
Children and COVID-19. Cesvi: increased risk of maltreatment, especially in the south of Italy. Zavatta: "Reinforce infancy territorial services and mental health care"

Over a year of pandemic is causing a major crisis with a serious impact on mental health across society. The most vulnerable groups have been hit hardest, notably children and adolescents, who are at greatest risk of abuse. This alarming picture is outlined in the Fourth **Regional Index on Child Maltreatment in Italy**, published by [Cesvi Foundation](#), presented online on Tuesday on [Facebook](#) and [Youtube](#), during a live streamed meeting moderated by **Cristina Parodi**, ambassador of the Foundation, with the participation, inter alia, of the Minister for Equal Opportunities and the Family, **Elena Bonetti**. According to the Report, 45 in every 1,000 minors in Italy are under the care of social services.

It is estimated that 77,493 children were victims of maltreatment.

The Index - compiled by researchers **Giovanna Badalassi** and **Federica Gentile**, and aptly named **Il tempo della cura** ('The time of care') - features a ranking based on 64 indicators classified according to six faculties: the ability to care for oneself and others, to enjoy a healthy life, to experience a safe life, to learn and be informed, to work, and to access resources and services. The findings point to the emergence of a specific

collective trauma from COVID-19 that triggered conditions of severe distress,

especially among vulnerable persons and households or with pre-existing traumas, characterised by a worrying increase in domestic tension, violence against women and violence witnessed and/or suffered by minors. In fact, homes are the most dangerous settings: 60 to 70 per cent of children aged 2 to 14, according to the Report, were subjected to emotional violence by their caregivers. This situation was exacerbated during the lockdown period by compulsory cohabitation combined with fear of falling ill, economic concerns and distance learning.



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While 43% of Italians reported deteriorating mental wellbeing in the past year, a high number of children and adolescents requested psychological support, especially during the second wave of the pandemic: self-harm and suicide attempts by adolescents have increased by 30% since October 2020. "Following years of underinvestment, Italy was clearly unprepared to face the ordeal of the pandemic. This makes it all the more important to strengthen territorial services for families and children to ensure targeted response to inevitable difficulties that lie ahead. The risk of mistreatment of children and adolescents is bound to escalate dramatically, and with it the need for psychological support. Now is the time for care and we can no longer afford to remain indifferent to this issue", said Gloria Zavatta, Cesvi Foundation chairperson, noting that the phenomenon is largely underestimated: there are nine undetected cases for every one reported'. **The national situation.** The findings of the research confirmed Italy as a two-speed country, with the South at higher risk of mistreatment and a poor or inadequate offer of welfare services at local level. **All eight northern regions are above the national average, while southern regions - Campania, Sicily, Calabria and Apulia - register a critical situation.** The region with the greatest capacity to cope with the problem is Trentino-Alto Adige, this year for the first time outperforming Emilia-Romagna, thanks to a marked improvement over the national average in terms of risk factors. In spite of being the region with the most efficient child maltreatment prevention and care strategy, Emilia-Romagna dropped from first place after three years due to a significant worsening of risk factors. Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Veneto and Umbria are ranked next. Parental low age and education, poverty, alcohol and/or drug use, mental illness, social isolation, unwanted pregnancy, dysfunctional family, domestic violence, poor childcare provision **are the main risk factors. Child maltreatment** - neglect; physical violence (wounds, bruises, fractures, beatings; sexual abuse; psychological or witnessed violence - has dramatic consequences on the short to long term health of the abused, on their mental and physical balance and, more generally, on society as a whole. These include psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, mood swings and, in the most serious cases, post-traumatic syndrome, as well as retarded mental, cognitive and linguistic development. In some cases, abused children tend to become violent parents.



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