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Abstract:

On a European level, Romania is a case of extreme normalization of domestic violence and violence against women. However, the past decade has seen several improvements in addressing the issue, culminating with the ratification of the Istanbul Convention that acknowledges the gendered dimension of violence. Recently, the legislation was modified to align with the convention and brings with it new instruments for the protection of the victims. Nevertheless, much of the violence remains unreported and previous studies show that women who experience abuse face numerous obstacles and have little trust in authorities. In a qualitative explorative inquiry built on recent studies and literature, I aimed to investigate the experiences of women dealing with intimate partner violence (IPV) and authorities, as well as the experiences of authorities that work with victims of IPV in the context of recent legislative improvements. Based on an ecological framework of IPV that embraces a feminist methodological perspective, I conducted in-depth interviews in the county of Brasov with women who recently experienced IPV, with lawyers and police officers, complemented by a group discussion organized during a support meeting group for survivors of IPV. Thematic coding and analysis of the data reveal instances of well-functioning of the new legislation in protecting victims, as well as of poor implementation and insufficient resources. On the other hand, the study also shows the revictimization of women who end up being blamed by partners, family, authorities, and society for being abused. Finally, it unveils street-level authorities having different coping mechanisms regarding the frustration of unsolved cases of IPV, resorting to personal opinions in their work. While the small sample of the research cannot lead the reader to generalizations, the study gives a relevant glimpse of how women experience IPV in a patriarchal society with yet-to-improve instruments of combating and prevention.

Keywords: intimate partner violence, gendered violence, domestic violence, street-level authorities, feminist research, Romania, revictimization

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1. Introduction

1.1. The issue of violence against women in Romania

The concerning magnitude of various forms of violence against women in the EU became evident with the report published by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2014, the first EU-level survey on the matter with a homogenous methodology. Based on interviews with 42,000 women across all Member States, the survey shows that gender-based violence affects women disproportionately and reveals a high prevalence that affects many lives while remaining drastically underreported (FRA 2014).

On a European level, Romania appears to be an extreme case of normalization of domestic violence. In the FRA survey, Romania scored the lowest percentage of reported violence as only 17% of the cases were reported to the police and 1% to social services, the highest EU percentage of 55% regarding the justification of rape and the second highest after Bulgaria on the opinion that domestic violence is a private matter that should stay within the family. Furthermore, it ranks the lowest on the knowledge of institutions and services for combatting and preventing domestic violence, with 74% of respondents being unaware of any support and help services. According to the Romanian Police, there have been over 20.000 cases of reported violence between family members in 2017, with 76% of the victims being adult women and 92% of the aggressors being adult men. More than half of the cases of domestic violence occurred at home between spouses or partners, proving that women are predominantly affected by violence between partners (Reteaua VIF 2018).

After 1989, Romania experienced a re-traditionalization of family and gender norms reinforced by Christian Orthodox values during the post-socialist transition and a renewed emphasis on the public/private division. Furthermore, the economic crisis of the 1990s affected women in particular, who became increasingly financially dependent on men. On this background, the government was attempting to meet the pre-accession demands of the EU in terms of gender equality (Popa 2015: 192).

An evolving women‘s movement struggled through campaigns and protests to reform the legislative and policy responses to violence against women and introduced a gendered frame in public debates. The most successful outcome of these efforts was Romania‘s ratification of the Istanbul Convention in 2016. However, experts and activists criticised the inconsistency of the Romanian domestic violence policy regime with the Convention and the lack of action in the direction of legislative and policy harmonisation (Krizsán, Roggeband 2018). Nevertheless, two years after the ratification of the Convention, the Romanian parliament passed and published the law 174/2018 as a modification of the previous 217/2003 law regarding prevention and control of violence within the family.

Some important novelties of this law are the possibility of police officers to issue an immediate temporary protection order in cases of domestic violence, and the intervention of an emergency Social Service team in case of any abuse notice. Other than that, the definition of domestic violence of the new law includes that of psychological and physical violence between former partners or spouses. These instruments are believed to be a positive change as they should secure victims immediate intervention of authorities and provide them with more safety and support.

Although the Romanian police issued hundreds of emergency restraining orders since the law entered into force in 2018 until now, the reality is that violence against women remains severely underreported in Romania and victims and survivors encounter difficulties that impede them from acting against abusive situations (Reteaua VIF 2019). The obstacles faced by women victims and survivors of domestic violence are multiple, from internalised blame and blame within the family/community, to economic dependence from the abuser, to mistrust in authorities, to insufficient protection and aid instruments or institutions, and finally to unequal access to resources and justice (Vrabiescu 2018, Adorjani 2012, Braga et. al. 2015). I was driven to inquire the experiences of women with domestic violence and with authorities and that of authorities directly interacting with them. My aim is of exploratory nature, seeking to find out more about the recent experiences of women with domestic violence and with authorities in the context of the newest legislative changes.

The reason why I chose Romania for the research is that it presents an interesting case of contrasts. There is a discrepancy between an alarming normalization, justification and underreporting of domestic violence comparing to neighboring countries, while being one of the few states in the region that adopted the Istanbul Convention with fairly little public opposition and recently implementing an improved legislation in terms of combating and preventing domestic violence.[1]

1.2. State of the art

The interaction between women victims/survivors of domestic violence and street-level authorities has received considerable scholarly attention in the past decade. By street-level bureaucrats it is referred to public service workers such as police officers, social workers, judges and other law enforcement agents who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work. The fact that they are arguably favouring some clients over others and resorting to personal judgements can prove to be a problem that is relevant, among others, in cases of domestic violence (Lipsky 2010). In relation to domestic violence, the

[1] In Bulgaria, the Istanbul Convention was declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court in 2018, while Slovakia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and the Czech Republic have not ratified the Convention yet but are under pressures from the EU Commission , and from European Parliament Members who condemn the campaigns against the Convention and urge the Member States to ratify it urgently.

conditions experienced by frontline workers throughout their work are believed to be an important factor in case handling and interactions with victims and perpetrators. These range from excessive paperwork (Grant, Rowe 2011) to limited resources, administrative pressure for case closure (Lindhorst, Padgett 2005), limitations imposed on their practices, to the lack of larger systems of accountability (Horwitz et. al. 2011). The powerlessness rendered by these structural factors may lead to a sense of frustration that translates into negative claiming attitudes towards women victims related to their lack of cooperation and less or no blaming of perpetrators. Such behavioural patterns are believed to hinder policy efficacy and real protection against domestic violence by discouraging individuals from reporting their experiences (Brodkin 2012). For example, Stephens and Sinden (2000) identified four demeanours crucial for victims‘ perceptions on how they were treated by police officers, namely minimising the situation, disbelieving the victim, „we don‘t care“ and „the macho cop“. Another study by Russel and Light (2006) linked three dimensions of police response as factors influencing the empowerment of the victim. It showed that victims felt more empowered by police who did not blame them and who seemed to be truly invested on their behalf. The downplaying perception that police officers have on domestic violence is believed to have a demoralising effect on victims, especially when they experience negative interactions with them (Logan et al. 2006). In particular women with multiple encounters with the legal system as victims of domestic violence are argued to feel that police officers lack empathy (Stalans, Finn 2006). An ethnographic research of rural woman abuse in Kentucky reveals how the support of local law enforcement providers for battered women can be compromised by their personal relationship with the perpetrators (Websdale 1995).

The research on violence against women emerged late in Romania, as the phenomenon has not been acknowledged until the end of the 1990s. Out of all forms of violence, domestic violence began to be researched in the 2000s (Radulescu 2001, 2010, Irimescu 2005, ANPF 2009), followed by inquiries on violence within the couple (Rujoiu 2010, Bonea 2012, Adorjani 2012). While some have an intersectional approach (Oprea 2004, Bitu and Morteanu 2009, Braga 2014, Rada 2014) , other focus on psychological, medical and social or legal consequences of violence (Bucuta 2015 , Popa 2009, Vrasti 2012, Bogeanu 2012). Furthermore, there is considerable literature on the politics of domestic violence and on its framing (Kriszan, Popa et al. 2010, 2014, 2018). However, there is only few qualitative studies that focus on the narrative of women victims and survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) and on their interactions with authorities.

Muntean (2000) reveals, by interviewing 40 women that experienced IPV, that the way the police intervenes in cases of domestic violence encourages the violence indirectly. In an extensive qualitative research, Adorjani (2012) interviewed 78 women from two Romanian counties, Cluj and Iasi, with special regard to minority ethnic groups. Her analysis focused both on the women‘s perception of the justice system regarding domestic violence and on the external factors of support that

impede or motivate them to use the criminal justice system. The results show the importance of non-legislative factors in combatting domestic violence, such as the positive attitude of the police encouraging women to pursue contact with the criminal justice system when they experience it. Dumitrescu (2014) carried out interviews in Arges county in the south of Romania with women who experienced domestic violence and accessed social services such as shelters, in order to identify the cultural and structural barriers they encounter when trying to leave abusive situations. Her findings are internal and external obstacles, such as insufficient legislation that protects women, patriarchal community values, ill response from the police, little information or financial resources and lack of programs for perpetrators of domestic violence. Vrabiescu‘s (2016) inquiry in the Romanian county of Giurgiu focused on the different ways in which violence against women is experienced and perceived by victims and authorities. By emphasizing state-community relations, the study divulges how policies, laws and institutional practices shape the understanding of intimate partner violence. An important argument brought up is that state non-intervention becomes crucial in deterring women from seeking formal assistance, leaving them instead to patriarchal community structures and the personal turmoil of their experience of violence. Furthermore, the lack of public policies addressing the gendered dimension of violence is also argued to encourage street-level bureaucrats to express informal emotions and values in their interaction with the victims, as they resort to a high discretion in their work. Often, their judgments are based on stereotypes that blur the lines between discrimination and necessary identification of victims as part of vulnerable groups or minorities. Braga, Neaga and Nica (2017) conducted an extensive qualitative research in the Ferentari neighbourhood of Bucharest and in the Valea Seaca region of Bacau County. The study found that violence against women has a very similar prevalence in any socio-demographic and cultural environment, though authorities do not intervene equally in every case. Not only were there findings of discrimination against Roma women, but also of solidarity between male authorities and male perpetrators. The class identity proved to be relevant, as they revealed that housing precarity, economic vulnerability and poverty stigma led women to hide their experiences of violence. These dimensions intersect with legislations and policies that put too much pressure on victims and a high degree of bureaucracy that demotivate both bureaucrats in pursuing the cases and victims in seeking help from authorities.

1.3. Questions and Hypotheses

Based on the aforementioned literature, the research questions that will guide my inquiry are:

How are victims/survivors of IPV experiencing the interactions with street level authorities and vice-versa after the legislative change in 2018? How do these interactions shape their perceptions of intimate partner violence (IPV)?

Consequently, the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. Victims/survivors who had contact with authorities after the legislative changes feel more empowered to escape the abusive situation than before and experience less negative feelings such as shame and guilt.

2. Victims/survivors trust street-level authorities more since they can issue a protection order on the spot.

3. Economically and socially vulnerable women benefit from the legislative change the least and don not trust the help of authorities.

4. Street-level authorities have more empathy with women victims/survivors than before and positively perceive a personalisation of the justice process.

Since the aforementioned hypotheses have an explorative character, they only serve to guide me throughout the research and will not be tested.

1.4. Methodology

In order to address the phenomenon of domestic violence as an issue that affects women disproportionately on several dimensions, I employed a feminist methodology. The main goals of feminist research are to shed light onto women‘s voices, issues and lived experiences and thus to support social justice and gender equality. An important aspect of feminist research is the reflexivity of the researcher which involves reflecting on how the social background, position, and personal biases can influence the relationship with the researched and the whole research process. Feminist scholars see

gender as the central aspect of intimate partner violence and argue that it should be seen as qualitatively different than other forms of violence in the family due to its gender-based nature (Lawson 2012).

Since violence against women is a delicate topic, the research was based on several ethical considerations. The key aspects of ethical feminist research are minimizing the harm of the researched, respecting their confidentiality, requiring informed consent, the potential for deception, power relations between the researcher and the subject, the representation of research findings and ensuring respect for human dignity and self-determination of the subjects (Hesse-Biber 2013). In order to ensure the ethics and relevance of the research, I sought to involve organizations carrying out advocacy and support for women survivors of violence in the local communities.

I argue that a suited data-collection method for feminist research focused on experiences of women survivors of domestic violence is rather of qualitative ethnomethodological nature, which is why I chose to conduct semi-structured in-depth interviews and group discussions. During the data collection, sampling remained an open and flexible process. Additionally, I planned to interview authorities that enter in direct contact with survivors of IPV and whose attributes in cases of domestic violence have changed in 2018, namely police officers and social workers. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, then translated to English. I wrote memos after every interview that referred to the content of the interview and reflected on the dynamics and power relations between me and the respondents. The research was conducted in the city of Brasov in Romania. After collecting the data I coded it, employing a manual two-cycle coding strategy (Miles et. al. 2014), interpreted and presented the findings with the aid of prior research.

1.5. Chapter overview and limitations

The paper is divided into five chapters. The introduction reveals the relevance and scope of the study, as well as the research question and hypotheses. The second chapter focuses on the contextualization of women in transitioning Romania and on relevant concepts and theories of domestic violence, as well as on the present legal framework. The third chapter establishes a research methodology, starting from epistemological assumptions that justify the use of certain methodologies and methods and continues with reflections on my positionality as a researcher. In the fourth chapter, the findings are presented and connected to previous research. The concluding remarks are discussed in the fifth chapter.

Undoubtedly, there are limitations to the research that should not be left unmentioned. An important aspect is the relatively low sample of respondents, which proved to be smaller than planned. This outcome can be related to my lack of experience as a researcher, not being fully aware of the difficulty of finding respondents on a topic as sensitive and taboo, in a country where such a topic is

riddled with shame and where many authorities prefer not to speak about their work. On the other hand, due to planning and logistical reasons I could only collect the data in early summer, a time when many public servants in Romania tend to leave for holidays. Therefore, I would like to stress my avoidance of generalization of my findings.

2. Violence against women in Romania

2.1. Women, gender and public/private distinctions in transition

Building around the premise of redistributing resources in the interest of the general welfare, the Romanian socialist state held the paternalist view of the 'nation' conceived as a family under its parental care. Consequently, socialism changed the gender-specific private and public realms and dismantled the former nuclear family arrangements by turning several reproduction elements away from the household into the public sphere. However, many domestic tasks remained feminized while the division of labor and the distribution of power did not cease to be gendered. Several labor sectors were almost entirely masculine, including the heavy industry, state and repression structures, while the service and agricultural sector were rather occupied by women (Verdery 1996). The masculine employment sectors had considerably higher salaries than the feminized ones and superior retirement payments. Additionally, the state did not remunerate the domestic labor performed exclusively by women and lacked sufficient public childcare infrastructure (Weber 2017).

The gendered division of labor and housework were masked by an overt ideological commitment towards gender equality and the assumption that integrating women in labor would erase the bourgeoise and patriarchal subordination of women. This kind of egalitarianism, however, forged a double burden on women as both workers and caretakers. In the case of Romania, when the state declared childbirth a patriotic duty, the burden became triple. It thus can be argued that the past patriarchal relations barely have been altered. Such latent contradictions in the lives of women as reproducers of the patriarchal family and of the paternal state, yielded a disintegration of the boundaries between public and private, while the state took over the assignments of the patriarchal family in order to reconcile the needs of the family with those of the state economy. In the best case, the emancipation of women at the time was partial and their rights were deeply conditioned by their reproductive roles (Susan, Gail 2000). Through this multiple burden, women were being desexualized in public participation and hypersexualized and objectified in private life (Lukić, 2006). Later, the enforcement of the strict Romanian pro-natalist policies, established by Nicolae Ceausescu, brought women into an unparalleled situation that had a dramatic impact on them. The degree of intrusion within reproductive issues impacted the way families lived their privacy and the public/private dynamic,

leading to increased scepticism towards state intervention in family life after the fall of socialism (Gheaus 2001).

During the post-socialist transition, the sovereignty and privacy of the family gained strength, especially economically and in terms of welfare arrangements, becoming increasingly dictated by a liberal market model. The legacy of state intervention started to be beheld as an invasion of privacy and of private property (Katalin 2010). At the beginning of the 1990s, privatization and restructuring of enterprises affected women disproportionately, proving to be additional economic and political burdens for them. Subsequently, they were disproportionally affected by the ill implementation of gender equality policies, unemployment, low payments and public marginalization, experiencing very low rehiring opportunities (Oprica 2008). Another important aspect is the withdrawal of state provision of care. As public day-cares and other childcare services deteriorated, private ones were not affordable, pushing the task of care back to women (Lula 2017).

While some argue that Romania experienced a recurrence of the traditional values discourse after the collapse of communism, affecting the way the state engages with gender roles (Iancu 2010), other scholars claim that it is not a re-traditionalization process in terms of values, but rather the aftermath of economic changes. Instead, we can regard it as a continuous process in terms of societal values that communist regimes and industrialization could not obliterate (Lula 2017).

In other words, a patriarchal legacy subsisted throughout socialism in a hidden ideology related to the Christian religion that kept gender equality to a rather formal level (Miroiu, Popescu 1989). Besides economic changes falling disproportionately on women, there are some resurgent factors that can be linked to patterns of post-socialist gender inequality in Romania, such as the returning influence of the Orthodox Church from communist oppression. In order to protect Romania from the dangers of the liberal decadent West while restoring its political influence, the church promotes a "return" to traditional values and ideas of female subjection within the patriarchal family. This discourse is of particular significance in the highly religious rural and low-income urban areas (Oprica 2008). Invoking the normality of a "traditional" family can also be linked to a dismissal of socialism through the means of idealizing a distant past (Magyari-Vincze, 2017).

Although it became a central issue elsewhere, the repressive abortion ban diminished the possibility of a strong anti-abortion discourse in Romania. Nevertheless, anti-feminism and campaigning the return of women to family life surfaced back in public discourse (Verdery 1996).[2] Miroiu (2010)

[2] In Romania, this discourse gained recent popularity through the campaigns carried out by the „Coalition for the Family", that opposes an alleged „gender-ideology", holds very conservative views on gender roles and, among others, crystallized in a referendum on the constitutional redefinition of the family as a union between man and woman in 2018. Although the referendum was invalid due to low turnout, the supporters of the Coalition continue their activities and are not to be underestimated.

argues that right after socialism men could not be seen as oppressors, coming from a society where both men and women were deprived of personal autonomy under the power of the socialist state. Therefore, the feminist arguments were met with resistance.

Especially regarding violence against women in Romania before 1989, the conjunction between the socialist ideology of gender equality and the reality of naturalized norms of masculinity or femininity is essential to comprehending its normalization, since these norms enabled the justification of control over women (Marcus 2009). Finding the appropriate and previously absent terminology and thinking about domestic violence during the post-socialist transition proves to be challenging, as it questions assumptions about gender roles, private/public distinctions, as well the function of the state and democratic procedures (Katalin 2010).

2.2. Towards an ecological understanding of IPV

In the following subchapter, I will address the different ways of looking at domestic violence and establish a conceptual framework for my research.

In the 1970s, the emerging "battered women" term was one of the first to acknowledge the gender and structural inequality aspects of domestic violence. The term "battered women syndrome" was introduced by Lenore Walker, based on extensive qualitative research performed between 1978 and 1981, including 435 interviews with women who experienced domestic abuse. In her work, she emphasized the relationship between structural constraints of a patriarchal society and psychological restraints that impede women from leaving abusive situations. Her core argument is that women are socialized into believing that because of the role ascribed to them in society, they have no choice but to be victims (Walker 1979). A valid critique of her approach is that the battered woman syndrome perspective portrays women as passive and helpless and focuses on the individual and psychological facets of the problem rather than on larger structural factors. Nevertheless, battered women's advocates enabled the recognition of domestic violence as a legitimate and serious social issue. (Rothenberg 2003).

The feminist advocates that criticized the lack of empowerment and the ill-fitting use of a syndrome for explaining all the symptoms that battered women could experience, chose a model that nested the clinical symptoms within the environment that caused them. Such early feminist approaches on domestic violence have been built around the concept of patriarchy, while overlooking the fluidity and complexity of other variables and contexts, such as ethnicity, class, race, education, social status, religion and so on (Dima, Beldianu 2015). One of the main feminist explanations for domestic violence is the subordination of women in society. The aim of violence towards them is perceived from this viewpoint as the exercising of patriarchal control within the family. The power

and control wheel (see fi. 1), is a prominent model that seeks to explain the exertion of male‘s power over their partners (Ali, Naylor 2013).

*Figure 1: The Power And Control Wheel, Source (*https://www.theduluthmodel.org*, accessed 2020)*

While the above-discussed ways of looking at domestic violence emphasized either psychological or structural factors with the risk of overlooking the others, an ecological framework encompasses four levels of factors in order to understand the exchange between personal, situational, and socio-cultural factors in cases of domestic abuse. The factors are visualized as four concentric circles, namely the biological and personal history, the immediate context of the abuse such as family or relationship, the institutions and social structures and finally the economic and social environment and cultural norms (Ellsberg, Heise 2005). The strength of the ecological theory lies primarily in its interdisciplinarity, as it brings together several theoretical concepts. However, it can be criticized for not differentiating between different types of violence within the family, although violence against

women has different traits, approaches and causalities than violence against kids or the elderly (Dima, Beldianu 2015).

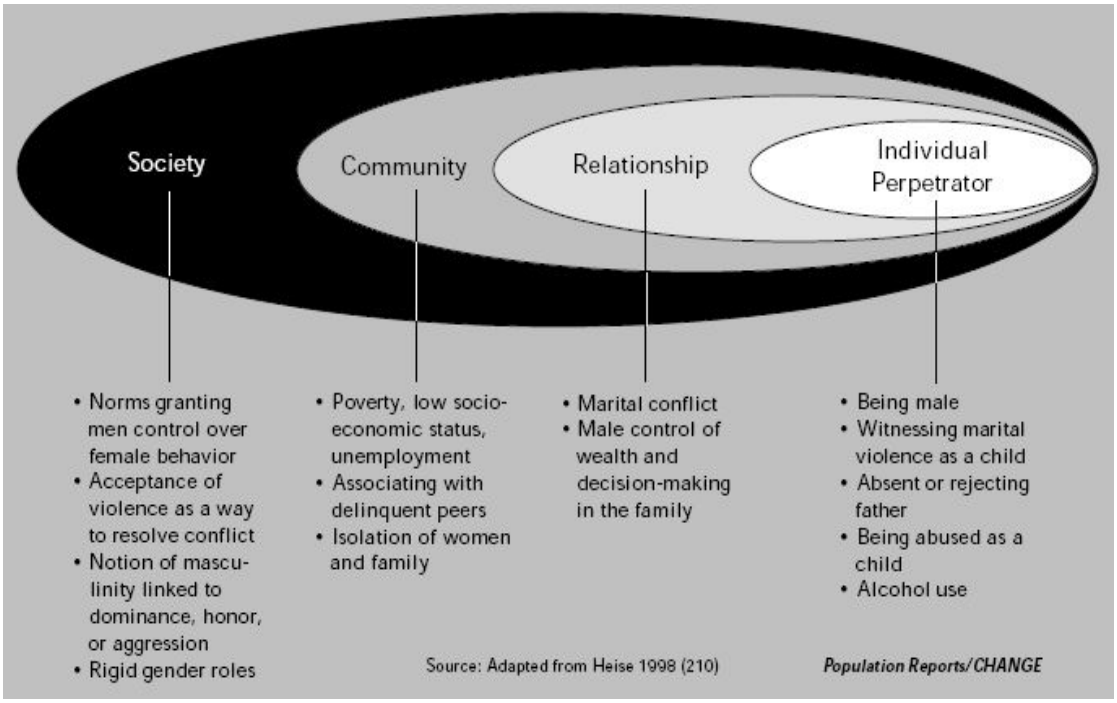

Figure 2: Ecological Framework of factors related to IPV, Source (Heise L., Ellsberg, M., & Gottemoeller, M. 1999).

Heise (1998) integrates the ecological framework previously developed by Belsky and Dutton, in the context of gender-based violence and argues for its potential to harbor both feminist and social science visions about violence. While previous feminist theories had rather focused on macrosystem factors such as patriarchy, this nested approach emphasizes the link with other factors, too. The ecological framework that emphasizes individual, interpersonal, social and political dimensions of domestic violence became widely accepted and used by NGO actors and researchers on violence against women and domestic violence. However, the framing of domestic violence remains disputed on a political level in post-socialist Romania, which will be discussed later in the paper.

For my research I opted for the term "Intimate Partner Violence". My motivation aligns with Lawson's argument, namely that the term seems to be more objective than other terms such as wife battering and avoids implicit alignment with one particular theoretical framework, while still focusing on a partner relationship rather than on the broader family violence framework (Lawson 2012).

2.3. Between family protection and gendered violence frames

The legislation regarding domestic violence in Romania is the result of mutual efforts of local NGOs for women' s rights and gender equality, foreign organizations and local policymakers while

being shaped by international agreements. After 1989, there was a persistent lack of policy response despite the concerning prevalence of domestic violence (Krizsan, Popa 2014).

The framing of the first draft of the law against domestic violence was a family protection frame that did not consider the structural gender inequality. In 2003, the Law Against Violence in the Family was endorsed and followed by an implementation plan and an implementation body in 2004 and 2005. However, several civil society actors and MPs saw the 2003 law as deficient and continued to pursue law reforms and the framing of domestic violence as violence against women. Their attempts to amend the law in a more gendered frame were blocked in 2003, 2007 and 2008 by several organizations, such as mainstream human rights groups, conservative women‘s groups, and other church-affiliated groups (Krizsan Popa 2018).

In 2010 and 2011, the feminist mobilization resulted in demonstrations against the spending cuts of domestic violence services and policies and included women‘s rights on the discussion agenda (Roggeband, Krizsan 2018). Under the motto “Stop Violence against Women!”, the women‘s organizations and their allies claimed protection orders and shelters for victims and enabled the amendment of the domestic violence law in 2012 (Krizsan, Popa 2018).

The 2012 framing shifted from a family protection frame towards an individual rights frame and represents a progressive policy change, since it included new measures for protecting the victims such as funding for shelters and protection orders. Later, the *National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Violence in the Family* between 2013-2017 embraced the progressive language of the Istanbul Convention regarding domestic violence (Roggeband, Krizsan 2018).

Romania signed the Istanbul Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women in 2014 and ratified it in 2016. The first major step made in the direction of harmonizing the Romanian legislation with the Convention has been the law 174/2018, completion of the Law no. 2017/2003. This amendment includes positive modifications regarding the protection of victims of domestic violence. However, the framing of violence remains focused on the family and does not address the gendered dimension. Some reports indicate several legislative gaps and difficulties of implementation of the protection order in cases of domestic violence. For example, the monitorization of the breach of protection order does not function de facto in Romania, as there are no available electronic bracelets for the perpetrators (Mosneagu et. al., 2019).

3. Doing feminist research

The following chapter will focus on aspects of epistemology, methodology and methods that informed my research. When feminist research practices and theories of knowledge emerged during the second-wave feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970a, they addressed the positivist paradigm,

the male-centred bias in sciences and the marginalization of women‘s experiences (Hesse-Biber 2013). Although based on different assumptions, all feminist researchers see epistemology, methodology, and method as interlinked, in what is called a synergistic framework. A synergistic research requires intention, effort and engagement of the researcher with the research process, participant and readers, while seeking to challenge the status quo of scientific knowledge production. (Hesse-Biber, Leckenby 2004).

3.1. The view from „somewhere“

Feminist empiricists brought the attention to the previously marginalized experiences of women, while holding to the positivist assumption that truth can be accessed and measured, but instead in a better and more objective way if the patriarchal bias is eliminated.

The increasing awareness of the marginalization of women‘s experiences enabled the development of feminist standpoint epistemology. This theory requires us to look at the world through the experiences of oppressed women and to use this knowledge for activism and social change (Brooks 2007). Standpoint epistemology evolved from focusing on the experience of all women as part of a single group, to acknowledging the complexity and variety of experiences and the different layers of oppression. The theory claims that the knowledge coming from the experience of marginalized populations owns epistemic authority over that coming from dominant groups, since it‘s a double vision of own realities and of those of the others (Hesse-Biber 2013).

The claim over epistemic authority declared by feminist standpoint theorists and the reliance on the positivist objective truth of feminist empiricist has been challenged by feminist postmodernists and poststructuralists (Hesse-Biber 2013). Postmodernists hold social identities and categories related to, among others, sexuality, race, ethnicity and nationality, as constructed in the frameworks of available discourses in specific cultural contexts (Jaggar 2015). Donna Haraway formulates a postmodern feminist epistemology that speaks to the need to position oneself in relation to truth claims and that resonates with how this research is positioned. She argues for a situated view from a complex structuring and structured body, versus a view from above or from nowhere (Haraway 1998). Her concept of „situated knowledge“ shifts the positivist „view from nowhere“ to „view from somewhere“. For her, situated knowledges are not about isolated individuals, but rather about communities and about the merging of partial views into a collective position. Similarly, Laurel Richardson describes a feminist-postmodernist model of knowledge, that challenges different ways of validity and brings to light the role of emotions in science. Her view aims to debunk the myth of emotion-free social science by validating female labor and emotional response in the creation of knowledge (Richardson 1993).

3.2. Methodology

Just like there are multiple feminist epistemologies, there is no claim for a universal feminist methodology. What makes feminist methodology particular is that it is informed by feminist theory, inseparable from politics and ethics and sourced in the experience of women. As such, it defies patriarchal ideas and methods that are blind to male dominance (Ramazanoglu, Holland 2002).

The ethical and political aspects of research relate to the reflexivity of the researcher, which matters in all stages of its stages. The researcher should reflect on the impact of his position when asking his questions, on how it affects the interactions with the subjects when he interprets the data, and on the implications of disseminating the findings (Jaggar 2015). The first level is the examination of power balances and power exertion and their impact on the research. Furthermore, one should reflect on the ethical considerations that frame the research and on how to avoid possible harm that could emerge from it. This leads to the question of accountability for the findings and awareness of the knowledge community in which the researcher is positioned (Ramazanoglu, Holland 2002).

Especially when researching the lives of victims of domestic violence, the ethical dimension needs careful consideration, since the safety and integrity of the researched can be at risk. The researcher needs to ensure that the safety of his respondents is not jeopardized, that their confidentiality is protected, that the distress of the participants is being kept at minimal and that the findings are interpreted and used for policy advancement or that the benefits of the participants are maximized by the research (Ellsberg, Heise 2005). Involving organizations that support survivors of domestic violence and local experts can improve the relevance and ethicality of such a study.

3.3. Methods

Although it‘s hard to pinpoint specific feminist methods, researchers should focus on how the methods are employed and within what frameworks they position them (Creswell 2007). Nevertheless, interviewing is a powerful tool for studying women and letting them speak their thoughts in their own words. This method counteracts the centuries of ignorance and oppression of women‘s voices and thoughts, or their expression through men (Reinharz 1992). In-depth interviewing is well suited for a study which aims to let the public gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of women. Such qualitative methods have, however, the methodological downside of leading to overgeneralization and poor representation (Jaggar 2015). From a feminist perspective, the in-depth interview becomes rather a conversation and a flow of information where the researcher listens carefully and through the practice of listening is prevented from asserting his own agenda (Hesse-Biber 2013). The practice of in-depth interviewing can be of special significance in the study of violence against women and seen as an intervention in itself. Reportedly, there have been studies in which the interviewed

women had empowering experiences due to the chance to speak up and share their stories with the researchers (Ellsberg, Heise 2005: 43).

Focus groups or group discussions can also have advantages for feminist research, as they can shift away from the power balance from the researcher to the respondents and create more of a social context and avoid issues of artificiality and exploitative power dynamics (Hesse-Biber, Yaiser 2004). The sharing and comparing of experiences that occur in a group conversation can bring to light knowledge that cannot be expressed in an interview. These methods can be fruitful for gathering experiences of oppression that are internalized and invisible, as group dynamics can resurface thoughts and feelings that have been forgotten, repressed or routinized (Hesse-Biber, Yaiser 2004).

3.4. Site selection, sampling and field reflections

When I decided to collect the data in Brasov, I did research about its uniqueness in Romania, lying in the networked cooperation between authorities and civil actors (Dima, Beldianu 2015). At the time, Brasov reported the highest number of issued emergency protection orders in 2019 after Bucharest, making me think that the authorities are effective and responsive in cases of IPV (Dragan 2019). Being a medium-sized city with less than 300.000 inhabitants and immediate rural areas, I imagined I would get to speak with women from very diverse socio-economic settings and thus get an understanding on the difference between urban and rural experiences, as well as on how social status shapes the experience of domestic violence. In total, I spent 3 weeks collecting the data in Brasov, being timely and financially conditioned.

Being a young Romanian student researching for a Master‘s Thesis and not being involved in any bigger research or advocacy project on domestic violence, I imagined I will encounter scepticism on multiple levels. First of all, I had the fear of being judged regarding my identity as a Romanian person that studies and lives abroad and returns to Romania in order to study and criticize its negative aspects, only to leave again. Secondly, I was aware that having no prior experience and doing a small research project on my own that is not affiliated to a bigger project, could be perceived as a waste of time that does not bring any social change or added value. I also expected scepticism from authorities that would not want sociological research to jeopardize the credibility of their work or of their institutions. Finally, I expected all of these combined to trigger the mistrust of women that I would approach to interview.

Thinking about the researcher‘s bias, I acknowledge that my personal opinions, especially my feminist view on domestic violence as an issue that affects women disproportionately, did not only drive me to choose this research topic and to narrow it down to the experiences of women, but also ultimately influences the way I collect, analyze, interpret and present the data. Instead of claiming

that I suspend or deconstruct my biases for the sake of objectivity, I decided to be transparent about my positionality and accept that it had an unequivocal impact on my research.

As for finding the respondents, I applied both snowball and purposive sampling strategies. First I identified experts and activists who work with IPV in Brasov. The first person I got in touch with was a psychologist who had more than 10 years of experience in the field and worked in one of the few shelters for IPV victims in the country. She had just quit the field and directed me towards a lawyer specialized in divorces, custody, and IPV in Brasov, as well as to the founder of an NGO who organizes a bi-monthly support group for women who experience or have experienced IPV. The lawyer has been the first person I have interviewed and she linked me to some of her clients, as well as with a police officer and two social workers who intervene in cases of IPV. She warned me that the social workers are overworked and might not have the time and energy for interviews, which proved to be true. In order to minimize the pressure and emotional distress of her clients, the lawyer sent them messages, asking if they would be interested to be interviewed. I then interviewed a police officer who works in the department of prevention of domestic violence, who then enabled me to interview her colleague who works in the police intervention department. Although initially I planned to interview at least a judge and a prosecutor too, everyone in the community advised me against it, saying it will be very hard to get any response from them. Since Brasov has a small and tightly knit community, it turned out that the lawyer also collaborated with the NGO that organizes the support groups. It organizes a bi-monthly secret support group for victims/survivors and recently initiated a monthly meeting for perpetrators. I contacted the organization and told them about my intentions and about who I have spoken to so far. They invited me to their next session and suggested that they initiate a group discussion about experiences with authorities. The session was mediated by a psychologist and sociologist with many years of experience with IPV. She asked me to participate in the group instead of being a mere observer, and thus to build more trust with the participants. In the goodbye round I left them the option to contact me for private interviews. One of them was excited about the idea and arranged a meeting with me right away. Two others said they will think about it and contact me if they decide to do it but ended up not doing it. The support group coordinators invited me to the next meeting too and said that it would be the most efficient and ethical way to meet potential respondents without being invasive. Meanwhile, I reached out on local social media, which materialized in three interviews. The first woman was living in a village bordering Brasov with her husband and her two kids. The second one had recently broken up with her partner and was living with her young son in Brasov. The third one was older and had been all her life in abusive partnerships until recently.

I experienced ethical dilemmas in the field at times. I was chatting to a woman who reached out online. She wanted to meet me but was hindered by the fact that she lived with her abusive husband, his parents and her baby. She tried to arrange a secret meeting with me while her husband was at work by lying to her parents-in law. I then realized that our encounter could put her in trouble and have a very negative impact on her life, which would not be worth the risk. I was aware that her story could valuable for my research and was ready to meet her and make sure that we will not be seen by anyone, or that I would leave as soon as I realize that her safety is at risk. Luckily, the weather decided for us and we could not meet because of days of heavy rain. In hindsight, I regret that I had even considered to meet her in such dangerous circumstances without acknowledging or being willing to deconstruct the power dynamic between us.

3.5. Data collection and analysis

During the time spent on field, I conducted five semi-structured in-depth interviews with women who were in abusive situations at the time or who had been in the past year, an expert interview with a lawyer, and two police officers. Four of the interviews with women were recorded with a digital recorder, as well as the interview with the lawyer. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim at the end of every day spent on the field, followed by written memos with reflections on the data and additional data that emerged during discussions we had after I had stopped recording. Both police officers refused to have the interviews recorded and one of them preferred to answer a set of questions in writing, while the other one agreed on a verbal interview during which I took notes. Before every single interview, the interviewee signed a data confidentiality and anonymity agreement between me and them. All the interviews were conducted and transcribed in Romanian and the parts that were selected to be presented in the findings were translated into English. The group discussion was fully noted by me and later memos were written directly in English.

The data analysis occurred through a coding process that views coding as deep reflection, deep analysis and interpretation. During the first stage, I assigned in-vivo codes to chunks of data. Then, I complimented the in-vivo technique by utilizing emotion coding, which is well suited for inquiries of intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences (Miles et. al. 2014). In the second coding cycle, I grouped the first codes into clusters and assigned them thematic codes by looking at patterns and commonalities. Finally, the pattern codes were arranged in an order that allowed presenting the findings in a flowing narrative. Chunks of data were selected as a support and translated into English. I chose to present as much as possible of the original and unaltered voice of the women I interviewed, thus staying in alignment with my wish to conduct feminist research.

4. Findings

4.1. Women‘s experiences of IPV

The women I have interviewed all experienced multiple kinds of aggression from their current or former partners, from physical, verbal, psychological to sexual violence. However, physical violence tends to be the form taken most into account by authorities and society, making it difficult for them to even gain awareness of other kinds of abuse they experience or to hold the aggressor accountable.

The experienced physical violence in the form of beatings is the first form of violence that comes in the mind of women who have been or are still in situations of IPV:

“*...so he had hit me in the back and it was a trauma that wasn‘t visible by looking at it, there was no external bruise and in had happened a while ago, I let time pass since I was terrified by the situation. […] All of the sudden he was strangulating me and he knew how to choke, he would press here until I was losing my breath and fainting and he would say: ‘See, if you go and complain, by the time the police or your sister will arrive they will find you cold.* “‘
(Woman, 48)

“*So he is violent, violent verbally and physically. He chokes me, hits me in the head with his fists, lately he hit my daughter too because she started defending me. Last time she tried to separate us and he hit her too.*“
(Woman, 47)

Verbal and psychological violence is experienced by some of them very frequently, having a strong impact on victims that then makes room for the normalization of other forms of abuse:

“*...but it‘s not easy to ignore him, telling you every day things to offend you in every possible way even when you did not cheat on him or did anything wrong, so it starts to eat you away and then the fight begins again and so on and he threatens to kill me, so lately he threatened me to death on a daily basis, so I don‘t know, he was telling me that he will do this to me (mimics knife pointed at her neck)...”*
(Woman,43)

“*Violence sets in imperceptibly, gradually, the aggressor doesn‘t come to you suddenly and says, ‘you know what, from now on I will beat you every day‘. No, it starts with, ‘today ,you‘re not allowed to*

put lipstick on', 'tomorrow ,you can't say hello to that person', the day after tomorrow you slap her because she bought herself a cake and ask her , 'why did you do that, can't you see how fat you are?' Then he drinks a bit of alcohol and reproaches her that she's not good enough of a woman, not a good mother, that she didn't clean and after 2-3 months he beats her daily." (Lawyer)

"*He continued to torture me psychologically, in the sense that when he heard that I was pregnant he said he will bury me under Tampa, he said he will wait as long as necessary to take revenge on me, to make my life hell."*
(Woman, 23)

The experienced sexual violence can overlap with physical violence and potentially minimizes the awareness of physical violence between partners:

"*He was torturing me sexually, meaning that he tied me with chains, he was burning me with the cigarette, with candle wax, he didn't care, didn't care that I was crying, I was screaming."*
(Woman, 23)

"*That why I saw it as an abusive relationship because although he didn't beat me up, he still tied me with chains, I had cigarette burns, cuts. He thought of it as a kind of punishment and every time I would wrong him he would torture me sexually, he didn't abuse me physically because he knew there were too many people on my side but instead he did it sexually and I was just a child, I did not know what a man in bed meant, I had no idea. I had lost my virginity through a rape when I was 17, for me a normal relationship didn't exist, I thought that was normal."*
(Woman, 23)

Some victims' awareness of violence is particularly low regarding sexual violence but extends to all other forms of abuse. Especially the normalization of intermarital rape and the lack of information about consent came to surface during the interviews. In some cases it seems that awareness was gained after leaving the abusive relationships and sometimes through psychological counselling.

"*Only when I went to a psychologist I realized what a rape between spouses was. I did not know, I did not know that I was raped, that when you say no it should stay no. I couldn't conceive such a thing, so one had to say yes to everything that he suggested."*
(Woman, 48)

"*I didn't realize, for two years and even after the relationship ended I didn't realize. I was visited by SMURD (an ambulance service) every evening, I was having panic attacks and I didn't understand why I wasn't aware of this thing. I only realized now, after all these years.*"
(Woman, 23)

Yet another type of violence that came to surface during the research is economic violence. In the lives of the interviewed women, this can manifest itself as deprivation of the victim from financial means or as a form of blackmail.

"*...in the moments when I was earning more, he didn't notice that, meaning that he wasn't talking about it. I didn't need any praise but when he started bringing more money in the house he started saying that we should separate, that he earns more, started counting everything I spent, took all the money, both his and mine were in one place and after paying the bills there was a very small amount left for daily expenses or emergencies – something to wear for the kids or sweets were out of question, we started begging him: you know, we need this for… and then I was embarrassed to even ask, many times I wouldn't ask so there wouldn't be any argument."*
(Woman, 48)

"*I broke up with my first husband because of alcohol but he doesn't come to visit our daughter anymore. With the second husband, I cannot break up because he invested some money in the house and I don't have the means to return him that sum."*
(Woman, 47)

Financial hardships were prevalent in all conversations and showed to be a big impediment in leaving abusive relationships and gaining financial independence from their partners. Not only are legal costs for divorce procedures unapproachable, but also housing costs without a partner, supporting children and paying bills. Most interviewed women were receiving financial help from relatives, working extra hours or earning more money through side illegal jobs in order to survive.

"*I didn't ask how much the divorce costs because I wanted to divorce him in December because we had so many fights, I couldn't take it anymore, my brothers have been telling me for a long time now to divorce him. I had found a lawyer who was charging me 4000 lei. I had a bank loan of 3000 lei but couldn't find more money. He hadn't given me any money since November so I started paying for the*

house on my own, after school for the girl 650, the house is 1180… how much can I earn to be able to pay bills and food and buy her everything she needs for school… I simply didn‘t have money left.“
(Woman, 47)

“*I tried through the internet, found 2-3 lawyers and I told myself that maybe I will look for more until I find a cheaper one but I can‘t afford any. One of them asked me for 16 million (1600 lei) to help me with the protection order and to obtain full custody of the child. I don‘t have this kind of money, it‘s too much for me. I only have 13 million (1300 lei) wage, net. I get minimum wage plus food vouchers, plus what I earn illegally on the top because you can‘t survive with this money only, you have to do more to survive.“*
(Woman, 47)

“*But to leave my house to get rid of him, that‘s not good either because I can‘t afford to live with rent. It‘s a tough decision that I don‘t know how to tackle to overcome this. I would leave from my own house but I don‘t know I would afford to pay rent. I would do this step too but I don‘t know if I will manage.“*
(Woman, 47)

„ *I had some difficulties lately, had some huge electricity bills that I paid for on my own, he didn‘t help me with a single leu… what can I say, I‘m not doing so well but one has to carry on.“*
(Woman, 47)

An important theme that emerged from the interviews is the emphasis on physical violence over all other forms of abuse. This proves to be a big impediment for victims who try to hold the aggressor accountable through the judicial system or that seek any kind of help from authorities. This issue has been addressed by a study on the implementation of the protection order, which reports that the number of victims of psychological, emotional and economic violence is much higher than the number of protection orders issued, as the judges tend to assess insufficient danger and reject the protection order applications (Reteaua VIF 2017). Furthermore, abuse that cannot be proved with marks or bruises tend to be mocked or disbelieved, which lowers their confidence to act.

“*I ended up breaking vegetables out of fear, every time I had the knife around my neck...so the fact that you had it around your throat and he didn‘t cut your neck and blood didn‘t come out… I was really bothered the moment the policeman said: but you know madam, you don‘t have any scratch.“*
(Woman, 48)

"*Unfortunately the laws are not made to punish psychological and economical abuse, even if you have witnesses. They need written documents, not just witnesses, for them psychological trauma that is not visible, even if you talk about it for days uninterrupted, and now after all this time I can talk uninterrupted about everything I've been through because there were moments when I couldn't say why I can't even see a knife, why I don't use the elevator, why I'm scared when someone approaches me."*
(Woman, 48)

"*I told you that the police asked me a lot if he didn't hit me, right?" 'Are you sure he didn't hit you?' Well if he didn't I can't say he did...So I can't lie. He tried some other times, but..."*
(Woman, 43)

"*The gesture matters in my opinion. You don't need to break someone's hand or bruise their eyes or hospitalize them in order for someone to take action. So if that's what it takes then it's really bad..."*
(Woman, 47)

During the group discussion, a woman confessed that she continued living with her abusive husband until she had visible beating marks that she could instrumentalize to obtain a medical certificate. Another woman told us about how she had strong physical pain caused by beating from her husband but was not believed by the doctor who suggested her to see a psychiatrist. The social workers believed her but admitted that she will have higher chances if she framed the situation as an abuse of the children instead.

Financial hardships, along with alcohol consumption, tend to serve as scapegoats for the causes of violence. These narratives are employed either by victims and aggressors or by their families.

"*So he started drinking during work too and, of course… we would always fight because of alcohol, there was no other reason to fight. Today a bit, tomorrow a bit..."*
(Woman, 43)

"*My parents at least say 'aaah but he is drunk, just ignore him', but you can't… it's easy to say that when you're far away from him*"
(Woman, 43)

"*With my first husband I broke up because of alcohol too, but that one doesn't even come to see his daughter anymore"*
(Woman, 47)

"*In the beginning, he was still like this but as I told you earlier, I thought it was because of the living costs because he couldn't afford to pay for the house maintenance. People do certain things when they are in trouble but I think that's how he likes to live. I think so, I don't know… So he likes drinking more than he likes family life.*"
(Woman, 47)

Despite the popular link between poverty, alcohol, and IPV, it seems that violence does occur among all social categories but is frequently hidden by those that fear the stigmatization of their status. While during my research I tried to talk to women from very different economic and social backgrounds, it's worthy to mention that all my respondents struggled financially and had a „nothing to lose" attitude as that described below.

"*Unfortunately violence doesn't discriminate and victims are from all social categories, from all rural and urban areas. It is very difficult for victims of a higher social category to come out and say that they are victims of domestic violence because they are ashamed, they are ashamed of the following stigma. A doctor, a lawyer or I don't know what will never confess what happens in their homes. Only when it's so severe that they cannot take it anymore. On the other hand, those from a lower social category have nothing to lose and ask for help easier because otherwise, they will not survive."*
(Lawyer)

"*You can be a professor, an accountant, a doctor or… many are ashamed to come out in public and say: ‚yes, I suffered a depression because I was threatened in numerous ways, or because I lived in this relationship because I accepted from the beginning thinking it will get better', then out of fear you don't know where to go anymore and you don't see any solution."*
(Woman, 48)

Nevertheless, those women with little access to information and specialized services experience bigger difficulties in their lived experiences with IPV. This is especially the case in rural or peripheral areas. In a cross-sectional study, Rada (2014) identifies living in a rural area and being female as one of the main risk factors for IPV in Romania. One the other hand, other international

and Romanian-based studies showed that small rural communities have strong male solidarity or the authorities are acquainted with the aggressors and take their sides in the unjust disadvantage of victims (Websdale 1995, Vrabiescu 2018, Braga et. al. 201). These issues are reflected in the findings of this research, too.

"*...the difference between violence in the village and in the city is that victims from villages benefit less from specialized help because they don't know they can use different services because they are not encouraged because policemen in villages and in peripheral police stations are completely unprepared in this field, the police office closes at 4 pm and after for pm, if something happens you call 112 and if someone sends a police agent good, if not that's it...or there's… the aggressor is friends with the only policeman in the village who then won't come to you to tell you: 'you know what, stop fighting'.*"
(Lawyer)

"*In rural areas, in some of them, the information medium is the internet and often they only get their information from there and manage to get to different associations that help victims of domestic violence or to specialists that work with victims. Policemen will never go and tell, even if the victim went 7 times to complain, they won't tell her look you can do this, go there, do this, do that. He either does not know himself, he is not interested or just waits for 4 pm to go home.*"
(Lawyer)

"*This year, in January or February I called the police. But I ended up concluding that it's in vain to call it because they come and now last time when I called it they said they will fine me too if I don't calm down. […] They didn't tell me anything, they only said I can kick him out of the house and go to court to request an eviction order because without that order they cannot help me. And basically, on TV I saw that they can also remove him from the house, they said that on the news.*"
(Woman, 47)

4.2. Victim-blaming

According to FRA, almost a quarter of victims of sexual violence from a partner or someone else did not contact the police, nor sought help from any organization because of the feelings of shame and embarrassment (FRA 2014). Another European survey reveals the prevalence of victim-blaming attitudes, with an average of 52% of respondents thinking that women's provocative behavior was a cause of domestic violence. This mechanism can be seen as a form of second victimization of women

who experience IPV, which not only has a negative influence on their mental health but also reinforces the behavior of the perpetrators (Garcia 2014).

The projection of blame on victims proves to be a central theme in my findings. Starting from aggressors blaming the victims for their behaviors, to the blame coming from the family and peers and ending with the blame inflicted on them when they seek help from institutions and authorities or when they proceed to legal action against the aggressor, this mechanism re-victimizes them and proves to be omnipresent in their lives.

First and foremost, in the majority of the cases, the aggressors began in the early stage of abuse to tell their partners that their behavior is the cause of inflicted violence.

"*He ended up checking the electricity meter, opening the TV cable, so I won't have access to information, he would chord the phone off, following all my phone calls and it was a surveillance, a harassment that seemed justified in the eyes of others as if I was doing something wrong and he was forced to do those things to prevent me from doing bad things. It was like necessary for him to do those things..*"
(Woman, 48)

"*...and then we went to visit a distant relative and in the elevator, he stopped the elevator between levels and said: 'I can kill you right here because you deserve it and no one will find you.'*"
(Woman, 48)

"*He always accused me that I ruined his life, that he was better off without me, that he didn't want any kids, that I wanted a child, but if he didn't want a child it's not like I made it on my own, right? So yeah… and many others.*"
(Woman, 43)

„*So I don't know, he was always asking me why I gave him a defective daughter, a wrong child.*"
(Woman, 43)

The blame inoculated by the aggressor can turn into self-blame and has a significant impact on the victim's awareness of the violent situation she finds herself in.

"...there was this symptom of returning to him, I wanted to return to him, I thought I had failed as a woman, I had failed as a mother, I wasn't capable of showing him that I want him and not his money. I blamed myself so many years, thinking it's all my fault because he made it like this, he manipulated

me so badly to make me think it's my fault, my fault that we broke up, that I am to blame for having a child and not listening to him, he turned everything against me to make me the main to blame."
(Woman, 23)

"*Then he comes and tells you 'oh but you made me do this, it's your fault that I'm doing this, I love you so much', and then brings her a bunch of flowers and she thinks , 'wow yes he really loves me so much, I must have done something wrong'.*"
(Lawyer)

Most of them experienced and observed the same mechanism in society, from acquaintances, friends, and work colleagues.

"*Some believed me, didn't do anything, and they were telling me they were sorry but they couldn't help her. Others were saying that I must have done something too, there's no way that I didn't do something wrong."*
(Woman, 48)

"*I know many (women who were abused) but they protect their image, are afraid of consequences at their workplace because… I understand them, I didn't have a tremendous workplace but colleagues still look at you with disgust. 'Aaa, if he cheated on her, if he took all the money away, it means she did something, she deserves it.' When more people found out that I had divorced: 'Did you find someone else'? So no one asked me , 'hey, but did you suffer, actually?'"*
(Woman, 48)

"*The shame and the consequences, how you are seen by society, there is still room for improvement in people's consciousness, the way they look at you.'Aaaa, her, how can I go and use the services of such a being who accepted violence acts against her?'"*
(Woman, 48)

One woman reported during the group discussion that in the small town where she lived before Brasov, she was especially struck by the attitude of other women who had shamed her and told her directly or talked about her to other people that she must have done something wrong to deserve the abuses.

4.3. Mistrust and experiences with authorities

Previous research reveal the obstacles that prevent women from using the criminal justice system in Romania. Feelings of fear, shame and the attitudes of the family held them back from seeking help, and on the other hand, the perception that the criminal justice system is inefficient (Adorjani 2012). However, there have been instances of women feeling encouraged by positive attitudes of the police to report cases of violence or to proceed to further legal action. One the other hand, Braga, Neaga and Nica‘s (2017) findings illustrate an overarching mistrust in authorities, that are not seen as helpful in situations of violence.

The lack of trust in authorities proved to be a dominant theme of my research that all the respondents tackled although with some differences. While some experienced prior fear, hopelessness, and mistrust that prevented them from seeking help from authorities, others argue it through negative experiences they had with police officers, social workers, lawyers and judges.

First of all, some women were intimidated from the start of the alleged closeness of their partners with the police.

“*If the police commissary sees what he‘s doing to me and doesn‘t react in any way, sees how he treats me, I said what‘s the point then, what‘s the point to go to the police to cause myself more harm because anyway those complaints and statements will go to hell. That‘s why no one ever complained to the police, out of fear.“*
(Woman, 23)

“*If he had poker nights, he was sometimes organizing poker nights where all kinds of important people came, like the police commissary, that‘s why he never had problems with the police, he did whatever he felt like.“*
(Woman, 23)

“*I thought I had no chance to do anything against him, especially since the first institution you go to is the police, and he said he knew everyone, x and y and that, and that, and I won‘t have no chance and no one will believe me. Actually up until these new women‘s protection laws came out I really wasn‘t believed when I went to file complaints.“*
(Woman, 48)

Moreover, the fear and feeling of helplessness of the victims, topped by the general ignorance of the peers and reluctance to report abuses to authorities contributed to a general mistrust in seeking help from institutions.

"*I didn't have authorities to go to, because Romanian institutions equal zero, at least that's how I saw it. He did this thing in public, in front of everyone, no one moved a finger. No one ever investigated why that woman ended up in a mental hospital because of him, no one investigated why so many women were abused, hit by him, no one intervened.*"
(Woman, 23)

"*...I was so scared by any kind of institution that I didn't know if there is someone that I can fully trust, to be believed and supported no matter what I say and then I said OK, maybe I will find a way to go there too, I couldn't find a phone number from that NGO and after some threats that he made I went to file a new complaint at a police station that I didn't belong to.*"
(Woman, 48)

"*Yes, so I went there (police) around two times without being able to enter, he had scared me so much that I couldn't even enter that institution and to whoever I asked for help said that they will not get involved in such a thing.*"
(Woman, 48)

„*If I had known that nothing bad will happen if I call 112 instead of going to the police station I would've done that, if I had known that if I start trusting I will be listened to.*"
(Woman, 48)

A different perspective is those of some of the women who had contact with authorities wishing to report the aggressors, to hold them accountable, to divorce or to obtain custody of the children. These respondents disclosed negative or unsuccessful experiences that diminished their trust in solving their problems with the help of authorities.

"*When I was with my first partner I called children's protection and they didn't help me with anything, they came home, made a social investigation and that was it so I don't trust in authority.*"
(Woman, 47)

"*Yes, I don't even wanna call them anymore, basically you go to them and they cut the branch under your feet so you don't have any courage to ask them anything anymore...So I don't trust the police, I don't have the least trust in them because they don't do anything, anything at all.*"
(Woman, 47)

In some instances, they felt revictimized, shamed and humiliated during the interactions with social workers, police officers, doctors, judges, and lawyers.

"*I went to the social services in Sacele and they told me to shut up, that he keeps me home and that I should go to work and that he doesn't have to give me any money, that he can buy whatever he wants and that that's how a woman has to suffer.*"
(Woman, 47)

One of the participants of the group discussion recalled how during the divorce process, the judge took the side of her husband unjustly and modified the testimonies of the witnesses in his favor. She felt traumatized by the divorce process and thinks that the judge humiliated and accused her. She felt misunderstood and wronged by the first lawyer too, who tried to convince her to divorce consensually and to drop the charges of violence against her husband from the case. When she ended up in the emergency room due to her husbands' beatings, she remembers the medical stuff mocking her and claiming she must have deserved that beating.

Especially regarding the trust towards police officers, there's a noticeable gendered dimension, as some respondents trust female officers more or feel uncomfortable around male officers.

"*The lady police officer who was there asked me, I told her I want to file a complaint and she asked me what circumscription I belong to. I told her and she said… 'I am willing to listen to you' and locked the door, gave me a tea and I started crying and told her everything and she said: 'I will give you a phone number but please call right now, don't go home', because she realized that if I go home I won't have any chance to call since I'm surveilled everywhere… A smart woman, indeed.*"
(Woman, 48)

The women who had contact with authorities after the legislative change at the end of 2018 and throughout 2019 have reported positive changes in both the response of authorities and in their own feelings of trust and peace.

"*The kids were with me, I got scared and called 112 and they sent those from the police officer who wouldn't believe me and I realized with joy that, even though it was too late for me, there's been changes in their awareness and as police officers, they know what harassment means, they know what*

psychological trauma means, they know about everything and they listened to me and talked to him and he left, precisely because he realized that something could happen to him if I complain another time. He was told: 'the lady can file a complaint even if you give her a mean look', after all the threats he did against me in the past that went unpunished and now only a mean look, so probably I feel somehow a winner, I found myself again, even if I obtained the results on my own, every woman that succeeds, every child that gets over these underserved mental and economical traumas, no-one deserves this, for me, this means a personal victory."
(Woman, 48)

"*Since I trusted in the new laws, I saw that things are changing, I tried this not only to prove myself, because I did it out of fear and I saw that indeed, that bit of mistrust turned into trust for this institution that has to defend you, first of all. No matter who you are… and I told myself that at least things have changed and are going towards something good."*
(Woman, 48)

"*I was desperate, I was thinking about what would happen if he comes home. With police and everything, I was thinking he will definitely kill me, he comes drunk and that's it, I was still waiting for the answer, they still didn't give me the answer. And then the lawyer sent me a photo with the extension of the protection order and then called me and said it was extended for 6 months. We have peace until November."*
(Woman, 43)

Despite some noticeable improvements for victims after the legislative changes, the question of what happens to the aggressor during and after the protection order emerged. The lack of integrated services and care for the aggressor, once the protection order is issued, tends to burden victims, as they are pressured to care for them or fear an act of possible revenge after the order expires. Although a protection order includes mandatory psychological counselling for the aggressor, the absence of counselling is not being sanctioned or taken seriously.

"*The police left him in the train station at 5:30 because the bus was at 6 and they didn't want to wait with him until 6 because they had other things to do… he didn't get in the bus and called me around 6 times but I didn't pick up the phone, then his brother and father called me to tell me that he asked them to come to pick him up by car, that he is in the parking lot next to the train station feeling sick. … he has a restriction order and I should go check on him… he had to get in the car and go to*

Fagaras, not me to follow him, because I did that enough.“
(Woman, 43)

“*….I think it‘s too short because maybe during these 6 months he knows the deal and doesn‘t come close to you but after this period what do you do… let‘s say he comes to your house and you call the police during these 6 months but after that… he can take revenge on you. And he doesn‘t let you live, because there‘s is idiots like that out there. So there are just humans to behave like this.“*
(Woman, 47)

“*These aggressors need specialized services, psychological counselling, a centre where to go to. Their only solution when they are evicted, if they don‘t have any relatives to go to, is to go to a day centre for homeless people… The support needs to exist for all perspectives. I don‘t want to find excuses for the aggressors but otherwise, we don‘t help the victim efficiently because we leave him somewhere to manage and then he returns and puts his accumulated frustrations on the victim.“*
(Lawyer)

“*As long as the mandatory psychological counselling is not taken seriously and not seen as a breach of the protection order… everyone says they couldn‘t find a place to do it or that they cannot afford it. OK, here you go to a free service… even like this, they didn‘t show up. And the court doesn‘t sanction and I see that some obligations are only fulfilled under the threat of sanctions.“*
(Lawyer)

4.4. Experiences of street-level authorities

A study on the view of police officers‘ experience with domestic violence shows multiple layers of relations to their work and to victims of domestic violence. While the first layer revealed frustration towards the victims that resulted in projections of blame on them, the second layer unveiled feelings of powerlessness and frustration towards more structural issues that impede solving the cases (Horwitz et. al. 2011).

Similar mechanisms are noticeable in Romanian qualitative inquiries on street-level authorities that work with IPV too. For example, frustrated by the work that results in numerous complaint withdrawals, police officers can develop a strategic behavioral pattern that discourages the victims from filing criminal complaints and utilizes the same rhetoric as aggressors do to revictimize them. This is fuelled by the feeling that their work is in vain and that the aggressors will not be held accountable all the way. Some authorities still hold the conservative view that that domestic violence is a private matter (Braga et. al. 2017). Furthermore, due to the lack of specialization on IPV,

authorities resort to personal opinions regarding the phenomenon and in practical situations of handling victims and cases. Often, these are based on sexist and misogynistic preconceptions and lack an understanding of the complexity of IPV (Vrabiescu 2016, 2018).

The county of Brasov is a very particular setting, being the first area in Romania to have a network of specialists working on domestic violence. The network comprises social workers, guardianship authority representatives, psychologists, family practitioners, interested students and NGOs active in the field. Once a month, the group meets and talks about cases that they work on. Other than that, they organized trainings on victim and aggressor psychology for police officers, lawyers, and social workers. The impact on the awareness-raising and specialization of frontline workers on domestic violence is unquestionable.

"*That's how this 'culture' of domestic violence emerged in Brasov and police officers manage to have more empathy, victims gained more courage, they got more support because the difference of approach became obvious between before and after the network.*"
(Lawyer)

Moreover, the network benefits the victims a lot as they can be directed to specialists from the network when they seek help.

"*If she comes to me first, I know I can tell her, look you go to social services and ask to talk to Mrs. XX, you go to children's protection and go straight to Mr xx and the same everywhere, they know how to contact me if they need legal services. And then it's much easier for the victim than to go on her own, not even knowing where. The victim goes directly to the person of contact if we call, we call a person, not an institution, and then we have a different kind of connection. It's a big thing, and coming back to Friday's conference, when I told everyone about this network they were really surprised and said 'wow, what a great idea, how could we replicate this in Bucharest?'*"
(Lawyer)

An important aspect that was addressed is the lack of human resources that drives the available frontline workers to the point of exhaustion.

"*There are not enough police officers, there are not enough social workers, in a city like Brasov, with this mobile team I was telling you about that works only inside the city, you can't only have 2 social workers in the mobile team who are on call 24h.*"
(Lawyer)

"*At first they teamed up and always worked together until they realized they burned out within two weeks and ever since they work separately, one goes to a case and the other one goes to another case because otherwise, it's not doable.*"
(Lawyer)

During the conversation with the lawyer specialized on IPV that is a member of the network, the theme of frustration emerged, not only towards the workload that goes into cases of IPV, but also towards the frequency of victims who return to their partners. The frustration was backed by an underlying understanding of the complexity and the psychology of abuse that prevents the frustration from turning into blame towards the victim.

"*Besides that, it also works as a therapy group for us specialists because often we are very affected by what we experience. […] and our frustration goes there which is good because we don't put it on the clients because we have a lot of frustration when you see how much you work and she still chooses to reconcile. But it's her choice, there's nothing you can do, really nothing you can do… but I cannot express it to her, I can't go and pull her ear but in this group where we all know how much we work and I can say ,look how much this annoyed me' because I need to say this thing otherwise I go crazy, I go bananas because we are also humans and have a background and a family.*"
(Lawyer)

The key issue that shows to impede solving cases of IPV and reinforces the frustration of frontline workers, is the possibility of the victim to withdraw the criminal complaint against the aggressor. The lawyer and the police officers held divergent opinions on the matter.

On one hand, the lawyer thinks it occurs due to pressures from multiple directions on the victim and thinks the aggressor should be held accountable no matter what.

"*…but most of the times the victim doesn't withdraw her criminal complaint voluntarily, she goes under so much pressure from the side of the aggressor and of the family of the aggressor or from the kids or from the relatives, that her consent to withdraw the complaint is almost never expressed out of the free will. But the police goes so much in this direction, let's assume we're not talking about a court hearing yet, and asks the victim seven times if she doesn't want to withdraw her complaint so then we have the pressure of family, the pressure of the police and poor victim has to face everyone alone which mostly she cannot so she withdraws her complaint and the second time she files one she*

is treated differently, ends up in court where she has again the option of withdrawing the complaint or of reconciliation and again, the aggressor ends up not being convicted.“
(Lawyer)

On the same not, a woman said in the group discussion that after receiving an extended protection order of 6 months and full custody of her children, her husband begun to breach the protection order constantly and was threatening her to withdraw the complaint, while the kids were pressuring her to bring him back home, making it extremely difficult for her to pursue the divorce and the criminal procedure against her husband.

In some instances, the pressure for reconciliation comes from magistrates:

“*In court, if we don‘t have staff specialized in domestic violence we hit against his attitude of judges: ‘Wouldn‘t it be better if I give you a deadline for you two to reconcile?‘. Before studying their file, before even seeing how many medical certificates are in it or how many times the victim was in a shelter.“*
(Lawyer)

On the other hand, the police officers I spoke to tended to blame this phenomenon on the attitude of the victim or see it as a matter of free will. The male police officer I interviewed claimed that reconciliation is very frequent due to social conditions, such as psychological and financial dependency. He acknowledged the social pressure from friends and family towards reconciliation but argued that the decision lies in the willpower of the victim. According to him, if a victim decides to withdraw the complaint, the aggressors' criminal prosecution should be stopped, as these decisions „should remain within the family“. He didn‘t express any concern about the efficiency of the monitoring of the protection order and claimed that there have been many exaggerated situations where the victim and perpetrator „simply happened to be in the same supermarket at the same time“, which the victim used against the perpetrator unjustly. Similarly, the female police officer also emphasized the will of the victim in the act of withdrawing the complaint against the aggressor, mentioning „the wish to scare the aggressor without following all the way the judicial procedures, ambivalent attitude of the victim“, but acknowledged that this procedure represents an actual impediment in helping the victim.

The tendency to attribute women the blame in cases of IPV was dominant in the discussion with the male police officer. He talked about atypical cases where the lawyers advised the victims to frame their situation as domestic violence in order to win an advantage in a divorce or custody trial.

Therefore, he argued, police officers need to assess the situation objectively, instead of believing everything the woman says. He then gave examples of unexpected turns where the man turned out to be the victim and the woman was faking it to scare her partner. I asked him how he explains the domestic violence phenomenon and he first said that „I do not want to know the answer“. He said that he can tell me out of „personal and professional experience“ that 90% of the conflictual situations are provoked by women, who don't have the capacity to communicate constructively and should instead learn how to have a conversation without raising the voice. He then said that maybe men „make mistakes more often“ and that alcohol is not necessarily a decisive factor, but the way women talk to men on „a sharp note, that is not OK“.

Even regarding the legislative change, he claimed it having a negative side, namely that women „of bad will“ can take advantage of this law. He described a hypothetical situation of a woman who injures herself and creates false proof and how unpleasant it would be for them to unjustly accuse a man of something he didn‘t do.

This narrative indicates strong solidarity with male aggressors and the interference of personal experiences and gendered preconceptions in a professional work that requires a more complex understanding of the issue of IPV.

The lawyer I interviewed also underlined this kind of masculine solidarity prevalent especially in rural areas that lead to blaming the victim:

“*Let‘s say you‘re at a police station from a village. He doesn‘t even know what it‘s about but says, ‘come on, I had a beer with him yesterday, he‘s a good guy, I think you did something wrong, why did you provoke him?‘*“
(Lawyer)

When we talked about the expectations that the victims have from police officers, he expressed frustration towards impulse-drive expectations to have the perpetrator immediately removed from the house and prosecuted and mentioned the women‘s „desire for revenge“. Then, he emphasized that the victims do not understand the procedure that police officers perform for one case and that one arrest means 6h of constant work for 2 workers. However, he did not acknowledge any obstacles in the current legislation and implementation and said he would not reorganize the procedures differently. This conversation indicates that the frustration tends to be projected on the victims rather than explained through structural problems that pose challenges to solving the cases of IPV.

5. Discussion

In my research, I inquired the experiences of Romanian women with IPV and with authorities, as well as of authorities working with IPV, in the context of the recent legislative changes on domestic violence, following Romania‘s ratification of the Istanbul Convention.

Although the law 178/2018 refers to all types of violence, physical violence continues to be forefronted by most authorities working with IPV. However, economic, sexual, social, psychological and verbal violence are very big parts of the experiences of the women I have interviewed. Even when they experienced physical violence, the fact that they couldn‘t prove it with visible bruises or marks proved to be an impediment in the contact with authorities. Nevertheless, my findings did unveil a case of a protection order issued and extended for six months, based on verbal and psychological violence, showing an example of good implementation of the law 178/2018.

In peripheral and rural areas, authorities appear to be misinformed and ill-prepared to implement the new measures for help and protection of the victims or to inform victims about their options, while reportedly keeping a certain solidarity with the male perpetrators. The gendered solidarity emerged in several instances of my research, from both victims and authorities. Thus it‘s revealed that domestic violence in Romania is not only gendered in terms of prevalence but also in the way people engage with it in the public sphere and professionally.

Perhaps the most prevalent theme of the findings is the blame projected on women for their experiences of IPV. The blame emerges in all dimensions of the ecology of violence against women, from the partner, family, peers, society, street-level authorities and courts. At times, it becomes internalized into feelings of self-blame and shame and turns to be a major impediment for women to report cases of abuse, seek help from institutions, leave abusive relationships and not return to them.

In conversation with authorities, however, projecting blame on women was partly related to the frustration of a big workload that turns out to be in vain, as many women withdraw their complaint. While those who were specialized in working with IPV and committed to the cause, had a complex understanding of the phenomenon and emphasized rather the legislative and structural issues while aware of their work frustration, others attributed the responsibility to women and to their free will to reconciliate with the perpetrator. This contradicts my fourth hypothesis and shows that street-level authorities do not tend to show more empathy with victims than before the legislative change.

The insufficient number of street-level authorities working on IPV, of integrated services for victims and perpetrators provided by the state, the complicated criminal procedures and justice inefficiency, insufficient trainings and specializations of authorities on IPV, lack of surveillance methods for perpetrators who received protection orders and of laws that hold the perpetrators accountable, and poor implementation of the existing legislation all show to be issues that affect both victims and

authorities, impede the prevention and combating of IPV, and are by far from being harmonized with the Istanbul Convention.

The patriarchal and misogynistic attitudes and mechanisms of control through blame and shame of women who experience IPV permeate all spheres of the IPV ecology and play a very important role in deterring victims from seeking help or from fully breaking the cycle of abuse. This problematic calls for the need of awareness and information campaigns in schools, workplaces and other public institutions, which promote gender equality and healthy relationships. The prerequisite for this would, however, be the correct implementation of the existing legislation and further harmonization with the Istanbul Convention, which takes into account this issue and lays the ground for fitted solutions.

Financial hardships, poverty and economic dependence of women from men are realities that were reflected in my research and often played a role in the narrative of leaving the abusive situations. The women I spoke to had their own income and received some form of material support from their families in order to regain their independence from the perpetrators, which does not reflect the situation of those living under the poverty line or who are unemployed due to unpaid carework. Thinking back to my third hypothesis, it seems indeed that the economically and socially vulnerable women benefit from the legislative changes less and still tend not to leave abusive situations, with or without the help of authorities.

While the findings of the study mostly align with the previous studies conducted in Romania before the legislative change, there are also instances of recent positive examples of specialized and competent authorities and NGOs, good implementation examples and women who trusted themselves and authorities, and succeeded to leave their abusive partners. My first two hypotheses have been partly confirmed, as it seems that victims who had contact with authorities after the legislative change feel more empowered to act, experience less shame and trust authorities more, knowing that they can protect them from the abusers with a protection order. However, the fate of the perpetrators remains marginalized and is an aspect that should not be overlooked, as the lack of integrated services, disregard for mandatory counselling and care for the perpetrators mostly have consequences for the victims.

Although the aim of my research was explorative, on a final note I would like to add that it did gain an adjacent transformative dimension that aligned with my initial feminist intentions, for me and for the women I have interviewed. All of them expressed gratitude for allowing their voices to be heard and for the simple act of being listened to, and told me it felt important for their healing process, for passing their stories to others, and for realizing that their experiences are not shameful. Some of

them received information and advice from me and wrote to me after the research that our conversation was helpful and important to them. For me, it was humbling to offer them a platform to speak up and to have a small impact on their wellbeing.

6. Appendix

6.1. Interview guides in Romanian and English

A. Interview with victims of IPV

Imi puteti povesti putin despre dvs? Ati fost la scoala? Ce ati studiat? Unde locuiti acum? Lucrati? Ce ocupatie aveti? Aveti copii? Cati? Ce varste au? Cum va petreceti timpul liber? Ce va place sa faceti? Ce interese aveti?

Can you tell me a bit about yourself? Where did you go to school? What did you study? Where do you live now? Do you work? What is your job? Do you have kids? How many? What age do they have? What do you do in your free time? What do you enjoy doing?

Povestiti-mi despre relatia dvs actuala/ultima relatie. Cand v-ati cunoscut cu actualul/ultimul sot/ partener? De cat timp sunteti impreuna/ Cat timp ati fost impreuna? Cu ce se ocupa?

Tell me about you current relationshp. When did you meet with your current/ last partner? How long have you been together? What does he do?

Ce roluri aveti/aveati in intretinerea casei? Cine aduce/a venituri in casa? Ce efect are/avea acest lucru asupra relatiei? Credeti ca v-ati descurca sa va intretineti familia singura/ Va descurcati sa va intretineti singura? Cum?

What roles do you have/did you have in the household? Who brought/brings money in the household? What impact did this have on the relationship? Do you think you would manage to support your family on your own? / To support yourself independently? How?

Va intelegeti bine? Cand au inceput problemele dintre voi? Cum se manifesta? Se poarta urat cu dvs? Cum va explicati acest comportament? Cat timp a continuat sa se comporte asa? S-a intamplat sa devina mai bine sau mai rau intre voi?

How do you get along? When did the problems between you begin? How did they manifest? Did he/ does he behave badly towards you? How do you explain this behaviour? For how long did he behave like this? Did it become better or worse?

Cum ati reactionat in aceste situatii? Ati vorbit cu persoane apropiate despre asta? Cum au reactionat?

How did you react in these situations? Did you talk to people around you about it? How did they react?

Cum ati reusit sa va separati de partener? Cand ati decis acest lucru? El cum a reactionat?

How did you separate from your partner? When did you decide this? How did he react?

Ati luat legatura cu autoritatile? Cand? Cum a decurs cand le-ati contactat? (povestiti ce s-a intamplat cand ati reclamat violenta partenerului/ de ce nu l-ati reclamat la politie sau spital sau alte autoritati?)

Did you contact authorities? When? How did you go when you contacted them? (tell me what happened when you reported your partner's violence/ why you did not report him to the police/ hospital/ other authorities)

Cunoasteti si alte servicii care va pot ajuta? Care? Ati apelat la ele? De ce da/nu?

Do you know other services that could help you? Which ones? Did you contact them? Why?

Cum vi s-a parut ca v-au ajutat aceste servicii sa va imbunatatiti situatia? Ce alte masuri/servicii credeti ca v-ar fi ajutat mai mult?

How did these services help you improve your situation? What other measures/services do you think would've helped you?

Cunoasteti si alte femei care se confrunta cu probleme asemanatoare? Imi puteti povesti cate ceva despre situatia lor?

Do you know other women who are confrunted with similar situation? Can you tell me a bit about their situation?

Uitandu-va la trecutul dvs, ce sfat i-ati da unei alte femei care trece printr-o situatie similara ?

Looking back, what advice would you give to other women who go through similar things?

B. Interview guide with experts/authorities

Care este functia dvs si ce atributii aveti? De cat timp lucrati aici?

What is your function and what work attributes do you have? How long have you been working here?

Ce atributii aveti/ ce servicii oferiti in ceea ce priveste violenta domestica?

What are your attributes/ what services do you offer regarding domestic violence?

Cum ajung victimele la dvs? Ce imi puteti spune despre ele? Provin predominant din anumite categorii sau din anumite zone ale orasului?

How do the victims reach you? What can you tell me about them? To they come predominately from certain categories or areas?

Cum va explicati fenomenul violentei domestice? Credeti ca este vreodata justificata? Care factori credeti ca contribuie la rata joasa de raportare a abuzurilor?

How do you explain the phenomenon of domestic violence? Do you think it is ever justified? Which factors do you think contribute to the low rate of abuse reports?

Va rog sa imi descrieti procedurile actuale de interventie in cazuri de violenta domestica. Cum vi se par aceste proceduri? Cum ar putea fi imbunatatite?

Please describe me the intervention procedures in cases of domestic violence. What do you think of them? How could they be improved?

Imi puteti vorbi mai mult despre dificultatile cu care va confruntati in rezolvarea cazurilor/ ajutarea victimelor?

Can you tell me more about the difficulties you encounter in solving cases/ helping victims?

Ce imi puteti spune despre introducerea ordinului de protectie de urgenta? (Ati emis vreun ordin de la introducerea noii legislatii? Cum s-a desfasurat? Cum a reactionat victima? Dar agresorul? Cum s-a efectuat monitorizarea respectarii ordinului?)

What can you tell me about the introduction of the provisional protection order? (Did you ever issue one since the new law was implemented? How did it go? How did the victim react? What about the aggressor? How did the monitoring of the order go?

Imi puteti detalia despre interactiunile dvs cu victimele? Ce asteptari au de la dvs? Cum s-au schimbat de cand a fost introdusa noua legislatie? (Dvs cum percepeti faptul ca aveti autoritatea de a emite ordinul pe loc? In ce fel influenteaza munca dvs cu cazurile de violenta?) Credeti ca imbunatateste protectia victimelor?

Can you tell me more about your interactions with the victims? What expectations do they have from you? How did they change since the new law was implemented? (How do you percieve your attribute of issueing a protection order on the spot? How does it influence your work with domestic violence? Do you think it's improving the protection of victims?)

Credeti ca unor victime le este mai greu sa ajunga la dvs/ sa iasa din situatii abuzive decat altora? De ce?

Do you think some victims have more difficulties to reach you/ to leave abusive situations than others? Why is that?

6.2. Confidentiality agreement

Stimati participanti,

Theodora Tepeneag, studenta la Freie Universitat Berlin, departamentul de sociologie din cadrul Institutului de Studii Est-Europene, va invit sa participati la proiectul de cercetare privind experientele victimelor/supravietuitoarelor violentei domestice. Sunt interesata de cunoasterea relatiei lor cu autoritatile si impactul acesteia asupra raportarii cazurilor de violenta.

Veti fi solicitat/a sa raspundeti la niste intrebari pe durata a aprox. 60-90 minute. Puteti fi vulnerabil/a doar daca datele personale vor fi asociate cu raspunsurile furnizate in cadrul studiului. Imi asum intreaga responsabilitate pentru protejarea datelor personale (prin folosirea unui pseudonim), pentru asigurarea anonimatului si a confidentialitatii.

Fiecare participant are dreptul sa se retraga in orice moment.

Participarea la studiu este voluntara.

Acest studiu este realizat sub egida Universitatii Freie Universitat din Berlin si rezultatele vor fi prezentate sub forma unei dizertatii in cadrul facultatii.

Mentionez ca aceasta cercetare ma va ajuta sa avansez cunoasterea despre fenomenul violentei domestice si despre obstacolele ce intervin in combaterea si prevenirea sa.

Daca aveti intrebari, va rog sa ma contactati la adresa de e-mail: theodora.tepeneag@gmail.com.

Va multumesc!

Cercetator principal

Numele si prenumele……. Semnatura……

Data…….

Va rog sa semnati mai jos daca sunteti de acord sa participati la proiectul de cercetare mentionat mai sus.

Participant

Numele si prenumele……. Semnatura…….

Data……..

Dear participants,

Theodora Tepeneag, as student of the Free University Berlin, department of sociology of the Eastern European Studies Institute, I would like to invite you to partake in a research project regarding

the experiences of victims/survivors of domestic violence. I am interested in getting to know more about their relationship with authorities and its impact on the reporting cases of domestic violence.

You will be asked to answer some questions during aprox. 60-90 minutes. You can only be exposed if you personal information will be associated with the answers given within the research. Therefore I take full responsibility for protecting your personal data (by using a pseudonym), in order to ensure anonimity and confidentiality. Every participant has the right to withdraw at all times and the participation is voluntary.

This research is conducted within the Free University Berlin and the results will be presentate in the form of a disertation at the faculty.

I would like to mention that this research will help me advance knowledge about the phenomenon of domestic violence and about the obstacles that intervene in combatting and preventing it.

For any further questions, feel free to contact me at the following e-mail adress: theodora.tepeneag@gmail.com.

Thank you!

Researcher

First and last name……. Signature……

Date…….

Please sign below if you agree to take part of the abovementioned research project:

Participant

First and last name……. Signature…….

Date……..

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