

## Sense-Based Approach in the Design of Anti-Violence Shelters: A Comparative Analysis

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**Abstract :** Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and Non-Partner Sexual Violence (NPSV) are still the most common forms of interpersonal violence against women today, and numerous studies have shown how they can affect women's physical and psychological well-being, frequently leading to depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and substance abuse. The primary goal of Italian Anti-Violence Centres (AVCs) is to provide an appropriate context for women to embark on a personalised path out of violence by providing various services such as listening groups, psychological and legal support, housing support in collaboration with shelters, work orientation, and specific support in the case of minor children. However, their physical environment is frequently overlooked, partly because these centres are typically established in pre-existing buildings and have a limited budget. Several studies on healthcare design and mental health, on the other hand, emphasise the potential of the built environment to facilitate healing by providing a restorative setting that aids in coping with stress and traumatic experiences, investigating the positive role of natural features and sensorial qualities such as light, colours, sound, and smell. This research aims to collect and summarise the key evidence-based principles derived from a multidisciplinary literature review about interior design elements that can help women recover after their traumatic experience. Furthermore, the study examines multiple case studies of Italian AVCs through the lens of previously determined principles, to understand how and whether these guidelines have been applied and which outcomes can provide relevant insights for design practice, with an emphasis on sensory qualities, usually overlooked in favour of other requirements. The outlined guidelines may serve as a framework for various typologies of services provided to women who are the victims of interpersonal violence, such as women's crisis centres and shelters.

**Keywords :** anti-violence centres, environmental psychology, interior design, interpersonal violence, restorative environments

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