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New developments on crime statistics concerning population survey in Italy

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At the end of the 1990s, ISTAT started to do victimisation surveys. These surveys are very useful to gain a more complex knowledge of criminality, because they go over what can be defined as the reported crime. Before the 1990s, the administrative statistics were the only source of data. This course is common to other statistical institutes too, for instance, Statistic Canada, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and the Netherlands Statistic Institute.

The administrative statistics more ancient than the population surveys on crime are also more difficult to be compared. The difficulty is also due to the strict linkage between the judicial and penal system of each countries with the respective statistics.

In Italy, as in many other countries, crime statistics mean administrative statistics and population survey statistics. Victimization surveys and violence against women surveys are carried out, as well as statistics based on the registered crimes. Police statistics, court statistics, jail statistics (prisoners and internees), and criminal army law statistics.

It is necessary to have these different sources of data, because different are the concepts of criminality that have to be studied:

1. Real criminality: the whole crime set in a specific time and place, regardless of police reporting or inquiring or finally sentenced;
2. Reported criminality: crime behaviors registered by police or court of justice or penitentiary system;
3. Hidden criminality: crimes in a specific time and place, not reported to the police or to the magistrates and then unknown to social control agencies.

Both reported and hidden criminalities refer to quantitative collecting methods and sources, the reported criminality is better studied through administrative sources, the hidden criminality through sample surveys. The sum of reported criminality and hidden criminality helps in assessing the real status of criminality in Italy.

In Italy there are two main statistical administrative sources for criminal justice statistics: the so called statistics of criminality and the police statistics, called statistics of offences. There are many differences and different analysis objectives between the two sources. Primarily, differences regard the contents of the two surveys, the juridical actors and the geographic reference. Secondly, differences regard objectives: while offences statistics are very useful to point out the picture of some macro category of crimes at the local level, the criminal statistics are better for long term longitudinal studies and to investigate police control and justice system efficacy by crime.

The administrative statistics are carried out by the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Interior; ISTAT takes care of the quality of statistics they produce. ISTAT takes the data, assesses their quality and then disseminates them. Furthermore, ISTAT promotes better quality in criminality statistics.

The statistics of criminality

The statistics of criminality is the most ancient; data have been collected since the XIX century. Criminal action has been taken up by the justice authority (crimes whose police reporting were

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retired are not considered) and data are collected by the justice offices. Until 2000 data on criminality were provided to ISTAT on a paper module and quarterly, now they are automatically recorded. 377 crime headings are reported, but in some cases they are not always detailed enough (for instance some individual thefts such as bag-snatching and pick pocketing are indistinguishable).

The statistics provided

The Ministry of Justice is the data source. And thanks to this source, different statistics are produced, including: statistics of penal trials (movement of prosecutions of several offices); statistics of criminality (crime, individual suspect, minor individual suspect); statistics of convictions; statistics on suicide; statistics of penitentiary institutions (movement of prisoners, prisoners characteristics, penitentiary institution); and, statistics on justice regarding minors.

The main tool is R.e.g.e, which is the general register of crimes. This is a very helpful tool to public solicitor activity, to study proceedings of accused known and unknown, to study the amount of crime on the territory (municipality, province, region, court district) and to map it. Information about victims and author (sex, age, citizenship) are collected, as well as those on criminal career (legal situation: arrest, detain, number and type of crime committed). The crime typologies is articulated according to the Italian penal system and is subdivided into macro-categories: crime against person; crime against household, moral; crime against property; crime against the State, other social institution and public order; crime against economy and public faith. Organized crime is collected too.

The police statistics: the statistics of offences

The statistics of offences started in 1955. The Ministry of Interior is the source of data, thanks to citizens' reports and to investigation activities. It concerns crimes marked out by police to justice authority to evaluate taking up a criminal action (crimes directly marked out to the justice authority by others are not considered). The main statistic is that on offences: recorded crimes, victims and suspects. The police statistics has fewer crime headings than the crime statistics, more or less 30, but much more usefully detailed (especially for predatory crimes).

Data are collected by police at the local level and provided to ISTAT monthly (paper module until 2003). While since 2004 data are provided electronically through the SDI that is a system of investigation. This Inter-force Informative System is a helpful tool for the operative action of police forces where many subjects are involved: police officers, prefectures, magistracy.

The information collected concern subjects (authors and victims), objects (vehicle, arms, documents, money, finance acts, etc), reported crime and many other things. Information about crime concern day, time and place of occurrence, address; those about victims, sex, age, citizenship, residence; and those on authors, sex, age, citizenship, residence.

SDI has been a very important step on crime information. More aspects can be known from a statistical point of view too: more detailed crime classification, time and space contextualization (address, day and hour of occurrence), victim characteristics, author characteristics, and police forces activity.

Unluckily, until now, most of these information have been used only for operative use; furthermore some data are missing or they can be improved since the system began to work only few years ago and because persons involved in the work need to be better trained on the importance of the statistical approach. Nevertheless the potentiality of the new system is really

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very innovative and interesting. A new very interesting product made by Istat is the dissemination of data on line at territorial level which allows the downloading of users defining tables.

Survey Sources: the Italian victimization survey and the violence against women survey

The Italian victimization survey

The first victimization survey was carried out in 1997/1998 and it's updated every five/six years. Furthermore questions on victimization and safety perception have been included in the yearly omnibus survey.

Goals and indicators

The victimization survey represents the possibility to understand the safety phenomenon from objective and subjective point of views. The main goal of the Italian victimization survey concerns the estimate of the dark figure of crime, the hidden crime that it's not possible to know otherwise. Just think that the percentage of unreported crime is more or less the 70% and that this is high also for some important crimes such as robbery or burglary or bag snatching or assaults and above all violence. Only 7% of rapes are reported. This is the main reason why decision makers want victimization surveys, because they highlight the true criminality level. The second reason is linked to the study of crime perception and citizens' fear of crime which is very useful to decide prevention policies.

Other very important goals concern the knowledge of the crime dynamics, of the places more at risk, of victims' and offenders' characteristics, of the victim-offender relationship, of social alarm, of social deterioration of the area where people live, of victims' coping skills and defence strategies adopted, of the relationship with the police.

Furthermore, since one of the main aims of the survey is to provide answer to political needs and to monitor social change, every new survey edition tries to answer to new needs of users or to challenges proposed by the specific social context. For instance in the last survey edition, some crimes such as bank cards cloning, internet theft and fraud were urged to be studied. The Department of Equal Rights and Opportunities asked to deepen the harassment at work topic; plus, the Ministry of Interior required more specific estimates for the South of Italy.

The survey collects both objective and subjective indicators useful to analyse the criminality issue. Objective indicators that can be calculated concern:

- Crime incidence, prevalence, density. These indicators are calculated.
- Kinds of crimes suffered
- Reporting behaviour and reason for reporting/not reporting
- Characteristics of victims and offenders
- Victim life styles
- Conditions in which crimes are committed
- Economical and physical consequences
- Characteristics of author and way of acting

Subjective indicators are about:

- Perception of fear in the street
- Perception of fear at home
- Crime risk of the area where ones lives
- Soft crimes concerning social – environment decay
- Defense strategies at individual and household level

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- Worry about crime

These indicators are really meaningful, on one hand to give a framework of criminality assessment and its impact on quality of life, in term of changes, psychological and economical consequences, strategies citizens adopted to defend themselves; on the other hand to support policy choices and to monitor the outcomes of policies adopted

Looking more in detail at the main indicators, it is possible to assess the prevalence, the incidence and the density rates. They are calculated referring to a definite period. The prevalence rate is the proportion between the number of victims who suffered the crime in the reference period and the global population (both victims and non victims), the incidence rate compares the number of new crimes that occurred in a determined period on the exposed population at risk in the same period and the density represents the number of crimes that happened in the period by the number of victims. These indicators can be calculated as an aggregate for the whole of crimes or singularly for each type of crime, depending on the needs of the research of getting a global or a specific information. Particular aggregations can also be done, pointing out homogeneous classifications of crimes: i.e. individual or household crimes, property or violent ones.

Methodological aspects

Data are collected with telephone (CATI) method by female interviewers. Interviewers are personally recruited and trained for 5 days (3 days of theoretical training and 2 of technical one). They are daily monitored and evaluated.

The survey has a sample of 60,000 households, where only one person aged 14 and over is interviewed. The sample is random at two stages with stratification, for region and type of municipality, of units at the first stage (the households). The estimates provided are representative at regional level (21 areas).

Crimes measured

The survey collects data on predatory crimes and some types of crimes against the person. Furthermore a module on sexual harassment and violence (only for women 14-65 years) is included.

Crimes concerning individuals are:

- Bag-snatching
- Pick-pocketing
- Personal theft with no physical contact
- Robbery
- Internet theft and phishing (since 2008)
- Cloning of electronic cards (since 2008)
- Threat
- Assault
- Sexual harassment (verbal, physical harassment, exhibitionism, obscene telephone calls, to be followed)
- Sexual blackmail at work
- Rape and attempted rape

Crimes concerning households are:

- Household burglary (main and secondary house)
- Unlawful entries

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- Motor vehicle (car, van, motorcycle, bike) theft
- Theft of parts or properties in the motor vehicle
- Acts of vandalism
- Animal theft and animal maltreatment
- Consumer fraud (since 2008)

In the last survey edition, harassment at work (mobbing and straining) is also collected. This is an experimental module for people that work or worked in the past.

Critical points to be further studied

Even if victimization surveys are really very important to have a more precise idea of crime in Italy, some criticisms have to be pointed out. These regard some difficulties in collecting crime suffered in the past, for instance, the right remembering and right placing in the time (telescoping effect), the risk to underestimate some crime typologies, the sensitiveness of some issues, the measurement of safety perception and now the problem of telephone coverage. Some strategies were adopted to cope with these aspects and some of them give truly given good results. Others, instead, need more work and more testing.

The Italian Violence against women survey

Official data gathered on criminal statistics do not provide needed evidence on the phenomena of violence and, above all, on domestic violence. Violence in the family setting is still an underreported and understudied social problem affecting millions of women all over the world. Violence against women exists in all societies, in all cultures and religions and in all social classes and we know that if the percentage of underreported crime is generally very high, this is a higher risk for violence, especially for intimate violence. The topic needs further investigation. Women rarely disclose what has happened to them and even more rarely they report to the police or they might seek for help in the crisis centres or in other social services.

Recommendations and policies at the national and international levels have provided useful guidelines for the implementation of laws and services for the protection of women and their children (EU Recommendation Rec(2002)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the protection of women against violence). Learning about the prevalence and nature of domestic violence, as well as the characteristics of those involved and its consequences, helps developing at an institutional and legal level, needed policies and services to protect those most in need. But violence against women, in general, and specifically, domestic violence are sensitive problems very difficult to study.

The National Survey on violence against women originates from the need to disclose the problem on violence against women in Italy in terms of its prevalence, incidence, rate and nature.

Victimisation surveys, developed to shed light on the underreported crimes, are useful methods to address and to understand several types of victimisation. However, they don't do justice to disclose those forms of violence perpetrated by someone close to the victim (usually the partner or former partner) unless they make use of special wording and description of a complex pattern of physical, sexual, psychological and economical violence that characterises domestic violence.

The Italian Minister of Equal Opportunities, through the European fund, has funded the project on violence against women survey (2001) and has agreed that such study could only be conducted by the National Statistical Institute that is in charge of producing all official statistical data on a large national scale by using representative samples of the population.

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Before setting up such studies there was a need of following essential steps, here outlined according to the procedure adopted by the Italian National Institute of Statistics:

- 1) Identification and definition of the phenomenon
- 2) Creation of useful indicators to measure the phenomenon under investigation
- 3) Identification of the population and sampling procedure
- 4) Qualitative studies to fully understand all possible aspects of the problem under investigation
- 5) Questionnaire development
- 6) Pilot stage of the study to test the instrument
- 7) Final survey

The survey was carried out in 2006, from January to October 2006, thanks to shelters for women victims of violence that contributed to survey in its different phases and thanks to the availability of abused women. The survey has been carried out on a sample of 25,000 women aged 16-70 years old, telephonically interviewed.

Goals and indicators

The first official numbers on violence against women were disseminated in February 2007; the indicators released concerned prevalence, by different violence forms and different violent perpetrators, violence intensity, violence severity and consequences, seeking for help, the dynamics of violence, the risk factors.

The Italian VAW survey presents an integrated approach to gender based violence aimed at having accurate data that meets users and community needs, highlight the hidden violence phenomenon and contribute in eliminating stereotypes, define priorities for policy makers, and allow social and cultural change in combating violence against women. For these reasons the focus is on physical and sexual violence (by partner and non partner) and as regards domestic violence on psychological and verbal violence, economical violence and stalking.

Other important issues are: the victim's violence perception as a crime, the severity (injuries and type of injuries, perceived seriousness, feeling of life in danger, use of medicine and therapy to cope with violence), the intensity (one or more times violence occurred, repetitiveness), violence dynamics (arms, alcohol abuse of perpetrators), reporting behaviour and women's capacity for seeking help (shelters, with whom women speak of violence, police relationship, etc), children witness of violence, violence in pregnancy, women's childhood abuse, risk factors for violence (women abuse background, partner abuse background, risk factors related to the partner – alcohol consumption, violence outside the family, etc.).

How to collect data : methodological aspects

This kind of survey needs methodological and procedural dedicated tools to guarantee women safety, help women disclosure, and have sound data.

First of all we look at the appropriateness of the setting; the risk to underestimate data is in fact minor in a specialized survey. Secondly, it was very important the accurate planning phase involving the community, in particular shelters, users, policy makers, through pre-test, focus groups, interviews of key professionals and the pilot survey at the aim to deepen the questionnaire content and the procedural methods. Thirdly data are collected investigating behaviours, the form of violence is defined in a way that women can remember and reflect their lives as if in a mirror, the psychological violence questions are measured considering the different aspects of the daily

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life; the violence word is not named, the questionnaire sections sequence as well as the questions sequence is ranked from the less to the more sensitive. Fourthly it's decisively better: don't be afraid to ask women regarding their violence experience, rather it's better to motivate them with the importance of the study; don't hesitate in asking questions on sensitive forms of violence, sometimes the interview represents the only occasion to speak of violence, it's very important.

Lastly the attention to women safety and to the emotional trauma has to be paid in all phases of the survey: to choose the right methodology (the telephone technique for instance is a guarantee for anonymity, high privacy and has the possibility to interrupt the telephone call in every moment and to take easily an appointment); to find the best time for her when she is alone at home (with no partner in the house) or to reach her on a mobile phone; to reassure her about privacy issues/anonymity, to create a good climate of confidence and faith; to address her to shelters.

The interviews were carried out by female interviewers well recruited and well trained (ten days of training, plus discussion groups with a psychologist). The sample was a two-stage random sample stratified (by region and type of municipality as in the case of the victimization survey) at the first stage. The first stage unit are the households present on the official list of telephone subscribers, the second stage units are women aged 16-70 years old.

Critical points to be further studied

Many things can be done to achieve good data, taking into account the social and cultural contexts of each specific country. Hoping in a new edition, some aspects of the survey can be surely improved, for instance the measurement of violence intensity or the focus on raped women. But the many problems still remain concerning mainly the use and the actual acceptance of the outcomes from the data, especially those regarding domestic violence. It is then important to work on the cultural context receiving data too: mass media workers, policy makers and general public have to be sensitized. This is the only way to engender social change.

International collaboration

Since 2004 we took steps forward and many goals have been marked UNECE and UNODC, as well as EUROSTAT began to work on crime. Working group and task force on crimes and justice statistics and task force on violence against women started to work hardly on this topic. Since the beginning Istat has been involved in these activities contributing and participating actively. At the moment there are three different directions of work.

As regards victimization survey, the UNECE-UNODC task force, after having carried out an inventory on the existing researches, are preparing a manual on how to do victimization surveys. This manual provides a good guideline useful for work on data comparability. In the meantime EUROSTAT is testing a European module on victimization aimed at finding a meaningful core set of questions to be harmonized. Both these works are set on the idea of the importance of official statistics in carrying out surveys, as far as it increases the credibility and quality of the studies.

Concerning administrative statistics, since they are more ancient and due to the fact that, as already said, they are strictly linked with the penal system of each country, the harmonization seems to be difficult, a possibility is to start harmonizing homicide statistics, for example, car theft. An exercise was begun in this direction by Eurostat in 2005, which tried to compare some crimes and their metadata. As a starting point, the attention is also in comparing definitions, for instance on crime association, money laundering, and macro crimes categories.

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Concerning violence against women survey, an inventory of the existing researches has been carried out too and an interesting document on indicators has been produced.

It would be very important that UNSD started up a new work of harmonization, guidelines would be very important both about victimization survey as well as violence survey. It could be the right way to work. UNSD should work in designing a framework on crime in the wider perspective of social statistics. The international context requires a harmonization of statistics (administrative versus population survey) to be carried out, indicators needed, crimes to be studied and methodologies to be implemented. Italy is very interested to be an active part in this international process and will provide the needed support.