Anexa nr.6

ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ
SCOSAAR

ABSTRACT OF THE HABILITATION THESIS

Title: Violent Crime, Vulnerability and Protection: Theoretical, Empirical and Applied Sociological Contributions

Habilitation field: Sociology

Author: Simona Ionela Mihaiu

The habilitation thesis presents the main outcomes of my scientific and professional activity following the award of my PhD in Sociology by Order of the Minister of Education No. 5581 of 3 December 2013. The research programme begins with the explanation of violent crime and continues with the investigation of violence in intimate relationships, the intergenerational transmission of domestic violence, the victimisation of vulnerable people, and institutional prevention and protection measures. The relationship between individual characteristics, family experiences, social relationships, community conditions, and the protection measures adopted by the competent authorities provides the common point of reference for the works presented.

The thesis is organised into six parts. The first presents my academic training, doctoral and postdoctoral research, and the consolidation of my research profile. The second brings together the principal results obtained after the award of my PhD in the fields of violent crime, domestic violence, victimisation, and the prison institution. The third examines their academic dissemination through publications, conferences, and editorial work, while the fourth presents the transfer of these contributions to public policies and institutional interventions. My experience in research coordination, university teaching, and professional training is summarised in the fifth part. The final part sets out future research directions, methodological development, the establishment of a research team, and the involvement of doctoral students in the proposed projects.

My sociological training began at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Craiova and continued with the Master's programme in Social Deviance and Crime at the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work of the University of Bucharest. My undergraduate dissertation examined the relationship between the family environment and children's psychosocial development, while my Master's dissertation analysed female offending from the dual position of perpetrator and victim of violence. My doctoral studies in sociology, completed between 2010 and 2013 under the supervision of Professor Dan Banciu, resulted in the thesis entitled *Violent Crime in Romania: Assessment, Aetiology and Social Prevention*. The research correlated data from the General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police with findings from an empirical study of 362 people with final convictions for murder, rape, and robbery. Statistical analysis, a sociological survey, observation, interviews, and documentary research provided the basis for distinct aetiological models for the three categories of offences.

Drawing on the ecological model of violence (Krug et al., 2002), the research examined individual, family, relational, community, and societal factors. The proposed explanation distinguishes between the elements that favour the emergence of violence, the circumstances in which risk increases, and the situations immediately preceding the offence, thereby avoiding the attribution of violent acts to a single cause. In subsequent works, I defined violent crime by reference to the perpetrator's intent, the harm caused to a person's life, physical integrity, or liberty, the seriousness of the consequences, and criminal liability. I also examined the possibilities and limitations of administrative statistics, which capture offences known to institutions but provide limited information about the perpetrator's biography, the relationship with the victim, and the sequence of events preceding the offences.

The postdoctoral research project *Conjugal Homicide: Perpetrators and Victims*, conducted between 2014 and 2015 at the Research Institute for Quality of Life of the Romanian Academy, continued the investigation of homicide by considering the specific characteristics

of the couple's relationship. The study included 40 people deprived of their liberty and used semi-structured interviews, prison files, and the *Conflict Tactics Scales*, with the resulting data considered alongside statistics from the police and the Public Ministry. The conclusions emphasise the need to explain conjugal homicide by examining the history of the relationship, previous conflicts and violence, the distribution of power within the couple, and the factors that increased the risk of a lethal outcome. In 2015, this project received the Research Institute for Quality of Life Award for Excellence in Scientific Research.

The findings of my doctoral research and subsequent studies were further developed in my sole-authored volume *Violent Crime: Meanings and Social Implications*, published by Pro Universitaria in Bucharest in 2021. The book relates theoretical explanations and empirical findings to criminal law provisions, prevention policies, and reintegration measures. Social prevention is treated as an objective of scientific research through the identification of risk factors and the development of measures tailored to individuals, relationships, and the social environments in which violence may emerge or intensify. In 2023, the volume received the Romanian Academy's Henri H. Stahl Award.

A major contribution concerns the differentiation of forms of lethal violence in intimate relationships. The volume *The Intergenerational Transmission of Domestic Violence: Femicide, Reactive Captivity and Child Victimisation*, published by Pro Universitaria in Bucharest in 2026, examines the killing of a woman by a current or former intimate partner, homicide committed by a woman with a history of victimisation within the couple relationship, and violence against children. The study draws on administrative data and 18 semi-structured interviews conducted at Bucharest-Rahova Prison and Ploiești-Târgșoru Nou Women's Prison with three groups of six participants. The analysis of femicide considers the course of the relationship, coercive control, threats, isolation, separation, and the perpetrator's loss of his established position within the couple. The accounts of convicted individuals are interpreted as reconstructions of events and are not used to establish judicial facts.

My original concept of 'reactive captivity' constitutes a theoretical contribution to the study of lethal acts committed by victimised women. It captures situations in which repeated violence, the perpetrator's control, social vulnerabilities, and insufficient or unsuitable external support progressively limit women's options for protection. The lethal response is considered in relation to previous abuse, strategies for avoiding conflict, help-seeking, the intention to separate, and the assessment of imminent danger. The act may constitute a form of self-protection, without being regarded as an inevitable consequence of victimisation and without the explanation being applied to all women convicted of killing an intimate partner.

The sociological investigation of intergenerational transmission foregrounds the child as a victim in their own right. Exposure to threats, assaults, and conflict between adult family members may affect a child even in the absence of violence directed at them. Interviews with respondents convicted of offences against their own children explored experiences within the family of origin, conceptions of authority, and parenting practices. The data do not indicate an identical or inevitable reproduction of violence across generations. Relationships with protective adults, community support, and early intervention may limit the consequences of victimisation, which justifies assessing children's needs separately and including them in safety and protection measures.

Another research direction examines vulnerability in relation to social position, resources, discrimination, dependency, and effective access to protection. The studies have addressed the circumstances of migrant and refugee women and Roma communities, as well as human trafficking and labour exploitation. Research on discrimination against Roma included an analysis of the continuity between everyday microaggressions and hate crimes. This analysis was developed in an article published in 2026 with Dr Simona Maria Stănescu and Dr Sorin Cace in the *International Review of Victimology* (impact factor 3.0). In this article, the concept of symbolic compliance denotes the gap between formal alignment with non-discrimination regulations and the effectiveness of protection in practice.

Research on the prison institution covered the exercise of rights, living conditions, relationships between people in custody and staff, access to services, and the evaluation of reintegration programmes. The *Quality of Life in Prison* study compared the perspectives of people deprived of their liberty with those of professionals in four institutions. In addition, the external evaluation conducted between 2022 and 2024 covered 51 social reintegration programmes, including ten social work programmes examined as part of the component in which I participated. In 2024, as sole author, I designed the *Programme for Developing the Knowledge and Skills Required for the Financial Independence of People Deprived of Their Liberty*. The programme was adopted and incorporated into the range of interventions used in every custodial institution in Romania.

The methodological approaches used both administrative sources and directly collected empirical data. Depending on the objectives of each study, statistical documentation was supplemented by sociological surveys, interviews, focus groups, observation, case studies, and the analysis of prison files, court judgments, and institutional documents. The corroboration of sources highlighted both shared information and aspects found only in participants' accounts. Research involving hard-to-reach populations required the adaptation of instruments, the protection of confidentiality, and the prevention of revictimisation. Sampling limitations, differences between operational definitions, and the impossibility of generalising the conclusions of qualitative studies were explicitly acknowledged when interpreting the findings. Following the award of my PhD, my scientific work has resulted in two sole-authored volumes, two co-authored volumes, two co-edited volumes, 15 articles in journals indexed in Web of Science, Scopus or other international databases, 13 chapters in edited collections, and 16 papers published in international conference proceedings with an ISSN or ISBN or indexed in at least one international database, all of which are included in the List of Publications. My editorial work includes membership of the editorial boards of *Comunicación y Hombre* (Spain) since 2020 and *Sociologie Românească* since 2021.

University teaching developed alongside my research. At the University of Craiova, I held the position of Teaching Assistant and Doctoral Candidate from 2011 to 2014 and subsequently that of Lecturer from 2016 to 2021. The subjects I taught included social research methodology, the sociology of deviance, domestic violence, the sociology of the family, social work with offenders, case management, and policies for the inclusion of vulnerable groups. My international teaching experience included appointments as a Visiting Lecturer at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń in 2018 and at Universidad Francisco de Vitoria and the Robert Schuman Institute for European Studies in Madrid in 2019.

My experience in coordinating scientific research encompasses setting objectives, designing methodologies, constructing research instruments, organising data collection, supervising fieldwork teams, interpreting information, and drafting reports. Studies conducted in prisons and among victims of violence and groups exposed to discrimination involved cooperation with public institutions, international organisations, and practitioners from different fields.

The applied component has resulted in methodologies, assessment instruments, public policy recommendations, intervention programmes, and training activities. Collaborations with the National Administration of Penitentiaries, the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men, the General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police, UNICEF Romania, UNICEF Moldova, UN Women, and non-governmental organisations addressed detention conditions, social reintegration, cooperation between social services and the justice system, the barriers encountered by victims, and risk assessment.

Professional training has covered the prevention of violence and crime, the rights of vulnerable people, non-discrimination, equal opportunities, social reintegration, and family policies.

The experience gained provides the basis for supervising doctoral projects and establishing an interdisciplinary team to research violence, crime, and institutional responses. Future research will continue to examine lethal violence in intimate relationships and femicide, children who are victims of domestic violence, the victimisation of vulnerable groups, human trafficking and labour exploitation, and violence in digital environments. The planned work includes establishing a database on homicides committed within intimate relationships, conducting comparative research in Central and Eastern Europe, evaluating risk assessment instruments, and integrating administrative, judicial, and sociological information. The development of the programme entails securing funding through national and international competitions and strengthening institutional collaborations while preserving research independence.

Doctoral training is integrated into the proposed programme through participation in research projects, methodological discussions, fieldwork, conferences, and publications. Mentoring will focus on defining research topics, selecting empirical methods, documenting decisions, meeting ethical requirements, and developing interpretations that avoid stigmatising the people and groups studied. Joint publications will reflect each author's actual contribution. The involvement of doctoral students in funded projects and international collaborations can support their scientific training and the development of a team capable of continuing the research programme.

The contributions presented outline a research profile centred on explaining violence, researching experiences of victimisation, and evaluating institutional responses. The theoretical, empirical, and applied results, together with my experience in methodological coordination and university teaching, provide the basis for continuing this programme within doctoral studies in sociology. The habilitation will support the supervision of doctoral students, the development of comparative research, and the consolidation of an interdisciplinary team capable of investigating violence and crime through rigorous scientific methods and translating the resulting evidence into tools useful to institutions and professionals.