



## **THE PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS INVOLVED IN SHAPING MARITAL COUPLES ATTITUDES TOWARDS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN WESTERN ROMANIA**

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### *Abstract*

*Even today in the Romanian society the organizing family pattern is closely linked to marital violence, a central social issue. The paper aims to highlight the role of psychosocial factors in outlining the marital couples attitude towards domestic abuse in western Romania, giving the fact that these factors are the ones who determine the main differences in this sense. The research was conducted on marital couples belonging to the rural and urban. We suggest a comparative and co-relational procedure, using the following independent variables - gender, age, residency, educational level, number of children, income of the respondent and of the partner. We obtained an image of domestic violence in terms of its incidence and managed to surprise the partners' attitude towards marital abuse, in relation to the perception of marital dissatisfaction and gender belief system. According to the study, in the context of Romanian postindustrial society, male domestic violence prevails along with the*

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*equalization tendency of marital roles: women's independent position are clearly outlined, the behaviors and attitudes adopted by women are consistent with this trend.*

Keywords: domestic violence, victim, marital couple, abuse, gender inequality

## **Introduction**

Present in all societies and stages of development in various forms, manifest or latent, directly or indirectly, domestic violence, especially the one against women and children, has been treated differently along the evolution of society. If we work within Durkheim's paradigm on social facts and their characteristics, we may agree that domestic violence is an issue of "normality", being present in most societies, having general and collective features and effects, which distinguishes it from its particular and concrete manifestations (Durkheim, 2002).

Even since the medieval era and continuing with the beginning of industrialized society, domestic violence – the abuse exercised against women - was one of the social and cultural "practice" tacitly accepted. Only since the 1970s, along with the feminist movement, the modern society began to consider the social problem of violence as having centrality status, with all the theoretical and practical - applied consequences arising from this type of evaluation (Zamfir, 2007).

Social scientific researches realized in the context of the social, and also the data provided at the common sense shows that the phenomenon, even if present in all social classes, records the highest rates among those who have a lower socioeconomic status - here we mention lower educational level associated with a lower level of income (Straus, 2000). Violence in marital couples (real violence) is more widespread than shown in official statistics on this phenomenon (registered or official violence), because many victims do not report this type of incidents to the competent authorities, for various reasons, most being associated with traditional patriarchal attitudes, that preserve despite all the changes in social statuses and roles of contemporary women, the idea that she is man's property (Straus, 2000).

Generically, *violence* is seen as "use of force and coercion by an individual, group or social class to impose will on others" (Zamfir &

Vlăsceanu, 1998, p. 658). Domestic violence as a typology of violence is a behavioral model of exercising power and control over a partner in the couple's relationship, using harassment, intimidation, threat and physical injury (Dutton, 1995). This type of abuse is manifested in various forms: physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological.

According to *Law no. 217/2003 on preventing and combating domestic violence* in Romania's Penal Code (published in the Official Gazette, Part I, no. 367 of 29 May 2003), domestic violence is "any physical or verbal action committed intentionally by a family member against another member of the same family that causes physical, psychological, sexual or material damage. Domestic violence is also seen as preventing women from exercising her rights and fundamental freedoms "(Law no. 217/2003, art. 2, 2003 of the Romanian penal code).

Being considered a social phenomenon, researchers try to identify the sources of domestic violence in values, norms and beliefs of the environment within they manifest. In this regard, numerous studies have highlighted the importance of some socio-cultural or personality factors in generating the violence phenomenon within the marital couple. *Gender inequality* would be a main explanatory factor for the high rates of domestic violence manifested especially in traditional societies, where the dominant role is assigned to the man as the "family head" (Larossa, 1980; Straus, 2000). Another category of contributing factors in the occurrence of domestic violence is one that includes elements such as *drug or alcohol consumption, psychological issues* (mental illness, frustration or jealousy, behavioral and attitudinal problems, inability to control anger), *socialization problems for the man* – here can be also included the problems generated by the partner's membership in a violent group / subculture (Worden & Carlson, 2005).

*The violent family environment* where the child grows and develops, also favors the formation of a violent behavior in adults that will be exercised in the marital couple relationship. Consequently, the primary socialization is considered to be extremely important process in the psychosocial shaping of the individual (Straus, 2000), *stressful events experienced by a family* generates a high incidence of domestic violence occurrence (Kaufman & Straus, 1987). Also, the precarious economic situation of the family is positively associated with domestic violence (Straus, 2000).

Another explanation is attributed to the widespread concept among men according to which, *sexually speaking the wife is "owned" by the husband* (Wilson & Daly, 1993), this is where the sexual abuse against women occurs – the marital rape, when the woman is being forced by the partner to unwanted sexual relations.

Some guidelines analyze and explain domestic violence in terms of *the behavior adopted by the woman* (Worden & Carlson, 2005). These approaches assign the guilt to the woman, considering that she is the one to generate the violent behaviors: she was not attentive to the needs of her partner, she is talking too much, she does not take care of the children as she should.

The widespreading of domestic violence in the society, has created the need to develop explanatory theories in this sense. Although these theories are different, we will focus on outlining those which identify violence`s sources among the social.

Domestic violence is a complex psychosocial phenomenon, with adverse consequences for the partners and also for the children whom are socialized in a culture marked by violent behavior. Society can not ignore a phenomenon of this kind, aiming to investigate its causes, its incidence in different environments in order to formulate appropriate measures to reduce this phenomenon and to construct attitudes to repel it through stigma and appropriate sanctions.

## **Objective**

Starting from the idea that in recent years, domestic violence has become a matter of national interest and that the model of family organization is a closely linked factor to marital violence, the study captures the incidence and attitude of marital partners towards conjugal violence.

The study aims to identify participants` attitudes towards domestic violence, to determine its manifestation forms and participants` acceptance degree regarding this phenomenon, to capture whether gender roles identification justify domestic violence acceptance and to determine how marital dissatisfaction can be a source of marital violence.

## Method

### *Research hypothesis*

1. There are significant differences in the attitudes towards domestic violence determined by the sex of participants and their residence, meaning that participants who live in rural areas will show a higher level of acceptance towards domestic violence.

2. We postulate that a direct relationship between the degree of acceptance towards domestic violence and identifying with male role is establishing.

3. We suppose that there is a direct relationship between the degree of acceptance towards domestic violence and hostile attitude toward women.

4. The level of marital dissatisfaction is in direct relation with the incidence of the violence.

### *Participants*

The research was conducted on a sample of 100 participants, 25 married couples from urban areas and 25 married couples from rural areas. Their age is ranged between 22-60 years. Participation in research (Table 1) was voluntary and was intended that the two samples drawn from urban and rural area to be equivalent in terms of economic level, educational level, number of children and years of marriage.

Table 1. Comparison by residence, educational level, income, number of children and years of marriage

| Variables          | t      | M              | SD            | Sig. | df | Studied samples |
|--------------------|--------|----------------|---------------|------|----|-----------------|
| Education level    | -2.548 | 2.60<br>3.14   | .92<br>1.17   | .01  | 98 | Rural<br>Urban  |
| Years of marriage  | -129   | 15.72<br>16.00 | 9.97<br>11.60 | .89  | 98 | Rural<br>Urban  |
| Number of children | .000   | 1.12<br>1.20   | .96<br>.87    | 1.00 | 98 | Rural<br>Urban  |
| Own income         | -4.020 | 2.26<br>2.98   | .77<br>.99    | .00  | 98 | Rural<br>Urban  |
| Partner`s income   | -4.157 | 2.26<br>3.00   | .77<br>.98    | 0.00 | 98 | Rural<br>Urban  |

### *Instruments*

*Inventory of Beliefs About Wife Beating* (I.B.W.B.; Saunders, Lynch, Grayson, & Lintz, 1987) is a scale that measures attitudes and beliefs about physical violence manifested against the wife. The score for each subscale is done by summing the numerical scores obtained and the total score is obtained by summing the scores of the component subscales. The inventory includes 5 subscales - their scores express the participants' attitude towards physical abuse as being acceptable. Scale has a good fidelity, with a Cronbach alpha score of .89 (Radu, 2003) and consists of: 1. *the attitude subscale according to which aggression against female is justified* (contains statements about the reasons why beating a woman is acceptable); 2. *the subscale for assessing the belief that the woman has to gain when she is being beaten* (includes those myths that work in society according to which the woman wants to be abused in order to obtain mercy and compassion from others, from her husband or because she feels pleasure when beaten); 3. *the subscale measuring the support attitudes for the abused women* (concern legislative measures to be taken in supporting women); 4. *the subscale measuring attitudes towards the idea of abuser's responsibility* (concerns perpetrator's or victim's responsibilities, the abuse is seen as a premeditated incident, that is spontaneous, unwanted); 5. *the subscale for measuring attitudes regarding the idea of perpetrator's punishment* (appreciates the opportunity, type, duration and severity of the measures that should be instituted against the perpetrator). The instrument was validated on Romanian population by A. Radu (2003), achieving a good internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = .89) and stability over time; the correlation coefficient between summed beliefs is  $r=.49$ , at a significance limit of  $p<.002$ .

*The Conflict Tactics Scale - Physical Violence* (C.T.S.-P.V.; apud Brehm, Kassin, & Saul, 1989) was proposed by Straus (1979) in order to measure physical violence manifested by partners in the couple. The scale is designed based on eight behaviors included in the notion of physical violence and reflects different intensities of these. The scale asks participants to indicate on a scale from 0 (never) to 7 (daily) how many times they were involved in each of the eight types of violent behavior: 1 - throwing an object towards the partner, 2 - bullying, grasping, pushing the partner, 3 - slapping the partner, 4 - hitting with fists, 5 - trying to hit the partner with an object, 6 - beating, 7 - gun threat, 8 - the use of weapons for injuring the partner. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha was .72

*Ambivalent Sexism Inventory* (A.S.I.; *apud* Glick & Fiske, 1996) measures the attitude regarding women in general and it is structured in two subscales: *hostile sexism and benevolent sexism*. In the first stage, the inventory has been adapted to the Romanian population, being applied in the initial batch on 120 participants whose task was to indicate the degree of agreement with each statement on a scale in 4 steps. The items were reversed in contrary with the original version and there are 4 scales, in contrary with 6 scales being present in the original version. From the original items were excluded three of them for each subscale in order to maximize the internal consistency, so that the final version used includes 16 items, 8 for each subscale. The psychometric qualities of the final scales are: internally consistence (Cronbach alpha) for hostile sexism of .72 and for benevolent sexism .71. The test-retest fidelity is .73, respectively .70.

*Personal Attributes Questionnaire* (P.A.Q.; Spence & Helmreich, 1978) measures the degree according to which participants identify themselves with gender roles, in terms of respondent's self-perceived possession, of personality traits that are considered to differentiate the two sexes (being in the same time socially desirable). The instrument included in its initial form 24 items, grouped into 3 subscales: one to assess masculinity, the second to assess femininity and the third reflects the initial one-dimensional conception regarding masculinity and femininity. Only the first two subscales were used - masculinity and femininity, constructed according to the idea that these traits are independent-orthogonal. The subscales have significant psychometric qualities: acceptable internal consistency (between .67 and .75) and test-retest fidelity between .71 - .87 (Lenney, 1991).

*Index of Marital Satisfaction* (I.M.S.; Hudson, 1992) wants to measure the issues within the marital relationship. It includes 25 items, constructed to measure the extent, severity or magnitude of an issue that a partner has in a marital relationship. It quoted from 1 ("never") to 7 ("always"). Scale's fidelity has a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .96, indicating an excellent internal consistency (Hudson, 1992). IMS also has a very good stability with a test-retest correlation of .96. Regarding validity, I.M.S. provides a very good discrimination between couples known to have marital problems and those who do not face such problems.

*Procedure*

The study is comparative and co-relational; in the comparisons were used the following independent variables: sex of participants, residency, educational level, number of children, age, own income and partner's income.

The participants completed the questionnaires individually after they have been informed about work requirements and instructed about how to fill them. They were asked to respond as honestly as possible to each item, ensuring them of confidentiality and anonymity.

**Results and discussion**

In the first part of the study our objective was to identify participants' attitudes towards domestic violence taking account of their gender, area of residence and level of education.

Table 2. Comparison of the attitudes on "beating your wife" according to participants' gender, area of residence and level of education

| Source                              | Sum squares | df | m       | F      | Sig. |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|----|---------|--------|------|
| Residence                           | 71.29       | 1  | 71.29   | .159   | .69  |
| Gender                              | 6629.64     | 1  | 6629.64 | 14.830 | .001 |
| Education level                     | 157.68      | 1  | 157.68  | .353   | .55  |
| Residence * gender                  | 115.90      | 1  | 115.90  | .259   | .61  |
| Residence * education level         | 142.17      | 1  | 142.17  | .318   | .57  |
| Gender * education level            | 17.87       | 1  | 17.87   | .040   | .84  |
| Residence* gender * education level | 153.47      | 1  | 153.47  | .343   | .55  |

Regarding the comparison of attitudes on "beating your wife" according to participants' gender, area of residence and level of education, the data showed significant differences only by participants' gender ( $F=14.830$ ,  $p<.001$ ), that indicates that men show a supportive attitude to physical violence manifested in a greater degree than women. Depending on the residence and other demographic variables there were not significant differences regarding attitudes towards domestic violence (Table 2). Also, participants with the same level of education do not differ significantly in terms of scale of beliefs about "beating your wife" depending on the area of residence (urban vs. rural).

Table 3. Comparison on subscale 1 ("Beating the woman is justified")

| Source                              | Sum square | df | m        | F      | Sig. |
|-------------------------------------|------------|----|----------|--------|------|
| Residence                           | 100.10     | 1  | 100.10   | 1.028  | .31  |
| Gender                              | 1058.44    | 1  | 1058.44  | 10.876 | .001 |
| Education level                     | 1434E-02   | 1  | 1434E-02 | .000   | .99  |
| Residence * gender                  | 11.61      | 1  | 11.61    | .119   | .73  |
| Residence * education level         | 82.84      | 1  | 82.84    | .851   | .35  |
| Gender * education level            | 1.69       | 1  | 1.69     | .017   | .89  |
| Residence* gender * education level | 20.72      | 1  | 20.72    | .213   | .64  |

The analysis of the attitude for justifying the behavior of "beating a woman" in relation to variables such as sex of participants, area of residence and level of education, shows significant differences only according to gender ( $F=10.876$ ,  $p<.001$ ) in the sense that male participants consider in a greater degree that beating the wife is justified. Depending on other analyzed variables there were no differences in this sense (Table 3). In fact, when generally talking about the phenomenon of domestic abuse, we refer to the female victim because she usually plays the role of the person abused by the partner. The risk for a woman to be attacked (physically or emotionally) by her couple partner is much higher than that of being attacked by a stranger (Bachman & Carmody, 1994).

Table 4. Comparison on subscale 2 („The woman has to gain from being beaten”)

| Source                               | Sum square | df | m     | F     | Sig. |
|--------------------------------------|------------|----|-------|-------|------|
| Residence                            | 56.36      | 1  | 56.36 | 2.922 | .09  |
| Gender                               | 79.76      | 1  | 79.76 | 4.135 | .04  |
| Education level                      | .34        | 1  | .34   | .020  | .88  |
| Residence * gender                   | 4.68       | 1  | 4.68  | .243  | .62  |
| Residence * education level          | 98.15      | 1  | 98.15 | 5.088 | .02  |
| Gender * education level             | .45        | 1  | .45   | .023  | .87  |
| Residence * gender * education level | .27        | 1  | .27   | .014  | .90  |

According to the results shown in table 4, there are significant differences regarding the belief that "the woman has to gain from being beaten" in relation to the participants` gender, education level and area of residence, meaning that male participants ( $F=4.135$ ,  $p<.04$ ) although they have post-secondary studies, tend to believe that wife beating brings some benefits for the

woman ( $F=5.088$ ,  $p<.02$ ). Some theoretical guidelines analyze and explain domestic violence in terms of the behavior adopted by women (Worden & Carlson, 2005). These approaches assign the blame to the woman, considering that she is the one generating violent behaviors: she was not attentive to the needs of her partner, she talks too much, she does not take care of children as she should etc.

Table 5. Comparison on subscale 3 (Subscale measuring attitudes regarding the idea of supporting the abused women)

| Source                               | Sum square | df | m         | F     | Sig. |
|--------------------------------------|------------|----|-----------|-------|------|
| Residence                            | 30.06      | 1  | 30.06     | 1.494 | .22  |
| Gender                               | 31.06      | 1  | 31.06     | 1.594 | .21  |
| Education level                      | .32        | 1  | .32       | .016  | .89  |
| Residence * gender                   | 13.14      | 1  | 13.14     | .653  | .42  |
| Residence * education level          | 21.17      | 1  | 21.17     | 1.052 | .30  |
| Gender * education level             | 9.87       | 1  | 9.87      | .491  | .48  |
| Residence * gender * education level | 4.961E-02  | 1  | 4.961E-02 | .002  | .96  |

Comparison on subscale 3 “Attitudes regarding the idea of supporting the abused women” do not show significant differences in terms of the help that should be given to the abused women (Table 5), when taken into account gender, education level and area of residence. All the respondents support the victim in the same degree.

Table 6. Comparison on subscale 4 (Subscale measuring attitudes towards the idea of the abuser`s responsibility)

| Source                               | Sum square | df | m      | F     | Sig. |
|--------------------------------------|------------|----|--------|-------|------|
| Residence                            | 21.02      | 1  | 21.02  | .542  | .46  |
| Gender                               | 313.84     | 1  | 313.84 | 8.086 | .005 |
| Education level                      | 19.10      | 1  | 19.10  | .492  | .48  |
| Residence * gender                   | 1.94       | 1  | 1.94   | .050  | .82  |
| Residence * education level          | 4.54       | 1  | 4.54   | .117  | .73  |
| Gender * education level             | 16.90      | 1  | 16.90  | .436  | .51  |
| Residence * gender * education level | 28.15      | 1  | 28.15  | .725  | .39  |

Analyzing the data in the table 6, we find that there were significant differences by participants` gender ( $F=8.086$ ,  $p<.005$ ) regarding the attribution of responsibility for initiating and conducting the violent act to the aggressor. Men, compared to women, consider to a lesser extent that the abuser is responsible for triggering the violent act toward their partner.

Table 7. Comparison on subscale 5 (Subscale for the attitudes assessment regarding the idea of punishing the aggressor)

| Source                               | Sum square | df | m      | F      | Sig. |
|--------------------------------------|------------|----|--------|--------|------|
| Residence                            | 1.34       | 1  | 1.34   | .044   | .83  |
| Gender                               | 303.75     | 1  | 303.75 | 9.946  | .002 |
| Education level                      | 15.31      | 1  | 15.31  | .501   | .48  |
| Residence * gender                   | 42.87      | 1  | 42.87  | 1.404  | .23  |
| Residence * education level          | 34.87      | 1  | 34.87  | 1.1142 | .28  |
| Gender * education level             | 3.16       | 1  | 3.16   | .104   | .74  |
| Residence * gender * education level | 9.64       | 1  | 9.64   | .361   | .57  |

In table 7 the attitude regarding punishing the aggressor is different only in terms of gender ( $F=9.946$ ,  $p<.002$ ). Thus male participants support in a lesser extent than women, that the aggressor should be punished.

Table 8. Comparison at the level of the attitudes towards domestic violence by participants` gender and their level of identification with the traditional masculine gender role

| Level of masculinity | Attitude towards domestic violence | N  | m     | SD    | t      | df | Sig. |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|----|-------|-------|--------|----|------|
| Upper-medium level   |                                    | 27 | 93.96 | 21.90 | 22.284 | 49 | .001 |
| Lower-medium level   |                                    | 23 | 88.73 | 25.87 |        |    |      |

Comparing male participants` attitudes towards domestic violence according to their degree of identification with the traditional masculine gender role ( $t=22.284$ ,  $p<.001$ ), there is a significant difference between those with upper-medium level and those with lower-medium level (Table 8). The positive attitude towards domestic violence is more pronounced at the participants whose level of accession to the traditional male gender roles is above the average. In this regard, numerous studies have highlighted the importance of

socio-cultural or personality elements in generating the phenomenon of violence within the marital couple. *Gender inequality* would be a first explanatory factor for the high rates of domestic violence manifested especially in traditional societies, where the dominant role is assigned to the man - he is the "head of the family".

Table 9. Correlation between the attitude towards domestic violence and sexist attitude at the level of the entire group of participants ( $N = 100$ )

| Variable                              | Hostile sexism | Benevolent sexism |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Beating the woman is justified        | .58**          | -.13              |
| The woman has to gain by being beaten | .30**          | -.04              |
| Help given to the abused woman        | .37**          | -.08              |
| Aggressor`s responsibility            | .43**          | -.08              |
| Aggressor`s punishment                | .37**          | -.23*             |
| Attitude towards domestic violence    | .60**          | -.19              |

Note: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ;

Data from table 9 show a very significant link between hostile sexism and the belief that women's physical aggression is justified ( $r=.58$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Participants who show a favorable attitude to physical violence exercised against the woman, also present a high level of hostile sexism. This correlates significantly with all the subscales from the inventory measuring the beliefs about wife beating and with the positive attitude towards domestic violence ( $r=.60$ ,  $p<.01$ ) in general. The benevolent sexism correlates negatively with the idea of punishing the perpetrator ( $r=-.23$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Participants showing a greater benevolent sexist attitudes will consider more closely that the aggressor should be punished. These attitudes are built mainly in the primary family environment.

Thus, the primary socialization is considered to be a very important process in the psycho-social profile of an individual (Straus, 2000). Other surveys highlight a significant relation between stressful events experimented by a family and the high rates registered for domestic violence (Kaufman & Straus, 1987). Also the precarious economic situation of one family is positively associated with marital violence (Straus, 2000).

In order to achieve a deeper analysis we highlighted the association between variables of interest (attitude towards domestic violence / type of sexism), separately for male and female participants.

Table 10. The association between the attitude towards domestic violence, respectively properly subscales and the hostile / benevolent sexist attitude for the male participants ( $N=50$ )

| Variable                              | Hostile sexism | Benevolent sexism |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Beating the woman is justified        | .57**          | .003              |
| The woman has to gain by being beaten | .20            | .21               |
| Help given to the abused woman        | .37**          | .01               |
| Aggressor`s responsibility            | .44**          | .15               |
| Aggressor`s punishment                | .34**          | -.05              |
| Attitude towards domestic violence    | .59**          | .02               |

Note: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

In table 10 it is to be noted that the association is significant not only between hostile sexism and positive attitude towards domestic violence ( $r=.59$ ,  $p<.01$ ), considered as a unit, but also between hostile attitudes toward women and the belief that woman's beating is justified ( $r=.57$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

Table 11. The association between the attitude towards domestic violence, respectively properly subscales and the hostile / benevolent sexist attitude for the female participants ( $N=50$ )

| Variable                              | Hostile sexism | Benevolent sexism |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Beating the woman is justified        | .34**          | .00               |
| The woman has to gain by being beaten | .22            | -.13              |
| Help given to the abused woman        | .23            | -.06              |
| Aggressor`s responsibility            | .20            | -.16              |
| Aggressor`s punishment                | .13            | -.20              |
| Attitude towards domestic violence    | .32*           | -.15              |

Note: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

Data from table 11 indicate a significant correlation between hostile attitudes toward women and the acceptance of domestic violence by female respondents ( $r=.32$ ,  $p<.01$ ). A high level of hostility toward women manifested by male participants entails the growth of the hostile sexism degree also for the female participants. Therefore, regarding the analyzed variable, we can speak of a correlation within the couple. Thus the criticism against feminist theories is significant because they exclude the fact that violence within the marital couple is generated by both sexes (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Non-accepting the reality that also in patriarchal societies there may be cases when men

exclude domestic violence and abuse against women, is another criticism of feminist trends (Stark & McEvoy, 1970).

There can be also identified the existence of a *significant link between hostile attitude toward women and the belief that beating women is justified* for the female participants ( $r=.34$ ,  $p<.01$ ). In this case, the correlation intra-couple in terms of hostile attitude against women, is also present.

Table 12. Comparison at the level of hostile sexist attitudes by gender, area of residence and education level of the participants

| Source                      | Sum square | df | m      | F      | Sig. |
|-----------------------------|------------|----|--------|--------|------|
| Residence                   | 29.40      | 1  | 29.40  | 3.041  | .08  |
| Gender                      | 169.42     | 1  | 169.42 | 17.518 | .001 |
| Education level             | 15.72      | 1  | 15.72  | 1.625  | .20  |
| Residence * Gender          | .76        | 1  | .76    | .079   | .77  |
| Residence * Education level | 3.15       | 1  | 3.15   | .326   | .56  |
| Gender * Education level    | 1.7        | 1  | 1.71   | .121   | .72  |
| Residence * Gender *        |            |    |        |        |      |
| Education level             | .50        | 1  | .50    | .052   | .82  |

The data in the table 12 show that significant differences regarding the hostile attitude against women were registered only by the gender participants ( $F=17.518$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

Table 13. Comparison at the level of benevolent attitudes towards women by gender, area of residence and education level of the participants

| Source                      | Sum square | df | m         | F     | Sig. |
|-----------------------------|------------|----|-----------|-------|------|
| Residence                   | 1.45       | 1  | 1.45      | .197  | .65  |
| Gender                      | 68.79      | 1  | 68.79     | 9.353 | .003 |
| Education level             | 7.10       | 1  | 7.10      | .965  | .32  |
| Residence * Gender          | 11.45      | 1  | 11.45     | 1.558 | .21  |
| Residence * Education level | 21.66      | 1  | 21.66     | 2.946 | .08  |
| Gender * Education level    | 3.910E-02  | 1  | 3.910E-02 | .005  | .94  |
| Residence * Gender *        |            |    |           |       |      |
| Education level             | 1.59       | 1  | 1.59      | .216  | .64  |

The data in the table 13 show that significant differences regarding the benevolent attitude towards women, were registered only by gender ( $F=9,353$ ,  $p<.003$ ).

Analysis carried out allows us to hold that there is a strongly significant correlation between the hostile attitude towards women and their age ( $r=.43$ ,  $p<.01$ ), which means that level of hostility grows along with age advancing.

The phenomenon should be considered in relation to hostile sexism and the direct link which is established between this and the number of years of marriage. It appears that there is a *significant correlation between the men's hostile attitude towards women and the number of years of marriage* ( $r=.41$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Thus, for the men, more the years of marriage are, more does their degree of hostile attitude against women amplify. For the women, there was no significant correlation between these two variables, thus the number of years of marriage and age do not correlate with the dissatisfaction felt in the marriage.

The data suggest a significant correlation between attitudes towards domestic violence (men vs. women), which means that a pro-abuse attitude of the men is doubled by a growth of the acceptance degree for domestic violence also from the women ( $r=.57$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

Regarding the marital dissatisfaction felt by the husband and wife, there is a direct relation, so that the growth of marital dissatisfaction level declared by men entails a growth of marital dissatisfaction level declared by women ( $r=.86$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

Table 14. The correlation between the level of marital dissatisfaction and the frequency of the 5 forms of physical violence manifested by men

| Variables                               | 2          | 3   | 4          | 5          | 6          | 7          | 8          | 9          | 10         | 11        |
|---|------------|-----|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| 1 Marital dissatisfaction               | .60<br>*** | .01 | .23        | .22        | -.04       | .16        | .47<br>*** | .66<br>*** | .32<br>*   | .02       |
| 2 Object thrown by the partner          | -          | .17 | .36<br>**  | .23        | .24        | .40<br>*** | .61<br>*** | .50<br>*** | .07        | .15       |
| 3 Bullying made by partner              |            | -   | .50<br>*** | .44<br>*** | .45<br>*** | .26        | .36<br>**  | .27<br>*   | .35<br>**  | .26       |
| 4 Spanking made by partner              |            |     | -          | .30<br>*   | .34<br>**  | .23        | .51<br>*** | .36<br>**  | -.05       | .27<br>*  |
| 5 Hitting with fists made by partner    |            |     |            | -          | .43<br>*** | -.04       | .12        | .22        | .25        | .08       |
| 6 Partner attempt to hit with an object |            |     |            |            | -          | .09        | .02        | .03        | .08        | .39<br>** |
| 7 Object thrown towards the partner     |            |     |            |            |            | -          | .36<br>**  | .32<br>*   | -.00       | .08       |
| 8 Bullying the partner                  |            |     |            |            |            |            | -          | .60<br>*** | .23        | .08       |
| 9 Spanking the partner                  |            |     |            |            |            |            |            | -          | .40<br>*** | .07       |
| 10 Hitting partner with fists           |            |     |            |            |            |            |            |            | -          | -.06      |

Note: \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$

Male respondents declared that they can tolerate, as a form of violence coming from their partner, an object thrown in towards them. Thus, this type of

violent behavior is the most practiced by women, according to men's statements. Men admit that in marital conflicts, they adopt the following forms of physical violence against their wives: throwing an object towards the wife ( $r=.60, p<.001$ ), jarring the wife ( $r=.47, p<.001$ ) or slapping her ( $r=.66, p<.001$ ). There can be identified a correlation between different forms of physical abuse adopted by women against their husbands. A significant correlation can be seen between throwing an object towards partner and slapping him, as shown by table 14. A woman who throws an object towards partner will tend to engage herself in a higher degree in violent behaviors towards her partner in order to produce him physical pain, such as slapping.

Another correlation is seen between throwing an object towards the female partner as a form of abuse made by the man and jarring the partner, as a form of violent behavior carried out by women. Correlations appear also between grabbing - pushing the wife and throwing an object towards the man, bullying, slapping and hitting with fists ( $r=.32, p<.02$ ). As declared by men, their violent behavior is a response or a way to defence themselves against his wife initial attack towards them.

Table 15. The correlation between the level of marital dissatisfaction and the frequency of the 5 forms of physical violence manifested by women

| Variables                               | 2     | 3      | 4      | 5    | 6      | 7      | 8      | 9      | 10     | 11     |
|---|-------|--------|--------|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1 Marital dissatisfaction               | .40** | .61*** | .59*** | .14  | .26    | .60*** | .25    | .20    | .17    | .22    |
| 2 Object thrown by the partner          | -     | .30*   | .34**  | -.06 | .34*   | .40**  | .41**  | .46*** | .24    | .48*** |
| 3 Bullying made by partner              |       | -      | .54*** | .29* | .31*   | .59*** | .42**  | .25    | .18    | .23    |
| 4 Spanking made by partner              |       |        | -      | -.05 | -.15   | .42**  | -.00   | .26    | .10    | .00    |
| 5 Hitting with fists made by partner    |       |        |        | -    | .56*** | .17    | .41**  | -.10   | .14    | .16    |
| 6 Partner attempt to hit with an object |       |        |        |      | -      | .40**  | .63*** | .31**  | .49*** | .67*** |
| 7 Object thrown towards the partner     |       |        |        |      |        | -      | .34*   | .33*   | .24    | .42**  |
| 8 Bullying the partner                  |       |        |        |      |        |        | -      | .29*   | .49*** | .43**  |
| 9 Spanking the partner                  |       |        |        |      |        |        |        | -      | .24    | .57*** |
| 10 Hitting partner with fists           |       |        |        |      |        |        |        |        | -      | .33**  |

Note: \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$

Significant correlations exist also between different forms of violent behavior exhibited by men against women. If a man shows one or other of the forms of physical abuse, it will not be unique but correlated with other forms of physical violence. Throwing an object towards the wife is significantly correlated with bullying and slapping her. Slapping the woman is significantly correlated with beaten her with fists.

According to the data shown in table 15, men declare that the woman throws with an object towards them, when she feels marital dissatisfaction ( $r=.40$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The women acknowledged that their husbands manifest the following forms of violent behavior against them: throwing an object in their direction, bullying and slapping which correlates significantly with marital dissatisfaction.

There is a statistically significant association between bullying the partner and the following forms of abuse supported by the women from their partner: throwing an object in their direction, slapping, hitting with fists and even trying to be hit with an object. This means that a man who pushes his partner, threatened to strike her, over time, he will adopt specific behaviors.

If throwing an object towards partner is significantly correlated with marital dissatisfaction for women, this form of physical violence, also correlates with partner`s bullying, slapping him and trying to hit him with an object. A number of other associations can be drawn from table 15, between different levels of intensity with which women exhibit their violent behavior against their partner. For example, trying to hit with an object is significantly correlated with all other forms of physical abuse of lower intensity.

Another association occurs between throwing an object towards the wife and abusive behaviors supported by the husband in response to his attack. Jarring the wife is followed by the same behavior from her against the man - if the man gives her a slap, she responds in a lower intensity way. But if the husband tries to hit her with an object and the wife is forced to defend herself, she manifests against him all five forms of physical abuse.

*The attitude towards marital violence is different by the respondents` gender.* For the other social factors (residence, education level and the interaction between these two variables) there were no differences registered. Thus, independent of the residence or education level, men compared to women, manifest a more pronounced pro-abuse attitude and a lower degree

attitude towards blaming domestic violence. In general, men consider that the abusive attitude towards the wife can be generated by the woman's behavior before the aggression. Often men justify their own violent behavior by lines like: "She challenged me," "if she hadn't said anything, I would not have hit her" "she knows that I go mad when she speaks about ....". It seems that in these conditions, the men declare themselves as being the victims of their own tendency, of their own lack of self-control, or paradoxically, the fault is considered to belong to the victim.

Moreover, some men are convinced that the woman has to gain from being beaten, seeking thereby to obtain pecuniary or emotional advantages - support from friends, family, colleagues. It may seem surprising that this belief is common among men, regardless of education level or area of residence. The phenomenon could be explained by analyzing the degree of identification with traditional gender roles.

The tendency of gender roles equalization is more evident in urban areas, women being considered equal man in a greater degree, which is why child behaviors, repeated complaints, avoidance behavior of certain tasks are perceived by man as means of handling others attitudes, to obtain mercy, falling in what names as "feminine tricks".

Although between the masculinity level and The Scale of Attitude Towards Domestic Violence there is no statistically significant association, dividing male participants into two types (above average and below average) depending on the degree of identification with the traditional masculine gender role, there are differences regarding attitudes towards domestic violence. Thus, those who identify themselves more strongly with the traditional male gender role, they manifest in a greater extent an abusive behavior against the wife.

Within the couple is a direct correlation between the level of hostile sexism shown by the husband and by the wife: when the first one increase in intensity is followed by the growth of the second one. Another element able to support the existence of a positive attitude towards physical violence is that men consider that the aggressor is not guilty of abusive behavior triggering, so he should not be punished. Most often men hide behind a superficial justification ("I was nervous") when asked to justify their aggressive behavior.

*The benevolent sexism* according to which the woman, in the role of wife and mother (traditional role), should be adored and respected by her

husband, is replaced by tendencies that are part of the *hostile sexism*, when the women exaggerate their problems at work or feel slightly offended. Similar tendencies are often identified in the case of female participants, and borrowing features from the traditional male role and identifying with them, accept the equal treatment with men applied by society. They no longer allow to be regarded as weak, helpless, husband dependent, they do not accept the emphasis treatments as a woman because they are involved in the traditional female role, which is probably why their hostile attitude against women entails also a positive attitude toward wife aggression. In traditional society, if a woman stays in an abusive relationship because she fears the perpetrator's threats or she fears an uncertain future, is considered to be an evidence of weakness and woman's inability to fight, harshly criticized also by representatives of the fair sex.

Analyzing the data of the entire group of participants, there is a negative correlation between the benevolent sexist attitude and the idea of punishing the aggressor. Thus, a high level of benevolent sexism entails an increase in participants' belief that the aggressor should be punished. Following statistical analysis (male and female participants) do not show a significant correlation between the variables mentioned above. Over the years, with men's age advancing and with more years of marriage, the hostile attitude against women knows an upward trend. It is possible that during the youth, during the courtship of women could be prefigured the image of the women as the future wife, as a unique person, with whom the man can feel fulfilled. But, along with the crystallization and extinction of the feelings within marriage, less benevolent attitudes toward women were developed. Although the hostile sexism of men does not correlate with the positive attitudes towards domestic violence and is not influenced by the level of marital dissatisfaction, it is mentally present even if it is not strongly manifested in behavior.

The phenomenon can be explained through the fact that men had enough of their wives frequent discontents, with their permanent need of protection and security and therefore a gradually desensitization was produced towards all these behaviours, or through the fact that the husbands concluded that the image of a frail, caring, sensitive woman outlined at the beginning of the marriage, is not real; often the common experience proved over the years that the wife is more stronger and balanced, proving their superiority. Another explanation could be given by the many years of marriage, the individual's age

or inter-generational differences: younger generations have an attitude that is becoming more egalitarian, reducing gender differences and establishing democratic relations within the couple. Women no longer feel the need to be financially sustained by the husband, to be treated by him as "princess", they build their own social and professional career without relying on a man. Are those women who perceive their self-efficacy, have a high self-esteem and expect others to appreciate their leadership qualities, as being a pragmatic and active person. This explains why professional competitive women, successful ones, have internalized the hostile sexism ideology in a higher degree.

We noted that *the marital dissatisfaction level felt by men does not influence the degree of hostility toward women*. The marital dissatisfaction level correlates in different proportion with the five forms of physical violence considered in the study: throwing an object towards the partner (man or woman), partner's bullying, slapping him / her, hitting with fists, trying to hit the husband / wife with an object.

Most often a low intensity abusive behavior, such as throwing an object toward the partner, sooner or later degenerates into a form of higher intensity, such as hitting with fists or with a blunt object. If at the beginning the man will threaten to beat his wife, over time his threats will be materialized into action. Moreover, he assigns the blame to his wife in order to justify his own behavior and the woman internalize this explanation, considering herself to be guilty, strives to please her partner and to avoid conflicts, efforts which often leads to a failure, which through repetition, erodes the woman's self-esteem, considering herself an incapable person, who deserves the abusive treatment.

According to the women's statements, they support the following forms of abusive behavior coming from their partners, being in direct correlation with the level of marital dissatisfaction: throwing an object in their direction, bullying and spanking. When the partner manifests the tendency to aggress her by throwing an object towards her direction, the woman retorts by one of the five forms of physical abuse, even hitting her partner with an object. Thus, when the husband's abusive behavior increases in intensity and triggering a real abuse is obvious, the woman still feels sure of herself as such she will respond him with the same form of aggression, without risking to exceed the intensity of the husband's aggression.

The negative consequences of the abuse are recorded at both mental and physical integrity, and at the level of couple's balance and harmony which

could be irreparably destroyed. Within the couple, there is a correspondence between the partners' answers when reporting the supported or exercised violent behaviors. Thus, men declare and women acknowledge that the most common form of abuse manifested by their wives is throwing an object in their direction. Women, in turn, declared and the men agree, that they support from their husbands spanking and bullying. Whatever the supported or manifested domestic violence form is, in long term it is associated with disastrous consequences for both the couple and the individual.

The data do not allow to assess that a form of aggressive behavior is less harmful than another, or that one would be preferable to the other, because a low intensity form of abuse, apparently harmless and often overlooked by the partners, can constitute a dangerous precedent that could escalate into more serious forms.

### **Conclusions**

The conducted analysis surprises the incidence of physical forms of violence within the couple along with the attitude that partners have towards the phenomenon according to their marital dissatisfaction level and the degree of identification with gender roles.

In shaping attitudes towards violence, social factors are those that determine the key differences. Domestic violence, in general and the marital one as it's particular form, is reality often manifested in the Romanian family, which is why it recently became a subject for and the media and a public discourse.

At the collective level is perpetuated the general attitude, according to which in every family, at some point, there may be misunderstandings that can escalate into argues materialized in aggressions from partners, but such incidents are seen as being normal and reversible. But this mentality generates dysfunctional consequences, inducing the idea of men's superiority, who has the freedom to discipline his wife who is inferior to him, obliged to accept the "corrections" based on her lower status.

Compared with the data existing at the European level, the population of Romania is significantly more lenient towards domestic violence which, in many families has become a natural way of communication and networking.

Through the socialization process, under the disguise of normality, this attitude is passed from one generation to another.

The study highlights the prevalence of male domestic violence, while emphasizing the tendency of marital roles equalization in specific social contexts for the postindustrial society, where women tend to express their power, to have more and more control through an independent, even aggressive attitude and conduct.

In contemporary society, where girls are educated from childhood in developing a combative, biting and competitive behavior, we are witnessing a dissolution, a devaluation of traditional gender roles, according to which man is the strong and aggressive one, in constant competition and the woman is perceived as being submissive, quiet, sensitive. This phenomenon of disguising and metamorphosing of the traditional gender roles, whether it is considered beneficial and positive, whether it is criticized and disputed in media, represents a form of adjustment to the environmental and to our society's demands.

According to scientific discourse, in rural areas the traditional gender roles are kept in a greater extent, people often acting in accordance with them, but in urban areas, in the modern and especially in the postmodern society, a process of renouncing to the traditional division of roles has been triggered and the tendency of strong equalization and normalization of gender roles is manifested. The man is no longer so imperative required to be the most powerful and confident in any situation and, without cancelling his masculinity, he can be sensitive, fearful or he can even cry. The woman is no longer required to be totally obedient to the husband, to have a submissive behavior, having the opportunity to show strength, courage, determination, without thereby becoming a man in the true sense of the word. We are witnessing a merger of the two traditional gender roles along with a conversion in a third model - androgynous, present in the scientific literature (Hotaling, Finkelhor, Kirkpatrick, & Straus, 1988).

We believe that the study provides premises to sustain the need to implement programs to inform and educate young people, in order to change wrong attitudes regarding marital relations and to be aware that a marriage may exist even in the absence of aggressive behavior.

In a couple can arise misunderstandings that can degenerate into conflict on various aspects of marriage, but the two partners will prove their maturity when they try to deal with conflict, in order to make their marriage

work. Developing verbal communication skills, building skills in order to settle down the conflicts, to tolerate and accept the other, creating efficient modes of self-control, are just some of the objectives that a specific program of educating young people should follow.

#### *Limits*

The study also raises several questions, which may be prerequisites for future studies, such as: are women the initiators of aggressive behavior or the aggression occurs in response to threats coming from the man or to frustrations?; which are the long-term consequences of domestic violence on both partners, on their ability manifested in their interpersonal relationships and on children who have witnessed such behavior from parents?

On the other hand it would be necessary for a future study to include representative samples of the population, according to criteria such as: age, residence, education level, profession.

The study should be also extended in order to identify the psychosocial consequences of marital violence on the couple partners and on children who socialize in violent environments.

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