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The Mediatisation of Femicide and Intimate Partner Violence in Romania: Media Exposure, Perceived Safety, and Relationship-Specific Psychological Vulnerability Among Women

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Abstract: *Femicide and intimate partner violence (IPV) represent important public health, social, and human rights concerns. Beyond their direct consequences for victims, media coverage of severe gender-based violence may also be associated with broader perceptions of personal safety among women. This study examined the associations between exposure to media coverage of femicide, perceived personal safety, levels of reported interpersonal abuse experiences, and current relationship-specific psychological vulnerability among women in Romania. A quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional study was conducted with 98 women aged 19–65 years who completed an online questionnaire in Romanian or Hungarian. Measures included an adapted Media Exposure Scale (MES), the Personal Safety Perception Scale (PSPS-26), an Abuse Experience Scale (AES), and a Partner Vulnerability Scale (PVS) administered to currently partnered participants (n = 71). Simple linear regression indicated a significant negative association between media exposure and perceived safety, with media exposure accounting for 53.1% of the variance in perceived safety, $F(1, 96) = 108.79$, $p < .001$, $\beta = -.729$. A corresponding Pearson correlation was also statistically significant, $r(96) = -.729$, $p < .001$. Group comparisons showed no significant difference in perceived safety between participants with lower and higher levels of reported interpersonal abuse experiences, $t(96) = 1.05$, $p = .298$, $d = .210$. In contrast, currently partnered participants with higher levels of reported abuse experiences reported significantly greater relationship-specific psychological vulnerability than those with lower levels of reported abuse experiences, Welch's $t(39.72) = -4.21$, $p < .001$, $d = .954$. The association between relationship-specific vulnerability and generalized perceived safety was small and not statistically significant, $r\square(69) = -.077$, $p = .520$. The findings are consistent with theoretical perspectives on heuristic processing of risk, including the availability and affect heuristics, but the cross-sectional design does not permit causal conclusions. The results highlight the importance of distinguishing generalized perceptions of safety from relationship-specific vulnerability and support further investigation of how media exposure and contextual experiences of interpersonal violence relate to women's perceptions of safety.*

Keywords: *femicide; intimate partner violence; media exposure; perceived safety; psychological vulnerability; women; Romania; availability heuristic.*

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1. Introduction

Femicide and intimate partner violence (IPV) constitute significant social, public health, and human rights concerns. Femicide is generally understood as the gender-related killing of women and is frequently situated within broader patterns of violence against women, including violence perpetrated by current or former intimate partners. IPV may involve physical, sexual, psychological, and economic forms of abuse and may have consequences that extend beyond immediate physical harm, affecting women's psychological well-being, perceptions of safety, and their ability to evaluate risks within intimate relationships (Al-Modallal, 2016). Although objective indicators of victimisation and crime are important for understanding violence, subjective perceptions of safety constitute a distinct dimension that may shape how individuals interpret their environment and respond to information about violence.

In Romania, violence against women and intimate partner violence remain significant social concerns (Parliament of Romania, Senate, 2025). Recent official data indicate a substantial demand for support related to domestic violence and gender-based violence, with the national helpline receiving 5,437 calls in the first half of 2026, approximately 40% more than during the same period in 2025 (ANES, 2026). Femicide has also received increasing public and media attention in Romania. Recent research has documented the representation of intimate partner femicide-suicides in Romanian online media, highlighting the continued visibility of such cases in news reporting (Balica et al., 2025). More broadly, recent reporting on the Romanian media environment has noted that journalistic coverage and public campaigns concerning gender-based violence have contributed to increased public engagement with femicide and related policy debates (Trandafir, 2025; Reuters Institute, 2026). However, the way such cases are presented to the public does not necessarily reflect the underlying epidemiological or criminological distribution of risk. Media reports frequently emphasise individual cases, particularly when they involve highly violent circumstances, unusual details, or emotionally salient narratives. Such coverage can increase the visibility of violence against women and contribute to public awareness, but it may also influence how audiences perceive the prevalence and personal relevance of violent crime. Consequently, examining women's exposure to media coverage of femicide and its association with perceived safety may provide an additional perspective on the psychological implications of the mediatization of violence.

The concept of mediatisation is particularly relevant because contemporary perceptions of social reality are shaped not only by direct experience but also by repeated exposure to information transmitted through traditional and digital media. Contemporary communication environments can shape social perceptions through processes of social influence, persuasion, and news framing (Calderaro et al., 2025a).News coverage of violent crime is often episodic and case-oriented, with individual incidents receiving substantially greater attention than less visible forms of everyday violence (Correa-Chica et al., 2024). The repeated availability of emotionally salient examples may affect judgements of frequency, probability, and personal vulnerability. From the perspective of cognitive heuristic theories, individuals may rely on readily accessible examples when making judgements under conditions of uncertainty. The availability heuristic proposes that events that are particularly memorable or easily recalled may appear more frequent or more probable than they objectively are (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). Similarly, affective responses can influence judgements of risk and perceived threat, with emotionally charged information potentially contributing to heightened perceptions of danger (Slovic et al., 2004). These theoretical perspectives provide a possible framework for interpreting associations between exposure to highly salient violence-related media content and subjective safety. However, the present study does not directly measure cognitive heuristics and therefore does not test them as mediating or explanatory mechanisms.

Perceived personal safety is an important construct in this context because subjective safety does not necessarily correspond directly to objective risk. Crime exposure has also been associated

with broader consequences for mental well-being, suggesting that perceptions and experiences of crime may extend beyond immediate assessments of physical safety (Cornaglia et al., 2014). Two individuals exposed to similar information about violent crime may evaluate their personal vulnerability differently depending on previous experiences, social context, psychological characteristics, and perceptions of control (Dichter & Gelles, 2012). Media exposure may therefore be considered one factor associated with perceptions of safety rather than a direct determinant of those perceptions (Dubey et al., 2025; Keel et al., 2025; Pachur et al., 2012). Previous research on fear of crime and media consumption has similarly indicated that media representations of crime may be related to perceptions of risk and safety, although the direction and strength of these relationships may vary according to the type of media, the characteristics of the audience, and the social context in which information is received (Andersen et al., 2024).

An additional factor warranting consideration is prior experience of interpersonal abuse. Women who have experienced interpersonal violence may interpret information about femicide and IPV within a different personal context from women without such experiences (Gonzalez-Mendez & Hamby, 2021). Previous victimisation may be associated with heightened awareness of relationship-related risks and may influence evaluations of safety in both general and intimate-partner contexts (Baker et al., 2021; Girard et al., 2024; Iverson et al., 2013)). At the same time, previous victimisation should not be assumed to produce uniform psychological responses. Women's perceptions may be shaped by the characteristics of the previous experience, the time elapsed since victimisation, current social support, relationship circumstances, coping resources, and other individual and contextual factors. Accordingly, comparing women with higher and lower levels of reported interpersonal abuse experience may help identify whether generalised safety perceptions and current relationship-specific vulnerability differ between these groups.

This distinction is particularly relevant when considering psychological vulnerability within intimate relationships. Generalised perceived safety concerns the individual's broader perception of personal security across different contexts, whereas relationship-specific psychological vulnerability concerns experiences and perceptions within the current intimate relationship. These constructs may overlap conceptually but should not be presumed to represent the same psychological dimension (Serban, 2023). Research on violent offending has also highlighted the relevance of maladaptive cognitive schemas, including mistrust/abuse, emotional inhibition, and insufficient self-control, in understanding psychological characteristics associated with violent behaviour (Siserman et al., 2022). A woman may report relatively high levels of general perceived safety while simultaneously experiencing vulnerability within an intimate relationship, or may perceive the broader environment as unsafe without reporting comparable vulnerability in her current relationship. Recent research on emotional abuse further highlights the complex links between adverse interpersonal experiences, psychological distress, and vulnerability, supporting the importance of considering psychological responses within their broader psychosocial context (Vîșcu et al., 2025). Examining the relationship between these dimensions can therefore contribute to a more differentiated understanding of women's perceptions of violence and safety.

Despite increasing attention to the mediatization of violence against women, relatively limited research has examined the relationship between exposure to media coverage of femicide and perceived personal safety among women in the Romanian context while simultaneously considering reported levels of interpersonal abuse experience and current relationship-specific psychological vulnerability. Previous Romanian research has primarily examined how femicide and intimate partner femicide are represented in online and mainstream media, including the framing of victims and perpetrators, episodic reporting, and victim-blaming practices (Balica, 2021; Balica et al., 2022; Balica et al., 2025; Rovența-Frumușani & Stoica, 2023). Recent Romanian research has continued to focus largely on media representations of femicide and intimate partner femicide rather than on women's psychological responses to exposure to such coverage (Balica et al., 2025).Previous research has also examined how exposure to femicide news may relate to responses to intimate partner violence, including help-seeking behaviour (Colagrossi et al., 2023) Existing approaches

therefore leave less attention to the possible relationship between media exposure, generalised safety perceptions, and vulnerability within intimate relationships. Relationship-specific vulnerability may be particularly relevant in the context of intimate relationships characterised by coercive control, threats, social isolation, and other dysfunctional relational dynamics that may precede more overt forms of gender-based violence (Calderaro et al., 2025b). Addressing these dimensions together may provide a more nuanced account of how women perceive violence and safety.

The present study therefore examined the associations between exposure to media coverage of femicide and violent crime, perceived personal safety, reported levels of interpersonal abuse experience, and current relationship-specific psychological vulnerability among women in Romania. The study used a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional design. In accordance with this design, the analyses were intended to identify associations and group differences rather than establish temporal or causal relationships.

Based on the theoretical framework and previous literature, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1. Greater exposure to media coverage of femicide is associated with lower perceived personal safety among women.

H2. Women with higher versus lower levels of reported interpersonal abuse experiences differ in perceived personal safety and current relationship-specific psychological vulnerability.

H3. Current relationship-specific psychological vulnerability is associated with generalised perceived personal safety.

The study's primary objective was to examine whether media exposure was associated with perceived personal safety and to determine whether participants with higher versus lower levels of reported interpersonal abuse experiences differed in generalised safety perceptions and current relationship-specific psychological vulnerability. A further objective was to explore the relationship between generalised perceived safety and relationship-specific vulnerability. By distinguishing these dimensions, the study seeks to contribute to a more context-sensitive understanding of women's perceptions of violence and safety in the context of the mediatisation of femicide and IPV in Romania.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional design with correlational and comparative analyses. The study examined the associations between exposure to media coverage of femicide, perceived personal safety, levels of reported interpersonal abuse experience, and current relationship-specific psychological vulnerability among women in Romania.

The cross-sectional design was selected to assess relationships among these variables during a single period of data collection. The analyses focused on the association between media exposure and perceived safety and on differences in perceived safety and relationship-specific psychological vulnerability between participants with higher and lower levels of reported interpersonal abuse experience. Because all variables were assessed at one time point using self-report measures, the findings are interpreted as associations and group differences rather than causal effects.

2.2. Sampling and Participants

Participants were recruited online through social media networks and academic platforms in Romania. Eligible participants were women aged 18 years or older, residing in Romania, who completed the questionnaire in either Romanian or Hungarian. The initial recruitment resulted in 104 responses. During data screening, four responses were excluded because the questionnaires

were incomplete, and two responses were excluded because they were duplicate submissions. After these exclusions, the final analytical sample comprised 98 women aged between 19 and 65 years (M = 30.99, SD = 9.792).

Of the final sample, 56.1% of participants completed the questionnaire in Hungarian, while 43.9% completed it in Romanian. Regarding place of residence, 40.8% lived in county capitals, 32.7% in other urban centres, 15.3% in Bucharest, and 11.2% in rural or communal areas.

The sample was characterised by a relatively high level of formal education: 43.9% reported having a Master's degree, 28.6% a Bachelor's degree, and 25.5% secondary education with a baccalaureate diploma. In terms of occupational status, 75.5% were employees, 13.3% were students, and 10.2% were entrepreneurs. Regarding relationship status, 39.8% reported being in a committed partnership, 23.5% were married, 31.6% were single, and 5.1% were divorced or separated.

Given the online recruitment procedure, the relatively small sample size, and the demographic characteristics of the participants, the sample should be considered a convenience sample. Consequently, the findings should not be assumed to be representative of Romanian women in the general population.

2.3. Statistical Power Considerations

An a priori power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1.9.7 (Faul et al., 2009) with an alpha level of .05. For the primary linear regression analysis, assuming a medium effect size (f^2 = 0.15), one predictor, and statistical power of .95, the required minimum sample size was 89 participants. The final sample of 98 participants exceeded this target.

For the independent-samples group comparison, a medium effect size (Cohen's d = 0.50), a two-tailed alpha level of .05, and statistical power of .80 would require 128 participants under an equal-group allocation (64 participants per group). The final sample of 98 participants was therefore below this conventional target for the group-comparison analysis.

For bivariate associations, a medium expected correlation (r = .30) at α = .05 requires approximately 84 participants for .80 power and 111 participants for .90 power in a two-tailed test. The final sample of 98 participants was therefore sufficient for detecting a medium correlation at the .80 power level, but not at the .90 level.

These calculations were used to contextualise the statistical sensitivity of the planned analyses and are considered alongside the observed effect sizes and confidence intervals reported in the Results section.

2.4. Procedure and Ethical Standards

Data were collected between February and mid-April 2026 using an online questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The questionnaire was available in Romanian and Hungarian. The instruments were translated into the two languages and subjected to back-translation procedures involving independent language specialists.

Before participation, all respondents received information about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and their right to withdraw. Given the sensitive nature of questions concerning interpersonal abuse, violence, and femicide, participants were also provided with information about relevant support and counselling resources at the end of the questionnaire.

The estimated completion time was approximately 15–20 minutes. Data preparation and coding were conducted using Microsoft Excel 365, and statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 26 (George & Mallery, 2010).

2.5. Measures

Four measures were used to assess media exposure, perceived personal safety, experiences of interpersonal abuse, and current relationship-specific psychological vulnerability. The

questionnaire was administered in Romanian and Hungarian versions following translation and back-translation procedures.

2.5.1. Media Exposure Scale (MES)

Media exposure was assessed using a six-item scale adapted from Kim et al. (2024). The original items were contextually adapted to the present study to refer specifically to exposure to media coverage of femicide, intimate partner violence, and violent crime in Romania. The response format used a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater exposure to and engagement with violence-related media content. The Romanian and Hungarian versions were prepared using translation and back-translation procedures involving independent language specialists. The adapted scale demonstrated high internal consistency in the present sample (Cronbach's $\alpha = .917$). Because the scale was contextually adapted for the present study, the reported reliability should be interpreted as evidence of internal consistency in this sample rather than as evidence of full construct validity.

2.5.2. Personal Safety Perception Scale (PSPS-26)

Perceived personal safety was assessed using the 26-item Personal Safety Perception Scale (PSPS-26) developed and validated by Dabbous et al. (2025). The scale assesses perceived personal safety as a multidimensional construct, including fear of crime, safety confidence, feeling safe, neighbourhood walkability, and safety at night. Participants responded using a seven-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater perceived personal safety. In the present study, the instrument was administered in the adapted questionnaire format used for the study population. The scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency in the present sample (Cronbach's $\alpha = .954$).

2.5.3. Abuse Experience Scale (AES)

Experiences of interpersonal abuse were assessed using a 54-item composite measure integrating items from the Composite Abuse Scale and the Economic Abuse Scale, following the framework described by Vasiliauskaitė and Geffner (2021). The measure covered physical, sexual, emotional, and financial forms of abuse. Higher scores indicated greater reported exposure to abusive experiences. The scale demonstrated very high internal consistency in the present sample (Cronbach's $\alpha = .987$).

For the comparative analyses, participants were divided into two groups according to a median split of their total AES scores. Participants scoring above the sample median were classified into the higher-abuse-experience group, whereas those scoring at or below the median were classified into the lower-abuse-experience group. This procedure resulted in 55 participants in the higher-abuse-experience group and 43 in the lower-abuse-experience group. The median split was used to facilitate the planned comparative analyses; however, this classification reflects relative levels of reported abuse experiences within the study sample and does not represent a clinically validated threshold for the presence or absence of interpersonal abuse.

2.5.4. Partner Vulnerability Scale (PVS)

Current relationship-specific psychological vulnerability was assessed using a 10-item measure based on the **Experience of Battering Scale (EBS-C) framework described by Choi (2020)**, which was developed to assess psychological vulnerability among intimate partner violence victims. The 10 items were selected because they specifically addressed psychological vulnerability within the current intimate relationship, rather than broader or lifetime experiences of interpersonal abuse. The resulting Partner Vulnerability Scale (PVS) was administered only to participants who reported being in a current relationship ($n = 71$). Higher scores indicated greater relationship-specific psychological vulnerability. Because the present 10-item version was adapted for the purposes of this study and was not independently validated as a separate instrument, it was

treated as a **study-specific measure of relationship-related psychological vulnerability**, rather than as an established validated scale (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). Accordingly, interpretation of the resulting scores was limited to the present study context, consistent with the view that validity concerns the evidence supporting interpretations of assessment scores rather than representing a fixed property of an instrument (Messick, 1995). Nevertheless, it demonstrated high internal consistency in the present subsample (Cronbach's $\alpha = .934$).

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive Statistics and Assumption Testing

Prior to the inferential analyses, descriptive statistics and distributional characteristics were examined for the primary study variables. Skewness and kurtosis were considered when evaluating the suitability of parametric procedures, using ±2.0 as a descriptive reference criterion. The psychometric profiles for the final sample (N = 98) are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive and distributional indices of the primary study variables.

Variable	n	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Min	Max
Participant Age	98	30.99	9.792	1.649	2.178	19.00	65.00
Media Exposure (MES)	98	2.97	1.332	0.141	-1.190	1.00	5.00
Perceived Safety (PSPS-26)	98	2.76	0.952	-0.112	-0.731	1.00	4.84
Psychological Vulnerability (PVS)	71	1.45	0.768	2.289	5.115	1.00	4.60
Abuse Experience (AES)	98	1.52	0.975	2.343	5.032	1.00	5.00

Note. PVS was administered exclusively to participants who reported being currently partnered (n = 71).

The MES and PSPS-26 showed relatively limited departures from symmetry, whereas both PVS and AES displayed positive skewness and elevated kurtosis. Given these distributional characteristics, analyses involving the asymmetrical variables were interpreted with appropriate attention to the assumptions of the statistical procedures used. Welch's t-test was used for the PVS group comparison because the homogeneity-of-variance assumption was not satisfied, while the non-parametric Spearman correlation was used for the association between PVS and PSPS-26.

3.2. Association Between Media Exposure and Perceived Safety

To examine the first hypothesis, an ordinary least squares (OLS) simple linear regression was conducted with Media Exposure (MES) as the predictor and perceived personal safety, assessed using the Personal Safety Perception Scale (PSPS-26), as the outcome. Because the study used a cross-sectional design, the regression result is interpreted as an association between the two variables rather than evidence of a causal effect. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 96) = 108.79$, $p < .001$, and explained 53.1% of the variance in perceived safety ($R = .729$, $R^2 = .531$, adjusted $R^2 = .526$).

Table 2. Linear regression parameters for perceived safety as a function of media exposure.

Predictor	B	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	SE B	β	t	p
(Constant)	4.304	3.982	4.626	0.162	—	26.54	< .001
Media Exposure	-0.521	-0.620	-0.422	0.050	-0.729	-10.43	< .001

Note. CI = confidence interval; SE = standard error; β = standardised regression coefficient.

Media exposure was negatively associated with perceived safety. The unstandardised coefficient was B = -0.521 (SE = 0.050, 95% CI [-0.620, -0.422]), indicating that higher media exposure scores were associated with lower perceived safety scores. The standardised coefficient was $\beta = -0.729$, $t = -10.43$, $p < .001$. Consistent with the regression analysis, the Pearson product-moment correlation between MES and PSPS-26 was statistically significant and negative, $r(96) = -.729$, $p < .001$. In a simple regression with one predictor, this correlation corresponds directly to the standardised regression coefficient and therefore represents the same underlying bivariate association. Taken together, these findings provide support for H1, while they should not be interpreted as demonstrating a causal effect of media exposure on perceived safety.

3.3. Perceived Safety and Relationship-Specific Psychological Vulnerability by Level of Reported Interpersonal Abuse Experience

To examine differences according to relative levels of reported interpersonal abuse experience, participants were divided into two groups based on the median split of AES scores: lower-abuse-experience (n = 43) and higher-abuse-experience (n = 55). For perceived personal safety (PSPS-26), the homogeneity-of-variance assumption was not violated (Levene's $F = 2.30$, $p = .133$), and an independent-samples Student's t-test was therefore used. For relationship-specific psychological vulnerability (PVS), the variance assumption was violated (Levene's $F = 40.74$, $p < .001$); consequently, a Welch's t-test was used.

The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Group comparisons for perceived safety and relationship-specific psychological vulnerability by level of reported interpersonal abuse experience.

Dependent Measure	Lower-Abuse-Experience Mean (SD)	Higher-Abuse-Experience Mean (SD)	Statistical Test	df	p	Effect Size (d)
Perceived Safety (PSPS-26)	2.87 (1.05)	2.67 (0.87)	t = 1.05	96.00	.298	0.210
Psychological Vulnerability (PVS)	1.10 (0.17)	1.76 (0.94)	Welch t = -4.21	39.72	< .001	0.954

Note. SD = standard deviation. For PVS, the analysis included n = 30 participants in the lower-abuse-experience group and n = 41 participants in the higher-abuse-experience group.

Perceived personal safety did not differ significantly between participants with lower and higher levels of reported interpersonal abuse experience, $t(96) = 1.05$, $p = .298$, $d = 0.210$. The difference was small, with the lower-abuse-experience group reporting a mean PSPS-26 score of 2.87 (SD = 1.05) compared with 2.67 (SD = 0.87) in the higher-abuse-experience group. In contrast, among currently partnered participants, psychological vulnerability scores were significantly higher in the higher-abuse-experience group (M = 1.76, SD = 0.94) than in the lower-abuse-experience group (M = 1.10, SD = 0.17). The Welch test indicated a statistically significant difference, Welch's $t(39.72) = -4.21$, $p < .001$, with a large standardised effect (Cohen's $d = 0.954$). Thus, the results provide evidence of a difference in current relationship-specific psychological vulnerability between the two groups, whereas no statistically significant difference was detected for broader perceived safety. Accordingly, H2 received partial support based on the observed pattern of group differences.

Finally, the association between current relationship-specific psychological vulnerability (PVS) and broader perceived safety (PSPS-26) was examined using Spearman's rank-order correlation because of the non-normal distribution of PVS. The analysis yielded a small negative, non-significant association, $r_s(69) = -.077$, $p = .520$. Therefore, the analysis did not detect a statistically significant monotonic association between current relationship-specific vulnerability

and broader perceived safety. This finding should not be interpreted as evidence that the two constructs are independent. Accordingly, H3 was not supported.

4. Discussion

4.1. Media Exposure, Perceived Safety, and Cognitive Heuristics

The primary finding of this study was a strong negative association between exposure to media content concerning femicide and perceived personal safety. The regression model accounted for 53.1% of the variance in perceived safety ($R^2 = .531$, $\beta = -.729$, $p < .001$). Given the cross-sectional design, this finding should be interpreted as a substantial statistical association rather than evidence that media exposure causes changes in perceived safety.

The observed relationship is consistent with theoretical accounts of heuristic processing of risk, particularly the availability and affect heuristics. According to the availability heuristic, events that are vivid, emotionally salient, and easily retrieved from memory may exert a disproportionate influence on judgements of probability and risk (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). Media coverage of femicide can provide highly salient examples of severe violence, potentially increasing the accessibility of such events when individuals evaluate their own safety. Similarly, the affect heuristic suggests that emotional responses may influence judgements of risk, particularly when individuals evaluate threatening or uncertain situations (Slovic et al., 2004).

These mechanisms provide a plausible theoretical interpretation of the observed association. However, the present study did not directly measure the availability or affect heuristics, nor did it assess objective crime risk or changes in perceived risk over time. Consequently, the findings cannot establish that either heuristic mediated the relationship between media exposure and perceived safety.

The magnitude of the association nevertheless warrants attention. The unstandardised coefficient ($B = -.521$) indicates that higher media exposure scores were associated with lower perceived safety scores in the present sample. The findings therefore suggest that the way severe gender-based violence is encountered and processed through media environments may be relevant to women's subjective perceptions of safety. Future longitudinal and experimental research is needed to determine whether repeated exposure to such content contributes to sustained changes in perceived safety and to identify the psychological mechanisms involved.

4.2. Generalised Safety and Relationship-Specific Vulnerability

A second important finding concerned the distinction between broad perceived safety and current relationship-specific psychological vulnerability. Participants with higher and lower levels of reported interpersonal abuse experience did not differ significantly in generalised perceived safety ($p = .298$, $d = .210$). In contrast, among currently partnered participants, those in the higher-abuse-experience group reported significantly higher relationship-specific psychological vulnerability than those in the lower-abuse-experience group ($p < .001$, $d = .954$).

This pattern suggests that generalised perceptions of safety and vulnerability within an intimate relationship may capture different aspects of women's experiences. The absence of a statistically significant group difference in PSPS-26 scores should not be interpreted as evidence that higher levels of reported interpersonal abuse experience have no relevance to broader perceptions of safety. Rather, within the present sample, participants with higher and lower levels of reported interpersonal abuse experience did not differ significantly on the generalised safety measure.

The substantially larger group difference observed for PVS suggests that relationship-specific psychological vulnerability may be more closely differentiated by relative levels of reported interpersonal abuse experience than by generalised perceptions of personal safety.

Previous research on vulnerability and trauma has emphasised the importance of perceived control, threat appraisal, and contextual characteristics in understanding responses to interpersonal violence (Jackson, 2009; Matias et al., 2020). From this perspective, relationship-specific measures may capture dimensions of vulnerability that are not necessarily reflected in generalised assessments of public or environmental safety.

The present findings should nevertheless be interpreted cautiously. The PVS analysis was conducted only among the 71 participants who reported being currently partnered, and the higher- and lower-abuse-experience groups were unequal in size. Moreover, the study design does not allow conclusions about the temporal or causal processes linking reported interpersonal abuse experience with current psychological vulnerability. The large observed effect is noteworthy; however, replication in larger and more diverse samples is required.

The analysis of the association between PVS and PSPS-26 produced a small, non-significant Spearman correlation (r_s = -.077, p = .520). This result is compatible with the possibility that the two measures capture related but distinguishable dimensions of perceived safety and vulnerability. However, the non-significant correlation does not demonstrate statistical independence between the constructs. It indicates only that a statistically significant monotonic association was not detected in this sample.

4.3. Forensic, Clinical, and Policy Implications

The findings have several potentially relevant implications for forensic, clinical, and policy contexts, although these implications should be considered preliminary given the study design and sample characteristics.

From a forensic perspective, the results illustrate the potential value of distinguishing generalised perceptions of safety from relationship-specific vulnerability. A person may report relatively stable perceptions of safety in public or environmental settings while simultaneously reporting substantially greater vulnerability within an intimate relationship. Accordingly, assessments of victim vulnerability or risk should avoid assuming that a single generalised safety indicator adequately represents all relevant dimensions of interpersonal vulnerability. In forensic and medico-legal contexts, self-report measures should be interpreted as components of a broader, multi-method assessment rather than as stand-alone indicators of risk or trauma impact.

Clinically, the findings support the potential value of context-sensitive and trauma-informed assessment. Interventions involving survivors of interpersonal violence may benefit from assessing relationship-specific experiences of control, vulnerability, and perceived agency alongside more generalised measures of psychological well-being. The present study does not establish the effectiveness of any particular intervention; rather, it highlights the importance of considering the relational context when assessing women's experiences of safety and vulnerability.

At the policy and media level, the observed association between media exposure and perceived safety suggests that reporting practices surrounding femicide and other forms of severe gender-based violence deserve continued attention. Media organisations may benefit from balancing individual case narratives with contextual information concerning intimate partner violence, prevention, available support services, and relevant structural factors. The present findings do not demonstrate that particular reporting practices cause increased fear; however, they provide a basis for further investigation of how the framing and frequency of exposure to violent crime coverage relate to subjective safety perceptions.

4.4. Methodological Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the cross-sectional design prevents conclusions about temporal ordering and causality. Although the regression analysis identified a strong association between media exposure and perceived safety, it cannot determine whether greater media exposure contributes to lower perceived safety, whether

individuals with lower perceived safety are more likely to seek or notice such media content, or whether both variables are influenced by other factors.

Second, the study relied on a relatively small online convenience sample of 98 women. The sample also included a comparatively high proportion of educated and urban participants, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to women from different educational, socioeconomic, geographic, and demographic backgrounds. The use of Romanian- and Hungarian-language versions represents an additional methodological consideration, and future studies should examine measurement equivalence across language groups before making direct comparisons.

Third, the Media Exposure Scale was adapted from an existing measure rather than being developed specifically as a fully validated instrument for exposure to femicide-related media content. Although the adapted scale demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha = .917$), internal consistency alone does not establish construct validity. Future research should undertake systematic cultural adaptation, pilot testing, and psychometric validation of measures specifically designed to assess exposure to media coverage of femicide and gender-based violence.

Fourth, the measures were based on self-report. Such measures may be affected by recall limitations, response tendencies, and individual differences in interpretation of questionnaire items. These limitations are particularly relevant when assessing sensitive experiences such as interpersonal abuse and psychological vulnerability.

Fifth, participants were classified into higher- and lower-abuse-experience groups using a median split of AES scores. Although this procedure facilitated the planned group comparisons, median-split classification reduces the information contained in the continuous AES scores and does not constitute a clinically validated threshold for distinguishing the presence or absence of interpersonal abuse. The group-comparison findings should therefore be interpreted as differences between participants with relatively higher and lower reported abuse-experience scores within this sample.

Future studies should use larger and more diverse samples and, where feasible, longitudinal designs to examine changes in perceived safety over time. Experimental or repeated-exposure designs could further clarify whether and under what conditions media exposure influences subjective safety perceptions. Future research should also incorporate potentially relevant variables such as social support, institutional trust, prior victimisation characteristics, resilience, media-use patterns, and personality-related factors. Finally, replication using validated, culturally adapted measures and transparent scoring and classification procedures would strengthen the reliability and generalisability of the findings.

5. Conclusions

This study identified a strong negative association between exposure to media coverage of femicide and perceived personal safety among women in the present Romanian sample. Media exposure was significantly associated with lower perceived safety and accounted for 53.1% of the variance in the regression model. Given the cross-sectional design, this finding should be interpreted as an association rather than evidence of a causal media effect.

The study also identified an important contextual difference between generalised perceived safety and relationship-specific psychological vulnerability. Participants with higher and lower levels of reported interpersonal abuse experience did not differ significantly in generalised perceived safety, whereas currently partnered participants in the higher-abuse-experience group reported substantially higher relationship-specific psychological vulnerability than those in the lower-abuse-experience group. These findings suggest that assessments of safety may benefit from considering both broader environmental perceptions and vulnerabilities specific to intimate relationships.

The non-significant association between PVS and PSPS-26 should not be interpreted as evidence of statistical independence. Rather, the present data did not provide evidence of a statistically significant monotonic association between the two measures ($r_s = -.077$, $p = .520$).

Overall, the findings support the value of examining media exposure, perceived safety, reported levels of interpersonal abuse experience, and relationship-specific vulnerability as related but context-sensitive dimensions. Further research using larger and more diverse samples, validated culturally adapted measures, and longitudinal or experimental designs is needed to clarify the direction and mechanisms of these associations and to inform evidence-based forensic, clinical, and media-policy approaches.

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