

Study on Legal Empowerment in Puerto Rico



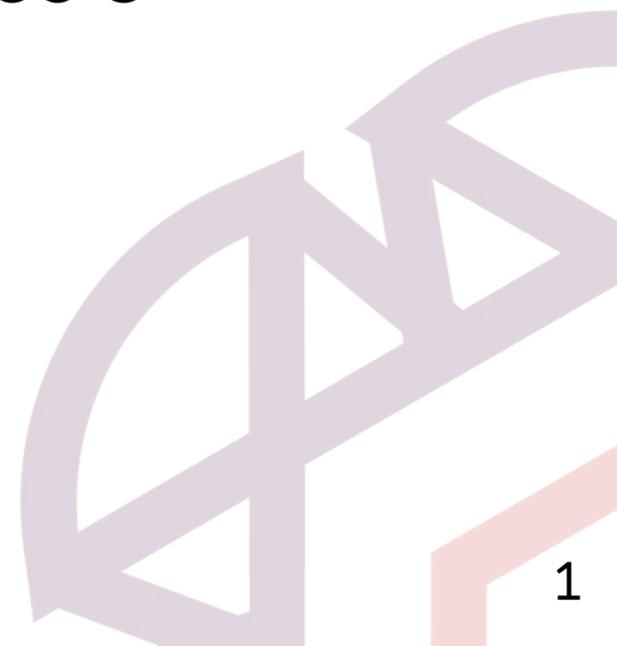
**AYUDA
LEGAL**
PUERTO RICO



Research Objective

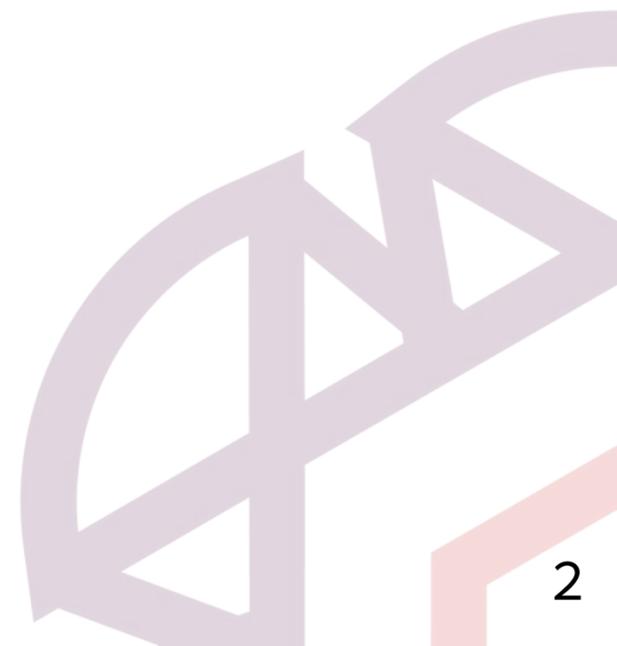
This study sought to obtain information concerning people's experience, perception, and understanding of the legal system and of administrative forums in Puerto Rico. The following aspects were evaluated:

- Information related to the understanding and use of legal assistance.
- Perceptions, insights, and experiences related to Puerto Rico's legal and judicial system.
- Experiences of legal and administrative processes.
- Demographic data.



Methodology

- 500 aleatory interviews among Puerto Rico's non-institutionalized adult population.
- Interviews were conducted between the months of June and July 2021.
- Surveys were not limited to specific municipalities.
- Interviews were conducted by phone (CATI); 96% on cell phones.
- The questionnaire lasted approximately 17 minutes.
- Representative studies among adults require the pondering of responses to line them up with the current population.



Questionnaire

- Divided in three parts: sociodemographic questions; experience and understanding of the law and of the administration of justice; and perception concerning the justice system. As in Caraballo Cueto and Godreau (2021), a question on skin color was included to explore racism patterns in the access to justice.
- It was piloted three times with different convenience samplings to evaluate whether the technical questions were comprehensible and the length adequate, as well as to ensure there was no repetition of the areas explored.
- To design the questionnaire, various sources of information were consulted, such as ABA (1989; 1994), Legal Services Corporation (2017), and the Washington State Supreme Court (2003). We also had the support of Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico.
- In what follows, each question's final version is included at the bottom of the page where it is first introduced.

References

- American Bar Association (1989). Two Nationwide Surveys: 1989 Pilot Assessments of the Unmet Legal Needs of the Poor and the Public Generally. Library of Congress Catalog, 89-81239. ISBN 0-89706-496-3
- American Bar Association (1994). Legal Needs and Civil Justice A Survey of Americans: Major Findings from the Comprehensive Legal Needs Study.
- Caraballo-Cueto, J. & Godreau, I.P. (2021). Colorism and Health Disparities in Home Countries: The Case of Puerto Rico. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10903-021-01222-7>
- Legal Services Corporation (2017). The Justice Gap: Measuring the Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-Income Americans. Prepared by NORC at the University of Chicago for Legal Services Corporation. Washington, DC.
- The Washington State Supreme Court (2003). Civil Legal Needs Study.

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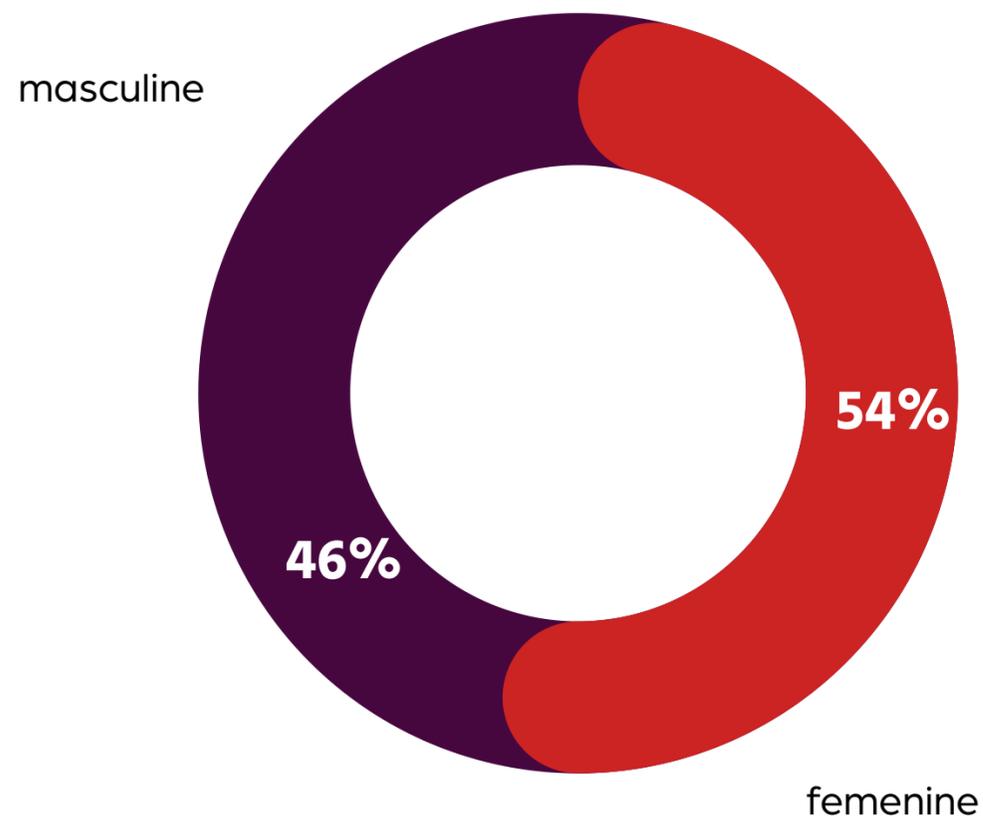


Part I.

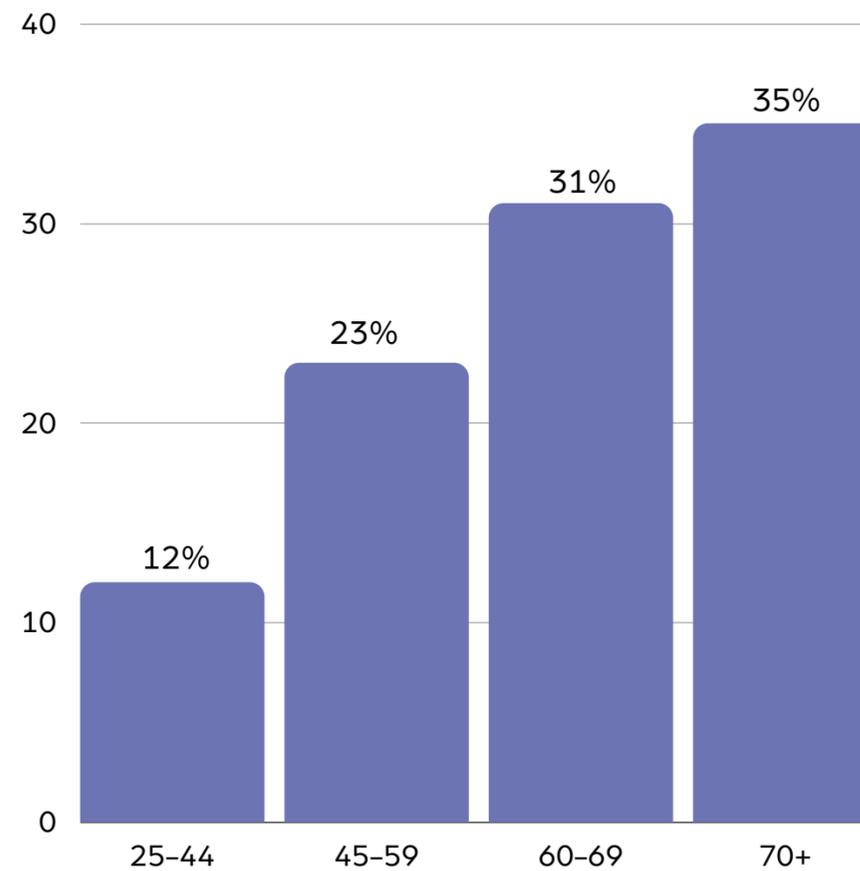
**Demographic information,
perceptions, and source of
legal information**



Gender

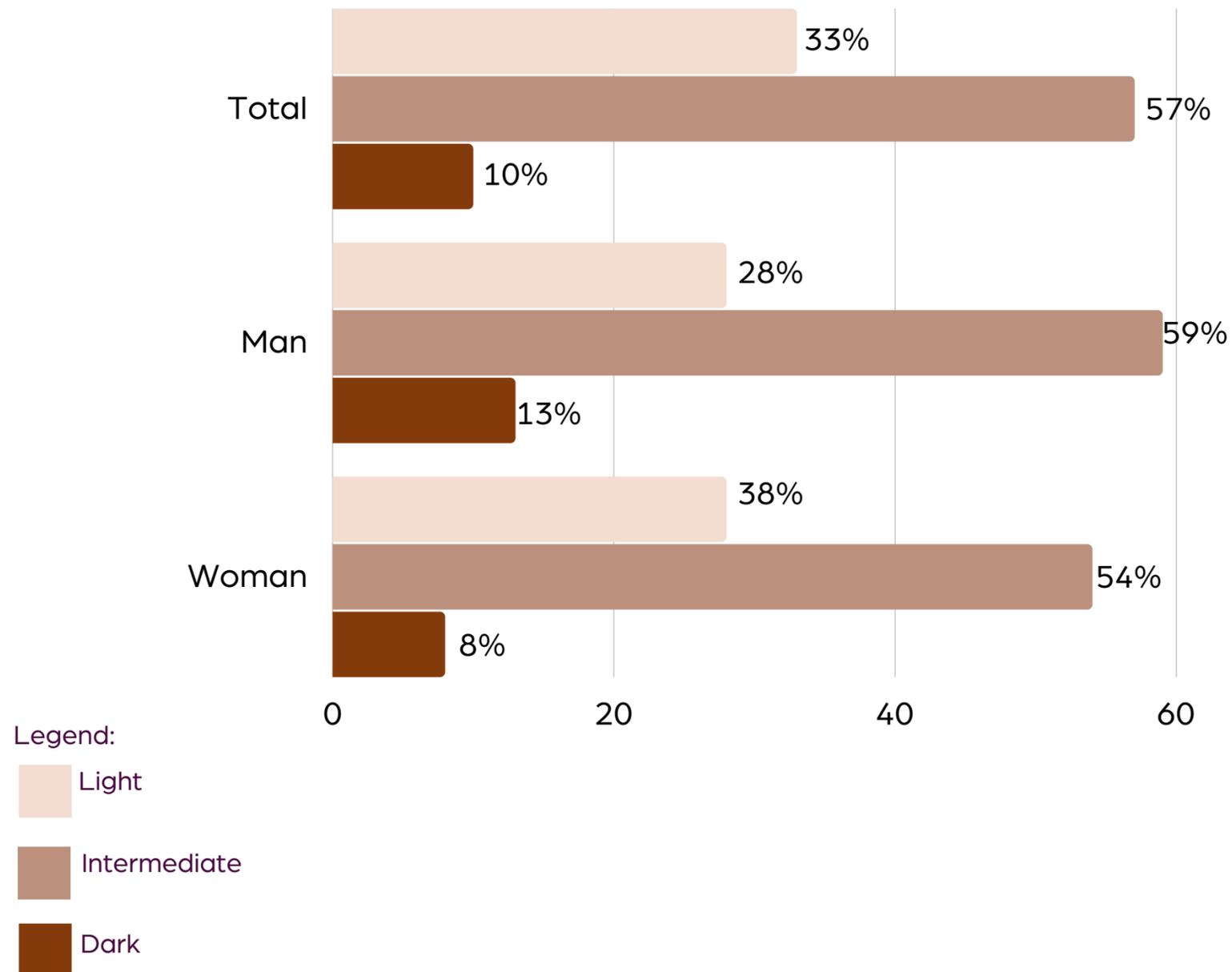


Age



- 54% of the adult population in our sample identified as feminine. This percentage was very close to the findings of the U.S. Census Bureau's Puerto Rico Community Survey (53%).
- The age distribution in our sample is illustrated on the left. Close to 35% of the adult population was younger than 60 years.

Skin Color



- The question concerning skin color was the following: how would you describe your skin color in a scale from 1 to 6, where 1 represents the lightest color and 6 the darkest color?
- Fifty-seven percent answered 3 and 4 on the scale (intermediate). This is slightly greater than the BRFSS survey of 2016, where 47% identified themselves on the 3 and 4 scale (Caraballo-Cueto and Godreau 2021).
- A greater proportion of women than men identified themselves with the scales that represented the lighter skin colors (38% of women vs. 28% of men). In the darker scales, the opposite was the case: 13% of men identified with the darker scales vs. 8% of women.

Type of employment

What is your employment?	Total	Light	Intermediate	Dark
Full-Time Employee	35%	33%	35%	47%
Retired	22%	30%	18%	12%
Freelance or Self-employed Worker	9%	6%	10%	9%
Domestic Worker	6%	9%	4%	5%
Seeking Employment	6%	5%	7%	4%
Part-Time Employee	5%	2%	6%	5%
Individuals with Disabilities	4%	3%	4%	9%
Caregiver for Children or Individuals with Illnesses	3%	2%	2%	6%
Freelance Worker, Working Regularly (20 hours or more)	2%	1%	3%	4%
Student	2%	3%	1%	0%
"On call" Worker	1%	0%	1%	0%
Worker on a Family Business, with Salary	1%	1%	2%	0%
Worker on a Family Business, without Salary	0%	0%	1%	0%
Working from Home in Profit-Making Businesses (arts and crafts, car repairs, food services, etc.)	0%	1%	0%	0%
Does Not Know/Does Not Respond	4%	3%	5%	0%
	100%	99%	99%	101%

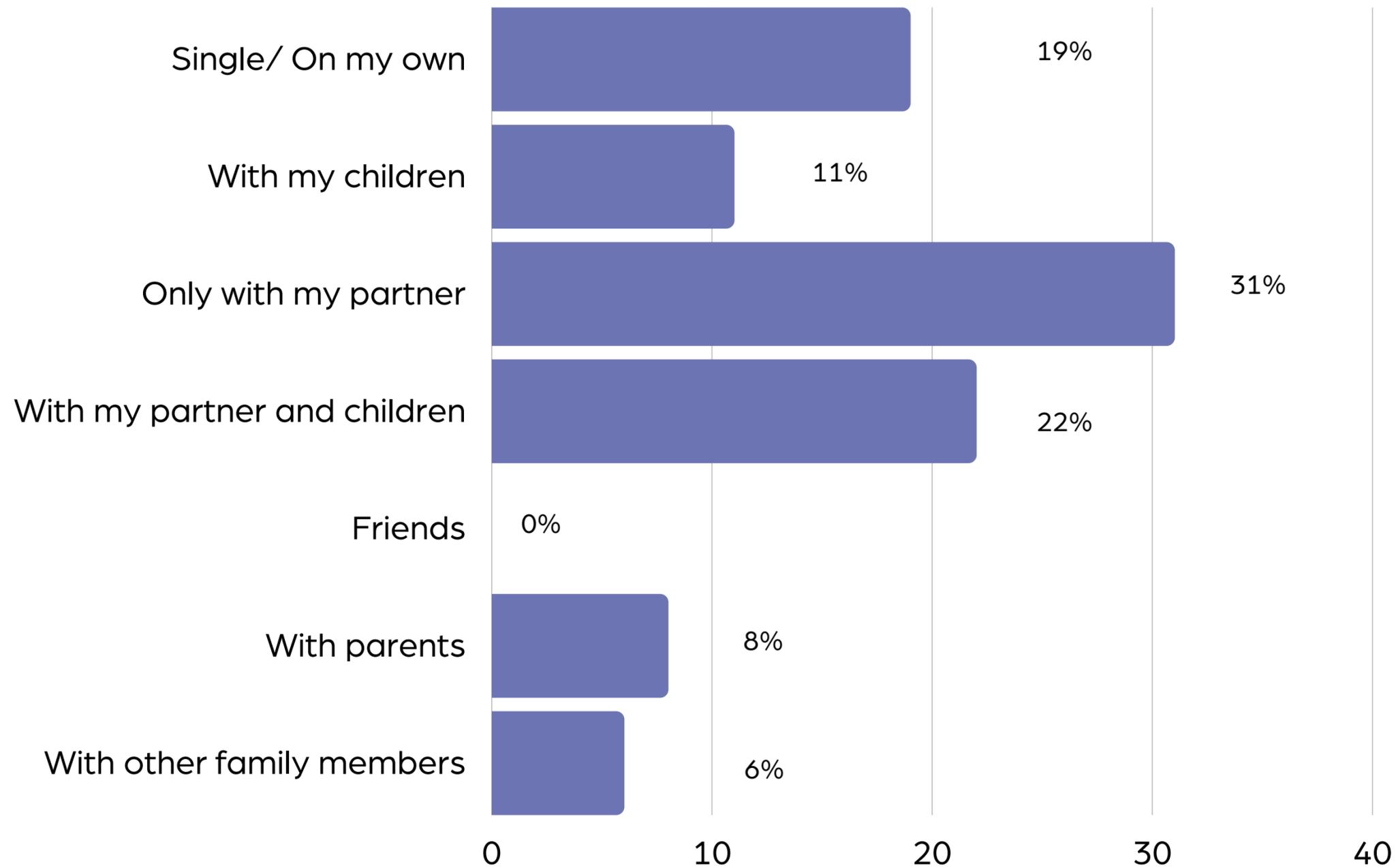
- Fifty-three percent was working, either as an employee or freelancer, part-time or full-time. This contrasts with the data from Puerto Rico's Department of Labor, which, by omitting categories related to informal employment, finds that only 34% of the adult population is working.
- Six percent is seeking employment, while 4% are individuals with disabilities.
- Less than 1% works from home to make profit.
- When categorizing findings by skin color, the most salient differences concern the greater proportion of darker-skinned individuals working full-time (47%) and who have disabilities (9%), when compared to lighter-skinned participants (33% and 3%, respectively).

Participation in Governmental Assistance

	Total	Light	Intermediate	Dark	Less than High School	High School	More than High School
Nutritional Assistance Program (PAN)	21%	19%	24%	17%	47%	32%	17%
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	1%	0%	2%	2%	3%	4%	0%
Government's Health Insurance Plan	19%	14%	21%	21%	31%	25%	17%
WIC Program	4%	3%	5%	0%	0%	6%	3%
Does Not Participate in Governmental Programs nor Receive Governmental Assistance	61%	63%	58%	70%	49%	40%	68%
Other	2%	3%	2%	3%	6%	1%	3%

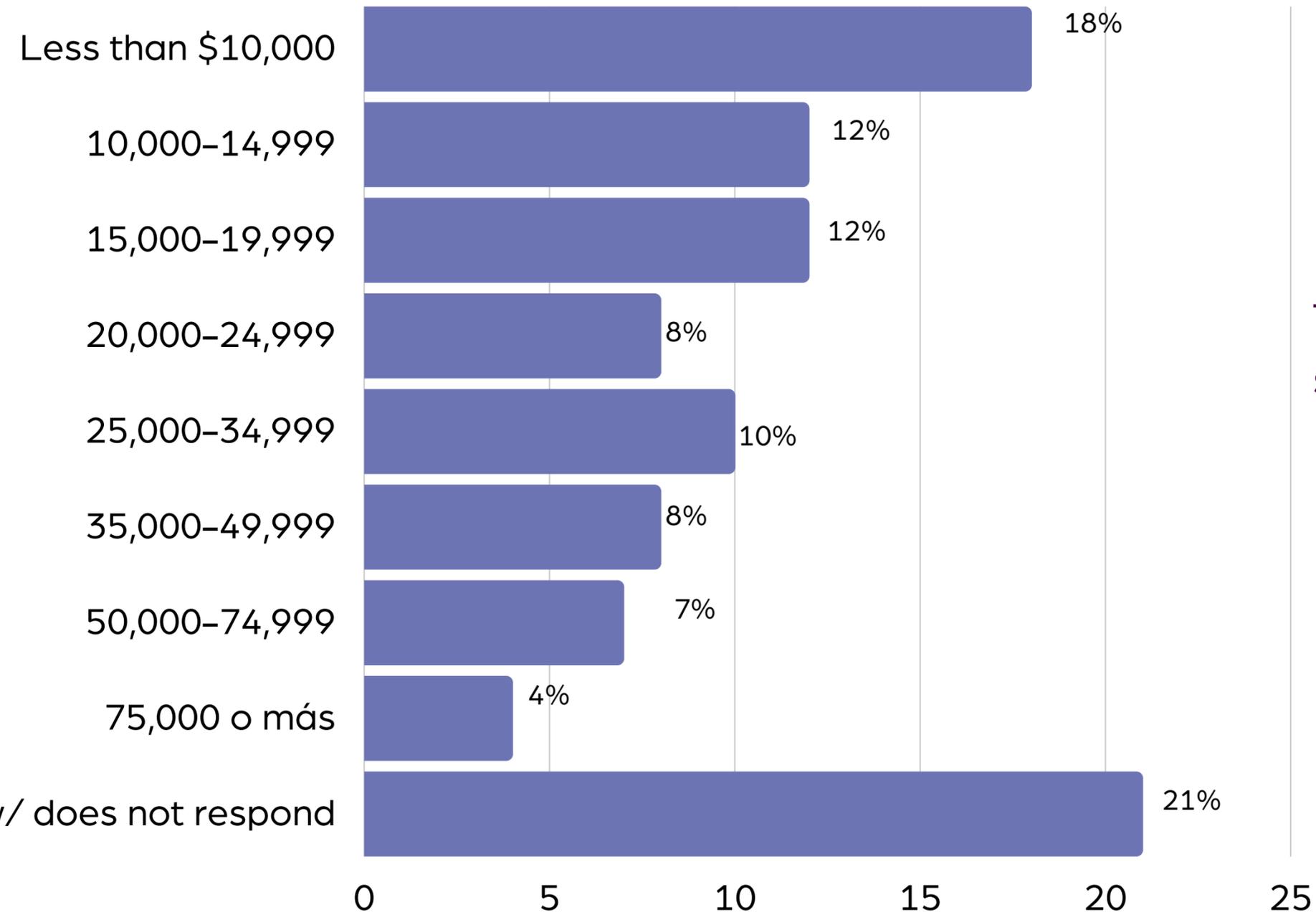
- 1 out of each 5 participants receives Nutritional Assistance Program (PAN) and the government's health insurance plan.
- 7 out of each 10 participants who describe themselves as dark-skinned do not receive governmental assistance. This does not necessarily constitute evidence that these dark-skinned individuals enjoy a better socioeconomic status, as we will see below that this is not the case.
- Folks with lower levels of schooling participate of governmental assistance programs in a greater proportion (47%) than those with a more-than-high-school level of schooling (17%).

Family Composition



- Close to 1 out of each 5 participants lives alone on their own.
- Eleven percent of the sample is a single parent. The family composition of the rest of surveyed households includes a partner, children, and other family members.
- The average annual income of those surveyed is \$20,075.00/year.

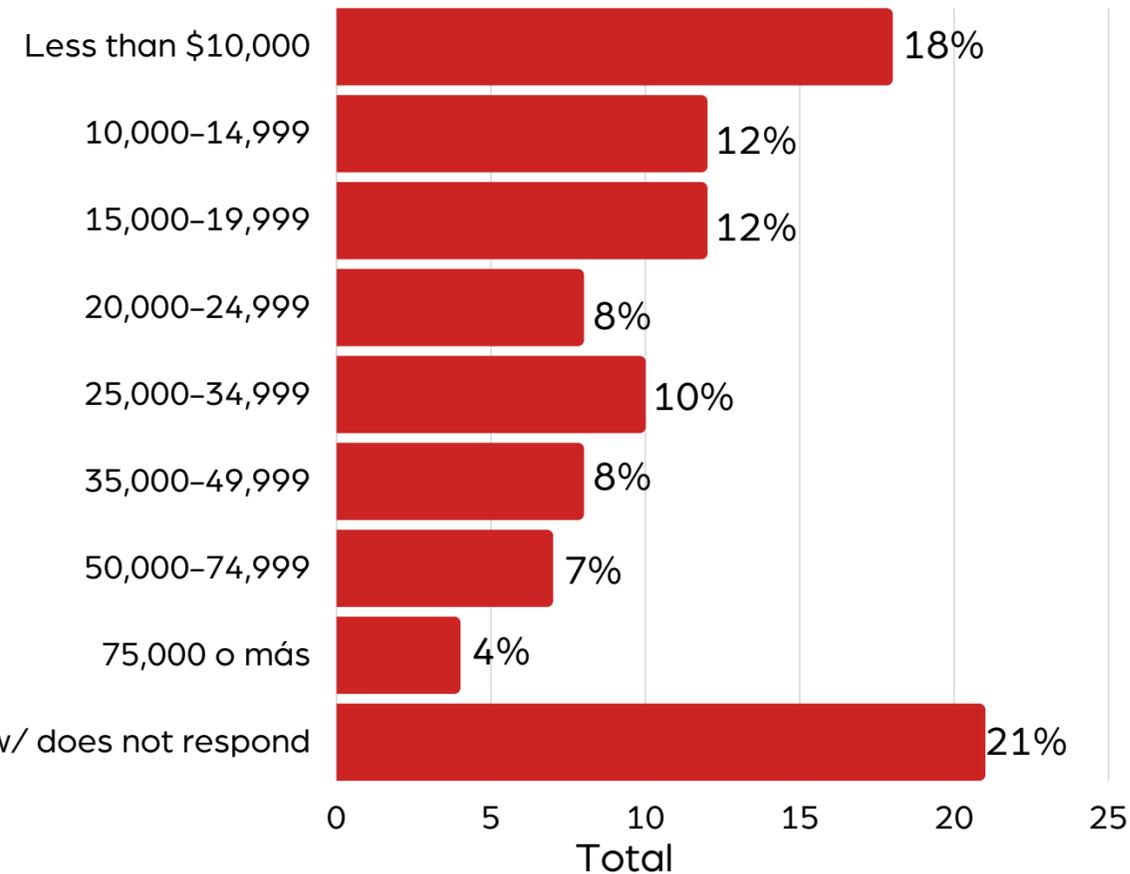
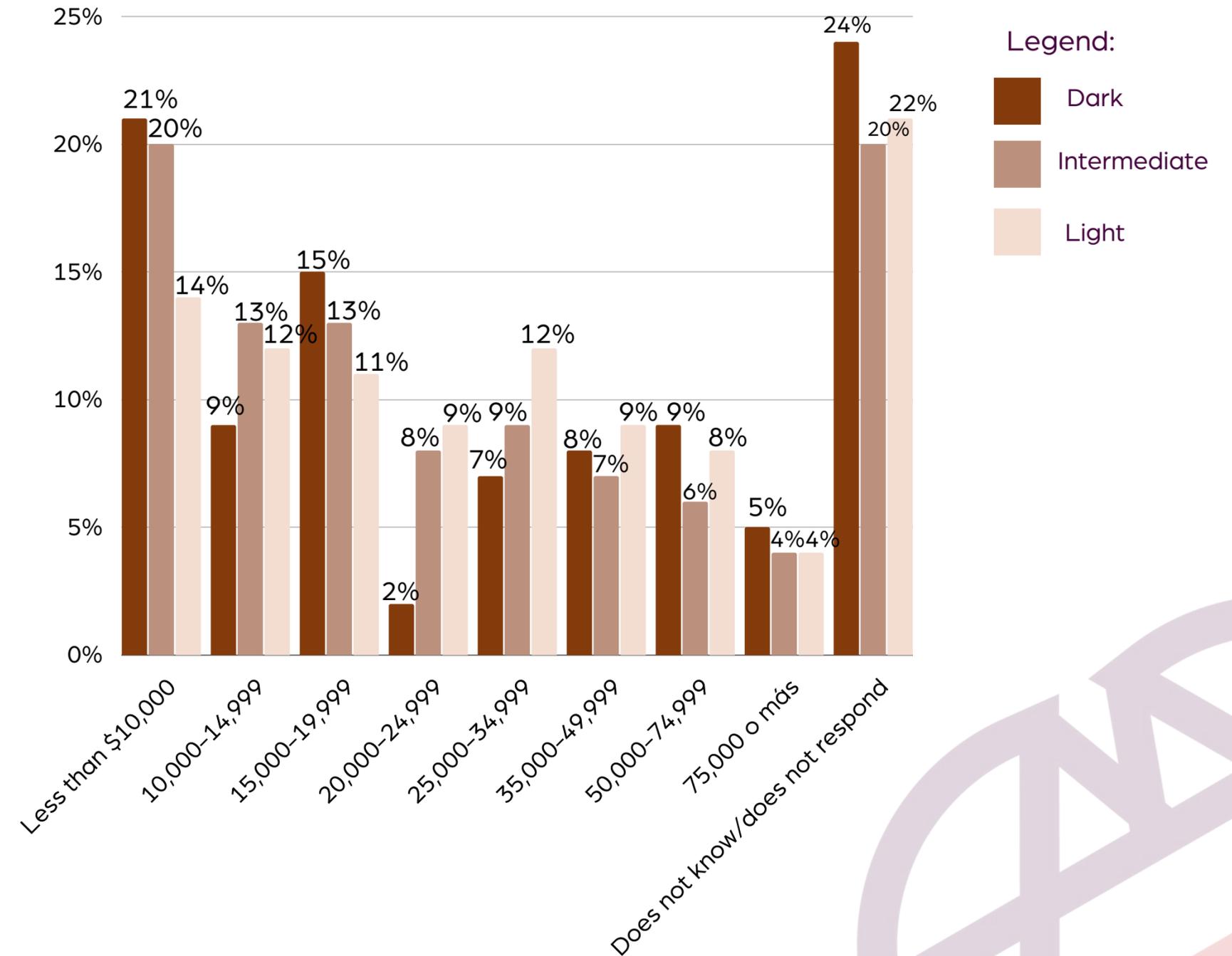
Family Income



The average annual income of those surveyed is \$20,075.00/year.

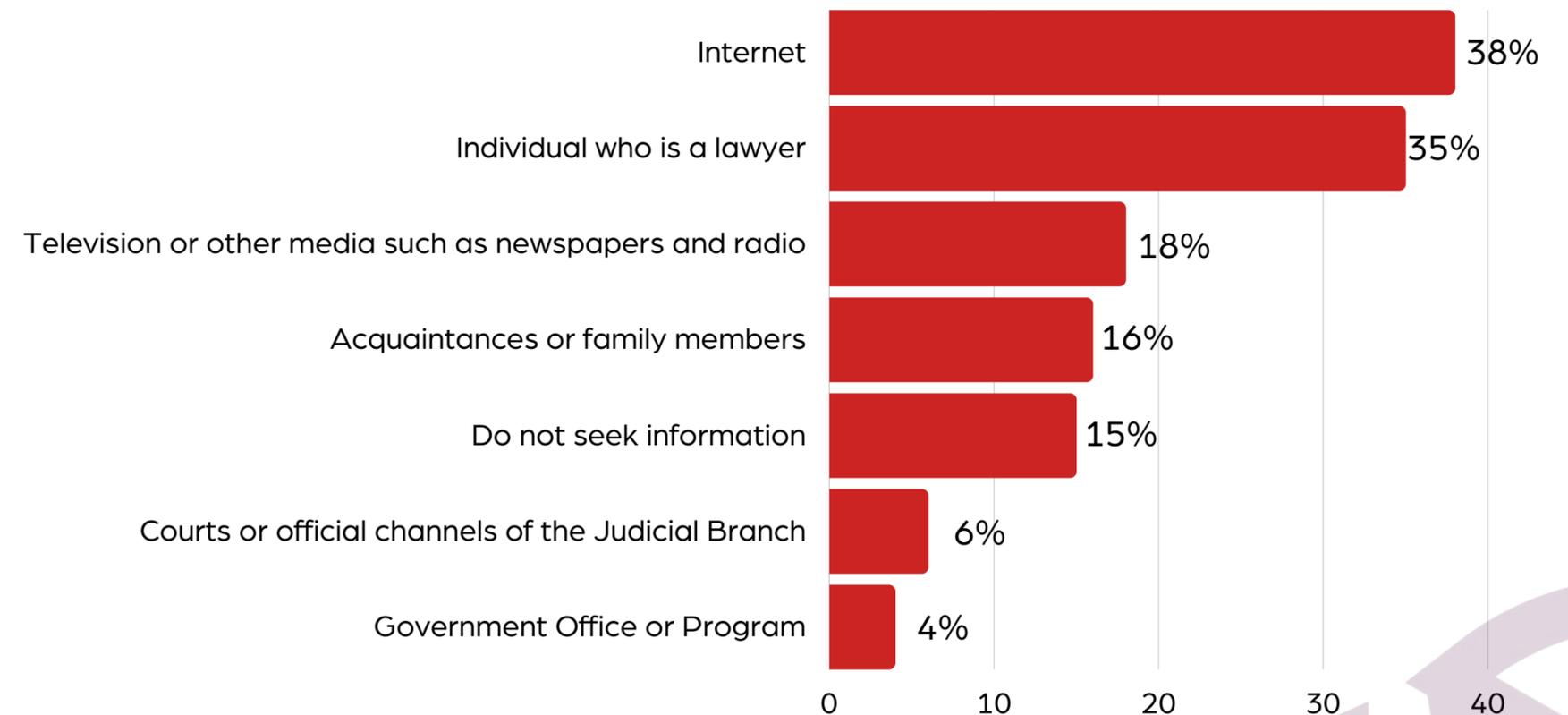
Annual Family Income by Skin Color

Fourteen percent of light-skinned folks has an annual income below \$10,000, while that proportion was greater among dark-skinned individuals. However, the proportions of people with the highest incomes were similar among the three skin color categories.



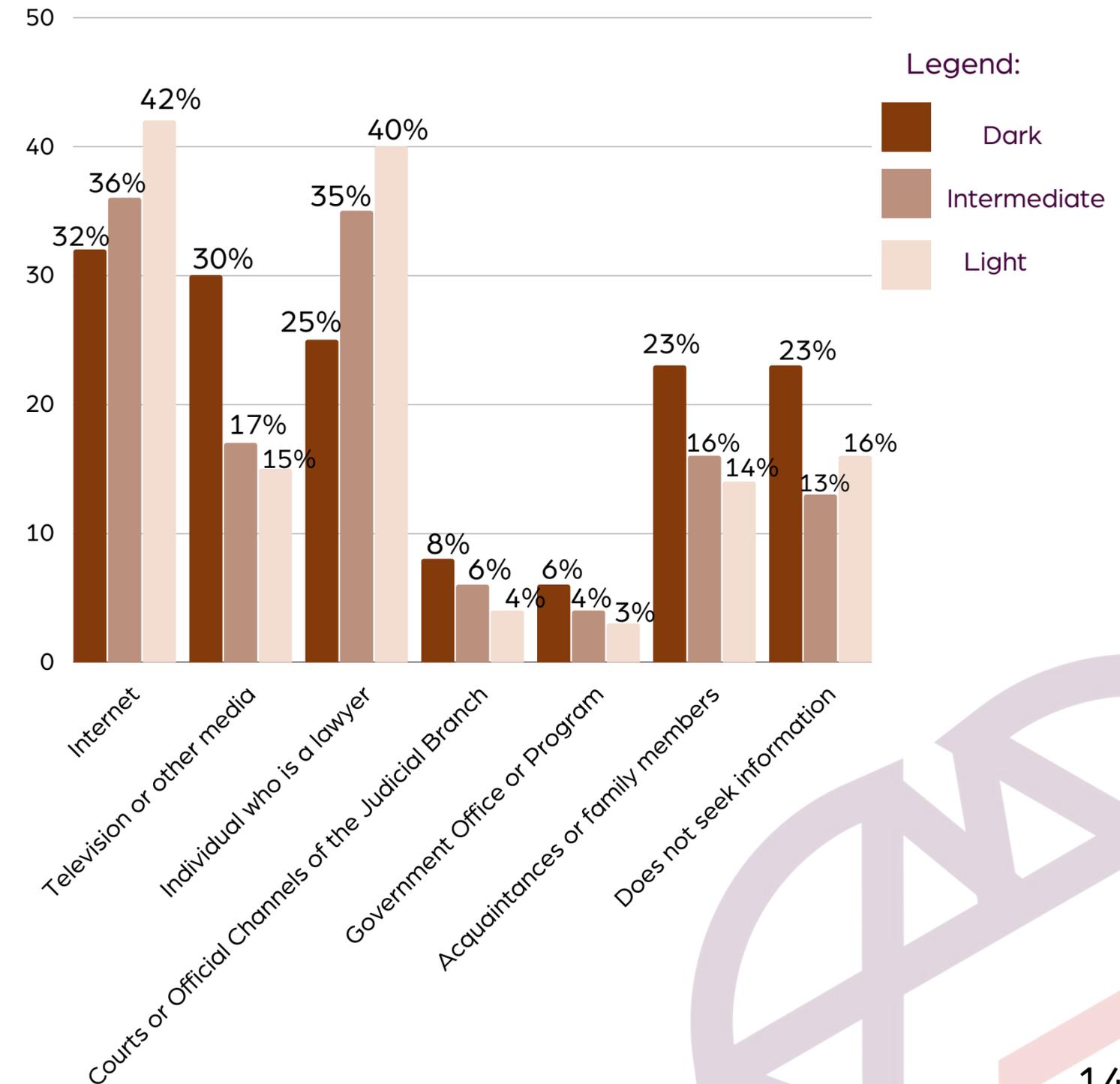
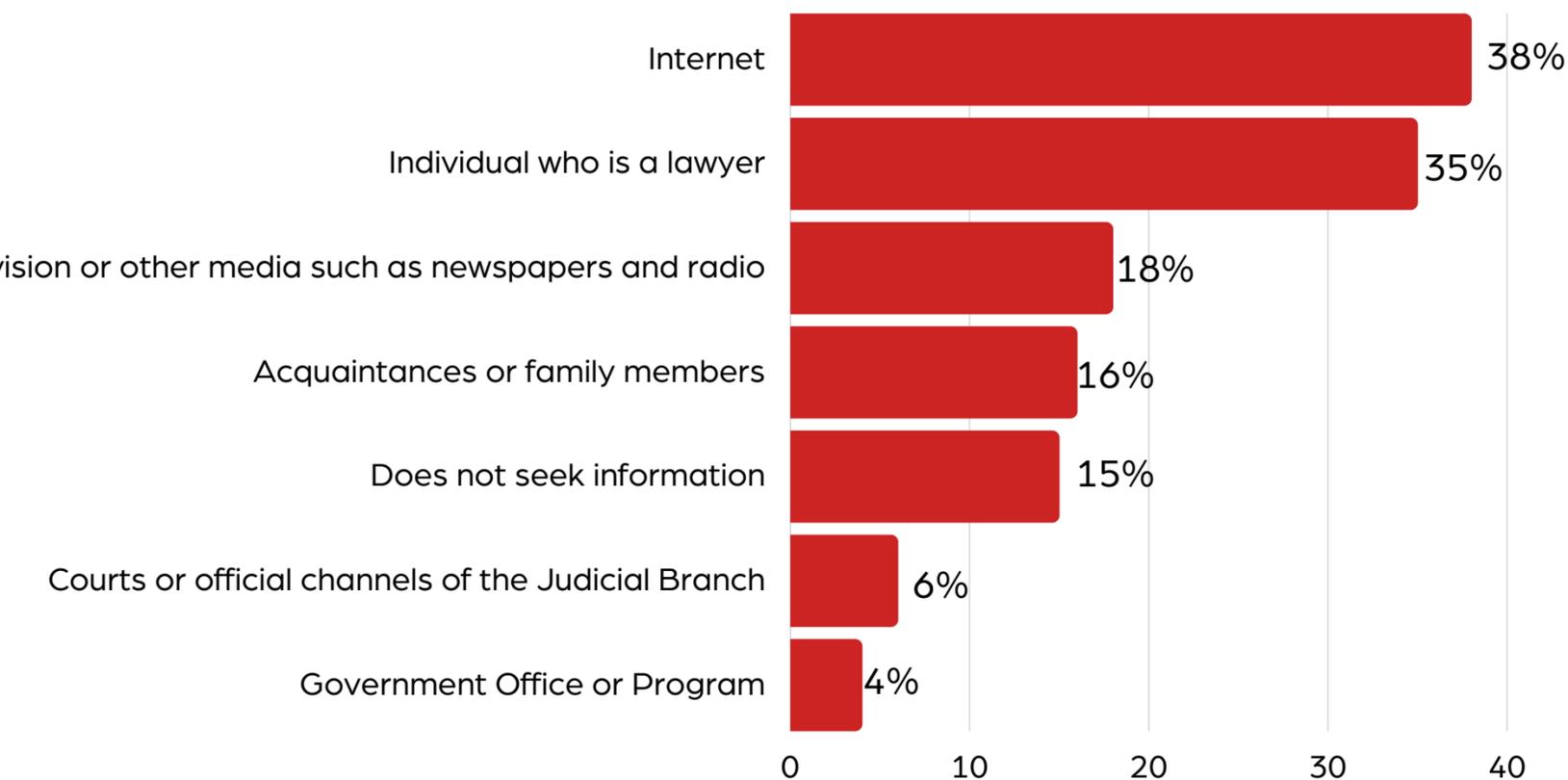
Source of Information on Legal Matters

- It is unsurprising that the internet is the most used source of information when consulting about a legal matter. Recall that 8 out of each 10 individuals who have a cellphone, have a smartphone, with which they can access the internet. Close to 4 out of each 10 individuals use the internet when they need to find legal information. Thirty-five percent of participants mentioned that they sought assistance from an individual who is a lawyer. The proportion of folks who go to acquaintances or family members (16%) is close to that of those who do not seek legal information (15%).
- There is a relatively low proportion of people of both sexes who resort to official channels of the judiciary branch (6%) or to governmental counseling programs (4%).



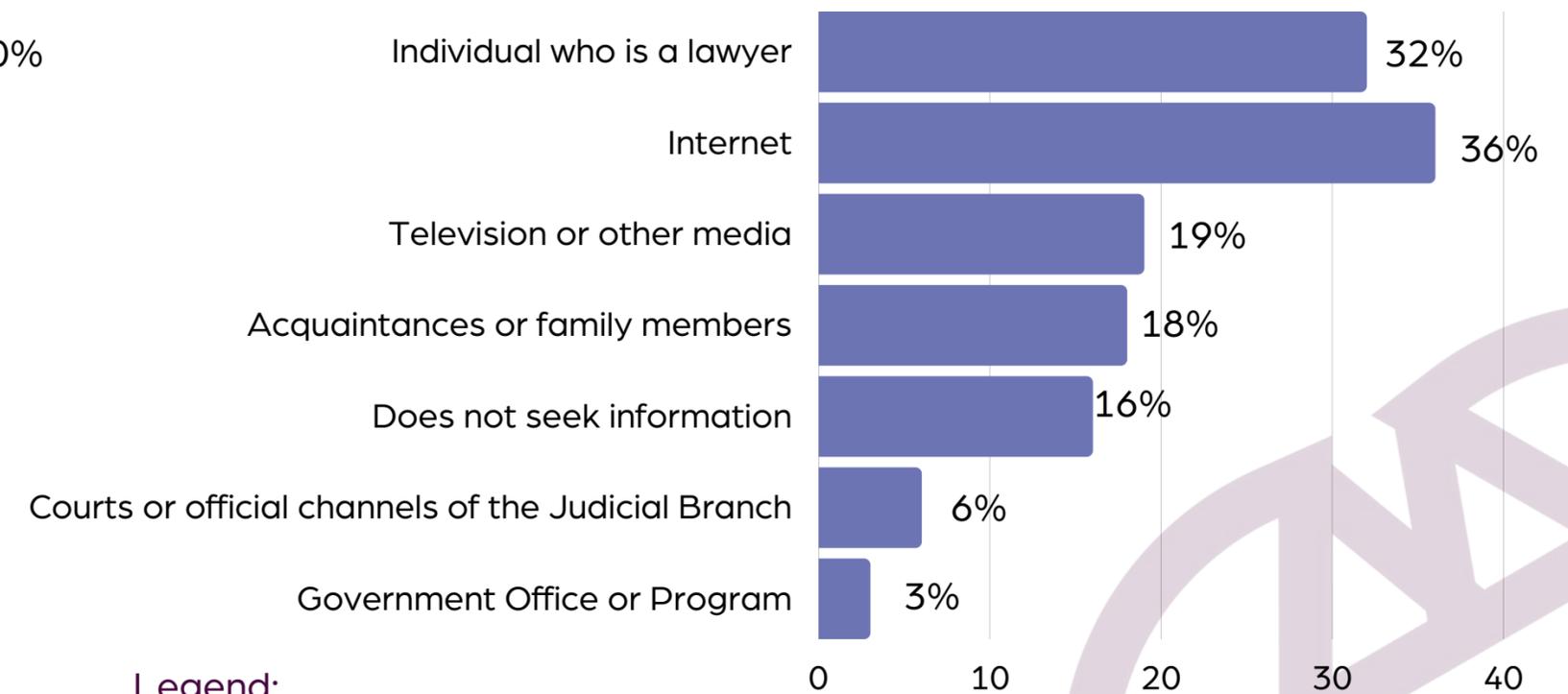
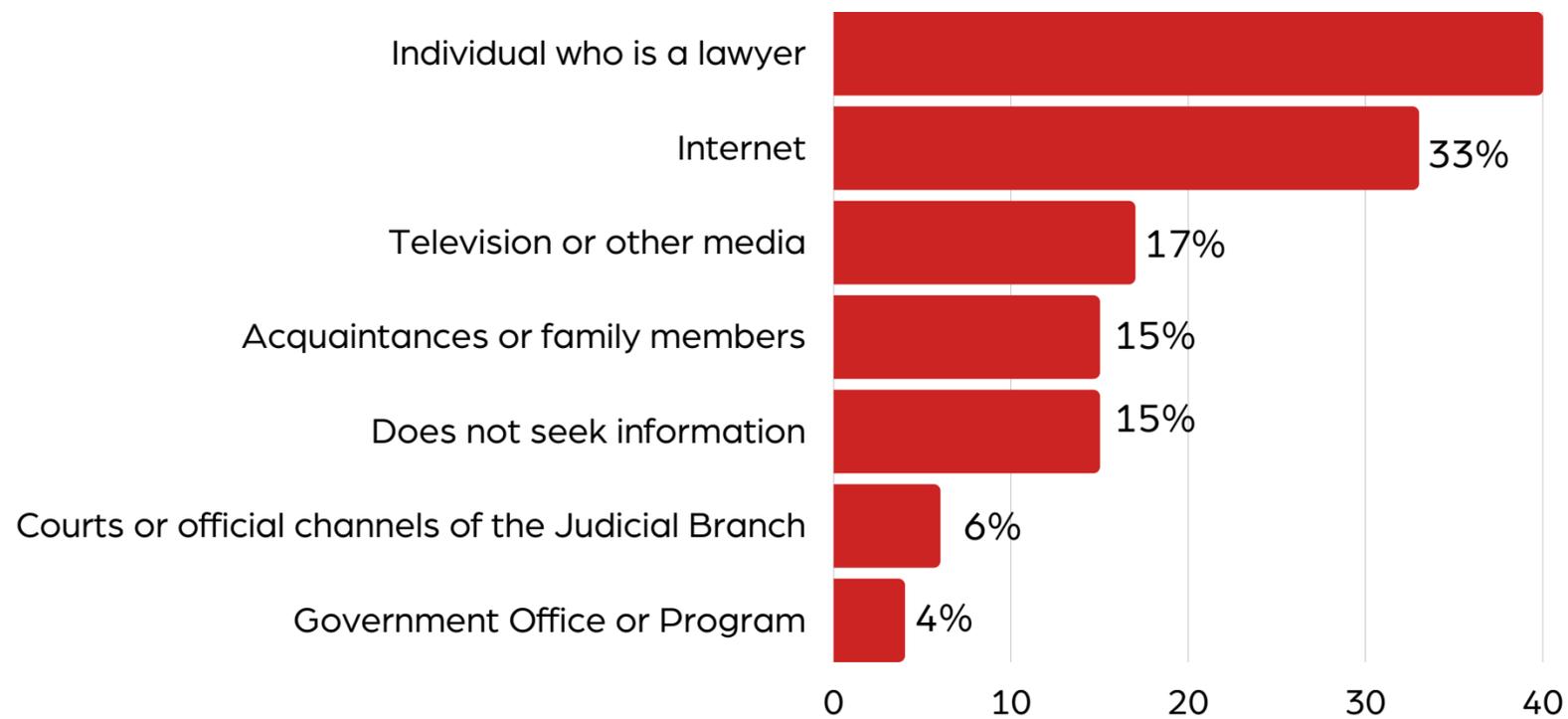
Source of Information on Legal Matters by Skin Color

- The internet and an individual who is a lawyer are the most used sources of information by participants who consider themselves light-skinned. In contrast, those who consider themselves dark-skinned, make use of traditional media such as TV, radio, newspapers, and acquaintances and family members in a higher proportion.



Source of Information on Legal Matters by gender

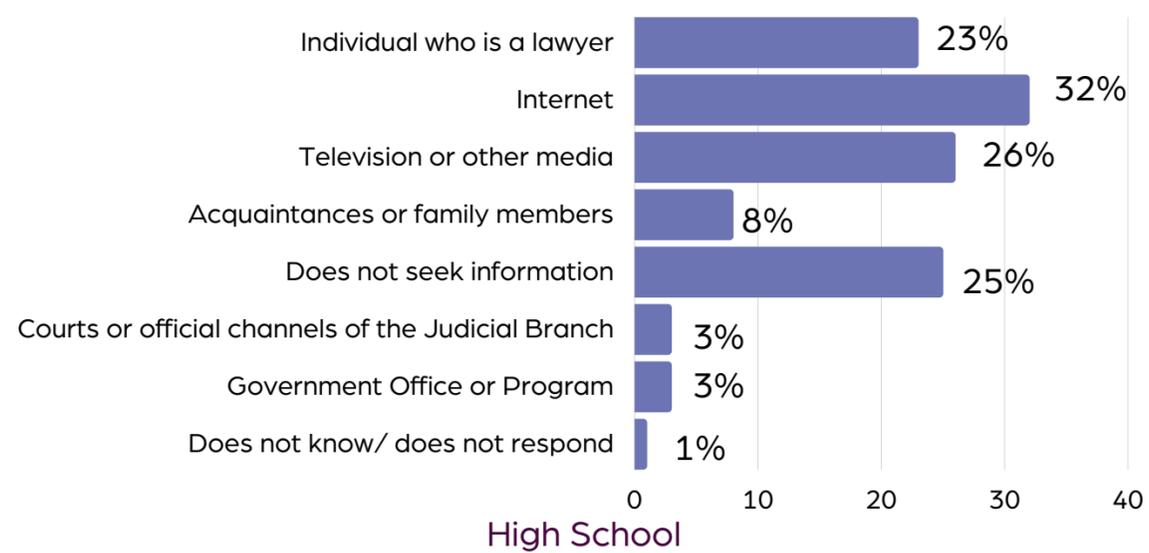
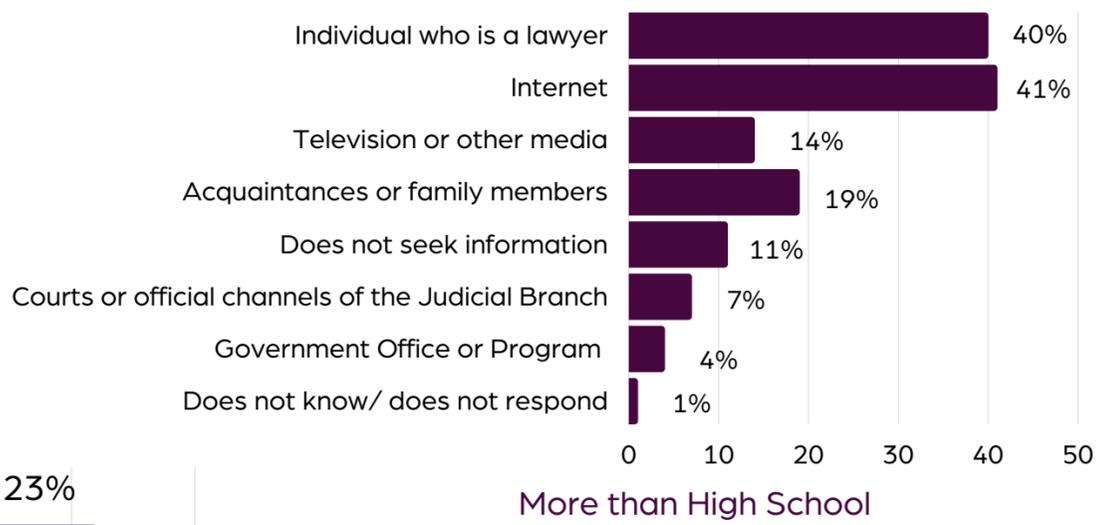
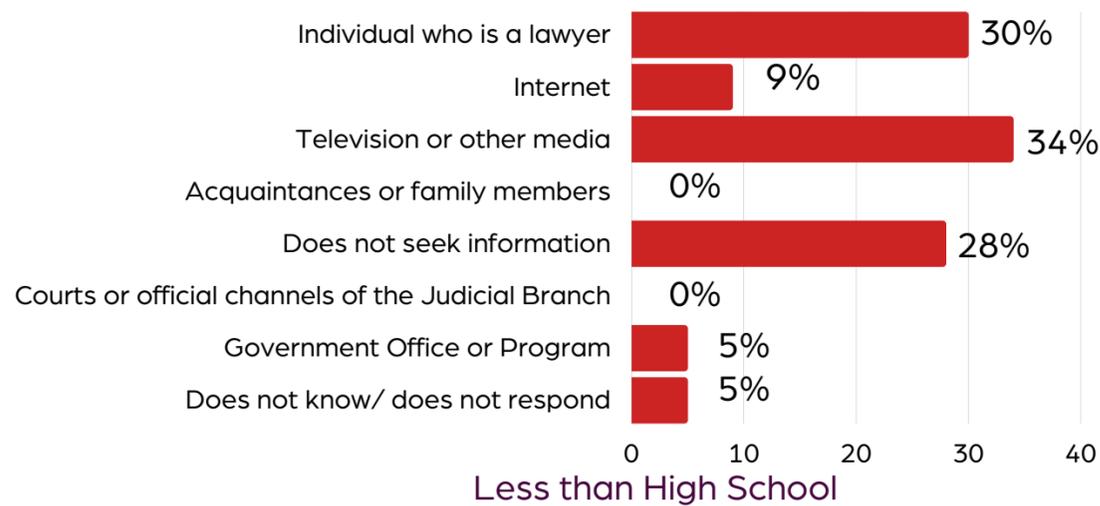
- The main sources of legal information are the internet and an individual who is a lawyer.
- Women prefer to seek counseling from folks who are lawyers (40%), while men seek the most assistance from the internet (36%).



Legend:
■ Women
■ Men

From whom or from where to you obtain information on legal matters?

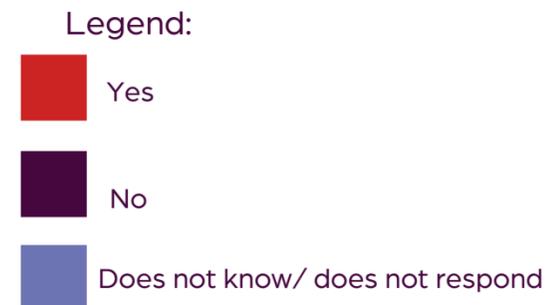
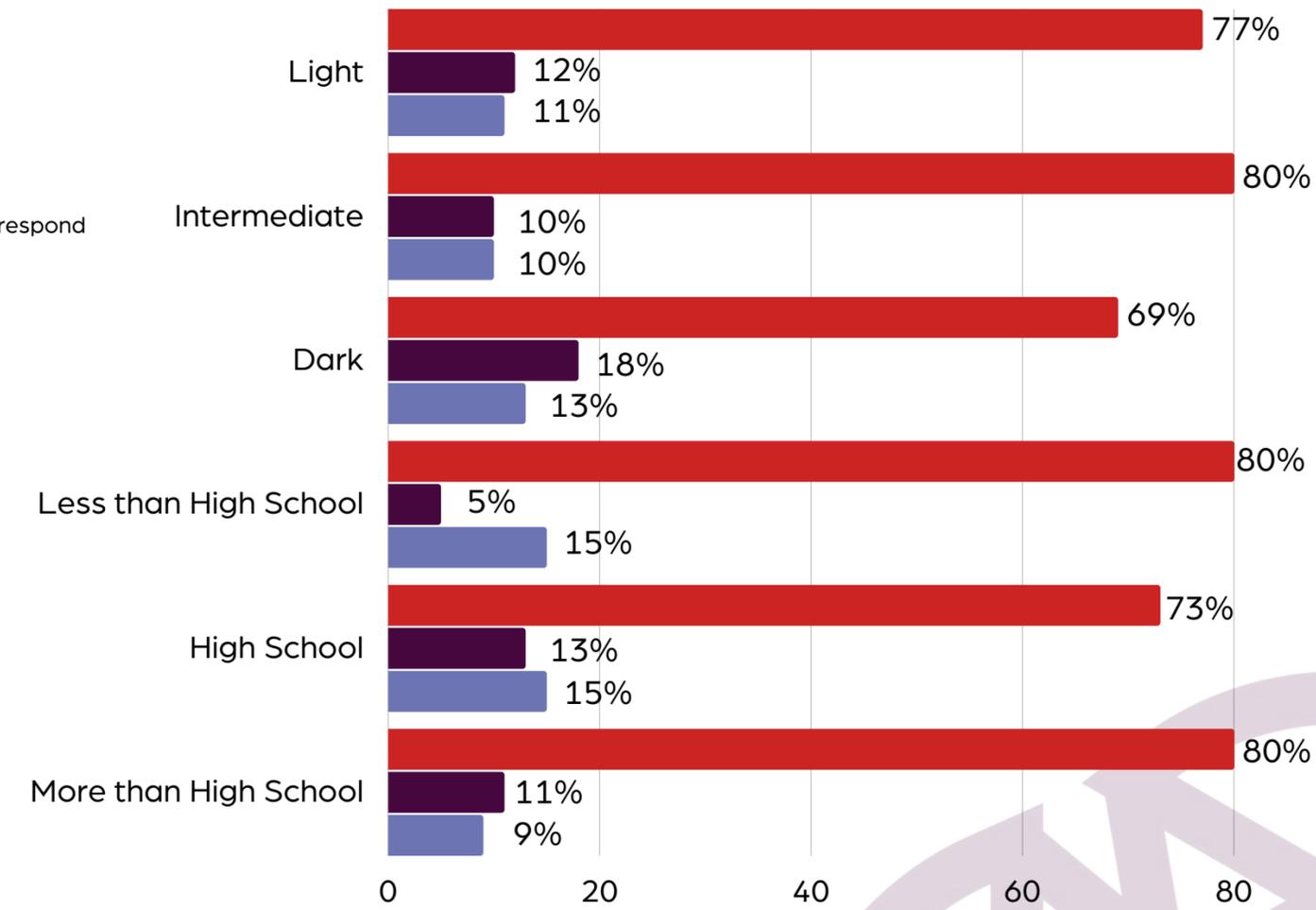
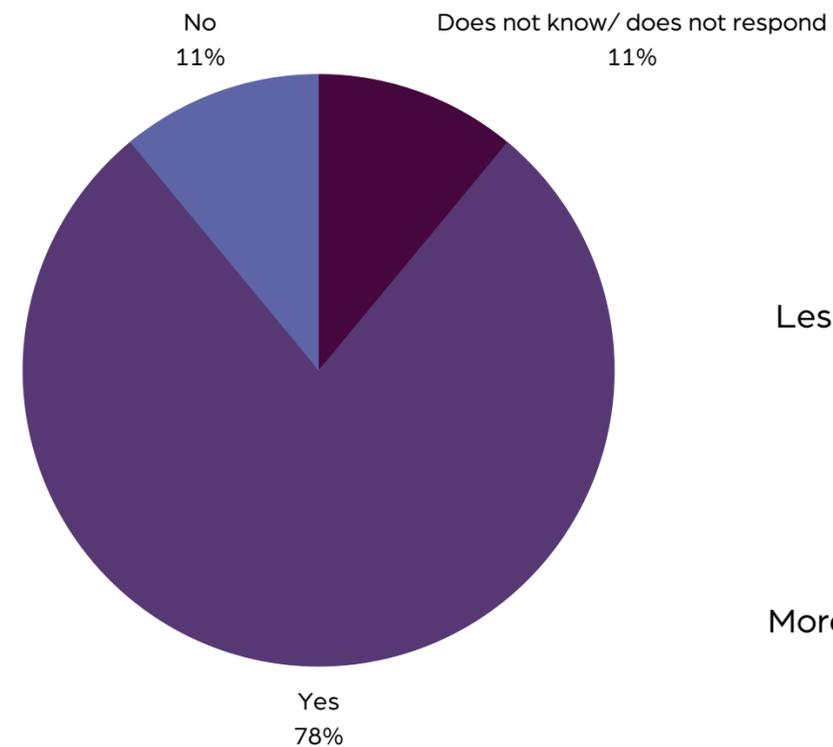
Source of Information on Legal Matters by **Level of Schooling**



- Apparently, folks with higher levels of schooling tend to make more use of the internet and individuals who are lawyers as sources of information.
- Television and other media, as well as individuals who are lawyers, are the sources of information that predominate among participants with a lower level of schooling, while, among this same group, the use of the internet drops to 9%.
- In general, 38% of the 500 interviewed participants is the average of people who use the internet as their source of legal information.

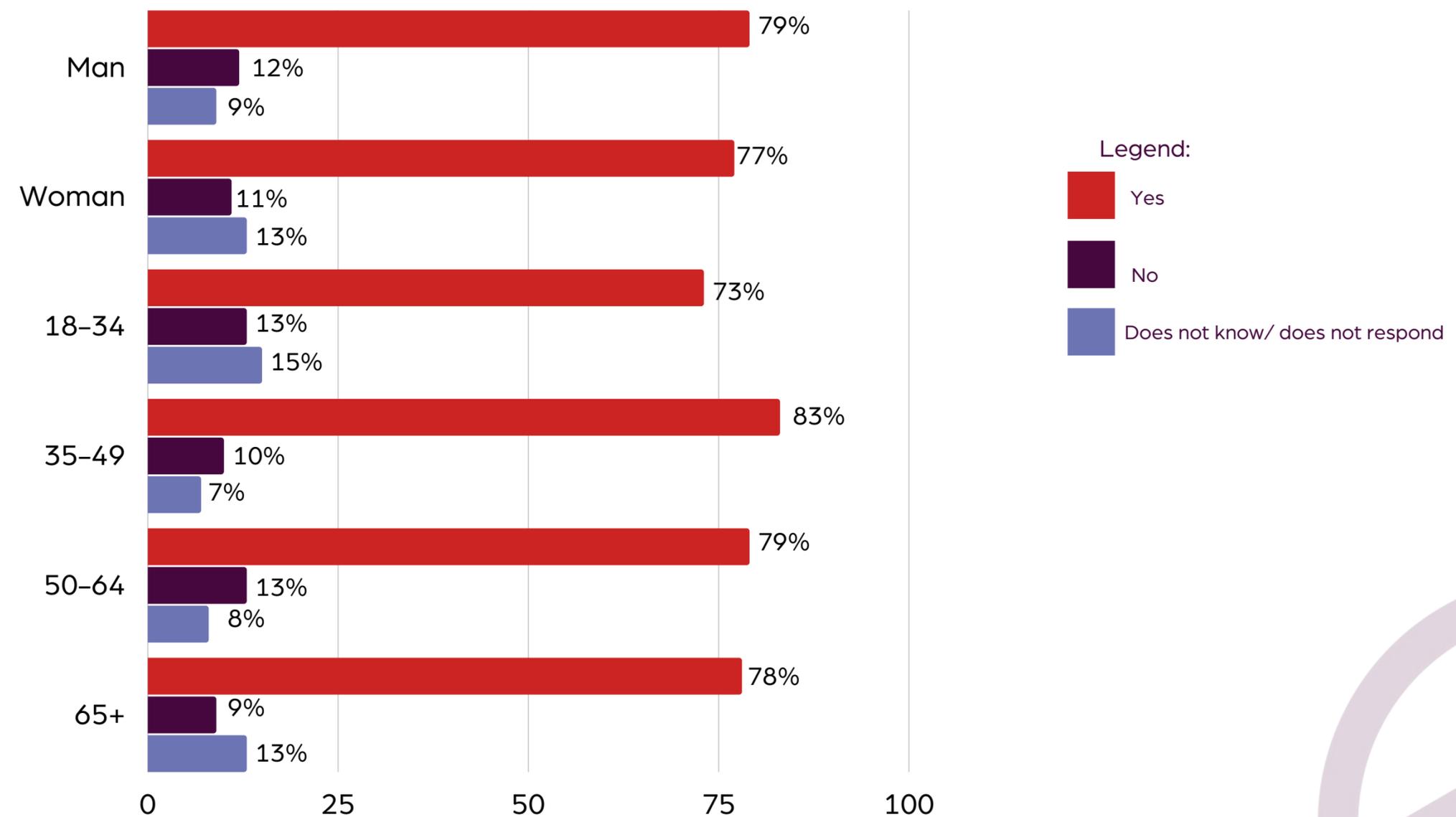
Trust in the Source of Information on Legal Matters by Gender, Age, Skin Color, and Level of Schooling

- Close to 8 out of each 10 individuals surveyed trust the source/s of information they use to obtain assistance on legal matters.
- There is a difference between the level of trust in the source of information among the younger group (73%) and the 35–49 years of age group (83%).
- There is no statistically significant difference on the level of trust by gender.
- Folks who consider themselves dark-skinned seem to distrust slightly more their sources of information than their light-skinned peers.
- The same tendency applies to those who completed high school (73%), when compared with those who have other levels of schooling (80%).



Do you trust that the information on legal matters you obtain from these sources is correct? n=500

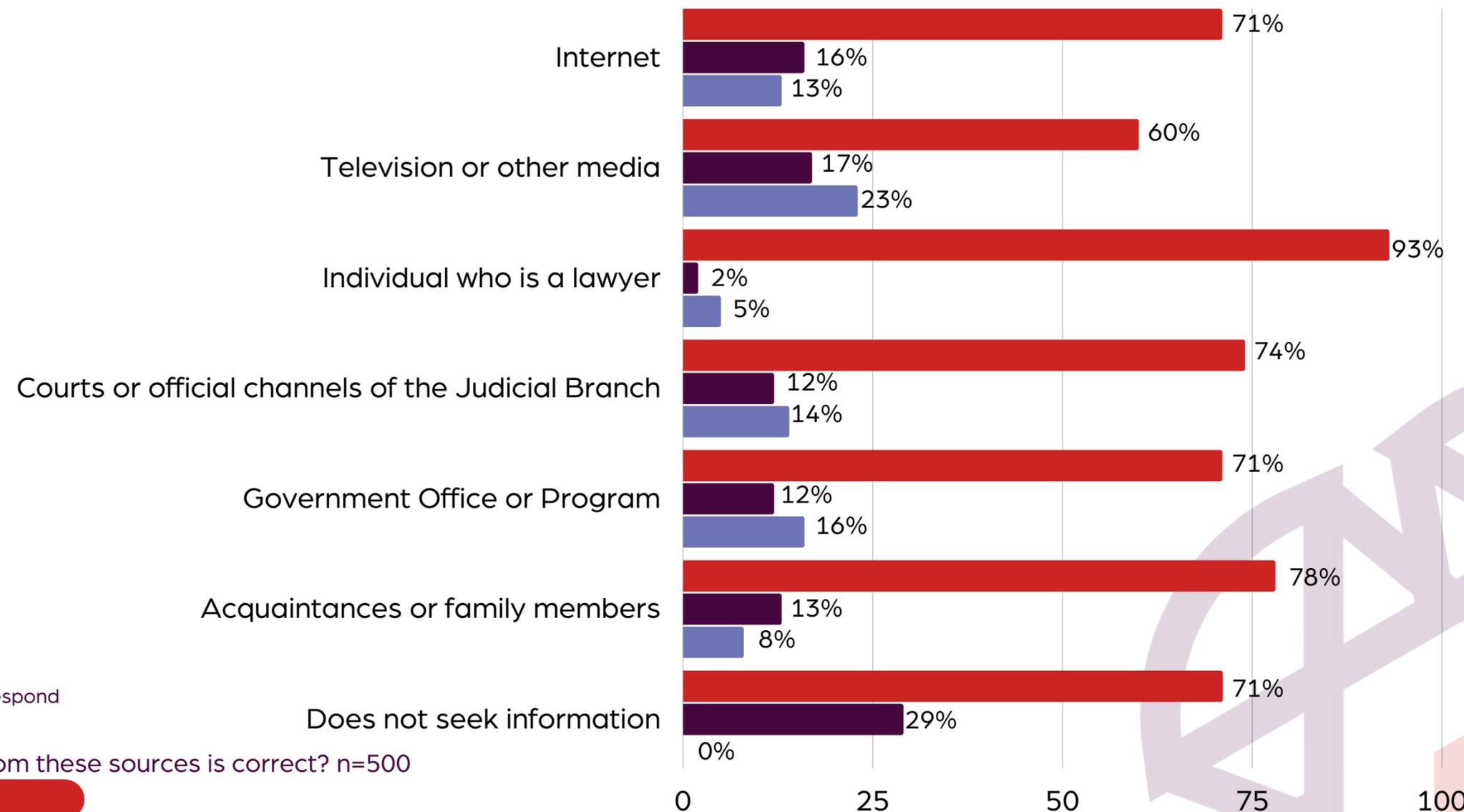
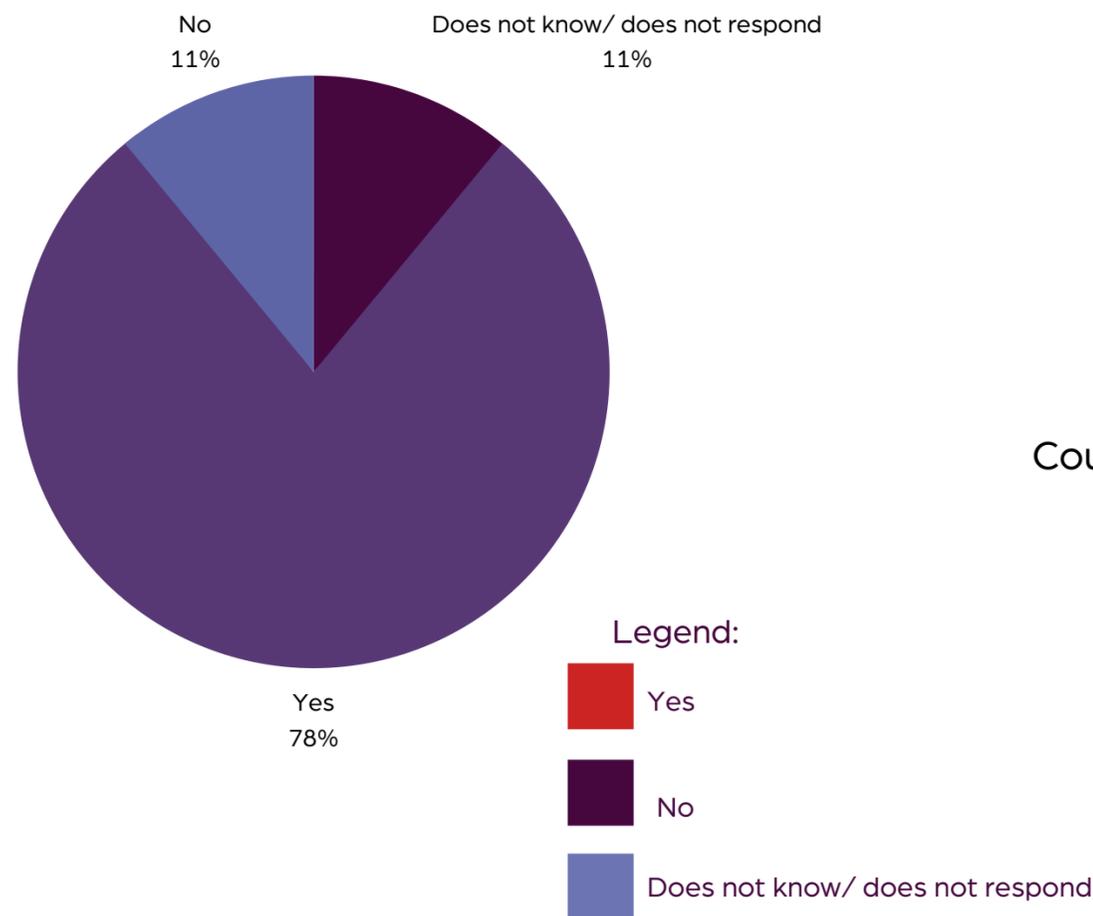
Trust in the Source of Information on Legal Matters by Gender, Age, Skin Color, and Level of Schooling



Do you trust that the information on legal matters you obtain from these sources is correct? n=500

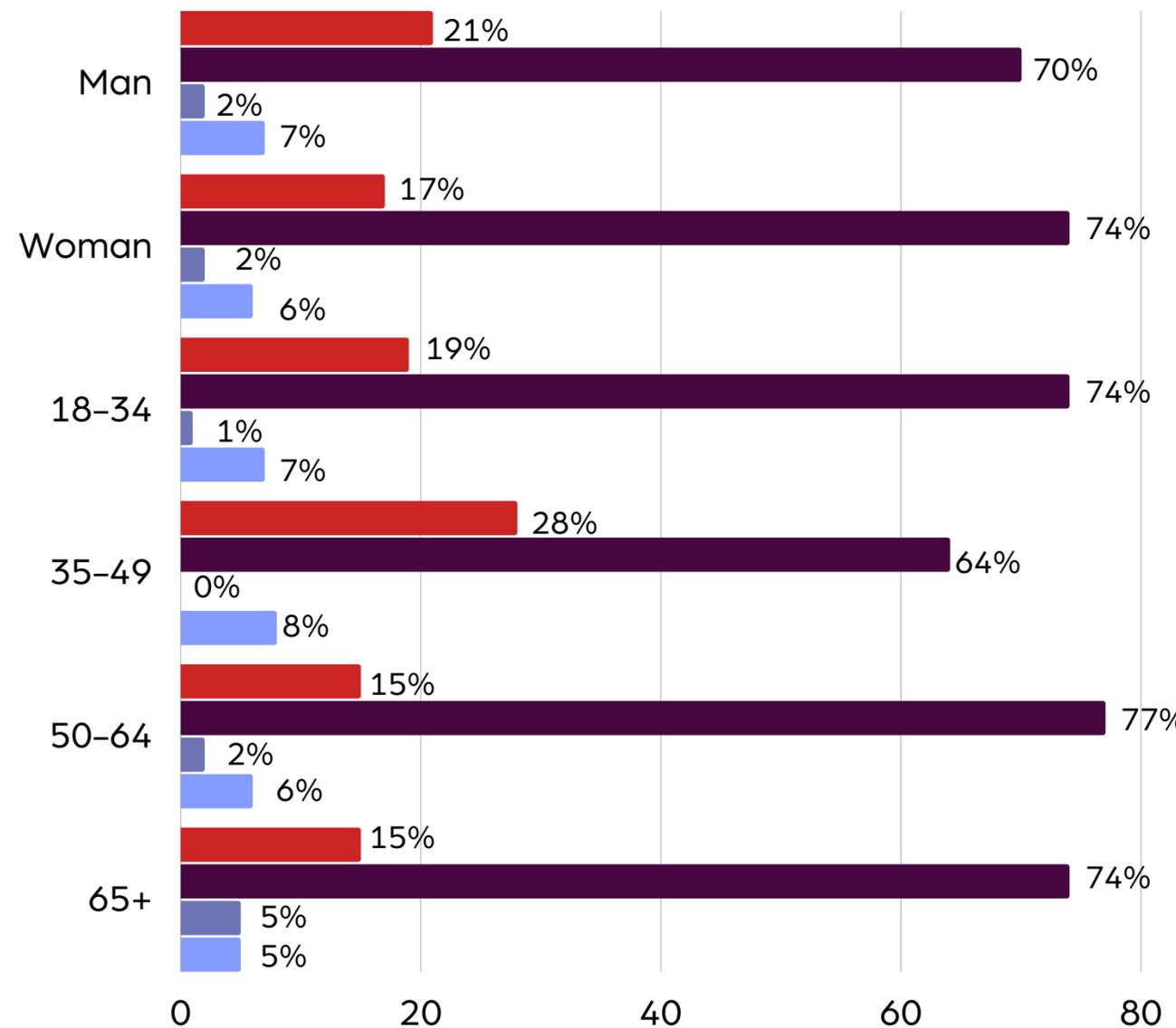
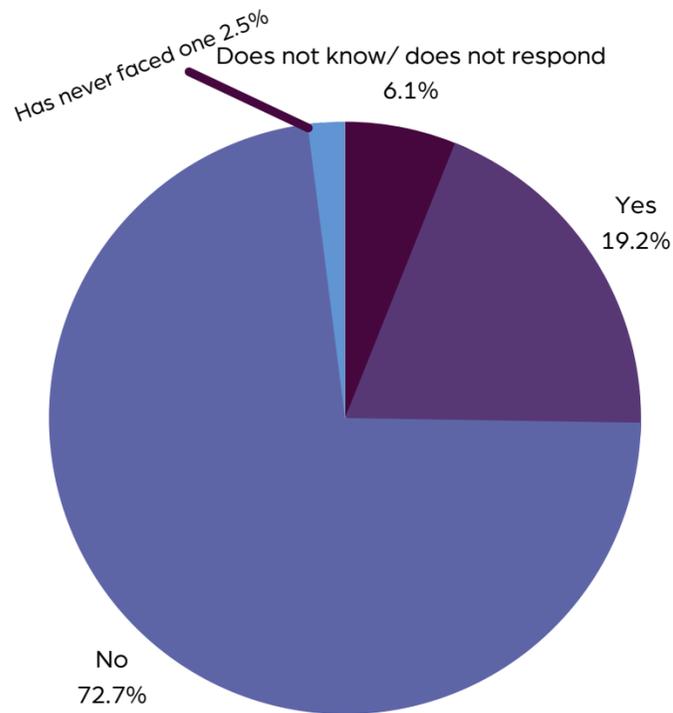
Trust in the Source of Information on Legal Matters by the Source of Information

- An individual who is a lawyer is, undoubtedly, the most trusted source of information among surveyed participants (93%), followed by "acquaintances or family members", with 78%. The latter category is more trustworthy for participants than the information obtained from the courts or from government counseling programs.



Do you trust that the information on legal matters you obtain from these sources is correct? n=500

Capacity to Confront a Legal Process by Myself by Gender and Age



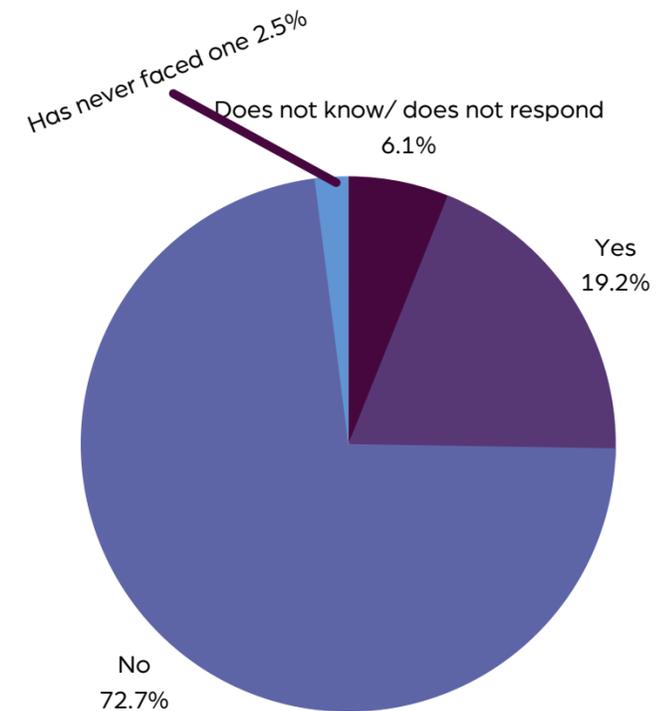
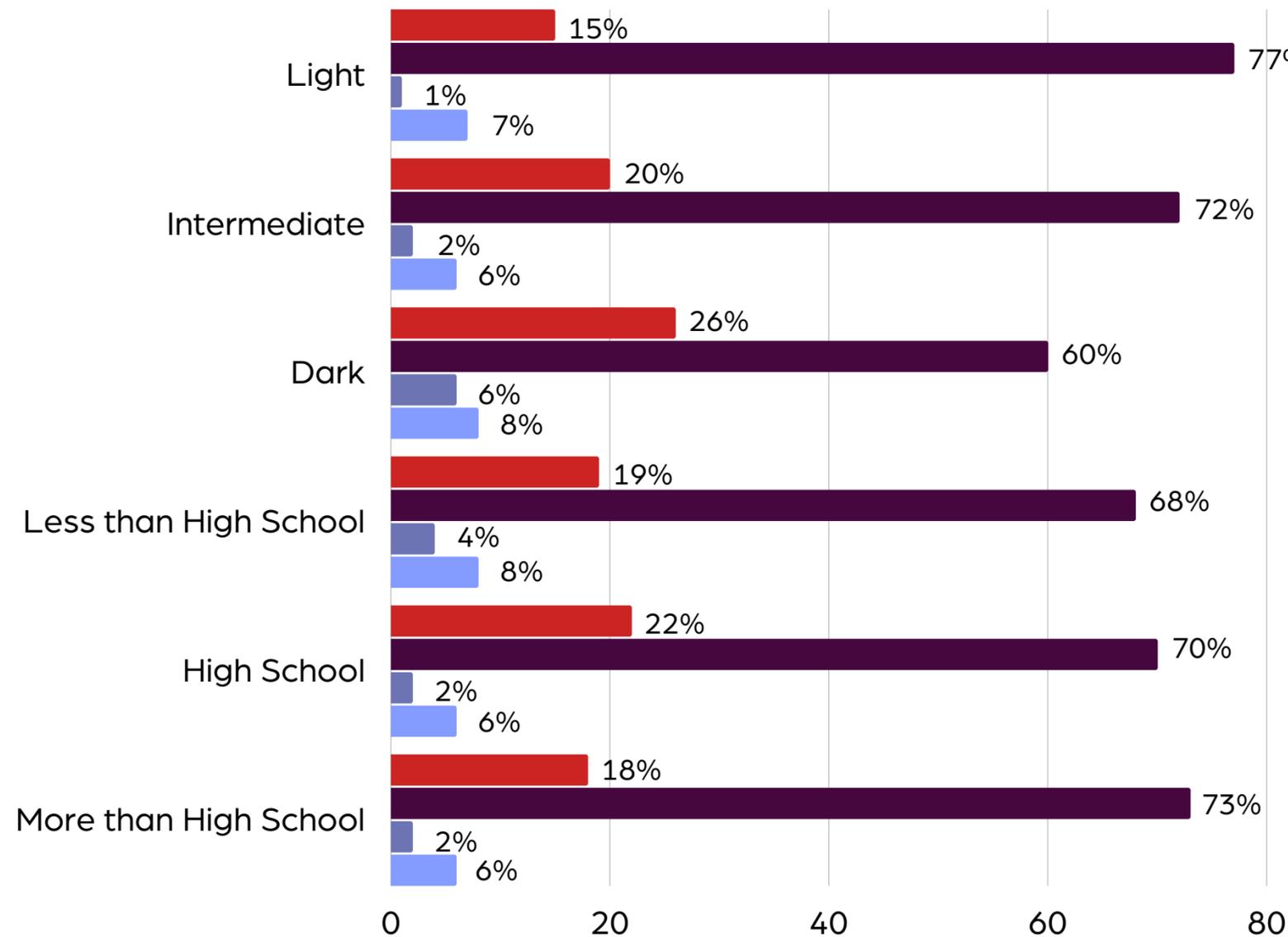
- Only 19%, or 1 out of each 5 participants, believes that they could face a legal process without professional help. This proportion is greater among men (21%) than it is among women (17%), as it is among folks between the ages of 35-49 (28%) in comparison with those 50+ years of age (15%).
- 7 out of each 10 surveyed individuals believes that they could not face a legal process without professional assistance. This belief is more prevalent among women (74%) and among folks between the ages of 50 to 64 (77%).



Do you believe you could face a legal process or procedure on your own, without legal professional assistance? n=500

Capacity to Confront a Legal Process by Myself by Skin Color and Level of Schooling

- A greater proportion of folks who consider themselves light-skinned believe that they would not be able to confront a legal process without professional help (77%), when compared with dark-skinned individuals (60%).
- Likewise, those with a higher level of schooling believe that they could not face a legal process without professional assistance in a great proportion than those with a lower level of schooling.
- An excess of self-trust seems to predominate in the group with lower levels of schooling, but this conclusion cannot be reached with certainty because the sample of folks who did not finish high school was composed of only 25 individuals.



Do you believe you could face a legal process or procedure on your own, without legal professional assistance? n=500

Agreement or Disagreement Arguments on Legal Processes

Arguments	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agrees nor disagrees	Disagrees	Strongly Disagrees	Does Not Know/ Does Not Respond
You completely understand the processes that take place in courts, and you are aware of their purposes.	5%	31%	12%	31%	8%	13%
Legal processes in courts take place within a reasonable amount of time.	3%	18%	11%	50%	11%	7%
You completely understand the processes that take place in administrative forums at governmental agencies (for example: DACO, ASUME, CRIM).	3%	29%	11%	36%	9%	12%
Legal processes in administrative forums take place, are evaluated, and are resolved within a reasonable amount of time.	1%	15%	14%	51%	12%	7%
You are aware of mediation services and understand their functions.	6%	35%	9%	28%	8%	14%
You feel safe with the presence of the police in your community.	10%	46%	13%	24%	7%	1%

- Thirty-six percent of participants say they “completely” understand the processes that take place in courts, while 32% indicate that they understand those that occur in administrative forums.
- Only 20% of surveyed individuals agrees that processes taking place in courts are completed within a reasonable amount of time, and 16% agrees concerning administrative forums.
- 4 out of each 10 participants answered that they are aware of and understand mediation services.
- 56% feels safe with the presence of the police in their community.

Please indicate the scale of your agreement or disagreement with the following arguments. Using the scale Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree, could you tell me the extent of your agreement or disagreement when I say that...? n=500

Agreement or Disagreement Arguments

Argument: You completely understand the processes that take place in courts, and you are aware of their purposes.

Understanding of Legal Processes and Purposes	Total	Man	Woman	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
Agree (strongly or partially)	36%	46%	27%	37%	37%	39%	32%
Disagree (strongly or partially)	39%	32%	46%	38%	36%	40%	44%
Percentage Point Difference	-3%	14%	19%	-1%	1%	-1%	-12%

Understanding of Legal Processes and Purposes	Total	Light	Intermediate	Dark	Less than High School	High School	More than High School
Agree (strongly or partially)	36%	37%	38%	25%	41%	42%	34%
Disagree (strongly or partially)	39%	42%	35%	52%	33%	40%	40%
Percentage Point Difference	-3%	-5%	3%	-27%	8%	2%	-6%

- People who identify with the masculine gender consider that they understand the processes that take place in courts more (46%) than those who identify with the feminine gender (27%). The opposite is the case within the age group of 65+ (44%), among whom more participants understand less of legal processes and purposes than the global average (39%).
- When the sample is segmented by skin color, the responses from the group that identifies as dark-skinned show a lesser understanding about the processes taking place in courts (52%) in comparison with light-skinned individuals (42%).
- The same happens with the group with a higher level of schooling, among which 40% expressed that they did not understand the processes, in contrast with the 33% among those who did not finish high school.

Please indicate the scale of your agreement or disagreement with the following arguments. Using the scale Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree, could you tell me the extent of your agreement or disagreement when I say that...? n=500

Agreement or Disagreement Arguments

Argument: Legal processes in courts take place within a reasonable amount of time.

Legal Processes Take Place within Reasonable Amount of Time	Total	Man	Woman	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
Agree (strongly or partially)	21%	23%	20%	27%	21%	15%	20%
Disagree (strongly or partially)	61%	62%	61%	52%	59%	68%	64%
Percentage Point Difference	-40%	-39%	-41%	-25%	-38%	-53%	-44%

Legal Processes Take Place within Reasonable Amount of Time	Total	Light	Intermediate	Dark	Less than High School	High School	More than High School
Agree (strongly or partially)	21%	28%	18%	17%	28%	32%	17%
Disagree (strongly or partially)	61%	54%	64%	66%	60%	51%	65%
Percentage Point Difference	-40%	-26%	-46%	-49%	-32%	-19%	-48%

- Most participants agree that legal processes in courts take too much time.
- There is a difference by skin color. The proportion of dark-skinned individuals who disagree with the argument that legal processes in courts take place within a reasonable amount of time is 66%, while among light-skinned folks, 54% disagrees.
- At least 65% of those who have a higher level of schooling than high school or who are among the ages of 50–64 disagree that legal processes are completed within a reasonable period.

Please indicate the scale of your agreement or disagreement with the following arguments. Using the scale Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree, could you tell me the extent of your agreement or disagreement when I say that...? n=500

Agreement or Disagreement Arguments

Argument: You completely understand the processes that take place in administrative forums at governmental agencies (for example: DACO, ASUME, CRIM).

Understanding of Administrative Processes	Total	Man	Woman	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
Agree (strongly or partially)	32%	38%	27%	41%	31%	29%	26%
Disagree (strongly or partially)	45%	42%	47%	41%	43%	48%	47%
Percentage Point Difference	-13%	-4%	-20%	0%	-12%	-19%	-21%

Understanding of Administrative Processes	Total	Light	Intermediate	Dark	Less than High School	High School	More than High School
Agree (strongly or partially)	32%	34%	30%	36%	35%	34%	31%
Disagree (strongly or partially)	45%	43%	46%	42%	27%	48%	46%
Percentage Point Difference	-13%	-9%	-16%	-6%	8%	-14%	-15%

- With a negative difference of 20 percentage points, most women respond that they do not understand administrative processes.
- The proportion of men who answered that they completely understand administrative processes (38%) is close to that of men who say they do not understand them.
- When analyzing age groups, we notice that, as the age increases, the understanding of administrative processes decreases.
- If we segment by skin color, it is notable that the lowest proportion (30%) of those who say they completely understand processes at administrative forums consider themselves as having skin colors classified as intermediate (3 and 4).

Please indicate the scale of your agreement or disagreement with the following arguments. Using the scale Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree, could you tell me the extent of your agreement or disagreement when I say that...? n=500

Agreement or Disagreement Arguments

Argument: Legal processes in administrative forums take place, are evaluated, and are resolved within a reasonable amount of time.

Administrative Processes Take Place within Reasonable Amount of Time	Total	Man	Woman	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
Agree (strongly or partially)	16%	16%	17%	22%	15%	12%	15%
Disagree (strongly or partially)	63%	67%	59%	46%	66%	75%	67%
Percentage Point Difference	-47%	-51%	-42%	-24%	-51%	-63%	-52%

Administrative Processes Take Place within Reasonable Amount of Time	Total	Light	Intermediate	Dark	Less than High School	High School	More than High School
Agree (strongly or partially)	16%	20%	15%	9%	28%	27%	12%
Disagree (strongly or partially)	63%	54%	66%	69%	43%	58%	66%
Percentage Point Difference	-47%	-34%	-51%	-60%	-15%	-31%	-54%

- The overwhelming majority of participants (63%) consider that processes at administrative forums take too long to be resolved, even more so than at the courts. There were no significant differences in this question by gender.
- The age group of 50–64 and those who consider themselves dark-skinned are the participants who believe that administrative processes take too long (75% and 69%, respectively), while 54% of lighter-skinned individuals believes the same. Forty-six percent of the youngest sample thinks that these processes are not completed within a reasonable period.

Please indicate the scale of your agreement or disagreement with the following arguments. Using the scale Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree, could you tell me the extent of your agreement or disagreement when I say that...? n=500

Agreement or Disagreement Arguments

Argument: You are aware of mediation services and understand their functions.

Awareness of Mediation Services and Functions	Total	Man	Woman	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
Agree (strongly or partially)	41%	45%	39%	41%	47%	48%	32%
Disagree (strongly or partially)	36%	36%	36%	37%	30%	28%	46%
Percentage Point Difference	5%	9%	3%	4%	17%	20%	-14%

Awareness of Mediation Services and Functions	Total	Light	Intermediate	Dark	Menos de HS	High School	Más que HS
Agree (strongly or partially)	48%	40%	33%	31%	26%	47%	48%
Disagree (strongly or partially)	34%	36%	43%	33%	52%	31%	34%
Percentage Point Difference	14%	4%	-10%	-2%	-26%	16%	14%

- Close to 4 out of each 10 interviewed participants say that they are aware of and understand mediation services. The proportion was slightly greater among men than women.
- The age group of 65+ is the only one among which the majority (46%) does not understand these services. The same is the case for the group with a lower level of schooling (52%).
- When compared to the light-skinned group (40%), the awareness concerning mediation services was low (31%) among dark-skinned participants.

Please indicate the scale of your agreement or disagreement with the following arguments. Using the scale Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree, could you tell me the extent of your agreement or disagreement when I say that...? n=500

Agreement or Disagreement Arguments

Argument: You feel safe with the presence of the police in your community.

You Feel Safe with the Police	Total	Man	Woman	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
Agree (strongly or partially)	56%	54%	57%	59%	51%	55%	57%
Disagree (strongly or partially)	31%	31%	30%	30%	27%	32%	32%
Percentage Point Difference	25%	23%	27%	29%	24%	23%	25%
You Feel Safe with the Police	Total	Light	Intermediate	Dark	Less than High School	High School	More than High School
Agree (strongly or partially)	56%	56%	53%	66%	64%	56%	55%
Disagree (strongly or partially)	31%	30%	31%	25%	27%	37%	29%
Percentage Point Difference	25%	26%	22%	41%	37%	19%	26%

- Close to 56% of surveyed participants say that they feel safe when there is police presence in their communities. There is no significant difference by gender.
- The differences by age are primarily observed among the 35–49 age group, as 51% said they agreed with the argument, as well as with the youngest participants, who reported agreement corresponding to 59%.
- Individuals with dark skin and those with a lower than high school level of schooling exhibit greater agreement with the argument.

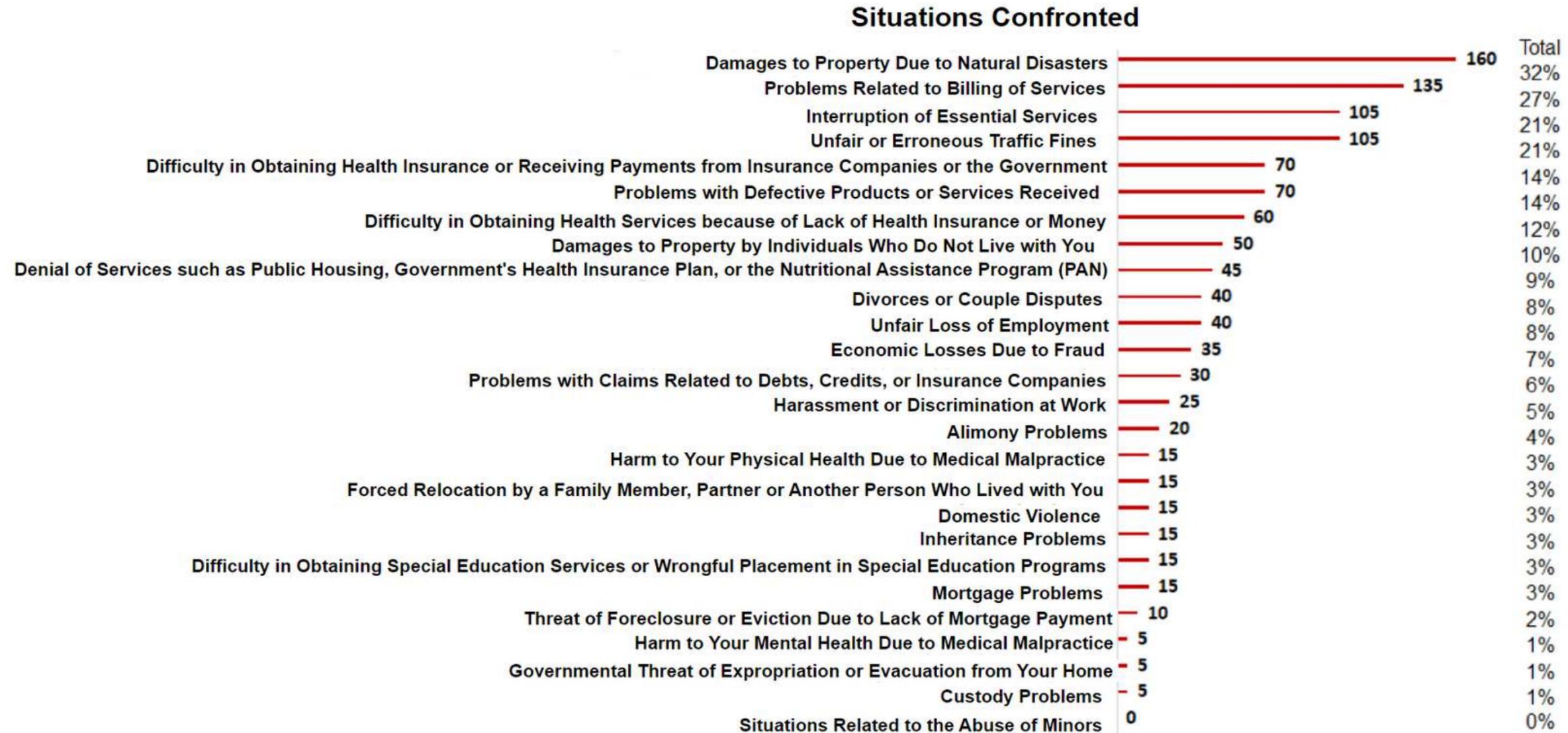
Please indicate the scale of your agreement or disagreement with the following arguments. Using the scale Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree, could you tell me the extent of your agreement or disagreement when I say that...? n=500

Part II.

Experiences with Legal Processes

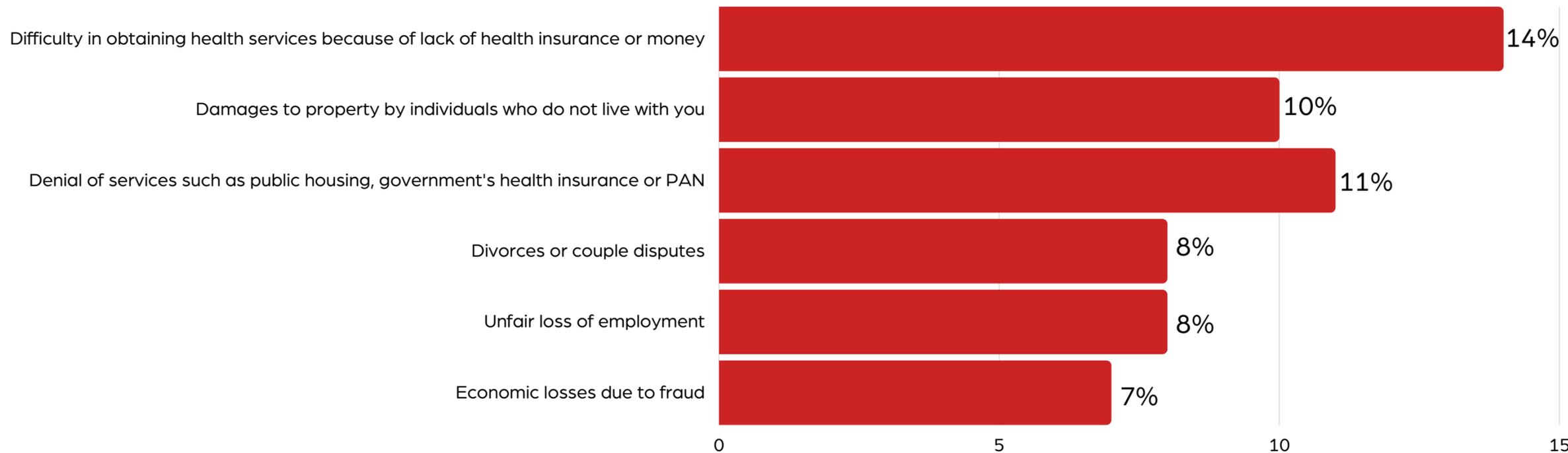
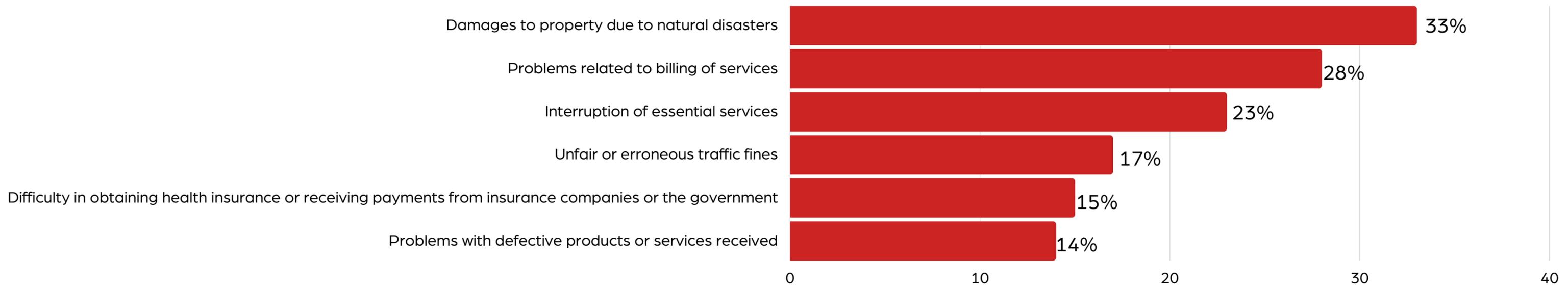


Experiences with Legal Processes



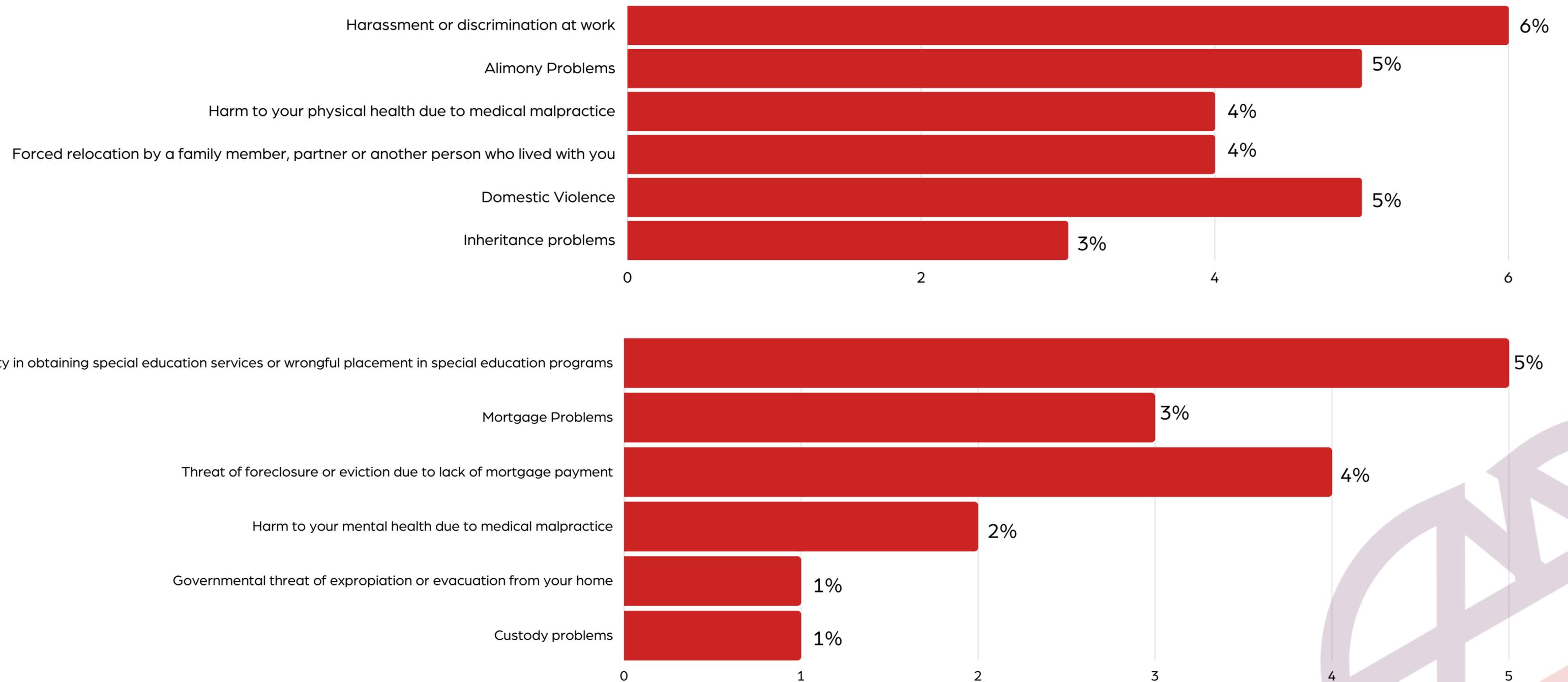
- The most common situations confronted by participants are:
 1. Damages to Property Due to Natural Disasters (32%)
 2. Problems Related to Essential Services and to the Billing of Services (27% y 21%)
 3. Unfair or Erroneous Traffic Fines (21%)
- At the time this Study was conducted, the average of confronted situations by each person interviewed was 2.1 situations.

Experiences with Legal Processes by **gender: women**

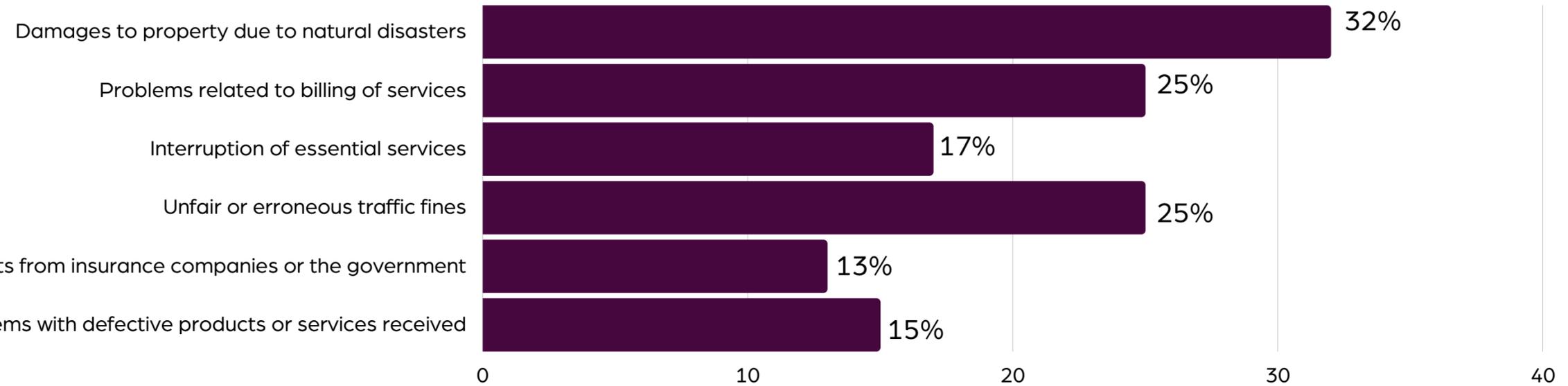


- Except on processes related to traffic fines, women tend to experiment more legal situations than men. The greatest differences by gender concern interruption of essential services, domestic violence, threat of foreclosure or eviction, problems with obtaining health insurance, or education services.

Experiences with Legal Processes by **gender: women**

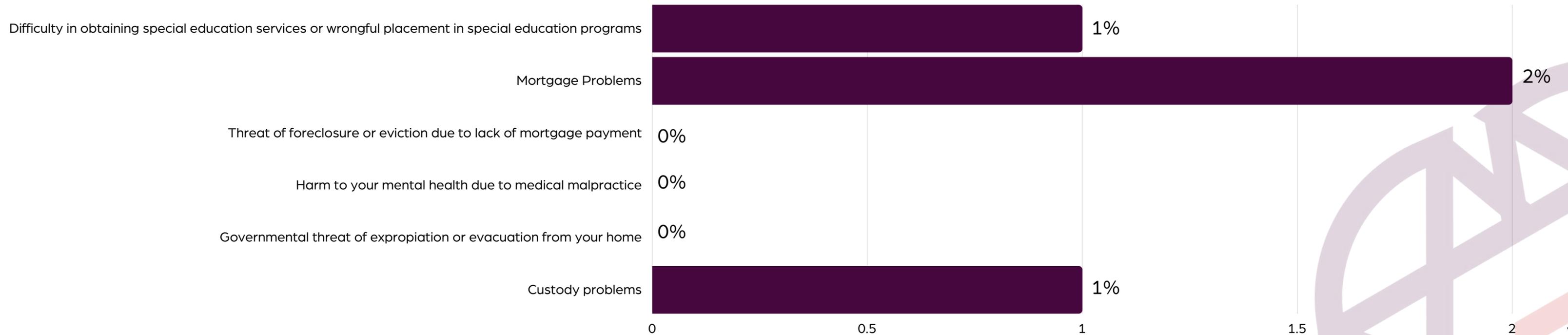


Experiences with Legal Processes by Gender: Men



- Except on processes related to traffic fines, women tend to experience more legal situations than men. The greatest differences by gender concern interruption of essential services, domestic violence, threat of foreclosure or eviction, problems with obtaining health insurance, or education services.

Experiences with Legal Processes by Gender: Men



Experiences with Legal Processes by Gender

Situations Confronted by Gender

Average by person	2.21
Man	2.03
Woman	2.39
18-34	2.11
35-49	2.74
50-64	2.58
65+	1.55
Light	2.1
Intermediate	2.32
Dark	2.05
Less than High School	1.37
High School	1.86
More than High School	2.42

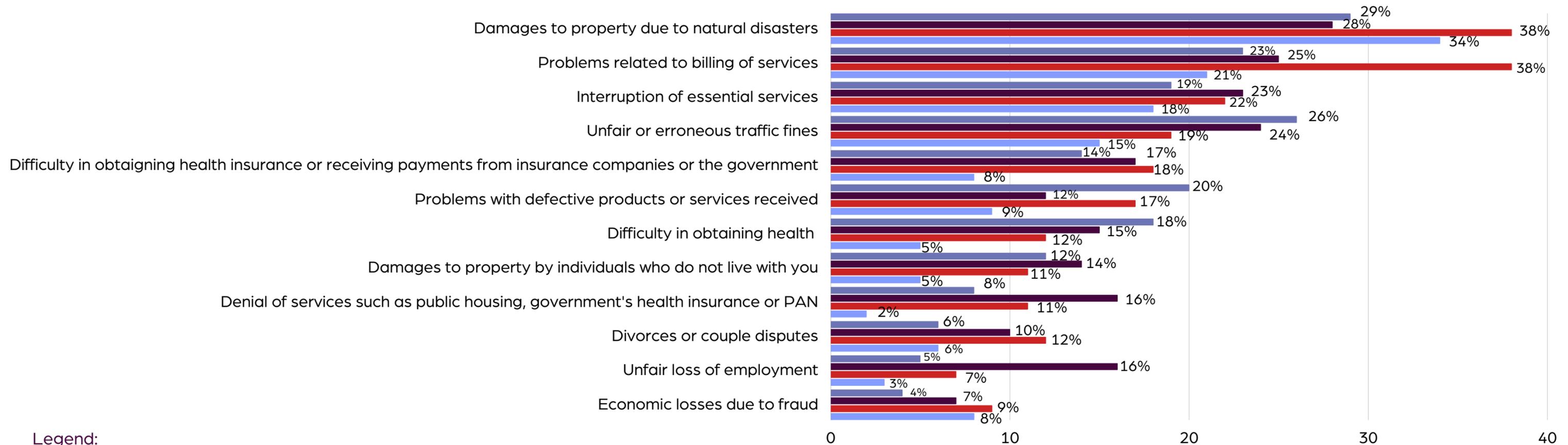
Situations Confronted	Total	Man	Woman	Total
Damages to Property Due to Natural Disasters	160	63	100	32%
Problems Related to Billing of Services	135	50	85	27%
Interruption of Essential Services	105	34	69	21%
Unfair or Erroneous Traffic Fines	105	50	51	21%
Difficulty in Obtaining Health Insurance or Receiving Payments from Insurance Companies or the Government	70	26	45	14%
Problems with Defective Products or Services Received	70	30	42	14%
Difficulty in Obtaining Health Services because of Lack of Health Insurance or Money	60	20	42	12%
Damages to Property by Individuals Who Do Not Live with You	50	22	30	10%
Denial of Services such as Public Housing, Government's Health Insurance Plan, or the Nutritional Assistance Program (PAN)	45	14	33	9%
Divorces or Couple Disputes	40	18	24	8%
Unfair Loss of Employment	40	14	24	8%
Economic Losses Due to Fraud	35	14	21	7%
Problems with Claims Related to Debts, Credits, or Insurance Companies	30	10	24	6%
Harassment or Discrimination at Work	25	10	18	5%
Alimony Problems	20	8	15	4%
Harm to Your Physical Health Due to Medical Malpractice	15	4	12	3%
Forced Relocation by a Family Member, Partner or Another Person Who Lived with You	15	4	12	3%
Domestic Violence	15	0	15	3%
Inheritance Problems	15	6	9	3%
Difficulty in Obtaining Special Education Services or Wrongful Placement in Special Education Programs	15	2	15	3%
Mortgage Problems	15	4	9	3%
Threat of Foreclosure or Eviction Due to Lack of Mortgage Payment	10	0	12	2%
Harm to Your Mental Health Due to Medical Malpractice	5	0	6	1%
Governmental Threat of Expropriation or Evacuation from Your Home	5	0	3	1%
Custody Problems	5	2	3	0%

- Women, individuals between the ages of 35 and 64, folks with intermediate skin colors, and those with higher levels of schooling seem to have experienced more legal situations than the average of the total surveyed population.
- Among women, there is a greater incidence of situations such as damages to property, erroneous billing of services, interruptions in essential services, domestic violence, evictions, and malpractice, among others.

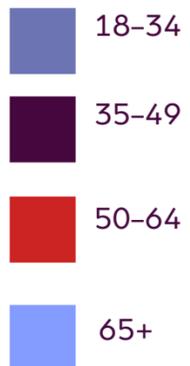
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Experiences with Legal Processes by Age

Situations Confronted by Age



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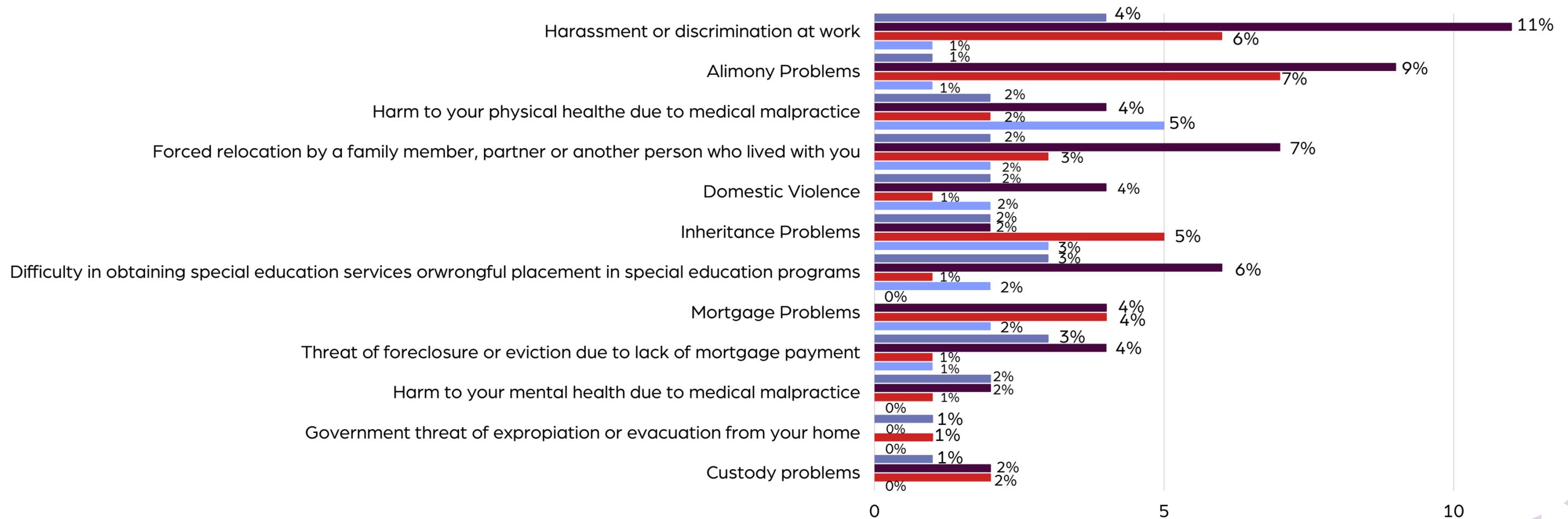


- The legal situations that people confronted are related to their age. Fifty-nine percent of folks facing problems with the billing of essential services and 72% of those dealing with damages to their property because of natural disasters are over 50 years of age. But the youngest population had the most experience with traffic fines (26%), obtaining health services (18%), or dealing with defective products (20%).
- The 35-49 age group had a greater incidence of unfair loss of employment (16%), denial of public services (16%), and damages to their property by individuals who do not live with them (14%).

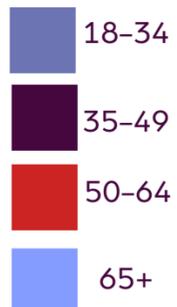
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Experiences with Legal Processes by Age

Situations Confronted by Age



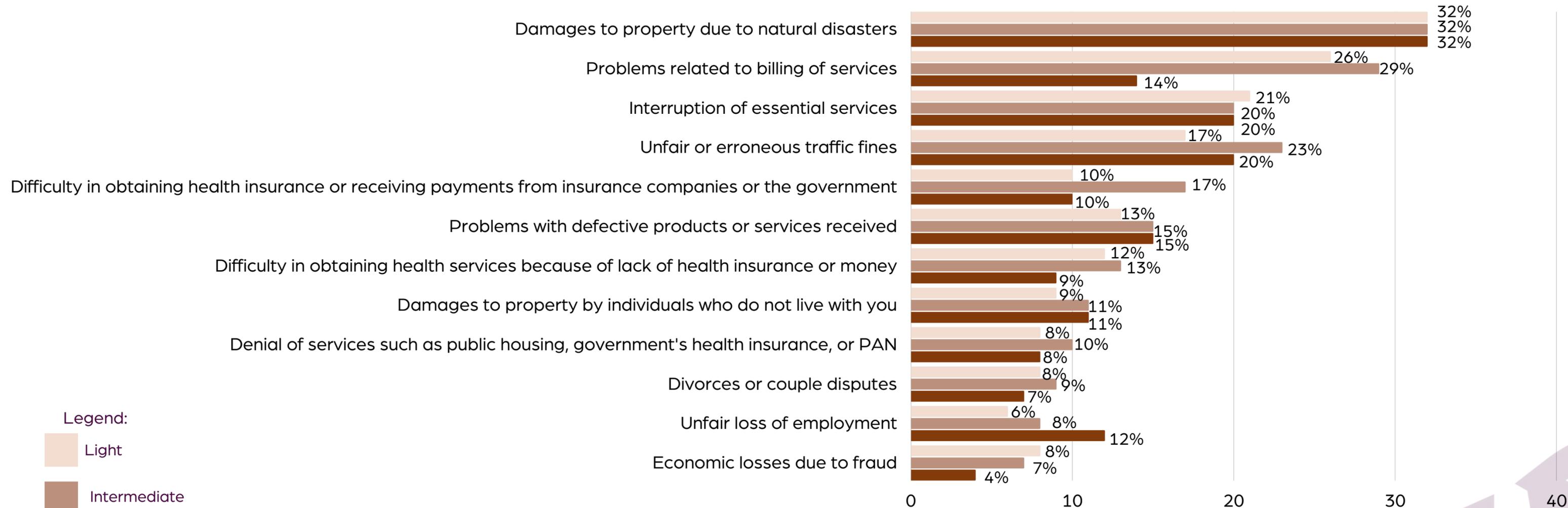
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Experiences with Legal Processes by Skin Color

Situations Confronted by Skin Color

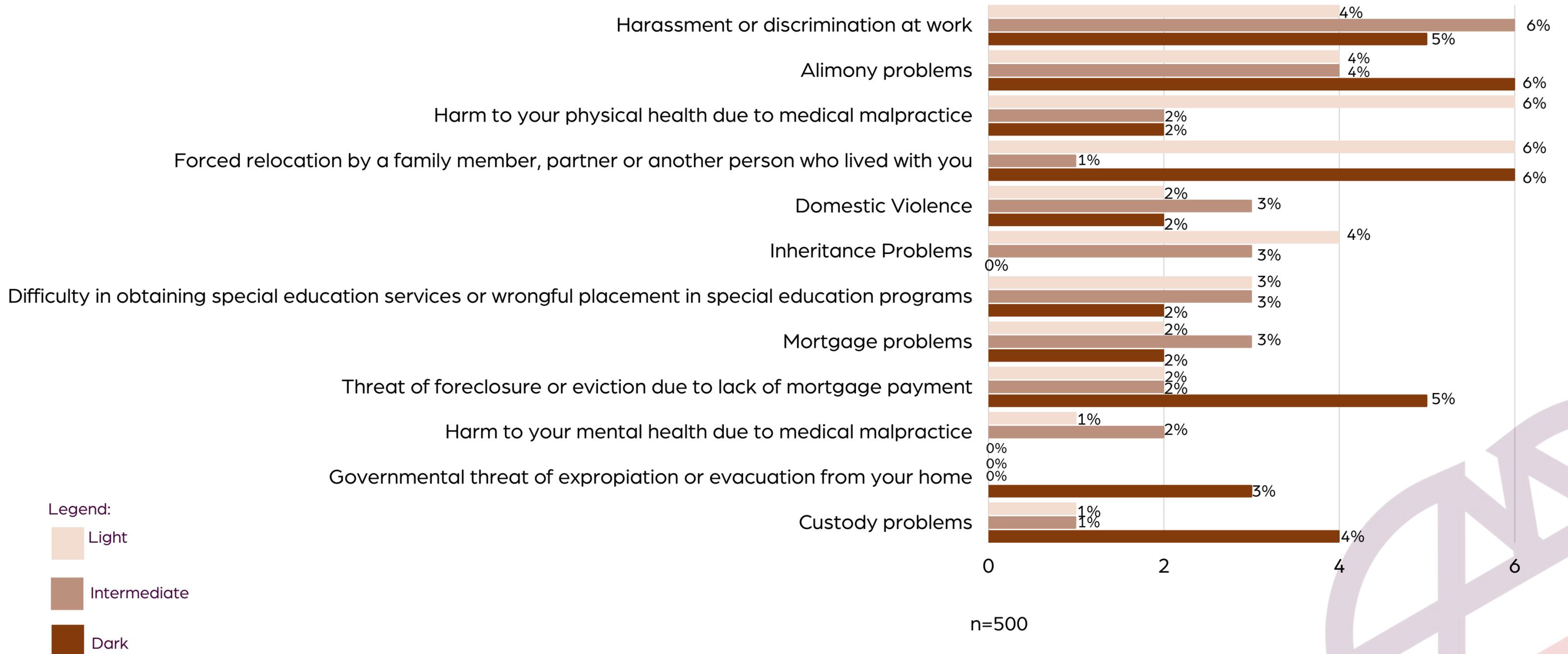


- Although there are no statistically significant differences in the proportions of people with different skin colors who confronted many of the legal situations included in this Study, there are some areas where differences are quite pronounced.
- Individuals with intermediate skin colors face the most problems with essential services and with obtaining health insurance.
- Participants with dark skin have a higher incidence of problems with billing errors, obtaining health services, unfair employment loss, fraud, custody problems, and the threat of foreclosure or eviction.

n=500

Experiences with Legal Processes by Skin Color

Situations confronted by Skin Color



Experiences with Legal Processes by **Level of Schooling**

Situation Confronted by Level of Schooling

Situations Confronted	Total	Less than HS	High School	More than HS
Damages to Property Due to Natural Disasters	160	33.3%	27.0%	33.6%
Problems Related to Billing of Services	135	12.5%	17.1%	30.5%
Interruption of Essential Services	105	12.5%	18.9%	22.4%
Unfair or Erroneous Traffic Fines	105	20.8%	17.1%	23.5%
Difficulty in Obtaining Health Insurance or Receiving Payments from Insurance Companies or the Government	70	8.3%	8.1%	16.2%
Problems with Defective Products or Services Received	70	12.5%	11.7%	15.4%
Difficulty in Obtaining Health Services because of Lack of Health Insurance or Money	60	8.3%	10.8%	13.2%
Damages to Property by Individuals Who Do Not Live with You	50	8.3%	6.3%	12.3%
Denial of Services such as Public Housing, Government Health Insurance Plan, or the Nutritional Assistance Program	45	0.0%	6.3%	11.2%
Divorces or Couple Disputes	40	12.5%	5.4%	9.2%
Unfair Loss of Employment	40	0.0%	6.3%	8.1%
Economic Losses Due to Fraud	35	4.2%	7.2%	7.0%
Problems with Claims Related to Debts, Credits, or Insurance Companies	30	8.3%	4.5%	7.0%
Harassment or Discrimination at Work	25	0.0%	2.7%	7.0%
Alimony Problems	20	8.3%	2.7%	5.0%
Harm to Your Physical Health Due to Medical Malpractice	15	8.3%	2.7%	3.1%
Forced Relocation by a Family Member, Partner or Another Person Who Lived with You	15	0.0%	1.8%	4.2%
Domestic Violence	15	4.2%	2.7%	2.0%
Inheritance Problems	15	0.0%	2.7%	3.1%
Difficulty in Obtaining Special Education Services or Wrongful Placement in Special Education Programs	15	0.0%	3.6%	3.1%
Mortgage Problems	15	0.0%	0.0%	4.2%
Threat of Foreclosure or Eviction Due to Lack of Mortgage Payment	10	0.0%	2.7%	2.0%
Harm to Your Mental Health Due to Medical Malpractice	5	0.0%	0.9%	1.1%
Governmental Threat of Expropriation or Evacuation from Your Home	5	0.0%	1.8%	0.0%
Custody Problems	5	0.0%	0.0%	2.0%

- The proportions of individuals with postsecondary education who confronted legal situations are higher than those of other groups in all areas except for:
 - Divorces or couple disputes, problems with monetary claims, alimony problems, medical malpractice, domestic violence (which was higher among those with a less-than-high-school level of formal education), and economic losses due to fraud (greater incidence among group that completed high school).

n=500

Experiences with Legal Processes

Situations Confronted	Percentage of Those Who Confronted It	Taken to Court	Taken to Administrative Forum	Never	Does Not Know/ Does Not Respond
Harm to Your Physical Health Due to Medical Malpractice	6%	1%	0%	92%	1%
Harm to Your Mental Health Due to Medical Malpractice	1%	0%	0%	98%	0%
Difficulty in Obtaining Health Services because of Lack of Health Insurance or Money	12%	0%	0%	87%	0%
Difficulty in Obtaining Health Insurance or Receiving Payments from Insurance Companies or the Government	14%	1%	1%	83%	1%
Damages to Property by Individuals Who Do Not Live with You	2%	10%	1%	87%	0%
Governmental Threat of Expropriation or Evacuation from Your Home	1%	0%	0%	99%	0%
Damages to Property Due to Natural Disasters	32%	1%	5%	62%	0%
Threat of Foreclosure or Eviction Due to Lack of Mortgage Payment	2%	0%	1%	97%	0%
Forced Relocation by a Family Member, Partner or Another Person Who Lived with You	3%	0%	0%	96%	0%
Economic Losses Due to Fraud	7%	0%	0%	92%	1%
Problems with Claims Related to Debts, Credits, or Insurance Companies	6%	1%	1%	91%	0%

- Among the most common situations confronted by participants are damages to property due to natural disasters, which is possibly related to hurricane Maria. Even so, very few of these cases have been taken to court.
- On the contrary, when compared to other legal situations, damages to property by individuals who do not live with the participant exhibit a high rate of being taken to court.

In what follows, I will read a few situations. For each one, please indicate whether you have confronted it at any point in your life, and if so, whether the situation has been taken to court or to an administrative forum at a government agency. Have you ever confronted or have been taken to court or to an administrative forum at a government agency because of...? n=500

Experiences with Legal Processes

Situations Confronted	Percentage of Those Who Confronted It	Taken to Court	Taken to Administrative Forum	Never	Does Not Know/ Does Not Respond
Problems with Defective Products or Services Received	14%	0%	1%	84%	1%
Custody Problems	1%	4%	0	94%	0%
Alimony Problems	4%	5%	0%	90%	0%
Situations Related to the Abuse of Minors	0%	1%	0%	99%	0%
Domestic Violence	3%	3%	0%	94%	0%
Divorces or Couple Disputes	8%	10%	0%	81%	0%
Inheritance Problems	3%	1%	1%	96%	0%
Denial of Services such as Public Housing, Government's Health Insurance Plan, or the Nutritional Assistance Program	9%	0%	0%	90%	1%
Problems Related to Billing of Services	27%	0%	3%	69%	1%
Interruption of Essential Services	21%	0%	1%	78%	0%
Unfair or Erroneous Traffic Fines	21%	7%	2%	70%	1%

- Problems with defective products, divorces, the government's public housing agency and other public agencies, services' billing errors, and traffic fines have a relatively high incidence of occurrence, but few cases are taken to court or to an administrative forum.
- The incidence of cases taken to court is present in family cases and those related to traffic fines.
- The greatest incidence of administrative cases was that of damages due to natural disasters, followed by problems with the billing of essential services.

In what follows, I will read a few situations. For each one, please indicate whether you have confronted it at any point in your life, and if so, whether the situation has been taken to court or to an administrative forum at a government agency. Have you ever confronted or have been taken to court or to an administrative forum at a government agency because of...? n=500

Experiences with Legal Processes

Situations Confronted	Percentage of Those Who Confronted It	Taken to Court	Taken to Administrative Forum	Never	Does Not Know/ Does Not Respond
Unfair Loss of Employment	8%	1%	1%	90%	0%
Harassment or Discrimination at Work	5%	1%	2%	91%	0%
Difficulty in Obtaining Special Education Services or Wrongful Placement in Special Education Programs	5%	1%	2%	91%	0%
Mortgage Problems	3%	0%	0%	96%	1%

In what follows, I will read a few situations. For each one, please indicate whether you have confronted it at any point in your life, and if so, whether the situation has been taken to court or to an administrative forum at a government agency. Have you ever confronted or have been taken to court or to an administrative forum at a government agency because of...? n=500

Part III.

**Individuals Who Handled
Situations without
Recourse to Legal Means**



Reasons to Evade Judicial Means

Reasons	%
I did not deem it necessary to seek counseling because I thought I could handle the situation without any help.	24%
I thought that solving the conflict would take too much time and effort.	18%
I think the judicial system is very complex.	15%
I thought that solving the conflict would imply too much stress and emotional burden	14%
I could not afford legal assistance services, or I thought it would be too expensive.	11%
I was not aware of my rights.	10%
I did not know how to get help.	9%
I did not know who to turn to for consultation.	9%
I thought a legal representative or counselor could not help	6%
I did not see the need to ask for help	6%
I feared I would be creating more problems if I sought help.	4%
I felt fear or shame.	3%
I used dialogue. / There was good communication.	3%
I dealt with it myself. / I did it personally.	2%
The process is still ongoing.	1%
Other	8%
Does Not Know/ Does Not Answer	11%

- Among the main reasons to solve situations without recourse to legal means, we find the following, in descending order:
 - not deeming it necessary
 - believing it would take too much time
 - considering that the judicial system is too complex
 - the stress it would cause
 - not being able to afford it
 - lack of understanding/knowledge

Reasons to Evade Judicial Means by Skin Color

Reasons	Light	Intermediate	Dark
I did not deem it necessary to seek counseling because I thought I could handle the situation without any help.	1	1	1
I thought that solving the conflict would imply too much stress and emotional burden.	2	4	7
I thought that solving the conflict would take too much time and effort.	3	2	2
I think the judicial system is very complex.	4	3	3
I did not know how to get help.	5	6	8
I did not know who to turn to for consultation.	6	8	4
I was not aware of my rights.	7	7	5
I could not afford legal assistance services, or I thought it would be too expensive.	8	5	6
I used dialogue. / There was good communication.	9	13	14
I feared I would be creating more problems if I sought help.	10	11	12
I felt fear or shame.	11	14	11
I thought a legal representative or counselor could not help.	12	9	13
I did not see the need to ask for help.	13	10	10
The process is still ongoing.	14	15	15
I dealt with it myself. / I did it personally.	15	12	9
Other	16	16	16
Does Not Know / Does Not Respond	17	17	17
It did not qualify.	18	18	18

- When analyzing the reasons why participants evade resolving the conflict through legal means, we notice significant patterns by skin color.
- Reasons such as “I did it personally” and “I did not see the need to ask for help” were the predominant motives among the population who identified as light-skinned.
- Among dark-skinned participants, the predominant reasons were: “I used dialogue”, “I thought a legal representative or counselor could not help”, and “I feared I would be creating more problems if I sought help”.
- The population identified as intermediate in terms of skin color primarily answered, “I felt fear or shame” and “I used dialogue”.

Reasons to Evade Judicial Means by **Level of Schooling**

Reasons	Less than HS	High School	More than HS
I did not deem it necessary to seek counseling because I thought I could handle the situation without any help.	1	1	1
I thought that solving the conflict would take too much time and effort.	2	9	2
I thought that solving the conflict would imply too much stress and emotional burden.	3	3	4
I could not afford legal assistance services, or I thought it would be too expensive.	4	10	5
I thought a legal representative or counselor could not help.	5	15 ←	9
I feared I would be creating more problems if I sought help.	6	11	11
I dealt with it myself. / I did it personally.	7	12	14 ←
I did not know how to get help.	8	4	7
I did not know who to turn to for consultation.	9	2	8
I was not aware of my rights.	10	5	6
I think the judicial system is very complex.	11	6	3
The process is still ongoing.	12	13	15
I felt fear or shame.	13	14 ←	12
I did not see the need to ask for help.	14 ←	7	10
I used dialogue. / There was good communication.	15 ←	8	13
Other	16	16	16
Does Not Know / Does Not Respond	17	17	17
It did not qualify.	18	18	18

- Among the group of participants who finished high school, the prevalent reasons for deciding not to resolve the situation with recourse to legal means were, "I felt fear or shame" and "I thought a legal representative or counselor could not help".
- Individuals who did not finish high school either did not see the need to resolve the issue through legal means or used dialogue.
- The group with the highest level of schooling responded that they dealt with the situation themselves.

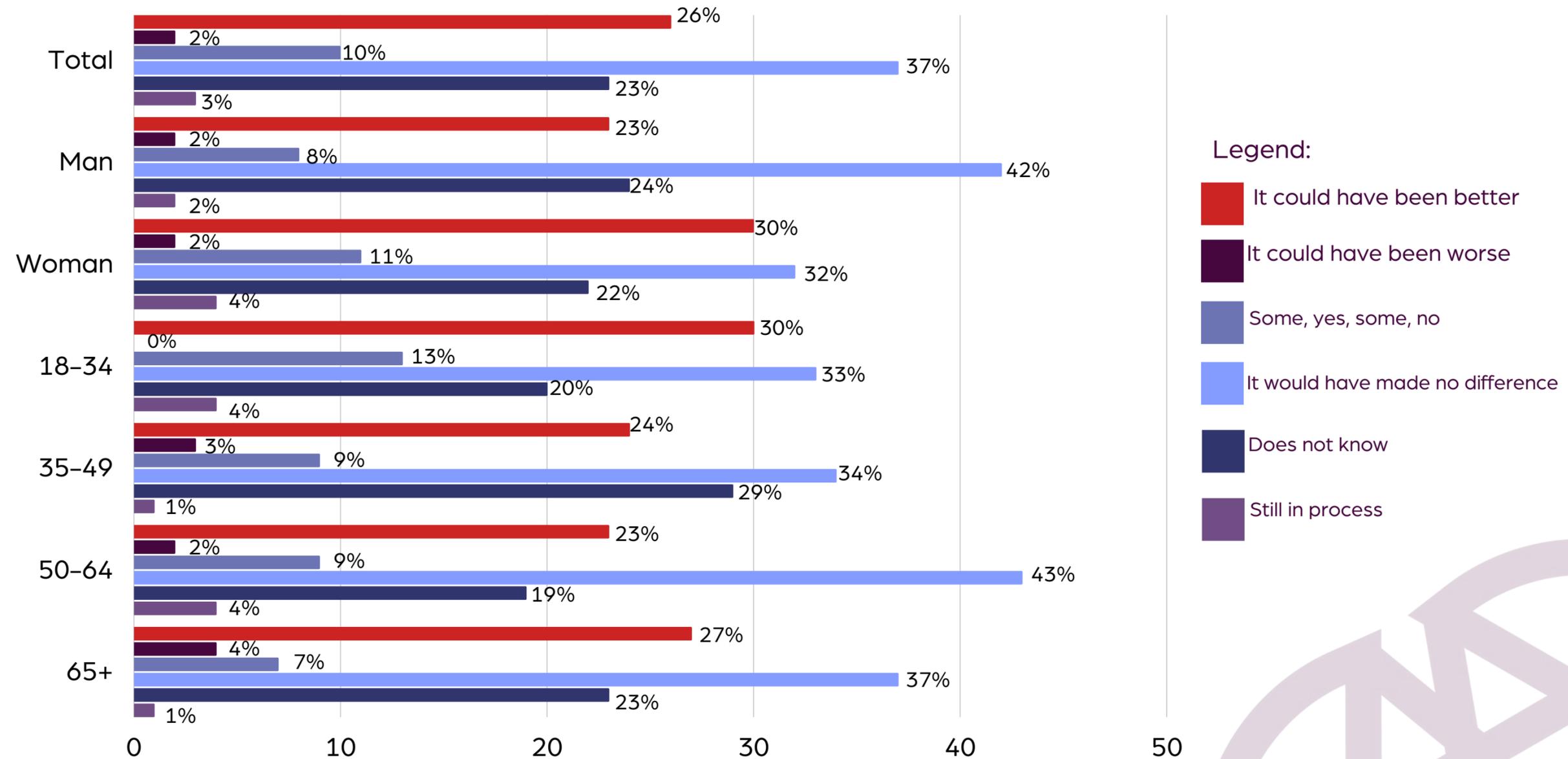
Reasons to Evade Judicial Means by Age

Reasons	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
I did not deem it necessary to seek counseling because I thought I could handle the situation without any help.	1	1	1	1
I thought that solving the conflict would take too much time and effort.	2	2	3	2
I think the judicial system is very complex.	3	4	2	6
I thought that solving the conflict would imply too much stress and emotional burden.	4	7	9	10
I could not afford legal assistance services, or I thought it would be too expensive.	5	3	5	3
I was not aware of my rights.	6	8	4	4
I did not know how to get help.	7	15	14	14
I did not know who to turn to for consultation.	8	5	6	8
I thought a legal representative or counselor could not help.	9	6	7	5
I did not see the need to ask for help.	10	9	10	11
I feared I would be creating more problems if I sought help.	11	10	8	9
I felt fear or shame.	12	13	15	7
I used dialogue. / There was good communication.	13	11	11	12
I dealt with it myself. / I did it personally.	14	14	13	15
The process is still ongoing.	15	12	12	13
Other	16	16	16	16
Does Not Know / Does Not Respond	17	17	17	17
It did not qualify.	18	18	18	18

- When evaluating the sample by age groups, the reasons not to resort to the legal system are relatively homogeneous.
- Some observable differences in the eldest group are stress and emotional burden, using dialogue, dealing with the situation themselves, ignorance concerning how to get help, among several others.

What Would Have Been the Result with Recourse to Legal Means?

- Twenty-six percent of those who did not resort to legal means believes that they could have obtained better results through it. By seven percentage points, women are the most optimistic in this respect.
- Close to 40% of participants believes it would have made no difference. This was particularly the case among men and individuals aged 50 or more.



Do you think that the situation you faced would have turned out differently if you had proceeded through the legal means? n=342

Part IV.

Individuals Who Handled

Situations with Recourse to Legal

Means



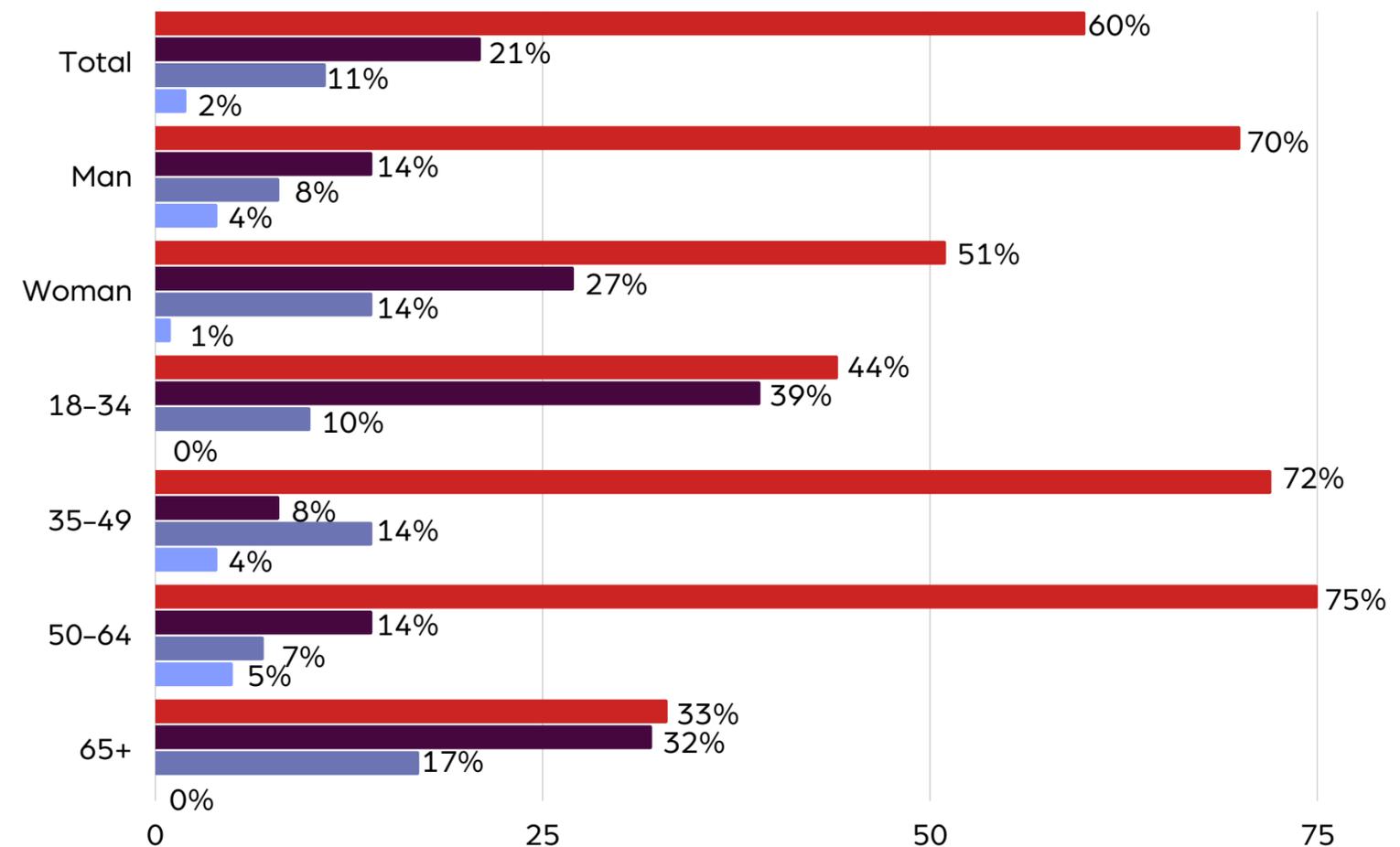
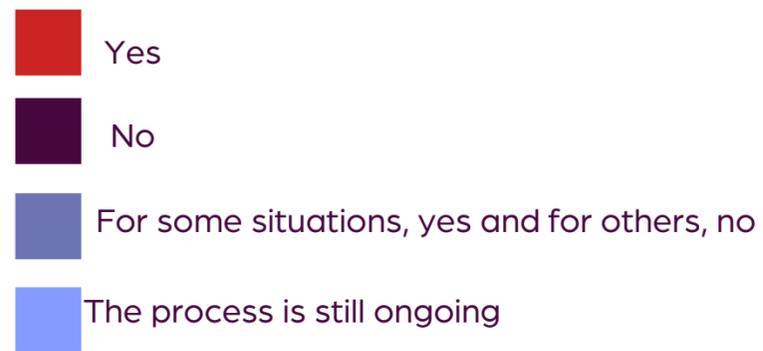
Request for Legal Assistance to Address the Situation at the Courts

Requested Legal Assistance	Total	Man	Woman	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+	Light	Intermediate	Dark	Less than HS	High School	More than HS
No	43%	50%	36%	41%	34%	51%	46%	49%	41%	30%	70%	48%	42%
Yes, and I received it.	40%	37%	43%	31%	52%	37%	39%	32%	42%	58%	0%	39%	42%
Yes, and I did not receive it.	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	2%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Yes, but they took too long in answering me.	1%	0%	1%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%	0%	0%	1%
Yes, but I did not understand the initial counseling they gave me.	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	3%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
I used the legal representation provided by the State.	2%	0%	4%	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%	0%	30%	0%	2%
I tried to resolve the situation on my own, without recourse to legal assistance.	9%	11%	6%	8%	8%	10%	8%	11%	8%	6%	0%	13%	8%

- More than 4 out of each 10 participants (43%) who utilized legal means to attempt to resolve the situation, did not request legal assistance or representation. Forty percent of surveyed individuals requested and received it, while 1 out of each 10 asked for legal representation but did not receive it.
- Most men (50%) chose not to request legal assistance, in contrast with 36% of women who did the same.
- The greatest proportion of individuals in the following groups decided not to request legal assistance: those among the ages 50–64 (51%), light-skinned people (49%), and folks who did not finish high school (70%).
- Thirty percent of the population who did not finish high school used the legal representation provided by the State, well above the 2% of participants with postsecondary studies who took the same course of action. Women (4%) and the youngest (8%) also resorted to these governmental services to some extent.
- Fifty-eight percent of dark-skinned individuals requested legal assistance, in contrast with 32% of light-skinned people who did the same.

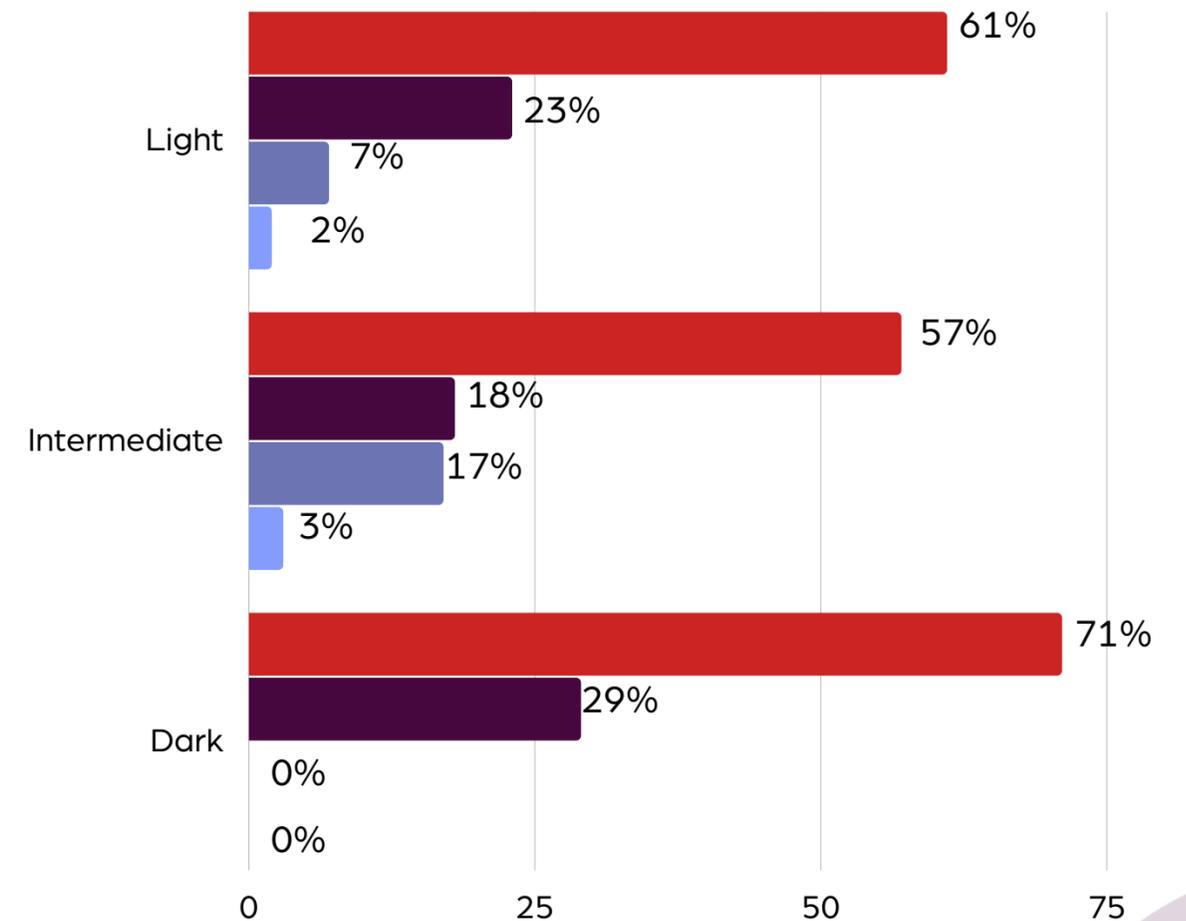
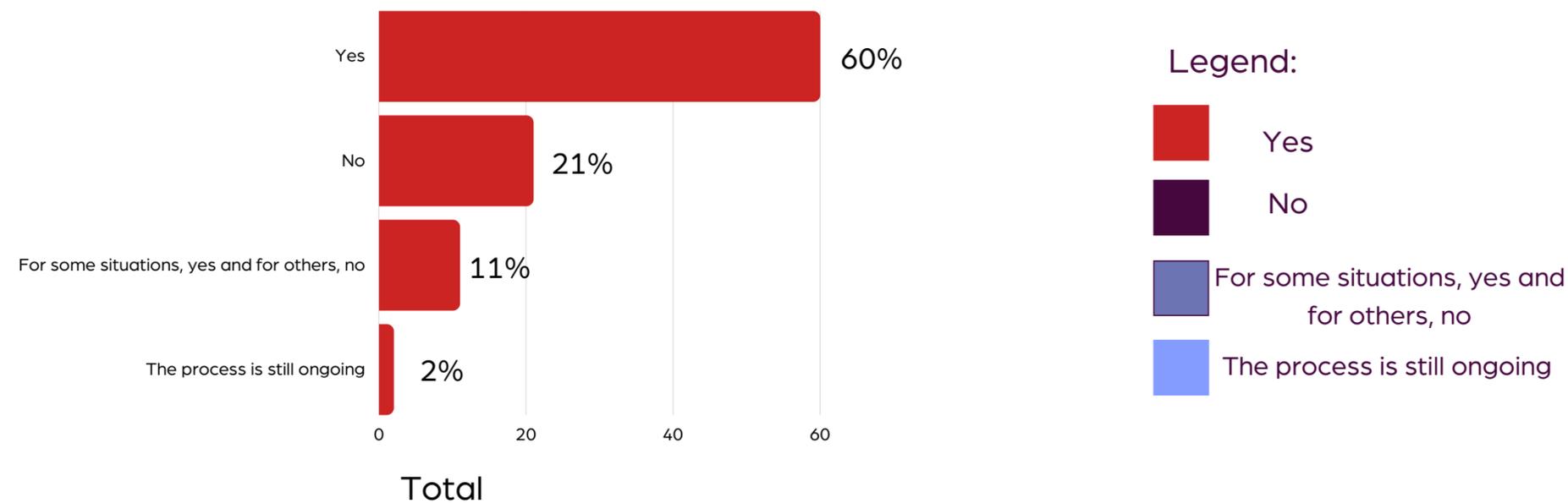
Satisfaction with Remedies Obtained through Legal Means by Gender and Age

Legend:



- 6 out of each 10 participants who opted to confront their situations with recourse to legal means feel satisfied with the remedies obtained. However, the level of satisfaction drops to 43% among those with the lowest incomes, while it increases to 89% among those with an annual income of \$50,000 or more.
- 1 out of each 5 (21%) surveyed individuals was not satisfied with the result obtained.
- The youngest participants and women have the lowest levels of satisfaction, while the responses from the 65+ years old group are distributed across all the options.
- There was a group of participants that did not know/did not respond.

Satisfaction with Remedies Obtained through Legal Means by Skin Color



- The level of satisfaction with the remedy obtained through legal means was greater among dark-skinned participants. Moreover, as we previously saw, this group requested legal assistance in a greater proportion.
- Light- or intermediate-skinned groups respectively reported 7% and 17% of situations still ongoing at the time of the survey.

Conflict Resolution After the Court Process

Did the problems continue?	Total	Man	Woman	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+	Light	Intermediate	Dark	Less than High School	High School	More than High School
Yes	11%	9%	13%	13%	14%	5%	12%	9%	14%	0%	30%	0%	12%
No	66%	75%	58%	56%	65%	75%	64%	75%	57%	76%	70%	82%	64%
For some situations, yes, for others, no	17%	11%	22%	31%	15%	11%	9%	11%	19%	24%	0%	18%	16%
The process is still ongoing	3%	2%	5%	0%	0%	9%	3%	2%	5%	0%	0%	0%	4%
Does Not Know/ Does Not Respond	4%	5%	3%	0%	7%	0%	11%	3%	5%	0%	0%	0%	4%

- Sixty-six percent of those interviewed who turned to legal means said that, once the court process concluded, problems ceased.
- Seventeen percent considers that, on some occasions when they took a case to court, the situation was not resolved, while 3% (about 4 individuals) said that, at the moment of the survey, the process was still ongoing.
- More men (75%) than women (58%) informed that the problem was resolved. The same was registered among the 50–64 age group (75%) and those who finished high school (82%).

Payment for Legal Services

Did you pay for legal services?	Total	Man	Woman	Light	Intermediate	Dark
	53	20	33	16	28	9
Yes, it was a private service.	63%	83%	49%	51%	58%	100%
No, it was a free, government service.	25%	11%	35%	21%	36%	
No, it was a free service from a nonprofit.	4%	6%	2%	5%	4%	
Sometimes, yes, others, no.	4%		6%	13%		
Does Not Know/ Does Not Respond	4%		7%	10%	2%	

- Sixty-three percent of those interviewed who took their cases to court used a private service.
- One fourth (25%) of the sample turned to a free, government service.
- A greater proportion of men (83%) than women (49%) paid for private legal services.
- One hundred percent of dark-skinned participants paid to receive legal services.
- Thirty-five percent of women sought assistance through a government service provider, as well as 36% of folks who identify with intermediate skin colors.

Requesting Legal Services

How did you obtain legal services?	Base 53 (n=53)
I already had a lawyer before the process started.	8
I personally knew a lawyer.	9
An attorney who was recommended by a family member, friend, or acquaintances.	17
Referred to me by a legal program or service.	5
Found through an advertisement, sign, or any other form of publicity.	1
Other, explain.	9
Does Not Know	4

- Most of the interviewees turned to a legal professional who was recommended by a family member or friend.
- 9 out of the 53 individuals already knew a lawyer, and 8 out the 53 already had an attorney–client relationship with the person who represented them.

Reasons for Not Receiving Legal Assistance	Total (Percentage)	Individuals (Quantity)
It was innecessary/ I thought it was not necessary.	34%	18
I did not deem it necessary to seek counseling because I thought I could handle the situation without any help.	26%	14
I could not afford legal assistance services, or I thought it would be too expensive.	17%	9
I think the judicial system is very complex.	12%	6
I thought that solving the conflict would take too much time and effort.	8%	4
I was not aware of my rights.	7%	4
I did not know how to get help.	6%	3
I did not know who to turn to for consultation.	4%	2
I thought that solving tha conflict would imply too much stress and emotional burden.	4%	2
I thought a legal representative or counselor could not help.	4%	2
I felt fear or shame.	2%	1
I feared I would be creating more problems if I sought help.	2%	1

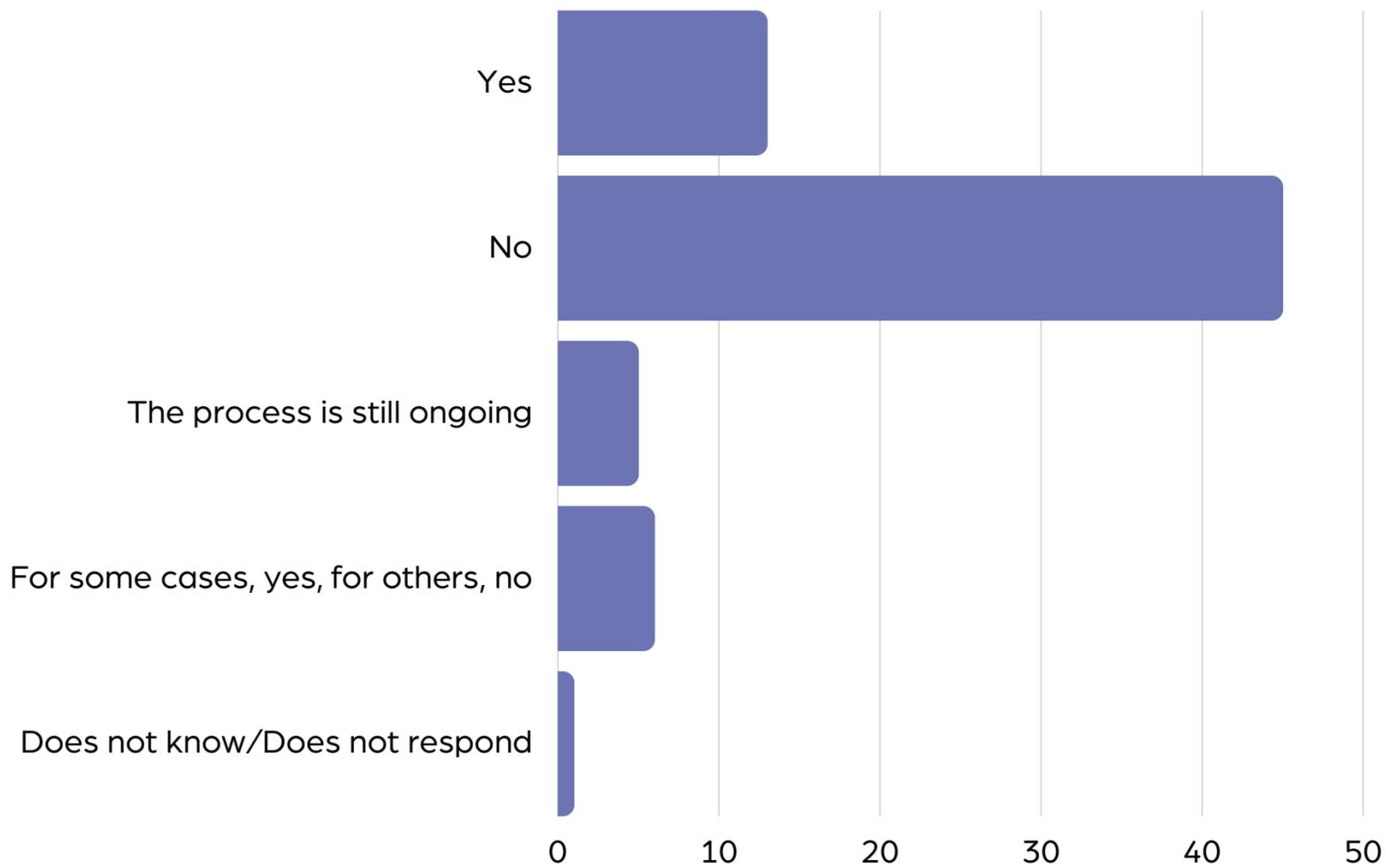
- In those cases where individuals did not opt to use legal means:
 - Thirty–four percent did not deem it necessary.
 - One fourth (26%) of participants considered they could handle the situation without external help.
 - If we join these two groups, we can infer that 60% believed they did not need legal support.
 - Close to 1 in each 5 participants manifested that they could not afford legal services.
 - 1 in each 10 thought that the system was too complex, in addition to other reasons mentioned by one or two individuals.

Part V.

**Individuals Who Handled
Situations With Recourse to
Other Forums**



Satisfaction with Administrative Remedies Obtained

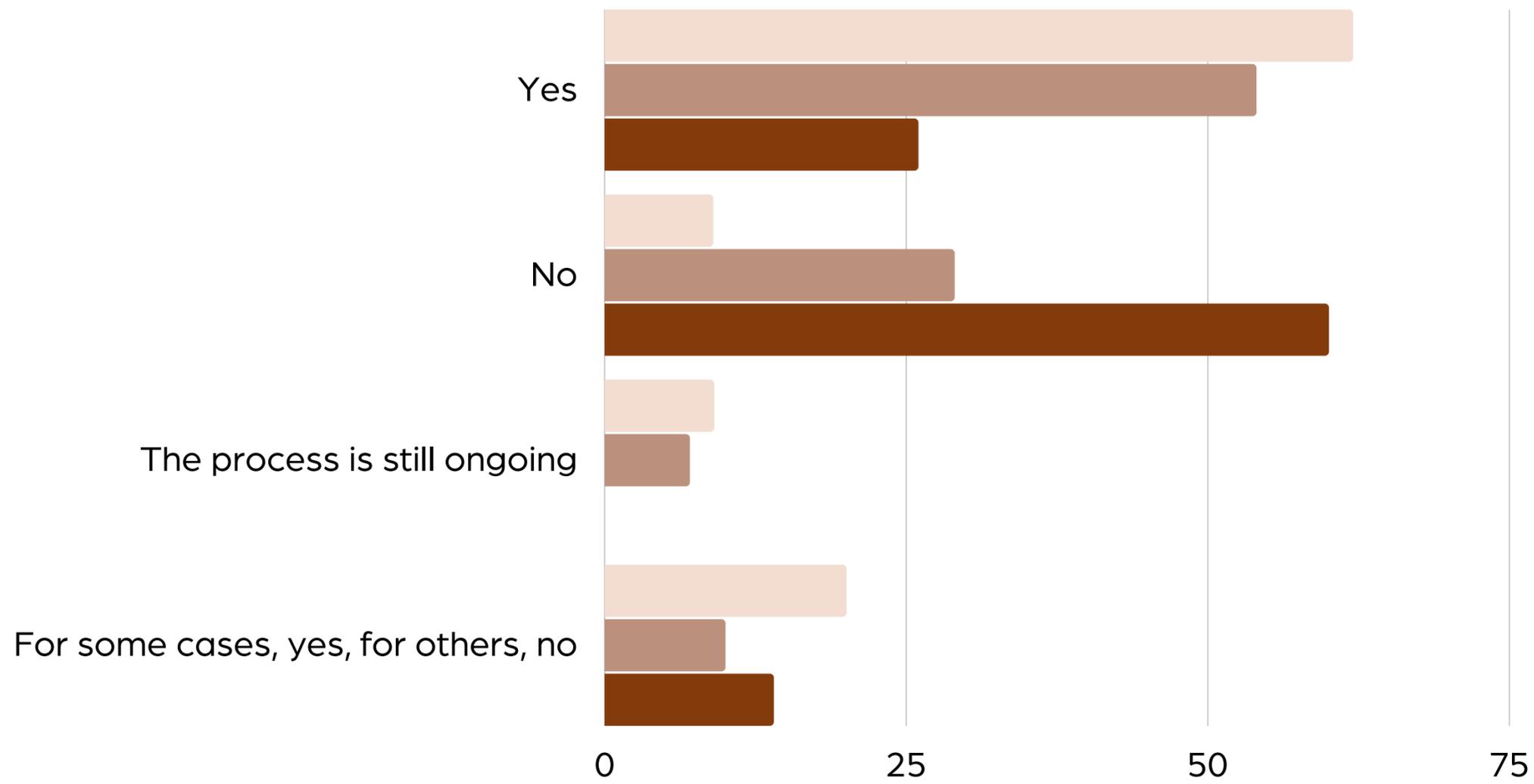


- Fourteen percent of participants in the study took their situations to administrative forums.
- Of these, 53% felt satisfied with the remedies obtained, while a little over 1 out of each 4 of them was not (26%).

Do you feel satisfied with the remedies granted by the administrative n=71



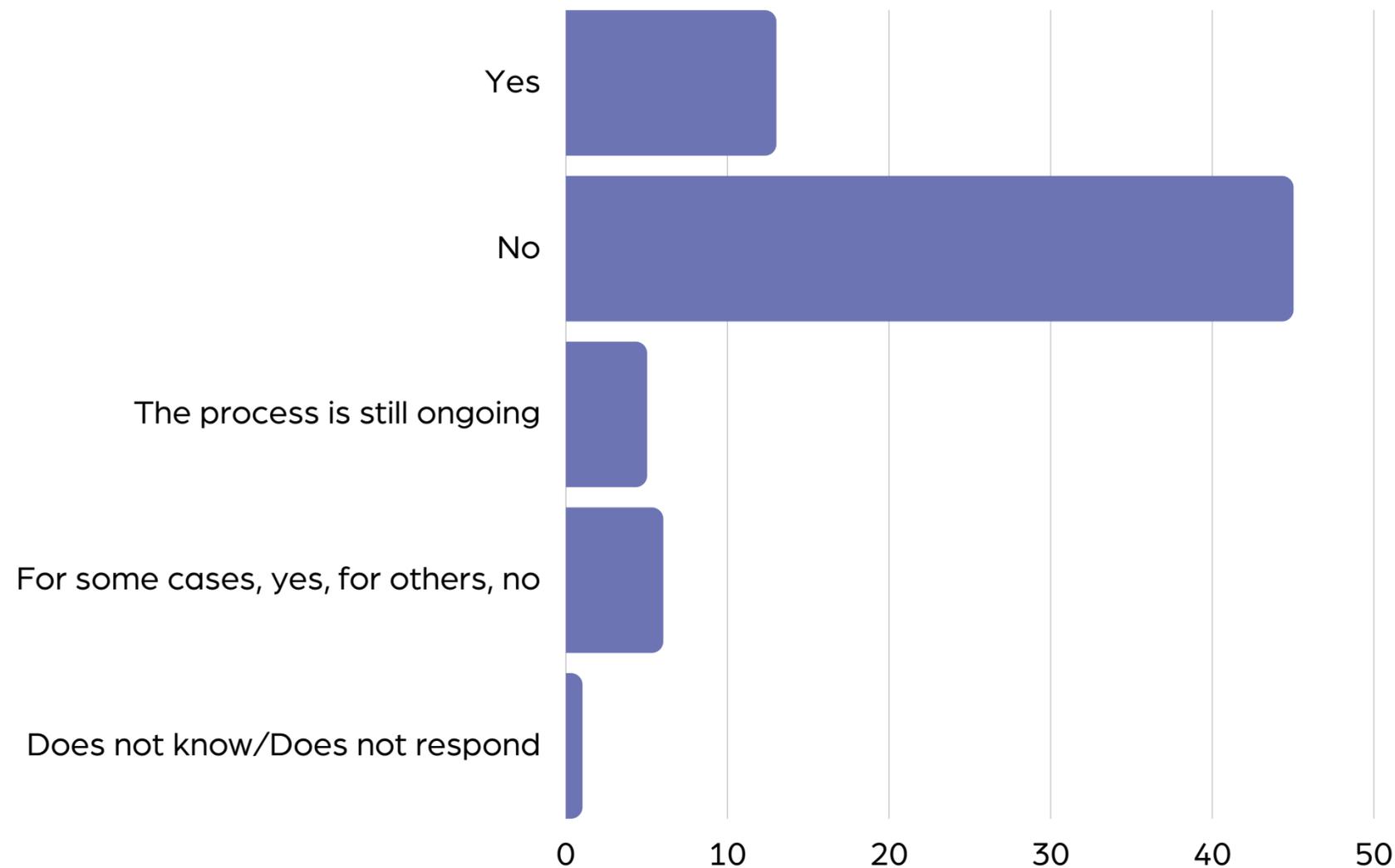
Satisfaction with Administrative Remedies Obtained by Skin Color



Although the number of participants who answered in the category of administrative forums is low, we can observe that the level of satisfaction with the remedy obtained by dark-skinned individuals was lower than that of the rest of participants. The opposite was registered with the remainder of skin color groups, where over half of them was satisfied with the result of their processes.

Do you feel satisfied with the remedies granted by the administrative n=71

Conflict Resolution after the Conclusion of Administrative Processes



- 13 of the participants interviewed who turned to administrative forums indicated that the situations had not been resolved.
- 5 of them mentioned that the process was still ongoing.
- Eleven percent, or approximately 43 individuals, informed that they had gone through a conflict mediation process.
- Forty-five percent of these said they were satisfied with the results.

Part VI.

Discussions and Findings



Findings

- Close to 6 out of each 10 study participants have a steady income, either because they work full-time or because they are retired. Six percent are in search of employment, while 4% are individuals with disabilities. Less than 1% generates income working from home.
- When asked about governmental assistance, 1 out of each 5 interviewees receives Nutritional Assistance (PAN) and the government's health insurance plan (Mi Salud).
- Each participant was asked to evaluate their skin color using a scale from 1 to 6, where 1 corresponded to the lightest skin color and 6 to the darkest.
- 7 out of each 10 participants who described themselves as dark-skinned do not receive governmental assistance. However, they have a higher proportion of lower income than those in the intermediate and light skin categories.

Findings

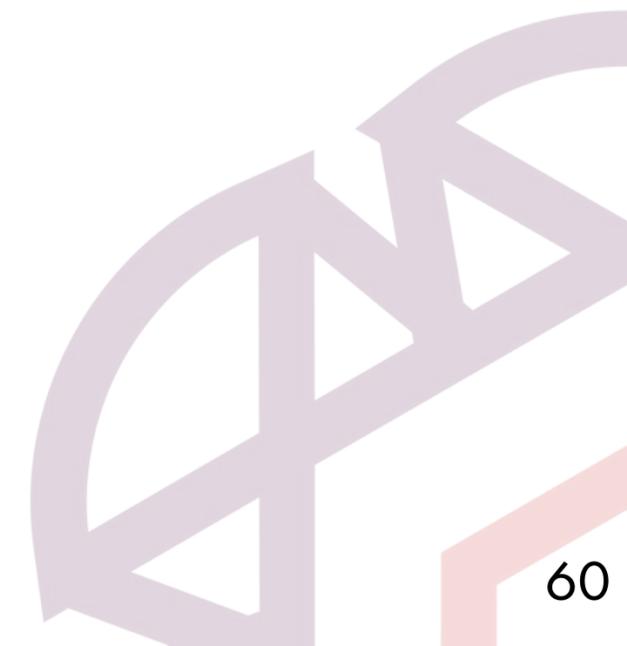
- In terms of levels of schooling, it is unsurprising that those with less formal schooling receive more governmental assistance.
- Close to 1 out of each 5 surveyed individuals said they live alone, by themselves. The family composition of the rest of the interviewees' households includes couples, children, and other family members. The average annual income of interviewees is \$20,075.
- Concerning the sources of information that participants use to obtain legal information, it is not surprising that the internet is the most utilized. Recall that 8 out of each 10 individuals who have a cellphone, have a smartphone, with which they can access the internet. Close to 4 out of each 10 individuals use the internet when they need to find legal information. Thirty-five percent of participants mentioned that they sought assistance from an individual who is a lawyer. They also turn to acquaintances or family members (16%).

Findings

- The internet and a person who is an attorney are the most common sources of information among those who consider themselves light-skinned. However, to a greater extent folks with dark skin use traditional sources such as television, radio, newspaper, and acquaintances and family members.
- A slightly greater number of dark-skinned participants consider it possible to confront a legal process on their own, but a greater proportion of them also seeks information at the court or the media, and turn to legal representation.
- This can perhaps explain why for the interviewees with dark skin, the level of satisfaction with the obtained result is higher than among the rest of participants.
- There is a slight preference on the part of women to seek legal information from legal professionals, while men's preference is to depend on the internet.

Findings

- Apparently, participants with a higher level of schooling tend to prefer individuals who are lawyers as source of information.
- Courts, persons who are attorneys, and government agencies appear to be the main sources of information for folks with a lower level of formal education.
- Close to 8 out of each 10 interviewees trust the sources of information they use to obtain counseling on legal matters.
- The youngest age group (18–34 years old) appears to be the age group that trusts less their sources of information.
- Those who consider themselves dark-skinned seem to distrust their sources of information slightly more than their light-skinned peers. The same tendency was observed among those who completed high school.



Findings

- Only 19% (or 1 in each 5) believes they could face a legal process without recourse to professional assistance. 7 out of each 10 believe they could not.
- The disbelief that they could face a legal process on their own is greater among light-skinned folks. The same was registered among individuals with high levels of schooling.
- In terms of the level of understanding concerning processes at the courts and administrative forums, 4 out of each 10 participants answered that they understand them “completely”.
- Only 20% agrees that court processes take place within a reasonable amount of time, and 16% believes the same concerning processes at administrative forums.
- 4 out of each 10 study participants say they are aware of and understand mediation services.



Findings

- Legal and administrative topics are, according to participants, well understood by close to half of the sample.
- When differences are analyzed, women indicate they understand processes at administrative forums less than men do.
- In terms of age groups, as the age increases, the understanding of administrative processes decreases.
- Concerning skin color, it is notable that 38% and 41% of those who say they “completely” understand processes at administrative forums described themselves as light- and dark-skinned, respectively.
- Close to 4 out of each 10 participants say they are aware of and understand mediation services. The 65+ age group is the only one among which the majority answered that they did not understand mediation services. The same is the case with the group of dark-skinned folks and those with a lower level of schooling.
- Fifty-six percent of interviewees, regardless of age, gender, or level of schooling, feel safe with the presence of the police.



Findings

- Among the situations most confronted by participants are damages to property due to natural disasters. It is very probable that this finding is the immediate result of hurricane Maria.
- The average of legal situations that a person has confronted is on 2.1 occasions.
- Women tend to confront more legal situations than men do, except in the rubric of traffic fines.
- Among women, there is a greater incidence of situations such as damages to property, erroneous billing of services, interruptions in essential services, domestic violence, evictions, and malpractice, among others.



Findings

- The youngest folks face situations related to employment, housing, and health, which are commonly associated with their age.
- Age has a direct relation with some situations. For instance, problems with billing, health insurance plans and coverage, divorces, and inheritance, are most common among participants between the ages of 50 to 64. Within the 35–49 age group, the predominant situations have to do with employment (discrimination and loss) and housing (forced relocation), among others.
- Ninety individuals confronted situations with recourse both to legal and non-legal means.



Findings

- The level of schooling is directly tied to the situations evaluated in the study. In average, 80% of legal situations confronted by interviewees involve individuals with a more-than-high-school level of formal education.
- Problems with defective products, divorces, public agencies (especially the Public Housing Department), utilities' billing errors, and traffic fines, have a relatively high rate of occurrence.
- Most situations confronted by participants are not taken to court. Family-related and traffic-fines-related cases are those most taken to court.
- According to interviewees, the main reasons not to turn to legal means are not deeming it necessary, that the judicial system is too complex, that the process would take too long, would cause too much stress, or would be too costly, and ignorance concerning legal processes.



Findings

- Those participants with a high school diploma said that time and effort, high cost, and distrust in a legal counselor were the main reasons for them not to resort to legal means.
- The complexity of the legal system and participants' lack of understanding of it were the reasons offered in a greater proportion by folks with a less-than-high-school level of formal education.
- Little over a fourth of those who did not turn to legal means consider that they could have had a better result if they had done so. However, close to 40% of participants—and especially men over 40 years old—believes that it would have made no difference. More than 4 out of each 10 (43%) participants who used legal means to try to solve their issue did not request legal assistance or representation. Forty percent requested and received it, while 1 out of each 10 attempted to solve the situation by themselves.



Findings

- 6 out of each 10 interviewees who opted to handle their situations with recourse to legal means feel satisfied with the remedies obtained. 1 out of each 5 (20%) were not satisfied with the obtained result.
- The degree of satisfaction with the remedy obtained through legal means was greater among participants with dark skin, but 67% earn a higher-than-\$25,000 annual income, which is a greater proportion than the groups with intermediate (38%) or light (59%) skin color, and who exhibited a higher tendency to request legal assistance.
- Close to 7 out of each 10 participants who resorted to legal means reported that their problems did not continue once the court process concluded.
- 1 out of each 5 considers that, sometimes, they did solve their issue, while 3% (about 4 individuals) reported that their processes were still ongoing.
- Sixty-three of interviewees who took their situations to court hired private legal services. One fourth (25%) of the sample used a free, government service, and 4% received services from a non-profit. Still, the size of the sample in these cases was low.



Findings

- 7 out of 36 individuals interviewed who used a legal service feel satisfied with the services they received.
- Most of those interviewed who used legal assistance were supported by a person who was recommended to them by a family member or friend. Nine of them already knew the attorney, while eight of them already had a work relationship with the legal professional.
- For the most part, those who did not use legal means came to that decision because they did not deem it necessary (34%). One fourth of them (26%) thought that they could handle the situation on their own. If we combine these two groups, 60% of participants believe that they did not need legal support.
- Close to 1 out of each 5 indicated that they could not afford legal services, and 2 out of each 10 believed the legal system is too complex.
- Fourteen percent of participants took their situations to administrative forums. Among these participants, 53% feels satisfied with the remedies obtained, while a little over one fourth of them does not.



Findings

- In terms of conflict mediation, 11%, or about 43 individuals, had experienced it. A little less than half (45%) of them was satisfied with the result.
- Thirteen of the individuals interviewed who turned to administrative forums manifested that the situations that prompted them to do so had not been resolved. Five of them indicated that the process was still ongoing.
- Administrative forums have a lower satisfaction rate than courts, even though such forums should constitute more practical and expedite settings.
- Future studies could evaluate whether there are some geographical areas with a higher incidence of certain legal situations; investigate the impact in specific communities of the recent closing down of courts; and explore the reasons why people who handle legal situations on their own believe that having legal representation would have not made any difference.

