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How to Help Female Victims of Domestic Violence? A Dialogue Between Scientific, Professional and Political Expert to Build Networks of Support

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Abstract

How and through which instruments can social policies prevent domestic violence? Three of these instruments are, in our point of view: 1) the professional competence of the social workers and caregivers in protecting and preventing; 2) a shared gender-sensitive methodology, to help victims of domestic violence; 3) and the dialogue (necessary but not yet realized) among scientific, professional and political experts.

Competent help is the pivot around which prevention strategies can be developed, to support networks of solidarity with victims. The building of networks is conclusive in overcoming the lack of social capital, above all in situations characterized by the fragility of social ties.

Furthermore, the sector skill alliance could represent an innovation in the field of interventions to prevent the phenomenon of domestic violence and to build a more radical culture of non-violence in interpersonal relationships. In that way it will be possible a common vision on gender-based violence in diverse disciplinary fields: medicine, sociology, psychology, human rights, social services, criminology, social pedagogy and, at the same time, outline social policies that lead to effective solutions.

Keywords: gender-based violence, sector skill alliance, professional expertise, lifelong learning, social workers.

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1. A modern system of welfare is the one capable of investing in professional competencies

An argument overlooked by the literature on social policies is the training of its professionals. If it is true that the quality of welfare consists in the possibility of creating relationships and promoting people's abilities, rather than assisting them passively (Sen, 1992; Donati, Colozzi, 2007; Folgheraiter, 2007; Nussbaum, 2011), it is also true that a system of social policy that wants to implement effective interventions must be able to show competence in helping people (Facchini, 2010). This goal can only be achieved if the social policy system takes care with the training of professionals who are appropriate to the task. Otherwise, their daily professional action will risk the 'bureaucratism' of tasks and the consequent burn out and inability to deal with complex problems, such as those related to the emergence of new needs in local contexts, marked by chronic lack of financial and organizational resources. Those who help, professionally or voluntarily, are more and more often influenced by the organization to which they belong, while the development of knowledge is progressing towards further and further specialization.

These tendencies lead to great risks of fragmentation and represent a problem themselves, especially when we must respond to a problem which is a real emergency of our time, such as violence against women and children.

It is clear that, more than ever in this case, those who help must know how to empower 'the outraged person' and know how to overcome the differences between welfare and education, between institutional and informal: 'Violence against women represents (...) a recognized problem that is not always addressed, because tackling it would mean questioning the relationships between the subjects, the organization of services, the training of the operators, the cooperation between the latter' (Cersosimo, Marra, Rauty, 2008: 180). Actions to combat violence are a novelty for social policies, something new that struggles to become innovation within the institutions of mature welfare (Cimagalli, 2014).

For this reason we ask ourselves about the quality of the interventions, believing that it derives, as an emerging effect, from the dialogue between the different actors that intervene on the problem in a preventive, protective or punitive sense.

Since 2011, the European Council Convention on the prevention and fight against violence with regards to women and domestic violence (noted as the Istanbul Convention) calls the attention of governments on the recommendation of the 4 Ps: *Prevention, Protection, Punishment, integrated Policies*. Thus we now have the first principles that are legally binding and proposed at

an international level but above all active in the European context; however, specific regulations have not yet been enacted. It is an instrument that does at least present itself as quite innovative, because it is characterized by much attention dedicated to the participation of civil society, in the role of information and communication to prevent and combat this phenomenon. Thanks to this Convention (ratified in Italy with the law 119/2013) it is possible to establish the precise responsibilities of the signatory states, to assume consequent decisions and to activate a monitoring system on a supranational level, with the objective of favoring harmony in the regulations of the diverse States under contract. The Convention represents a significant example of the process in motion that holds together global awareness and local action. Along with the instruments and actions brought forth by the international community on the whole, there is thus a parallel process represented by the recent tendency towards 'regionalization' of the problem, or better still of the instruments with which to confront it. Even though violence against women may be a universal problem, its causes can be analyzed, understood and resolved only in specific local contexts. Here, we underline the value of understanding and the possibility of having information and data necessary to enact coherent and efficient government actions. Despite a large amount of data provided by universities, research institutes, NGOs and other agencies (FRA, 2014; Istat, 2015; Eures, 2017; Danna, 2008), local and regional policies suffer because of this pulverization of knowledge, because a unitary view of the problem is missing and it is difficult to put in place concrete solutions in local contexts, starting from the training of competent professional figures. What has been missing until now is a unitary training program to teach the various professionals involved, taking into account the specific differences of every context and every skill, to preventively confront the phenomenon, to recognize it at its onset, in order to anticipate specific and adequate responses. Before identifying the tools and solutions that social policies can offer, it is advisable to explore the concept of domestic violence, to understand in what terms the problem is defined.

2. Understanding what domestic violence is in operational settings

By domestic violence we mean every type of physical, psychological, economical and/or sexual abuse that occurs within the internal workings of a couple's relationship and consists in almost all cases of acts by a man against a woman. That violence, aggravated by the fact that it is done not by a stranger, but by a partner-companion-husband (namely within the framework of intimate relationships, where trust is seriously betrayed), manifests itself in

various forms and in various combinations that have dramatic effects on women and their children (Romito, 2000; WHO, 2002 and 2013; Walby, 2004; Intervita, 2013). It has perhaps never been so visible as it is today, be it on a national or international scale. But the attention of the media, though it may contribute to the formation of an informed public opinion, sensitive to and aware of the problem, does not exhaust the range of the acts necessary to solve it. In Europe the concept itself of *violence against women* did not exist before the 1970s. Today, terms such as *gender-based violence*, *domestic violence* and *intimate partner violence* are key references in international, scientific literature (to view the survey, see Heise, 1994; Gelles, Straus, 1998; WHO, 2002).

In general, by violence we mean any abuse of power and control, which manifests itself through physical, sexual, psychological or economic abuse against women, children, the elderly, the disabled, homosexuals, and immigrants. Domestic violence may be explained under the category of *Gender-based violence*, even if the outraged gender is not a category closed by its strictly defined outlines, but a relational state that calls into question the relationship between unequal partners. That is why we prefer to adopt the concept of intimate partner violence, because it refers to the close relationships that can also occur between people of the same sex and also regardless of marital status. From a sociological point of view it is the structure of this relationship between the unequal partners that needs to be illuminated (Giddens, 1995). There are many possible interpretations of this. Recent transformations of the family, not accompanied by suitable policies of reconciliation that could modify the structure of inequalities based on gender, force us to address an additional problem: not only the suffering of the abused woman, but also the discomfort felt by the men mistreating them, actual or potential, who feel threatened in their traditional roles and therefore tend to react negatively/aggressively/abusively. Given this new vision, violence can be considered as a type of real conflict in which the right to express oneself and even to exist is negated to one of the two partners, a controversy resolved to the disadvantage of the weaker subject (Bourdieu, 1977, 1998; bell hooks, 2000). Today it is necessary to understand the changes in the role of women in all spheres and perhaps the sole patriarchal explanation that finds in its initial asymmetry one of the founding presumptions of violence is not enough (Dobash, Dobash, 1979).

With respect to this, policies of reconciliation can contribute in redirecting gender inequalities toward a more just society for all, that foresees a revolution beginning with the masculinization of feminine roles, but not yet the feminization of masculine roles (Esping-Andersen, 2011). Perhaps the structural violence that hides behind the scarcity or total absence of family-work reconciliation policies is not sufficiently clear to all: these serious lapses

perpetuate the unequal distribution of domestic and extra-domestic work loads. Furthermore, this happens on the basis of a widespread argument, never overtly expressed, according to which the best person to look after the children is the woman who brought them into the world (and not those who conceived them). In the end it is taken for granted that a female worker or professional with a family to look after must toil in silence and alone with her daily work load of 27 hours. Public authorities do not take due account of the fact that we are living in an historic era that no longer sees the family as a supplier of services and help for all members, but as an institution whose own members demand the need for aid and services (Ferrera, 2008; Di Nicola, 2015; Saraceno, 2003).

3. The competencies in protecting

While sociology struggles to explain violence and it is difficult to arrive at a unified vision of the problem (Corradi, 2016), on an operational level it is urgent to develop knowledge and methods of protective and preventive intervention. This is a specific task of the social service, which intervenes to develop skills to meet emerging problems.

This type of violence is difficult to explain sociologically, with regards to its causes, its manifestations, from the personal devaluation to the physical elimination of women, and its boundaries: how far does the legitimacy of male power (of a father, of a husband, of a brother, of a son) impact on a woman? When can we start talking about domination? (Cersosimo, Marra, Rauty, 2008; Bagattini, Pedani, 2016).

In Italy, social policies from 2000 onwards pay particular attention to the centrality of the person, the organization of social services on a territorial basis and the proximity to needs. Despite this, the instruments of social policies, such as the Zone Plans, article 19 Law 328/2000¹, do not provide for the priority of the CAVs², therefore their funding is discontinuous, among other things in the absence of national guidelines: 'Violence against women represents for the institutions an absolute political novelty and a phenomenon that emerges at times without ever really taking on a social and priority dimension' (Romito, 2000: 205). We may say there is still no solution to provide women with a coherent response, which starts from the skills of those

¹ *Legge quadro per la realizzazione del sistema integrato di interventi e servizi sociali.*

² The Cav are the anti-violence Centers, which generally are located in the provincial capitals. Their origin in Italy can be traced back to the early eighties. Many centers are born as voluntary organizations, where women work together with others, activating pathways for women in temporary conditions of difficulty. In 1990 the 'Casa delle Donne' of Bologna opened the first Italian refuge home, to which will soon be added those of Milan and Rome.

who help, to empower the victim's residual self-esteem. A significant variable for social policy could be that which involves the absence/presence of protection factors, since violence seems to have lost every dimension of exceptionality and has been structured in our daily life. In Italy the legislation provides, in the abstract, sufficient protection for violence against women; however, the fragmentation of the legal framework, the inadequate punishment of the aggressors and the lack of effective legal remedies for victims of violence are factors contributing 'to the silence and invisibility surrounding violence against women, its causes and consequences' (Article 46, Istanbul Convention). Furthermore, violence has become unpredictable (Basaglia, *et al.* 2006; Cersosimo, Marra, Rauty, 2008).

In the meantime, however, the daily emergencies remain to be resolved and these fall largely on the shoulders of social workers in the CAVs. For this reason it is necessary to dwell on the problem, to deepen the critical aspects of social policies, given that the instruments of intervention are inadequate, fragmented or disorganized. With professional action, social workers turn to a horizon of meaning that is social and interacts with local policies: thanks to this figure, the system has, in a certain sense, wide margins of reflexivity and self-correction. It is also necessary to dwell on some 'old' system problems. One of the characteristics of Italian welfare, already highlighted in the literature, is the high institutional fragmentation of skills (Giraldo, Riefolo, 1996; Sgroi, 2001; Corposanto, Fazzi, 2005; Facchini, 2010). Furthermore, the risks of discontinuity and dispersion related to the turnover of operators (Ruggeri, 2010), together with the complexity of the work in the era of managerialism (Tousijn, Dellavalle, 2017) are 'old' topics, to which 'new' problems must be added, such as the performance of the tools of daily action put in place by those specific figures who make first contact with the woman who has suffered violence: they need 'bureaucratic renewal, assumption of responsibility and certainty of shared acts' (Conte, 2008: 197).

Framed within the single regional systems of social policies, one of these tools is, from our point of view, the professional expertise of social workers and caregivers. To reach an improvement in the professional skills of those that work in contact with the 'managing' of the social problems of violence, it is necessary for knowledge of their discipline to be adequate, constantly updated, and useful in order to structure a path of empowerment. Above all professional skills, employed with the necessary attention to the monitoring of fragile situations, can be useful in the development of factors of protection that can save the potential victim from the risk of solitude and isolation characteristic of her condition before, during, and after the occurrence of violence.

What resources are available to a social workers in order to design paths of assistance? We can start by showing to women a different way of relating to others, in such a way as to break the 'cultural chain of reproduction of violence' and to isolate 'violence from one's life by defining it as an illegitimate mode to be opposed' (Cersosimo, Marra, Rauty, 2008: 187-188). It is always difficult for the women overwhelmed by this experience to face the next phase. They find themselves in complete solitude, often without work, after having sustained the difficult task of reporting the man who mistreated them, from which, in the majority of cases, they relied upon for income. How is it possible to provide them with specialized support which demands sensitivity, great competence and professionalism?

'In order to concretely and truly help a woman who is a victim of violence to recognize the violence suffered, to overcome it, to oppose it and to distance it, it is an indispensable and essential requirement that the operator know the phenomenon of gender violence and the specific reception methodology for women victims of violence' (Barone, 2008: 291).

In fact we must consider the obstacles present in the procedure of caring and curing: the scarce knowledge of the phenomenon, its dynamics and its diffusion, the entrenched conviction that violence in intimate relationships is a 'private matter' and not a crime; preconceived notions about the co-responsibility of the woman in the violence; thinking that one is either not entitled or not competent enough to help; not having the time necessary to investigate the situation or activate help; the fear of having to confront the aggressor; the need for proof that the woman underwent violence; the feeling of inadequacy in collecting evidence of the undergone violence; not wanting or knowing how to confront our emotions and those of the woman; and lastly, the weak competence of social services and support groups that are offered. For these reasons the specialized training of territorial social workers and those of CAV becomes decisively necessary. In some cases, this gender training has already been activated: for example considering the 'pink codes' that have been activated for emergency services in a few regions of Italy.

In order to put processes that might be translated into targeted regional, synergetic, and sensitive policies on gender into motion, intervening in a preventative sense becomes indispensable. The emergence of the problem of violence requires competencies in offering support and protection to the victim (of a reparative type) but also tools linked to the ability to recognize symptoms, signals, and indicators of environmental and relational distress.

4. The competencies in preventing

In order to face the problem of people who due to their subjective fragility can become victims of violence, it is necessary to strengthen institutions but also the community of reference. For these reasons, we should analyze the social environment of the victims, to understand what tools are available for them to prevent violence. In general, the risk assessment method can be used when assessing the danger of an undesirable event in order to define the priority or urgency of the measures necessary to keep it under control. If it is not seen within the context in which the violence originated, it is not possible to fully understand its multi-factorial genesis, nor let it emerge from invisibility (Baldry, 2006). Consequently, actions aimed at social change cannot be established (not just those repressive and punitive toward offenders) and in particular (if we believe in a preventive approach) those aimed at bettering the quality of a woman's life.

We are aware that the solution to the problem of violence involves a long-term path, on which not only social policies, but politics as a project of coexistence can intervene, re-orienting cultural and educational processes in the direction of real change, where in perspective we can speak of greater respect between genders and of a more widespread equity in relationships, private and public, in the family, at work and in every sphere of social life. Social policies and equal opportunities policies could also respond efficiently to the need for a new cultural basis in the relationship between genders, in institutions and in civil society.

In order to avoid that welfare operators themselves become a problem (Sicora, Nothdurfter, Sanfelici, 2017), since they must always deal with emergencies with poor tools, it is necessary for them to know how to plan aid courses: this skill consists in their professional specificity, in maintaining the approach of skills and investing in people, to overcome 'welfarism'.

Investing in work study programs to prevent and overcome emergencies becomes necessary because professionals, both paid and volunteer, do not often have specific training on violence, whereas they would need continuous refresher courses as well as periodic supervision acted upon to protect them from the risk of *burn-out* and secondary trauma (Anci-D.i.Re, 2014). In this sense, a contribution to the solution of the problem is the formation of competent professionals in recognizing early violence. In order to be effective, policies should aim for timely intervention. A valid alternative to violence is the timeliness of the response. Indifference and resignation of institutions sometimes seem like the only reactions to the frequent acts of violence against women and children. Instead, to intervene in a timely manner, by way of an efficient system of prevention, can contribute drastically not only in battling

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the phenomenon and keeping its more devastating effects under control, but also by putting in motion positive actions to develop preventive factors (Piga, 2017).

However, we need to understand the meaning of prevention, because timely interventions make sense if they translate into a constant practice of inter-professional and inter-sectoral collaboration.

Prevention has different spheres of action, as is known in literature and in public health practices: primary, secondary, tertiary or harm reduction. We must believe that the worst can be avoided: this is how we can prevent situations of fragility and isolation and put women at risk of violence in the context of significant relationships. Generally, the victim's condition is characterized, in the beginning, by situations in which social capital is deficient, conflictual, or absent (if violence has as its basis conjugal problems, family disintegration or forced immigration, see Callà, 2011). So in this sense we can say that the construction of networks, and primarily the training of social workers in this competence, is the fundamental axis of the quality of social policies. This can certainly be done through lifelong learning (Field, Leicester, 2000; Campanini, 2010; Greco, 2011). Not a long-life learning 'indifferent' to gender inequalities but sensitive to it and which, starting from this, points to inter-professional and inter-sectoral collaboration to solve the problem of violence against women. It is not enough, in fact, to organize network work between professions, primarily among social workers, psychologists and nurses: it is necessary to do this from a gender perspective. This gender-sensitive collaborative skill may be a priority, but in the Italian social policy system it is not developed in a shared form: 'The critical situation in the various services is confirmed by the reduced presence of shared protocols of cases of violence (...) with the result that the assessment of a violent act is the result of changing subjective feelings, rather than shared protocols, especially in some services (public security or administrative) still unprepared to classify elements that detect the violence suffered' (Conte, 2008: 197).

How can we overcome these 'interpretative opacities' of violence? If we look at the role of the nursery in identifying the need and the early risk (for example through the use of special check lists or routine screening) we must admit that 'we have not yet reached a consensus to establish precise guidelines' (Greco, 2011: 50).

Social research on the theme of gender violence is a particularly difficult and insidious field for reasons that have to do with the delicate nature of the topic and the culture of silence about it, the depth of its roots in society, the entrenched conviction that violence in intimate relationships is a 'private matter' and not a crime, the difficulty of measuring the phenomenon, the non-

specificity of the tools for its detection, or the inadequacy of the research methods used (Crowell, Burgess, 1998).

5. Protecting and preventing by a shared gender-sensitive methodology

Only if specifically formed in a gender-based approach and in a shared gender-sensitive methodology can one help tackle a problem (such as suffering violence) that requires a careful process of personal restructuring, since violence involves 'the most radical break in the ability to offer oneself to others and to offer oneself to one's and others' future (...) to physical and psychological pain is added the lesion of a fundamental mode for social relations constituted by trust, without which we could not make any social pact with others' (Conte, 2008: 199).

Also for these reasons social workers must have the ability to design life scenarios and personal reconstruction paths, which will put victims of violence in a position not to suffer violence again (because their aggressors violated their freedom and because the services failed to receive their request for help). In fact, those who have suffered violence often have to cope with the indifference of public policies, caused by the lack of local institutions (Cortimiglia, 2008: 302).

In addition to the role of professionals in protecting, within the CAVs, or in collaboration with them, we should also look at the role of *prevention* on the part of others. In fact, those who suffer violence do not always address the CAV, or the hospital, let alone the police, so it is difficult to clearly see the condition of the victim, whose invisibility is confused with the dark side of institutions. In the prospect of intensifying the range of preventive actions of professional expertise which favor unified paths within society, and of reducing the power of structural violence, we must take into consideration the note-worthy potential of civic participation that public authorities could promote, involving active citizens in the field of guardianship of rights and making widespread solidarity possible by way of targeted training, creating skills, resources, synergy, alliances and innovations for personal services: in other words, creating those factors that permit a woman in difficulty to feel the help that surrounds her.

In the case of the violence suffered by immigrant women, victims of trafficking and forced prostitution, the reasons behind their lack of trust in institutions must be considered: because of the prevalent attitudes towards prostitution; because often these women are without a residence permit and if they have underage children, they fear that social workers will take them away;

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they are also used to law enforcement agencies colluding with the underworld. In these cases women who suffer violence are much more willing to let themselves be helped by the third sector and by volunteers. In order to get out of this type of violence, in essence, the support of other women is important.

To do this, apart from the feelings of indignation and resignation expressed on the part of a civil society that is justifiably *reactive*, it is necessary that institutions back up an *active* citizenry that should also accept the contribution offered by associations working against violence against women, in order to build pathways of solidarity, also and especially for the victims of forced prostitution, which are usually arrested but not helped.

In that lies the potential of a 'network', where training and sector skills alliances are a priority, because it is the first step toward the careful selection of external aid and to necessary collaboration, even that of men, in order to create specific projects with CAV and investing on *community-based prevention* (Goodman, 1998; Garcia, Levi, Finkelstein, 2009).

For these reasons it would be important to finance the specialized training of social workers in local offices and in the CAVs. That training should provide for a continual exchange of occasions purposely structured for inter-sectoral cooperation, in order to avoid the dispersion of the help into a thousand trickles of specialized skills, with which one risks not being able to efficiently take into consideration the uniqueness of the person. Base training, and in particular that which is post-university and onward, represents a useful resource for creating competent personnel and for responding (in a reparative and protective sense) to the need of the victim for personal re-organization to overcome situations of pathological dependence and initiate an autonomous governing strategy for her own life.

How do we coordinate a policy in a gender-sensitive vision? It is necessary to re-address the gender regimes underlying each discipline as a result of past choices. In fact, shared planning requires a unitary knowledge of gender as a presupposition of interventions in favor of victims of violence. This 'formative' work is indispensable for professional figures that deal with problems such as: a) re-examining the social policy system in light of the 'gender orders' that are established by hierarchy and priority; b) overturning the dominant stereotypes in our society, characterized by structural violence; c) uncovering the prejudice implicit in health care and judiciary procedures, that often end up with the woman who endured the violence on trial, at the most crucial and delicate moment, when the victim finally gets the courage to report her aggressor.

Within this prospective a new agenda becomes necessary, one that focuses the public reflection upon the theme of violence and clarifies the link between scientific, professional and political expertise. There are many studies

that evidence the role of women-led associations and the contribution they can have on expanding knowledge of the problem (Bimbi, 2002; Riggio, Strani, Tromba, 2003; Basaglia, *et al.* 2006; Barone, 2008; Gambardella, 2014; Bartholini, 2014). What is not clear is how this could reinforce welfare systems and structures and especially the training of its operatives on gender. In what way could the scientific advancements in the study of gender not only improve professional skills, but also lead to coherent reform measures and social policies, aimed at the prevention of gender violence, and, specifically, domestic violence and IPV? Based on what empirical research experiences can the literature about violence bring forth the inadequacy of interventions or good practices to imitate?

The dialogue between the different actors is neither automatic, nor to be taken for granted. On the theme of domestic violence in particular it would seem urgent to favor discourse and alliances amongst the scientific, professional and political expertise not only to prepare professionals to be at the proper level for the job of helping women and children who are victims of violence, but also to achieve the following positive actions, aimed against structural violence: a) to observe and study the phenomenon, keeping oneself constantly updated, on the individual territories organized as regional observers, the relative geographical data and the typology of the declared violence, and at the same time monitoring the risk situation, to also keep the submerged and *invisible* violence under control; b) to foster sensitivity awareness, and give rewards and incentives, from primary school onward, for specific educational courses in reciprocal respect for the genders; c) to foster co-planning among institutions, by way of ‘roundtables’ that bring the delegated operatives into a constant relationship with the problem at hand, also with the prospect of ulterior alliances (consider structures or practices connecting personnel in health care, social services, consultancy, judiciary, police forces, etc.); d) to create memoranda of understanding between employers and institutions responsible for social reintegration of women who are victims of violence.

6. Dialogue between scientists, professionals and politicians to build prevention networks: is a sector skill alliance possible?

Since the unsuccessful prevention of gender violence is an underdeveloped field, upon which the diverse disciplines (from medicine all the way to sociology) have made their mark in a partial and fragmentary way, it is necessary to investigate the possibility of a post-graduate ‘gender’ work-study program for professionals that operate in social services. Considering

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the high financial, social, and health care costs of the unsuccessful prevention to date (Walby, 2004; Intervita, 2013; Biancheri, Piga, 2016), it would be very convenient, from all points of view, to evaluate the risks of violence in advance, develop an 'anticipated' knowledge of the phenomenon, and put efficient preventative measures in place. The updating of skills needs to be developed particularly in those figures or individuals which are most frequently in a condition to recognize accusations, confidential information, and confessions, or at least those who have the first contact with the problem (in a more or less direct way) and who must make crucial decisions. On the whole these figures are quite numerous: doctors, nurses and paramedics, teachers, principals or other scholastic personnel, lawyers, judges, social workers, educators, criminologists, psychologists, consultants and family mediators, cultural mediators, the clergy, state police and law enforcement in general. A high-level work-study program could be offered to these professionals that prepares them to recognize and deal with, each with his/her own appropriate skills, the diverse social and psychological consequences that are caused, directly and indirectly, by violent and abusive relationships.

Education represents the most powerful antidote against gender stereotypes; investment in work-study programs and research can prevent violence through the creation of networks that can give back to the victims a dimension of daily life with a hopeful horizon that the institutions by themselves cannot ensure. The building of networks is conclusive in getting over the lack of social capital, above all in situations characterized by the fragility of social ties (Piga, Pisu, 2016). The choice of investing in work-study programs and cultivating alliances among experts assumes strategic significance in the prevention of violence against women if it aims to overturn the *gender regime* even in a single institution (Connell, 2006: 105), such as, for example, science and university: it is in fact the university that educates doctors, lawyers, social workers and psychologists. The increased awareness and professional work-study programs, able to identify gender orders behind each discipline, should lead the various caregivers to adopt common principles, based on a social interpretation of violence that points out how this is the result of a construct that is also cultural. The reference in this case is not just to the individual pathology of the abuser or to the submissiveness of the victim, but also and above all to the consequences of the disparity of power between men and women.

These are a few of the reasoning points supported by the thesis that in order to get over this emergency we must question scientific and operative knowledge, dismantle their false neutrality and engage public responsibility in the improvement of secondary and higher education. Investing in training programs as an alternative to the decades-long policy cuts to culture, scientific

research and universities means building unitary pathways of competence to face up to the phenomenon in question. These pathways, developed in the framework of specific regional policies, can contribute to overcoming the limits and risks of self-referential bias in every profession, in order to create a dialogue between scientific and institutional experts. In that way it will be possible to approach the theme of gender from the same perspective in diverse disciplinary fields such as medicine, sociology, psychology, human rights, social services, criminology and social pedagogy, while at the same time outline social policies that aim toward equal opportunity. This can represent an innovation in the field of interventions to prevent the phenomenon of domestic violence and to build a more radical culture of non-violence in interpersonal relationships.

Overcoming the problem demands deep changes in society that can only be realized if they are supported by an active citizenry that keeps a constant open dialogue with public institutions (in particular with Municipalities, Regions, Professional Bodies, and Universities); this means creating operative agreements, sharing protocols, dialogue between professionals, synergies, alliances, institutional understandings, guidelines and much more. Answers to violence should not be limited to one performance by a single professional. What we need is an integrated network of services that are capable of protecting endangered women and their children. Social policies and institutional logistics are not always respectful and attentive to subjective life paths: for this reason safe houses should be developed, privileged channels of access to job and real estate markets, as well as the widespread specialized skills that consent to the identifying of violence in intimate relationships and the possibility to establish efficient contact with the women.

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