

Intimate Partner Violence: Marital Rape

Valentina Rujoiu

Abstract

The habilitation thesis has two distinct parts. The first part presents my teaching activity and the scientific areas of interest in which I carried out research and my future academic development plans. In the second part, I will address a topic which brought me, in 2008, a Ph.D in sociology: marital rape. It was the first doctoral thesis in Romania that analyzed this topic from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Domestic violence is an area where legislative decisions and social policies, although they are vital for the optimal functioning of the society, have dormant, confusing, controversial effects, so the prevalence and severity is minimized. Moreover, there are aspects of this area that have been ignored and invalidated from the legal perspective. For example, marital rape - the topic of this habilitation thesis - was incriminated, in our country, only in the year 2000.

The thesis deals with a subject that is part of the taboo area of privacy life and it was insufficiently researched by scholars in social and human sciences. The validation of marital rape, both as recognizing it as a social problem, as well as from the legislative perspective, is relatively recent. To be consistent with the new regulations on human rights, laws were amended and special laws were introduced aiming to prohibit violence against women in general, and sexual violence, especially, as this aspect was ignored, mainly in the family context.

The civil society must be helped to recognize different forms of violence that intersect and feed each other. In the last two decades in Romania, shelters were created for victims of domestic violence (this service network is underrepresented in this context), public information campaigns have been conducted, social work programs have been implemented, but without a proven success. Although the effort of psychologists, sociologists, social workers, lawyers, doctors resulted in a noticeable awareness increase about the negative and dramatic aspects that violence against women generate, still, in many countries, silence and reluctance about intimate partner violence is shown. Marital rape is an issue little addressed by researchers in social sciences and it is still categorized as a contradictory concept. There are few public debates focused strictly on this issue, and the effort of Romanian practitioners to find real and pragmatic solutions to prevent such abuses or to help victims are minimal. The first cause is the fact that this subject was not approached from an interdisciplinary perspective to create an overall picture in relation to the prevalence and costs, socially involved in the proliferation of this social problem and to generated effects on women and family life.

Every culture has its own values and principles on how gender relations, stereotypes and prejudices manifests, and the way masculinity and femininity concepts are defined. How we relate to sexuality is legitimized and perpetuated by culture. Thus, it is explained - in the most logical and simple way – violence against women. In this context, we can consider a cultural violence exercised against women that incites and legitimizes the abuse, and the effect is the devaluation of women. The idea of women inferiority is common in most societies that created complex mythology in religion, philosophy, and science.

The topic of marital rape was inconceivable, being invalidated from a triple perspective: legal, cultural, and even professional. But the wake-up call came in many countries, this invalidation being theoretically eliminated by the legal incrimination of marital rape. From a practical standpoint, invalidation is present in the collective mentality and generates a multitude of negative consequences on the social perception on the victim status and the victimization phenomenon.