

Preliminary Report
Received: 24 June 2025
Accepted: 10 November 2025
UDC: 343.97:343.988(460.27)
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31299/ksi.33.2.2>

A PILOT PROJECT OF VICTIMISATION AND PERCEPTIONS OF INSECURITY IN THE BATAN AREA, MADRID (2022)

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ABSTRACT

In 2020, the Batan area of Madrid experienced a dramatic 611% increase in recorded crimes compared to the previous year, according to judicial sources. Since then, completed crimes have been frequently reported, raising significant concern among local residents. This pilot study aims to assess levels of perceived insecurity and victimisation within the Batan neighbourhood. To this end, a victimisation questionnaire was distributed to residents in 2022 through neighbourhood networks. The questionnaire is based on the last general survey conducted by the Centre for Sociological Research for the Community of Madrid in 2007. The sample size for the pilot project includes 62 completed questionnaires. Findings indicate that 78.7% of respondents perceived the level of security in the Batan neighbourhood as either regular, bad, or very bad - with 49.2% describing it as bad or very bad and 29.5% describing it as regular. One of the most concerning issues for respondents was the fear of criminal victimisation. Based on these preliminary results, the study has expanded into a larger project that includes the broader Lucero neighbourhood, and it has incorporated qualitative methods in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of urban insecurity. In the future, it would be important to consider a citywide assessment across Madrid.

Keywords: victimisation, perception, insecurity, fear of crime, Madrid

ABBREVIATIONS

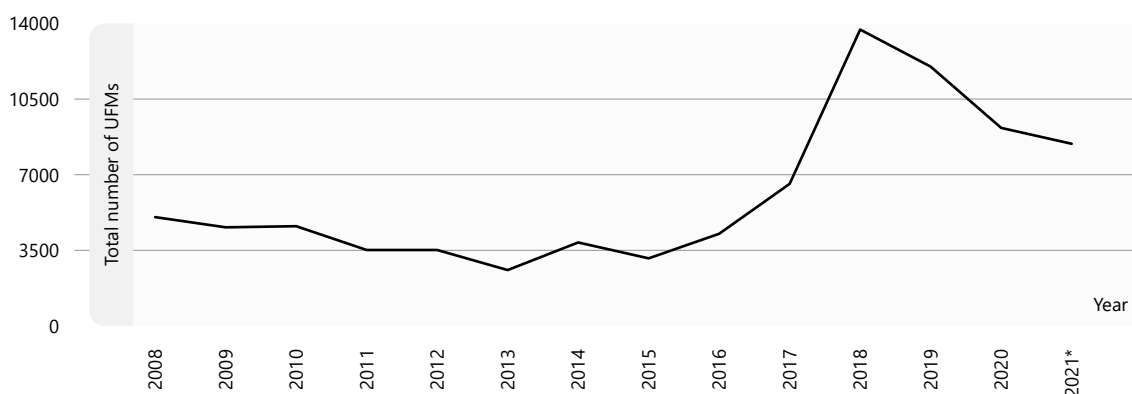
- **CSR:** Centre for Sociological Research.
- **GIWPS:** Georgetown Institute for Women Peace and Security.
- **NIS:** National Institute of Statistics (Spain).
- **UFM:** Unaccompanied Foreign Minors.
- **PRIO:** Peace Research Institute Oslo.
- **REIS:** Spanish Journal of Sociological Research.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years in Spain, particularly since 2015, the reception of unaccompanied foreign minors (UFMs) has increased, thus creating different challenges in the country, for example, in terms of law, national security, or the child welfare system (Aparicio, 2015; Bravo & Santos, 2017; González, 2020). According to official data from the Government of Spain, the peak was reached in 2018 when 13,796 UFMs were received (see Fig. 1). In 2023, the flow of foreign migrants continued to rise, especially in the border regions of Southern Spain such as the Canary Islands, Ceuta, and Melilla. Among them, 396 UFMs were recorded in the Canary Islands and Ceuta, with the Community of Madrid accommodating 34 UFMs (La Vanguardia, 2023). More recent data remains unavailable in official statistical sources, limiting the ability to analyse ongoing trends (see Fig. 1).

Figure 1

*Evolution of the total number of unaccompanied foreign minors in Spain, 2008-2021**



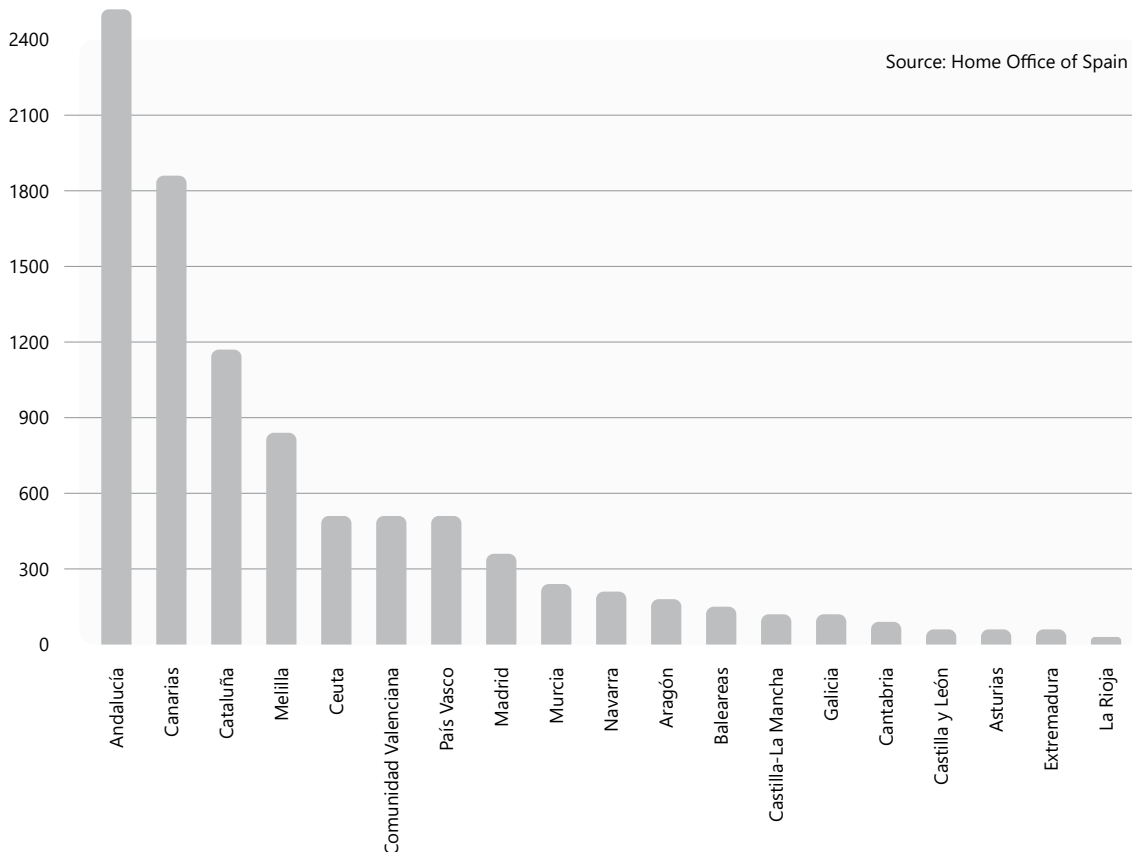
Source: General Commissariat for Immigration and Borders/Ombudsman and UNICEF (www.epdata.es)

Note (*): Data for 2021 is only available until 30th June.

The geographical distribution of UFMs across Spain remains uneven. Based on available data from 2020, autonomous communities such as Andalusia, Canary Islands, and Catalonia received the largest numbers of UFMs, followed by the border autonomous cities of Melilla and Ceuta (see Fig. 2). Madrid ranks 8th in this list of autonomous communities in Spain and it received 356 UFMs in 2020, approximately 20% of whom were housed in the former Richard Schirrmann Youth Hostel. In response to the social emergency created by the rise in arrivals, the Regional Government of Madrid repurposed this facility in 2019 as a Centre for the First Reception of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors.

Figure 2

Total number of unaccompanied foreign minors received by autonomous communities in 2020



Further, the Unified Police Union has associated the continued increase in local crime with the operation of the current Centre for the First Reception of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors in Casa de Campo. Data from the National Institute of Statistics for convicted minors (see Table 1) reveals that 415 foreign minors were convicted in the Community of Madrid in 2021, 87.5% of them being boys. This figure represents a 36.1% increase in convictions compared to the previous year, and the largest rise in convictions among minors recorded in the region since 2013.

In this broader context, data from the Crime Balance Report provided by the Home Office of Spain confirmed that conventional crime (including robbery, homicide, threats, injuries, and assaults) in the Community of Madrid rose by 15.6% between 2021 and 2022, while cybercrime increased by 21.5% during the same period. Thus, the regional context in which the Batan case study is situated corroborates a sustained upward trend in crime. Therefore, the context of the Madrid region, in which the Batan area is located, reaffirms that there has been an increase in crime. These data reflect a reality that, as demonstrated in previous studies, directly affects the perceptions of citizens regarding insecurity and fear of crime, and therefore interferes with their quality of life and social well-being (Huesca & Quicios, 2020).

Contemporary sociological studies and empirical academic research on the immigration-crime link are scarce, even in Spain. Therefore, research on this topic from a multidisciplinary perspective would be valuable (Lee et al., 2021; Reid et al., 2005, as cited in Kubrin & Ousey, 2023).

Table 1

Convicted minors by nationality in the Community of Madrid and percentage increase compared to the previous year (2013-2022)

Year	Foreigners	Difference %
2013	512	/
2014	503	- 1,8%
2015	355	- 29,4%
2016	304	- 14,4%
2017	320	5,3%
2018	254	- 20,6%
2019	279	9,8%
2020	305	9,3%
2021	415	36,1%
2022	385	- 7,2%

Source: Spanish Institute of Statistics

Regarding criminological research, one of the instruments for measuring crime and insecurity is victimisation surveys (United Nations, 2009). The results of this pilot study are based on the last general victimisation questionnaire used in 2007 in the Community of Madrid by the Centre for Sociological Research of Spain, with some small modifications specifically designed for this case study (CIS, 2007).

This research is fundamentally framed within the scope of urban security, which is associated with a limited set of data sources beyond police databases, judicial records, and/or those related to citizen complaints and demands made to the administration. This is the main reason why victimisation surveys are conducted, which has not been the case in Madrid, compared to other cities such as Barcelona where the City Hall uses this type of questionnaire more often (Santcovsky, 2020).

In the Batan case study, according to the Local Security Board held at Paco de Lucía Auditorium on December 1st, 2021, the crime rate in the Latina District decreased by 10% between January and November 2021, compared to the same period in 2019 (Guía de Aluche, 2021). However, police statistics are blurred by data from neighbouring areas of this district, such as the Moncloa-Aravaca District. This statistical comparison is not entirely valid since it seems to have overlooked/obscured other relevant data.

Following another increase in crimes in January 2023, the National Police implemented a fixed 24-hour police presence at Batan Metro station, which remained until the end of May 2023. The severity of crimes has been increasing since 2019 (starting with robberies, drug use, and various types of assaults, all the way up to armed/forced entry into other people's homes). A map of urban crime in this area was published using data from newspapers and geographic tools, highlighting some of the crimes (Gutiérrez Sanchis & Gómez, 2024).

Without access to objective security data in Madrid, the general population is unaware if the 611% increase in crimes in 2020 was the highest in Madrid, but it can be confirmed that the only fixed police units in the city of Madrid were located in Batan. Since the Batan area continues to be a crime hotspot, it has been relevant for this pilot project to understand the state of insecurity perception, victimisation, and fear of crime. Huesca González (2022) pointed out that, in the last two years, being a victim has definitely influenced individuals' subsequent behaviours.

In the neighbourhood, there were two prominent neighbourhood demands: one related to the A-5 undergrounding, which, in addition to addressing environmental pollution and territorial division, also considers the elimination of spaces conducive to crime and delinquency (e.g., highway A-5 tunnels); and the other demand related to the recovery of the Richard Schirrmann Youth Hostel in Batan-Casa de Campo, both for security reasons in the area, as well as for social well-being and health issues. Many residents believe that the youth hostel was not designed as a living space for Social Services and that it was built for youth tourism, hence, UFM's must be housed in other more appropriate locations. Some minors have suffered sexual abuse in the Centre (Carmona, 2025), and some have been exposed to addiction and drug trafficking (El Debate, 2025), which could be one of the root causes for the increase in problems and crimes in that area. This is further proof indicating that UFM's lack the necessary conditions for successful social integration. Additionally, after this conversion, the city of Madrid currently has only one public youth hostel for the entire city: San Fermín Youth Hostel (in the southern part of Madrid's urban area).

It must be considered that the Community of Madrid announced the closure of the Centre for the First Reception of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors after receiving several demands and significant pressure from the neighbourhood to return the Richard Schirrmann Youth Hostel to its original purpose (Echagüe, 2022), as this was one of the crime hotspots according to previously cited police sources. Despite the fact that this closure could be implemented at any time, depending on the Government of the Community of Madrid, it is clear that crime is difficult to eradicate overnight.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of victimisation and perceptions of insecurity has a long tradition in criminological and sociological research. The first known victimisation survey dates back to 1730, when the Aarhus City Council in Denmark conducted a household study to assess experiences of burglary (Sparks, 1981, as cited in Linde & Aebi, 2020). Later, in 1945, Gallup incorporated the question - "Have you personally been a victim of a crime this year?" - into a Finnish public opinion survey. During the 1960s, public concern about crime had led to the inclusion of victimisation questions in general social surveys. In the United States, the emergence of the National Crime Survey programme be-

gan in 1972, establishing the basis for annual national data collection on victimisation (Linde & Aebi, 2020; Rand, 2006). In Spain, the first victimisation questionnaire was carried out in 1978 by the Centre for Sociological Research (Rubio & Alvira, 2024), marking the beginning of institutionalised measurement of crime beyond police statistics.

Victimisation surveys have since become a crucial tool for assessing both objective crime trends and subjective experiences of insecurity (United Nations, 2009). Public concern regarding citizen security has intensified in recent years. However, the most recent large-scale victimisation project conducted in Spain dates back to 2009, while the last regional-level survey for the Community of Madrid was carried out in 2007 by the Centre for Sociological Research. At that time, Spain was experiencing a period of economic expansion, as well as an exponential growth in immigration.

García España et al. (2010) demonstrated through national victimisation data that common crime in Spain followed a downward trajectory between 1989 and 2008, which corresponded with a period of economic expansion and rising immigration. However, the last large-scale national victimisation project in Spain was conducted in 2009, and the last one in the Community of Madrid dates back to 2007, leaving a significant empirical gap in contemporary data, especially since the current context differs significantly.

Based on a classical theoretical approach with empirical support, the concept of ‘fear of crime’ was associated with factors such as gender, age, race, neighbourhood cohesion, confidence in the police, levels of local incivility, experience of victimisation, perception of risk, and assessment of offence seriousness (Box et al., 1988). It is well documented that fear of crime should be understood as a complex, layered phenomenon. There is a difference between general worries about crime as a social problem and the fears of being personally victimised. The latter is generally referred to as a personal fear of crime (Brands et al., 2025; Farrall et al., 2009; Ferraro & Grange, 1987; Hale, 1996; Hart et al., 2022).

Victimisation refers to the experience of individuals who suffer harm or loss due to various events, which can be categorised into three primary sources: natural events, non-criminal human actions, and criminal acts. The most commonly discussed form of victimisation is criminal activity, which encompasses acts that intentionally inflict harm, such as theft, assault, or online crimes such as identity theft and cyberbullying. The study of victimisation also addresses the psychological and emotional impacts on victims, as well as their families and communities, who may experience secondary victimisation. Karmen (2001) limited victimisations to criminal acts and focused on the dynamics and actors involved in these acts.

Research on fear of crime and perceived insecurity in Madrid has shown that citizens’ perceptions often diverge from objective crime rates. Huesca and Ortega (2007) demonstrated with objective security data that insecurity was greater than what the population perceived in Madrid, meaning that people felt more secure than the actual situation warranted. More recently, Juan Díez Nicolás (2023) identified a slight decline in the perception of security in the latest crime wave compared to 2010. This *“can be attributed to the 2008 financial crisis, whose consequences extended until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and, above all, to the increased tension in international relations due to China’s emergence as a world power”* (Díez Nicolás, 2023).

Broader analyses highlight additional threats - organised crime, geopolitical tensions, drug trafficking, and cybercrime - that have collectively contributed to an increase in the feeling of insecurity in Spain (Prosegur & Centro Bien Común Global UFV, 2022).

From a theoretical standpoint, the perception of insecurity is shaped by both objective and subjective determinants. Objective factors include crime rates and social disorder, while subjective dimensions relate to distrust or the stigma associated with certain urban areas (Huesca & Quicios, 2020). This perception of insecurity may intensify and persist if measures are not taken to correct essential elements that shape well-being and serve to guide and evaluate strategies, guidelines, and decisions aimed at the common good. Some of the 'public evils' such as terrorism-related insecurity and poverty that drives migration, human trafficking, or arms trafficking, which frequently underlie these issues, should not be forgotten (Larrú-Ramos, 2023). Additionally, there is a theoretical link between how newspapers report crimes and how this may intensify perceptions of personal risk and fear of crime. Williams and Dickinson (1993) reported a significant positive correlation between these two factors, which appeared to be independent of demographic factors associated with readership.

From the perspective of neighbourhood sociology, which is one of the approaches used in the present study, Keller (1975) referred to the importance of four factors influencing neighbourhood relationships: 1) neighbourhood traditions linked to location and social class - small cities generate more trust than larger, more heterogeneous, and more urbanised areas; 2) social change reflected in changing values and institutions, and increasing physical and social mobility; 3) individual characteristics such as gender, age, family life cycle, personality and character type; 4) physical planning of the territory and urban environment, provided that the social and personal composition of a given population is considered.

In summary, previous literature in the fields of urban sociology and criminology underscore the importance of contextual and structural factors - such as inequality, spatial distribution, and the formation of insecurity hotspots - in shaping perceptions of safety in urban environments. Despite this, there remains a notable absence of recent empirical data on victimisation and insecurity in Madrid, reinforcing the relevance of this pilot study.

AIM AND PURPOSE OF RESEARCH: HYPOTHESES AND OBJECTIVES

The lack of scientific studies in the field of perception of insecurity and victimisation questionnaires in the city of Madrid is relevant to this pilot study. The last general victimisation questionnaire in Madrid was administered in 2007, when the social context was very different in terms of the economy and immigration in Spain. Furthermore, crime report statistics alone are not enough to acquire information about victimisation, as they only collect data on crimes that were reported to the police. Another important reason to conduct further research on this topic is that the recent information available on fear of crime is restricted to information that is reported by the media, journalists, and political parties, who currently dominate public discourse on issues of insecurity, crime, and delinquency.

The general objective of the present study was to understand perceptions of insecurity and the state of victimisation among the residents of Batan-Casa de Campo in Madrid, due to the exponential increase in crimes in the year 2020. It is relevant to conduct research on this area as it has been one of the places in the city of Madrid where the National Police has chosen to set up 24h vigilance during the last years. The implications of this research on minors, youth, immigration, and natural protection environments makes this case study interesting.

The target population was the residents in the Batan-Casa de Campo area. The main hypothesis was that there are high levels of insecurity, as well as an increase in the instances of victimisation in this area in recent years.

Other secondary objectives, addressed through the questionnaire from the Centre for Sociological Research, can be explained with the following research questions:

- How do residents perceive the presence and impact of UFM's at the local, regional, and national levels?
- What are the main problems associated with citizen insecurity as perceived by residents at the national, regional (Madrid), and neighbourhood levels?
- How do residents assess the justice system and legal responses to criminal behaviour, particularly concerning the rights of offenders?
- What types of crimes are most frequently reported by residents, and what are the typical profiles of victims and offenders in the area?
- What are the physical, psychological, and economic consequences of victimisation among respondents?
- To what extent are crimes reported to law enforcement, and how do victims evaluate the response and support received from police and security services?
- Which security force do residents trust the most for crime reporting and protection in the neighbourhood?
- How do socioeconomic characteristics (e.g., income, education, employment) and residential factors (e.g., length of residence, housing tenure) relate to perceptions of insecurity and victimisation?

METHODOLOGY

The research conducted in this pilot project is primarily based on sociology and criminology concepts. The methodology used was quantitative, based on the victimisation questionnaire from the Centre for Sociological Research of Spain (CIS, 2007), which was adapted to address the objectives of the case study in the Batan area in Madrid. The target population were the residents of the Batan-Casa de Campo area, located in the Lucero neighbourhood, which belongs to the Latina District of Madrid.

Sampling method and sample size

The sampling method used was non-probabilistic sampling with a snowball technique. This method is considered the most appropriate for an exploratory research project with budgetary limitations. Moreover, the snowball technique is ideal when the target population is difficult to reach (in this case study, the victims) and when the sample size might be small (Naderifar et al., 2017; Noy, 2008; Sefcik et al., 2023; Ting et al., 2025; Törnävä et al., 2025). According to Ting et al. (2025), the hard-to-reach population for this study can include senior and elderly individuals, who are less likely to use internet and social media platforms, as well as vulnerable populations, marginalised groups, and other populations who resist participating in the study. Although the use of snowball sampling represents a methodological limitation, it has enabled the collection of relatively unique and otherwise inaccessible data on a topic of broader societal relevance, extending beyond the city of Madrid. Since this a preliminary report based on a pilot study, the exploratory nature of the research is reflected in the scope and quality of the data obtained.

The questionnaire was distributed online through various associative groups and neighbourhood networks (mainly through the social networking platforms Facebook and WhatsApp). The different neighbourhood groups on Facebook totalled approximately 6,000 profiles in 2022, however, it is not possible to determine how many of these profiles were active.

It is also very difficult to determine the total population of the Batan-Casa de Campo area (i.e.,) the study area and one of the crime hotspots in Madrid. However, population data for the Lucero neighbourhood showed 36,062 inhabitants registered in the Madrid City Council in 2022. Therefore, the population of the Batan-Casa de Campo area must be smaller than that: it could be a third of the population of the Lucero neighbourhood (i.e.,) approximately 10,000 citizens.

With a sample size of 62 completed questionnaires, it is estimated that the confidence level of the study was 95%, with an estimated error rate of < 12%. Since the total population of the area remain unknown, only an approximate estimate can be made.

Measurement instrument: victimisation questionnaire

The instrument used in this research to measure crime and insecurity at Batan area was the victimisation questionnaire. As previously mentioned, this questionnaire was developed based on the victimisation questionnaire conducted in the study (Nr. 2702) by the Centre for Sociological Research (CSR) in 2007 for the Community of Madrid (CIS, 2007). Ethical considerations were taken into account for the victimisation questionnaire of the Centre for Sociological Research, which is the most important public research institution for Sociology research in Spain. All respondents were informed about the data protection legislation and guarantee of anonymity at the beginning of the questionnaire. Any individuals who completed the questionnaire were requested to provide informed consent. The results show that data analysis was performed while maintaining anonymity.

The selected questions used from the CSR questionnaire were questions 1 to 7 (where questions 3 and 6 were modified for the purpose of the present case study). From the general questions, the following were used: questions 1-4 (where question 2 was modified), questions 7-19 (where questions 7, 14-16, 17.3-17.4 were adapted), question 21, and questions 23-32.

The victimisation study of 2007 conducted by the Centre for Sociological Research was published in the CSR Methodological Notebooks (61) of the Spanish Journal of Sociological Research, REIS No. 157 (Caro & Navarro, 2017).

The victimisation questionnaire used for the present pilot case study contains questions aligned with the general goals, specific objectives, and research questions of this study, which can be classified as listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of categories and main aspects of the victimisation questionnaire

CATEGORIES	ASPECTS
Socioeconomic and sociodemographic data	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Respondent data (sex, age, nationality, marital status, and so on).• Composition of households.• Occupation, level of education.• Income, socioeconomic status.
General questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Antiquity and feeling of belonging to the neighbourhood.• Degree of in/security.• Main problems.• Feelings of fear, insecurity, and worry in different circumstances.• Impact of UFM in Spain, the Community of Madrid, and the neighbourhood.
Crime and reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Crime or attempted crimes; types of crime.• Victimization: the aggression (crime), the aggressor, and the victims.• Feeling like a victim.• Reporting the crime.• Restorative justice for minors as aggressors.
Security services evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attention received.• Reason for complaint or dissatisfaction with the Municipal Police.

The victimisation questionnaire was disseminated in neighbourhood groups in the area between February and March 2022. This distribution period did not coincide with peaks of high crime rates. Crime in the area fluctuates and was usually related to the number and profiles of minors (depending, for example, on variables such as age and origin) who were housed in the Centre for First Reception in Casa de Campo.

RESULTS

The descriptive analysis of the data collected through the victimisation questionnaire is presented in this section. The total sample for this pilot study was 62 completed questionnaires. The analysis of the results will be presented in five blocks: socioeconomic and demographic data; residential and housing aspects; perception of insecurity; evaluation of security services and the care received; victimisation (crime, aggressors, and victims).

Socioeconomic and demographic data

This section aims to understand the profile of the citizens surveyed in this pilot project. Individual characteristics (such as gender, age, or family life cycle) are one of the four factors that have a strong influence on neighbourhood relations (Keller, 1975).

Considering gender and age profiles, 98.4% of the questionnaires were completed by individuals over 16 years old, with an age range between 25 and 73 years. In the Batan neighbourhood, the elderly have been one of the most attacked and vulnerable groups (Hispanidad, 2023; Durán, 2023A, 2023B; Soler, 2023). However, given their technological limitations, they are not represented in this sample since the questionnaire was disseminated online.

Among the citizens surveyed, 53.2% were women and 46.8% were men, showing near gender parity among the respondents. This gender parity is important to consider, as previous studies have demonstrated that the perception of insecurity is higher among women than men (Generalitat, 2021; Montiel, 2021). Additionally, it is important to note that Spain has seen a decline in objective safety for women, dropping from the 5th place out of 170 countries in 2017 to the 14th place in 2022 and the 27th place in 2023, according to the 2023/2024 Women, Peace, and Security Index compiled by the Georgetown Institute (GIWPS & PRIO, 2023).

All respondents held Spanish nationality, regardless of their place of birth. Regarding marital status, 70.5% reported living with a partner and 47.5% were legally married. Additionally, 21.3% identified as single, 3.3% as divorced, 3.3% as widowed, and 1.6% as separated.

With respect to level of education, 16% of respondents reported having completed only the first stage of secondary education, while 17.2% had completed their secondary education. Additionally, 25% held qualifications in higher vocational training or equivalent programmes. More than half of the participants (56.2%) possessed a university-level education: 37.5% held undergraduate degrees (including graduates, engineers, or equivalent qualifications), 15.6% held a postgraduate or master's degree, and 3.1% had completed a doctoral degree (PhD).

Regarding satisfaction with household income, 48.4% of respondents reported feeling little or no satisfaction, while 42.2% indicated being moderately satisfied, and only 9.4% expressed a high level of satisfaction.

Regarding employment status, 75.4% of citizens surveyed were employed, 9.8% were retired, 11.5% were unemployed, and 1.6% were engaged in unpaid domestic work. Among those employed, 75% held permanent positions, 9.4% had temporary contracts, almost 8% were self-employed, and 3.2% were either unemployed or on leave. The remaining respondents reported being business owners in cooperative enterprises.

On the other hand, in terms of occupational profiles, nearly 40% of respondents identified as technical professionals or held similar roles, 18.8% worked as administrative staff, and 11% worked as merchants or sales personnel. The remainder included skilled workers, members of the armed forces, service personnel, and senior executives.

Regarding the sector of employment, approximately 61.3% of respondents were employed in the private sector, 27.4% were employed in public administration or public enterprises, 1.6% in non-profit organisations, and the rest in other types of institutions.

In terms of social class, the Batan neighbourhood is predominantly composed of middle-class residents, who represent 75.4% of the sample, of which 45.9% identified as belonging to the old middle class and 29.5% identified as belonging to the new middle class. Additionally, around 21.3% identified as skilled workers, 1.6% as members of the upper or upper-middle class, and another 1.6% as unskilled workers.

Residential and housing aspects

With respect to residential aspects, 93.5% of citizens surveyed reported residing in the Batan neighbourhood. Of these, 80% lived within the 28011 postal code area, while the remainder resided in adjacent postal zones (28024, 28025, 28047, 28054). A small minority reported having previously lived in Batan, or residing there seasonally, or currently live in nearby areas. Additionally, 98.4% of respondents reported living in an apartment, which aligns with the predominant housing typology in this urban setting.

The majority of respondents (69.4%) reported that they did not have children under the age of 16 years in their household. Conversely, 30.6% did have children under 16 years, with 14.5% living with one child and 16.1% with two children under that age. Regarding household composition, more than half (55.6%) indicated that their household included two individuals over the age of 16 years, 12.7% reported living alone, and 31.7% lived in households with three or four individuals over 16 years old.

Finally, 84.5% of respondents were long-term residents of the Batan neighbourhood and were familiar with the area prior to the emergence of the current issues. More specifically, 75.9% had lived in Batan for more than 10 years, 8.6% had lived there for 5-10 years, 10.3% for 1-5 years, and 5.1% for less than a year.

Perception of insecurity

From a criminological perspective, there are several factors that play a crucial role in the perception of insecurity and fear of crime. These include space, environmental variables, and ecological and sociological processes. Gottdiener (1994) proposed the spatial perspective as an object of “settlement space”, which includes economic, political, and cultural aspects within the built environment. Social relationships between individuals also have spatial attributes or a spatial dimension (Leal, 1997). As Simmel (1927) previously argued, social reality is the relationship between objects and subjects within a space. Additionally, the types of relationships that occur, based on these spatial attributes, change over time (Leal, 1997).

After emphasising the importance of space and social relationships for constructing social reality, this section descriptively analyses the results of the victimisation survey conducted around vari-

ous generic questions. To begin with, Figure 3 shows a summary of the respondents' opinions on the main problems in Spain, in the Batan area, and those that affect them personally the most.

Regarding the main problem in Spain, most respondents believed it was the government, politicians, and political parties, followed by unemployment and economic issues. Concerning the main problems in the neighbourhood, 48.4% of respondents stated that the main issue was public safety, followed by healthcare (16.1%), housing (14.5%), as well as the government, politicians, and parties (12.9%). Only a minority (8%) believed that immigration was the main problem. It is known that many of the victims were of foreign origin. This area belongs to the Lucero neighbourhood (Latina District of Madrid), which had a foreign population of 18.4% in 2022.

Public safety was the most selected response by the respondents (with a majority of 37%), who indicated that this is the main problem that personally affects them the most, followed by healthcare (17.7%) and housing (16.12%).

This confirms the hypothesis that public safety is both the main problem in the Batan area and the issue that affects them personally the most. It is also worth noting the concern about the functioning of public healthcare, as this survey was conducted months before the demonstrations and the public demands for better healthcare that were held on November 13, 2022, for the first time in the Community of Madrid. Subsequently, there were more demonstrations, spreading to other autonomous communities in Spain.

Figure 3

Opinion on the main problems in Spain, in Batan, and those that personally affect respondents the most

SPAIN
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Government, politicians, and political parties.• Unemployment.• Economic problems.
BATAN AREA AND SURROUNDINGS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Citizen insecurity.• Public health.• Housing.• Government, politicians, and political parties.
...WHAT AFFECTS YOU MOST PERSONALLY
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Government, politicians, and political parties.

Continuing with the perception of public safety, Figure 4 shows that 70.2% of the respondents believe that public safety has worsened in Batan, 24.6% believe that it has remained more or less the same, and only 5.3% believe that it has improved. Regarding the Community of Madrid, 59.7% be-

lieve that public safety has worsened, 30.6% believe that it has remained more or less the same, and 8.1% believe that it has improved. In terms of the perception of insecurity at the national level in Spain, 55.6% believe that it has worsened, 27% believe that it has remained more or less the same, and 11.1% believe that it has improved.

Concerning the degree of safety in the Batan-Casa de Campo area (Fig. 5), 76.2% believe that it is fair, bad, or very bad (of which 47.6% believe that it is bad or very bad and 28.6% believe that it is fair), while 23.8% believe that it is good or very good. Around 60% of respondents who think the degree of safety is bad or very bad are women. There are no gender differences in citizens who reported that the degree of safety is regular, good, or very good.

Figure 4

Perception of the public safety problem in Spain, the Community of Madrid, and the Batan area

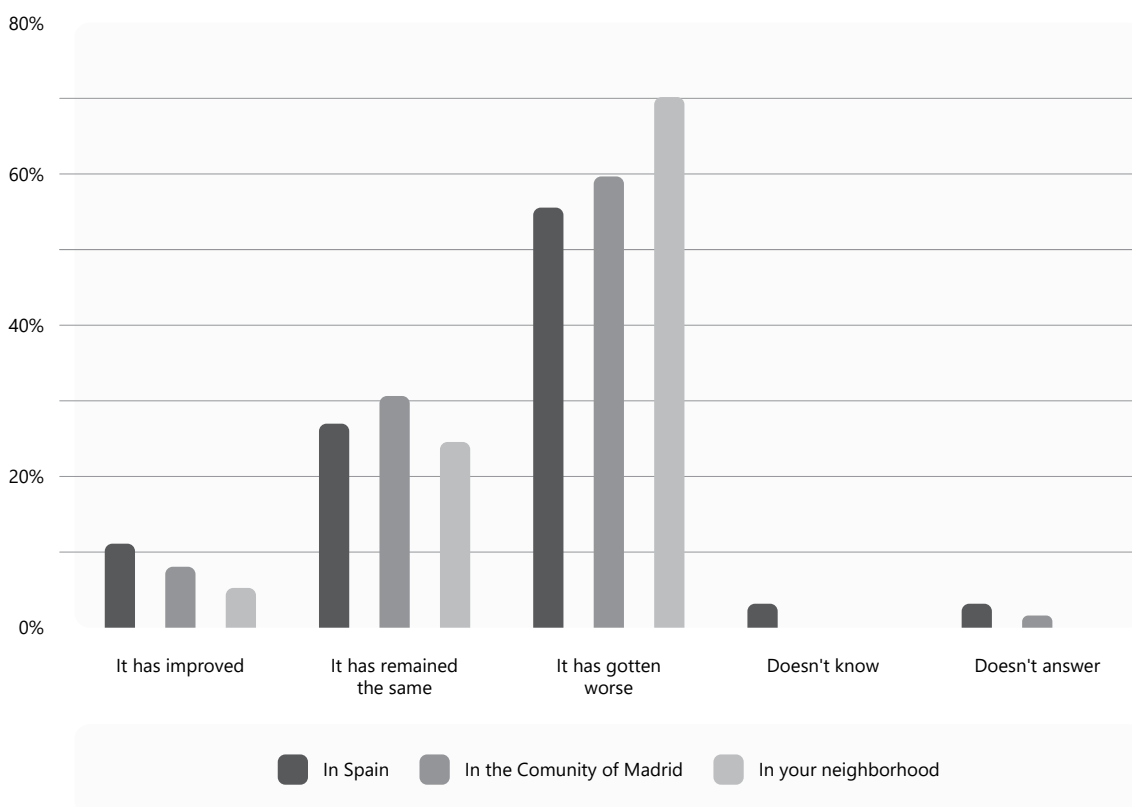
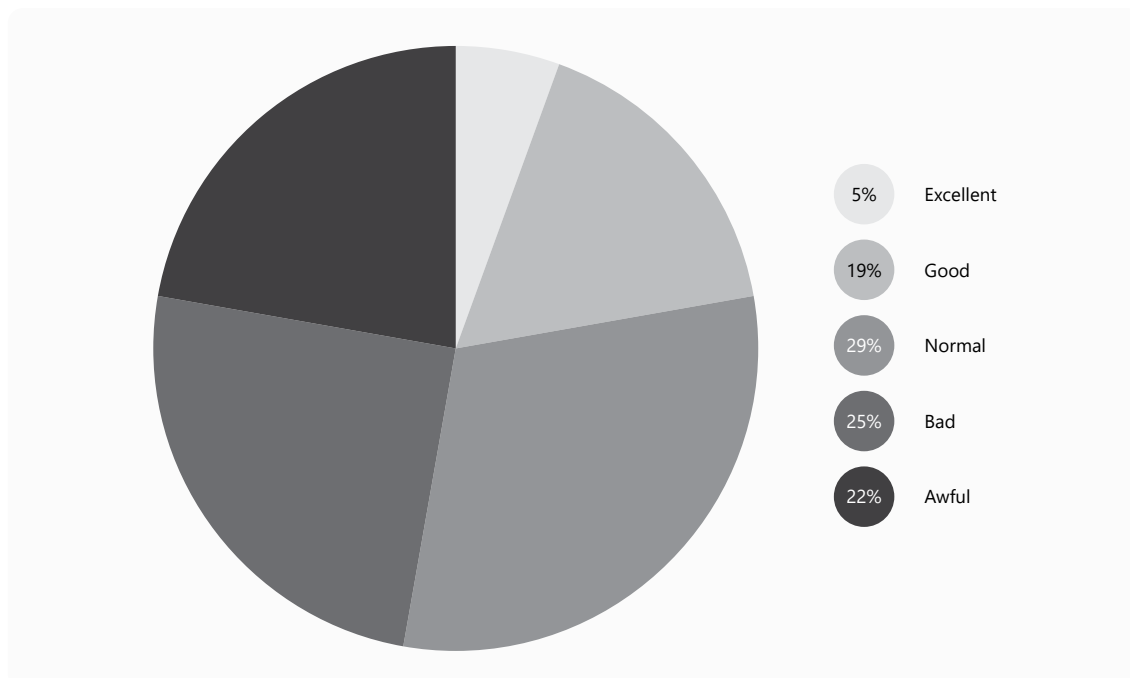


Figure 5

Perception of the degree of safety in Batan (Madrid)

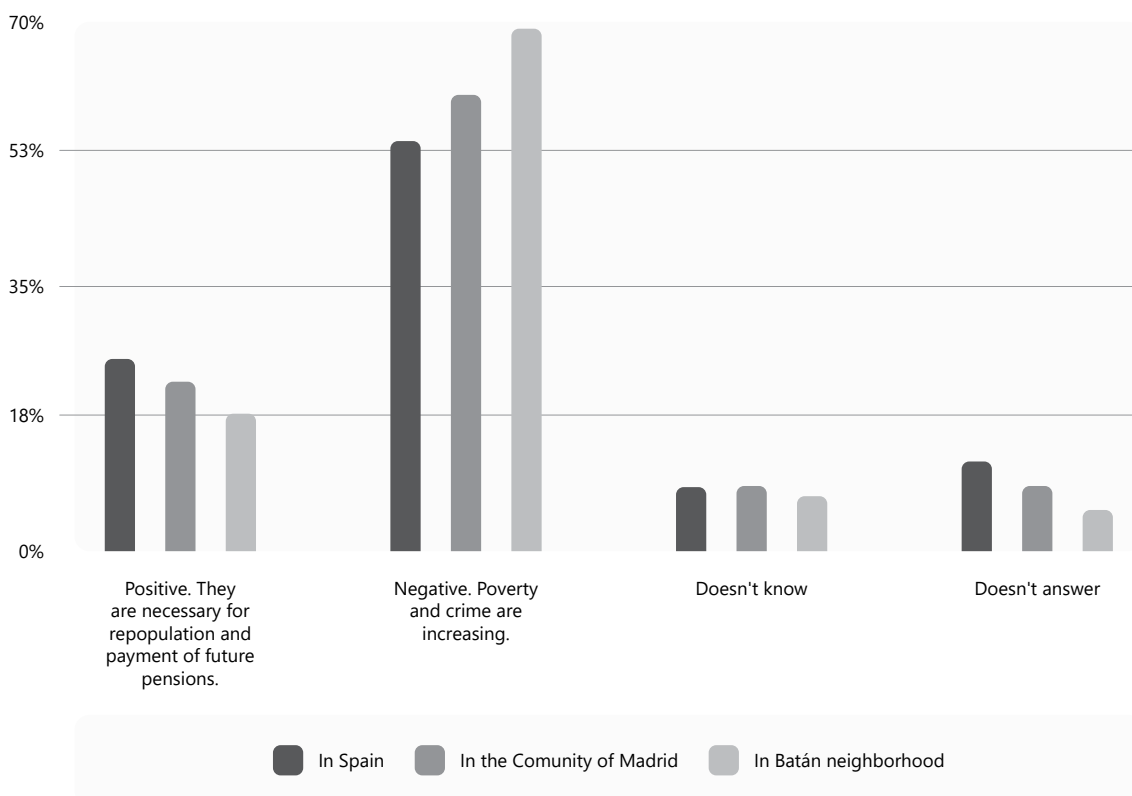


Given that, the increase in crime in recent years in the Batan area has been related to the arrival of UFM. Therefore, a specific question was included to assess the perception of the impact of UFM in Spain, the Community of Madrid, and the area of Batan where they live. Based on the results, 69.1% of respondents believe that the impact in Batan has been negative, compared to 18.2% who believe that it has been positive. In the Community of Madrid, 60.3% believe that the impact was negative, compared to 22.4% who believe that it was positive. At the national level, 54.2% thought they had a negative influence compared to 25.4% who thought that their influence was positive (Fig. 6).

In terms of perception, general public safety (Fig. 4) and the impact of UFM specifically (Fig. 6) tend to be evaluated more negatively when these complex social realities are closer to their homes.

Figure 6

Perception of the impact of unaccompanied foreign minors in Spain, in the Community of Madrid, and in the Batán area



The surveyed residents reported that criminal acts occur frequently or very frequently in Batán, in addition to the presence of poorly maintained urban infrastructure (streetlights, sidewalks, asphalt, traffic lights), several poorly lit areas, the presence of individuals who intimidate, as well as frequent alcohol consumption in the street or criminal acts. Conversely, abandoned cars, prostitution, begging, drug dealing, street brawls, or conflictive neighbours were rarely or never observed.

The feeling of fear (see Fig. 7) has been analysed based on mode (frequency) in percentage, with 49.2% of the respondents reported feeling fear more often when going out at night, while 32.3% reported feeling fear when encountering unknown groups. Respondents also tend to feel fear when walking through a park (29.5%), on the metro (29.5%), in areas where immigrants tend to gather and spend time (28.6%), and on the bus or at bus stops (24.2%).

In addition, 42.6% of the respondents reported feeling fear sometimes when entering or leaving a building, 41.9% felt fear when encountering unknown groups, and 41% felt fear when walking down the street during the day. On the other hand, they did not feel fear in shopping centres and large stores (66.1%), when staying home alone at night (61.9%), or at mass events such as concerts or football matches (48.4%).

Figure 7
Feeling of fear in various situations

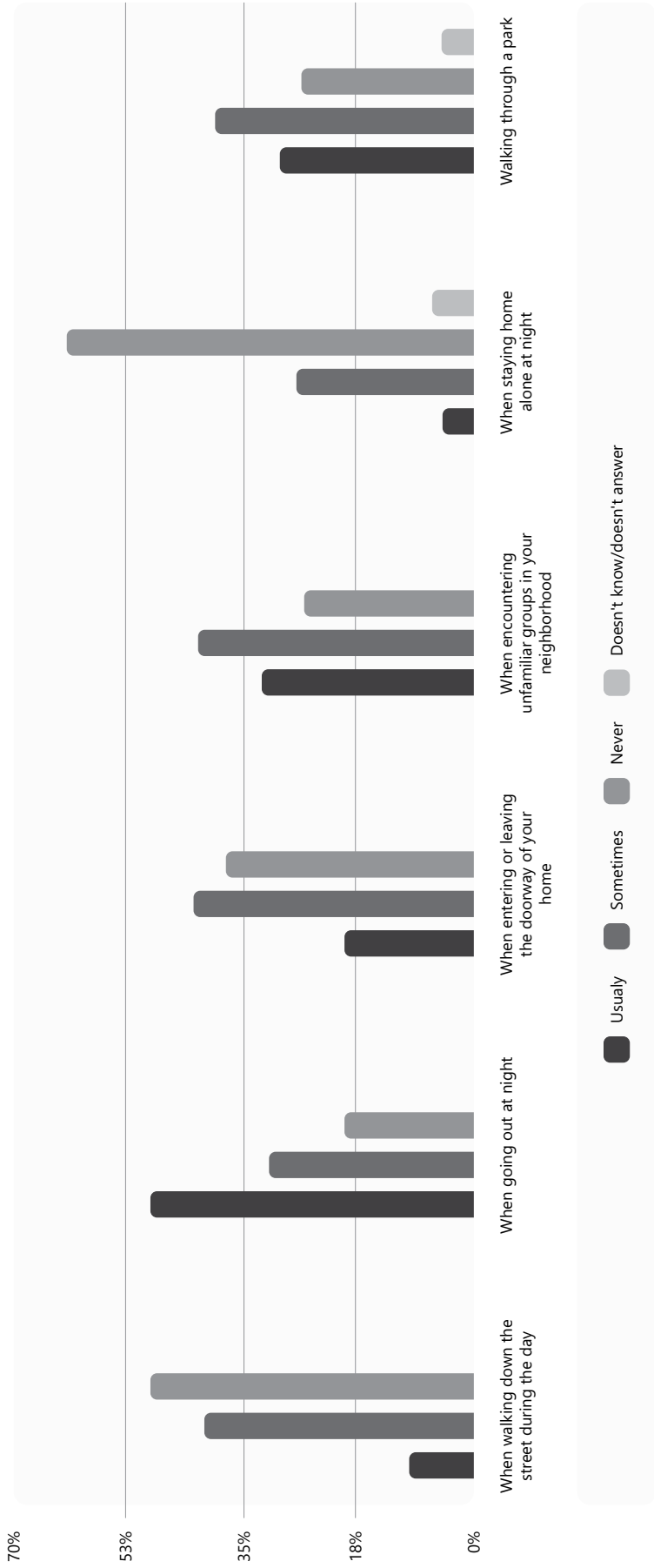
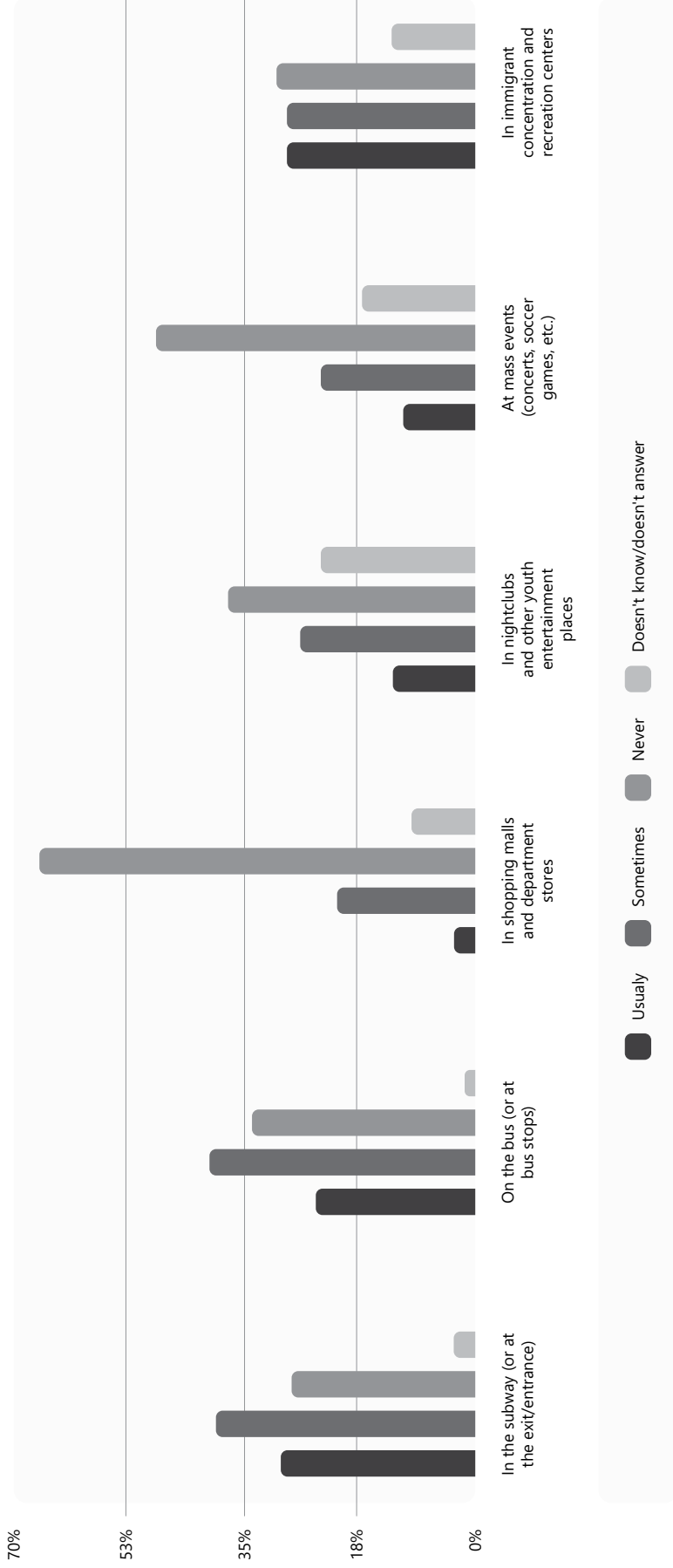


Figure 7 continues on the next page...

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In order to feel safe (Fig. 8), 73.8% avoided walking through certain areas, 71% did not leave any objects in plain sight in the car, 67.2% tried not to carry a lot of money, and 52.5% tried not to go out alone at night. Furthermore, 86.9% reported that they have not learned self-defence techniques, 80.3% did not have a weapon at home, nor had they installed an alarm in their home, and 75.8% did not carry any weapons or defensive objects.

Figure 8
Actions taken to feel safer

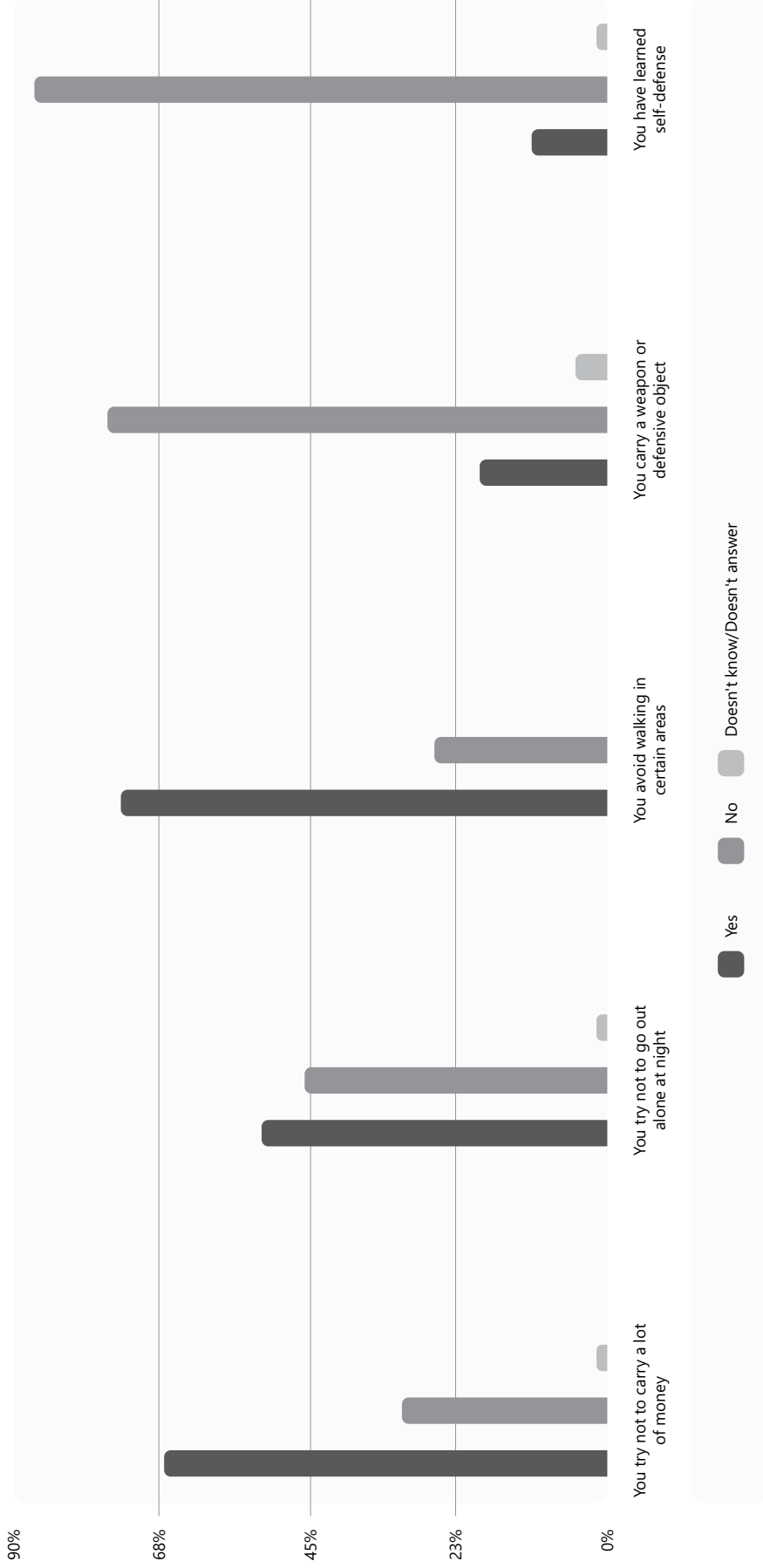


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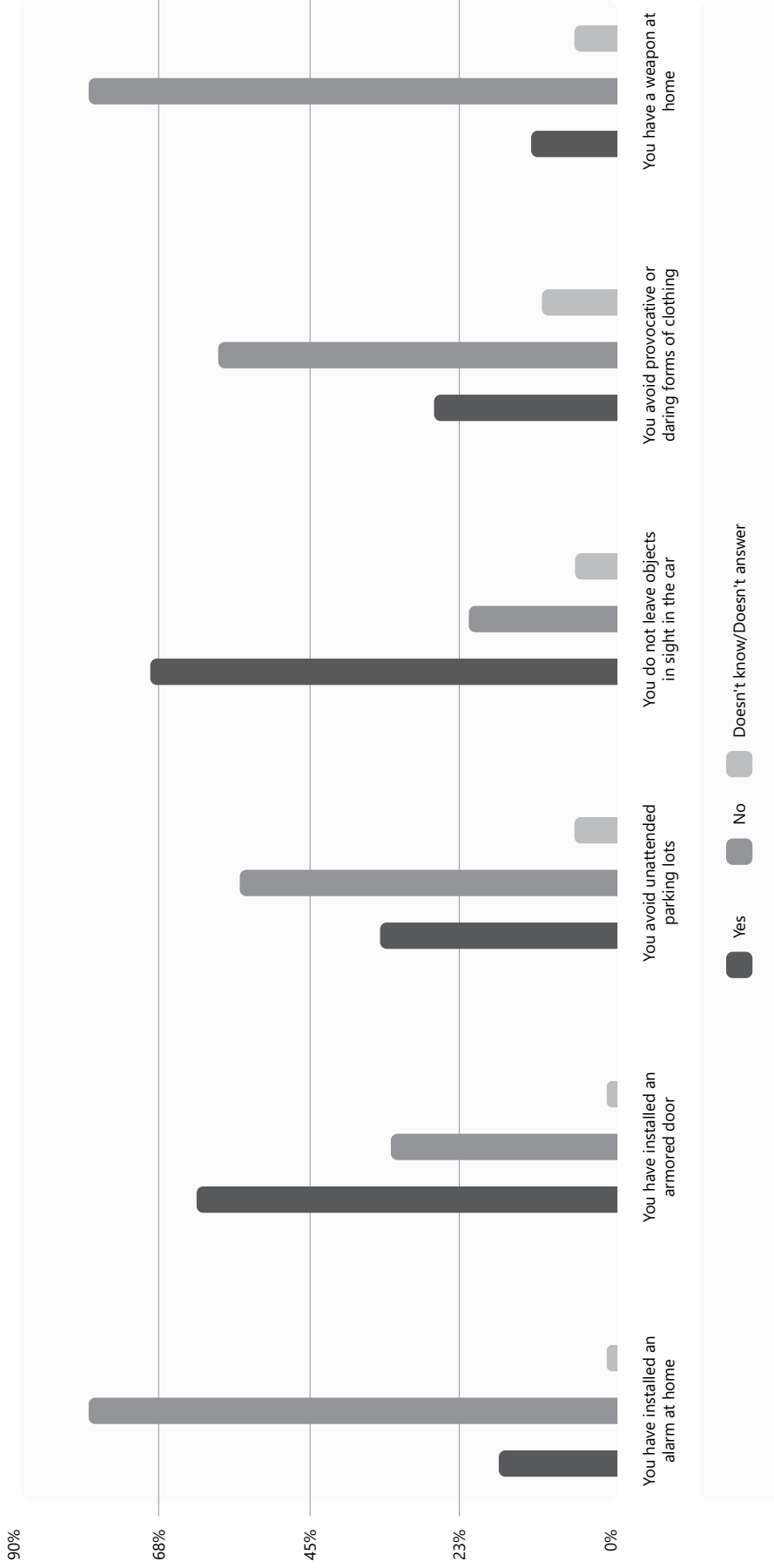


Table 3 shows that the main concerns of Batan residents coincide with the main demands of the neighbourhood's residents: air quality and the risk of becoming a crime victim. This demonstrates the representativeness and consistency of the research conducted. Other concerns include a serious incident encountered by a family member (other than illness), drinking water contamination, or a possible nearby fire.

Table 3

Level of personal concern in daily life with respect to different events

LEVEL OF WORRY	DAILY LIFE EVENTS
Really worried	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Air quality in their city. • Being a victim of a crime.
Quite worried	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Air purity in their city. • A serious incident (that is not an illness) encountered by a family member or loved one. • Possible contamination of drinking water.
Worried	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible fire in your building or nearby (gas station, field, etc.); possible gas leaks near your home. • Genetically modified foods. • Radiation from nearby antennas.
A little worried	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systemic fear (prolonged power outage, prolonged water shortage, computer system failure). • Illnesses suffered by oneself or a family member or a close loved one.
Not worried	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systemic fear (prolonged power outage, prolonged water shortage, computer system failure). • Genetically modified foods. • Radiation from nearby antennas.

Evaluation of security services and the care received

In the Batan area, the National Police received the highest evaluation from the population. A total of 68.8% of the respondents rated the National Police between "good" and "excellent", followed by the Civil Guard (55.7%) and the Municipal Police (52.5%).

On the other hand, the Municipal Police received the worst evaluation, with 24.6% of the respondents rating it as "insufficient" (see Table 4).

Table 4

Overall evaluation of the Municipal Police, the National Police, and the Civil Guard

	Municipal Police	National Police	Civil Guard
Insufficient	24,6%	14,8%	18%
Sufficient	9,8%	9,8%	11,5%
Good	13,1%	6,6%	14,8%
Very Good	37,7%	37,7%	29,5%
Excellent	14,8%	31,1%	26,2%

Based on Figure 9, the evaluation of different aspects of the various security forces can be observed. The positive aspects highlighted for the Municipal Police were their professionalism and honesty. However, respondents rated the resources available to the Municipal Police and their presence on the streets as insufficient.

For the National Police, the most valued aspects were their professionalism, honesty, and effectiveness (in that order). However, resources available to them and their street presence were also rated as insufficient. It should be noted that this survey was conducted before the fixed police presence that was established for several months in 2023 (Santos, 2023), and two years after the first police reinforcement in 2020 (EuropaPress, 2020; La Vanguardia, 2020).

As for the Civil Guard, their professionalism and honesty were also highly rated. However, their street presence was rated as the most insufficient aspect, followed by the resources available to them. It is important to note that the Batan area is an urban zone, and street patrols do not fall within the jurisdiction of the Civil Guard. Nevertheless, they have had to intervene on certain occasions, such as during Operation Physalis (La Vanguardia, 2023; Ministerio del Interior, 2023).

Regarding security services, 61.7% of respondents reported that they had no need to contact the Municipal Police, regardless of whether they had been a victim or not. This indicates that 38.3% did contact and use the services of the Municipal Police.

Likewise, 54.2% of respondents felt that the attention received from the Security Forces was as expected, while 29.2% rated it as worse than expected and 16.7% as better than expected.

The main complaints or dissatisfaction with the Municipal Police were their limited presence on the streets, the lack of patrols, and the time taken for them to arrive at the scene of incidents.

Figure 9
Evaluation of different aspects of the Municipal Police, the National Police, and the Civil Guard

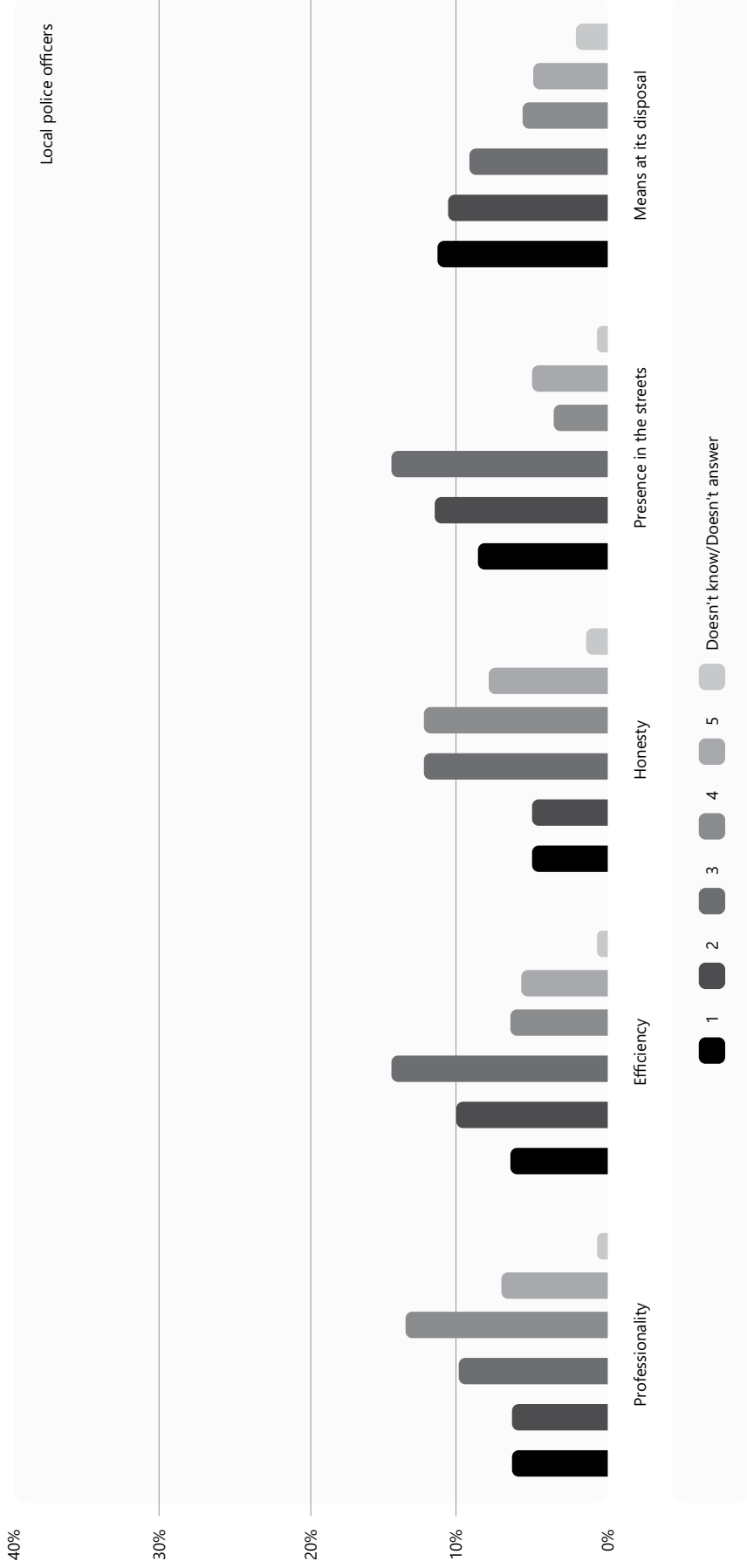


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Ana Gutiérrez Sanchis: A pilot project of victimisation and perceptions of insecurity in the Batán area...

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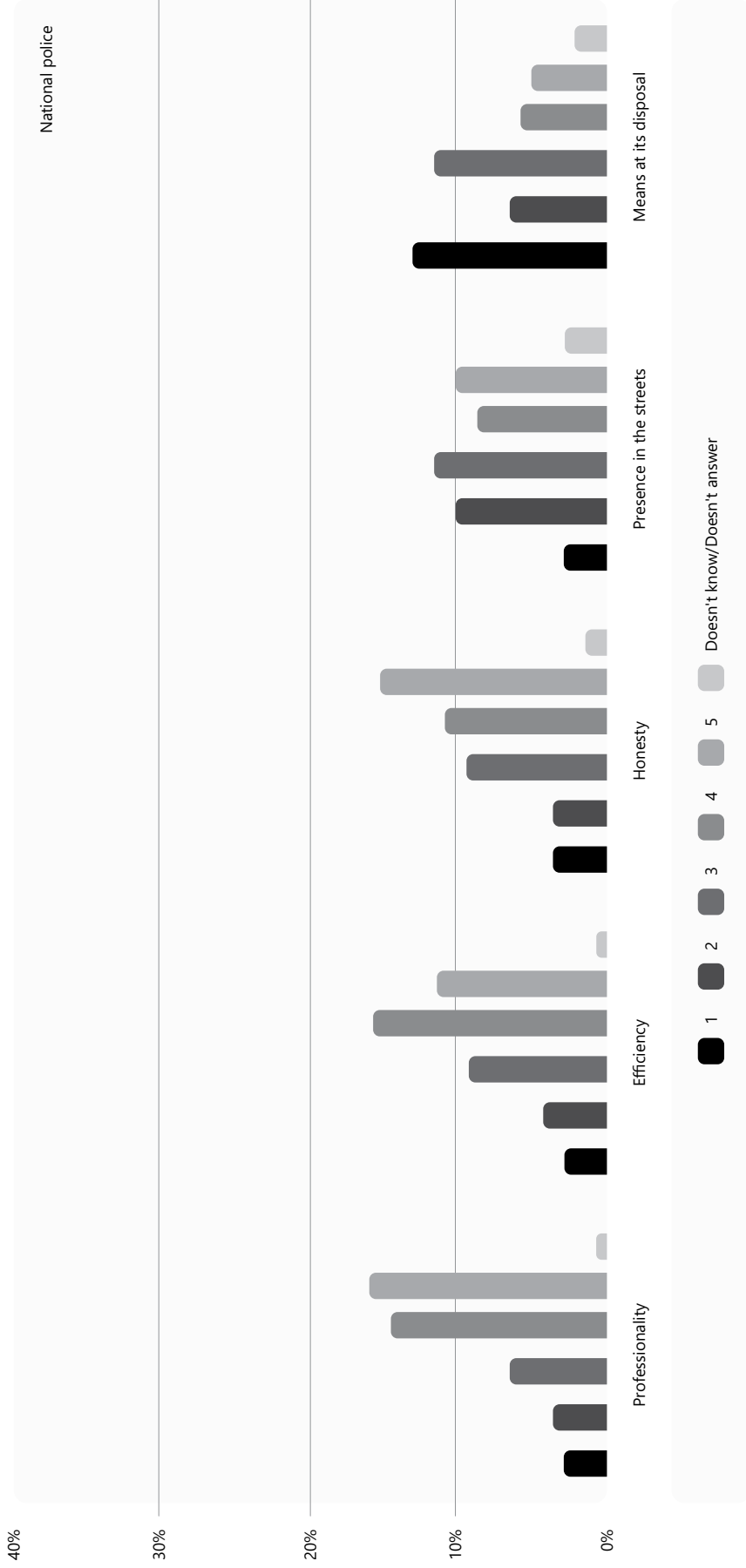
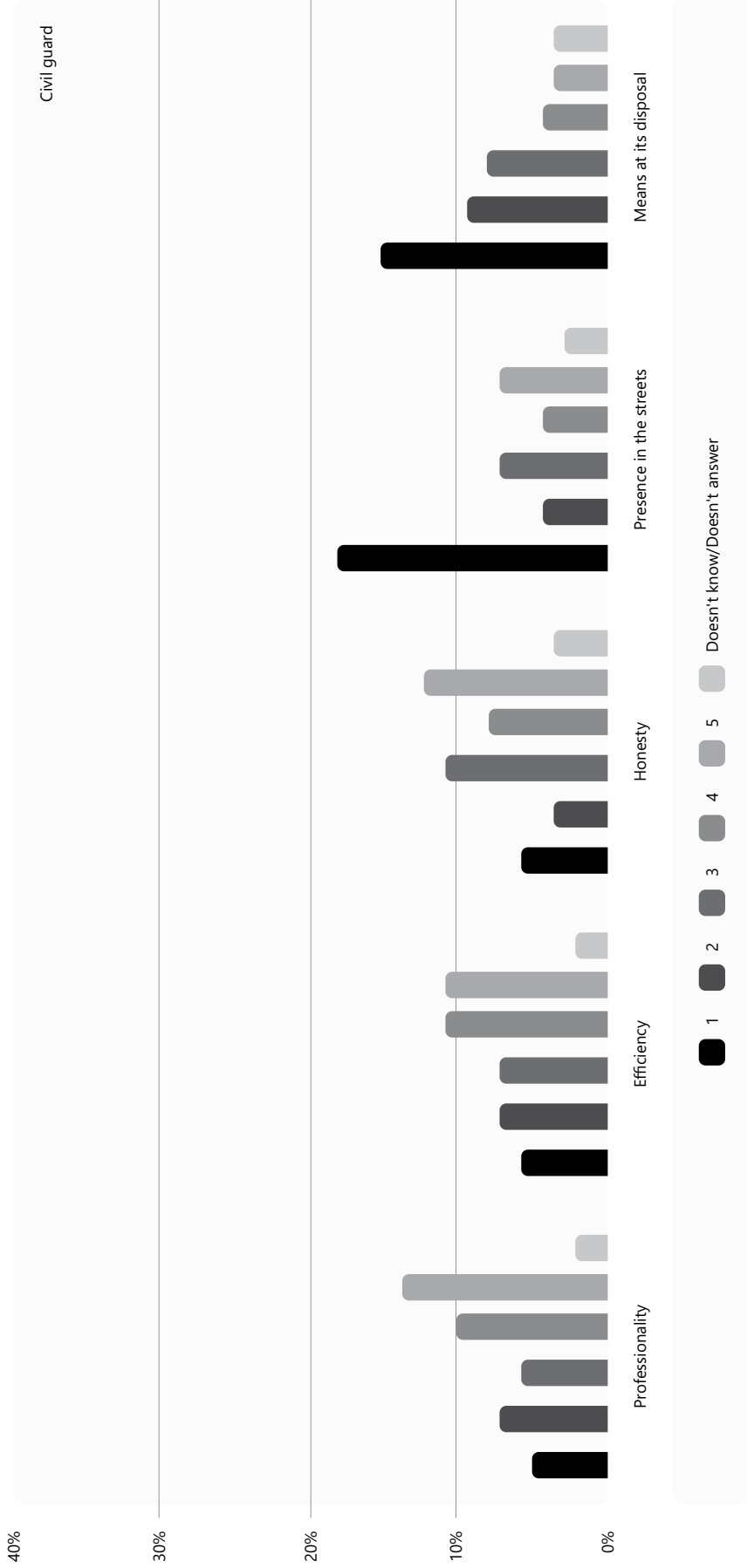


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Victimisation: the crime, the aggressors, and the victims.

It should be taken into account that 34.4% of people from the respondents' family circles were victims of a crime since the Casa de Campo Youth Hostel was converted into the Centre for the First Reception of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors in 2019. These respondents were all women, which confirms a gender bias in the victimisation. The age range of these individuals/victims were between 25 to 60 years. This figure is three times higher than usual with respect to this particular response in victimisation questionnaires.

Considering the previous analysis regarding the feeling of fear in certain circumstances (Fig. 7), as well as the actions taken to feel safer (Fig. 8), it is important to recall that Huesca González (2022) pointed out that the fact that an individual was a victim of a crime in the last two years influences their subsequent perception of insecurity. The results indicate that more than a third (34.4%) of individuals from respondents' family circles have been victims of a crime since 2019.

Additionally, 81% of crimes occurred in Batan (with 48% in the specific area of SurBatan), while the 9.5% occurred in Casa de Campo, and the crimes also spread to Lucero and Aluche (4.8% respectively).

In relation to victimisation, 8.2% of the respondents were victims of completed crimes or attempted crimes since 2019, of which 60% were robberies with violence and 40% included car thefts (20%) or thefts of objects from cars (20%). All of them were women, which confirms, once again, a gender bias in victimisation. In terms of age, there is no a clear pattern in the surveys, since the age range of the victims was between 28 and 60 years.

Regarding robberies with violence, 60% of the victims confirmed that the aggressor was part of a group, while 40% did not remember any details. None of the victims confirmed that the aggressor was alone. The "mataleón" technique (a chokehold) was used in 20% of the cases, and all the victims described that they did not know whether the aggressors were under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of the crime.

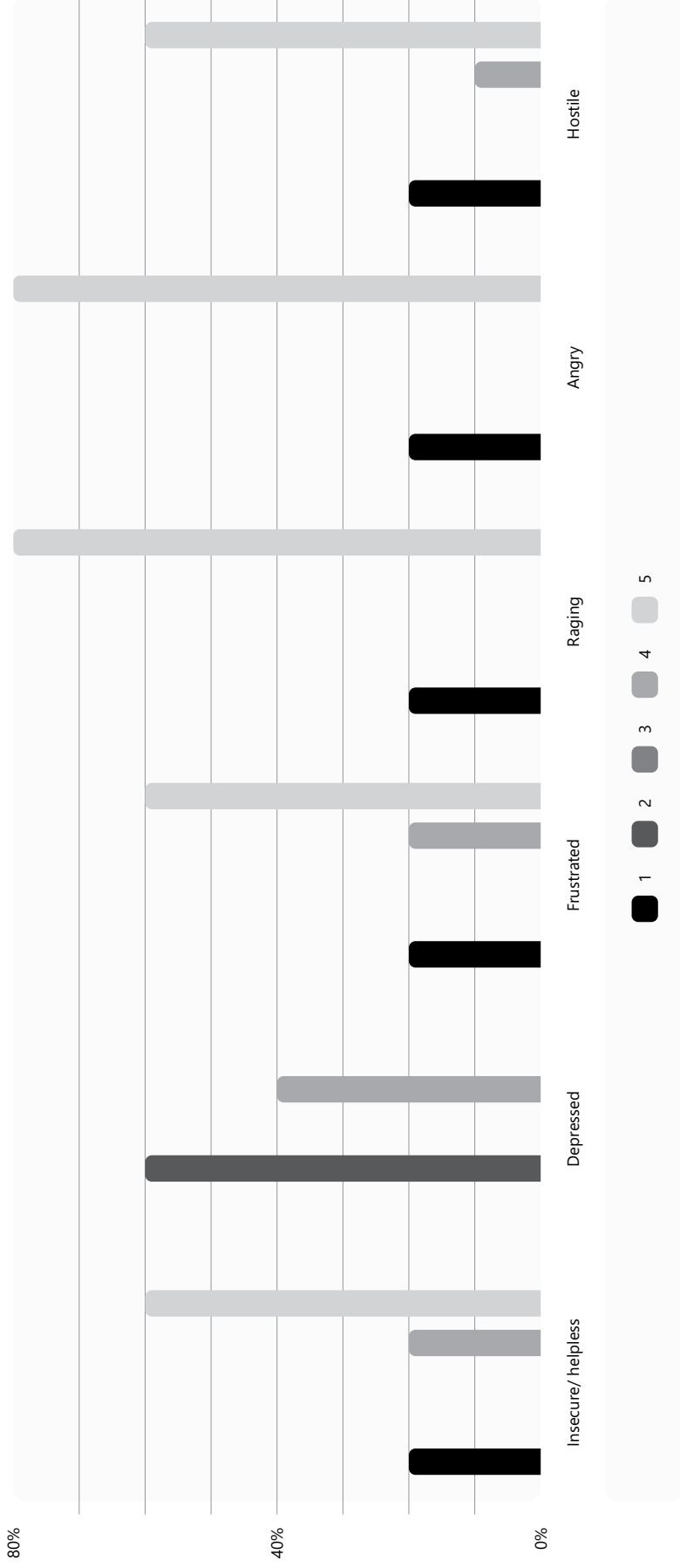
In addition, 20% of the victims described that the aggressors did carry some type of weapon, while 80% either do not know or did not respond. Since 2019, 40% have been victims of the same crime twice, meaning 60% have been victimised at least once. At the same time, 80% of repeated crimes occurred near the victim's home, while 20% did not know where it occurred.

Most of the victims suffered psychological (60%) and economic (40%) damage. Among those who were victims of a crime committed by a minor (given the legal protection afforded to minors in Spain), 80% felt angry, furious, and upset. Other common feelings among 60% of the victims included insecurity/helplessness, frustration, hostility, distrust, and abandonment. Additionally, 40% of the victims also felt fragile or vulnerable, humiliated, and/or depressed (see Fig. 10). Consequently, 60% of the victims do not believe in restorative justice for minors, and the rest did not know how to answer this question.

All the above crimes were reported, with the 80% of the reports made to the National Police and only 20% to the Municipal Police. Of those who made complaints, 80% described the police service at the time of the report as good, while 20% rated it as being very poor.

Figure 10

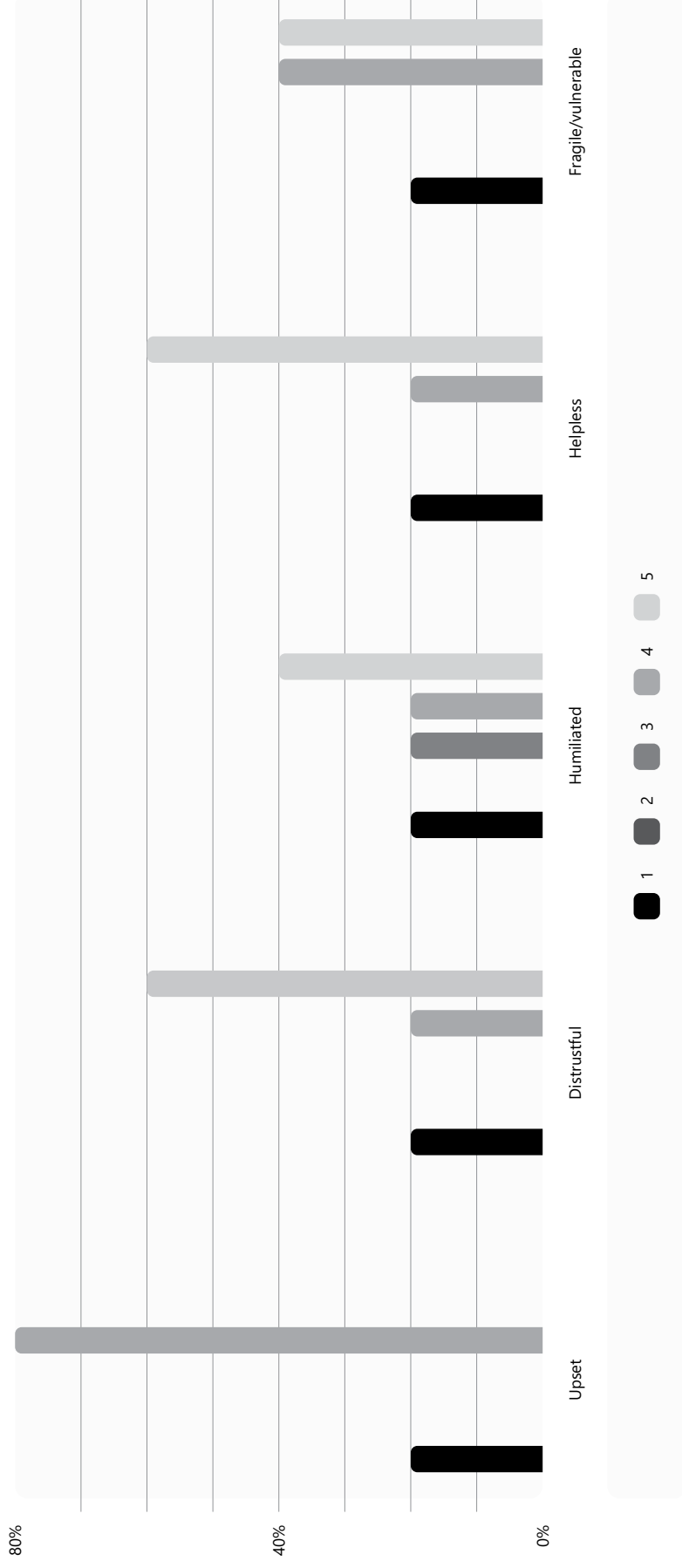
Feelings of victims of crimes committed by a minor, knowing the legal protection minors receive in Spain



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DISCUSSION

This pilot study aimed to explore the perceptions of insecurity and victimisation patterns in the Batan neighbourhood of Madrid, a context marked by the recent media coverage and political discourse surrounding the presence of unaccompanied foreign minors (UFMs) and a reported increase in crime. The findings support previous literature emphasising the complex interplay between objective crime rates, subjective fear, and broader sociopolitical narratives (Box et al., 1988; Hale, 1996; Huesca & Quicios, 2020). The results aligning with previous findings suggest that the perception of insecurity is not merely a reflection of actual crime rates, but is also deeply shaped by socio-spatial, subjective, and symbolic factors (Huesca & Ortega, 2007; Huesca & Quicios, 2020; Keller, 1975).

One of the most salient outcomes of the present study is that it confirms that public safety is perceived by residents as the main issue in Batan, both at neighbourhood and personal levels. This aligns with existing research showing that the concerns of citizens about crime often reflects broader anxieties beyond actual crime statistics (Farrall et al., 2009; Ferraro & Grange, 1987). While there are no previous general victimisation surveys in Madrid since 2007, this pilot research illustrates a shift in perceived insecurity, which is likely intensified by recent socioeconomic challenges and demographic changes, including the arrival of UFMs in the area.

Consistent with findings on how fear of crime is influenced by gender and socio-economic conditions, the current study's sample revealed that women perceived higher levels of insecurity, echoing earlier research by the Generalitat de Catalunya (2021) and Montiel (2021). This gender gap in perceived safety is well-established in victimological research and has been further underscored by the decline in Spain's ranking in the Women, Peace, and Security Index (GIWPS & PRIO, 2023).

Moreover, residents' concerns about crime appear to be heightened in proximity to their own neighbourhood, supporting studies that argue for the role of territorial proximity in shaping insecurity perceptions. The findings show that the Batan area is perceived as considerably more unsafe than the broader Madrid region or Spain as a whole, mirroring the results by Huesca González (2022) which demonstrate that recent victimisation - within the last two years - can affect behaviour and fear responses.

The results also underscore a significant dissonance between the fear of crime and actual experiences of victimisation. This is consistent with findings from the British Journal of Criminology and others, which demonstrate that the perception of insecurity often persists independently of empirical crime rates (Williams & Dickinson, 1993). The high levels of fear in certain everyday situations - such as walking at night, encountering unfamiliar groups of individuals, or using public transport - support theories that highlight the role of situational and spatial factors in shaping fear of crime (Brands et al., 2025; Gottdiener, 1994).

The present study also supports the assertion made by Sparks (1981) and later by Linde and Aebi (2020), that victimisation surveys are indispensable tools for understanding the real impact of crime on communities, especially when official police data fails to reflect unreported crime and social fears. In the case of Madrid, the absence of updated regional victimisation data since 2007

underscores the relevance of this pilot project in capturing contemporary social dynamics, specifically for this area.

The results further confirm existing findings about the spatial and ecological factors involved in fear of crime. The data shows that poorly maintained urban infrastructure and the presence of intimidating individuals or poorly lit areas increase the feelings of fear, confirming the assertions of Gottdiener (1994) and Leal (1997) regarding the role of spatial features in shaping urban insecurity. The spatial dimension of insecurity becomes especially relevant when considering the urban ecology of Batan. Poor lighting, deteriorated infrastructure, and perceived disorder amplify the sense of vulnerability, echoing theories from urban sociology that tie environmental neglect to heightened fear (Keller, 1975; Leal, 1997). Furthermore, the demographic profile of respondents - mainly middle-class, highly educated, and long-term residents - suggests that the disruption of perceived social cohesion may be a key factor in the rising insecurity perceptions (Díez Nicolás, 2023; Karmen, 2001).

Regarding UFM, the findings confirm a predominantly negative perception of their impact on neighbourhood security. While only a small fraction of the respondents explicitly identified immigration as the main problem in Batan, the strong association between the perceived rise in crime and the arrival of UFM highlights the influence of political and media narratives in shaping public opinion (Aparicio Chofré, 2015; González Moreno, 2020).

Furthermore, the present study touches on the complex intersection between crime, immigration, and public discourse. While only 8% of the respondents saw immigration as the main problem, over half attributed rising crime in Batan to the presence of UFM, reflecting the discourse surrounding migration (Kubrin & Ousey, 2023).

Importantly, the victimisation data gathered in this pilot study reveal a striking prevalence of repeated crimes, particularly violent robberies, resulting in an obvious psychological toll on the victims. This is consistent with literature showing that victimisation significantly influences future feelings of fear and protective behaviours (Huesca González, 2022). Feelings of vulnerability, anger, and distrust - especially when the aggressors are perceived as minors protected by the legal system - reinforce the need for both victim-centred policies and accurate public communication.

From a methodological perspective, the use of snowball sampling proved effective in accessing the hard-to-reach population of crime victims (Naderifar et al., 2017; Noy, 2008). Despite limitations related to sample size and representativeness, the technique allowed for the collection of rich, context-specific data in a setting where insecurity hindered in-person surveying.

Finally, this study highlights a lack of trust in restorative justice for minors among those who have been victimised, echoing the tension between punitive and rehabilitative approaches in youth justice. The emotions expressed by the victims - anger, helplessness, distrust - reveal the psychological and social toll of victimisation and the perceived inadequacies in the response of the justice system.

In conclusion, this study has contributed to the literature on urban insecurity by highlighting how fear of crime in Batan was shaped by a combination of local conditions, social narratives, and media framing, rather than solely by objective crime data. The findings underscore the importance of

revitalising victimisation surveys in Madrid, with updated instruments that can capture the complex realities behind perceived insecurity in urban neighbourhoods.

LIMITATION OF THE RESEARCH

This research is subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. Due to safety concerns in the study area, it was not feasible to conduct the questionnaire in person with one researcher, which restricted the range of data collection methods and limited opportunities for direct engagement with participants. The use of the snowball sampling methodology, while appropriate for accessing hard-to-reach populations, was carried out primarily online. This may have introduced sampling bias and restricted participation from certain demographic groups, such as elderly residents with limited digital access or literacy. The exact size of the population in the Batan-Casa de Campo area is not clearly defined in publicly available data, preventing the calculation of precise confidence intervals or sampling error margins.

The absence of up-to-date victimisation surveys in the city of Madrid hindered opportunities for exploration, comparative analysis, or longitudinal insights, limiting the ability to examine the findings within the broader context of regional trends. A portion of the target population was unfamiliar with victimisation surveys and expressed suspicion regarding their purpose, since it is not common to conduct such surveys for academic research, as evidenced by the lack of victimisation questionnaires in Madrid. The broader social context of the study - particularly around themes of migration, security, and youth - has been politically charged in public discourse.

CONCLUSIONS

The pilot project on victimisation and the perception of insecurity in the Batan area confirmed the main hypothesis proposed for this research.

Firstly, 48.4% of the respondents stated that the main problem in the neighbourhood/district is citizen insecurity, followed by healthcare (16.1%). Only a small minority (8%) believed that immigration was the main problem, indicating that racism and xenophobia regarding this issue are minimal in the Batan area. Additionally, it is known in the neighbourhood that many of the victims were of foreign origin. It was also confirmed that the main problem that most personally affects them is citizen insecurity, as this was the most frequently selected response (with a 37% majority) as the first and main problem, followed by healthcare (17.7%) and housing (16.12%). This reinforces the hypothesis that citizen insecurity was the main problem in the Batan area in 2022, as well as being the issue that personally affected the residents the most.

Regarding victimisation, 82% of respondents have been victims of a crime or attempted crime since 2019, and 34.4% of people from the respondents' family circles have been victims of a crime. Since 2019, 40% have been victims of the same crime twice, and 80% of repeated crimes occurred near the victim's home the second time.

Geographically, 81% of the crimes occurred in Batan, confirming the crime hotspot in this area near the current Centre for the First Reception of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors (formerly the Richard Schirrmann Youth Hostel).

On the same path, 60% of the victims of robberies with violence confirmed that the aggressor was part of a group and that the “mataleón” (chokehold) technique was used in 20% of the cases, while 20% of victims reported that the aggressor carried some type of weapon. The victims suffered psychological and economic damage, in addition to physical injuries in violent robberies.

Among those who were victims of a crime committed by a minor (who was given the legal protection afforded to minors in Spain), 60% did not believe in restorative justice for minors, and the rest did not know how to answer this question. Regarding subsequent feelings, 80% of the victims felt angry, furious, and upset. Other common feelings among 60% of the victims were insecurity/helplessness, frustration, hostility, distrust, and abandonment. Additionally, 40% of the victims felt fragile or vulnerable, humiliated, and/or depressed.

Regarding security services and the care received, the National Police was rated the best by the residents of Batan. The professionalism, honesty, and effectiveness of the security forces are highly appreciated, although respondents also mentioned that the resources at the disposal of the Local Police and their presence on the streets was insufficient.

Returning to the perception of citizen insecurity, 70.2% of the respondents believe that citizen insecurity has worsened in Batan, while 59.7% think that it has worsened in the Community of Madrid, and 55.6% believe that it has worsened in Spain on the whole.

For this pilot case study, given that the increase in crime in the Batan area in recent years is related to the arrival of UFM, the perception of the impact of UFM was also evaluated in Spain, in the Community of Madrid, and in the Batan neighbourhood where they live. Responses indicating negative impacts constituted 69.1% in the Batan area, 60.3% in the Community of Madrid, and 54.2% at the national level.

It can be concluded that, in matters of perception of general citizen insecurity and the specific impact of UFM, these issues tend to be evaluated more negatively the closer one lives to this complex social reality of UFM. Conversely, they tend to be evaluated more positively when the problem is experienced from a distance, away from their place of residence.

Regarding the degree of security in the Batan-Casa de Campo area, 76.2% thought it was regular, bad, or very bad (of which 47.6% thought it was bad or very bad and 28.6% thought it was regular) compared to 23.8% who thought it was good or very good.

Finally, the representativeness and coherence of the results from the pilot study can be demonstrated by the fact that the major concerns of Batan residents align with the main demands of the neighbourhood: air quality (undergrounding of the A-5) and the risk of becoming a crime victim (‘Let’s reclaim the hostel’).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the residents who completed the questionnaire and those who collaborated by sharing the questionnaire with other neighbours. Without them, this pilot research study would not have been possible. Special thanks to Dr. Ana Huesca who introduced me to this line of research on the perception of insecurity in Spain, as well as gave me some tips and followed my progress. Thanks to Alberto Rodriguez for his implementation of neighbourhood security. Last, but not least, thanks to everyone who provided me with daily moral support and security throughout this research.

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