

## Early Network-based Action Against Violent Behaviors to Leverage victim Empowerment: Results from an action-research plan

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## **Ethics Statement**

Since all of the data was collected without any contact by the research team with the participants, and no personal or sensitive data was collected, an Ethical vetting was not required.

## **Abstract**

The ENABLE project, which aims to implement the ZEUS protocol at the national level, aims to activate specific interventions to prevent violence against women by going directly to individuals who have been admonished for domestic violence or stalking, thus implementing a system of protection towards victims. A second objective concerns the implementation of a training intervention aimed at project workers and law enforcement officers. The topic of gender-based violence, identification and management of situations at risk of escalation through the construction of shared operational practices was the subject of the training. Following the trainings, a quantitative survey was administered to law enforcement officers (both training participants and non-trainees) to assess their knowledge of the instrument of warning, referral to treatment and specific forms of gender-based victimization, use of referrals to treatment, and knowledge of gender-specific forms of victimization. The results showed significant differences between participants versus non-participants to ENABLE training, with respect to intervention effectiveness, awareness and knowledge related to the training. With regard to the admonished and petitioning parties, two different surveys were administered aimed at investigate, at the end of intake, clinical and individual adjustment variables (in terms of depression and posttraumatic symptoms, coping strategies, risk of victimization, and adverse childhood experiences). The results showed significant differences between the two groups (admonished versus instant parties), particularly with regard to the depressive and post-traumatic risk variables, with the instant parties being more likely to be exposed to this condition than the admonished.

**Keywords:** PV, treatment of offenders, admonishing, victims protection

## Introduction

The ENABLE (Early Network-based Action against abusive Behaviours to Leverage victim Empowerment) project, funded on the REC-RDAP-GBV-AG-2020 “ENABLE” call, is a research-intervention project aimed at preventing gender-based violence, protecting victims and activating integrated intervention models, with particular reference to the social perception of the phenomenon of domestic violence and stalking, and the taking charge of warning situations by the Questore.

The project which aims to implement the 2018 ZEUS protocol at the national level, a memorandum of understanding between the Milan Police Headquarters (Central Anticrime Service, Ministry of the Interior) and the Italian Center for the Promotion of Mediation (CIPM), for the effective implementation of Law 38/2009 and 119/2013, concerning the crimes of persecutory acts – stalking – and domestic violence.

In Italy there is the device of the Questore’s “warning”, that is, a formal warning issued by the Questore to the reported person to refrain from committing further acts of harassment and/or violence and understand its social disvalue. Contextually, the warning allows the Questore to take measures such as the withdrawal of weapons and – in case of reiteration of conduct, ex officio prosecution – to prosecute ex officio.

The practice defined by the Zeus protocol stipulates that concurrently with the warning, subjects are sent to the CIPM for clinical-criminological treatment.

Likewise, victims are given information and referrals regarding territorial support and advocacy services such as anti-violence centers. They are also asked for their willingness to be contacted by the CIPM for more accurate situation monitoring and risk assessment.

It is important to clarify that a “warning” does not mean a complaint against the perpetrator of violence, but is a *“measure designed to ‘recall’ or ‘warn’ a person who engages in persecutory and/or violent acts, which do not yet constitute a crime, so that he or she will stop his or her harassing activity before it escalates to a worsening that makes the activation of a criminal trial inevitable”* (ARES Association APS, 2003). This prevention perspective is also concerned with the possible escalation of the frequency, intensity, and harmfulness of victim-protection conduct.

The following participated as Project partners: the CIPM (soc. coop. soc. as lead partner), C.I.P.M. Liguria APS, The CIPM Emilia Impresa Sociale, C.I.P.M. Sardegna, Associazione ARES APS, and the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart of Milan as scientific referent.

Associate partner was the Ministry of the Interior, Servizio Centrale Anticrimine (SCA). With the ENABLE project it was possible to replicate

in 10 Italian cities the model of the ZEUS Protocol, which had already been initiated in the city of Milan. The goal of the project was the implementation of good practice that allowed: the early interruption of violent behavior and the reduction of recidivism, the protection of victims and the knowledge of territorial support resources, the definition of a multiagency model, and the awareness of stakeholders and the community.

The Zeus protocol aims at the awareness and empowerment of the admonished through reframing their acts and gaining awareness of the effects of their violent behavior. In particular, potential abusers are offered the treatment opportunity to question their relational patterns and views on gender relations (cf. Garbarino & Giulini, 2022, 2020).

In addition, a number of training days were conducted, addressed to the Forces dell and project operators in which some pivotal issues of interventions in situations of gender-based violence were addressed and delving into the operational practices of the ZEUS Protocol, such as:

- The legal context of the warning and the application of the Zeus Protocol;
- The opportunities and methods for sending to treatment;
- The techniques for collecting the testimony of the petitioning party for the issuance of warnings;
- Reception and interviews with the petitioning parties and referral to the appropriate territorial services;
- The recognition of high-risk individuals, through the recognition of situations at risk of escalation or reiteration;  
The construction of territorial networks.

In addition, 6 more trainings have been conducted at police headquarters in some of the cities involved in the project in a logic of cascade training (train the trainer) and training packs that allow people to take advantage of the training content

The following paragraphs will detail the results (quantitative and qualitative) collected within the ENABLE Project, with respect to the Law Enforcement Agencies, the admonished, and the petitioning parties.

### ***Gender-based violence***

In 2002, the Council of Europe defined violence against women as “*any act of violence based on sexual affiliation that results or is likely to result in harm or suffering of a physical, sexual or psychological nature to women, who are targeted by it*” (Recommendation REC (2002) of the Council of Ministers of member states on the protection of women from violence). In June 2013, Italy ratified the Istanbul Convention, which

identifies violence against women as “*a violation of human rights*” and includes any act or threat within the scope of gender-based violence that causes or is likely to cause physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm or suffering in both public and private life. With this document, the focus is also placed on violence in private life, and thus violence within the home is placed in a perspective according to which it is not merely a private matter, but one of public significance. With the coining of the term “*intimate partner violence*”, or *intimate partner violence*, we go on to specify and define that form of violence against women, committed in the couple relationship system, by current or former partners: this type of violence against women is the most frequent within the domestic walls (Bonura, 2018).

Among the many and other types of male violence against women can be found: physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, economic violence, and stalking. Stalking is a very frequent form of violence, which was recognized as a crime in Italy in 2009 (Art. 612 bis of the Criminal Code, L. n 38 of 2009) and is, together with intimate partner violence, one of the focuses of this research-intervention project. Stalking encompasses a set of persecutory behaviors repeated over time, towards an individual, who develops fear and anxiety, due to the feeling of being constantly followed and/or controlled.

### ***The Zeus Protocol***

Signed on April, 5th 2018 by the then Quaestor of Milan, Dr. Cardone, and the President of the CIPM, Dr. Giulini, the Zeus Protocol was created as a tool for first-level secondary prevention and combating gender, domestic and relational violence. It introduces an unprecedented and innovative form of collaboration and cooperation between the Police and the CIPM, within which subjects admonished by the Quaestor for stalking, domestic violence or cyberbullying are invited to follow a treatment path aimed at understanding the social disvalue of their violent actions.

The choice of the name was oriented on the representation of a possessive attitude, with no possibility of containment and reflection on the consequences and risks of one's actions.

Therefore, the Zeus Protocol, which started from the Anticrimine Division of the Milan Police Headquarters as a “pilot” project and as experimentation of an integrated multidisciplinary intervention modality, thanks to the ENABLE project has been extended nationwide, in 10 other Italian provinces, through the signing of similar protocols between Police Headquarters and local CIPMs, also on the impulse of the DAC Circular No. 225/UAG/2019-66981-U of September, 06<sup>th</sup> 2019.

It was the so-called “Security Decree” approved by Decree-Law 11/2009 and converted into Law 38/2009, which introduced the criminal offence of “persecutory acts” (Article 612 *bis* of the Italian Criminal Code, commonly referred to as “stalking”) and the measure of the warning as an administrative measure *until a complaint is lodged* for the offences 612 *bis* and 612 *ter* of the Italian Criminal Code (Article 8). The meaning of the warning is a formal oral warning by the Quaestor against conduct whose effects are deeply detrimental to the person subjected to it, and an invitation *to behave in accordance with the law*.

According to the article, the reiteration of the conduct by the person, after being admonished, provides for ex officio prosecution, arrest in flagrante delicto, and an increase in sentence.

Subsequently, the instrument of the warning is extended to domestic violence behavior (ex art. 3 Law 119/2013) and cyberbullying (ex art. 7 Law 71/2017), thus recognizing also in these behaviors what we can call “sentinel offence” and in the warning an effective first-level secondary prevention intervention.

Sentinel offences are in fact those behaviors, still characterized by sporadicity, but at risk of escalation from the point of view of the seriousness and harmfulness of the effects they generate in those who suffer them, and found to be sufficiently serious to trigger an administrative sanction; such behaviors need the possibility of being intercepted early, preventively.

A few months after the conclusion of the ENABLE project, the changes in the law contained in the “Caivano Decree” on combating juvenile distress and crime (Decree-Law 123/2023, converted into Law 159/2023) extended the warning to minors over the age of fourteen for offences under articles 581 (battering), 582 (personal injury), 610 (deprivation of liberty), 612 (threats) and 635 (damaging) of the Criminal Code; and for minors between twelve and fourteen years of age (who cannot be charged under the Italian criminal system) for offences provided for by law as crimes punishable by imprisonment of not less than a maximum of five years.

This choice testifies to the recognition of the warning as a tool for the timely and effective interception and intaking of risk situations.

The warning procedure provides that the offended person may report the offending conduct, without initiating criminal proceedings, to the Police Office, which, after assessing the report through an investigative phase, will decide whether or not there are grounds for a warning. The law provides that, for cases of domestic violence or cyberbullying, anyone aware of the facts may request a warning, resulting as a protected source within the administrative procedure.

The Zeus Protocol enhances and organizes the innovative provision introduced by Art. 3, p.5, Law 119/2013 in the warning procedure: the contextual sending for treatment through a formal invitation to attend at least one interview with an operator at the CIPM, in order to start a preliminary assessment and monitoring process. Although the admonished person is not obliged to attend such an interview, non- participation is reported to the police, so that evaluation can be made regarding the implementation of more incisive prevention measures by the Quaestor. In fact, a parallel can be drawn between the violation of precautionary measures in criminal proceedings, which is a risk factor for the reiteration of deviant conduct, and the refusal to participate in the treatment referral, assessed as a sign or “symptom” of a reduced awareness and accountability of what has happened and what is postponed in the formal act of warning, but also of criticality in identifying and implementing appropriate, functional, adaptive behavior.

The aim of the treatment intervention of the Zeus Protocol is to provide the admonished person with a space for reflection and elaboration with a direct impact on his/her own behavior to the benefit of the offended party, of society and of the person himself/herself.

The Zeus Protocol is in fact a measure that can be defined as “Restorative Justice”, because it promotes tools and sensitivity in the community that can promote practices designed to prevent and combat violence, operating outside the penal system but integrating its possibilities of intervention and effectiveness.

Another aspect borrowed from Restorative Justice is the centrality of the protection of the offended person and the reparation of the damage caused, made possible, as in all treatment interventions, by the work of accountability and awareness of the offender.

In the implementation modalities of the Zeus Protocol there is the possibility of contact and meeting with the offended person for a preliminary work of listening, support and assessment of the situation, of the context and of the risks of re-victimization, even secondary. When the offended parts are notified of the issuance of the warning, they can freely express their consent to be contacted by the CIPM, a qualified interlocutor for a monitoring intervention but also, if necessary and requested, to be sent to other specialist victim support services, to psychological support or to a talking group.

The multidisciplinary evaluation, re-evaluation and monitoring work on the treated situations, always within the implementation modalities of the Zeus Protocol, provides for quarterly meetings between the CIPM team and the Police operators, for a comparison on the progress of the

treatment paths and an evaluation, case by case, of possible risk or critical factors. The sharing of the outcome and progress of the treatment has nothing to do with its contents but with the way in which the offender participates and adheres to it.

The overall meaning of the treatment is in fact to encourage the admonished person to reflect on his or her own fragility and the consequences of his or her actions with a view to reparation and prevention.

The methodology used to conduct the interviews with the admonished person is inspired by the clinical-criminological interview as a diagnostic and prognostic tool, to get to know the person's functioning, to deepen the motivations, the genesis and dynamics of the admonished conduct, to identify any risk and protection factors with respect to the reiteration or escalation of harmful behavior.

There are two main specificities of the intervention setting: the absence of demand and therefore the treatment *injunction* and the fact that it does not operate within the framework of the criminal prosecution that identifies the subject as a perpetrator; the admonished person is therefore a free citizen who has acted dysfunctional and risky behavior.

The first contact has a mainly informative purpose, aimed at clarifying the objective and functioning of the warning and the Zeus Protocol, defining the setting and the constraints governing it, explaining the function of the operator and treatment.

The preliminary interviews, not defined or definable in number a priori, are space and opportunity to fostering motivation through a mode of encounter and confrontation that holds together welcoming and *questioning*. Welcoming the subject's fragilities, the narration of the self, of the relationship and of the conduct enacted within it, the defenses, minimizations, distortions, even denials; welcoming them in order to be able to question them, through a joint *reconstruction* that gives a new and different meaning to what has been enacted, and that takes into account the reading of the subject but also the contribution of the operator as representative of the community and of the offended party, and of their demands.

At the end of the preliminary interviews, the operator can assess what intervention to propose and what restitution to give the offender. Some people already have a good critical capacity with respect to the conduct they have acted, they understand its effects on the offended party and the social disvalue; these are cases in which the effect of the Police intervention and a short-medium term monitoring work appear adequate and sufficient. Other persons show criticalities in the acquisition of an



adequate awareness and accountability, but the time of the preliminaries made it possible to create a motivation and an alliance to work such as to support a short individual pathway aimed at elaborating and consolidating what had emerged, or a referral to an external therapy pathway, supported by an help demand.

Finally, in some cases, the assessment of the risk of escalation or recidivism or other factors lead the operator to formulate the need to intake of the offender and to include him/her in a medium-long term treatment programme; this is carried out in a group setting, on a weekly frequency, and is designed as a tool for *benevolent control*, the promotion of a critical and reflective attitude, the development of empathy and awareness of the effects of one's behavior, and accountability.

In cases where relevant psychopathological aspects emerge, referral to a specialist service is possible, as a parallel or alternative intervention to treatment.

### ***Statistical data and mapping***

Before presenting the results of the research, it is important to introduce some Italian statistical data on warnings. The data come from the Ministry of the Interior (Department of Public Security - Central Directorate of Criminal Police) and were processed by the Central Anticrime Directorate of the State Police.

In 2022, 3,654 individuals were admonished in Italy (up from 2,886 in 2021), of whom 78 percent were found to be of Italian nationality. Furthermore, in 2022 recidivism was 9.7 percent (compared to 14.8 percent in 2021). Regarding the warnings issued in 2022, 703 are reported within Questuras adhering to the Zeus Protocol, while 2,951 are related to Questuras not adhering to the Zeus Protocol. Of the cases related to Questuras adhering to the Zeus Protocol, the recidivism rate is 7 percent, while in Questuras not adopting the Zeus Protocol, the incidence of recidivism is 10 percent.

At the national level, interesting data are found regarding the provincial distribution of the number of warnings. Catania turns out to be the province with the highest number of warnings in 2022 (346), followed by Trento (200), Milan (181), Turin (153), Rome (142), Naples (129), Venice (124), Padua (100), Genoa (82) and Palermo (77). Of the top 10 provinces by number of warnings in 2022, two took part in the ENABLE Project (Milan, Rome and Genova). The ENABLE Project also covered the provinces of Reggio Emilia (49), Cagliari (26), Vicenza (42), Verona (42), Bari (52), Piacenza (9), Savona (57) and Prato (22). The province with the

lowest number of warnings in Italy in 2022 is Campobasso (2), followed by Sondrio (3) L'Aquila (3).

In the 12 months prior to the signing of the ZEUS Protocol the recidivism index by province was: Bari (21%), Cagliari (23%), Genoa (10%), Milan (14%), Piacenza (20%), Prato (24%), Reggio Emilia (18%), Rome (12%), Savona (23%), Verona (23%) and Vicenza (24%). After 12 months of signing the ZEUS protocol, the recidivism index by province was: Bari (4%), Cagliari (38%), Genoa (23%), Milan (8%), Piacenza (0%), Prato (24%), Reggio Emilia (16%), Rome (7%), Savona (6%), Verona (20%) and Vicenza (13%).

## **Objectives**

In the context of the scientific activities of the ENABLE Project, the overall objective was to collect information regarding the psychological, social, and value dimensions associated with gender-based violence, both from law enforcement and from instantiating and admonished parties. The information collected represents both a useful national database for benchmarking future similar projects and a measure of the effectiveness of the intervention itself.

More specifically, an initial objective of the research was to collect data from law enforcement agencies regarding variables such as: the knowledge of the instrument of warning, methods of referral to treatment and implementation of multiagency intake, and knowledge of gender-specific forms of victimization (in particular, in relation to stalking and domestic violence). A specific anonymous quantitative survey was developed for this objective.

A second specific objective, aimed at the instant parties, was to investigate some clinical and individual adjustment variables (in terms of depression and posttraumatic symptoms, coping strategies, and risk of victimization). For this objective, a specific anonymous quantitative survey was developed and sent to the instant parties participating in the ENABLE Project.

Finally, a final specific objective was aimed at the admonished, with the purpose of investigating some clinical and individual adjustment variables (in terms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms, coping strategies, risk of recidivism, and adverse childhood experiences). Also for this objective, a specific anonymous quantitative survey was developed and sent to the admonished participating in the ENABLE Project.

## Methodology

### *Participants*

A total of 148 officers participated in the Law Enforcement Survey, of whom 56.8% (n = 84) were female, having an average age of 48.5 years (SD = 8.6; range: 26-62) and coming in 45.9 (n = 68) from northern Italy, 22.3% (n = 33) from central Italy, and 29.7% (n = 44) from southern Italy and islands.

Fourteen female individuals (mean age: 41.3 years; range: 19-59 years) and 31 male individuals (mean age: 42.8 years; range: 24-56 years) participated in the Instant Part Survey and 31 male individuals (mean age: 42.8 years; range: 24-56 years) in the Admonished Survey. Participants were recruited through Project partners. Anonymity and confidentiality was guaranteed to all participants.

### *Tools*

The following tools were used to construct the Survey addressed to law enforcement agencies:

- the *Victim Credibility Scale* (Page, 2008), to assess the victim's credibility. This instrument was translated into Italian by the research team, using the translation and backtranslation method;
- the *Quantitative Survey with qualitative components to examine law enforcement perspectives and attitudes about Domestic Violence* (Toon & Hart, 2005), to investigate representations and beliefs about domestic violence. This instrument was translated into Italian by the research team, using the translation and backtranslation method;
- the *Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale* (STSS; Bride et al., 2004), to assess the psychological effects of direct exposure to situations connoted by traumatic stress (such as criminal victimization). This instrument was translated into Italian by the research team, using the translation and backtranslation method.

The following tools were used to construct the Survey addressed to the instant parties and the Survey addressed to the admonished:

- *Impact of Event Scale - Revised* (IES-R; Weiss & Marmar, 1997; Weiss, 2007), for the assessment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms. This instrument was used in its Italian adaptation (Giannantonio, 2003);

- Beck Depression Inventory - II (BDI-II; Montano & Flebus, 2006; Becket et al., 1961), for the assessment of depressive symptoms. This instrument was used in its Italian validation;
- Coping Orientation to the Problems Experiences-new Italian version (COPE-NVI; Sica, et al., 2008), for the identification of coping strategies. This instrument was used in its Italian validation;
- Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ; Finkelhor et al., 2011), for the assessment of victimization in youth. This instrument was translated into Italian by the research team, using the translation and backtranslation method;
- Bright Sky (Vodafone Foundation, Cadmi and State Police, 2020), Italian questionnaire for assessing victimization experiences.

### ***Procedure***

All Surveys were constructed using the online platform “Qualtrics” and were distributed to territorial project partners via links. Subsequently, the partners distributed the Surveys to participants, both with regard to Law Enforcement (through SCA) and to admonished and instant parties (through the regional offices of CIPM and ARES). Subsequently, through the Qualtrics platform, the results were collected and analyzed. In all cases, the utmost confidentiality and protection of privacy was ensured, as no personal or sensitive data was collected.

### ***Analysis***

Descriptive and correlational analyses were conducted for the Survey targeting law enforcement officers. A comparison analysis of the mean scores obtained (Student’s *t-test* for independent samples) between the experimental group (ENABLE training participants) and the control group (non ENABLE training participants) was conducted.

As for the Surveys addressed to the admonished and the instant parties, the results were analyzed by percentage calculation. The results were then compared with each other.

## **Results**

### ***Law Enforcement.***

#### ***The credibility of the victim***

Results on victim credibility in domestic violence cases do not appear to be related to the respondent’s age, gender, or length of service. Instead,

there are some significant associations between the number of domestic violence and/or stalking cases (followed in the past six months) and the credibility of someone you know ( $r = .165$   $p = .050$ ), a *transgender person* ( $r = .254$   $p = .003$ ), a *teenager* ( $r = .260$   $p = .002$ ), of an older person ( $r = .197$   $p = .021$ ), of a person in prostitution ( $r = .245$   $p = .004$ ), of a man ( $r = .294$   $p = .001$ ), of a professional woman ( $r = .270$   $p = .001$ ), of a married woman accusing her husband ( $r = .266$   $p = .002$ ). This means that the more frequent the respondents' current experience "in the field," and more credibility is given to the victim, regardless of type. Furthermore, for *transgender* victims, there is a further significant correlation between the number of years of experience with respect to domestic violence and/or stalking cases and the credibility accorded to the victim ( $r = .185$   $p = .029$ ). This means that, for *transgender* victims, credibility is also related to years of service experience.

Similarly, results on victim credibility in stalking cases do not appear to be related to respondent's age, gender, or length of service. There are some significant associations between the number of domestic violence and/or stalking cases (followed in the last six months) and the credibility of someone you know ( $r = .171$   $p = .046$ ), a *transgender person* ( $r = .256$   $p = .003$ ), a *teenager* ( $r = .284$   $p = .001$ ), of an elderly person ( $r = .219$   $p = .010$ ), of a person in prostitution ( $r = .275$   $p = .001$ ), of a man ( $r = .269$   $p = .002$ ), of a professional woman ( $r = .251$   $p = .003$ ), of a married woman accusing her husband ( $r = .273$   $p = .001$ ). Similar to domestic violence cases, this means that the more frequent the respondents' current "on-the-ground" experience, the more credible the victim appears to be.

## **Representations and beliefs about domestic violence**

Regarding representations and beliefs related to domestic violence and related psychological dynamics, most respondents (64.2%;  $n = 95$ ) believe that domestic violence is a significant problem for the community in which they serve (*versus* 10.2%;  $n = 15$ ). Almost all respondents (94.5%;  $n = 140$ ) do not believe that domestic violence should be considered a private matter rather than a matter for law enforcement (*versus* 0.7%;  $n = 1$ ).

Most respondents (77.6 percent;  $n = 115$ ) do not believe that victims of domestic violence are often as responsible for the events as the person arrested (*versus* 2.1 percent;  $n = 3$ ).

The majority of respondents (51.3%;  $n = 76$ ) do not believe that victims of domestic violence often exaggerate about the extent of violence

experienced (*versus* 8.1%;  $n = 12$ ). 39.9% of respondents ( $n = 59$ ) do not take a definite position (neither agree nor disagree).

Most respondents (47.9%;  $n = 71$ ) believed that substance abuse by abusers was a major cause of domestic violence (*versus* 17.5%;  $n = 26$ ).

For the majority of respondents (66.2%;  $n = 98$ ), most domestic violence situations occur because of the abusers' anger management problems (*versus* 12.1%;  $n = 18$ ).

According to the largest number of respondents (75.6 percent;  $n = 112$ ), most domestic violence situations stem from the abusers' need for control and exercise of power over victims (*versus* 4.1 percent;  $n = 6$ ).

The majority of respondents (63.5 percent;  $n = 94$ ) say that mental disorders contribute significantly to domestic violence situations (*versus* 11.5 percent;  $n = 17$ ).

Most respondents (68.8 percent;  $n = 102$ ) believed that one of the main problems of domestic violence was attributable to the many cases of recidivism (*versus* 4.8 percent;  $n = 7$ ).

Regarding representations and beliefs referring to intervention methodology and practice (with particular reference to arresting abusers), 38.6 percent of respondents ( $n = 57$ ) do not believe they need more freedom to decide how to intervene in domestic violence situations (*versus* 16.8 percent;  $n = 25$ ).

The majority of respondents (60.8%;  $n = 90$ ) believe that most victims of domestic violence are responsive and receptive to law enforcement interventions (*versus* 6.1%;  $n = 9$ ).

38.8 percent of respondents ( $n = 59$ ) felt they needed more precise guidelines from superiors on how to behave in domestic violence calls (*versus* 27 percent;  $n = 40$ ), and in addition, 94.4 percent of respondents ( $n = 119$ ) felt more training could help on how to behave in domestic violence situations (*versus* 4.7 percent;  $n = 7$ ).

44% of respondents ( $n = 65$ ) do not believe that, in domestic violence cases, law enforcement should only make arrests when there is clear evidence of injury (*versus* 24.3%;  $n = 36$ ).

38.5% of respondents ( $n = 57$ ) believe it is more likely to make an arrest when there are children in domestic violence cases, who witness the violence (*versus* 27%;  $n = 40$ ).

Most respondents (65.5%,  $n = 97$ ) believe that domestic violence perpetrators should be arrested even when the victim does not want to (*versus* 10.8%,  $n = 16$ ).

The *Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale* (STSS; Bride et al., 2004) was administered to assess the psychological effects of direct exposure to situations connoted by traumatic stress.

A positive trend ( $r = .165$   $p = .055$ ) emerges between intrusive symptoms and the number of domestic violence and/or stalking cases followed in the past six months, meaning that the greater the number of cases followed, the greater the presence of intrusive traumatic symptoms. A higher burden of traumatic stress (and associated symptoms), on the one hand, turns out to be related to the awareness that domestic violence represents a significant problem for the community in which one serves, marked by high levels of recidivism and a certain causal complexity, which imposes strategies of contrast and intervention that go beyond normal practices (resulting in a sense of unpreparedness and difficulty in case management). On the other hand, the development of traumatic symptomatology seems to be associated with evasive attempts to downplay/minimize the real psychological (and social) scope of this phenomenon, considering that many reports of domestic violence instead concern mere verbal family quarrels, which are often traceable to substance abuse problems on the part of the abusers and which go on to occupy too much time and resources for law enforcement officers.

In the context of the ENABLE Project, there was a specific training activity directed to law enforcement officers, oriented on the general issues of gender-based violence and stalking and personal attitudes about these issues. The majority of respondents (85.1%,  $n = 126$ ) report that they did not participate in ENABLE training.

To better understand whether ENABLE training appears to be associated with a different profile of representations/beliefs between participants *versus* non-participants, analyses were conducted to compare the mean scores obtained (Student's  $t$  test for independent samples) between the two groups.

With respect to victim credibility (in cases of domestic violence and stalking) and traumatic psychological effects from exposure to criminal victimization, no significant differences were found between experimental group (the training participants) and control group (the non-training participants). Therefore, the two groups are shown to be similar with respect to the representations that guide the construction of a victim's credibility (of domestic violence and/or stalking) and the traumatic psychological effects (in terms of total score, intrusive symptoms, avoidance symptoms and nervous activation) that may result from exposure to criminal victimization.

Significant differences emerge, however, with respect to representations and beliefs about domestic violence. The following table shows the main descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) of the experimental

group (the training participants) and the control group (the non-training participants)

Table 1 - *Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) between participants versus non-participants in ENABLE training.*

	ENABLE training participants		Non-Participants in ENABLE Training		t	p
	M	DS	M	DS		
Domestic violence should be considered as a private matter rather than a matter for law enforcement agencies	4,80	0,410	4,58	0,612	-2,022	.050
Victims of domestic violence are often just as responsible for the events as the person arrested	4,40	0,598	4,05	0,822	-2,306	.056
Most victims are safer as soon as they break an abusive relationship	2,45	0,686	2,81	0,890	2,096	.044
Most domestic violence situations stem from the abusers' need for control and exercise of power over victims	2,40	0,681	2,02	0,788	-2,016	.046
One of the main problems of domestic violence is that there are many cases of recidivism	2,65	0,933	2,13	0,765	-2,739	.019
I am more likely to be physically injured by intervening in a domestic violence call than by intervening in a stranger violence call	3,55	0,605	3,24	0,817	-2,017	.052
In domestic violence calls, it is often best to arrest both parties	4,70	0,571	4,32	0,771	-2,598	.014
If the victim of domestic violence shows cooperation, I am more likely to apprehend the abuser	2,90	0,718	3,33	0,969	2,358	.025
More training could help me on how to deal with domestic violence situations	2,65	1,226	1,94	0,727	-2,535	.019



Regarding representations and beliefs related to domestic violence and related psychological dynamics, our results show that ENABLE training participants, compared to non-participants, report more disagreement with the following statements:

- domestic violence should be regarded as a private matter, rather than a matter for law enforcement ( $M = 4.80$  versus  $M = 4.58$ ;  $t = -2.022$ ;  $gdl = 142$ ;  $p = .050$ );
- victims of domestic violence are often as responsible for the events as the person arrested ( $M = 4.40$  versus  $M = 4.05$ ;  $t = -2.306$ ;  $gdl = 143$ ;  $p = .056$ );
- most domestic violence situations stem from the batterers' need for control and exercise of power over victims ( $M = 2.40$  versus  $M = 2.02$ ;  $t = -2.016$ ;  $gdl = 143$ ;  $p = .046$ );
  - one of the main problems of domestic violence is the many cases of recidivism ( $M = 2.65$  versus  $M = 1.94$ ;  $t = -2.739$ ;  $gdl = 142$ ;  $p = .019$ ).

While, compared to non-participants, ENABLE training participants report greater agreement that most victims are safer as soon as they break an abusive relationship ( $M = 2.45$  versus  $M = 2.81$ ;  $t = 2.096$ ;  $gdl = 141$ ;  $p = .044$ ).

Finally, regarding the belief that most victims are safer as soon as they break off an abusive relationship, only 5 percent of ENABLE training participants strongly disagree/disagree (versus 26.8 percent of non ENABLE training participants).

On the other hand, with regard to representations and beliefs referring to the methodology and practice of intervention (with particular reference to arresting abusers) in cases of domestic violence, our results show that training participants, compared to non-participants, report more disagreement with the following statements:

- Be more likely to be physically injured by intervening in a domestic violence call than in a stranger violence call ( $M = 3.55$  versus  $M = 3.24$ ;  $t = -2.017$ ;  $gdl = 143$ ;  $p = .052$ );
- In domestic violence calls it is often better to arrest both parties ( $M = 4.70$  versus  $M = 4.32$ ;  $t = -2.598$ ;  $gdl = 142$ ;  $p = .014$ ).

Whereas, compared with non-participants, training participants report greater agreement that if the domestic violence victim shows cooperation, the abuser is more likely to be arrested ( $M = 2.90$  versus  $M = 3.33$ ;  $t = 2.358$ ;  $gdl = 142$ ;  $p = .025$ ).

### ***Instant parties and admonished***

A high risk of PTSD was found in 32% of responding admonished ( $n = 31$ ) (*versus* 57% of responding instant parties;  $n = 14$ ). Thus, instant parties have a higher possibility of risk for developing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder than the admonished.

68% of the responding admonished ( $n = 31$ ) scored low in the risk of developing depression (*versus* 54% of the responding instant parties;  $n = 14$ ). In the instant parties, it is possible to find 33% moderate risk and 13% high risk of depression (*versus* 26% and 6% in the admonished). Thus, the instant parties have a higher depression risk than the admonished.

The most frequently used coping strategy by respondent admonishments ( $n = 31$ ) is possessing a positive attitude (63%), followed by avoidance strategies 19%. In the responding instant parties ( $n = 14$ ) the most used coping strategy is again positive attitude (34%), which deviates only slightly from the second most used coping strategy, which is problem orientation (33%). In the admonished the coping strategy of problem orientation is the least used (3%), while in the instant parties the least used appears to be avoidance strategies (7%).

### ***Youth victimization***

Regarding the risk of juvenile victimization, through the JVQ instrument, it was possible to find that 48% of the responding admonished ( $n = 31$ ) were victims of property assaults at a young age (*versus* 50% of the responding parties;  $n = 14$ ).

3% of the admonished respondents ( $n = 31$ ) were victims of sexual assault at a young age, while as for the instant parties ( $n = 14$ ), 36% say they were victims .

Sixty-two percent of admonished respondents ( $n = 31$ ) have been victims of physical assault at a young age, while as for petitioning parties, 71% of respondents ( $n = 14$ ) claim to have been victims.

Seventy-seven percent of the responding admonished ( $n = 31$ ) say they were victims of at least one type of maltreatment at a young age (*versus* 57 percent of the responding petitioners;  $n = 14$ ).

Twenty percent of admonished respondents ( $n = 31$ ) claim to have witnessed intimate partner violence at a young age (*versus* 43% of responding admonished parties;  $n = 14$ ).

Forty percent of admonished respondents ( $n = 31$ ) say they witnessed at least one type of violence at a young age (*versus* 43% of responding admonished parties;  $n = 14$ ).

Forty-seven percent of admonished respondents ( $n = 31$ ) say they were victims at a young age of indirect exposure to violence (*versus* 50 percent of responding petitioners;  $n = 14$ ).

64% of responding instant parties ( $n = 14$ ) say they are afraid or feel anxiety in the presence of their partner; 57% of responding instant parties say their partner's use of physical violence against themselves, their children, or a pet; 57% of responding instant parties consider their partner too jealous and/or controlling; 43% of responding instant parties say their partner has threatened to kill them, and by the same percentage say their partner has used or threatened to use a weapon against them.

14% of the petitioners feel that the situation is getting worse; 7% of the petitioners say they are experiencing economic violence from their partner; while 0% of the petitioners say they have been forced by their partner to perform sexual acts against their will (*versus* 29% who answered "don't know" and 64% who answered "no").

## **Discussion and conclusions**

With regard to the effect of the ENABLE training, from the significant differences that emerged between the experimental group (the training participants) and the control group (the non-training participants), it is possible to conclude that the training enabled the participants to gain a greater awareness regarding the complexity of the phenomenon of domestic violence, the real understanding of which goes far beyond the context of a "legal fact" to which a sanction corresponds. For ENABLE training participants, it becomes clearer how domestic violence should be considered as the outcome of an articulated and multifaceted psychological dynamic (Kimber et al., 2018), which has deep origins within individuals and couples (Bonura, 2018), and which requires a broader external and social "taking charge". In addition, training participants appear more aware in overcoming some "clichés" referring to domestic violence ("victims are often just as responsible for the acts as perpetrators" or "domestic violence stems from the abusers' need for control and exercise of power"), which make the phenomenon simple, downplaying its magnitude. In this sense, training participants show that they have accurately internalized a reading of the dynamics of gender-based violence as an exercise of power within intimate relationships, in concordance with the Duluth Model's "wheel of power and control" metaphor (Pence & Paymar, 1993).

Increased awareness and understanding of the psychological characteristics of domestic violence also make ENABLE training

participants more open to countering and restorative interventions: in fact, through targeted and specialized actions, domestic violence can be effectively curtailed and taken care of, interrupting or at least limiting the phenomenon of recidivism.

These representational aspects then spill over into practical operations, methodology and intervention practice. Again, training participants are shown to be more competent in “reading” the criminological dynamics inherent in domestic violence situations, in which arresting abusers cannot be considered the sole and definitive to the problem. In fact, the request turns out to be more complex and requires a careful assessment of the individuals involved.

Finally, ENABLE training participants say they are more confident in dealing with domestic violence situations and feel less of a need for further pathways.

Following the administration of the surveys for admonished and instant parties, one can, first of all, find limited and uneven numbers between the two groups. The results regarding the risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder are very interesting, with the instant parties being more exposed to this possibility than the admonished. These results agree with the literature; in fact, there are several studies that have shown a significant association between the development of PTSD and being a victim of Intimate partner violence (Lily, 2010; Mignone et al., 2017), and stalking (Dardis et al., 2017). Specifically, the study by Dardis et al. found that women who were victims of stalking by their partners were 2.5 times more likely to develop PTSD than women who had never experienced stalking by their partners.

From the results, it can also be seen that the instant parties are more likely to develop a depressive disorder, compared to the admonished. This result agrees with the literature from which it is possible to find that intimate partner violence significantly increases, in victims, the risk of developing mood disorders, such as depression and suicidal ideation (Okuda et al., 2011; Afifi et al., 2009).

Regarding coping strategies, it is interesting to note heterogeneity in response modes, but also how in both groups positive attitude was reported as the most used strategy, and how the second most used response mode in the instant parties is also the least used in the admonished (problem orientation) and the second most used in the admonished is also the least used in the instant parties (avoidance strategies). In contrast, the literature shows that there is a tendency for victims to implement the avoidance coping strategy and notes that coping strategies related to emotional

regulation are those that most moderate intimate partner violence and the development of PTSD (Mignone et al., 2017; Lilly, 2010),

With the administration of the JVQ instrument related to victimization in youth, it is interesting to note that both instant parties and admonished were significantly victimized by physical assault and other unspecified types of mistreatment. The results diverge significantly in the variable related to sexual assault, which show greater victimization of this crime among the instant parties. This finding is congruent with the hypothesis of intergenerational transmission of violence, and in particular with the numerous data in the literature indicating that being a victim of assault (especially in the family context) exposes one to a subsequent increased risk of enacting violent acts in turn (cf. Widom & Wilson, 2014).

### **Limits and future directions**

The most obvious limitations were found as a result of the administration of the surveys related to admonished and instant parts. As mentioned in the introduction, quantitative surveys were not planned within the project, but semi-structured, qualitative focus groups were planned. Given the considerable difficulty in recruiting participants, two quantitative surveys were added so as to go to increase the data pool. Although the surveys were distributed online, under the premise of ensuring total anonymity and protection of the participant, a relatively exiguous number of data were retrieved.

Another limitation noted was the numerical difference of instant parties and admonished, evidenced by a significant gap that made the two groups uneven (N instant parties = 14; N admonished = 31).

A third limitation concerns the use – in some cases – of instruments for which no official Italian validation and adaptation is available. This is because the variables measured by these scales are of an extremely specialized nature, and no other instruments were available. The translation and back-translation procedure met all the criteria required by good scientific practice.

As reported, the territorial services showed considerable difficulty in recruiting participants, especially with regard to the requesting parties who either were not present within the service or did not agree to participate in the research. This difficulty is definitely to be taken into consideration for further research on this topic, so that useful strategies can be found in such a way as to go and increase the amount of data.

The study by Dardis (2017), cited earlier, found that women who experienced intimate partner violence and stalking by their ex-partner

were 4.2 times more likely than women victims of intimate partner violence without stalking to develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. One could try to understand whether there is, in light also of the results obtained in this project, a correlation between the development of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and the relationship the victim has with their stalker (partner, ex-partner or stranger).

In the future, research on this topic should even more effectively take up the issue of delving into the history of early unfavorable experiences in people at risk of committing domestic violence or stalking, delving into the issue of “intergenerational transmission of violence” and identifying the specific risk profiles that would allow for early interception of people prone to enacting gender-based violence.

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## Sitography

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- <https://www.cipm.it/enable/> (project landing page).