

Distr.: General
26 April 2023

English

Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

Group of Experts on Gender Statistics

Geneva, Switzerland, 10–12 May 2023

Item F of the provisional agenda

New data sources and emerging issues

Integrating Survey Data and Big Data. Results Based on Istat's Work about Gender Stereotypes

Note by Istat*

Abstract

Within the framework of gender statistics and the need to measure the different gender-based dimensions that hamper gender equality, a central role is played by stereotypes on gender roles. They limit the access of women and girls to education, work, career and more in general prevent their full advancement. They also feed the cultural context where violent relationships find their genesis and justification. For several reasons, the measurement of gender stereotypes is essential to understand causes of violence and their monitoring over time is a key tool for policies' evaluation in terms of cultural changes. Nevertheless, collecting data on such a relevant topic is not an easy task. This paper will present the Istat approach to study this topic considering different data sources, as the more traditional population surveys and the new alternative sources, as the big data.

The paper will describe the methodological approach adopted within the surveys on stereotypes about gender roles and the social image of gender based violence (GBV). The survey on adult population was carried out in 2018 with astonishing results and will be repeated in March 2023. Still in 2023, a module will address these topics among children and young students (11-19 years old). Information will be complemented exploring the stereotypes on gender roles and on gender based violence in the social networks. At this aim, the sentiment and emotional analysis are applied to social media messages. The use of big data represents an added value, because these experimental statistics allow to reveal what happens in the social media communication about this topic, led to discover different and new gender stereotypes among our society and help in shedding a light on the intersectionality of the discrimination grounds.

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I. Introduction

1. Within the framework of gender statistics and the need to measure the different gender-based dimensions that hamper gender equality, a central role is played by stereotypes on gender roles. They limit the access of women and girls to education, work, career and more in general prevent their full advancement. They also feed the cultural context where violent relationships find their genesis and justification. For several reasons, the measurement of gender stereotypes is essential to understand causes of violence and their monitoring over time is a key tool for policies' evaluation in terms of cultural changes.
2. The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, the so-called Istanbul Convention (2011), focuses on stereotyping as a major cause of violence. The Istanbul Convention in fact, consider the importance to measure and to monitor gender stereotypes and at the same time points out their importance for the violence prevention. In particular article 12 invites Parties "to promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behaviour of women and men with a view to eradicating prejudices, customs, traditions and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women". Article 14 focuses on the role of education to eliminate stereotypes "Parties shall take, where appropriate, the necessary steps to include teaching material on issues such as equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships, gender-based violence against women and the right to personal integrity, adapted to the evolving capacity of learners, in formal curricula and at all levels of education" and it underlines the need to work in the same direction also in informal activities, as sports and leisure activities.
3. Studying gender based stereotypes is in fact very important to understand the culture of a country. Surveys on gender stereotypes have several aims. First of all they are important to understand the level of gender stereotypes that corresponds to a specific culture, a society, and characterize a country. Secondly, to study stereotypes means to monitor over time changes in the culture and the effectiveness of education policies and it is helpful to evaluate the strategies undertaken by the States to reach gender equality. Thirdly, to assess the level of gender stereotypes and the tolerance level of violence of a specific country is also helpful to be correlated with the prevalence survey results. The idea is that a higher awareness of "women situation" can be linked with a higher ability to disclose and recognize gender based violence (GBV). Nevertheless this correlation could be not valid for all kind of violence typology: more for sexual harassment or harassment in general, or for humiliating and degrading sexual activity, where the perception could be more important, while it can be less meaningful in case of "more objective" violence forms that are described through acts, behaviour based, like physical violence is, or some kind of rape.
4. Nevertheless, collecting data on such a relevant topic is not an easy task due to methodological constraints and the sensitive nature of the topics covered.
5. This paper will present the Istat approach to study this topic considering different data sources, as the more traditional population surveys and the new alternative sources, as the big data. More in particular, the aim of the paper is threefold: 1) at one hand, to discuss the methodological approach used by Istat while conducting in 2018 the first nationwide survey on gender-based stereotypes in terms of overall survey production, survey-instrument development and data collection technique used; 2) at the other hand, to present the main results obtained; 3) to discuss to what extent the informative capacity of population-surveys can be enhanced by their integration with big data, such as those related to the sentiment

analysis. In the conclusions, it will be presented the lessons learned and the process that has led to the design and conduction of the second nationwide survey on gender-role stereotypes and social image of violence to be conducted in April-June 2023.

II. The methodological approach

6. Data on gender role stereotypes and the social image of violence were collected by Istat in 2018 through a dedicated module developed by Istat as part of a Collaboration Agreement with the National Equal Opportunities Department, within the framework of the Integrated Information System on violence against women: a multiple-source system that will track data on the phenomenon of violence against women in its various forms and that will allow monitoring this phenomenon both qualitatively and quantitatively.
7. In this regard data on gender stereotypes and the social image of violence seeks to be the tool for analysing cultural models and some of the factors influencing attitudes towards violence against women among the adult population, considering that violence against women is rooted in the more general asymmetry of gender.
8. Within this framework, the need for data on gender role stereotypes and the social image of violence is of the outmost importance in order to provide the research community and stakeholders operating in the field of preventing and combating gender-based violence (GBV) with data that are able to underline the social and cultural dimension in which GBV originates and is perpetrated.
9. All this considered, one of the main challenge was that of developing a survey module with questions able to measure gender role stereotypes and, for the first time, opinions on the acceptability of violence, its permeation and its causes as well as stereotypes about sexual violence. Istat already studied gender stereotypes in two other surveys, the Time use survey, carried out in 2014, and the Survey on discrimination on the base of gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity, 2011. Very helpful to design our module were also the Australian experience (2014), the Spain survey (as part of the National Strategic Plan to Eliminate Violence against women 2013-2016), the Daphne Project, the Eurobarometer data collections 2014 and 2017, requested by the European Commission.
10. Based on previous Istat's experience and the other relevant experiences examined at the international level, a dedicated module was proposed in order to answer to the evidenced purposes.

Table 1

Thematic areas and research purposes, Survey on Gender stereotypes and the social image of violence 2018.

Questions	Purposes
Battery on stereotyped gender roles at work, education, in the family	To know the level of gender stereotyping in a country
Tolerance (acceptance) towards intimate partner violence	To understand how is pervasive the culture of violence and how the population is aware of intimate partner violence
Battery on the possible causes of intimate partner violence	To understand the population's awareness of intimate partner violence and opinions about its causes
Battery on stereotypes towards sexual violence	To know the social representation of sexual violence and how is widespread the idea of the responsibility of women as main cause of violence (victim blaming attitude)

Questions	Purposes
The women/men representation	To know the social representation that women and men have of each other and of themselves, to look in a soft way at the gender stereotypes
Socio-demographic data (sex, age, education attainment, variables on socio-economic status, citizenship, health conditions) and questions on life satisfaction	Variables useful for analysis and data interpretation. These variables can be at the beginning of the questionnaire

A. The survey instrument

11. For these reasons, also in accordance with the Istanbul Convention, the module was organised into six main areas:
 - 1) stereotypes about gender roles
 - 2) stereotypes about sexual violence
 - 3) the perception of the extent of the violence
 - 4) the causes of intimate partner violence
 - 5) the acceptability of intimate partner violence and
 - 6) the reactions to violence.
12. In order to collect data on stereotypes about gender roles, the following questions have been posed with response modalities ranging from 1 (Strongly agree) to 4 (Strongly disagree):
 - 1) When jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to men over women;
 - 2) It's up to the man to provide for the family's financial needs;
 - 3) It's up to the man to take the most important decisions about the family;
 - 4) Men are less suited to do housework;
 - 5) For the man, more than for the woman it is very important to be successful at work.
13. In regard to acceptability of intimate partner violence (always acceptable, acceptable under certain circumstances, never acceptable), the following questions have been posed, asking about the behaviours' acceptability:
 - 1) A young man slaps his girlfriend because she flirted with another man;
 - 2) In a couple's relationship, it is normal that a slap might occasionally occur;
 - 3) A man habitually control his wife's/partner's mobile phone and activities on social media (Facebook, chats, etc.).
14. The under-reported nature of the phenomenon has several implications both in terms of designing prevention and counter-measures to fight it as well as in terms of awareness among the population and the violence survivors. As a matter of fact, a better understanding of the phenomenon also means greater awareness of it and thus is one of the factors that may influence responses to violence both individually and collectively.
15. The perceived phenomenon has been collected through the following question: "In general, how common do you think the violence (physical and/or sexual) that women suffer from their partners/husbands is in Italy? Very common; Fairly common; Not very common; Not at all common; Does not know; Not answered."
16. Data have been collected also on the perceived causes that lead to violence against women. The question used was: "Some men are violent with their partners/wives. In your opinion, why is this?"

- 1) Because they have difficulty managing anger
 - 2) Because they consider women to be property, as something they own
 - 3) Because as children they had (seen or suffered) negative experiences of family violence
 - 4) For religious reasons
 - 5) Because they do not stand women's empowerment
 - 6) Because they abuse drugs or alcohol
 - 7) Due to a need to feel superior to their partners/wives
17. Exploring the perceived causes that lead to violence against women occur within intimate partner relationships means exploring that possible justifications for men committing violence against their female partners. Moreover, it means also collecting data on the perceived factors that ascribe violence respectively to individual factors related to those perpetrating the violence, the responsibility of the victim and more generally on the occurrence of certain special situations.
 18. The questionnaire collects data also on the reactions to violence to measure the citizens' familiarity with some services and, on the other hand, seeks to gather attitudes towards the victims of violence and the awareness of the complexity of the pathway out of violence. The way people would react in case of violence is of the utmost importance in order to understand both the elements that can impact on the reporting behaviour of survivors of GBV, the help-seeking behaviour, as well as the behaviour of relevant others in terms of providing victims of GBV with the appropriate advice.
 19. Understanding stereotypes about sexual violence is of the utmost importance, also considering the role that the definition of violence itself has on the self-definition of the person suffering violence and its role in the help-seeking and reporting behaviour.
 20. To this aim, a battery of questions that investigate the extent of stereotyped opinions on the possible justifications for sexual violence, that place responsibility on the victim and on the occurrence of certain special situations, has been developed.
 - 1) Women can provoke sexual violence by how they dress
 - 2) Women who don't want to have a sexual intercourse are able to avoid it
 - 3) Serious women don't get raped
 - 4) If a husband/partner forces his wife/partner to have sex against her will, it isn't sexual violence
 - 5) 5) Faced with a sexual proposal, women often say no but in reality mean yes
 - 6) If a woman suffers sexual violence when she is affected by alcohol or drugs, she is at least partially responsible

III. The main results of the survey

21. In Italy the most common stereotypes about gender roles are: 'for the man, more than for the woman, it is very important to be successful at work' (32.5%), 'men are less suited to do housework' (31.5%), 'it is up to the man to provide for the family's financial needs' (27.9%). The statement with the lowest level of agreement is 'it is up to the man to take the most important decisions about the family' (8.8%). Without particular differences between men and women, 58.8% of the population (aged 18-74 years) have these stereotypes, which are more widespread as age increases (65.7% of those aged 60 to 74 and 45.3% of people aged 18 to 29) and among the less educated.
22. On the subject of intimate partner violence, 7.4% of people think it is always or under certain circumstances acceptable that 'a young man slaps his girlfriend because she flirted

with another man', and 6.2% think that in a relationship a slap might occasionally occur. Regarding control, however, more than double that number (17.7%) think it is always or under certain circumstances acceptable that a man habitually control his wife's/girlfriend's cell phone and/or activities on social media. It is very worrying that younger people in this case find it acceptable twice more the average.

23. In the territory, Basilicata (38.1%) and Campania (35%) have the highest. But the opinions of men and women differ by region.
24. To the question about why some men are violent with their girlfriends/wives, 77.7% of those interviewed answered because women are considered as property (84.9% of women and 70.4% of men), 75.5% because men abuse drugs or alcohol, and another 75% because of men's need to feel stronger than their girlfriends/wives. The difficulty some men have in managing their anger is indicated by 70.6%, especially by women with about 8 percentage points more than men.
25. Regarding a woman who has suffered violence from her boyfriend/husband, 64.5% of the population would recommend reporting it to the police and 33.2% would recommend leaving the partner. Out of the population, 20.4% would direct the woman to anti-violence centres (25.6% of women versus 15.0% of men) and 18.2% would advise her to use other services or professionals (counselling public services, psychologists, lawyers, etc.). Only 2.0% would suggest calling the dedicated national helpline 1522.
26. Looking at stereotypes towards sexual violence, the prejudice that assigns responsibility to the woman who suffers sexual violence persists. 39.3% of the population believes that a woman is able to avoid having sexual intercourse if she really doesn't want to. The percentage of those who think that women can provoke sexual violence by how they dress is also high (23.9%). Also, 15.1% hold the opinion that a woman who suffers sexual violence when affected by alcohol or drugs is at least partially responsible.
27. The application of multidimensional analyses at data, highlights situations and types of individuals diversified based on the position taken on gender role stereotypes and sexual violence, increasing from slightly or not at all stereotyped positions to somewhat or very stereotyped positions and the type of advice they would offer a woman who suffers violence and the different motives ascribed for violence. First of all it is important to underline the strict link between prejudices and the acceptability of violence.
28. The output concerns five clusters, two clusters (36.3% of those interviewed) are individuals with the most stereotyped convictions, 2 clusters are individuals less supportive of stereotypes (who make up 62% of the total) and, finally, one cluster characterised by indifference (1.8%).
29. In the first two clusters are individuals with few or no stereotypes on gender roles and sexual violence, who do not believe that reports of sexual violence are false, do not think that women have the responsibility for sexual violence suffered, and do not believe that men should be privileged in the labour sphere, and do not think that it is acceptable that a man control his partner. The two clusters differ in the advice they would give a woman who suffers violence and on the opinion of the causes of violence.
30. These clusters are characterised by a greater preponderance of individuals with higher education, who are employed, mostly unmarried and young. Women are more present in a relatively greater percentage in these two clusters (56.6% in the first and 53.1% in the second), but there is also a significant presence of men.

31. The fourth cluster, the smallest one (1.8%) contains individuals without a position, as they did not provide opinions on possible reasons for violence, and state they do not know how or do not want to give advice to any violence survivors so as not to intrude. More than 60% of the people in this cluster are male, while the most associated age group is those aged 45-59.
32. The third and fifth clusters are the types of individuals with the most stereotypes.
33. The fifth group, or 8.5%, features the most extreme positions. Regarding gender roles, they believe that men should be guaranteed the job if there is a choice between a man and a woman, including because men must provide for his family's financial needs. They believe the woman is partially responsible for sexual violence she suffers: if she is a victim, it means that she provoked it or is not 'serious' enough, if she is drunk or using drugs she is partially responsible and, in any case, reports of violence are often not true. In addition, if the partner demands sex, it is never sexual violence, and they consider violence acceptable and normal within a couple's relationship.
34. The third cluster (27.8%) has more nuanced positions than the previous one, although the responses reveal that 'being successful at work is more important for the man', 'the man is less competent at housework', and they consider it acceptable that a man control his partner's activities on social media. If they were to give advice to survivors, they would recommend talking to her partner, but not reporting the event.
35. In these two final clusters are people with the lowest education levels, who are married and in older age groups (almost 35% are aged between 60 and 74) and male (more than 60% in the fifth group).
36. A look at the variables on work satisfaction indicates that the cluster of individuals holding more stereotypes is also more characterised by dissatisfaction related to work compensation, career prospects and the climate of professional relationships.

IV. Lessons learned from big data analysis

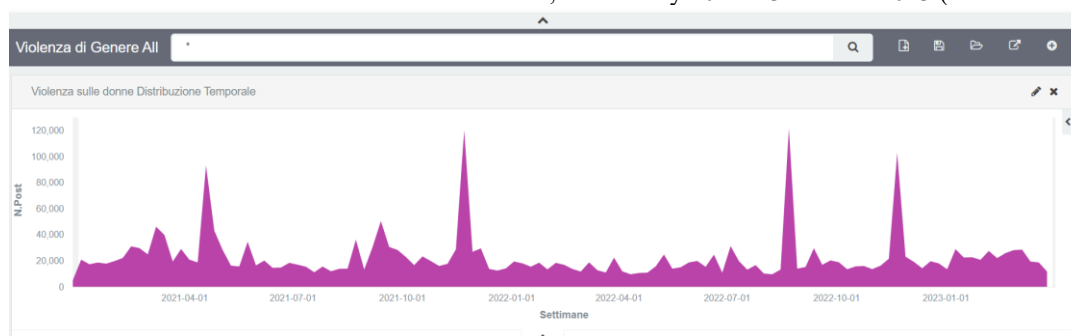
37. In line with the multi-source approach that characterizes the approach adopted by Istat in studying and collecting data on gender-based violence, it's worth mentioning within this paper also the methodological effort results of Istat in order to analyse Big Data, as an additional source to be considered for the study of violence against women.
38. In 2020 Istat started an experimental study to use the Big Data and, in particular, the contents of social media, to gather some information on the attitudes towards Gender based Violence (GBV) and the Gender stereotypes among the population. The aim is to analyse how GBV and the related stereotypes are represented and perceived in such media. Exploring the use of these source of data is in line with the European Statistical System net framework related to the web intelligence source of data and their recognised role to better understand our society (Bucharest memorandum European Statistical System Committee, DGINS2018 - Bucharest Memorandum adopted – ESS). Moreover the study intends analyse and monitor the different uses of social media: when the main effect is rising awareness or, on the opposite, when they lead to reinforce stereotypes. An additional reason to further develop methods of analysis of social media contents is the fact that they can be used also to perpetrate some forms of violence (cyberviolence, cyberbullying).
39. In the experimental study, the contents of social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, press review websites) are selected on the basis of specific keywords and are processed using a Natural Language Processing (NLP) system, using deep learning methods. This allows to

apply the sentiment and emotion analysis to the contents of interest (buzz). They are collected on a dedicated platform that shows dashboards with the main findings.

40. Between January 2021 and March 2023 there were almost 3 million buzz related to the topic Gender Based Violence. The vast majority is represented by messages using Twitter: tweets are almost 90% of the total buzz. Monitoring the volume of buzz over time, the increase of number of buzz is visible in peaks that correspond to events, such as a crime occurred against a woman that raised the attention of the media, or special events such as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Table 2

Number of buzz related to Gender Based Violence, 1st January 2021 – 31 March 2023 (absolute values).



41. The topics that are considered in this analysis as related to gender based violence are several, taking into account the complexity of such type of violence. Therefore also issues that refer to gender stereotypes are included. An example is the body-shaming, which shows how thin is the line between verbal violence and the spread of stereotypes linked to the body of women. The experimental study allows to see over time the interest raised by this topic, the volume of messages that generates, the prevalent sentiment but also the words used to express them. In a similar way, Istat is further analysing the language used about gender based violence in the social media, with the aim to identify additional dimensions of analysis: for example attitudes expressing aggression and attitudes expressing awareness. The study is currently ongoing.
42. With reference to the goals of the experimental study, the main limit of the use of social media contents as source of data is represented by the lack of information on the sex, age, education and geographical area of the users. This prevent from identifying different kind of profile among users. However the analysis of social media contents offer the opportunity to study our society from a new perspective, a different way that can be complementary compared to the information gathered through the traditional sample surveys. Contents of social media involve some groups that might be excluded by the Istat Survey on gender roles stereotypes, such as the young population (under 18). Moreover contents of social media can be used to know the new expressions of stereotypes, evolving over time, the words and events that shape them, in multiple forms. The analysis can help in shedding a light on the intersectionality of the discrimination grounds: studying the language and the stereotyped opinions used against women allow to study those used also or additionally against other vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, the LGBTQIA+ communities, ethnic minorities.

V. Conclusion and future development

43. Based on the survey results it appears clear the long work we still have to do. Data from the survey do represent a solid informative tool that can be used in order to effectively design and implement policies that aim at combating gender-role stereotypes and stereotypes on gender-based violence. More in particular, there is the need to work more actively at the cultural level, taking into account that stereotypes do have an intersectional nature and data to be collected have to be as much granular as possible, collected and made available on a regular basis and guaranteeing comparability across time and space.
44. As a matter of fact, women and men do not have so different opinions, the young generation and the more educated people are the less stereotyped. This suggests that variables like sex, age and education have to be considered both in terms of data collection (i.e. variables to be considered in the survey instrument design, sampling typology and technique) as well as in terms of variables useful to contextualize stereotypes. Moreover, considering the relevance played by education, it emerges the need for having policies in schools and training as essential to drive towards a major equality.
45. Based on the data collected, another area of interest that deems to be further explored is that of work environment and working conditions of men and women since it does represent an area of intersectionality in terms of bringing together objective elements of inequality between men and woman that are supported by gender-role stereotypes. The relevance of data on gender-role stereotypes in this regard is essential to continuously measure whether efforts made in terms of policies and legal instruments, recommendations are accompanied by changes also in the general population's opinions and stereotypes. In other terms data on stereotypes do represent also an indicator for measuring the population's awareness on the topic.
46. Looking at the results concerning the opinions and reactions of the population to an episode of intimate-partner-violence, the data sheds light on the intersectional nature of the reporting behaviour of victims of intimate partner violence, as determined, among others, by individual-level and meso-level factors. The role of the relevant others in terms of advising violence survivors to contact the police, anti-violence-centers or to leave the violent partner is an essential element in the long help-seeking and reporting behaviour. At the same time, the more the institutions (police forces, anti-violence centres) are known and considered by relevant others and persons suffering violence, the more they may better act in order to support victims.
47. Analysing together the element of population's awareness and the results of big data analysis, it emerges also the need to further explore the "on-line" behaviour of the population and more specifically in regard to themes related to gender roles and intimate partner violence.
48. All this considered, besides the inputs gained in terms of broader understanding of the phenomenon, also inputs for a deeper and appropriate data collection instruments emerged. All this resulted in two main areas of work for Istat: 1) at one hand, a new dedicated survey on gender-roles and social image of violence has been designed to be conducted in the period April-June 2023, with a new survey instrument; 2) at the other hand, given the relevance of the variable age in explaining the phenomenon and its cultural centrality, questions on gender-role stereotypes are planned to be included also in a dedicated survey for youths (11-19 years old).

49. In regard to the new survey on gender-role stereotypes in the adult population, the questionnaire has been integrated with reference to different questions with the aim of better understanding the basis for gender-roles and their justifications. For instance, the following items have been included in regard to the population's awareness regarding intimate partner violence (IPV). When asking for the reasons "why always more often it is spoken about IPV", the following items have been included:
 - Because violence against women increased
 - Because victims are ashamed about the violence and speak more about it
 - Because there are more initiatives/services for the protection of women survivors
 - Because newspaper/TV/media give more attention to the phenomenon
50. In order to understand to what extent the population is active on the social media with specifically reference to themes related to gender-roles and, stereotypes and IPV, two dedicated questions have been included:
51. "Do you use social network (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) to express opinions or take part in debates about different topics? Yes, regularly / Yes, rarely / No, never"
52. "Has it happened to you to express opinions or take part in debates in the social networks about the topics we mentioned? For example the differences between sexes, the roles women and men should have, the violence against women. Yes/No".
53. The questions concerning the use of social media allows to describe the profiles of social media users, in terms of their opinions about gender roles and violence against woman. This information will be used to have an idea of the users beyond the social media contents analysed in the experimental study on attitudes towards gender based violence in the social media.
54. Further developments in the use of contents of social media will make possible studying gender based violence and the related stereotypes in a new and more comprehensive perspective. New forms of gender-based stereotypes and gender-based violence can be revealed looking closer at the social media. The conditions of women might be described in fact over time monitoring the spread of the most common stereotypes, using the powerful tool of the sample survey. At the same time it is crucial to consider that stereotypes among the population evolve in their forms and expressions and the social media can be the space where quickly they are more visible. As well as, these analysis give light to the intersectionality of the discrimination grounds.

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