

From Awareness to Action: Help-Seeking and Femicides after Gender-Based Violence Campaigns in Italy

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Abstract

Awareness campaigns are among the most widely deployed policy responses to gender-based violence, yet systematic evidence on their behavioural effects remains scarce. This paper examines whether variation in campaign intensity around the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (November 25) affects help-seeking behaviour and femicide rates in Italy. We exploit the unusually high salience of the 2023 campaign in a temporal difference-in-differences design that compares outcomes before and after November 25 across years of varying intensity. Helpline calls to the national 1522 anti-violence line increase by approximately 160 percent in the weeks following the high-intensity campaign, with the effect concentrated among non-victim callers. Femicides decline by approximately 61 percent during high-intensity campaign months. Event-study specifications reveal no differential pre-trends, and placebo tests yield null effects for alternative treatment years, supporting a causal interpretation of the estimates. These findings suggest that awareness campaigns can be effective tools for gender-based violence prevention.

Keywords: gender-based violence, awareness campaigns, help-seeking, femicide

JEL Codes: I12, J12, J16, K42

1 Introduction

Awareness campaigns are among the most widely used policy responses to gender-based violence (GBV). International institutions and governments invest heavily in public messaging, media coverage, and coordinated events. The EU-UN Spotlight Initiative alone has committed EUR 500 million to end violence against women and girls, while the UN Trust Fund has awarded over USD 250 million to initiatives in 140 countries since 1996 (European Union and United Nations, 2017; UN Women, 2024). Yet despite this scale, systematic reviews classify stand-alone awareness campaigns as requiring “more evidence” on their effectiveness in reducing violence, with most evaluations demonstrating changes only in attitudes and norms rather than behaviour (World Health Organization, 2024). If campaigns shift only attitudes without affecting behaviour, these investments may fail to protect women at risk. This paper provides causal evidence on whether recurring awareness campaigns can shift behaviour and affect severe outcomes.

We study the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (November 25). Each year, coordinated campaigns increase the visibility of GBV through media coverage, public events, and institutional messaging. We focus on Italy, where the November 25 campaign exhibits substantial variation in intensity across years. While most years display stable seasonal patterns in public attention, 2023 stood out as a period of exceptionally high salience: Google searches for GBV-related terms reached historical highs, planned public events increased substantially, and newspaper coverage of gender violence surged. This variation provides a natural experiment allowing us to identify the causal effects of awareness shocks on behaviour.

We estimate a temporal difference-in-differences model exploiting variation in campaign intensity. The design compares outcomes before and after November 25 and contrasts high-intensity years (2023 for helpline calls; 2023 and 2024 for femicides) with lower-intensity years (2020 to 2022). We restrict the sample to August through December to isolate the campaign window. For helpline calls, we use weekly data at the provincial level (107 provinces) from administrative records on the national 1522 anti-violence helpline. For femicides, we use monthly data at the regional level (20 regions) from *Non Una di Meno*, a civil society organisation that systematically collects data on gender-related

killings.

We find large effects on help-seeking. Following the 2023 campaign, helpline calls increase by approximately 160 percent relative to the same period in control years, corresponding to roughly 5 additional calls per week in an average-sized province. The increase is concentrated among non-victim callers, suggesting that campaigns operate partly through a social multiplier: higher public attention activates the broader community as a help-seeking channel.

We also find substantial reductions in severe violence. Femicides decline by approximately 61 percent during high-intensity campaign months, corresponding to roughly 6 fewer femicides per month nationwide.

Several pieces of evidence support a causal interpretation. Event-study specifications show no differential pre-trends before November 25, followed by a sharp discontinuity at the campaign cutoff. Placebo tests assigning treatment to an alternative year, or shifting the treatment window to other weeks within November, yield precisely estimated null effects. We also replace the binary treatment indicator with continuous measures of campaign intensity : a Google Trends index and a media salience index based on newspaper coverage, and find consistent results: years with stronger campaigns generate larger behavioural responses.

Descriptive evidence on helpline referral patterns offers suggestive evidence on one channel. Following the 2023 campaign, the share of victim callers transferred to police services nearly tripled relative to control years, consistent with campaigns facilitating earlier intervention.

We contribute to several strands of literature. First, we provide causal evidence that high-intensity awareness campaigns reduce severe violence in Italy, not only change attitudes or reporting. A large literature documents that GBV has persistent negative effects on employment, earnings, and wellbeing ([Adams et al., 2024](#); [Sabia et al., 2013](#); [Sobeck, 2025](#)). We shift the focus from documenting consequences toward identifying policy levers for prevention. We complement this work by studying whether a widely used but understudied intervention, recurring awareness campaigns, can reduce severe violence outcomes, not only change attitudes.

Second, we extend the emerging literature on determinants of help-seeking behaviour. [Giacobbe et al. \(2026\)](#) and [Miller and Segal \(2019\)](#) show that female representation in institution increases help-seeking among GBV victims; [Pisanelli \(2024\)](#) find that divorce law reform raised helpline use. We provide complementary evidence on the role of awareness campaigns as a distinct policy lever that operates through information and norm salience rather than institutional change.

Third, while prior work has studied how media coverage of individual GBV cases affects reporting in the short run ([Colagrossi et al., 2023](#); [Levy and Mattsson, 2023](#); [Belguise and Monterosa, 2026](#)), we examine whether coordinated, recurring awareness efforts can influence both help-seeking behaviour and severe violence outcomes. Our empirical approach follows [Black et al. \(2026\)](#), who leverage variation in awareness generated by Australia’s *R U OK?* mental health campaign to study effects on mental health outcomes. We extend this logic to the GBV context, where social norms and stigma are central constraints on behaviour, and where the stakes include lethal violence.

Our findings suggest that campaign intensity matters: years with greater public attention generate larger behavioural responses, implying that campaign design, timing, and coordination can amplify effectiveness. The substantial increase in help-seeking also implies that awareness efforts should be accompanied by investments in service capacity to meet demand during peak periods.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 describes the institutional context and the November 25 campaign. Section 3 presents the data. Section 4 outlines the empirical strategy. Section 5 reports the main results. Section 6 presents heterogeneity analysis. Section 7 examines mechanisms. Section 8 presents robustness checks, including continuous intensity measures and an alternative femicide data source. Section 9 concludes.

2 Institutional Background

2.1 Gender-Based Violence in Italy

Gender-based violence remains pervasive in Italy. According to ISTAT, approximately one in three women has experienced physical or sexual violence during her lifetime (ISTAT, 2014). In 2022, women represented 91 percent of intimate partner homicide victims (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2024). Help-seeking remains low: only 4.4 percent of women who report being raped file a formal complaint (ISTAT, 2023).

Italy's institutional response includes the national 1522 helpline and a network of 409 anti-violence centres (ISTAT, 2024). Funding varies substantially across regions, from EUR 15,000 to EUR 65,000 per centre per year (GREVIO, 2025). Critics argue that government spending is overly focused on punishment rather than prevention: between 2020 and 2023, just 12 percent of allocated funds went toward prevention (ActionAid, 2024).

2.2 November 2023: A Convergence of Factors

The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (November 25) is a major annual mobilisation moment. Most years display stable seasonal patterns in public attention. However, 2023 stands out due to a convergence of factors.

First, the film *C'è ancora domani*, depicting domestic violence in postwar Rome, became the highest-grossing film in Italy in 2023 (EUR 32.4 million), sparking widespread discussion about patriarchy (CINETEL, 2024).

Second, a high-profile femicide on November 11 received extensive media coverage. The victim's family framed the murder as a product of patriarchal culture, and their public statements calling for men to stand against patriarchy were widely reported (Inter Press Service, 2023). This case amplified attention to the November 25 campaign.

Third, Non Una di Meno organised large protests on November 25, with approximately half a million participants in Rome (Inter Press Service, 2023). The government accelerated passage of Law No. 168/2023, introducing new restraining orders and heightened surveillance on domestic violence offenders (GREVIO, 2025).

3 Data

This paper uses two main sources of data. First, data on calls to the 1522 national helpline is drawn from administrative records released by the Department for Equal Opportunities and made available by Istat. The 1522 helpline operates 24/7 in multiple languages, providing support and information to survivors of violence and stalking, as well as referrals to anti-violence centres and shelters. The data provides weekly call counts at the provincial level for all 107 Italian provinces, covering 2013–2023.¹ The mean number of weekly calls per province is approximately 5.3.

Second, data on femicides comes from an independent dataset constructed by Non Una di Meno through systematic collection of gender-related homicides in Italy. The dataset compiles information from multiple open sources and provides detailed records on timing and location. We aggregate this data at the regional-monthly level for the period 2020–2024. The mean number of femicides per region-month is approximately 0.5 in raw counts. Expressed as a rate, this corresponds to approximately 0.03 femicides per 100,000 women per month. Femicide rates in Italy are substantial: 0.20 and 0.21 per 100,000 women were killed by a partner or ex-partner in 2022 and 2023, respectively, compared to 0.02 per 100,000 among men.

Table 1: Summary Statistics

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Panel A: Helpline Calls (Province $\times$ Week)					
Helpline calls	4.979	(10.462)	0.000	226.000	8,988
Helpline calls per 10,000 inhabitants	0.079	(0.091)	0.000	1.857	8,988
Panel B: Femicides (Region $\times$ Month)					
Femicides	0.490	(0.812)	0.000	5.000	500
Femicides per 100,000 women	0.032	(0.063)	0.000	0.455	500

Notes:: Sample restricted to August–December. Panel A covers 2020–2023 for 107 Italian provinces. Panel B covers 2020–2024 for 20 Italian regions, reflecting the extended treatment window (2023–2024) used in the femicide analysis.

¹The latest data release extends only to the third quarter of 2024; therefore, observations for 2024 are excluded from the analysis.

4 Empirical Strategy

We adopt a difference-in-differences design that exploits temporal variation in campaign intensity. The design compares outcomes before and after November 25 and contrasts high-intensity years with lower-intensity years. The sample is restricted to August through December in all years to isolate the campaign window and provide a sufficient pre-treatment baseline period.

For helpline calls at the weekly-provincial level, we estimate:

$$y_{it} = \alpha + \tau \cdot (Post_{Nov25} \times HighIntensity_t) + \delta_i + \gamma_w + \mu_y + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

where i indexes provinces ($1, \dots, 107$) and t indexes year-weeks. $Post_{Nov25}$ is a binary indicator equal to 1 from the week containing November 25 onward; $HighIntensity_t$ equals 1 for 2023. Province fixed effects (δ_i) absorb time-invariant heterogeneity across provinces; week fixed effects (γ_w) absorb seasonal patterns common across years; year fixed effects (μ_y) absorb aggregate annual shocks. Standard errors are clustered at the provincial level.

For femicides at the regional-monthly level, we estimate:

$$y_{it} = \alpha + \tau \cdot (Post_{Nov} \times HighIntensity_t) + \delta_i + \gamma_m + \mu_y + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (2)$$

where i indexes regions ($1, \dots, 20$) and t indexes year-months. $Post_{Nov}$ is a binary indicator equal to 1 for November and December; $HighIntensity_t$ equals 1 for 2023–2024. Region, calendar month, and year fixed effects are included with the same interpretation as above. Given the small number of regional clusters, standard errors are obtained via wild cluster bootstrap.

In both specifications, the coefficient τ captures the differential change in outcomes following the campaign cutoff in high-intensity years relative to lower-intensity years.²

²While treatment varies only at the national level, estimation at the region-month level is consistent with the grouped-data literature (Lang and Gottschalk, 1996), which studies the estimation of coefficients on group-level variables using disaggregated outcomes.

4.1 Identifying Assumptions

The key identifying assumption is that, absent the awareness shock, outcomes would have followed similar seasonal patterns across years. We support this assumption with several checks:

Parallel trends. We estimate event-study specifications that allow for differential effects in each period relative to the campaign cutoff. These reveal no differential pre-trends before November 25.

Placebo tests. As a further check on parallel trends, we re-estimate the main specifications assigning treatment status to 2022, using 2020 and 2021 as control years. Table 2 shows that for both outcomes the placebo estimate is small and statistically insignificant at any conventional level, consistent with the absence of spurious differential trends in the post-November window prior to the actual treatment period.

Falsification test. We test whether the femicide results reflect a GBV-specific response rather than a generic post-November shock. Using the same DiD specification, we apply our estimator to monthly road accident fatalities, an outcome for which GBV awareness campaigns provide no plausible channel. Figure 5 shows no significant effect in high-intensity years, confirming that the post-November divergence in femicides is specific to GBV-related behaviour and not driven by unobserved time-varying factors coinciding with the campaign period.

Table 2: Placebo Tests Using 2022 as a Fictitious Treatment Year

	Weekly Calls per 10k (OLS)	Monthly Femicides (Poisson)
Post Nov 25 $\times$ Placebo Year	0.00357 (0.00337)	0.567 (0.365)
Observations	6,741	270
Number of units	107 Provinces	20 Regions

Notes:: Column (1) reports difference-in-differences estimates for weekly helpline calls per 10,000 inhabitants using 2022 as a placebo treatment year. Column (2) reports Poisson HDFE estimates for monthly femicides using 2022 as a placebo treatment year. Standard errors clustered at the province level in Column (1) and wild-cluster bootstrap standard errors in Column (2) are reported in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

5 Results

5.1 Helpline Calls

Table 3 reports the difference-in-differences estimates of the effect of heightened public awareness on helpline calls per 10,000 inhabitants at the weekly provincial level. The specification includes province fixed effects, calendar week-of-year fixed effects, and year fixed effects; standard errors are clustered at the provincial level. The coefficient of interest captures the average differential change in helpline calls during the weeks spanning from November 25 to the end of December 2023, relative to the same calendar weeks in the control years 2020–2022, after absorbing province-specific time-invariant heterogeneity, common seasonal patterns, and year-level aggregate shocks.

The estimates indicate a statistically significant increase in helpline calls following the onset of the treatment period. At the national level (Column 1), heightened public awareness is associated with an increase of 0.097 additional calls per 10,000 inhabitants per week, relative to a pre-treatment control mean of 0.06. This corresponds to a 160 percent increase, suggesting that the awareness shock generated a substantial and broad-based increase in help-seeking behaviour.

To appreciate the magnitude of these estimates, consider an average-sized Italian province of approximately 500,000 inhabitants. At the baseline call rate, such a province would receive roughly 3 helpline calls per week during the November 25–December window in a typical year. The estimated treatment effect implies approximately 5 additional calls per week in 2023, more than doubling the baseline volume of help-seeking contacts.

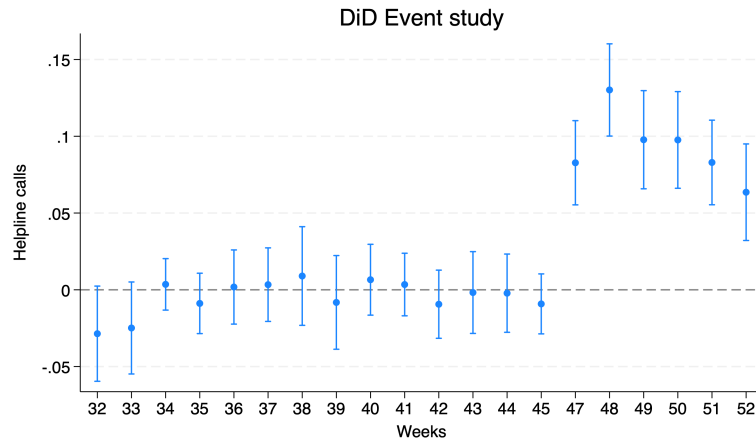
Table 3: Difference-in-differences estimation of the effect of increased campaign intensity in 2023 on helpline calls per 10,000 inhabitants at the weekly provincial level.

	Weekly Calls per 10k inhabitants
Post-Nov 25 $\times$ High Intensity (2023)	0.0968*** (0.00558)
Pre-treatment mean	0.06
Observations	8,988
Provinces	107

Notes: Province, year, and calendar week fixed effects are included. Years 2020 to 2023 are included in the analysis. Standard errors clustered at the provincial level in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Figure 1 presents event-study estimates. The pattern shows no differential trend before November 25, followed by a sharp increase in the week of the campaign and sustained elevated levels thereafter.

Figure 1: Weekly Calls per 10k inhabitants



5.2 Femicides

Table 4 reports Poisson difference-in-differences estimates of the effect of heightened public awareness on femicides at the monthly regional level. We use Poisson pseudo-maximum-likelihood estimation because femicides are rare count outcomes for which linear models can produce implausible estimates.³

The results indicate a substantial decline in femicides during the high-intensity campaign period. The estimated coefficient of -0.947 at the national level implies a reduction of approximately 61 percent in the incidence rate ($1 - e^{-0.947}$). Applied to the national baseline rate of approximately 0.031 femicides per 100,000 women per month and the female population of Italy (approximately 31 million), this corresponds to roughly 6 fewer femicides per month nationwide during the post-November period.

Table 4: Effect of Increased Campaign Intensity on Femicides (Poisson Estimates)

	Monthly Femicides per 100k women
Post-Nov 25 × High Intensity	-0.947*** (0.184)
Pre-treatment mean	0.031
Observations	450
Regions	20

Notes: Poisson HDFE estimates. Female population is included as an exposure offset. All specifications include region, year, and month fixed effects. Standard errors obtained via wild cluster bootstrap at the regional level. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

6 Heterogeneous Analysis

³Linear estimates are reported in Appendix Table A1 for completeness. The linear coefficient of -0.033 against a baseline of 0.031 would imply a reduction exceeding the baseline mean, which is implausible. We therefore report Poisson estimates in the main text.

6.1 Caller Type

The 1522 administrative records distinguish calls placed by victims directly from those placed by third parties, such as relatives, acquaintances, or social workers calling on a victim’s behalf. We estimate the baseline specification separately for each caller type to examine whether the campaign differentially activated victims themselves or their social networks.

Table 5 reports the results. Both victim and non-victim calls increase significantly following the campaign, but the effect is substantially larger for non-victim callers. The estimated treatment effect is 0.027 additional calls per 10,000 inhabitants for victim callers, relative to a pre-treatment mean of 0.030, a 90 percent increase. For non-victim callers, the effect is 0.069, against an identical pre-treatment mean of 0.030, a 229 percent increase. The event-study estimates in Figure 2 confirm clean pre-trends for both series and a sharp divergence at week 47, with non-victim calls rising more steeply and reaching approximately three times the magnitude of victim calls by the end of the post-treatment window.

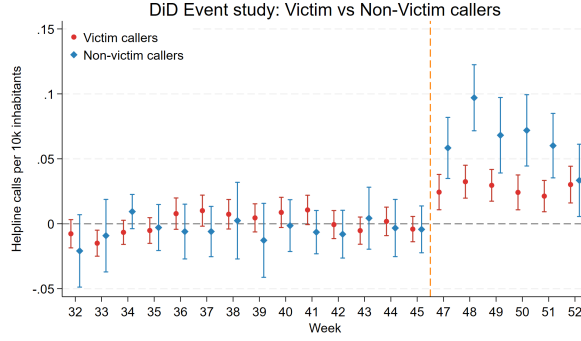
This pattern is consistent with the campaign primarily mobilising bystanders and social networks rather than victims alone. High-salience media coverage and public debate may lower the threshold for third parties to intervene, by calling on behalf of someone they know or suspect is at risk, while victims themselves face higher personal barriers to disclosure that a single campaign period may only partially erode. The result suggests that awareness campaigns may operate partly through indirect social channels: increased public attention activates the broader community as a channel for help-seeking, complementing the direct effect on victims.

Table 5: Effect of November 25 Campaign by Caller Type

	Victim callers	Non-victim callers
Post-Nov 25 $\times$ High Intensity (2023)	0.0266*** (0.00244)	0.0692*** (0.00480)
Pre-treatment mean	0.0295	0.0302
Observations	8988	8988

Notes: Province, year, and calendar week fixed effects are included. Standard errors clustered at the provincial level in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Figure 2: DiD Event Study: Victims vs Non-Victims



6.2 Availability of Anti-Violence Centres

We next examine whether the campaign effect varies with local service capacity, proxied by the number of anti-violence centres (CAV) per province. Using data on CAV locations as of 2019 drawn from [Cerqua et al. \(2025\)](#), we split the sample at the median number of CAV into low- and high-CAV groups and estimate the baseline specification separately for each.

Table 6 reports the results on helpline calls. Both groups exhibit large, statistically significant increases in helpline calls following the campaign. The estimated effect is 0.089 additional calls per 10,000 inhabitants per week in low-CAV provinces, against a pre-treatment mean of 0.048, an increase of approximately 186 percent. In high-CAV provinces the effect is 0.105, relative to a pre-treatment mean of 0.054, an increase of approximately 194 percent. While the point estimate for high-CAV provinces is somewhat larger, the difference is not statistically significant ($p = 0.152$). The uniformity of effects across groups suggests that the campaign operated primarily through a demand-side mechanism, raising awareness and reducing stigma, rather than through improved supply of or access to services. The marginally larger point estimate in high-CAV provinces is consistent with this reading: provinces with a denser service network may exhibit slightly greater baseline familiarity with available support, amplifying the behavioural response to a salience shock, but the results are more consistent with a demand-side response triggered by increased awareness and salience than with differential service availability alone.

The event-study estimates in Figure 3 reinforce this conclusion. Both series display flat and statistically indistinguishable pre-trends through week 46, followed by a sharp and

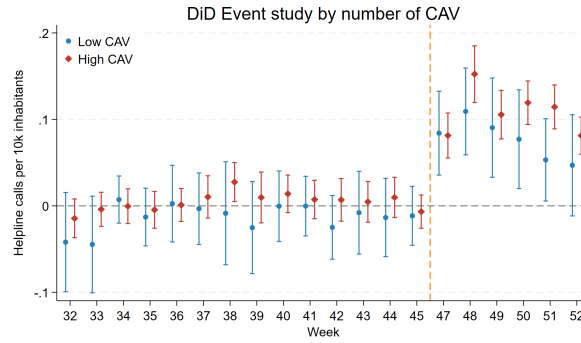
simultaneous jump at week 47. The two series track closely throughout the post-treatment window, with high-CAV provinces marginally higher from week 48 onward but within overlapping confidence intervals.

Table 6: Heterogeneous Effects by Number of CAV

	Helpline calls per 10,000 inhabitants	
	Low CAV	High CAV
Post $\times$ 2023	0.0891*** (0.00894)	0.105*** (0.00643)
Pre-treatment mean	0.0478	0.0540
Number of provinces	55	52
Observations	4,620	4,368

Notes: Province, week, and year FE included. Standard errors clustered at the province level in parentheses. Sample: August–December, 2020–2023. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Figure 3: DiD Event Study by Number of CAV



We extend the heterogeneity analysis to femicides, splitting regions at the median number of anti-violence centres (15 CAV per region) into low- and high-CAV groups and estimating the baseline Poisson specification separately for each.

Table 7 reports the results. Both groups exhibit significant reductions in femicides following the high-intensity campaign years. In low-CAV regions the estimated coefficient is -1.352 , implying a reduction of approximately $1 - e^{-1.352} \approx 74$ percent. In high-

CAV regions the coefficient is -0.853 , corresponding to a reduction of approximately $1 - e^{-0.853} \approx 57$ percent. The difference across groups is not statistically significant.

The point estimates suggest, if anything, a larger proportional reduction in low-CAV regions, though the wide confidence intervals in that group, reflecting both fewer observations and greater outcome variability, preclude strong conclusions. Taken together, the results are consistent with the pattern observed for helpline calls: the campaign generated broad-based reductions in severe violence outcomes regardless of local service infrastructure, consistent with the interpretation that awareness and salience effects played an important role independently of local service capacity.

Table 7: Heterogeneous Effects by CAV Availability

	Monthly femicides per 100,000 women	
	Low CAV	High CAV
Post $\times$ Treatment	-1.352^{***} (0.463)	-0.853^{***} (0.204)
Pre-treatment mean (per 100k)	0.0225	0.0289
Observations	200	250

Notes: Poisson HDFE estimates. Coefficients are log incidence rate ratios. Region, year, and month FE included. Standard errors clustered at the region level in parentheses. Sample: August–December, 2020–2024. The CAV split is at the regional level; the median is 15 CAV per region. The number of observations differs across specifications because PPMLHDFE drops observations separated by fixed effects. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

6.3 Gender Norms

We examine whether the campaign effect varies with prevailing gender norms at the provincial level. We construct a gender norms index using ISTAT survey data on attitudes toward traditional gender roles, aggregating responses across five statements capturing male breadwinner norms, decision-making authority, and occupational priorities.⁴

⁴The five items are: (i) men should have priority over women in scarce labour markets; (ii) men should be the primary economic provider; (iii) men should make the most important household decisions; (iv) men are less suited to domestic tasks; (v) professional success is more important for men than women.

The index is constructed at the regional level and assigned to provinces within each region. Because the index is measured at the regional level and assigned uniformly to all provinces within each region, there is measurement error in provincial-level norms. This attenuation bias would work against finding heterogeneity; the absence of significant differences should therefore be interpreted as an upper bound on true heterogeneity by gender norms. Regions above the national median are classified as conservative; those below as progressive.

Table 8 reports the results on helpline calls. Both groups respond strongly to the campaign. The estimated effect is 0.101 additional calls per 10,000 inhabitants per week in progressive provinces, against a pre-treatment mean of 0.050, a 200 percent increase. In conservative provinces the effect is 0.091, relative to a pre-treatment mean of 0.051, an increase of approximately 176 percent. The difference between the two estimates is not statistically significant, confirming that the two effects are not systematically different.

The absence of heterogeneity by gender norms is itself informative. It indicates that the campaign’s impact on help-seeking was not confined to areas with more progressive attitudes, where barriers to disclosure might be expected to be lower. Awareness campaigns appear to generate behavioural responses even in contexts where traditional norms are more entrenched, suggesting that salience shocks can temporarily lower the threshold for help-seeking irrespective of the local normative environment.

For each item we take the share of respondents reporting agreement (“strongly agree” or “agree”) and average across the five items to obtain a composite index. Higher values indicate more conservative gender norms.

Table 8: Calls by Gender Norms

	Helpline calls per 10,000 inhabitants	
	Progressive	Conservative
Post $\times$ 2023	0.101*** (0.00744)	0.0906*** (0.00846)
Pre-treatment mean	0.0504	0.0514
Number of provinces	62	45
Observations	5,208	3,780

Notes: Province, week, and year FE included. Standard errors clustered at the province level in parentheses. Sample: August–December, 2020–2023. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 9 reports heterogeneous effects on femicides by local gender norms. The estimated coefficients are negative and statistically significant in both groups, indicating that the campaign was associated with a decline in femicides irrespective of the prevailing normative environment. In progressive regions, the coefficient of -0.814 implies a reduction in the incidence rate of femicides of approximately 56 percent ($1 - e^{-0.814}$), relative to a pre-treatment mean of 0.032 femicides per 100,000 women per month. In conservative regions, the coefficient is larger in magnitude (-1.124), corresponding to a reduction of around 67 percent, against a baseline of 0.023 femicides per 100,000 women.

Although the point estimate is larger in conservative regions, the difference between the two effects is not statistically significant, indicating that the campaign effect did not differ systematically across regions with more traditional versus more progressive gender norms.

The absence of strong heterogeneity by gender norms is informative in itself. It suggests that awareness campaigns can affect both help-seeking behaviour and severe violence outcomes even in contexts where traditional attitudes toward gender roles remain more entrenched. Rather than operating only where social barriers are already relatively low, the campaign appears to have generated responses across heterogeneous cultural environments, potentially by increasing the salience of available support services and public

attention to violence against women.

Table 9: Femicides by Gender Norms

	Femicides per 100,000 females	
	Progressive Regions	Conservative Regions
Post $\times$ Treatment	-0.814*** (0.233)	-1.124*** (0.247)
Pre-treatment mean	0.0318	0.0228
Observations	225	225

Notes: The table reports Poisson regression estimates of the effect on monthly femicides. Coefficients are reported as log incidence rate ratios. All specifications include region, year, and month fixed effects. Standard errors clustered at the region level are reported in parentheses. The sample covers the period August–December, 2020–2024. The exposure variable is the female population. Pre-treatment means are expressed per 100,000 inhabitants.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

7 Descriptive Mechanisms

We examine whether the 2023 campaign changed what happened to victim callers once they contacted the helpline. The 1522 system records whether each victim caller is transferred to another service and, if so, the destination service.⁵ To simplify the analysis, we aggregate these destinations into five broad categories: anti-violence centres and shelters, police and law enforcement services, social and family services (including child protection), health services, and other specialised services.

Table 10 reports transfer patterns in Q4. The overall transfer rate, that is, the share of victim callers connected to at least one service, remains remarkably stable across years, fluctuating between 68 and 73 percent. This suggests that the sharp increase in demand observed in 2023 did not reduce the helpline’s ability to connect callers with support services. However, the composition of transfers changes. The share of transfers directed

⁵The full list of services includes anti-violence centres, shelters, police services, social services, family counselling, public psychological support services, child protection services, health services, NGOs, anti-discrimination services, anti-trafficking services, and other specialised providers.

to police and law enforcement services rises from 2.5–4.0 percent in the pre-campaign years to 10.1 percent in 2023 Q4. At the same time, the share directed to anti-violence centres and shelters declines from around 94 percent in 2021–2022 to 86.2 percent in 2023. Transfers to social and family services, health services, and other specialised services remain comparatively small throughout the period.

Despite this compositional shift, anti-violence centres and shelters continue to receive the overwhelming majority of referrals, accounting for more than 86 percent of all transfers in 2023 Q4. Taken together, these patterns suggest that the campaign may have changed the type of support sought by victims contacting the helpline, increasing the involvement of formal law-enforcement services while preserving access to anti-violence support networks.

Table 10: Composition of Transfers Among Victim Callers in Q4

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Transfer rate (% of victims)	72.8	68.8	68.1	68.5
<i>Among those transferred:</i>				
Anti-violence centres and shelters (%)	83.3	94.0	93.8	86.2
Police and law enforcement (%)	4.0	2.5	3.7	10.1
Social and family services (%)	9.2	3.1	1.6	2.2
Health services (%)	2.5	0.1	0.8	1.4
Other services (%)	1.0	0.3	0.1	0.1

Notes: Data from ISTAT 1522 administrative records. Q4 refers to October–December. The transfer rate is the share of victim callers (those seeking help for violence or stalking) who are connected to at least one service. Percentages in the lower panel are calculated among transferred callers and sum to 100 within each year.

8 Robustness Checks

8.1 Continuous Measures of Awareness Intensity

So far, we have examined the impact of campaign activity around November 25 using a binary indicator that distinguishes the period before November 25 from the period after. As a robustness check, we replace the binary treatment indicator with two continuous

measures of campaign salience and interact them with a post-November 25 dummy in treated years (2023–2024).

The first measure is a Google Trends index of normalised search volumes for *violenza di genere* (gender violence), ranging from 0 to 100 (mean 7.41, s.d. 8.81 in our sample), with a mean of approximately 7.41 and a standard deviation of 8.81 in our sample. The second is a media salience index constructed from *La Repubblica* articles on gender-based violence in a given week, normalised by the average total number of articles in the same period, with a mean of approximately 0.23 and a standard deviation of 0.45. The Google Trends data are available from October 2020 onward, which reduces the sample to 7,704 province-week observations for that specification.

Figure 4 plots both series from August to December, 2020–2024. Both display stable seasonal patterns in earlier years, a sharp spike in November 2023, and elevated but lower levels in 2024.

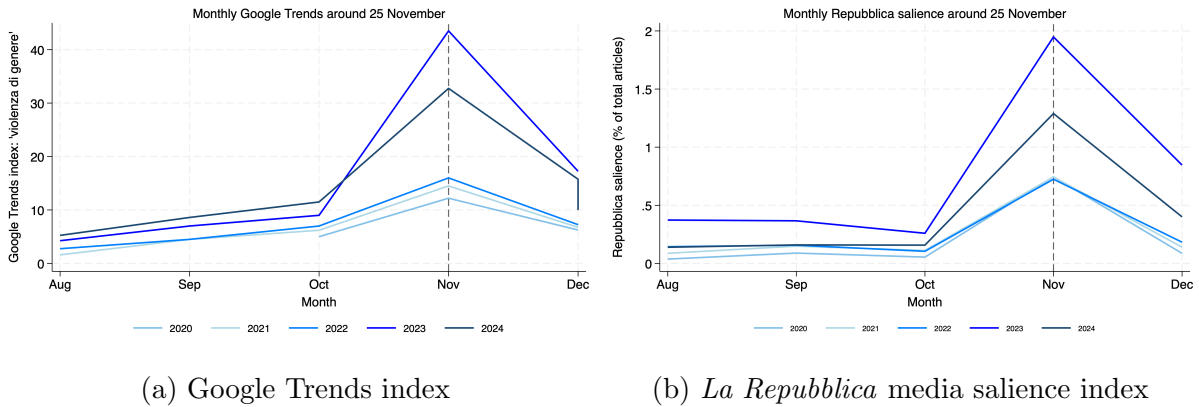


Figure 4: Monthly measures of public attention to GBV around November 25, 2020–2024.

To facilitate comparison across measures of different scales, we express effects in terms of one standard deviation changes. For helpline calls (Table 11), the Google Trends index implies an effect of approximately 86 percent of the pre-November 25 mean per standard deviation increase; the media salience index yields a comparable effect of approximately 95 percent.⁶ The similarity in magnitude across two measures capturing distinct dimensions of public attention, online information demand and traditional media coverage respectively, supports the interpretation that both track the same underlying awareness

⁶For the Google Trends index: $0.00636 \times 8.81 = 0.056$, or $0.056/0.065 \approx 86$ percent. For the media salience index: $0.127 \times 0.449 = 0.057$, or $0.057/0.060 \approx 95$ percent.

shock.

Table 11: Awareness Intensity and Helpline Calls Around November 25

	Weekly Calls per 10,000 inhabitants	
	(1)	(2)
Post-Nov 25 $\times$ Media Saliency Index	0.127*** (0.0106)	
Post-Nov 25 $\times$ Google Trends Index		0.00636*** (0.000770)
Observations	8,988	7,704
Provinces	107	107
Pre-Nov 25 mean	0.0598	0.0650

Notes: The dependent variable is the weekly number of helpline calls per 10,000 inhabitants at the province level. The key regressors interact a post-November 25 indicator with measures of awareness intensity: (i) a media saliency index based on newspaper coverage, and (ii) a Google Trends index for searches related to gender-based violence. All specifications include province and year fixed effects. Standard errors clustered at the province level are reported in parentheses. Google Trends data are available from October 2020, reducing the sample in column (2).

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

For femicides, given the rarity of the outcome we focus on the Poisson specification in Table 12. Scaling by one standard deviation, the Google Trends index implies a reduction of approximately 72 percent in femicides, and the media saliency index implies a reduction of approximately 55 percent.⁷ These magnitudes are broadly comparable across the two measures and consistent with the binary DiD estimates, supporting the robustness of the main findings to the choice of treatment variable.

⁷Percentage reductions are computed as $1 - e^{\hat{\beta} \times \text{s.d.}}$. For the Google Trends index: $1 - e^{-0.143 \times 8.81} \approx 0.72$. For the media saliency index: $1 - e^{-1.755 \times 0.45} \approx 0.55$.

Table 12: Awareness Intensity and Femicides (Poisson Estimates)

	Monthly femicides per 100,000 women	
	(1)	(2)
Post-Nov 25 $\times$ Media Salience Index	-1.755** (0.883)	
Post-Nov 25 $\times$ Google Trends Index		-0.143** (0.059)
Observations	450	324
Pre-treatment mean	0.031	0.034

Notes: The dependent variable is the monthly number of femicides per 100,000 women at the regional level. Poisson HDFE estimates. The key regressors interact a post-November 25 indicator with measures of awareness intensity: (i) a media salience index based on newspaper coverage, and (ii) a Google Trends index for searches related to gender-based violence. Standard errors obtained via bootstrap and reported in parentheses.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

9 Conclusion

This paper provides causal evidence that high-intensity awareness campaigns can increase help-seeking behaviour and reduce femicides. Exploiting the sharp increase in campaign salience surrounding Italy’s International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women in 2023, we find that helpline calls rose by approximately 160 percent relative to the pre-treatment mean, and that femicides declined by approximately 61 percent during high-intensity campaign months. These effects are corroborated by continuous intensity measures and are robust to a range of placebo and falsification tests. Event-study specifications show no differential pre-trends, and placebo tests yield null effects for alternative treatment years, supporting a causal interpretation.

Descriptive evidence on call composition suggests one potential channel through which

help-seeking may translate into reduced severe violence. Among victim callers, the share transferred to police services nearly tripled in 2023 Q4 relative to control years, driven primarily by a shift in referral rates rather than volume alone. This pattern is consistent with a chain in which heightened campaign salience induces victims to seek help earlier, enabling formal intervention before violence escalates to lethal outcomes. Whether this mechanism accounts for the observed reduction in femicides remains an open question, as establishing the full causal chain requires data on downstream service engagement and case outcomes that we do not currently observe.

These findings carry implications for policy. Campaign intensity matters: years with greater public attention generate larger behavioural responses, suggesting that investment in campaign reach and coordination can amplify effectiveness. The substantial increase in help-seeking also implies that awareness campaigns should be accompanied by investments in service capacity to meet elevated demand during peak periods.

Some limitations merit discussion. While we document increased campaign intensity through multiple indicators, we cannot fully separate the contributions of media coverage, public events, and online attention to the estimated effects. The mechanism evidence remains descriptive and based on national aggregates, precluding causal identification of specific channels. Finally, the findings are specific to Italy and to a period of exceptionally high campaign salience; whether similar effects would obtain in lower-intensity campaigns or in different institutional contexts remains an open question.

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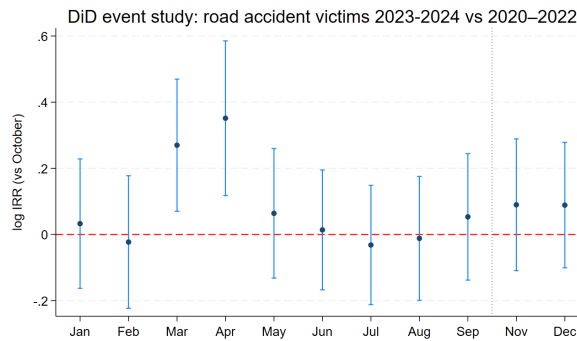
Appendix

A.1 List of Provinces

Istat records the following provinces: Agrigento, Alessandria, Ancona, Aosta, Arezzo, Ascoli Piceno, Asti, Avellino, Bari, Barletta-Andria-Trani, Belluno, Benevento, Bergamo, Biella, Bologna, Bolzano/Bozen, Brescia, Brindisi, Cagliari, Caltanissetta, Campobasso, Caserta, Catania, Catanzaro, Chieti, Como, Cosenza, Cremona, Crotone, Cuneo, Enna, Fermo, Ferrara, Firenze, Foggia, Forlì-Cesena, Frosinone, Genova, Gorizia, Grosseto, Imperia, Isernia, L'Aquila, La Spezia, Latina, Lecce, Lecco, Livorno, Lodi, Lucca, Macerata, Mantova, Massa-Carrara, Matera, Messina, Milano, Modena, Monza e della Brianza, Napoli, Novara, Nuoro, Oristano, Padova, Palermo, Parma, Pavia, Perugia, Pesaro e Urbino, Pescara, Piacenza, Pisa, Pistoia, Pordenone, Potenza, Prato, Ragusa, Ravenna, Reggio Calabria, Reggio Emilia, Rieti, Rimini, Roma, Rovigo, Salerno, Sassari, Savona, Siena, Siracusa, Sondrio, Sud Sardegna, Taranto, Teramo, Terni, Torino, Trapani, Trento, Treviso, Trieste, Udine, Valle d'Aosta/Vallée d'Aoste, Varese, Venezia, Verbano-Cusio-Ossola, Vercelli, Verona, Vibo Valentia, Vicenza, Viterbo.

A.2 Falsification Test: Road Accident Fatalities

Figure 5: Falsification Test: Road Accident Fatalities



A.3 Linear Estimates for Femicides

Table A1 reports linear difference-in-differences estimates for completeness. The coefficient of -0.033 against a baseline of 0.031 would imply a reduction exceeding the baseline mean, which is implausible for a linear model applied to rare events. We therefore report Poisson estimates in the main text.

Table A1: Linear Difference-in-Differences Estimates for Femicides

	Monthly Femicides per 100k women
Awareness intensity	−0.033 * ** (0.009)
Pre-treatment mean	0.031
Observations	500

Notes: Wild cluster bootstrap standard errors in parentheses, clustered at the regional level. All specifications include region, year, and month fixed effects.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

A.4 Poisson Robustness for Helpline Calls

Table A2 re-estimates the baseline specification using a Poisson pseudo-maximum-likelihood estimator with high-dimensional fixed effects, modelling raw call counts with a population exposure offset. The interaction coefficient implies an increase of approximately 51 percent in helpline calls during the treatment period,⁸ consistent with the baseline OLS estimates and supporting the robustness of the main findings to the choice of estimation method.

Table A2: Poisson HD FE Robustness Check: Helpline Calls

	Weekly Calls (count)
Post Nov 25 $\times$ 2023	0.412*** (0.0463)
Observations	8,988

Notes: Poisson HD FE estimates. The dependent variable is the raw weekly count of helpline calls at the provincial level, with population included as an exposure offset. Standard errors clustered at the provincial level in parentheses.

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

Figure A1 reports the corresponding event-study estimates. Pre-treatment coefficients for weeks 42 through 45 are small and statistically indistinguishable from zero, supporting the parallel trends assumption. The treatment effect emerges sharply at week 47, the week

⁸Computed as $e^{0.412} - 1 \approx 0.51$.

of November 25, and stabilises at approximately 0.6–0.7 in log terms through week 51, corresponding to an 80–100 percent increase in helpline calls relative to the control group.

Figure A1: Poisson HDFE Event Study: Helpline Calls

