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Violence against women

Femicide and violence against women in Italy: How policies and statistics deal with it

Note by the Italian National Institute of Statistics*

Abstract

Measuring, combating and preventing Gender Based Violence is an important issue in Italy. Recently, following the stimulus of the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence) the Department of Equal Opportunity (DPO) and Istat have addressed this challenging issue in a more systematic way.

Article 11 of the Convention emphasizes the importance of collecting disaggregated relevant statistical data at regular intervals on cases of all forms of violence covered by the scope of the Convention; and of supporting research in the field of all forms of violence covered by the scope of the Convention in order to study its root causes and effects, incidence and conviction rates, as well as the efficacy of measures taken to implement the Convention.

Measuring GBV is indeed one of the main focuses addressed in the Istanbul Convention and the main focus of the Istat - DPO agreement signed to implement the new road map to combat and prevent GBV in Italy. Many data sources, from registers and from population surveys, data from ministries and NGOs will be part of the information system for GBV. This system will present data, analysis, legislation and policies regarding the following aspects: 'measuring GBV and genders stereotypes'; 'monitoring GBV and victim protection systems'; 'measuring and monitoring all aspects of justice concerning GBV'.

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I. Introduction

1. Measuring, combating and preventing Gender Based Violence (GBV) is an important issue in Italy. Recently, following also the stimulus of the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence) the Department of Equal Opportunity (DPO) and Istat, addressed in a more systematic way this challenging issue when looking at statistical data.
2. Data are essential to measure and to monitor GBV and are the basis to plan and to evaluate policies.
3. The article 11 of the Convention, emphasizes the importance to collect disaggregated relevant statistical data at regular intervals on cases of all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention; and support research in the field of all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention in order to study its root causes and effects, incidences and conviction rates, as well as the efficacy of measures taken to implement this Convention.
4. Data need to refer to Gender based violence, considered as the violence suffered by women because they are women. But this definition is not easy and it has not been operationalized yet.
5. The definition issue is in fact very complex. Looking for instance at most serious form of violence, femicide, in Italy and in the EU countries there is not a legal definition for femicide, which does not constitute a specific offence, as on the contrary it is in 16 countries of Latin America. Representing, however, a phenomenon of significant interest in public debate, femicide is measured for statistical purposes on the basis of the relationship between the victim of the murder and its perpetrator.
6. This choice has also been shared at international level, when in May 2017, the UNODC Experts Group for the definition and implementation of the International Classification of Crimes for statistical purposes (ICCS) decided, for the meanwhile, to adopt as statistical definition for "femicide" the murder of women happened in the family context from partners, former partners or relatives.
7. Considering the Italian case for instance, in 2016, 149 women were killed, but how many of these murders are femicides? Looking at the perpetrator/victim relationship, almost 3 out of 4 of 149 were committed in the family: 59 women were killed by partners, 17 by former partners and other 33 by relatives (data from Ministry of Interior), on the contrary only the 15.9% of men were killed in the context of family relationships (40 men on 251)
8. Gender differences are evident and very stable. In the last decade, in Italy, the percentage of women homicides in the family context fluctuated from a minimum of 62.7% in 2010 to a maximum of 77% in 2014, decreasing to 73.2% in 2016.
9. Furthermore while the murders of men are constantly reduced, women' murders are stable. Men victims of murder decreased from 4 to 0.9 per 100,000 males between 1992 and 2015 (according to the Causes of Death Data), while for women the rate fell from 0.6 to 0.4.
10. This means that although, for males, the incidence of murders still remains greater (about double) than for women, progress were very important, above all due to the decline of deaths due to common criminality and to organized crimes. While for women, who started from a much more favorable situation, the decrease in time has followed much slower rhythms.
11. Femicide is the extreme violence form, but what about the other most common violent expressions?
12. The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (VAW) defined in 1993 violence against women 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 private life".

13. Nevertheless measuring VAW is not an easy issue. It develops mainly in the familiar environments, where a woman should feel safer. This characteristic represents one of the most important reasons why this phenomenon remains to a large extent underreported. The proximity with violence perpetrator, the loved person, and the complex and opposing emotional and psychological reactions does not help the victims' disclosure.
14. Our violence population surveys show, in fact, a sensitive gap between the number of victims of physical or sexual violence and the number of those who reported the suffered violence to the police and the competent authorities.
15. For this reason, it is important consider both sources of data, the police and judicial ones and the ad hoc surveys, designed to collect directly the women experiences. This allows to integrate the information and to achieve a more likely representation of the entity and the characteristics of the phenomenon.
16. Furthermore other kind of sources are quite useful in order to monitor cultural changes, since stereotyped culture is the main cause of gender based violence. In particular Istat is planning a survey on gender stereotypes and attitudes towards GBV in adult population and between teenagers at school.

II. The Italian Violence against women survey

17. In 2014, Istat carried out the second VAW survey, financed by the Department of Equal Opportunity. The survey was carried out on a sample of about 24.700 women aged 16-70. Estimates are widespread for both Italian and foreigner women (Romania, Ukraine, Albania, Morocco, Moldavia, China, other citizenship).
18. The first survey was carried out in 2006 and the Citizens' Safety Survey collects data on sexual harassment and sexual blackmail at work, since the end of nineties.
19. Data underline a complex phenomenon. Violence against women is widespread, serious, frequent, and underreported, but interesting and positive changes arise in women awareness and in the decreasing of the less serious forms of violence.
20. According to the 2014 survey, 6.788,000 women have been victims of some forms of violence, either physical or sexual, during their life equals to 31.5% of women aged 16-70; 20.2% has been victim of physical violence; 21% of sexual violence (including sexual unwanted touching) and 5.4% of the most serious forms of sexual violence such as rape and attempted rape: 652,000 women have been victims of rape; and 746,000 have been victims of attempted rape.
21. Current or former partners are the perpetrators of the most serious violence. 2 million and 800,000 women were victims of their violence: 5,5% of women with a current partner (855.000) and 18,8% of women who have had a partner in the past (2 million and 44). In particular, partners are the perpetrators of the 62.7% of rape and the 90.6% of the unwanted sexual relationships experienced by women as violence, while the perpetrators of sexual unwanted touching are in the majority of cases unknown (76,8%).
22. Women also suffered psychological and economic violence by partners (the 26.5% by a current partner; the 46.1% by a former partner) and the 16.1% stalking (the 15.3% of women having a partner in the past suffered stalking by a former partner; the 10.3% of women by a non-partner).
23. Foreign women are victims of sexual or physical violence on a scale similar to Italian women's: 31.3% and 31.5%, respectively. However, physical violence is more frequent among the foreigners (25.7% vs. 19.6%), while sexual violence is more common among Italians (21.5% vs. 16.2%).

Specifically, foreign women are more exposed to rape and attempted rape (7.7% vs. 5.1%). Moldavians (37.3%), Romanians (33.9%) and Ukrainians (33.2%) are the most affected ones.

24. Furthermore from the data results emerged that the 10.6% of women suffered some form of sexual violence before the age of 16 and that it is unfortunately increasing the percentage of children who witnessed episodes of violence on their mother (from 60.3% to 65.2% between 2006 and 2014), as it is also higher the percentage of children that were directly involved in the violence episodes (from 15.9% to 25%). These aspects are really important as predictive factors and for the intergenerational transmission of violence. Current partner violence rate increases indeed from 5.2% (of women with a current partner) to 22% if the partner witnessed the violence of his father on his mother and reach the 35.9%, if he suffered physical violence by parents, particularly by mother when a child.
25. Comparing the estimates of the 2014 with those of 2006, some encouraging signals are evident, which indicate an overall reduction of all forms of violence suffered and a greater inclination to undertake pathways of exit from the spiral of violence.
26. However, strongly negative signals remain. The proportion of women who are victims of extreme violence (rape and attempted rape) and the most serious forms of physical violence (use or threat of using a weapon or a knife) remain stable (1.2% and 0.4% respectively) and increases the severity of sexual and physical violence.

III. Seriousness of offences

27. In the 37.8% of cases of partner violence, women suffered injuries, bruises or other. About 20% was hospitalized following the injuries reported, and more than a fifth of those who went to the hospital had permanent damage. Violence does not stop even during pregnancy: in about 1 case out of 4, violence decreased, while for 11.3% of women increased and for 5.9% started.
28. Foreign women who were victims of violence by partner suffered more injuries and have a greater incidence of hospitalizations. At the same time they reported more to the police and more often seek help in shelters.
29. Women have direct and indirect costs due to abuses: expenses for medical and psychological care at private facilities, drug expenditures, legal expenses and property damage. Many had to be absent from work and had difficulty managing daily activities (respectively 5.7% and 6.7%), in most cases for more than 10 days.
30. While the indirect costs regard the economic costs (for instance for health care received in the public system, services provided by shelters, police and judiciary activities) and the indirect social costs for children and the family of abused women and the whole society, for example in terms of less contribution to the production system.

IV. Sexual harassment and blackmail at work

31. Citizens' Safety Survey allows to focus on another specific aspect of gender violence: harassment and sexual blackmail in the workplace.
32. Based on the survey carried out in 2016, 1,403,000 women suffered during their working life harassment or sexual blackmail in their workplace, the 8.9% of current or past workers, including women looking for a job.

33. In particular, sexual blackmail to obtain a job or to maintain it or to obtain advances in the career concerned, in the course of their life, 1 million and 100,000 of women (equal to 7.5% of women workers or looking for a job).
34. Only one in five women, among those who have been blackmailed, has told their experience, talking mainly with colleagues (8.1%), much less with the employer, executives or unions. Almost none denounced the fact to the law enforcement (0.7%).

V. The judicial point of view

35. In order to provide a comprehensive framework on gender-based violence, Istat, in line with international conventions and guidelines, collects also data and information from a plurality of sources, which, in addition to experiences reported by women in the population surveys, include administrative data collections.
36. Register statistics (police and justice statistics) do not allow, due to the low reporting rates, to correctly represent the size and the characteristics of the phenomenon. However, they allow describing the type of violence and how often this has become acquainted with the law enforcement and the judicial system, the number of convictions and the characteristics of the sentenced persons. They also allow analyzing the type and incidence of concomitant offences, a series of characteristics relating to the context and dynamics of the phenomenon and a series of information on the outcome of the proceedings.
37. In addition to the problem of the dark figure number of violence, in Italy, the judicial statistics are affected by a further problem, of much easier solution, which concerns the detection, still lacking, of information on the sex of victims and the information regarding the victim-perpetrator relationship. These aspects, which are repeatedly requested to the ministries of competence, will be addressed and resolved in the future to meet the demands of the Equal Opportunities Department, which in the Antiviolence Plan asked in a stronger manner to target GBV offences. This is absolutely important as the current normative is not adequate to detect violence in intimate partner relationship and in the family context.
38. For subsequent analyses, the focus is on some crimes, stalking, sexual assault, maltreatment in the family, female genital mutilation, which can be considered crimes to majority vocation of gender.

VI. Proceedings statistics

39. In 2015, 15,733 were pursued for stalking: the prosecution took place for just over half of the cases (8,041, equal to 51.1%), while the others proceedings were archived. The number of perpetrators charged by the Public Prosecutor increased over the years starting from 2012. Domestic violence in the family (maltreatment) concerned 21,305 cases, the 42.5% of these prosecution took penal effect. Also for this crime there is an increment in the decision of charge by Public prosecutor.
40. Perpetrators are above all men. In 85.5% of proceeding of stalking the defendant was an Italian, in 73.5% of proceedings for maltreatment. As regards sexual violence the percentage of Italian charged was 64.1% and 41.6% for sexual violence committed by more than one person.
41. The importance of using more than one source for the data analysis is very important as already said and data on the citizenship of the perpetrator is a very good example for this issue.
42. In fact data from the Istat VAW survey, show that Italian victim suffered rape by Italian perpetrators in 81.6% of cases and by foreigners in 15.1% of cases (data regard the last episode of violence suffered outside the couple). On the contrary foreign victims were abused by a compatriot in 73.2%,

by an Italian man in 18% or by another foreigner in 10.9% of cases. This data apparently ambivalent with the previous statement (prosecution data) are indeed very coherent when we introduce another aspect. It is interesting to underline, in fact, that the reporting behavior of Italian women is very different if the perpetrator of violence is a foreigner: the share of victims who reported to the police the suffered rape by a foreign perpetrator is more than 6 times higher than in case of Italian perpetrators and is ten times higher in case of attempted rape.

VII. Convictions data

43. In order to know information on final judgments, convictions data are extremely important. They offer a framework of great interest, in relation to the offences already taken into account for the proceedings analyses, in particular in relation to crimes association and the length of the processes.
44. Since 2009, when the stalking law entered into force, convictions for stalking sharply increased: from 35 sentences in 2009, to 1,601 in 2016. Convicted persons were Italian in 1,309 cases (of which 1,212 male) and 292 foreigner (18.2%). The most frequently associated offences with stalking are “private violence”, injuries, and insults.
45. In 2016, the estimated length, from the date of the committed crime to the date of the final sentence, is increased from less than one year to two years, at first instance stage, 3 years in appeal.
46. Sentences with at least a crime of maltreatment in the family also increased from 1,320 in 2000 to 2,923 in 2016. The trend is determined substantially by convicted men born in Italy.
47. The most associated crimes to maltreatment in the family were threat, sexual violence, “private violence” and injury, while other crimes associated only in some years (between 2000 and 2016) were extortion and resistance to public official. Substantially constant, in the considered period, the time needed to arrive at the final judgment from the date of committed offence, which is always equal to 40 months on average.
48. Sexual violence final sentences grew slightly from 1,124 in 2000 to 1,419 in 2016. The convicted person is predominantly male and Italian, even if the foreign perpetrator increased from 21.1% in 2000 to 41.6% in 2016.
49. Offences that are most associated with sexual violence are injuries, maltreatment, “private violence”, acts of obscene sexual acts, kidnapping and residually violence on minors.
50. The average period (in months) between the date of the committed offence and the final sentence varies between 24 and 30 months in the considered period for sentences definitive at first instance, with a slight, irregular increase over time; around 60 months if the final judgment occurs after the second degree.

VIII. The Gender Based Violence Information System

51. Present and future statistical information provided to institutions, associations, citizens, are a reference base to assess the extent of the phenomena, to know the characteristics of victims and perpetrators, to understand the roots and the contexts in which these crimes mature and to elaborate effective policies and actions of contrast.
52. Nevertheless important cognitive gaps persist, as shown before, and they need to be solved as soon as possible. In this direction, the implementation of the integrated system for the data collection and analysis provided by the extraordinary Action Plan against Sexual and Gender based Violence,

adopted in July 2015 could be strategic. The Istat-DEO memorandum of Understanding was signed on 25 November 2016 and the institutional agreement was signed on 24 March 2017.

53. The architecture of this informative system and database consider different data sources:
 - periodic surveys on people, such as the violence against women survey (to be conducted every 4 years);
 - surveys on gender stereotypes and attitudes towards GBV in the general population and in teenaged group;
 - registered data, such as health data, police data and data from the judicial system;
 - registered data on victims collected by NGO, more specifically shelters, Antiviolence centers and refugee houses and data of victims seeking for help calling the national Antiviolence number -1522.
 - In perspective, the information system will also be enriched by the general social services data.
54. A part of the system also provides information on national and international legislation, address the definition issue of gender based violence, looks at indicators planning, policies undertaken in term of primary and secondary prevention of the phenomenon, best practices on the territory (established networks protocols at local level for the taking care of the victim).
55. The information system has and needs for a permanent collaboration between all the involved institutions and subjects. In addition to the contribution guaranteed by Department of Equality Opportunity (DEO) and Istat, it is very indispensable the synergic involvement of other actors, in particular the Ministries of Justice, internal and health, as well as the system of public research, as well as the system of regions and of local autonomies and the world of NGO. This approach should help to take steps forward in the field of secondary prevention, tracing for example the victim's path in services, which is what the current information is lacking.
56. Istat has already started to interact with the main stakeholders, but only a concrete willingness to convert some information in statistical terms, present in the computerized registers and used only at the operational level, can allow a correct definition of the phenomenon of gender violence. In this perspective, the willingness and commitment of ministries to cooperate in order to make gender-based violence measurable is crucial.
57. In particular, the availability of information on the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator of violence is essential, as well as to establish the link between the information about victim and perpetrator. It is also important to follow the judicial proceedings and to know, for example, the number of acquitted perpetrators and not only the convicted or imprisoned ones. These aspects are also very crucial in order to monitor the effectiveness and efficacy of undertaken policies to combat violence.
58. Furthermore for monitoring gender based violence, it is important to conduct studies to observe the evolution of social relations between men and women, to analyze the impact of women's stereotypes and social image and its change over time. It is important to understand, moreover, how men and women behave in society, considering the various phases and areas of their lives, for example at school, at work, in the family. It is also important to evaluate the undertaken policies, in term of prevention campaigns and raising awareness, for instance in relation to a proper gender relationship in the education system, help to prevent violence itself.
59. Recent studies on social investment (SROI-Social Return on Investment) have highlighted the importance of prevention and raising awareness to stop the cycle of violence. The primary

prevention, in fact, is essential to disrupt the vicious circle of the intergenerational transmission of violence, a mechanism on which the intervention has hitherto been modest.

60. Read and analyzed as a whole, this information will provide an accurate and complete picture of the phenomenon of violence against women in its various forms. It is and it is going to be a high quality observation system, which will allow the governing bodies and all public and private actors involved in contrasting gender based violence to monitor different aspects of the phenomenon.
61. When finished and completely operating, the system will be an essential tool for evaluating the effectiveness of policies undertaken to protect and support the victim and to prevent the phenomenon, in line with the Istanbul convention goals' achievement: protecting women from all forms of violence and preventing, prosecuting and eliminating violence against women and domestic violence.
