

# The Impact of Sars-Cov-2 Pandemic on Romanian Transnational Families

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**Abstract**— As we all noticed, the Covid-19 pandemic had numerous negative effects at a macrosocial level affecting the whole world's population, and at a microsocal level generating important changes in family functionality and structure. Seen as the biggest challenge of the XXI century, there is no doubt that the covid-19 pandemic leads to a whole world reconfiguration by leaving important negative effects in personal, family, and professional lives. In a way or another, the individuals, the family, the community, the countries, the European communities, and the whole world, in general, try to cope with its important challenges and in this paper, we want to bring to the front the main resource used by transnational families in the fight with the coronavirus which is represented by the resilience capacity.

**Keywords**—Transnational Families, Covid-19, Resilience, Romanians, Migration

## I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of resilience was approached in general by psychologists, but the novelty of this article consists in presenting a sociological approach to this concept. Through qualitative research, conducted by the method of documents study, observation and phenomenological semi-structured interview, we aim to capture and present the most important aspects that describe the experiences of transnational families and the challenges faced by members of these families since the beginning of the pandemic. Our attention is focused on the family and in this article we explore relevant aspects related to the impact that the covid-19 pandemic has generated on Romanians family members affected by migration.

Family is a fundamental social institution because, in history, appears to be universal and covers a range of vital functions for human life in society. Most scholars claim that family suffered major changes and the problems/conflicts regarding it are viewed with concern by specialists (Cojocaru, 2008; Ducu, 2016; Pîslariu, 2020).

Specifically, the present study aims to capture on one hand how members of transnational families have adapted to the changes given by the pandemic, how they communicated and managed to maintain emotional ties, and on the other hand to

reveal what were the biggest challenges of at the onset of the pandemic of parents working abroad.

The main objective of the study was to find out how parents working abroad managed to keep in touch with the family left in the country and what were the biggest challenges they faced since the beginning of the pandemic.

The target group consists of Romanian parents from the northeastern region of Romania who are working in Italy and have children in Romania.

The considerations for which this target group was chosen were given by the fact that the most numerous Romanian emigrants currently live in Italy and this country was among the most severely affected countries in Europe by the covid-19 pandemic, registering a very high of deaths caused by Sars-Cov-2.

The present study is framed within the sociology of the family and focuses on the identification of the most relevant issues that describe how the pandemic affected the transnational families and what was the influence of the restrictions imposed by authorities on the Romanian parents who work in Italy. The scope of this paper is to present what were the identified solutions to overcome the obstacles met by parents and children affected by migration in the pandemic period and to identify what were the construction resilience strategies used by Romanian transnational families.

## II. CONCEPTUAL DELIMITATIONS

### A. Transnational families

The most well-known and recognized definition of the transnational family is given by Bryceson and Vuorela who define the transnational families as "families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely 'familyhood', even across national borders" (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002, p. 3).

The concept of transnationalism currently has a new significance because, in time, it suffered many changes, which led in our days to a new interpretation. Viorela Ducu, in the book "Romanian Transnational Families. Gender, Family Practices and Difference", claims that "this new interpretation on transnationalism concept offers new perspectives to understanding mobility outside borders, not as departure, a one-directional movement toward the host country with integration there as a goal, but rather as a permanent relation to both the point of departure and that of destination, with an effect in both directions" (Ducu, 2018, p. 1). The same author

affirms that the advancement of information and communications technology (ICT) has a defining role in the development of transnational existence, wherein a constantly increasing number of persons is involved, is played by, which allows for permanent virtual interaction (Ducu, 2018, p. 2). Moreover, it was observed that new communication technologies played a decisive role in terms of maintaining relationships, continuing professional activities during the pandemic and obtaining information on regulations aimed at taking the necessary measures to prevent and spread the new virus.

### *B. Resilience*

Despite the construct being operationalized in a variety of ways, most definitions in the psychology sphere are based around two core concepts: adversity of difficulty and positive adaptation seen as a response (Reich et al., 2010, p. 11). Recent studies claim that resilience is required in response to different adversities, in our case, specific to migrants, or to major life events, like period of the pandemic.

We consider that an important distinction must be made on the term resilience. In a psycho-social context we talk about "resilience", while in psychology, we talk about "resiliency". The two concepts, although similar, have certain different characteristics. Resilience is defined as "a phenomenon or process reflecting relatively positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma" (Luthar, p. 742). The same author affirms that "resilience is a superordinate construct subsuming two distinct dimensions -- significant adversity and positive adaptation -- and thus is never directly measured, but rather is indirectly inferred based on evidence of the two subsumed constructs".

Researchers who approach the concept of resilience generally agree on the main components of the concept, as they appear in the definition presented above, positive adaptation and adversity, to which are added the protection factors, which are directly responsible and influence the life trajectory of the individual. It should be noted that there are still many divergences and disputes regarding the approach, the definition and the measurement of resilience and its components, with an effect on the direction of research, the conclusions obtained and the proposed intervention models (Bunea, 2019, p. 16).

## III. METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

### *A. Research methodology and strategies*

In the research we proposed to capture and present the effects of the covid-19 pandemic on Romanian families affected by migration through the "phenomenological method", which was initially developed by Ed. Husserl, a method that seeks to understand and describe the significance of studied behavior, individually or collectively" (Lyotard, 1997, p. 72).

Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre are emblematic authors in the field of phenomenological science. While Husserl uses a philosophical approach to phenomenology, with a particularly important emphasis on the

individual's own experience, "on what is experienced in the consciousness of the individual" (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 16–17) and on the way of perceiving it according to personal characteristics, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre move towards a sociological approach to phenomenology, considering that this interpretive position of lived events is rather generated by understanding subjective experiences in the close context of our relationships with the world and other individuals and does not take into account only the consciousness of the individual (Smith et al., 2009, p. 24).

Starting from these perspectives, we consider a complex understanding of the "experience" of individuals, which involves a lived process. Through this phenomenological approach, we investigated the effects of the covid-19 pandemic both on Romanian parents who went to work in Italy, and on Romanian children left at home. Therefore, our approach is based on an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to know, examine in detail and delve into the experiences of Romanian parents and children affected by migration, from the beginning of the pandemic. Through this method, parents were encouraged to express in their own terms what the "covid-19 pandemic on the relationship with children and other extended family members" meant in order to describe as naturally as possible their particular contexts and personal life prospects in a pandemic (Smith et al., 2009, p. 34). The participants in this study are 6 parents (5 mothers and 1 father) and 4 children (of these parents), who are currently adults.

The interview method used provides the participants in this study with an opportune framework, both for parents to express themselves about the experience lived in Italy during the pandemic crisis, and for children in Romania, to describe in a narrative way how they managed to face the challenges, maintain interpersonal connections and overcome the difficulties caused by the pandemic. The analysis process begins with a detailed examination of each case and then proceeds cautiously to an examination of the similarities and differences between cases (Smith et al., 2009, p. 39).

We followed the surprise of some possible common explanations for what it meant not to be able to visit their child / children, fear of illness, restrictive traffic measures and how they built and developed their resilience despite the vicissitudes encountered throughout this period.

### *B. Design methodology*

The design of this study is qualitative and starts from the premise that "the object is built as it is written" (Frunțelată, 2017, p. 92). The research strategy used is transversal, which involves the analysis of documents for a single period of time and the use of semi-structured interviews and the observation method once in a while (Sârbu & Străinescu, 2012, p. 30).

### *C. Epistemology*

The epistemology approached in this scientific paper is an interpretive one, supporting the subjective understanding of social action. This perspective is ontologically based on an interpretive phenomenological approach, "which seeks to reveal and convey a deep perspective and understanding of the hidden meanings of everyday experiences" (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p. 165).

#### *D. Research procedure*

As a research procedure, we consider a qualitative data management. We support the idea that qualitative analysis is best suited to examine the significant aspects of semi-structured interviews, as it can decode certain nuances of texts or recordings obtained after interviewing the subject, such as his feelings or allusions, ironies, ways of addressing, mechanisms rhetorical and stylistic, including metaphors and other figures of speech, often used in everyday speech. The research design focuses mainly on knowing and understanding the behaviors of parents and children affected by migration during the pandemic (Sârbu & Străinescu, 2012, p. 23).

#### *E. Research questions, aim and objectives*

In the study we aimed to obtain and provide answers to the following research questions:

1. How did Romanian transnational families experience the pandemic period?
2. What was the biggest challenge faced by the members of the families of Romanian transnationals and what effects did the restrictive measures regarding the right to free movement have on them?
3. How did the Romanian transnational families manage to face the adversities encountered during the pandemic and to maintain the optimal relations within the family?

The main purpose of the study was to find out what were the main mechanisms for building resilience by transnational Romanian families to overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The main objective of the research was to identify the coping strategies by which Romanian parents and children affected by migration have adapted to the adversity situations generated by the pandemic context.

#### *F. Characteristics of the analytical sample*

We chose to use a qualitative design because it has a high degree of flexibility and gives the possibility that as data is collected, the sample undergoes certain changes so that the data obtained in the end lead to the goal of in-depth research. The type of sampling is nonprobability, specific to qualitative research, and the sampling strategy is oriented towards the purpose of the research, which appears in the literature through the term "purposeful sampling". As a specific type of sampling, of the 16 proposed by Patton in his work "Qualitative evaluation and research methods" (1990), we will focus on "intensity sampling" (Patton, 1990, p. 171), which are rich in information and intensely describe the phenomenon, without looking for and describing extreme or deviant cases that may distort the understanding of the phenomenon.

Through this type of sampling specific to qualitative methods, the researcher is given the opportunity to intentionally select certain cases to be investigated and the right to make decisions about the size of the sample or about who or what to include in the sample, for conducting the in-depth study (Rusu-Mocănașu, 2016, pp. 6–8).

The aim is to identify those parents and children affected by migration and who have traits or characteristics that can allow

both detailed exploration and understanding of central themes, and that can provide relevant answers to research questions.

Regarding the sample size, we took into account the following aspects:

1. the purpose and objectives of the research;
2. credibility;
3. time allocated to research;
4. logistical constraints;
5. the ease with which participants respond to the invitation to study;
6. choice of methods (single interviews, observation);
7. limitations given by the restrictions imposed by the authorities since the beginning of the pandemic.

#### *G. Data collection*

The data collection starts with the in-depth analysis of the studied problem, and the method used is the semi-structured interview of phenomenological type.

For this research, only part of the data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The field research was conducted between April and June 2021. There were 10 in-depth interviews with a number of 6 parents (5 women and 1 man) who experienced what it means to be working abroad in the pandemic period in Italy and 4 children who are older than 18 years (children of these parents who have been selected in the target group) which are in Romania. The respondent parents were identified by two methods: 1) with the help of the Public Social Assistance Services from Iași County, to which an address was sent requesting support in identifying the parents who went abroad and 2) through Facebook networks Facebook groups of Romanians in Italy.

In order to obtain the children's opinion regarding the difficulties they faced during the pandemic and how the pandemic affected the relationship with the parents, we asked the parents if they could provide us with the contact details of their own children. The parents provided the contact details of their children and later the 4 young people were contacted by phone to schedule interviews. Interviews with parents were conducted by telephone and interviews with young people (their children) were conducted face to face. The data collection starts with the in-depth analysis of the studied problem, and the method used is the semi-structured interview of phenomenological type.

#### *H. Data analysis*

We took into account the recommendations of several researchers, who state that for phenomenological studies, "the number of participants usually varies from 3 to 10 people; Creswell (1998) recommends between 5-25 subjects, and Morse (1994) suggests at least 6" (apud. Rusu-Mocănașu, 2016, p. 10).

We aimed to achieve an optimal level of data saturation, a rule that was introduced by Glaser and Starau (1967, apud. Rusu-Mocănașu, 2016, p. 11) in order to meet the methodological criteria necessary for a scientific approach and to give validity. data, but without generalizing the results to the entire population.

The investigated units (cases) were established according to the purpose and objectives of the research, the available

resources, and the access opportunities, taking into account certain specific sampling criteria.

The main argument for which we chose to use a qualitative design is that "the validity, significance, and understanding generated by the qualitative investigation have to do with the informational richness of the selected cases and the researcher's observational/analytical abilities, rather than the sample size (Patton, 2002, p. 245).

The information gathered from the interviews was entered into the NVivo software, where the data was coded.

The respondent parents are between 46 and 63 years old and are from the North-East region of Romania. Only one of the parents (C.M., aged 46) is permanently settled in Italy, and the other 5 respondents are parents who have temporarily migrated.

In order to prevent any risk situation of falling ill with the new Coronavirus, to provide respondents with a high level of safety and to ensure an open framework for dialogue, interviews with Romanian migrant parents were conducted by telephone. The 4 interviews with the children of these parents were conducted face to face at the beginning of June 2021 in Iasi (Romania), respecting all measures to prevent the spread or disease with the Sars-Cov-2.

#### IV. ETHICAL ASPECTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS PROTECTIONS

Because long-distance relationships between parents and children can cause some psycho-emotional suffering to family members, we agreed that the sample should consist exclusively of adults.

The reason why we chose the sample to be made up of adults is related to certain ethical issues.

We have taken into account that minors do not have full exercise capacity and cannot give their written consent to participate in this study. Given that in the case of this study, the sample consists of parents who went to work in Italy, we consider that some questions addressed to certain children with higher emotional sensitivity could have produced some negative feelings, even if at the time of the interview, the researcher would have made sure that the child's respondent feels comfortable and does not present increased stress as a result of the questions asked. All respondents were informed of the purpose and objectives of the research and agreed to participate voluntarily in this study and to be recorded audio.

#### V. LIMITS

Scientific research, which involves the use of qualitative methods, automatically generates a higher degree of subjectivity in the interpretation of data, compared to quantitative research methods, which leads to the delicate issue of its validity. Hence the question of how relevant are the results of qualitative research, given that it respects to a small extent the classic validation postulate stated in social research: stability (or the level of trust offered), replicability (in the smallest details) and validation (Sârbu & Străinescu, 2012, p. 24). In addition to these dimensions that have received the most attention from research, Patton (2014) discusses

measurement and generalization (p. 1445). However, these main criteria for evaluating research can be met if we take into account that the use of several qualitative methods can lead to an adequate degree of research stability. Also, assuming and respecting the ethical criteria by honestly providing all the research data, so that, in case another researcher would like to approach the same phenomenon studied by following the same path, it can confer a high level of replicability. 'False testing' in the case of a qualitative methodology, however, differs from the quantitative methodology in that the presentation of arguments invalidating the final results and the inclusion of these results in the 'final product' does not prove to be substantiated, as it does not base deductive reasoning, a demonstration by "reduction to the absurd" (Frunțelată, 2017, p. 94) and does not aim at predicting and controlling independent and dependent variables to verify the theory for a particular case. In other words, we do not have an assigned sample of subjects for the experimental and control groups, and the analysis of these data should be analysed according to descriptive statistics in order to finally reach "a conclusion for a large population using statistical decision methods" (Sârbu & Străinescu, 2012, pp. 14–15).

But these arguments do not lead to the idea that in the case of a predominantly qualitative methodology, "falsity testing" cannot be performed.

Once the ethical conditions are met, the study can be considered valid, because in the research process, the author undertakes to keep the confidentiality of personal data provided by respondents, to publish data only with their consent and not to falsify them by arbitrary additions or omissions. At the same time, the researcher has to report any errors or limitations of the research and is obliged to treat all respondents with respect and dignity, and not as mere objects of the study or as "depersonalized" data providers (Frunțelată, 2017, p. 2017), without taking into account their feelings, emotions, thoughts and personal life context.

Another limitation is that the research results cannot be generalized to the entire population or country, as the sample is not scientifically representative. However, it is known that for a correct evaluation, the sample must be evaluated according to the "purpose and reasoning of the qualitative study" (Rusu-Mocănașu, 2016, p. 6) and not based on the logic and size of the sample. The purpose of sampling used in qualitative research is not to extract a representative sample from the population, so that research results can be generalized to a large or even the entire population, but "achieving the goal in depth" (Rusu-Mocănașu, 2016, p. 6).

Patton (2014) makes a clear distinction between quantitative sampling, which follows a certain logic, and describes the results in a statistical manner and qualitative sampling. The author considers that "the validity, significance and understanding generated by the qualitative investigation have more to do with the informational richness of the selected cases and the analytical (observational) capabilities of the researcher, than with the sample size" (p. 669).

The same author states that the results of qualitative studies can be transformed into quantitative scales for statistical analysis, but it is not possible for this to happen the other way around and to transform the results of a quantitative research into detailed, qualitative descriptions (Patton, 2014, p. 687).

Based on the results obtained, certain predictions cannot be made, because the "objectivity" of the social discourse cannot be ensured. The interpretive orientation used points rather to the "irreducible subjective specificity of social phenomena or human behaviour" (Vlăsceanu, 2013, pp. 33–34).

## VI. PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

After analysing the data collected by the interview method, it is observed that the same life event "pandemic" involves different interpretations from person to person.

The family has undergone many changes since the beginning of the pandemic, being subjected to important challenges. If we refer to the restrictions imposed by the authorities regarding the restriction of freedom of movement, we could see that the family has developed a resilience mechanism that has helped its members to overcome or cope with the new Mondial context. Therefore, the family, although subjected to severe trials, proves that it can continuously readjust itself to overcome any difficulties. In most cases, it was observed that intra-family relations were strengthened even though parents did not have the opportunity to move as easily from one country to another to visit their family members.

This study can open many further research topics and may form the basis for studies focusing on the effects of the covid-19 pandemic on migrants depending on certain aspects of the family of origin, gender, ages, profession, training, and country of destination. In a subsequent study it would be important to capture through a qualitative study, the issues that aim at the motivation of Romanian emigrants in choosing the administration of the vaccine anti-covid-19 and could try to be measured by a quantitative study, which is the vaccination rate of adult Romanians in the Diaspora, compared to the vaccination rate of citizens who are in Romania, which is known by the authorities and updated periodically.

By their very nature, transnational families constitute an elusive phenomenon— spatially dispersed and seemingly capable of unending social mutation (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002, p. 3). Coronavirus disease affected not only the medical system, but we could see that it had important effects on the social system, the relationships between members of communities, groups and families. We can say that on the transnational families, the pandemic produced a new mutation, further strengthening the ties between the family members.

Research results of this study show that the ability of these particular types of families, to reconstitute and redefine themselves continuously, even in harsh conditions, is based on a good resilience-building capacity. It has also been observed that maintaining personal ties between family members who are working abroad with family members who are at home, has helped them cope with the difficult times they had face from the beginning of the period of the pandemic. World Health

Organization, recommends also to maintain and stay connected with our social networks and to try to talk about our own fears or concerns, own intentions, plans, needs, and emotions to other persons who we consider are important to us (World Health Organization, 2020).

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