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## Divorce, domestic violence, and help seeking

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DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

**Divorce, domestic violence,  
and help seeking**

Elena Pisanelli

Quaderni - Working Paper DSE N° 1195



# Divorce, domestic violence, and help seeking

Elena Pisanelli\*

## Abstract

This paper examines the impact of the 2014 Italian divorce law on help-seeking behavior of domestic violence victims and femicides. I find that contrary to expectations, the reform, which aimed to make divorce cheaper while requiring mutual consent, led to a decrease in help-seeking behavior among intimate partner violence (IPV) survivors and an increase in femicides perpetrated by husbands. These findings suggest that while reducing the cost of divorce may empower individuals to leave abusive relationships, the requirement for mutual consent may inadvertently escalate violence as husbands seek to assert control and prevent separation. The study underscores the importance of considering the unintended consequences of divorce legislation and prioritizing the safety of IPV survivors in family policy interventions.

*JEL:* J12, J16, I10, I31

*Keywords:* Domestic violence, Femicides, Divorce, Help-seeking, Family policy

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# 1 Non-technical summary

Domestic violence is a widespread problem globally, especially affecting women from disadvantaged backgrounds. Research shows a strong connection between divorce and intimate partner violence (IPV), with separation rates spiking after abusive incidents. However, there's not enough evidence in economic studies about how divorce laws impact domestic abuse and femicides.

This paper adds to economic research on IPV causes. Previous studies (see, for instance, García-Ramos (2021), Bowlus and Seitz (2006), Dee (2003) and Stevenson and Wolfers (2006)) found that while divorce laws didn't immediately change IPV rates, they rose over time, especially among women who stayed in marriages after the laws changed. Other research (see Brassiolo (2016)) showed that reducing divorce costs led to less spousal violence.

This study focuses on Italy, where divorce became cheaper and easier in 2014, but both partners needed to agree. This change might affect how violence happens in households. Cheaper divorce might give spouses more power to negotiate, but it could also lead to violence if one partner feels they're losing control.

The study suggests two things might happen: fewer people might report IPV due to fear, and femicides (women killed by their partners) could rise as men try to keep control and stop separations.

Using data on calls to helplines and femicides, the study found that after the 2014 law change, helpline calls dropped, and femicides against wives went up. This contradicts earlier studies suggesting cheaper divorce reduces spousal murders. The Italian law's requirement for both partners to agree on divorce might create more tension in relationships, leading to deadly violence.

These findings challenge the idea that lowering divorce costs reduces domestic violence. Instead, they support theories that violence can increase as traditional gender roles are threatened. The paper emphasizes the need for family policies that support victims and reshape household dynamics. Policymakers should consider these consequences when designing new family laws.

## 2 Introduction

Domestic violence remains a pervasive issue globally, disproportionately affecting women, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Research underscores the intricate link between divorce and intimate partner violence (IPV), with separation rates significantly higher following abusive episodes (Bowlus and Seitz, 2006). Despite the critical link between domestic abuse and divorce legislation, empirical evidence in the economic literature is scarce and leaves open questions regarding the relationship between divorce laws and femicides.

This paper contributes to the expanding body of economic literature dedicated to understanding the causes of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). Several key studies have explored the relationship between divorce and IPV in various contexts. For example, García-Ramos (2021) investigate the dynamics between divorce laws and intimate partner violence (IPV) within the specific context of a developing country, Mexico. By harnessing the temporal variance in the implementation of unilateral and no-fault divorce laws across different states in Mexico, they show that while IPV incidents exhibit no significant changes in the short term, they increase in the long term. Particularly compelling is the observation that this increase primarily stems from women who choose to remain within marital unions post-reform, hinting at a potential coercive mechanism wherein IPV serves to deter women from seeking marital dissolution. Bowlus and Seitz (2006) conduct a comprehensive analysis of domestic violence, aiming to understand the dynamics of abuse, its impact on relationships, and the responses of individuals, particularly women. Contrary to prevailing beliefs, their findings reveal a significant trend: women who experience abuse are more inclined to seek divorce, suggesting a proactive step towards ending abusive relationships. Brassiolo (2016) capitalize on a significant and unforeseen reduction in divorce costs in Spain to investigate its impact on domestic violence. His results suggest a decline in spousal conflict as a consequence of the reform and a decline in spousal violence among couples who remained married after the reform.

Previous research that is closely related to this paper includes Dee (2003) and Stevenson and Wolfers (2006). These works shed light on the relationship between divorce laws and spousal lethal violence. Dee (2003) studies the impact of unilateral divorce law in the US on lethal spousal violence. The results suggest that unrestricted unilateral divorce laws had only minimal and statistically insignificant effects on the incidence of lethal spousal violence directed towards wives. Stevenson and Wolfers (2006) evaluate how unilateral divorce changed family violence and whether the option provided by unilateral divorce reduced suicide and spousal homicide. Contrary to Dee (2003), they show that unilateral divorce both potentially increases the likelihood that a domestic violence relationship ends and decreases females murdered by their partners.

In addition to showing conflicting results, these studies have examined the reduction of divorce costs when unilateral divorce is introduced. This paper explores a distinct setting under Italian law, where reduced costs do not come with unilateral divorce but necessitate either the consent of the partner or proof of fault. In particular, the paper leverages the 2014 Italian divorce law, through mutual consent - both spouses agreed to the divorce and its terms - couples were no longer required to appear before a judge or undergo lengthy legal proceedings. Instead, they could file for divorce directly at their local municipality without the need for legal representation and paying a very small procedural amount.

This paper suggests that reducing the cost of divorce while requiring mutual consent alters household bargaining power, potentially increasing violence. One pathway is through “male backlash,” as proposed by Macmillan and Gartner (1999). With cheaper and easier divorce, spouses gain greater leverage in bargaining. However, for husbands facing a loss of control or status, resorting to violence may become a strategy to maintain authority and prevent their wives from leaving the marriage. This is also suggested by the behavioral “cue-triggered theory” proposed by Card and Dahl (2011), males may fundamentally have a preference against being abusive but may become violent as a result of losing control in response to some negative cues and

stress.

Thus, the hypothesis emerges that (hp1) reporting and seeking help for IPV may decrease due to fears of retaliation, while (hp2) femicides could increase as men attempt to exert control and prevent separations.

I employ a regression discontinuity design, robust to placebo changes in the calendar time of the reform, to examine the impact of the 2014 Italian divorce law on domestic violence outcomes. Using weekly provincial data on calls to the 1522 helpline numbers and a rich dataset on femicides episodes occurred at the municipality level, I assess changes in help-seeking behavior and femicides following the law's implementation. In particular, close to the reform implementation, helpline calls decrease by 16.9 percentage points, while the reform increases femicides against wives by 3.7 percentage points. The increase in spouse femicides does not align with existing research showing that the introduction of unilateral divorce reduces women murdered by their spouse (Stevenson and Wolfers, 2006). However, this is likely explained by the fact that Italian divorce law does not guarantee unilateral divorce; rather, it requires mutual consent in order to reduce the costs of divorce. This generates additional stress and tensions within the couple that explode in lethal spousal violence. At the same time, the decrease in help-seeking post-reform suggests a negative impact of the reform on intimate partner violence and victims support, rather increasing victims' fear of retaliation if help is sought.

The findings are inconsistent with traditional bargaining models, suggesting that the likelihood of domestic violence decreases as divorce costs decline, leading to a reduction in abusive behavior within marriages because of diminished incentives for husbands to resort to violence (Brassiolo, 2016). Conversely, the findings suggest support for "cue-triggered" theory and sociocultural models of "male backlash." As female bargaining power increases, violence against women may intensify, reflecting the fragility of traditional gender roles. The paper underscores the importance of family policy interventions in reshaping household power dynamics and incentivizing help-seeking behavior. The paper provides important empirical evidence on the care pol-

icymakers should take when designing new family policies, highlighting the relevant consequences family policies have in introducing tensions within the household.

### **3 The Italian Divorce Law**

Divorce is a legal institution in the Italian legal system aimed at terminating the civil effects of marriage.

It was introduced on December 1, 1970, during the Colombo Government, through Law No. 898 of December 1, 1970 - “Discipline of cases of marriage dissolution” (the so-called Fortuna-Baslini law), primarily authored by the socialist Loris Fortuna.

Article 1 of Law No. 898/1970 states that “the judge pronounces the dissolution of marriage [...] when [...] it is ascertained that the spiritual and material communion between the spouses cannot be maintained or reconstituted.”

The competent Court to pronounce judicial divorce is that of the defendant’s residence in the lawsuit. In the case of joint divorce, the Court may alternatively be that of the territory of one of the spouses.

Before declaring the dissolution of the marriage bond (if it is a civil marriage only, i.e., celebrated before the Civil Registrar) or the cessation of the civil effects of marriage (if it is a concordat marriage), the Court must ascertain the existence of two conditions.

The first, of a subjective nature, consists of the cessation:

- of material communion between the spouses, constituted by stable cohabitation, a common domestic organization, mutual personal assistance, and the presence of sexual relations;
- of spiritual communion, consisting of mutual affection, listening, mutual psychological help and support, understanding, and sharing of problems, on which the *affectio coniugalis* that binds them in a true communion of life and spirit is based.



The second, of an objective nature, consists of the existence of one of the causes expressly provided for by law (Article 3 of Law 898/1970):

- that consensual separation has been homologated or judicial separation has been pronounced, with a final judgment, and at least twelve months have elapsed since the spouses appeared at the first hearing of the judicial separation procedure, and six months in the case of consensual separation (in the case of consensual separation without judicial proceedings, the six-month period starts from the date certified in the separation agreement reached following a negotiation agreement assisted by a lawyer or from the date of the document containing the separation agreement concluded before the Civil Registrar);
- that one of the spouses has been sentenced to life imprisonment or at least fifteen years of imprisonment or to any custodial sentence for particularly serious offenses;
- that one of the spouses, a foreign citizen, has obtained abroad the annulment or dissolution of the marriage or has contracted a new marriage abroad;
- that the marriage has not been consummated;
- that the judicial change of sex of one of the spouses has been judicially declared.

The declaration of nullity of the religious marriage also entails the cessation of civil effects, including the obligation to pay maintenance, without prejudice to the effects of the putative marriage.

The vast majority of divorce proceedings are based on the personal separation of the spouses lasting for one year in the case of judicial separation, six months in the case of consensual separation.

For joint divorce applications and consensual separation, since 2014, it is no longer necessary to resort to the court, but for spouses without minor or incapacitated children or those with severe disabilities or economically not self-sufficient, it can be done with a joint declaration to the mayor as the civil registrar, with optional assistance from a lawyer. Spouses with children who have the aforementioned issues can divorce through negotiation assisted by at least one lawyer per side, without resorting to court.

A peculiarity of the Italian legal system is that, except for rare exceptions (criminal judgments, annulment or dissolution of marriage or new marriage of the foreign spouse abroad, unconsummated marriage, judgment of sex change), divorce must be preceded by legal separation lasting at least six months if consensual, one year if judicial. This choice stems from the fact that in Italy many couples have separate residential registrations for tax or professional reasons, which have nothing to do with the crisis of the marital relationship. For this reason, unlike in other legal systems (German, Norwegian, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, Irish, etc.), it is not enough to have lived separately for a period, but a titled separation (judicial or consensual) is required. The costs of lawyers and the complexity of the dual judicial procedure (separation and divorce) have had the effect that many separated couples hesitate to seek divorce.

Faced with this situation, the procedure has been simplified, not in the sense of avoiding the double step, but in the sense of speeding up the obtaining of both separation and divorce.

Thus, since September 12, 2014, it has been definitively established by law that the two spouses who agree both on divorce and on the conditions (for common assets, use of the residence, maintenance allowance, etc.), if they do not have minor or disabled children (even if of legal age), can declare to the civil registry office of the municipality their intention to divorce without the assistance of lawyers and paying only 16€. The divorce is immediately transcribed without further formalities; in case of disagreement, they can try to reach an agreement with the assistance of their lawyers, possibly with the assistance of a third lawyer appointed by the Bar Association; in any case, if no agreement is reached, the three lawyers submit to the Court a written report with all the details of the case and it is up to the judge only to decide based on what is summarily presented to him; in the case of minor children (or disabled children, even if of legal age), the procedure remains similar to the pre-existing one. Specifically, Article 12 of the decree-law of September 12, 2014, no. 132, provides that spouses may conclude, before the mayor, acting as the civil registrar of the municipality of residence of one of them or

of the municipality where the marriage certificate is registered or transcribed, with the optional assistance of a lawyer, an agreement of personal separation [...] dissolution or termination of the civil effects of marriage. The civil registrar receives from each party personally, with the optional assistance of a lawyer, the declaration that they want to separate or terminate the civil effects of marriage or obtain its dissolution according to conditions agreed upon between them. The same procedure applies to the modification of separation or divorce conditions.

## 4 Data and Empirical Strategy

### 4.1 Data and Descriptive Statistics

The two main dependent variables are calls to the 1522 helpline and femicides. Table 1 shows summary statistics.

Data on calls to the 1522 helpline come from administrative data covering weekly calls at the province level for the years 2013-2019, released by the Department for Equal Opportunities and made available by Istat. The 1522 helpline is a public utility number provided by the Department for Equal Opportunities of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers to support and assist victims of gender-based violence and stalking, in line with what is defined within the Istanbul Convention. It is free of charge, ensures anonymity, and covers various forms of violence 24 hours a day and in 9 different languages besides Italian (English, French, Arabic, Spanish, Farsi, Albanian, Russian, Ukrainian, Portuguese, Polish). This helpline provides first aid information in case of emergency or useful directions to active anti-violence services and centers at the local level that victims of violence, or other users, can turn to.

Depending on the motivation, the calls are classified into three macro-groups: (i) valid calls coming from callers seeking information or seeking support for themselves or other individuals within their social and/or familial network; (ii) invalid calls, as they come from users whose purpose is not to seek help but to joke or denigrate the service itself, and calls made due to unintentional

errors. In this paper, I use data on valid calls. The system currently, also for privacy reasons, does not verify socio-demographic information if provided and does not require callers to provide their personal information.

Panel a of Figure 2 shows the geographical distribution of the average number of calls to the 1522 helpline in Italian provinces over the years 2013-2019 per 100,000 population. The map shows that no clear regional patterns emerge in the geographical distribution of calls. Table 3 shows details about the calls received by the 1522 helpline for the years 2013-2019. On average, 89% of calls are made by women, and only 17% of calls are made by victims to seek help for themselves.

Data on femicides come from a unique, geolocalized dataset on daily episodes for the years 2006-2022 on killings of women compiled by the non-governmental organization Casa delle Donne per Non Subire Violenza, which is an anti-violence center located in Bologna, Italy. The database includes information on all female murders reported by the local and national press or media in Italy. It includes information on the date and place of the murder, the relationship between the victim and the murderer, the name of the victim, and for some of the murders, the reason why the murder took place.

The definition of femicides follows the one given by the United Nations Statistical Framework, i.e., intentional homicide of women and girls with a gender-related motivation<sup>1</sup>. Gender-related motivation refers to stereotyped gender roles, discrimination towards women and girls, inequality, and unequal power relations between women and men in society, that characterize the specific context in which such killings take place. These factors can trigger violence by perpetrators when a woman's behavior is perceived not to be in line with social norms or stereotyped gender roles. In this context, the term "gender-related motivation" does not refer to the subjective intent of the perpetrator to commit the homicide, but to its underlying root causes.

Specifically, femicides include any killing of women that has the following

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/Statistical\\_framework\\_femicide.2022.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/Statistical_framework_femicide.2022.pdf)

characteristics: (i) the killing of a woman by another person; (ii) the intent of the perpetrator to kill or seriously injure the victim; (iii) the unlawfulness of the killing; (iv) the gender-related motivation of the killing. In a strictly statistical sense, femicides are defined as intentional homicides of female victims committed by intimate partners, those committed by other family members, and those committed by other known or unknown perpetrators with a certain *modus operandi* or in specific contexts indicative of gender-motivations.

In Italy, femicides are reported by national media on the day the news is released, providing information on the date, place, identity of the victim and her murderer, and the relationship between the two. Thus, my data on femicides are likely to be accurate. As Figure 1 shows, my yearly data on femicides (panel b) are closely correlated with Istat yearly data on femicides (panel a). The average number of femicides in my data across the period 2006-2022 is 115, while the average number of femicides registered by Istat for the same years is 117. Panel b of Figure 2 shows the geographical distribution of the average number of femicides in Italian provinces over the years 2006-2022 per 100,000 population. The map shows that femicides are homogeneously spread across Italy, without clear regional patterns.

## 4.2 Empirical Analyses

In the setting of this paper, there is no geographical variation in treatment assignment and all units are treated simultaneously. This paper, thus, leverages the natural occurrence of a cut-off point in the data at the time the reform took place. I employ a regression discontinuity design (RDD) methodology to estimate the causal impact of the Italian 2014 divorce reform on calls made to the 1522 helpline and incidences of femicides perpetrated by husbands, exploiting the temporal discontinuity created by the reform.

The key identifying assumption of the RDD approach is that units just above and below the threshold defining eligibility for the reform are comparable except for the treatment itself. In the context of this paper, this translates

to focusing on observations just before and after the implementation of the 2014 reform. I define the cutoff point based on the date of enactment of the reform, September 12, 2014.

Though very local in nature, this approach allows us to reduce remaining concerns that other potential confounders are driving calls to the 1522 helpline and incidence of femicides. All Italian municipalities (and provinces) are treated after the reform, ensuring stable unit treatment value assumption.

Regarding the baseline, Figure 3 shows the presence of a discontinuous decrease in calls to the 1522 helpline (Panel a) and an increase in femicides perpetrated by husband (Panel b) across the cutoff. More formally, columns 1–6 of Table 2 present estimates of the linear local regression model using the periods to the reform as the forcing variable and a triangular kernel (Cattaneo et al., 2019). The linearity assumption requires performing the analysis within a small enough bandwidth; therefore, I use the MSE optimal bandwidths as suggested by (Calonico et al., 2014).

The coefficient in column 1 of Table 2 indicates that calls to the 1522 helpline are 16.9 percentage points lower after the reform. Conversely, the coefficient in column 4 of Table 2 indicates that femicides committed by husbands are 3.7 percentage points higher after the reform. These results are significant at the 5% level and robust to several checks.

First, to rule out that my results are driven by unobservable events at the cutoff, in columns 2, 3, 5, and 6, I employ a “donut hole” approach and exclude days within 1 and 2 weeks of the reform. This accounts also for any potential effects due to anticipation of the reform being approved in parliament and potential advertisement of the reform in the media. Coefficients remain large in magnitude and highly significant.

Second, I investigate the sensitivity of the estimates to the use of alternative placebo cut-offs in the dates. As before, the dependent variables are calls to the 1522 helpline and femicides committed by husbands, and I report in Table 4 the linear local regression model using the periods to the placebo date and a triangular kernel. Results show that there are no significant changes

at random placebo reform dates.

Third, as a placebo exercise, I investigate whether there is any change in femicides committed by non-spouses. Because the reform changes the costs and procedures of divorce, its impact is only supposed to realize on femicides committed by husbands. Therefore, no effect should be expected on femicides committed by other than husbands. The dependent variable is any femicide committed by someone who is not the victim's husband and available in the data compiled by the non-governmental organization Casa delle Donne per Non Subire Violenza. I report in Table 5 the linear local regression model using the periods to the placebo date and a triangular kernel. Results do not show any significant effect of the reform.

## 5 Interpreting the results

The results of this paper can be summarized as follows: making divorce cheaper but requiring consent from both partners decreases help-seeking behavior and increases lethal spousal violence.

The decrease in help-seeking is consistent with IPV survivors anticipating heightened retaliation if they choose to seek help after the reform. These expectations are shaped by their husbands' high level of violence during negotiations and discussions when women try to obtain consent for divorce. This interpretation builds on Colagrossi et al. (2023). In response to intimate partner violence (IPV), women may adopt various strategies: resisting, fleeing, or trying to appease their abusive partners. These choices are often made with the aim of ensuring their safety and that of their children. Factors such as fear of retaliation, financial dependence, concern for children, and hope for change in the partner can hinder survivors from taking action to end the violence. When faced with the decision to take action or not, survivors weigh the potential outcomes. If action is taken, there's a chance of either a positive or negative outcome. The positive outcome may involve receiving support services like counseling or escaping the violence altogether, while the negative outcome could result in further violence as retaliation from

the abusive partner. On the other hand, if no action is taken, there's a possibility that the violence may decrease or stop without intervention, leading to a neutral outcome. However, if the violence persists, not taking action results in enduring negative consequences. Survivors base their decisions on their perceptions of past violence and expectations regarding the consequences of taking action. When the expectation of retaliation is high and the perceived benefits of intervention are low, survivors may be less inclined to seek help.

The increase in femicides committed by victims' husbands supports the notion that husbands experience heightened stress and a sense of losing control when faced with requests for divorce from their wives. This heightened tension and need to re-establish typical male control can lead to an escalation of violence, resulting in lethal outcomes. This interpretation aligns with the concept of "male backlash" proposed by Macmillan and Gartner (1999), which suggests that easier access to divorce gives spouses more bargaining power. However, for husbands who perceive a threat to their control or status, resorting to violence may become a means of asserting authority and preventing their wives from leaving the marriage. This behavior can also be understood through the lens of the behavioral "cue-triggered theory" proposed by Card and Dahl (2011). According to this theory, males may inherently prefer non-abusive behavior, but they may become violent in response to stress and negative cues that challenge their sense of control.

## **6 Conclusion**

This paper examines the relationship between divorce legislation, intimate partner violence (IPV), and femicides, focusing on the impact of the 2014 Italian divorce law. Drawing on a regression discontinuity design and utilizing data on calls to the 1522 helpline and femicides, the study investigates the effects of making divorce cheaper while requiring mutual consent on help-seeking behavior and femicides.

The findings of this study shed light on the intricate relationship between divorce legislation, help-seeking behavior, and femicides. Contrary to con-



ventional wisdom, the 2014 Italian divorce law, which aimed to reduce the cost of divorce while requiring mutual consent, appears to have unintended consequences.

I observe a decrease in help-seeking behavior among IPV survivors following the implementation of the reform, suggesting heightened fears of retaliation from abusive partners. This may stem from experiences of increased violence during negotiations for mutual consent divorce. The decision-making process for IPV survivors is complex, often influenced by various factors such as fear, financial dependence, concern for children, and hope for change in the abusive partner. In situations where the expectation of retaliation is high and the perceived benefits of intervention are low, survivors may be deterred from seeking help, perpetuating a cycle of violence.

Moreover, I show an increase in femicides perpetrated by husbands post-reform, highlighting the heightened stress and loss of control experienced by husbands facing divorce requests from their wives. This escalation of violence underscores the potential for violence as a means of asserting control and preventing separation.

These findings call for a careful approach to family policy interventions. While reducing the cost of divorce may empower individuals to leave abusive relationships, policymakers must consider the potential unintended consequences of the requirements of divorce procedures, such as increased violence. While making changes to divorce laws to make them more accessible, it is imperative to prioritize the safety and well-being of IPV survivors, ensuring access to support services and resources to facilitate their decision-making process.

In summary, this study contributes to our understanding of the complex relationship between divorce legislation, IPV, and femicides, highlighting the need for comprehensive approaches to address domestic violence and promote healthy family dynamics. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics and evaluate the effectiveness of policy interventions in mitigating the risk of violence within intimate relationships.

## 7 Tables and Figures

### 7.1 Tables

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics

	N	Mean	Sd	Median	Min	Max
<i>Weekly data at province level. Years 2013-2019</i>						
Helpline calls (standardized)	37,100	0.000	1.000	-0.219	-0.811	13.45
Helpline calls for 100k pop.	37,100	0.186	0.229	0.136	0	3.272
<i>Daily data at municipality level. Years 2006-2022</i>						
Femicides by husband (standardized)	233,171	0.000	1.000	-0.0237	-0.0237	202.8
Femicides by husband for 100k pop.	233,171	0.0295	1.245	0	0	252.5

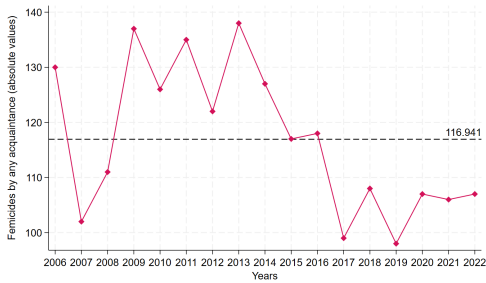
Note: Helpline calls and femicides are per 100,000 population. Sources are Istat and Department of Equal Opportunities (Helpline calls); and Casa delle donne per non subire violenza NGO (Femicides). Standardized variables represent the standardization of the variables per 100,000 population.

**Table 2:** RDD main

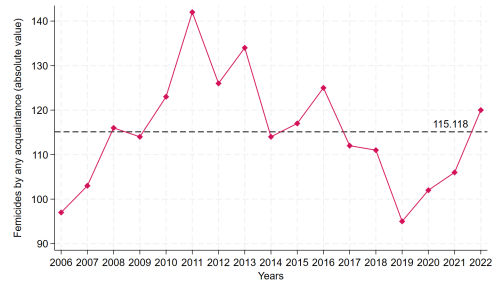
	Calls to 1522 helpline			Femicides by husband		
	(1) Opt. bandwidth	(2) ± 1 week (donut)	(3) ± 2 weeks (donut)	(4) Opt. bandwidth	(5) ± 1 week (donut)	(6) ± 2 weeks (donut)
RD Estimate	-0.169** (0.073)	-0.131* (0.083)	-0.203** (0.115)	0.037** (0.017)	0.038** (0.017)	0.038** (0.017)
Robust p-value	0.014	0.058	0.035	0.021	0.020	0.020
Optimal Bandwidth	12.102	12.179	10.926	757.936	753.454	751.222
Polynomial order	1	1	1	1	1	1
Observations left	1,200	1,200	900	39,182	38,998	38,853
Observations right	1,300	1,200	900	41,714	41,433	41,266

Note: RD estimates using standardized outcome variables. Observations are provinces for 1522 calls and municipalities for femicides. In column 2-5 and 3-6 I employ a “donut hole” approach and exclude respectively 1 week and 2 weeks from the reform. All specifications employ a local linear regression model. All estimates are based on the optimal bandwidth (Calonico et al., 2014), which is reported for all specifications together with the effective number of observations to the left and to the right of the border. Conventional standard errors are reported in parenthesis. Significance is evaluated using bias robust p-value (reported for all specifications).  
 \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1.

## 7.2 Figures

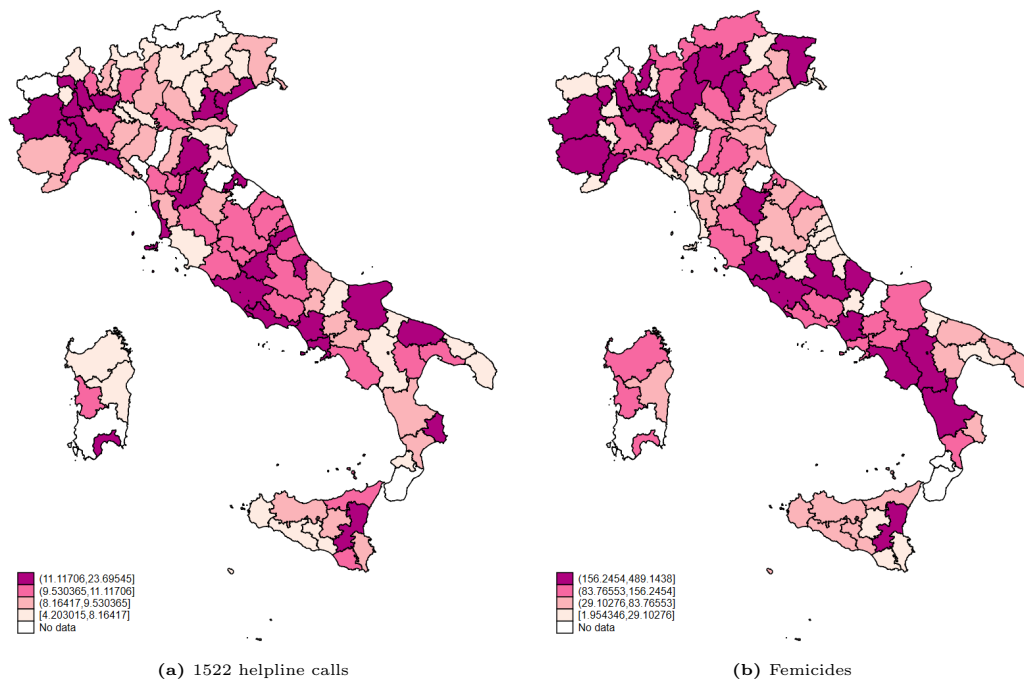


(a) Istat data on femicides by any acquaintance of the victim

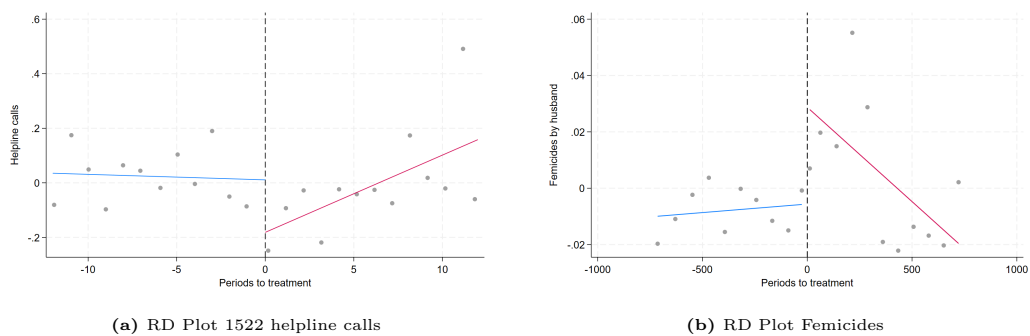


(b) My data on femicides by any acquaintance of the victim

**Figure 1:** Comparison of femicides data provided by Istat and femicides data provided by Casa delle Donne per Non Subire Violenza. Absolute values.



**Figure 2:** Geographical distribution of 1522 helpline calls and femicides in Italian provinces. The maps report (a) the average number of calls per 100,000 inhabitants over the period 2013-2019, and (b) the average number of femicides per 100,000 inhabitants over the period 2006-2022.



**Figure 3:** Regression Discontinuity Plot considering weeks before and after the reform for 1522 helpline calls and days before and after the reform for femicides. The x-axis depicts periods to treatment (positive for treated periods and negative for untreated periods). Outcome variables are standardized.

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# Appendix

**Table 3:** Calls to 1522 helpline

	Valid calls <sup>1</sup>	Calls by women	Calls by men	Calls to seek for help by victims of violence <sup>2</sup>
Years 2013-2019	279,740	247,754	31,654	47,150
% of valid calls		89%	11%	17%
Yearly average	39,962	35,393	4,522	6,735
% of valid calls		89%	11%	17%

Note: 1. calls coming from callers seeking information or seeking support for themselves or other individuals within their social and/or familial network; 2. include both stalking and physical violence.

**Table 4:** RDD placebo dates

	Calls to 1522 helpline			Femicides by husband		
	(1) Rnd Date 1	(2) Rnd Date 2	(3) Rnd Date 3	(4) Rnd Date 1	(5) Rnd Date 2	(6) Rnd Date 3
RD Estimate	-0.038	-0.046	0.001	0.003	0.005	0.006
	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.011)	(0.009)	(0.011)
Robust p-value	0.327	0.328	0.955	0.997	0.472	0.603
Optimal Bandwidth	74.397	71.020	70.398	537.887	917.432	713.460
Polynomial order	1	1	1	1	1	1
Observations left	6,662	6,444	6,393	24,529	40,507	32,142
Observations right	6,707	6,484	6,376	26,941	46,805	36,096

Note: RD estimates using standardized outcome variables. Observations are provinces for 1522 calls and municipalities for femicides. All specifications employ a local linear regression model. All estimates are based on the optimal bandwidth (Calonico et al., 2014), which is reported for all specifications together with the effective number of observations to the left and to the right of the border. Conventional standard errors are reported in parenthesis. Significance is evaluated using bias robust p-value (reported for all specifications).

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1.

**Table 5:** RDD any femicide other than committed by husbands

	Femicides		
	(1) Opt. bandwidth	(2) $\pm 1$ week (donut)	(3) $\pm 2$ weeks (donut)
RD Estimate	0.008 (0.008)	0.008 (0.007)	0.008 (0.007)
Robust p-value	0.289	0.294	0.309
Optimal Bandwidth	623.123	643.995	660.399
Polynomial order	1	1	1
Observations left	49,032	50,575	51,807
Observations right	48,170	49,555	50,719

Note: RD estimates using standardized outcome variables. Observations are provinces for 1522 calls and municipalities for femicides. In column 2-3 I employ a “donut hole” approach and exclude respectively 1 week and 2 weeks from the reform. All specifications employ a local linear regression model. All estimates are based on the optimal bandwidth (Calonico et al., 2014), which is reported for all specifications together with the effective number of observations to the left and to the right of the border. Conventional standard errors are reported in parenthesis. Significance is evaluated using bias robust p-value (reported for all specifications).  
 \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .



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