

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:  
CHARACTERISTICS, CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES**

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## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

What is affection, intimacy, and love relationships? In life there are stimulating meetings that push us to give the best of ourselves, there are also others that undermine us and they can end up destroying us.

It is fairly common and normal for family conflicts to occur, since the conflict itself is evolutive and allows personal and group growth. This is to be distinguished from marital violence: it is not the striking or the offensive word, but the asymmetry in the relationship. In a couple's conflict, everyone's identity is preserved, the other being respected as a person, while this is not the case in the violent relationship when the purpose is to dominate or annihilate the other (Hirigoyen, 2005).

The World Health Organization (WHO, 1996) defines **Domestic Violence** "Any form of physical, psychological or sexual violence that affects subjects who have, had or intend to have an intimate relationship, couple or subjects who have within their family relationships of parental or affective nature."

The family is often identified as a place of protection where people look for love, hospitality, security, shelter, and it is the place where people take shape and establish the first bonds of attachment. In some cases, it becomes a place that endangers life and produces some of the most dramatic forms of violence committed on women and girls. Violence in the home environment is in most cases committed by men who have or have had a relationship of trust, intimacy and power with the victims: husbands, boyfriends, fathers, mothers, patrons, brothers, uncles, sons, or other relatives. Even women can be violent, but their actions amount to a minimum percentage of cases.

## THE VARIOUS FORMS OF VIOLENCE

Violence takes on many forms and modes, though physical violence is the most recognizable. What is meant by **physical violence** is the use of any act guided by the intention of hurting or terrorizing the victim. Acts related to physical violence are: throwing objects, pushing, smacking, biting, kicking or punching, striking or trying to hit with an object, beating, suffocating, threatening with a firearm or cutting weapon, using

a firearm or cutting weapon. Such forms are used in offenses of perjury, personal injury, private violence, domicile or kidnapping.

**Sexual violence** includes the imposition of unwanted sexual practices or relationships that physically harm and that are detrimental to dignity, obtained by threats of various kinds. The imposition of sexual intercourse or an unwanted intimacy is an act of humiliation, overwhelming and subjugation, which provokes in the victim deep psychological wounds as well as physical. Social prejudice in many contexts is that forced sex within marriage is not considered a violence. The assumption is that once a woman contracts with a marriage contract, her husband has the right to have unlimited sexual access to his wife, but the nonviolent sexual act is represented by the dimension of individual freedom.

**Psychological violence** encapsulates any form of abuse that is detrimental to the woman's identity, such as verbal attacks (derision, verbal harassment, insult, denigration) aimed at persuading the woman to "not value anything" to better keep it under control. Psychological violence is isolating the woman, moving her away from social support or hindering her access to economic resources in order to limit her independence. Often, jealousy and obsessiveness are seen as manifestations of love, while excessive control, repeated accusations of infidelity, and control of his attendance are a mode of pathological relationship. Psychological Violence is also to be betrayed, lying, deceiving, silent days, enduring refusal to give domestic or educational help in raising the child, pursuing, and subtracting documents. Other psychological forms of violence are: verbal threats of abuse against her and her friend and/or family network, repeated threats of abandonment or divorce; Damage or destruction of the property of the woman; Violence on animals dear to the woman and/or her children. In psychological violence these modes do not fall into a momentary anger, which can occur in situations of conflict between partners, but are constant and intentional dynamics with the aim of subduing the other and maintaining their power and control. A particular form of psychological violence, mainly implemented by the ex-partner after the end of a relationship, is stalking, or a controlling behaviour carried out by the persecutor against the victim from whom he has been refused. Often the stalker's conduct is sneaky, aimed at harassing the victim and putting her in a state of subjection, with the intent of compromising her serenity, making her feel restricted nevertheless not free.

**Economic violence** is difficult to record as a form of violence: social prejudice is that the management of family finances belongs to man. Economic violence, on the other hand, concerns all situations where access to family finances is limited or denied, the financial situation and resources of the family are hidden. Jealousy and the will to isolate and control the woman puts in place mechanisms for prohibiting, hindering or boycotting the partner's employment. Other forms of economic violence are the non-fulfilment of the maintenance duties established by law; The exploitation of women as a workforce in family economic activities without giving any kind of remuneration; Appropriating women's savings or earnings to use them for their own benefit; The implementation of any form of legal protection for his personal gain only (for example, the deeds of real estate). The economic form of direct control, which limits and/or prevents the woman's independence, often does not allow the subtraction from a destructive maltreatment relationship.

While on one hand the consequences of physical violence are more "visible" than psychological wounds, other forms of violence such as repeated humiliations and persistent insults, forcible isolation, limitations of social mobility, constant threats of violence and striking, the deprivation of their own economic resources, are thinner and more insidious. The intangible nature of these forms of violence makes them more difficult to define and denounce, and often women are brought to a situation of mental instability and impotence.

## **VIOLENCE IN A WOMAN'S LIFE**

Violence against women is often a cycle of maltreatment that manifests itself in many forms throughout their lives. The common idea is that such violent behaviours take place on the part of strangers, but the statistical data show that most of the violence takes place in the "domestic" environment, understood as a context of proximity and intimacy. Effects of family violence can occur during pregnancy, with damaging effects on the foetus (malformations, psycho-motive delays, disability, etc.). During childhood, girls may be victims of physical, psychological, sexual violence, including real and virtual child pornography. In some cultures, there are forms of violence against girls who may include: forced malnutrition, lack of access to health care and education, incest, female genital mutilation, early marriage and coercion to prostitution or to coercive work. Some women then continue an adult life of suffering, beatings, rapes, and

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even homicides by the hands of intimate people. Already during the first sentimental relations, there are signs of risk of physical and psychological violence. Various forms of ill-treatment affecting adolescent and adult women are: sex linked to economic reasons (eg. female students who have sex with mature men in exchange for money for studies); incest; sexual harassment at work; rape; sexual harassment; prostitution and forced pornography; trading of women; Conjugal rape; Ill-treatment of disabled women; Forced pregnancy. Furthermore, in the last part of life, even widows and older women may experience severe physical and/or psychological harassment. The woman may apparently have the freedom to interrupt her marital relationship, but is actually held "captive" by the fear of further violence against her and her children, or by the lack of resources or support on the part of the family, Community or by the legal system. Shame, fear of revenge, lack of information about their rights, lack of trust in the legal system, or fear of it, as well as the legal costs involved, make women more vulnerable and isolated in seeking help.

## CAUSES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

There is not just one single cause of violence against women, especially in the family. Many complex and interconnected factors, both institutional and social or cultural, have kept women in a position of particular vulnerability to violence against them. All of these factors are manifestations of historically unbalanced force relationships between the sexes. Among them, we find the socio-economic forces, the establishment of the family where the relationships of strength, fear and desire to control female sexuality are expressed, the idea of the inherent superiority of the male, and the traditional laws and cultures that have always denied women and girls a legal and social status of independence.

Lack of economic resources strengthens the vulnerability of women and their difficulty in escaping a violent relationship. The opposite is also true: the growing importance of the economic role and independence of women is perceived as a threat and stimulates an increase in male violence. Specifically, when the male partner is unemployed, he is able to escape the symbolic power of possession in the family.

Experiences during childhood, such as having witnessed domestic violence scenes or being subjected to physical and sexual abuse, are identifiable as a risk factor for children. From these experiences, children sometimes learn to resort to violence as a way to deal with conflicts and affirm their own virility. Excessive consumption of

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alcohol and other narcotics has also been identified as a triggering factor for aggressive and violent behaviour of humans against women and children.

The isolation of women in their families and communities contributes significantly to promoting violence, especially if the women in question have limited access to the family or local organizations. The causes of violence are precisely the limitation in socialization and the need to relate to the outside of marital and/or sentimental relationship. This limitation often affects other groups of women, both in formal (family) and informal networks (associations or groups), which may represent a different pattern of relationship, based on equality and acceptance of difference, models that contrast the violent relational typology.

Until recently, the distinction between public and private underlying the majority of legal systems has been a major obstacle to affirming women's rights. Recent measures have legitimized the offense of gender violence and femicide, including the Istanbul International Convention of 2011 at international level and Law 119/2011 at national level. However, it is often the case that law enforcement officials sit side by side with those who are guilty of mistreatment man, due to prejudices and little knowledge of the dynamics of domestic violence. In addition, despite the recognition of the offense and the greater applicability of the penalties, there is no decrease in cases of domestic violence, since the underlying common thought is the idea that when violence occurs in an intimate relationship, it is easier to justify a violent attitude among partners.

## **CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLENCE IN FAMILY ENVIROMENT**

The most significant consequence of violence against women and girls is the negation of their fundamental human rights, as with any form of maltreatment, it is harmful not only to women and girls but to society as a whole. In fact, violence against women hinders the progress of human and economic development. Women's participation has become a central element of all social development programs, whether environmental, poverty-stricken, or improving administrative structures. By stifling the full participation of women, countries are “throwing into the wind” half of the human capital of their population.

Important consequences of domestic violence are found in the physical and mental health of women and children. The type of damage suffered is from hematoma and

fracture to permanent disability, such as partial loss of hearing or sight, or disfigurement due to burns. Medical complications resulting from female genital mutilation may go from haemorrhage and sterility to severe psychological trauma. In many countries, studies have found elevated levels of violence during pregnancy, with serious health risks for both the mother and the foetus. In the worst cases, all these examples of domestic violence can lead to the death of a woman by the hand of her partner or ex-partner. Sexual assaults and rape can cause unwanted pregnancies and the dangerous complications resulting from the practice of illegal abortion. Girls who have suffered sexual harassment in their childhood are more likely to take risky behaviours as early sexual relations, and are more likely to have unwanted or premature pregnancies. Women undergoing violent situations are less likely to use contraception or to be able to use precautions in sexual intercourse, thus posing a high risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS.

The impact of violence on women's mental health has serious and fatal consequences. Women who have been beaten suffer high levels of stress and stress-related illness, such as posttraumatic stress syndrome, panic attacks, depression, sleep and nutritional disorders, high blood pressure, alcoholism, drug abuse and poor self-esteem. For some women, fatally depressed and unwrapped by ill-treatment, there is no other way of escape from a violent relationship than suicide.

Children who have experienced domestic violence scenes or who have been a victim of it first-hand have health and behavioural problems, including weight or sleep disorders. They may have difficulty in school and fail to develop intimate and positive relationships. They can try to flee or even show suicidal tendencies.

Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome complex, develops In many victims of domestic violence. Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome complex differs from PTSD for severe, prolonged and repeated traumas, especially of interpersonal nature. The following features may be present:

- **Alteration in emotion regulation:** therefore, it is difficult to modulate anger and fear, self-behaviours, suicidal behaviours or concerns, difficulties in modulation of sexual involvement, excessive tendency to risky behaviours.
- **Disturbances of consciousness and attention:** amnesia of some moments or years of own life, transient dissociative episodes, depersonalization.
- **Somatizations:** digestive system disorders, chronic pain, cardiopulmonary symptoms, and sexual dysfunction symptoms.

- **Alterations of self-perception:** sense of impotence and poor personal effectiveness, feeling of being damaged, sense of guilt and excessive responsibility, pervasive shame, idea not to be understood by others.
- **Alterations in the perception of abusing figures:** tendency to take on the prospect of the other (<< I deserved it>>), the idealization of the mistreatment, fear of damaging the mistreatment.
- **Relational disorders:** inability or difficulty to have confidence in others, tendency to be victimized again, tendency to victimize others.
- **Alteration in personal meanings:** despair and sense of unswerving, negative self-perception, loss of personal convictions.

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## STATISTICAL DATA ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

According to research conducted by the Equal Opportunity Department and the National Institute of Statistics of 5 June 2015, for the five years of 2009/2014, 31.5% of Italian women between 16 and 70 years have suffered physical or sexual violence at least once in their life. That's approximately (6,788,000) 6 million, 788 thousand people, one woman out of three. Among the forms of violence: 20.2% suffered physical violence, 21% sexual violence, and 5.4% more serious forms of sexual violence such as rape and rape attempts. There are 652,000 women who have been raped and 746,000 victims of attempted rape. Current or former partners commit the most serious violence. 62.7% of rape is committed by a current or former partner. The authors of sexual harassment are instead unknown in most cases (76.8%). Considering the total violence perpetrated by women with children, the percentage of children who have experienced violence on their mother increases (from 60.3% in 2006 to 65.2% in 2014).

According to the Grevio - Group of Experts on Action against Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence - domestic violence "could be compared to a low-intensity civil war but, as they do not need F35 and Kalashnikovs to counteract it, it seems less interesting. The survey says that the cruellest violence happens thanks to the hands of current partners or ex, family members and family friends, and this has to deeply question contemporary society, that lives looking for the ideal love".

It is at the time of separation that violence becomes more serious, especially when the woman denounces the violence suffered. From the research of ISTAT, it emerges that the main or predominant cause of separation is the violence suffered during the cohabitation period and the phenomenon of stalking committed by the ex-partner during the separation is also a frequent occurrence.

## REGULATIONS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The issue of violence against women was faced at a supranational level already in 1979, with the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW), an international agreement that places inequality and discrimination against Women within the context of poverty, race, health and political representation, including discrimination within the domestic walls.

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After ten years in 1989, the CEDAW Committee was set up to monitor the implementation of the Convention, with General Recommendation n.12, explicitly invites States to periodically report on laws and initiatives at national level to protect women from every form of violence in daily life and to provide them with assistance and services. Already in 1980, the Second World Conference on the Juridical and Social Condition of the Woman, it was established that violence against women seems to be the most silenced form in the world. Thirteen years later, the Human Rights World Conference of Vienna supposed the recognition of the rights of the women as Human rights. In the same way, the Convention about the elimination of all the forms of discrimination against the woman (CEDAW), in its general recommendation n ° 19, stated in 1993, that "The Violence against the woman is a form of discrimination that seriously prevents the possession of rights and freedom in equality with man". This definition includes the violence based on the gender, that is to say, violence against the woman motivated by her gender or that it affects her in disproportionate form. It includes acts that inflict wounds or sufferings of physical, mental or sexual nature, threaten to commit such acts, coercion and other forms of privation of the freedom. Two years later, in 1995, the Fourth World Conference on the Juridical and Social Condition of the Woman, started a new chapter by shifting women's focus to the concept of gender, recognizing that the whole structure of society, and all the relationships between men and women within that structure, had to be reevaluated.

The issue of violence against women was also deepened in the 1995 Beijing Conference, which stressed that violence against women is both a violation of women's human rights and an impediment to the full enjoyment of all their rights and has established three strategic objectives: to implement integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women, to study the causes and consequences of violence, to eliminate the trading of women and to assist victims of violence.

In the fight against domestic violence, we also recall the Council of Europe Recommendation 1582 of 2002, which proposes various instruments to combat this form of violence, such as guaranteeing free advocacy for female victims of violence, opening women's listening centres, developing cooperation between institutions and non-governmental organizations, increasing the relationship between central and local institutions.

Among the various activities undertaken by The Council of Europe to counteract this phenomenon, it has launched a European awareness campaign and information campaign, in particular on domestic violence, and with Recommendation 1681 of 2004 invited the formation of a Task- Transnational force implementing awareness-raising campaigns and having the task of assessing the progress achieved at national level during their implementation.

On 7 April 2011, The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers adopted the Istanbul Convention, which is defined as "the first legally binding international instrument establishing a comprehensive legal framework to protect women against all forms of violence", focusing on violence prevention, Domestic violence, the protection of the victims and the punishment of the transgressors.

The Convention is the first international treaty to contain a gender definition. In fact, art. 3, became. C), gender is defined as "roles, behaviors, activities and socially constructed attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men."

It defines violence against women as a violation of human rights and as a form of discrimination (Article 3 (a)). Countries should exercise due diligence in preventing violence, protecting the victims and prosecuting the perpetrators (Article 5).

In Italy, the Istanbul Convention was ratified in July 2013, converted into law on October 15, 2013, no. 119 published in Official Gazette 15 October 2013, n. 242. The measure enriches the code of aggravating new ones and at the same time extends the measures to protect the victims of domestic abuse and domestic violence. The text also targets resources to fund an anti-violence action plan and a shelter network, it also makes provisions for other criminal offenses involving acts such as robbery or robbery.

The main additions concern the affective relationship: as of now, the focus is on the relationship between any two persons, regardless of coexistence or marriage constraint (current or past). As for witnessed violence, the code is enriched with a new aggravating common ground applicable to maltreatment in the family and to all crimes of physical violence committed in the face of harm or in the presence of minors or in the detriment of pregnant women. In particular, Art. 61 c.p. n. 11 quinquies and the Istanbul Convention states that witnessed violence is not only when the child sees and experiences directly the beatings, insults, threats and

suffering to which the parent has been exposed, but even if this violence is not carried out directly in front of the child's eyes, but becomes known to the child through the perception of its effects.

As for the aggravated stalking of a spouse, it is no longer considered that the legal separation or divorce needs to be a condition.

## HOW TO INTERVENE IN SITUATIONS OF HOME VIOLENCE

During the last 5 years, physical or sexual violence has risen from 11.3%, to 13.3% compared to the previous five years. This is due to more information, fieldwork, but above all about better capacity of women to prevent and combat the phenomenon and a social climate of greater condemnation of violence. The greater ability of women to escape violence or prevent it is accompanied by greater awareness. More often, violence is reported to be a crime (from 14.3% to 29.6% for partner violence) and is being denounced more so now to law enforcement (6.7% to 11.8%). Victims often talk to someone (from 67.8% to 75.9%) and seek help from specialized services such as anti-violence centres (2.4% to 4.9%).

According to L.119 / 2013, anyone who becomes aware of domestic violence has the duty to report the situation to the Forces of the Order, who have an obligation to intervene in order to ascertain the facts. After reporting, Law Enforcement, Social Services or any institution may indicate to the woman who is subjected to violence, the nearest violence action centre, which are also traceable through the national telephone number 1522.

The Violence Centre welcomes the woman in difficulty predominantly in two ways: the first involves a path of psychological, legal and / or health support with the goal of escaping the violence; The second modalities include, where the woman needs protection and hospitality, a shelter home is offered in the victim's country of residence. The first goal of the exit path from violence is that of the woman's safety. It will be indispensable to identify a project in accordance with the woman, who becomes the protagonist of the entire path; A project that can be implemented taking into account its general framework and requirements and to complete it. Listening is the cornerstone of reception which must be active and not investigative, without

answers or solutions, and must give the woman the time to elaborate what happens by herself. Active listening cannot be dissociated from an empathic attitude. It is important for women to know that the centre is a safe and secure place where they will be believed, not judged and have the right to anonymity, because professional secrecy is an inalienable norm.

For any way out of violent environments/situations, to be successful, they must include a number of elements among which, amongst others, there is the motivation of women. Without such a presumption, in most cases intervention cannot be successful. In the case of hospitality in a shelter home, it is necessary to share the project with the competent social services, who have the duty to take charge of the family, activating the necessary socio-sanitary interventions. The shelter home is a safe place for women to escape the partner's violence. It is a place to embark on a journey of emotional and material retreat from the violent relationship and to reconstruct its autonomy with serenity.

Shelter homes offer protection to older women with or without children, both Italian and foreign, who are subjected to violence by welcoming them to secretly-owned facilities. Hospitality is on average between 6 and 8 months. In the shelter homes, there are skilled workers who offer the victims emotional and practical support in a delicate moment of change with a work method based on the relationship between women.