VAW in public spaces in the City of Skopje as well as to be able to identify most suitable recommendations, a content analysis was made on the legal framework. Additionally, policy review is performed on the urban development's plans, strategies and legal framework in order to determine possibilities and modalities for gender mainstreaming in planning departments, and all urban planning and design processes. Some of the laws that were analyzed are the Criminal Code⁹², Law on spatial and urban planning⁹³, Law on Family⁹⁴, Labor Relations Law⁹⁵ and Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination⁹⁶.

Primary data

The primary data collection was crucial for the implementation of the project and the methodology was designed using the mixed method approach utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods. Special consideration was given to establishing a rapport with the respondents and ensuring confidentiality and privacy during the data gathering process. Also, within the research process, strict ethical and safety guidelines⁹⁷ were followed as developed by World Health Organization (WHO) to be used by researchers working with women who have experienced domestic violence.

Survey

We conducted a telephone survey and an online survey to explore the experiences with gender-based violence among women and girls aged 15 and over, living in Skopje, as well as their perceptions and safety concerns regarding urban spaces of the city. The survey was based on existing but updated questionnaire that was first used in the first Scoping study that was completed in 2012. The purpose of the survey was to gather information on the following aspects of safety for women in public spaces:

- 1 Personal perception of safety of selected specific public places (public transport, market, streets, gathering places, violence at work).
- 2 Most common measures employed by women to avoid violence.
- 3 Personal experiences of violence in public spaces.

- 4 Response of the police (reported incidents).
- 5 Perceptions about the social and physical factors that affect personal safety.

Safety Audit Walks

Audits are generally understood to mean the process of inspection, correction and verification. Women's safety audits on the other hand are used as tools for collecting information on public perceptions of urban safety in relation to the urban design. The information generated in safety audits is used to create positive changes for a safer social and physical environment for women and they were considered as an excellent tool by the participants in the original study. This tool was developed in Canada to assess the safety of an area according to the opinions, experiences and perceptions of women.⁹⁸

The second round of Safety Audit Walks were organized between May 21th and 22th, 2018 and for each route two walks were planned – one during the day and one in the evening after 8pm. In the municipality of Chair the meeting point for the walk was the Specialized Hospital for Gynecology and Obstetrics “Mother Theresa” in the municipality of Chair and the ending point was the square Skenderbeg on Boulevard Goce Delcev. The safety audit walk lasted approximately 1 hour and the length of the route was 3.5 kilometers. In the municipality of Chair the meeting point for the walk was the Primary Court 2 and the ending point was the Parking Garage “Solunski Kongres”. The safety audit walk lasted approximately 1 hour and the length of the route was 2.05 kilometers. A total of 42 participants took part in the safety audit walks of who 39 were women.

Participants in the walk were provided with training on the principles and methodology of conducting safety audit walks, and evaluated the safety using the developed instrument. This checklist was adapted from the original scoping study of the City of Skopje⁹⁹.

The safety audit walks generated general information regarding the overall feelings about the safety of the area but also specific information regarding:

- 1 Physical features (lighting, maintenance, signs and maps, accessibility, sightlines);
- 2 Security (isolation, emergency protocol, entrapment sites, public transportation);
and
- 3 Attitudes and behaviors (feeling threatened or intimidated, experiences of discrimination based on marginalized peoples' identities (e.g. race, class, gender, sexuality).

Focus groups

Focus groups are used for producing in-depth knowledge on collective views, and the connotations behind those views. To explore the experiences with gender based violence and social narratives about safety, inclusion and violence against women, between 10th and 16th of May, four focus groups targeting different groups of women were organized:

- 1 A focus group with Civil Society representatives who work with specific and/or vulnerable groups of women.
- 2 A focus group with Muslim women who wear hijab.
- 3 A focus group with Roma women.
- 4 A focus group with homeless Roma women.

The groups' sizes varied between 5 and 10 participants, all of them women, recruited through Civil Society contacts. All participants signed informed consent forms and were compensated for their participations.

The questions covered, were tailored specifically for each focus group, but the focus was on:

- 1 Types of forms of violence/harassment women face in public spaces, including types of forms of underreported violence against women in public spaces.
- 2 Factors that play a role or contribute to creating greater safety and inclusion of women in the public spaces.
- 3 Responses of women to violence in the public spaces.
- 4 Institutional response to violence against women in public spaces.
- 5 What can we do to improve the situation.
- 6 Faced stereotypes and discrimination in accessing public institutions as a form of 'nonvisible' violence.

The focused groups were moderated by two female researchers, who at the beginning acknowledged the presence of the audio recording device. All discussions were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Sessions lasted approximately 90 minutes.

Online survey for gathering experiences with gender based violence in specific public places

The findings from the first focus group pinpointed that some public spaces are especially prone to gender based violence. The public transport and spaces used for leisure and sports activities were mapped as "places" where women and girls face risks of physical and sexual violence. To collect diverse experiences, anonymous online self-completion surveys were conducted between May 14th and June 3th 2018. The purpose of the surveys was to accumulate "stories" for qualitative content analysis and 69 women shared their personal experiences with gender based harassment or violence.

The Macedonian Legal Context

North Macedonia's Constitution guarantees that the rights and freedoms of its citizens are protected, irrespective of their sex, race, color, national and social background, political and religious convictions, wealth and social status. The Law for the prevention, combating and protection of family violence¹⁰⁰ was adopted in 2014, taking a positive step towards addressing family violence. However, the legislation concentrates on family violence which occurs in the private sphere and not on gender based violence as a whole including violence which takes place in the public spaces. The law is criticized for the lack of definitions and protection of other forms of gender based violence including sexual violence towards women¹⁰¹. Furthermore, the legislation does not recognize women and girls as especially vulnerable groups exposed to gender based violence.

Republic of North Macedonia is a signatory of a number of international treaties pertaining to gender equality. Republic of North Macedonia ratified UN's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)¹⁰² in 1994 but despite being a signatory of CEDAW, North Macedonia reports progress only in combating domestic violence, excluding other types of gender-based violence, as indicated in CEDAW's concluding observations on the country's combined fourth and fifth periodic report¹⁰³. In May 2011, Republic of North Macedonia signed The Council of Europe *Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*¹⁰⁴ more commonly known as the *Istanbul Convention*. However, despite increased pressure from Civil Society Organizations the ratification of the Istanbul Convention was delayed. In this period, victims of gender based violence were left virtually unprotected, as the state did not provide the minimum prescribed services to protect victims of gender based violence as per the convention. In 2017, concrete steps were undertaken by the new Government to speed up the process of ratifying the convention. A working group was formed within the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy that includes representatives from Civil Society which were expected to work jointly on the preparation for the process of Ratification of the Convention. The working group was also responsible to prepare a National Action Plan for the implementation of the obligations arising from the ratification of this Convention. Finally, in December 2017 the government adopted a draft law for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, and on December 22nd 2017 the Istanbul Convention was ratified by the Parliament of Republic of North Macedonia. This is an important step, since the Convention is the first international legally binding instrument that specifically address-

es VAW and sets standards for preventing violence against women (including domestic violence), protecting victims and prosecuting perpetrators. The Convention has filled in a huge gap in the protection of human rights of women and at the same time extended the protection to all victims of VAW. However, the following period is crucial in establishing cross sectional mechanisms for prevention and protection of victims from gender based violence as per the instructions of the Istanbul Convention. Moreover, establishing minimum services for victims of gender based violence is essential, as it will not only improve the position of victims of GBV but will also show that the state is seriously committed to providing adequate protection for victims of gender based violence. In addition, in October 2018 a National Action Plan for the implementation of the Convention for the period of 2018-2023 was created, however the implementation of the planned activities and if they are realized as expected are yet to be assessed.

Additionally, there are number of laws which directly or indirectly address equality of women and men however where the laws are not enforced in practice there are many areas where women face inequality. Within this publication the focus will be only on the relevant legislation that regulates or can be a basis for protecting or enabling an environment for violence towards women, specifically in public spaces. In the Macedonian legal system gender based violence is partially covered in different provisions of the following legislations: the Law for Equal Opportunities between women and men (2012)¹⁰⁵, The Criminal Code (1996)¹⁰⁶, Law for prevention, combating protection of family violence (2014)¹⁰⁷, Law for prevention and protection of Discrimination (2010)¹⁰⁸, Labor Relations Law (2005)¹⁰⁹ and Law for protection from harassment in the work place (2013)¹¹⁰.

National Mechanisms for Preventing VAWG: Legislative and Strategic Documents

The legislative framework for advancing gender equality is regulated by the Law on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men (2012)¹¹¹. The purpose of this law is to systematically mainstream gender equality in order to address social, economic and political inequalities between women and men. Although the law prohibits discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment it does not explicitly regulate gender based violence. The law was implemented through a National Action Plan (2013-2016)¹¹² and annual Operational Plans^{113,114}. However, research indicates that since 2013 none of the activities and measures planned for tackling gender based violence in the National Action Plan were implemented¹¹⁵. In 2018, a New National Action Plan¹¹⁶ was adopted by the government for the period of 2018-2020.

Institutional gender equality mechanism on local and national level is foreseen in different provisions of the Law on Equal Opportunities¹¹⁷, and the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy as the primary Ministry responsible for leading the process of implementation of this Law, the National Strategy for Gender Equality, the National Action Plans and Op-

erational Plans. Within the Ministry, The Sector for Equal Opportunities works towards advancing the status of women as well as promoting equal opportunities for women and men locally and nationally. An important provision within the Law and as part of the gender machinery is that a Legal Representative should be appointed which should be responsible for any complaints made in regards to unequal treatment based on gender. However, from 2014 until 2019, the gender machinery lacked an appointed legal representative within the ministry, suggesting that for five years this mechanism could not be utilized, leaving the gender machinery as incomplete and not protecting victims of gender based discrimination. A serious concern which the sector is facing is the absence of adequate financial, technical and human resources which is continually stated in various reports, including the European Commission Country Progress Report and CEDAW concluding observations¹¹⁸. These challenges faced by the Sector for equal opportunities hinder the advancement of gender equality, as well as the opportunity to properly report and address gender based discrimination.

The framework for the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (2010)¹¹⁹ was adopted in 2010 and entered into force at the beginning of 2011. The law defines discrimination on nineteen different grounds, including sex and gender, and specifically points out aspects that are important when dealing with gender based violence, acknowledging harassment, including sexual harassment, as a discriminatory practice and including victimization as discrimination. Since the law was frequently criticized for not covering all grounds for discrimination particularly gender identity and sexual orientation, in 2017 an expert working group was established to work on a new Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. The working group included members from Civil Society as well as Women's Civil Society Organizations. The law was formally adopted by the National Assembly in May of 2019. The new law provides more protections for citizens including protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Additionally, civil society organizations can initiate cases of discrimination of a certain larger group should they deem this appropriate, without the permission of that group.

A novelty in the previous law was the introduction of the Commission for Protection from Discrimination as an independent body¹²⁰ funded by the State. In 2016 when new members of the Commission were elected, a wide spread criticism was drawn, especially from the Network for protection of discrimination. Namely, the network criticized the newly elected members for the lack of expertise in discrimination, with some members' public supporters of government policies, especially policies that do not allow equal treatment of ethnic minorities in the country. Additionally, from total of seven committee members only one is a woman, indicating that the commission has not taken the principal of equal opportunities and representation of women when electing their members.

A positive aspect is that in 2019, with the changes of the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination it is expected that the election of members of the Commission will be more open and transparent. However, more than 6 months since the new law entered into force a new Commission for protection of Discrimination is still not established. This means that a crucial mechanism for protection of discrimination is missing and the citizens that need to access this mechanism are unable to do so.

Looking at the number of complaints submitted to the Commission for protection of discrimination in the period 2011-2017 (table I), it can be noted that the overall number of complaints submitted to the commission are relatively small and the percentage of complaints made on the ground of gender and sex are even smaller. Namely the highest percentage of complaints (sex and gender) occurred in 2017, whereas in 2015 only 4% of complaints made to the commission were on the ground of gender or sex.

Table I: Commission for Protection of Discrimination complaints 2011 -2017¹²¹

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total	60	75	84	106	70	60	59
Based on sex	4	5	9	10	2	8	11
Based on gender	5	2	0	4	1	No information	No information

The Criminal Code

The Criminal Code defines violence as abuse, rude insults, threats to safety, conducting violent attacks and through this creating among the public a feeling of insecurity, threat or fear (Article 386)¹²². Sexual assault as defined in the Criminal Code requires the use of force as one of the elements of the crime.

Chapter 19 within the Criminal Code defines crimes against sexual freedoms and sexual morals and providing consequent punishments. Such crimes are defined as attacks on the life or body with the use of force, forced intercourse, as well as threats thereof. The punishment is higher if the forced intercourse is committed towards a person with a disability or a minor. The law provides punishment for obscene behavior in front of others and is especially strict if this occurs in front of children. Pimping is also included as punishable violence, as is presenting pornographic material to a minor. Additionally, a parent, an adoptive parent or a guardian abusing a child, including forcing him or her

to work, beg, or perform other activities that are damaging for the minor, will be subject to imprisonment. The only mention of sexual violence (sex attack), in public spaces is in Article 190, which indicates that anyone performing a sexual activity in front of another person will be punished by the law either by paying a fine or a one year imprisonment¹²³.

According to the concluding observations on the third periodic report of the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights the Committee recommends that in order for the State to eliminate violence against women and children, recognizing violence against women needs to be recognized as specific criminal act in Criminal Code¹²⁴. Rape is addressed under Article 186 of the Criminal Code and what is noticeable in this article is that rape is regulated with specific punitive measures only when a third party attempts, threatens or performs sexual abuse against an individual, while similar courses are not explicitly codified in cases of rape within the family. While in case of sexual abuse by a third party, the public attorney is entitled to start a case, this is not the case with abuses within the private sphere, where the victim is expected to initiate the indictment herself/himself (Stojanovska, 2008)¹²⁵.

While some measures have been undertaken to address domestic violence, other forms of Gender based violence have not been systematically tackled and remain unaddressed. For example, in the current Family Law is the introduction of the right of the victim of domestic violence to submit a request for provisional protective measures¹²⁶, either directly to the competent court or via the Centers for Social work. The Law for prevention, combating and protection of family violence stipulates that the courts immediately and within 24 hours of receiving a report from the Ministry of Interior, without holding a hearing, will decide on issuing a temporary protection measure – (removal of the perpetrator from the home and prohibition of getting closer to the home). The court, based on the proposal of the victim or the center for social work can issue a temporary protection measure and will act immediately and, within seven days from the day of receiving the request, will make a decision. The court shall, within 24 hours of without holding a hearing, decide on issuing a temporary protection measure when there is a reasonable suspicion of serious harm to the victim. However, according to the National Network to End Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence at present, issuing a temporary protection measures usually takes up to 3 weeks, which indicates that the courts do not prioritize the protection of victims of domestic violence¹²⁷. These measures are not available for victims of other types of gender-based violence.

In accordance with Law for prevention, combating protection of family violence, a national strategy should be established for a five year period that would include an analysis of the situation, measures and activities to improve the situation with family violence and ongoing training for experts which work in the area of family violence. Unfortunately, since the introduction of the law in 2014, a national strategy has not been introduced.

Within strategic documents, Gender Based Violence is partially addressed within the Strategy for Gender Equality (2013 -2020)¹²⁸. Implementation of the Strategy was regulated through a National Action Plan and yearly Operative Plans and is coordinated by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, specifically by the Sector for Equal Opportunities within the ministry. In the National Action Plan, Gender based violence is a specific strategic goal with four concrete results expected to be met following the implementation of the National Action Plan (end of 2016)¹²⁹. However, research has indicated that none of the planned activities and measures to combat gender based violence in the past 3 years have been implemented¹³⁰. Furthermore, no allocation of financial, technical and human resources for activities targeting gender based violence.

Regarding the economic strengthening of women who are victims of domestic violence, since 2015 Employment Service Agency has introduced a measure that aims to support women victims of domestic violence. Subsidizing employment is a program which provides financial subsidies to employers for people who are in social risk including victims of domestic violence. However, since the introduction of the measure, there have been no women users (victims of domestic violence) that have utilized these measures¹³¹.

Access to justice for victims of violence is one of the most important issues when we talk about violence against women. The Law on Free Legal Aid¹³² has enabled domestic violence victims and victims of trafficking to be included in the provision of free legal aid, but until July 2011 only six cases have been allowed such concessions. The newly adopted Law on Free Legal Aid¹³³ has broadened the scope of beneficiaries to cover victims of gender based violence as well as cover court costs, which should improve the access to justice overall. Additionally, an important introduction to the law is enabling victims of family and gender based violence to access free legal aid without assessing their financial situation, which should significantly improve access to justice for victims of gender based violence.

The Helsinki Committee for Human rights is one of the Civil Society Organization which provides Free Legal Aid to victims of domestic violence. According to the Helsinki Committee in 2017 from 217 persons that had access to Free Legal Aid only 12 were victims of domestic violence. In 2018, up until July, 170 persons accessed Free Legal Aid Services and of those only 6 needed required assistance for domestic violence.

The manner in which women and men use public spaces, and how women and men move around public spaces has not been a subject to much investigation by authorities or policy makers. In this regards there is lack of data in terms of what women and men experience in the public spaces of Skopje and North Macedonia. Since, the first Scoping Study conducted by Reactor – Research in Action¹³⁴, with the Support of UN Women, this area of research has not received much public attention. Furthermore, there have been no public campaigns to tackle violence towards women in public spaces, to raise awareness of how women and men use public spaces and the challenges which women

experience in utilizing not only public spaces but also public transport, taxi services, health and other public services.

Institutional Context

The Ministry of Interior and its local offices are the first point of contact for victims of gender based violence in public spaces, or specifically the local unit for public order and intervention or the special police unit for intervention “Alfi”. However, it is important to mention that in a study conducted by the National Network to End Violence Against women and domestic violence, indicates that when violence against women is reported, police officers usually do not give the victim appropriate information such as what protective measures can be put in place and overall what the rights of the victim are¹³⁵. According to the study, the lack of professionalism on behalf of police officers include: absence of gender sensitive training for police officers, not acting in line with protocols and not taking a serious approach towards gender based violence. Furthermore, another study on the different forms of sexual violence, conducted by the Network suggest that victims do not feel comfortable reporting sexual violence to the police, as they believe that women will be ridiculed, labeled and appropriate measures will not be taken to resolve the case¹³⁶. Recommendations by the Committee on Elimination on All Forms of Discrimination include that the State *“Raise public awareness, through the media and educational programmes and provide mandatory training for judges, prosecutors, lawyers, police officers, health-service providers and social services and teaching staff in order to ensure that they are sensitized to all forms of violence against women and girls and can provide adequate gender-sensitive support to victims”*¹³⁷.

An example of how gender based violence in public spaces was handled can be analyzed by a public case of violence towards a female police officer, and how the case was addressed by institutions. Namely, a female officer was verbally attacked by a high official of the ruling coalition party, with suspicions that she was physically attacked, and although she had physical injuries, the case was not investigated further. The case was closely followed by media and the Minister of Interior met with the police officer in question, however the institutions failed to thoroughly investigate if there was physical violence involved. The Ministry of Interior has prosecuted the perpetrator for violating public order and he will be only faced with paying a fine. Such failure to sufficiently address this case only shows that violence towards women is accepted without being appropriately punished. The message that institutions have sent with ignoring this case is that violence against women is accepted and tolerated in North Macedonia’s society. This is also a striking example how police addresses violence against women and the attitude of police towards dealing with gender based violence. Such nonchalant acts on behalf of the police will not only raise distrust among victims of gender based violence but will further discourage women to report gender based violence to police.

Ratification of the Istanbul Convention

The Ratification of the Istanbul Convention¹³⁸ took place in December 2017, followed by the decision accepted by the Council of Europe in March 2018¹³⁹ and The Convention entering in force as of 1st of July, 2019. As per the Istanbul Convention, North Macedonia has an obligation to take the necessary legislative or other measures to provide for the setting up of appropriate, easily accessible rape crisis or sexual violence referral centers for victims in sufficient numbers to provide for medical and forensic examination, trauma support and counseling for victims. In this direction in July 2018, a notable step was taken on behalf of authorities with the opening up of three centers for victims of sexual violence. These centers which are the first of this kind were opened in three hospitals on the territory of North Macedonia – In the University Clinic for Gynecology in Skopje and in the public hospitals in Tetovo and Kumanovo. This is a considerable step since these are the first services of this kind in the country, however at least 2 more centers for victims sexual violence need to be established. In total 25 shelters for victims of violence are needed and at least 20 centers for crises intervention, psychological counseling and free legal aid.

Harmonization of the national legislation with the Convention is one of the key reforms expected in order to align the requirements of the Convention with the Criminal Code¹⁴⁰. This means that the Criminal Code needs to adopt new changes including criminalizing gender based violence and family violence, introducing stalking as a criminal act, and “ensuring that any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, is subject to criminal or other legal sanction”¹⁴¹. Bearing in mind that the current version of the Criminal Code only regulates rape but not all the other forms of sexual violence, it is substantial that reforms of the legislations are made in order to cover the other various forms of sexual harassment (fondling or unwanted sexual touching, forcing a victim to perform sexual acts, such as oral sex or penetrating the perpetrator’s body, penetration of the victim’s body, also known as rape). In addition, a recent analysis¹⁴² highlights the gap between the existing Criminal Code confirming the need for amendments within the Criminal Code in order to align the scope of crimes covered as per the Istanbul Convention. In addition, changes should be made to the Criminal Code regards to anti-discrimination and pressing charges for acts of discrimination.

It is important to mention that in 2019 a Draft Law on prevention and protection of violence of women and family violence was prepared with assistance of a working group which included representatives of civil society, experts, representatives from state institutions and academia. It is expected that the law will be adopted in late 2019 or early 2020.

SURVEY FINDINGS

In order to gain insight into the experiences of violence and fears of violence of women in public spaces in Skopje, we conducted a telephone survey and an online survey. The reference population for the surveys were women and girls aged 15 and over, living in Skopje.

The telephone survey was carried out via Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). The households were selected through random digit dialling and quota sampling was applied to ensure demographic representativeness. In total 730 women and girls from Skopje participated. Because the pre-determined age quotas for younger women were not filled with the telephone survey, additional online survey was launched. The anonymous online survey was conducted via Lime Survey- an open source on-line survey web app. The questionnaire was disseminated on social media and in totals 530 women and girls from Skopje participated.

The two samples are markedly different in terms of key demographic variables. The self-recruited participants of the online survey are on average younger and more educated compared to the participants of the telephone survey. The data of the both surveys is analysed separately and because the probability of experiencing gender-based violence and the related perceptions of safety in public spaces may be determined by age and other demographics, below are contrasted the online and the telephone survey samples.

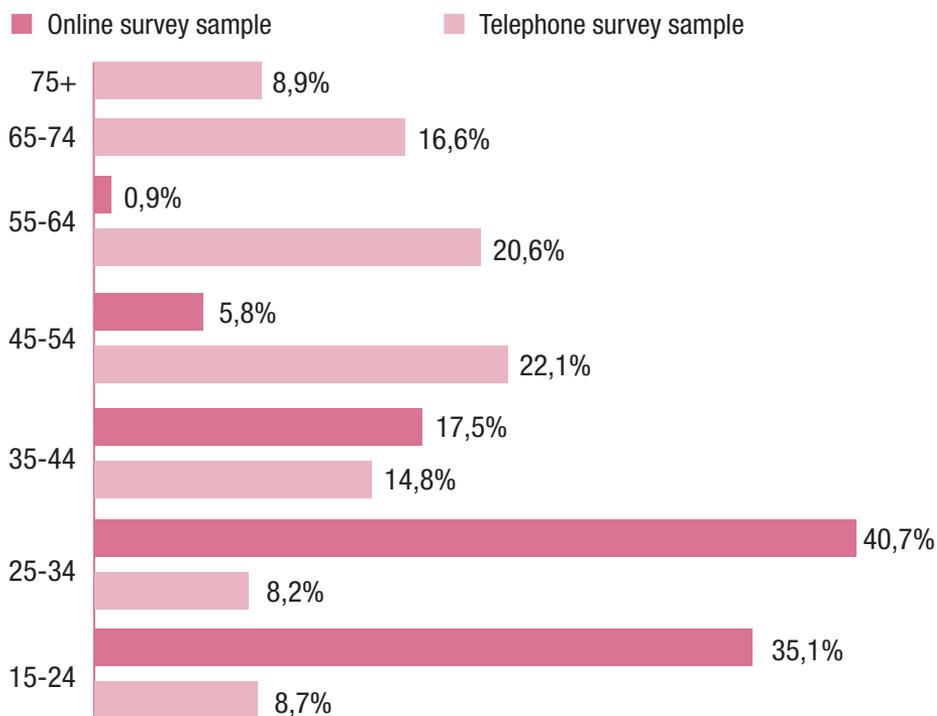


Figure 1. Distribution of the online and telephone survey samples by age group in percentages

The majority i.e. 75.8% of participants of the online survey are younger than 34 years old. The mean age of the participants of the online survey is 29 years old, while the mean age of the participants of the telephone survey is 52 years old.

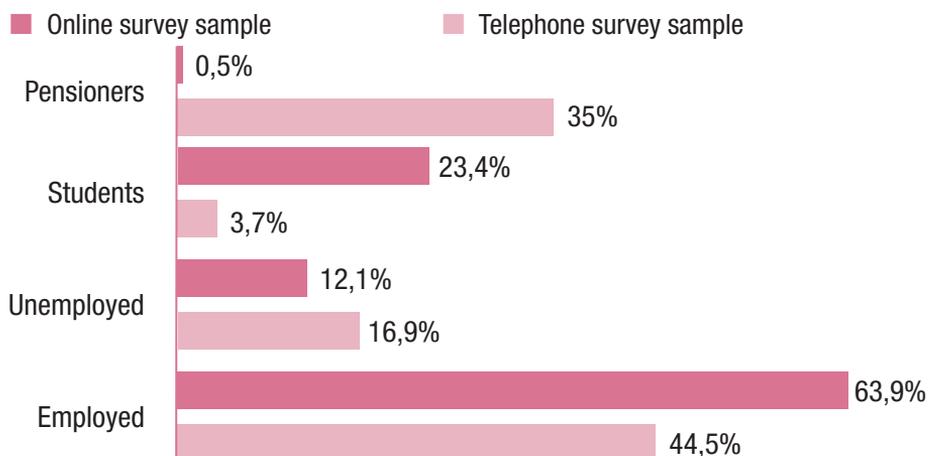


Figure 2. Distribution of the online and telephone survey samples by economic status in percentages

Consistent with the differences in the age distributions, 35% of participants of the telephone survey are pensioners (compared to 0.5% of the participants of the online survey). On the other hand nearly a quarter i.e. 23.4% of the participants of the online survey is students (compared to 3.7% of the participants of the telephone survey).

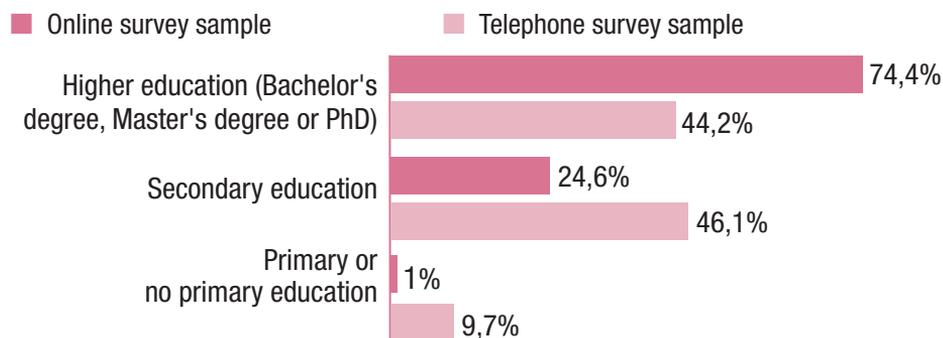


Figure 3. Distribution of the online and telephone survey samples by level of education in percentages

The majority of the participants of the online survey are with high educational attainment, with 74.4% of them holding Bachelor’s, Master’s degree or PhD. Nearly half (46.1%) of the participants of the telephone survey have secondary education as the highest level of completed education while 44.2% have higher education.

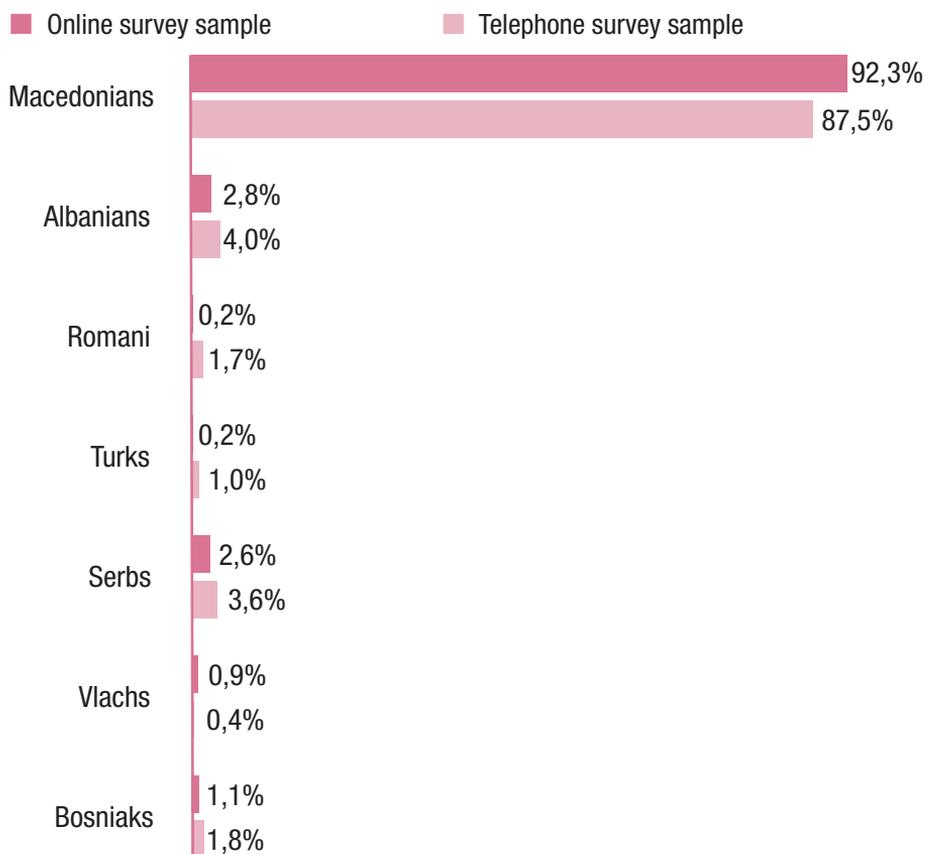


Figure 4. Distribution of the online and telephone survey samples by ethnicity in percentages

Regarding the ethnic affiliations, in both of the surveys the huge majority of participants self-identified themselves as Macedonians.

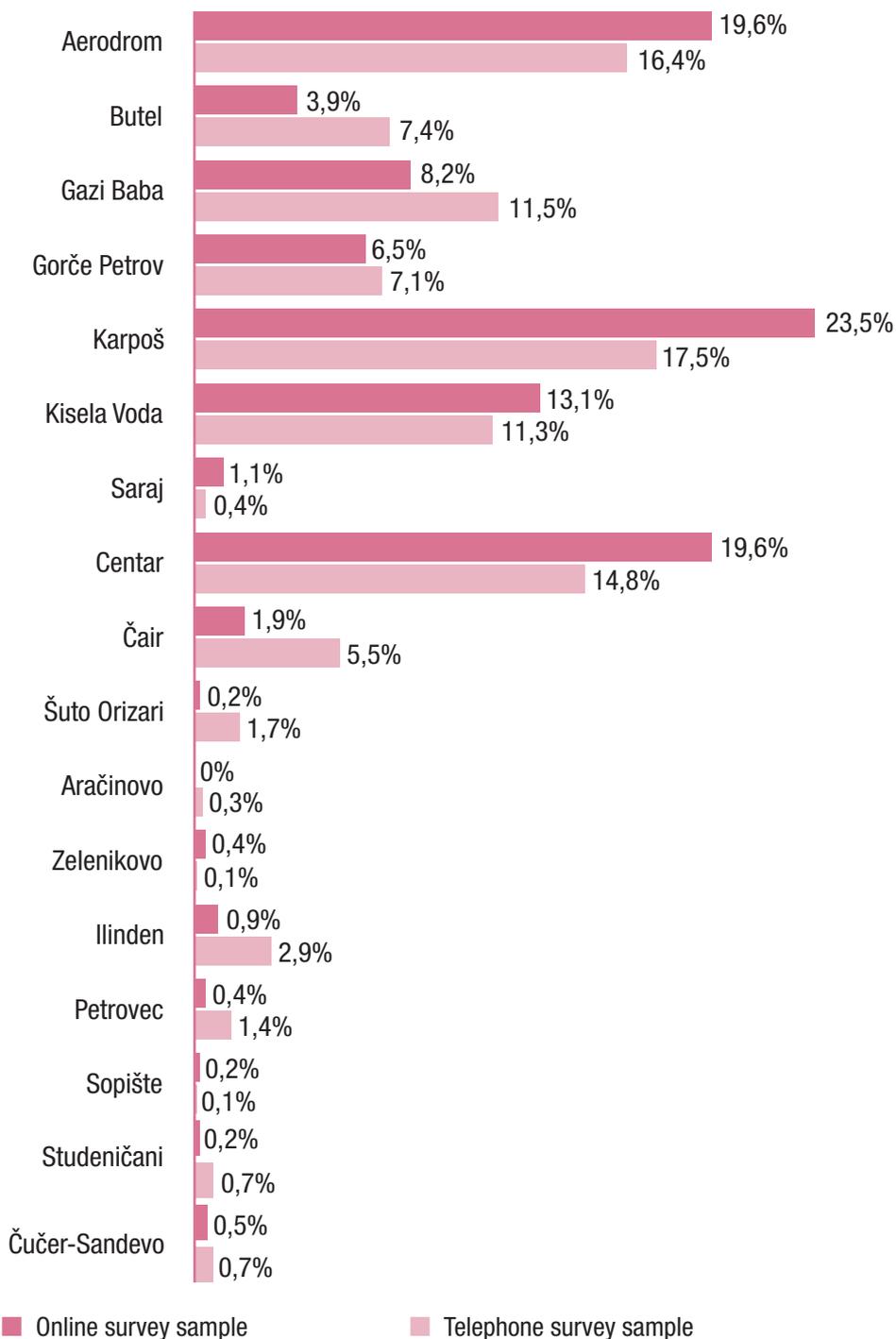


Figure 5. Distribution of the online and telephone survey samples by municipalities in percentages.

Regarding the place of residence, participants of the online survey were mostly from the municipality of Karpoš (23.5%), the municipality of Aerodrom (19.6%) and the municipality of Centar (19.6%). The citizens from these municipalities are also more represented in the telephone survey although it can be noted this sample is more diverse in terms of the place of residence of the participants in comparison to the telephone survey.

In summary, the two modes of surveying targeted slightly different subpopulation of women living in Skopje. The most pronounced differences are in terms of age distribution i.e. 75.8% of the participants of the online survey are younger than 34 years, whereas only 16.9% of the participants of the telephone survey are aged 15 to 34 years. On the other hand only 6.7% of participants of the online survey are 45 or older compared to 68.2% of participants of the telephone survey. In the telephone survey 35% of the surveyed are pensioners compared to only 0.5% of the participants in the online survey.

Having in mind the different samples we can argue that the online survey is more insightful of the experiences and perceptions of women and girls aged 44 years old or younger (93.3% of the sample), whereas the telephone survey is more informative about women older than 44 (68.2% of the sample).

We first present the findings from the online survey, and then we continue with the findings from the telephone survey. Although there are marked differences the data from the online survey reveals more alarming answers, the two surveys reveal consistent depictions of the urban landscape of the city of Skopje, through the perceptions and experiences of women and girls.

ONLINE SURVEY FINDINGS

Experiences with gender based violence

The presented findings from the anonymous online survey indicate that gender-based harassment is a very common experience in the streets and public spaces of Skopje. According to participants answers' the majority of girls and women in Skopje are exposed to the seemingly "mild" forms of harassment such as catcalling. What is especially disturbing in the findings is the reported frequency of the more severe forms of gender-based violence i.e. every fifth woman knows a woman who was attacked or raped according to the online survey data, and every fifth herself has experienced sexual violence like grabbing.

Every fifth (21.4%) woman in Skopje knows a woman who was sexually assaulted or raped, and 4.9% said they personally experienced this. More than every third (35.0%) knows a woman who was physically assaulted and 8.9% were themselves victims of physical assault. More than every third (33.6%) knows a woman who was grabbed or touched in a sexual way and every fifth (20.9%) personally experienced this. More than half (53.5%) know a woman who was stalked or followed, and every third (32.9%) has experienced this first hand. Subjected to flashing have been 40.1%, and half (50.5%) know a women who has experienced flashing or has had someone masturbate at her. The majority of women have experienced first-hand (86.2%) or know someone (83.4%) who has been catcalled in a public space in Skopje.

Table 1. Experiences with gender-based violence in public spaces

	Yes, both to me and to someone I know	Yes, it happened to me	Not to me, but to someone I know	Neither to me nor to anyone I know	Personal experience	I know a woman with personal experience
	a	b	c	d	a+b	a+c
Stare at her	82,4%	8,4%	6,6%	2,6%	90,8%	89,0%
Whistle after her or called her names such as	73,7%	12,5%	9,8%	4,0%	86,2%	83,4%
Comment on her appearance	46,7%	8,7%	29,3%	15,3%	55,4%	76,0%
Curse her or showed her vulgar gestures	21,6%	6,3%	34,3%	37,8%	27,9%	55,9%
Stalk or follow her	21,3%	11,7%	32,2%	34,8%	32,9%	53,5%
Deliberately blocked her path	17,9%	7,1%	29,4%	45,5%	25,1%	47,4%
Address her with nationally, ethnically or religiously offensive comments	6,4%	3,0%	35,4%	55,2%	9,4%	41,8%
Threatened to harm her	8,4%	6,1%	28,0%	57,5%	14,5%	36,4%
Attacked her physically (pushing, slapping, hitting etc.)	5,4%	3,5%	29,6%	61,5%	8,9%	35,0%
Show her genitals or masturbated in front of her	30,3%	9,8%	20,2%	39,7%	40,1%	50,5%
Touched her and/or grabbed her in a sexual way	13,6%	7,3%	20,0%	59,1%	20,9%	33,6%
Attacked her sexually or raped her	2,4%	2,4%	19,0%	76,1%	4,9%	21,4%

Personal strategies (Self-protection mechanisms)

We wanted to explore the personal strategies that women use to cope with the risk of experiencing gender-based violence and harassment. Some of this “tactics” may severely constrain the freedom of using the public spaces and the commonness of these strategies is suggestive of the compromises women and girls do.

The majority of participants stated that they use some of the listed self-protection mechanisms i.e. 94.6% sometimes or always avoid places that they consider unsafe; 90.8% sometimes or always look back and scan the environment; 87.4% sometimes or always avoid eye contact with men they cross path; 85.6% sometimes or always watch their cell phone; 80.8% sometimes or always choose the longer route just to avoid certain places etc. Interestingly one of the least common ways of self-protection among the participants is carrying self-protection items like spray, knife etc.

Sometimes when we are outside or in a public place, we do some things to protect ourselves. Have you done anything of the following?

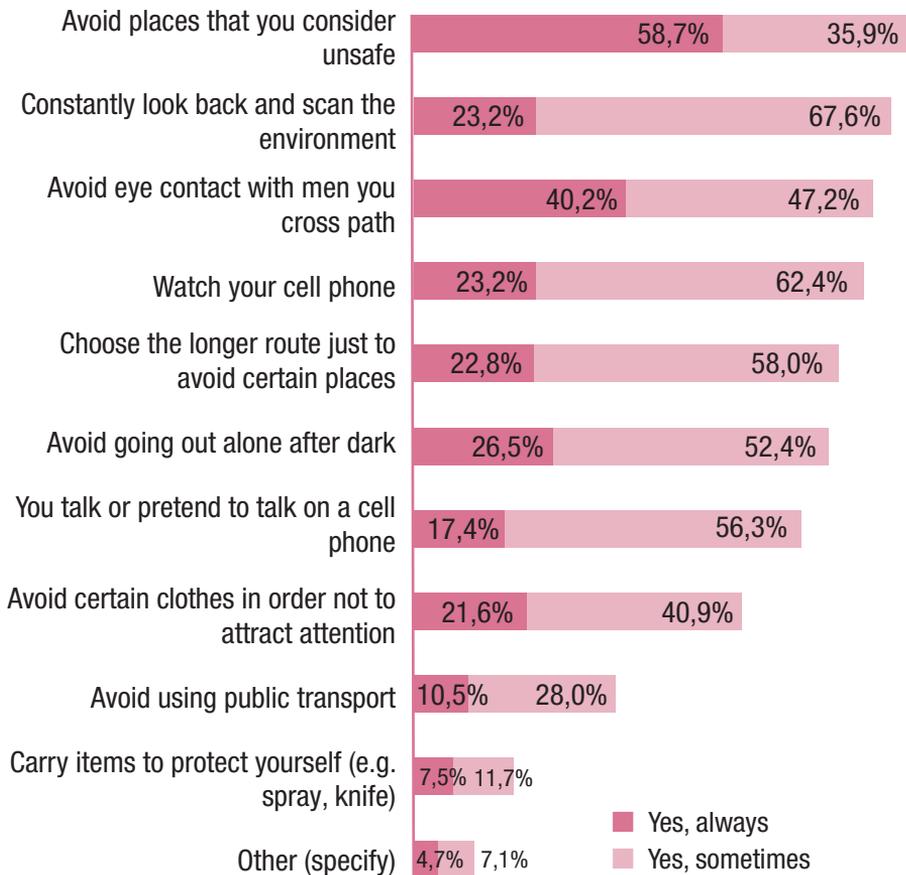


Figure 6. The prevalence of personal strategies for self-protection

Social categories as vulnerabilities

The overall majority i.e. 92.2% think that women are at higher risk of being attacked or sexually harassed in public. This suggests that women and girls perceive their gender as a “risk factor” meaning that their chances of experiencing gender-based violence in urban public spaces are higher compared to that of men.

Do you think that women are at higher risk of being assaulted or sexually harassed in the street or in other public space in Skopje?

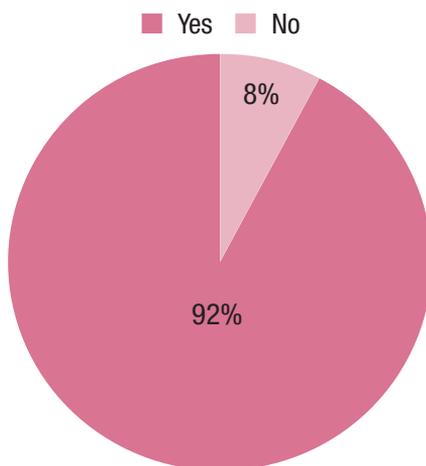


Figure 7. The percentage of women who agree that women are at higher risk of facing gender based-violence

According to participants' answers other social categories and cues are also determinative of the danger of public harassment and assault. The vast majority i.e. 87.6% think that being alone or unaccompanied in the streets of Skopje as women puts them at a higher risk of being assaulted or harassed. Wearing a certain type of clothing is perceived as a risk factor by 65.3% and more than half (57.0%) think that being a young woman heightens the risk of experiencing assault or sexual harassment. Even certain types of social identities (that are not necessarily “obvious” for the public eye) are perceived as a risk factor - every third (32.4%) thinks that certain religious confessions are a vulnerability factor and the same percentage (32.4%) think that being a lesbian or transgender heightens your chances of being assaulted or harassed in the public spaces of Skopje.

Do you think the risk of being assaulted or harassed in public is higher if you are:

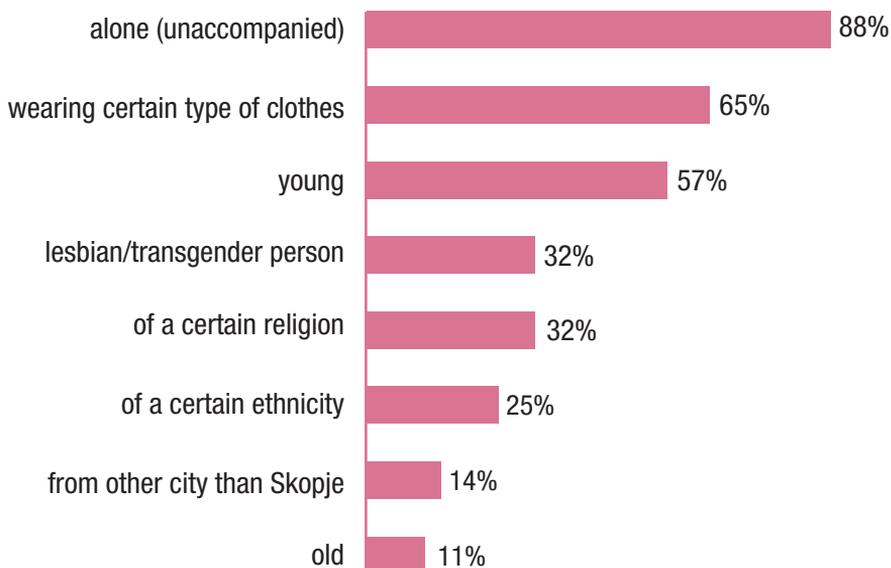


Figure 8. The percentage of women who agree that different categories of women face higher risk of gender-based violence in public spaces

In conclusion, the conception that women are not safe when they are alone or unaccompanied in public is a general perception among the participants. Although all women are at higher risk of being assaulted or harassed some categories of women are even more so e.g. young women, lesbians and transgender women. This suggests that the probability of experiencing gender-based violence is “stratified” and that some women may face unique risks when using public spaces. The finding that more than half i.e. 65.3% believe that wearing certain clothes heightens the risk of gender-based violence is upsetting and may implicate the “inescapability” of the patriarchal reasoning “she asked for it”.

Physical factors of the urban landscapes that affect the perception of safety

Regarding the physical surroundings that make women feel unsafe in public spaces, the majority identified poor lighting as a risk factor (93%). Most participants feel unsafe in isolated places (92.5%), underground passages (82.9%) and construction sites or enclosed spaces (69%). Eight of ten (79.6%) feel threatened by groups of men hanging around.

In some public places we feel less safe. What of the following makes you feel unsafe?

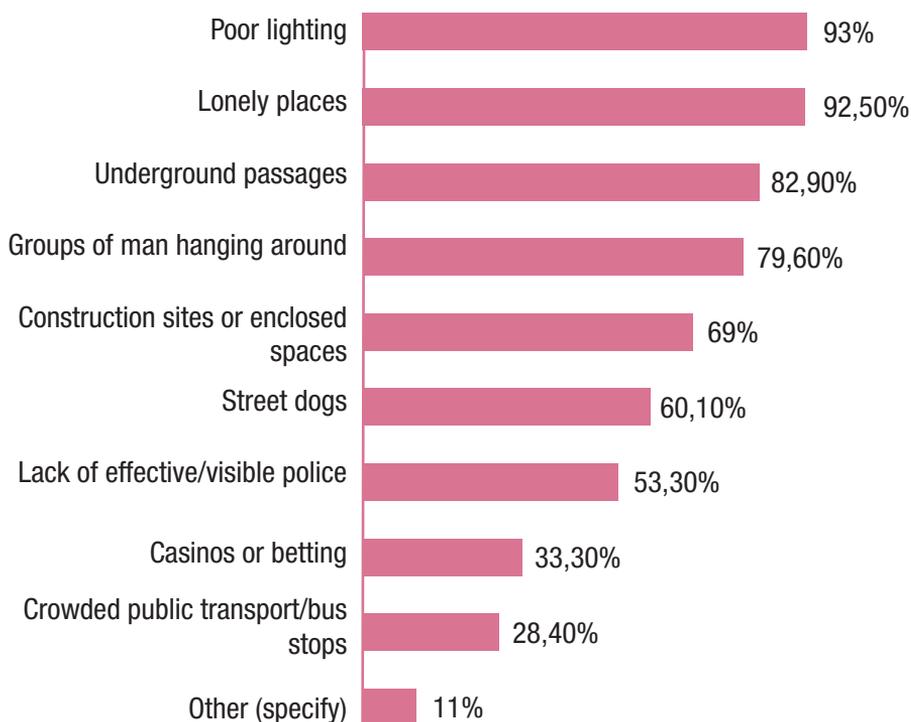


Figure 9. Physical circumstances perceived as threat or risk

Regarding the physical features of the urban environments we can conclude that women feel unsafe in poor or dimly lit spaces and urban environments that evoke the perceptions of entrapment e.g. underground passages, construction sites or enclosed spaces etc. The expressed safety concerns are also associated with isolation i.e. secluded places.

Places and spaces – during the day and during the night

We asked participants to rate several public spaces and the city of Skopje in general, based on how safe or unsafe participants feel during the day and after dark (1=not safe, 5= very safe). Participants' mean ratings indicate that during the day Skopje's public spaces are perceived as safe i.e. only multi-storey parking garages received lower mean rating than four. On the other hand, the after dark ratings portray a different overview. Perceived as the least safe urban landscapes are: parks, multistorey parking garages and open parking lots. More importantly Skopje in general during the night is rated as not safe (mean rating lesser than 3).

On a scale from 1 to 5, how safe do you feel in these public spaces in Skopje (1= not safe, 5 = very safe)?

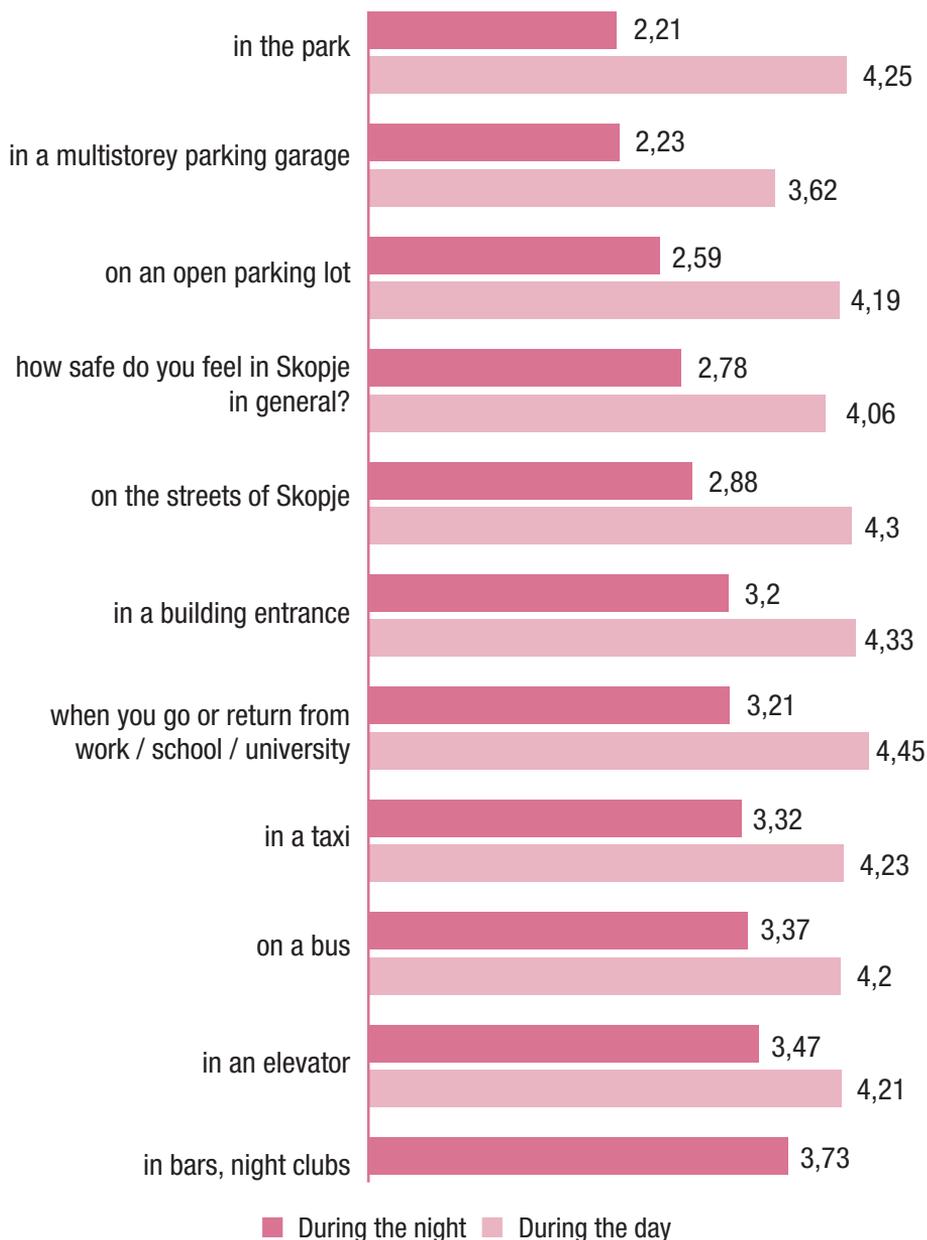


Figure 10. *The perceived safety of different public spaces during the day and night*

The intuition that certain areas in Skopje are perceived as particularly dangerous is confirmed by the findings that the overall majority i.e. 90.9% are sometimes or always afraid to go through certain neighbourhoods or streets during the night. Going out alone, during

the night sometimes or always inflicts fear for 63.6%, and 78.6% are afraid (sometimes or always) to return alone after a night out. In general, women feel safer during the day, but for half of them (52.3%) certain neighbourhoods or streets in Skopje (sometimes or always) cause fear even in broad daylight.

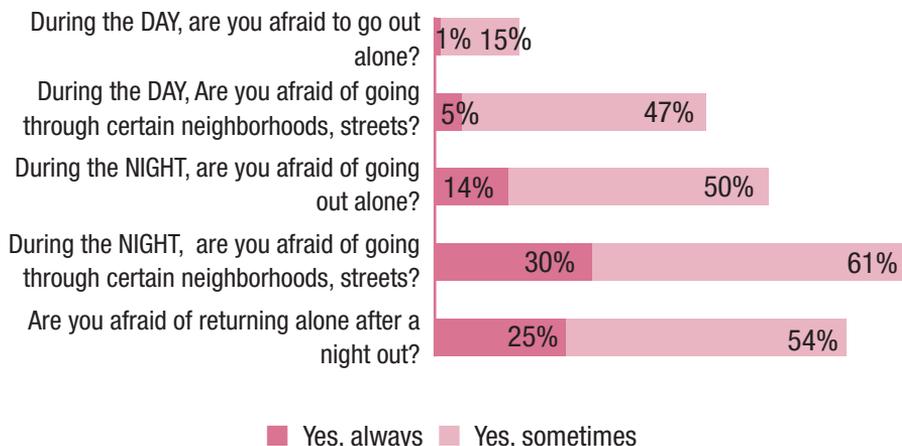


Figure 11. The perception of safety during the day and night

When asked how many times they had been out alone in the past month, only 0.9% reported to have done so on a daily basis. Every fifth (18.3%) woman did not go out alone even once in the past month and 46.9% only went out alone a couple of times. This suggests that urban spaces are perceived as potentially dangerous for women and girls and for a significant percentage of them the practical “inaccessibility” of the public spaces equals unequal participation in the public life.

Have you been out alone in the past month?

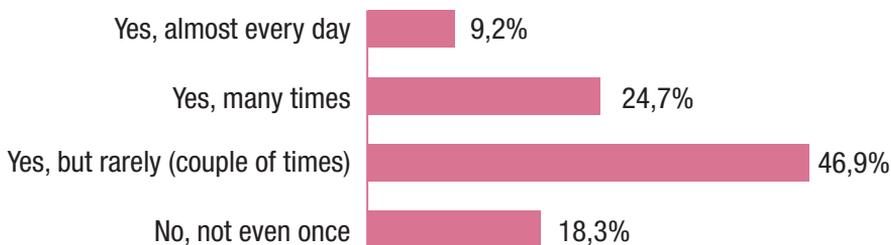


Figure 12. The percentage of women that have been out alone in the past month

Public institutions

Public institutions are public spaces that emanate and replicate the shared social reality of (in) equality. They project the dominant discourse of governance and they imply the omnipresent narratives of inclusion or exclusion of certain social categories.

We asked our participants about the treatment they receive in public institutions and whether they feel unfairly treated because they are women. According to participants answers nearly half (46.3%) felt humiliated or offended in a public institution on the basis of their gender. Additionally nearly every fourth (24.2%) confirmed that she has been humiliated or offended in school or university, and more than every tenth (12.5%) experienced disrespectful treatment in a police station. Humiliated or offended in the workplace were 28.6%.

Have you ever felt humiliated or offended only because you are a woman:

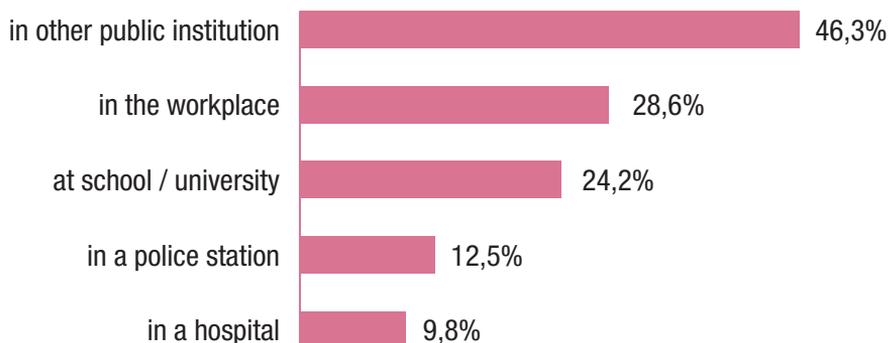


Figure 13. Experiences with harassment in institutions

Suggestive comments and graphic gestures are a fairly common experience in public institutions according to participants answers i.e. 41.1% received vulgar comments or gestures in a public institution (not specified), and additional 28.7% experienced this in an educational institution. Every fifth was subjected to vulgar comments or gestures in the workplace.

Have you ever received vulgar comments or gestures:

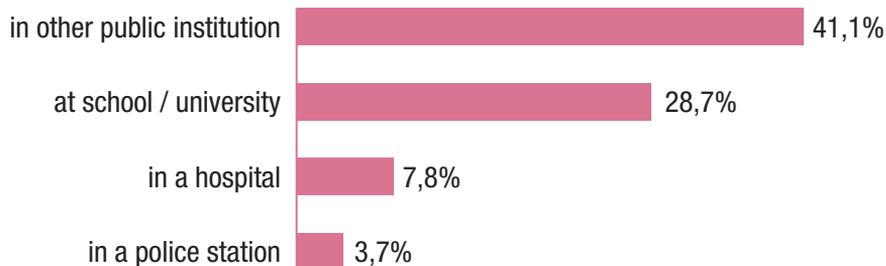


Figure 14. Experiences with harassment in institutions

Online harassment - the cyber space as a public space

The cyber space is another public space that may reproduce the inequalities from the social sphere. We first mapped the prevalence of the online presence among the participants and then asked them about their experiences with online harassment. The majority i.e. 97.2% have a personal profile on at least one of the listed social networks - the most popular being Facebook (94.6%) and Instagram (69.9%).

Do you have a personal profile on these social networks:

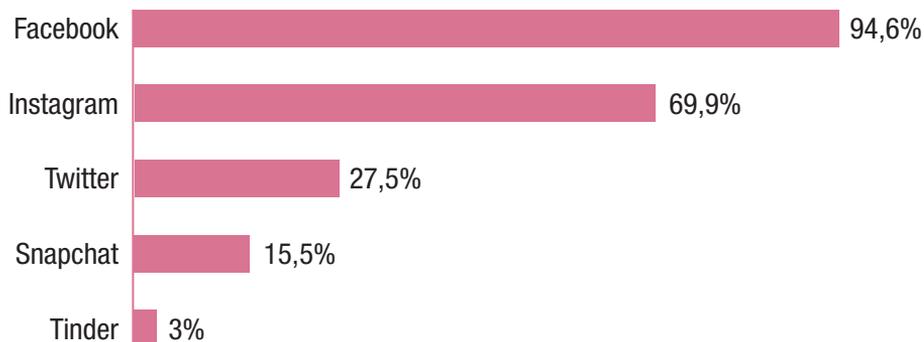


Figure 15. *Participants with personal profiles on social media*

When asked about experiences with online harassment on social networks, 80.1% confirmed that they have experienced at least one of the listed forms of harassment or cyberbullying. More specifically nearly half (47%) have received messages with vulgar content, more than every third (34.8%) has been insulted or trolled, more than every fourth (26.2%) has received explicit photos (with genitals etc.) and more than every fourth has been asked to send explicit photos of her (26%). More than every fifth (22.9%) had an online stalker, and slightly less than every fifth has experience with a “hacked” profile on social network.

Being on social networks, have you experienced something of the following:

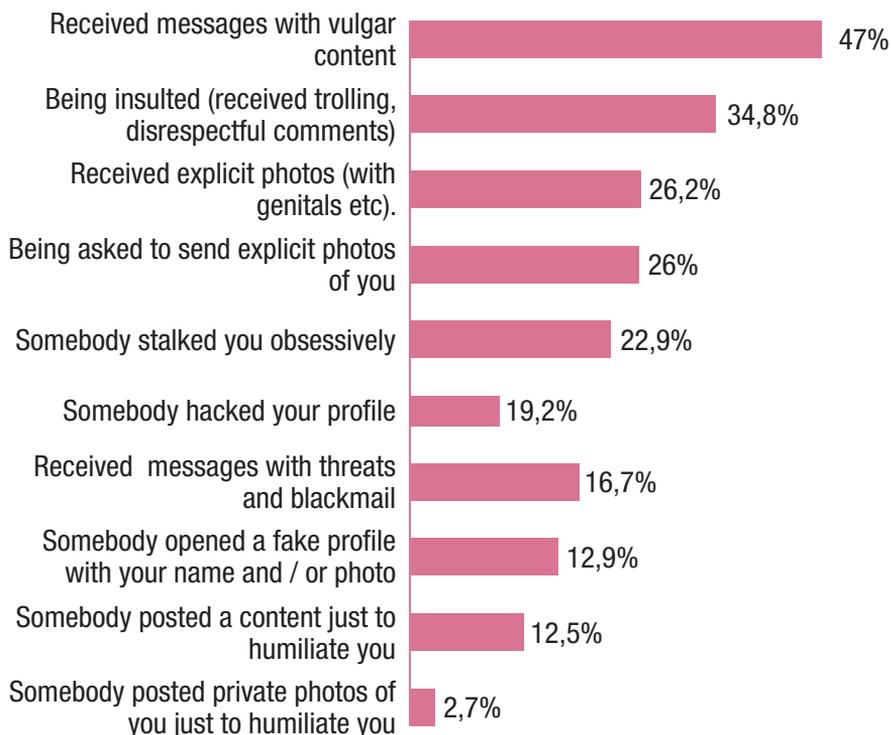


Figure 16. Online harassment

Police

The response of the police is crucial step as part of the institutional protection of women victims of gender based violence. Nearly half of the participants confirmed that they personally have reported an incident related to gender - based violence to the police or they know a woman who has done so. When asked about their experience, the answers reveal mixed overview. Some of the participants voiced their frustration regarding the ineffectiveness of the police e.g.: “they [the police] did not do anything” and some of them have expressed their concerns regarding the police officers’ treatment of the survivors of gender-based violence e.g. one participant wrote:

“My friend was sexually assaulted near the police station Beko. When she reported the incident in the police station, the officers very casually received the information and even joked about the situation. They did not do anything”.

On the other hand among the shared experiences there are “witnesses” of fast and effective police responses, for example one participant wrote:

"I was attacked in front of a pharmacy, by a man holding a knife. I called 192 and the police immediately came and arrested the assaulter".

Have you ever reported or do you know a woman who reported an incident (related to gender-based violence) to the police?

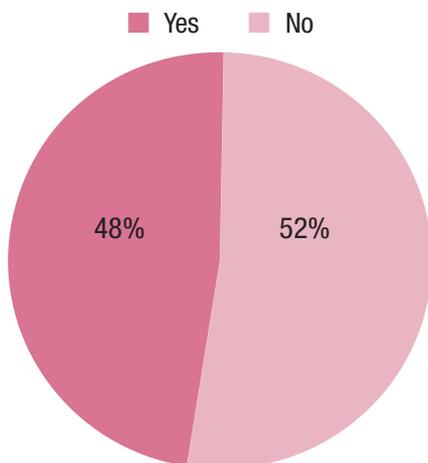


Figure 17. *The percentage of women who reported or know a woman who reported an incident to the police*

Another crucial part is played by civil society organisations that deal with the survivors of gender-based violence. Only 16.7% of participants confirmed that they know a free helpline, a shelter center or organizations to which they can turn to in case of gender-based violence. When asked to specify, the participants identified Crisis Centre "Hope", the national S.O.S. line for victims of domestic violence 15-315, Centres for Social Work, the National Network to End Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, H.E.R.A., Helsinki committee for human rights and the police.

Do you know a free helpline, a shelter center or organizations to which you can turn to in case you experience gender-based violence?

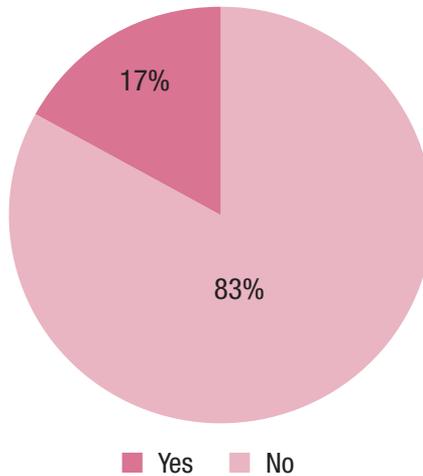


Figure 18. The percentage of women that are informed about organizations that deal with the survivors of gender-based violence.

Reactions of bystanders

The majority of participants i.e. 72.8% think that in general, bystanders will notice but will not react to an act of gender-based violence. Only 14.8% think that the “typical” bystander will call for help (police/other officials etc.) in case of gender based violence in a public space and additional 29.1% reason that bystanders will probably offer help to the victim.

What do you think, how would people react if they run into a woman or a girl that is assaulted or harassed in a public place? They:

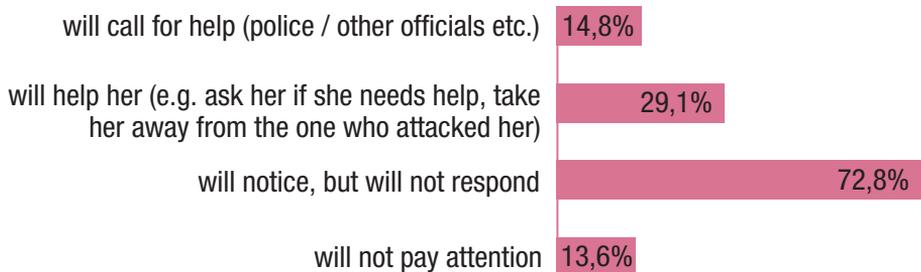


Figure 19. Reactions of the bystanders according to participants

Telephone survey findings

The findings of the telephone survey suggest similar portrayal of perceptions and concerns regarding the safety of the urban spaces of Skopje, although it must be noted that the reported incidence of gender-based violence is markedly lower according to the telephone survey results. When interpreting this we must also consider at least two factors. First, although both surveys guaranteed anonymity to the respondents, we may assume that the participants were more reserved on the telephone survey because they needed to share their experiences with the person doing the telephone interview. Furthermore, the participants of the online survey were self-selected i.e. they proactively chose to participate which means that from the start they might have been more willing to share their experience. Another even more important determinant is the evidenced difference in the samples. As previously mentioned the average respondent in the online survey is a woman aged 29 years old, with high education whereas on the telephone survey the average participant is a woman aged 52 years, with secondary education as the highest level of completed education.

Acknowledging the differences in modes of surveying, their implications and the demographic dissimilarities of the samples we continue with the presentation of the telephone survey findings.

Experiences with gender based violence

The results from the telephone survey suggest that nearly one in ten (7.8%) knows a woman who was sexually assaulted or raped, and 0.8% said they personally experienced this. Nearly one fifth (19.5%) know a woman who was physically assaulted and 4.1% were themselves victims of physical assault. More than every tenth (13%) knows a woman who was grabbed or touched in a sexual way and 5.8% personally experienced this. Nearly a quarter of the participants (24.4%) know a woman who was stalked or followed, and 11.8% have experienced this first hand. Subjected to flashing have been 15.6% and 18.6% know a women who has experienced flashing or has had someone masturbate in her presence. Nearly half of women have experienced first-hand (41.5%) or know someone (40.8%) who has been catcalled in a public space in Skopje.

Table 2. Experiences with gender-based violence in public spaces

	Yes, both to me and to someone I know	Yes, it happened to me	Not to me, but to someone I know	Neither to me nor to anyone I know	Personal experience	I know a woman with personal experience
	a	b	c	d	a+b	a+c
Stare at her	32,9%	14,5%	16,2%	36,4%	47,4%	49,0%
Whistle after her or catcalled her	25,8%	15,1%	15,8%	43,4%	40,8%	41,5%
Comment on her appearance	18,4%	9,5%	18,5%	53,7%	27,8%	36,8%
Curse her or showed her vulgar gestures	11,2%	6,3%	16,6%	65,9%	17,5%	27,8%
Stalk or follow her	4,8%	7,0%	19,6%	68,6%	11,8%	24,4%
Deliberately blocked her path	7,7%	7,1%	14,0%	71,2%	14,8%	21,6%
Address her with nationally, ethnically or religiously offensive comments	5,1%	3,7%	11,4%	79,9%	8,8%	16,4%
Threatened to harm her	3,0%	3,0%	10,3%	83,7%	6,0%	13,3%
Attacked her physically (pushing, slapping, hitting etc.)	2,2%	1,9%	17,3%	78,6%	4,1%	19,5%
Show her genitals or masturbated in front of her	7,5%	8,1%	11,1%	73,3%	15,6%	18,6%
Touched her and/or grabbed her in a sexual way	2,6%	3,2%	10,4%	83,8%	5,8%	13,0%
Attacked her sexually or raped her	.1%	.7%	7,7%	91,5%	0,8%	7,8%

Personal strategies (Self-protection mechanisms)

Regarding the physical conditions that make women feel unsafe in a public space, the vast majority identified poor lighting as a risk factor (80.3%), substantial percentage are scared of street dogs (69%) and 63.3% felt unsafe if there is not a visible presence of the police. More than half felt unsafe in underground passages (54%) and half (50.8%) felt unsafe in construction sites or enclosed spaces.

Sometimes when we are outside or in a public place, we do some things to protect ourselves. Have you done anything of the following?

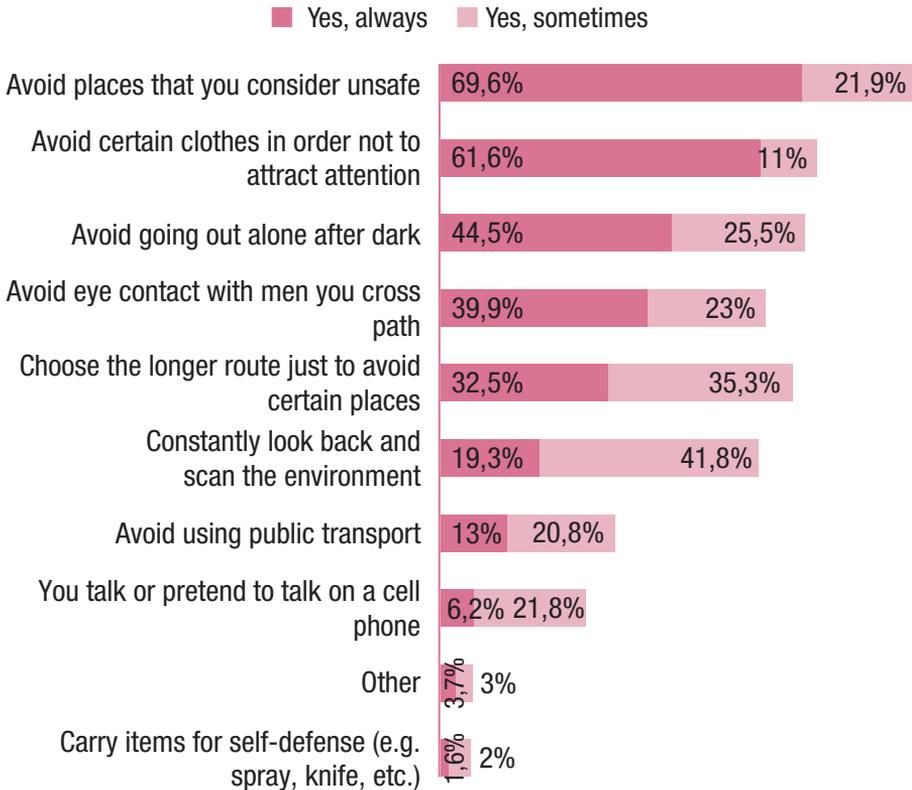


Figure 20. The prevalence of personal strategies for self-protection

Social categories as vulnerabilities

The overall majority i.e. 85.6% think that women are at higher risk of being attacked or sexually harassed in public.

Do you think that women are at higher risk of being attacked or sexually harassed at the street or in other public space?

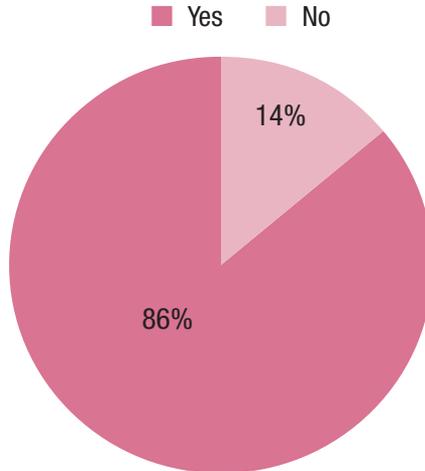


Figure 21. The percentage of women who agree that women are at higher risk of facing gender based-violence

The majority of participants think that wearing certain types of clothes (74.4%) or being alone i.e. unaccompanied (65.6%) in the streets and public places of Skopje is a risk factor for a woman or girl. More than half think that being a younger women or girl heightens the risk of being subjected to GBV while 31.5% reason that being older increases the chances of experiencing GBV. Being a lesbian or transgender person is considered as risk factor by 37.7%.

Do you think the risk of being assaulted or harassed in public is higher if you are:

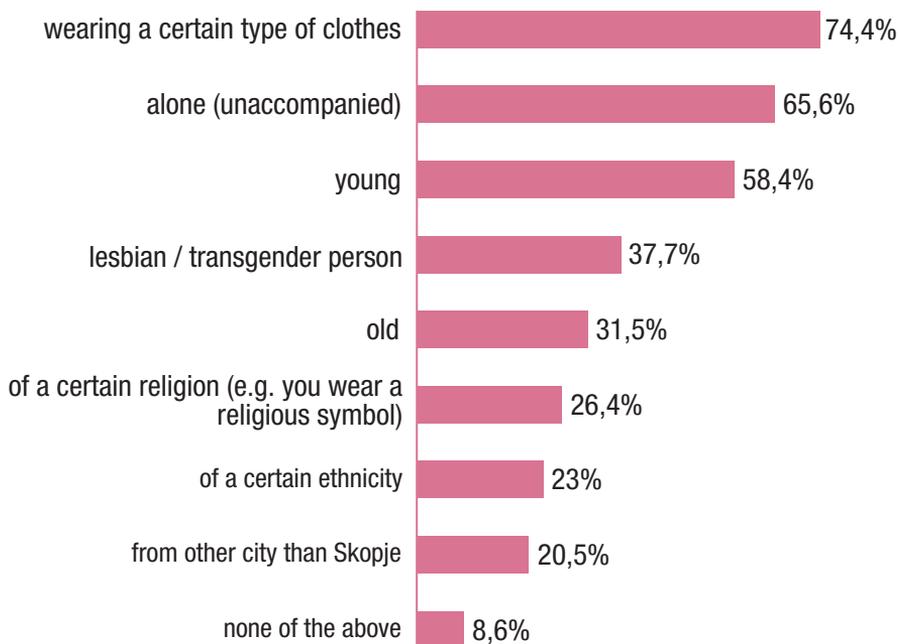


Figure 22. The percentage of women who agree that different categories of women face higher risk of gender-based violence in public spaces

Physical factors of the urban landscapes that affect the perception of safety

Regarding the physical conditions that make women feel unsafe in a public space, the huge majority identified poor lighting as a risk factor (80.3%). Significant percentage of participants felt unsafe in lonely places (73.6%), underground passages (54%) and construction sites or enclosed spaces (50.8%). Nearly half (48.4%) feel threaten by groups of man hanging around and more than half (69%) are afraid of street dogs.

In some public places we feel less safe. Do some of the following circumstances make you feel unsafe?

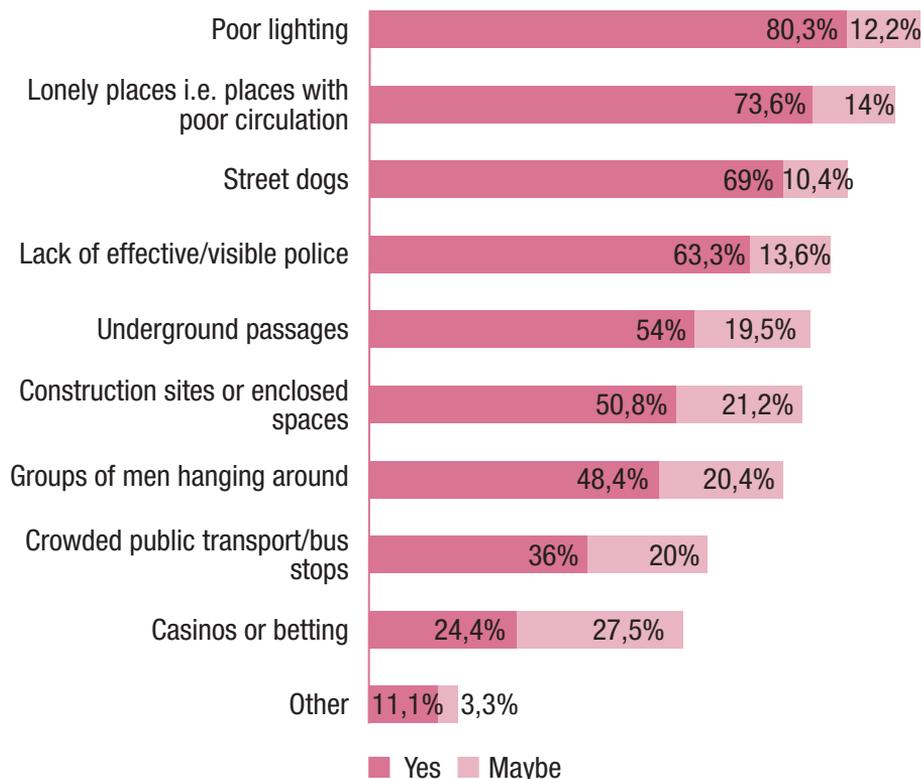


Figure 23. Physical circumstances perceived as threat or risk

Places and spaces – during the day and during the night

The majority i.e. 67.1% are sometimes or always afraid to go through certain neighbourhoods or streets. Going out alone, during the night sometimes or always causes fear for 67.1%, and 48.5% are afraid (sometimes or always) to return alone after a night out. In general, women feel safer during the day, but for 35.4% certain neighbourhoods or streets in Skopje (sometimes or always) cause fear even in broad daylight.

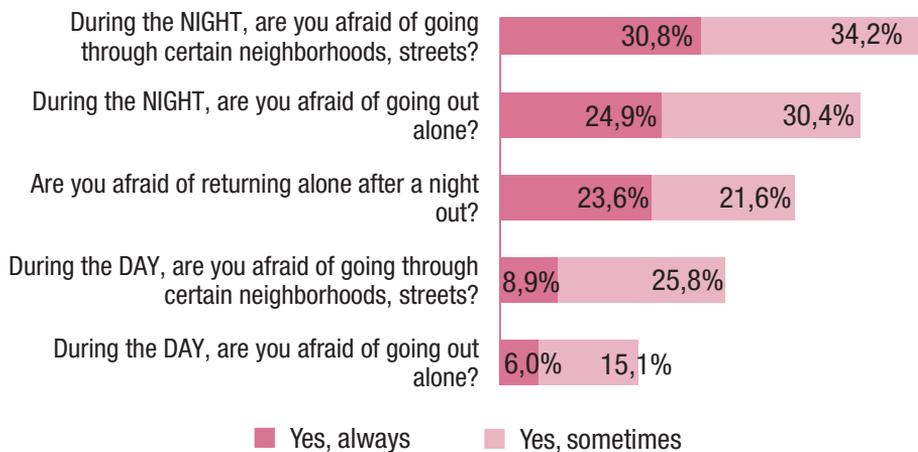


Figure 24. *The perception of safety during the day and night*

When asked to specify or name public places or areas in Skopje that make them feel unsafe, the majority of participants described urban areas with poor lighting. Frequently identified are the flea market “Bit Pazar” and the City Park and among the mentioned “dangerous” places are the areas around shopping mall Mavrovka, the parking lot of the Macedonian Opera and ballet, the and the river bank near the National TV station.

When asked how many times they had been out alone in the past month, 6.7% reported to have done so on a daily basis. Substantial percentage i.e. 43% did not go out alone even once in the past month and 30.4% only went out alone a couple of times.

Have you been out alone in the past month?

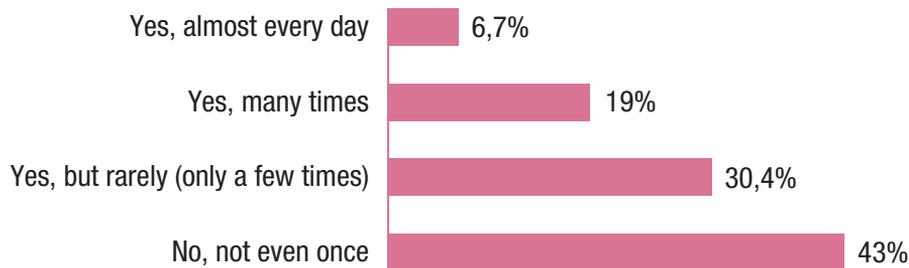


Figure 25. *The percentage of women that have been out alone in the past month*

Police

When asked if they have reported an incident (related to gender-based violence) to the police or do they know a woman who has, 28.2% of participants confirmed.

Have you ever reported or do you know a woman who reported an incident (related to gender-based violence) to the police?

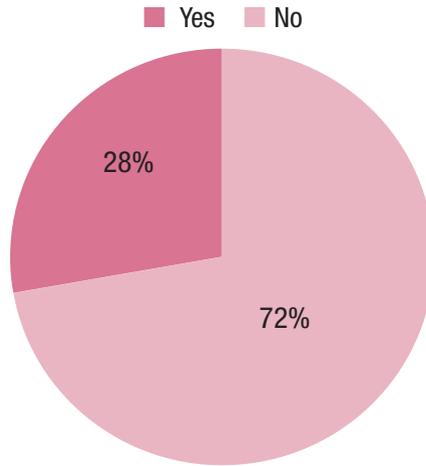


Figure 26. The percentage of women who reported or know a woman who reported an incident to the police

Although 29.6% of participants confirmed that they know a free helpline, a shelter center or organizations to which they can turn to in case of gender-based violence, when asked to specify, 43.98% did not know any. Among the rest, the most popular answer is “S.O.S.” (but not specified which helpline), 192 Police number, Megjashi – the First Children’s Embassy in the World, Centers for Social Work etc.

Reactions of bystanders

When asked how the “typical” bystander will react to an act of gender-based violence in a public place, the participants of the telephone survey are somewhat split. Half i.e. 49.2% think that people will call for help (e.g. police / other officials etc.) or try to help a woman assaulted or harassed in a public place, but a substantial percentage i.e. 37% think that people will notice, but will not respond and 9.1% think that people will not pay attention to an incident related to gender-based violence in a public place.

How people in general react if they cross with a woman or a girl that is assaulted or harassed in a public place? They:

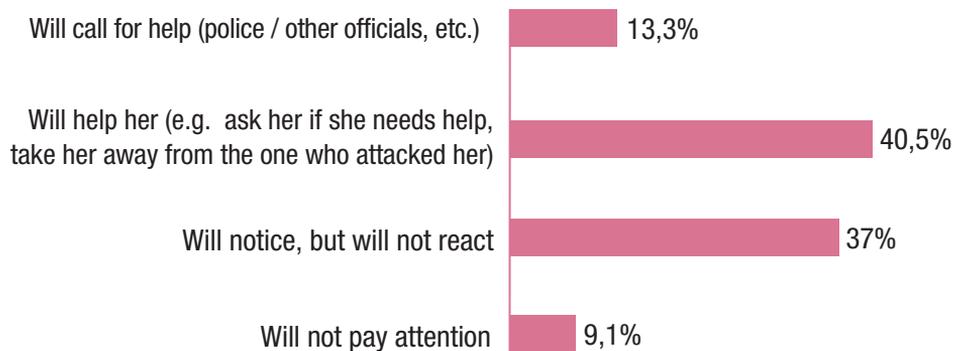


Figure 27. Reactions of the bystanders according to participants

FINDINGS FROM THE SAFETY AUDITS WALKS

Safety audits may be used as an exploratory instrument and as a planning tool. Assessing their own perceptions of safety, women as ‘experts of experience’ (Whitzman, Shaw, Andrew, & Travers, 2009¹⁴³) can note what constrains their use of public spaces and what can be done in order to create safer urban spaces. According to Andrew, Cook, & Bruin (2000, pp. 163)¹⁴⁴ “women are acting as visualizations of the greater vulnerability of certain groups in the urban context” and the understanding is “Safer for women, safer for all”.

In order to understand the gendered nature of utilization of public spaces, we conducted five safety audit walks, one in November, 2017 and four in May, 2018. For the November walk, the audit started immediately before it became dark and it lasted approximately two hours. Two routes were assessed, one in the municipality of Chair and one in the municipality of Centar. The first walk started at The Obstetrics and Gynecology Hospital “Mother Theresa” in Chair and ended on the so-called Plastic street¹⁴⁵. The second walk began at the underground parking at the Macedonian Opera and Ballet and finished in front of the Church St. Demetrius in the municipality of Centar. These safety audit walks coincided with the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence and representatives from various institutions, local municipalities, the gender equality commissions, Civil Society Organizations and MPs were invited to participate. The duration of the walk was approximately 2 hours.

The focus of the May walks were women users of the designated spaces, and only municipality representatives, Civil Society Organizations and local citizens were invited. In each municipality two audits were performed once during the day, and once at night. In the municipality of Centar, the first route started at the Primary Court 1 and ended at the underground parking at the Macedonian Opera and Ballet. The second route started at the Macedonian Opera and Ballet and ended near the Parking Garage “Solunski Kongres”.

In the municipality of Chair the meeting point for the walks was the Specialized Hospital for Gynecology and Obstetrics “Mother Theresa”. The first assessment was performed at the end of the route on the Plastic street and the second evaluation was done at the square Skenderbeg on the boulevard Goce Delcev.

Table 3. Number of filled out audit questionnaires

	November		May			
	Chair	Centar	Chair		Centar	
	1st route	2nd route	1st route	2nd route	1 st route	2nd route
Daytime audits	/	/	9	8	12	11
Nighttime audits	32	19	8	6	13	6
Total	32	19	31		42	

In total 51 questionnaires were filled out in the November safety audits (49 filled out by women), and 73 questionnaires were filled out in the May safety audits (63 filled out by women).

The criteria for evaluating the safety were the physical features of the assessed spaces (pedestrian and road infrastructure, lighting, maintenance, signage, sightlines) and the meanings and perceptions emanating from these features (isolation, entrapment spots etc.). The participants filled out the audit questionnaires either online on their smartphones or using paper and pen.

The daytime audits made visible the deteriorating asphalt and the poor pedestrian infrastructure. The participants vocalized their concerns about the lack of sidewalks and the unclear demarcations of the pedestrian zones. One of the respondents has noted “At the crossroad, from Skenderbeg Square to the Philharmonic: It’s unclear- Is it a lane or a crosswalk?” implicating that pedestrians are practically forced to walk on the road coping with fast moving traffic. The feeling of threat from the chaotic setup is especially evident in the statement of one participant: “every step without attention is a danger”. Most of the participants agreed that the easy movement of pedestrians is thwarted on the sidewalks “occupied” by illegally parked cars. The findings in table 2 indicate that the majority of the participants perceive that only 25% of the audited routes had a functional sidewalk. The assessment is more “optimistic” only for the second route in Centar (November walk).

Table 4. How much of the assessed route had a functional sidewalk according to participants. Presented are percentages of participants.

Perceived portion the route that had a functional sidewalk	November		May			
	Chair	Centar	Chair		Centar	
	1st route	2nd route	1st route	2nd route	1st route	2nd route
0%	18,8%	5,3%	52,9%	28,6%	28,6%	41,2%
25%	65,6%	21,1%	41,2%	50%	42,9%	23,5%
50%	15,6%	57,9%	5,9%	21,4%	28,6%	35,3%
75%	/	5,3%	/	/	/	/
100%	/	10,5%	/	/	/	/

Some of the participants acknowledged that the “obstructed” pedestrian zones are especially tricky if you are in a wheelchair or pushing a pram, and noted that there are no slopes from the footpath to the road. Although the perceived safety varies marginally, the lowest average scores for safety are for women with limited mobility and elderly women (table 3), finding that confirms the “implicitly” evident notion that the city is “impaired” for some categories of citizens, disabling the equal participation in public life, and replicating the inequalities.

Table 5. Perceived safety for different categories of women. Presented are average scores, 1 = Very unsafe, 5 = Very safe.

How safe a woman would feel on this route if she were:	November		May			
	Chair	Centar	Chair		Centar	
	1st route	2nd route	1st route	2nd route	1st route	2nd route
Alone	2,47	2,68	2,08	1,82	2,75	2,44
With children	2,20	2,32	2,08	1,64	2,20	1,94

A person with limited mobility	1,83	2,16	1,33	1,45	1,50	1,38
An elderly person	2,07	2,16	1,33	1,45	1,95	1,56
Member of an ethnic minority	2,40	2,53	2,25	2,09	2,70	2,31
Navigating this space for the 1st time	2,17	2,42	1,83	1,73	2,30	1,87

The majority of participants confirmed that the routes have potholes in the road, or unpaved parts and the sight of broken or dug up pavement is not an unusual one - the most infamous being the so-called Lawyer's street¹⁴⁶.

The rain and the bad weather on the November walk made visible the inadequate drainage systems, and the landscape of littered and poorly maintained places produced a feeling of unease among the participants. Noted as spots that make them feel more vulnerable or threatened were: the crossroad near Chairchanka, the streets near the shopping mall Mavrovka, the so-called Plastic street, the so-called Dukjandjik street, the underground parking at the Macedonian Opera and Ballet, the passage between MKC—the Youth Cultural Centre and MTV- the National TV station, the area behind MEPSO-Electricity Transmission System Operator of North Macedonia, the so-called Attorneys street etc. The “unnamed” entrapment spots were small alleys, narrow and claustrophobic streets, construction sites that limit visibility or movement, dark parking lots, littered and abandoned looking areas.

As pointed out by Andrew et al. (2000, p. 158) “women’s use of urban spaces is heavily marked by considerations of time”¹⁴⁷. During the night time audits, the dimly lit narrow alleys in Cahir (after Plasticarska) became a maze from which the potential victim could hardly escape. The evoked perception is consistent with Fenster’s (2005)¹⁴⁸ notion of the urban spaces designed as a ‘trap’ for women -”unpleasant and thus unused” (pp 224). Most of the participants noted that large sections of the audited roads are poorly lit and the safety concerns were associated with factors which include seclusion. Articulating the anticipating danger that creeps from the dark small alleys in Chair, one participant stated: “...anything can happen without anyone noticing”.

At the end of every audited route, the participants were required to provide an overall assessment of the safety, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = very unsafe, and 5 = very safe. The average scores are given in Table 6.

Table 6. Average safety scores

	November		May			
	Chair	Centar	Chair		Centar	
	1 st route	2 nd route	1 st route	2 nd route	1 st route	2 nd route
Daytime audits	/	/	2,11	2,38	3,00	2,09
Nighttime audits	2,66	2,84	3,00	2,33	2,80	2,67

The finding that average score assessments do not exceed grade 3, suggests that even in broad daylight the routes are generally perceived as moderately safe at best. What is more surprising is the conclusion that the average marks of daytime audits are not consistently higher than the average scores of nightly walks. Although the conclusion is based on a small number of observations, the findings are indicative that the sense of lack of safety is equally pervasive during the day, although from the qualitative analysis of the answers it can be concluded that various aspects of the poor urbanization are more salient at different times of the day. During the day, the chaotic traffic and the unstructured and compromised circulation generate the feeling of threat and vulnerability as a pedestrian, and during the night, the dimly lit and claustrophobic streets create the feeling of “unsafe maze”.

Recommendations brought forward by the participants were: restoration of the deteriorating asphalt on the roads, installment of streetlights, regulation of the chaotic traffic and illegal parking (especially on sidewalks and passenger zones), garbage removal and better community hygiene, and creation of greener and safer urban environments.

FOCUS GROUPS FINDINGS

Civil society representatives

This focus group included 5 members of Civil Society Organizations which work specifically with women. The focus group was conducted at the office of The National Macedonian Youth Council on the 9th of May 2018.

The purpose of this focus group was to speak to different representatives from women's organizations and to gain more insight about what according to their work, most likely is faced by women in Skopje's public spaces. Furthermore, through the knowledge of the experts, identifying specific groups of women with whom focus groups can be conducted was also an important factor of this focus group.

Participants of this focus group discussed different forms of violence faced by women in the public spaces in Skopje. In general participants talked about the volume of violence that women face in public spaces, including verbal violence, street harassment such as cat calling, commenting, verbal gestures and wolf whistling. Overall, the group discussion pointed out that women are frequently faced with all forms of violence when using the public spaces in the capital city.

The public transport was pointed out as a notorious hot spot for violence towards women, including verbal harassment of elderly women by younger men, standing too closely to girls and women as well as men showing their intimate parts or masturbating in the bus. It was also pointed out that in cases when someone is exposed to violence in the public transport usually there is no assistance and help from onlookers on the bus.

"I say this from a personal experience but for the general public 90% of the girls have witnessed that someone masturbating in public transport. I have experienced it, across from me, he is sitting down his hands in his pants and he is doing his thing. I may notice after 15 minutes and there is no reaction. I feel that if I start to scream, that he will attack me, you do not know in what kind of condition is the man, and the surrounding will not jump and protect you, because you have been a witness of a countless number of cases of violence, and either only you react and the other ones have been silent observers and no one reacted, institutions do not react and you say to you self, oh I will just move (seats)."

Playing sport in public was also raised as a concern for women as women are not freely able to use public spaces to enjoy sports. Women that train pay particular attention to the sporting attire which they wear in order not to attract bystanders to stare or comment on their appearance or in worse cases attack them. This means that in summer, women are subjected to wearing long sleeved shirts and pants which are not suitable for the weather conditions as a measure of protecting themselves from unsolicited and unwanted attention. Additionally, due to the lack of adequate lighting specifically in the areas which lead to the foreshore and the exercise track, women are in danger of being attacked and this is a particular fear for women which practice sports on daily basis.

“Specifically for those who start off with sports very often are embarrassed to wear suitable attire which is made to make running easier. It is tight and it is open, and they put jerseys on, they are hot and they go running during the hottest hours, they give up sport because they think that their body will be the reason that they are attacked”

Roma women were identified as a group which is particularly vulnerable to violence. According to Roma organizations women in the Roma community do not even recognize acts of violence towards them. Furthermore, cases when Roma women are attacked in public spaces and the lack of assistance of bystanders were also shared. In particular women which collect plastic bottles are particularly exposed to violence in public spaces.

The lack of professionalism and sensitivity of police officers towards women who have experienced violence was also identified as a crucial problem when it comes to reporting of violence towards women. Two of the participants shared a story of women which have been stalked and where the police and institutions did not react appropriately. The lack of mechanism for protection of women who have been stalked was indicated as a serious issue, and the fact that the police are not gender sensitive was one of the key issues raised in the focus group. Most participants provided an example of how police officers do not act appropriate when it comes to gender based violence, including lack of sensitivity towards victims, lack of protection mechanisms and overall lack of understating the concept of gender based violence specifically in public spaces. Women are discouraged to report any forms of violence whether in public spaces or private spheres as they know that they will not be able to have the adequate protection.

“When the police are called for family violence, they charge them both for violation of public order when in fact he grabbed her head and smacked it against the table – and that is considered violation of public order”

“I think that first of all there should be change in the way police work as when I personally see police I absolutely does not feel safe”.

“We are opening an important moment the trust of police to protect us which actually does not protect us. The police look at Roma women as this is the way it should be and that

this is some sort of tradition in regards to their family violence” “Come on it won’t be a first or last time that he beat you, no big deal he is your husband, you will go to bed with him and you will make up” – Comment towards a victim of family violence on behalf of a police officer.

Participants also discussed the public face of the city and how this affect the way women move around. Women shared their personal protection mechanism and how they behave when feel threatened or were concerned about their safety. This included changing their usual walking route (taking the longer route) to their destination, pretending or actually speaking on the phone and letting someone walk in front of them (instead of behind them).

“When you are walking and you feel that someone is walking behind you, it has happened to me, I will stop, slow down, I will wait for him to pass me and then I will continue behind him. This is usually at night.”

Women also spoke about the fact that most women do not even take note of cat calling and street harassment as it occurs almost on daily basis and it is normalized in our society. This indicates the amount of verbal violence that women experience on daily basis in the Macedonian society.

Women wearing hijabs

This focus group included 7 members of the community that wear the hijab - which is the traditional head covering for Muslim women. The focus group was conducted at the office of The National Macedonian Youth Council on the 10th of May 2018.

The purpose of this focus group was to find out which forms of violence are experienced by women who wear hijabs and use the public Spaces of Skopje. Similarly to the other categories of women with whom focus groups were conducted, using the public transport was again raised as a space where women experience different forms of violence (touching, rubbing and staring). Namely, participants provided few cases where they have been either inappropriately touched or rubbed against while using public transport in Skopje. Participants felt that when it comes to perpetrators on the bus, it does not make a difference what the victim is wearing – whether the victim is wearing lighter “provocative” clothing or is wearing more “conservative” clothing. In their view there is no woman that has used the public transport which has not experienced some form of violence.

“I do not know a woman that I have met, which has used the bus, and that has not expressed that someone (a male) has not come too close, or has not touched her. I do

not think that it matters if you have make up on, no makeup, tight, loose (clothing), black, white. It does not make a difference. My personal belief is that it has nothing to do with you physical look. It can happen to you regardless of what you wear."

Moreover, participants felt that when it comes to violence on public transport, if you are in a situation where you require help from the public, it is probable that no one would come and assist the woman. Participants suggested that this is due to bystanders fearing being attacked or not wanting to become involved in other people's issues. Although participants felt that wearing a hijab caused more discrimination towards them in regards to accessing services such as hospitals and employment agency, in general they felt that overall they do not feel threatened to experience more violence because of wearing the hijab. However, they indicated that in their suburb of residence they feel most safe, even though at times men still call out or whistle at them. Considering the political context of the country and different protest which took place in Skopje in the last 3 years, women suggested that when nationalist groups protest women tend to stay away from the protest. Part of the group have experienced verbal violence due to wearing the hijab which they connect to the inter – ethnic tension in North Macedonia's society. Most of the participants felt that verbal abuse directed at them is because people think that they are Albanian and there is generally lack of inter – ethnic tolerance.

I was a victim of nationalism, with one of my Macedonian friends. We were walk around it was 2-3pm, literally on the city square and some kids walked past and they said to me – "discussing siptar go back where you came from". "Where did I come from? – "Saudi Arabia". So that is that. We are not safe when there are political tensions in the country".

When it comes to the place of residence most participants agreed that wearing the hijab provides respect within their community, especially among the male population. An example of this is when on the bus, boys or men tend to stand up to give the seat to a girl or a woman wearing a hijab. Furthermore, women indicated that boys/men behave differently towards women within their community which do not wear the hijab.

For example, I am walking with my friend and she does not wear a hijab and someone will comment something and I feel stupid. I feel like I am protected because I am wearing the hijab and she isn't so let's make a comment to her. They give themselves the right to.

However, one of the girls still felt that this is not the case and that within their community men still comment regardless if the girl/woman is wearing the hijab.

"I am disappointed. I wear the hijab for a reason, one of the reasons is to protect myself from such situations but I am not protected because for example I will go out with one of the girls that wear hijab and that has put make up on and from the side everyone comments. This has happened many times. Personally, I am disappointed because I think the guys who comment know that I wear the hijab to protect myself from comments but the situation is not like that."

In regards to what measures should be taken to make public spaces in Skopje more safe participants felt that the police does not do anything to increase the protection. Training of police was also suggested so they can become more sensitive towards victims. Additionally, participants felt that verbal violence such as commenting and wolf whistling is normalized in our society and this needs to be changed through awareness raising media campaigns. Education in school was also pointed out as a manner of educating children about how to behave as well as violence and family violence.

“This should go through the media for example. That way we can still touch every home. First to educate parents, since we assume that violence comes from men and parents are the ones raising boys. To educate them how to behave towards girls and women.”

As for public transport the group felt that there needs to be training of bus drivers and more buses since many of the bus lines are overcrowded which increases the chances sexual and physical violence towards women.

Roma women – diverse group

The focus group with Roma women took place on May 11, 2018 at the Civil Society Organization Umbrella in the municipality of Shuto Orizari. The group was diverse as it consisted of 9 women, some which were part of CSO's while some were part of “Ranka Milanovic” a public institution for care, education and education of children and youth, however currently used for accommodating homeless Roma people displaced from their previous settlement near the Skopje Fortress. The length of the focus group was 1 hour and 14 minutes. The purpose of the focus group was to identify situations and experiences of gender based violence towards Roma women in public spaces, perception of safety for Roma women and what measures they take to protect themselves. Having in mind that Roma women are one of the most marginalized groups of women in society and that that income generating activities include low paid and unregulated work places (gray economy) such as cleaning and collecting plastic bottles, it can be observed that Roma women often face gender-based violence and sexual harassment at work due to the lack of formal protection and higher risk of violence and harassment.

A number of situations were shared by women where they felt threatened and felt fearful about their safety. An experience shared by participants was about two men who tried to pressure her into cleaning the toilet in a coffee shop where the woman worked as a cleaner, and she believed that they tried to lure her into the toilet with the purpose of sexually abusing her. As a measure of protection the woman called the coffee owner who assisted her.

"I thought they would (the men) come inside the toilet with me and who knows what they will do to me, I got frightened, I do not know how I managed to... I got out right away, and I called the owner, the owner came and reacted... If he did not come, and I did not have a slight chance to go out, to call him, I do not know what might have happened to me inside."

Another woman, who collects plastic bottles and re-sells them for money, thought the city (from waste), shared her experience about a man who waited on the bridge which she had to cross on the way to her place of settlement. As the plastic bottles are transported in a cart the woman feared that she will be attacked by the man on the bridge who stood there for a prolonged period of time. There were no other persons in her close proximity and she feared that she will be attacked, killed, raped and thrown in the river.

"I will throw the cart, I will save my life or I will plunge into the river from fear..."

Women who collect plastic bottles frequently experience sexual harassment on the streets of Skopje. Men usually approach women and ask for sexual favors in return for money, regardless of the fact that waste collectors are not sex workers. On one occasion one of the participants was collecting plastic together with her niece and they were followed by a man who offered her money to go with him.

"I stopped to buy food and he started speaking to me, showing me money, asking if I can go with him, he will give me money".

A similar situation was shared by another woman:

"I am collecting plastic bottles from garbage the garbage bins ... there was a man there ... he took out (his penis) ... and he comes and starts asking me, how much money I want, he offers me money to go with him". I did not go with him... if you wanted to go for money there is a place for that, you won't be going through garbage bins to earn your bread and bring food to your kids".

Roma women generally identify certain neighborhoods or places as less safe than others. - Women have identified the neighborhoods of Chair and Suto Orizari as the least safe neighborhoods, as well as a John Kennedy – one of the main and most frequent streets of the Municipality of Chair. Another "hot spot" identified by participants is the under bridge passage that separates the settlements of Avtokomanda and Aerodrom – this spot was identified as unsafe, poorly lit, with no pedestrian crossing and often in the presence of people who are using this spot to urinate. Additionally, their perception is that under this bridge someone can easily hide and it is unsafe since it must be passed to get to the settlement of Avtokomanda.

A number of participants of this focus group stated that they feel safer in their own neighborhoods since they are familiar with their neighbors and their surroundings, and if they run into trouble someone will assist them. In comparison to other neighborhoods women felt that in their own neighborhoods they can be whistled at, cat called and

teased but nothing serious can happened to them but if this occurred in an unfamiliar neighborhood women expressed that they would try to get away as soon as possible.

“I feel safe in my neighborhood, because whatever happens, you know that all your neighbors and all of your relatives are close and they will come to your help, whatever the situation”.

In order to protect themselves, Roma women often avoid wearing certain type of clothes or improvise if they feel threatened – This includes pretending to speak on the mobile phone when they are fearful, when they think that they are being followed and entering a random property (usually a house with a yard) in order to lose someone who may be following them.

“What can I do, I went inside an entrance, I didn't even know whose house it is, but I went inside as if I live there, just to lose the guy.

Another participant indicated that she wears long clothing to cover herself and not to draw attention, as she believed that the clothes will protect her from provoking others. This was something that many of the women believed and that if you are wearing short clothing you are more likely to provoke or attract men.

Within this group the focus was also on the public transportation and women suggested that very often they experience sexual harassment and inappropriate touching even if the bus is reasonably empty. Leaving the bus at the first available bus station is one of the measures which Roma women take to protect themselves on the public transport.

Roma women believe that they are not sufficiently protected by the police - They shared that they often find that calling the police is useless, because very often there were situations when the police came, made a record, but never followed up and seldom there were resolution of their cases.

Homeless Roma women

This focus group was conducted on May 16, 2018 at the premises of Ranka Milanovic a public institution for care, learning and education of children and youth, where Roma families displaced from their previous settlement near the Skopje Fortress were temporary accommodated here. The length of the focus group was 1 hour and 30 minutes. The purpose of the focus group was to identify situations and experiences of gender based violence towards Roma women in public spaces, perception of safety for Roma women and what measures they take to protect themselves. The group consisted of 6 women who collect plastic waste throughout garbage dumps and resell it in order to make income to survive (one kilogram of plastic is sold for 8 denars/0.1euro).

An overall observation is that when these women are moving throughout the city to collect plastic waste, they are constantly exposed to sexual harassment, physical violence and psychological terror from by passers. The anonymous aggressor is usually a man or a boy, and according to the participants' statements, sometimes he is a child, which further illustrates the position of powerlessness of these women.

Participants described their experiences including aggressive behavior directed at them, people swearing and cursing at them and threats of sexual violence towards them.

"When we go through the garbage if a child is there, he will offend you, he will hit you with something, he will come to your cart and push you, and our children are also beaten."

Most women indicated that they fear going out to collect plastic alone and usually are accompanied either by their partners, their children or even by the children of their relatives. If they are with their children they either observe their children being attacked or in order to protect their children can be victims of violence themselves. Accounts of violence were shared including instances of verbal abuse such as swearing, cursing and objects being thrown at them while trying to collect plastic bottles. Exposed to the unprovoked anger of the anonymous by passers, women either ignore the person abusing them or mirror their behavior and curse or swear at them also.

The sexual harassments experienced by these women are not at all subtle but rather is violently direct and open. An example is about how men follow them around and openly ask them for sexual favors. Some of the women shared experiences when unknown men try to lure them to do sexual favors with the reason that they will give them clothing.

"Do you want 100 denars? I will give you 100 denars, come with me..." "I will give you 100 denars, come with me to do my business"

The Central City Park which is full of activity during the summer months is particularly dark and unlit large area. Situated within the park are a number of nightclubs and the foreshore/bridge near these nightclubs was identified as spot where women are often harassed by groups of men or adolescents that are gathering in a groups under the bridge near the nightclubs. This route is part of the trip that these women have to go through every day, and is most dangerous at night when they come back with the plastic they have collected during their day trips. Describing what might happen there, one of the participants said:

"I say if they get you alone on that street, they might rape you, they will kill you and throw your body away"

Discussing the treatment of police towards women when they reported incidents which they have experienced suggests that women do not feel comfortable reporting their cases to police. One reason for this is the fear of repercussion on behalf of the attacker if they are reprimanded by police. Since women are frequently on the streets of Skopje,

they fear that they may more violently attacked if they dare to report their experiences. Although it was not explicitly highlighted, from the discussion we can conclude that in the best case scenario the police are only passive observers to the violence that these women experience. Additionally, these women are traumatized by the forceful eviction from their settlement under the Fortress - when their improvised housing was torn down with the help of the special tactical police, leading to further distrust in police.

Although most of the aggressors that attack or harass informal plastic collectors are male, participants also shared experiences where women have verbally harassed them while collecting plastic bottles. In particular women spoke about how other women also curse and swear at them, commenting on the fact that they have many children and as a result they have to pick through rubbish to feed them.

When it came to sharing cases of experiencing different forms of violence within their own communities, participants were more reserved to speak about this. However, it can be noted that violence is considered somewhat of a normal occurrence within their own community and even phenomenon that is readily accepted. Additionally, it is almost as though love and affection does not exist if jealousy or physical violence is not demonstrated between partners. Women spoke the fact that – the cursing, swearing and beating from their partners is something that is accepted and they just take it.

“Swearing, cursing, beating, you will take it”...

“For example, my husband died, I put up with him for 25 years because of the kids, the drinking and fighting and beating.”

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: WOMEN'S LIVED EXPERIENCES

Central to the primary data collected we can also add recollection of women's stories, told in their own words. As mentioned in the methodological principals, our approach allows for women's knowledge to be valued, and treats women and girls as key sources of information by encouraging them to express their thoughts, emotions, and experiences. Using open-ended questions in all questionnaires used in the study, we collected over 300 stories of women's lived experiences with gender-based violence.

Experiences using public spaces for sports and recreation

One of the most frequent ways in which women reported using public spaces for leisure was for sport related activities. The bank of the river Vardar and the largest public park in Skopje were identified as both most frequently used and considered dangerous as potential places in which a woman can be attacked.

"I've had numerous experiences of older men (45 to 50+ years old) masturbating at me while I was riding my bike by the river".

An additional recurring thread in the stories we collected from women who use public spaces for sports and recreation, and indeed, from women in all the surveys and focus groups we conducted, was that they have identified repeat offenders. This confirms findings from similar studies in other countries, as well as the general wisdom that the vast majority of acts of sexual violence are perpetrated by a small number of repeat offenders.

"It's a regular occurrence in the city park. Whether out for a walk, or on my bike, it doesn't matter. I'm going to be vulgar and say that there's someone jerking off behind every bush. Up until a few years ago I didn't even notice them, but now that I go to the park every day, I see them literally every day, they just change spots. And I already know their faces too."

When it comes to the city park, which was identified as a place where a women is highly likely to experience some sort of sexual harassment or assault, what stood out that the experiences all happened during the day and that women have no experiences to share of something happening at night because they don't dare enter the park after dark.

"It's well known that the city park is full of creeps who seemingly passively attack women. Unfortunately, I have more than one such experience. The first time, I was on a bench sitting and chatting with a friend, when a guy not older than 40 sat on the bench next to

ours, unzipped his pants and started touching himself while looking at us. This happened during the day, at around 6 pm. The next time was by the lake, when a man of a similar age as the one I mentioned flashed me and another girl, completely taking off his clothes. The third and last time (for now), in the same part of the park, around the lake, there was a man hiding behind a tree and masturbating while I was trying to enjoy the day with a group of my girlfriends. It's important to note that these things all happened during the day. I don't even want to imagine what could happen at night!"

Experience using public transport

One of the most vulnerable public spaces for women identified both in this and in the original study are buses – public transport which is unavoidable for the majority of women. They are especially vulnerable here due to the fact that they are in an enclosed space from which there is no immediate way out, as well as the fact that they are often prevented from getting off because they are on their way to work and can't afford to be late.

Fear of using public transport

"Public transport is a place where perpetrators have the opportunity to sexually attack women. Starting, coming up from behind and rubbing up against me, are experiences I will never forget from my high school days, when I took the bus to go to school. These experiences have deterred me from using public transport."

"You have to consider that us women cannot take the bus in peace. Men will try to get our attention; they'll sit next to us or in front of us when there's more than enough room. We need a change of culture. I've had numerous experiences where someone gets off the bus after me and follows, or starts talking to me, or comes up to me when it's crowded and won't take no for an answer. As a young woman, I am afraid to use public transport."

Crowded buses as prime conditions for assault

The most common circumstances in which women experiences some form sexual harassment or assault are overcrowded buses, when men can creep up behind them unnoticed and use the crowded space to rub up against women who have no way of getting out.

"Of course I've had these experiences, it's mostly when it's crowded. My experience was with a man who kept creeping up behind me, and at first I thought it was the movement of the bus, the abrupt breaking and the crowd of people, but when it became very uncomfortable, I turned around and saw that he was literally rubbing his erect penis on my buttocks. It was a horrid experience..."

Vulnerability of underage girls

One of the most disturbing findings that came up in the public transport survey was how vulnerable underage girls are to these attacks.

“When I was in high-school, I was on the bus on my way to school when a man, probably in his 50s, groped me and was rubbing up against me”

Women shared their experiences from when they were much younger and are still dealing with the associated feelings of shame for what happened, and even guilt that they did not react to the incidents.

“I’ve been harassed many times, but there’s one incident that I will never forget. It will remain imprinted deep in my psyche. I was very young, around 6th or 7th grade. I was on the bus on which there was quite a crowd. An older man, around 55-60 years old was standing behind me the entire time. At first that seemed normal to me because the bus was full. But he kept coming closer and closer to me. Because I was a 12-13 year old girl, I couldn’t do anything; I was ashamed and afraid and couldn’t say a word. The only thing I could do was to try to pull away from him. The bus was becoming less and less crowded, and I was happy because I thought that now he would have to step back and I would no longer have to be in this shameful position. But even though there was plenty of space, he kept coming up behind me. I was startled and afraid, I didn’t know what to do, I was afraid to say anything and ask for help. When I felt that the man was so close to me that for a moment I could feel his front part of the body against me (I am too ashamed to say the exact word for it, because I am too ashamed, but you know what I am talking about), I immediately moved away, I stood by the door and the next station was close by, luckily, so I got off. I never told anyone about this until today, but I sometimes remember it when I’m on the bus and the fear is back. But, from this perspective, I would not be quiet about this; I would react and would not allow myself to feel shame. Girls and women should stop being afraid of other people’s inadequate behavior and should be able to speak up and ask for protection, instead of being afraid.”

“I was on the No. 2 bus, it was very crowded and at one moment an elderly man who was standing behind me came up even closer and started rubbing his penis against me and made loud comments in a larger group – I didn’t understand because it was Albanian, but by the way they were looking at me and laughing, I could tell they knew even if they couldn’t quite see the details. I was 14 years old and with my aunt and my 11 year old sister. They were a big group so I was afraid to react. I tried to move away but he kept coming up behind me. I felt very uncomfortable, but luckily we made it to our station very soon and we got off... I was so ashamed and afraid that I didn’t even tell my aunt...”

Reactions to incidences

"During the summer vacation after the first year of high school, while sitting on the upper floor of a No. 22 bus, the man who was sitting behind me was much older than me and tried to stretch his hand or penis (I failed to define what exactly it was) between the seats to do something to me and at the moment I reacted quickly shouted "How dare you?!?! You better not try that again". The most tragic part was that he started yelling at me:" Jesus, you are always complaining! I wish I had more of a reaction and allowed the situation to happen without doing anything more. I got off the bus right after that, scared and filled with anger."

"During the day I was on bus no 41, going to the city center. The bus did not have many passengers, the seat next to me was empty and at one point a stranger, about the age of 45, politely asked me to sit on the empty seat next to me. He sat down, and 10 minutes later he started to move his hand over the seat next to me. I thought, I'm imagining things, but at one point he put his hand on my thigh, in my lap and he looked at me. I turned to him and I yelled, but there was no reaction from him, as if nothing had happened."

"This happened a few years ago. I was on my way to practice at 7 am and there was a big crowd in the bus, so I was forced to stand on the lower deck like many of the other passengers. It was so crowded that I couldn't move. At one point, a man (whose face I couldn't really see because I was literally stuck) started to rub his genitals against me. At first I tried to move away, I didn't know what the right response is. As I kept moving away, he kept coming at me. I felt shame and fear and couldn't react (which I now regret). At one moment I realized that enough is enough and that if he doesn't get off on the next station, I'll use the fact that the bus is becoming emptier and I'll yell at him to stop. When the doors opened, many of the passengers left, and I assume he did too. Anyway, after that incident I felt very horrible and I felt bad. I only told my friends at school. I didn't tell my parents because I was ashamed and because I didn't want to upset them. I decided to forget it happened. Today, after all this time, the weird feeling is not as intense, but the discomfort is there every time I remember this event."

Drivers of buses as perpetrators or silent bystanders instead of protectors

"I had no change for the bus and the driver was very upset about it. He started yelling a swearing at me. No one dared interfere and I was very ashamed and upset in front of the full bus. I call JSP [the public transport company] and reported him, but never got a response. I reported him electronically, using the webpage for complaints."

"About 10 years ago, I was on the no. 12 bus and was harassed, which became even worse when the driver did not respond to my cries for help. It was fall, sometime around

6 pm, so it was already dark outside [...] after the station by the post office; it was just me and a guy on the bus. Then after the next stop, I got up so the driver would see that I need to get off soon. All of a sudden I felt that someone was standing right next to me. It was the guy, the only other person on the bus, standing beside me, pants down and masturbating... the driver was just looking at me and as I ran up to him to yell for him to stop the bus, he didn't do or say anything. He only stopped at the regular bus stop and then turned to me and asked why I am yelling!!! In the meantime, the guy ran out of the bus and ran away. My colleague who was meeting me at the bus stop also became upset and talked to the driver, she even wanted to go after the guy, but the bus driver, he said nothing. Horrible!”

Bystander interventions

“Yes, I've unfortunately had many bad experiences with harassment in public transport. It was a long time ago, but I remember it like it was yesterday. I was 16 years old and on the bus, and an older man was sitting next to me and started sliding his hand toward me, i.e., tried to slide it underneath my jacket...it was sickening.. there were around 100 people around us on the bus, I don't even know how he dared do that.. After I and a few of the other passengers reacted, the man had no shame and just acted like nothing had happened and just got off on the next stop.

RECOMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study a set of recommendations have been created in order to systematically prevent, combat and address gender based violence of women in public spaces. The purposes of the recommendations are to comprehensively cover the existing gaps in terms of legislative and institutional protection taking into account all relevant stakeholders. As a primary and key recommendation, the forming of the Commission for the protection of discrimination should be a priority since this mechanism is currently nonexistent and leaving victims of discrimination without any protection.

Following are legislative and institutional recommendations that should be implemented both locally and nationally.

1. Legislative changes

Since the publication of the first Scoping Study in 2012, there have been some legislative changes, however what remains concerning is the lack of implementation of all the relevant legislation. Positive developments such as the ratification of the Istanbul Convention as well as the passing of a new Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination can be noted. Additionally, a draft Law on the prevention and protection of violence of women and family violence was also prepared. It is also of a significant importance that the law comprehensively addresses violence against women in public spaces. Furthermore, the new law for prevention and protection of discrimination does not explicitly include gender based violence as a form of discrimination. It should be noted that although some recommendation are new and relevant to the current context, reoccurring recommendations from the scoping study from 2012 are also integrated as during the last 7 years the recommendations have not been fully implemented by stakeholders.

Recommendations:

- Treat different forms of discrimination equally – This means that the institutions should provide equal treatment for person experience the different (all) forms of discrimination including in legislation, fines/penalties and access to institutional protection.

- Law on the prevention and protection of violence of women and family violence should comprehensively addresses sexual harassment and all forms of violence against women in public spaces.
- Align the national legislation with the provisions and standards of the Istanbul Convention, particularly regarding acts of different forms of sexual violence.
- Provide explicit definition of economic violence as a form of violence in the national legislation.
- Include gender based verbal violence as misdemeanor in relevant legislation.
- Amend the Criminal Code either by introducing psychological violence as a crime or supplementing the existing crime: Threatening the safety, where serious impairment of person's psychological integrity through coercion or threats can be sanctioned.
- Supplement the criminal code either by a new crime: Stalking, or by supplementing the existing provisions on the crime: Threatening the safety.
- Although included in the Labor Relations Law, introducing provisions in the Criminal Code to cover all cases of sexual harassment.
- Include public safety issues in laws and plans that determinate urban development, such as urban planning, transport and public lighting.

2. Political and institutional commitment

To begin with, there is an urgent need for allocation of financial, human and technical resources in preventing all forms of violence against women. Adopting a new Law on prevention and protection of violence of women and family violence and recognizing all forms of gender based violence (not only domestic violence) is a crucial component when addressing violence against women. Implementation of the Strategy for Gender Equality (2013-2020) and National Action Plan for Implementation of the strategy specifically the measures and activities concerning GBV are crucial.

Recommendations:

- Support and fund specialist, CSO's run services for women survivors of violence, specifically for survivors of rape and sexual violence. Ensure that these services (such as rape crises centers or sexual violence referral centers) are adequate, accessible and fulfill minimum set standards. Adjust the system for protection from VAW to reflect Internationally agreed standards containing the minimum prescribed services as per the Istanbul Convention to include: Minimum 1 national SOS helpline providing 24/7 support in the languages in use, Minimum 1 rape crisis center per 200.000 women, Minimum 1 center for victims of sexual violence per 400.000 women and

Minimum 1 counseling centers (early intervention, psychological counseling, free legal aid) per 50.000 women.

- Develop specific programs that deal with violence against women separate from gender equality plans and strategies. Ensure these programs provide specific solutions pertaining to marginalized women.
- Extend the group of beneficiaries to include women who are victims of gender based violence (not only domestic violence) and to provide necessary support to them, including to rape victims.
- Civil Society Organizations can be contracted in providing services for victims of gender based violence including specialized services. Where the State or Local Government does not have the capacities to maintain services for victims of gender based violence organizations which have expertise in this area should be contracted by the State/local government.
- Develop sound system for monitoring and evaluation with clearly set out goals, actions and most importantly, funding of all levels and in all institutions. For example, The State Statistical Office can conduct regular surveys on the perception of public safety, which can give indication about the issue and guide further action for improvements.
- Set up a monitoring system at two levels in the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. At the first level, monitoring the status and number of cases of different vulnerable groups in order to see the trends, conduct analysis and inform policy decisions, and on the second level develop clear indications for monitoring the quality of services provided in the Centers.
- Promote and integrated approach with all relevant stakeholders taking action and responsibilities, as well as facing consequences when failing to comply.

3. Institutional and internal systems capacity development

Although coordinated and systemic approach is necessary to protect victims of GBV, the study indicates that there is a lack of knowledge and capacities on behalf of the relevant institutions whose role is to protect women from GBV. In fact, the study shows that institutions such as the Ministry of Interior (police) and healthcare facilities (hospitals) do not have appropriate trained staff to work with women that have experienced GBV. Additionally, not only there is limited institutional capacity but furthermore at times violence is (re)committed within institutions (healthcare workers, police officers, court system).

(a) Police

Typically, the police are the first point of institutional contact for women that have experienced GBV; therefore it is critical that police officers are well trained and equipped with the knowledge to appropriately handle cases of GBV. However, women expressed that due to different negative experiences with police officers, there is a lack of trust towards police when it comes to reporting their experiences. Lack of sensitivity on behalf of police officers was one of the key issues mentioned within the different focus groups including that police officer often question the behavior of women such as what women were wearing as a factor which contributed towards the violence. This is a serious restraint which prevents women to access institutional support and to be adequately protected following their experience with GBV. Furthermore, without gender sensitive training of the police, the approach towards GBV of police officers will continue and women will be mistreated when reporting their experiences of GBV. Additionally, it is essential that police officers understand the position/vulnerability of women and how crimes differently affect women and men.

Recommendations:

- Include gender as a subject/module or incorporate it within human rights lectures at the Police Academy.
- Train all police teams to deal with cases of gender based violence and provide adequate support in the police stations – specifically when it comes to police officers which first come into contact with victims (Unit for intervention, Unit Alfi)
- Form GBV teams – special teams which will be specifically responsible for working with victims of GBV that have specific forms of violence (sexual violence, stalking).
- Improve the police's inter-institutional cooperation and coordination in dealing with cases of gender based violence by developing and abiding by agreed procedures for cooperation (for example with the Health Sector, Centers for Social Protection and Courts).
- Develop internal regulations for dealing with cases of gender based violence reported by Internal Control of the Police to monitor and sanction non-compliance with the regulations for respecting gender equality and especially women's victimization.
- Develop external control to monitor implementation of gender responsive polices in the police that refer to their personnel as well as their work with women.

b) Local government and Public enterprises

Urban planning and the outside look of a surrounding is a significant aspect which impacts how women perceive their safety. The physical surrounding of the city and the state of footpaths, lighting, parks and building sites influence how women move throughout the city – ranging from avoiding certain areas, taking longer routes or completely staying away from places which women deem unsafe.

In Skopje there are a total of 10 municipalities and The City of Skopje as an additional unit of self-government. It is the responsibility of these local governments to ensure that within their municipalities' women feel safe to freely move around. As part of the local government there are public enterprises responsible for maintaining the urban spaces including lighting, green areas and parks. The Safety audits conducted as part of the research suggested that the urban areas are not often accessible for women and women have different experiences when using the public spaces than those of men.

Additionally, it is important to mention another very important segment of using the public spaces for women in Skopje and that is the **public transport**. The public transport was pointed as one of the spaces where women frequently feel unsafe or have experienced some form of violence or harassment. Furthermore, while experiencing violence on buses women reported that many times they feel helpless when there is violence as bystanders usually do not help them and turn a blind eye to the incidents.

Recommendations:

- Improve the inter-institutional cooperation between the public enterprises and the municipalities in order to alleviate and resolve public safety issues
- Since all municipalities have established committees for equal opportunities of men and women, they should work within their mandate to review all work plans of the municipality and its enterprises in order to incorporate the principle of gender equality, including the elimination of gender based violence against women in public spaces, as well as monitor their implementation.
- The annual work plans (their main activities) of the public communal enterprises should be presented and discussed with the public. This is very important since women have very specific requirements in relation to the urban environment.
- Amend the practice of presenting detailed municipal urban plans in an overly mechanical manner and ensure the discussion if not very technical in order to leave space for citizens, including women, to place their concerns, and ensure that sufficient time is allocated for discussion and presenting urban plans.

- If The City of Skopje plans to adopt a new Strategy for Gender Equality, it is necessary that it incorporates aspects of the competences of the City in the communal sphere (transport, maintenance of the streets, lighting, maintenance of the parks and green areas, hygiene, etc), which, as our study shows, have a direct impact on the perception of violence in public spaces by women. The City can recommend to the public enterprises under its umbrella to include the gender aspect when preparing annual programs, which the Commission for Equal Opportunities will review as well.
- Improve the formats for accessing the impact of the actions funded by the City on both genders.
- The City of Skopje can adopt and institutionalize safety audit walks as an innovative tool for practicing inclusive and democratic participation in decision making. Safety audit walks can enable women, persons with disabilities and other stakeholders to assess the risks of poor urbanization and to voice their visions for safer and need-tailored public spaces.
- The city of Skopje should enable free 24-hour telephone helpline for women who have experienced sexual harassment or violence (including in public spaces). The helpline should provide counselling, emotional support, information and referrals.
- Based on police records data, the local authorities should map the “hot spots” of the city and devise strategies to elevate the security.

Public Transport – Buses

- The Public Transport Company should collaborate with research organizations in order to obtain relevant information about the status of the safety of their passengers with the focus on women.
- The Public Transport Company should include women’s needs in the planning process. This can be done through consultations with local Civil Society Organizations, organizing focus groups of women, as well as surveys targeting women; or organizing safety audits (assessing the safety of bus stops, roads leading to bus stops, pedestrian crossings, etc).
- Partnerships with women’s CSO’s. These types of initiatives can provide them with the insight of how women perceive public transport and if there are specific groups that need additional support and ultimately lead to new services offered by the Transport Company.
- Since fights between youth groups are identified as a major obstacle for safety , working with the police, especially local prevention councils, to prevent fights in and around buses as well as to identify and sanction culprits is crucial.

- Adopting a more “holistic” approach to travel safety to include concerns not only for safety in buses, but also on bus stops and around them. This is quite a challenging approach since it includes cooperation and coordination with other relevant local actors (municipalities, city of Skopje, other public enterprises); however, if set as a priority, it can also impact the general public safety.
- Public Awareness Campaigns, including ads inside the buses and on bus stop inspired by the “if you see something say something”, which would encourage bystanders to react when they witness improper behavior.
- Ticket controllers (which are currently only males) should be divided into mixed teams of women and men.
- Training bus drivers to be gender sensitive and developing a plan (procedures) of what steps should be taken if women feel threatened or attacked on the bus.
- Displaying bus drivers identity information within the bus including his first name and a number which she/he can be identified by.
- Providing regular police patrolling in buses
- Buses should be adapted to be used by women with strollers and people with disabilities.
- The Public Transport Company in collaboration with relevant institution should asses the gender differences in mobility patterns. The policy makers should evaluate and adjust the public transport pricing policy if for example the assessment shows that women more often use public transport and usually do several multi-stop trips daily (e.g. for running errands or escorting children to school).

c) Schools

The education system is one of the crucial elements to systematically address gender based violence and discrimination in society starting at a very early age.

- Teachers and educational staff should be trained in using gender responsive pedagogics.
- Introducing mandatory gender sensitive education which will educate children from the youngest age (primary school) about gender based violence and it will raise awareness among peers about GBV and what behavior is considered as violence. Gender sensitive education should continue in high schools/higher education.
- Improving infrastructure in schools in order to promote safe environment including gendered outside/play areas appropriate for both girls and boys

d) Health

In our previous study the health sector was identified as one of the weakest links when it comes to protection and support of victims. Information obtained in focus groups with marginalized and minority women have suggested that women accessing health services especially hospital health services prior, during and following child birth are experiencing high volumes of discrimination and violence. Although further research is necessary to establish the exact level of violence and discrimination that women face within the health sector – particularly services connected to child birth (maternity wards), it is indicative that many cases of discrimination and violence towards women exist.

- Medical staff (doctors/nurses/wardens) that work in maternity wards should undertake annual training/retraining in regards to discrimination and GBV in hospital settings
- Respectful Maternal Care as a concept should be incorporated into training and standards for healthcare providers
- Ministry of Health should establish a hotline for complaints with appropriate trained staff that will approach complaints of maternal violence with sensitivity.
- Civil Society Organizations
- Jointly with the local governments, Civil Society Organizations should organize awareness raising campaigns and activities such as safety audit walks to raise awareness of the how women move/perceive the public areas in their municipalities.
- Civil Society organizations jointly with local municipalities and schools to work with students to raise awareness about gender based violence in public spaces and in schools.
- Developing comprehensive services (government supported) for victims of violence, including free legal aid as well as mandatory services (such as a anger management) for perpetrators of violence

Donor Agencies

- Donors should reconsider channeling funds through the government (especially EU/ IPA funding), and funds should be increased for services for victims of gender based violence.
- Donors should allocate funds for prevention and measures of different forms of Gender Based Violence including violence towards women in public spaces and stalking.

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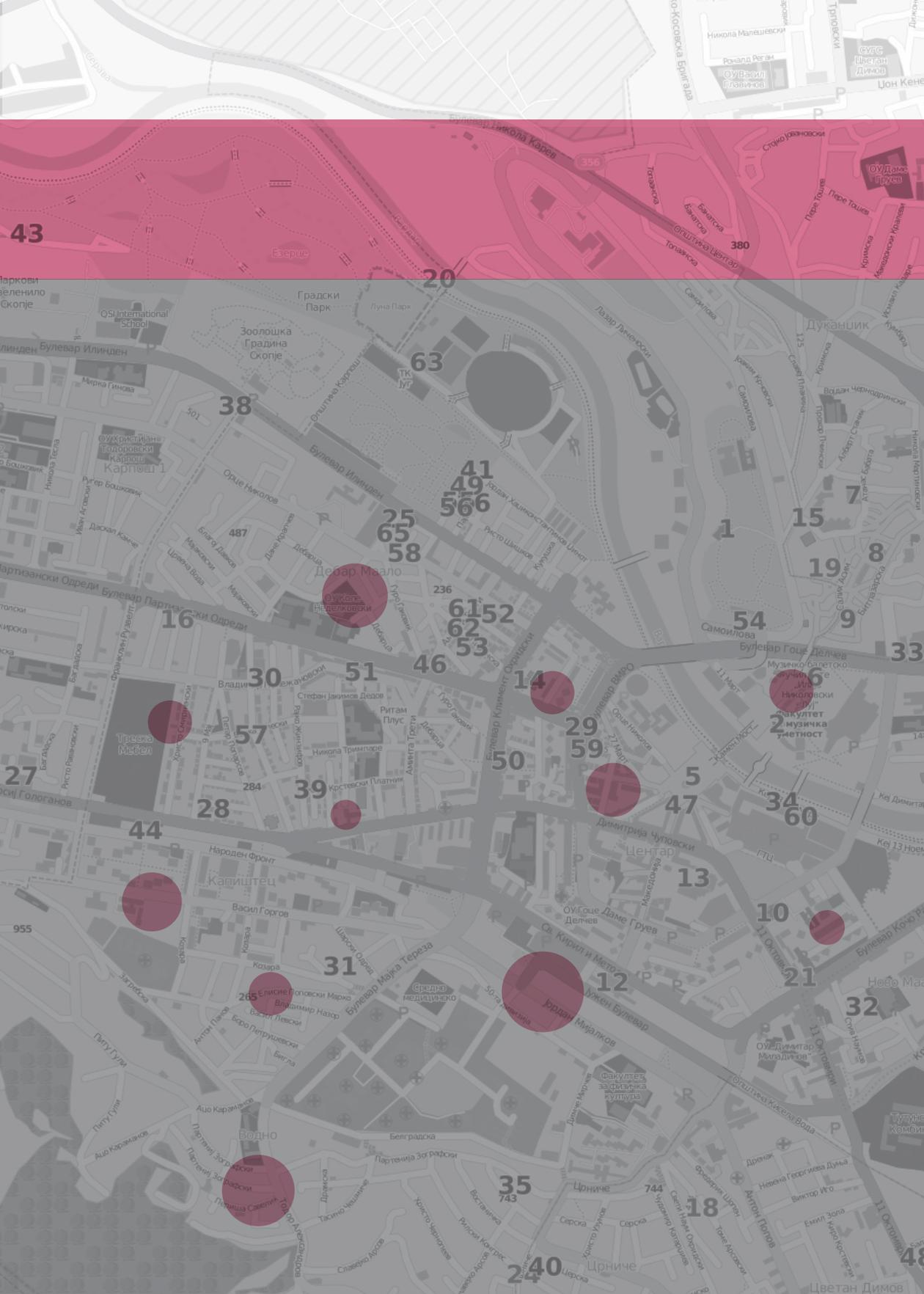
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