

HOW MUCH DOES THE SILENCE COST?

Summary of the research on the social and economic cost of the violence against women in Italy

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WeWorld Intervita

Introduction

WeWorld Intervita is an NGO whose aim is to help improve the living conditions of vulnerable populations in the north and south of the world. Intervita works to support children and local communities in the fight against poverty and inequality, for a sustainable development. This mission is strictly connected to the promotion of women's fundamental freedom and rights, by uprooting all types of discrimination and gender stereotypes. According to its mission, in 2009, Intervita launched 'Siamo Pari!', a major communications and sensitisation campaign on gender equality. Alongside this, Intervita decided to promote an action research to fight against gender discrimination and gender violence, with an innovative focus on the social and economic costs of violence against women: this approach, whilst increasingly common at the international level, is unique in the Italian context. The survey "How much does the Silence cost?" was thus the first research in Italy to focus on the social and economic costs of violence against women.

Violence against women is a violation of human rights, as is widely recognised by most national governments and international organisations. However, the magnitude of the phenomenon remains difficult to determine, particularly in Italy. Violence against women has assumed epidemic proportions, and is also connected to health risks and psychological distress; it limits personal freedom, influences collective security and affects the growth of human capital and of economic and social systems.

The survey "How much does the Silence cost?" aimed to provide knowledge, resources and policy tools with which to face this phenomenon, thus in turn supporting Italian institutions in the creation and reinforcement of a wide and long-lasting range of policies and initiatives designed to prevent and fight gender violence. The survey stressed the fact that costs are not the only – not even the main – reason to take a stand against violence. Violence against women is a crime and a violation of human rights. However, this research aimed to provide further insights into the phenomenon as well as the consequences of violence for victims and society at large. In addition, it addressed the fact that available statistics significantly underestimate the extent of violence, and as such there is an urgent need for comparable data on gender-based violence so as to support the institutions and experts engaged in preventing and combating the phenomenon. With this in mind, there is an economic justification to reduce and eliminate violence against women: international research has shown that effective prevention policies are crucial to promote gender parity and human rights whilst simultaneously reducing the extent of gender violence. In addition, financial resources and investment in services encompass substantial long term

savings for the economy. Again, while human pain and dignity has no economic price, it may be useful to refer to social and economic consequences in order to demonstrate the savings which institutions would make if they promote investments.

There are few European and international studies which focus on the topics of social and economic costs of violence. In addition, existing studies have different research methodologies, use different categories of costs, and use different data samples and resources. For these reasons, it is difficult to compare research results and obtain a global picture.

The Italian Survey

According to Ecosoc – United Nations Economic and Social Council, Commission on the Status of Women – the annual cost of gender violence lies between \$1,16 and \$32,9 billion. A stocktaking study of the Council of Europe estimated annual cost of violence against women in Council of Europe member states to be as high as 34 billion Euros. It is estimated that domestic violence alone costs EU member states 16 billion Euros each year. This estimate reflects costs in health services (including mental health and long term disability caused by injuries); policing and justice system costs; mortality; and the loss of economic productivity from victims. Violence also has a longer term impact on productivity and victims need to draw on state resources.

These costs include: the use of public services (health and psychological care, criminal justice system, civil legal system, social services, shelters and counselling centres); lost output of the economy (as a result of time off work), as well as recognising the suffering of pain and injury.

Methodology

All methodologies present a number of limitations. In Italy (as in other countries) violence is chronically under-reported and data are often missing for different services, thus pointing to the importance of further work to establish a secure evidence base. In addition, caution should be applied to the estimate of human and emotional costs of domestic violence, as these are particularly difficult – if not impossible - to measure. Although there is no agreed methodology with which to measure the economic impact of violence, the survey relies on three steps and three methodological tools.

Steps

Cost definitions rely on Buvinic (1999), adapted to the Italian context:

- Direct costs: these costs cover the amount which public authorities actually spend on services and measures linked to preventing and combating violence against women, or monetary expenses incurred by the victims themselves.
- Economic multipliers: these costs are measured as a loss of potential (examples are lower earnings and profits resulting from reduced productivity; these indirect costs are also measurable, although they involve estimating opportunity costs rather than actual expenditures).
- Non-monetary costs and social multipliers: costs result directly from the violent act but have no monetary value. Examples are pain and suffering, as well as the emotional loss.

In the table below are listed the costs found within each of these categories.

1. Data analysis

Researchers have analysed available data and statistics, together with the total number of victims for each chosen service.

2. Economic value

Total costs were estimated through measuring the goods and services consumed and multiplying this figure by their unit cost. Given the fact that non-monetary costs result from the physical and psychological trauma and life-long effects which violence has on victims, the survey proposed a methodology based on the evaluation of a compensation of 'biological and moral damage' (as used in the case of road accidents).

Tools

1. Analysis of quantitative data

The main source used was the Istat survey "La sicurezza delle donne"- which in 2006 interviewed 25,000 women aged between 16 and 70 years. A method-specific correction was used to include migrant women (32%), whom the Istat survey did not take into account. According to Istat, women suffer 14 million episodes of violence each year. However, this amount may take into account multiple episodes, thus meaning that it does not refer to the number of women suffering violence.

2. Interviews with expert witnesses

Experts have been interviewed with a focus on several key areas/services connected to violence against women.

3. Interviews with victims

Researchers interviewed 9 women with a past experience of violence. The semi-structured interviews focussed on their life course, as well as the economic and social costs which had to face because of the violence they suffered. Respondents were asked to describe their experiences of abuse, with a focus on the context in which the violence took place, the types of violence they suffered, the consequences of this violence, and the public/private services they requested in order to escape from this violence.

Results

The survey categorised the economic and social costs of violence based on the services utilised as a result of violence, together with an analysis of indirect (non-monetary) costs and an analysis of investments in prevention (cost/opportunity).

Separating the costs into manageable categories facilitates an understanding of the extent of the costs and consequences related to violent acts. For researchers working to measure economic costs, the categories also point the way to finding different sources of usable data.

Direct costs and economic multipliers can be found in seven major categories: Health, Psychological counselling, Pharmaceutical drugs usage, Justice, Police, Private legal

services, Social Services, Shelters and counselling services, and lost productivity. In addition, there are also non-monetary costs resulting from the physical and psychological trauma as well as the life-long effects which such violence has on victims. A decrease in the quality of life of the victim and those close to them may also be considered as an indirect cost.

The survey estimates that violence against women costs Italy **16.719.540.330 Euros**, **1.773.324.085** of which is for direct costs. The total costs also include 604.103.835 Euros in lost productivity. The largest proportion of the costs is derived from non-monetary costs and social multipliers, amounting to **14.342.112.410 Euros**.

Cost categories	Estimated cost (in Euro)
Direct costs	
Health	460.440.546
Psychological counselling	158.740.629
Pharmaceutical drugs usage	44.582.514
Police	235.760.187
Justice	421.357.019
Private legal services	289.917.809
Social services	154.697.925
Shelters and counselling services	7.827.456
Total Direct costs	1.773.324.085
Economic multipliers	
Reduced/lost productivity	604.103.835
Total Direct costs and Economic multipliers	2.377.427.919
Non-monetary costs and social multipliers	
Compensation of 'biological and moral damage'	14.342.112.410
TOTAL	16.719.540.330

One of the limitations faced by all existing studies (including the Italian one) which focus on the costs of violence against women is that they mostly represent underestimates. Research on the costs of violence cannot take into account non-reported cases, nor the long-term effects, and it is extremely difficult to include all of the costs linked to violence against women. It is important to stress that proposed numbers are estimates: they allow us to capture the complexity of the problem, although it should be borne in mind that cost figures are in fact larger. In addition, prevention costs should be considered as an investment: creating a society free from violence against women certainly requires an investment, but it is an investment which pays off in the long run. As pointed out by Day et al. (2005), "all the economic costing literature indicates that the whole of society pays for the costs of not addressing this pressing social concern".

Recommendations

The survey under discussion aimed to support the institutions and experts engaged in the prevention and combating of gender-based violence. Violence against women and girls is recognised internationally as one of the most widespread human rights violations: however, the survey showed how there is also an economic justification to reduce and eliminate gender-based violence. With this said, in order to achieve these results it is crucial to gather and collect reliable data from many different sources.

In addition, while the cost of violence against women is in the order of billions, budgets devoted to tackling this problem are much smaller: there is a strong business case for an adequately funded comprehensive strategy with which to tackle violence against women. The survey finally recommends funding services and initiatives designed to prevent violence should receive high priority and be promoted and clearly put into the public domain. A holistic and coordinated approach amongst various actors, whilst also securing appropriate levels of funding is essential in order to effectively tackle violence against women effectively.