

National Report Romania

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1. Introduction

The present document corresponds to the national report on Romania, part of Deliverable D2.2 'National and summary reports' of the project Prevent And combaT domesTic violEnce against Roma women with the acronym PATTERN and project number 881731 that started on June 1st 2020, for a duration of 24 months.

PATTERN addresses the call priority 'REC-RDAP-GBV-AG-2019 – Call for proposal to prevent and combat all forms of violence against children, young people and women'. The overall objective of the project is to contribute to the prevention and combatting of domestic violence against Roma women in Greece, Bulgaria, Portugal, Spain, and Romania.

In order to reach its overall objective, the project has set the following more specific objectives:

- Increasing access to knowledge/data on the phenomenon of domestic violence against Roma women.
- Developing Domestic Violence Protocols for Roma Women that enable professionals to respond to domestic violence comprehensively.
- Enhancing the capacities of at least 350 Roma intercultural mediators and professionals in community centres/other local community services on domestic violence against Roma women.
- Enhancing the capacities of at least 100-150 Roma women on how to recognize and report domestic violence and act as leaders of change in their communities.
- Raising awareness in Roma communities to building healthy & egalitarian relationships.

This deliverable D2.2 forms part of PATTERN WP2 "Research on domestic violence in Roma communities with the involvement of Roma women" which has the objective of increasing access to knowledge/data on the phenomenon of domestic violence against Roma women.

This report has the following structure ; in section 2, the national framework (in brief) on domestic violence in the Roma communities is set; in section 3, the methodology adopted in the fieldwork is detailed; section 4 is devoted to the characterisation of the participants in the interviews; section 5

presents the main findings of the interviews; finally section 6 summarises the key conclusions of the research on domestic violence against Roma women in Romania.

2. National framework (in brief) on domestic violence in the Roma communities

2.1 Law and policy

In order to better understand the context of the Romanian laws that fight against domestic violence, we would like to offer the text of the Law nr 217 from 22 May 2003 that was reedited and published on National Monitor on the 15th of October 2020.

One can find here the definitions of the different types of domestic violence and the way they operate.

Article 3

For the purposes of this law, domestic violence means any inaction or intentional action of physical, sexual, psychological, economic, social, spiritual or cyber violence that occurs in the family or domestic environment or between spouses or ex-spouses, as well as between current or former partners, whether the aggressor lives or has lived with the victim.

Article 4

1. Domestic violence shall take the following forms:

- a) verbal violence - addressing through offensive, brutal language, such as the use of insults, threats, degrading or humiliating words and expressions;
- b) psychological violence - the imposition of personal will or control, the provocation of states of tension and mental suffering in any way and by any means, by verbal threat or in any other way, blackmail, demonstrative violence against objects and animals, ostentatious display of weapons, neglect, control of personal life, acts of jealousy, coercion of any kind, unlawful pursuit, surveillance of the home, workplace or other places frequented by the victim, making telephone calls or other communications by means of transmission to distance, which by frequency, content or when they are issued creates fears, as well as other actions with similar effect;
- c) physical violence - bodily injury or health injury by hitting, pushing, slamming, pulling hair, stabbing, cutting, burning, strangling, biting, in any form and of any intensity, including disguised as a result of accidents, by poisoning, intoxication, as well as other actions with similar effect, submission to exhausting physical exertion or to activities with a high risk of life or health and bodily integrity, other than those referred to in letter e;
- d) sexual violence - sexual assault, imposition of degrading acts, harassment, intimidation, manipulation, brutality in order to maintain forced sexual relations, marital rape;

- e) economic violence - prohibition of professional activity, deprivation of economic means, including lack of primary means of subsistence, such as food, medicine, basic necessities, the act of intentional theft of a person's property, prohibition of the right to own, use and disposes of common goods, unfair control of common goods and resources, refusal to support the family, imposition of heavy and harmful work to the detriment of health, including a minor family member, and other actions with a similar effect;
- f) social violence - imposing the isolation of family, community and friends, prohibiting attendance at school or work, prohibition / limitation of professional development, imposing isolation, including in the common home, deprivation of access to living space, dispossession of identity documents, intentional deprivation of access to information, as well as other actions with similar effect;
- g) spiritual violence - underestimating or diminishing the importance of satisfying moral-spiritual needs by prohibiting, limiting, ridiculing, penalizing the aspirations of family members, access to cultural, ethnic, linguistic or religious values, prohibiting the right to speak in the mother tongue and teaching children to speak their mother tongue, enforcing adherence to unacceptable spiritual and religious beliefs and practices, as well as other actions with similar effects or similar repercussions;
- h) cyber violence - online harassment, online messages inciting hatred based on gender, online harassment, online threats, non-consensual publication of information and intimate graphic content, illegal access to interception of communications and private data and any other form of misuse of information and communication technology via computers, smartphones or other similar devices that use telecommunications or can connect to the Internet and can transmit and use social or e-mail platforms in order to be ashamed, humble, scared, threatens, silences the victim (2) In no form and under no circumstances may custom, culture, religion, tradition and honor be considered as justification for any kind of acts of violence defined in this law.

Article 5

(1) For the purposes of this law, a family member means:

- a) ascendants and descendants, brothers and sisters, their spouses and children, as well as persons who become relatives by adoption, according to the law;
- b) spouse and / or ex-spouse; siblings, parents and children of other relationships of the spouse or ex-spouse;
- c) persons who have established relationships similar to those between spouses or between parents and children, current or former partners, regardless of whether or not they lived with the aggressor, the ascendants and descendants of the partner, as well as their siblings;
- d) the guardian or other person who exercises in fact or in law the rights towards the person of the child;
- e) the legal representative or other person who takes care of the person with mental illness,

intellectual disability or physical disability, except for those who fulfil these attributions in the exercise of professional tasks. (2) For the purposes of this law, the victim means the natural person who is subject to one or more forms of violence provided in art. 4, including child witnesses to these forms of violence.

We will see in the following pages, how many of the types of domestic violence can be recognised by the women we have spoken to and how do they see a way out of the abusive situations.

2.2 Statistics and research results

The increase in the number of cases of domestic violence since the beginning of 2020 is an alarm signal on the resurgence of the phenomenon of domestic violence in our country and on how these acts directly affect the safety and often even the lives of women and other members of the family.

Thus, regarding the number of cases of domestic violence registered and centralised by ANES (Agentia Nationala pentru Egalitatea de Sanse intre Femei si Barbati) on reports submitted by the General Directorates of Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC), institutions subordinated to county councils and local councils of the sectors of Bucharest, the number of victims who have benefited from specialised social services in recent years is as follows: 2017 - 13,201 people, 2018 -13,182 people, the first semester of 2019 - 6,731 people. Notified criminal acts: - 2017 -36,245, 2018-38,445, 2019 (7 months) - 23,830.

Protection orders (POs) (valid for up to 6 months) issued - 2017- 2,894, 2018- 3,775, 2019 (7 months) - 4,166. Offenses of non-compliance with OP - 2017: 1,011; 2018: 1,424; 2019 (5 months): 766.

Provisional protection orders (OPP) (valid for 5 days) issued: 2019 – 7,986, no. of 2,958 being transformed into protection orders. Offenses of non-compliance with the OPP – 2,019 (5 months): 236. Between January 1 and July 31, 2020, at the telephone line with no. 0800,500,333 for victims of domestic violence, discrimination on the grounds of sex and trafficking in human beings, within ANES, a number of 1,977 calls were received. Out of the total of 1,977 calls received in July 2020: 1,607 were answered calls, 253 were short calls, and 117 missed calls (engaging in another call, interrupted call).

From the 1,607 answered calls, 829 were calls in the field of domestic violence. Information required by callers included:

- hotline purpose
- location of centres for victims of domestic violence existing in certain territorial areas
- types of information provided to the victims
- information on shelters for victims of domestic violence
- relatives of appellants
- services provided to these victims during the COVID-19 pandemic

Regarding the types of violence that have been reported (including in the case of return of the caller), in cases of domestic violence and for situations in which the appellant has expressed her/his willingness to provide details in this regard, the following data have resulted:

- 345 acts of verbal violence
- 460 acts of psychological violence
- 465 acts of physical violence
- 16 sexual violence
- 8 economic violence
- 25 social violence

In the case of a call, several types of violence are usually reported.

Also, for the appeals in which acts of domestic violence were reported, according to the agreement expressed by the persons who notified the acts of domestic violence / human trafficking, 17 steps were taken to the competent authorities.

The respondent who participated in our study did not call the Police nor had any major conflict in the current year.

100% consider that violence against women is a crime and should be punished. Again 100% consider that domestic violence is a real problem in our country.

80% consider that the women are not to be blamed for starting or provoking a violent act upon themselves. And 20% consider that women might be the culprit.

Around 60% have information about the organisations and institutions that exist in order to help the victims of domestic violence, but almost 90% never used that information to help others in need.

All the respondents agreed that watching TV or surfing the internet helps nowadays to be better informed about the solutions they have to escape their current abusive situations.

2.3 Specifics of domestic violence in the Roma communities

Key elements of the Roma communities:

Social organisation¹

- Roma is not a homogeneous social group. There are different Roma communities, grouped on socio-professional and linguistic criteria. The family is the traditional nucleus. The groups that make up a community are made up of several families, differentiated based on the above criteria.
- There is a visible differentiation between the category of poor Roma communities, whose members are at the lower end of survival, and rich Roma communities.
- Roma culture is an oral, dynamic and diverse culture, which changes over time and place.
- The value of the individual is seen from the perspective of the value of the family and the role it has in society. Individual choices are strongly influenced by social norms.
- While compliance with the rules is rewarded with social recognition, the violation is severely punished.
- Everything related to personal interests is subordinated to family decisions and the future of the community is more important than any life project of an individual.

“The value of the individual is viewed from the perspective of the value of the family and the role it plays it has it in society. Individual choices are strongly influenced by social norms.” (Fundacio Surt,Combaterea violentei domestice impotriva femeilor rome: prevenire, depistare, recomandari de interventie, pag 10, 2012).

¹ Combaterea violentei domestice impotriva femeilor Rome: prevenire, depistare, recomandari de interventie, elaborate de Fundatia SURT, 2012.

- Autonomy, personal initiative and independence are not encouraged. Instead, fidelity and respect for tradition are popular behaviours that allow individuals to be recognized as part of the community.
- Real problems of Roma communities, with repercussions on the whole society: poverty, social exclusion, violation of human rights, lack of identity documents, lack of access to medical services, low level of employment, multiple discrimination, social and spatial segregation of the Roma.

“Roma are defined either by negative stereotypes, derived from selective judgment over the centuries of social exclusion and institutionalized racism, or through a positive stereotype derived from the romantic view of literature and popular culture.” (Consiliul Europei – Setul de instrumente pentru a lupta impotriva Anti-Gypsismului, pag 15, 2014)

The patriarchal system in the Roma communities and the family as a social institution

- Within the Roma communities the patriarchal system is strong and has an important role in creating both social and individual identities.
- Roma identities are correlated with traditional gender roles. The result is the definition of gender social roles that are especially limited and restricted for women.
- The family is the central institution of the Roma communities. Identities are developed around this institution and roles are defined.
- The Roma family is defined as an extended family, as a network and not as a family with a nucleus. The family is not only an alliance between two people, but an alliance between two families belonging to the same community. Alliances have an endogamous character, because they are made within the same group. In traditional communities, alliances between families belonging to different groups are not accepted.
- The Roma family is a place of belonging, self-preservation and protection. But the family is also a place where there is strong social control that limits women's freedom and autonomy. Preserving the family's prestige is a capital duty.
- The family is the institution where cultural values are preserved and passed down from generation to generation, especially with the help of women as the main caregiver and educator.
- The family exercises strong social control over the woman to ensure that she responds to the assigned social role.
- Marriages are established by families, with young people not having a say in choosing a partner. “Undocumented” marriages predominate and at an early age (sometimes even 12-13 years old).

- The persistence of patriarchal thinking and practices that support the rigid distinction between the private (female domain) and the public (male domain), as a result of which, even if women also provide income-generating work, they continue to play a predominant role in children and household chores.
- Assimilation of masculinity with authority and superiority; the assimilation of femininity with motherhood, sensitivity, fragility which is supposed to determine their lower performance in society compared to men.

Roma women

- Roma women are a heterogeneous group. They respond to a variety of situations, needs and lifestyles.
 - The identity of Roma women is based on the intersection of several types of discrimination. Roma women suffer discrimination both within the community, because they are women from the patriarchal system and outside it, because they are part of a stigmatized and socially excluded ethnic group.
 - Aspects such as submission to male authority, virginity before marriage, fidelity, motherhood and sexual division of labour are important in establishing the identity of Roma women.
 - Roma women are not autonomous and represent the honour of their families. Any decision made by a woman represents and involves her whole family. All decisions must be approved by the community and must meet established social norms related to gender.
 - Roma women must guarantee the honour of the family by meeting social expectations. If, for any reason, the family honour is questioned, it is very likely that the woman is responsible.
 - Roma women represent in some communities goods and not people. They are currencies for increasing the prestige of a family in the community.
- « In Romani families, women have the most important place. Women stand on the front line — they are the first to shout to protect their children and families. This is the structure of the Romani family and if some part is missing — for any reason — it threatens the cementing force holding it all together.” (European Roma Rights Center - ROMANI WOMEN IN ROMANI AND MAJORITY SOCIETIES, 2000).

3. Methodology

This period has been and is one full of challenges that we have not faced before. The pandemic, which broke out in early 2020, changed the lives of the majority and everyone was forced to find new ways to adapt, in line with the new conditions that exist worldwide. Restrictions due to general or partial quarantine have also brought about a change in the way we work in the field and the way we interact and communicate.

The interviews we conducted, having such a personal and sensitive subject, needed to take place in special conditions of privacy and security. We really wanted these interviews to be conducted face to face and to provide respondents with all the comfort to get maximum results.

38 interviews out of the 40 took place face to face and took place at our headquarters in the Ferentari neighbourhood. Our community mediator was present at the interview. We chose this option so that women feel safe and open to a person they trust and whom they already know. Two respondents chose to answer by phone.

The interviews were scheduled in advance and we made sure that the security measures imposed by the authorities were complied with.

We followed the agreed methodology together with our partners in this project and we also respected the proposed interview structure.

The mediators were trained in advance, and were trained on the project, what we want to achieve and how to ask questions.

Each person interviewed has previously signed the GDPR agreement.

The meetings were recorded, with the signed consent of the respondents. These took place in an intimate and relaxed setting, in a one-to-one formula.

Our challenge was not to find people to answer. The ladies in the community were eager to talk about their personal experiences or those they had witnessed.

Our main challenge was the restrictions imposed by the authorities, which greatly limited our ability to travel and interact. Due to the fact that we have our own headquarters and in the period when we did the interviews, the quarantine was a partial one and not a total one, we managed to overcome these problems and to complete the challenge, exactly as we set out.

Another difficulty encountered in this process was to convince the ladies to follow the safety measures, many of them not believing in the real existence of the Crown Virus and being very outraged that they have to wear a mask or disinfect their hands frequently. I explained to them in turn the importance of complying with these measures and especially what are the consequences of non-compliance.

It was difficult to schedule the interviews, not because the ladies did not want to participate, but because the schools are closed and they had no one to leave the children with. We offered them the opportunity to come with their children and colleagues, educational counselors took care of them during the interview.

A challenge was to adapt the questions to be understood by all, without changing the original meaning and not to lose sight of the essence of this research and its purpose.

We managed to do this by working with our community mediators who explained and translated the questions into simpler words that could be understood by all the ladies who answered.

The recorded interviews were centralised and as I received them, they were transcribed and analysed.

The interviews lasted an average of 15 minutes, depending on the personal experiences and the willingness of the women to share them (with more or less details).

4. Characterisation of the participants in the interviews

The Romanian team had conducted 40 interviews – 38 of them face to face and 2 of them over the phone (it was the choice of the respondents).

We tried to find Roma women taken out from different scenarios and different backgrounds. The age varies from 20 years old until 70 years old.

We tried to also find Roma women with different educational background – starting with only two grades finished, up until University Level Degree. Most of them finished 8 grades – so they left school around 16 years old – to get married. Around 10% went back to school and finished 10 grades or 12 grades (depending on the programme) on the “Second Chance” School Program. What is very interesting is that the ones with university degree felt the need to “give back” to the community and returned to help and work within the community.

They were not very comfortable answering the questions about their education. In most interviews we could sense a way of hesitation and shame. Most of them were trying to explain why they had to give up school. The main reason was that their family decided that they should get married so, starting a new family did not go very well with continuing studies.

One of the respondents said that her parents split up and she had to give up school to take care of her younger brothers, because her mother left and her father had to work to support them.

90% had problems understanding the questions at first (with explanations) and they were unable to give proper examples or to bring arguments to sustain their statements.

Over 80% of them are housewives and their main occupation is to take care of the house and the children. They consider it to be normal and they think that the most important thing to do in life is to take care of your children and to make sure they are very well taken care off.

What was common to all participants was that they all consider that Domestic Violence is a problem in our country and that the information they have or can get about the alternatives an abused woman has to escape her aggressor – is useless, because the authorities “do not take them serious”.

We only had one woman who was never married, the rest of them were either widows, married or cohabiting or divorced (and cohabiting). Since a very small percentage of them were working, most of the women depend on their husband to provide food and pay the bills.

60% live in one room apartments in mixed neighbourhoods, even though they live with more than 4 people in the house. The rest 40% live in houses. All of them are living in mixed neighbourhoods.

The opinions about their surroundings are very different – quite opposite, we might add. Some of them find the people living in that area as being very friendly and calm and with no appetite for violence, and some of them consider that their street is very dangerous and they prefer to never walk alone at night in those areas. None of them spent too much time on describing the surroundings and were rather quick in choosing the words and eager to move on to the next question.

The average age for them to get married was 13 to 15 and legally at 18. But starting at the age of 13-15 they were given by their families to their husbands. Most of them have children (at least one) and the ones who are over 35 already have grandchildren.

Around 80 % of the respondents declared that their husband is Roma, the rest 20% declared that he is non-Roma.

It was very interesting to observe that women with such different backgrounds and different social status shared common views on defining the domestic violence and that they all had the courage to speak about it. Some of them declared openly that they were such victims themselves, some said that even now they still have problems with their husbands and suffer from domestic violence, but every single one of them agrees that domestic violence is a real problem and it should not be ignored anymore.

5. Findings

5.1 Roma women's perceptions of domestic violence

Violence has taken so many forms and it has so many names, over these past decades and it seems that as society is evolving the forms of violence are spreading and finding new ways to develop.

Even though the violent behaviour can be found since the beginning of time, now the forms of violence can be found in every aspect of our lives.

Actually, the types of violence did not change that much, but our perception of what it is violence indeed has changed a lot. Until a few years back, if one would ask a woman if her husband abused her, she would only think of beating as the form of violence, even though other forms are even more dangerous than the actual hitting of a person.

From our research, we have found that 100% of the respondents were able to identify at least three major types of domestic violence.

Nowadays, women can identify more types of violence and they also have more ways to find shelter and escape the aggressor, independent of the form of aggression that we are referring to.

When asked what they think that domestic violence is about, all of them, without exception answered that it is beating and insulting are for sure the most common signs of domestic violence and violent behaviour.

None of the respondents considered that the financial type of violence is among the acts of violence how they describe them to be. They only saw violence - physical violence, verbal violence, and psychological violence. Not even the sexual violence appeared in their answers.

All the women think that domestic violence is a real and big problem in our country. The reasons why they think that are quite diverse. Around 30% consider that the Authorities are responsible for this because they do not take Roma people into consideration and they do not respond to their needs.

The rest of 70% consider that the responsible persons behind the domestic violent acts are men and the general considerations about women. They said that men consider themselves as “gods” and they have ultimate power upon a woman. They decide everything that goes on in the woman’s life and the woman has no right to reply. Her only solution is to keep her head down to avoid confrontation.

Again all 40 respondents agreed on the fact that the women are the ones to suffer most. Among the reasons for that was that women are more sensitive than men, and that they have to sacrifice for their children.

The main reasons for violence, discovered by our respondents are drinking, lack of money and jealousy. Actually jealousy is the most mentioned word in all the answers. Roma women consider that Roma men are very jealous, and this is a distinguished feature for them.

Even though 80% of them consider that no woman is responsible for being the source or motive for men’s violent behaviour, 20% consider that there are some women who “are asking for it”. When asked to give an example to illustrate their sayings they said that some wives are provoking the husbands and “looking for fights” when the husband is tired or had a drink. Some others consider that women are responsible because they decide to put up with the violence and keep things silent.

When asked why they think women endure all this kind of domestic violence, we found several reasons for it. Most of the respondents said that Roma women have no other place to go. Most of them have no jobs and they have no house of their own, and because they have limited access to education they cannot pay for their own house and support the children.

All of them consider that violence against women is a serious crime and it should be punished by law. But when it comes to explaining why it is a crime- 90% could not provide an explanation and just said that it is not normal for a woman to be beaten and abused.

10% answered that violence against women is a crime, because we all have equal rights and it should be treated as a serious crime.

All the Roma women who participated in our study said that there is never a justification for an act of violence against women. They said that people should be able to talk things through and if they decide that the relationship is not working anymore, they should then go, on their separate ways, and never use violence to settle conflicts inside the family.

When asked why some Roma women decide to keep silent about the situations in their homes and they choose to suffer in silence, we have got some different answers that helped us to have a complete picture about the situation in the Roma communities.

All of them agreed that fear is the main reason for their silence. They are afraid because they have no other place to go. They are afraid because the Authorities do not take them seriously and there were some cases when the victim was sent home by the Police, to wait for a court order and they had to face the aggressor's rage, and some of the cases ended tragically for the women involved.

Most people say that Roma community is very closed one and that they govern by their own rules. Women explained to us that saying out loud that you experience violence in the family is to bring shame and blame upon yourself from the community. So a lot of the Roma women decide to keep the silence because they do not want to bring shame upon their families and to be excluded from the community.

Another reason is that they have no place to go and start a new life for them and their children. Their families would not take them back and most of them know nothing besides taking care of the house and the children. They follow the rules of Ancient societies in which the woman had to suffer and be silent in order to ensure a good life for their children, so they will not grow up without a father. They consider that family is the most important thing and they have to sacrifice everything to keep it unite.

5.2 The range of domestic violence commonly occurring in Roma families

As said before, the perception of domestic violence has changed a lot over the last decades and now people are able to identify a wider range of domestic violence manifestations, such as physical violence, psychological violence, economical violence, verbal violence, sexual violence etc.

Most Roma women even now, they cannot really identify all range of domestic violence manifestations, but if explained to them they can come up with examples that illustrate the different types of violence.

According to their saying there are three types of violence that occur the most: that would be in the order they identified – the verbal violence, physical violence and psychological violence.

All the participants declared that they know cases of violence that happen in their community. 30% admit that they have been themselves victims of domestic violence and 10% that really are victims as we speak.

The physical violence is the one that is more visible and the respondents said that beating is very frequent in Roma communities. 50% consider that Roma communities are more violent than non-Roma ones and that the Roma men are more violent than the non-Roma ones. The rest of 50% consider that the manifestation of violence is the same all over the place and that are no differences.

The verbal aggression is also recognized as being very frequent in Roma families and communities. All respondents were able to give examples of scandals and insults that happen daily in their community or around it.

The economical violence is the less present in their answers and most of them do not recognise this type of violence as being a problem or a crime. They consider it to be normal for a woman to give up her income to her husband and they see it is violence only if his request is not honoured and he starts beating her.

One of the respondents said that all the women she knows – Roma and Non-Roma, they all have been at one point in their lives, victims of domestic violence, but they did not know it.

What was really interesting was that, even though all the women condemned the acts of violence against other women, some of them (more than 50%) tried to find a reason and to excuse the aggressor.

We can say that, in Roma communities we can find the whole range of domestic violence but more aspects are easily seen by the women, than others. Even though the psychological violence can have

greater impact on long term on the life of children and on their own, they see the physical violence as the most dangerous.

One of our respondents told us that she had to put up with psychological violence for years. Her self-esteem dropped to the minimum and she was terrified to go home.

She tried to talk to her friends and with her family but all of them told her that her husband is a good man because he never hits her, so she should be pleased and thankful.

So, even though we live in very modern societies, some things never changed inside the communities and the women status it is still considered inferior to men.

Sexual violence is also a very subtle form of abuse that most Roma women cannot recognise as a violent behaviour. 30% of our respondents were able to recognize and condemn the sexual abuse, but most of the women consider this as normal, because it was an idea inoculated by the family and the society.

So, there is still a long way to go, but the first step has been made, and women were able to recognize different types of domestic violence and abuse and they all agreed that domestic violence is a serious crime that needs punishment.

5.3 The level of knowledge Roma women possess in regard to domestic violence, their rights, and how to seek help for themselves

For this study we have tried to speak with 40 Roma women who have different backgrounds, social situations, education level and marital status, in order to get information to better understand the whole picture of the Roma communities. This is why we have chosen a wide range of age – from 20 years old until 70 years old. We have respondents with 2nd grade level in education and also we have with university level.

As came out from the interviews and highlighted in the previous section, Roma women have deep knowledge of identifying the different types of domestic violence. We also have seen that inside the Roma communities all range of domestic violence can be found: verbal violence, physical violence, psychological violence, sexual violence and economical violence.

All respondents agreed upon the fact that violence against women is a serious crime. This is a very good observation, and it means that all the women, despite their level of education, understand that violence against women is a crime. The downside to that is that they consider that only physical violence is a crime. All the examples given by them were related to beating.

When asked why they think that domestic violence is a crime only 20% referred to the rights that women have. The rest of 80% said that it is a crime because it is “not normal” to hit somebody.

When asked how a conflict is solved in their community only 20% said that the Police comes and stop the aggressor. 50% said that they don't know how a conflict is solved, and 30% said that the conflict is not really solved because it is only an episode that will happen again tomorrow or the next day.

All of the respondents agreed that nowadays, with the TV programs and with the access to internet, things had changed for the better and women have better chances to find out more information about their rights and how they can get help even being abused.

Even though, the access to information should be at hand, some of the women in Roma communities have no access to television or internet because their husbands “do not allow it, because they say she might find another man and leave” – this is what one of the respondents has told us.

They all are aware that women should have rights and they should be treated equal as men, but they do not know exactly the law and what are these rights.

70% declared that they are well informed about what they should do in case of a domestic violence episode but when asked what the steps are, 90% of them could only name the Police as the authority to deal with domestic violence.

Even those who know there are some organizations that can help them and special hotline for women who are victims of domestic violence, they said that these organizations do not help them because “they ask for some many papers that in the end the woman gives up and returns home”.

What was considered to be a very interesting finding is that, only 10% said that they have used the information to help somebody in need. The rest of 90% said that they prefer not to intervene in other family’s conflicts.

Even though the Roma women know their rights, they do not trust that the Authorities will offer any assistance when they are in need. If they are not certain of the outcome of their actions, they choose to stay silent and to suffer because they are afraid that if they will not find a way to leave and to support herself and the children, she will have to return to the aggressor and her situation will be even worse than before.

“Where should they go? What if they go and ask for help?! Nobody cares for them. Even the Police does this. Until they are killed nobody cares for them. After they are killed, they come and investigate. This is how it is” (B.G, 38 years old).

Only 15% of the respondents heard about the existence of the inter-cultural mediators, and only one person said that she saw them in action. The rest of 85% said that they have never heard of the existence of the mediators and never seen anybody coming to help with the conflicts inside the community.

When asked what they will advise a friend who is suffering from domestic violence to do, only 30% of the respondents said that they will advise her to go to the Authorities. The rest of 70% said that the best piece of advice they could give is to “get away from that toxic relationship” but they were unable to give advice on the methods how to do it.

“Yes, I know what it should be done! If somebody comes to me and asks for my advice, I would tell them : go away from that relationship, and never look back, come on ..go go” (B.S., 29 years old)

The main difficulty that stands in the way of the Roma women getting the help they need, that the respondents recognize is the lack of education. They have no knowledge to use the internet or to use the other apps on mobile phone and seek help.

When asked if domestic violence is breaking the rights of women, they all agreed with this statement but not many were able to give an example or to explain why this is happening.

The women said that their main obstacle in finding the path for themselves is that they find no understanding and because they have to obey the unwritten rules of their society in which the woman has to shut up and blindly obey her husband.

Because most men do not give their wives the permission to work, they have no financial independence and they are totally dependent on their partner.

5.4 The experiences of Roma women in accessing or not accessing, support services

Even though nowadays there are a lot of institutions that offer assistance to the victims of domestic violence like the police, the social workers, a lot of NGOs that work around the clock and really helped a lot of women to construct a new life.

Most of the women (70% of them) we spoke with said that they have never needed any help from the authorities and that they have never needed that information in order to help other women.

Trust in the Police is extremely low among the interviewed women, and most of them do not have examples of good practice in which the Police intervened and sanctioned the aggressor according to the victims' expectations. According to the interviews, women who are victims of domestic violence do not complain to the Police so as not to cause harm to the aggressor or to avoid a fine that affects the entire family budget or not to blame them for bringing shame on the family.

In the absence of effective measures for police intervention in crisis situations, providing immediate safety to victims, aggression returns to the common home and violence against partners intensifies. Women who are assaulted develop their own mechanisms of survival in the abusive relationship and give up calling the Police, being aware of the lack of adequate intervention measures by the authorities.

The negative experiences of women in relation to the intervention of the Police regarding the domestic violence experienced or witnessed consolidate the distrust in the public authorities.

The first point of contact in case of an emergency regarding the domestic violence is the Police. Because the first measure that the police can take is to give a fine, most of the women give up and prefer not to call them, because they are the ones who have to pay the bill and that can only be the source for even more violence.

“Yes, I needed help, and I called the emergency number. The Police came and they told me they have no power ...and I have to go back home and wait for a Court order. Only the Judge can give that order. So they did nothing...and they sent me back to him. He could have killed me that night! Nobody cares! “(D.D. 41 years old)

Most of the respondents declared that they did not interact with the authorities too much but from what they have heard from others, nothing really happened.

We also have a case where the woman was helped:

“I have called one of those NGOs who helps the mother and the child and I got my friend out of there. Yes, they helped her and now she is out of the danger.” (P.R, 42 years old)

Women said that when Police comes to investigate the case the answer they get most of the times is “this is what you Roma people do. You fight and then you make up. This is how you are”. Because of this answer and knowing that the next time it will be the same, women choose to suffer in silence and not to call the Police again.

Most of the women consider that it could be very helpful to have mediators around but even if they are, they cannot interfere without being asked first.

10% of the respondents considered that it would be more helpful to organize seminars and workshops where people can be informed about the aspects of domestic violence and some others to help them prevent such cases.

One other aspect that stands in the way of Roma women is the lack of knowing their rights. Every time there is a scandal in the family and when the woman wants to file a complaint, the aggressor tells the victim that the authorities will take her children away if she calls them. And being afraid to lose her children, the woman has no trust in the local authorities and again, the aggressor is the one who is “winning the fight”.

The physical violence is a way of showing off to the woman, that the husband is in control and he “teaches her a lesson.”

“If she talks back and did not listen to him, he hits her, and hits the children in order to teach her to never disobey him again. “(N.N. 41 years old)

The Roma women, because they suffer all kind of discrimination during their life time, do not trust anybody and this fact makes it near to impossible to interfere and convince them that they might get help if they ask for it.

“They (men) keep them to be all dependent. The woman believes everything her husband says. He is like a second God to her. She has no education, so she only knows what he tells her. “(G.M. 39 years old)

5.5 The skills Roma women may lack in order to claim their rights

The lack of education is the main reason which limits the access of Roma women to claiming their rights. 90% of the respondents gave up school before reaching the 12 grades (that are mandatory in Romania).

The Authorities consider that Roma women form the category with most high school dropout rate in our country. And that the main reason for their drop out is the transition from childhood to adulthood marked by the change in the Roma women status. Most of them are getting married at a very young age (between 12 and 16 years old) or they have to give up school to take care of the household because of a missing parent.

Another obstacle is the lack of personal freedom. Most of them are not allowed to use the internet or to go out in public much. They have to wear certain clothes, or they are not allowed to go out with friends. So for this reason, they have very limited access to information.

“ They are not allowed to go out at all. They have to wear those long skirts and they are not allowed to wear any makeup. They can not even stop and chat with friends. If the man says no..is no. You have to obey.” (A.P. 24 years old)

This also makes it very difficult for NGOs who try to organize workshops and to inform the women about their rights, because the women are not allowed to come to those sessions.

Another obstacle is that Roma women are not taken serious by the state. They are discriminated even by the state agents and the Policy and this makes very difficult to gain their trust.

Discrimination can be considered the second biggest issue for them, because it is very difficult to find a job. It can be because they are missing the studies needed for some specific jobs but also, most companies choose not to hire Roma women. Even there are job posts that say out loud and clear that they hire women, but they must not be Roma.

The lack of economic freedom keeps the Roma women trapped in a cage – like a vicious circle. Because they cannot work to earn their own money.

One other aspect that is very important is that a lot of women do not have official papers like ID cards and birth certificate and this really makes things very difficult for them in order to find a way out of their current situation.

The Roma women have no real support from their community and families.

“ Young Roma are taught by their mothers to listen to the men and to keep all the problems to themselves. It is a shame to let people know what happens in your family. People will think that you are not living a good life and this brings shame on your entire family” (R.P. 42 years old)

As they take care of everything that implies taking care of the family – housework, children, give the women a sense of vulnerability, because all the responsibilities fall on their shoulders. After the children grow and get married (which is still at a very young age) they find themselves without a purpose and without an occupation. Some of the women continue to help their children and start taking care of the grandchildren, but most of them are kept away from their children’s new families.

Most of the women lack self-confidence and develop severe psychological problems due to dependent and co-dependent behaviour.

Another important issue is the medical problems. This is really a consequence of the lack of education and poverty. They do not have access to the medical system and they do not have the information they need in order to access it.

Most Roma women have never been to a gynaecologist or have never been to a routine scanning and for this reason a lot of health complication may occur.

Also, the lack of independence in all its forms and the lack of trust make it very difficult for the women to really get help and move on.

5.6 Any other significant findings

One of the most interesting findings of this study is that even though all Roma women consider that violence against women is a crime, they all understand that the women have no choice but to endure for the sake of the children and of the family.

We have confronted the answers we got with some of similar studies that took place more than 10 years back and the findings were almost the same. Not very much changed in the status of the Roma women in the last decade.

Even though there are so many activists and so many NGOs fighting for women rights, the Roma women from these modern communities are still considered to be inferior to men.

The situation is worse in the rural part of the country. Here in Bucharest, organizations like ours are fighting every day for their right to an education and tries to inform them about the choices they have.

Another important finding is that all Roma women consider that there is no real solving for the domestic violence that happens in their communities.

Almost 70% consider that the State Authorities are responsible for the rise of violence within the community.

Most Roma women do not consider that sexual violence is against their rights because they were taught that one of their roles is to please the man whenever he wants it. So they have grown up to consider abusive behaviour as normal.

10% of the respondents do not consider that divorce is a valid option.

“They should sit down and talk and stop messing around. They must not split up. They should stop with the stupid things and take care of the family together”. (N.N. 41 years old)

6. Conclusions

The social context in Romania has changed quite a lot in the last 20 years, but according to this study and the X-ray of the Roma communities, we can clearly see that things haven't changed that much for these women.

Maybe for some, it is unbelievable to think that in the year 2020 there are people with no internet access, or that they have no idea how to use a computer or a phone, or that they are not allowed to leave the house and go out with friends.

But these things happen very often and sometimes, like it is the case for most women in our study, it happens right next to us, in the capital city of our country.

We were very happy to observe that all of our respondents were able to identify most of the types of domestic violence and that all of them consider that violence against women it is a crime. But in the same time it was very hard to see that they still consider that they have no chance or a better life and for a change.

It is clear that there is a huge gap between what NGOs and the State is trying to do and what really happens inside the Roma communities. They could not name one single program from preventing violence that goes on in their community.

We also found out that the level of trust in the law and the protection the law offers them is almost inexistent.

More than 90% of the Roman women choose to keep their problems private and to suffer in silence. The main reason for this is FEAR. They fear the aggressor, they fear that the authorities will not believe them, they fear that by telling out the problems she has, she will only bring more pain upon herself and that nothing will be done.

If a Roman woman had a bad experience with the Police once, she will probably never call the Police again. And this may lead to her losing her life or ending up in hospital and damaged for life.

The fear that her family will cut communication and will not support her, the fear that the authorities will take away her children because she has no income and she can not support them properly. The fear that the community will exclude her and she will end up being the one to blame for everything.

“ Some people say – yea, it serves her right! She talks back and she wants independence. So, you see.. you get beaten and you are also to blame. So, why should she say anything?” (M.M. 55 years old).

This FEAR keeps her trapped in an abusive relationship and she is willing to suffer every day.

Being discriminated every day, the Roma woman does not trust anybody. It may take years until an inter-cultural mediator gains her the trust.

“I tried to help a woman once. I called the authorities, they came and took her away to a safe house, but she ran away from there in the same night and went back to the aggressor. So, it is her own fault that she keeps going back. I will not interfere anymore with that”. (N.P. 30years old)

The problem is more complex and these issues should be handled out by psychologists. The Roma women who were used and taught all their life to depend on their husband had developed a dependent psychological disorder. They consider that they cannot live or go on without their man. This is a real psychological problem and it is as real as depression.

It is not an easy one to cure but it can be done with the help of mediators and psychologists, especially trained to deal with this kind of problems.

People do not see things in depth, and it is easier to blame the victim. But, the truth is that this sick dependent relationship is one of the main symptoms of an abusive and unhealthy relationship.

We have seen that one of the main obstacles in finding a way to save themselves is the lack of education.

Here we can find several reasons. First of all, even though the education in Romania is free, you still need some resources in order to sustain your children to school. If a family has more than one child, they will always choose to support the boy. Because the boy has to learn how to make money, while the

girl should stay around her mother and learn how to take care of the house and to prepare herself for marriage.

Second, the fact that not all of the Roma people have legal documents like birth certificates and IDs make the process of school registration very difficult. In order to enter the school you need to be able to provide quite a lot of documents.

And there is another thing, if one of the parents dies, or goes to jail (very often), or just leaves the family, the eldest girl must take over and help with raising of the other brothers and becomes the person in charge with the household.

If the young Roma girl's family decide to marry her at young age, then she most likely drop out of school and follow her husband in her new home. In most cases they do not come back to school due to several reasons (she is not allowed to, she has children, etc).

The conclusion to this study is that authorities and NGOs did not find yet the best way to make sure that the right information reaches out to exactly the ones in need. The people who have access and participate to workshops, or watch TV are the ones who already are having a different life and more liberty.

And the fact that the Roma women experience racism when they call the Police for help is really encouraging the aggressor and puts the victim into an even more delicate situation.

The best part of this study was that the Roma women were very much willing to talk about the violence and even though they stated several times that "this is not happening into my family, but I have heard cases...", it shows that they are willing to know more about this problem and they are open for discussion.

We hope that because they were able to speak about the violence and found out more about the types of violence happening, they will pay more attention around them and help and direct those in need.

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