Female Violence Against Men: An Italian Study

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the present study is to investigate in greater depth the phenomenon of violence perpetrated by women against men in Italy, through the administration of a survey based on the Italian Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (ISTAT) guidelines used to investigate male violence against women.

Methodology: In collaboration with the Ankyra Center, which has been assisting victims of gender-based violence for many years, the survey questionnaires were administered online through a controlled web-based procedure. The questionnaire was published on the Ankyra website and disseminated through its social media pages (Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube). Online administration began in February 2025 and ended in May 2025.

Findings: A total of 3,873 questionnaires were completed in full and statistically analyzed. Among the respondents, 71.25% reported having experienced physical violence, 40.62% sexual violence, 83.18% psychological violence, 55.64% stalking, and 8.37% revenge porn.

Originality: Given the absolute lack of data at the national level in Italy, this study, following the 2012 fact-finding survey, represents the first substantial research effort specifically aimed at investigating this phenomenon. Although the phenomenon has been studied in other countries, it unfortunately remains underestimated in Italy.

Social Implications: The findings of this study raise the hope of fostering greater awareness of a real phenomenon that is too often overlooked both in courtrooms and in society at large, with the aim of creating support networks that also address the needs of male victims.

Keywords: male victimization, social and health interventions, quantitative analysis, abuses, female offenders.

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Introduction

In 2012, a fact-finding study was published on violence experienced by men in Italy (Macrì et al., 2012). The purpose of the study was to determine whether, in accordance with the international scientific literature (for example, Davies, 2002; Breiding et al., 2011; Vertamatti et al., 2013), a proportion of the Italian male population could also be victims of physical, sexual, and psychological violence, as well as stalking*, perpetrated by female partners and/or former female partners. In the absence of official data, this study was sufficient to refute the idea—still widespread and deeply rooted today—that inter-gender violence is unidirectional (man vs. woman), demonstrating, on the contrary, that women can also perpetrate physical, sexual, and psychological violence against men.

The issue that arises in the study of this phenomenon is presumably related to a cultural problem dating back to criminological studies, which allowed a series of prejudices to become established and led to the emergence of stereotypes akin to those associated with Lombrosian thinking concerning the intrinsically benevolent nature of women's behavior (Lombroso & Ferrero, 1893).

As is well known, Lombroso, reflecting on female criminal activity, argued that the lower prevalence of female criminality was attributable to women's weakness and stupidity in comparison with men. He went so far as to assert that numerous factors protected women from entering the criminal sphere, including motherhood, compassion, and weakness. We believed such assumptions had been overcome by decades of research grounded in approaches far removed from positivist methodology and had been dismantled by the very cultural evolution of our society.

Today, in light of the research presented here, we discover that gender-based interpretations such as Lombroso's, which had long been considered outdated, have instead generated over time a remarkably tenacious cultural substratum, both within the subtlest layers of public opinion and deeply rooted social attitudes and, consequently, within legislative development itself. For a long time, legislation codified women's inferiority within family law and, at times, in the field of employment—for example, by regulating access to the magistracy, which was not opened to women until as late as 1963 (Law No. 66 of 1963).

The Lombrosian—or, more precisely, para- or crypto-Lombrosian—legacy was presumably responsible for translating the alleged biological inferiority of women into an equivalent form of social inferiority. This approach is well exemplified by the various debates within the Constituent Assembly, where, despite the affirmation in Article 3 of the Constitution of the equality of all persons before the law, the subsequent implementation and application of the law itself, encompassing both men and women, resulted in restrictions and unequal application to the detriment of women.

This stereotypical view of women, regarded as being removed from any form of violent or deviant behavior, also contributed significantly to distorting the role of women within the dynamics of organized mafia crime, denying any form of participatory activity on the basis of the prejudice that mafia rituals and practices could not pertain to women. This approach resulted in significant errors in investigative analyses of various mafia-related criminal activities. Female agency was often obscured by a distorted view of women's role within mafia organizations, which was erroneously regarded as an exclusive domain of the male sphere.

As already mentioned above, although criminological research over the long post-Lombrosian decades has sought to overcome the remnants of positivism and has developed a theoretical and methodological *habitus*—and may even be described as scientific *tout court*—that is far more conscious and sophisticated, it nevertheless appears to have been affected by the cultural stereotype of men as having higher rates of criminality than women. This has partly resulted in a focus on the

quantitative analysis of the phenomenon, while thereby completely losing sight of a phenomenon that is by no means residual or secondary, such as the one addressed by this research.

The gradual overcoming of the positivist perspective is certainly also attributable to the cultural revolution initiated by the feminist movement. While advocating for women's intellectual and cultural engagement in academia and society through recognition of women's role in the various domains of social discourse, the movement also, more or less implicitly, and particularly through its most insightful voices (Marotta, 1987), drew attention to female criminal behavior that had too often been ignored or underestimated (Fadda, 2012).

It is from these premises that the study undertaken by the Authors originates. Drawing on the complementarity of their respective disciplines, they investigated a real phenomenon—violence perpetrated by women against men—by analyzing its behavioral dynamics (Physical Violence, Sexual Violence, Psychological Violence, Stalking, and Revenge Porn) and providing a criminological and sociocultural interpretation of the findings that emerged.

Materials and Method

The questionnaire used in the study is based on the one employed by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat) in its 2014 survey on violence against women. It consists of a series of questions to which participants are required to answer "true" or "false" and, in the event of an affirmative response, to identify the perpetrator of the violence (a person with whom they have had an intimate relationship, a relative, an acquaintance, or a stranger).

The questions are divided into the following categories: Physical Violence, Sexual Violence, Psychological Violence, Stalking, and Revenge Porn.

The questions relating to the category "Physical Violence" (PV) are eight in total. Some examples are: "Has it ever happened that a woman pushed, shoved, scratched, or pulled your hair, causing you harm?" and "Has it ever happened that a woman threw an object at you or hit you with an object that caused or could have caused you harm?"

The questions relating to the category "Sexual Violence" (SV) are eight in total. Some examples are: "Has it ever happened that a woman touched you on your intimate areas against your will or without your consent?" and "Have you ever had sexual intercourse with a woman even though you did not want to, in order to avoid negative reactions from her?"

The questions relating to the category "Psychological Violence" (PsyV) are twenty-three in total. Some examples are: "Has it ever happened that a woman unpleasantly criticized you because you were unable to earn enough money or because of your social standing?" and "Has it ever happened that a woman tried to restrict your relationships with your family of origin or with your friends/acquaintances?"

The questions relating to the category "Stalking" (S) are eight in total. Some examples are: "Has it ever happened that a woman sent you unwanted messages, e-mails, letters, telephone calls, or gifts?" and "Has it ever happened that a woman repeatedly waited for you outside your home, workplace, or elsewhere, against your express wishes?"

The questions relating to the category "Revenge Porn" (RP) are four in total. Some examples are: "Has it ever happened that a woman posted your intimate images online or shared them with others without your knowledge or without your consent?" and "Has it ever happened that a woman threatened to make your intimate images public as an act of revenge or blackmail?"

It should be noted that the questionnaire also includes an additional open-ended section in which respondents can describe the circumstances and methods of the violent acts they experienced.

In collaboration with the Ankyra Center, which has been assisting victims of gender-based violence for many years, the questionnaire was administered online through a controlled web-based procedure. The questionnaire was published on the Ankyra website and disseminated through its social media pages (Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube). The questionnaire data were collected from February 1 to May 25, 2025.

The questionnaire could be completed only by adults and was anonymous. A single access point was provided to anyone wishing to complete it. To prevent duplication and falsification, the questionnaire incorporated a control system designed to prevent more than one questionnaire from being submitted from the same device. Once access had been granted, participants were asked to provide basic demographic information concerning their age, geographical area of residence, possible number of children, and marital status. A questionnaire was considered valid for the purposes of sample data collection only if it had been completed in its entirety.

Results

During the data collection period (February–May 2025), 6,523 accesses to the questionnaire were recorded, resulting in 3,873 complete and valid questionnaires for research purposes (equivalent to 59% of all accesses). A total of 50.5% of the questionnaires were completed in Northern Italy, while 26.6% were completed in Central Italy and 16.7% in Southern Italy. With regard to the Islands, 6.8% of the questionnaires were completed there.

The respondents were also divided into four age groups (18–29, 30–39, 40–49, and 50–59 years).

The questionnaire identified seven different marital-status categories (single, cohabiting, married, separated, divorced, undergoing separation, and widowed). ISTAT statistics do not allow for a precise distinction between being in a “couple relationship” among single and cohabiting individuals. Similarly, it is difficult to provide an overall figure for separated individuals, since many of them subsequently divorced or entered into a new relationship.

Broadly speaking, the proportion of single respondents, including cohabiting individuals, corresponds to that of the general population (58% versus 54%), whereas the proportion of married respondents, including separated individuals, is lower (30.5% versus 42%). Conversely, divorced individuals account for approximately 10% of the sample, compared with 3.2% of the general population.

General Results

The following section presents the overall results of the study, broken down by geographical area (Northern Italy, Central Italy, Southern Italy, and the Islands) with regard to Physical Violence (PV), Sexual Violence (SV), Psychological Violence (PsyV), Stalking (S), and Revenge Porn (RP), together with their frequency: Frequent (F) and Very Frequent (VF).

North	PV	F+VF/VF	SV	F+VF/VF	PsyV	F+VF/VF	S	F+VF/VF	RP	F+VF
18-29	**66,29%**	24,24% 3,90%	**42,13%**	27,40% 4,11%	**81,46%**	67,01% 22,22%	**43,54%**	46,41% 13,07%	**9,55%**	21,43%
30-39	**71,66%**	27,61% 3,66%	**43,31%**	30,23% 4,19%	**83,83%**	69,05% 21,67%	**53,69%**	45,63% 11,79%	**8,98%**	8,11%
40-49	**74,23%**	35,84% 3,90%	**44,42%**	24,02% 3,49%	**88,85%**	74,03% 22,29%	**67,69%**	55,20% 11,56%	**7,88%**	5,71%
50-59	**66,28%**	23,68% 4,82%	**33,43%**	21,05% 4,39%	**81,27%**	70,21% 22,70%	**55,04%**	54,59% 12,43%	**6,63%**	17,39%
Total North	**69,62%**	28,14% 3,79%	**40,83%**	24,18% 3,91%	**83,85%**	68,58% 21,09%	**54,99%**	50,18% 12,83%	**8,26%**	15,93%

Table 1. Overall results for Northern Italy. VC = Very Frequent; F+VC = Frequent plus Very Frequent. The "Very Frequent" category is not calculated for Revenge Porn due to a lack of data.

Central	PV	F+VF/VF	SV	F+VF/VF	PsyV	F+VF/VF	S	F+VF/VF		RP	F+VF
18-29	**67,06%**	28,57% 2,68%	**44,71%**	37,84% 0,00%	**81,27%**	66,41% 23,66%	**42,35%**	47,22% 8,33%		**10,59%**	11,11%
30-39	**72,20%**	29,48% 3,47%	**38,17%**	24,44% 2,22%	**84,65%**	63,24% 16,18%	**50,21%**	41,18% 5,04%		**8,30%**	5,26%
40-49	**74,81%**	30,26% 5,64%	**38,93%**	21,43% 4,08%	**81,30%**	71,83% 22,54%	**59,54%**	55,84% 11,69%		**4,58%**	10,00%
50-59	**67,15%**	24,81% 6,02%	**34,83%**	31,88% 4,35%	**75,62%**	71,71% 21,71%	**57,21%**	56,64% 18,58%		**7,96%**	25,00%
Total Central	**70,31%**	27,47% 4,09%	**39,16%**	27,64% 2,62%	**79,80%**	67,48% 19,35%	**52,33%**	50,37% 11,22%		**7,86%**	14,44%

Table 2. Overall results for Central Italy. VC = Very Frequent; F+VC = Frequent plus Very Frequent. The "Very Frequent" category is not calculated for Revenge Porn due to a lack of data.

South	PV	F+VF/VF	SV	F+VF/VF	PsyV	F+VF/VF	S	F+VF/VF	RP	F+VF
18-29	**74,67%**	33,04% 5,36%	**48,67%**	38,36% 10,96%	**81,33%**	69,67% 28,69%	**44,00%**	57,58% 16,67%	**10,67%**	46,67%
30-39	**77,92%**	24,37% 9,24%	**40,91%**	30,16% 12,70%	**87,66%**	71,11% 27,41%	**60,39%**	46,24% 20,43%	**14,94%**	25,00%
40-49	**78,49%**	39,26% 8,15%	**47,09%**	35,80% 9,88%	**92,44%**	74,68% 34,18%	**65,70%**	62,16% 21,62%	**8,72%**	53,85%
50-59	**75,53%**	35,21% 7,04%	**41,49%**	31,58% 10,53%	**81,91%**	70,13% 27,27%	**65,96%**	67,74% 17,74%	**11,70%**	30,00%
Total South	**76,65%**	32,44% 8,18%	**44,54%**	34,52% 11,11%	**85,84%**	68,53% 25,59%	**59,01%**	59,86% 25,59%	**11,51%**	36,85%

Table 3. General Results – Overall results for southern Italy. VC = Very Frequent; F+VC = Frequent plus Very Frequent. The "Very Frequent" category is not calculated for revenge porn due to a lack of data.

Islands	PV	F+VF VF	SV	F+VF VF	PsyV	F+VF VF	S	F+VF VF	RP	F+VF
18-29	**62,96%**	27,27% 0,00%	**44,44%**	30,43% 4,35%	**77,78%**	61,90% 16,67%	**40,74%**	31,82% 9,09%	**9,26%**	20,00%
30-39	**75,31%**	26,67% 5,00%	**49,38%**	23,68% 2,63%	**81,48%**	65,15% 18,18%	**60,49%**	33,33% 6,25%	**8,64%**	0,00%
40-49	**76,39%**	49,09% 5,45%	**37,50%**	25,93% 3,70%	**91,67%**	75,76% 24,24%	**75,00%**	61,11% 11,11%	**5,56%**	66,67%
50-59	**58,97%**	29,17% 0,00%	**20,51%**	37,50% 12,50%	**82,05%**	77,42% 32,26%	**48,72%**	70,59% 29,41%	**0,00%**	0,00%
Total Islands	**68,41%**	30,70% 2,55%	**37,96%**	25,12% 4,26%	**83,24%**	67,75% 21,60%	**56,24%**	50,01% 13,57%	**5,86%**	20,98%

Table 4. General Results – Overall results for Islands. VC = Very Frequent; F+VC = Frequent plus Very Frequent. The "Very Frequent" category is not calculated for revenge porn due to a lack of data.

Italy	PV	F+VF VF	SV	F+VF VF	PsyV	F+VF VF	S	F+VF VF	RP	F+VF
18-29	**67,75%**	28,28% 2,98%	**44,99%**	33,50% 4,86%	**79,55%**	66,24% 22,81%	**42,66%**	45,76% 11,79%	**10,02%**	24,80%
30-39	**74,27%**	27,03% 5,34%	**42,94%**	27,12% 5,43%	**84,41%**	67.13% 20,86%	**56,20%**	41,60% 10,88%	**10,21%**	9,59%
40-49	**75,98%**	38,61% 5,78%	**41,99%**	26,80% 5,51%	**88,56%**	74,08% 25,81%	**66,98%**	58,58% 15,94%	**6,69%**	34,06%
50-59	**66,99%**	28,20% 4,21%	**32,56%**	30,50% 7,94%	**80,21%**	72,36% 25,99%	**56,73%**	62,39% 19,54%	**6,57%**	18,09%
Total Italy	**71,25%**	30,53% 4,57%	**40,62%**	29,48% 5,93%	**83,18%**	69,95% 23,86%	**55,64%**	52,08% 14,53%	**8,37%**	21,63%

Table 5. General Results – Overall results for Italy. VC = Very Frequent; F+VC = Frequent plus Very Frequent. The "Very Frequent" category is not calculated for revenge porn due to a lack of data.

The results appear consistent and homogeneous and demonstrate similar patterns across all geographical areas and age groups. With regard to physical violence, psychological violence, and stalking, all geographical areas show an age-related pattern in which prevalence reaches a peak among respondents aged 40–49 and subsequently declines in the 50–59 age group. This pattern is also reflected in the overall Italian average (Table 5). Central Italy is the only area showing a peak in the 30–39 age group with regard to psychological violence.

The situation is more complex with regard to sexual violence. In this case, there is a fairly clear shift toward the younger age groups, which show higher percentages in Central Italy (18–29), Southern Italy (18–29), and the Islands (30–39). This is reflected in the overall average, which reaches its highest value in the 18–29 age group. Northern Italy presents a more regular pattern, with a peak among those aged 40–49, although the percentages of sexual violence in the first three age groups are very similar to those observed in the other geographical areas.

Finally, with regard to Revenge Porn, positive responses do not exceed 15%, probably because this is a phenomenon whose social harmfulness and criminal consequences have not yet been fully assessed.

Overall, the figures are consistent with one another: physical violence ranges between 50% and 78%, while sexual violence ranges between 20% and 49%, with the lowest values occurring only in the 50–59 age group. Psychological violence consistently shows high values, ranging between 75% and 92%. Stalking ranges between 43% and 75%, while Revenge Porn ranges from 0.00% to 14%.

The Islands have the lowest average values for physical violence (68%) and sexual violence (37%), while Central Italy records the lowest values for psychological violence (79%) and stalking (52%). Southern Italy has the highest values for physical violence (76%), sexual violence (44%), psychological violence (85%), and stalking (59%). Southern Italy also records the highest percentages for Revenge Porn; however, given the limited amount of data, there is insufficient evidence to assert that this represents a statistically reliable prevalence.

Conversely, an analysis by age group shows that the age group most affected by the phenomenon is 40–49 years for physical violence (75.98%), psychological violence (88.56%), and stalking (66.98%), whereas for sexual violence the most affected age group is 18–29 years (44.99%), and for Revenge Porn it is 30–39 years (10.21%).

With regard to differences between geographical areas, Southern Italy appears to be the area with the highest percentage of self-reported violence experienced by men across all forms examined: physical

violence (76.65%), sexual violence (44.54%), psychological violence (85.84%), stalking (59.01%), and Revenge Porn (11.51%).

Physical Violence: Questionnaire Items

1 – Has it ever happened that a woman threatened to physically strike you?

2 – Has it ever happened that a woman threw an object at you or hit you with an object that caused or could have caused you harm?

3 – Has it ever happened that a woman pushed, shoved, scratched, or pulled your hair, causing you harm?

4 – Has it ever happened that a woman slapped, kicked, punched, or bitten you?

5 – Has it ever happened that a woman intentionally attempted to strangle, suffocate, poison, or burn you?

6 – Has it ever happened that a woman used or threatened to use bladed weapons (knives, scissors, etc.) against you?

7 – Has it ever happened that a woman used or threatened to use firearms against you?

8 – Has it ever happened that a woman locked you in an enclosed place against your will?

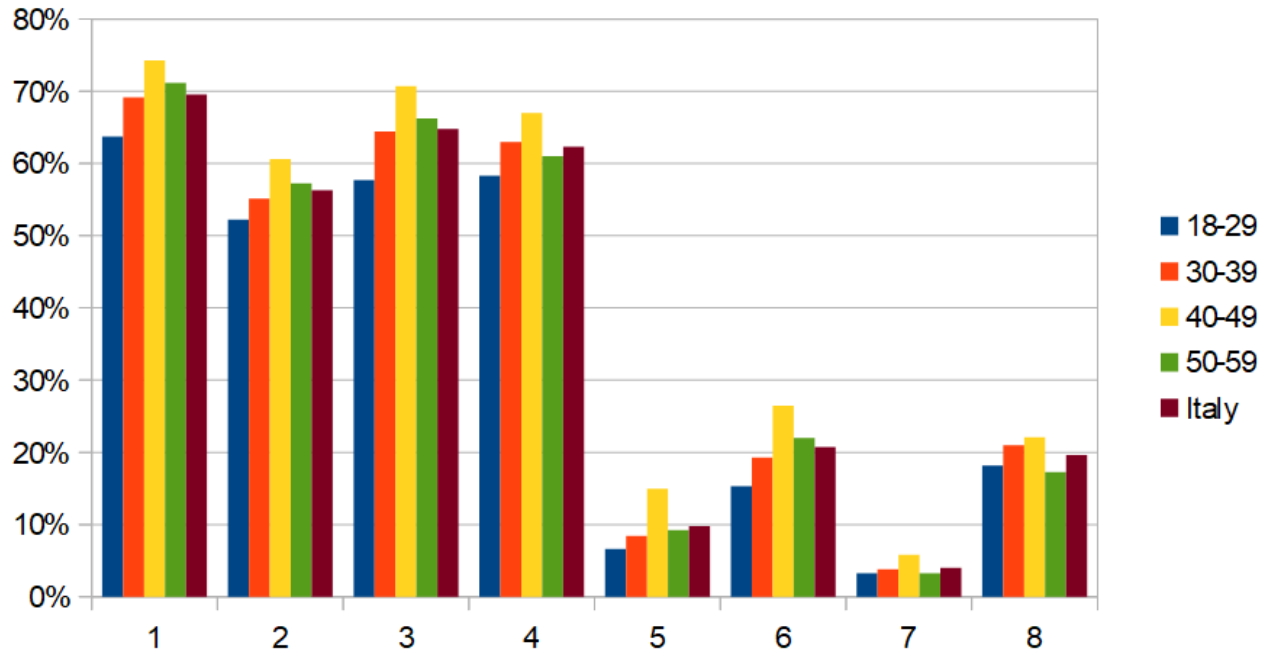


Figure 1. Percentage of affirmative responses to the items in the "Physical Violence" category.

Sexual Violence: Questionnaire Items

1 – Has it ever happened that a woman initiated sexual activity with you and then refused to continue without giving you any explanation as to why?

2 – Has it ever happened that a woman showed contempt for or ridiculed you because of a sexual performance or physical sexual characteristic that she considered unsatisfactory?

3 – Has it ever happened that a woman compared you with others in terms of sexual performance or characteristics, ridiculing and humiliating you?

4 – Has it ever happened that a woman forced you to have sexual intercourse by threatening or blackmailing you, or by promising you favors in return?

5 – Has it ever happened that a woman forced you, against your will, to engage in other forms of sexual activity, e.g., BDSM practices, sexual intercourse during menstruation, or other sexual practices that you did not wish to engage in?

6 – Has it ever happened that a woman attempted to force you to engage in sexual activity with other people, including group sex, same-sex sexual activity, or partner swapping?

7 – Have you ever had sexual intercourse with a woman even though you did not want to, in order to avoid negative reactions from her?

8 – Has it ever happened that a woman touched you on your intimate areas against your will or without your consent?

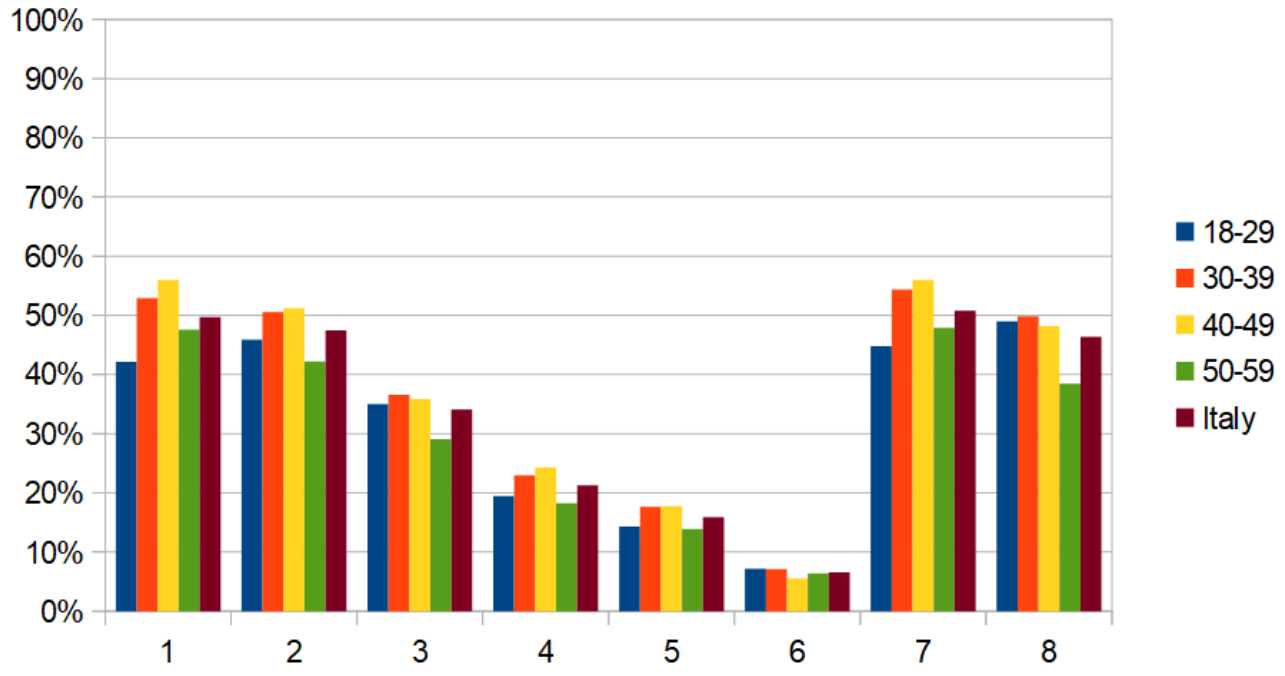


Figure 2. Percentage of affirmative responses to the items in the “Sexual Violence” category.

Psychological Violence: Questionnaire Items

1 – Has it ever happened that a woman unpleasantly criticized you because you were unable to earn enough money or because of your social standing?

2 – Has it ever happened that a woman compared you, ridiculing and humiliating you, to acquaintances, colleagues, friends' husbands, etc., particularly when they enjoyed a better economic position than yours?

3 – Has it ever happened that a woman refused to contribute financially to household expenses in proportion to her income?

4 – Has it ever happened that a woman constantly monitored how much money you spent and how you spent it?

5 – Has it ever happened that a woman damaged or destroyed your personal belongings or property, or threatened to do so?

6 – Has it ever happened that a woman humiliated or insulted you in front of other people, treating you as foolish, ridiculing your ideas or habits, or disclosing personal matters about you?

7 – Has it ever happened that a woman criticized you, publicly or privately, for physical characteristics (short stature, baldness, glasses)?

8 – Has it ever happened that a woman criticized you, publicly or privately, for your clothing, footwear, hairstyle, beard, general appearance, or the way you behaved in public?

9 – Has it ever happened that a woman attempted to restrict your relationships with your family of origin or with your friends/acquaintances?

10 – Has it ever happened that a woman prevented you, or attempted to prevent you, from playing sports, pursuing a hobby, or engaging in other activities that give you satisfaction?

11 – Has it ever happened that a woman repeatedly questioned your fidelity and/or sincerity?

12 – Has it ever happened that a woman harmed, or threatened to harm, people close to you (children, parents, etc.)?

13 – Has it ever happened that a woman threatened to kill herself or engage in other acts of self-harm and blamed you for them?

14 – Has it ever happened that a woman attempted to fabricate false allegations against you or your family members of harassment, assault, injury, sexual violence, or other wrongdoing?

15 – Has it ever happened that a woman declared that she was in love with you and determined to build a life with you, only for you to discover that she was actually being unfaithful to you?

16 – Has it ever happened that a woman attempted to provoke you, verbally and/or physically, with the calculated intention of triggering a reaction from you?

17 – Has it ever happened that a woman threatened to seek separation and/or throw you out of the house and/or leave you financially ruined?

18 – Has it ever happened that a woman threatened to prevent you from seeing your children or to allow you to see them only when and if she wanted?

19 – Has it ever happened that a woman denied you paternity by terminating a pregnancy that you would have wanted to be carried to term?

20 – Has it ever happened that a woman attributed, or attempted to attribute, paternity of a child to you when the child had actually been conceived with another man?

21 – Has it ever happened that a woman allowed you to develop a closer emotional relationship with her, giving you hope of a possible relationship, only to suddenly disappear without a trace?

22 – Has it ever happened that you were deceived by a woman who simulated romantic involvement, but whose intentions ultimately proved to involve a request for money, blackmail, or extortion?

23 – Has it ever happened that you met a woman online who, once you met her in person, turned out to be completely different from her photographs or from the descriptions she had given of herself?

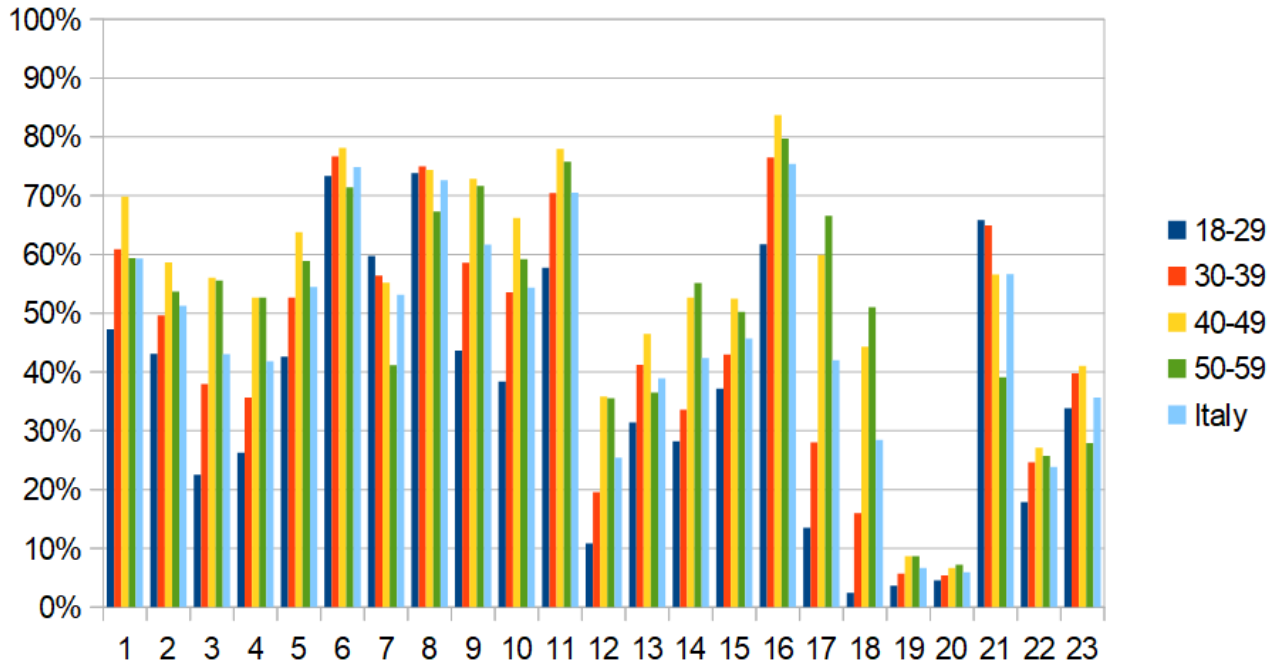


Figure 3. Percentage of affirmative responses to the items in the "Psychological Violence" category

Stalking: Questionnaire Items

1 – Has it ever happened that a woman sent you unwanted messages, e-mails, letters, telephone calls, or gifts?

2 – Has it ever happened that a woman repeatedly asked you to go out with her and/or meet "for one last clarification"?

3 – Has it ever happened that a woman repeatedly waited for you outside your home, workplace, or elsewhere, against your express wishes?

4 – Has it ever happened that a woman persistently attempted to speak with you against your express wishes?

5 – Has it ever happened that a woman followed you, spied on you, threatened you, or blackmailed you?

6 – Has it ever happened that a woman harassed people close to you, including relatives, colleagues, or loved ones?

7 – Has it ever happened that a woman regularly monitored your phone/computer/tablet, private messages, e-mail, or other means through which you communicate with others?

8 – Has it ever happened that a woman became obsessed with you and attempted to court you through persistent sexual advances that you found unwanted?

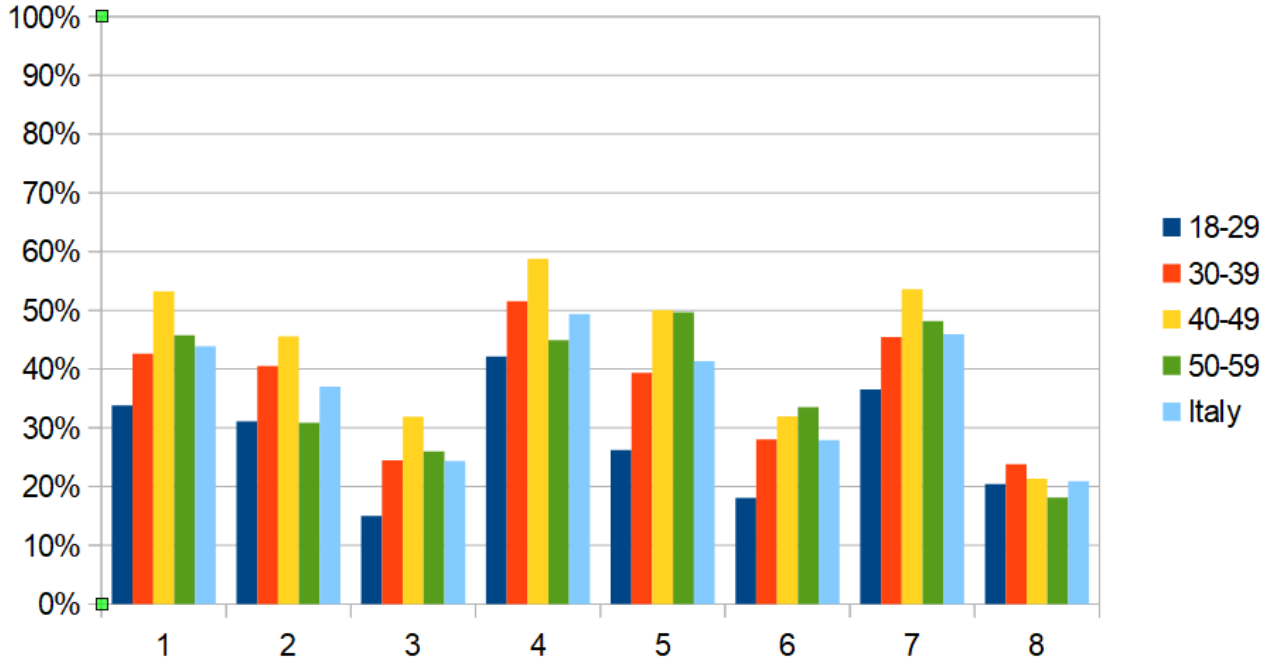


Figure 4. Percentage of affirmative responses to the items in the "Stalking" category.

Revenge Porn: Questionnaire Items

1 – Has it ever happened that a woman posted your intimate images online or shared them with others without your knowledge or against your will?

2 – Has it ever happened that a woman threatened to make your intimate images public as an act of revenge or blackmail?

3 – Has it ever happened that a woman posted your intimate images online or shared them with others when they had been taken or recorded without your knowledge?

4 – Has it ever happened that a woman proposed that you jointly create intimate images to be subsequently posted online for her personal financial gain?

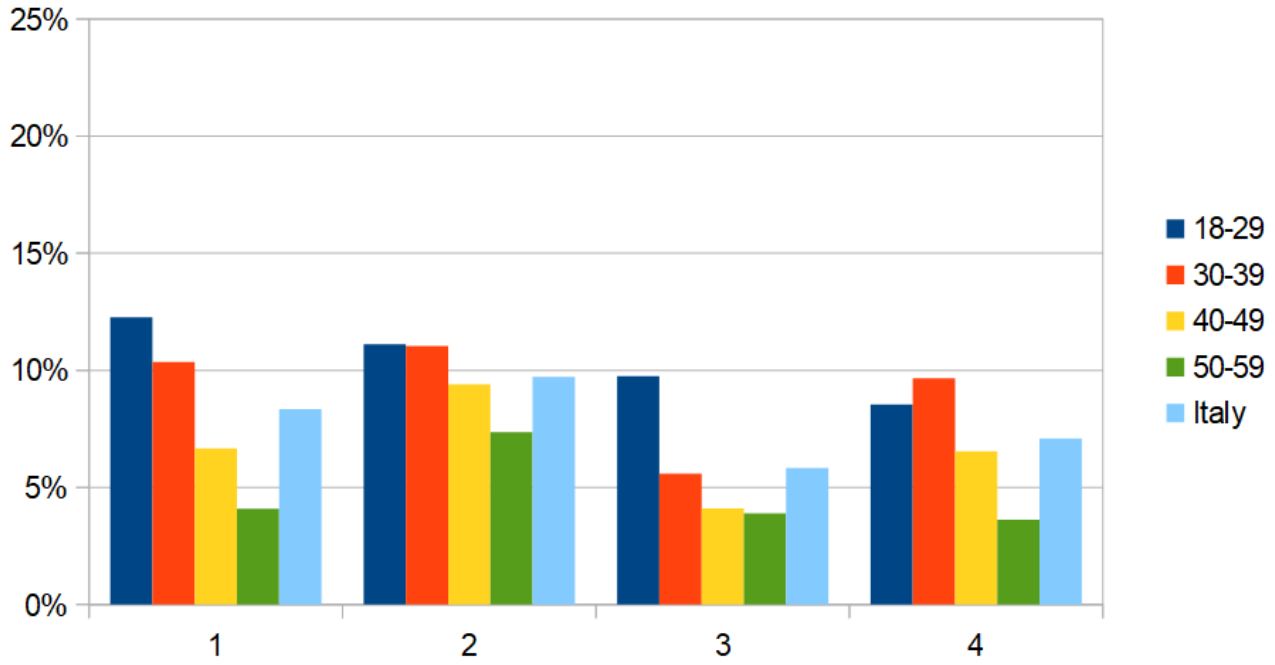


Figure 5. Percentage of affirmative responses to the items in the "Revenge Porn" category.

The results suggest that the perpetrator is almost always the *victim's partner* (see Figure 6, "Percentage of Female Perpetrators of Violence in Italy"). It can also be observed that, as the second most frequent group of perpetrators, *family members* are particularly represented in cases of Physical and Psychological Violence among the 18–29 age group, whereas in the case of Revenge Porn, the percentage of casual acquaintances is relatively high.

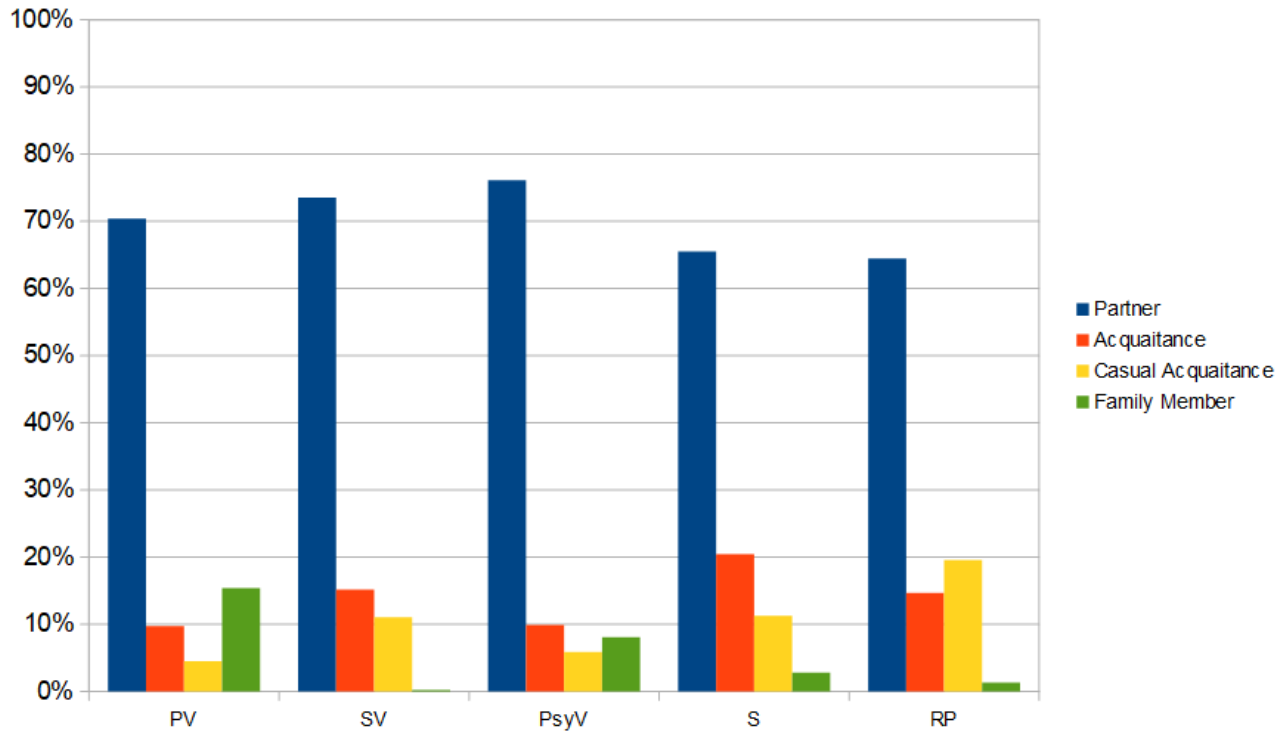


Figure 6. Percentage of Female Perpetrators of Violence in Italy.

Discussion

The present study sought to investigate whether, in Italy as well, men may be considered victims of physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, stalking, and Revenge Porn perpetrated by women.

One of the most interesting findings of the study concerns the role played by the female perpetrator in the victim's life, who is often found to be a partner or former partner (this finding is consistent with the study published by Esquivel-Santoveña & Dixon, 2012).

This evidence therefore links violence to the domestic and intimate context, placing it within what the literature defines as "Intimate Partner Violence" (IPV), that is, violence against an intimate partner. It is also important to emphasize that violence within an intimate relationship is often continuous in nature. It does not necessarily occur as an isolated episode and then cease; rather, it is characterized by recurrence and, in a certain sense, by its cyclical or chronic manifestation.

Another important finding of the study is that the form of violence most frequently experienced by men is psychological violence. In addition to confirming the findings of the study by Macrì et al. (2012), this supports the hypothesis advanced by several studies that men rarely perceive physical violence perpetrated by their partners as serious, intimidating, frightening, or as a genuine threat (Anderson, 2005; Swan & Snow, 2006), and that they are less likely to identify themselves as victims of sexual violence (for a review, see Scott-Storey et al., 2023).

Furthermore, psychological violence is often, as is well known, more difficult to demonstrate. Consequently, men rarely report what has happened to them, also because they are not often listened to or considered credible by anti-violence centers or judicial authorities. This, moreover, is likely to increase the problem of the *dark figure of crime*, that is, all those incidents of violence that, despite

actually occurring, are not reported, thereby preventing a more accurate estimate of a phenomenon that is consequently destined to remain, to a significant extent, hidden.

Another problematic issue concerns the specific characteristics of Italian culture, which, like other Mediterranean and Latin cultures, often regards men as representatives of the "stronger sex" and women, conversely, as representatives of the "weaker sex." This deeply stratified and historically entrenched cultural construct, particularly in certain areas of the country, leads men who have experienced violence perpetrated by a woman to perceive themselves as a "weak subject." This cultural attitude increases men's feelings of "inadequacy to their role" and shame, making them even more reluctant to report what has happened to the competent authorities or to anti-violence centers.

An analysis of the open-ended responses reveals that the finding we consider particularly significant is the high prevalence of psychological violence, which in some cases also involves threats to take away children and false accusations ("psychological violence involving the child", "threatened to throw me out of the house and never let me see my daughters again", "threatened that I would never see my son again unless I complied with her financial and visitation demands. She told me that if I did not do so, she would move 700 kilometers away and take the child with her", "forced to have sex even after I discovered that she was cheating on me. It was excruciating suffering; she was the mother of my children, my ex-wife. I screamed while crying", "She accused me of physical and psychological violence", "Threatened to file a complaint based on a false allegation of harassment", "Falsely reported me to the police", "False allegations of pedophilia involving the son during the separation proceedings", "She took the children away without my permission and subsequently returned, threatening to report me for violence").

Nevertheless, whereas Lombroso emphasized women's weakness, the research conducted here found that certain forms of physical violence perpetrated by women are comparable to those perpetrated by men, in line with the meta-analysis conducted by Fiebert (2014), which examined 270 empirical studies and 73 reviews.

Considering well-known cases involving acid attacks and disfigurement, respondents in the present sample also reported having experienced and/or been threatened with acid attacks ("Threatening to throw acid on me", "Throwing hydrochloric acid", "Threatening to disfigure me with acid", "Threatened to throw acid on me"), in addition to violent acts such as physical assaults both with and without objects, throwing objects, spitting, punching, scratching, extinguishing cigarettes on the body, and restraint with ropes ("A sharp, red-hot object inserted into the anus", "Punctured my thigh with a nail", "Beaten with a wooden stick", "Thrown blunt objects at me", "Throwing a brazier and a bedside table", "Repeatedly struck in the face with a glass bottle", "My ex-wife struck me with a hammer", "Glass fragments in my salad", "Cigarettes extinguished on my arm", "Burned with cigarettes", "Whipped with an antenna cable", "Injured with an axe", "Slapped with rings on her fingers", "Injured with scissors during intercourse"), as well as damage to vehicles and attempts to run them over ("I was run over by a car", "Attempts to run me over with a car", "Car scratched," "Chased and rammed with a car").

Respondents also reported that the part of the body most frequently subjected to physical violence was the male genital area itself ("Kicked in the testicles", "Punched in the testicles", "Squeezing my testicles with her hand", "Bitten on the penis", "Blows to the genitals", "Violently grabbing my testicles", "Injuries to intimate areas", "Slaps, spitting, punches to the testicles"), as well as conduct that may be classified as sexual violence, falling within the scope of Article 609-bis of the Italian Criminal Code, or other forms of sexual abuse ("I was repeatedly forced to have sexual intercourse even when I did not want to; otherwise, I was ridiculed and blamed", "Forced sex", "Forced to have unprotected sexual intercourse with open wounds and under threat that she would inject into my body

a syringe that she had just used to take a dose of heroin", "Forced to have sexual intercourse under threat of retaliation during separation and child-custody proceedings", "Non-consensual sex", "Sexual violence under threat of ruining me and taking away my right to see my daughters", "Forced to have sex even after I discovered that she was cheating on me", "She wanted to anally sodomize me with objects in order to see me suffer").

It is worth recalling that the harmful conduct perpetrated by women against men cannot be attributed exclusively to the so-called "reactive model"; that is, women are not necessarily aggressive in response to aggression by their partner but may also be the ones who initiate the aggression (Brzozowski et al., 2021).

Conclusions

The findings of this research provide an important starting point and invite further investigation into men as victims of violence perpetrated by women, precisely because this phenomenon currently lacks the necessary epidemiological data, which alone can provide a comprehensive criminological analysis of violence perpetrated by women against men.

Naturally, the enormous seriousness of male violence against women is in no way called into question by the premises or findings of this research.

Building upon the analysis of the results presented here, it is necessary to advance some socio-criminological considerations, which may be developed more fully and refined as research into male victimization by women increases.

It should be observed that female violence against men is subject to a phenomenon of genuine tabooization. In this regard, it is worth recalling Starr's (2015) insightful observations concerning the false allegations that women, particularly in the context of separation or divorce proceedings, make against men, accusing them of sexual and psychological violence against both themselves and their children.

It is precisely the underestimation of women's criminal potential that has contributed to the underestimation of the phenomenon of violence perpetrated by women against men.

The urgency of investigating the *status* of men as victims of violence stems from the need to examine this phenomenon without the distorting lenses that may impair our vision, avoiding being misled either by Lombrosian legacies or by statistical analyses of crime, in which women do indeed appear to have lower levels of criminal involvement than men. Instead, there is a need to open the field to a deeper investigation of male victimization by women—a phenomenon that requires further and more thorough research, as it currently lacks answers capable of being translated into appropriate social and healthcare intervention strategies and into the body of knowledge that, by contrast, has progressively enriched the care and support provided to women who are victims of violence.

To date, men who are victims of violence lack access to an emergency-care protocol whose guidelines take into account men's specific psychophysical characteristics from the moment they are received, as well as appropriate psychological support and assistance aimed at processing the trauma resulting from loneliness, ridicule, emasculation, lack of solidarity, incomprehension, and social isolation.

The situation of male victims is further exacerbated by the absence of support networks, which makes their physical and psychological circumstances even more difficult.

The challenge that scholars in the field of criminological sciences must embrace is to investigate this phenomenon in greater depth, since it is only through such an undertaking that social and healthcare responses capable of restoring dignity to male victims of violence can be developed. Such responses would give a voice to forms of *help-seeking* that remain largely unheard and, at the same time, give full effect to the obligation imposed by the Italian Constitution on the Republic to remove the conditions that restrict and undermine the principle of equality among citizens.

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