An Empirical Investigation of Perceived Violence in Communication in Six Different University Settings in Romania

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Abstract: - This paper is the result of a research that examined, analyzed and interpreted the differences in the perceptions of violence in communication in six different university settings in Romania, by investigating the relative and the combined influence of the place and frequency of violence with relevance to the response. The study utilized a new analytic framework for understanding the personalized perception of violence through a self-administered questionnaires divided into five sections, investigating the socio-demographic data, the presence of violence as a problem of the main issue, the places, the frequencies, the perception of different forms of verbal and non-verbal violence in communication and their induced response. The data were analyzed by using statistical elements. The findings have suggested that communication is far from being a neutral way even in the same country and everyday life perceptions of violence can induce a specific response.

Key-Words: - Violence, Communication, Perception, University Settings, Frequencies, χ² test)

1 Introduction
Understanding the person’s point of view, and his/her perception about violence in communication, especially at persons from different cultural backgrounds represent an important challenge to society and to those who, today, and practice medicine in a specific place.
In order to understand the role of aggression in our society, we need to highlight that violence and aggression lie at the heart of humanity. The violence is an universal phenomenon existing in all cultures. Culture is the fundamental source of diversity in thought and behavior among different human groups. It is transmitted from a generation to the next one through the symbolic communication of language, including, in the some time, the directly observable behaviors and also, an ideological component with its specific beliefs and values. Each culture has a system of values that classifies phenomena into good and bad, right and wrong, desirable and undesirable ones.
Now, we are aware of the fact that violence and aggression occur in all cultures, to a degree or another; therefore, they become universal phenomena. To provide an example, the USA is popularly perceived as a violent society, whilst Austria is not.

2 Normal and Pathological Aggression and Violence
Distinguishing the normal from the pathological aggression can generate a supplementary difficulty and render the research more complex. Aggression and violence are behaviors on a continuum, and verbal aggression (violence in communication) is especially difficult to assess because it may be a function of social class. Assessment of violence requires the clinician to look outside the patient, and to enter the society where he/she is living. It is the medium that dominates social human communication. The ability to communicate through non-verbal language depends on social cognitive processes.

2.1 Culturally specific aggression and violence
As members of society, we have all encountered violence shaped in one form or another and have learned to asses it and to initiate a response. These skills are culturally specific. They differ from society to society and even among subgroups within a wider cultural entity.
It is only through analysis of individual’s specific perception about violence in verbal and non verbal communication that we can see how he/she will respond. Only by examining specific instances of talk, and behavior in comparatively safe and civil circumstances can we increase the safety in society and foster the cross-cultural communication.
3 Literature Review

Despite its ubiquity, the clinical literature concerning violence and aggression in humans is scant. The clinical studies of violence has largely been relegated to the forensic realm [1] or to the psychiatric ward [2;3;4] and to geriatric settings [5]. The violent behavior of mentally ill people is seen as a source of considerable public and professional concern. Tidmarsh noted the need for the adoption of a “safety culture” by the management of psychiatric services. Alexander and al. suggested the need for better inter and intra professional communication, thought assessment and monitoring of patients, decisive interventions in high-risk situations, knowledge in the process of “risk assessment”, accurate and full record keeping, taking family’s concerns seriously and attention to situations of vulnerability. The specific cultural violence of a society is usually under-detected and it occurs among professionals, family members, friends, in the street, or mass media.

Some studies [6; 7, 8; 9;10] investigated the way in which individuals evaluated the communication and behaviors of other individuals, and this can also be crucial in determining the way they will act.

In order to study the violence encountered in everyday life, Campbell and Muncer applied a social representation theory to explain how men and women perceive aggressive experiences. In fact, individuals can have varying degrees of both instrumental and expressive aggressive beliefs.

Little consideration, however, has been given to achieve multidimensional aspects of verbal and non verbal violence in communication, risk assessment and cross-disciplinary professional education.

In the last decade, much more consideration was given the importance of violence risk communication and perceived value of different forms of risk communication toward others. Because there is of crucial importance to assess the everyday life violence, not only in its extreme aspects or individuals with disabilities, our study is designed to explore the perception of an apparently non-implied person in violence in communication (language and behaviors). This could emphasize the power of communication and how a particular perception can influence the individual’s response. Our study intends, like other research to reduce the gap between what is known about preventing from violence as a public health problems and what society actually does to prevent from violence and aggression.

4 Research Method and Design

The study collected information using a self-administered questionnaire (Perceived Violence in Communication Questionnaire – PVCQ). The participation in the study was voluntary and was considered that consent to participate was given by students when they completed the questionnaire. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and all information gathered where non – attributable to any individual. It was hoped that, by maintaining anonymity, both the number of respondents and the truthful answers would increase, thereby improving the validity of the questionnaire and research.

We try to design a new questionnaire about the perception of verbal and non-verbal violence in communication in civil society. In psychology and the cognitive sciences perception is the process of attaining awareness or understanding of sensory information. The word perception comes from the Latin words perception “percepio”, meaning “receiving, collecting, action of taking possession, apprehension with the mind or senses, as the term is defined in Oxford English Dictionary. What one perceives is a result of interplays between past experiences, one’s culture and the interpretation of the perceived. We know that the questionnaires obey the rules of any scientific experiment; consequently, it was carefully designed to collect data from the Romanian society. The questionnaire is quite flexible in what it can measure, however it is not equally suited to measuring all types of data. Our questionnaire is subjective and the questions are in closed format that usually take the form of a multiple-choice question. We phrase our questions empirically in order to avoid all sort of interpretation. Closed format questions offer many advantages in time and money. By restricting the answer set, it is easy to calculate percentages and other hard statistical data over the whole group or over any subgroup of participants. The questions are easy for the respondent. We tried to offer sufficient choices to fully cover the range of answers, but not so many that the distinction between them becomes blurred. Usually, the choices were translated into two to three possible answers per questions.

300 questionnaires were distributed in six different university settings in Romania (Bihor, Arad, Brasov, Bucuresti, Cluj, Constanta, Iasi) and 195 returned. So, sample group comprised 195 students from six university settings in Romania who completed self-questionnaires in maximum 10 minutes each during the laboratory classes. This kind of evaluation was selected also for its ability to generate a large amount of data quickly and for its cost effectiveness.

The questionnaire was divided into five sections:

1. Section one - six items investigating socio-demographic data.
2. Section two - one item investigating the presence of violence in communication, as a problem of our society.
3. Section three - four items investigating the most frequent places of occurrence of violence and its frequency.
4. Section four - seven items investigating the perception of different forms of violence in verbal and non-verbal communication.
5. Section five - one item investigating the personal answer to those perceptions.

Participants where asked to respond to a series of statements using closed format questions allowing the collection of subjective data about items of sections indicating the strong agreement or disagreement with the statement in conformity with fig.1 and fig.2.
Each item was introduced by a brief statement providing subjects with explicit examples of how one might be influenced by this type of communication, frequencies and places.

**Questionnaire on the Violence Perception in Communication (QVPC)**

Visit the box corresponding to the answer you consider the most representative for you. There are no correct or incorrect responses. Necessary time: approx. 10 minutes.

### Section 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>SEX</th>
<th>PLACE OF RESIDENCE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>BUCURESTI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>BRASOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>BIHOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>COSTANTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>CLUJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>IASI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MARRITAL STATUS

<table>
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<tr>
<th>MARRITAL STATUS</th>
<th>EDUCATION</th>
<th>DISTRICT</th>
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<td>BUCURESTI</td>
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<td>BRASOV</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIVORCED</td>
<td></td>
<td>BIHOR</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**DO YOU THINK THAT VIOLENCE IN COMMUNICATION IS A PROBLEM IN OUR SOCIETY?**

- Daily
- Weekly
- Not frequently

**HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU NOTICED ASPECTS OF VIOLENCE IN COMMUNICATION IN THE FOLLOWING PLACES?**

- Family
- School
- In society
- Daily
- Weekly
- Not frequently

**Fig.1** Questionnaire on the violence perception in communication (QVPC) - sections 1-3

### Section 2

**DO YOU CONSIDER THE SPEAKING ON A HIGH TONE AS A MANIFESTATION OF VIOLENCE?**

- Yes
- No

**DO YOU PERCEIVE THE INVOLUNTARY TOUCH AS A MANIFESTATION OF VIOLENCE?**

- Yes
- No

**DO YOU PERCEIVE THE INTENSIVE LOOK AS BEING VIOLENT?**

- Yes
- No

**DO YOU PERCEIVE IT MORE AGGRESSIVE?**

- A VIOLENT ISSUE
- A RUSHED INSULT

**DO YOU PERCEIVE A MANIFESTATION OF VIOLENCE IN COMMUNICATION AN INSULT UTTERED BY A FRIEND DURING AN EVERYDAY CONVERSATION?**

- Yes
- No

**DO YOU PERCEIVE VIOLENCE IN COMMUNICATION COMING FROM A CLOSE PERSON AS BEING MORE EASILY TOLERATED?**

- Yes
- No

### Section 3

**Fig.2** Questionnaire on the violence perception in communication (QVPC) - sections 4-5

### 4.1 Research Hypotheses

The study adopts the following hypotheses:

**H1**: The perception between verbal and non-verbal violence of communication and its response is strictly dependent on the district.

**H2**: The excessive presence of violence in mass media has an overwhelming influence on the person's response.

### 5 Research Findings

#### 5.1 Socio-demographic characterization of the sample

The studied target group comprised 195 students from different university settings in Romania, such as:

- 43 subjects (22%) from Bucuresti (B);
- 54 subjects (28%) from Brasov (BV);
- 25 subjects (13%) from Bihor (BH);
- 30 subjects (15%) from Constanta (CT);
- 28 subjects (14%) from Cluj (CJ);
- 15 subjects (8%) from Iasi (IS).

The target group majority was made up of 134 female respondents (68.7%) and 61 male respondents (31.3%). The average age of the target group was 25.3, on a range from 19 to 56. The female average age was 25.4, and the male average age was 25.

The great majority of respondents – 89.23% belonged to the age group of [19-25) and [25-35), as it is shown in fig.3.

#### 5.2 The presence of violence in communication, as a problem of Romanian society

The results highlighted the fact that 91.8% out of the respondents appreciated violence in communication as a major problem of our society. 8.2% out of the respondents do not perceive violence as being a problem; part of this second group were females (37.5%) and 62.5% males. After having been analyzed the presence of violence in communication as a problem, the results recorded in each district are shown in fig. 4.

**Fig.3** Distribution by groups of age

The marital status shows that the large majority of respondents were single (79.49%), 19.49% married and 1.3% divorced people.

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As we can notice from the histogram above, there are several differences among the districts: the respondents from Bihor totally consider (100%) violence as a problem of today's Romanian society; with a percentage close to the previous one come the respondents from Brasov (98.15%) and from Constanta (93.33%). The respondents from Cluj considered the issue being the least important (82.14%).

5.3 The most frequent places of occurrence of violence and its frequency in the Romanian university setting

Analyzing the sample group, the most frequent place where violence is encountered is mass media (71.28%); street (58.97%), academic environment (31.28%). The last position is taken by the family environment with a frequency of 12.31%.

These results are maintained, at the same proportions, at the level of districts, even if some of them are characterized by higher percentage of violence in environment seemingly protected, such as: family (20.93% in Bucharest, 16.67% in Brasov) and the academic environment (46.30% in Brasov, 42.86% in Cluj, 37.21% in Bucharest) exceeding the sample group's percentage of 12.30% in family and of 31.28% in the academic environment. Close values of violence percentages in the academic environment and that of street can be noticed in certain districts such as Brasov (street violent reaching 70.37%), where the general street violence percentages is of 58.97% and of 46.30% in the academic environment in contrast to the general sample group's percentage of 31.28%. The result is even more relevant if the differences between the two sample groups are very slight; it is the case of Bihor or Constanta. Street violence is of 48% in Bihor in contrast to 4% in the academic environment and the street violence in Constanta reaches 33.33% in comparison with the percentage of 10% in the academic environment.

5.4 The perception of different forms of violence in verbal and non verbal communication

5.4.1 The degree of dissatisfaction related to family, street and mass media violence

Responding to the question: "Which, of the following environments do you consider the most troublesome in terms of violence?" (family, street, mass media), the respondents considered family as the most troublesome one (55.38%), followed by street violence (33.77%) and, paradoxically for its high frequency of the investigated phenomenon, mass media on the third position (13.85%)

Analyzing the results of the investigation in the departments, the degree of dissatisfaction related to violence phenomenon, there can be noticed that the most afflicted persons are those from Bihor, with a percentage of 72% in contrast to the general sample group's percentage of 55.38 % and Constanta with
70%. The less afflicted seem to be the respondents from Cluj, with a percentage of 28.57%.

Fig.7 Dissatisfaction rate of violence in communication per district

5.4.2. Violence in verbal communication
For the item “Do you perceive the speaking on a high tone as a manifestation of violence” the result of the general sample was different, but close as value, respectively 47.18% from the respondents considered the speaking on a high tone as a manifestation of violence while 52.82% had a another opinion. As for the other items of the questionnaire, there are districts that present specific aspects different from those of the general sample. As an example, 28.57% form the respondents in the district of Cluj appreciated that the use of the high tone is a manifestation of violence in communication. Instead, 66.67% form the respondents in the district of Iasi had the same opinions.

5.4.3.a Assessment of violence in non-verbal communication A
For the item “Do you perceive the involuntary touch as a manifestation of violence”, 90.77% from the general sample considered that the involuntary touch is not a manifestation of violence in non-verbal communication. The almost same percentage remains at equal values in all districts, as you can see in Tab.1.

5.4.3.b Assessment of violence in non-verbal communication B
For the item “Do you perceive the intrusive look as being violent?”, as we can see in Table 1, 76.41% from the general sample appreciated that the intrusive look is not a manifestation of violence in non-verbal communication, the values being almost equal in the analyzed districts, excepting Bucharest and the district of Cluj where the respondents perceived to a larger extent the intrusive look as a sign of violence in non-verbal communication: 30.23% of subjects from Bucharest consider the intrusive look as a sign of violence as the 32.14% of the subjects of Cluj in contrast to the percentage of 23.59% of the general sample.

5.4.4. Difference in verbal and non-verbal violence in communication
As Tab.1 shows, the investigated subjects perceive the use of vulgar gesture and the serious insult in a similar way. 43.59% of the general sample considered the vulgar gesture being a sign of violence in communication and 56.41% thought that the serious insult had the same signification. Anyway, we can notice a difference between violence of verbal and non-verbal communication, which is more pertinent in certain districts (60.47% in Bucharest and 64% in Bihor) who perceived the serious insult as a manifestation of violence in communication.

5.4.5. a. The perception of violence in verbal communication in a familiar context
For the item “Do you perceive a manifestation of violence in communication an insult uttered by a friend during an everyday conversation?” the statistical analysis of the general samples shows that the majority of the subjects considered as non violent an insult uttered by a friend during an everyday conversation (56.41%). Much more conclusive date is those collected from Bucuresti (69.77%) and Constanta (73.33%). The only district that considered this item a manifestation of violence in communication was the district of Bihor (60%) as we can see in Tab.1.

5.4.5. b. The perception of violence in verbal communication in a familiar context
For the item “Do you perceive violence in communication comming from a close person as being more easily tolerated?” As we can see, in Tab.1, the majority of the subjects of general sample considered as being more difficult to tolerate the violence of close persons. 56.4% of the respondents of the general sample is exceeded by the majority of the district, excepting the district of Cluj (50%). The most affected district is Bihor (92%) and Brasov (75.93%).

6 The way to react in front of violence in verbal and non verbal communication
For the item “Which is your own way to react to violence in communication? (violently / by withdrawing)” the majority of the sample responded in conformity with statistical analyses by withdrawing (87.18%). This percentage was exceeded by the districts of Iasi (100%), Brasov (94.44%), Constanta (90%), Cluj(89.29%), Bihor (88%). The only district where the subjects responded with much more violence in response to perceived violence in verbal and non verbal communication was Bucuresti (30.23%) in contrast to 12.82% of the general sample (Tab. 1).
We analysed the dependencies between the following characteristics:

a) Null hypothesis (H0) states that “there is no association (connection) between the two studied characteristics”;

b) Alternative hypothesis (H1) states that “there is an association (connection) between the two studied characteristics”.

We analysed the dependencies between the following characteristics:

1. the violence in verbal communication and its response by districts;
2. excessive violence in communication in mass media and its individual response.

The $\chi^2$ test has led to the following result: in both situations, H0 was accepted, we obtained data, such as: (1) $p=0.90 > 0.05$, and (2) $p=0.38>0.05$.

8 Discussion and Conclusion

Even if our questionnaire included socio-demographic questions addressed the participants; we have not used them to make any correlation with the other items, considering it as a multistage process with a lot of aspects that will be examined and interpreted in the future. Actually, we shall carry on the process of verification of the used items regarding the perception of violence in verbal and non-verbal communication by using several statistic tests.

The major conclusions of the study are that the large part of the respondents considers that violence in communication is an issue of Romanian society. Even if the most frequent places where violence in communication occurs are the mass media and the street, it is surprising the fact that the university setting has high rate of violence in communication. The family environment appears to be the most protected one. The subjects seem to be more disturbed by the violence in communication in family environment. The mass media violence seems to be the least disturbing. The high tone, the utterance of serious insults in everyday conversations and the intrusive look do not seem to have a significant importance in perceiving violence in communication. The way in which the large part of the subjects reacts to the perceived violence in communication is the withdrawal.

References:


