



INCEST TRAUMA CENTAR - BEOGRAD
Grupa za podršku seksualno zlostavljanoj deci, žrtvama incesta i žrtvama rata

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STATEMENT FOR THE MEDIA

The day before November 19th, The World Prevention Day of Child Abuse, Incest Trauma Centre – Belgrade wants to call public’ attention to the acuteness of the child sexual abuse problem from the survivors’ point of view. We learn about the gravity of this problem mainly from personal experiences of children and adults exposed to violence and from the persons supporting them. Our service receives, on the average, seven reports per week.

We would like to inform You that on November 19th, The World Prevention Day of Child Abuse, **Incest Trauma Centre – Belgrade is opening 24-hour crisis telephone service to fight sexual abuse, the first one of this kind in our country.** As the oldest specialized service in our country, we bear a special responsibility, which derives from a deep knowledge about this problem acquired during ten years of direct daily work with survivors. Therefore, through 24-hour accessibility we meet the needs of children and adults – survivors of sexual trauma and the needs of individuals supporting them. **The number of crisis telephone service is +381 11 386 13 32.**

Anyone reporting sexual abuse will get proper and urgent psychological help from the staff on duty in Incest Trauma Centre – Belgrade. If a caller tells us that she/he needs to connect with other trained services able to provide shelter (in cases of existential danger) or with police services (for protection of physical safety or for providing it), staff on duty will be ready to help. **Telephone contact remains just the initial contact, the purpose of which is to arrange a meeting in person, as the main way of work.** Incest Trauma Centre – Belgrade also offers expert opinion for every report and every case of psychological help given during eye-to-eye contact, which is valid in all other institutions, especially in a process of criminal prosecution of sexual offenders. During criminal prosecution, the usual Incest Trauma Centre – Belgrade services consist of preparing children and adults to be valid witnesses in court. Our team also accompanies children and adults to institutions when the need for it occurs.

In June of 2001 Incest Trauma Center - Belgrade founded the project "Network of Trust to Fight Gender-Based Violence", and has been coordinating and guiding it still as a part of its regular activities. Network of Trust is an intervention team of practitioners of various professional profiles from 15 governmental and nongovernmental organizations, who provide appropriate assistance to children and adults – victims of any kind of violence (emotional, physical and sexual). As a result, Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade is able to provide maximal help to children and adults that turn to our and other services by connecting with other institutions needed (police, public prosecution, social work centers, public health organizations, NGOs, etc.).

Opening of 24-hour crisis telephone line is supported by Reconstruction Women Fund and Save the Children, UK.

We are compelled to call attention to (some of the statistical data averages for the period 1994-2004) OR THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO BELIEVE CHILD'S WORDS!

Three out of four sexually abused children were girls and one was a boy. Four out of five sexual offenders were men and one was a woman.

In 39.12% of cases, the sexual offender was child's father (the most often form of incest is father-daughter incest).

In 53.22% of cases, the sexual offender was a father figure (together: father, stepfather, foster father or adopter). We find it necessary that The Social Politics Ministry Department should create risk assessment matrixes that would be used both in deciding about committing children to foster families' care and in adopting process.

In 1.75% of cases, the offender was an unknown person; in 98.25% of cases the offenders were persons known to the child. Proper prevention means explaining to a child 1. that a person she/he knows and, especially, a member of her/his own family can harm her/him emotionally, physically and sexually, and 2. what to do in such situations.

There is no geographical, social, educational, national or other characteristic that would indicate who could be the victim of sexual abuse or the offender, or that would point out a family within which sexual abuse could occur. The only thing that could be said is that "the secret is better kept" in urban surroundings and highly educated part of society. It is important to stress out that the marginalized groups are under higher risk of being abused (by majority groups).

The period between the first sexual abuse incident and reporting of abuse is shorter when the sexual abuse offender is a person outside the family known to child (a neighbor, godfather, family friend, etc.). The period of disclosure is much longer when the offender is a person within the family. The shortest period for reporting is in cases when the offender is an unknown person.

Higher visibility of violence problem and availability of different services fighting it, lead to shortening of the period between the first incident and reporting for abuse survivors (in 1995 the time average of disclosing was more than 15 years, but in the last three years that average was 4 years and 8 months).

The average age when the first incident occurs is 9 years and 2 months. It is of utmost importance to emphasize the "underreported"; reported cases are merely the peak of the iceberg. 1. The adults mostly do not believe what the child is saying, 2. The youngest children's ways of reporting are often incomprehensible to supporting adults, because of the offender's tactics.

In 62.33% of cases, sexual abuse lasted for years (child abuse never consists of one incident; violence is repetitive by its nature).

In 48.51% of cases, abuse was reported while still in acute situation of violence (the abuse was still going on).

6.2% of cases reported to Center in the period September 2003 – September 2004 were related to child physical abuse (without sexual abuse). These cases also include violence the child's mother was exposed to by her partner. Often the abuse was reported during the separation process when, as a rule, violence increases.

Over 40% of older adolescent girls/boys and adult women turn to us several years after the abuse had ceased. How many individuals among us have experienced sexual abuse and have never told anyone what happened to her/him?

In 26.44% of cases, the offender used physical force. Physical violence is combined with sexual abuse when: 1. It is performed on adolescents (they are a bigger threat that the abuse could be revealed) and 2. It takes place in families where the mother had been exposed to physical, emotional, economical and sexual violence by her partner (a long time back or from the beginning), therefore with children being witnesses and/or victims of abuse.

At the top of the “persons reporting sexual abuse” list are survivors themselves, the police and the mother of the survivor.

5.13% of cases reported to Center in the period of September 2001 – September 2004 concern the rape of adolescent girls and adult women by persons known to them (boyfriend, former boyfriend, boyfriend's male friend, etc.) and unknown persons.

The Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade has achieved the closest cooperation in effective and proper assistance to sexual abuse survivors with the Police and, in turn, with Legal Prosecution Office. Educational programs performed by the Center for 218 police members from 30 cities in Serbia, in the period November 2001 – December 2003, produced manifold beneficial effects. They were performed in partnership with Sex Offences Section of Belgrade's Police Homicide and Sex Offences Department.

The poorest cooperation was accomplished with public schools and public health organizations. We find it necessary that The Serbia Public Ministry of Education should introduce family violence and child and women sexual abuse as subjects in the regular curricula at all levels of schooling, with special emphases on the educative and preventive component of these subjects.

Only in the period of September 2003 – September 2004, the Center's team issued 38 expert opinions at police, legal prosecution and social work 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.

WE CALL SPECIAL ATTENTION TO!!!

10.62% of cases reported during the period September 2003 – September 2004 was about physical and emotional children abuse 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). Also, one of identified institutions is temporary, “Central Shelter” in Belgrade, where younger children often experience sexual abuse by older ones. Children also report that staff's reactions aren't adequate, not only in these cases, but also within staff-children relations.

We note inadequate reactions in the above-mentioned cases inside institutions, keeping the “taboo inside the taboo”, that is, all actions are directed to preserving “the reputation of the house”. Children say that in their own words: “Nobody can do anything to them”. We find it necessary that The Ministry for Social Politics should be more attentive to the problem of child abuse in institutions and take the necessary steps within its authority. An equal engagement is needed from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Public Education and Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Dusica Popadic
Director

Belgrade, November 18th, 2004