

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

WOMEN'S STUDY

THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH
MACEDONIA 2020/2021

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December, 2020

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FOREWORD

Gender equality is, undoubtedly, an essential factor in the development of a society. It improves productivity and economic growth, enhances the well-being of all societal groups and thus improves the development of a society and future generations, as well as the efficiency of institutions. In short, the more equal the conditions for the different genders are, the better the country is off.

For these reasons, in 2020 the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in North Macedonia decided to develop and conduct a women's study, in order to measure, describe and explain the status of the female population vis-a-vis society, family, values, education, employment, politics, security and healthcare.

The study was developed based on our experiences of conducting comprehensive youth studies which in 2014 and 2019, that were well-received in the country and across the region and served as the basis for drafting and developing policies and projects in the past years.

The data obtained in the research cannot not be presented in its entirety in this publication but will be available upon demand. However, this study, provides a comprehensive overview and analysis of the most relevant data. The women's study is an interdisciplinary study with the primary objective to lay the foundations of further interpretation and analysis. We also sincerely hope that in the coming years, data obtained from the research will be used for policy development and different purposes benefiting the enhancement of gender equality in Macedonian society, as well as for scientific use and drafting projects.

According to existing research, women in the Republic of North Macedonia (at the cognitive level) do aspire towards gender equality. It is notable that all of them perceive the Macedonian society as patriarchal, where tradition is an important and commonly accepted value, but every woman (regardless of her demographic background) is trying in her own ways to fight for her rights and equality in her (newly established) family and the surrounding.

Unfortunately, our results once again confirm that women largely accept the patriarchal gender division of roles in Macedonian society. They predominantly chose to spend most of their free time with the family,

perform most of the household chores and consider such division fair and just. The financial status of women is linked to their position in the home, and a woman's equality is linked to her husband/partner.

The research revealed that the unfavourable position, compared to men, as well as the gender-based discrimination on the labour market are not recognized by women. Most women earn less than their partners and the men in the same positions. Often the professional competence of women is measured lower merely because of their gender, not their performance. As a result, women are often less supported by managers unlike their male colleagues discharging the same duties, which manifests and perpetuates the "glass ceiling" phenomenon, discouraging women to assert themselves.

Although women largely exercise their right to vote, their political participation is at a low level and they are generally disinterested, not informed and not familiar with politics and "women's issues and equality".

The study targets a series of challenges that all stakeholders need to confront, in order to improve the individual and societal well-being: policymakers, decision makers, as well as all citizens, men and women, in our society.

Lastly, our gratitude goes to the research team that, even under the conditions of a pandemic, carried out the research professionally, diligently and in great detail. The team successfully faced the challenge of conducting a field research of a nationally representative sample of 1066 respondents during the pandemic, with a large questionnaire, which required time, much focus and perseverance from the respondents.

Friedrich Ebert Foundation will promote the results of this study also in further activities and looks to conduct similar studies across the region of Southeast Europe. This pilot project from FES Skopje provides crucial best practices.

Nita Starova, Program Coordinator of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Skopje & member of the research team

Eva Ellereit, Resident Representative of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Skopje

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METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

2.1. RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

This study combines quantitative and qualitative research methods and techniques, along with primary and secondary data analysis.

More specifically, the following research techniques were used for data collection:

- Literature review;
- Documentation analysis;
- Face-to-face CAPI survey, using a nationally representative sample;
- Semi structured e-interviews.

The CAPI (Computer-assisted personal interview) survey - questionnaire is composed of the following thematic sections:

- DEMOGRAPHIC DATA
- VALUES, TRUST, AND RELIGION
- FAMILY AND SOCIAL LIFE
- EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT
- POLITICS AND PARTICIPATION
- SAFETY AND SECURITY
- WOMEN'S HEALTH

The semi-structured interviews consist of 10 open-ended questions (with sub-questions) that align with the thematic sections in the CAPI survey questionnaire, including a section on demographic data.

2.2. RESEARCH SAMPLE DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

The CAPI survey research uses a stratified-quota sample designed based on officially published data on population estimates¹ from the website of the State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia.

The target population encompasses women aged 18 to 67, who live in the Republic of North Macedonia. The study first segmented/stratified the female population into mutually exclusive subgroups (strata) according to the statistical region (of which there are eight in the country), municipality, and age group. The sample design determined the selection of cases in each segment/stratum based on a specific ratio of quotas according to ethnicity and place of residence (urban/rural). The calculation resulted in a sample size with a marginal error of 3% and a confidence level of 95%. The size of the research target population is 710 287², hence the size of the projected research sample is N = 1066.

From this sample, a total of N = 1064 respondents validly completed the CAPI field research survey questionnaire from October 19 to November 10, 2020. The questionnaire was administered in two languages (Macedonian and Albanian), using an offline Android application. A team of 18 interviewers conducted the CAPI survey face-to-face, with the assistance of mobile devices (tablets), throughout the entire territory of the Republic of North Macedonia. The average time taken to complete each survey was 35 minutes.

For the semi-structured e-interviews, the sample consists of 12 female respondents, selected based on the principle of maximum variation, meaning the sample is

1 Since 2002, no census has been conducted in the country.

2 MAKstat data, State Statistical Office, 2020

heterogeneous according to demographic characteristics (e.g., age, ethnicity, level of education, place of residence, employment, and relationship status). Interviewers successfully conducted twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews online, coinciding with the timing of the CAPI survey.

2.3. DATA ANALYSIS

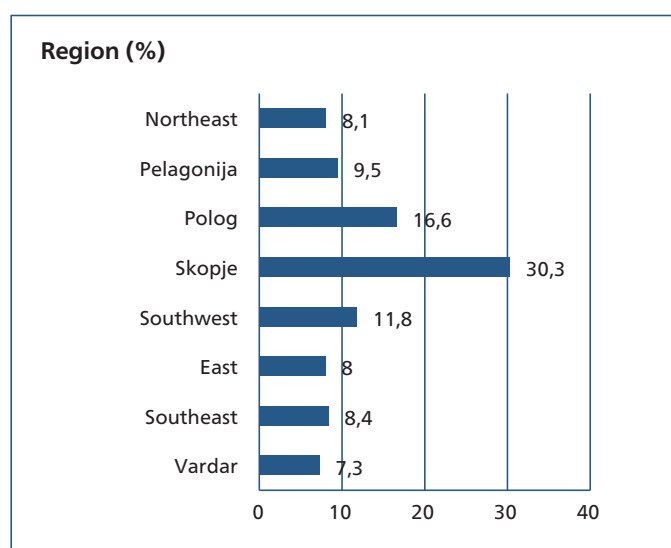
The Women's Study 2020 performed various quantitative analyses on the data collected from the quantitative survey, and qualitative analyses on the data collected during the interviews.

The following dimensions characterize this research study:

- Exploratory;
- Descriptive;
- Comparative;
- Explanatory.

Quantitative data obtained from the CAPI survey were analyzed at univariate, bivariate, and multivariate levels, using appropriate statistical (descriptive and inferential) procedures in SPSS, visually presented as images, tables, diagrams, and graphs, and narratively interpreted.

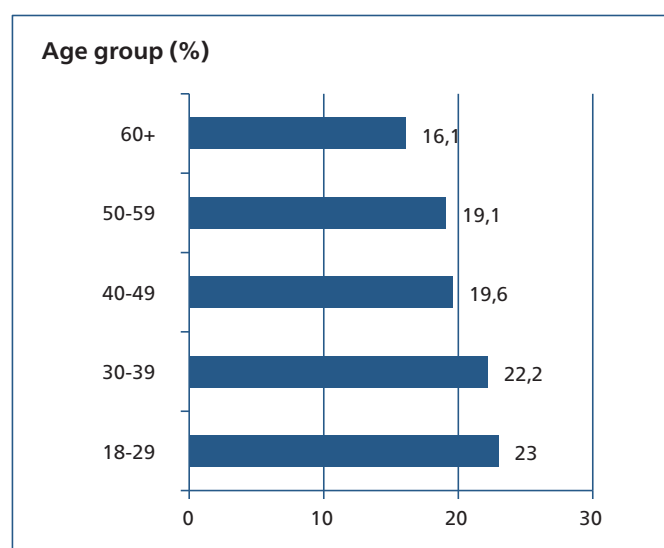
2.4. RESEARCH SAMPLE

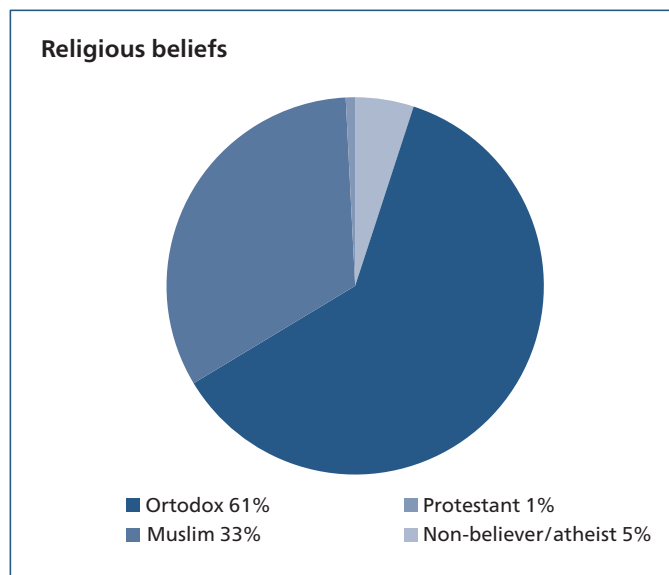
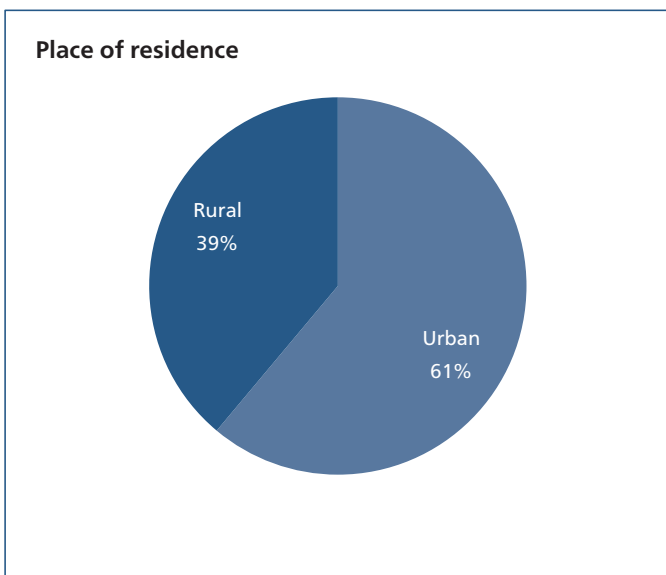
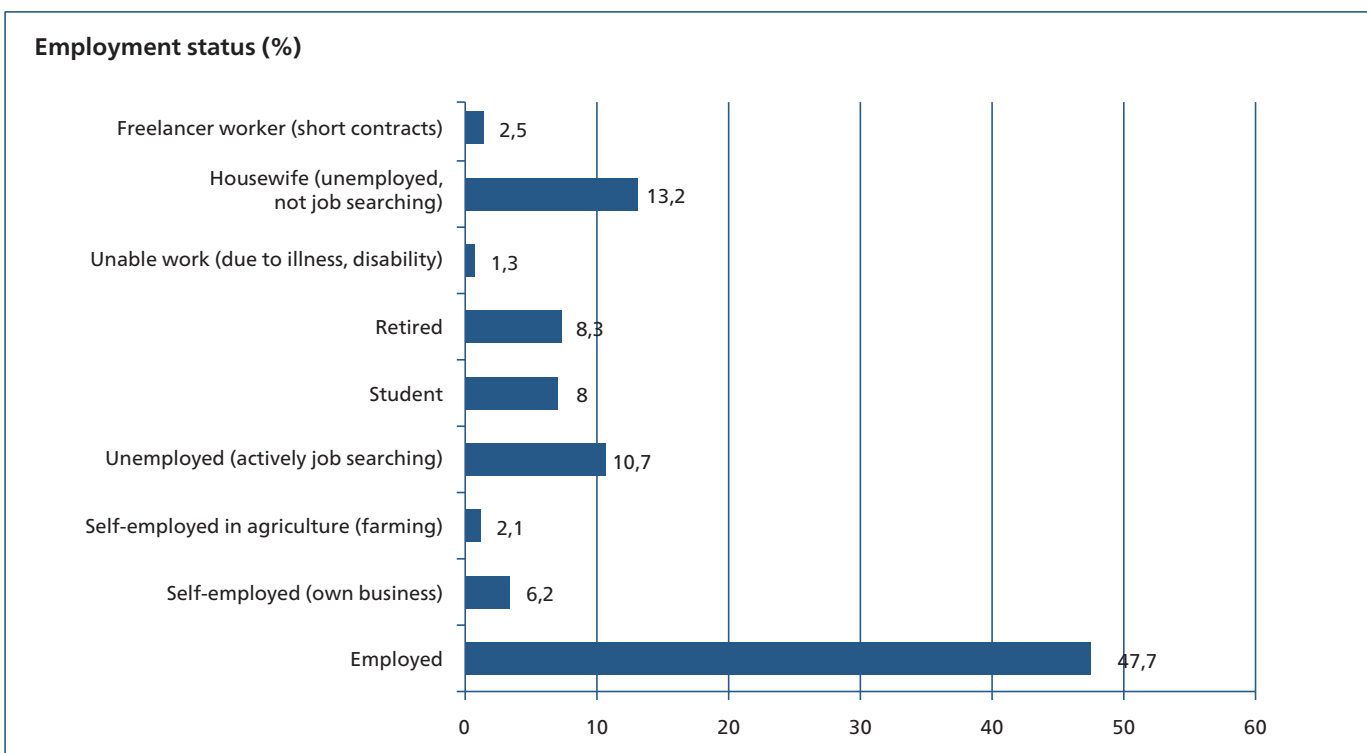
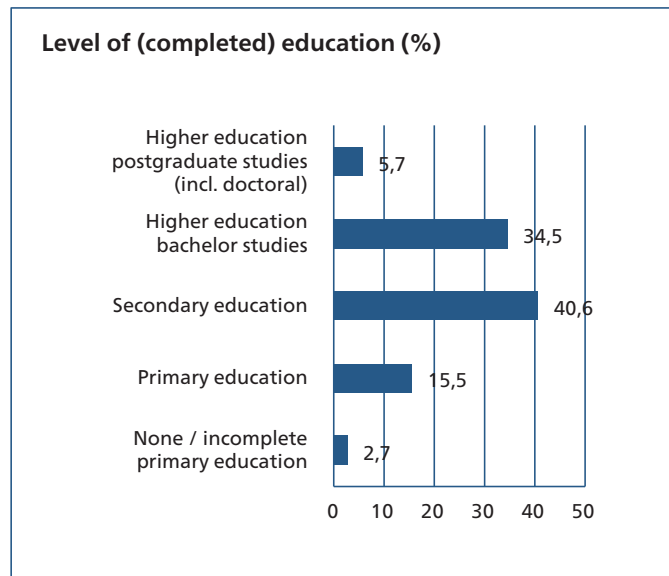
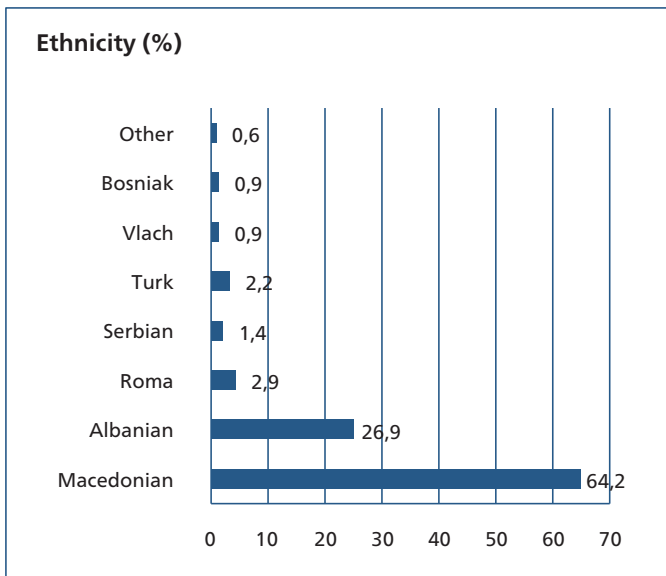


Legend:

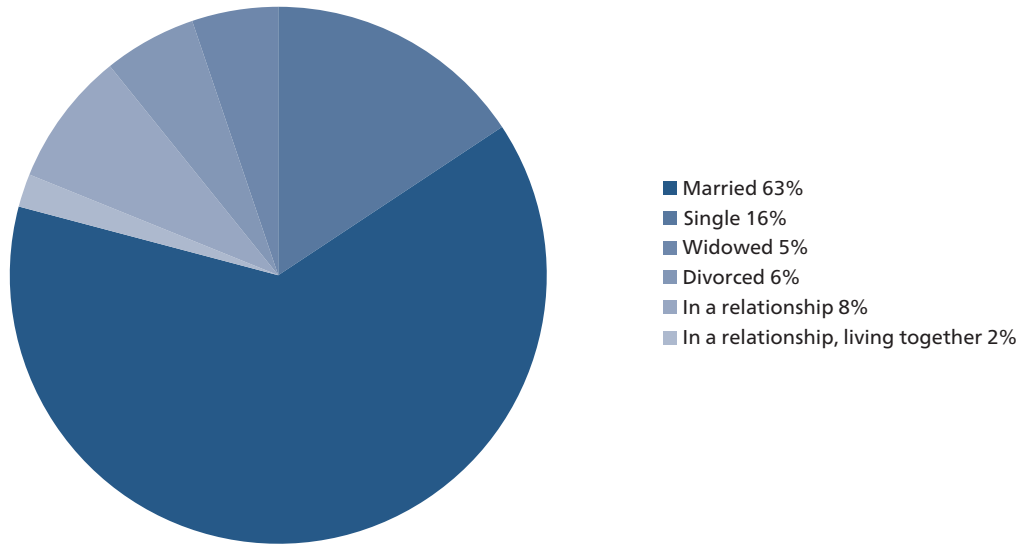
- N = number (of respondents, frequency)
- p value = probability value
- $p < 0.01$ = existence of statistically significant difference/association/correlation (99% confidence level), findings can be generalized for the whole research target population
- $p < 0.05$ = existence of statistically significant difference/association/correlation (95% confidence level), findings can be generalized for the whole research target population
- $p > 0.01$ = no statistically significant difference/association/correlation (99% confidence level), findings cannot be generalized for the whole research target population
- $p > 0.05$ = no statistically significant difference/association/correlation (95% confidence level), findings cannot be generalized for the whole research target population
- m = arithmetic mean (mean value, sum of all data obtained divided by the number of elements in the distribution)
- χ^2 = chi-square (test for whether any observed frequency, during cross-tabulation, deviates from the expected frequency, proves a statistically significant association)
- r = Pearson coefficient of bivariate correlation (two-way relationship between the variables)

Qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews were anonymized, narratively analyzed, and presented in the form of anecdotes and quotations.

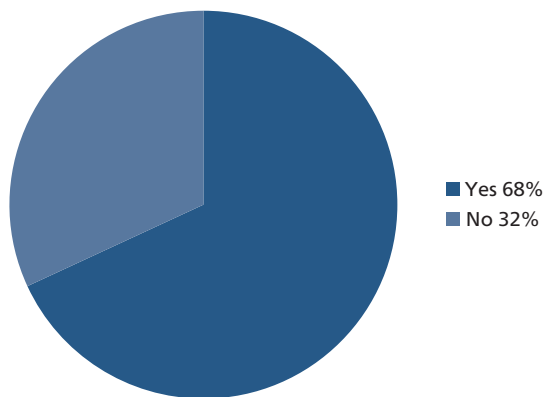




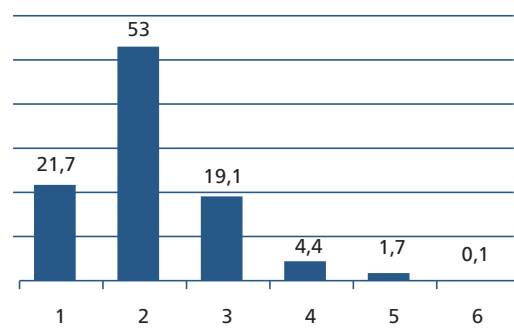
Relationship status



Has children?



If yes, how many children? (%)



3

VALUES, RELIGION, AND TRUST

3.1. ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER-BASED EQUALITY, STEREOTYPES, SOCIAL ROLES, AND VALUES

Gender stereotypes are predetermined sociocultural models and ideas that define and restrict the characteristics and roles given to men and women according to their gender. They encourage discrimination based on gender and are serious obstacles to achieving true gender equality. Such stereotypes can limit the development of the natural talents and abilities of girls, boys, women, and men, their educational and professional preferences and experiences, and their life opportunities in general. Gender stereotypes are both the result and cause of deeply ingrained attitudes, values, norms, and prejudices (Council of Europe, 2018).

Traits that are stereotypically seen as “masculine” include competitiveness, courage, vigor, aggressiveness, and activity, while traits such as cooperativeness, timidity, indulgence, passivity, and tenderness are considered “feminine” (Koenig, 2011).

The case-law of the European Court of Human Rights highlights two types of gender stereotypes as particularly worrying in relevant discrimination cases (Poposka, 2015). The first type stems from a belief in the superiority of men and the inferiority of women, which can lead, in turn, to the widespread practice of coercion and violence to control women, especially in the form of domestic violence. The second type refers to certain sociocultural roles given to each gender, such as the mother as the caregiver for the children and elderly members of the family, and the father as the working member and financial provider of the family. Such stereotyping also leaves many of those who do not fully embody the stereotypical gender roles without social support. The patriarchal matrix and traditional values underpin social norms and the division of gender roles in the Republic

of North Macedonia, giving household responsibilities primarily to women. A 2019 USAID Gender Analysis of the Republic of North Macedonia found little difference in cultural norms and beliefs by region, as opposed to by ethnicity and/or place of residence (urban/rural). About one-third of women in the country believe that their primary roles include giving birth and caring for the home and family, not working in the formal labor market. The study also saw traditional cultural norms and beliefs more strongly embedded in the Roma and Albanian populations, among economically inactive women, and rural areas (USAID, 2019).

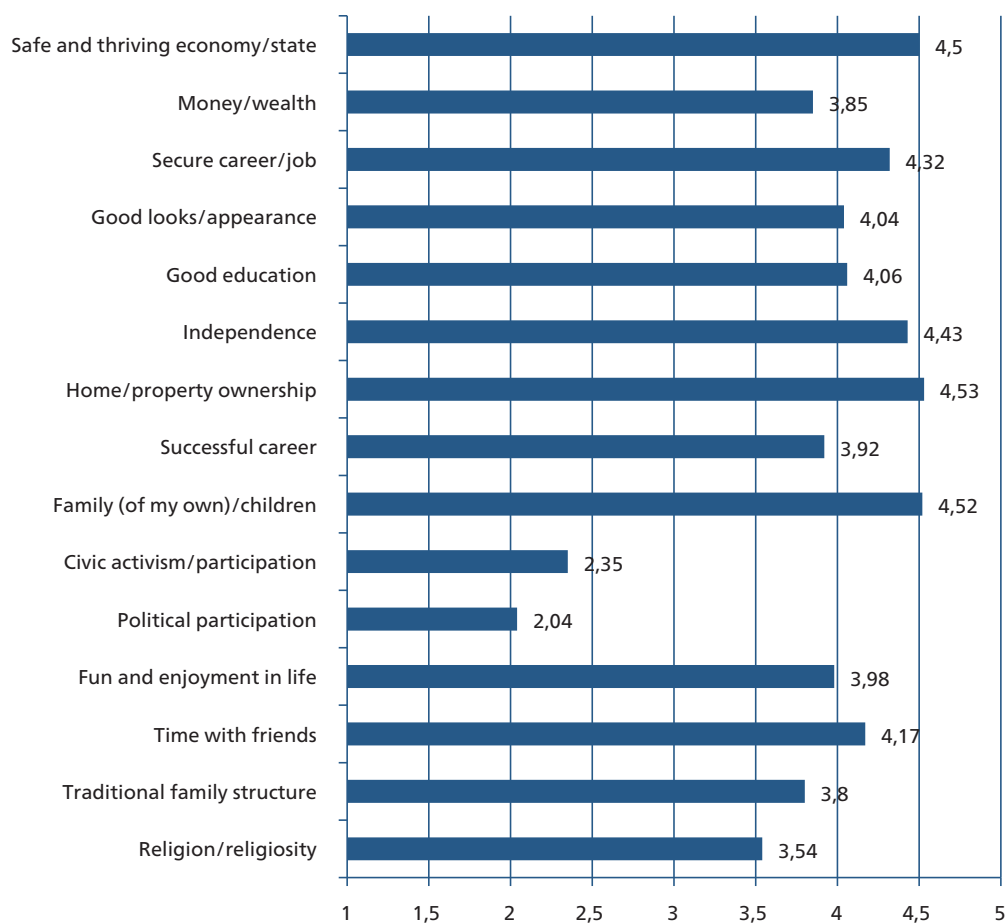
The central themes of the Women’s Study 2020 build upon these secondary findings.

The study collected data about the importance of certain **life values** to the target population, using a scale of importance from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important). According to the analysis, women place the most importance on owning a home/property ($m = 4.53$), having a family/children ($m = 4.52$), living in a safe and economically promising country ($m = 4.5$), being independent ($m = 4.43$), having a secure job ($m = 4.32$), spending time with friends ($m = 4.17$), being educated ($m = 4.06$), and looking good ($m = 4.04$). Still important, but less so (with mean values between 3 and 4), is to enjoy life and have fun ($m = 3.98$), to have a successful career ($m = 3.92$), to have wealth ($m = 3.85$), to respect tradition ($m = 3.8$), and to live a religious life ($m = 3.54$). Least important or irrelevant (with mean values below 3, and sitting in the negative interval of the axis) is civic activism ($m = 2.35$) and political engagement (2.04).

According to research by Schwartz and Rubel (2005), men cherish values related to power, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, and self-direction, while women cherish values related to benevolence, universalism, security, and tradition. The data largely builds on this division.

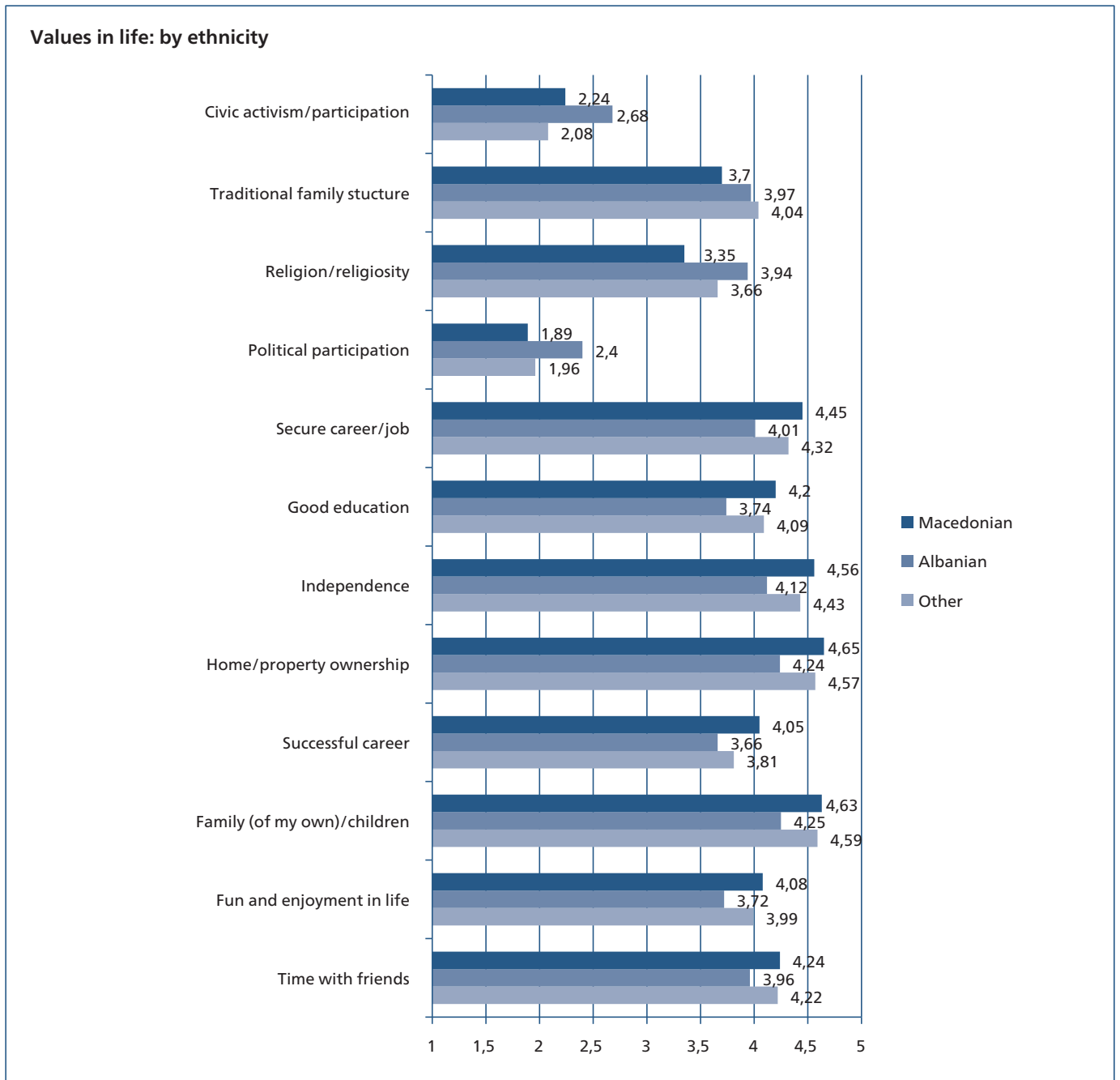
How important are the following values in life?

Scale: 1 = not important at all, 5 = very important



Further analysis using non-parametric tests confirmed statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) in the responses according to ethnicity, which apply to the wider target population, for the following life values:

- Women of Macedonian ethnicity indicated it was more important to spend time with friends, to enjoy life and have fun, to start a family, to have a successful career, to own one's own home, to be independent, to be educated, and to have a safe workplace;
- Women of Albanian ethnicity indicated it was most important to live a religious life, to respect tradition, to be politically active, and to participate in civil initiatives.
- It appears that Macedonian women prioritize independence and security, social life and having fun, career development, and education over other life values, in contrast to Albanian women, who prioritize religion and tradition, and political engagement and civic activism.



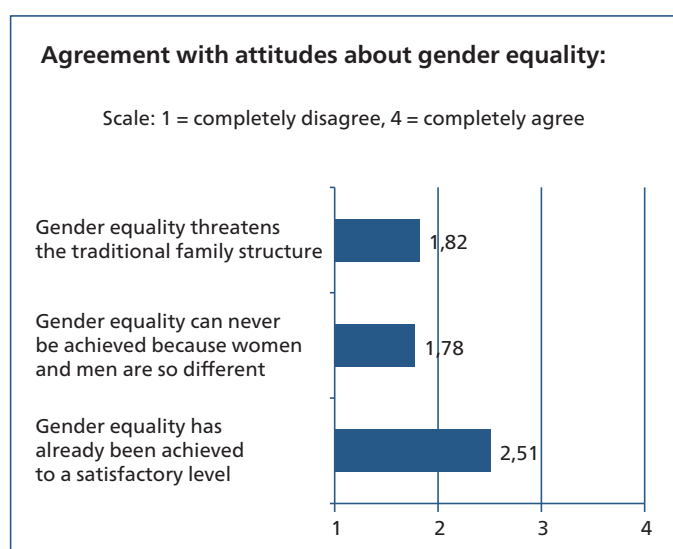
The bivariate correlation analysis of data on life values showed a statistically significant (although not very strong) correlation between age and the following variables:

- Practicing religion as a value is proportional to aging ($r = .181, p < 0.01$);
- Respect for tradition family structure as a value is proportional to aging ($r = .259, p < 0.01$);
- Family of one's own (creation) as a value is proportional to aging ($r = .064, p < 0.05$);
- Spending time with friends as a value is inversely proportional to aging ($r = -.174, p < 0.01$);
- Enjoying life and having fun as a value is inversely proportional to aging ($r = -.266, p < 0.01$);
- Participation in civic initiatives/activities as a value is inversely proportional to aging ($r = -.080, p < 0.01$);
- Successful career as a value is inversely proportional to aging ($r = -.277, p < 0.01$);
- Independence as a value is inversely proportional to aging ($r = -.141, p < 0.01$);
- Being educated as a value is inversely proportional to aging ($r = -.271, p < 0.01$);
- Looking good as a value is inversely proportional to aging ($r = -.332, p < 0.01$);
- Job security as a value is inversely proportional to aging ($r = -.236, p < 0.01$);
- Material wealth as a value is inversely proportional to aging ($r = -.197, p < 0.01$).

The analysis of data collected on levels of agreement with statements about gender equality on a scale of agreement from 1 (completely disagree) to 4 (complete-

ly agree), indicates that women in the Republic of North Macedonia, at least at a cognitive level, demonstrate support for gender equality. The resulting mean values are in the negative axis interval and indicate disagreement with the statements, "gender equality threatens the traditional family structure" ($m = 1.82$) and "gender equality can never be achieved because women and men are so different" ($m = 1.78$). For the statement, "gender equality has already been achieved to a satisfactory level in this country", analysis shows a positive response ($m = 2.51$), meaning that women are somewhat satisfied that gender equality has been achieved in Macedonian society.

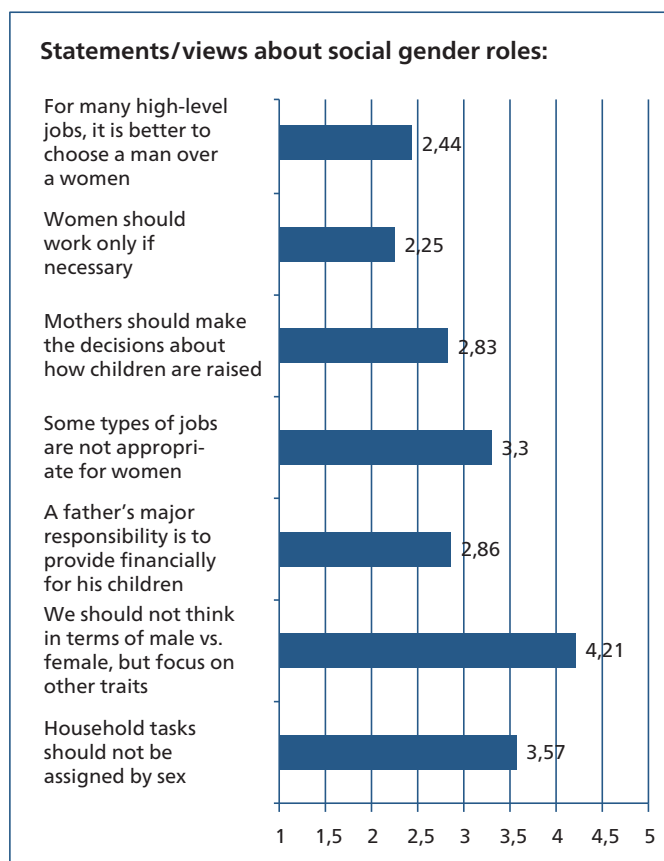
It remains unclear (as a research limitation of this study) how women understand the concept of gender equality. National documentation, such as the Strategy for Gender Equality 2013-2020, states, "gender equality means fairness in dealing with men and women per their personal needs, and fairness, especially in terms of rights, benefits, obligations, and opportunities. Gender equality is influenced by the promotion of personal, social, cultural, political, and economic equality for all. Gender equality means that different behaviors, aspirations, and needs of women and men are respected, taken into account, valued, and equally supported. This means that their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities will not depend on whether they were born a man or a woman. It is based on the principles of human rights and social justice" (Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2013).



The Women's Study 2020 used an adapted and abbreviated scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree) (Baber & Tucker, 2006) to measure perceptions about social **gender roles**. According to the analysis of the collected data, women strongly agree (mean values in the positive axis interval) with the statement, "we should not think in terms of male vs. female, but focus on other traits" ($m = 4.21$), and quite agree with, "household tasks should not be assigned by sex" ($m = 3.57$). For the statement, "some jobs are not appropriate for women", a neutral, slightly positive mean value of $m = 3.3$ (middle of the axis) was registered.

Negative views were expressed towards the other statements (relative disagreement):

- "For many high-level jobs, it is better to choose a man over a woman" ($m = 2.44$);
- "Women should work only if necessary" ($m = 2.25$);
- "Mothers should make most decisions about how children are raised" ($m = 2.83$);
- "A father's major responsibility is to provide financially for his children" ($m = 2.86$).



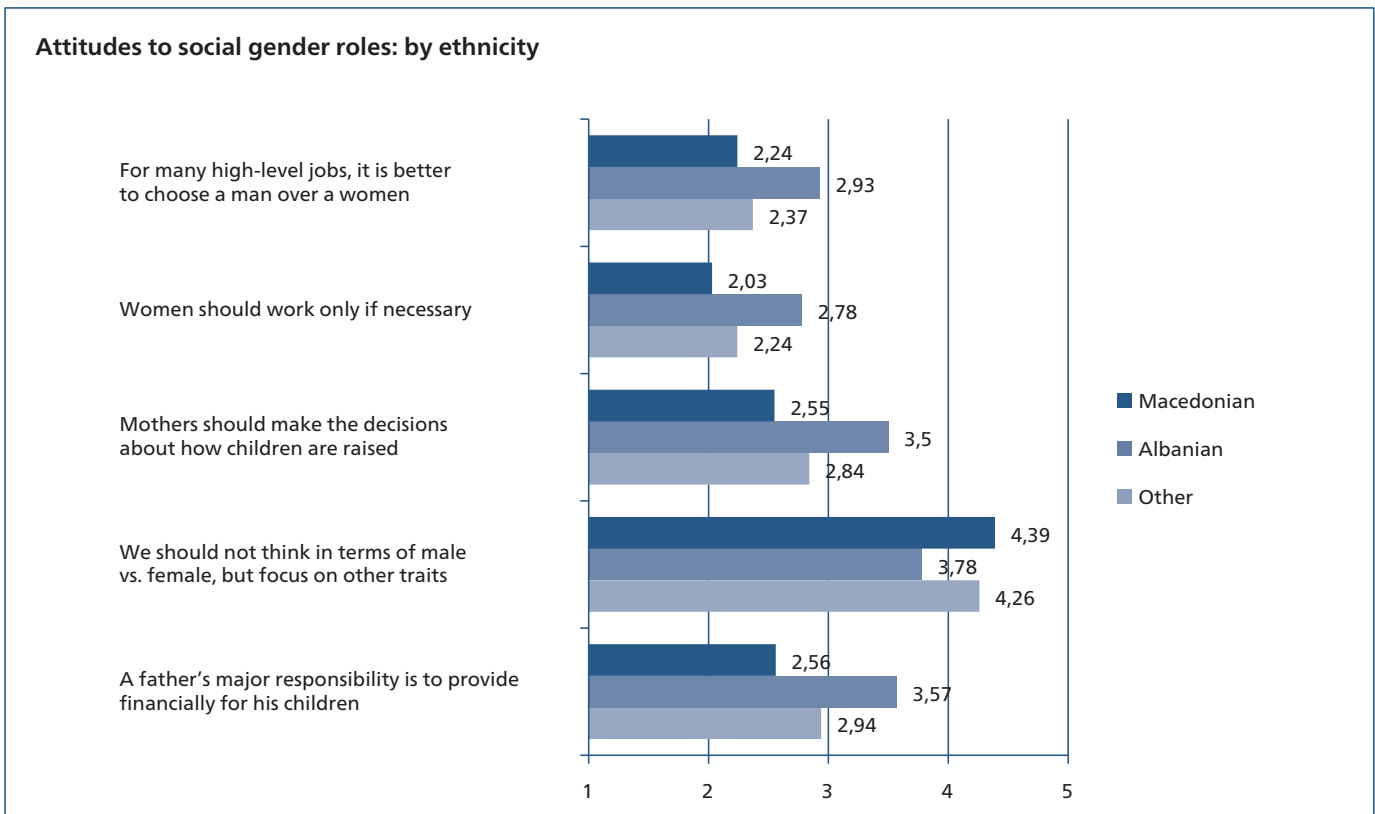
The bivariate analysis by age confirmed a statistically significant (although weak in intensity) correlation with the following statements:

- "A father's major responsibility is to provide financially for his children" grows in proportion to age ($r = .090$, $p < 0.01$);
- "Women should work only if necessary" grows in proportion to age ($r = .067$, $p < 0.05$).

Analysis using non-parametric tests ($p < 0.05$) registered the following statistically significant differences by ethnicity:

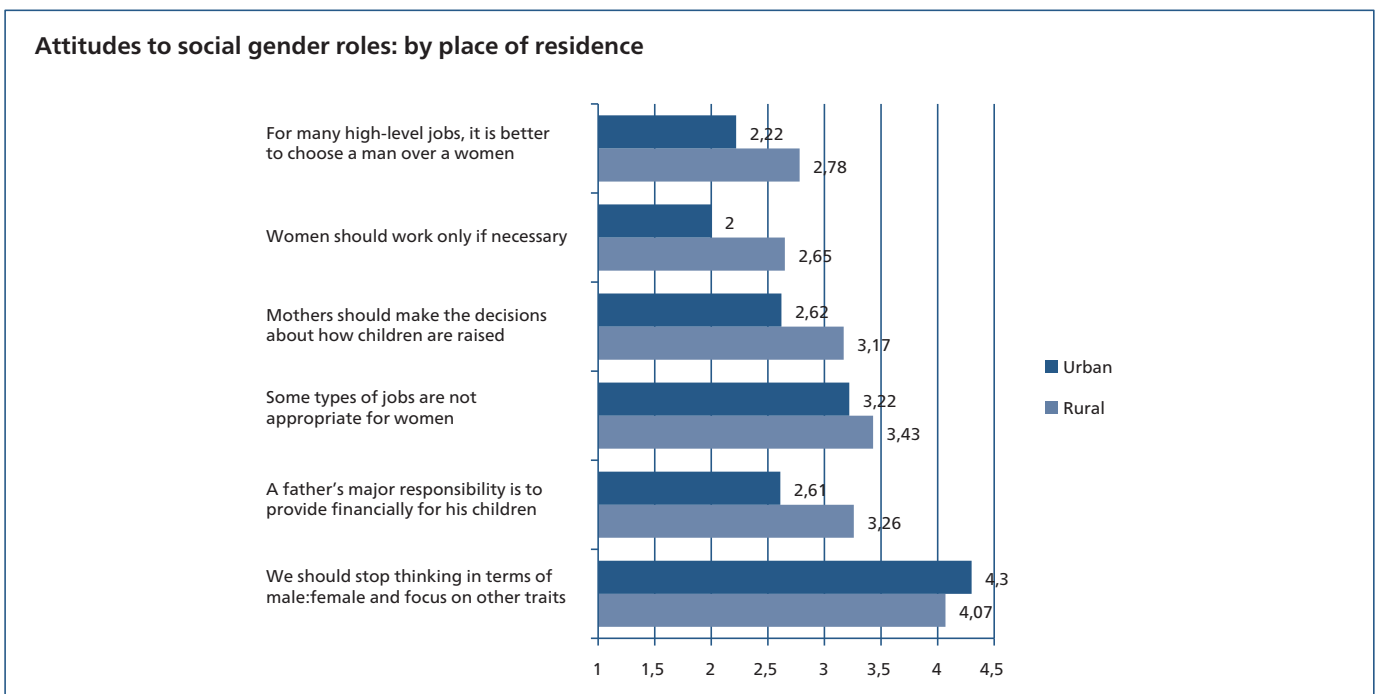
- Macedonian women believe to a large extent that one should stop thinking about whether people are male or female and focus on other characteristics;
- Albanian women largely believe that a father's main responsibility is to provide financially for his children, that mothers should make most decisions about how children are brought up, that women should work only if necessary, and that for many high-level jobs, it is better to choose a man instead of a woman.

These data indicate that the traditional (and patriarchal) division of gender roles is more widely accepted among Albanian women than among Macedonian women, which aligns somewhat with the results relating to **life values**, as well as the findings from the secondary data analysis.



According to the analysis of the non-parametric tests, statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) were seen between places of residence (urban/rural) for all statements, except for the statement, "tasks around the

house should not be assigned by sex". This shows that women in rural areas are more likely to accept traditional (and patriarchal) divisions of gender roles than women in urban areas are.



"According to my values, there is no division of roles by sex. My husband thinks like me and supports everything that advances the whole family. I raise my daughters in the same spirit." (BS, 43, Skopje, Macedonian)

"Unfortunately, in our society, there are traditional divisions of gender roles. It did not affect my life many thanks to the fact that I had a healthy family, and emancipated and educated parents who, despite having

5 children (4 daughters and 1 son), did not differentiate based on sex; each of us is educated and has a Master's degree." (RC, 35, village of Cegrane/Gostivar, Albanian)

"Luckily, I am surrounded by people who do not divide between typically male and typically female [roles] (...) I live in line with my beliefs, which do not imply a division of traditional gender roles." (GT, 44, Ohrid, Macedonian)

"In our tradition, there is a division of male and female roles, but in the past 10 years, with the increase in the level of education of the young Roma population, these barriers are being removed slowly (...) there is some visible progress in this field." (TV, 26, Skopje, Roma)

"As much as that division bothers me, I realized that I must find my place and at least personally reduce its impact on my life. Maybe that is why my children have not developed such stereotypes, although that in itself may sometimes be a barrier [for them] in this environment. It is difficult to change the mind-set of a community, and it can still affect your life." (LO, 56, Skopje, Serbian)

"Our society is still stuck in a traditional style of upbringing. We raise men to hand over most of the responsibilities to their wife, and therefore, after working hours she must be at home and fully dedicated to her family." (MI, 36, Skopje, Albanian)

"Unfortunately, tradition is still present in our town and affects many things, but one thing makes me happy - the younger generations are managing to uproot it." (IJ, 53, Delchevo, Macedonian)

"In my family, we have overcome the traditional division of gender roles and we function equally. But in my workplace and social life, as a woman, I come across this division, especially by men, and it is most visible when expressing views, giving opinions, and suggestions. Particularly when we are talking about topics that affect the male majority population, my 'female' perspective is dismissed simply because it comes from a woman. [These talks] deteriorate into denial, ignoring, or completely rejecting what I say." (AT, 45, Kavadarci, Macedonian)

"The traditional division of gender roles directly contradicts my feminist beliefs and practices. We are witnessing misogyny, patriarchy, and sexism being too prevalent in our society and unfortunately, our children [are exposed] at all levels of formal education, starting from kindergarten. Traditional gender roles are promoted as 'model examples' in all textbooks and most children's television shows, leaving a feeling of unease and non-belonging to all those children who do not come from so-called traditional families (...) My family members are being brought up in the spirit of gender equality, respect for diversity, and advocacy for full equality among people." (DV, 37, Skopje, Serbian)

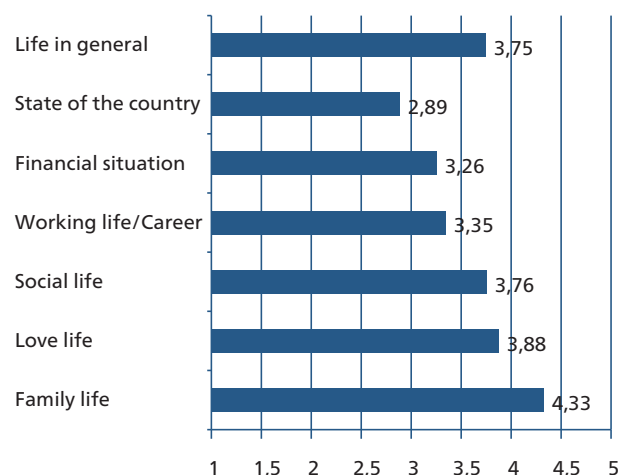
3.2. SATISFACTION/DISSATISFACTION AMONG WOMEN

The analysis of respondents' **satisfaction** with various aspects of life (ignoring the effects of COVID-19 for now) indicates that women feel most satisfied with their family life ($m = 4.33$). Following closely (with mean values between 3 and 4) is satisfaction with their love life ($m = 3.88$), social life ($m = 3.76$), life in general ($m = 3.75$), work ($m = 3.35$), and finances ($m = 3.26$). Macedonian women living in urban areas appear to have higher rates of satisfaction with their finances and working life ($p < 0.05$) than other groups do.

Women are quite dissatisfied with the country they live in, as reflected by the position of a mean value in the negative axis interval ($m = 2.89$). Further analysis indicated that the younger the woman is, the less satisfied she is with the country ($r = .098$, $p < 0.01$), while Albanian women are more satisfied ($m = 3.15$) than Macedonian women are ($m = 2.79$), with a statistical significance of $p < 0.01$.

How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your life? (not considering COVID-19)

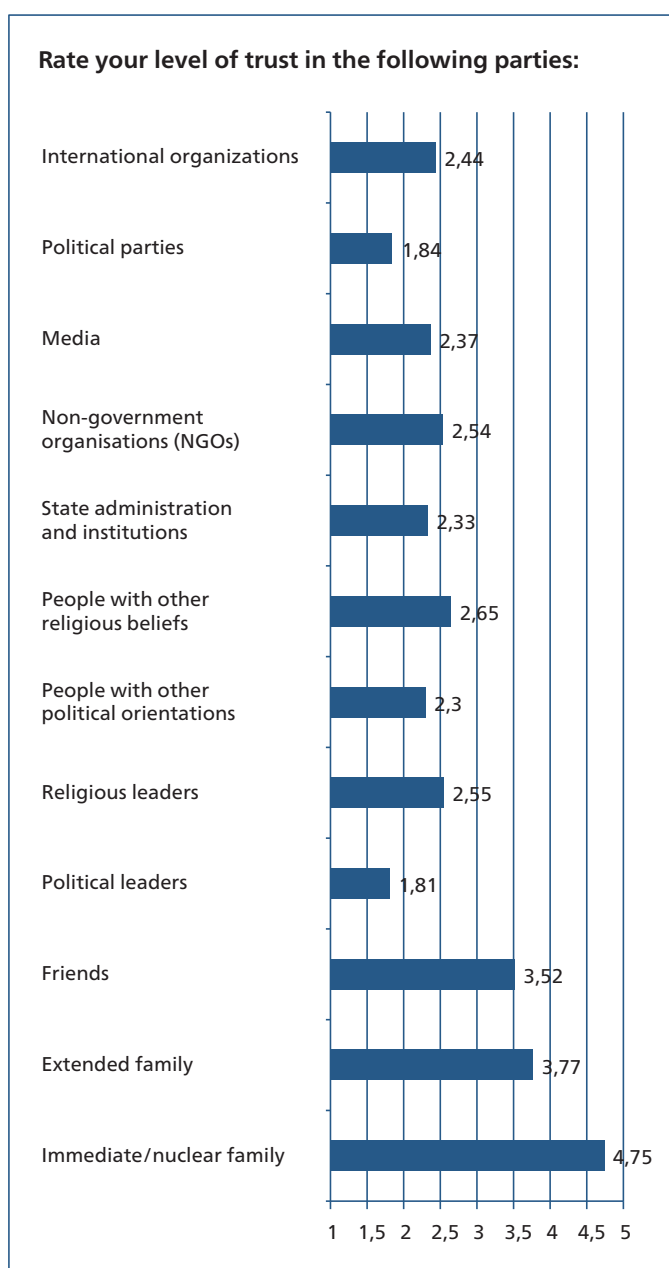
Scale: 1 = very dissatisfied, 5 = very satisfied



3.3. TRUST

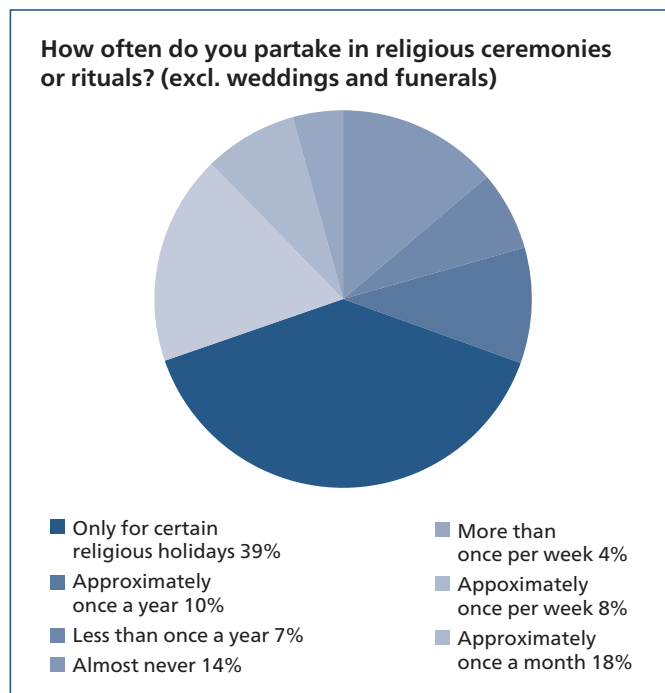
Similar to results seen so far that show women prioritizing and indicating the highest satisfaction with family, women also expressed the greatest **trust** in the immediate family (m = 4.75), on a scale from 1 (do not trust at all) to 5 (completely trust). Next in line were their extended family members (m = 3.77) and friends (m = 3.52).

Women indicated low levels of **trust** for the remaining parties, such as people of other faiths (m = 2.65), religious leaders (m = 2.55), NGOs (m = 2.54), international organizations (m = 2.44), media (m = 2, 37), state administrative bodies and institutions (m = 2.33), and people with political beliefs different from their own (m = 2.3). Lowest levels of **trust** were seen in relation to political parties (m = 1, 84) and political leaders (m = 1.81).

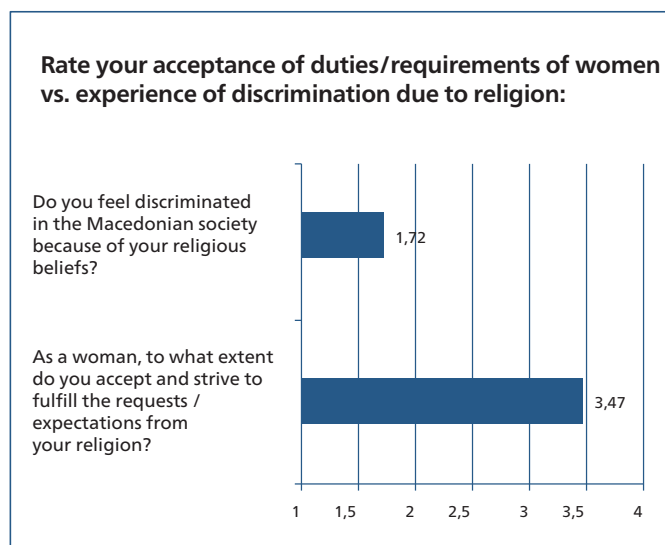


3.4. IMPORTANCE AND PRACTICE OF RELIGION

The largest proportion (39%) of women celebrate religious ceremonies and rituals (not including weddings or funerals) only on religious holidays, while the rest practice either once per month (18%), once a year (10%), once per week (8%) or more than once a week (4%), less than once per year (7%), or seldom (14%).



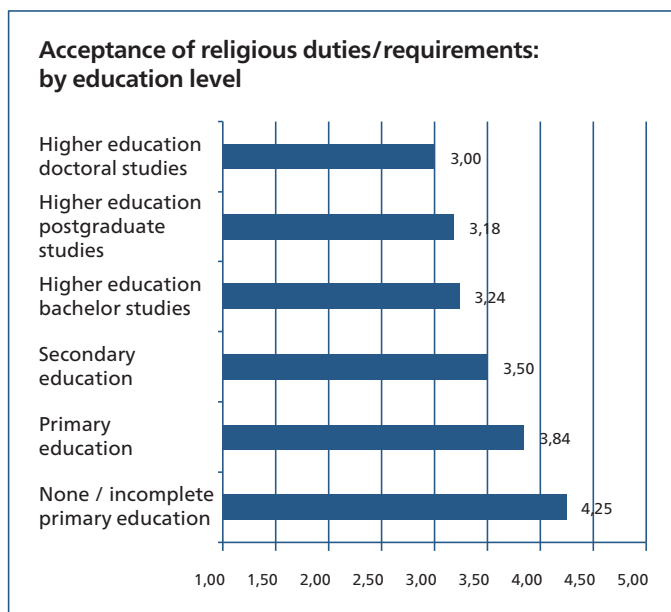
Despite the results above hinting at moderate **religiosity**, respondents still express a strong desire to fulfill the duties/requirements expected of women by their religion (m = 3.47). At the same time, most do not feel they have suffered a great deal of religious-based discrimination in Macedonian society (m = 1.72). Results are measured on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (completely).



Correlation analysis shows that the rate of accepting female-specific religious duties/requirements increases proportionally to age ($r = .071$, $p < 0.05$).

Non-parametric tests indicate that women in rural areas feel more compelled to fulfill the gender-specific religious duties expected of them ($m = 3.79$) than their counterparts in urban areas do ($m = 3.24$), with a statistically significant difference of ($p < 0.01$). The data shows no statistically significant differences by ethnicity.

Further statistically significant differences ($p < 0.01$) are, however, seen according to education level, where those women with less formal education showed a greater acceptance of religious duties than those with higher education levels.



3.5. CONCLUSIONS

- Values that women in the Republic of North Macedonia find most important are homeownership, starting a family, living in a safe and prosperous country, financial independence, secure job, time with friends, education, and having a good physical appearance. Macedonian women tend to prioritize the values of independence and security, social life, career, self-development, and having 'fun', while Albanian women value more highly religion, traditional family, political activity, and civic activism.
- Women across the country show support for the concept and achievability of gender equality, negating ideas that it is a "threat" to the traditional structure of family and "impossible" to achieve due to male-female differences. Although, women were neutral (neither agreed nor disagreed) when asked if they believe the country has already "achieved" gender equality. A limitation of this study is the absence of a question to accurately assess the wider understanding of gender equality as a term.
- Some progressive attitudes were recorded for the division of gender roles in society, with women strongly in agreement that people should be valued and judged based on character and not gender, and that household tasks should be shared by both genders. Although with a

slightly positive mean value, 'neither agree nor disagree' was the response to "some jobs are not appropriate for women". A further breakdown by ethnicity indicated that Albanian women are more likely to accept traditional/patriarchal) gender role divisions compared to women of other ethnicities.

- Analyses by ethnicity show that Albanian women are most likely to highly value and respect tradition, and embody traditional gender roles. A parallel can be drawn with earlier results, which showed Albanian women highly value traditional family structure.
- Women show high satisfaction with their family, love, and social lives, and life in general. They report some satisfaction with their work-life and finances, with Macedonian women from urban areas showing the highest rates of satisfaction in these areas. The only aspect with which women indicate dissatisfaction is the situation in their country. On that, dissatisfaction with the country rises inversely to age, meaning the younger the age of the woman, the more likely she is to be dissatisfied with the country. Macedonian women are also dissatisfied overall with this aspect, while Albanian women are satisfied overall.
- Women expressed almost complete trust in their immediate family and a solid level of trust in their extended family and friends. They view any party outside of their immediate familial and social circles with distrust, including people with other religious or political beliefs, religious leaders, international, state, and non-government institutions and organizations, and, most of all, political leaders.
- Only 12% of women partake regularly in religious ceremonies (once or more than once per week), while the remainder engages irregularly, only on special occasions or never. Despite this apparent moderate religiosity, women are likely to accept female-specific religious requirements, and this is more common among women with lower levels of education and from rural areas.
- Qualitative data from the interviews confirm the obtained quantitative data, where it can be noticed that everyone perceives the Macedonian society as patriarchal, in which tradition is an important and generally accepted value, but every woman (regardless of the demographic background) tries in her own way to fight for their rights and equality in their family and environment. Change for the better and progressiveness is expected from the younger generations. The family in which women grow up, regardless of ethnicity and place of residence plays the most important role.

3.6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Encourage women and young girls to build a strong sense of independent self, outside of sociocultural-determined gender roles, and to protect and prioritize their values, beliefs, expectations, desires, and aspirations in life; this should start at an early age and continue within the family, and extend to the institutional level, i.e., schools, universities, religious centres, serving to indirectly increase women's trust in institutions;

- Revise the curricula for primary and secondary education by removing gender stereotypes and prejudices, and introducing content that will promote gender equality;
- The media to promote gender equality, and commit to exposing examples of stereotypes about women and gender roles to the public;
- The Ministry of Culture to provide special funding to support cultural projects and programs that promote gender equality; include the gender aspect in award and grant criteria for other cultural projects and activities;
- The Agency for Youth and Sports to offer special funding for youth projects that promote gender equality; prioritize gender equality when cooperating with youth organizations;
- International and donor organizations to allocate more funds for projects, campaigns, and activities that promote gender equality and that support the work of women's organizations.

4

FAMILY AND SOCIAL LIFE

4.1. NATIONAL CONTEXT

The average age of women when entering into their first marriage in the Republic of North Macedonia is 26.6 years, in comparison to 29.3 for men, (Republic of North Macedonia Statistical Office, 2019). The most vulnerable to entering into early marriages are Roma girls, 12% of whom marry before the age of 15 (USAID, 2019). According to a 2012 Reactor-Research in Action study, "if we look at the tradition as a traditional division of gender roles, the most common type of household in [North] Macedonia is the one in which the husband works and the wife does not." The same study (using a nationally representative sample) found that 40.1 percent of the country's population lived in "traditional" households, 32.4 percent in households where both spouses were unemployed, and 27.5 percent in households where both spouses worked. Regardless of the employment situation, and even if they are the only employed member of the household, women still have a considerably higher share of the household responsibilities and chores. Furthermore, just under half of the participants agreed that "if there are children in the family or elderly people who need care, it is not profitable for the mother to work" (Reactor-Research in Action, Skopje, 2012). Ivanovska and Dimitrovska (2015) state that women in the country's rural areas are far more disadvantaged than women in urban areas, due to limited or no access to childcare or services for the elderly or sick. This forces those in rural areas to stay home and take care of the family and the household, making them economically dependent on the husband.

Further research shows that women in rural areas, unlike women in urban areas, have very little opportunity for a social life because restaurants or cafeterias are commonly a 'forbidden place' for women, and other entertainment venues do not exist. Distances and limited public transport options to reach major cities are additional obstacles for women from rural areas to socialize in public and

therefore, often the only option available to them is to visit one another to socialize at home (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia, 2018). The analysis of data collected on family and social life in the Women's Study 2020 yielded both promising and concerning results, as seen below.

4.2. WOMEN'S LEISURE TIME ACTIVITIES

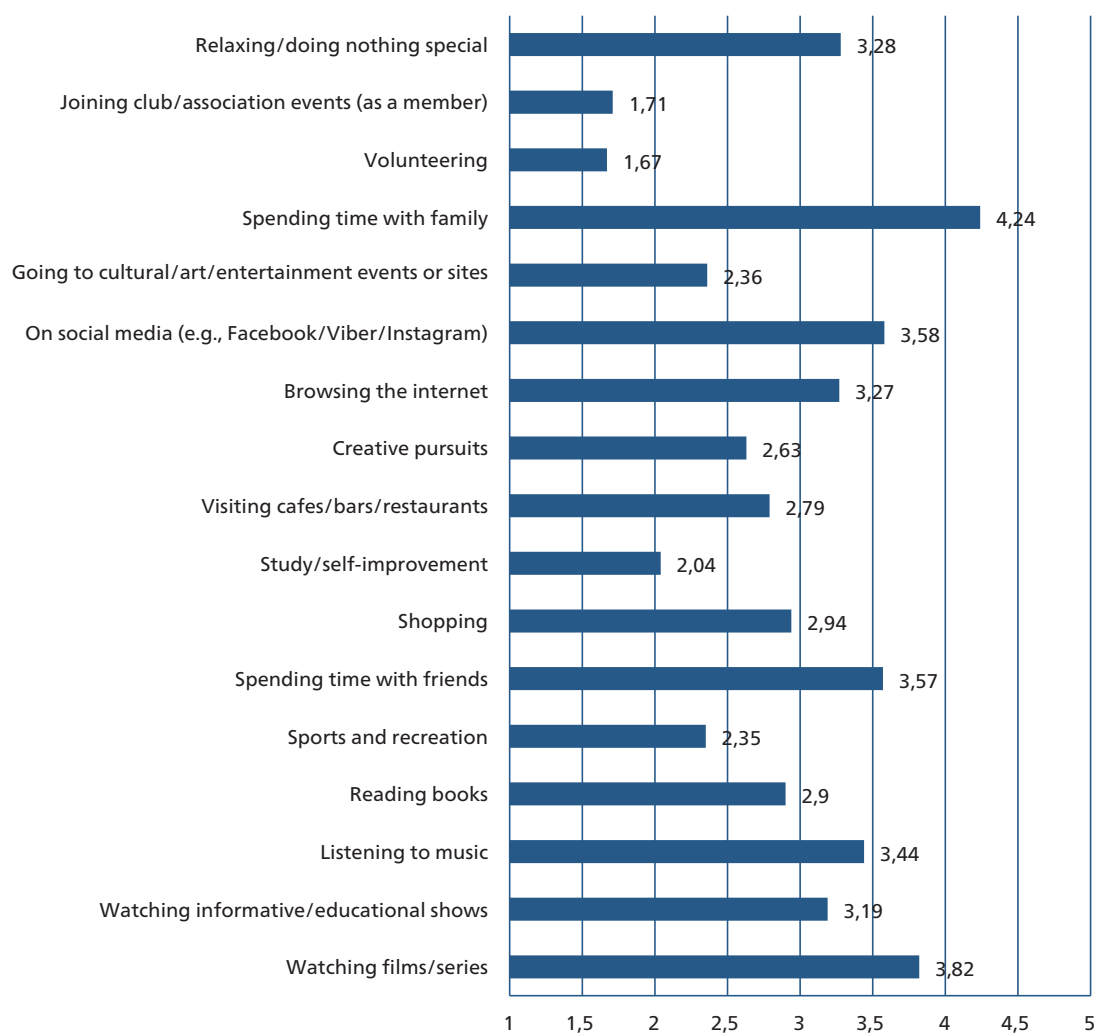
Respondents usually spend time with family ($m = 4.24$), which is not surprising considering the results seen in the analysis so far. Next favourite choices include watching movies and series on TV or online ($m = 3.82$), using social media such as Viber, Facebook, Instagram etc. ($m = 3.58$), spending time with friends ($m = 3.57$), listening to music ($m = 3.44$), relaxing ($m = 3.28$), and browsing the internet ($m = 3.27$).

Women indicated they were less in favor (mean values less than 3) of using their free time to gain knowledge or skills, volunteer, be creative, do sport, or see cultural/entertainment sites/events.

The bivariate correlation analysis, against age as an independent variable, shows the following activities are inversely proportional to age (i.e., become less popular with age): listening to music ($r = -.428, p < 0.01$); reading books ($r = -.257, p < 0.01$); sports and recreation ($r = -.339, p < 0.01$); seeing friends ($r = -.304, p < 0.01$); shopping ($r = -.298, p < 0.01$); studying/learning ($r = -.361, p < 0.01$); going to cafes or bars ($r = -.486, p < 0.01$); creative pursuits ($r = -.169, p < 0.01$); surfing the web ($r = -.437, p < 0.01$); using social media ($r = -.460, p < 0.01$); going to cultural and entertainment sites/events ($r = -.231, p < 0.01$); membership in organizations ($r = -.120, p < 0.01$); volunteering ($r = -.144, p < 0.01$); relaxing ($r = -.096, p < 0.01$).

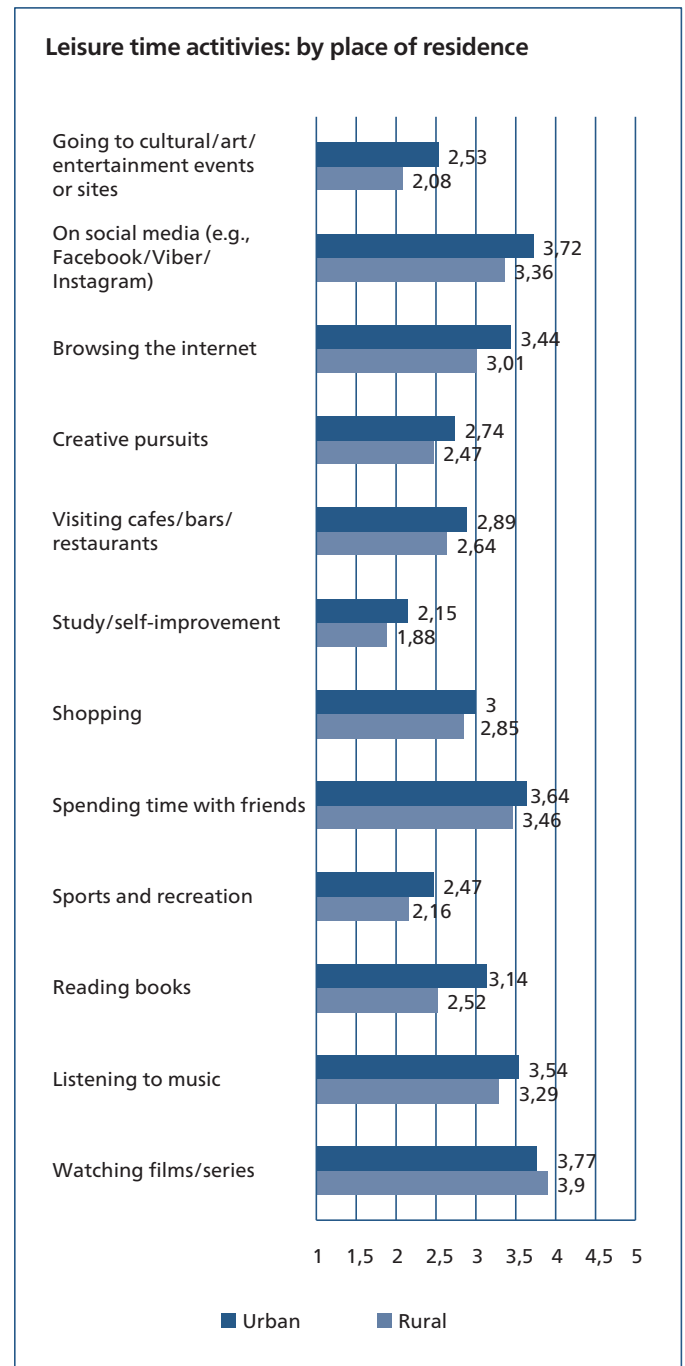
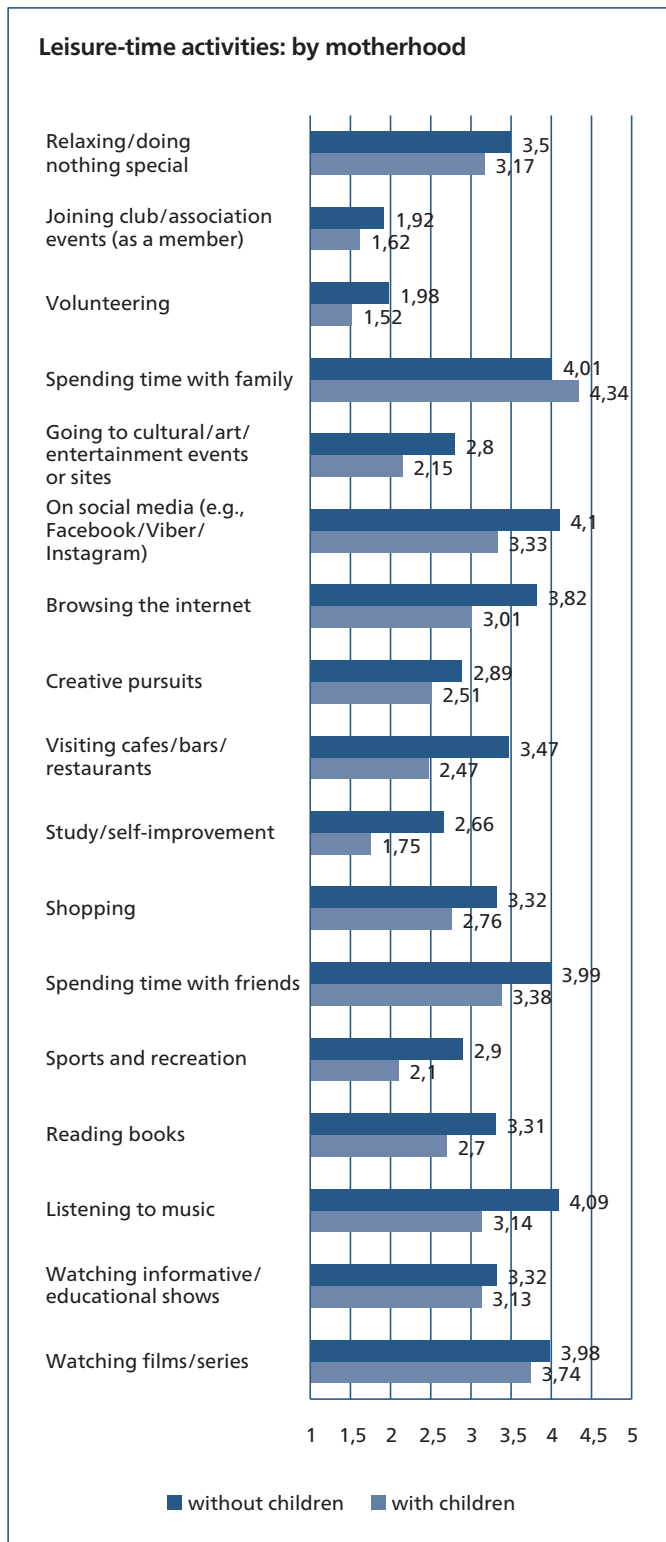
No variable grows in direct proportion to age, meaning there are no activities that become more popular with age. Younger women are thus generally more likely to do more activities in their free time.

What leisure-time activities do you partake in and how often?



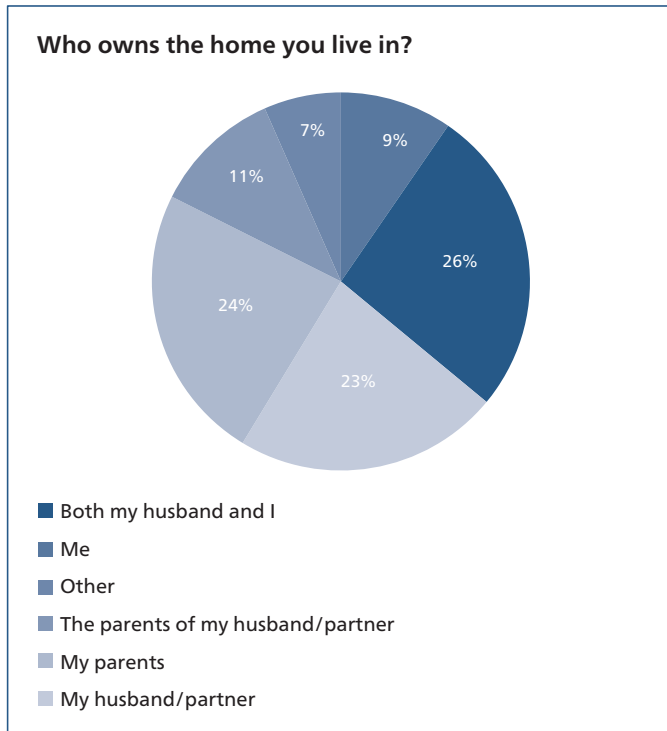
Non-parametric tests show that, for all activities, there are statistically significant differences ($p < 0.001$) according to motherhood status, with mothers being likely to choose time with family over other activities, compared to non-mothers, who not only favour spending time with family but also engage in a variety of activities. Motherhood therefore greatly affects free time activity and shapes the women’s lifestyle.

Non-parametric tests registered statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) between the choice of leisure time activity and place of residence (urban/rural). Women in rural areas spend more time watching movies/series online or on TV, while women in urban areas show slightly more interest in all alternative activities. This data builds on the analysis of secondary data and is probably due to the greater opportunities that exist in cities, as opposed to villages.



4.3. HOUSEHOLD ORGANIZATION AND GENERAL EQUALITY OF ROLES

Although this study found homeownership to be the important value to women, only 9% own their home, while 25% co-own their apartment with their spouse/partner. Of the rest, about one-quarter live in a home owned by their partner, one-quarter live in a home of their parents, and 11% live in a dwelling owned by their partner's parents; 7% answered 'other'.

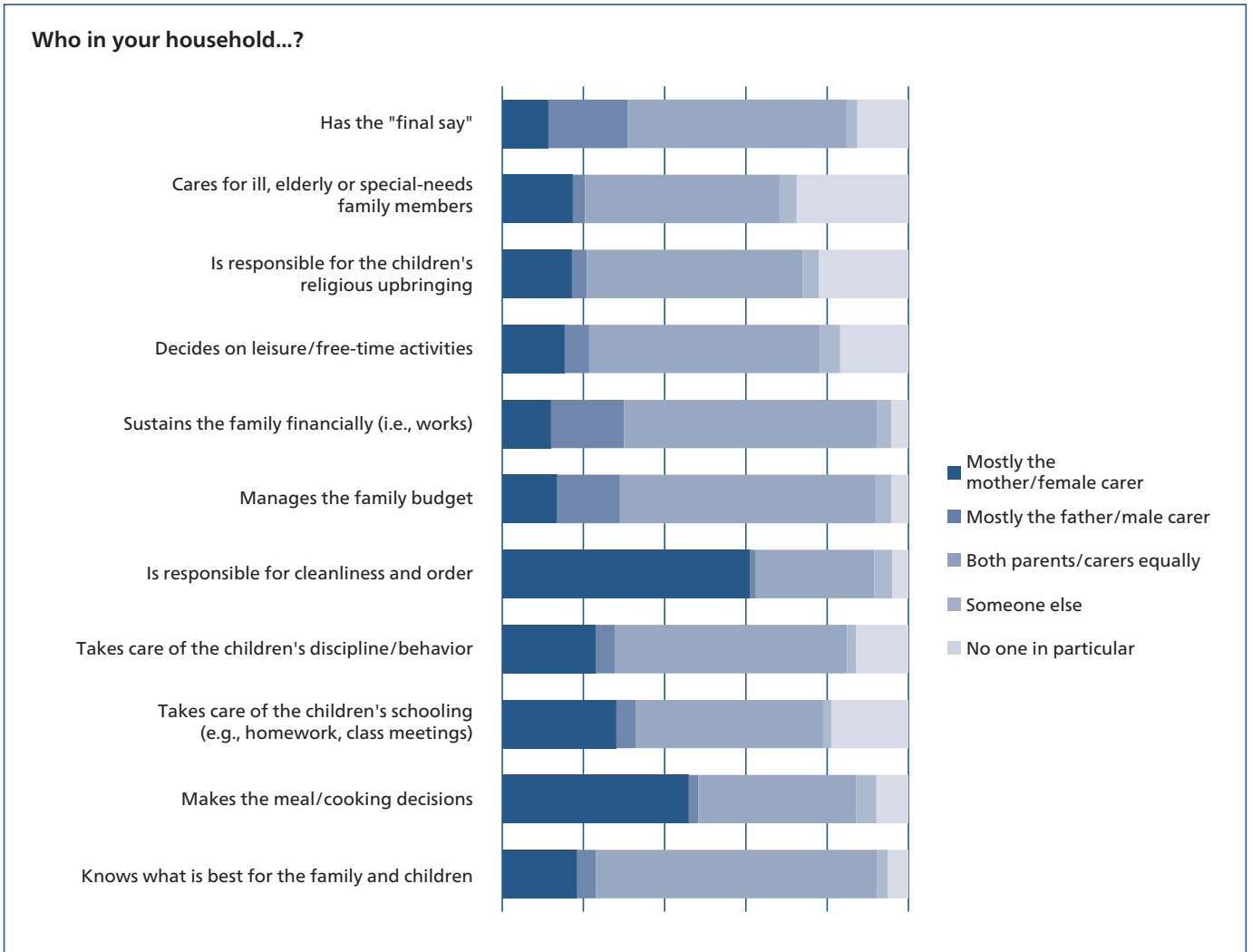


This study asked all respondents (irrespective of relationship or motherhood status) about the sharing of **household responsibilities**. Respondents answered either about the family home they grew up in, or the household in which they currently live (i.e., their formed family).

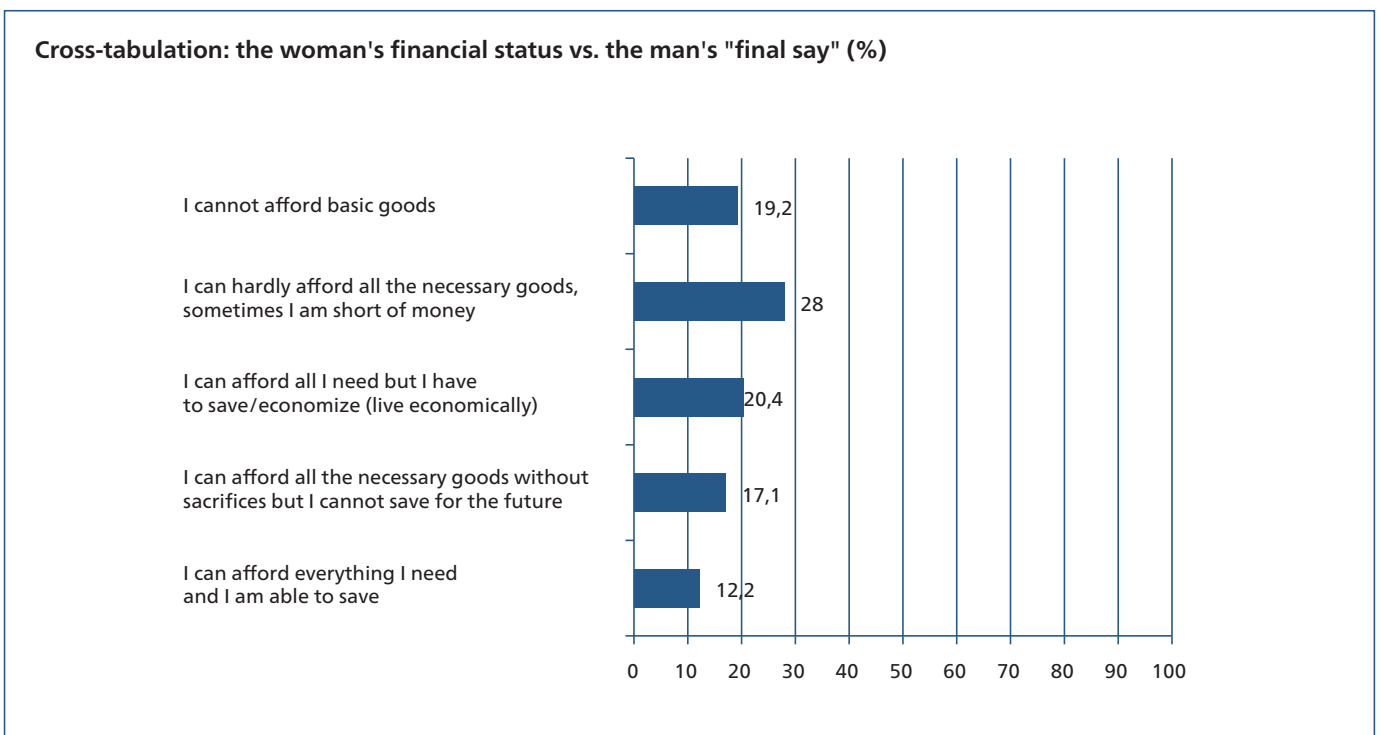
- Most respondents (69%) answered that parents/spouses equally know what is best for the family, 18% said the mother/wife knows best, 5% said the father/husband, 5% said no one in particular, and 3% said someone else;
- Almost half of the respondents (46%) answered that the mother/wife makes meal decisions, 39% said that the parents/spouses decide equally, while only 2% said the father/husband; 8% answered no one in particular and 5% said someone else;

- In terms of tasks related to their children's schooling (homework, parent meetings), 46% indicated both parents are responsible, 28% said the mother is, and 5% named the father; 19% said no one in particular, and 2% said someone else;
- Most (57%) said both parents discipline the children equally, while 23% said responsibility lies on the mother and 5% said it is on the father; 13% said no one; 2% said someone else;
- More than half (61%) of respondents say the woman is fully responsible for the household chores/hygiene, and only 1% said the man is. Both spouses/parents are equally responsible in 29% of cases, no one in 4% and someone else in 5%;
- Both parents/spouses are equally responsible for family budget expenditure in 63% of households, while the father/husband is solely responsible in 16%, and the mother/wife in 13%; 4% said no one in particular and 4% said someone else;
- Just under one-fifth of women (18%) said the husband/father is solely responsible for the overall financial well-being of the household, while most (62%) said that both spouses/parents are equally responsible and only 12% said the woman takes charge; 4% answered that someone else is responsible and 4% said no one in particular;
- In just over half (53%) of cases, parents/spouses take equal responsibility for the religious education of the children, while the mother is solely responsible in 17% of households, the father/husband in 4%, no one in particular in 22%, and someone else in 4%;
- In 48% of households, the parents/spouses equally look after elderly or sick relatives, in 17% only the wife/mother does and only the father/husband does in 3%, while another 28% answered no one in particular and 4% said someone else;
- Almost one fifth (19%) of respondents named husband/father as having "final say" in their house, half (54%) said both partners have, and 11% named the mother/wife; others said no one in particular (13%) or someone else (3%).

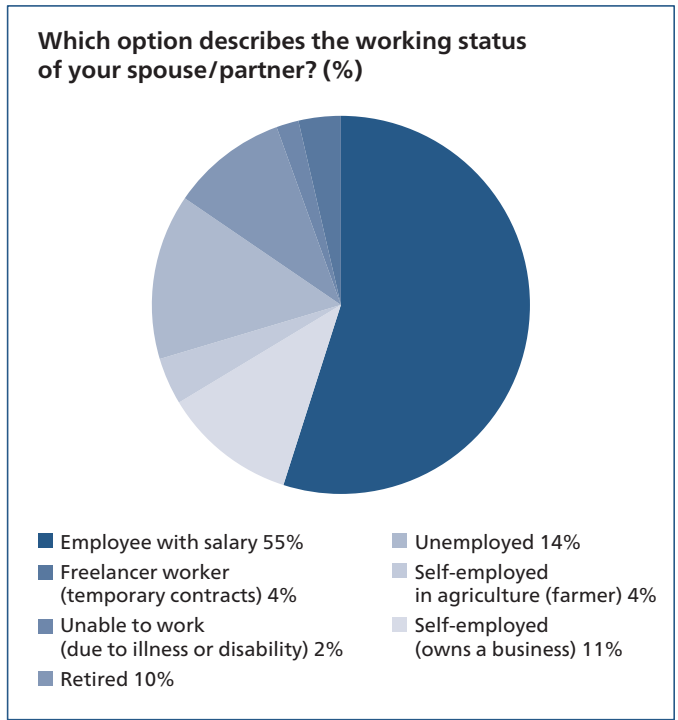
According to the answers, for most responsibilities in the home, the answer "both parents/partners equally" is the most common. While the man's final say is more relevant than women's, and he is more responsible for the financial well-being, the woman has the biggest burden in maintaining hygiene and housekeeping, as well as in deciding what to eat/planning the meals.



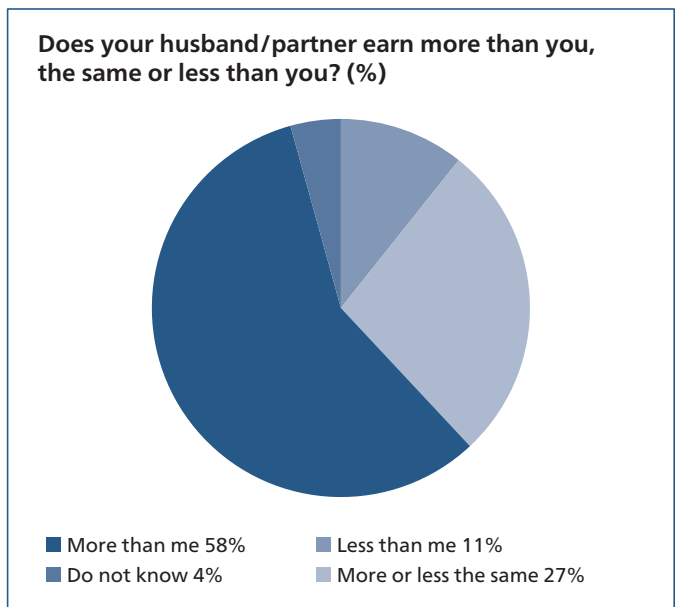
The cross-tabulation analysis of variables shows the husband/father is more likely to have "final say" in a household if the wife/mother is in a difficult or disadvantaged financial situation.



The following data relates only to respondents who are married/live with a partner (N = 639). When asked about the employment status of their partner/spouse, over half (55%) indicated they are employed (with a salary), 14% said unemployed, 11% said self-employed with their own business, 10% said retired, 4% said self-employed in agriculture, 4% said a freelancer (contractual), and 2% said their spouse/partner is unable to work due to illness/disability.

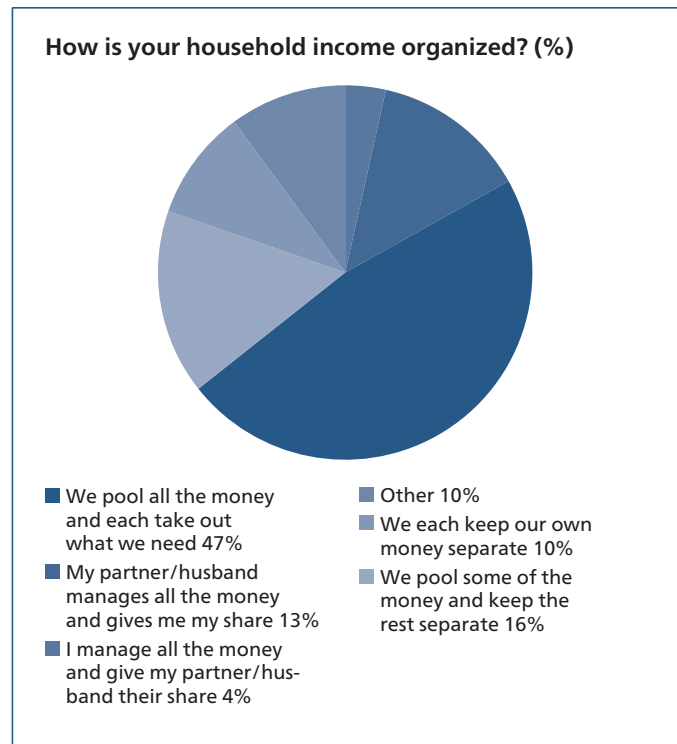


Additionally, 58% shared that their husband/partner earns more than them, 27% said they earn similarly, 11% said they earn more than their husband/partner, and 4% did not know.

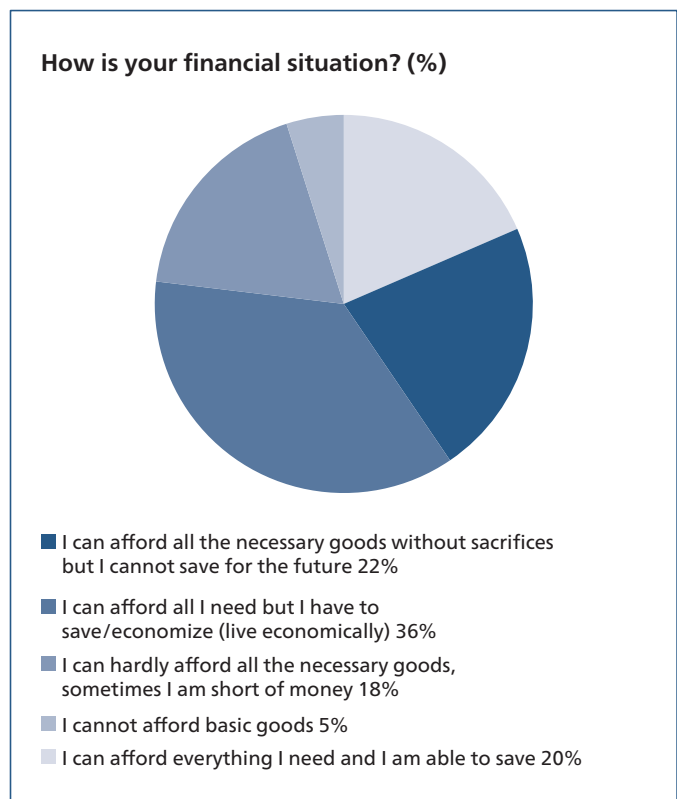


Regarding household income, 47% of women said they pool their income together with their partner/spouse and each takes out what they need. A further 16% pool partial income jointly with their partner and keep the

rest, while 13% said their partner/spouse manages all money and gives them a share and 4% said they manage all money and give their partner a share; 10% said they each keep their own money and 10% answered "other".

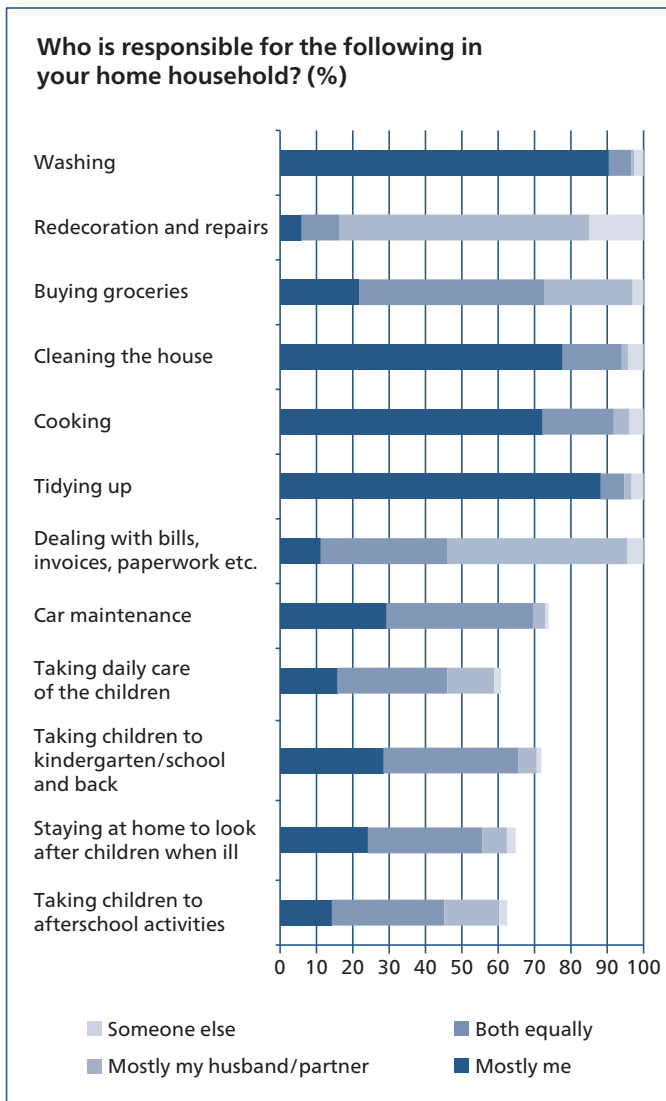


The largest proportion of women (36%) can afford all the necessities but have budget carefully to save money, 22% can afford everything they need but cannot save, and 20% can afford all they need and can save. Still, many women (18%) can barely afford necessities and are sometimes short of money, while 5% are unable to afford basic goods.

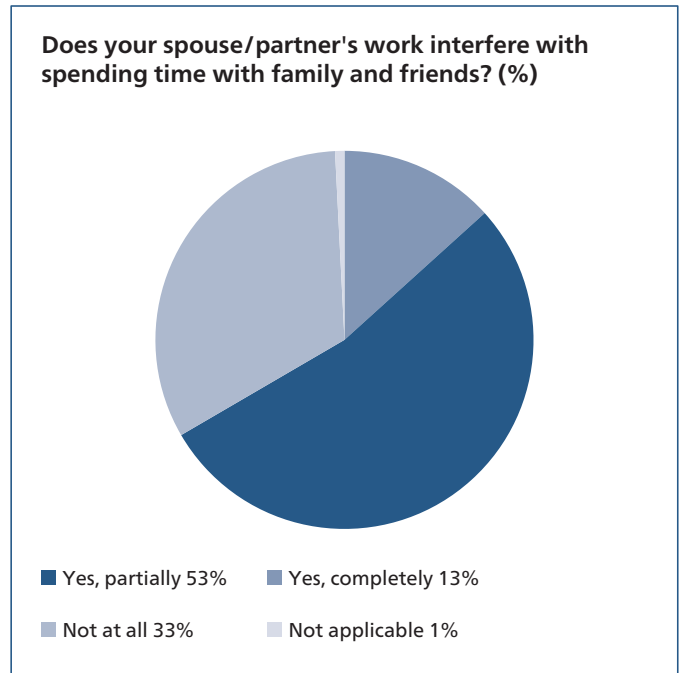


According to our study's data, women who live with a spouse or a partner are more likely to be solely responsible for household chores such as laundry (90%), cleaning (77.6%), cooking (72.1%), and ironing (88.1%), and the husband/partner is likely to do household repairs (68.9%) and pay bills (49.5%). Both share equal responsibility for shopping (51.1%), and the childrearing responsibilities tend to lie solely on the wife/mother or the parents take equal responsibility.

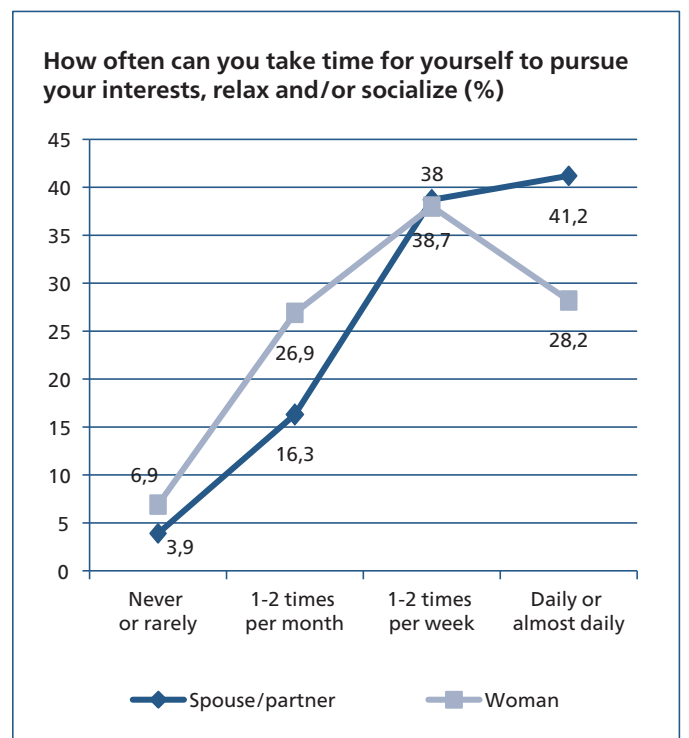
The Time Use Survey of the State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia (2015) showed that, on any given workday, employed women who have children and live with a partner will spend many more hours than men (up to 3 hours more on average) doing household chores, and less time than men enjoying leisure time activities. The situation is similar on weekends.



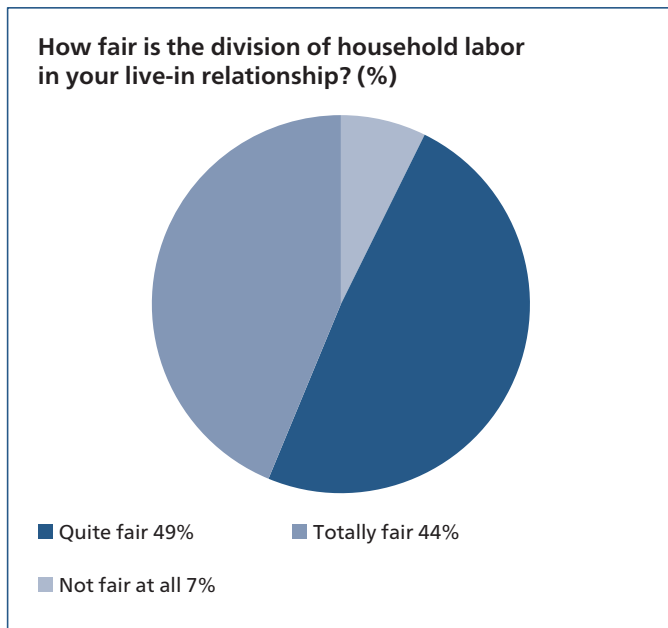
As many as half of the respondents (53%) answered that their spouse/partner's work demands stop them at times from spending with family and friends, while 13% said that their spouse/partner is completely preoccupied with work and has no time for family or friends. The remaining 35% said their spouse/partner's demands do not restrict their time with family or friends at all.



Data shows that women who are married or living with a partner have substantially less time for personal pursuits, socializing, or relaxing than their spouse/partner does. The biggest difference exists for the frequency variable "daily or almost daily", with 28.2% of women agreeing they have each day for leisure activities and 41.2% saying their spouse/partner does. Another large discrepancy exists between the perceptions of how much time women dedicate to personal pursuits (16.3%) versus how much time their partner dedicates (26.9%) "once or twice a month". There is no perceived difference between women and men who have time "once to twice a week" (38%) for leisure.

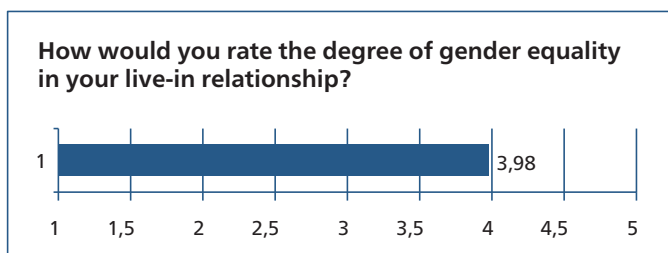


Almost all respondents (93%) believe that the division of household tasks (within their marriage/relationship) is fair, with 44% answering "completely fair" and 49% "somewhat fair". Only 7% answered, "no, not at all".



Respondents also rated the degree of gender equality within their marriage/relationship, on a scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high), resulting in a mean value close to "high" (m = 3.98). This implies that women perceive the current division of household labor and leisure time as fair and that women, to some extent, accept the traditional/patriarchal division of gender roles in Macedonian society as normal.

The analysis did not register any statistically significant correlations with the variables of age or level of education.



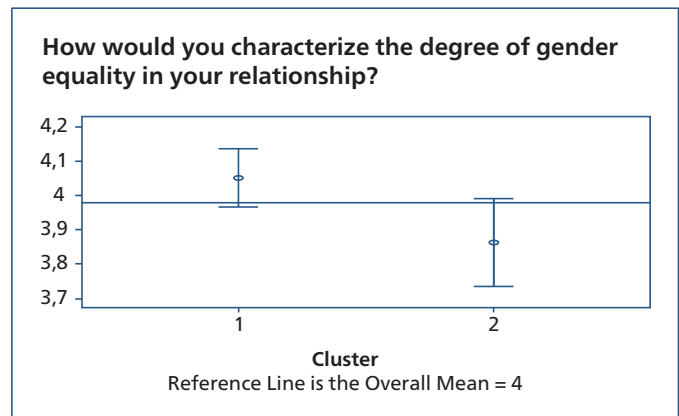
The cluster analysis on **gender equality in a marriage/live-in relationship** identified two distinct groups (clusters 1 and 2) according to demographic characteristics, such as education level, ethnicity, place of residence, and age group.

Cluster 1: Women who expressed gender equality in a marriage/live-in relationship to a higher degree have the following profile:

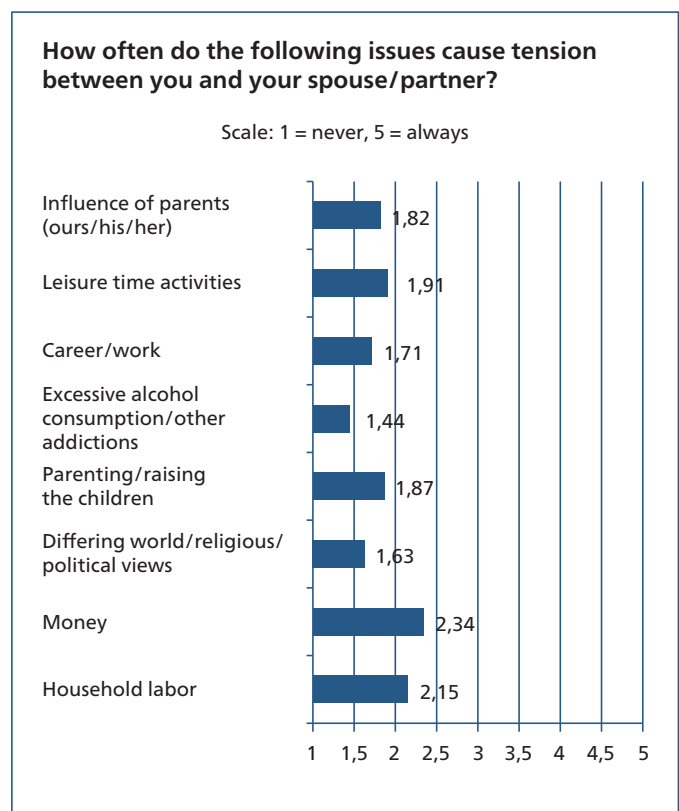
- Macedonian ethnicity;
- urban environment;
- age groups 30-39 and 40-49 years;
- completed secondary education.

Cluster 2: Women who expressed gender equality in their marriage/live-in relationship to a slightly lower degree are profiled as follows:

- Albanian ethnicity;
- rural area;
- age groups 30-39 and 50-59 years;
- completed primary education.

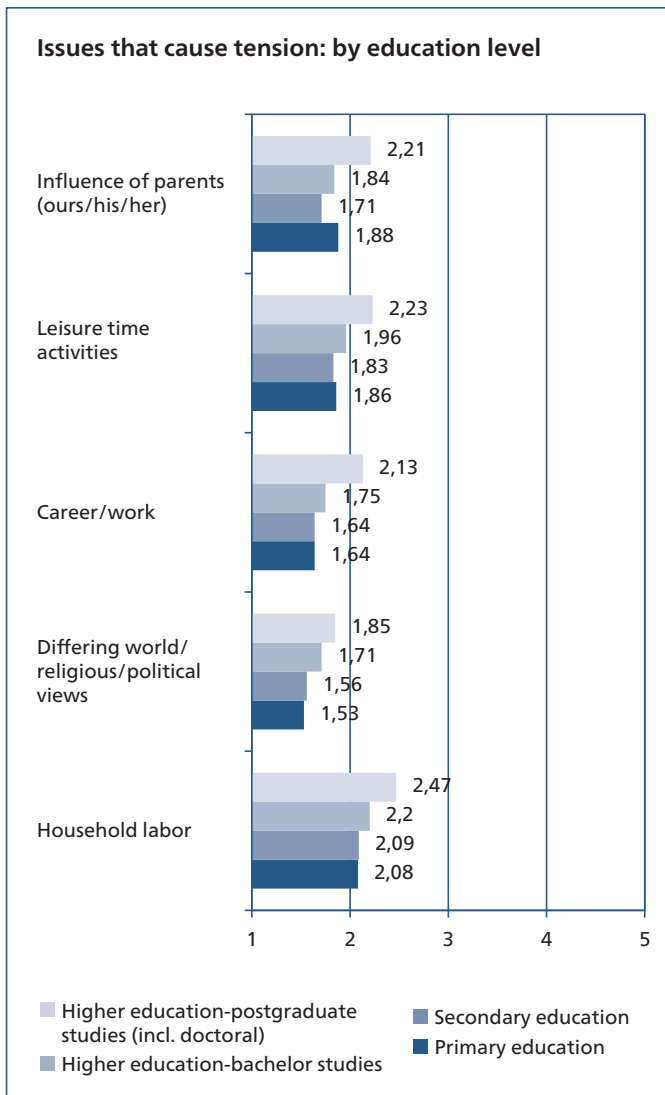


A further look finds that the issues that cause the most arguments between spouses/partners are money (m = 2.34) and household responsibilities (m = 2.15). These values are located in the negative interval of the axis, implying that the 'highest' rated issues do not cause many arguments within the respondents' relationships, with a standard deviation of about 1 (no extreme answers), meaning that they are not widely present within the entire female population.

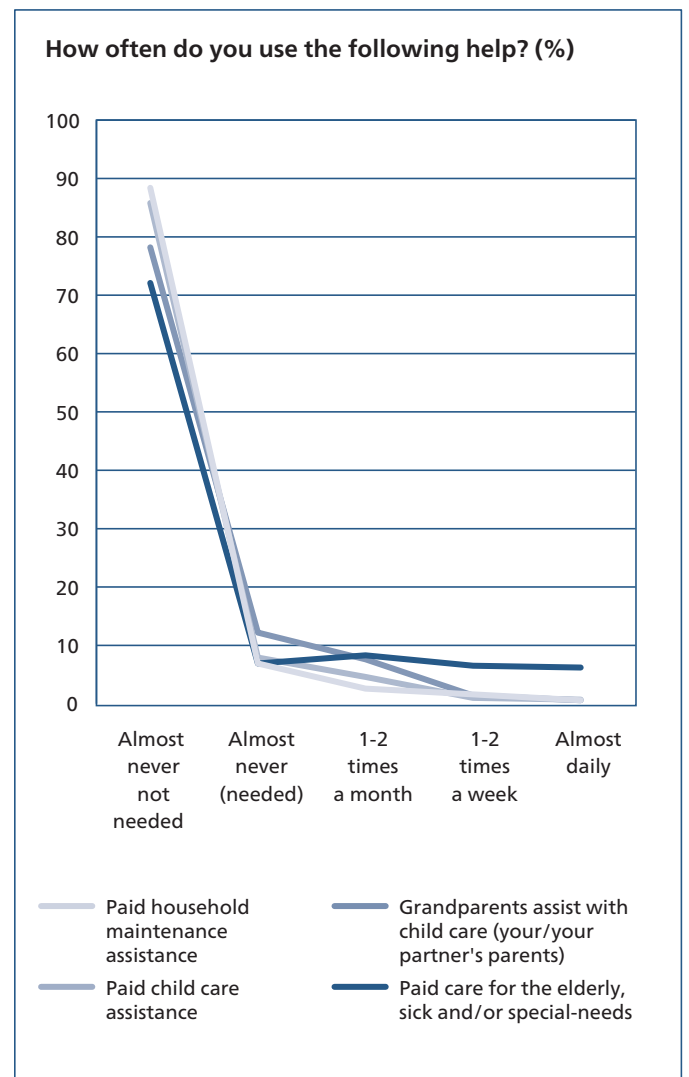


Statistically significant differences were recorded (p < 0.05) by the level of completed education for household responsibilities chores, different views on the world/religion/politics, work and career, use of free time, and influence of their parents. Analysis indicates

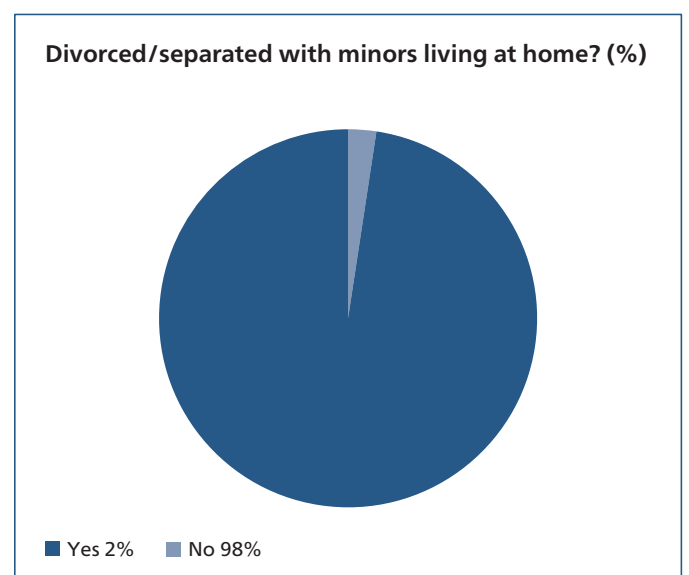
that women with higher education are more likely to have arguments with their partner about these issues than women with lower education levels are.



Women who are married and/or living with a partner rarely use paid or out-of-home help for household duties, childcare, or care for elderly/sick family members. Most of the respondents chose the answer "almost never, no need". The main kind of assistance listed was that of grandparents looking after the children (cumulatively 20%): daily (6%); once or twice a week (6%); and once or twice per month (8%). Another 7.6% enlist the help of a paid housekeeper/cleaner once or twice a month. An additional analysis of divorced/separated respondents with dependent children showed no significant differences recorded in the data.

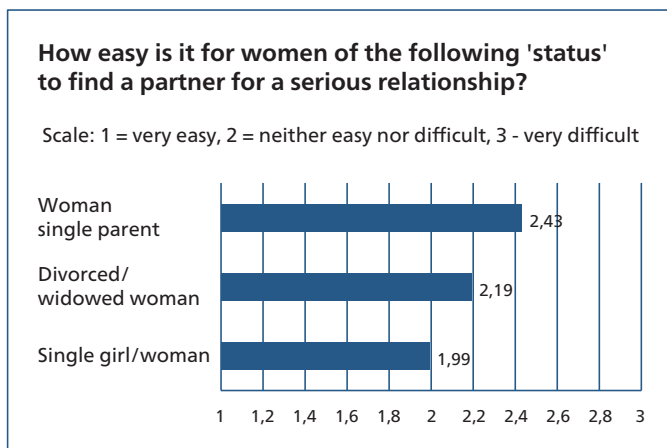


Only 2% of the respondents have a minor child/children with someone with whom they no longer live together (separated/divorced). Due to the extremely small percentage of cases (as a research limitation), the questions/answers from the survey (who has custody, what are the challenges/problems, payment of alimony, etc.) are no further analysed.



4.4. FINDING A PARTNER FOR AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP/MARRIAGE

On a scale of 1 (very easy) to 3 (very difficult), respondents agreed that it is most difficult for single mothers ($m = 2.43$) to find a serious partner for an intimate relationship, followed by divorcees/widows ($m = 2.19$). This suggests the existence of prejudices in Macedonian society relating to a woman's eligibility for a serious relationship/partner. That said, the perception of the level of ease for single women seeking a partner is also not high, with a marginally positive result of $m = 1.99$, essentially meaning "neither easy nor difficult". Bivariate correlation analysis indicates this perception is not proportional to the respondents' age.



4.5. THE SITUATION OF WOMEN DURING COVID-19

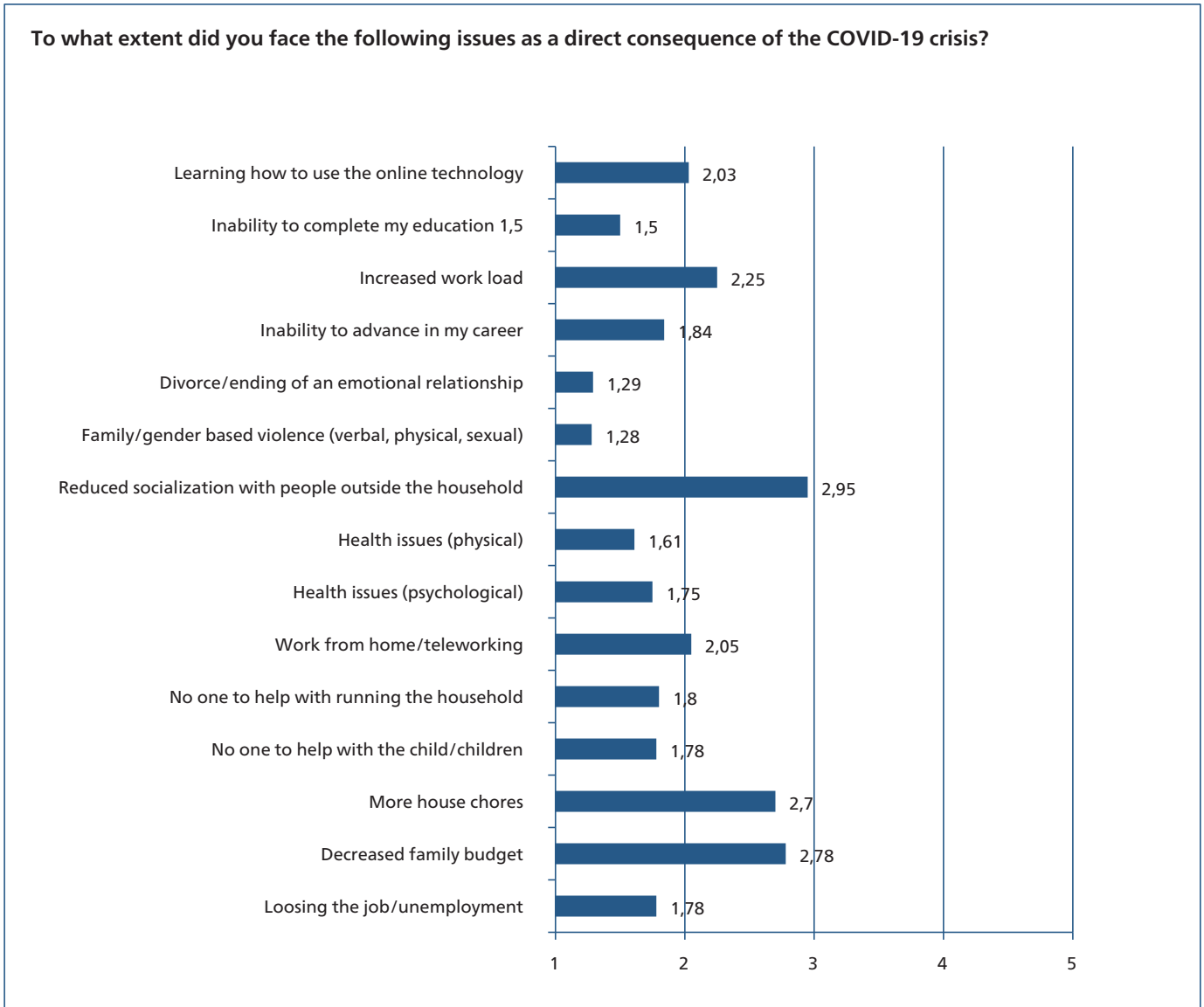
Secondary data show that the volume of unpaid work done by women at home, as recorded before the pandemic, was alarming. Namely, in the Republic of North Macedonia, the ratio of women to men performing unpaid work relating to family care and household chores pre-pandemic was 72.5% to 27.5% (Charmes, 2019). One of the first COVID-19 crisis support measures issued by the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia was to offer female employees with children under 10 years of age a special absence of leave, mandatory for public sector employers and encouraged in the private sector. Many eligible mothers, however, did not take

the special leave by either choice, or pressure from employers and fear of losing their job, and consequently faced the exceptional challenge of juggling work demands with existing household and family demands, their children's online/home-schooling, and many other additional activities (Reactor-Research in Action, 2020). Now, after the passing of the state of emergency, many of the women who did take advantage of the measure-prescribed leave during the initial stages of the crisis are working online from home, sometimes having to learn new technology, in an environment not suitable for working. Those mothers who must go to work in person, face the predicament of leaving young children at home alone or arranging a way for their children to continue to attend school online (at the time of the Women's Study 2020, there were no in-person classes for fourth grade and up).

Women are among the most at-risk in the pandemic. ILO reports (2020) report that women who work in frontline services such as hospitality and health (e.g. nurses) are more vulnerable than men are to the adverse effects of the virus and situation. Women have less social protections (welfare support, minimum guaranteed wage) and bear a disproportionate burden of care at home during the closure of schools, kindergartens, and care centers. The situation with gender inequality in the world, at work, and in general, is in danger of regressing decades (ILO, 2020).

The Women's Study 2020 asked respondents to rate the extent to which they faced various problems, challenges, and risks as a direct consequence of COVID-19, on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (very high extent). The analysis saw mean values for all aspects located in the negative interval of the axis ($m < 3$ and a standard deviation of around 1), indicating that, at the time of the research or the beginning of the second 'wave', the wider target population did not experience the listed problems/challenges/risks as a direct result of COVID-19.

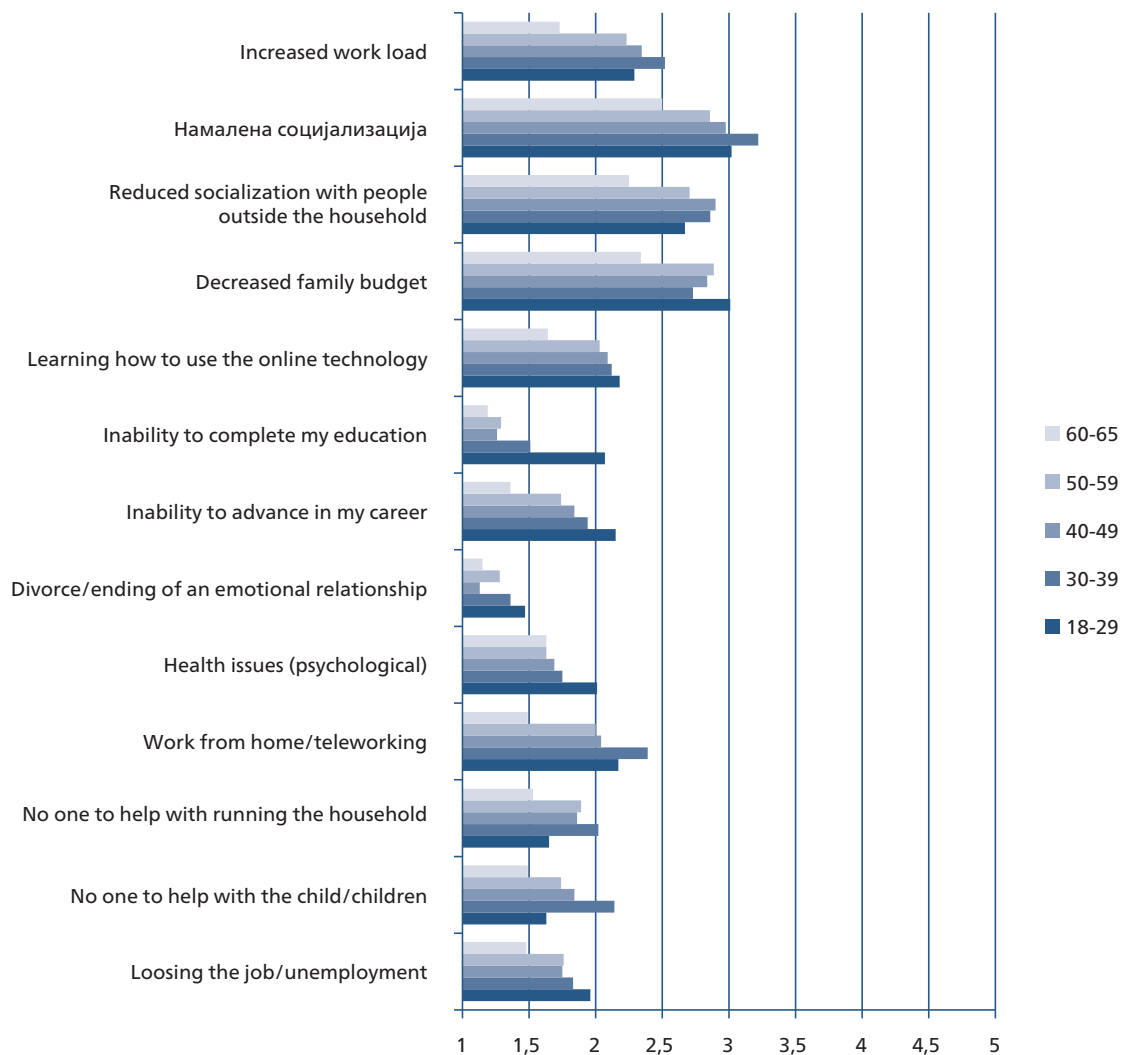
The issues faced 'largely' as a direct result of the COVID-19 crisis, include reduced socialization with contacts outside the home ($m = 2.95$), reduced family budget ($m = 2.78$), and an increased volume of domestic responsibilities ($m = 2.7$). Since all mean values are low and sit in the negative axis interval, the overall perceived connection to COVID-19 is weak.



The bivariate correlation analysis shows an inverse relationship to age for almost all variables. The exceptions are physical health, childcare assistance, and domestic violence (showing no connection to age). Therefore, younger women are more likely to see COVID-19 as the direct cause of the stated problems (apart from the exceptions). Non-parametric tests show statistically significant differences ($p < 0.01$) by age group for all issues except physical health problems and domestic-based violence. The following analysis is a comparison of mean values by age group. The most negative perception of the

effects of COVID-19 is seen among women aged 18 to 39. Those aged 18-29 saw COVID-19 as a contributor to unemployment, reduced family budgets, barriers to career advancement and education completion, relationship breakdowns/divorce, psychological problems, and the need to use new technology (to work online). Those aged 30-39 saw COVID-19 as somewhat linked to struggles with managing children, household responsibilities and working from home, and limited chances to socialize away from home.

Impact of COVID-19: by age group



"Up until now, I was using the energy I had accumulated pre-pandemics (...) I still went to work and I believe that exhausted me. Some of my colleagues are getting sick with COVID-19 and the circle [of unaffected] continues to narrow. Of course, I am scared for the health of my family, my mother, and that sometimes blocks me. From time to time, I drink coffee outdoors [with friends and colleagues] in nature and that helps." (BS, 43, Skopje, Macedonian)

"As mothers and as women, this crisis of COVID-19 negatively affects us psychologically. We are not free to have fun or go out with the children; the stress is great when buying food, and then hygiene and cleaning exhaust us more. This situation has affected work, with the closing of schools and (...) online learning. We see many delays in the progression of learning (...) the state has left pupils [unable to] connect online because they do not have the necessary equipment (...) one day they have classes, two days they do not." (RC, 35, village of Cegrane/Gostivar, Albanian)

"The longer this crisis lasts, the worse it affects me as a woman, as an employee, and in every other role. In the beginning, I had patience and understanding, I found ways to work on myself and fill my time by changing my daily routine. Now, I see this situation as a big constraint, a disruption of plans, and a waste of time [just] waiting for the crisis to end. I try to maintain my physical and mental health, but the stress is great and I am afraid of what I will be like, and what we will be like, after the pandemic - a big change for the worst - dissatisfaction and growing fear." (GT, 44, Ohrid, Macedonian)

“The COVID-19 crisis has caused a lot of changes for me. For example, I cannot see my close relatives, or my best friends, even my boyfriend, because we both have older and younger family members that we need to look after. Then, as an activist for the rights of Roma women and girls, I cannot carry out activities, I cannot see the activists, my freedom of movement and ability to take action has been completely violated.” (TV, 26, Skopje, Roma)

“Personally, it did not affect me that much, as I have been working from home for many years now, but [you see it] in the children: work, school, company, meetings with friends are reduced to a minimum, lack of travel, coffee catch-ups, but the world has already faced pandemics and survived.” (LO, 56, Skopje, Serb)

“It is difficult, because in addition to the epithets of wife, housewife, careerist, for the first time, I gained the title ‘mother’. During the same period, my husband worked with a reduced salary, and then he lost his job due to the crisis. I waited 3 months for the parental leave payment.” (AM, 30, Skopje, Macedonian)

“The psychosis that has arisen in which we are constantly overwhelmed with information about the number of infected and deceased has caused a feeling of powerlessness in all of us. The priority is, of course, the protection of children, to provide a solid education for them. Surviving this pandemic is a difficult mission.” (MI, 36, Skopje, Albanian)

“Hard, very hard - one thing you fear for is your health, and financially it’s very hard without a job.” (IJ, 53, Delchevo, Macedonian)

“The COVID-19 crisis restricts daily living. It causes fear and unrest among the population in general.” (ES, 26, Stip, Macedonian)

“The situation with Covid 19, personally, did not change much in my way of life as a woman whose primary activity is agriculture. But, how time passes and the situation oscillates it is reflected through the reduced opportunity for open communication with others. I have accepted the situation with Covid-19 as a new imposed way of life in which both physical and mental adjustment is required. However, the events cause alienation among the population.” (AT, 45, Kavadarci, Macedonian)

“As an employed mother of two school-age children (first and sixth grade) I must say that this crisis has affected my mental health quite seriously due to the need to simultaneously ‘play’ more roles as a mother, educator, teacher, worker, wife... I take comfort in the fact that I am still in a privileged position because the employer allows me to work from home, with flexible working hours and to adjust the working hours to other responsibilities and needs. I am aware that many women do not have this privilege. Although, it could lead to a ‘burnout’ in a very short time ...” (DV, 37, Skopje, Serb)

“This crisis has caused fear, not only for me as a young woman and as an employee, but for the entire population (...) for my health and the health of my loved ones and beyond, fear for our health system, fear for economic loss.” (KSh, 26, Stip, Macedonian)

4.6. CONCLUSIONS

- Women tend to dedicate their time to family, friends, relaxing and media entertainment, such as watching movies or series, using social media (e.g., Viber, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), listening to music or using the internet. Less so to knowledge or skills acquisition, volunteer work, creative pursuits, sports, and cultural or entertainment events.
- Age, motherhood, and place of residence all influence leisure time activities, with younger women and women in urban areas engaging in a wide variety of activities, and women with children predominantly spending time at home with family.
- Married women or those living with a partner take on almost all the household labor, apart from home repairs, which the man does usually. Both tend to share shopping and bill-paying equally, and in many cases the child-rearing, although many households solely leave this to the mother/wife. Women who live with a partner report having far less time for personal pursuits, socializing, or relaxing than their partner. Yet, nearly all women in this category believe the division of household chores is, “somewhat” or “very” fair, and they largely agree they have a “good” level of equality in their relationship. This may point to the acceptance of gender roles as prescribed by traditional values and beliefs.
- Women with higher perceptions of gender equality in their live-in relationship were of Macedonian ethnicity, living in urban areas, aged 40-49 years, with secondary education. Whereas lower gender equality exists in a live-in relationship for women who fit the profile of Albanian in ethnicity, living in rural areas, aged 30-39 and 50-59, and with primary education only.

- A woman's financial situation affects her "say" and thus the equality in the relationship. Financial dependence on her partner usually equates to her spouse having the "final say".
- Women in live-in relationships rarely use paid or outside help for housework or caring for children or the elderly/sick relatives; grandparents help with child caring in some cases.
- Regardless of age, respondents perceive single mothers and divorcees as facing the most discrimination when seeking a partner for a serious relationship, although they also answered it seemed "neither easy nor difficult" for single women without children. This may suggest traditional notions in Macedonian society about women and dating.
- Those aged 18-29 see COVID-19 as a cause of unemployment, reduced family budget, barriers to advancing career and completing education, breaks up/divorce, psychological issues, and the push to learn new technology (work online). Those aged 30-39 indicated COVID-19 left them without childcare and help at home, despite having to work from home, as well as reducing chances to socialize outside of the home.
- Qualitative responses regarding the COVID-19 situation indicated fear and anxiety about health and finances, reduced social interaction, the inability to plan for the future, greater difficulties for young girls and women in terms of education, employment, socializing, and emotional well-being, and for employed women, especially mothers of school-aged children (learning online), who are juggling various conflicting roles: wife, mother, employee, household manager, daughter to own parents, etc.
- Ensure unimpeded access to social services and governmental support measures;
- Introduce long-term paternity leave and parental leave that parents can share, since maternal protection is a fundamental right of working women as stipulated in key universal human rights treaties;
- Strengthen existing capacities and open community centers in rural and urban areas, which provide for counseling, socializing, cultural, child care, and elderly needs (per the needs assessment), managed at local and national levels;
- Raise awareness of the unpaid care-workload done predominantly by women in society;
- employers to introduce benefit packages and flexible work schedules for the working mothers they employ (these do not have to be regulated only by law, but can arise from organization-led initiatives), with special attention given to single mothers and mothers of children with health problems or disabilities requiring additional care and support;
- The State, local government, and international organizations to provide sustainable funding to local women's organizations that best understand the situation, problems, and priorities specific to different categories of women (according to type and degree of vulnerability). Such funding will enable women's social activation and improve their personal and family well-being;
- Publicly address gender stereotypes that are detrimental to women, through campaigns and education, whilst sharing success stories and examples from educational and scientific institutions, professional associations, and companies to present dynamic role models to the public, especially to girls and women, i.e., educated, employed, financially independent, successful, influential, and decision-making female role models;
- Assist women to deal with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, both during and after the crisis, with the necessary stakeholders tailoring assistance according to women's specific needs, issues, challenges faced as a result of COVID-19;
- Introduce a "first homeowner" tax package to support women to buy their first home.

4.7. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is not possible to influence the family and social life of women directly, but it is possible to provide direct support through:

- Build mechanisms that provide women with greater social security and job protections;
- Support implementation of and compliance with existing Labor Law provisions;

5

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

5.1. ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Data on the position of women in the workplace (for both the private and public sectors) is insufficient. Therefore, this part of the research refers instead to the attitudes of respondents towards their working environment. Data shows positive attitudes about mutual trust and respect, attitude towards women, adequacy of work and education, career advancement, and relationships between men and women in the workplace. More than half of respondents have positive attitudes (60.8%) to the statement, "in the organization I work in there is mutual trust and respect"; 27.2% take a neutral position.

Over half also agree (56.2%) that "indecent treatment of women in my organization is illegal and severely punished"; 22.5% are neutral and 21.3% do not agree.

Half of the respondents agree (47.4%) with the statement, "career advancement in my organization is achieved based on fair and objective criteria"; 34.9% are neutral and 17.8% do not agree.

Regarding the freedom to use days off, 16.8% agree that they are afraid to ask for days off in case of disapproval by their superiors. Just over half (57.4%) do not agree and do not feel scared to ask for days off; 25.8% are neutral.

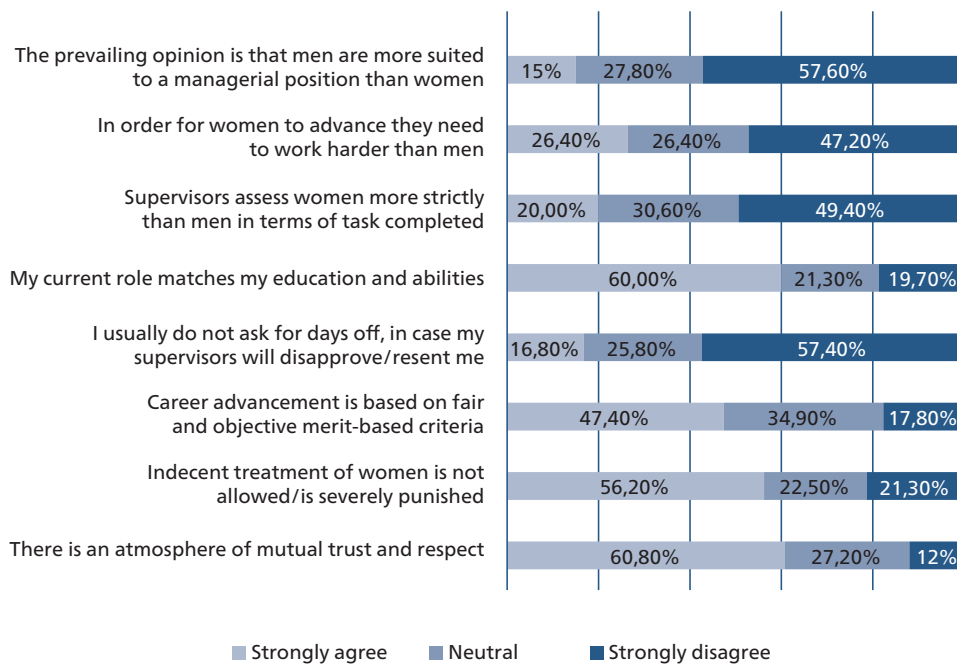
As to whether the job in which they work is appropriate to their education and abilities, 60% of the respondents agree; 21.3% are neutral and 19.7% disagree.

Regarding the statement, "women's work is measured more strictly than men's", half of the respondents do not agree; 30.6% are neutral and 20% agree with the statement.

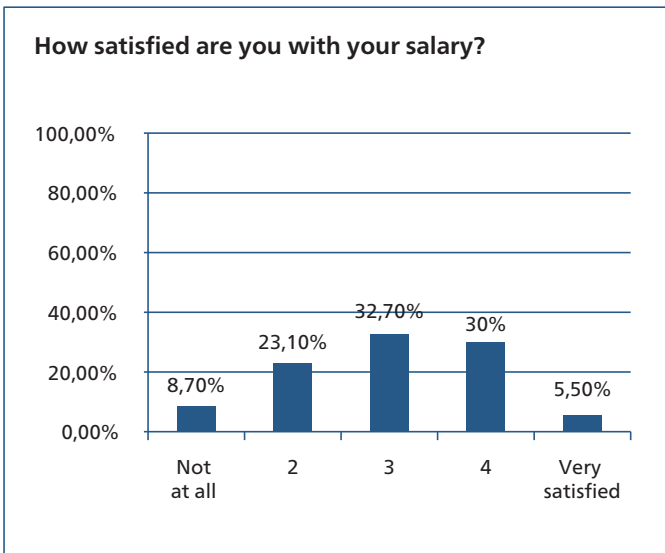
A quarter (26.4%) believe that to be promoted, women need to work harder than men; 26.4% are neutral and 47.2% do not agree.

Regarding the statement, "in the organization in which I work, the prevailing opinion is that men are more suitable for a managerial position than women", 57.6% do not agree; 27.8% are neutral and about 15% agree with this statement.

To what extent do you agree that the following kinds of situations occur at your workplace:

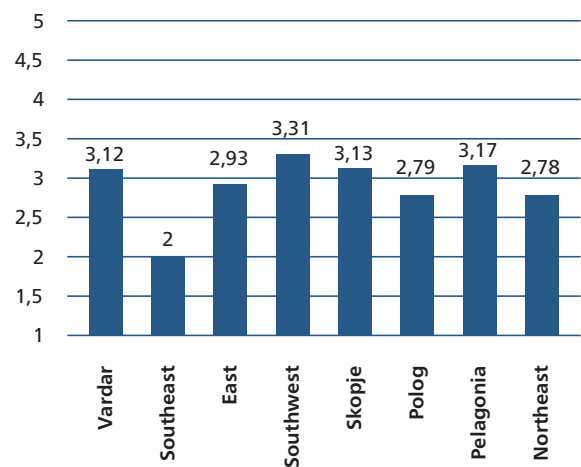


Regarding salary, employed women are largely indifferent 32.7% or overall satisfied (30% are "somewhat satisfied" and 5.5% "very satisfied"), while almost one-third are dissatisfied (23.1% say "somewhat dissatisfied" and 8.7% "completely dissatisfied"). Women in urban areas lean towards satisfied (m=3.09) and those in rural areas lean towards dissatisfied (m=2.81).



Women in the Southwest show slightly positive satisfaction (m = 3.31), as do those in Pelagonija (m = 3.17), Skopje (m = 3.13) and Vardar (m = 3.12). Leaning towards being dissatisfied are women in the Southeast (m = 2), followed by those in the Northeast (m = 2.78), Polog (m = 2.79), and the East (m = 2.93). No statistically significant differences exist by ethnicity or education level.

How satisfied are you with your salary: by region

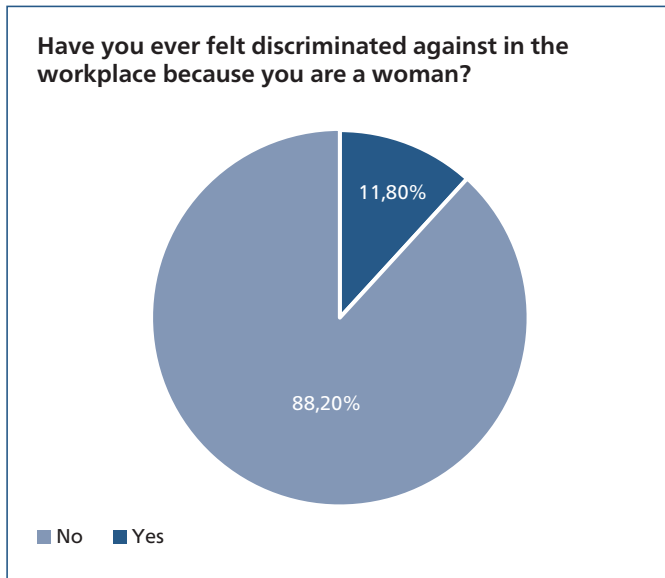


5.2. DISCRIMINATION AT THE WORKPLACE

Some of the above data show an almost ideal atmosphere in workplaces, however, secondary research points to the phenomenon of unrecognized inequality and discrimination, which should not be ignored. Several studies have concluded that gender discrimination in the country is unrecognized both at a structural level and by the victim of discrimination (OSCE, 2013; Perceptions of Gender Equality: Women in the Macedonian Economy, 2011).

The results from the Women's Study 2020 lead to the same conclusion: women do not recognize discrimination.

In response to the question “have you ever felt discriminated against in the workplace because you are a woman?” a surprising 88.2% said “no,” they never felt discriminated against at work.



To explore more deeply how gender equality and discrimination might present in the workplace, in possibly ‘unrecognized’ ways, our study posed a series of targeted questions.

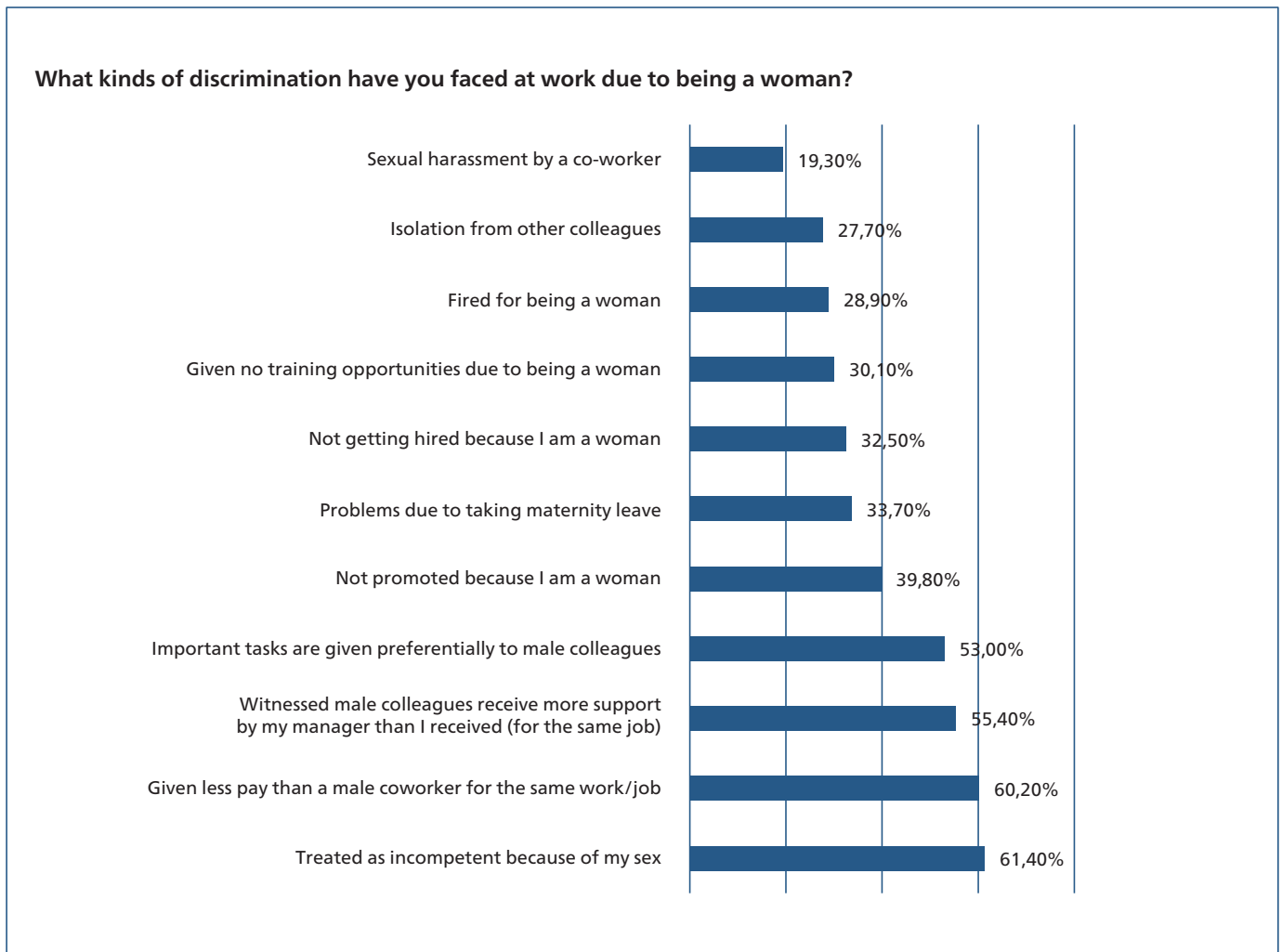
Almost two-thirds of working women report they earn less than men do for the same job position (60.2%), and 60.4% have been made to feel ‘incompetent’ because they are women.

Over half of employed women receive less support from managers than their male counterparts do, to do the same job (55.4%), while 53% have managers who preferentially assign significant tasks to colleagues of the opposite sex.

One-third of employed respondents experience/d the following gender-based discrimination:

- I was not promoted because I am a woman (39.8%);
- I had problems due to taking maternity leave (33.7%);
- I was not hired because I am a woman (32.5%);
- I was not offered training/educational opportunities because I am a woman (30.1%);
- I was fired because I am a woman (28.9%);
- I am made to feel isolated in the workplace because I am a woman (27.7%).

One-fifth (19.3%) of respondents indicated they had been sexually harassed by a co-worker.



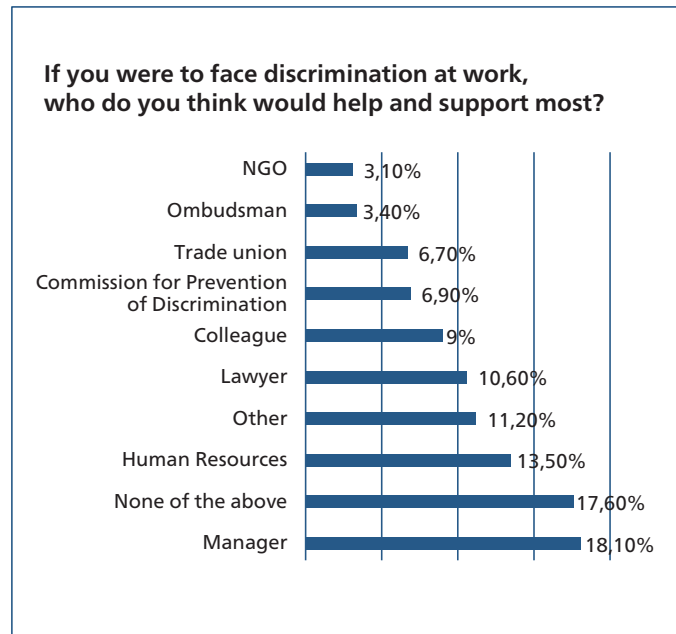
An analysis by education level indicates that women with secondary and primary education tend to experience a greater degree of certain types of workplace gender-based discrimination than women with higher education do. A breakdown by education level shows the following results: I have experienced earning less than an employee of the opposite sex (primary 77.8%, secondary, 68.4%, higher 47.2%); I got fired because I am a woman (primary 66.7%, secondary 26%, higher 22%); I have not been hired because I am a woman (primary 44.4%, secondary 34.2%, higher 27.8%); I have experienced sexual harassment (primary 33.3%, secondary 15.8%, higher 19.4%); I have had problems due to taking/requesting maternity leave (primary 44.4%, secondary 44.7%, higher 19.4%). By contrast, those with higher education are more likely to feel isolated at work based on gender (36%), compared to those with secondary (21%) or primary (22%) education.

These results are troubling, in that they suggest that women may not recognize or understand the full spectrum of what constitutes discrimination (or do not want to admit to or define it as such in association with themselves). This is seen in the fact that women initially overwhelmingly claimed never to have felt discriminated against at work based on gender, and then later attested to many negative experiences that are by definition discrimination. It is also disheartening to note that few women trust that someone will help them if they are discriminated against.

When asked to whom they would turn for the most help and support, if faced with discrimination in the

workplace, more women said they would seek out someone internally, notably their direct superior (18%), the human resources department (13%), or a co-worker (9%). Outside bodies seen as most helpful were trade unions (6.7%), the Commission for Prevention of Discrimination (6.9%), the Ombudsman (3.4%), and related NGOs (3.1%); while 10% would consult a lawyer first.

Almost one-fifth (17.6%) think that none of the above would give them the appropriate help and support and 11.2% chose the option "other".



"I had a positive experience when I was hired in a bank as a warden, despite being a woman, and I was discriminated against in a factory - I applied to be a doorkeeper and was rejected because I am a woman" (IZ, 53, secondary education).

"I recently came across an example where an employee of a company received threats and insults because she became pregnant, just because she was a new employee (...)" (ES, 29, secondary education).

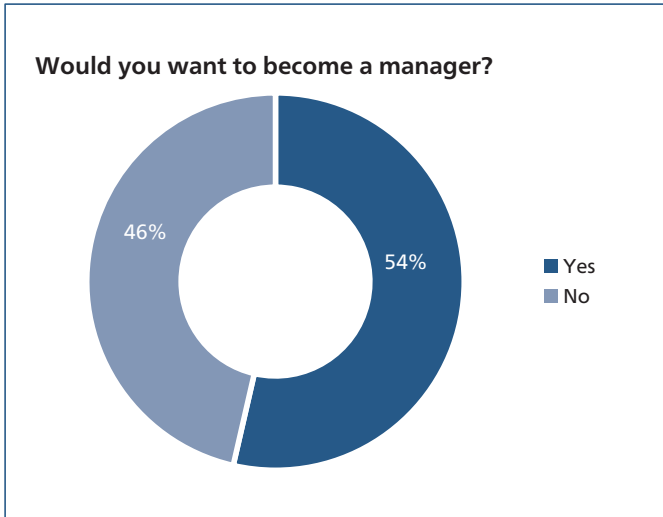
"Many mothers of young children and pregnant women lose their jobs for "no reason" and have no protections, or the employer, during the job interview, asks the woman if she plans to give birth" (KSh, 26).

5.3. ADVANCING TO MANAGERIAL POSITIONS

Job promotion is one of the areas in which "hidden" discrimination is prevalent, and the inability of women to advance is popularly referred to as the "glass ceiling". The glass ceiling effect is defined as "an invisible barrier in the hierarchy that prevents women or minorities from gaining positions at higher levels" (Merriam-Webster, 2019) or "an invisible but real barrier through which the next level of progress can be seen, but cannot be reached by some qualified and deserving employees" (Businessdictionary, 2019).

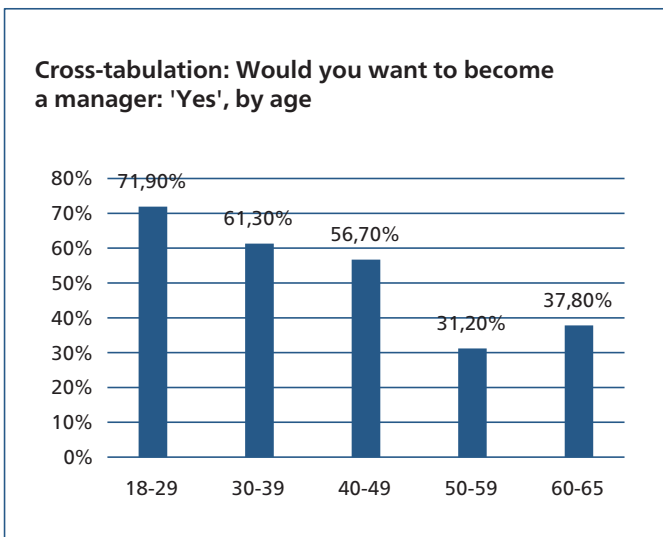
Referring to the Republic of North Macedonia: "In the largest companies in the country, the ratio between women and men is as follows: 30:70 (a total of 3 women

are chairpersons), 20:80 (a total of 12 women are members of boards), 26:74 (a total of 11 women are executive directors) and 10:90 (3 women are general directors)" (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2018). The proportion of women in management positions in the Republic of North Macedonia (Topuzovska Latkovikj, 2019) is below European Union figures (26.7%) (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2018) and far from the 2020 European Union goal for women to be represented on the supervisory and management boards of medium and large companies with a minimum of 40% (European Commission, 2012). Women managers are most often present in small and medium-sized companies, while in the largest and most influential fields of the industry they find it more difficult to reach senior management positions (MTM, 2018).



The figure of only 54% of women who want to advance to a managerial position also confirms the existence of hidden discrimination.

Women in the city (59%) want to advance to a managerial position more than women in rural areas (41%) want to. Young people up to 29 years old want to advance the most to a managerial position (71.9%), with this desire decreasing with the increasing of age, down to 61.3% for those aged 30-39 and 56.7% for women in the 40-49 age group.



That the glass ceiling phenomenon is present and comes equipped with a faulty (promotion) ladder, is also shown by the data on why women do not want to attempt to advance to a managerial position. Respondents rated the reasons why they do not want to advance to a managerial position.

The highest-ranked reason, "I would not receive support from the top management" (3.55), suggests that management in the country is still a "men's club" that does not welcome women.

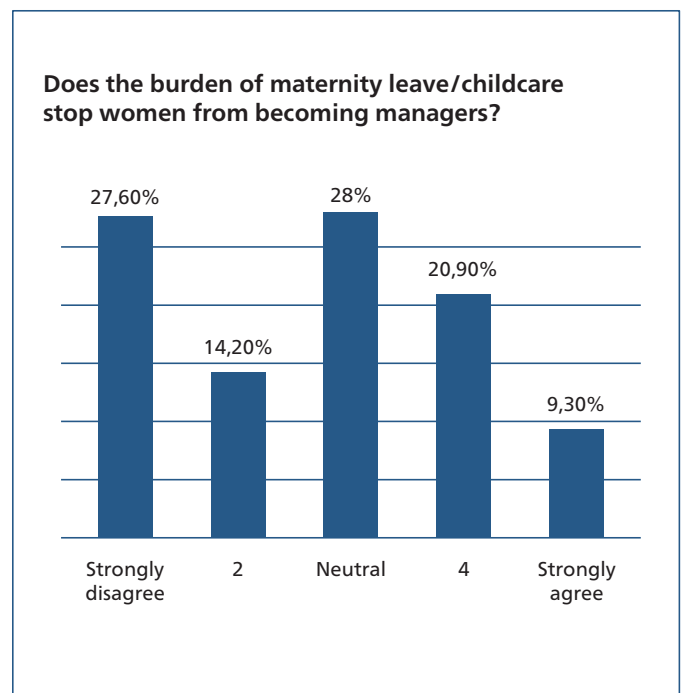
The next highest response supports the data that the woman is the one who is mainly responsible to carry the

burden of home and family duties: "I'm not sure if I can balance between family responsibilities and work demands" (3.18).

Fears of failure, "I am not sure I will be successful as a manager" (3.14), and isolation and stress: "I won't be able to handle the stress associated with management responsibilities" (3.11) were also high. Far less of a factor is: "I am not interested in that kind of work" (2.01).



When asked whether maternity leave and childcare needs are factors that reduce women's ability to advance to managerial positions, 30% of respondents agree they are, 42% do not agree and 28% are neutral.



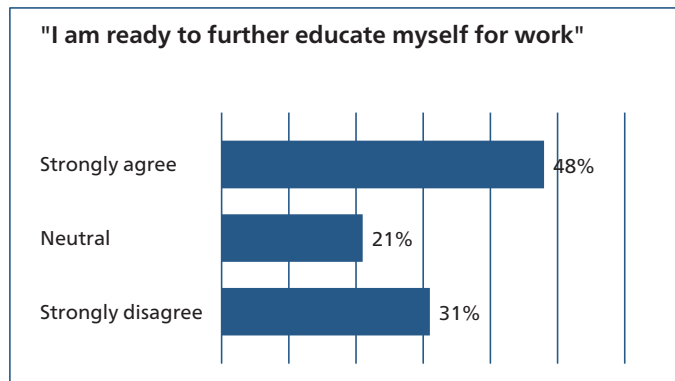
5.4. WOMEN AND PERSONAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS CAREER

Career development is the shaping of personal identity and the path to work advancement. It starts long before the first job, starting with ideas about what you want to do and other work-related goals. It then extends throughout one's working life and into retirement. The research for this section starts from the broadest and most accepted definition of career: "[it is] a continuous lifelong process of developing an experience focused on seeking, providing and processing information about oneself, professional and educational opportunities, lifestyle and taking on various roles throughout life." (Hansen 1976). In other words, a career is a process through which people understand how they relate to the world of work and realize their role in it. The objective dimension of a career is for one person to take on one or more individual job positions throughout their working life. The subjective dimension consists of the changes in values, attitudes, and motives that occur during and resulting from a person's working life.

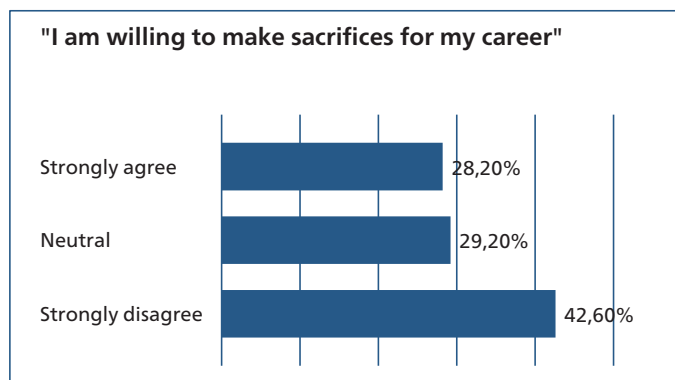
Super's career development theory (Super, 1957, 1990) has career "maturity" as a central construct. Career maturity refers to an individual's willingness to make age-appropriate career decisions and to manage the development of the career tasks he or she faces. The effectiveness of the decision for future career development depends on the maturity of two-dimension types: affective and cognitive (Crites, 1976). The cognitive dimension refers to decision-making skills, and the affective dimension refers to the assessment of career attitudes and the decision-making process. The cognitive dimension includes adequate knowledge of the work world and one's work skills and abilities. Also, Savickas (1996) believes that the cognitive dimension is important to examine because cognitive competencies are what leads a person to take action.

It is especially important to be proactive in this whole process, which means creating your own goals and vision for career development and personally investing and persevering to fulfill these (Borota Popovska et al. 2014). Therefore, the Women's Study 2020 asked each respondent questions about their vision, readiness to sacrifice for a career, and desire or willingness to learn.

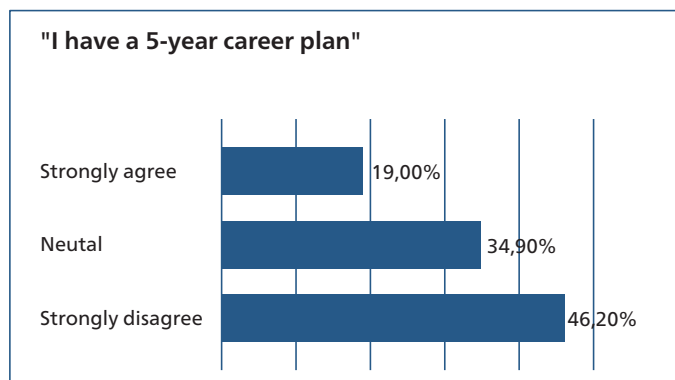
Almost half strongly agree they are willing to educate themselves further for the needs of their job (48%), while 31% strongly disagree and 21% are neutral or not strongly decided either way.



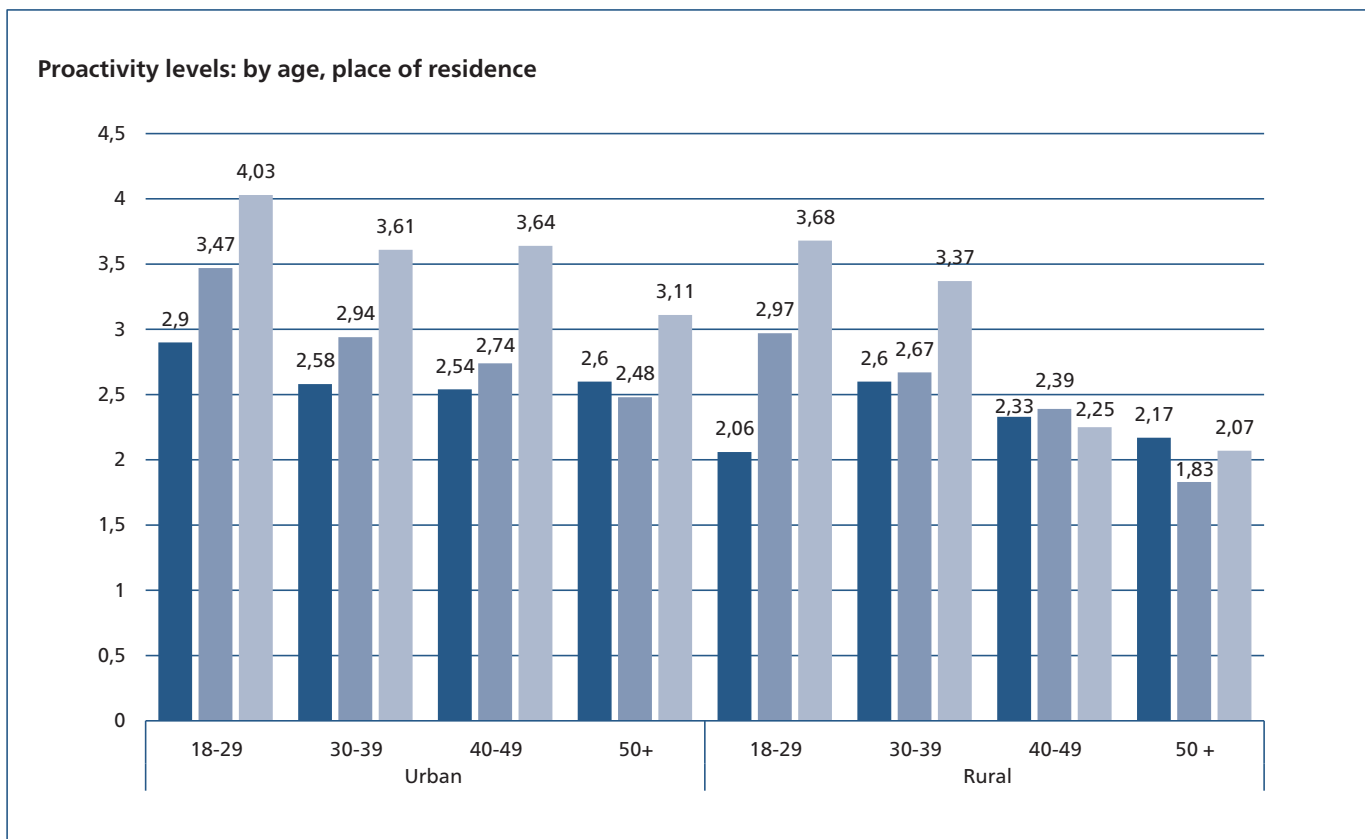
More than one-quarter (28.2%) expressed their strong willingness to make sacrifices to advance their career, although more (42.6%) showed strong resistance and 29.2% were undecided.



Only 19% of respondents have a 5-year career, while 46.2% have no plan and 34.9% are neutral, whereby neutrality infers a negative response; this indicates low proactivity among women.



The highest proactivity exists among those respondents with higher education ($m = 3.58$), a result that is far greater than those educated to secondary ($m = 2.87$) or primary ($m = 2.52$) levels. By age and place of residence, women aged 18-29 years old from urban areas show the highest overall proactivity, compared to all other groups.



5.5. UNEMPLOYED AND LOOKING FOR WORK

According to the Labor Force Survey methodology, the activity rate among women (44.3%) is lower than among men (69.3%) in the Republic of North Macedonia. Women’s activity is higher in urban areas (48.4%) compared to rural areas (38.9%) (State Statistical Office, 2019).

The inactivity rate is higher in women (55.7%) than in men (30.7%). The most commonly cited reasons for women’s inactivity in the country are: the traditional role that women still have in the home; the level of education; remittances from abroad (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, 2015).

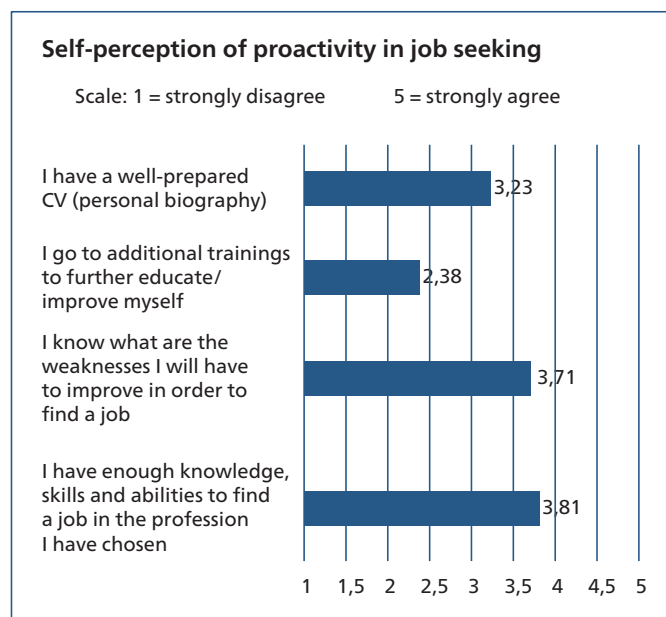
The country’s unemployment rate for women is 21.8% and for men, it is 22.7%.

An analysis of related secondary documents, research, and studies point to the following barriers to employment in the country: difficulty transitioning from school to work; no practical employment experience; discrepancies between knowledge and skills acquired through education and those required by the labor market; working ‘undeclared’; very low salaries.

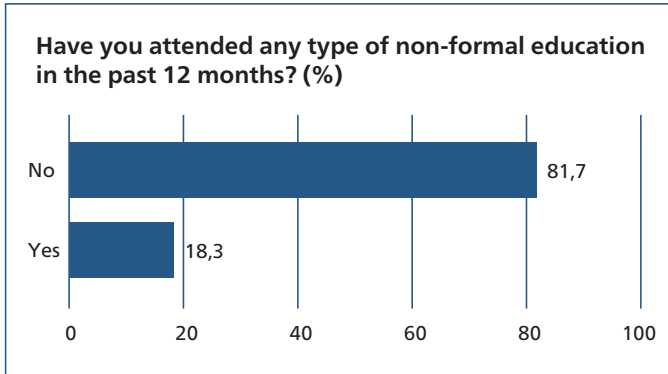
The Women’s Study 2020 analyzes the proactivity of unemployed women, including the resources they use (and favor) to find a job and their attitudes towards the recruitment process.

Proactive behavior whilst unemployed means making certain efforts that will enable the faster securement of

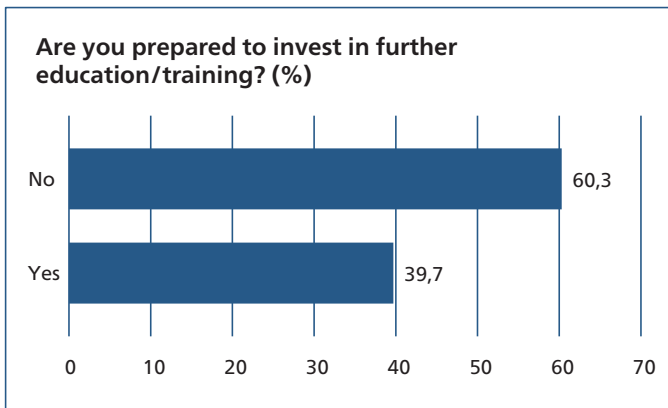
a job that both suits one’s education and skills, and pays adequately. It is important to have an objective assessment mechanism that helps job seekers to assess their knowledge, skills and abilities, strengths and weaknesses, and willingness to do further training. It should also assist them to prepare a CV. The answers indicate that unemployed women largely agree that they have the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to find a job in their profession (m = 3.81), know their weaknesses (m = 3.71), and have a well-prepared CV (m = 3.23).



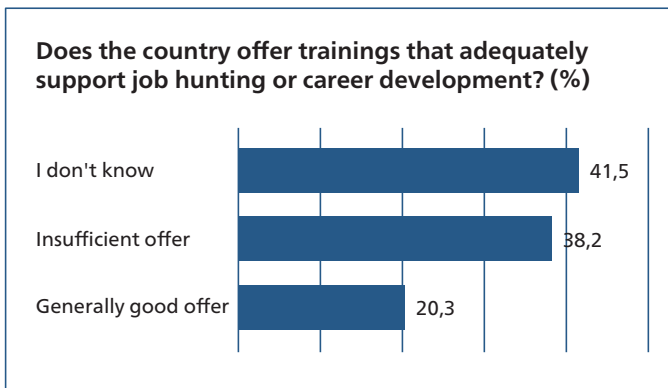
Unemployed respondents somewhat disagree (m = 2.38) with the statement, "I undertake additional training opportunities to further educate/improve myself". Findings show that in the labor market in the Republic of North Macedonia there is a syndrome of "discouraged" job seekers (Bardak, Rubal Maseda & Rosso, 2015). Almost half have been out of work for over 5 years and hence their knowledge is also outdated (Atanasovska-Noveski and Trpeski, 2015).



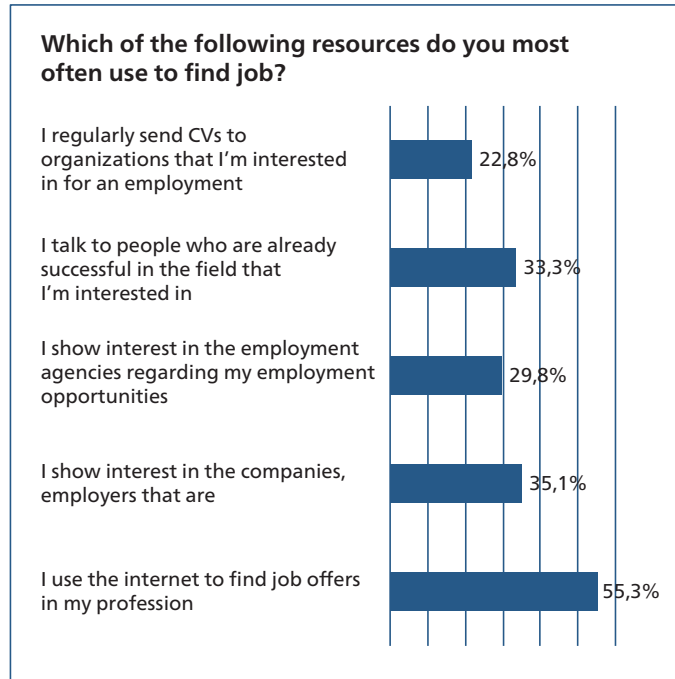
Only 18.3% of unemployed respondents have attended some kind of non-formal education in the last year, and only 39.7% would consider investing in furthering their education.



Meanwhile, when asked if the country offered professional development training opportunities useful to job hunting or career development, 41.5% said they do not know, 38.2% said the offer is insufficient, while 20.3% said the offer is generally good.

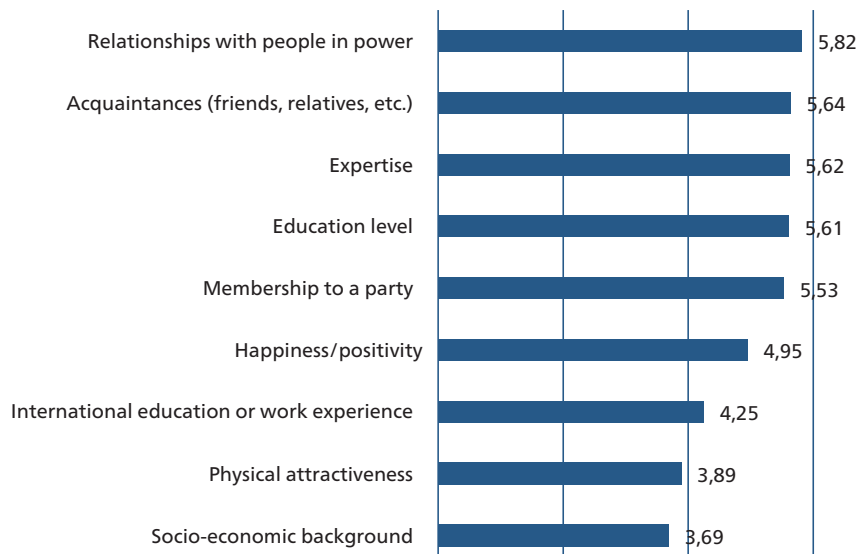


Besides the general distribution (see chart below), we also wanted to examine proactivity through the activities undertaken by unemployed women to find work, i.e. what sources they use to find work. One half of unemployed respondents (55.3%) use the Internet to find work; 35.1% are interested in employers/companies relevant for their employment; 33.3% talk to people who are already successful in the field they are interested in; 29.8% are interested in employment agencies for their own employment opportunities; 22.8% regularly send CVs to the organizations they are interested in employment.



The next question asked them to rank the factors they think are important to finding a job in the country. Nine (9) items were offered and respondents had to rank them by relevance on a scale from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important). In the first place, they opted for "relationships with people in power" (5.82), followed second by "acquaintances (friends, relatives ...)" (5.64), third by "expertise" (5.62), fourth by "level of education" (5.61), fifth by "party membership" (5.53), sixth by "happiness" (4.95), seventh by "education or work experience in a foreign country" (4.25), eighth by "good looks" (3.89), and in ninth by "social background" (3.69).

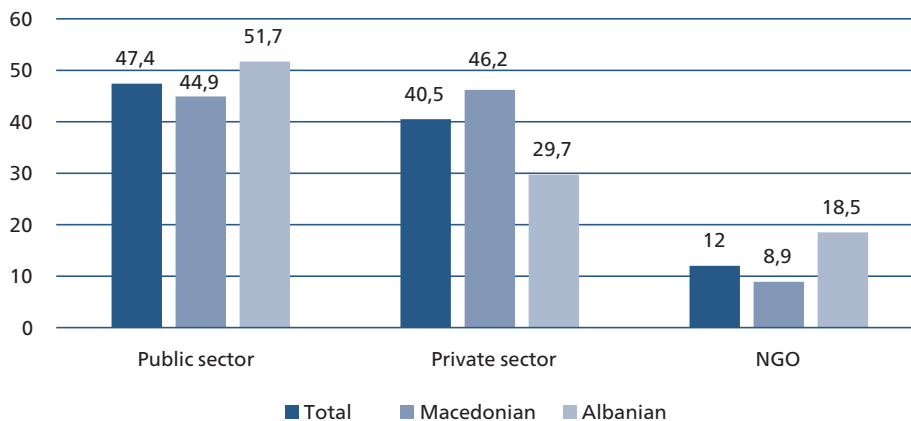
Important factors in finding a job (Friedman ranks test)



Regarding desirable employment sectors, women have divided opinions about the public sector (47.4%) and the private sector (40.5%), although both were favored far more than the non-government sector (12%). Albanian women find the public sector more suitable than

Macedonian women do (51.7% Albanian women vs. 44.9% Macedonian women), as well as the NGO sector (18.5% Albanian women vs. 8.9% Macedonian women), while Macedonian women (46.2%) opt for the private sector more than Albanian women (29.7%).

In your opinion, which employment sector is most suited to women? (%)



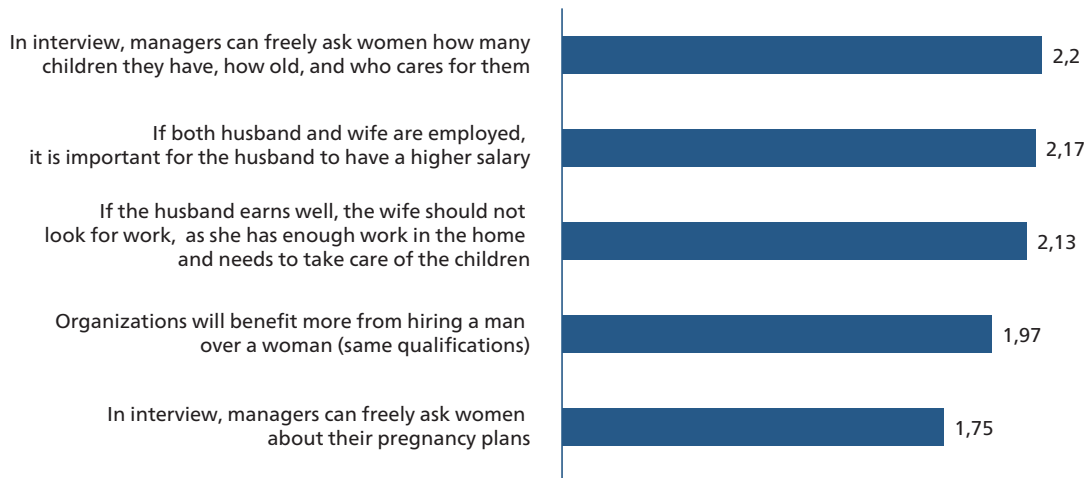
Moreover, we wanted to examine general attitudes about job and employment.

We wanted to see the level of awareness of women about what is and what is not allowed in the selection process. The responses to the statements, “during a job interview, managers are free to ask women how many children they have, how old the children are and who looks after them” (m = 2.2) and “during a job interview, managers are free to ask women what their plans for pregnancy are” (m = 1.75), show disagreement. These results indicate that women are aware that they should

not be asked intrusive questions about their private lives. Regarding employment and male-female differences, results sit in the negative axis interval for “when both the husband and wife are employed, the husband needs to earn a higher salary” (m = 2.17), “if the husband earns well, the wife should not work because she has enough work in the home and needs to take care of the children” (m = 2.13), and “the organization benefits more from hiring a man versus a woman even if they have the same qualifications” (m = 1.97), indicating that generally, women do not agree with these views.

Your attitudes toward women and employment:

Scale: 1 = do not agree at all , 5 = completely agree



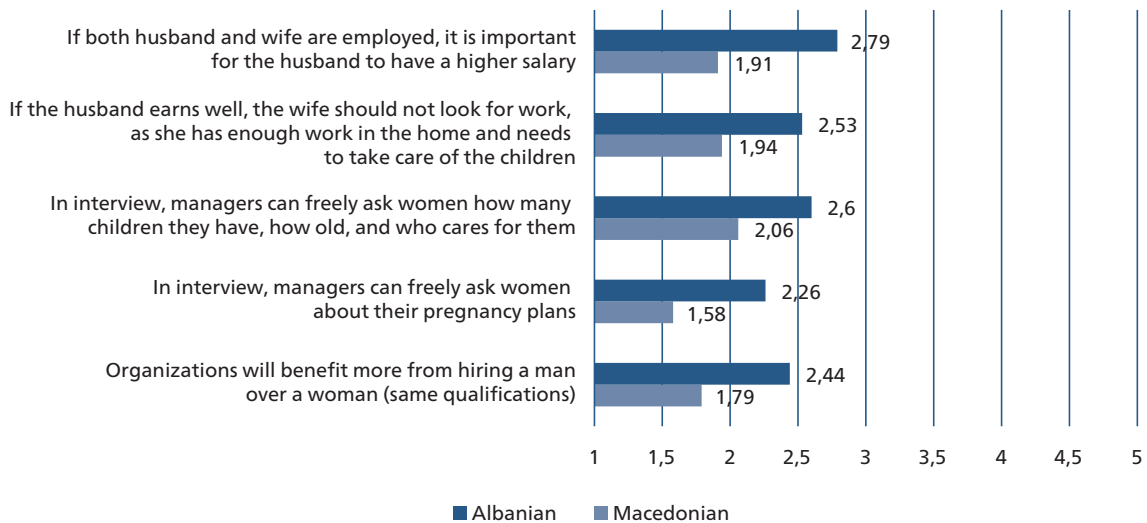
A deeper statistical analysis showed a statistically significant difference in the answers in terms of education and ethnicity. Women with primary education showed a slightly higher level of agreement for all statements in the table above than those with secondary and higher education.

Albanian women showed greater agreement for all of the views than Macedonian women did, especially those that aligned with patriarchal role divisions, such as, “the husband needs to have a higher salary” (mean value for

Albanian women is 2.79 vs. Macedonian women 1.91), “if the husband earns well, the woman should not look for a job” (Albanian women 2.53 vs. Macedonian women 1.94), and “it benefits the organization hire a man over a woman” (Albanian women 2.44 vs. Macedonian women 1.79). The same was true for the statements relating to intrusive questioning during interviews about women’s private lives, with Albanian women showing a higher level of agreement (that managers may ask such questions) than Macedonian women do.

Attitudes towards women and employment: by ethnicity

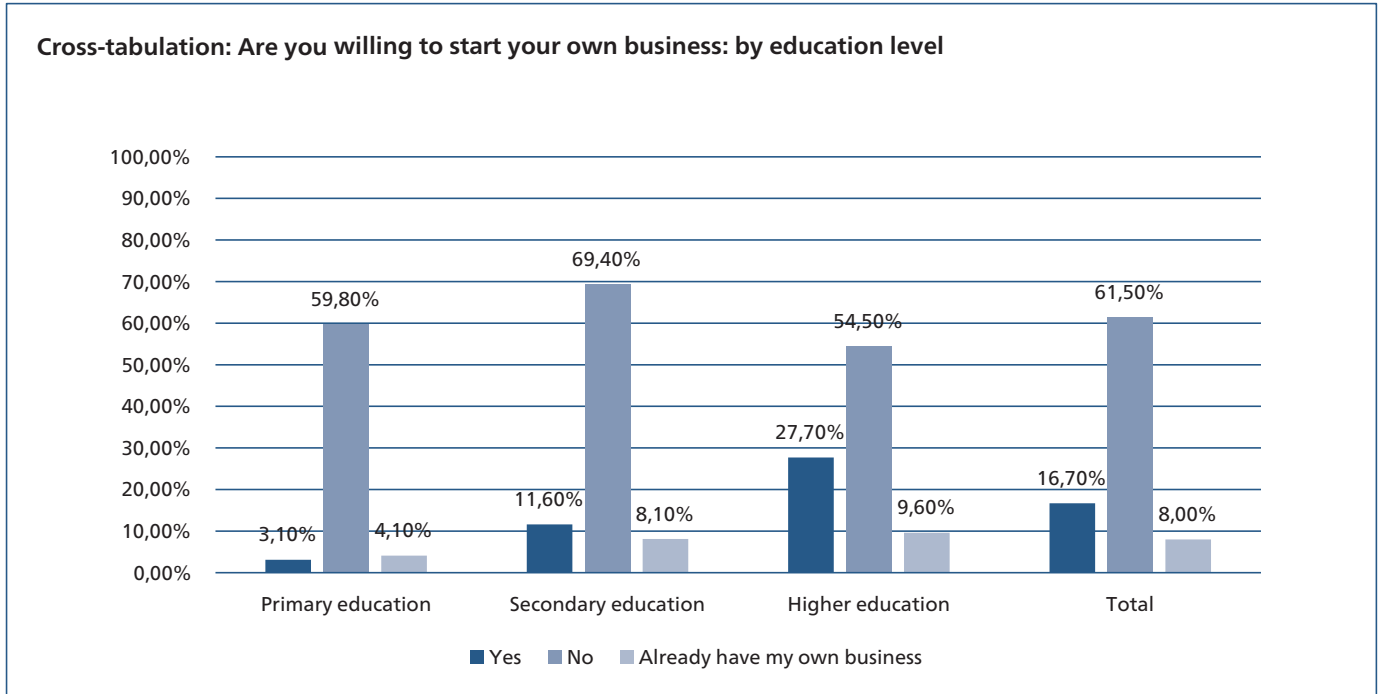
Scale: 1 do not agree at all, 5 = completely agree



5.6. SELF-EMPLOYMENT

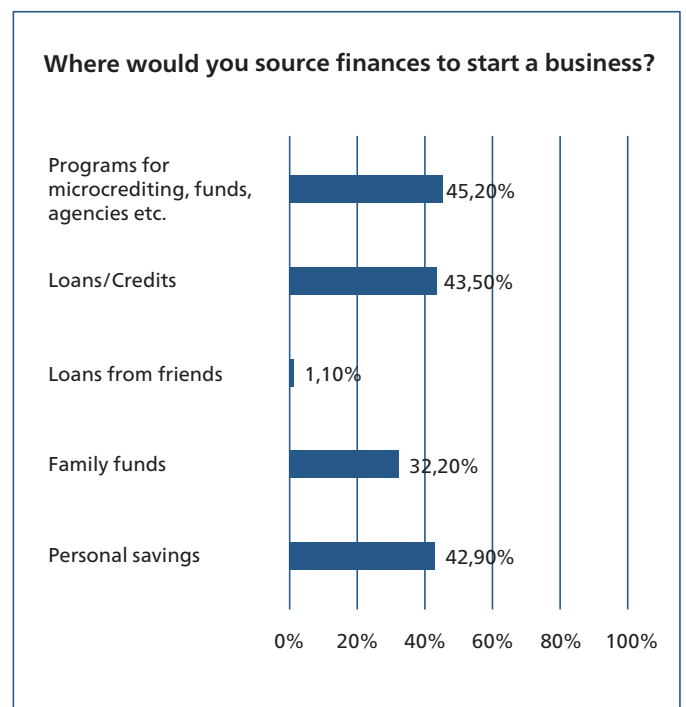
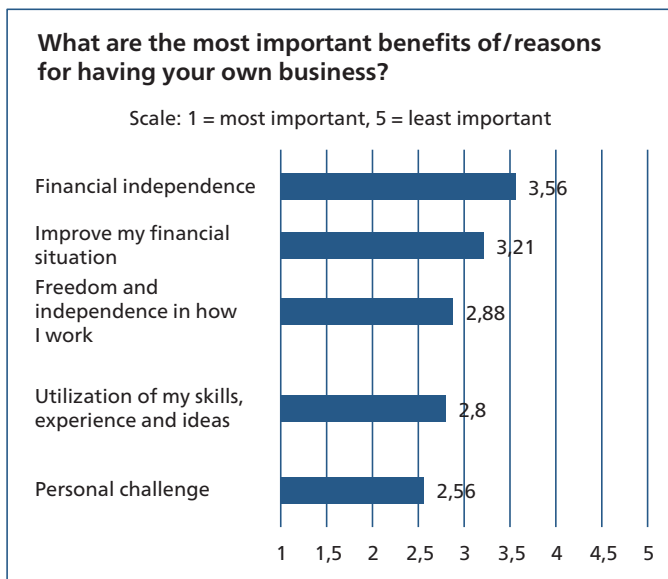
The percentage of women who are ready to start their own business is small (16.7%). Only 8% of respondents had their own business. Women with higher education (27.7%) are more willing to start their own business

than women with secondary (11.6%) or primary (3.1%) education and are more likely to have their own business already (9.6% high versus 8.1% secondary and 4.1% primary). Three age groups showed the greatest enthusiasm for starting their own business: the 18-29 age group (23.3%), the 30-39 age group (23.7%), and the 40-49 age group (20%).



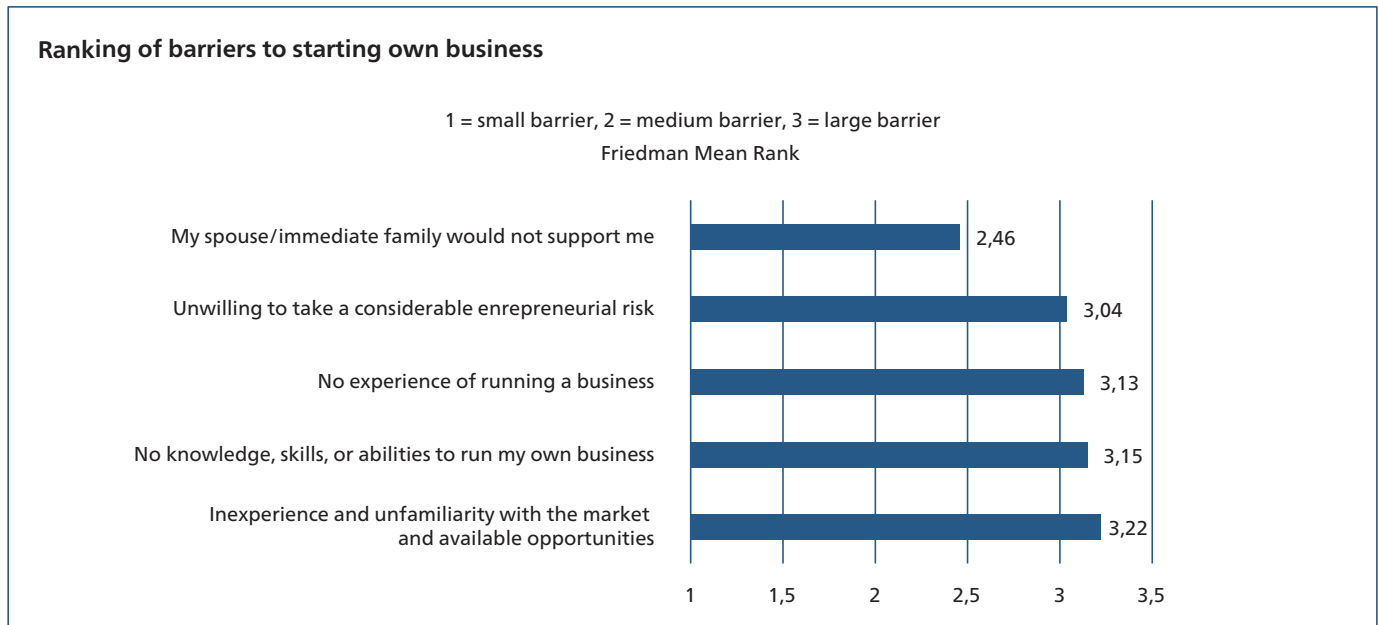
Moreover, we were interested in the reasons why one would want to start her own business. The respondents were presented with 5 factors, which they had to prioritize from 1 (most important) to 5 (least important). For the most important factor, they singled out "to be personally challenged", while the second was "to use the skills, experience, ideas I have", third was "to have freedom and independence in my approach to work", fourth was "to improve my financial situation" and fifth was "to have financial independence".

The next topic was about funding sources for starting a business. Respondents favoured "microloan programs, funds etc." (45.2%), "loans/credits" (43.5%) and "personal savings" (42.9%), over funds from "family" (32.2%), much less so from "friends" (1.1%).



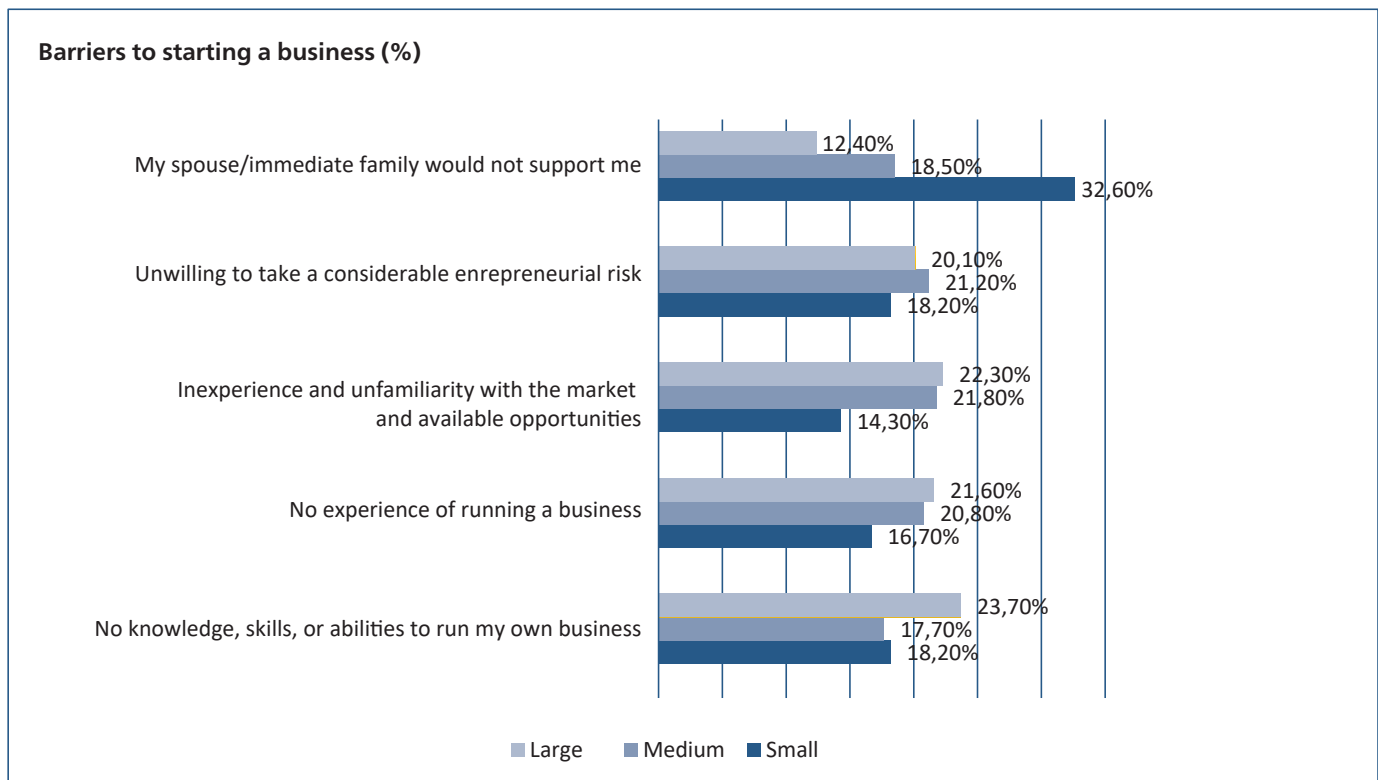
To understand why the percentage of women willing to start their own business is low, we asked which barriers would prevent women from starting a business and to what extent, on a scale of 1 (small barrier) to 3 (large barrier). According to the Friedman Mean ranking, the biggest barrier cited is, "inexperience and unfamiliarity

of the market and its opportunities", followed closely by, "no knowledge, skills, or abilities to run a business", and "no experience of running a business". Next cited is, "personal reluctance to take a significant entrepreneurial risk", while the smallest barrier is noted as, "no support from my husband or my closest family."



"For example, during a workshop where I spoke about the importance and need for the application of organic production in viticulture, a winery owner said to me, "instead of dressing like a woman in a skirt and smiling, you are lecturing us on what we need to do."

- "Do you expect me to entertain you?" [I asked]
- "Yes," he answered convinced
- "Then this is not your day."" (AT, 45, self-employed/farmer)



5.7. SITUATION IN EDUCATION

The gender structure observed among primary and secondary pupils remains the same over time, as does the structure observed among the teachers (who are predominantly female). A low 1% of pupils drop out of primary and secondary education, which applies to both males and females. In higher education, however, the gender structure among students is changing over time, with more women enrolling in university (Basevska, 2019).

Regarding the quality of education, there is also alignment in the results obtained from other research studies. In general, the quality of education is with an average assessment of, "good but in need of solid reforms" (Youth Study, 2018/19). As education in the country is in a continuous process of reform, this state of ongoing reform leaves no room for assessing the effects of the application of certain educational models and their success.

In this section, the study analyzes women's general views about education, their own educational experiences, and the prevailing traits and roles that the education system applies to women.

5.8. ATTITUDES TOWARDS EDUCATION

To investigate general views on education, statements are presented and respondents are asked to rate their

level of agreement on a scale from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (completely agree).

The highest level of agreement was expressed for the statement, "a woman's education is important for her future and a better life" ($m = 4.24$). There was no statistical difference in terms of place of residence, education level, age group, ethnicity, or personal financial situation.

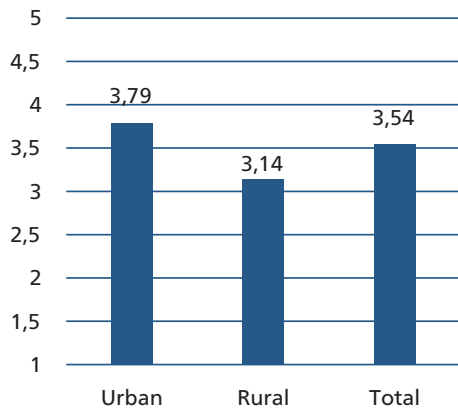
Regarding the statement, "I have/had adequate opportunities to be educated" ($m = 3.54$), women from the city ($m = 3.79$) are more in agreement than women from the village ($m = 3.14$), that is, women in urban areas have more educational opportunities available to them. As expected, women with higher education ($m = 4.24$) have (had) more education opportunities, than women with secondary ($m = 3.35$) and primary ($m = 2.36$) education. Also, women whose families have a good financial situation agreed that they have adequate opportunities to study. As the material and financial condition of the family deteriorates, so too do the opportunities to get an education. On the positive side, the youngest age group (18-29) most agreed ($m = 3.87$) that they have adequate opportunities to get an education. As they get older, their agreement about having educational opportunities reciprocally decreases, although not by much. Women in the age group 60-65 years ($m = 3.12$) reported having the least opportunities. Albanian women ($m = 3.24$) reportedly have slightly fewer opportunities for education than women of Macedonian ($m = 3.66$), or other ($m = 3.55$), ethnicities have.

What are your views on education as a woman?

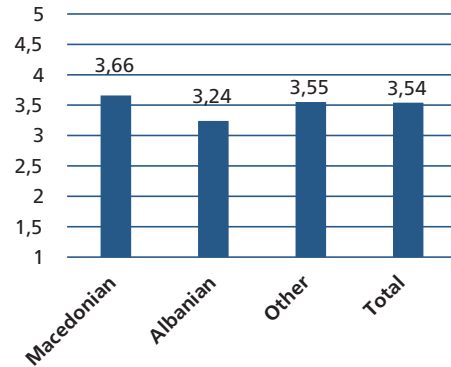
Scale: 1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree



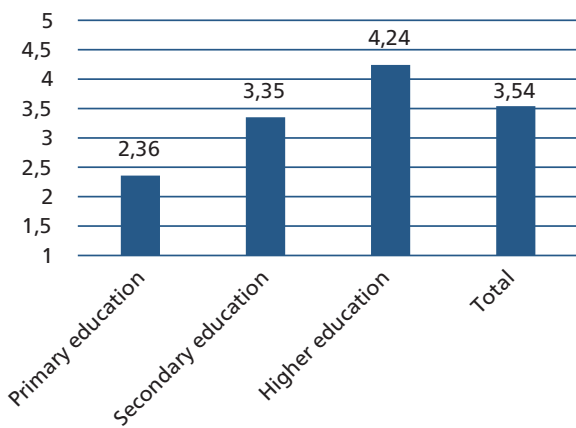
I have/had adequate educational opportunities: by place of residence



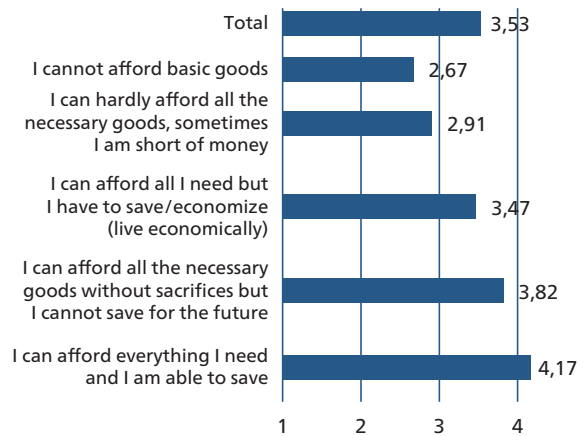
I have/had adequate educational opportunities: by ethnicity



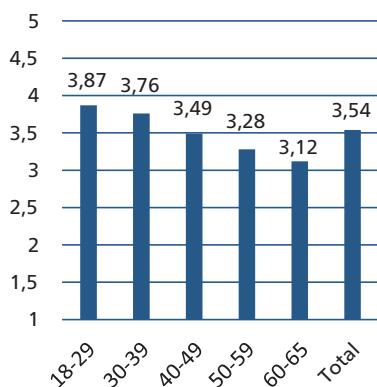
I have/had adequate educational opportunities: by education level



I have/had adequate educational opportunities: by financial situation

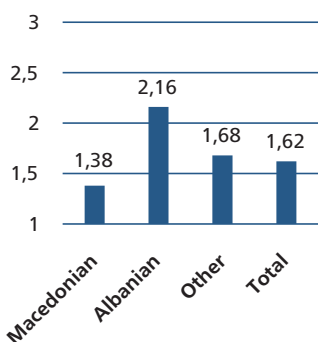


I have/had adequate educational opportunities: by age

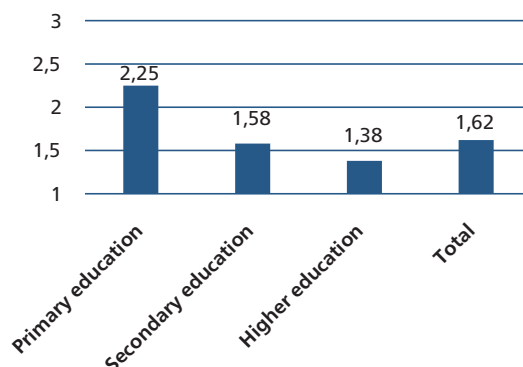


Regarding the statement, "studying is more important for men than for women" ($m = 1.62$) the answers are positioned in the negative axis interval, meaning that varying degrees of disagreement are registered. However, certain statistical differences were detected in terms of ethnicity: Albanian women ($m = 2.16$) are more in agreement with this attitude than women from other ethnic groups ($m = 1.68$) and Macedonian women are ($m = 1.38$). In terms of place of residence, rural women ($m = 1.93$) are more in agreement than urban women are ($m = 1.43$). By education, those who are studying/have studied at university are least in agreement with the above statement ($m = 1.38$), and as education decreases, the agreement with this attitude increases, which can be seen among those with secondary ($m = 1.58$) and primary education ($m = 2.25$). As the material and financial situation of the family deteriorates, agreement that education is more important for men than women goes up.

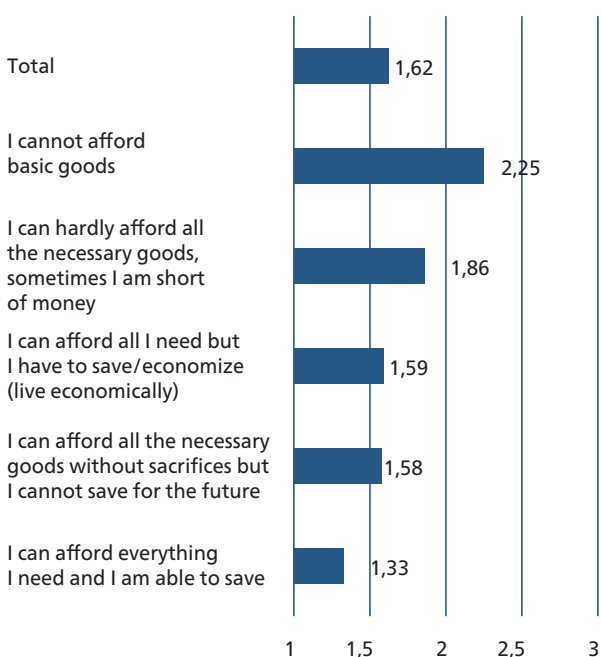
Studying is more important for men than for women: by ethnicity



Studying is more important for men than women: by education level

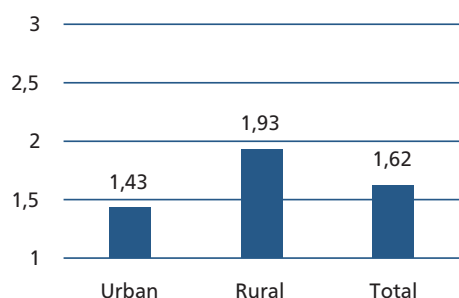


Studying is more important for men than for women: by financial situation

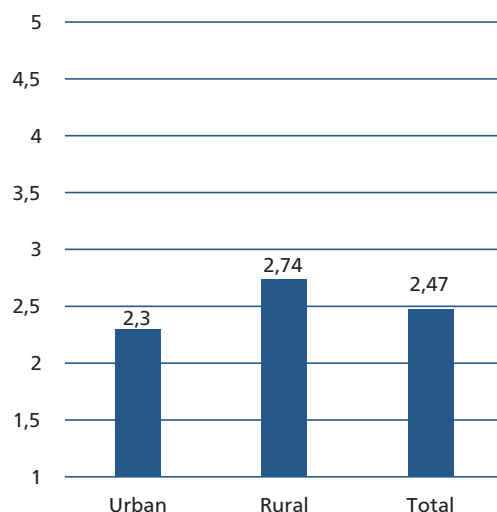


Regarding the attitude, “women should choose study and careers that give them time for housework and child care”, the result is positioned in the negative axis interval ($m = 2.47$), representing disagreement. The analysis detected statistical differences by ethnicity: Albanian women ($m = 3.18$) are slightly in agreement with this attitude, while women from other ethnic groups ($m = 2.61$) somewhat disagree, as do Macedonian women ($m = 2.15$). In terms of place of residence, rural women ($m = 2.74$) disagree with the statement, but not as strongly as urban women do ($m = 2.30$). Regarding education, those with higher education disagree most ($m = 2.14$), and as education decreases, the compliance with this attitude increases, with secondary education still in disagreement, but less so ($m = 2.49$), and those with primary ($m = 3.17$) marginally in agreement. As the material and financial situation of the family deteriorates, agreement that women should choose to be educated in professions that make it easier to take care of the home and children goes up, with those who are in the most difficult situation agreeing most ($m = 3.02$).

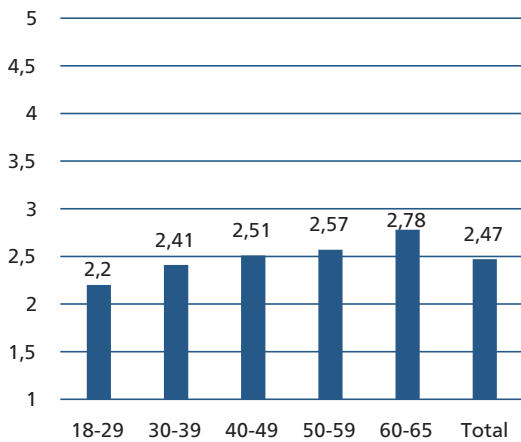
Studying is more important for men than for women: by place of residence



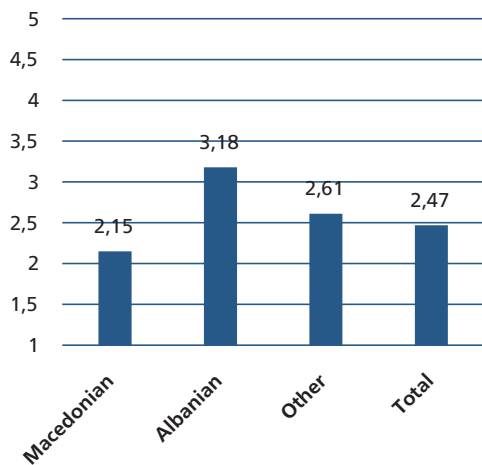
Women should choose careers that give them time for housework and child care: by place of residence



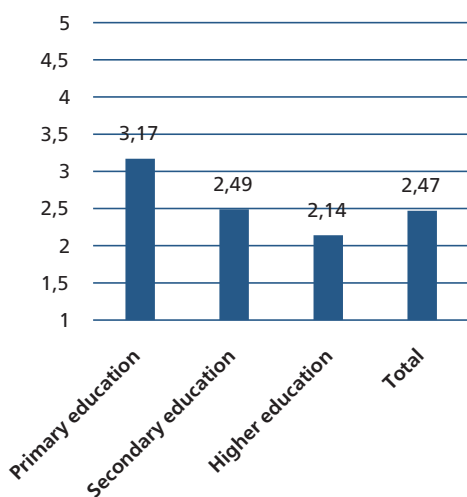
Women should choose careers that give them time for housework and child care: by age



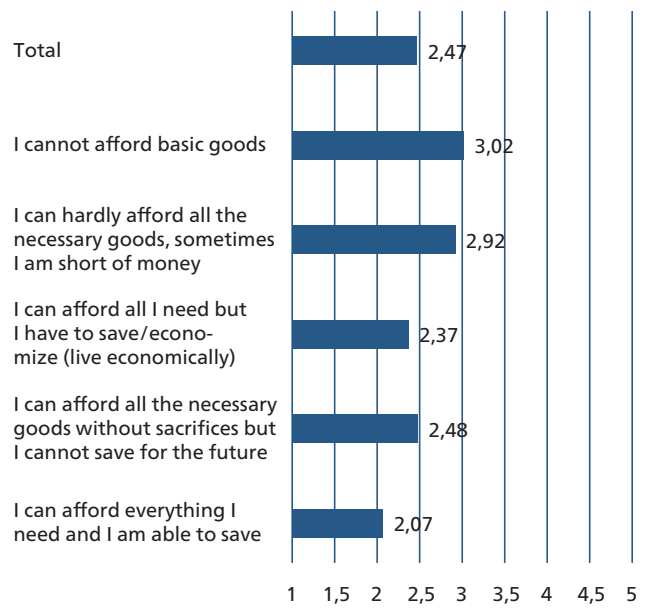
Women should choose careers that give them time for housework and child care: by ethnicity



Women should choose careers that give them time for housework and child care: by education level



Women should choose careers that give them time for housework and child care: by education level



5.9. WHAT DOES THE EDUCATION SYSTEM TEACH ABOUT THE ROLE OF WOMEN?

A society that fosters equality between women and men increases the value of women and their role in society and improves the overall achievement of women and society as a whole. UNESCO's Education Agenda 2030 recognizes that gender equality requires an approach that "guarantees that girls and boys, women and men not only have access to education cycles, but that gender equality is supported and strengthened during education." (UNESCO, Strategy/Education 2030).

"In high school we had a seminar on gender equality that I still remember because I liked it very much; it is a pity that such lectures were rare." (AM, 30, higher education)

"There was no gender discrimination at any level of my education. Maybe that was our generation; the students were valued for their hard work and abilities. Everyone could choose a profession that suits them." (LO, 56, secondary education)

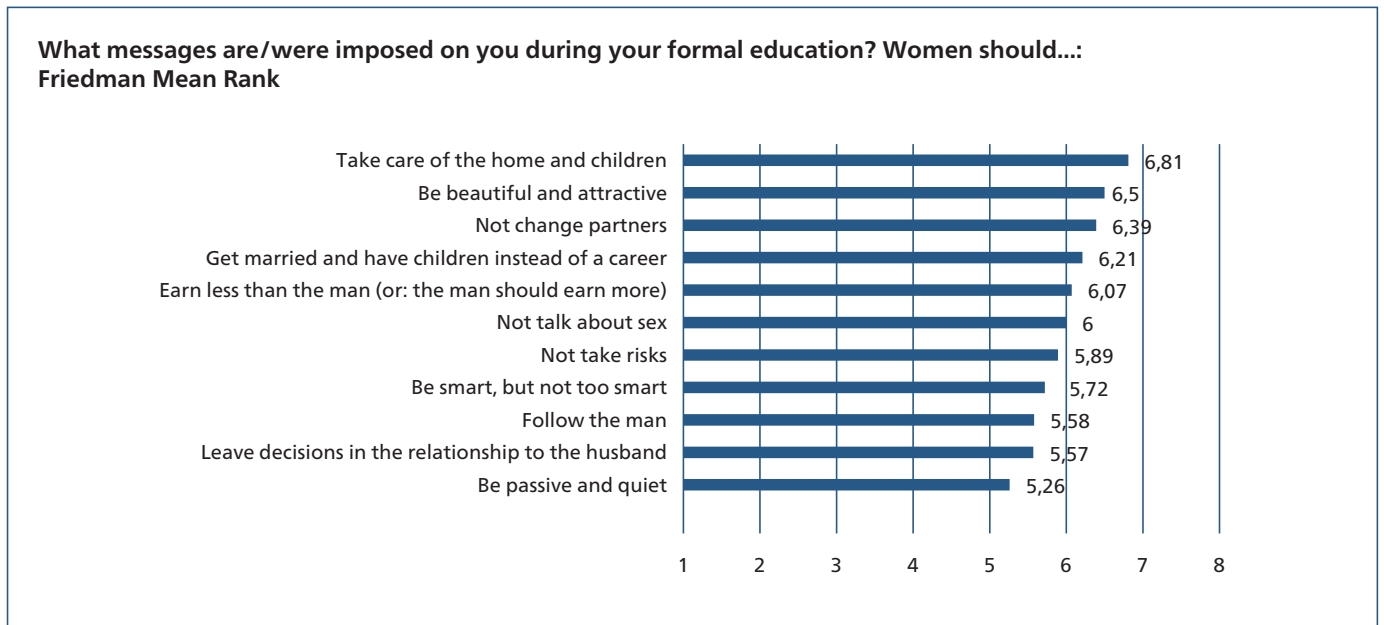
"As an example of how much is valued and valorised in what a woman says, I can cite a personal experience. When holding a training on gender equality in the city and in the rural areas, with representatives of local institutions as participants, after the training, one of the participants approached me and said: "everything you said is true," (I also talked about gender roles and their occurrence in the socialization process) "but if there was at least one man by your side, to confirm it, they would take you more seriously"." (DV, 37, secondary education)

“There are too many cases in which boys, since early childhood, are taught some backward traditional values; that the male is the head of the family and that influences boys in schools to behave violently and humiliatingly towards girls.”(TV, 26, postgraduate studies)

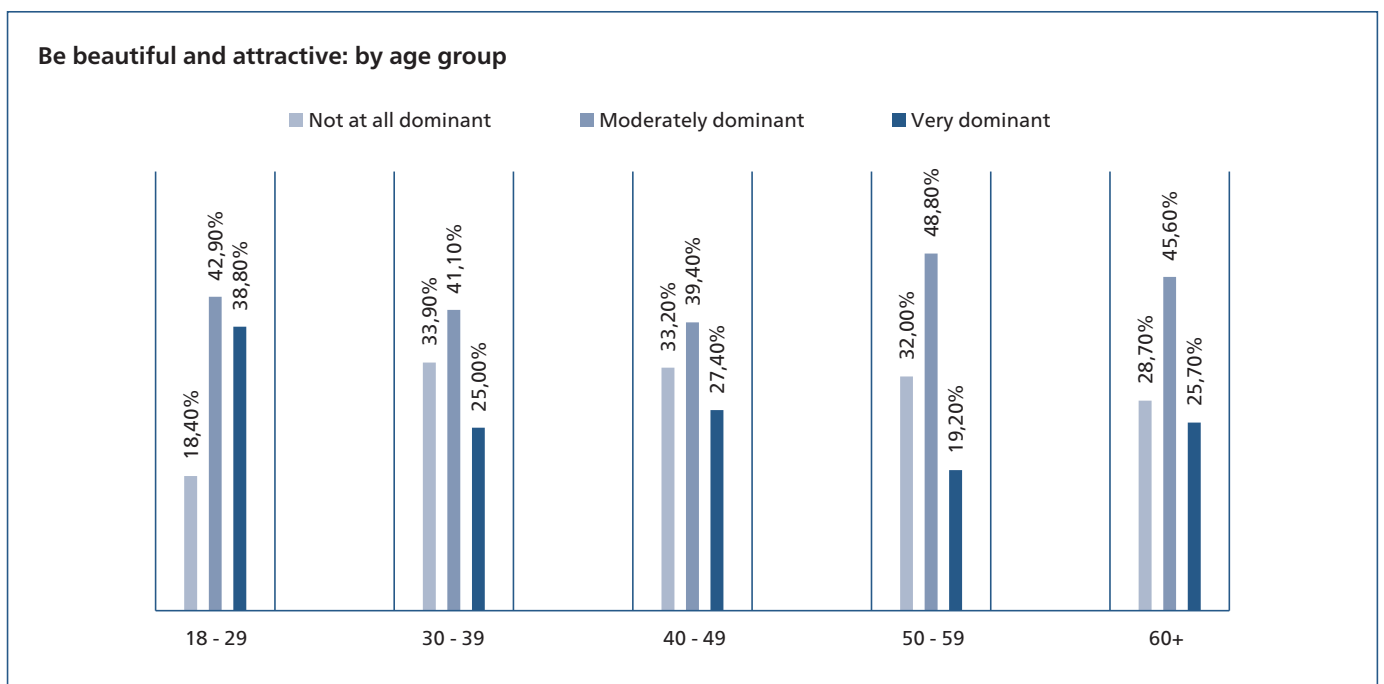
country’s educational system imposes upon students to condition them about gender-specific roles and traits during their formative years.

To do this, the study presented respondents with 11 statements containing stereotypes about women. Women reflected on their own experience to rate how dominant each message is or was in their education using the scale: 1 = not dominant at all (was not imposed), 2 = moderately dominant and 3 = very dominant. Results are presented in descending order (very dominant to not dominant at all), with statistically significant differences further explained by the intersection of the variables.

To see how gender equality could be more supported and strengthened in education, the Women’s Study 2020 investigates the dominant messages that the

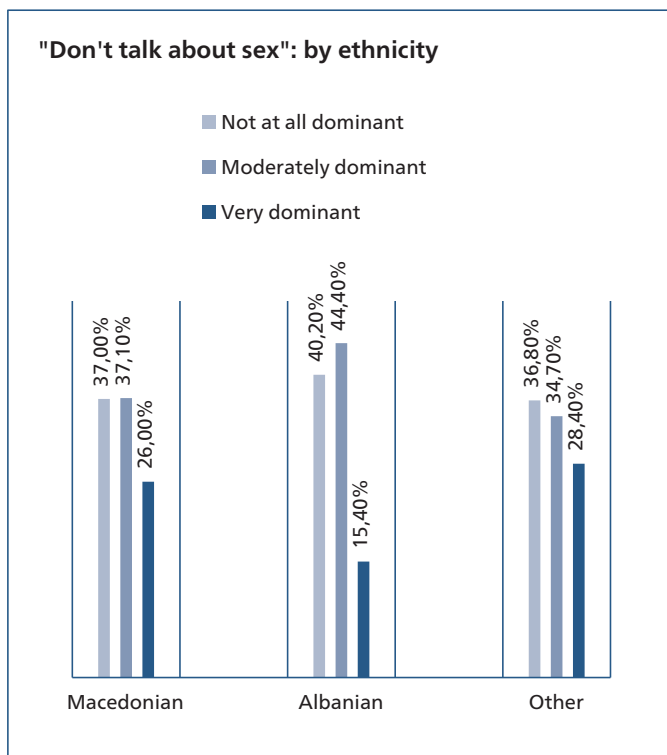
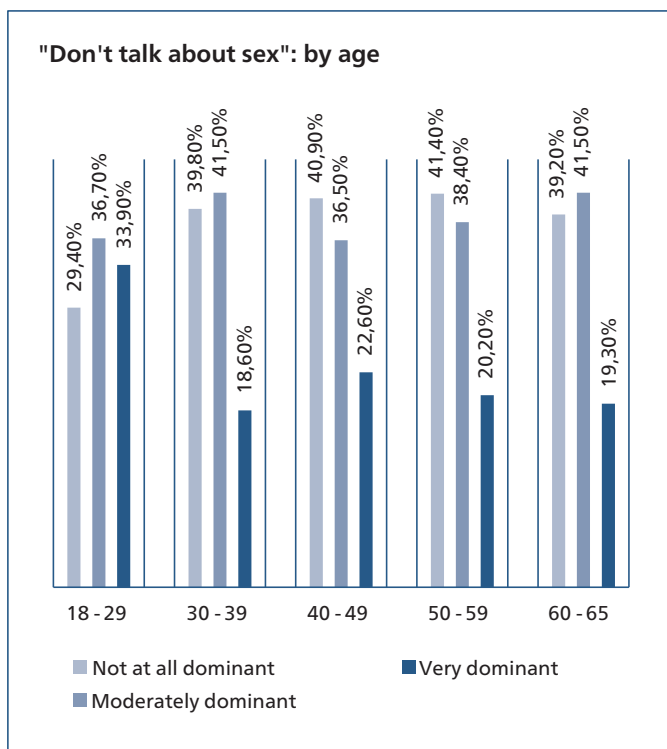
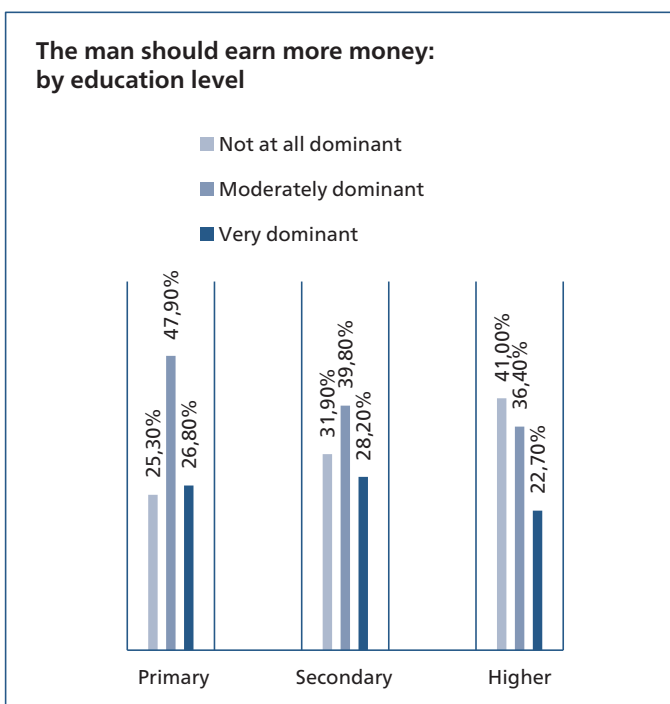
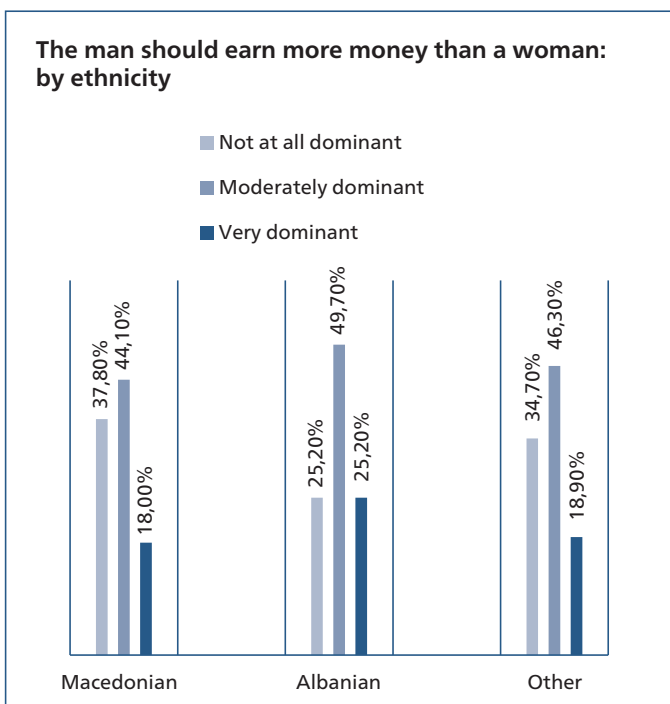


- The most dominant gender message imposed on students during education is that “**women** should take care of the home and children” (29.8% rated it very dominant);
- The second is “**women** should be beautiful and attractive” (27.7% said very dominant, 43.4% moderately dominant). A significant difference was shown by age (p < 0.005), with 38.8% of those aged 18-29 saying this was very dominant growing up (highest rate), while only 19.2% of women aged 50-59 said the same (lowest rate);



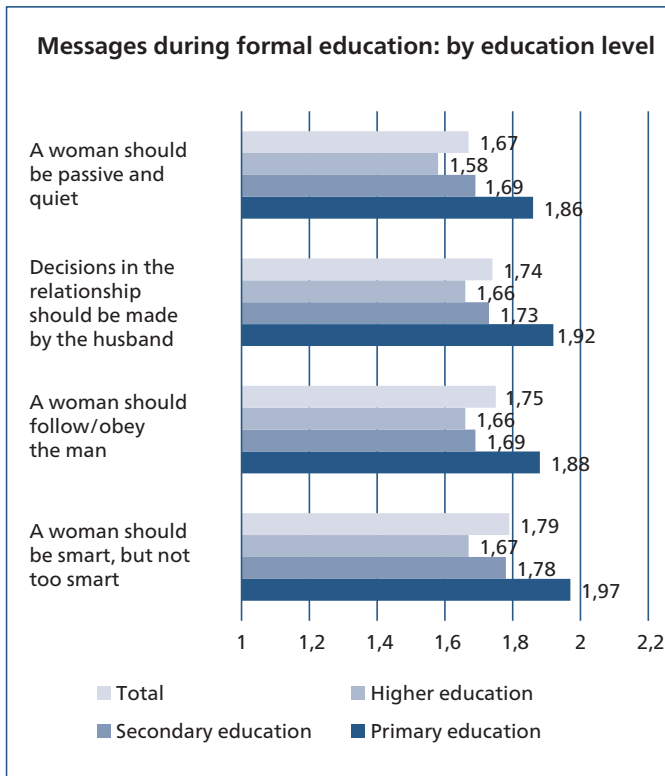
- The third is, **"women should not change partners"** (28.3% said this was very dominant, 38.1% moderately dominant);
- The fourth is **"women should get married and have children versus career"** (25.7% said very dominant, 39.9% moderately dominant);
- The fifth is, **"men should earn more than a woman"** (20% said very dominant, 45.8% moderately dominant). Statistical differences ($p < 0.005$) by ethnicity and education level are as such: Albanian women report hearing this message very strongly (25.2%), compared to women of other ethnicities (18.9%) and Macedonian women (18%), while secondary (28.2%) and primary educated women (26.8%) are more likely to hear this message than higher educated women are (22.7%);

- The sixth is, **"women should not talk about sex"** (23.3% said very dominant 38.9% moderately dominant). There are significant differences in answers according to age and ethnicity: women of other ethnicities (28.4%) and Macedonian women (26%) reported the message as very dominant in their education, in contrast to 15.4% of Albanian women. The 18-29 age group (33.9%) also noted very dominant messages to this effect, much more so than women from other age groups, who reported rates around 20%;



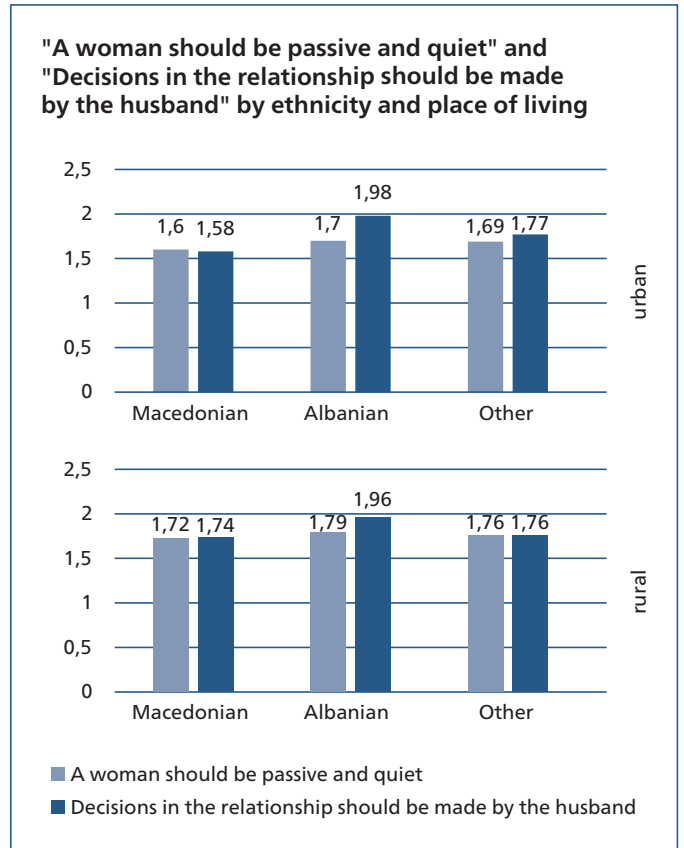
- The Seventh is, **"women should not take risks"** (17.5% said very dominant, 46.5% moderately dominant).

- The eighth is, “**women** should be smart but not too smart” (18.2% said very dominant, 42.5% moderately dominant); there was a difference in terms of the level of education, with primary educated women (1.86) indicated this attitude as dominant, more so than for those with secondary (1.69) and higher (1.58) education.



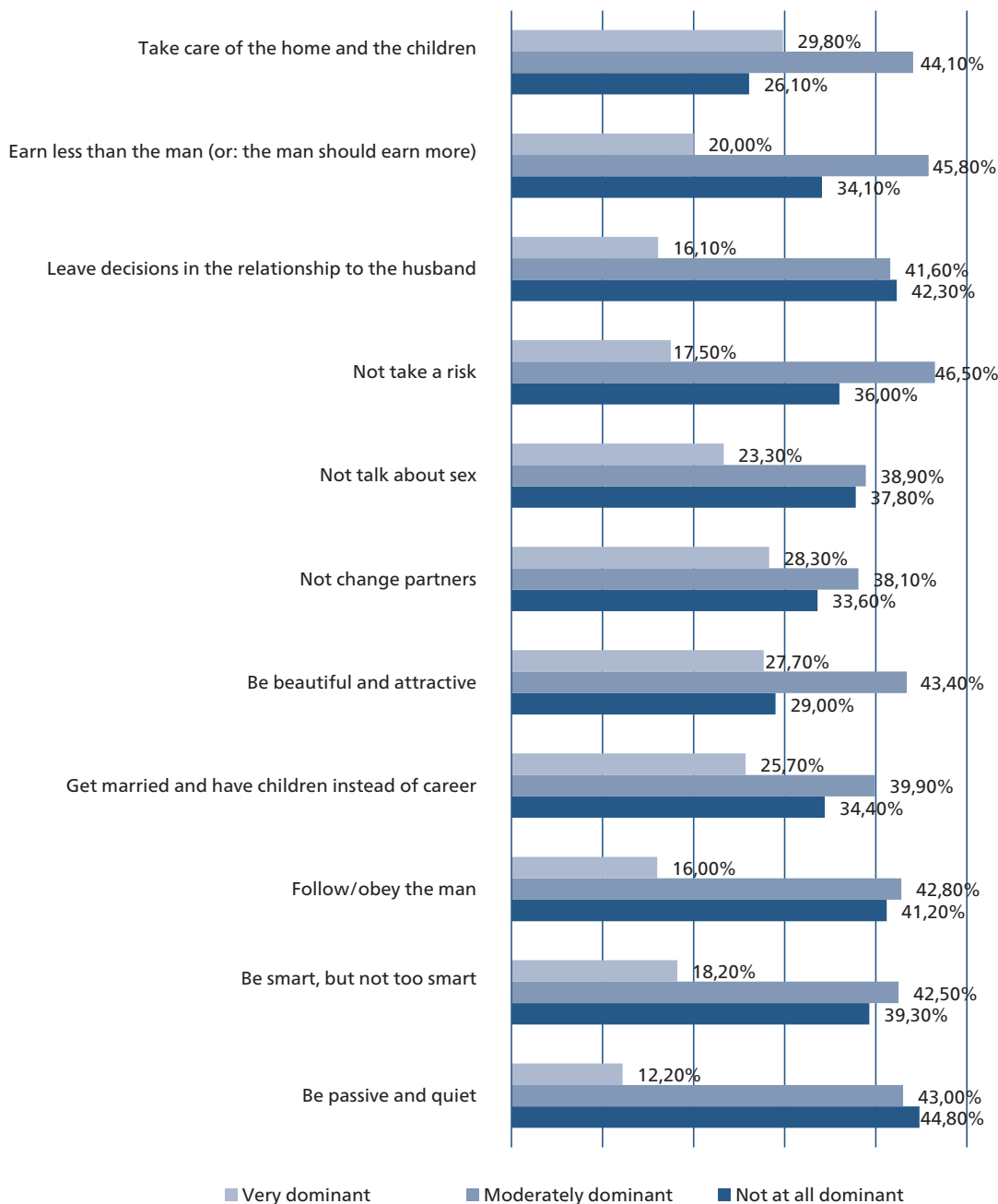
- The ninth is, “the **woman** should follow the man” (16% said very dominant, 42.8% moderately dominant); primary educated women heard this strongly (1.88) more than more educated women;
- The tenth is, “decisions in the relationship should be made by the **husband**” (16.1% said very dominant, 41.6%

moderately dominant). Those with primary education experienced this message more often (1.92) than those who are more educated, while for Albanian women, it is very dominant during education and slightly more so for those in rural areas.



- The eleventh is “a **woman** should be passive and quiet” (12.2% said this message was very dominant, 43% moderately dominant). By ethnicity, slightly more Albanian women said it was dominant in their education, particularly for those living in urban areas.

How dominant were/are the messages about women, as taught to you during your education? Women should.... (%)



5.10. CONCLUSIONS

- Employed women generally show positive attitudes towards their workplace, in terms of respecting their rights, fair treatment, career development, and moderate satisfaction with salary.
- Initial questions in the Women's Study 2020 revealed positive results, with almost 90% indicating they had never felt discriminated against as a woman at work. Unfortunately, this study shows that women often do not recognize the inequality and discriminatory treatment that disadvantages them (and favours men) in the workplace. Targeted questions revealed, that just

over 60% of women earn less than their male counterparts for the same job done, while 60% of women are treated as 'incompetent' in the workplace. Over half receive less support from managers than male co-workers in the same position (55.4%) and/or see managers bypass female colleagues to hand significant tasks over to male counterparts in the same position (53%). Another 27.7% to 39.8% reported the following types of discrimination based on their gender: not receiving a promotion; mistreatment due to taking maternity leave; not being hired; not receiving training/professional development; getting fired; isolation at work. 19.3% of women have experienced sexual harassment by a co-worker.

- Women who are not university-educated, with lower economic status and from rural environments experience far higher rates of the above discrimination.
- Women show little trust in organizations/institutions from which they could seek help, in a situation where they are being discriminated against.
- Data on why women do not want to advance in a managerial position show that the glass ceiling phenomenon is present and accompanied by a “faulty ladder” to promotion. Most respondents strongly agreed they “wouldn’t be supported by the upper management” if they were to apply for a promotion, pointing to management still being a “men’s club” in the country. Women also strongly indicated work-life balance as a deterring factor, with many unsure if they would juggle family and work demands since women carry almost the sole burden of household labor.
- Hidden discrimination exists by way of low motivation levels for women to become managers (54%) and women’s very low confidence in their ability to handle the perceived stresses and responsibilities of becoming a manager.
- There is also a low level of proactivity and motivation among unemployed women to find work, with only 48% of respondents interested in further education for work, 19% having a personal 5-year career plan, and 28% willing to make sacrifices for career progression.
- Looking at job search proactivity, in terms of resources used, only 55% use the internet; 35.1% search for specific employers (22.8% proactively send their CV directly), 33.3% rely on personal contacts in the desired industry, and 29% use employment agencies.
- Women report that the three most important factors (out of 9) for finding a job are relationships with powerful people, personal contacts (via friends, family), and expertise.
- Only 16.7% of respondents expressed interested in owning a business. The biggest barriers to starting a business are perceived limited ‘experience or familiarity with the market and opportunities’, specific ‘knowledge, skills or abilities’, and ‘necessary experience’ to successfully run a business.
- Women have a positive attitude to education, and they mostly agree that “it is important for one’s future and a better life”.
- The formal education system continues to teach traditional social ideas about gender roles. This is more common in rural areas, among Albanian women, and in primary and secondary school level education. The most prevalent messages heard growing up indicate that women “should take care of the home and family”, “be beautiful and attractive”, “not change partners”, “get married and have children (and not a career)”, and that the man “should earn more than the woman”.

5.11. RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is necessary to encourage the proactive behaviour of women in all areas: education, job search, self-employment, job advancement. Proactive behaviour is self-initiated behaviour in trying to solve a problem before it occurs and involves action and plan, not just reaction. Encouraging proactive behaviour requires creating conditions that will stimulate self-initiated action from an early age aimed at preventing problematic situations;
- Create accessible platforms that provide women, employers, unions (etc.) with information/education on workers’ rights, discrimination, gender equality/equal opportunity, and appropriate campaigns/training to raise awareness, develop workplace standards and codes of conduct that encourage inclusivity, equal opportunity, and discourage discrimination), and platforms that offer professional training, job-seeker assistance;
- The results of this research showed that women do not recognize discrimination in the work environment, and are subject to it, especially employed women with primary and secondary education background, i.e. women in low-ranking positions, mostly from rural areas. They do not know who to turn to in case they are discriminated against. Therefore, an educational campaign is needed to raise awareness for recognizing and preventing discrimination. The same campaigns should be aimed at the general public - for all (not just women) and to focus on identifying different types of gender stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination in organizations, promoting gender equality in them, to provide protection for women from discrimination and encouraged women to take up managerial positions and ensure gender-sensitive career management.
- Introduce a 30% quota for women in corporative boards/ boards of directors, so the participation of women as decision makers would be stimulated and increased;
- Establish and strengthen support mechanisms that provide free legal aid, advising/counselling and representation, within the NGO sector, trade unions, and the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination;
- Write into the law, precise provisions that support these mechanisms, such as to prohibit and make punishable by law, the termination of employment due to pregnancy, childbirth, or parenthood (regardless of contract type), to prescribe harsher penalties for employers who discriminate or violate workers’ rights, provide paid parental leave, and to regulate flexible and part-time hours and home-based conditions for employees with children;
- The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy to pursue the above mechanisms and laws as a strategic commitment, whilst also promoting the importance of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination;

- The Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination to closely cooperate with trade unions, civil society, labor inspectors, and educational institutions;
- Prioritize the organizational capacity building (human and technical resources) of the newly established Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, to ensure its success and sustainability;
- Encourage and support women to proactively search for jobs or be self-employed and advance career in the form of appropriate professional and vocational education, which will provide women with formal and informal qualifications and expertise;
- Develop non-formal educational programs that provide women with advice and training on career building, starting with formal education, through to the job search and working periods; these programs should take into account all the needs specific to different groups of women, to tailor support to different education levels and backgrounds and thus enable them to advance in their chosen careers;
- Form cooperative alliances between stakeholders to determine the needs and content of the above programs' training; suggested stakeholders include employers (and human resource management departments/professionals), trade unions, chambers of commerce, NGOs, employment agencies, educational institutions, and the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy;
- Improve the quality, quantity, and accessibility of non-formal education programs for women from all backgrounds, notably those that provide skills and knowledge to work and start businesses, thus reducing social exclusion of women;
- Open financial channels and support for women to start their own business;
- Initiate mentorship programs for entrepreneurial women;
- Introduce international mobility education and internship programs for women who own a business or are interested to start one;
- To improve the quality of the education, it is necessary to improve learning outcomes and therefore should have teaching staff who are properly recruited, well-trained, qualified and motivated to foster creativity, knowledge and basic skills (literacy, mathematics, analytical and cognitive skills) and which will foster a pedagogical approach that will develop values and attitudes for a healthy and fulfilling life, non-discrimination and support for gender equality as well as content for sexual and reproductive health. The results of this research indicate that it is necessary to work on promoting non-discrimination and gender equality in the educational process which should be a strategic commitment of the Ministry of Education in accordance with the policies of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, led by the Bureau for Development of Education and the Council for Vocational Education in cooperation with the municipalities and supported by the school boards and realized by the schools. The goal is to create a friendly environment in educational institutions that will be used by all students, regardless of gender, ethnicity, social background, lifestyle, religion, values. Therefore, school programs should aim to build an environment that will be characterized by mutual trust, mutual acceptance and respect;
- Develop and provide additional teacher training, especially in primary and secondary education, on how to promote gender equality, dismantle stereotypical views of women and men in society, as well as how to teach about sexual and reproductive health; first of all, teachers should be trained to know what gender equality is and to recognize different forms of discrimination, to know how to use different prevention approaches and know-how to mediate a democratic and proactive solution;
- Review textbooks to remove gender-biased content;
- Revise curricula to include learning outcomes aimed at recognizing and reducing all forms of discrimination and those aimed at promoting gender equality;
- Initiate school projects (extracurricular) in cooperation with the community to raise awareness about gender equality;
- Develop a code of conduct for gender sensitivity and safety in educational institutions;
- Introduce content, at all levels of formal and non-formal education that promotes gender equality and dismantles gender stereotypes and prejudices; create career counselling and guidance programs that are gender-sensitive and provide entrepreneurial knowledge, so that women and men are on an equal footing when it comes to entrepreneurship.

6

POLITICS AND PARTICIPATION

Given that the status of women in modern societies is considered one of the key indicators of good governance and a condition of liberal democracy in general (Dahlerup 1978; Dahlerup & Leyenaar 2013; UNDP 2000), world and national research methods are becoming increasingly sophisticated, to provide the most relevant data on the equal inclusion of women in socio-political life. In that direction, this study dedicates a section to politics and participation and identifies several clusters of interrelated issues, namely the perception of the current situation with women's equality, their interest in politics and political participation, and attitudes towards democracy, ideology, values, and expectations. In general, the Republic of North Macedonia is a country that is making progress towards ensuring gender equality and well-being, but there is still much room for improvement, as is also confirmed by the results of the Women's Study 2020. It is important to emphasize that this study recognizes the current national political context in which it is conducted and thus takes into account the fact that Macedonian democracy is relatively young, unconsolidated, and has already faced an episode of democratic setback since its recent conception. This political episode led to the country being labelled a captive state, a hybrid regime, a liberal democracy, and an authoritarian populism (among other terms) (FH Report 2015; 2016). It also served to highlight the pitfalls of a transitioning political culture (Klicperova-Baker, 1999; Bernik, 2000; Pendarovski, 2015, 2016), wherein political participation is largely absent and thus citizens, particularly women, are non-responsive. The Macedonian context reflects a global trend of growing distrust in politics (Edelman Trust Barometer 2020).

It is well-known that women's political participation is essential to the democratic progress of modern society and must therefore be continuously prioritized by society; exercised not only at the level of active and passive

suffrage but at all levels (i.e., women as stakeholders in public decision making, policymaking, political activism, etc.). In the recent election campaign (2020), we could see that only one ideological option, namely the social-democratic one, promoted the concept of gender equality for the first time, through the 50/50³ platform. Now the current ruling coalition adheres to gender commitments such as equality and non-discrimination, which will undoubtedly lead to national strategies for gender equality and protection against discrimination.

6.1. PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE CURRENT STATUS OF WOMEN'S EQUALITY

This study analyzes perceptions of respondents on the status of women's equality in the country, including the capacities of the current female politicians and overall levels of political trust. These perceptions are such that, in the Republic of North Macedonia, politics does not represent women adequately in terms of female membership nor the issues that affect them. Results also show that many women are not keeping abreast of how they are being represented in politics, and from this group, very few agree that their interests are well-represented at the national and local/community levels (6% and 5% respectively).

3 For more see in МКД,МК "Заев на следните изборни листи ќе има 50 отсто жени", available at <https://www.mkd.mk/makedonija/politika/zaev-na-slednite-izborni-listi-sdsm-kje-ima-50-otsto-zheni> accessed on 30.06.2020.

According to you, are the interests of women well-represented in politics at the...?

(cumulative % for "answers:" to a great extent" and "to a very great extent")

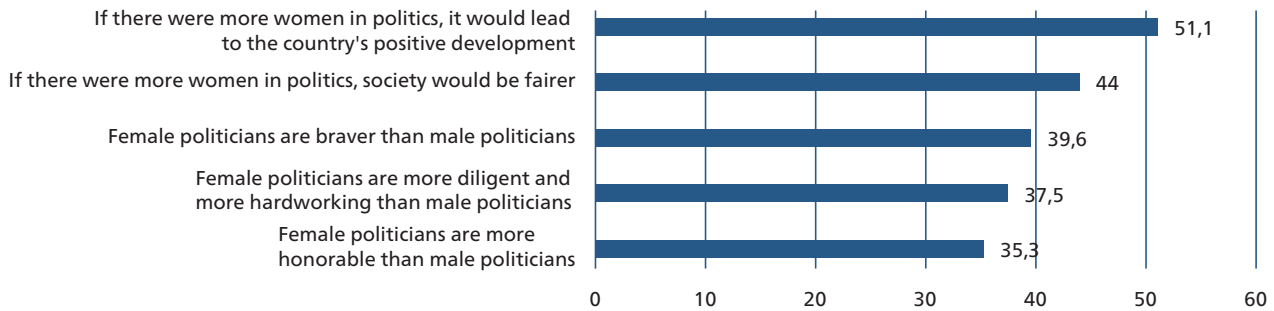


The respondents do not appear to recognize the relationship between democratic development and the democratization of the political order through strengthening women's participation in politics. It is curious that although respondents recognize that an increase in women's involvement in politics would positively

influence the development of the state (51.1% expressed full agreement with the position), they believe it would do so in terms of ensuring more order. This coincides with the finding that respondents show some support for authoritarian attitudes. Many respondents were very much in favor of women participating in politics, agreeing that it will contribute to a fairer society (44%) and that women make braver (39.6%), more diligent (37.5%), and honorable (35%) politicians than men. The findings also point to low awareness among women that their participation is vital to building a healthy democracy, as well as the apparent prevailing perception that strengthening women's influence in politics would lead to 'order'. Respondents appear to view 'order' as a desirable value, even though it is implicitly associated with authoritarianism.

How would you assess the political performance of female vs. male politicians?

cumulative % of respondents that answered "agree" and "completely agree"

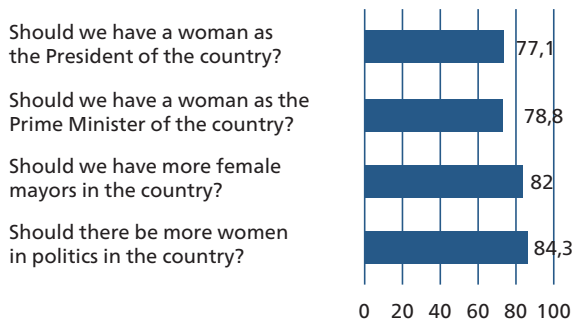


The majority of the respondents (84%) believe that there should be more women in political positions, while 82% believe that there should be more mayors, 79% say the country should have a woman as Prime Minister, and 77% want a woman as President. However, while there is strong support for increased participation of women in politics, these figures should be interpreted in light of the previously indicated findings (the link they make between women participating in politics and the assurance of order and justice, as opposed to the possibility of democratization). The results show that it is disputable as to whether a solid understanding of democracy exists among the target population.

Moreover, when examining which additional attitudes and demographics of the respondents may present as determinants for the statement, "should there be more women in politics in the country", the following proved to be (statistically) insignificant: do you think we should have a woman as President in the country; if there were more women in politics, society would be fairer; female politicians are more diligent and hardworking than male politicians; female politicians are more honorable than male politicians; age group and education level of the respondents. Another interpretation of this result is that although there is a correlation between the answers to these questions, they do not influence the view that there should be more women in politics.

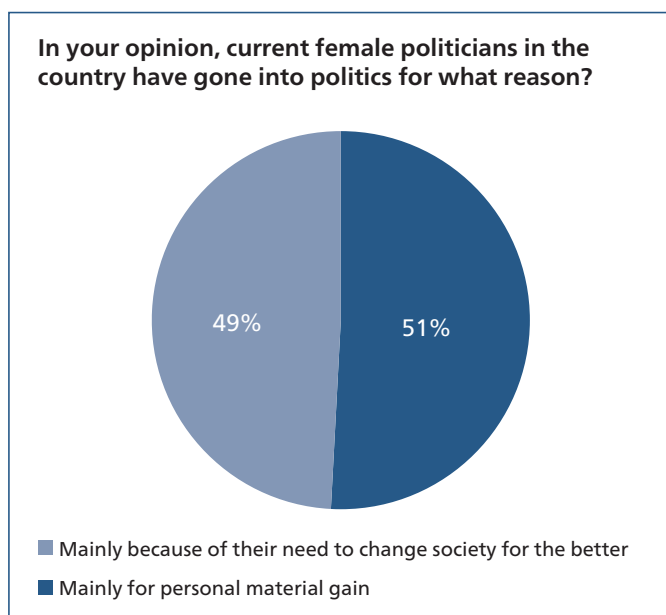
Views on women holding political office

% of respondents that answered "YES"



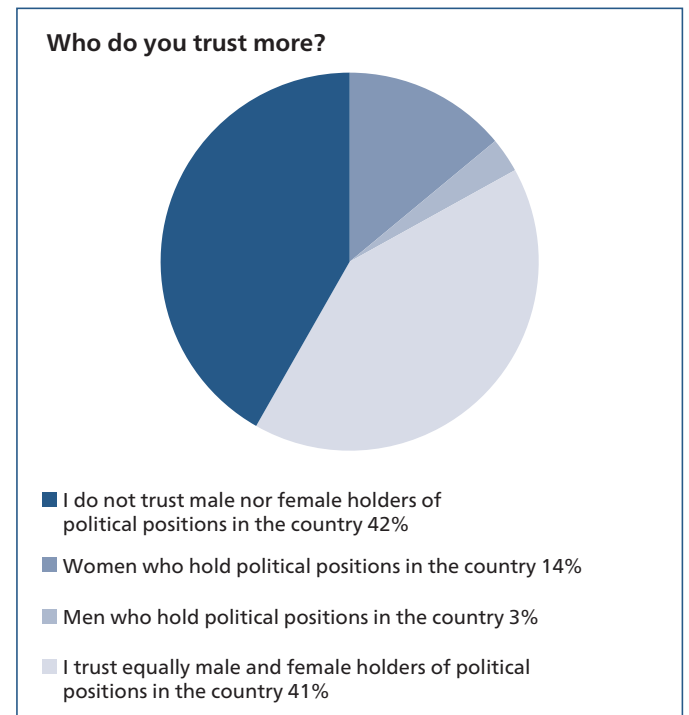
Further analysis shows the responses to the questions, "should there be more female mayors", "should there be a woman Prime Minister in the country" and "female politicians are braver than male politicians" explain 76% of respondents' views on the question, "should there be more women in politics" by way of the following: the positive support for electing more female mayors explains 45% of the positive support for more women in political positions; the positive support for a female Prime Minister explains 29% of the positive support for more women in politics; the positive agreement that female politicians are braver than male politicians explains 2% of the positive support for more women in politics. In short, respondents who show greater consistency in

their views, when it comes to political issues in North Macedonia, consider the position of Prime Minister to be more important than that of President and believe that women are more courageous as politicians (although it is not completely clear why they think so). Respondents are divided, almost equally, over which factors motivated the current female politicians to enter politics. Half (51%) believe they were driven by personal gain and 49% believe they wanted to change society for the better. The 49% who believe they want to change society for the better, gives hope that there are enough room and potential for women to mobilize and engage in politics when the collective will arises to make a change. This is still speculation, however, and warrants further in-depth analysis. The other half (51%) said, "personal gain", an attitude that mirrors the current spirit of worldwide politics, i.e., "distrust" (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2020).

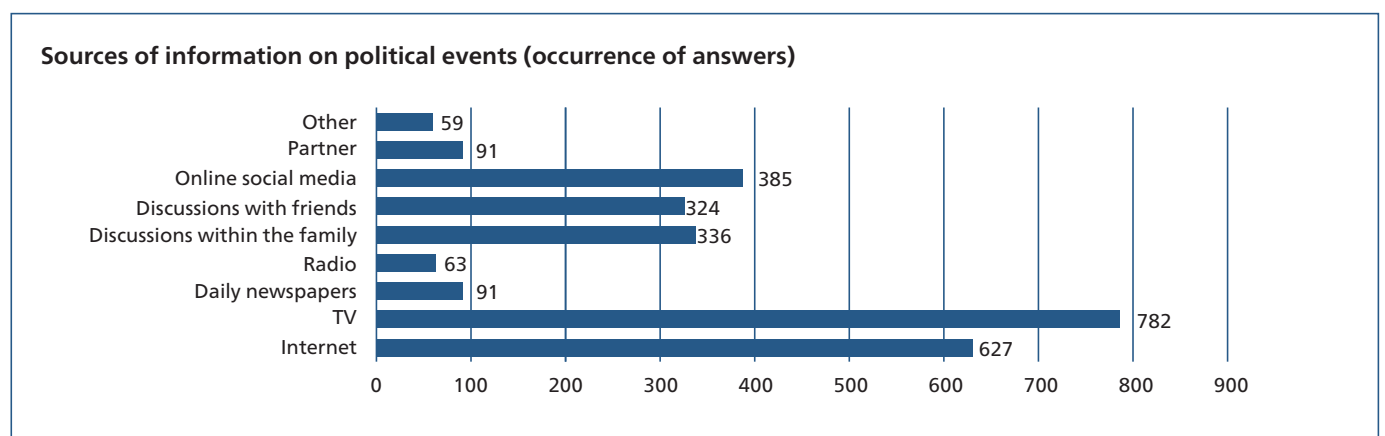


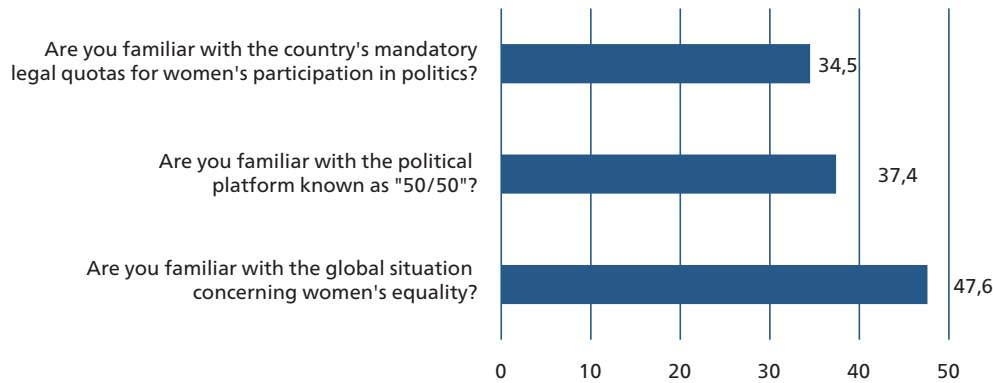
It appears then, that the degree of distrust in politics is overall high, and more specifically, 42% of respondents trust neither male nor female holders of political positions. Although, another 41% answered that they trust men and women politicians equally. However, 14% indicated they trust women in politics more, compared to 5% who trust men more. The growing distrust of politics is a global trend in the post-political age, and the reasons for this vary: from alienation from politics,

degree of emancipation, psychological profiling, sources and manner of information, media literacy and exposure, to fake news; but also experiences of democracy, etc. Specifically for the context of the unconsolidated Macedonian democracy, we want to emphasize, in addition to the stated reasons, the episode of the democratic setback in the country and the ensuing authoritarian populism, which undoubtedly contributes to the apparent increasing distrust of politics here.



In terms of being informed about political events, the respondents are mostly oriented towards the traditional media-television, and then towards the internet and social media. This fact alone does not mean anything, but in the context of many respondents indicating they neither know about the 50/50 platform nor the mandatory legal quotas, it seems that the drastic shift in behaviour relating to news consumption may be taking its toll. Exposure to fake news, limited media literacy, and the general current challenges with media may obstruct the communication about campaigns supporting women's equality and political empowerment, i.e., not enough media attention on "women's issues". The role of the media in addressing women's equality and campaigning on these issues needs to be explored further.



Familiarity with women's equality trends/movements: (% of respondents who answered "YES")

In other words, the awareness about the situation with women's equality among the respondents is not at a satisfactory level. Sixty-five percent (65%) of respondents are not familiar that there are mandatory legal quotas in this country that support women's participation in politics, 63% are not even familiar with the 50/50 platform, and 52% do not follow the global situation with women's equality at all. The indicated unawareness of the basic opportunities for political participation (legal

quotas and 50/50) is likely one of the most prevalent reasons for the absence of political participation among the female population, which is, in fact, the biggest detected challenge that has emerged from this research and is explored in the next part of this section. Similar to the findings presented above, qualitative research shows that women and their interests are under-represented in politics.

"I think that women are not sufficiently represented in politics. There are women, but not enough and when they reach a certain position, personal rather than collective interests prevail. This is not a problem of women, but of men in politics, that is, a problem of the whole society." (B.S., 43, Skopje, Macedonian)

"I am not satisfied at all, they just look like marionettes that someone leads and directs, so women in our country are just pictures and nothing else." (R.C, 35, Chegrane, Albanian)

"Honestly, there are not many female politicians in high positions, I think that those who are in such positions are still under the influence of the male leadership forces in their parties, even in their workplace." (T.V., 26, Skopje, Roma)

"I am not informed enough to comment, I am generally not satisfied with anyone in that area." (A.M., 30, Skopje, Macedonian)

"The current situation does not allow any greater engagement, but I think that there is a need for greater communication with women of all profiles to emphasize the need for each engagement to motivate other women." (D.C., 36, Skopje, Albanian)

"I have not watched television for months, and before that, I had the impression that women are influenced by men's manners as they progress at work and lose women's ethical values and rush forward, ruthlessly, arrogantly, and without forgiveness. As long as we do not respect each other's successes "more femininely", I think there is no room for success. Respect to every individual woman whom I admire, who is an example of a woman, in every way." (E.S., 45, Kavadarci, Macedonian)

"Certain female politicians do their job successfully believing that this is due to greater commitment and hard work to prove their equality with men."

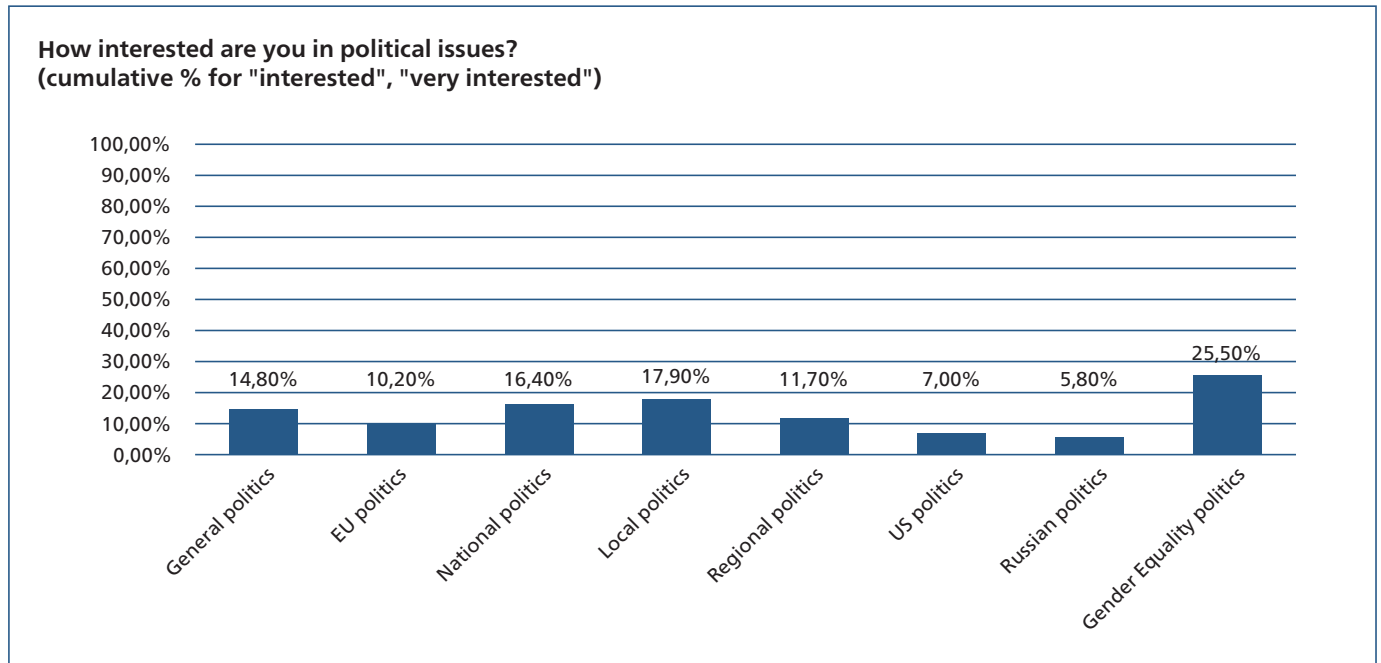
6.2. INTEREST IN POLITICS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Our study shows worrying data regarding general (dis)interest and political (non)participation among women. There is a clear and unequivocal indication that women are not interested enough in politics on a more general

level. Proportionally, however, they are more interested in women's equality policies (25.5%) and only then in local (17.9%) and national (16.4%) politics, followed by an interest in regional politics. Policies of the EU, Russia, and the United States are of the least interest to the respondents. These data are helpful in terms of assessing the level of civic responsiveness, inclusion, and

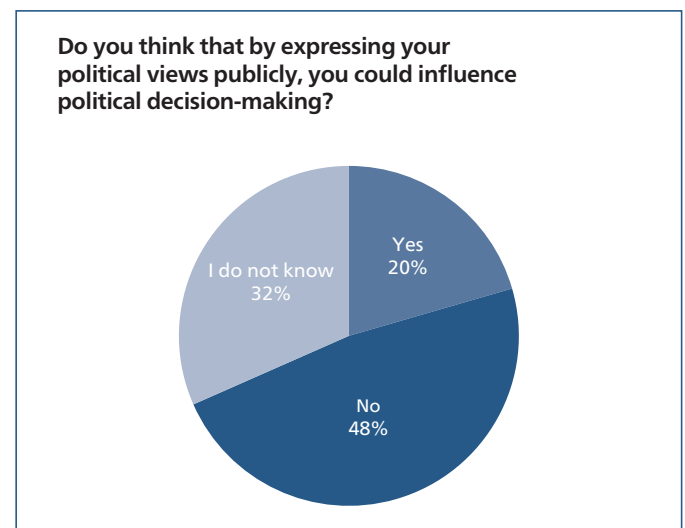
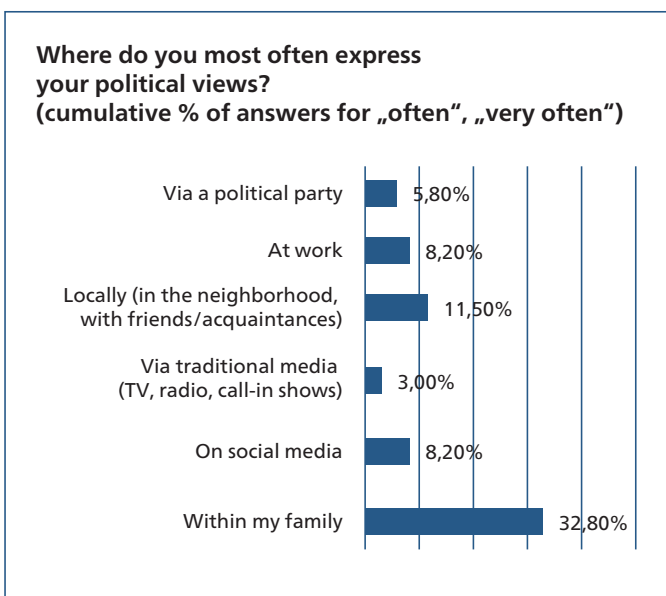
civic virtue, and largely coincide with the detected mistrust in politics and the perceived lack of information. These phenomena are intertwined, especially given the insufficient consolidation of democracy in the country and authoritarian recidivism, both at the level of values and politics. The connection respondents see between women’s political participation and order, and the

findings of how democracy is valued and understood (which is detailed further in the analysis below), points to the presence of unconsolidated views on democracy within the country that appear to be the result of experiencing both a short democracy and an episode of authoritarian populism.



Respondents with higher education showed greater interest in the listed aspects and all other monitored aspects ($r > 0.25$, $p < 0.01$). Respondents who consider themselves to have (higher) incomes, i.e., incomes that meet their needs, tend to be more interested in general, national, US, and gender equality politics. Moreover, the lack of interest in political topics is reflected in the data regarding the discussion of political topics and the expression of views. Namely, a large percentage of women in the Republic of North Macedonia stated that they never express political views. Those who say they express political views do so mostly within the family, and rarely within the party or to traditional media.

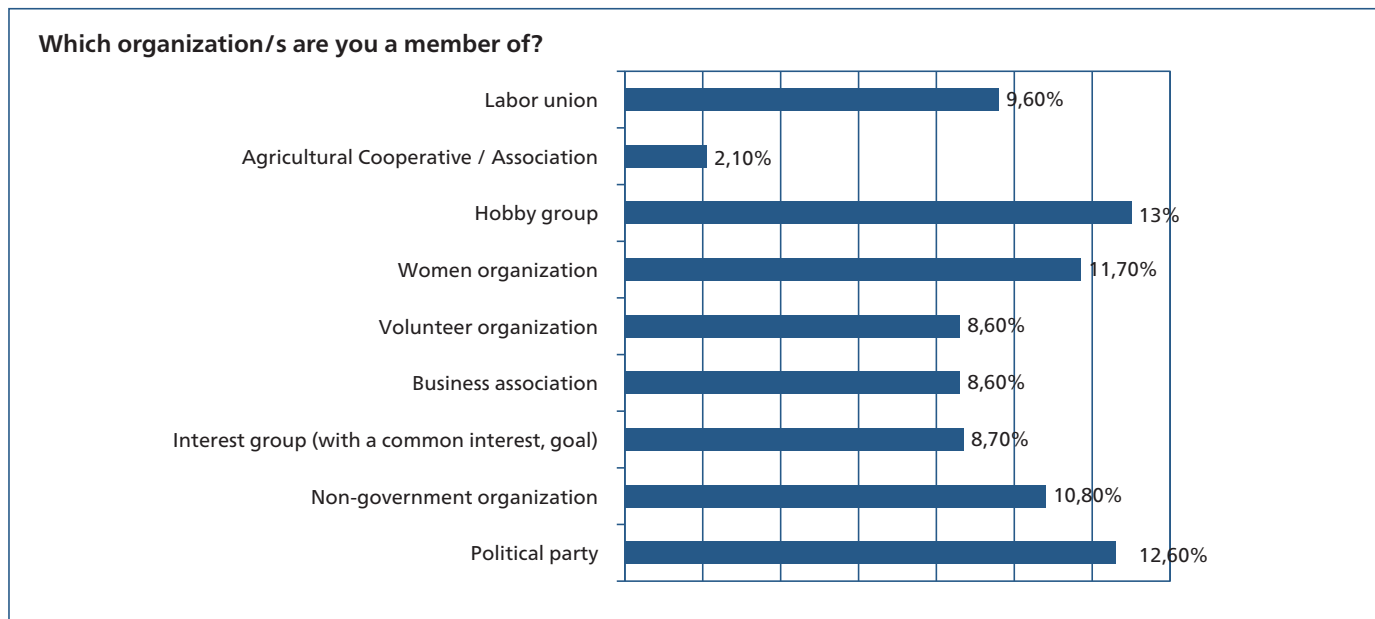
This lack of interest is likely due to only 20% of women in the country believe that their expression of political views can effectively influence politics in the country. These data indicate the perception that the political opinion and attitudes of individuals are considered completely irrelevant in policymaking and decision making.



Civic unresponsiveness, in a wider social setting, is confirmed by the finding that women do not show interest in becoming members of organized socio-political groups. However, it is interesting to note that despite the low level of membership, women are more present in political parties, hobby groups, and women’s organizations than in other groups: 13% of respondents reported membership in a party or hobby group, and

12% in a women's organization, which were all higher than membership rates to NGOs, agricultural cooperatives, volunteer organizations, trade unions or interest groups. The reason for this civic unresponsiveness is probably the absence of participatory political culture, given the immaturity of democracy in the country, but

also points to the traditional view that a woman's primary focus is within the home. One of the more visible democratic setbacks promoted by the then government, was the reminding, stimulating, and propagating of the traditional role of women, which played out not so long ago.



Women in the Republic of North Macedonia show an extremely low level of motivation for political participation reflected in the findings that as many as 47% "do not bother with politics at all" and 28% are very rarely active. Only 5% show a high level of participation and 20% have a self-perception of moderate participatory performance. The "do not bother with politics" qualification is probably due to a combination of the absence of participatory political culture often seen in young democracies and feelings of political alienation on a global scale, but also at the country level, which must be interpreted in light of citizens' experience of authoritarianism, fear-mongering, and political labeling, discrimination, and dishonesty.

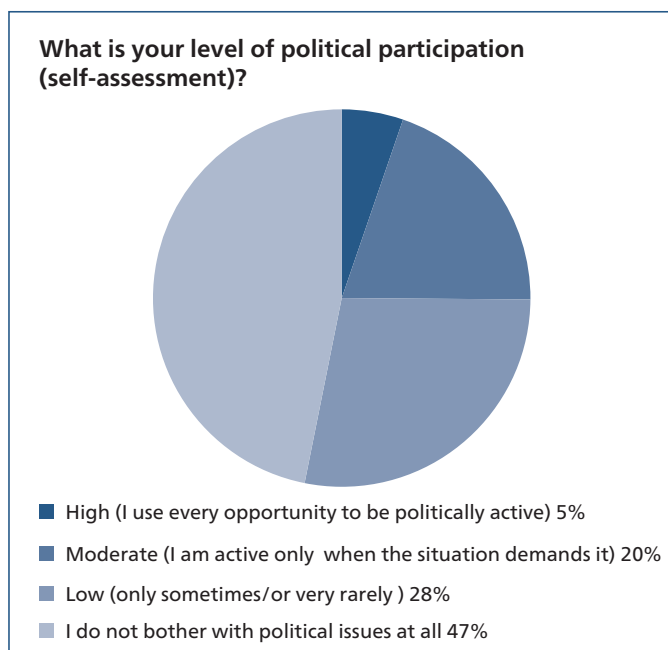
Other than that, at the sample level, the model, although statistically significant, has little explanatory value. Only the level of completed education proves to be a determining factor in the political self-assessment among the respondents, a rise in education level coincides with a rise in self-perception of political participation.

Age and financial status did not prove to be significant determinants in the level of self-perception in the respondents.

Place of living and ethnicity do not (statistically) significantly affect self-perception ($p > 0.05$).

Respondents with higher levels of self-perceived political activity showed a significantly higher tendency to take interest in general political issues (e.g., national/local politics, regional politics, US politics, Russian politics), to express their political opinion more often (in the family, on social media, through traditional media, in the local community, at work, within the party), to believe that expressing their political views can influence politics in the country, to join organizations within which they can express their political opinion (e.g., political parties, non-governmental organizations, women's organizations), to monitor global trends of gender equality, to be familiar with the 50/50 political platform, and to be aware of the country's obligatory quota for women's political participation.

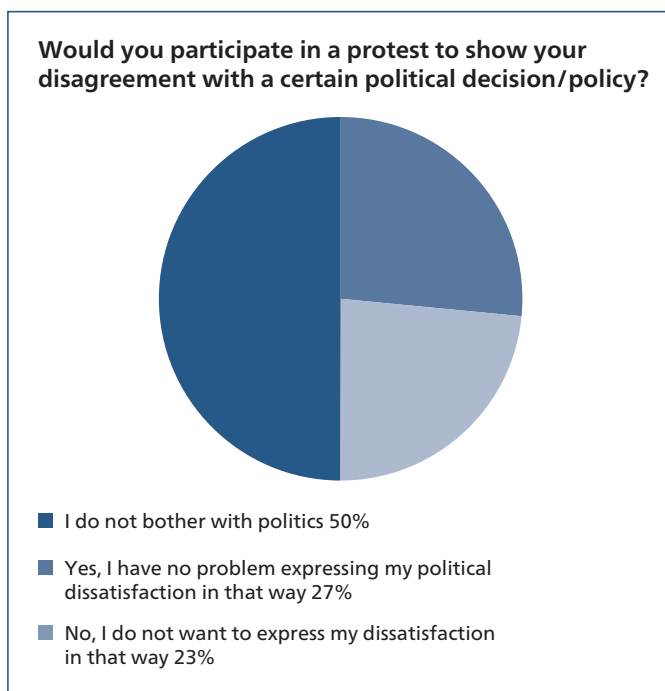
Despite the tendencies in the expressing of one's political views, the determination towards taking concrete action to advocate for these issues does not statistically explain the level of self-perception of political engagement. Only some of the views can be considered as explanatory: attitudes towards the general interest in political issues; attitudes towards the interest in national and local politics, and US politics; expressing political



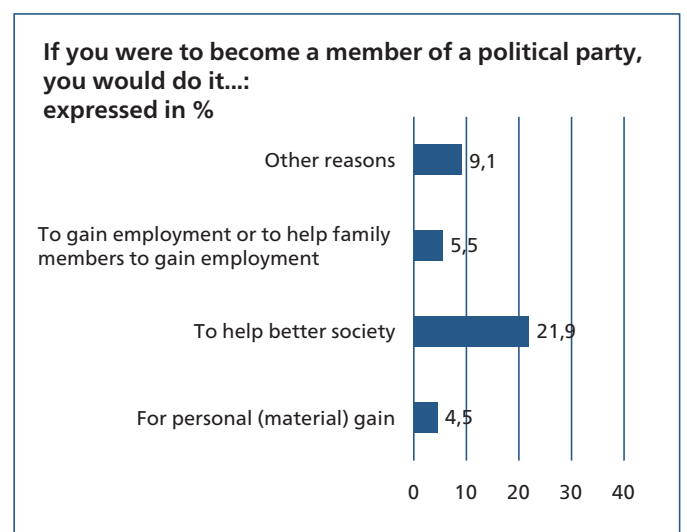
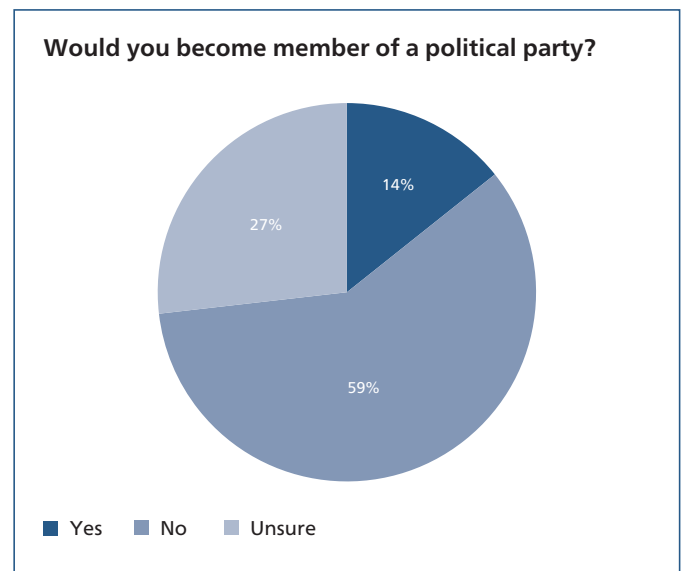
opinions on social networks and in the local environment; membership to a political party; interest in monitoring the global situation with women’s equality; and familiarity with the legally mandatory quotas for women’s participation in politics. Even with these explanatory variables, the model explains the level of self-assessed political engagement by only 56%.

It can be concluded that politically active women (political party members) have a higher level of political self-perception, but that said, the possibility of endogeneity between these variables is not excluded, i.e., that a higher level of self-perception is a woman’s motivation to join a political party. This relationship would need to be verified through a longitudinal or further study.

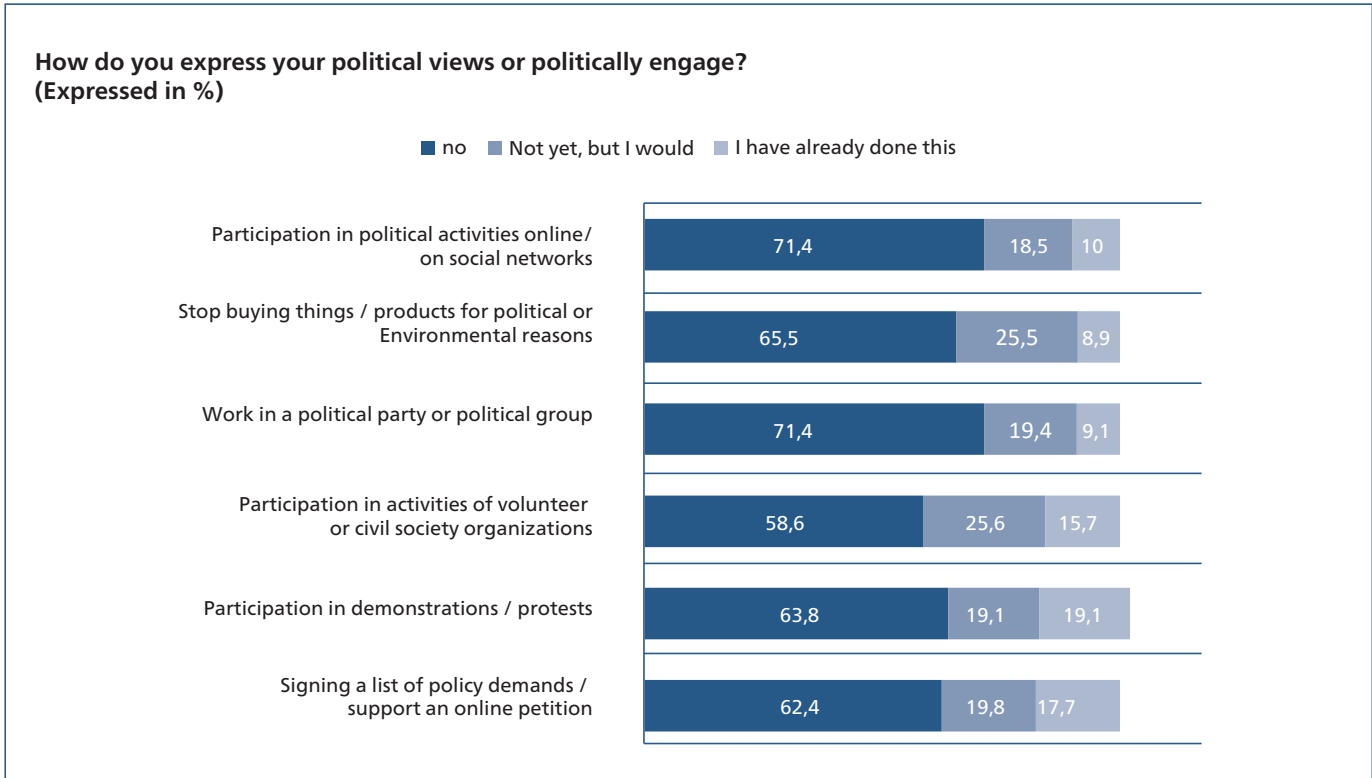
Regarding the question about protest participation to express political disagreement, the interest was low, reaffirming that respondents do not ‘bother’ with politics (50%), while 23% explicitly claim that they do not want to express their dissatisfaction through protest. Only 27% of respondents said they had no problem expressing their political dissatisfaction in this way. Alternatively, as previously suggested, non-responsiveness and non-partisanship may underpin these responses, as one of the dominant challenges arising from this research.



Similarly, the initiative to become a member of a political party is also low, namely, only 14% of respondents confirmed that they would join a political party, compared to 59% who would not join. Of those respondents who would join a political party, 21% would do so because of the need to improve the situation in society, as opposed to 5.5% who would do so for employment reasons and 4.5% who would join to gain personal material benefit. Here, we see there is still some room for participatory initiative for those who still believe that society can improve.

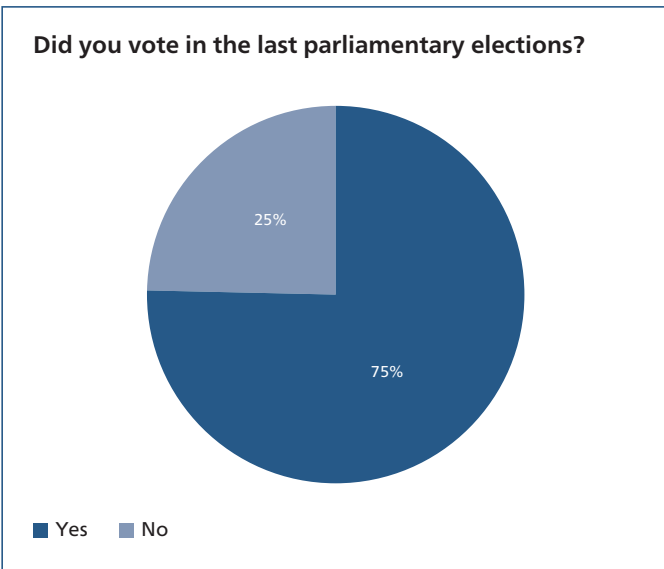


Concerning the different forms of political opinion expression or socio-political engagement, the respondents again show extremely low levels of activity. Namely, 62% have never signed any list of political demands or online petition, nor do they intend to. Similarly, 64% did not and do not intend to participate in demonstrations or protests to express their political opinion, and 59% show no interest in participating in volunteer or civil society organization activities. Furthermore, 66% have not boycotted a company by refusing to buy their products for political or environmental reasons, nor do they intend to. Notably, the greatest resistance is seen with activities connected to a political party (72% show no interest) and participating in political activities online or on social networks (71.4% have not tried nor want to). These findings and those above that relate to reasons for non-participation suggest that the (un)democratic experience and resulting political culture have greatly influenced political engagement.

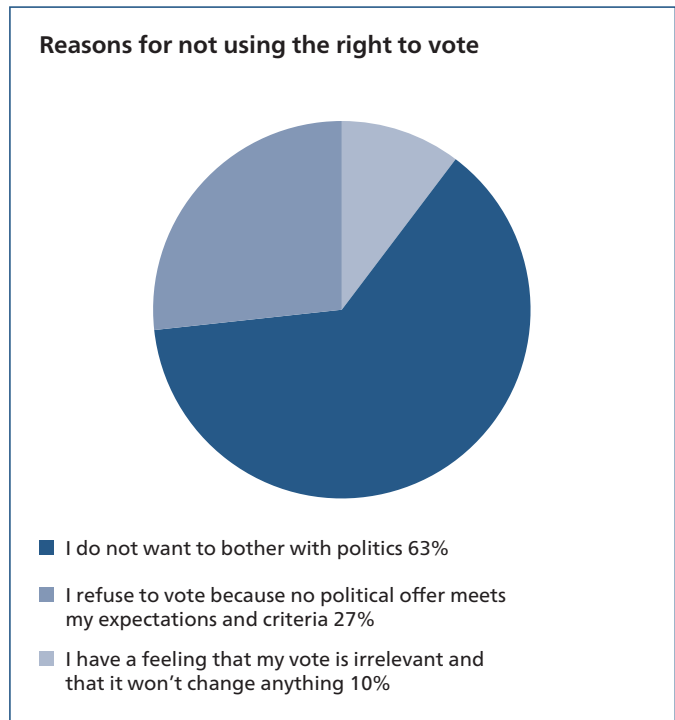


Although the interest in politics and political participation of women in the country is at a very low level, and the electoral model is a commonly debated topic, the proportion of women voting in elections in the Republic of North Macedonia is extremely large. In the last elections, 75% of the respondents voted, while 25% did not exercise their right to vote.

does not vote in the elections in anticipation of reaping future rewards from the parties. Meanwhile, of those respondents who did not exercise their right to vote, the majority (63%) indicated a total disinterest in politics, a third (27%) are disillusioned and believe that no political offer will meet their expectations or needs, and 10% consider their vote irrelevant and unable to change anything.

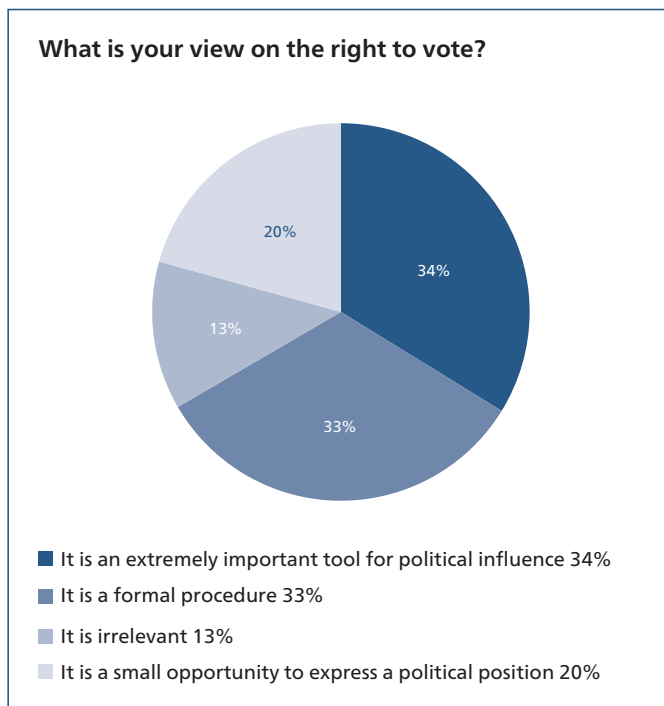


This contradiction in attitudes is especially interesting when we take into account that the largest percentage of respondents (60%) who exercise their right to vote, do so according to personal conviction. Although it is known that political parties in the country are seen as guarantors of employment and utilitarian agents, still only 11% answered that they vote in a way that will provide them with personal benefits, such as employment or similar. This data indicates that the female population

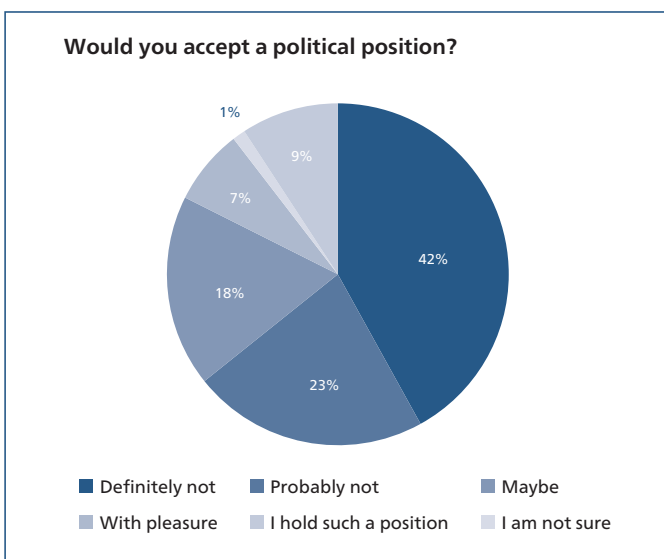


Only 34% of the respondents in the Republic of North Macedonia recognize the right to vote as an extremely important instrument of political influence. A third

(33%) consider it simply a formality, 20% see it as having only a minor influence on politics, and 13% view the most fundamental civil right of a democratic society (i.e., to vote) as completely ineffectual.



When asked if they would accept a political position, 65% of women answered negatively. Only 7% would gladly take on a political position, while 18% would be hesitant to, and 1% answered that they are already in such a position.



The level of education is a significant indicator of the determination of the respondents to accept a political position (out of the whole sample, 39% answered, "completely agree" to the question of whether they would accept a political position), and show the respondents with higher levels of education as 20% more willing to accept a political position. By age, the ratio is negative or inversely proportional, showing a 2% drop in willingness for every year gained in age.

Predominantly, responses from the qualitative part of the research also suggest similar attitudes of political non-participation and disinterest.

"I am not politically active, because I do not see the quality in any political party, I do not believe in political ideology, I think it is [self-]interest and I do not want to belong to a group where the only criterion for progress is a membership card. (...) I do not want injustice, and there is a lot in politics." (G.T., 44, Ohrid, Macedonian)

"No, I do not want to be a politician and I honestly do not see any benefit in that." (T.V., 26, Skopje, Roma)

, "No. I do not like the parties or the way they work. They are groups of people who care about their personal well-being, not the common good." (L.O., 56, Skopje, Serb)

"No, because I do not believe I can change anything." (A.M., 30, Skopje, Macedonian)

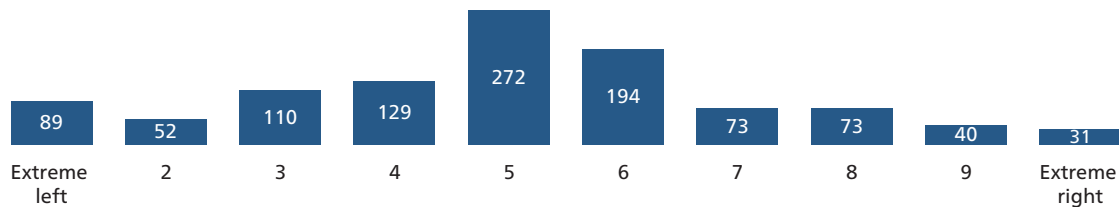
"I am not because I do not want to be marked and I do not justify the actions of any of them." (I.J., 53, Delchevo, Macedonian)

"No. Because I am politically unaffiliated." (K.S., 26, Stip, Macedonian)

6.3. DEMOCRACY, IDEOLOGY, AND VALUES

On the ideological spectrum, the respondents are predominantly self-positioned in the center ($m = 5.01$).

In general, where would you place your political views on a scale from 1 to 10? (occurrence of answers, scale from extreme left to extreme right)

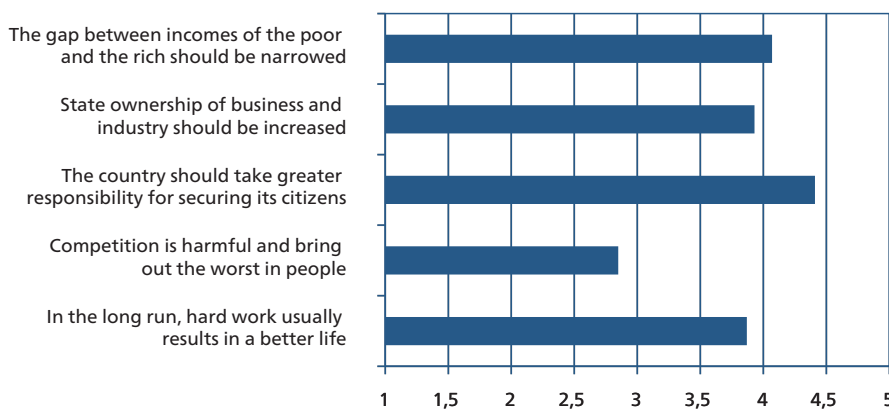


But despite ideological centrist self-identification, the research contraindicates dominant support for left-wing policies. In that direction, high mean values were recorded for (hence showing strong agreement with) the following attitudes: the state should take greater responsibility to provide for everyone ($m = 4.41$); the incomes of the poor and the rich should be more equal

($m = 4.07$); state ownership of business and industry should be increased ($m = 3.93$); and, in the long run, hard work usually brings a better life ($m = 3.87$). On the other hand, the mean value (also in the negative interval of the axis) is lower for, and thus shows disagreement with, the attitude that competition is harmful and brings out the worst in humans ($m = 2.85$).

Ideological positionings

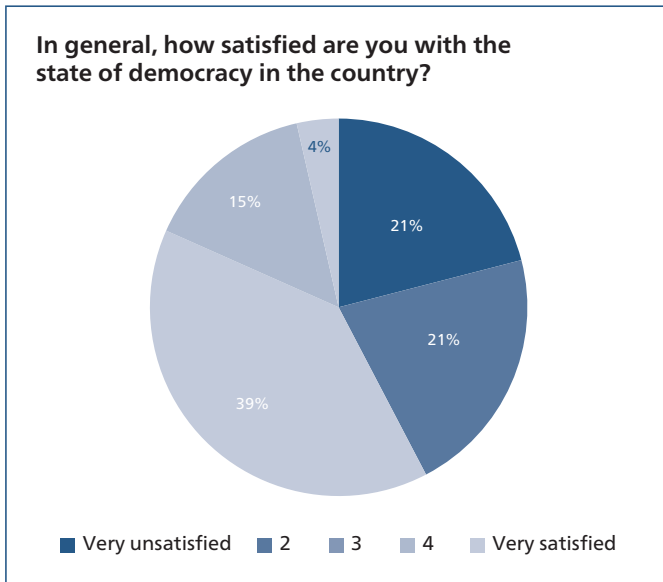
Scale: 1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree



In general, the satisfaction with the state of democracy in the country is not at an enviable level, but it is still not low, namely, 39% express neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction with the state of democracy in the country, and on the extreme ends, 21% are not satisfied at all and 4% are very satisfied. This fact is good to interpret in the context of the general understanding of democracy as noted above, and especially in terms of the upholding of democratic values. In other words, data on the support of democratic values and understanding of politics indicate that the majority (63%) of respondents believe that democracy is a good form of government, but at the same time, contradictory authoritarian views can be observed. Half (54%) of respondents identify fully with the view that under certain circumstances, dictatorship is a better form of government than democracy,

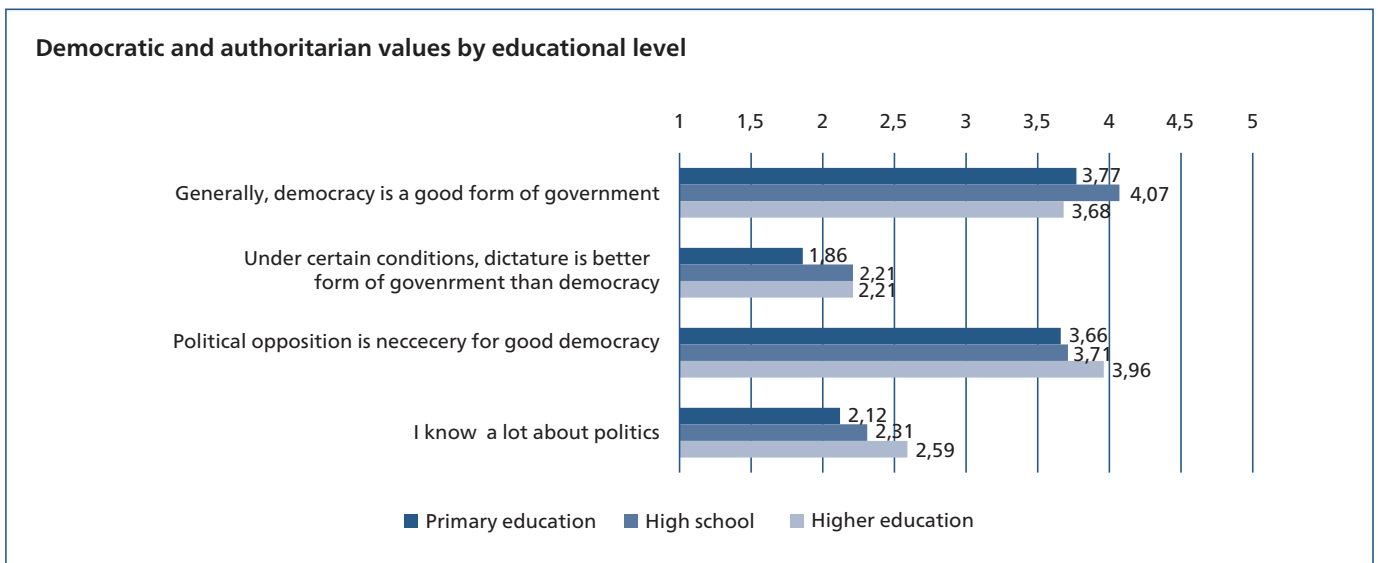
and agree that the country needs a strong party (46%). Along the same lines, a not-so-small percentage of 34% of respondents fully support the view that a leader is needed who can lead the country with a "firm hand". Support for a female leader, and not a leader to lead the country in the good direction, was registered by 39% of the respondents. A large number have the impression that politicians do not care about women's opinions, as confirmed by 61%. Also, 44% believe that it is the duty of every citizen in a democratic society to vote and 41% see political opposition as necessary for a healthy democracy. The percentage of pacifist views is high, namely, 68% expressed disagreement with the view that in every society there are conflicts that can only be resolved through violence. Only 21% can recognize there is a link between increased female participation in

politics and democracy. A small percentage of respondents believe themselves to be knowledgeable about politics (18%). These authoritarian attitudes and statist values were strengthened in the country after the democratic setback in recent Macedonian political history, during which time the country gained the epithet of a hybrid regime and a captive state. These views, as pointed out above, are contraindicated with declarative support for both democracy and a strong state and a firm-handed leader.



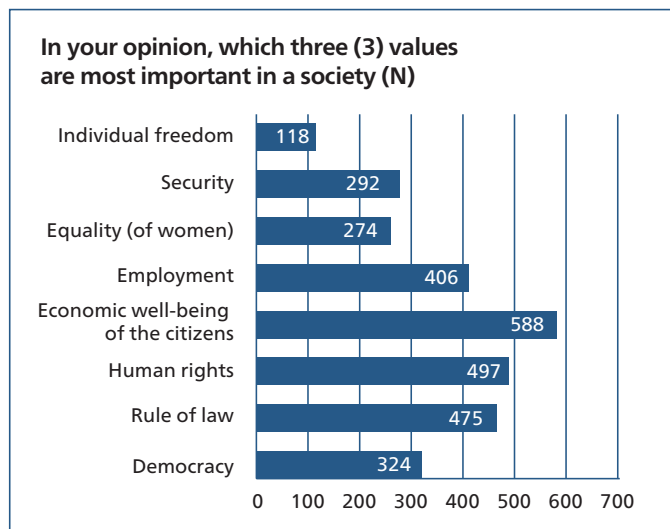
According to the non-parametric tests and the comparison of mean values, there are statistically significant differences in the attitudes towards democratic and authoritarian values ($p < 0.05$) according to ethnicity, with Macedonian women having higher values (showing agreement) for attitudes promoting democratic values than Albanian women. There are differences with the category "others", but no concrete conclusions can be drawn because this grouped category consists of several ethnic groups (Serbs, Bosniaks, Roma, Turks, Vlachs, etc.), which individually have a negligible percentage in the sample.

By education level, regarding the perception of how democracy is as a form of government, respondents with incomplete primary and secondary education, plus those with completed secondary education, consider it generally a good form of government, while respondents with higher education are more reserved about it but also consider it a positive form of governance. Respondents with a high school or university degree are more likely to justify dictatorship under certain circumstances, while most of them also believe that political opposition is essential for a healthy democracy. The level of completed education also has an impact on the knowledge of politics, with results showing that respondents holding a university degree were more likely to self-assess that they know a lot about politics (compared to those with unfinished or completed secondary education).



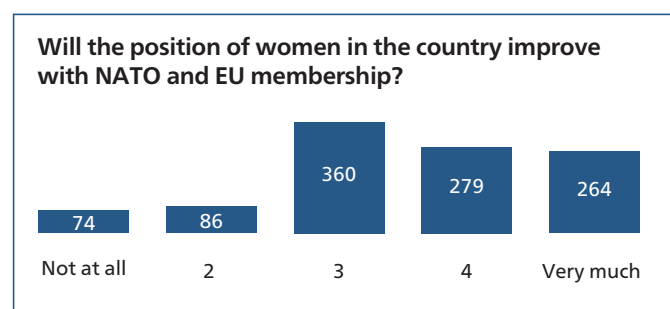
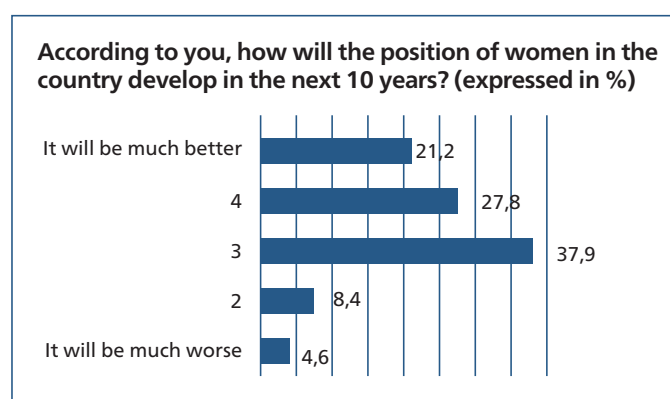
According to the research, the three (3) most important values in society for women are economic well-being, human rights, and rule of law. Notably, women rate individual freedom as the least important, which also

indicates that liberalism has taken its toll. Thus, the understanding of democracy in its reductive variant, that is, without the liberal attributes, is one of the reasons for the absence of participation.



6.4. FUTURE EXPECTATIONS

With how the position of women will develop in the next 10 years, 21% think that it will improve significantly and 28% say it will somewhat improve, while 4.6% think that it will be much worse, and 8.4% think it will be bad. This indicates relative optimism for the future, similar to the slight optimism about the future improvement of the position of women with the membership of the Republic of North Macedonia to NATO and the EU. One-quarter (25%) believe that the position of women will very much improve with the Euro-Atlantic integration, and another 26% say that it should improve. Those who see no opportunity to improve the position of women within that context are relatively few (7%), as are those who see little improvement post-membership (8%). These recent findings should be taken with caution because, in the meantime, the Republic of North Macedonia has faced another blockade to its integration into the EU, hence the general expectation is to see a rise in Euroscepticism.



6.5. CONCLUSIONS

- Data from the Women's Study 2020 points to women feeling insufficiently represented at all political levels (national, local, and community), with only 6% indicating their interests are largely reflected in politics; additionally, they show a low degree of trust in politicians, even female candidates and generally feel they are not being informed about issues and relevant to them.
- Despite or perhaps due to the above grievances, the study showed worrying data regarding female (dis) interest in any kind of politics, with many taking the stance "I do not bother with politics," and similarly indicated unawareness about policies that directly affect women, such as legally binding quotas or the 50/50 platform.
- In line with these results, interest and participation or membership in other organized social activities and clubs are low among the surveyed female population.
- Particularly indicative is the ideological self-perception of women, who refer to their political stance predominantly as ideologically central, while showing contradictory support for values belonging to the left ideological political spectrum.
- Self-perceptions about supporting and understanding democracy, in general, are also contraindicative; with women showing great declarative support for democracy, but also indicating quantitatively substantive support for authoritarian notions, such as wanting a 'strong' state, party, and leader, and that increased female participation in politics will contribute to more 'order'.
- The conflicting results above indicate that respondents do not recognize the relationship between the development of democracy and stronger female participation in socio-political life; rather, on the contrary, they associate the strengthening of women's participation in politics with achieving 'order' and 'order' with 'fairness'. To be able to make sense of these contradictory attitudes further in-depth research is needed.
- Women exercise their right to vote to a high degree and express (slight) optimism about the near future, in terms of gender equality and the country's Euro-Atlantic integration; although optimism for the latter may change after the last veto against the country starting negotiations with the EU, which may realistically lead to Euroscepticism.
- The cause for women's combined low political participation, general political disinterest, ignorance about the state of women's issues and equality, and contradictory notions of democracy and ideological profiling could potentially be due to some of the following factors. The most obvious is that Macedonian democracy is still unconsolidated, and in such conditions, there is an absence of internalized substantive democratic standards in the population and an absence of participatory political culture (hence non-participation). A specific national contextual factor is the regressive democratic setback

(2006-2016) in the young Macedonian democracy's political history, which consequently took its toll on citizens and the willingness of women to be active actors in the democratic progress. That, in addition to the logic of conservative authoritarian populism, has greatly encouraged the traditional role of women (i.e., discouraged their participation in the political sphere). The question that remains is how men in the country perceive the addressed issues.

6.6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Political parties to include more women in leadership positions, which will increase women's trust women in politics and motivate them to participate in political processes;
- Raise awareness among decision-makers about the benefits of empowering women and their involvement in decision-making processes;
- Civil society and media to initiate a campaign that empowers women to engage actively and continuously in political debates and movements and thus in political processes;
- The government to continue systemic incentives for greater participation of women at all levels of government;
- Strengthen media literacy among women;
- Local municipalities to collaborate actively with local women's organizations to increase female participation and make local policies more inclusive and gender-sensitive;
- Institutions and international organizations to consider providing special financial support to those women's organizations that can raise political awareness among women to stimulate their proactive involvement in decision-making processes;
- Strengthen international and regional networking between women's organizations, civil society, political parties, and public institutions and bodies;
- Women's groups (within political parties) and female politicians to campaign more proactively and visibly for gender equality to be recognized as a reliable and trusted political ally for the general female population.

7

SAFETY AND SECURITY

The emphasis on the importance of the role of women in modern society is being seen in all segments of life. One of them is defense and security. The active role of women in the creation and implementation of the security policy of the country is one of the aspects that leads to the realization of gender-conscious policy.

The emergence of globalization, digitalization, and the demographic problems facing the world in the 21st century, all have had a major influence on expanding security research. These changes in international relations led to redefining and expanding the concept of security to include individual, social, economic, international, digital, and other elements. For these reasons, modern states strive for security policies that synthesize with other policies in various areas of social and state life to achieve the total (social, economic, political, environmental, health, and so on) security of their citizens.

Specific to the context of the target group of this research, is the data from the Women in Peace and Security Index Report for 2019-2020, which is published annually and provides insight into patterns and advances in the well-being and empowerment of women around the world (WPS Index Report 2019/20)⁴. The last indexed ranking report analyzed 167 countries worldwide, including the Republic of North Macedonia, which was ranked 37th in the general ranking of this list⁵ (WPS Index Report 2019/20). The country is making progress in terms of ensuring gender equality and well-being, but there is still considerable room for improvement in the country.

4 The index is structured through three basic dimensions of inclusion and well-being of women (economic, social, political); justice (formal laws and informal discrimination); and security (at the family, community and social level). They are quantified through 11 indicators, which are collected nationally to create a global ranking of 167 countries.

5 <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/the-index/>

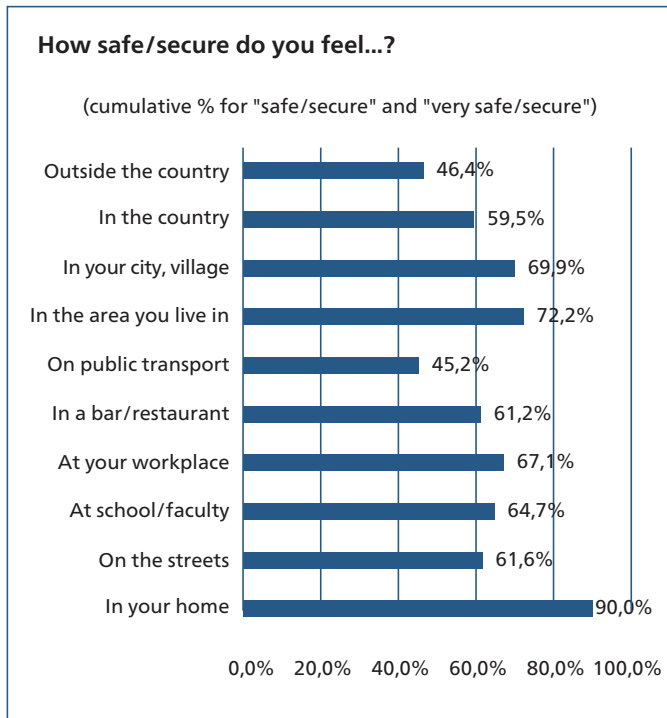
A study conducted by the OSCE Mission to Skopje in 2019, entitled, "The Well-being and Safety of Women", detected a high prevalence of violence against women in the country. According to the study, psychological violence against women is especially prevalent in intimate partner relationships, with 44% of respondents saying they were victims of this type of violence. Regarding sexual harassment, as many as 30% of respondents said that they have been victims of this type of violence since the age of 15. Furthermore, according to the findings of the same study, 14% of women surveyed said that since the age of 15, they experienced some form of physical or sexual violence by a partner or another person.⁶

In 2011, the Republic of North Macedonia signed the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention, a human rights treaty to Prevent and Combat Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, with its ratification following seven years later in 2018. By signing and ratifying, the country demonstrated the political will to tackle violence against women. To meet the provisions of the Convention, there is a need to harmonize domestic legislation with the commitments of the Convention. In that direction, the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination was adopted, which by including the basics of sexual orientation and gender identity expands the protection against discrimination of this group of citizens. The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy is the designated competent authority for implementing the provisions of the Convention. The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia additionally adopted the national action plan for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, which centrally envisages activities to change the legislation to translate the

6 https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/4/424409_0.pdf

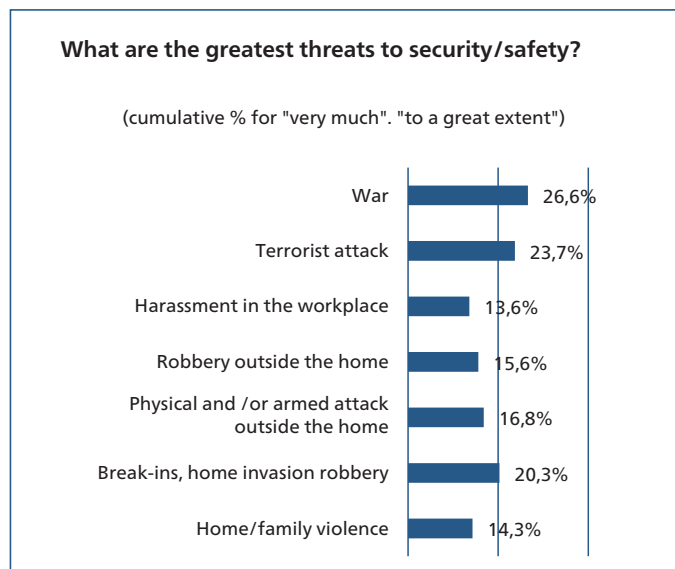
standards of the Convention into practice.⁷ The latest report of the European Commission on the progress of North Macedonia points to the fact that earmarked funds are needed for effective implementation of the policies envisaged in the action plan.⁸

In terms of feeling safe, the cumulative result of the answers "safe" and "very safe" show women in the Republic of North Macedonia feel safest in their own home, and they consider themselves to be at risk on public transport and whilst traveling abroad. There is no statistically significant difference ($p > 0.05$) in the answers between respondents of Macedonian and Albanian ethnicity.

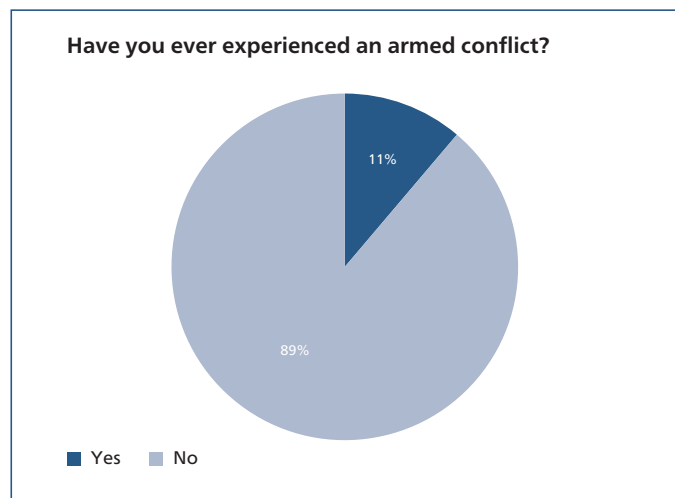


There is a significant ($p < 0.01$) (but weak) correlation between respondents' answers to how safe they generally feel in the country and abroad and their financial situation. Respondents who think that income provides for all their needs tend to feel safer both in the country and abroad.

The biggest perceived security threat for women in the Republic of North Macedonia, according to respondents, is that of war and terrorism, followed by a home-invasion robbery. Lower perceived threats are workplace harassment, domestic violence, and robbery outside the home.



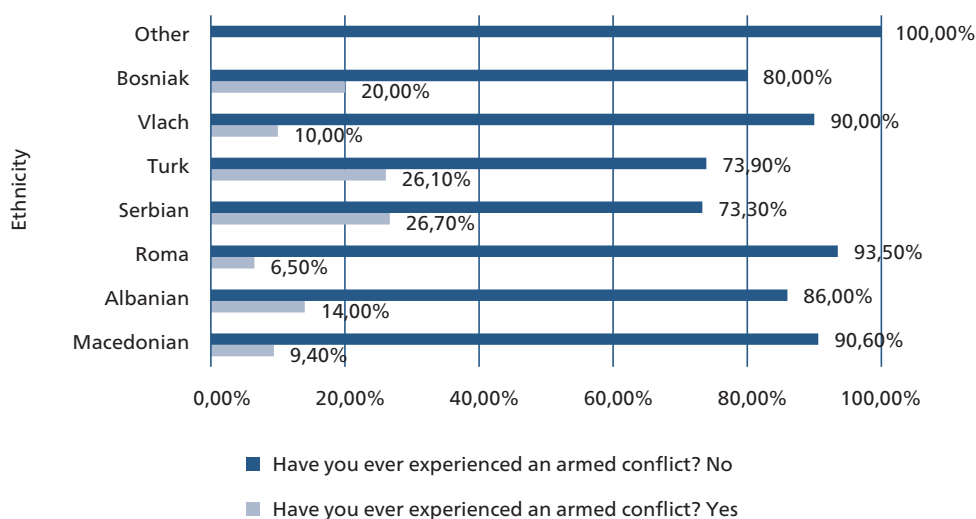
Attitudes about security threats differ significantly between those who have witnessed an armed conflict and those who have not, with the data showing a correlation of the experience of an armed conflict with the perception of war as the greatest threat to security. Although the Republic of North Macedonia gained its independence peacefully, in 2001 an armed ethnic conflict broke out in the northern and western parts of the country. As a result, 11% of women said they had witnessed an armed conflict and almost all these respondents had gone through a tense period for the duration of the conflict. This phenomenon is more pronounced among women who are over the age of 50 and from the smaller ethnic communities in the country.



7 https://mtsp.gov.mk/pocetna-ns_article-nacionalniot-plan-za-sproveduvanje-na-konvencijata-za-sprecuvanje-i-borba-protiv-nasilst-voto-vrz-zen.nspix

8 <https://www.sep.gov.mk/post/?id=5657#.X9ZJd9hKg2w>

Have you ever experienced an armed conflict?



Answers to the open question, “what do you think is the biggest danger to the safety of women in the Republic of North Macedonia?” in the interviews with representatives atypical of the target group, indicate the presence of gender-based violence as the most serious threat to the female population, primarily in their own family, and then in the workplace. This data is in

line with the results of the aforementioned OSCE survey from 2019, according to which 44% of respondents were victims of psychological violence from a partner, and 30% experienced sexual harassment. According to the World Health Organization, every third woman in the world has experienced physical or sexual violence during her lifetime.⁹

“In my opinion, the biggest threat to the safety of women, including me, is gender-based violence that can occur in any form (physical, psychological, economic, sexual, etc.) by known (partner or other family members) or unknown perpetrators.” (D.B., 37, Skopje, Serb)

“Sexual harassment.” (E.S., 29, Stip, Macedonian)

“The biggest threat to mainly women’s mental health is their husband, at least in our surroundings. There are certainly exceptions, but from what I see, they are rare. A woman, even if she is financially secure though most of them are not, is dependent on the husband and his decisions.” (L.O., 56, Skopje, Serb)

“, As a person, I fear the coronavirus, floods, earthquakes ... natural disasters. Maybe as a woman, I am afraid of being attacked on the street by a person who is under the influence of drugs to rob me or try to kiss me ... But of course, it is my personal experience. I know women who suffer domestic violence, of course, they are afraid of it, or [women] who are afraid of their bosses at their workplace [and] to lose their jobs.” (B.S., 43, Skopje, Macedonian)

“, The biggest threat is the attack on personal integrity.” (M.S., 36, Skopje, Albanian)

“The current problem, which should have disappeared during the development, but unfortunately still exists and will probably exist [for] as long as this is how the future generations are brought up, that the son should inherit everything, i.e., the boy; and the question arises where the wife would go if there is a divorce. So many women suffer both psychological and physical violence in marriage, precisely because of this, because they have nowhere to go.” (K.S., 26, Stip, Macedonian)

9 <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/violence-against-women>

To advocate for gender equality is to advocate not only for the economic, political, and social empowerment of women but also for progress and conflict prevention.

In the past 20 years, the United Nations Security Council has adopted 10 resolutions under the Women Peace and Security Agenda (WPS Agenda)¹⁰, including Resolution 1325. The Resolution affirms the role of women in defence and security and plays a major role in the way the international community approaches conflict prevention and resolution, and how it promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women as a factor of international peace and security.

The Republic of North Macedonia has ratified the United Nations Resolution 1325, and a gender perspective is integrated into the strategic documents of the Ministry of Defence and the Army. The promotion of gender equality has been an integral part of both the new law on defence and the law on military service since the beginning of 2020. In the work program of the Ministry of Defence for 2020, the process of preparation of the second National Action Plan for Resolution 1325 (2020 - 2025) has started, as well as monitoring and reporting on its implementation¹¹. The latest report of the European Commission from October 2020 points to the need to adopt such an action plan¹².

The proportion of women within peacekeeping missions and their involvement and role in negotiating and important decision-making has substantially grown since the adoption of the Resolution, but much remains to be done in this area. The Republic of North Macedonia Armed Forces has seen visible progress in recent years¹³, but there exists invisible discrimination against women, and they are rarely accepted within the military ranks at the beginning of their careers.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of women in the Army, although the representation of women is at a much lower level than that of men.

Since 2018, there has been an increase in the number of female military officers; percentage-wise, the increase is 1.40%. Increasing the number of women in senior positions is the focus of the Ministry of Defense and the Army. Namely, in 2019, the number of women in the rank of colonel has increased threefold.

10 <https://www.peacewomen.org/security-council/WPS-in-SC-Council>

11 <http://www.mod.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Godisen-plan-za-rabotata-na-MO-za-2020-god..pdf>

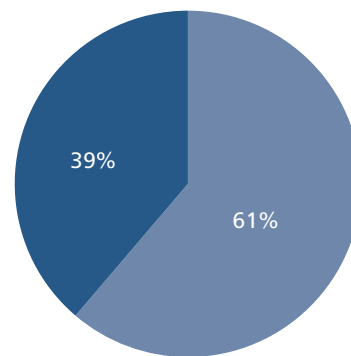
12 <https://www.sep.gov.mk/post/?id=5657#.X9ZJd9hKg2w>

13 (<http://www.mod.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Godisen-izvestaj-za-napredokot-na-ednakvite-moznosti.pdf> - Incorporated principle of equal opportunities and gender perspective in laws, by-laws, strategic documents, programs and sub-programs of the Ministry of Defense Implemented activities in accordance with the Annual Work Plan of the working group for implementation of the gender perspective in the Ministry of Defense, Establishment of a gender structure in the Ministry and the Army. Keeping gender-disaggregated data on staff by categories, Enhanced staff capacities in the Ministry and the Army in the field of gender equality and protection from all forms of harassment, Implementation of gender responsive budgeting for the selected program - Military Academy (2018-2020) - increase of the financial means for this program in the budget of the Ministry, Introduced mechanisms for protection from harassment at the workplace in the Ministry of Defense and the Army of the Republic of North Macedonia)

The majority of respondents (61%) agree with the fact that there needs to be greater representation of women in the Army.

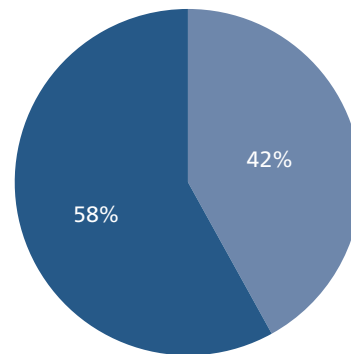
Despite the majority of respondents agreeing that a greater representation of women in the Army is needed, a lower proportion believes that they would feel safe if women were placed in key positions related to the country's security. This data indicates that respondents' sense of security and their expectations from the country's security policies are not dependent on the gender representation of women, which may be due to a lack of information about the role and contribution of women in conflict resolution and peace processes in different social contexts.

Do you think that there should be a greater representation of women in the Army?



■ Yes ■ No

Would you feel safer if women were placed in crucial national security positions?



■ Yes ■ No

7.1. CONCLUSIONS

- Almost all respondents (90%) feel safe at home, despite secondary data indicating high rates of domestic violence and psychological and/or physical partner violence.
- For the other choices, around 60% said they feel safe in their town or area of living, at work, in educational facilities, businesses, and on the 'streets'; less than half feel safe on public transport or whilst traveling abroad.
- Women perceive war and terrorist attacks as a major threat to their security; secondary data from WHO (World Health Organization) validates this fear, with natural disasters and wars seeing gender-based violence increase¹⁴ (and may be applied to the COVID-19 crisis).
- The majority of respondents (61%) believe that women should be more represented in the Army, although the same percentage do not think that women's presence in positions related to the country's security will directly impact the sense of security.

7.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

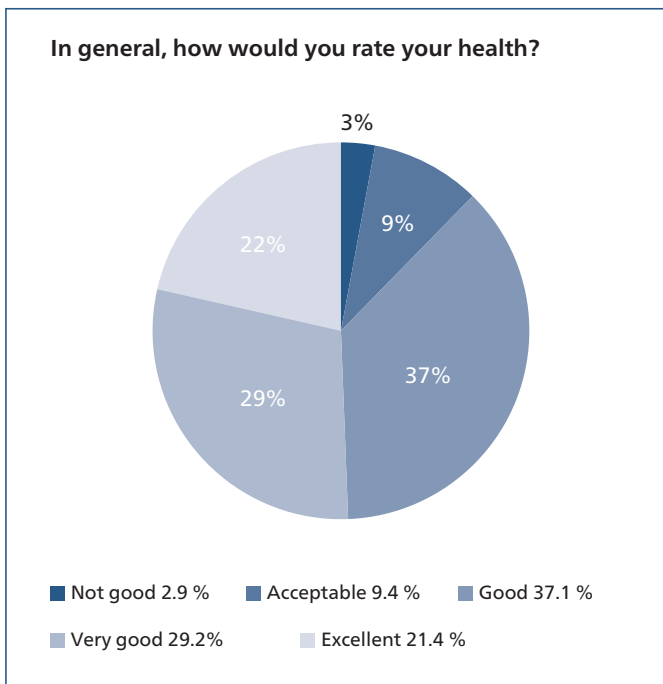
- Facilitate broader public debate on the impact of women's contribution to conflict resolution and peace processes in different social contexts;
- Continue to increase women's participation in the armed forces and peacekeeping operations by promoting successful examples of high-ranking female military officers;
- Align legal provisions with the Istanbul Convention, especially those in the criminal code;
- The relevant institutions to monitor carefully the process of the National Action Plan for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, and to open opportunities for greater involvement of the non-governmental (NGO/civil society) sector;
- Encourage NGO activists to work on security issues by way of greater involvement in the creation and monitoring of national action plans, through regular meetings and with the cooperation and support of government officials and decision-makers.

¹⁴ <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/violence-against-women>

8

WOMEN'S HEALTH

In 1948, the WHO defined health as, "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Health is a positive concept that emphasizes social and personal resources as well as physical capacity. Health is considered a resource for everyday life, not a goal to simply stay alive. The Women's Study 2020 analyses women's health by considering several determinants of a woman's physical, mental, and social health, and well-being. Women in the Republic of North Macedonia have a high opinion of their health. Just over 50% (50.6%) think that their health is very good or excellent.



The highest percentage of women who complain of poor health are from the age group 60-65 (8.2%) and

the highest percentage of women who claim to be very satisfied with their health, are those from the age groups 18-29 (38.0%) and 30-39 (25.8%). The difference in the answer to this question between the age groups is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 171.13, p < .001$).

In general, how would you rate your health?
Cross-tabulation by age

	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-65
Not good	1,6 %	1,7 %	1,0 %	3,4 %	8,2 %
Acceptable	6,5 %	3,4 %	10,1 %	17,7 %	11,1 %
Good	22,4 %	31,8 %	38,0 %	40,9 %	59,6 %
Very good	31,4 %	37,3 %	31,2 %	28,1 %	13,5 %
Excellent	38,0 %	25,8 %	19,7 %	9,9 %	7,6 %

Macedonian women were less likely to rate their health as very good or excellent, opting more for good, while among Albanian women, as many as 57.4% said they have very good or excellent health. This difference in answers is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 20.06, p = .01$).

In general, how would you rate your health? Cross-tabulation by ethnicity

	Macedonian women	Albanian women	Other	Total
Not good	2,2 %	4,9 %	2,1 %	2,9 %
Acceptable	10,3 %	8,4 %	6,3 %	9,4 %
Good	39,6 %	29,4 %	42,1 %	37,1 %
Very good	28,7 %	32,2 %	23,2 %	29,2 %
Excellent	19,2 %	25,2 %	26,3 %	21,4 %

The cross-tabulation of the answers shows that among younger women (18-29), Albanian women are more satisfied with their health (81.8% say it is very good or excellent), compared to the percentage of Macedonian women (66.4%) or those of other ethnicities (66.2%). The ratio is similar in the oldest group (60-69). Namely, older Albanian women are much more satisfied with their health (29.1% feel very good or excellent) than older Macedonian women (17.8%).

Early detection of malignant diseases is extremely important for a woman's health. Proper information is of the highest priority. In one of the few surveys on a woman's level of awareness of health risks, as many as 54.7% of respondents were not able to list any sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). The highest level of awareness was shown by those women who were of Macedonian ethnicity, aged 30-35, and with higher education (Shopova, 2017).

In our research, as many as 30.2% of respondents stated that they are not familiar with the procedures for early detection of malignant diseases. There is a statistical significance by ethnicity between the percentage of Macedonian women who are informed about these procedures (80.1%) and the proportion of Albanian women (only 46.2%) and women of other ethnicities (67.4%) ($\chi^2=110.18, p < .001$).

Cross-tabulation of ethnicity leads to even more disturbing findings among young Albanian women, where only 30.9% of those respondents know the early detection procedures for malignant diseases (compared to 72.2% among young Macedonian women and 71.9% among other ethnic groups). In almost all age groups, the difference in information among members of different ethnic groups is statistically significant ($\chi^2=18.56-31.01, p < .001$).

Cardiovascular diseases continue to be a major part of the women's burden of disease, representing over 50% of that burden and the cause for the loss of over 7,100 years of healthy living in women in the Republic of North Macedonia, which is similar statistically to neighbouring Serbia and significantly higher than Slovenia. Among other things, this fact speaks of the non-existence or insufficient effectiveness of public health promotional programs for protection against non-communicable diseases. Also, the most common risk factors for cardiovascular disease are lifestyle and behavior such as tobacco use, physical inactivity, poor diet, and alcohol abuse, leading to four key metabolic/physiological changes such as elevated blood pressure, being overweight/obesity, high blood sugar, and high cholesterol. A significant number of deaths are attributed to smoking, which increases the risk of death from coronary heart and cerebrovascular diseases. The risk increases two- to threefold with age and is higher in women than in men. Thus, in 2018, in the Republic of North Macedonia, the mortality rate from diseases of the circulatory system was 512.1 per 100,000 inhabitants, and it was higher in women than in men and the most common causes of death were ischemic heart disease, stroke, and malignant neoplasms (IPH, 2018).

Of the total number of respondents in this study, 27% suffer from high blood pressure, 15.1% have heart problems and 8.5% have diabetes. Other chronic diseases to note are the high percentage of vaginal infections (in 20.2%) and allergies (in 19.9%).

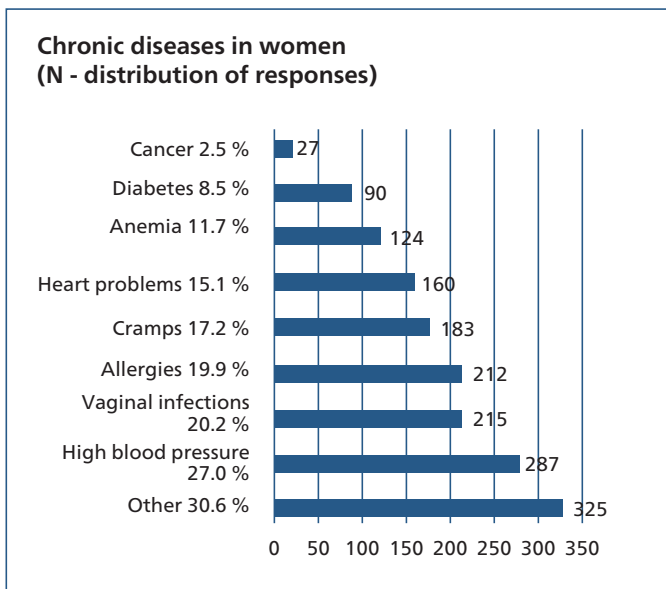
Are you informed about the procedures for the early detection of malignant diseases in women? Cross-tabulation by ethnicity

	Macedonian women	Albanian women	Other	Total
Yes	80,1 %	46,2 %	67,4 %	69,8 %
No	19,9 %	53,8 %	32,6 %	30,2 %

The youngest respondents have the weakest knowledge (only 62.9% have the necessary information) ($\chi^2=18.44, p < .001$).

Are you informed about the procedures for the early detection of malignant diseases in women? Cross-tabulation by age

	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-65
Yes	62,9 %	74,6 %	78,4 %	69,0 %	63,7 %
No	37,1 %	25,4 %	21,6 %	31,0 %	36,3 %



There is a statistically significant difference in the occurrence of high blood pressure among different age groups ($\chi^2=261.66, p <.001$) where as much as 65.5% of the age group of women over 60 years and 43.3% of respondents between the ages of 50-59 reported having high blood pressure. It is similar to the presence of diabetes, which is statistically significantly more common in the oldest group of respondents (in 24.0% of women over the age of 60). Heart problems also occur at this age, so the percentage of women who have such problems is statistically significant ($\chi^2= 107.61, p <.001$) and begins to grow from the age of 40.

Do you have or have you had any of the following chronic diseases?
Cross-tabulation by age of respondents who answered "Yes"

	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-65
High blood pressure	2,4 %	11,0 %	26,4 %	43,3 %	65,5 %
Diabetes	1,6 %	3,8 %	6,2 %	11,3 %	24,0 %
Heart problems	4,1 %	5,1 %	15,9 %	21,2 %	36,3 %
Cramps	15,1 %	15,7 %	17,8 %	19,7 %	18,7 %
Vaginal infections	23,3 %	23,7 %	24,0 %	15,8 %	11,7 %
Anemia	11,8 %	9,7 %	12,0 %	13,8 %	11,1 %
Cancer	0,0 %	2,1 %	3,4 %	3,9 %	4,1 %
Allergies	22,0 %	16,5 %	22,6 %	20,7 %	17,5 %
Other	23,7 %	21,6 %	32,2 %	38,9 %	40,9 %

Albanian women have the lowest percentage of heart problems (11.9% of respondents).

Analysis of data on diseases and causes of death in women shows that physical health is most often endangered by issues in the early life, depression and stress in adulthood, and problems with back pain, ischemic heart disease, and cancer in old age (WHO, 2016).

Anxiety disorders are among the most common and widespread mental health disorders in the United States. An estimated 264 million people worldwide have an anxiety disorder. Women are almost twice as likely as men to be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder in their lifetime. In 2016, for example, the prevalence of all anxiety disorders was higher in women (23.4%) than in men (14.3%) (NIMH, 2017).

The percentage of respondents in our study who reported having been treated for depression (9.7%) and anxiety (6.7%) is relatively low, with no statistically significant difference in the answers between different ethnic and age groups. The age group 40-

49 years has the highest percentage of positive answers (13.5% in depression and 10.6% in anxiety).

8.1. SATISFACTION WITH HEALTH SERVICES

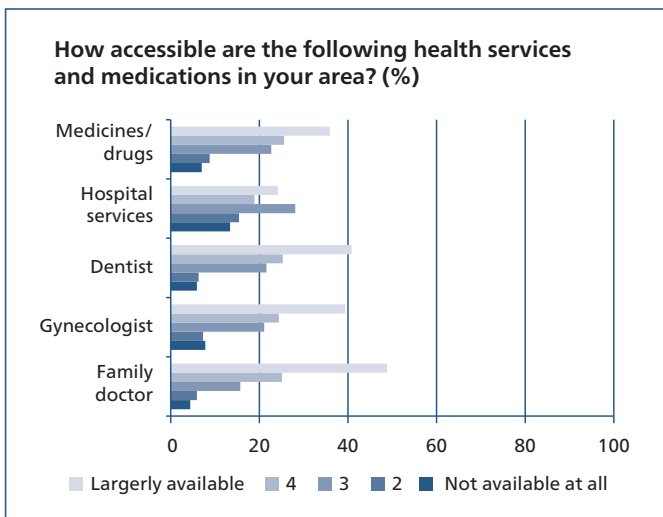
Family doctors are the basic pillar of primary health care and their efficiency and continuous communication with patients has an exceptional impact not only on the physical and mental health of citizens but also on the functioning of the entire health system.

Out of the total number of respondents in the study, most are satisfied with the services of the three primary care doctors (general practitioner (GP) - family doctor, gynecologist and dentist). 67.3% of them are satisfied or very satisfied with the family GP and 61.9% of the services of the dentist.

To what extent are you satisfied with the quality of the health services provided in your area by your...?
Cross-tabulation by ethnicity

	Macedonian women	Albanian women	Other	Total
Family doctor GP	68,4 %	66,8 %	62,1 %	67,3 %
Gynecologist	58,4 %	57,4 %	51,6 %	57,4 %
Dentist	61,3 %	64,4 %	58,9 %	61,9 %
Hospital services	31,1 %	44,4 %	30,5 %	34,6 %

Even higher, is the percentage of respondents who say that gaining access to the services of a local family doctor is relatively easy (cumulatively 73.9%). The percentage of respondents who are dissatisfied or only partially satisfied with the availability and quality of gynaecological services is also slightly higher (15.1%).



Albanian women are less satisfied with the availability of the services of the family doctor (only 53.6% expressed satisfaction). The evaluations of the services of their gynecologist are similar, without a statistically significant difference among the different ethnic groups, although the members of the other ethnic communities, with the largest percentage (20%), expressed their dissatisfaction with the services of their gynecologist. The high percentage (i.e., 20% of Macedonian women, 30.9% of Albanian women, and 18% of other ethnic groups) of the youngest respondents (18-29 years old) who are dissatisfied or partially satisfied with the services they receive from their gynecologist is worrying. It is at this age of the patient that the advisory and educational role of one's gynecologist is of great importance in shaping the basic knowledge of healthy sexual lifestyles and protection and prevention of sexually transmitted and malignant diseases.

The respondents express the greatest dissatisfaction with the quality of the services in the hospitals. Namely, a high percentage of them (23.2%) are completely dissatisfied or are only partially satisfied with the quality of hospital services and even 28.7% of respondents believe that these services are inaccessible or partially available. There is also a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2=31.049, p < .001$) in the assessments of the quality of hospital services by different ethnic groups. The greatest dissatisfaction or only partial satisfaction is expressed by Macedonian women (37.9%).

"I am generally dissatisfied with our health and state hospitals, especially for women. Being pregnant made me feel sick at every stage of my pregnancy." (AM, 30, Skopje, Macedonian)

"I am generally satisfied with the health services from the primary health care and in the state hospitals, but for specialist services, I think that sometimes better services can be obtained in the private hospitals. As a positive example, I can share the experience with the first delivery in a private hospital, while as a negative experience, the second delivery in a public clinic. "In terms of the positive example, I was very satisfied with the hygiene, the attitude of the staff and the overall climate of the hospital." (DV, 37, Skopje, Serbian).

"There are cases when I am satisfied there is respect for women and a woman is listened to carefully, but we find these positive behaviors more in private institutions than in public ones, and there are also cases when there is no special respect, especially in our hospitals." (RC, 35, village of Cegrane/Gostivar, Albanian)

"Until now, I have not had experience with a general practitioner advising on lifestyle changes and health protection. Instead of prevention, they usually focus on therapy and treatment. The one I consider to be my gynecologist is from a private clinic and I can consult with him about preventive aspects of my sexual and reproductive health. "The main sources of information for healthy living and disease prevention are different relevant articles, texts or advice from friends with appropriate expertise on the subject." (DV, 37, Skopje, Serbian)

"My family doctors are women with ethics. Receptive, approachable, understanding women. Over the years, I only visit a doctor when it is unavoidable. My books are a source of information on healthy living, disease prevention, and sharing experiences with people who have a healthy lifestyle. In recent years, I have been getting information from the internet; I do not read everything, but selectively." (AT, 45, Kavadarci, Macedonian)

8.2. PHYSICAL SAFETY AND SECURITY

A small percentage of the women from our study state that they have experienced someone trying to physically harm them (13.7%) or that they are afraid of such an attempt (only 9.5% of the respondents). However, statistically significantly higher ($\chi^2= 21.85, p <.001$) percentages of Macedonian respondents (16%) and women from other ethnic communities (as many as 21.1%) report an attempt of physical violence against them, compared to Albanian women (5.9%).

Regarding the occurrence of domestic violence, 63 respondents (5.9% of total) answered that they were victims of domestic violence; of these women, only 23.8% said they had reported it to the relevant authorities. The highest percentage of those who stated that they were victims of domestic violence are members of other ethnic groups (11.6%) and the lowest percentage are Albanian women (4.2%). The highest percentages of women who said they also reported the instances of domestic violence are found in the age groups 40-49 (40%) and 50-59 (28.6%), while the lowest percentage was seen among the youngest age group (only 8.3%). The most common reason for not reporting violence is, "personal weakness to solve the problem" (52.1%) or "fear of recurrence" (29.2%).

Ignoring the occurrence of sexual violence does not reduce the severity of the problem, nor does it reduce the pain of the women and girls who have been victims. It is estimated that 35 percent of women worldwide have experienced physical and / or sexual violence from an intimate partner or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point in their lives (National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence - Voice against Violence, 2017). However, some national studies show that up to 70 percent of women have experienced physical and / or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime (World Health Organization, 2013). At the national level, there are still no services specialized in offering help and support to victims of sexual violence. The number of respondents in the study who answered that they were victims of sexual violence is small (only 13 out of the total number or 1.2%). Most of them are Macedonian (11) and two are from other ethnic groups. No Albanian woman claimed to have been a victim of sexual violence. Only three of the victims (or 23%) reported violence. Unfortunately, as many as 8 of the victims (or 61.5%) were from the youngest group of respondents (18-29 years). Of those who reported the violence, all were in the age group of 40-49. The biggest reason for not reporting the violence was, "personal weakness to drive the problem to the end" (in 80% of cases).

8.3. ADDICTIONS AND LIFESTYLES

In this study, 3.7% of respondents said they had problems with drug or alcohol abuse. Of those who used drugs or alcohol, as much as 76.9% were of Macedonian nationality. In the age group cross-tabulation, the largest percentage of women who abused drugs or alcohol (48.7%) was from the youngest age group, significantly

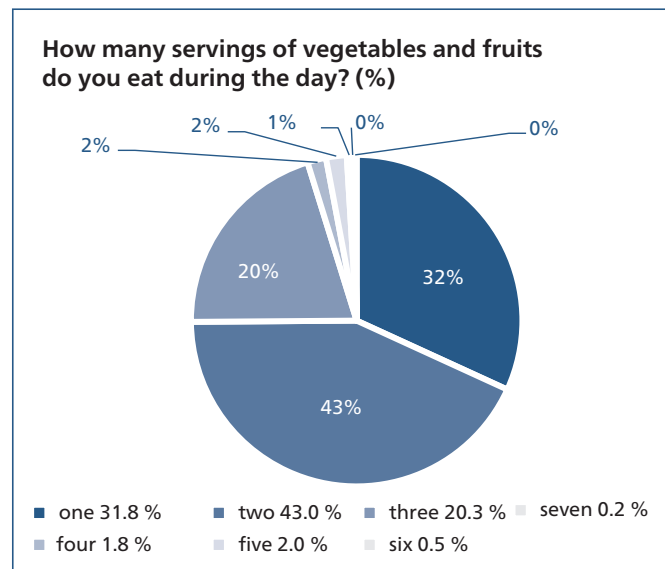
different from other age groups ($\chi^2= 16.12, p = .003$). That aside, the 2018/2019 Youth in North Macedonia study conducted a cluster analysis to create a social profile of young people who consume higher amounts of alcohol and soft drugs. The cluster consisted mainly of Macedonians with a higher percentage being male and female respondents with primary and secondary education and mostly from more urban areas, as well as a much smaller percentage of rural areas (Topuzovska Latkovikj M. et al. 2019). Regarding smoking, as many as 39.9% of respondents said they had smoked more than 100 cigarettes in their lifetime. Here, too, the percentage among Macedonian women with a positive answer is higher than that of other ethnicities (44.3% of Macedonian respondents) ($\chi^2= 14.77, p = .001$).

Дали сте пушач (дали сте испушиле повеќе од 100 цигари во текот на вашиот живот)?
Кростабулација според етничка припадност

	Macedonian	Albanian	Others	Total
Yes	44,3 %	31,8 %	33,7 %	40,0 %
No	55,7 %	68,2 %	66,3 %	60,0 %

The high percentage of positive answers among the young group of respondents aged 18-29 (36.3% of the group) is worrying. For this group, the findings of the aforementioned Youth Study (2018/2019) confirm similar findings for what is a major public health problem. Namely, according to the results of that study, 26% of young people smoke cigarettes regularly and 18% occasionally.

In our study, to the question, "How many meals with vegetables and fruits do you eat during the day?", the biggest group said they eat two such servings per day, and as many as 74.9% consume 1-2 servings of fruits and vegetables, which in any case is a deficient intake (as many as 31.8% stated that they consume only one such meal per day).



As expected, the largest percentage of women who consume three meals a day with fruits and vegetables (28.6%) pertain to the oldest age group 60-65 years.

A sedentary lifestyle is a serious risk to physical and mental health and is a proven risk factor in the etiology of cardiovascular disease. That is why the World Health Organization recommends regular but moderate type of physical activity for all age categories (18-64 years) at least 60 minutes a day. All other modifications by strength and length of activity depend on gender, age, health status, etc. The Youth Study in North Macedonia (2018-2019), which was conducted using a representative sample of young people aged 14-29 years, found that only 50% of young people practice some type of physical activity, mostly recreational.

In this study, to the question, "do you exercise for at least 20-30 minutes, 3 times per week", only 38.1% of

respondents gave a positive answer. Statistically significant ($\chi^2= 57.59, p <.001$) is the difference in response among members of different ethnic groups. Albanian women gave the lowest percentage of positive answers to this question (only 19.6%), compared to Macedonian women (45.5%) and members of other ethnic communities (38.1%). As expected, a statistically significant difference was registered ($\chi^2= 40.06, p <.001$), and in the response between different age groups with the youngest (18-29 years) having the highest percentage of positive responses (49.8%).

When asked what kind of physical activity is most often practiced, the most common answers are walking and running, with the largest number (61.9% of the total number of respondents) indicating walking (60.2% of them walk every day of the week). Only 6.2% of women run every day and 19.3% once a week.

Which of the following activities do you practice and how often?

	Walking	Running	Cycling	Mountain climbing	* Fitness ...	Gym	Yoga	Amateur sport	Professional sport
Everyday	60,2%	6,2%	11,9%	3,0%	2,7%	2,5%	4,4%	3,0%	2,5%
2-3 times a week	19,0%	15,1%	16,8%	1,5%	7,4%	4,0%	3,7%	2,2%	1,2%
Once per week	12,3%	19,3%	15,6%	4,4%	4,9%	3,0%	4,0%	2,0%	1,7%
Once in two weeks	5,4%	7,4%	7,4%	13,1%	4,2%	3,5%	2,7%	2,2%	1,2%
Once per month	2,2%	12,1%	8,6%	33,8%	5,2%	4,2%	6,9%	4,0%	1,5%
never	0,7%	40,0%	39,8%	44,2%	75,6%	83,0%	78,3%	86,7%	91,9%

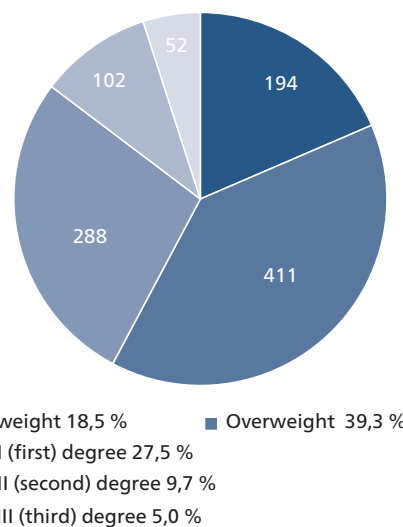
* Fitness, Zumba, Pilates, aerobics

A small percentage of women ride a bicycle every day (4.5% of all). The percentage of women who practice other physical activities such as fitness, gym, hiking, or yoga is lower. Albanian women statistically run more often ($\chi^2= 39.94, p <.001$) than others (23.2% run every day). As expected, running is significantly more common in young age groups than in older ones ($\chi^2= 66.26, p <.001$). On the other hand, 21.4% of Albanian women stated that they ride a bicycle every day.

Weight gain and obesity is another serious risk factor for several chronic and degenerative diseases, especially cardiovascular disease. The body mass index (BMI) is a valid indicator of nutrition of related health risks.

As many as 81.5% of the respondents have overeating issues or varying degrees of obesity. 39.5% have an overeating problem, 27.5% have first and 9.7% second degree of obesity.

Body mass index of respondents (occurrence and %)



Body mass index (BMI) Cross-tabulation by ethnicity

	Macedonian			Albanian			Other		
	#	%	% of the ethnic group	#	%	% of the ethnic group	#	%	% of the ethnic group
Normal(healthy)weight	133	68,6	19,7	48	24,7	17,2	13	6,7	13,8
Overweight	251	61,1	37,2	125	30,4	44,8	35	8,5	37,2
Obesity I degree	195	67,7	28,9	62	21,5	22,2	31	10,8	33,0
Obesity II degree	63	61,8	9,3	28	27,5	10,0	11	10,8	11,7
Obesity III degree	32	61,5	4,7	16	30,8	5,7	4	7,7	4,3

A statistically significant difference was recorded among different age groups of respondents ($\chi^2=179.08, p < .001$). Moderately increased nutrition is more common in young age groups (42.6% in girls aged 18-29), and higher degrees of obesity are characteristic of older women and it entails an extremely high risk of developing blood pressure, heart failure, and other chronic diseases.

8.4. LIVING CONDITIONS, ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS, AND WELL-BEING

Women in this study are, on average, satisfied with the living conditions in their home and neighbourhood. The satisfaction with the conditions in the home is greater (46.1% are very satisfied) and slightly lower is the satisfaction with the neighbourhood (20.4% of the respondents are very satisfied with their neighbourhood).

41,416, $p < 0.001$). Albanian women have the highest percentage among the extremely dissatisfied (10.5%) but also the highest among the very satisfied with the living conditions in the neighborhood (31.1%).

Regarding the working conditions at the workplace in which a woman spends a significant part of her life, there is a high percentage of respondents who are not at all satisfied (13.4%) and only 21.7% said that they are very satisfied.

There was a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2=48.236, p < 0.001$) in the satisfaction with the working environment among the ethnic groups, with the greatest dissatisfaction being present among the respondents from other ethnic communities (at 18.9%). The highest percentage of satisfaction was expressed by Albanian women (34.3% of them are very satisfied with the working conditions).

How satisfied are you with the:

	Living conditions in your home?	Living conditions in your neighborhood/ town/ village?	Conditions at your workplace?
Not at all	3,5 %	7,9 %	13,4 %
2	3,6 %	9,6 %	7,7 %
3	18,2 %	33,1 %	31,4 %
4	28,7 %	29,0 %	25,8 %
Very satisfied	46,1 %	20,4 %	21,7 %

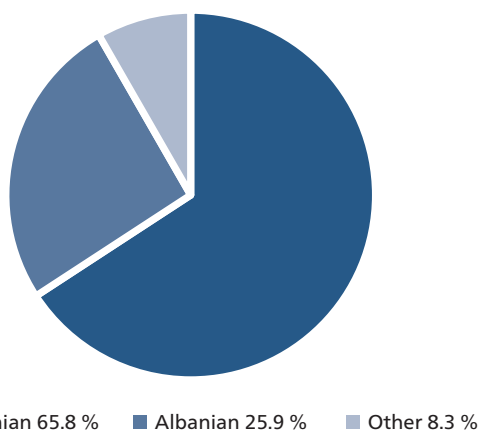
Within the ethnic communities, there is a statistically significant difference in the satisfaction with the conditions in the home ($\chi^2=28.65, p < 0.001$) whereby Albanian women have the highest percentage (52.8%) of very satisfied respondents. The differences are similar when assessing the conditions in the neighborhood ($\chi^2=$

How satisfied are you with the working conditions of your workplace?
Cross-tabulation by ethnicity

	Macedonian women	Albanian women	Other
Not at all	12,0 %	14,7 %	18,9 %
2	8,5 %	4,9 %	10,5 %
3	32,7 %	27,3 %	34,7 %
4	29,3 %	18,9 %	21,1 %
Very satisfied	17,4 %	34,3 %	14,7 %

Air pollution is the most important environmental factor for the occurrence of diseases primarily of the cardiovascular system but also for the increase of the general mortality of the population (Dimovska, 2018). More than half of the respondents in the study are concerned about the level of air pollution in the place where they live (51.1%).

Percentage of respondents who agree there is a problem with air pollution in their neighborhood/ place of living: by ethnicity



8.5. COVID-19 AND WOMEN

COVID-19 is an acute respiratory viral infection that has reached pandemic proportions worldwide, infecting over 70 million people so far (December 2020) and taking over 1.7 million lives worldwide. The percentage of people infected of both sexes is approximately equal, but the number of deaths in most countries is higher in men.

Out of a total of 196 respondents that were tested for COVID, 39 (3.7% of the total) tested positive. No statistically significant difference was observed by ethnicity or between different age groups. Only 6.7% of respondents believe that they have poor knowledge of measures and procedures for protection and prevention of the spread of the COVID infection, and more than half of women (57%) are satisfied with their knowledge of protection against this pandemic threat. There is a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2=42.75, p < .001$) in the knowledge among the different ethnic groups, with the highest percentage of "very poor" knowledge among Albanian women (14%) and the highest percentage of Macedonian women have "very good" knowledge of these measures (62%).

The terrible pandemic with COVID-19, in addition to serious damage to physical health and fatal consequences, has led to a disruption of social and mental health and has caused great fear among people. Thus, 24.1% of respondents in the study believe that it will be very difficult to avoid contracting the virus in the current situation and as much as 61.3% believe that it will be "neither easy nor difficult". There is a significant difference in the response among different ethnic groups ($\chi^2= 18.27, p = .001$), with Albanian women being more concerned that it will be difficult to avoid infection (29.4%).

8.6. CONCLUSIONS

- This analysis of women's health is focused on multiple determinants of physical, mental, and social health, and lifestyles relevant to women's health and well-being.

Overall perceptions of health are positive, with more than 50% of the women in the study "very satisfied"; younger women and Albanian women are more satisfied (statistical significance recorded) than other women are.

- Of concern, is that 30.2% of women are not familiar with procedures for early detection of malignant diseases, with Albanian women and women from other ethnic groups significantly less informed than Macedonian women are, and the youngest age group (18-29) being less informed than other age groups.
- Cardiovascular diseases and high blood pressure are still the most prevalent health issues for women in the country; in this study alone, 27% stated that they have high blood pressure, 15.1% have heart problems and 8.5% have diabetes.
- The majority of respondents indicated overall satisfaction with the primary care of their local GPs (67.3%), gynecologists (57.4%), and dentists (61.9%).
- Contrasting the above result, 68.9% of young women (aged 18-29) are overall dissatisfied with local gynecological services (of these, 20% are Macedonian, 30.9% Albanian, and 18% from other ethnic groups). This is concerning because the gynecologist plays an important advisory and educational role for young women, to inform about healthy sexual choices and the prevention of sexually transmitted and malignant diseases.
- The respondents express the greatest dissatisfaction with the quality of the services in the hospitals. Namely, a high percentage (23.2%) are dissatisfied or are only partially satisfied with the quality of hospital services.
- A small percentage of women said they have been physically threatened with violence (13.7%); statistically significant differences exist by ethnicity, being higher for Macedonian women (16%) and lower for Albanian women (5.9%).
- Of those who said they were victims of domestic violence (5.9%), only 23.8% reported it, with many deterred due to not wanting to appear weak or due to fear; middle-aged to older women (40-59 years) showed the highest rates of domestic violence (68.6%).
- Out of a total of 13 women who reported being victims of sexual violence, only three (23.1%) reported it, with the most common reason for not reporting it being "the feeling of weakness to solve the problem"
- Alcohol and recreational drug consumption are low among women, whilst smoking rates are high (39.9%); higher rates for both are seen among Macedonian women.
- There is a deficit in the intake of nutritionally useful food in the diet. Thus, contrary to the need to eat 4-5 meals a day of fruits and vegetables (2-4 units of fruits and 3-5 units of vegetables), women in Macedonia eat much less. Namely, as many as 74.9% of the respondents stated that they consume 1-2 such meals.
- The physical activity of women in our country is insufficient. To the question "Do you practice physical

activity for at least 20-30 minutes three times a week”, only 38.1% of respondents gave a positive answer, which is far from the recommendations of the World Health Organization.

- As many as 81.5% of the respondents have a high BMI or varying degrees of obesity.
- In terms of mental health, there was a statistically significant difference in the satisfaction with the conditions of their working environment between the ethnic groups, with the greatest satisfaction being present among Albanian women (34.3%).
- More than half of the women in the study are concerned with the level of air pollution in the place where they live (51.1% of respondents).
- Setting up and promoting health services that meet all the needs of women concerning prevention and health care throughout their life;
- Improving women’s access throughout their life to adequate, available, quality health care and information, and related services, especially in rural areas;
- Strengthening prevention programs that promote women’s health;
- Training to advance the knowledge, skills, and competencies of health professionals to address interactions between biological, psychological, social, environmental factors and women’s health and well-being; and to address gender stereotypes that lead to direct or indirect gender-based discrimination, which can deter and prevent women from seeking help or accessing health care (physical, psychological);
- Actively improving women’s health literacy to ensure that they make informed decisions about their health;
- Supporting the development of gender-based medicine aiming to improve the detection, diagnosis and treatment of the most common chronic non-communicable diseases and their risk factors, with an emphasis on diseases specific to women, cardiovascular disease, mental health disorders, cancers and other

8.7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Reform the health system in the country, to ensure the specific health needs of women are integrated into the national health policy and strategy through:

- Collecting, analyzing, and using data disaggregated by gender and age and intersected with other determinants of women’s health and well-being such as income, education, urban or rural area of living, etc.;

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