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Collecting and integrating data on violence against Children. The Italian case between the national and international level

Note by ISTAT*

Abstract

Preventing and combating Violence Against Children (VAC) requires a complete picture of the phenomenon, and data availability and comparability is crucial to understand its extent and characteristics, both at national and international level. However, the current data collected in the EU and worldwide on this topic does not provide enough comparable information on the scale of violence, as well as on its characteristics and on victims' profiles. The identified gaps hamper policies addressing these issues. To this aim, the Italian National institute of Statistics (ISTAT) within the framework of the project DORA, (EU - CERV-2022-DAPHNE), is addressing the topic, with particular emphasis on the

(1) identification and systematization of all the sources currently available on VAC, pinpointing strengths and weaknesses;

(2) estimation of the scope of the phenomenon, its several dimensions and risk factors;

(3) definition of a new framework for measuring VAC including content and methodologies;

(4) support the statistical capability building on official statistics on VAC at the national and international level.

The paper aims at presenting both the methodological approach used as well as preliminary results, highlighting the relevance of NSOs, based on the work of ISTAT, in promoting an integrated system of data collection on VAC.

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I.   Introduction

"Violence against children cuts across boundaries of geography, race, class, religion and culture. It occurs in homes, schools and streets; in places of work and entertainment, and in care and detention centres. Perpetrators include parents, family members, teachers, caretakers, law enforcement authorities and other children. Some children are particularly vulnerable because of gender, race, ethnic origin, disability or social status. And no country is immune, whether rich or poor."[1]

1. Recognition of human rights obligations to eliminate violence against children has intensified with the adoption and almost universal ratification of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC). The latter underlines children's status as rights holders. The first declaration was the Universal declaration of the rights of the child, 1959, and important were also the WHO World Report on Violence and Health, 2002, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Adolescent, 1989. This international framework has been reinforced at European level within the EU Strategy on the rights of the child (adopted on 24 March 2021) aimed at preventing and combating Violence Against Children (VAC). To this aim, it is crucial to have a solid knowledge of the ***phenomenon characteristics*** and its *extent*. However, the current data collected in the EU on this topic does not provide enough comparable information on the scale of violence, as well as on its characteristics and victims' profiles. There are gaps at all levels: local, national, and European, which hamper policies addressing these issues. The current situation also needs further attention because the Covid-19 pandemic heightened children's vulnerability. Notwithstanding, only accurate, robust, pertinent, timely, and comparable data can portray the phenomenon of VAC, its roots, and its consequences in a way useful to produce sound policies aimed at preventing and combating it. Focus on minors has been deemed crucial for a long time. Moreover only a small proportion of acts of violence against children is reported and investigated, and few perpetrators held to account. In many parts of the world there are no systems responsible for recording, or thoroughly investigating, reports of violence against children. Where official statistics based on reports of violence in the home and other settings exist, they dramatically underestimate the true magnitude of the problem. There are various reasons for this lack of reporting.

2. Thus, as a result, there are two main problems to address:

    a) lack of data and their comparison at international level,

    b) under-reporting and difficulties to gather data.

3. In order to try to respond to these main issues Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) started a project on Data integratiOn for acknowledging Risks And protecting children from violence (DORA) within the priority 4 of CERV-2022-DAPHNE "Supporting and improving national data collection on Violence Against Children (VAC)"[2]. It will contribute to the elaboration and delivery of more integrated and accurate data addressing VAC including Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting, and the improvement of data analysis, fostering accurate knowledge of the intrinsic characteristics of the phenomenon. The general objective of this proposal is to identify the existing informative gaps on VAC and to elaborate statistical solutions able to combine, integrate, and thus produce refined and of

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[1] United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children, World Report on violence against children, ISBN-10 92-95057-51-1, ISBN-13 978-92-95057-51-7 p.XI.

[2] The project is in co-partnership with the University of Bologna, Brescia, Milano Bicocca, Napoli Federico II and Ares 2.0.

high quality data. By focusing on Italy and directly involving, among other partners, the National Institute of Statistics, DORA will produce the following outputs: (1) identification and systematisation of all the sources currently available on VAC, pinpointing strengths and weaknesses; (2) estimation of the scope of the phenomenon, its several dimensions and risk factors; (3) definition of a new framework for measuring VAC; (4) analysis of the phenomenon through data modelling and integration; (5) support the statistical capability building on official statistics on VAC at the national and international level; (6) advancing data analysis and methodology to understand the extent of FGM/C among girls.

4. This activity pursuit the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Goals 16 and 5, which address some forms of violence that also harm children, such as punishment from caregivers, sexual violence and human trafficking, among other harmful practices and is in line with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) - Task force on Children for the Conference of European Statisticians (CES as well as of the UNICEF) work to design the International classification and operational definitions of VAC for statistical purposes. Accordingly, VAC refers to: *"[...] all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse [...]. Physical violence includes fatal and non-fatal physical violence, corporal punishment, and other forms of cruel or degrading treatment. Psychological violence refers to mental, verbal, or emotional abuse. Neglect or negligent treatment includes physical, psychological or emotional neglect, educational neglect, neglect of children's physical or mental health, and abandonment. Sexual abuse and exploitation include the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any sexual activity, the use of children in commercial sexual exploitation as well as in audio or visual images of child sexual abuse, child prostitution, sexual slavery, trafficking and sale of children for sexual purposes, and forced marriage"*[3].

5. To pursuit DORA aims, ISTAT is adopting a multi-sources approach that, as it will be explained below, focuses on different kind of data collections, and use both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, involving different stakeholders, in designing the appropriate framework for measuring violence against children.

II. Steps forward the measurement of Violence against Children

6. Defining a theoretical framework and, accordingly, availability and comparability of meaningful data are two main concerns that hamper measurement of VAC. These are related to the definitional issues and to the possibility to measure it. Our work was oriented firstly in defining what is violence and what not, the identification of the main forms of violence, that we defined as "domains of violence".

A. Setting the VAC domains of analysis.

7. Considering the high dark figure affecting the phenomenon, in light of the difficulty to report it, it is essential to take into account the multifaceted nature of VAC and the different forms and aspects that any definition should consider[4].

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[3] Unicef, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.
[4] See United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Division of Data Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, International Classification of Violence against Children (ICVAC), June 2023

8. Therefore, the project has recognized the need to go beyond the collection and analysis of further data on VAC in order to define properly and exhaustively domains of analysis enabling to establish the dimensions and its indicators (an, potentially, the construction of a synthetic index to monitor over time).

B. Measuring the domains

9. After defining a domain setting, the second order of problems pertains to its measurement, i.e., the collection of data. As far as the measurement, it is essential to consider:

   - the difficulty to collect data on VAC, due to its sensitive nature, that is even more sensitive due to the involvement of minors, with all the ethical cautions to be taken into consideration;

   - the need of different sources of data when considering the several forms of violence encompassed within VAC;

   - the scarcity of available data coming from different sources providing thus a scattered picture on the phenomenon;

   - the need for an integrated and harmonized data ecosystem that, other than measuring VAC, is able to measure and frame also its preventive and causal factors that impact on the development of VAC and its emerging new manifestations, acting both at micro, meso and macro level;

   - the consideration of the preventive and protective factors relevant to VAC, such as: data on the wellbeing of children and youth, access to school, access to justice and social protection services.

10. To this aim, we focused on and undertakes the following tasks:

    - Reconstruction of direct and indirect statistical sources containing information on VAC, highlighting strong and weak points of the current situation in Italy;

    - Recognition of data collection and dissemination on VAC in the EU NSO;

    - Increasing understanding of existing data and analysis on VAC;

    - Identification of current gaps in order to highlight the next steps towards improving current statistical data and indicators on VAC.

11. We implemented these tasks to the Italian case for different reasons: a) a variety of data on VAC is available, but it is scattered. It comes from different sources (surveys, administrative records, data from registers) and collected by different bodies, b) a comprehensive analysis of the topic is still lacking, in particular regarding any attempt to integrate data coming from different sources. In this regard, the Italian case is of particular relevance because it represents a situation common to many EU-MS and focusing first on a MS will then allow to eventually extend also to others – in a harmonized way – suggestions and tools.

    a) Concerning the a) point, Italy represents an emblematic cases where data sources, from one side, give useful insight on VAC, but, from the other, they are not specifically designed for this aim. For example, they include data from the ISTAT sample surveys, like the victimization survey and the violence against women survey, that are not

focused on children, but that can offer retrospective information on some topics, or for instance the ISTAT multipurpose survey, that provides interesting indicators on children wellbeing, or the survey on Children and adolescent that measures bullying. At the same time, data from registers and NGOs, like "Telefono Azzurro" and other helplines provide important data on the emerged part of the phenomenon. Also data from anti-violence centres and residential shelters for women, as well as data from helpline "1522" against violence and stalking, have some focus on girls and provide important information on violence witnessed by children. The panorama is more complete considering other data from registers, as the social health and social care/assistance services; data from the Ministry of Education on school dropout; statistics from law enforcement and judicial sources on minors who are victims of all forms of violence (including child pornography and child prostitution); the database on homicide from the Ministry of Interior with the number of children killed during the murder of their mothers and the children orphaned after their mothers' killings; some data on trafficked children that are collected by the Department of Equality Opportunity; data from the Department of Juvenile Justice for identifying young offenders.

b) About the recognition of the models adopted among European NSO for measuring VAC, we conducted a desk analysis and a check-list with different questions on data availability, definitions, data collection and dissemination has been also distributed to the different EU contacts points.

C. The mixed methodology: rationale and added value

12. Definition of VAC domains of analysis has been conducted through a mixed methodology (qualitative and quantitative methods) by:

a) using focus groups and qualitative interviews with NGOs, stakeholders, and experts in the field;

b) analyzing of literature and of existing quantitative researches on the issue, with reference to data and their metadata, identifying definition(s) used, timeframe, target population, geographical coverage, time-space comparability, nature of the source, dissemination techniques, regularity of data collection/collation.

13. This mixed methodology makes it possible to build a general framework to better define the domains and dimensions of analysis and, at the same time, to assess the quality of data available to measure these domains. The strength of this approach relies on the direct and participatory involvement of key actors and stakeholders (public, private, institutional, and non-institutional) directly concerned with VAC and child well-being more generally. Only in this way, it is possible to reach a good representation of the VAC, as well as of its preventive and protective indicators.

14. Based on ISTAT's experienced approach aimed at measuring violence against women, the methodological choices emphasize the need to adopt and apply a multi-source approach in order to gain detailed data on the different forms of violence and, at the other hand, to enhance the informative value of different data sources, with specific reference to the producers of data such and NGOs and other actors actively engaged in fighting VAC. The added value of such an approach is twofold: while each source can provide unique and detailed insights on the phenomenon, at the other hand a proper integration of different data sources lead to a mutual and common improvements in regard to content and

methodological aspects, also with the aim of reducing the statistical burden on the respondents.

15. The role of the qualitative phase within the project was of the outmost importance in order to understand, the concept of violence, the subtle boarder between violence, abuse and Adverse Child Experience (ACE), what violence is and what is not, the main variables - acting at macro, meso and micro-level - that impact on the phenomenon. Considering that children can be victims of violence at home and in the family, in schools and educational settings, in care and justice institutions, in public and private spaces, in the community, and in the mass media, offline and online, stakeholders and key actors dealing with these aspects have been identified and interviewed.

16. Qualitative study allowed also to evaluate aspects cover the researches' methodologies, such as the role of both children and their families in the production of data collection, which are the needs for preventing VAC and protecting the victims. Their involvement represented also an opportunity to identify the alternative sources of data different from those coming from the official statistics and discuss their possible integration within a broader multi-source data system on VAC. More in particular, the knowledge and daily operational experience of experts in the field does represent a fundamental step to understand what kind of data and information may be available and the procedural steps behind their production. This allowed to better explore the places, the forms and the modality of VAC, to have an insight of causes and roots of violence, as well of consequences. Dealing with different data producers and sources has further helped in highlighting critical elements in terms of data quality and comparability due to the nature of the data (administrative vs. survey data), the reason and the institutional context in which data are generated and collected, the timeframe in which are collected, the different target population data refer to.

III. Preliminary results

17. The main goals of qualitative analysis (focus groups and interviews with key experts and stakeholders) have highlighted important questions related to:

- Which are the minors target of violence;

- The consequences of violence;

- Main causes and risk factors of violence;

- The perpetrators of violence (adult and minor).

18. Relevant insight has been also provided in improving knowledge of the latest dynamics related to the phenomenon (online VAC and Violence among peers).

19. The first methodological result has been the definition of the conceptual framework. This is based on the theoretical approaches to VAC (coming from the international classifications and studies), policy priorities identified through an analysis of relevant strategic documents (Lanzarote Convention) and from the stakeholder raised and driven topics. With reference to the definitions used and their statistical operationalization, UNICEF recently published the International Classification on Violence Against Children (ICVAC) that can be considered one of the main reference document for our work. Nevertheless, following the results from the qualitative methodology, we decided to enlarge some dimensions of the international classification, considering for instance trafficking in human being of children and child labour exploitation as an important domains of violence. Furthermore, we consider issues

like child poverty, educational poverty and child labour as "Adverse Child Experience" and not as violence against children.

20. The conceptual framework set up the following domains that defines and structure what is measured and provides the basis for the selection and combination of variables into a meaningful indicators:

- Homicide of a child;

- Physical Violence against a child (including chemical abuse, shaken baby syndrome, dual harm, isolating a child, female genital mutilation);

- Psychological violence against a child (including witnessing violence, bullying and cyberbullying, Stalking and cyber stalking);

- Sexual violence against a child (including Cyber violence, child prostitution, child pornography and sexual grooming);

- Neglect of a child and pathologies of the care child (including Munchausen syndrome by proxy);

- Child trafficking and child labour exploitation (including abduction of a child, sale of a child);

- Other forms of violence: forced marriage (and early marriage).

21. The second results concern the development of a strategy to approach each domain, taking account of the complexity of their measurement and comparability. The following steps are the key points of the strategy:

- analysis of the literature;

- definitions from the literature;

- developing of a new shared definition (also taking into account the qualitative phase);

- defining the core/additional indicators (metadata);

- selecting the Italian data sources, also focus on the regularity of data availability to measure indicators;

- providing the convergence/divergence between sources-definition, looking at ICVAC and other countries main experiences.

A. Some insights on two domains

22. The study carried out so far allows to report some insights from specific domains taken into account, that are the most challenging to be measured from our point of view: psychological violence (both off line and online), neglect of a child and pathologies of the child care.

1. Psychological violence

23. Within the broader framework of the phenomenon of violence against children and the initiatives implemented at international, regional and national level to prevent and monitor

the phenomenon, psychological violence perpetrated against children is widely recognized as one of the main characterizing form of the phenomenon. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognizes, in fact, at art. 19 that "States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child." Art. 19 of the CRC is of the outmost relevance because it encompasses not only a broad definition of violence, including explicitly physical and psychological violence, but it also recognizes that children should be protected from violence perpetrated by adults who, instead, should take care of children. It also emphasizes the dependency condition of the child when considering the adult-child relationship, independently from its nature (parental, care-giving etc.). According to the 1999 WHO Report *"emotional abuse includes the failure of a caregiver to provide an appropriate and supportive environment, and includes acts that have an adverse effect on the emotional health and development of a child. Such acts include restricting a child's movements, denigration, ridicule, threats and intimidation, discrimination, rejection and other nonphysical forms of hostile treatment".*[5]

24. When framing psychological violence within the broader definition of violence against children (VAC) it is of the outmost importance to consider that it represents a form of violence per se and, at the same time, a constituent part of other forms of violence and a consequence of them. As a matter of fact, according to the 2006 World Report on Violence against Children "[6].

25. Its multidimensionality and intersectionality with other forms of violence against children and different contexts in which it is perpetrated, with different implications and consequences depending also on the age of the minor abused and the perpetrator represents a considerable challenge when the aim is that of measuring psychological violence against children and, prior to that, defining psychological violence and its forms. Already the 2006 World Report on Violence against Children stated that "standard definitions are lacking, and little is known about the global extent of this form of violence against children except that it frequently accompanies other forms: a strong coexistence between psychological and physical violence against children in violent households has been established". The same report frames psychological violence against children in relation to other macro-forms of violence that should be also considered when studying psychological violence against children:

- its embedment and relation to domestic violence and violent family settings "in the violent family setting, there is constant fear and anxiety caused by the anticipation of violence; pain, humiliation and fear during its enactment; and, in older age groups, the loneliness of parental rejection, distrust, and at times self-disgust";

- psychological violence as a form of violent discipline, either physically and/or psychologically perpetrated "psychological violence may be the product of uncontrolled frustration, or it may have a similar purpose to that of corporal punishment: to cow a child into obedience and 'retrain' his or her unruly behaviour";

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[5] World Health Organization, Report of the Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention, 29-31 March 1999, WHO, Geneva, 1999

[6] Pinheiro, P. S., World Report on Violence against Children, United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children, United Nations, Geneva, 2006.

- the link between psychological violence against children and intimate partner violence "Psychological violence, by spouses, against married girls includes humiliation, threats against her or someone close to her, and controlling behaviours. Where a girl flees a violent marriage and returns home, she may be rejected by her parents and beaten for inadequacy as a wife."

26. On the way to further strengthening the capacity to protect children and to measure VAC internationally, included psychological violence, a pivotal stage is represented by the SDGs framework. Within it, child-specific indicators" fall into two categories:

    a) those that make explicit reference to children as part of the indicator definition, such as those on child labour, violent discipline and birth registration, and

    b) those that make reference to adults but cover violations that occurred in childhood, like FGM, child marriage and sexual abuse."[7]

27. Of interest for the study of psychological violence against children is Target 16.2: *End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture* and, in particular, Indicator 16.2.1 – Violent discipline defined as "Proportion of children aged 1 to 17 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month of children". To the aim of measuring the indicator, the following definitions, derived from the UNICEF MICS, are applied:

    - *Psychological aggression* refers to the action of shouting, yelling or screaming at a child, as well as calling a child offensive names, such as 'dumb' or 'lazy'.
    - *Violent discipline* encompasses any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression.

28. A fundamental step toward a systematization and broader consideration of the forms of psychological forms of psychological violence against children has been made by the definition of the International classification of Violence against children released by UNICEF in 2023. According to the ICVAC psychological violence against a child is "any deliberate, unwanted and non-essential act, verbal and non-verbal, that harms or has a high likelihood of harming the development of a child, including long-term physiological harm and mental health consequences". More in particular, it encompasses different forms of violence, grouped according to Level-2 categories, such as:

    - Terrorizing a child, including threat;
    - Harassing, spurning and humiliating a child, including bullying and cyberbullying, stalking and cyber-stalking;
    - Exposure of a child to domestic violence;
    - Exposure of a child to other violent experiences;
    - Other acts of psychological violence against a child not elsewhere classified.

29. ICVAC recognizes the broad spectrum of forms under the umbrella of psychological violence, providing also with illustrative examples of acts for each Level-2 category. More in particular, psychological violence can be identified according to three main subcategories as: a) an act or multiple of them perpetrated directly against a child; b) violence as a form of exposure to other forms of crimes and violent experiences, with specific emphasis on domestic violence; c) violence in terms of involving a child in illegal or criminal activities and delinquent behaviors, of every nature. In this regard, ICVAC recognizes also the

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[7] UNICEF, A generation to protect. Monitoring violence, exploitation and abuse of children within the SDG framework, 2020, UNICEF, New York.

bidirectional nature of psychological violence as both a form of violence impacting specifically on the psychological aspects of the child's well-being, health and development as well as focusing on those experiences that produce on the child a psychological impact. Moreover, by recognizing a dedicated a level-2 category for domestic violence, it emphasizes the strict interconnection between domestic violence and violence against children, in particular with reference to the psychological consequences it has on the children exposed to it.

30. Also the qualitative phase with experts in the field confirmed the strong interrelation between psychological violence as a direct form of violence against children as well as the need to consider psychological violence as a consequence of other forms of VAC. In this regard, additional sources of data may be of great interest in order to measure and estimate, also through proxy indicators, the number of children victims of psychological violence. More in particular, the long process involved in the help-seeking behaviour of both children victims and their caregivers, represents also an important stage in which data and information emerge. Services and NGOs dedicated to support children and families may be also play a role toward a systematization and enhancement of data, when provided with harmonized tools.

2. The online psychological violence

31. Within the ICVAC framework the online VAC is placed as a continuum from offline forms of violence (sexual, psychological) from which it is distinguished by the setting where VAC occurs. The different and new forms of online psychological violence against minors, such as cyberbullying, griefing, should be considered as just a new setting of well-known form of violence (in this case bullying). However, the cyber sphere also leads to different and unique forms of violence (such as non-consensual intimate image abuse or doxing) and can amplify the scale of harm compared to violence perpetrated in the physical world, intersecting different forms of violence (such as sexting and grooming). The online VAC is perpetrated across different cyberspaces, including social media platforms, messaging apps and videogames. As the digital environment is constantly evolving, new technologies are bound to give rise to new and diverse manifestations of violence. For example, the Metaverse is emerging as a new space for the perpetration of new forms of online VAC.

32. The increased use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has taken bullying online and there is a blurring of the line between bullying offline and cyber-bullying. In addition, the anonymity of the internet has scaled up the dimension of violence seen in bullying, and acts of cyber-bullying increasingly fall into the realm of criminal offences which necessitate the involvement of law enforcement. The links between cyber-bullying and sexualised intimidation or violence are many, and cyber-bullying can border on online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA).As children spend more time in the digital environment, their access to opportunities increases but so does their exposure to risk. During last decade the literature on this topic largely increased.

33. No data are available to measure the incidence of this type of violence. At European level, the Digital Service Act is a broad and comprehensive institutional framework that provides strict guidelines and limitations aimed at ensuring online safety and can help, in the future, to collect comparable data across member states. At the national level, current legislation allows for the monitoring of cyberbullying complaints[8]. This makes it possible to capture

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[8] Law 71/2017 "Provisions for the protection of minors to prevent and combat the phenomenon of cyberbullying.

administrative data on the emergence of the phenomenon, but much remains to be done on under-reporting. However in this respect several international surveys[9] and national surveys[10] make up for the lack of information.

34. In defining the dimensions of analysis of online psychological violence, such as cyberbullying, it will be crucial to establish not only indicators of prevalence and incidence of the phenomenon, but also, in light of the findings of the desk analysis and interviews with stakeholders, predictive factors of online violence, consequences, and factors that protect against children's risk of exposure.

3. Neglect

35. In relation to a child, the term neglect means a failure in the exercise of parental responsibilities to provide for the child's basic physical, intellectual, emotional or social needs. Child neglect is caused by dysregulation of parental competence: the mother or father does not respond adequately to the essential needs of the child. In some cases, there is also antipathy toward the child, who becomes the scapegoat and is treated with coldness or hostility.

36. As known, neglect can be really difficult to spot. Having one of the signs doesn't necessarily mean a child is being neglected. But if multiple signs are noticed that last for a while, they might show there's a serious problem. So historically, defining and measuring neglect has been a subject of debate, particularly in cross-cultural contexts, with many questions hanging in the balance. For instance, what are the minimum requirements associated with caring for a child? What constitutes failure to provide 'adequate' food, shelter, clothing and protection?

37. Difficulty in gathering evidence about neglect in order to inform practice lies in the complexity surrounding its definition. However, beyond the consensus that neglect involves acts of omission, definitions of neglect vary in significant ways, including differences in the breadth and scope of what is considered to constitute a 'basic need' and differences in what are considered to be adequate standards of provision to meet them. Above all, it is very important the consciousness of parents that have neglected behavior: where the parent is in a position to do so in one or more of the following areas: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and safe living conditions.

38. Neglect is thus distinguished from circumstances of poverty in that neglect can occur only in cases where reasonable resources are available to the family or caregiver. For example, families may be perceived as being neglectful where in fact their cultural context or economic situation may be more important considerations. Child neglect is the type of VAC, probably most in need of a universally accepted definition. Therefore, there are many different definitions of the phenomenon, some more than others widely shared by the international scientific community.

39. The ICVAC-UNICEF definition declares: neglect is: *"The deliberate, unwanted and non-essential failure to meet a child's physical or psychological needs, protect a child from*

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[9] Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC). It is a large school-based survey carried out every four years in collaboration with the WHO Regional Office for Europe
Smahel, D., Machackova, H., Mascheroni, G., Dedkova, L., Staksrud, E., Ólafsson, K., Livingstone, S., and Hasebrink, U. (2020*). EU Kids Online 2020: Survey results from 19 countries. EU Kids Online.* https://doi.org/10.21953/lse.47fdeqj01ofo. Another relevant source of data is the OECD's Survey of Social and Emotional Skills

[10] *Children and teens: behaviors, attitudes and future plans* is a survey conducted by Istat with the aim of collecting information on some basic aspects of the daily lives of boys and girls aged 11 to 19 years resident in Italy.

danger, or obtain medical, educational or other services when those responsible for the child's care have the means, knowledge and access to services to do so". There are different types of neglect:

- Physical neglect of a child: Ongoing failure to protect a child from harm, including through lack of supervision, or ongoing failure to provide a child with basic necessities, including adequate food, shelter, clothing when those responsible for the child's care have the means, knowledge and access to services to do so;
- Psychological neglect of a child: Ongoing failure to provide adequate nurturing and affection to a child, when those responsible for the child's care have the means, knowledge and access to services to do so;
- Neglect of a child's physical or mental health: Ongoing withholding of proper medical care when those responsible for the child's care have the means, knowledge and access to services to do so;
- Educational neglect of a child: Ongoing failure to secure a child's education through attendance at school or otherwise when those responsible for the child's care have the means, knowledge and access to services to do so;
- Abandonment of a child: Any act by parents or other caregivers to leave behind a child with the intention to willingly relinquish parental responsibility, whether openly or anonymously.

40. Therefore, neglect is a multifaceted type of violence and, obviously, cannot be measured by one single indicator. So, we have proposed existing indicators from international surveys or administrative data, and new ones. Some of them are core indicators, while others are proxy or risk indicators which we indicate here as additional indicators.

41. In defining the most important indicators to be used, an important role was played by the qualitative phase of our work, which involved stakeholders, experts on the neglect phenomenon, associations, etc. Indeed, the interviews with key experts and focus groups had a great role for raising awareness and improving knowledge of the latest dynamics related to the phenomenon and helped the research group in the individualization of principle indicators.

42. Data on child neglect are poor, with existing statistics limited mostly to high-income countries. The scarcity of data on neglect is due in part to problems associated with measuring it, some of which are similar to those confronted by data collection on other forms of violence against children. So, in Italy there are scarce sources that specifically analyses the phenomenon of neglect, even if within the broader concept of Maltreatment and Pathology of Care. One of these, is the survey "Indagine Nazionale Sul Maltrattamento Dei Bambini E Degli Adolescenti In Italia". It's a sample survey carried out from Terres des hommes and Cismai. Here, as mentioned, neglect is therefore included in the category of pathology of care. Another interesting source is the Telefono Azzurro data on emergency calls (114) and the data of the listening and help service (19696) to which adolescent children or adults report cases related to children in difficulty. Moreover, in the next wave of Women's Safety Survey, planned for 2024, will have questions on neglect, but referring exclusively to women.

IV. Conclusions

43. Defining VAC and its new forms, mapping existing data and planning new data collection and research are essential to design good policies to stop violence. Therefore, the research team will, continue to work on this important topic in the coming months.Specifically, ISTAT conducted a desk analysis and recognition of data collection and dissemination on VAC. This activity depicts the current Italian situation regarding data availability and analysis of the VAC and ISTAT will elaborate a report that describe the violence against children based on the available information.

44. Another important step of the project is the identification of current gaps and the steps towards improving current statistical data and indicators on VAC. The objective of this phase will be to identify existing gaps in the current production of statistical data. In particular, attention has been focused to: a) data already systematically collected, organised and disseminated and the thematic areas covered; b) data already collected but not systematically organised/disseminated; c) data collected and disseminated that need to be reviewed in terms of relevance and/or methodological soundness. Finally, consideration has been given to new data that have not yet been collected (e.g. cyber-violence; the borderline between bullying and illness).

45. Finally, it's clear that we cannot prevent, address and thus end the phenomenon of violence against children without first understanding it in its entirety. The more we understand the context and nature of violence, the better we can work together to end violence against children and young people. Solutions to prevent and respond to violence against children therefore require, first of all, much more and better data from a wider range of sources, and where possible, ad hoc surveys must be implemented to detect the phenomenon. There is, furthermore, an absolute need for solid, accurate, reliable, objective and disaggregated data to understand the environment in which children grow and develop.

46. The availability of comparable data on certain forms of violence against children has increased significantly in recent years through the inclusion of violence related questions in several international survey programmes. Nevertheless, at the moment, there are still significant data gaps that must be addressed and that still present a critical barrier to preventing and ending violence against children.

47. The methodological approach adopted by ISTAT, however, deliberately based on the involvement of the actors directly involved in combating VAC, is a clear step to overcome to these barriers; the suggestions coming from the stakeholders have been collected precisely aimed at grasping how this phenomenon evolves and what are the most appropriate tools for observing it adequately. The qualitative study in particular has enabled the development of a dynamic proposal that intends to observe the phenomenon in its recent forms and interpret the collected and comparable data with greater depth and meaningfulness. It is possible in this way to imagine new tools, to be fulfilled by paediatricians or teachers for instance, able to look at the first signals of disease, in order to prevent violence and illness. Tools planned together with other institutions, which have to be tested and experimented, before their use. It means a huge coordination work with other institutions that generally do not have a statistical sensibility and culture.

48. The **mixed methods** adopted by the ISTAT DORA project to focus on a national case, identifies methodological and content procedures that could represent a relevant case study for necessary future data harmonization at the European level. The multidisciplinary

collaboration is in fact strategic to achieve important goals looking at prevention and combating violence against children.

V.   References

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