

Escaping from violence: a path towards knowledge^{*}

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Summary. *The phenomenon of domestic violence is a growing reality, even in a provincial town like Rovigo (PD). In our study we collected data from the local anti-violence center, which enabled a picture of the situation to emerge that was filtered through the eyes of the staff that work there. Starting from the initial interview, going through a process of psychological restructuring and legal counselling, we try to provide women with the tools they need to get out of the cycle of violence.*

Key words: *gender violence, Rovigo, Anti-Violence Service*

According to the World Health Organization, at least one in five women has been physically or sexually abused by a man in the course of her life. And the greatest risk are family members, husbands and fathers, followed by friends, neighbors, colleagues and close acquaintances of work or study (WHO, 2002).

In Italy the largest statistical study on domestic violence is a piece of research carried out by ISTAT in 2006. The study shows that "the phenomenon of physical and sexual violence by men against women covered a third of women who live in Italy: the number is, in fact, 6 million and 734 000 (31.9%) women who are victims of such violence in the course of their lives "(ISTAT, 2007, p.1).

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It is important that in every sphere of society that information is disseminated on the existence of specialized centers able to help women in need.

One of these centers is also active in our little Rovigo: This is the Anti-Violence Service, founded in 2008 and located in the Social Services of the City. It is made up of a social worker, a psychologist and an advocate, providing free social, psychological and legal advice.

Among the most important goals of the project are the protection of women in our area, the level of awareness regarding the issue of violence and the processing of data relating to cases of violence against women in the areas concerned.

The approach of the Service is usually through a first telephone contact. The answering-machine system, active 24 hours a day, uses a toll-free number through which women can leave their contact details at any time. As soon as the message is heard or the call received the operator re-contacts the user and sets the first interview.

The first interview carried out by the workers with the female victim of violence is of fundamental importance, as it is in this initial delicate phase that the needs, requirements and demands of a fragile person, who is in search of help, must be understood.

In the interview the activities performed by the Anti-Violence Service and the help that it can offer are illustrated.

After the first meeting an "internal map" is constructed, which is then shared as a team. At that time the boundaries of the individual project on women are defined.

Starting from the individualized design, each woman defines the specific objectives that need to be monitored over time through weekly or fortnightly meetings, useful for the ongoing understanding of the successes achieved.

The primary purpose of the project is to start the woman on a path of self-development, aimed at change, which takes into account all social, health, psychological, economic, business and accommodational aspects.

Great importance is given to the collection of statistical data on the women taken into care.

As far as the victim of violence, the data collected relates to: citizenship, residence/domicile, age, education, occupation, economic status, marital status, housemate(s), children. With regard to the perpetrator the following data is collected: nationality, age, education, occupation; with regard to the violence the data collected is as follows: type of violence, place, time, repeated frequently, complaint/lawsuit.

In addition, the date relating to the access of the woman to the Anti-Violence Service and when the woman was taken up as a case.

The considerations that emerge from a first analysis of the data are the following: the victims of violence who have applied to the Service of Anti-Violence Rovigo, in the period from June 2011 to June 2012, are mostly Italian citizens (61.54%), living in very similar percentages in Rovigo (46.15%) and the province (44.23%) and a percentage of around 9% residing outside the province of Rovigo.

With regard to the age, the band most affected is that which goes from 36 years to 45 (42.31%), just after that in order of magnitude is the band that goes from 18 to 35 (30.77%). The percentage of the band 46-55 years (21.15%) is also significant.

In order of study title, 50% of the victims only made compulsory schooling, but 32.69% have a high-school diploma and 15.38% are graduates.

The majority of female victims of violence are not employed (53.85%) and only 34.62% are financially independent, while the others depend mostly (32.69%) on the spouse/former spouse/former partner/ex boyfriend.

The majority of women who have applied to the Anti-Violence Service are separated/divorced (44.23%), but a relatively high percentage (28.85% + 9.62%) are, respectively, married and living together.

More than 50% of the percentage of female victims of violence have young children who have witnessed violence.

With regard to the data on the perpetrators of violence 69.23% of them are Italian citizens, while the age groups most affected are respectively those between 36-45 years (40.38%) and 46-55 years (32.69%), but the data concerning the age group of 56 is certainly not negligible (13.46%).

Nearly 80% of the perpetrators of violence have stable work and almost all are spouses/partners/boyfriends or former spouses/former partners/ex boyfriends (respectively 44.23% and 48.08%).

The prevalent type of violence is physical and psychological (44.23%) and the place of violence is in the home in beyond 80% of the cases (82.69%).

The majority of women (67.31%) suffer from violence over many years, and in nearly 90% of cases (88.46%) they are not individual and sporadic episodes, but the violence is repeated with a frequency of once or several times per week (71.15%).

As for the complaint, approximately half of the women lodged one (53.85%), but one must keep in mind that in very rare cases does the complaint show the real situation of violence suffered by the woman. In almost all cases does the exasperated woman turn to the police, and in that

case recounts only the occurrence of the latest episode, often havin no medical records relating to violence against her, since she is not able to go to the ER.

In this way, a fact that should be included in the offenses of maltreatment in the family ends up being contested as an offense of beatings or minor/very slight injury.

The considerations relating to the numbers listed above are manifold. The approach of the Service, however, is to elaborate statistical data in the hope that in the future they can be compared with those collected by other agencies or services.

For this reason, a collaboration with the Police of Rovigo and the ER has been initiated.

Conclusions

What we want and are interested in publicising is the importance of information and the awareness of individuals, institutions, public and school regarding the culture of non-violence.

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize that violence against women is a hidden phenomenon, which can be effectively countered through prevention: the dissemination of information on this subject can help women not to feel alone and to find the courage to denounce the violence at its first appearance. Information is also of fundamental importance in society in order to increase the awareness of how serious and widespread the phenomenon is, thereby strengthening the antibodies that can help fight it and thus defeat it once and for all.

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