

Gender Violence and the Construction of New Gender Identities: Roma Migrant Women's Lived Experiences in Romania and Spain

Adriana Jupîneanț Cioran^A, Remus Crețan^{A*}, Sorina Voiculescu^A, Mercedes Alcañiz Moscardó^B

^A Department of Geography, West University of Timișoara, Vasile Parvan 4, 300233 Timișoara, Romania; adricioran@yahoo.es, ORCID: 0000-0002-4501-5367; remus.cretan@e-uvt.ro, ORCID: 0000-0002-9053-8394; sorina.voiculescu@e-uvt.ro, ORCID: 0000-0002-2016-8711

^B Department of Sociology, Universitat Jaume I, Castellón de la Plana, Spain, moscardo@uji.es, ORCID:0000-0002-6513-0266

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ABSTRACT

Recent research indicates that there are critical physical, psychological, verbal and economic issues that shape the types of violence to which women are subject. This study analyses how Roma migrant women fall victim to domestic abuse, both in their home country (Romania) and abroad (Spain). Drawing on literature regarding violence against women, a survey (N=132) was conducted with Romanian Roma migrant women in Spain to understand the ways in which they reconstructed their gender identities in the face of violence. Further semi-structured interviews were undertaken with five Roma migrant women to determine the ways in which these women perceived the forms of violence to which they fell victim, what caused their partners to become perpetrators, and what roles their own families played in this scenario. The findings of our study reveal the inherent insecurities that violence has inflicted on our participants, unmask the destructive effects on the family unit, and explain how some of the interviewees were able to transcend their experience and initiate a process of resetting their gender identities. If the predominance of the traditional patriarchal structure of Roma society can be observed during the life experiences of the Roma women in Romania, the gender characteristics are changing among those Roma women who have migrated to Spain: there is a greater emphasis on a fairer distribution of domestic tasks, decision-making in the family, and their ability to adapt to new possibilities for professional development. The study concludes that although violence against Roma women is still a real issue in Spain, women are re-defining their gender identities to resist traditional patriarchal structures.

Introduction

The European Union (EU henceforth) considers that violence against women and girls is one of the highest forms of infringement of human rights, and implicitly, a systematic violation. The perpetrator is usually one's life part-

ner and a staggering third of all women have experienced physical or sexual violence (Council of the European Union, 2022). The benchmark for international standards in the field of domestic violence started with the Istanbul

* Corresponding author: Remus Crețan, remus.cretan@e-uvt.ro

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Convention in 2014, and was ratified in 2017 by The Council of Europe convention, which was based on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence (UN, 2022). The latest European Commission directive that actively challenges gender and domestic violence was launched in March 2022. It includes women's access to justice, the right to claim compensation, access to rape crisis centres and free of charge helplines (EU, 2022).

Recent studies on gender-based violence have also revealed that women suffer different forms of violence at home, at work and in society at large (Cantera, 1999; Cantera, 2005; Ferrer & Bosch, 2005; Alcañiz, 2015; Perrone & Nannini, 1995; Racz et al., 2022). However, the ways in which migrant Roma women experience this kind of abuse are still not dealt with in current literature.

Consequently, this study aims to identify to what extent the Romanian Roma migrant women have managed to reshape and reconstruct their gender identity in Spain, and

what role played their previous perception of domestic violence in their attempt to make a significant change.

The key questions of the paper are:

- a) How do the Roma migrant women in Spain reconstruct gender identity?
- b) What are the significant lines of rhetoric on gender violence and how are these perceived from a diachronic perspective in Romania and in Spain?

This paper draws from recent debates in gender violence studies and migrant gender studies by placing the lived experiences of violence against Roma women.

The structure of this study has got three focal points. First, we will present the outlines of recent literature review which will set the theoretical foundation for our analysis, then we present our findings through interviews and finally examine the data in relation to known literature.

Gender-based violence and the Roma migrant women

In the international gender-based violence sphere (Cantera, 2007; Perrone & Nannini, 1995), we notice a consensus regarding abuse in the domestic and public space. It is perceived as a recurrent issue across all cultures, social classes, ethnic groups, religions and ages, and not surprisingly, as a violation of human rights. In order for us to understand better the features related to gender-based violence as rooted in domestic violence, we need to point to the United Nations' Beijing Declaration (UN, 1995) which states that „violence against women means any act based on gender that results in psychological, sexual, physical harm, including threats of such acts, deprivation of liberty” (p. 1).

There are many explanatory theories of domestic violence. The ideas of Perrone and Nannini (1995) for instance, come from the theories of gender-based violence, which state that domestic violence has complex forms of manifestations that interact with each other due to family dynamics; this entails that the family unit would undergo difficulties, but lack the communication skills to reach a consensus. The authors insist on the fact that the perpetrator actively refuse to take responsibility for their actions and suggests that the female victim adds to this form of abuse by being afraid to make a change, which inevitably forces her to remain confined in a toxic environment. This statement has been criticised by Cantera (2007), who focuses mainly on the aggressive conduct of the perpetrator against the woman, discarding the woman's side of inaction. Perrone and Nannini (1995) relate the thinking and behaviour of the aggressor to their inability to change, as society itself is limiting men's opportunities to make a substantial transition, such as are the ramifications of feminism.

From a biological point of view, Ramírez (2000) explains the process of domestic violence as a response to one's intrinsic survival instinct, as part of the biological makeup of men, as it is well-known that men tend to react more aggressively when their well-being is challenged. The same author gives examples of aggressiveness in different male animal species when faced with pressure and relates this to the lack or poor education that men receive, which could be a decisive factor in the development of domestic violence. Along the same lines, Booth and Dabbs (1993) analyse the testosterone level in men and the ways in which it affects their aggressiveness. The results reveal that there is a strong association between high testosterone and physical aggression in the man-woman relationship. As we are going to see later on, the present study indicates that there are ways to successfully change these aggressive impulses into initiatives, and make conscious efforts for personal development.

On the other hand, feminist theories of violence focus more on cultural analysis of violence. Male violence against women is seen as an abuse of power in a social structure that allows men to assault women (Walker, 2004). In this context, Vicente and Turinetti (2008) highlights male social privileges at the expense of females to maintain male superiority. This fact proves the importance of social exposure, education and interpersonal relationships. Therefore, in a society dominated by the male model, patriarchy renders women as an object of control and domination, where the „training” and „education” of a woman is part of a broad phenomenon produced and reproduced by the social structure of patriarchal sovereignty (Cantera, 2007; Hunnicutt, 2009).

Curiously enough, the mistreatment of women is seen as a socially accepted form of conduct in certain parts of the world; however, from an ideological and cultural point of view, this kind of behaviour can be reinforced in time, but fortunately, is prone to changing (Cantera, 2007). As the same author points out, domestic violence is a public, social, political and moral problem. A crucial point in this case is the maltreated woman's resilience in the face of an abusive relationship, and her ability to become economically and psychologically independent. Domestic violence, as a byproduct of the evolution of gender dominance, can be transformed and substantially reduced if early intervention is made in society's education (Cantera, 1999). Domestic violence may also appear in the social and geographical space: it does not have concrete social classes, nor does it belong to a specific ethnic group, nor is it directly related to one's faith, cultural background or economic status.

Vicente and Turinetta (2008) claim that any violent behaviour is intentional and has a clearly predetermined objective (i.e., physical, psychological, economic, and sexual abuse). For this reason, domestic violence aims to control the victim and/or create a sense of fear (Ferrer Pérez & Bosch Fiol, 2005). In the same context, Vicente and Turinetta (2008) reject the generational theory and insist on the fact that the aggressor cannot be exempted from social responsibility, even if domestic violence is perpetuated from generation to generation and is accentuated due to the power imbalance in the couple's relationship.

Ecological theories of violence examine the social context to understand the factors that influence domestic violence. According to this theory, we could look into several angles:

- the macrosystem: includes all forms of social organization, as well as cultural and ideological values of a society that fuel domestic violence (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).
- the exosystem: it consists of the social relations that are established between an individual and a public institution (school, church, workplace, social networks, mass media) that may help perpetuate domestic violence (Belski, 1980). In this context, we can include the following factors: the ineffectiveness of laws in the face of gender and/or domestic abuse, the scenes of violence prevalent in mass media, and female economic autonomy (De Maris et al., 2003). The number of children per family unit may also add to the pressures faced by the married couple (Flake, 2005).
- the microsystem: refers to the area closest to the person and their relationships (family, friends, spouse), which can fuel domestic violence (Heise, 1998). In this context, the theory explains marital conflicts regarding the fair distribution of domestic tasks, sets the scene for drug addiction and challenges the education the woman receives. In the face of these problems, Belski (1980) re-

lates anger outbursts to reduced stress tolerance. Regarding the relationship between violence and alcohol consumption, Carlson (1984) insists on alcohol being a risk factor that enables domestic violence. Combined with macro-systemic elements, such as an individual's culture, deep-rooted beliefs, etc., it can generate different forms of violence in the marital space.

- the individual level: it focuses on the personal set of beliefs (including self-image) that the individual brings to the relationship. The biological, cognitive, and emotional characteristics that intervene in interpersonal relationships are related to the system of values and beliefs received by the perpetrator in the family before marriage (Carlson, 1984).

Finally, violence related to stress theories are also relevant in this case. For instance, Mullender (2000) argues that men become violent due to the pressure of social problems (poverty, lack of jobs) and analyses the behaviour of aggressors in a situation of social equality, demonstrating that it is men who usually attack women, even in situations of social equality. Analysing gender structures, social order and social inequalities, the gender perspective considers that gender, class and ethnicity overlap to generate social hierarchies and inequalities. These open up the possibility of substantial changes in different social contexts. However, according to the same author, they also allow social identities to be redefined in terms of class, rather than ethnicity or gender.

Chodorow (1995) on the other hand, believes that political and cultural dynamics are responsible for the perception of people's multiple social identities and the various social divisions produced in society. In this sense, the author emphasises that: "it is crucial ... to recognise that the ideologies of difference that define us as women and men, like inequality itself, are socially, psychologically and culturally produced by people living and creating their social, psychological and cultural worlds." (p. 48).

Continuing the theoretical analysis of gender relations, we may notice a tendency to classify certain theoretical viewpoints. Within the specialised literature on Roma women, there is a separation and a stratification of social theories about gender, as follows:

The theory of gender relations is dominated by traditional models, a concept supported by Magyari-Vincze (2001). The author argues that the principles of gender-based allocation of domestic tasks in the family result in the inequality between women and men. The author also insists on the unfair gender positioning of the woman in the sphere of domestic roles, even under the conditions where she contributes financially to running the family home. Furthermore, based on a study including 350 Roma women living in several isolated Roma settlements in Međimurje county, Croatia, Racz, Rončević and Milošević (2022)

proposed a model of prediction of exposure to violence against Roma women. Authors identified three predictive profiles of Roma women as victims of gender violence in Roma families considering that Roma women victims of childhood violence could have a much higher risk of being a victim of adult violence. On the other hand, in a report of United Nations (UNDP, 2018) it is also highlighted that Roma women in Albania, Montenegro and former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia encountered strong intersectional inequalities based on gender violence against women as well as child and forced marriages.

Voicu and Popescu (2009) go deeper in this analysis, by suggesting that there are three determining factors that create the structure of gender relations: the educational level of the family members, the effective integration of both partners into the job market, and the influence of a community over the individual behaviour. Therefore, the sex-gender system prevails. Thus, it is considered that in families where the level of education is higher and there is a positive experience in the job market, the status of the woman is usually a better one, she displays greater involvement in making decisions in the household and a status closer to that of the man. Also, in modern families, where there is no longer a strict traditional control over family life, gender roles tend to be more relaxed than in traditional communities.

Interestingly, Mocanu (2008) highlights the fact that women belonging to the Roma ethnicity are more discriminated against than Romanian women, which shows that the former are subject to differential treatment based on their membership to the Roma ethnic group, than those belonging to the group of people with disabilities for instance, or poor people. The theory of absolute gender discrimination, supported by Băluţă (2006), is based on the low degree of accessibility of women, which tends to zero

in certain socio-ethnic structures. In the case of Roma women, the theory of intersectionality that points to the double discrimination suffered by women because of both their gender and their ethnicity, is confirmed.

In terms of gender relations exercised by public institutions on Roma women, Băluţă (2006) highlights the fact that institutional gender discrimination is perceived as having twice the intensity/frequency for disadvantaged categories than for any other individual in Romania. Access to high-end job positions puts under the magnifying glass not only discrimination between women and men but also institutional sexism, the role of motherhood in the personal and professional development of women, and even the lack of social policies that regulate gender equality.

Spatial dynamics of ethnicities in post-communist Romania shows a decreasing trend of all ethnic groups except the Roma, whose trend is upward (Rotaru et al., 2023), who are prone to stigmatisation when migrating to different regions of Romania (O'Brien et al., 2022). Furthermore, in order to find better welfare, Roma migrated to western European countries (Pantea, 2012). On the other hand, most of the literature on the Roma people in CEE debates issues of marginalisation of Roma communities. Sadly, Roma people are usually perceived as outsiders, both at the rural (Creţan et al., 2023) and urban (Creţan et al., 2022) levels. Moreover, they are targeted by political leaders as an important electoral basin in order to gain votes (Doiciar & Creţan, 2021). The broader Roma Studies literature discussed also gender issues connected to the Roma women (Oprea, 2004; Pantea, 2012; Vrăbiescu, 2016; Vrăbiescu & Kalir, 2018), but none includes aspects of specific gender-based violence against the Roma women. In this respect, our paper brings theoretical contributions to the international literature on Roma women migrations, as well as on gender-based violence against the Roma women.

Study area and Methodology

Study area

This study is based on the analysis of the Eastern urban areas of Spain, where Roma migrant communities of Romanian nationality prevail. Comunidad Valenciana is a focal point of this area, and it is geographically comprised of Valencia, Castellón de la Plana and Alicante as its major cities. These cities and their surrounding towns (Villareal, Valdeuixo, Nules, Burriana, Xativa, Alzira, Alginet, Tavernes de la Vall-digna, Gandia, Elche, Altea, Benidorm) and villages (Benisa, Alfàs del Pi) have been populated by different ethnic minority groups in the last few decades. From a general perspective, Romanian nationals, including Roma people settled in Eastern Spain, migrated to this area mainly during the 1990s and 2000s. The majority of Roma migrants have chosen to work in Spain in construction, agriculture and tourism.

Methodology and data

This paper is based on a mixed-methods approach, including a survey carried out on 132 migrant Roma women and an in-depth, open-end interview with five Roma women living in the area of Comunidad Valenciana. Due to the lack of specific statistical Roma ethnic data that would have originated from the Data Protection Law, the two techniques have been beneficial in the achievement of our objectives.

The survey

The survey was designed and carried out to identify the impact of contemporary feminism on the reconstruction of gender identity of Roma immigrant women in the region of Valencia. The survey contains elements based on

gender characteristics in specific migratory communities, on gender equality in Romania as a society, and on the concept of social dignity. Significant factors that will be taken into consideration are the political involvement in social discrimination, the detection and analysis of domestic violence indicators and, nonetheless, the self-perceived identity of the Roma community.

From a geographical perspective, we are going to focus on the territory of the Spanish Valencian community, with a special emphasis on the Romanian female migrant Roma.

Demographic and social data is provided in Figure 1 below, which shows the approximate percentage of the interviewed migrant Roma females and their original place of departure to Spain:

As seen above, there is a moderate coverage of counties in Romania that our interviewees have come from, with Timiș, Bihor and Mureș being more prevalent. Given the Covid-19 regulations put in place by the Spanish government, physical contact with the subjects and their families has not always been possible; however, online contact was preferred instead and a large part of the participants have been fully cooperative throughout. The only setback that we have experienced was the withdrawal of some of the participants after being exposed to the sensitivity of the topic and having had to recall personal memories that produced visible pain and sadness.

The distribution and completion of the surveys took place from 27 July 2022, to 18 August 2022, in the Span-

ish territory of the Valencian Community (counties of Alicante, Valencia and Castellón de la Plana) (Figure 2).

The survey questions were in Romanian language and it was unnecessary to be translated into Romani language because all Roma women speak Romanian fluently. All Roma women gave full consent to respond to the survey and for the results to be published.

The methods of carrying out the surveys were both direct, i.e. face to face (precisely to avoid interpretation errors and preserve the accuracy of the information collected), as well as online, where computer-assisted means of communication were used (for instance, WhatsApp and emails). For the distribution of the online surveys, civil associations were contacted and agreed to cooperate; in particular, these were the Agency for Mediation, Integration and Social Cooperation, from the Valencian Community and the Foundation of the Spanish Gypsy Secretariat. Similarly, we were assisted by religious organisations (Orthodox, Pentecostal and Baptist churches) and private families, both in the Spanish territory, as well as in the Romanian one. Thus, from a procedural point of view, the survey application was made individually, in writing and/or online, orally, and physically and/or online.

The survey includes twenty-seven questions related to the investigation of the following objectives

- confirming the gender characteristics of the migratory space of departure.
- identifying the gender characteristics of the migratory space of arrival;

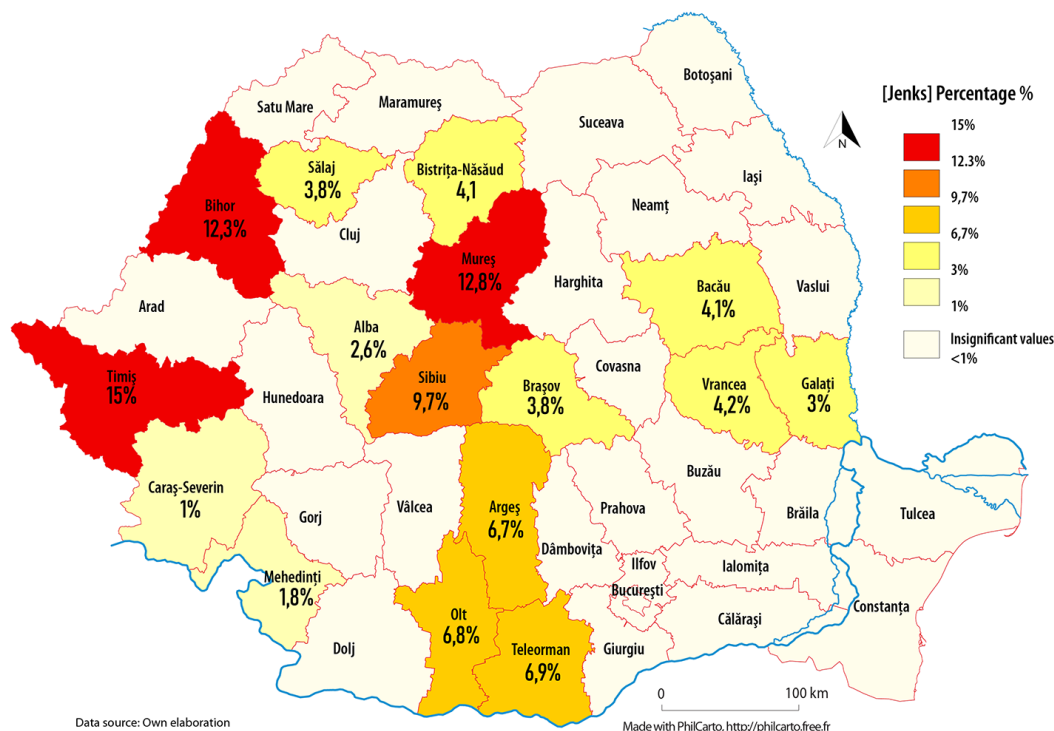


Figure 1. Romanian counties of origin of the surveyed Roma women

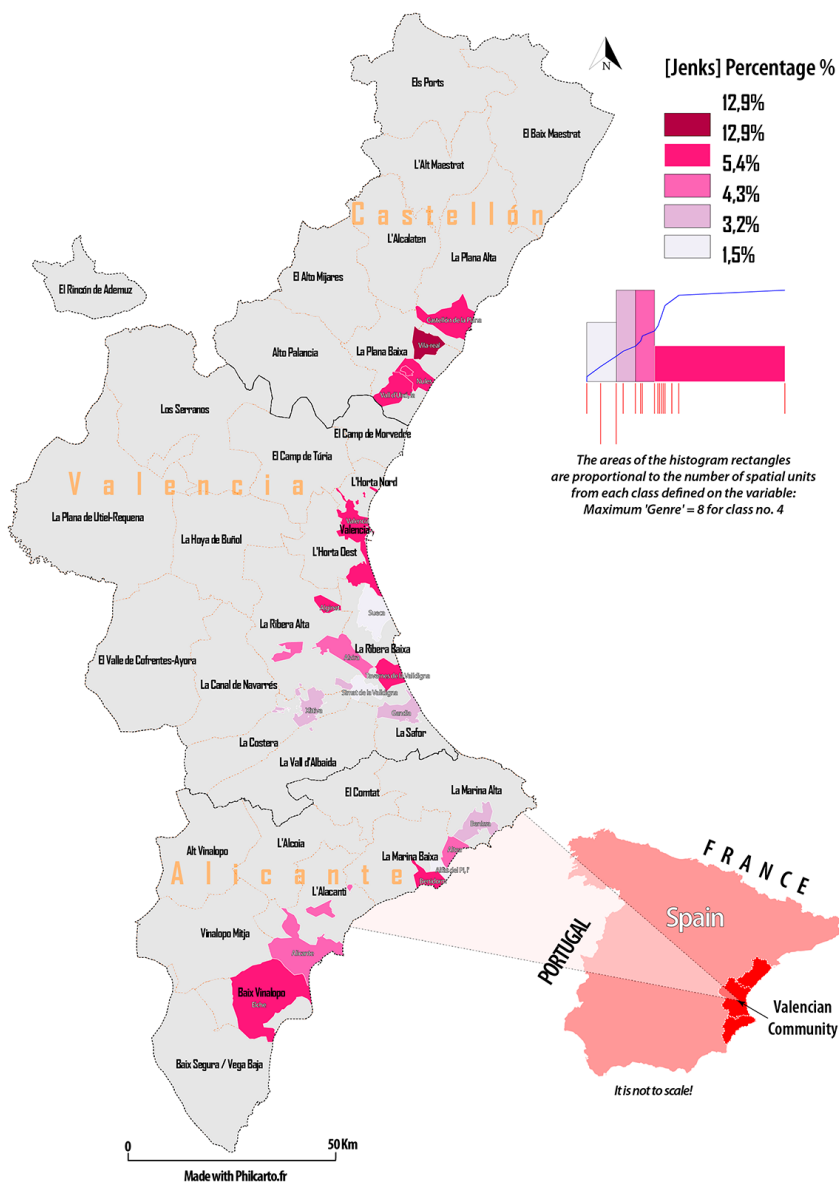


Figure 2. Study area - the proportion of surveyed Roma women in the total surveyed Roma people at the level of Valencian municipalities

- identifying equality between women and men;
- identifying social dignity and socialisation agents;
- reconsideration of political participation and nationality;
- detection and analysis of indicators of domestic violence (physical, economic, psychological, sexual in the migratory space of departure and arrival);
- analysis of gender equality policy indicators;
- identifying Roma contexts of gender power.

Semi-structured interviews

The first author of this paper approached five women to participate in the interview. Interviewees were selected from those who participated in the survey. The interviews took place online via the Google Meet platform in Janu-

ary-February 2023. The five Roma women gave full consent to respond to all interview questions but did not wish to be recorded, so the procedure of taking notes of all responses was used instead. The questions were about different forms of domestic violence that the Roma women encountered in Romania and in Spain. Questions were in Romanian language, as all respondents were fluent speakers of the target language.

The interviewees had an average age of 35 years of age. Four of them were minor when they left Romania (M.F. 15 years, I.L. 17 years, D.S. 13 years and L.P. 13 years). All the interviewees are nowadays mothers. From the point of view of marital status, only one person is married, two declared to be divorced, one is separated, and one is a widow (Table 1).

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of participants in the interviews

Subjects' Initials	Residence in Spain Spania/ Valencia region	Settlement and county of origin in Romania	Migration year to Spain	Current age	Marital Status	Employment status
A.G.	Castellón de la Plana/ Region Castellon	Piatra Neamț/county Neamț	2006	52	Widow	Owens a bar / HORECA
M.F.	Alzira/ Region Valencia	Alexandria/ county Teleorman	2007	31	Divorced	Operator at an oranges' warehouse
I.L.	Valencia/ Region Valencia	Târgu Mureș/ county Mureș	2001	38	Separated	Chef at a hotel
D.S.	Alicante/ Region Alicante	Oradea/ county Bihor	2006	29	Divorced	Owens a bar/ HORECA
L.P.	Elche/ Region Alicante	Piatra Neamț/ county Neamț	2008	27	Married	Commercial agent at an international transport firm

Source: based on authors' own data interpretation gathered from the interviewees

It should also be noted that the average number of years since they settled in Spain is about 16 years, which also justifies the greater capacity of the interviewees' adaptation to the new lifestyle and standards imposed by the immigrant status. Therefore, the duration of continuous stay in the same economic-cultural space (Spain) is on average higher than that of the age of arrival in this country. This in turn can be an argument in favour of a form of cultural assimilation, with a tendency towards a new lifestyle based on respect for human rights and of the family, as can be seen from their responses.

From an employment point of view, it may be observed that two women own their own businesses in the HORECA

field (hotels and restaurants), and three are also employed in the private field. One interviewee works in a company with international salience as a sales agent, which testifies to their professional competence, and the absence of discrimination in the work place.

All interview data was transcribed and a thematic interpretation was carried out. All the authors of this paper attentively read the transcripts and came across four themes of domestic violence that appeared prevalent in the data that was collected – physical and sexual violence, psychological violence, economic violence and verbal violence, which we present in the results section.

Results

Analysis of the survey

Regarding the age of the interviewees, we note the essential participation of people aged between 31 and 40 (35%) and those aged 41 – 50 (30%). At the other end we had three Roma ladies aged over 60.

We were able to observe that 16 Roma women claimed that they were divorced or separated, from which we could conclude that social and gender transformations of im-

migrant Roma women did occur. Traditional patterns of marital behaviour indicate an effective adaptation to the changes of current Spanish society, and the migrant Roma woman being more than able to demonstrate her capacity and zeal for personal transformation. (Table 2)

As for the province and localities in the Valencian Community where the people surveyed live today, the results show that most of them, i.e. a percentage of 37.1%, live in

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of participants in the survey

Age	Marital status						Province of Residence in Spain			
	Married	Cohabiting	Divorced or separated	Widower	Single	Total	Castellón	Valencia	Alicante	Total
over 60s	-	-	-	3	-	3	-	2	1	3
51-60	8	-	-	3	-	11	5	2	4	11
41-50	21	8	11	2	-	42	17	14	11	42
31-40	28	16	5	1	-	50	17	17	16	50
19-30	3	20	-	-	3	26	10	9	7	26

Source: based on authors' own data interpretation gathered from the survey

the province of Castellón, a county with a high percentage of Romanian migrants. The Roma women surveyed live in the towns of Villareal (7.6%), Vall d'Uixó (5.3%), Nules (5.3%) and Castellón de la Plana (4.5%). In second place is the province of Valencia, where the cities where the interviewed Roma communities predominate are: Alginet (6.1%), Alzira (4.5%) and Valencia (4.5%). In the last category we note the province of Alicante, with 29.5% of the female Roma interviewees, residing in Elche (6.1%), Benidorm (5.3%), Altea (4.5%) and Alicante (3.8%).

Regarding the counties of departure from Romania, the respondents indicate, once again, Timiş county in the first place, with 16.7%, a result that can have a slightly subjective interpretation, due to the undersigned's pre-existing contacts and the increased interest in interviewing Roma women from the Banat region. The following county represented as the departure area is Mureş, with approximately 14.4% of respondents. At the opposite end we find the counties of Mehedinţi, Alba and Vrancea, each having less than 0.4% of respondents.

An interesting factor in identifying the gender characteristics of the migratory space of departure, it could be remarked that 59.1% of the interviewees left their migratory destinies led by the father, the family's patriarch. In comparison, 39.4% of the interviewees accepted the husband's decision to emigrate to Spain. We note only two responses in which it is stated that the Roma woman was the one who decided to migrate to Spain, which defies the context of long-standing traditional Romani patriarchal supremacy in Romania. We also observe that, before the initiation of migration to Spain, there was a marital consensus between husband and wife in the proportion of 1.5%. Most of the responses come to reinforce a timid change in the decision-making tendency related to the migration process.

These comparative data presented in the table above come to strengthen the theory of Voicu & Popescu (2009), which approaches the issue of gender equality through the lens of influence that the social community has on the individual behaviour of Roma women in general, a fact that can also be applied specifically to migrant Roma women in Spain.

Interestingly, data shows that, in Romania, only 29.6% of Roma women declare they have not faced this situation. At the same time, the rest admit that they have suffered severe manifestations of domestic mistreatment rooted in financial reasons: 24.2% state that their husbands do not allow their wives to manage the family money and, furthermore, limit their access to money altogether. Curiously, 19.7% of interviewees accused their husbands of

being squanderers, and 13.6% stated that their husbands left them with money to only meet the bare necessities of the family for a few days. Only 6.8% of the Roma women surveyed did not want to respond to this question. These data are noticeably different from their living situation in Spain, as 63.4% state that they have not identified with situations of this kind during their stay in Spain. In comparison, only 11.5% admit that their husband does not allow them to manage the family's financial resources, and 6.1% believe that their husbands left them strictly with the money needed for food since they had migrated to Spain.

Strangely enough, almost half of the subjects stated that domestic violence seemed to have become more frequent (48.5%) in Spain than in Romania (31.8%). This fact may also explain why some interviewees were reserved in making the answers of this study public in Romania. Moreover, a negative transformation of male domestic behaviour is evident throughout the migratory process, and even more so during the period of these families' residence and settlement in Spain.

Psychological violence further indicates a surprising balance of opinions because 32.80% of the interviewees admit that they have suffered this type of violence in Romania. Another 34.30% say that they do not identify with humiliating situations, with mean or humiliating jokes in public and at home. In Spain, however, as we can see in the graph below, the situation changes substantially - only 8.2% recognise this type of situation (all are women who live with their partner, without being officially married or declaring that they are divorced/ separated), and 40.3% state that they do not identify with this type of situation. However, we note the considerable decrease in the incidences of psychological domestic violence from 33.33% in the period lived in Romania to 8.3% in their period spent in Spain, due to the integration of Romania into the EU and the observation of the new rules of Spanish social life.

A staggering 21.1% of Roma women admit that in Romania they were subjected to jealousy from their husbands, having received verbal messages with sexual connotations, suffered sexual harassment, were even raped, etc. However, for the period spent in Spain, these forms of violence in Spain decreased to 7.8%.

Broadly speaking, following the analysis of domestic violence indicators, we can conclude that the majority of migrant Roma women (70.1%) have changed their social perception of equal rights between men and women, which fostered a stronger desire for them to become autonomous.

Analysis of the Interviews

Physical and sexual domestic violence

The results related to physical domestic violence identified in the answers given by the interviewees revealed that only A.G., who is also the oldest of the interviewed, who came to Spain married, was the victim of continuous violence from her husband, both in the home country and the host country. The subject admitted to this form of abuse as more prevalent after settling in the host country (Spain).

In regard to types of physical abuse, A.G. confirmed punching, pushing, adding that the frequency of these acts of aggression was unpredictable. This lady labels a specific set of acts of violence as “severe”, namely, the times when they were conducted in front of children. Inevitably and unfortunately, the constant (or even one-time) exposure of children to domestic abuse in their own home has a domino effect, which forces them to endure the ruthless humiliation of one of their parents, where the perpetrator is the other parents. It does have a long-standing shock effect on both the children and their mother, as they will be unwillingly exposed to long term insecurities, trauma and broken identity, among others. Thus, it is safe to say that physical abuse goes hand in hand with psychological abuse and probably, only specialised support may enable the victims to find complete healing and make a fresh start. Fortunately, laws against domestic violence are robust enough in Spain to prevent a family from going through this trauma; however, fear of further, harsher forms of abuse from their husbands prevent these women from seeking help and reporting the perpetrator.

Moving on, the other four women interviewed were not married in Romania. However, they noticed this „habit” of beatings and other forms of aggression in families of provenance, parents and grandparents, and neighbours of the same ethnicity. Our previously mentioned A.G. emphasises the authoritarian role of the man, leader of the clan/family, including physical violence against the wife, a traditional inherited role from father to son. As for the physical consequences - wounds, contusions, fractures, the skin tears etc., -2 answers attest to the presence of women in the family who act as ‘doctors’, respectively their mothers. If family members are unable to help the victim heal, specialised help is finally sought from medical staff in a hospital. This in turn shows the degree of vulnerability and helplessness of women who fall victims to their own partners.

A different point of view is offered by L.P., who talked more about her father, to whom she attributes a „more authoritative” attitude after arriving in Spain. However, some responses given by the interviewees show their tendency towards taking a stand and acting accordingly, or reacting towards physical abuse from their own family, by calling the authorities, especially the police. This shows a pos-

itive shift in traditional tendencies within the Roma family unit, with women now actively exercising their rights, and recognising their abilities (to run a home, to be financially independent, etc.), although much more work needs to be done in this field in order to see long term results.

Furthermore, the characteristics of more respondents’ declarations, especially those given by D.S. or L.P., represent the first steps towards the emancipation of Roma women. At the base of these female reactions are the conscious rejection of abusive practices and the confrontation of the „adversary”, who fosters convenient conservatism. Therefore, we have sufficient evidence to believe that there was significant data available to the authorities that enabled the creation of a rigorous set of laws that tackle domestic violence. In fact, Torres Falcón (2004) remark that domestic violence that occurs in the private space must be the responsibility of the State, which must include sanctioning abusive conduct (whether by administrative, civil or criminal means), as well as the establishment of protective measures that would guarantee freedom and safety for the victims. Based on the International Law of the U.N. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), Spain produced the first comprehensive Pact against Gender Violence in January 2004 (i.e., Law 1/2004, that was approved in December 2004. The State Pact against gender violence was approved in 2017). Similarly, an additional law was released in 2007 that would further challenge inequalities, called the Law 4/2007 on effective equality between women and men. The rule of inverse proportionality has begun to be phased out in countries such as Spain by implementing women’s inclusion policies and gender equality plans reflected in the Organic Law No. 3 of 22 March 2007 and Organic Law of October 2022. Both laws are important because they favoured to the implementation of public policies that promoted equality and consequently gender identity in Spain. Also, the Valencian Community has laws against gender violence and equality between women and men.

The Organic Law 10/2022 is based on the comprehensive guarantee of sexual freedom. This allows us to compare the two styles of coexistence: first, in the country of origin, with more lax legislation, and second, in the new host country, Spain, where the rule of law is based on interculturalism, respect and robust social protection. It is also vital for migrants of all kinds to succeed in their integration process as a group, a family, or an individual, and achieve their goals.

In Romania, the first step in legislation against domestic violence was the Organic Law No.217 of May 2003 and, most recently, the Organic Law No. 183 of 2022. All these laws clearly emphasize the importance of gender equality and equal rights for women.

The continued reactions of violence against women in the family determined either by grandparents' family model, by jealousy or by refraining women from financial autonomy, have led some of our respondents to seek help, with two of them filing official complaints with the Spanish authorities, and one that has chosen to take the route of reconciliation with her partner. Exceptions are A.G., a follower of a conservatism, and M.F., who is afraid to make an official complaint, admitting to being apprehensive of public rejection from her clan.

Finally, only one woman had not gone further with her intention to file a written complaint against her husband, as a result of being pressured by her elder children who were afraid of having their father thrown into prison and consequently become the laughingstock of the Roma community. Public shame has always been a strong deterrent against the challenges of domestic violence, bringing 'tradition' forward as a priority over family peace and over mutual respect, which leaves most women fighting a lonely, seemingly helpless battle.

Domestic sexual violence on the other hand, is one of the most reprehensible forms of domestic violence. Given the deep traumas it causes the victims in the long term, this form of violence also exposes the flagrant violation of basic morality and calls urgently for the intervention of the community and the action of the authorities. In Northern Ireland for instance, the Department of Health and the Department of Justice (UK, 2019) worked together and implemented a new set of laws that aimed at offering continuous support to victims of domestic sexual abuse. In their seven-year support plan, the authorities tackle the effects of this type of violence on the victims, grant psychological and financial assistance, and even offer guidelines to employers, whilst perpetrators are brought to justice.

Evidently, criminalizing domestic and sexual violence is the first step forward. Making the victims aware that they are being abused is a milestone in itself, and ensuring that they are fully informed of the support that is available to them is another. Their own psychological barriers might be the reason why they never ask for help, which fosters the perception in their partners that they can continue abusing their wives, and precipitates these victims into becoming the 'hidden faces' of modern-day society. Not surprisingly, their own children who have been exposed to this family model, will probably create their own families and run them in a similar manner, which creates an endless cycle of perpetual abuse.

It also follows that jealousy is a determining factor in a potential family conflict (jealousy can also derive, beyond feelings exacerbated by affection, from the man's need for control and the unconditional maintenance of the woman's subservience). At the same time, the idea of sexual abuse between the two spouses is excluded from the point of view of the same A.G., who considers that, after mar-

riage, the woman belongs to the man, therefore excusing her husband's behaviour, and posing no conditions to marital cohabitation. Basically, once married, there is no concept of 'rape', as sexual intercourse is understood as 'part of marriage' regardless of both spouses not being always prepared for it (due to health conditions or mental health).

From the responses received, it also emerges that these forms of sexual violence were not perceived as a form of abuse by the interviewees, as A.G. herself explains that 'religious morality' does not include the concept of 'rape' in a marriage. Moreover, I.L. also admits that she did not know that the phenomenon of violence existed in sexual intercourse in married couples, which indicates a poor level of information, and insufficient education in this regard. Sadly, this is a commonly held mentality in Romanian society - but also, possibly, these customs are ethnically inherited from a generation to another in set groups, such as the Roma in our case. These women were raised by their mothers since they were little girls to blindly accept abuse, blaming religion and tradition for this 'metamorphosed' morality.

Once these families had arrived in Spain, it was noted in the interviews that compliance with the ethnic-specific family code was maintained as a paramount priority, whereby the wife must respect her husband unconditionally. Four out of five interviewees married during their stay in Spain. Out of these, two confirmed cases of jealousy from their partners, three confirmed sexual intercourse under the influence of alcohol, one revealed sexual indifference, and one sustained her affection towards the ex-husband decreased in the meantime.

As forms of reaction, most of the interviewees declared themselves dissatisfied with their sexual life after their arrival in Spain. This feeling had appeared either sometime after the early stages of marriage, or after they had had children, or even after the extramarital experiences of the husband. One stated the normality of sexual life in the couple, which was still stained by the husband's jealousy.

Psychological domestic violence

Psychological violence is a filtered form of gender-based violence. Psychological violence and control are traumatic in the long term, with side effects that can last a lifetime: lack of self-confidence, distrust of others, nervous exhaustion, depression etc. It could be expressed through a gesture, a word, comparing one's spouse to another, or humiliating them by pointing out what one perceives as physical defects. These forms of aggression naturally lead the victims to see themselves as unattractive and insufficient, lowering their self-esteem and weakening their defense mechanism when feeling attacked. Psychological violence is very likely to have destructive effects on a massive scale, which can destabilize a whole family and destroy its unity at the core.

For the period lived in Romania, the cause of domestic violence identified in the present interview is one's family status, in which the woman/the wife is always in second place, a fact demonstrated by continuous verbal humiliation, as A.G. admits. Pressures from the side of her husband's family puts the victim into isolation. Furthermore, a paternal dictatorial attitude was also reported by D.S., who defined the role of a man in the Roma family and set the scene for D.S.'s role as a future wife and a mother, where she had already perceived the male figure as a tyrant. The other respondents revealed the obligation to respect the unwritten laws of ethnicity, the total submission to the husband, and the public humiliation of the wife. The prohibition to call for medical assistance was identified by all Roma respondents.

For the period lived in Spain, the causes of continuation or the manifestation of psychological domestic violence and control identified in the interview are language barriers - because the Roma language was not understood in the community, the attitude of superiority on the part of the husband (knowledge, intellectual capacity), and imitation of one's paternal model as a male figure in the family. As if these were not enough, our participants also cite indecent behaviour of the husband in public as a form of humiliation, envy of his wife's professional achievements where the situation is given, and lack of appreciation of the wife's full commitment to domestic tasks.

Among the effects of these psychological traumas are: divorce, fear of the unknown, insomnia, loss of appetite, effects on physical health (e.g. cessation of lactation), and self-hatred. However, Roma women's devotion to their families and especially to their children, have given them the motivation to move forward: they felt a stronger will to look for a job, to attend courses that prepare them professionally, and to look after themselves as women. Our subjects' exposure to more emancipated women in the Spanish society has showed them a different way of life, and that transformation is possible. Some forms of support that our respondents benefited from that have enabled them to make significant changes were counselling from a psychologist, their general practitioner, their mother and some friends.

Economic domestic violence

What we call *economic domestic violence* can be summed up in money control. Through money, the husband - the head of the family - can control the domestic micro-universe, both from a material point of view, and a psychological point of view, by creating dependence of his family on him. Once this dependence is created in one direction, husband towards wife, male dominance is established within the family and, naturally, the wife's submission follows. If the woman is not able to overcome this status, there is a risk of family imbalance ensued by constant arguments.

As for money expenditures in the families of the interviewees, wives were given just enough money to buy food when living back in Romania. Recurrent issues arose when the wife complained of insufficient money to meet the family's needs, which led to accusations from the husband that his wife is unable to manage the (little) money she is given efficiently. This in turn led to strife and, eventually, to physical violence.

In Spain, some Romanian Roma families have succeeded to achieve their goals: a better life, a better and more secure future for their children, earning higher salaries to help their relatives back home, or for future projects. If they felt it was necessary, our subjects asked for help from institutions like the town hall, the Red Cross and Cáritas. When the family unit found temporary work in agriculture, the Roma woman was willing to emigrate to work together with the family in other parts of Spain, or even in the other EU countries.

This demonstrates the change in attitude towards incorporating women into the job market, giving Roma women a chance for economic independence. It begins to dissolve barriers of seclusion, resets gender mentality, changes the public perception of the gypsy woman's role in family life and includes her in decision-making, money spending, and inclusion in the community.

This financial independence, due to some advantageous jobs, or some investments in their own businesses, was managed in expenses for child support (quality food and clothing), home maintenance, personal care and education, as well as real estate investments. In this context, Roma women have proven an outstanding spirit of entrepreneurship. However, the dependence on the material resources provided is discretionary to their husbands. Moreover, the idea of affirmation and success no longer exists as a privileged prerogative of only some Roma women, but it is now a result of their own will at a larger scale.

Verbal domestic violence

Verbal violence is one of human nature's most pervasive forms of aggression. It carries meaning and includes harsh messages. When we choose a set of words that we accompany with certain inflections of our voice and use a specific face expression, we communicate our thoughts. What we communicate is just as important as how we communicate it. Verbal domestic violence, just like physical violence, represents a form of domination, intimidation, and humiliation.

Based chiefly on verbs, adjectives, interjections, and other forms of expression, verbal violence is the index of a permanent power imbalance between *me* and *you*, between a perpetrator and a victim. The use of abusive language could go from a „canonical” insult to the vulgar one, which in turn could either be grotesque or rough.

Verbal violence is also pervasive, as we have seen, in all environments, from the street of our town to TV shows. In

the family, verbal violence can sometimes be a prelude to physical violence as one of our interviewees stated:

A.G.: *He swore at me every day, it was something normal... My goodness... I promise, it was a daily habit for him! However, I got used to it... He did it both in the house and on the street!... Clearly, he was doing it as something normal!*

In the migratory space of origin, experiences of verbal violence from the husband were prevalent, the only one who communicated this experience was A.G., married in Romania. The place of manifestation of domestic violence is either at home or in public space, without any shame. This interviewee presents an interesting picture of adaptation to the daily maltreatment from her husband, fully aware that this is a model of behaviour in the Roma community. The unconscious repetition of “normal” is key, as the victim has never been able to see that behaviour as normal, but is visibly shocked that her husband has gone forward and made it a “habit”.

All five interviewed women recognised the practice of swearing in the family as something prevalent. Four of the subjects explained that verbal violence is a common form of expression in Roma families, from neighbors to friends who pay them a visit. The existence of this practice was also given when the father of D.S. swore when „he was drunk,” or disapproved of her mother. In the case of I.L., she manifested the lack of confidence in the probability of a positive change in her husband, at least in the short term, once arrived in Spain.

Regarding the involvement of the authorities (i.e., the police), the responses are similar to those regarding physical violence. These women are too afraid to ask for help, which portrays an ironic distrust in the public authorities, but could also suggest that having asked for help back home in Romania, they did not get the support that they needed, which placed them at a higher risk. This may have

created a precedent for future decisions of this sort, which explains the Roma women’s fears.

In terms of continuing verbal violence, all five interviewees declared that nothing had changed in their husbands’ behaviour after they had moved to Spain. Apart from A.G., the other four ladies interviewed have married in Spain. However, their spouses’ verbal abuse had already been assimilated by them and used in the country of origin, even by M.F.’s husband, who is of Romanian nationality but not of Roma ethnicity.

The responses of the interviewees confirmed that the new lifestyle, in a new geo-cultural area, the impact of a new civilisation, and the accountability demanded by a new set of laws, had no impact on their husbands, who did not change their behaviour or language. A nuanced response is formulated by L.P., who considers her husband’s verbal aggressions as an expression of envy felt by him for his wife’s personal successes, but also his unfulfilled desire to get her to stop working, stay at home with the child and depend on him.

It should also be mentioned that a Roma woman challenging her husband’s abusive behaviour may pose an atypical attitude from a traditional perspective, which may cause the perpetrator to increase their level of aggressiveness and fear-control their victim. The reactions that some of our interviewees had in their attempt to refute their partners’ conduct is admirable, as it brings about a much-needed change in the family, and a hope for future generations. The emancipation of Roma women is a step forward, and indeed the support of Spanish authorities when called for, has left its mark.

To sum up the comparative results from the survey and interviews (Table 3), the conclusions clearly indicate the same tendency of transformation of the gender mentality of immigrant Roma women:

Table 3. Comparative results of the survey and the semi-structured interviews

The survey	Semi-structured interviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ gender roles tend to be more relaxed and egalitarian in Spain than in Romania; ▶ the traditional patriarchal dominance in decision-making in personal and family life is diminished in Spain; ▶ a new behavioural trend is observed for the Roma migrant women during their life experience in Spain; ▶ awareness of the social importance of women in the social sphere is becoming more prevalent in Spain than in Romania; ▶ personal and social emancipation confers with Roma women the figure of the integrating social agent in a new host society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ the reduction of physical domestic violence is the result of the positive pressure from the host society on the Roma individual obliged to respect the new rules of coexistence; ▶ sexual domestic violence undergoes an experiment of slight improvement in individual male behavior Roma between the period of living in Romania and Spain; ▶ the decline in economic domestic violence is based on the incorporation of migrant Roma women into the Spanish labour market; ▶ the reduction of verbal domestic violence indicates new Roma masculinities more respectful of the couple; ▶ the decrease in psychological domestic violence reflects the influence exerted by the Spanish social environment on marriage as a whole, and on the Roma woman as an individual.

Analysis of indicators of domestic violence (physical, sexual, economic, psychological, verbal) presents several patterns for Roma women (Table 4).

Table 4. Comparative degrees of domestic violence perceived by the interviewed Roma women

Type of violence	Experience impact in Romania	Experience impact in Spain
Physical	High	Low
Sexual	Moderate	Low
Economical	High	Low
Psychological	High	Moderate
Verbal	High	Moderate

Firstly, physical domestic violence registers increasingly reduced values on Spanish territory due to the implementation of social protection measures, the awareness of the problem, and the education Spanish society gives to the present generation. Gender roles tend to be more relaxed and egalitarian compared to traditional Romanian society.

Discussion

In the literature on peripheral feminism, the issue of domestic violence against Roma immigrants is practically unaddressed. Having as a starting point major debates on domestic violence (Cantera, 2005; Cantera, 2007; Dutton & Golant, 1997; Ferrer Pérez & Bosch Fiol, 2005; Heise, 1998; Mullender, 2000; Perrone & Nannini, 1995; Ramirez, 2000; Soler, Vinayak & Quadagno, 2000; Walker, 2004), we identified a series of changes in social behaviour and gender of migrant women of Roma ethnicity.

In the new Valencian space of migratory destination, gender roles tend to be more relaxed and egalitarian, a fact that contradicts the theory of Perrone & Nannini (1995) that relates the behaviour of the aggressor with the inability to modify and adapt the way of thinking and acting of men in the domestic sphere, under the umbrella of a society marked by profound changes in social optics and feminist values. Roma migrant women demonstrate a much more visible shift in gender mindset than Roma men.

The awareness of the social importance of women in the social sphere becomes more present due to personal empowerment, integration, and a certain acculturation to which the new host society invites. Consequently, verbal, psychological, and economic domestic violence, explained by Gelles (1974), is diminished by reduced stress in the couple's relationship and confers a personal and social emancipation never seen before in the Romanian country of migratory departure.

It has been shown that domestic violence, as indicated by Cantera (2007) as a political, public, social and

Secondly, sexual domestic violence shows significantly lower values in the new migratory space compared to the Romanian geographic space, due to the influence of the social community on the individual Roma male behaviour, a fact that can also be extended to the Roma female migrant in Spain.

Thirdly, economic domestic violence has a lower value in Spain than in Romania due to the incorporation of Roma women into the Spanish workforce. This chance has given them economic independence, which in turn generated personal and family economic comfort.

Next, psychological violence experiences a considerable decrease in incidences, given the influence of the social environment on marriage, integration and compliance with the new rules of Spanish social life.

Finally, verbal domestic violence has not decreased too much once the family had reached Valencia as compared to their time in Romania. As such, modifying masculinity along the migratory process is possible, in favour of a new gender identity that is more respected and valued.

moral problem, is deeply rooted within the Romanian immigrant Roma ethnic group, where the traditional patriarchal model predominates, above all. However, the new imbalance of power manifested by the partners/families of the interviewees put the focus of the analysis on the emergence of a new mentality in the Roma woman based on the following issues:

- reducing the phenomenon of physical domestic violence. Based on the desire to constantly express the domination of the patriarchal family model and the exploitation of female vulnerability (Heise, 1998) and apparently without resolution in the migratory space of Romanian origin, physical and sexual domestic violence began to be seen as abuse and confronted, steadily, by some of the Roma women interviewed, especially young women in the migratory space of Valencian destination.
- awareness of verbal domestic violence. Despite the generational inheritance received analysed by Dutton & Golant (1997) and the real and timely support received from the Spanish authorities, we identified the increase in verbal domestic violence due to the imbalance of power in the couple's relationship and the timid desire for emancipation of Roma immigrant women.
- the economic emancipation of migrant Roma women. This aspect reveals the commitment to reducing the feminisation of poverty among ethnic Roma immigrants. This process leads to the incorporation of Roma immigrant women into the Spanish labour market.

Roma immigrant women have proven to be able to remove obstacles in their career paths and reduce difficulties in reconciling family life with work. Nevertheless, despite several laws supporting the equal inclusion of women in political, social, and economic leadership positions in society, immigrant women Roma is far from being socially included in Spanish society.

However, traditional patterns anchored in Roma patriarchy have still been detected in aspects of sexual domestic violence and verbal violence. Sexual domestic violence, a taboo subject within the Roma ethnic group, remains challenging to investigate. The interviewees' negative responses and conservative attitude, above the jealousy and exacerbated feelings of affection for their partners/husbands, demonstrate unconditional respect

for the family. In general, it can be said that domestic sexual violence does not have significant differences between the two migratory geographical spaces, being that the unwritten rules of intimate life are practically the same. Furthermore, no extreme practices of sexual violence (prostitution, human trafficking) have been identified. On the other hand, verbal domestic violence means controlling the victim and/or creating fear to dominate the victim (see Alcañiz, 2015; Ferrer Pérez & Bosch Fiol, 2005). It is presented as trapped within the comfortable limits of ethnic heritage not altered by migratory processes. The idea of the impact of a new society and the social responsibility within it must have a substantial impact on both spouses and is invalidated since the Roma spouses did not improve their behaviour or verbal language in the domestic sphere.

Conclusions

Roma people who chose to migrate from Eastern Europe to Western countries for better welfare have shown that Roma people and Roma women, in general, are prone to stigmatisation even in Western societies (Creţan et al., 2022; Vrăbiescu & Kalir, 2018). Their adaptation to the new migration space encountered many obstacles already debated in the existing literature (Pantea, 2012). However, the issues of how Roma women became emancipated in Western Europe, and how they faced domestic violence are a less-researched topic.

Our findings reveal that regarding the confirmation of the gender characteristics of the Romanian migratory space of departure, the predominance of the traditional patriarchal supremacy of the Roma ethnic group can be observed, both from a decision-making point of view and from the point of view of the distribution of domestic attributions between life partners. Instead, in the new Valencian migratory space of arrival, the gender characteristics are changing, giving more value to the Roma woman in terms of the fair distribution of domestic tasks, and decision-making in the family. Among migrant Roma women, their ability to adapt to new possibilities for professional development outside their home, whilst coping with domestic duties is outstanding. Therefore, the creation of new levels in the structure of gender relations is demonstrated, reflecting the creation of new gender identities for the Roma migrant woman.

The majority of Roma women have changed their social perception of equal rights between men and women. Thus, their definition of equality between genders changed, especially after they had lived in Spain and were exposed to a new lifestyle and set of ideas. Despite the lack of feminist

social culture back home in Romania, and despite their traditional ethnic ideas, some of our Roma female participants were able to transcend these mindsets and make a substantial change in their lives. It should also be noted that the set of laws that tackle domestic violence is more robust in Spain than in Romania, although both countries have still got work to do in confronting this issue at the core.

On the one hand, we may also observe the role of Roma women as the primary social agent in the process of integration and adaptation to the new Spanish society and, on the other hand, its evolution in the process of social transformation and personal development. Once again, the impact of Spanish feminism in the reconstruction of the gender identity of the Roma migrant woman is validated.

Our findings call for the necessity to implement effective laws that protect the rights of women and guarantee equal opportunities for men and women. Moreover, there is a need to implement national and local plans of action that protect victims' rights. Providing better education, equal treatment, and free specialised services for abused women would be a step forward. Moreover, increasing the number of Roma women in the police forces are seemingly ambitious plans that could be fulfilled in the future.

One of the limitations of this study was that we were only able to tackle a relatively small group of Roma women who migrated to Spain. Another limitation is that we did not include the opinion of the Roma men. Future studies can be made in other Western migratory spaces where the Roma women live to find out if the Roma women encounter similar patterns. Moreover, comparing Roma women to other migrant women would be an interesting point of study for another research paper.

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