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THE DYNAMICS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIOECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: STATISTICAL EVIDENCE FOR SOCIAL POLICY

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Abstract: Domestic violence is a complex social phenomenon with significant demographic and socioeconomic implications. This study analyzes trends in domestic violence victims in the Republic of Moldova between 2015 and 2024, disaggregated by sex and age, and interprets these trends in the context of demographic and social transformations. The analysis is based on official national records, providing a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon. Results show fluctuations in the total number of victims, with a decline until 2020 followed by an increase from 2021 to 2024. Women constitute the majority of victims, reflecting structural vulnerabilities related to gender inequality, economic dependence, and family responsibilities. Adults aged 35–64 are the most affected, while children and adolescents represent vulnerable groups, with a recent rise in cases among younger children. Elderly individuals also face notable vulnerabilities due to physical or economic dependence and social isolation. Factors such as unstable partnerships, multiple responsibilities, economic stress, parental migration, and cultural norms regarding gender roles and child-rearing contribute to the persistence of abuse. The study highlights the multidimensional nature of domestic violence and emphasizes the need for integrated public policies incorporating demographic perspectives to prevent and address family violence.

Keywords: domestic violence, demographic structure, victimology, migration, Republic of Moldova, family change

Résumé : La violence domestique est un phénomène social complexe ayant des implications démographiques et socioéconomiques significatives. Cette étude analyse les tendances des victimes de violence domestique en République de Moldova entre 2015 et 2024, ventilées par sexe et âge, et interprète ces tendances dans le contexte des transformations démographiques et sociales. L'analyse repose sur les registres officiels nationaux, offrant une vue d'ensemble complète du phénomène. Les résultats montrent des fluctuations du nombre total de victimes, avec une diminution jusqu'en 2020 suivie d'une augmentation entre 2021 et 2024. Les femmes constituent la majorité des victimes, reflétant des vulnérabilités structurelles liées à l'inégalité de genre, à la dépendance économique et aux responsabilités familiales. Les adultes âgés de 35 à 64 ans sont les plus affectés, tandis

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que les enfants et adolescents représentent des groupes vulnérables, avec une augmentation récente des cas chez les plus jeunes. Les personnes âgées présentent également des vulnérabilités notables en raison de la dépendance physique ou économique et de l'isolement social. Des facteurs tels que l'instabilité des partenariats, les responsabilités multiples, le stress économique, la migration parentale et les normes culturelles relatives aux rôles de genre et à l'éducation des enfants contribuent à la persistance des abus. L'étude souligne la nature multidimensionnelle de la violence domestique et met en avant la nécessité de politiques publiques intégrées incluant la perspective démographique pour prévenir et traiter la violence familiale.

Mots-clés : violence domestique, structure démographique, victimologie, migration, République de Moldova, changements familiaux

Rezumat: Violența în familie reprezintă un fenomen social complex cu implicații demografice și socioeconomice importante. Scopul prezentului studiu este analiza evoluției victimelor violenței domestice în Republica Moldova în perioada 2015–2024, în funcție de sex și grupe de vârstă, precum și interpretarea acestor tendințe în contextul transformărilor demografice și sociale. Studiul se bazează pe înregistrările tuturor cazurilor raportate la nivel național, oferind o perspectivă exhaustivă asupra evoluției fenomenului. Rezultatele evidențiază fluctuații ale numărului total de victime, cu o scădere progresivă până în 2020, urmată de o creștere în perioada 2021–2024. Femeile reprezintă majoritatea covârșitoare a victimelor, reflectând vulnerabilități structurale legate de inegalitatea de gen, dependența economică și responsabilitățile familiale. Din perspectiva vârstei, adulții maturi (35–64 de ani) sunt cei mai afectați, iar copiii și adolescenții reprezintă grupuri vulnerabile, cu o creștere recentă a victimelor în rândul celor mici. Persoanele vârstnice prezintă, de asemenea, vulnerabilități semnificative, determinate de dependența fizică sau economică și izolarea socială. Factori precum instabilitatea relațiilor de cuplu, responsabilitățile multiple, stresul economic, migrația parentală și normele culturale legate de rolurile de gen și educația copiilor contribuie la perpetuarea abuzului. În concluzie, studiul subliniază caracterul multidimensional al violenței în familie și evidențiază necesitatea elaborării unor politici publice integrate și includerii perspectivei demografice în elaborarea politicilor publice de prevenire și combatere a violenței domestice.

Cuvinte-cheie: violență în familie, structură demografică, victimologie, migrație, Republica Moldova, schimbări familiale.

1. Introduction

Domestic violence constitutes one of the most serious contemporary social problems, affecting the stability of family relationships, individual well-being, and the social development of communities. Domestic violence, also referred to as domestic abuse or family violence, is defined as violence occurring within a domestic setting, such as marriage or cohabitation (Shorey et al., 2023). According to the Law of the Republic of Moldova No. 45/2007 on the prevention and combating of domestic violence, family violence is defined as acts of physical, sexual, psychological, spiritual, or economic violence, excluding acts of self-defense or defense of another person, including threats of such acts, committed by

a family member against another member of the same family, causing material or moral harm to the victim (Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, 2007).

In the Republic of Moldova, demographic changes over the past decades—characterized by intense external migration, depopulation, population aging, and shifts in family patterns—have led to significant modifications in household structure and functioning. These processes can directly or indirectly influence the dynamics of intrafamilial conflicts and the risk of domestic violence. Statistical analysis of the evolution of domestic violence victims in the Republic of Moldova for the period 2015–2024, disaggregated by sex and age group, allows for the identification of relevant structural trends and the identification of the most vulnerable population categories.

A crucial aspect in the analysis of domestic violence is its multidimensional nature, determined by the interaction of individual, relational, community, and societal factors. The literature highlights that domestic violence cannot be explained by a single cause; rather, it results from power imbalances, social norms regarding gender roles, and socioeconomic conditions that can exacerbate household tensions. In this context, gender inequalities and the asymmetrical distribution of resources and responsibilities within the family constitute key determinants in the manifestation of violent behaviors.

Domestic violence should also be analyzed from the perspective of its intergenerational impact. Exposure of children to violence, whether as direct victims or as witnesses, has long-term consequences on their emotional, behavioral, and social development, contributing to the perpetuation of the cycle of violence. Thus, the phenomenon affects not only the individuals directly involved but also has broader implications for human capital and for the development of society as a whole. In addition, statistical analysis of domestic violence represents an essential tool for the formulation of effective public policies. Identification of temporal trends and vulnerable groups allows for the development of targeted interventions focused on prevention, protection, and support for victims. In this regard, the use of data disaggregated by sex and age groups contributes to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of the phenomenon and to the development of strategies adapted to the national context.

Although the phenomenon of domestic violence has been extensively analysed in the international literature, in the Republic of Moldova there is a limited number of studies that examine its evolution from a demographic perspective, using long-term official statistical series. The originality of the present study lies in the integrated analysis of the evolution of victims of domestic violence during the period 2015–2024, by correlating the gender dimension and age-group structure with the demographic and socioeconomic transformations characteristic of the Republic of Moldova. The research provides a demographic perspective on the distribution of victims and identifies population categories with increased vulnerability, supplying empirical evidence useful for underpinning public policies aimed at preventing and combating domestic violence.

2. Theoretical framework

Domestic violence constitutes a major field of research within the social and medical sciences, analyzed through the lens of theories regarding gender inequalities, power dynamics within couples, and the socio-economic determinants of deviant behaviors. Contemporary theoretical approaches highlight the systemic nature of this phenomenon, as well as the interdependence between individual, relational, and structural factors that contribute to its manifestation. In this context, the assessment of the prevalence and forms of violence occurring within intimate relationships represents an essential element for the development of prevention and intervention strategies.

International studies show that the dimensions of domestic violence are significant. It has been observed that physical or sexual violence, or both, against women by male intimate partners is highly widespread globally. In general, more than one in four (27%) women aged 15–49 who have ever had a partner have experienced physical or sexual violence, or both, by a current or former intimate partner at least once in their lifetime; and one in seven (13%) experienced it in the past year. This finding indicates that in 2018, up to 492 million women aged 15–49 who had ever had a partner were subjected to this type of violence by an intimate partner at least once since the age of 15. Attention is also drawn to the high number of recent or current intimate partner violence experienced by young women, with one in six women (16%) aged 15–24 estimated to have experienced physical or sexual violence, or both, by an intimate partner in the year preceding the survey (Sardinha et al., 2022).

The presented data highlight the systemic and extensive nature of domestic violence, particularly intimate partner violence against women. The global prevalence of 27% indicates that physical and/or sexual violence is not a marginal phenomenon but a structural one, integrated into gendered relationship dynamics and sustained by persistent power inequalities between men and women. This proportion reflects a major public health and human rights issue, with direct implications for the physical, psychological, and social well-being of victims. The difference between lifetime prevalence (27%) and past-year prevalence (13%) suggests both the repetitive nature of violence and the existence of cycles of victimization within intimate relationships. The estimated absolute number of approximately 492 million affected women underscores the global scale of the phenomenon and the need for coordinated international interventions. This figure transforms domestic violence from an individual problem into a societal one, impacting socio-economic development and gender equity. A particularly relevant aspect is the heightened vulnerability of young women (15–24 years), where recent violence prevalence reaches 16%. This suggests that the onset of intimate relationships is a critical period marked by increased risks, possibly due to lack of relational experience, internalization of traditional gender norms, or limited capacity to identify and manage abusive behaviors.

Studies focused on domestic violence against women, both lifetime and current, in low- and lower-middle-income countries indicate that the phenomenon is highly widespread and unacceptably high. The cumulative lifetime prevalence of intimate partner violence was 55%. The main categories were: lifetime physical violence — 39%; psychological violence — 45%; sexual violence — 20%. The cumulative prevalence of current intimate partner violence was 38%, with prevalence by type: physical violence 25%, psychological violence 30%, and sexual violence 7.0%. The prevalence of concurrent (multiple-type) partner violence was 13%. Individual, relational, community, and societal factors were associated with intimate partner violence (Semahegn et al., 2019).

The presented data highlight the extremely widespread nature of domestic violence against women in low- and lower-middle-income countries. The distribution of violence types shows that psychological and physical violence are the most frequent forms, suggesting that intimate partner abuse is not limited to visible aggression but also includes subtle yet persistent forms of control, intimidation, and emotional degradation. Sexual violence, although reported at a lower level, remains a serious component of abuse, often underreported due to stigma and restrictive cultural norms. The prevalence of current violence indicates that the phenomenon is not only a feature of past relationships but continues to actively affect the daily lives of a significant number of women. This aspect underscores the chronic nature of domestic violence and the difficulty of interrupting the cycle of abuse, especially in contexts with limited support resources.

A particularly relevant element is the coexistence of multiple forms of violence within the same relationship, highlighting the complexity of the phenomenon and the intensified impact on victims. Simultaneous exposure to physical, psychological, and sexual violence amplifies risks to mental and physical health and reduces victims' capacity to leave abusive relationships. Furthermore, identifying determinants at the individual, relational, community, and societal levels confirms the multidimensional nature of intimate partner violence. It is influenced not only by the characteristics of the individuals involved but also by relationship dynamics, social norms, economic conditions, and institutional effectiveness. In this regard, addressing the phenomenon requires integrated interventions simultaneously targeting prevention, victim protection, and transformation of the social norms that perpetuate violence.

The literature consistently highlights that children's exposure to domestic and familial violence is a widespread global phenomenon, with significant variations according to socio-economic and cultural contexts. Recent empirical studies indicate both the considerable scale of this problem and important differences across regions and demographic groups. The cumulative global prevalence of children's exposure to physical domestic and family violence was 17.3% for victims and 16.5% for witnesses. The highest values were recorded in Western Asia and Africa (victims = 42.8%; witnesses = 38.3%), and the lowest in developed Asia-Pacific (victims = 3.7%; witnesses = 5.4%). Boys were 25% more

likely than girls to be victims of physical violence in childhood, while both sexes were equally likely to be witnesses. These findings suggest that children's exposure to domestic and family violence is relatively frequent, affecting approximately one in six individuals globally by the age of 18. Regional variations in prevalence may reflect underlying economic conditions, cultural norms, and the availability of services (Whitten et al., 2024).

The data presented above highlight that children's exposure to domestic and family violence is a widespread global phenomenon, affecting a significant proportion of the population up to adulthood. The similar levels of children who are direct victims and those who are witnesses suggest that family violence is not limited to the direct relationship between perpetrator and victim but has an extended impact, influencing the entire family climate and children's psychosocial development. Marked regional differences indicate the important role of socio-economic and cultural contexts in shaping this phenomenon. Regions with higher exposure levels may reflect structural vulnerabilities, such as limited economic resources, reduced access to protective services, and social norms that tolerate or trivialize violence. Conversely, more developed regions tend to record lower levels, which may be associated with more effective institutional systems and greater awareness of children's rights.

Gender analysis shows that boys are more frequently exposed to the risk of becoming victims of physical violence, possibly due to cultural models that legitimize harsh discipline. At the same time, the absence of significant differences between girls and boys as witnesses indicates that violence affects children similarly, regardless of sex, when it occurs in the family environment.

International literature emphasizes that the distribution of domestic violence is not uniform across the population but shows significant variation according to individuals' life stage and family configuration. In this regard, demographic analysis allows for the identification of age groups with increased vulnerability and an understanding of social mechanisms that favor the occurrence of violence at certain stages of family life. According to family demography approaches, the family life cycle includes several main stages: couple formation, childbirth and child-rearing, mature family stage, and post-parental stage. International studies indicate that the risk of violence is often higher during periods characterized by demographic and social transitions, such as the beginning of married life or the period of raising young children. During these stages, tensions associated with adapting to family roles, economic pressures, and the redistribution of domestic responsibilities may generate conflicts that, in certain contexts, manifest as violent behaviors.

Family violence cannot be understood solely through the individual behaviors of perpetrators or victims; sociological literature emphasizes that the phenomenon results from the interaction of individual, relational, community, and structural factors. Explanatory models adopted in international research provide complementary perspectives for analyzing the causes and mechanisms of domestic violence. The ecological approach conceptualizes violence as a multifactorial

phenomenon, grounded in the interaction of personal, situational, and sociocultural factors (Heise, 1998). Domestic violence is perpetuated through multiple systems: at the microsystem level, patterns such as low education, alcohol and drug use, and emotional dependency; at the mesosystem level, lack of life skills, decision-making incapacity, and child abuse; at the exosystem level, low income, poverty, unemployment, and criminal history; and at the macrosystem level, spousal control behaviors and societal influences (Brito Jiménez & Rodríguez Ávila, 2024).

The family stress theory explains violence as a result of cumulative pressures and tensions within the household. This theoretical model focuses on four dominant domains, detailed but often disconnected: (1) exposure to three forms of physical violence — child physical abuse, interparental violence, and exposure to community violence; (2) multinational correlates and causes — for example, neighborhood characteristics, including concentrated disadvantage, as well as family characteristics, socioeconomic status, and family stress factors; (3) a range of outcomes — such as internalizing and externalizing mental health problems, role transitions, and academic results; and (4) multilevel and cross-domain mediators and moderators of effects — for example, school and community factors, family social support, and individual coping/adaptation resources (Foster & Brooks-Gunn, 2009).

The gender inequality theory highlights the role of power structures and social norms that favor male dominance within the family. According to this theory, domestic violence is more prevalent in societies or communities where male authority is emphasized; cultural norms that tolerate control, corporal discipline, or female submission contribute to the normalization of aggression; and gender inequality intersects with socio-economic factors, increasing the vulnerability of women and children.

Sociological studies emphasize that family violence can be transmitted intergenerationally, meaning that children exposed to violence in their own families may later develop aggressive behaviors or become victims in adult relationships. Scientific investigations have shown that individuals who were psychologically and/or physically abused in childhood by their own parents were more likely to reproduce the same pattern of violence toward their children. For instance, children experienced physical violence more frequently in larger families from parents who had themselves been subjected to physical violence in childhood by their fathers. Children experienced psychological violence more frequently from parents who had experienced psychological violence from their own parents during childhood (Rikić et al., 2017). This theory explains the perpetuation of the cycle of violence and highlights the importance of early interventions and psychosocial support.

The models presented provide a multidimensional approach to domestic violence, integrating individual, relational, community, and structural factors. In demographic and sociological analyses, these perspectives allow for: the interpretation of sex- and age-based differences; understanding the relationship

between socio-economic stress and family violence; and the development of evidence-based public policies for prevention, protection, and social support.

3. Methodology

The research adopts a retrospective descriptive longitudinal design based on official data provided by the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova concerning victims of domestic violence. The data were extracted from the official statistical database of the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova (PxWeb platform: https://statbank.statistica.md/PxWeb/pxweb/ro/30%20Statistica%20sociala/30%20Statistica%20sociala__12%20JUS__JUS010/JUS011800.px/).

The study covers the period 2015–2024, representing ten consecutive years, which allows the identification of medium-term trends and the analysis of the evolution of domestic violence within the social and legislative context of the Republic of Moldova. The analyzed data are derived from the registration of all officially reported cases of domestic violence at the national level, thus providing a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon within the limits of the existing reporting system. The analytical framework focuses on three main dimensions: annual temporal evolution (2015–2024), gender distribution, and demographic segmentation across five age groups (0–14 years, 15–17 years, 18–34 years, 35–64 years, 65+ years).

To ensure comparability across years and demographic groups, the absolute number of registered victims was converted into incidence rates expressed per 100,000 inhabitants. The rates presented in Table 2 were calculated by relating the number of officially registered victims of domestic violence to the population with usual residence corresponding to the same sex and age group. The calculations were performed separately for the total population, women, men, and each analyzed age category. This methodological approach allows for a more accurate assessment of the relative magnitude of domestic violence and facilitates comparisons between population groups with different demographic structures.

The statistical analysis was primarily descriptive and aimed to identify temporal patterns and demographic differences in registered domestic violence victimization. Absolute frequencies, percentages, and incidence rates per 100,000 population were calculated and compared across years, sex, and age groups. Comparative trend analysis was used to examine changes over time and to identify population groups with consistently higher levels of registered victimization. Given that the study is based on complete national administrative records rather than sample survey data, the analysis focuses on observed population-level trends rather than statistical inference based on sampling variability.

These official statistics lend legitimacy and credibility to the analysis, as they are collected in accordance with national statistical reporting standards; however, the interpretation of results must consider the inherent limitations of administrative data, including underreporting (with many cases remaining

unreported), potential legislative variations in legal definitions or reporting procedures, the pandemic impact during 2020–2022, which may have caused anomalies due to COVID-19 restrictions, and socio-cultural factors influencing victims' propensity to report violence.

4. Results

During the analyzed period (2015–2024), significant fluctuations in the total number of domestic violence victims were observed. In 2015, 1,289 victims were registered, representing the peak value of the series. Subsequently, until 2020, a gradual decrease in the number of victims was noted, reaching a minimum of 517 cases. From 2021 to 2024, an increasing trend is evident, culminating in 926 victims in 2024 (National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova). This evolution may reflect both an intensification of the phenomenon and improvements in mechanisms for identifying and reporting cases of domestic violence. From a demographic and social perspective, the increase in the number of victims may be associated with factors such as economic instability, changes in household structures, and heightened social vulnerabilities.

The gender analysis shows a clear predominance of women among domestic violence victims throughout the entire analyzed period. In 2015, of the total 1,289 victims, 1,068 were women, representing approximately 82.9% of the total. Although the absolute number of victims fluctuated in subsequent years, the gender distribution remained relatively constant. In 2024, women accounted for 653 of the total 926 victims, representing approximately 70.5%. At the same time, the number of male victims is significantly lower but relatively stable: 221 men in 2015 and 273 men in 2024 (National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova). This pattern is consistent with theoretical explanations emphasizing unequal power relations within families and the structural vulnerabilities of women associated with economic dependence, labour market inequalities, and caregiving responsibilities. Nevertheless, the slight increase in the number of male victims in recent years may indicate a greater willingness to report cases or an expansion of institutional recognition of violence against men in the family environment.

The analysis of the victims' age structure reveals the existence of significant differences. In 2024, the distribution of domestic violence victims by age shows a predominant concentration among middle-aged adults: 470 cases (50.8%). This is followed by the 18–34 age group with 212 victims (22.9%), children aged 0–14 years with 108 cases (11.7%), and elderly individuals aged 65+ with 103 cases (11.1%). Adolescent youths aged 15–17 represent a smaller share, with 33 victims (3.6%).

Children and adolescents (0–17 years) represent a vulnerable category within the phenomenon of domestic violence. In the 0–14 age group, the number of victims decreased significantly between 2015 and 2020, from 97 to 17 cases. However, after 2021, an increasing trend is observed, culminating in 108 victims in

2024, which represents the highest value for this category across the entire analyzed period (National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova). From a sociological perspective, child victimization is commonly interpreted as being associated with the structural dependency relationships characteristic of this life stage. Children are entirely dependent on adults for protection, care, and socialization, and this dependence can transform the family environment into a vulnerable space in situations where conflicts or abusive behaviors exist. From a sociological perspective, violence against children is often associated with factors such as parental stress and economic difficulties; low levels of parental education; intergenerational transmission of violent behaviors; and the consumption of alcohol or other substances.

In the context of the Republic of Moldova, the phenomenon can also be interpreted in relation to parental migration, which has generated a considerable number of children left in the care of relatives or grandparents. The absence of direct parental presence may lead to supervision difficulties, emotional problems, or the emergence of forms of neglect and abuse. However, the data used in this research do not allow for direct testing of the causal relationships between these factors and the evolution of the phenomenon, the interpretations being of a theoretical and explanatory nature. Another important factor is related to cultural norms regarding child-rearing. In certain social contexts, corporal punishment continues to be perceived as a legitimate method of discipline. These cultural norms may lead to the normalization of violent behaviors in the parental education process, making the boundary between discipline and abuse often difficult to delineate. In this context, the increase in reported cases may also reflect a gradual change in social perceptions, whereby behaviors previously considered acceptable are increasingly recognized as forms of violence.

One possible explanation discussed in the literature concerns the delayed effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the identification and reporting of child abuse cases. During the pandemic, mobility restrictions and reduced social interactions limited children's contact with teachers, social workers, or other individuals who could have identified abuse situations. Consequently, some cases of violence against children may have remained unreported or unidentified during 2020–2021, being reported later with the resumption of institutional and school activities. This interpretation should be regarded as a theoretical explanation rather than an empirical finding of the present study.

This increase may also reflect the intensification of mechanisms for detecting child abuse, as well as greater institutional and societal awareness regarding the protection of minors. Gender analysis in this age group shows that boys and girls are affected in similar proportions. This situation suggests that, for minors, vulnerability factors are less related to gender compared to adults and more related to children's structural dependence on the family environment.

Adolescence represents a transitional stage between childhood and maturity, characterized by complex processes of identity formation, personal autonomy, and renegotiation of relationships with parental authority. Among

adolescents aged 15–17, the number of victims is lower compared to other age groups, ranging between 14 and 58 cases annually (National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova). Victimization of adolescents within the family can be sociologically explained by several factors: intergenerational conflicts related to autonomy and control; tensions associated with socialization and discipline processes; and communication difficulties between generations. In this group, the predominance of females persists, which may indicate early manifestations of gender-based violence in family relationships. Cultural norms regarding gender roles and authority within the family may contribute to the emergence of coercive or abusive behaviors toward adolescent girls. At the same time, adolescents may become indirect victims of adult conflicts, being exposed to the existing domestic violence climate within the family.

The increase in the total number of minor victims in 2024 may reflect an intensification in the identification and reporting of cases of child abuse. Institutional analyses indicate that, in recent years, the process of screening and referring children in at-risk situations has improved, which may lead to an increase in the number of officially identified cases.

The highest levels of victimization are recorded among the adult population, particularly in the age groups 18–34 years and 35–64 years. The 18–34 age group includes individuals in the stage of family formation, consolidation of couple relationships, and transition toward economic and social stability. In 2015, 391 victims were recorded, of whom 354 were women. After a decline between 2017 and 2023, the number of victims increased again in 2024 (212 cases). This period is characterized by major transformations in social roles, including the assumption of marital and parental responsibilities. In this context, domestic violence may arise from factors such as couple relationship instability; difficulties in adapting to family roles; tensions related to economic resources; and jealousy or control in intimate relationships. In transitional societies, including the Republic of Moldova, young adults frequently face economic and professional uncertainty, which may amplify stress within couple relationships. Additionally, external migration and the temporary separation of partners can generate conflicts related to family roles and the management of economic resources.

The 35–64 age group represents the category with the highest number of victims throughout the analyzed period. One possible interpretation proposed in the literature is the accumulation of tensions within long-term family relationships. In 2015, 648 victims were recorded, and in 2024, 470 victims were recorded (National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova). This life stage is characterized by multiple social and economic responsibilities, including parental responsibilities toward children, financial and professional obligations, and the care of elderly family members. These pressures can generate chronic family stress, which in certain situations may manifest as aggressive or abusive behaviors. In addition, long-term couple relationships may accumulate unresolved conflicts, which can escalate into situations of violence.

The 65 years and older category presents a relatively lower number of victims. However, the data evolution indicates some instability in the phenomenon. In 2015, 95 victims were recorded, increasing to 103 cases in 2024 (National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova). Elderly women constitute the majority of victims in this category. Violence against older adults may be associated with vulnerabilities such as economic or physical dependency, social isolation, deteriorating health, and reliance on care provided by family members. In societies characterized by demographic aging, this form of violence may become increasingly relevant. In some cases, violence against the elderly may take more subtle forms, such as neglect, deprivation of resources, or control over their assets and income. In the context of the demographic aging process in the Republic of Moldova, the issue of violence against older adults may become increasingly significant for social policy analysis and protection mechanisms.

Sociological interpretation of the data highlights that domestic violence is closely linked to life cycle stages and the structure of social relationships within the family. In childhood, vulnerability is determined by structural dependence on adults. During adolescence, intergenerational conflicts and identity formation processes may generate family tensions. In early adulthood, couple relationship instability and socioeconomic pressures may promote the emergence of violence. In mature adulthood, the accumulation of family and economic responsibilities can amplify intrafamilial stress. In the case of older adults, vulnerability is associated with dependency and changes in family structure.

Table 1. Victims of Domestic Violence in the Republic of Moldova, 2015–2024

		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total		1289	1059	760	778	539	517	648	698	685	926
Women		1068	861	553	563	373	333	442	491	488	653
Men		221	198	207	215	166	184	206	207	197	273
Total, 0-14 years		97	75	57	43	32	17	30	45	38	108
Women		51	34	26	21	13	7	13	17	20	53
Men		46	41	31	22	19	10	17	28	18	55
Total, 15-17 years		58	30	23	14	22	18	24	20	28	33
	Women	39	22	17	9	10	7	9	14	18	19
	Men	19	8	6	5	12	11	15	6	10	14
Total, 18-34 years		391	326	202	220	200	163	183	165	122	212
Women		354	297	169	164	162	123	147	129	87	166
Men		37	29	33	56	38	40	36	36	35	46
Total, 35-64 years		648	515	398	434	234	283	343	389	434	470
	Women	555	427	284	326	156	179	225	278	326	341
	Men	93	88	114	108	78	104	118	111	108	129
Total, 65 years and over		95	113	80	67	51	36	68	79	63	103
	Women	69	81	57	43	32	17	48	53	37	74
	Men	26	32	23	24	19	19	20	26	26	29

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova. *Victims of domestic violence by age group and sex, 2015–2024*. Statistical database: https://statbank.statistica.md/PxWeb/pxweb/ro/30%20Statistica%20sociala/30%20Statistica%20sociala__12%20JUS__JUS010/JUS011800.px/

The analysis of incidence rates complements the interpretation based on absolute numbers by controlling for changes in population size over time. Overall, the rate-based indicators largely confirm the patterns identified in Table 1, indicating that the observed differences between population groups are not merely the result of demographic changes but reflect genuine differences in the risk of registered domestic violence victimization.

At the aggregate level, the incidence rate decreased substantially from 45.28 cases per 100,000 inhabitants in 2015 to 19.56 in 2020, followed by a gradual increase to 38.34 cases in 2024 (Table 2). This evolution closely mirrors the trend observed in the absolute number of victims, confirming that the decline until 2020 and the subsequent increase after 2021 cannot be explained solely by population decline, but likely reflect changes in the occurrence, identification, and reporting of domestic violence cases.

The gender-specific incidence rates also confirm the findings presented in Table 1. Throughout the entire study period, women consistently recorded considerably higher victimization rates than men. In 2024, the incidence rate reached 51.29 cases per 100,000 women, compared with 23.9 cases per 100,000 men, indicating that the gender disparity observed in absolute numbers persists even after adjusting for population size. Therefore, women remain the population group with the highest risk of registered domestic violence victimization.

The age-specific incidence rates largely support the age distribution identified in the previous analysis. Adults aged 35–64 years continue to present the highest overall risk, with incidence rates remaining consistently higher than those recorded in other age groups throughout most of the observation period. Similarly, the 18–34-year age group also maintains elevated incidence levels, particularly among women, confirming that working-age adults represent the demographic categories most exposed to domestic violence.

The incidence rate analysis also reinforces the conclusions regarding children and adolescents. Among children aged 0–14 years, the sharp increase in the incidence rate from 3.5 cases per 100,000 children in 2020 to 22.8 cases in 2024 confirms that the increase observed in absolute numbers reflects a genuine rise in registered victimization rather than demographic fluctuations. Moreover, the nearly identical incidence rates recorded for girls (23.0) and boys (22.7) support the conclusion drawn from Table 1 that domestic violence affects children of both sexes relatively equally, with vulnerability being primarily associated with age and dependency rather than gender. Among adolescents aged 15–17 years, incidence rates likewise confirm the tendency identified in the absolute data. Although the total number of victims remains lower than in adult age groups, female adolescents consistently present higher incidence rates than males, particularly in recent years. This finding strengthens the evidence that gender differences begin to emerge during adolescence and become more pronounced in adulthood. The analysis of incidence rates among older adults also supports the interpretation based on absolute numbers. Although persons aged 65 years and over represent a smaller proportion of all registered victims, older women continue to exhibit higher

incidence rates than older men (28.3 versus 18.1 cases per 100,000 in 2024), confirming that gender-related vulnerabilities persist even in later life.

Overall, the incidence rate analysis validates the principal findings obtained from the analysis of absolute numbers. The highest risk of registered domestic violence is concentrated among women and adults aged 18–64 years, while children and older adults remain vulnerable groups whose victimization is strongly associated with dependency relationships. The consistency between absolute and rate-based indicators strengthens the robustness of the observed patterns and suggests that recent increases in registered domestic violence represent not only changes in the number of reported victims but also a real increase in the population-level risk of victimization. These findings provide a stronger empirical basis for the development of targeted prevention and intervention policies adapted to different stages of the life course and to the specific vulnerabilities of each demographic group.

Table 2. Incidence Rate of Registered Domestic Violence Victims by Sex and Age Group in the Republic of Moldova, 2015–2024 (per 100,000 population)

	2015	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**
Total	45.28	37.48	27.33	28.50	20.08	19.56	24.67	27.21	27.49	38.34
Women	72.26	58.75	38.24	39.52	26.59	24.10	32.18	36.45	36.98	51.29
Men	16.1	14.6	15.5	16.5	12.9	14.6	16.4	17.0	16.8	23.9
Total, 0-14 years	18.9	14.7	11.1	8.4	6.4	3.5	6.2	9.6	8.5	22.8
Women	20.5	13.7	10.4	8.5	5.3	2.9	5.6	7.5	9.2	23.0
Men	17.5	15.6	11.8	8.4	7.4	4.0	6.9	11.6	7.8	22.7
Total, 15-17 years	57.9	31.8	25.8	16.1	26.4	21.5	28.5	23.6	33.0	37.4
Women	79.9	48.0	39.3	21.5	24.8	17.3	21.9	34.0	43.8	43.7
Men	37.0	16.4	13.2	11.1	27.8	25.5	34.8	13.8	22.9	31.3
Total, 18-34 years	51.0	43.7	28.4	32.8	31.6	27.1	31.6	30.6	24.8	49.4
Women	93.0	80.5	48.0	49.0	51.2	41.1	51.2	48.1	34.7	76.4
Men	9.6	7.7	9.2	16.7	12.0	13.3	12.3	13.4	14.5	21.7
Total, 35-64 years	56.8	45.4	35.6	39.3	21.3	26.0	31.4	35.9	40.8	46.9
Women	93.2	72.2	48.7	56.5	27.2	31.5	39.5	49.2	58.4	65.6
Men	17.1	16.2	21.3	20.5	14.9	19.9	22.6	21.5	21.4	26.7
Total, 65 years and over	29.1	33.3	22.8	18.6	13.8	9.4	17.5	20.1	15.5	24.4
Women	33.7	38.3	26.1	19.2	13.9	7.2	19.9	21.7	14.7	28.3
Men	21.3	25.1	17.3	17.6	13.6	13.1	13.6	17.6	17.0	18.1

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova. *Victims of domestic violence by age group and sex, 2015–2024*; *Population with usual residence by age, area and sex, at the beginning of the year, 2014-2026*. Statistical database.
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5. Discussion

The original contribution of this study lies in the use of a complete series of official administrative data for the period 2015–2024 and in the integration of the demographic analysis of victims of domestic violence into an interpretative framework that takes into account the social transformations in the Republic of Moldova. Unlike studies that approach the phenomenon predominantly from a legal or psychosocial perspective, this research highlights the specific features of the distribution of victims by sex and age and reveals their implications for the development of social policies.

The demographic analysis of family violence victims for the period 2015–2024 highlights several important trends. First, the phenomenon exhibits a pronounced gender dimension, with women consistently representing over two-thirds of all cases throughout the analyzed period. Second, the age distribution indicates that the adult population, particularly individuals aged 35–64 years, is the most affected, reflecting prolonged exposure to intrafamilial conflicts. This pattern does not reflect isolated incidents alone, but rather a persistent pattern of tension and abuse, reflecting both the dynamics of couple relationships and the influence of contextual factors such as economic pressures, multiple family responsibilities, and stress associated with caring for children and elderly family members.

This trend can also be interpreted in light of the family life cycle theory, which posits that conflicts and tensions evolve in parallel with changes in roles and responsibilities within the family. Adults in this age category are often simultaneously engaged in multiple interdependent relationships—with partners, children, elderly parents, or other household members—which may increase the risk of violence through accumulated stress and repeated conflictual interactions. Moreover, the high prevalence among this group suggests that the effects of violence are not limited to immediate manifestations but also have long-term consequences on physical and mental health, social functioning, and professional performance. These findings underscore the need for prevention and intervention strategies tailored to mature adults, including psychological support, conflict mediation, and family education programs designed to reduce chronic tensions and promote healthy relational patterns.

The significant increase in the number of child and adolescent victims in 2024 may indicate an emerging issue regarding child safety within the family, highlighting the need to strengthen mechanisms for child protection and prevention. Furthermore, the presence of violence cases among older adults suggests vulnerabilities associated with demographic aging processes and transformations in family structure. The upward trend observed in recent years indicates the persistence of social and familial risks despite institutional prevention measures.

The socioeconomic context represents a major determinant of domestic violence. The Republic of Moldova faces a series of economic challenges, including high levels of relative poverty, social inequalities, and economic instability.

Socioeconomic stress can generate tensions within households, particularly in situations characterized by unemployment or occupational instability; insufficient income; economic dependency among family members; and limited access to social and support services. These conditions can amplify family conflicts and increase the risk of violent behaviors. In this context, the increase in the number of victims in recent years may reflect the cumulative effects of economic difficulties on intrafamilial relationships.

Research addressing this issue has identified factors associated with domestic violence, including: early age at marriage, low educational attainment, inadequate fulfillment of household duties, financial problems, patriarchal families, „inappropriate" cooking relative to the husband's preferences, dowry-related issues, the birth of a female child, poverty, women's employment as well as female unemployment, the presence of other children in the family and perceived neglect by the husband, the husband's unemployment, and personal experiences of domestic violence for both partners. Additionally, significant risk factors include the husband's substance dependence and the wife's refusal to engage in sexual relations (Christaki et al., 2023).

An essential element for interpreting the recent evolution of the phenomenon is the COVID-19 pandemic, which had significant consequences for social and economic life. The pandemic period was characterized by mobility restrictions, social isolation, and increased psychological stress. These conditions contributed, in many societies, to the intensification of domestic violence, a phenomenon often described as a „shadow pandemic." Moreover, the pandemic amplified existing vulnerabilities within households, particularly those characterized by economic precariousness or conflictual family relationships. Scientific studies have also captured this situation in its complexity, emphasizing that fear and uncertainty associated with pandemics create a conducive environment that can exacerbate or trigger various forms of violence. Measures such as social distancing, home confinement, mobility restrictions, and the closure of essential community resources are likely to significantly increase the risk of domestic violence (Campbell, 2020).

The patterns identified in the Republic of Moldova are broadly consistent with developments reported in other Central and Eastern European countries. Administrative statistics collected across European Union Member States indicate that women consistently constitute the majority of officially registered victims of domestic or intimate partner violence, while adult women of working age remain the population group at the highest risk of victimization (European Institute for Gender Equality). At the same time, European administrative data reveal substantial differences between countries in legal definitions, recording practices, and reporting systems, limiting direct comparisons of absolute numbers or incidence rates. Nevertheless, the predominance of female victims and the concentration of victimization among adults observed in Moldova correspond to the general demographic profile reported across Europe.

Although the overall demographic profile of victims resembles that reported in many Central and Eastern European countries, the Republic of Moldova presents several contextual particularities that may influence domestic violence dynamics. These include sustained international labour migration, rapid population ageing, extensive rural depopulation, and relatively high levels of economic vulnerability. Such demographic and socioeconomic characteristics may shape both family relationships and access to institutional support services, potentially influencing the reporting and registration of domestic violence. Because the present study relies exclusively on administrative statistics, these contextual factors should be regarded as explanatory hypotheses requiring further investigation through individual-level survey or qualitative research.

6. Research limitations

The findings of this study should be interpreted considering several limitations related to the use of administrative data. First, the statistics analyzed include only officially registered cases of domestic violence and therefore do not capture the full magnitude of the phenomenon. Due to factors such as fear, stigma, economic dependence, limited access to support services, or lack of trust in institutions, many cases may remain unreported, meaning that the actual incidence of domestic violence is likely higher than the officially recorded one. Second, variations over time may reflect not only changes in the occurrence of domestic violence but also changes in reporting practices, institutional capacity, and legislative or procedural developments affecting case identification and registration. The COVID-19 pandemic may have additionally influenced reporting patterns by limiting victims' contact with support services and institutions. Finally, the aggregated nature of the available data does not allow for analysis of individual-level risk factors or causal relationships. Therefore, factors such as socioeconomic conditions, migration, family structure, or other vulnerabilities discussed in the interpretation section should be considered as possible explanatory factors rather than empirically tested determinants.

7. Policy implications and recommendations

The findings of this study highlight the need for differentiated public policy responses adapted to the demographic profile and specific vulnerabilities of domestic violence victims identified in the Republic of Moldova. The concentration of registered cases among women, particularly those aged 18–64 years, indicates the importance of strengthening gender-sensitive prevention and protection mechanisms. Priority measures should include improving access to specialized support services, expanding counselling and assistance programs, ensuring timely institutional responses, and strengthening referral mechanisms between police, social assistance, healthcare, and justice institutions.

The significant increase in the number of registered child victims, especially among children aged 0–14 years, underlines the need to reinforce early identification and prevention systems. Schools, healthcare providers, and social services should play a more active role in detecting children at risk and ensuring appropriate interventions. At the same time, preventive programs promoting non-violent parenting practices, positive discipline methods, and awareness of children's rights should be strengthened, particularly in communities with increased social vulnerability.

Although older adults represent a smaller proportion of registered victims, the observed increase in this group highlights the need for targeted measures addressing violence associated with dependency, social isolation, and caregiving relationships. The development of community-based social services, improved monitoring of vulnerable elderly persons, and increased awareness among caregivers and professionals working with older adults should become important elements of policies addressing demographic ageing and social protection.

The fluctuations observed during 2015–2024, including the increase in registered cases after 2021, also demonstrate the importance of strengthening systems for monitoring and evaluating domestic violence. Improving the integration of administrative data from different institutions would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and support evidence-based decision-making.

Finally, although the present study does not allow direct assessment of causal factors, the identified demographic patterns suggest the importance of complementary socioeconomic interventions aimed at reducing vulnerabilities associated with economic dependency, social exclusion, and limited access to support resources. Measures supporting employment opportunities, social protection, and access to community services may contribute to creating protective environments and reducing risk factors associated with domestic violence.

Overall, effective public policies require an integrated and life-course approach that combines prevention, early identification, victim protection, institutional cooperation, and socioeconomic support. Policies should be tailored to the specific needs of different population groups, recognizing that women, children, and older adults experience distinct forms of vulnerability within the family environment.

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