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ACTION FOR CHANGE

ACHIEVING RESILIENCE, RECOVERY AND CHOICES FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN FOLLOWING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

ITALY DESK-RESEARCH REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

This report is the result of a systematic analysis of existing published literature, either scientific and peer-reviewed or issued by associations, organizations and official sources ("gray literature"), focusing on the situation of children and families in Italy affected by care interventions and living in households where inter-parental violence is present, on the existing services for children at risk of being placed into out-of-home care, on the experience of domestic violence and child removal in Italy, and on the policy framework shaping interventions in the field.

The desk-based research was carried out as part of a European research on the topic of child care, child removal and domestic violence against women organized in the framework of the *Action for Change* project, funded by the European Commission through the Daphne III Programme. The main findings of the Italy-based research included in the document will populate the transnational report of the *Action for Change* partnership, covering the UK, Romania, Hungary and Italy.

The review of the literature in Italy followed the common Literature Review Protocol for the Consortium and aimed to provide a context about the needs and gaps in service provision which the partnership will address through the pilot projects specifically designed and implemented during the lifecycle of the *Action for Change* project.

STRATEGY & METHODOLOGY

Existing literature on the situation in Italy was screened through a search in 7 databases, organized in 31 search strings which contained the search terms identified at partnership level during the *Action for Change* first Transnational Workshop held in March 2015 in London, UK.
The databases utilized for the purpose of the literature review are the following: Google Scholar, Elsevier, JSTOR, Wiley Online Library, Ca' Foscari, Web of Science, ESSPER.

The search terms are the following (English and Italian):

Search Terms in ENG	Search Terms in ITA
1. Domestic abuse	1. Abuso domestico
2. Domestic violence	2. Violenza domestica
3. Perpetrator	3. Perpetratore
4. Child protection	4a. Protezione dei minori
-	4b. Protezione dei bambini
5. Child removal	5a. Istituzionalizzazione dei minori
-	5b. Allontanamento dei minori
-	5c. Allontanamento dei figli
6. Care proceeding	6. Procedimento di affid* servizi* social*
7. Repeat removal	7. Allontanamento ripetuto
8. Economic dependency	8. Dipendenza economica
9. Mental health	9. Salute mentale
10. Practice	10. Pratica
11. Refuge	11a. Rifugio
-	11b. Casa famiglia
-	11c. Comunità educativa
12. Care leavers	12. *Care Leavers*

The 31 search strings utilized are the following (in Italian):

1. "Abuso" OR "violenza" AND "domestic*"	17. String 6 AND term 9
2. String 1 AND "perpetratore"	18. String 3 AND term 10
3. String 1 AND "protezione" AND "minori" OR "bambini"	19. String 4 AND term 10
4. String 1 AND "istituzionalizzazione" AND "minori"	20. String 5 AND term 10
5. String 1 AND "allontanamento" AND "minori" OR "figli"	21. String 5 AND term 10 AND "ripetuto"
6. String 1 AND "servizi* social*" AND "procedimento" AND/OR "affid*"	22. String 6 AND term 10
7. String 1 AND "allontanamento ripetuto" AND "minori" OR "figli"	23. String 1 AND term 11a AND/OR term 11b AND/OR 11c
8. String 3 AND term 8	24. String 18 AND term 11a AND/OR term 11b AND/OR 11c
9. String 4 AND term 8	25. String 19 AND term 11a AND/OR term 11b AND/OR 11c
10. String 5 AND term 8	26. String 20 AND term 11a AND/OR term 11b AND/OR 11c
11. String 5 AND term 8 AND "ripetuto"	27. String 21 AND term 11a AND/OR term 11b AND/OR 11c
12. String 6 AND term 8	28. String 4 AND term 12
13. String 3 AND term 9	29. String 5 AND term 12
14. String 4 AND term 9	30. String 6 AND term 12
15. String 5 AND term 9	31. String 6 AND term 12 AND "ripetuto"
16. String 5 AND term 9 AND "ripetuto"	

The literature screened was selected according to a set of inclusion criteria: the reference period used was 10 years; all types of study such as academic research, policies and gray literature were included in the review; the jurisdiction of reference was the Italian jurisdiction and the language was Italian, with few exceptions dictated by the relevance of the literature in English referred to Italy.
The publications returned by the search strings were in most of the cases around the thousands or hundreds, and therefore needed a screening strategy to consider their inclusion in the literature review. The publications were therefore first screened by the title; during a second round of screening, the literature was analyzed and included if the abstract suggested that the publication had been developed following a quality assurance methodology (including peer review but not exclusively) and if the focus of the publication was deemed relevant to answer the research questions. A final round of screening consisted in the analysis of the full text of the shortlisted publications and inclusion in the desk-research report.
Overall, the search strategy returned 35 publications. Among these, only 11 were shortlisted to undergo the final screening of the full text. The citations retained after the final screening were 4.

Given the paucity of the valid and relevant results obtained from the search strategy, the latter was extended to the bibliography of the citations retained, and to other lists of publications obtained by analyzing new titles, abstracts and full texts from same or similar online journals as the ones where the search results had been published.

As a final step of the desk-based research, the information obtained through the selected publications were complemented by secondary-data gathered from official national sources and official reports also by official sources, such as the Italian National Statistics Institute and the Department of Equal Opportunities of the Ministry of Labour and Welfare, as well as from private organizations.

What follows is a report that organizes the literature review and wider desk-based research according to the research questions set by the partnership. A second section of the report includes the main findings gathered from the literature review that had not already been discussed in answering the research questions.

STATISTICS ON CHILD PROTECTION AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Intimate partner violence (IPV) and child abuse are two hot topics in Italy, however not yet systematically researched by the public authorities. The latest official data on violence against women were issued by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) at the beginning of June 2015. The data included in the report refer to the year 2014, while the previous official data on gender violence were issued nine years before, in 2006.

The effort of gathering data on either child abuse or on domestic violence has also been made by several private institutions and public-private co-operation groups, but the extreme differences in the organization of the services on the local level and of the recording of the data regarding violence have made the success of these attempts nearly impossible.

The official statistics and the results of recent research carried out by scholars and organizations on violence against women, the prevention of violence and the removal of children from families at risk are summarized below.

CHILD PROTECTION: CHILDREN IN CARE IN ITALY

According to the latest research by the National Observatory on Childhood and Adolescence, Terre des Hommes and the Italian Council of Services against Maltreatment and Abuse in Childhood (CISMAI), published in 2015, 457,453 children, i.e. 47.7 children out of 1,000, are included in the framework of social care in the country, accessing different services and with different care modalities (National Observatory on Childhood and Adolescence, Terre des Hommes and CISMAI, 2015). The research was based on a representative sample of 2.4 million children in Italy. Of the children in social care, the majority is male (234,904) and the minority is female (200,048). Differences can be observed between the North, Centre and South of Italy, with a very high concentration in Northern Italy (63.1 children out of 1,000), a lower number in the Centre (44.5 out of 1,000), and the lowest in the South (30.5 out of 1,000). The reasons for such geographical distribution may perhaps be attributed, as explained in the same report, to the different ability to intercept situations of risk in the South (National Observatory on Childhood and Adolescence, Terre des Hommes and CISMAI, 2015).

The reasons of the care are several, and are accounted for by the 2015 report as being the following: material and/or emotional negligence, witnessed violence, psychological maltreatment, problematic care (either absent, lacking, or too intense), physical maltreatment, and sexual abuse. More than half of the abused children are a victim of serious negligence, while one out of five is a witness of domestic violence (National Observatory on Childhood and Adolescence, Terre des Hommes and CISMAI, 2015).

In early June 2015, the National Institute of Statistics issued a new report on violence against women, introducing updated data also on witnessed violence, which constitutes one of the causes for child removal and care procedures. The data from 2014 suggest a negative trend when compared to that of the previous 2006 report: 65.2% of the women interviewed said that domestic violence was witnessed by their children, against 60.3% in 2006. Moreover, in 25% of the cases, children were included in the violence, i.e. they were direct victims (against 15.9% in 2006) (ISTAT, 2015). In the array of literature on the effects of witnessed violence on children, a 2008 qualitative research carried out in Italy with 45 women victims of violence, who were or had been in care in anti-violence centres, shows the effects of witnessed violence on children as perceived by their mothers. The following effects were identified by the women interviewed: social

effect (aggressive behavior against themselves and the others); relational issues; issues at school; difficult relationships with peers, with children of other genders, with male individuals; clinical effects, such as eating and sleep disorders, speech difficulty, sphinteric disorder, anxiety and mood disorders (Verrocchio and Miragoli, 2008).

According to Italian law no. 149 issued in 2001, a child should be removed from their family only when a real need for protection exists, as they would be exposed to serious risks in their families of origin.

In Italy more than 30,000 children are placed outside of their families, which count for one child out of 1,000. Of these, the National Centre of Documentation and Analysis on Childhood and Adolescence reported in 2011 that 15,200 were in foster care with 15,000 foster families, and about 15,500 were in residential care in 1,809 communities (National Centre of Documentation and Analysis on Childhood and Adolescence, 2011).

The 2015 data show that 19.3% of the abused children is removed from the family and placed in a community, while 14.4% is placed in care with a foster family, totaling to 33.7% of the abused children being placed in out-of-home care. The remaining number of children are supported through different paths of care, which do not include removal from their family: 10.2% is supported in day semi-residential communities; 17.9% is supported within the family of origin through home assistance; 27.9% receives economic support within the family of origin; 38.4% is assisted through other forms of support; 7.6% is not given any assistance. Children usually access about two types of support of the ones listed above (National Observatory on Childhood and Adolescence, Terre des Hommes and CISMAI, 2015).

In 2014, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies issued a report on foster care in families and in communities, including data from 2012. The number of children out of their homes just one year later seems to be lower than the National Centre of Documentation and Analysis on Childhood and Adolescence had recorded in 2011: 28,449 children were living outside of their family of origin – of which 14,194 in foster care with families (intra or hetero family) and 14,255 in residential communities (Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 2014).

The following table gives an overview of the age, gender and citizenship distribution of children in foster care, in families and in communities.

Table 1 – Children in Foster Care by age group, gender and citizenship.

	% in foster families	% in communities
Age		
0-2 yo	35.8	64.2
3-5 yo	57.3	42.7
6-10 yo	61.4	38.6
11-14 yo	54.2	45.8
15-17 yo	33.8	66.2
Gender		
male	43.5	56.5
female	52.2	47.8
Citizenship		
Italian	47.5	52.5
Foreigner	33	67

Non-accompanied foreign children	13.9	86.1

Source: Centro nazionale di documentazione e analisi per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza – 31.12.2012.

It is worth noting that the majority of girls are placed in foster families, while the majority of boys is assigned to residential communities. The bias is even more clear when looking at the distribution of foreign children and Italian children: 67% of the former are placed in residential communities, while the same happens for a smaller percentage of Italian children (52.5%).

PREVALENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Europe-wide research by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) of 2014 found that 9 million women in the 28 EU countries had suffered abuse in the 12 months prior to the survey (FRA, 2014). In the panorama of physical and/or sexual violence victims, Italy showed a lower percentage of occurrences if compared to Northern European countries, such as Finland or the UK, with 19% of women having suffered violence from a partner (against 30% of Finland and 29% of the UK) and 17% from a non-partner (against 33% of Finland and 30% of the UK). As the same report explained, the lower percentages in Mediterranean countries, including Italy, is probably due to cultural barriers to acknowledging and reporting domestic violence (FRA, 2014). The interest on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in Italy has arisen later than in other European countries, most probably due to cultural influence and resilience (Malagoli Togliatti, Iesu and Caravelli, 2007). This is especially true when the violence is received from a partner, confirming that even if IPV is recognized by literature, the phenomenon remains mostly uncovered and unreported in Italy (Romito, 2005).

The already-mentioned report by the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) provides the most up-to-date data: the research carried out in 2014 with a sample of 24,761 women aged 16-70 showed that the estimated number of women victims of violence is 6 million 788 thousand, of which 20.2% are victims of physical violence, 21% of sexual violence, 5.4% of serious violence such as rape or sexual intercourse perceived as violence. The percentage of women victims of violence exercised by a partner or former partner is established at 13.6%: of this, 5.2% was victim of violence by a partner, and 18.9% by a former partner (ISTAT, 2015).

IPV in Italy – Partners and Former Partners

Partner violence is recorded by the ISTAT 2015 report as more severe: very serious violence is mostly exercised by partners, relatives or friends. In the case of rape for instance, 62.7% are by partners, 3.6% by a relative, and 9.4% by friends (ISTAT, 2015).

Former partners abuse women more than partners, and in more serious ways: 40.8% of the women said they were wounded by a former partner as a consequence of the violence, against 29.6% of the partners, and very serious violence by a former partner was confirmed at 50.9% against 28.3% of the partner.

Acknowledging and Reporting Violence

The high percentages of violence witnessed by a child (65.2%, ISTAT 2015) represents one of the main causes of resistance to reporting domestic violence in Italy, as women fear the removal of their children as a consequence of the reported violence (Bertotti and Bianchi, 2005).

The official data by ISTAT show that 23.5% of women who suffer violence by the former partner do not talk about it with anybody, but the percentage is even higher (39.9%) when the violence is exercised by a partner (ISTAT, 2015). The resistance to talking about the violence is also a symptom of the lack of awareness about domestic violence, which is also confirmed by the percentage of women victims of violence who were not aware of the work of anti-violence centres and other services (12.8%) (ISTAT, 2015).

Perception of violence as a crime is quite problematic, with only 35.4% of the victims of violence saying that they perceive it as a crime, 19.4% perceiving it as something that has happened, and 44% believing that it was something somewhat unfair, but not a crime (ISTAT, 2015).

Partner violence has a greater incidence for women aged 25-44, more educated women, with higher professional positions or who are looking for an employment opportunity. However, IPV is a rather transversal phenomenon observed in all age groups and socio-economic levels (ISTAT, 2015).

Researches such as the study by ISTAT are an important source of knowledge on the issue of domestic violence, which remains largely hidden as confirmed by the percentage of reports to the police in cases of IPV: according to the ISTAT report, only 11.8% of the women victims of physical or sexual violence by a partner or former partner report the abuse to the police. The trend is however positive, as it shows that since 2006 there has been an increase in the number of reports, which were only 6.7% according to the previous research (ISTAT, 2015).

CHILD CARE AND ASSOCIATED COSTS

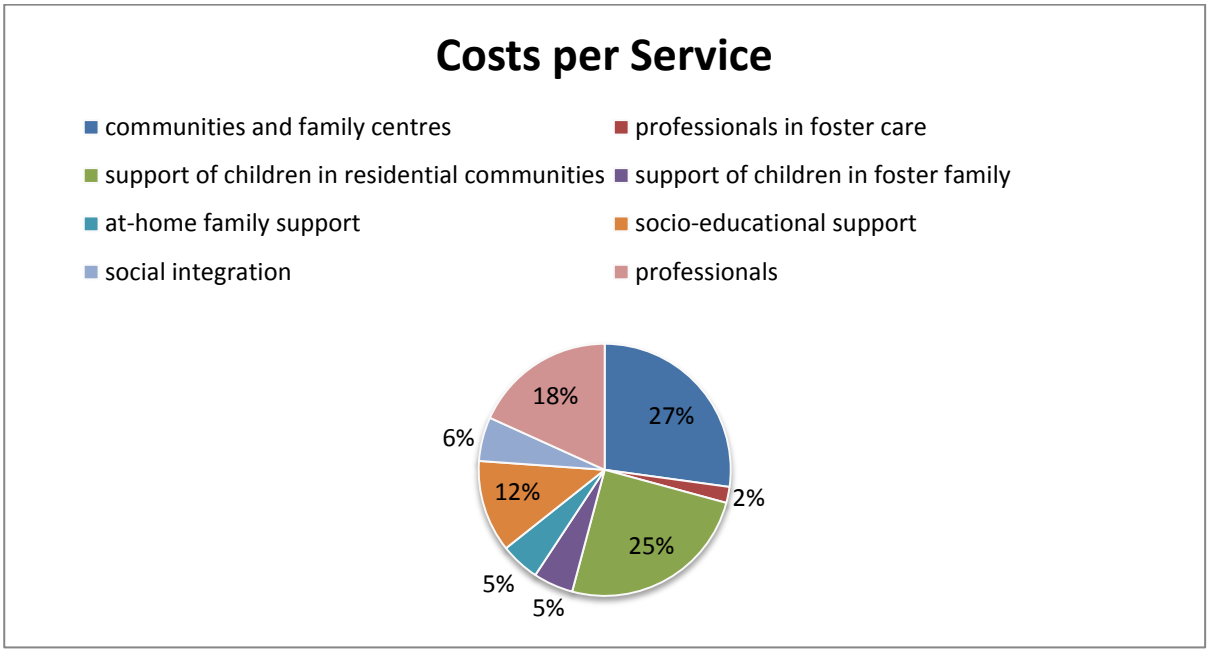
Child care has associated costs that are recognized as being both economic and emotional (Carmarlinghi et al, 2012).

In the latest available report by the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), the economic costs of social care were calculated at €2.8 billions (ISTAT, 2011). With the expense for general social services in Italy at €7 billions, social services for families and children account for 40% of the total cost.

Of the €2.8 billions, €313 millions are spent for semi-residential and residential communities, and family centres; €58 millions for at-home family support; €136 millions are directed to socio-educational support of the children; €65 millions for social integration activities for children at risk; €210 millions are spent to pay for professionals, including in parenting support and family mediation (respectively, €20 millions and €3.5 millions); €23.6 millions are used to pay for professionals working in foster care; €282.7 millions is the sum spent to support children in residential communities; and nearly €59 millions are spent for the support of children in foster families (ISTAT, 2011).

As the table below shows (Table 3 – Cost per service), more than half of the total cost of child care (59%) is allocated and spent for the care of children who have been removed from their families. Planning the allocation of funds for child care could probably benefit from stronger prevention policies and greater economic attention for solutions different than foster care, which is, according to the official data, absorbing the greater part of the budget for child care and whose efficacy is not yet being measured appropriately.

Table 2 – Costs per Service (percentages).



Source: ISTAT (2011). Gli interventi e i servizi sociali dei comuni singoli e associati. Famiglia e minori.

EXISTING SUPPORT TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS

In the occasions when domestic violence gets reported, women can access a number of services available to them. Services of first contact are the social services, emergency rooms at the hospitals, services for substance abuse at local health centres, family counseling clinics, police, the Superior Council of Judiciary (Department of Equal Opportunities, 2006).

Important data are those related to the emergency service number "1522", which is available 24 hours 7 days a week to assist women victims of violence. The Department of Equal Opportunities published a monthly report summarising the number of calls for support received: in May 2015, 1,533 women called the 1522 service to request assistance, and 568 of the women identified themselves as victims of violence. The number of victims who also identified their children as victims were 409, of which 229 children under the age of 18. In about 80% of the cases, the abuser was identified as the current or former partner. The types of violence victims request assistance for are physical (54.75%), psychological (35.74%), threats (3.52%), sexual (1.94%), sexual harassment (1.06%), economic (07%) and mobbing (0.18%). In 91.37% of the cases, the house is the place where the violence occurs. The vast majority of the service users have never reported the violence (76.94%), mostly because they are afraid of losing their family or because they are afraid of the abuser; however, a small percentage (3.52%) was also invited by the police forces to withdraw the report or not report the violence (Department of Equal Opportunities, 2015).

The network of services available to victims of violence is rather extended, and differentiated according to the region. This is due mainly to the reform of the fifth chapter of the Italian Constitution, which granted the responsibility to provide social services to local authorities and regions.

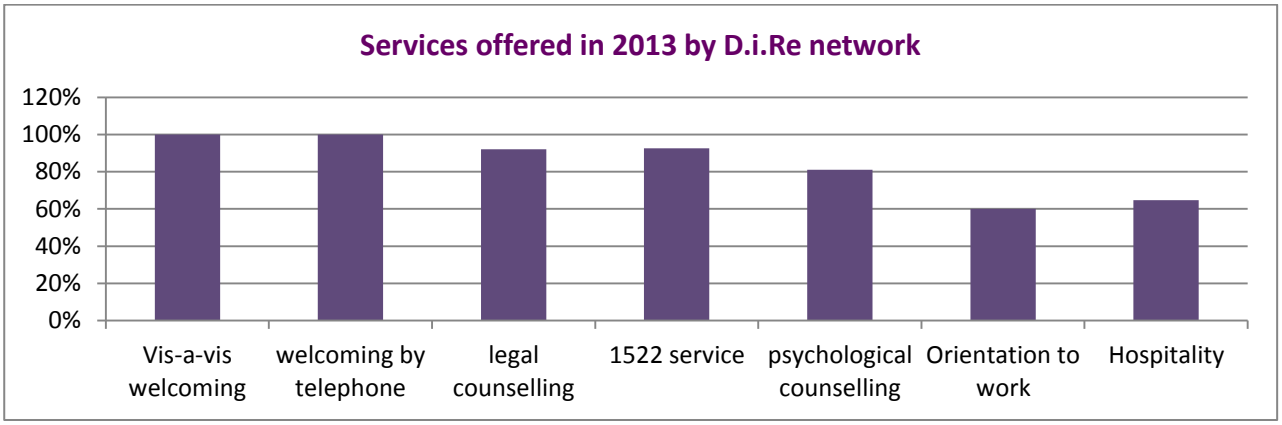
The wide array of support centres for women, which include anti-violence centres, residential and semi-residential communities, and mother-child shelters, are organized in the network "D.i.Re".

Figure 1 - Map of centres of assistance against violence in Italy

Source: Department of Equal Opportunity – www.pariopportunita.gov.it/index.php/numeri-di-pubblica-utilita-sezione/2557-numero-verde-1522antiviolenza-donna

The network gathers 65 centres all across Italy and publishes data on the number of women assisted and the services offered by the centres. In 2014, the network D.i.Re published a report with data gathered in 2013. The report states that 18,521 women had been welcomed by the centres, which represents an increase between 2012 and 2013. Most of these women were aged 30-49 and were Italian. The majority of them suffered psychological or physical violence, for the most part from a partner. The main services accessed by the victims were vis-à-vis services, support via phone, legal and psychological counseling. Hospitality for these women is offered for the greater part by the centres in the Centre-North of Italy, whereas other regions do not have the resources to offer a shelter. A total of 602 women and 622 children were hosted in the centres in 2013 (D.i.Re, 2014).

Table 3 – Services offered by D.i.Re. network in 2013 by type of service.



Source: D.i.Re. – Donne in Rete contro la violenza (ed.) (2014). Violenza maschile contro le donne. Linee guida per l'intervento e la costruzione di rete tra i Servizi Sociali dei Comuni e i Centri Antiviolenza.

The objective of the social worker and of social services offering support to women who are domestic violence survivors is not to force standardized paths on the victim, but to inform them about their options and working together to find a solution for the woman, regardless of whether she is willing to leave the partner (D.i.Re., 2014).

CHILD PROTECTION STRUCTURE

RISK FACTORS FOR CHILD REMOVAL

In 2001, law no. 149 was introduced in the Italian legislative system to promote the deinstitutionalization of children. The law reinforced the right of each child to grow up with their family and the right of families to receive support in being caregivers for the child.

As registered by literature, in the late '90s new approaches towards child care started to develop towards the prevention of child removal through early intervention schemes within families at risk (Canali and Vecchiato, 2011). However, in cases where the well-being of the child was at risk, the removal and placement in a foster family context was said to be preferred instead of the placement in a residential community, as officialised by the abovementioned law.

Decisions about the removal of a child are strictly child-focused: the protection of the child's well-being is the main objective, and often social workers operate in mostly unconsciously bias, identifying the guilt of the parents and focusing on the protection of the child through their removal as the main aim of their work. Parents, identified as the destabilizing factors in the life of the child, are more often than not kept away during the out-of-home placement of their children (Carmarlinghi et al, 2012).

The identification of risk factors is the focus of the activity that leads to the decision to remove the child from the family, or to activate at-home support. Several risk assessment methods are at place in the Italian framework of social work and a number of experimentations have been made to develop new and more efficient risk evaluation systems. However, it is worth noting well at the beginning of this overview that social workers, who are called to assess situations of risk for children, are trained and operate in a

framework set by regional or even more local regulations, generating different outcomes with the application (or non-application) of different methods of risk assessment.

The main actors in the decision of placing a child out of their home are childcare institutions and schools, who can directly report to the competent social services, social services themselves (who provide care, support, assessment, planning and monitoring), and the Judiciary. The latter includes different types of Courts depending on whether the decision for foster care is consensual (i.e. the parents agree with it, or have requested it), or whether the consent is missing. The Probate Judge can order, in the presence of the consent of the parents, that a child is put in foster care for up to two years, as established by law no. 149/2001; however, the Juvenile Court can request binding foster care beyond the two-year limit set by law, and can issue the declaration of the status of adoptability for children certified as abandoned (Assessorato Politiche Sociali, Regione Emilia-Romagna, 2013).

Studies on the topic of risk, and risk assessment of children, are lacking in Italy (Caso, Vitale & Boni, 2011). However, according to the literature, risk factors can be identified at individual level for both the parents and the child, and at family and society level (Verrocchio & Miragoli, 2008). The usual risk assessment is based on the following elements: characteristics of the child (age, disability if any, etc.), parent characteristics (substance abuse, availability for the child, parenting ability, etc.), maltreatment characteristics (level of severance, duration, frequency), environment of origin (social support, dwelling situation) and the level of collaboration of the family with the social services (Verrocchio & Miragoli, 2008).

According to other sources, namely the Regional Ministry of Welfare of the Emilia-Romagna Region, risks are observed in 3 areas: the couple, the general life context, and the responses to the services. The couple is therefore evaluated for a. their ability to take care of the child, to protect the child in their growth (for the presence of elements of negligence, for the quality of the emotional relationships and the ability to fit in the role of the parent); b. the interaction within the couple and between the parent(s) and the child; c. the cultural reference models (e.g. different cultural models of the parents, or inability to allocate resources prioritizing the actual needs of the child); d. the conflict level within the couple or with the family of origin of the couple; e. the existence of critical situations or events (e.g. health issues, deaths, unemployment, sudden critical events); f. the psychological strength of the parents; g. problems of the parents (e.g. substance abuse, mental health issues).

Risks related to the family are the lack of a support network (for instance if the couple is foreign, young or isolated for some reason), the risk of losing their jobs, the economic dependency of the mother, an interrupted pregnancy, etc.

The interaction of the family with the services is also evaluated to the extent of their cooperation with the services, the level of adequacy of the services, the level of development of the network of services, the lack of trust or of communication between the family and the services (Ministry of Welfare of Emilia-Romagna Region, 2013).

Two tools are identified by Verrocchio and Miragoli (2008) for the assessment of risk: consensus-based risk assessment tools and actuarial risk assessment. The first utilizes the sum of the points of different items evaluated to establish whether the risk exists for child maltreatment. However, the items evaluated are not weighted in the sense that they are all evaluated as important as the others. Actuarial risk assessment instead looks for the correlation between risk factors and their possible consequences, and factors are weighted (Verrocchio and Miragoli, 2008).

With a focus to establish new theoretical and multidisciplinary approaches to risk assessment, the Italian Ministry of Labour and Welfare developed, with the Foundation Emanuela Zancan onlus, the RISC project, testing and adopting an inter-professional protocol and the use of an interactive database in the municipalities selected to participate in the pilot programme.

The RISC protocol follows five phases: the request (request is received from the family, parent, school, etc.), the situation analysis (study of problems, risk factors, ability and potential capability of the family), definition of the problems, development and implementation of a personalized plan and of an operative plan, verification of the outcomes and plan efficacy evaluation. The RISC project identified four macro-areas of observation of risk and of monitoring of the situation (functional-organic, cognitive-behavioural, socio-relational, spiritual and of the values), which are to be combined and evaluated by the professional during the intervention (Ministry of Labour and Welfare & Fondazione Emanuela Zancan onlus, 2012; Canali & Vecchiato, 2012).

In line with the literature, both Italian and international (e.g. Di Blasio, 2005, and Morton & Salovitz, 2006), the protective capacities, and the resources of the family which can act as protective factors in the presence of risk, are included in the assessment and monitoring of the families in the RISC pilot project.

Risk factors are however insufficient to determine violence. The context and the interrelations between distal factors (i.e. factors of the environment and of the context) and proximity factors (i.e. risk and protective factors) are linked to the occurrence of violence (Di Blasio, 2005). As an example, the case study analysed by Caso, Vitale and Boni (2011) overturned the common understanding of pregnancy acting as a protective factor against violence: in fact, it was found that a correlation exists between pregnancy, violence and risk factors, and between the birth of the (first) child, violence and risk factors – the shift from the relationship as a couple to the parenting relationship is positively correlated, in the case study, with the event of violence (Caso et al, 2011).

It is the responsibility of the professional to identify the indicators related to the state of the woman, of the abuser, of the child, the context of the family, the social context of belonging, and the characteristics of the violence (Luberti & Pedrocco Biancardi, 2005).

The lack of general State guidelines and specific regulations about the assessment of risk is however a fundamental obstacle for an adequate understanding of risk, and hence for an informed decision-making by professionals of the social services, who, more often than not, do not apply risk assessment methods adequately (Verrocchio & Miragoli, 2008). In fact, a national report on the Anti-Violence network of the Urban-Italy municipalities, published in 2006 by the Department of Equal Opportunities has highlighted that only a small percentage of professionals (8.5%) use specific protocols, while the majority uses their own procedures when getting in contact with victims of violence (Department of Equal Opportunities, 2006).

PARENTING ASSESSMENT FOR CHILD REMOVAL PREVENTION AND CHILD RETURN

As outlined in the previous paragraph, in an area where guidelines are missing, many methodologies exist and different protocols can be applied in order to make an informed decision on the removal of a child, and hence of the return of the child into the family of origin. The result of such complexity of situations and a vacuum of specific legislation leads to the identification of a major role for the Court, which can order that families are included in a path with the social services, and for the social services themselves, who are given

the space to shape the processes identified as suitable within the framework given by the court (Carmarlinghi et al, 2012).

In the overall analysis of the case, the social worker is asked to identify the risks for the child, as well as to consider the context, and any protective factors that may balance the risks out and bring the child safety to an acceptable level. Risk assessment is a continuous process: it is the basis for the intervention as it identifies the risks and hence the main weak points and strength points of the family on which to work through a plan; it is also the same process that is applied to identify the outcomes and efficacy of the plan, and to make decisions about the removal or the return of the child.

Following Di Blasio (2005), risk factors are not to be understood in a cause-effect framework with abuse and violence, but they are factors that may potentially lead to vulnerability of the family. In this context, protective factors can act as to reduce the risks, while context factors can increase risks. Protocols on assessing risk should be dynamic processes looking at the different variables in a situation, and at the way they interconnect (Di Blasio, 2005).

When assessing the circumstances of a parent, to make a decision about the non-removal of a child or of the return of the child to a family, the risk factors are hence evaluated together with the preventive factors. The latter can be analysed, as in the case of risk factors, in relation to the parent, to the child, to the family, and to the context. The characteristics of a child can in fact act as protective factors in case of a high intelligence, or an easy temperament (Camicasca & Di Blasio, 2002). Family or social factors of protection include the existence of the network of friends and of support (Di Blasio, 2005), while the protective factors for parents have been identified as good confidence, personal autonomy, rejection of violence, ability to feel empathy (Camicasca & Di Blasio, 2002). Finally, resilience as the ability to adapt is also an important trait for the child and the parent (Di Blasio, 2005). Resilience is a main protective factor for the woman, together with independence and the professional and economic autonomy (Caso et al, 2011).

PARENTING SUPPORT IN ITALY

Law no. 149 of 2001 stands at the basis of parenting support: by defining the right of the child to grow up with their family, the act focuses on the reunification of the family, while the specific support that parents can expect from the social services is not included in the guidelines set by law.

The general support to parenting is identified by Ciampa and Milani (2011) as the preventive health services, the early childhood education and care, also through schools, family centres, family guidance centres. The decision to join the services offered lies with the parents, and is hence voluntary, but the specific offer depends from the regions of Italy and is therefore not homogeneous (Ciampa & Milani, 2011).

Whenever the persistence of the child with the family is at stake, the prevention of the removal of the child and the promotion of family reunification following the removal of the child can be pursued through a series of targeted services: home and community-based education projects, children's rotection and residential communities for minors, home education services, services of foster care and day centres for partially-removed children, voluntary care programmes, family programmes, adoption services, child neuropsychiatry services (Ciampa & Milani, 2011).

Following the removal of the child, a combination of the available services, which change substantially from region to region, is activated. Integral part of the process is the evaluation of recovery. Despite the

separation of the child from the family, the parenting functions should remain and be supported (Malagoli Togliatti et al, 2007).

The protective actions identified by the Ministry of Welfare of the Emilia-Romagna Region include support for the prevention of removal and for the return of the child. These include the support for the improvement of social network support, health education, education support, counseling for the couple, child support in their interests, home visiting, home education support, support of the emotional relationships and of the parenting activities (Ministry of Welfare of Emilia-Romagna Region, 2013).

The development of parenting competences following a removal are evaluated in a process which involves the parents as the main actors: they are supported to identify the resources and positive elements needed to become adequate as parents and are evaluated in their willingness to embark in the programme and for the level of collaboration and shared aim with the social worker. The process is also expected to involve the child, and be shared by all professionals involved. The programme of recovery is therefore a path activated by the social services that put in place a network of support actions for the identification and implementation of resources for parenting. The psychologist involved in the programme is in charge of submitting a report to the judicial authority. Regular reports are also prepared by the social services during the process, submitted to the court for final decisions, and shared with the parent as a tool for the recovery (Ministry of Welfare of Emilia-Romagna Region, 2013).

The focus of such support is on both the parents and on the child, at least ideally. However, families are often kept out of the assessment and planning phases, and sometimes even of the intervention (Ciampi & Milani, 2011).

Novelties and experimental elements have been the focus of two projects developed in the latest years in Italy to promote the deinstitutionalization of children and for the more efficient use of social funds to support the families at risk and avoid the removal of children from their families.

The RISC project and the RISC2 project promoted by the Ministry of Labour and Welfare introduced an experimental protocol for the evaluation of risk and for the support action to prevent child removal. The pilot projects included a phase of development of personalized care plans for the family, setting the expected results, actions and factors for monitoring the process. A second plan would follow the first, based on the analysis of the results attained. Two sets of factors to be observed were identified for the child and the parents, and included the autonomy (food, hygiene, self-care), responsibility (school attendance, participation in life, rule acquisition), learning, psycho-hysical well-being and the in-family, school and extra-school relationships. The activities included in the plan were home visiting, intermediate (part-time foster care, socialization, socio-educational support at school, semi-residential care) and residential (group home, family community) (Ministry of Labour and Welfare & Fondazione Emanuela Zancan onlus, 2012).

A more recent pilot programme, started in 2011, was the P.I.P.P.I. programme (Programme of Intervention for the Prevention of Institutionalization. The main characteristics of the pilot programme were its focus on the person, and the direct involvement of the parents, children and professionals in the intervention and evaluation phases, the multi-disciplinarity of the work teams and the training of the professionals, the development of comparable and standardized tools for evaluation and of models of intervention, and the set-up of new partnerships between the schools, the families and the social services. The intervention was based on a combination of four types of activities: home care intervention, parent groups, family helpers and cooperation between schools/families and social services (Ciampa & Milani, 2011; Daly, 2014).

MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The present report is the result of the review of existing literature, either peer-reviewed and scientific or gray literature, published in the last 10 years in Italy about the relationship between domestic violence and the placement of children at risk of abuse outside of their family of origin. While the sections above have answered the research questions included in the Literature Review Protocol by gathering information from the literature published about parenting at risk and child removal, the following section outlines the main findings resulting from the literature review and that go beyond the matters previously covered.

Fragmentation of the Regulations

In spite of the existence of framework laws at state level, which regulate the matters of domestic abuse against women and child abuse, the degree of detail of such laws merely revolves around general guidelines. Since the reform of the fifth chapter of the Italian Constitution in 2001, the twenty Italian regions and the local authorities have been subsidized welfare policies, and hence the specific development, management and organization of social services (health, education, etc.), including the services for women and children at risk of abuse.

The most recent national laws about gender violence are law no. 77 issued in 2013, which ratifies the Convention of the Council of Europe on the prevention and fight against violence against women and domestic violence, and law no. 119 also issued in 2013 to better regulate and fight the crime of violence against women in order to prevent violence itself, but especially femicide. Only two years later, in May 2015, was a plan of action against sexual and gender violence put in place. The plan sets out a system of public policies integrating the penal interventions and provisions set out by law no. 119 of 2013.

The main laws that guarantee the support for families with children at risk of removal are law no. 285 of 1997 and law no. 149 of 2001: while the first introduced new support services for families (parents' schools and self-help groups for instance) to promote the well-being of children and families, the second confirmed the right of the child to grow up with their family and provided general guidelines indicating the need to avoid the placement of children in residential communities away from their families. The reform of the fifth chapter of the Italian Constitution also led to mandating the responsibility for the protection of children at risk to the regions (Innocenti, 2007a; Innocenti, 2007b).

Legislation about the support to families at risk is in place in all twenty Italian regions, and it regulates social services, the safeguard of children and families, the residential communities, semi-residential community and care in foster families. Specific regulation about the support and prevention in cases of removal of the child is however not identified in regional legislation (Ministry of Labour and Welfare & Fondazione Emanuela Zancan onlus, 2011). Because of the responsibility lying with regions in these matters, the services are rather heterogeneous and the resources allocated to the services for children and families at risk are different in all Italian regions (Ciampa & Milani, 2011).

In such a complex and diversified context, the prevention of child abuse and the services for children at risk of abuse and of removal from their family are differently implemented, leading to different outcomes and levels of efficacy, for example in the case of the ability of the services to identify risk situations in different regions (National Observatory on Childhood and Adolescence, Terre des Hommes & CISMAI, 2015).

Insufficient Integration of the Services

A close look at the services offered even within the same region uncovers one of the main issues brought up by the literature on the topic of domestic violence and child abuse: a wide array of services is in place in Italy, however they are not working in collaboration and professionals are not trained following set standards, resulting in a multitude of methodologies and practices and a set of approaches that may be jeopardizing the effectiveness of social services for children and families at risk (Daly, 2014; National Observatory on Childhood and Adolescence et al, 2015; Department of Equal Opportunities, 2006; D.i.Re, 2014; Ministry of Labour and Welfare & Fondazione Emanuela Zancan onlus, 2011; Verrocchio & Miragoli, 2008; Romito & Gerin, 2002).

The RISC project is evidence of the awareness of the insufficient integration of the services even by the government. In fact, in 2009, the Ministries of Labour, of Health and of Welfare, and the foundation Emanuela Zancan onlus developed the R.I.S.C. project to experiment on the adoption of a common protocol for a number of municipalities in Italy, in order to monitor and evaluate the efficacy of interventions according to agreed standards, and to combine the input of professionals from different disciplines, specifically trained during the project lifecycle (Ministry of Labour and Welfare & Fondazione Emanuela Zancan onlus, 2012).

Barriers to the Reunification of the Family

The return of a child to the family of origin is the final aim of the removal, reunification of the family being the focus of law no. 149 of 2001. Nevertheless, the chances for a successful reunification after a child has been placed outside of the family are dim. This is mainly due to the failure of the care process to encourage a relationship between the parents and the removed child, as it exists a bias of social workers who often blame the parents as the destabilizing factors in the life of the child, therefore failing to provide the necessary resources to nurture the parent-child relationship when the child has been removed from the danger (Carmarlinghi et al, 2012).

In the light of the differences and lack of standards, even in training opportunities, for the services and the professionals working with families at risk of having their children removed, or who have had their children put into foster care, different understandings and practices to fill the “empty box of intervention” lead to different paths of evaluation, of risk assessment and of implementation of plans for recovery, thus eventually restituting several degrees of efficacy for the programmes developed to prevent the risk of removal or to promote the reunification of the family (National Observatory on Childhood and Adolescence et al, 2015).

In spite of the recommendations made by National Centre of Documentation and Analysis on Childhood and Adolescence already in 1998, the mere existence of pilot programmes, such as the P.I.P.P.I. programme and the R.I.S.C. programme, underline an existing gap and identifies a barrier for family reunification in the practice of social services often consisting in not involving fully the families of children at risk in the risk assessment, evaluation and planning phases of interventions (Ciampa & Milani, 2011).

Lack of Data-Gathering, Monitoring and Systematic Research

From the Europe-wide research of the European Agency of Fundamental Rights, Italy appears as a medium-level-risk country in terms of domestic violence. However, the literature analyzed underlines the bias of the results obtained so far from research, as extremely influenced by the culture of silence, sometimes even

suggested to the victims of violence by the police forces (FRA, 2014; Department of Equal Opportunities, 2015).

Moreover, data-gathering enterprises and research on children at risk of being removed from their families following domestic violence are not systematic, and there are no specific systems to gather the data on the national basis in a standardized way, due for some part to the different models of reception of support requests from families, to the variety of public and private services in the field, and to the cultural resistances to opening up about domestic violence, which would most likely lead to an inaccurate understanding of the situation in the country. Public funds also represent an obstacle to improving the knowledge around the issue of child removal and domestic violence (National Observatory for Childhood and Adolescence, 2011).

The official sources for data gathering and statistics about child abuse and violence against women remain valid, thanks to the representativeness of the samples of such research. These are the yearly surveys by ISTAT and the Home Office about crimes, the surveys carried out by ISTAT about the safety of citizens and the surveys about domestic and gender violence also carried out by ISTAT. However, most of these are not systematic in terms of their cyclic nature (for instance, the two most recent ISTAT reports on gender violence were issued with a time distance of 7 years one from the other).

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