

VICTIM BLAMING: BEING A VICTIM TWICE. COMPARISON OF EMOTIONAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECTS

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SUMMARY

World Health Organization Director-General Margaret Chan said that violence against women is a global structural issue. It is a health problem of epidemic dimensions, the analysis of 141 researches carried out in 81 countries shows that 35% of women suffer some form of violence during their lifetime. These data were presented in the largest study ever done on the physical and sexual abuse suffered by women in all regions of the planet. When we talk about violence against women we refer to the definition provided by the United Nations and the World Health Organization. As regards the definition provided by the UN, the expression covers "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering, including threats of such acts, coercion and arbitrary deprivation of liberty, both in public and private life". The WHO definition outlines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself. But the definitions don't end there. The Convention of the Council of Europe, the first regulatory element on the matter of preventing and combating violence against women, states that the term "domestic violence" refers to all acts of violence, whether physical, sexual, psychological or economic, occurring within the family or household or between current or former spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim. The document, which starts from the same cultural reading of the roots of violence against women, commits the signatory states to protect women from all forms of violence and to prevent, prosecute and eliminate violence against women and domestic violence. The Convention requires states parties to organize "specialised immediate, short- and long-term support services for each victim of any act of violence falling within the scope" of the Convention. Unfortunately violence is a dynamic event, in fact it is constantly changing, so we are witnessing a continuous transformation of the forms of violence. In particular, in this study we will address the issue of secondary victimization, which unfortunately represents an increasingly present form of violence. citation. This form of violence was defined by the American psychologist, William J. Ryan, Jr, who in 1971 defined it as a phenomenon of secondary victimization.

Key words: victim blanding - violence against women

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of violence against women is a topic of global importance. Worldwide, it is estimated that around 35 per cent of women have experienced violence, sexual or otherwise, at least once in their life (WHO 2013). In 38 percent of cases of murders of women, the culprit is the partner. 30% of women are victims of it. And again: 38% of all women killed die at the hands of their partners, 42% of those who have suffered physical or sexual violence by men with whom they had been in an intimate relationship reported damage to their health, certifies the WHO that in 2013 worked together with the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine in London and the South African Medical Research Council, on research that involved many countries around the world. This is the first study that systematically analyzes data on the prevalence of violence against women globally, inflicted both by one's partner and by strangers, and highlights for the first time the global prevalence of these two forms of violence, thanks to information collected during investigations carried out around the world. The report indicates the consequences on the mental, physical and reproductive health of a woman who has suffered abuse, reaching

conclusions based on studies, which have analyzed the relationship between different forms of physical and sexual violence and the development of specific health problems (WHO 2013). The 2022 report published in the scientific journal Lancet by Sardinha and collaborators showed that levels of violence are very high everywhere in the world. The data was collected in the pre-COVID two-year period from 2000 to 2018. According to this report, one in six women seeking treatment for fractures experienced domestic violence in the last year, almost none of these 3,000 women, before At the time, had a doctor ever asked about any abuse the partner had suffered. The report gives a rather alarming picture, although it does not take into account the problems that emerged during the pandemic, which have led to an increase in violence. Indeed, the Communication of the European Parliament of 7 April 2020 stated that, following the lockdown, cases of domestic violence have increased by about a third in some EU member countries. The scientific literature shows that intimate partner violence is the most common form of violence worldwide and a major contributor to the overall impact of mental health problems. What we should focus on are the consequences that violence entails. It must be underlined that, regardless of the

form of violence a woman suffers, the consequences can be of varying severity (Juli 2015). In this regard, underlines the Lancet Psychiatry Commission, it is important that mental health services are aware not only of the suffering caused by violence in the couple on the person who suffers it, but also of the social characteristics and context in which violence in the couple manifests itself. The fact that violence in the couple is endemic does not mean that it is inevitable and it can and above all must be faced with a preventive approach. Secondary victimization is a typology still little investigated among the recognized forms of gender-based violence. It is one of the most painful consequences of the judicial processes that women experiencing domestic violence have to face. These are procedures and approaches that do not recognize violence, or minimize it, questioning the credibility of women. Victims are blamed for what they have suffered. Furthermore, the impact of violence witnessed by sons and daughters is underestimated and forms of double parenting are forced to be imposed which allow abusive men to repeat abusive behaviors towards them.

THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE AND THE PHENOMENON OF SECONDARY VICTIMIZATION

The phenomenon of gender-based violence is complex and due to a multiplicity of causes, often concurrent with each other. However, this should not be thought of as an obstacle to its understanding: one of the ways to study this phenomenon is to analyze the different forms it can take, highlighting its characteristics, consequences for the victim and, when possible, its extent. In reality, "forms of violence" rarely exist as distinct categories. As Romito points out, the victims very often find themselves living in a real "continuum of violence", i.e. they find themselves facing, in the course of their lives, different types of aggressions in more serious or milder forms, which make it difficult sometimes even distinguishing violent episodes from each other (Romito 2000). Furthermore, it should be borne in mind that violence against women is a largely submerged phenomenon, especially when it occurs in the family. The data available are often based on the number of reported violences, which however represent the tip of the iceberg of a phenomenon that is impossible to estimate precisely. Gender-based violence can take various forms, evident or more hidden. Usually we speak of domestic violence, to indicate all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or family unit or between people linked, currently or in the past, by a marriage bond or from an emotional relationship, regardless of whether the author of these acts shares or has shared the same residence with the victim. The cultural root of the phenomenon, for a long time tolerated and under-

estimated, as considered an expression of consolidated social customs, has only seen a more incisive international awareness in recent decades with the elevation of the fight against domestic violence and against women in the framework for the protection of human rights and with the consequent introduction of precise and more effective regulations. It is within the family that relationships based on abuse and oppression have the most serious and devastating effects, it is in fact within the home that the highest number of acts of violence are concentrated, which consequently have the greatest difficulty in emerging as a phenomenon (Reale 2011). In dysfunctional relationships based on relationships of prevarication by the violent partner on the other, the so-called "cycle of violence" takes place which sees a first phase follow one another in which the preliminary conducts of violence are carried out, followed first by violent behaviors, and then of reconstitution of the bond, in which the violent man promises not to repeat the aggressive conducts, shows himself attentive and tends to attribute the responsibility to external conducts, on other occasions attributed instead to the victim himself, in order to regain his trust, even in family unit name. In this circle, if the woman finds herself in a position of subjection to her partner (in many cases also economically), she ends up resuming the relationship until the next episode of violence, in a repetitive cycle that can follow one another for a long number of years. The lack of ability of the legal system and above all of justice operators (judges, lawyers, heads of social welfare services, consultants) to identify violence in behavior considered - and often described by the victim himself - as a mere family conflict produces significant damage, not only towards the woman who has suffered violence not recognized as such, a woman often held responsible and guilty for not having escaped the spiral of violence, but also towards minors exposed to the same violent conduct. This dimension is both social and psychological (Toni 2009) the process of secondary victimization implies a recrudescence of the victim's condition attributable to the methods of support by the institutions" often characterized by an inability to understand and listen to individual requests that are projected onto the victimizing experience due to an excessive routinization of the interventions which in the literature is defined as a one size fits all approach (Williams 1984) (Figure 1).

VICTIM BLAMING

The term secondary victimization refers to the phenomenon whereby the victim of a trauma, abuse (both minor and serious) or of a crime relives the conditions of suffering to which she was subjected, with the consequence that she is discouraged from speaking openly about the his suffering situation, or even to denounce the incident (Rossi 2005). In other words,

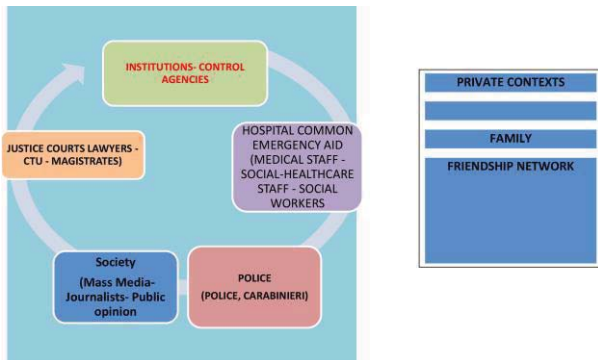


Figure 1. Victim blaming consists in assuming the victim of a crime or other misfortune partially or wholly responsible for what happened to her. This reversal of reality is doubly serious: misrepresents the collective representation of the phenomena and, even more, it reverberates on the perception of the reality of victim leading to self-blame

victims can become victims a second time: it often happens that people offended by the crime are forced to repeat the painful narratives relating to the crime several times, in order to verify their credibility and morality, as well as the personality of the victim. offender (Spaccatini et al. 2019), moreover, if after some time they don't remember the facts in detail, the statements they made painfully in the first instance could be censored. This form of violence was described for the first time in 1971 by the American psychologist William J. Ryan, Jr. who published most of the results of his studies in a book entitled *Blaming The Victim*. We generally speak of "secondary victimization" (or "post-crime victimization") when the victims of crimes undergo a second "victimization", i.e. a second aggression, which makes them victims again. This second attack can be carried out by the so-called "control agencies", i.e. doctors and health professionals, the police, lawyers and the judiciary, who may not believe the victim's version and accuse her of having provoked the attack. As anticipated, the perpetrators of secondary victimization can be various, such as for example the mass media, for example by publishing the victim's photo and name, exposing it to public opinion without any ethics, or insinuating that the complaint is a slander without waiting for the court verdict. According to Recommendation No. 8 of 2006 of the Council of Europe, "secondary victimization means victimization that does not occur as a direct consequence of the criminal act, but through the response of institutions and individuals to the victim". With particular reference to that relating to the judicial proceedings of separation, custody and limitation and forfeiture of parental responsibility, secondary victimization occurs when the same authorities called upon to repress the phenomenon of violence, by not recognizing or underestimating it, do not adopt towards the victim the necessary safeguards to protect it from possible conditioning and recurrence of violence (Figure 2).

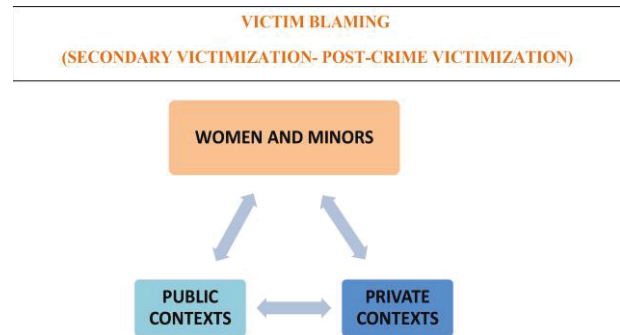


Figure 2. It can be caused by a routine or insensitive, even unaware, attitude towards the victim. it can take place through processes of procedural, judicial, expert, welfare victimization

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES IN SECONDARY VICTIMIZATION

Despite the many forms that secondary victimization can take – from minimizing suffering (Rosenberg 1994), to blaming and devaluing (Jones 1973, Lerner et al. 1966) to a tendency to remove the problem (Furnham et al. 1992). The consequences, on a psychological level, can be serious, among many we find fear, a sense of helplessness, low self-esteem, even depression and loss of trust in others and in institutions, those who suffer secondary victimization are in fact "blamed" for what suffered. In fact, those who suffer from it blame themselves to the point of taking responsibility for what happened, also feeling a sense of shame and giving up on asserting their rights. There are very serious cases, such as violence or harassment, but also minor ones such as suffering moral blackmail from your partner or suffering the consequences of a toxic relationship. A person suffering from secondary victimization is in this situation not because of who first made them suffer; the "executioner" so to speak becomes who should help and support it, often even the institutions themselves. Therefore, often the "culprits" of victimization are precisely the people we have asked for help, those in whom we have placed our hopes and who disappoint us by reproaching us that perhaps, all in all, it was our fault - the trauma that this entails can have serious consequences, episodes of crippling anxiety and above all, take years to heal. The consequences of repeated episodes of victim blaming are found on several levels: firstly on the person who directly suffers secondary victimization, but also on a social and cultural level, through the strengthening of gender stereotypes and biases linked to violence against women women. The attribution of blame and guilt to the victim influences the reactions of the contexts and proximity relationships of the victim himself. Direct effects on the victims include impairments of individual emotional and psycho-physical functioning (Spaccatini et al. 2019) women experience impotence and the likelihood of incurring substance abuse, depression, post-traumatic

symptoms and self-blame increases. Furthermore, secondary victimization often fuels the feelings of self-blame women experience in abusive relationships and discourages reporting. In fact, women fear being further stigmatized or compromised and avoid making their stories public, even if this means giving up legal protection and recognition (Spaccatini et al. 2019). On a social level, victim blaming feeds gender stereotypes and prejudices of a sexist nature (De Nicola 2018). The blaming of the victim inevitably entails a collective acquittal of the perpetrator of the violence, or in any case a minimization of the seriousness of the violent acts. This vicious circle triggers a series of further social consequences, which include a decrease in the support offered to women, not only by informal support networks (family and friends), but also at an institutional level.

REGULATORY ASPECTS

At international level, there is legislation that emphasizes the need not to subject victims to unnecessary pressure and to adopt all possible strategies to avoid it. In terms of secondary victimization, one of the most significant supranational contributions was released by the United Nations General Assembly in 1985 with the Declaration of the basic principles of justice for victims of crime and abuse of power. Only in 2012 did the Directive establish minimum standards on the rights, assistance and protection of victims of crime. Among the main concerns of the European legislator is that of decreasing the risk of secondary victimization and, in this regard, dedicates some provisions to protect the safety and dignity of the victims and their families from it, from intimidation and retaliation. The aim is to limit the risk by carrying out the procedure in such a way as to allow the victim to establish a climate of trust with the authorities and by avoiding contact between him and his family members and the perpetrator of the crime. The Directive then supports the possibility of using a series of measures, such as non-disclosure or limited disclosure regarding his identity, in order to protect the private life and image of the victim and his family members (Giannini et al. 2009). The Istanbul Convention, ratified in Italy in 2013 but still largely unimplemented today, in article 18 stigmatizes the phenomenon which takes the form of "reviving the conditions of suffering to which the victim of a crime has been subjected, and it is often attributable to the procedures of the institutions subsequent to a complaint, or in any case to the opening of a judicial proceeding", in a definition of secondary victimization that borrows from the United Sections of the Cassation

Finally, considering that during criminal proceedings some people are particularly exposed to the risk of secondary victimisation, a rapid individual assessment is necessary to allow this risk to be recognized and to

establish which special protective measures they need. This individual assessment should take into account the personal characteristics of the victim and the type or nature and circumstances of the crimes. Adequate training of operators likely to come into contact with victims, such as police and judicial personnel, judges, lawyers and those providing assistance and support services, is also of vital importance, so that they are able to treat them appropriately.

CONCLUSION

As already highlighted, the phenomenon of secondary victimization of mothers who are victims of violence is increasingly at the center of social and political debate. Compared to 2017, the year in which the proceedings subject to sample surveys were registered, indicators emerge that show that a more marked attention is emerging towards the repression of domestic violence and an ever greater consideration for the issue of secondary victimization. In the light of these reflections, it is necessary to prepare the construction and dissemination of adequate support interventions consisting in the knowledge and implementation of complex consultation paths that can find space in a multi-professional organization such as the one already tested at the Victim Support service" (Perry 2005). Much of this work today is carried out by the Anti-Violence Centres, the main service for welcoming women victims of any form of gender-based violence is represented by the CAV (Juli 2021). The need for new professionals with modern intervention strategies is evident: prudence, courage and empathy constitute a conceptual and theoretical framework within which the discontinuity of care is understood in terms of "institutional abuse", capable of activating a secondary victimization process. In the light of this writing, it appears essential to increase the training of all operators on the subject of domestic violence. The goal is to make violence against women less and less socially acceptable. To this end, also in the light of the above criticality, it is necessary to provide for:

- shared training courses between the judiciary, law enforcement agencies, lawyers, social services, health services, anti-violence centers and associations, also for the dissemination of shared knowledge for the identification of domestic violence indices. Secondly, it is necessary to expand the support to women victims of violence in the support plans provided for women in the various sectors of daily life (work, home, childcare, services). Finally, it is necessary to equip women with a toolbox for a basic competence in economic and financial matters which is often lacking means helping them, by doing it in practice, not to suffer unilateral decisions capable of depriving them of any economic autonomy.

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Contribution of individual authors:

Maria Rosaria Juli: conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, project administration, visualization, validation, writing – original draft, writing – review&editing. supervision.

Rebecca Jul, Giada Juli & Stefania Figliuzzi: conceptualization, visualization, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing.

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