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Helping to Dream Again What Support Do the Orphans of Femicide Need?

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Abstract

Although femicide represents the most extreme manifestation of gender-based violence, the condition of children orphaned by femicide remains an understudied issue (Baldry, 2017). These *special orphans* experience dual victimization: they often grow up witnessing domestic violence and then suffer the traumatic loss of their mother at the hands of their father or another family member (Baldry, 2017: 44-45). This reality underscores the urgency of targeted and multidisciplinary intervention to address both past trauma and future challenges.

In response to these needs, the S.O.S. (Support for Special Orphans) project, funded through the “A Braccia Aperte” initiative by *Con I Bambini*, aims to develop a national program for the timely and integrated care of femicide orphans and their foster families. Our contribution, as the monitoring group conducted by the Department of Cultures, Politics, and Society at the University of Turin (Italy), focuses on the North-West consortium operating in Piedmont, Liguria, and Valle d'Aosta.

This study presents initial findings from a multi-phase monitoring process (2021-2024) that employed participatory action-research through interviews and focus groups with 19 partners. By September 2024, the project had taken in 25 orphans, with educational grants addressing four main dimensions: basic needs, recreational activities, psychosocial support, and educational assistance. The analysis reveals critical challenges in identifying beneficiaries, communication fragmentation within the network, and the need for continuous specialized training on issues such as witnessed violence and the intergenerational transmission of violence (CISMAI, 2017; Bruno, 2022).

The findings emphasize that femicide orphans require personalized and multidimensional interventions that address educational, psychological, and relational needs, while foster families need both financial resources and specialized training. The project represents an important step toward building a more integrated support system capable of responding to the specific needs of one of the most vulnerable groups in society.

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1. Introduction

Male violence against women is never an isolated act: it is rooted in bonds, perpetuated through silence, and transmitted across generations. Inspired by the work of Anna Costanza Baldry (2017), these words succinctly encapsulate the intergenerational transmission of violence. They emphasize how exposure to domestic violence deeply impacts not only direct victims but also the life trajectories and relational patterns of their children. This reality underscores the urgency of a targeted and multidisciplinary intervention.

The phenomenon of children orphaned by femicide¹ remains an understudied issue in our country. To date, Baldry's work (2017) represents the first and most significant reflection on this subject: She coined the term 'special orphans' to emphasize the unique circumstances of those who have lost their mother to femicide. This term refers to individuals who experience the traumatic loss of their mother at the hands of their biological father. The adjective *special* underscores the distinct psychological and legal conditions resulting from this particular situation (Baldry, 2017: 44-45). According to the latest estimates from *Save the Children* and *Con I Bambini*, approximately two thousand cases exist in Italy. This paper focuses on the issue of witnessed violence and the condition of children orphaned by femicide to stress the importance of adopting an interdisciplinary and intersectional approach in designing support strategies.

In doing so, the research questions are:

- a) what reparative strategies effectively recognize and meet the complex needs of children and young people orphaned by femicide?
- b) What forms of support do persons orphaned by femicide truly need?

To address these questions, we analyze the preliminary findings from the monitoring of the **S.O.S. Special Orphans Project**, which operates in Italy, in the regions of Piedmont, Liguria, and Valle d'Aosta.

2. Dual Victimization

People orphaned by femicide experience a dual victimization:

- a) *Witnessed violence*: they often grow up in an environment steeped in abuse, witnessing physical, psychological and economic mistreatment of their mother, which exposes them to deep and lasting trauma;
- b) *Femicide*: they lose their mother in a tragic and violent way, at the hands of their father or another family member, suffering not only the deprivation of an important emotional bond, but also the social and material consequences of this loss.

This dual victimization exacerbates their suffering and underscores the necessity of an integrated intervention that addresses both past trauma and future challenges. Witnessing violence and femicide are intrinsically linked, as both stem from dynamics of patriarchal domination and coercive control within the familial sphere. Witnessing

¹ In this text, the term *femicide* specifically refers to the 1992 definition by Russell and Radford, which situates the phenomenon within a socio-cultural framework, defining it as the killing of women by men because they are women.

violence is defined by *Italian Coordination of Services against Child Maltreatment and Abuse* (CISMAI, 2017) as:

The experience, by a child or adolescent, of any form of abuse perpetrated through acts of physical, verbal, psychological, sexual, or economic violence, as well as stalking, against reference figures or other emotionally significant individuals, whether adults or minors (CISMAI, 2017: 17).

The harm caused by exposure to domestic violence—whether through direct observation or indirect awareness—is profound, multifaceted, and complex. A comprehensive discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. However, for the purposes of this analysis, it is essential to highlight some key elements that are commonly identified in the literature on this topic.

Growing up in a violent family environment entails a series of traumatic experiences that, if not promptly identified and mitigated through professional support, can severely compromise a child's development (Baldry, 2017: 44-45). The repercussions of witnessing paternal violence against one's mother can manifest in various forms and intensities, depending on factors such as age, gender, individual characteristics, external support systems, and the duration of exposure to violence (Bruno, 2022). Frequently observed consequences include premature adultification, anger, depression, anxiety, hypervigilance, concentration difficulties, sleep disorders, and behavioral dysregulation—symptoms commonly reported by professionals working with child witnesses of domestic violence (Baldry, 2017).

Furthermore, as Luberti (2017) notes, experiencing violence—whether direct or indirect—within one's primary environment from childhood can fundamentally shape perceptions of gender roles. Luberti (2017: 59) highlights that such children may internalize contempt toward women and individuals perceived as vulnerable or may struggle to differentiate between affectionate relationships and dynamics of dominance, leading them to conflate the two.

From a procedural, diachronic and intergenerational perspective, the violence suffered risks influencing how the affected children engage with the world (Bruno, 2022: 94):

Witnessing violence is a risk factor for other forms of victimization affecting minors, such as neglect, psychological abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse, as well as for the intergenerational transmission of violence (CISMAI, 2017:19).

In situations of domestic violence such as those described above, it is possible to break the cycle of violence through interventions targeting children and/or by supporting mothers in their efforts to escape abusive environments. With the help of the anti-violence network and professionals specialised in gender-based violence, distancing mothers and children from the violent dynamics often enables the reconstruction of the mother-child relationship and the learning of new, alternative behavioural models to those of domination and submission that have shaped the child's development within the couple (Bruno, 2022).

3. The Impact of Femicide on Special Orphans and the Limitations of Policies and Institutional Approaches

Femicide not only takes the life of a woman, but also leaves behind a profound trail

of pain, particularly affecting the couple's children. According to data from the *Italian Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on Femicide* (Commissione parlamentare di inchiesta sul femminicidio, 2022), 74% of femicide orphans are children of the perpetrator of the violence. In one-third of cases, the father commits suicide after the murder (Solinis-Saunders, 2022; Tosini, 2020), while in the others he is arrested or turns himself in to the authorities (Todesco, 2021: 59-60). This double loss – of the mother through murder and of the father through arrest or suicide – causes profound psychological trauma, amplified by the intrinsic violence of the crime.

Children are frequently not only witnesses to such extreme acts of violence but also passive recipients of prolonged exposure to domestic abuse, which precedes and culminates in the homicidal act. They may be present during the murder or, in some cases, discover their mother's body (Commissione Parlamentare sul Femminicidio, 2022). The psychological consequences include severe post-traumatic effects (Alisic et al., 2015; Diano, 2005), but the damage does not stop there: relocation to other cities, loss of social network and interruption of school and recreational activities exacerbate the picture of instability (Baldry, 2017).

The complexity of the subject is useful to highlight how, in this particular field of investigation, the lack – or rather, the deficit in the production of data – constitutes a significant limitation not only for the understanding of the phenomenon but also for the development of actions and policies to deal with it, which would allow for the design of interventions tailored to the needs of orphans (Ibid.: 21-22). Institutional responses continue to be limited.

The First General Report on GREVIO activities (2021) points out that, between 2015 and 2019, Italian data on violence against women were not disaggregated by gender of victim and perpetrator nor by the relationship between them. Furthermore, cases with underage witnesses were not reported and there was a lack of harmonisation between data from law enforcement and judicial authorities (GREVIO, 2021: 28-31, 50). This information gap hinders the identification and support of special orphans.

An important step has certainly been taken with Law No. 4/2018, which introduces amendments to the Civil and Criminal Code to protect orphans of domestic crimes (Biginelli, 2020). However, its application encounters considerable difficulties: the provision of compensation is slow, leaving around two thousand beneficiaries without the necessary support (Autorità Garante per l'Infanzia e l'Adolescenza, 2020) and the absence of multidisciplinary protocols limits the creation of networks of territorial services, which are fundamental for both emergency and long-term support (De Carli and Pignataro, 2021). These institutional gaps contribute to secondary victimisation, which manifests itself in the judicial, economic and social spheres (Bourke, 2011). Orphans not only suffer the loss of their mothers, but also face material difficulties, such as the loss of their homes or lack of financial support.

To address this complex reality, a number of innovative projects were initiated. Among the first works, the *Switch-off* project (2013-2014), coordinated by Anna Costanza Baldry, analysed cases of femicide in Italy to understand the fate of special orphans (Baldry & Cinquegrana, 2015): where they were placed and what consequences they suffered (Baldry, 2017). This study laid the foundations for subsequent initiatives, highlighting the need for multidisciplinary and integrated interventions.

The research conducted by the Autorità Garante per l'Infanzia e l'Adolescenza (2020) expanded on these analyses, highlighting the lack of adequate tools for social and health workers, as well as for law enforcement agencies. Furthermore, it noted persistent

shortcomings in the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989), particularly Article 12, which enshrines the child's right to be heard, and Article 3, which establishes the best interests of the child as a primary consideration. These shortcomings exacerbate the trauma experienced by children orphaned by domestic violence, undermining both their immediate well-being and efforts to prevent the intergenerational transmission of violence.

4. Searching for a National Protocol: the "A Braccia Aperte" Call by the Social Enterprise *Con I Bambini*

Building on the findings of the Switch-Off project, the *Impresa Sociale Con i Bambini* launched the "A Braccia Aperte" call, financed through the *Fund for the fight against juvenile educational poverty*. The main objectives include precisely the development of a national protocol for the timely and integrated care of orphans of femicide and their foster families (including psychological and educational support, etc.); the creation of guidelines for the management of emergencies and paths to autonomy; the training of specific multidisciplinary teams; and the development of anti-violence networks in Italy. At the national level, the funding supported four projects on four territories, each represented by a different partnership network: North East (Orphan of Femicide Invisible Victim), North West (S.O.S- Support for Special Orphans), Centre (Airone), South and Islands (RESPIRO - Support Network for Inclusion and Resilience Pathways with Special Orphans).

By the end of 2023, the four projects funded by Con I Bambini had taken in 157 orphans of femicide. This number is destined to grow, as a further 260 minors throughout Italy have already been intercepted by the managing partnerships and, shortly, they too will begin a path of support and accompaniment together with their families.

The highest percentage of orphans in the project is in the South. As of October 2023, the Respiro project has taken² in 100 orphans, with the percentage of beneficiaries still growing. Looking at the whole sample, 74% of these minors are between 7 and 17 years old, 17% between 18 and 21 years old, and 8% are under 6 years old. Most (95 per cent) have Italian citizenship, with 56 per cent being male.

About 36% of boys and girls were present at the time of the femicide, an event that leaves a devastating psychological impact, often associated with traumatic childhood bereavement syndrome, which prevents grief processing. In addition, 13% of the children had disabilities prior to the trauma, while 8% have special educational needs or psychological disorders. For 42% of the beneficiaries, placement is in foster families; 10% live in communities, another 10% with cohabiting couples, and only 5% were adopted. The socio-economic condition of foster families is often precarious: 83% face difficulties at the end of the month, although 52% receive income support. However, most living spaces are adequate.

A further critical element is that 65% of the households were not followed by social services before the event, despite vulnerabilities such as addictions or judicial problems. Moreover, in many cases, the children were exposed to witnessing violence, especially psychological violence, which is an alarm bell for future episodes³.

²<https://www.conibambini.org/bandi-e-iniziative/a-braccia-aperte-iniziativa-a-favore-degli-orfani-di-vittime-di-crimini-domestici-e-femminicidio/>

³ The data presented herein were obtained directly from the funding body, which has not yet made them publicly available within a comprehensive report that will be presented upon completion of the project call.

Consequence management requires constant training and supervision, as demonstrated by the cases where projects have helped families to communicate the truth about the incident to minors, a step often avoided due to lack of adequate preparation.

5. Towards Customized Support Models: The S.O.S - Special Orphans Support Project

Let us now turn our attention to the **SOS project: Support for Special Orphans** in the North-West area, a pioneering initiative led by the E.M.M.A. Anti-Violence Centres, which aims to offer concrete and innovative support to orphans of femicide, transforming the help network into a tool for change. The project activities are taking place in Piedmont, Liguria and Valle d'Aosta with the involvement of 25 organizations⁴. The initial overall duration of the project was 48 months (from August 2021 to July 2025). However, due to operational complexities and the need to ensure continuous support, the project received an extension, extending its duration until December 2026.

The project includes an extensive intervention plan targeting various groups, including:

- a) Mapping the current situation for both femicide orphans and the organizations in the network and their activities;
- b) Developing a standard methodology for initial interviews with orphans and foster families;
- c) Creating a protocol for *Integrated Support Plans* to be shared among network actors; ensuring consistency and fluidity in the personalized pathways;
- d) Training for operators and the educating community;
- e) Initiatives to raise public awareness.

The beneficiaries of the project are therefore persons orphaned by femicide up to 21 years of age, foster families, educating communities and the operators and professionals of the services and territorial network.

5.1 Data & Methods

The monitoring process, conducted by the research team of the Department of Cultures, Politics, and Society at the University of Turin⁵, focused on the development of the *SOS project* over the years, structured into four main phases.

The first phase of observing network dynamics began alongside the launch project activities, with feedback provided to lead partner every six months⁶. During this phase, action-building strategies were monitored across all project lines, with particular attention given to the internal and external training activities initiated in the project's first year. The second phase began in October and November 2023 with a participative action-research aimed not only at identifying, with the network of partners involved, critical issues, but at producing a positive change to be realised in the following months. The second phase ended with two moments of restitution: a first restitution through a report to the lead

They are a collection of data from the various monitoring bodies of each consortium. They can be found on the website indicated here: <https://www.conibambini.org/2023/11/20/orfani-di-femminicidio-presentati-i-dati-inediti-di-con-i-bambini/>

⁴ For more details on the composition of the partnership, see <https://www.centrososorfani.it/chi-siamo/>

⁵ The research group of the Department of Culture, Politics, and Society is composed of Paola Maria Torrioni (scientific lead), Anna Micol Tropeano (coordinator), and Linda Scali (research fellow). Cesare Bianciardi (research fellow) and Nicoletta Sciarrino (research fellow) have collaborated until 2023.

⁶ This is a phase that is still ongoing through the participation of the research group in meetings, events, and training sessions.

partner in March 2024, to allow an initial alignment by the project coordination itself, and a second final restitution to the partnership in June 2024. The methodological approach, in these phases, was mainly qualitative and envisaged the use of interviews (12) and focus groups (2), with a sample selected based on both availability and territorial balance, as well as between operational and institutional partners⁷. The monitoring involved a total of 19 partners out of the 27 presents at the start of the project.

The third phase consists of analysing the data regarding the beneficiaries of the project, which is the focus of this article. Specifically, the data analysed cover the period from July 2024 to December 2024 and were provided by the E.M.M.A.- Anti-Violence Centres. The inclusion criteria were: children and young people between 0 and 21 years old, orphans of femicide living in Piedmont, Liguria, or Valle D'Aosta. In this phase attention was given to the characteristics of the support requested by them. The analytical approach involved a reasoned re-categorization and descriptive analysis of the quantitative and semi-structured variables present in these records. The research team systematically mapped the various forms of support requested by the beneficiaries onto the four major thematic dimensions (basic needs, recreational, psychosocial, and educational) that structure the Findings section (§ 5.3).

The fourth phase of monitoring is currently ongoing, with a follow-up with project partners starting in the early months of 2025 to identify areas for further recalibration of project actions.

In the following paragraphs, we will illustrate the results of the first three phases, with particular attention to the second and third phases.

5.2 Identifying and Taking Charge of Femicide Orphans: Critical Issues, Challenges, and Proposals for Realignment

In the process of building the *SOS project*, EURES data (updated up to 2020) was used to trace a base of potential beneficiaries. From the initial analysis, 40 femicide orphans and 26 foster families emerged. In line with the project criteria, all selected orphans were aged between 0 and 21 years. Among these, 32 were residents in Piemonte, 8 in Liguria, and none were identified in Valle d'Aosta. Based on this information, the partnership initiated dialogue with the local network, particularly involving social services, to locate potential beneficiaries.

However, this process revealed some critical issues. Firstly, the likelihood of losing track of the orphans and foster families, especially when they are no longer followed by social services or involved in judicial proceedings, turned out to be unexpectedly high. Compared to the initial numbers, some foreign-born orphans had returned to their countries of origin. This problem also affected Italian nationals: it was common for orphans and foster families to move from the location of the femicide to other regions. Another critical issue concerns the project's age limit, which prevents the participation of beneficiaries over 21. Not all potential beneficiaries were eligible after a more thorough check. Considering these complexities, by September 2023, after two years of the project, 13 orphans had been

⁷ During the design phase, the decision was made to ensure the presence of key operational partners in each region, essential for the effectiveness of the initiatives, such as a women's shelter, private social organizations, and associations focused on labor market integration. At the same time, the involvement of institutional partners (such as the Piedmont Region, the Metropolitan City of Turin, etc.) was emphasized, considering that supporting orphans and their foster families requires an effective network approach, where public entities and institutions collaborate to ensure an integrated and coordinated strategy.

taken into care, 17 orphans had been connected across the three regions (7 of whom were adults), and 6 foster families were involved. The initial difficulty in identifying beneficiaries posed a significant obstacle, as it hindered the smooth construction of the network and marginalized several partners who were supposed to carry out direct activities with the beneficiaries. This situation generated tensions within the network, communication and coordination difficulties, and a widespread sense of isolation, disconnection, lack of cohesion, and synergy.

Other critical aspects, arising from the lack of participants, include the poor mutual understanding of roles, activities, and intervention opportunities between project partners, both regionally and interregionally. A discontinuity in the implementation of project activities was observed, with a strong need to create spaces for discussion on methods and practices for taking charge of beneficiaries. This highlighted the necessity for ongoing, targeted training within the partnership, focusing on femicide-related topics, such as the relationship with the father, grieving processes, and the impact of violence on children's behavior in assuming gender roles.

During the discussions in the focus groups and interviews, an uneven involvement of the different regional realities emerged, with a clear centrality of the Piemonte context (home of the lead partner), while Liguria's involvement was more limited, and Valle d'Aosta was completely absent. The absence of femicide orphans in the Valle d'Aosta was certainly the main reason for this complete misalignment, so much so that the Valle d'Aosta group did not participate in meetings for several months. Another identified cause was the communication and sharing difficulties within the network: there was a lack of clear and targeted communication, both among the partnership members and with local services and institutions not directly involved in the project.

The realignment proposals that emerged from the monitoring were divided into two categories: immediate actions and long-term actions. Immediate proposals (such as sending agendas, minutes, and reintroducing information about partners in the materials to be disseminated) aim to improve communication and provide more clarity on roles, reducing disconnection between partners and facilitating access to information. These actions were also designed to support the lead partner in initiating new strategies to locate femicide orphans (also using other databases and intensifying interviews with local social services). Additionally, the allocation of a budget for each territory was a step toward more balanced resource management, which helped address the regional disparity, particularly between Liguria and Valle d'Aosta.

As for long-term actions, the resumption of continuous training on specific issues such as femicide and its impact on gender roles helped strengthen cohesion and competence within the partnership. This addresses part of the criticality related to discontinuity in activity implementation and the need to align intake practices.

Since September 2024, the lead partner has implemented fundamental changes that have allowed the project and the consortium to establish a new shared and collective path. Some examples include the implementation of a new updated communication strategy⁸,

⁸ After approximately two years from the launch of the project, the communication methodology was renewed. Specifically, informational postcards about the project were sent to all professional orders, such as those of doctors, nurses, social workers, and journalists. So far, communications have been sent across the entire Piedmont region, and efforts are now beginning in the other two involved regions. Additionally, the project's presence at city events, such as the Book Fair in Turin, and the presentation of the project to local and national media outlets, has allowed for reaching an increasingly broad audience, which has helped identify new beneficiaries of the project.

accompanied by the realignment of operational staff within the lead partner, the redefinition of the meeting schedule, weekly minutes of activities, and the launch of new training courses. Furthermore, the identification of new beneficiaries and the appointment of a new territorial referent for Valle d'Aosta led to some progress. In the following paragraphs, we will analyze these changes in detail.

5.3. What Do the Beneficiaries of the SOS Project Ask For?

To overcome the complexities related to identifying beneficiaries, since September 2024, the partnership has made use of new information collection tools, such as the database created by *NonUnaDiMeno* on femicides, lesbicides, and trans*cides⁹. This database allowed for the recovery of data collected since 2020, extending beyond the EURES data (which had been used in the project design phase and only went up to that year). The implementation of communication strategies also enabled the arrival of new beneficiaries through services and the territorial network.

The data presented here were collected through beneficiary forms (forms filled out at the time of intake), minutes from the various steering committees¹⁰, and materials available on the Chairos platform, the *SOS Orphans project* platform used by all consortia participating in the "A Braccia Aperte" funding program.

Since September 2024, new femicide cases involving individuals under 21 years old have occurred, prompting the consortium to assess new strategies to disseminate the project and its opportunities so that orphans and foster families seek support and operators can offer a quick and effective intake. After two years from the start of the project, the situation is summarized in the table below:

Table no. 1. Number of beneficiaries considered within the SOS Special Orphans project, retrieved through the analysis of beneficiary forms, minutes, and the Chairos platform.

Regions	No. of identified beneficiaries	No. of beneficiaries contacted	No. of beneficiaries taken in charge	Total No. of potential beneficiaries taken in charge by the SOS project
Piemonte	18	11	13	42
Liguria	11	0	12	23
Valle d'Aosta	0	0	0	0
Total	29	11	25	65

Source: Centralized data collection platform for all consortia belonging to the Con I Bambini 'A Braccia Aperte' funding call. The data are not publicly accessible and have not been released.

Identified beneficiaries are those who have been identified starting from the reports of the territorial network and from EURES data and those identified in progress through

⁹ <https://osservatoriorazionale.nonunadimeno.net>.

¹⁰ The steering committees are monthly online meetings where the entire operational partnership comes together.

the national database of *NonUnaDiMeno*¹¹. The number of *engaged* beneficiaries, on the other hand, means all the beneficiaries with whom, again through the territorial network, the health services or other public services, the *lead partner* has already had a first contact, by phone, via mail or with a meeting directly at the S.O.S. Centre¹². The first three columns represent distinct sets of individuals: the number of identified beneficiaries does not include the number of connected beneficiaries, just as the number of connected beneficiaries does not include those who have been formally taken in charge.

Table no. 2. The cases managed, both previous and new, at the start of the project across the three involved regions.

Regions	No. of femicide cases taken on during the project (in emergency)	No. of femicide cases taken on before the start of the project (Previous cases)	No. of cases taken on (emergency and Previous cases)
Piemonte	1	12	13
Liguria	8	4	12
Valle d'Aosta	0	0	0
Total	9	16	25

Source: Centralized data collection platform for all consortia belonging to the Con I Bambini 'A Braccia Aperte' funding call. The data are not publicly accessible and have not been released.

As for the number of individuals taken on, there are currently 25 young people receiving support from the *SOS project* in the areas of education, economics, and other relevant aspects. However, the changes in communication practices within the project activities, as previously discussed, have not only accelerated the identification of orphans but have also facilitated their faster inclusion in support pathways, contributing to a significant increase in the educational grants allocated.

Support interventions with beneficiaries are carried out through *educational grants*, which are *individualized assistance plans* aimed at providing educational goods and services to children, adolescents, and young people up to the age of 21, who belong to the target group of orphans of victims of domestic crimes. The grant is thus structured as a personalized plan, designed to meet the specific needs of each beneficiary, considering their age group and individual needs. It includes, for example, the distribution of goods, access to services provided by entities outside the partnership, expenditure for restricted goods (such as meal vouchers, both food and non-food, fuel vouchers, paper and electronic vouchers), reimbursement of expenses to beneficiaries, advances for documented expenses, advances for non-documented and unrestricted expenses, and access to services provided by the partnership.

¹¹ <https://osservatorionazionale.nonunadimeno.net>

¹² In November 2021, the S.O.S. Orfani Center was opened in Turin, serving as the central hub and coordination point for the network, which allowed for the institutionalization of the project and its activities.

Table 3. Numbers of beneficiaries and the educational grants provided across the three regions involved in the project.

Regions	No. of beneficiaries of educational grants	No. of educational grants distributed
Piemonte	6	11
Liguria	5	7
Valle d'Aosta	0	0
Total	11	18

Source: Centralized data collection platform for all consortia belonging to the *Con I Bambini 'A Braccia Aperte* funding call. The data are not publicly accessible and have not been released.

Table 3 presents the numbers of grants awarded. The data refers to 11 beneficiaries, as the database update is still in progress. The number of grants is higher than the number of beneficiaries because some orphans have been assigned multiple educational grants, each identified through different needs.

The grants can cover various areas of intervention, each with specific objectives:

1. *Basic needs dimension:* Aims to meet the basic needs of beneficiaries in situations of economic hardship, providing support for food, housing, and clothing expenses.

2. *Recreational dimension:* Aims to promote and support, in a positive environment, the individual, relational, and social resources and potential of the beneficiaries. Activities can include theater, music, art, or sports workshops (e.g., swimming or basketball courses).

3. *Psychosocial dimension:* Seeks to enhance the emotional and relational well-being of children and young people through initiatives such as trips, summer camps, or vouchers for psychological support.

4. *Educational and school dimension:* Aimed at supporting minors in their educational path, offering motivation and assistance in learning and completing school assignments. Activities can include the purchase of books, academic tutoring, or remediation in school subjects.

According to the data, the interventions are primarily related to basic needs (8 cases), particularly interventions such as payment for the driver's license course, the purchase of clothing, or support for the activation of a public transportation subscription for school transport. Another intervention was the payment of the IMU (Municipal Property Tax)¹³ for the house where the femicide occurred, which the orphans no longer resided in. Regarding other dimensions, in the recreational area (2 cases), support was provided, for example, for the annual membership for a soccer course, including costs for clothing, equipment, and travel for attendance, or swimming pool registration. In the only case where psychosocial support was offered, it was a path with a psychologist from the Torino Center, which is still ongoing. In terms of educational and school support (7 cases), the main assistance was provided, for example, through help with the purchase of books and

¹³ IMU (Municipal Property Tax) is a local tax on the ownership of real estate in Italy. It is levied annually by municipalities on property owners, including second homes, commercial buildings, and land.

stationery, payment of university tuition fees, and so on. Other important pieces of information to highlight include trends observed in the project cases, as confirmed by the literature (Baldry, 2018), which indicates that foster care typically occurs within the maternal family when present, or alternatively in residential communities. Only in one case was the person placed in a therapeutic community. Regarding the foster care of the 19 beneficiaries considered in our project (excluding six young persons who live independently), 6 were placed in communities, while the remaining 13 were placed with relatives. Of these 13, only 2 (siblings) were placed with the paternal family, while the others were placed with uncles or maternal grandparents. Another data point presented in the analysis of the project's beneficiary sheets is mostly previous cases¹⁴: out of a total of 25 orphans taken in charge, only 9 are recent cases. Others have been identified in recent months, with whom contact has already been made but who are not included in this count.

6. Conclusions and Policy Implications

6.1 Evidence Alignment and Overarching Findings

This paper analysed the main challenges and first results of the S.O.S. project, highlighting the complexity of intervention addressed to persons orphaned by femicide in the specific North-Western Italy. The multi-stage monitoring process empirically validated the need for a systemic, rather than an emergency-based, response.

The analysis of beneficiary data confirms that femicide orphans, often doubly victimised by the trauma of loss and the subsequent complex family dynamics, face unique and complex challenges that are multidimensional. Summarizing the main results of this study, the support needs observed and systematized from the project records are clustered across four critical dimensions (psychosocial, educational, basic needs, and recreational), which must be addressed holistically. Furthermore, the monitoring process highlighted significant systemic fragmentation in service delivery, communication, and resource allocation among the project partners, which poses the greatest barrier to effective intervention.

This evidence directly validates the urgency of overcoming the current fragmented approach and makes it crucial to implement a structured reparative policy that ensures the legal recognition of minors as direct victims and the development of a stable, integrated, and multidisciplinary system of services.

6.2 Delineating Practical Implications (Micro, Meso, and Macro Levels)

Our findings translate into specific and differentiated implications for policy and practice across three interconnected levels:

Micro-level (Direct Practice): At the individual level, the high incidence of psychosocial and relational needs necessitates the adoption of standardized assessment tools for complex trauma and risk screening for witnessed violence. Practice must be highly personalized and trauma-informed, particularly in managing delicate aspects such as the request for rapprochement with the offending father. This dynamic requires targeted training of social workers and practitioners to manage the difficult balance between the child's rights and their emotional needs, ensuring every decision is made solely in the person's best interest.

¹⁴ "Previous cases" refer to, as previously emphasized, all cases that date back to the years prior to the activation of the project in 2021.

Meso-level (Service Design and Inter-Agency Coordination): To address the fragmentation observed, the design of the support system must become user-centric, moving beyond the operational logic of individual partners. This requires a formalized approach to Service design should focus on: a) mapping the orphan's course of life (delineating every touchpoint, from initial contact to legal proceedings) to identify critical break points (e.g., long waiting times, repeated disclosure of trauma); b) creating holistic solutions to ensure that the four identified dimensions of support (psychosocial, educational, etc.) are delivered as a single, integrated flow rather than separate interventions; and c) standardizing protocol of intervention across regional contexts (Piedmont, Liguria, Valle D'Aosta).

These objectives must be implemented through *binding inter-agency protocols* among all institutional partners, ensuring the necessary data sharing, timely action, and continuous, multi-disciplinary training required to overcome operational silos and strengthen territorial networks.

Macro-level (Policy and Legislation): The structural gaps confirmed by this study demand that the Italian government move beyond project-based funding toward a national, long-term Reparative Policy Framework. This policy must implement structural funding mechanisms to sustain specialized services and legally establish the child's status as a direct victim, which is essential to effectively prevent the intergenerational transmission of violence and ensure homogeneous access to support across all regions.

6.3 Constraints, Trade-offs, and Future Research Directions

Despite the robustness of our multi-phase monitoring process, this study is subject to several constraints that influence the scope and limits of inference. First, the findings are constrained by the regional scope of the North-West consortium, limiting the external validity and generalizability to other national or international contexts. The beneficiary sample is also a convenience sample, meaning the needs described may not fully represent the entire population of femicide orphans in Italy.

The implementation of the S.O.S. model highlights a critical trade-off in service design: the need for specialized, high-quality, trauma-informed care (high cost) often conflicts with the political imperative of broad national coverage and resource sustainability (low cost/high scale). Addressing this conflict requires a systemic shift in financial prioritization.

To advance research in this critical area, future studies must prioritize longitudinal designs to assess the long-term efficacy of intervention models and work to overcome system-level data gaps at a national level to ensure more comprehensive policy planning.

Authors contributions

Anna Micol Tropeano coordinated the monitoring activities (data collection and methodological section) and analyzed the results.

Paola Maria Torrioni had the scientific responsibility for the project, contributed to the conceptual framework, and supervised the overall research design and literature review.

Linda Scali contributed to data collection and to the writing and revision of the methodological section. All authors discussed the results together and approved the final manuscript.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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