Work Against Gender Violence: The Effect of Employment Incentives to Victims Hosted by Anti-Violence Centers

Giuseppe Rose[a] , Patrizia Ordine[b] , Andrea Mosca[c]

[a]Dept. of Economics, Statistics and Finance, University of Calabria, Italy

[b]Dept. of Business Administration and Law, University of Calabria, Italy

[c]Dept. of Economics, University of Bergamo, Italy

Focus of the Paper

- This study analyzes the impact of active policy measures aimed at improving employment opportunities for women who are victims of violence.

- The study exploits an Italian policy that incentivizes the permanent hiring of women who are victims of violence.

- We analyze the number of cases of violence registered in almost 1/3 of the existing anti-violence centers operating in Italy.

- The impact of the reform is examined by using a Two-Way Fixed Effects model with continuous treatment, given that the firms that can have access to the subsidy are distributed across Italian provinces with a high degree of heterogeneity.

Preview of the Results

- Firstly, the reform had a positive effect on employment since the presence of female workers in incentivized firms increased substantially during the period of its implementation.

- Secondly, admissions into anti-violence centers significantly decreased after the reform in those provinces where incentivized firms were more present and this applies to both new and recurring cases.

- In numbers: we detect a 1% increase in female employment share in incentivized firms which led to a 1.5% reduction in the average number of cases hosted in anti-violence centers.

Literature

Women's labor market participation has recently been related to domestic/intimate partner violence against women on the basis of the consideration that women's employment status could:

- render them autonomous enough to extricate themselves from violent situations;

- reduce exposure time;

- improve the overall economic situation of the family, reducing stressful events and expressive violence.

However, the empirical literature on this topic is divided:

- On the one hand, some studies claim that economic autonomy and active working status reduce the probability of abuse (Bhalotra et al., 2023).

- On the other hand, others find that if women work, the likelihood of violence may increase. Adams-Prassl et al. (2024) develop a dynamic theory where they discuss how abusive men have an incentive to use coercive control to sabotage women's labor market outcomes and their ability to exit the relationship.

Our Contribution

We add to the existing literature by:

1) Focusing on women who: i) are in abusive relations; ii) have realized that they are suffering violence and iii) have asked for some help in anti-violence centers.

2) Looking at the consequence of improvement in employment opportunity specifically designed for these women in order to promote their autonomy and economic independence.

3) Providing evidence derived from new type of data.

The Policy

- The Italian government set a provision for women victims of gender-based violence with the goal of providing some stimulus for their employment opportunities. The law came into force on 1st January 2018 and applied only to hirings that took place in 2018.

- Permanent employment in firms established as *social cooperatives* has been incentivized.

- Incentives were guaranteed in the form of relief from the compulsory social security and welfare insurance contributions due for the above-mentioned recruited women.

- The violence experienced had to be certified by an anti-violence center. This meant that, in order to be hired and to use the benefits of the law, there was no need for long drawn-out legal proceedings for any crime involving gender-based violence.

Anti-Violence Centers

Anti-violence centers operating in Italy are run by non-governmental organizations which support abused women.

Victims are supported by means of short and long-term psychological counselling, trauma care, legal counselling, empowerment and support towards achieving economic independence, legal support and outreach services, telephone help lines and specific services for children as victims or witnesses.

Immediate, round-the-clock access to safe accommodation for victims and their children is also ensured by some anti-violence centers, a number of which, therefore, further qualify as shelters.
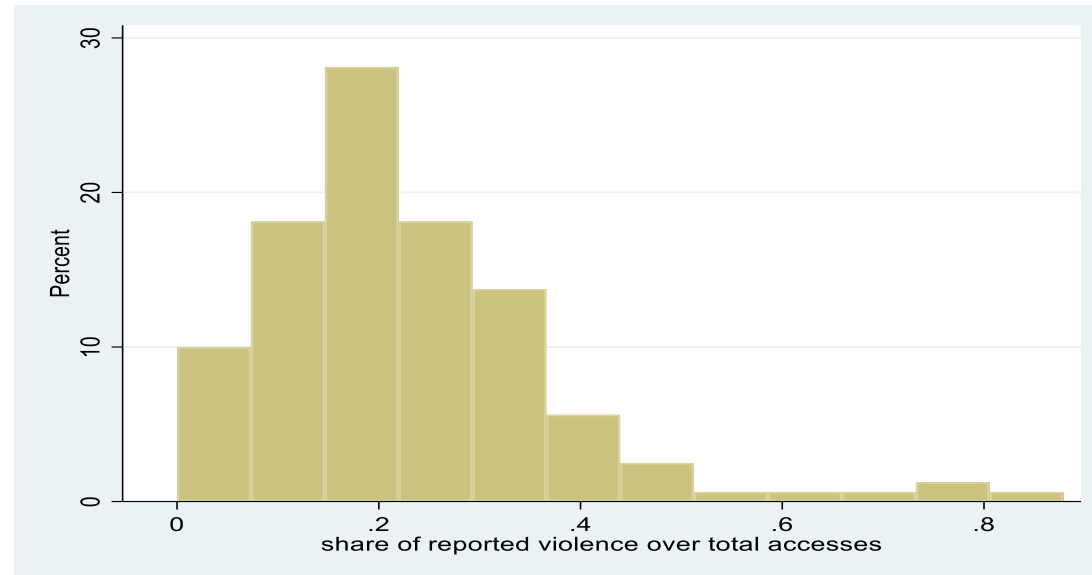
Social Cooperatives

The social cooperative is a particular legal form of firm. No more than 80% of profits may be distributed. The objective is the general benefit of the community and the social integration of citizens. Thanks to this form, all members of the cooperative have the same rights and the same votes in assembly independently of their share of the social capital. Furthermore, in case of legal complaints, all the members are legally responsible and not only the CEO.

Coop Employed
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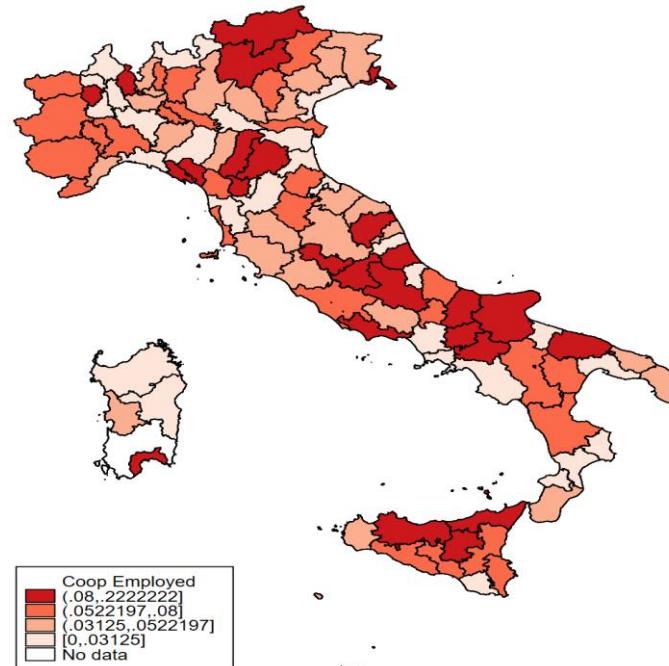
Data

Our research is based on data from two different sources:

- The ISTAT Quarterly Labor Force Survey for the years from 2016 until 2018

- A never explored data set consisting of a 4-year (2016-2019) unbalanced quarterly panel of 103 anti-violence centers located in 100 Italian provinces (out of 105).

The Empirical Model

The empirical model goes in two steps:

- STEP 1: Assess whether the policy gave a boost to women's permanent employment in social cooperatives.

- STEP 2: Evaluate if a rise in employment for victims of violence generates a reduction in the number of admissions into anti-violence centers.

Step1: Employment Effect

- Using the ISTAT data set, we estimate if the outflow of women from unemployment toward incentivized jobs has been modified by the policy.

- To this aim we use a TWFE exploiting the heterogeneous distribution of social cooperatives across provinces.

- Formally, we estimate the following equation:

$$Incentivized\_Job_{ipt}= \alpha+\phi_p+\eta_t+\beta X_i+\gamma_1 Post_t*Intensity_p+\varepsilon_{ip}$$

- **Incentivized_Job$_{ipt}$** is a dummy equal to 1 if woman i in province p in quarter t is employed in an incentivized position, 0 if she is unemployed.
- **α** is a constant, **θ** are provincial fixed effects (105 provinces), **η** are time fixed effects (12 quarters), **ε** are the residuals clustered at provincial level.
- **X** indicates independent control variables (age, marital status, number of kids, education) and **β** is their parameter vector.
- **Post** is a dummy variable which takes value 1 for quarters in the year 2018 only.
- **Intensity** is a continuous variable measuring the share of employment in social cooperatives in each province (given by the ratio of employment in these firms over total employment) in the year immediately before the reform (2017) derived from census data.

Step 2: Impact of Policy on Violence

- Using data of anti-violence centers we evaluate if labor market participation of victims of violence generates a reduction in the number of admissions into these shelters.

- The estimation of this effect is based on the fact that the presence of social cooperatives was very heterogeneous across provinces so we can estimate the following TWFE model:

$$CHIAC_{cpt}= \alpha+\vartheta_p+\eta_t +\delta_1\ Post_t*Intensity_p+\xi_{cpt}$$

- the dependent variable is the number of cases hosted in center c located in province p in quarter t according to the information provided by anti-violence centers for the 2016-2019 period.
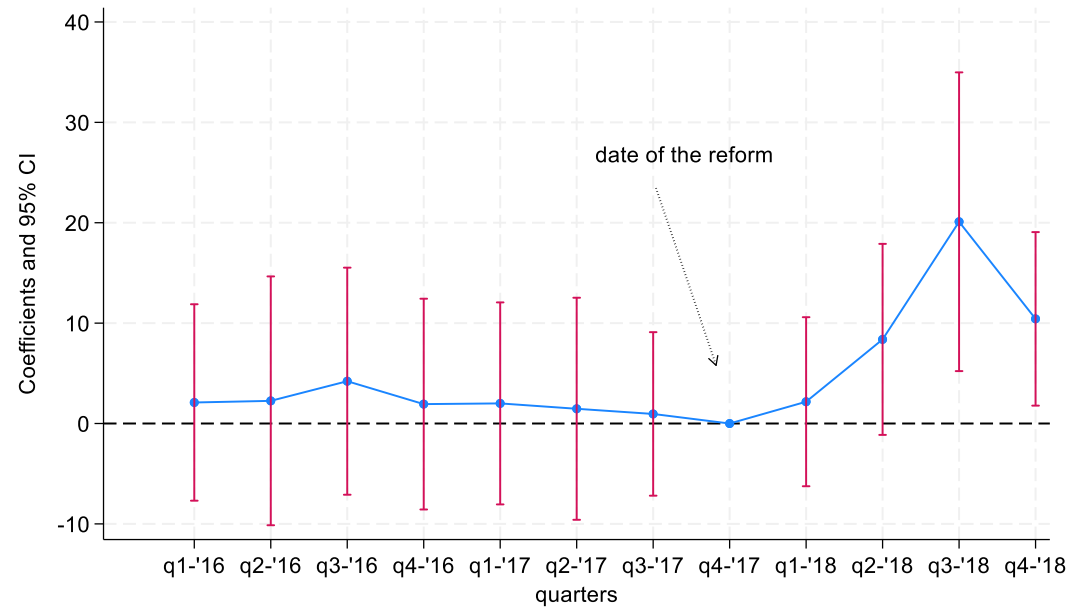
Results: The Employment Impact of the Law

- We start by estimating eq. 1 for a sample of 33,807 women who, in each quarter, were either unemployed or employed in social cooperatives on a permanent contract which started in that quarter.

- The dependent variable takes value 1 if the woman is employed in an incentivized position.

Table 6: Estimates of the effect of the policy on the employment probability of women in incentivized positions, women only.

Independent Variables	Column I TWFE	Column II TWFE	Column III CBS	Column IV CBS
Post · Intensity	.068***	.068***	.068**	.068**
	(.021)	(.033)	(.021)	(.033)
Post	.005**	.005**	.005**	.005**
	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)
Year 2017	.007***	.007***	.007***	.007***
	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)
Age 35-44		.001		.001
		(.001)		(.001)
Age: 45-54		.001		.001
		(.001)		(.001)
Age: 55-64		-.002*		-.002*
		(.001)		(.001)
Education: Secondary school		-.001		-.001
		(.001)		(.001)
Education: High school		-.001		-.001
		(.001)		(.001)
Education: University degree		.009***		.009***
		(.001)		(.001)
Children		-.001		-.001
		(.001)		(.001)
Citizenship		-.001		-.001
		(.001)		(.001)
Family members		-.001		-.001
		(.001)		(.001)
Married		-.001		-.001
		(.001)		(.001)
Provincial fixed effects. (105)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Time fixed effects (12)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clustered standard errors	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	33,807	33,807	33,807	33,807

Event study and common trend test


Women

Men
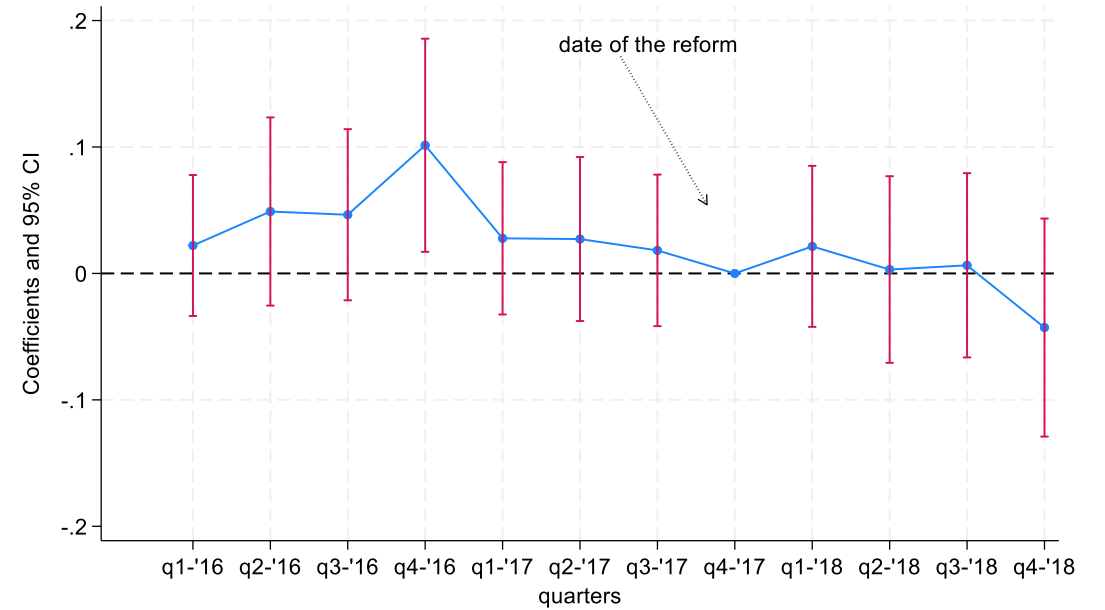
Results: Impact of the law on CHIAC-Total

We estimate the effect on total CHIAC. We detect a reduction of about -343 units meaning that in the two years after the policy implementation, a 1% increase in the employment ratio in cooperatives, with respect to total employment, leads to a 1.5% reduction in the average number of cases hosted in anti-violence centers in that period.

Table 10: Effect of the policy on total, new, and recurring cases hosted in anti-violence centers *(CHIAC)*.

	Panel A: TWFE		
Independent Variables	**Column I** **All**	**Column II** **New**	**Column III** **Recurring**
Post · Intensity	-343.770*** (123.841)	-242.725*** (86.978)	-101.045** (50.421)
Provincial fixed effects. (103)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Time fixed effects (16)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clustered standard errors	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,608	1,608	1,608
	Panel B: CBS		
Post · Intensity	-341.110*** (133.333)	-242.0555*** (94.120)	-99.045* (46.221)
Provincial fixed effects. (103)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Time fixed effects (16)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clustered standard errors	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,608	1,608	1,608

Event study and common trend: CHIAC
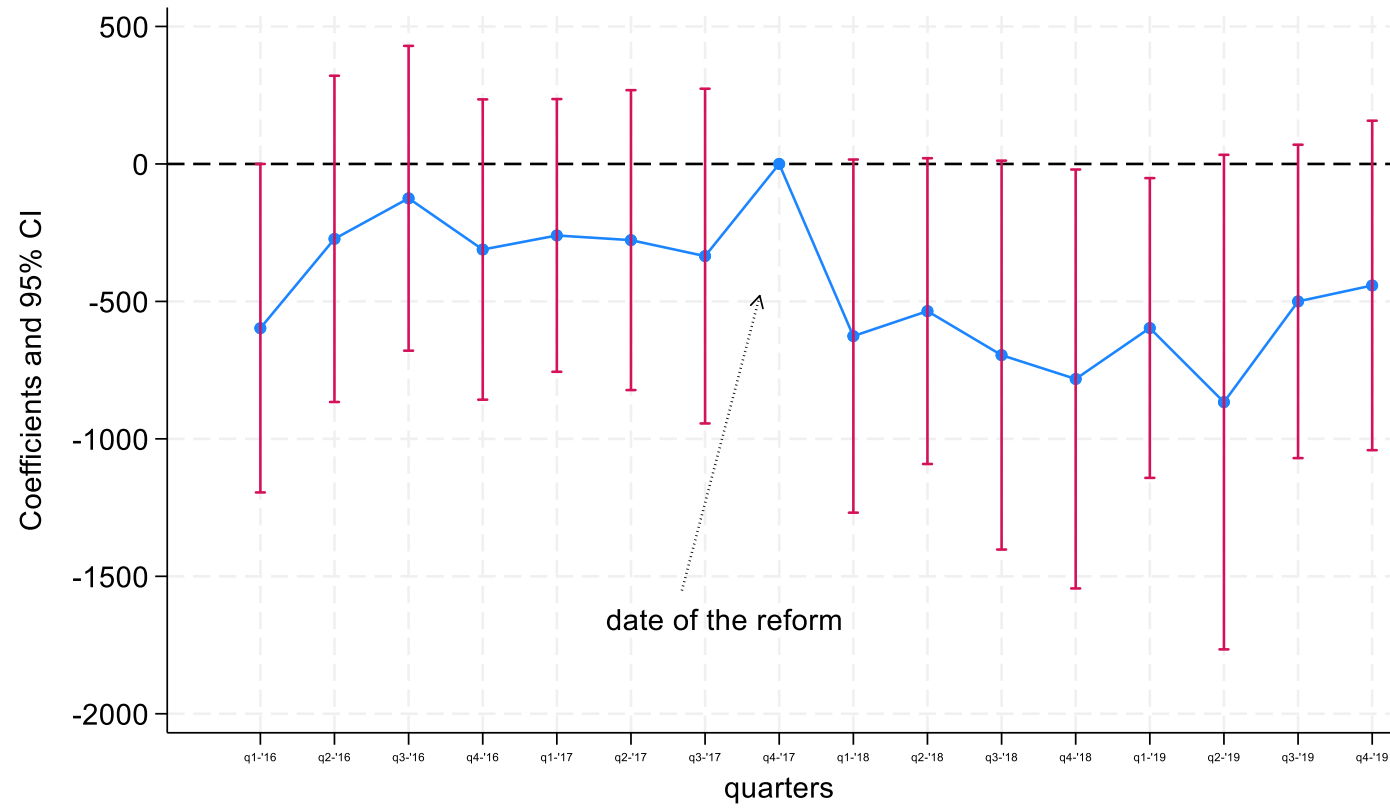
Results : Violence by type of perpetrator

We consider CHIAC according to the type of perpetrator, i.e., intimate partner, family member or unknown respectively. Results show that admissions relating to violence by intimate partners and family members have the most significant reduction while those committed by perpetrators who are not a part of the domestic environment are not affected.

Table 12: Effect of the policy on *CHIAC* by type of persecutor.

	Panel A: TWFE		
Independent Variables	Column I Intimate Partner	Column II Family member	Column III Stranger
Post · Intensity	-106.093** (42.526)	-28.862*** (9.370)	-0.989 (12.623)
Provincial fixed effects. (103)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Time fixed effects (16)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clustered standard errors	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,608	1,608	1,608
	Panel B: CBS		
Post · Intensity	-104.110** (43.117)	-26.190** (10.110)	-0.151 (14.111)
Provincial fixed effects. (103)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Time fixed effects (16)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clustered standard errors	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,608	1,608	1,608

Results: Type of Violence

We consider admissions due to four specific types of violence, that is, psychological, sexual, physical and economic. According to our estimates, the policy only induced a significant reduction in physical and sexual violence.

Table 13: Effect of the policy on *CHIAC* by type of violence.

	Panel A: TWFE			
Independent Variables	**Column I** **Psychological**	**Column II** **Sexual**	**Column III** **Physical**	**Column IV** **Economic**
Post · Intensity	-25.708 (91.098)	-39.476** (16.501)	-154.929*** (54.343)	-24.961 (43.806)
Provincial fixed effects. (103)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Time fixed effects (16)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clustered standard errors	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,608	1,608	1,608	1,608
	Panel B: CBS			
Post · Intensity	-24.492 (83.122)	-36.130** (17.112)	-144.331*** (64.111)	-21.222 (42.113)
Provincial fixed effects. (103)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Time fixed effects (16)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clustered standard errors	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,608	1,608	1,608	1,608

Falsification Check: Admissions of already employed women

We do not find any statistical variation on CHIAC. This means that the policy had no impact, either direct or indirect, on women who were already employed.

Table 11: Effect of the policy on *CHIAC* by victim's occupational status and on reported violence.

	Panel A: TWFE		
Independent Variables	**Column I** **Employed** **victims**	**Column II** **Unemployed** **victims**	**Column III** **Reported** **violence**
Post · Intensity	-31.734 (34.396)	-72.872** (30.889)	18.068 (11.080)
Provincial fixed effects. (103)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Time fixed effects (16)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clustered standard errors	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,608	1,608	1,608
	Panel B: CBS		
Post · Intensity	-41.100 (33.337)	-78.000** (29.120)	20.045 (14.201)
Provincial fixed effects. (103)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Time fixed effects (16)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clustered standard errors	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,608	1,608	1,608

Final Remarks

Our study makes a contribution to the empirical literature on violence against women and employment since it evaluated the short run effect of an exogenous shock to the employment opportunity of victims of violence. The paper is innovative for two reasons:

1. Existing papers considering the employment-violence relationship by looking at exogenous firings and evaluating their consequences on reported violence cannot explain the possible consequence of improving labor market opportunities for women who are systematically victims of violence and are trying to find a way to stop being victim.

2. The empirical evidence is not based on violence reported to the police, which makes up less than 25% of the total cases hosted by anti-violence centers.

Results are robust and show that:

1. victims improved their employment status.

2. cases registered into antiviolence centers decreases more where victims' employment was mostly affected.

Providing incentives specifically designed to boost employment of victims who try to react to their suffered violence can be an effective policy instrument to reduce the occurrence of domestic/intimate partner violence.