

*Violence Against Women? An Evaluation of the Intervention Method Adopted by Ala Milano Onlus**

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Summary. *This long abstract presents the state of the art results achieved by the Italian ONG “Ala Milano Onlus” in the development of some prevention programs of violence against women among students, using the Life Skill Training Method (Marmocchi, Dall’Aglia & Zannini, 2004).*

After carrying out some intervention programs in various schools in Milan and the surrounding neighborhoods of Milan for three consecutive years (2009/2012), in early 2013 we will carry out a more systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of the intervention model used. The hypothesis to be tested is that the students who took part in the intervention projects show a lower level of sexism and a higher level of equality when compared to the group of non participating students.

Key words: *violence against women, adolescence, evaluation, ASI, equality in relationships*

During the school year 2010/2011 a series of interventions were carried out in the neighbourhood of Milan: 420 high school students (245 males and 175 females) aged between 14 and 19 were involved in the project. The main goal of the research was the prevention of violence against women

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among students, with a special attention on symbolic and psychological violence and the concepts that this kind of violence is associated to (Picco, Caravà & Ferrario, 2011). 'Ala Milano' also carried out two additional projects in which the staff met the students of four classes in the school year 2009/2010 and the students of five classes in the school year 2011/2012. These interventions were based on the Life Skill Training Method (Marmocchi, Dall'Aglio & Zannini, 2004).

The interventions performed in the school year 2010/2011 were evaluated through the administration of a partly-structured ad hoc questionnaire and an analysis of 21 brainstorming questions on the stimulus expression: "violence against women" carried out in the classes involved in the project. The questionnaire results show that the intervention gave rise to an availability and a careful consideration of gender issues among the students: Specifically, violence against women, as well as issues concerning equality in relationships, were deeply developed. The results also show that such issues were carefully examined even when the students were not participating in the project at school. Compared with the social representation of violence that the male and female students had at the beginning of the intervention, the qualitative results of the questionnaire also show a greater capacity to imagine and recognize forms of symbolic violence besides physical and sexual violence. In the light of this data, we can conclude that the model proposed by Ala Milano Onlus is effective in preventing the phenomenon of violence against women, in particular because it helps those involved to perceive violence in a more complex manner, by including symbolic and relational aspects, in addition to those strictly physical. This makes the boys and girls more aware and more competent in recognizing different kinds of violence, both in their own relationships and in the relationships of other people.

However, we have now opted for a more systematic evaluation of the intervention examined that were carried out with the same method in the school years 2009/2010 and 2011/2012. The project will involve the students of three high schools, two of which (22 classes) have already taken part in some prevention interventions, and one school which has never taken part in such projects.

This evaluation aims at testing the effectiveness of the method adopted by the Italian ONG Ala Milano ONLUS through the assessment of the level of sexism, which in the literature is identified as a triggering factor for violence against women (Gray & Foshee, 1997) and through an assessment of the level of equality in relationships, intended as an alternative to symbolic violence (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2005).

The hypothesis to be tested is that the students who took part in the intervention projects show a lower level of sexism and a higher level of gender parity in relationships when compared with the non participating students. A qualitative-quantitative method will be used for the evaluation. Quantitative data will be gathered to evaluate the levels of sexism in an extensive way, while a qualitative method will be used for a precise and deep analysis of gender parity in relationships. The Italian version of the ASI – Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996) will be submitted to all the male and female students at three high schools. The evaluation will consider whether the intervention method adopted by Ala Milano Onlus can successfully modify the levels of sexism at different ages and in different contexts depending on the time expired from the end of the intervention, and whether differences can be observed in the levels of sexism in the interventions performed by two staff members of different genders (man/woman) or of the same gender (woman/woman).

A qualitative method will be used to evaluate gender parity in relationships (Tuites & Tuites, 1997) and a focus group discussion will be used to investigate the social representation of gender parity in relationships (Abric, 1994) and the attitudes that are associated with it (Tuites & Tuites, 1997). The participants of every focus group will come from the same school year. Six focus groups will be organized, three with male and female students involved in the prevention interventions and three with male and female students not involved in the prevention interventions. The reports from the focus group discussions will then be analysed with the quali-quantitative software T-LAB and through an analysis of the paper and pencil content.

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