

Intimate Partner Violence in media representation: a comparison between two Italian newspapers

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Abstract

The media sector plays a crucial role in the representation of issues which are uncomfortable, reflecting and shaping public opinion: intimate partner violence (IPV) is one such issue (Lloyd & Ramon, 2013). The aim of study is to explore how IPV is represented in 2 Italian newspapers in the years 2002/12. Seven keywords have been used to point out the appropriate articles, after that two independent researchers categorized the keywords into: form and content. We focalized the analysis on the correlation between journalists gender and victims' and perpetrators' portraits. The results show an increase of articles, and a deeply change into the newspaper coverage of IPV, from 2002 and 2012.

Keywords: domestic violence; intimate partner violence; italian newspapers; content analysis; media coverage

1. Introduction

Violence against women is a severe social and mental health problem (World Health Organization b, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c; Vachher, & Sharma, 2010; Babu, & Kar, 2009; Ellsberg, Jansen, Heise, Watts, & Garcia-Moreno, 2008; Bonomi et al., 2006; Kumar, Jeyaseelan, Suresh, & Ahuja, 2005; Campbell, & Boyd, 2003) of women's human rights involving the whole of society (World Health Organization, 2013c; Kulkarni, 2012; Tokuç, Ekuklu, & Avcioglu, 2010; Dalal, Rahman, & Jansson, 2009; Koenig, Stephenson, Ahmed, Jejeebhoy, & Campbell, 2006; Kishor, & Johnson, 2004; United Nations, 1997). World Health Organization defines violence against women as "[...] many forms of violence, including violence by an intimate partner and rape/sexual assault and other forms of sexual violence perpetrated by someone other than a partner" (World Health Organization, 2013c, p.4). The intimate partner violence (IPV) is the most frequent type of violence experienced by women. "It refers to a broad pattern of coercive or violent tactics used by one partner to establish and maintain power and control over the other" (New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 2008, p.1). IPV has achieved widespread proportions in several societies (Alhabib, Nur, & Jones, 2010): in fact no ethnic, demographic or socioeconomic group is free to "the omnipresent phenomenon of IPV" (Rettenberger, & Eher, 2013, p.76). All over the world 30% of women who have been in an intimate relation have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their partner (World Health Organization, 2005, 2013b). Prevalence of violence varies within countries, communities and regions and this variability underline that "violence is not inevitable, and that it can be prevented" (World Health Organization, 2013c, p.36). In Italy over 7 million women have reported to have suffered from sexual or psychological abuse by husband, partner or boyfriend, but only 7,2% denounced the fact, while the remaining 92,5% of physical and sexual violence are an hidden number (Istat, 2006).

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The media sector that includes newspapers, TV, radio, etc., must play a greater role in responding to intimate partner violence. WHO's (2013) new guidelines point out the immediate necessity to integrate the problem of violence against women into clinical training. The news media play a crucial role in the society, one major responsibility is setting the agenda for public and health policy debates. Newspaper coverage conditions policy debate in a local and national level. Issues not covered by the news media are frequently ignored and stay put largely outside public interest, for example newspapers' decisions about pressing problems can raise the profile of an issue. "Across all forms of media, social and health issues are "framed" or portrayed through a complex process of organizing information to create meaning" (Mejia, Nixon, Womack, Cheyne, & Dorfman, 2014, p.4). Journalists create an image of the issue choosing specific sources, arguments, photos, examples and messages. Selecting or omitting these, journalists show what information is significant and what information can neglect by public opinion. The language and content of the Newspapers Coverage of public health issues (or social issues), as domestic violence, reveal the concrete and may affect people's perceptions of these deals (Jabeen, 2014). The media influence public opinion emotionally, and at the same time they affect it. It is indispensable to explain that the newspapers (NP) do not work a totalizing control, but we do not undervalue the effect of a influential message repeated with the same characteristics (Vives-Cases, Torrubiano-Domínguez & Álvarez-Dardet, 2009; Lloyd & Ramon, 2013).

The aim of this study is to observe the differences of expression about the representation of the DV in the two most widespread Italian newspapers in 2002 and 2012: "Corriere della Sera" and "la Repubblica". Following the National and International papers we hypothesize: an increasing of articles in the years considered and a significantly variation in respect of dealing phenomenon of DV. We suppose many changes about the type of articles' publication and a stronger correlation between style of articles and journalist gender; finally we assume to observe several differences in the relation between the victims' and perpetrators' portraits written by male or female journalists.

2. Methodology

Our sample, in this study, are the numbers of the published articles into 2 Italian NP not politically aligned – "Corriere della Sera" and "la Repubblica" – in the online and hardcopy version. The first one, has results from some national analysis is most read by men as the second by women. "Corriere della Sera" is the first Italian newspaper by diffusion - 685.519 copies daily average – against "la Repubblica" with 623.239 both in 2002. Also ten years later we find the same relation: "Corriere della Sera" 433.307 and "la Repubblica" 403.086 copies. The analysed articles have been extracted for the hardcopy, page by page, instead a boolean operators – and/or – has been used for the online version. The used keywords to identify the online articles were: couple violence, domestic violence, family violence, husband violence, private violence, stalking and wife violence. All founded articles have been given to 2 researchers (double blind) with two request. The first one was to identify only the articles that the issues was heterosexual inrapartner domestic violence, instead the second request was to try to organize them into categories using the criteria of form and the content –form is always referred to the positions of the articles the editions (online or hardcopy), the sections regard the national or local pages, the presence of images and photos in the articles and, if available, the journalists' gender.

The elected articles refers information on victims and perpetrators (type of hurts, perpetrators' features and nationality of victims and perpetrators), the articles' style, the victim and perpetrator's portrait (positive, negative, undefined, absent victim/perpetrator) and if any intervention from first aid or police services was reported. A second categorization of the hurts has been done and we identified physical, psychological, sexual, economic abuse but also the presence of more than one at the same. The classification criteria for the nationality of victims and

perpetrators were foreigners, Italian, not specified. A sub-categorization has been created for the style of the articles: factual when facts were described in an objective way; denouncing when it pointed out to inform and sensitize the public opinion about the importance of the phenomenon; emphatic when the author, through stylistic expedients, highlighted some aspects of the news, considered particularly outstanding; humorous if the writer induced smiling in the reader; sensationalist when news was presented as something extraordinary and clamorous. The independent researches defined a portrait as the description about victims and perpetrators. They classified a positive portrait when the journalist described the subjects using some words to point out their good qualities; instead negative portraits were characterized by disparaging and negative adjectives. If the portrait was defined in a neutral way, it has been categorized as undefined. About the interventions from first aid or police services interventions the presence or the absence of explicit information about them was analyzed. If there was not a clear information we classified the articles as not specified intervention (Rollè, Abbà, Fazzino, Marino, Brustia, in press).

3. Data Analysis and Results

In 2002 we found 46 articles - 12 articles in "Corriere della Sera" and 34 in "la Repubblica"; while 304 in 2012 - 64 in "Corriere della Sera" and 240 in "la Repubblica". The keyword more frequently used was "husband violence" (33%) in 2002 while - in the opposite side - "stalking" (3%). In 2012 the data related to stalking keyword is reversed: it is the most frequent keyword (29%). Comparing the articles editions (local and national) we observe that the percentage remains unchanged, but an opposite trend can be noted between "Corriere della Sera" and "la Repubblica". In 2002 the first published the totality of national articles in the edition in hardcopy, while the second in the same year published 76% of the articles in local editions. We underline the increase of articles published in national edition a decrease about local articles. Furthermore the online articles increase of 31% compared with those in hard copy. In 2002 all articles categorized are published in the chronicle section, and also the majority of articles is published in the same section in 2012, but 18% is divided between other sections. This shows how this phenomenon is widespread in other fields, different from the "Chronicle" section, like "Letters, Comments and Ideas", "Diary", highlighting that although the percentage is low the public opinion is involved to the issue more than ten years ago, we analyzed only the position of the articles published in "national hard copy": in 2012 57% are published in "Full Page", while only 36% in 2002 as high percentage (29%) are in the "Shoulder" position - in the 2012 the percentage is 7%.

In 2012 the female journalists represented 34% of the total number of journalists, compared to 17% in 2002. Regarding male journalists reduced, the decrease is evident from 46% (2002) to 19% (2012). The remaining 33% (2002) and 46% (2012) are related to journalists where it was not possible to define their gender. Examining the style, in 2002, the more adopted is the emphatic (46%) with a decrease to 28% in 2012. The more adopted style is the factual in 2012 (32%) while it represents 26% in 2002. Comparing the years we observed a significant increase of 300% about denouncing style: from 9% in 2002 to 27% in 2012. About the last two styles analyzed: sensationalist style decreases to 3% in 2012 and we found one article with humorous style in 2002, while this style is absent in 2012.

Correlating style with journalist gender, we discovered that the major writing style adopted by female journalists, in both years, is denouncing (41%). On the contrary the more adopted by male journalists is emphatic style (from 64% to 45%). In particular, in 2002 no male journalist used the style of denunciation, in 2012 the number equals 17%. Comparing the two headlines, in 2002 the more adopted style by "Corriere della Sera" is emphatic (83%), while in 2012 it represented 48%. We underline an increase of the denouncing style from 0% to 30%. Relating "Corriere della Sera" and "la Repubblica" we noted that the first unlike the second represents a variety of styles: 32% factual style, 32% emphatic style, denouncing style 12% in 2002. Emphatic style

decreases (26%) while factual and denouncing style increase respectively by 4% and 15%.

The number of the photos and images increased from 2002 (32) to 2012 (171). Specifically, “la Repubblica” shows more photos and images in both years. In 2002 “Corriere della Sera” presents 12 articles in total: 5 articles have at least one photo and/or image, 3 don’t have any and for the last 4 articles is not possible to identify the presence or the absence of a picture due to the fact it is a local edition. In the same year “la Repubblica” presents 34 articles in total, 10 of them with at least a photo and/or image, 5 with no photo nor images, and 19 are out of our urban area. In 2012 “Corriere della Sera” shows 64 articles in total: 26 have at least one photo/image, 9 have no photos nor images, and 29 in a local edition. Instead, “la Repubblica” shows a total of 240 articles: 122 have at least one photo/image, 30 have no photos nor images and 88 articles are out of our urban area. Considering only the subcategory we found 29 photos in 2002 and 147 in 2012. Analyzing the type of them we observed that the victims’ photos increased from 14% to 43% while the perpetrators’ photos decreased from 34% to 8%. Photos that represent the Police increase significantly from 7% - in 2002- to 29% in 2012.

There are no significant differences in the portraits of the perpetrator but the percentage of articles in which there is not a “specific perpetrator” increases of 22% in 2012. The same applies to the victim (increased by 17%). In 2002 female journalists not present any victims’ positive portrait but in 2012 it represent 14% in 2012, while male journalists describe victims positively also in 2002 (19%) not only in 2012 (15%). In 2002 there aren’t any articles that described positively the perpetrator. In 2012 there are 5 positive portrait: 2 of which are published by the “Corriere della Sera” - one written by a male journalist and one by a female journalist. The last three articles are published by “la Repubblica” written by female journalists. In 2012, female journalists report 4% of articles in which there is a positive description about the perpetrator, while they are no one in 2002 - negative portraits represent 6% in 2012 while the 13% in 2002. In the comparison between 2002 and 2012 the percentage of the negative portrait of the perpetrator remains unchanged (19%), while the positive portrait of the perpetrator is 2% if the journalist were male. Below some extract from articles that showing a positive description of perpetrator are shown:

“la Repubblica”, 06/28/2012: STALKING, INTIMIDATIONS TO HIS EX BY SMS; YOUNG MAN BARGAIN FOR 10 MONTHS

“young worker from a good family; [...] a clean record, he would never repeated those behaviors”.

“la Repubblica”, 02/06/2012 ME, FROM MODEL BOYFRIEND TO JAILER. IN THIS WAY I CAME OUT FROM STALKING TUNNEL

“merchant, pretty face, well dressed, gentle manner, quiet voice. The bourgeois next door, to which an enforcement notice has changed the life, unexpected perpetrator [...] aware of his mistakes and has taken treatment [...]”

“la Repubblica”, 11/13/2012: HE KILLED HIS WIFE STABBING HER FOUR TIMES

“My wife was depressed - he says through tears - She had a tumor and this destroyed her. She had reached the limit. She kept saying to me, “Please, kill me. I do not want to see anyone. Kill me and let our son in custody”.

“Corriere della Sera”, 05/25/2012: WHY DID WE DO IT? MEN SPEAK - SHE INSULTED ME, I GRASPED HER TO THE WALL. WHAT IS THIS THING, IT’S REALLY ME?

“[...] It started well this way, with an email to the Pink Phone, the path of A. to exit from the hell. From the end of October he took part to “sharing meetings” organized by the association “The circle of men” and attempts to explain, first of all to himself, what happened[...]”

“Corriere della Sera”, 27/08/2012: BLINDED BY JELOUSY, HE STABS HIS COHABITEE

The perpetrator is described as a “kind and quiet man” [...] he was able to go back alert, he realized the gravity of the situation, and then he called for help.

In the 50% (2002) and 56% (2012) of cases examined the perpetrator has already accomplished in the past domestic violence. Only 4% in 2002 and 1% in 2012 respectively, the perpetrator had no report of violent behavior. Concerning the nationality -in both years- the specification of foreign victims increase from 6% to 16%. The percentage of the foreign perpetrators increases by 14% while the rate of the Italian perpetrator decreases to 7%. Regarding the type of damage we observed a considerable increase of 30% in physical and psychological in 2012. Physical hurts decrease by 46% from 65% in 2002 to 19% in 2012%. Comparing the two years it's possible to notice a decrease from 95% to 72% about the police intervention. In 2012 in the 26% of the articles this intervention isn't specified, while it represents 0% in 2002. From the 2002 to 2012 the intervention not specified of first aid services increases by 24%.

4. Conclusions

From our study is clear that a new type of visibility on the domestic violence issues is now possible: we have 46 articles in 2002 and 304 in the 2012. Probably this could be possible thanks to the diffusion of the internet network and also for the online version that can be updated all day long. It seems that the media in the last years are more sensitive to this themes, also because, perhaps, the women can do a coming out of their condition with the support of the local services. There is an higher numbers of the articles published in the local pages rather than in the national ones. The increasing of articles in the Chronicle underline, from our point of view, that the public opinion and the journalist, is closer to the phenomenon than ten years ago. “la Repubblica” - the most widely read by women- publishes more denouncing articles, mostly used by female journalists; it is visible that the number of women dealing with women has increased (Lloyd, & Ramon, 2013).

Data confirmed an increasing of stalking media coverage in 2012: from 3% in 2002 to 29% in 2012: the explanation can be identified in the fact that it has been introduced in the penal code but also because, in some way, can be considered a very new word. The results shown that the aggression is never identified as a product of “raptus” or acts of sudden violence, in fact there is a very low percentage of the perpetrators presented as non-violent before the episode of violence. Often journalists explain that the reason of domestic violence is a burst: this contributes to a distorted point of view of the phenomenon. In no articles there is an explicit refers to the telephone number 1522, the one to prevent and fight DV. The focus is rather on the intervention than on prevention. As shown in the extracts above mentioned we suppose that this representation of DV diverts the attention from the seriousness of the problem. It seems that there is a preference to generally explain the phenomenon rather than face deeply the problem; due to that we would like to point out the importance of correct information from the newspapers to avoid the misunderstanding in the reader on the significance of the phenomenon. It's important to remember that also if the hidden number is a very high percentage, in the last years the denouncing of the perpetrator increased exponentially. People and viewpoints that are included in the newspapers are perceived as more credible than those that are excluded. The content and the form of the articles “create tracks for a train of thought - and once on that track, it's hard to get off” (Richmond & El Monte, 2014, p. 4). In the next future it will be necessary to fight the silence on DV and IPV to permit the coming out to that women that daily suffered alone. We believe that the newspapers could be a “place” where the correct information could found “the strength” of the women.

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