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**NATIONAL STUDY ON THE CHILD SEXUAL ASSAULT ISSUE
IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**

**Leader, owner and commissioner of the National Study: Incest Trauma Center
- Belgrade**

Partners:

1. Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia
(Violence Prevention Unit / Group for the protection against violence and discrimination)
2. Women Health Promotion Center from Belgrade

In the age group of 10 to 18-year-olds, there are 4 children out of every school class in Serbia who have experienced sexual violence and 4 more who know somebody who has experienced it. At this moment, 2 children out of every school class are exposed to sexual violence. Primary school pupils usually disclose their experience to a family member, but generally encounter disbelief. Secondary school pupils tend to confide in a female or male friend, who more readily trust them. Out of the 2/3 of the children who disclose their experience, more than a half of the trusted persons fail to take action. Only 7% of them report the case to the authorities.

Excerpt from a letter to the Incest Trauma Center - Belgrade: "Above all, I am joyful, and then also grateful to you, for finally having before us the first *National Study on the Social Problem of Child Sexual Abuse in Serbia*, to the preliminary report of which I hereby give my full consent.

I wish this Study a long life and to become very soon a shield in the hands of every unprotected woman and child."

Kind regards,

Nježa Mrše

President of the Supervising Committee of the National Study

June 2015

INTRODUCTION

Before you is a short Preliminary Report of the first National Study on the social problem of child sexual abuse in the Republic of Serbia (hereinafter: National Study). Our motivation to conduct the National Study was that the words and experiences of the child survivor of sexual abuse become documented public words and confirmation that children in our country are also exposed to sexual violence and that they expect us to take urgent measures to counter it. We were strongly motivated by our year-long practical work with child and women survivors of sexual abuse, and in a very special way by the children who did us the honor of disclosing to us their most painful secrets.

The Incest Trauma Center - Belgrade is the official leader, owner and commissioner of the National Study. The National Study is financed by the European Union through the Program of support to the civil society of 2013 and we have realized it in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia (Violence Prevention Unit / group for the protection against violence and discrimination) and the Women Health Promotion Center, Belgrade. Additional financial support was provided by the Australian Embassy in Belgrade, Reconstruction Women's Fund and the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society of the Government of the Republic of Serbia.

The Incest Trauma Center - Belgrade (officially registered in 1994) is a women's non-governmental organization, a specialized agency for the social problem of sexual violence. We have been appointed official partner for Serbia of the Council of Europe Campaign "1 OF 5". This refers to the signed agreement between the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and the Incest Trauma Center - Belgrade concerning our conduct of the Council of Europe Campaign against child sexual abuse, based on the Lanzarote Convention. The name of the Campaign, "1 OF 5" ("ONE OF FIVE"), reflects the official figures issued by the Council of Europe, according to which one out of five children in Europe has survived sexual violence. The Incest Trauma Center - Belgrade, a specialized agency with a 21-year work experience - the longest-standing of this type in Serbia - was appointed official partner throughout the implementation period of the Campaign (2012-2015).

The Campaign "1 OF 5" comprises three dimensions: a) public awareness-raising about the topic of child sexual abuse b) reforms in legislation and education and c) the parliamentary dimension. The National Study is being realized within the dimension "Reforms in legislation and education" and the benefit of its results is interconnected with and transferred onto the other two.

The National Study Team comprises the Incest Trauma Center - Belgrade, the Women Health Promotion Center and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia (Group for the protection against violence and discrimination), together with the Ethics Committee and Supervising Committee, whose members are prominent experts with year-long experience in the area of working with children, young people and in the sphere of education, who were brought together as part of the realization of the National Study. The Team focused their special attention on the ethics component of the National Study. The Republic of Serbia Ombudsman institution monitored the process of implementation and issued their positive professional assessment regarding the full respect of children's rights in the process.

National Study Team:

Dušica Popadić, Director of the Incest Trauma Center - Belgrade and Supervisor of the National Study

Dr. Ljiljana Bogavac, Deputy Director of the Incest Trauma Center - Belgrade and President of the Ethics Committee of the National Study

Women Health Promotion Center:

Dr. Stanislava Otašević, Director and Manager of the National Study

Prof Dr. Viktorija Cucić, Lead Researcher

Dr. Loraine J. Bacchus, international consultant (Lecturer, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine / Gender Violence & Health Center (LSHTM, GVHC), in London, Great Britain)

Prof Dr. Milan Gajić, main statistics expert of the three-member Statistics Team (all employed full time at the Statistics Institute of the Medical Faculty in Belgrade)

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia (Violence Prevention Unit / Group for protection against violence and discrimination):

Biljana Lajović, specialist in school psychology, coordinator of the Group and member of the Ethics Committee of the National Study

Smiljana Grujić, psychologist

Gordana Medenica

Ethics Committee (the other two members are mentioned above):

Milena Jerotijević, psychologist

Supervising Committee:

Snježana Mrše, Group "Most" from Belgrade and President of the Supervising Committee of the National Study

Livia Joo Horti, Director of the Mental Hygiene Foundation "Exspecto" from Subotica

Marija Krivačić, "Psihokod" from Belgrade

Interviewers' Team: 61 trained persons (59 women and 2 men). Part of our Interviewers' Team were members of our partner organizations: *Center for Girls* from Niš, *"Femenergy"* from Pirot, *Mental Hygiene Foundation "Exspecto"* from Subotica and *"Impuls"* from Tutin.

The Incest Trauma Center - Belgrade wish to thank all the members of the National Study Team for their dedication and invaluable faith in our joint public voice against child sexual abuse in Serbia.

ABSTRACT

AIMS, REVIEW OF THE BASIC RESULTS AND CONTEXT

The general aim of the National Study was to assess the proportions of the phenomenon of child sexual abuse (CSA) in Serbia by defining its incidence and prevalence in the target group of school children. Thus, we attempted to find out how many children in Serbia survive sexual abuse in the course of their lives (prevalence) and how many children in Serbia have been exposed to sexual abuse over the past year (incidence).

The specific aims referred to:

A) Identification of:

- social environment factors and other factors which can be related to the CSA risk
- the most frequent forms and duration of CSA
- the most frequent profile of CSA offenders
- the incidence and the type of consequences SA has on the child, based on the child's testimony
- the incidence of child appeals for help
- the number of children who have sought help relative to SA
- the type of reactions of the persons from whom the child sought help
- the number of persons who reported CSA after the child appealed to them
- the level of information on CSA issue
- parents' and children's opinions on CSA

B) Providing recommendations in the sphere of prevention and protection of children against sexual abuse, with specific reference to the sphere of education.

REVIEW OF THE BASIC RESULTS - WHAT DID THE NATIONAL STUDY REVEAL?

The National Study was conducted on a representative sample of 2053 children aged between 10 and 18, from 97 schools, 61 primary schools and 36 secondary schools from 51

cities in Serbia. The sample was defined according to the data base of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia. In the course of the entire process, 11 instruments of work were applied, in order to interview pupils from the fourth grade of primary school up to the third grade of secondary school (e.g. information on the National Study, the form of informed consent /acceptance, the questionnaire, the range of attitudes, Certificate of Appreciation). In addition to the basic questionnaire on the experience of CSA (personal or others') - in primary schools, a contribution to the research of attitudes concerning SA was given by the parents whose children participated in the National Study, and in secondary schools, by the young people who also took part in the basic part of the interviews.

The basic questionnaire for children and youth

In the age group of 10 to 18-year-olds, there are 4 children out of every school class in Serbia who have experienced sexual violence and 4 more who know somebody who has experienced it. At this moment, 2 children out of every school class are exposed to sexual violence. Primary school pupils usually disclose their experience to a family member, but generally encounter disbelief. Secondary school pupils tend to confide in a female or male friend, who more readily trust them. Out of the 2/3 of the children who disclose their experience, more than a half of the trusted persons fail to take action. Only 7% of them report the case to the authorities.

It is of utmost importance that, through a series of results, the National Study has clearly verified the gender component, i.e. the ways in which CSA affects girls and boys respectively, and that it has clearly confirmed the proper understanding of CSA as a form of gender based violence targeting predominantly girls. Out of 5 CSA survivors, 4 are girls and 1 is a boy.

The children have survived the following violent acts - An adult or a person more than 2 years older than the child, wanted the child to perform one or more of the following actions or forced her/him to do so:

- To watch them naked, i.e. her/his genitals;
- To strip naked and show them her/his genitals;
- To let the child touch his/her genitals;
- To watch that person masturbate;
- To pet their body or to let them pat her/his body;
- To stand naked (alone or with a female/male partner) before their photo camera, film camera, or mobile phone (or, for secondary school pupils, to stand together with her/his partner);
- To watch pictures, films or magazines with pornographic content together with them;

- Sent her/him letters, notes or text messages with sexual content (by email, Facebook, and other social networks);
- Asked her/him or forced her/him to let them put their fingers or some other object in her/his genitals;
- Resorted to threats, coercion and the like to force her/him into a sexual act during which two sexual organs came into contact;
- Carried out sexual intercourse with her/him using force;
- Given her/him alcohol or some other drug and then forced her/him into sexual intercourse;
- Given other persons alcohol and drugs and incited them to have sexual intercourse with her/him;
- Offered her/him money in exchange for sexual intercourse with them or some other persons;
- Other;

Findings indicate that the most difficult question to answer for most children was the one about the identity of the perpetrator of SA. 62.1% of child survivors of SA decided not to tell who the perpetrator was. This is not surprising, since the Incest Trauma Center - Belgrade practical experience shows a strong presence of the feelings of shame, fear, guilt and low self-esteem. Moreover, on this occasion the children more "readily" indicated what violent sexual acts they had survived. In one half of the cases, CSA was repeated. The place where CSA happened is most often at home, in 32%, with the social networks being yet another source of concern, with 22% percent of the places where children had been exposed to explicit sexual content. Data reveals that acute situation of CSA (ongoing sexual violence) is more frequent with primary school children. Furthermore, the fact that secondary school pupils indicated the school as the place where the CSA actually took place is alarming, and implying that we should develop prevention measures against e.g. date rape and other forms of sexual violence.

The average age when CSA happened is 14 and it took the children an average period of 2 after the event to tell us that they had been traumatized. During the interview and at the very end, the interviewers' team expressed special gratitude to every child who had disclosed her/his own, or a friend's CSA experience.

The National Study powerfully confirms that the children do talk about survived CSA and persistently look for a person they can trust. Related to this is the high degree of concern about the fact that the person the child confides in - most often does not do anything to protect her/him. An equally serious warning is the fact that family members are not the first option for the child, who always knows best whom she/he can tell.

Another important moment is that the children find it hard to talk about the effects of CSA, i.e. in what way they have been scarred by the violence they survived. One third of them decided not to talk about it. Of those who provided the answers, young people indicated anger and rage as the most frequent effects (74.1%), followed by feelings of fear (69.3%), shame and guilt (55.8%) for both children and young people.

The educational character of the National Study is also reflected in the finding that 48% of the children spoke about the topic of CSA for the first time ever during our interview, and on the other hand, this fact reveals the disturbing practice of year-long silence and persistent concealing of the taboo topic during (even throughout) the child's growing up period. Maintaining the taboo, according to the results, are also the parents (51.1% of them did not tackle this topic) and the educational system (10.2% did not address this topic). The children who have spoken about CSA with their parents, in accordance with the patriarchal pattern, mentioned the mother as the main source of information for the child (48.6%), who continues to bear the brunt of responsibility for the child's wellbeing. Following mothers, the grandmothers and sisters were mentioned as educators - therefore, the extended long-standing pattern of women's responsibility. The child they spoke to, according to the results of this Study, has been given full information about the fact that family members and family friends can be offenders of CSA and that, if that happens, they should by all means inform their most trusted person about it. Outside the family, the children spoke about CSA most often with their friends (30.2%), which once again confirms the importance of educating of schoolchildren and peer support.

In order to ensure a responsible, preventive approach, the assistance mechanism in the form of "person for emergency situations", which is activated in case of a child's immediate need for help during or after the interview, was introduced as part of the regular procedure in the implementation of the National Study. This mechanism was not used at all throughout the interviewing period in schools, because the need did not arise.

At the same time, irrespective of whether a child was going to seek help or not, part of the regular procedure of the National Study is the educational character of the information offered to each and every child during the interview, no matter if she/he reported any CSA experience or not. In the corpus of the information given during the initial introduction, every child found out about the main activity of the Incest Trauma Center - Belgrade, and at the end of the interview, every child was given a Certificate of Appreciation, containing our contact information and encouragement to call us at any time should they, or a friend they know, find themselves in a situation of violence.

The feelings of the children and young people during the interview were conveyed by the fact that 80.4% of them said they had felt relaxed, 13.9% were surprised by the topic and

7.1% felt uneasy. The conclusion is that with the right approach, resulting from education, the topic of SA is not off-limits and it can be comfortably discussed with children in the school context.

Range of attitudes - parents and young people

A total of 1039 young people in secondary schools and 532 parents of primary school children filled in the Range of Attitudes form (total 1571).

The term "correct attitude" (which was later changed into the research term "desirable reply") means that the person who uses it recognizes the existential specificities of a CSA survivor and that her/his attitude reflects alliance in the form of understanding the dynamics of violence, encouragement and taking action with the aim to protect the child. Notably, out of the 23 offered attitudes, in most cases the parents gave desirable responses, i.e. their attitudes were somewhat more correct than those of young people. However, both young people and the parents fall in the trap of blaming the child-victim, stigmatizing girls and vulnerable groups of children living in homes and in the streets, as well as children with disabilities. Responses were given by both groups that "Sex between an adult person and a child does not have any consequences for the child", or that "If a child is sexually mature, it is alright for an adult person to have sex with her/him". Young people are more clearly aware than the parents that CSA offenders are most often of male sex. Parents to a great extent do not recognize girls as the main targets of the CSA offenders. There is a considerable level of preparedness to report CSA to the authorities regarding the attitudes "When you suspect or know that a child has been sexually abused, you should always report to the police" and "Persons who sexually abuse children have to be sent to prison", while at the same time, we remind of the fact that, the main part of the interview for the children and young people direly warns that only 7.1% of persons who have found out about CSA have reported this criminal act to the authorities. Readiness to report seems to be only declarative. Data shows that fewer parents than young people tend to believe that the recovery of a CSA survivor is possible. In very high percentage, young people and parents agree that "The topic of child sexual abuse should be addressed from kindergartens to universities, so that children can recognize violence and protect themselves".

COMMENTS ABOUT THE CONTEXT

The context in which the National Study unfolded was characterized by the following:

- The majority of the schools presented the aim, the benefits and the procedure of the National Study correctly, and adhered to the procedure completely.
- Within the school system, there is a need for further consciousness raising about the necessity of publicly addressing the topic of child SA and implementation of the National Study in Serbia (44 schools rejected participation, whereby their teaching staff directly

prevented child participation and expression (17 in Vojvodina, 12 in Belgrade, 2 in Valjevo, 2 in Čačak, 2 in Kraljevo, 2 in Novi Pazar), in 7 primary schools the initial parents meetings that were held according to the procedure, resulted in 0 parents' consent or up to 5, which was not sufficient for those school environments). We frequently recorded explanations that "such cases have not been recorded in our community m so that there is no need to conduct the National Study here", "We have a school competition taking place in a month", at the very end of the survey period, and "We are beginning to test the first graders", etc.). It is important to mention that the maximum recorded time necessary for the 3-member interviewers' teams to complete the interviewing process of an entire selected class in each particular school was 6 working hours.

- Complex circumstances on the social plan, e.g. a long period of school strikes and the reactions of the teaching staff to the recent reduction of salaries.
- In a certain number of schools which participated in the Study there was some uncertainty as to how to present the topic to the school staff, the parents and the children. The Incest Trauma Center - Belgrade provided assistance in this respect.
- In a certain number of schools, in spite of the reached agreement in accordance with the training session for school coordinators, and written regulations, there were difficulties in providing conditions for unobstructed activities (entering the rooms during the interviews, rushing the pupils and the interviewers' team, requests to move to another room in the course of the interviews, etc.). Besides, occasionally, the interviewers' team encountered the situation where the children had been told that they were going to take part in a "testing", "you will be interrogated...", "it is going to be hard...", "it is a strange topic" and even that the research was dreadful, etc.

In the schools where Hungarian is the pupil's mother tongue, the interviews were conducted in the Hungarian language.

GENDER ROLES AS A BASE FOR SEXUAL ABUSE TO TAKE PLACE

We learned about girls and boys

Risk factor for CSA to occur: sex (girls targeted)

88.5% GIRLS

11.5% BOYS

Out of 5 CSA survivors, 4 are girls and 1 boy.

GIRLS

- MORE OFTEN survivors
- Survive a larger number of modalities of sexual abuse they experienced (pls. look at the number of forced actions listed above)
- More often survive REPEATED sexual abuse
- A bigger number is exposed to the abuse NOW
- THEY KNOW SIGNIFICANTLY BIGGER NUMBER OF SURVIVORS
- MORE OFTEN TALK TO SOMEONE about their abusive experience
- Only they experienced abuse by teacher, coach, family friend
- FEAR is the most prevalent effect, then anger and rage
- AT HIGHER RISK to be exposed to sexual abuse
- State a larger number of modalities of sexual abuse experienced by other persons (pls. look at the number of forced actions listed above)

BOYS

- Less are exposed to sexual abuse than girls
- At lower risk to be exposed to sexual abuse
- Repetition of sexual abuse occurs more rarely
- Less talk to someone about their abusive experience
- Do not want to speak about effect of sexual abuse (how it affected their life)
- More often do not want to talk about offender

RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE SPHERE OF EDUCATION

**(short version based on the results of the National Study
presented in Chapters 1 and 2 of the Preliminary Report)**

For each of the following recommendations, the Incest Trauma Center - Belgrade is ready to take full participation in their preparation and implementation, relying on our own resources and the infrastructure developed over the 21 years of activities:

- 1. It is requisite that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia build the first long-term National Strategy for the prevention of child sexual abuse. The National Strategy should take into consideration the features that are specific for our country, relying on the results of the National Study.**

The following represent separate segments: a) engagement in the development and application within the system of education of mechanisms for early detection of sexual abuse, as well as b) adoption of the procedure of child-friendly advocacy during the processing of the CSA offenders - which also leads to intersectoral cooperation in the prevention of CSA and protection of children against it.

- 2. There is no prevention of child sexual abuse that could be more efficient than integrating topics from the sphere of prevention, and those of recognizing sexual violence and protection of child sexual assault survivors, into the regular syllabi of the national curricula of pre-school institutions and schools, including the relevant textbooks.** Therefore, it is necessary that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia intensify their engagement in fulfilling their international commitments deriving from the Council of Europe Lanzarote Convention, as well as from the obligations laid down by the existing national regulations, which invariably contain this orientation.
- 3. It is necessary to carry out a comprehensive Study on attitudes towards child sexual abuse.** The obtained results will be used so as to practice and promote primary prevention of sexual violence against children in order to bring about a change of customs, patterns of behavior and existing social stereotypes.

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Belgrade, June 09, 2015