

THE DEFAMATION MEDIA CAMPAIGN SHAPED THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION UPON THE ROMANIAN YOGA MOVEMENT – A QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of a quantitative research focused on the public perception about Romanian yoga practitioners. The research analyzed also the opinion of persons belonging to the yoga movement, regarding the defamation media campaign and their testimonials about discrimination incidents. Romania is the only country in the world where yoga practice was ever forbidden, during the communist regime. Although the communism came to an end in 1989 and yoga became legal, the yoga practitioners continued to face difficulties like media campaigns of defamation and hate speech. This study aims to estimate the effects of the continuous defamation of the yoga practitioners in mass-media. Our results suggest that the two strongest effects of the hate speech and stigmatization media campaigns are the marginalization of the yoga practitioners as a social group and their discrimination in the Romanian society. We were able to estimate the outcome of the media campaigns comparing the perception about the yoga practitioners of people who know them directly and the perception of people who only learned about them from the media. The total discrepancy of the direct and mediated perceptions and the fact that the people who know about yoga students just from media consider that they should be isolated and excluded from the public sphere show that media had a strong influence in generating the social discrimination of yoga students in Romania. It also implies that the defamation media campaigns constructed an image of them very different from reality.

Keywords: *human rights, hate speech, stereotypes, defamation, discrimination.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Romania is the only country in the world where yoga practice was ever forbidden. This happened during the communist regime, when an order of the Secret Political Police (Securitate) declared in 1984 that it is forbidden to practice yoga in any public facility. Although the order was practically illegal, it was applied until 1989 and also extended to private life of people. The interdiction referred to yoga practice, yoga teaching and dissemination of information about yoga. Even detaining books, journals and teaching materials about yoga was considered offensive to the communist regime. People who did not respect the abusive order of the Securitate were thrown into jail or were isolated in mental facilities.

Although the communism came to an end in Romania in December 1989 and yoga became legal, the yoga practitioners continued to face difficulties like discriminative treatment from the authorities, abusive interrogatories and searches and media campaigns of defamation and hate speech. This happened because of the continuity of the officials in Police, Secret Services and Justice. The former

elite of the communist regime found its way to leading positions in the political life in post-communist regime. International reports on Romania confirm the intrusion of politics in Justice and also the influence of the secret services upon Justice and media. The media in Romania is notorious for the lack of professional ethics.

In EU countries and also in other countries of the world there is a false common idea that traditional yoga practice is somehow associated with religion. The biggest yoga schools in Europe, US and other countries all over the world were labeled from time to time as “cults” and subjected to media campaigns of defamation and also persecutions. The European countries where the phenomenon is harshest are Poland and Romania. In both countries, cases of human rights violations and hate speech against yoga students are well documented. In order to come to a solution to human rights problems faced by the yoga schools and other new spiritual movements, at the time being the only legislation available is, indeed, in the area of “religious rights”. However, as researchers like Karl-Erik Nylund point out [1], yoga is *not* a religion.

In Europe, the liberty regarding religion and opinion is protected, especially, by the Article 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights [2] and Article 10 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights [3].

On the 24th of June, 2013, the Council of the EU adopted the “EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief” [4], based on the principle of equality, nondiscrimination and universality. According to this document, when addressing freedom of religion or belief, the EU will pay special attention to the following themes, which are all of equal importance: violence, freedom of expression, promoting of respect for diversity and tolerance, discrimination, changing or leaving one’s religion or belief, manifestation of religion or belief, but also support and protection for human rights defenders including individual cases.

Giving the fact that the EU Council issued these new Guidelines in 2013, the research activity of The Anti-Defamation League for Yoga and Spiritual Movements (LAYMS) included several case studies of defamation and discrimination of spiritual and religious movements in Romania, France and Italy. The case of MISA Yoga School in Romania appeared as different from the others mainly because of its dimension and duration. In order to understand the phenomenon, LAYMS conducted in Romania a sociological research regarding the defamation and discrimination of the yoga practitioners from MISA. The research implied a stage of quantitative research (presented in this paper).

Completing the knowledge about the situation of the yoga movement in Romania, the studies initiated by LAYMS aim to deepen the understanding of the acts of defamation and discrimination of yoga practitioners from MISA in Romania.

The main research question of the quantitative research is if there is a measurable effect of the defamation campaigns of the media regarding the MISA Yoga School. The hypotheses of the study are:

- (1) The defamation campaign of the media affects the yoga practitioners in Romania;
- (2) The defamation campaign of the media has an effect on the public perception regarding the yoga movement.
- (3) Discrimination of yoga practitioners is related to the defamation campaign.

There is strong evidence that the media campaigns against MISA are not based on real facts. Investigations of several NGOs confirm that there is

no factual reason at the origin of this campaigns. Because of threats that resulted from media hate instigation, the founder of MISA Yoga School, Gregorian Bivolaru, had to leave the country and lived in exile in Sweden since 2005, as a political refugee. The Supreme Court of Sweden rejected all the requests of Romanian authorities for Bivolaru’s extradition, invoking as the main reason the hatred media campaigns against him and his yoga school in Romania.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH: PREVIOUS STUDIES ON THE MISA YOGA SCHOOL

There are quite a few previous sociological studies about MISA Yoga School. In spite of the huge presence of this subject in media and the large coverage especially in tabloid media, there are just few scientific studies available. All these studies mention the media defamation of yogis, as a phenomenon that affects them directly, but they do not analyze it. Also, the subject was never before studied from the perspective of the people outside the movement.

The first sociological study about MISA Yoga School was published in 1997 in the Romanian Journal of Sociology and was conducted by Carmen Mărcuş [5]. The study was the result of a 3-year research of the author and included the quantitative analysis of 800 interviews with yoga students attending the MISA classes, at a time when the number of yoga students of the School was estimated at 15,000. The author approached also an ethnic research, participating at many events and classes of the School. The results of the study pointed out the effects of the yoga practice, but also revealed some problems that yoga students had to face – at that time – due to the hate speech of the media campaigns.

Two studies conducted by European experts are also available [1], [6]. Their purpose was mainly to establish if the Romanian Yoga School MISA is a dangerous cult, as it was labeled by media. The conclusion of the research was for both studies similar: MISA Yoga School promotes an alternative way of life and by now means can be labeled as a cult. The group of the yogis has none of the characteristics of the “dangerous cults”.

A psycho-sociological research was conducted in 2005 by members of the Yoga School, in order to establish the componse of the group and the features of yoga practitioners [7]. The results are impressive, as compared to similar statics in Romania: the number of divorces, addictions,

psychic problems etc. is considerably lower in the yogis' group than in Romanian Society.

The historical perspective of the MISA case is best documented by the researcher Gabriel Andreescu who wrote many articles and two books on the subject. After analyzing the secret archives of the Securitate, Andreescu was able to prove that practically the same officials were responsible for the oppression and repression of yoga practitioners in Romania during communism and in the post-communist era. He published exclusive interviews with subjects of abuses of authorities and victims of discrimination [8], [9].

Andreescu's hypothesis that the former Securitate was responsible not only for the repression of the yoga movements, but also for the hate speech of the media against MISA after 1989 is consistent with researches over media independence (or rather lack of independence) in Romania after 1989. In [10], Richard Halls explains the total control of the media after 1989 by the former secret police (Securitate), even after its legal dissolution.

Another category of studies analyze the MISA Yoga School from the perspective of discrimination, hate speech and human rights violation that they were subjected to. A very interesting study (from the point of view of our own research) was conducted in 1996 by APADOR-CH [11] who took part observers in the activities of the movement and came to the conclusion that the "disclosures" published in media regarding immoral, illegal or occult practices of MISA were not sustained by facts. Evidence pointed out that all accusations in media were calumnies. In 1996 and 1997 Amnesty International conducted a survey of human rights violation in Romania, regarding yoga practice. In a report issued in March 1998, Amnesty International highlights some cases of human rights violation and discrimination of MISA yoga students in Romania. Another report of APADOR-CH, issued after a research demanded by European Council, documented such cases [12].

In 2004, MISA Yoga School was victim a military attack of the authorities and accused of drug trafficking, weapon trafficking, prostitution and even human trafficking. None of the accusations was ever proven, and the huge operation of the authorities is considered to be the second biggest human rights violation and abuse in post-communist Romania. The incidents are mentioned in several reports: the reports on human rights in Romania in 2004 issued by APADOR-CH [13] and the report issued by SoJust in 2006 [14] are the most detailed.

3. THE METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The sociological research of LAYMS started in 2014 with a quantitative research (that is the subject of this article) that had two main areas of interest:

1. The defamation/discrimination perceived by the members of MISA community of yoga practitioners;
2. The perception of the Romanian citizens about the practitioners of integral yoga system promoted by MISA.

Therefore, the quantitative research was designed having two main parts (two different investigations), conducted in parallel. What we have called the "internal research" addressed the first subject, and was applied to the community of yogis from the MISA Yoga School. The "external research" was addressed to people who do not practice yoga, in order to cover the second subject above. Both investigations, internal and external, were based on questionnaires, applied by operators that were previously verified and trained by LAYMS' sociologist.

The internal research (investigation) was undertaken at public events of MISA Yoga School and at some yoga classes in different cities in Romania, as it was focused on the yoga practitioners themselves. The external research (investigation), also done through questionnaires, took place in the same cities as the internal investigation. The questionnaires were applied randomly by operators in public spaces.

The internal and external research had different, specific questions (19 for the internal investigation and 22 for the external investigation). The answers of the open questions were classified in "favorable" and "unfavorable". Both questionnaires were validated after a pilot survey. In this first stage of the research (the pilot survey), the preliminary questionnaires were applied to a target group for each of the two investigation. Each group consisted of 150 subjects. The internal consistency of the tests were evaluated on the basis of Cronbach's alpha value. Different research manuals, like "The Handbook of Psychological Testing" [15] considers values of Cronbach's alpha over 0.7 as acceptable for the internal consistency of the questionnaires, while values greater than 0.9 are considered to correspond to an excellent internal consistency. The values Cronbach's alpha of the pilot survey obtained:

1. 0.925 for 163 standardized items, for the internal investigation and
2. 0.713, for 85 standardized items, for the external investigation.

After the questionnaires in the pilot survey have been validated, the field research was conducted in the same manner and the same conditions as in the pilot survey. In this stage, each of the two questionnaires has been applied on a statistical population for the sociological research, and data samples have been processed with a predictive analysis program (SPSS - Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, from IBM). The total number of interviews in this stage was over 3000 (1520 for the internal research and 1520 for the external research).

The collection and interpretation of data samples took place from June to December 2014. In order to triangulate the results of the first part of the sociological study, several different stages of the research followed. LAYMS consulted over 600 of documents (official complaints of yoga practitioners, addressed to Romanian and European authorities, related to discrimination and related situations). This study was followed in 2015 by the documentation of 20 individual case studies and open interviews with victims of discrimination, according to qualitative research methodology, as explained in classical manuals of sociological research (see, for instance, [15] and [16]).

The main limitation of the present study is the fact that it does not make a content analysis of the media campaigns, in order to identify the stereotypes, the themes and the message. We have taken as a given fact the existence of the defamation campaign, verifying some examples and analyzing what other authors wrote about this (the media campaign is discussed in [1], [9], [11], [12], [13], [14]).

In the next sections we offer only a few relevant results from the statistical analysis of the data, extracted from the results of the quantitative research, about the defamation and discrimination to which the yoga practitioners from MISA in Romania were subject. The entire document can be studied at <http://www.layms.net/documente/Cercetare-Sociologica-LAYMSprvind-cazul-MISA.pdf>

4. THE INTERNAL INVESTIGATION

The “internal investigation” questioned the perception of the yogis from MISA Yoga School about the defamation and discrimination they are

subjected and also other problems they might have because of their yoga practice, in the Romanian society. The questions that were addressed through this part of the quantitative research were, among others:

- Does the yoga practice in MISA School expose yogis to defamation and/or discrimination?
- In what context discrimination and defamation manifested, in what way and what generated it?
- What were the consequences of defamation and/or discrimination on the individuals and on their families?

The group of the respondents of the internal investigation (1520) was estimated as 10% of active yoga students of the movement (in March 2014, the estimated number of yoga students was 15,000 in Romania), of which 42% were males and 58% females. Their age distribution is similar to the component of the movement (going from 18 to over 65), with around 50% persons in the category of 35-44 age. 95% are Romanians as nationality, while 4% are Hungarians. The educational level distribution also corresponds to the average distribution of the whole group, as reported in [5] and [7], with more than 75% university graduates (of which over 15% have also post-graduate, including PhD degrees), as detailed in figure 1.

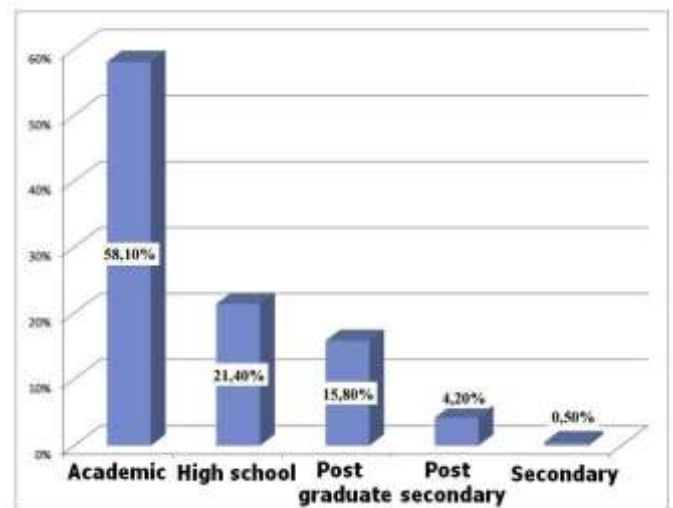


Figure 1. Internal Investigation - Sample Structure By Educational Level

Figure 2 shows the professions of the respondents (81% had declared their profession). The largest category of professions belongs to IT, socio-psychology, juridical, artistic and editorial, followed by engineers and economists.

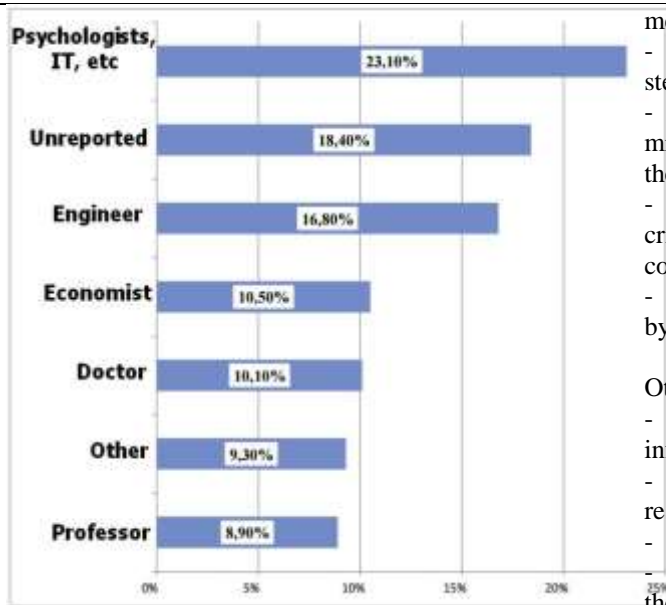


Figure 2. Internal Investigation - Sample Structure By Profession

The questionnaire was applied by operators and included 19 questions of different types: open, fixed, simple dichotomies. This section reviews only few examples of questions and the results of statistical analysis of the answers.

Some questions refer directly to the opinion of the yogis: do they consider their group to be subject of an unfair treatment in the Romanian society? Who are, in their opinion, the responsible factors? Did they experience themselves any kind of unfair treatment (from authorities, colleagues, teachers, employers etc.) that was clearly related to their affiliation to the Yoga School? What are the elements of their lifestyle that attract contradiction, opposition and critique?

The yoga practitioners in MISA who were questioned considered almost unanimously (98.1%) that the community they are part is subject to an unfair and defamation treatment which consisted mainly in the creation of an intimidating, hostile, humiliating attitude by mass-media/ authorities. They also declared, almost unanimously (98.8%) that their fundamental rights were violated comparing to other persons/groups who don't practice yoga at MISA and are better protected by Romanian authorities.

The types of defamation and discrimination reported by the yoga practitioners in MISA are, according to their testimonial:

- 68.5% declared they were insulted, bullied, mocked and denigrated due to yoga practice, from a

medium to a high level;

- 62.4% declared being subject of negative stereotypes, suffered labeling and stigmatization;
- 61.7% reported violent discussions, misunderstandings or conflicts caused by the fact they were yoga practitioners in MISA;
- 50.7% were suspected of different offences or crimes, unfairly, because they were part of yoga community in MISA, and were interrogated;
- 44.5% reported of being rejected and excluded by relatives, neighbors or friends.

Other significant answers reveal also that:

- 27.6% of yogis were treated unfairly or infamously on different occasions;
- 29.7% of yogis consider their rights were not respected;
- 24.5% said their rights weren't defended;
- 21.6% of them had, at work, conflicts because they were part of the yoga community in MISA;
- 20% were threatened because of the yoga practicing;
- 12.7%, were victims of domestic violence, just because they do yoga;
- 11.6% were occasionally refused the access in public spaces due to yoga practicing;
- 10.4% missed business opportunities problems because they practice yoga in the MISA Yoga School.

The respondents yoga practitioners in MISA considered, almost unanimously (98.3%), that to them were applied negative stereotypes / clichés / labels. Some of these negative stereotypes are listed below:

- cult member/sectarians: 35.8%;
- urine drinkers 28.8%;
- group sex: 23.9%;
- brainwashed: 20.9%;
- freaky: 10.5%.
- sexual orgy: 9.5%,
- sexual obsessed: 8.8%,
- antisocial: 8.2%,
- bivolar's (regarding to Gregorian Bivolaru): 6.7%,
- drug, drug consumers, arm traffickers: 6.6%,
- arm traffickers/ human traffic: 6.2%,
- manipulated: 5.5%,
- prostitution: 4.8%,
- Godless: 3.6%,
- addicted to MISA/misan's: 2.7%.

The labels and stereotypes applied to yoga practitioners in their personal, public and professional life are the ones that were largely presented in the media campaigns and "borrowed" by the public opinion. 88% of the yogis consider that mass-media is responsible for the creation of

the stereotypes applied to them. The defamation campaign led, in their opinion, to incidents listed above (bullying, conflicts, threats, discrimination, etc.), although the reasons that directly caused the incidents of defamation and discrimination of the yoga practitioners in MISA are, in the opinion of the respondents:

- The lacto – vegetarian diet: 61.4%;
- The participation at the events organized by MISA: 59%;
- The relation with the MISA founder, Gregorian Bivolaru: 53.2%;
- Yoga practice itself: 52.3%;
- Weekly yoga courses: 43.6%;
- The relation with others yoga practitioners: 29.7%;
- Reading and owning the materials with spiritual character: 22.6%.

The context of the incidents is illustrated in Figure 3. Although most of them are reported in private life, the professional incidents are also significant.

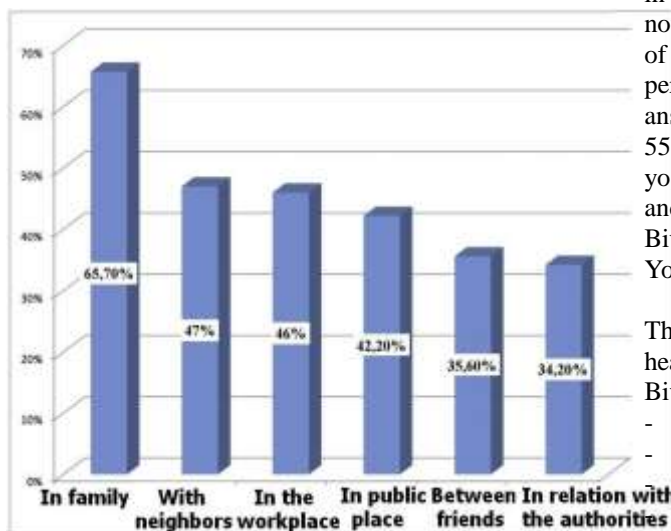


Figure 3. Internal Investigation - Background (Context) Of The Defamation / Discrimination Incidents

There is no surprise that some of the yoga students decided to practice yoga in secret as much as possible. They made this decision because they consider that they would be regarded with suspicion, humiliated, mocked, marginalized if their family, friends, colleagues or neighbors would know that they go to yoga classes. 32% of the persons who prefer to keep their yoga practice secret consider that they would lose their jobs/positions if their superiors would know about yoga.

5. THE EXTERNAL INVESTIGATION

In the external investigation, that referred to the

public perception about yogis from MISA Yoga School (and their defamation and discrimination in Romania), questionnaires were applied by operators in public spaces to 1520 persons. The structure of the group was chosen similar to the one of the yoga movement: balanced from the point of view of age, gender, nationality, but with a predominance of highly educated people, with access to information and technology. The geographical distribution was also similar: investigation was conducted in the same towns as the internal investigation, with same number of persons (42% of the total number of questionnaires were applied in Bucharest and other were distributed in towns from all regions of the country, like Cluj, Timișoara, Iași, Brașov, Constanța).

In order to gather significant data for our research, regarding the influence of the media in shaping the public perception of MISA Yoga School, the respondents were asked to mention if they do know in person yoga students of MISA Yoga School or not. Therefore, it was possible to compare the effect of the media campaigns in constructing the public perception on this movement. The analysis of the answers revealed three categories of respondents: 55% know personally one or many persons in the yoga movements, 14% have never heard of MISA and 33% have heard about MISA and Gregorian Bivolaru, but don't know anybody from the MISA Yoga School.

The context in which the yoga non-practitioners heard about the organization and Gregorian Bivolaru is significant, too:

- News/ TV shows: 79.9%;
- Newspapers/magazines: 40.9 %;
- Internet: 27.9%;
- Radio: 5.7%.

The 22 questions of the external research referred mostly to the opinion of the people about the yogis, their acceptance and their willingness to collaborate with them. Also we were interested to find out if other people consider that the MISA group is somehow treated different in Romania.

The opinion of Romanian citizens (non-yoga practitioners in MISA) about the organization revealed some of the most interesting results. It was realized a parallel statistic analyze of the answers, regarding the two subcategories of respondents who heard about MISA and Gregorian Bivolaru: those who know and the others who don't know personally the yoga practitioners in MISA.

The results are shown in Table 1. Note the dichotomy of bad-good opinion: people who know MISA students from the media have in most part

(95%) a negative perception over the movement, while this percentage is lowered to 55% in the case of people who know MISA students directly.

Opinion	People who know MISA students from the media	People who know MISA students in person
Very unfavorable	49%	22%
Unfavorable	46%	33%
Good	4%	30%
Very good	1%	15%

Table 1. General Opinion About MISA Yoga Movement.

The yoga non practitioners Romanians in MISA who heard about the organization and Gregorian Bivolaru but who don't know personally yoga practitioners in MISA, described, generally, in a proportion of 64.1%, the yoga MISA School in depreciative and negative terms such as: cult, dangerous group, people who are astray, mentally ill, must be put in mental hospital, depraved, freaks, extremist movement, crazy about sex, a bunch of losers, dissolute, dangerous, devils, odd, obscene, a crap, aberrations, dangerous organization with weapons and drugs, do "unchristian" things, a criminal organization, liars, causes scandal, libertines, depraved, people with no goal.

Romanian citizens who heard about MISA and Gregorian Bivolaru, but don't know the yoga practitioners in MISA consider unacceptable the following yogi practices:

- The lacto-vegetarian regime: 18.5%;
- The attendance at the events organized by MISA: 43%;
- The relationship with Gregorian Bivolaru: 53.6%;
- The yoga practice itself: 37.2%;
- The weekly yoga courses: 8.5%;
- The relationship with the other practitioners: 19.6%;
- Charts, posters, pictures, books yoga: 19.4%;
- Perception/vision regarding sexuality: 69%;

The final part of this question offered the respondents the possibility to enumerate themselves yoga practices which they consider unacceptable.

It was noticed that 22% of the Romanians who heard about MISA and Gregorian Bivolaru, but who don't know personally people who practice yoga in MISA, gave answers such as: „group sex”, „sex with minors”, „I've heard from TV that they have

father and daughter sex”, „from what is said on TV”, „their sexual life”, „sex at spirals”, „to let children at their parents' homes, not to rape them anymore”, „all that was said on mass-media”, „human traffic”, „urine drinking”, „drugs”.

Are the Romanians non yoga practitioners at MISA willing to have professional relations or collaboration with yoga practitioners in MISA? At this question, there were the following statistics:

- The respondents who heard about MISA and Gregorian Bivolaru (mass-media being the source) but who don't know personally yoga practitioners in MISA: No, I would prefer someone else: 40.7%; definitely no: 28.4%; Yes, but very attentive: 21.4%; definitely yes: 9.7%.

- The respondents who know personally yoga practitioners in MISA: Yes, definitely: 64.5%; Yes, but very attentive: 21.70%; No, I would prefer someone else: 9.7%; definitely no: 4.3%.

Other significant results:

- 97% of the respondents wouldn't agree that their priest practice yoga in MISA;
- 53% of them wouldn't agree for their husband and wives to practice yoga in MISA; 52% wouldn't agree for their parents or children to practice yoga in MISA;
- 40% wouldn't agree for their children's teacher to practice yoga in MISA;
- 39% don't agree for the politicians or important officials from justice or public administration to practice yoga in MISA;
- 35% wouldn't accept for their friends to practice yoga in MISA;
- 35% wouldn't agree for their physician who takes care of their health to practice yoga in MISA;
- 26% declare that they wouldn't tolerate the situation in which their neighbor would practice yoga at MISA.

Regarding the phenomenon of discrimination, 53.20% of the questioned Romanians who don't practice yoga at MISA consider the yoga practitioners from MISA are dispraised and/or discriminated in Romania. There is a significant distribution of the answers, depending of the category the respondents belong to.

The Romanians who don't practice yoga at MISA and know themselves yoga practitioners at MISA consider, in a proportion of 76%, that the MISA yogis are exposed to defamation/discrimination in Romania, 15.2% don't know, and only 8,8% consider that the yoga practitioners from MISA are not discriminated/dispraised in Romania.

6. INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

The yogis consider almost unanimously that their movement is the most discriminated group in Romania. However, in the external investigation, they come on third place – that means that even persons who are not well aware about discrimination of the yogis realize that their group is between the most disadvantaged social groups in Romania.

The majority of the respondents from MISA Yoga School reported incidents that they considered were caused by the defamation campaign. Apart from this, the persons outside the movement who do not know yogis directly are very suspicious and reluctant toward them. This confirms the hypothesis that the defamation campaign of the media affects the yoga practitioners in Romania. A percentage of 76% of the yoga non-practitioners, who were questioned, consider that yoga practitioners in MISA are treated in different manners in society or family because to their affiliation to this group. However, there is a significant difference in the way the respondents understand this difference: only 30% of the persons who do not practice yoga consider that there is a discrimination phenomenon of the yogis. On the other hand, almost every person who practices yoga considered that he/she was subject of discrimination.

The most significant qualitative conclusion of the research is the correlation between the impression of people and their source of information. There is a huge discrepancy of how people who really know yogis think about them and the way yogis are judged by people who never met anyone of them in person.

The respondents who do not know the yoga movement directly answered that they have their information from the media, mainly from broadcasted news (TV). Analyzing their answers, it results that their representation of the movement is based only on the messages disseminated by media. The first effect of the defamation campaign is the opinion of the public about the MISA Yoga School. One can conclude that the very detrimental image of MISA yoga School and its founder, Gregorian Bivolaru, among the Romanian citizens (yoga non practitioners at MISA), is related to the media presentation (and especially the broadcasted news which, according to statistics, represent the main source of information for Romanians). There is a significant difference in the way yogis and non-yogis perceive the movement itself and also the defamation campaigns. This confirms the

hypothesis that the defamation campaign of the media has an effect on the public perception regarding the yoga movement.

The data analysis proved that Romanians who do not practice yoga in MISA and who know personally yoga practitioners in MISA are willing, almost unanimously, to collaborate with them, while those who have already a strong negative opinion about yoga practitioners in MISA due to media campaigns, are definitely against this collaboration or would prefer to work with other persons who don't practice yoga at MISA. Romanians who heard about MISA only from media have an overwhelming negative opinion about yogis, whilst the opinions are balanced for people who know directly the movement (in their case, the influence of the media stereotypes is still present, but diminished). The answers reflect the strong impression of the mass-media discourse and the mediated stereotypes.

Comparing the results of the internal and external research from the angle of the reasons of discrimination of yogis, we found some of the most interesting differences. The yogis consider that their problems are caused mainly by vegetarian diet and participation to the MISA events. The external research revealed as “most unacceptable” in public perception the vision about sexuality. One can notice that the stigmatization of yogis in media campaigns lead to discriminatory and offensive treatment by others, including even family members, just because they are different, they go to yoga classes, do yoga exercises, don't eat meat etc.

Analyzing the data corpus, one can identify the problems that the yoga students consider they are facing just because they follow the yoga courses of MISA Yoga Schools, the most common issues are discriminative treatment, not being defending their rights, not having their rights respected, and also hate speech. In conclusion, the third hypothesis is also (discrimination of yoga practitioners is related to the defamation campaign).

7. CONCLUSIONS

The research presented in this paper is the first quantitative research regarding the social phenomenon of defamation and discrimination of the yogis in the Romanian post-communist society. There is strong evidence that the phenomenon is related to the media defamation campaign. The consequences of the defamation campaign of Romanian Yoga practitioners cannot be ignored in order to have a true democratic society in Romania.

The different perception of the persons who know directly and indirectly the yoga movement is a proof of the media influence. On the other hand, the better (favorable) perception of people who directly know the movement and the yogis, shows that mass-media constructed an altered representation of the reality in the case of MISA Yoga School.

The yogis themselves are very conscious about the rejection and marginalization of their group in the Romanian society. Apart from the documented cases of discrimination, they confess to be subject of hate, dispraised and humiliation. However, their idea about the reasons of the individual unfavorable opinion of the public is quite different than the one stated by persons who have such unfavorable opinion.

Problems that yoga students say that they have, just because they learned yoga in MISA Yoga School, are multiple: from family conflicts to threats, from abuses of authorities (illegal searches, brutality, penalties etc.) to work conflicts and firings. Our study revealed a large number of implications, personal drama and injustices at personal level that are perceived by the subjects as a direct consequence of the defamation campaigns in mass media. Much more research is needed in order to fully understand the phenomenon. Further research would address the correlation of stereotypes used by mass-media with the public opinion upon the subject. The complete effects of the continuous defamation campaigns against a social group (that is guilty only of being different than the average social norm) will be fully understood only in time, as a wound of a society that seem unable to reach a functional democracy.

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