



National Report: Italia



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

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MAPPING OF EXISTING RESEARCH IN ITALY AND IDENTIFICATION OF DEFICIENCIES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST VIOLENCE ON WOMEN.

0. Introduction

According to Greek myth, even Apollo – the god of beauty – was sometimes rejected. On one of these occasions, he tried to rape Daphne, a mountain nymph and a priestess of Mother Earth. Besides being a myth imbued with deep meaning, Daphne is now an EU-funded programme¹ aimed at encouraging actions to prevent, combat, and eliminate violence against women through the building of statistical indicators on the effects of gender-based violence.

This report illustrates the present situation and the results of the studies, the research, the legislative history, and the policies on gender-based violence in Italy.

Violence against women is a worldwide issue, which is addressed in many countries through extensive research and several studies performed at different levels and in different contexts. In the 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, it is defined as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”. Violence against women is a gender-based violence that is deeply rooted in relationships of inequality between women and men and in men’s desire to control and own women. It comes in different forms: physical violence (physical abuse), sexual violence (harassment, rape, sexual exploitation), economic violence (forbidden access to the family’s financial resources, even when they are produced by women), psychological and emotional abuse (violation of one’s identity)², or stalking (repeated and persistent harassment that often leads to murder).

Violence against women primarily occurs within the couple or within the family and it concerns women from all social and cultural backgrounds. Not only does it cause harm and serious consequences to the actual victims but it also carries a high social and economic cost for the communities where these women live.

European statistics show that, in Europe, violence against women is the leading cause of death among women aged between 16 and 50 years³. In Italy, it has been calculated that one out of three violent deaths involves a woman killed by her husband, cohabiting partner, or boyfriend⁴.

¹ In Greek mythology, Europa too was abducted by Zeus and raped by him; following that rape, she bore three sons: Minos, Rhadamanthus, and Sarpedon

² In a scholarly essay called “*Le molestie morali, la violenza perversa nella famiglia e nel lavoro*” Einaudi, Torino, 2000 (published in English with the title: *Stalking the Soul: Emotional Abuse and the Erosion of Identity*), author Marie-France Hirigoyen introduced the crime of murder of the soul.

³ WHO, *Rapport Mondial sur la violence et la santé* (World Report on Violence and Health), Geneva 2002; See also: UNFPA Report, *Le donne nel Mondo. Tendenze e statistiche*, (The World’s Women 2000: Trends and Statistics) Edited in Italy by the Italian National Equal Opportunities Commission – Prime Minister’s Office. UN 2000 and UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, *La violenza domestica contro le donne e le bambine* (Domestic Violence against Women and Girls), Florence 2000.

⁴ The data contained in the research paper called: “*L’omicidio volontario in Italia. Rapporto 2005*” (Murder in Italy, 2005 Report), edited by EURES in collaboration with ANSA (The Italian News Agency), were aggregated differently and therefore they cannot be directly compared. According to these

1. So many honour killings later...

Laws dealing with violence against women and gender-based violence in Italy: an overview of national and regional legislation

In Italy, the status of women underwent a radical change in 1975 with the introduction of the new Family Law. This is because the family has always been one of the hardest places to affirm individual rights due to the emotional relationships existing between the people involved. In fact, violence against women within marriage was quite common, since there were no laws forbidding husbands from abusing their wives, unless the abuse went as far as murder or grievous bodily injury. The reform of family law challenged patriarchal authority and paved the way to women's new role as subjects of rights. This change stemmed, on the one hand, from the rejection of the notion of the family as a private institution and, on the other hand, from the rising recognition of individual rights. This involved an increasingly extensive protection of each single individual to the detriment of the 'family' considered in its entirety. Marital authority was abolished, as well as the figure of the head of the household, which is still used to this day only to register personal data; in fact, after the introduction of **law 151 of 1975**, men and women have the same rights and duties. Since then, every decision concerning the couple and their children (the children's upbringing, the place where the family should live, and so forth) should be agreed upon by both spouses, without either one prevailing over the other. The wife cannot be made to live in a place that had been chosen exclusively by the husband: both husband and wife should set the family's place of residence according to their mutual needs. Excluding the wife from decisions concerning the children (until then, parental authority had only been exercised by the father), withdrawing the means of subsistence from her or denying her involvement in the running of the household – even if only in terms of the financial management of the household – is a crime. When a man and a woman get married, they acquire mutual inheritance rights. Naturally, the woman only acquires all these rights if she gets married. If she lives in unmarried partnerships, she can only claim a contribution to the maintenance and assistance of the couple's children. Fortunately, the Italian Penal Code contains several articles concerning crimes against the person: art.581 on battering, art.582 on personal injury, art. 594 on slander, art. 612 on threats, art. 610 on duress to the person, and art. 609 bis on sexual assault. It should also be noticed that the notion of **honour killing** disappeared from the Italian Penal Code only as recently as **1981** with **law n. 442 of 5 August**, called "Abrogazione della rilevanza penale della causa d'onore e del matrimonio riparatore" (Abolishment of the 'honour motive' and of 'shotgun' marriages in criminal proceedings). This law was introduced long after the referendum

data, in 2004, 187 crimes took place in the "domestic sphere", that is within the couple or between family members. This means that in Italy one murder committed "within the family" is committed every two days. With regards to murders "within the couple", 100 cases were recorded: men were the offenders in 85 incidents and they were the victims in 17 cases. Women, on the contrary, were the offenders in 15 incidents, while they were the victims in 83 cases. It appears that in 17 cases men killed their ex partners (as opposed to 3 cases involving women offenders) and in one case a man killed the woman he desired. An additional 12 murders involved a male perpetrator and a male victim, where the victim was a rival in love (these cases are not counted in the 100 murders occurred within a couple). According to this study, as many as 59 incidents involved a partner killing the person who was leaving them (this is an aggregate figure and it does not distinguish between males and females).

legalising divorce (1974), the reform of Family Law, and the referendum that legalised abortion (1978) were passed. Until then, the murder of “one’s woman”, whether a wife, a daughter, or a sister, in order to preserve a man’s honour was given a milder sentence than a similar offence with a different motive. This happened because the injury to the man’s honour caused by dishonourable acts (that were considered as such because they were done by a female member of his family circle) was considered as a serious provocation. The cleansing of one’s honour was not met with social disapproval. In fact, it was almost condoned. Art. 587 of the Italian Penal Code said that those who killed their wife, daughter, or sister in order to defend their honour or the honour of their family should be given a reduced sentence:

Italian Penal Code, art. 587: He who causes the death of a spouse, daughter, or sister upon discovering her in illegitimate carnal relations and in the heat of passion caused by the offence to his honour or that of his family will be sentenced to three to seven years. The same sentence shall apply to whom, in the above circumstances, causes the death of the person involved in illegitimate carnal relations with his spouse, daughter, or sister.

Naturally, the state of great anger (fit of fury) of the person whose honour had been offended – which was a precondition for the application of the article mentioned above – was automatically assumed, since it was initiated by “illegitimate carnal relations”. Women therefore were the object, while honour belonged to the men women were related to.

In order to understand the reasons underlying this way of thinking, it should be said that, at that time, the practice of forced marriages (widely known as ‘shotgun’ weddings) could lead to the exemption from punishment for rape if the rapist of an underage girl agreed to marrying her, thus saving the honour of the family. It should also be said that nowadays, in court, jealousy is still often used as an extenuating circumstance⁵.

The passing of **law n. 66 of 15th February 1996** was a major turning point. This law was a significant legislative innovation because it defines violence against women as an offence against the person and no longer as an offence against public morality. It should be noticed that in Italy, in 1979, before the passing of this law and after the reform of Family Law (1975), in the wake of the steep rise in the number of rapes and sexual assaults, a people’s Bill concerning violence against women was submitted to Parliament. The bill was signed by 300,000 people, among whom there was a large part of the women's movement. Nonetheless, this bill was not followed by parliamentary consideration. Finally, after a long and strenuous ideological struggle that was

⁵ A few months ago, in Italy, a heinous murder hit the headlines. Barbara Cicioni, a young mother who was eight months pregnant, was battered to death by her husband, Roberto Spaccino. When he was charged with murder and maltreatment, he accused his wife saying that the baby she was expecting was not his. Following his declaration, the judge ordered a DNA test for the foetus. What was the point of that decision? Is it perhaps to resolve the man’s concerns about his wife’s alleged adultery? Should this be the case, from a procedural viewpoint, the use of adultery as an extenuating circumstance would fall within the archaic notion of ‘honour killing’. Ascertaining the identity of the father of the foetus adds further insult to injury to a woman who was hideously slaughtered; moreover, it is a sign of a dangerous cultural regression.

conducted in Parliament for almost twenty years, on 15 February 1996, the Assembly voted into law a bill that had been signed and staunchly supported by 67 female MPs from all political parties.

Law n. 66 “Norme contro la violenza sessuale” (Norms against sexual violence) brought a significant change of perspective in the extremely backward dominant legal culture of the time: sexual violence changed from being considered as a “offence against morality” – as found in the 1930 Italian Penal Code (the Rocco Code) – to being a “offence against the person” and in particular “against personal liberty”, thus giving dignity back to women victims of violence. The bill of law that had been submitted to Parliament, though fraught with countless contradictions and riddled with several conflicts arising between the different trends of the feminist movement, aimed at introducing harsher sentences, with the underlying aim to combat violence against women not only by means of new laws, but also through a genuine acknowledgement of this issue. This aim, also endorsed by the people’s Bill, increased public awareness of this issue and raised debates and discussions on society’s attitude to violence against women throughout the country. The fundamental principles underlying that bill of law were the recognition of women as “persons” and the definition of sexual violence as aggravated violence against the person. However, the law contained a new element that led to strong conflicts within the feminist movement. Two types of prosecution were introduced: proceedings could be taken of the court’s own motion and upon application by a party. The latter type was favoured by the most radical wing of the feminist movement, because it preserved women’s freedom to choose whether or not to get involved in emblematic trials. This is because criminal proceedings can only be initiated by the woman who has been abused and therefore she must take an active role in the proceedings⁶ .

Law n. 269 of 3rd August 1998, “Norme contro lo sfruttamento della prostituzione, della pornografia, del turismo sessuale in danno di minori quali nuove forme di riduzione in schiavitù” (Provisions against the exploitation of minors in prostitution, in pornography and in sex tourism as new forms of slavery) strengthened the protection of personal dignity and liberty, especially with regards to minors, and supported the judicial suppression of acts against personal and sexual freedom and against children’s physical and psychological freedom . This was also done through the introduction of new offences, provided for in the following articles of the Italian Penal Code: art. 600 bis (Child Prostitution); art. 600 ter (Child pornography); art. 600 quater (Possession of pornographic material), and art. 600 quinquies. (Tourism aimed at the sexual exploitation of children). The law was based on the commitment made by Italy upon signing the New York Convention on the Rights of the Child on 20 November 1989, ratified by law n. 176 of 27 May 1991.

Law n. 154 of 4th April 2001, “Misure contro la violenza nelle relazioni familiari” (Measures against intra-family violence), specifically addresses domestic violence. It is of a crucial importance, because it provides for protective measures such as the removal of the perpetrator from the household. If the spouse or cohabiting partner has shown detrimental behaviour, the judge, in order to protect the safety of the victim, may order the offender to leave the family home and/or keep away from any place in which the victim is likely to be.

⁶ For more details, please see Tamar Pitch, (1998) *Un diritto per due. La costruzione giuridica di genere, sesso e sessualità*. Il Saggiatore, Milan

The offender may also be ordered to pay a fixed amount of money regularly to the cohabiting persons who have been left without sufficient means of subsistence as a result of the injunction order.

In the same year, **laws n. 60 and n. 134** on Legal aid came into force. Legal aid is a very important tool provided to abused women without sufficient financial means so that they can defend themselves and assert their rights. This is done mainly through collaboration with crisis centres and courts. All these laws had been strongly advocated by women working in the numerous women's crisis centres operating throughout Italy; there was a recognised need to have an effective legal tool that could pull the victim away from her victimiser who, in the majority of cases, is her spouse or cohabiting partner. According to law 154, for example, urgent court orders can be issued to remove violent husbands or cohabiting partners from the household, ensuring an effective and timely protection. Yet, the most innovative aspect of law 154 is that women victims of violence do not only have the possibility to report their husband to the police for physical abuse, which usually causes visible injuries; they can also report their persecutor for emotional and psychological abuse, that is for all those behaviours causing scorn, humiliation, derision and for all acts of disdain and harm against women's physical and emotional health.

Finally, this law states that the perpetrator can be reported to the police even when he forces his wife, cohabiting partner, or any other member of his family to do or not to do something (like, for example, forbidding victims to go out or use the telephone) through abuse or explicit and even implicit threats. Moreover, law 154 states that if there has only been one single violent incident, the woman must lodge a complaint within three months of the occurrence; only then can criminal proceedings be initiated against her perpetrator. When, on the contrary, there have been several and repeated violent incidents, legal proceedings are commenced after reporting the incident to the Police or to Carabinieri, though reporting often does not imply that the abused woman wishes to punish her attacker. Reports can be made also when the victims of violence are the perpetrator's children or any other member of the woman's household.

In September **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 by Equal Opportunities Minister Pollastrini, Family Minister Bindi, and Justice Minister Mastella. This proposal followed a meeting between Minister Barbara Pollastrini, Silvia Della Monica (Chief of the PMO's Department for Rights and Equal Opportunities of the Italian Prime Minister's Office), and representatives of over 70 women's crisis centres. The issues discussed during the meeting were the need for measures to prevent and suppress violence and to promote an effective inclusion of victims, with the aim of stopping the increasingly frequent events of violence against women in Italy.

Law 151 of 1975
Introduction of the
new Family Law,
*“Men and women
have the same
rights and duties”*

Law n. 442 of 1981
*“Abolishment of the
'honour motive' and
of 'shotgun'
marriages in criminal
proceedings”*

Law n. 66 of 1996
*“Norms against sexual
violence”*

Law n. 269 of 1998
*“Provisions against the
exploitation of minors in
prostitution, in pornography
and in sex tourism as new
forms of slavery”*

Law n. 154 of 2001,
*“Measures against
intra-family
violence”*

**Laws n. 60 and n. 134
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1. 1. Regional laws to combat violence against women

1.1.1. Lazio

Regional law n. 64 of 15 November 1993 called “Norme per l' istituzione di centri antiviolenza o case rifugio per donne maltrattate nella Regione Lazio” (Norms for the creation of crisis centres and refuges for abused women in the Lazio region) provided for the creation of municipal and district crisis centres in at least every principal town of each province. These centres offer support, help, and hospitality to Italian and foreign women with children who have been victims of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and maltreatment.

Moreover, this law states that:

- municipalities, consortiums, or provincial authorities shall choose the location to set up a women's crisis centre on their territory;
- the centre may include or be connected to a women's refuge, which must be functional and safe for women and their children;
- the buildings where the centre will be located shall belong to the State or, alternatively, to municipal, provincial, or regional authorities;
- in municipalities with a population of over 100,000 inhabitants, and in particular in the city of Rome, several centres may be created.

1.1.2. Friuli Venezia Giulia

Law n. 17 of 16 August 2000, “Realizzazione di progetti antiviolenza e istituzione di centri per donne in difficoltà” (Realisation of projects to combat violence and creation of centres for women in need), the regional government of Friuli-Venezia Giulia recognised that any act of any kind and degree involving physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence perpetrated against women is an attack to the inviolability of the person and to personal liberties, according to the principles embodied in the Italian Constitution and in the laws currently in force in Italy. Women who suffer violence in any form – and their children, as the case may be – are guaranteed the right to a temporary support aimed to reassert their inviolability and regain their freedom, while protecting their privacy and anonymity. The Regional Authority of Friuli Venezia Giulia promotes, coordinates, and encourages initiatives to combat the use of violence between sexes by taking effective measures against sexual, physical, psychological, and/or financial violence, maltreatment, sexual harassment, and sexual blackmail in all social spheres, starting from the domestic one. These principles were established in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, which was implemented in Italy through the Prime Minister's Directive of 7th March 1997, published in Gazzetta Ufficiale⁷ n. 116 of 21st May 1997.

1.1.3. Emilia Romagna

Regional Law n. 2 of 12th March 2003 of the Regional Authority of Emilia Romagna called “Norme per la promozione della cittadinanza sociale e per la realizzazione del sistema integrato di interventi e servizi sociali” (Norms for promoting social citizenship and for establishing an integrated system of interventions and social services) states that each municipality, as part of their local social service system, should set up women's

⁷ The Italian Official Gazette

refuges and crisis centres for women under threat of or experiencing physical, sexual, psychological, and financial violence and for their children.

1.1.4. Campania

With regards to violence against women, the Regional Authority of Campania approved Regional Law n. 11 of 23rd February 2005 called “Istituzione di centri e case di accoglienza ed assistenza per le donne maltrattate” (Creation of support centres and refuges for abused women).

This law states that refuges for abused women are places that receive and provide accommodation for women under threat of physical, sexual, and psychological violence and/or for women who have experienced any form of abuse. Women’s centres do not only act as abuse outreach services but they are also entrusted with the following tasks:

- a) collecting and analysing data on abused women and disseminating results and analyses, using the information gathered from the interviews and the complaints made;
- b) training and continuously updating staff working at the centres and refuges as well as social workers working for public institutions;
- c) organising cultural initiatives to prevent violence against women, reporting and disseminating information about this problem, and sensitising the public. This may also be done in collaboration with other agencies, institutions, and associations;
- d) providing legal and psychological support.

As for refuges for abused women, they are assigned the following tasks:

- e) offer solidarity and counselling to all women with European citizenship or to non-European citizens legally residing on the national territory, who address women’s centres and refuges after experiencing abuse, harassment, or bullying;
- f) provide legal and psychological advice;
- g) developing and testing systems to prevent all forms of violence or abuse against women, encouraging education for non-violence and providing assistance in order to overcome any emotional and material damage caused;
- h) sponsoring networked interventions in collaboration with public or private institutions, associations, and organisations as well as with some specialised professionals in order to provide support for all different forms of violence experienced by women.

1.1.5. Abruzzo

Regional Law n. 31 of 20th October 2006 “Disposizioni per la promozione ed il sostegno dei centri anti violenza e delle case di accoglienza per le donne maltrattate” (Provisions for the promotion and the support of crisis centres and refuges for abused women) affirms that all forms or degrees of violence against women are an attack to the inviolability of the person and to personal liberties, according to the principles embodied in the Italian Constitution and in the laws currently in force in Italy. Women who suffer violence in any form and their children are guaranteed the right to a temporary support aimed to reassert their inviolability and regain their freedom, while protecting their privacy and anonymity.

By means of this law, the Regional Authority of Abruzzo promotes, coordinates, and encourages initiatives to combat the use of violence between sexes by taking effective measures against sexual, physical, psychological, and/or financial violence, maltreatment, sexual harassment, and sexual blackmail in all social spheres. This law was inspired by the provisions contained in law n. 154 of 4th April 2001 “Misure contro la violenza nelle relazioni familiari” (Provisions against violence within the family) and law n. 328 of 8 November 2000, "Legge quadro per la realizzazione del sistema

integrato di interventi e servizi sociali" (Framework law for the establishment of an integrated system of interventions and social services).

1.1.6. Basilicata

In Regional Law n. 4 of 14 February 2007, called "Rete regionale integrata dei servizi di cittadinanza sociale" (Regional integrated network of welfare services), which was introduced by the Regional Authority of Basilicata, at art.2, the following principles are mentioned as part of "Principles underlying integrated welfare policies":

- supporting women's condition and employment;
- promoting work-family balance;
- enhancing gender diversity and women's social promotion activities;
- combating the use of violence against women by means of effective measures against sexual, physical, and psychological abuse in all social spheres and in the domestic environment.

1.1.7. Liguria

The Regional Authority of Liguria boasts some of Italy's most advanced measures with regards to combating violence against women: on 21st March 2007, it passed law n. 7 called "Interventi di prevenzione della violenza di genere e misure a sostegno delle donne e dei minori vittime di violenza" (Prevention of gender-based violence and measures supporting women and children victims of violence).

This law states that:

- gender-based violence against women and children is a violation of the fundamental human rights, which include the rights to physical and psychological integrity, safety, freedom, and dignity;
- the effects of gender-based violence on women and children, whether of a physical, sexual, psychological, or financial nature and deprivation of personal liberty constitute an obstacle to the enjoyment of safe, free and just citizenship.

The Regional Authority of Liguria has included the suppression and the prevention of gender-based violence and measures supporting abused women and children as part of its social welfare objectives and as part of the Region's basic welfare services.

Another important feature is that the above law attributes key tasks to the Regional Observatory, which has to monitor incidents of violence through the collection, the processing, and the analysis of data provided by women's crisis centres, local service providers, and other actors involved in local service networks. An effective mapping of this phenomenon can produce a synergy among the various players involved and thus lead to a deeper knowledge of issues concerning violence against women and children and to the harmonisation of the different strategies of intervention adopted at a local level.

1.1.8. Bill proposed by the Regional Authority of Calabria

To this day, the Regional Authority of Calabria has not yet approved a law specifically addressing violence against women; there is however a draft bill which is still at its very early stages.

Nevertheless, the Regional administration has pledged to recognise that all forms of violence against women are an attack to the inviolability of the person and to personal liberties, according to the principles embodied in the Italian Constitution and in the laws currently in force in Italy and in compliance with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women.

The draft bill proposed by the Regional Authority of Calabria provides for funding projects presented by various social players to combat abuse; other aims include promoting the creation of crisis centres and refuges for abused women and encouraging

the labour integration of abused women by means of traineeships (borse-lavoro) to last for a minimum period of one year.



In this map there are the regions that approved the regional laws to combat violence against women (Lazio, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Emilia Romagna, Campania, Abruzzo, Basilicata, Liguria). In Calabria there is a drast bill.

2. Overview of research in Italy

Research and studies carried out in Italy about violence against women make a rather complex picture and should be divided into two categories:

- inquiries on victimisation calculating the quantitative incidence of these episodes (which therefore provide an estimate of the number of women experiencing abuse);
- research on the perception of violence against women, which aim at posing this issue as a social problem.

The first official nationwide survey on victimisation in Italy was conducted in 1997 by ISTAT, the Italian National Institute for Statistics, and it was published the following year. The second survey

was conducted always by ISTAT in 2002 and it was published on 17th December 2004. The latest survey, on the contrary, was carried out in 2006 and then published on 21st February 2007. Outreach centres for abused women, which have been working all over Italy since 1980⁸, have also collected and processed some quantitative data on violence against women. In addition, some surveys and studies were also conducted by some researchers who were particularly sensitive towards this issue⁹.

In Italy, the first action research on the perception of violence against women and on the various phenomenological types of violence was realised in 1998 under the coordination of the Italian Department for Equal Opportunities within the framework of the URBAN Community Initiative funded by the European Commission. In its first phase, this research was called “**Rete anti violenza tra le città Urban Italia**”(Network against abuse of the Italian towns participating in URBAN) and it was carried out in a total of twenty-five Italian towns, although only eight town were involved in the pilot stage: Venice (project leader), Catania, Foggia, Lecce, Naples, Palermo, Reggio Calabria, and Rome. At a later stage, the project was named “**Rafforzamento della Rete anti violenza**” (Strengthening of the network against abuse) and it was extended to the towns of Bari, Cagliari, Catanzaro, Cosenza, Genoa, Salerno, Syracuse in Sicily, Trieste, Brindisi, Carrara, Caserta, Crotone, Misterbianco, Mola di Bari, Pescara, Taranto, and Turin¹⁰.

The original Network of Italian towns against abuse and its strengthening (the project lasted from 1998 to 2005) were inspired by the Prodi-Finocchiaro Directive of 7th March 1997 called “Azioni volte a promuovere l’attribuzione di poteri e responsabilità alle donne, a riconoscere e garantire libertà di scelte e qualità sociale a donne e uomini” (Actions promoting women’s empowerment and responsibilities, recognising and guaranteeing freedom of choice and social quality for women and men). This was the first document produced by the Italian Government where violence against women was set as a priority in the Government’s agenda. As a result, Italian institutions made a commitment to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women, which are considered as an attack to the inviolability of the person and to personal liberty.

⁸ Data, publications, studies and research issued by these centres can be found by accessing their web sites.

⁹ For more details, please see paragraph 2.3.

¹⁰ The local surveys carried out during the first and the second phase of the URBAN project can be found on the website of the Department for Equal Opportunities of the Italian Prime Minister’s Office: www.retepariopportunita.it – topic: Projects

Furthermore, after Italy joined the IVAWS project (International violence against women survey) in 2001, a convention was signed between the Italian Institute for Statistics and the Italian Ministry for Equal Opportunities. After that, thanks also to the Department for Equal Opportunities, which considered the issue of violence against women as a priority, two types of action were developed on the institutional front. On the one hand, thanks to co-financing from the Structural Funds, the Italian Institute for Statistics developed a specific module aimed at detecting violence and abuse within the family, in order to identify the actual scope of sexual offences in the country. This module was introduced in ISTAT's Households, Housing and Citizens' Security Multipurpose Survey, which, like the previous survey, was performed on the whole national territory. At the same time, eighteen Italian municipalities were given some funds to implement the project called Rafforzamento della Rete antiviolenza (Strengthening of the network against abuse), which followed the first phase called Rete antiviolenza (Network against abuse). This second phase was coordinated by the Equal Opportunities Unit of ISFOL¹¹ in order to establish a much-needed close connection between central policies and local choices and responsibilities. ISFOL's responsibilities included: the provision of technical assistance to the Department for Equal Opportunities and to all the implementing agencies in the municipalities of the network; the coordination of all project activities in the municipalities of the network; attendance of the Information/Training Seminars organised locally. The Scientific Committee was composed by some representatives of the Department for Equal Opportunities, by experts in the field, and by ISFOL. The second phase of the project, which strengthened the existing network, was realised thanks to the financial support of the ESF, the NOP "Sicurezza per lo sviluppo del Mezzogiorno d'Italia" (Security for the development of the Italian Mezzogiorno), led by the Ministry of the Interior, and the NOP "Azioni di sistema" (System actions) – Measure E.1 Action 1, headed by the Department for Equal Opportunities.

2.1. The ISTAT Survey on "Citizens' Security": the module on Sexual Harassment and Violence

With regards to the ISTAT survey, it should be said that, as mentioned above, it is a Multipurpose Survey on Citizens' Security, within which a module on harassment and violence against women was introduced. One of the aims of the Security Survey was to record criminal and injurious events affecting citizens and their families starting from the citizens' experience, focusing on lack of safety – both actual and perceived – and on the ensuing questions concerning social cohesion. The use of sexual harassment and sexual violence as indicators of citizens' safety/lack of safety showed that gender relationships can actually be taken into account when dealing with issues of participatory citizenship, social cohesion, and social conflict. A cross-analysis of the records from the section on sexual harassment and sexual violence and findings of the general Security Survey shows that women report a greater feeling of unsafety – despite

¹¹ ISFOL, the National Research Institute for the Development of Vocational Training as created in 1973 and it is located in Rome. It has scientific, methodological, administrative, accounting autonomy but it is supervised by the Ministry of Welfare and Social Policies. It provides skills support to Government bodies, Regional authorities, and Autonomous Provinces in the fields of training, social policies, and labour issues in order to foster employment, upskill human resources, improve social inclusion, and promote local development.

of a lower overall actual risk – while, on the other hand, young males are the most frequent perpetrators of victimisation incidents. Several scholars, like Barbagli¹², have theorised that these two factors are linked: the sense of insecurity felt by women can be linked to the likelihood of experiencing sexual harassment and sexual violence, a risk unknown to men. The assumption that Barbagli uses in his analysis is indeed very important, though it is deprived of all symbolic and cultural connotations. In fact, the link between women feeling unsafe and their accessibility by potential attackers can be traced back to some key factors such as women's submission to a patriarchal cultural and legal system and the accessibility of their body to men's desire, regardless of their consent.

In the IVAWS convention mentioned above, signed in 2001 between ISTAT and the Ministry for Equal Opportunities, it was agreed that, in the second ISTAT multipurpose survey on citizens' security to be carried out in 2002, the questionnaire on sexual harassment that had already been used in 1997 would be extended. In the first survey, only some types of sexual violence (rape and attempted rape) and incidents involving blackmail and harassment in the workplace were recorded and analysed. The survey did not record episodes connected to financial, psychological, verbal abuse or stalking, which is only recently being proposed as a new criminal offence. Also, there are no records concerning domestic abuse, which does not necessarily mean sexual violence. This hinders an effective cross-analysis between Italian official surveys. Only as recently as 2002 did surveys start looking more deeply into the places and the perpetrators of violence against women,

distinguishing between incidents of domestic and non-domestic violence. In 2006, the Multipurpose Survey on Citizens' Security recorded three types of violence against women:

- physical abuse
 - sexual abuse
 - psychological abuse
- within and outside the family.

2.1.1 Considerations arising from the ISTAT Survey

Women and sexual offences

Here, we shall consider the more comprehensive ISTAT survey carried out in 2002 following the agreement signed between ISTAT and the Ministry for Equal Opportunities. We will also use some empirical evidence to prove our main claim that women suffer sexist violence during their whole lives, at all ages, although different age groups are mostly affected by different types of crime. Very young women (aged between 14 and 24) mostly report being followed; young women (aged between 25 and 34), on the contrary, mainly experience verbal harassment, while adult women (aged between 35 and 44) are mostly victims of rape or attempted rape. Sexual violence (rape and attempted rape) mainly affects the 25 to 44 age group and it increases among women with a higher educational level. This could be partly explained by the fact that a higher qualification leads to greater social mobility and consequently also to a greater risk of victimisation. This is corroborated by the analysis by women's employment status, where it appears that women with a medium occupational status (senior

¹² Barbagli M. (1998) *Reati, vittime, insicurezza dei cittadini*. Istat, Rome.

managers, middle managers, and clerks) or with a high occupational status (executives, entrepreneurs, independent workers) are more likely to be victims of sexual offences, and in particular of harassment. Women looking for a new job, on the contrary, display the highest rate of rape and attempted rape.

Sexual harassment and stalking

Episodes of stalking and sexual harassment (verbal and physical harassment, indecent exposure, obscene phone calls, following) are found frequently in our interview sample. One woman out of four has experienced verbal harassment in her life, mainly in the 25 to 34 age group. In the last three years, verbal harassment tends to decrease as age increases.

Women aged between 35 and 44 years, on the contrary, display the highest incidence of physical harassment in their lives. Like for verbal harassment, physical harassment too tends to diminish as age increases both in the last three years and in the last 12 months.

Another type of sexual harassment is indecent exposure, which is also less frequent as the victim's age increases. Events of obscene phone calls, on the contrary, follow a different pattern to other types of harassment: the age group that showed the highest rate of episodes of obscene phone calls in their lives were women between 35 and 44, whereas in the last three years and in the last 12 months, the age group with the highest victimisation rate are women between 25 and 34 years old. In this type of harassment, as opposed to the trend shown by verbal harassment, physical harassment, and indecent exposure, incidents do not tend to decrease as women's age increases.

Data concerning stalking are similar to those regarding verbal and physical harassment and indecent exposure: they decrease as women get older. This offence principally affects very young women (aged between 14 and 24 years). The places where sexual harassment is most likely to happen are means of public transport and stations, both when considering women's whole life span and when focusing on the last three years of their lives. The street comes second. The picture changes when considering the last 12 months: in this case, means of transport are no longer followed by the street, but by the workplace. Physical harassment is most likely to be perpetrated by a stranger.

Respondents considered acts of physical harassment as adversely affecting their dignity. In all the periods considered, these incidents were considered as quite serious, which also shows that experience of harassment can have repercussions in people's lives.

Rape

About 2.9% of women aged between 14 and 59 have suffered at least a rape or an attempted rape in their life. The most victimised age group are women between 25 and 44 years.

The least victimised group, on the contrary, are very young women (between 14 and 24 years), who are married, housewives, and have a university degree. During their life, about one woman out of two has repeatedly suffered sexual assaults; 12.4% every day; 20.1% several times a week; finally, 12.6% once a week.

In 50.6% of cases, the main perpetrators of sexual violence were people known by the victim: friends, employers or colleagues, partners/ex partners, spouses/ex spouses. Only 32.5% are victims of strangers or acquaintances.

Rape and attempted rape mainly occurs in the places that are most familiar for the victim, namely their home, the workplace, places where friends, relatives, or acquaintances live, or the attacker's place (6.9%).

2.1.2. Violence against women and their feeling unsafe in the ISTAT survey

The perception of security/insecurity is the feeling stemming from the experience (or lack of experience) of positive/negative events during one's life.

Insecurity is composed of two elements: fear and worry of crime. The former element is the feeling of becoming a victim of crime; the latter, on the contrary, is feeling distress and anxiety about one's neighbourhood. Here, we will analyse some aspects of the sense of safety of women who have been victims of sexual offences, inquiring into the reasons that cause feeling unsafe. In general, the causes for feeling unsafe can be divided into three main categories: experience of victimisation related the violation of one's sexuality, local crime levels, and social disorder. When analysing the relationship between feeling unsafe and having been sexually victimised, it appears that women who have never experienced harassment or abuse still don't feel safe in their own surroundings when they are alone and in the dark. This figure, however, is higher among women who have reported at least one incident of sexual harassment as well as for women who have been victims of rape or attempted rape. The same is true about the perception of safety in one's home. Although the majority of women feel safe in their home when they are alone and in the dark, the number of women who feel unsafe rise according to the seriousness of the offence they have suffered. Feeling unsafe therefore depends on the seriousness of the sexual crime experienced. The same applies when considering anxiety about sexual violence. Interestingly, the majority of respondents declared being "very" or "fairly" worried about this problem; worry tended to increase according to the seriousness of the crime experienced. Figures also show that crime levels in society strongly influenced respondents' lifestyle. Local crime levels are a factor making women feel unsafe even if

what causes fear and anxiety is not always the actual level of crime but also the perception of the risk of becoming a victim of crime in a given area of town.

Social disorder is another key factor causing people to feel unsafe. It comprises a whole set of visible physical incivilities (abandoned buildings, graffiti, broken lampposts, vandalised telephone boxes, littered and foul smelling streets, and so forth) and social incivilities (drug addicts, prostitutes beggars, homeless people, drunks, etc.) found in a given neighbourhood¹³. Seeing people taking and dealing drugs, prostitutes looking for clients, acts of vandalism and so forth can increase citizens' fear and worry of crime. Social disorder therefore has an impact on women's perception of safety. Most importantly, the victims of sexual crime detect greater signs of physical and social incivility in their neighbourhood, which impacts their perception of insecurity. The most victimised women appeared to feel the most unsafe.

2.1.3. Women's coping strategies

It is now useful to understand what women do in order to lessen their sense of insecurity. Behaviours were analysed according to two main places: the street and the home. Walking in the street at night is considered as the time of the day carrying greater risks of victimisation. Nonetheless, most women go out at night defying danger, although they take some precautions (most women lock their car doors).

Women who have been victims of rape show greater caution, followed by victims of harassment and by non victims.

¹³ See Barbagli, M., (ed.), *Perché è diminuita la criminalità negli Stati Uniti?* Bologna, Il Mulino, 2000, pp. 35-36

Home, which is the intimate place by definition, is the most important factor that makes people feel safe. The safety of its dwellers, however, is not always guaranteed. Thus, other strategies are used to reduce all possible risks of crime, The most common strategy is asking neighbours to keep an eye on the house. With regards to security devices, the most popular ones are reinforced doors, followed by window locks.

2.1.4. Methodology and comparison between surveys

The surveys conducted by ISTAT in 1997, 2002, and 2006 were based on different methods, namely concerning the choice of the survey sample, which has been gradually extended over the years. In 1997, a total of 20,064 women were interviewed; in 2002, this number rose to 22,759, reaching 25,000 in 2006. Moreover, in the first two surveys, the sample was composed of women aged between 14 and 59, while, in the last survey, following Italy's conforming to EU standards, the age of the sample was extended to cover women aged between 16 and 70 years. As a result, Italy, together with Finland and Spain, is of the most advanced European countries in this type of large-scale surveys on victimisation. In particular, the last edition of the survey was carried out by telephone using CATI (Computer Aided Telephone Interview). Following a specific "screening" technique, interviewees were asked a series of questions on the type and the number of violent incidents they had suffered; lists of events were preferred to detailed descriptions. It was chosen not to talk explicitly about "physical violence", "sexual violence", and so forth, but of acts of violence in general, in order to make it easier for the victims to tell their experience.

When comparing the results of the 2002 survey with those collected in 1997, there was a decrease in episodes of physical harassment (from 24% to 19.7%), rapes and attempted rapes (from 3.9% to 2.9%), and sexual blackmail on the workplace (from 4.2% to 3.1%). If we compare the number of victims recorded in the first edition of the survey with the one shown in the latest survey, it appears that – despite a greater survey sample – the incidence of violence seemed to have diminished. In 1997, a total of 9,420,000 women reported having experienced at least one episode of sexual harassment in their life; in 2006, on the contrary, this figure dropped to 6,743,000. The latest research also reveals a dramatic situation: about 64.4% of respondents had experienced some form of violence before the age of 16. The danger of domestic violence also appears to be rather alarming: 69.7% of rapes are perpetrated by the partner, while only as few as 18.2% of physically or sexually abused women regarded those episodes as crime.

2.2. Network against abuse of the Italian towns participating in URBAN

The URBAN survey, as illustrated above, collects the findings from the eight towns forming the Network against abuse of the Italian towns participating in URBAN as well as the data gathered in the seventeen towns that joined the network in the second phase ("Strengthening of the network against abuse among Italian towns participating in URBAN"), for a total of twenty-five towns. Its main objectives were:

- to gain some knowledge on the perception of violence and on the scope of violence against women;
 - to appraise the level of security perceived by residents of areas considered as "socially problematic" (this is why the sample was composed of towns participating in the URBAN project, since they were all characterised by high levels of social problems);
 - to evaluate the stereotypes associated to this phenomenon;
 - to identify indicators capturing gendered attitudes in order to detect and analyse high-risk environments in terms of violence both within and outside the family;
 - to identify resources to combat violence (not only by detecting existing services but also by assessing the cultural attitudes of their staff);
- This study, which is conceived as an action-research, had the twofold objective of, on the one hand, building a potential and sustainable intervention model that, in time, could be also applied in other contexts and, on the other hand, supporting local plans to combat intra-family violence against women in the twenty-five municipalities involved in the project. Various social players were interviewed:
- men and women;
 - staff of public and private services;
 - privileged observers;
 - victims of violence.

Survey activities included field research, studies, analyses, and seminars.

The field action-research highlights the social effects of violence against women; it also led to the acquisition of tools of knowledge and to the definition of indicators capturing gendered attitudes. Seminars and networking actions, on the contrary, provided training and communication aimed at a wide, open audience, which principally included people working in this field. The underlying objective was to create 'anti-violence against women' networks within single municipalities but also to disseminate information on violence against women and mainstream best practices throughout the country by means of exchanges of experience and shared project planning in this field.

The different phases of the field research were organised as follows:

- identification and mapping of private and public services dealing with episodes of violence;
- realisation of a sample survey by means of face-to-face questionnaires administered to people working in local private and public services;
- sample survey of men and women living in the urban areas concerned by the project by means of a CATI questionnaire (both surveys were aimed at identifying the attitudes, the perceptions, and the stereotypes concerning domestic violence against women);
- in-depth qualitative interviews to some privileged observers, players and recognised community leaders in the fields covered by the survey;
- in-depth qualitative interviews to women who, during the CATI sample survey, had reported having been victims of episodes of violence and declared they were available for another telephone interview.
- seminars, conceived as "mini cycles" of training for people who work and are in contact with women with experience of violence (police forces, workers of social and health services, senior civil servants, volunteers in non profit associations, women NGOs, staff of women's crisis centres). These seminars aimed to enhance and take full

advantage of local resources, promote the creation and the support of women's associations, and/or create some specialised services (women's crisis centres). These aims were pursued through a basic training programme on therapy protocols, laws, violence indicators, networking and building integrated services.

This study has shown that violence against women is widespread: the assumption that it mostly concerns marginalised social groups, women with a limiting disability, and multi-problem families is simply wrong. In fact, it can be considered more as part of everyday life than morbidity and it concerns men and women from all social groups. It is found in every town; it cuts across cultures, social classes, educational levels, financial statuses, and age groups. It usually appears as a combination of repeated incidents of physical, sexual, psychological and financial abuse, which tend to become increasingly serious over time. This type of violence stems from relationships of inequality between women and men and from men's desire to control and own women.

2.3 Other studies

Several unofficial studies on violence against women have been carried out in Italy, highlighting the regrettable lack of adequate tools to tackle this problem. Here, we will only mention some of them.

In 1988, in Milan, Carmine Ventimiglia carried out a famous sociological study called "La differenza negata: ricerca sulla violenza sessuale in Italia" (Denying difference: a research on sexual violence in Italy), which analysed data on sexual assaults coming from ISTAT surveys and from forty-eight Italian newspapers in 1985. The author analysed offences classified as acts of intra-family violence, the lives of the perpetrators of these crimes, their declarations, and the backgrounds of victims.

In 1993, Sonia Stefanazzi and Laura Terragni produced an empirical research on violence within marriage in Milan.

In 1994, the Commissione regionale per le pari opportunità tra uomo e donna (regional Commission on Equal Opportunities between Men and Women) of the Autonomous Regional Authority of Friuli Venezia Giulia carried out a survey on "Violenza fisica e sessuale contro le donne e risposte dei servizi socio-sanitari" (Physical and sexual violence against women and responses of social and health services), edited by Patrizia Romito.

In 1995, in Milan, a Survey on incest in Italy by Iaia Caputo showed the activities and the opinions of all women's crisis centres, private and public agencies, professionals, and experts who dealt with this issue. The survey also included some statements made by women/girls who had suffered sexual abuse and their relatives.

In 1999, the Local Health Agency of the town of Prato (ASL 4), thanks to the work of the Unità Operativa Ginecologia e Ostetricia (the Operational Unit of Gynaecology and Obstetrics), carried out a survey on "Violenza sulle donne: epidemiologia in Italia" (Violence against women: epidemiology in Italy), edited by Citernesini and Dubini.

In 1996, in Bologna, the women's anti-violence organisation Casa delle donne per non subire violenza carried out a survey called "Osservazione di un servizio" (Service monitoring) within the framework of the P.A.S.S. programme (Programme for the analysis of service delivery systems), edited by Annalita Bellei.

Women's refuges and crisis centres, established and managed by women's groups throughout Italy, are a key source of information on violence against women. For

example, a network of sixteen women's refuges and crisis centres in the Emilia Romagna region conducted a survey on 1,422 women who sought their services in 1997. This survey shows that 82% of these women had suffered abuse by their partner or former partner; 12% also suffered sexual abuse; 19% of them were battered on a weekly basis and over 50% of violence began after the first five years of the relationship. In almost all instances, women who sought help from these centres tried to escape situations of domestic violence. In 76% of cases, perpetrators were "beyond suspicion": this means that they did not suffer from alcohol/drug abuse or psychological and social disorders. Insufficient financial means increase violence and make it harder for women to run away from it, while in some cases they are the consequence of violence. Adult women and separated or divorced women are overrepresented: this seems to show that the way out of violence is long and arduous, and therefore tardy; on the other hand, it appears that it is easier for separated women to acknowledge and talk about the violence suffered, because in some way their decision has already been made. About 60% of the women in the sample had already sought help from other services. Only 9% had contacted health services (general practitioners, hospital emergency rooms), which is probably due to the lack of organised, specifically targeted services.

In 1998, the first national conference on violence against women was held in Bologna. It was called "Zero Tolerance: experiences, projects and proposals for the European campaign against violence against women" and it was promoted by the Zero Tolerance campaign against violence against women and by the Tavolo delle donne sulla violenza e sulla sicurezza nella città (Women's Board on violence and security in town), in collaboration with the Assessorato alle Politiche Sociali (the Municipal Ministry of Social Policies) of the Municipality of Bologna and the Department of Equal Opportunities of the Prime Minister's Office.

In 1998, the Bologna Working Group on violence against women, who has been working for a long time to create a shelter for abused women, carried out a research called "S.O.S. Donna: documentazione sulle case delle donne maltrattate in Europa" (S.O.S. Donna: documentation on refuges for abused women in Europe). Accounts of abused women in Bologna were used to prepare some explanatory sheets, like those illustrating different experiences in Europe (three centres in Switzerland, one in France, three in Austria, four in Germany, one in Denmark, one in the Netherlands, and one in Ireland, the UK and Spain) Some of these sheets contain by-laws, rules for those who work with abused women and for women who seek their services, objectives and political aims, funding channels, and all the matters concerning the daily work of these centres and their working methods. This study also stresses the importance of refuges for women in need; however, at the same time, they depict the frustration of the women who work there (who often have a feminist background), due to the fact that many abused women who turn to women's refuges then go back to live with their abusive family and they never achieve their emancipation.

The following year, in 1999, always in Bologna, a temporary body called "Tavolo delle donne sulla violenza e sulla sicurezza nella città" (Women's Board on violence and security in town), composed of women coming from political volunteering, women's associations, professional sectors – such as psychology – medical, legal, and architecture practice proposed a project called "Zero Tolerance contro la violenza alle donne" (Zero Tolerance against violence on women) with the aim of reorganising public space and ensuring women's safety. The Board was also composed of some female representatives of the Municipality of Bologna, of the Commissione delle elette (the

Commission of female municipal council members), and the town's Women's Committee. This campaign originated within the project Bologna Sicura, concerned with gender mainstreaming in social security policies and it aimed at raising public awareness about violence. Several associations took part to this project: SOS Donna, Centro documentazione delle donne, La Meta, MIT (The Movement for Transsexual Identity), Noi Donne Insieme, UDI (the Italian Women's Union), Armonie, Il solito gruppo di donne, Visibilia, Donne dolci, FIDAPA (Italian Federation of Women in the Art, Professional, and Business sectors), and Zonta Club. All these associations were based in Bologna.

In 1999, twenty-nine guilty verdicts on grounds of domestic abuse were analysed in a study called "Ellissi d'amore ieri come oggi: storie vere di maltrattamenti in famiglia" (Blanks of love past and present: true stories of family abuse). This work dealt with psychological, physical, and sexual abuse and it was edited by Mariella Lentini.

In 2000, the women's crisis centre Centro contro la violenza alle donne Roberta Lanzino of Cosenza, in partnership with the Interdepartmental Centre of Women's Studies "Milly Villa" of the University of Calabria conducted an awareness-raising campaign against violence on women called "European Project MYIA for respect and harmony within the family"

In Udine, in 2003, an action-research project was carried out in upper secondary schools. It was called "Percezione della violenza domestica e stereotipi" and it was managed by the women's crisis centre "Io tu noi voi donne insieme".

3. Political interventions to combat gender-based violence

The URBAN project, after its completion, inspired and encouraged the realisation of an **experimental project to combat all forms of violence against women** throughout the country by means of:

- the establishment of a public utility phone number in 2006: 1522, a 24/7 Multilingual helpline service;
- the establishment, always in 2006, of a National network against abuse.

It should be noticed that in 2005, O.N.D.A. (the National Women's Health Observatory) was established to contribute to identifying specific gender issues concerning women's health in general. The Observatory analyses the most important medical conditions affecting women, proposing primary and secondary prevention strategies, as well as fostering gendered health behaviours. O.N.D.A supports basic and clinical research on women's main medical conditions, it assesses their social and economic impact, and it provides information to institutions, practitioners, and the general public. It is currently collaborating with all the national institutions working in this field to study, inform, educate, and stimulate attention to these issues.

The 1522 helpline is managed exclusively by women, who receive specific training and whose work is regularly supervised. This service protects callers' anonymity, in compliance with the provisions of the Italian privacy law. It promotes the emergence of this phenomenon by listening to callers, making an initial analysis of each request, and taking concrete action following the requests for help made by women suffering

violence. For example, it provides useful indications and guidance to access services delivered by the third sector, social and health institutions, police forces, and women's crisis centres operating locally. All these services – and not the 1522 helpline – are in charge of protecting and supporting women wishing to break free from violence.

This said, 1522 handles all the situations requiring urgent action to protect the victim, like in cases of immediate danger or high risk of victimisation. In these instances, the operator has to call the police forces immediately, keeping the caller on hold. This procedure strictly follows the indications received by the Italian Police, the General Headquarters of the Carabinieri Corps, and the Finance Police.

The National network against abuse is a network of networks coordinated by the Department for Equal Opportunities, which anyway has to work closely with: the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Labour and Welfare, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice, the General Headquarters of the Carabinieri Corps, and the Finance Police. The national network against abuse establishes connections between several women's crisis centres, as well as various women's refuges, local social services, health services and hospitals, police forces, courts, education and school services. This has produced exchanges of experiences and best practices in order to tackle the problem of violence against women in a concerted way.

The Network pursues three main objectives:

- promoting adequate measures to strengthen existing services and creating new ones;
- identifying and disseminating best practices;
- the drawing of intervention protocols to be used locally, with a special focus on rural and mountainous areas.

In order to achieve its mission, the network will use three specific tools: the identification and the dissemination of best practices; mapping and monitoring; project work carried out by the National Observatory.

Identification and the dissemination of best practices

The term “best practices” identifies the whole set of existing practices already operating in the country and in the EU that produce effective actions able to impact social processes and that can also be used as a base to widen, adjust, and plan interventions to combat violence involving various players at municipal and regional levels.

Mapping and monitoring

Mapping and monitoring activities are performed through the organisation and the running of call centres. Mapping actions are mainly concerned with recording local initiatives, activities, and services. They use a quantitative and qualitative method, where data are recorded by means of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to some privileged observers.

Monitoring activities are performed every six months, using some specific indicators in order to assess the various actions and the integrated services delivered by call centres and the adjustment/extension of existing services.

Project work carried out by the National Observatory

The National Observatory is the most important tool used to identify “a place” from where to observe but also to connect the organisations concerned with violence against

women through a number of different actions. It provides data, analyses, information, and knowledge to all the public and private actors who perform direct or indirect interventions in this field.

The Observatory has to buttress and support the design of policies to combat violence against women and promote the adjustment of women's support centres and services.

The National Observatory on gender-based violence was created as part of the Action Plan developed by the Minister of Equal Rights and Opportunities Barbara Pollastrini. The Observatory should foster a radical culture change in terms of prevention. Its lines of action, based on the principle of subsidiarity, envisage a collaboration between regional authorities, local agencies, and the third sector.

The Ministry conceived the Observatory as a privileged place for developing positive policies and actions aimed at disseminating a culture enhancing women's freedom and fostering harmony between the sexes in order to bring violence against women into the open. The Observatory should support the creation of a new gender culture also by reflecting on the issue of violence against women; it should strengthen the network where women should be able to express their discomfort and report violence; finally, it should urge institutions to provide responses that do not penalise women by relegating them to a solitary corner. The ultimate wish is for men to embark on an in-depth study of the dynamics of their own sexuality and the nature of their relationships with women and with other men.

These suggestions come from the experience of women's crisis centres and women's groups, who have worked strenuously for a radical change of the approach towards this problem by providing training in schools, courts, hospitals, and the police forces. The precious synergy established between institutions and the voluntary sector has led to the creation of an Interministerial Committee that acknowledged violence against women as a social problem affecting society as a whole. A number of initiatives have already been launched on the media in order to eradicate sexist stereotypes and the biased representation of women, which has become widespread in the last few years.

The National network against abuse was conceived as a 'networks of networks', a place where actions carried out by local networks against abuse would be known, received, strengthened, and disseminated throughout the country. This would not only guarantee the dissemination of information at a national level but it will also lead to the creation of key connections with national authorities. The Network will develop a strategy for the progressive involvement of twenty districts in the testing of an integrated protocol involving Call centres and local networks. The services involved in the Local Networks are the following:

- women's crisis centres and refuges;
- local social services;

- health services and hospitals;
- the police forces;
- courts;
- education and school systems.

Local Networks and the National Network will be enhanced thanks to specific actions carried out by the Department for Equal Opportunities. The Department will develop interventions to be performed by all the Ministries local services respond to; it will also promote adequate actions at a regional level through the introduction of some specific

modules in the Operational Plans in order to strengthen existing services and create new ones.

Some specific tools will be developed to promote the work of local networks, such as:

- multiprofessional training;
- multidisciplinary seminars;
- working groups composed of different professional figures;
- development of networks of service coordinators;
- development of action plans to prevent violence against women, which will be integrated with national action plans.

The ultimate objective is to progressively disseminate knowledge on violence against women and intervention methods to tackle it. This would reduce the existing gaps between different territories, which are caused by the presence or the lack of women's crisis centres or specialised services. This objective will be pursued in the following ways:

- the support and involvement of women's crisis centres operating all over Italy and their networking with public institutions and authorities
- the promotion of new anti-violence against women services
- the launch and the embedding of multidisciplinary networks within the community
- the development of local network protocols to encourage access to services on the part of women victims of violence.

In the following phases, a website (portal) will be developed and maintained. It will consist of two areas:

Open access area, which will contain tools supporting local services against violence on women. In particular, it will contain:

- links to relevant national, European, and international websites;
- documentation on the project and on the issue;
- abstracts of manuals for aid professionals;
- summary sheets of best practices;
- MoUs signed between local actors, to be used as working examples;
- intervention protocols.

Restricted access area, which will be reserved for pilot districts and to those women's crisis centres that will request access. this area will contain:

- adequate tools to support networks and services against violence on women;
- guidelines to create local networks;
- training packages on violence against women;
- manuals for aid professionals;
- operational guidelines for emergency room workers;
- a guide to available funds for the creation of services or the launch of new projects;
- local mapping results;
- periodic statistics featuring data from Call Centres.

This area of the Portal will also contain:

- three-month issue-specific discussion forums
- online technical consultancy to support local networks

The portal will be a means of mainstreaming existing tools with a view to triggering a self-transformation of staff working in local public and private services. It will provide network members and service workers training and information materials to support their initiatives effectively. The portal will also contain some useful links to develop such initiatives on the basis of

successful experiences already realised in Italy and abroad. The services participating in local networks will include: women's crisis centres and refuges; local social services, health services and hospitals, the police forces, trial and juvenile courts, and education and school services. The objective is to develop common intervention protocols and standards. These protocols will be built on the basis of: role and task descriptions; choice of local project leaders and promoters; objectives; opportunities and constraints of project interventions; methods of implementation of local actions and of call centres; testing and evaluation methods; possible local resources available for planning supplementary actions.

With regards to the setting up and the running of call centres, a specific action will be addressed to pilot districts to promote this service and illustrate the way it will work:

1. initial contacts and referrals to local specialised services, available throughout Italy;
2. helpline reception and orientation of women to the specialised service that will carry out the intervention; available in the pilot districts, with a subsequent impact assessment through local networks;
3. emergency interventions, especially in cases of sexual assault, in direct contact with Police and health emergency services, available throughout Italy.

4. Conclusions

All the surveys, studies, and research have stressed the need to develop aid protocols for women victims of violence (women temporarily in need) to help them learn recognise violence in their lives and become aware of the seriousness of these acts.

The complex legislative process of the law against sexual violence and the main recommendations and empirical findings of the studies considered in this paper lead to some considerations: the spreading of new cultural and normative approaches, the law against sexual violence, and other laws dealing with intra-family relationships and women's protection did not bring about a decrease in sexual violence. This is because laws alone do not discourage men from adopting violent behaviours against women. On the contrary, it seems that, currently, the number of episodes of violence has increased. This is due to the fact that violence is now more visible: there are higher reporting rates of events closely connected to behaviours that used to be considered as normal in the past and that are now socially disapproved because they are deemed as injurious to women. The threshold criteria of rape have decreased, following a rising perception of what women define as offensive to them. However, this has not led to an increase in the number of guilty verdicts and convictions for violence: impunity and decriminalisation are an enduring effect of the little social importance attached to this phenomenon. So much for criminal laws. Verifying whether a rape has actually been committed and assessing the actual scope of violent episodes through present standards of proof (linked to proving consent or lack of consent) are still key elements in any court case.

Nowadays, women in Italy surely enjoy greater legal protection than in the past (here, it should be remembered that this protection derives from some extremely difficult

changes of legislative approaches). However, it is not enough to deter violent crime against women. This is also because women are reluctant to take legal action for a number of reasons of a social, cultural, financial nature and, most importantly, to protect their children.

Changes in legislation have not been followed by a general social disapproval of violence against women. Numerous abuses of power against women are still largely ignored like, for example, all behaviours that – though they cannot be defined as sexual violence – are closely related to the sexual sphere. Women are regularly and systematically victims of rubbing, verbal innuendo, and a wide range of disagreeable sexually related behaviours. When dealing with women victims of harassment, it is inevitable to make associations with crimes falling within the sexual sphere (rapes, assaults). If, on the contrary, one considers other acts that unfortunately are still not strictly defined as criminal offences (following, mischievous looks, or more or less bold approaches), these associations are not made. In psychology and sociology, this phenomenon is known as “Stalking”: it refers to the typical behaviour of harassers, who follow their victim wherever they may go¹⁴. Stalking therefore consists of a set of repeated and intrusive behaviours, in the obsessive attempt to make contact and communicate with a targeted victim. It consists of acts of actual controlling behaviour, such as, for example, following, spying, showing up at the victim’s workplace, or making unwanted obscene phone even at night. In Italy, these behaviours are deemed as criminal offences worthy of legal protection only when they fall within the offences provided for in art. 660 of the Penal Code, which reads: “Whoever, in a public place or a place open to the public, or by means of the telephone, through pestering of by any culpable motive, causes molestation or disturbance is punishable by up to six months in prison and a maximum fine of 516 euros”. This means that an incident of harassing or disturbing behaviour cannot in itself be considered as a criminal offence since, in order to be subject to criminal prosecution, such behaviour would have to be pestering, that is, repeated over time. This clearly explains why there is a widespread reluctance to prosecute some harassing behaviours against women, especially if they are perpetrated by a former partner, as it is usually the case.

The three ISTAT surveys on “Citizen’s security” show that women’s fears, even in urban and city areas, are not irrational: females are forced to negotiate public space since they already have to tolerate regular abuses of power in the domestic sphere. If they mainly suffer violence at the hands of someone they know, they certainly do not know what to expect from a stranger. Violence generates fear not only because it produces incapacitation but also because it may cause death, injury, pregnancy, and childbearing.

Therefore, women’s fear of street violence perpetrated by strangers and the fear of crime – which is now analysed in several scholarly works and which is an established subject of research in the earliest surveys on victimisation in Italy – do not carry the greatest weight. This is because most violence against women is perpetrated in the domestic sphere; it is as part of everyday life, of intimate relationships between partners; it occurs in spheres that are usually regarded as the safest places and it leaves scars and consequences that are noticeable even after years. Women are subject to various forms of violence: harassment; physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and economic violence, and even murder. The victimiser is usually their partner, husband,

¹⁴ Aramini, M.; *Lo stalking: aspetti psicologici e fenomenologici* in “Sessualità, diritto, processo” by G. Gullotta, S. Pezzati; Giuffrè, Milan, 2002, p. 495

father, or brother, or again – in fewer events – a stranger. The place where most violent episodes occur is the home. This place is virtually considered as “beyond the law” and it is widely represented as the ‘safe haven’ by definition. Violent events therefore stay confined within the private sphere, because the place where violence occurs is most frequently an intimate place.

Domestic violence is deeply painful as well as unexpected, since it is perpetrated by those who are given the most trust. Closeness and bond make it difficult to talk about the violence experienced. Victims’ silence is one of the hardest obstacles to the fight against violence on women.

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