

# BROKEN RAINBOW? Domestic Violence and the LGBTI Community in Italy

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## Introduction

Domestic violence is a current concern of Italian society which has required the intervention of the State to protect the victims, often intended as cisgender heterosexual women. Recent research studies by the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) and the Department of Equal Opportunities (DEO) show for example that partners, relatives and friends are the perpetrators of the most severe forms of physical and sexual violence: in last years, rapes were committed in 62.7% of cases by partners, in 3.6% by relatives and 9.4 % by friends. However, the above numbers do not give a precise idea of the nature of domestic violence in Italy. Indeed, according the last ‘Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences’ about Italian domestic violence in the private sphere remains largely invisible and underreported. A certain culture of machismo, protection of the privacy of family life, fear, sub-consciousness of being a victim of violence, lack of familiarity with the Italian language and law, limited trust in the authorities, are only some of the reasons which prevent abused victims to ask for help.



Overall, the Italian legislation tackling domestic violence<sup>1</sup> falls within the framework outlined by the Istanbul Convention, which recognises the domestic violence as a form of violation of human rights and a potentially gender-based discrimination. Therefore, in principle, the legislation applies to all victims of domestic violence, regardless of SOGIESC, but many are explicitly directed toward cisgender women and the case-law outside the “traditional” family is virtually non-existent.

As a result, reliable data on domestic violence within the Italian LGBTI community is often missing. We believe that the lack of knowledge in the field is influenced by traditional gender role stereotypes that have created myths about intimate partner abuse and about who can be the abused and who the perpetrator of such violence. In fact, in the collective imagination the abuser continues to be identified in a cisgender male individual while the victim continues to be recognised in as a cisgender heterosexual woman. As a result, we tend to exclude the possibility that a LGBTI relationship can be violent or, even when recognised as such, we might underestimate the severity of the abuse, believing that the violence suffered by a man, or one perpetrated by a woman against her partner, is not as

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<sup>1</sup> Law 15 February 1996, n. 66 (“Rules against sexual violence”); Law 5 April 2001, n. 154 (“Measures against violence in family relationships”); Law 23 April 2009, n. 38 (“Urgent measures regarding public safety and the fight against sexual violence, as well as with regard to stalking”); Law 27 June 2013, n. 77 ( “Ratification and execution of the Istanbul Convention”); Law 15 October 2013, n. 119, (“Fight against gender-based violence”); Law 15 June 2015, n. 80 (“Leave for women victims of gender-based violence”); Law 15 December 2015, n. 212 (“Implementation of the Directive 2012/29/UE”); Law 19 July 2019, n. 69 (“Amendments to the Criminal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code and other provisions on the protection of victims of domestic and gender-based violence”).



severe as a violence that a woman suffers from a man. This thinking comes from the fact that we often forget to consider that control, and not physical strength or biological gender, is the key element of the abuse. However, in 2020 the equality body (UNAR) financed the establishment of some “Centers against discrimination motivated by sexual orientation and gender identity”, which should guarantee, free of charge, victims of discrimination or violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity, adequate legal, health, psychological, social mediation assistance and, where necessary, also accommodation and subsistence. This study represents and reports the core activity implemented within the twelve-month project “Broken Rainbow? Domestic Violence and the LGBTI Community in Italy”, financed by the ILGA-Europe Documentation and Advocacy Fund and aiming at filling the research gap in the field of domestic violence and the LGBTI community, by combining quantitative and qualitative data collections, and investigate the access to services and assistance by victims (e.g., denial of access to shelters for trans or male victims of domestic violence).

The methodology underpinning the research for this study relied on both quantitative and qualitative methods, and, in particular, desk research of primary and secondary sources, surveys and semi-structured interviews. The data collection plan will be divided into three progressive phases. In a first phase, a mapping of research on domestic violence within the LGBTI community, both national and international, was carried out starting from the baseline of the previous research “Bleeding Love: Raising Awareness on Domestic and Dating Violence Against Lesbians and Transwomen” (2015-2016). At a second stage, a survey





was created to be administered to the LGBTI community. Based on the ideas deriving from the desk research, the questionnaire, in addition to some demographic questions, considered attitudes and beliefs in relation to assistance and services to victims of domestic violence, on the one hand, and refusal to and/or lack of support because of their SOGIESC, on the other. In the third and final phase, in order to deepen the results of the quantitative survey, some semi-structured interviews were conducted with the heads of recently established “Centers against discrimination motivated by sexual orientation and gender identity”. The aim of the interviews was to collect data about the characteristics and effects of violence suffered by LGBTI persons, and about the availability and quality of the support services.

The data collection followed a protocol that included a commitment of data confidentiality by each partner and a guarantee that privacy and rights of the people were preserved (e.g., only aggregate data are disseminated). Where a choice of ethical regulations was available, the research team applied whichever standard was the highest. Thus, the activities were compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679, as well as national provisions on privacy and electronic communications.

Regarding the vocabulary, we followed ILGA Europe glossary, and we integrated it with new definitions, whether necessary. In general terms, we used the term LGBTI when referring to people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), and included people who did not refer to themselves as such or used other terms but had non-normative or marginalised genders and sexualities.



## The survey results

### **Methodology**

First, a mapping of previous quantitative research on domestic and family violence within and outside the LGBT community was conducted, including Italian sources (e.g., ISTAT). Subsequently, a questionnaire was developed to be administered to members of the LGBT community. Based on insights from the literature review, the questionnaire, besides some demographic questions, was structured into three sections: 1) Questions about gender roles and the social perception of violence, 2) Questions about violence experienced by LGBTI individuals, and 3) Questions about reports of violence experienced by LGBTI individuals. The third section was reserved for those who answered positively to a screening question about previous experiences of violence. Once validated by two external experts, the questionnaire was uploaded to the Limesurvey platform and preceded by an information sheet indicating the aims and purposes of the research. An access link to the survey was then be generated and subsequently disseminated through the social media of the Rete Lenford – Avvocatura per I Diritti LGBTI+ and to the email addresses of the Italian LGBTI+ associations, with a request for dissemination to its affili-



ates and sympathizers.

The completion of the survey was anonymous, as the respondent wasn't asked to indicate any identification data (e.g., name or address). However, the respondent's IP address was temporarily stored by the system, in order to prevent the data from being polluted by double compilations. In general, the data collection followed a protocol that included a commitment of data confidentiality by each partner and a guarantee that privacy and rights of the people are preserved (e.g., only aggregate data are disseminated). Where a choice of ethical regulations was available, the research team applied whichever standard was the highest. Thus, the data collection was compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679, as well as national provisions on privacy and electronic communications.

## The Participants

Regarding the number of respondents, 324 individuals agreed to participate, but only 188 completed the entire questionnaire and were, therefore, considered valid for analysis. The sample showed a balanced distribution in terms of gender, with 48.93% of respondents selecting "male" and 51.06% "female." No respondent chose the "Other" option.

The spectrum of responses varied significantly for the subsequent question "How do you describe yourself today?" where 46.28% identified as male, 42.02% as female, 6.91% as non-binary, 1.60% as transgender male, 1.06% as transgender female, and 2.13% as "Other."



The sample appeared relatively young, with an average age of 37.8 years and a median age of 36 years, partly due to the questionnaire's distribution methods, which favored social media.

Consistent with the age data, marital status reflected that 60.64% of respondents declared themselves as single, followed by 18.09% in civil unions, 9.57% married, while the rest of the sample was separated/divorced or in other statuses. No respondent was widowed.

The sample appeared well-educated, with 45.21% holding a university degree, 22.34% a high school diploma or equivalent, and 17.55% a doctoral degree. The remaining 2.66% either reported a lower qualification or did not respond. These figures, however, deviate from those of the general Italian population, where only 26.8% of 30-34-year-olds hold a university degree, and 0.5% of the working-age population holds a doctoral degree.

As of the questionnaire completion date, 79.26% of the sample were employed, 11.17% were students, while the rest were seeking new employment, unable to work, or in other conditions.

Regarding sexual orientation, 61.70% identified as homosexual, 23.40% as bisexual/pansexual, 10.64% as heterosexual, 1.06% as asexual, while 3.19% chose the "Other" option. It's worth noting that three of these respondents later indicated "lesbian", therefore falling under the homosexual orientation. The rest mentioned "Polysexual Gino-romantic", "Skoliosexual," or expressed a general refusal to define their orientation.

Regarding the question "Are you a person with intersex variance?" 96.81% responded negatively, while the rest did not know/did not respond.



Regarding nationality, 98.94% of respondents were Italian, consistent with the subsequent question about their habitual residence. In terms of residency, 70.74% lived in Northern Italy (Emilia-Romagna, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Liguria, Lombardy, Piedmont, Valle d'Aosta, Veneto, and Trentino-Alto Adige), 14.89% in Central Italy (Lazio, Marche, Tuscany, and Umbria), and only 11.71% in Southern Italy and Islands (Abruzzo, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Molise, Puglia, Sardinia, and Sicily). Finally, 3.19% declared being Italian residents abroad.

## **Data Analysis & Results**

Data collected was analyzed following the most common statistical measurements of central tendency, such as mean (i.e., the average of a data set), median (i.e., middle of the set of numbers), and mode (i.e., the most common number in a data set). Also, data was disaggregated by SOGIESC, whenever relevant.

### **1. Questions about gender roles and the social perception of violence**

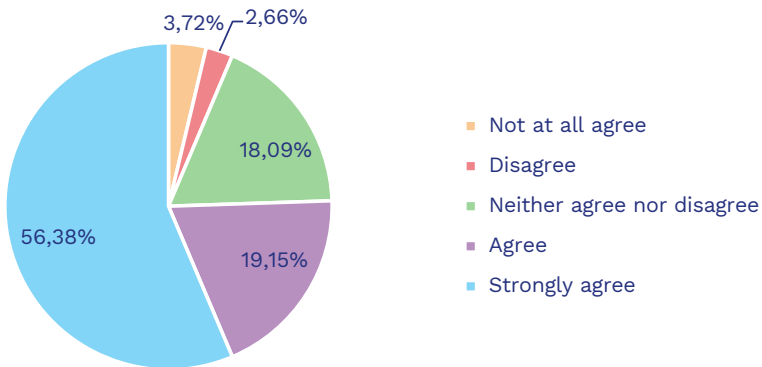
A first set of questions focused on gender roles and the social perception of violence in everyday situations. In this way, the study has allowed us to identify the cultural models that still today guide the social perception of violence within the LGBTI community, as stereotyped models linked to gender roles can profoundly influence the assessment of behaviors observed in cases of domestic violence.



Concerning gender roles, respondents were presented with statements and asked to respond on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 corresponded to 'Not at all agree', 2 to 'Disagree', 3 to 'Neither agree nor disagree', 4 to 'Agree', and 5 to 'Strongly agree'. The vast majority of respondents do not support a 'traditional' division. For instance, 84.04% and 97.34% respectively disagree with the statements 'Some jobs are not very suitable for a woman' and 'A mother should only work if necessary'. Less unanimous but still quite clear is the response to the statement 'The primary responsibility of a father is to provide economically for his children', with 64.89% expressing not agreeing at all.

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We should stop thinking of people as male or female and focus on other characteristics



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Even within the household and concerning responsibilities in child-rearing, respondents show egalitarian views. 93.09% agree or strongly agree with the statement 'Household chores should not be assigned based on the



sex assigned at birth', and 96.81% disagree or strongly disagree with the statement 'Most decisions about raising children should be made by a mother'. However, the sample does not fully endorse a genderless position, as slightly more than half – 56.38% – strongly agree with the statement 'We should stop thinking that people are male or female and focus on other characteristics', while 19.15% simply agree and 18.09% neither agree nor disagree.

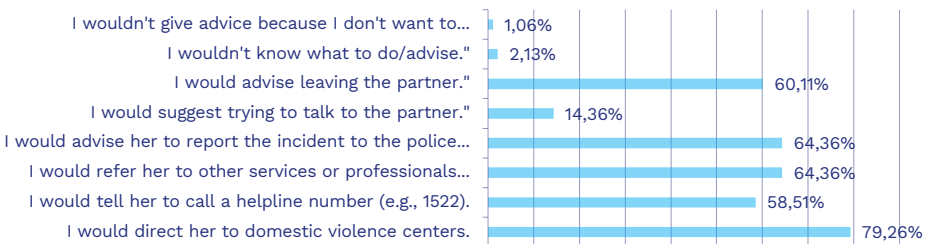
Regarding the social perception of violence, respondents were presented with everyday situations and asked to respond if these were 'Always acceptable', 'Acceptable in certain circumstances', or 'Never acceptable'. In general, the sample does not find physical violence towards a partner acceptable under any circumstance. 96.28% and 89.36% of the sample respectively believe it is never acceptable for 'a boy/girl to slap his/her partner because they flirted with another person' and that 'in a romantic relationship, it's normal for an occasional slap to happen'. Asked about reasons why people are sometimes violent with their partners using predefined responses, the sample chose, in decreasing order: considering the partner as an object of ownership (90.43%), difficulty managing anger (80.85%), the need to feel superior to their partner (78.19%), intolerance towards their partner's emancipation (70.71%), childhood experiences of negative family violence (64.89%), substance abuse (67.02%), and finally, religious reasons (37.77%). Additionally, 90.43% of the sample strongly agree or agree with the statement that individuals can be both aggressive and nurturing, regardless of their assigned gender at birth.



The sample demonstrates resistance to victim-blaming. 84.04% and 87.23% respectively do not agree at all with the statements ‘The LGBTI partner can provoke sexual violence through their way of dressing’ and ‘Serious LGBTI individuals do not get raped.’ Furthermore, 91.49% strongly disagree with the statement ‘If an LGBTI person experiences sexual violence while drunk or under the influence of drugs, they are at least partially responsible.’ The sample does not associate violence with the victim’s gender: 86.17% and 78.72% respectively strongly disagree with the statements ‘In a relationship between women, there cannot be sexual violence’ and ‘Gay men always say yes to a sexual proposal.’ However, the response to the question about what the respondent would advise if they knew someone who had experienced violence from their partner (multiple responses were possible) was diverse.

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If you knew someone who has experienced violence from their partner, what would you advise them to do?




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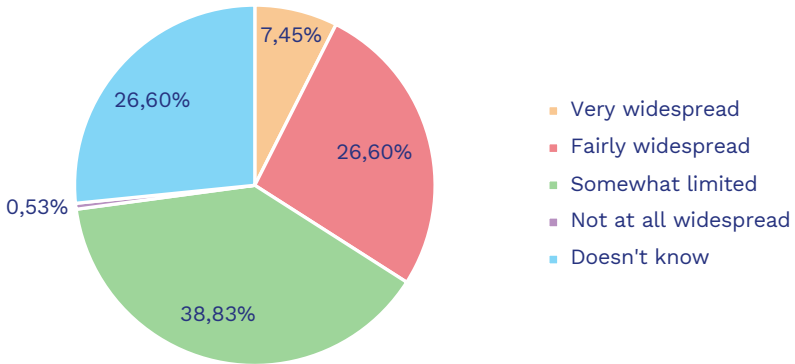
Eventually, a final set of questions aimed to assess the sample’s perception regarding the prevalence of violence in romantic/affectionate relationships among in-



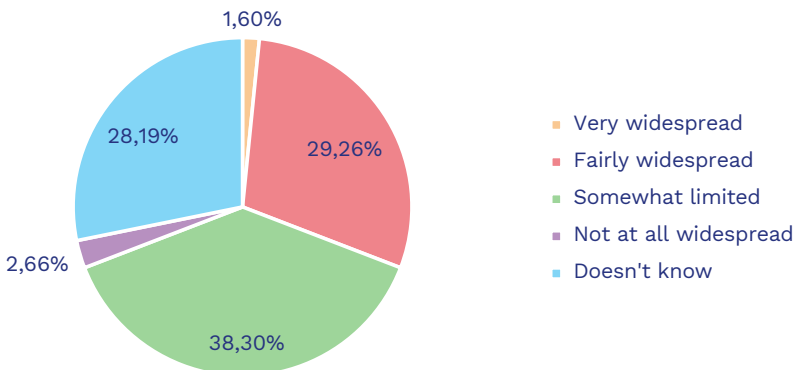


dividuals in the LGBTI population in Italy. Overall, violence is perceived as somewhat or fairly widespread, particularly concerning psychological violence, with significantly higher numbers.

In general, how widespread do you think physical violence is in Italy in romantic/affectionate relationships among people in the LGBTI population?

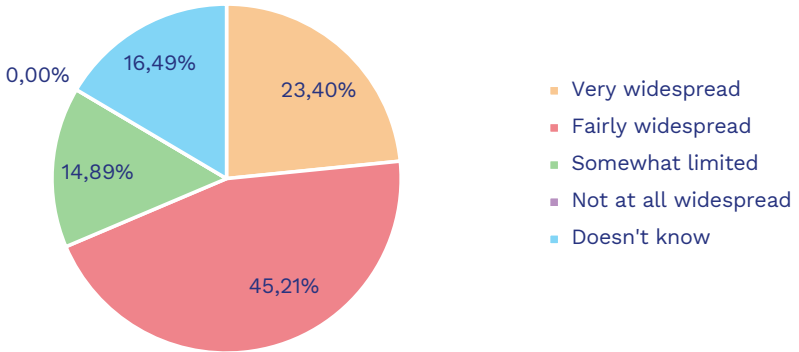


In general, how widespread do you think sexual violence is in Italy in romantic/affectionate relationships among people in the LGBTI population?



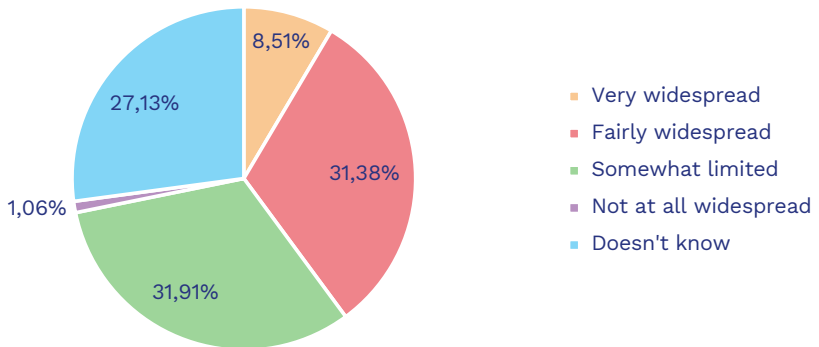
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In general, how widespread do you think psychological violence is in Italy in romantic/affectionate relationships among people in the LGBTI population?



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In general, how widespread do you think economic violence is in Italy in romantic/affectionate relationships among people in the LGBTI population?



## 2. Inquiries about violence experienced by LGBTI individuals

A second set of questions aimed to gather respondents' personal opinions on the living conditions of LGBTI individuals in Italy. Participants were presented with everyday relationship situations with their partners and were asked how often these situations had occurred in the past year, whether they had occurred in previous years, or had never occurred before.

Overall, the sample did not report experiencing forms of physical violence. 92.02% responded that their partner had never thrown something at them that could cause harm, 93.09% mentioned that their partner had never twisted their arm or pulled their hair, 90.43% stated that their partner had never pushed them violently, 97.34% affirmed that their partner had never punched them, 90.96% indicated that their partner had never slapped them, and 96.81% stated that their partner had never threatened to hit them or throw something at them. For respondents who reported experiencing any of the above incidents, it occurred only once in the past year or in previous years. Only a very small minority declared that such episodes happened more frequently.

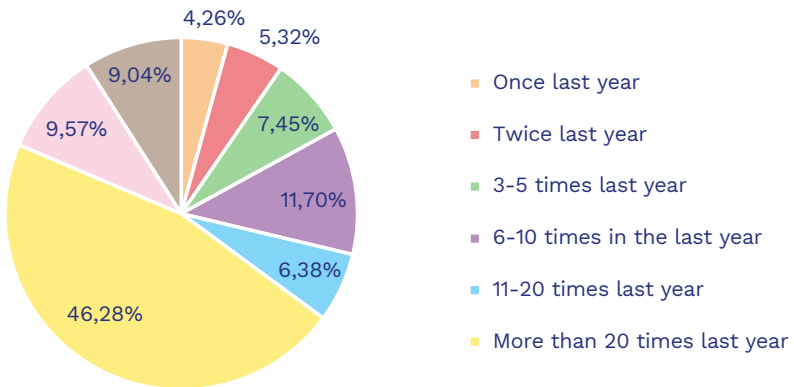
A similar situation was observed concerning sexual violence. For 91.49% of the sample, their partner had never refused to use safe sex methods; for 97.34%, their partner had never used force to compel them to have sex; for 96.81%, their partner had never engaged in sex without their consent (while incapacitated due to being drugged, intoxicated, or unconscious); and for 98.94%,



their partner had used threats to engage in sexual intercourse. For a slightly lower percentage of the sample - 85.64% - their partner had never insisted on having

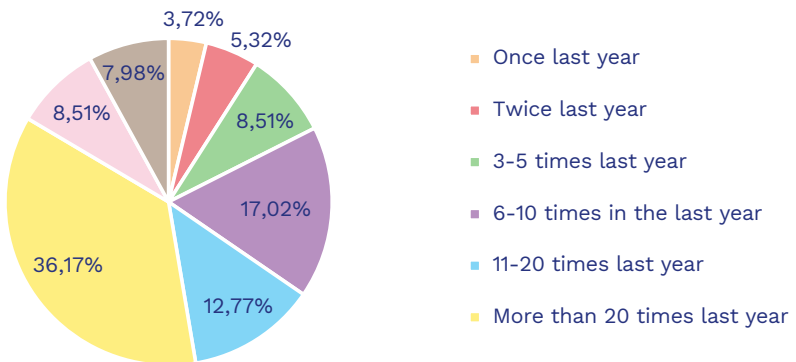
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My partner showed care for me even when we disagreed



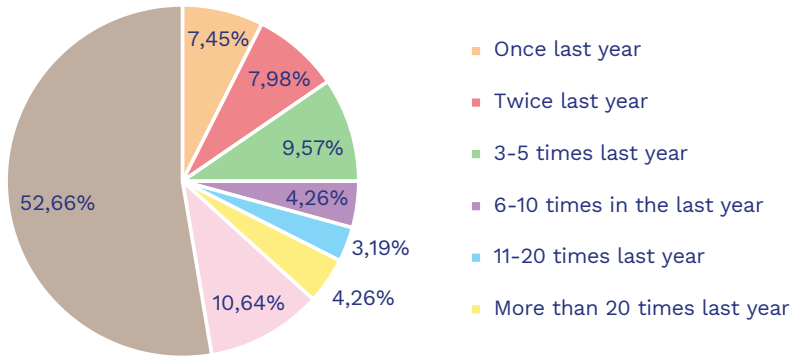

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My partner explained their point of view on a disagreement between us

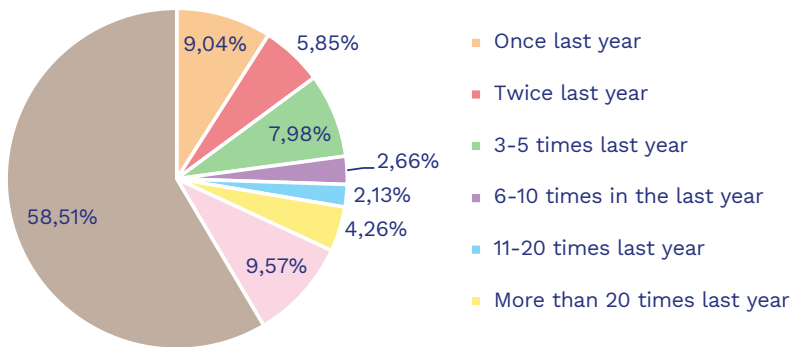


sexual intercourse (without using physical force). Responses regarding situations related to psychological and/or verbal violence, however, were more varied,

My partner offended or insulted me

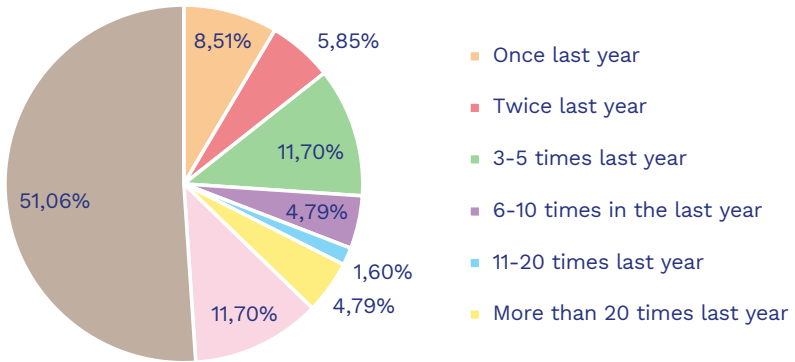


My partner ranted or raged against me

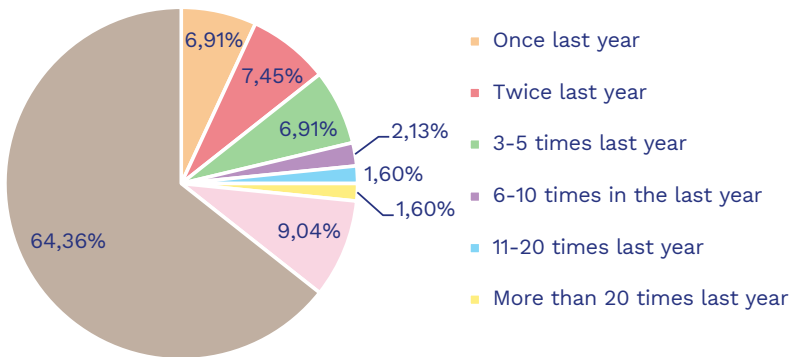


with many respondents having experienced these situations, which sometimes appeared to be quite frequent.

My partner shouted or yelled at me



My partner did something to spite me



### **3. Questions about reports of violence experienced by LGBTI individuals**

An ultimate set of questions aimed to investigate the behavior following an episode of violence.

It is important to note that only 8.51% of the sample believes they have experienced some form of violence (physical, sexual, psychological, and/or economic) from their LGBTI partner in the last 12 months. 5.85% declared not knowing, while the remaining 85.64% responded negatively. The questionnaire considered this a filtering question, allowing respondents to answer subsequent questions only if they responded affirmatively to it. Therefore, it was possible to investigate the behavior following an episode of violence for only a small percentage of respondents (8.51%), which doesn't allow for generalizations.

Overall, this subset did not reach out to a violence prevention center or shelter for people who have experienced violence, nor did they contact a helpline, association, community, or family center following the episode of violence. Only half sought psychological, psychiatric, or neurological assistance or counseling, while a third turned to the use of medications or alcoholic substances to cope with this experience. Finally, no one reported the incident to the police or other judicial authorities.



## The results of the interviews

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### Methodology

The qualitative phase of the project did not aim to collect data on prevalence of the phenomenon of violence in the LGBTI population in Italy. We aimed to inspect family violence in the LGBTI community from the words of LGBTI activists working in some of the main LGBTI associations and municipalities in the Italian context. Specifically, the research questions of this study were the following: (1) what are the main dimensions and characteristic of family violence in the Italian LGBTI community?; (2) what are the interventions directed to contrast family violence in LGBTI community? (3) what we need to do in order to improve interventions, services and norms devoted to prevent and contrast family violence toward LGBTI people? We aimed to sample a wide range of views and rationales within the LGBTI associations to examine the routes to violence and discrimination. The objectives were exploratory in nature so we had no specific hypotheses.

Ten open-ended questions were organized in four main area as follows: (a) The project: (1) “In general, what services do you offer?”; (2) “What was the project that UNAR funded for your association/municipality?”; (3) “What are your specific services in cases of violence?”; (b) Violence: (1)





“What types of violence were reported or you observed?;” (2) “Is there a specific LGBTI group which is most at risk of violence?;” (3) “In your experience, what are the differences and similarities - if any - in the phenomenon of LGBTI family violence compared to the family violence in the heterosexual and cisgender population?;” (4) “In your experience, what are the main causes, correlates and consequences of family violence toward LGBTI people?;” (c) Outcomes: (1) “Which of the services you offer seem to be the most relevant for victims?;” (2) “What are the positive effects of the services you provided (for victims and other people)?;” (d) Future indications: “What would be needed in the near future to succeed in preventing and contrasting the phenomenon of violence and discriminations toward LGBTI people?“. The reported questions constituted the general outline. The questions could be rephrased in a simpler language (e.g., providing examples of explanation but avoiding influencing the responses) or adapted following the content that emerged from the previous questions.

## The Participants

Out of 37 invitations, sent twice if no response was obtained, 37.84% of the total sample responded. Specifically, fourteen LGBTI associations and municipalities (i.e., six in southern Italy, six associations in northern Italy, and two in central Italy) responded and 16 activists participated in recorded audio interviews on the platform Meet lasting an average of 60 minutes. Of those who agreed to participate, the majority were activists from LGBTI associations and only 3 were activists working to projects funded to



municipalities. Activists were all responsible, coordinators or directors of specific centers, associations, desks, or projects. The majority were large centers, while others were smaller desks. However, all activists worked in very extensive networks of services and professionals. No case, therefore, was excluded from the analyses.

All these associations and municipalities were invited by email to participate in online semi-structured interviews from 21 March to 7 August 2023. Interviews were presented as an exploration of LGBTI activists' experiences and opinions concerning family violence, discrimination and prejudice toward LGBTI people. All interviews were conducted in a very cooperative and serene climate. Each activist was told that the interviewers were not interested in research data and, on the contrary, the study intended to collect their own personal experiences on violence and discrimination. Generally, interviews were conducted with only one activist at a time. However, in the case of two associations, there were two - and three - activists involved. In these latter cases, it was always one activist who answered the main questions, but a second - and a third - activist had allowed to assist and intervene as needed. All activists participating in the interview read and filled out an informed consent and personal data processing form, which they returned to the interviewer by email. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary, that they could leave the interview at any time without explanations and that the data would be kept confidential and anonymized. The research complied with the Helsinki Declaration for research with human beings.

The interview respondents are referred to as "activists" in this research because in addition to having their own



specific expertise and basic training (e.g., educators, psychologists) they all shared knowledge derived from experiences of LGBTI activism: participating in associations activities, organizing education and awareness-raising events, engaging in listening desks and others.

## **Data Analyses & Results**

Data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis that searches for themes or patterns of data. This method is adapt, because we collected data without a priori hypotheses and we mainly used an inductive approach, in order to develop our results based on data. Eventually, the interviewer and the principal investigator produced some thematic maps of the analysis. Also, definitions and names for each theme were refined in the production of the final report conducting a final revision of the selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research questions and literature.

The themes and sub-themes identified by the researchers did not exactly correspond to the questions that were asked of the participants and the data coding was not conducted trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame. However, we wished to provide a detailed and nuanced account of themes and sub-themes within the data. We also found it was misleading to count text units as in a content analysis, because the research participants were relatively few in number but very knowledgeable about LGBTI violence and discrimination. Therefore, each content reported is considered significant, even if highlighted only a few times.



Three overarching themes were extracted by data with relative ten sub-themes: (1) characteristics of violence; (2) barriers to help; and (3) interventions and outcomes.

## 1. Characteristics of Family Violence

All activists reported cases of psychological abuse. Other types of violence (e.g., physical and sexual abuse) were also being reported, especially in case of transgender or gender nonconforming victims, LGBTI youth who were minors or otherwise not yet independent from their families of origin, and in case of immigrant LGBTI people. Almost all activists found many more similarities than differences of violence toward LGBTI people than violence toward heterosexual and cisgender people. For example, a common root was identified in stereotypical reasoning about gender roles. Among the correlates and consequences of violence, most activists reported examples of isolation and minority stressors. Activists reported very few cases of IPV in LGBTI couples, but they reported cases of abuses in the family of origin.

The activists described five principal dimensions of family violence (i.e., psychological or emotional abuse, physical or sexual abuse, economic abuse, threats, and stalking), pointing out that these dimensions could also involve violence by non-family members. In all cases, activists highlighted the relevance of psychological and emotional abuse. In many cases, activists described the coexistence of multiple forms of violence.

Activists also reported some dimension of violence that were not necessarily linked to family violence, occurring at schools, at work, from the neighborhood, in the



streets and, even, at the LGBTI association. In these contexts, activists reported situations of verbal and physical abuse, mockeries, ostracism, and damages to properties:

A girl was part of the company before her transition; she communicated the transition and they seemed to welcome the request, and then instead, at one point, when she started transitioning and had a mastoplasty, they tried to fire her. I remember her telling me that there were update meetings to attend and they would not update her. They were hiding important information from her to be able to harm her at work. (Activist from a LGBTI association of Northern Italy).

Recently we had a case of a minor girl who had experienced discrimination at school by a religion teacher. In this case, we offered a psychology support, and we also offered her more concrete support. [...] We could have a meeting with the faculty or go into the school assembly [...], but she was so scared [...]. She was afraid that this might come out. (Activist from a municipality of Southern Italy).

A single activist of an association in northern Italy that recently opened an anti-violence and anti-discrimination service claimed few cases of reported violence in general. However, the activist reported that their service has only been active for a few months and that LGBTI people who have approached the association declared a strong difficulty in coming out in an area where there have never been services for LGBTI people before. Almost all activists found many more similarities than differences of violence toward LGBTI people than vio-



lence toward heterosexual and cisgender people. For example, a common root was identified in patriarchy and stereotypical reasoning about gender roles. Some activists reported that a common root of violence for both LGBTI and heterosexual and cisgender (cisHet) people lies in the difficulty in identifying the severity of abuse. This common difficulty also explains the few cases of IPV reported to LGBTI associations.

Some activists also found differences between the violence in LGBTI population on one hand and cisHet populations on the other hand: (a) a tendency of LGBTI people of conceiving intimate relationships in a less hierarchical way compared to the general cisHet population, with greater respect for the equal distribution of tasks and responsibilities in a couple; and (b) a tendency of LGBTI people to strongly search for economic independence that some cisHet women struggle to achieve. These two aspects could create good basis for making LGBTI people more equipped against family violence. However, activists report that the phenomenon is relevant, serious and in some ways similar to violence against women:

It's a very relevant violence, it's very serious problem [...]. Actually, women also experience violence systematically [...]. The number of accesses that we have had in our territory are comparable to the accesses that receive anti-violence centers for women victims of violence. (Activist from a LGBTI association of Northern Italy).



## 2. Barriers to Help

In this overarching theme, two types of barriers were identified: the internal and psychological barriers (e.g., fear of not being believed and lack of trust in the justice system); and the barriers that stemmed from problems in the services provided and the general environment (e.g., lack of emergency housing).

Among psychological barriers, very often activists mention the term “fear.” Victims report being afraid of being visible and “out”, of receiving threats or retaliation, of being alone and having to change habits, or of not being believed. Activists also reported that LGBTI people can develop a strong sense of distrust in various institutions and social contexts, because they can be victimized in multiple contexts, in family of origin, in intimate relationships, at school, at work. This widespread victimization also creates in victims a difficulty in decoding violence and becoming aware of violence.

Many activists highlight the problem that in Italy the lack of appropriate laws to protect LGBTI victims of discrimination and violence makes many pathways to help complicated and discouraging for victims. For example, one activist reported as follows:

I would really like to see what the situation will be in the future [...] when the “Zan Act” or a similar law against violence and discrimination will finally passed. I have the impression that this can concretely produce changes. [...] There are forms of violence that are violence but are not received as such, so laws and norms are absolutely insufficient. The reason why in Ilga’s Rainbow map we are in such a low position detects very well the



lack of protections even in the area of violence. (Activist from a LGBTI association of Northern Italy).

Other external barriers were identified in economic or structural resources (e.g., shelters), the lack of dissemination of culture on LGBTI issues even among professionals involved in support, and the difficulty of coordination among the associations and services. Among the problems in shelters, some activists pointed out that some professionals are unprepared to handle certain situations and put some victims at risk of further violence, including physical and sexual violence.

### **3. Interventions and Outcomes**

All activists mentioned a wide range of specialized activities and services that were attentive to the specific needs of each victim. The activities were carried out in collaboration with other associations (e.g., associations working against violence against women) available in the regional and national context and other professionals, making it possible to achieve a number of significant outcomes for victims and other persons close to the victims.

All associations and municipalities offered an initial reception service and a structured second-level intervention with the intervention of professionals and services. Each activist listed several services that were common to all associations and municipalities, for the most part, such as legal and psychological services, job orientation for autonomy development or health services for the





gender affirmation pathway. Then, some association offered further specific services that address particular needs of their social context (e.g., services for LGBTI people who are incarcerated or migrants, services for parents of transgender children, and others).

Only activists of one LGBTI association in Northern Italy presented their selves as an association completely dedicated to IPV for LGBTI people. They worked for many years to violence against women and also recently opened a service specifically dedicate to IPV for LGBTI people. They confirmed the extreme difficulty to recognized and intercept cases of IPV in the LGBTI population. They reported some case of violence, discrimination and IPV in the population of transgender women - particularly if migrant and sex workers.

Some activists in more isolated and small towns reported the importance of working with helpline tools, as well as trying to spread information widely in small towns. However, all associations engage, more or less formally or informally, to meet the needs of individual cases either directly in their own facility or by sending to other suitable facility.

All activists reported the importance of educating and networking in order to be able to help people with multiple vulnerabilities.

Concerning emergency housing for LGBTI people, some activists reported some distinctions. For example, some activists reported that there are houses that only accommodate for situations of discrimination, on the one hand; and homes for victims of persecutory violence who protect people in anonymity, on the other hand. Activists reported that emergency housing for



anonymous protection are generally designed only for women and not for men. In addition, activists reported that services and communities that have to deal with situations of multiple vulnerabilities are almost non-existent in Italy. There are indeed residences for LGBTI people providing a semi-autonomy to their guests but few communities dedicated to LGBTI people victims of violence and with severe multiple vulnerabilities (e.g., substance addictions).

Only one activist in northern Italy reported that their association was engaged in a statistical data collection regarding violence and discrimination in LGBTI community in order to create a map of the phenomenon that is still poorly investigated at a systematic level in Italy. Indeed, activists reported descriptions of very complex cases, in which victims often reported multiple causes and multiple perpetrators of violence. The majority of activists pointed out that the lack of specific cases of IPV was probably due to victims' difficulty in recognizing and reporting violence.

Furthermore, activist also found that it would be important to create a method of intervening in cases of family violence toward LGBTI people that is based on multiple experiences. The importance of psychology and psychotherapy interventions, including preventive ones, were indicated as a fundament from the majority of activists. For example, an activist who was not a psychologist or a psychiatrist reported as follows:

The issue of mental health is so fundamental. I must honestly say that when we opened [the services] we didn't imagine that this problem would be of this mag-



nitude. We first started with three psychologists, then we also involved a psychiatrist, and now we have integrated two more psychologists because the issue of mental health is really important. (Activist from a LGBTI association of Northern Italy)

Particularly highlighted was also the need for training for professionals as well as programs for education against violence in different contexts (e.g., schools). No activists considered the actual Italian legislation for LGBTI violence and discrimination adequate and argued that laws need to be modified.



## Conclusions & recommendations

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The quantitative data-collection has revealed that family violence against the LGBTI persons and within the LGBTI community does exist. Often the episodes of violence can be considered to be the consequence of reiterated bias and stereotypes regarding sexual orientation and gender identity or a more general structural stigma. However, the phenomenon is not well acknowledged, and victims are somehow reluctant to report their experiences. Discrimination is rarely reported because the legal framework is considered unreliable.

In the qualitative study, family violence was described as strongly interrelated to other forms of collective violence and discrimination. Almost all the activists in this study reported the high occurrence of psychological abuse and the high request for psychological support also for dealing with the internal factors for help-seeking behaviours. Among barriers for help-seeking behaviours, the lack of adequate legislations for dealing with violence and discrimination in the LGBTI community were considered strong obstacles to the emergence of violence. Indeed, the violence was often defined as a result of systemic discrimination affecting LGBTI people. Activists also reported that the low occurrence of family violence cases could be the result of submerged and unreported data



from victims, or it could depend on the fact it is difficult to clearly distinguish hate-based violence from family violence. Furthermore, all activists reported the importance of offer different interventions adapted to single specific situations (e.g. young transgender boys and girls facing the paths of gender affirmation).

For future directions, we identified the importance of working for increasing awareness of violence toward LGBTI people both in victims and in society, the relevance of education and of team-based interprofessional care. In this study indeed, the importance of awareness of violence was a theme shared by the cisnet and LGBTI populations as a barrier to seeking help and one of the major goals that associations seek to pursue in order to empower victims to recognize, counteract, and prevent violence. Also, education, training and information was identified as a vital factor. Finally, we identified the importance of a team-based interprofessional care for dealing with the complexity of family violence situations and the multiple vulnerabilities or risk factors for victims.

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are put forward.

For public authorities and/or administrations:

- *Inclusive Laws and Policies:* Authorities should develop and implement laws specifically addressing domestic violence within the LGBTI community, ensuring that domestic violence laws explicitly include protections for all gender identities and sexual orientations.
- *Personnel Training:* Provide mandatory training to health-care professionals, social workers, law enforcement, and



emergency service providers to recognize and handle cases of LGBTI domestic violence sensitively and appropriately.

- *Dedicated Resources:* Allocate specific funds for programs and services aimed at preventing and supporting LGBTI victims of domestic violence, including safe shelters and support services.
- *Promotion of Safe Reporting:* Ensure there are safe and accessible channels to report domestic violence, and that LGBTI individuals feel secure in reporting cases without fear of discrimination or reprisal.
- *Monitoring and Data Collection:* Implement data collection systems that include specific information about domestic violence within the LGBTI community to better understand the scope of the issue and guide resource allocation.

For non-governmental organizations (NGOs):

- *Specific Services:* Organizations should provide direct services and specific resources for LGBTI victims of domestic violence, such as safe shelters, psychologically and legally sensitive support tailored to the community's needs.
- *Education and Awareness:* Conduct educational programs and workshops to increase awareness about domestic violence in LGBTI relationships. These programs can be held in schools, community centers, and online.
- *Strategic Collaborations:* Establish partnerships with other LGBTI and non-LGBTI organizations, including social services, government agencies, and law enforcement, to develop a broader and integrated support network.



- *Advocacy and Activism*: Engage in advocacy activities to ensure that the needs of LGBTI individuals affected by domestic violence are part of governmental policies and programs.

Specific recommendations relating to transgender people:

- *Gender-Affirming Services*: Ensure that support services and safe shelters are inclusive and sensitive to the gender identities of transgender individuals, providing safe and welcoming spaces that respect their gender identity and expression.
- *Empowerment Programs*: Create specific empowerment programs for transgender individuals, promoting economic and social independence to reduce dependence on abusive situations.
- *Culturally Competent Resources*: Ensure that resources and services are culturally competent and sensitive to the diverse experiences and backgrounds of transgender individuals, recognizing the unique challenges they may face in domestic violence situations.
- *Involvement of the Transgender Community*: Actively involve members of the transgender community in the design and implementation of programs and policies aimed at combating domestic violence, ensuring their voices are heard and considered.



