



Roma Community Strategies to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence

Teresa Sordé¹ · Diana Valero² · Carmen Elboj³ · Ariadna Munté⁴

Received: 4 June 2025 / Accepted: 9 December 2025
© The Author(s) 2026

Abstract

This article examines community-driven strategies developed within the Roma population to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, highlighting mechanisms that support women's safety while respecting Roma identity and cultural frameworks. Adopting a qualitative design grounded in Communicative Methodology (CM) and Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), we analyzed $N=28$ participants, comprising 6 semi-structured interviews with professionals, 8 interviews with Roma women from two associations, one focus group ($n=6$) with association members, and 8 Communicative Life Stories (4 women and 4 men) with Roma community members. Using reflexive thematic analysis, we identified three interconnected themes: (1) an unwritten inter-family pact, (2) community mediation—including the Roma mediator, and (3) women's solidarity networks, notably the role of the mother-in-law. These mechanisms offer culturally embedded forms of support that challenge prevailing stereotypes portraying Roma culture as permissive of gender violence. By foregrounding Roma women's agency and the community's internal resources, this study underscores the importance of incorporating culturally specific mechanisms into formal support systems. Such integration can foster more inclusive and effective interventions that both protect and empower Roma women.

Keywords Roma community · Gender-based violence · Community mediation · Communicative methodology · Family strategies · Solidarity networks

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

Introduction

Violence against women remains one of the most pressing human rights challenges of our time. According to the 2024 EU Survey on Gender-Based Violence¹, nearly one in three women in the European Union (31%) have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15. In addition, the report reveals that one in six women (17%) have been victims of sexual violence, including rape or other degrading acts, committed by either a partner or another person. Despite the prevalence, gender-based violence remains largely underreported, with only one in eight victims filing a report with the authorities (FRA, EIGE & Eurostat, 2024). This phenomenon affects women from all social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds, albeit in different ways. Roma women are no exception; in some contexts, they face both interpersonal and institutional violence. Studies have documented high rates of domestic violence as well as the persistence of practices such as forced, early, or child marriages in certain Roma communities (Joamets & Sogomonjan, 2020; Martsenyuk, 2015). Velentza (2020), for example, focuses on early marriage in Roma communities in Transylvania, illustrating the need for careful interpretation of findings so as not to conflate distinct forms of gendered harm. While these practices are not exclusive to the Roma community, their prevalence and impact warrant closer attention.

International research identifies minority ethnic status as a significant risk factor for experiencing gender-based violence (GBV) even more so than age, income, or education (Breiding et al., 2008). While some scholars attribute this increased risk to systemic exclusion and discrimination, others (Erickson, 2017; Timmerman, 2004) point to perceived cultural traits of the minority itself. This latter view has been especially prevalent in studies of the Roma community, often portraying it as inherently patriarchal and more accepting of violence (Djikanovic et al., 2018; Vives-Cases et al., 2021). Yet, empirical evidence challenges this determinism: in Spain, a national survey found that 70.9% of Roma respondents considered GBV unacceptable under any circumstances (Vives-Cases et al., 2021), a figure that undermines stereotypes and points toward structural rather than cultural drivers.

Such culturalist assumptions contribute to the persistence of stereotypes that hinder a nuanced understanding of GBV. Gender-based violence is a complex and multifactorial phenomenon that demands intersectional analysis, considering how it is shaped by factors such as ethnicity, gender, class, and immigration status (Nixon & Humphreys, 2010). Despite the growing body of literature on GBV, there is still a lack of detailed, community-specific data on Roma women.

Although Spanish public strategies and policies recognize certain vulnerable groups—such as women with disabilities, immigrant women, young and elderly women—the specific realities faced by Roma women continue to be overlooked. Neither the *State Pact against Gender-Based Violence* nor the *Organic Law 10/2022 on the Comprehensive Guarantee of Sexual Freedom* (Government of Spain, 2022) have fully incorporated an intersectional approach that addresses the unique barriers

¹ While this article primarily uses the term “gender-based violence” (GBV), it aligns with international frameworks that often refer to “violence against women and girls” (VAWG) to emphasize the gendered, structural, and systemic nature of the phenomenon (European Institute for Gender Equality EIGE, 2023).

experienced by Roma women. This invisibility contradicts the principles of inclusive feminism and weakens the effectiveness of institutional responses.

One explanation for this gap may lie in the underreporting of violence among Roma women. As highlighted in the *Report on the Situation of Roma Women in the Municipality of Bilbao* (Kale Dor Kayiko, 2013), their presence in victim services is disproportionately low compared to their demographic weight. Recent reports by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (2023) and the Council for the Elimination of Racial or Ethnic Discrimination (CEDRE, 2023) confirm that Roma women continue to face widespread discrimination in healthcare, education, and social services. These structural inequalities contribute to underreporting and mistrust toward institutions, exacerbating vulnerability to violence. Several reasons contribute to this pattern: (1) Roma women often turn first to internal community mechanisms for support; (2) reporting a fellow Roma to authorities is considered socially unacceptable, as the community tend to first use its own conflict resolution systems; (3) GBV tends to be equated exclusively with physical violence, leaving out psychological, sexual, or economic abuse.

Addressing GBV in Roma contexts therefore requires understanding not only the risks but also the protective factors embedded in community life. This study seeks to identify and analyze intra-community strategies to prevent and address GBV, focusing on family structures, community mediation, and women's solidarity networks. In doing so, it aims to highlight culturally embedded protective mechanisms, challenge deficit-based narratives, and inform the design of interventions that are both effective and culturally respectful.

This article advances a simple claim: intra-community mechanisms identified by participants—such as women's solidarity, inter-family accountability, and community mediation—do not replace statutory responses to GBV; rather, they create practicable bridges that can be coordinated with formal services when trust, timing, and risk conditions are met. Accordingly, we asked two research questions: What intra-community strategies are currently employed within Roma communities to prevent and respond to GBV?; and, in what ways, if any, can these strategies be integrated into formal GBV interventions without undermining cultural identity?

Conceptual Framework

This study draws on three interrelated conceptual lenses to analyze gender-based violence (GBV) in Roma communities: intersectionality, community agency, and the dialectic between cultural resilience and stereotyping. Together, these concepts provide a framework for understanding how Roma women experience, confront, and respond to GBV within culturally specific contexts, while also navigating broader systems of structural discrimination.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality, first articulated by Crenshaw (1989), remains a foundational concept in feminist and critical race theory. It highlights how systems of oppression—such

as racism, sexism, and classism—intersect to shape unique forms of marginalization. For Roma women, this intersectional lens is particularly relevant, as they experience multiple, overlapping exclusions related to ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status (Macías & Redondo-Sama, 2012; Vives-Cases et al., 2021).

Recent scholarship emphasizes that institutional barriers—such as culturally insensitive public services, underrepresentation in policy agendas, and stigmatizing narratives—compound the effects of interpersonal violence (George et al., 2021). Applying intersectionality thus enables a shift from pathologizing Roma women’s “vulnerability” to analyzing the systemic conditions that limit access to protection, justice, and support.

Community Agency

In contrast to individualistic understandings of agency, this study adopts the concept of community agency to explore how Roma families and networks mobilize internal mechanisms of care and accountability in response to GBV. This approach builds on frameworks in community psychology and participatory action research that recognize the collective capacity to generate resistance and protection from within (Cammarota & Romero, 2014).

In Roma communities, such agency is expressed through strategies like inter-family pacts, elder-led mediation, and female solidarity networks—often overlooked or misunderstood in dominant policy frameworks. These practices represent adaptive responses to institutional neglect and align with participatory research literature that highlights the importance of local knowledge and culturally grounded interventions (Gómez et al., 2019; Lokot et al., 2023).

Cultural Resilience and Stereotyping

Roma communities have historically been framed through deficit-oriented narratives that depict their cultural practices as incompatible with gender equality or modernization. These stereotypes perpetuate a form of epistemic violence, denying the legitimacy of Roma women’s voices and knowledge systems (Burman & Chantler, 2005; Fine, 2018).

In response, this study adopts the concept of cultural resilience to foreground how Roma communities mobilize protective structures—such as respect for elders, intergenerational solidarity, and informal justice mechanisms—to address violence and uphold women’s safety (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; Lopez, 2019). These practices are not passive traditions, but dynamic responses to both internal and external challenges.

By centering cultural resilience, the research seeks to deconstruct stereotypes that depict Roma culture as inherently violent or patriarchal and instead highlights the transformative potential of community-led strategies when supported rather than undermined by institutional actors.

We frame Roma women’s responses to GBV at the intersection of structural constraints (poverty, racialization, antigypsyism) and community-based agency. Drawing on intersectionality, we understand risk and protection as co-produced by gender, class, age, and migration status. We also draw on cultural resilience and collective

efficacy to conceptualize women's solidarity networks, inter-family accountability, and community mediation as protective mechanisms that can operate in coordination with statutory routes rather than in opposition to them.

The lens of intersectionality is closely connected to our notions of community agency and cultural resilience. Considering these together allows us to capture not only how oppression operates at the intersections of gender and ethnicity, but also how Roma women actively create spaces of protection, solidarity, and transformation within those same intersections.

State of the Art

The analysis of gender-based violence (GBV) within Roma communities has been historically limited, often framed through stereotypical and culturalist perspectives that obscure the structural dimensions of violence. Recent research, however, has begun to shift toward more nuanced and intersectional understandings, highlighting the complex interplay of gender, ethnicity, and social exclusion (George et al., 2021; Vives-Cases et al., 2021). In terms of health, several studies have documented the physical and psychological consequences of violence among Roma women, including anxiety, depression, migraines, rapid weight loss, and motor impairments, particularly among younger women (Kozubik et al., 2020). These outcomes, similar to those experienced by the general population, highlight the need for culturally competent approaches that neither invisibilize nor stereotype Roma women's suffering.

Intersectionality provides a valuable lens to understand how Roma women experience GBV as a result of overlapping forms of discrimination—linked to gender, ethnicity, poverty, educational exclusion, and institutional antigypsyism (Council of Europe, 2024; Macías & Redondo-Sama, 2012). Multiple studies show that Roma women face systemic barriers in accessing GBV services, ranging from mistrust of institutions to discriminatory treatment by professionals (George et al., 2021; Gómez et al., 2019). Professional biases—often expressed through patronizing attitudes, ethnocentric assumptions, or overly technical language—can erode trust and discourage Roma women from seeking help (Briones-Vozmediano et al., 2018). Recent findings also indicate that structural and cultural limitations within primary care hinder proper identification and support for intimate partner violence (Briones-Vozmediano et al., 2021; Duque et al., 2023). In Spain, despite awareness of existing support services, many Roma women delay or avoid seeking help, citing past experiences of institutional racism, lack of cultural sensitivity, and rigid protocols focused exclusively on formal complaints (Pohjolainen & Pavee Point, 2015).

Some literature portrays Roma women as more tolerant of abuse, generalizing this perception to other minority groups (Briones-Vozmediano et al., 2018; Wasileski & Miller, 2010). Wasileski and Miller (2010) emphasize that many healthcare and social service professionals tend to perceive Roma women as “bad victims,” which undermines their access to institutional protection. This perception, rooted in culturalist stereotypes, not only diminishes empathy but also weakens professional responses to gender-based violence. According to Tokuç et al. (2010), belonging to the Roma community—more than to any other minority or immigrant group—places women in

a particularly vulnerable position when facing partner violence. New evidence from health settings documents persistent gaps in providers' recognition and response to GBV among Roma women, including limited cultural competence and inconsistent referral practices (Radovanović et al., 2025). These findings mirror our participants' accounts of mistrust and underline the need for targeted training and Roma-inclusive protocols.

These stereotypes have become deeply rooted in institutional spaces such as healthcare systems (Briones-Vozmediano et al., 2018). Some scholars argue that Roma women tend to prioritize their ethnic identity over their gender identity, leading them to accept patriarchal norms that contribute to victimization (Wasileski & Miller, 2010). Others attribute the normalization of violence in Roma communities to socioeconomic marginalization, referencing broader patterns that link lower socioeconomic status with higher social acceptability of violence (Vives-Cases et al., 2021). However, empirical evidence suggests that socioeconomic marginalization, rather than ethnicity per se, explains these patterns (Vives-Cases et al., 2021). Contrary to assumptions of cultural acceptance, national data from Spain indicate that over 70% of Roma respondents consider GBV unacceptable (Vives-Cases et al., 2017, 2021). This challenges essentialist narratives and instead points toward systemic barriers, such as institutional racism, rigid service protocols, and lack of cultural sensitivity, that hinder reporting and access to services (Pohjolainen & Pavee Point, 2015).

In addition, studies suggest that men from Roma and other minority groups may interpret acts of violence not as abusive behavior but as legitimate efforts to protect their cultural privacy and maintain control within the family unit (Niu & Laidler, 2015). While embedded in patriarchal logics, this is not exclusive to Roma culture; similar dynamics are found across ethnic and national contexts (Bovarnick, 2007; de Castella et al., 2011). Professional misinterpretations of such discourses can reinforce under-identification and perpetuate systemic neglect (Vives-Cases et al., 2017).

To counter these essentialist views, other scholars argue that ethnicity alone does not explain the prevalence of gender violence. Instead, social integration plays a crucial role. Ramirez (2007) suggests that Roma men's lack of integration into mainstream society is a more powerful predictor of violent behavior than cultural belonging per se. Despite welfare state developments, Roma women remain among the most segregated groups, and it is their lack of social protection—not their cultural identity—that exacerbates vulnerability (Wasileski & Miller, 2010). This vulnerability is further compounded by what has been called "triple discrimination": Roma women face marginalization as women, as ethnic minorities, and as individuals with limited access to formal education (Macias & Redondo-Sama, 2012). As such, their exposure to violence is best understood through the intersections of sexism, racism, and classism (Pohjolainen & Pavee Point, 2015).

Against this backdrop, authors like Bovarnick (2007) argue that GBV is not exclusive to cultural minorities but is an endemic issue rooted in patriarchal structures across societies. From this perspective, GBV emerges as a structural problem embedded in global patriarchal systems, transcending ethnicity, class, religion, and national origin (Bannenber & Rössner, 2003; de Castella et al., 2011). Comparative work on intersecting marginalizations among ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ refugees shows

how structural inequities—rather than cultural essences—shape exposure to violence and access barriers (Gümüş & Kjaran, 2025). This reinforces our intersectional reading of Roma women's experiences.

Nonetheless, Roma communities have developed informal mechanisms that play a protective role in intimate partner violence cases (Aiello et al., 2013). These practices reflect forms of community agency that challenge deficit-based narratives and underscore the presence of protective cultural logics. Recognizing these forms of agency aligns with calls in recent feminist and participatory research to validate localized, collective responses to GBV (Lokot & Hartman, 2023; Wallerstein et al., 2020).

Solidarity among Roma women is also central to GBV prevention and intervention. Networks of trust, often composed of female relatives and neighbors, act as early detection and support systems (Valls et al., 2023). These dynamics echo patterns in other minority and Indigenous contexts, where women's informal networks are vital to survival strategies (Burman & Chantler, 2005; George et al., 2021).

Organizations working with Roma women also emphasize that, like women in general, they often remain silent in abusive situations due to self-blame, denial, fear of retaliation, or hope for improvement. In the Roma context, this silence may also reflect a desire to avoid further stigmatizing an already marginalized community (Pohjola & Pavee Point, 2015). Thus, there is no causal relationship between ethnic identity and exposure to violence. Instead, risk increases through complex interactions among social, cultural, and structural factors (Gulliver & Dixon, 2015; KAMIRA, 2015; Pohjola & Pavee Point, 2015). This reinforces the need for approaches that respect cultural specificity while safeguarding women's rights.

Considering this, Bovarnick (2007) calls for an examination of both global patriarchal traditions and culture-specific values that either perpetuate or counter gender violence. Recent studies have begun to explore such transformative elements within cultural minorities. These include the intervention of respected family figures like mothers-in-law (Niu & Laidler, 2015), religious identities as sources of resilience (Niu & Laidler, 2015), solidarity networks among women within the same ethnic group (Raghavan et al., 2009), and the role of socio-educational programs (Cheng & Lo, 2016).

More recent studies highlight the importance of identifying transformative elements within Roma communities—particularly in times of heightened vulnerability, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Roma-led responses to the health crisis demonstrated strong internal solidarity mechanisms and culturally rooted practices that helped mitigate structural barriers (Valero, Elboj, & De Botton, 2024; Council of Europe, 2024). These findings reinforce the need to rethink dominant approaches to social intervention. Valero, Elboj, Plaja & Munté 2021 or George et al. (2021) argue that effective social work with Roma populations must incorporate cultural competence, long-term trust-building, and collaboration with community-based agents. This growing body of research supports the idea that addressing GBV in Roma contexts requires not only recognizing systemic inequalities but also valuing existing community-based strategies as part of the solution.

Noting that similar patterns have been observed in other Roma communities across the Balkans and Eastern Europe, it is necessary to bring our findings into a broader European context. Research conducted in Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria (Petričušić,

2025; Radovanović et al., 2025) has underlined how different forms of exclusion—most especially the intersections of ethnicity, gender, and poverty—shape both the risks of GBV and the construction of community protective practices. Such comparative insights reinforce the transnational importance of our findings and highlight the potential efficacy of community-based participatory approaches across diverse Roma contexts.

Beyond Roma-specific contexts, studies in Indigenous and minoritized populations globally offer valuable comparative insights. In many of these communities, collective responsibility and culturally embedded practices (e.g., spiritual ceremonies, community councils, female circles) serve as tools for preventing and resolving violence (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008). These approaches demonstrate that effective responses to GBV must not only address individual behaviors but also engage with communal structures and norms. From a practical perspective, Vives-Cases et al. (2017) outline key strategies to improve Roma women's access to healthcare in cases of intimate partner violence. These include training professionals in cultural sensitivity, strengthening partnerships with Roma associations, and fostering collaboration with community-based actors. Such recommendations align closely with our findings, which highlight the need for support services that are embedded in the everyday contexts and cultural realities of Roma women.

Methodology

Recent methodological work on GBV in Romani and Traveler lives underscores the need for participatory designs, reflexive ethics, and sustained trust-building with communities, aligning closely with our CM/CBPR approach (Gay y Blasco, 2025). This scholarship cautions against extractive designs and supports the integration of advisory boards and co-interpretation to ensure epistemic justice. Accordingly, this study adopts a qualitative design grounded in Communicative Methodology (CM), (Gómez et al., 2011), complemented by principles of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) (Israel et al., 1998; Wallerstein et al., 2017). Both approaches emphasize the co-production of knowledge through egalitarian dialogue and the active involvement of participants throughout the research process. In line with these frameworks, the research was conducted with Roma individuals rather than on them, recognizing their lived experience as a valuable source of knowledge. More recent work by Gómez et al. (2019) has emphasized how the Communicative Methodology not only enables the co-creation of knowledge but also enhances social impact by integrating participants as active agents in the research process.

Both approaches share a foundational commitment to epistemic justice, egalitarian dialogue, and social transformation, making them especially suitable for conducting research on sensitive topics such as gender-based violence (GBV) within historically marginalized communities.

CM is a well-established methodology in European research and has been successfully applied in previous studies on gender-based violence (Puigvert, 2014; Vidu et al., 2014), on Roma communities more broadly (Aiello et al., 2013; Gómez & Munté, 2016), and in studies focusing specifically on GBV within Roma populations

(Amador, 2019). Furthermore, CM is endorsed by the European Commission as a scientifically valid and ethically appropriate method for research involving socially vulnerable groups (European Commission, 2010).

At the same time, CBPR has gained recognition internationally as a rigorous, ethical, and effective approach for engaging communities as co-researchers in studies that seek to address health and social inequities (Oetzel et al., 2020; Wallerstein & Duran, 2010). CBPR emphasizes long-term collaboration, power-sharing, and actionable outcomes, and has been increasingly recommended in feminist and anti-racist research for its ability to center community agency and situated knowledge (Cammara & Romero, 2014; Fine, 2018).

Recent scholarship has emphasized the importance of combining participatory approaches like CBPR with culturally responsive and context-specific frameworks when researching GBV in ethnic minorities (Baird et al., 2022; George et al., 2021). This study responds to those calls by drawing on both CM and CBPR to develop a culturally grounded, community-led, and socially relevant analysis of intra-community strategies addressing GBV.

The integration of CBPR principles into the Communicative Methodology employed here allowed for:

- The collaborative definition of research priorities, grounded in concerns expressed by Roma women and community professionals.
- The co-design of interview tools and thematic focuses aligned with Roma cultural values.
- The inclusion of community voices in the interpretation and validation of findings.
- The involvement of an Advisory Board composed of Roma and non-Roma women with experience in gender-based violence, social intervention, and Roma advocacy.

This dual framework ensured that the study was ethically grounded, culturally sensitive, and oriented toward institutional change. It also allowed for the identification of transformative practices within Roma communities that are often overlooked by mainstream GBV research and policy.

Participants

The fieldwork was carried out as part of the Spanish R&D&I project “SARTUCUE”. The sample comprised 28 participants selected through purposive and snowball strategies to ensure heterogeneity and relevance to the research aims: (a) six interviews with professionals who support Roma GBV survivors (two Roma and four non-Roma); (b) eight interviews with Roma women from two associations; (c) one focus group ($n=6$) with members of those Roma women’s associations; and (d) eight Communicative Life Stories (CLS) with Roma community members (four women and four men). Participants represented a diverse range of profiles, including both professionals with experience in supporting Roma GBV survivors and members of the Roma community themselves. The sample was intentionally heterogeneous,

including individuals of different ages, genders, educational backgrounds, belief systems, socioeconomic statuses, and varying levels of involvement in community-based organizations. A full profile is provided in Table 1.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews (professionals), Communicative Life Stories (community members), and one focus group (association members). Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 min, were conducted in Spanish, and were audio-recorded and transcribed. Interviews were held in community centers, NGOs, or participants' homes, ensuring a culturally safe and familiar environment. Pseudonyms were used to protect participant identities. Before participation, all interviewees received an information sheet and signed a written informed consent form, which explained the study's aims, voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw at any point, and the measures for anonymity and data protection.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a thematic approach informed by the principles of Communicative Methodology (CM) and participatory qualitative research. The goal was to identify transformative elements—community-driven strategies that contribute to the prevention or resolution of gender-based violence—as well as exclusionary elements—barriers that reproduce or exacerbate violence and inequality (Gómez et al., 2011; Vidu et al., 2014). Transcripts were coded manually using a combination of inductive and deductive strategies, which allowed themes to emerge from the data while being guided by prior research on gender-based violence in ethnic minority communities (Baird et al., 2022; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding was conducted by two researchers who worked independently at first and then collaboratively refined the coding structure. Any discrepancies in interpretation were discussed and resolved through dialogue, in keeping with the CM emphasis on co-interpretation and shared meaning-making.

We conducted a reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). In line with RTA's interpretive orientation, we did not quantify "theme prevalence." In purposive, information-power-driven samples, counting codes or mentions neither signals importance nor supports statistical generalization; in RTA, themes are valued for their analytic contribution, coherence, and explanatory power, not their frequency (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021; Malterud et al., 2016). Accordingly, rather than report counts, we demonstrate robustness by (a) showing breadth—whether patterns cut across Roma women, elders, and practitioners; (b) attending to convergence, divergence, and deviant cases; and (c) offering thick description with illustrative extracts. Transparency and trustworthiness were strengthened through reflexive memoing, an audit trail, collaborative coding discussions, and Advisory Board triangulation. This approach avoids implying unwarranted generalizability from a non-probabilistic sample while remaining faithful to RTA's epistemology.

The final thematic map identified three overarching community-based strategies:

Table 1 Profile of the participants

Code	Technique	Role	Profile
Prof_1	Interview	Roma mediator	11 years working at a Roma Association, 3 years at a woman association, and another 3 in a shelter. Works periodically with more than 80 Roma women, running support and training groups. She is Roma, and given the trust built, it is common for women experiencing gender-based violence (GBV) to approach her to share their situation and seek help.
Prof_2	Interview	Gender Equality Officer, Program for the Equality of Roma Women	2 years heading this service. Previously, 5 years at Social Services and at the Employment, Housing and Literacy Service of a Roma Association. She is a Roma woman; through the service she manages, she conducts the first interview with Roma women seeking help for GBV issues.
Prof_3	Interview	Police officer	Non-Roma. Reported no training in GBV or on the Roma community.
Prof_4	Interview	Social support officer	Roma woman who supports Roma women victims of GBV through the service. Reported several institutional trainings on GBV.
Prof_5	Interview	Care and training professional	Non-Roma GBV expert. The organization generally works with any women who approach it, although few Roma women have done so.
Prof_6	Interview	Women's support and counseling professional	GBV expert and president of the municipality's Gender-Based Violence Commission.
Ent_1.1_Entr	Interview	Director	Roma woman, approximately 40 years old. Her training on GBV in the Roma community has mainly consisted of online empowerment workshops, empowerment courses, gender equality officer courses, and prevention and awareness workshops on GBV. In 2018–2019 she attended classes in the Master's program on equality between men and women at the University of the Basque Country.
Ent_1.2_Entr	Interview	Association social worker	Roma woman. 7 years as a social mediator at the Association. Leads women's groups for empowerment, self-esteem, etc.
Ent_1.3_Entr	Interview	Roma mediator	Roma woman. Member of the Association. 55 years old. Over 15 years collaborating with the Association
Ent_1.1_GD	Group discussion	Roma mediator	Roma woman. 40 years old. Recently affiliated. (<i>Mediator 1</i>).
Ent_1.2_GD	Group discussion	Roma mediator	Roma woman. 40 years old. Recently affiliated. (<i>Mediator 2</i>).
Ent_1.3_GD	Group discussion	Participant in a Roma association	Roma woman. 20 years old. Connected to the association for 2 years.
Ent_1.4_GD	Group discussion	Roma mediator	Roma woman. 50 years old. Pastor of the congregation. More than 30 years collaborating with the Association. (<i>Mediator 3</i>).
Ent_1.5_GD	Group discussion	Roma mediator	Roma woman. 50 years old. 8 years collaborating with the organization and working in its activities. (<i>Mediator 4</i>).
Ent_1.6_GD	Group discussion	Social worker	Roma woman. One and a half years working with Roma women at the Association.

Table 1 (continued)

Code	Technique	Role	Profile
Ent_2.1_Entr	Interview	Association president	Roma woman, 40 years old. Involved since the Association's inception.
Ent_2.2_Entr	Interview	Association program officer	Roma woman, 24 years old. 1 year as a volunteer and later engaged as the Association's facilitator.
Ent_2.3_Entr	Interview	Participant in a Roma association	Roma woman, 50 years old. Has known the Association for more than 3 years and participates in its activities.
Ent_2.4_Entr	Interview	Participant in a Roma association	Roma woman, 30 years old. Trained in the Association's school lunch monitor course.
Ent_2.5_Entr	Interview	Participant in a Roma association	Roma woman, 30 years old. Trained in the Association's school lunch monitor course. Has participated in the Association's activities for 10 years.
Com_1M_2M	Communicative life story	Roma women victims of violence	Mother and daughter; both survivors of GBV (counts as 2 participants).
COM_1H	Communicative life story	Respected Roma man	Roma man. Pastor of the Evangelical Church.
COM_2H	Communicative life story	Roma man	Roma man.
COM_3H	Communicative life story	Roma man	Roma man.
COM_3M	Communicative life story	Roma woman	Roma woman.
COM_4M	Communicative life story	Roma woman	Roma woman.
COM_4H	Communicative life story	Roma man	Roma man.

1. The unwritten inter-family pact to prevent and sanction violence;
2. Community mediation as an alternative to formal legal mechanisms;
3. Women's solidarity networks, including the role of older women and mothers-in-law.

Each of these themes encapsulates a range of practices and meanings that were carefully analyzed to uncover their protective functions, limitations, and implications for policy and intervention.

This analytical process not only produced descriptive categories but aimed to generate actionable knowledge that could be integrated into culturally responsive interventions and service provision. In line with both CM and CBPR, the emphasis remained on identifying forms of agency and resistance within the Roma community that are often overlooked in mainstream research and policy approaches.

Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (Spanish National R&D&I Program Addressing Societal Challenges 2015) and complies with national regulations on research ethics and data protection. All participants were invited to voluntarily take part in the research and provided written informed consent. The consent form clearly explained the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. It also detailed that *Communicative Life Story* would be audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis and subsequent dissemination through articles and reports, always ensuring participants' confidentiality and data protection in accordance with legal and ethical standards.

A key component of the CM and CBPR framework was the establishment of an Advisory Board (AB). The AB was composed of Roma and non-Roma women, including leaders of Roma organizations, researchers, and practitioners with extensive experience in GBV prevention. This board provided input during the study design phase, validated the interview protocol, reviewed emerging findings and ensured the cultural sensitivity, scientific robustness, and ethical soundness of the research process and conclusions.

Results

We present three interconnected themes that describe how Roma communities mobilize culturally embedded mechanisms to prevent and respond to GBV: (1) the unwritten pact between families, (2) community mediation, and (3) solidarity among women, including the pivotal role of the mother-in-law. Each strategy is described below.

The Unwritten Pact Between Families as a Mechanism for Collective Prevention

Family networks are a fundamental source of protection in Roma communities, playing a central role not only in everyday life but also in resolving serious issues such as GBV. When a Roma couple becomes engaged, it is customary to hold a formal gathering that includes family elders and other respected figures, whose presence legitimizes the commitment between the families. Beyond celebration, participants describe this moment as the origin of a socially binding understanding that frames GBV not as a private issue but as a matter in which both families are accountable.

In practice, this pact tends to operate through family meetings convened by respected figures, close monitoring by relatives, and decisions that are socially enforceable; however, we do not present these as a fixed sequence, since cases vary.

When a Roma couple gets engaged, it is usual to celebrate a marriage proposal where relatives participate and where people of respect have a prominent role in the public formalization of the commitment. This engagement ceremony marks a verbal, though unofficial, pact between families, who take joint responsibility for the couple's well-being. If violence is detected, the victim's family may invoke this

pact and demand accountability from the aggressor's family. When safety cannot be ensured, the woman is supported in leaving the relationship and returning to her family with her children.

"When a marriage breaks down, the elders convene a family meeting... and it is declared that the marriage is over." (Com_4M).

Family intervention functions as a deterrent, where the shared concern of multiple relatives exerts pressure on the perpetrator. The fact that violence becomes a matter of public concern within the family breaks the isolation typically associated with intimate partner violence. These pacts are grounded in moral authority and cultural legitimacy, often more effective than formal interventions perceived as disconnected or distrusting. Rather than seen as a substitute for institutional services, these pacts function as a first line of defense that enables prevention and early containment. Besides parents, the whole family intervenes if something happens, and the role of the elders is crucial.

In this way, they establish a relationship between the families and a verbal commitment that obliges them to ensure the couple's well-being and intervene in the event of detecting a threat to that well-being. For example, faced with a case of gender violence, the victim's family can claim against the aggressor's family the violation of this unwritten pact if an episode of violence occurs. On the other hand, suppose the well-being and safety of the woman are not guaranteed. In that case, the relationship does not have to continue, and the victim's family can mediate so that she separates from the aggressor and returns to her family with her children.

"Unwritten but deep-rooted commitment, it may lead to major conflicts between families if a man has mistreated a woman. The victim's family comes to her defense, and if the other family does not want to admit it, they have problems, and the woman automatically returns home (parents") (Com_1H).

Women in the family are often the first to detect abuse and seek solutions. In many cases, mediation is led by the victim's mother and is not necessarily aimed at maintaining the relationship, but rather at organizing separation and childcare arrangements. At that time, the women themselves seek mechanisms to end this situation. In this sense, family mediation is one of the main ways. The victim's parents can meet the aggressor and their parents to discover and stop the situation of violence. The mediation can be led directly by the victim's mother and does not have to be aimed at maintaining the couple's relationship; instead, it can be focused on managing the separation and sharing the children.

"I tell my daughters not to put up with a man mistreating them at all. You are not orphans, you have a father and you have a mother. The day a man lays his hand on you, you take your things, your children, and you come. I have put up with it, my mother has put up with it, they don't have to put up with it." (Ent_1.3).

As mentioned, we have seen with community and associations interviews family pacts go first, as has been also confirmed by professionals: “The first approach is within the family... to avoid problems for her family. That is their main approach.” (Prof_2).

Across accounts from Roma women, mediators, and “Roma of respect,” the unwritten inter-family pact surfaced as a culturally legitimate mechanism for early detection, rapid de-escalation, and, where necessary, organized separation. Its protective value lies in making the couple’s well-being a collective responsibility, thereby widening the circle of accountability beyond the aggressor. At the same time, participants underscored limits: the pact’s effectiveness depends on the aggressor’s family acknowledging and acting on the breach; when that recognition is absent, women rely on their natal families to exit the relationship or ultimately consider formal services. This pattern complements scholarship that foregrounds community agency and culturally embedded safeguards, while cautioning against cultural determinism.

Taken together, the pact functions as a culturally legitimate first line of protection that can either contain risk quickly or escalate the matter to broader community mechanisms. Its efficacy appears contingent on inter-family cooperation and on the ability of respected women to intervene early. When cooperation fails or violence escalates, cases typically move toward community mediation (Section “[Community Mediation](#)”) or into formal services. This sequencing helps explain why some situations are resolved without formal complaints while still reflecting a clear normative rejection of GBV.

Community Mediation

Beyond dispute resolution, community mediation in our sample operates as a culturally legitimated early-warning and accountability mechanism, typically mobilized before (and sometimes instead of) formal reporting. Anchored in the authority of respected elders and in the inter-family pact, it can produce enforceable social sanctions—from public reprimand to temporary banishment—while organizing practical safety steps. At the same time, its protective capacity is contingent: when kin support is fragmented or the aggressor’s family is non-compliant, mediation may delay recourse to state protection and expose women to retaliation.

Community mediation is typically carried out by respected elders who uphold Roma values and are known for bringing peace to conflicts. Outcomes depend on whether the couple remains together or separates, and measures are tailored to the circumstances. Analytically, mediation channels collective agency into concrete safety planning (e.g., negotiated separations, childcare arrangements) while preserving inter-family peace; however, it is not a substitute for risk assessment, evidence preservation, or legal remedies. Mediation is sought by both families and rests on mutual agreement to respect the decisions reached. While not limited to violent situations, it is frequently used to resolve disagreements before they escalate. Its effectiveness hinges on compliance: sanctions “work” because non-compliance carries reputational costs across dense kin networks—precisely what also explains uneven outcomes across cases.

In such situations, Roma women may turn to elders or the broader community for support—especially if the aggressor’s family fails to act. Several participants framed GBV as morally unacceptable within community codes, but emphasized that the path to protection depends on whether the aggressor’s family assumes responsibility.

Linked to the unwritten inter-family pact, mediation decisions can entail consequences for breach (e.g., restricting contact with children or, in serious cases, banishment). Where relatives enable or fail to prevent abuse, sanctions may extend to them. In practice, these measures function as community-level deterrents that protect the woman’s immediate safety and incentivize family-side intervention.

This encourages family responsibility for prevention and timely intervention. Yet when this responsibility fails, participants stressed the need to “switch tracks” to statutory options without incurring penalties in welfare or credibility: “The figure of mediators (respected Roma) is very positive. They are called when the family cannot mediate, and they achieve what neither the police nor any other authority can achieve. Their aim is that there is peace.” (Com_4H).

When intervention by the woman’s family or the aggressor’s family fails, formal resources are used:

“When a woman seeks outside help, it is because she does not have the support of her husband’s family or her own family. That’s when she looks a little helpless. Maybe his own family is far away or the relationship is not good or because the man’s family does not want to respond for various reasons. That is when women contemplate the possibility of resorting to the general resources of society.” (Ent_1.2_Entr).

This marks a typical transition point: where kin support is absent or exhausted, women look outward to formal services; where mediation achieves separation and safety, some women prefer to remain within community pathways.

However, this reliance on community resolution may also delay or prevent formal legal action. Some professionals highlight the need for protection mechanisms that do not require legal complaints, as many women are afraid of repercussions within their family networks.

Participants described community-led mediation as a first-line response that is both value-driven and outcomes-oriented (reconciliation or separation), typically convened by respected elders whose legitimacy facilitates compliance. The breadth of these accounts—spanning Roma elders, mediators, and practitioners—suggests mediation is routinely activated before formal pathways are considered. Yet interviewees also identified boundary conditions: in ongoing or severe abuse, mediation may unintentionally prolong exposure if not coupled with culturally coordinated routes to protection. Divergent accounts are informative here: while some saw mediation as decisive (including sanctions such as restricted contact or, in extreme cases, banishment), others emphasized that lack of coordination with official services and pressure to file a complaint can alienate victims. Together, these narratives point to the need for bridging mechanisms that preserve the community’s conflict-resolution role while ensuring timely access to legal safeguards when risk escalates.

“Many women say, ‘My family is already supporting me. We’ve already separated, and respected Roma have intervened, but my social worker keeps insisting I file a complaint or I’ll lose my minimum income. There are so many barriers.’” (Prof_2).

These testimonies point to a sensitive interface with institutions: requirements tightly linked to legal complaints can collide with culturally legitimate resolutions, generating hesitation or delays in help-seeking even when safety has been secured through mediation. Overall, the data portray mediation as a proximate, legitimate, and rapid response with clear limits; designing smooth hand-offs to formal protection when risk is high or kin support fails emerges as a practical necessity.

Solidarity Between Women and the Role of the Mother-in-Law

Mutual support among Roma women is a key protective factor. When a potential case of violence is detected, women often gather around the victim, offering emotional support and a safe space where she may choose to disclose her situation. Dialogue is highly valued in Roma culture, serving as a tool to help break the silence. Participants described these women’s circles as a low-threshold, proximity-based safety net that provides immediate containment (staying close, accompanying the woman outside the home), practical problem-solving (childcare, safe lodging, escorting to trusted relatives), and continuous monitoring of risk. This collective presence reduces isolation—a known amplifier of danger—and helps the victim articulate boundaries before conflicts escalate.

“Roma women support each other a lot. If someone is going through something, we go to her house, see what she needs, maybe take her out. We stay close because you never know about the abuser.” (Com_1M).

In our data, this “staying close” operates as everyday safeguarding: it normalizes seeking help within kin networks, lowers the emotional cost of disclosure, and creates room for safer decisions (e.g., planning separation) without immediate exposure to inter-family confrontation.

Participants portrayed these actions as protective tactics deeply embedded in everyday relationships.” A friend helped me leave him. She didn’t judge me, just told me: ‘You’re worth more than that.’ That gave me strength.” (Com_4M). Such examples reveal that female solidarity builds emotional resilience and enables resistance, especially when institutional trust is low. These networks also provide the emotional validation that is often missing from formal services.

Elder women are especially respected, and their interventions are culturally legitimized. When they detect abuse, they can directly confront the aggressor. Ignoring or disrespecting them is highly frowned upon, as it violates community codes of respect. Interviewees stressed that this authority grants older women standing to set non-negotiable limits (“this must stop”), to summon relatives from both sides, and to activate further steps if necessary. One participant contrasted an intervention that halted a Roma aggressor—who complied out of respect for elders—with a similar

attempt involving a non-Roma aggressor, where her authority was not recognized; this contrast underscores how communal norms legitimize decisive action and can interrupt violence quickly within Roma settings. Women's solidarity emerged as an early-warning and containment layer: female relatives and neighbors create safe proximity, sustain daily check-ins, and encourage disclosure without forcing pace—practices that participants linked to Roma norms of dialogue and mutual care. This solidarity was reported by Roma women and mediators alike, indicating cross-role breadth.

One of the interviewees highlighted that, despite the interventions are more commons among the older ones, “Daughters also stand up for their mothers. I’ve seen girls confront the father and tell him to stop.” (Com_3M).

This quote reveals how intergenerational solidarity among women can generate protective dynamics, especially when younger generations internalize zero tolerance discourses and intervene to support their mothers.

Among these figures, the mother-in-law holds a particularly influential role. Following marriage, ties with in-laws grow stronger, and younger couples often rely on them for guidance. The mother-in-law can detect and address conflicts early, and if needed, she has the legitimacy to reprimand her son or call for family intervention. Accounts depicted the mother-in-law as an ambivalent figure: in many narratives she is a protective gatekeeper who can discipline her son and mobilize family support for the woman; in others, she may reproduce harmful norms, discouraging external help or minimizing non-physical abuse. Recognizing this ambivalence is analytically useful: it suggests that engaging mothers-in-law within culturally attuned programming could convert a variable influence into a consistently protective one, while avoiding simplistic portrayals of either ‘ally’ or ‘obstacle’. Because of her everyday proximity to the couple, she is often the earliest detector of control, jealousy, or verbal aggression, and can mobilize kin resources before harm escalates. When aligned with the victim's safety, her gatekeeping accelerates protective actions (temporary separation, childcare arrangements, convening elders). Participants also acknowledged variation: where a mother-in-law minimizes abuse or prioritizes family cohesion over safety, progress stalls and cases more frequently require escalation to respected elders or formal services.

This early intervention can prevent the need for community mediation, which often results in more serious consequences. As one Roma association leader noted:

“The mother-in-law plays a fundamental role—both in supporting the couple and addressing challenges. That’s why our role as mediators is to work with mothers-in-law, with women, and with the community—to ensure that everyone has a point of support, and that support is us.” (Ent_2.1_Entr).

Overall, the pathway that emerges from the testimonies is sequential: women's solidarity creates immediate safety and disclosure; mothers-in-law act as privileged brokers to resolve or escalate; and, if risk persists or cooperation fails, cases move to community mediation or to formal resources. This sequencing helps explain why some survivors prefer community routes initially while still reflecting a clear normative rejection of GBV and a readiness to involve institutions when communal

mechanisms reach their limits. Taken together, women's solidarity and the strategically engaged role of elder women operate as informal, proximal safeguards that can complement—rather than substitute for—formal services when coordination and trust are in place.

Discussion of the Results

The aim of this study was to identify and analyze intra-community strategies activated by the Roma population to prevent and address gender-based violence (GBV), as well as to explore their potential for integration into institutional interventions without eroding cultural identity. The findings highlight three key pillars—unwritten inter-family pacts, community mediation, and female solidarity networks—that challenge dominant deficit-based narratives about the Roma community and reveal internal social capital that, under specific conditions, can play a crucial role in the protection of women.

These intra-community strategies contest the widespread academic perception that Roma communities are passive or tolerant in the face of GBV. On the contrary, our findings illustrate that Roma families and community structures play a central role both in prevention and response. Collective organization within the community—based on a strong sense of belonging, respect for elders, and well-established female solidarity networks—legitimizes the active involvement of multiple agents in the detection and resolution of cases. This shared responsibility for ensuring women's safety and non-violence in intimate relationships is not new: it constitutes a historical mechanism that has enabled Roma communities to survive centuries of persecution and exclusion (Duque et al., 2023).

The unwritten inter-family pact, which is activated once a couple formalizes their relationship, implies that both families assume joint responsibility for the well-being of their members. Breaching this pact may lead to community sanctions, including, in more severe cases, the expulsion of the aggressor. Rather than a punitive measure, this expulsion is conceived as a protective strategy for the victim, aimed at avoiding continued exposure to violence and reducing the risk of retaliation. Recent findings from Romania and Slovakia reveal similar family-based pacts that act as a first filter for conflict resolution and the protection of women (Bojinca, 2020). This mechanism is interpreted here as a form of cultural resilience (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; Lopez, 2019), though its effectiveness may be limited by family disputes, internal power dynamics, or the tendency to minimize non-physical forms of violence, as noted by Duque et al. (2023)..

Community mediation represents another key strategy, deeply rooted in Roma traditions and documented in Spain (Duque et al., 2023). It is carried out by legitimized figures such as respected elders, seasoned mediators, or community leaders, who may intervene on their own initiative or at the request of the parties involved. This process aims not only to halt the violence but also to preserve family harmony and avoid inter-family conflict, while ensuring accountability from the aggressor—and when necessary, their family. However, recent studies warn of potential risks: delays in reporting, superficial agreements, or pressure on the victim to avoid formal services

(Burman & Chantler, 2005; Duque et al., 2023). These dilemmas point to the need for hybrid models in which community mediators work in close collaboration with public services, thereby reducing institutional mistrust and facilitating safe referrals (Jara Gómez, 2021).

Female solidarity networks emerge as a third essential pillar, consistent with recent studies on female leadership and GBV prevention in Roma communities (Jara Gómez, 2021; Valls et al., 2023). Women in the immediate environment—neighbors, friends, relatives—are often the first to detect signs of abuse and receive the victim’s disclosure. These networks may activate community mechanisms or intervene directly, especially when backed by respected elder women whose cultural authority legitimizes confrontation with the aggressor. A particularly notable case is the role of the mother-in-law who, due to her close relationship with both the victim and the abusive son, may mediate, de-escalate conflict, and coordinate a family response before broader intervention is necessary. This finding, rarely documented in the literature, suggests that empowering and training such figures could be key to reinforcing community-based protection (Bojinca, 2020; Valls, 2023; Duque et al., 2023).

A transversal element across all these strategies is the protection of those who support victims, often referred to as “second-order victims.” Recent literature (Duque et al., 2023) confirms that community rejection of retaliation against those who intervene on behalf of women strengthens the willingness to act early. However, these protective dynamics remain largely invisible or misinterpreted, as some studies continue to frame Roma social networks as mechanisms that exacerbate victimization (Raghavan et al., 2009), overlooking their roles in containment and prevention.

Nonetheless, these strategies are not always sufficient to address a problem as complex and widespread as GBV. Research shows that Roma women rarely turn to official services—not due to an absence of violence, but because of the systemic barriers that hinder access (Duque et al., 2023). As Erickson (2017) warns, stereotypes may lead professionals to delegate case resolution to the community itself or, worse, treat victims with suspicion or discrimination. This generates a perception of two parallel and incompatible support systems—community-based and institutional—forcing victims to choose between them. Bridging this divide requires embedding official services within the community so they are perceived as close and trustworthy, fostering collaboration and mutual recognition (Burman & Chantler, 2005; Valls et al., 2023).

The practical implications of these findings are clear. The identified transformative elements can serve as entry points for designing culturally adapted interventions, avoiding the framing of Roma practices as obstacles. Examples include the development of legal services within the community to facilitate access to the justice system (DePrince et al., 2012), the strengthening of alliances between community and external services to cover basic needs such as childcare or job training (Lipsky et al., 2012), and the implementation of community health workers who, in addition to providing culturally relevant health education, can directly support GBV survivors.

Taken together, the findings support the relevance of an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1989; Nixon & Humphreys, 2010) and the value of participatory methodologies such as Communicative Methodology and CBPR for accessing situated and culturally relevant knowledge (George et al., 2021; Wallerstein et al.,). Public poli-

cies must move beyond the binary of internal vs. external mechanisms, recognize and build on existing community resources, and ensure that professionals working with Roma women in GBV contexts are trained in cultural competence. These findings invite a rethinking of how research and public policy approach gender-based violence in Roma communities. Recognizing the existence of internal protective mechanisms does not mean replacing institutional responses, but rather integrating them into an architecture of intervention that combines the best of both systems. This approach would not only reduce access barriers and institutional mistrust, but also contribute to strengthening community agency and respect for cultural identity. From an academic perspective, these results offer evidence for a shift in focus: from deficit- or stigma-based frameworks to asset-based and collective-capacity models, fostering a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of GBV prevention and intervention in culturally diverse contexts.

Conclusions

Taken together, our findings respond directly to the research questions. Regarding RQ1, we identified three intra-community strategies that operate as immediate, legitimate responses to GBV: (i) an inter-family pact that distributes responsibility for the couple's well-being and enables rapid mobilization and the imposition of social sanctions; (ii) community mediation led by respected elders, which functions as an early warning and accountability mechanism, often organizing separation processes and practical safety measures; and (iii) female solidarity networks—including the role of mothers-in-law as watchful and protective figures—that detect risk early and shield survivors through proximity and moral authority (see Sections “[The Unwritten Pact Between Families as a Mechanism for Collective Prevention](#)”, “[Community Mediation](#)”, and “[Solidarity Between Women and the Role of the Mother-in-Law](#)”).

Regarding RQ2, the data suggest concrete pathways for respectful integration with formal systems: co-management of cases with recognized community mediators; protection protocols not conditioned on formal complaints and accompanied by phased preservation of evidence; culturally competent risk assessments that treat compliance by in-laws as a variable rather than an assumption; and warm referrals from mediation to statutory protection services when risk escalates. These measures directly address the barriers reported by participants (pressure to file complaints, penalties in social benefits, weak institutional coordination), while leveraging the speed, trust, and accountability inherent to intra-community action. In line with CBPR-related approaches documented in other minoritized contexts, this bridge preserves community agency without Romanticizing it, and strengthens the timeliness, safety, and legitimacy of interventions.

The study's main contribution is to show that these culturally rooted resources, with built-in social enforceability, can serve as strategic allies of public policy when articulated without eroding Roma identity and aligned with participatory frameworks (CM/CBPR).

Based on the findings, we propose four implications for practice and policy:

- Formal case co-management channels with mediators and respected elders, including “warm referral” protocols from community mediation to statutory resources when risk increases.
- Protection pathways not conditioned on formal complaints, alongside protocols for phased evidence preservation and culturally competent risk assessment (treating in-law compliance as a variable, not a given).
- Structured training in cultural competence for health, social, and justice professionals, co-designed with Roma agents.
- Programs that strengthen female networks (early detection, safety, referral), without overly institutionalizing them or displacing their community-based legitimacy.

Some limitations of this study are apparent. First, the non-probabilistic qualitative sample herein used ($N=28$) limits the generalisability of findings. The results presented here should therefore be framed as contextually grounded rather than statistically representative, with transferability dependent on specific local contexts and Roma sub-groups. Second, though the triangulation of data sources—professionals, associations, and community members—has enriched the analytical depth of this study, future research might extend to other territories and also incorporate cross-national comparative designs. Third, further studies may use longitudinal or mixed-method approaches as a way to track how community-led strategies against GBV evolve over time. Further work will need to broaden the range of sites and subgroups studied while retaining the CM/CBPR orientation that underpins this research.

In any case, this being a qualitative study, our goal is not one of statistical generalization but rather one of providing empirical evidence that contributes to ongoing debates and highlights four key implications for the stakeholders involved. This article ultimately decenters deficit-oriented narratives, documents internally developed protective mechanisms, and offers concrete steps that can be taken to strengthen the bridges between community members and institutional guarantees.

Acknowledgments This study was supported by funding from the Spanish National R&D&I Program Addressing Societal Challenges 2015, under Project SARTUCUE (Ref. CSO2015-69504-R). The authors wish to express their gratitude for this support, which made the development of this research possible.

Author Contributions All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection and analysis were performed by Teresa Sorde, Carmen Elboj, Ariadna Munté and Diana Valero. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Diana Valero, and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding Open Access funding provided thanks to the CRUE-CSIC agreement with Springer Nature. This study was supported by funding from the Spanish National R&D&I Program Addressing Societal Challenges 2015, under Project SARTUCUE (Ref. CSO2015-69504-R).

Data Availability The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declarations

Competing Interests The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Ethical Approval This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards established in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its subsequent amendments. Formal evaluation by an ethics committee was not required under the terms of the national funding call (Spanish National R&D&I Program Addressing Societal Challenges 2015, Project SARTUCUE, Ref. CSO2015-69504-R). The research was supervised by an Advisory Board comprising Roma and non-Roma women, including members of Roma-led organizations and professionals in the field. The Advisory Board provided guidance throughout the study and validated the findings presented.

Consent to Participate All participants received detailed information about the study's objectives and procedures and provided written informed consent prior to participation. This consent included permission for audio recording, transcription, and the use of anonymized data in publications.

Consent to Publish Participants consented to the publication of anonymized data collected during the study.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

- Aiello, E., Mondejar, E., & Pulido, M. Á. (2013). Communicative methodology of research and recognition of the Roma people. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 6(2), 254–265. <https://doi.org/10.1525/irqr.2013.6.2.254>
- Amador, J. (2019). Who said submissive? Pentecostalism and the Roma woman fighting against gender violence. *International Journal of Roma Studies*, 35–57. <https://doi.org/10.17583/ijrs.2019.3786>
- Baird, K., Briskman, L., & Fiske, L. (2022). Participatory research with marginalized communities: Challenges and opportunities in addressing gender-based violence. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 31(1), 48–64. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2021.1921324>
- Bannenber, B., & Rossner, D. (2003). New developments in restorative justice to handle family violence. In *Restorative Justice in Context*. Willan.
- Bojincă, M. (2020). Considerations on the traditional justice of the Roma community. *Annals of the „Constantin Brâncuși” University of Târgu Jiu, Juridical Sciences Series*, (2), 55–64 <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=883441>
- Bovarnick, S. (2007). Universal human rights and non-Western normative systems: A comparative analysis of violence against women in Mexico and Pakistan. *Review of International Studies*, 33(1), 59–74. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210507007309>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 18(3), 328–352. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238>
- Breiding, M. J., Black, M. C., & Ryan, G. W. (2008). Prevalence and risk factors of intimate partner violence in eighteen US states/territories, 2005. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 34(2), 112–118. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2007.10.001>
- Briones-Vozmediano, E., Parra-Casado, L., D., & Vives-Cases, C. (2018). Health providers' narratives on intimate partner violence against Roma women in Spain. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 61(3–4), 411–420. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12235>
- Briones-Vozmediano, E., Castellanos-Torres, E., Goicolea, I., & Vives-Cases, C. (2021). Challenges to detecting and addressing intimate partner violence among Roma women in Spain: perspectives of primary care providers. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 36(19–20), 10433–10452. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519872299>
- Burman, E., & Chantler, K. (2005). Domestic violence and minoritisation: Legal and policy barriers facing minoritized women leaving violent relationships. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 28(1), 59–74. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlp.2004.12.004>
- Cammarota, J., & Romero, A. (2014). *Participatory action research: Theory and methods for engaged inquiry*. Routledge.
- Cheng, T. C., & Lo, C. C. (2016). Racial disparities in intimate partner violence examined through the multiple disadvantage model. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 31(11), 2026–2051. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260515572475>
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of anti-discrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139–167.
- de Castella, K., Platow, M. J., Wenzel, M., Okimoto, T., & Feather, N. T. (2011). Retribution or restoration? Anglo–Australian's views towards domestic violence involving Muslim and Anglo–Australian victims and offenders. *Psychology Crime & Law*, 17(5), 403–420. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10683160903292253>
- Council of Europe. (2024). *Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)1 on the equality of Roma and Traveller women and girls*. Council of Europe <https://rm.coe.int/recommendation-cm-rec-2024-1-on-the-equality-of-roma-and-traveller-wom/1680b21286?>
- Council for the Elimination of Racial or Ethnic Discrimination (CEDRE). (2023). *Annual results report 2023* [Annual report]. Ministry of Equality, Government of Spain.
- Djikanovic, B., Stamenkovic, Ž., Mikanovic, V. B., Vukovic, D., Gordeev, V. S., & Maksimovic, N. (2018). Negative attitudes related to violence against women: Gender and ethnic differences among youth living in Serbia. *International Journal of Public Health*, 63(8), 923–932. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00038-017-1033-y>
- DePrince, A. P., Labus, J., Belknap, J., Buckingham, S., & Gover, A. (2012). The impact of community-based outreach on psychological distress and victim safety in women exposed to intimate partner abuse. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*, 80(2), 211. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027224>
- Duque Sánchez, E., Khalfaoui Larrañaga, A., Macías-Aranda, F., & Carol, V. (2023). R. Estudio Violencia de género en la población gitana [Informe]. Ministerio de Igualdad. <https://violenciagenero.igualdad.gob.es/violenciaEnCifras/estudios/investigaciones/home.htm>
- Erickson, J. (2017). Intersectionality theory and Bosnian roma: Understanding violence and displacement. *Romani Studies*, 27(1), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.3828/rs.2017.1>
- European Commission (2010, April 8). *Conclusions: 'Science Against Poverty*. Segovia Conference, The Farm. www.idi.mineco.gob.es/stfhs/MICINN/Presidencia%20Europa/Ficheros/Conferencia_Ciencia_contra_la_pobreza.pdf
- European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (2023). *Violence against women: Definitions and terminology*. <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/terminology-and-indicators-vawg>
- Fine, M. (2018). *Just research in contentious times: Widening the methodological imagination*. Teachers College.
- Fleming, J., & Ledogar, R. J. (2008). Resilience, an evolving concept: A review of literature relevant to aboriginal research. *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health*, 6(2), 7–23.
- FRA, EIGE, & Eurostat (2024). *EU survey on gender-based violence against women – Results at EU and national level*. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/pr-2024-eu-gender-based-violence-survey_es.pdf




- Fundación Secretariado Gitano. (2023). *Discrimination and the Roma Community: Annual Report 2023*. Fundación Secretariado Gitano } https://www.gitanos.org/upload/12/22/Annual_Report_Discrimination_and_Roma_Community_FSG_2023.pdf
- Gay, P. (2025). *Introduction: Researching gender and violence in Romani and Traveller lives—methods, ethics, and dilemmas*. En P. Gay y Blasco (Ed.), *Gender and Violence in Romani and Traveller Lives*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781032629285-1>
- George, A., Mehra, R., Scott, K., & Sriram, V. (2021). Community participation in health systems research: A systematic review assessing the state of research, the nature of interventions involved and the features of engagement with communities. *PLOS ONE*, 16(10), e0259132. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0259132>
- Gómez, A., & Munté, A. (2016). Communicative methodology of research and Roma migrant women in Spain: A process of social change. In *Critical and Creative Research Methodologies in Social Work*. (pp. 61–74) . Routledge.
- Gómez, A., Padrós, M., Ríos, O., Mara, L. C., & Pukepuke, T. (2019). Reaching social impact through communicative Methodology. Researching with rather than on vulnerable populations: The Roma case. *Frontiers in Education*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2019.00009>
- Gómez, A., Puigvert, L., & Flecha, R. (2011). Critical communicative methodology: Informing real social transformation through research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(3), 235–245. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410397802>
- Government of Spain (2022). Organic law 10/2022, of September 6, on the comprehensive guarantee of sexual freedom. Official State Gazette. <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/lo/2022/09/06/10>
- Gulliver, P., & Dixon, R. (2015). The influence of ethnicity on the outcomes of violence in pregnancy. *Ethnicity & Health*, 20(5), 511–522. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13557858.2014.939577>
- Gümüş, B., & Kjaran, J. I. (2025). Intersecting marginalisations: Violence against LGBTQ+ refugees and ethnic minorities in Turkey. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2025.2529496>
- Israel, B. A., Schulz, A. J., Parker, E. A., & Becker, A. B. (1998). Review of community-based research: Assessing partnership approaches to improve public health. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 19(1), 173–202. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.publhealth.19.1.173>
- Jara Gómez, A. M. (2021). Identity of Roma women and processes of international and transitional justice. *The Age of Human Rights Journal*, 17, 222–243. <https://doi.org/10.17561/tahrj.v17.6385>
- Joamets, K., & Sogomonjan, M. (2020). Influence of forced child marriage and domestic violence on mental health and well-being. Conflict of traditions and rights of Roma children. *International and Comparative Law Review*, 20(1), 58–76. <https://doi.org/10.2478/iclr-2020-0003>
- Kale Dor Kayiko (2013). *Report about situation of Roma women in the municipality of Bilbao* (p. 127). Area of Equality, Cooperation and Citizenship of the Bilbao City Council and Emakunde Basque Institute for Women. https://www.bizkaia.eus/gizartekintza/genero_indarkeria/blt31/documentos/gitana_2013_c.pdf?hash=0dcda3cd73e0d9f8b9da65728a2a4473
- KAMIRA (2015). *Research and intergenerational awareness on the situation of Roma women*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation. <https://www.aecgit.org/downloads/documentos/145/investigacion-y-sensibilizacion-intergeneracional.pdf>
- Kozubik, M., van Dijk, J., & Rac, I. (2020). Roma health mediation in slovakia: Practical examples and lessons learned. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(19), 6992. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17196992>
- Lipsky, S., Cristofalo, M., Reed, S., Caetano, R., & Roy-Byrne, P. (2012). Racial and ethnic disparities in police-reported intimate partner violence perpetration: A mixed methods approach. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 27(11), 2144–2162. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260511432152>
- Lokot, M., Hartman, E., & Hashmi, I. (2023). Participatory approaches and methods in gender equality and gender-based violence research with refugees and internally displaced populations: A scoping review. *Conflict and Health*, 17, 58. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-023-00554-5>
- Lokot, M., Hartman, E., & Hashmi, I. (2023). Participatory approaches and methods in gender equality and gender-based violence research with refugees and internally displaced populations: a scoping review. *Conflict and health*, 17(1), 58. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-023-00554-5>
- Lopez, J.A. (2019). Who said submissive? Pentecostalism and the roma woman fighting against gender violence. *International Journal of Roma Studies*, 35-57. <https://doi.org/10.17583/ijrs.2019.3786>
- Macias, F., & Redondo-Sama, G. (2012). Roma people, gender and education: Research to exclude or research to transform. *RISE: International Journal of Sociology of Education*, 1(1), 71–92. <https://doi.org/10.4471/rise.2012.04>

- Malterud, K., Siersma, V. D., & Guassora, A. D. (2016). Sample size in qualitative interview studies: Guided by information power. *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13), 1753–1760. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315617444>
- Martsenyuk, T. (2015). Early marriage in Roma communities in Ukraine: Cultural and socioeconomic factors. *Emerson Employment and Economy in Central and Eastern Europe*, 5(1), 1–22. <https://www.emecoon.eu/index.php/emecon/article/view/33/24>
- Niu, X., & Laidler, K. A. J. (2015). Understanding domestic violence against Muslim women in China. *Feminist Criminology*, 10(1), 92–112. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1557085114536766>
- Nixon, J., & Humphreys, C. (2010). Marshalling the evidence: Using intersectionality in the domestic violence frame. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender State & Society*, 17(2), 137–158. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxq003>
- Oetzel, J. G., Wallerstein, N., Duran, B., Sanchez-Youngman, S., Nguyen, T., Woo, K., & Belone, L. (2020). Impact of participatory health research: A test of CBPR principles. *Bmc Public Health*, 20(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-08987-4>
- Petričušić, A. (2025). Introduction to the special issue on the gender dimension of minority policies. *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, 24(1), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.53779/ANPE1903>
- Pohjolainen, L., & Pavee Point Traveler and Roma Centre. (2015). & Violence Against Roma Women (No. 9). Pavee Point Traveler and Roma Center Coordinator of Violence against Women Programme. <http://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Violence-against-Roma-Women-%E2%80%93-93-9-Principles-to-Human-Rights-based-and-Gender-responsive-approach-to-protection.pdf>
- Puigvert, L. (2014). Preventive socialization of gender violence: Moving forward using the communicative methodology of research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(7), 839–843. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414537221>
- Radovanović, S., Simić, V. I., Radević, S., Kocić, S., & Janjić, V. (2025). Gender-based violence in Roma communities and the response of healthcare professionals. *Glasnik Javnog Zdravlja*, 99(1), 22–34. <https://doi.org/10.5937/serbjph2501022r>
- Raghavan, C., Rajah, V., Gentile, K., Collado, L., & Kavanagh, A. M. (2009). Community violence, social support networks, ethnic group differences, and male perpetration of intimate partner violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 24(10), 1615–1632. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260509331489>
- Ramirez, I. L. (2007). The relationship of acculturation and social integration to assaults on intimate partners among Mexican American and Non-Mexican white students. *Journal of Family Violence*, 22(7), 533–542. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-007-9102-2>
- Timmerman, J. (2004). When her feet touch the ground: Conflict between the Roma familistic custom of arranged juvenile marriage and enforcement of international human rights treaties. *Journal of Transnational Law & Policy*, 13(2), 475–497. <https://ir.law.fsu.edu/jtlp/vol13/iss2/5>
- Tokuç, B., Ekuklu, G., & Avcioğlu, S. (2010). Domestic violence against married women in Edirne. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 25(5), 832–847. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260509336960>
- Valls, R., Martínez, A., & Amador, J. (2023). Weaving strong relationships within Roma women associations to overcome violence against women. *International Journal of Roma Studies*, 5(2), 158–175. <https://doi.org/10.17583/ijrs.13580>
- Valero, D., Elboj, C., & De Botton, L. (2024). Roma in the COVID-19 Crisis: Transformative Elements That Emerge from the Research. *Social Sciences*, 13(12), 679
- Valero, D., Elboj, C., Plaja, T., & Munté, A. (2021). Social work and the Roma community: elements to improve current practices*** *European Journal of Social Work*, 24(6), 978–989. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2020.1857705>
- Velentza, C. (2020). Early marriage and education drop out in traditional Roma communities in Transylvania. *Journal of Roma Studies*, 2(1), 39–54. <https://doi.org/10.33182/jgs.v2i1.614>
- Vidu, A., Schubert, T., Munoz, B., & Duque, E. (2014). What students say about gender violence within universities: Rising voices from the communicative methodology of research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(7), 883–888. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414537211>
- Vives-Cases, C., Espinar-Ruiz, E., Castellanos-Torres, E., & Coe, A. B. (2017). Multiple struggles in fighting violence against women: Implications among Romani women leaders in Spain. *Global Health Action*, 10(sup2), 1317084. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16549716.2017.1317084>
- Vives-Cases, C., Parra-Casado, L., Gil-González, D., D., & Caballero, P. (2021). Acceptability of violence against women among the Roma population in Spain. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36(11–12), 5795–5812. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518807910>

- Wallerstein, N., & Duran, B. (2010). Community-Based participatory research contributions to intervention research: The intersection of science and practice to improve health equity. *American Journal of Public Health, 100*(S1), S40–S46. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2009.184036>
- Wallerstein, N., Duran, B., Oetzel, J., & Minkler, M. (Eds.). (2017). *Community-Based participatory research for health: Advancing social and health equity* (3rd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Wallerstein, N., Duran, B., Oetzel, J. G., & Minkler, M. (2020). *Community-based participatory research for health equity: Advancing social and structural interventions* (3rd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Wasileski, G., & Miller, S. L. (2010). Review essay: The elephants in the room: Ethnicity and violence against women in Post-Communist Slovakia. *Violence against Women, 16*(1), 99–125. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801209354203>

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Authors and Affiliations

Teresa Sordé¹  · Diana Valero²  · Carmen Elboj³  · Ariadna Munté⁴ 

✉ Diana Valero
dvalero@unizar.es

Teresa Sordé
teresa.sorde@uab.cat

Carmen Elboj
celboj@unizar.es

Ariadna Munté
amunte@ub.edu

- ¹ Department of Sociology. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona., Barcelona, Spain
- ² Department of Psicology and Sociology (Social Work and Social Services), University of Zaragoza, Zaragoza, Spain
- ³ Department of Psicology and Sociology (Sociology), University of Zaragoza, Zaragoza, Spain
- ⁴ Departament de Treball Social i Serveis Socials, Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain