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Sex sells? – Journalists and sexual violence

"Sex sells" - it is one of the simplest "wits" of (boulevard) magazines. Sex-stories sell the newspaper. They are not only photographs on the verge of pornography, but also stories about marital and extramarital relationships of public figures, about secret sexual orientation of famous show business or art figures, intimate life confessions... But in that "package" there are also reports of the other kind - on sexual abuse, rape, women trafficking, forced prostitution... Because, "sex sells"...

Is it realistic to expect that the media will report about the sexually abused children with more consideration than about the victims of a mass murderer or the ones killed in a tragic airplane crash? There will always be some media and journalists / photo reporters who will gladly "dissect" the murderer's life, or with an easy conscience publish in the least a blurred picture of the place of accident with dead passengers' body parts scattered about..

Let us remember how it was a year ago, when young Natascha Kampusch from Vienna after eight years escaped from the underground hiding place where she was kept against her will by the man who kidnapped her when she was ten years old. Public admiration of Natascha's bravery in fleeing her terrible imprisonment did not last long. Not satisfied by the tormented young woman's refusal to disclose details about her sexual life during imprisonment, just a few days later, the first media (with the full support of readers, whose letters could be read on Internet web pages) started to speculate that Natascha Kampusch may have had sexual intercourse with her kidnapper and torturer willingly, even with pleasure (!!!??). Soon it was necessary to include media experts into the team of psychologists' that took care of Natascha, in order to return things to relatively reasonable proportions.

Of course, not every case of sexual violence / crime causes this kind of media attention and public reaction. The public usually reacts according to the same pattern - showing compassion and pity for the victim and loathing the offender. This is invariably accompanied on both sides by those unconstructive feelings that cannot lead to objective evaluation of the issue or support to the societal and legal efforts to fight it.

Even in those states whose public has been facing the issues of sexual abuse and sexual crimes for a long time, it took a long time before the question of the attitude of the journalists and journalism toward them was posed. In many

European countries today there are seminars on the topic, organized by the psychological societies and with the support of journalists' associations, in the tradition of American **Dart Centre für Trauma & Journalism**. The main idea is to support those journalists who have to report on terrible events that are neither floods, traffic accidents nor devastating earthquakes, but those facing the body of a raped and murdered girl or the face of a man suspected of being multiple rapist. Because only the journalists who learn how to deal with their own feelings in cases like this will manage to find a reasonable tone in their reports.

Furthermore, journalists' organizations generally have official rules laid down in their documents on how to write about crime and violence, victims and offenders. Their importance is perhaps the most obvious precisely in cases of sexual violence or sexual offences. The victim is not helped by public sorrow or by tacit concessions that "perhaps it was her own fault", just as the most cruel offender is not punished by public outrage and being sent to the gallows. Therefore, both victims and offenders should be treated exactly as prescribed by law in the media - that is, full protection of the victim and objectivity to the offender until the level of responsibility / guilt is determined. And the best preparation for such reporting is definitely regular, and not just "incidental" reporting about the issue - the sexual abuse and the social environment in which it takes place.

September 2007, the start of the Incest Trauma Center - Belgrade "The Me Nobody Knows" campaign against sexual assault (a part of the official press package)