

## **Minors who assault their parents - a buried problem**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Our society, for many reasons, has unhinged the fundamentals of educating; and that means also the responsibility and the authority of the adults towards the minors. Consequently to govern the relationship with children and adolescents becomes more and more a difficult challenge, especially for the parents.

The children who attack the authority of the parents are more and more younger. When the child feels taking upwind, the parent, in its normative function, is already knackered. Without help an aggressive escalation against the parents sets off and consequently the roles become inverted.

We are ahead of the “tyrannous son”: a son who insults, disqualifies, offends, blackmails, manipulates, a son who hits his parents, nearly always his mother.

Mothers who are deeply involved in the life of their sons, constantly exposed to the pressures of their sons, mothers who feel deeply lonesome. Being flanked by fathers who are extremely occupied in their job. Often they are bright, but perceived as distant, critical and detached fathers. A distance which limits them into the role of passive watchers of the familiar scene.

The “tyrannous son” just seems to be potent. With his furious attacks expresses his great suffering, because he feels himself without any help and the guilt senses make him doubt about the parents’ love.

The intra-familial violence has always existed. Also sons who assault their parents have always been. But there are two new aspects to worry about: the phenomenon is more and more increasing and the age of the sons is more and more premature when the problem appears.

In contrary to Spain, in Italy the violent behaviour of sons against their parents is not considered as a specific crime and therefore there are not previewed any penalties. This situation introduces some advantages: the primary investment of the parents and their protagonism. The disadvantages are the strong feeling of lonesomeness and impotence.

### **A BURIED PROBLEM**

The intra-familial violence is, for its nature, hidden and characterized by shame. To endure as parent the violence of the own son is considered as a guilt. The parents feel the failure of their role and the shame prevents them from asking any necessary help.

The violence of the child against his parents transgresses the quality of the relation that links them: a symbiotic tie of dependency.

Generally being victim is more serious than being actor of violence against the child, so the problem remains buried.

To find a way for making emerge this drama, which is fruit and source of isolation, has been the main objective of this project. How can we do it?

### **HOW CAN WE ACT?**

- To institute a SPECIALISED SERVICES for consultation and reception

- To train the actors of the counselling centres for INTERCEPTING the problem
- To STUDY the phenomenon analysing it in its specificity
- To CONNECT the counselling centres with the relevant social, sanitary and judicial institutions.

## INTERVENTION LINES

In order to face such a phenomenon it is necessary to work on more dimensions at the same time:

- **Socio-Cultural**  
To fight against the contradictions of our society, which on the one hand exalts violence and on the other hand punishes it.
- **Educational**  
To support the parents in their normative function
- **Therapeutic**  
To take more care of the relation between people than of the people

## THE PROJECT 2009

In the project “Violent Minors against their parents II” there have been two main activity fields:

the first activity is connected to the secondary prevention, the second activity belongs to the tertiary prevention:

- Sensitisation
- Analysis and clinical Intervention

In order to sensitize the families and educational institutions there have been elaborated **two information-leaflets**: one aimed at the **parents**, the other one addressed to the **actors of the socio-educational sector** (teachers, educators, operators of social services, etc.) who are confronted with that problem.

Leaflet addressed to actors of the socio-educational sector. EXTRACT

### CHALLENGING CHILDREN, BINDED PARENTS

#### **A buried problem**

In our culture, to endure as parent the violence of the own child is considered as a guilt. The parents feel the failure of their role and the shame prevents them from asking any necessary help.

Understanding the signals and knowing the specific risk factors allows

- to make the problem visible
- to evaluate the dimension
- to understand the significance
- to try new solutions

#### **Approaching to the problem**

Instinctively we are tending towards judgments, but in these cases it is indispensable to suspend them. Judgments prevent reciprocal listening, acceptance and understanding. Moreover it is necessary:

- to resist to the temptation to form a coalition with one part: neither with the victim, nor with the perpetrator or the passive observer.

- to consider that all the involved parts are persons who suffer and don't have found a way out yet.
- to remember that the problem has its roots in the history of the family
- to understand the involved persons in order to help them exceeding the shame
- to stop the aggressive escalation through the intervention of an expert
- to consider the problem as an expanding social phenomenon which tortures the familiar limits
- to face the problem through a solidarity pact and the collaboration of all the educating persons in the field

### **Risk indicators:**

#### **Characteristics of the minor**

He shows strong attitudes of:

- pretension towards the adult
- favour towards the adult and incitement towards other minors
- continuous and persistent challenge of the authority
- disownment of the authority

#### **Characteristics of the parent**

She tends in prevalence to:

- to show herself disarmed
- to devote herself to the job
- to delegate her functions
- to feel the child like part of herself

#### **Familiar dynamics**

Family is characterized by:

- competition between the parents for the child's affection
- high parental contentiousness
- separation with conflicts or by judicial act
- child slips into the role of the adult
- involvement of the child in the parental relationship

#### **Socio-cultural factors**

Context is characterized by:

- cultural approval of the violence
- difficulty or inhibition of access to the relevant social services
- secondary importance of the feminine roles
- exaggerated comprehension of privacy

### **What's to do?**

#### **Assessment of doubts and suspicions through:**

- Aimed observation of the "minor in relation"
- Survey about the persistence or temporary appearance of the signs
- Comparison with the colleagues
- Expressive productions of the minor
- Exploratory colloquiums with the parents

#### **Intervention with the parents**

It is up to the educator/ teacher to choose the level of involvement and personal participation on the treatment of the problem. Therefore there can be indicated two options:

- a. Preparations for passing the case to competent services (children's neuro-psychiatric service, social services, free-Student-box or internal school psychologist, Interdisciplinary anti abuse commission, Social Prevention Centre, Psychotherapeutic services of the private social sector, e.g. CEIS or other private associations.
- b. Construction of the motivation of the parents, accompaniment and sharing of the treatment in collaboration with the social services.

The second main activity field of the project concerned the work on **5 CASES** of violent minors against their parents. In synthesis the outcomes are:

**The work on 5 families with violent minors against their parents:**

**Qualitative analysis of the spot check:**

Males (5)

Age: 14-20 years

First born (4)

Unique child (1)

Families: integral 3, reconstituted 2

Socio- economic level: medium

Age of occurrence of the violence: infancy (2), adolescence (3)

**Provenience of the spot check:**

- 2 from the Centro di Solidarietà di Reggio Emilia
- 3 from the Centre of Social Prevention Reggio Emilia

**Psychological suffering and violence:**

- In 4 cases already in the first infancy the child shows problems, in the way that professional assistance is requested
- In 4 cases one of the two parents is violent with the child:  
2 fathers, 2 mothers

**Diagnostic hypotheses:**

We can assume that in the base of the below nominated problems, it exists an unsolved problem of release for the family of origin.

- The cases are characterized of conflicts and rift of the couple
- The separated mother suffers because of the strict judgment of her own mother
- The situation grew because of the lack of emancipation from the origin family
- In the cases where the family is reconstituted the precedent partner is not involved officially, that means with the consent of the new parent
- The father has defiladed himself because of serious personal problems or he allowed to be turned out of the parental role
- The grandparents are far away of the being important persons who support the parents in difficulty
- The grandparents tend to have an ambiguous and ambivalent role: in their need of being considered indispensable weaken and disqualify the role of the parents.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

- At the end of the second European project about violent children against their parents we can say that:
- Very often we find ourselves ahead of an announced drama
- The violent way to interact is not always a model which is learned in the family
- There is a problem of intergenerational transmission of abuse
- There is also a new phenomenon: the turnover of the balance of power inside the family
- The parents have an urgent need of help and support
- Violence leave wounds, for this reason primary prevention is very important.

## **PERSPECTIVE FOR THE NEAR FUTURE:**

- Meeting with the school directors for introducing the leaflet for parents and teachers.
- Eventual planning of training courses for teachers
- Meeting with parochial educators and sport trainers in order to sensitize them on the topic of violence
- Meeting with the responsible of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia in order to prepare a conference on the topic for employees of the Social Services, of the Women' Centre, the Police headquarters and the Centre for Social Prevention CPS
- Two training sessions for the employees of the Centro di Solidarietà di Reggio Emilia CEIS

## **FOR KNOWING MORE**

you can contact the Centre for Familiar Counselling and Psychotherapy c/o the Centre di Solidarietà di Reggio Emilia (CEIS).

The Familiar Counselling Service, in its seventh year of wide ranged clinical activities, has participated in numerous European DAPHNE projects dedicated to the theme of intra-familial violence and abuse. In particular the precedent two projects have been concentrated on the topic of the violence of minors who assault the parents.

The Counselling Service offers:

- Counselling for teachers, educators and parents
- Training courses for teachers and educators
- Psychotherapy
- Therapy groups for parents

The Service is offered by two psychotherapeutic experts and a teacher specialized for familiar counselling. For contacts please phone to:

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