

# **PERCEPTIONS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN SHETLAND**

***INCLUDING PERCEPTIONS OF LOCAL CHARITIES.***

BY GRACIE GOWANS-LITTLE



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS!**

Having received an overwhelming response from the community, I feel heartened to see such a large amount of people who care about this issue in Shetland. With this being a project for the Social Science Baccalaureate, I did not expect it to become as big as it has become, and I am incredibly grateful for all the input I have received from the community. This report would be impossible without the 325 people who took the time to complete my survey, and for that, thank you!! In particular, I want to say thank you to those who have shared personal experiences with me through the survey. Your willingness to help me understand this important issue further is invaluable.

Through my research I have learned so much from 5 amazing local charities; Space2Face, The Compass Centre, Women's Aid, Victim Support Shetland and The Open Project. I was welcomed with such kindness from each charity and was motivated after each interview to complete this project to the very best of my ability in order to do such inspiring charities justice.

While publicising my research, I also wanted to thank ShetNews and BBC Radio Shetland for being so willing to give me a voice to publicise my project. Thank you also to those of whom who shared my survey around their own social media platforms.

I also want to thank my supervisor throughout this project, Mr Mackenzie. Let's hope that the social science baccalaureate can become as well established as the science baccalaureate for all the future pupils under his wing!

But mostly, I want to give a special thank you to Ella, my go-to person throughout this. Thank you for all your encouragement, advice and support throughout the entire baccalaureate (and S6 in general). It goes without saying I definitely could not have done it without you and our Friday mornings! Well done for sticking with, and fighting for, your project – it is an incredibly worthy topic.

Gracie x



## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements!	2
Trigger Warning	4
Aims and Objectives	5
Research Methods	5
Who participated in the survey?	6
○ <i>Awareness by age</i>	6
○ <i>Awareness by gender</i>	7
Do you think sexual violence is an issue in shetland?	8
Recognising where to access support and information	10
The Compass Centre	13
○ <i>Awareness by age</i>	13
○ <i>Awareness by gender</i>	14
The Open Project	15
○ <i>Awareness by age</i>	15
○ <i>Awareness by gender</i>	16
Shetland Women's Aid	17
○ <i>Awareness by age</i>	17
○ <i>Awareness by gender</i>	18
Space2face	19
○ <i>Awareness by age</i>	19
○ <i>Awareness by gender</i>	20
Victim Support Shetland	21
○ <i>Awareness by age</i>	21
○ <i>Awareness by gender</i>	22
how does being in shetland affect accessing support?	23
what are the barriers of addressing sexual violence in shetland?	24
○ <i>Culture</i>	25
○ <i>Privacy</i>	26
○ <i>Small community</i>	27
○ <i>Rurality</i>	28
Language we use	29
Education	31
Summary of findings	32

## TRIGGER WARNING

***To give a heads-up, this report discusses themes and includes language regarding sexual violence that may be triggering for some individuals.***

I used the following definition of sexual violence throughout my project.



I gave this definition at the start of my survey as there are varied interpretations of sexual violence. Often it can be an incredibly stigmatised term, leading to people making assumptions about what they think that it is based on preconceived ideas. To clarify my stance, I used this particular definition as I felt that it best encapsulated my viewpoint.



## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

One of the main aims of my project is to raise awareness within the community about sexual violence and to talk about the perceptions of sexual violence itself, and the local charities in Shetland that work to tackle it. There is a much-needed conversation to be had about sexual violence and the stigma surrounding it in Shetland. This can allow us to make the changes we need as a community to improve experiences of people accessing support or seeking information. Often, we are greeted with a 'oh this doesn't happen here' stance, but, sexual violence happens everywhere. We cannot shy away from this fact. By researching local perceptions, I hope that this data can be used to raise awareness of the charities included and the incredible work they do. Not only this, but I hope that the data can be taken further and used to make positive change within the community.

## **RESEARCH METHODS USED**

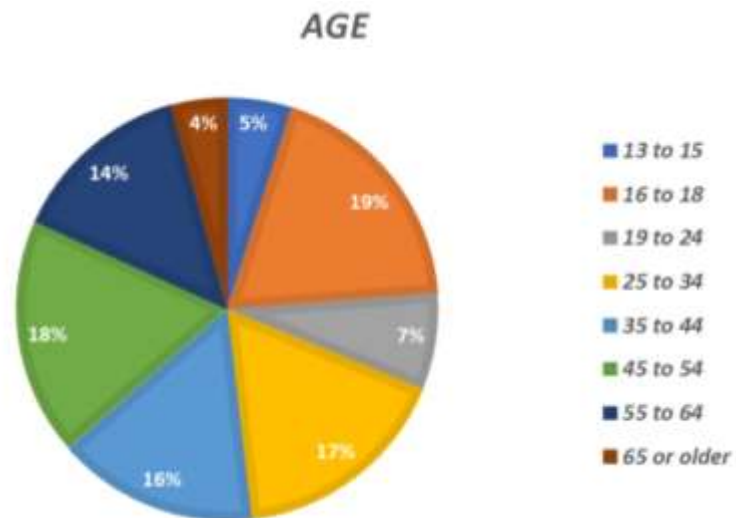
To measure perceptions, the most appropriate method of research was a survey. Having the survey be completely anonymous I felt was important as people are more likely to be honest, especially with a topic such as sexual violence. My goal was to reach as many people as I could, so an online survey with an easily distributable link was apt. My survey included lots of different types of questions. These included 'yes' 'no' questions, often with the option to write more information if required. Images of each charities logo with the option of tick boxes was incorporated, as well as a grid table in which folk could click strongly disagree to strongly agree where they felt their knowledge lay regarding awareness of the work that each charity in the grid does to tackle sexual violence. There was also a long answer text question at the bottom that allowed people to write about barriers to addressing sexual violence in Shetland.

While this isn't included in my report, as part of the baccalaureate, I conducted five semi-structured interviews with a member of each of the charities. These lasted up to an hour each and was so that I could understand the work that these charities do.

## WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE SURVEY?

### AGE:

In my survey, I received an incredible total of 325 responses from folk across Shetland of various ages ranging from 13-65+. Despite the diversity of ages represented in the responses, there was a fairly even split between most of them, with the majority of participants being 16-18 years old (19%). I was pleasantly surprised with the large number of 45-54 year old responses (18%).

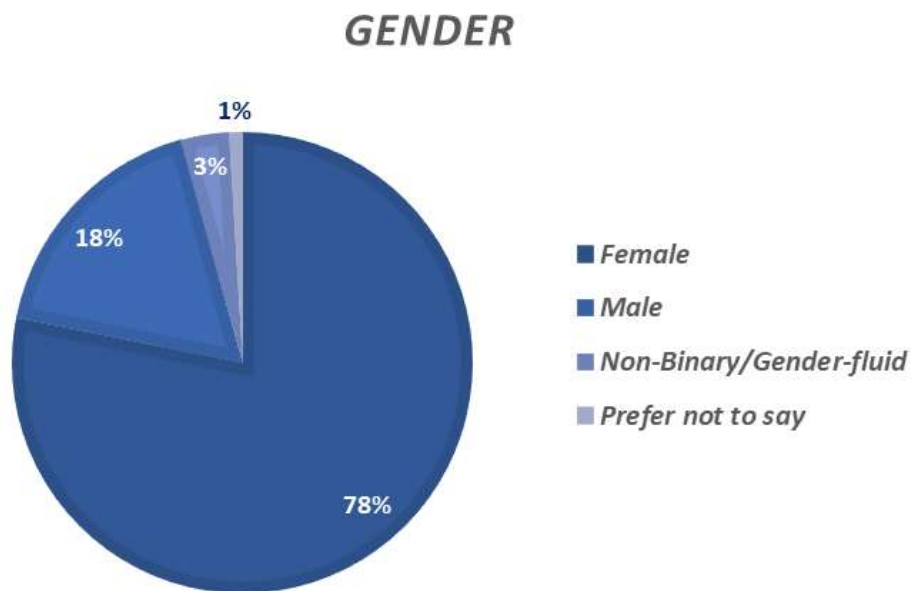


I was able to publicise my survey through a wide variety of sources. The survey was published through my own social media page, the social media pages of the charities involved in the research, the 'Shetland for Equality' Facebook page, an article through ShetNews and an interview with BBC Radio Shetland.

Unfortunately I wasn't able to get a large number of 13 to 15 year olds responses despite The Compass Centre sending QR codes to local schools on my behalf. Partly I believe this may be because schools were hesitant to share the survey with younger students due to the sensitive nature of the topic, that maybe they didn't see a need to educate younger students about sexual violence. I also know that at 3 weeks in, my QR code stopped working. However, it is important to understand that sexual violence can affect anyone, regardless of age, and that educating young people on this issue is crucial to ensuring their own safety.

## **GENDER:**

While the responses from my survey represented a diverse age range, there was not an equal split of gender in the responses as shown below:

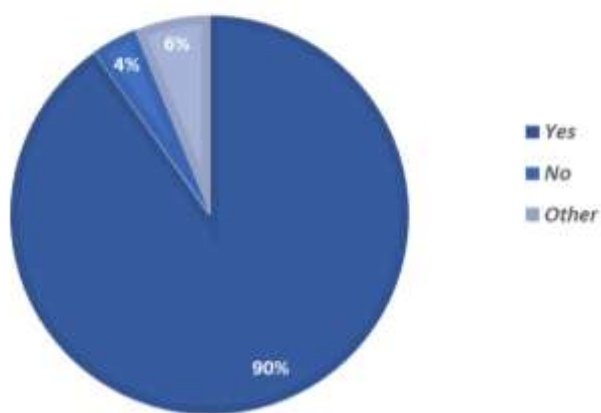


However, this was not unexpected, as the subject of the survey may have attracted specific demographics. While it's not uncommon for men to feel excluded, targeted or unsupported by this topic, the lack of balanced representation of men in the survey raises important questions about the gender dynamics and societal expectations when it comes to sexual violence and gender. As we know, the vast majority of survivors of sexual violence are women. It's possible that the majority of responses came from women because this is an issue that many women have experienced.

## DO YOU THINK SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS AN ISSUE IN SHETLAND?

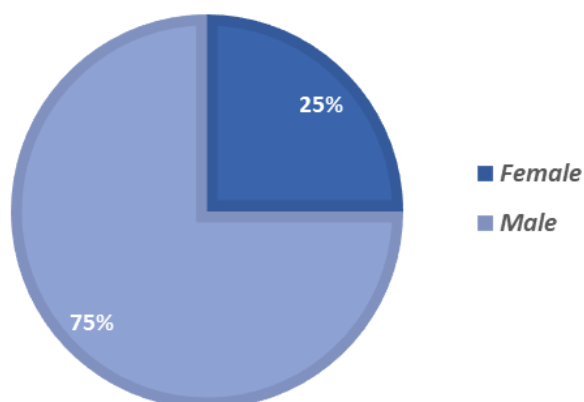
At this part of the survey, there was a 'Yes' and a 'No' option. But, I provided a space for people to write their own answers if they felt those answers weren't representative of their ideas. I have made a word-cloud of some of these opinions. I really appreciate people adding their own answers, it gave a wider insight into local ideas and really transformed the question into something broader, giving me much more to consider.

*DO YOU BELIEVE SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS AN ISSUE IN SHETLAND?*

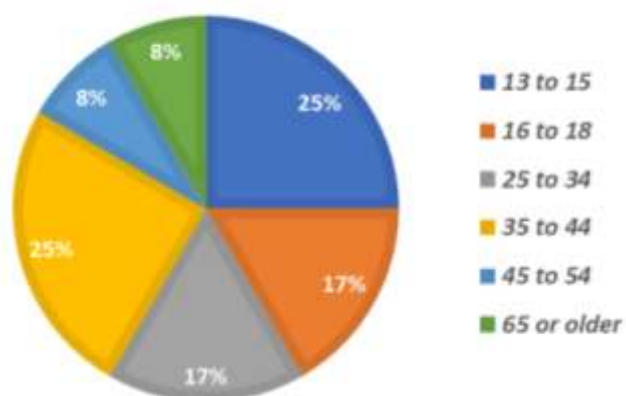


I was particularly interested in the 4% of individuals who responded 'No' to the statement. Although it is important to understand that there is no right, or wrong answer to this question (as it is all part of measuring local perceptions) this particular response could potentially perpetuate a harmful stigma that can negatively affect those seeking support. To further analyse this data, I have broken down the gender and age of those who answered 'No' in order to gain a better understanding of who holds these beliefs.

*GENDER SPLIT OF 'NO'S*

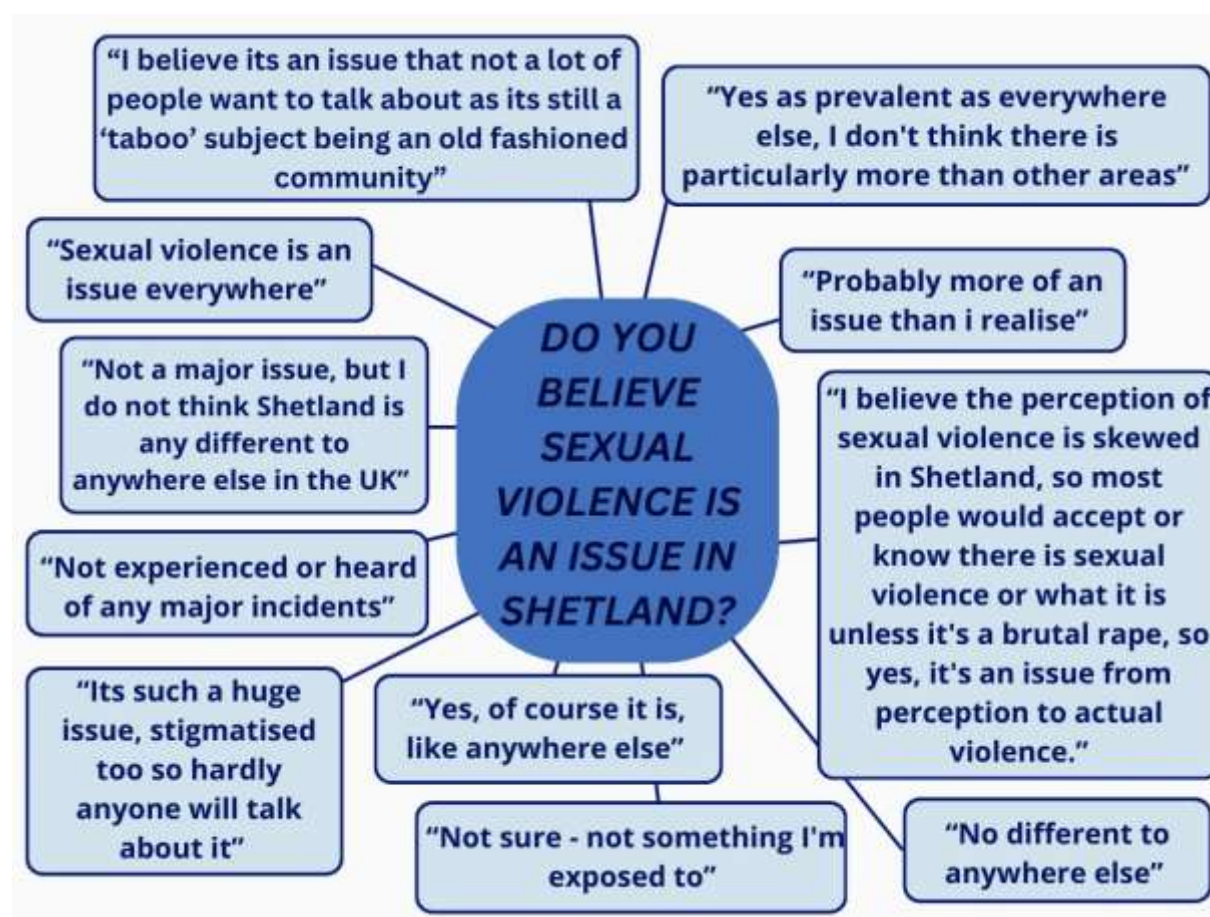


*AGE SPLIT OF 'NO'S*





The 6% of individuals who chose to write their own responses generated a diverse set of answers. A handful of responses expressed not knowing the answer, this is just as valid as a yes or no. Here is what the 6% said:



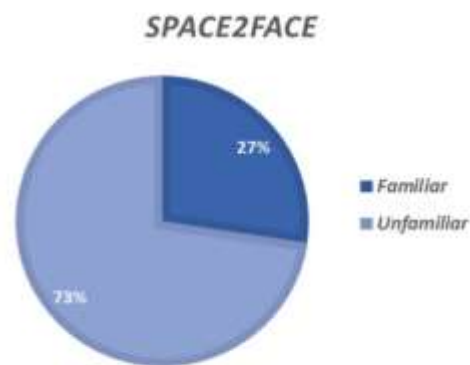
I found these answers incredibly interesting. Multiple answers expressed it not being a different issue than anywhere else or being an issue everywhere. This is true, sexual violence is an issue not specific to Shetland. As my project is partly centred on perceptions, this was an important response to hear. It was interesting to see that when posed with this question, the responses were primarily focused on the occurrence of the sexual violence itself, rather than its aftermath or the unique challenges that rural communities may face.

A couple of the answers stuck out to me. *"Not experienced or heard of any major incidents"*, to me, suggests the stigma that only 'major incidents' create sexual violence to be a perceived issue. The dismissal of many people's experiences as 'not serious enough' as it 'wasn't rape' perpetuates warped ideals of what can qualify you for support. This can lead to suffering in silence and feeling invalidated by your trauma. Regardless of severity, sexual violence can have long-lasting emotional, physical and psychological impacts.

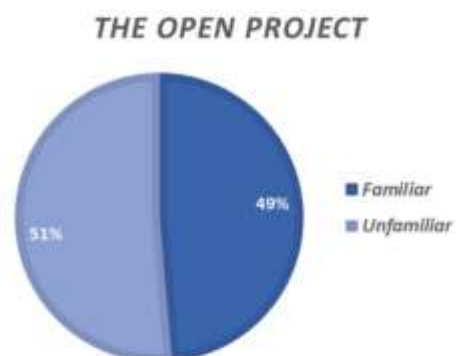
## RECOGNISING WHERE TO ACCESS SUPPORT AND INFORMATION

The first step of accessing support and information, is being able to recognise what services are available. Recognising logos can play an important role in accessing both support and information, particularly in regards to sexual violence. I was interested in measuring recognition of the logos of each charity themselves as I wanted to see if there was a link between familiarity of the logo and perceived awareness of each charity when combined with the next question.

### CHARITY ONE: SPACE2FACE



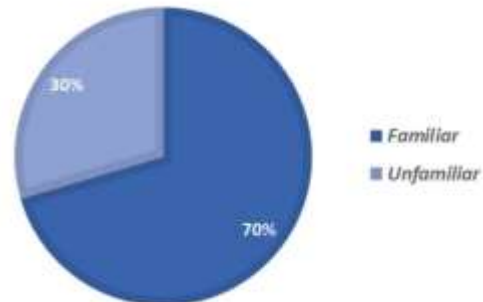
### CHARITY TWO: THE OPEN PROJECT



### CHARITY THREE: THE COMPASS CENTRE



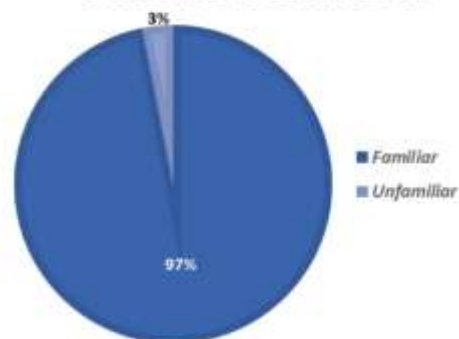
THE COMPASS CENTRE



### CHARITY FOUR: SHETLAND WOMEN'S AID



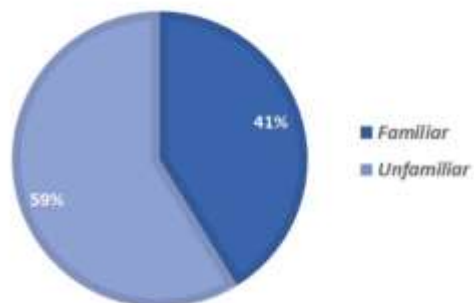
SHETLAND WOMEN'S AID



### CHARITY FIVE: VICTIM SUPPORT SHETLAND



VICTIM SUPPORT SHETLAND



## **KNOWING WHAT SERVICES PROVIDE**



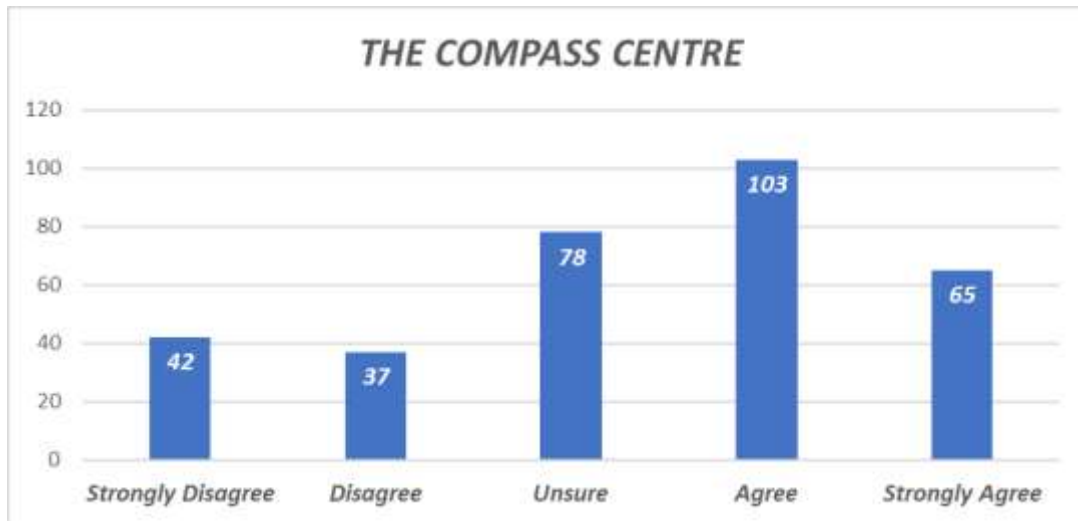
It's easy to look at a name of a charity on a survey and believe that you know exactly what services they provide. Clearly, many of the people filling in this survey have a very good idea and either work for or have accessed these services. It is important to separate the data of awareness into gender and age because it can give us a more nuanced understanding of who is more aware of a particular charity or service. You can be aware of a charity, but not fully understand what

exactly it does, or the impact that it can have on the community.

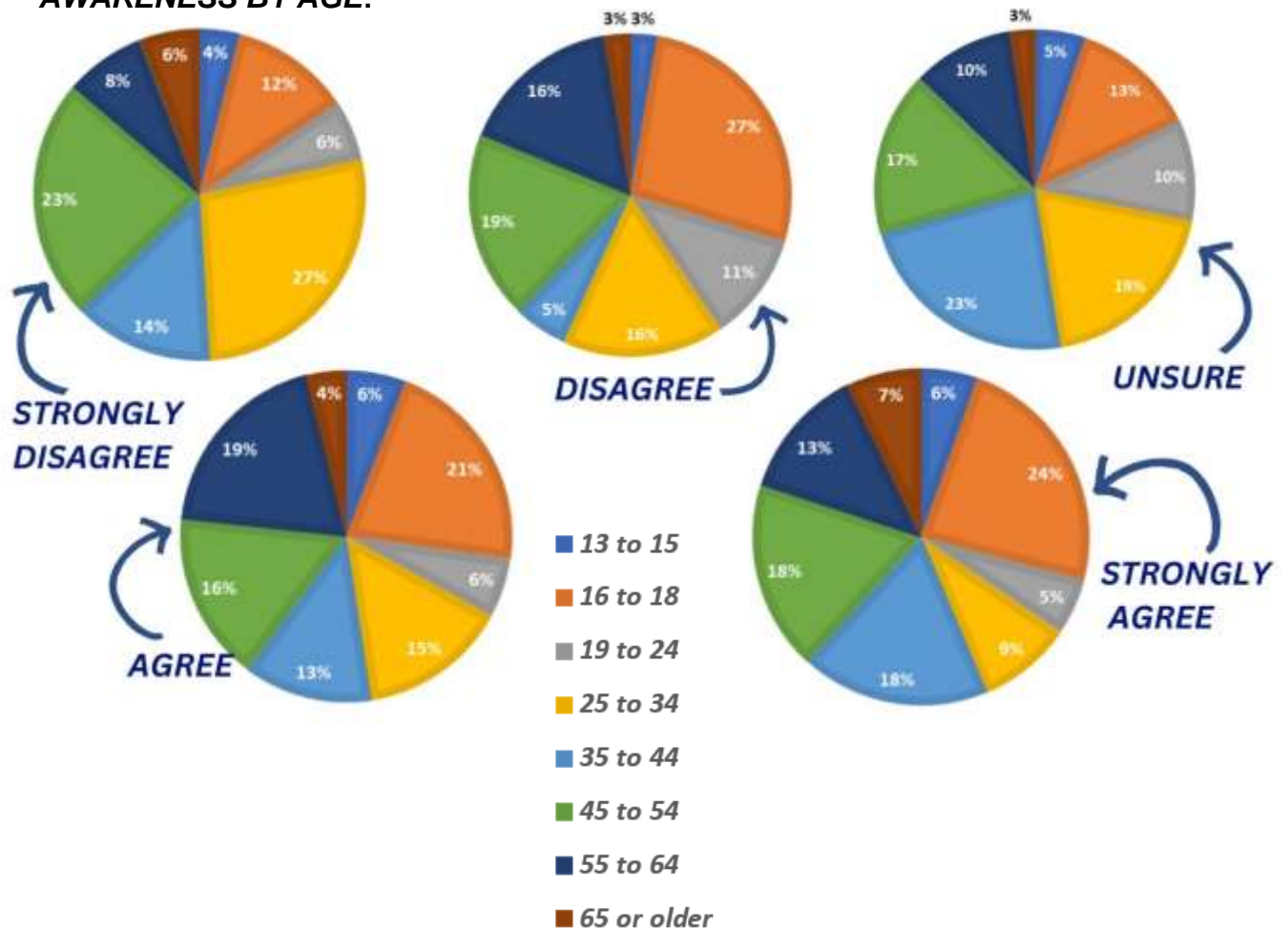
I was interested in finding out if people knew what each service did to tackle sexual violence after considering topics for this project. Having known the work of the Compass Centre well, I realised that I wasn't sure what other support and information was available. By understanding what services are available and what they offer, we can make, and help others make, informed decisions about what might best meet our peers and our own needs.

I have separated the awareness into sections of gender and age. I have had to remove the data of those who chose 'Prefer not to say' for both categories due to the small sample size. I have done this so the research can ensure that these individuals will not be identified due to their responses.

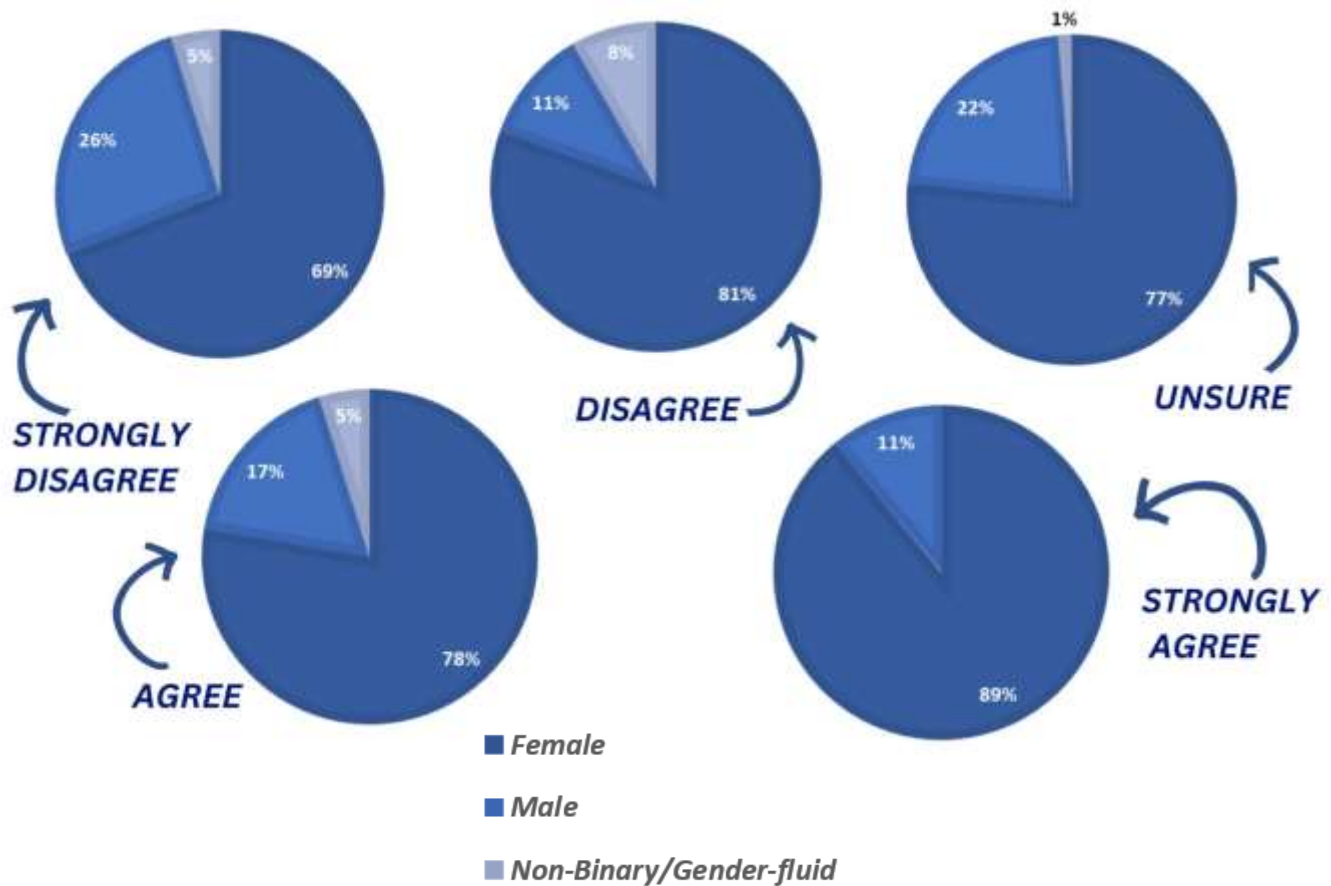




### AWARENESS BY AGE:

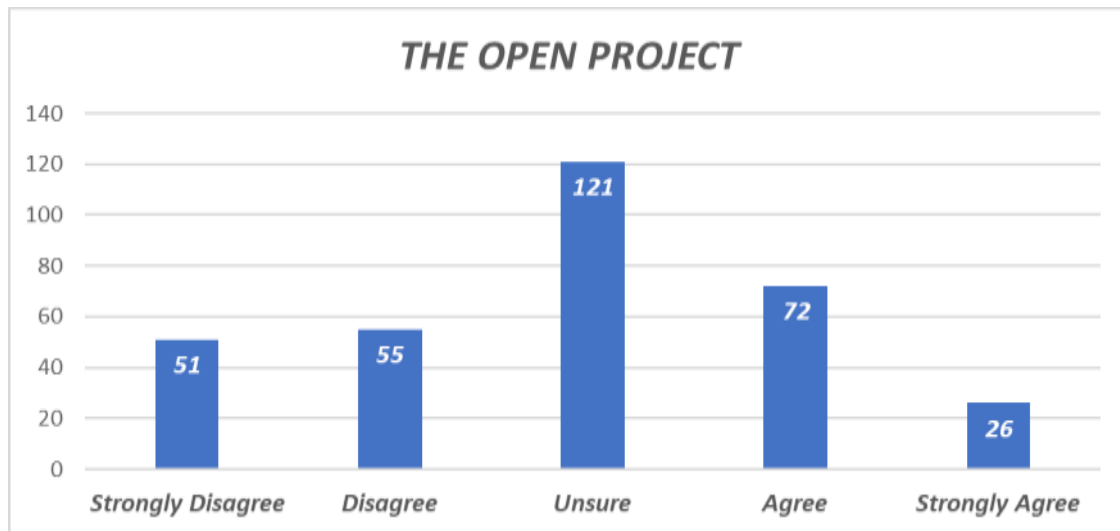


### AWARENESS BY GENDER:

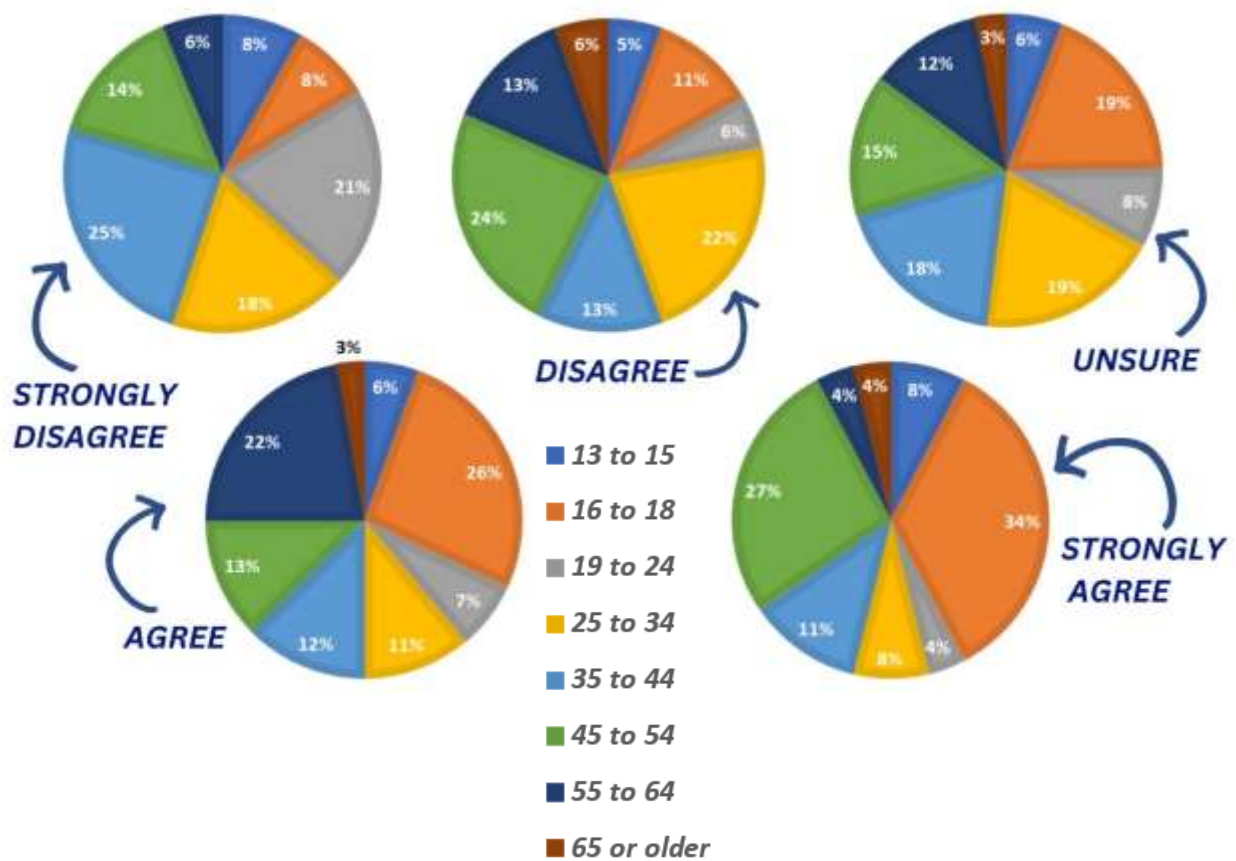


### ARE THERE LINKS BETWEEN LOGO RECOGNITION AND PERCIEVED AWARENESS OF WORK?

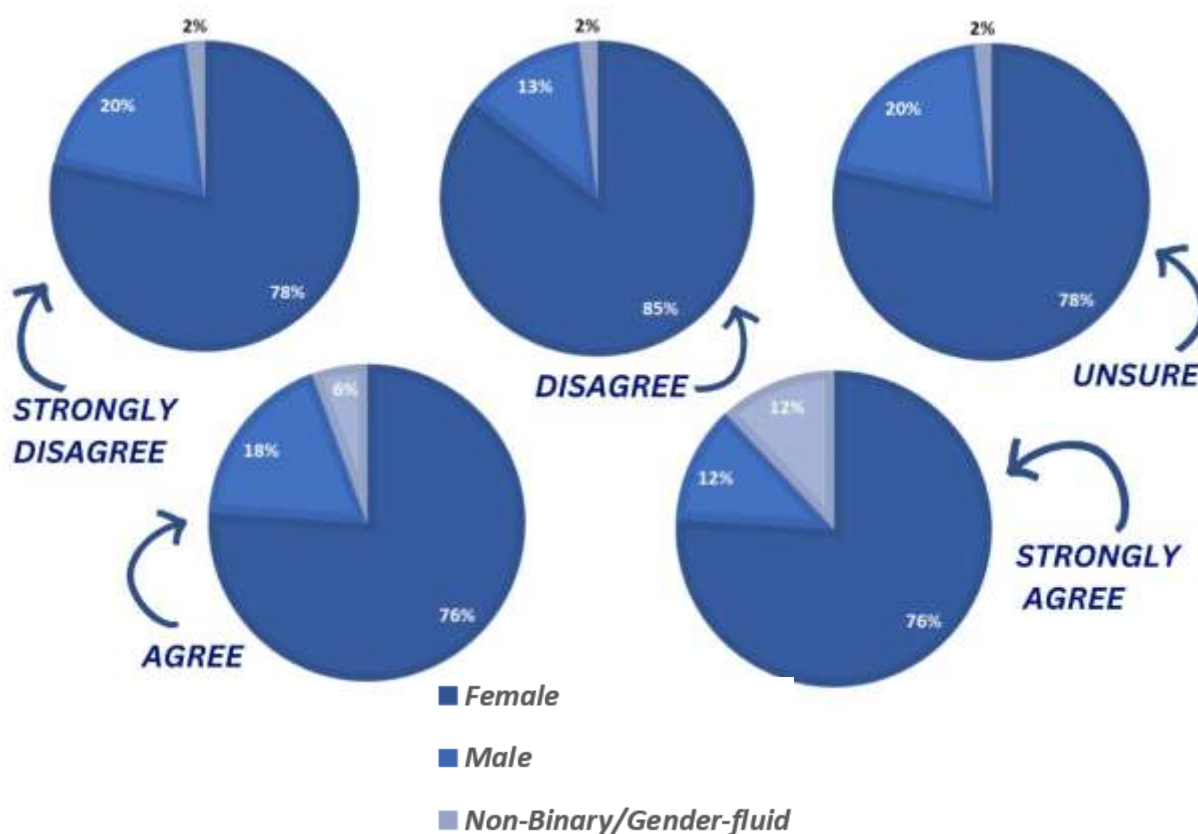
- 70% were familiar with The Compass Centre's Logo.
- 52% agreed/strongly agreed about the awareness of the work that the service provided. 24% were unsure and a further 24% disagreed/strongly disagreed.
- The majority recognised the logo, while just over half were aware of the work carried out by The Compass Centre.
- Overall, the visibility of The Compass Centre in the local community is good.



### AWARENESS BY AGE:



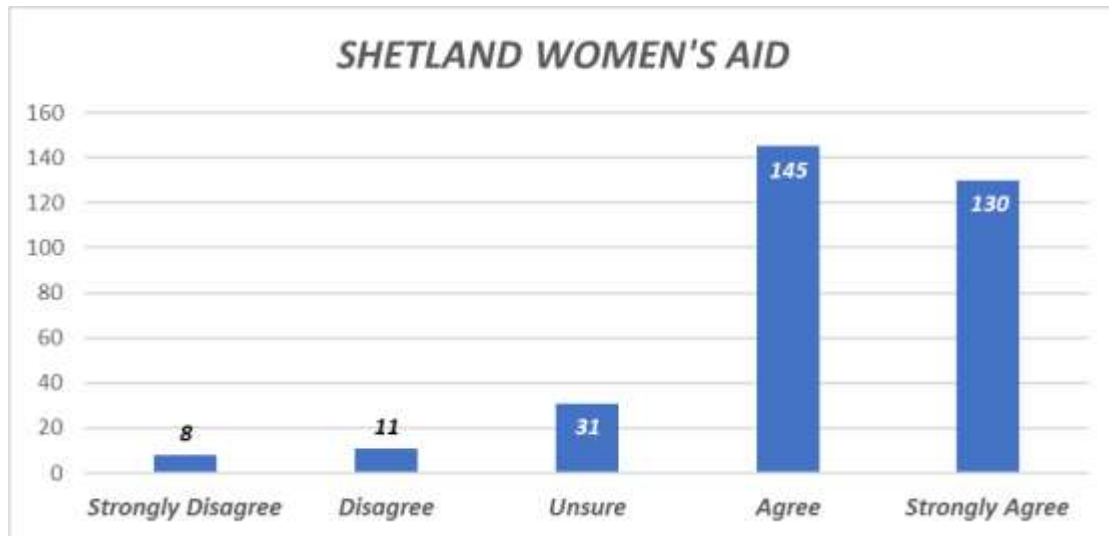
### AWARENESS BY GENDER:



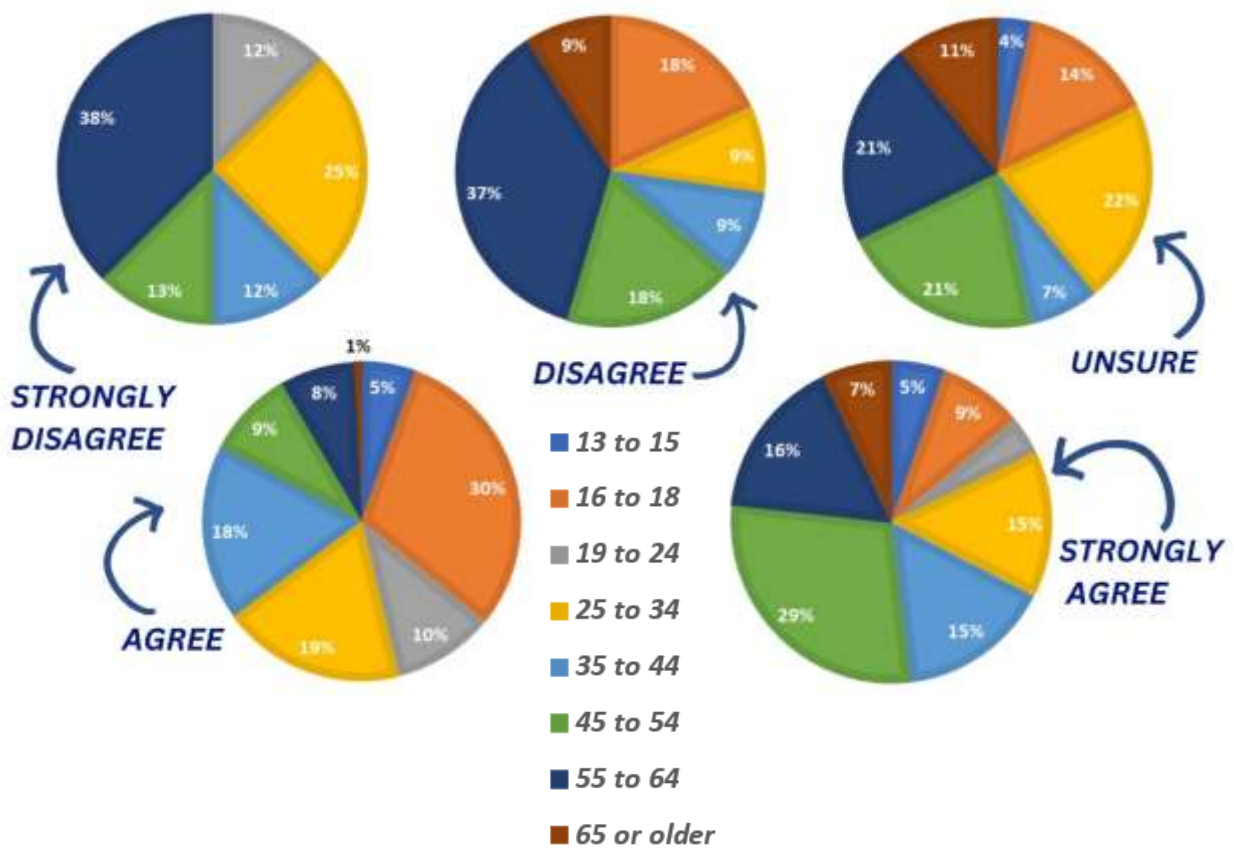
### ARE THERE LINKS BETWEEN LOGO RECOGNITION AND PERCEIVED AWARENESS OF WORK?

- 49% were familiar with The Open Project's logo
- 30% agreed/strongly agreed about the awareness of the work that the service provided. 37% were unsure and a further 33% disagreed/strongly disagreed.
- Just under half of respondents recognised the logo, the figure dropping by around 20% when it comes to awareness of work regarding sexual violence suggesting a potential correlation between logo recognition and perceived awareness of work.
- Overall, The Open Project's visibility in the local community is fair.

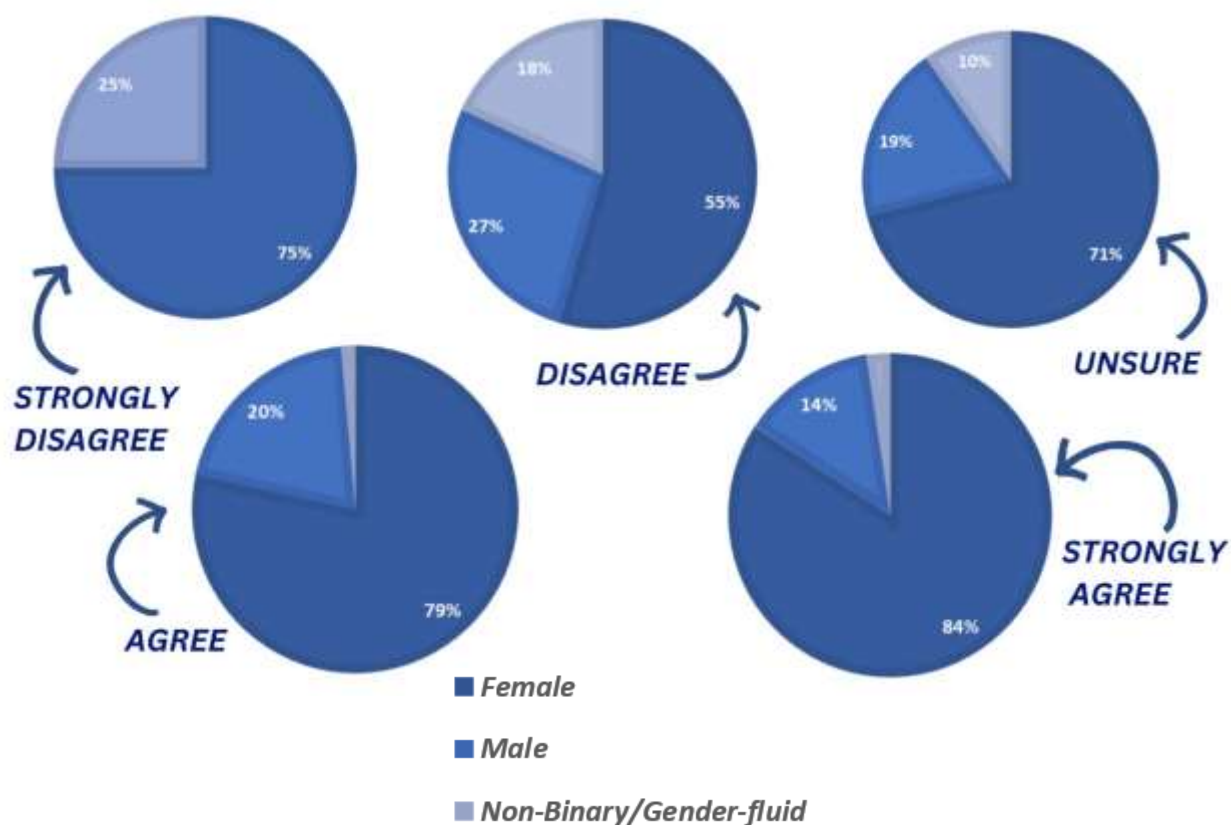




### AWARENESS BY AGE:

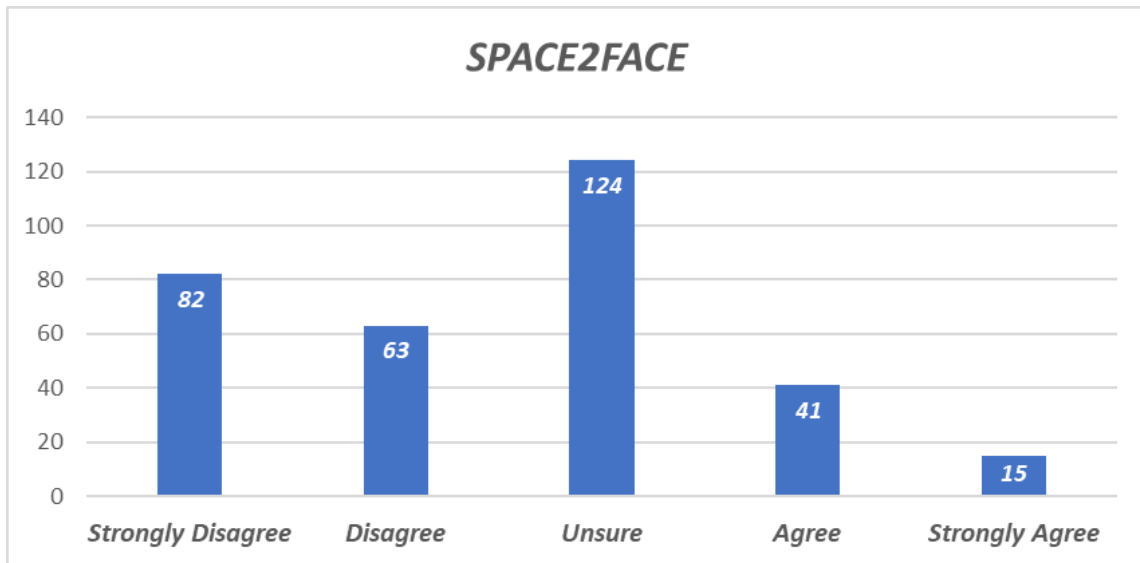


## AWARENESS BY GENDER:

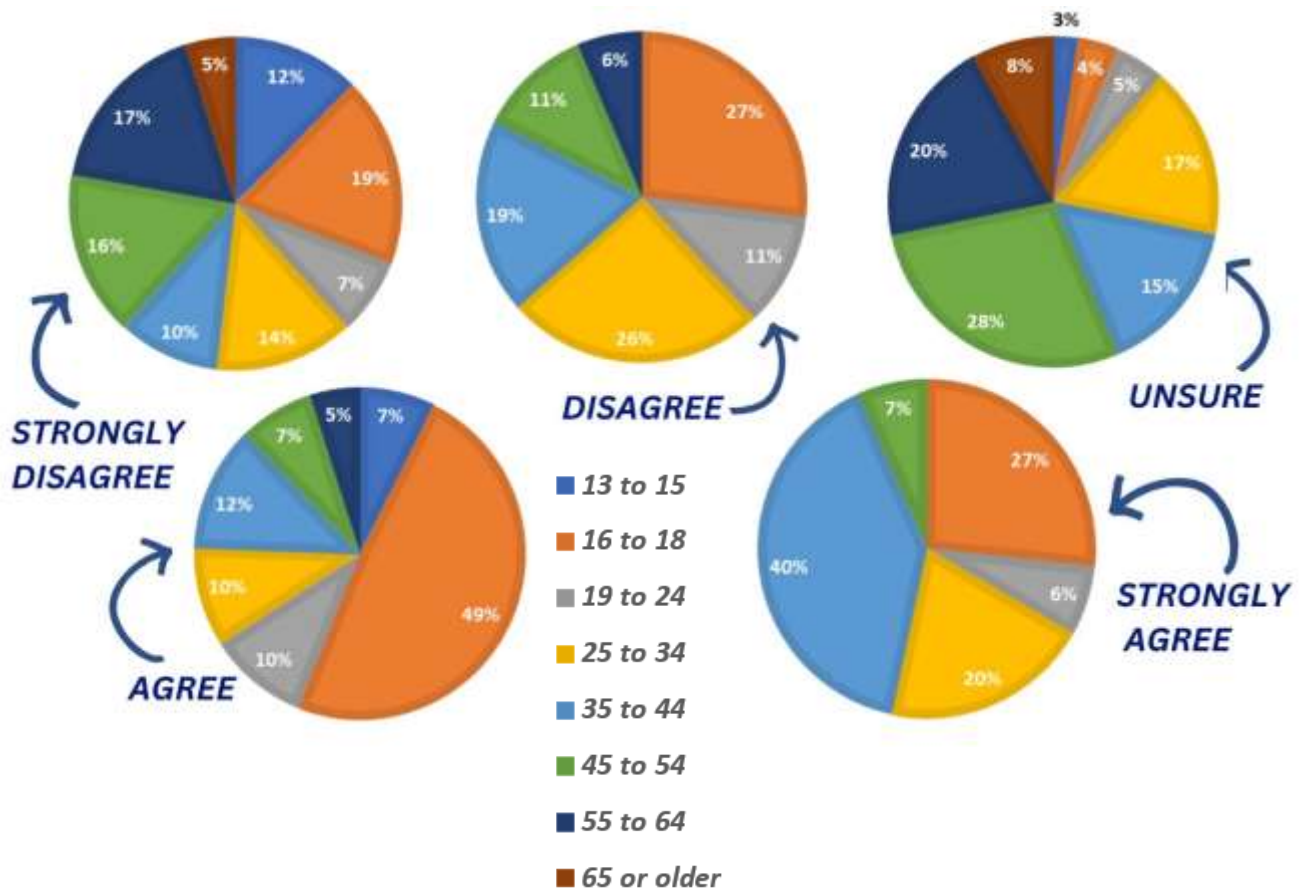


## ARE THERE LINKS BETWEEN LOGO RECOGNITION AND PERCIEVED AWARENESS OF WORK?

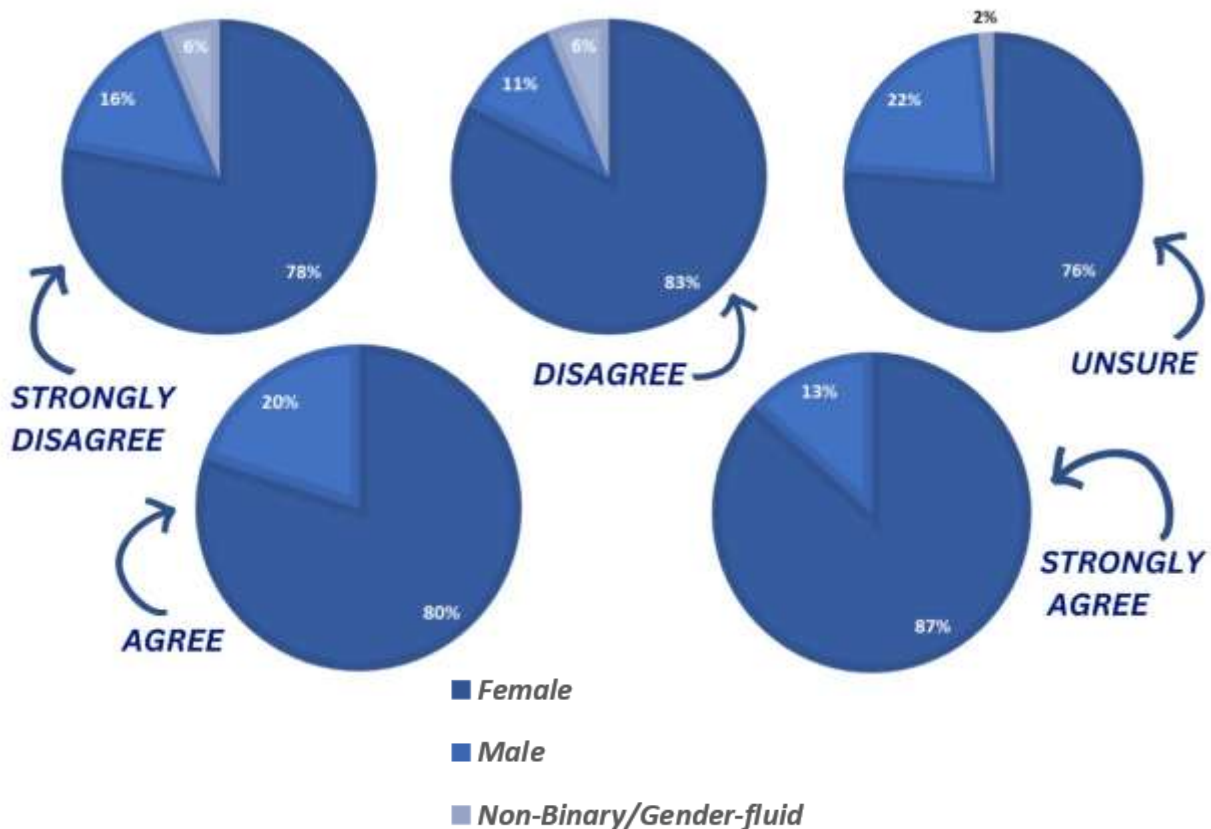
- 97% were familiar with the Shetland Women's Aid logo
- 85% agreed/strongly agreed about the awareness of the work that the service provided. 9% were unsure and a further 6% disagreed/strongly disagreed.
- Almost 100% of respondents were familiar with the logo of Shetland Women's Aid. This figure drops when it comes to the awareness of work, but it still very high, which suggests that there is a correlation between logo recognition and perceived awareness of work for the majority of respondents.
- Overall, Shetland Women's Aid has very high visibility in the local community.



**AWARENESS BY AGE:**

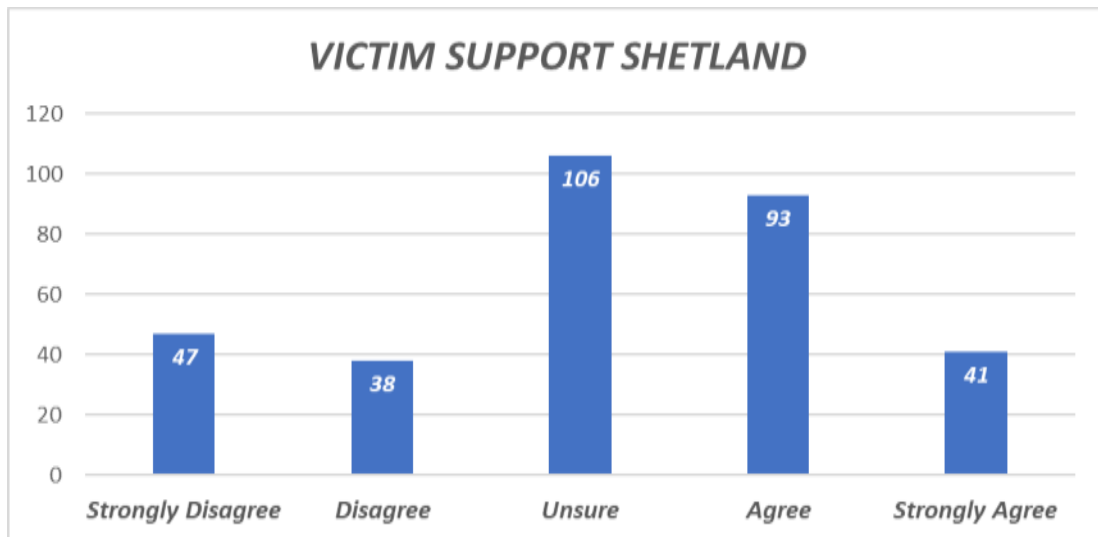


### **AWARENESS BY GENDER:**

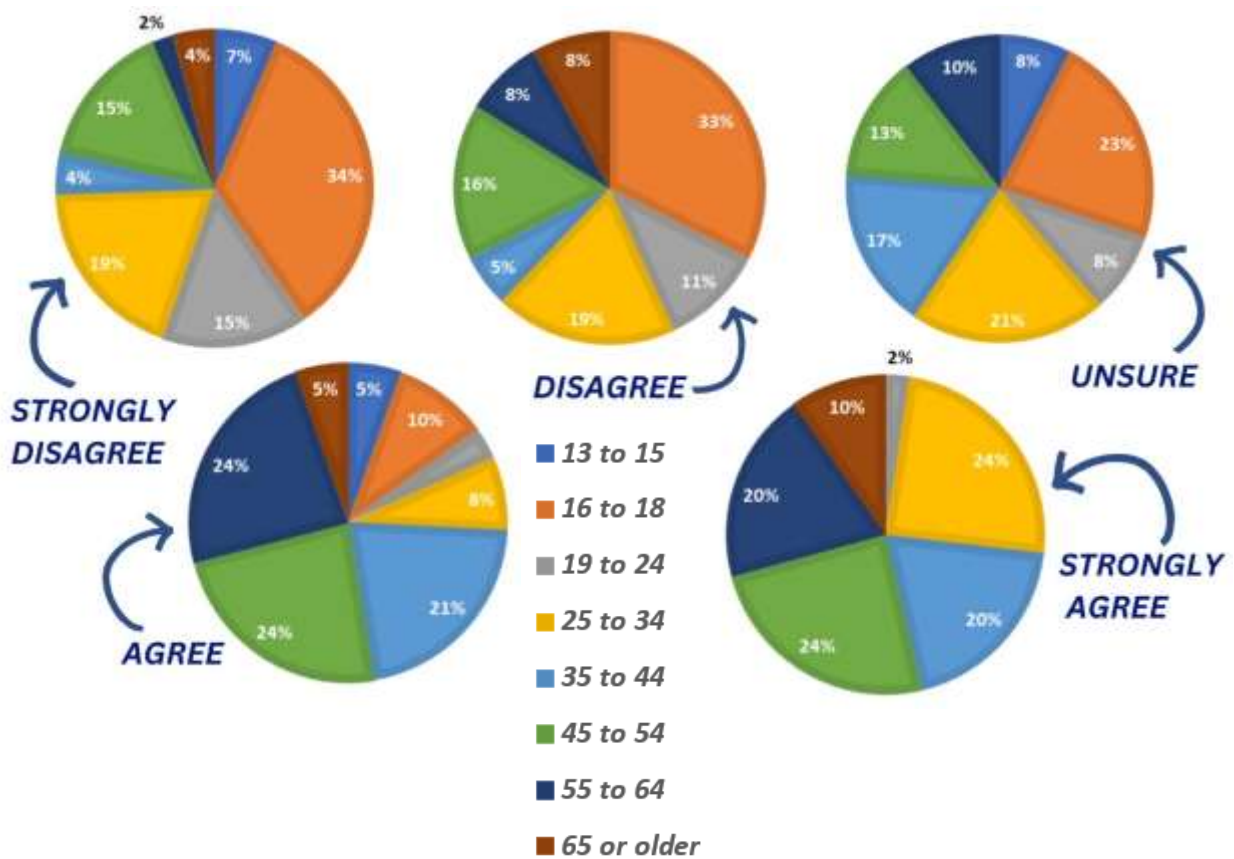


### **ARE THERE LINKS BETWEEN LOGO RECOGNITION AND PERCIEVED AWARENESS OF WORK?**

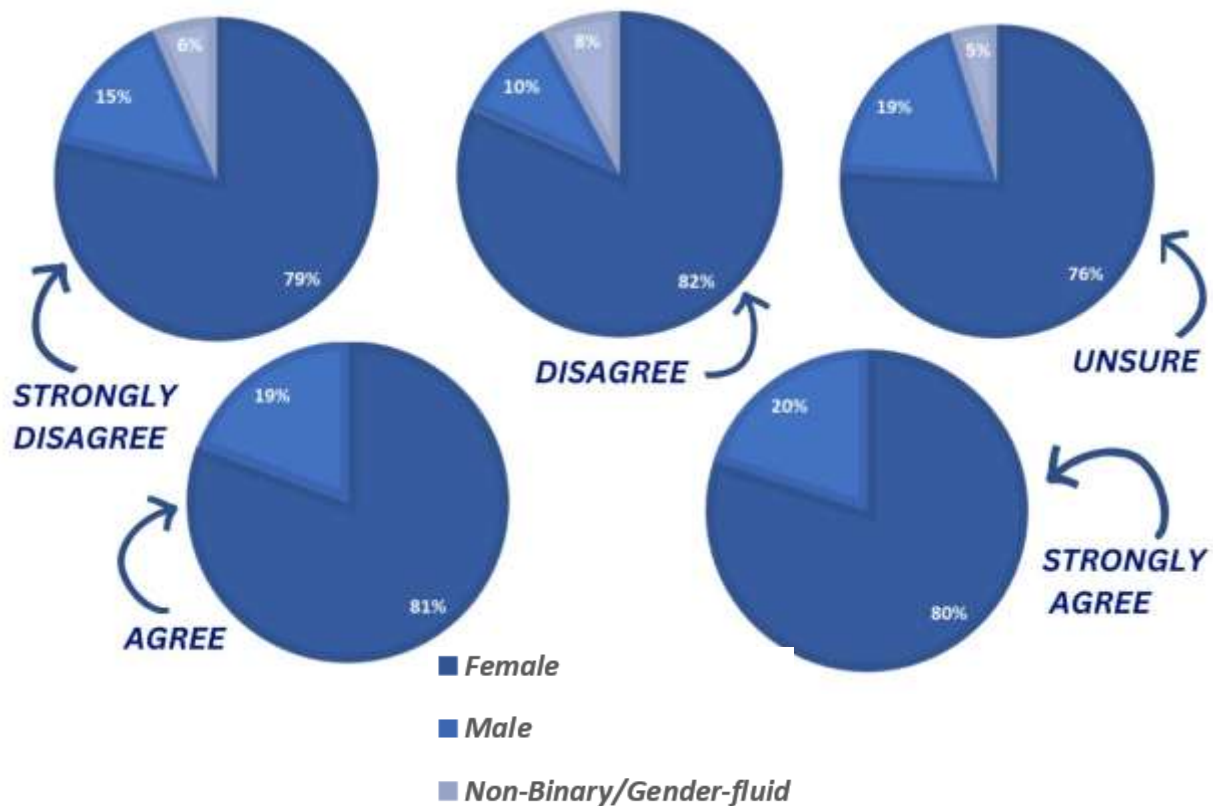
- 27% were familiar with the Space2Face's logo.
- 16% agreed/strongly agreed about the awareness of the work that the service provided. 39% were unsure and a further 45% disagreed/strongly disagreed.
- Just under 30% of respondents were familiar with Space2Face's logo, the figure dropping to 16% when it comes to the awareness of their work. This suggests a slight correlation between logo recognition and perceived awareness of work.
- Overall, visibility is low for Space2Face in the local community.



### AWARENESS BY AGE:



### **AWARENESS BY GENDER:**



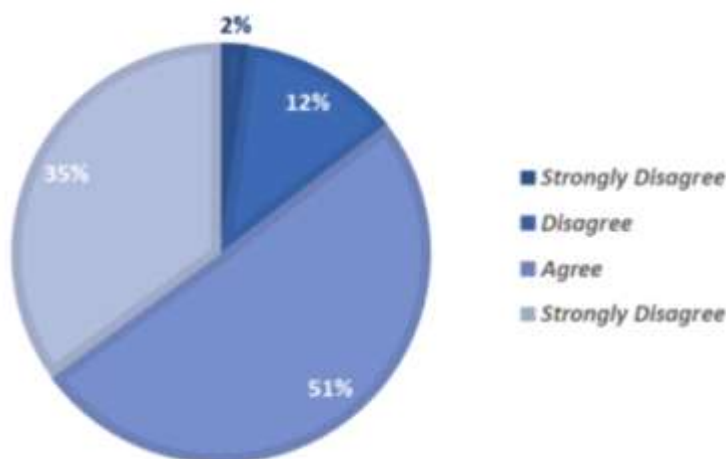
### **ARE THERE LINKS BETWEEN LOGO RECOGNITION AND PERCIEVED AWARENESS OF WORK?**

- 41% were familiar with the Victim Support Shetland's logo
- 41% agreed/strongly agreed about the awareness of the work that the service provided. 33% were unsure and a further 26% disagreed/strongly disagreed.
- The familiarity of their logo and perceived awareness of their work are the same, suggesting that there is a clear correlation between the two.
- Overall, visibility for Victim Support Shetland is moderate within the local community.



## HOW DOES BEING IN SHETLAND AFFECT ACCESSING SUPPORT?

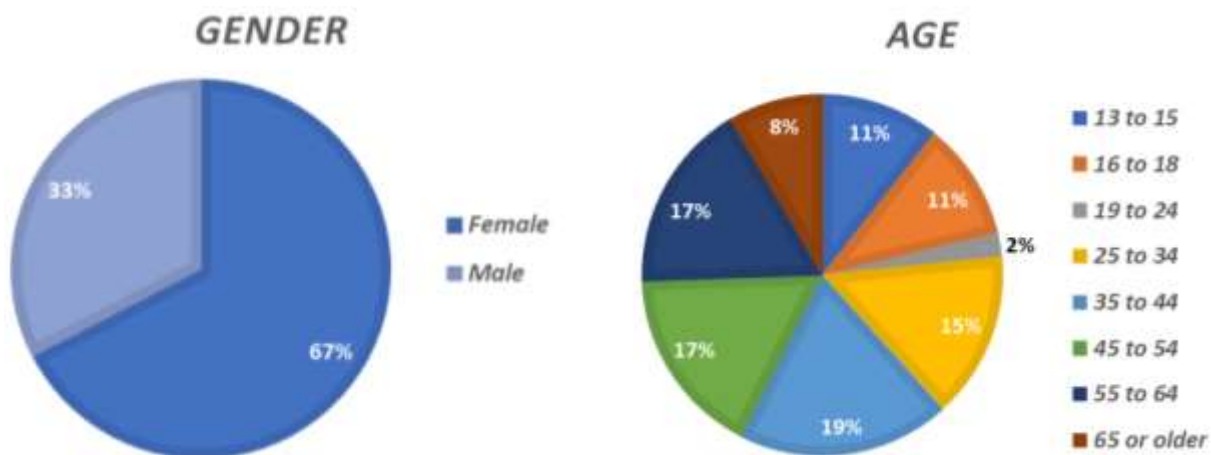
*It is more difficult for survivors of sexual violence to seek support in a rural community than in urban areas.*



With the statement given, I wasn't surprised to see that the majority of folk selected agree/strongly agree to this statement. This question directly links with the perceived barriers for accessing support in Shetland.

*86% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed with the statement, while 14% disagreed/strongly disagreed.* This holds implications for the unique challenges that living in a rural island community can harbour.

I was interested to see if the gender and age of respondents who disagreed/strongly disagreed in order to see if there was a correlation between those who believed that sexual violence is not an issue in Shetland.



Interestingly, there doesn't appear to be a correlation between the two. However, the belief that it is in fact harder for individuals in a rural community to access support aligns with the barriers to addressing sexual violence question at the end of my survey.

## WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS OF ADDRESSING SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN SHETLAND?

In this section of the survey, I received 199 long answer responses, which resulted in a document with over 8,000 words of perceived barriers to addressing sexual violence in Shetland. I was so pleased with the response rate of this question and it has ended up being what I believe to be one of the most valuable pieces of research in my project.

A handful of these responses were personal experiences, and while I have not shared any of these in this report, I have taken the key themes from the barriers these individuals faced and incorporated them into selecting the key themes I have chosen to discuss. Thank you for your willingness to share your stories.

I decided that to me, 'addressing' sexual violence included anything from accessing services to calling out inappropriate behaviour.

*The key topics I shall be discussing are:*

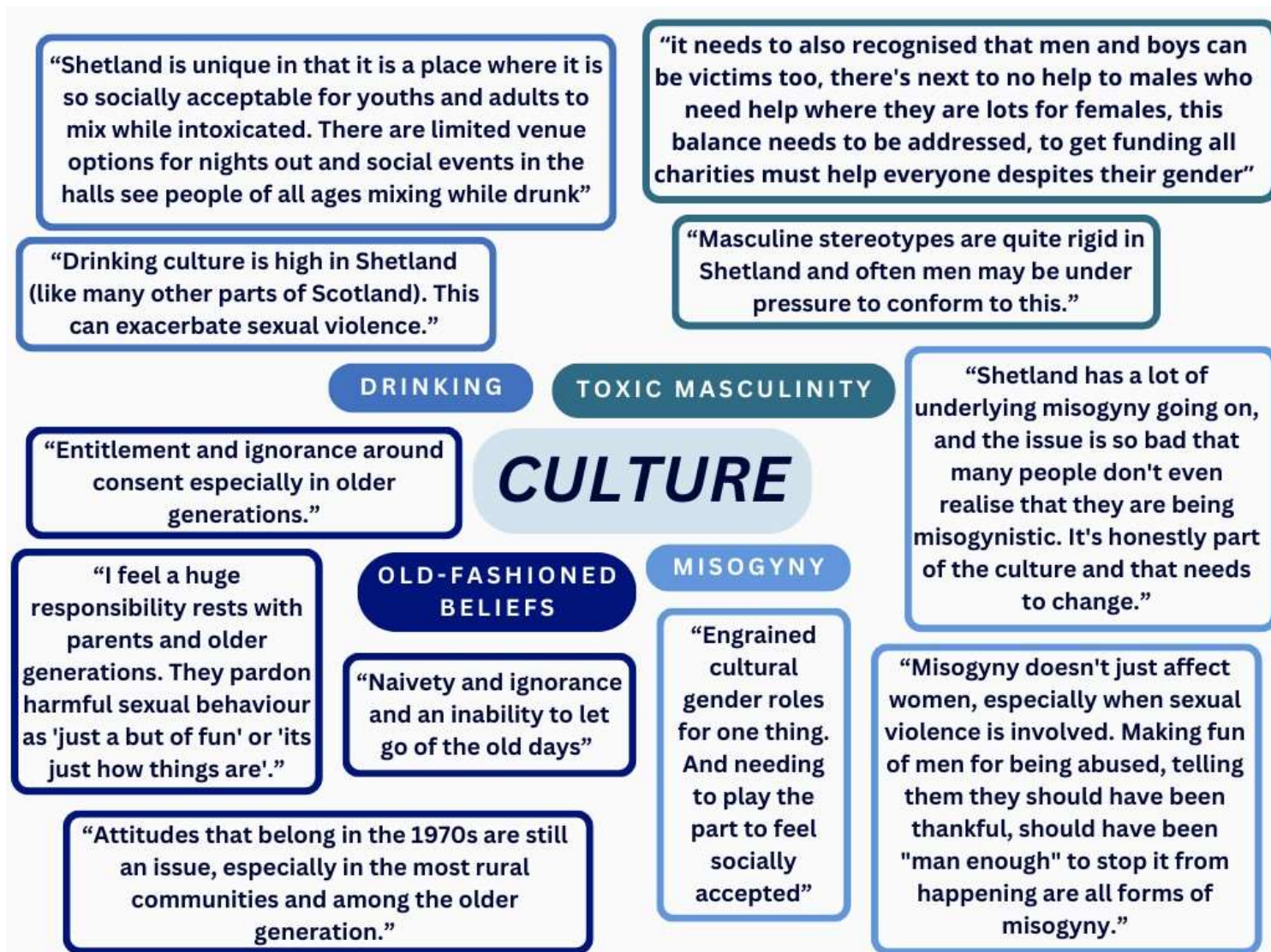




## CULTURE

Shetland has a strong and distinct culture that can be quite daunting when something goes against the 'norms' of island life. Culture in Shetland was a common theme throughout the barrier question, so here are a handful of quotes that best represent the majorities viewpoint. There was one quote that I received that I thought was a great way to introduce the barrier itself:

***“There’s a culture in Shetland of things being downplayed, so some sexual violence is downplayed as not being a big deal.”***



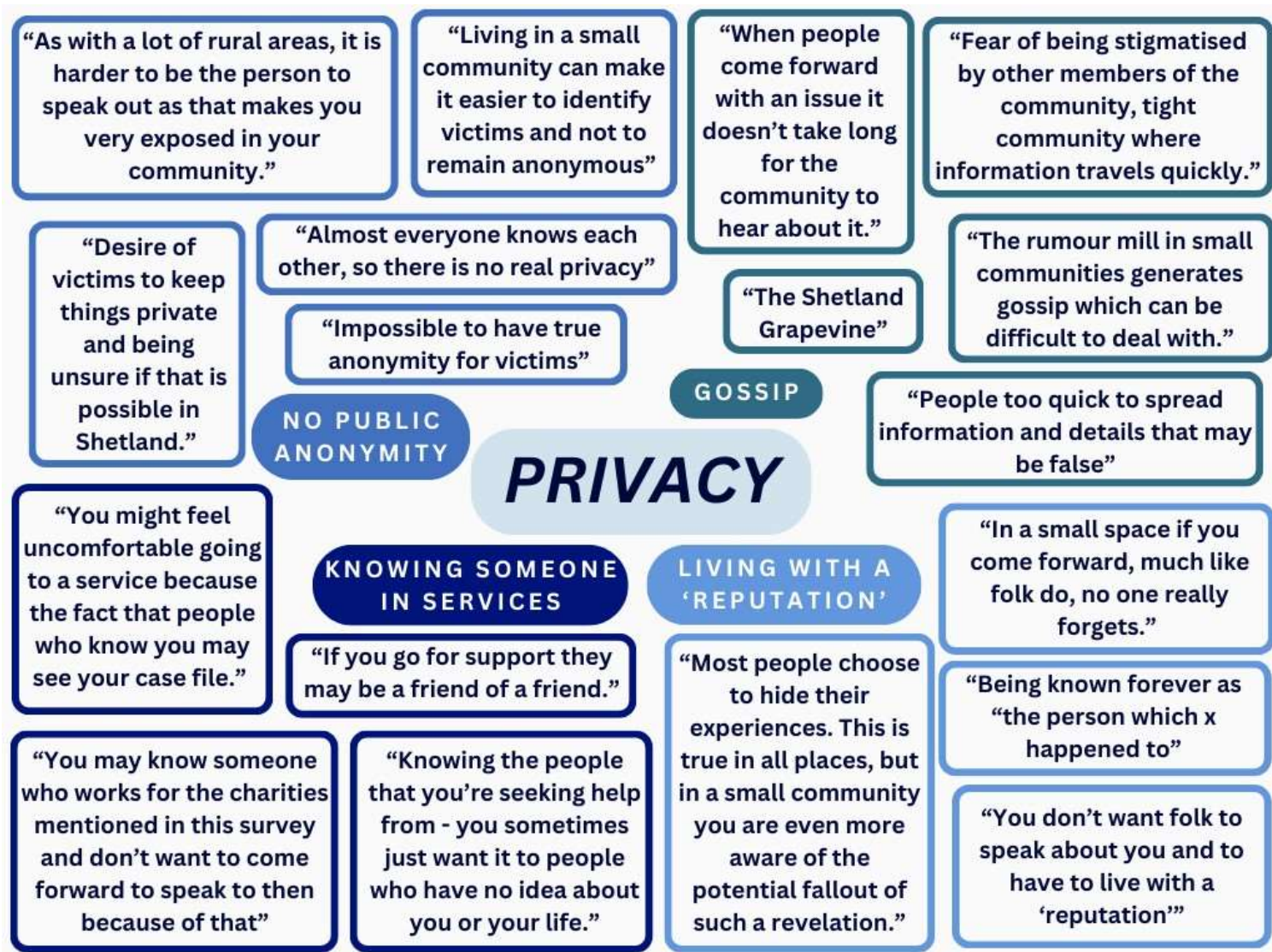
These are not the only quotes that I received about culture in Shetland posing as a barrier to accessing support, but these four sub-categories represent what the majority of respondents believe. What we can conclude from these quotes is that to address sexual violence, cultural acceptance of the aforementioned issues need to be addressed.



## PRIVACY

To introduce the next barrier to addressing sexual violence, I want to share a quote from a respondent which has stuck in my head since the closure of the survey. I believe this quote sums up perfectly how privacy, or a lack there of, can affect accessing support in Shetland:

***“No one wants to be the talk of the local hall.”***



“When something happens, everyone finds out about it. Everyone will talk about it or ignore it and it makes people feel ashamed for speaking out incase it gets brushed under the carpet like nothing happened, because boys will be boys, or that guy wanted it, or thats just lesbian sex.”



## SMALL COMMUNITY



As a community, Shetland has always rallied together when it comes to charity, volunteering - which is great. But when it comes to 'taboo' topics like racism, identity, inequality and sexual violence Shetland can often have two outlooks: one being to keep quiet and not discuss the topics and the other that the rumours are created which tend to victims blame, further stigma and shame.



"In a small community there are times where people don't want to see the reality of a situation, especially when they believe that people are one thing or another and "would never do that".

"Police not being in when victims try to report things"

"[many experiences] highlight a pattern of victim-blaming, especially when Shetland police have a positive relationship with the perpetrator or their family."

"Everyone knows each other and sometimes its too easy to say "everyone knows what she is like" or "no way he would do that" When in actual fact, it does happen."

"It can be hard to get people to realise someone they've known since childhood is capable."

"The worry that you are reporting someone to a friend or relative of theirs."

"The way the police speak to survivors."

"Not believing survivors because 'he's a fine guy he would never.'"

WEEL KENT

POLICE

**SMALL  
COMMUNITY**

"The community knows who the predators are, but the community protects them rather than deal with the issue. This is an issue everywhere, but most of all in a rural community."

"The fact that it's such a small community and people are all connected in some way."

INTERLINKED  
RELATIONSHIPS

'PROTECTED'  
PEOPLE

"Everyone knows everyone. "I know his mother, he wouldn't have it meant it in a bad way."

"Small rural communities often protect people within their communities. They may have pre-established ideas of people due to local knowledge which leads to people to protect and making excuses for offenders as accepting they are does not align with their preconceived idea of what that person is like/the family they come from/etc."

"Shetland has too many protected people with important families and things being swept under the carpet or hidden away from the public."

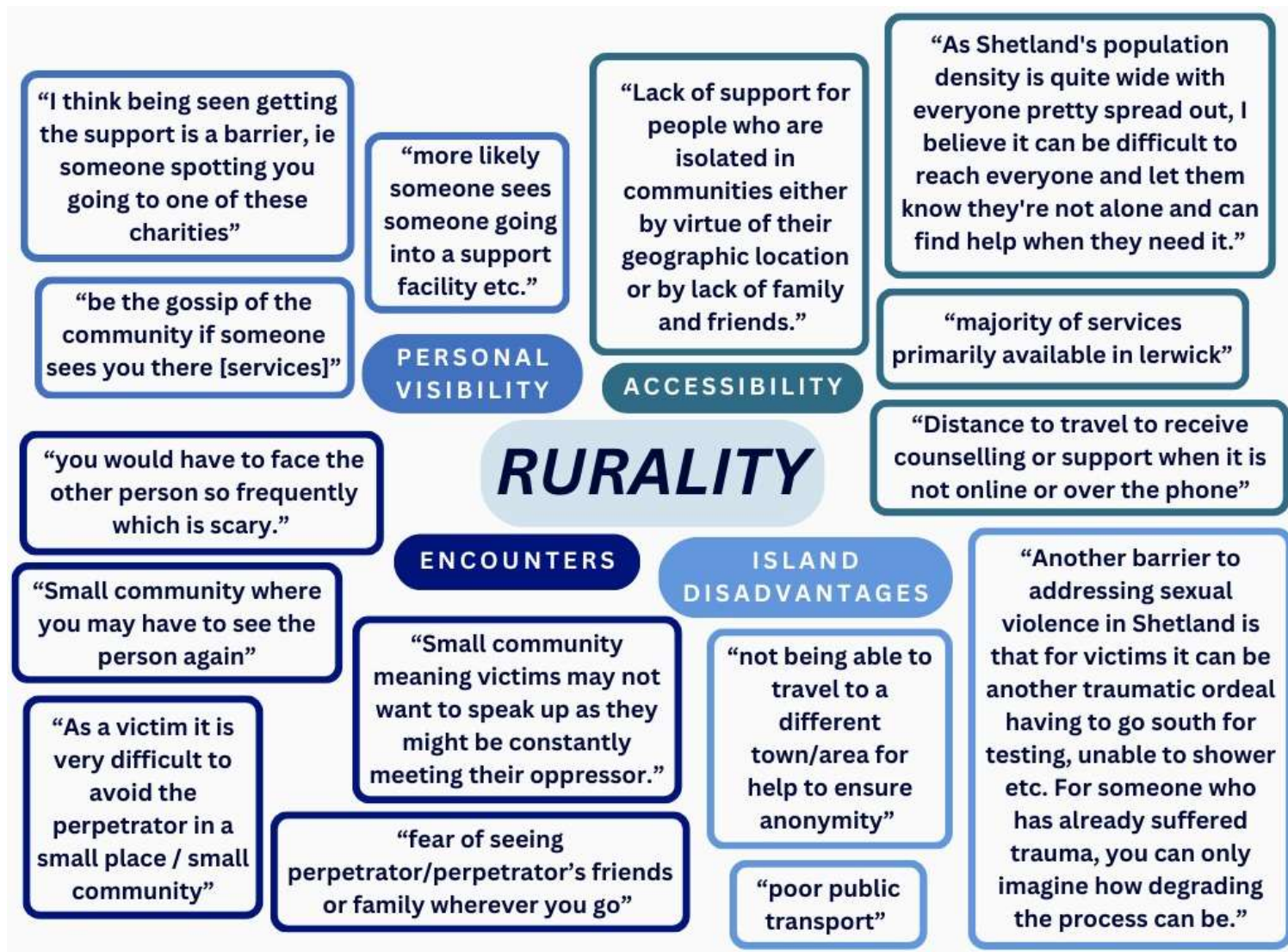
"The small community means that everybody knows everybody. Sometimes the person who is harassing you is married to your cousin."

To conclude, **"Connections between everybody make people very wary of reporting or standing up to sexual violence"**, to me, shows the harm this barrier can have on everyone wishing and campaigning for change.



## RURALITY

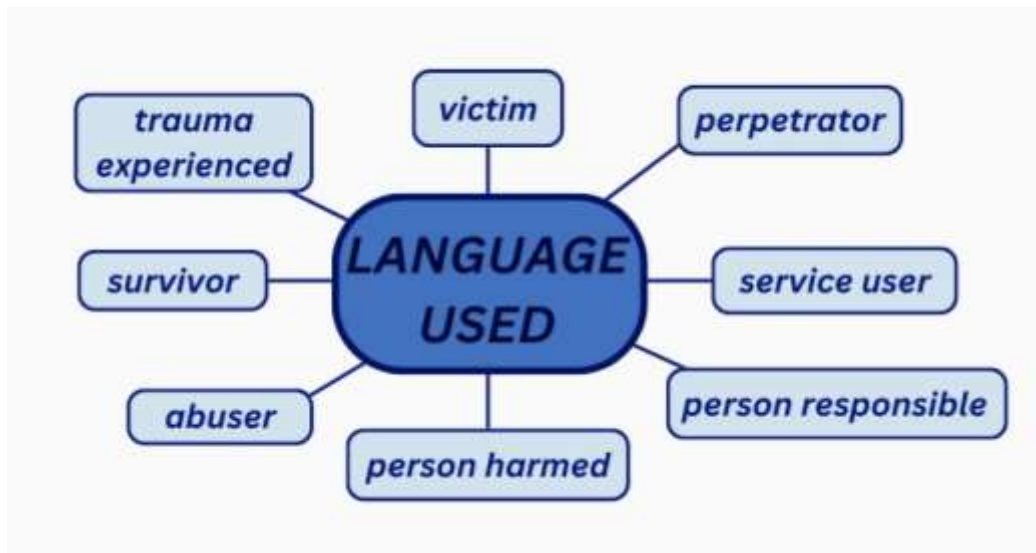
With the population of Shetland being almost 23,000, it is not surprising that there are barriers unique to living on an island. These quotes shine a light on how hard it can be to address sexual violence within Shetland.



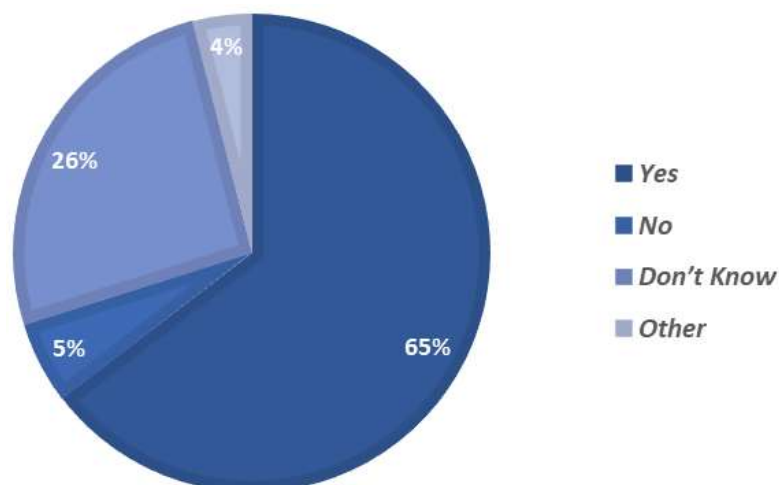
“This happens everywhere, no matter how small the community”

## LANGUAGE WE USE

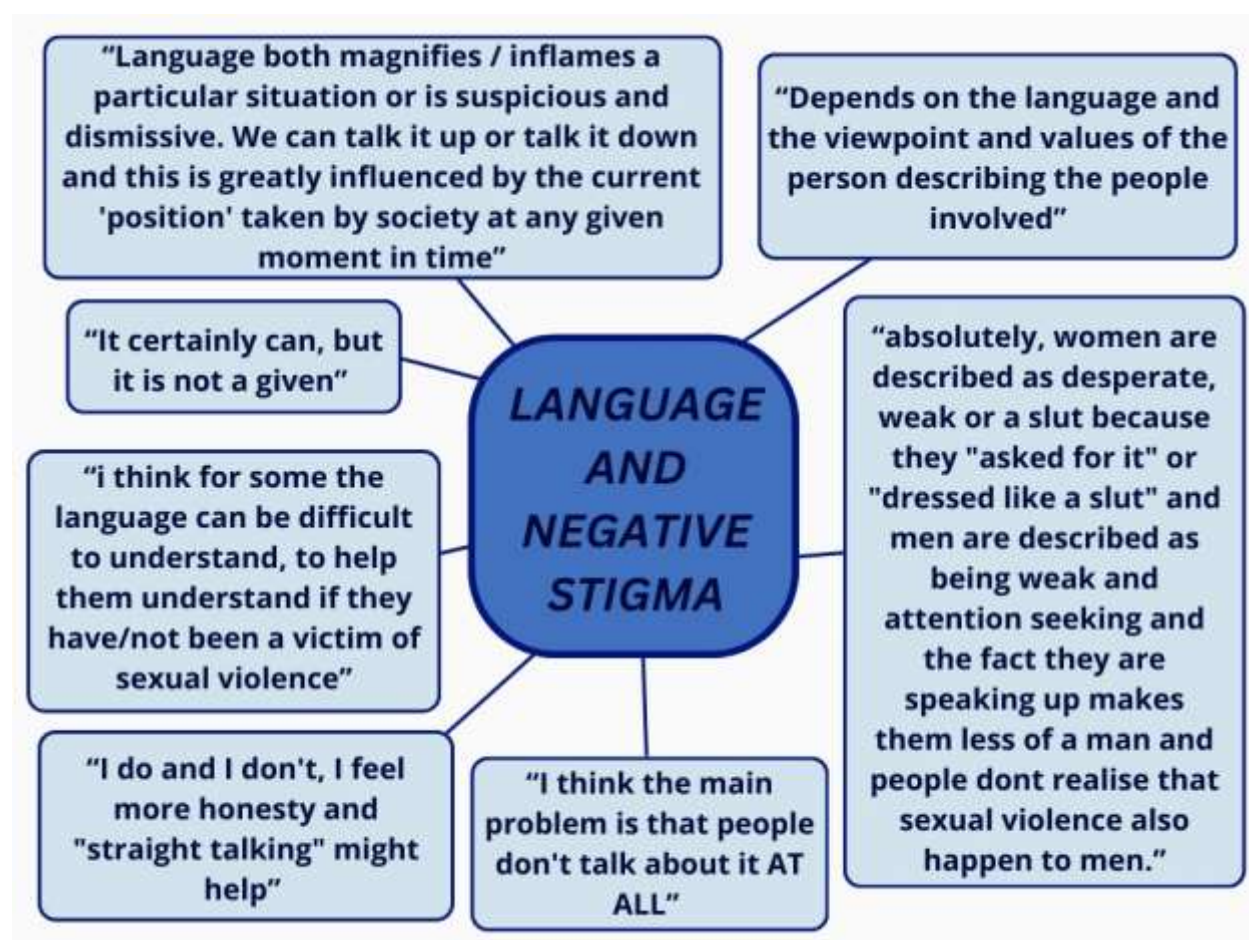
At the beginning of each interview with the charities, I asked how each organisation referred to all parties involved in sexual violence. The answers I received are included in the mind map. Based on my interviews, the terminology related to sexual violence varies widely and is heavily influenced by the context of the individual's experiences or actions. When in legal conversations, legal terms, such as 'victim' and 'abuser' are used. While it can seem small, giving someone the chance to decide how they want to be referred can be incredibly empowering.



*Do you think that the language used when describing people involved in sexual violence furthers negative stigma?*



Similar to the question regarding whether sexual violence is an issue in Shetland, I provided an 'Other' section in which people could write their thoughts. Here is what the 5% said regarding the above statement:



In this box I also received a small number comments expressing a misunderstanding of the question itself. There was confusion over whether I was referring to 'victims' or 'perpetrators'. I understand the misperception, as I worded the question purposefully so that it could cover both. This was important feedback to hear and advice I can take forward for any future research projects.

“There’s a lot of dismissive language used about incidents of sexual assault and a lot of victim blaming/shaming.”

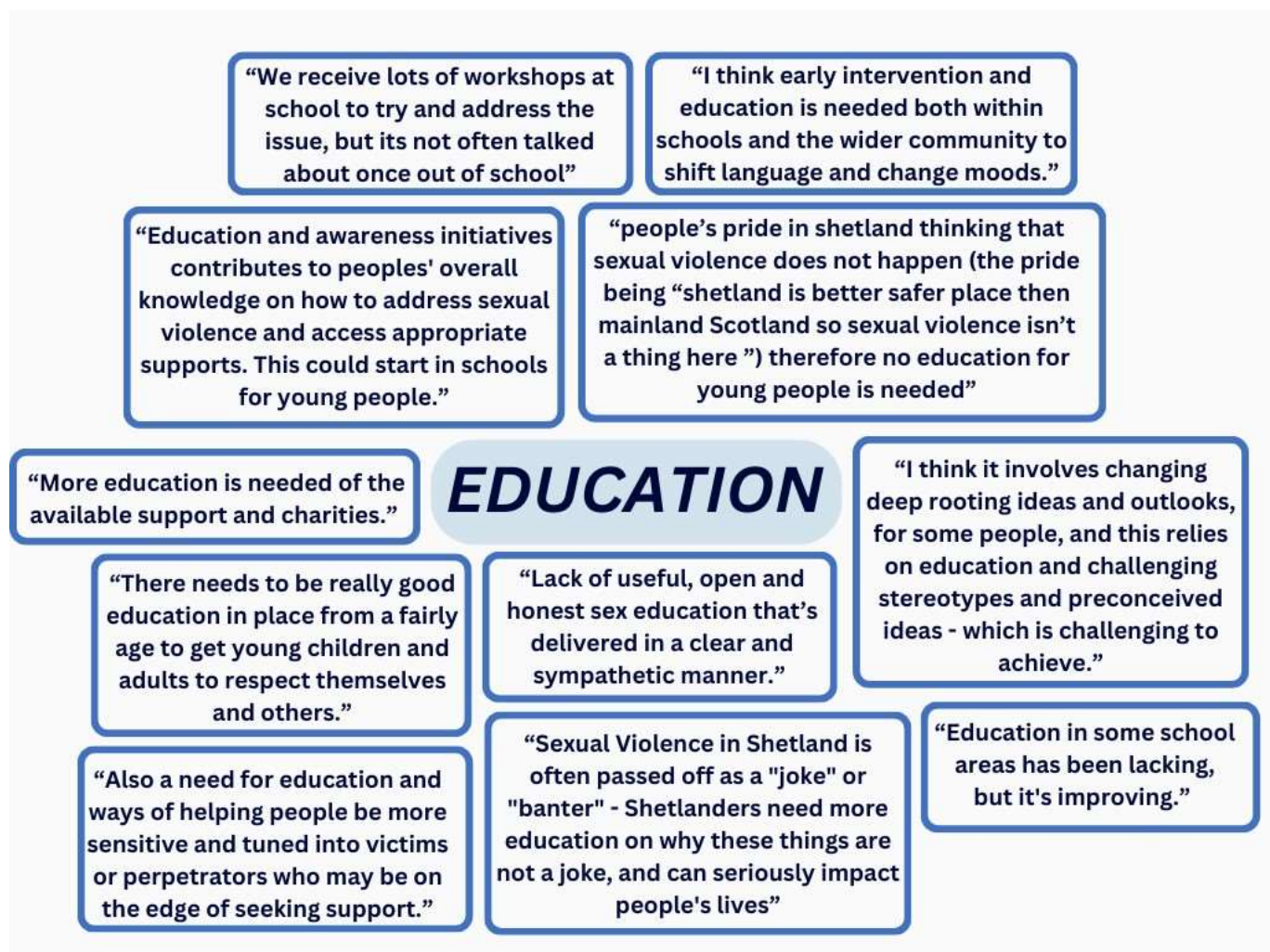
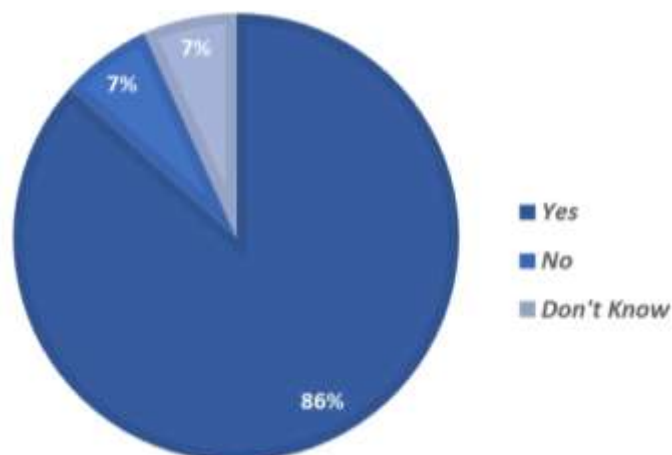


## EDUCATION

The vast majority (86%) of respondents believed education was capable of having an impact in reducing the stigma surrounding sexual violence. This indicates a clear need to educate everyone, not just young people.

I didn't include an option for people to type in their own answers to this question. Instead, I collated the data regarding education in the barriers question above. This proves that improving on or developing existing education for young people is a perceived 'solution' to not only negative stigma, but ability to address sexual violence.

*Do you think education has an impact in reducing stigma surrounding sexual violence?*



## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

90% of respondents believe that sexual violence is an issue in Shetland. Of the 4% who answered 'no' to the question, 75% were male. This raises implications for the gender dynamics and societal expectations we have regarding sexual violence in Shetland.

I would like to note the willingness of many individuals to share their experiences of sexual violence in Shetland, which I believe shows a readiness to contribute to awareness raising regarding sexual violence.

86% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that it is harder for people in rural communities to access support. We must work to reduce the barriers for individuals to access support.

From the above statistic, another key finding are the unique barriers we face in Shetland when it comes to addressing sexual violence:

- *Culture* – drinking; old-fashioned beliefs; misogyny; toxic masculinity.
- *Rurality* – accessibility; personal visibility, encounters and island disadvantages.
- *Small Community* – perpetrators being 'weel kent' and therefore being incapable of doing wrong; interlinked relationships; 'protected' people in the community; issues with local police.
- *Privacy*; living with a 'reputation' if you speak up; knowing someone who works in services; no public anonymity as a survivor; local gossip spreading and mutating quickly.

This suggests that we need to further challenge the problematic beliefs that may be 'common' in Shetland. Just because these beliefs are common, it in no way makes them socially acceptable as demonstrated by the aforementioned quotes.

Another key finding is that 65% believe that language can perpetuate stigma surrounding *everyone* involved in sexual violence. The option to include your own answer received responses such as the lack of discussion around sexual violence itself at all or certain language being used to perpetuate and entertain victim-blaming.

86% believe that education can help to reduce and address stigma surrounding sexual violence. However, education proved to be another barrier to addressing sexual violence in Shetland due to the large number of responses inferring a lack of open and honest conversations about sexual violence not just for young people but for adults too. Once workshops are over in school, there is a reported lack of addressing of the issue in schools. When formal education ends, is it up to ourselves to educate ourselves on these issues?