

# **'Perspectives, tools and methodologies to prevent and combat gender and homophobic violence: problems and resources picked out from the Italian experience of associations'**

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## **1 Preface: description of the contribution**

The gender and the homophobic violence, anyhow they show up, more in particular when we consider interfamilial violence, are among the most hidden and widespread social phenomena.

In Italy, even if these two kinds of violence have many common aspects, have been contrasted in different ways in terms of service and prevention, according to distinct historical context and political movements.

ONG services for the protection and the empowerment of women appeared during the seventies within women rights movement and feminism, whose aim was to start to fight against gender violence during that decade.

The first centers against violence were created in Italy at the beginning of the nineties, especially in those contexts where feminist experience is still lively. In these places, where the connection between theory and political practice is quite strong, women are given a political interpretation of their life experience which tries to put in practice a real and enduring social example of feminine emancipation.

Practices and perspectives of prevention and intervention in the case of homophobic conducts, and their theoretical implications, are a new research and policy areas in the Italian context. Since the nineties, the national LGBT associations, have experimented – usually as informal practice and on a voluntary basis – policies and some interventions such as counseling and self-help groups to overcome anti-homosexual prejudice and homophobic conducts.

Soon after the creation of informal networks of families and LGBT people and associations, the intervention has been implemented by the cooperation and coordination with local and national governmental institutions. Such strategies have underscored the importance of the contextualization of each intervention and program of implementation, and have vividly marked the necessity of considering the intervention in the case of homophobic violence as a situated practice which must be critically compared with social, cultural, economic and political context.

In this article we propose to examine the methods commonly used in Italy to fight and prevent gender and sexual violence starting from the description of the main services on national area, focusing on differences and similarities that characterized other interventions in this field starting from different historical contexts. The analysis of methodological aspects will help to highlight the critical and strength points in a future perspective of the actions and interventions.

## **2. Historical notes on the first interventions and prevention of the discrimination and the gender violence.**

The reality and the concept of gender violence have changed across the time with the evolution of the cultural, social and institutional context. Until the sixties the event of violence was placed in the category as pathology: on the one hand, violent men were seen as diverted, on the other hand, women were seen as equally responsible for the violence and then somehow guilty. In Italy, only with the approval of the family law in 1975, it was abolished the authority of the husband on his wife, i.e. the legality to use "ways of correction" and of controlling towards her, and only in 1981, then, it disappears the crime of honor from our code, that allowed husbands to enjoy sensitive sentence reductions in case of killing his wife for betrayal, and the shotgun wedding, that allowed to see abolished his own crime in case of marriage with the victim of his rape. Only with the feminist movement it was introduced a new definition of violence connected with the gender, i.e. linking it to the way in which are structured the relationship between men and women. With the birth of the anti-violence centers, the Desks addressed to women and help centers, the idea of woman also changes, she isn't seen as a "victim" but "subject" believable, strong and able to face these situations in order to protect herself and her children. Since the beginning of the eighties there was the birth of the Woman Centers, documentation centers, cultural production and political relationship, (in some cases with the support of local councils): mental and physical places in which they can cultivate the passion of memory and the feminist ideas. From these political and membership experiences, has grew up one of the conditions that has characterized the development of the feminist thinking about the violence: the consideration that any woman is at risk of violence, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, social class, sexual orientation, disabilities and/or lifestyle. That means it is the gender difference that is socially, culturally, and, above all politically important in describing men's violence against women and to define a model of manhood closely connected to the power (in relationships, economics, etc..). Through the comparing and recognition of one's experiences, women in the feminist movement and the ex-victims have quickly learned that domestic violence includes physical, psychological and sexual abuse; there are different kinds of abuse, and only one purpose: to have power and authority over the behavior and choices of women. From this point of view, the origins of domestic violence have been found within the traditional family structures and patriarchal domination and women's subordination, and within an overall drawing of discrimination and human rights denial. From the common and solidarity work between women, it has been built a cultural and political patrimony of practices and experiences in order to change and to acquire the rights, which are also part of the protection services and the empowerment for women. On March 29 of the 1981, in Rome, with a large demonstration were delivered 300,000 signatures for the law against sexual violence, while in November of the same year, just to mention some events that were organized in those years, at the Cultural Centre V. Woolf, the National Conference of cinema and video, it was organized by the roman group "Baba jaga", from "Scheherazade" by Florence and the "Nemesiache" of Naples. The first anti-violence centers were born in 1990 in Bologna, Modena, Milan, Rome and Merano. In 1990, the first meeting took place in Bologna, with the aim of creating a coordination of the groups that had begun to deal with violence. Today there are more than one hundred centers operating throughout the country. They were born in contexts in which the feminist experience is still alive, and are organized by women's associations, including the "House of women to be free from violence" in

Bologna, the "House of battered women" in Milan and the "International House of women of Rome". In this sense, the connection between political theory and practice is an essential framework in the origin of the Centers, that has characterized the sharing and promotion of experiences of those women who are victims of violence. They can find assistance and protection and, at the same time, they can refer to a political reading of these experiences.

## **2.1 Historical notes on the first contrast interventions and prevention of the discrimination and the violence against LGBT people**

The birth of the gay rights movement begin in Italy in the early seventies, and it develop especially in the second half of that decade. It shares many characteristics of the other social movements that shake the country in those years: the proliferation of a network of small groups militants and the guidelines close to the radical left. This decade is also interested by a processes of executive structures and kind of approach to the political institutions, especially the local ones. Since 1978 it began the connection between the Italian events and the International Gay Pride. In the eighties, the general atmosphere of demobilization also involves groups of the homosexual rights movement. At the same time, from the middle of the decade, there is an organizational reinforcement with the development of the national Arcigay, that includes most of the groups for the gay rights movement, in which the problem of AIDS represents a very important element of mobilization. During its history, the Italian lesbian movement will have a strong linking with the problems and feminist battles, so to maintain a specificity respect to the gay movement. Then is not a surprise that, although in the course of the eighties the Arcigay has appeared with a strong female presence, a few years later, in 1996, there will be a separation between Arcigay and Arcilesbian (Barili Rossi, 1999). Over the nineties, it increases the visibility of the gay and lesbian movement, together with an international trend that turns its attention from the homosexual and bisexual acts and behaviors to the protection and development of non-heterosexual identity. Recently, it was founded an association of parents, relatives and friends of the homosexuals: the A.ge.do, which propose itself as a favorite interlocutor for the Institutions, not only for the social policies in relation to families, but it develops an expertise in the educational and preventive aspects on the practices of homophobia in the schools and in the educational area; the parents of A.ge.d.o. begin to enter in the educational institutions to bring their experience, to share with students and teachers of the Italian school, "other kinds of education", new pedagogical practices and a more inclusive didactic that consider the differences related to the gender identity and sexual orientation, so they start to produce, through the support of professional psychologists and expert researcher on these issues, educational tools for social workers and educators. Families, say the parents of A.ge.do, have no rules, neither positions, or a constructive language to deal with the finding that one of its members is homosexual. There is not a family role for homosexuals, which they can refer to, gays and lesbians have been socially built as strangers to the family (and Dall'Orto, 1999). At the same time, these operators underline the need to develop strategies and instruments that can support families, with preventive interventions on the homophobic violence, inside and outside their families, it is not so rarely that boys and girls are subjected to physical and psychological limitations of their personal freedom or

they are driven away from home. Social policies and social health interventions should ensure correct information, advices and support in order to remove obstacles to the personal freedom concerning their sexual orientation or gender identity, as well as promoting the cultural comparison on the family cases, favouring, without prejudice on the different identities and sexual orientations, the equality of opportunities for all the parents of taking on the tasks of caring and education of their children in the respect of their own rights; the operators of the association try to propose interventions and activities mainly direct to the youth gay and their families, as well as the structures and institutions close to them (public authorities, third sector, etc.), working even and especially on the cultural aspects. The socio-cultural context, therefore, plays a key role on which they can turn virtuous consequences. It is clear that, the passage from the behavior to the identity also means the claim of a public and social role and so it collides with what was the Italian policy of tolerance in the private and the repression into the public sphere. Over the nineties also were born the first services: help line, listening centers and territorial interventions that raise awareness and prevention of homophobic violence, in the counseling centers are becoming even more numerous the requests of helping for homophobic and transphobic violence: beatings, domestic violence, discrimination and pressing at work are some of the reasons that lead LGBT people to call for these services, but the passage to the complaint is hardly ever done because the victims are often girls who have never declared their homosexuality in family or in peer groups, or else are adults who live in secret their sexual and emotional life, they live situations in which the fear to be "identified" and to be seen as homosexual is greater than the psychological damages and the shame caused by the violence. At the moment there is, all over the national territory, a networking plan among LGBT associations and local authorities, for short-and long-term actions that focus mainly on prevention and education, information and training courses for educators, social workers and professionals in the helping relationship, concerning the homophobic bullying. Regarding the trans rights movement, in the central and northern area of the country, the associations of transsexual and transgender people, are independent from gays and lesbians, and they are a well-established reality, that have sometimes many decades of history for their operating ability which makes them as efficient instruments in the representation and protection of these rights. Instead, in the southern regions the associations for the fight against the discrimination towards people with this mismatch of gender is a recent experience with a scarce spreading and institutional recognition. The first association of Italian transsexual and transgender people, MIT (Movement of Transsexual Identity) was born in Milan in 1979, and its action is one of the main factors that led to the adoption of the law 164 of 1982. Today this organization has a national trait, its headquarters is in Bologna, and it is among the founders of the ONIG (National Observatory on Gender Identity). In the nineties the demonstrations linked to the Gay Pride have become as mass events, above all the World Gay Pride in Rome in 2000 that was a crucial moment for the LGBT movement and for the experience of many gays and lesbians. In March 2009, ISFOL<sup>1</sup> has published a report on the local networks against discriminations, we refer to it for a more detailed list of the most important associations and

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<sup>1</sup> Isfol (2009), "Identification and spreading of the specific ways of action to overcome the economic and socio-cultural barriers resulting from the racial-ethnic origin, religion and diversity of opinions, disabilities or age, as well as the 'sexual orientation', in the Final Report.

commercial reality to LGBT theme. This survey shows that LGBT associations in the ROC<sup>2</sup> operate mainly in two areas: the research of the visibility and social recognition of the LGBT population, and the supply of services. The political activities of the associations also seem to focus on these themes, across the annual events: on May 17, International Day for the fight against homophobia, on November 20, the Day against transphobia, and on December 1, World Day for fight against AIDS. In addition, about Arcilesbian, gender themes are often at the center of their activities. From the late nineties, all the LGBT associations and their families, are trying to put together their resources to promote a common planning on the most recent developments of European events concerning to the fighting against discriminations based on sexual orientation and gender identity and equal opportunities, as well as on the main socio-cultural intervention programs, activated and supported by the European Union, in agree with technical information about designing and formulation of prevention programs and on the European funding channels of projects conceived by young Europeans for young Europeans, promoting the network job and the linking between all sectors of the civil society, the national and European institutions and the LGBT associations.

### **3 Prevention and networking activities**

The quantification of the gender violence event and the evaluation of its impact in society, together with the knowledge and the spreading of this information is a preventive<sup>3</sup> action itself. The knowledge of the event's characteristic traits, its determinants, as well as its consequences, of the most successful methods of working and of the hurdles to overcome, everything is necessary to "fill in the gaps that often make it difficult political actions for fighting violence and the spreading of a social consciousness of the problem" (Sgritta, 2007). In this sense, the anti-violence centers and the support for women in a difficult situation, contribute to the theory elaboration and the practical application of culturally innovative ways of working, far from that manner of pure and simple assistance but directed to the testing of methodologies and instruments conceived and implemented in a gender perspective, as show us the experience of the Solidea<sup>4</sup> network of the Province of Rome. From the necessity to have a proper reading and a frequent updated on the gender-based violence, in order to make a proper planning of the interventions, it was born in 2005, a Provincial Observatory in collaboration with the University "La Sapienza" of Rome (Deriu , 2011). The prevention action that finds its reason in the working on the relationships between men and women and in the promotion of an equality culture that elaborates and interiorizes the gender differences. The matter

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<sup>2</sup> Convergence Objective Regions in Italy are Campania, Calabria, Sicily and Puglia.

<sup>3</sup> From the data processed by Istat in the survey on "Women's Safety" in 2006, nearly seven million of women between the age of sixteen and seventy years, they report that have experienced at least once in their lifetime physical or sexual violence, i.e. the 31, 9% of Italian women. This analysis shows that there are three types of violence: physical, sexual and psychological violence, both inside and outside the family, the number of women victims of violence is further than seven million for psychological violence, described as events of isolation, control, economic violence, intimidation and devaluation. In addition, 96% of the violence against them is not reported, and only a little more than 18% of women who have suffered physical or sexual violence in the family consider it as a crimes.

<sup>4</sup> Organization of the female gender and solidarity of the Province of Rome, founded in 2004 by co-operation between institutions and associations that deal with the gender violence, for an integrated gender policy project (Association difference Woman, The Bridge and International House of Women).

of violence against women, however, can't be confined in the relationships area. In fact, it needs to consider the social and cultural atmosphere in which we live, that guide the hostility and aggressiveness against women, the child, the different and the stranger. Then, the gender injustice is a serious problem in the cultural, social and institutional areas and a powerful factor in the reproduction of the gender inequality: it nourishes discriminations at work, and in the social and political opportunities. That's the reason why every measure of support and prevention must keep together the different approaches: relational, cultural and political. So, to raise the awareness, it is essential the actions of the anti-violence centers in Italy that promote information campaigns and cultural activities (seminars, national and international conferences, theater performances, music and movies, etc).

A specific strength of this action of raising awareness is carried out in the schools across courses on the gender violence, bullying and aggressive behaviors. In the school, in fact, doesn't happen often that girls and boys have some spaces for their reflections or for critic and constructive debates in relation to this, with the result of leaving an open field to the reproduction of stereotypes and of sexual roles in society. Working on the basis of an equality culture spreading, it allows to promote a prevention that comes from a complete development, in-psyche, and of a new self-perception and relation with himself, enriched by the shared experience. Unfortunately we must underline that these awareness actions especially in the schools, despite being considered as central policy on equal opportunities, don't represent a constant element in every Italian regions, and even the most "virtuous" of them, or where the public fundings for such activities are more frequent, they are still considered sporadic and irregular compared to the spreading and seriousness of the problem that they should prevent. This is demonstrated by the fact that femicide<sup>5</sup> is a very widespread event in Italy (124 women were killed by their partners in 2012), a country severely mentioned in the first thematic report on this problem presented to the Onu in June of 2012 by the lecturer Rashida Manjoo in 'field of the meetings on the Cedaw application, the Convention on the Elimination of any kind of discrimination against Women. The work of the network should be understood as a dynamic process in a logic of a continuous movement, with the desire to connect and re-connect the relationships to encourage circulation of experiences and the building up of integrated answers. If we think in fact to the word network, it brings us up to the idea of wires that are linked and knotted than the meaning of the containing or holding back. Sometimes, in spite of the common strategies used, it should be noted that not always there is a uniformity in the answers by different protagonists of the network: local government, social and health care companies, police forces, etc. The effort of the networking work is caused by the difficulty to be ready to make new knowledge and to the possibilities of change. The battle for prevention was introduced in Italy by the Centers of support for women who are victims of violence and especially thanks to them, many steps have been taken even if in a very difficult way. Over the years a few examples have aimed to train the

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<sup>5</sup> The word femicide, or femicide, refers to violence committed by men against women, because belonging to the female gender. Femicide also includes all those cases of murder in which a woman is killed by a man for reasons concerning her gender identity. The word was used by the criminologist Diana Russell in 1992, in the book co-written with Jill Radford *Femicide: The Politics of woman killing*. Russell put it in a true category of crime: extreme violence by men against women "because women", in which the violence is the result of misogynous practices.

police and the doctors in order to recognize the event of abuse (Project Iara). The networking between the different institutions has been promoted during these years in several Italian regions through the training and starting up of the formal collaborations between anti-violence centers, first aids and police forces promoted by the Udi and from Arciwoman of Naples through the creation of the "Pink notice boards" at the police stations. Since 2006, the Department for Equal Opportunities has developed, throughout the activation of a public utility number: 1522, a great action system for the developing and fighting against the violence on the women, in and out their family. Thanks to these several year working of the anti-violence centers that oppose to the gender discriminations, even the male universe begins to feel the need of stopping this event.

Recently, they have been developed some reflection and action groups composed by men: the national network "masculine plural" dedicates a huge space to the analysis of this violence event. In Bergamo, is developing the "Men no violent anymore" project, in Turin, Bolzano and Rovereto are born similar counseling for men, while in Florence there is the Listening Center for mishandle people (Cam) that offers support to people who becomes conscious of their overbearing approach towards women. On the basis of these experiences, the research group for women of Rome "The Nine" led the study of "Men abusers." The first reflections and experiences in Italy start from the assumption with a larger awareness that the violence event against women can't be considered only as a women deal, but it should become also a male problem, especially for responsibility.

### **3.1 Prevention activities and networking**

The intervention activities realized on homophobic behaviour, differently from the anti-violence centers (and therefore on the gender-based violence against women), appears to be more fragmented and dispersed and almost exclusively delegated to the third sector and to the social private. From a theory point of view and of the intervention policies, these aspects make reflect on a matter that, in summary, includes: a) a reduction and flattening of the gender exclusively on the women themes; b) the difficulty of understanding and, therefore, to take action on a wider range of violent behaviors in which the genders are considered as relationship structures and in the dialogue (and in the conflict) between them; c) the necessary (and the urgency) of dealing with the themes of violence in conditions that are in and between gender. Interventions and policies to fight homophobia following the defaulting by the Italian legislative institutions able to identify hate crimes inspired by the sexual orientation and gender identity. Therefore, from a purely reconstructive point of view, it isn't often possible to define planned and implemented interventions on a regular basis. However it's important to remember, at the institutional level, the UNAR (National Office against Racial Discrimination<sup>6</sup>) of the Department for Equal Opportunities of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, established for the execution of the Directive 2000/43/EC with the task of promoting equal treatments and remove any discrimination based on the race and ethnic origin. The department has extended its activities and ways of intervention by inserting within the typical identity areas new kinds of discrimination, linked to the age, disability, religion and personal

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<sup>6</sup> It's important to note that UNAR has also started with the Observatory for the Protection against discriminatory acts (OSCAD), at the Ministry of the Interior, a collaboration for the reporting and dealing with cases of discrimination treated as crimes including those for homophobia and transphobia.

beliefs, the sexual orientation and gender identity. The intervention strategy would answer to what is indicated by the Directive of the Minister for Equal Opportunities of 21 July 2010, which has identified it as one of the political priorities for the "strengthening of no-discrimination principle." Among the national networks, it must be mentioned the role of RE.A.DY (National Network of Public Administrations Anti Discriminations based on the sexual orientation and gender identity), which includes the public authorities that develop or want to promote the social inclusion policies for homosexuals and transsexuals.

In the June 15 of 2006 it was founded in Turin: "Città amiche, friendly cities, villes amies" with the European Conference arranged by the Pride Turin Coordination in partnership with the local and regional administrations. Among the network activities we can remind the collection and documentation of the well-done practices made by the partners, the organization of national conferences on this subject with the involvement of other public bodies and associations LGBT; the celebration of the International Day Against Homophobia through the local events promoted by the partners at the national level, the creation of a web page on the LGBT website net; the presentation of the network to the government departments interested to associate. At the local level, instead, the main networking experiences, which also consider the fighting against homophobia and transphobia are: the permanent Negotiation Table between LGBT associations and the City of Naples, the permanent Coordination Table on the gender identity and sexual orientation with the City of Rome, the Advisory Table of the LGBTQ associations and groups of the City of Bologna; and the Coordination Turin Pride and LGBT Service of the City of Turin.

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#### **4. Description of services: specific local experiences of the anti-violence centers**

The Italian Centers and Services for fighting violence against women are above all, as already mentioned, the telephone number 1522 that allows to women in a difficult situation of calling the nearest Center or Desk. Even if they share some basic principles, the services that join to the 1522 number are different in their own organization, because of the various cultural and political conditions. In addition to the long-established tradition of anti-violence centers, most of them are in the D.i.R.e.<sup>7</sup> network, it must be recognized, indeed, the role of support and protection for victims of violence played by the so-called "Woman Centers", and other social reality in the country, according to the principle of the defense movements of women rights, and it doesn't appear included in the first feminist debate, even if in some cases it keep the same name used in the sixties and seventies. These latter haven't a clear indication of "anti" and refer to a space less characterized and most widely addressed to women needs. Over 90% of women who contact the woman centers or the anti-violence network of the 1522 number are escaping from the violence in their family by husbands, partners, fathers, brothers or sons. And it is important to report that this violence, in different ways and proportions, involve women from all social and cultural levels. For various

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<sup>7</sup> The D.i.R.e. network has been founded in 2008 as a national federation which brings together 58 anti-violence centers throughout Italy with the name of D.i.R.e.: "Women in network against women violence" joined for sharing some common principles.



reasons the violence that takes place in the family is the most complex to deal with, because it has all several kinds of abuse: physical, psychological violence, sexual, economic and sometimes even spiritual. Also looks like a protracted event that tends to become almost daily and it causes not only remarkable and repeated physical damage, but also serious mental health consequences. There is another difficulty factor: women who suffer violence for years end up to consider it inevitable, as part of their lives and their marriage. They deny it to themselves, their relatives, friends and doctors. The activities of the centers is to identify the dramatic needs of the women in the perspective which they refer to relationship, cultural and political aspects, and require timely and proper answers.

The centers of the D.i.R.e. network add to the preceding principles those of a statute approved by the reality which they refer to, D.i.R.e. services are totally free and based on empowerment and self-help, are managed by women associations with a feminist point of view, aim to guarantee a safe place for every 7,500 people with some accommodations, are open to all women who suffer of violence (and migrants of any ethnicity). To ensure this ideology, the D.i.R.e. centers should benefit from a funding enough from governments for having an additional factor, no less important: a team of paid and trained workers. The other centers, so-called Woman Centers, not necessarily embrace these ideology, not only for different experiences and origins, but also because are frequently based on a voluntary work rather than on the public funding. The centers of the D.i.R.e. network follow the perspective of the gender difference and/or the thinking and the practice of sexual differences in which they work. In particular they consider male violence towards women as a violence that has its roots in the different distribution of the power between sexes, and they are composed exclusively of women, and here women deal with intra and extra family violence to women (physical, psychological, sexual, economic, stalking, trafficking), and of assisted violence (children who see these kind of violence), expressed in every way. All operators and reception consultants, voluntary or not, must have a proper training and have to respect the professional skills of the reception methodologies in the Centers. Sometimes the centers require an outside help or collaborations, also male, directed towards specific projects, after a careful selection and training. The methodology of reception used in the Centers D.i.R.e. is based on the relationship between women that imply a positive reference of their own sex/gender. This relationship requires recognition of skills, competences and women value. It contains the opportunity for women to benefit from the strength of the political project of change, towards the fighting against the hopelessness and loneliness feelings, that they often have in these situations of violence. The way out from the violence will be negotiated in a continuous process of reciprocity, without judgment, providing instruments and information about the rights, resources, strategies in order to return to the women independence and awareness. The crucial role of the Centers presence on the national territory, beyond of belonging, or not, to the network D.i.R.e. comes from the fact that they represent a concrete point of reference, but also symbolic, very important for women who decide to get out from the violence. The Centers provide an immediate support and a safe place for women and children with a basic services of reception and hospitality. All the women who arrive to the centers, either directly or upon notification of various protection centers (other reception centers, police, social services, counseling centers, first aid, courts, national green number 1522 ...) receive a reception service that listens to them, have some information on the possibilities offered at the local level and, if so, put them on a

range of services: from the accompanying to the social (ex. in the case of immigrant women), support and legal assistance, psychological support from the social secretariat, orientation and work placement. To the women at risk and their minor children, which must be immediately removed from the household, is instead given the opportunity to be included in Reception Centers for women who are victims of violence. So they can benefit in protected contexts, of those services to which is added, when necessary, the school integration of the children. Both the reception and hospitality, at the same time, involve the elaboration and implementation of individual projects. The raped women often feel like worthless, helpless. They end up basing their sense of self on the image got from their abuser: as a despicable human being, without dignity and rights. Of this violence are widely and well known the risks to the mental and physical health of women and of children who are witness of violence. No less serious and often underestimated, are the consequences of the social exclusion resulting from it. In her experience of domestic violence, the woman comes in an wicked circuit: it appears as weak and without energy, with a lack of alternative projects of life. In this way she is often understood, from society and from institutions such as a subjective inability, lack of desire to leave the violence, or weakness. For this reason it is essential the individually intervention that the centers offer in direction to training-work-home: the Centers promote some independent ways to empower women through the job training, search for employment and, where necessary, access to an accommodation to guarantee to the woman and her children a free and dignity life. It is clear that violence and gender discrimination don't tolerate sectoral and simplifiers approaches. The complexity of problem require a multidisciplinary intervention, that is integrated, structured on several levels, for keeping open the exercise of comparison with other reality and experiences.

#### **4.1 Description of services: specific territorial experiences. The Agedo association of Palermo, interventions and integrated services**

The Agedo, is a voluntary association of the homosexuals' parents that offers support in many situations of discomfort and suffering caused by the denial of the homosexuals inside and outside the family. The Agedo association of Palermo, since 1998 as Agedo delegation and since 2009 as an independent association, performs its activities mainly pursuing the goal of the personal development, and in particular the protection of LGBT people and their families, and prevents and operates in cases of hardship, discrimination and violence linked to the gender identity and sexual orientation through the information, training and counseling. Agedo Palermo is working to remove prejudices, fears and stereotypes about homosexuality and transsexuality, and want to educate people to the respect, recognition and valorization of the different sexual orientations and gender identities, offering new ways to interacting, communicating and sharing. The volunteers and a team of skilled professionals, try to prevent and intervene in cases of violence, hardship and discrimination towards on the gender identity and sexual orientation, with changes of the intrapersonal and interpersonal level of young homosexuals and/or in their families, allowing to the family of origin, the acknowledgement of their sons' identity and their rights, so to live it and to save the integrity, making them as social active subjects. Through the focused social actions, they try to promote a positive attitude towards the homosexual behavior and to fight the dysfunctional

stereotypes, promoting changes to an intersystem level related to a possible coordination, collaboration and harmonization of activities between the local services, schools, local health units (Asl) and Agedo, as well as the possibility of an integrated information and training. The association then, through the formal and informal available networks, want to create a sort of co-operation with local structures and a visibility of activities against homophobia and transphobia. The services provided, the investigating researches performed on the territory, also try to identify, monitor and study the less visible aspects of the discrimination, such as the exclusion from the social relationship which determine the lesion of the human dignity, the sense of life and the ability of the individual reaction. Working in synergy with the observers on the bullying, with the intervening of the programmed actions of listening, monitoring, and information/training, they propose and implement some specific interventions in education and training, to prevent cases of the homophobic bullying, gender stigma and youth violence in the schools and educational contexts. The association thinks it's very important the training work to raise the teachers' awareness on the basis of cultural, educational and social subjects, concerning bullying and also the education to the differences, including those of gender, proposes and implements specific interventions in the education and training, and requires to the schools to organize activities, meetings and debates on the themes linked to the listening and relationship with the young people's world.

Operators and volunteers provide some counseling services, psychological support, self-help and help-line to the parents and children who are in a state of mental suffering, and through these instruments try to support forms of empowerment related to a desirable change of the attitudes, behaviors, emotional states, satisfaction level of the needs linked to the self-esteem and the improving of the quality and quantity of family relationships and/or friendships. Over the years we have made studies and local, national and international researches in cooperation and partnership with several Universities, Departments and Research Institutions that refer to the homosexual identity, these latter allow the production of scientific and instructional texts, educational videos and pedagogical guides used in education or as a teaching support, at the same time the creation of a working network with international associations, that share the best procedures, the co-planning and identification of EU social policies, as well as the public effective policies of the European area. The training courses tend to implement and propose for educators, parents, teachers, social workers and professionals of the social and health areas, a raising of public awareness on the problems related to the homosexuality, to confirm the equality of the rights of every child, to create, with the help of the teachers and social workers, educational instruments that offer an expertise in the psycho-sexual, sociological and educational sphere, and an environment suitable for a balanced, harmonious and safe growth, to build the identity of the LGBT young people. It need to emphasize the implementation of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention to the suicide in adolescence through the psychosocial, individual and ecological instruments. Concerning to the phenomenological areas of the gender identity disorders, the Association is based on the opinion that human dignity includes the right to live a life in their own gender identity and self-define their personal choices of life: since 2002, following the protocols and best practices of the National Observatory of Gender Identity, the Association works to support a psycho-medical--social

integrated implementation of in every process of the adjustment from the sex to the gender. The psychological and professional services, are always offered to the community, public and private entities in which they operate, allowing, on the one hand, a better understanding of the psychological and social themes related to homosexuals in general and LGBT, on the other hand, have made possible a partial change in the life of the people and their families and it has been verified, in a longitudinal point of view, that the people who have had the opportunity to use the services of the associations, have often re-contacted them for sharing their new state of well-being and sense of self-confidence: the passage from an origin state of learned helplessness and powerlessness to a further state of learned hopefulness and empowerment, in which they can show a sense of self positive, an ability to develop strategic actions for their own purposes and then the mobilization of their personal resources and those of their social support systems.

## **5. Conclusions: criticality level and potentiality**

The status description of the women who are victims of violence, and of the homosexual and transsexual people, it's possible to identify an historical overview of the birth of anti-violence centers for women and LGBT movements, highlighting their characteristics related to the interventions and methodologies employed. Of course we have described some of the services and interventions that have been adopted in Italy, not selecting them by importance, but because closer to our experience and themes that interest us examine in this contribution. It seems right to conclude with some observations resulting from the exercise of their comparison, in a networking perspective, as the associations<sup>8</sup> that we have always tried to foster. The Hermes project has been an opportunity to compare us in a more focused way with other associations. In particular, through the services mapping to fight gender-based violence of the Campania Region performed by the Kassandre Association as part of the Hermes project, has been possible to observe that almost all of the operators who call the anti-violence and woman centres, often underline some common problems: the difficulties for users to the services access because of a poor knowledge on the territory, the lack of an awareness and/or a promotion work, but also the total lack of centres in some areas; then it's evident a networking work not organized and generally fragmented, and the presence of projects for fighting violence that are almost all with a time limit, the absence of services that ensure continuity to the operators and users, and finally the precariousness of the operators who can't guarantee a continuous and lasting taking care of the woman. Among the ten interviewed centres, only three of them were reported to the D.i.R.e. network, which would mean that most of the services in Campania are supported by a voluntary work, for different experiences and reasons respect to the entities closer to the feminism of the first hour. The absence of centres funded which guarantee continuity of the service, then, presents us an important and serious situation on the gender violence that is underestimated by the political institutions. It would seem that the base ideology of the fighting violence interventions, are in a perspective of

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<sup>8</sup> We refer to the association experiences of the Agedo of Palermo and Kassandre of Naples. In particular, the issues related to the violence against women, performed by the Kassandre that deals with the women rights since 2004, working to fight the violence in risk areas of Naples. The Kassandre, as part of Hermes project, have organized the services mapping for fighting violence against women of the Campania Region.

multidisciplinary, integrated, structured on several levels, and careful to keep opened the comparison with others reality and experiences, with quite different characteristics: the Centers to the south are few, with limited financial resources, available only for some realities, with a loss of the comparing and the right space that they should give to the complexity of the problem. In a previous work (Riccardi, 2012), following the logic of comparing, we tried to make reflections on some of the procedures considered as priority in the centres of the D.i.R.e. network. The Hermes project experience and the analysis on the European sphere on the gender subject and its possible articulations, let us to try to ask for the "methodology of reception" which, in the Centers experience, is based on the relationship between women and their positive reference of own sex/gender. On the basis of this report, each woman has the opportunity to undertake a process of independence awareness and empowerment. It's important to remember, that," in the Centers and in the Houses it's necessary only the operators work who have had a specific training on the violence and its impacts, so to guarantee the monitoring and continuous training". Regarding the people who are victims of coercive and/or humiliating behaviours coming from their equal, it's important to think about the personal aspects concerning the woman on their relationships with her partner, without forget the gender's factor that characterizes the negative event. The D.i.R.e. network Centers want to foster, during the reception, to a reconstruction of all the parts heavily traumatized with a strengthening of the self, through a harmonious thinking: I'm worth as a woman! The declaration of their own worth and hurt dignity, passes for the reception and taking charge, characterized by the gender commonality, in which the femininity aspects need to be repaired: this methodological work is connected to a concrete requirement that the operators of the Centers must be women. Without limiting the gender equality "politically correct" character between the operator and user in the contexts in which the gender violence has a key role, we believe, as previously argued (Riccardi, 2012), that it can't be exclusive: in this sense we propose to show some its possible risk aspects for a psychological support.

In our opinion, from a psychodynamic point of view, it may happen that the mirroring, in this case from woman to woman, doesn't promote a real process of the subject change, or the way out from an mishandling<sup>9</sup> relationship. In this sense, the relationship between the operator and the victim in a female connotation, it could facilitate a mimetic identification, "symmetrical" or "adhering" (Bick, 1968), of the woman victim with the emancipated woman, so the mimic identity can't resist in the time. According to L.Storti (2010, p. 106), who describes the activity of the anti-violence Centers, *"in spite of the best intentions to give back to women their dignity and give value to their potential, the risk, in this case, is to offer them a type of woman's emancipation, prêt-à-porter, only functional for a social discourse"* (ibid., p. 107). In this sense, it is difficult to consider the uniqueness and particularity of the woman who asks for help, if the operator can represent a prepackaged example to which magically adhere, in order to escape from the pain. The female gender of the operator required by the statute of the anti-violence Centers of the D.i.R.e. network as a specific condition of the helping relationship for women victims of the gender violence, it can sometimes dangerously

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<sup>9</sup> The term mishandling is synonymous of violence and implies that the woman, as being forced to do things against her will, she is in a state of inferiority from an objective point of view, as in the physical way (highest, lower, stronger, weaker), and subjective, if felt like a missing quality, a prerogative of the others.

collude with the "adhering" and passive identification aspects of the user with the woman operator, activating a way that, rather than be a positive return for women can reproduce a protective fusion for which the other, the different, is expelled. The contradiction is even more evident: when people who ask for help aren't the users we imagine to meet: for example the violence and discrimination suffered by all those people, not only women, who express different ways to be socially considered as "normal" or culturally accepted. If the violence concerns the relationships and appears as an elimination of differences, how to contextualize these situations? In the comparing logic, the anti-violence Centers should be able to deal with different situations that today are more and more frequent. So how look at the LGBT reality? We can say that the events of violence and discrimination based on the sexual orientation and gender identity, depend largely on the socio-cultural contexts (the values, the beliefs, the perceptions and representations attributed to homosexuality) and can have strong consequences in other contexts (individual, relational and economic sphere, etc.). The young homosexuals experience the isolation, the fear of stigmatization and lack of support by the peer groups and family members: they have, in fact, few opportunity to observe positive and affirmative role examples in adults, because of the general culture tendency that makes the homosexuals as *invisible* (Cappotto and Rinaldi, 2003). The hardship, violence and discrimination expressions, therefore, take on a variety of the dynamic phenomenologies: from any kinds of self-destructiveness, low self-esteem from risk behaviors to self-injury, from the poor integration into the society to the distance and breakup of the family, from the school drop-out to the isolation, from the homophobic bullying, from the stalking, from the sexual harassment, from the domestic violence, from the physical aggressions up to the sexual abuse. It needs to pay attention to the identification of the less visible aspects of the discrimination: the exclusion from the social relationships that establish the lesion of human dignity, the sense of life and the individual reactive ability. The cultural ambiguities linked to the male gender role and its social meaning allow us to suggest the actions that have some effects on the heterosexual groups, who show themselves without the necessary skills of disambiguation and are victims of the crisis through the re-definition of the gender roles. Then, the interventions should embrace the main changes: a) changes at intrapersonal and interpersonal level in young gay men, in their families and peer groups: in particular, it refers to the ways of *empowerment* related to the hoped change of attitudes, behaviors, emotional states, level of satisfaction and self-esteem, the quality and quantity improving of the family relationships and/or friendships b) *changes in the intersystemic level*: refers to the possible coordination, collaboration and harmonization of activities between local services (Asl), schools, local health authorities and associations related to the LGBT community, as well as the possibility of an integrated information and training. These actions and strategies seem to find, in the context of belonging and comparison with the territory, their main implementation: the territory becomes the primary point of reference, which includes located and contextualized<sup>10</sup> actions and consider

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<sup>10</sup> In the case of the homosexual community, they can be also considered as virtual environments, the online worlds, as environments that the subjects use strategically for their coming-out or as a pure support for their identity development, we refer to an exploratory analysis for the use that young homosexuals make of the social networks online, in Cappotto and Rinaldi (2002).

concrete<sup>11</sup> situations. The processes of training and information are necessary to the challenge of change.

In the networking system people exchange their identity and live the membership, where are socially defined, where they control and are controlled, where they are represented and represent the reality, so it is the place of collective representations (Merlo, 1996:504 ss).

The network is primarily a network of sense. It must not become an *exclusive paradigmatic scheme*, but it should try to include through the production of “*ritual and symbolic systems of social control*” based on the difference and complexity. Therefore, the loss of relationship can be taken again with symbolic-ritual actions that give the sense of community. The activity that come out is a process of the social *re-signification* on the gender and sexual orientation problems.

The result is the consideration of themes linked to the homosexual orientation, that arrive at the expressive and creative spaces of free expression and of "contact", an environment for a constructive dialogue where can rediscover the values and common memberships. Even within a more comprehensive analysis of relations not only *inter-genders* but also *intra-genders*.

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<sup>11</sup> The hoped strategies emphasize on the empathy, the understanding, the possibility of having spaces of expression, the taking care, "care without having a pre-established goal of change, caring for the mere fact that the other person is a citizen, as a subject of rights and duties like me and then must be able "to be", regardless his behaviors"(Merlo 1996: 503).

