

## International Day to Stop Violence against Women

Criminal harassment is a crime which affects mostly women in Italy, according to the data circulated by the Interior Ministry: 38,142 complaints for stalking were submitted in the period 1st August 2012 - 31st July 2013. In 73% cases the victims were women. Harassers are often former partners who refuse to accept the end of a couple relationship. The data provided by the Department of Public Security, and in particular by the Criminal police, show that the number of family abuses and mistreatments has grown steadily, reaching 9,899 cases in 2012, with 81% female victims.

This form of violence which often occurs in a couple relationship makes it necessary to implement a broader plan of action, involving the police, but also raising people's awareness on this pressing social issue.

**A new law against femicide** After the law against stalking was passed in 2009 to punish harassers, Italy has recently enacted a new law on gender violence (Law October 15, 2013, no.119) aimed at providing more effective means against criminal offences of domestic violence, sexual violence, all forms of harassment.

The Interior Minister Angelino Alfano said that three objectives have been achieved: "Prevent crimes, punish offenders and protect victims", and pointed out "As of today the victims of violence are no longer alone".

**A social disease** The new provisions strengthen the law against gender violence and favour victims, assuming that these crimes perpetrated against women are a social disease, and need to be tackled as a shared responsibility.

In fact, victims are provided with protection and preventive care instruments encouraging them to report the crime by assuring the necessary assistance. Harassment is not just a form of physical violence, and everyone who is a mere observer can hardly understand it.

**Victims of violence: what to do** The victim should fully rely on law enforcement officers, who must be able to provide exhaustive and correct information. The police often put victims in touch with the nearest anti-violence centre or invite them to contact the toll free number 1522, available 24 hours a day. A report is then lodged with the police or the anti-violence centre, and in a stalking case it is followed by a request for a warning. Under the new law, it could also end up with the arrest of the stalker.

The Cesvis (Study Centre for Victims SARA) - which has long cooperated with the Department of Public Security of the Interior Ministry - offers the ISA (Increasing Self Awareness) questionnaire, which can be filled in online anonymously on its website. It is a tool to help victims make a risk self-assessment and draw a risk profile, identifying those factors showing that violence could happen again.

The risk level assessment through the SARA (Spousal Assault Risk Assessment) method, the one currently used by the National Police in Italy, is followed by the risk management phase involving various stakeholders charged with triggering criminal, administrative or civil action, with monitoring the case and protecting the victim.

The National Police also provide additional tools for easy reference. As an example, the Police in Milan offer a free guide to women's defence against stalkers, written by a cop, and a handbook containing useful tips and information to help women overcome their nightmare. Both can be

downloaded from the website of the Provincial Police Headquarters of Milan (Questura).

Italian

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