# A Study on Malaysian Public Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Violence Against Women (VAW)

*Initial Findings and Recommendations*

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    d. Objectives
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# 1. Overview of Study

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# Introduction

- Public attitudes towards VAW → **understudied** in Malaysia

- Increasing trend by countries (Australia, Scotland, Ukraine etc.) to use **'attitudes' as a proxy indicator** of the level of tolerance for the use of VAW within society

- **Why this study matters?**
  - serves as a **baseline measure** and **template** for how Malaysia can adopt a similar approach to addressing underlying attitudes
  - is the **first nationally-representative study** on **Malaysian public attitudes towards VAW**
  - Is in alignment with recommendations by the CEDAW Committee to the government to address stereotypical gender norms in Malaysia

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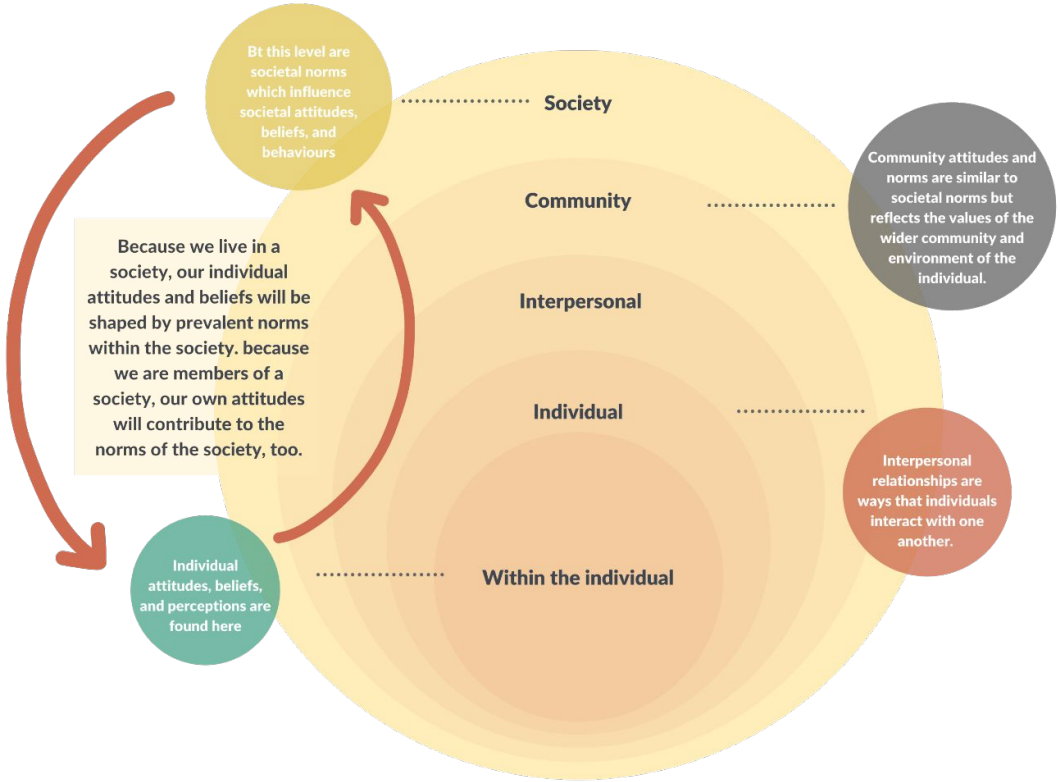
# Introduction

- **Why study attitudes?**
  - VAW is rooted in **patriarchal attitudes and social norms**
  - Widely-held patriarchal attitudes and social norms **affects individual behaviours and responses towards VAW**
  - VAW is **preventable** through prevention programmes **that actively challenge violence-endorsing attitudes** that help to sustain VAW
  - To understand **what violence-endorsing attitudes are prevalent in Malaysian society**

# Attitudes its connection to VAW




The relationship between societal norms and individual attitudes

- Attitudes/beliefs shape and are shaped by social norms
- Attitudes and social norms affect behaviours:
  - Perpetrators' behaviours
  - Survivors response to VAW
  - Third party responses to VAW

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# What are violence-endorsing attitudes?

*Attitudes that **justify, excuse, minimise** or **trivialise** physical, sexual and other forms of violence against women, or **blame or hold women** at least partly responsible for violence perpetrated against them... such attitudes expressed by influential individuals or held by a **substantial number of people** can create a **culture** in which violence is at best **not clearly condemned** and at worst **condoned** or **encouraged**.*

Powell and Webster, "Cultures of Gendered Violence", pp. 8 (quoting VicHealth).

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# Study objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- To explore and assess Malaysian attitudes and awareness towards **VAW and gender equality**
- To explore Malaysian perceptions and awareness towards **sources of support and public messaging for VAW**
- To explore how these attitudes and perceptions **impact survivors' help-seeking experiences**.

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# Methodology

- **Quantitative component**
  - Partly modelled after Australia's National Community Attitudes Towards VAW (NCAS), periodically conducted every 4 years since 1987
  - 80-question survey
    - **Question scales from NCAS 2017**
      - Community Attitudes Supportive of Violence Against Women (CASVAWS)
      - Gender Equality Attitudes Scale (GEAS)
      - Understanding Violence Against Women Scale (UVAWS)
    - **Self-developed questions** about child marriage, rape, sources of support and public messaging
  - Validated survey
    - Content validation
    - Translation and back translation to produce final BM and English versions
    - Face validation
    - Pilot testing
- **Qualitative component**
  - In-depth interviews with 16 VAW survivors

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| Factors | Questionnaire components | Composite measures |
| --- | --- | --- |
| • Gender<br>• Age<br>• Socioeconomic status (B40 / M40 / T20)<br>• Caregiver status<br>• Urban/rural strata | **Knowledge of violence against women**<br>• Definition / nature of the problem<br>• Violence & the law<br>• Patterns & consequences<br>• Contributing factors<br>• Knowledge of resources | Understanding Violence Against Women Scale (UVAWS) |
| | **Attitudes towards gender equality**<br>• Undermining women's independence and decision-making in – public life – private life<br>• Promoting rigid gender roles, stereotypes and expressions<br>• Condoning male peer relations involving aggression & disrespect<br>• Denying gender inequality is a problem | Gender Equality Attitudes Scale (GEAS) |
| | **Attitudes towards violence against women**<br>• Excusing the perpetrator and and holding women responsible.<br>• Minimising violence against women<br>• Mistrusting women's reports of violence<br>• Disregarding the need to gain consent | Community Attitudes Supportive of Violence Against Women Scale (CASVAWS) |

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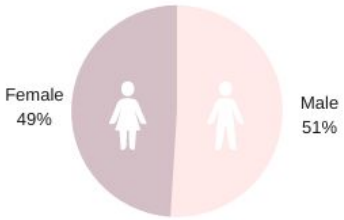
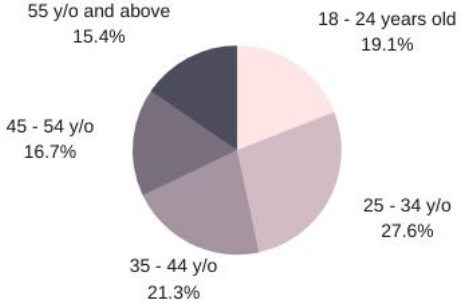
# Profile of respondents (n=1,000)

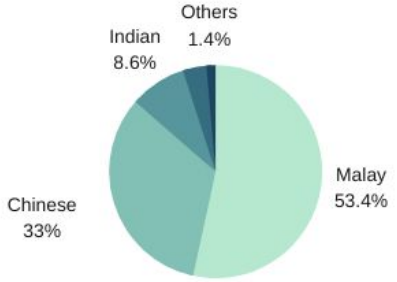
## Gender



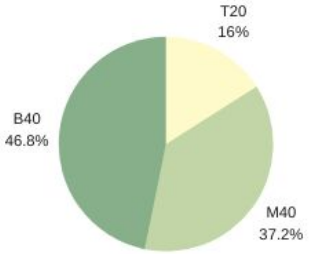

## Age group



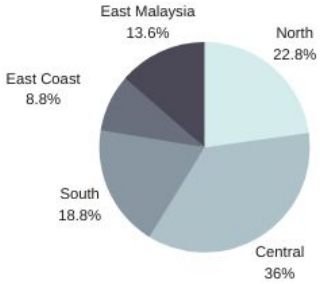

## Ethnicity




## Income group




## Region



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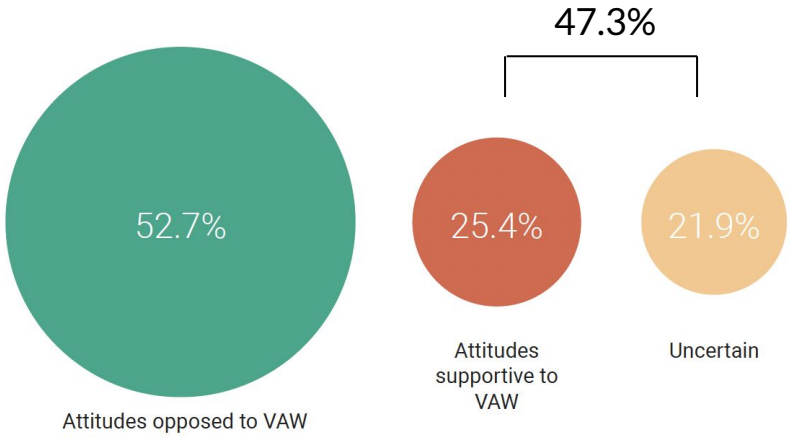
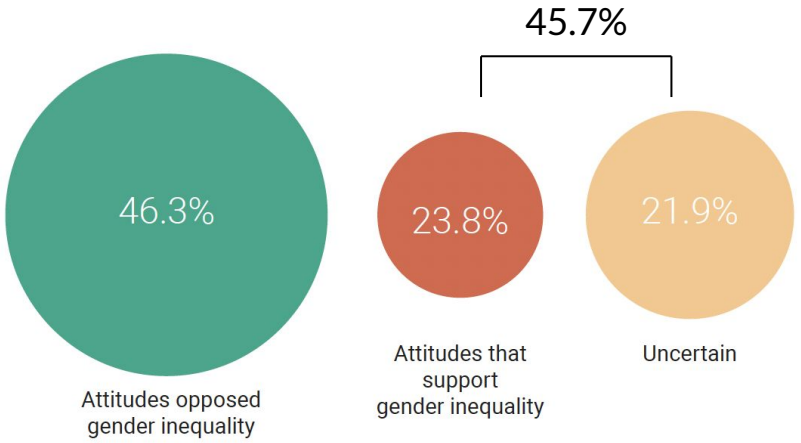
# 2. Key Initial Findings

# 1. Only approximately half of Malaysians are likely to oppose violence-endorsing attitudes and support gender equality

## Community Attitudes Supportive of Violence Against Women Scale (CASVAWS)



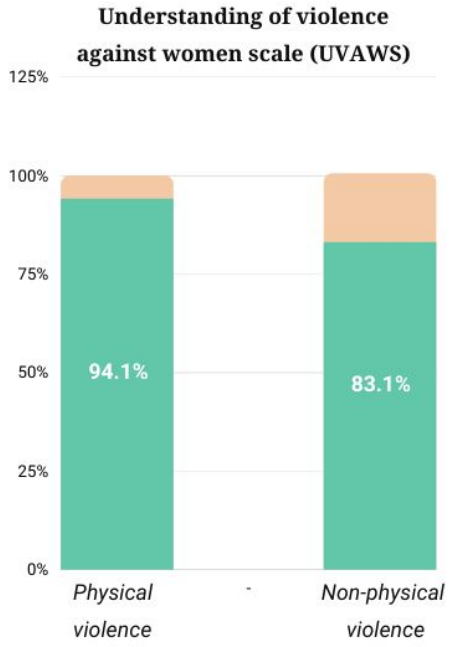

## Gender Equality Attitudes Scale (GEAS)



# 2. The most concerning attitudes and perceptions likely to held by Malaysians are:

| Scale | Theme | Percentage of negative responses (%) | Percentage of uncertain responses (%) | Combined percentages of negative and uncertain responses (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women (CASVAW) scale | Excusing the perpetrator and holding women accountable | 24.5 | 16.3 | 40.8 |
| | Disregarding women's right to consent | 38.2 | 27.5 | 65.7 |
| | Mistrusting women's reports of violence | 20.8 | 35.9 | 56.7 |
| Gender Equality Attitudes Scale (GEAS) | Undermining women's independence and decision-making in private life | 48.0 | 34.6 | 82.6 |
| | Undermining women's independence and decision-making in public life | 27.2 | 30.7 | 57.9 |
| | Denying gender inequality is a problem | 27.2 | 36.6 | 63.8 |

# 3. There is a disconnect between knowledge and practice

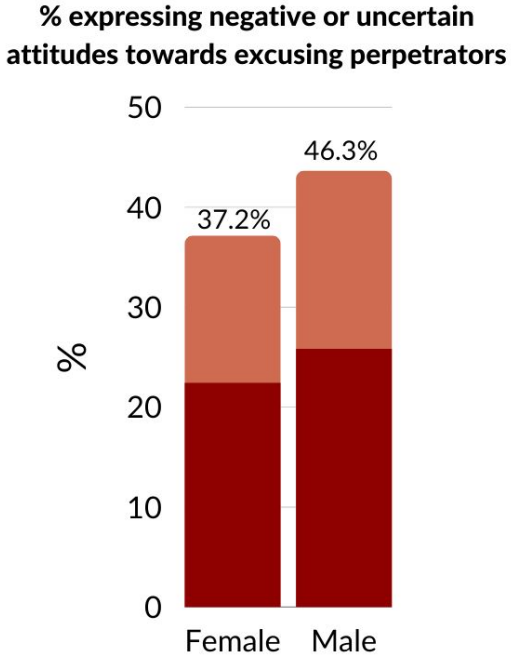


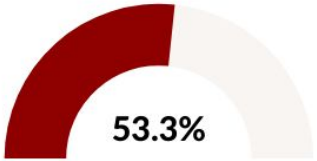

- There is a **disconnect** between respondents' ability to identify violence when it is described, and how this looks in our everyday lives.
- Findings from other domains and questions indicates that **this understanding may be superficial.**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Example of a **physical violence** question | If one partner in a domestic relationship slaps or pushes the other partner to cause harm or fear, is this a form of domestic violence? | **96.5%** recognises this as domestic violence |
| Example of a **non- physical violence** question | If one partner in a domestic relationship controls the social life of the other partner by preventing them from seeing family and friends, is this a form of domestic violence? | **84.4%** recognises this as domestic violence |

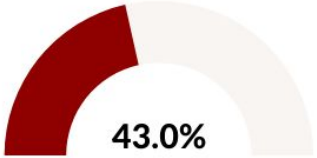
# 3. There is a disconnect between knowledge and practice

**41.8% of respondents exhibit attitudes that excuse perpetrators for violence or are complicit towards it.**

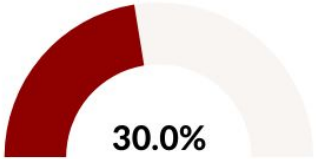



Believe that domestic violence is a normal reaction to everyday stress and frustration.

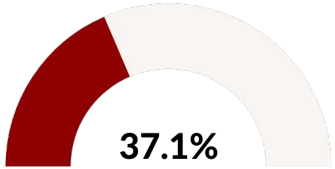



Think that sometimes a woman can make a man so angry that he hits her when he didn't mean to.

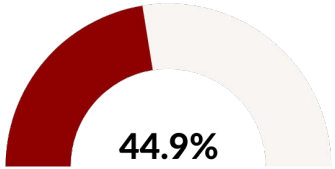



Believe that women who flirt all the time are somewhat to blame if their partner gets jealous and hits them.

# 3. The disconnect between knowledge and practice




Believe that leaving an abusive relationship is not as hard as people say it is




Think that female victims who stay with their abusive partners are also responsible for the ongoing abuse.

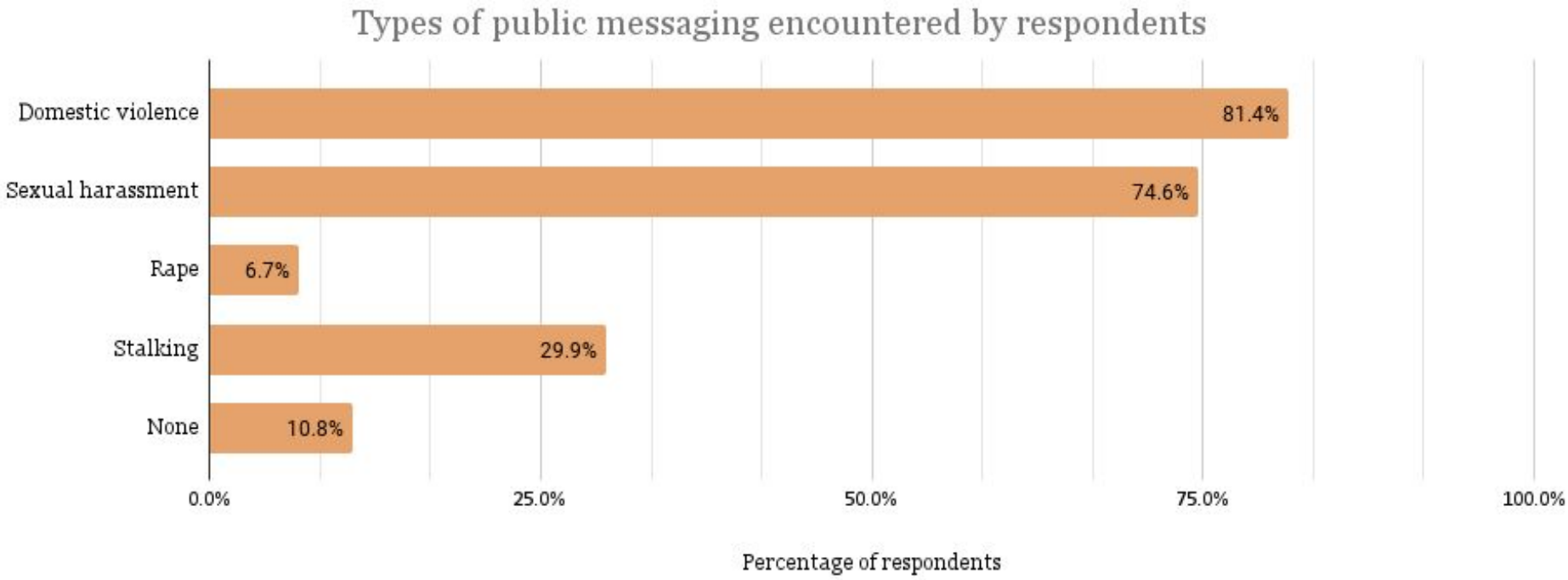
This suggests that an understanding of what constitutes VAW **does not necessarily include an understanding of the inherent and unequal power relations between perpetrators and survivors or a consciousness of rape myths, victim-blaming tendencies, and the injustice that it perpetuates against survivors**.

# 4. Complicity towards mistrusting women's reports of violence

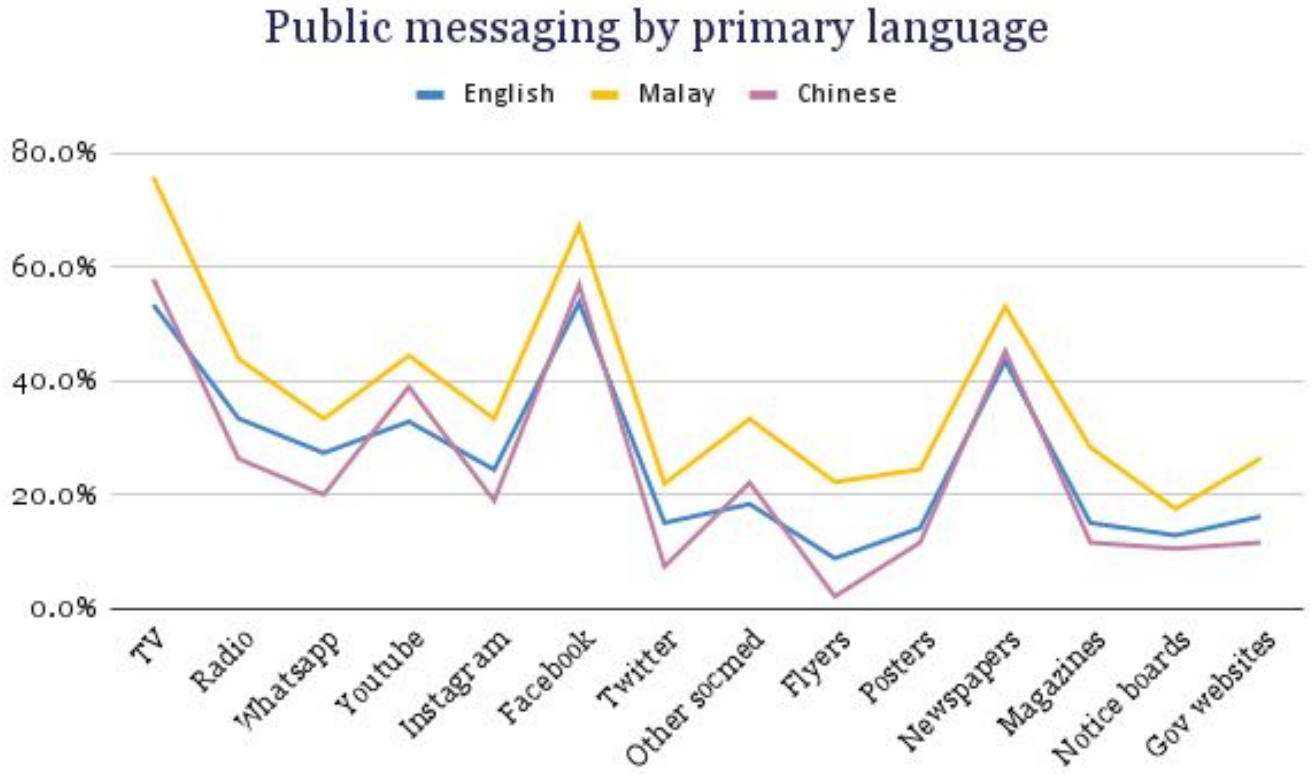
| Theme: Mistrusting women's reports of violence | % of respondents who agree | % who are uncertain |
|---|---|---|
| MANY women tend to exaggerate the problem of male violence. | 18.7% | **33.6%** |
| A lot of times, women who say they were raped had led the man on and then had regrets. | 18.4% | **35.9%** |
| It is common for women to make sexual assault accusations as a way of getting revenge against men. | 22.3% | **36.1%** |
| Women who are fighting for child custody tend to create or exaggerate domestic abuse allegations to help their case. | 23.6% | **37.9%** |

- Suggests respondents are least likely to take a stance or speak out or against these beliefs.

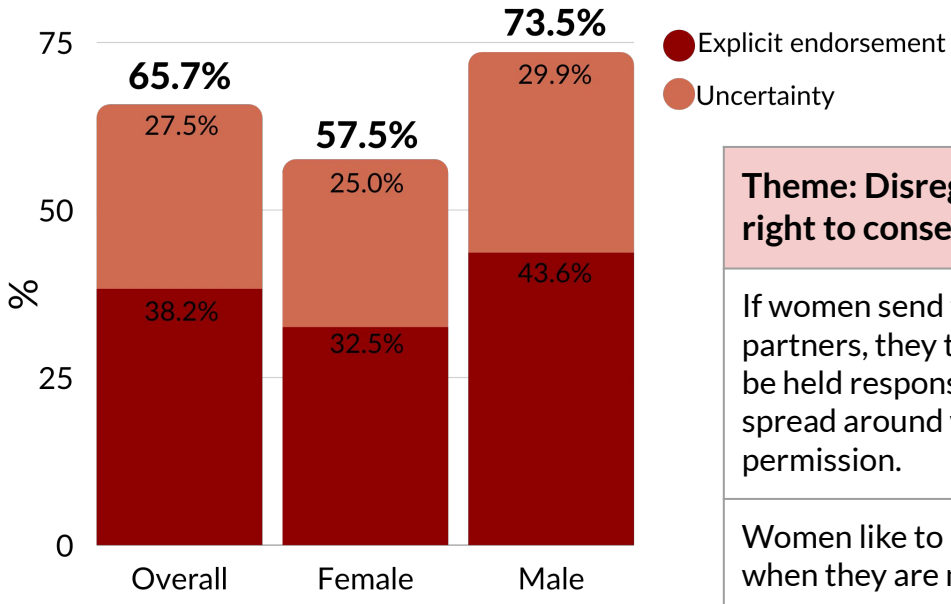
# 5. Reach of existing public messaging are highest for domestic violence and sexual harassment



# 6. Existing public messaging on television, Facebook, and newspapers received the highest recall



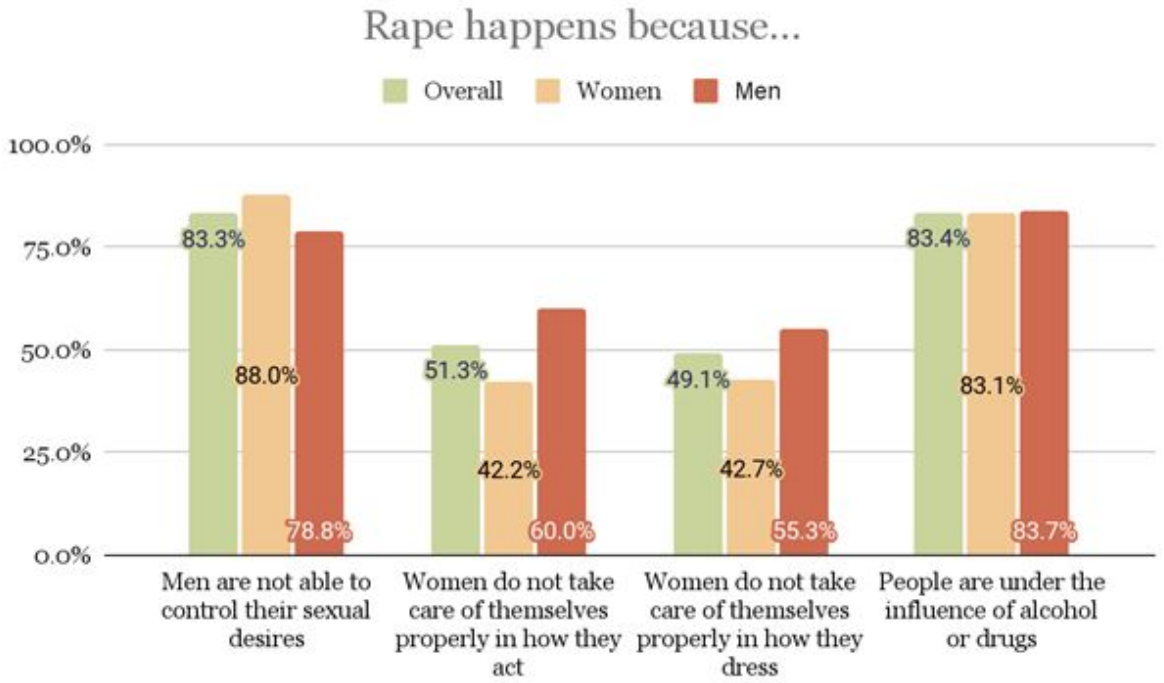
# 7. There is a high tendency in Malaysians to disregard women's right to consent




| Theme: Disregarding women's right to consent | Endorsement | Uncertain |
|---|---|---|
| If women send their nudes to their partners, they themselves should also be held responsible if the pictures are spread around without their permission. | 64.6% | 16.2% |
| Women like to be chased after, even when they are not interested. | 37.2% | 33.9% |
| Women often say 'no' when they actually mean yes.32.2% | 32.2% | 36.7% |

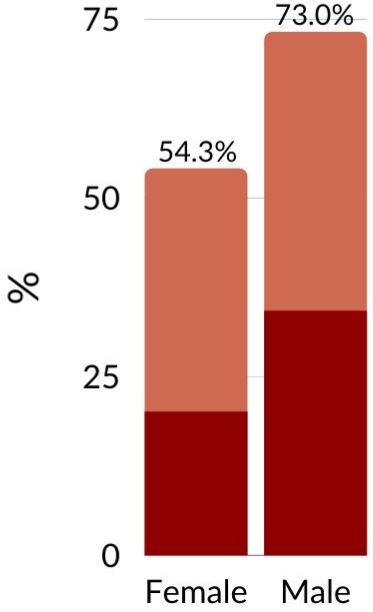
# 8. Rape myths are pervasive

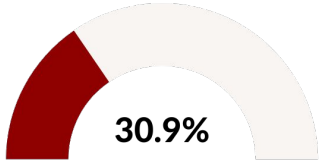
Rape myths are *"attitudes and beliefs that are generally false, but widely held - serving to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women".*



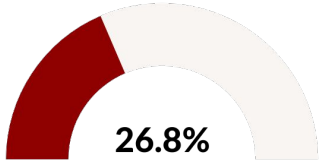
# 9. Malaysians tend to deny that gender inequality is a problem.

**% expressing negative or uncertain attitudes towards gender inequality**

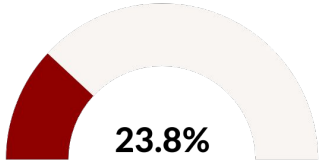



Malaysians who think that many women exaggerate how unequally they are treated in Malaysia.



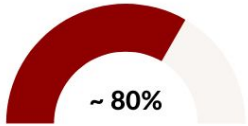

Malaysians who think many women wrongly interpret words or actions that are innocent as sexist.




Malaysians who think that discrimination against women is no longer a problem in workplaces in Malaysia

# 10. Malaysians tend to undermine women in everyday life

## Private life




- Malaysians supporting or complicit towards the idea that:
  - Men should control the relationship and become the head of the family. **(80.0%)**
  - Women prefer a man to be in charge of the relationship. **(85.1%)**

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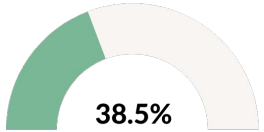
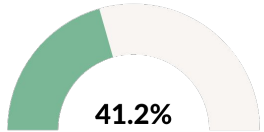
## Public life

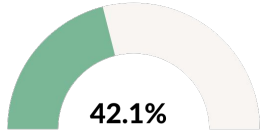
This endorsement also affects the roles women are expected to play in the public sphere, based on **how low levels of opposition** are to these statements:




Men make more capable bosses than women

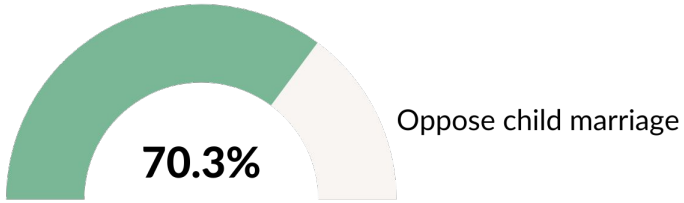



Men make better political leaders

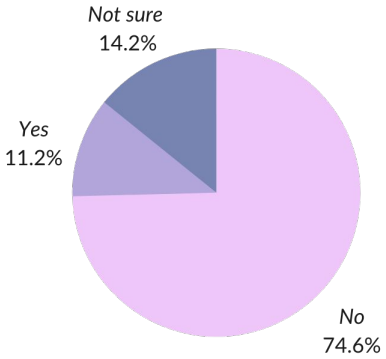



Men, rather than women, should hold positions of responsibility in the comunity

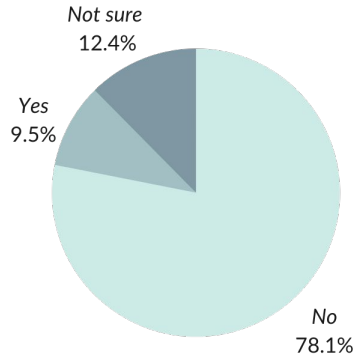
# 11. Malaysians are likely to oppose child marriage




**Should girls under the age of 18 be allowed to get married?**



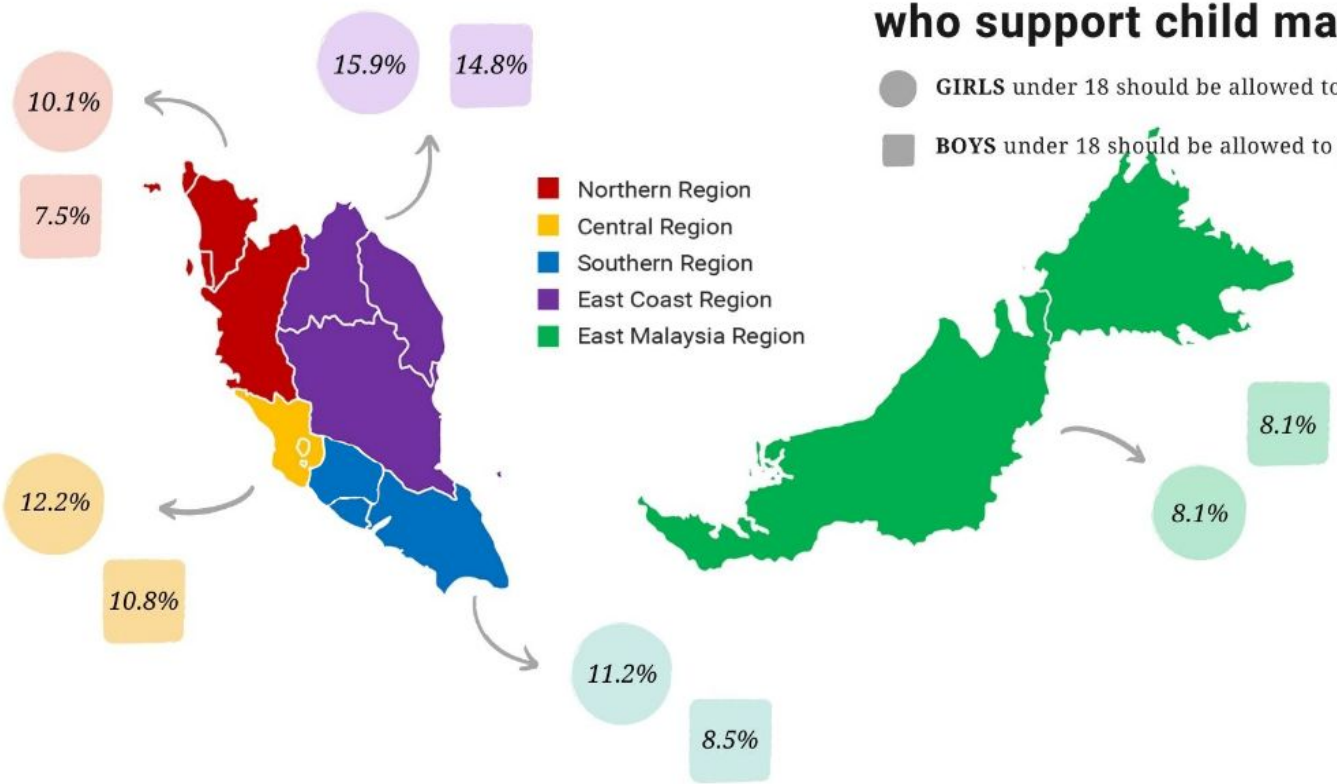

**Should boys under the age of 18 be allowed to get married?**



# Regional distribution of Malaysians who support child marriage.

**GIRLS** under 18 should be allowed to get married.

**BOYS** under 18 should be allowed to get married.



# 12. Malaysians are likely to first seek help from the police following incidences of DV and sexual harassment

**Table 1: Respondents' preferred source of formal support following incidences of domestic violence and sexual harassment**

| Form of VAW | Formal Source of Support | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Primary health clinics | Hospitals | Social Welfare Department | Workplace management | Religious body | Mental Health Experts | Legal Services | Talian Kasih | Police |
| Domestic Violence | 0.4 % | 1.4% | 4.4% | - | 2.3% | 4.8% | 4.2% | 9.4% | 29.2% |
| Sexual Harassment | 0.3% | 1.2% | 2.9% | 3.9% | - | 4.5% | 4.9% | 8.1% | 34.4% |

- Family is also a critical informal source of support for the public receiving 30.5% (DV) and 26.0% (sexual harassment) of responses

# 13. Friends, Family and community are integral in influencing survivors' help-seeking decisions

- **Informal sources of support play a critical role** in connecting survivors with formal sources of support

.

- Encouraging responses and support encountered:

| **Type of support** | Examples |
|---|---|
| **Emotional support** | Believing the survivor, semangat |
| **Offering expertise, knowledge, or insight** | Knowledge of legal structures or processes |
| **Offering tangible support** | Sharing a resource or contact |
| **Displaying professional conduct** | Specifically from frontline officers |

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# 3. Key Recommendations

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# Key Recommendations

**1: Adopt a comprehensive prevention strategy**

2: Enhance public understanding towards rape and non-physical forms of violence

**3. Actively challenge underlying violence endorsing attitudes and societal norms in prevention programmes**

4. Integrate modules on challenging violence-endorsing attitudes within trainings of frontline officers

5. Invest in public information campaigns

**6. Conduct nationally representative (longitudinal) surveys that measure public attitudes towards VAW**

7. Increase efforts for data collection, analysis and transparency on VAW by government stakeholders

8. More political will and research is needed to adequately direct and inform the design of prevention initiatives for child marriage and FGM/C in Malaysia.

9. Implement and enforce law and policy reforms that criminalise acts of VAW and promote gender equality

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# 1. Adopt a comprehensive prevention strategy

- To achieve a wider reach and  impactful results
- Work towards collective action, rather than isolated initiatives
- Target men and women across the **social ecology**:
  - **Individual:** skills-building, consciousness raising
  - **Interpersonal:** neighbourhood organising, skills-building, critical reflection
  - **Community:** popular education, edutainment/public debate
  - **Societal:**  legal and policy reforms, public opinion campaigns Aligns with recommendations by the CEDAW Committee to the Malaysian government
- **Conduct a review** of evidence-based approaches and interventions that could work within Malaysia

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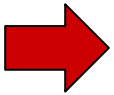
# 3. Prevention programmes should actively challenge underlying violence-endorsing attitudes and societal norms

**Raising awareness** on what constitutes VAW, its unacceptability, resources for helps and developing skills for psychological first aid



**Actively challenging** underlying widely shared community attitudes and social norms that support VAW and gender inequality

- Emerging evidence that interventions that employ a **gender transformative approach** are likely to be more effective
- Create **new shared beliefs and values**
- Illustrate **how** such attitudes are **reflected through common daily practices/conversations**

| Themes of Violence Endorsing Attitudes | Questions with the most concerning responses | | | Example of messages to be amplified[237] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Questions | Negative/ Supportive responses | Uncertain responses | |
| Excusing the perpetrator and holding women accountable | Most domestic violence cases are actually just a normal reaction from everyday stress and frustration. | 53.3% | 15.9% | • Violent behaviour is not an acceptable response to stress, frustration, jealousy or anger nor should it be regarded as normal<br>• Violent behaviour is a deliberate choice. Perpetrators use it to control and dominate their victims because no one is watching or holding them accountable<br>• Usually perpetrators of domestic violence are never violent outside the home or in public, even when under stress. |
| | Sometimes a woman can make a man so angry that he hits her when he didn't mean to. | 43% | 21.7% | |
| | Women who flirt all the time are somewhat to blame if their partner gets jealous and hits them. | 30% | 25.8% | |

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# 6. Conduct public attitude surveys towards VAW every few years to track progression and regression of Malaysian attitudes

- Attitudes act as a 'proxy indicator' for the prevalence of violence within a society
- Identifies problematic attitudes held by a society and segments of the population that hold them
- Monitors the progression and regression of attitudes
- Informs the design and effectiveness of national prevention programming

# Thank You!

*For further information, please contact:*

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