

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. THE TRUE LIFE OF WOMEN IN THE „PERFECT HOME”

**Mihaela-Andreea STAMATE<sup>1</sup>**

---

### **Abstract**

Domestic violence is one of the most frequent violations of human rights, occurring worldwide and manifesting in various forms. It has been found that domestic violence should not be ignored or considered normal. Thus, various actions have been initiated to inform society about the consequences of this issue at individual, community, and national levels. Although in Romanian society, the awareness of domestic violence came much later, in the last three decades, previously being a „taboo” subject, today, violence against women is viewed with a different attitude. Through this paper, I aimed to identify the effects of domestic violence on victims, and for data collection, the interview guide has been used. The study is based on the analysis of 5 interviews conducted with women victims of domestic violence, who were beneficiaries at the time at the Social Services Center for Adults in Difficulty in Iasi. The discussion areas have been focused on the following aspects: the history of violence in the couple relationship, the couple relationship, the factors leading to acts of violence, the reason why the woman remains in the abusive relationship, and support services for victims. The main aspects identified from the study refer to the partner’s alcohol consumption, which is a primary factor in triggering acts of violence, jealousy, lack of financial resources (a reason that keeps the victim trapped in the relationship), and the partner’s promises.

**Keywords:** domestic violence, victim, factors, effects.

### **Résumé :**

La violence domestique est la violation des droits de l'homme la plus fréquente, se produisant dans le monde entier et se manifestant sous diverses formes. Il a été constaté que la violence domestique ne doit pas être ignorée ou considérée comme normale, c'est pourquoi des actions ont été initiées pour informer la société des conséquences de ce problème aux niveaux individuel, communautaire et national. Bien que dans la société roumaine, la prise de conscience de la violence domestique soit venue beaucoup plus tard, au cours des trois dernières décennies, ce sujet ayant été auparavant un sujet „tabou”, aujourd'hui, la violence contre les femmes est perçue avec une attitude différente. À travers ce document, j'ai cherché à identifier les effets de la violence domestique sur les victimes, et pour la collecte des données, le guide d'entretien a été utilisé. L'étude est basée sur

---

<sup>1</sup> College graduate, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, Sociology and Social Work Department, mihaelaandreeastamate@gmail.com

l'analyse de 5 entretiens réalisés avec des femmes victimes de violence domestique, qui étaient bénéficiaires à l'époque au Centre de Services Sociaux pour Adultes en Difficulté de Iasi. Les domaines de discussion se sont concentrés sur les aspects suivants : l'histoire de la violence dans la relation de couple, la relation de couple, les facteurs conduisant aux actes de violence, la raison pour laquelle la femme reste dans la relation abusive et les services de soutien pour les victimes. Les principaux aspects identifiés de l'étude se réfèrent à la consommation d'alcool du partenaire, qui est un facteur principal déclenchant les actes de violence, la jalousie, le manque de ressources financières (une raison qui maintient la victime piégée dans la relation) et les promesses du partenaire.

**Mots-clés :** violence, victime, facteurs, effets.

### **Rezumat**

Violența domestică este cea mai frecventă încălcare a drepturilor unui om, aceasta are loc la nivel mondial manifestându-se sub diferite forme. S-a constatat că violența domestică nu ar trebui să fie ignorată sau considerată o normalitate, așadar s-au demarat acțiuni cu scopul de a informa societatea cu privire la consecințele pe care le poate avea această problemă, atât la nivel individual, comunitar, cât și național. Deși în societatea românească, conștientizarea problemei violenței domestice a venit mult mai târziu, în ultimele trei decenii, anterior fiind un subiect „tabu”, în prezent violența împotriva femeilor este privită cu o altă atitudine. Prin prezenta lucrare mi-am propus să identific care sunt efectele violenței domestice asupra victimelor, iar pentru colectarea datelor a fost utilizat ghidul de interviu. Studiul se bazează pe analiza a 5 interviuri realizate cu femei victimele violenței domestice, ce erau beneficiare în acel moment în cadrul Centrului de Servicii Sociale pentru Persoanele Adulte aflate în Dificultate din Iași. Ariile de discuție au fost axate pe următoarele aspecte: istoricul fenomenului de violență în relația de cuplu, relația de cuplu, factorii ce duc la actele de violență, motivul pentru care rămâne femeia în relația agresivă și servicii de suport pentru victime. Principalele aspecte identificate în urma studiului realizat fac referire la consumul de alcool al partenerului, ce reprezintă un factor principal în declanșarea actelor de violență, gelozia, lipsa resurselor financiare (un motiv ce o ține captivă pe victimă în acea relație) dar și promisiunile partenerului.

**Cuvinte cheie:** violență, victimă, factori, efecte.

### **Introduction**

International research on family violence began in the 1970s, but it cannot be said that was when the discovery of this concept took place. Researchers from various fields observed that family violence, defined as a form of abuse manifested by men towards their partners through control and domination, requires investigation and attention (Manu, 2009, p. 14).

In 2000, the United Nations General Assembly decided to establish November 25 as the „International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women”, aiming to increase awareness in society about violence against women.

Due to the complexity of the phenomenon of domestic violence, there is no single definition, as associating the term „violence” with another word can give it a completely different meaning (for example: physical violence, sexual violence, economic violence, etc.).

According to the Romanian Crime Prevention Institute, domestic violence is defined as „a series of repeated constraining behaviors and physical, sexual, psychological, economic, social, or spiritual attacks that a person manifests towards a partner, with the aim of controlling and dominating them, using force and/or the victim’s inability to defend themselves, which occurs within a couple relationship” (Romanian Crime Prevention Institute apud Rujoiu & Rujoiu, 2012, p. 24).

Legislatively, specifically Law no. 217/2003 for the prevention and combating of family violence, domestic violence is defined in Article 3 as „any intentional inaction or action of physical, sexual, psychological, economic, social, or spiritual or cybernetic violence that occurs in the family or domestic environment or between spouses or former spouses, as well as between current or former partners, regardless of whether the aggressor lives or has lived together with the victim”.

Mândrilă (2009) stated that when we hear the word „violence”, we involuntarily think of abuse of power, which paradoxically means powerlessness. In most situations, when a partner abuses power, their behavior can escalate and lead to acts of violence against women. In Romanian society, the role of victims of domestic violence is largely attributed to women. The purpose of this research was to determine the effects of domestic violence on women.

## **1. Forms of Domestic Violence and their repercussions on abused women**

Irimescu & Rădoi (2017, p. 13) emphasize that the issue of violence against women and inappropriate behaviors towards them are subjects of global interest

According to Law no. 217/2003 for the prevention and combating of family violence, the forms of domestic violence are listed in article 4 as „verbal violence, psychological violence, physical violence, sexual violence, economic violence, social violence, spiritual violence, and cybernetic violence”.

Domestic violence is a social issue that does not suddenly appear, or that a person finds themselves in at an inappropriate moment or place. Although it may seem paradoxical, women are most often abused by those who claim to love them, or by someone they know, which makes it harder for the victim to overcome such an event (Snyder, 2020, p. 21).

Many times, family violence remains hidden from society’s eyes until the physical traces disappear, and those involved in acts of violence tend to behave as if nothing had happened. However, even if it is assumed that such experiences can be forgotten or erased from the victim’s memory, this is only an illusion. When women are addressed with insulting or derogatory words, their wounds are reopened, and emotional trauma persists (Hogaş, 2010).

Hogaş (2010) highlighted that acts of violence against women have devastating effects, both physically and emotionally. These effects can persist for a long or short period of time, profoundly affecting the victims’ well-being.

Women subjected to both physical and psychological violence are prone to chronic illnesses such as diabetes, joint inflammation, and back pain. In addition to

these medical issues, victims of domestic violence may experience frequent fatigue and insomnia due to constant stress and anxiety caused by emotional and physical traumas (Dumitrescu, 2015).

In the case of abused women, post-traumatic stress disorder is often mentioned. In some research, it is also referred to as the Battered Woman Syndrome (source?).

Muntean (2011) mentions the Battered Woman Syndrome as a condition that combines physical and psycho-social problems that women develop as a result of repeated acts of violence from their partners.

Post-traumatic stress disorder or the Battered Woman Syndrome, as defined in DSM III (1980), involves negative reactions generated by the recollection of painful past events, including dreams or nightmares associated with those traumatic moments. These reactions may include feelings of fear, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, etc., which can persist for minutes, hours, or even days.

The World Health Organization (2002) highlights that women who have been forced into sexual relationships are at an increased risk of suffering from depression and post-traumatic stress.

Vrasti (2012) emphasizes that, in addition to the direct effects of violence on the victim, it also has repercussions on children who have been exposed to scenes of violence in the family.

Most of the time, victims decide to leave their abusive partner only when they realize that their child is being affected by the (aggressive) environment in which they are growing up.

Mândrilă (2009) argued that the abused woman is often compelled to leave her partner only when she notices that their child is affected by the tensions and violence in the family environment. In those moments, the mother feels a deep responsibility to provide the child with a stable and healthy home, avoiding a dysfunctional family environment.

Domestic violence has devastating negative effects on women who have been repeatedly subjected to acts of aggression.

Albiol (2022) underscores that acts of violence lead to a significant increase in mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, psychiatric disorders, post-traumatic stress, alcohol and substance abuse, eating disorders, and sleep disorders. Additionally, women who have been subjected to violence are more prone to self-harm or suicidal thoughts.

Many women stated that the consumption of alcohol and drugs represents a form of refuge for them, helping them to forget the physical and emotional pain caused by violence. Studies in Romania focused on the phenomenon of domestic violence have found an increase in the rate of alcohol and drug consumption during periods when the incidence of violence was also rising (Mândrilă, 2009).

Violence directed at women not only affects their physical and mental health but also has devastating consequences on their reproductive system. Unfortunately, violent acts against women during pregnancy can lead either to a

miscarriage or premature birth, endangering the mother's life in this situation (Necula, 2021).

Turliuc (2009) mentioned that domestic violence can be a triggering factor for suicidal behaviors in women, and those who have been victims of abuse are at a higher risk of suicide compared to the general population. When depression and post-traumatic stress disorder are associated with low self-esteem, they can generate suicidal thoughts in women who have been subjected to domestic violence.

When a woman has suicidal ideation or even resorts to this act, in the victim's mind, there is only the desire to break the cycle of violence. An example from Romanian literature is presented in the case of Ana from the novel „Ion” by Liviu Rebreanu, in which the victim can no longer endure the repeated episodes of violence perpetrated both by her father and her partner, leading Ana to tragically take her life (Mândrilă, 2009).

According to previous studies, it has been found that only one of the partner's deaths can put an end to the cycle of domestic violence. The loss of life represents the most tragic consequence of domestic violence, and this should be a wake-up call for the entire society (Mândrilă, 2009).

Mândrilă (2009) stated that some of the aforementioned effects can be viewed as strategies of cooperation – survival. Women who are victims of abuse adopt two distinct strategies, one being destructive, and the other being constructive. Self-destructive behaviors include substance abuse such as alcohol, drugs, and suicidal behaviors. Constructive strategies are those that victims take when they understand the impact that violence can have on both them and their children, subsequently deciding to separate from the abusive partner and begin the process of rebuilding their lives.

When the victim decides to separate from the abusive partner, there are two possibilities: either she seeks support from her family (this can happen if the victim has a good relationship with her family), or she will leave as far away from the aggressor as possible to feel safe (Hogaș, 2010).

Women who experience repeated physical and emotional abuse require continuous and long-term assistance from specialists in the field to reduce the risk of other negative events, such as alcohol abuse, suicidal tendencies, depression, and substance abuse (Hogaș, 2010).

Albiol (2022) observed that domestic violence can undermine the victim's self-confidence, and this can have repercussions on all aspects of her life. Often, the victim tends to choose another aggressive partner due to low self-esteem and the desire to feel loved. This dynamic can lead to entering a vicious cycle of violence.

The greatest harm done to a woman in a toxic relationship is the loss of self-respect, despite appearances, victims of domestic violence often develop an attachment to the aggressor (Muntean & Munteanu, 2011).

## 2. Study Design

My research was a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews.

According to Hurubean (2011), the individual interview technique represents a meeting between two people where a free discussion takes place, during which one person provides information while the other obtains information.

The data collection period was from January to May 2023. The interviews took place face-to-face between the interviewee and the researcher, following a predetermined plan, with an informed consent form signed because the interviews were recorded, and subsequently, the provided information was analyzed for research purposes. The interviews were held at the Social Services Center for Adults in Difficulty in Iași. The interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes each. A total of 5 women, aged between 19 and 41 years old, who were at that time beneficiaries of social services at the Social Services Center for Adults in Difficulty, were interviewed.

The study aimed to identify the consequences of domestic violence on the victims. The discussion topics focused on the following aspects: identification data, the history of violence in the couple's relationship, the couple's relationship, factors leading to acts of violence, the reasons why the woman remains in the abusive relationship, and support services for victims.

## 3. Research Results

Starting from the discussion topics and from the analysis of the interviews, we identified that the interviewed victims in this research came from dysfunctional families, with abusive and addictive behaviors, representing for them a normality and an example of how the family system operates. „My siblings and I wouldn't leave the room until they finished their circus...dad threw a knife at mom right in front of me” (S1, 41 years old, victim of domestic violence).

“They are hardworking people, but alcohol ruins them” (S2, 19 years old, victim of domestic violence).

The influence of the victim's background environment (especially the rural environment) was also noted, which in their case represented an impediment to their educational development.

“...I had to stay with my siblings, and because of that, I couldn't finish school” (S2, 19 years old, 6 grades, victim of domestic violence).

The history of violence in the couple's relationship was another discussion topic proposed in the research. Following the interviews with victims of domestic violence, we identified that the first signs of aggression towards them appeared after approximately 3-5 months of the relationship.

“about 5 months in, he started being violent, but I hoped he would change” (S1, 41 years old, victim of domestic violence).

“after 3 months of a relationship, we started arguing because of alcohol and gambling” (S2, 19 years old, victim of domestic violence).

“Well, about 2 months in, he started insulting me and hitting me” (S5, 31 years old, victim of domestic violence).

From the interviews with the victims, the most common form of violence manifested towards them was *physical*: „he hit me 2,3 times on the head” (S5, 31 years old, victim of domestic violence); „I was beaten with fists, slaps, and with a belt” (S1, 41 years old, victim of domestic violence), followed by *verbal* violence: „he called me stupid, cow...” (S4, 24 years old, victim of domestic violence); *social* violence: „I had family support, not anymore, because I disappointed them,...now I understand why, because I didn’t go back to him only once” (S1, 41 years old, victim of domestic violence); „he took my phone, if he went to work...he took my phone with him” (S5, 31 years old, victim of domestic violence); and *economic* violence: „he took the child allowance and withdrew it, but the money was left in the house, meaning he knew where it was and I did too...but that happened on good days, but there were days when he took all the money from my pocket and left home” (S1, 41 years old, victim of domestic violence); „I only had the child allowance, which his mother would withdraw,...I don’t even know what salary he has” (S3, 21 years old, victim of domestic violence).

Analyzing the couple relationship between victim and aggressor, we identified a different dynamic of functioning of the couples and their evolution. If in the first months of the relationship, the partner was attentive to the woman’s needs „he bought me gifts” (S3, 21 years old), later he would change his behavior and attitude towards the partner „he was aggressive only at home, he behaved nicely in public” (S2, 19 years old, victim of domestic violence); „a year ago he hit me, he’s not violent at all” (S3, 21 years old, victim of domestic violence).

From the analysis of the interviews, we identified several main factors that trigger acts of violence such as alcohol abuse and jealousy.

Alcohol abuse was mentioned as a factor that leads to the partner’s aggression towards the victim, because when the man consumes alcohol, changes occur in his character, becoming jealous and impulsive.

Jealousy was also mentioned individually as a factor that makes the partner aggressive.

“...I worked for 6 months in sales, but he would come and cause trouble, he thought I was looking at customers (men) in a certain way,...he was jealous, and that’s why I chose to quit the job” (S1, 41 years old, victim of domestic violence).

“he has problems with alcohol, he drinks daily, stays out at night, and when he comes home, he beats me” (S1, 41 years old, victim of domestic violence).

“every time he drinks, he insults me” (S2, 19 years old, victim of domestic violence).

“he came home drunk and started accusing me of talking to other men,...then he slapped me across the face” (S4, 24 years old, victim of domestic violence).

When victims were asked during the interview why they did not leave their abusive partner, they mentioned reasons such as lack of their income, lack of housing, but also their love for their partner. Paradoxically, many times the victim’s love for the abuser keeps them in that relationship, hoping that the abuser will change.

“I hope he would change” (S1, 41 years old); „I have nowhere to go” (S2, 19 years old); „I had nowhere to go” (S3, 21 years old).

Following the interviews conducted with the victims, we identified the importance of support services that are necessary for victims of domestic violence, especially when they lack other resources. Victims are helped to overcome difficult moments through temporary accommodation (60 days) and the protection provided within the Social Services Center for Adults in Difficulty. Psychological counseling represents another support offered to victims in overcoming trauma and rebuilding self-esteem, while also assisting them in finding employment. All these services aim to prepare victims to become independent in all aspects after their discharge from the Center.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Domestic violence is a real problem, and to reduce this phenomenon, the intervention of both specialists and society is necessary.

From the analyzed interviews, victims mentioned that the most frequent violence they were subjected to was *physical violence*, followed by *verbal, social, and economic violence*.

A primary triggering factor of acts of violence identified by victims refers to the partner’s alcohol consumption, noticing that the most frequent episodes of domestic violence occurred when the partner was drinking alcohol. Besides alcohol consumption, victims also mentioned the partner’s jealousy, often unjustified. By mixing these two factors, domestic violence emerges.

Referring to the repercussions of domestic violence on victims, these are either observed near the incident (presence of bruises on the victim) or are observed over time, talking here about the disorders that many arise after abusive episodes (anxiety, depression, somatic disorders, etc.). Victims are often confused and do not understand why their partner behaves in such a way towards them, and even if they begin to understand his behavior, most of the time they fall prey to his promises „he promised me he wouldn’t do it again”.



The phenomenon of domestic violence began to be viewed in Romanian society as a real problem in recent decades, with various campaigns, projects, conferences, and legislative measures initiated to prevent and combat domestic violence (Bright Sky Ro App; Campaigns conducted by the Romanian Police – „Broken Wings” Domestic Violence Prevention Campaign; National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men – national campaign for information and awareness regarding domestic violence and violence against women, promoting the unique national toll-free hotline number for victims of domestic violence, sex discrimination, and human trafficking – 0800 500 333; POCU VENUS Project – Together for a Safe Life!).

### Bibliography

- Albiol, L. M. (2022). *Violența O viziune psihologică actuală*. Litera.
- Băban, A. (2002). *Metodologia cercetării calitative*. Presa Universitară Clujeană.
- Bonea, G. V. (2012). *Violența în relația de cuplu: Victime și agresori, Teorii și aplicații*. Sigma.
- Dumitrescu, A. M. (2015). *Violența domestică și victimizarea femeii în România*. Da ARS Docendi, Universitatea din București.
- Gătej, M. (2021). *Violența în familie*. Orizonturi.
- Hogaș, D. L. (2010). *Patriarhatul, subordonarea femeii și violența domestică*. Editura Lumen, Iași
- Hurubean, A. (2011). Investigare și intervenție în asistența socială individualizată. În Neamțu, G. (coord.), *Tratat de asistență socială* (Ediția a II-a, pp. 503-530). Polirom.
- Irimescu, G. & Rădoi, M. (eds.). (2017). *Violența asupra femeii. Ipostaze. Explicații. Intervenții*. Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” Iași.
- Legea 217 din 2003, publicat în MONITORUL OFICIAL nr. 948 din 15 octombrie 2020, pentru prevenirea și combaterea violenței domestice <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocument/44014> accesat în 20 Februarie 2023.
- Manu, B. (2009). *Violența familială. Maltratarea femeii și a copilului*. ARS Academia.
- American Psychiatric Association. (1980). *Manualul de Diagnoză și Statistică al Tulburărilor Mintale*. DSM III (1980) Ediția a III-a. Asociația Americană de Psihiatrie
- Mândrilă, G. (2009). *Violența în familie o realitate dramatică*. Ediția a II-a. Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași.
- Muntean, A., & Munteanu, A. (2011). *Violență, Traumă, Reziliență*. Polirom.
- Necula, M. R. (2021). Efectele violenței asupra femeii. În Rădoi, M. & Irimescu, G. (coord.), *Fețele nevăzute ale violenței*. Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași.
- Rujoiu, V., & Rujoiu, O. (2012). *Violența în familie. Între percepție socială și asumarea individuală*. Editura ASE.
- Snyder, R. L. (2020). *Vânătași ascunse. Ce nu știi despre violența domestică te poate ucide*. Nemira.
- Turluc, M., Huțuleac, A., & Dănilă, O. (2009). *Violența în familie. Teorii, Particularități și Intervenții Specifice*. Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași
- Vrasti, R. (2012). *Ghid practic de intervenție în criză* <http://www.vrasti.org/>

**Biodata**

**Mihaela-Andreea STAMATE**

Bachelor of Social Work, Student within the Master's program: Family and Family Resource Management, Department of Sociology, Social Work and Human Resources, Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences, „Alexandru Ioan Cuza „ University of Iasi, Romania, Volunteer at the Social Services Center for Victims of Domestic Violence, Volunteer at the Diocesan Caritas Iasi Association and volunteer at Initial Assessment Service, Emergency Intervention, and SPAS Coordination.