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PERCEPTIONS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND DIGITAL VIOLENCE AMONG STUDENTS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK: BETWEEN NORMALIZATION, RISKS AND MECHANISMS OF CONTROL

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Abstract: The research explores the perceptions of female students enrolled in the Department of Social Work, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, West University of Timișoara, regarding domestic violence and digital violence. A descriptive design was employed, using a qualitative method, with fifteen individual interviews conducted with female students aged between 18 and 23. The main results reveal a complex understanding of the phenomenon, with domestic and digital violence being interconnected but producing different effects in certain areas. Respondents believe that in contemporary society there is a need for specialized interventions to counter gender-based violence and to stop the perpetuation of abuse against women. The findings were organized into three broad themes were studied: perceptions of domestic and digital violence, romantic relationships in the online romantic relationships and their risks, as well as the direct consequences of toxic relationships in the digital sphere. The practical implications point to a wide range of solutions and strategies, from awareness campaigns and continuous training of police forces to the inclusion of sexual education in educational institutions and the development of prevention mechanisms in the digital environment.

Keywords*:* domestic violence, digital violence, students, abusive control, perceptions

Résumé : La recherche explore les perceptions des étudiantes inscrites au Département de travail social, Faculté de sociologie et de travail social, Université de l'Ouest de Timișoara, en termes de violence domestique et de violence numérique. Un plan descriptif a été utilisé, en utilisant une méthode qualitative, et quinze entretiens individuels ont été appliqués à des étudiantes âgées de 18 à 23 ans. Les principaux résultats révèlent une compréhension complexe du phénomène, la violence domestique et numérique étant interconnectées, mais produisant des effets différents dans certains domaines. Les personnes interrogées estiment que la société contemporaine a besoin d'interventions spécialisées pour lutter contre la violence sexiste et cesser de perpétuer la maltraitance des femmes. Les résultats ont été organisés en trois thèmes principaux : la perception de la violence domestique et

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numérique, les relations amoureuses en ligne et leurs risques, ainsi que les conséquences directes des relations toxiques dans la sphère numérique. Les implications pratiques indiquent un large éventail de solutions et de stratégies, allant des campagnes de sensibilisation et de la formation continue des forces de police à l'inclusion de l'éducation sexuelle dans les institutions.

Mots-clés : violence domestique, violence numérique, étudiants, contrôle abusif, perceptions

Rezumat: Cercetarea explorează percepțiile studenților de sex feminin înscriși în Departamentul de Asistență Socială, Facultatea de Sociologie și Asistență Socială, Universitatea de Vest din Timișoara, în ceea ce privește violența domestică și violența digitală. S-a utilizat un design descriptiv, folosind o metodă calitativă, fiind aplicate cincisprezece interviuri individuale studenților de sex feminin cu vârste cuprinse între 18 și 23 de ani. Principalele rezultate dezvăluie o înțelegere complexă a fenomenului, violența domestică și cea digitală fiind interconectate, dar producând efecte diferite în anumite domenii. Respondenții consideră că societatea contemporană are nevoie de intervenții specializate pentru a contracara violența bazată pe gen și pentru a opri perpetuarea abuzului împotriva femeilor. Rezultatele au fost organizate în trei mari teme: percepția violenței domestice și digitale, relațiile romantice online și riscurile acestora, precum și consecințele directe ale relațiilor toxice în sfera digitală. Implicațiile practice indică o gamă largă de soluții și strategii, de la campanii de conștientizare și formare continuă a forțelor de poliție până la includerea educației sexuale în instituțiile de învățământ și dezvoltarea mecanismelor de prevenție în mediul digital.

Cuvinte-cheie: violență domestică, violență digitală, studenți, control abuziv, percepții

1. Theme and objective of the research

The article „Perceptions of domestic violence and digital violence among students in the department of social work: between normalization, risks and mechanisms of control" addresses a contemporary issue that has been widely debated both nationally and internationally, namely abusive relationships that originate in the digital environment. From a relational perspective, many individuals choose to seek partners online without being fully aware of the potential risks involved. They may encounter harassment, dependency, control, verbal and emotional abuse, and once the relationship extends into offline interactions, the consequences can become even more severe.

Romanian Law 217/2003 states that „domestic violence means any intentional inaction or action of physical, sexual, psychological, economic, social, spiritual or cyber 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 lived with the victim."

Domestic violence may take the following forms: verbal violence, psychological violence, physical violence, sexual violence, social violence, economic violence, spiritual violence, cyber violence.

The same law also defines cyber violence as „online harassment, online gender-based hate speech, online stalking, online threats, non-consensual publication of information and intimate graphic content, illegal access to intercept private communications and data, and any other form of misuse of information technology and communications through computers, and smartphones or other similar devices that use telecommunications or can connect to the Internet and transmit and use social media or email services to embarrass, humiliate, scare, threaten, silence the victim."

The use of technology has become an integral part of contemporary society. However, along with the positive aspects, we also observe various forms of harassment and abuse. In general, individuals are potentially vulnerable to such attitudes and behaviors, regardless of age. In the digital environment, digital violence may occur between individuals regardless of perceived power differences. In the specialized literature, we find different typologies, characteristics, and particularities of both victims and abusers. Studies suggest that long-term solutions and strategies can only be effective if the behavior of victims of digital violence, as well as that of abusers, is thoroughly studied to understand both the differences and the similarities (Mirić & Vasiljevic-Prodanovic, 2022; Ansary, 2020).

In many cases, romantic relationships that originate in the online environment continue in the continue offline. An increasingly common risk is related to sexual violence, which is becoming ever more present in the digital sphere. In the specialized literature, this phenomenon is often referred to by the phrase „he-said-she-said." Some criminal investigations take into account digital evidence and proceed to determine whether these abusers are, in fact, sexual offenders. At the same time, there is a risk that such evidence may be deemed insufficient, and therefore unable to establish the perpetrator's guilt. The specialized literature also introduces the concept of the „digital witness," which is employed in the context of sexual violence occurring in digital environments (Dodge, 2018; Powell, 2015).

The constant evolution of technology has brought with it new forms of online violence and harassment. In large-scale research, the term „offline intimate partner violence" is frequently used, which highlights the real-world dimension of relationships mediated by the online environment and social networks. These forms may be observed through persistent technological surveillance, emotional abuse via social media, threats aimed at obtaining intimate images, as well as threats that such images will be published. At the same time, the two types of violence—domestic and digital—may intersect, thereby becoming significantly more harmful (Hearn et al., 2023; Wibberley et al., 2018).

The phenomenon of domestic violence and digital violence has become an intersectional issue related to gender issues manifested at the global level, as both women over the age of eighteen and adolescent girls face abuse, ultimately becoming victims or survivors of abuse. Whereas in the past domestic violence was linked to family background, resources, and education, it is now directly correlated

with the increasingly widespread use of social networks (Bailey et al., 2021; Barter & Koulu, 2021; Phippen & Brennan, 2021).

In the digital era, social networks have expanded and become part of everyday life. They have become as important as communication in public or private spaces; however, the risk of abuse is increasing in the online environment. Violence against women is directly related to gender, being observed as a phenomenon distinct from digital violence in general (Reyes González – Cantu Ortiz, 2021).

Valero (2021) conducted a study on communication and the presence of violence in the digital environment, both among faculty members and students, once interactions shifted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The main findings reveal that, with the change in the medium of activity, reports of digital violence increased, both among faculty and within student communities. A warning sign highlighted by the author is that digital violence is predominantly addressed in the context of severe issues such as child pornography and sexual violence, without encompassing the emotional dimension or the transgressions arising from bullying.

The literature highlights several warning signs related to the rapid changes that have occurred with digitalization and the evolution of information technology. In the recent past, violence against women manifested itself either in private or in public spaces. In this context, communication platforms need to implement monitoring algorithms in order to be alerted to certain linguistic patterns that may endanger an individual's integrity (Reyes González – Cantu Ortiz, 2021).

Digital violence is on the rise not only in Romania but also globally. In Australia, it is directly regarded as a serious social problem, as technology enables abusers technology enables abusers to exercise coercive control over their victims and violence emerges in connection with the victim's gender. There are four main spheres in which digital violence manifests: intimate relationships marked by control, abuse that occurs during separation, and the lack of parental education regarding the use of social media platforms (Dragiewicz et al., 2021; Aghtaie et al., 2018).

Jurasz & Barker (2021) argue that the unlimited time spent in the online space, for various purposes such as entertainment, social interaction, communication, or professional activities, has led to a wide range of behaviors and attitudes, both positive and negative. Moreover, everything that happens in the digital environment is closely connected to society's perception of different aspects such as romantic relationships, property, and profit. In many cases, users forget social norms and behave differently online.

When considering the evolution of digital violence, one can start from the use of email, which led to various forms of spam, then move to social media posts, which may generate bullying, and to communication through chat messaging, where the risks include hate speech, threats, harassment, and violence. All these reflect a broader problem of internet misuse, driven by self-interest and revenge.

In the specialized literature, digital violence is identified as a form of criminality (McGlynn & Rackley, 2017; Lewis et al., 2017).

Reyns et al. (2011) discussed marital characteristics and online risks. The authors emphasize that individuals who are not in a relationship are almost twice as likely to become victims in a relationship formed online. Other socio-demographic characteristics refer to the type of family of origin, educational level, willingness to form a relationship, its duration, the frequency of offline meetings, religion, and age.

Regarding the consequences of abusive online relationships, Garcia-Rojas et al. (2023) state that 20% of victims reported feeling dominated, emotionally abused, and isolated. Additionally, denigration in the online space is another negative effect brought about by digital violence. The authors argue that digital violence is more frequent among students and is often not strictly linked to offline real-life experiences.

Interestingly, there are differences regarding the manifestation of digital violence. Adams et al. (2021) reveal that the most frequent problems occur in rural areas, where cultural, religious, and educational barriers exist. The main explanation is related to patriarchal conceptions in which women are forced to remain silent and submissive. At the same time, poor education leads to digital illiteracy, which makes women vulnerable to violence.

In the context of the evolution of information technologies, it is easy to observe that temporal and spatial boundaries can be overcome through digital contact. Self-expression, interactions, and human relationships have changed, as social networks enable instant communication from anywhere in the world. Alongside the obvious benefits, criminal networks have expanded, and gender-based violence has become increasingly present, as has the spread of hatred directed toward people (Barter et al., 2017; Harris & Woodlock, 2019).

Harris & Vittis (2020) argued that digital violence emerged as a result of a sense of insecurity and as a continuation of violent acts from the offline environment, and with this phenomenon, women experience repeated victimization.

The present study focuses on the impact of domestic and digital violence on women and highlights the need to understand this phenomenon directly from the perspective of women, who, according to previous studies, are the most affected. Moreover, the analysis of women's perceptions can be relevant for gaining a deeper understanding of the consequences that may arise after abusive episodes and of the necessity for competent solutions to respond effectively to this increasingly prevalent phenomenon, which is growing day by day.

2. Research methodology

The purpose of the research is to identify the perceptions of female students from the Department of Social Work, aged between 18 and 23, regarding domestic violence and digital violence against women.

The objectives of the research are as follows.

O1: To identify and critically analyze the perceptions of female students in the Department of Social Work concerning digital violence and its implications.

O2: To analyze the risks and challenges encountered by women in the digital sphere

O3: To identify and examine the perceived consequences of digital violence experienced by women.

The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the perceptions of female students within the Department of Social Work regarding digital violence and its implications?
2. What are the risks and challenges faced by women in the digital environment?
3. What are the consequences of digital violence experienced by the women population?

With regard to the research method, a qualitative approach was employed, using a structured interview guide consisting of eight questions. The structured interview guide consists of eight questions focused on the following themes: the perception of domestic and digital violence among female students from the Department of Social Work, the romantic relationships initiated online and their associated risks, and the consequences of digital violence. The data were collected in August 2025 and processed in September 2025. Respondents live in Timisoara and were selected through non-probability purposive sampling because they are students and are enrolled in the Social Work programme, and their perspective is important to understand how young women and future social workers perceive the phenomenon of domestic violence combined with digital violence.

Data were collected through fifteen structured individual interviews. Fifteen individual interviews were conducted with female students from the Department of Social Work. The interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes, and the respondents were between 18 and 23 years old. All respondents were informed in advance about the research topic, the purpose and research objectives, and provided informed consent to participate in the study. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and subsequently analyzed for greater clarity of the conveyed message.

3. Results

Bătrânu-Pinţea & Coman (2023) referred to the digital environment as a risk factor. Similarly, in the present research, the digital space is perceived as a dangerous environment, marked by different types of individuals and violent acts. The authors argue that the digital environment represents a risk factor for the manifestation of violence, whereas in the present study, the digital environment becomes risky in the sphere of romantic relationships and in the context of violence.

In the specialized literature, we find the article by Goian (2020), which presents similarities with the current study. The author points out that bullying, digital violence, and domestic violence are all observed as negative behaviors, characterized by excessive control, the desire to dominate, power relations, and aggression. Both studies reveal that young people may perceive the phenomenon of domestic violence through the lens of their own experiences, which leads to differences in the way they react.

The thematic analysis identified four main themes: the perception of domestic and digital violence among female students from the Department of Social Work; the portrayal of romantic relationships initiated online and their risks; the consequences of digital violence; and the prevention of domestic and digital violence in contemporary society.

The first theme addressed is the perception of domestic violence and digital violence among female students from the Department of Social Work. Within the qualitative analysis, the emerging trend highlights a nuanced perception of this phenomenon. Respondents consider it a globally widespread issue, as it occurs frequently, while society tends to normalize it rather than counteract it. Furthermore, the risk of normalization leads to the perpetuation of abusive behaviors against women and decreases society's willingness to intervene.

> *„When I hear about domestic violence, I think of something that happens very often in society, almost as if it were considered normal. Many men say it happens out of love, but that is not true. It is a serious phenomenon that society tends to see as something normal. There is also violence against men, but unfortunately, violence against women is much more common." (R8)*

Respondents view domestic violence as a phenomenon that generates not only psychological and emotional trauma but also insecurity and serious effects on physical health. It is important to note that all respondents clearly distinguish between different forms of violence, ranging from physical, emotional, psychological, financial, and sexual violence to the less visible forms of domestic abuse.

> *„Domestic violence is a phenomenon that leads to increased criminality; femicide exists, and there is a climate of social fear because women do not feel safe. Many forms of violence can cause emotional problems, depression, anxiety, and even death." (R15)*

At the same time, female respondents affirm that domestic violence can affect both women and men, although women are most often the victims. The participants in the study consider that domestic violence reflects power imbalances and gender inequality, where coercive power is exercised by men through constraint, threats, and abuse. Moreover, female respondents state that domestic violence has intensified over time due to social pressures that contribute to the normalization of abuse. These include the imposition of traditional obligations, pressures related to men's sexual expectations, as well as the exclusive

responsibility assigned to women for managing household duties, employment, and childcare.

> *„Digital violence involves more than the aspect of intimacy, the violation of privacy, threats through messages, and the sending of certain types of content. I believe that both domestic violence and digital violence are equally dangerous." (R2)*

With regard to the distinction between domestic violence and digital violence, it can be observed that respondents clearly understand these phenomena as having slightly different characteristics, while at the same time being interconnected. In legal contexts, when the two coexist, they are difficult to distinguish and prove. All respondents affirm that both offline and digital violence produce psychological consequences for the victim. These findings suggest that in contemporary society, digital violence has become an extension of traditional violence, bringing equally serious effects.

> *„Digital violence can be verbal and emotional, while physical violence seems more serious to me because it can cause lifelong harm." (R10)*

Respondents state that in the case of digital violence, intimacy and data confidentiality can be much more easily violated through abusive messages, threats, and harassment. Regarding a clearer distinction between traditional and digital violence, most study participants highlight that digital violence focuses on emotional, psychological, and verbal abuse, whereas offline violence tends to involve sexual and physical abuse. A considerable part of the research group affirms that offline, traditional violence poses greater risks to a person's physical health, since it can result in severe assaults that threaten life and bodily integrity. However, online violence is perceived as a means of excessively controlling the victim and creating insecurity, forcing submission through fear.

The second theme refers to the portrayal of romantic relationships initiated online and the risks perceived by the respondents. In this case, respondents' perceptions are diverse and ambivalent, outlining both the disadvantages and the benefits of the online environment.

> *„Risks exist both offline and online. I do not necessarily see the online environment as a risk factor; I don't think it is something bad to have online relationships, but it is important to truly know the person and for respect to exist. In the online environment, however, there are more risks because you do not really know that person." (R3)*

The first idea emphasized is that of insecurity, as well as the lack of trust and authenticity that online relationships may bring. Most respondents state that, among the disadvantages of the online environment, there are concerns regarding the intentions of the two individuals, as well as their real identity. Respondents often think that in the online environment everything can be false, since behind

accounts there may be completely different people with different identities, which leads to emotional insecurity and a distorted reality.

> *„I would not start a relationship in the online environment; there is pressure in the online space, a game of control and manipulation." (R7)*

Respondents also point out that minors are at risk, as they can be manipulated and deceived with clever promises, making them vulnerable to abusers. They further state that at the beginning of every romantic relationship, things seem positive due to involvement, vulnerability, and intensity, but these can deteriorate over time. At the same time, there are also positive perceptions regarding the benefits brought by the digital environment.

Respondents mention constant communication and long-term mutual acquaintance, something that cannot be achieved as quickly if interaction takes place only offline. Furthermore, through constant communication, one can identify both negative aspects and positive qualities of the other person, which may help overcome the risks of manipulation and control.

> *„There are many couples who met online and are together, and everything is fine. Direct physical acquaintance may actually bring more risks; I think I would like to have a period of getting to know each other from a distance. If I meet the person right away, I feel that everything is rushed and that you can be more easily manipulated at the beginning of the relationship, when you are in love." (R5)*

Additionally, individuals who struggle with social anxiety consider social networks as an advantage, since they tend to feel more comfortable, dare to get to know the other person, and reduce certain feelings of fear and anxiety that might appear in the offline environment.

Some respondents believe that the digital environment can support romantic relationships, as it allows the prevention of certain abuses and fosters awareness of the precautionary measures that should be implemented before transitioning to in-person meetings. Half of the respondents indicated that, in contemporary times, it is even normal to have a period of getting to know each other at a distance.

> *„Traditional relationships also carry risks, perhaps even more. I think it would be appropriate to have a period of online acquaintance, and then, when you feel everything is safe, to meet that person in a public place rather than a private one, to protect yourself. You should inform your friends and family about where you are going and the location and time. Things are no longer as natural as they used to be, when you could go on a date without letting anyone know." (R7)*

They consider that when meeting in person, family and friends should be informed about the location and time, in case unpleasant events occur. All female respondents believe that it is important to build trust at the beginning of the

relationship; however, given the terrifying events and cases of abuse frequently presented in the media and in the public sphere, the prevailing tendency is toward caution.

> *„In direct interaction, you can see and observe what the person is like, what behavior they display, and how they react. However, there is also a danger, because someone may appear a certain way online but turn out to be different in the physical environment." (R12)*

Female respondents state that domestic violence most often occurs when the woman tends to question the man or disagree with what he says. In this context, where traditional norms still persist in Romanian culture, the man reasserts his authority and social status through abuse of any kind. At the same time, the majority of respondents believe that violence also stems from a traumatic or abusive childhood experienced by the abuser, as well as from unresolved problems and insecurities that remain untreated due to the lack of therapy. In Romanian culture, therapy is still not well understood and is perceived as a source of shame and a problem; therefore, traumatized individuals tend to refuse it.

> *„Excessive control stems from unresolved insecurities; unfortunately, in our country therapy is perceived as if it were only for people with mental disorders. We should learn to recognize the signs of abuse, as many believe it is love rather than possessiveness." (R5)*

The next theme addressed is the perception of the consequences that domestic violence and digital violence have on women. All respondents state that jealousy, possessiveness, control, and lack of trust are factors that can generate violence. Often, partners choose to maintain a long-distance relationship for various reasons, which entails more intense communication, greater uncertainty, and feelings of doubt or even fear of being cheated on. In this case, repeated questions and the desire to receive pictures and videos from different contexts of everyday life lead to a stressful atmosphere within the couple's relationship.

Half of the respondents disagree with any idea that jealousy and possessiveness have a place in a couple's relationship. They consider that jealousy is not a sign of love but a problem that negatively affects the relationship. Likewise, all respondents see repeated episodes of jealousy as a risk indicator and a form of control, which can further lead to abuse and control in the offline environment, where the partner may wish to spend all their time with you.

> *„There is no such thing as jealousy and possessiveness—what exists is constant control. Women who do not see this and believe that it is all about love are manipulated into seeing only the positive side. These women need therapy to become aware of the truth." (R2)*

At the same time, certain signs in the digital environment can characterize an abusive person: the excessive desire to monitor your private messages, to log into your social media accounts, or to block certain people from your friends list

without a concrete reason. Respondents believe that this type of person lacks self-confidence or trust in others because they did not receive love in childhood.

> *„I have often witnessed episodes of jealousy and possessiveness, and from there it escalates into verbal and physical abuse." (R4)*

Female respondents link toxic relationships to the absence of the father figure in a woman's life, as this can lead her to choose an abuser out of a desire for validation and fear of being abandoned again later in life. All respondents believe that women are exposed to such abuses also because of the family relationship they had with their father figure. Abusers manage to discover these personal vulnerabilities and exploit them, making women dependent on their presence.

> *„Jealousy can only be explained through insecurity. If you have confidence in yourself and in the person next to you, jealousy should not exist at that point; it already becomes emotional abuse. If women do not understand this, it means there is a paternal absence in their lives; they become attached quickly and accept anything, believing that is what they deserve. Then manipulation comes in—you are left with the impression that he loves you, but in reality, it is control." (R7)*

In the same context of uncontrolled jealousy, female respondents reported experiences of pressure they felt to send photos and videos to their partners through social media. All respondents state that such demands stem from the fear of losing one's partner and of being cheated on or permanently replaced. Moreover, digital images and videos become instruments of blackmail and amplify sexual and emotional abuse against the victim.

> *„There is pressure to reveal absolutely everything, to say where you are at any moment; men set conditions, are jealous, and want to control the situation, asking many questions and imposing many restrictions." (R9)*

This increasingly common practice, both among minors and adults, generates long-term feelings of fear and insecurity. Members of the research group believe that this practice creates the feeling of being used by their partner, of being seen only as an object of desire, without consideration for one's values, principles, and personal decisions.

> *„There is pressure to send images online, but I would not recommend doing so. After a breakup, you may feel emotionally abused simply by knowing that he has intimate images. And the very fact that he asks for those pictures is, in itself, a form of abuse." (R2)*

At the same time, female respondents highlighted how women are perceived in society compared to men. Since ancient times, there has been the belief that men make the decisions and are responsible for controlling the family, while women take care of the household and children and are expected to obey their partners.

„In a relationship, there are two people; you cannot resort to cheating just because I do not send you pictures. It should not be only the woman's responsibility to keep the relationship alive. I would not agree to send pictures online, as it can become a form of abuse. You end up feeling constrained in the situation, because you do not want to, but when the person insists, you feel used." (R1)

All respondents state that in contemporary society there is an attempt to normalize abusive behaviors and to excuse men simply because they are men and express sexual desires. Respondents believe that such situations lead to social and cultural norms that reinforce a double standard regarding women's social roles. On one hand, women are expected to be good mothers, wives, and successful professionals, while on the other hand, they are expected to tolerate their partner's abusive behaviors.

In the same context, half of the respondents noted that the age difference between partners can be problematic, as the more mature partner may exert pressure and manipulation over the younger woman.

„There is still the belief that men can do whatever they want, while women cannot. The mentality persists that a man can cheat, and if he does, it is because the woman did not give him what he needed. This is a form of abuse, since a woman cannot be forced sexually. Women are expected to endure and fight for the relationship, but this conception is heading in a completely wrong direction. Abused women remain in relationships out of fear of being judged by society. They are seen as women who left their husbands and did not fight." (R6)

The results of the research bring both convergence and divergence of opinion on certain components, especially on the impact of the online environment on personal life and interpersonal relationships. Respondents believe that the online space is marked by risks that lead to the emergence of digital violence, such as manipulation, identity concealment, threats, and harassment, but at the same time some perceptions highlight positive aspects related to the online space, such as socialization opportunities and the possibility to know the person before meeting in person. The results of the research lead to the particularization of an ambivalent character of the online environment, characterized, on the one hand, by vulnerability and risk, and on the other hand and, on the other hand, by its usefulness as a tool in initiating conversations and strengthening relationships. We can specify that these differences of opinion are closely correlated with the subjective experiences of the respondents and their level of trust in the virtual environment.

The themes presented highlight the contemporary context in which Romanian society currently finds itself, as well as the perceptions of young women regarding a phenomenon that continues to increase. In the future, it will be necessary to also analyze the perceptions of men concerning domestic and digital

violence to compare the two subjective perspectives and to better understand their similarities and differences.

4. Implications and applications

The research objectives have been achieved. Regarding the objective that aimed to identify the perception of female students toward domestic violence and digital violence, the following key results can be observed. These two phenomena are viewed both separately and as interconnected.

The main contribution of the study lies in the exploration of the perceptions that young women aged 18-23 years, students of social work, have about violence against women and how the online environment may contribute both to the prevention of violence and to its perpetuation. Respondents emphasized the dual nature of the online environment: on the one hand, risk management and risks presented in the literature, and on the other hand, the use of the online environment as a tool for communication and getting to know a potential romantic partner.

Domestic violence is perceived primarily through physical, sexual, and verbal abuse, while digital violence is seen as particularly dangerous in the sphere of psychological, emotional, and verbal abuse. Respondents frequently referred to contemporary society and the frequent cases of violence against women, stating that if a new legal framework is not established, femicide may become normalized. All respondents are aware of how each form of abuse manifests, but they also consider that, for many women, emotional abuse is perceived as a form of protection, as they are manipulated within romantic relationships.

Respondents reported that gender-based social inequalities persist, since violence often stems from the male partner's desire to demonstrate that he holds a dominant position within the relationship through power and violence.

With regard to romantic relationships mediated by the digital environment, respondents highlighted both advantages and disadvantages. The main risks identified are linked to the lack of trust and the constant uncertainty about the identity of the person with whom one is communicating. The other person's intentions may be genuine or concealed, which can be interpreted both as a benefit and a disadvantage.

On the positive side, the online environment provides a period of communication that facilitates getting to know each other; however, disadvantages are observed in terms of mistrust and pressure. Respondents believe that the digital environment becomes dangerous when partners struggle with traumas and insecurities and shift the blame onto each other, which results in possessiveness and excessive control.

Concerning the final theme, namely the consequences of domestic and digital violence, the results show that emotional and psychological abuse are perceived as long-term consequences that can only be overcome through prolonged therapy. From a medical perspective, physical abuse is considered highly

dangerous, as it may leave lasting effects. Additionally, respondents emphasize jealousy and possessiveness as abusive behaviors. They believe that in contemporary society, jealousy is often perceived and normalized as a form of love and care, but in reality, it can quickly lead to abuse and toxic relationship dynamics.

The practical implications of the research on domestic violence and digital violence lead to the development of educational programs aimed at describing both the risks of the online environment and the ways of managing romantic relationships in contemporary times. Currently, the best professionals to open these discussions are teachers, as they spend a significant amount of time with students.

The mandatory introduction of sexual education in educational institutions is a necessity for both adolescents and young people to better understand the consequences of social media. Based on the respondents' answers regarding the tendency to normalize violence against women, it can be understood that both victims and abusers need long-term access to therapy, while society requires awareness campaigns to reduce social stigma and to promote social integration and community support.

At the national level, there is a need for a clear normative framework concerning the recognition and sanctioning of violence in all its forms, both offline and online. The study provides a clear and forward-looking perspective from female students from the Department of Social Work, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, West University of Timișoara.

The phenomenon of domestic violence is increasingly interconnected with digital violence, both being influenced by social and cultural spheres. These phenomena are discussed at both national and international levels, according to the specialized literature, and require specialized interventions to minimize social crises and to mitigate their long-term consequences in the short, medium, and long term.

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