



Sociologie Românească

ISSN: 2668-1455 (print), ISSN: 1220-5389 (electronic)

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Sociologie Românească, 2024, vol. 22, Issue 2, pp. 82-107

<https://doi.org/10.33788/sr.22.2.4>

Published by:
Expert Projects Publishing House



On behalf of:
Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy
and
Romanian Sociology Association

TOLERATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: ATTITUDE EVOLUTION AND TYPOLOGY IN ROMANIA

Cosima RUGHINIȘ¹, Simona-Nicoleta VULPE²,
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Abstract

In this study, we investigate public attitudes toward violence against women, by analyzing the 2022 Violence Against Women (VaW) survey in Romania. The objectives of this research are to study the evolution of attitudes, to explore the typology of tolerance regarding violence against women, and to uncover the social stratification of the typology of tolerance attitudes in this regard. The methodology uses secondary analysis of a nationally representative survey, using both linear and cluster analysis to explore patterns in public tolerance regarding violence against women. We found that violence against women is strongly condemned by a large majority of the Romanian population, albeit with some variability. Men and people with lower formal education, lower household income, and who are more religiously involved were more likely to express weaker condemnation of violence against women. We identified four types of attitudes through cluster analysis, distinguishing people with zero tolerance from a very small cluster with high tolerance for all forms of violence against women. In addition, two types of relative tolerance were identified, namely the cluster of “tolerance for domestic patriarchy,” which was discursively inclined toward some justification for social violence and for forms of sexual violence, but not for physical violence, and the cluster of “tolerance for domestic violence,” which was inclined toward

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some justification for verbal, physical, sexual, and social violence located in the household or between men and women who are familiar with each other. This study contributes to the understanding of how social norms and discursive practices influence gender-related attitudes and the legitimization of violence, with implications for policy and public education aimed at reducing tolerance for gender-based violence.

Keywords: violence against women, public opinion, Romanian society, social stratification, cluster analysis.

Introduction

Violence against women remains a widespread phenomenon in most societies (World Health Organization, 2021). For centuries, and even in recent decades, women's subordination within families and society has perpetuated a range of abuses, including domestic violence, marital rape, and forced marriages. Legal systems were often biased against women, offering limited protection and reinforcing gender inequalities. The prevailing social norms and expectations have confined women to traditional gender roles, restricting their autonomy and perpetuating violence. Violence against women is a form of gender violence that consists of "acts that cause, or have the potential to cause, harm" (Krantz, & Garcia-Moreno, 2005, 818), perpetrated, as a rule, by men against women.

Violence against women can take many forms, such as verbal, physical, sexual, psychological, social, economic, spiritual, or online violence (Băluță, & Tufiş, 2022). Some forms of violence are more frequently tolerated, whereas others are widely condemned. Longitudinal data from the World Values Survey (WVS) 2003–2018 showed that in most countries, a large majority of people consider that it is totally unjustifiable for a man to beat his wife, but there is scope for intra- and inter-country variability (see Figure 1).

Tolerance for, and legitimacy of this phenomenon are seen as higher in patriarchal societies, while the process of modernization, feminist movements and female emancipation, and an increased focus on gender equality at the policymaking level have changed social norms and attitudes. Therefore, violence against women has become more often seen as unjustifiable in the eyes of the public in social and cultural contexts that valorize human rights and gender equality and sanction aggressors. However, persistent challenges remain. Cultural norms, stereotypes, and social attitudes continue to perpetuate violence against women. In Eastern Europe, the post-communist transition, economic disparities, and social conservatism have created hurdles to effectively combating violence against women. Sexual harassment, gender-based discrimination, and the persistence of traditional gender roles present ongoing challenges that require sustained efforts to de-legitimize violence against women.

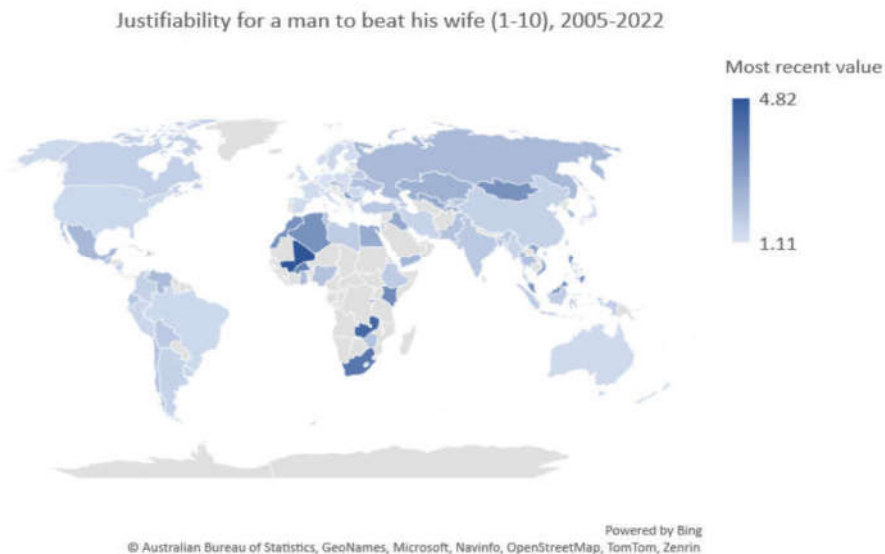


Figure 1. A global view on the perceived justifiability of a man beating his wife (2005–2022). The map includes the most recent average estimate for each surveyed country. Source: Authors' analysis of the integrated World Values Survey dataset 2005–2022, <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSEVStrend.jsp>.

Evolution of attitudes to violence against women

Our study focuses on discursive tolerance for violence against women, which is different to actual behaviors and life experiences. In a social context in which violence against women is widely condemned, people may choose not to express their alternative views if they anticipate condemnation. Still, even if not uniformly shared, public discourses and opinions shape the vocabularies of motive (Wright Mills, 1940) that legitimize or delegitimize acts of violence and reactions when confronted with violence.

Attitudes change over time under the influence of large-scale social processes, impactful events, and systematic micro-level initiatives for social change. In Romania, tolerance for domestic violence decreased significantly between 2005 and 2018. According to data from the WVS, 79% of the population considered that it was never justifiable for a man to beat his wife in 2005, whereas by 2018, the last WVS wave available, this percentage had increased to 86% (see Figure 2).

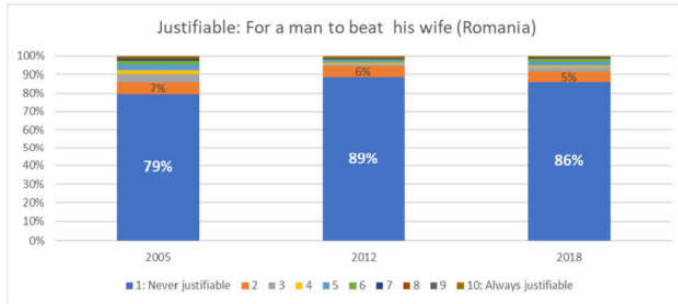


Figure 2. Evolution of the perceived justifiability of a man to beat his wife, Romania (comparison of three survey waves). Source: Authors' analysis of the integrated World Values Survey dataset (2005–2022), <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSEVStrend.jsp>.

This change in attitudes was also captured by the 2022 Violence Against Women (VaW) in Romania survey (Băluță & Tufiș, 2022), which is a nationally representative dataset on the phenomenon. Compared with data from 2003 on the tolerance for domestic violence affecting women in Romania, the 2022 data showed decreased tolerance for all the forms of domestic violence that were measured (see Figure 3). Most people in Romania considered it very serious for a woman to be beaten by her male partner (89% in 2022 vs. 66% in 2003), slapped by her male partner (79% in 2022 vs. 36% in 2003), or forced by her male partner to have sexual relations (76% in 2022 vs. 57% in 2003). Other forms of violence, such as a woman being offended or threatened, were considered very bad by lesser proportions of the population.

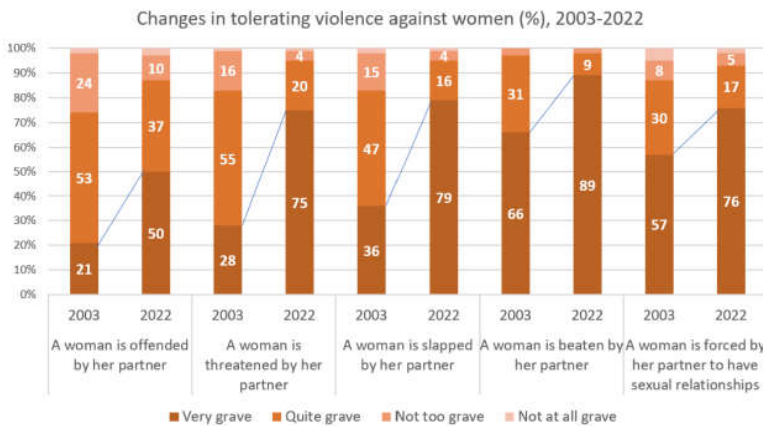


Figure 3. Changes in Romanian respondents' attitudes to violence against women, 2003–2022. Source: Băluță, & Tufiș (2022, 22).

These changes in attitudes among the Romanian population have occurred in a cultural context where voices in the media and activists have strongly condemned violence against women in recent years. Some cases of violence against women have been highly visible in Romania and had a strong impact on public opinion, revealing the harm of a patriarchal culture and systemic violence. One case that left a mark on the public consciousness occurred in 2019, when a teenage girl was kidnaped, raped, and murdered by an older man. She had contacted the police three times while being kidnaped, but the operator had been dismissive, and the police were not able to rescue her. The criminal confessed to also murdering another teenage girl who had been missing and whose family had not been taken seriously by the police (Știrile PRO TV, 2020). In 2020, a social media personality incited violence against and the rape of teenage girls in a YouTube video. He was arrested and forbidden to make posts on social media for a period of time (Știrile PRO TV, 2020). In addition to these controversial cases that outraged the population, some media outlets published journalistic investigations of how the Romanian justice system tended to blame the underage victims of rape, by considering that preadolescent girls would be able to consent to having sexual relations with much older men (Onicioiu, 2019; Oprea, 2022).

Taking into account the changing social and cultural landscape in Romania, we set the following research objectives for this paper: (1) to study the evolution of attitudes to various forms of violence against women, (2) to explore the typology of tolerance for violence against women, and (3) to uncover the social stratification of the typology of tolerance attitudes. We conduct a secondary analysis of the VaW 2022 survey. In the following sections, we present a literature review on this topic, the methodology used for the study, the results, a discussion of the main findings, and the conclusions.

Literature review

Attitudes to violence against women have been studied in relation to the individual and social characteristics that can influence tolerance for violent behaviors affecting women. Some forms of violence are still considered legitimate or justifiable by people in various social categories and situations, according to the current literature on this topic (Scarduzio *et al.*, 2017; Edwards *et al.*, 2024).

The highest rates of women being the victims of intimate partner violence have been registered in countries in Africa and Asia. Similarly, in Latin American countries, rates of behavioral violence against women are higher compared with North America and Western Europe. With regard to the social acceptability of violence against women, social science studies identified a reduction in all regions. However, the reported attitudes of women in Africa and Asia show a higher acceptability of violence by their partner compared with women in other regions (Rocha *et al.*, 2024).

Previous research has documented the factors that shape attitudes to violence against women in several countries. Serrano-Montilla *et al.* (2020) found that in 54 countries, people from certain sociodemographic categories were more likely to share patriarchal value systems and justify intimate partner violence against women. Specifically, men, older people, people with a higher level of education, and those who were married tended to consider it more justifiable for a man to be violent in an intimate relationship with a woman. The relationship between education and tolerance for violence against women was different in this study than in others which have found, as a rule, people with lower degrees of education to be more tolerant. A study concerning 39 low- and middle-income countries reported that tolerance for wife-beating was higher among younger people, those living in rural areas, people with less formal education, and individuals with a low level of household wealth. Tolerance for wife-beating was lower in Central and Eastern Europe than in countries in Africa and South Asia (Tran *et al.*, 2016). In Turkey, data from the sixth wave of the WSV (2011) showed that men, and less wealthy respondents were more likely to justify violence against women. In addition, older age was associated with less tolerance, as was higher religiosity. The latter was in contrast with the hypothesis of the author, who expected that respondents who were more religiously involved would be more tolerant of violence against women (Karakuş, 2015).

Qualitative research has shown that US participants interpret violence against women through the lens of gender stereotypes regarding aggression and emotionality, and in the context of the relative acceptability of violence (for self-defense purposes) (Scarduzio *et al.*, 2017).

In the European Union area, socio-demographic characteristics were also identified as correlates of public attitudes to domestic violence and other forms of violence against women (Gracia, & Herrero, 2006). In Spain, tolerance for sexual violence was associated with older age and lower educational level, while “the impact of gender on tolerance toward sexual violence was rather small when controlling for other variables,” according to Sirvent Garcia del Valle (2020, 1093). The majority of individuals in Spain still believe that women overstate the issue of male aggression, and they also believe that most women in Spain make false reports to harm men and to get money. In particular, 78.3% of victims of violence perpetrated by their intimate partner never reported it, according to a national study conducted in 2020 in Spain. Of those who reported the violent incident, the frequency of complaints dropped dramatically when the aggressor was the current spouse (Badenes-Sastre *et al.*, 2024).

Review studies have also emphasized the role of sociodemographic characteristics in shaping attitudes to violent behaviors against women. In their review article, Flood and Pease (2009) identified two clusters of factors that influenced such attitudes, namely gender and culture. Most of the reviewed studies identified a gender gap in attitudes to violence against women, with men being more likely to tolerate and justify violence. With regard to age, there has been no

clear pattern of association in previous research, as we have shown above. The review of Flood and Pease (2009) mentioned less tolerant attitudes to violence among individuals under 55, compared with older generations, in Australia and the United States, although the youngest age groups were the most tolerant of violence against women. This relationship was probably moderated by gender, since the youngest male subjects had the most positive attitudes to violence against women. Spirituality and religiosity also seemed to influence attitudes to violence, considering that “there is evidence of contexts in which religion is (mis)used to justify violence against women” (134).

A more recent systematic review by Gracia et al. (2020) on studies related to intimate partner violence against women in the EU emphasized the associations between sociodemographic variables and attitudes to violence. The influence of gender was reported in most studies, showing that men were more tolerant of violence against women in intimate relationships. The association between respondents' age and attitudes to violence against women in intimate relationships was inconsistent across the studies. In addition, educational level and economic status were found to be negatively related to tolerance for violence against women in intimate relationships.

A critical review of studies on young people's attitudes towards violence against women identified the tendency of this social category to justify male aggression based on certain situational settings, even though intolerance is theoretically claimed. Young people set boundaries on what constitutes “real” and “unreal” violence. Physical violence is widely recognized, but it is alarming that many coercive behaviors as well as sexual violence and abuse tend to remain unacknowledged by young people. The fact that violence is widely accepted in the lives of young people is an alarming conclusion shared by numerous studies included in this review (Edwards *et al.*, 2024).

Tolerance for violence against women is also influenced by discourses at the institutional level and media practices that shape individual perceptions and attitudes (Băluță, 2015). Some studies have shown that news and media reports of violence against women that use the passive voice, focusing on women as victims, were associated with a more negative attitude to the victim and an increased tolerance for violence among the public (Bohner, 2001; Henley *et al.*, 1995). The use of the active voice, focusing on men as aggressors, is encouraged by scientists and activists to place the emphasis on the perpetrator and on the acts of violence against women (Henley *et al.*, 1995; Frazer, & Miller, 2009).

Methodology

The analytical strategy employed multiple complementary techniques to address our research objectives. First, to study the evolution of attitudes, we used descriptive statistics and comparative analysis between the 2022 VaW survey and previous WVS data. Second, to understand the basic patterns of social stratification, we began with bivariate correlations between tolerance for violence and sociodemographic characteristics, providing an initial picture of how these attitudes vary across social categories. Thereafter, we employed multivariate linear regression to examine how these factors work together in predicting tolerance levels, while controlling for potentially confounding variables. However, since linear approaches might mask distinct patterns in how people view different forms of violence, we used K-means cluster analysis to identify typologies of tolerance, thus addressing our second research objective of exploring distinct types of attitudes toward violence against women. Finally, to understand how these types are socially distributed - our third objective - we employed multinomial logistic regression, which is particularly suited for analyzing how social characteristics predict membership in different attitudinal clusters.

The VaW survey was conducted in Romania on 15-28 August 2022 through computer-assisted telephone interviewing. A nationally representative sample of 1,363 respondents were interviewed. Post-stratification weighting was applied for age, gender, type of community, development region, and educational level. In the final dataset, the weights had values between 0.37 and 3.86 (Băluță, & Tufiș, 2022). We used variables from this dataset that measure the level of tolerance for various forms of violence against women to conduct linear and typological analyses using IBM SPSS Statistics 27 to uncover patterns of social stratification regarding tolerance for violence against women as well as to present a typology of public legitimization of violence against women.

The Violence Against Women scale

The VaW scale includes questions⁵ that are answered on a Likert scale with the following values: 1 (very bad); 2 (quite bad); 3 (spontaneous answer: neither, nor); 4 (not too bad); 5 (not at all bad); 98 (spontaneous answer: I don't know [DK]); and 99 (spontaneous answer: nonresponse [NR]). The responses were read in a variable, rotating order. DK/NR answers were recoded into missing values.

All questions had two versions: (A) one that foregrounds the woman as a victim and (B) one that foregrounds the man as the aggressor. Half of the sample

⁵ All questions refer to violence by men against women. In the Romanian-language formulation of the questions, it is clear that the woman's partner is a man (through the gendered formulation of "partner") and that the man's partner is a woman.

received the (A) version, and the other half the (B) version. A comparison of the public answers to the two formulations is available below.

The questionnaire items were as follows:

Q7. How bad do you think the following situations are, in a couple:

1. A woman is offended by her partner / A man is offending his partner;
2. A woman is threatened by her partner / A man is threatening his partner;
3. A woman is slapped by her partner / A man is slapping his partner;
4. A woman is beaten by her partner / A man is beating his partner;
5. A woman is forced to have sexual relations with her partner, despite her not wanting to / A man is forcing his partner to have sexual relations, despite her not wanting to.

Q8. What about the following situations? How bad do you think they are, in a couple?

1. A woman is not allowed by her partner to look for a job / A man is not allowing his partner to look for a job;
2. A woman is not allowed by her partner to spend money as she wishes / A man is not allowing his partner to spend money as she wishes;
3. A woman is not allowed to get out in the city on her own, without her partner / A man does not allow his partner to get out in the city on her own, without him;
4. A woman is not allowed to have a group of women and/or men friends / A man does not allow his partner to have a group of women and/or men friends;
5. A woman is not allowed to use contraceptive means / A man does not allow his partner to use contraceptive means.

Q9. Please tell me how bad do you think the following situations are:

1. A girl younger than 15 years of age has sexual relations with an adult man / An adult man has sexual relations with a girl younger than 15 years of age;
2. A woman is raped after she consumed alcohol or drugs / A man is raping a woman who consumed alcohol or drugs;
3. A woman who is dressed provocatively is raped / A man rapes a woman who is dressed provocatively;

4. A woman is raped after she has accepted to go home to a man / A man rapes a woman who accepted to go to his home;
 5. A woman is raped by a known person / A man rapes a woman whom he knows;
 6. A woman is raped by an unknown person / A man rapes a woman whom he does not know.
- Q 10. What about the following situations? How bad do you think they are?
1. A woman is touched/grabbed by an unknown man / A man touches/grabs an unknown woman;
 2. A female high-school student receives messages with a sexual meaning from a professor / A professor sends messages with a sexual meaning to a female high-school student;
 3. A female university student receives messages with a sexual meaning from a professor / A professor sends messages with a sexual meaning to a female university student;
 4. Students in a school or high-school classroom are told jokes with a sexual meaning by a professor / A professor makes jokes with a sexual meaning in the school or high-school classroom;
 5. Students in a university classroom are told jokes with a sexual meaning by a professor / A professor makes jokes with a sexual meaning in the university classroom;
 6. A woman is asked sexual favors in order to advance in her career / A man asks a woman for sexual favors in order for her to advance in her career.

Comparison of victim- and aggressor-focused formulations

A comparison of the two types of formulations indicates that, as a rule, the victim-centered formulations elicited more tolerance for violence against women than aggressor-centered formulations, which had a stronger perceived gravity. Still, we found that the differences were very small or not even statistically significant (see Table 1). We therefore decided to unify the two formulations under a single variable, thereby obtaining items that covered the entire sample. We also included the type of formulation as a control variable in the regression models.

Table 1. A comparison of the victim- and aggressor-centered formulations in the Violence against Women in Romania survey

	Type of question formulation		Pearson Chi-Square tests for cross-tab association are statistically significant (Yes / No) for $p = 0.05$ (see details in the S.M.)
	Variant A- victim centered	Variant B -aggressor centered	
	Mean	Mean	
q71 Offending	1.84	1.73	No
q72 Threatening	1.41	1.34	No
q73 Slapping	1.37	1.28	Yes
q74 Beating	1.22	1.10	Yes
q75 Forced sexual relationship	1.47	1.32	Yes
q81 Forbidding her to look for a job	1.74	1.79	No
q82 Forbidding her to spend money as she wishes	2.20	2.15	No
q83 Forbidding her to get out in the city on her own	2.12	2.13	No
q84 Forbidding her to have a group of friends	2.11	2.05	No
q85 Forbidding her to use contraceptives	2.07	2.14	No
q91 Sexual relations with girl younger than 15	1.30	1.10	Yes
q92 Rape after alcohol or drug consumption	1.38	1.15	Yes
q93 Rape with provocative clothing	1.68	1.45	Yes
q94 Rape after going to a man's home	1.84	1.80	No
q95 Rape by a known man	1.32	1.30	No
q96 Rape by an unknown man	1.17	1.09	Yes
q101 Touched or grabbed by an unknown man	1.33	1.32	No
q102 Sexual message from professor to high-school girl student	1.19	1.18	No
q103 Sexual message from professor to university woman student	1.31	1.25	Yes
q104 Sexual jokes by professor in school / high-school classroom	1.66	1.38	Yes
q105 Sexual jokes by professor in university classroom	1.89	1.42	Yes
q106 Sexual favors asked for career advance	1.31	1.26	No

The reliability of the entire collection of 22 items had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87, thereby indicating good inter-item correlation. A factor analysis (using the principal component analysis extraction and the Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization rotation methods) indicated that there was a principal component explaining about 29% of the variance of the scale, namely a generic tolerance for all forms of violence against women. Other, less powerful factors captured the specificity of the item subsets, indicating that there were patterns of distinctive forms of tolerance. For example, the second factor, explaining 9% of scale variance, indicated a form of relative tolerance for talk that is sexually charged but an aversion to constraints against women's freedom in a couple, which was thus akin to a libertarian moral vision, which values liberty of speech and individual liberty of action. Four other factors, each having an eigenvalue larger than 1 and explaining between 5% and 8% of the scale variance, captured patterns of relative intolerance for physical violence but relative tolerance for other forms or situations of violence, such as constraints that are not physically violent, rape in situations in which the woman takes risks through her appearance or behavior, tolerance for making jokes with sexual meaning, or a specific tolerance for rape and sexual aggression, which was least in statistical relevance, coupled with intolerance for other forms of physical aggression. All factors were positively intercorrelated, with values for the Pearson correlation coefficient of between 0.15 and 0.30.

We opted to conduct a comprehensive analysis of public perception of violence against women and to capture the variability of all items included in the scale, not just the main factor. Therefore, we composed an index of tolerance for violence against women by summing all items.

In our first exploration, we used the summative index in the linear analysis as a dependent variable in the multivariate linear regression model to estimate its social stratification. In our second exploration, we used all 22 items individually as criteria for classification through a K-means cluster analysis, thereby estimating the typology of respondents depending on their tolerance for violence against women. For the K-means cluster analysis, we choose to iterate and classify the cases and we set the maximum iterations to 100. We also examined the social stratification of the identified types through a multinomial logistic regression model. Results for both the linear scale analysis and the cluster analysis are synthesized in the Results section. We used listwise deletion to manage missing data in regression models and in the cluster analysis, considering the low level of missing data (less than 5%) and aiming to avoid the artificiality of data imputation techniques.

Both the multivariate linear regression model and the multinomial logistic regression model assume linearity between the predictor variables and the dependent variable. This assumption may constitute an analytical limitation, since it cannot fully capture complex relationships. The limitation of the K-means cluster analysis is related to its sensitivity to the initial identification of cluster centers, which may affect the final clusters.

The predictors that we used in our analysis included the set of sociodemographic characteristics of the respondent that had been included in the survey and the attitudes of valorization for gender equality. The sociodemographic predictors included the following variables: respondent's age (measured in years), educational level (measured on nine levels, from no formal schooling to postgraduate studies), whether the respondent lived in an urban area (1 = yes, 0 = no), whether the respondent was a woman (1 = yes, 0 = no), the respondent's household income in the previous month (measured on four income categories), and whether the respondent was active in religious or church organizations (1 = yes, 0 = no).

We measured the attitude of valuing gender equality by a summative index, adding respondents' rating of the extent to which they agreed with the following statements (from 1 = "Strongly agree" to 4 = "Very little/not at all"; a higher value indicated higher commitment to gender equality): "The man is the head of the household," "Women need a man's protection," "Women should listen to their partner (to obey him)," "It is better to stay in an unhappy marriage than not be married at all," and "For the children's sake, it is preferable to stay in a violent relationship."

Secondary data analysis is faced with some limitations. In regard to our analysis, the measure of religiosity included in the survey captures only the active involvement in religious organizations, while there are no measures of religious beliefs or practices. Another limitation derives from the formulation of violence-related items. Violence against women is a sensitive topic, and responses might be affected by social desirability. This potential bias was not mitigated by positive and negative formulations of the same items in the survey.

Also, since each respondent answered only one version of the questions (split-half design), complete measurement equivalence between the two formulations cannot be definitively established without further validation research. While we proceeded with scale unification based on the small or insignificant differences found between versions, this methodological choice represents a limitation of our study.

Results

To contextualize the results of the VaW 2022 survey, we begin by offering a comparative view on the indicators of tolerance for violence against women, measured at different points in time, using data from the WVS 2018 and VaW 2022 surveys. We then presented the results of the linear and typological analyses.

Comparison of the Violence Against Women in Romania survey with the World Values Survey

A comparison of the two surveys indicated similar results, despite having different formulations (see Table 2). In the WVS 2018, a proportion of about 14% of Romanian respondents answered something other than “never justifiable” when asked “How justifiable is it... for a man to beat his wife,” on a scale from 1 to 10, thereby signaling some form of tolerance for violence against women. In the VaW 2022 survey, about 11% of respondents answered something other than “very bad” when asked how bad it is in a couple if a woman is beaten by her partner. The difference was coherent with a decrease in tolerance for violence against women, as documented earlier for previous decades, but it might also reflect the uncertainty of sample-based estimates. The VaW 2022 survey also included an item on “slapping,” which elicited about 21% answers that were other than “very bad”.

Table 2. A comparison of the World Values Survey 2018 and Violence against Women in Romania 2022 survey estimates

Question:	World Values Survey 2018 % people who answered with a value of 2-9 (Something else than 1 “never justifiable”)
How justifiable it is... for a man to beat his wife (from 1 = never justifiable to 10 = always justifiable)	13.9%
Questions:	Violence against Women Survey 2022 % people who answered with a value of 2-5 (Something else than 1 “very bad”)
How bad do you think the following situations are, in a couple... (from 1 = very bad to 5 = not at all bad)	
A woman is beaten by her partner / A man is beating his partner	11.3%
A woman is slapped by her partner / A man is slapping his partner	20.9%

Social stratification of tolerating violence against women: A linear analysis

Attitudes of relative tolerance for various forms and intensities of violence against women were not evenly distributed across society, and there was a strong consensus that such forms of violence were “very bad” (see Table 3). People who tended to answer otherwise were, on average, somehow older; they had completed less formal schooling, lived more often in rural areas, had a lower average household income, and were more often active in religious or church organizations. Correlation with age was lowest in intensity, compared with other correlations. As expected, women were less inclined to tolerate violence against women than

were men, although the bivariate correlation with gender was less strong than the associations of tolerance for violence against women with educational level and household income. Tolerance for violence against women was also, as expected, negatively correlated with attitudes of valorization for gender equality.

Table 3. Bivariate correlations between the scale of tolerating violence against women and sociodemographic characteristics. Source: Authors' analysis of Violence against Women in Romania 2022 survey data

		Respondent age (years)	Respondent educational level	Respondent lives in urban area (1=yes, 0=no)	Respondent is woman (1=yes, 0=no)	Respondent is active in religious / church organizations	Household income last month (4 categories)	Valuing gender equality
Perceived gravity of violence against women - summative score	Pearson Correlation	.092**	-.295**	-.167**	-.129**	.183**	-.267**	-.248**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	1391	1391	1391	1363	1387	1184	1391

A multivariate regression model yielded similar results (see Table 4). We used the question formulation (victim- or aggressor-focused), age, type of locality, education, religiosity, gender, household income, and valorization of gender equality as independent variables to predict the variance of tolerance for violence against women. The model had an R Square of 16.9% and an adjusted R Square of 16.4%, thereby explaining a moderate proportion of about 16% of the variance of tolerating violence against women.

When controlling for all variables in the model, age was no longer a statistically significant predictor. This indicates that generational differences in the perceived gravity of violence against women were completely mediated by education, income, and religious activity associated with age. The predictive relevance of the type of locality and of being active in a religious organization were also very low, although statistically significant, when controlling for the other variables in the model. The respondents' gender, educational level, and household income remained the strongest predictors for attitudes of tolerance for violence against women, even when controlling for the related attitude of valuing gender equality.

Table 4. Multivariate linear regression model explaining the variance of tolerance for violence against women. Source: Authors' analysis of Violence against Women in Romania 2022 survey data.

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	50.98	2.20		23.14	0.00
Question formulation (victim vs aggressor formulation)	-1.87	0.60	-0.08	-3.14	0.00
Age (years)	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.43	0.67
Respondent lives in urban area	-1.37	0.63	-0.06	-2.20	0.03
Respondent's educational level	-0.90	0.18	-0.16	-4.91	0.00
Respondent is active in religious / church organizations	1.75	0.69	0.07	2.53	0.01
Respondent is a woman	-3.65	0.62	-0.17	-5.87	0.00
Household income last month	-1.77	0.33	-0.17	-5.37	0.00
Valuing gender equality (index)	-1.67	0.54	-0.09	-3.12	0.00

Types of tolerance for violence against women

Given that only relatively small co-variations were identified through the linear analyses, we considered that the observable phenomenon of tolerance for violence against women might aggregate and thus obscure, when analyzed linearly, multiple types of tolerant attitudes and that some categories of people might tolerate certain forms of violence while condemning others. Thus, we conducted a K-means cluster analysis to identify a relevant classification of public tolerance for violence against women. We used a pairwise treatment of the missing values (see Table 5), classifying respondents according to their answers to all items in the Violence Against Women scale (total N = 1,391 cases included in the analysis, with two missing cases).

Table 5. Profiles of four types of attitudes to violence against women. K-means cluster analysis with pairwise deletion of missing cases. Source: Authors' analysis of Violence against Women in Romania 2022 survey data. Relatively high tolerance values are marked in bold.

Indicators (answers range from 1 = very bad, to 5 = not at all bad)	Low tolerance	Tolerance for domestic patriarchy	Tolerance for domestic violence	High tolerance
q71 Offending	1.43	1.88	2.90	3.97
q72 Threatening	1.15	1.47	1.91	4.55
q73 Slapping	1.11	1.35	1.94	4.66
q74 Beating	1.05	1.14	1.49	4.28
q75 Forced sexual relationships	1.15	1.52	1.97	4.49
q81 Forbidding to look for a job	1.29	1.75	3.52	4.41
q82 Forbidding to spend money as she wishes	1.40	2.71	4.03	4.93
q83 Forbidding her to get out in the city on her own	1.38	2.57	4.09	4.57
q84 Forbidding her to have a group of friends	1.37	2.43	4.15	3.86
q85 Forbidding her to use contraceptives	1.37	2.60	3.93	4.57
q91 Sexual relations with a girl younger than 15	1.11	1.22	1.42	3.15
q92 Rape after alcohol or drug consumption	1.09	1.44	1.49	4.13
q93 Rape with provocative clothing	1.22	2.02	1.88	4.40
q94 Rape after going to the man's home	1.29	2.35	2.75	4.17
q95 Rape by a known man	1.09	1.46	1.72	3.97
q96 Rape by an unknown man	1.05	1.15	1.26	3.95
q101 Touched/grabbed by an unknown person	1.16	1.44	1.68	2.58
q102 Sexual message from professor to female high-school student	1.08	1.25	1.38	2.97

Indicators (answers range from 1 = very bad, to 5 = not at all bad)	Low tolerance	Tolerance for domestic patriarchy	Tolerance for domestic violence	High tolerance
q103 Sexual message from professor to female university student	1.14	1.38	1.46	3.91
q104 Sexual jokes by professor in school / high-school classroom	1.33	1.74	1.79	3.22
q105 Sexual jokes by professor in university classroom	1.47	1.94	1.81	3.96
q106 Sexual favors asked for career advance	1.12	1.39	1.60	3.80
Unweighted N	877	360	146	8
Weighted N	791	390	197	13
Proportion of sample respondents (weighted)	57%	28%	14%	1%

The cluster analysis yielded four types of attitudes to violence against women: low tolerance for all forms of violence, tolerance for domestic patriarchy, tolerance for domestic violence, and high tolerance for all forms of violence against women. The low-tolerance cluster grouped the highest number of respondents, with over half of the Romanian population represented by this profile. The cluster with tolerance for domestic patriarchy comprised 28% of respondents. This cluster expressed a higher level of tolerance for social violence and for some forms of sexual violence (rape with provocative clothing and rape after going to the man's home). The third cluster, with tolerance for domestic violence, grouped 14% of respondents who were more inclined to tolerate verbal, physical, sexual, and social violence that had been committed in the household, but did not tolerate sexual violence in public spaces. The high-tolerance cluster grouped 1% of the respondents, who were inclined to tolerate all the forms of violence against women that were assessed in the survey.

Social stratification of tolerating violence against women: A typological analysis

We analyzed the social stratification of the attitude profiles for violence against women by estimating a multinomial logistic regression model. We predicted membership of the tolerance for domestic violence and the tolerance for domestic patriarchy clusters, the reference category being the low-tolerance cluster. The high-tolerance cluster was omitted from the analysis because it contained a very low number of cases and regression coefficients could not be reliably estimated.

The predictors included in the model were sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender, educational level, household income, type of locality, and religiosity) and the valorization of gender equality. The Nagelkerke Pseudo R-Square indicated that 22% of variance in individuals' cluster membership was explained by this model.

The multinomial logistic regression model showed that a higher level of education decreased the odds of belonging to the cluster with tolerance for domestic violence to 0.61 (see Table 6 for P-values and confidence intervals), compared with the low-tolerance cluster. Similarly, a higher level of household income decreased the chance of belonging to the cluster with tolerance for domestic violence to 0.52. Gender also influenced cluster membership, with women having lower odds of belonging to the cluster with domestic violence tolerance (with 0.24) in relation to the low-tolerance cluster.

With regard to membership of the cluster with tolerance for domestic patriarchy, gender, education, income, religiosity, and the valorization of gender equality influenced respondents' odds of being part of this cluster, compared with the low-tolerance cluster. Being a woman decreased the odds to 0.65, a higher educational level to 0.83, a higher household income to 0.78, and a positive attitude to gender equality to 0.58. The only sociodemographic characteristic that increased the chance of being tolerant of domestic patriarchy, relative to the low-tolerance cluster, was religiosity, with a value of 1.90.

Table 6. Difference between the cluster of low tolerance and the two clusters of relative tolerance for violence against women, with regard to sociodemographics and valuing gender equality. Multinomial logistic regression model. The dependent variable is cluster membership. Source: Authors' analysis of Violence Against Women in Romania 2022 survey data.

Type of tolerance for violence against women ^a		B	P-value	Exp(B) Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval for Exp(B)	
					Upper Bound	
Cluster of "Tolerance for domestic violence"	Intercept	3.30	0.00			
	Age	-0.02	0.07	0.98	0.96	1.00
	Educational level	-0.49	0.00	0.61	0.48	0.78
	Woman	-1.44	0.00	0.24	0.13	0.44
	Household income	-0.65	0.00	0.52	0.38	0.73
	Urban	0.20	0.48	1.22	0.70	2.14
	Active in religious / church organizations	0.09	0.76	1.10	0.60	2.00
	Valuing gender equality	-0.40	0.12	0.67	0.40	1.11

Type of tolerance for violence against women ^a		B	P-value	Exp(B) Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval for Exp(B)	
					Upper Bound	
Cluster of "Tolerance for domestic patriarchalism"	Intercept	1.73	0.00			
	Age	0.01	0.10	1.01	1.00	1.02
	Educational level	-0.19	0.00	0.83	0.75	0.91
	Woman	-0.43	0.00	0.65	0.49	0.87
	Household income	-0.25	0.00	0.78	0.66	0.91
	Urban	-0.11	0.43	0.89	0.67	1.19
	Active in religious / church organizations	0.64	0.00	1.90	1.41	2.56
	Valuing gender equality	-0.55	0.00	0.58	0.45	0.74
^a The reference category is the cluster of "Low tolerance". The cluster of "High tolerance" was omitted from analysis because of its very low number of cases.						

Pseudo R-Square	
Cox and Snell	0.176
Nagelkerke	0.222
McFadden	0.123

Discussion

Tolerance for many forms of domestic violence affecting women has decreased in recent years in Romanian society, in line with global trends, as shown by the data from the WVS (2003–2018) and, more recently, the VaW 2022 survey. By conducting secondary data analyses on the VaW 2022 survey, we classified current attitudes regarding multiple forms of violence against women and presented their social stratification among the present-day Romanian public. While previous research approached the topic from a linear variation perspective, our analysis contributes to the state of the art by also incorporating a typological analysis, which captures more variability with regard to the social stratification of tolerance for violence against women.

Our results showed that victim- and aggressor-centered formulations elicited small differences in terms of tolerance for violence among the respondents, which were in most cases not statistically significant. Therefore, recommending that men be focused on as aggressors when reporting cases of violence against women to reduce victim blaming and tolerance for violence (Bohner, 2001; Henley et al.,

1995) might make a difference in some situations, but its impact is not likely to be large for the Romanian public. As a rule, people assign high gravity to behaviors that are physically, verbally, socially, and sexually violent to women.

Persisting tolerance for violence against women is shaped by sociodemographic characteristics. As expected, women were less likely to be tolerant than men, as were people with a higher level of education and those with higher household income. This social stratification of tolerance for violence against women was also identified in previous studies, which showed that social characteristics such as gender, education, and income shape attitudes to violence against women. A clear pattern of association between age and tolerance for various forms of violence against women was not identified in prior research. In our study, age was not a statistically significant predictor for tolerance for violence against women, when controlling for the other variables, which suggests that, in this regard, social contexts shape attitudes similarly across generations.

Given that only small co-variations had been identified through the linear analyses, we conducted a K-means cluster analysis to uncover configurations of attitudes supporting various degrees of tolerance for violent behaviors against women. Four types of attitudes were identified, ranging from low tolerance to high tolerance for all forms of violence against women. The majority of the Romanian population was included in the low-tolerance cluster, while membership of the high-tolerance cluster was very rare (around 1% of the respondents). Two types of relative tolerance were identified, namely the type of “tolerance for domestic patriarchy,” which was discursively inclined toward some justification for social violence and for forms of sexual violence, but not for physical violence, and the type of “tolerance for domestic violence,” which was inclined toward some justification for verbal, physical, sexual, and social violence located in the household or between men and women who are familiar with each other.

It was not clear from the available information whether the two intermediate types were derived from lower condemnation of some forms of violence against women or (also) from attempts to differentiate between the very bad and the bad forms of violence. While it was definitely possible for the respondents to answer “very bad” to all forms, there is a discursive norm to answer differently to different questions, thereby indicating thoughtfulness and discerning analysis. It is possible that the respondents who strongly condemned violence against women chose the “bad” rather than the “very bad” answer to interactionally signal attention and make a considered distinction between what are different forms of abuse. Therefore, it is difficult to interpret the in-depth configuration of beliefs for the two intermediate clusters, based on their pattern of survey answers, other than to remark that they marked a difference between the very bad forms of violence and those that they evaluated as bad.

The four attitudinal types were not evenly distributed in society. People who are highly educated and have a higher level of the household income were less

likely to be tolerant of domestic violence and of domestic patriarchy, and they were more likely to have low tolerance for violence against women. Women were less likely than men to have tolerance for domestic violence and for domestic patriarchy. Additionally, membership of the cluster with tolerance for domestic patriarchy was negatively associated with a positive attitude to gender equality and positively associated with being religiously active.

Therefore, a higher level of education and income, higher valorization of gender equality, and weaker religious involvement remain significant benchmarks of the social world in which social actors are most distant from patriarchy and its associated forms of violence against women in present-day Romania.

The patterns of social stratification in attitudes toward violence against women identified in our study converge with several previous findings in the literature, while also showing some distinct features of the Romanian context. Similar to Sirvent Garcia del Valle's (2020) findings in Spain, our results indicate that lower educational levels were associated with higher tolerance for violence, though in our case the gender effect remained significant when controlling for other variables. The positive association we found between religious involvement and tolerance for domestic patriarchy contributes to previous mixed findings about religiosity. While Karakuş (2015) found higher religiosity was associated with less tolerance in Turkey, our findings support Flood and Pease's (2009) observation that religious contexts can sometimes be used to justify certain forms of violence against women.

The findings of this study have several important implications for education and public policy aimed at reducing tolerance for violence against women in Romania. First, the identification of distinct types of tolerance suggests that interventions need to be tailored to address different patterns of attitudes. While outright physical violence is widely condemned, there remains a notable segment of the population that shows tolerance for patriarchal control and forms of non-physical violence. This indicates that educational programs should focus not only on obvious forms of violence but also on raising awareness about the harmful nature of controlling behaviors, social restrictions, and other subtle forms of domestic abuse.

The strong association between education level and lower tolerance for violence highlights the crucial role of formal education in shaping attitudes. Thus, incorporating comprehensive gender equality education and violence prevention programs into school curricula could be particularly effective. Such programs should start early and continue through all educational levels, with special attention to helping students recognize and reject all forms of violence against women, including those that may be culturally normalized.

The persistence of certain forms of tolerance among religiously active individuals suggests the importance of engaging religious organizations and leaders in efforts to combat violence against women. Religious institutions could be valuable partners in promoting non-violent relationship models and challenging patriarchal interpretations that might be used to justify controlling or violent behaviors.

Conclusions

This study set out with three main objectives: to examine the evolution of attitudes toward violence against women, to explore the typology of tolerance, and to uncover its social stratification in Romania. Our findings successfully addressed each of these aims. Regarding the first objective, we documented a clear trend of decreasing discursive legitimacy of violence against women in Romania, as shown by both WVS data and the 2022 VaW survey. For our second objective, the typological analysis revealed four distinct attitudinal clusters, providing a deeper understanding than previous linear approaches: zero tolerance (57%), tolerance for domestic patriarchy (28%), tolerance for domestic violence (14%), and high tolerance (1%). Finally, addressing our third objective, we uncovered clear patterns of social stratification, with education, income, gender, and religious involvement resulting as key factors shaping these attitudes.

Successive waves of the WVS have converged with the data from the VaW 2022 survey, indicating a trend for decreasing discursive legitimacy of violence against women in Romania. Still, this latest estimate indicates that about 11% of the Romanian respondents made some discursive space for possible justifications for a man to beat his wife, answering that this situation is not “very bad” but, rather, “bad” or less than bad.

While for some items, the type of formulation made a difference that was statistically significant, in others it did not, and the differences were, as a rule, small. Perpetrator-focused formulations tended to elicit stricter condemnation responses than those that were victim-centered. Overall, violence against women was strongly condemned by a large majority of the Romanian respondents, across all social strata. This social consensus leads to the fact that, in present-day Romania, there is a relatively low co-variation between discursive tolerance for violence against women and sociodemographic variables including gender, age, household income, education, medium of residence, and religious involvement. A linear regression model that included the above-mentioned predictors and the attitude of valuing gender equality explained about 16% of variance in public tolerance for violence against women.

A typological analysis captured more nuances of the phenomenon, distinguishing four attitudinal types. *High discursive tolerance* for violence against women was very infrequent, estimated at about 1% of respondents. Still, the three other types indicated a variable inclination to express a less strong condemnation for some forms of violence. While about 57% of the Romanian respondents declared almost *zero tolerance for violence against women*, another 28% condemned less strongly *nonviolent domestic patriarchy*, while about another 14% condemned less strongly even some forms of *domestic violence*. Both intermediate clusters may also condemn less strongly, to some extent, violence between men and women who are familiar with each other or in situations in which they can attribute blame to

the victim. About 22% of the variability in individuals' profiles can be explained by correlations with the sociodemographic variables and the attitude of valuing gender equality through a multinomial regression model.

The limitations of our study are shared with other secondary analyses, as we were limited in the choice of predictors. Specifically, the measurement of religiosity could have been more nuanced, since we only had an item capturing active involvement in religious organizations, without other forms of religious belief or activity. While the scale did afford an examination of the relevance of the type of formulation (victim-centered vs. perpetrator-centered), it did not enable an analysis of the acquiescence response style, which is a probable bias for such a sensitive topic. To evaluate this bias, items would have had to be asked in positive versus negative formulations. Such inquiries will be useful for future research because they can better isolate the underlying opinion construct from the discursive compliance to a widely accepted social norm. There are also some analytical limitations to our study. The regression models that we estimated are based on the assumption of linearity between the predictors and the dependent variable, which may interfere with the identification of complex relationships. The K-means cluster analysis is limited by the initial identification of cluster centers, which influences the final clusters.

As an additional direction for future research, in-depth qualitative studies could shed useful light on vocabularies of motive that justify violence against women in specific situations and for specific categories of respondents.

Funding

This research was funded by The Research Institute of the University of Bucharest (ICUB), Senior Research Grant 2896/28.03.2024.

Supplementary material

Supplementary material for this article is available online at <https://tinyurl.com/VaW-Supplementary>.

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