

## VIOLENCE WITHIN THE FAMILY

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### Abstract

Violența domestică reprezintă o problemă întâlnită la nivel mondial, fiind prezentă în intimitatea multor familii. Problematika este privită și tratată în mod diferit, de la o țară la alta, în funcție de codurile sociale, juridice, culturale și politice ale societății.

Necesitatea cercetărilor empirice în domeniul acordării serviciilor victimelor violenței domestice este evidențiată atât de numeroasele modificări care au fost impuse prin intermediul cadrului normativ, cât și pentru a avea o imagine de ansamblu asupra calității serviciilor oferite de către sistemul de stat.

Cercetarea mixtă (cantitativă și calitativă - s-a utilizat analiza secundară de date și metoda studiului de caz) s-a desfășurat la Centrul de Servicii Sociale pentru Persoane Adulte în Dificultate din cadrul Direcției Generale de Asistență Socială și Protecția Copilului Iași pe parcursul anului 2022. Scopul acesteia a fost identificarea consecințelor violenței domestice asupra familiei nucleare. Studiul și-a propus să determine care sunt factorii declanșatori ai violenței domestice, să identifice principalele tipuri de violență la care sunt supuse victimele și să identifice rolul și importanța pe care o au serviciile sociale în viața victimelor. Lucrarea aduce în atenție importanța și rolul serviciilor sociale oferite victimelor, care se vor cuantifica în timp, dar și necesitatea îmbunătățirii sistemului actual.

**Cuvinte cheie:** familie, violență, consecințe, resurse, servicii.

### Abstract

Domestic violence represents a worldwide problem, being present in the privacy of many families. This issue is viewed and treated differently, from one country to another, depending on the social, legal, cultural, and political codes of the society.

The necessity of empirical research in the field of providing services to victims of domestic violence is highlighted both by the numerous changes imposed through the regulatory framework and by the need to have an overview of the quality of services offered by the state system.

The mixed research (quantitative and qualitative - utilizing secondary data analysis and the case study method) was conducted at the Center for Social Services for Adults in Difficulty within the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection in Iași throughout the year 2022. The present research aimed to identify the consequences of

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domestic violence on nuclear families. The study aimed to identify the triggering factors of domestic violence, determine the main types of violence to which victims are subjected, and identify the role and importance of social services in the lives of victims. The paper highlights the importance and role of social services offered to victims, which will be quantified over time, as well as the need to improve the current system.

**Keywords:** family, violence, consequences, resources, services.

### **Résumé**

La violence domestique représente un problème mondial, étant présente dans l'intimité de nombreuses familles. Cette question est perçue et traitée différemment, d'un pays à l'autre, selon les codes sociaux, juridiques, culturels et politiques de la société.

La nécessité de mener des recherches empiriques dans le domaine de la prestation de services aux victimes de violence domestique est soulignée à la fois par les nombreux changements imposés par le cadre réglementaire et par la nécessité d'avoir une vue d'ensemble de la qualité des services offerts par le système étatique.

La recherche mixte (quantitative et qualitative - utilisant l'analyse des données secondaires et la méthode des études de cas) a été menée au Centre de services sociaux pour adultes en difficulté au sein de la Direction générale de l'assistance sociale et de la protection de l'enfance à Iași tout au long de l'année 2022. La présente recherche visait à identifier les conséquences de la violence domestique sur les familles nucléaires. L'étude visait à identifier les facteurs déclenchants de la violence domestique, à déterminer les principaux types de violence auxquels les victimes sont soumises et à identifier le rôle et l'importance des services sociaux dans la vie des victimes. Le document souligne l'importance et le rôle des services sociaux offerts aux victimes, qui seront quantifiés au fil du temps, ainsi que la nécessité d'améliorer le système actuel.

**Mots clés:** famille, violence, conséquences, ressources, services.

## **1. Introduction – about Domestic Violence**

The concept of *violence* is defined as aggressive behavior inflicted upon a physically and morally weaker individual by a stronger one. Here, we refer to the mistreatment of minors (abuse), acts of physical violence, or even actions such as robbery, rape, and homicide (Turliuc et al., 2009).

According to the World Health Organization (World Report on Violence and Health, 2002, page 23), *violence* involves „the intentional use of force/power, actual or in the form of threats, against oneself, another person, or a group/community, resulting in/or having a high probability of producing an injury, death, psychological harm, developmental harm, or deprivation”.

The primary purpose of violence in the family environment is to exert power and control over the other person. The aggressor often uses physical force and control tactics (threats, isolation, coercion, disregard, economic abuse, etc.) to intimidate, humiliate, and dominate the victim.

Domestic violence has certain characteristics compared to other types of violence, including (Muntean, 2003, cited in Neculau & Ferreol, 2003):

- The aggressor has constant access to the victim, considering they share the same living space or the aggressor knows the victim's exact address.

- The cyclical nature of violence, with multiple episodes and an escalation of severity.
- The presence of direct and indirect victims within the family (children, witnesses).
- Personality changes for all involved parties - the direct victim exhibits low self-esteem and isolation, indirect victims are often children with poor academic performance, illiterate, or delinquent, and the aggressor presents social integration disorders, substance/alcohol abuse, unemployment, etc.
- The existence of a deviant emotional relationship, such as the Stockholm syndrome, where the victim develops a pathological attachment to the aggressor.
- The private nature of events and the fear of victim stigma.
- Non-interventionism, where bystanders adopt a neutral stance, tolerating the violence.

As can be seen from the definition and descriptions presented above, violence (in all its forms) describes reprehensible behaviors that do not align with societal values, norms, and rules, which is why they are or should be severely condemned.

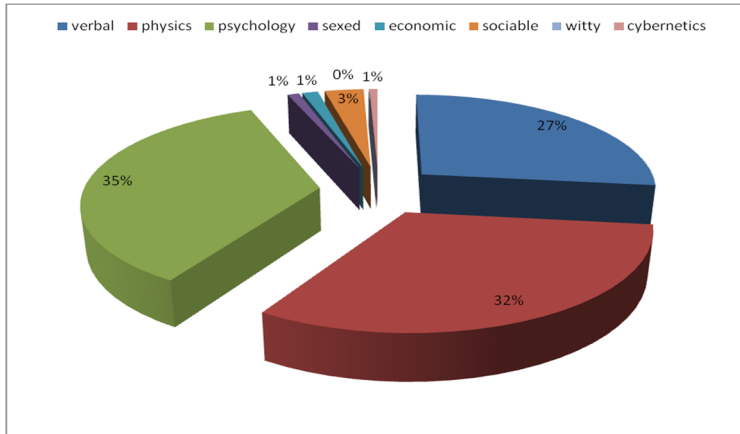
Unfortunately, statistics show that violence is tolerated, more or less, worldwide, being identified in any type of family, regardless of socioeconomic status, educational level, race, sexual orientation, or religion.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948 clearly states that all people have the right to a life free from violence, as it represents a violation of human rights. Studies have found that victims of domestic violence can be women, children, the elderly, men, and even extended family members.

Research has shown that **violence against women**, regardless of the form of aggression, has negative effects both in the short and medium to long term, and the repercussions take various forms, from visible marks on their bodies to psychosomatic disorders.

The reasons why women continue to cohabit with the aggressor are multiple and diverse: fear of reprisals, lack of alternative means of economic support, lack of support from extended family and close friends, fear of stigma, losing custody of children, but also the hope that the partner will change.

In recent years, Romania has seen an increase in the number of women who have become victims of their partners. Year after year, women gain the courage to verbalize and report the abuses they endure. Throughout the year 2022, 2162 calls regarding domestic violence were registered at the national hotline dedicated to victims of domestic violence, discrimination based on sex, and human trafficking, provided by the National Agency for Gender Equality (Agenția Națională pentru Egalitate de Șanse între Femei și Bărbați – ANES). Most calls reported psychological violence, followed by acts of physical and verbal violence.



**Figure 1:** Types of domestic violence reported to the Helpline – 0800.500.333  
Source: National Agency for Gender Equality, 2022

Although over 11,000 protection orders and over 20,000 provisional protection orders were issued throughout the year 2022, 42 women and 4 children died as a result of beatings and abuses within the family.

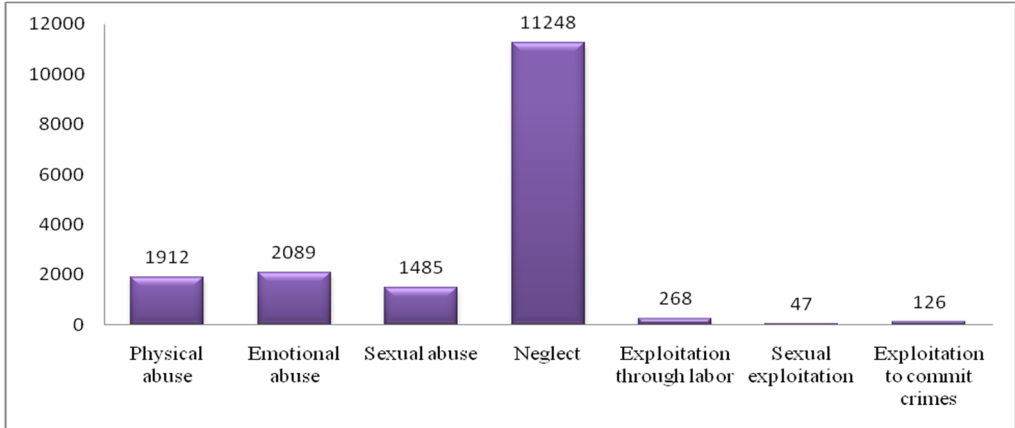
Law no. 272/2004 on the protection and promotion of children's rights establishes the main forms of **violence against children**: abuse, neglect, exploitation, and trafficking.

Article 19 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that all children have the right to „be protected from all forms of violence, injury, physical or mental abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of par ents, a legal guardian, or any other person who has the care of the child.”

However, the reality shows otherwise. The National Authority for the Protection of Persons with Disabilities, Children, and Adoptions (Autoritatea Națională pentru Protecția Drepturilor Persoanelor cu Dizabilități, Copii și Adopții - ANPDPDCA) recorded a total of 17,175 cases of abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation of children for the year 2022, an increase of approximately 7.3% compared to 2021.

Violence against children in the context of domestic violence causes physical and psychological traumas, including fear, distrust, insomnia, nocturnal enuresis, shame, speech disorders, behavioral disorders, nightmares, anger, as well as feelings of helplessness.

Studies have shown that abuses experienced in the family environment by a child are the main cause of developing pre-delinquent behaviors such as lack of friends, aggressive language/behavior, socialization difficulties, school dropout, vagrancy, use of hallucinogenic substances, alcohol, etc.



**Figure 2:** Situations of child abuse, neglect, and exploitation

Source: National Authority for the Protection of Persons with Disabilities, Children, and Adoptions, 2022

Although statistics depict men as aggressors, there is a smaller percentage (up to 20%) that demonstrates *that males can also be victims of domestic violence*. The main reason why men refuse to report the aggressions they suffer in the family environment is the fear of blame.

Aggressions by women against men are studied by specialists in terms of their reactions to the violence they have been subjected to. There are cases where victims can no longer bear the abuse and resort to extreme gestures, such as killing their partner (Irimescu, 2005).

Currently, in Romania, there are 16 counseling and assistance centers for aggressors. Through specialists, they primarily receive psychological, social, and vocational counseling, support for developing life skills (non-violent communication, anger management), support for social reintegration, facilitating access to specialized treatments, etc.

Gătej (2021) mentioned another form of *family violence*, namely, violence directed *against the elderly*, which consists of neglect, abuse, or mistreatment by their children or close relatives. Often, the elderly are abused by a family member with whom they live, by people in their social circle, or by employees of dedicated centers. They are perceived as a burden by those who care for them, for several reasons: economic difficulties, additional activities that the family must perform, the lack of the elderly person's occupational status, the aggressor's problems, the different mentality and behavior of the elderly, etc. (Crudu, 2021). The most commonly abused individuals have the following characteristics: mostly single women over 75 years old, who have no roles in society, with poor health (chronic/acute conditions, diminished mobility).

Unfortunately, worldwide, one of the most widespread and devastating violations of human rights is domestic violence, poorly reported due to fear of stigma and blame. To reduce this problem, the following should be done:

- More specialists should be trained;
- More awareness and education programs should be implemented within communities;
- Victims should have access to more services (rehabilitation, prevention, support, and charity) for a longer period;
- Various research initiatives should be initiated to help combat/eradicate the phenomenon;
- Various legislative changes should be approved.

Following studies, it has been found that victims of domestic violence can utilize both internal (coping strategies, resilience) and external resources (tools and services provided by current legislation, NGOs, etc.) to cope with and/or exit their adverse situations.

Specialized literature, Lecompte, (2020), Petrova Dimitrova (2021), Greitens (2020), and Pânișoară (2024) provide a wide range of definitions for **resilience**, but they all lead to an individual's capacity to cope with adversities or stressful situations. The concept of resilience has been studied over time in terms of traumatic events that could easily lead to psychopathological manifestations, such as depression, post-traumatic stress, and excessive consumption of alcohol or psychotropic substances. Thus, resilient individuals cope with these events without their subsequent development being affected.

Regardless of the level at which it is applied, resilience has several distinctive characteristics:

- ✓ Even if the level of risk is high and the experienced events are destabilizing, the victim's capacity for psychological development is positive;
- ✓ They demonstrate sustained skills to confront stress and do not develop mental disorders over time;
- ✓ Despite the trauma suffered, the victim goes through a process involving various protective factors that help them recover.

We can thus conclude that resilience simply helps a person who has faced an adverse event to develop, and appreciate interpersonal relationships and intensify them, be more empathetic, cope successfully with daily difficulties and stress, etc. The resilience of a person exposed to risks or adversities (domestic violence, natural disasters, physical/mental illnesses, poverty, etc.) should represent the main goal of all interventions performed by specialists. These interventions should not lead to dependence on the person providing support but to an improvement in the victim's autonomy, the development of trust in others, and even the development of creativity.

Another internal resource that victims of domestic violence can rely on is **coping**. Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 141) define coping as „a continuous adjustment process, with a personal character, which allows individuals to maintain their functioning during periods of stress, a specific, deliberate process of thought, feeling, and behavior, to reduce/eliminate stress, maintain well-being, and develop as a person.”

Therefore, in the event of a highly stressful situation or when a traumatic event occurs/is inevitable, the person involved will mobilize various coping strategies learned, developed, and planned over time to control and solve the situation of suffering/ subsequent suffering feelings after experiencing the unfavorable event.

Any victim of domestic violence will develop various strategies to resist, cope with abuse, or leave the aggressive environment, with as few negative consequences on their physical and mental health as possible. Specialists consider that the coping process should be dynamic, changing, and evolving constantly so that the person in question does not use only one style because this would lead to a blockage that would limit their flexibility and freedom to respond to changing situations.

As mentioned earlier, a victim of domestic violence in Romania can also use external resources. They can resort to various tools/institutions to request information/services to overcome the crisis they are in:

- Information obtained from official websites ([www.anes.gov.ro](http://www.anes.gov.ro), [www.politiaromana.ro](http://www.politiaromana.ro)) indicating the correct procedure in such situations;
- The BrightSky phone application provides assistance and information to victims, concerned individuals, and specialists in the field;
- Call the National Emergency Call System – 112;
- Call the toll-free hotline for victims of domestic violence provided 24/7 by ANES, call center – 0800 500 333;
- Call 119 – the national UNICEF number for children, for cases of abuse, neglect.
- Providers of social services, both public and private (General Directorates of Social Assistance and Child Protection or within the Public Social Assistance System, non-governmental organizations).
- Visit any emergency reception unit or forensic medicine service (when there are visible injuries or psychological traumas) to obtain the medical-legal certificate documenting the aggressions.
- The local police department filed a complaint against the aggressor.
- The court for the issuance of a protection order.
- The prosecutor's office attached to the court for filing a criminal complaint.

For their safety, victims of domestic violence can request, according to the law, a protection order against the aggressor for a maximum period of 12 months and electronic monitoring of the aggressor.

## **2. Study Design. Method, Sample, Data Collection Instruments**

The research spans a period of 12 months, namely January-December 2022, and was conducted at the Emergency Reception Center for Victims of Domestic Violence - Center for Social Services for Adults in Difficulty within the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection Iași.

Based on *secondary data analysis* and *the case study method*, I synthesized the information obtained and conducted *mixed research – quantitative* and *qualitative*.

*Secondary data analysis* is defined as a subsequent analysis of a set of data that had already been collected, with the aim of answering a different research question from the one for which the data were initially collected and generating new interpretations and conclusions.

R.K. Yin (2005) defines *the case study* as a „research strategy that requires empirical investigations into a particular contemporary phenomenon, in a real-life context, and using multiple sources of information (interviews, questionnaires, testimonies, evidence, documents)”. The same author described the case study as a concrete, precise investigation that examines a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not delineated, and to obtain viable results, multiple sources of data must be used.

I used *an exploratory case study* in the research because I aimed to obtain information about a frequently encountered phenomenon, that of domestic violence, and to preliminarily understand this social issue.

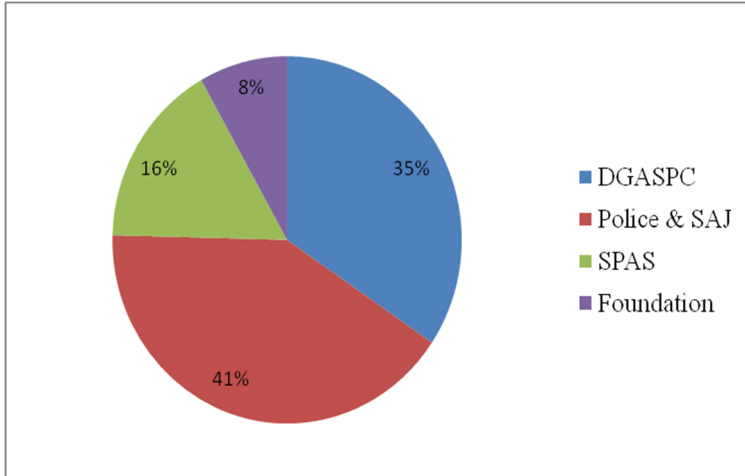
To collect as much data and information as possible for the elaboration of this work, I used complementary work tools: *documentation, participatory observation, and interviews*.

### **3. Results – The Role of Social Services in the Lives of Domestic Violence Victims**

To obtain a comprehensive and accurate overview, I analyzed all cases recorded at the Center for Social Services for Adults in Difficulty during January - December 2022 from multiple perspectives, and I presented the results statistically, graphically, and proportionally, according to the figures below. Thus, following the analysis, it was found that during the year 2022, 188 individuals passed through the Center for Social Services for Adults in Difficulty. Among these, 61 were adults (60 women and 1 man), direct victims of domestic violence, while the remaining 127 individuals were minors accommodated with their mothers. All beneficiaries of the center came from rural areas.

The majority of cases brought to the attention of the Center for Social Services for Adults in Difficulty were referred by the City or Rural Police of Iași County or by the Iași County Ambulance Service. A significant number of victims, 21 in total, directly sought assistance from the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection from Iași, either at the institution's headquarters or through the 119 service - the National UNIQUE number for children.

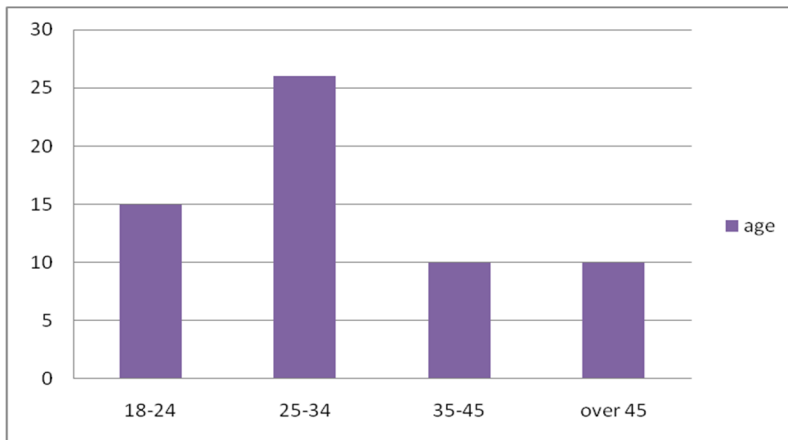




**Figure 3:** The institution that referred the domestic violence case  
 Source: Center for Social Services for Adults in Difficulty, 2022

A percentage of 16% of cases were referred by the Public Social Assistance Services (SPAS) at the village level. Additionally, foundations played an important role, getting involved and assisting a total of 5 cases to benefit from the center's services.

As you can observe in the figure below, the majority of abused individuals who were admitted to the center were between the ages of 25 and 34, followed by those under the age of 25.

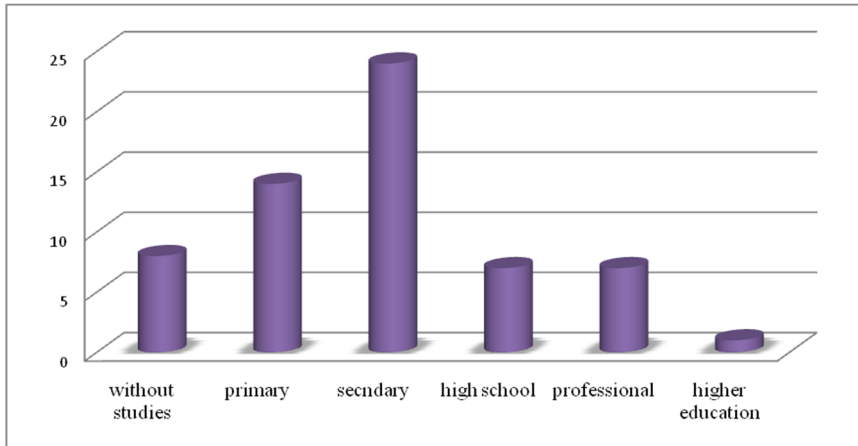


**Figure 4:** Beneficiaries by age group  
 Source: Center for Social Services for Adults in Difficulty, 2022

Approximately 62% of domestic violence victims were in a consensual union, while 38% had a formalized relationship with the aggressor.

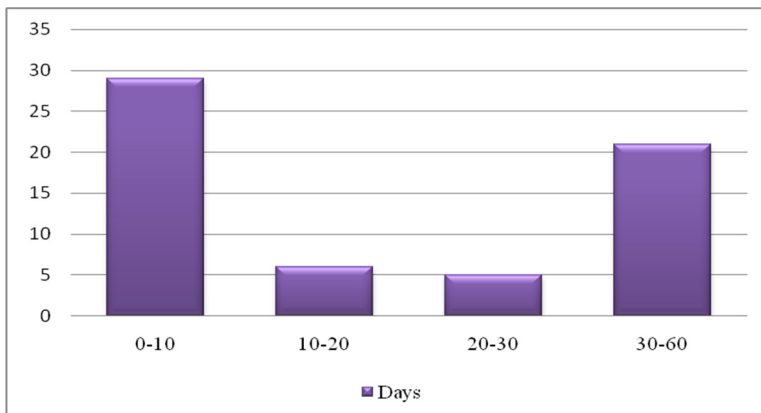
Individuals with completed or ongoing primary education represented the largest proportion of adult victims admitted to the center during the year 2022. On

the other hand, there was only one victim who had completed a higher education cycle.



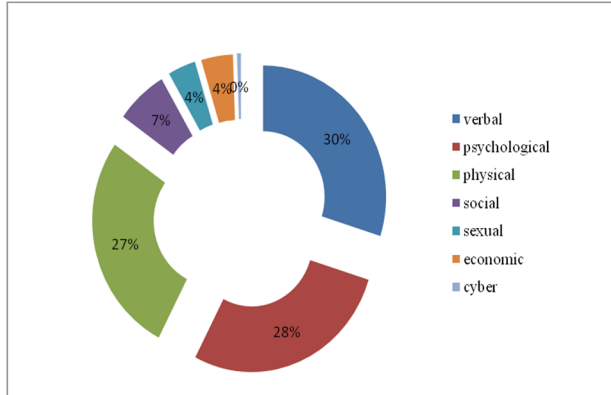
**Figure 5:** Education level of victims of domestic violence  
Source: Center for Social Services for Adults in Difficulty, 2022

Out of the total of 61 cases, 54 women were assaulted by their partner, husband, or cohabitant. There were also a few isolated cases where the aggressor was a family member (son, brother, brother-in-law) or a former partner.



**Figure 6:** Period of stay in the center  
Source: Center for Social Services for Adults in Difficulty, 2022

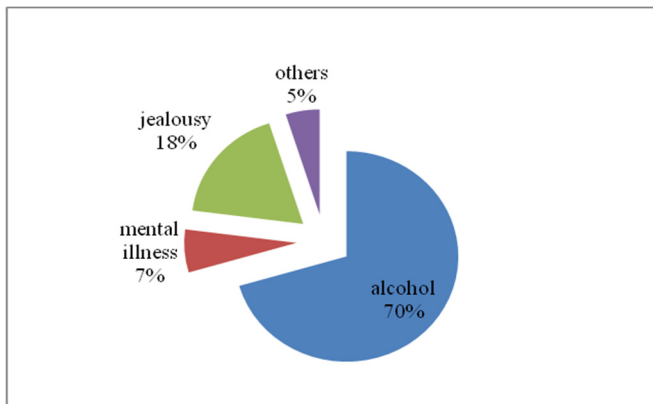
Over 88% of the victims housed at the center were accompanied by children (from 1 up to 6 minors). Within the first 10 days of their stay, 29 beneficiaries requested discharge from the center as they quickly identified a new housing solution, turning to extended family, relatives, and friends, or returning to the aggressor's home. 21 cases required more than 30 days to overcome the difficult situations they had faced.



**Figure 7:** The type of domestic violence inflicted on the victims  
 Source: Center for Social Services for Adults in Difficulty, 2022

As it can be seen in Figure No. 5, the most common form of domestic violence experienced by beneficiaries hosted in 2022 is verbal abuse, closely linked to physical and psychological abuse. More often, victims suffer from multiple types of abuse.

The majority of aggressions occurring in the family environment were caused by excessive alcohol consumption. Over 70% of the beneficiary victims at the Center for Social Services for Adults in Difficulty were assaulted by their partners when they were intoxicated with ethanol. Jealousy crises also play an important role in the aggressors' behaviors, as illustrated in the figure below. A smaller proportion consists of individuals who become aggressive due to mental health conditions they may or may not have been diagnosed with.



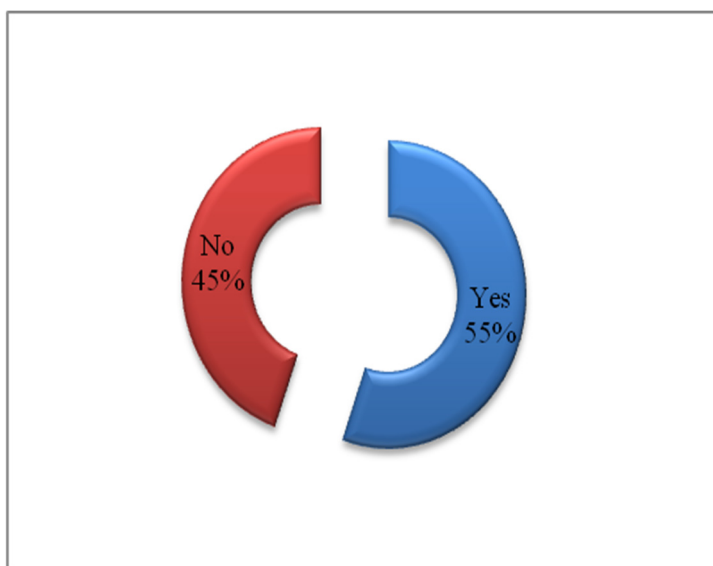
**Figure 8:** Causes of domestic violence  
 Source: Center for Social Services for Adults in Difficulty, 2022

Out of the total of 61 adult victims, only 27 beneficiaries requested a protection order against the aggressor, while the remaining 34 did not want it issued, justifying their decision as follows: they immediately returned to the

aggressor's home, left home „to teach their partner a lesson,” or „do not wish to harm their partner.” Although they were counseled about the risks they face, some victims do not want or are not ready to make a real change in their lives.

Unfortunately, even those who obtained protection orders violate them (approximately 44%), returning to the aggressor, who manages to „lure” them back through various methods: abstaining from alcohol for a period of time (usually as long as they are in the center), reaching out to extended family/relatives/friends to convey messages of remorse, expressing feelings of longing for the children, threatening self-harm, etc.

The aggressor's behavior changes for a short period of time, and the couple experiences that „honeymoon phase,” after which they return to old habits, leading to the repetition of the cycle of domestic violence. In 2022, 9 victims were re-admitted to the center (some of them were beneficiaries for the fourth time).



**Figure 9:** Recidivism rate

Source: Center for Social Services for Adults in Difficulty, 2022

As we can see in the above figure, in 2022, a percentage of 55% of the cases recorded at the Center for Social Services for Adults in Difficulty returned to the aggressor, whether they had a protection order issued or not. The remaining 45% managed, with the help of resource persons and specialists from the center (social workers, psychologists, educators), to identify new living spaces to start a new life.

Some victims were assisted by extended family members, some went to work abroad, and others were taken in by various foundations (such as the „Glasul vieții” Association, the Hecuba Foundation, the „Casa Vieții” Center), and a few were included in the Protected Housing of the Center for Social Services for Adults in Difficulty.

#### 4. Conclusions

Domestic violence is a widespread phenomenon worldwide, affecting women, men, children, and the elderly alike, regardless of age, level of education, socio-economic status, cultural background, or religious beliefs. It produces negative effects on victims, both directly and indirectly, as well as on the aggressor, in the short, medium, and long term.

As discussions about domestic violence increase in civil society and both national and international media, victims have begun to gain courage and seek help from authorities. In 2022, 41% of beneficiaries admitted to the Center for Social Services for Adults in Difficulty sought assistance from the Police or Ambulance Service, 35% turned to the General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection in Iași, either through the 119 Child Helpline or at the institution's headquarters, 16% sought help from the Public Social Assistance Service in their communities, and a relatively small number, 8%, sought assistance from associations and foundations.

Over 60% of the assaulted individuals hosted at the center were under the age of 35 and were in consensual unions with the aggressor. Those without education or with primary/gymnasium education, whether completed or not, represent the largest proportion of adult victims admitted (over 75%).

Out of a total of 61 cases, 54 women were assaulted by their spouse or partner. There were also isolated cases where the aggressor was a family member (son, brother, brother-in-law) or former partner.

More than 88% of the victims housed at the center were accompanied by children (from 1 up to 6 minors). Approximately half of the beneficiaries requested discharge within the first 10 days of their stay, as they quickly identified alternative living arrangements, either with extended family, relatives, and friends or by returning to the aggressor's home. Unfortunately, over half of the victims did not request a protection order against the aggressor, even though they were counseled about the risks, both for themselves and their children. Some victims do not wish or are not ready to make a real change in their lives. Many of the protection orders issued are violated within the first month, as the aggressor temporarily changes their behavior, followed by a return to old habits, thus restarting the cycle of violence. In 2022, 9 victims were readmitted to the center (some of them were beneficiaries for the fourth time, with a recurrence rate of almost 15%).

Through the research conducted, it can be concluded that the most common form of domestic violence experienced by beneficiaries hosted in 2022 was verbal abuse, closely linked to physical and psychological abuse. Often, both direct and indirect victims suffer from multiple types of abuse. The repercussions of domestic violence are observed over time on the victim (anxiety, substance abuse, psychological problems, etc.), on children (behavioral problems, adaptability issues, language difficulties, etc.), and the aggressor (protection orders, separation, divorce, etc.).

The causes of aggression within the family are multiple. A significant percentage, over 70%, consists of victims who were assaulted by their partners

when they were intoxicated with alcohol. Jealousy crises also play an important role in the behavior of aggressors. A smaller proportion consists of individuals who become aggressive due to psychological disorders, whether diagnosed or not.

Through the services provided by the center (social, psychological, legal, and educational counseling), approximately 30% of beneficiaries managed to break away from the aggressive and toxic environment in which they lived. Some victims were assisted by extended family members, some went to work abroad, others were taken in by various foundations (such as the „Glasul Vieții” Association, the Hecuba Foundation, the „Casa Vieții” Center), and a few were included in the Protected Housing of the Center for Social Services for Adults in Difficulty. The importance and role of social services offered to victims of domestic violence will be quantified over time through the regaining of psychological balance and social reintegration of the victims. The support they receive will help them reintegrate into society, regain confidence in themselves, and be certain that they will be able to cope on their own.

Although domestic violence is punishable by law in Romania, this scourge is still frequently encountered. In recent years, a series of measures have been taken to prevent and combat domestic violence, including improving the legal framework, developing social services, implementing projects aimed at increasing public confidence in relevant institutions, conducting programs to raise awareness in civil society, and allocating the necessary resources for the effective functioning of institutions fighting against violence.

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## **Biodata**

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