



Rethinking violence against women from real to online teen violence

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Abstract

In our (iper)complex society, social relations have been transformed by the new technologies use. In fact, in the pandemic time caused by Covid-19 (especially in the severe moments), individuals had to interrupt their traditional live, included the social relations, and to carry online all the social interactions. The boundary between real and virtual has fallen. Consequently, it has now become a current habit to seek social relations in the virtual world. However, within this framework, these bonds have very often turned into experiences of general violence and especially violence against women. The aim of the article is to examine this social phenomenon in its multidimensionality, investigating it also through the ecosystem model, as well as reporting the most recent data in the international and national context, stressing the impact that social media, social networks and Internet communications have on violent and offensive behavior against women, especially younger women.

Keywords: *violence; women; onlife social relations; social network; teenagers'.*

1. Introduction

More than ever, violence takes on labile connotations connected to new forms of affective regulation with deep socio-educational roots that, in turn, are embedded in the digital and technological context of reference. There is, in fact, a space-time compression that allows for more difficult control over violent acts online and, as a result, acting institutionally becomes equally complex. But talking about violence, in its totality, seems to be repetitive but the reality is that there are still people who die at the hands of a partner, ex partner. This is the case with violence against women, also younger and older, a specific type of gender-based violence that has complex and multidimensional roots. Violence that can be physical, psychological, and also perpetuated through technology via social networks and social platforms. A public health problem, as well as a social problem that sociology, in comparison with other disciplines, has a duty to investigate in order to be able to create a correct information and therefore, a scientific awareness.

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2. Violence against women: a multidimensional phenomenon

The violence perpetuated against women is very complex and is characterized by being transversal to different social statuses. In addition, in people's everyday lives the exercise of violence reproduces the asymmetry of relationships and power, and also gender stereotypes.

In particular, the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (UE) define the "gender-based violence" as a imbalance relational between sexes and a desire for control and possession by the male gender over the female (The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, General Assembly Resolution, 1993). While the World Health Organization (WHO) argues that violence against women is "a public health problem as well as a violation of human rights" (Ministero della Salute, Informativa OMS: Violenza contro le donne, 2014).

In addition, gender-based violence is defined by the 1993 UN General Assembly as "any act that causes or is likely to cause physical, sexual or psychological harm to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life" (UN - Declaration for the Elimination of Violence against Women, Adopted by the UN General Assembly resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993).

The Article 1 of the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* (1993) points out that violence consists in: "all those forms of violence, from psychological and physical to sexual violence, from stalking to rape to femicide, which affect a large number of persons discriminated against on the basis of sex" (UNHR, the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*, 1993). A phenomenon, therefore, whose implications are diverse and whose causes are many. For this reason, the WHO, in its Report on Violence and Health (2002) (WHO, World report on violence and health, 2002), proposes an interpretative approach to violence through the so-called *Social Ecological Model* (SEM) (WHO, World report on violence and health, 2002: p. 12) to imply that violence is the result of a multidimensional interaction of social, cultural and environmental (community), relationship and individual factors that evolve over the time (WHO, World report on violence and health, 2002: p. 32).

In fact, the *Social Ecological Model* (SEM), which covers four levels (from the individual to the social, via the relational and the community), provides a better understanding of violence and the effect of potential prevention strategies.

In particular, through the model proposed it is possible to understand the complexity of the phenomenon and how individuals relate to others individuals and to the socio-cultural environment in which they live their lives.

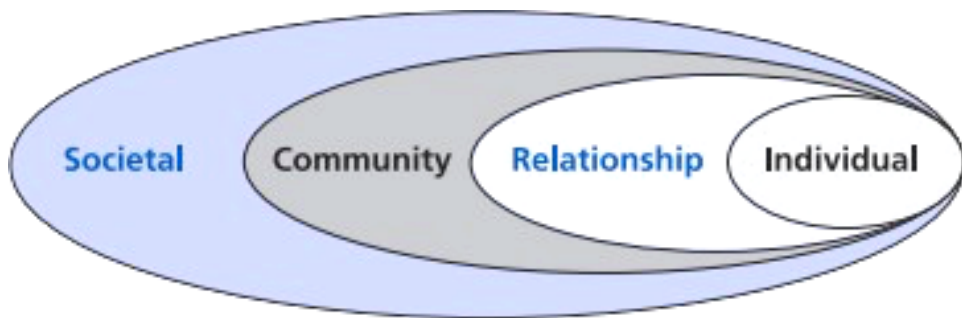


Fig. 1 - Social Ecological Model (SEM) from the WHO – *Report on Violence and Health*, 2002:12

Following this scheme, the first level of the SEM, is the individual level based on the personal history of the person. This experience is also determined by the biological, socio-demographic, educational/training characteristics and the specific life experiences that each subject experiences during his or her life course. A life that may be contradicted by particular situations of personal general “deficiency” as absence such as unemployment or characterized by substance use/abuse and experiences of aggression and abuse⁵. All elements that can increase the risk towards violent actions suffered or acted upon.

The second level of the model explores the role played by social relationships (in the peer group or between family members, as well as within the couple itself) and how they, by influencing behavior and contributing to the range of experiences, can increase or decrease the risk of victimization and perpetration of violence. The focus is especially on the couple relationship and interaction patterns, examining the communication processes activated, the degree of satisfaction in the relationship, the distribution of power between partners and the conflict management.

The third level of the SEM, is the community in which social relations occur, considering how specific group and social situations can increase the risk of violence. These situations include, for example, the absence of socializing agencies (for example, the school role or the family role) and the lack of aggregative and cultural venues in community spaces, as well as the absence of the access to proximity services or, in addition, the lack of institutional support, as well as the presence of areas of poverty or physical degradation in the community, can more likely lead to violent behavior. In addition, the high level of residential mobility, or the density and heterogeneity of the population in the community; all together with unemployment and social isolation, are associated with the possibility of violent actions occurring (WHO 2002: p. 13)¹.

¹ See the social learning theory (Bndura,1973). Children who suffer any form of maltreatment and abuse or who witness violent interpersonal relationships between adult reference figures, including parents, have a higher risk of becoming individuals with relational problems or perpetrators of violent conduct in the future. On this topic, see: Malacrea, M., Seassaro, U.,

Finally, the fourth and last level of the SEM, the society and other specific social situations that determine violence. In this case, it is possible that conflicts are resolved through a shared socio-cultural behavior based on violence and the power exercised by men over women and children (Ibidem:33). In addition, in the society that 'justifies' violence as a life approach, there also persists a general inequality between men and women legitimized by a rigid perception of gender roles and a real (not only symbolic) cage of behavior, built on gender stereotypes. It is also possible that can be started a process of violence banalization that makes aggression a "normal" social practice, nearly justified. Finally, in this level are examined health, economic, educational and social policies, that contribute to a create a climate in which violence is encouraged or inhibited.

Thus, for example and as said before, numerous risk factors that can be detonators of violence include poverty, social isolation, alcohol/drug use, the absence of a social network (Capaldi et al., 2012) and socio-economic conditions.

For all these reasons, violence is a complex phenomenon linked to behavior driven by a multiplicity of dimensions within individuals, relationships, communities and societies that are affected by important developments in terms of prevention and protection at global level.

3. The "double pandemic" effect: epidemiology, violence, analysis and sociological implications

In order to understand the phenomenon of violence against women and to implement specific prevention and protection policies, it is necessary to turn not only to theoretical approaches related to inequalities and asymmetries between women and men, as recognized internationally in various documents produced following the Vienna (1993) and Beijing (1995) Conferences or the Istanbul Convention (2011); but also is important to conduct research measuring the problem from also a quantitative perspective.

The most recent studies indicate that, internationally, one in three women is a victim of violence, while in Italy specifically, 31.5% of women claim to have been victims of physical or sexual violence during their lives. In most cases, the "violence took place in intimate relationships" (Bimbi and Basaglia 2013:35); the offender was the partner or ex-partner, or the violence took place between parents and children, between brothers and

Sexualised behaviour as indicators of sexual abuse: validity and limits, in *Maltreatment and Abuse in Childhood*, 1, 1999. Ackerman N. W., *Psychodynamics of family life. Diagnosis and treatment of family relationships*, Boringhieri Editore, Turin, 1999. Forke C. M, Myers R K, Fein JA, et al. Witnessing intimate partner violence as a child: how boys and girls model their parents' behaviors in adolescence. *Child Abuse & Neglect* 2018;84:241-242. Gartland D, Giallo R, Woolhouse H, et al. Intergenerational impacts of family violence-Mothers and children in a large prospective cohort study. *Lancet* 2019;15:P51-P61. Gover A. R. , Kaukinen C, Fox K. A., et al. The relationship between violence in the family of origin and dating violence among college students. *J Interpers Violence* 2008;23:1667-1693

sisters, between friends and, finally, between people on a first date².

In particular, 92.2% of the murdered women, out of a total of 116, were killed by a person known to them. In more than half of the cases, women were killed by their partners. Namely 51.7% of the cases, corresponding to 60 women, 6%, by their previous partner, corresponding to 7 women, in 25.9% of the cases (30 women) by a family member (including children and parents), and in 8.6% of the cases by another person they knew (friends, colleagues, etc.) (10 women)³.

In addition, in the year under review, more than half of the women (57.%) were killed within the couple's relationship and more than a quarter (25.9%) within parental relationships (Istat 2022).

Until now, October 2022 in Italy, 77 women have been killed.

According to the D. i.Re Network (*Women in Networks Against Violence*), which coordinates 80 anti-violence centers throughout Italy, there was a 74.5% increase in requests for support in 2020 compared to the monthly average recorded in the last statistical survey (2018). Specifically, in just over a month (2 March - 5 April 2020), 2,867 women contacted the Network's anti-violence centers and for more than a quarter of them (806 women) it was the first time⁴. The data highlights how the Covid-19 pandemic was an activator of violence, especially in the domestic sphere: the social confinement measures of the first and second pandemic phases brought out all the fragility of women, who in this historical period, more than in others, were victims of their own 'reduced social network', husband/partner/partner, without having the possibility of turning to the assistance and help services. Women in the pandemic period, therefore, not only felt insecure outside the home, but in some cases also experienced a risky situation inside the home, a place that is by definition cozy and safe, and were subject to this condition especially those women who were not employed and were forced to live with an abusive partner or another violent family member, on whom - unfortunately - they were economically dependent (Grignoli 2022).

The United Nations (UN) refers to this particular historical moment as a period of a '*shadow pandemic*'⁵ or a '*shadow crisis*' to mean a widespread practice of both a lack of gender equality in relationships and, consequently, a diminishing empowerment of women.

A double virulence, therefore, which, taking the name of "double pandemic" (Catelani and D'Amico, 2021), contracts, especially for women, more and more

² In <https://www.istat.it/it/violenza-sulle-donne/il-fenomeno/violenza-dentro-e-fuori-la-famiglia/numero-delle-vittime-e-forme-di-violenza>. See also: <https://www.salute.gov.it/portale/donna/dettaglioContenutiDonna.jsp?id=4498&area=Salute%20donna&menu=societa> and https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/2022-03/settimanale_omicidi_7_marzo_2022.pdf

³ Full report at: <https://www.istat.it/it/violenza-sulle-donne/il-fenomeno/omicidi-di-donne>. Considering the pandemic time.

⁴ In https://www.direcontrolaviolenza.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Monitoraggio-Covid19_14-apr-2020.pdf

⁵ In <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19>

economic, social and participatory spaces, nullifying years of progress achieved (Grignoli 2022), further exacerbating the gender gap. Women earn less, experience greater job insecurity and have less access to social protection, as well as taking on more family-related responsibilities (UN 2020:4). All this, moreover, occurs in a context in which women are paid less than the European average, as EUROSTAT data show, until 2021⁶.

In fact, women who have quit job are the 77% of the total (on 2020)⁷; the presence of a child (less than one year old) affects women's inactivity more than men⁸.

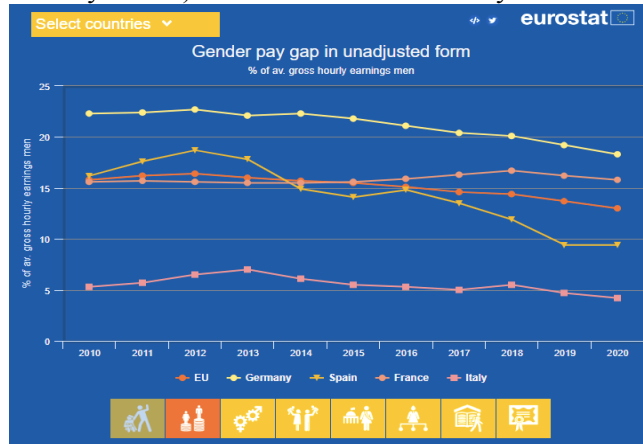


Fig. 2-Eurostat Gender Gap in unadjusted form in <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/sdi/gender-equality>, 2010-2020. Comparison between Italy, Germany, Spain, France and Europe.

⁶ See data on gender gap available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/sdi/gender-equality>

⁷ In <https://www.ispettorato.gov.it/it-it/in-evidenza/Documents/Rapporto-annuale-2020.pdf>

⁸ See also the topic of unpaid care work of women.

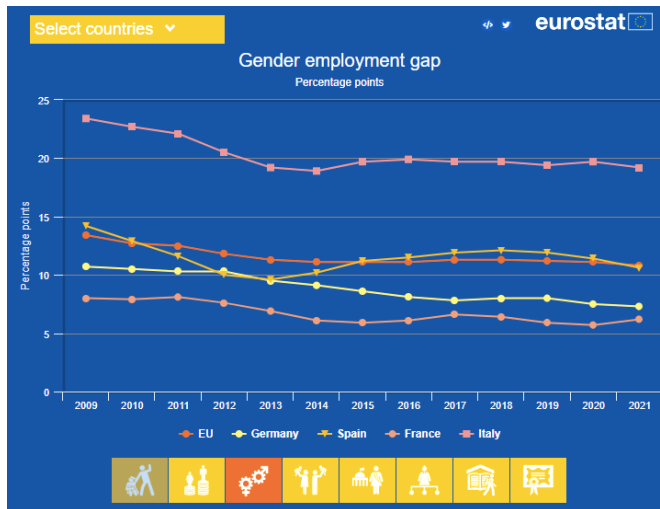


Fig. 3 – Eurostat, *Gender employment gap*, in <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/sdi/gender-equality>, 2010- 2020. Comparison between Italy, Germany, Spain, France and Europe.

The theme of gender equality is therefore central and consistent here.

With the pandemic: “their ability to absorb economic shocks is therefore lower than men” (UN,2020:4)⁹. In Europe, approximately 84% of working women aged between 15 and 64 are employed in accommodation and tourism services, childcare and retailing; sectors that during the pandemic period had the greatest economic impact¹⁰.

According to Ipsos data on the level of the Gender Gap in the G7 countries¹¹, the effects of Covid- 19 and its consequences had a strong impact on everyone, but it was women who suffered the most: “the economic condition of Italian women in the era of Covid-19, showing how 1 in 2 women saw their economic situation worsen due to the Coronavirus and 1 in 2 female workers are afraid of losing their jobs” (IPSOS,2021)¹².

⁹ Report available at:

<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Policy-brief-The-impact-of-COVID-19-on-women-en.pdf>

¹⁰In <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/it/headlines/society/20210225STO98702/l-impatto-della-pandemia-covid-19-sulle-donne-infografica> and [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/658227/IPOL_STU\(2020\)658227_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/658227/IPOL_STU(2020)658227_EN.pdf)

¹¹ In <https://www.womens-forum.com/2021/06/09/second-edition-of-the-womens-forum-barometer/>

¹² In <https://www.ipsos.com/it-it/impatto-covid-donne-livello-gender-gap-paesi-G7> and <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2021-06/L%27impatto%20del%20Covid%20sulle%20donne%20-%20il%20livello%20di%20Gender%20Gap%20nei%20Paesi%20del%20G7.pdf>

The risk for women is reverting to traditional roles that in the pandemic is greater, as gender stereotypes remain widespread: “64% of respondents believe that it is more difficult for a woman than for a man to have a successful career because she has to accept sacrificing part of her family life; 50% believe that you cannot have it all: if you want to be a good mother, you have to accept sacrificing part of your professional career; and finally, 26% think that a woman will always be happier in her role as a mother than in her professional life”¹³.

Stereotypes and prejudices that trace that cultural and social make-up of the multidimensional model of violence where such orientations still persist as well as a scientific evidence, with economic implications, that relegates women to the a-economic role of mothers and wives/companions.

4. “On-life” violence: when violence happens in the real context and in the virtual dimension

As technology has progressed, violence against women (as well as all types of violence) has taken on increasingly pervasive connotations that echo the mentioned *Socio Ecological Model*: it is an “onlife” violence.

There is no longer a difference between real and virtual. We all live in a continuous interaction between digital and material reality, of a pragmatic type (Floridi, 2018) and so violence against women transcends space-time boundaries, persists over time, becomes horizontal, viral and impacts on their well-being: there is a compromise of the reputation and credibility of women whose harmful and aggressive contents through social networks can be easily spread, modified but difficult to control.

According to Amnesty's International report in 2021¹⁴, misogyny has been an active trend over the years: women are hated online throughout all Italy country, with a strong concentration in the north-east. There were more than 240,000 negative tweets analyzed referring to working women who were deemed incompetent, useless, incapable. A language of hate (*Hate Speech*)¹⁵, an intolerant lexicon that takes the form of anger, even through the use of terms of contempt (*Ibid.*)¹⁶.

¹³ Report available at: https://www.womens-forum.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/2021_Main-outcomes-of-the-Barometer_110621.pdf, p.5

¹⁴ Report complete available on <https://www.amnesty.it/barometro-dellodio-intolleranza-pandemica/> e <http://www.voxdiritti.it/mappa-dellintolleranza-6-misoginia/>. Platform analyzed twitter. Data, 2021.

¹⁵ Hate Speech falls into the broader category of online harassment along with unwanted sexually explicit messages (mail or text messages); offensive advances on social networks ;threats of physical and/or sexual violence via text or mail messages.

¹⁶ Among personal attacks, the rate of hate speech directed at women exceeds that of hate speech targeting men by 1.5 times. Finally, of the personal attacks directed at women 1 in 3 is explicitly sexist. 1 in 4 pieces of content on the topic of women and gender rights offenses, discriminates or incites hatred and/or violence against women in Amnesty International, Hate Barometer

<https://d21zrvtkxt6ae.cloudfront.net/public/uploads/2020/03/15212126/Amnesty->

It is important to stress that hate speech is defined by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers as a "forms of expression that spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or intolerance in general, but also nationalism and ethnocentrism, abuse and harassment, epithets, prejudices, stereotypes and insults that stigmatize and insult"¹⁷.

Therefore, the basis of hate speech are stereotypes and misrepresentations that are normalized to the point of becoming real discrimination whose peak, very often, goes beyond social networks to actual acts of physical violence. This is the escalation of Hate Speech which, like many other types of 'online' aggression, turns into hate crimes causing, in the extreme and in some specific circumstances, death.

In fact, hate language, along with all hate crimes, is characterized by its multi-offensiveness, the risk of escalation (Chirico, Gori, Esposito, 2020:4): the hater does not merely verbally attack the victim but the social category to which he or she belongs, instigating other users to do the same; the risk of escalation, on the other hand, stems from the social acceptance of discrimination (normalization of hate), which allows an increase in hate crimes¹⁸.

From a micro-sociological conflict perspective, fundamental the nine-stage escalation model application (Glasl, 1990; 2012:233; Scotto, Arielli, 2003) to hate speech, and thus to the network as a whole, which can also say a lot in terms of de-escalation and possible mediation (systemic-transformative model proposed by Scotto, 2017:127-139), should be emphasized:

- 1) Hardening: the stage where people and/or the group harden their beliefs. In the case of hate speech, this stage creeps into a cultural terrain already formed by stereotypes and prejudices that harden in the digital world;
- 2) Debate and controversy: a stage when the parties do not communicate effectively and the exchange of messages becomes increasingly threatening and aggressive; the language becomes, consistently, aggressive and violent. Very often it also happens that offensive comments are perceived as ironic, goliardic, sympathetic, and thus socially shared;
- 3) Tactics of the *fait accompli*: the other is seen as a real obstacle, as an adversary to be fought; goals contrary to those of the other party are desired. In hate speech, the aggressor wants to use language aimed at annihilating the other, often remaining anonymous or using an ad hoc created identity;
- 4) Image concern and seeking allies: this is the stage where the aggressor seeks

Barometro-odio-aprile-2020.pdf and <https://www.amnesty.it/barometro-dellodio-sessismo-da-tastiera/>

¹⁷https://www.camera.it/leg17/995?sezione=documenti&tipoDoc=lavori_testo_pdl&idLegislatura=17&codice=17PDL0034780#:~:text=Il%20Comitato%20dei%20ministri%20del,le%20molestie%2C%20gli%20epiteti%2C%20i

¹⁸ In Italy, worth mentioning is the "pyramid of hatred" by the "Jo Cox" Commission, MP in the UK House of Commons killed on June 16, 2016, on the phenomena of hatred, xenophobia, intolerance and racism established in 2016 MP in the UK House of Commons killed on June 16, 2016

to find allies. In the language of hate perpetuated online, seeking users to comment and share the offensive and violent post is an important part of the aggressive act. The victim must be discredited in the eyes of as many users as possible¹⁹. In addition, a real diffusion of responsibility is implemented, in an automatism that requires less effort and time;

5) Loss of face: the defamatory action continues, in a conflict that becomes totalizing (Scotto, Baukloh, 2019:13);

6) Threat strategy: the aggressor seeks threat as a means of communication;

7) Limited destruction: the person does not exist as such but as an object, as a thing, depersonalized (de-humanization of the victim; Bandura, 2017), sexualizing women's bodies. In the digital, this mechanism is possible for two reasons. The first is that there is no tangible feedback, i.e., the hater has no immediate feedback on the emotional reactions of the affected person and because he or she enacts a mechanism of moral disengagement (Ibid.) that neutralizes in his eyes any consequences associated with his negative and violent action. This is euphemistic labeling (Ibid.) through which he tends to minimize the seriousness of his behavior. It triggers a viral process, in which harmful content can easily propagate and persist, as well as be reposted and modified potentially indefinitely;

8) Disintegration: the hater's goal is to disintegrate the target's social system, isolating him socially. By collapsing his or her credibility, even online;

9) Mutual destruction: the last step, aiming at the destruction of the other, in a (social) death that must become effective even at the cost of self-destruction.

Glasl's model, among other approaches, can also explain the escalation of a conflict in terms of hatred, where social networks transpose what is real and already in place, in a dangerous polarization that can turn into real acts.

Among the types of online violence against women (but not exclusively) that the escalation model recalls, there is not only hate speech but also cyber-stalking, stalking carried out by means of messages, posts via social networks and via the Internet. In particular, cyber-stalking consists of sending offensive or threatening e-mails, text messages; posting offensive comments on the Internet in relation to the person concerned; sharing intimate photographs or videos of the person concerned on the Internet or via smartphone (EIGE, 2017:2)²⁰. These are behaviors repeated over time that undermine the victim's sense of safety and can cause a state of discomfort, fear, anxiety, and alarm.

Other risks are sextortion (sexual extortion) and revenge porn, which indicate actual extortion and revenge porn: in the first case, it is "extortion of money, sexual or other favors against a person under the threat of making public compromising personal content of a sexual nature (text messages, photos or videos)"²¹. Revenge porn, on the

¹⁹ See also the theme of the "online reputation".

²⁰ EIGE-European Institute for Gender Equality. In <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1486?lang=en>

²¹ Crusca Academy : <https://accademiadellacrusca.it/it/parole-nuove/sextortion/18464>

other hand, consists of a series of violent behaviors that consist of publishing, sending and sharing, without the consent of the other person, intimate and private videos or images.

It should always be emphasized that the reality of gender stereotypes underlying all these phenomena is still deeply rooted (ISTAT, 2022): “almost 60% (58.8%) of the population (aged 18-74) agree on many stereotypes about gender roles; 22.4% very much agree; 54.6% of the population are carriers of at least one stereotype about sexual violence’ (Istat, Muratore, 2022:3)²².

Approximately 7% consider it acceptable “for a guy to slap his girlfriend because she has flirted with another man”; 6.2% that in a couple a slap happens every now and then and 17.7% consider it acceptable always or under certain circumstances for a man to routinely check his partner's mobile phone or social network activity’ (Ibid.)²³

5. Women’s secondary victimization and “victim blaming”

The social phenomenon of secondary victimization for women victims of violence is an increasingly central theme in the understanding of the spiral of abuses that are perpetrated against them²⁴.

The term refers to “an aggravated and prolonged consequence of certain criminal actions; it originates from attitudes of the judicial authorities of denial towards the victim in a condition of lack of support, if not blame and/or alienation” (Fanci, 2011:53-54 translated from Williams J. E, 1984, vol. 9:67). *Victim blaming*, in other words, is the devaluation of the suffering and pain felt by the victim.

Once again, it is necessary to stress the gender stereotypes: according to ISTAT (2019), “the most common gender role stereotypes express as follow: ‘it is more important for men than women to be successful at work’ (32.5%), ‘men are less suited to take care of household chores’ (31.5%), ‘it is the man who has to provide for the financial needs of the family’ (27.9%). The least common is ‘it is up to the man to make the most important decisions concerning the family’ (8.8%). 58.8% of the population (aged 18-74), with no particular differences between men and women, subscribe to these stereotypes, which are more widespread with increasing age (65.7% of those aged 60-74

²² Istat Data available at:

https://www.istat.it/it/files/2022/03/MariaGiuseppina_Muratore_slide.pdf

²³ See also Istat (2019), Gli stereotipi sui ruoli di genere e l’immagine sociale della violenza di genere, <https://www.istat.it/it/files/2019/11/Report-stereotipi-di-genere.pdf>

²⁴ It should be noted that Italy has been condemned by the ECHR precisely on the issue of secondary victimization. Judgment of the European Court of Human Rights of May 27, 2021 - Appeal No. 5671/16 - Case of J.L v. Italy.

Art 8 - Positive Obligations - "Secondary victimization" of a victim of sexual violence due to guilt-inducing, moralizing and conveying sexist stereotypes statements in the grounds of the judgment - Authorities who supervised the respect for the personal integrity of the applicant during the investigation and trial hearings. In In [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{%22itemid%22:\[%22001-210299%22\]}](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{%22itemid%22:[%22001-210299%22]}) e https://temi.camera.it/leg18/post/OCD15_14466/stereotipi-genere-e-violenza-sessuale-cedu-condanna-l-italia.html

and 45.3% of young people) and among the less educated'²⁵.

The stereotypes that a woman always bears some responsibility when she suffers sexual violence are, once again, central. And with respect to the specific phenomenon of *victim blaming*, again ISTAT finds that: “the prejudice that blames the woman for the sexual violence suffered persists. As much as 39.3% of the population believes that a woman is capable of evading sexual intercourse if she really does not want to. The percentage of those who think that women can provoke sexual violence by the way they dress is also high (23.9%). Furthermore, 15.1% are of the opinion that a woman who suffers sexual violence when drunk or under the influence of drugs is at least partly responsible. For 10.3% of the population, accusations of sexual violence are often false (more men, 12.7%, than women, 7.9%); for 7.2% 'when faced with a sexual proposal women often say no but actually mean yes', for 6.2% serious women are not raped. Only 1.9% believe that it is not violence if a man forces his wife/partner to have sexual intercourse against her will” (Ibid:2).

The problem, therefore, is related to the dynamics of power, possession and gender roles that, in violent dynamics, are reversed: the woman victim is “seen” as responsible while the aggressor is “justified” and also the system of judicial support that is provided to the woman victim of violence, abuse and mistreatment (in particular, to the victim of sexual and/or domestic violence, Gravelin, Biernat, Bucher, 2019), can reproduces stereotypical behaviors stressing, for example, the victim attitude (such as provocations, provocative clothing, etc...) (Randall, 2016).

Again, ISTAT (2014), reports that women are not fully satisfied with the help they receive from the police when reporting a crime; indeed, women ask to be listened to more, and to be taken seriously, in a desire for more general protection²⁶.

In the decision to have to help the woman victim, all social actors (so-called control agencies) may think they do or do not do it, according to the belief that 'she brought it on herself': the violence happened, and therefore the woman suffers and asks for help because of it, but it is all to do with her inappropriate behavior, her unsuitable attitude. The blame pours, in a double mode, on the victim who in this way suffers a double violence and worse, blames herself, assuming the motivation for the violence and going so far as to justify it in extreme cases. This leads, in many cases, to attitudes of laxity and reluctance (Frenci, 2011:63) in seeking help from the competent authorities or even involves refraining from reporting²⁷.

An interesting perspective in this regard comes from Lerner (1997;1980): the problem lies in the attribution of blame to women that is normalized in and by society

²⁵ In Istat (2019), Gli stereotipi sui ruoli di genere e l'immagine sociale della violenza di genere, <https://www.istat.it/it/files//2019/11/Report-stereotipi-di-genere.pdf>, p. 1

²⁶ Istat (2014), Awareness of and exit from violence in <https://www.istat.it/it/violenza-sulle-donne/il-fenomeno/violenza-dentro-e-fuori-la-famiglia/consapevolezza-e-uscita-dalla-violenza>

²⁷ It is important to think to the 'dark number' concerning situations of violence, abuse, mistreatment.

(see also the ecological model of violence, society section). Indeed, according to the theory of Belief in a Just World.

In other words, individuals need to believe that they live in a world in which good things happen to people who behave well while, conversely, those who behave badly receive bad things. Each of us, therefore, reaps what we sow (Ibid.) This belief should be read from the perspective of adaptation to the external social environment that allows for greater control over what happens, in a kind of prediction of events (Ibid.). The theory, therefore, reads secondary victimization as an adaptive response and social reaction that starts from the consideration that the victim has deserved that kind of suffering (Fanci 2011:57).

Among the latest research in this regard is that proposed by Wenzel et al., (2017) who, on the basis of belief theory, goes so far as to argue that such an attitude can have maladaptive side effects for individuals, not only influencing their attitudes but also their everyday behavior. This can also be linked to the reasoning on the ingroup/outgroup dichotomy (Lerner, 1980) because belonging to the same social group may generate a more decisive and incisive social response than those who are not in that social circle but stand outside it. This polarization is very evident in the online world in that the victim of violence is either targeted or understood through the sharing of posts, which are much more immediate and direct, and which also represent sides of belonging to certain culturally given ideas.

To be considered, also in the 'online' dimension of victim blaming, is the possible 'halo effect', a cognitive bias, a prejudice that leads to an error of assessment as well as a 'contagion effect' (Le Bon's contagion theory, 1895) according to which anonymity (a typical possibility offered by the network) gives the individual (in the crowd, mass) a feeling of power, in the viral sharing of ideas, information, facts, unrealistic or in any case distorted considerations.

A further possible reading should be added: the one offered by Sykes and Matza (1957): not only does the offender deny his responsibility, but the criminal act is minimized, brought down to a euphemistic level in which, again, victim blaming is proposed.

6. Teen Dating Violence and Online Teen Dating Violence: the abuse in teenage couples. Focus on a rising “social phenomenon”.

Violence against women also takes place in the couple, always in a cross-reference that is real and virtual at the same time. Even between teenagers.

According to the World Report on Violence and Health (WHO,2002): “every day more than 500 adolescents and young people die because of interpersonal violence, and between 3.5 and 7.5 million young people are hospitalized each year for the same reason”²⁸.

While 1 in 3 women worldwide have recently (2015) experienced online violence

²⁸ See:

https://www.epicentro.iss.it/focus/domestica/rapporto_campagna#:~:text=The%20Global%20Report%20on%20violence,global%20the%20prevention%20of%20violence.

and in Europe, approximately 9 million girls/women have been subjected to offence, harassment and aggression via social networks .

This is an alarming fact that has to be reconciled, as has already been emphasized several times in the discussion, with stereotypes²⁹ of gender roles³⁰ .

Out of 1276 Italian adolescents aged between 14 and 22, control and jealousy are considered acceptable elements within a relationship, especially for males, even online (Save The Children Italy,2022:4)³¹.

Indeed, one can speak of *Teen Dating Violence* (TDV), peer-to-peer violence in dating relationships characterized by forms of violence and maltreatment (O'Keefe,2005): 'Violence among adolescents is a major problem not only because of its alarming recurrence and consequences on physical and mental health but also because such relational patterns can also occur in adulthood. Violence among adolescents ranges from emotional and verbal abuse to rape and murder and appears to be related to domestic violence perpetrated by adults. Adolescents often have difficulty recognizing physical and sexual abuse as such and may perceive controlling and jealous behavior as signs of love' (Ibidem:1).

As Pomicino³² (2018) also suggests, TDV is “the set of acts of coercion, prevarication and control, acted out through psychological ill-treatment, physical aggression, sexual abuse, or even just the threat of such actions, acted out repeatedly and intentionally, causing harm in those who suffer them and characterized by taking place within intimate relationships that differ from domestic violence situations in that the couple is not bound by structural bonds”³³.

²⁹ "Stereotypes are more prevalent among those who are older (65.7 percent of 60-74 year olds vs. 45.3 percent of younger people), among the less educated (79.6 percent among those without a degree or elementary school license vs. 45 percent of college graduates), and among those with a profession as a labourer or self-employed/co-employed. The South and Sicily present higher shares of people who agree with the stereotypes submitted. The highest value is estimated in Campania where 71.6 percent of the population agrees with at least one stereotype, the lowest in Friuli Venezia Giulia (49.2 percent)." In <https://www.istat.it/it/files/2019/11/Report-stereotipi-di-genere.pdf>, 2019, p. 2

³⁰ See also: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/9/cyber-violence-report-press-release>

³¹ Report complete on:

<https://www.savethechildren.it/sites/default/files/files/infografiche%20unico%20file.pdf>

³² There is a recent Italian project presented by Save the Children and Centro Studi Erickson titled: D.A.T.E. (Develop Approaches and Tools to end Online Teen Dating Violence) (24-month duration, 2021-2022) on the topics of TDV and OTDV. Project link: <https://www.savethechildren.it/cosa-facciamo/progetti/date-develop-approaches-and-tools-end-online-teen-dating-violence>

³³ See: <http://www.vita.it/it/article/2022/05/13/la-violenza-nella-coppia-teen/162829/> but also Menesini E., Nocentini A., Comportamenti aggressivi nelle prime esperienze sentimentali, in *adolescenza*, Giornale Italiano di Psicologia, 2 maggio 2008, pp.407-434.

TDV becomes, in the digital society, *Online Teen Dating Violence* (OTDV) if we consider, in addition to what has already been said, the violent and controlling use of social networks within the relationship between boys and girls, in a dynamic of power and gender stereotypes³⁴. Pervasive tools (one speaks of a digital environment precisely for this reason) that recall the possible manipulation and surveillance of the victim, his possible control (by accessing his social profiles and contacts), the possible dissemination of content (photos, videos) without consent, also damaging his credibility and reputation.

Underlying the phenomena is the belief that the use of violence is licit and acceptable (O'Keefe 1997), especially by males, that there is a gender imbalance in terms also of socialization processes, as well as individual, couple/relational variables and the use of alcohol and drugs (Ibid). Elements, therefore, that retrace the ecosystem model and that must be integrated with each other, in an overall reading of the conflict and its management in relational terms.

7. Conclusions

The phenomenon of 'onlife' violence is, as summarized, the result of several factors that the sociological view intercepts in its ecosystem dimension. Society's responses are many, but all of them should tend even more towards an integrated reflection of interventions, between control and socialization agencies such as the family and school in the first place and social services in the area (in the construction of a network of services and a proximity response) in which investments are made in primary prevention starting from childhood also in the field of emotions; in the training of young people in the school and university context; in awareness campaigns and in specific training courses for targets, also incorporating professionals from all institutions, directing forms of control and help in reality and in the network. Promote projects that hold together cultural, relational (and conflict management), technological-digital, affective-emotional and sexual dimensions, beyond taboos still present in the current societal context.

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³⁴ See also reference to the cinematic representation of gender-based violence: Curti S., Fornari S., (2018) Un'analisi sociologica della violenza di genere attraverso il cinema italiano, in *Fuori Luogo* / n. 4B, dicembre 2018, pp. 11-24.

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