

### 34. Ethnography of violence in intimate relationships.

#### **Convenors**

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This panel seeks to explore various dimensions of gender-based violence in intimate relationships through ethnographic research. We would like to exchange views with scholars who have focused in ethnographic studies on gender-based violence, the system that generates it and the self-organised and or institutional responses. The field is potent and highly mediatised, which is why we feel it is important to explore it from a social science perspective even if in a partial way or with research still ongoing.

Feminist movements have significantly influenced the understanding of power relations and the family as an institution (Walker, 1979), allowing gender violence to be analysed as a phenomenon embedded in specific social dynamics such as sexism—defined as the domination of one sex over another—and the patriarchal system, which comprises institutions designed by men to maintain sexual domination over women (Letellier, 1994; Cavarero, Restaino, 2002; Gottzén, *et al.*, 2020). In this context, gender-based violence is seen as a routine and pervasive phenomenon, impacting women's social worlds across both public and private spheres (Kimmel, 2017; Oddone, 2020). However, it remains one of the most highly mediated and elusive concepts of our time.

The media's portrayal of perpetrators as «monsters» complicates sociological analyses of the ways in which gender shapes the relationship with violence (Belmonte, 2024). Despite recent studies questioning the misleading rhetoric around the term «raptus», the image of the male villain continues to dominate public discourse. Men are frequently depicted as having always exhibited inherently violent tendencies, often reinforced by retrospective interpretations of their biographies, lifestyles, and substance use (Belmonte, 2024).

This perception influences prevention and support policies, particularly in services for abusive men (so-called CAMs in Italy). These services aim to support men who have committed violence by promoting re-education towards a masculinity that questions the link between violence and male identity. However, these services remain sporadic, likely exacerbated by a paternalistic welfare approach that focuses on victim protection while reinforcing dependence on institutional care. Ethnographic and qualitative research have an important role to play in shedding light on the everyday dimension of such phenomena.

#### **Open Questions**

- How do different media represent the phenomenon of intimate partner violence, and what are the consequences of these representations?

- What are the relationships between masculinity and violence?
- How does qualitative research address the responses and care pathways of institutions and/or social movements and grassroots organisations to gender-based violence?
- What issues are at stake in violence in LGBTQ relationships and how do these coincide with or differ from heterosexual relationships?
- Can we envisage a systematic framework for intervention and care for male abusers, moving beyond localised and fragmented efforts?

### **Keywords**

violence in intimate relationships; masculinity; gender-based violence interventions; perpetrators.

### **Sub-disciplines or cross-disciplinary areas of concern**

sociology of deviance; gender studies; sociology of sexuality.

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### **Convenors' bios**

Maria Urso is a social worker with a degree in Social Services and Policies. She is a member of the «Research Laboratory on Bodies, Rights and Conflicts» and a PhD student in «Inequalities, Differences, and Participation» at the University of Palermo. She also volunteers at the Lia Pipitone Anti-Violence Centre in Palermo. Her research focuses on the construction of masculinities and sexual abuse perpetrated by male minors.

Martina Lo Cascio is a Research Fellow at the Department of Culture and Society, University of Palermo. Previously, she was Research Fellow at the European University Institute. She holds a PhD in Social and Psychological Sciences from the University of Palermo, with research focusing on migrant labour in Southern Italy's intensive agricultural production sector. During her PhD, she conducted ethnographic research on olive production in Western Sicily, analysing the experiences of seasonal workers and producers.