Intimate partner violence and help-seeking

The role of femicide news

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Introduction

Motivation and contribution

Intimate Partner Violence is one of the most frequent forms of violence against women

- 1 in 5 women who have had at least one partner have experienced IPV (EU–FRA, 2015)

The most extreme form of violence against women is the gender-related murder of a woman by a man, or **femicide**

- In 2017, 87,000 women across the world were intentionally killed
  - 58% by a current or former intimate partner or by a family member (Stöckl et al., 2013; UNODC, 2018)
- In Italy, the male-to-female sex ratio among victims of voluntary manslaughter has decreased from around 5 to 1 in the early 1990s, to 1.6 to 1 in 2018
  ▸ Male and Female homicides
  - In 2018, **80%** of women were murdered by a current or former partner or by a family member (55% and 25%, respectively, ISTAT, 2020)

Motivation and contribution

In this paper, we study the drivers that lead survivors of IPV to seek help

We investigate <u>whether the news about femicides trigger help-seeking behavior by IPV victims</u>

- We use two unique high-frequency databases containing geo-localized information on **femicide events** and on the **calls to the Italian national anti-violence helpline**
- We corroborate our findings using a newly aquired database on **police reports for maltreatment and domestic abuse**
- We interpret our results in view of a **theoretical model** where an IPV survivor contemplates whether to seek help after receiving the news of a femicide

Motivation and contribution

We contribute to the literature studying what policy tools can effectively address IPV and help protecting survivors

- Aizer and Del Bo (2009): no-drop laws → increased help-seeking behaviour.
- Chin and Cunningham (2019): discretion to arrest → lower number of intimate partner homicides.
- Amuedo-Dorantes and Deza (2019): limited co-operation between police and immigration authorities → decrease in femicides among Hispanic women in the US
- Miller and Seagal (2019): increase in female representation among police off → higher IPV reporting
- Colagrossi et al. (2022): awareness campaign during COVID → higher reporting to helpline

We also add to the lit on the impact of media exposure on crime

- Jensen and Oster (2009): introduction of cable television → lower acceptability of domestic violence in India
- Card and Dahl (2011): football games loss → rise in IPV

Outline

Data and method

Data sources

News Geolocalized **daily** data on all killings of girls and women (2015-2019)

Collected by NGO *Casa delle donne per non subire violenza* from national and local press

Info on date, location, relationship perpetrator-victim, motive, type of weapon, age, nationality, job, history of violence/illness, etc.

Calls Province-level **weekly** number of calls to the 1522 helpline (2015-2019)

Admin data provided by the Dep of Equal Opportunity of the Italian Gov

Police Province-level **monthly** counts of police reports for maltreatment and domestic abuse (2015-2019)

Newly acquired admin data provided by the Dep of Public Security of Italian Ministry of Interior.

Coverage Complementary data on news coverage and salience from Google searches and the Global Database of Events, Language and Tone (GDELT) database.

Official anti-violence hotline

- Launched in 2006 by the Department for Equal Opportunities

- It's free-toll and available 24/7 in 5 languages, via phone or chat

- Dedicated telephone service operators

- Provide a **first response** to the needs of victims of gender-based violence and stalking

- Offers **info and guidance** to public and private local services, health centers and shelters where victims can seek assistance.

The helpline receives ∼ **20,000+ calls per year**

▸ Interview − 1   ▸ Interview − 2

Helpline calls by reason and identity of the caller, 2019

| Reason	Calls in 2019	of which:		
		made for oneself	made by family/friends	made by professionals
Request for information	10,816 (50.8%)	95%	1%	4%
Request for help: violence	6,483 (30.5%)	100%	0%	0%
Reporting of violence	1,098 (5.2%)	29%	67%	4%
Request for help: stalking	897 (4.2%)	100%	0%	0%
Emergency	174 (0.8%)	100%	0%	0%
Other	1,822 (8.6%)	100%	0%	0%
Total	21,290 (100%)			

Note: *Request for information* includes information on the service, on national anti-violence centres, legal information, information on procedures from professionals and on the legal responsibilities of public operators; *Other* includes reporting of malfunctioning services, misleading media coverage and calls out of target.

- The offender is a current or former partner (79%) or a family member (13%)

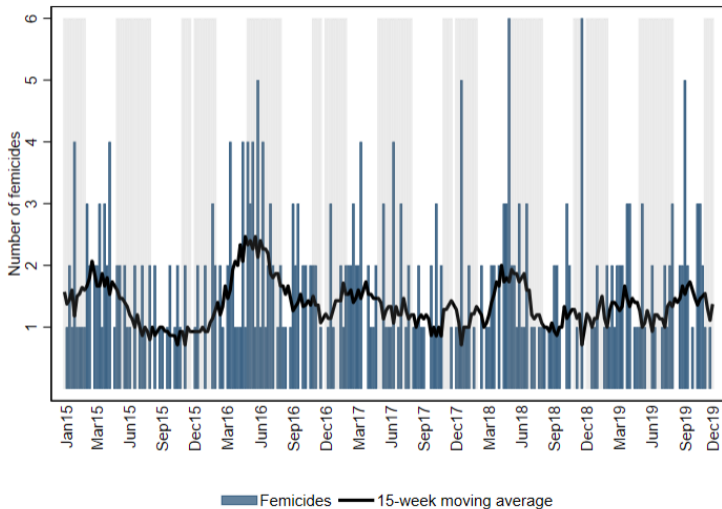- 92% of the calls refer to reiterated episodes of violence

Female homicides by year and type

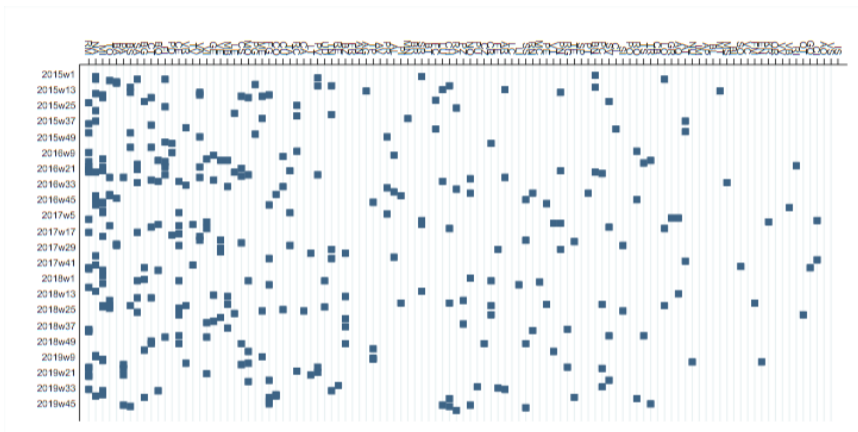**Femicide** Motive associated to sentimental or sexual relationship

Other Motive related to health condition of the murderer, the victim or her relatives
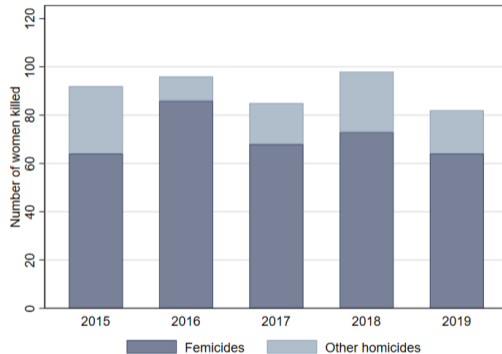
Femicides over the years 2015-2019

Legend: Femicides (blue bars) — 15-week moving average (black line)
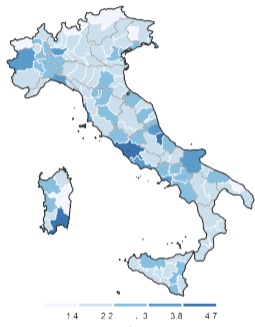
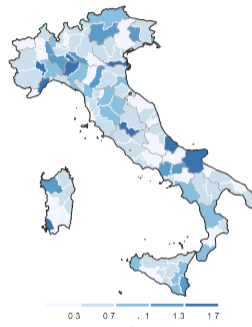# Distribution of femicides across provinces and time, 2015-2019

Note: Spatial-temporal distribution of the treatment. Each square represents a femicide in a given province in a given week (w). Provinces are ordered by population size.
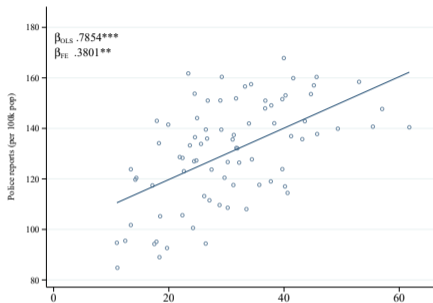
(a) Calls to the *1522* helpline (monthly avg. pop 100k)

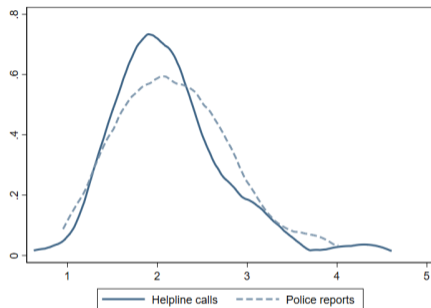(b) Femicides (tot. in 2015-2019 pop 100k)

Helpline calls and police reports

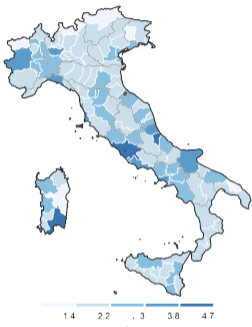(a) Correlation between calls to the helpline and police reports by women for menace, beating, attempted homicide and sexual violence (yearly regional data per 100k pop, 2015-2016).

(b) Comparing the distribution of monthly calls in Italian provinces and monthly reports for maltreatment and domestic abuse (per 100k pop, 2015-2019)

(a) Calls to the *1522* helpline (monthly avg. pop 100k)
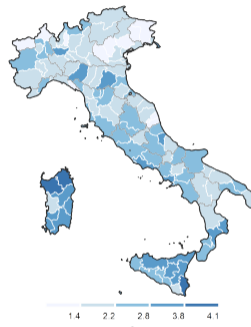
(b) Police reports (monthly avg. pop 100k)

The model

Survivor

Take Action

No Action

N

N

Bad state

p

$1-p$

Good state

Bad state

q

$1-q$

Good state

$-V$

B

$-v$

0

(e.g. violence from
retaliation)

(e.g. counselling,
escaping violence)

(violence persists
$v = status\text{-}quo$)

(violence is reduced
or ceases)

14
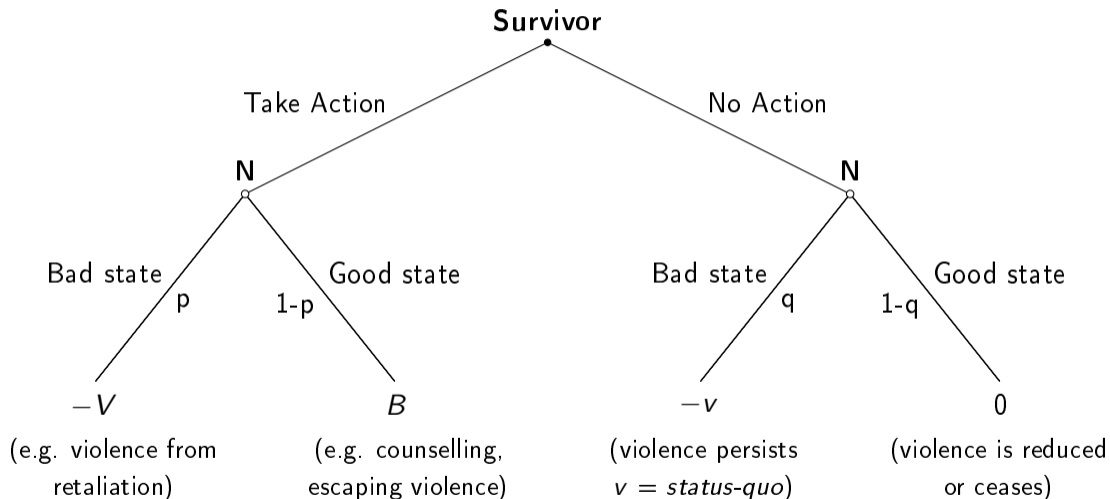
Under risk neutrality,

$$U(\text{Action}) = (1 - p) B - pV \qquad (1)$$
$$U(\text{No Action}) = -qv \qquad (2)$$

A survivor that expects a level of violence v in the status-quo **will take action** if

$$v > \hat{v} \equiv \frac{pV - (1 - p) B}{q} \qquad (3)$$

where $\hat{v}$ denotes a threshold level of expected violence in case no action is taken

Femicide news increases the **salience of future expected violence in the bad states** due to, e.g. an emotional identification with the victim, or fear of being subject to additional violence.

$$p' \equiv \frac{\partial p_{i,t}}{\partial n_{i,t}} \geq 0, \qquad q' \equiv \frac{\partial q_{i,t}}{\partial n_{i,t}} \geq 0. \tag{4}$$

The effect of femicide news on the decision to call will depend on the threshold $\hat{v}_{i,t}$:

$$\frac{\partial \hat{v}_{i,t}}{\partial n_{i,t}} = \frac{(B_{i,t} + V_{i,t})\, p' - \hat{v}_{i,t} q'}{q_{i,t}}. \tag{5}$$

After a femicide is reported in the news, **more survivors take action if the motives driven by increased expectations of violence in the status quo dominate the increased expectations of violence-as-retaliation**

Empirical strategy

$$Y_{pt} = \alpha + \sum_{\pi=-4}^{-1} \beta_\pi D_{pt+\pi} + \sum_{\tau=1}^{4} \beta_\tau D_{pt+\tau} + \delta_t + \gamma_p + \epsilon_{pt}$$

- Y_{pt} is the number of helpline calls per 100k pop in province p and week t
- $D_{pt+\pi}$ and $D_{pt+\tau}$ describe 4 pre- and 4 post-treatment periods associated to each femicide
- δ_t and γ_p are week and province fixed effects
- ϵ_{pt} is the error term
- standard errors clustered at province level
- baseline: week prior to the femicide $(t-1)$

Results

Helpline calls and femicides
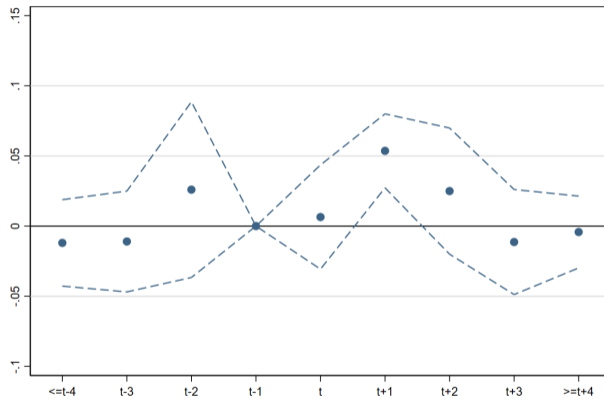
Helpline calls and female homicides, main estimates

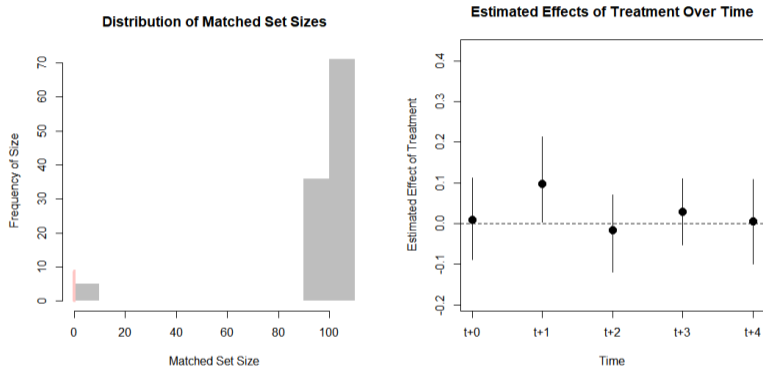| Treatment	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Femicides		Other homicides	
Dep. Variable	Total calls	Calls from victims	Total calls	Calls from victims
	per 100k pop	per 100k pop	per 100k pop	per 100k pop
t-4 or earlier	-0.012	-0.004	-0.027	-0.009
	(0.016)	(0.005)	(0.022)	(0.009)
t-3	-0.011	0.012	-0.060	-0.041*
	(0.018)	(0.010)	(0.042)	(0.022)
t-2	0.026	0.025	0.008	0.010
	(0.032)	(0.017)	(0.027)	(0.018)
t	0.006	0.000	-0.051*	-0.021
	(0.019)	(0.013)	(0.028)	(0.019)
t+1	0.054***	0.025***	-0.040	-0.013
	(0.013)	(0.009)	(0.028)	(0.018)
t+2	0.025	0.021	0.050	0.028
	(0.023)	(0.016)	(0.035)	(0.024)
t+3	-0.011	-0.001	0.045	0.005
	(0.019)	(0.009)	(0.030)	(0.019)
t+4 or later	-0.004	-0.006	-0.015	0.001
	(0.013)	(0.008)	(0.016)	(0.008)
Observations	28,231	28,231	28,231	28,231
R-squared	0.307	0.184	0.307	0.184

Note: The baseline period is $t-1$ (one week prior to the event of interest). The dependent variable is the number of helpline calls (total or from victims only) per 100,000 population. Population-weighted estimates include province and week-year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at province level. *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$.

|	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
t-4 or earlier	-0.014	-0.014	-0.014	0.002	-0.008	-0.007
	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.026)
t-3	-0.013	-0.014	-0.014	0.009	0.002	0.009
	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.042)
t-2	0.024	0.023	0.023	0.044	0.024	0.049
	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.027)	(0.025)	(0.046)
t	0.004	0.003	0.003	0.008	-0.015	-0.023
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.020)	(0.022)	(0.042)
t+1	0.052***	0.050***	0.050***	0.059***	0.081***	0.137***
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.020)	(0.025)	(0.041)
t+2	0.024	0.022	0.022	0.042*	-0.008	-0.013
	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.046)
t+3	-0.012	-0.014	-0.014	-0.035	-0.029	-0.050
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.022)	(0.018)	(0.036)
t+4 or later	-0.008	-0.009	-0.009	-0.005	-0.016	-0.028
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.026)
Observations	28,231	28,231	28,231	27,972	28,231	28,231
R-squared	0.311	0.319	0.319	0.464	0.165	
Population-weighted	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Violence linear trends	✓					
Poverty linear trends		✓				
Education linear trends			✓			
Province-Year FE				✓		
Week-Year-Region FE				✓		
Estimator	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	PPML

Note: The baseline period is $t-1$ (one week prior to the event of interest). The dependent variable is the number of calls to the *1522* helpline per 100,000 population. Population-weighted estimates include province and week-year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at province level. *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$.

Matched controls and estimated average effect (Imai et al., 2019)

Distribution of Matched Set Sizes

**Estimated Effects of Treatment Over Time**

Note: Procedure suggested by Imai et al., 2019 and implemented via the *PanelMatch* R package. The left plot shows the number of matched control units that share the same treatment history as a treated observation. The red thin bar at zero represents the number of treated observations that have no matched control units. The right plot displays coefficients and corresponding 95% confidence intervals estimated based on a matching method that adjusts for the treatment and covariate histories during the four weeks period prior to the treatment.

Helpline calls and femicides, other results
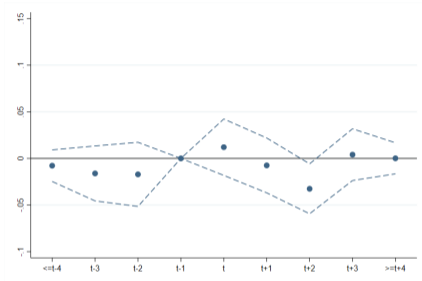

(a) Adjacent provinces (SUTVA)
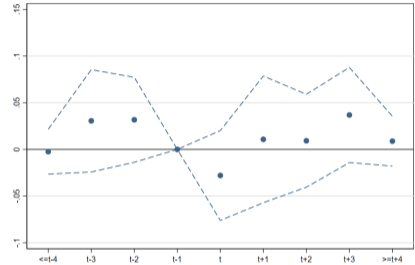
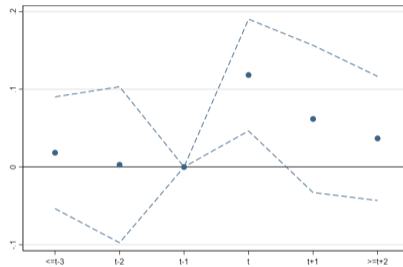(b) Future femicides (Placebo)

Note: The dependent variable is the number of helpline calls per 100,000 population. Treatment is assigned to (a) adjacent provinces, or (b) future femicides in the same province (same week). Population-weighted estimates include province and week-year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at province level.
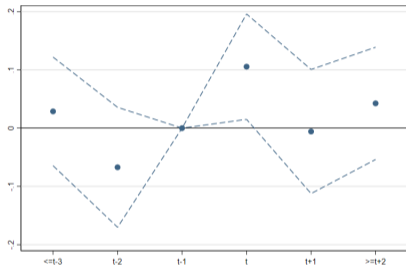
(a) Helpline calls

(b) Police reports

▸ Table

Are some news more salient than others?

Treatment	(1) Most searched	(2) Young	(3) Victim Children	(4) Non-Italian	(5) Beating/ hitting	(6) Murder-suicide	(7) Most covered
Baseline: The effect of the news of a femicide							
t-4 or earlier	-0.003	-0.011	-0.018	-0.021	-0.010	-0.013	0.004
	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.020)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.015)
t-3	-0.002	-0.009	0.006	-0.013	-0.025	-0.008	-0.035
	(0.026)	(0.021)	(0.019)	(0.026)	(0.028)	(0.020)	(0.025)
t-2	0.024	0.022	0.012	0.023	0.032	0.030	0.022
	(0.021)	(0.031)	(0.038)	(0.030)	(0.028)	(0.036)	(0.026)
t	0.006	-0.004	0.014	0.017	0.017	0.010	0.001
	(0.019)	(0.021)	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.021)
t+1	0.047*	0.036*	0.078***	0.054***	0.028*	0.079***	0.035*
	(0.025)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.017)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.018)
t+2	0.037	0.003	0.067*	0.014	0.019	0.015	0.015
	(0.023)	(0.031)	(0.035)	(0.026)	(0.024)	(0.016)	(0.016)
t+3	-0.022	-0.027	0.011	-0.018	-0.018	-0.008	-0.013
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.026)	(0.024)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.024)
t+4 or later	0.003	-0.010	0.015	-0.011	-0.015	-0.002	-0.002
	(0.014)	(0.017)	(0.013)	(0.020)	(0.022)	(0.013)	(0.013)

Treatment	(1) Most searched	(2) Young	(3) Victim Children	(4) Non-Italian	(5) Beating/ hitting	(6) Murder-suicide	(7) Most covered
Differential effect of the selected treatment							
t-4 or earlier	-0.005	-0.001	0.012	0.025	-0.004	0.004	-0.022
	(0.022)	(0.015)	(0.030)	(0.016)	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.015)
t-3	-0.027	-0.004	-0.029	-0.001	0.036	-0.009	0.004
	(0.024)	(0.038)	(0.024)	(0.035)	(0.045)	(0.036)	(0.020)
t-2	0.050	0.025	0.025	0.002	-0.018	-0.018	0.022
	(0.052)	(0.029)	(0.023)	(0.037)	(0.071)	(0.031)	(0.051)
t	0.044	0.053	-0.014	-0.041	-0.026	-0.013	0.021
	(0.040)	(0.038)	(0.028)	(0.026)	(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.028)
t+1	0.048*	0.089	-0.044	-0.002	0.067**	-0.091**	0.054*
	(0.026)	(0.057)	(0.031)	(0.034)	(0.031)	(0.036)	(0.030)
t+2	-0.006	0.103*	-0.074**	0.043*	0.012	0.039	0.039
	(0.027)	(0.059)	(0.035)	(0.025)	(0.033)	(0.045)	(0.035)
t+3	0.031	0.067	-0.037	0.019	0.012	-0.011	-0.006
	(0.035)	(0.042)	(0.023)	(0.034)	(0.032)	(0.029)	(0.035)
t+4 or later	-0.013	0.018	-0.031	0.019	0.028	-0.007	0.001
	(0.021)	(0.025)	(0.022)	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.016)	(0.012)
Observations	28,231	28,231	28,231	28,231	28,231	28,231	28,231
R-squared	0.307	0.307	0.307	0.307	0.307	0.307	0.307

▸ GS   ▸ GDELT   ▸ GS-char

Conclusions

Conclusions

We study **how victims of IPV react to the news of a femicide** by estimating whether it triggers calling a helpline and reaching out for help and support

We find that after a femicide is reported in the news, **calls to the helpline increase by 11% (weekly), police reports by 5% (monthly)**

These findings are consistent with femicide news **increasing the survivor's expectations about future IPV**

The effect is short-lived, and geographically localised

Conclusions

Our paper provides **empirical support** to the impact of **information campaigns** and the **increased importance given in the news to femicides**

However, the salience of the news and its impact on help-seeking behavior **fades away quickly**

To avoid this, the policy maker should promote **recurrent information campaigns and public discussion** around gender-based violence, together with **active local support services for survivors** aimed at increasing the expected benefits of calling for help

What happens when I call 1522?

The person who answer is always a highly specialized anti-violence worker, expert in gender-based violence, who will know how to listen to you, without judgment and with respect for privacy and anonymity. Its primary goal is to make the caller feel that they are understood and believed. You will be able to talk about what you are experiencing and you will be able to receive all the information relating to the Anti-violence Network present on the Italian territory (anti-violence centers, shelters, social and health services, law enforcement agencies, hospitals), which, if you wish, you can contact to start a path to escape from violence. Contacting 1522 represents a first step to get out of isolation and a situation of violence.

▸ back

My partner is violent, but I have no money or a job. So I can't imagine being able to leave him. Can 1522 help me?

Many women who are economically dependent on their partners cannot imagine an alternative future to violence precisely because of violence. 1522 can help you redraw the imagery that prevents you from leaving your abusive partner. The operators are able to help you start a path towards economic and working autonomy. In short, to start a new life. The Anti-violence Centers - towards which 1522 can direct you - are concerned with accompanying women who have suffered violence towards the regaining of their autonomy, aiming at economic and working stability. In the Centers, you will be able to be followed for free by specialized lawyers and included in orientation and job placement projects, which will allow you to regain social and economic autonomy to live free from violence.

Male and Female homicides over time
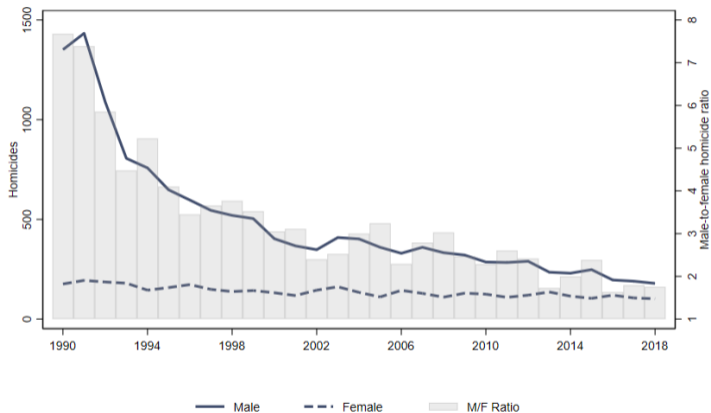
Note: Solid and dashed lines represent the yearly total number of men and women who died by homicide, respectively. Bars indicate the male-to-female homicide ratio. Source: Italian Cause of Death database, ISTAT (1990-2018).

Effect of femicide news on helpline calls and police reports, monthly data

Dep. Variable	(1) Total calls per 100k pop	(2) Calls from victims per 100k pop	(3) Police reports per 100k pop
t-3 or earlier	0.029	-0.008	0.018
	(0.048)	(0.020)	(0.037)
t-2	-0.067	-0.020	0.003
	(0.053)	(0.031)	(0.051)
t	0.105**	0.084***	0.118***
	(0.046)	(0.030)	(0.037)
t+1	-0.006	-0.023	0.062
	(0.054)	(0.039)	(0.048)
t+2 or later	0.042	0.044*	0.037
	(0.049)	(0.026)	(0.041)
Observations	6,360	6,360	6,360
R-squared	0.554	0.438	0.532

Note: The baseline period is $t-1$ (one month prior to the event of interest). The dependent variable is the number of helpline calls per 100,000 population and the number of police reports for domestic abuse and maltreatment per 100,000 population. Population-weighted estimates include province and month-year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at province level. *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$. ▸ back

Most searched – Google searches
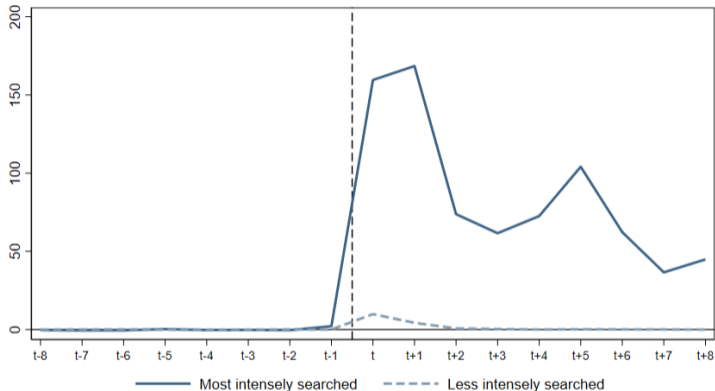
Note: The solid dark line is the average Google Search index for the most intensely searched names (i.e. above the fourth quartile of the overall distribution). The dashed light line refers to the average search index of less intensely searched names (i.e. below the fourth quartile of the overall distribution). All series are recentered around the date of each victim's murder (week t).
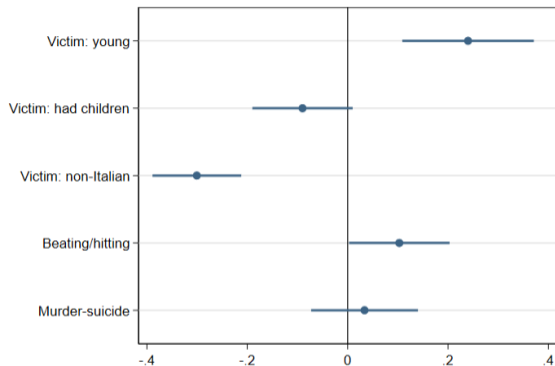
Media coverage GBV – GDELT
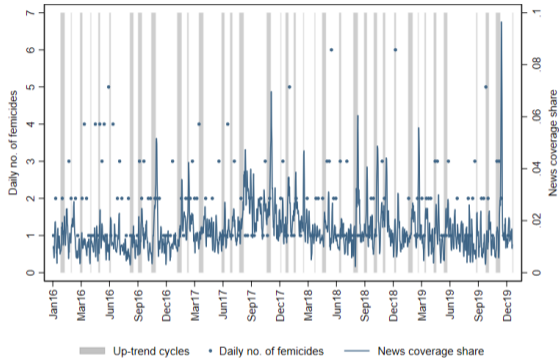
Note: The solid line represents the share of news covering topics related to gender-based violence and femicides in any given day. Each dot is the number of femicides occurred each week. The vertical bars indicate the periods of high news coverage.

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Searches and characterstics

Note: OLS estimates (blue dots) and robust 95% confidence intervals associated on the probability that a femicide is flagged as most searched on the web.

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