



INCEST TRAUMA CENTER – BELGRADE
Support Group for Child Sexual Abuse Survivors
and War Survivors of Sexual Violence

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CONTRIBUTION OF THE INCEST TRAUMA CENTER-BELGRADE TO
THE NACIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR WOMEN (STRATEGIES FOR PERIOD 2007-2010)
(OVERVIEW OF DATA, ORGANIZATIONS / INSTITUTIONS AND ACTIVITIES IN THE FIELD OF
SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN TERRITORY OF SERBIA AND RECCOMENDATIONS)

CURRENT FACTS

Sexual violence against women is a problem that is socially invisible and implicitly accepted in Serbia in 2006. This issue's treatment is deeply marked by the big difference between perspective of a woman who survived sexual violence (including her needs revoked by the traumatic incident) and «law definitions» - as well as the other definitions in different official manuals used by various helping / protecting services. There is also a difference between one's perspective and institutional response to sexual violence, i.e. ways the services function concerning sexual violence against women. Sexual abuse of women can be described as an issue which is marginalized within the context of gender-based violence. When general conditions are met to open this topic, domestic violence (emotional, physical and economical abuse of women in partner relationship and the same ways of abuse of children in the family) drives most of the attention, while sexual abuse of women issue remains in a shadow. Sexual abuse of a (female) child drives more attention than the other forms of sexual abuse of women (including «invisibility» of women who survived sexual abuse as children and who are looking for proper protection and intervention as adults - and whose experience can “relapse” concerning the law system). Form of women sexual abuse that draws both general and professional public's attention is sex trafficking of women, strongly reinforced by the international community. The special taboo is rape of women in wars, concerning previous history of the wars in '90s. Mainly women's NGOs (so far) have been working in the field of sexual abuse of women in Serbia - by starting the first SOS telephone for women and children victims of violence (in 1990 in Belgrade) and by the later profesionalization of the different women's organizations for problems of violence against women and children.

Sexual abuse of women is not recognized fully as an issue resulting from societal constructs of unequal power distribution and gender roles. It is still referred to as woman's “private” problem that keeps her isolated, ashamed and feeling guilty. In case this problem becomes more visible, it is mostly explained as product of poverty or is discriminately addressed to different (and already marginalized) groups of women. Conditions for accepting gender roles' perspective are yet to be met. The approach to woman survivor of sexual violence is based on psychopathology (instead of trauma and recovery perspective) and (mostly) on medicine model premises. General public and professionals lack both professional and personal responsibility to report when doubting or knowing this crime happened. Not reporting is negative practice because there are no legal sanctions for such a case, especially for professionals. When criminal prosecution does occur, procedures and the whole treatment are highly retraumatizing for the victim (therefore protecting the offender). All of this is a repetition of institutions' power to woman whose traumatic experience is exactly consequence of the power abuse.

In Serbia, sexual abuse of women is still not seen as a hate crime. When pointing out this fact, one usually meets with (negative) reactions mentioning «feminism». There is societal consensus that the awareness-raising campaigns are the important instrument of public speech— but this topic is not welcome and there has been no so-called

national campaign. (Sexual) Abuse of women is still not part of the curriculum for the various profiles of future professionals. It neither exists in school prevention programmes for children and adolescents. There is serious lack of any kind of literature both for general public and for professionals. The official institutions have not integrated the activists' approach in their work yet (which is necessary in order to avoid being static and closed and to reach out to women through prevention / intervention activities, i.e. protection).

Existing data and researches¹

Significant databases in the field are done mainly by the women's NGOs specialized for problem of violence against women and children (Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade and Autonomous Women's Center from Belgrade). State institutions that have their own databases are social care centers so far – Center for social care of Belgrade, department of Grocka (three years' history of noting cases of violence against women) and Center for social care Subotica, whose registering system is in its beginning (24 cases of sexual violence registered in period June 2003-April 2006). Only one comprehensive and representative research was conducted so far in Serbia, and it addresses sexual violence against adolescents. There are no organized and coordinated registering systems within state as well as within NGOs, so it's a necessity to establish them. The only temporary collecting of this kind of evidence is noted within Network of Trust to Fight Gender-Based Violence (practitioners' intervening team from 15 GOs and NGOs, founded by the Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade in 2001. and the Center has coordinated it until nowadays). There are also various kinds of approach within women's NGOs concerning evidencing of so-called vulnerable groups of women, aimed at stopping repetition of the stereotypes and stigmatization. State institutions have no data of such kind.

1. Women's NGO **Autonomous Women's Center from Belgrade** in period 1993-2006 noted more than 1000 women clients who survived rape attempt and rape in 33%, rape in marriage in 29%, sexual harassment and blackmailing in 19%, childhood sexual abuse in 14%. **From its founding in 1993. until 2000, the Center noted 28 cases of women raped during the war, and this is the only official data on the subject in this country.** Autonomous Women's Center's database for period 01. January 2000. - 01. April 2006. is based on work with 300 women who survived sexual abuse. The data shows that the offenders are partners and ex- partners (in 33 %), person from a family (19%), all together misuse of the authority: boss, colleague, professor etc. (16%), unknown person (15%), known person (12%), others (5%). In 3%. of cases, the offenders are women. In 8 % of cases, women were exposed to multiple sexual victimization. Sexual abuse took place at home (30%), at a space known to woman (29%), at the institution: work / school (14%), during the date (13%), in public space (13%), other (1%). Before coming to the Center, women turned to police (17%), court (9%), health institutions (16%), and social care centers (4%). Center also notes how many women belong to various different groups, therefore respecting the integrity of the vulnerable groups of women.

2. Database of the women's NGO **Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade** for period 1994-2005. (Representative sample of 3792 cases, 7 reported cases per week in average, in average 72% of total cases is sexual abuse survived in childhood, and then the other forms of sexual violence against women. **In November 2004, Incest Trauma Center opened the first 24-hours crisis hotline in the country for reporting cases of sexual abuse, which led to increased number of reports.** Specialized service with regular supervision, intervention, monitoring and evaluation within Dutch professional support for the Center's team.)

- Three out of four sexually abused children are girls and one is a boy. Four out of five sexual offenders are men and one is a woman.
- In 39.12% of cases, the sexual offender was child's father (the most often form of incest is father-daughter incest, all together: father, stepfather, foster parent, adopter 53.22 %). In 1.75% of cases, the offender was an unknown person; in 98.25% of cases the offenders were persons known to the child.
- Period from the first incident of abuse until disclosure is getting shorter (In 1995. the period was more than 15 years in average, while in last three years that period is 4 years and 8 months).
- In 62.33% of cases, sexual abuse in childhood lasted for years
- In 48.51% of cases, abuse was reported while still in acute situation of violence (the abuse was still going on).
- Over 40% of older adolescent girls/boys and adult women turn to us several years after the abuse had ceased.

Remarks: 1. The Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade has achieved the closest cooperation with the Police since October 2000 (for example, in the period of September 2003 – September 2004, the Center's team issued 38 expert opinions at police, legal prosecution and social care centers' demands. The team has also prepared children and adults for criminal prosecution process, accompanied them to court and been appearing as an expert-witness).

2. 10.62% of cases reported during the period September 2003 – September 2004 was physical and emotional abuse of children by helpers in institutions where children are permanently taken care of (most often in homes for children without parental care, but also in institutions for disabled children and so-called special schools). There is an inappropriate reaction noted within institutions when such case happens, as well as keeping "a taboo within taboo". All the steps taken are aimed to protect «name of the house» completely. Sexual abuse of women and female children by the helpers in institutions will be one of the Center's priorities in the next long-term period (and the issue of pedophilia in Internet as well). 3. There is no geographical, social, educational, national or other characteristic that would point out a victim of sexual abuse or the offender and the family. There is a search for "scapegoat" being conducted by the major society groups, as well as official (oral or written) statements of e.g. media representatives that "incest was brought by refugees, it didn't happen here before", "sexual abuse happens to Roma people only because it's a part of their tradition", etc. General and professional public often make the wrong connection between (homo) sexual / lesbian orientation and pedophilia, i.e. there are stereotypes such as «lesbians and homosexuals sexually abuse children» or «I'm a lesbian because I was sexually abused». Instead of the additional stigmatization, it's important to recognize that lesbians are discriminated and exposed to sexual violence as a hate crime exactly on bases of their sexual orientation. The lack of more extensive data is due to various difficulties of collecting them in Serbian society climate that is discriminatory for lesbians.

The Network of Trust to Fight Gender-Based Violence was founded by the Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade in 2001. and the Center has coordinated it until nowadays. It is practitioners' intervening team from 15 GOs and NGOs from all the resores, mainly from Belgrade (and from Vojvodina as well – Center for social care Subotica as a local partner). For the first time, there was established coordinated registering system for the Network's intervening multidisciplinary support system, and it was implemented in period April – October 2003². The whole system was created by the institutions within the Network of Trust and was available to all the interested organizations outside the Network.

3. **Branković, Biljana, 2003;** (Results of many researches on sexual violence against adolescents in Yugoslavia / Serbia and Montenegro in period 1998-2003). The research included 3825 high school students (age from 15 to 19) from 24 towns in Serbia, so the sample can be considered representative. Forms of sexual violence that were listed are: rape, rape attempt, group rape, incest, blackmailing/threat, status/authority misuse, leading into prostitution and commercial sexual exploitation, etc. The main result is alarming - every eighth girl described her personal experience of sexual abuse (e.g. rape, rape attempt, group rape, incest, blackmail/threat, status/authority misuse) or sexual harassment. Two thirds of the participants described sexual abuse cases they know from the close surroundings (i.e. cases that happened to someone they know personally). Some descriptive analyses showed that the cases described can potentially be criminally prosecuted, considering the fact that victims are mostly underage girls (age in average: 16.47 years) and offenders are men of age (age in average: 29.26 years) that know the victim or are close to her. Namely, in 70% of the described cases, the offenders are – friends, partners, ex-partners, family members, cousins, family friends, neighbours/known persons, superiors (teachers, bosses, house fathers), stepfathers/foster fathers etc.

As a rule, cases were not reported to institutions / organizations (police, SOS centers, centers for psychological counseling, medical centers), neither to parents (victims almost exclusively turn to their friends). Only 16% of cases were reported to the police, and only 1% to various SOS services. Concerning these data, it can be assumed that SOS statistics are merely "tip of the iceberg". The assumption is confirmed by the results on high school students' trust in the services working on sexual abuse issue. None of them was evaluated as efficient in helping the victims. Courts are the least trusted, and centers for psychological help are little more trusted than the other institutions. More complex analysis show that group of cases that ended in police / court prosecution are mainly cases of rape in public places, by the offenders who victimized other persons as well and whom the victim mostly didn't know before. The reasons most often listed for not reporting sexual violence are: victim's fear of social criticism, not knowing the procedure of reporting, fear that the abuse won't be proven at the court, as well as the offender's threats of revenge. When this result (reasons for not reporting) is compared with the previous one, it

can be concluded that not trusting the services isn't without a bases.

4. **City Social Care Center– Department of Grocka** notes that from the total number of 320 abused women who received their services, 14% were subjected to sexual violence, while in 3% sexual abuse of female child was committed. Sexual abuse mostly happens at home, and the offenders (sorted by frequency) are exclusively known persons: partners, family friends, peers (friends from school). Rape in marriage is repeated during the marriage, and mostly happens right from its beginning. In cases when the offender is a person outside the family, it is one incident of violence. Department of Grocka also notes cases of sex trafficking of women. Only 1.5% of the total number of abused women recognize the psychosomatic complaints caused by the violence (and sexual violence as well), 8.5% state that they have no complaints at all, and 90% doesn't fill in this form. Department especially stresses the educative component of the intervention, which is based in recognizing the essence of an issue together with woman - that rape in marriage is a criminal offence. Their experience demonstrated that women rarely talk about rape in marriage and are not familiar with the reporting procedures, or are afraid of them. The second observation of this Department considers biases and stereotypes in professionals concerning sexual violence against women.

5. Women's NGO **ASTRA** through its crisis telephone provided services for 186 victims of human trafficking in period March 19th 2002 -December 31st 2005. Out of these 186, 179 were women-victims of sexual trafficking³.

WHAT DOES THE STATE DO?

Since political changes in Serbia in October 2000, state advocates partnership with NGO sector, including women's NGOs working in context of violence. Partnerships' encouragement by the state results in occasional forming of multidisciplinary cooperation teams on local level (domestic violence issue) or strongly organized on republic level (human trafficking, issue strongly supported by international community). **Except regarding sex trafficking of women , other forms of sexual abuse of women are not systematically worked on by these partners, or, separately, by the state.** There are different educational programs realized with the "extinguishing fire" function, i.e. immediate transfer of women's NGOs expertise in context of violence against women and children - so that professionals already working in state institutions can have the knowledge and skills needed (for example, the Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade has trained 3720 trainees since 1994, out of whom 2/3 come from GOs).

Practice of empowering the professionals from GOs for work in the context of violence often stops after educational programmes (or some other short-term projects) end. There is a lack of usual and necessary support through supervision (as an instrument of stimulating the team work, not of control and inspection), learning and intervention - regarding both content⁴ (direct work with abused women) and organizational questions. The second form of empowering is connecting the employees with existing practitioners' intervention teams that work in context of sexual abuse of women (e.g. Department for Sexual offences within Department for blood and sexual crimes of Belgrade police, or Institute for law medicine – obligatory and equally including professionals from women's NGOs), to stop their returning to isolation and to make them a part of professionals' support system. Listed needs of employees' empowering are certainly important to address in aim of proper intervention when any kind of abuse of women, including sexual, happens.

* Lack of data on traditional practices that hurt women (genital mutilation and such) doesn't mean that this form of abuse is non-existing in Serbia.

Cooperation of GOs and NGOs in context of violence is a specific process of getting to know each other, and there is also a burden of the '90s' history when NGOs were directly stigmatized - especially the ones openly declaring themselves as feministic. This process also means defining and practicing one's role within support system for women with experience of sexual abuse. All of this is new for Serbia and therefore different intersectoral/resorral phenomena can be noted (such as rivalry, unloyal competitions, etc). State politics is also known for lack of clear and precise informing of general public about cooperation politics regarding NGOs. The cooperation trend

is still not visible enough for Serbian citizens and it's permeated with double messages, therefore confusing. It is necessary that the state develops mechanisms of authentic and transparent partnerships, both because of general and professional public.

Intersectoral cooperation also exist within different state bodies formed in aim to make different documents needed for European integration processes. There are two drafts of National strategies made so far, which would have to include sexual abuse of women issue. They are the First draft of National strategy for development and health of youth in Serbia (written by the Working group for developing National strategy within Republic Ministry of Health in August 2005.). Even with a subgroup established (Group against abuse and neglect of youth), sexual violence wasn't even mentioned in this working version.

The second document is Draft of National strategy against violence (working text), made in October 2005. by the Working group within Republic Ministry of work, employment and social politics. The Draft (page 5) contains data of the Republic Ministry of Interior that in period January 2000 - December 2004 there were 871 criminal offences of rape committed, 696 cases of sexual misconduct, 294 cases of human trafficking, 254 cases of unnatural sexual misconduct, 244 cases of adultery or sexual misconduct with the person under 14 and 3 cases of minors' exploitation for pornography. In 239 cases mediation in prostitution was registered, out of which 23 cases were perpetrated to underage girls or using threat / frauds. There were also registered offences of holding in slavery and transportation of enslaved persons (15 cases) and displaying pornographic material (3 cases). Out of total number of the perpetrators of these offences (listed in the Criminal Law of Republic of Serbia as "offences against one's dignity and moral" and "offences against freedom and human rights of citizens"), 24.847 perpetrators were criminally prosecuted by the police. 93.9% were male, out of which 14.1% were underage (and 409 were children under 14, with no sex structure specified).

The same document has the following data on sexual violence: 1. Department for Urgent Protection of Abused Children (separate unit within the Center for care of infants and youth) in Belgrade (19 out of 102 children placed there from end of December 2002 – October 2005 had the experience of sexual abuse; children sex structure were not published), 2. Center for social care Priboj (in 2004. there were 7 cases of sexual abuse of children registered (sex structure not published) and women NGOs from Belgrade: Autonomous Women's Center and Incest Trauma Center.

The first document didn't integrate contribution of NGOs and that is its serious flaw. Working group of the second document included one NGO (to look below on the state's attitude toward NGOs) Although both drafts are published, minimum of professionals know about them. Information about date of their passing also lacks, so there is a question of necessity of their implementation and eventual action when it is missing. General public's knowledge about these documents is not even to mention.

WHAT DO NGOs DO?

Mixed NGOs are currently in the process of learning about women human rights. Within that corpus, sexual abuse of women is (for now) still a « faraway » topic.. Women's NGOs are making the maximum effort in their small, local capacities, mostly concerning emotional, physical and economical violence against women. Within women's NGOs, sexual violence against women is marginalized compared to other forms of abuse of women (as well as direct support and protection of (female) children through direct work). This phenomenon can partly be explained by the level of consciousness and by the capacity built within women's NGOs themselves. Often there are troubles in keeping the primary mission connected to violence against women– because of hindered financial existence, and also because it is extremely difficult to meet high standards when working on sexual abuse of women issue. Mixed NGOs' support would be helpful when researching, prevention, education, monitoring and evaluation, but this support is occasional and therefore insufficient. The support is sporadic when lobbying for change of the legal regulations and practice, organizing certain public events and directly supporting and protecting (perhaps supporting sexually abused women at the court) . In such cases the supporters are established human rights organizations from Belgrade, such as Belgrade Center for Human Rights, YUCOM and Fund for Humanitarian Law. Always solidar concerning the sexual violence problem is women's NGO Women in Black, Belgrade.

There is a noticeable process of mutual closing and non-transparency in NGO field, caused by (often unhealthy) competition between NGOs encouraged both by the state and by the international organizations. For women's NGOs is of main importance to exchange information and to plan strategies toward the state in aim to promote mutual philosophy in interest of (sexually) abused women as successfully as possible, and to position an organization better. Strong coalitions of women's NGOs are necessary to fight occasional backlash that is inevitable part of these processes, but is somehow intensified because of the socio-political context. These are the strongest reasons for allying of women's NGOs and for the opening within their own 'system'.

■ Some of the examples of women's NGOs initiatives concerning sexual violence against women:

- The names of some women's NGOs in Serbia were conceived to break a taboo. Autonomous Women's Center from Belgrade was founded in 1993. as Autonomous Women's Center Against Sexual Violence - hoping that the name itself, for the first time in history of the region, will address the sexual violence problem. The same is with founding of the Incest Trauma Center-Belgrade in 1994.

-Autonomous Women's Center in Belgrade:

a) Organization-member of Network Against Violence Against Women in Wars, that addresses mainly rape in wars issue. One of this network's big international actions is organizing a tribunal titled WOMEN'S TRIBUNAL AGAINST SEXUAL SLAVERY IN PACIFIC WARS, which was prepared since 1997 and held in Tokyo in 2000. One member of the Center was among expert witnesses concerning effects of rape trauma on women survivors.

b) Prevention workshops «Unlearning the violence» for girls, stressing the subject of sexual violence. Organization of campaign during Exit musical festival in Novi Sad and distribution of leaflets titled «When I say no, it means no» (for women) and «When she says no, it means no» (for men).

c) Since 2005, there is activists' group in the Center working on issues of prostitution and pornography. Autonomous Women's Center has an official policy that prostitution and pornography are forms of men's violence against women, and therefore supports decriminalization of women prostitutes and criminalization of users, i.e. implementation of the famous Swedish model.

-Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade:

a) Trained 3720 professionals on gender-based violence since 1994. All the profiles were included (except the judges) such as 228 members of police from 11 towns (including the teachers within police schooling system), staff representatives from 35 primary schools in Belgrade that are now ready to do violence prevention program by themselves, professionals from Women's Penitentiary in Požarevac and its Hospital, and from Central Prison in Belgrade, etc.

b) May 2003 – held the Regional conference in Belgrade “Multidisciplinary Approach to Protection of Children and Women from Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse” The conference was attended by the similar organizations from ex-Yu region.

c) March 2004 –published the book “Courage to Heal” written by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis, 2002, 496 p. (translated to Serbian).

d) July 2005 – published “TOT Manual: Gender-Based Violence from Survivors' Perspective”; authors: Dušica Popadić and Ljiljana Bogavac, 2005, 50 p.

-ASTRA from Belgrade is member of the HPVPI network and regularly keeps in touch with organizations and institutions working on HIV and STD prevention. If a woman- victim of trafficking wants to be tested for HIV, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C, ASTRA will make the necessary contacts (in cooperation with health care services and NGO IAN) in order to respect confidentiality, anonymity and to provide counseling before and after testing.

RELATION OF THE STATE, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND FOUNDATIONS IN SERBIA TOWARD WOMEN'S NGOS AND TOWARD VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ISSUE IN GENERAL:

The state is trying to address violence against women, with no systemic solutions so far. Particular women's NGO's will be more or less welcome and invited to cooperation, depending on the extent their philosophy is

directed to the proper understanding of trauma in women subjects to violence (stressing the gender base of violence) or to keeping the organization's autonomy. This positioning is also influenced by the extent to which (women's) NGOs clearly state their opinion on Serbia's responsibility for the wars in '90s (or have no opinion at all). Compromising of working principles concerning violence against women can occur in this complex context. Speaking of NGOs generally, some of them - founded in the second period of the '90s- were never autonomous since their founding, but strongly influenced by the certain state ministries. Their authentic non-governmental identity is therefore problematic. After the political changes in Serbia in 2000, trend of partnership between GOs i NGOs has also tested the identity of (women's) NGOs. The sub phenomenon is in «multiple identities» of the persons working parallelly in governmental and non-governmental sector. All of this influences communication / cooperation culture, proper intervention and other areas of work in violence against women context.

As for financing, there is no transparent exchange of information. E.g. Incest Trauma Center-Belgrade was financially supported only by the Republic Ministry of Health. Past cooperation with Republic Ministry of Police, Republic Ministries of Education and Sport, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Work, was based on letters of support concerning certain projects written by the Center for employees in the Ministries.

As for support of international organizations and foundations: Reconstruction Women's Fund (Serbian women foundation) is a reliable partner organization for work in context of violence against women. The rest of international organizations and foundations in Serbia have no clear and transparent donor policies. Even the simplest information is often of high value - to be informed is not something that is "normal", which refers to the concept of power once again: to have the information (power) is disproportionally valued. Economical condition (poverty) challenge building and maintaining of value system that is to be established together by the state, international organizations and NGOs.

Belgrade, 07 May 2006.