

**PAOLA PAOLONI
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ANTONIETTA COSENTINO**

**GENDERED
ECONOMIC VIOLENCE:
ANALYSIS
OF THE PHENOMENON
AND MITIGATION
STRATEGIES**



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INTRODUCTION

Economic violence represents one of the most subtle, pervasive, and structurally underestimated forms of gender-based violence. It can be defined as the set of behaviors through which financial and economic resources are controlled, restricted, manipulated, or withheld in order to prevent, reduce, or undermine the victim's autonomy and self-determination. Unlike more visible forms of abuse, economic violence frequently operates through ordinary and normalized practices, including exclusion from financial decision-making, restriction of access to employment or entrepreneurial opportunities, deprivation of independent income, imposition of debt, concealment of financial information, and systematic obstruction of economic independence. For this reason, economic violence must be understood not as an ancillary manifestation of gender violence, but as one of its structural dimensions, capable of generating long-term dependency, social marginalization, and an inability to escape abusive relationships. The phenomenon extends beyond the domestic sphere and intersects with broader socioeconomic dynamics related to labor market inequalities, entrepreneurship, welfare systems, migration, financial exclusion, and cultural gender norms. Its multidimensional nature makes economic violence particularly difficult to identify, quantify, regulate, and

counteract within existing legal and institutional frameworks. Although the Istanbul Convention already acknowledged the economic dimension of violence against women, many countries still lack a specific regulatory framework capable of recognizing economic violence as an autonomous category of abuse. In Italy, the phenomenon has historically been addressed only indirectly through broader legal provisions concerning domestic abuse, family obligations, patrimonial crimes, or workplace discrimination. A significant institutional turning point emerged through the work of the “Commissione Parlamentare di Inchiesta sul Femminicidio, nonché su ogni forma di violenza di genere,” which approved the “Relazione Sulla Violenza Economica Di Genere” on April 15, 2026, formally recognizing economic violence as a specific area requiring dedicated political, legal, and social intervention¹. The present study originates from an action-research perspective developed through the direct participation of one of the authors, Professor Paola Paoloni², in the activities of the Parliamentary Commission as an expert on the topic. Professor Paoloni was formally heard by the Commission on January 22, 2026, contributing to the institutional reflection surrounding the recognition and conceptualization of economic violence in the Italian context. Starting from this institutional experience, the present work seeks to move beyond the descriptive and policy-oriented dimension of the Commission’s report in order to develop a scientific and analytical contribution capable of systematizing the phenomenon from a multidisciplinary perspective.

Despite the growing institutional and academic attention devoted to the topic, economic violence remains characterized by substantial conceptual, methodological, and operational gaps. Existing literature often

1 Commissione Parlamentare di Inchiesta sul Femminicidio, nonché su ogni forma di violenza di genere, Relazione sulla Violenza Economica di Genere, drawn up pursuant to Article 2, paragraph 1, letters (a) and (b), of Law No. 12 of 9 February 2023, and approved on April 15, 2026.

2 Paola Paoloni is Full Professor of Business Administration at the Department of Business Law and Economics of Sapienza University of Rome (Italy). Professor Paoloni is the Scientific Director of Ipazia - Scientific Observatory on Gender Research (www.ipaziaobservatory.com). Ipazia has the aim of building a comprehensive and continuously updated framework of research, services, projects, and initiatives related to women that study their condition at local, national and international level.

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examines isolated dimensions of the phenomenon, such as domestic financial control, labor market discrimination, economic dependency, or barriers to female entrepreneurship, without integrating these elements into a coherent analytical framework capable of explaining how economic violence operates across different social contexts. Furthermore, empirical evidence remains fragmented, and the phenomenon is frequently under-reported due to the normalization of financial control within gendered power relations. The lack of standardized indicators and shared conceptual boundaries further complicates both the measurement of the phenomenon and the development of effective countermeasures. In particular, limited attention has been devoted to understanding how contextual variables such as education level, family composition, cultural norms, labor conditions, and gender stereotypes influence the manifestation and persistence of economic violence. Similarly, while institutional initiatives and support measures have increased in recent years, there remains a significant gap between formal recognition of the problem and the implementation of integrated prevention and protection policies capable of addressing the structural roots of women's economic vulnerability.

Against this background, the present study aims to develop a scientific framework for interpreting economic violence as a multidimensional mechanism of restriction of individual financial autonomy. Building upon the institutional foundations established by the Parliamentary Commission while extending them into a broader academic inquiry, the paper is guided by three main research questions. The first research question investigates the domains through which gender-based economic violence is expressed as a form of restriction of individual financial autonomy, taking into account contextual factors such as educational level, family composition, and prevailing gender norms (RQ1). The second research question examines how the phenomenon manifests itself within the Italian national context, with particular attention to the interaction between institutional, socioeconomic, and cultural factors shaping women's econom-

ic vulnerability (RQ2). The third research question explores the existing countermeasures currently adopted to address economic violence and identifies additional policies, institutional instruments, and social interventions that should be implemented in order to strengthen prevention, protection, and empowerment mechanisms (RQ3).

From a methodological perspective, the study adopts a Structured Literature Review (SLR) in order to identify, classify, and critically systematize the principal research streams concerning economic violence. The SLR allowed the identification of the main thematic areas through which the phenomenon has been interpreted in previous studies, including domestic financial abuse, workplace inequality, barriers to female entrepreneurship, economic dependency, financial literacy, welfare vulnerability, and institutional protection mechanisms. Building upon this analytical foundation, the study develops a multidimensional interpretative framework that conceptualizes economic violence as a systemic phenomenon operating across four interconnected domains: the domestic sphere, the labor market, entrepreneurship, and the broader social context. The findings show that economic violence is not limited to explicit deprivation of financial resources but frequently emerges through indirect and structural mechanisms that progressively reduce women's decision-making power and economic agency. The analysis further highlights how the phenomenon is reinforced by persistent gender stereotypes, unequal care responsibilities, asymmetrical access to employment opportunities, and institutional gaps in welfare and financial protection systems. Within the Italian context, the findings reveal that economic violence is deeply intertwined with broader structural inequalities affecting women's participation in the labor market, access to leadership positions, entrepreneurial opportunities, and financial independence. Moreover, the study emphasizes that existing countermeasures remain largely fragmented and reactive, often focusing on emergency protection rather than on long-term economic empowerment and structural prevention strategies. Consequently, the

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paper argues that effective responses to economic violence require integrated interventions combining legal recognition, financial education, labor market inclusion, welfare support, institutional coordination, and cultural transformation.

The contribution of this study is therefore twofold. On the one hand, it advances the academic debate by providing a systematic and interdisciplinary framework capable of interpreting economic violence as a structural dimension of gender inequality rather than as an isolated or merely domestic form of abuse. On the other hand, it contributes to the ongoing institutional and policy discussion by identifying concrete implications for public policy, welfare systems, financial inclusion strategies, labor regulations, and gender equality initiatives. In this sense, the paper represents an evolution of the work carried out by the Parliamentary Commission, transforming institutional evidence into a broader scientific reflection capable of supporting future research and policymaking on economic violence.

In order to develop the contents of the study in detail, the first chapter conceptualizes economic violence through a multidimensional framework based on legal, institutional, and academic perspectives. It first reconstructs the main legal sources, including international conventions, European provisions, Italian legislation, and relevant case law, showing how economic violence is still often addressed indirectly rather than as an autonomous legal category. It then examines institutional definitions developed by international and national bodies, research centres, foundations, and public authorities, highlighting the plurality of operational meanings attributed to the phenomenon. Finally, the chapter presents the academic perspective through a Structured Literature Review conducted on Scopus and Web of Science. This review makes it possible to identify four main domains in which economic violence emerges: the domestic sphere, the labour market, female entrepreneurship, and the social domain. In this way, the chapter provides the conceptual and meth-

odological basis for the subsequent analysis.

The second chapter investigates the concrete forms through which economic violence manifests itself across the four domains identified in the literature review. In the domestic domain, the analysis focuses on restriction of access to personal and family financial resources, coerced debt, exclusion from financial decision-making, economic sabotage, barriers to employment, care obligations, lack of financial competence, and male-oriented family financial management. In the labour market domain, the chapter examines structural mechanisms such as the glass ceiling, the glass cliff, gender pay differentials, the gender quotas gap, and discriminatory mechanisms affecting women's entry into and permanence in employment. The entrepreneurial domain is analysed through the specific barriers faced by women entrepreneurs, including difficulties in accessing credit, work-life balance constraints, and exclusion from generational transitions in family businesses. The social domain broadens the analysis to migration, prostitution and begging, kidnapping, slavery, trafficking, and illegal gang labour. This chapter therefore translates the conceptual framework into a detailed taxonomy of the phenomenon's manifestations.

The third chapter focuses on the Italian context by examining the evidence emerging from existing reports and statistical sources. It first considers international sources, including the World Bank and the European Institute for Gender Equality, in order to situate Italy within comparative frameworks concerning women's legal rights, financial independence, labour participation, access to credit, and gender equality indicators. The chapter then turns to national sources, particularly ISTAT and ASviS, to identify how economic violence is reflected in Italian data on gender stereotypes, dependence, labour market exclusion, poverty risk, unpaid care work, and access to support services. Particular attention is devoted to the difficulty of measuring economic violence as a distinct phenomenon, given its frequent overlap with psychological, domestic, and social forms

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of abuse. The chapter also highlights the gradual emergence of more specific measurement tools, such as scales designed to detect economic control and economic exploitation. Overall, this section responds directly to the question of how economic violence manifests itself in the national context.

The fourth chapter analyses the policy and operational responses currently available in Italy to prevent, identify, and counter economic violence. The discussion is again organized according to the four domains of the study. In the domestic domain, the chapter examines instruments such as the Freedom Income, the Freedom Microcredit, anti-violence centres, shelters, financial education initiatives, and institutional support pathways designed to help women regain autonomy. In the labour market domain, it considers measures aimed at reducing gender discrimination, improving access to employment, supporting work-life balance, promoting pay transparency, and strengthening women's representation in decision-making positions. In the female entrepreneurship domain, the chapter focuses on policies supporting access to credit, guarantee funds, incentives, training, and programmes aimed at consolidating women-led businesses. Finally, in the social domain, it reviews interventions addressing migration, trafficking, exploitation, illegal gang labour, and the protection of particularly vulnerable groups. This chapter therefore links the diagnosis of the phenomenon to the existing architecture of prevention and intervention.

The fifth and final chapter outlines the conclusion and future scenarios for addressing economic violence, moving from existing countermeasures to structural interventions capable of producing long-term change. In the domestic domain, it proposes stronger funding for anti-violence centres, broader financial education in schools and universities, and more stable partnerships between institutions and third-sector organizations. In the labour market domain, it identifies the need for interventions capable of reducing structural inequalities in employment, pay, career progression,

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and care responsibilities. In the entrepreneurial domain, it emphasizes the importance of strengthening women's access to credit, supporting female-led enterprises, and removing cultural and organizational barriers that exclude women from business succession and strategic roles. In the social domain, the chapter calls for integrated policies addressing intersectional vulnerability, migration, trafficking, labour exploitation, and social marginalization. The concluding perspective is therefore not limited to emergency protection, but aims to promote a structural and cultural transformation consistent with the objectives of the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2026.

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Gendered Economic Violence: Analysis of the Phenomenon and Mitigation Strategies

Paola Paoloni, Giuseppe Modaffari, Antonietta Cosentino

The book **offers a comprehensive and interdisciplinary analysis of economic violence phenomenon** as one of the most pervasive yet under-recognised **forms of gender-based violence** in contemporary societies. Moving beyond traditional interpretations that confine economic violence exclusively to the domestic sphere, the book develops a broader conceptual framework capable of identifying the structural, institutional and socioeconomic mechanisms through which women's financial autonomy is restricted throughout different dimensions of economic and social life.

Through a Structured Literature Review conducted on the international scientific literature indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, the work reconstructs the principal manifestations of economic violence and examines how they emerge across intimate partner relationships, workplace dynamics, entrepreneurial activity and broader processes of social vulnerability and exclusion. By combining legal, economic, sociological and institutional perspectives, the volume highlights how economic violence manifests through **labour inequalities, barriers to access to credit, occupational segregation, welfare asymmetries, entrepreneurial exclusion and structural forms of economic dependency**, and not only through direct financial control and deprivation.

Particular attention is devoted to the Italian context, examining the interaction between institutional frameworks, cultural stereotypes and socioeconomic conditions that contribute to women's economic vulnerability. Combining theoretical reflection with empirical evidence and policy-oriented analysis, **this work contributes to reframing economic violence as a structural issue of autonomy, citizenship and democratic participation**. Accessible to scholars, policymakers, legal practitioners and professionals working in the fields of gender equality, welfare and social protection, **the volume offers both a rigorous analytical framework and concrete proposals for understanding and combating one of the least visible dimensions of gender inequality**.

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