
THE FINE LINK BETWEEN MIGRATION AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: A SHORT GLIMPSE OF VICTIMS' PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

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Abstract: *This study is important in order to identify the fine link between migration and domestic violence. Through qualitative research, the study is based on three face-to-face semi-structured interviews, conducted via Zoom, between June 2021 and January 2022. The interviewed subjects are women, victims of domestic violence in their family of origin, aged between 22 and 37 years old, who migrated to Romania. The short fragments of their testimonies provide a unique perspective about victims' perceptions and experiences on the subject, revealing factors of domestic violence and the main risks and problems faced by migrant women who were abused in their family of origin. Secondary data analysis and specialized literature review are being pursued in order to create a comprehensive overview of the subject. The main two limitations consist in the lack of multiple perspectives offered by the specialized literature and analyses based exclusively on the link between migration and domestic violence, but also the limited number of interviews. The findings confirm the fact that women are more vulnerable to the risk of becoming victims of domestic violence, being abusive parenting practices, while migration becomes the right solution to escape the terror at home. The factors emerging from the study show that the excessive consumption of alcohol, financial problems and marginalization, often lead to domestic violence in the intimate family space.*

Keywords: *migration, woman, domestic violence, abuse, vulnerability*

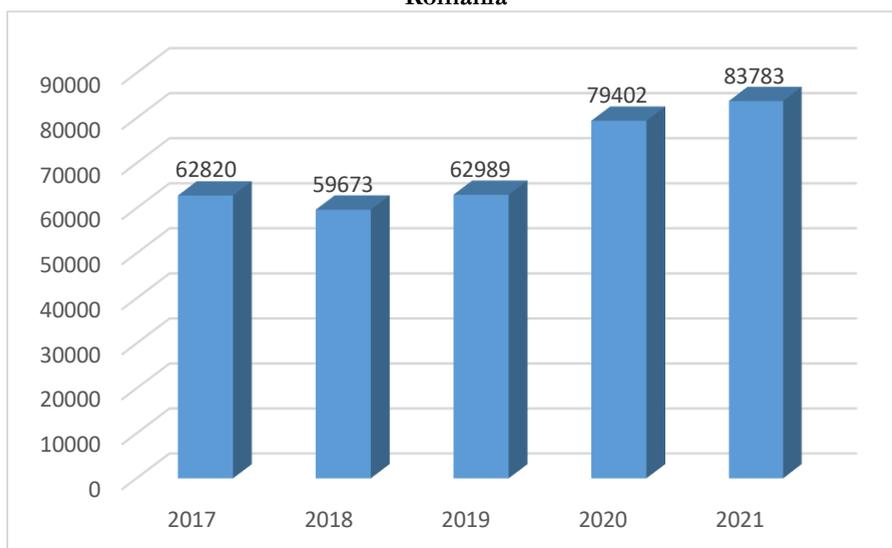
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Introduction

Between January and August 2021, approximately 97.000 refugees and migrants arrived in Europe, a 95 per cent increase compared to the same period of the previous year (UNICEF, 2022). Such international developments were also recognizable in Romania, which, although mainly a country of emigration (with an estimated of 4 million Romanians living abroad as of 2022), saw a steady increase in the number of incoming migrants since the early 2010's onwards, especially third-country nationals (TCNs) looking for work. According to Eurostat, Romania has the lowest share of non-nationals of all EU member states; still, the number of TCNs has gradually increased, as can be seen in Figure 1, with some 84,000 of them living in Romania in 2021, next to approximately 60,000 EU citizens (European Commission, n.d.).

Figure 1: The Evolution of the number of Third Country Nationals living in Romania



Source: own representation based on Eurostat data on Population and social conditions; database identifier: MIGR_POP1CTZ

Table 1 shows the number of TCNs living in Romania and their gender distribution. With the exception of 2018, the number of TCNs has increased year for year. 2021 saw 33 per cent more TCNs living in Romania than in 2017. Most of them are male, with a roughly 60-65 per cent distribution, to 35-40 per cent women.

Table 1: Number of TCNs living in Romania and their gender distribution

Year	TCNs	Males	Females	%Males	%Females
2017	62820	38065	24755	61%	39%
2018	59673	36378	23295	61%	39%
2019	62989	38447	24542	61%	39%
2020	79402	50766	28636	64%	36%
2021	83783	54202	29581	65%	35%

Source: own representation based on Eurostat data on Population and social conditions; database identifier: MIGR_POP1CTZ

Migration is a complex phenomenon, and migrants face a series of problems such as the difficulty of finding a job according to their training, health problems, problems in adapting to the new environment, discrimination based on gender and ethnicity etc. (Carballo et al., 1996: 158). In addition to the trauma of the abuse suffered in the family of origin and the abandonment of the country of birth, migrants are subjected to stress factors and adaptation to the new life context (Liem et al., 2021). Thereby, intra-family relations and migration are characterized by a dynamic influenced by customs, culture, religion, education, the structure and composition of the family, intergenerational and intrafamilial relations between family members etc. (Enachescu and Rosca, 2014; Hugo, 2002: 14).

In general, migrants can be subjected to various forms of violence and abuse during their migration process or once they arrive in their destination countries. Thus, the main forms of violence and abuse that migrants may be subjected to include: physical violence, torture; sexual abuse in which migrant women present a higher risk than men; economic exploitation, where migrants may be forced to work in squalid conditions and receive irregular or below-minimum wages; psychological abuse, which may include threats, humiliation, discrimination or social isolation, having a serious impact on the mental health of migrants; different abuses at the border; discrimination and racism; repeated abuses in various refugee camps or in detention centers etc. (Infante et al., 2012; Adanu and Johnson, 2009).

At the same time, migrant women face a series of specific vulnerabilities during their migration process, in transit and destination countries. These vulnerabilities can start from gender-based violence, where migrant women are at increased risk of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and human trafficking, gender-based discrimination (Calderón-Jaramillo et al., 2020). Migrant women show increased vulnerability to human trafficking, especially young and unaccompanied women are more likely to become victims of human trafficking, including trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation or forced labor (Alvarez and Alessi, 2012). Migrant women may also be more vulnerable to economic exploitation, including poor work conditions, underpayment and long working hours (Hennebry, 2017). Furthermore, migrant women may experience difficulties in accessing health and education services in destination countries. Language and cultural barriers, stigma and discrimination can make these services inaccessible or avoided for fear of reprisal or

deportation (Stewart et al., 2006). In some cases, migrant women are separated from their families, and this can lead to social isolation, increasing the risk of abuse and exploitation. When it comes to reproductive health, migrant women may experience difficulties in accessing reproductive health and family planning services, which may expose them to health risks for themselves and their children (Allotey et al., 2004). Last but not least, migrant women may have difficulties in obtaining legal assistance for the protection of their rights, either due to a lack of knowledge about the laws and procedures in the countries of destination, or due to a lack of financial resources (Kawar, 2004).

Migrants in general, but women in particular, are vulnerable to domestic violence, and addressing this issue is crucial for the respect of human rights, for the safety of women and children, for the health of society as a whole, as well as for the social and economic well-being of society as a whole. Thus, by studying the link between migration and domestic violence, we can identify the risk factors that contribute to the increased likelihood of migrant victimization.

The current study is located at the border between migration and domestic violence against women, emphasizing the fine link between the two elements. In order to escape the violence at home, some women choose to migrate (Alcalde, 2006; Erez, 2002), facing a multitude of socio-cultural and economic problems, but also with various dangers, as it is a question of an increased degree of their vulnerability from all points of view. Thus, the study is built around three face-to-face semi-structured interviews with female victims of domestic violence in their family of origin, who chose to emigrate in order to build a better life and to save themselves from abuse. So, exposing short fragments of their life stories, migrant women, victims of domestic violence, make their voices heard.

General Views on Migration

An attempt to define migration can prove to be a difficult undertaking, given the complexity of the phenomenon. As Castles (2000) observes, there are multiple definitions of migration, of different origins (social, economic, political etc.). Yet, in general, migration is understood as a movement of individuals over a certain geographical distance, involving crossing the border of a predefined spatial unit, in order to change residence, to ensure a better and safer life (Kok, 1999, 19). The spatial unit can be internal or international, meaning migration can occur within the boundaries of a state or it can take an international form (Bernard and Perales, 2022; Shamsuddin et al., 2022). Over recent years, globalization has drawn increasing attention towards international migration (Khaje Nouri and Sharifi, 2022). Nevertheless, the mere geographical movement is not enough to fully understand migration. Next to space, time is also an important dimension of migration. Migration can be temporary or permanent (Clibborn and Wright, 2022; Tazreiter and Burrige, 2022). Temporary migrants intend to return to their country of origin after a shorter or longer stay abroad, while permanent migrants do not have such intention whatsoever (Dustmann, 1999; Khoo et al., 2008). Migration, therefore, is defined by its temporal and spatial-geographic dimensions, but without ignoring other important characteristics (Axelsson, 2022; Nedomysl and Fransson, 2014).

So, migration is the process of population movement from one place of origin to another place, either within a country or between different countries. This movement can have many causes, such as seeking better economic opportunities, fleeing political conflict or persecution, family reunification, or other personal reasons. However, migration brings with it a number of challenges and vulnerabilities for those involved, including the stress of adapting to a new cultural and social environment, as well as greater exposure to discrimination and social exclusion (Sinha, 2005).

Migration is a complex phenomenon that raises a number of problems and challenges at global level, and the main issues of migration include: discrimination and xenophobia, where migrants can be victims of discrimination at work, in education and in other aspects of everyday life; security and dangers of the migration routes, where migrants can be exposed to significant risks during their journey and these risks can include human trafficking, violence, sexual exploitation, separation from family and even death during travel, especially for those trying to cross borders illegally or reach conflict zones; family disintegration; integration and assimilation in the destination countries; legal status issues with uncertain migratory status that can lead to vulnerability and difficulty in accessing health services, education and other rights; poor living conditions especially for those working in precarious or illegal sectors; the impact on countries of origin with job losses, family separation and other social and economic effects; contribution of migrants to the development of host countries by contributing to economic growth and the development of various industries and sectors; economic opportunities in finding better paying jobs and a better life in countries with more developed economies; cultural diversity and cultural exchange; challenges related to integration and assimilation (Harzig and Hoerder, 2013; Boghean, 2016). So, we have to take into account the fact that the perspective on migration is very varied and can be influenced by many factors, including the social, political and economic context specific to a country or region.

Migration raises a series of questions regarding national security, cultural identity and social cohesion in many countries, but the cooperation of states at the international level is guaranteed by international agreements, such as the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration adopted in 2018 by the Organization United Nations, are important for the management of migration at the global level. It cannot be ignored that migration plays an essential role in the economies of many countries, providing labor for sectors such as agriculture, construction and health care. At the same time, migration brings economic and cultural benefits to destination countries, but it can also create challenges in terms of integration and acceptance of diversity (Munck, 2013; Castles, 2002).

Theoretical dimensions: discussion about domestic violence

Domestic violence is not only a social problem, but also a public health problem (Tetikcok et al., 2016; Winett, 1998). In general terms, domestic violence involves several key elements related to the family domestic space: abusive and violent behavior, as well as the aggressor's desire to subjugate his victim. In other words, "domestic violence is

defined as the threat or infliction of physical, psychological and/or emotional violence; that is, any type of force against another person with intent to cause harm or to exercise power and control over them" (Flury et al., 2010: 2). Therefore, domestic violence does not only involve the physical manifestation with beatings and blows of all kinds, but each individual case can carry a varied series of abuses and aggressions of different intensity and duration (Hegarty and Roberts, 1998: 49).

There are two major forms of manifestation of the intensity of domestic violence, according to Johnson (2017), each having a different impact on the victim and, implicitly, on the family. The first form is occasional domestic violence between family members caused against the background of conflicts and tensions that can lead to various verbal manifestations and/or aggressive behavior, followed by reconciliation. The second form is characterized by violence and systematic abuses exercised, most of the time, by men, being defined as "patriarchal terrorism". In these cases, isolation and marginalization can become decisive factors in maintaining violence in the family. Also, "structural violence" takes place in a systematic way, indirectly by those who belong to a certain society, cultures that maintain and promote these types of conduct, strengthened by praise or attributions of blame to individuals depending on the role played by them (Farmer, 1996).

The explanation according to which the vast majority of victims of domestic violence are among women, lies in their increased vulnerability (Both et al., 2019; Kapoor, 2000; Alhabib et al., 2010). Also, women are more exposed to the risk of becoming victims of gender-based violence, whether at work, in the circle of acquaintances or in the public space (Krahé, 2016; Bonea, 2020). Migrant women are vulnerable and gender-based violence amplifies even more this vulnerability of becoming victims of domestic violence (Erez, 2002).

By creating various domestic scenarios in which the victim is deprived of power and help, the aggressor wants to tilt the balance of power in his favor through fear and manipulation (Bonea et al., 2022). It is a complex and complicated situation, in which the aggressor has the necessary privacy in the domestic space, in order to gain control over the victim (Hegarty et al., 2000; Bonea, 2020). Precisely this aspect of the inaccessibility from the outside of the family environment becomes one of the most relevant factors of domestic violence, in combination with a multitude of other factors of social, cultural and economic nature.

The factors favoring domestic violence are very complex, so that the explanatory theories offer a comprehensive but partially incomplete picture. Each theory focuses on certain factors that it carefully analyzes, which is why a series of theories must be included in order to capture the dynamics of the overall picture. Thus, the favoring factors of domestic violence are framed in a certain context of life and culture, and can vary from marginalization and strict socialization according to gender, up to the culture of violence that promotes certain deviant behaviors and the intergenerational transmission of violent behavior etc. (Berrios and Grady, 1991; Obi and Ozumba, 2007). So, here follows a brief exposition of the main theories in the field of domestic violence that can have an impact on the phenomenon of migration.

The first theory we discuss is related to excessive alcohol consumption, that facilitates the appearance of aggressive and violent behavior, especially in the private, restricted family environment, where access from outside is limited. Alcohol leads to disinhibition and may lead to engaging in abusive behavior towards the other members of his family (Galvani, 2006; Leonard, 2001; Kaysen, 2007).

Further, the culture of violence shows that through the culture, the norms generally accepted within society, but especially the increase in the degree of tolerance for deviant behavior, domestic violence is the form of manifestation that establishes the hierarchy in the family and tilts the balance of power in favor of the aggressor (Perilla et al., 1994; Fischer et al., 1992).

Also, socialization according to gender reflects the values that promote the secondary role of women, always subordinate to men. This type of socialization provides fixed gender roles and facilitates the abuse of women in the social and family environment (Kim et al., 2019; Fulton, 2017).

The social-psychological model, highlights the influence of external environmental factors on the manifestation of domestic violence. In other words, the various interactions between family members are seen as precursors to the occurrence of violence between family members. It is an intergenerational transmission of abuse and violence as a form of manifestation and conduct, considered to be appropriate in certain life situations (Gelles, 1979, 1980).

Marginalization and financial problems can be a major factor that must be taken into account. Besides many other factors, such as inequality and financial problems, marginalization remains an important aspect in the emergence and maintenance of violence between family members. Male dominance in the family and isolation, together with certain traditional practices that encourage a series of gender-based discrimination forms, can be triggering factors of domestic violence. Social policies focused on equal access to family resources, as well as combating gender violence, play an essential role in preventing marginalization (Kuskoff et al., 2022; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005).

And last but not least, the patriarchal vision shows that male family members have a number of privileges and powers over female members. The submission of women to men in the family is one of the main rules that must be respected, according to the patriarchal vision. The man has the advantage of power and superiority over the woman, which inevitably makes her vulnerable to his abuse and aggression. At the same time, although the woman complements the man in the family, the norms that a woman must respect are established by men, and their non-compliance leads to abuse and violence. And finally, according to the patriarchy, women are worth less than men, which is the first reason why they must be obedient (Johnson, 2017; Bettman, 2009).

The main elements regarding the connection between migration and domestic violence

For the victim of domestic violence, the family environment is no longer a safe place, where she can feel protected, but becomes a permanent danger to her physical and mental integrity, with serious consequences in the short and long term (Kofman and Garfin, 2020; Nason-Clark, 2020). In this way, the victim, in the desire to defend herself from the abuses received from one or more family members, but also to ensure a better future, can choose to migrate. It is a radical decision that implies determination and courage for the female victim of domestic violence, involving a series of unknown situations and problems that may arise along the way. The vulnerabilities of migrant women can start from actually traveling the road to the desired country, until finding a job and a home. Also, the process of integration into the respective society can be fraught with difficulties in adapting to the new language, culture, customs etc.

Depending on the complexity of the causal factors, migrant women have unique needs and problems, while the abuses suffered by them in the past, in their families of origin, can be the link that determines the migration of the victim to another country (Guruge et al., 2010). Women are more vulnerable than men in the context of migration, being exposed, to a greater or lesser extent, to all forms of abuse (Kawar, 2004). Added to all this are the various obstacles and barriers in seeking help and at the same time, there is a reduced availability of women to defend themselves against abuse (Colucci and Montesinos, 2013). Men's violence against women and children within the family has an impact on migration, in that the victim decides to leave the country of origin in order to put an end to the abuses and to build a new life, far away from the terrorism inside home (Alcalde, 2006).

In general, migrants can become more vulnerable to domestic violence due to difficulties in accessing support and protection services, as well as fears about their legal status. The link between domestic violence and migration is complex and multifaceted. Migration can influence how domestic violence is experienced, perpetuated and addressed. In other words, migrants may be more vulnerable to domestic violence due to factors such as social isolation, financial dependence by their partner or family, difficulty accessing support and protection services, and fear of deportation or loss of their migratory status (Satyen et al., 2018). Also, migrants may experience difficulties in communicating with authorities and service providers due to language and cultural barriers. This can make reporting domestic violence and seeking help difficult (Ngo-Metzger et al., 2003). The migration process brings with it a number of stresses, such as adapting to a new culture and language, loss of social support networks, and lack of economic security. These stresses can intensify family tensions and lead to the escalation of domestic violence (Coll and Magnuson, 1997).

Domestic violence can affect the phenomenon of migration in several ways, influencing both the decision to migrate and the experience of migrants. Thus, migration can be seen by the victims as a form of escape in order to escape from an abusive relationship or from an abusive family. At the same time, domestic violence can lead to social isolation of women, making them less accessible to the support network. Victims of domestic

violence may face stigma and social judgment from their community, which may make it more difficult for them to integrate even into the host society after emigration. Domestic violence can leave deep traumas and affect women's mental health, making it difficult to adapt to a new country or culture after emigration (Binder and Tošić, 2005; Parkins, 2010). Therefore, for some individuals, domestic violence can be a trigger that leads them to try to escape the abusive situation by migrating. In other words, people who are victims of domestic violence may see migration as a way to escape abuse and seek a better or safer life elsewhere (Bowstead, 2015). Also, migrants who have survived domestic violence in their country of origin may carry the trauma and psychological effects of that experience with them during migration. These traumas can influence adaptation to the new environment and have an impact on migrants' mental health (Kirmayer et al., 2011). The individual circumstances are very varied and each case has its own particularities.

Methodology

This study is based on the short statements of three migrant women who were victims of domestic violence in their families of origin. Through semi-structured, face-to-face individual interviews, three women, between 22 and 37 years of age, were interviewed, respecting the rigors of ethics and with the consent of the subjects. The three interviews were part of a research project based on oral history interviews with third country nationals who migrated to Romania, conducted between June 2021 and January 2022. The three interviews were chosen for this article based on the domestic violence accounts provided by the respondents. Contact to the three women was intermediated by the representative of an NGO which provides integration services for immigrants. Because the data collection was conducted in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, with social distancing regulations in place, that confined people to their homes, the interviews were carried out remotely, online, per Zoom, in either Romanian (Milena and Valeria) or English language (Stephanie), as preferred by the respondents. The interviews were recorded on computer (video and audio) and then transcribed. Notes were also made during the interviews.

Brief participant biographies

The interviewed subjects come from different countries, with different backgrounds, presented in the following short biographies (the real names have been replaced with fictive ones):

Milena (36 at the moment of the interview) is Byelorussian. She holds a BA degree in Philology, specialization English-German studies, obtained in her native country. She first found employment as a language professor in Byelorussia, then found a job in the travel/tourism industry, where she met her husband. She moved to Romania in 2013 for family unification purposes. Mother of a boy.

Stephanie (37) is Filipino. She graduated in Business Administration, then worked in the real estate sector in her native country, before moving to Romania in 2019 to marry her partner whom she met on the internet. Was in pregnancy at the moment of the interview.

Valeria (22) is Moldovan. She left her native country to pursue educational opportunities in Romania. She graduated high school in Romania, then started her university studies in Medicine here, which she was industriously and passionately pursuing at the moment of the interview.

Several similarities can be identified between the three migrants. At the moment of being interviewed, all of them resided in the county of Brasov, two of them moving to Romania for family reunification purposes (thus confirming research findings of Jayaweera (2018) that female migrants are most likely to be spousal migrants) and the other one for studies. All have been subject to some form of domestic violence before emigration and all of them have siblings. Milena has one elder brother and one elder sister, Stephanie has two brothers and one sister, while Valeria has two brothers and six sisters. For all of them, the domestic abuse was caused by the father, while in one case, the mother was also reported to have caused troubles.

Oral history

The oral history was used as a research method in response to the suggestion made by Willans and Stewart-Brown (2021) that the qualitative research on migration should capture the personal narratives of the migrants, so that a clear understanding of the migration rationale and background can be obtained. In such a case, oral history is a suitable research instrument, as it has the ability to capture a vast number of personal stories from the migrants. Oral history was used to create that sort of space that Miller (1998) is talking about, in which women should feel the necessary comfort to voice out their personal stories. This was the case with Milena, Stephanie and Valeria, who opened up and shared stories of their past, not exactly the most pleasant. The oral history interviews were semi-structured: while they followed a certain set of questions, the interviewer also adapted to the flow of discussion and allowed participants to share their own ideas about their lives. As a matter of fact, there were no questions on domestic violence per se, but the questions aimed at the family life or the childhood back home. The questions about family or childhood were, thus, an aide-mémoire paving the way for the accounts of domestic violence: it was the participants who opened up and shared the stories about domestic violence when it came to discussing about their families, with the interviewer letting the participants set the pace of the domestic violence accounts being shared. By simply listening to the personal narratives and laying accounts of them, domestic violence became a point in the research process (Miller, 1998). The personal narratives helped in the better understanding of that aspect of the migrants' lives related to domestic violence.

Mission and limitations

The mission of the current study is to show the fine link between migration and domestic violence, where the victims are female. This leads the study to enter the area of feminist

research, in which the use of oral history to collect the life histories of migrants is aligned to Geiger's (1986) idea of bringing to light the social experiences of 'silenced women', who might not have opened up if other research methods had been employed. Indeed, qualitative methods seem popular in feminist research, as they ensure that in-depth needed for women to open up (Letherby, 2003). Nonetheless, neither Milena, nor Stephanie or Valeria did not voice over too many of the traumatic experiences from childhood, but, rather, fugaciously mentioned them. The lack of more insights is one of the major limitations of this research paper. Still, the stories were useful for a better understanding of the participants' lives and their migration contexts, especially since various other dots were connected during the interviews by the participants themselves. As Letherby (2003) observes, one advantage of oral history research is that listening to a life narrative offers the lived experience in full (in our case, before and after migration), without fracturing it. As such, employing this kind of participatory research methods, in which respondents are directly involved by providing fine details of their lives, in their own words, helps in a better evaluation of the present and past alike. In migration studies, knowing more about the past of women migrants can help explain social aspects post-migration, especially since other information channels, such as mass-media, in general, tend to fracture their reporting on migration to some disparate episodes, without capturing the whole life of the migrant and the roots that might explain some of her behaviour during or after the migration.

Another possible limitation of the research is that, as believed by Livne and Bejarano (2021), online interviews cannot create that intimate atmosphere which encourages respondents to feel comfortable enough in order to open up more and recall and share even more memories of their lives. Yet, such limitations are debatable, since other methodologists claim the opposite, namely that Zoom interviews offer convenience and user-friendliness (Serhan, 2020). As perceived in the own data collection for this research, the fact that Zoom allowed migrants to stay at their own homes, without having to travel for the interviews, provided the necessary simplicity and convenience to create a good rapport between interviewer and interviewee, not to mention that, during the interview, all three women migrants presented here moved their laptop video-camera around their homes in order to show several artefacts brought to Romania from their native country, which helped them maintain an emotional connection to back home. Moreover, it genuinely seemed that showing those artefacts and discussing about their roles and meanings helped the participants open up even more to share their life stories. Also, using Zoom offered more flexibility in scheduling, allowing the interviews to be set whenever it was most appropriate for the participants (with some of them even being carried out late in the evening, less likely to happen with face-to-face interviewing), as well as more flexibility in not setting a time limit for the interviews (Gray et al., 2020): the three interviews selected for this paper lasted for 60, 65 and 100 minutes.

Other limitations of the research were the limited number of interviews and the insufficiency of available studies strictly on the identification of the link between migration and domestic violence, which raised a series of difficulties at the theoretical level.

Research Findings

Of the eleven men and nine women interviewed in the research project, only the three women dealt with in this research paper have reported cases of domestic violence, thus confirming the view in the academic literature that women are more exposed and vulnerable to domestic violence than men (Bonea, 2020; Hegarty and Roberts, 1998). Box 1 displays the narratives of the three interviewed women on the various forms of domestic violence experienced before their emigration to Romania.

Box 1: Answers of interviewees concerning important events in their lives

Milena (Belarus), 36 years old

"[There was] a strong impact in adolescence. My father and my mother... My father was an alcoholic, he drank a lot. Then my mother started too. I think that's when it started to have an impact on me because I grew up in a lot of quarrels and unpleasant things".

Stephanie (The Philippines), 37 years old

"I didn't have a good childhood in the Philippines. My father used to have a lot of vices, you know, drinking, smoking, we've experienced physical abuse from our alcoholic father".

Valeria (Republic of Moldova), 22 years old

"We couldn't stay there any longer for various reasons and they had to place us [the children] in another orphanage, a kind of social assistance, not really an orphanage, where we stayed for another year. After that, my mother bought our house; father has not been with us since he went to Moscow. He stopped contributing, they decided not to be together anymore.

When we went to the orphanage, my mother initially went with him to work so she could help us with the house. He decided not to be with us anymore. I mean, he didn't really contribute. For example, when I came to Romania, I had to... My mother was not legally married to my father. I mean, not legally, they lived without having... so, as it is done in some cases in the Republic of Moldova. And, what can I say, he didn't even want to come and sign a document allowing my mother to take me to Romania, because I was 16 years old, I was a minor. As a result of this, my mother took the decision to remove him from the birth certificate, as they were not married so she had the right to decide. So, we have nothing to do with him, unfortunately, and, no..."

Source: Transcripts of the Zoom interviews

Researches show that parental domestic violence, since it is a so-called 'pre-migration stressor' (Velezmoro, 2014), can be a factor in motivations to migrate. In a context of domestic violence, migration can be an exit strategy for survival (Conrad, 2013; Cook Heffron, 2019). Neither of the interviewed women did not mention parental abuse as a reason in migration decision-making: Milena and Stephanie migrated to unite with their husbands in Romania, Valeria migrated for studies. Parental violence did not seem to play a role, at least not at declarative level. Yet it can be assumed that, to a given extent, domestic violence during childhood might have had an impact on the migration patterns pursued later in life.

Studies also reveal that being a woman migrant leaves one in a precarious position, especially when women migrate for reasons other than occupational or economic ones, which forces them to try and make a living for themselves in the new country (Lagon,

2008; Schneider, 2020). Milena and Stephanie are spousal immigrants who came to Romania for family reunification and, in spite of full support from their husbands, still had various societal problems after migration. Valeria, at her turn, didn't have it much easier either, although it has to be mentioned that she had the advantage of being native in Romanian language.

The findings also seem to confirm another view held in the scientific literature, namely that, in most cases, men are the aggressors and women the victims (Asper et al., 2003; Flury et al., 2010). All three women in this study share in common experiences of fathers deserting from their responsibilities (desertion by father). In Valeria's case, it was a pure, physical desertion, a father abandonment, with the father leaving the family behind and moving away to Moscow („*He decided not to be with us anymore. I mean, he didn't really contribute?*”), while for the other two it was an emotional abuse, with the fathers indulging in alcohol, in Stephanie's case even combined with physical abuse. The voices of the three women reveal the complexity of domestic violence: Milena and Stephanie had to deal with excessive alcohol consumption, while Valeria, due to the desertion of the father, had to deal with financial problems. Moreover, in the case of Stephanie, alcohol consumption soon transformed into a culture of violence („*we've experienced physical abuse from our alcoholic father?*”).

Parental abuse and psychological repression are both identified in the literature as factors of sorrow (Lyu and Lu, 2021; Madigan, 2011). Sorrow can be a factor of imbalance in the years after emigration, as evidenced by Maglizza (1985: 35-36), who offers a case study of a migrant woman victim of domestic violence before migration. Maglizza believes that a sense of sorrow or grief suffered in the family, in the country of origin, can leave deep psycho-social scars even years after emigration. The author adds that a crisis or, in this sense, abuse at home can make emigration and inclusion in the new society harder than normal. For Maglizza, as well as for many other authors, women often migrate for family purposes, either because the husband decides to move abroad and they follow, or because they migrate in order to reunite with a spouse from that country (as with Milena and Stephanie, who both met Romanian partners and then married in Romania). The woman will need many years to adapt to the new country, Maglizza thinks, and what could help her in making the whole process smoother is support from the family. Luckily enough, both Milena and Stephanie receive unconditional support from their husbands, which they are happy and grateful for, yet both mentioned that this is not enough to ensure proper social inclusion in the host society. Maglizza states that an important pillar of social inclusion is the reference of identity, understood by Yatsyna (2020: 177) as „a way of self-expression of one's personality in interpersonal relationships”. Milena and Stephanie claim the absence of this reference of identity from their post-emigration lives, in that they could not relate or communicate to their in-laws in Romania. At the same time, life after emigration can be made harder by a lack of reference of identity from the family of origin back home, which should provide support during life. Domestic violence and a sense of grief in the family of origin can leave scars even after the emigration of a member, especially for women, Maglizza points, who have few things which they can relate to in the destination country. Especially in the first years after emigration, the family – either of origin or of procreation – has the role to provide that identity that the migrant woman can relate to. Yet, for Milena and Stephanie, apart from their husbands, their

extended families of procreation do not provide much support, while the connections to the families of origin are wired through episodes of domestic violence:

„It's also challenging for me to communicate with my in-laws because my in-laws don't to speak English [and] I don't know how to speak Romanian” (Stephanie)

„It's just my husband and myself and I have no one else” (Milena)

Moreover, Milena has undergone acculturative stress after the traumatic event of her parents passing away within two months, shortly after her wedding, leaving her, as she states, with just her husband and herself. Studies have demonstrated that the loss of loved ones increases migrant's sensitivity to stress (Smid et al., 2018), since physical and emotional distance, plus having to cope in a society different to the native one, are added to the sorrow of losing the loved ones. This also confirms the idea of Aspinall and Watters (2010) that migrants who have experienced stressors before migration were more likely to undergo stressful situations after migration as well.

Pre-migration trauma is linked with mental health issues (Buchmüller et al., 2018) and posttraumatic stress disorder (Torres, 2019). Traumas experienced in the family of origin are believed to lead to adaptation problems even later in life (Maglizza, 1985; Poraj, 2014). To overcome such negative developmental outcomes, Jang et al. (2022) claim that migrants have to enhance their networks of friends, yet this also proved difficult for the three migrant women interviewed, who claimed that it was difficult for them to make friends in Romania.

One of the effects that parental alcoholism had on Milena was the rejection of alcohol:

„Here [in Romania], I also told my husband, in so many years, I only saw one single drunk man on the streets. It had a positive impact upon me that I didn't see [drunk people on the streets]. You know, [in Romania] people know how to drink, when to stop”.

The fact that Milena talks about moderation in alcohol consumption, about knowing when to stop when drinking, can be related to emotional trauma in childhood. Gorsuch and Arno (1979) demonstrated that children tend to reject acts considered to be deviant when they internalize values related to abuse; precisely, being exposed to abuse, once children become adults, they tend to develop negative attitudes towards that kind of abuse, leading to acts of rejection later on in life. In Milena's case, the rejection contributed to the development of an angle of regarding the host society after emigration. Had Milena not had to live the experience of an alcoholic father, she might well not have been able to perceive the cultural dimension of alcohol consumption in different societies, which would not have allowed her to observe that people in Romania tend to be more moderate in alcohol consumption than in her native country.

Conclusions

In this article we have exposed the unique experiences and perceptions of migrant women victims of domestic violence, indicating the fine link between migration and domestic violence. With this study we try to draw attention to the fact that both migration and domestic violence are two big and extremely complex subjects, but which are closely related to each other, in certain life contexts.

The fine interaction between domestic violence and migration, highlighted two big favouring factors: excessive consumption of alcohol and marginalization. Also, society can indirectly contribute to the perpetuation of violent behavior in the family, through the increased degree of tolerance and even indifference to the suffering of the victims.

In the case of migrant women, the family history in which domestic violence is found, is a factor of physical vulnerability with the appearance of various health problems and also a psychological increased susceptibility.

Gender dynamics in the context of the migration of women who were abused in their families of origin are very complex and can be understood through culture, customs, gender roles and the norms of conduct in the family and society (Abdi, 2014: 479). The migrant women who witnessed and/or were victims of domestic violence, suffer various traumas along the way. Also, these women have in their cultural and educational background, the customs and behaviour norms received in their families of origin. Gender norms in the patriarchal cultural context, see family as a forbidden space for the public, like an isolated fortress, where only members have access (Akpınar, 2003: 438). Thus, the isolation of female family members can increase the risk of abuse and violence in the private space.

Besides the desire to have a better life, women also migrate to be able to put an end to family abuse. Isolation, marginalization, poor material situation, the culture of violence, the excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages, all of these are among the main factors of the emergence and maintenance of domestic violence.

First, a victim of domestic violence, then a migrant, women face a multitude of risks and difficulties in the process of integration into society, in finding a job according to their qualifications, identifying a home they can afford, adapting to the new social rules, culture, language etc. (Alcalde, 2006). Also, in the context of migration, once they arrive in the desired country, women are most exposed to the danger of becoming victims of domestic violence and gender-based violence (Raj and Silverman, 2002; Menjívar and Salcido, 2002).

If we pay attention to the effects of the culture of violence, where the patriarchal vision places the man in a privileged position of power over the wife and children, we will find that abusive and violent behavior is transmitted intergenerationally and encouraged in certain circumstances. Thus, society's perception of domestic violence is distorted, offering advantages to the aggressor and endangering the victims. The marginalization of the family and the isolation of the victim make the domestic space a true cage from which the victim can hardly leave to put an end to the abuse.

Authorship

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