



DATI ALLA MANO

I PODCAST

A CERTAIN KIND OF VIOLENCE

Violence against women is a multifaceted phenomenon. It has different faces and, sometimes, subtle implications, and is rooted in culture. In our culture which, probably, is affected by ancient legacies that have not yet been completely overcome.

I am Cristiana Conti, and this is Dati alla mano (Data at Hand), a podcast by Istat, the National Institute of Statistics, where I work in the Directorate for Communication, Information and Services to Citizens and Users. This initiative is part of a broader project to promote statistical culture.

In this episode, we will discuss data that quantifies the phenomenon of gender-based violence. We will also talk about the information we have available to monitor an unpleasant reality, because to stop it, we need to understand it. We will also discover the origin and meaning of the word femicide.

Let's start from the end: gender-based homicide. Let's see what the numbers tell us: in 2023, homicides – without gender distinction – were 330, a stable figure compared to the previous year. Of these 330 victims, 120 were women. This means they were fewer than men. Moreover, compared to the previous year, while homicides of men increased slightly, those of women decreased. However, there is an aspect that deeply differentiates female victims: more than half of them were killed by their partner or ex-partner, and overall, four out of five were killed within the nuclear unit or extended family. Among these cases, there are elderly women killed by a family member, generally by their partner, to end critical situations, such as a debilitating illness. However, men are not killed by their partners for similar reasons.

In other words, we are facing extreme acts of gender-based violence, even if our legislation does not distinguish it as a specific offence. But today, we have a term that is commonly used: femicide. Where does it come from and what exactly does it mean? We asked an Istat expert - Maria Giuseppina – Giusy – Muratore who has been dealing with data on violence against women for years.

Cristiana: Hello Giusy, welcome.

Giusy: Thank you, hello everyone.

C. Femicide is a word that appears in the media, but what exactly is its origin?

G. In reality, it is a definition that originated in Latin American countries, where it represented and represents a particularly significant phenomenon. The term has actually been used for some years as a statistical definition, meaning a woman killed because she is a woman.

C. What's that?

G. That is, we are talking about a gender-related homicide where the victim, perpetrator, and context can outline a specific picture. There are many variables to take into account. The

definition by the United Nations Statistical Commission considers that the murderer is the partner or ex-partner, or another family member, or even a person outside the family circle but in a context attributable to gender motivation.

C. Can we quantify the phenomenon in Italy, in Europe, and in the rest of the world?

G. Look, the United Nations estimated that in 2021 gender-related reasons can be identified in 45 thousand cases of women murdered worldwide. Five femicides every hour. The highest femicide rate is in Africa: 2.5 per 100,000 women.

C. And in Europe?

G. Much lower, 0.6 per 100,000 women.

C. And in Italy?

G. In Italy, Istat started calculating the number of femicides in 2020, based on the information provided by the Ministry of the Interior. I can tell you that for 2022, out of 126 murders of women, 106 are alleged femicides.

C. But gender-based violence is not limited to these extreme and irreversible acts, isn't it?

G. That's right, it's a phenomenon with many aspects. It can be physical violence, whether carried out or threatened, or psychological violence, sexual violence, but it can also be economic violence, a more subtle kind ...

C. What do you mean?

G. Well, consider that about 40% of women who contacted an anti-violence centre in 2022 reported having experienced some type of economic violence: for example, they could not use their own income or did not know the amount of money available in the family, or they had no say in how to manage the money from the family budget.

C. I imagine there were also cases of total economic dependence?

G. Yes, 60% of women were not economically independent.

C. Listen, you mentioned anti-violence centres...but how many women turn to them and for how long do they suffer before taking this decision?

G. Look, in 2022, more than 26,000 women started a journey with the help of anti-violence centres. And for over 40% of them, at least five years had passed since the first violent incidents.

C. But have requests for help become more frequent?

G. Yes, the number of violence victims contacting 1522, for example, is increasing, in 2023 there were more than 16,000. This is an increase compared to the previous year.

C. 1522, I remind you, is the public utility number against violence and stalking. But what kind of experience do these women have behind them?

G. More than half of the victims experience violence within their current relationship, more than 20% suffer it from an ex-partner, 13.5% are victims of family members.

C. How are these data collected?

G. It is possible thanks to the collaboration among institutions, Regions and associations. This joint effort is essential to understand the different aspects and forms of gender-based violence and also to bring out the hidden cases. I would also like to remind our listeners that since 2017, Istat has created a dedicated information system, which is available on our website and is very detailed.

C. But in your opinion, apart from producing and disseminating data, and this is absolutely the main rule, because if you don't know a phenomenon, you can't even address it, what can be done to try to contain violence against women?

G. The Istanbul Convention of 2011 states it: one of the three 'P's is prevention, in addition to protection and prosecution.

C. And how can prevention be done?

G. For example, by working with young people, in schools, by providing training to teachers, to fight stereotypes regarding gender roles.

C. And how widespread are these stereotypes?

G. Well, we conducted the first survey in 2018 and repeated it in 2023, and the first data from this second edition, which is still ongoing, tell us that generally the prevalence has decreased, but much more among women than among men. And then – fortunately – tolerance towards physical violence has decreased.

C. Thank goodness for that, at least.

G. However, there is still 4.3% of respondents who consider it acceptable for a couple to occasionally exchange a slap. Then there are opinions regarding sexual violence...

C. That is to say?

G. Regarding the statement that if a woman truly doesn't want to, she can avoid a sexual contact, more than 39% of the men interviewed declared themselves very or quite in agreement.

C. That is, denying the rape, if I succeeded it's because she wanted it after all.

G. There is also a percentage of interviewed women who think this way, unfortunately, but it is a lower percentage compared to the percentage of men. As I mentioned earlier, the data collected in 2023 tell us that women have made great strides in awareness.

C. Looking now at the web and social media: what role do new technologies play, do they fuel or help in containing violence?

G. It's difficult to give a clear answer, I'd say both are true.

C. Why?

G. I'll explain, in agreement with the Department for Equal Opportunities, at Istat we have developed an in-depth study on gender-based violence based on sentiment analysis and emotions generated by content conveyed through social media.

C. Interesting.

G. Yes, the aim was to observe how social media users react to violence against women and what discussions are generated around violence.

C. And what did you find?

G. I should start by saying that we developed an indicator that measures both the degree of indignation and the presence of hate speech, which is mainly triggered by specific events. What emerges is certainly a very strong level of indignation from people when we talk about violence, but on the other hand, we also detected violent language.

C. For example?

G. Body shaming or even the secondary victimisation of women who have experienced violence.

C. This makes us understand that, on some issues, we are divided. But there is a mindset that still exists, I would like to understand: when it comes to women who suffer harassment, or even rape, is it still believed that they 'were asking for it'? As if men cannot resist what they perceive as a provocation?

G. Yes, and this attitude also survives among some women. These are the stereotypes where men and women tend to converge: the role played by how one dresses, or having accepted an invitation after a party, or being under the influence of alcohol.

C. Still stereotypes... will we manage to dismantle them?

G. As I said before, we need to work with the younger generations. Furthermore, the 2023 data tell us that 16.1% of young people aged between 18 and 29 consider as acceptable solution to monitor his wife's or partner's mobile phone or social media activities. You understand that this involves a kind of exercise of power by men over women. This too can be seen as a form of violence.

C. I'd say there's still a long way to go!

G. And what emerges from the data is that more educated people are less subject to stereotypes at all ages. And this is a turning point, considering that violence has strong cultural roots.

C. However, we know that among women who are victims of violence, there are also graduates, even women who hold a doctorate...

G. Yes, violence is a cross-cutting phenomenon. But it is possible to stop this cycle, that is, the transmission of a violent behaviour to children who risk becoming perpetrators of violence if they have experienced it in their family, or learn to tolerate it.

C. Do we also have evidence of this phenomenon?

G. Yes, we found this with the survey on violence against women and more recently with the survey on the users of anti-violence centres: the latter shows that the percentage of those who had experienced at least four acts of violence was higher among women who had witnessed their father's violence against their mother as children.

C. As you said, one also learns to tolerate. So, let's end on this note of awareness: stopping violence is important for ourselves but also as to safeguard future generations. Thank you, Giusy, for being with us.

G. Thank you and goodbye.

We have understood that violence is the result of an unbalanced power relationship between men and women. We have also understood that education is a tool to fight gender role stereotypes and that for women, protecting themselves also means stopping the transmission of violent behaviour from generation to generation.

I am Cristiana Conti and this was Dati alla mano (Data at Hand), a podcast from the National Institute of statistics.

This episode was produced with the support of Storielibere.fm

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Are there any topics you would like to explore further? Write to me at datiallamano@istat.it

Maria Giuseppina Muratore and Manuela Bartolotta worked on this episode.