



## National Report: Italia



**DAPHNE PROJECT “PROPOSING NEW INDICATORS: MEASURING VIOLENCE’S EFFECTS. GVEI”**

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## Introduction

This report contains the analysis of the interviews made with some women who suffered gender-based violence in their daily life -- be in the workplace or in their private sphere -- as well as the analysis of the focus groups organised with some experts. This survey aimed at identifying social indicators to measure the effects of gender violence in all spheres of women's life. They should assess the impact and consequences of gender violence not only at an individual level but also on society as a whole, in order to appreciate the economic costs it carries. These indicators will be used to recommend policies, measures, and interventions to prevent and combat violence on a European scale. The results of this survey will also contribute to the design of policies and recommendations aimed at promoting and enhancing strategies to fight and prevent violence in several countries and in different social, political, and cultural contexts.

The research carried out in Italy shows that, when it comes to analysing gender violence in terms of women's victimisation in the private sphere and in the workplace, boundaries are blurred. This is because the victim's dynamics in their private and professional spheres are somewhat similar to one another. Several women experience or have experienced gender violence in both contexts. For purely methodological reasons, it has been decided to analyse violence in the private sphere -- that is, in intimate relationships -- and violence suffered in the workplace separately. However, it should be said that the issues involved were almost identical.

Before analysing in greater detail the topics covered by the qualitative interview, it is important to recap some of the main points already illustrated in the previous report. This will be done in order to analyse survey results against the Italian normative framework, where good laws exist but poor practice prevails in women's everyday lives, as will be shown below. In Italy, Law 151 of 1975 stated that men and women had the same rights and duties. Oddly, though, the honour motive disappeared from the Italian penal code only as recently as 1981. Law n. 66 of 15<sup>th</sup> February 1996 was a major turning point, because it defined violence against women as an offence against the person and no longer as an offence against public morality. Law n. 269 of 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1998 further strengthened the protection of personal dignity and liberty. Then, in 2001, Law n. 154 "*Misure contro la violenza nelle relazioni familiari*" (Measures against intra-family violence) was introduced. In the same year, laws n. 60 and n. 134 on *Legal aid* came into force. Legal aid is a very important tool for abused women who do not have sufficient financial means to be able to defend themselves and assert their rights. Finally, in 2006, a bill of law called "*Misure di sensibilizzazione e repressione dei delitti contro la famiglia, per l'orientamento sessuale, l'identità di genere ed ogni altra causa di discriminazione*" (Awareness-raising and suppression measures on crimes against the family on grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, and any other cause of discrimination) was proposed. In addition to this proposal, there are also several regional laws already in force in Italy to combat violence against women.

### 1. Method and data

This survey was carried out by means of a semi-structured interview with an interview plan containing a list of topics to guide the interview. A total of fifteen women who suffered violence were interviewed: seven of them experienced domestic violence, while eight of them, three of whom were foreigners, suffered violence in the workplace. Then, two focus groups and five in-depth interviews were organised, involving a total of thirteen experts. The first focus group was multidisciplinary; it involved some legal experts legal, sociological, and academic experts; the second focus group, on the contrary, was formed by a group of psychologists. Finally, the third focus group was composed of people involved in public or private services providing support to

women suffering gender violence and who worked following an integrated approach. Tables 1 and 2 show some data concerning our interview sample.

**Tab.1 WOMEN SUFFERED VIOLENCE IN INTIMATE PARTNERSHIP**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Current marital status</b>	<b>PERPETRATOR OF VIOLENCE</b>	<b>Type of violence suffered</b>
39	Italian	University degree	separated	Husband	Physical and psychological violence
38	Italian	Upper secondary school	married	Husband	Economic and psychological violence
35	Italian	University degree	single	a) Unknown people b) Boyfriend	a) Rape b) Physical, psychological violence, sexual harassment, run over by a car
43	Italian	University degree	separated	Husband	Violence
50	Italian	University degree	separated	Husband	Physical, psychological violence, sexual harassment
22	Italian	Undergraduate about to graduate	single	Boyfriend	Physical, psychological violence, sexual harassment, run over by a car
47	Romanian	Upper secondary school	separated	Husband	Physical and psychological violence

**Tab.2 WOMEN SUFFERED VIOLENCE IN WORKPLACE**

age	ethnicity	education	current employment	PERPETRATOR OF VIOLENCE	type of violence suffered
28	Italian	upper secondary school	Land surveyor	a) Superior b) Clients	a) Physical and psychological violence, b) Sexual harassment
23	Romanian	upper secondary school	Barmaid	Employer	Psychological violence, and sexual harassment
30	Italian	university degree	Deputy director of a bank	University teacher	Psychological violence, and sexual harassment
30	Italian	university degree	University researcher	a) Superior b) Colleagues	a) Physical and psychological violence b) psychological violence
46	Polish	upper secondary school	Unemployed	Employer	Psychological violence and sexual harassment
37	Italian	university degree	Job advisor	University teacher	Psychological and economic violence and sexual harassment
46	Italian	upper secondary school	Cinema industry	a) Unknown people b) Colleague c) Employer	a) Attempted rape b) Sexual harassment, c) Psychological violence
48	Italian	upper secondary school	Nurse	a) Work colleague b) Work colleague	a) Physical, psychological and sexual violence b) Sexual violence

## 2. Violence in intimate partnership – women's perspective

Some situations leading to domestic violence against women seem to stem from a specific type of inculturation and culturally acquired beliefs; these notions have never been critically understood and, in time, have become somewhat dogmatic. Victims “believe” in the institution of marriage or similar practices more than they believe in their relationship with their own partner. Almost all the women we have interviewed do a lot of things. For example, Paola 1,39, teacher, said:

*“One day I found myself being a housewife, a university student, and a worker and then, when my son was born, also a mother...”*

Did she feel accomplished? No way!

*“That person always found fault with what I did”.*

What is more, the lives of these women always seemed to be “two-sided”. When Paola 5,50 went to work, she would start off by crying and then she *“happily started work”* and go on working *“... 20 hours a day”*. After suffering violence on their bodies and their minds, they developed some coping strategies mostly to protect their health. These strategies often led them to grow estranged and distant from their husbands after separation. Paola 1,39, when talking about her ex-husband, said: *“that person, who was my husband”*. Paola 2,38, because of the violence she had to endure, declared:

*“I could never have a quiet life, I had multiple miscarriages due to periods of distress and arguments. Some of these miscarriages occurred after a fight and this left an even greater void in me that cannot be filled”.*

Paola 3,35 was raped by the cousin of a neighbour – who was 9 years older than her – when she was 13. She did not talk to anybody about it until she thought she had found *“somebody strong”*. She went on to specify:

*“I don’t mean violent, but a boy who seemed to be able to give me comfort. In actual fact, he did it on condition I had sex with him. It was like torture. I didn’t struggle: I just turned my head and cried”.*

At the time, in her mind, she thought that her boyfriend, who had confronted the person who raped her, had finally avenged her.

## **2.1 Understanding gender violence in intimate partnerships**

Paola 1,39, a university graduate, was raised *“... in a strong Catholic environment... ”*. She added: *“I got divorced and then my marriage was also dissolved by the Church”*. If she had not believed in marriage in such a dogmatic way, she might have had the time and space to get to know Man (*antropos*) in its universal meaning, in his actions, his beliefs, his being, and his culture. Or anyway, they – he and she – would have both had the time and space to attain the basic tools to perhaps be able to try and get to know each other. These assumptions are supported by the fact that not even often long engagements seem to raise the chances of getting to know each other better. The length of the engagement seems to be solely aimed towards marriage; it is a situation, a “thing” that naturally unfolds to reach its end. By “thing” we mean the sequence involving partnership, cohabitation, and marriage. Paola 1,39 declared:

*“... my marriage lasted eleven years, after five years’ engagement... the marriage was quite difficult right from the start”*. She also added: *“(I’d really love to) be with a man who loved me also because I’ve never had such experience. My first boyfriend became my husband. So, when it comes to these things, I’m a bit of a dreamer; I’d like to know what it is like to have a man who really loves you, though I’m also scared. I’m in a quandary: I wish for something but then my actions don’t follow my feelings”*.

Paola 5,50 got married when she was still underage because she was pregnant. Now, she has three children, two girls and a boy, she got a university degree in Humanities and she writes novels. She started university late in life, when she was 40, which she explained by saying: *“I wanted to get my life back”*. She became conscious of her situation when she met some women belonging to the feminist academic scene. Paola 1,39 said:

*“we (women) are put in a position where we have to justify ourselves but there is no excuse for violence of any kind”.*

Still, she thought that women should be persistent and not give up until the problem is solved. This is because, in case of rape, the person who needs help is not so much the woman as the violent man who raped her. Paola 5,50 would welcome the adoption of the French approach, where *“violent men have to undergo psychotherapy with men who have experience of violence”*. Paola 6,22 warned women to be very careful and *“get to know a man very well before starting a relationship with him”*. Paola 3,35 was subjugated by her boyfriend, who avenged the rape she had suffered by a stranger. When talking about him, she said:

*“I suffered all sorts of abuse: he even ran me over with his car. He was terribly jealous, I used to be conditioned by him; I was under his control every second of every day, he made me change school so that he could check up on me more easily; he also used to check my calls. It was awful: he beat me every day”.*

## 2.2 Gender violence effects

Paola 5,50's marriage was *“fraught with continuous abuse, even severe physical abuse”*. She had to visit the emergency rooms of different hospitals several times. On one occasion, for example, she was serving her husband coffee when, she said: *“without any warning, he got up and punched me in the face so hard he completely destroyed my jaw”*. Both Paola 5,50's and Paola 1,39's husbands were ten years older than them and had a lower educational level. The violence and the abuse did not seem to surprise these women. In none of the interviews did they appear to be totally unaware; they never said that violence had been unexpected. It surely caught them off guard though; that is why they had to develop some self-defence strategies, although that did not happen right from the start. In most cases, a long time passed between their acknowledgement and awareness of their being abused and their life-saving reaction. For Paola 1,39, for example, it took eleven years of marriage. She denied that he was violent during their engagement, which sounded rather strange since, when she was asked:

*“So, how many years after marriage did the violence start?”* she answered: *“I wouldn't say years: it all started almost immediately”*.

The situation then got worse after the birth of their child. That was what really shocked and bewildered Paola 1,39. She could not believe that he kept on being violent even after the birth of their child:

*“When a child is born, a woman tends to think that her man might soften up with such a small creature beside him but that is not what happens”*.

Children become victims of violence too and all this occurs in a cultural environment where mothers go as far as saying to their abused daughters things like: *“See what you can do to please him”*. That is what Paola 1,39 was told by her mother. She explained: *“... when I was abused, I was almost ashamed to tell anybody”*. Here, two different assumptions can be made: these women maybe did not realise that their partner was violent when they got to know him, during their engagement, for example, and that was because they lacked the right tools, as suggested above. Alternatively, it could be assumed that, as soon as they got married, suddenly and unexpectedly, their partners turned out to be different. Paola 5,50 was engaged *“only for few months...”*.

After she got married, *“the next day, I found out that he was a completely different man to the one I knew”*. Most of these women are socialised into the idea that their role as females is to be mothers,



carers, and child-rearers (*"I tried to save my marriage"*). They try to find solutions but they are not always successful (*"...when I realised that there was nothing else to do, I separated"*). They cure and re-mediate. Just like patriarchy has always been considered as the site where men hold and maintain power, in this sense, we could also speak of "underlying matriarchy": an unconscious belief held by women to have to bring back order where chaos reigns. Paola 5,50 suffered in silence because, as she said: *"the children were my Achilles heel..."*. Violence, *"flying objects and punching"* were virtually an everyday occurrence and she was often injured. When she had to have stitches, he would say: *"It's not my fault: that object was flying by itself..."*, with a kind of black humour. Though she never actually said it explicitly, Paola 5,50 corroborated the above theory of the unaware therapeutic matriarch, who waited as long as twenty-five years before pressing charges against her husband: *"I went to the police after 25 years of marriage and then I left home"*. Then, almost as to justify him even after their separation, she did not throw his violence in his face; on the contrary, she asked him to leave her alone on grounds that he was already with another woman. The underlying thought in many of these women seemed to be *My love will cure him, I understand him, we have children so he won't go that far, he'll become more compassionate*. Paola 1,39 said:

*"one day I asked him if he was willing to see a psychologist and a family counsellor, but he refused. Then I gave up, because I thought I wanted to get at least something positive out of this marriage and that was a child"*.

In this cultural context, children are often a sort of "bond". With hindsight, Paola 1,39 said:

*"I think he developed the belief that since we had a child I would have never left"*.

People who did not know Paola 6,22 thought she was *"... strange; she wouldn't accept flowers"* from her boyfriend. Her teachers used to ask her: *"why won't you kiss such a courtly gentleman?"*. In addition to the suffering caused by being subjugated and continuously abused by her boyfriend, Paola 6,22 also bore the brunt of her anger for having being "touched" by her paternal grandfather when she was little. She tried to tell a cousin of hers once but, she said:

*"... nobody believed me and anyway nobody could understand where the truth really lay"*.

In cases like this, women also feel the *"stress of not being believed"*. Paola 1,39 said:

*"First of all, people didn't believe me when they asked me why I had separated and I told them that I used to be abused and betrayed by my husband"*.

They almost treated her as a *"liar"*, saying things like: *"If you really suffered all this, why were you married to him for eleven years?"*.

She then added: *"... people just can't understand why a woman endures all that for years"*. Here, there is a cultural and sometimes even a pathological problem whereby part of the blame should necessarily be placed to the woman:

*"People didn't believe that he could be so different outside and so violent at home, behind closed doors. They asked me if he had a drinking habit"*.

But her husband had never had such a habit and if he had he would have been culturally justified anyway. As it if was a strange ritual that nobody could understand unless they had been through it, Paola 1,39 added: *"... once you're in that situation, it's hard to get out"*. It took Paola 5,50 twenty-five years to report her husband to the police. How could she be credible? (*"...I went to the police after 25 years of marriage and then I left home"*). What was stopping Paola 5,50 and Paola 6,22



was their pride, their having to admit to the failure of their marriage or their engagement, which they had fought for in spite of the fact that their families did not approve: they had acted rash. Paola 2,38 said:

*“sometimes, my mind drifts off to my health and my financial problems and I realise that I don’t have any support if I should need some”.*

### 2.2.1 Health

**Indicators:** a feeling of going crazy, sleeping disorders, depression, sadness, fear, anxiety, angst, loss of self-esteem, and loss of self-confidence.

This dimension involves women’s physical, sexual, and reproductive spheres as well as the psychological effects of gender violence. Emphasis will be placed on psychological violence, since it concerns all the women we interviewed who have been victims of violence at home or in the workplace. This violence consists of a series of inherently insulting and humiliating behaviours such as acts, allusions or direct language used by perpetrators to slowly destroy a woman without “getting their hands dirty”. The sexual violence suffered by some wives can be considered as a mixture of dominance and subjection reinforcing the notion of male power and men’s ownership of women. Most respondents declared they also suffered from eating disorders, a heavy head, a feeling of going crazy, sleeping disorders, depression, sadness, fear, anxiety, angst, loss of self-esteem, and loss of self-confidence. Paola 1,39, who was bulimic, said:

*“...there were situations where I just threw up”. Then, she added: “there were times when I would eat an awful lot and then throw up” and she also confidently explained: “These are the effects of violence”.*

When she was married, she often suffered from headaches and insomnia, which disappeared after she separated. Paola 1,39 still had some unidentified health problems, which had been defined as “separation stress”. Her health problems were still being investigated, seven years after her separation. When talking about her depression, she said:

*“(I suffered from depression) when I was married and then, soon after I separated, I was in a terrible state but I couldn’t go to see a psychologist for two reasons: first, there was the money problem – though I could have sought a free counselling service – and second, I was scared they would think I was crazy and that my husband would jump at the chance and have my child taken away from me. (...) I suffered from stomach ache a lot and it was food-related, because when I was nervous I would eat an awful lot and then I threw up. I often suffered from intoxication, probably because I didn’t digest my food”.*

She also had sleep disorders:

*“sometimes I can’t sleep at night: I get the shakes and that keeps me awake. I’m now taking several drugs to relax my colon and to keep me calm. My gastroenterologist explained to me that our colon is like our second brain and so all that goes through my head has an impact on my stomach and my colon. Soon after I separated, I thought I was going mad. I went through a long period where I just cried all the time. I wished for death: I didn’t only want to harm myself, I actually wished for death! I asked God to take me; I didn’t have the nerve to take my own life because there was this voice in my head echoing that suicide was a sin. One day, I got to the point I didn’t care about that either because I thought the Lord would forgive me anyway. Then, all of a sudden, I thought to myself: “How could I possibly leave my son alone with that man?”.*

Paola 5,50 seemed a very confident lady; however, at the same time, her self-esteem just dropped. She had been using sleeping drugs for fifteen years and she constantly suffered from headaches. She remembered the bruises and the concussions. When she was twenty-five, after her third daughter was born, she did not have her period for four years. She was always tired: she suffered from fatigue. When describing her current state of health, Paola 2,38 said:

*“it’s quite appalling, in addition to the fact that I’m diabetic. This is also the cause of my mood swings, my sleepless nights, and my fear that something might happen to me or my daughter during the night. I can’t seem to have a peaceful sleep. I get headaches and stomach aches. I suffer from several conditions at the same time, which seems to be due to a state of anxiety and continuous tension, because I never seem to take it easy”.*

Paola 6,22 said that she felt “...almost chronically tired”; she could not sleep, yet she felt the need to lie in bed, so much so that during her marriage she had put on over twenty kilograms. Paola 1,39 and Paola 5,50, who experienced all different types of violence in different degrees, drew a sort of hierarchy of violence and its different categories. Paola 1,39 said that she found psychological violence “mainly in the workplace”, while she claimed that physical violence occurred mostly within the household, where there is no control and where “extreme behaviours are sometimes displayed”. The worst violence of all, according to Paola 1,39, was to have sex with a person who had just beaten her. She reported her experience:

*“... I noticed that he’d become even more violent because I didn’t want to have sex with him. I thought that was just ridiculous: it was really hard for me to have a sexual intercourse with him only a few days after he’d beaten me”.*

As mentioned above, Paola 1,39 seemed to draw a hierarchy of violence:

*“... he’d become more aggressive... even more violent towards me; so I’d yield to sex to try and protect myself”.*

She also mentioned a sub-category of sexual violence, which she defined “... a more subtle kind of sexual violence”, with a preliminary remark:

*“he never tied me to the bed, but still that was violence because I was always scared of what he might do and therefore I had to have sex with him in order to avoid the worst”.*

Paola 1,39 was also a victim of a type of violence called **stalking**<sup>1</sup>.

Paola 1,39 said:

*“One type of violence had ended because I had moved to a different environment, but then other types of violence started” and again “When I went out, I often felt I was being followed; I became anxious every time the phone rang; he would come outside the house and take our child”.*

At that point, Paola 1,39 went to the judge and asked for a non-molestation order to be issued for her husband. Paola 5,50, after separating from her husband, moved to another region and started living in hiding. Paola 6,22 experienced stalking too: she received up to six letters a day and “...phone calls every five or maximum ten minutes... the phone wouldn’t stop ringing”. Paola 5,50

<sup>1</sup> “Stalking” comes from hunting, meaning “waiting in ambush”; it comprises behaviours such as following, obscene or unwanted phone calls, repeated visits to the workplace, loitering, and watching the victims’ home.

described violence first of all as an undue influence but also as any violent way of communicating: *“Violence is when somebody holds you down...when they use violent language...”*.

Paola 6,22 too thought that physical violence was a sort of sub-violence:

*“...first of all, by violence I also mean the way you say something...”*.

Some of these women did not only suffer from self-harm but they had also wished for death. Paola 1,39 had a nagging thought: *“I wished for death... I asked God to take me”*. Paola 5,50 often thought she was going mad: *“I also wished to take my own life”*. Paola 6,22 claimed:

*“First of all, I didn’t want to live anymore”*; her boyfriend had laid down a list of rules to follow as if they were commandments: *“don’t ever lie to me – don’t ever leave me – don’t ever betray me – don’t go out alone..”* an endless list of rules.

### 2.2.2 Relationships and social life

**Indicators:** the loss of friends, social and/or family isolation and criticism, problems with their work/family balance, people’s suspiciousness towards them.

This section looks into the social relationships held by our respondents. We considered events such as the loss of friends, social and/or family isolation, problems with their work/family balance, problems looking after their children due to their psychological state, people’s suspiciousness towards them, ostracisation by others, the type of relationship with their family/friends and criticism coming from their family and friends. Other factors considered were any possible problem interacting with people; lack of self-esteem; community participation and/or organisation; regard of men in general; ability to communicate with men or fear of men in general; ability to maintain loving relationships and attitudes towards sexual relationships, if they are still able to engage in them at all. On the whole, after what they had been through, these women were not very willing to have social relationships. Paola 2,38 had lost some friends due to her husband’s character: *“he was a little hot-tempered and we lost many friends because of that”*. She did not have a very good relationship with her girlfriends because she found it difficult to tell her story: *“I’d rather talk to men about it, although then I start worrying that some of them might take advantage of it”*.

Some women were able to get involved in another intimate relationship, while some others could not even do that because they were too scared. *“I got to the point that when I got back home, I was scared”*, said Paola 1,39. In her case, she did not only fear for herself. The “total” fear that led her to break her marriage was for her newborn son. She described the worst episode of abuse she had suffered, which got things to the point she decided to separate:

*“It happened about fifteen or twenty days after my son was born. He kicked me and I was more scared than usual, because I was holding my son in my arms”*.

She was still afraid of getting married again, even after seven years. Paola 1,39 said:

*“I’m not saying I don’t want to get married again: I’m just scared, so scared”*.

Paola 6,22 too described her being scared:

*“... he crushed my finger ... his continuous apologies and promises not to do it again made me forgive him”*.

Paola 6,22, who was aware of the fact that she was “*with a disturbed person*”, complied with his wishes “*for fear of... always for fear of...*”. She could not finish that sentence. Then, she hinted at the fact that she feared he would kill her and she confirmed it after the tape recorder had been switched off. Paola 6,22 had a new boyfriend but she found it hard to relax during sex. However, her boyfriend’s understanding and patience were helping her recover her serenity. When talking about her friends and the support received by her family, Paola 1,39 said:

*“There is no such thing as true friendship, even when you don’t have problems. As I said, I had a girlfriend who grew estranged from me when I asked her to testify in court. She was the only person I had asked, because the other people who knew were only acquaintances and I would have never asked such a thing of them. On the contrary, there was another person I met through some private lessons: he was a university teacher and I was giving him private tuition to get him ready to undertake a training period in California. He told me that he was ready to testify, as opposed to many other people. This is maybe because there the academic environment has a different culture. Anyway, eventually his testimony was not required. He was knowledgeable of these problems and he believed me immediately”.*

All in all, Paola 1,39 mentioned two positive cases, because another girlfriend of hers testified at the Ecclesiastical Court so that her marriage could be dissolved by the Sacred Rota. As for her family, she said:

*“they came to collect information on what had happened soon after it had happened. Then, when I asked them to testify, only one uncle accepted, as well as only one of my female cousins, who was very hesitant anyway and whose father even got angry with her. I’m talking about an uncle who was related to me by blood, not my marriage”.*

These accounts show a cultural environment where even supposed girlfriends refuse to testify in court for a victim of violence. In addition, her mother said to her: “*See what you can do to please him (her husband, editor’s note)*”.

Paola 1,39 repeated: “*There is no such thing as true friendship*” though she added she had a lot of acquaintances. Sometimes, she felt alone and she found it hard to trust people in general; she had become distrustful. This was mainly because people did not believe her, or sometimes only partially believed her, or anyway had reservations. All this caused her to develop *liar syndrome*. Moreover, she felt judged by her son, because her husband had turned him against her. Therefore, she had problems interacting with anybody, especially with men:

*“I find it very hard to trust people. Even more so with men my age and especially with some specific age groups. I mean, when they are younger than me, I consider them as brothers and I feel very much at ease; similarly, I feel at ease with men who are much older than me, since I’ve never had problems with my father. When I suspect that a man might be attracted by me or might try to woo me, it kind of irritates me; I’m quite suspicious and so I try to fend them off, I don’t expose myself to them”.*

Paola 1,39’s judgement was stark: “*... there are few real men around these days*”. After separating, she did not have other affairs. After all the suffering she endured, she wondered:

*“How could I do it? How could I be so stupid?”.*

Paola 5,50, who, at the age of seven was “*severely abused*”, though she never told anybody, had a partner with whom she felt good, though they did not live together on a regular basis because she

sometimes had to go and work up north and she did not feel totally safe where she lived. She thought she might face problems if she decided to live with a man:

*“... I’m not scared of suffering violence, I’m scared of the dynamics that might develop...”. Paola 5,50 lived almost in hiding: “... he (her husband) doesn’t know where I live and I always have to use precautions ...”. Paola 5,50 was living a beautiful love affair with a younger man and she was sexually satisfied.*

With regards to childcare issues, Paola 1,39 found it difficult to strike a good work/family balance. At first, she said:

*“yes, you can do it” but then she added: “you need help from your family, especially when your children are very young; you need a grandmother who is willing to look after them when you’re at work”. Since she could not communicate with her partner in a relaxed way, she could not “keep cool and keep the child calm as well, because it was difficult not to shout on the phone so that the child wouldn’t hear.”*

However, in the last four years, the situation had changed considerably and she had calmed down.

Paola 2,38 complained:

*“I get no help at home so I work long hours at the shop and then, when I get back at nine in the evening, I always have something to do until about one in the morning. I have a house, a daughter, and also him to look after”.*

Paola 2,38 reported she had some problems coping with her daughter because of her psychological state:

*“When I’m really upset, I take it out on her. I often tell her off and I also make innuendos about her father but then I feel sorry about that because she takes things ten times more seriously than I intended”.*

### 2.2.3 Economic

**Indicators:** economic dependence, need for economic and financial support, reliance on social support and benefits.

This section will look into the financial problems caused by gender violence: however, it will not dwell on the details of economic violence, that is the series of acts of victimisation occurring through material deprivation and control, limiting respondents’ access to economic independence. Our interviews inquired into economic dependence, debt, bank overdraft, economic damage resulting from violent incidents, need for economic and financial support, and reliance on social support and benefits. Paola 1,39, an unemployed mother, lamented the fact that she did not receive any economic support through educational, social or family policies:

*“what upsets me the most is that when you ask for a book voucher for your child, they ask you to show them your income and then they give everybody the same allowance. This year, all applicants have been given a €100 book voucher. I think that a distinction should be made between people like me, an unemployed woman with a dependant child, and, on the other hand, households with two or three sources of income. I just don’t feel protected and supported, even in the smallest of things”.*

In a nutshell, it can be said that almost all respondents were in a financially precarious position. This was also because, although separation agreements and divorce settlements cover alimony payments



by court order, these women never received any or, in some cases, they preferred to waive this right. Paola 1,39 said:

*“... the father of my child pays some money for him but not for me; he should do... still, he doesn't pay ...”.*

Paola 5,50, who writes novels, said:

*“it's hard to live off the proceeds of writing in some contexts”.* However, she had always worked and earned more than her husband: *“... they used to call him by my family name”.* Then, after separating, she lost everything.

## 2.2.4 Housing

**Indicators:** *lost her home, emergency accommodation in a shelter, to live in her parental house.*

With regards to accommodation, some respondents had to flee their homes due to conflict. Paola 5,50 claimed she had lost her home and had to seek emergency accommodation in a shelter, while many others could not afford to pay rent. Paola 1,39 lived in her mother's house also because her husband, in order not to leave the matrimonial home to his separating wife, changed all the locks (even the car locks, though the car was in her name). Paola 1,39 did not even want to live in that house and preferred to stay with her mother. Paola 5,50 was granted the right to remain in the former matrimonial home by the court but she could not live there *“... for security reasons”.* Still, the house belonged to both of them. At the time of the interview, Paola 5,50 lived in rented accommodation, though she added: *“I can't have a contract in my name, not even the electricity bill”* and that was because she was still living *“...in hiding”.*

Paola 2,38, on the contrary, declared she had been through times where she risked losing her house:

*“every time we stop speaking to each other, he stops paying the bills. Our telephone line has been cut off several times. We risked losing the house several times because he always asked me for money to cover the expenses he couldn't pay (...) I had to provide for his needs when he asked me for small sums of money”.*

She still was in debt with the bank. Paola 4,43 waived all her rights

*“I didn't want alimony; I didn't want anything except for child support: I just wanted him to leave”.* She went on to add: *“he wanted us to be separated in the same home then he wanted me to go and stay with my parents while he would keep on living at home ... he often came inside the house and robbed several objects that also belonged to me”.*

## 2.2.5 Labour

**Indicators:** *was often off work sick, work inefficiency, to abdicate the job, absenteeism.*

This section looks into all the possible consequences that respondents who had experienced or were still experiencing domestic violence faced in their work: absenteeism, lack of punctuality, cash penalties, disciplinary measures and other sanctions that led them to lose their job or be demoted due to their lack of punctuality. In these cases, women might experience concentration problems or reduced efficiency at work. Problems resulting from gender violence could also be caused by sexual harassment, death threats, threats of being fired or demoted, threats of being deprived of one's salary or of having one's income reduced, mobbing on the part of colleagues, wish to leave one's job, fear of going to work, isolation in the workplace or again problems finding a job due to one's

physical or psychological health. Paola 2,38 was often off work sick. She also took time off because, she said:

*“I have to look after my daughter since he doesn’t attend meetings at school and doesn’t take her to do sport and exercise activities, which I pay for”. She managed to get to work on time unless she had “commitments of this kind or other specific commitments. Although I work, my financial situation is not brilliant and so if I had to seek helpers, that money would come off the budget dedicated to me and my daughter”.*

Paola 1,39 declared she wanted to work; however, she also stated that her health was not good and that it had an impact on her work efficiency: *“I really want to work, but I have physical health problems. There are days when I can’t get out of bed”.* When these women decide to react, they behave differently from women who suffered violence in the workplace, who tend to be more constructive. Their behaviours, on the contrary, seem to be more of a “reaction” to the attempt to destroy their potentials. Victims of domestic violence want to prove that they are not useless. Paola 1,39, who obtained a university degree after separating from her husband, told us that, as a result of the abuse suffered, she had to turn down some jobs because her husband did not want her to be employed in manual labour:

*“At the beginning, I was not allowed to work at all: I had to stay at home and be a housewife. When the need arose, I started looking but no job suited him so I tried to explain that the jobs he wanted me to do required me to hold a university degree”.*

Paola 1,39 only had a higher secondary school qualification, which was quite limiting in terms of employability. She used to give English private lessons and she was not allowed to ask for more. *“I started studying”*, she said. When her husband perhaps realised that she was doing well, he said to her: *“Listen, you have to leave university, it’s taking you far too long and I can no longer afford it”.* Men like are not only violent but they are also very subtle, trying to crush their partner’s personality.

## 2.2.6 Legal

### Indicators: lack of confidence in the judicial system

In the few cases where violence was actually reported to the police, women always played down events in court, following their lawyer’s advice. It would be quite safe to assume that these women were not provided security and protection during court proceedings; for this reason and more, they appeared to have very low trust in the judicial system. Paola 1,39 did not bring action against her husband; she did not report him to the police because she said:

*“I thought they wouldn’t believe me; when I decided to separate, as I said before, I was met with a wall of resistance: nobody believed me”.*

In spite of the serious physical injuries caused by the violence suffered, she declared:

*“I went to see the doctor because he had pulled my arm; as a result, I couldn’t move my arm and the area around my armpit for two or three weeks. My doctor got a bit suspicious but he didn’t ask many questions; he said I had a torn muscle and prescribed me an ointment. I think he suspected something. However, when he was summoned to testify before the court, he said he had never suspected anything. I couldn’t move that arm but, in court, he said he didn’t remember”.*



As mentioned above, at first, she applied for legal aid but a female lawyer told her she would not be granted it:

*“Then I enquired about it and found out that I was eligible for legal aid since I was unemployed. I got to the point I could no longer afford to pay this lawyer, because my father had died and we had to pay for the funeral; when she asked me for more money, I decided to dispense with her services. As I had a court hearing the following day, during the night we thought of a lawyer who was a relative of some relatives of mine. So we went knocking on his door. He was fair: he referred us to a colleague of his, who was a criminal lawyer and this lawyer gave me legal assistance through legal aid. The whole thing ended up well; however, I never felt protected. (...) I thought that when a woman reported the violence she suffered by her husband, that husband would be banned from approaching her home but that just didn't happen. He would come to see me whenever he wanted and, in this respect, neither I nor my parents felt protected”.*

Subsequently, Paola 1,39 had to report what was happening not because of the violence suffered but to avoid being accused of deserting the marital home. She was then granted legal aid. Paola 1,39 had to seek social services assistance:

*“(my son would) scream, cry, wander around the house”.*

Then, Paola 1,39 added: *“I had to admit to what we had been through”*. Paola 5,50 reported the violence suffered after twenty-five years. Ironically, all the times she visited an emergency room, she was taken there by her husband, who gave her suggestions as to what she should say to the doctors:

*“he had broken my head and I told the doctor that they were fixing a wall cupboard... that's what he'd told me to say”*. She declared that she trusted the judicial system but then she added: *“these men often get away with it”*. What she confided in was *“the ability of lawyers”*. Finally, she concluded: *“all is relative, even in justice”*. Her daughters did not want to testify: *“my daughters won't talk ... they're scared ... he's their father ...”*

### **3. Violence in the workplace – women's perspective**

The interviews conducted with women who suffered violence in the workplace show that some of them were determined and resolved to rebuild something for themselves, something with foundations (like in a house), stemming not only from the need to work and earn their bread and butter but from the will and the strength of building something that could last, something to be remembered by, something that could compensate them for the damage suffered. Violetta 7,46 said:

*“This is how I make my work grow, day by day”.*

#### **3.1 Understanding gender violence in the workplace**

Violetta 6,37 had to abandon a university career when the teacher she was working under said to her: *“I only give to those who give me something back”*. By saying that, he was suggesting that she should be physically, sexually, mentally, and intellectually available. However, she did not lose heart and now she works in a managing position as a job advisor in a no-profit organisation. She described her work environment as highly professional, fostering professional as well as personal growth and reward. Some of these women seemed to be willing to “achieve”, to “take action”; at the same time, they also appeared to be aware of the fact that what they were building may not work. In fact, they also considered the possibility that their professional plans may fail. Violetta 7,46 said:

*"... we obviously expect to have positive results, though we know it could all fall through..."*

These women appeared to be farsighted; the sorrow and disappointment they experienced in the workplace only seemed to have had a very limited impact on their plans. This assumption was supported by Violetta 7,46, when she said that:

*"movie-tourism is already established in countries like the United States, but here in Europe, and in Italy in particular, it is a new concept, in the forefront of this industry, with much room for development"*

These women moved beyond the notion of work for work's sake. Violetta 5,46, an immigrant woman from Poland, said that, though she had a dependent child, she did not only work to support her family, but *"to feel independent"*. The words spoken by Violetta 7,46 showed she had higher and determined ambitions; she appeared to be aware of the many obstacles she was to find on her professional path; nonetheless, in spite of the violence she had experienced, she seemed determined not to give up and aim higher. Being concerned and working for the common good almost revealed a political approach. Violetta 7,46 added that, if her job was well done, it could contribute to

*"...the local economy, local development and culture, but, most importantly, it could enhance the profile of the whole area, because when the product comes out and people see it on television – if it's drama – in documentaries or at the cinema, then that work acquires meaning and that product could become an effective way to promote tourism"*

Violetta 7,46 felt the need to go back to work after separating from her husband with *"...three daughters with small age gaps..."*. In spite of her need to find employment, she still sounded determined not to settle for just any job, because she said:

*"the first job I was offered was a cleaner position but I was lucky I didn't have to do that job even for one day"*

This woman, in spite of what she had been through, displayed considerable self-awareness. She also added:

*"... when presenting their product, women are more creative, they are better than men and pay more attention to details; in my experience, they are also better team-workers. Men always assert themselves as leaders and the others have to abide by their decisions. Women, on the contrary, tend to sit down and talk with their peer colleagues and split their duties"*

However, it has to be said that Violetta 7,46, who showed to be very strong and determined in spite of the harassment she had experienced in the workplace, needed to reconsider her reaction and think of how she would have responded to the harassment if she had not needed that job:

*"While he was driving, his hand slid on my leg... I grabbed his hand and moved it, saying: what are you doing?"*

Violetta 7,46 had learned to control herself as well as others:

*"I didn't slap him because he was somebody important..."* . If she had slapped him, she might have lost her job as well as the chance to work in that field again, which she couldn't afford, as that was the field she wanted to be involved in:

*"... unfortunately, I can't afford that, so I've always kept the situation under control in this way"*

The same goes for Violetta 3,30 who, in spite of her professor's lewd advances when she was about to graduate, said:

*"every time I went to see him, he'd say he needed more time to talk and we should see each other for dinner so we could talk more privately (...) he made that request several times". She went on to say: "if that had happened before an exam, I would have had a psychological block and left my studies (...) It was such a shock for me, I would have certainly quit".*

This said, Violetta 3,30 was working as the deputy director of a bank, where, by statute, until a few years ago, women were not allowed to be employed as middle or top managers. Unfortunately, not all the women who experienced harassment and therefore suffered serious consequences found themselves in relatively optimistic scenarios like these.

### 3.2 Gender violence effects

Violetta 5,46 talked about her job and her relationship with her male colleagues:

*"it has always been excellent". She was not prejudiced in her social interactions: "I like company, I like to have a laugh". However, she was not naive: "I like being friendly, without overstepping the boundaries though".*

Violetta 5,46 was not weak; however, she was a victim of a deviant male-dominated power structure. She showed to be a strong lady: *"if their jokes overstep the mark, I defend myself".* Her self-defence strategy, which did not always work, included two patterns of behaviour:

- a) not hiding violence from their colleagues;
- b) not giving up to harassment, in spite of the harsh consequences resulting from it.

Violetta 5,46 did not distinguish between sexual harassment and sexual violence; this was not because she did not know the semantics of the words. She explained the concept of violence and harassment very clearly:

*"I think sexual harassment occurs when I'm at work and a man brushes and touches my body with his: well, that classifies as sexual violence... you just don't do these things in the workplace".*

Violetta 5,46 chose her words to strengthen, highlight, and define the type of injury she had to suffer. She was not harassed only because she was a foreigner, but especially because she was a woman. This provides further insight into the cultural framework. Evidently, this is not only about racism, where injury is caused to the otherness of the "other" because they come from another place. The core of the issue is gender violence, gender difference, which is sometimes combined and coincident with the foreigner's otherness. Violetta 5,46 corroborated this assumption:

*"I've never come across anybody who said: "You're a foreigner". I'm happy here in Italy, I've never suffered discrimination".*

According to Violetta 5,46, violence against women in the workplace is widespread, since she knew of other fellow countrywomen from Poland who had suffered it:

*"I know girls who work in bars and who also had to quit their job because they got sexual advances from their employers. So I think it's quite common".*

Violetta 5,46 reckoned that a foreign woman was more likely to experience violence, though she herself had never suffered discrimination on grounds of her country of origin. This might appear to be in contradiction with what she had said before. However, at a closer look, her arguments and considerations were correct. Foreign women are those who most experience harassment not only because they are foreigners and migrants, but because, since they are foreigners, they are more defenceless than Italian women, who, after all, live in their own country and theoretically have somebody who protects them even if they are not physically there. The impact of gender violence in the workplace upon women's work and career will be illustrated in more detail in paragraph 3.2.5.

### 3.2.1 Health

**Indicators:** fear, weeping, stomach pain, stress, use of medicinal to help her sleep.

Before looking into the effects of gender violence on women's health, this paragraph will illustrate the comments made by Violetta 2,23, a barmaid coming from Romania, about the connection between women's work and their health. She claimed that, since she was a migrant, she accepted the work conditions that were imposed on her, like being paid less than other Italian fellow workers doing the same job in the same bar. This was only because she was happy to work with her colleagues even though, since she did not have a regular work contract, she was not entitled to a general practitioner service.

*"If I get sick, nobody cares. That's why being regularly employed is important; if I get a regular contract, I'll choose a GP (...) Last week, for example, I had a heavy cold, I was feeling really sick so I went to see a doctor through an acquaintance of mine; the doctor saw me just to tell me what drugs I had to take and that I should pay for them myself (...) then, they wouldn't sell them to me because I didn't have a prescription. Now, that is a problem, because the chemist won't sell you antibiotics so you might as well die and nobody cares".*

Violetta 4,30, a university researcher, when talking about her health mentioned stomach pain, swelling, stress, and the use of non-drug remedies to help her sleep. Violetta 1,28, a land-surveyor, said:

*"during a whole year, I was very anxious, I even used tranquilisers and I couldn't get on with my work, I mean, I did not make any headway, I couldn't get my work done, I couldn't even plan my day's work, I couldn't do anything because I just wasn't motivated. Sometimes, my spirits are high, which is good because other times I lose heart and even get depressed".*

Did Violetta 5,46 lead a quiet life? Her answer was:

*"Well, yes, a rather quiet life, I would say ...",*

which was far from being a positive and pleased response. During the interview, Violetta 5,46, a Polish woman who had come to Italy to find an occupation, started talking about her health: she said that she did not want to sleep with her employer and that was causing all her misery, because he would blame her even and especially when she had nothing to do with it:

*"If there was something wrong in the kitchen or if the chef or a waiter messed something up, he'd always take it out on me and shout at me ...".*

Violetta 5,46 did not live at home, in her country; she felt she was a foreigner and she did not feel part of what went on around her. She was scared and terrified and so she reacted by getting sick. However, she did not seem to be afraid of moving through time and space in order to find

employment. After the fall of the Communist regime, she lost her job and, in order to sustain herself and her child, she “... ended up here in Italy”. Her strength did not prevent her from getting sick. Violetta 5,46 talked about her stress and her poor work performance. She claimed that her willpower was not enough; her physical strength and her determination were not enough, so she said:

*“I’d go back home and cry, I lost seven kilos in three months; I stopped eating and cried all the time. I got upset for any odd reason: if people simply looked at me I thought they wanted to rape me; my psychiatrist advised me to stop working (...) I was scared, when I drove to a crossroads I wouldn’t know what to do. It was getting dangerous for me because I kept thinking “If I go to work, he’ll tell me off”. I was afraid of getting to work. When we finished work, I was the first to leave to make sure I was not the last one out (...) I wouldn’t put any make up on lest men should look at me and one of them should harass me again; I’d rather stay at home and not go out”.*

Violetta 7,46 too said:

*“I usually feel very tired, I went through a period of great stress... some of these periods would last months: I couldn’t walk into squares or where it was crowded... I had troubles like... my stomach would freeze and I’d feel faint and so I had to rush back home...”.*

In Violetta 7,46’s case, the reason behind her health problems became clearer as the interviews developed; Violetta 5,46, on the contrary, felt the urge to talk about it straight away, almost anticipating interview questions. When she talked about the harassment she had experienced, she said:

*“... I had work-related problems; they wouldn’t leave me alone. Then I started seeing a psychiatrist because I’d fallen into a depression and so I started taking drugs... I was fired... and my job has now been filled...”.*

### 3.2.2 Relationships and social life

**Indicators:** lack of self-confidence, excess of self-defence mechanisms.

Gender violence affect the victims’ social relationships and interactions with other people and with men in particular. This is corroborated by the account given by Violetta 1,28, who is no longer able to welcome genuine gestures such as the exchange of small gifts on some special occasions:

*“Now, I’m much more disillusioned; I used to be more genuine in some ways, while now I’ve become more disenchanted, much more distant and cold. Before, if I bought a small gift, a little something for some women, I didn’t think twice before buying something for the men as well; now, I make sure little presents made for Christmas or Easter or on birthdays are not too personal but simply a token of friendship and esteem”.*

Also, when talking about her insecurity and her being a possible prey, she talked about her self-defence mechanisms:

*“I now have a video entry phone; I had it installed straight away! If it’s late and somebody I don’t fully trust rings it, I just don’t open the door. That’s a protection. Then, I also had a security grille fitted at the entrance, so if somebody should find the main door open by mistake and try to come up, they’ll find this grille. Now I only allow in who I choose. I don’t need to let everybody in; if somebody wants some documents (when delivering work to clients) I could let them have them without letting them in”.*



Violetta 5,46, just like Violetta 7,46, was scared, although she looked strong too. When she got lewd comments like “Nice ass” she did not react: “*I don’t even react, I walk on by and pretend not to hear, as if those comments were not aimed at me*”. This said, she was able to distinguish between rude and, on the other hand, genuine compliments like “*what a pretty woman*”.

Respondents’ accounts show that gender-based violence somehow affected their lives and had an impact on their behaviours, which tended to become defensive. Violetta 5,46 said: “*I’ve become increasingly cautious*” and then, talking about when she was with friends, she added: “*... I try not to make jokes...*” as she was afraid of being misunderstood. This behaviour ended up isolating her: “*...maybe I’ve become a sadder person... I feel really good when I’m by myself*”. Violetta 7,46 said: “*... I’m very careful, I wouldn’t want to be in the position of having to defend myself*”. These women were scared and they did not trust anybody because they felt under constant threat. Still, they were very open-minded: Violetta 5,46 and Violetta 7,46, although they were both over 40, contemplated the idea of going back to university to finish or study further the topics they enjoyed and they were interested in.

In addition to considerations about their sociability and their social relations, it is worth mentioning a remark made by Violetta 5,46, a migrant woman from Poland. She hinted at the fact that having a husband, a boyfriend, a brother, a male cousin or anyway a man beside her could be a deterrent for potential harassers and rapists. Foreign women who come to Italy to work come without their husbands, boyfriends, or partners. In other words, they are not perceived as being “protected”. Therefore, their potential or actual molesters are not bothered by the real or imagined presence of a man. Being foreign, in these cases, involves being “alone and defenceless”. On the one hand, local women appear to be more fearful and they manifest their fears more, which ironically makes them look “more protected”. Foreign women, on the contrary, display a certain confidence, perhaps due to their “adventurous background” (for having migrated by themselves, for example); this said, they look “alone and unprotected”. Violetta 5,46 said: “*they (harassers) think that foreign women are defenceless and scared*”. Eventually, Violetta 5,46 started feeling like a local; she started living with her partner, whose very existence protected her:

“*... he protected me, I’d take me to work, he’d come and pick me up in his car, I didn’t get around by myself anymore*”. The key, the strategy, seemed to be: “*having a partner to accompany you*”. Someone to protect you.

Prejudice and gender-based stereotypes with regards to household and care work were exemplified by Violetta 4,30, a university researcher:

“*when I got married, they said to me ‘You’ll get married, you’ll have a baby and then you’ll quit’*”.

Nevertheless, in spite of the many efforts and the great sacrifices they have to make, these women are able and quite happy to look after their children. Violetta 3,30 did not agree with the assumption that wives and mothers had fewer opportunities. However, her words revealed that she herself was a victim of our culture, where gender discrimination is embedded throughout the system and where it is not even perceived as such by those who are directly affected by it. In fact, she said:

“*a woman has fewer protections, she needs to be more flexible. For example, if you are a director... you have meetings to attend in other regions, in the north of Italy, in the headquarters: this means you have to travel, you have to stay away for three, four or even seven days. A family man can do it, while a mother can only do it if she manages to find suitable arrangements, though I wouldn’t leave my child for a week to attend a meeting*”.

Only Violetta 7,46, seemed to be aware that the strict gender-based division of roles is a social construction that has nothing to do with nature or with being born a man or a woman:

*“my brother-in-law holds a very important position, he has received an excellent education and he has won several competitive examinations. When he gets home, he washes the dishes, he cleans, and he changes nappies for his five children: he lends a great hand to my sister. When I ask him: “aren’t you tired when you get home from work?”, he says: “I like my job and it doesn’t get me tired; what really tires me out is looking after the family: now, that is hard work”.*

It is a shame Violetta 7,46 could not get any help from the father of her three daughters:

*“I tried to be a member of some associations and political groups to put a spark back into my life but also to protect myself in a way, because my ex husband was involved in politics. He was so powerful, he just overpowered me and so I thought I’d get involved in politics too in order to be able to fight back. I attended a series of meetings with my daughters. One day, I was filmed by the local television channel: I was the only woman in a group of women of the Ulivo<sup>2</sup> party inside that hall holding three daughters who were leafing through some Mickey Mouse comics. I remember receiving countless calls from all over the region where I live asking me what I was doing there with my three daughter. People were a bit shocked that I had taken them to meetings, but I didn’t know where to leave them and I couldn’t afford a baby sitter, that’s why they were always with me”.*

Violetta 5,46, just like Violetta 7,46 is a cultured woman, she had only seven exams left to attain her university degree. She then left her studies because she got married and had a child. She started working in a factory, her marriage broke up, and, just like Violetta 7,46, she could not rely on help from her ex-husband or ask her parents to keep her and her son:

*“because, when my husband and I broke up, he didn’t pay alimony and so I had to find a solution...”.*

Violetta 5,46’s parents, who live in a deeply Catholic country like Poland, welcomed their grandson in their home so that their daughter could come to Italy.

### 3.2.3 Economic

**Indicators:** loss of job, loss of money, lost pay, discouragement from looking for another job, economic dependence.

Violetta 1,28, a land surveyor, suffered abuse and even lost an order because she could not handle some documents and file some papers in time. Violetta 1,28 lost her money and her job in one year. What was worse, that increased her insecurity. In this regard, Violetta 1,28 claimed:

*“Yes, sometimes I feel insecure, I don’t feel I have what it takes to do this job; what happened to me caused this insecurity”.*

Violetta 4,30, a university researcher, never had pay cuts because she was paid directly by the Ministry, however, she complained that she had never had her work recognised:

*“Recognition is when you do extra work on behalf of university teaching staff even though you’re a researcher and that is not your job; it’s not about getting paid for those extra hours, but when you do those projects – like a report, for example – that’s a skill and, in theory, a job as well. Yet, I*

<sup>2</sup> An Italian centre left political party.



*didn't get paid this time either and I can't tell you if it's because I'm a woman or because of the internal hierarchy of the academia".*

Violetta 2,23, a barmaid from Romania, did not earn any money for one year due to the abuse she suffered:

*"(...) I didn't work for one year because I no longer felt like working; the only job that I could feel comfortable with would have been a carer, but not everybody can do that. When I got here, I thought that if I shouldn't find a job I sort of liked, I wouldn't have been a carer anyway, because I didn't feel up to it. I was twenty-one, I didn't want to work as a carer (...)"*

In addition, past experience and lost pay increased her uneasiness and discouraged her from looking for another job. Violetta 2,23, added:

*"I worked in another bar for one month. After talking to the owner about pay and work hours, we reached an agreement... then he started asking me to work more, I ended up working 12 hours a day and when he paid me, he didn't even pay me the amount we had originally agreed on; he gave me less, even though I'd worked much longer hours. So I told him that I was leaving, saying: 'If you don't pay me what we agreed on, I'll leave'. He didn't say anything, so I left".*

Violetta 5,46, a Polish commis chef, said that she had happened to be short paid by about 50 euros more than once and that they assured her by saying: *"There is no money, when I earn some, I'll pay you"*. This is the reason why she is still financially dependant on her partner who, as she said, "kept" her.

### 3.2.4 Housing

None of the women we interviewed about gender violence in the workplace reported having housing problems.

### 3.2.5 Labour

**Indicators:** harassment, hostile work environment, loss of job, not insured job.

Violetta 4,30, a university researcher, portrayed the environment of the department where she worked by illustrating its gender composition: *"there are 34 of us, 3 women and 31 men"*. She got comments by her colleagues and superiors like: *"you're a woman anyway"*. She then went on to explain a typical way in which her colleague and especially her director upset her:

*"The form of violence that upsets me the most, that really gets to my nerves... (...) is when they said those words to me. That happens so often (...) I'm actually used to it now: when something goes wrong or when I do something wrong, I anticipate them by saying WELL, I'M A WOMAN ANYWAY. I say that to myself, because I know that's what they mean".*

Her colleagues too, almost all of whom were men, sometimes made humorous remarks in a cryptic language, Violetta 4,30 said: *"I couldn't understand (...) at first I'd ask 'What do you mean? What are you talking about?' (...) now I know... and I just say: 'Talk about whatever you like and if you deem it appropriate to let me know, fine, otherwise I don't care'"*. The only protest Violetta 4,30 made against this male chauvinist system was when she talked to her superior and told him what she thought, threatening to leave her job: *"On that occasion, he even threw his mobile phone at me; it didn't hurt, so I didn't give it much weight. Still, he threw his mobile at me in a fit of anger"*.

Violetta 7,46's work and career were affected by gender violence; in her own way, she claimed to know the "culture" of different work environments very well. Consequently, she knew what to do, at least when dealing with harassment coming from powerful men, people she could not expect much from:

*"I often reacted by slapping them".* She gave a harsh judgement on her work environment, because women, be them married, single or separated – as it was her case – were often assumed to have affairs: *"I was often thought to have affairs with men such as MP's... or senators... I was always somebody's current mistress".* Then, Violetta 7,46 started talking about her daughters and said that, if two young people started seeing each other, rumours started spreading: *"she got engaged to that guy".* This state of affairs led Violetta 7,46 to describe that cultural environment as *"almost medieval"*. That cultural environment led her to develop a sort of "pre-emptive defence strategy" against gender violence, a strategy base on *warning* her daughters during their upbringing. Violetta 7,46 stated:

*"... I was forced to tell them to be careful, I mean, there's nothing wrong with having a chat with a male friend; they might go on chatting the following day and they might also go for a drive but they have to know that they are putting themselves in a position where somebody will gossip about them, and that will hurt and make them feel uncomfortable".*

The strategies she had developed for herself to fend off unwanted attentions in the workplace turned into "avoidance" strategies for her daughters. She warned them, whereas she used a totally different tactic for herself, since she was well aware of gender role patterns:

*"Well, I've always tried to make fun of the person who made me suffer this kind of attention, I ended up considering this person as an inferior being".*

According to Violetta 7,46, strategies may change depending on different cases and situations and therefore it is necessary to develop some *ad hoc* solutions and reactions. That is why some women feel they just have to suffer an utterly hostile work environment; if they decide to fight back, they could suffer great distress or even lose their job. Violetta 5,46 declared she was paid as much as Italian women, if not more; although she was happy with her occupation, she decided to leave her job as a domestic worker because she was not insured and she was paid cash in hand. This situation is quite common in all fields of employment. What struck interviewers was the intellectual honesty displayed by respondents, who appeared determined to fight against the adverse situation they were living. They said things like:

*"... we all have upper secondary and even university qualifications...";* nonetheless, they accepted those jobs because they didn't want to become *"thieves or prostitutes"*.

Moreover, the Italian "madams" employing them paid them more if they were happy with their work. This corroborates the claims made by Violetta 7,46 on women's behaviour and culture when she talked about women *"... women are those who most pursue harmony in the world"*, which we could call a sort of "female justice". On the other hand, Violetta 5,46 also provided some information on the Italian environment and subcultural background, a place where the fact of being a lone woman – who is singled out as "unaccompanied" and unprotected in some ways – is immediately perceived as a "go-ahead" by harassers, who have obviously spent some time observing them first. Violetta 5,46 explained it clearly:

*"...I worked in the kitchen (of a restaurant) for three or four months and everything was cool, I got on well with my colleagues".*

After that, her employer appeared on the scene, probably after he had observed her victim for a while, which would explain why Violetta 5,46 said that she enjoyed her job in the first three or four months. *“Then the owner appeared; he pinched me; he also made prank calls...”*. This behaviour, which the employer displayed in the starting phase of the harassment, soon degenerated into much more brutal attitudes and explicit words, which were summed up in a final ultimatum:

*“... one day he told me straight out that if I didn't go to bed with him he would have made my life hell...”*.

Violetta 5,46's life became unliveable. Violetta 2,23, a barmaid, was also repeatedly harassed in the workplace. It all started with remarks like: *“you didn't clean up today”*. She was then forced to find explanations and asked why that remark was made before 4 pm, which was the end of her shift. She wanted to avoid the subject and pretend not to see that it was actually a sexual advance, which her employer gave for granted because she was a young foreign woman and also because it was part of the established culture of local men and women in general:

*“when I got here, they thought I hadn't come to work, but to do other things. Everybody was afraid we'd steal their husbands and if they saw us talking to somebody in the street, the rumour soon spread that we'd slept with them. (...) So it was hard to earn people's trust; they just didn't trust us. Then, day after day, when they get to know you, they see if you're a serious person. My employer kept on asking me if I'd go out with him after work; after two weeks, I couldn't deal with it anymore and so I left”*.

When she started working in another bar, her employer was really pressing:

*“I got really scared one day; I was in the kitchen doing something when he came behind me and grabbed me. I pushed him away... I was so terrified he might do it again, I started shouting and ran away”*.

Violetta 8,48, a registered nurse who had had an affair with a workmate, also had to suffer blame, condemnation, and criticism from her colleagues and superiors:

*“this person caused me a series of problems. I filed a complaint against him: he was put under house arrest but finally he was acquitted of the charge. My case even made it to the papers for what I went through was very hard. I remember that when I started work and nobody knew me, I received a very warm welcome... after a few days, the head of ward stopped greeting me; only a few days after starting, I found myself in a hostile environment”*. Her having had an affair with a workmate became a mark of infamy and a go-ahead for all the other men: *“I remember that after a couple of weeks, during my second night shift, a male colleague made a heavy pass at me and so I kicked him a couple of times”*.

Although these women were strong, their bodies were affected; however, they drew strength from the relationships they created with other people and from their ability to establish social relations. Violetta 7,46 said:

*“Some people were really supportive, some friends gave me their support from time to time, with their ups and downs. This said, I must admit that I've been very lucky; I've always had people around me who understood and gave me a helping hand ... and anyway, I've always been there for other people too...”*.

When violence occurs, help does not always come from the ones women most expect it from – like their mothers – or by people working in Women's support centres. In the former case, the lack of

support on the part of mothers could be ascribed to the generation gap and to the dominant chauvinist and patriarchal culture, which is also endorsed by women. In the latter case, the lack of support by Women's support centres stem from the extreme difficulties in helping women in the existing context. When she talked about the lawyer working in the Women's support centre, Violetta 8,48 said:

*"in that situation, she looked powerless, which is strange because she's very much on the ball and very clever. She seemed to be powerless; I saw something was stirring inside her".*

Violetta 7,46, on the contrary, said:

*"after I separated, I was not welcome in my mother's house anymore, she even sold her sofa beds... she didn't want to attract my ex-husband's reprisals..."*

It should be noticed that Violetta 7,46's mother had divorced her husband and that her new partner was an unfrocked priest. Violetta 7,46 was an educated woman, she looked confident and she had a lot of respect for herself and for her intelligence. When asked if she trusted herself, she replied, without a second thought: *"Yes, absolutely"*.

### 3.2.6 Legal

**Indicators:** to hesitate to report violence, telephone was tapped, stereotypes and prejudice about women suffering violence.

Violetta 5,46 did not depict Italy and Italian people in a stereotypical way because, in spite of everything, she loved Italy and did not miss her country. *"I don't miss anything, I've settled very well in Italy"*, she said. However, nobody stood up for her, though she had several male workmates. Was it a conspiracy of silence? Was there tacit consent? In that microworld that excluded outsiders and that was not inclusive, there was only one person who lent a helping hand, a safe haven for Violetta 5,46: this person was a woman. She was just like her and, just like her, she did not have any influence on the bar owner. That woman understood her. They were two women who came from two different cultures: one was Polish and the other Italian. They were two different women but they were equally victims of an in-culture characterised by bullying and abuse of power. Violetta 5,46 described her with some profound words, pregnant with meaning:

*"... this lady was older than me and I put all my trust on her; she helped me a lot; she never left me alone; she always stood by me and stuck up for me as best as she could. Eventually, she ended up getting fired too"*.

Violetta 5,46 pointed out that her lawyer advised her against filing a complaint:

*"she told me that I'd be better off not getting myself into this situation because there was no chance of winning. She said "You could try, but you'll never win"*.

There are three points to be made about the firing of her supportive colleague, which was "in the cards", like a prophecy come true:

- The demonstration of solidarity among women in this specific framework of violence. In this case, however, these two individuals were too weak to possibly defeat an abusive force;
- The repetition of violence (that, in this case, occurred through the dismissal of the lady Violetta 5,46 relied upon), which generates powerlessness in its victims;

- The one who had the power and exerted it seemed to be untouchable and unpunishable. Violetta 5,46 added: *"Once a girl filed a complaint against him and then he attacked her in public"*.

How can one report the violence suffered if in the social and cultural context where a man has perpetrated the abuse nobody, not even other men who witness the abuse, say anything, where nobody offers even a little help to the women who suffer the violence. *"Everybody knew because it was so obvious, everybody had realised"*, said Violetta 5,46. When she was blamed for mistakes she hadn't made because it was the chef's fault, she was subject to a series of insults: *"He'd call me all sorts of names: bitch, idiot, loony"*. Everybody knew, but nobody said anything. Male-perpetrated abuse and its surrounding climate of silence seem to be an established practice:

*"That's the way it is: I was not the first one, because there is a high turnover of girls in this restaurant... if you want to keep your job, you just have to keep your mouth shut"*.

Workers cannot afford to lose their job; this applies to men, who do not speak out about the violence taking place, as well as women, who are often in need and, especially if they come from abroad, face even worse abuse. As illustrated above, Violetta 7,46 developed several coping strategies that made her life very hard, though she was always enthusiastic. She worked as a TV editor for a television programme in Rome, which she enjoyed, though she said:

*"... I'd get there... get the report ready ... stay the night and travel back home because I couldn't leave the girls alone..."*. The controlling father of her daughters, her ex-husband, had to be kept in the dark: *"...I had to make sure he didn't know"*.

Eventually, Violetta 7,46 was accused of abandoning her children, though she actually left her three daughters in the care of a girlfriend of hers who was also a professional childminder. This time, justice was done and she was acquitted of the charge; in fact, the judge warned her ex-husband to leave his ex-wife alone and not to consider her as his prisoner. Still, more judicial ordeal was awaiting Violetta 7,46. It is important to notice that, in the cultural context she inhabited, women too, in order to stop being subject to unwelcome attentions, made comments like:

*"go on, give it to him, it's no big deal"*.

This experience depicts a culture of oppression where women, in order to be left alone, are invited to yield to their bosses' demands for sexual favours. Violetta 7,46 described the attitude of some of her "advisors" as resting on the notion that, after all, *becoming a sexual object was not such a big sacrifice*. Violetta 7,46 was strong, she showed her character and refused to be crippled by fear, except when, for a moment, she hesitated to report an attempted rape because, she said: *"I didn't want to upset my daughters"*. Violetta 7,46 was waiting for some friends to go out for dinner when she was sexually assaulted. Three lorry drivers started bothering her

*"... one of them actually stuck his head inside the open car window, he touched me and asked me how much I charged..."*.

A security guard who witnessed the scene said he *only* saw a lorry driver running away but *strangely enough* he didn't hear the woman shout and ask for help. Violetta 7,46 asked herself an almost rhetorical question: *"... if he was a security guard, why didn't he come to my aid?"*. The *Carabinieri* (the Italian military police), who are supposed to protect citizens, questioned Violetta 7,46 and, when it got to four o'clock in the morning, they said to her: *"Madam, you can be frank with us, you received some compliments from this lorry driver and your friends took it all a bit too far"*. This is the cultural background, which is imbued with commonplace stereotypes and prejudice about women suffering rape and/or attempted rape. Violetta 7,46, as mentioned earlier, showed to



be very strong and determined. However, that incident caused her to be ostracised at work. Her employers, embarrassed by all the rumour and scandal raised, said to her: *“why didn’t just stay at home instead of going out at night to dine with your friends?”*. Violetta 7,46 was alone; divorced with three daughters, she also got some death-threatening telephone calls in connection with issues related to her field of work. Although her telephone was tapped, no investigating authority would tell her where those threatening calls had been made from.

Violetta 8,48 suffered threats, harassment, and violence from a colleague with whom she had had a long affair. She endured all of sorts of abuse, she said, *“in order to avoid the worst”*. Then she added:

*It got so bad that, after a serious harassment that lasted several months, I started fearing for my own life and so I decided to press charges against him”.*

Foreign women contemplate the possibility of pressing charges and actually go ahead with it more often than local women, who are less inclined to do so due to the systems of family and social relations and the environment they inhabit, where almost everybody knows each other.

Stereotypes are also reinforced when they are accepted as an established fact. One example was provided earlier by the advice that a lawyer gave to Violetta 5,46, who wanted to report the abuse suffered to the police: *“You can try, but you’ll never win”*.

#### 4. Gender violence from experts’ perspective

The study was conducted by means of two focus groups and interviews to five female healthcare professionals. Interviews were aimed at gaining a deeper insight into expert knowledge on the effects of gender violence and they were used as an alternative to organising a third focus group.

The first focus group was formed by a woman working as a volunteer in a women’s support centre, a woman who created a refuge for women in crisis, and a sociologist in charge of a section of a local health agency. The second focus group was formed by a psychologist working in the local health agency, a psychologist and family counsellor, a sociologist working in the male section of a prison, and the Secretary of the *Arcigay* Association<sup>3</sup>. The in-depth interviews were conducted with a psychologist working in a *Consultorio familiare*, a female nurse working for the 118 emergency service, a female doctor working for an out of hours medical service, a female radiology technician working at the local hospital, and a social worker working in a *Consultorio familiare*<sup>4</sup>. We opted for in-depth interviews because these healthcare professionals often see the violence perpetrated against women. We chose to gauge the awareness of this type of violence in healthcare services because of widespread *“social invisibility of gender violence in these services. At a closer look, this seems to be caused by the fact that staff working in these services are not trained to recognise and deal with violence against women”*<sup>5</sup>. This state of affairs often impedes permanent and effective networking. All experts agreed that violence is a complex event infesting the body and destroying the mind,

<sup>3</sup> One of Italy's main gay rights associations.

<sup>4</sup> A *Consultorio familiare* is a free counselling and support service addressing women, couples, and children. 118 is a free, 24/7 emergency number for access to urgent health care through the provision of appropriate emergency transport. The out of hours medical service guarantees home or surgery primary health care in case of emergency or during nights, week-ends, and bank holidays. This service provides urgent and occasional medical assistance. The radiology unit often offers care to women who have suffered some serious traumas following one or more incidents of physical abuse. The interview with the social worker provided an analysis of violence against women through the experience of children, who unwillingly become direct or indirect victims of domestic violence and abuse.

<sup>5</sup> EU-funded project *Urban*, (2004), *Vite sommerse, parole ritrovate. Violenza contro le donne: percezione, esperienze, risposte sociali nella città di Pescara*, Tipolitografia Sigraf, Pescara, p. 60.

fuelling fear and insecurity to the point of snuffing out the twinkle in a woman's eyes, which is often her very last effort to survive.

“.. gender-based violence is violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman ... and which impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of human rights and fundamental freedoms under general international law or under human rights conventions ...”<sup>6</sup> reads the General Recommendation No 19, adopted by CEDAW in 1992<sup>7</sup>.

#### 4.1 Understanding gender violence

The term “gender violence” emphasises the gendered dimension of this phenomenon, which stems from the traditionally unequal relationship between men and women, whereby the former abuse their power and discriminate against the latter.

*“I think there are several factors at play: social violence, male violence, psychological and physical violence.. so, when we talk about violence against women (...) we always think of the use of force on a weak subject. This goes back a long time and, unfortunately, the perpetrators are always men”.* (Family counsellor).

Gender-based violence is thus encouraged by women's lower status, which places them in a subordinate role in social, family, and work relationships. The continued existence of this type of subjugation represents and reproduces men's age-old control over women and their bodies. In the name of women's inferior status, men – especially those who have an intimate and binding relationship with a woman – feel they have the right to abuse, rape, discriminate, and murder her. Consequently, violence becomes one of men's routine ways of being in a relationship with women, little girls, and teenage girls as well as with little boys and teenage boys<sup>8</sup>.

There is also an issue concerning the very definition of violence against women: *“We often use the term “violence against women” (...). Perhaps ...I think it is now important to name the “male” word in order to spell it out more clearly: I have noticed that, among people dealing with violence, there is a widespread tendency to talk loosely about violence in general and place violence against women – male violence against women – within a wider sphere of violence.”* (Volunteer at the Women's support centre “R. Lanzino”).

*“In fact, when we play games where we ask participants to come up with words to associate to maleness and other words to associate with femaleness, their view of males is appalling ... When we meet with them and discuss the issue with them, they don't seem to recognise violence; however, when they play this game, males are depicted as arrogant”.* (“R. Lanzino” Foundation).

Secretary of Arci Gay stated his view:

<sup>6</sup> For the complete text of General Recommendation N° 19 on Violence against Women, please see: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/>.

<sup>7</sup> The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women is a legally binding international agreement on women's rights, issued by the United Nations in 1979. The CEDAW Convention is concerned with inequality and discrimination against women in all domains, such as poverty, race, health, and political representation, including discrimination in the domestic sphere. In its preamble, CEDAW states that: *“...a change in the traditional role of men as well as the role of women in society and in the family is needed to achieve full equality between men and women”*.

<sup>8</sup> See Garreffa F., (2005), L'orientamento di genere come pista di lettura nella spiegazione della violenza, in *Violenza alle donne. Rappresentazione ed esperienze nella città di Crotone*, (a cura di) Fantozzi P., Licursi S., Rubettino, Soveria Mannelli (eds), p. 13.



*“Of course, I believe that violence can be defined as gender-based when it is grounded in a male chauvinist vision, which is the dominant notion. Why does homophobia exist? It exists because homosexuals are perceived by men with regards to their own manliness. The deep hatred against us probably comes from those men who are not sure about their own sexuality; they see homosexuals as those who reject those features that they believe to be unavoidable, such as being manly and having set roles”.*

#### **4.2 Gender violence effects in intimate partnership**

Women who suffer violence, especially when they are victims of domestic violence, rarely report these incidents. Women often feel trapped in their sense of guilt; other times, on the contrary, they are afraid of fuelling violence by their partners. Furthermore, they are aware of the fact that their complaint will not be met with effective judicial measures. Victimised women are often disappointed by judgements; they know that, however serious the crime they suffered, the ensuing punishment will hardly ever fit the bill. Judges do not usually take into consideration psychological violence, especially if it is not particularly noticeable. This is hardly ever the case, given the perverse dynamics that are often at play in these cases. Victims can heal their wounds only if they are recognised as victims and if the violence suffered is punished<sup>9</sup>. Experts claim that, in case of psychological violence, instigating judicial proceedings becomes even more complex; the victim does not appear to see a way out, since she is not able to give evidence of the abuse suffered. The lack of medical reports testifying to the physical abuse suffered or the refusal to testify in court on the part of acquaintances are all factors which contribute to diminish women's credibility. As a result, women find it hard to protect themselves.

*“(...) Finally, after many years, physical violence is now regarded as a legal offence; unfortunately, the same does not apply to psychological violence, since it cannot be proven. Still, the greatest number of abuses fall within the sphere of psychological violence. This type of violence has therefore become one of the hidden problems of our time: it is extremely difficult to identify, prove, or fight in court, although some proposals have been made in this respect”.* (Family counsellor).

Experts also made a rather worrying connection between financial status and violence. This does not mean that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between the two but rather that financial problems contribute to putting people in a predicament and make violence more problematic<sup>10</sup>. The burden of financial difficulties is felt both by the perpetrator of violence and by his victim: for the former, it is often a powerful cause and almost a justification for violence, while for the latter it is a strong deterrent not to leave the relationship she is in, even if it is a violent one.

*“I think that (violence) is extremely widespread, even if only very few cases come to the surface: women are afraid to tell what they are going through, sometimes because they do not have a job and they know that, if they leave their husband, they will no longer enjoy their financial stability”.* (118 nurse).

It thus clearly appears that financial violence and psychological subjugation go hand in hand. Financially dependent women gradually learn to put up with violence almost as if they would not be able to cope with possible hardship. The thought of being left without sufficient financial means and without a future is often much more worrying than the violence suffered. This fear leads

<sup>9</sup> Hirigoyen M.F., (2006), *Sottomesse. La violenza sulle donne nella coppia*, Einaudi, Torino, p. 222.

<sup>10</sup> See Garreffa F., (2005), *La violenza percepita: intervista a testimoni privilegiati*, in Progetto Urban, *Violenza alle donne. Rappresentazione ed esperienze nella città di Crotone* (a cura di) Fantozzi P. Licursi S., Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, p. 91.

women to develop some adaptation strategies whereby they cannot see the danger in their relationship. Also, when a man uses violence on a woman, children often witness it and, even when they do not suffer direct violence themselves, the damage done is just as serious. Children will then re-enact the internalised violence suffered with others<sup>11</sup>. Abused children do not always grow up to become abusive parents; this said, their experience sets off a downward spiral. They will live in dysfunctional marital relationships as if they were normal and they will impact their children's attitudes: boys, though they might swear they will never behave like their father, will internalise the violence seen and might re-enact it when they grow up; girls, on the contrary, will recognise the abusive behaviour of their future partner as so similar to that of their father, they will develop a greater tolerance and raise their fear threshold from a very early age<sup>12</sup>.

*"Thus, mothers who have suffered violence and abuse will convey the same model to their daughters, who will then reproduce the same behavioural pattern with their future partner...they will be afraid of being left without a man who guarantees them a given financial status"*(Family counsellor).

*"Men assume the breadwinner role: they are in charge of providing for the family – and for women – and attaining social and financial independence for them. Therefore, women find it hard to break away from this state of affairs, also because they feel the responsibility of their caregiving role as well as the emotional implications of looking their family, the relationship with their partner, and their children ...In a way, women are those who decide to break up. However, their separation ironically becomes another step in the spiral of violence. They feel guilty for separating and for increasing their problems: they are not only concerned because they have worsened their social and financial status, but also because of the greater problems they will face with their relationships and especially if children are involved. In fact, if their children are still young, women worry that they might reproduce their parents' model. Usually, children act out the violence they have witnessed or suffered directly ...I consider children a crucial concern, because very often this spiral of violence transmits some behavioural patterns through which children internalise violence. This means that, on the one hand, these children will accept violence while, on the other, they might also display some powerful reactions".* (Psychologist)

Men's control over women can be exerted through some quite subtle strategies:

*"Abused women no longer believe in themselves as they should and they are not even willing to recognise their own worth. In contrast, they are anxious and fearful and their fears often lead them to depression, isolation, and rejection of the outside world. Raped women are afraid of everything, even of talking to professionals who could help them".* (Psychologist).

Violence does not break out unexpectedly; it goes through *"a subjugation that prevents women from rebelling against the abuse suffered, makes them subservient and encourages them to protect their perpetrators and absolve them of all violence"*<sup>13</sup>. In his regard, Recamier<sup>14</sup> talks about *décervelage*, a sort of "brainwashing" which traps women in a state of daze and uncertainty through the use of little acts of violence and threats. In this way, piece by piece, women lose their freedom; nonetheless, they still think that what they are going through is not so serious and they consider the way they are treated as normal. Staff working in women's support centres turn this insecurity into a strength:

<sup>11</sup> Hirigoyen M.F., (2000), *Molestie morali. La violenza perversa nella famiglia e nel lavoro*, Einaudi, Torino, pp. 35-49.

<sup>12</sup> Ponzio G., (2004), *Crimini segreti*, Baldini Castoldi Dalai editore, Milano, pp. 20-22.

<sup>13</sup> Hirigoyen M.F., (2006), *Sottomesse. La violenza sulle donne nella coppia*, Einaudi, Torino, p. 90.

<sup>14</sup> Racamier P.C., (1992), *Pensée perverse et décervelage*, in *Secrets de famille et pensée perverse*, a monographic study by Group 8

*“Women who have suffered violence and abuse become unable to plan. They live in a state of stagnation; they cannot envisage being in a different situation than the difficult one they are living and so ...we are able to recognise their strength to endure the destructive situation they are in; in spite of everything, this is a strength. We are also able to recognise the values and the positive aspects in their lives, the good things they do and cannot see and we highlight and strengthen each one of them after listening to their story ...”* (Women’s support centre “R. Lanzino”).

The sociologist added:

*“Women who want to live in this world are required to act out some strong rational behaviours and undertake some strategies and tactics proper of war and fighting”.*

Women’s inability to rationalise events in case of serious acts of violence can be partly explained by the fact that, paradoxically, a special relationship is usually established between the victim and her perpetrator, where

*“when a person suffers an unexpected violence, when she is placed in a position of utter powerlessness and there is no way out, she activates a defence mechanism and she could gradually identify with her aggressors”<sup>15</sup>.*

This means that a woman trapped in a violent relationship starts looking at the world with the eyes of her abuser.

#### **4.3 Gender violence effects in the workplace**

Violence does not only occur in the domestic sphere; it could also be experienced in the work sphere and the effects it produces are just as devastating: *“Violence against women, whether it occurs in the domestic sphere, at work, or in the street, infringes on the internal and external domains of women’s intimate sphere, causing some deep wounds to the self as well as some serious post-traumatic effects for women’s health and wellbeing”<sup>16</sup>.*

*“All research shows that women who suffer violence, be it physical or psychological, are in unquestionably worse health than other women and they use more drugs, especially psychotropic drugs”<sup>17</sup>.* A violated body does not only suffer from headaches, stomach ache, joint pain, and palpitations; it has also internalised hatred and anger: *“Women feel dirty, they feel ashamed because their intimacy has been suddenly exposed. Women feel a sense of disgust, a sense of annoyance, and a deep unease that they cannot put into words at first and you have to help them do that step by step through therapy”.* (Psychologist).

*“Unease often turns into solitude: women frequently say things like: ‘I’m alone, nobody can help me, only death can set me free’ as if they couldn’t imagine that there is a whole world out there and that there are other women”.* (Family counsellor).

Harassment in the workplace may be defined as abusive behaviour (in the form of actions, words, conduct, attitude, etc.) which does harm (...) the dignity or psychological or physical well-being of

<sup>15</sup> Hirigoyen M.F., (2006), *Sottomesse. La violenza sulle donne nella coppia*, Einaudi, Torino, p. 99.

<sup>16</sup> WHO, (2002), *Mondial sur la violence et la santé*, Ginevra; UNFPA Report (2000), *Le donne nel Mondo. Tendenze e statistiche*, The Italian edition was edited by the Italian National Commission on Equal Opportunities – Prime Minister’s Office; UNICEF, (2000), Centro di Ricerca Innocenti, *La violenza domestica contro le donne e le bambine*, Firenze.

<sup>17</sup> Hirigoyen M.F., (2006), *Sottomesse. La violenza sulle donne nella coppia*, Einaudi, Torino, p. 41.

a person, endangering their employment or causing their working environment to deteriorate<sup>18</sup>. The working environment thus becomes

*“asymmetrical”* (Secretary of Arcigay),

*“humiliating”* (Family counsellor),

*“inappropriate”* (Psychologist), and

*“unreliable, which ultimately does not provide any assurance”* (Sociologist).

Gender-based violence in the workplace is rather complex and can take several different forms. The sociologist associated discrimination with being a mother and a wife,

*“like when you go to a job interview and they ask you if you are married and have children ... (...) a company, for example, looked for men or women aged 35 or over who already had a family”*.

In most cases, pregnancies and the ensuing maternity periods are the triggering factors of indirect discrimination, that is all those apparently “neutral” behaviours who place female workers in a weaker position vis-à-vis their male counterparts.

The sociologist added that:

*“Discrimination against women in the workplace does not only stem from men (...) but also from the lack of legal protection granted to women; this is because fixed-term contracts do not contain protection measures in case of pregnancy or illness, which therefore basically justifies discriminatory behaviour”*.

Psychological harassment often starts in the event of pregnancy. For the employer, this means maternity leave, an early finish to pick up the child from the crèche, and time off work when the child is ill<sup>19</sup>.

The family counsellor states: *“A Sicilian hard discount store does not hire women. If you enter the store in Cosenza, you’ll only find men employee. It is in their by-laws (...), women might well submit as many job applications as they wish, they just won’t be hired”*.

Very frequently, gender-based violence comes in the form of sexual harassment: the body of the female worker is seen as being at the employer’s service. Harassment does not only mean obtaining sexual favours, but also showing one’s power, where the woman is considered as one’s own (sexual) object<sup>20</sup>. Harassment can take many different forms, leading victims to a progressive erosion of their psychological well-being: they include innuendos with double meanings, foul language, lewd comments, and direct sexual propositions:

*“I witness rude comments about women’s breasts, legs, and other things ... the way they dress... their thighs peeking through their clothes ...”* said the sociologist.

There is also another form of seductive behaviour, which is characterised by unwelcome sexual proposals and clichéd sexual advances:

<sup>18</sup> Hirigoyen M.F., (2000), *Molestie morali. La violenza perversa nella famiglia e nel lavoro*, Einaudi, Torino, p. 53.

<sup>19</sup> Hirigoyen M.F., (2000), *Molestie morali. La violenza perversa nella famiglia e nel lavoro*, Einaudi, Torino, p. 57.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 69.

*“ You’re a beautiful woman, this is your job, I know, but I’m offering you something more, it’s between you and me, nobody knows ... There’s this place I’m renting (...) when we meet, I’ll pay for everything ... I’ll bring you some nice lingerie and you’ll wear it when I ask you to ”.*

This is what the family counsellor told us about a girlfriend of hers. Sexual harassment also includes repeated subtle and embarrassing threats, obscene gestures, blackmail, and intimidation. The family counsellor explained: *“Harassment occurs when blackmail starts (...) and then it turns into violence”*. The perpetrator is usually someone higher up the organisational hierarchy, who, in the majority of cases, is male and abuses his power. Power is the privileged weapon used by superiors to enhance their importance and bring their victims down to a position of powerlessness by attacking them and not letting them answer back. The aggressor uses his power to make up for his own fragile identity: he needs to dominate and he does so all the more easily because his subordinate often has no other choice but to suffer in silence.

The sociologist said: *“I know somebody who is not a manager and therefore she has people above her in the organisational hierarchy. One day, she took the courage to reveal some serious things about a male manager (...) as a result, she was demoted to another position after less than four days”*.

All harassers share a dominant male culture as well as negative attitudes towards women and feminism. This means that gender-based harassment occurs when a woman is treated differently because she is a woman (...) <sup>21</sup>.

*“A man who has some power or who has internalised a dominating role, a predator approach (...), belongs to a male culture: attack first, go and hunt first”*, said the psychologist.

Harassment in the workplace has been subject of research in Anglo-Saxon and northern countries for many years now, where it is known under the name of *mobbing*. Leymann, a Swedish researcher in work and organisational psychology, talked about “psychoterror at work” <sup>22</sup> exerted through repeated attacks on the part of colleagues and or employers. Mobbing therefore includes all those behaviours like marginalisation, continuous criticism, the assignment of tasks that are unsuitable to one’s professional expertise and skills, and the denigration of a worker’s social image before clients and superiors, which seriously affect the victim’s health and cause stress, anxiety and mood disorders. The sociologist defined all these behaviours as forms of *“dejection and despondency”*, while the psychologist added that *“an emotional violence tears you apart”*. Fear of unemployment puts a psychological pressure on the victim and prevents her from reacting. *Power and control over the other is kept by means of some petty strategies (...) at first, the victim is deprived of all critical sense until she can no longer make out who is right and who is wrong (...) the worker is put in a tight spot. She puts up with increasing violence and she just can’t say that she can’t take it anymore* <sup>23</sup>. Violence annihilates the victim’s ability to react. When harassment starts, it is like a machine that, once it is set in motion, could destroy everything it comes across <sup>24</sup>.

The volunteer working in the Women’s support centre explained: *“ Violence is devastating and therefore it could also produce some strong reactions (...), which may harm victims; they have to be careful and make sure they never lose their ability to think rationally”*.

<sup>21</sup> Idem.

<sup>22</sup> Leymann H., (1993), *Psychoterror am Arbeitsplatz und man sich wehren Kann*, Rowohlt, Reinbek bei Hamburg.

<sup>23</sup> Hirigoyen M.F., (2000), *Molestie morali. La violenza perversa nella famiglia e nel lavoro*, Einaudi, Torino, p. 64.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 54.



At first, the perpetrator tries to destabilize his victim by insulting her dignity and her mental integrity through a continuous hostile attitude. This is the time when the victim should learn to put up resistance. Violence in the workplace can therefore produce some devastating effects on the victim's relationships: a woman who suffers violence, especially if it is sexual violence, cannot get rid of her sense of guilt and she will feel she was the cause of the conflict that made her suffer.

The psychologist said: *"I remember the case of a woman who kept on saying "But I've been raped" and she felt labelled because of that violence. Wherever she went, she heard people say "She's the one who's been raped".*

Only when women will be able to work through their experience will they finally get better and make an attempt at understanding the reason why they did not put up resistance. The family counsellor analysed in more detail the process through which women come to terms with their grief. This process requires the acceptance of their powerlessness and the recognition of their suffering as a part of themselves, which deserves respect:

*"After the initial stage marked by grief, depression, despondency, loss of self-esteem and so forth, if women find the courage of letting things out, taking action and acting out their anger and sorrow, this could turn into a strength (...) women I've seen have become a strength for other women. What they suffered has become such a powerful weapon that now they virtually go out and look for women suffering violence in order to help them".*

Immigrant women are mostly employed in menial and undervalued jobs that are nonetheless crucial for everyday life and for the smooth running of the host society. In the workplace, these women seem to be more likely to experience violence. What is more, they are also the target of prejudice by Italian women: there is the idea that they come to Italy to steal their husbands and achieve a good social and financial standing. Immigration in Italy, especially when considering some specific ethnic groups, is predominantly female. Immigrants are mainly employed in household and care work.

The sociologist asserted that she met a lady who was *"furious with her father's carer because she was clearly making passes at her husband (...) to make the long story short, the carer was eventually fired while the husband stayed at home"*.

Immigrant women are required to perform some simple tasks since, because they are women and they come from a "traditional" society", they are assumed to be more inclined to look after the household and people in need of care. At the same time, the stereotypes attached to immigrant women severely impair the free expression of their selves. Gender and ethnic stereotypes thus lead to a double discrimination: being a woman and an immigrant means not only being marked as "suited" only for some tasks but also being labelled as "easy women".

The family counsellor stated that: *"(...) they have a certain kind of attitude, that's the way they live; they come here mainly to get Italian men and marry them (...) women from Ukraine and Eastern Europe (...) come here to exploit people, find their advantage, it's an actual strategy they have (...)".*

In times of economic recession and high unemployment, the immigrant population may become the scapegoat for all problems. Labelling and stigmatising these women on the grounds of their appearance or their different cultural norms and values have been powerful tools leading to the

ghettoisation and social subordination of immigrants and minorities in Europe<sup>25</sup>. The family counsellor added: *"A neighbour of mine, aged 70, married a 20-year-old girl who, after she got him to marry her, ran away"*. There is a percentage of foreign women who become victims of a modern form of slavery: the sex industry. However, in the representation held by the host society, there is the notion that this is what these women are all about<sup>26</sup>.

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

The notion of marriage as an unchangeable and sacred institution and women's economic dependence underlie different forms of gender violence. Violence can occur in different ways, through the coercion or through the subjugation of women. Most women end up being mistreated, abused and raped both in the domestic and in the professional sphere due to existing gender relations and gender roles. However, even when women had envisaged the possibility of being subjected to abuse by their husband or employers, after they marry or start working, there is always a gap between what they had thought it would be like and the actual dependence, subjugation, coercion, and violence they have to suffer at the hands of their violent and abusive husband or employer. Cultural gender stereotypes are still embedded in the family and in the public sphere: few women are assigned senior and managerial roles. "Gender" is not perceived as difference but, on the contrary, it still carries discrimination. Although some small changes are indeed taking place, they are not actual transformations but merely formal revolutions brought about by few women.

The family counsellor expressed her opinion: "gender quotas... when I heard that term, I said *"What kind of place is this? Why should we need to impose them? Do we need to call them gender quotas? That's why there is social violence. Gender quotas are ridiculous"*. Paola 1,39, who has double citizenship (Italian and Canadian) added: *"(in Italy) we can't talk about an efficient welfare state"*. That is also why she declared she trusted herself rather than society. *"Politicians are not concerned much with these issues and television has only recently started to dedicate some space to them..."*.

Women themselves should increase their gender awareness. However, the psychologist also noted: *"Male culture and men too should start questioning themselves and witness the process (... ) it shouldn't be confined to the female sex..."*. The family counsellor, on the contrary, made another suggestion: *"Disseminate information over the whole area"*.

On the whole, this research revealed three different types of violence: a) violence occurring through physical and sexual coercion, destroying the victim's willpower and ruining their bodies and souls. These acts are typical of, but not restricted to, domestic violence; b) violence occurring through mainly psychological coercion where, even when women would like to report that violence, they are discouraged and prevented from doing so by threats. These acts occur in both the domestic and the professional spheres; 3) exploitation at work, which occurs through ill-

<sup>25</sup> Excerpt from *Donne, migrazioni, diversità: l'Italia di oggi e di domani*, proceedings of the seminar held on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2001, issued by the Commissione nazionale per la parità e le pari opportunità (the Italian National Commission for Parity and Equal Opportunities).

<sup>26</sup> The condition of immigrant women is made worse by the fact that many of them are not aware of the services available locally. Therefore, they need effective cultural mediation that could help their integration into the host society. *"Their immigrant status could enhance the risk of being killed, since sometimes immigrant women do not hold a residence permit or they are not familiar with the language and the services available to them. Also, they may not seek help because, in some cultures, suffering abuse without reacting is considered as normal. Often, these women do not seek help from the police or support centres for fear of being sent back to their country of origin"*. Baldry A. C., (2006), *Dai maltrattamenti all'omicidio, la valutazione del rischio di recidiva e dell'uxoricidio*, Franco Angeli, Milano, pp. 54-55.



treatment, belittling, and material deprivation. This is made possible by the fact that women, especially migrant women, are more vulnerable and find themselves in a more precarious situation. These women are unable to take legal action or seek alternative solutions.

The woman volunteering at the “R. Lanzino” Foundation made a suggestion: *“one of the greatest problems for women is unemployment: even when, after various fortunes and misfortunes, they finally make decide to take action, they are confronted with the lack of work. Social policies are lacking. What is more, there is nobody to make sure that if a husband has to pay his wife €200 he actually pays. It’s incredibly difficult; even lawyers say that it’s not worth trying, which shows that current laws are not being followed. There is a need for better employment and housing policies. Women are granted the right to live in the matrimonial home more often than men only because they have custody of their children more often than men”*.

Thus, women have to endure all sorts of violence: they are often alone, deceived and abused by their boyfriends, their husbands, their partners, their workmates, and their employers. Some of them withdraw in isolation; they no longer want to have social relationships or dealings with men in general. Some others, on the contrary, manage to rebuild something that gives them a new identity, often through work. Often women blame themselves as they are victims of gender in/culture. Finally, those who decide to put an end to violence by ending their love or professional relationship – which rarely occurs through a legal complaint – are faced with several financial problems and acts of revenge.

The reintegration of women who suffered violence, which implies an actual “rehabilitation” pathway, calls for targeted measures aimed at promoting equal opportunities and providing victims with the tools to initiate an empowerment process. The stories of these women can provide a picture of this route to rehabilitation. Representing them along the various steps of their pathway out of violence would be useful to design recommendations that would prevent other women from becoming caught up in violence and abuse. Some actions like, for example, creating support and counselling services, could reduce violence and promote acculturation towards gender equality and equal gender roles. It would also be important to set up advisory centres not solely concerned with women’s physical health, as it is currently the case in Italy. These centres should also focus on the provision of psychological services, which are now partly offered inside women’s health clinics and, most importantly, legal advice. In addition, it would be crucial to focus on some direct interventions, like, for example, making a clear distinction between *Case di fuga*<sup>27</sup>, *Case di accoglienza*<sup>28</sup>, and *Case famiglia*<sup>29</sup>.

The core of the Italian issue, however, was clearly exposed by the words of the psychologist: *“there was a bill on homes for raped and abused women and their children; the bill was unanimously approved but it had no financial backing. That’s what we need to stress: intentions are good, but then what’s the point if there is no financial backing?”*.

Finally, it would be useful to organise social rehabilitation (opportunities to know other experiences or language courses for immigrant women) and retraining courses in order to increase women’s negotiating and bargaining power vis-à-vis their colleagues and employers. These measures should fall within a *“networking strategy based on a holistic view of services, since*

<sup>27</sup> A *Casa di fuga* is a refuge for women fleeing violence, whether suffered at home or as a result of sexual exploitation.

<sup>28</sup> A *Casa famiglia* is a residential unit providing temporary or permanent accommodation to underage or adult people who do not have family support and who suffer from psychological or social problems. These homes are run on a family-like model, with the permanent presence of some adult figures who act as carers and choose to have an educational role.

<sup>29</sup> A *Casa di accoglienza* for women is a community-based residential home providing shelter to women victims of physical or psychological violence, with or without children as well as women victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation. These women need to be removed from the place where violence occurred and need to be reintegrated in the community.

*violence cannot be dealt with by one specific service alone” (psychologist). The psychologist then stated that prevention was “key”. The family counsellor gave her suggestion: “there should be prevention and information, as well as training in matters of peace, where peace is a feeling”.*

In Italy, women’s support centres, counselling centres, helplines, and refuges have sprawled a bit everywhere. These services are points of reference where women can find people who listen to their problems, give them advice, counselling, health information and guidance on how to access other services.

The volunteer working at the “R. Lanzino” Foundation declared: *“I’m more interested in women’s empowerment than in solutions. Therefore, during our sessions, that’s what we focus on. Meeting with a lawyer is also crucial, because women who know their rights are stronger than women who don’t. Thus, our counselling services also have an impact on women’s health problems, since I think the most serious troubles in women are depression and low self-esteem, which result from the violence suffered (...). We also give them some ‘homework’, things they have to do anyway. like going to the hairdresser’s, putting a little make-up on. For example, we told a woman who had been repeatedly raped by her father to close the door and not let her father in her room. She had been given this assignment so she had to make a real effort”.*

Immigrants would greatly benefit from the services offered by cultural mediators coming from the same country and belonging to the same ethnic group. This would help break the ice, promote a deeper communication, and respect immigrant women’s different cultural expectations with regard to gender differences. Anyway, not all women have all the resources they need to seek help, find a way out of violence, and regain their trust. In these cases, an effective approach could be to organise self-help and mutual-help groups formed by women who are going through different stages of their pathway out of abuse and who could benefit from meeting women who have their same problems and who are overcoming them.

The volunteer of the “R. Lanzino” Foundation said: *“some women have very clever children; they are devastated, still their children are very good at school and they are not problematic. Well, these women do not realise that this is thanks to them, despite the absence of their husbands and their having been battered. Women do not realise that they can claim credit for it. These things and other many little things like these need to be emphasised”.*

Violetta 7,46 put forward the idea of a sort of “feminist masonry”, where women would protect other women.

Finally, the sociologist stated: *“War and warriors are male notions: they belong to the male memory. I think that being able to handle things sensibly means being able to switch from goose stepping to a sort of feminine dance and vice-versa. What I mean is that women should always bear in mind who they are. They should be able to play with a sense of humour, pretending to be a man while not actually being a man, because trying to be a man causes some women to lose their identity. Pretending, on the contrary, is wonderful: it is an amazing game. I learned from experience. Eighteen years ago, I was the only female manager among a multitude of cunning men. Now I can see clearly what I’ve done in these years. At first, I couldn’t see it: I suffered a lot, I cried, and I tried many things, like this game of being able to go to war not in a manlike manner but just pretending ... using my head and my heart at the same time. It is a great talent and I think that the problem with many women is that they do not play using both of these two great assets”.*

Table 4. Suggested sample description

Country	Name	Age	Ethnicity	Have been divorced, separated formerly	Current marital status*	Living together with a partner	Number and age of children	Educ.	Employment status	Living in urban or rural area
Italia	Paola 1	39	Italian	Y	separated	N	1 (11)	H	PT	C
Italia	Paola 2	38	Italian	N	married	Y	1 (11)	M	FT	T
Italia	Paola 3	35	Italian	-	single	N	1 (2)	H	PT	T
Italia	Paola 4	43	Italian	Y	separated	N	1 (16)	H	FT	C
Italia	Paola 5	50	Italian	Y	separated	Y	3 (37, 31, 28)	H	PT	C
Italia	Paola 6	22	Italian	-	single	N	-	M	UE	T
Italia	Paola 7	47	Romanian	Y	separated	N	1	M	PT	T
Italia	Violetta 1	28	Italian	N	single	N	-	M	FT	U
Italia	Violetta 2	23	Romanian	N	choabiting	Y	-	M	PT	U
Italia	Violetta 3	30	Italian	N	married	Y	1 (1)	H	PT	T
Italia	Violetta 4	30	Italian	N	married	Y	-	H	FT	T
Italia	Violetta 5	46	Polish	Y	choabiting	Y	1 (24)	M	UE	T
Italia	Violetta 6	37	Italian	-	widowed	N	-	H	FT	C
Italia	Violetta 7	46	Italiana	Y	separated	N	3 (25, 24, 22)	M	FT	U
Italia	Violetta 8	48	Italian	Y	separated	N	2 (25,23)	M	FT	T

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