

## Methodological features of the survey

### 1. KNOWLEDGE AIMS OF THE SURVEY

Violence against women and, in particular, domestic violence, represent a widespread and complex phenomena very difficult to study. Yet knowing them is essential to develop, at the institutional level, policies and services needed to face them.

The United Nations World Conference (Vienna, 1993) defines violence against women as:

*“... any gender violence act causing, or likely to cause, a physical, sexual, psychological or any other kind of suffering to the woman, including threats of such violence, acts of compelling or arbitrary acts of depriving personal freedom, both in private life than in public one”.*

Since the beginning of '90s, statistical institutes have studied violence within victimization surveys, collecting information about many kind of crimes, from theft attempted or realised, to robbery and so on. Also in Italy Istat dealt with sexual harassments and violence by a specific module within the multi purpose survey on citizens' safety (editions 1997-1998 e 2002). Such surveys about violence, planned to make light on not reported crimes and some important aspects as victims characteristics and the event modalities, represent useful tools to study and understand the dark figure of crime, but they are not enough to detect kinds of violence the victim suffers by someone who is very close to her, for example the *partner* or *ex-partner*, that is *domestic violence*.

On the basis of the above considerations since year 2001 the Equal Opportunity Department c/o the Ministries' Assembly Presidency and Istat entered in an Agreement to realize an *ad hoc* survey about domestic violence whose main aim is to know violence against women phenomena in Italy considering its whole types, in terms of prevalence and incidence, characteristics of anyone involved and consequences for victims.

In more details, the survey aims at detecting and describing:

- Widespread and characteristics of the extra-family violence and of domestic violence, in terms of number of events, dynamics and peculiarities of different violence events;
- Period when the event took place, for example during life or in the last 12 months;
- Victims' characteristics, their reactions to the violence event and physical, psychological and economic consequences of the suffered violence;
- Violence perpetrators characteristics, in particular for domestic violence;
- Incidence of the dark figure of violence, and reasons why violence is not reported to police;
- Daily life contests where violence happens;
- How the violence happened, the relationship history for domestic violence;
- Risk and protective factors both at an individual than a social level;
- Social costs of violence, both directly than indirectly related to the victim and eventually to her sons and daughters, to the offenders, to society, measured according to some negative consequences as the victim not able to perform normal daily activities, to work, the use of social and health services, or according to direct costs of violence (medical and psychological expenses, material or legal expenses);
- Violence suffered before 16th years of age.

### 2. THE SURVEY TECHNIQUE AND TRIALS MADE

The survey was realised by phone with the aid of computers (CATI), from January to October 2006 on a sample of 25.000 women.

The extremely sensitive subject required particular care to be taken about any phases of the process. Quality monitoring was made daily during the whole 9 months period of the survey. Women were very collaborative, for 52.7% of interviewers women were very willingness, and for 31.6% respondents' willingness was good. Only 2.8% of interviewers declared little collaboration of women along the whole length of the interview. The interviews' interruption rate was 2.5% and the refusal rate was 16,1%. The

last one is perfectly coherent with other similar surveys' refusal rates, as for example the Citizen's safety survey's one.

Interviewers were scheduled along all the day, so as to give the woman the possibility to choose the best moment to be interviewed.

Much care has been given to women safety, from the first to the last contact. Women had the possibility to stop the call at any time, they could be contacted on their mobile, they could verify the authenticity of the call and of the survey by calling the toll free number, if they asked for it they could obtain information about addresses and phone numbers of the closest to them women shelter.

Particular care was taken when selecting and training interviewers. The training consisted of front-desk lessons, exercises, role-playings (where participants, simulating interviewers and interviewee, simulate conditions similar to the correspondent actual ones). A specific psychological aid was assured to interviewers both during the training than during the data collection phase.

During interviews 63 interviewers were involved, considering times as to assure a good turn over and to contain the psychological stress and related burn out risks.

The survey is quite complex and a long design period was needed, with focus groups, qualitative studies, experts interviews, pre-test and pilot surveys, before the best release of the questionnaire was defined and the most suitable methodology to collect information in the Italian context was found. 9 focus group were conducted, with operators of women shelters, victims of violence, interviewers and other women aged in age class 18-70, not included in the above categories.

The design of the survey dealt with the possibility to define and better understand some contents to be analysed on one side, as the psychological violence, the economic one, risk factors, consequences of violence, the social context and violence stereotypes, on the other side some methodological aspects as the questionnaire design and the *wording*, the best way to approach the woman, interviewers characteristics, their training, the monitoring of the process quality and the interview's context.

### 3. THE QUESTIONNAIRE

To correctly collect data about the number of *physical and sexual violence* the respondent has suffered during the reference period, the so called *screening technique* is used. This technique consists in asking the respondent a set of questions about the typology and the number of violent behaviours she has suffered during a specific period of time, without asking at the moment other details about them. Indeed the *screening* technique focuses on the counting of events, making the interviewee be careful about event's frequencies instead of their description. The collection of details of the crime events follows their enumeration, by ad hoc deepening sections.

Questions are worded as to describe examples, victimization events in which the interviewed woman can recognise her experiences. The methodological choose shared with other international surveys was to avoid to use the terms of "physical violence" or "sexual violence", preferring to describe concretely acts and/or behaviours as to make women more easy to disclose their experience and to make different type of violence being known.

The large use of details when asking women if they have suffered violence, providing them various possible situations, places and authors of violence, is a strategic choose to help victims to remember events happened many times ago and so decreasing a possible underestimate of the phenomena. Such an underestimate can be also caused by the fact that sometimes women do not consider themselves as victims and they have not developed the consciousness regarding the suffered violence, while they can more easily recognise single facts and episodes actually happened.

To make women feel more comfortable allowing them to speak more easily about the suffered violence, questions about the actual partner are placed after the violence by non partner section, where violence by relatives, colleagues, friends, other known people, strangers is detected.

Physical and sexual violence are collected with respect to various possible authors through *three different screening*:

- the section “*Screening of violence suffered by a non partner man*”, is administered firstly and to every interviewed women. Two sets of questions, one about physical violence and the other about sexual violence, both by relatives, colleagues, friends, other known people, strangers, are proposed;
- the section “*Screening of violence suffered by actual partner*” is administered to women who are married, or living with their partner, or fiancé at the moment of the interview;
- finally, the section “*Screening of violence suffered by previous partners*”, is administered to women that had one or more marriages, cohabitations with their partners or engagements.

The choose of three separated *screening* is considered strategic, firstly as it allows women to focus more accurately and in different moments of the interview, on events, stories of violence related to different authors, and secondly as it allows to address the theme of domestic violence more gradually, in an advanced phase of the interview, that is when a collaborative and faithful relation with the interviewer is expected to be reached.

**Physical violence** data have been collected by the following set of questions, conveniently customized depending on the fact if violence by a non partner or violence by the actual partner or an ex partner were asked about:

- has any man ever THREATENED to hurt you physically in a way that frightened you
- Since the age of 16, has any man ever THROWN SOMETHING AT YOU OR HIT YOU WITH SOMETHING that hurt or frightened you
- Has any man PUSHED OR GRABBED YOU OR TWISTED YOUR ARM OR PULLED YOUR HAIR in a way that hurt or frightened you
- Has any man SLAPPED, KICKED, BIT OR HIT YOU WITH A FIST
- has any man tried to STRANGLE OR SUFFOCATE YOU, BURN OR SCALD you on purpose
- Has any man used or threatened to use a KNIFE OR GUN on you
- has any man ever been PHYSICALLY VIOLENT towards you in a way that I have not already mentioned

data on **sexual violence** were obtained by the following set of questions:

- Has a man ever FORCED YOU INTO SEXUAL INTERCOURSE by threatening you, holding you down, or hurting you in some way

*If the interviewed woman answers no:*

- Has any man ever FORCED you INTO OTHER TYPES OF SEXUAL INTERCOURSE, for example anal sex also using hands or objects, or oral sex, that is using mouth
- Has any man ever ATTEMPTED TO FORCE YOU INTO SEXUAL INTERCOURSE by threatening you, holding you down or hurting you in some way
- Has any man ever forced or attempted to force you into SEXUAL ACTIVITY WITH SOMEONE ELSE, including being forced to have sex for money or in exchange for goods
- Has any man ever been sexually violent towards you in a way that I have not already mentioned

**Only for partners :**

- Did you ever had SEXUAL INTERCOURSES with Your PARTNER ALSO WHEN YOU DID NOT REALLY WANT IT because you feared his reaction
- Has Your PARTNER ever forced you into some SEXUAL ACTIVITY YOU FOUND DEGRADING OR THAT HUMBLING YOU

**Only for a man non partner**

- Has any man ever TOUCHED YOU SEXUALLY when you did not want him to in a way that was DISTRESSING to you

**Sexual violence before sixteen**

- Before you were sixteen HAS SOMEONE TOUCHED YOU SEXUALLY OR FORCED YOU INTO ANY SEXUAL ACTIVITY AGAINST YOUR WILL

**Physical violence before sixteen within family**

- Has Your father (or stepfather or another partner of Your mother) ever been violent against Your mother
- Has Your father (or stepfather or another partner of Your mother) ever been PHYSICALLY violent against You before you were sixteen
- Has Your mother (or stepmother, or another partner of your father) ever been PHYSICALLY violent against You
- Did You ever assist to violent events against Your brothers/sisters in the family You was born
- Have Your brother/sister ever been physically violent against You.

Psychological and economic violence was collected only referring to the women partners. More precisely, such violence is always asked when referring to the actual partner if there is one, and only referring to violent ones when considering ex-partners. The used set of questions was the following:

**Your actual partner /your ex partner (husband/cohabitant/fiancé ex husband /ex cohabitant /ex fiancé:**

- Got angry if you spoke with other men
- Humiliated or offended you in front of other people, for example treating you as silly, ridiculing Your opinions, or telling Your personal facts
- Criticised you for Your look, for how You dress or hair for example telling you are unattractive, inadequate
- Criticised you for how you manage the house, how you cook, or how you educate your children, for example telling you are unable to do anything. Ignored you, did not talk with you, did not listen to you, for example not considering what you say or not answering to your questions
- Called you names, insulted you or behaved in a way to put you down or to make you feel bad
- Tried to limit your contact with family and friends
- Was not supportive towards your work or studies or other activities that took place outside the home
- Imposed you how to dress, to comb or behave when you are with other people
- Was constantly suspicious that you had been unfaithful
- Followed you or kept track of your whereabouts in a way you found frightening
- Forbade or tried to forbid you to work
- Continuously controls how much and how you spend your money
- Forbade you the knowledge of the household income
- Forbade you the use of Your money or of the household money

- Damages or destroys your possessions or property
- Harmed or threatened to harm your children
- Harmed or threatened to harm someone else close to you
- Harmed or threatened to harm your pets, if you have any
- Threatened to kill himself

Violence expressed in the form of persecutory behaviours (the *stalking*) are collected with respect to ex partners of the woman (ex husband, ex cohabitant, ex fiancé) at the end of the screening section dedicated to such kind of partners. The set of questions are the following:

**Has a previous partner ever stalked you when you were ending your relationship or after the end of it, in a way you found frightening? For example:**

- Did he send you messages, phone calls, e-mail, mails or unwanted presents
- Did he repeatedly ask a date with you?
- Did he wait for you out of home/work/school?
- Did he try hard to speak with you notwithstanding you did not want it?
- Did he follow you, spy on you, blackmail you?

After having administered the *screening* about physical and sexual violence, the interview continues with two deepening sections: one about violence events suffered by non *partner* men and one about violence events suffered by a *partner* of the woman. If the interviewed woman has suffered more than one violence events of the same type (same type of violence to be explained), only details about the most recent event are collected.

In the deepening section the following information are collected.

In the case of **non partner author**:

- **Contextualize the episode**

Age of the victim at the time of the fact, period of the year and moment of the day when it happened, place and Country where it happened;

- **Characteristics of the author**

Age, education level, working and professional condition and economic activity of the author;

- **Details of the episode**

What has happened, if there were other people involved, victim's reaction, if the author was drunk or drugged, if he used arms, if there were other people not directly involved, if the victim felt her life in serious danger;

- **Consequences of violence and victim behaviours**

If the victim told the fact to somebody, who was that person and after how much time, eventual injuries of the victim, if the victim required medic care, the need to keep from daily activities and/or work, pregnancies caused by the sexual violence, applying to specialised structures or services, applying to psychological /psychiatric help, costs of medical and/or psychological care, remedies costs, damages to properties costs, legal costs, perceived seriousness of the fact, possible use of drugs or alcohol due to the suffered violence, changes of the victim's behaviours and/or manners.

- **Relation with police**

If the victim reported the fact to police or why she did not make it, consequent police actions, if after the report to the police there was an indictment and a conviction, victim's satisfaction with respect to the police actions.

In the case of **partner author**:

- **Details of the episode**

What was happened, if there were other people involved, where it happened, events or facts causing the violence, victim's reaction, if the author was drunk or drugged, if he used arms, if the victim felt her life in serious danger;

- **Consequences of violence and victim behaviours**

If the victim told the fact to somebody, who was that person and after how much time, eventual injuries of the victim, if the victim required medic care, the need to keep from daily activities and/or work, pregnancies caused by the sexual violence, applying to specialised structures or services, applying to psychological /psychiatric help, costs of medical and/or psychological care, remedies costs, damages to properties costs, legal costs, perceived seriousness of the fact, possible use of drugs or alcohol due to the suffered violence.

- **Relation with police**

If the victim reported the fact to police or why she did not make it, consequent police actions, if after the report to the police there was an indictment and a conviction, victim's satisfaction with respect to the police actions.

- **Story of the violence** (when more than one violence episode happened with respect to the same partner)

Number of suffered episode, when they began, violence when the victim was pregnant, children witness of the violence, children as victims of violence, previous episodes where the victim was injured, previous reports to the police, periods of separation from the partner due to the suffered violence, why, if she did, the victim decided to live again with the violent partner after separation.