

A First Survey on Victim-Offender Mediation in Italy

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Introduction

Victim-offender mediation (VOM) was introduced in Italy in the mid 90s. The present study was aimed at providing a first overview of the characteristics and functioning of the VOM services throughout the country. Specifically, the investigation focused on the organization of VOM services, and resources available, as well as on the characteristics of the profession of the mediator (i.e., training, motivations, perceptions). It should be noted that VOM practice in Italy is currently limited to the juvenile criminal justice system. Before presenting the results of the survey on VOM services, I shall outline briefly the implementation of VOM and a description of the legal framework within which VOM can be adopted.

The introduction of Restorative Justice (RJ) practices even before the birth of formal VOM services in 1995 demonstrates the attention paid to alternative procedures inspired by RJ in the Italian juvenile justice context. Such attention ultimately led to the establishment of VOM groups promoted by juvenile prosecutors and judges, and supported by social workers and/or lay judges, some of whom were directly involved in mediation. It was in fact a small group of juvenile magistrates of Turin (an important North-Western city) which was the promoter of VOM in Italy. I must clarify that in Italy, like in France, the term "magistrates" includes both judges and public prosecutors, who share the same bureaucratic recruitment, training and career.

Four articles published in the period 1992-1994 opened a new scenario on VOM in juvenile criminal justice and were crucial to the implementation of VOM (Bouchard, 1992, 1993, 1994; Juvenile magistrates of Turin, 1994). The latter two articles, published in the same issue of the official journal of the juvenile and family magistrates association (*Minori giustizia*) had a remarkable impact. The one by Bouchard (1994) pointed out that "restorative practices as mediation" had quickly developed in Eastern European countries, lamenting that Italy had remained substantially resistant and unavailable for the experimentation. The other one by Bouchard's colleagues, magistrates of the juvenile court and prosecution office of Turin, was quite unusual because, exceptionally, the authors' names were replaced by the following premise: "*We present a document prepared by the magistrates of the juvenile court and prosecution office of Turin. It proposes a new path for the juvenile criminal process through the so-called victim-offender mediation and the reparation of damage caused by the crime*" (Juvenile magistrates of Turin, 1994). Taking into account the journal where this article was published, the absence of the authors' names and the fact that the authors were probably the most representative and authoritative group in the juvenile justice arena, the article may be considered as the manifesto for the application of RJ and VOM in Italy.

Given these premises, it comes as no surprise that the first Italian VOM service was founded in Turin in the following year, 1995, and located in the juvenile prosecution office. Subsequently, VOM was gradually and

spontaneously adopted elsewhere: in 1996 VOM services were created in Trento, Catanzaro, Bari and Rome, in 1998 in Milan, in 1999 in Sassari, in 2000 in Cagliari and Foggia. Our survey is concerned with the above mentioned 9 VOM services.

Although the code of juvenile criminal procedure implemented in 1989 does not include a specific provision for VOM, nor is the term mediation ever mentioned, the Department for juvenile justice of the Ministry of Justice has relied on its web site to encourage the experimental application of VOM [2]. A few norms are currently used to apply VOM and RJ practices, but the norm providing for probation (art. 28 DPR 448/88) is the most commonly applied. The institute of probation differs substantially from similar institutes in other countries because instead of being a real sentence, it results in the suspension of the trial until a later time at which a sentence will be given. During the time of suspension, the juvenile may participate in programs or projects aimed at rehabilitating him or her and/or guaranteeing a positive outcome of the sentence. The judge (frequently the judge of the preliminary hearing) may in fact refer the case to the social service and/or to the VOM service with the aims of “conciliation”, “reparation” or “mediation”. At the time of the sentence, if the outcome of the mediation is positive, the judge may proceed by dismissing the case or giving judicial pardon.

It may be added that until 1993, VOM lacked structure and organization. The social workers were the only professionals conducting mediation, but they were not prepared for the job (Baldry, 1998). Moreover, according to Baldry (1998), little attention was given to the victims’ interests and needs, and in most cases the focus was on young offenders. A sizeable minority of these cases (40.5%) did involve direct victim-offender mediation but for the majority of the cases (59.5%), mediation did not involve a direct meeting with the parties, possibly because social workers acting as mediators preferred to ask the offender to write a letter of apology to the victim.

Thus RJ practices rise spontaneously in Italy in the 90s even before the formal establishment of VOM services. This is confirmed also by the results of a longitudinal analysis on the application of probation in the period 1991-96 that we carried out in Bari, an important South-Eastern city on the sea side (Mestitz, Colamussi, 2000). This research significantly showed that the institute of probation was applied mainly with reference to the RJ model. In fact, RJ strategies were part of the probation projects for the large majority (81.1%) of the sample (190 probation cases). Mainly restorative prescriptions entailed the reparation of the damages caused by the crime (either materially or symbolically) and/or the reconciliation with the victim. In Table 1 restorative practices concerned with 154 cases have been classified in 4 sub-categories. It can be observed that direct mediation through victim-offender meetings was very rarely used, only in 9.1% cases. Instead, in most cases the mediation was formal and indirect. The research stressed that the two main restorative practices adopted were: symbolic financial compensation to charity and welfare institutions, churches included (51.3%), and writing formal letters of apology to the victim (35.7%). These results stimulated the survey here presented.

Table 1 - Categories of 154 restorative practices adopted in a sample of 190 probation projects as documented by Court social services in Bari in the period 1991-1996.

<i>Restorative practices</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
- symbolic payments to charity and welfare institutions (churches included)	79	51.3
- letter of apology to the victim	55	35.7
- meeting of reconciliation with the victim	14	9.1
- financial compensation to the victim	6	3.9
Total	154	100

Survey of VOM services in Italy

As previous researches on Italian VOM services were lacking [3], the main scope of the present study is exploratory. The survey was carried out in the period 2001-02 at the Research Institute on Judicial Systems of the National Research Council (IRSIG-CNR).

Method and subjects

Two different questionnaires, one addressed to mediators and one to the mediation service coordinators/directors, were administered in 9 VOM services. The questionnaires were returned by almost the entire universe: 9 coordinators of all existing VOM services (listed in Table 2) and by 50 mediators. Only 6 mediators did not return the questionnaires. The questionnaires collected information on the following aspects: organization and funding of VOM services, mediators' main characteristics, impact of VOM, mediation features, mediators' perceptions, and work satisfaction. Data were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively in order to permit an initial evaluation of the work organization and characteristics of the mediators. However the research is currently underway and it will be completed in the coming months by a series of interviews with mediators.

Table 2 - VOM services in Italy by date of foundation.

<i>Sites of VOM services</i>	<i>Date of foundation</i>
Turin (Piedmont region, North-West)	Jan.1995 (founded again in May 2000)
Trento (autonomous province, North-East)	Feb. 1996 (founded again in Feb. 1999)
Catanzaro (Calabria region, South-West)	July 1996 (working from Oct. 1997)
Bari (Puglia region, South-East)	November 1996
Rome (Lazio region, Central Italy)	End of 1996, closed in 1999
Milan (Lombardy region, North)	May 1998
Sassari (Sardinia island)	June 1999
Cagliari (Sardinia island)	April 2000
Foggia (Puglia region, South-East)	May 2000

The survey considered 9 services, but the one in Rome founded at the end of 1996 was closed in 1999. Thus at present 8 VOM services for juvenile offenders are operative: three are located in the North (Turin, Milan, Trento), three in the South (Foggia and Bari in the region Puglia; Catanzaro in the region Calabria), and two on the island of Sardinia (Cagliari, Sassari)

Organization and funding of VOM services

VOM services generally stem from the collaboration of judicial authorities, local institutions and social services. Thus three common elements can be traced in the organizational models and the funding of the VOM services: a) they are public services, as local and/or State governments provide personnel and financing; b) magistrates and lay judges played an active role in their foundation; c) court social workers' collaboration and agreement was an essential condition for VOM services functioning.

a) The sources of funding may be the State government (Ministry of Justice) and/or the local governments such as municipality (city administration), province, region. As shown in Table 3 these sources are not mutually exclusive as most services rely on multiple sources of funding.

Table 3 - Funding of VOM services in Italy.

<i>Source of funding</i>	<i>VOM services</i>
City and province	Cagliari
City and region	Bari
Province	Trento, Sassari
Region	Catanzaro, Foggia
Ministry of justice, city and region	Turin
Ministry of justice and region	Milan
No funding	Roma

Thus, with the exception of the Roman group, VOM services are structured as public services depending in some way on the funding administrations. The regional governments appear the main sources of funding both in the Northern and Southern regions as they totally or partially fund 5 groups (Catanzaro, Foggia, Bari, Turin and Milan). Both Trento and Sassari services rely on funding by the provincial administrations while the Cagliari service is jointly funded by the city and the province. The Turin service receives funds from the Ministry of Justice as well as from the city and region of Piedmont. The Milan service is funded by the region of Lombardy and the Ministry of Justice. It should be noted that the Ministry of justice funds only the VOM service of Milan and Turin and that the most unusual formal organization in the Italian VOM landscape is that established in Rome where the VOM service was a private institution, born within the Department of Psychology of the University "La Sapienza", which did not receive any funding. This is one of the reasons why it was closed in 1999.

b) The second point is that the creation of VOM services was often stimulated and actively organized by juvenile professional magistrates and lay judges. Two indicators confirm this pre-condition. First, the fact that at the beginning almost all VOM services were located in the buildings of the juvenile courts and prosecution offices (i.e. Turin, Bari, Trento and Milan) or in the same location as the court social service (i.e. Catanzaro). Only recently some VOM services have changed their status and/or location as funding became available from local governments [4] (Table 4). Second, juvenile magistrates and lay judges had often solicited the participation of local governments in funding the VOM services and letters of intent to this aim between different institutions were signed in 5 cases (Milan, Turin, Trento, Bari and Foggia) [5]. This permits employees of a variety of institutions or administrations (Ministry of justice, municipality, province or region), to become mediators at the disposal of the VOM services.

Table 4 - VOM services in Italy: locations and promoters.

<i>Sites of VOM services</i>	<i>Location in buildings of juvenile courts, prosecution offices, court social services etc.</i>	<i>Promoters and founders</i>
Turin	Yes 1995-2000 (c/o Prosecution office) No from 2000 (c/o municipal social service)	Juvenile magistrates; members of court and local social service
Trento	Yes 1996-1999 (c/o Prosecution office) No from 1999 (c/o Provincial social service)	Juvenile magistrates; members of court and local social services
Catanzaro	Yes (c/o court social service)	Juvenile magistrates; members of court and local social services
Bari	Yes (c/o juvenile court and prosecution office)	Juvenile magistrates; members of court and local social services
Rome	No (c/o Dept. of Psychology, University La Sapienza)	One university professor and 3 researchers (one was also a lay judge)
Milan	No (c/o municipal social service)	Lay judges, researchers and university professors
Sassari	Data not available	One lay judge
Cagliari	Data not available	Two juvenile magistrates and one lay judge
Foggia	No (c/o municipal offices)	Juvenile magistrates; lay judges; members of court and local social services

No data are available on the location of the VOM service in Sassari as the mediator/coordinator, a lay judge of the juvenile court, provided only her personal address and phone numbers (Table 4), no statistical data and only partial information on the items listed in the questionnaire. These circumstances indirectly suggest that the service is not yet operative even if its formal foundation dated June 1999. We may note close connection between Bari and the most recent VOM services in Foggia, Cagliari and Sassari: the coordinator and mediators in Bari carried out the training and supervision of the personnel in the three new VOM services.

c) In their beginning phases, VOM practices were carried out by court social services. Currently operating VOM services appear to be more autonomous, although the majority are directly connected with the juvenile courts and prosecution offices. Indeed, the service in Catanzaro is so closely connected to the court social service that it is even located inside the same office. In this landscape the only exception is the VOM service founded by a group of researchers at the University of Rome. This initiative can be considered a “deviant”

model of independence, but it failed as the service was closed after three years (1997-1999) during which only 20 cases were referred to it. According to some members of the group, the failure was the result of a silent boycott by juvenile magistrates and court social workers. Indirectly this experience seems to confirm the non-written rule that a strong agreement with juvenile magistrates, as well as the agreement and collaboration of court social workers, are needed - at least in the phase of implementation - to launch a well-functioning VOM service in Italy.

Mediators' characteristics

Our questionnaire collected information on the following characteristics: gender, age, marriage, children, beginning of mediation activity, profession, training and motivations.

Table 5 - Mediator gender distribution in the VOM services.

<i>VOM services</i>	<i>Mediators</i>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>T</i>
Bari	2	6	8
Cagliari	-	1	1
Catanzaro	1	8	9
Foggia	-	1	1
Milan	5	7	12
Rome	-	3	3
Sassari	-	1	1
Trento	2	4	6
Turin	2	7	9
Totals	12 (24%)	38 (76%)	50* (100%)

* The universe of mediators is 56, of whom only 6 did not respond to the questionnaire

Table 5 shows that although 8 VOM centers are currently active, 3 of them - in Cagliari, Sassari and Foggia - employ only one person (as mediator/coordinator). This indicates that only 5 VOM services are actually fully operative. In Table 5 the distribution of mediators by gender in each VOM service shows that the majority of Italian mediators is female (76%). Mediators are mainly young (62% of them are between 28 and 38), the majority are married (58%) but without children (52%) and have a University degree (68%). Moreover, mediators had only recently begun the mediation activity: in 1997-98 (48%) or in 1995-96 (40%).

Juvenile lay judges and social workers not only participated in the creation of mediation groups but they represent the majority of mediators. Table 6 shows that 42% of the total number of mediators are social workers: 11 are employed by the court social services and 10 by the local social services (assigned to the VOM services as mediators). It is interesting to note that, as 10 out of the 16 volunteer mediators are lay judges, the majority (31, or 62%) are social workers or juvenile lay judges. These two tasks are not mutually exclusive. Moreover, volunteer mediators are about one third of the total number of mediators (32%); most of these are either from Bari (N = 8) or Rome (N = 3). The remaining 11 mediators (22%) are self employed professionals (lawyers, psychotherapists etc.). Only one mediator is hired directly by the VOM service and one mediator is a consultant for the Ministry of justice.

Table 6 - Mediators' professional position in the VOM services.

<i>Professional position</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Social workers of court and local social services (at disposal as mediators)	21	42
Volunteer mediators	16*	32
Self employed professional	11	22
Mediator employed by the VOM service	1	2
Other	1	2

* 10 out of the total are lay judges.

The vast majority of mediators (76%) received formal training before the beginning of their mediation activity (Table 7). An exception to this is the VOM service in Catanzaro where only one mediator participated in some training before beginning his/her activity. The majority of the individuals who became mediators in Catanzaro were already employed as court or local social workers dealing with adolescents, and began their activity as part of their job. Briguglio (1999) describes how mediators in Catanzaro had several meetings before beginning VOM, to discuss their expectations and to decide on the organization of the service. It is quite remarkable that during these meetings, articles and other published material on VOM practices with juveniles were read in detail in order to set up their own guidelines for VOM practice. It should be added that all the individuals who did not receive any formal training before practising VOM, participated in training activities later.

Table 7 - Training of mediators before and after the beginning of VOM activity.

<i>VOM services</i>	<i>Mediators (January 2002)</i>	<i>Mediators trained before the beginning of their activity</i>	<i>Mediators trained after the beginning of their activity</i>		
		<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Bari	8	8	100	3	37.5
Cagliari	1	1	100	1	100
Catanzaro	9	1	12.5	8	88.9
Foggia	1	1	100	0	100
Milan	12	12	100	12	100
Rome	3	2	66	3	100
Sassari	1	1	100	1	100
Turin	9	7	78	9	100
Trento	6	5	83	1	20

As Table 8 illustrates, Italian mediators' motivations mostly stem from interests in professional growth, both generally (i.e., enriching professional skills) and specifically (e.g., interest in conflict resolution methods, RJ, juvenile justice, etc.). A sizeable minority also expresses personal reasons (i.e., ideological and personal interest) and an altruistic motivation, such as helping juveniles. When gender differences were considered, there was no statistically significant difference in the expression of motivations [6].

Table 8 - Mediators' motivations to work with VOM by gender (12 males and 38 females). The percentages reported below are calculated on the total number of mediators responding (more than one answer was possible).

<i>Motivation to work with VOM</i>	<i>Females</i>		<i>Males</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Increase of professional skills	12	31.6	4	33.3	16	32
Interest for RJ and VOM	9	23.7	3	25	12	24
Interest in conflict resolution methods/strategies	8	21.1	3	25	11	22
Ideological and personal interest	7	18.4	3	25	10	20
Interest for new judicial/extra-judicial models	6	15.8	2	16	8	16
Interest in minors and juvenile justice	6	15.8	1	8.3	7	14
Altruism	3	7.9	3	25	6	12
Other	2	5.2	2	16	4	8

Impact of VOM

To understand and evaluate the impact of VOM on the juvenile judicial system, it would be important to rely on precise quantitative data concerning juvenile offenders in Italy. Unfortunately, these data are not consistently available and they are rarely reliable (Di Federico et al., 1995). Because official data for the last two years are unavailable (ISTAT [7] has thus far published statistics on juvenile crimes only until 1999), I am unfortunately unable to interpret my results with reference to the current situation. However these results may still provide a general idea of: 1) how often juvenile cases are referred to VOM services in relation to the total number of juveniles prosecuted within the juvenile criminal justice system, and 2) how often was mediation was actually possible for the cases referred to VOM services.

Table 9 shows data concerning referrals to VOM services, including the official data on juveniles referred to prosecution offices in the provinces where a VOM service is (or was) operative. Additionally, the number of cases referred to VOM services is included so that the percentage of cases for which VOM was actually attempted might be calculated. Specifically, the percentage of referrals to mediation was calculated for each year by dividing the overall number of cases referred to mediation services (i.e., the sum of referrals across VOM services) by the number of cases referred for prosecution (i.e., the sum of referrals across prosecutor offices) in the areas where a VOM service was operative. For the reader's convenience, the last column in Table 9 reports the location of VOM services contributing to the number of cases and percentages reported.

VOM was attempted in a very low percentage of cases, thus its use appears very marginal. It seems that after an initial enthusiasm in the years 1995-97, VOM was rarely applied. In comparison to 1995, in 1999 referrals to juvenile prosecution increased three times, VOM services had grown to 4 and the number of cases referred to mediation increased from 33 to 153. This last finding suggests that the application of mediation is more frequent and its diffusion on the territory has increased. Nevertheless, the cases referred to VOM services are still a small minority. Unfortunately, the lack of ISTAT reports in 2000 and 2001 does not permit us to establish whether the VOM practice has further increased or is still marginal.

Table 9 - Referrals to the juvenile prosecution offices and cases referred to mediation services (1995-1999 national data)

<i>Years</i>	<i>Referrals to juvenile prosecution*</i>	<i>Cases referred to mediation services</i>	<i>Location of VOM services</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	
1995	702	33	4.70	Turin
1996	1460	48	3.29	Bari, Turin
1997	1437	78	5.4	Bari, Turin
1998	2762	89	3.18	Bari, Catanzaro, Turin
1999	2187	153	6.99	Bari, Catanzaro, Turin, Trento

* Source: official data on juveniles reported to prosecution offices in the period 1995-1999 (ISTAT, *Statistiche giudiziarie penali*, Roma; volumes of 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999).

The limited application of VOM is confirmed by mediators' reports of a very low number of cases managed in the last year. More than one third of mediators (38%) dealt with 6 to 15 cases, 22% dealt with less than 5 cases, 12% dealt with 16 to 25 cases and only 4 mediators (8%) dealt with more than 25 cases. In other terms the majority of mediators (60%) dealt with a mean of 15 cases per year, that is, about 1.4 per month.

Table 10 - Cases of VOM dealt with by VOM services from 1995 to 2001 [8]

<i>VOM services</i>	<i>Years</i>	<i>Juveniles referred to VOM services</i>	<i>Successful VOM</i>	<i>Unsuccessful VOM (failed or no agreement)</i>		
			<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Turin	1995-2001	318	140	44.0	156	49.1
Catanzaro	1995-2001	174	155	89.1	19	10.9

Bari	1996-2001	222	118	53.1	88	39.6
Rome	1997-1999	20	17	85.0	3	15.0
Milan	1998-2000	120	73	60.8	45	37.5
Trento	1999-2001	40	30	75.0	9	22.5
Cagliari	2000-2001	50	25	50.0	5	10.0
Foggia	2000-2001	13	8	61.5	5	38.5
Sassari	1999-2001	n.a.*	n.a.	-	n.a.	-
Totals	1995-2001	957	566	59.1	330	34.9

* data not available

How many cases referred to VOM services actually resulted in mediation? Table 10 reports the number of cases referred to each VOM service across years of activity and whether mediation was successful or not (i.e., no agreement was reached). Thus, it is specified whether mediation was actually put into practice, or if, instead, it was not possible. Unfortunately data were not provided by the mediator/director of the VOM service in Sassari and there may be some doubt regarding the data indicated by the mediator/director of the VOM service in Cagliari (50 cases in two years). A new service always encounters difficulties in the beginning phase: as Table 10 shows, this happened both in Trento, where in 3 years the VOM service dealt with 40 cases, and in Foggia where the service dealt with only 13 cases in two years.

When asked about the most common outcomes of the mediation, 94% of the mediators report positive results. Actual data on cases referred to the VOM service show that the mediation practice fails on average in more than a third of cases (34.9%). There is, however, a remarkable variability in this percentage among different VOM services. Whereas mediation was successfully conducted for about 90% of all cases in the Cagliari and Catanzaro services, this was true for only about 50% of the cases in Turin (in Turin the failure rate is 49.1% while in Catanzaro it is only 10.9%).

It is not clear why the observed differences among services exist, and in the following months, I will address this question as I carry out the interviews with mediators. One possible explanation might lie in differences among the strategies used to approach and select victims and offenders, and these different styles may result in different rates of agreement between victims and offenders to participate in the mediation. Another possible explanation might be connected to the differences between North and South in evaluating mediation cases and indirectly due also to the differences in the mediators' training (Table 7). A third explanation is that the differences in rates of agreement across services does not reflect a characteristic of the service *per se*, but a characteristic of the territory in which the service is placed (e.g. geographical differences in crime, trust in institutions, etc.). This should be the object of future research which should also investigate the relationship between type of crime and the success of VOM. It is plausible, for example, that the more severe the perpetrated crimes, the more difficult it is to gain the victim's agreement to meet the perpetrator.

Also, insufficient information is available to establish whether or not there may be a propensity to refer juveniles with specific charges to mediation services, or whether instead other criteria are used. Future research should investigate the extent to which referrals to VOM are at the discretion of the judicial authorities (and may therefore depend on personal factors like, for example, ideological background).

In conclusion, the role of VOM in altering the Italian juvenile justice landscape is quantitatively marginal. Nevertheless, the creation of these services and mediation restorative practices are slowly contributing to the promotion of a cultural change in the bureaucratic organisational setting of the Italian juvenile justice system. This is shown by the promotion of VOM in the web site of the Ministry of justice (Department of juvenile justice), the conference on the subject organized by the same Department in Rome (December 1998), the publication of a book containing the reports presented at the conference funded by the same Department (Ufficio Centrale giustizia minorile, 1999) and by a general increase in articles and books on the subject.

VOM features

All VOM services provide only for face-to-face mediation between victims of crime and juvenile offenders, as neither circle nor family group conferences have thus far been promoted in Italy. Some services work exclusively with VOM (namely Milan, Rome, and Turin), whereas others also work also with mediation in other fields. Almost all mediators carry out VOM (92%), 34% of them exert also family mediation and 24% other kinds of mediation (such as school, social etc.). In particular 5 VOM services (Bari, Cagliari, Catanzaro, Foggia, and Sassari) practice family mediation and 2 of them (Bari and Cagliari) operate also social mediation. Finally, school mediation is implemented in Trento.

The French influence is very strong as the most widely represented theoretical model of mediation is that proposed in France by Jeanne Morineau. Mediators of all working VOM services (Bari, Cagliari, Catanzaro, Foggia, Milan, Turin and Sassari) received their training directly from Morineau either in France and/or in Italy. The American model by Umbreit was used only by the mediators in Rome, who closed their service. Interestingly, only Trento mediators define their model as “atheoretical”. The Bari group report that they had elaborated and improved the French model, calling their new version the “Mediterranean model”, which was adopted also in Sardinia by mediators in Sassari and Cagliari (as they were trained by the Bari group).

The majority of mediators (66%) reports that the objective of VOM is that of establishing communication and a relationship between victim and offender. Additional objectives frequently reported by mediators are: facilitating the sharing of feelings and emotions between victim and offender (36%), making the offender responsible (34%), providing support to the victim (26%).

The mean number of victim-offender meetings differs considerably in each VOM service, ranging from one meeting, indicated by the majority of mediators in Milan and Turin, to 5 or more meetings, indicated by those in Rome and Foggia. In the middle, the majority of mediators in Catanzaro, Trento and Sassari report 3 meetings, and those in Bari and Cagliari, 4 meetings. The majority of mediators (68%) report that mediation meetings include 4 participants: the victim, the offender and 2 mediators. All 12 mediators of the Milanese VOM service and only one mediator in Bari (for a total of 26%) report 5 participants (3 mediators instead of 2).

In general mediators devote limited time (a few hours per week) to the mediation activity: 46% devote 6-10 hours per week, 28% from 2 hours and a half to 5 and only one fourth (24%) 11 hours and more. Thus the work activity per week is scarce and much more scarce if compared with the mediators' evaluation of the time needed for an intervention of VOM, which can last from 7 to 18 hours (50%) or 19 hours and more (20%) (Table 11).

Table 11 - Mediators' evaluation of the time needed for an intervention of VOM.

<i>VOM services</i>	<i>No answer</i>	<i>2-6 hours</i>	<i>7-12 hours</i>	<i>13-18 hours</i>	<i>19 hours and more</i>	<i>Total</i>
Bari			2	5	1	8
Cagliari				1		1
Catanzaro	1			7	1	9
Foggia					1	1
Milano		3	2	2	5	12
Roma	1				2	3
Sassari		1				1
Torino	1	4	4			9
Trento		4	2			6
Total	3	12	10	15	10	50

Mediators' perceptions and work satisfaction

Only 8 mediators (16%) think that there are no limits or problems in applying VOM. The majority does indicate the following as main limits: difficult relationships and poor coordination with judicial authorities and/or social services together with the difficulties of involving victims/offenders in the mediation meetings (Table 12). Remarkably, almost all mediators think that VOM does not increase the duration of the justice process (92%) nor its costs (88%).

Table 12 - Limits to the application of VOM

<i>Limits</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Limited relationships and coordination with judicial authorities and/or social services	10	20
Difficulties in involving victims/offenders	8	16
Scarce resources/time/space to deal with VOM	6	12
Lack of norms and procedures	4	8
Victims/offenders may manipulate the VOM	2	4
Poor relationship/coordination among mediators	2	4
Other	6	12

Mediators appear very satisfied by their activity. Table 13 shows that the mediation activity seems to allow: a high personal work satisfaction (52%), a high degree of autonomy (64%), a high satisfaction about work

organization (54%), a quite satisfactory number of mediators (52%). A moderate satisfaction is reported with the mediation and bureaucratic work load. Mediators are unsatisfied with organizational features such as: the scarcity of support personnel (48%), the location of the VOM service and the space available (44%) and the office automation and technologies (40%).

Table 13 - Mediators' work satisfaction

<i>Satisfaction with</i>	<i>Very high/ High</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Low/ Very low</i>
personal work satisfaction	36	13	-
personal autonomy	38	11	1
mediation work load	3	38	7
bureaucratic work load	5	34	9
location and space of the VOM service	19	7	22
office automation and technologies	15	13	20
distribution of mediation referred	27	12	9
work organization	27	13	8
human resources as mediators	26	13	9
human resources as support personnel	20	3	24

Concluding remarks

The creation of new VOM services and the diffusion of restorative practices seem to be slowly contributing to the promotion of a cultural change in the Italian juvenile justice system. By paraphrasing the title of this conference it may be concluded that in Italy many initiatives have been undertaken with the aim to transform the “dream” in “a new reality”. Nevertheless, further efforts are needed both in terms of the application of procedures and in terms of research, both in the national and international contexts. In particular, in the national context evaluative research is needed as well as the coordination of new initiatives and projects aimed at collecting homogenous data, disseminating VOM standardized procedures and more generally RJ applicative models. At the international level, comparative analyses should be undertaken in order to shed light on many issues, including those for which data are not presently available.

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Endnotes

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[2] See “*minori*” section in the web site of Italian Ministry of justice (www.giustizia.it).

[3] With the exception of a first explorative research on the early attempts of VOM in 1991-93 (Baldry, 1998).

[4] For example from January 1995 to May 2000 the VOM service in Turin was named *Ufficio Mediazione* and was located in the juvenile prosecution office; in May 2000 it was renamed *Centro mediazione penale minorile di Torino* becoming an institution of the city government. This model was also followed by the VOM service in Trento which until February 1999 was located inside the juvenile prosecution office and then became an institution of the province of Trento.

[5] These documents were published in the journal *Minori giustizia* n. 2/1999.

[6] Chi-square (50) < 3.1, p > .07