**Homicide-suicides in Romania and the role of migration**

**Abstract**

Homicide-suicides are the term for homicides followed by the suicide of the offender. This study utilized police statistics, information from the penal files and an online search of news reports to establish the prevalence of homicide-suicides in Romania. We compare characteristics of homicide-suicides among current or former Romanian emigrants and Romanians who never emigrated. The estimated homicide-suicide rate was 0.005–0.146 per 100.000 inhabitants in Romania between 2002 and 2013. Intimate partners committed significantly more homicide-suicides among emigrants than non-emigrants. Emigrant homicide-suicides also had significantly more reports of prior abuse than non-emigrant homicide-suicides. The findings of this study call for improvements in intimate partner violence prevention in Romania and among Romanian migrant communities abroad.

**Keywords**

Homicide – suicide, intimate partner homicide-suicide, Romania, emigration

**Introduction**

Homicide-suicides (HS) are the murder of one or more individuals followed by the suicide of the offender. These cases are also called ‘extended suicide’, ‘murder–suicide’ or ‘dyadic death’ and the relationship between victims and offenders is often intimate (Large et al., 2009; Liem et al., 2011). HS are a distinct phenomenon compared to homicides alone or suicides alone, which results in comparatively lower prevalence alongside a relatively higher reporting of such events by news outlets.

HS also vary in their nature and the characteristics of their victims and offenders to homicides or suicides alone. Literature reviews on HS find that the majority of HS are intimate partner HS, involving current and former intimate partners (Eliason, 2009; Panczak et al., 2013). Although Liem et al’s comparative study of HS also found that the majority of HS involve intimate partners, they also established variations between countries in the victim-offender relationship. For example, compared to homicides only, they found a relative overrepresentation of HS involving children in the Netherlands and a higher prevalence of older victims and offenders in the United States and Switzerland (Liem et al., 2011). Offenders of HS were also more likely to be male and older compared to offenders of homicides only, and there were more women and multiple victims among HS cases (Panczak et al., 2013). HS were also found to be more likely than homicides to take place in residential settings and to be committed through the use of firearms, although the latter also differs across countries (Liem et al., 2011).

Prior studies have shown that the prevalence of HS in Western European countries varies between 0.05 to 0.16 per 100.000 inhabitants. Rates in the Netherlands (1992 – 2006) and in the UK (1996 – 2005) were 0.05 per 100.000 inhabitants, while Switzerland (1980 – 2004) was 0.09 per 100.000 inhabitants and 0.163 per 100.000 inhabitants in Finland (1996 - 2006) (Flynn et al., 2009; Liem et al., 2009; Liem&Oberwittler, 2013). Few studies on HS have been conducted in South Eastern European countries, with the exception of Greece, where the HS rate was 0.07 per 100.000 inhabitants between 1998 and 2005 (Vougiouklakis & Tsiligianni, 2006). So far, HS rates have not been established for Romania.

Romania, a country of 20.1 million inhabitants, is a southeastern European country with a weaker economy and distinct history, culture and traditions. As it was part of the communist bloc, Romania has been marked by tremendous political, social and economic changes in the last 25 years in its attempt to pass from a dictatorial to a democratic regime. One of the major challenges was the growth of violent crime and homicide, with peaks between 1990 and 1995 and 2009 and 2011 (Name of Person Cited, 2012; Favarin, 2014). The analysis of official data given by the General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police (GIRP) shows that the rate of violent crime (homicide, attempted homicide, bodily injury, battery causing death, rape and robbery) has decreased step by step after 1995 as the transition towards democracy was being settled, from 36.7 per 100,000 inhabitants (1995) to 24 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2007 (Name of Person Cited, 2008, p. 176). The homicide rate in Romania, according to the GIRP and European Crime statistics also decreased since the 90’s from 3.5 per 100,000 inhabitants in 1990 to 2.5 in 2003 and 1.9 in 2007 (European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics, 1999, 2003; Name of Person cited, 2008, p. 180). Using WHO mortality statistics, Stamatel (2008, 2009) verified the decrease in the Romanian homicide victimization rate and the homicide rate after the 1989 revolution. Immediately after the revolution, the average homicide rate for 1990 to 1994 was larger (4.70) than the average homicide rate of the last five years from the communist period (3.87) and the average rate calculated for 1995 to 1999 (3.73) or 2000 to 2003 (3.60) (Stamatel, 2008, p.126).

Romania is also highly affected by migration. The rate of temporary departures for working abroad (number of departures per 1.000 inhabitants aged between 15-64) constantly grew from 3‰ (1990-1995) to 7‰ (1996-2000) to 9.4‰ (2002) and 28‰ (2005) (Sandu, 2006, p. 24). In the first period of the transition, the majority of temporary emigrants were married (1990-1995: 88%) and from urban areas (1990-1995:59%). Later (2002-2006), the proportion of young unmarried emigrants from rural areas increased to 31% and the proportion of emigrants from rural areas to 49% (Sandu, 2006, p. 31). After Romania became a member of the European Union in 2007, its labour emigration rate continued to increase.

According to Eurostat, Romanian emigration increased considerably between 2001 and 2011 from 0.3 to 2.3 million in 2011 (EUROSTAT, 2012). Temporary and circulatory emigration, going abroad for a short period of time and going abroad more than once is a unique characteristic of Romanian emigrants (Croitoru et al, 2014; Bădescu, 2013; Vives – Cases et al., 2013; Sandu et al., 2006). For example, in 2012, Romanian citizens represented the largest group of immigrants in the European Union who migrated back to their own country, as approximately 93% of the total immigrants to Romania from the EU were Romanians (EUROSTAT, 2014). Many Romanian emigrants adopt this life strategy of ‘between here and there, between the foreign country where they were working and making sacrifices and Romania where they could find their place again and where they could enjoy the material benefits accumulated through emigration’ (Vasilcu&Séchet, 2011, p. 219). While most Romanians initially emigrated to Israel, Turkey, Italy and Germany, their main destination countries in the last years were Italy and Spain (Sandu, 2006). In 2011, the official estimate of Romanian emigrants in Italy was 997.000 (Centro Studi e Ricerche, 2012), which translates to 4.95% of the population of Romania. In Spain, official statistics registered 769.608 Romanian migrants at the end of 2013 (Instituto Nacional de Estadistica, 2014), which captures 3.86% of the Romanian population.

During the period of the early 2000’s, the number of men who temporarily migrated to work abroad (1990-1995 - 88% of the total were temporary emigrations) decreased to 56% between, while the number of women who emigrated increased (Sandu, 2006, p. 31; Stănculescu et al, 2011, p.139). In 2012, women represented 60.3% of the total emigrants aged between 15 to 24 and 61.4% of the total Romanian emigrants aged between 25 to 64 (National Institute of Statistics, 2014). In some districts of Romania, Iași for example, there are communities with 70.4% of women from rural areas and 47.9% of women with children from urban areas who emigrated to provide for their families (Irimescu&Lupu, 2006, p. 5). Women’s emigration increased during the 2008 economic crisis and outnumbered those of male emigrants, as sectors that predominantly employed male migrants suffered from the recession. Female Romanian migrants were mainly employed in the child care, elderly nursing and cleaning sector (Stănculescu et al, 2011, p. 139).

Studies on the effect of migration on changes in roles and relationships inside the families who remained in the country of origin highlighted its connections with the dissolution of families, the increase in the number of divorces (Sadiqi&Ennaji, 2004), violence against women, and alcoholism and depression of the partners who remained at home (El Jack, 2003; Bojorquez et al, 2009). Romanian studies on the issue found that migration challenges existing gender norms (Anghel&Horváth, 2009). By becoming the main breadwinner through emigration, women strengthened their position in the household and relationship (Irimescu & Lupu, 2006). Their partners often perceived this as a challenge to their masculinity and prescribed gender role. In addition, long absences from home increased male fears of infidelity (Girigan, 2011; Anghel&Horváth, 2009, p. 400; Vlase, 2011; Lupu, pp. 49-51; Torre, 2013). Violence and infidelity were identified as the main sources of Romanian marital conflict, particularly within relationships involving children (Toth&Toth, 2006, p. 68; Anghel&Horváth, 2009, p. 400).

Despite the known associations between domestic violence and claims of infidelity and fatal intimate partner violence (Campbell et al, 2003), and the association between immigration and domestic violence (Vives-Cases et al, 2008, 2013), little is known about the influence of migration on HS committed in Europe. A study from Spain found that immigrants are more affected by intimate partner homicides than the general population (Vives-Cases et al., 2008). Other studies reported that immigrants are more frequently victims and not offenders of homicide (Hiatt, 2007). In Italy, for example, the number of immigrant homicide victims is three times higher than the number of Italian homicide victims (Barbagli&Colombo, 2009). In Germany, the majority of homicides is intra-ethnic and is committed among immigrant communities (Albrecht, 1997). However, none of these studies focuses on emigrant populations who leave their country of origin for a period of work abroad.

By focusing on HS in Romania, this study seeks to characterize HS in Romania and to contribute to the limited knowledge on the effect of emigration on HS. The study explores the patterns, victim-offender relationships, and factors associated with HS among current or former emigrants and non-emigrant Romanians between 2002 and 2013.

**Method**

*Data source*

In Romania, there is no standardized reporting system of HS, as no special classification of HS exists in the Romanian police reporting system on homicide. This study therefore uses a triangulation of data consisting of available data from police files, information from penal files stored by the Parquet of Bucharest, and data collected via online searches of newspapers and internet outlets.

The online search used the Google search engine with the keywords: ‘he/she killed and then killed himself/herself’, ‘he killed his wife and then killed himself’, ‘she killed her husband and then killed herself’, ‘he killed his girlfriend and then killed himself’, ‘he killed his children and then killed himself’. The term HS itself was not used as it does not exist in Romanian. Identifying case descriptions, for example, names, places, nature of the HS of identified cases were used to search for more information on the case through other newspaper reports or online news. In case the news report mentioned other HS cases, these were followed up. The search strategy was developed with the assistance of a Romanian communication specialist, who advised on using Google Chrome over online newspaper archives, as these are often incomplete or not available on Google Chrome anyway. “Google search” has also been successfully applied in previous studies, for example in examining how doctors use the Internet in settling diagnoses (Tang&Ng, 2006), to analyze information about self-injury (Lewis et al, 2014), to investigate the modus operandi of criminal organization (Coscia&Rios, 2012) and to find out how the online press presents suicide cases (Auxéméry&Fidelle, 2010; Westerlund et al, 2012).

Through the Google search method, local, regional, national and international newspaper reports, TV sites, blogs and news sites were identified, with a focus on articles written in Romanian. English, Spanish and Italian online searches were used to identify and find out more about a case committed abroad. For this study, HS was defined as a murder followed by the offender’s suicide within several hours to one week (Liem et al., 2009). Cases with attempted homicides or attempted suicides were excluded from the analysis. Cases were included if the offender or a victim was a Romanian citizen and occurred between 2002 and 2013. HS were categorized as involving emigrant Romanians if either the victim or the offender lived or worked abroad for some time, regardless of whether they had already returned to Romania. No time specifications were made regarding the time spent abroad or time since return, as prior studies have shown that many Romanians decide to migrate abroad for a short period of time to return to Romania after they generated sufficient income (Potot, 2009; Sandu, 2006).

Data abstracted from the online search included information on the nature of the HS, where HS occurred, the victim-offender relationship, the offender and victim socio-demographic characteristics, their relationship characteristics and the perceived HS motives. Newspaper online searches are of course limited in their ability to estimate the prevalence of HS, as it is unknown if all HS cases were considered newsworthy and therefore reported on. The online search might also not have been able to pick up cases reported in languages not included in the search or cases occurring in the earlier years of the period under investigations, as they might have been deleted from the online archives. In addition, the quality of online and newspaper reports on HS highly depends on the reporting skills of journalists and what information they consider important. Analyses of the context of the HS and the socio-demographic characteristics of the victim and offender are therefore limited to information that has been reported on. This might differ from reality, especially regarding the information on alcohol or drug consumption or pre-existing violence. Still, the information from the online newspapers can be considered reliable as in most cases Romanian journalists use official institutions from the penal system as primary informants (Name of person cited, Forthcoming).

To minimize the biases introduced by the limitations of using only online newspaper reports, this study also used data from the homicide archives from the Criminal Investigations Department of the General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police to estimate the prevalence of HS in Romania. The police data, which only included information on the victim’s and offenders’ name, their age, relationship and occupation and the HS modus operandi was used to identify additional cases of HS not picked up in the online search and to complete information on insufficiently described cases. For a limited number of cases, penal files could also be located via the Parquet of the Bucharest Court. This allowed an abstraction of more detailed information on the nature of the HS cases, offender’s and victims’ characteristics and other socio-economic characteristics, for example, history of previous abuse, modus operandi or health. The 15 case files in the Parquet of the Bucharest Court were all found in the online and police data search and their information was merged. Case files could not be investigated for every court, as the distribution of cases across the country was large and difficult to identify in archives. The shortcomings of the reporting system of the police and Parquet data are that they do not have a special classification system for HS, which makes it difficult to identify them and that the information in the police system is quite limited as the penal files are sent to the Parquet’s archives upon the closing of the case, which are difficult to access.

*Data analysis*

A total of 169 cases identified from all data sources were used to estimate the rate of HS per 100.000 inhabitants in Romania from 2002 to 2013. 83 cases were identified by the online search, 154 cases in the police data and 15 cases in the parquet data. After all information was merged, we found 169 cases based on at least one source.

Only 83 cases were used to discuss the role of emigration because we have two sources for them and we can be sure that there were not attempted HS and non-HS. From 83 cases identified by online search 53 were also listed in the police data and 15 in the police and Bucharest Parquet data. 15 cases were therefore only found in the online media but not in the police records. They were still included in the analysis as the newspaper reporting on those cases was rich and because they based their information on police or Parquet information. Table 1 displays that journalists quoted the police as primary informants for their articles in 76 cases of HS (51 cases of non-emigrants and 25 cases of emigrants) and the Parquet in 8 cases of HS between emigrants and 33 cases of HS between non-emigrants.

Table 1 here

Only two HS were committed by Romanian emigrants who emigrated and became residents in another country a long time ago. One of them was a familicide-suicide committed by a Romanian emigrant who had lived in Switzerland for 30 years and one familicide-suicide in a family of emigrants in which the offender had been settled in USA for 10 years. They were excluded from the calculation of the HS rate as they were not residents in Romania anymore. The estimated rate presented in this analysis is therefore likely to be an underestimation due to the above-mentioned limitations of the data sources.

Information on the nature of the HS and the characteristics of the offenders and victims were based on the rich information of the 83 cases identified via the online search, which were supplemented by the police and penal file data. This information is presented in total and separately for the 25 cases in which at least the victim or the offender emigrated in the past years to find a job and for the 58 cases where no information exists that indicated that one of them has emigrated. Differences between emigrant and non-emigrant HS were assessed for statistical significance using Fisher Exact Tests. The data was analyzed using SPSS Version 22.

**Results**

*Prevalence of HS in Romania from 2002-2013*

Between 2002 and 2013, at 83 HS cases were reported, with 78 women and 23 men being killed. The HS rate found in this study varied between 0.005 – 0.146 per 100.000 inhabitants in Romania during this time. As displayed in Table 2, there is a visible increase in the numbers and rates of HS after 2007, the same year that marked the worldwide economic crisis. The average annual rate for HS between 2002 and 2013 was 0.07 per 100.000 inhabitants, with 0.02 average rate for 2002-2006 and 0.11 average annual rate for 2007-2013.

(Table 2 here)

Of the 83 cases analyzed in detail, 30% (25 cases) involved Romanians who were current or former emigrants. Out of them, both the victim and the offender had emigrated to Italy (8 cases), Spain (2 cases), Greece (2 cases), USA (2 cases), Canada, Switzerland, and UK (1 case each). In six cases, three to Italy, two to Spain, and one the UK, only the victim had emigrated. In two cases, one to Italy and one to Austria only the offender had emigrated.

*Types of homicide-suicides*

The majority of the 83 Romanian HS cases analyzed in this study were committed within the family, with 69% being intimate partner HS, followed by filicide-suicide cases (13%), familicide-suicide (8%), parricide-suicide (5%), kinicide-suicide (2%) and non-family HS (2%). See Table 3 for details. Intimate partner HS were significantly more frequent among HS involving emigrants than among the non-emigrant sample (p<0.04), while familicide-suicides and parricide-suicides only occurred among non-emigrant HS.

(Table 3 here)

*Places where the HS occurred*

The majority of HS cases in this study occurred in Romania (n=70, 84%), with 13 cases occurring in the destination country of Romanian emigrants, including Italy (7 cases), Spain (2 cases), USA (2 cases), Switzerland (1 case), and Greece (1 case). HS involving Romanian emigrants therefore took place in Romania (12 cases) as well as in the countries they emigrated to. Five HS cases of Romanian emigrants occurring in Romania happened within a month after their return to Romania, with three cases happening within the first two days, one within a week and one after a month after return.

More than half (61%) of all HS in this study took place in an urban area, with HS among non-emigrant Romanians being distributed almost equally between the urban (32 cases, 55%) and rural areas (26 cases, 45%). Within the emigrant HS subgroup, 80% (20 cases) of cases happened in an urban environment.

*Offender and victim characteristics*

The majority of HS offenders in this study were male. Offenders perpetrating HS involving emigrants were all male. The majority of HS offenders were 25 to 64 years old, with a higher percentage of HS offenders involving emigrants being 25 to 39 years old (56%) and a higher percentage of HS offenders involving non-emigrants being 40 to 64 years old (45%).

Information on the offenders’ level of education and occupational status was missing for 77% and 41% of offenders respectively. Of all offenders with known information, 74% had a university degree. Both of the two offenders of HS involving emigrants for whom this information was reported had a university degree, compared to 74% (14) of offenders with a non-emigrant background.

18% of all HS offenders in this study for whom this information was reported had a higher occupational status, with four offenders being businesspersons, one being a manager, and four being engineers, teachers, journalists or priests. The remaining HS offenders included police officers and security agents (n=10) and workers (n=29). Among HS offenders involving emigrants, only two offenders had a high occupational status, including a businessman and a manager, the rest of the offenders were workers (7 cases), pensioners (2 cases) or unemployed (4 cases). For ten HS offenders the online search reported a history of mental health disorder, most often depression. In addition 18 had a reported history of alcohol abuse.

(Table 4 here)

The majority of HS in this study had only one victim (78%), with the majority of victims being female (74%). Among HS involving emigrants, the percentage of female victims was higher with 84% compared to HS not involving emigrants (70%). The majority of HS victims were aged 25 to 64, with the majority of victims in the HS involving emigrants being aged 25 to 39 (44%). Victims of non-emigrant HS cases did not display a clear age pattern. Of those with available educational (23%) and occupational status information (48%), 42% of all HS victims had a university degree and 14% had a superior occupational status. The distribution was similar for victims of emigrant and non-emigrant HS. For further details on victim and offender characteristics, see Table 4. There were no significant differences between emigrant and non-emigrant HS in terms of victim-offender characteristics. *Victim-offender relationship characteristics*

As 22% of HS involved multiple victims, the type of HS and the victim-offender relationship differed slightly, although they follow the same pattern. In this study, intimate partners committed 69% of investigated HS, among HS involving emigrants, 84% were committed by intimate partners and among HS involving non-emigrants 62% were committed by intimate partners. In 13% of all HS in this study, a parent murdered their child or children. This occurred in 12% of HS involving emigrants and in 14% of HS not involving emigrants. Children who murdered their parents represent five percent of the total HS and occurred only among non-emigrants as did parricide-suicides and familicide-suicides in this study. The latter two were often closely linked to intimate partner HS.

*Intimate partner HS*

Among all intimate partner HS, current intimate partners were the main perpetrators with 69% (46 cases). Among non-emigrants, current partners committed 81% (29 cases) of the intimate partner HS, former partners committed 8% (three cases) and in 11% (four cases) the couple was in the process of separation. Among the HS involving emigrants, intimate partners were current partners in 13 cases (62%) and former partners in eight cases (38%). Among those with former partners, three (20%) were in the process of a divorce, seven (47%) had been separated for less than one month, two (13%) for less than four months and two (13%) for more than four months. In the majority of cases (93%, n=14) the victim had ended the relationship.

Of the 10 HS among intimate partners for which information on the relationship duration was available, the relationships lasted between one to five years (4 cases), 11 to 12 years (2 cases) and over 20 years (4 cases). For the 20 cases where the motives are known, news reports mentioned that they were triggered by the victims' desire to end the relationship (60%, 12 cases) and jealousy and suspicions of unfaithfulness voiced by the offender (50%, 10 cases). In one of these cases, the woman had worked abroad to pay for their child's surgery. During her visit in Romania her partner killed her when she wanted to leave again as he suspected her of infidelity. In the three cases of parental filicide among HS involving emigrants, the father murdered the children to punish his wife for wanting to end their relationship or refusing to come back to Romania. For the 33 cases of intimate partner HS involving non-emigrants for whom motives were reported, the main motives were also jealousy (42%, n=14), the victim’s desire to end the relationship (39%, n=13) and suspicions of unfaithfulness (15%, n=5). In three cases news reports mentioned financial difficulties (two cases among emigrant HS) and mental illness (one case among emigrant HS) as motives.

Intimate partner HS involving emigrants were more likely to have prior abuse reported (p-value: 0.047) than HS among non-emigrants. Out of the 36 intimate partner HS among non-emigrants, seven cases (19%) had a reported history of physical violence prior to the homicide, 10 cases (28%) had reports of verbal abuse, including death threats (4 cases) against the victims or relatives supporting the victim. Among HS cases involving emigrants, prior intimate partner violence was reported for half (n=12.48%) of the cases, with five cases reporting a history of physical abuse, six cases a history of verbal violence, two cases reported prior death threats and in one case the perpetrator threatened to commit of suicide before the HS. In two cases the partner received a restraining order and in one case the police had intervened a month before the HS as the offender had physically attacked the victim.

**Discussion**

To the knowledge of the authors, this is the first study investigating the prevalence of HS in Romania, and one of the first that compared the characteristics of HS cases involving emigrants and non-emigrants. This study established that the HS rate among Romanians ranged from 0.005 to 0.146 per 100.000 between 2002 and 2013, with an average annual rate of 0.07 per 100.000 inhabitants. A sharp increase in the HS rate was found since 2007, when the average annual rate between 2007 and 2013 was 0.11 per 100.000 per inhabitants. The most likely explanation is the economic crisis, starting in 2007, which led to unemployment, income reductions, and loss of mortgaged assets across Europe. The economic crisis may have also exacerbated challenges related to economic migration. Approximately a third of HS cases identified in this study occurred among Romanians who had emigrated to Europe or the USA. Emigration of Romanians increased rapidly between 2001 and 2007, after Romania became a member of the European Union, with the majority of Romanians migrating to Italy, Spain, France and Germany (Abraham et al., 2008; Instituto Nacional de Estadistica, 2014; Instituto Nazionale di Statistica, 2013; Vives-Cases et al., 2013). The peak of Romanian emigration occurred at the same time as the economic crisis in destination countries. It is therefore possible that the economic aspirations of Romanian migrants were frustrated (Abraham et al., 2008; Potot, 2009; Sandu, 2006; Vives-Cases et al., 2013), especially since a third of Romanian emigrants had incomes at the limit of subsistence in Romania when they decided to emigrate, and a comparatively low level of education and occupational training (Abraham et al., 2008; Sandu, 2006). In addition, most emigrants migrated for a short term and preferred to travel back and forth between Romania and different countries of employment, forms of emigration specific to Romanians (Croitoru et al, 2014). These forms of emigration are known to carry several disadvantages for the emigrant, such as family fragmentation, social isolation due to linguistic barriers feelings of alienation from both countries, and the employers' lack of interest for the professional formation of temporary emigrants (Triandafyllidou et al, 2011, p. 5; European Migration Network, 2011, p. 12). In the Romanian case, where most emigrants are women and mothers, emigration also was an important personal hardship, as they had to leave their families for short and repeated periods of time (Triandafyllidou et all, 2011, p. 5). Interestingly, the perpetrators of HS among emigrants in this study were all male, despite the fact that Romanian women emigrate more often in the last years (Institutul National de Statistică/National Institute of Statistics, 2007; Instituto Nazionale di Statistica, 2013). Women seemed to be victims regardless of the fact whether they emigrated or not.

Several other interesting factors emerged that characterized Romanian HS. Despite the majority of Romanian emigrants coming from rural areas (Institutul National de Statistică/ National Institute of Statistics, 2014), 60.2% of HS and nearly all HS involving emigrants took place in urban areas between 2002 and 2013. The five cases of HS involving emigrants in this study that occurred in the rural area happened in fairly traditional, religious, culturally isolated villages with limited experience with emigration and higher levels of suicide compared to the rest of the country (Institutul de Medicină Legală 'Mina Minovici'/’Mina Minovici’National Institute of Forensic Medicine, 2014; Sandu, 2006). The dominance of knives as the main modus operandi in HS in Romania compared to firearms can be explained by existing gun laws in Romania. In Romania, only sportsmen, hunters, policemen, military people, security agents and citizens who fulfill the legal conditions of receiving the license of carrying a weapon have the right to possess a specific type of firearms (Legea 295/2004 regimul armelor şi muniţiilor/ Law 295/2004 weapons and munitions regime).

The finding that the majority of HS cases in Romania involved male offenders killing their female intimate partner because of jealousy, pending separation and the male partners controlling behavior are in line with the international literature on HS, especially the claim that perpetrators are more likely to commit suicide after they murdered someone who is close to them (Barber et al., 2008; Eliason, 2009; Harper&Voigt, 2007; Liem&Oberwittler, 2012; Marzuk et al., 1992; Panczak et al., 2013; Roma et al., 2012; Stack, 1997). The main difference between HS involving emigrant and non-emigrant Romanians was the significantly higher prevalence of intimate partner HS among emigrants, which in turn explain differences in victim-offender characteristics. The latter were not significant in most cases, probably due to small numbers, however the observed trends align with the international literature (Barber et al., 2008; Eliason, 2009; Harper&Voigt, 2007; Liem&Oberwittler, 2012; Marzuk et al., 1992; Panczak et al., 2013; Roma et al., 2012; Stack, 1997). Strikingly, offenders of HS involving emigrants consisted solely of men and a majority murdered their intimate partner.

Another interesting aspect was the victim’s age. In line with European research, victims of HS not involving emigrants were mainly aged 40 to 64. This suggests that the risk of HS increases with the relationship duration in the case of intimate partner HS (Liem&Oberwittler, 2012). Victims of HS involving emigrants were mainly aged 25 to 39, which is likely to be related to most emigrants being young and in less stable relationships. Offenders of HS involving emigrants were also more likely to have a low educational and occupational level in Romania, which only gives them access to poorly paid and under-qualified jobs abroad (Abraham et al., 2008; Vasilcu&Séchet, 2011). Low economic prospects, mixed with the necessity of many emigrants to leave their children and sometimes partners behind might increase the relationship tensions that can trigger HS, as relationships are often limited to telephone contacts, packages and money sent or holiday visits. Furthermore, studies have shown that emigrant women face higher financial, legal and social risks than non-emigrant women, which makes them less likely to leave abusive relationships (Amanor-Boadu et al., 2012). Stress is also created by negative perceptions of Romanian emigrants, linguistic barriers and social isolation during emigration (Antonopoulos et al., 2008; Cecchi, 2011; Menjívar&Salcido, 2002; Moroșanu, 2007). All these aspects make Romanian female emigrants more vulnerable than non-emigrant women to experiences of domestic violence (Amanor-Boadu et al., 2012; Ilie, 2014; Mastrobuoni&Pinotti, 2014; Vicol&Allen, 2014).

The findings of this study have to be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the utilization of an online search, which was due to the absence of a clear reporting on HS in police statistics, may present an incomplete picture. Studies based on newspaper reports on HS and homicides in general suffer from the probability that not all homicides or HS are reported in the news. Even if they are, it remains unknown if the online search allocated all news items on HS. This is especially the case regarding HS cases involving emigrants, as they could only be picked up if they were reported in a Romanian news outlet or in a language included in this study. The quality of reporting on HS cases in news items also depends on the investigation and reporting skill of the journalist. Not only did this strongly influence the inclusion of the HS case into the emigrant or not emigrant category. It also impacted the amount of information on other characteristics this study investigated, such as motives, victim-offender relationship, and mental health disorders and alcohol abuse of the offender. It remains unknown whether those categorized as non-emigrants have indeed not emigrated in the past and it has just not been reported. To overcome these limitations, this study has also accessed police files and case files from the Parquet to supplement the information obtained from the online search. Another important limitation of this study is the small sample size of emigrant HS, which may have influenced the lack of statistical significance when comparing characteristics of emigrant to non-emigrant HS. Future research needs to be expanded to a larger sample of emigrants to investigate the risk factors specific to this group.

Despite these limitations, this study provides an important contribution to the HS research in Europe. It highlights that Romanian HS rates might be similar to those in Western European countries, that HS offenders and victims show similar characteristics as in previous studies, and that HS occur primarily among intimate partners. The study also emphasized the need to investigate HS involving emigrants separately, as some of the risk factors are more pronounced among them. Ultimately, research is needed on the prevention of HS and probably homicides in general among this group through the further development of tools such as the Danger Assessment for Immigrant Women (DA-I) (Messing et al., 2013). This study also emphasizes the necessity to develop a prevention strategy for domestic violence, both within Romania and for Romanian emigrants, as HS among Romanian emigrants happen not only in Romania but also abroad. This includes, but should not be limited to informing Romanian emigrants about the support systems available in their host country in cases of domestic violence and targeted prevention interventions in countries with large Romanian communities.

**Funding**

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Table 1: Official institutions journalists based the information of the newspaper reports included in this study on (N=83 cases)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Institutions that were sources for journalists | HS between Romanian emigrants  (number of cases) | HS non-emigrants  (number of cases) |
| Police (spokespersons, official press releases, representatives of some police units) | 25 | 51 |
| Parquet (the case prosecutor, the spokesperson, representatives of Parquet) | 8 | 33 |
| The National Institute of Forensic Medicine (coroners, spokesperson) | 2 | 4 |
| SMURD (teams of interventions for emergency situations – doctors, firemen) | 1 | 3 |
| Other institutions (Hospitals, City Halls, The Direction of Social Assistance, The Direction for Child Protection etc) | 2 | 18 |

Table 2: HS trends between 2002 and 2013

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Year | Total number of HS | Rate HS |
| 2002 | 3 | 0.014 |
| 2003 | 3 | 0.014 |
| 2004 | 1 | 0.005 |
| 2005 | 10 | 0.046 |
| 2006 | 5 | 0.023 |
| 2007 | 12 | 0.056 |
| 2008 | 17 | 0.079 |
| 2009 | 25 | 0.116 |
| 2010 | 14 | 0.065 |
| 2011 | 22 | 0.103 |
| 2012 | 26 | 0.122 |
| 2013 | 31 | 0.146 |

Table 3: Distribution of cases according to the type of homicide-suicide

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Type of Homicide-Suicide** | **Total** | **Emigrants** | **Non-migrants** |
| **Intimate partner homicide-suicide**  (murder of spouses, former spouses, concubines, former concubines, lovers or former lovers) | 57 (68.7%) | 21 (84%) | 36 (62%) |
| **Filicide –suicide**  (murder of daughter or son) | 11 (13.3%) | 3 (12%) | 8 (13.8%) |
| **Familicide-suicide** (murder of the whole family) | 7 (8.4%) | - | 7 (12%) |
| **Parricide –suicide**  (Murder of mother or father) | 4 (4.8%) | - | 4 (6.9%) |
| **Kinicide – suicide**  (murder of extended family members such as cousins, brother and sister or grandparents) | 2 (2.4%) | 1 (4%) | 1 (1.8%) |
| **Non-family homicide-suicides**  (murder of friend, colleague or acquaintance) | 2 (2.4%) | - | 2 (3.6%) |
| **Total** | **83** | **25** | **58** |

Table 4: Offender and victims’ characteristics

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Offender characteristics** | |  | **Victim characteristics** | |  |
|  | **Total** | **Emigrants** | **Non-migrants** | **Total** | **Emigrants** | **Non-migrants** |
| One victim |  |  |  | 65 (78.3) | 17 (68) | 48 (82.7) |
| Multiple victims |  |  |  | 18 (21.6) | 8 (32) | 10 (17.3) |
| Gender |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Male | 78 (93.9) | 25 (100) | 53 (91.4) | 23 (21.9) | 5 (15.6) | 18 (24.7) |
| Female | 5 (6.1) | - | 5 (8.6) | 78 (74.3) | 27 (84.4) | 51 (69.8) |
| Not mentioned |  |  |  | 4 (3.8) | - | 4 (5.5) |
| Age |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| ≤17 |  |  |  | 18 (17.1) | 4 (12.5) | 14 (19.2) |
| 18-24 | 4 (4.8) | 1 (4) | 3 (5.1) | 5 (4.7) | 2 (6.3) | 3 (4.1) |
| 25-39 | 36 (43.5) | 14 (56) | 22 (37.9) | 31 (29.5) | 14 (43.8) | 17 (23.3) |
| 40-64 | 37 (44.5) | 8 (32) | 29 (50) | 26 (24.7) | 6 (18.7) | 20 (27.4) |
| 65+ | 3 (3.7) | 1 (4) | 2 (3.5) | 2 (1.9) | - | 2 (2.7) |
| Age not mentioned | 3 (3.7) | 1 (4) | 2 (3.5) | 23 (21.9) | 6 (18.7) | 17 (23.3 |
| Occupational status |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Higher | 9 (10.8) | 2 (8) | 7 (12.1) | 7 (6.7) | 2 (6.3) | 6 (8.2) |
| Lower | 40 (48.3) | 15 (60) | 25 (43.1) | 43 (40.9) | 16 (50) | 26 (35.5) |
| Not mentioned | 34(40.9) | 8 (32) | 26 (44.8) | 55 (52.4) | 14 (43.7) | 41 (56.3) |
| Education |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| University | 14 (16.8) | 2 (8) | 12 (20.6) | 10 (9.5) | 3 (9.4) | 7 (9.6) |
| Not university | 5 (6.1) | - | 5 (8.7) | 14 (13.3) | 5 (15.6 | 9 (12.4) |
| Not mentioned | 64 (77.1) | 23 (92) | 41 (70.7) | 81(77.2) | 24 (75) | 57 (78) |
| Mental health disorder | 10 (12.1) | 2 (8) | 7 (12.1) | - | - | - |
| Alcohol abuse | 18 (21.6) | 4 (16) | 14 (24.1) | - | - | - |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Total** | **83** | **25** | **58** | **105** | **32** | **73** |