

VIOLENCE AND CRIME BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

I tried during this introductory study to broadly describe the trends in crime during and post-pandemic COVID-19. I did this out of the desire to put in context the articles selected for this special issue of the Romanian Journal of Sociological Studies. In this context, the researchers and collaborators of the Romanian Observatory for the Analysis and Prevention of Homicide decided to discuss how some types of lethal and non-lethal violence evolved during the pandemic, compared to the previous period. The results of their analyzes materialized in the form of this special issue “Violence and crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic”. And because these professionals are particularly interested in analyzing certain types of lethal violence, this issue of the journal deals only with topics of lethal violence.

Keywords: domestic violence, violence against women, crimes in the European Union, crimes in Romania, the COVID-19 pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

More and more researchers are analyzing the impact of the health crisis generated by the SARS-CoV-2 virus at the level of some components of society, at the level of institutions or at the level of human behavior. Professionals interested in identifying the factors that influence the evolution of crime also approached the pandemic period, in their attempt to highlight how health crises can lead to the increase or decrease of certain types of crimes.

In this context, most studies on violence and crime have included in the analysis data on some types of violence, data from the period before the pandemic, during the pandemic and from the period after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. Just to be more precise, I think it is necessary to remember here that the COVID-19 pandemic was declared by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020

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(World Health Organization). On May 5, 2023, the director general of the World Health Organization declared that “COVID-19 is now an established and ongoing health issue which no longer constitutes a public health emergency of international concern” (World Health Organization 2023).

At the international level, studies carried out even during the pandemic drew attention to the increases recorded in the case of certain types of violence. In the first stage of the pandemic, most of these studies analyzed the evolution of crime at the level of cities and less at the level of countries or regions (Trajtenberg *et al.* 2024).

A study that analyzed the evolution of some types of violence (homicide, aggravated and gun assault, burglary, domestic violence, drug offenses, etc.) in 32 American cities highlighted the fact that some types of violence increased at the very beginning of the pandemic and, although the recorded rates decreased gradually, the rate values remained above the level recorded before the pandemic (Rosenfeld and Lopez 2021). The homicide rate is the one that experienced the most significant increases (24%) in the 2020–2021 interval, followed by aggravated assault (7%) and gun assault (22%) (Rosenfeld and Lopez 2021, 5–9).

Other studies that tried to analyze how crimes evolved during the pandemic confirmed the fact that only some types of crime varied. For example, a study carried out at the level of 45 cities from 5 continents highlighted the fact that during the COVID-19 pandemic, in total, there were decreases in robberies (28.2%), burglaries (20.4%), thefts (31.5%), vehicle thefts (18.8%), assaults (20%) and homicides (10.3%) (Trajtenberg *et al.* 2024, 5).

The analysis showed that, in the first three months of the pandemic (March–May), burglaries (25%), thefts (30%), robberies (30%), petty thefts (30%) decreased significantly (Trajtenberg *et al.* 2024, 5). On the other hand, in the cities where there were strict lockdowns, the decreases were significant in the case of robberies, burglaries and vehicle thefts, but there were no statistically significant changes on assaults, thefts and homicides (Trajtenberg *et al.* 2024, 8). However, the increases recorded for homicides were not significant (*Ibidem*). Other study conducted in Bangladesh indicates a 9.5% increase in homicides during the lockdown followed by a 3% decrease post-lockdown (Zobraj 2023, 5).

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Violence against women includes several types of violence. The most frequently analyzed forms of violence against women are: femicide, domestic violence and rape. On the other hand, domestic violence can have female victims, but also men. If there is no information on the victims, then we must appreciate that it is about all categories of victims, regardless of the gender of the victim.

Studies conducted early in the pandemic indicate that the data on domestic violence is mixed, at least for American cities. Some analyzes indicate a 4% decrease in the rate of domestic violence, other studies indicate significant increases compared to the period before the pandemic (8.1%) (Rosenfeld and Lopez 2021, 10).

A systematic review of 18 studies on domestic violence committed between January 30 – December 15, 2020 highlighted that, “domestic violence increased in response to stay-at-home/lockdown” (Piquero *et al.* 2021, 5). The analysis included studies conducted at the level of some cities and counties from the US and studies conducted at the national level (Italy, Mexico, Sweden, Australia, Argentina and India). In this context, the increase in domestic violence, per total analyzed units, was 7.86%, while the increase only for American cities was 8.1% (Piquero *et al.* 2021, 3).

While some studies do not specify, when talking about domestic violence, if it is about acts of violence against women, there are also studies that deal only with violence against women. A study carried out in Mexico highlighted the fact that, in lockdown, crimes against women decreased by 24%, domestic violence decreased by 20% and sexual crimes (rape and sexual assault) by 28% (Hoehn-Velasco *et al.* 2021, 2). Immediately after the end of the lockdown, the values recorded by all these crimes increased and reached the pre-lockdown level ((Hoehn-Velasco *et al.* 2021, 2). The same trend was also indicated by a study from Bangladesh where the rape rate decreased during the lockdown by 34.3% and increased post-lockdown (13.9%) (Zobraj 2023, 5).

The only act of violence against women that did not change during the pandemic was femicide (Hoehn-Velasco *et al.* 2021; Aebi *et al.* 2021; Hacin and Meško 2024). In Italy, although the rate of femicides during the pandemic did not experience significant variations, changes were observed between March and May 2020: the number of femicides between former intimate partners decreased and the number of femicides between current partners increased (Coco *et al.* 2024, 415). There were also countries for which increases in femicides were recorded in 2020: Croatia and Slovenia (Hacin and Meško 2024).

CRIMES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION, DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The analysis of crime data in the member countries of the European Union for the period 2019–2023 indicates that, in the first year of the pandemic, there were increases in the rate of femicide and rape, while the rate of sexual assault decreased. In the European Union, the average homicide rate did not change at the beginning of the pandemic (2019 – 0.85, 2020 – 0.85). Only in the second year of the pandemic (2021) did the average EU rate decrease (0.82) and then increase slightly in the following years (2022 – 0.90, 2023 – 0.91) (Eurostat _2 2025). Although the average rate of intentional homicide in the EU did not experience

significant changes, the intentional homicide rate increased in 15 European countries during the pandemic. If in some countries the rate increases were small in 2020 compared to 2019 (for example, Germany from 0.75 to 0.94) there were also European countries for which intentional homicide rates increased significantly more: Iceland (2019 – 0.28; 2020 – 1.37) and Estonia (2019 – 1.96; 2020 – 3.16) (Eurostat_2 2025).

The average female homicide rate calculated for EU states (femicide) increased slightly in 2020, then decreased in 2021 (0.59) and continued with increases for the following two years (0.67, 0.67) (Eurostat_2, 2025). The femicide rate increased in 2020 in 17 EU countries, with Estonia being the country with the highest increase in the homicide rate with female victims (2019 – 0.86; 2020 – 1.43)(Eurostat_1 2025).

Table 1
Crimes in the European Union countries (average rate for EU countries)

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Intentional homicide	0,85	0,85	0,82	0,90	0,91
Intentional homicide_female victim	0,61	0,63	0,59	0,67	0,67
Rape	14,95	15,82	19,29	21,45	23,52
Sexual assault	29,93	31,28	34,98	38,16	40,04

Source: Eurostat_2 2025, Intentional homicide and sexual offences by legal status and sex of the person involved, DOI:10.2908/crim_hom_soff, last update 23/04/2025 12:00.

The average rate of rape increased steadily during the pandemic, the increasing trend was maintained until the end of the pandemic and after the pandemic, so that in 2023 an average rate of rape in the EU of 23.52 was reached (Eurostat_2 2025). Increases in the rape rate were experienced by 15 European countries, the most significant increases being in Sweden (2019 – 80.85; 2020 – 86.02), France (2019 – 34.05; 2020 – 37.95), Denmark (2019 – 35.33; 2020 – 37.35) (Eurostat_1 2025).

The average rate of sexual assault committed in the EU decreased in 2020, but increased steadily in the following years (Table 1). Although the average rate for EU states decreased, there were 7 countries where the sexual assault rate increased in 2020. The biggest increases were in the rates of Sweden (2019 – 108.91; 2020 – 112) and Denmark (2019 – 48.98; 2020 – 54.87) (Eurostat_1 2025).

CRIME IN ROMANIA, DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In Romania, few studies have addressed the issue of crime during the pandemic and post-pandemic period. The analysis of the data on the crimes solved by the police, highlights a decrease in the crime rate in Romania in the first year of

the pandemic. Starting from the second year, the crime rate increased steadily in Romania (see Figure 1).

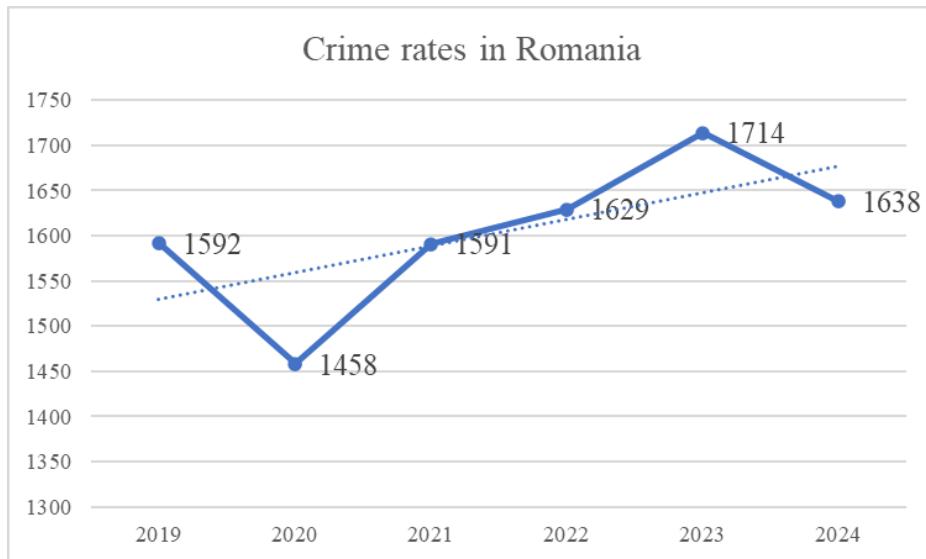


Figure 1.

Source: General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police, Department of Judicial Records, Statistics and Operational Records, Statistics of the main activities carried out by the Romanian Police in the years 2019–2024.

The total number of crimes solved by the police decreased in the first year of the pandemic, then the number of crimes increased and even surpassed pre-pandemic crime levels in subsequent years. In 2020, while murders, fatal stabbings, and robberies increased, rapes, attempted murders, and robberies decreased (Table 2).

Table 2

The evolution of crimes before, during and after the pandemic (no of offences)

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Number of offences	352810	322753	350875	357552	374829	356724
Homicide	244	251	190	171	134	150
Attempted homicide	361	335	300	299	252	232
Fatal blows	44	53	24	38	34	26
Rape	918	883	964	938	1011	626
Robbery	3470	3854	3414	3070	3235	2876
Theft	95945	87818	90525	84742	91220	76399

Sursa: Inspectoratul General al Poliției Române, Direcția Cazier Judiciar, Statistică și Evidență Operativă, Statistica principalelor activități desfășurate de Poliția Română în anii 2019–2024.

In Romania, the intentional homicide rate increased in the first year of the pandemic (2020 – 1.45), compared to the previous year (2019 – 1.26). Then, the intentional homicide rate trend decreased in each of the following years: 2021–2023 (Eurostat_2, 2025). Sexual assault Romania rate decreased in 2020 (1.65) compared to 2019 (1.81). Then the sexual assault rate increases in the next years: 2021 (2.06), 2022 (2.36) 2023 (2.92) (Eurostat_1 2025)

“VIOLENCE AND CRIMES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC” – SPECIAL ISSUE

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The study “The evolution of homicides recorded in Bucharest between 2020 and 2024 in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic” developed by Radu Gavriș analyzes the evolution of homicides in Bucharest, the capital of Romania, the largest city in the country. The analysis revealed a tendency to decrease murder and attempted murder during and post-restriction period (Gavriș 2025). The article has the merit of analyzing crime data provided by the General Inspectorate of Romanian Police and Homicide Division of Bucharest Police Directorate.

Another study using data from the Romanian Police on traffic accidents, including accidents followed by the death of the victims. Titled “An overview of Road traffic accident in Romania between 2013–2023”, the article is written by Ramona Marinache and Valentina Marinescu. The article deals, from a sociological perspective, with the problem of traffic accidents in Romania, a problem that requires great efforts in the context in which Romania has the highest mortality rate from road accidents in the European Union (Eurostat_3 2025).

Paying heed to how the media presents acts of lethal violence, the authors of the two other studies included in this special issue sought to analyze media representations of intimate partner femicide-suicides and child homicides. Thus, the study “Intimate partner femicide-suicides in Romania. Media representations of victims and aggressors” approaches in a comparative perspective the way in which Romanian journalists describe intimate partner femicide-suicides, victims and

aggressors. A special place in the structure of the article is occupied by the analysis of victim-blaming techniques used before and during the pandemic in the Romanian online media. On the other hand, Badea Andreea addresses in the article "Commodifying homicide in Romanian online media: the case of Estera" the problem of commodification of child homicide through online media.

The studies included in this special issue try to raise in the public (including academic) space the issue of the impact of the pandemic on crime. The authors draw attention to the fact that the pandemic period requires more attention from professionals interested in highlighting how the evolution of crime can be influenced by risk factors that manifest themselves at the macrosocial level, especially by global health crises (or other types of crises) or natural disasters (floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, etc.).

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