



Family relationships, domestic violence and child maltreatment in the Caribbean Netherlands

Bonaire

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Background



Context of study

- On May 11, 2011, the Istanbul Convention was passed: a human rights treaty of the Council of Europe opposing violence against women and domestic violence.
- For the European Netherlands, the Convention came into effect on March 1, 2016. The goal is to also put it into effect in the Caribbean Netherlands in the near future.
- This goal is closely related to the ambition to implement the rights of the child in the Caribbean Netherlands, as laid down in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which is applicable to Bonaire.
- In 2022, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport commissioned a study into attitudes about the use of violence in families in the Caribbean Netherlands.
- The main research question of this study was: *What are the attitudes of residents of the Caribbean Netherlands regarding parenting children and in particular the use of violence in childrearing or in family and partner relationships?*
- The study is intended as a baseline assessment that can be used as a starting point for evaluating the effectiveness of new policies in the upcoming years.
- The research team consisted of Ton Liefwaard and Judi Mesman (Leiden University), Merel Griffith-Lendering and Tamara Salsbach (University of Curaçao), and Johan Kruip (UNICEF Nederland).
- The study resulted in three separate reports for each of the islands of the Caribbean Netherlands. This is the report specifically about Bonaire.



Legal and policy context

- Bonaire is a 'special municipality' of the country the Netherlands, with its capital in The Hague. It forms part of the 'Caribbean Netherlands' (Art. 132a Dutch Constitution).
- The Public Entity of Bonaire governs the island and reports to the Dutch government in the capital. Some of the governmental tasks are carried out by the National Office of the Caribbean Netherlands ('Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland') including taxation, policing, immigration, health, education and social security (<https://bonairegov.com/bestuur-organisatie>).
- As part of the Caribbean Netherlands, Bonaire falls under Dutch law. Yet, some laws have been or are in the process of being adjusted to the Caribbean context (Van Rijn 2022, p. 518).
- On the 1st of January 2022, the Civil Code for the Caribbean Netherlands ('Burgerlijk Wetboek BES') was changed in order to include a prohibition of violence against children in the upbringing (art. 1:247 (2) BW BES). Domestic violence and violence against women is protected under the Criminal Code for the Caribbean Netherlands ('Wetboek van Strafrecht BES'; art. 313 ff).
- The Dutch Constitution contains a 'differentiation clause', which allows for differentiation between the European part and the Caribbean parts of the country, because of significant geographical, cultural and economic differences (art. 132a (4) Dutch Constitution). The practical implications of this clause are not clear and it has been argued that it has not been favorable to the Caribbean Netherlands, for example in the context of social security and an adequate standard of living (Van Rijn 2022, p. 519-521; Oostindie & Veenendaal, 2022, p. 165).
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is applicable to Bonaire, whereas the Istanbul Convention is likely to take effect for the Caribbean Netherlands in the near future (State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sports 2022a).
- There is a policy basis concerning family relationships, domestic violence and child maltreatment, which recognizes international legal requirements flowing from the CRC, the Istanbul Convention and related international standards (e.g. European Convention of Human Rights).
- Existing policies and professional practices on Bonaire find their basis in domestic legislation and the Policy Agreement concerning Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment for the Caribbean Netherlands 2021-2024 ('Bestuursakkoord').
- The Policy Agreement sets the following priorities (State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sports 2022a):
 - » Prevention focused on awareness and information on the theme of domestic violence and child maltreatment;
 - » Professional development of the professionals involved on the islands;
 - » Strengthening assistance and cooperation in support services, including safe shelter for victims of domestic violence and child maltreatment and cooperation between healthcare, police and justice partners to break the cycle of violence for victims and perpetrators;
 - » A well-functioning, accessible reporting structure for professionals and citizens to obtain advice about and report (suspected) situations of domestic violence and child maltreatment;
 - » A legal framework in which existing legislation and regulations in the Caribbean Netherlands regarding the approach to domestic violence and child abuse are supplemented where necessary to promote and support the above priorities.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

What does the CRC stand for?

- The rights and freedoms of the child must be respected, protected and fulfilled;
- A child is defined as 'every human being below the age of eighteen years' (art. 1 CRC);
- Each child has to be protected against discrimination or exclusion (art. 2 CRC);
- The best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children (art. 3 (1) CRC);
- The right to life, survival and development of every child must be safeguarded (art. 6 CRC);
- A child has the right to be heard in all matters affecting the child and the child's views must be taken seriously, which has implications for the development of laws and policies and for decision-making at an individual level (art. 12 CRC).

What about the CRC and family relationships?

- Each child should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding, which is considered essential for the child's full and harmonious development (preamble of the CRC);
- The state should support parents in their role primary caregivers (art. 18 (1) CRC), which includes the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children (art. 18 (2) CRC; see also art. 3 (3) CRC), and material assistance and support programs, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing (art. 27 (3) CRC);
- Every child has the right to be protected against all forms of violence and the state must take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures (art. 19 CRC).



Challenges for the Caribbean Netherlands identified by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (the CRC Committee)* in 2022

The CRC Committee expressed its concerns regarding:

- the existing disparities within the Kingdom of the Netherlands between the countries and the Caribbean Netherlands regarding children's access to health and youth services, education, social assistance and support in response to child abuse and neglect (CRC Committee 2022, para. 15 (a));
- the lack of legislative measures to protect children from abuse, domestic violence and corporal punishment in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, bearing in mind the 'high prevalence of violence against children (...) in the State party' (CRC Committee 2022, para. 21).

The CRC Committee recommended:

- to set up a child protection infrastructure (legislative and administrative matters) to better protect the rights and interests of children (CRC Committee 2022, para. 22(b));
- to provide for 'explicit prohibition of corporal punishment by law in alternative care settings, day care and schools' in the Caribbean Netherlands (CRC Committee 2022, para. 22(g));
- to 'strengthen awareness-raising campaigns aimed at promoting positive, non-violent and participatory forms of child-rearing and discipline and underscoring the adverse consequences of corporal punishment' (CRC Committee 2022, para. 22(g)).

* The CRC Committee monitors the implementation of the CRC in the Kingdom of the Netherlands and all other States Parties, periodically.

Follow up

- In response to the CRC Committee's recommendations, the Dutch government has confirmed its commitment to promote positive, non-violent and participatory forms of child rearing in the Caribbean Netherlands. More specifically it announced further legislative guidance on the matter, the promotion of accessible support services for children and the implementation of a protection code, as part of the strategy concerning the prevention of violence against children (State Secretary of Health, Welfare and Sports, 2022b, p. 15-16).
- UNICEF has developed a new policy plan '*Kinderen in hun kracht. Kinderrechten in Caribisch Nederland*', in partnership with the Public Entities of Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius and the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, to support the Islands in this regard. This program runs from 2023 until 2025 and focuses on:
 - » Positive parenting;
 - » Social, emotional resilience and youth skills;
 - » Participation;
 - » Child protection: signaling, reporting and follow up ('*signaleren, melden en opvolgen*');
 - » Child poverty;
 - » Linking and learning.

Istanbul Convention

What does the Istanbul Convention stand for?

- Official name: Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.
- The Istanbul Convention aims to eliminate violence against women and the protection of women against all forms of violence (art. 1(a)).
- It expects States Parties 'take the necessary legislative and other measures to promote and protect the right for everyone, particularly women, to live free from violence in both the public and the private sphere' (art. 4 (1)).

More specifically the Istanbul Convention aims to:

Ensure prevention of domestic violence and violence against women by:

- changing 'social and cultural patterns of behavior of women and men with a view to eradicating prejudices, customs, traditions and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women and men' (art. 12 (1) and
- by taking legislative and other measures to prevent all forms of violence (art. 13 (2)).
- Other measures include (art. 13-17):
 - » Awareness raising;
 - » Education;
 - » Training of professionals;
 - » Preventive interventions and treatment programs;
 - » Participation of the private sector and the media.

- Ensure the protection of victims from further acts of violence through legislation and other measures, including information, support and specialist services, individual remedies, support to child witnesses and victims of sexual violence (see also art. 56), reporting mechanisms, and protective measures, including telephone helplines and shelters (art. 18ff);
- Ensure adequate and speedy investigation and prosecution of all forms of violence through legislative and other measures (art. 49ff); and
- Ensure comprehensive and coordinated policies and data collection (art. 7ff; Niemi et al. 2020, p. 8-9).

Local context of Bonaire

- In March 2023, a delegation of the research team (TL and MGL) visited Bonaire to get acquainted with the local context and learn about the challenges that professionals in the family and youth domain have identified.
- The research team met with a total of 15 professionals (all working with youth and/or parents). Local organizations represented in these meetings included 'advies- en meldpunt HGKM Guiami', Stichting Reclassering Caribisch Nederland, Voogdijraad en Akseso. In addition, the team visited 'Jong Bonaire' for meetings with professionals and local youth and met with representatives of the Public Entity of Bonaire, UNICEF, and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, and an external academic expert and consultant on communication, a politician (former 'gedeputeerde') and his advisor.
- The main issues raised during the team visit to Bonaire were concerns about:
 - » The quality of parenting, especially lack of time spent with children due to working multiple jobs;
 - » The high cost of living and the fact that many families struggle with poverty, affecting family life negatively;
 - » Changing times and norms, a sense of loss by the older generation, the experience of a generation gap;
 - » The strong matriarchal culture in families, with limited participation of men in this domain;
 - » Lack of clarity about division of tasks between different organizations in the family and youth domain;
 - » The need for greater clarity about the definitions of domestic violence and child maltreatment;
 - » The need for availability of communications in Papiamentu around these themes;
 - » The specific needs of migrant communities who are not always easy to reach.
- These issues were incorporated in the data collection phase to make sure they were addressed in the study.





Methods



Overview

Desk research

- Analysis of relevant policy reports, legal sources and academic literature to provide context to the current study.

Quantitative study

- Online survey among the adult population of the island, with questions about specific aspects of family relationships, partner relationships and parenting.
- For each topic, participants were asked to report on a 1-10 scale how common they think certain behaviors are on Bonaire.
- Participants asked to report about their impression of family life on the island (i.e. not their own behavior).

Qualitative study

Interviews

- Individual interviews conducted by telephone with adults, young people aged 16-19 years, and professionals.
- Questions about family relationships, partner relationships and parenting.

Focus groups

- Focus group interviews conducted in person with adults, young people aged 16-19 years, and professionals.
- Questions about recommendations for policy and practice.

Ethical review

- The study has been approved by the Committee Ethics and Data of Leiden Law School, Leiden University, the Netherlands.

Description of survey participants

Total sample size



263 participants started the survey



173 participants completed the survey

Response rate: ca 1-2% of adult population on Bonaire*

** This response rate would amount to close to half a million participants in the European part of the Netherlands.*

Sample sizes per topic



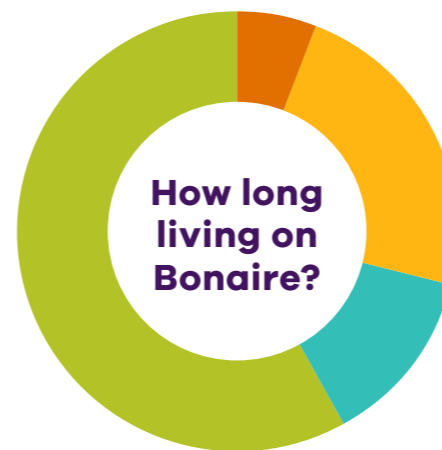
263 parenting questions



190 Family and partner questions

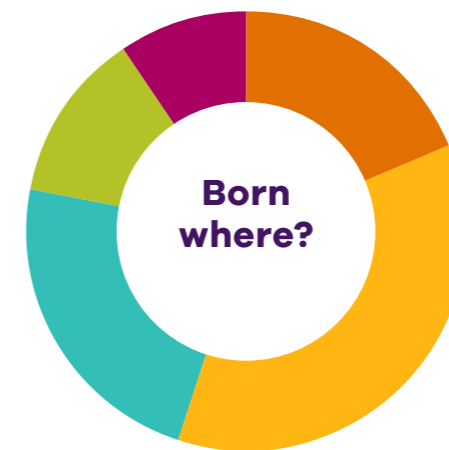


173 Background questions



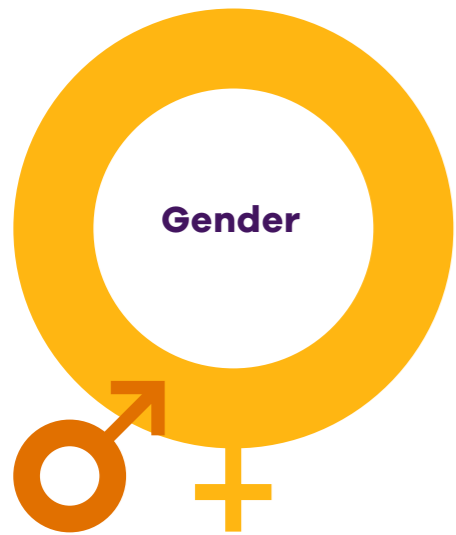
6% Less than 2 years
23% 2-5 years
13% 6-10 years
58% More than 10 years

- More than half of participants have lived on Bonaire for more than 10 years.



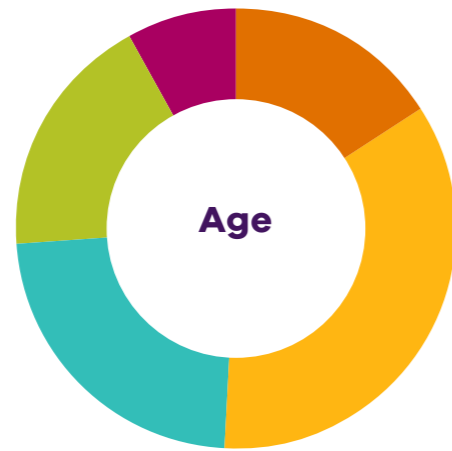
18% Bonaire
35% Other Caribbean Island
22% Netherlands
12% Mainland South America
9% Other

- 18% of participants were born on Bonaire itself (in the total Bonaire population this is about 40%).
- 35% of participants were born on another Caribbean island (in the total Bonaire population about 40% is from another Caribbean island within Kingdom or from South or Central America).
- 22% of participants were born in the Netherlands (in the total Bonaire population this is about 15%).
- Based on island statistics, the category 'other' is likely to refer to people born in the US or Europe.



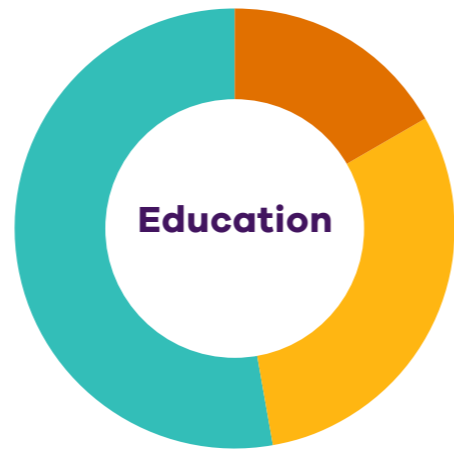
20% men 78% women

- Women were overrepresented among the participants (2 participants did not identify as male or female).



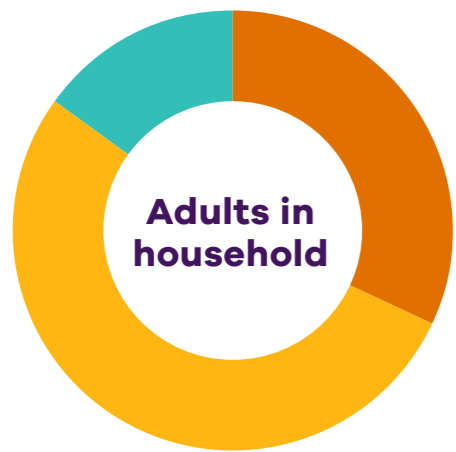
16% 20-30 23% 41-50
35% 31-40 18% 51-60
8% 60+

- The majority of participants were between 31 and 50 years old.



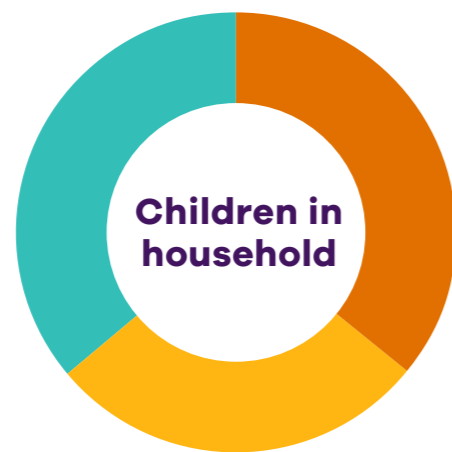
18% Low 49% High
33% Middle

- More than half of the participants had a high educational level (for the total Bonaire population this is 18%).



27% One 16% Three or more
57% Two

- The number of adults in most participant households was 1 or 2.



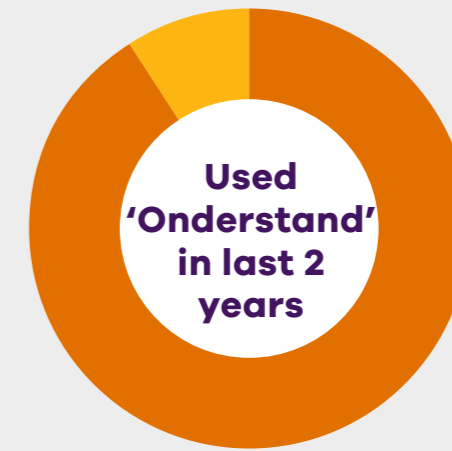
36% None 36% Two or more
28% One

- The majority of participants lived in households with one or more children.



27% None 28% Some
35% Minimal 10% A lot

- The participants are not representative of the Bonaire population in terms of financial situation.
- More than half of the participants experienced at least some financial problems, only 27% had no financial problems at all.



91% No 9% Yes

- However, only very few participants had made use of the 'Onderstand' in the past 2 years.

Women were overrepresented among the participants.

Description of interview participants



Adults

- 5 women, 8 men
- Age 22 – 60 years
- 2 born on Bonaire
- Most have children
- Most been living on Bonaire 5+ years
- 3 with high educational level
- Income between \$1000 – \$2999



Youth

- 4 girls
- Age 16 – 19 years
- 1 born on Bonaire
- All on Bonaire 6+ years



Professionals

- 10 professionals
- 7 women, 3 men
- Age 25 – 62 years
- Living on Bonaire: all 3+ years
- 5 with high education level

Description of focus group participants



Adults

- 5 women, 1 man



Youth

- 1 girls, 3 boys,
- Age 16 – 21 years



Professionals

- All women

Limitations of the study

The study's samples on Bonaire are not fully representative of the island's population.

The following groups were underrepresented:

- » Men;
 - » People with lower educational and income levels;
 - » People from migrant groups who might not be comfortable enough in English or Dutch or Papiamentu to participate in the study.
- The underrepresentation of people from more challenged socio-economic backgrounds is common in the majority of this type of research. However, the individual and focus group interviews partly made up for this limitation, as these included more socio-economically diverse samples than the survey.
 - The sample size of the survey on Bonaire (173 - 263 people) constitutes a very good response rate for a relatively small-island population, but only about 20% of the participants were men. In research on families, men are typically underrepresented, which might also reflect the involvement of men in families more generally as will be discussed later on in this report.
 - The study has not specifically focused on the issue of sexual abuse. This issue does, however, deserves attention in future studies.



Results and

recommendations

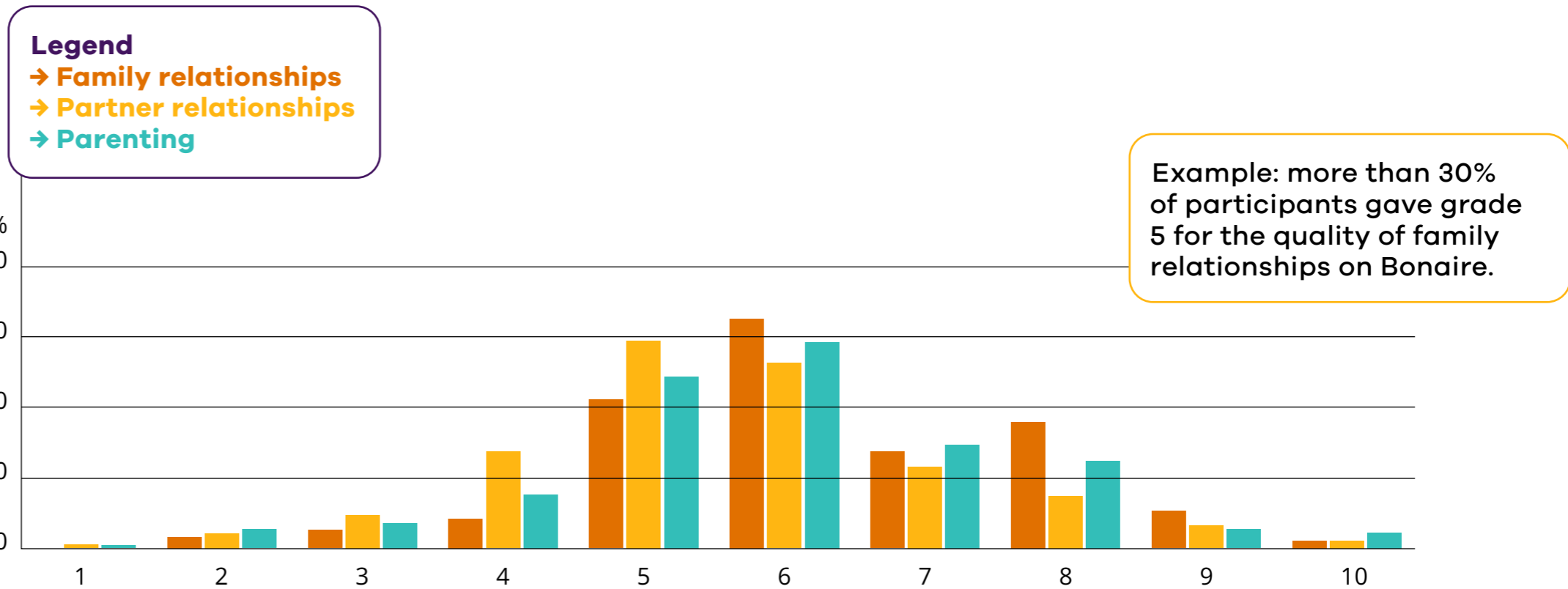
Results

Survey: Grade 1-10 for the quality of...

Overall evaluation of family life on Bonaire

Before diving into the results on specific topics regarding family life on Bonaire, this section reports on overall evaluations of family life by the participants to show their general impressions as a starting point for further specification of strengths and challenges.

Participants were asked to give a 'report card grade' to the quality of family relationships, partner relationships and parenting on Bonaire.



Clarification

- The average grades are just under 6 (just sufficient) for the quality of partner relationships, and parenting on Bonaire. The average grade for family relationships was higher at 6.3.
- Around a quarter of participants were (very) positive (grade 7 and higher) about the quality of family relationships, partner relationships, and parenting on Bonaire.
- Not many participants were (very) negative (grade 3 or lower) about the quality of family relationships, partner relationships, and parenting on Bonaire.
- Most participants chose a grade 5 or 6 for the three different domains of family life on Bonaire. This means that most of them see a mix of positive and negative aspects.

Structure of the results

In the following sections, the specific areas of strengths and challenges of families on Bonaire will be presented.

- **Part 1:** The strengths of family life on Bonaire;
- **Part 2:** The financial context of family life on Bonaire;
- **Part 3:** Maltreatment in family life on Bonaire;
- **Part 4:** Gender inequalities on Bonaire;
- **Part 5:** Changing times on Bonaire;
- **Part 6:** Support services on Bonaire.

The general structure of these sections consists of:

- **A brief introduction to the topic;**
- **The relevant survey results** (data from Bonaire);
- **Relevant quotes from the interviews** (voices from Bonaire);
- **A reflection, and**
- **A recommendation.**

Parts 1 to 5 concern the substantive strengths and challenges concerning families on Bonaire, whereas part 6 focuses on the role of support services in addressing the strengths and challenges.

After the presentation of the study's results, the report continues with some overarching recommendations relevant for Bonaire as well as for Sint Eustatius and Saba.

Part 1

The strengths of family life on Bonaire

A small-island community

Several professionals and some adults and youth reflected on the positive sides of the fact that Bonaire is a small island with a small community.

"Bonaire is a small island, so yes it is easy to communicate well with each other."

(professional)

"Everyone helps, that is the bond you have and the example on such a small island."

(professional)

"Bonaire is small, it is safe."

(adult)

"Within a family you have relationships with the aunt, the grandmother, they all help and that is a bond you have on an island like this."

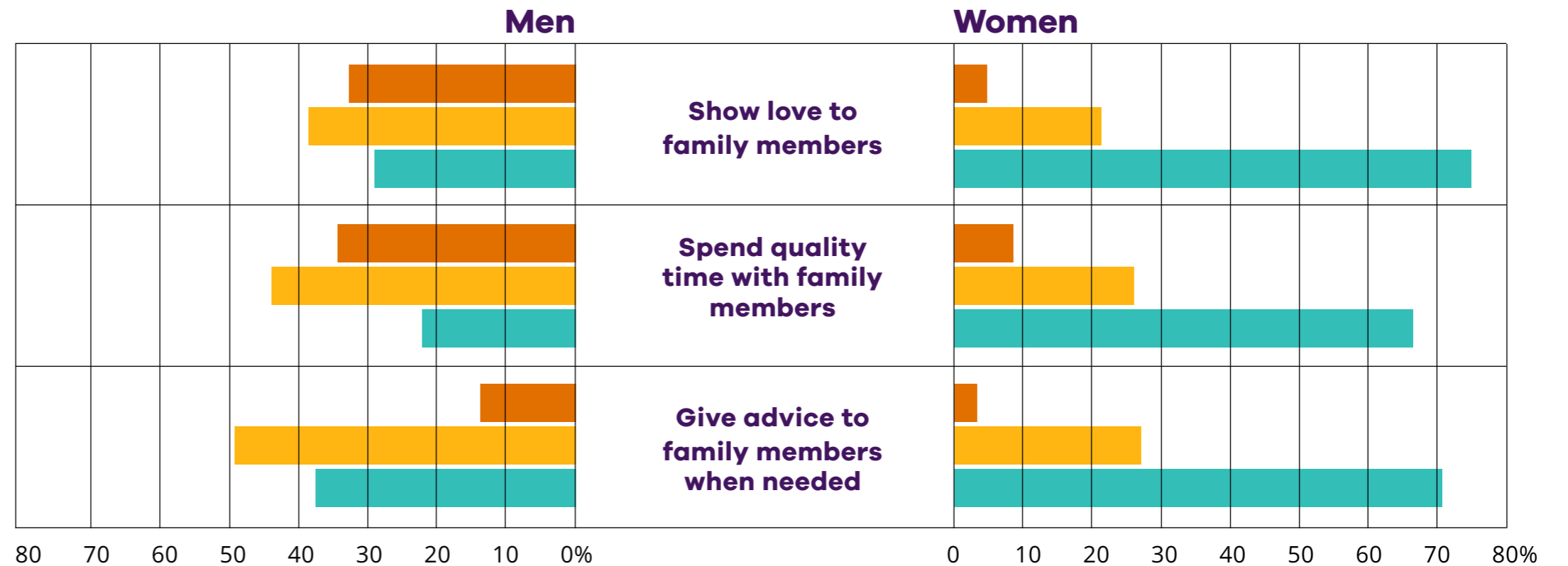
(professional)

"Some children don't have family to rely on, so the nice thing is that other families take care of them."

(youth)

Data from Bonaire

Family life on Bonaire



Legend

- Not common (scores 1-3)
- Somewhat common (scores 4-6)
- (Very) common (scores 7-10)

Example: only 5% of participants reported that women on Bonaire do not commonly show much love to their family members.

Clarification

- Most participants reported that showing love, spending quality time, and giving advice is more common among women than men on Bonaire (this is true for both male and female participants, but it has to be noted that there were only few male participants).
- Most participants reported that these things are also at least somewhat common among men.

Data from Bonaire

Parenting on Bonaire

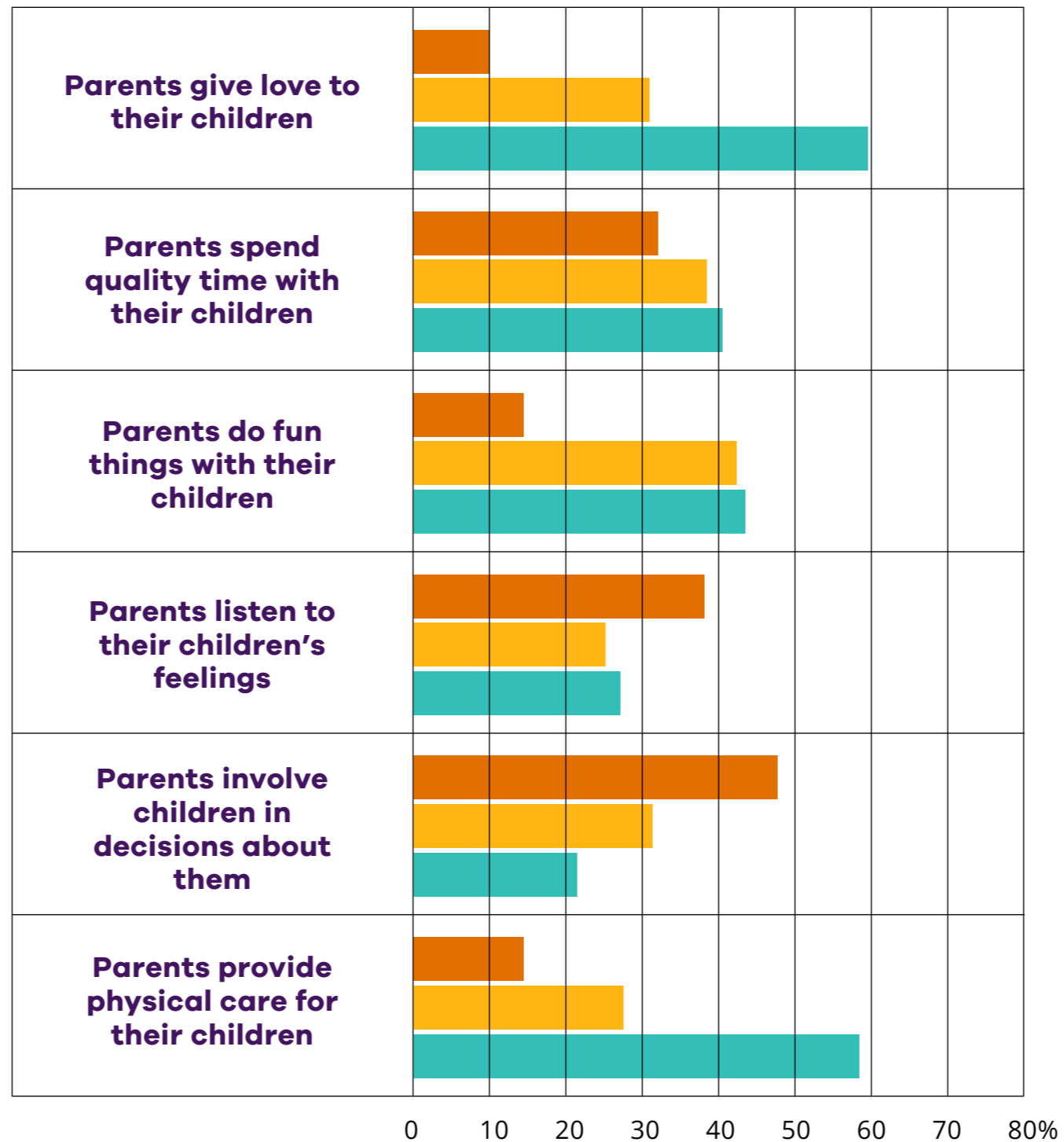
Legend

→ Not common (scores 1-3)

→ Somewhat common (scores 4-6)

→ (Very) common (scores 7-10)

Example: almost 60% of participants reported that it is common that parents on Bonaire give love to their children.



Clarification

- Most participants reported that it is at (very) common for parents on Bonaire to give love to their children.
- Participants were divided about how common it is for parents on Bonaire to spend quality time with their children.
- Most participants reported that it is at least somewhat common for parents on Bonaire to do fun things with their children.
- Most participants reported that it is not that common for parents on Bonaire to listen to their children's feelings
- Most participants reported that it is not that common for parents on Bonaire to involve their children in decisions about the children.

Voices from Bonaire

“What goes well in our culture is love, the love that you have learned from a young age and having respect for adults.”

(professional)

“Many families are there for each other, in good times and bad times.”

(adult)

“We value extended family, the wider family is something I think is really good about our culture.”

(adult)

There is a lot of deceit in relationships.”

(adult)

“All parents want what’s best for their children but they don’t know how to get there.

They need guidance.”

(professional)

“When my mother needs to work overtime, I need to stay home to take care of my younger siblings.”

(youth)

Reflection

- Families on Bonaire are seen as loving and warm, and supporting each other in the context of close extended (family) networks who take care of each other. Parents show love to their children and provide them with the necessary physical care. These are all very important strengths of family life on Bonaire.
- Yet, participants noticed some challenges in family life on Bonaire as well. They reported a gender imbalance in family life, with women being more involved than men, and parents not always having enough quality time and a listening ear for children. These challenges will be discussed in more detail in the next sections.
- During its visit to Bonaire, the research team noticed that parents were criticized, by professionals, for being absent, difficult to reach, not engaged, passive (i.e. waiting for the government or schools to provide (financial) help instead of feeling empowered to address challenges themselves) or even irresponsible. It was reported that parents on Bonaire do not embrace new developments but prefer to leave things as they are. The researchers also met professionals who portrayed parents differently and underscored their resilience. These somewhat contrasting patterns are important to address (see also part 6 on support services).
- Although the small island also comes with challenges ("there aren't many educational opportunities here for"- youth; "Everybody knows your business, also if you don't want them to" - professional), the strength of the island community on Bonaire is clearly something to build on.

Recommendation 1

Make use of the strong warm bonds within families on Bonaire and the strength of the island community to address the challenges in family life that will be discussed in the next sections.

- Emphasize that children, parents, the elderly and other community members essentially care about good family relationships and deserve to be respected in their role within families and within the wider community.
- Invest in community engagement as a means to empower communities, community leaders and community organizations to play a role in improving family life and protecting family member against domestic violence and child maltreatment (UNICEF 2020).
- **More specifically:**
 - » Recognize communities as meaningful stakeholders in policy reform;
 - » Make sure that community members know and claim their rights;
 - » Ensure participation without exclusion or discrimination, bearing in mind power inequalities;
 - » Align policies, programs and projects with community needs, values and cultures, while recognizing national and international laws and policies;
 - » Involve communities in the monitoring and evaluation of policies, programs and projects that impact them.
- Make sure that the Bonaire community are in the lead concerning the development of policies, programs and projects, while the Government of the Netherlands plays a supportive role and local values and cultures are respected.

Target group: Public Entity of Bonaire in close collaboration with community stakeholders (e.g. schools).

Part 2

The financial context of family life on Bonaire

Financial hardship on Bonaire

The literature shows that financial problems and poverty are important factors when it comes to family problems such as domestic violence (Jewkes, 2002) and child maltreatment (Skinner et al., 2022). The study also asked participants about the financial situation of families on Bonaire and many mentioned that there is substantial financial hardship on Bonaire.

"On Bonaire there are a lot of families who do not have enough money for the basics, so no money to pay rent, electricity, water, or even food."

(adult)

"There are a lot of single-parent families, and one job is not enough to support the children, so the mothers work 2-3 jobs and the children can just do what they want at home."

(adult)

"Yes, there are families who do not have enough money. The parents just have to work all the time."

(youth)

"Water and electricity are way too expensive, they need to calm that down!"

(youth)

"Bonaire is expensive. There are no affordable houses and no rent subsidy, and then people just have to work all the time to make ends meet."

(professional)

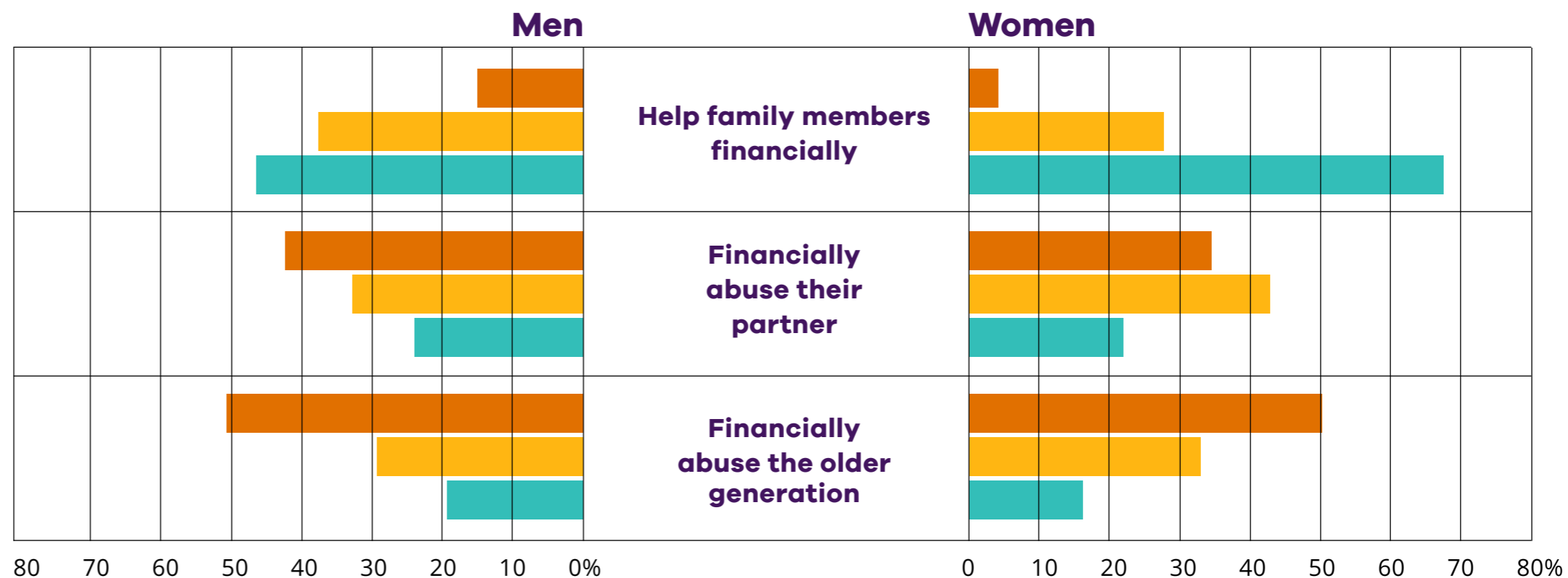
"But it is also that the priorities are different, handling a budget.

Some women get Understand, but they buy expensive food like Chinese takeout and Coca Cola."

(professional)

Data from Bonaire

Family finance



Legend
 → Not common (scores 1-3)
 → Somewhat common (scores 4-6)
 → (Very) common (scores 7-10)

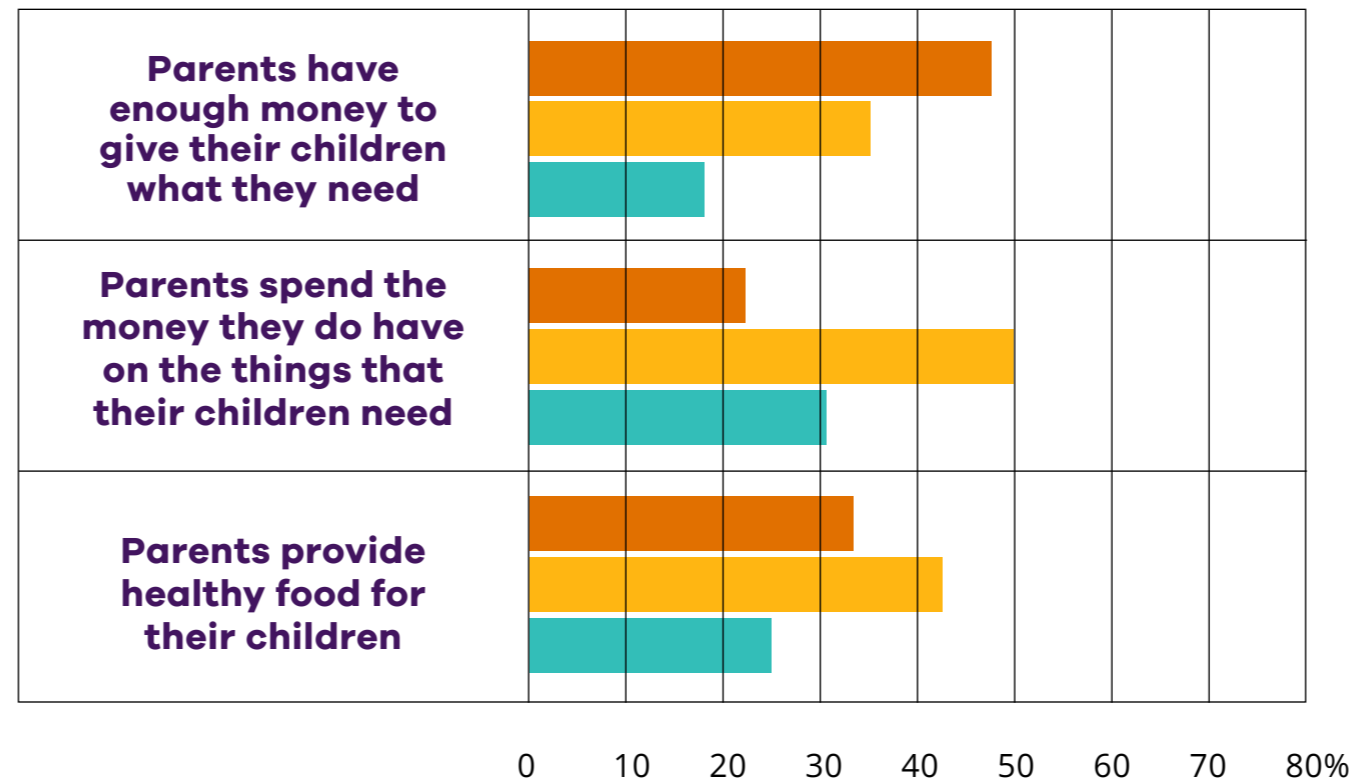
Example: almost 40% of participants reported that it is somewhat common for men on Bonaire to help family members financially if needed.

Clarification

- Most participants reported that on Bonaire both men and women commonly help their family members financially if needed.
- Over half of participants reported that financial abuse of partners is at least somewhat common among both men and women on Bonaire.
- About half of participants report that financial abuse of the older generation is somewhat common among men and women on Bonaire.

Data from Bonaire

Family finance



Clarification

- Most participants said that it is not that common for parents on Bonaire to have enough money to give their children what they need.
- Participants are divided about how common it is for parents on Bonaire to spend the money they do have on what their children need, about half reported that this is somewhat common.
- Most participants reported that it is not that common for parents on Bonaire to provide healthy food for their children.

Legend

- Not common (scores 1-3)
- Somewhat common (scores 4-6)
- (Very) common (scores 7-10)

Example: Almost 60% of participants reported that it is not common for parents on Bonaire to have enough money for their children.

Voices from Bonaire

What people observe

“People also make the wrong choices, they drive a nice car, but cannot buy bread.”

(professional)

“Sometimes there is no money for food and then children go to school without food. Or they have really old clothes.”

(professional)

“There are single mothers who are forced into a relationship because they need a partner to help financially, but when they want to leave they can’t because they are financially dependent on the man.”

(professional)

“Sometimes it gets to you if you don’t have money, then you start yelling, you are in a bad mood, you start crying. Those things happen.”

(adult)

“Because the supermarkets keep increasing prices, they have to keep the child waiting, they do not give the child a lot of attention because they have to work more so they can pay for what is necessary.”

(youth)

What people would like to see improved

Professionals, adults and youth all agreed that something should be done about the lack of spending power of families on Bonaire. Some mentioned the low wages as a problem, others the cost of living.

It was also noted that childcare specifically is too expensive, but that the people who work there don't make enough money and need to work elsewhere after they are finished at the childcare center. Reducing childcare costs would be good for families who need it.

Improving single mothers' financial position was also seen as a priority by professionals, adults, and youth on Bonaire, so that the women would not be dependent on men solely for money, and so that they don't have to choose between working and taking care of their children.

In addition, professionals mentioned that parents could benefit from being trained in budgeting skills and prioritizing expenses for their families.



Reflection

- Many families on Bonaire struggle financially. Although helping family members financially is very common on Bonaire, there are also concerns about people taking advantage of family members when it comes to finances.
- There seems to be an imbalance between wages and the cost of living for families.
- It seems that the financial struggles on Bonaire can lead to both supportive actions (helping) and abusive actions (taking advantage).
- When it comes to raising children, most families on Bonaire do not always have enough money to give their children what they need, including healthy food.
- There are also concerns about budgeting skills on Bonaire. People do not always spend the money they have wisely, which impacts their financial room for providing basic needs to their children.
- The literature shows that financial worries and poverty are strong predictors of many different problems in families, including violence in general and violence against women in particular (Stephenson, 2021). All policies that contribute to poverty relief will improve the general quality of life, which in turn will benefit overall family functioning (Jones et al., 2017).
- Previous studies and reports concerning the Caribbean Netherlands have also pointed at the impact of financial concerns and poverty on family relationships (Nationale Ombudsman 2020), and more specifically on the prevalence of domestic violence and/or child maltreatment (Kloosterboer, 2013; De Bruijn, Kriek & De Vaan, 2014; UNICEF, 2019; Kinderombudsman, 2021; CRC Committee 2022).
- The literature also shows that unconditional cash transfers can be beneficial to poverty reduction, development of community and autonomy and dignity of community members (Peterman, Yablonski & Daidone, 2017).
- The recently announced increase of the social minimum on Bonaire could have a positive impact on the financial situation of families on the island.

Recommendation 2

Invest in the financial health of Bonaire, including attention to education and employment opportunities, and promoting budgeting skills

- Closely monitor the impact of the recently announced increase of the social minimum;
- Consider implementing additional measures (e.g. specific cash transfer programs) where needed to provide relief for families with persistent financial struggles;
- Continue to invest in employment and appropriate wages, also in light of the imbalance between income and cost of living;
- Offer budgeting skills training, in schools and community centers;
- Pay special attention to the issue of financial abuse of the older generation within families. Increasing financial security and financial skills may be significant first steps.

Target group: Public Entity of Bonaire, in close collaboration with community groups and key stakeholders.

Part 3

Maltreatment in family life on Bonaire

When family life is not safe

This section zooms in on maltreatment in family relations (incl. partner relations), which is relevant to consider in addition to the strengths of the community and the precarious financial context of family life on Bonaire.

The Istanbul Convention, the CRC and legislation in the Caribbean Netherlands reject domestic violence and violence against children. This finds support in the case law of the European Court of Human Rights and related standards from the Council of Europe (see preamble of the Istanbul Convention; Niemi et al. 2020, p. 4-5).

Relevant legal definitions in international law:

- *Domestic violence* includes 'all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim' (art. 3 (b) Istanbul Convention). It enshrines violence against women and girls (art. 3 (a), (d) and (f) Istanbul Convention)
- *Violence against children* includes 'all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse' (art. 19 CRC) and also encompasses exposure to domestic violence (CRC Committee, 2011).

Relevant legal definitions in Dutch law:

- Child maltreatment (*kindermishandeling*): 'elke vorm van voor een minderjarige bedreigende of gewelddadige interactie van fysieke, psychische of seksuele aard, die de ouders of andere personen ten opzichte van wie de minderjarige in een relatie van afhankelijkheid of van onvrijheid staat, actief of passief opdringen, waardoor ernstige schade wordt berokkend of dreigt te worden berokkend aan de minderjarige in de vorm van fysiek of psychisch letsel' (art. 1.1.1 (1) Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning 2015).
- Domestic violence (*huiselijk geweld*): 'lichamelijk, geestelijk of seksueel geweld of bedreiging daarmee door iemand uit de huiselijke kring' (art. 1.1.1 (1) Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning 2015); 'huiselijke kring' (domestic): 'een familielid, een huisgenoot, de echtgenoot of voormalig echtgenoot of een mantelzorger' (Ibid.)

Maltreatment in family life on Bonaire

According to the State Secretary of Health, Welfare and Sports the term 'domestic violence' does not really fit the Caribbean context, where 'domestic' includes a much wider range of community members, in addition to immediate family members (State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sports 2022a, p. 2). A special Governmental Decree (*Algemene Maatregel van Bestuur*) aims to provide rules concerning domestic violence and child maltreatment in the context of the Caribbean Netherlands (*Besluit maatschappelijke ondersteuning en bestrijding huiselijk geweld en kindermishandeling BES*; State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sports 2023). This Decree, which is expected to enter into force on 1 July 2024 as far as domestic violence and child maltreatment is concerned, provides a broader definition of domestic ('huiselijke kring'): *'de partner of voormalige partner, een familielid, een huisgenoot of een persoon die regelmatig de woning bezoekt'*.

- This report refers to violence and maltreatment interchangeably. It also uses the terms domestic violence, violence against children or child maltreatment. Unless specified, these terms refer to all kinds of forms of violence, including physical, emotional and sexual maltreatment or abuse, neglect and witnessing violence, among others.
- In the interviews, participants were invited to define 'maltreatment' and reflect on it, also in light of the local, cultural context of Bonaire.
- In both the survey and the interviews, participants were asked about their perceptions concerning maltreatment and violence. A wide range of forms of maltreatment were identified: between partners, against the elderly and between parents and children. This also includes forms of emotional and physical violence.



Defining maltreatment on Bonaire

In the interviews participants generally defined domestic violence and child maltreatment according to international legal norms, including physical and emotional abuse and neglect in their descriptions. This shows general awareness of international definitions, which are incorporated in domestic laws and policies, even if the local reality is different.

Maltreatment in Papiamentu

There have been discussions on Bonaire about the most appropriate terms to use when referring to issues of abuse and maltreatment in Papiamentu. This point also came up in the interviews and focus groups:

- » According to most, *'maltrato'* is the best term to use.
- » For child maltreatment it would be *'maltrato di mucha'*.
- » *'Abuso'* sounds more severe and is often associated with sexual abuse
- » *'Violensia Domestiko'* is seen as an adequate translation of domestic violence.

"Domestic violence is everything, abuse, everything that hurts a person in the family against their will. It can also be mental abuse."

(professional)

"The definition fits with that is good for children around the world [no maltreatment], but we will need time, we say it needs to change, but we don't know how to do it differently. This is how we were raised."

(professional)

"Neglect is also maltreatment."

(adult)

"If the mother gets hit, or the mother hits the father, or they argue a lot, say bad things, that is all domestic violence."

(adult)

"When they fight, or hit for no reason, or get angry about little things, and almost kill them."

(youth)

"Or they don't hit the children but they say bad things to the children, discourage them."

(youth)

Data from Bonaire

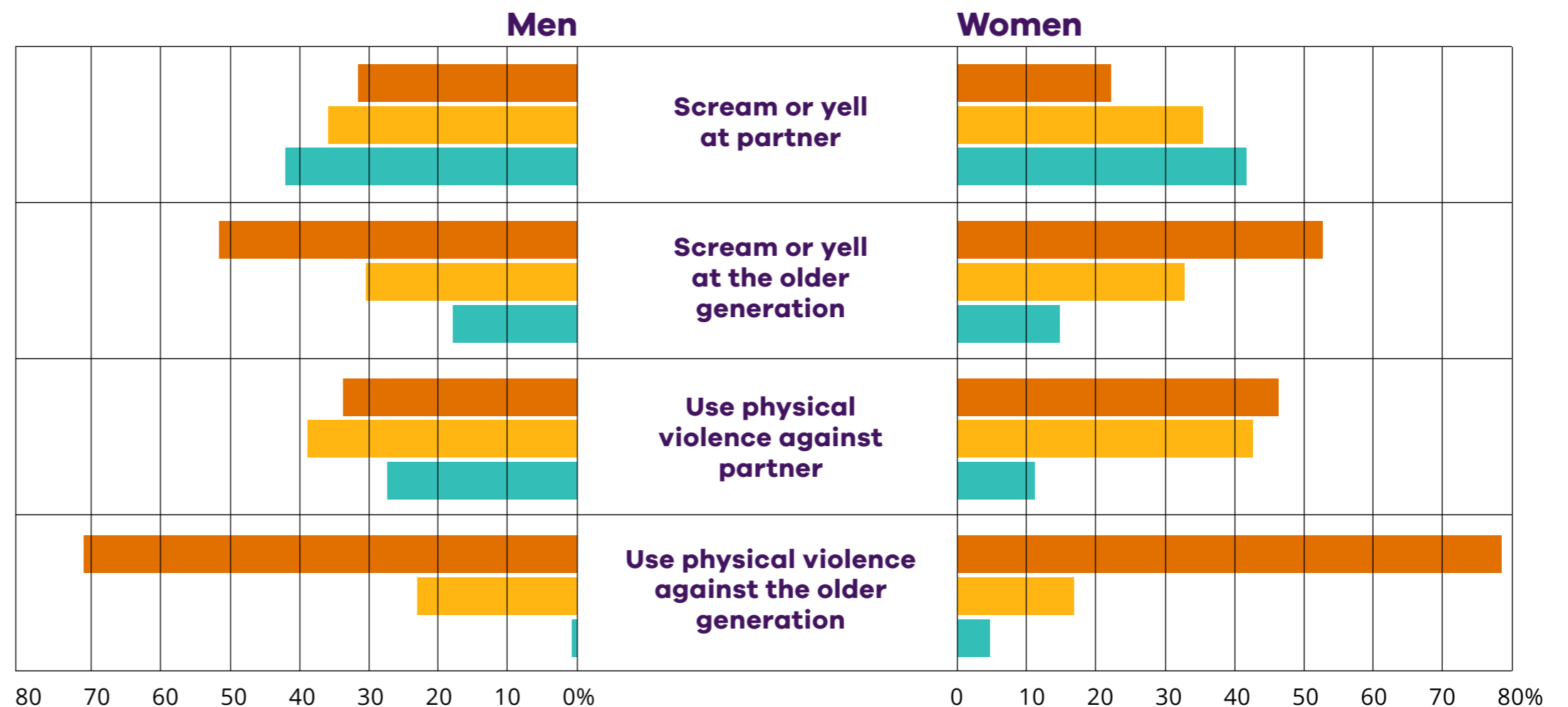
Emotional & physical maltreatment

Legend

→ Not common (scores 1-3)

→ Somewhat common (scores 4-6)

→ (Very) common (scores 7-10)



Clarification

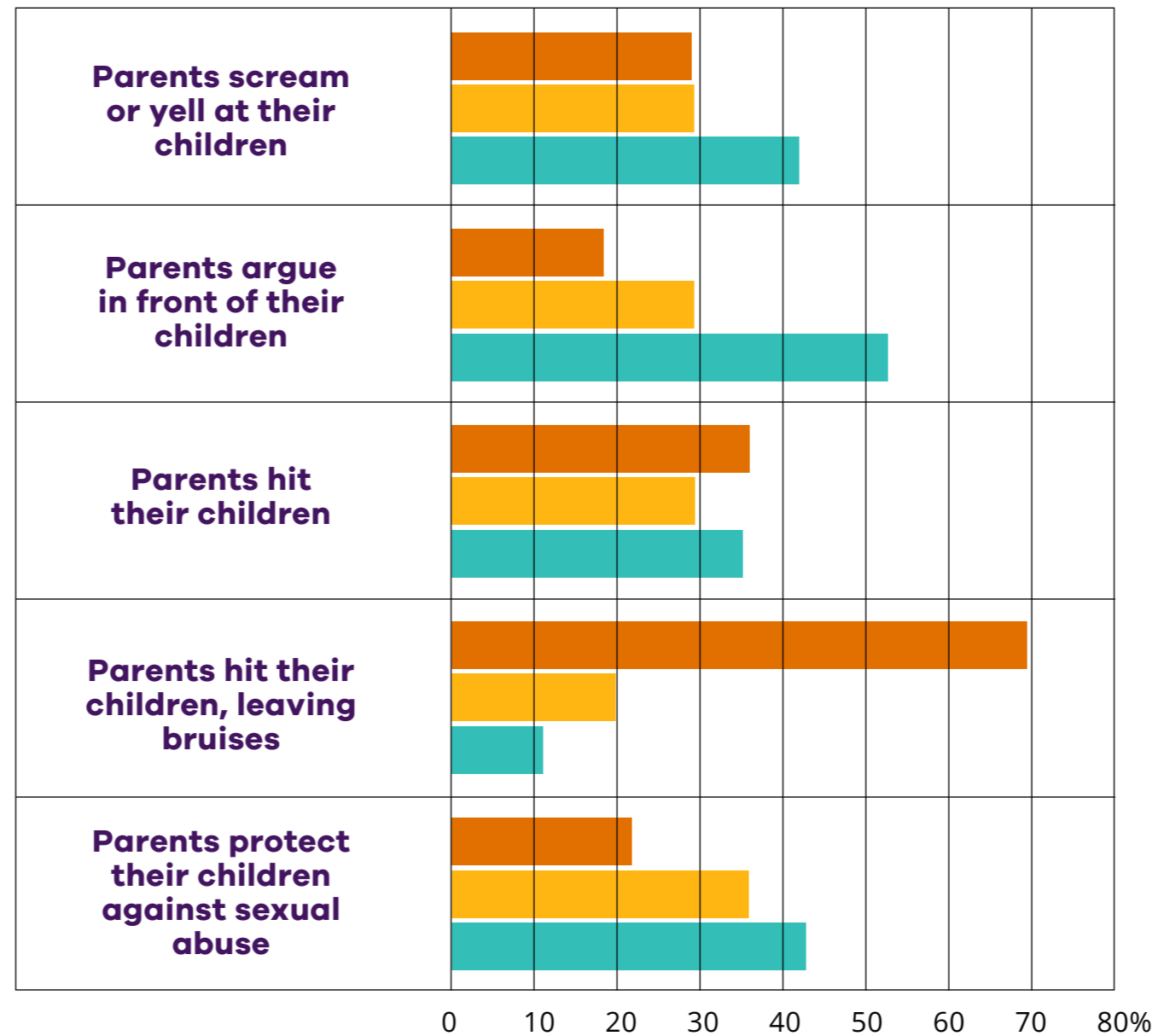
- Most participants said that it is (somewhat) common for men and women on Bonaire to scream at their partners
- Screaming at the older generation is reported to be a lot less common on Bonaire, but is still reported as (somewhat) common by about half of the participants.
- Most participants said that it is at least somewhat common for men and women on Bonaire to use physical violence against their partners, and about a quarter reported that it was (very) common among men.
- Most participants reported that physical violence against the older generation is not common on Bonaire, but around 40% reported that this is somewhat common.

Data from Bonaire

Emotional & physical maltreatment

Legend
 → Not common (scores 1-3)
 → Somewhat common (scores 4-6)
 → (Very) common (scores 7-10)

Example: About 35% of participants reported that it is not common for parents on Bonaire to hit their children.



Clarification

- Most participants said that it is (very) common for parents on Bonaire to argue in front of their children.
- Participants were divided about how common it is for parents on Bonaire to scream at their children, but more than 40% reported this to be (very) common.
- Most participants said that it is at least somewhat to very common for parents on Bonaire to hit their children.
- The large majority of participants reported that it is not common for parents on Bonaire to hit their children in a way that leaves bruises, although about 30% did report that this is (somewhat) common.
- Most participants reported that it is common for parents on Bonaire to protect their children against sexual abuse, but about 20% reported that this is not common.

Voices from Bonaire

What people observe

"Some people I see how they yell in their families. **It is not good for a child to be raised like that.**"

(adult)

"Mother may come home tired from work and asks the child to cook for them because the parents are tired. **If the child does not start cooking, they can hit him.**"

(youth)

"A slap on the ear used to be normal. **In the Netherlands that is domestic violence.**"

(adult)

"Domestic violence, especially when alcohol is involved or unemployment, people get angry at each other and start hitting each other. That is the stress, right."

(professional)

"A lot of family problems are **caused by alcohol.**"

(professional)

"You have to change the idea that 'they hit me when I was little and I'm still fine'. If you do not change that idea people keep thinking that hitting is ok."

(professional)

"Now you cannot hit your child, because they will take your child away. So you want to tell me I have to raise a pig, a monster. **I won't hit my child every day, but on a day that he infuriates me, you have to give him two, and they don't want that.**"

(adult)

"And maybe you have warned your child, but you did not explain it to him. And what do we do, **our punishment is to hit immediately.**"

(professional)

"Abuse of women, of children, that you can see because of the bruises or they have broken something. **But abuse of men you don't see because it is more emotional.** Men whose children are taken away, even though they want to be in their lives."

(professional)

"**The culture of hitting is very much present.** That it is normal."

(adult)

What people would like to see improved

Professionals, adults, and youth all emphasized the need for more awareness campaigns about improving family communication and preventing family violence on Bonaire:

- Break the taboo on talking about family problems.
- Break the cycle of hitting children. Just because it was normal before, doesn't make it good.
- Try to teach people communication skills so partners argue less and can agree on parenting practices.
- Address the problem of so many broken homes.
- Improve communication between parents and children.
- Parents should take responsibility for their children.
- Small children should not be left alone by themselves.
- Raise awareness about the dangers of alcohol and drugs, because this causes problems in families.

Reflection

- Domestic violence in the form of verbal abuse is seen as quite common on Bonaire. Physical abuse seems far less common, but is still a concern, especially in partner relationships.
- Child maltreatment in the form of verbal abuse or hitting is seen as quite common on Bonaire. Hitting children is a culturally accepted part of regular discipline.
- The pattern of quite harsh parenting and not so much room for children to express their opinions points towards a generally authoritarian parenting style (common in the Caribbean) as opposed to a more authoritative parenting style that favors non-violent communication with room for children's voices (Roopnarine & Jin, 2016).
- This finding is consistent with research showing that authoritarian parenting and domestic violence are widespread in the Caribbean region (Bissessar & Huggins, 2022; Fry et al., 2021). Scholars have noted that the historical background of the wider region can explain some of these patterns (e.g., Brereton, 2010).
- Participants on Bonaire did show that they are aware of other parenting norms in the Netherlands and elsewhere, in relation to international children's rights and legislation in the Caribbean Netherlands. They are also generally able to describe domestic violence and child maltreatment in those terms.
- There appears to be growing support for non-violent alternatives and better parent-child and family communication with more room for children to voice their opinions. However, it is seen as a challenge to put this development into practice because it contrasts with traditional Caribbean parenting that is more authoritarian in nature.
- Although the survey and interviews did not explicitly address alcohol and drug abuse, this topic did come up during the conversations with professionals and adults as an important factor in problematic communication in the family context. More organized leisure opportunities for youth might also reduce alcohol and drug use among young people.
- Previous reports on domestic violence and/or child maltreatment have underscored the importance of awareness raising as part of a comprehensive strategy to address and prevent violence in family relations (Kloosterboer, 2013; De Bruijn, Kriek & De Vaan, 2014; UNICEF, 2019).

Recommendation 3

Confirming norms concerning non-violent parenting and family communication on Bonaire.

Confirm the norm that all forms of violence against women, children and anyone else in the domestic environment and wider community are unjustifiable and need to be prevented.

- Carry out this norm in culturally appropriate public awareness campaigns on Bonaire in offline and online form;
- Repeat and reconfirm this norm in all relevant policies, protocols, working methods, trainings and other measures to implement laws and policies;
- Invite community role models and influencers from Bonaire to support the norm confirmation and public campaigning around it;
- Invest in comprehensive education about children's rights, women's rights and related issues around human dignity, (gender) equality and intergenerational social justice on Bonaire (primary and secondary schools);
- Organize local professionally mediated broadcasts of roundtable dialogues with participants from different age groups, including young people, to create better intergenerational understanding in general and constructive discussions about changing norms favoring non-violent parenting and family relationships, and lifting the taboo on discussing these topics;
- Pay specific attention to the ambivalence concerning the transition to non-violent forms of child-rearing and family communication in light of the still widely present more traditional Caribbean authoritarian parenting style;
- Develop preventive training programs on Bonaire to foster non-violent parenting and communication norms.

Make use of lessons learned from previous initiatives taken by the Public Entity of Bonaire, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports (ZJCN) and UNICEF to address violence against children and to provide comprehensive family support.

Invite UNICEF and other stakeholders to support these initiatives.

Target group: Public Entity of Bonaire, in close collaboration with community groups and key stakeholders, and with the assistance of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports and UNICEF.



Part 4

Gender inequalities on Bonaire

Gender roles

In the conversations during the research team's visit to Bonaire, it was clear that there are several concerns regarding gender roles on the island. People mentioned the fact that women on Bonaire take on most of the care for children and other family responsibilities, and that children often do not spend much time with their fathers. Statistics from Bonaire show that more than a third of young people (aged 0-25 years) live in a single-parent home. (CBS, 2018/2021), mostly headed by mothers according to locals.

Research shows that such gender roles in the Caribbean context are learned from a young age and that parents play an important role in how boys and girls learn about what is and is not expected of them in family life (Roopnarine & Jin, 2016).

In both the survey and the interviews, participants were asked about differences in family involvement between men and women, and about differences in how boys and girls are raised.

Data from Bonaire

Men and women

In the survey, participants reported their impressions of how men and women on Bonaire engage in family life. The results for men and women were shown in the previous parts of this report.

The figures below summarize the gender differences in a different way by comparing the average scores (on a 10-point scale) for men and women regarding some key aspects of family life. Only those behaviors where the difference between men and women were statistically significant are shown.

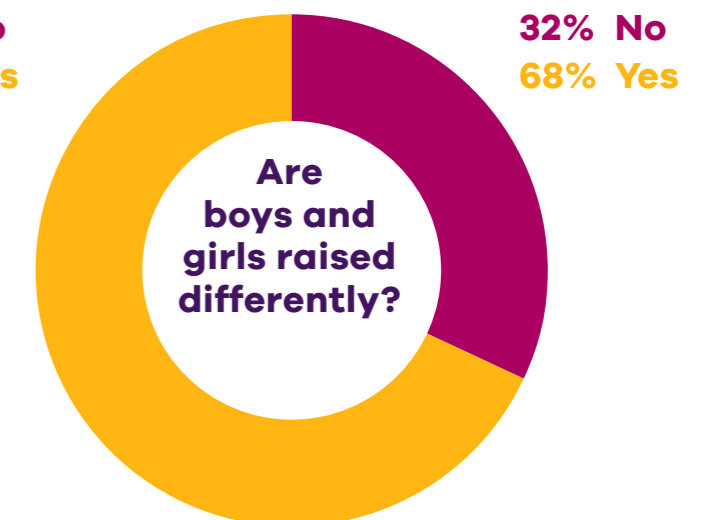
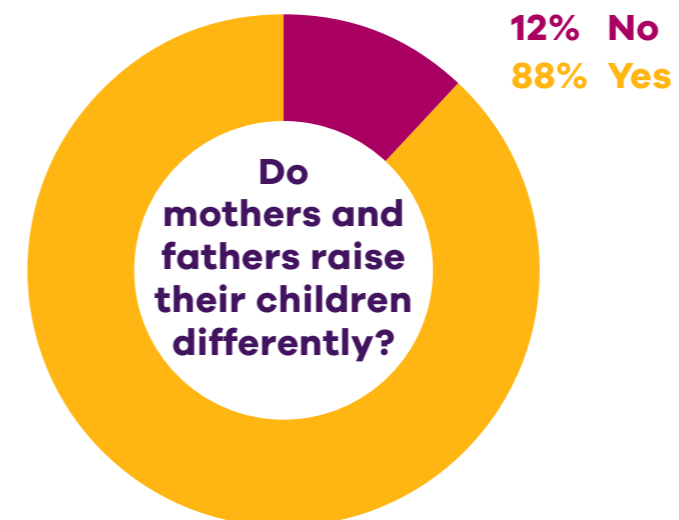


Legend
 → Men
 → Women

These results confirm the pattern from the earlier section on family relationships: according to the participants, in families on Bonaire men are less likely to give love, spend quality time, give advice, or help financially. Men are seen as more likely to show physical violence against their partner and against the older generation than women.

Parenting differences

In the survey, participants were asked whether they think there are differences between mothers and fathers in how they raise children, and whether there are differences between how boys and girls are raised on Bonaire.



Together we protect

Voices from Bonaire

"A lot of fathers are not present in the household and if they are, they are often times not emotionally available."
(adult in survey).

"There are quite a lot of men who are very depressed because they cannot see their children, because the mother resists, and the whole system on Bonaire is not equipped to deal with parent estrangement."
(professional)

** The quotes shown here are from the interviews but also from the survey section where participants could write down their impressions of gender differences on Bonaire.*

"It is our culture: Mothers pay more attention and spend more time with their children. Fathers are bread winners and don't spend as much time with their children as they should be."
(adult in survey)

"The gender roles are very strong, you hardly ever see fathers helping at home."
(adult).

"They have children to keep a man, but he won't stay anyway. We should put it into our heads that nobody belongs to anybody."
(adult)

"You see that they give boys more freedom and are stricter with the girls."
(adult).

"Boys and girls should be raised the same way."
(adult).

"And maybe the boys have bad friends, and the girls think more, like a mother, a sister telling the brother to watch out for bad friends."
(youth)

"And what you see is that when people have been outside of Bonaire, especially in the Netherlands, they have noticed that it can be different. Yes a girl can clean, but a boy can also clean."
(professional)

Reflection

- The general observation by participants is that women take on the lion share of caring tasks in family life, both in relation to family members in general and when it comes to raising children on Bonaire.
- This finding is consistent with results from many other studies in the Caribbean region.
- It has been shown by various scholars that current gender norms and roles in the region are strongly related to the history of the region (e.g., Blank, 2013).
- The fact that there are clear indications that boys and girls are being raised differently suggests that these patterns are transferred from one generation to the next, with girls learning to take family responsibility and boys being encouraged to have freedom. This is consistent with previous research findings (Endendijk et al., 2018).
- Studies also show that fathers in the Caribbean are more likely to be take on caring family roles when relationships are stable and socioeconomic conditions are favorable (Roopnarine, 2012), suggesting that contextual factors need to be taken into account in policy making.
- Another concern is that poverty rates are particularly high in single-mother families (Nationale Ombudsman, 2022), so that the absence of fathers also has an indirect negative influence on children through financial struggles of the mothers.
- Although the participants did not specifically formulate suggestions for improvement in this area, many expressed frustration with the current gendered division of tasks in families.
- The promotion of gender equality (in law and practice) and the prevention of stereotyped roles for women and men are considered key elements in the prevention of domestic violence and violence against women, including girls (see preamble and art. 12 Istanbul Convention; CRC Committee 2011, para. 72 (b)).

Recommendation 4

Promoting gender equality on Bonaire

- Invest in culturally appropriate awareness campaigns about gender stereotypes and how they perpetuate the gendered division of labor in families that puts the burden mostly on women.
- Provide support to women specifically, given their primary role as caregivers in families.
- Acknowledge and support men who do want to be more involved but do not know how and encourage men to reflect on their role as fathers. The roundtable discussion with fathers on Bonaire that was broadcast in 2022 and can still be viewed on YouTube (Tei p'abo – ròl di hende hòmber den un famia) is a great example of such reflection.
- Invest in policies that promote gender equality, among others with regard to parental leave, custodial arrangements after separation and assumed parental responsibilities, building on the guidance provided by international legal provisions laid down in the Istanbul Convention, and related Council of Europe recommendations, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Target group: Public Entity of Bonaire, in close collaboration with community groups and key stakeholders – where relevant with the assistance of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports (ZJCN).



Part 5

Changing times on Bonaire

Generations and migration

During the research team's visit to Bonaire, local professionals referred to the experience of a generation gap. Children and adolescents in the current younger generation were described as being difficult and disobedient and parents were described as incompetent to deal with those challenges. In addition, there was a sense of nostalgia about the olden days in which families seemed to have been closer and children more respectful. People also felt that Bonaire used to be safer and the community used to show more coherence and solidarity.

It was also observed that although the Bonarian society is rapidly changing (due to migration and tourism), people from Bonaire do not always embrace new developments. They seem to prefer to keep things as they are.

The study did not collect survey data on changing times and generational differences, but these topics were mentioned quite frequently in the interviews.

Voices from Bonaire

Generation gap

“There are parents who try to make changes in their upbringing. A bit more ready to listen to their children than we used to be on Bonaire, that is a good thing.”

(adult)

“On Bonaire there is a lot of respect, but this is becoming lost. They are becoming vulgar, watching stupid things on television.”

(adult)

“Today’s generation thinks that older people don’t have authority anymore. In the old days when a child was naughty, a neighbor could slap the child, that was normal.”

(adult)

“The union has gotten lost over the years. Everyone is just by themselves, as if there is no family anymore, it is broken, split.”

(adult)

“In our culture, I used to get hit with two belts on my bottom, and that helped, because I was not a good boy, but now a mother may think it is necessary, that she needs to stop her child from becoming really bad, but it is not allowed anymore.”

(professional)

Reflection

- It is clear that the generation gap and culture change are experienced on Bonaire can be challenging for community cohesion. This is important to address in the design and implementation of support services for families and community members.
- The generation gap is also reflected in the finding that older generations feel they need to be strict and clear to young people who in their eyes misbehave or do not show respect. Strict discipline is often considered an essential element in this regard, which may not be conducive to inclusive and non-violent family and community communication that is also deemed important.
- These observations also speak to the finding that youth do not feel taken seriously. It is important to note that not giving children a voice in decisions that are important to their lives conflicts with their right to be heard (art. 12 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).
- The generation gap that is experienced by both the older and the younger generations could jeopardize the strength of the Bonaire community and its families that was highlighted at the beginning of the results section. It could also hamper attempts to effectively address domestic violence and child maltreatment.
- Another potential source of changes in the culture of Bonaire are the relatively high migration rates and the arrival of groups of people mostly from other Caribbean islands, Latin America and the European Netherlands. Interestingly this topic was hardly ever mentioned in the interviews. It came up, though, during the research team's visit to Bonaire. It is also noted in literature (Oostindie & Veenendaal 2022).

Recommendation 5

Give voice to different generations, including children, in all family-related policies and practices, and in community engagement.

- As part of the investment in community engagement (see recommendation 1), it is important to engage and empower community members from different generations at the same time. This can be done through local roundtable dialogues (town hall meetings) with participants from different age groups, including young people, to create better intergenerational understanding on family life on Bonaire (see also recommendation 3).
- Moreover, all recommendations should be translated into concrete policy and practice in close collaboration with various generations of community members, and in particular also young people by giving them opportunities to express their views and by giving due weight to their views in accordance with article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Age should not be a limiting factor in this regard; younger children (e.g. primary school age) should be invited as well (CRC Committee, 2009, para. 20; see e.g. Kinderombudsman, 2021).
- Ensure the involvement of representatives of specific migrant groups in the society of Bonaire (e.g. the Chinese community) in the above-mentioned actions.

Target group: Public Entity of Bonaire, in close collaboration with community groups and key stakeholders.

Part 6

Support services on Bonaire

What is available on Bonaire?

Support services and other stakeholders

The previous parts have shown that there are both strengths and challenges concerning family life on Bonaire that ought to be addressed. Support services play a critical role in this regard. Several support services are available on Bonaire to offer help, care, assistance and protection to families and community members. These services are generally very much appreciated. There are, however, also some concerns that require attention.

List of services and stakeholders:

- Veiligheidsnetwerk Bonaire
- Politie
- Gezag
- Slachtofferhulp
- Zorg en Jeugd Caribisch Nederland
- Voogdijraad
- Stichting Reclassering Caribisch Nederland
- Akseso
- Krusada
- Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid
- Justitie en Veiligheid
- Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport
- Expertise Centrum Onderwijs en Zorg
- Mental Health Caribbean
- Openbaar lichaam Bonaire
- Fundashon Cas Boneiriano
- Jong Bonaire
- Praktijk Ondersteuning Huisartsen
- Volwassenonderwijs Forma

Voices from Bonaire

What people observe

"I think they're doing a great job. They know what they're talking about and know how to persevere."

(professional)

"There is help and it is pretty clear. You can go to parenting support, etcetera."

(professional)

"Parents do not know where they can go and shame is also a big thing here, then things stay hidden."

(professional)

"There is a lot of mistrust about the organisation within the community."

(professional)

"There is not enough attention for prevention."

(professional)

"The support options are there, but not sufficiently in tune with the needs of the people."

(adult)

"People have to wait a long time or do not get a clear explanation."

(adult)

"We do not have a place where abused children can go."

(adult)

"At Akceso you can trust them, they help and organize things."

(youth)

"For Dutch people it is easy to find information on the internet, but I can't see people from here doing that in Dutch or English."

"So making information available in Papiamentu is important."

(professional)

What people would like to see improved

- Youth, adults, and professionals mentioned the importance of improving family communication, and preventing violence through organized programs.
- Youth also mentioned that parents should take a more active role in parenting and be more engaged with the available services if they need them.
- Professionals mentioned preventive parent support groups as a good idea for Bonaire.
- Youth, adults, and professionals emphasized the importance of building trust in the available support services among community members. This might also relate to needing more professionalism and efficiency in services.
- Professionals indeed mentioned the need for more training for professionals, more collaboration between different support services, and investment in making services more accessible. Accessibility also means making sure information is available in Papiamentu.
- Youth, adults and professionals advocated for more organized leisure opportunities for young people on Bonaire, and professionals also mentioned the need for more childcare because parents need to work so much to make ends meet.

Reflection

Support services are vital for the support of families and are considered part of the implementation of the obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights to support parents and others responsible for the upbringing of children (see art. 18 (2) and 27 (3) CRC; see also art. 3 (3) CRC).

Support services are also key for the prevention of and protection against domestic violence (art. 16 Istanbul Convention) and child maltreatment (art. 19 CRC).

- In order to effectively promote non-violent alternatives for child-rearing and better parent child and family communication with more room for children to voice their opinions, support services should provide concrete examples to parents and other family members that will foster the growing support for non-violence family interactions.

Support services are present on Bonaire and are also appreciated by the participants, but there are concerns about several issues:

- People's lack of familiarity with services, not knowing where to find them;
- Lack of trust in the available support services;
- Lack of information available in Papiamentu;

The lack of confidentiality when using support services was not explicitly mentioned by the participants in this research (unlike on Saba and Sint Eustatius). Guana Chat was implemented on Bonaire in 2023. This could be a blueprint for a similar service for adults.

Earlier research and reports pointed to the importance of accessible and anonymous support services for both adults and children (Kloosterboer, 2013; De Bruijn, Kriek & De Vaan, 2014; UNICEF, 2019; Kinderombudsman, 2021; CRC Committee 2022; see also Zijlstra et al., 2021). The same is true for specific groups in the society of Bonaire, including migrant communities.

The sometimes negative perceptions towards parents among professionals may stand in the way of the effectiveness of the services provided to families, parents and children.



Recommendation 6

Strengthen support services for youth and adults

- The role and functioning of support services should be clearly defined in legislation and policies. The recently developed Government Decree (*Besluit maatschappelijke ondersteuning en bestrijding huiselijk geweld en kindermishandeling BES*) providing a legal basis for the '*Advies- en meldpunt huiselijk geweld en kindermishandeling*' and the compulsory '*beschermingscode huiselijk geweld en kindermishandeling*' can make an important contribution.
- Make sure that support services work within a comprehensive framework of family support and collaborate where appropriate and relevant. And invest in education and training concerning the role and responsibilities of each service provider and other key stakeholders (government, judiciary, police, among others) and the prevention of feeling unequipped to act. → *continuation*

Recommendation 6

- Ensure that support services offer concrete ways to parents and families for non-violent child-rearing and better parent-child and family communication with more room for children to voice their opinions, while building on previous initiatives taken by the Public Entity of Bonaire, different Ministries and UNICEF.
- Invest in comprehensive education about children's rights, women rights and related issues around human dignity, (gender) equality and intergenerational social justice on Bonaire for professionals.
- Make sure that all community members of Bonaire know about the existence of support services and understand how to effectively and privately access these. The earlier recommendation about fostering openness about family problems (part 3 of the results) would hopefully also increase the use of the appropriate services.
- Make sure all relevant information about support services is available in Papiamentu.
- Invest in more opportunities for leisure activities for young people to prevent them being home or on the streets unsupervised after school, especially in the context of many parents working multiple jobs to make ends meet.

- Invite representatives of various generations, including young people, and migrant communities within the community of Bonaire to provide input for the process of continuous learning and improvement of services.
- Make use of lessons learned from previous initiatives taken by the Public Entity of Bonaire, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports (ZJCN) and UNICEF to provide comprehensive family support and invite UNICEF and other stakeholders to support these initiatives.

Target group: Public Entity of Bonaire, in close collaboration with community groups and key stakeholders, and with the assistance of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports (ZJCN), Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations and UNICEF.

A woman with curly hair, wearing a black and white vertically striped dress, is seen from the side, leaning against a decorative, ornate metal post. She is looking towards a house in the background. The scene is set outdoors, likely in a garden or courtyard, with some foliage visible. The entire image has a magenta/pink color overlay.

Overarching

recommendations

General points of attention

After having presented the study's findings, reflections and recommendations on Bonaire, the report concludes with a number of general points of attention, which bear relevance for all three islands in the Caribbean Netherlands, as well as some overarching recommendations.

- Because of the strong overlap in the identified areas for improvement across the Caribbean Netherlands, sharing best practices and co-developing new initiatives across the three islands is recommended to strengthen systematic changes. The newly developed strategy for the Intercountry Taskforce on Children's Rights (*Interlandelijke Taskforce Kinderrechten*) comes with an opportunity to exchange knowledge, experiences and good practices to promote the protection of children against all forms of violence. A similar strategy could be developed in the future concerning domestic violence and violence against women, under the realm of the Istanbul Convention.
- All recommendations need to be integrated in the overarching, comprehensive strategy for the Caribbean Netherlands on family relationships, domestic violence and child maltreatment. More specifically, the renewal of the *Bestuursakkoord* in 2024 provides an opportunity in this regard.
- All actions should be guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Istanbul Convention and related international standards.
- All actions should be supported – financially and otherwise – by the Dutch government in ways that acknowledge and respect local needs and wishes, also considering sensitivities between the Caribbean Netherlands and the European part of the Netherlands. This was also noted by some participants: "Thank God we do not copy everything from the Netherlands. Children are taught some respect at least." (adult); "In school books, children do not see anyone who looks like us, or things our culture. Because we belong to the Netherlands, they are indoctrinating our children, telling us how things are supposed to be." (adult).
- To aid efficiency, the practical implementation of the recommendations would ideally build on structures, plans and policies already present, formalizing and putting into practice what might already be there informally or just on paper, and, thus, consolidating and furthering local strength.

"Thank God we do not copy everything from the Netherlands. Children are taught some respect at least."

(adult)

Recommendation 7

Periodic collection of disaggregated data

- Repeat this study every five years.
- Assess how this periodic data collection can be connected to existing or future data collection and monitoring instruments, including the Youth Monitor for the Caribbean Netherlands (Netherlands Statistics), the reports of the National Ombudsman and Children's Ombudsman, UNICEF and the Interagency Taskforce on Children's Rights.
- Consider conducting smaller and more specific measurements, tailored to the island's needs, in the interim, for example on the impact of the recently announced increase of the social minimum, or on the issue of sexual abuse.

Target audience: the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports (ZJCN) and other relevant Ministries (Interior and Kingdom Relations; Social Affairs; Justice and Security), together with the Public Entities.

Recommendation 8

Entry into force of the Istanbul Convention for the Caribbean Netherlands

- Set a specific date for the entry into force of the Istanbul Convention in the near future and continue to prepare its implementation, as explained in the letter to Parliament by the State Secretary of Health, Welfare and Sports in February 2022 (State Secretary of Health, Welfare and Sports, 2022a).
- Continue to invest in the required general measures of implementation of this and other relevant international legal instruments.

Target audience: Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports (ZJCN) together with other relevant Ministries of the Dutch Government.



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Zorg en Jeugd Caribisch Nederland
Ministerie van Volksgezondheid,
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