



I2 Women Victims of Violent Partners The Italian Situation Between Culture and Psychopathology

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By attending this presentation, attendees will understand social, cultural, and psychopathological factors that could explain the phenomenon of women as victims of inter-family violence, physical and sexual, in Italy.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by presenting a hypothesis of insanity in violent men that have killed their female partners. This is especially important now that the Italian judiciary has ruled that personality disorders can be considered in trials involving such crimes.

For some time, criminological investigations have noted an elevated number of women who have been victims of violence perpetrated by their partners.

In Italy, a complete forensic psychiatric examination is conducted only in cases of homicide. From the cases observed, it is clear that a psychopathological perspective alone cannot explain the multiplicity of factors involved in violent behaviors toward women.

Two studies conducted in Italy – the first involving all inter-family homicides (EURES, 2003-2007) and the second involving family abuse (ISTAT, 2007) – have shed light on how vast (though hidden) this phenomenon has actually become. The ISTAT conducted an anonymous questionnaire on a nationwide, representative sample of women which demonstrated that 31.9% of women had been subjected to violence, perpetrated by their partner or ex-partner, during the course of their life. Despite this fact, the number of actual formal police reports was very low (3-8%). This figure may be explained by considering the fact that these episodes were considered “true offenses” in only 18.2% of cases.

By reviewing Italian homicide cases from recent years, the studies conducted by EURES show that there has been an increase in inter-family homicide cases from 20% in 2002 to 31% in 2006. In 2006, more than 50% of these homicides were committed by partners or ex-partners; most of the perpetrators (84%) were male. Furthermore, in only a small percentage of such homicides (11%) were the culprit reported to have a clear mental disorder.

Therefore, it is almost certain that social and cultural aspects interact with psychopathological aspects of the criminal. It has been rare to find serious mental disorders in individuals allegedly perpetrating these homicides or attempted homicides; instead, it is common to find that many of these individuals have narcissistic traits or characteristics. However, it was rare for these individuals to meet criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder.

The research has often seen male adults with little cognitive and emotional ability to deal maturely with a relationship. In these immature relationships, partners tend to react to real or perceived “loss” in a violent manner. It is hypothesized that this increased narcissism can affect men who lack a “cultural anchor,” which might otherwise protect them. For example, the title “head of the family” guarantees a man a precise and relatively prestigious position within the couple or family. It is a model, which though unacceptable, is able to provide a sense to their male being, either intellectual or characterological. It is a model which though abandoned has not been substituted with something equally “strong” and able to support psychological fragile personality.

To further this view, women declare their rights - as if trying to distance themselves physically or psychologically from their partner. This declaration; however, is purely verbal; many young male adults appear “frightened” of a (negated) fragility, though being only structural, regarding their role in identity, and the only response they then find themselves able to enact is that of aggression.

The court expert will have to bear all this in consideration when called upon to express the ability to intend and want regarding the accused. Above all now that the Italian judicial order has accepted the hypothesis that even personality disorders could be considered relevant when taking into account proposed insanity.

Inter-Family Violence, Social Pressure, Psychopathological Factors