Violence against women? What do the men have to say? A prevention project aimed at adolescents in the Milan territory on the theme of violence against women[*]

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Summary. *This article presents the results of a series of interventions carried out on 420 high school students (245 males and 175 females) between 14 and 19 years old in the neighbourhood of Milan during the school year 2010/11. The main goal of the research is to prevent violence against women among students. Particular attention was paid to symbolic and psychological violence and its representation. The research aims to better understand which aspects -among the central and peripheral nucleus- have to be explored in order to induce a change in the behaviour of students. The research applied the Life Skill Training Method (Marmocchi, Dall'Aglio, Zannini, 2004).*

Keywords: *violence against women, adolescence, social representation, prevention, action research.*

According to a 2006 study by the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), persistent harassment, acts of persecution, and psychological violence are carried out in daily life with a very low perception of committing a crime nor of provoking any harm or damage to one's own partner. This phenomenon, besides distinguishing adult couples' behaviour (Romito, 2005), is particularly evidenced within friendship reference groups (Gray & Foshee, 1997) and between adolescent partners (Capaldi, Kim, & Shortt, 2004). The results of a

research commissioned by the Veneto Region (CREL, 2011), a region located on the north east of the country, shows in fact how Italian teenage boys and girls share an asymmetric and basically sexist representation of gender relations, and thus the possible justification of violent action.

Adolescence is that phase in life when pressures on behaviour according to rigid gender models are strongly intensified (Hill, and Linch, 1983), but during which the construction of one's sexual role also takes place, as well as the experiencing of first romantic relationships (Palmonari, 2001). Therefore this must be considered the period of life during which the asymmetric and fundamentally sexist representation of gender relations may be questioned (Hirigoyen, 2006), also through preventive programs within the school system. Hence the need to address not only the issue of physical violence, but primarily that of symbolic violence implied in the couples relationship (Bourdieu, 1998), by reflecting on the representations of violence and of the roles that men and women play in society. As an institution delegated to transmit cultural gender models (Connell, 1996), the school constitutes a privileged place to carry out prevention strategies.

On the basis of these premises, in order to reach out to adolescent boys and girls, the Italian ONG "Ala Milano ONLUS" decided to implement a prevention project on the theme of Violence against Women within High Schools in the Milan territory (Milan is one of the main cities in northern Italy with a population of about 1.3 million).

Project Objectives

General objective:
•   prevent the rise of different manifestations of violence against women among students of both sexes attending High School.

Specific objectives:
•   stimulate the surfacing of the structure of social representation of violence against women;
•   promote greater awareness of the multiple forms in which violence can manifest itself;
•   enhance a process of critical reflection based on the exploration of gender stereotypes present in the class;
•   propose equality-relationship as an alternative to a violent-relationship;

Hypothesis of the research
The present work, based on action research (Colucci, Colombo, & Montali, 2008), is based on four research hypothesis:
1.   that the social representation of violence against women is different according to gender;

2.	that the method implemented by Ala Milano Onlus may produce a good level of interest on the theme of violence on women, beyond gender difference;

3.	that the method adopted by Ala Milano Onlus may favour further reflection on the subjects discussed beyond the duration of the program in the schools;

4.	that the experience of the project may lead the students to a greater capacity to recognize other forms of violence (symbolic), besides physical and sexual.

Method and Model of the Project

The project, financed by funds from the Lombardy Region, for the academic year 2010/2011 took place in the centre and south part of Milan. The project developed over the period from October 2010 to November 2011. The project involved four High Schools, and a total of 420 students (245 boys and 175 girls) between ages 14 and 19, from 21 different classes participated.

Special attention was focused on the creation of a network, for the purpose of building efficacy and resonance around the project through the promotion and the diffusion of information throughout the territory, as well as the involvement of diverse and complementary resources:

❖ Ala Milano Onlus (initiator): establishing contacts with the High Schools and the formation of student's teachers and parents for whom the project was created;

❖	University of Milano Bicocca: Department of Psychology, prof. Elisabetta Camussi for the theoretical supervision;

❖	Public Institutions, Local and Regional Government Offices (Lombardy Region, Milan Province, Local Sanitary Office, municipality organism, monitoring and promoting throughout the territory);

❖	"Filo di Arianna" (Women's Association): collaboration for the notification of cases of violence during the period of the program.

Project Description

For each class, three two-hour meetings were carried out in order to develop the theme of gender violence through live participation activities (Mabrouk, 2007).

At the end of the program, students were offered an opportunity to access a listening post, thus providing the operators with an ulterior possibility of re-elaborating and intercepting problematic situations or risks among the students.

The activities proposed were diversified according to the needs and the characteristics of each specific class.

Following is a description of the project's evolution beginning with the themes which were dealt with and some examples of activities undertaken.

Development of Life Skills

At every meeting we utilized the Life Skill Training method (Marmocchi, Dall'Aglio, & Zannini, 2004), generally adopted for drug abuse prevention projects. The choice of this method and the focus on the development of certain social skills (critical thinking and empathy) was motivated by the theoretically indicated, tight connection between the work carried out in the present and a future relapse of the persons involved (Botvin, Griffin, Diaz, Scheir, Williams, & Epstein, 2000). Furthermore, as indicated by Hirigoyen (2006), the development of social skills during adolescence is the most incisive preventive factor for the prevention of violence in couples during adulthood. Through this method the aim was to develop protective factors in relation to the possibility of becoming either the victim or agent of violent behaviour.

Social Representation of Violence

In order to measure the activities according to the characteristics of each specific class, we decided to start off by allowing the emergence of the social representation (Abric, 1994) of "violence against women" to unfold. So each class started off with a session of Brainstorming (Anzieu & Martin, 1990), and we subdivided into two sub-groups of males and females, so as to facilitate the females participation and also to favour the confrontation of the masculine and feminine points of view (Monacelli & Mancini, 2009).

Each student, individually, wrote on a post-it note, one to three aspects (thoughts, words, phrases) which they associated to the phrase "violence against women", and, consequently pinned it on to a poster. Subsequently, the words that emerged from the two subgroups were then transferred onto the blackboard and discussed together, highlighting via categories the main aspects which had surfaced.

The focus was concentrated specifically on the structure of the representation (Abric, 1994), by defining a central nucleus and a peripheral nucleus, in consideration of the attention which theory places on possible processes of change thereof. As Palmonari (2002) upheld: "the peripheral elements which are those more in relation with the context, undergo changes which, in the long-run, could undermine also the central nucleus and, consequently, the global representation", while "if a change insinuates itself in the central nucleus, the entire representation changes." From this viewpoint, the work done on the representation allowed for the development

of specific activities aimed to re-negotiate the aspects of both the central and the peripheral nuclei.

Increase Knowledge of the Phenomenon

With the purpose of increasing knowledge of the phenomenon of violence and produce a Sense Making (Weick,1995) effect aimed at questioning the structure of the representation, a confrontation was proposed between the students' ideas/knowledge and the objective data published by the ISTAT 2006 research. With the aid of a Quiz Game intended to stimulate their curiosity and the existing knowledge already present in class, the students' task was to discuss and confront the ISTAT research data with their own ideas which had emerged during the Brainstorming session.

This confrontation produced information on the extent and the gravity of the phenomenon, and allowed the correct framing of the problem according to its vastness and complexity, undoing some of the clichés and errors of evaluation.

Furthermore a guided discussion took place on the diverse forms of violence against women as proposed by the OMS (WHO, 2005), hence introducing the concept of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1998) which permeates our daily lives, i.e., those forms of violence which are not exercised as direct physical acts, but by the imposition on the part of a violent person of a certain vision of the world, of rigid social roles and of cognitive categories through which the world is thought of and perceived.

Gender Stereotypes

During the second meeting, it was deemed important to work on the theme of gender stereotypes (Arcuri & Cadinu, 1988) particularly to encourage the students' concentration on the stereotypes existing in society and how such stereotypes may prescribe and contribute to the formulation of masculine and feminine roles (Camussi & Leccardi, 2005). The documentary "Women's Bodies" by Lorella Zanardo (2009) about the role of men and women in the Italian media was screened, followed by a class discussion.

Equality within the Couple

The third meeting was focused on the theme of romantic relationships and of equality within the couple. With the 16 to 18 year old students, the theme was approached by including real life situations and examples; with the 14 and 15 year-olds, who are mostly involved in their first romantic experiences, the work was principally focused on the psychological future (Lewin, 1951), on expectations and imagined future relations, and it favoured the positive representation of equality in the couple's relationship. This type of reflection

may take on a preventive value since it provides students with certain tools which help them recognize and evaluate the degree of parity within the couple.

To this end, the "Well-being Grill" was utilized: each student in turn picked a note where a situation of equality or of inequality was described (ex: each time you go out to dinner, he pays) and then placed it on a poster which pictured a grill with two axis, 1) equality/inequality, 2) well-being/dis-ease. A reflection was stimulated on the concept of equality/parity with the objective of negotiating and building together the meaning of this concept.

Work on the dynamics which emerged from the class group

The Group as container of reciprocal exchange and confrontation was utilized in the class as an indicator of inter-gender relations. Camussi (2008) proposed that abstract considerations were attached to real-life examples which the students could perceive as close to their own experience, in the awareness of what was taking place in the class itself during the group's activity. In the course of the interventions, during the group discussions, we noticed that the males often interrupted the females or paid less attention or importance to their opinion, or they even challenged the girls' right to express their own opinion.

The task of the adult facilitators was to bring attention to these dynamics of manifested male chauvinism or of benevolent sexism (Glick, Fiske, 1996) within the class, so that both the girls and the boys could become aware of certain behaviours and of socially rooted and culturally accepted relational modalities implicit in man-woman relationships. This also led to the reflection on the concept of "power", and how certain cultural mores valued as positive (ex: man always paying for female companion's meal) are in fact aimed at establishing the power of the masculine over the feminine.

Utilizing the relational aspect of the facilitators (man and woman) as leverage to determine change

It was considered important that the work be facilitated by two professionals, one male and one female, and that the formative management of the student assembly should be exercised and marked by equality. By making the experience and the analysis of this relationship appealing, the students could prefigure a process of change.

Working with male youths as potential agents of violence

The ultimate effort to restructure the representation of violence against women consisted in focusing attention on the male members of the class. It is often more difficult for males to recognize the symbolic violence implicit

in certain behaviours and the work they must tackle is more complex since it implies critical observation of oneself, one's way of behaving in the world and the acknowledgement of emotions and desires which might have an aggressive connotation. By working on the gender stereotypes, the objective was to affect that which is defined as the "invisibility of the masculine", or in other words, the incapacity of perceiving oneself as a sexual being (Bellassai, 2004). It was hypothesized that in order to perceive oneself or one's equals as possible agents of violence, a fundamental step must be taken by considering oneself the object rather than the subject of analysis (Connell, 1996).

Evaluation of the Project

In order to evaluate the impact of the work, a partly-structured ad hoc questionnaire was formulated with 6 questions intended to measure: resonance/follow-up in terms of thoughts/discussions beyond the duration of the program; perception of the program's utility; degree of interest; perception of having acquired new knowledge; perception of having acquired greater capacity to recognize situations of violence in daily life and which types of violence; potential interests regarding the themes covered.

The questionnaire was handed out at the end of the three encounters and was returned by each class filled in by each student anonymously, indicating only sex and age.

Analysis of the results

The analysis of the program focused on two aspects:
    (a)   analysis of the social representation of violence against women;
    (b) analysis of the data emerged from the questionnaire;

Analysis of the social representation of violence against women

In order to identify and understand the social representation of violence against women the analysis started off with the Brainstorming session in each class. To compute the results, an analysis of the content was formulated according to theme categories created from reading the data provided during the Brainstorming, on the basis of a Grounded Theory approach (Strauss, Corbin, 1990). The interpretation of the results was developed through a coding theory (Flick, 1998), which consisted in the fragmentation, conceptualization and re-assemblage of information in new ways. This mounted in the development of the following system of categories and sub-categories:

Table 1 The social representation of violence against women.

	FEMALE STUDENTS	MALE STUDENTS
Description of the act of violence	**Different kinds of violence** Violence against women mainly includes "rape", "beating", wounds. However, psychological abuses, such as "lies" and "stalking", also emerge. **Where does the act of violence usually occur?** The acts of violence usually occur in isolated and dangerous places, in a dark environment. Every day life aspects such as "married life"/"double bed" are also mentioned by a minimum percentage.	**Different kinds of violence** The violence against women is mainly described in its physical and sexual aspects. The most widespread perception of violence is connected with "rape", "punches", "insults". Sexual desire permeates the act of violence, which is described with vulgar expressions such as "a dick in the ass", "a dick in the throat", "shut up and come bitch". **Where does the act of violence usually occur?** Violence can occur both in public places ("at work", "on the underground") and in isolated places ("in a car park", "in the wood", "at home", "online").
Reasons of the act of violence	**Social-Cultural Aspects** Factors such as "chauvinism", "male selfishness", "misogyny" and "male fun" are often mentioned as reasons of the violence against women. **Psychological Aspects** The aggressor's "wickedness", "male cowardice" and "madness" are considered as causes of the violence against women. **Relational Aspects** The interviewees speak of relationships which are marked by "no love", "no trust", "jealousy" and "possessiveness". A triggering event such as "infidelity" or "spite" can therefore have serious consequences. **Drug Use/Abuse** None.	**Social-Cultural Aspects** "ignorance" and "chauvinism" are often mentioned as reasons of the violence against women. **Psychological Aspects** The aggressor is viewed as a person who is incapable of controlling his impulses due to a strong "instinct" ("hormones", "strong desire for pussy") and psychological problems ("mental problems", "difficult childhood", "insecurity"). **Relational Aspects** Violence can occur due to couple problems such as "infidelity" and "quarrels". **Drug Use/Abuse** "Alcohol" and "drug" abuse are often mentioned.
Emotional Aspects	Violence is portrayed with a great variety of emotional aspects. "Fear" is the emotion which is most frequently mentioned by the interviewees. The women speak of "shame", a "sense of guilt", "pricks of conscience" and "feeling something is wrong with them". In addition, these aspects are accompanied by "anger", "contempt", "grudge" and "hate" towards the aggressor. The victims feel a sense of "depression", "loneliness", "sadness" and "suffering".	Emotional aspects do not seem to be of great importance. As for the girls, the most often mentioned emotion is "fear". In particular, emotional aspects resulted to be of marginal importance. No emotions connected with the aggressor's experiences are mentioned. However, pleasure, sexual excitement or desire emerge.

Opinions on the Violence	**Negative Opinions** The violence against women arouses a deep sense of "injustice", which is expressed by words as "injustice". **Positive Opinions** None	**Negative Opinions** The act of violence is viewed in a negative way and the action is linked with negative aspects of the aggressor: A "bastard", an "asshole", an "idiot". **Positive Opinion** Although minor, a positive perception of the violence is also expressed. In fact, some interviewees claimed violence "is fair", mentioned "pleasure": "some women deserve it". There were also some ironical comments such as "Can women be touched with a flower at least?".
The Consequences of Violence	**Consequences for the Victim** The consequences of violence are identified in "unplanned pregnancies" and abortions", but more attention is given to the victim's emotional experiences of "depression", anxiety, fear of others, loss of self esteem, loneliness, and incapability of accepting oneself". **Consequences for the Aggressor** Should consist of imprisonment or castration.	**Consequences for the Victim** The main consequence for the students is mostly identified with abortion. Also negative states of mind bring the victim to "stop trusting anyone" and to have fear of getting out of the house. **Consequences for the Aggressor** Mainly consist of imprisonment; varying from Jail to lifetime imprisonment or even death penalty.
Description of the Aggressor	**Territorial Origin** None. **Personality Aspects** They focus mainly on the psychological/behavioural aspects. The man that commits violence is overall "bad", 'weak' and 'mad'. **Typical Social Categories (Stereotype of the Aggressor)** Possible Aggressors are: the mentally ill, serial rapists and family members. **Real People** None.	**Territorial Origin** Aggressors often are foreigners, illegal immigrants, gypsies, Albanians or blacks **Personality Aspects** They are seen as 'cowards', 'mentally ill', 'drunks' and 'alcoholics'. **Typical Social Categories** The types of possible aggressors are many, predominantly 'priests' and paedophiles. **Real People** The real people that are identifiable as possible (aggressors) often are Italian politicians of the centre-right wing (Berlusconi) or fascism (Mussolini). Among them there are also people known to the media to have committed or presumably have committed acts of violence. (M. Tyson, M. Jackson)
Victim's Characteristics	**Personality Traits** They mostly agree on the fact that violence doesn't just happen to women with deter-mined physiological characteristics, but it can happen to any woman. Sometimes though they are likely to point out that the most common type of woman to become a victim of violence is the "easy", the "provocative" one. **Typical Social Categories** The most common types of victims here are children, followed by common women and prostitutes. **Real People** The only real person that emerged in the discussion was Sara Scazzi, made famous by the Italian media as victim of rape	**Personality Traits** In certain cases the students described the victim as a "provocative 'woman, "sexy", "easy". Sometimes also as the type of woman that enjoys being violated. **Typical Social Categories** The most common social category figures are prostitutes. They also mention minors and children. **Real People** The real people been mentioned by the students are Sara Scazzi (real Italian victim of violence), porn stars or escorts or attractive tv hosts.

Opinions on the aggressors	**Negative Opinions** The main opinion among the students is referring the aggressor as "asshole" **Positive Opinions** None.	**Negative Opinions** The aggressor is described by the students as "vile" **Positive Opinions** None.
Opinions on the Victim	**Negative Opinions** The image of the Provocative woman that encourages the act of violence is the main opinion among the students. **Positive Opinions** Besides the image of the victim emerges the one of the woman that has the courage to react to the violence and perhaps finds the strength to start a revolt.	**Negative Opinions** In some cases the students describe the victim as promiscuous, provocative woen, responsible for encouraging the violence. **Positive Opinions** None.

On the basis of the categorical analysis of the Brainstorming, the social representation of violence against women indicates many aspects which are differentiated according to gender, while few aspects are shared. It is therefore hypothesized that there is a homogeneous central nucleus and a differentiated peripheral nucleus in relation to gender.

The central nucleus seems to enclose an image of strictly physical and sexual violence referred to the body, performed by men with psychological problems, in "dark" fearful places, far from domestic life. The victim who emerges seems to be fragile and overpowered by fear, but there is also another aspect of provocation and guilt/blame which might justify the act of violence (ex: betrayal, provocative attire or attitude). This aspect of justification is often associated to relational events such as "betrayal". Such a representation is personified with names of famous politicians or victims of crime published by the news/media during the duration of the program.

The peripheral nucleus on the other hand presents differences tied to gender: symbolic and psychological violence (stalking, domestic/home violence, maltreatment) is more present among female students, less among the male students, who recognize only the action of stalking.

The process of identification constitutes an important difference between the female and male students in regards to their representations. The girls identify themselves more with the victims of violence: they use many words which recall emotional conditions and they indicate a number of relevant consequences.

For the male students, violence is always thought of and represented from a third party position with respect to the aggressor-victim dyad (i.e. judge or censor). A difficulty persists in their self- identification with the aggressor. It is probably difficult and uncomfortable for a teenage boy to think of violence, such as violence against women, as a specific gender phenomenon. To understand this, the interesting fact is the desirability of a violent act indicated in the male students' use of terms connected to sex and pornography, while by contrast they in fact disapprove of individuals who

commit acts of violence. A possible hypothesis is that the desirability of violent action may draw males closer to the idea that they themselves could be aggressors; consequently, as a form of defence, negative and devaluating judgements may be cast on the aggressor ("vile", "coward", "loser") and a process of removal might emerge in order to identify the aggressor with someone very removed from an ordinary man or youth: the "foreigner" (the stranger), the "extracomunitary" (foreigner from outside the European Union), the "clandestine" (illegal immigrant), the "gypsy", and with little capacity for self-control ("crazy", "mentally ill", "drug-addict/drunkard"). The male students find it difficult to identify themselves with the victim.

The issue of identification emerges also in the idea of the consequences of violence: while the females easily point out the psychological and emotional effects for the victim, for the aggressor they indicate only penal consequences. The boys, on the other hand, identify mostly with the physical consequences for the victim (ex: abortion), and penal consequences for the aggressor. A last important difference regarding judgement of violence is that the female representation entails a strong negative judgement in connection with both to the aggressor and the act; the male representation, instead, sees a very negative connotation of the aggressor, accompanied however by a certain degree of desirability/pleasure regarding the act.

The importance of these differences, as well as of the shared aspects of the problem, must be taken into consideration. They are to be considered helpful in the choice of action to be undertaken for the de-construction of the representation and the introduction of new elements.

Analysis of the data resulting from the questionnaire

In order to evaluate the resonance of the debated themes, in the form of ideas and discussions, two questions were put to the students: 1) Did you reflect over the issues we discussed at the end of the program?; 2) Did you ever speak with your friends, parents, professors or classmates about the violence of gender, at the end of the program?

In response to question no.1: 79.3% (333 out of 420) of the students confirm that they discussed the themes after the end of the program. Out of the 87 negative answers, 71 (81.6%) came from the males. Hence, the efficacy of the project is not limited only to the work in class.

In response to question no.2: 61.4% confirmed that they spoke with friends, parents, professors or classmates about gender violence, outside of the school premises and after the program ended. This process is evidenced by the females, 74.3% of whom said to have spoken about it (130 out of 175), as well as by males (128 out of 245). In 52.2% of cases, the male students have introduced the theme within the framework of "discussions about life". Considering the males' reluctance to approach the subject, this data is significant. According to the high percentages tabulated, it is believed

that the project produced an amplified effect in the territory, beyond the school premises, which involved reference groups.

Subsequently, the perception of the utility of the project was investigated with two specific questions: (a) Do you think you have learned something useful during these meetings?; (b) How useful do you think these class encounters have been?.

Almost the total number of participants, some 92.1% (387 out of 420), said that they learned something useful during the meetings. The positive answers came from 97.7% of the females and 88.2% of males. 96.9% of students experienced a satisfactory (very much 15.2%, much 45.5%, enough 36.2%) sense of correlation between their own formative needs and the contents of discussion of the program. Only 3.1% did not find the program useful, a percentage which covers answers mostly from the male students.

The distribution of percentages between the males and females does not denote any particular difference, apart from one light perception of greater utility on the part of the females. The homogeneous distribution of the perception of utility leads to the conclusion that the program was functional in reaching out to the class, addressing both potential "performers" and potential "victims".

The previous question n.5 (Do you believe you have achieved greater capacity to recognize situations of violence in daily life?) intended to investigate the participants' perception of having become more competent in identifying situations of violence. The majority (69.5%) confirmed having acquired such competence. Since the percentage of the answers from the males and females differ merely by a few points, such acquisition may be considered to be quite homogeneous.

The students were then asked which types of violence they were now capable of recognizing. Numerous answers indicated "on-line violence" and "stalking", but also, especially the females, indicated "psychological violence" and "domestic violence". Both the male students, but especially the female students confirm that they are capable of instantly recognizing perceptible manifestations of violence such as physical violence, but also more subtle manifestations such the lack of respect during discussions: interruptions and underrating of words and ideas expressed by the female classmates.

Lastly, the students were asked to indicate which themes they would like to study further. Two principal themes were indicated: parity/equality between men and women, its meaning and how to develop it; and representations of men and women/the stereotypes.

Conclusions and hypothesis for future projects

The students' social representation as emerged from the categorical analysis of the Brainstorming results indicates many differentiated aspects

on the basis of gender, and only a few aspects that are shared. Hence we suppose that there is the presence of a homogeneous central nucleus and a differentiated peripheral nucleus in reference to gender. We may therefore conclude that the representation of violence against women, as hypothesized, is differentiated according to gender group membership, even though an undifferentiated and homogeneous central nucleus exists. The differences relating to the peripheral nucleus can be explained by the position from which the act of violence is represented: the females identified themselves with the victims, while the males estranged themselves from the dyad victim-aggressor, taking on the role of judge or censor. We believe that the central nucleus is shared within the cultural framework and social context of the Milan territory, but also in the vaster context of Italian culture in general.

A second research hypothesis is in regards to the degree of interest aroused by the project. The analysis of the results of the questionnaire and the level of active participation during the meetings confirm that the themes which were tackled in class aroused widespread interest both among the females and the males. The results of the analysis show a slightly higher level of interest among the females, but also that there is evidence of an openness and interest in discussing gender themes, especially regarding violence against women, also among the males.

The third research hypothesis, i.e., that the method implemented by Ala Milano Onlus favors further reflection and follow-up on the themes covered during the program, is also evidenced by the results of the questionnaire, where the students confirm that they have thought and spoken about those themes beyond the program and outside the school premises.

Finally, it is hypothesized that the program structured in this manner offers the students a greater capacity to recognize other forms of violence (symbolic), in addition to physical and sexual violence. By confronting the students' social representation of violence introduced at the beginning of the program with the results of the evaluation of the questionnaire, we can state that the Life Skill Training Laboratory is an effective instrument for the development of greater capacities to recognize other forms of violence. It is worth nothing than the initial representation of violence against women did not include domestic violence, which is a type of violence which is removed or not often recognized. During the program the students were informed of its existence and were stimulated to reflect on various different aspects of the problem.

The issue of equality within the couples relationship approached during the meetings with the aim of preventing relational violence, aroused interest both with the females and the males, who in many cases expressed their desire to study further this subject in the future.

It is interesting to highlight that during the interventions aimed at de-constructing gender stereotypes and stimulating reflections on equality/parity in the couple, students were able to acknowledge that equality within the couple is associated with an increase in well-being for both members of the

couple and that relationships based on equality and on reciprocal respect may realistically be more satisfactory.

It seems that the interventions have in fact increased the students knowledge of the phenomenon as well as provided a greater awareness regarding the causes and consequences of the different forms of violence. They have become aware of the fact that there is more than just physical or sexual violence and that there are other forms of violence that are more difficult to identify, such as symbolic violence.

The program however introduces some critical aspects which must be taken into consideration should other similar projects be undertaken in the future. One of these aspects consists in the possibility of reinforcing the very stereotypes in question, and to consolidate forms of virility intended to protect female classmates from violent individuals, by shifting the attention away from the cultural model which favours violence against women. In order to avoid these critical aspects, it is necessary to explicitly represent violence against women within the class-group itself, negotiating and marking the meanings, the beliefs and the experiences associated to the phenomenon. On the basis of these co-constructed meanings, it is possible to enact special activities and projects which will meet the needs of each specific context.

In view of an improvement and future project planning, three additional elements can be proposed to be integrated into the research. These suggestions, if implemented, would promote the development of a better research project, and a more refined evaluation which could consolidate the promotion of a greater awareness.

The three suggestions are:

➢ utilizing quantitative standardized tools pre/post encounters in order to measure the impact of the research project, identifying both the changes which have taken place as well as the changes which have not occurred. This process could allow for a better assessment of the project's objectives and would provide guidelines to modify or integrate the method to be applied;

➢ audio-tape the encounters in class, and carry out subsequent analysis of the transcriptions. A qualitative analysis of the recorded material would lead to a clearer definition of the representation of violence against women provided by the students;

➢ video-tape the encounters, developing a grill of qualitative analysis of the behaviour of the female and male students in class. This procedure could lead to a more profound definition of how relational violence is produced in a class and would strongly improve the efficacy of future projects.

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