The Violence Prevention Research Process: ITALY

Department of Equal Opportunities, Prime Minister’s Office

Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) Forum 2015
Special Session II
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Overview of VAC in Italy

• Sexual abuse
  – Sexual abuse reported by women as minors: 33% (Bianchi and Moretti, 2006).
  – Abuse in Italy occurs within children’s circles of trust: the family being the most common place but also within the schools. Overall, girls are significantly more likely to report sexual abuse than boys.
  – High levels of trafficking of foreign children especially for sexual exploitation.
  – Increasing attention to child prostitution and on-line violence.

• Physical abuse
  – In schools bullying affects over 1/3 of students (HBSC, 2010).
  – Italian fathers (more than mothers) believe in the educational ‘value’ of corporal punishment especially for boys (Arace et al, 2013).

• Emotional abuse
  – 20% of children who accessed services have witnessed domestic violence - this is likely underreported
Factors leading to Italy’s involvement in the ‘drivers’ research process

• Violence against children is a priority of the Italian government with investment in surveys, extensive observatories and legislation reflected in different policies and practices.

  However, rationalizing services in the face of economic austerity will be critical - so too is a prevention focus (rather than service response).

• Italy has recently created a comprehensive national system of data collection on child abuse with a data bank of multiple data sources. Understanding the national ‘picture’ will help advocate for common service provision indicators and more informed prevention efforts.

• Italy is suffering from the global (and specifically European) economic downturn. Understanding what drives violence will help prioritize practices and prepare for changing population dynamics.
Lessons learned in Italy by the end of Stage 1

- Children and adolescents often do not have a clear perception of what is violence, especially on-line violence (sexting, grooming, etc) as well as bullying.
  - Awareness raising and training of teachers/educators emerges as crucial for prevention as well as research to better understand how different types of violence affect children’s lives so that prevention can be more directed.

- European countries like Italy, even with comparatively low levels of registered abuse, face the challenge of below replacement fertility, aging populations (and a disappearing extended family) leading to family isolation and weaker social networks. This may be affecting the size and strength of adult and children’s care and support networks.

- The increase of refugees and migrants, especially minors and women of child-bearing age, is likely to present new challenges for violence prevention and service provision.
Changes created by the ‘drivers’ process in Italy

- Findings from the national report fed into Italy’s *National Plan of Action for Children and the National Plan to Prevent and Combat the Abuse and Sexual Exploitation of Children* approved last July.

- The Government of Italy recognizes the importance of carrying out an **evaluation of interventions** to better understand ‘what works’, to determine priority services vis-a-vis the economic crisis.

- The Department of Equal Opportunities has expressed willingness to participate in **Stage 2 of the Multi-Country Study**; there is particular interest in the work around social norms as an entry point for effective violence prevention.