
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BEFORE AND DURING THE FIRST YEAR OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A RAPID REVIEW OF THE CONTEXT IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an upward trend in domestic violence cases at the international and, of course, national level. In fact, over time it has been shown that there are links between various natural disasters or pandemics and the increase in these cases. The first part of the study provides a brief theoretical analysis of domestic violence, as well as the main forms of manifestation and consequences for the victim. The second part focuses on the interrelationship between the sanitary measures imposed in the pandemic context and the impact on the evolution of this problem, as well as the identification of general factors that contributed to the emergence and maintenance of domestic violence, before and especially in the first year of the pandemic. Through the secondary data analysis, the third part of the study highlights the trends of domestic violence in Romania in the period between 2016-2020, focusing on the first year of the pandemic (2020), by looking at the statistics provided by the Agenția Națională Pentru Egalitate de Șanse pentru Femei și Bărbați (ANES). The last part of our paper offers a series of discussions and conclusions on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the evolution of domestic violence cases. The main limitation of the study was a time deficit in the supply of specific statistics for 2021, as well as the general unpredictability of the pandemic in terms of future trends in domestic violence and case reporting.*

Keywords: *Domestic violence; COVID-19 pandemic; victim; aggressor; family.*

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1. Introduction

On December 1st, 2019, the first case of COVID-19 virus infection appeared in Wuhan, China, and on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) declared COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-1) pandemic. As of February 7th, 2022, a number of 395,805,935 confirmed cases of SARS-CoV-2 infection have been reported globally, of which 5,758,394 deaths from this cause, according to the National Institute of Public Health Romania (INSPIR, 2022). In the context of COVID-19, as there is a high risk of contagion, the imposition of specific restrictions was absolutely necessary. In Romania, during the state of emergency between March 16th and May 15th, 2020, taking into account the obtrusion of strict sanitary measures to limit the spread of the virus at community level (Mediafax, 2021), a considerable increase in cases of domestic violence can be observed (Mihaiu, 2020, p. 39), being registered a number of 251 calls to the special telephone line *0800 500 333*, dedicated to the victims, compared to the similar period of 2019, when 111 cases were registered (ANES, 2020).

Analyzing the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, research into domestic violence is needed to track and understand trends, but especially to identify current issues regarding the emergence and maintenance of abusive and violent behavior within the family. Against the background of the multiple uncertainties and fears generated by the pandemic, a series of unprecedented changes took place, including at the couple and respectively, at the family level. This has led to a gradual evolution of cases of domestic violence around the world, mobilizing the scientific community to carefully analyze the impact of the pandemic on this worrying phenomenon (Bradbury-Jones and Isham, 2020; Forbes et al., 2020; Peterman et al., 2020; Sharma and Borah, 2020). While the daily routine of many has changed radically in response to new challenges, strict quarantine and social isolation have meant that the victim has limited access to sources of help. Thus, a dangerous environment was created in which the aggressor acquires unlimited powers, increasing the risk of occurrence and maintenance of abuse for a long period of time (Kaukinen, 2020; Roesch et al., 2020).

The main objective of the study is to perform an x-ray on the impact of the evolution of domestic violence in the first year of the pandemic, in the context of restrictions on free movement in Romania, in order to provide an image of the addressed problem. More precisely, through secondary data research, the data provided by the Agenția Națională Pentru Egalitate de Șanse pentru Femei și Bărbați (ANES) in the period 2016-2020 is analyzed, in order to follow the influence of the pandemic evolution in Romania on the phenomenon of domestic violence, with emphasis on the year 2020.

The study starts from the general theoretical analysis of the problem of domestic violence, emphasizing later, the connection between the influence of the restrictions imposed in the pandemic context on the aggressive and violent behaviors inside the small circle of the family. The main cardinal points of the characteristics of this social problem in Romania are followed, as it appears from the statistics provided by ANES. In conclusion, a retrospective is proposed to provide further clarification on the identified issues, as well as a number of recommendations.

One of the main limitations of the present study is a temporal shortage of official national and international statistics on the evolution of domestic violence in 2021, in the context of the multiple uncertainties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, the diversity of statistical data is extremely limited, making it difficult to estimate the unreported number of these cases. Another major limitation is the challenges posed by the unpredictability of the COVID-19 pandemic and the anticipation of the impact on the evolution of the risks of abuse and domestic violence. In terms of knowing the violent manifestations, the intimate family space remains isolated, hidden.

2. Brief theoretical approach

Domestic violence is a widespread term that refers to a number of forms of aggression, abuse, and violence that occur in the intimate family space between family members of any age, respectively between the couple's partners (Aihie, 2009). A very relevant aspect that needs to be mentioned is that most of the victims are female (Office of National Statistics, 2020), but it is not excluded that there are cases of abused men in the couple's relationship. In particular, violence against women is defined as any act of gender-based violence, in order to provoke suffering of any kind, and to punish or exercise control over the victim (WHO, 2021). Regardless of the form of aggression, the aggressor's goal is to gain control and dominate the victim while causing her a series of sufferings, creating an abusive relationship of subordination (Bonea, 2012; Johnson, 2006). In its worst forms, domestic violence can escalate to the point of threatening the victim's life (Ver Steegh, 2004) (see Table 1).

Table 1: The main types of domestic violence: definition, forms of manifestation, consequences on the victim

Type of domestic violence	Definition	Forms of manifestation	Consequences on the victim
Physical violence	– The use of physical force by the aggressor in order to injure and cause pain to the victim.	– Hitting with fists and feet, or other blunt objects; – Throwing various objects in the direction of the victim; – Sharpening; – Combustion; – Pushing; – Dragging the victim; – Strangulation; – Scratching; – Slamming.	– Development of Stockholm Syndrome; – Physical pain that can become chronic; – Various wounds, bodily injuries; – Scars; – Development of sleep and eating disorders.
Psychological abuse	– Through various deviant behaviors, including by manipulation and blackmail, the aggressor will aim to gain control over the victim.	– Humiliation; – Threats; – Mockery; – Constraint; – Reclassification; – Insults; – Embarrassing the victim in public; – Offenses.	– Occurrence of Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome; – Decreased self-esteem; – Fear of the aggressor; – Use of various medicinal substances with a calming effect.

Type of domestic violence	Definition	Forms of manifestation	Consequences on the victim
Sexual abuse	– Any act of sexual intercourse without the victim's consent, committed by coercion or physical force perpetrated against her.	– Unwanted touches; – Forcing the victim to maintain unwanted and unprotected intimate relationships; – Subjugation.	– Causing physical injuries; – Mental suffering; – The appearance of an unwanted pregnancy; – The appearance of the desire for suicide; – Depression.
Social abuse	– Exercising excessive and strict control over the social and family life of the victim.	– Prohibition of the victim from having friendly relations with other persons of the opposite gender; – Locks the victim in the house; – Prohibition of exits in which the victim is not accompanied by the aggressor; – Controlling the victim's social networks; – Removal of the victim's friends; – Preventing the victim from having relations with her extended family.	– Insulation; – Development of depressive states; – Lack of communication outside the abusive relationship; – Creating a victim-aggressor dependency relationship; – Fear of socializing; – Installing the victim's distrust in those close to her.
Economic abuse	– Preventing the victim from having a job, from having her own money, or prohibiting her from having any kind of economic activity meant to bring money.	– Prohibition imposed on the victim to have a job; – Control of the victim's money; – Saving the victim to work; – Accumulation of debts on behalf of the victim, without her knowledge or consent; – Stopping the victim's monthly income; – Using the financial resources of the victim without her consent or knowledge; – Selling or destroying the property belonging to the victim.	– Bankruptcy; – Loss of the job; – Loss of personal property; – Appearance of unwanted debts; – Creating financial dependence on the aggressor; – Lack of decision-making power of the victim over her own financial resources; – Limiting the possibility of self-defense of the victim against the abusive relationship.
Neglect	– It is one of the most common forms of abuse, especially for minors and other people who are considered vulnerable.	– Ignoring the basic needs of the victim; – Creating various damages to the victim; – Creating contexts in which the victim can be injured; – Lack of emotional support of the victim and cognitive stimulation; – Creating an unstable living and development environment; – Exposure of the victim to various dangers or domestic aggression.	– The appearance of various psychological problems; – Recourse to various deviant acts; – Deterioration of the victim's physical health; – Physical and mental underdevelopment in accordance with the chronological age; – Creating the relationship of deficient attachment; – Behavior problems; – Anxiety; – Distrust of others.

Source: Ali et. al., 2021; Bonea, 2020; Dubowitz et. al., 2005; WHO, 2021.

Thus, domestic violence includes several forms of manifestation such as: physical violence, sexual abuse, social abuse, psychological abuse, economic abuse, neglect (Bonea, 2020; Muntean, 2011).

3. Highlighting the main links between COVID-19 pandemic and domestic violence

Over time, international research has drawn attention to cases of domestic violence in the general context of natural disasters, humanitarian crises, armed conflicts, or pandemics (Boserup et. al., 2020; Forbes et. al., 2020; Parkinson, 2019; Buttell and Carney, 2009).

In the last two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of life, including family life, and is characterized by unpredictability, with effects that are difficult to predict for long periods of time. Under these conditions, isolation and quarantine at national and international level were the main health protection measures, leading to an adverse effect, initially unsuspected by the authorities. In the first year of the pandemic, 2020, according to the specialized literature, several factors favoring the appearance and manifestation of domestic violence could be observed, starting from the increase of the individuals' anxiety; accentuation of depressive states; not adapting to the new challenges of the environment; the appearance of the post-traumatic stress syndrome; reduced response capacity of public systems to prevent and combat violence; as well as the escalation of existing conflicts in the family (Brooks et. al., 2020; Peterman et. al., 2020; NZFVC, 2020). Undoubtedly, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health at the individual level has been felt since the first part of the imposition of traffic restrictions, having close links with the occurrence and/or intensification of domestic violence (Ali et al., 2021; Campbell, 2020; Merenda et al., 2021). At the same time, other consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic were job loss and financial instability; changing the work environment characterized by teleworking and affecting the quality of individual and family life; closing schools and moving teaching activity online; disruption or termination of any social relations; radical change of individual and couple daily routine; changing the roles of family members; abrupt limitation of access to various services and resources etc. (Arpinte et al., 2020; Mihaiu, 2020; Talevi et al., 2020; Voicu, 2020). We are therefore talking about an unprecedented situation, full of social and economic uncertainties that has led to a series of radical changes, forcing the individual's ability to adapt and respond. Thus, the clear link between the restrictions in the pandemic context and the increase in cases of domestic violence around the world is highlighted (Bradbury-Jones and Isham, 2020; Boserup et al., 2020; Sharma and Borah, 2020).

The victim was forced by the health circumstances to remain isolated with the aggressor in a dangerous, insecure and stressful environment. International reports of domestic violence show upward trends, in the context of restricting freedom of movement, as the main form of prevention of SARS-CoV-2 virus infection (Roseboom, 2020; Kaukinen, 2020; Piquero, et al., 2020). Specifically, the social isolation caused by the pandemic, associated with the economic recession and widespread uncertainty on all fronts of life, has led to an increase of up to 50% in

domestic violence cases internationally, in 2020, in countries such as Germany, Brazil, Spain, England, Cyprus, Italy, China, Greece, as reported in an article from The Guardian (Graham-Harrison et al., 2020). Also, in another article published in The New York Times (Taub, 2020), the hypothesis is underlined that: *The more time family members spend together isolated in quarantine, the greater the risk of abuse and domestic violence will be manifested in more frequent and severe forms.*

Isolation is one of the main factors favoring the occurrence and maintenance of violence in the family intimate space, implying the limitation of access to everything that means asking for help and resources of any kind that the victim could use to defend herself from the aggressor (Bright et al., 2020; Morton, 2020). On the other hand, the unreported number of cases is difficult to estimate, this being another consequence of social isolation, and at the same time, ensuring a *cyclicity of domestic violence* (Bonea, 2016; Walker, 1999). In the case of long-term abusive relationships, restrictive health measures have created an extremely favorable context for the aggressor (Selvaratnam, 2020).

Beyond the pandemic context, there are a number of main risk factors for the occurrence and maintenance of domestic violence, which refer to the excessive consumption of alcohol; the existence of neuropsychological diseases; the precarious material situation in which the victim depends on the income of the aggressor; the victim's shame to seek qualified help; isolation from family and friends; the onset of Stockholm Syndrome; lack of information on ways to defend against the abuse; experiencing by one or both partners various abuses during childhood; the victim's fear of the aggressor; the existence of a criminal record etc. (Bonea, 2015; Davis, 2008; De Fabrique et al., 2007; Tower, 2006).

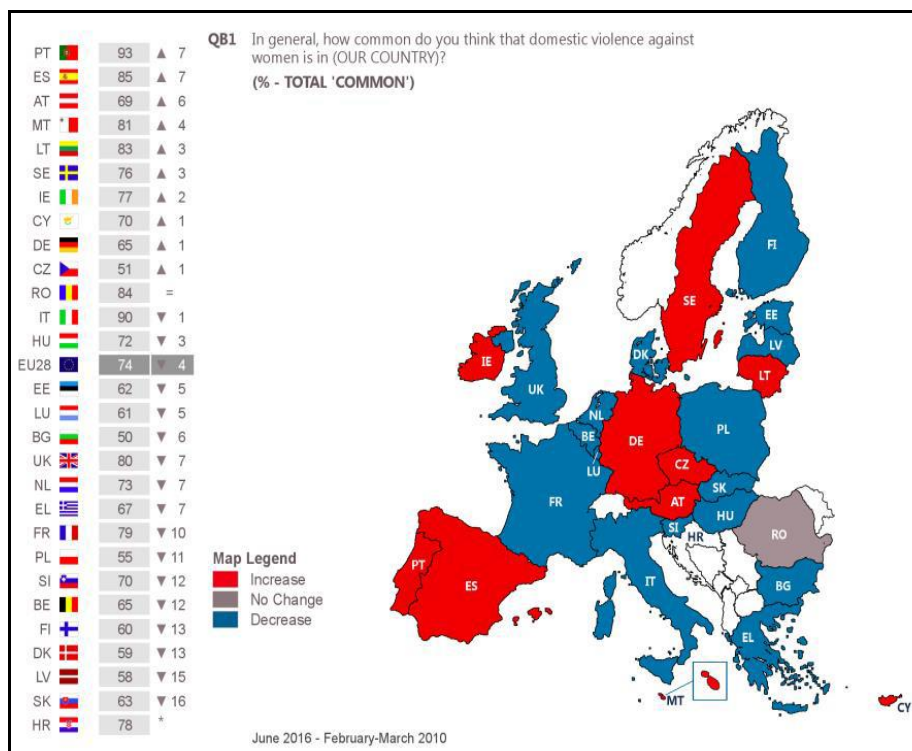
4. Brief literature review of existing legislation

The Istanbul Convention which recognizes violence against women as a human rights violation was ratified in 2011 and entered into force in 2014 (Caragnano, 2018, p. 51). According to Caragnano, (2018, p. 56) the Istanbul Convention represents “the first legally binding instrument creating a comprehensive legal framework not only to protect women against all forms of violence, but also to prevent, prosecute and eliminate violence against women and domestic violence”. Domestic violence is defined as “all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit, irrespective of biological or legal family ties, or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence as the victim” (Council of Europe, 2011). According to Romanian Law 217/2003 article 3 domestic violence is defined as “any inaction or action intended of physical violence, sexual, psychological, economic, or social or spiritual which is produced within the family or domestic area, between spouses or ex-spouses as well as between actual or former partners regardless of whether the aggressor lives or has lived with the victim”.

In Europe there are two surveys on domestic violence one collected in 2016 Special Eurobarometer 449: Gender-based violence and one collected in 2010, Special Eurobarometer 344: Domestic violence against women. There will be another survey scheduled by EIGE in 2023 on domestic violence.

Almost all respondents of the survey from 2016 consider that domestic violence is unacceptable while domestic violence is perceived to be more prevalent against women (see Graph 1).

Graph 1. Map of Europe showing Violence against Women and the change in Opinion since the Last Survey in 2010



Source: *Special Eurobarometer 449: Gender-based violence (TNS opinion, 2016, p. 11).*

Notes: Base: All respondents (n=27.818).

*Croatia was not covered in 2010.

The graph shows that “across the EU there has been a four-percentage point decrease in the proportion who say domestic violence against women is common in their country, but much larger decreases in this view are observed amongst respondents in Slovakia (-16 pp), Latvia (-15 pp), Denmark and Finland (both -13 pp). On the other hand, in 10 Member States respondents are now more likely to say domestic violence against women is common, with the largest increases observed amongst those in Portugal, Spain (both +7 pp) and Austria (+6 pp).” (TNS Opinion, 2016, 11) Romania shows no change in the perception that domestic violence is common, it is above the EU average perception of 74 by 10 percentage points.

5. Trends of domestic violence in Romania before and during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic

In the following section we will analyse the data from National Agency for Equality of Chances between women and men (ANES/NAEC) on victims helped by the agency.

In 2019 there was a spike in the number of victims taken care of by the National Agency for Equality of Chances between women and men (ANES). The number of cases of victims of domestic violence decreased in 2020 to 11607 cases compared to 2019 when they were 14074 cases reported, and even compared to 2018 when they were 13182 cases. In 2019 according to General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police there were 44090 cases of criminal complaints and 43712 complaints in 2020 so although there were fewer cases of overall criminal complaint if we look at a disaggregated level we see there were more cases of harassment, blackmail, threat, pimping, rape, sexual aggression, failure to comply with the measures regarding custody of the minor: the detention of the minor child by a parent, without the consent of the other parent, or the impediment of the minor's relations with the parents in accordance with the law, offenses specified in Law 217/2003 on breach of a protection order or a provisional protection order by the person against whom it was issued (Ilic, 2022). This we will argue shows an inability of the victims to reach out because of fear due to the pandemics with an under-reported number of cases because the economy contracted with 3,7% (Source: Eurostat, Series TEC00115), there was job loss especially in the HORECA sector and tourism due to measures of lockdown. 51% of cases of victims were from the rural areas and 49% of the victims helped by ANES were from urban areas.

According to a news press release by UNICEF (2020), “due to the conditions of isolation at home, limitation of contacts with other members of the social network, closing of schools, lack of facilities to spend free time, and financial insecurity, it was observed that family relations tend to become more and more tensed, increasing the vulnerability of children and women and the risk to be exposed to domestic violence”. The UNICEF statements are based also on the situations created as a result of Ebola and Zika, during which domestic violence increased as well as the physical abuse against women, traffic of human beings and marriage of children as well as sexual exploitation. Moreover, research dealing with the impact of natural disasters show that these contributes to the more frequent manifestation of various abuses and aggressions (Weitzman et al., 2010; Parkinson, 2019). More specifically, the the data registered at international level, confirmed the hypothesis that COVID 19 pandemics has negative effects on the couple relationship and favours the occurrence of episodes of domestic violence (Finlay and Gilmore, 2020). World Health Organization (2020) reports the increase of domestic violence in China, Great Britain, and the United States of America. Other studies state that there is an increase of domestic violence in France with 30%, and in Brazil with 40-50% (Campbell, 2020).

Stanciu, Mihăilescu and Ștefănescu (2021, p. 31) also argue that the domestic violence has increased based on a study carried out by University of Medicine and Pharmacy Carol Davila in 4 hospitals from Bucharest which showed an increase of four times in traumas caused by physical aggression compared to the last three years and on data of

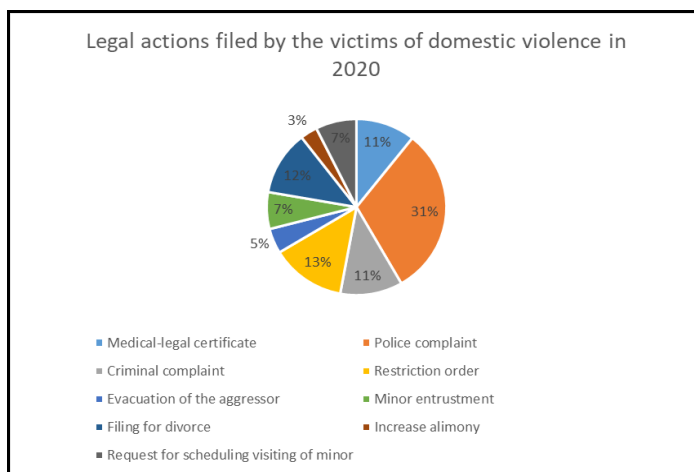
protection orders from the The Law Court of Bucharest where the protection orders doubled compared to the same period of 2019. The Law Court of Bucharest where the protection orders doubled compared to the same period of 2019.

Table 2. Legal actions that were filed by the victims of domestic

Legal actions filed by the victims	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Medical-legal certificate	408	349	459	535	408
Police complaint	941	1009	1226	1499	1184
Criminal complaint	464	366	507	609	429
Restriction order	224	248	329	746	515
Evacuation of the aggressor	66	19	89	363	175
Minor entrustment	229	186	192	363	258
Filing for divorce	310	285	345	681	450
Increase of alimony	53	20	159	65	118
Request for scheduling a visit of the minor	119	130	74	164	282
Total	2814	2612	3380	5025	3819

Source: own calculations based on ANES data

Graph 2. Legal actions that were filed by the victims of domestic violence



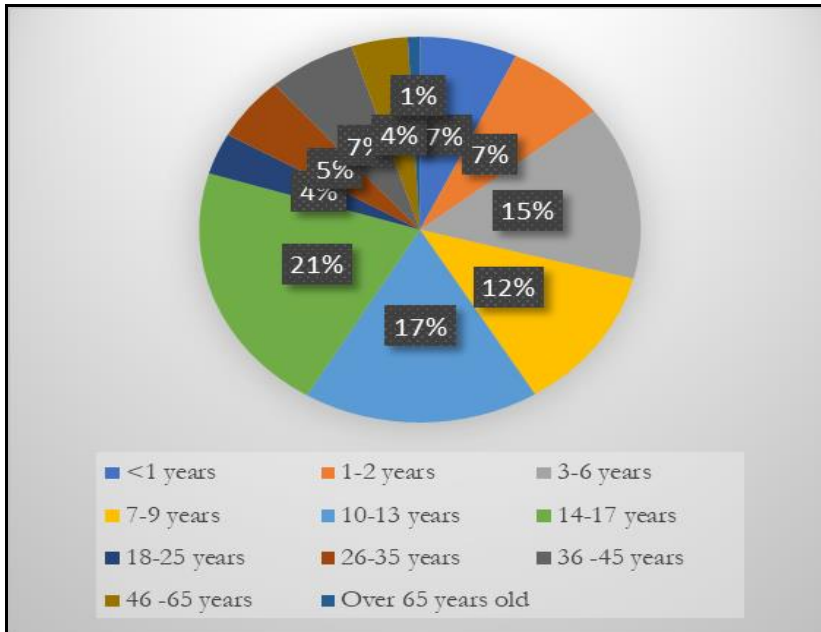
Source: own calculations based on ANES data

Only 8-10% of the victims request a protection order according to experts from ANES cited in Stanciu, Mihăilescu and Ștefănescu (2021, 32). In 2020 out of the data from the ANES of the victims helped, 13% of the victims filed for protection order, most victims filed for a police complaint 31%, 12% filed for divorce, 11% obtained a medical-legal certificate, 11% filed for a criminal law complaint, 7% filed for minor entrustment, 7% requested scheduling a visit of the minor, 5% requested evacuation of the aggressor, 3% requested an increase in alimony (see Table 2). According to Stanciu,

Mihăilescu and Ștefănescu (2021, 31) the increase of violence during the pandemics has led to a change in legislation by which aggressors who violate protection orders are sentenced to 1-5 years of prison (Law 183/2020).

In 2018 most of the cases were between 14-17 years old, second in place there were the cases between 10-13 years old, third in place there were the 3-6 years old (see Table 3). In 2020 there were 21% of the cases with the age between 14-17 years old, second in place there were the victims aged 10-13 years old with 17%, third in place with 15% of the cases there were 3-6 years old. By far children were the largest group of victims supported by ANES with 14% of the cases between 0-2 years and 65% between 3-17 years old. These data can be corroborated with those collected by the National Authority for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Children and Adoptions (NARPDCA) according to which in 2020, 14170 cases of child abuse and neglect were reported by social services. Over 90% of cases of abuse and neglect occur in the family and the most common forms of victimization are neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse. Unfortunately, more studies realized around the world, point out that children are in general very vulnerable and exposed to domestic violence (Edleson, 2009; Díez et al., 2018; Gao et al., 2021). There is a second spike in cases with victims aged 18-65 that represent 19% of the cases of victims. Only 1% in 2020 were cases of victims over 65 (See Graph 3).

Graph 3. Distribution of victims by age



Source: own calculations based on ANES data

Table 3. Distribution of victims by age 2016 – 2020

	<1 years	1-2 years	3-6 years	7-9 years	10-13 years	14-17 years	18-25 years	26-35 years	36-45 years	46-65 years	Over 65 years old	Total
2016	795	1012	2291	1643	2046	1990	302	610	572	272	121	11654
2017	1010	1097	2272	1799	2443	2351	296	620	573	392	103	12956
2018	1064	1169	2219	1834	2254	2321	400	760	645	412	104	13182
2019	1116	1316	2168	1763	2252	2547	419	850	914	594	135	14074
2020	831	850	1698	1412	2007	2455	403	622	746	479	104	11607

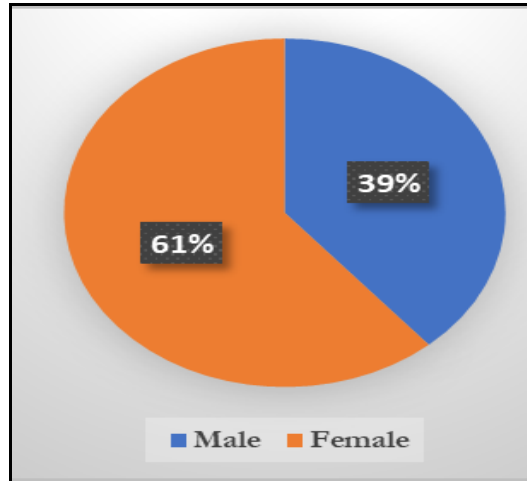
Source: own calculations based on ANES data

Most victims were female with an increase in their number especially in 2019, when there were 8747 women followed by a decrease in 2020, to 7117 (see Table 4). There were 61% female victims in 2020 and 39% male victims (see Graph 4). In general, the violence against women is more prevalent compared to violence against men within the family (Leight, 2022; Sardinha, 2022). According to WHO (World Health Organization) 1 out of 3 women experienced some form of physical violence or sexual during their life (WHO, 2017). Notable differences are often found between attitudes towards gender roles in public (e.g. labour market insertion) and in private (e.g. relationship with partner) (Voicu, 2006; Voicu and Constantin, 2016). Unsurprisingly at home remains the most dangerous place for women who continue to be victims of violence, as a result of inequalities and gender stereotypes (UNODC, 2019). In fact, the status of women in the couple is often disadvantaged, especially in terms of power relations, which shows that domestic violence is a social phenomenon with deep ramifications in the collective mentality and in history (Miroiu, 2004; Rujoiu and Rujoiu, 2014). In particular, with regard to the COVID19 pandemics, there has been an increase in the number of women victims of domestic violence in several countries (Mittal and Singh, 2020; Roesch et al., 2020; Fawole et al., 2021).

Table 4. Distribution of victims by gender 2016 – 2020

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Male	4929	5435	5297	5327	4490
Female	6725	7521	7885	8747	7117
Total	11654	12956	13182	14074	11607

Source: own calculations based on ANES data

Graph 4. Distribution of victims by gender, 2020

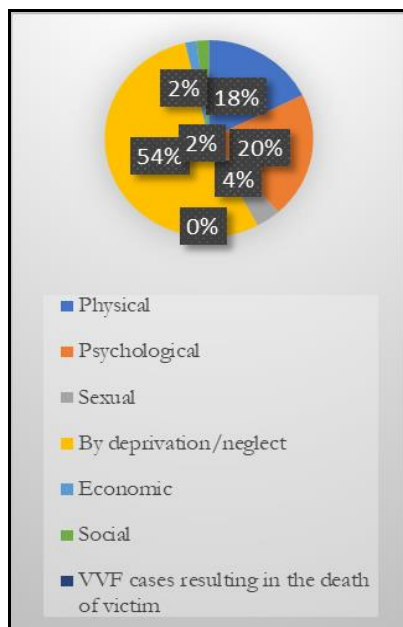
Source: own calculations based on ANES data

By far the most prevalent form of violence according to ANES data is that by neglect and deprivation, second in place is psychological, and third in place is physical (see Table 5). In 2020 54% of the victims helped by ANES were in some form of deprivation or neglect, 20% were abused psychologically and 18% were abused physically, 4% were abused sexually, 2% were abused socially and 2% were economic victims, and very few were victims of violence causing death (see Graph 5).

Table 5. Distribution of victims by type/forms of violence 2016-2020

	Physical	Psychological	Sexual	By deprivation/neglect	Economic	Social	VVF cases resulting in the death of victim	Total
2016	2085	2123	324	6818	372	175	0	11897
2017	2043	2030	372	6807	259	178	1	11690
2018	2121	2500	330	6313	336	689	3	12292
2019	3056	2956	601	6900	286	213	3	14015
2020	1875	2186	410	5719	189	200	1	10580

Source: own calculations based on ANES data

Graph 5. Distribution of victims by type/forms of violence 2020

Source: own calculations based on ANES data

The risk associated with the occurrence and maintenance of violence (see Table 6) is by far poor living conditions this is in line with previous research that found that poor living conditions such as chronic poverty especially in rural areas are the main drivers of violence together with low incomes and unemployment, and a culture of dominance of masculinity (Stanciu, Mihăilescu and Ștefănescu, 2021). Second in place was excessive alcohol consumption that increased the risk with occurrence and maintenance of domestic violence, third in place was a history of home childhood domestic violence that predispose the victims to be in abusive relationships. These two are in a relationship of interdependence, in the sense that excessive alcohol consumption by parents is associated with physical or sexual abuse of children and other family members (Gadd et al., 2019; Mayshak et al., 2020). At the same time, the experience of being abused as a child may increase a person's risk of having alcohol problems as an adult and of engaging in violent behaviour towards family members (Gil-González et al., 2008; Mihăiu, 2015; Meyer et al., 2021).

In 2020 (see Graph 6), 53% of the risks associated with the occurrence and maintenance of domestic violence came from poor living conditions, 21% from excessive alcohol consumption and 13% from a history of home childhood domestic violence, 5% from isolation from family and friends, 4% from criminal record, 3% neuropsychiatric illnesses, 1% drugs consumption. When we look at the risks broken down by aggressor or victim (see Table 7), we see that alcohol consumption of the aggressor is a risk factor (18% of the

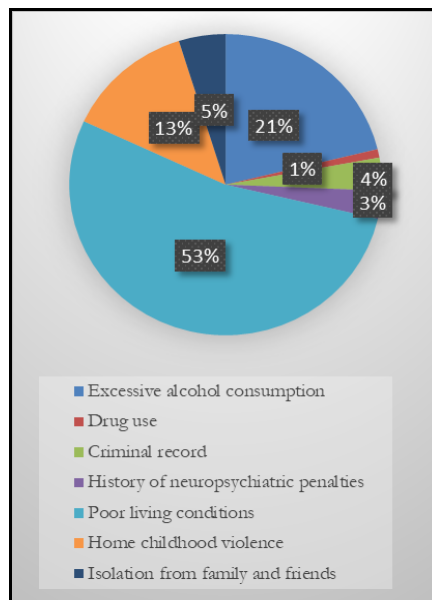
aggressors) and only 3% of the victims consume alcohol, whereas 31% of the victims live in poor living conditions and 22% of the aggressors live in poor living conditions, 7% of the aggressors have a history of childhood domestic violence and 6% of the victims, showing that they tend to perpetuate the cycle of aggression or abuse. In 4% of the cases isolation from family and friends of the victim places the victim in a relationship of dependence with her/his abuser making it impossible for the victim to break the cycle of abuse. Drugs consumption, criminal record and neuropsychiatric illnesses of the aggressor all increase the risk of domestic violence occurrence.

Table 6. The risk associated with the occurrence and maintenance of violence 2016 – 2020

Risk factors	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Excessive alcohol consumption	3066	3107	3207	3235	2511
Drug use	69	86	99	155	108
Criminal record	387	373	855	526	416
Neuropsychiatric illnesses	458	379	482	463	356
Poor living conditions	8300	8853	8120	6846	6306
Home childhood violence	1573	1721	2296	2037	1568
Isolation from family and friends	959	699	801	836	572
Total	14812	15218	15860	14098	11837

Source: own calculations based on ANES data

Graph 6. Risk associated to the case of domestic violence in 2020



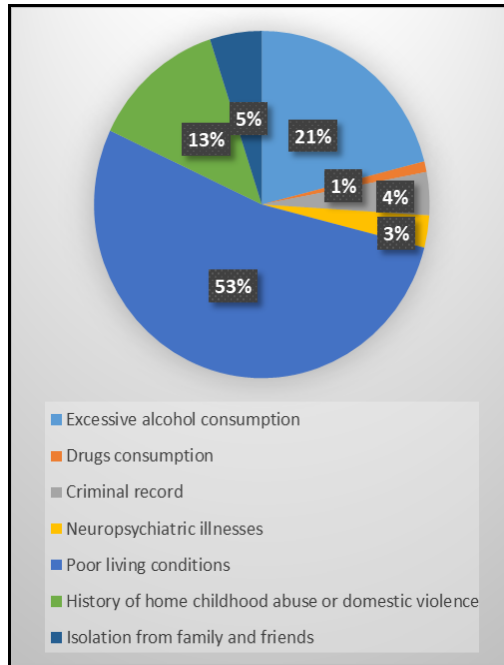
Source: own calculations based on ANES data

Table 7. Risk associated to the case of domestic violence in 2020

Risc factors	victims	aggressor	Total
Excessive alcohol consumption	3%	18%	21%
Drugs consumption	0%	1%	1%
Criminal record	1%	3%	4%
Neuropsychiatric illnesses	1%	2%	3%
Poor living conditions	31%	22%	53%
History of home childhood abuse or domestic violence	6%	7%	13%
Isolation from family and friends	4%	1%	5%

Source: own calculations based on ANES data

Graph 7. Risk associated to the case of domestic violence in 2020



Source: own calculations based on ANES data

When we look at the type of relationship between the victims and aggressor in ANES data, by far most of the victims were in a filiation relationship (see Table 8), being the daughter or son of the aggressor, children seem more exposed to domestic violence this is in accordance with the data from ANES on the age of the victim. The second largest is living in a consensual relationship, and the third largest is being married to the aggressor, both assume an existing relationship of love between the victim and her/ his aggressor. Parental or assimilated relationship is on the fourth place followed by

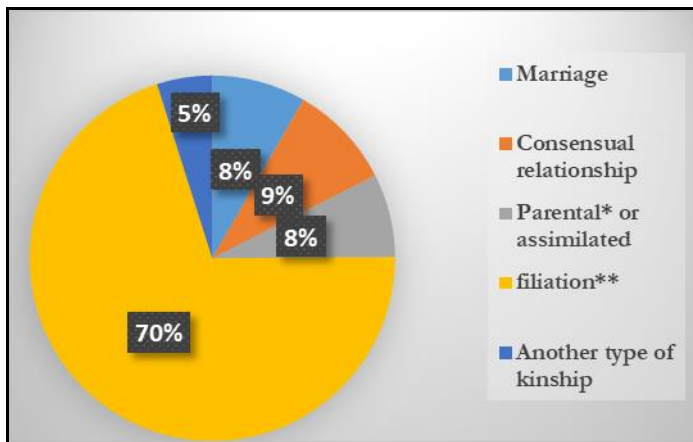
another type of kinship. In 2020 (see Graph 8), over 70% of the victims helped by ANES were in a filiation type of relationship, 9% were in a consensual relationship, and 8% were in a marriage type of relationship, which implies 17% were in a partnership situation, 8% were in a parental or assimilated relationship and 5% were in another type of kinship.

Table 8. Distribution of victims according to the victim`s relationship with the aggressor 2016 – 2020

	Marriage	Consensual relationship	Parental* or assimilated	Filiation**	Another type of kinship	Total
2016	870	706	418	8888	619	11501
2017	900	698	638	7755	736	10727
2018	912	1246	615	8092	541	11406
2019	1227	1464	1333	7760	861	12645
2020	791	876	703	6684	466	9520

Source: own calculations based on ANES data

Graph 8. Distribution of victims according to the victim`s relationship with the aggressor 2020



Source: own calculations based on ANES data

In 2020, there were less services provided by ANES compared to 2018 and 2019 (see Table 9). This is to be expected as there were less victims helped. In 2020, a quarter of all the services provided were in primary counselling, 21% were social counselling, 19%

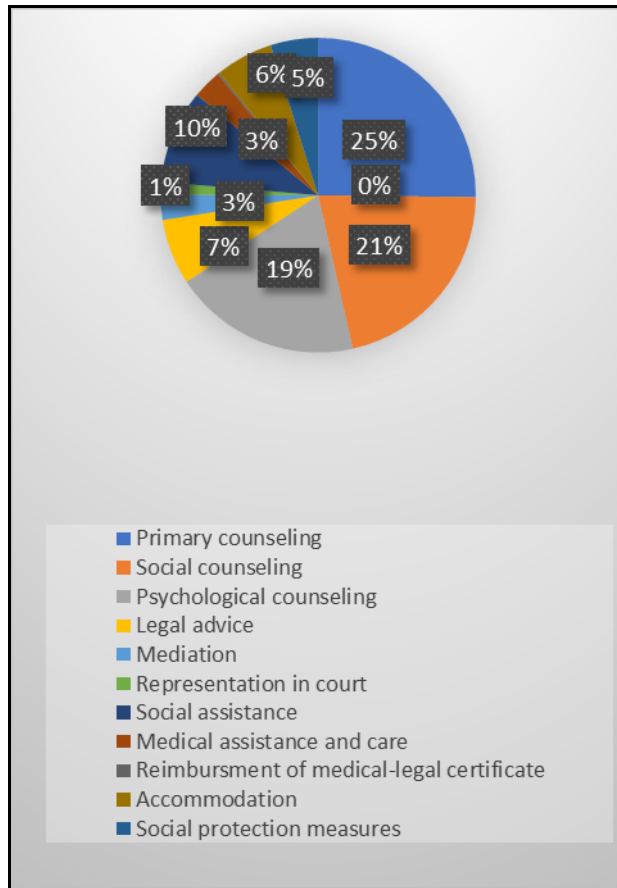
were psychological counselling, only 10% was social assistance given that most victims live in poor living conditions and the most prevalent form of domestic violence is by deprivation and neglect, so for most of the cases was not a pre-emptive type of action but rather reaction. Only 7% were given legal advice, 6% accommodation, 5% social protection measures, 3% medical assistance and care (see Graph 9).

Table 9. Distribution of victims according to the services they received 2016 – 2020

The type of domestic violence*	Services of which the victims of domestic violence have benefited in 2016-2020										Total/ cases	
	Primary counseling	Social counseling	Psychological counseling	Legal advice	Mediation	Representation in court	Social assistance	Medical assistance and care	Reimbursement of medical-legal certificate	Accommodation		Social protection measures
2016	8016	6917	5375	3069	914	293	4477	1937	96	2328	2175	11654
2017	9482	7895	6334	3710	1255	452	4576	1705	87	2493	2456	12956
2018	10495	8216	6763	3989	1129	1067	3990	1971	125	2600	2852	13182
2019	10553	8669	7216	2189	766	572	4727	1381	117	2448	2197	14074
2020	7864	6636	6011	2100	811	400	3017	928	60	1851	1524	11607

Source: own calculations based on ANES data

Graph 9. Services provided



Source: own calculations based on ANES data

When we look at the type of abuse and the type of services provided in 2020, we see that for victims of physical abuse only 8% were measures of accommodation and almost 60% were measures of counselling (psychological, social or primary), 13% were social assistance measures, and 5% measures of social protection, 9% received legal counselling. For sexual violence only 2% were measures of medical care and assistance, the majority received primary counselling (27%), psychological counselling (26%), social counselling (22%). Regarding violence by deprivation and neglect, which is the most common type of violence according to ANES data, 28% received primary counselling, 24% received social counselling, 20% received psychological counselling, only 8% received social assistance tackling the root cause of the domestic violence, 5% measures of social protection, 5% measures of legal counselling (see Table 10).

Table 10. Services of which the victims of domestic violence have benefited in 2020

Type of domestic violence *	Services of which the victims of domestic violence have benefited in 2020										
	Primary counselling	Social counselling	Psychological counselling	Legal counselling	Mediation	Representation in court	Social assistance	Medical care and reimbursement of medical-legal certificate	Accommodation	Social protection measures	
Physical abuse	23%	18%	15%	9%	4%	1%	13%	4%	1%	8%	5%
Psychological abuse	22%	19%	22%	7%	3%	1%	9%	4%	0%	7%	4%
Sexual abuse	27%	22%	26%	8%	2%	0%	8%	2%	0%	2%	2%
By deprivation/neglect	28%	24%	20%	5%	2%	2%	8%	2%	0%	5%	5%
Economical violence	32%	14%	16%	10%	0%	1%	12%	2%	0%	8%	5%
Social violence	18%	19%	17%	12%	0%	1%	11%	4%	0%	11%	7%
Total / services	25%	21%	19%	7%	3%	1%	9%	3%	0%	6%	5%

Source: own calculations based on ANES data

6. Conclusions and recommendations

We argue that though there is a decrease in the data collected about domestic violence, the phenomenon is underestimated due to the pandemic; our argument comes from an extensive literature review that shows that because of isolation and fear of the disease the victims fail to reach out. In conjunction with this, international and national statistic data confirm the hypothesis that the COVID 19 pandemic has negative effects on couple relationships and increases the number of acts of domestic violence. We provide a snapshot of the years before the pandemic while focusing on 2020, and show that most prevalent is domestic violence against women, against children, by deprivation and neglect, the victim is in a filiation or partner relationship, living in poor living conditions, the aggressor often consumes excessive alcohol leading to domestic violence. It should be emphasized that, as the statistics show, the global trend of victimization at the level of the family, especially women and children, has been maintained. As for our country, family environment has proved to be a dangerous one, during the pandemic period also, for those women who continue to be victims of violence, as a result of gender inequalities and stereotypes, of power relations, still persistent in Romanian society. In addition to all that, isolation, financial instability, a change in daily routine,

limited access to many services and resources are just some of the factors that have contributed to the intensification of domestic violence in the context of the pandemic. Regarding social services available at national level, they have focused mostly on counseling and little on social protection or social assistance measures. Most of the victims in 2020 filed a police complaint (31%) but few complaints lead to protection orders (13%) or other legal actions such as minor entrustment (7%).

Both in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and independently of it, it is desirable that the risk factors for domestic violence be understood and counteracted in a timely manner, as much as possible. In the first instance, it is recommended that the principle of immediate intervention be respected, as well as that of promptness in situations of domestic violence, especially by social control bodies and social service specialists. Equally, it is necessary for all structures with responsibilities in the field to take into account the fact that many of the people vulnerable to domestic violence face a lack of a safe and concrete perspective on the difficulties they may face with their removal from the abuser, such as moving house, if necessary, accessing a job, providing the necessities for subsistence. As far as possible, these people should be identified in a timely manner, through the collaboration of several bodies (police, non-governmental organizations, social assistance services, community members) and informed about the services they can access according to their most pressing needs (security, medical, social or economic). Social policies in the field must be based mainly on the real life situation, both at the level of society as a whole and aimed at the groups most vulnerable to domestic violence (people in rural areas, children, people from the social assistance system or who have various health issues, etc.).

The main limitation of the study was a time deficit in the supply of specific statistics for 2021, as well as the general unpredictability of the pandemic in terms of future trends in domestic violence and case reporting.

Authorship

Georgiana-Virginia Bonea (GVB) did the Introductions, indicating the direction of the study, the main objectives and limits, as well as the literature review for the theoretical approach (chapter 2). GVB also identified the links between the restrictions imposed in the pandemic context and the upward evolution of cases of domestic violence at international level in chapter 3. Bianca Buligescu (BB) collected the ANES data for the statistical analyses and performed the statistical calculations, essential for performing secondary data analysis and wrote chapter 4. Subsequently, Simona Mihaiu (SM) joined the team and did the selection of tables and formatting of graphs from chapter 5, thus providing a clear picture of the studied issues. SM and BB did the commenting on tags and graphics, as well as the Conclusions of the study, in chapter 6. SM has edited, and formatted the work. GVB, SM and BB did the proofread of the work. The research was carried out between January 2022 and March 2022.

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Declaration of conflicting interests

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