Parliamentary Assembly
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Preventing and combating vicarious violence as a form of gender-based violence against women

Motion for a resolution
tabled by the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

Vicarious violence is any type of violence against children, or other family members, with the aim of causing psychological damage to the woman who is their mother or relative. It is a form of gender-based violence as the children or other relatives who suffer directly the physical or psychological violence are instrumentalised with the objective of harming the woman.

The concept of vicarious violence is used to give visibility and address the increasing prevalence of violence against children, including their killing, in order to inflict suffering on mothers. The final target of vicarious violence is the mother, but the children themselves are also victims. As such, their needs, rights and best interest must be considered in legal and policy measures to prevent and combat this form of gender-based violence.

Article 3 of the Istanbul Convention defines gender-based violence against women as violence that is "directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately". It refers to harm perpetrated against a woman, which is both the cause and the result of unequal power relations that lead to women's subordinate status in private and public spheres. This type of violence is deeply rooted in the social and cultural structures, norms and values that govern society. The Istanbul Convention considers that children can be direct victims of physical, sexual or psychological violence, including in a context of domestic violence, and it requires harsher sentences if the violence is committed against, or in the presence of, a child.

The Parliamentary Assembly should give visibility to vicarious violence and call on member States to take measures to prevent and combat this form of violence affecting women and children, and other relatives, which is also a manifestation of the ongoing backlash against gender equality and women's rights.