

THE VICIOUS CIRCLE OF VIOLENCE BETWEEN AGGRESSOR AND VICTIM

Angelica Mădălina BANCĂ¹, Felicia ANDRIONI²

¹PhD student, University of Craiova, Doctoral School of Social Sciences and Humanities (Romania), Email: angi.banca@gmail.com

²Professor PhD.habil., University of Petroșani (Romania), Email: felicia_andrioni@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The problem of violence against women is very complex and still little studied in Romania, although the number of studies carried out in the last 30 years in other countries of the world is very large. What is missing is the essential for completing the statistical data: the truth about the victims. In most cases, the victim is isolated, she cannot communicate, so the data about her does not report. This research is qualitative, including the document analysis method and the interview, as well as the comparative analysis of the results of several types of studies from different periods and from different countries, multidisciplinary, in relation to the victims of abuse who become minor mothers, dropping out of school early, as well as victims of family violence. The objective of the research is to analyze the vicious circle of violence through the perspective of the victims' perception of the phenomenon and the aggressor. The premise of the research is that people exposed to domestic violence since childhood become victims of domestic violence, developing risk behaviours of school dropout, early motherhood, dependence on the aggressor and social exclusion. The hypothesis of the research was confirmed, the results of the study demonstrated that the victims of domestic violence since childhood, develop risky behaviours, there is a vicious circle between these victims and aggressors from which the victims of domestic violence can be extracted with great difficulty.*

Keywords: violence against women, bullying, underage mothers, school dropout, abuse.

1. Introduction

The studies made on the topic of abuse and violence against women show that, in most cases, women who become victims can no longer be independent, most of the time becoming dependent even on the abuser. This can be the boyfriend/husband, but also the father, brother or other man from the victim's entourage. Romania allocates the lowest amounts in the EU for social assistance, and victims of domestic violence and underage mothers are almost invisible, being ignored from society, even by social workers. Some NGOs support these victims, but so far they have not been able to replace the work that state workers should be doing. Special programs and centers for recovery and social inclusion of these categories of victims are not enough either (Dima and Beldianu, 2015) and can be starting points in the reconstruction of the social work system (Corman, 2020:73). Romanian legislation was amended, at the insistence of NGOs for the protection of women's rights, in 2020. Thus, based on Law no. 217/2003, republished, pursuant to art. II from Law no. 183/2020, the protection order can be granted immediately, at the request of the victim. However, the legislative and institutional system is far from being able to provide real help to victims of domestic violence or young girls abused in the family, who become underage mothers and drop out of school early. The problems of these victims are not understood even by society, and because of this, they also become victims of bullying. In most cases, school dropout occurs because of bullying. The same thing happens in the case of adult women who go as far as social exclusion. Most of the victims in these two categories are dependent both materially and emotionally on the abuser. In the case of minors who become mothers and drop out of school, social workers and NGO experts who have conducted research in several underprivileged communities have found that in

many cases, girls are first victims of abuse by adults, including abuse committed by adult partners, and dropping out of school occurs before becoming pregnant. These are, however, assumptions of social workers and sociologists, since there are no definite data to show what exactly causes the victim to become dependent on the aggressor, breaking away from society, including dropping out of school.

2. Analysis of specialized literature

Research in this field began at the end of the 80s, in most Western countries, after it was concluded that it is a serious phenomenon that affects the whole society (Hindberg, 1988). Based on the specialized studies analyzed and on the basis of the comparative analysis of the research results, it is found that there is an increasing trend of aggressive behaviors at the global and national level in society, but also in the school environment (Bancă, Andrioni, 2022:382). Definitions were given more clearly after the first 15 years of studies, at the European level, when the risk markers for victimization and the consequences for victims, as well as coping processes and their relevance for research in this field, were also established (Löbmann, et al., 2003).

In the case of Romania, in 2022 there is still too little research in this field, and most of it is carried out by NGOs, not by state institutions, because social assistance is heavily underfunded. In addition to the activity of NGOs, the mass media contributed greatly to the popularization of this topic and thus the attention of the authorities was drawn to the situation that requires a solution from the state institutions, but the annual budget allocation from the GDP for social assistance remains the lowest at the European level.

A research carried out in 2022 in Romania, by the Save the Children Organization, shows how serious is the situation of underage mothers and how difficult is any attempt to stop this phenomenon, due to the lack of social assistance in disadvantaged communities, due to the lack of funding in this field from the state. A study carried out by the Save the Children Romania Organization in 2022 shows that a third of underage mothers in Romania were also born by underage mothers, 8 out of 10 mothers and pregnant women under the age of 18 do not go to school, 45% of births registered among of girls under the age of 15 in the European Union come from Romania, and 85% of mothers and pregnant women under the age of 18 no longer go to school, most of them dropping out before pregnancy (Save the Children, 2022).

The results of the research show that school dropout is not only a consequence of early pregnancy, it is the very first sign that should immediately trigger a social protection mechanism, but this does not happen. One of the specialists who contributed to the study gave an interview to the national newspaper „Jurnalul”: „The social workers could go to check each individual case, after the schools find that minors are no longer attending classes. In most of the cases analyzed by us, we found that these girls drop out of school even before they become pregnant, many of them being victims of abuse by adults. There are a few counties where social work intervenes, but generally this happens when cases end up in court, while almost 3,000 localities do not have social workers who could go to the communities where these cases come from and offer them support. There may be an employee of the city hall who deals with the social assistance part, but often it is a person who only has a highschool education and cannot even do the social investigation, because the law does not allow it. In many of the cases, it is an employee of the town hall who also deals with the social assistance part, receiving money in addition to the salary, but there are no specialist employees”, explained George Roman, Director of Advocacy, Save the Children Romania” (Scarlat, 2022).

In the article written for the newspaper, on the occasion of the launch of the research results, by the Save the Children Organization, the author further states that the NGOs specialist also explained why the approach according to which Romania would be the country of social assistance was wrong, because the statistics show the opposite. „Romania invests the

least money in social protection, in general, and in order to have positive results, especially with the social reintegration of underage mothers, but also to reduce their number, a much better social assistance system would be needed strong and better funded. Eurostat statistics (the statistical office of the European Union) show that in the last 12 years, Romania has invested between 11 and 17% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in social assistance, while the European average is over 23%, and some countries allocates more than 30% of GDP. A country like France, from the last category, also has a much higher GDP than Romania's, which means much higher costs with social programs, but also results commensurate with the investments" (Scarlat, 2022). Such analyzes are made by NGOs and journalists, but are not found in the official studies of state institutions.

The studies carried out by the Romanian Police complement those in the area of social assistance, within the prevention programs and are published or commented on in the mass media. In order to prevent this phenomenon, the intervention of the authorities is also needed by adopting effective laws to protect victims of domestic violence (Filip, Popp and Androni, 2020:311). In general, the mass media is the main partner of the institutions that do prevention in this field. Also, there is research in the legal field and the research of some NGOs for the defense of women's or children's rights. Another approach comes from the area of psychological and psychiatric research.

3. Behavioural patterns of victims and aggressors

There exists a behavioural pattern of the victim and one of the aggressor, but also a pattern of couple relationships in which violence occurs. This complex pattern, in which typologies are complementary, has been described in the same way by all researchers of this phenomenon: „There is a vicious circle of violence. Although everything begins with the acceptance of a first act of aggression („the first slap”), unfortunately, over time, violent episodes can become more frequent and more intense, more serious. Often, after such situations, the aggressor asks for forgiveness or tries to justify his behaviour. Not infrequently he accuses the victim and convinces her that she had her share of the blame. The victim can be more or less overwhelmed with various attentions/gifts to forgive their behaviour. This phase, that of the partner's repentance, is characterized by the affectionate behaviour of the abuser. It is the period when the aggressor can show availability towards the partner and her needs, giving her the impression that their relationship is functional, which can deepen the dependence between the victim and the aggressor. It is the so-called „honeymoon” phase, in which the episode is ignored and forgiven.

Tensions have been released through violent behaviour, and the period of regret and begging for forgiveness can cause the victim to see the partner as fragile and insecure, as needing her. A double dependency is thus structured, it being difficult for the victim to leave the abusive relationship. Psychologists draw attention to the fact that in the situation where this period of „love” is quickly followed by another one of intense conflict tension” (Stoica, 2020).

The problem of the inefficiency of protection orders in combating the phenomenon of domestic violence and for the effective rescue of victims is also raised in other countries, not only in Romania, being the subject of study of some recent scientific articles that show that victims need much more support, for to be saved and included in society (Burgess-Proctor, 2003). Studies also show that many of the victims of couple violence come from the category of bullying victims, including suffering from anxiety or depression, due to repeated psychological aggressions (Swearer, et al, 2001). In general, psychological and social research shows that victims of school bullying suffer from anxiety or depression, and thus lose the ability to fight the bullies, while the bullies consolidate their position of power by bullying the victims (Espelage, and Holt, 2001).

From the initial bullying, from the victims' childhood and adolescence, to social exclusion is a single step that relates to the entire social structure, not just the psychology of the victim or the aggressor, nor even the relationship between the victim and the aggressor, the mechanism being much more complex, as other research shows: „Results from a survey of New Jersey middle school students indicate that eighth graders were significantly more indifferent to bullying and less sympathetic to victims than fifth graders. Older students were also more likely to identify themselves as outsiders and bully's assistants in bullying situations. In the absence of bullying prevention programs, witnesses to peer aggression become less willing to intervene on behalf of victims and more indifferent to the distress of the victim. The implications of these findings for the prevention of bullying and the achievement of civic responsibility are discussed” (Jeffrey, et al., 2001).

Another study, within the „Expect Respect” Project in the US, shows that when bullying and sexual harassment are not controlled in primary school, these behaviors condition students to accept mistreatment in their relationships with peers, laying the foundations for abuse in future marital relationships (Sanchez, et al., 2001). The conclusion reached by the researchers was that only through constant awareness of the phenomenon and through sustained education can be reduced the violence, and thus the number of subsequent victims of domestic violence also decreases.

In addition, other studies show that bullying in the school environment creates a kind of habit, so that it forms the behavior of the victim in the relationship with the aggressor, based on depression that paralyzes the victim's ability to react, in the long term, including in subsequent relationships as a couple, where she will become a victim of domestic violence (Carnelius and Dennhag, 2022). There is also the phenomenon of submission of the victim in the relationship with the aggressor, on sexual grounds (Rerick, et al., 2022). The fact that victims of bullying suffer in the long term, especially from anxiety or depression, with the victim's mental state and health deteriorating afterwards, is also demonstrated by other research. A study conducted at eight colleges and universities in the US Midwest between 2011 and 2015 shows how strongly the relationship between exposure to bullying and alcohol abuse is over time for male victims. The authors define bullying as a risk factor that contributes to high levels of alcohol use among college students that continues to be affected into adulthood (Lin, et al., 2022). The phenomenon is much more serious in the case of victims of sexual harassment and assaults, the victimization being much more pronounced and long-term (Knapp, Hogue and Polites, 2022).

In India, a program dedicated to reducing violence against women was recently implemented, the phenomenon being considered a serious public health problem and an unacceptable violation of human rights, the program being built on the principles of feminist ideology. „The Kabaddi group work project in West Bengal, India, integrates sports and socio-emotional learning as a strategy for preventing violence against women through the empowerment of adolescent girls. Delivered by Praajak, a non-governmental organization, the Kabaddi project involves participants in athletic training and weekly study circles that raise awareness; build knowledge, skills, and confidence; and generate mutual trust and motivation to promote individual and social change. Guided by social learning theory and feminist theory, the carefully designed group work intervention follows a developmental approach that is consistent with Linda Schiller's relational model of group development. Testimonies from group participants demonstrate the intergenerational impact of the Kabaddi project on participants, families, and communities” (Majumdar, Purkayastha and Goswami, 2022).

4. Materials and methods

The research uses qualitative methods. The method of analyzing documents from the specialized literature in the fields related to domestic violence and its potential implications

was used: school dropout, early motherhood, social exclusion, and the interview was also used, applied to a number of 20 victims of domestic violence. The objective of the research is to analyze the vicious circle of violence through the perspective of the victims' perception of the phenomenon and the aggressor. The hypothesis from which he started in the present research is that people exposed to domestic violence since childhood become victims of domestic violence, developing risk behaviors of school dropout, early motherhood, dependence on the aggressor and social exclusion.

5. Results

We have selected 20 victims of abuse and domestic violence, aged between 18 and 45, 10 of them coming from the category of underage mothers, the others being adult victims of domestic violence, to apply the Sociological Interview, between August and November 2022. The victims benefit from the protection of anonymity, being in the care of the state and some NGOs, in protected housing in several counties of Romania. The interviews were carried out with the help of representatives of NGOs or social workers, being transmitted and completed with the help of members of non-governmental organizations or social workers, in order to guarantee the safety of the anonymity of the victims under protection, in protected housing.

The first question of the interview, regarding bullying, highlighted the fact that all current victims of abuse and domestic violence were bullied at least once during their early school years. Also, all the victims come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and from broken families or with serious financial problems, being also victims of abuse by adults in the family, in the first years of their life. Furthermore, all 20 victims are unable to support themselves, having dropped out of school early. All victims acknowledged their ongoing dependence, both materially and emotionally, on abusive partners, and stated that they endured at least three years of abuse until they had made the decision to seek for help and enter the protection program.

Also, victims of domestic violence admitted that they would not have sought help from state institutions or NGOs if those ones had not reached their community. Eight of the victims admitted that they would have risked being killed by their extremely violent partners, rather than leaving their shared home, if they had not received sufficient guarantees from the NGO that provided them with support. The other 12 victims stated that their partner's aggression had already exceeded the limit they could accept, their lives and that of their children being threatened, and if they had not been offered support, they would have left assuming any risk, even if he should have lived on the street.

All victims continue to fear for their lives and that of their children, but also for the inability to adapt in society, all of them being isolated during cohabitation or marriage relationships with the abusive partners. In turn, all ten victims of domestic violence who were underage mothers stated that they were isolated first from the abusive family, then from the abusive partner. In relation to dropping out of school, all ten underage mothers stated that they were ashamed to go to school after starting the relationship with the abusive partner at a young age. Three of the victims who were also underage mothers ran away from home because the family would not have approved of their very early couple relationship and „for fear of being killed by their parents”, who were also very abusive and aggressive. Running away from home, they couldn't even go to school, because their parents could have found them there.

The other seven victims who were also underage mothers stated that their parents would not have had anything against their relationship, even though they were very young, but they stopped going to school when they suspected that they had become pregnant (5 of the victims), respectively because the adult and aggressive partners did not allow them to continue going to school (2 of the victims). All 20 victims stated that they could not defend

themselves and were generally afraid of any strong, male person if he became aggressive. Also, all 20 victims stated that they are afraid for their future and that of their children, even though they also receive professional training within the Integrated National Program for the Protection of Victims of Domestic Violence (PNIPVVD).

6. Conclusions

The conclusions of the research is that many of the women who become victims of abuse end up in a vicious circle that includes family violence, which can lead to early motherhood, school dropout, social exclusion and dependence on the abuser. As long as the victims do not ask for help and the problems of these victims do not become known to the state institutions, then the problems these victims face are amplified. The hypothesis of the research was confirmed, the results of the study demonstrated that the victims of domestic violence since childhood, develop risky behaviors, there is a vicious circle between these victims and aggressors from which the victims of domestic violence can be extracted with great difficulty. In this context, an important role is played by national prevention programs that can be based on the study and elimination of bullying to which young girls are exposed, since the first years of school.

As other states have done, by reducing bullying and raising awareness of its long-term effects, the number of future victims of domestic violence can be greatly reduced, as well as the number of underage mothers who are abused, after demonstrated, in research over the past 30 years, the causal link between long-term victimization and initial bullying. By eliminating or at least reducing the phenomenon of bullying, the number of victims resulting from exposure to this aggression can be significantly reduced. Thus, various complex problems generated by violence could be prevented on the basis of national programs to prevent or reduce the phenomenon of violence targeting minor mothers at risk of domestic violence and school dropout or other victims of domestic violence, on the one hand or the other part on the basis of studies and analyzes that provide more data to demonstrate the clear connection between these phenomena, both from a psychological and social point of view, and the causality of the phenomenon, there being the possibility of doing analyses, following some national programs to reduce abuse, in order to be able to see if the number of victims of domestic violence will be reduced, respectively the number of underage mothers, as well as school dropouts. Such a pilot program could track results over a ten-year time horizon.

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