

EDITED COLLECTION:

GENDER AND VIOLENCE IN THE BALKANS

Editors

Jelena Čeriman

Aleksandra Knežević

Gordana Lalić-Krstin



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Imprint

Publisher:

TPO Foundation, Sarajevo

Co-Publishers:

University in Belgrade, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory

University in Novi Sad

Editors:

Jelena Ćeriman

Aleksandra Knežević

Gordana Lalić-Krstin

Reviewers:

Adriana Zaharijević

Tanja Vučković-Juroš

Aleksandra Nikčević-Batričević

Sabina Subašić-Galijatović

Iva Subotić Krasojević

Lidija Marinkov

Translation: Đermana Kurić

Layout/Cover: Neven Misaljević

Print: Amos Graf d.o.o.

Sarajevo, 2024

ISBN



British Embassy
Sarajevo

This material is funded by the Government of the United Kingdom, as part of the UNIGEM project (“Universities and Gender Mainstreaming”). The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government of the United Kingdom

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FOREWORD

This collection that you are reading entitled „Gender and Violence in the Balkans“, represents a comprehensive analysis of gender-based violence and the wider influence of gender issues in Balkan society. The volume is the result of the work and thought of participants of the Winter School “Gender and Violence”. Their papers have been developed with the mentoring support of their professors. This volume not only documents the key insights that formed the program of the Winter School, but it also encapsulates the discussions that took place as a result of it. The volume also deepens our understanding of complex connections between gender, gender identities and different forms of violence reproduced and tolerated by society. Through different approaches and perspectives, the authors explore how gender manifests itself in different spheres of social life – from public spheres like those of law and politics, to education, science, culture and art, as well as deeply personal and intimate aspects of human lives. The papers in this volume aim to shed light on the ways in which gender, as a construct, influences different aspects of life and how, violence, especially targeted at women, shapes the social, political and cultural reality of the region.

Through these papers the authors aim to explore the ways in which the concepts of the “real man” and “real woman” are founded on deeply ingrained social norms and are instrumental in not only the perpetuation of inequality, but also explicit violence against women and other marginalized groups. The papers presented in this collection offer a multidisciplinary approach and comprehensive analysis in the field of media, language, science and literature, as well as practical case studies which shed light on the real consequences that these social dynamics have on individuals.

An important part of this Winter School was the encouragement of critical thinking around the culture of silence and denial surrounding gender-based violence. In this regard, the papers in this volume are not only critical of the existing state, but also propose paths for its betterment. Our goal is that this publication becomes a catalyst for further conversations and actions that could lead to real changes in the ways in which gender issues are thought about, but also in how societies in Balkans region are solving the problem of gender-based violence.

The Winter School “Gender and Violence” was held from 19 to 23 February 2024 at the Rectorate Office of the University in Novi Sad. Along with the University of Novi Sad, it was co-organised by the TPO Foundation from Sarajevo, the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory of the University of Belgrade and the University Gender Resource Centre from Sarajevo. It was financially supported by the government of United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

40 participants took part in the Winter School. They came from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia, from 20 universities gathered around UNIGEM (University and Gender Mainstreaming) regional project. During 5 days of this very intensive program 17 interactive lectures were organised, focusing on different aspects of violence. The aim was to look at violence from a multidisciplinary perspective in order to garner theoretical and practical guidelines for the

fight against violence. Exceptional lecturers through their lectures, but also many of them through their subsequent dedicated mentoring work, introduced the participants to the latest scientific insights in this area of studies. Students first had a chance to listen to introductory lectures about fundamental concepts such as sex, gender, gender identity, equality and patriarchy before being guided towards some more specific topics: femicide, measures for femicide prevention, and other forms of violence against women, as well as legal regulations, positive state obligations to fight violence and discrimination, trafficking of women, digital violence and the role of media in covering gender-based violence. The next set of topics was dedicated to sexual violence, relations between the body and power, female bodies in medicine and other similar topics. Issues of gender-sensitive language and violence in literature and other arts were also covered, as well as questions relating to science and its role in perpetuation of gender inequality. This program ended with a roundtable, in which the interlocutors discussed ways to jointly reach concrete, efficient and practically applicable suggestions for countering, preventing and uprooting gender based violence.

After the end of the Winter School, the participants, together with their selected mentors selected a topic for their papers, which they submitted for publishing in this volume. After the process of anonymous review, 22 papers were accepted for publication and divided into 4 thematic parts, mirroring the variety and complexity of gender issue in contemporary society.

The first thematic part, entitled *Gender Based Violence* deals with direct violence, such as economic violence against women and the influence of masculinity on violence. It also includes discussions about the role of multisectoral institutions in discovering, assisting and preventing this type of violence.

Džejlana Čejvan (*Influence of Masculinity Norms on Perpetration of Violence against Women*) shows how traditional masculinity norms are widely present in Bosnia and Herzegovina and that their contribution to different forms of gender based-violence is significant and incontestable. Ermin Mandžuka (*Prejudices about Violence against Women*) examines how prevalent prejudices about violence against women are, such as the belief that women are themselves responsible for the violence perpetrated against them, among high school students in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Helena Čavar (*"All That Is Mine Is Yours" Does Have a Price After All: Experiences and Consequences of Economic Violence Against Women*) shows that although women across Bosnia and Herzegovina recognize that they have been exposed to economic violence, their main response strategy in the fight against this form of gender based violence is silence. Through interviews with female victims of violence who spent time in a shelter in "Medica" in Zenica, Larisa Gadžun (*Gender Based Violence: Role of Multisectoral Institutions in Detection, Assistance and Continuing Prevention Through Legal and Psychological Support*) shows the importance of multisectoral institutions, like police, centres for social work, family clinics, shelters, in the fight against gender based violence.

In the second part *Gender in Public Spheres: Law and Politics* the authors delve into the legal aspects of femicide and the protection of personal integrity of rape victims. They also analyse social and demographic characteristics influencing political attitudes related to gender equality.

Adrijana Matković and Marin Milevoj explore contemporary Croatian and Yugoslav legislation pertaining to femicide i.e. gender-based murder of women. Matković (*Introducing Femicide as a Special Criminal Offense in Croatian Legal Framework – a Need or Discrimination against Men?*) looks at the recent amendments to the Criminal Code in the Republic of Croatia, introducing femicide as a standalone criminal act, exploring whether such amendment could improve gender equality or is it discriminating against men. By analysing accessible phenomenological and statistical data Milevoj (*Legal Analysis of Murders of Women in Socialist Yugoslavia: Comparison with Today's Concept of Femicide*) explores the phenomenon and frequency of murders of women in the countries of Socialist Yugoslavia to see how much the legal regulation from that time overlaps with today's legal regulation of femicide. By analysing the judgements of the European Court for Human Rights Darija Spasić (*Protection of Personal Integrity of Rape Victims in Criminal Proceedings: Analysis of Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights*) offers a deeper understanding of the challenges that victims of gender-based violence face in legal proceedings.

Ivan Petrović (*The Relationship Between Attitudes on Gender Equality with Political Attitudes and Sociodemographic Characteristics*) compares the attitudes of his respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina with their sociodemographic characteristics (age, sex and education) and political attitudes. Đorđe Gajić (*Gender Enters Parliament: The Case of Representation of Women in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia During the Plenary Debates on the Law on Gender Equality*) analyzed parliamentary debates on the Law on Gender Equality from 2021 to explore how women were represented during this discussion in Serbian National Assembly. Tijana Veselinović (*The Impact of Gender Inequality on the Living Standards of Nations*) explored the relation between GDP per capita and Gender Inequality Index (GII) in the Western Balkans and Scandinavia, showing how increased gender inequality in nations leads to a decrease in their living standards.

The papers in the part entitled *Female Experience and Gender Inequality* cover topics like female sexuality, genital mutilation and experience of trans women with the transition process, as well as the Islamic understanding of women and gender equality.

Vanja Stepanović (*Female Sexuality Through the Prism of Patriarchy*) offers philosophical and psychological insights into female sexuality by exploring, among others, ways in which sexism and misogyny keep women in a submissive position through the control of their sexuality. Selma Toromanović (*Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) – Socio-Cultural Context and Reasons for Practicing FGM*) explores genital mutilation as a special, radical form of control of female sexuality. Based on personal testimonies of female migrants who were stationed in migrant camps in Šid and Kikinda, and data from previously conducted research, Angelina Filipović (*Women in International Migration: Theory and Practice*) analyzed the female experience of migration processes. Lenka Aralica (*Experiences of transgender women with the transition process in Serbia*) uses in-depth interviews with three trans women from Serbia, in different phases of their transition, to present the complexity of their transition experiences as well as the meanings attributed to this process by the women themselves. Dženita Mehinbašić (*Islamic Understanding of Women and Gender Equality*) and Marija Blažević (*Selective Abortions Issue in Montenegro*

- *Vision of (In)Equality*") offer a theoretical overview of the religious understanding of the position of women in Islamic community and teachings, as well as the issue of selective abortions in Montenegrin context.

The final part entitled *Gender in Education, Science, Culture and Art* explores the ways in which gender roles influence the perception of female mental health, as well as how gender is presented in commercials, films and literature.

Anja Menjić (*Teaching feminism (?)*) explores the relationship between feminist theory and education: how and why this relationship was formed and how could it be improved. Almina Selimbašić (*Scientific knowledge under the influence of patriarchal violence*) explores the role of science in perpetuating gender inequality in society by shedding light on the contributions of feminist epistemology in considering this issue. Similarly, Kristina Đurić (*Reflection of Gender Roles on the Relevance of Women's Mental Health and Subjective Well-being: Analysis of Scientific Research Papers in Our Region*) asks whether and how the gender of the researchers conducting research influences the study of mental health and subjective well-being of women in the region. By analysing the design of menstrual products in Croatia, Ira Andrea Potnar (*Analysis of Advertising Design and Advertising Campaigns for Menstrual Products in Croatia (Comic Strip Proposal: Conversations)*) points out the inaccurate information about menstruation, menstrual pain and endometriosis which are disseminated in this way. To correct this misrepresentation, Potnar designed a comic *Razgovori* in which she offers a more accurate portrayal of situations and phenomena related to the female menstrual cycle. Elena Kuzman (*Expression of Gender in the Film "The Riddle of the Sphinx" by Lore Malvi*) examines the relationship between gender and language in the experimental film *The Riddle of the Sphinx*. Sumejja Muratagić-Tadić (*Imagining a Better World: Gender and Gender-Based Violence in the Novel Dreamsake by Vonda N. McIntyre*) offers a contemporary reading of the novel "Dreamsnake" inviting us to imagine a new, better society organised on principles of empathy and care, in which gender-based violence has finally been eliminated.

Organising this Winter School or the publication of this volume would not have been possible without the support of a small number of dedicated individuals. Therefore, we owe *immense* gratitude first and foremost, to Professor Zilka Spahić-Šiljak, Program Director of the UNIGEM Project, for her trust and wholehearted assistance in designing the program of the Winter School. We also received a huge amount of support from Lamija Subašić, Project Coordinator, who offered her stable and reliable assistance in all organizational challenges. We are also grateful to the members of the organizational and program board: Professor Smiljana Milinkov, Dr. Krisztina Rácz, Dr. Marko Konjović and Jelena Cvejin Poznić for their excellent cooperation and commitment which was essential for the success of this Winter School. We would like to thank the Vice Chancellor for International Cooperation of the University of Novi Sad Professor Sabina Halupka Rešetar for her invaluable support of this Winter School but also for her continuous efforts toward the improvement of gender equality in the academic community.

The greatest contribution to the quality and high academic level was most definitely due to the lecturers, who, with their enthusiasm and teaching zeal, managed to motivate and inspire the students to work on these topics in a more

serious manner. Finally, we are extremely grateful to the students for their active participation in discussions, critical thinking, and questioning of the problem of gender-based violence and a variety of inspiring questions that they posed during the school, as well as their interesting research ideas, which they converted into the papers which we are publishing in this edited collection.

We would like to extend our gratitude to all the authors who contributed to this volume with their work, expertise and passion. Their contribution is vital for the understanding of different perspectives, as well as the complexity and depth of the problem we are facing here. Additionally, we would like to thank the reviewers who, with their detailed and thoughtful comments, helped shape the final version of this volume.

This publication is not only meant for academic staff but also for a wider range of readers interested in deepening their understanding of gender issues and concomitant violence. We expect that these papers will instigate further discussion, increase awareness about the importance of combating gender-based violence and contribute to the establishment of a more just society for all of us.

Editors

Gender and Violence in the Balkans

THEMATIC PART:

1. GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN THE BALKANS

Influence of Masculinity Norms on Perpetration of Violence against Women

Mentor: Associate professor Azra Ahmić

azraahmic30@gmail.com

International University Travnik

Abstract

In the countries of the Western Balkans, dominating norms about gender roles and rigid patterns of patriarchal identity among men still dictate their behaviours, perceptions and relations towards women and others in the community, often teaching them that being a “real man” means being the backbone and protector of the family and community from an early age. Having in mind the alarming rates of violence against women around the world, this academic paper explores whether social expectations in the form of traditional norms of masculinity influence the perpetration of violence against women in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Methodologically, a questionnaire was used as a quantitative research method, and two models of multiple regression analysis were employed for the data analysis. Based on empirical data, it has been established that many masculinity norms are held by men in B&H, and there is a statistically significant and indisputable influence of the hegemonic concept of masculinity norms on different patterns of violence against women, including psychological and economic violence. The overall contribution of this research is multifaceted, as it enriches theoretical and empirical studies by offering a deeper understanding of the influence of masculinity norms on different types of violence against women. The paper also offers recommendations for a comprehensive approach focused on the promotion of gender-aware strategies of prevention and intervention aimed at decreasing violence against women and the establishment of a more inclusive society based on respect for gender equality.

Key words: masculinity; gender roles; violence against women; physical violence; psychological violence

1. Introduction

Most people, since their birth, have been socialized within a particular gender role, which was assigned to them by their parents or guardians, in relation to their sex at birth. Very often, negative consequences for society stem from gender roles, one example being violence against women (Gerić 2022). Violence against women represents one of the most pressing global problems facing humanity. Very often, violence is perceived as an individual problem, but it has deep societal roots and is related to different systemic factors. One of these key factors is in fact the norms of

masculinity. Masculinity involves questioning the masculine values and norms that society places on men's behaviour, and promoting the positive roles that men and boys can play in attaining gender equality in a given society (EIGE Europe 2024).

Masculinity norms relate to social expectations about how men should think, feel and behave (McDermott et al. 2019). A key role in the formation of these norms is played by specific characteristics of the society in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Several aspects can influence that process, including the traditional role of the society, war and post-war period, socioeconomic inequalities, cultural influence and the educational system. The society of Bosnia and Herzegovina is rooted in traditional roles, where it is still expected that men are the main decision-makers, and women are mostly assigned the traditional role. During the war, masculinity norms were heightened, which resulted in violent behaviour, but the post-war period did not bring a significant change in these norms. As the society faces socioeconomic inequalities, stereotypes about male power are also getting stronger. The society in Bosnia and Herzegovina is marked by the presence of different ethnic and religious groups, which influence the formation of masculinity norms, as well as the position of women in the society.

Previous research on masculinity norms and violence against women points to an existing connection between the two, but also offering a deeper understanding of this problem. Traditional masculinity concepts, which often promote ideas about domination, aggression, and control, could instigate violent behaviour as a way to affirm male identity. Research shows that men who relate to such traditional masculinity concepts have a greater propensity for violent behaviour toward women (Krivoshchekov, Gulevich, and Blagov 2023). Masculinity norms support gender inequality and patriarchal power relations. According to research, more than half female respondents (47.2% in B&H) were subjected to at least some form of violence since they were 15 years old, with physical violence being at the forefront (prevalence rate 41.9%; while physical violence was second ranked (prevalence rate 24.3%)) (ARS BiH 2014).

One of the aims of this research was to explore and present the traditional norms of masculinity dominant among men in B&H, as well as to identify which forms of psychological/economic violent behaviour against women (in the form of attitudes and activities) are most prominent among the sampled respondents. The second aim was to conduct empirical research into the connection between traditional masculinity norms and violence against women (physical and economic violence) in B&H, in order to better understand the factors contributing to violence against women and to identify possible approaches to prevention and intervention. The importance of this research lies in its contribution to a broader understanding of the problem of violence against women in the context of masculinity norms. The importance of the research also stems from the fact that such research has not been done in our country until now. Mostly, previous work has been either theoretical explorations or explanations of academic concepts. The research will offer a basis for the development of targeted strategies and policies aimed at reducing this type of violence.

The structure of this paper will be as follows: a theoretical review of concepts such as traditional masculinity norms, forms of masculinity norms, violence

against women (the concept and forms), and previous research on the relation between masculinity norms and violence against women. This will be followed by the formulation of the research concept, development of hypotheses and presentation of the applied methodology. Finally, after presenting the research results, the paper will discuss the key findings and offer a brief conclusion.

2. Theoretical Overview

2.1. The Concept of Masculinity Norms

The concept of masculinity norms entails a group of rules and patterns related to the behaviour of men. In other words, masculinity norms are defined as social conventions that describe what men do and what men should or should not be (Wong et. al. 2013). The norms establish the rules according to which men are expected to behave. These norms can vary between different cultures and different time periods but share some common elements (Krivoshchekov, Gulevich and Blagov 2023):

1. Domination and power
2. Physical strength and courage
3. Emotional containment
4. Unshakable independence
5. Sexual domination

2.2. Forms of Masculinity Norms

Forms of masculinity norms depend on the culture, social dependence and time period. Therefore we can categorize them as follows (EIGE Europe 2024):

- The traditional concept of masculinity implies that a man should be strong and dominant, promoting aggressiveness, control and lack of emotions;
- Social pressures force men to adhere to traditional norms of masculinity;
- The media have a significant influence because it portrays men in roles of traditional masculinity;
- Patriarchal structures and influence, support the idea that men have control over women;
- The socialization of men often implies that men suppress their emotions;
- Men are often exposed to stigmatization if they do not adhere to traditional norms of masculinity.

Heilman, Barker and Harrison (2017) in their study on masculinity norms within the Promundo project, categorised traditional masculinity norms into the so-called „MAN BOX“.

According to the study, there are a total of seven pillars, which are explained in the next part. The first pillar represents self-sufficiency and emotional control. There are widespread expectations that men should not show emotions, rely on other people, or talk about their feelings. Acting tough and risk-taking represent the second pillar of the “MAN BOX”, which holds that a man’s strength is connected with physical strength and toughness. Attractiveness, or physical appearance, is the third pillar, which includes ideas about physical activity, physical attractiveness and a man’s body image. Here, the connection is made with the use of dangerous substances to change physical appearance. Rigid masculine gender roles are the fourth pillar. This leads to the perception that some activities are only for men and others only for women. It refers to the fact that men must provide financially for the family, while women are expected to take on the role of mothers and housewives. Superiority among men is pillar five. Pillar five reflects the socially constructed hierarchy of male identity and the belief that men must experience a sense of superiority. This includes marginalizing or idolizing men based on specific behaviours, leading to perceptions of more or less masculine. Men who do not engage in certain behaviours (e.g. excessive drinking) are considered feminine or un-masculine, and are marginalized by other men. Pillar six, called hypersexuality, emphasizes not only that a man should be unequivocally straight or heterosexual, but also that he should always be ready for sex. The hypersexuality implied in pillar six undermines men’s sexual ability and sexual health. The last pillar of the “MAN BOX” is power, aggression and control, which emphasizes that men use physical, psychological, sexual and financial violence when necessary and to maintain power and control over women (Heilman, Barker and Harrison 2017).

2.3. Violence Against Women: the Concepts and Types

In academic literature there are different definitions of violence against women, but broadly speaking, it is mostly defined as gender-based violence or male violence against women. Therefore, violence against women represents any act of male violence against women and is present in all cultures, being considered a consequence of traditional conception of women as being in full ownership of men (Kolašinac, 2022). Violence against women happens as a hate crime due to the difference in sex or of a particular group.

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women states: “violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women” and “violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men” (UN 1993).

2.4. Forms of Violence Against Women

There are many forms of violence against women and some of them are: „psychological violence, emotional violence, economic violence, physical and sexual violence“. Violence against women has roots in the distant past. This paper will focus on exploring two types of violence:

1. Psychological violence
2. Economic violence.

Both types of violence in this paper are considered violent behaviours characterized as psychological abuse in the form of attitudes and acts related to humiliation (insults, threats) and control over someone's behaviour (Harrington et al. 2021).

Psychological violence against women entails a wide spectrum of undesirable behaviours that bring emotional harm and domination to the victim. This type of violence does not leave physical scars, but it mostly leaves permanent mental consequences, including diminishing women's independence and self-confidence.

Psychological violence entails the application of psychological coercion against women that causes feelings of fear, endangerment, verbal violence, verbal assault, insulting, slurs or some other forms of verbal harassment, stalking, or harassment through different means of communication such as telephone or social networks (Kolašinac 2022). Psychological violence has been recognised as domestic violence in the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence, Official Gazette 137/09, 14/10, 60/10. 47.2% of women in B&H have reported experiencing physical violence (ARS BiH 2014).

Forms of psychological violence against women are:

- Emotional abuse (includes constant criticism, insult, or humiliation of the victim);
- Manipulation (manipulating the victim in order to achieve certain aims);
- Limitation of freedom (control of movement, communication and activities of the victim);
- Isolation (isolation of the victim from her friends, family, relatives, etc);
- Constant suspicion (suspicion of the victim's fidelity without any justifiable reason);
- Ignoring and lack of interest (ignoring the feelings or needs of the victim); and
- Threats (threats of self-harm or physical violence).

Economic violence against women is often a characteristic of male partners who have absolute control over financial means, withhold financial support, or

refuse to financially contribute to their partners, making women completely dependent for their most basic needs (Werwie et al. 2019).

Economic violence against women is a form of violence that represents control over financial resources and the restriction of women's economic independence, mostly by their partners. This type of violence is not easily noticeable, but it can have serious consequences such as poverty, and economic dependence on a man, which makes it hard for her to decide to leave the relationship. Economic violence against women destroys the basic sociodemographic preconditions necessary for achieving equality of women with men in society (Maslić Seršić 2010).

Economic violence against women can be hard to recognise especially in traditional and patriarchal relations where there are commonly accepted opinions about female and male roles – where traditionally, the man has been seen as the one who earns and controls the money, while the woman is usually the one who takes care of family life. Economic violence is extremely horrifying because it mostly leads to the isolation of women, jeopardises their security and creates a feeling of dependence on their partners. When they start a family and have children, many women become vulnerable to economic violence. A woman who is exposed to economic violence usually has to justify the money she receives for spending and has to adjust her spending to the amount of money given to her by her partner, according to his own wishes.

Forms of economic violence against women include:

- Financial blackmail
- Property destruction
- Limits to education
- Debt incurrence
- Prohibition of earning money
- Limitation of access to bank accounts
- The removal of financial independence.

2.5. Previous Research into the Influence of Masculinity Norms on Violence against Women

Numerous studies has shown that traditional masculinity is indisputably connected to violence against women. Specifically, traditional masculinity presupposes attitudes that favor violence (Lutz-Zois et al. 2015), an inclination towards physical violence (Lisco et al., 2015). and psychological abuse (McDermott et al., 2017). Most of this research was directed towards the exploration of the influence of traditional masculinity on violence against women in developed countries, as well as on certain types of violence, apart from economic violence.

In terms of B&H, there have not yet been empirical studies exploring the influence of traditional masculinity norms on different types of violence against women. The aim of this research paper is to explore the influence of the above-mentioned

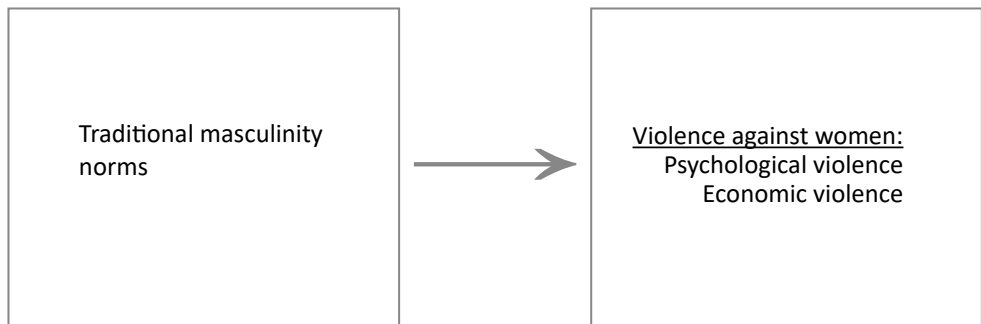
variables, while focusing on a developing country (B&H), as well as these two specific forms of violence (psychological and economic violence against women).

3. Conceptual Framework and Working Hypotheses

The main aim of this scientific paper is to explore whether traditional masculinity norms influence the perpetration of violence against women in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Based on this main aim, the conceptual model was designed in order to serve as the empirical basis in the research process.

Image 1. shows two parts of the proposed conceptual model: traditional masculinity norms (as an independent variable) and their influence on violence against women. Violence against women, as a dependent variable, entails for the purposes of this research, two hidden forms of violence: psychological and economic violence. The reason for the selection of psychological violence lies in the fact that data show that psychological violence against women in B&H ranks first, amounting to 47.2% of women (ARS BIH 2014). On the other hand, economic violence was selected because vulnerability in the labour market often reproduces and increases vulnerability in partner relations, and at the same time, economic dependence increases the risk of abuse and the probability that a woman might stay in an abusive relationship (Bašić and Miković, 2012).

Image 1. Conceptual Model



Based on this conceptual model, the following research hypotheses have been identified:

Hypothesis 1a: Traditional masculinity norms undeniably and statistically significant influence the perpetration of psychological violence against women.

Hypothesis 1b: Traditional masculinity norms undeniably and statistically significant influence the perpetration of economic violence against women.

4. Methodology

The sample in this research consists of employed men, aged between 18 to 60. A random selection of 50 companies across B&H was applied, and the

questionnaires were mostly sent *via* email to human resources managers and company directors, who then *forwarded* them to the employees, while some were also given out in person. In total 140 responses were registered, 15 were dismissed due to incompleteness (resulting in the final sample of 125 respondents). Demographic profile of respondents is presented in table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variables		N	Percentage
Age	18-25	26	20.8
	26-35	43	34.4
	36-45	40	32
	46-60	16	12.8
Partnership status	None (single)	23	18.4
	Married	42	33.6
	I have a girlfriend	47	37.6
	Divorced	6	4.8
	I had a girlfriend before	7	5.6
Education	High school	31	24.8
	Highly specialised high school	9	7.2
	Undergraduate/Bachelor degree	56	44.8
	Master's degree	24	19.2
	PhD degree	5	4
Years of employment	1-3 years	22	17.6
	4-9 years	58	46.4
	Over 10 years	45	36

When it comes to age, most of the respondents were in the age range of 26-35 years of age (approximately 35%), 32% of respondents were 36-45, 21% of men were 18-25, and the remaining respondents were 46-60 years of age. In terms of partnership status, most respondents were in a relationship (38% had a girlfriend and 34% were married). Approximately 19% of the respondents were single, and the remaining respondents were either divorced or had been previously in a relationship.

In terms of educational level, most of these men had a high level of education (45% of respondents held undergraduate university degrees, 19% held Master's degrees and 4% held PhDs). 25% of respondents had only high school education and the remaining ones had a highly specialised high school degree. When it comes to years of employment, most of them have been in the labour market for four to nine years (46%), 36% have been employed for over 10 years, and the remaining 18% have been employed for only one to three years.

4.1. Measurement Instruments Used in the Questionary

For the purposes of this research, a questionnaire was used in order to collect adequate data on masculinity norms and respondent's behavior in terms of psychological and economic violence against women.

The questionnaire was divided into three segments. The first segment of the questionnaire was related to personal data such as: "age, level of education, partnership status and years of employment".

The second segment included information on traditional masculinity norms. This component of the "traditional masculinity norms" included a total of 11 items, which were formulated on the basis of research performed by Wong and associates (2020) and similar academic work. Some of the items were: "Showing leadership and being naturally good in leadership positions"; "Take financial care of the family"; and "Have a strong character".

The third segment of the questionnaire included information related to violence against women: Psychological and economic violence (although this was not how they were labelled in the questionnaire and the questions were formulated as follows: "I think that a real man (e.g. husband towards his wife, or a long-term boyfriend towards his girlfriend) has the right in certain situations to"). Items listed for physical and economic violence were formulated according to previous UNFPA research (2013) and other similar research. The part related to psychological violence included seven items: "make her do everything that he wants"; "limit freedom of movement, communication and activities"; and "ignore her and show lack of interest in her". Economic violence included five items and some of them were: "deny her his financial support due to the fact that she did something that he did not like"; "limit access to bank accounts"; and "impose debts through a loan".

Responses for the second and third segment were placed on a five-point Likert scale as follows: „1 = I absolutely disagree and 5 = I absolutely agree“.

Reliability of all three addressed components was evaluated by Cronbach alfa tool for reliability testing, and reliability values are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Statistics for Realisability of Components

Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha
Traditional masculinity norms	11	0.875
Psychological violence	7	0.861
Economic violence	5	0.854

The reliability analysis was applied in order to reveal the internal consistency of the variables as presented in Table 2. Internal consistency analysis revealed that the alpha value for the traditional masculinity norms was 0.875 (N=11); for psychological violence 0.861 (N=7), and 0.854 (N=5) for economic violence.

5. Research Results

5.1. Overview of Average Values of Parameters for Independent and Dependent Variables

Based on descriptive statistics of average values (Image 2), it has been established that in this sample of employed men in B&H the highest ranking positions within traditional masculinity norms were as follows: (1) being ready to take risks (arithmetic mean = 4.77); (2) taking financial care of the family (arithmetic mean= 4.5) and (3) having tough character (arithmetic mean = 4.46). High arithmetic values within traditional forms of masculinity were also reached for the following items: showing leadership (arithmetic mean = 4.42); being sexually interested and active (arithmetic mean = 4.11); being physically strong (arithmetic mean = 4); being naturally good at some tasks (e.g. driving) (arithmetic mean = 3.76); and being well built (showing muscles) (arithmetic mean = 3.63).

Image 2. Average Values for Basic Factors of Traditional Masculinity Norms

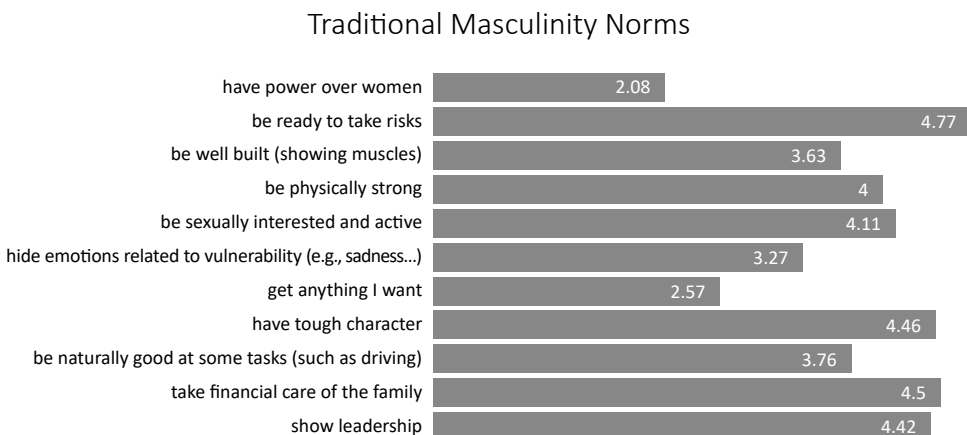


Image 3 shows that in terms of psychological violence by men against women, the three most represented categories were: (1) ignoring and showing lack of interest (arithmetic mean = 4); (2) manipulation – by leading the wife/girlfriend to do everything that he wants (arithmetic mean = 3.62); and (3) limiting freedom of movement, communication and activities (arithmetic mean = 3.5). It is also considered acceptable that a man has the right to occasionally criticize, insult or humiliate his wife/girlfriend; as well as to sometimes intentionally frighten her by looking at her in a particular manner or yelling at her.

Image 4 indicates that the following are the most represented forms of economic violence against women: (1) conditioning her and denying her financial support (arithmetic mean = 3.71); (2) limiting access to money and bank accounts (arithmetic mean = 3.63); and (3) imposing debt through a loan (arithmetic mean = 2.88).

Image 3. Forms of Psychological Violence against Women in B&H

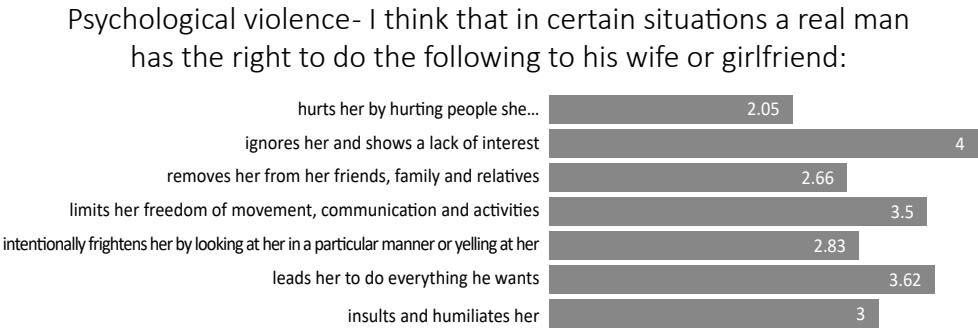
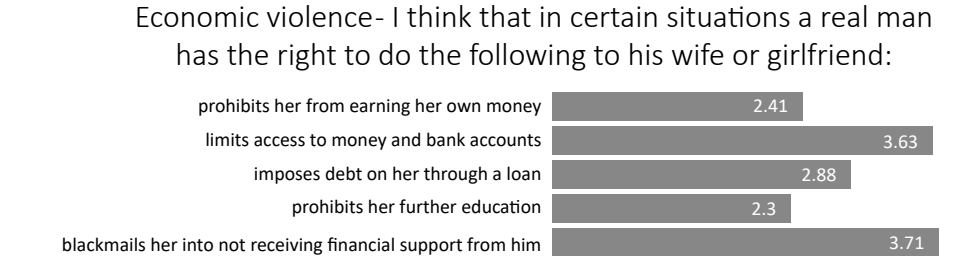


Image 4. Forms of Economic Violence against Women in B%H



5.2. Research Hypotheses Testing

In order to establish whether traditional masculinity norms influence violence against women, the hypotheses were tested (H1a; and H1b) using regression analysis. Two models of multiple regression were designed with traditional masculinity norms as the independent variable, while the dependent variable in each of the models was: psychological violence and economic violence.

As seen in the summary in Table 3, traditional masculinity norms statistically significantly influence violence against women in both multiple regression models. The first multiple regression model represents the influence of traditional masculinity norms on psychological violence were: R-square of this regression model was 0.664, which means that traditional masculinity norms can explain 66.4% of variance in psychological violence against women. Furthermore, traditional masculinity norms influence psychological violence against women with a beta coefficient of 0.58 (on a statistically significant level of 1% of correlation).

Table 3. Regression Analysis Results on the Influence of Traditional Masculinity Norms on Violence Against Women

	Violence against women	
	Psychological violence	Economic violence
R	0.815	0.743
R2	0.664	0.552
Df	125	125
Sig.	0.000	0.001
	Coefficient	Coefficient
Constant	1.185	1.021
Traditional masculinity norms	0.582**	0.445*

Notes: * Correlation is significant at 5% level; ** Correlation is significant at 1% level.

The second model of multiple regression analysis shows the influence of traditional masculinity norms on economic violence against women. The R-square of this regression model was 0.552, which means that traditional masculinity norms can explain 55.2% of the variance in economic violence against women. Traditional masculinity norms influence economic violence against women with a beta coefficient of 0,45 (at a statistically significant 5% level).

6. Discussion

The first part of this research study was dedicated to revealing the factors of traditional masculinity norms represented in the sample of working men, as well as the forms of psychological/economic violence against women in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The highest positions within traditional masculinity norms were recorded for the following items: (1) be ready to take risks; (2) take financial care of the family and (3) have a tough character. The reason for “readiness to take risks“ being first can be found first and foremost in economic pressures for better earnings with the aim to ensure security for themselves/family as living expenses are becoming higher and higher. The next reason for such readiness to take risks is the social pressure – where men are raised to be brave, strong and have a spirit for adventure; in their

adult age, their success is related to risk-taking, ambition and innovative action. Taking financial care of their family was ranked second by men in B&H, and this is a consequence of first and foremost historic circumstances that formed the gendered labour division, where men have been seen as primary breadwinners in the family. Although often “physical capacities” and “excellent physical built” come to mind among the main masculinity norms, these two components were ranked only sixth and eight. Men in B&H consider that the real man is more characterised by his physical strength than his excellent physical built (muscles). It is also interesting that “hiding emotions related to vulnerability” came only ninth on the scale of eleven items. Namely, men now more frequently show their emotions, which is the result of visible social norms (showing ones emotions is a characteristics of a healthy emotional life); cultural influences (e.g. through media – where in movies and TV series, men more often show a broader range of emotions, and this is being accepted as a new model of behaviour); and promotion of mental health awareness through education and awareness raising.

When it comes to the presence of psychological violent behaviour (understood as attitudes and actions) against women, the following three categories were recorded as highest ranked: (1) ignoring and showing lack of interest; (2) manipulating the wife/girlfriend to do everything as he wishes; and (3) limiting freedom of movement, communication and activity. Through this, we can see that men are ready to use different manipulation methods in order to provoke a sense of guilt in their partner, control her behaviour, and increase her sense of powerlessness. It is considered acceptable also for men to use somewhat more aggressive methods like criticizing, insulting and humiliating his wife/girlfriend occasionally; as well as intentionally frightening her by looking at her in a specific manner or yelling.

When it comes to the presence of economic violence, the respondents considered that in certain situations they had the right to do the following to their wife/girlfriend: (1) condition her so that she does not receive financial support from him; (2) limit access to money and bank accounts; and (3) impose debt through loan. Men in B&H can use economic violence as a way to preserve control and domination over women, as in this way they will keep her inferior and dependent.

The second part of this research study was related to the exploration of indisputable and statistically important influence of traditional masculinity norms on violence against women. The multiple regression results showed that traditional masculinity norms undeniably and statistically significantly influence psychological and economic violence against women. So, the men who reported higher levels of traditional masculinity norms are more prone to perpetrate different forms of violence against women, including psychological and economic violence. For example, men who believe that they are superior to women can use psychological violence as a way of controlling them, manipulating them or emotionally hurting them. This can include humiliation, insults, threats, ignoring, isolation and other forms of emotional abuse. When it comes to economic violence, the results of this research show that traditional norms support the idea according to which men have the right to control finances and property in the family. This could further lead to a situation in which men abuse this power in order to limit or control women, which can include withholding finances, limiting access to money or forcing their partners to work in particular types of jobs or not work at all.

7. Conclusion

Traditional masculinity norms have deep and harmful influence on the incidence of psychological and economic violence against women. These norms instigate the idea that men should be dominant, controlling and economically powerful, which often leads to the abuse of power in their relations with women. Psychological violence such as verbal threats and manipulation, and economic violence, such as control of finances and limiting the economic independence of women, often stem from these today “extreme” norms. The analysis of research focused on men in B&H showed that traditional masculinity norms are still very present in this society with the highest reported items were: (1) being ready to take risks; (2) taking financial care of the family; and (3) having tough character.

The research has further revealed that traditional masculinity patterns have a strong influence on the incidence of psychological and economic violence against women, as testified by the statistically significant results of multiple regression. This indicates that the norms promoting male domination and control are correlated with an increased risk of violence against women, be it psychological or economic. These norms can also create an atmosphere in which psychological violence is considered acceptable or normal behavior which makes it difficult for victims to recognise or report violence or ask for help.

It is important to work on changing these harmful masculinity norms in order to decrease violence against women and create a society in which equality, respect and mutual support between the sexes is respected. Fighting against the influence of masculinity norms on violence against women requires a comprehensive approach which includes changes at individual, social and institutional levels. All of this is possible through: the implementation of continuous education programs on gender equality and violence against women; a change in media representation (promotion of diverse and more realistic representations of men through the media); providing greater support to victims of violence (offering more safe spaces (shelters), counselling and legal aid for women victims of violence); changes in laws/policies and their efficient implementation concerning violence against women and the adequate sanctioning of perpetrators; as well as the active participation of men in the fight against violence against women through educational programs, awareness raising campaigns and the support of civil society organisations.

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Prejudices about Violence against Women

Mentor: Associate Tarik Hasanić

tarik.hasanic@unze.ba

Faculty of Philosophy, University in Zenica

Abstract

The topic of this paper is prejudices about violence against women. In contemporary society, the importance of addressing this issue is present due to the fact that we are witnessing different forms of violence, and recently, we are often encountering the discussions around femicide. In order to build humane relations between the sexes, among other things, we need to work on the prevention and removal of prejudices related to violence. Prejudices about violence against women have been historically present for a long time and, unfortunately, have survived in the contemporary civilisational climate as well.

In terms of the method for this research, the analytical-descriptive method has been applied, and the selected technique for data gathering was a questionnaire. Data gathering was performed through a questionnaire on prejudices about violence against women which was constructed for the purposes of this research. A total of 1111 high school students participated in the research, 789 female and 309 male students, from different cities in B&H. The conclusion of the research is that high school students partially display prejudices about violence against women, that there are some differences in prejudices about women in correlation with the location and sex of the respondents, and that there is no statistically significant difference when it comes to the expression of prejudices about violence against women in correlation with the age of respondents.

Key words: gender based violence, violence against women, prejudices, prejudices about violence against women.

1. Introduction

The social position of women throughout history has been far behind that of men. It has been an isolated, inferior, politically marginalised, and degrading position. This forced inequality of women has been a reality on which the dominant systems have been established, so that this fact remains almost unnoticed. In Greek democracy women were not citizens, they were wives, slaves. In these circumstances, Aristoteles formulated his principle of justice which states that what is the same should be treated in the same manner, and what is different should be

treated accordingly in a different manner – a concept which ever since then has not been essentially questioned, not even in the context of international human rights. According to this principle, it does not matter whether someone is being helped or harmed, whether someone is ruling or is being ruled over. What matters is only that the empirical state – no matter what what caused it– completely matches or is congruent with the normative practice. The fact is that Aristotele considered women to be different and that, according to his principle, they were not harmed when their right to be citizens was denied to them. This was not considered as an error or a sign that something was wrong. The universal measure of human dignity is the only principle that can fully prevent the exploitation of one sex class and bring us closer to future in which main political issues will focus on the quality of life for all humans (Ajduković, 2000).

Gender stereotypes are rooted in traditional ideas about the roles and status of women and men in society. Although these attitudes could have evolved over time, the basic assumptions about the suitable role for women in the family and the community still exist in many societies. For example, a surviving stereotype is the one that men are or should be heads of households and main breadwinners, while women give or should give priority to family life and give birth to children for whom they will be the main care givers. Such stereotypes are manifested in many spheres of life, from education, marriage and family relations, health and reproductive issues.

Gender-based violence is any action which threatens the physical, psychological or social well-being and dignity of another person. Therefore, it is extremely important to address gender-based violence. The topic of the paper is prejudices mostly related to adopted attitudes which do not find corroboration in facts. Therefore, incorrect presuppositions powerfully influence the behaviour of individuals. Unfortunately, very often in our contexts we notice that we live in “the world of prejudices”. So, this world of prejudices also entails prejudices about violence against women. This research focuses on adolescents, high school students, because they are in the process of their own identity construction. Therefore, it is essential that their adolescent identities are not “infected” by prejudices about violence, and that their personalities are built in a way which will support the humanisation of relations between the sexes.

2. Theoretical Analysis of the Problem

2.1. Prejudices about Violence against Women

Often in society there is a widespread prejudice existing which blames women for the violence perpetrated against them. This prejudice can be viewed through the prism of “victim blaming” where victims are blamed because of their behavior or dress. However, previous research such as the one performed by Brownmiller (1975) in the book *“Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape”* clearly shows that no woman is ever guilty for the violence perpetrated by her aggressor. Such prejudices only additionally traumatise the victims and hinder their search for support. The literature review on prejudices about violence against women reveals the existence of several key prejudices regarding this topic. One prevailing prejudice

is that violence against women occurs only in particular societies or economic groups. However, research performed by Johnson and Hotton (2003) shows that violence against women transgresses all social barriers and can happen anywhere to anyone, no matter their social status or education. Another prevailing prejudice is that violence against women is often related to prejudices about power and control. This prejudice often leads to the idea that violence against women is justified in certain situations. Kimmel (2018) highlights that such prejudices stem from notions about patriarchal domination and the suppression of women's rights. Very often we can hear the prejudice that women in "successful" or "mature" relationships are less likely to be victims of violence. However, research such as the one performed by Ferraro (1997) and Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) shows that violence against women has no boundaries and can happen in any type of relationship, no matter how successful the relationship appears from the outside. Another widespread prejudice about violence against women is the idea that violence happens only in its physical form, whereas other forms of violence, like emotional or economic violence, are less important. However, research such as the one performed by Stark (2007) in the book *„Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life“* shows that different forms of violence are equally harmful and traumatising for the victims. Many prejudices about violence against women stem from a culture which normalises aggressive behaviour by men and underestimates the importance of women's experiences. Such prejudices often lead to the minimization of the severity of the problem of violence against women (Johnson, 1995). Another dangerous prejudice concerning violence against women is the idea that violence is an indispensable part of a romantic relationship and that expressing jealousy or being possessive is acceptable behaviour. This prejudice normalizes violence and often prevents women from seeking help (Walker, 1979). Moreover, a prejudice that women victims of violence are "weak" or "indecisive" is often present in the society. However, research such as the one performed by Dobash and Dobash (1992) in their book *„Women, Violence, and Social Change“* shows that many women survivors of violence show extreme bravery and resilience while facing such tragic experiences. Often we hear the prejudice that violence against women happens only in romantic or partner relations. However, research such as the one performed by Džinović and Ajduković (2009) highlights the fact that violence against women can occur in different contexts, including family, friendly and professional ones. Also, there is often a prejudice that women victims of violence are only passive and helpless. However, research such as the one presented by Gavey (2005) in the book *„Just Sex? The Cultural Scaffolding of Rape“* shows that women can have different responses to violence, and that passivity is not always the dominant reaction. Another prejudice concerning violence against women is that it happens only in rural or less developed areas, while urban areas are safer in this regard. However, research such as the one performed by Nikolić-Ristanović and Šijaković (2006) shows that violence can be present in all social contexts, notwithstanding geographic location. Along with these, in the Balkans, prejudices about violence against women are often rooted in traditional gender roles and expectations. Women are often perceived as inferior and submissive to male control, which can hinder the recognition and reporting of violence (Ajduković, 2004).

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Definition and Relevance of the Problem

Recently we have witnessed an increase in the number of gender based violence. Femicide occurs more often as a consequence of long-term abuse and violence against women. This research focuses on exploring prejudices related to violence against women. With this in mind, the focus of this research is on prejudices about violence against women. *The theoretical importance* of this research lies in its contribution to theoretical knowledge on prejudices about violence against women. By reviewing recent literature, this paper offers systematisation of the most important aspects of this problem. Furthermore, the results from this research can serve as a theoretical foundation for future scientific and expert papers in areas dealing with problems related to violence against women.

The results have the potential to determine the course of action for pedagogical and educational practice and encourage teachers and students to work on combating prejudices against women, especially prejudices about violence against women. And that is *practical importance* of this research. Also, these results can be used as guidelines for drafting prevention programs for violence against women in schools. *The social importance* of this research lies in the possibility of instigating more humane relations within schools. The results could serve to attract the attention of the public to the social responsibility of schools when it comes to preventing and combating violence.

3.2. Objective and Tasks of the Research

The objective of this research is to explore the prejudices about violence against women.

The tasks of the research stem from the objective of the research:

- explore the presence of prejudices about violence against women in high school students.
- explore prejudices about violence against women in correlation with the sex of the respondents.
- explore prejudices about violence against women in correlation with the place of residence of the respondents.
- explore prejudices about violence against women in correlation with the age of the respondents.

3.3. Main Hypothesis and Sub-Hypotheses

It is assumed that the prejudices related to violence against women are widespread.

It is assumed that the high school students display prejudices about violence against women.

It is assumed that there is no statistically significant difference in the expression of prejudices against women, between males and females.

It is assumed that there is no statistically significant difference in the expression of prejudices about women in correlation with the place of residence of the respondents.

It is assumed that there is no statistically significant difference in the expression of prejudices about women in correlation with the age of respondents.

3.4. Research Sample

The research sample consisted of high school students from different cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to their characteristics the sample was convenience sample, which means that the research includes those members of this population who were available at the moment of the research process.

Table 1: Research Sample According to Sex

	Sex	
	n	%
Males	309	27.8%
Females	789	71.0%
Other	13	1.2%

The sample consisted of 1111 students from Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to the results, most of the respondents live in urban areas, namely 699 respondents (62.9%). On the other hand 412 respondents (37.1%) live in rural areas.

Table 2: Research Sample According to Place of Residence

	Place of residence	
	n	%
City	699	62.9%
Village	412	37.1%

The table shows statistical data on the age of the respondents. The average age of the respondents was 17.17 years, with the standard deviation amounting to 2.89 years. In the groups, 37,5% respondents were 16 or less, while 62,5% respondents were 17 or more.

3.5. Research Methods and Techniques

The methods used in the research are analytical and descriptive, and the technique used is a questionnaire.

The analytical-descriptive method is a method which can be applied in all pedagogical research and is used to explore and describe certain processes. We used this method for the systematisation of the theoretical research framework, the description and explanation of prejudices and violence against women, while analysing and interpreting the research results as well as for the deduction of generalisations based on the received and analysed results.

The questionnaire is a non-experimental research method and has a wide application. It has proven to be useful in researching different pedagogical, psychological, sociological and other phenomena. Its value lies in the fact that it can be applied to a large sample, even the whole population. It is suitable for collecting attitudes, opinions and understandings about a particular phenomenon. This method was used for the collection of data needed for the implementation of this research, i.e. for the self-evaluation of students about their prejudices regarding violence against women. An analytical form of this method was used for causal connections and theoretical relations.

In order to reach concrete data relevant for the problem of the research, the questionnaire technique was used. This technique allows us to reach data about the prejudices of students about violence against women in a simple and efficient manner.

3.6. Research Instruments

Concrete data necessary for this research has been collected through a questionnaire constructed specifically for this research. The statements were taken from the study entitled "*Dialogue against violence – gender based violence and multireligious dialogue*" by Zilka Spahić-Šiljak and Sabiha Husić (2015). The questionnaire has 15 statements, with offered responses being *true* or *false*. Within the questionnaire, there are also sociodemographic variables that include sex, place of residence and age.

3.7. Statistical Data Processing

The data collected using the constructed instruments has been analyzed using SPSS statistical software. With descriptive statistics, depending on the distribution of the collected data, adequate statistical methods have been used to test the stated relations between the variables.

4. Research Results

4.1. Statistical Analysis of the Attitudes of Respondents Related to Prejudices about Violence against Women

The analysis of the results from the questionnaire on the prejudices about violence against women indicates that there is a high level of agreement with the statements which highlight damaging consequences of alcohol and drugs as the main cause for domestic violence (80.6%). Also, most of the respondents agreed with the statement that perpetrators of violence are often individuals with mental illness (84.2%), as well as that men who abuse women are violent because they cannot control their anger and frustration (88.1%).

On the other hand, there is a significant dissensus in relation to statements which justify or minimise prejudices about violence against women. For example, a minority of respondents agree with the statement that abused women have legitimate reasons for staying in such a relationship (10.5%). Also, a small percentage of respondents supported the claims that domestic violence is a problem only in remote, rural areas (5.9%), that some violence is good for marriage (4.0%), that men have the right to slap a woman across the face sometimes (4.3%), that women love violence (3.3%), that a woman is to be blamed for the violence, “she asked for it” (3%), as well as the belief that it is women’s destiny to suffer in silence (2.8%).

Table 3 Sample of Responses in Percentages

	True		False	
	n	%	n	%
Domestic violence happens because of poverty or a low level of education	414	37.3%	697	62.7%
Alcohol and drug consumption is the main cause for domestic violence	895	80.6%	216	19.4%
The perpetrator is an individual with mental illness	935	84.2%	176	15.8%
An abused woman has many legitimate reasons for staying in such a relationship	117	10.5%	994	89.5%
An abused woman leaves her husband more than once	696	62.6%	415	37.4%
Women love violence	37	3.3%	1074	96.7%
A man has the right to sometimes slap his woman	48	4.3%	1063	95.7%
It is a woman’s destiny to suffer in silence	31	2.8%	1080	97.2%
Men are the victims of violence as often as women	236	21.5%	861	78.5%
Everyone knows a domestic violence victim	491	44.2%	620	55.8%

Men who abuse women are violent because they cannot control their anger and frustration	979	88.1%	132	11.9%
Domestic violence is a problem, but only in remote, rural areas	66	5.9%	1045	94.1%
Violence is a personal/private problem of the woman/family	186	16.7%	925	83.3%
The woman is to be blamed for the violence, "she asked for it"	33	3.0%	1078	97.0%
Some violence is good for the marriage	44	4.0%	1058	96.0%

Statistical analysis of the attitudes of respondents in relation to prejudices about violence against women divided by their sex (differences as pertaining to their sex)

The table below shows differences pertaining to the sex of respondents. Female respondents have statistically significantly more "True" responses than male respondents, for the following statements:

The perpetrator is an individual with mental illness (87.8% compared to 76.1%)

Everyone knows a domestic violence victim (48% compared to 34.6%)

Men who abuse women are violent because they cannot control their anger and frustration (90.1% compared to 83.5%)

Male respondents have statistically significantly more "True" responses than female respondents, for the following statements:

An abused woman has many legitimate reasons for staying in such a relationship (15.5% compared to 8.2%)

Women love violence (7.8% compared to 1.1%)

A man has the right to sometimes slap his woman (12.9% compared to 0.8%)

It is a woman's destiny to suffer in silence (6.8% compared to 1.1%)

Men are the victims of violence as often as women (36.1% compared to 15.6%)

Domestic violence is a problem, but only in remote, rural areas (8.4% compared to 4.8%)

Violence is a personal/private problem of the woman/family (28.5% compared to 12%)

The woman is to be blamed for the violence, "she asked for it" (8.4% compared to 0.6%)

Some violence is good for the marriage (11.9% compared to 0.8%)

For other claims there has been no difference between female and male respondents.

Table 4 Difference in Responses According to the Sex of the Respondents

	Sex							
	Male				Female			
	True		False		True		False	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Domestic violence happens because of poverty or a low level of education	120	38.8%	189	61.2%	291	36.9%	498	63.1%
Alcohol and drug consumption is the main cause for domestic violence	245	79.3%	64	20.7%	641	81.2%	148	18.8%
The perpetrator is an individual with mental illness	235	76.1%	74	23.9%	693	87.8%	96	12.2%
An abused woman has many legitimate reasons for staying in such a relationship	48	15.5%	261	84.5%	65	8.2%	724	91.8%
An abused woman leaves her husband more than once	196	63.4%	113	36.6%	494	62.6%	295	37.4%
Women love violence	24	7.8%	285	92.2%	9	1.1%	780	98.9%

A man has the right to sometimes slap his woman	40	12.9%	269	87.1%	6	0.8%	783	99.2%
It is a woman's destiny to suffer in silence	21	6.8%	288	93.2%	9	1.1%	780	98.9%
Men are the victims of violence as often as women	109	36.1%	193	63.9%	122	15.6%	660	84.4%
Everyone knows a domestic violence victim	107	34.6%	202	65.4%	379	48.0%	410	52.0%
Men who abuse women are violent because they cannot control their anger and frustration	258	83.5%	51	16.5%	711	90.1%	78	9.9%
Domestic violence is a problem, but only in remote, rural areas	26	8.4%	283	91.6%	38	4.8%	751	95.2%
Violence is a personal/private problem of the woman/family	88	28.5%	221	71.5%	95	12.0%	694	88.0%
The woman is to be blamed for the violence, "she asked for it"	26	8.4%	283	91.6%	5	0.6%	784	99.4%
Some violence is good for the marriage	36	11.9%	267	88.1%	6	0.8%	780	99.2%

Statistical analysis of the attitudes of respondents in relation to prejudices about violence against women divided by their place of residence (differences as pertaining to their place of residence)

The table below shows differences pertaining to the place of residence of respondents. Respondents who live in rural areas have statistically significantly more “True” responses than those living in urban areas, for the following claims:

Alcohol and drug consumption is the main cause for domestic violence (83.5% compared to 78.8%)

It is a woman’s destiny to suffer in silence (4.1% compared to 2%)

The woman is to be blamed for the violence, “she asked for it” (4.4% compared to 2.1%)

Some violence is good for the marriage (6.3% compared to 2.6%)

It has not been established that there were some statements for which respondents from urban areas have significantly more responses “True” than those from rural areas.

Table 5 Differences in Responses Considering the Place of Residence of Respondents

	Place of residence							
	Urban/city				Rural/village			
	True		False		True		False	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Domestic violence happens because of poverty or a low level of education	249	35.6%	450	64.4%	165	40.0%	247	60.0%
Alcohol and drug consumption is the main cause for domestic violence	551	78.8%	148	21.2%	344	83.5%	68	16.5%
The perpetrator is an individual with mental illness	583	83.4%	116	16.6%	352	85.4%	60	14.6%

An abused woman has many legitimate reasons for staying in such a relationship	76	10.9%	623	89.1%	41	10.0%	371	90.0%
An abused woman leaves her husband more than once	441	63.1%	258	36.9%	255	61.9%	157	38.1%
Women love violence	23	3.3%	676	96.7%	14	3.4%	398	96.6%
A man has the right to sometimes slap his woman	25	3.6%	674	96.4%	23	5.6%	389	94.4%
It is a woman's destiny to suffer in silence	14	2.0%	685	98.0%	17	4.1%	395	95.9%
Men are the victims of violence as often as women	150	21.7%	540	78.3%	86	21.1%	321	78.9%
Everyone knows a domestic violence victim	301	43.1%	398	56.9%	190	46.1%	222	53.9%
Men who abuse women are violent because they cannot control their anger and frustration	606	86.7%	93	13.3%	373	90.5%	39	9.5%
Domestic violence is a problem, but only in remote, rural areas	35	5.0%	664	95.0%	31	7.5%	381	92.5%

Violence is a personal/private problem of the woman/family	124	17.7%	575	82.3%	62	15.0%	350	85.0%
The woman is to be blamed for the violence, “she asked for it”	15	2.1%	684	97.9%	18	4.4%	394	95.6%
Some violence is good for the marriage	18	2.6%	672	97.4%	26	6.3%	386	93.7%

Statistical analysis of the attitudes of respondents in relation to prejudices about violence against women divided by their age (differences as pertaining to their age)

It has not been established that there were differences in responses in term of the age of respondents.

Table 5 Differences in Responses Considering the Age of Respondents

	Age							
	16 and bellow				17 and above			
	True		False		True		False	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Domestic violence happens because of poverty or a low level of education	143	34.9%	267	65.1%	265	38.8%	418	61.2%
Alcohol and drug consumption is the main cause for domestic violence	327	79.8%	83	20.2%	558	81.7%	125	18.3%
The perpetrator is an individual with mental illness	346	84.4%	64	15.6%	579	84.8%	104	15.2%

An abused woman has many legitimate reasons for staying in such a relationship	44	10.7%	366	89.3%	70	10.2%	613	89.8%
An abused woman leaves her husband more than once	256	62.4%	154	37.6%	429	62.8%	254	37.2%
Women love violence	8	2.0%	402	98.0%	23	3.4%	660	96.6%
A man has the right to sometimes slap his woman	15	3.7%	395	96.3%	29	4.2%	654	95.8%
It is a woman's destiny to suffer in silence	9	2.2%	401	97.8%	18	2.6%	665	97.4%
Men are the victims of violence as often as women	79	19.5%	326	80.5%	150	22.2%	525	77.8%
Everyone knows a domestic violence victim	172	42.0%	238	58.0%	311	45.5%	372	54.5%
Men who abuse women are violent because they cannot control their anger and frustration	361	88.0%	49	12.0%	608	89.0%	75	11.0%
Domestic violence is a problem, but only in remote, rural areas	21	5.1%	389	94.9%	42	6.1%	641	93.9%

Violence is a personal/private problem of the woman/family	75	18.3%	335	81.7%	107	15.7%	576	84.3%
The woman is to be blamed for the violence, "she asked for it"	11	2.7%	399	97.3%	18	2.6%	665	97.4%
Some violence is good for the marriage	13	3.2%	395	96.8%	26	3.8%	651	96.2%

5. Discussion

Gender-based violence is a subcategory of violence and represents a human rights violation and a form of discrimination related to gender roles. It is any act of violence which has or is likely to have as its consequence physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, i.e., suffering, including threats of such actions, coercion or intentional deprivation of freedom in public or private life. At the same time, it represents one of the most widespread forms of human rights violation and a phenomenon deeply rooted in gender inequality, based on gender norms and unequal power relations (Petrić, 2019). Similarly, the Law on Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2010) defines sex-based violence as a form of discrimination. The concept of "domestic violence" is gender neutral and both sexes can be both the perpetrator and the victim. However, in practice, especially in the transitional society of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with its patriarchal cultural heritage, men have a dominant role over women (Ždralović, 2009). Having all this in mind, this research explored the prejudices about violence against women.

One of the research tasks was related to the presence of prejudices about violence against women among high school students. The results show that respondents did display prejudices about violence against women by supporting some of the offered statements. For example, the results show a high level of agreement with claims that harmful consequences of alcohol and drug consumption are the main causes of violence against women (80.6%). Also, most of the respondents agreed with the claim that perpetrators are often psychologically ill individuals (84.2%), as well as with the statement that men who abuse women are violent because they cannot control their anger and frustration (88.1%). The offered responses were either "true" or "false". For these statements, we can see that the respondents chose "true". Moreover, in other responses it is also possible to notice consistent presence of prejudice about violence against women. The next section includes each of the statements and offers a detailed elaboration of responses vis-a-vis the presence or lack of presence of prejudices in them.

The second task of this research was related to the exploration of prejudices about violence against women in correlation to the sex of the respondents. The results indicate that there are certain differences in prejudices about violence against women, in terms of male and female respondents. For example women had statistically significantly more „True“ responses when compared to men, for the following statements: the perpetrator is an individual with mental illness (87.8% compared to 76.1%); everyone knows a victim of domestic violence (48% compared to 34.6%); men who abuse women are violent because they cannot control their anger and frustration (90.1% compared to 83.5%). On the other hand, men had statistically significantly more “True” responses for the following statements: An abused woman has many legitimate reasons for staying in such a relationship (15.5% compared to 8.2%); A man has the right to sometimes slap his woman (12.9% compared to 0.8%); Men are the victims of violence as often as women (36.1% compared to 15.6%); Violence is a personal/private problem of the woman/family (28.5% compared to 12%). More detailed results are visible in the presentation of the research results.

The third task of the research was related to prejudices about violence against women in correlation with the place of residence of respondents, namely urban or rural. The research showed that there are certain differences in prejudices about violence against women in relation to the place of residence of respondents. So, the rural respondents had statistically significantly more “True” responses in comparison to urban respondents, for the following claims: Alcohol and drug consumption is the main cause of domestic violence (83.5% compared to 78.8%); It is a woman’s destiny to suffer in silence (4.1% compared to 2%); Some violence is good for the marriage (6.3% compared to 2.6%); while on the other hand it has not been established that there were claims for which urban respondents had significantly more “True” responses than the rural ones.

The fourth research task was related to prejudices about violence against women in correlation with the age of the respondents. By statistical analysis, the respondents were grouped into two categories: those 16 and under, and those 17 and above. The research data shows that there is no statistically significant difference in the expression of prejudices about violence against women correlated to the age of the respondents.

The statements used for data collection were from a study “*Dialogue against violence – gender based violence and multireligious dialogue*” by Zilka Spahić-Šiljak and Sabiha Husić (2015). In this part we will quote those statements and their interpretation by the authors themselves. The statement that *domestic violence happens because of poverty or low level of education* is marked as false due to the fact that domestic violence occurs in all social classes, either rich or poor. Often it is easier to conceal violence when a person has money and influential friends, but it still nevertheless occurs. There is no evidence that would back up the idea according to which not educated and poor people are more prone to abusing their wives or partners more than those who are educated and rich. Experience from all organisations working with women shows that male violence is equally present in all social classes, has no limits in terms of the level of education, economic or social status. It occurs everywhere. Violence happens at all social levels. The statement that *alcohol and drug consumption is the main cause of domestic violence*

is marked as false due to the fact that men who beat their wives usually continue doing so even if they stop drinking. An abuser might use the argument of alcohol consumption as a justification for violence, or might not be aware of the level of force that he uses due to alcohol consumption, but alcohol as such is definitely not the cause of his violence. In more than 70% of cases of violence the male perpetrators were not under the influence of alcohol. Generally speaking, alcohol is not a cause for violence, but it can intensify it. Domestic violence and substance abuse can be understood and treated as separate problems. *The perpetrator is an individual with mental illness* is a statement which is marked as false. The statistics show that the percentage of psychologically ill perpetrators is the same as the percentage of psychologically ill individuals in general population. Most of the perpetrators function well at work or in the community. The function of this prejudice is to interpret violence as individual deviation that releases the perpetrator from responsibility. Mental illness is not a precondition for violence. The statement that *an abused woman has many legitimate reasons for staying in such a relationship* is true. So for example there are many social, economic and cultural reasons for which women remain in relationships in which they are abused, if they do not have means to support themselves and the children, if they are afraid that their friends, family and community will blame them for abuse, emotional or religious reasons, fear of perpetrators threats of harming her, himself, children, friends or family. The statement that *an abused woman leaves her husband more than once* is true. Most women who have this experience leave the relationship several times and routinely, consciously act in this way in order to decrease the violence targeted at them and their children. The statement that *women love violence* is false. Women do not love violence, do not enjoy in it, and do not want it. The logic of the patriarchy also generated a prejudice about “desirable” male harshness and women who “love” bullies. Women do not love violence. *A man has the right to sometimes slap his woman* is false. Patriarchal division of roles in marriage gives men more power and rights. Some men believe that they have the right to beat their wives. A wedding is not a licence for abuse. No one has the right to abuse others. The statement *it is a woman’s destiny to suffer in silence* is false due to the fact that society often pressures women, even when they are suffering from a heavy form of violence, to remain in such a marriage. Social pressure is such that the woman often does not have the right to choose if she will be married, cohabitate with someone, or remain single. The research shows that women are victims in 95% of cases of domestic violence so the statement *men are the victims of violence as often as women* is false. The statement *everyone knows a victim of domestic violence* is true, only that the victims of domestic violence may not talk about this due to humiliation, fear of being blamed for it, or danger of reprisal by the perpetrator. *Men who abuse women are violent because they cannot control their anger and frustration* is a false statement. Domestic violence is intentional behaviour and those who do it are not out of their control. Their violence is carefully targeted towards certain people, at a certain time, and in a certain place. Furthermore, domestic violence has been documented both in rural as well as urban areas, so the statement *domestic violence is a problem, but only in remote, rural areas* is false. There is this understanding that family relations are a private matter and that no one should be intervening in them. When a woman is exposed to violence this is no longer her private problem since this has societal consequences, and therefore, the statement that *violence is*

a personal/private problem of the woman/family is false. The statement that *the woman is to be blamed for the violence, "she asked for it"* is false due to the fact that blaming a woman for the violence perpetrated against her is a way to protect the perpetrator. This gives the perpetrator the right and the power to continue with the violent behaviour. *Some violence is good for the marriage* is a false statement. Experiences of women tell us that violence generates pain, alienation and hate between the spouses/partners. Violence is a part of a complex power and control model in a relationship.

Unfortunately, we are witnessing all elements of violence occurring in society, more or less in our proximity. The evidence of that is found in a multitude of media reports. It is also legitimate to ask "how much gender based violence is occurring without us knowing it". Gender-based violence should be addressed in a systematic manner, and pedagogical and educational institutions should have an obligatory curriculum dealing with this problem in order to raise awareness among children and youth about the need for humanisation of gender relations and to address prejudices that might exist in different relations.

6. Conclusion

In the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) the term *violence against women* means any act of *gender-based violence* that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. "Violence against women" is considered to be a human rights violation and a form of discrimination against women and represents all acts of gender-based violence resulting in, or that are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or intentional deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life, according to the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence – the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe, 2011). Having in mind the results of the research on prejudices among high school students about violence against women, as well as the hypotheses set for this research, hereby we would like to point out the following:

The first sub-hypothesis was about the presumption that high school students display prejudices about violence against women. By analysing the results, we can conclude that this first hypothesis has been partially confirmed and that high school students do display prejudices in relation to violence against women. For example, 84,2% of high school students consider that perpetrators are individuals with mental illness displaying thus a prejudice about violence against women. Or, for example 88,1% of high school students consider that men who abuse women are violent because they cannot control their anger and frustration, which again indicates the presence of prejudices.

The second sub-hypothesis for this research was that there is no statistically significant difference in the display of prejudices about violence against women between men and women. In the presentation of findings above, it was shown for

which statements women had more statistically significant “True” responses than men, while for a large number of statements there was no statistically significant difference between men and women. Therefore, we can conclude that the second hypothesis has been partially confirmed, i.e. that there is partially a statistically significant difference in display of prejudices about violence against women between males and females.

The third sub-hypothesis was that there is no statistically significant difference in display of prejudices about violence against women considering the place of residence. For example, rural respondents had statistically significantly more “True” responses in comparison to urban respondents for the following statements: Alcohol and drug consumption is the main cause for domestic violence (83.5% compared to 78.8%); Some violence is good for the marriage (6.3% compared to 2.6%), etc. On the other hand, it has not been established that there were claims for which urban respondents had significantly more “True” responses than the rural ones. Considering this, it can be concluded that generally there is no statistically significant difference in display of prejudices about women pertaining to place of residence.

The fourth sub-hypotheses in this research was that there is no statistically significant difference in the display of prejudices about women in correlation to the age of respondents. No difference has been established in the levels of agreement with statements that are correlated to the age of respondents, and therefore we can conclude that the fourth hypothesis has been confirmed.

If a woman has been physically abused by her intimate partner, she has most certainly also been the target of emotional abuse. Maybe a woman has never been physically abused, but the threats have caused fear in her and gradual loss of her own identity (ideas and requests of her partner have replaced her own identity). If the perpetrator does not threaten her but uses more subtle methods of manipulation, control and coercion – the woman can feel even more submissive, confused and prone to self-blame than a battered woman. In the West, thanks to a stronger women’s movement, the problem of domestic violence is addressed in a multidisciplinary manner (legally, psychologically, medically and sociologically). In the beginning, there was this belief that perpetrators are individuals with mental illness and that their condition requires a medical treatment. Women victims of violence were considered masochists in love with the role of the victim. At the same time, it was also considered that domestic violence does not happen that often since there were no real data about it. When psychological tests were done on perpetrators and victims the results showed that this group was not significantly different than other people. Besides, medication that was prescribed to women victims or their perpetrators did not bring decrease in the domestic violence. Therefore, the theory on mental illness was rejected and replaced with a role-modelling theory. We know that men who were raised in families with violent parents are seven times more often also perpetrators of violence than others who did not witness violence. Very often in our culture, consumption of alcohol is used as some sort of excuse for violence. Violence against women is present in all societies and the differences are in dominant forms of violence, attitudes towards violence and mechanisms of protection of women who are victims of violence (Kukić, 2004).

Having in mind all of the above, this research indicates that this is a problem that needs to be dealt with due to the fact that the research recorded the existence of prejudices in relation to violence against women. This research has its theoretical, social and practical importance that should be used towards addressing and preventing prejudices with young people in terms of violence against women in order to build a society where truly humane relations between the sexes will exist.

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Annexes

Questionary

Dear respondent,

This survey is constructed with the intention to explore opinions and attitudes of young people in relation to some statements. Please offer your first responses to each of the statements. This is an anonymous research, and the data will be used for the writing of academic papers. For each of the statements there are two offered responses – true or false. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sex: M/F

Place of residence: a) city b) village

Age: _____

STATEMENT	RESPONSE
Domestic violence happens because of poverty or a low level of education	TRUE or FALSE
Alcohol and drug consumption is the main cause for domestic violence	TRUE or FALSE
The perpetrator is an individual with mental illness	TRUE or FALSE
An abused woman has many legitimate reasons for staying in such a relationship	TRUE or FALSE
An abused woman leaves her husband more than once	TRUE or FALSE
Women love violence	TRUE or FALSE
A man has the right to sometimes slap his woman	TRUE or FALSE
It is a woman's destiny to suffer in silence	TRUE or FALSE
Men are the victims of violence as often as women	TRUE or FALSE
Everyone knows a domestic violence victim	TRUE or FALSE
Men who abuse women are violent because they cannot control their anger and frustration	TRUE or FALSE
Domestic violence is a problem, but only in remote, rural areas	TRUE or FALSE
Violence is a personal/private problem of the woman/family	TRUE or FALSE
The woman is to be blamed for the violence, "she asked for it"	TRUE or FALSE
Some violence is good for the marriage	TRUE or FALSE

Thank you for your cooperation!

„All That Is Mine Is Yours”¹ Does Have a Price After All: Experiences and Consequences of Economic Violence Against Women

Mentor: Assistant Professor, Ivona Čarapina Zovko ivona.carapinazovko@ff.sum.ba
Faculty of Philosophy, University in Mostar

Abstract

This paper focuses on the topic of economic violence against women using a sample of 316 women from Bosnia and Herzegovina, with an average age of 28 ($M=27,71$, $SD=8,82$). The objective was to explore how often does economic violence occurs, in which forms, and what relevant variables are connected to it. The data on prevalence and forms of economic violence against women were collected through adequate questionnaires and scales. Additionally, a qualitative analysis of women’s narratives about their experience with economic violence within their families and partner relations was conducted. The data indicate that women generally recognise economic violence, and statistically significant difference has been established in recognising economic violence in relation to the education variable, where women with higher levels of education are better at recognising economic violence. Based on the results, it can be concluded that (young) women across Bosnia and Herzegovina are exposed to some forms of economic violence by their families and their partners, and that the coping strategy they use is silence.

Key words: economic violence, recognition of violence, experiences, consequences.

1. Introduction

The topics covering violence against women and gender-based violence have been analysed from different perspectives and in different ways until now, but less research has been directed at exclusively economic violence. Adams and associates (2008) have defined economic violence as all behaviour that controls the ability of a woman to gain, use and maintain economic resources and they were the ones who, in fact, constructed the Scale of Economic Abuse in order to explore and gain insight into all forms of economic violence. Although women in the 21st century

1 Translator’s note: “All that is mine is yours” (“Sve je moje tvoje”) is a title of a pop song by a Serbian singer Željko Samardžić. The song is about a man who wants to be with a woman and offers her anything she wants “not asking about the price” only to be with him.

have advanced in terms of equality linked to their presence in the labour market, there is still a difference or a “*gender gap*” pertaining to unequal pay for women and men for the same types of jobs. Therefore, men mostly still have control over finances in households and in what researches call (Dobash and Dobash 1979: according to Sharp 2008) “negotiations in everyday life”. This means that women with lower income or women who are not employed and spend time at home with the children need to negotiate with their partner their access to finances. If the partner is violent, either physically, psychologically or economically or all of the mentioned – the problems related to money become even bigger.

Very often economic violence is analysed in the context of family, where the most likely scenario is the of a married couple with one or more children, and with the wife being the target of economic violence. But we should not neglect the fact that economic violence can occur in youth relationships, as well as in the family context - most often between a father and a daughter (as has been established in the qualitative analysis of the narratives from the respondents in this research). Also, some forms of economic violence in certain cultures are considered acceptable and a part of the tradition, as if for example in Turkey, where violence against women represents one of the major societal issues, and where they, among other, consider that violence between married partners is acceptable and should be considered as a private family matter (Alkan 2021). Women in Turkey with primary and secondary school education, in terms of percentages, have been more exposed to economic violence in comparison to those who never attended school (Alkan 2021). Exposure to physical, sexual and verbal violence is also an important factor influencing the exposure of women to economic violence (Alkan 2021).

According to European Institute for Gender Equality (2023), limited financial resources are a risk factor for domestic violence exactly because an abused woman is afraid to leave the perpetrator out of fear for her life without a partner, if she does not have financial stability. Although economic violence can be researched and analysed as a separate form of violence, it is also important to note that it often occurs with other forms of violence, such as physical, emotional and sexual violence. It is a form of control, and as such, can be divided in three types: economic control, economic exploitation and economic sabotage. Economic control entails limitation, prevention, or total control of the perpetrator over the victim’s finances or all financial decisions, while economic exploitation is, in fact, the exploitation of the victim’s resources for the benefit of the perpetrator. Finally, economic sabotage entails the prevention or prohibition of education and employment. There are numerous forms or tactics of economic violence, and some of them are: withdrawal of basic necessities like food and hygiene products, prohibition of education and employment, identity theft, refusal of alimony payment, opening bank accounts and incurring debt in someone else’s name, complete control over all financial assets in the household, controlling access to finances, interventions at work, prevention of work outside of the house or community, harassment at work, rejecting access to financial information, preventing or limiting access to necessary assets for needs like food and clothing, money stealing, rejecting work and incurring debt on their partners name, domination over family economy by adoption of unilateral decisions, etc. (EIGE, 2023).

According to Postmus and associates (2012) and the theory of marital

dependence and theory of co-dependence, women who are forced to be economically dependent on their partners are exposed to a higher risk of staying imprisoned in a violent relationship. The problems related to finances are considered to be one of the main reasons why they have a problem of leaving violent relationships. Stylianou and associates (2013) speak about the fact that, along with physical, sexual and psychological violence, which perpetrators use as a means to control the victims and gain power, they can also use economic violence tactics as an instrument to achieve their goals. As opposed to physical, economic violence does not leave visible bruises, but it does leave real and long-term consequences for the victims. In this context, it is important to highlight the importance of financial literacy and acquisition of relevant skills and knowledge in order for the victims to have increased chances of economic independence (Sanders and associates 2014). Education on financial literacy designed for women victims of violence has proved to be useful in increasing financial self-efficiency of women (Sanders, Weaver and Schnabel 2007). For men, violence is one of the ways to establish traditional masculinity, and when they do not have access to economic resources and employment, they can use violence and try to re-establish their power at home. Perpetrators can oppose women and can feel jeopardised when women are trying to gain or maintain financial independence, and can abuse them in order to prevent them from gaining financial resources through which they would be able to have their independence (Moe and Bell 2004). Gelles (1976) states that there are findings supporting the connection between economic dependence and risk of abuse. He has established that it is less likely that women with lower paying jobs will break up a violent relationship. Lack of access to economic resources makes women dependent on their violent partners (Sullivan, 1991). On the other hand, when a woman's economic status is higher than the status of her partner, she can be exposed to a higher risk of abuse. Macmillan and Gartner (1999), for example, have established that the risk of life-threatening violence is higher when she is employed, and her husband is not. Tjaden and Thoennes (2000) have established that women are exposed to higher risk of violence when their educational achievements are higher than their partners. Also, the very process of gaining economic independence can initiate more violence, such as gaining education.

Finally, the aim of this research is to test the thesis whether "all that is mine is yours" or, is it in fact "only his" - in order to gain an insight into the ways in which girls and women in B&H understand the phenomenon of economic violence and explore the variables related to recognition of economic violence and perception of economic violence. Additionally, the aim is to learn more about the experience of violence.

2. Methodology

Research aim and problems: the aim is to learn about the recognition of economic violence and susceptibility to economic violence, as well as to test the differences in recognition and experience of economic violence in relation to demographic variables in a group of women from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Problem 1: To explore if there is a statistically significant connection between the experience of domestic violence and the employment status of women

Hypothesis 1: Sanders (2014: as cited in Jasinski 2001) assumes that the employment status of women who are potential victims of economic violence is positively correlated with the experience of economic violence, i.e. if women are employed, they will have more experience with economic violence in terms of extortion of their assets by their partner.

Problem 2: To explore whether there is a problem and statistically significant difference in recognition of economic violence considering demographic variables.

Hypothesis 2. It is assumed that there will be a difference in relation to the level of education and recognition of economic violence, with women with a higher level of education being better at recognising violence than women with a lower level of education.

Problem 3: To explore how women recognise and describe economic violence, and their own experience with economic violence.

Hypothesis 3. It is assumed that women will recognize and adequately name economic violence and its forms.

Research participants: the conditions for participation were that they were not minors, and that they resided in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In order to reach a larger number of women, the snowball method was used and from each group or each individual email that was sent to participants, the invitation was forwarded to at least another woman. In the end, the total number of participants in the research was 316. The average age of participants was 28, with the youngest being 18, and the oldest being 65. The average length of their marriage was 2.5 years, and the longest was 46 years of marriage. The minimum number of children they reported was 0, and maximal 5. 37,9 % of respondents reported having primary education (primary school, high grammar school or some vocational high school), while 62,1 % had higher education (university degree or specialisation). In terms of the structure of their working status, 83 % reported that they were employed, and a lesser percent (around 16 %) reported that they were unemployed. Sectors in which they were employed were (55,7 %) quaternary (i.e. sector of education, healthcare, military, police, administration, science, culture and sports) and tertiary sector (i.e. transport, trade, tourism, hospitality, money management, banking and services). In terms of their partnership status 39 % of respondents were in a relationship, 35 % were single, 23 % married, and 3 % living in cohabitation. In terms of the employment status of their partner and earnings of their partner they reported the following: 59 % had an employed partner, and around 7 % had an unemployed partner. Furthermore, women with a partner reported that in relation to his earnings: 43 % (partner earns more than me), 11 % (same as me) and 10 % (less than me). The material status of the family was reported as average by 81%, above average by 15%, and below average by 4%. In terms of their personal material status, irrespective of their family or partner, they reported that: 54 % considered their material status average, 17 % considered it above average and 9 % considered it below average. A detailed presentation of their demographic characteristics is presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Basic Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Age	18	65	27,71	8,829
Marriage length	0	46	2,60	6,372
Number of children	0	5	0,36	0,810

Table 2. Detail Overview of Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Characteristics collected through a questionnaire	Frequency	%
Completed primary education (primary school, gymnasium or a vocational high school)	120	37,9
Completed higher education (a two-year college, university or specialization)	196	62,1
Employment status (employed, illegal employment, working while studying)	263	83,2
Employment status (unemployed, retired, housewife)	53	16,8
Employment sector (primary and secondary)	12	3,8
Employment sector (tertiary and quaternary)	176	55,7
Size of residence/settlement (2000-10 000 inhabitants)	122	38,6
Size of residence/settlement (10 000- 100 000 inhabitants)	91	28,8
Size of residence/settlement (100 000 or more inhabitants)	103	32,6
Partnership status: single	112	35,4
Partnership status: in a relationship	122	38,6
Partnership status: marriage or cohabitation	82	25,9
Material status in the family: below average	13	4,1
Material status in the family: average	255	80,7
Material status in the family: above average	48	15,2
Personal material status irrespective of partner or family: below average	53	16,8
Personal material status irrespective of partner or family: average	172	54,4
Personal material status irrespective of partner or family: above average	29	9,2
I do not earn money at all	62	19,6
My partner is employed	184	58,2
My partner is unemployed	23	7,3
My partner earns: less than me	32	10,1
My partner earns: equally as me	37	11,7
My partner earns: more than me	136	43,0

The research process: The research was conducted through Google Forms online platform for electronic surveys. Respondents were gathered through social network channels on Instagram, Facebook, Gmail, WhatsApp, Viber as well through direct emails to certain institutions with prior approval from the supervisors. Before the survey the respondents were informed about the aim of the research and they were reassured of the anonymity and confidentiality of the data. Also, they were informed that this was a voluntary research and that they are free to quit at any time without any consequences.

Measurement instruments: Demographic variables required for reporting were sex, age, level of education, employment status, employment sector, place of residence (rural, urban), marital status, length of marriage, number of children, joint monthly earnings in the family, personal monthly earnings irrespective of their partner, partner's employment and earnings (more/less/equal to my earnings) when compared to their female partner.

1.1 Scale of Economic Abuse - SEA (Adams 2008) has 28 items. The first 17 items are related to economic control, and the remaining 11 to economic exploitation. The entire scale has a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.931, with correlation coefficients between items and the entire scale ranging from 0.313 to 0.692. Examples of some items on this subscale are: *"My partner was hiding money in order for me not to be able to find it"* and *"My partner was forcing me to ask him about the money"*. Cronbach alpha coefficient for internal scale consistency in this research is $\alpha=0,997$.

1.2 Economic Violence Recognition Scale (Klasnić 2014) is a one-dimensional scale with 9 dichotomous items for which Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal scale consistency is $\alpha=0,884$. Examples of some of the items on this subscale are: *"One person is prohibiting the other person from getting employment"* and *"One person is prohibiting the other person from spending their own money"*. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal scale consistency in this research is $\alpha=0,972$.

1.3 Marital Traditionality Subscale (Pendleton, Paloma and Garland 1980) was used for exploration of the traditionality of the marriage, i.e. measurement of attitudes on marriage (Dual Career Family Scale). Cronbach's alpha for this scale is 0.594. It is comprised of six items. Examples of some of the items on this subscale are: *"If the child is sick, most probably the mother will stay with them at home."* or *"The wife should not work if her husband prohibits it"*. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal scale consistency in this research is $\alpha=0,469$, which is low.

1.4 In order to explore the consequences of economic violence for women who experienced it (if they experienced it) at the end of the questionnaire there were several open ended questions posed where they could, if they wanted to do so, include the description of their experience with economic violence.

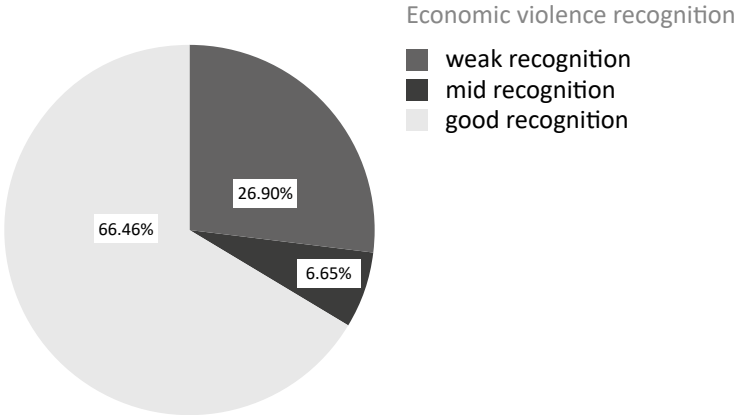
3. Research Results

Under methodology section, the metric characteristics of this research as well as the measurement instruments were listed, which are publicly available and were accessed as such. The manner in which the demographic part of the ques-

tionnaire was drafted as well as the questions in the qualitative part of the questionnaire, was also previously described. All data is original data and was entirely independently gathered on the basis of measurement instruments for the needs of this research. Statistical data processing was performed in IBM SPSS Statistics program. Before statistical data processing, it was tested whether the results of the analysed variables meet the assumption on the normality of distribution, concretely it was tested whether the distribution of the variable results follow normal distribution. The data processing showed that the distribution significantly deviates from the normal one, which was also expected considering the topic, i.e. violence. Having this in mind, for further analysis in the research nonparametric methods were used.

On the scale of economic violence recognition, the respondents were given some possible forms of behaviour of marital or extramarital partners. The task was to state, whether according to them, each of these should be punishable by law. Assessment scale was dichotomous, with yes/no responses offered. The results on this scale are visible on the graph 1.

Graph 1. Recognition of Economic Violence by Respondents (N=316)



When it comes to the subscale on the traditionality of the marriage, it seems that the participants have an average attitude on the traditionality of marriage, and in the analysis these attitudes were not significantly related to either recognising or experiencing economic violence.

The question “How would you name the form of violence mentioned in the questionnaire?” the respondents stated as: financial/economic (34 %), psychological (29 %), physical (5 %), generally abuse (5 %), emotional (4 %). Other 20 % of the responses characterised this type of violence as “domestic violence”, “manipulation”, “belittling behaviour”, “terror”, “financial dependence”, “violence instigated by money, i.e. man’s attempt to pressure a woman into financially taking

care of him, while denying her rights“. When responding to this open ended question “Based on the previous questions in the questionnaire, would you based on their content asses them as questions related to violence? To put it more simply, while filling in the questionnaire, did you have a feeling like you were responding to questions about some sort of violence?“ the respondents gave mostly affirmative responses and 88 % of them stated that they did recognise that this questionnaire was about some form of violence. Others stated “I did not recognise” or “I do not know, I am not sure“.

Statistically significant correlation of experience of economic violence and employment status of women has not been found, using Spearman correlation coefficient.

The respondents were divided into categories according to their educational level. The “primary” educational level category included respondents with primary, gymnasium or vocational school. The “higher” educational level category included respondents with a two year college, undergraduate degree or specialisation like master’s or doctoral degree. By applying Mann-Whitney U test a statistically significant difference has been established ($p < 0,05$) in recognising economic violence in correlation to the variable of education. It has been established that respondents with a higher level of education are better at recognising forms of economic violence. It is also important to highlight the very specificity of this sample which predominantly included women with higher educational background.

Table 3. Level of Education and Recognition of Economic Violence, Application of Mann-Whitney U Test

Educational level	N	M Ranks	Rank sum
Violence primary	120	150,09	20668,50
higher	196	172,24	29417,50
Total	316		

Furthermore, the table shows respondents’ experiences with economic violence. The responses are divided into two categories: experiences of economic violence by their partners and by their family members.

They were then further divided into subcategories in order to better present the different forms of violence. All statements are verbatim quotes as they were expressed by the respondents themselves, with the exception of anonymization, which included the erasure of the cities they came from, names of their partners, etc. With the aim of preserving the originality of their statements, it is possible that certain grammatical mistakes were preserved, as well as the simultaneous usage of Bosniak, Croatian and Serbian language variants.

Table 4. Respondents' s Statements on Their Experiences with Economic Violence by Their Partners

FORM OF VIOLENE	RESPONDENTS' STATEMENTS ON THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH ECONOMIC VIOLENCE BY THEIR PARTNERS
Property theft	<p><i>"(...) more than once he took from me some money that I earned. I felt really bad"</i></p> <p><i>"I was in a situation where my ex-partner would take money from my bank account in order to gamble with it. He still never returned either that money or other money that he borrowed from me."</i></p>
Extortion of money and material assets	<p><i>"My long-term partner didn't want to work, I supported him. He did return some money after we split, but we lost time."</i></p> <p><i>"I landed money to buy an apartment. He (still) did not repay me, and the apartment is fully owned by him now. We have not been together for 3 years now."</i></p> <p><i>"Spending money on gambling, I was angry, enraged and disappointed, because I earn my money the hard way."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes, I have been in such a situation, but when I was very young and trusted my boyfriend at the time, who would take from me my money and spend it on his needs, and then I would end up in an ugly situation, without money for my own needs."</i></p> <p><i>"(...) I paid for the disks on his car, as he was saying that allegedly he did not have money. We went on a trip before that and I shared with him the amount of money I have at my disposal. He said that I should not worry about it. And then at the border crossing he said that he has only 20 KM left before he receives his next salary. When I went mad because of that, he threatened that he will kill himself..."</i></p>

Property control	<p><i>“He made decisions on finances unilaterally, he used to hide the money that he earned.”</i></p> <p><i>“Few times it happened that he was nagging and controlling and yelling at me for spending my own money, he would even introduce prohibitions for me not to be able to buy some things with my money.”</i></p> <p><i>“(…) He buys things without agreement with me, things we do not need. He spends money on branded clothing, and then uses it against me when I spend more on food or basic necessities for the children.”</i></p> <p><i>“In previous relations there was financial judgement and attempts of prohibition, in terms what should I be spending my own money on …”</i></p>
Prohibition of employment	<p><i>„My husband used to say – you will not go to work tomorrow, I feel as if I do not have a wife, etc. or I intend to buy/pay for one thing and he spends it on something completely different.“</i></p> <p><i>“He forced me to leave the job which matched my educational background…”</i></p> <p><i>„(…) there were bad situations with jealous partners who would manipulate me and force me to leave a profession I liked and tried to control my situation when their control attempts would not succeed…”</i></p>
Forced employment	<p><i>„(…) he used his connections to get me a job in a company in front of his house, where I had to work at a job that required only a high school level education and was two times less paid than the one I used to do before with my university degree.“</i></p>

Table 5. Respondents’ Statements on their Experiences with Economic Violence by their Family Members

FORM OF VIOLENCE	RESPONDENTS’ STATEMENTS ON THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH ECONOMIC VIOLENCE BY THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS
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<p>Withholding basic living needs</p>	<p><i>“(...) I would receive 80 pfennigs for food in school all the way up to grade 8, and after that 1 convertible mark and 25 pfennigs, then 2.5 convertible marks, and then at university 5 marks every day ...”</i></p> <p><i>„(...) by my “foster parent”. By my choosing we are not in contact any more for more than 10 years now and these people say that “they do not know why is it that I am not contacting them”. Black-mailing, brunch money, money for school, school trips, etc. For all of this I needed to beg and still barely get it, even if so. I felt unimportant because in my understanding it would be more important to give me the money for school than for example buy new pots since you already have some. Unimportant, unloved, we needed to beg for sanitary pads all the time, basic hygienic products...”</i></p>
<p>Prohibition of education</p>	<p><i>“(...) I did not go to the university which I wanted since he prohibited it claiming we did not have money, and then he sent my brother to that same university ...”</i></p>
<p>Witnessing employment prohibition to a mother by a father</p>	<p><i>“(...)My father also prohibited my mother for many years from working and having her own money ...”</i></p> <p><i>“(...) He would not allow for her to work although we needed money because he thought that she will meet someone at work and cheat on him...”</i></p>

<p>Witnessing economic violence in the family</p>	<p><i>“Such terror I experienced more from my father than my partner and I felt bad of course, I felt neglected as if I did not have the right to my choice and my needs. The consequences for me were that I have been exclusively focusing on financial independence and separation from all...”</i></p> <p><i>“(...) since the early age, only that I did not understand it at the time that it was abuse, and only when I grew up I understood that some actions or worldviews were different exactly because of that. Not personal, but I witnessed it with my parents, and that left a deep imprint on me. And my mother ingrained in me that I should always have my own money, so that if I ever decided to leave I would have the means to do so ...”</i></p>
<p>Money Extortion</p>	<p><i>“(...) I gave him my scholarship money that I received and when I asked for 50 marks for boots he said that that was too expensive...”</i></p>

4. Discussion

The aim of this research was to test the recognition of economic violence, susceptibility to it, as well as the differences in recognizing and experiencing economic violence in relation to demographic variables in a group of women from Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to the first hypothesis it was assumed that an abused woman’s employment status has a positive correlation with her experience of economic violence, meaning that employed women will have more experience of economic violence. However, based on the analysis of this sample, a significant correlation has not been established between the experience of violence and a woman’s employment status. Therefore, this hypothesis is rejected, but we need to elaborate on the potential reasons for such data. By analyzing the characteristics of the sample we can see that 83 % of respondents reported that they are employed, colloquially employed “in the grey economy”, as well as working while studying. This data gives us the information that 83 % of women in this case have some source of income and can at least afford sustenance for themselves. Most of the respondents reported that their material status matches the average income level. Considering the sectors in which they are employed, generally speaking the 3rd and 4th sector, these sectors include mostly assisting and caring professions as well as service provision professions, i.e. lesser paid sectors. Since lack of access to economic resources makes women dependent on violent partners (Sullivan, 1991), it seems that employment i.e., access to economic resources functions as a protective factor which potentially decreases the experience with violence.

The presumption was that there would be a difference in a woman's level of education and recognition of economic violence, towards the direction in which women with higher levels of education are better at recognising violence than women with lower level of education, and this has been confirmed. The results show that women with primary and secondary education in some cases had difficulties recognizing economic violence and its constitutive parts, while on the other hand, a higher number of women in the category of higher education were better at recognizing economic violence. According to this, the second hypothesis has been confirmed as well. The analysis of the sample showed that 62 % of the respondents had a higher level of education meaning a two year college, university degree or a specialisation such as a doctoral degree, while the rest of them had primary or secondary school. Bates and associates (2007) state that women with higher education are less compatible with traditional expectations as educated women tend to enter marriage later, want to have less children and give birth less frequently and that this is a change which society needs to accept and is not aligned with societal expectations of women since the primary role assigned to women is the one of reproduction. Educated women, therefore, reject accepting conventional roles as the only ones and are aware that, thanks to their ever rising educational levels, they can also have other roles. This sometimes can be risky for them, exposing them to an exploitative form of economic violence due to the fact that they defy traditional gender roles by having a better education or better jobs than their male partners, and by the very fact of having higher educational levels, they are able to recognize forms of violence more effectively (Daibes and Safadi 2023).

How women in this research recognize and describe economic violence, as well as their personal experiences of economic violence, was the question that was posed to test the third hypothesis. It was assumed that women would recognise that this research is about economic violence and that they would be capable of naming it. This was later confirmed *through* the analysis of the statements given by the respondents. When asked "How would you name this form of violence which is described in this questionnaire?" respondents mostly characterised the violence as: primary financial/economic violence (34 %), where they saw the two terms as synonyms. Next, they characterised it as psychological violence (29 %) which is also accurate, as such tactics definitely influence the psychological well-being of the victim. When asked this open ended question "While responding to the questions in this questionnaire did you feel like you were responding to questions about some form of violence?" 88% of the respondents confirmed that they recognised that this was some form of violence. This is also a good indicator on their familiarity with the topic. Finally, during this research, respondents had the chance to describe their experience with economic violence if they experienced it, either in their families or relationships. The responses show the courage of these girls and women who were ready to share their detailed experiences for the purposes of this research, as presented in Tables 4 and 5 where they vividly describe the forms of violence they experienced, as well as the feelings and fears created by economic violence. Over 30 detailed statements and descriptions of violence were found in their responses, indicating that women do not have enough conversations about these topics, since there is a lack of awareness or information in the society about this type of violence, if we can say so. Some of them stated that they did not expect to be describing their experience, as they had never had the chance to do so before,

especially anonymously which made it easier for them to share it now. A number of respondents (around 5 %) were not ready to share their experience and they stated that they “cannot and do not want to talk about it” which is also a legitimate response, considering the fact that this is a truly sensitive topic. It requires a great deal of courage and readiness to describe violence that a person has experienced or is still experiencing, and in this sense the respondents should be appreciated for their efforts. Without their responses and insights it would not have been possible to perform this research.

Some researchers have operationalised economic violence as an invisible domestic violence, a form of invisible violence which does not leave bruises, and others described it as a unique form of violence, separate and different from others. Summarising the findings of this research, and especially the statements from participants, we could say that economic violence is, in fact violence as any other violence, applied with an aim of gaining power and control over another person. Violence operates like an umbrella under which there are all sorts of behaviours and acts serving the perpetrator to degrade their victim, including physical, sexual, psychological, etc. Unfortunately, economic violence is yet another creative tactic that perpetrators use in order to bring maximal damage to their victim, and in this specific case of economic violence the difference is in the fact that economic violence is difficult to prove and criminally prosecute.

5. Conclusion

Is economic violence a new form of violence, or is it an old form of violence but with a new name and operationalized definition. This is a question to be asked after researching this topic. Considering the significant response from participants and the amounts of collected statements offered by them, it is clear that economic violence is a topic which people do not talk about and they keep pushing it under the rug. It was the decision of the author not to include men in this research, but in future it would also be useful to include them as well, in order to gain insight into their general familiarity with the concept of economic violence, as well as their attitudes and opinions about it. The sample of this research largely included educated women, with an average income. A recommendation for further research would be to include women with lower educational levels, without their independent income and women living in rural areas. When asked why did not they leave their abuser earlier or why are they still with him, women often respond that they do not know where to go, they do not have a place to stay, and that they are worried that they will not have enough money to feed their children. Therefore, a key step in assistance to women who are victims of violence should be also financial assistance and support, with all other support that could be offered. It is clear that there is a need for further research into economic violence and initiatives to ensure that girls and women in such situations find adequate support, information and knowledge needed for life without violence. In terms of practical guidelines, it would be useful to establish a plan of workshops on financial literacy for women, acquainting them with the concepts of economic violence, and drafting a strategic plan for the economic empowerment of women, to make it easier for them to leave their abusers.

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Gender Based Violence: Role of Multisectoral Institutions in Detection, Assistance and Continuing Prevention Through Legal and Psychological Support

Mentor: Dr. Nermin Šehović

nermin.sehovic@gmail.com

University Gender Resource Centre, University in Sarajevo

Abstract

Gender based violence - violence against women represents an alarming societal problem with serious consequences, not only for victims themselves but also for society as a whole. In this research we focus on the role of multisectoral institutions in detection, assistance and prevention of gender-based violence, with a special focus on the safe house/shelter run by "Medica" in Zenica. Through this research, we explore the role of the shelter in supporting women who are victims of violence. The respondents were female clients who spent time in the shelter and who were victims of abuse. This research was conducted in a form of interviews/a questionnaire with key questions related to this topic. By analysing relevant literature, case studies and gathered data, this paper offers insights into effective strategies for improving the support given to women who are victims of gender-based violence as well as violence prevention. This research highlights the key role which multisectoral institutions, such as police, social service centers, family doctor clinics or shelters have in fighting gender-based violence and the need for a coordinated action in order to protect and support victims.

Key words: gender based violence, violence against women, shelter, police, social work

1. Introduction

1.1. *Gender Based Violence; Violence Against Women*

"Gender-based violence against women refers to all violence directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately" (Council of Europe 2011:5).

Violence against women, with a special focus on violence in partner relations, is a global phenomenon that does not discriminate in relation to religion, class, cultures or ethnic background. Research from around the world indicates that aetiology of violence has a multi-factorial composition. The combination of different factors can increase the probability that some persons will display violence towards their partners, ex partners or close individuals (Mikulec, Salihović and Dračić 2008).

Women who are victims of partner violence are often silent about their experience. They feel shame, discomfort and often feel lost, not knowing whom to turn to for help or how to do it. The fear of deterioration of their situation and of exposure additionally make their situation even harder. Forms of violence against women vary in their frequency and intensity, it can happen only once, occasionally or could be occurring constantly and involve a high degree of violence (Mikulec and associates 2008).

Violence against women in partner relations is a complex phenomenon that has been carefully studied in academic literature so far. Definitions of this form of violence vary, but they mostly agree that it includes control and domination over women. Mujezinović and associates (2020) highlight that this violence often develops gradually through a cyclic process that includes different elements. Economic abuse, as one of the forms of violence, is manifested through control of financial assets, prohibition of employment or earnings, and preservation of the situation in which the woman is economically dependent on her partner. Also, reproduction of male privilege patterns was noticed, which see a woman as submissive and inferior, while a man is given the role of the master of the house. Using children as instruments for pressure or intimidation is also often part of these patterns of violence. Although current research has identified these patterns of violence, we are still lacking a concrete analysis of potential solutions or strategies for prevention or intervention. Establishing an intersectional approach, which takes into account different factors like class, race, or sexual orientation could offer a deeper understanding of the problem and inform more efficient interventions. Also, it would be important to conduct more research on and offer more assistance to programs supporting women victims of violence, as well as promote education and awareness about this problem in order to decrease the stigma and ensure community support. Violence against women represents a serious social problem which requires a comprehensive reaction in order to be adequately solved. Despite the existence of laws and institutions which should be offering protection, underreporting of violence and inefficient application of the law often result in unrecorded cases. A growing trend of violence against women, including serious forms like femicide, requires serious reconsideration of the efficiency of current legal measures and support from relevant institutions. In a society which is directed towards higher education and progress, it is a paradox to witness this increase in violence against women as a form of serious fundamental human rights violation as well as a violation of societal values.

1.2. Violence against Women in B&H – Consequences and Statistics

“The victim is not guilty of the crime, she is a victim because the abuser labelled her as such”
(Hirigoyen 2003:17).

Violence is a harm which destroys every possible segment of a woman's life. It leaves consequences on her psychological and physical health, results in social isolation and apathy, and excludes her from every segment of her life. Every consequence that occurs can be very serious and long-term. After experiencing violence,

victims often suffer from long-term emotional consequences like fear, shock, shame or anger – between two fifths and two thirds of victims report having experienced such emotions. Around three out of ten survivors face permanent psychological consequences, including a sense of threat, depression, lack of self-confidence, and sleeping difficulties.

Physical violence leaves visible marks on the body, such as scratches, hematomas, dislocations, fractures, and marks of strangulation, etc. These injuries can be instantaneous or prolonged and we classify them according to the anatomical region where they are found. The consequences of violence are not only of physical but also psychological nature, and they affect the mental health of not only victims but also witnesses. Intimate partner violence creates many psychological challenges, and the ways in which women deal with them depend on many factors, including the length of the violent relationship. These consequences can be manifested through an increased number of physical illnesses and psychological challenges, such as depression, anxiety, sleeping and eating disorders, substance abuse and suicidal thoughts. Depression disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, or low self-esteem are common mental disorders connected to exposure to violence (Mujezinović and associates 2020).

In the Federation of B&H victims of the most serious incidents of violence report violence much more often than those in Republika Srpska, especially when it comes to violence perpetrated by non-partners (49% in FB&H, as opposed to 16% in RS). A very similar pattern is noticed also with violence perpetrated by intimate partners: 65% of women in the Federation of B&H and 44% in RS reported injuries inflicted by their intimate partners for the most serious incidents of violence. When it comes to violence in childhood, women in Republika Srpska reported a higher frequency of this type of violence when compared to those in the Federation of BiH (13% as opposed to 7% for all forms of violence) (OSCE 2019). Research done by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) gives us important insight into the problem of violence against women in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their data indicates that less than half of the women in the country have experienced some form of violence until the age of 15. It is alarming that almost one quarter of women state that they were exposed to psychological, physical or sexual violence, either by their partners or non-partners. Although one in seven women did report that violence, there is a worrying trend of underreporting, which indicates that this problem may not be adequately addressed through currently existing initiatives.

One important finding is that most cases of violence have been reported in cases when violence is perpetrated by an ex-partner. This indicates that a special focus should be placed on supporting women who are exposed to violence after the breakup. Also, the high percentage of sexual harassment, previously and currently, demands more efficient strategies for prevention and protection. Despite these important results, there are limitations to such research that need to be taken into account. There is a possibility that cases of violence are underreported due to stigma or fear of consequences, which could lead to an underestimation of the real scope of this problem. Also, the lack of detailed analysis of specific contexts in which violence occurs and the factors that contribute to it could limit our understanding of the causes and consequences of this problem. The OSCE research gives important insights into the prevalence of violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but

at the same time, highlights the need for further research to better understand the causes and consequences of this problem and to develop more efficient strategies for prevention and intervention.

1.3. Multisectoral Approach in Combating Gender Based Violence

Violence against women represents a complex and serious societal problem which demands a coordinated approach among different institutions in order to be adequately addressed. When speaking about multisectoral institutions, this mainly refers to institutions such as the police, shelters, nongovernmental organisations and centres for social work, which address this challenge. A key role in fighting violence against women belongs to the police. Radenović (2012) highlights that the police play a key role in detecting cases of violence and offering support to victims. However, critical voices point to the lack of adequate training for the police in the treatment of cases of violence against women, which can lead to inadequate protection of victims and re-victimization (Smith, 2019).

Shelters also play an important role in offering security and support to women who are exposed to violence. Nefić (2005) highlights their role in offering temporary accommodation and emotional support, but there is also the question of their long-term sustainability and capacity to offer high-quality support. (Brown, 2020).

Non-governmental organisations are also key stakeholders in the fight against violence against women. Their work in offering support to victims and advocacy for the improvement of the system of protection is often seen as indispensable (Johnson et al., 2018). Still, the question of sustainability and financing of non-governmental organisations, as well as their political independence, remains a challenge (Garcia, 2017).

Centres for social work play a key role in offering psychological and social support to female victims of violence. De et al. (2017) highlight the importance of their role in risk assessment and security planning, while questions remain about the lack of resources and capacity to provide adequate support in such centers (Jones, 2021).

A critical take on the public legislative framework and its application indicates that there is a need for stronger legal mechanisms and better coordination between different institutions (Robinson, 2019). Moreover, researchers have highlighted challenges in the application of the law and a need for stronger oversight of implementation (Gupta, 2020).

All in all, although multisectoral institutions have a crucial role in combating violence against women, there are challenges and gaps in their work which require a careful analysis and more efforts in order to improve their efficiency and efficacy. The legal basis for the work of Centres for Social Work in cases of domestic violence is defined in Articles 31, 33, 34, 40 and 42 of the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence, as well as Article 380 of the Family Code of the Federation of B&H (The Official Gazette of the Federation of B&H, No 20/13; The Official Gazette of the Federation of B&H, No 36/05, 41/05 and 31/14.). According to these laws, Centres for Social Work have an obligation to report domestic violence cases and offer support

to victims of violence which includes ensuring their basic living necessities, taking care of them, ensuring they have legal assistance, and accommodating them in shelters or other institutions of social protection. When the police record a case of violence, the representatives of the Centre for Social Work accompanied by the police, intervene in the family. Their talks with the family members are meant to establish the circumstances of the case, the level of threat for the family members, as well as the need for alternative accommodation for the victim or removal of the perpetrator. If needed, the victim will be relocated from their place of residence, or the perpetrator will be removed. A mobile team offers support on the grounds and assists the victims in exercising their rights. The work of the Centre for Social Work also includes drafting a plan for the victim of violence, which entails victim support, support for the children, as well as coordination with other expert teams and nongovernmental organisations. The aim is to ensure the safety of the victim, and offer her necessary support and the possibility to exercise her rights. The inclusion of other experts, such as psychiatrists or therapists, will additionally improve the efficacy and completeness of the provided support (Hrničić and Bećirović 2018).

Bosnia and Herzegovina has ratified several international treaties related to gender equality, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as well as its Optional protocol, as well as the Council of Europe Convention from 2011 on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (better known as the Istanbul Convention). These treaties bind member countries to take steps towards ensuring gender equality and the prevention of violence against women (OSCE 2019). The Law on Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in its Article 6, Item 4, states that competent authorities have the obligation to undertake necessary measures to eliminate and prevent gender-based violence in both public and private spheres, while also ensuring instruments of protection, assistance and compensation for the victims (Official Gazette of BiH, No. 32/10). In the Criminal Code domestic violence is qualified as a criminal offence in Article 222 of the Code. The Law on Criminal Proceedings prescribes the enforcement procedures for authorities during the processing of the criminal offence (Criminal Code of the FB&H, Official Gazette of the Federation of B&H, No. 36/03, 21/04, 69/04, 18/05, 42/10, 42/11, 59/14 and 76/14).

2. Methodology

Objective of the Research: The objective of this research is to explore the efficiency of the support offered by multisectoral institutions to the victims of gender-based violence in Zenica, including the analysis of the level of cooperation between the institutions, an evaluation of the experience of the women in the shelter run by “Medica” and the identification of the source of information on available shelters and level of awareness on the services offered.

The Context of the Research: The problem of gender-based violence is a widespread problem, and the city of Zenica is not an exception in this regard. A shelter run by “Medica” offers support to women who were victims of violence, but it is important to explore how much institutions like the police, social services and the shelter offer assistance and how that assistance can be improved.

Research Design: A qualitative, descriptive research study was conducted.

Set up of the Research: Interviews were held in the premises of the shelter run by “Medica” in Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The conversations were held in a private room within the shelter, ensuring privacy and a safe atmosphere for the respondents. This space was selected to allow the respondents to feel relaxed, enabling them to freely share their experiences and attitudes.

Sample and the Sampling Method: The sample of the research comprised 30 clients of the shelter run by “Medica” in Zenica, all of whom were victims of violence and were accommodated in the shelter in the last 5 years. The sampling method was targeted sampling, and the participants were selected based on specific criteria.

Selection criteria: The research included women who were victims of violence and who were accommodated in the shelter run by “Medica” in the last 5 years.

Exclusion criteria: Women who were not victims of violence and who were never accommodated in the shelter run by “Medica”.

Data gathering methodology: The research was performed by applying the qualitative method, i.e. interviews, that allowed for gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences of the victims of violence and their perception of the role of the institutions in providing assistance. The interviews were held in the premises of the shelter run by “Medica” in Zenica. This ensured the creation of an encouraging environment for open dialogue and honest responses. The interview included four questions related to demographic data of the participants (age, education, employment and marital status). All interviews were done in Bosnian. In total there were 30 individual interviews. Each interview lasted approximately from 27 to 55 minutes. The researcher also asked additional questions in order to clarify some individual responses and have additional elaboration if needed. Key questions on which the thematic areas and clusters were created included:

- What were the circumstances that resulted in you being accommodated in the shelter?
- Who referred you to the shelter?
- Which services were you provided with while being accommodated in the shelter (psychological support, legal counselling, medical care)?
- Have you generally been satisfied with your stay in the shelter?

Statistical Analysis:

The gathered data was transcribed and analysed using Colaizzi’s (1978) seven step process. The steps are (i) transcription of the interview, (ii) identifying significant statements, (iii) formulating meanings, (iv) forming clusters – groups of themes, (v) developing an exhaustive description, (vi) producing the fundamental structure and (vii) seeking verification of the fundamental structure.

Hypothesis:

- Working Hypothesis: There is a positive role and influence of multisectoral institutions, including the shelter, in the process of recognition, assistance provision, and continuing prevention of violence against women.
- Zero hypothesis: There is no significant role or influence of multisectoral institutions, including the shelter, in the process of recognition, assistance provision, and continuing prevention of violence against women.

3. Research Results

Four thematic clusters were detected related to the perspectives of the role of multisectoral institutions in detecting, preventing and protecting women victims of violence which include: the circumstances that resulted in them being accommodated in the shelter (this thematic cluster explores different factors and situations that preceded their arrival at the shelter, including types of violence, circumstances from they escaped, as well as the dynamics of intimate partner relations which led to these traumatic experiences), the person/s who referred them to the shelter (this thematic cluster explores who or what was the main driving force that ensured that women had access to the shelter, focusing on different institutions like the police, centres for social work), access to services in the shelter (this thematic cluster analyzes a variety of services available to women in the shelter, including psychological support, legal counselling, medical care), as well as satisfaction with their stay in the shelter (this thematic cluster explores their experience including their satisfaction with the services provided, the quality of the accommodation, safety as well as the manner in which their personal experience was understood).

Thematic Cluster 1: The Circumstances Under which the Woman was Accommodated in the Shelter

Physical violence: In this research the respondents highlighted several circumstances under which they were accommodated in the shelter. Physical violence entails a wide spectrum of aggressive acts, including beating, pushing and abuse resulting in injuries or fear of injuries. The women stated that they were exposed to physical violence by their partners, family members or other close people, which was a breaking point in their lives forcing them to search for a sanctuary in a shelter. Physical violence they experienced included different forms of brutality – from verbal threats to serious injury. Some of the participants described how they were physically attacked, either by punches or the use of weapons. Such situations often escalated due to emotional tension or attempts of control from their partners.

One of the most frequent forms of physical violence that they reported was beating. Partners or their family members would physically beat them, using fists, legs or any available object as weapons. These attacks were characterised by quick escalation of emotional tension, and victims would be quickly found under attack, leading to injuries, bruises and even more severe trauma.

Along with the beatings, the respondents also described the situations of pushing, hair pulling, strangulation or movement restriction. These forms of psychological violence would occur as partner's or family member's controlling behaviours

while trying to exert power and domination over the victim. Some of the most difficult cases of physical violence included the use of weapons like knives, bats or even firearms. These situations are high risk situations, especially for the physical safety of women and they often resulted in serious injury, like multiple fracture of facial bones and ribs.

Psychological violence: Psychological violence is another, key factor which was identified within circumstances that resulted in their accommodation in the shelter. Although less visible than physical violence, psychological abuse is equally devastating and leaves permanent emotional scars. The respondents described how they were exposed to continued psychological abuse by their partners. This included verbal threats, humiliation, control, manipulation and isolation. Psychological violence can be subtle and gradual, but equally destructive as physical violence, leaving victims with a sense of worthlessness and disempowerment. Some of the forms of psychological violence which the participants listed were: constant criticism, humiliation, control over finances, limitation of social contacts, threats and intimidation. These forms of abuse were often used as a means of control over the victim, maintaining power and dominance over her. Verbal abuse was one of the most frequent forms of psychological violence that they mentioned. This included: continuous verbal attacks, humiliation, insults, criticism and belittling of the victims. Their partners or family members would often use insults, slurs, or threats to control or manipulate the victims leaving them with a sense of worthlessness and disempowerment.

Psychological power play is also one aspect of psychological violence that the respondents reported on. According to their statements, which overlap with the literature's description of psychological abuse, the perpetrators used psychological strategies to maintain control over victims, manipulating their feelings, fears, and beliefs. This included gaslighting, where the perpetrators negated or contested the victim's real perceptions or experiences, creating doubt and confusion. Isolation was also another common form of psychological violence which respondents reported on. Perpetrators tried to isolate the victims from support and resources, controlling them or limiting their access to social media, family or external institutions.

Thematic Cluster 2: Referrals of Violence Victims to the Shelter

In this research on gender-based violence it was indispensable to detect the sources from which the victims learned about the shelter. By analyzing the sources of information which helped women reach the shelter, this research established that police and centres for social work were the key sources of information.

Data gathered from 30 respondents show that the majority of women, 21 of them, got their first information about the shelter from the police. The police emerged as a first line of support for most of the respondents who were faced with gender-based violence. On the other hand, 9 of them got to learn about the shelter for the first time through centres for social work. It is important to state that some of the respondents used the services on several occasions, and that it was not the first time for them to use the shelter. This suggests that women who already experienced violence and found support in the shelter, used the same sources of information again which indicates that there is continued need for support and

protection. These results highlight the importance of the role of the police and centres for social work in provision of support to women victims of gender-based violence. They also highlight the importance of continuous support and reintegration of women who already used the services of the shelter.

One of the respondents described the way in which she got to know about the shelter: "After I overcame the fear and shame, I called the police. You see, I am almost 70, and my man abuses me psychically and sexually. I just did not have any more strength to keep quiet. I called them (the police). They could not even bring him in, but they told me that it would be good for me to leave the house for some time and that I would be safer there. It is then when they told me about the shelter in Zenica and it is where they took me..."

Thematic Cluster 3: Access to Services in the Shelter (psychological support, legal counselling and medical care)

The access to services in the shelter in the context of gender-based violence represented an important topic due to the fact that it is directly related to support to women who are victims of violence and allows for them to access key resources needed in order to leave abusive circumstances and recover. The analysis of the data on access to services in the shelter indicates that psychological counselling and medical care were widely accessed by the respondents, whereas the utilization of the access to legal aid varied depending on the respondent.

Psychological counselling: All respondents were given access to psychological support. Through therapy sessions and group work, women were given chances to process their emotional trauma and strengthen their emotional resilience. Psychological counselling proved to be a key component in the process of victim recovery.

Legal assistance: 30 respondents out of 23 stated that they needed legal assistance and that they also had access to this type of support. These women faced legal issues like protection from violence, divorce or custody over children, and they were given the needed information and offered support during the legal procedure. The other respondents stated that they did not need legal assistance. Nevertheless, they stated that legal assistance was offered to them as an option. This availability of legal assistance often represents a significant resource for women facing violence, offering them a sense of security and support in the process of facing legal challenges.

Medical care: All respondents had access to medical care. Through medical examinations and treatments of their injuries, these women were given urgent medical intervention. Besides that, they were offered a long-term medical support in order to ensure their physical and emotional recovery. Although the utilization of access to legal assistance varied among the respondents, psychological counselling and medical care were widely accessed. Offering a comprehensive support, which includes psychological, legal and medical support, is key for the process of recovery of women who are victims of violence and for the protection of their wellbeing.

Thematic Cluster 4: Satisfaction with Their Stay in the Shelter

In relation to this part of the research and in connection with the satisfaction with their stay in the shelter, the respondents offered their experience and perception of services provided to them. The analysis of the results showed a high

level of satisfaction among the users of the shelter's service, with a special focus on different aspects of support that they had at their disposal. First, most of the participants expressed a high level of satisfaction with the psychological support that they received in the shelter. Through individual therapies, group sessions and workshops, women were given chances to process their trauma, develop emotional resilience and build their self-confidence. In addition, other services, like educational programs, access to child care, social support and safe accommodation contributed to their overall sense of security, support, and satisfaction.

4. Discussion

Based on the presented results, it is evident that their stay in the shelter run by "Medica" offered these women, victims of violence, a positive experience. In the context of gender-based violence, the role of the institutions like safe houses/shelters becomes extremely important in offering support and protection to women who were exposed to violence.

When we compare the results of our research with the study conducted by Gomez and Avellaneda (2021), which analyzed the influence of institutional factors on the reporting of violence against women in Brazil, we can notice similarities. Their research indicates that there are complex connections between pro-women's institutions and the reporting of violence, highlighting the importance of the role of institutions in motivating women to report violence. This study is especially relevant since it highlights the need for a more efficient cooperation among institutions in order to ensure that women victims of violence receive necessary support and protection.

Another important research that could be compared to ours was the one that was conducted by Belknap and associates (2009), which dealt with the experiences of women victims of violence and the support that they receive at social as well as institutional levels. Our research reaches similar conclusions in terms of the importance of the support offered by the institutions like safe houses/shelters, but at the same time, offers new insights into the complexity of this support, which is found in incorrect approach of the institutions to this overall problem – namely, the reaction is more momentary, and the root cause is ignored – as we could see from the quoted statement from one of the respondents. She highlighted the importance of the role of the police in terms of their referral of her to the shelter. But, this example also tells us that there is a lack of more permanent solutions in the fight against domestic violence. Although the police offered initial support to this woman, the fact is that no long-term measures were initiated in order to solve the root cause of this violence. This resulted in the fact that this woman returned to the same dangerous situation and this indicated that there are gaps in the system. This is once again highlighting the importance of a comprehensive approach which does not include only provision of a safe shelter, but also long-term strategy of support and protection for victims of violence.

It is interesting to notice that the results of the research showed that physical and psychological violence played a key role in circumstances that led to women coming to the shelter. Physical violence which included different types of brutality

like hitting, pushing and use of arms often escalated due to emotional tension and controlling attempts by the partner. On the other side, psychological abuse, which can be subtle and gradual, leaves permanent emotional scars on victims, including verbal threats, humiliation, control, manipulation and isolation.

It is important to highlight the role of the police and centers for social work as key sources of support to women victims of violence. The police often act as first responders, offering information on the shelters and ensuring that women can leave violent situations. On the other hand, Centres for Social Work offer continuous support and resources to women who are looking for a shelter and assistance. The analysis of the access to services in the shelter indicates the significance of psychological support, legal counselling, and medical care in the process of rehabilitation of women who are victims of violence. Psychological counseling offers women a chance to process their emotional trauma and strengthen their emotional resilience, while the legal assistance ensures they can face legal challenges like protection from violence or divorce. Medical care ensures urgent intervention and a long-term support for physical and emotional rehabilitation of the victims. The high level of satisfaction of the shelter beneficiaries highlights the importance of comprehensive support, which entails psychological, legal, medical and social support. This proves the need for a holistic approach in service provision to women victims of violence in order to ensure their complete recovery and protection.

5. Conclusion

At the moment when there are problems among people, institutions should be the ones supporting them and mediating their way towards justice. No woman should feel helpless and unprotected in the world where laws and rules are defined. The laws have been already adopted, but it is now their responsibility to be valued and adequately implemented. Although the existing literature does offer a deeper understanding of violence against women within intimate partner relations, more research and engagement should be done in order to develop more efficient solutions for prevention and support for victims.

The role of the institutions in prevention and service provision to victims of violence is key in the fight against gender-based violence. Our research clearly shows how important the multisectoral approach is to the resolution of this problem, where institutions such as shelters, the police, centres for social work and public institutions are of great significance in service provision and protection of victims of violence. The identification of the police and centres for social work as the main institutions which refer women to shelters indicates that there is successful cooperation among different institutions. Still, our research also indicates that current systems of support do not have long-term solutions and do not offer permanent protection to those women who return to dangerous situations after they leave the shelters. Although the institutions are working on provision of instant support, they are lacking a strategy for the prevention of repeated exposure of women to violence.

One of the key problems is the nonexistence of continuous support and an integrated approach to resolution of the problem of violence against women. This

highlights the need for a holistic approach combining psychological support, legal counselling, medical care and economic resources in order to ensure comprehensive support and protection for victims of violence. It is necessary to raise awareness in the community about the problem of gender-based violence and promote a culture of nonviolence. Public awareness raising can contribute to the reduction of the level of toleration of violence and the creation of a more supportive environment for the victims. All of this shows that societal engagement of the institutions can be improved through implementation of holistic approaches and integrated support programs. Without this, the risk of repeated exposure to violence remains high, which indicates the need for urgent action in the improvement of the efficiency of the systems of support for women who are victims of violence.

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Zakon o krivičnom postupku Federacije Bosne i Hercegovine/Law on Criminal Proceeding of FB&H ("Official Gazette of FB&H", No. 35/05, 37/03, 56/03, 78/04, 28/05, 55/06, 27/07, 53/07, 9/09, 12/10, 8/13 and 59/14)

Zakon o ravnopravnosti spolova Bosne i Hercegovine - prečišćeni tekst/Law on Gender Equality of B&H – final text ("Official Gazette of B&H", No. 32/10

THEMATIC PART:

2. GENDER IN PUBLIC SPHERES: LAW AND POLITICS

Introducing Femicide as a Special Criminal Offense in Croatian Legal Framework – a Need or Discrimination against Men?

Mentor: Professor Snježana Vasiljević

snjezana.vasiljevic@pravo.unizg.hr

Faculty of Law, University in Zagreb

Abstract

The paper explores the phenomenon of femicide as the most extreme form of gender-based violence against women, emphasizing its deep-rootedness in the structural injustices of society. Statistics indicate alarming numbers of murders of women around the world, confirming the widespread presence of violence against women that cannot be ignored. The paper analyzes the need for a more precise definition of femicide in legislation, highlighting the shortcomings of current approaches. Special attention was paid to the recent change in the Criminal Code in the Republic of Croatia, which introduced femicide as a separate criminal offense, prompting lively public discussions. The paper questions whether such a change could improve gender equality or whether it is unnecessary and discriminatory. Furthermore, the analysis of judicial practice in Croatia in relation to cases of femicide provides an insight into the way in which the judicial system deals with this serious form of violence against women. The paper highlights the responsibility of the state in ensuring justice and protection of the rights of its citizens, emphasizing that the sanction comes too late when the crime has already been committed, and that is why it is necessary to act on the prevention of gender-based violence, creating an environment where women are safe and live without fear.

Keywords: *femicide, gender-based violence, murder of women, discrimination, patriarchy, criminal law, gender equality.*

1. Introduction

Gender-based violence is one of the most widespread forms of violation of the human rights of women around the world. Femicide represents the most extreme form of violence against women and is one of the most obvious indicators of the unequal position of women in society. The occurrence of femicide is not just an isolated tragedy for few women, but a reflection of deep structural injustices that women face. Thus, this problem is deeply rooted in gender inequality and

patriarchal power patterns and requires a comprehensive approach to prevent and combat femicide, which includes education, legislative changes, strengthening institutions and promoting gender equality. Moreover, statistical data on the prevalence of femicide clearly indicate the pressing need for a more urgent solution to this problem.

The latest amendments to the Criminal Code of the Republic of Croatia, which entered into force on April 2, 2024, have included femicide as a separate criminal offense. Such changes stirred up the Croatian public, and the media space was full of debates as to whether the inclusion of femicide was necessary. While some welcomed this step as progress in the fight against gender-based violence, others considered it unnecessary, discriminatory against men and even unconstitutional (Index.hr 2024).

It is a horrible fact that, during the period of writing this paper, 4 women have already been killed in the Republic of Croatia. On the first Friday in April, the Croatian public was shocked by the news of two tragic murders in the area of the City of Zagreb, which resulted in the death of two women. One woman lost her life after being shot by her husband, while another woman was found stabbed by her son in the apartment, but we still have no official information about the perpetrator (N1 2024). Then in May, two more murders of women took place, one was killed by her son, the other by a close person (HRT 2024).

The aforementioned cases of femicide once again stirred up the public debate, since some claimed that this was proof that the introduction of femicide as a separate criminal offense was unnecessary because the law did not prevent the murders of the aforementioned women, which fueled claims that such legislation was obsolete (N1 2024).

The main purpose of this paper is to analyze the need for introduction of femicide as a separate criminal offense in the legislation of the Republic of Croatia and to assess whether such a change could have an impact on the improvement of gender equality or whether it represents an unnecessary discriminatory provision in the law.

The paper predominantly uses a descriptive legal method, since the paper deals with the analysis of international and Croatian sources of law and the analytical method that analyses the problem of femicide through the criminal justice system and politics. The methodological part of the paper consists of: a theoretical presentation of the definition, a hypothesis, explanations of the subject of the analysis, properties of the legislation regulating femicide, and indicators used to analyze and suggest the most appropriate definition, i.e. whether the definition set by the law corresponds to the solution of the initially defined problem.

Special attention is given to the situation in Croatia, since the introduction of femicide as a special criminal offense brought a significant change to criminal legislation. Through the analysis of the situation in Croatia, especially investigating the current practice of sanctioning the criminal offense of femicide, the real need for the introduction of this new legal provision is questioned.

Analysis of the state of legislation and practice in Croatia can serve as a relevant model for assessing the need for similar legal changes in other neighbouring

countries where statistical data on the prevalence of femicide show similar trends as in Croatia.

2. Gender-based Violence

Femicide is the most extreme form of gender-based violence, so it is important to first understand the concept of gender-based violence in order to better understand the phenomenon of femicide. The UN General Assembly already in 1993 declared that violence against women is a violation of women's rights and fundamental freedoms (Corradi et al. 2016). Gender-based violence is violence directed against a person because of that person's gender or violence that disproportionately affects people of a certain gender.

Violence against women is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and includes all acts of gender-based violence that result or could result in: physical injury, sexual injury, psychological or economic damage or suffering to women. (Rittossa and Vasiljević 2023:122)

Gender-based violence, and that violence against women are one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men. Also, it is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men, which have led to domination over, and discrimination against, women by men and prevention of the full advancement of women (Preamble to the Istanbul Convention).

It is very important to recognize gender-based violence, including femicide, as a form of structural discrimination. It is necessary to take such a broader approach in order to make us aware that gender-based violence is not only an individual act of violence by one perpetrator against one victim, but also the result of the failure of society and the state to stop continuous violence and prevent deaths that could have been avoided (Vasiljević 2024).

3. Definition of Femicide

The contemporary definition of femicide was given by the American feminist Diana H. Russell with the political purpose of changing the social order that tolerated the violent death of women (Corradi et al., 2016). In 1976, at the first International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women organized during the UN Decade of Women (1975-1985), Russell redefined the term femicide, describing it as the killing of women by men because they are women. Although the word femicide was already known in Anglo-Saxon countries, Russell added a critical political meaning to the term femicide and placed it within a wider feminist framework (Grzyb, Naudi and Marcuello-Servós 2018). Thus, the idea of femicide was introduced by the feminist movement, with the purpose of promoting awareness about how the murder of women represents a specific social phenomenon (Corradi et al. 2016).

Radford, describes femicide as the killing of women by men out of hatred, contempt, pleasure or a sense of ownership of women, and emphasizes the importance of researching this phenomenon in the context of the general oppression of

women in a patriarchal society. Although men are more often victims of murder, they are rarely killed simply because of their sex. According to Radford, femicide occurs in patriarchal societies where male dominance and female subordination prevail and can take different forms such as racist femicide, homophobic femicide, marital femicide or femicide committed by strangers. Radford also emphasizes that the term femicide should also be used in situations where women die from failed abortions or where female children are neglected or starved (Corradi et al. 2016).

What is the motive for femicide? Femicide stems from gender-based motives. These motives include stereotypical gender roles, discrimination and the power imbalance between men and women in society. The perpetrators often respond to behavior that does not fit traditional norms or gender roles. “Gender-related motive” does not necessarily imply the subjective intention of the perpetrator to commit the murder of a woman. Although subjective motives, such as prejudice or hatred of women, can appear together with the motive related to the victim’s gender, it is important to emphasize first of all, the structural causes of this type of violence. (Roksandić 2023). Therefore, it is necessary to understand the wider social and institutional factors that contribute to this type of violence against women, instead of limiting the analysis only to the individual motives of the perpetrators.

Dawson and Carrigan list intimate femicide, non-intimate femicide and feminicide as forms of femicide. Feminicide is a term mainly used in Latin American countries. The use of this term is often related to criticism of the government that reacts passively to this phenomenon, i.e. does not take adequate steps to prevent and punish such crimes (Dawson and Carrigan 2020).

The UN defines intimate femicide as:

The killing of a woman by a man with whom she had a relationship or intimate connection: husband, ex-husband, life partner, boyfriend, ex-boyfriend, lover, or person with whom she had a child. This includes the situation where a man murders a female friend or acquaintance that refuses to engage in an intimate relationship (emotional or sexual) with him. (EIGE 2017).

Thus, while intimate femicide focuses on the existence of a more intimate relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, non-intimate femicide includes situations in which a woman is killed by a person with whom she is not in an intimate relationship. This form of femicide can include, among others, sexually motivated killings or serial killings (Etherington and Baker 2015). A “textbook” example of this type of femicide is the killing of female sex workers.

It is important to emphasize that European and international definitions of femicide vary, but are mostly based on the concept of gender-based violence, emphasizing the connection between victims and their identification to a certain gender.

Thus, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (2009), by its resolution, defined femicide as “the killing of a woman because she is a woman”, which is a very broad definition. Furthermore, the World Health Organization (2012) defined femicide as the intentional killing of women because they are women (EIGE

2017). However, the inclusion of intent as a constitutive element in the definition of femicide is problematic because it excludes acts resulting from repeated domestic violence that may inadvertently result in death (Dawson and Carrigan, 2020).

The United Nations Academic Council and the Small Arms Survey organized a symposium on femicide, held on 26 November 2012, at the United Nations in Vienna. Experts and activists for women's rights gathered at the meeting to discuss the issue and the definition of "femicide" (Roksandić). It is important that the Vienna Declaration on Femicide² defines femicide very broadly as the killing of women and girls because of their gender, which, among other things, may include: (1) murders of women committed by an intimate partner; (2) torture and misogynist killing of women; (3) killing women and girls in the name of "honour"; (4) targeted killing of women and girls in the context of armed conflict; (5) dowry-related murders of women; (6) killing women and girls because of their sexual orientation and gender identity; (7) the killing of aboriginal and indigenous women and girls because of their gender; (8) female infanticide and gender-based feticide; (9) deaths related to genital mutilation; (10) accusations of witchcraft; and (11) other femicides associated with gangs, organized crime, drug dealers, human trafficking, and the proliferation of small arms.

At the level of the European Union (hereinafter: EU), the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) adopted two definitions: the general one, which was taken from the Vienna Declaration mentioned above, and the statistical one, which limits femicide to intimate partner femicide and the death of women as a result of some harmful practices (EIGE 2021). The statistical definition is much narrower, as it is the result of practical needs in collecting statistical data and directing policies, since intimate femicide is the one that prevails.

As a result of all of the above, it is clear that no consensus has yet been reached regarding a single definition of femicide. Also, the lack of statistical data on how widespread femicide is significantly complicates the analysis and prevention of this phenomenon.

However, calling femicide by its proper name is not just a formality, but a necessity that enables a precise definition of this serious problem, which further facilitates the monitoring and suppression of this most extreme form of violence against women. Precisely because violence against women is a frequent phenomenon in our society, this phenomenon is being normalized. In the media, femicide is rarely called by its real name, but rather referred to as a tragedy or a family tragedy, especially when the killer takes his own life as well. Femicide should be labelled as a murder, not as a tragedy, because murder clearly defines the act of committing violence and taking the life of a person. Calling femicide a tragedy can diminish the seriousness and specificity of the problem, portraying it as something that happens out of control or as something inevitable. In situations where femicide occurs, the focus is often placed on the perpetrator, seeking justifications and acceptable reasons for his actions. These reasons may include alcohol consumption, the victim's behaviour that provoked violence, feelings of jealousy or even love (Đurđević 2022).

2 Vienna Declaration on Femicide, 2012, https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CCPCJ/CCPCJ_Sessions/CCPCJ_22/_E-CN15-2013-NGO1/E-CN15-2013-NGO1_E.pdf (20.2.2023)

4. Most Important Documents Regarding Gender-Based Violence

The international legal framework for the elimination of violence against women is part of the broader international legal framework for the protection of human rights. With the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, a special international legal framework for the protection of human rights of women was developed. The CEDAW Convention defines discrimination against women as “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality between men and women”. (Article 1). This comprehensive definition also includes violence against women. This was also confirmed by the Committee of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1992 in its General Recommendation No. 19, when it defined violence against women as a form of discrimination that seriously prevents women’s ability to enjoy rights and freedoms based on equality with men (Vasiljević 2024).

Another very important document is the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, better known as the Istanbul Convention of 2011, which addresses violence against women and domestic violence and is a gender-sensitive convention. Its goal is the protection of women from all forms of violence and elimination of domestic violence, but at the same time it emphasizes that it will contribute to the suppression of all forms of discrimination against women, which indicates a clear connection between violence against women and discrimination.

These two conventions overlap and complement each other in terms of combating violence against women. The CEDAW Convention, as a global international legal instrument, includes violence against women as a form of discrimination against women. The Istanbul Convention, as a regional European convention, starts from violence against women as a form of discrimination against women and violation of human rights and contributes to the elimination of other forms of discrimination against women (Šimonović 2017).

5. Prevalence of Femicide - Facts and Figures

First we will focus on the statistics at a global level. The latest available statistics for the year 2022 reveal horrifying figures - nearly 89.000 women and girls worldwide were intentionally killed, representing the highest annual figure in the last twenty years. Moreover, most of these crimes have a gender-motivated background. Of all women and girls who were intentionally killed last year, about 55% were killed by intimate partners or other family members (48.000 victims). This means that, on average, every day more than 133 women or girls are killed by a member of their own family (UNODC 2022).

The truth is that the vast majority of murder victims in the world are men (80% in 2022), while women and girls make up a much smaller share of all murder victims (20%). However, women and girls are disproportionately affected by homicides in the private sphere (committed by intimate partners or other family members), while men and boys are more exposed to homicides in the public sphere.

Of all female homicide victims in 2022, approximately 55% were killed by intimate partners or other family members, clearly indicating that the most dangerous place for women and girls is their home. Men and boys, on the other hand, are mostly at risk of being killed by people outside of their family. Of all male homicide victims in 2022, about 12% were killed by intimate partners or other family members (UNODC 2022).

However, although these statistics are really worrying, it is important to note that a large number of cases of femicide are not recorded at all. This is mainly due to inconsistencies in the definitions of femicide and different criteria applied between countries.

What is the situation in Croatia? The Ombudswoman for Gender Equality (hereinafter: Ombudswoman) established a Monitoring Body called the “Femicide Watch” in 2017 with the aim of doing comprehensive monitoring, data collection, analysis of cases of murders of women and reporting on them.

Violence against women is the most dangerous form of crime in the Republic of Croatia, and its prevalence and serious consequences cannot be compared with any other type of crime. According to an analysis conducted by the Ombudswoman for Gender Equality, it was determined that in the period from 2016 to 2021, 92 women were killed in Croatia, which accounts for 45% of all murders, and 52 of them were killed by a “close person” (GREVIO 2023).

According to the report from the Ministry of the Interior, a total of 27 murders were recorded in 2022, of which 13 victims were female. Of the total number of women killed, 12 of them were killed by close family members, and 6 of them were killed by current or former intimate partners. It is important to point out that, out of a total of 6 women killed by current and/or former intimate partners, three killings were qualified as murder, and three as aggravated murders (Ombudswoman 2023).

On the other hand, when we study the figures of male homicides in the year 2022, it is observed that there are almost no cases of gender-based male homicides. In particular, not a single murder of a man committed by his intimate partner was recorded, while only two murders of men committed by close persons of the opposite sex were recorded. In both cases, the perpetrators were mothers who killed their sons.

It is important to point out that numerous studies confirm that the existence of a previous abusive relationship is often a key factor in cases of intimate homicides, regardless of whether the perpetrators are men or women. However, the dominant motive that prompts women to kill their partners is to stop their partner’s abuse, acting out of fear and self-defence and defence of their children, while men are more often motivated by jealousy, possessiveness, the discovery of infidelity by their partner or the breakup (including the threat of break up) of the relationship (Rittossa and Škorić 2021). Researchers point out that a history of domestic violence is identified in at least half of cases of femicide of intimate partners (Corradi et al. 2016).

It is also significant that the analysis of murder cases of women in Croatia has shown that femicide can actually be prevented or at least reduced if risk factors

are identified early. For example, women are particularly at risk after breaking up a violent relationship when they are exposed to threats of murder, and among other risk factors are the presence of jealousy, possessiveness or psychological disorders in the perpetrator, as well as his tendency to alcoholism and possession of weapons (Ombudswoman 2022).

The Covid-19 pandemic has further raised awareness of the need to strengthen prevention and support for victims of violence, in order to reduce the rate of femicide and ensure the safety of women in their homes. Most EU member states have recorded a significant increase in femicide in the post-pandemic period. The reason for this was that during the pandemic, women were forced to remain confined in the same space with the perpetrators, which increased the perpetrators' sense of control. This resulted in an increase in cases of intimate partner violence, but not femicide. However, after the lifting of restrictive measures, a significant increase in the number of femicides was observed (Vasiljević 2024).

6. Sanctioning Femicide

Legal solutions to combat femicide are usually based on two different approaches. Femicide is either considered a gender-neutral murder or a form of a gender-based violence (Vasiljević 2024). In this context, until the 21st century, femicide was not legally defined in many countries, for reasons that were mainly based on three arguments. First, it was argued that femicide was already covered by existing laws defining murder and its more serious forms. Second, there was a suspicion that defining femicide as a separate criminal offense might be against the principle of legality. Third, it was feared that the introduction of femicide into legislation could lead to discrimination based on sex (Maršavelski 2023). However, current trends show that femicide is explicitly prohibited in Croatia, and five other European countries: Malta, Cyprus, Belgium, North Macedonia and Spain (Vasiljević 2024).

One of the most significant cases that led to the introduction of the concept of femicide into criminal legislation, primarily in Latin America, was the case of *González and others v. Mexico*, also known as the Cotton Field case. The court found Mexico responsible for violations of women's rights, including the right to life, the prohibition of discrimination, the right to a fair trial, and the right to judicial protection.

This was the case of three young women, two of whom were minors, who were raped and killed in a cotton field in 2001, while the bodies of five other women were found in the same place under unexplained circumstances. It is very significant that the court in this case concluded that the victims were chosen precisely because of their gender. Also, the court criticized the Mexican authorities for judicial inefficiency, and insufficient protection of women victims of violence. At the same time, the court clearly said that Mexico is responsible for violating its positive obligation to make the necessary efforts to find and punish the perpetrators (Maršavelski 2023).

This judgment sets a precedent in international law in the fight for the protection of women's rights and the suppression of gender-based violence, since the court adopted a gender perspective for the first time in history (Vasiljević 2024).

7. The Need for the Introduction of the Concept of Femicide Into the Legislation: The Example of Croatia

7.1. Amendments to the Criminal Code

The eighth amendment to the Croatian Criminal Code (hereinafter: Criminal Code) introduced a new criminal offense called “aggravated murder of a female person”, all with the aim of punishing femicide more severely. Thus, Article 111a of the CC prescribes a prison sentence of at least ten years or a long-term prison sentence for anyone who commits gender-based murder of a female person. It is also prescribed that when establishing the criminal offense of aggravated murder of a female person, it will be taken into account whether the offense was committed against a close person, a person whom the perpetrator has previously abused, a vulnerable person, a person who was in a relationship of subordination or dependence, or an act committed in circumstances of sexual violence or because of a relationship that placed women in an unequal position or that there are other circumstances that indicate that it is a case of gender-based violence.

In Article 87, the legislator added and defined gender-based violence against women as violence that targets women because of their sex or that affects women disproportionately. In addition, it is also determined that gender-based violence will be taken as an aggravating circumstance for any criminal offense.

7.2. The Current Practice of Sanctioning Femicide

It is evident from the existing judicial practice so far that the typical forms of femicide are cruel murders of women, murders of women who are vulnerable due to pregnancy, murders of female children, murders of close women whom the perpetrator has previously abused, murders of women out of wanton revenge, murders of women for other base motives, such as jealousy, the murder of a woman in order to cover up another criminal offense against her (e.g. rape), which were already covered by the legal norm and qualified as grave murders prescribed in Article 111 of the Criminal Code even before the amended law in question.³

So, what is the problem then? In order to answer that question, I will present the research conducted by Škorić and Rittossana on a sample of 20 judgments of county courts as first instance courts, 18 judgments of the Supreme Court and two judgments of the High Criminal Court as second instance courts and five judgments of the Supreme Court as a third instance court in connection with the criminal offence of aggravated murder where the analysis included 20 perpetrators and 22 victims.

³ Article 111 of the Criminal Code stipulates that a minimal prison sentence of 10 years or a long-term prison sentence will be given to the a person who kills another person in a cruel or insidious manner, kills a person who is particularly vulnerable due to their age, serious physical or mental disability or pregnancy, kills a close person or kills a person whom he/she has previously abused out of self-interest, wanton revenge, hatred or other base motives, and a person who kills another for the purpose of committing or concealing another criminal act.

The analysis of judgments showed that the perpetrators received a prison sentence in 73% of cases, while a long-term prison sentence (prison sentence of more than 20 years) was imposed in 27% of cases. Moreover, in as many as half of the cases (for 11 victims), the courts sentenced the perpetrators to prison terms below the legal minimum of ten years.

Also, the research showed that the courts punish much more leniently in cases where the criminal offence was defined as an attempted criminal offence. Thus, in one case where the defendant inflicted multiple injuries on the victim by stabbing her in different parts of the body with a knife with a ten and a half centimetre long blade while she was sleeping, the court nevertheless decided to apply the institute of legal mitigation because the victim did not die.⁴ This decision of the court is, to say the least, paradoxical, considering that the court itself pointed out that the defendant took all the necessary actions to deprive the victim of her life.

It is also very doubtful that the court took as a mitigating circumstance the fact that there were long-term disturbed marital relations between the deceased and the defendant in the case where the perpetrator, who used an automatic rifle, shot at the car in which his wife, her partner and three children were located.

Among the other mitigating circumstances that the courts took into account when sentencing, “significantly reduced accountability” and “reduced accountability” prevail (found in a total of fifteen out of twenty perpetrators), then lack of previous conviction and impaired health (which was found in seven out of a total of twenty perpetrators) and expressed regret and/or remorse (found in four defendants). It is significant that participation in the Homeland War was taken as a mitigating circumstance for as many as seven out of a total of twenty perpetrators in the cases that were the subject of analysis (Rittossa and Škorić 2022).

7.3. The Need to Introduce the Offence of Femicide into the Criminal Code

The reason for introducing femicide as a separate criminal offense stems from the report of the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO 2023), in which it is pointed out that a detailed analysis of femicide in Croatia showed “insufficient application of legal measures for the protection of women from the violence of their intimate partners” and generally expresses criticism for the light punishment in cases of violence against women. We have also been criticized for the gender-neutral nature of the relevant laws and policies (GREVIO 2023). Therefore, the problem lies in the lack of a deeper understanding of the concept of gender-based violence against women as well as its consequences (Vasiljević 2024).

However, the public has raised the question of whether the introduction of femicide as a separate criminal offense is lawful or is such a provision discriminatory against men and therefore unconstitutional? The judges of the criminal department of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Croatia even objected to the mentioned provision, stating that women’s lives are given more value than men’s

4 Paragraph 2 of the Article 34 of the Criminal Code stipulates that the perpetrator of an attempted criminal offense may be punished more leniently.

lives, and they referred to the Constitution and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights.

First of all, the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *Opuz v. Turkey* confirmed that violence against women is a form of discrimination based on gender and disproportionately affects women (Vasiljević 2024). Therefore, the fact that femicide is a gender-based murder implies that in the case of such a murder, it is actually discrimination based on gender (Maršavelski 2023).

It is also important to refer to Article 4, paragraph 4 of the Istanbul Convention, which stipulates that special measures necessary to prevent and protect women from gender-based violence shall not be considered discrimination.

Special measures are nothing new in our legislation. For example, the Criminal Code already contains the gender-based criminal offense of female genital mutilation (Article 116 of the CC), and the constitutionality of that provision has never been questioned (Maršavelski 2023).

Also, the Institute of special measures is provided for in the Law on Gender Equality (hereinafter: LGE). Special measures are not considered discrimination and are defined as specific benefits that enable people of a certain sex to participate equally in public life, eliminate existing inequalities or ensure rights that were previously denied to them (Article 9 of the LGE).

So, what the state can do in order to reduce this horrifyingly high number of femicides is to apply the institute of special measures, and that is what it did by defining femicide as an aggravated murder of women in the law. In addition, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) recommends recognizing femicide as a special criminal offense in order to increase its visibility within the legal framework (Vasiljević 2024).

In any case, the introduction of femicide into the Criminal Code enables more precise statistical monitoring and punishment of such crimes and sends a strong message about zero tolerance for violence against women. However, including something in the law is nowhere near the end of the process, and change cannot be expected to come overnight.

For many years now, the Ombudswoman has pointed out that the Croatian system of combating violence against women and domestic violence is insufficiently focused on prevention, education and addressing the causes of violence, and that it mainly relies on sanctions as the primary response to violence. Such an approach, which relies too much on the consequences, while ignoring the causes, results in an overload of the police and justice system. Due to the overload, the police and the judiciary are losing much-needed sensitivity to gender-based violence. The above results in victims not feeling safe to report violence until the situation escalates to the level of a criminal offense. Therefore, it is completely wrong to look at femicide only as a legal problem and to reduce it to legal norms and sanctions, because by doing so we ignore complexity of gender-based violence as a social problem. Such a wrong approach often results in mild punishments for the perpetrators and an insufficiently sensitized approach towards the victims. The lack of preventive measures, education of experts and programs for resocialization of offenders further contribute to this problem. A balance needs to be struck between

repression and prevention, where repression should be the last line of defence, while the sanctions should reflect the gravity of the crimes committed.

Although the primary reaction to gender-based violence, as well as to other forms of criminality, is criminal sanction, due to the sensitivity of this topic, it is important to work more on education and raising awareness of children, women, men, and judicial and police officials. Also, the responsibility lies with the state, which has a positive obligation to protect the victims of violence. This includes implementing an effective criminal procedure to prevent further violence before and during the procedure, providing full protection and support to the victim, and imposing appropriate sentences that should have a special effect as well as general-preventive one.

8. Conclusion

Femicide, as the most extreme form of gender-based violence, represents a deeply rooted problem in society that requires a comprehensive approach and urgent interventions. Numerous studies and research indicate alarming statistics on murders of women around the world, confirming the widespread presence of violence against women, which is no longer possible to sweep under the carpet. Therefore, when studying the phenomenon itself as well as possible solutions for its prevention, it is important to keep in mind that femicide is not just a case of an individual murder, but a symptom of a wider social problem of women's inequality, which stems from deeply rooted gender-normative and cultural patterns as well as patriarchal power structures in society. Since femicide has devastating consequences not only for the victims, but also for their families, communities and society as a whole, the priority should be a pragmatic and comprehensive analysis of the causes of such an act, as well as finding timely and effective protection. The reaction of the justice system in situations where, unfortunately, femicide has already been committed plays an important role in all of this, and it is significant that it is named and incriminated as a special criminal offence. In this way, it will be possible to make the public aware of the prevalence of the problem, as well as more adequately sanction the criminal offense which within itself encompasses discrimination on the basis of sex.

It is therefore extremely problematic that, contrary to the seriousness of this criminal offense, murders committed against women are often met with mild sanctions, consequently stimulating a culture of violence and injustice. The analysis of court practice in Croatia shows the imaginativeness of judges who found various reasons to justify violence against women, thereby effectively denying respect for the fundamental human rights of victims who should be especially protected. Thus, the mere fact that the crime remained an attempted crime should not be sufficient to mitigate the punishment, nor should "disturbed intimate relationships" be a justification for a man to kill a woman, which had exactly in this way been cited as a mitigating circumstance. By introducing femicide, as a special criminal offense, stricter sanctions for this severe form of gender-based violence should be ensured, regardless of the judges' personal views.

In addition to special incrimination, it is necessary to take further urgent steps to prevent and sanction femicide, including improving access to justice for victims, educating the public about gender equality and violence prevention, and ensuring support and protection for all women. The very existence of gender-based violence represents a key obstacle for further development and progress of the entire society because society can realize its full potential only if all members are equal and safe to seek effective protection in the event of a threat of death on any possible basis. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the state itself to sanction serious violations of the rights of its citizens and thus protect the legal order itself from further violations. It remains to be seen what will be the consequences of introducing femicide as a separate criminal offense, but in any case it is only the first of many steps that must be taken in order to achieve full equality for women, whose existence is an absolute necessity and a need in modern society.

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Legal Analysis of Murders of Women in Socialist Yugoslavia: Comparison with Today's Concept of Femicide

Mentor: Associate Professor, Jelena Kasap

jkasap@pravos.hr

Faculty of Law Osijek, University of Josip Juraj Strossmayer in Osijek

Abstract

This research is primarily focused on the normative regulation of murder in socialist Yugoslavia with the aim to evaluate it in the context of gender-based murders of women, i.e. femicide. The incidence of murders in the legal sphere will be analysed through earlier statistical and phenomenological research on murders, with a focus on the murders of women and the motives for committing them. The research results will be compared with the regulation of femicide and the prevalence of femicide in modern legal theory and practice. The purpose of the paper is therefore to determine the incidence and frequency of murders of women caused by gender-based violence in the countries of socialist Yugoslavia and to detect the characteristics of femicide, which has been recognized as a separate criminal offense only decades after the breakup of Yugoslavia in some countries. By comparing the results of the aforementioned statistical and phenomenological research, we will finally try to explain the extent to which the analyzed murders of women in the observed period contained elements of gender-based murders and to what extent this is consistent with today's regulation of femicide.

Key Words: femicide, Yugoslavia, murder, gender-based violence, modern law.

1. Introduction

Socialist Yugoslavia (SFRY) made significant contributions to gender equality; it granted women the right to vote, ensured the right to abortion, and finally equalized the position of women with men in terms of their civil rights. Emphasis in numerous researches on the position of women in society was placed on gender equality in terms of rights, especially in the context of female workers (Željko 2014:39). Nevertheless, it would be wrong to talk about socialist Yugoslavia as a country that solved the problems of patriarchy, something that the authors of the time were also aware of. At that time, the idea of femicide or gender-based violence in general, had not yet been developed. This, in turn, means that academic research on this topic during the *period in question* is sporadic, that is, that gender

and the murders of women are mostly mentioned only as a secondary topic in more general research on murder and criminality.

The purpose of this paper is to determine the prevalence and frequency of murders of women caused by gender-based violence in the countries of socialist Yugoslavia and to detect the characteristics of femicide, which has been recognized as a separate criminal offense only decades after the breakup of Yugoslavia in some countries. In this sense, we will try to interpret the relevant literature from that period of time.

In the first part of the research, the normative framework that existed in socialist Yugoslavia will be presented through the prism of the possible application of the then legislation to the murder of women. Then, statistical and phenomenological data from research conducted at that time will be presented, and it will be shown whether elements of femicide can be recognized in the mentioned research results. Finally, the research results will be compared with the regulation and prevalence of femicide in modern legal theory and practice.

First, we need to define femicide. The most accepted definition is that femicide is the killing of a female person because she is a woman (Rittossa and Škorić 2021:15), that is, that femicide is actually a form of gender-based violence that is often committed by a woman's partner or ex-partners and "...it is usually preceded by continuous abuse, threats, intimidation, sexual violence and situations in which women have less power and less resources than their partner" (Blažinović Grgić 2022).

Some specific types of murders that are considered femicide would be murders of women as a result of domestic or intimate partner violence, torture and misogynist murders of women, murders of women due to so-called "honour", targeted murders of women in armed conflicts, dowry-related murders of women, murders of women because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, murders of Aboriginal and indigenous women because they are women, female infanticide and gender-based femicide, murders resulting from female genital mutilation, murder of witches and murder of women in the context of organized crime (Gryzb, Naudi and Marcuello-Servós 2018:22-23). We can actually see femicide as a collective term that includes all these types of murders.

Croatia is one of the countries that introduced femicide as a criminal offense as the aggravated murder of a woman, which is defined in Article 111a of the Criminal Code (Official Gazette 36/24) as a gender-based murder of a female person. This article of the Code also states that when establishing a criminal offense, it will be taken into account whether the offense was committed against a close person, a person whom the perpetrator has previously abused, a vulnerable person, a person in a relationship of subordination or dependence, or whether the offense was committed in circumstances of sexual violence or because of a relationship that puts women in an unequal position or whether there are other circumstances that indicate that it is gender-based violence. The mentioned situations, often characterising femicide, will also be useful as guides in recognizing the elements of femicide, both in the legislation of socialist Yugoslavia and in statistical and phenomenological data.

It is also worth briefly touching on the criticism that the introduction of femicide as a criminal offense represents discrimination on the basis of sex or gender. It is true that the introduction of the criminal offense of killing women would in itself be discriminatory. Here, however, we are talking about the gender-based murder of a woman, which is actually "...the result of the perpetrator's discriminatory treatment" and therefore we cannot talk about the criminal offense of femicide as a discriminatory legal provision (Maršavelski and Moslavac 2023:318).

2. Presentation of the Normative Regulation of the Criminal Offense of Murder and Analysis of Judicial Practice during the Period of Socialist Yugoslavia

Criminal law in socialist Yugoslavia was regulated through four time periods. The first period refers to the period from 1945, when the Second World War ended and the socialist government was established, until the adoption of the Criminal Code - the general part in 1948. Then the second period refers to the time from 1948 to 1951, when the complete Criminal Code was adopted. The third period then refers to the period of validity of the complete code, which lasted until 1977, when the new Criminal Code of the SFRY and the Criminal Codes of individual republics and provinces were adopted, and the fourth period began, which lasted until the dissolution of Yugoslavia (Bačić 1986:83-84). Given the short duration of the first two periods and the lack of relevant legal sources for the issue of murder of women, this presentation of the normative regulation of this criminal offense will focus on the second two periods.

The Criminal Code adopted in 1951 represents the first complete codification of the criminal law of socialist Yugoslavia (Bačić 1986:86). According to the then Constitution, only the federal government was authorized to adopt the Code, while the jurisdiction of the individual republics in criminal matters was limited to the determination of individual criminal offenses and sanctions for them, with the proviso that they were not allowed to change the regulations of the federal government on individual criminal offenses and sanctions (Sržentić and Stajić 1961:73-74). Since we are only interested in criminal offenses against life, for this period the most important focus for us is on the Criminal Code itself.

Looking at the crimes against life listed in the Code, the first among them is murder listed under Article 135. This article, in addition to ordinary murder, also prescribes the types of aggravated or qualified murder.⁵ The forms of the crime of aggravated murder that are relevant to the subject of the research, and are regulated by criminal legislation, are murder in a cruel or insidious manner, and murder for self-interest, for the purpose of committing or concealing another criminal offense, for wanton revenge or for other base motives (Tahović 1962: 263). The Criminal Code also recognizes the criminal offenses of murder on the spur of the moment and murder by negligence (Tahović 1962:268-269), but elements of femicide are not recognized in them because such murders cannot be gender-based.

⁵ Ordinary murder refers to any murder that is not specifically defined in the Code as another murder (Tahović 1962:264).

In the continuation of the research, an attempt was made to determine the motives of the murders of women on several representative cases from legal practice, which from the perspective of this research could correspond to gender-based violence.

The stated motive can be determined in the interpretation of the court decision of the Kraljevo District Court (Nikolić-Ristanović 1987:189). In this case of femicide in a cruel manner, the married defendant killed his sick lover (whom he believed had infected him with a venereal disease) by hitting and biting her all over her body while cruelly enjoying her suffering, while at the same time he was inserting a wooden roller into her genitals and performed lewd acts on her with his genitals. In this case, we can recognize the elements of the perpetration of this criminal offense that can be equated with a gender-based murder of a woman, especially considering that the offense was committed in circumstances of sexual violence. Nikolić-Ristanović in her research on homicide against women, explains how, since women are on average physically weaker than men, men as killers sometimes deliberately choose those methods of violence that allow them to enjoy the victim's helplessness and the suffering it causes her, and which at the same time cause the victim long-term suffering because they rarely lead to her immediate death (Nikolić-Ristanović 1987:188-190). This increases the chance that the murder of a woman will be qualified as aggravated murder, that is, murder in a cruel or insidious manner.

Elements of femicide can also often be found in murders with base motives.⁶ Some of the frequent base motivations (in addition to self-interest, reckless revenge and the execution or concealment of another criminal act) are hatred, malice, envy, sexual motivations and the like (Tahović 1962:266). In all these motives, elements of gender-based violence can be found when they are aimed at the murder of women, with the exception of murder for the purpose of committing or concealing another criminal offense, because murders for these reasons are usually not initiated in the context of intimate and family relationships (Rittossa and Škorić 2021:15).

Jealousy also often appears as a motive, that is, a motive for murders of women. Thus, it was established that in the period from 1946-1955 in the Republic of Croatia, murders due to jealousy were predominantly committed by men⁷ (Makra and Markovinović 1959:110), and that in cases of murders caused by imaginary

6 Article 38 of the Criminal Code stipulates that the court will take into account mitigating and aggravating circumstances when determining the punishment for the committed criminal offense (Tahović 1962:113). Thus, the reason or motive for committing a criminal offense can be taken as a mitigating or aggravating circumstance when sentencing, but only when they are not derived from the very concept of a specific criminal offense. So, for example, in the case of the crime of aggravated murder based on base motivations, these base motivations cannot be taken as an aggravating circumstance when determining the punishment (Tahović 1962:119), but they can in other criminal offenses.

7 It should be emphasized that women also often kill their partners because of jealousy or their adultery, that is, jealousy is not exclusively, and according to some studies not even predominantly, a male motive for murder (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, McCullars and Misra 2012:456).

adultery without real grounds, the perpetrators were exclusively men, and the victims exclusively women (Makra and Markovinović 1959:95). It can therefore be established that murders out of jealousy as a base motive, often overlap with femicide.

Makra and Markovinović describe a typical case of murder out of jealousy where a young man courted a girl whom he previously met at a dance, and later, since his advances were rejected and the girl quit her job and went back to her village to escape him, he started telling others that she got pregnant by him, in the hope that that this will prevent her from marrying someone else. He ends up being ridiculed by his colleagues for his lies and in order to save his “male honour” he decides to kill the girl. He takes a rifle and hides by the well in her village, waiting for her to come for water, and when she appears, he shoots a bullet from the rifle into her head (Makra and Markovinović 1959:98-99). This example of murder out of base motives, i.e. jealousy, contains elements of femicide, which can be especially seen in the fact that the killer mentally abused the victim for some time before the murder with his persistent advances for intimacy and lying to others about their relationship, and as we said before, femicide is often preceded by a period of abuse.

When in 1977 the new federal Criminal Code of the SFRY came into force, new Criminal Codes came into force in all republics and autonomous provinces of Yugoslavia. The reason for this is the period of decentralization that began with the constitutional amendments adopted in 1971 and the new Constitution adopted in 1974, which regulated the relationship and division of powers between the federal and republican (provincial) authorities in a new way (Bačić, 1986:87). Accordingly, in the domain of substantive criminal law, there is a division where the federal government retains its power to enact general provisions of substantive law and regulate some specific criminal offenses listed in the Constitution, while the republics and provinces gained the authority to enact provisions on all other criminal offenses, which also included crimes against life (Bačić, 1986: 91-92).

Regarding the regulation of the mentioned criminal acts, ordinary murder and murder in a cruel or insidious manner, it can be stated that the same normative regulation in all republics and provinces was the same as it was previously regulated in the Criminal Code (Buturović 1978:4). Differences existed in the cases of murder for self-interest, for the purpose of committing or concealing another criminal act, for wanton revenge, or for other base motives. Thus, in SR Croatia, the text of the code stipulated that motives (apart from self-interest, the purpose of committing or concealing another criminal offense and wanton revenge) must be extremely base and not only generally base (Buturović 1978:4). This means that the Croatian code was more lenient towards the perpetrator (Buturović 1978:5), which is especially relevant for the issue of murders of women, because some motives such as jealousy were not accepted as base enough by the courts (Bačić 1982:82), and as we pointed out earlier, murders of women due to jealousy can often be characterized as femicides.

Murder with reckless violent behaviour was introduced as a new criminal offense in the Criminal Codes of all republics and provinces with the same definition: as deprivation of life due to reckless violent behavior (Bačić 1982:73; Buturović 1978:8-9). Violent behaviour is defined in the code as: grossly insulting another

person, abusing another person, perpetrating violence against another person or other particularly insolent or reckless behaviour if it endangers the peace of citizens, and the circumstances of the perpetration of the offence or perpetrator's previous life indicate exaggerated behaviour of the perpetrator or a propensity to such behaviour (Bačić 1982:73-74). When such behaviour is reckless, that is, when it exceeds the "regular" measure of violence (Bačić 1982:74), and ends in murder, we can say that a qualified form of murder has occurred. This criminal offense could contain elements of femicide, especially when taking into account the definition of violent behaviour as behaviour in which the perpetrator of such violence has a propensity for it, and murders of women in marriage are often the culmination of long-term marital conflicts and disturbed marital relations (Dundović 2007:40; Pandurović et al. 1988:127; Rittossa and Škorić 2021:18-19; Vuković 1982:166-169).

There are also some types of murders that were regulated in only one or a few republics or provinces. SR Slovenia thus recognized murder by several persons who joined together to commit the criminal offense and murder in the presence of particularly mitigating circumstances, and SR Serbia and SAP Kosovo recognized criminal offenses of assisting a minor in the commission of a qualified murder and preparatory actions for a murder act (Buturović 1978:8-10; 12). Preparatory actions for a murder act is actually the only one of these criminal offenses that would be relevant to femicide. It is actually a legal regime that is stricter for potential murderers in general, so that it can certainly be used against those who plan to kill a woman, that is, commit a femicide.

3. Statistical and Phenomenological Presentation of Murders of Women

Statistical and phenomenological research in the era of socialist Yugoslavia rarely focused exclusively on criminal offenses against women, and thus on various forms of murder of women. Most of the data that will be analysed in this part are the result of different studies focusing on the number and types of murders, and only partially and sporadically touch on the issue of the gender of the victim.

Makra and Markovinović's research on murders in the Republic of Croatia represents one of the first and most comprehensive studies on murders in socialist Yugoslavia. The research analysed all criminal acts of murder committed in the Republic of Croatia from 1946 to 1955 (Makra and Markovinović 1959:3). Focusing on the relationship between the female victim and the killer, the first thing that the authors mention is the fact that there were 15 murders of mothers by their sons. The authors point out that mostly sons kill their parents because of parental tyranny, especially the father's; but in some cases when a son was the tyrant and killed a parent, that parent was most often his mother (Makra and Markovinović 1959:109-110). In relation to other levels of the relationship between women as victims and their murderers, which they analyzed in their research, Makra and Markovinović conclude that men killed more often out of jealousy than women, that there were several murders among in-law relatives, such as the mother-in-law by the daughter-in-law, and that in romantic relationships most often the murdered girls were "...those who rejected the offered love or marriage" (Makra and Markovinović 1959:110-111).

Pešić provides more detailed information on the number of murdered women and the reasons for their murders, stating that out of a total of 239 murdered women in Yugoslavia, 52 were murdered because of jealousy, 37 because of intolerance, 37 because of revenge⁸, 31 because of discord in marriage, and the rest for other reasons, such as self-interest, alcohol and removing obstacles (Pešić 1972:74). It was also established that women are less often victims of murder than men, except in cases of murder due to jealousy or discord in marriage, which the author explains by the fact that women generally were not as involved in social relationships as men, with the exception of intimate and marital relationships where they were equally involved, but also by the fact that “A man’s love for a woman serves, to a certain extent, as a kind of protection against encroachment on her bodily integrity” (Pešić 1972:75). This analysis is confusing and problematic: if a man’s love really worked preventively as described, wouldn’t we expect the number of women killed to be lower precisely in intimate and marital relationships?

Jealousy and disturbed marital relations are thus listed as the most common reasons for the murder of women in Yugoslavia. Looking again at the data from research in the Republic of Croatia, Makra and Markovinović point out that men often killed women who broke up with them because of their (men’s) sense of hurt pride, i.e., “male vanity”, and further claim:

This feeling has its roots in the belief in the supremacy of men over women. That is, from the still existing unequal position of men and women. A man has a hard time coming to terms with the fact that he was abandoned by a woman. People consider it somehow normal for a man to leave a woman, but not the other way around. If this happens to him, it is certain that he will be ridiculed by those around him, and that this will harm his social reputation. We believe that this social understanding of male honour has a significant role in the genesis of murders from this group, committed by male perpetrators (Makra and Markovinović 1959:97).

The authors recognized that this type of murder is gender-based (although they were unfamiliar with the use of that term) and find its source in patriarchy, which has taken root not only in the minds of individual perpetrators, but also in society as a whole. The authors also state that men were the ones who exclusively killed because of imagined adultery without any foundations (Makra and Markovinović 1959:95) and for rejections of their romantic offers (Makra and Markovinović 1959:98-99).

Similarly, research on murders in the SR Bosnia and Herzegovina found that men were the perpetrators in 79.5% of murders out of jealousy; that urban areas were more prone to these murders; that the killer and the victim were in a marital relationship in 45.5% of cases, and in 22.8% of cases in a love affair; and that the perpetrators came from all age groups (Criminal Institute of the Faculty of Law 1971:182).

As for murders in disturbed marital relationships, the same research in Bosnia and Herzegovina concluded that murders from this category were most often preceded by long-term conflicts, quarrels, threats, slander, hatred, insults, intolerance and the like, but did not connect these events with patriarchal beliefs, but

8 Not including the blood feud for which only 1 woman was killed.

only stated that the reasons were diverse (Criminal Institute of the Faculty of Law 1971:181). Salihu, who writes about murders in SAP Kosovo, recognises patriarchy and patriarchal beliefs as the source of murders, i.e. that the contact of patriarchal structures with progressive understandings leads to conflict, and that this is often a question of the authority of the head of the household who believes that accepting these progressive understandings is harmful and offensive (Salihu 1982:195). Pešić also sees the source of the murders in the patriarchy, claiming:

In some cases, men killed their wives, believing that they had a claim over the woman (i.e. ownership over the woman). This understanding sometimes came to the fore in relation to other family members as well. Guided by patriarchal beliefs and putting their honour above the lives of others, the murderers committed murders out of insult (Pešić 1972:65).

Pešić also blames this on the passivity of society mirrored in the failure of society to take the necessary measures to eliminate criminal situations when these suggested that they could lead to murders (Pešić 1972:67). Pešić also mentions “extreme beliefs” as another reason for these murders explaining how many people at that time believed in a sort of a right to kill another person, in some cases; in a sort of exaltation of individuals who kill bad individuals in folk literature; or “the influence of war” that normalized the taking of a human life, in the consciousness of many (Pešić 1972:66). In central Istria, some murders connected to superstition occurred due to the belief in the existence of witches (Makre and Markovinović 1959:231). The authors do not explicitly state that the victims were women, but since the witch (*štriga*⁹) is a female mythological creature, it can be assumed that they were probably femicides.

Returning to murders in the family and marriage, Pešić considers patriarchy to be the cause, claiming that the patriarchy in families has been often the cause for family conflicts, violence and, of course, murders. He therefore presents data claiming that his research shows that 80 women were killed by their husbands, 11 daughters by their mothers, 9 mothers by their daughters, 3 daughters by their fathers and 4 sisters by their brothers. He concludes that it is obvious that the murders of wives were the most common form of murders within a family (Pešić 1959:69).

The fact is, however, that numerous studies have established that in socialist Yugoslavia, women were less often victims of murder than men (Nikolić-Ristanović 1987:183). Such results were also obtained by research conducted in SAP Kosovo (Salihu 1982:144), SR Serbia (Vuković 1982:110) and SR Bosnia and Herzegovina (Criminal Institute of the Faculty of Law 1971:205), but, as mentioned before, murders of women were more violent (Nikolić-Ristanović 1987:188-190) and mostly committed by close relatives, specifically marital and other romantic partners.¹⁰

One of the rare studies from that era that exclusively included data on murdered women found that in 40.5% of cases the woman’s killer was her husband, in 10.8% of the cases it was her divorced husband, in 9.9% “...a boyfriend...”, in 4.9%

9 Translator’s note: *štriga* is a feminine gender noun

10 The data from the research in SR Serbia did not include homicides from the autonomous provinces.

her a partner she was not married to and in the same percentage, her son. Other male killers were a father-in-law, brother, neighbour etc., and out of the 4 female killers, 2 were the victim's daughters-in-law, 1 a female work colleague and 1 was the wife of her lover (Pandurović et al. 1988:126).¹¹ The authors also found that in almost half (48.5%) of the cases, the motive for the murders was a sexually-affective, due to jealousy or suspicion of the victim's infidelity, and in 18.8% of the cases, the murders were committed in an affective reaction due to intolerance, conflict and quarrel. The killer's alcoholism was determined as the reason for the murders in 12.8% of cases, and the victim's alcoholism in 3.9%. In 2.9% of cases, the motive for the murders was of a utilitarian nature, and in one case it was of a utilitarian-sexual nature (Pandurović et al. 1988:127). These data clearly indicate the existence of a gender element in the vast majority of murders of women, i.e., that the majority of murders of women were gender-based.

When it comes to the manner in which the criminal offence of murder of women was committed, they were most often carried out by the use of physical force, primarily with tool with a spike or a blade (most often a kitchen knife), which was found in 32.6% of cases, but also with a blunt object in 24.7% of cases and even by strangulation in 10.8% of cases. Firearms were used in 30.6% of cases. (Pandurović et al. 1988:127). These data partially coincide with the previously mentioned view that murders of women are often more violent, because methods are chosen that less often lead to the immediate death of the victim. Comparing this data with data on murders in general - such murders were committed with a knife in 36.9% of the cases, with a firearm in 18.8% of cases, with a blunt object in 18.7% of cases, with tools, most often an axe, in 16.5% of cases; and with hands in 7.6% of cases (Pešić 1972:34) - it can be seen that women were more often killed with blunt weapons and hands or by strangulation, than in murders in general, and the same applies to firearms, which more often bring immediate death. That's how Pešić claims "newborns and weak people are killed with hands" (Pešić 1972:34).

Finally, looking at women as murderers, it was found that they killed women less often than men (Konstantinović-Vilić 1984:218), but this does not mean that there were no cases of femicide committed by women in Yugoslavia. Thus, one situation was recorded where a woman killed her lesbian partner because she "annoyed" her (Konstantinović-Vilić 1984:212) and situations where a married woman who had never given birth to a child killed her pregnant friend with a gun and then removed the child from her womb (Konstantinović-Vilić 1984:214). In this second case, Konstantinović-Vilić point to the fault of social factors, that is, that the murder was committed in order to achieve social affirmation in the environment which expected "...from her to justify her function as a woman" (Konstantinović-Vilić 1984:214).

11 The authors reviewed data from the Institute of Forensic Medicine in Belgrade for the ten-year period from 1976 to 1985. In that period, 101 autopsies of murdered women were conducted (Pandurović et al. 1988:123-124).

4. Regulation of Femicide Today

Today, awareness about femicide as a serious social problem has increased, and this is primarily reflected in the changes to legislation in the region of the former Yugoslavia. In 2023, North Macedonia became the first country in the former Yugoslavia region to recognize femicide in its Criminal Code as a type of qualified murder (Beker 2023:59).¹² Similarly, on March 14, 2024, the Croatian Parliament voted to change its Criminal Code in order to introduce a new criminal offense under Article 111a “aggravated murder of a female person”, defined as gender-based murder of a female person (The Official Gazette 36/24).

There are also other new classifications of aggravated murder. The murder of a pregnant woman is explicitly recognized as a type of aggravated murder in Croatia (Rittossa and Škorić 2021:15), Serbia (Beker 2023:69), Montenegro (Beker 2023:51), Kosovo (Beker 2023:42) and North Macedonia (Beker 2023:59).¹³ Slovenia (Jakulin 2021:85) and Kosovo (Beker 2023:42) classify murder committed because of someone’s sex or gender identity as aggravated murder¹⁴, and in Croatia (Rittossa and Škorić 2021:15), the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Beker 2023:28) and in Brčko District (Beker 2023:31), hate-motivated murder as a hate crime is classified as an aggravated murder, which also includes murder as a hate crime against women¹⁵. Croatia (Rittossa and Škorić 2021:16), Montenegro (Beker 2023:51), and Serbia (Beker 2023:68) classify the murder of a family member who was previously abused by the perpetrator as aggravated murder; similarly, North Macedonia (Beker 2023:58) classifies domestic violence with fatal outcome as an aggravated murder, and Kosovo (Beker 2023:42) considers any murder of a family member as an aggravated murder. The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Beker 2023:28), Brčko District (Beker 2023:31), Serbia (Beker 2023:63) and Montenegro (Beker 2023:51) are the only ones that still classify murder due to reckless violent behaviour as an aggravated murder.

We will briefly refer here to “indirect femicide” which is understood as an event that is “...causing a death of a woman due to harmful and bad practices (related, for example, to abortion), or death due to neglect, abuse or intentional actions (such as, for example, trafficking in women)” (Maršavelski and Moslavac 2023:318). In Croatia, gender-based violence is explicitly listed as an aggravating

12 It covers the situation in which a woman or a girl who has not reached the age of 18 was murdered, in the context of gender-based violence (Beker 2023:59).

13 The mere fact that the victim is pregnant does not mean that the murder in question can be considered femicide. To convict a person for this criminal act, it is only necessary to prove that he killed a woman he knew to be pregnant, not that he killed her because she was a pregnant woman.

14 It should be emphasized that the murder of a person because of their sex or gender identity, as it is present in Slovenia and Kosovo, does not mean that Slovenia and Kosovo recognize femicide as a criminal offense, because femicide as the gender-based murder of a female person is a broader term, but this is certainly a good step towards recognition of femicide as a criminal offense and the prosecution of such an act in practice.

15 In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Brčko District, hate murder as a hate crime is listed separately, and in Croatia it is added as one of the explicitly listed base motives.

circumstance in Article 87, Paragraph 32 of the Criminal Code (The Official Gazette 36/24), and this provision should enable the criminal prosecution of indirect femicide, i.e. murders of women that cannot be qualified as aggravated murders, for example negligently causing the death of a woman or participating in a woman's suicide (Maršavelski and Moslavac 2023:318).

It is therefore evident that the normative framework for prosecuting femicide in most countries has improved since the time of Yugoslavia. However, the legal reality shows a different trend. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, 20 women were killed in 2020 and 2021 (EOF 2021:16), in Montenegro 4 (EOF 2021:21), in Serbia 46 (EOF 2021:28), in North Macedonia 10 (EOF 2021:26), and 2 women were killed in Kosovo in 2021 (EOF 2021:19). In the Western Balkans as a whole, 50% of femicide victims were killed by their husband or divorced husband, and 10% were killed by their partner or ex-partner (EOF 2021:4) ¹⁶. In Slovenia, on the other hand, in the period from 2014 to 2018, 68 women were killed, half of whom were killed by an intimate partner, and the rate of women killed per 100,000 inhabitants is 0.48, (EIGE 2021a), while in Croatia the number of women killed in the same period was 72, of which 60% were killed by an intimate partner, and the rate of murdered women per 100,000 inhabitants is 0.38 (EIGE 2021b). In comparison, in the European Union as a whole, only 29% of femicide victims were killed by their intimate partner (EIGE 2021a, EIGE 2021b).

It can therefore be seen that in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, women are still most often killed by their spouses. In addition, murderers are still, as a rule, persons who, before the actual femicide, abused the victim in various ways. Thus, in Croatia, for example, 70% of perpetrators of aggravated murder against a close person were previously convicted for violence against the victim, whom they later killed (Rittossa and Škorić 2021:18-19).

Also, violence against women is still extremely violent. Thus, a comparison of research in Serbia and North Macedonia showed that the types of physical violence against women are similar in both countries; these are "...slaps, beatings, pushing, pulling hair, bending arms, throwing various objects at the victim, strangling, hitting... kicking" (Čopić 2003:19). Therefore, violence against women is still most often committed with the use of physical force.

By comparing the data from various regions of Europe on the rate of female victims of intentional homicide in the female population, it can be seen that this rate is the highest in certain post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe. The highest rate of intentionally killed women in Europe was thus recorded in Latvia, where the rate is 4.08, followed by the Russian Federation, with a rate of 3.73, and in Moldova, where the rate is 2.04. Out of all former socialist countries of Europe, this rate is the lowest in Slovenia and North Macedonia, where the rate is 0.38. With the mentioned exceptions, there are not too many differences in the rate of murdered women between post-socialist countries and other European countries, nor between the rate of murdered women in the countries of former Yugoslavia and other post-socialist countries (Corradi 2021:25).

16 The Western Balkans is a term used collectively in this research for all Balkan countries that are not in the European Union, i.e. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Albania.

Finally, one cannot write about violence against women today without mentioning the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence from 2011, better known as the Istanbul Convention, which was signed and ratified by all countries of the former Yugoslavia that are members of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe 2024). According to Article 5 of the Convention, the Parties shall take the necessary legislative and other measures to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, punish and provide reparation for acts of gender-based violence (Council of Europe 2011). The Istanbul Convention thus has had a strong influence on the legislation of the countries of the former Yugoslavia, which can be seen, for example, in the fact that Croatia introduced into its Criminal Code not only femicide as a separate criminal offense¹⁷, but also specifically listed gender-based violence against women as an aggravating circumstance in Article 87 applicable for all criminal offenses for which a more severe punishment has not been explicitly prescribed (The Official Gazette 36/24), and it defined it as - violence directed at a woman because she is a woman or violence which disproportionately affects women - which is directly taken from Article 3 of the Convention (Council of Europe 2011).

5. Conclusion

Summarizing the results of previous statistical and phenomenological research on the murder of women in the context of gender-based motives by the perpetrators, we can conclude that femicide has been and remains a significant problem. We found that the normative regulation of femicide has improved since the era of socialism when there was no specific criminal offense related to the murder of women, and fewer criminal offenses for qualified or aggravated murder existed. Today, the countries of the former Yugoslavia qualify several types of serious and aggravated murders, such as hate murder, murder of a pregnant woman, murder within the family and, of course, gender-based murder or femicide, which, however, as a new criminal offense in Croatia and North Macedonia, is still a novelty and needs to be monitored in order to see how will it be applied in practice and in what way, and what the effect of that application will be.

Looking at the murders of women in Yugoslavia phenomenologically, we can conclude that jealousy and marital conflicts were the most common motives for the murders of women, and that the murders of women were most often preceded by a period of abuse of women, be it physical or psychological abuse, by their future killers, which is still the case today. The negative influence of patriarchy and

17 The Government of the Republic of Croatia, in its explanation to the Draft Law on Amendments to the Criminal Code, explicitly referred to Istanbul Convention, which "... imposes an obligation on the signatory states to sanction any act of physical violence against another person, including violence resulting in death of the victim", but also to statistical data indicating that in the period from 2020 to 2023, 11 judgements were adopted for a murder of a close person whom the perpetrator had previously abused, and that the victims were women in 9 cases, 6 of which involved the partner relations between the victim and the perpetrator, and in 3 case it was about the relationship between a mother and a

patriarchal beliefs about the position of women in the society and the family, as well as beliefs about the position of men and “male honour” is obvious.

It is interesting to note that the authors and researchers at the time were also aware of the harmful influence of patriarchy and that it was often recognized in different ways as the reason for committing murders, especially murders of women. At that time, the language of gender-based violence, as well as the concept of femicide itself, were not yet in use, but it is noticeable that even the authors of that time recognized elements of it in their research. Looking retroactively at their research, it is noticeable that their calls for a better normative regulation and increased awareness in general about gender-based violence, ultimately did result in the recognition of femicide as a separate criminal offense within the modern legislation of *ex-Yu* countries.

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Protection of Personal Integrity of Rape Victims in Criminal Proceedings: Analysis of Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights

Mentor: Professor Midhat Izmirlija

m.izmirlija@pfsaunsa.ba

Faculty of Law, University of Sarajevo

Abstract

The focus of this paper is the protection of the personal integrity of the rape victim during criminal proceedings. The paper starts with the definition of basic concepts - who is a victim, what rights are guaranteed to victims and the concept of secondary victimization - in relevant regional and international sources. Using an analytical approach, the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights are interpreted, with special attention given to the standards set by the European Court of Human Rights and its practice in terms of the protection of rape victims. The judgments that this paper focuses on are the following: *M.C. v. Bulgaria*, *Y. v. Slovenia* and *Gani v. Spain*. Furthermore, the paper analyses how secondary victimization can additionally traumatize rape victims during the entire judicial proceeding, as well as the role of the legal system in reducing the stress and trauma of victims during criminal proceedings. The aim of the paper is to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges that victims face in legal proceedings, as well as the identification of gaps in the existing legal systems. Noticing and adequately reacting to these shortcomings is essential for improving the legal protection of victims in criminal proceedings, while striving towards the main objective - ensuring justice and respect for human rights.

Keywords: rape victims, protection of personal integrity, secondary victimization, practice of the European Court of Human Rights.

1. Introduction

1.1 Defining Basic Concepts

Ever since victimology was founded by Hans von Henting (1948) and the first introduction of the term „victimology“ by Mendelssohn (1976), the focus has shifted away from the perpetrator and toward the victim. This change in focus points to the evolution of both legal and social approaches to the understanding of the concept of victims, their protection and the importance of their role in the legal system. Many international UN instruments, as well as regional ones such as the Council of Europe's and the European Union's, testify to this.

First of all, one should start from the very concept of a victim. *Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power* adopted in 1985, defines the victim in its first article as follows: “Victims” means persons who, individually or collectively, have suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial impairment of their fundamental rights, through acts or omissions that are in violation of criminal laws operative within Member States, including those laws proscribing criminal abuse of power. It is also necessary to mention *Directive 2012/29/EU* of the European Parliament and the Council, which provides a similar definition – “a natural person who has suffered harm, including physical, mental or emotional harm or economic loss directly caused by a criminal offence”. *Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power* also states what the state should provide victims – access to justice and fair treatment, restitution, compensation and assistance.

The Victims’ Rights Directive of the EU establishes minimum standards on the rights, support, and protection of victims and ensures that persons who have become victims are legally recognized as such, and that they are treated with respect, in a sensitive, appropriate, professional and non-discriminatory manner, respecting their legal status, i.e., their rights, as well as the rights of their family members, primarily to information, support and protection. Furthermore, for certain categories of victims, the EU adopted special rules that rely on the *Victims’ Rights Directive*, but also respond to the specifics and needs of victims of human trafficking, child victims of sexual exploitation and child pornography, and victims of terrorism.

Although *the European Convention on Human Rights* does not explicitly proclaim the principles and obligations of the states in this manner, this does not mean that the responsibility of the state to help victims does not exist. Namely, it is derived from the positive obligation of Member States to “secure to everyone within their jurisdiction the rights and freedoms defined in the Convention”, primarily through the following articles: Article 2 - right to life, Article 3 - prohibition of torture, Article 5 - the right to security and Article 8 - the right to private and family life. Article 6 is of particular importance as it, among other things, proclaims the right to a fair trial, i.e. the right to access the court and to have a trial within a reasonable time. The importance of the practice of the European Court of Human Rights lies in the fact that it tackles the issue of the importance of the position of victims in criminal proceedings. Also, in its decisions, the court refers to *Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims* and *the EU Directive 2012/29*, thus contributing to unification and achievement of a common objective – that victims have the right to justice and the right to protection from further victimization.

The concept of secondary victimization is provided by the *Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe Recommendation on Rights, Services and Support for Victims of Crime*. Although this *Recommendation* is not binding, this does not diminish its importance. Secondary victimization is defined as “victimisation that occurs not as a direct result of the criminal offence but as a result of the response of public or private institutions and other individuals to the victim.”

It is also necessary to mention *Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the Position of the Victim in the Framework of Criminal Law and Procedure* adopted in 1985. The *Recommendation* emphasizes

the fundamental function of criminal justice system in meeting the needs of the victims and protect their interests. It also mentions the need for greater attention in the criminal justice system to the physical, psychological, material and social damage suffered by the victim. It states that the measures taken in this regard do not necessarily have to be in conflict with other objectives of the criminal law and the procedure.

We are faced with an essential question here: If the protection of the rights of victims in criminal proceedings does not necessarily require compromising other principles, why do we so often encounter situations in practice where the rights of victims are unjustifiably neglected, in favour of the realization of other rights and principles in the criminal proceedings? Is there a possibility to act in a way that would achieve all the objectives of the criminal procedure? This question highlights the problem of balancing different interests and principles within the legal system, especially balancing the rights and protection of victims with the right of defense

2. Practice of the European Court of Human Rights

The European Court of Human Rights is of particular importance for victims, especially in cases where national courts are unable to ensure the protection and exercise of rights. In these situations, victims can seek legal protection in Strasbourg. Although the Court does not have the ability to systematically resolve problems of human rights violations, its jurisprudence develops from case to case (*case-law*) through a careful interpretation of the Convention. Decisions of the European Court are binding for the states and play a key role in correcting violations and removing harm, thus making the Court an authoritative source of judicial practice in the field of human rights protection.

Therefore, the topic of this paper titled “Protection of Personal Integrity of Rape Victims in Criminal Proceedings” will be presented through relevant articles of the Convention and significant standards that have been set by the European Court of Human Rights.

2.1. Prohibition of Torture

Decision of M.C. v. Bulgaria

Secondary victimization, also known as “the second rape”, in a broader sense implies a lack or inappropriate reactions toward victims of sexual assault that lead to a feeling of re-victimization (Cokell & King, 2002). The concept was first defined by academic research in the 1980s, sparked by criticism of women’s rights activists who criticized the way in which the police treated rape victims (Jordan, 2001).

Victimization can be understood as a social construct, subject to change. Two persons affected by the same criminal act might not be both considered victims in two different systems or at two different times. The criminal justice system is the one that evaluates which person is a “real victim” or “worthy of having the status of a victim”.

A notable case in this regard is *M.C. v. Bulgaria* from 2003. The applicant claimed that, when she was 14 years and 10 months old, on July 31 and August 1, 1995, she was raped by two men. The investigation established that there was not enough evidence that she was forced to have sexual intercourse. The European Court of Human Rights issued a decision in which it found a violation of Article 3 of the Convention, finding that the state did not fulfil its positive obligation to conduct an effective investigation, as well as the obligation to establish and effectively implement a system of criminal punishment for all types of rape and sexual abuse. During the investigation and the criminal proceedings, the analysis of the testimony of the accused and the victim revealed that there was not enough strong evidence to consider such an act as rape. The key challenges were related to the question of the applicant's consent and the extent of the resistance offered.

The conflicting statements of the applicant and the accused offered before the court in Bulgaria were not supported by solid, material evidence that would indicate the truth of their claims. In such a situation, the court was obliged to comprehensively and objectively approach the consideration of the factual situation. However, in this case, it seems that the national court only selectively approached the information and its qualification in making its final judgment.

On the one hand, as a relevant fact when making the decision, the court took into consideration the assertion of other persons who observed that the applicant was seen in a state of joy and happiness a few days after the disputed events, as well as that she was in the presence of one of the accused. Also, the absence of visible traces of resistance or struggle, as well as the lack of "direct" evidence pointing to an act of rape, was taken into account.

On the other hand, very important facts were not considered. First, that there was no confrontation between the defence witnesses, whose statements were contradictory. Second, that the court ignored the fact that the defendants intentionally deceived the applicant in order to take her to an isolated area and thereby create circumstances of coercion. Third, that the fact that the applicant was only 14 years old at the time, and that psychological experts emphasized the importance of taking this factor into account, were completely ignored.

Suzan Estrich mentions the term "real rape" - for rapes that are legitimate within the criminal justice process, but such cases are a non-representative minority of sexual assaults. It is most likely that the victim will "win the case" if the rape is clearly interpreted as violence, if the assailant was a stranger, if a weapon was used, if the victim offered resistance and suffered physical injuries that were documented (Estrich, 1987). It is important to note that the phrase "win the case" is used ironically, given the fact that even when the victim is successful in the dispute, she is often dissatisfied with the entire process and her treatment. However, most reported rapes do not fit this description, the parties know each other, external force, coercion or evidence is absent, and weapons are not present...

Both in the investigation and in the course of the proceedings, the court and the prosecutor focused on whether physical resistance was offered, relying on previous convictions in rape cases, where typical expressions of violence are mentioned - tearing of clothes and hitting the victim, delivering strong blows, causing bleeding of the victim, etc. Nonetheless, as psychological experts stated, there are

two known patterns of response from rape victims to their attackers: fierce physical resistance and numbness from fear. The second model is explained as a case when the victim is faced with the fact that there is no way to avoid the rape, so she accepts it, through a passive model of submission. It is clear that this does not negate her status as a victim and the act of rape itself, as it is enough that there is no consent. The concept of consent in the context of rape includes the ability of a person to express their consent to a sexual act in a clear and conscientious manner. The behaviour of the victim is of crucial importance for the existence or non-existence of the crime of rape. Depending on her consent or lack of consent, it is determined whether she will be considered a victim and whether a criminal offense of rape has occurred at all. Although this may also apply to some other criminal acts that contain coercion as a basic element in their execution, in the case of sexual offenses there is an important specificity. Numerous studies show that consent or the lack of it is often not expressed explicitly, but implicitly, in ways that are often non-verbal. Moreover, even verbal opposition will not always mean a lack of consent or indicate the use of coercion. Although today the attitude is that “no always means no”, when it comes to rape, in practice this is not always the case. There is a complex issue of delimiting consent and the lack of it, which creates further problems in proving the crime of rape (Stojanović, 2016).

The lack of consent makes the very act of sexual intercourse involuntary, regardless of the presence or absence of physical resistance. The protection of the sexual autonomy and integrity of each person is based on this. Investigative authorities and prosecutors, in the absence of “direct evidence”, could not conclude that there was no consent of the victim, and that there was no criminal act. However, they completely ruled out the possibility that the applicant did not consent to sexual intercourse and took the position that in the absence of evidence, it would not be possible to prove whether that the perpetrators had understood that the applicant did not consent.

If it is necessary to be “real” for the conviction of rape, then perhaps an even more vital condition appears: the expectation that the rape victim must be an “unequivocal victim”, as stated by Kim Stevenson. The victim’s behaviour must be in line with the “public and legal perceptions of the expected conduct and behaviour of the stereotypical rape victim”. The legal understanding of such expectations is neither modern nor realistic. It can be concluded that both the law and the entities that apply it strengthen and support “the stereotypical ideal of female vulnerability and the patriarchal concept of woman as property” (Stevenson, 2000:351). Stevenson further states that “Victorian stereotypes and expectations of feminine behaviour have had and continue to have. profound implications for the ways in which modern women are regarded in the trial process” (Stevenson, 2000:245).

Considering all of the above, an important question is raised about the adequacy of the investigation in the context of the case of the rape of a 14-year-old girl. Did the lack of a “good enough victim” contribute to the lack of an adequate and efficient investigation? The existence of clear criteria for conducting an adequate investigation is imperative in order to ensure the proper exercise of rights and the protection of all participants in proceedings. Therefore, taking into account the consent to a sexual act is a vital aspect in assessing the legality and voluntariness of sexual relations. In the context of this case, it is indisputable that the

selective approach to the facts, the ignoring of relevant evidence and the failure to recognize the rights of the victims, together represent inadmissible omissions that prevented the path of the implementation of justice. Finally, the essential question arises as to whether the authorities would have acted differently if the applicant had been perceived as an “ideal victim”? The very possibility of asking this question emphasizes the necessity of improving national legal systems in order to ensure equal treatment of all participants in the judicial process, regardless of their status, position or personality.

Rape is an act of serious violation of basic human rights, including the right to personal integrity, physical and psychological integrity, as well as autonomy within the right to respect for private life. This indicates the special importance of respecting the human rights of the victims of such crimes. This particular case, dealing with shortcomings in the actions of national investigative and judicial authorities, highlights the significant role of omissions that contributed to the secondary victimization and additional trauma of the victim. Such shortcomings have resulted in obstructed access to justice for the victim, which is of crucial importance for the real perception and awareness of the problems present in the judicial systems when it comes to the treatment of rape victims.

2.2. The Right to Respect for Private and Family Life and the Right to a Fair Trial

Judgment Y. v. Slovenia

The idea of normative behavior and the response of a “real” rape victim to a “real” rape is projected to all levels of the procedure, from the investigation to the trial and finally the verdict. The procedures used in the proceedings differ from country to country; however, the common theme in all rape trials seems to be - to establish a sense of fairness (Bacik, Maunsell, Gogan, 1998)

In particular, the intention to discredit the witness-victim stands out as a basic means of defence. Matoesian argues that cross-examination by the defence in cases of rape is inevitable, especially in the area of categorization directed at trying to distinguish the actions of the victim on one hand, and the requirements of the normative and socially structured duty towards the victim. And it is precisely in that categorization between the actual behaviour of the victim and that which is normatively prescribed to her that a lot of “blaming” happens. The conclusion that is drawn is that testimonies about rape are systematically discredited, showing how the victim did not do what the constructed, valued, hypothetical i.e. *ideal victim* should do (Matoesian, 1993).

Article 6 of the Convention – the right to a fair trial, also includes the right of the accused to question the witnesses witnessing against them. The question is then in the scope of this right. The Convention itself does not limit this right, but the practice of the European Court of Human Rights has not made this right absolute. The Court established certain legitimate reasons that can be the basis for limiting the right to examine witnesses. In addition, the court establishes a requirement to establish a balance between the interests of the defendant, the criminal justice authorities and other participants in the trial (where “other participants in

the trial” includes also victim-witnesses affected by the criminal offence).

One of the notable judgments of the European Court is in the case of *Y. v. Slovenia*. This is the first petition where the Court weighed on one hand the defendant’s right to defence against the victim’s right to protection of private life and personal integrity. The applicant, then a minor Y. born in 1985, appeared before a court in Slovenia as a victim of sexual assault by a 55-year-old family friend. 3 years have passed since the mother filed the criminal complaint in 2002, until the first hearing. The applicant was heard at 4 hearings, where in the last 2 she was questioned personally by the accused - X. At the 4th hearing alone, she was asked over 100 questions, while X began the questioning with the following question: “Is it true that you told me that you can cry whenever you wanted and that everyone will believe you?”. During cross-examination, X asked a series of questions that were of an extremely degrading and insulting nature, intended to humiliate and upset the victim. In 2009, the Slovenian Court issued an acquittal with the application of *in dubio pro reo* principle. On the basis of Articles 3 and 8 of the Convention, the applicant turned to the European Court of Human Rights, claiming that the criminal proceedings that were conducted were contrary to the positive obligation of the defendant state to provide efficient and legal protection against sexual abuse, referring to long duration of the proceedings, unjustified delay, lack of impartiality as well as the traumatic consequences of violation of her personal integrity.

Considering the topic of this paper, the focus will be primarily on the violation of the personal integrity of the victim in this particular case.

In the light of this case, the Court stated that essentially Article 8 of the Convention implies the protection of the individual against arbitrary interference by the authorities, and certainly imposes the obligation of the state to refrain from such interference. In addition to this negative obligation, Article 8 also includes the positive obligation of the state to effectively respect private and family life. The question that was raised in this case was - had the state fulfilled its positive obligation to protect the integrity of the person?

The boundary between the positive and negative obligations of the state under Article 8 is not subject to precise definition. In both contexts, consideration must be given to striking a fair balance between the relevant competing interests. This would mean that on one hand there is the right of the accused to defence, and on the other hand the right of the victim to personal integrity. In this judgment, the Court also stressed the need to take special measures for the protection of the victim in cases involving sexual offenses and involuntary confrontation of the victim with the defendant, especially considering this case where the victim was a minor.

Of course, the right of the accused to cross-examine is legitimate and legal, and it is stated that the court should not have denied it. However, the question remains whether the court could have taken any measures to regulate the conduct of the accused in the given case, and if so, what kind of measures? The answer to this question is provided by *The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*, which the Court referred to in this particular case. Namely, *the Istanbul Convention* in Article 56 contains protective measures stating that the Parties shall take all “necessary legislative or other measures to protect the rights and interests of victims, including their special

needs as witnesses, at all stages of investigations and judicial proceedings". In addition, it enumerates further special examples of measures, the following being crucial for this case: ensuring protection - as well as the protection of their family and witnesses - from intimidation, retaliation and re-victimization, enabling victims to testify, in accordance with the rules of their national legislation, in the courtroom without presence - or at least without the presence of the accused - especially by using appropriate communication technologies, where they are available; ensuring that, wherever possible, the meeting between the victims and perpetrators is avoided on the premises of courts and internal affairs bodies. During its procedures, the National Court should cautiously determine where to set the limits of the right of the accused to challenge allegations and examine witness/es, as guaranteed by Article 6 of the Convention, among others. This should be evaluated on a case by case basis, comprehensively considering the factual situation, the behaviour of the accused, their treatment of the victim and finally the position of the victim.

In the context of the analysis of the facts of this case, it is important to highlight the report of the clinical psychologist, which describes in detail the symptoms of sexual abuse that the victim experienced since 2001. This report emphasizes the emotional, behavioural and physical consequences that manifested in the victim, with the prediction that the extent of these consequences will manifest itself in key developmental stages of her life, and especially in stressful situations. The Court commissioned a clinical psychologist in order to provide them with an expert opinion. This suggests that considering expert opinion when making judgements is indispensable. Given the obligations to protect the rights and integrity of the victims, the Court should consider expert opinions when conducting the proceedings. It is especially important to respect the opinion of a psychologist, considering the evident emotional consequences that the victim incurred, as well as victim's request that the accused be absent during her testimony. Ignoring the opinions of experts and failing to set boundaries during the interrogation directly contributed to the additional traumatization of the victim, as well as the violation of the basic principles of fairness and respect for human rights.

The trial process is described as a specific way of sexualizing the female body with a precise intention of disqualifying her testimony and the rape experience itself. Victims are assigned the role of participants in a sexualized scenario, which effectively disqualifies them from the status of the victim, leading to the denunciation of the responsibility of the accused in relation to the events in question. The defence strategy, which is also present in the given case of *Y. v. Slovenia*, is often and very successfully used to create doubts as to whether the applicant is actually a real victim. Given that the behaviour and character of the "ideal" victim, as an imaginary construct, are always consistent and non-judgmental, the defence tends to present unfavourable conclusions about any present inconsistency, any undesirable fact related to the victim, and with the aim of discrediting them, ultimately resulting in a full distinction between "a victim" and "a survivor". (Smart, 1990)

In this case, the offensive content directed at the applicant by the accused clearly exceeded the limits of the permissible right of defence. The court did not adequately respond to such behaviour, although it was necessary to take into account the specificity of the situation. It was crucial to see that this was a sexual crime, where the victim was under strong emotional and psychological stress, and

any further examination and reliving of the trauma could further threaten her emotional integrity. For the victim, the cross-examination is a process of sexualisation, seduction, intimidation and intimate exposure, which further reproduces the ideological basis of gender domination and, ultimately, challenges the elements of rape (Larcrombe, 2002).

According to the standards set by the European Court of Human Rights, it is necessary to balance the right of the accused to defence with the right of the victim to protection and respect of her integrity. It is important to point out that the right to defence does not imply absolute freedom and permission for the accused to insult or humiliate the victim. On the contrary, the right to defence is a means of providing the relevant facts of a given case and an instrument of argumentation of the accused against the allegations against him. Limiting the accused from making insulting remarks aimed directly at endangering the personal integrity and degradation of the victim would not reduce his right to defence, but would certainly protect the victim from additional trauma and violation of rights. When establishing this balance of interests, the Court thereby provides a guarantee for the realization of a fair trial for all its participants, and in addition special protection and support is provided to the victim of sexual violence. In the case of *Y. v. Slovenia*, the European Court of Human Rights found a violation of Article 3 and Article 8 of the European Convention.

2.3. Judgment of *Gani v. Spain*

A good example of establishing a balance between the interests of the right to defense and the protection of the victim's personal integrity is the judgment in *Gani v. Spain* case. Namely, the applicant complained that he was not given a suitable and adequate opportunity to challenge and question the victim, i.e. the only witness in connection with the crimes for which he was accused and later convicted. One of the mentioned crimes was the rape of the victim N. In this case, the first-instance court stopped the hearing due to the victim's inability to describe the events, where a medical expert was consulted and it was concluded that N was suffering from post-traumatic stress symptoms. That is why her statement was only read before the court.

The principle of adversariality is one of the basic principles of criminal procedure, no matter what national law is in focus. In addition, the basic interpretation of Article 6 of the Convention requires that the accused be given an adequate opportunity to challenge and examine the witnesses against him. Therefore, the positive obligation of the state to actively take all steps in order to ensure the aforementioned right of the accused stems from Article 6. Considering that the conviction was based exclusively or to a decisive extent on statements made by a person whom the accused did not have the opportunity to question, the question arises: Have the rights of defense been limited so much so as to make it incompatible with the guarantees provided for in Article 6 of the Convention?

However, if such rules are viewed and applied in an inflexible manner, a counter-effect could be produced, that is, they could be in conflict with the overall fairness of the procedure. The European Court in several judgments states the

following: “When the conviction is based exclusively or decisively on the statements of absent witnesses who were not available for cross-examination by the defence, the admission of those secondary statements as evidence will not automatically lead to a violation of Article 6 Item 1. In those cases, however, the Court must subject the procedure to a strict control. “When analysing this case, it is crucial to redefine the term “absent witness”, and shift the focus to “incompetent witness”, because the consequences of both cases are technically the same - there can be no cross-examination. Therefore, it is necessary to carefully consider all the factors that can disturb the balance of interests, but also to apply all the instruments that will restore it.

It is pertinent to focus attention on the following facts. First, special emphasis should be placed on the fact that this is a sexual crime, which leaves deep and serious psychological consequences on the victim. In the context of this case, there was a victim’s statement that was taken earlier in the proceedings and later read out. Then the accused was given the opportunity to dispute all the allegations of the statement. In addition, it is important to emphasize that this statement was supported by other material evidence as well. On the other hand, due to the serious psychological condition of the victim, which was medically confirmed, it was impossible to cross-examine her.

That is why it is crucial to be aware of the fact that the victim has a kind of combination of fear and mistrust. Fear of revenge, the reaction from her family, as well as the way the police and representatives of other state bodies in charge of controlling criminality will act, which can lead to jeopardizing the victim’s trust in their willingness to efficiently react, but also her belief that what she survived will really be constituted as a criminal act of rape (Ignjatović, Simeunović-Patić, 2011).

The National Court, taking into account all of the above, issued a guilty verdict without further cross-examination and confrontation with the accused, considering that the existing evidence was sufficient and that the accused was given an adequate opportunity to defend himself. This approach, according to the principles of the European Convention, is crucial for guaranteeing a fair trial and protecting the rights of victims, while on the other hand, simultaneously ensuring respect for the right to defense of the accused. Accordingly, the European Court of Human Rights, observing the fairness of the proceedings as a whole, decided that there were enough counterbalancing factors to conclude that the mere acceptance and reading of the victim’s statements as evidence, did not lead to a violation of the right to defense, that is, to a violation of the right to a fair trial guaranteed by Article 6 of the Convention.

In relation to the above, it is important to note that the outcome of the trial is also an important factor that contributes to the experience of secondary victimization. Orth distinguishes between 5 main punishment goals for rape victims - retaliation, recognition of victim status, confirmation of societal values, victim security, and societal security (Orth 2003). However, in order to achieve these goals, the fairness of the justice system is necessary, which still remains an ideal to strive for.

3. Conclusion

The consequences of a sexual crime on the victim are numerous, including both physical and psychological effects. In medical research, the following consequences have been detected: longitudinal changes in levels of mental health symptoms and substance abuse, a tendency to self-harm, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and depression symptoms. Research participants (also rape victims) described feelings of worthlessness, withdrawal, stress, anger, some of them could not leave their homes, experienced disturbed sleep and frequent panic attacks. At the same time, the consequences are not one-dimensional, reduced to the internal state of the victim. It is also necessary to mention the social reaction of the environment to the act of rape itself. It is the social reaction that can have a significant impact on the victim's recovery process. It is important to emphasize that the role of society in supporting and protecting victims of sexual violence is crucial, especially in situations where the victim withdraws and closes in on herself, manifesting disengagement in everyday activities. Such behavior can be a symptom of deep emotional traumas resulting from the lived experience of rape and can make the process of resocialization and reintegration into society much more difficult. When society does not provide adequate support to the victim, there is a serious risk of secondary victimization, which can have devastating consequences for the victim herself. Secondary victimization can further intensify the trauma and complicate the recovery process, creating additional obstacles in the way of overcoming the trauma. However, the community, including the police, social workers, doctors, lawyers, judges, mental health workers, are of vital importance for the victim's recovery. These people, although educated and successful, are not immune to internalized stereotypes and beliefs related to sexual assault. Such internalized belief systems are not simple or easy to change. Perhaps the attempts to reduce the experiences of "the second rape" should be focused not only on the existing education of the service providers, but also on the entire public, so that in the future the service providers would be relatively free of stereotypes related to rape, which are at the basis of negative attitudes towards the survivors. (Okan, 2001).

In this context, the judiciary, as a basic pillar of society has a key role in protecting and supporting victims of sexual violence. However, it is important to note that victims often need a lot of courage to turn to judicial authorities after such traumatic experiences. When a victim decides to seek justice through the criminal justice system, this represents an important step in their recovery process, and therefore the judiciary must ensure that the victim is protected from further victimization and is provided with adequate support and justice.

In the analysis of the cases we considered, we could observe the complex dynamics of the judicial process in the context of the connection between sexual violence and the protection of the victim's personal integrity. The danger of secondary victimization is real, especially when it is inevitable that the victim will relive the incurred traumas through the process. The extent to which she will be exposed to discomfort, stress and traumatization may also depend on the acting authorities.

Accordingly, Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and the European Council, in its Article 31, elaborates the support that should be available from the moment the victim reports a criminal offense, during the entire criminal

procedure and for some time after it ended. Special attention is dedicated to victims who have suffered significant damage due to the seriousness of the crime, requiring specialist support adapted to their needs. In terms of support to victims of rape and sexual abuse, Directive 2012/29/EU explicitly states that there is the necessity of providing emergency medical assistance, referral to a medical and forensic examination, as well as providing short-term and long-term psychological counselling and care for traumatized persons. Also, it states that rape victims are extremely vulnerable and especially susceptible to secondary victimization, intimidation and revenge, and that when assessing whether victims are exposed to such dangers, one should approach this very carefully. Adequate protection measures will be applied to such victims during the criminal proceedings, but of course while maintaining the guarantee and balance related to the rights of defense.

These principles are also confirmed by the Istanbul Convention, where the importance of harmonizing material legislation in order to prevent violence against women, the necessity of providing protection and support to victims, as well as the imperative of coordination and cooperation between relevant institutions and experts - are additionally highlighted.

In accordance with the mentioned documents, the need for additional training of experts is emphasized in order to achieve the stated objectives – i.e. efficient implementation of support and protection for victims of criminal acts.

However, the most important step is certainly the application of these standards, because only through their comprehensive application can it be possible to avoid, among other things, the mentioned shortcomings from the listed judgments. Therefore, Member States should take appropriate measures to implement the Istanbul Convention and the EU Directive into their national legislation and practice. In order to achieve optimal results and the end goal, the activities that should be undertaken consist of legislative reform, measures aimed at educating the police and other actors in the criminal justice system, implementation of practical measures aimed at supporting victims and facilitating their position during criminal proceedings.

It is also necessary to mention the involvement of civil society organizations in providing support and assistance to rape victims. During the 60s and 70s, the feminist movement drew attention to victims in the area of sexual violence and domestic violence, and in the 80s, national services for help and support for victims of crime were established in some countries. Such volunteer and non-governmental organizations have remained one of the most important factors in providing assistance and support to victims of crime in local communities around the world¹⁸ (Vujičić, 2016).

For the optimal recovery of victims of sexual violence, coordination and involvement of all elements of the social system is necessary. In this sense, support and cooperation between state authorities, judicial institutions, health services,

18 Some of the non-governmental organizations in the Republic of Serbia, established in order to support victims: Centar za podršku ženama (Women's Support Center), Autonomni ženski centar (Autonomous Women's Center), Žene za mir (Women for Peace), Viktimološko društvo (Victimology Society), Oaza sigurnosti (Oasis of Security), etc.

non-governmental organizations is key for the implementation of protective and supportive measures for victims. Only through joint coordination can guarantees be provided to victims that they will be protected, that they will be provided with appropriate support and, in the end, ultimate recovery.

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The Relationship Between Attitudes on Gender Equality with Political Attitudes and Sociodemographic Characteristics

Mentor: Professor Davorka Topić Stipić

davorka.topicstipic@ff.sum.ba

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Mostar

Abstract

The research analyzes attitudes about gender equality and political attitudes, and establishes their connection with sociodemographic characteristics. The sample was a convenience sample and it consisted of 50 subjects. All data in the research was collected by an online questionnaire that contained 81 items. The research results showed a statistically significant negative correlation between the final results on the gender equality scale and certain conservative attitudes (3 out of 7 conservative attitudes), while certain liberal attitudes were positively correlated with the final results on the gender equality scale (5 out of 7 liberal attitudes). The analysis of the results indicates that age and education do not play a statistically significant role in differences in the scale of attitudes about gender equality, while gender is a significant characteristic. Female respondents achieved statistically significantly higher results on the scale of attitudes about gender equality, in contrast to male respondents who achieved lower results. Respondents in the sample were mostly of liberal, i.e., progressive thinking regarding the attitudes about gender equality, and they mainly agreed with liberal progressive attitudes.

Keywords: gender equality, attitudes, politics, gender discrimination, sociodemographic characteristics.

1. Introduction

Each person has attitudes about different social issues. It can be said that different attitudes (if they are strong enough) are associated with a certain behavior of a person (Tesser, Martin and Mendolia, 1995; Petty, Haugtvedt and Smith, 1995; according to Zagrebina 2020). The scope of the connection between the attitude with the behavior depends on the topic that is the subject of that attitude. For example, when it comes to some local issues such as certain professional or local issues, strong attitudes can be associated with changes or conversely limited changes in that given area.

Researchers have observed the complexity of the relationship between various aspects of gender equality, such as women's political participation, access to education and economic resources for women (Caprioli et al. 2000; according to Ekvall 2013). Furthermore, there is a clear indication that improving gender equality can lead to a decrease in conflict levels, suggesting that gender-empowered communities are more inclined to build peace and resolve conflicts peacefully.

Research has also shown that despite the recognition of gender equality as a fundamental principle, in real life there are often many violations of this same principle. Acceptance of gender equality as a universal concept in democratic states does not eliminate gender-based discrimination in different areas such as politics (Gidengil and Everitt, 2003; Messner, 2007; according to Zagrebina 2020).

According to a recent article in Forbes, author Josie Cox (*Stark Gender Gap Persists Among Young People's Attitudes Toward Feminism, Survey Shows, 2024*), there is a pronounced gender gap in attitudes about feminism and gender equality, especially among young people. Scientists from the Global Institute for Women's Leadership and the Policy Institute at King's College London, in cooperation with Ipsos UK, came to the conclusion that there are clear differences in the perception of gender equality based on the collected data. Almost half of the respondents believed that today it is more difficult to be a woman than a man, while only 14% said the opposite. However, the distribution of responses differed significantly by gender, particularly among those aged between 16 and 29 years. In this age group, about 68% of women said that it is more difficult to be a woman, while only 35% of men agreed with these statements.¹⁹

From the research by Ahmed and Sen (2018), we can conclude that the cultural view, in this case, the view of conservatism, is associated with worse economic outcomes for women. The results suggest that household conservatism can affect employment, decision-making autonomy, and also women's health. This realization is of great importance for policies aimed at improving gender equality and economic emancipation of women in rural communities.

Researchers have also examined contemporary right-wing policies to explore the meaning of gender equality. In the literature on the regression of gender equality policies, the radical right wing in Europe stands out, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. The aforementioned research shows that narratives that are not necessarily directly opposed to gender equality are "distorted and adapted" to manipulate its meaning and promote goals that can be characterized as xenophobic and illiberal (Kantola and Lombardo 2020: 576; according to Gaweda, Siddi, and Miller 2023).

Liberal attitudes, in this case emphasize political equality in terms of women's right to vote and the possibility of running for important positions, as well as access to the labor market and the business world. Furthermore, rights in the fields of marriage, education, employment, including equal pay for equal work, etc. are also advocated. Those who consider themselves liberals want to enable the rights for

19 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/josiecox/2024/02/05/stark-gender-gap-persists-among-young-peoples-attitudes-toward-feminism-survey-shows/?sh=351e1cec2ef9> (Retrieved 3/25/2024)

full participation of everyone in the society and demand that women be treated in the same manner as men (Cottais and Felner 2021).

In the research titled *Socio-Demographic Predictors of Gender Inequality among Heterosexual Couples Expecting a Child in South-Central Uganda*, conducted in September 2020, it was determined that 31.1% of men demonstrated a high acceptance of violence in partner relationships, while 15.9% of women had low decision-making power. Religion, education, HIV status, age and marital status were significant predictors of gender equality. In particular, it was noted that lower gender equality is present among Catholics, people with a lower level of education, married people, HIV-positive women and older women. These results indicate that there is a significant connection between socio-demographic characteristics and gender equality or inequality, that is represented in different groups (Vrana-Diaz et al., 2020).

Empowering women is a key task today because they make up half of the world's population and potential. Despite progress, much effort is still needed to achieve real gender equality (UN n.d.). The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, emphasizes the urgency of the goal, as the annual worrying gender gap is projected to be \$360 billion by 2030. Key strategies to combat this include investing in women, fighting against poverty, adapting finance to gender equality, transitioning to sustainable economy and support for feminist leaders (UN n.d.)

Looking at global trends, countries that record relatively equal access for men and women in economic participation and opportunities include diverse economies such as Liberia (89.5%), Jamaica (89.4%), Moldova (86.3%), Lao People's Democratic Republic (85.1%), Belarus (81.9%), Burundi (81.0%), and Norway (80%). At the lower end of the scale, apart from Afghanistan, countries that have achieved less than 40% of gender equality include Algeria (31.7%), Iran (34.4%), Pakistan (36.2%), and India (36.7%) (Global Gender Gap Report 2023).

Bosnia and Herzegovina had its Gender Equality Index partially calculated for 2022 for the first time, in cooperation with the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). The index covers six domains - Knowledge, Power, Work, Health, Time and Money. According to the index, Bosnia and Herzegovina has 58.7 points in the Knowledge domain and 51.2 points in the Power domain, which are slightly lower values than the EU average. The lack of data makes it difficult to calculate the index for all six areas. Creation of a partial index was based on the latest available data from relevant research (Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022).

In the case of BiH, the participation of women in the executive power is not in accordance with the principle of gender equality due to the lack of quotas or other measures to increase the representation of women. When analyzing the composition of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Government of the Republika Srpska, it is evident that women make up less than 40% of the members of the aforementioned bodies (Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe 2023). Although there is an occasional increase in the representation of women in government bodies, this trend can be considered limited. Initiatives to ensure gender equality in the appointments to the BiH Council of Ministers were

sent to the mandate holders after the general elections in 2014 and 2018, but in terms of changes in the composition of the government, they did not lead to significant progress in the representation of women. Annually, only 0.05% of the BiH budget is spent on promoting gender equality and supporting women. The CE-DAW committee recommended that Bosnia and Herzegovina intensify gender-responsive budgeting in public service. Although it can be said that there are good initiatives, the lack of aggregated data limits the assessment of the effectiveness of these initiatives (Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe 2023).

The Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, the Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (2023), point out a continuous imbalance in the representation of women in the political institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which especially applies to political parties, governments and parliaments. Although affirmative measures were adopted, such as quotas in the Electoral Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina and in political parties, they did not lead to full gender equality in the participation of women. Gender prejudices and stereotypes remain the main obstacle, both among the electorate and within political parties and decision-making institutions. Although the collected data indicate some progress, most people consider the situation as stagnant.

Some of the recommendations of the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, the Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (2023) for improving women's access to political life include:

- Introduction of quotas for the less represented sex in the statutes of political parties, aligned with the Law on Gender Equality, if they exist in the country.
- Monitoring the impact of affirmative measures on the number of political party members and their representation in decision-making within the party.
- Collecting and analyzing data on gender in the electoral process in order to better understand the structure of candidates and elected persons.
- Inclusion of a greater number of men in activities aimed at gender equality, and
- Continuously monitoring and supporting the efforts of legislative bodies and government institutions to expand affirmative action measures, including gender quotas and targeted measures of public financing of political parties.

As we have seen from this short presentation, political attitudes, as well as other social determinants, are significant variables in the formation of attitudes about gender equality. Understanding these factors is important for understanding the state of gender equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Objectives and Problems

The objective of the research is to examine attitudes about gender equality, as well as to examine certain political attitudes. The attitudes of individuals are analyzed and the connection between attitudes toward gender equality with socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender and education) and political attitudes is determined.

Problems:

Problem 1: Examine the relationship between liberal attitudes and attitudes about gender equality.

H₀ Hypothesis: There is no statistically significant correlation between liberal attitudes and attitudes about gender equality.

Hypothesis 1: There is a statistically significant correlation between liberal attitudes and attitudes about gender equality. People who express higher degrees of liberal attitudes will achieve higher scores on the scale of the assessment of attitudes about gender equality.

Problem 2: Examine the relationship between conservative attitudes and attitudes about gender equality.

H₀ Hypothesis: There is no statistically significant correlation between conservative attitudes and attitudes about gender equality.

Hypothesis 2: There is a statistically significant correlation between conservative attitudes and attitudes about gender equality. People who express a higher degree of conservative attitudes will achieve lower results on the scale of the assessment of attitudes about gender equality.

Problem 3: To examine whether there are differences in attitudes about gender equality with regard to the sex of the respondents.

H₀ Hypothesis: There are no statistically significant differences in attitudes about gender equality with regard to the sex of the respondents.

Hypothesis 3: It is expected that there will be statistically significant differences in attitudes about gender equality with regard to the sex of the respondents. Female respondents will achieve higher results on the scale measuring attitudes about gender equality.

Problem 4: To examine whether there is a statistically significant difference in attitudes about gender equality with regard to the age of the respondents.

H₀ Hypothesis: There is no statistically significant difference in attitudes about gender equality with regard to the age of the respondents.

Hypothesis 4: It is assumed that there will be statistically significant differences in attitudes about gender equality with regard to the age of the respondents. Respondents aged 18 to 25 will achieve higher results on the scale of attitudes towards gender equality, respondents aged 26 to 30 will achieve higher results than respondents aged 31 to 35, while the latter will achieve higher results than respondents at the age of 36 to 40 years.

Problem 5: To examine whether there is a statistically significant difference in attitudes about gender equality with regard to the education of the respondents.

H0 Hypothesis: There are no statistically significant differences in attitudes about gender equality with regard to the respondents' education.

Hypothesis 5: It is expected that there will be statistically significant differences in attitudes about gender equality with regard to the education of the respondents. Respondents with a graduate degree will achieve higher results on the scale of attitudes towards gender equality than respondents with a completed undergraduate degree, while the latter will achieve higher results than respondents with a secondary school degree.

2.2. Sample and Data Collection Procedure

The data used in this research were collected in March 2024 on a convenience sample (N=50). Most respondents were those who self-identified as women (N=29), while there were fewer men (N=21). Most respondents were in the age group of 18 to 25 years of age (N=22), followed by those aged 31 to 35 (N=10) and 36 to 40 (N=10), and the least number of people in age group from 26 to 30 years (N=8). According to the level of education, the majority of respondents stated that they had a Master's degree (N=17), slightly fewer had a Bachelor's degree (N=16). The least number of them have completed only high school (N=14). Two people stated that they had a PhD, and one person states that they had a 4 year University degree.

2.3. Measuring Instruments

For the purpose of this research, a questionnaire consisting of 81 variables was created. The variables were divided into 3 groups: sociodemographic characteristics, attitudes about gender equality and political attitudes.

Measuring Instrument: *Sociodemographic Characteristics*

It consisted of three short questions that ask about the age, sex and education of the respondent.

Measuring Instrument: *Attitudes about Gender Equality*

It was taken from a collection of psychological scales and questionnaires called *The Gender Equality Attitude Scale*. The scale consists of 64 statements that describe the behaviour of men and women in traditional and non-traditional roles. Respondents answered on a five-point Likert-type scale. High scores on the scale suggest that the person has less discriminatory attitudes toward sexes, while lower scores suggest that the person has more traditional or conservative attitudes about the roles of men and women. The scale contains 5 subscales that measure the attitudes of equality between women and men in different domains of social life. The listed subscales are: the parental role scale, or the R scale, consisting of 15 statements (statements No. 1, 9, 11, 16, 20, 24, 28, 31, 35, 40, 42, 46, 49, 54, and 63), the scale of social-interpersonal-heterosexual roles (SIH scale) - containing 12 statements (statements No. 2, 6, 7, 17, 19, 22, 39, 43, 44, 47, 53, 56), the scale of

professional roles (P scale) – had 16 statements (statements No. 3, 5, 13, 15, 18, 23, 25, 29, 33, 38, 45, 50, 52, 55, 59, 61), marital role scale (B scale) - consists of 12 statements (statement No. 4, 8, 14, 21, 30, 32, 34, 36, 41, 48, 57, 60) and the scale of educational roles (O scale) which had 9 statements (statements No. 10, 12, 26, 27, 37, 51, 58, 62, 64) (Proroković, Čubela and Penezić 2002).

Measuring Instrument: *Political Attitudes*

Alves, Porto, *Measuring Political Ideology: Validity Evidence for a Two-Factor Model, Trends in Psychology, 2021* was used for examination of political attitudes. The list uses the two-model principle of examining political attitudes, that is, examining economic attitudes and values of liberal and conservative leaning individuals. For the purposes of this research, 14 out of 15 statements were selected that were generally considered more conservative and liberal. Respondents answered depending on the degree of agreement with the statements on a 5-point Likert scale (Alves and Porto 2021).

3. Research Results and Discussion

Respondents’ views on gender equality were examined using an instrument containing 64 items. Table No. 1 shows the minimum and maximum amounts of individual responses, as well as the arithmetic mean and standard deviation. Statements number: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 26, 27, 30, 31, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 42, 44, 46, 47, 50, 52, 54, 55, 56, 58, 59 and 64 are positions that are evaluated inversely, that is, a higher degree of disagreement with the position is represented by a higher average value in table No. 1.

Table 1 Descriptive Indicators of the Gender Equality Scale

Statement	Min	Max	M	SD	No.
If one wants to be sure that the child will be properly vaccinated at the appropriate age, the responsibility for this should be held by the mother, not the father.	1	5	4.08	1.21	1
It is worse to see a drunken woman than a drunken man.	1	5	3.34	1.48	2
An intelligent man will be more successful in his career than an intelligent woman.	1	5	3.18	1.38	3
A woman is just as capable as a man of making minor household repairs.	1	5	3.92	1.26	4
Female secretaries devote themselves more to their work than their male counterparts.	1	5	2.92	1.29	5

When a group of friends gathers, it is normal for men to dominate more than women.	1	5	3.84	1.40	6
Women should have the same freedom as men to go out alone in the evening.	1	5	4.54	1.05	7
A woman has the same right as her husband to decide where the family will live.	1	5	4.46	0.99	8
Fathers, not mothers, should be responsible for whom their son or daughter goes out with.	1	5	4.04	1.26	9
Sewing and knitting courses are suitable for women only.	1	5	3.66	1.53	10
Fathers must be able to change their babies' diapers.	1	5	4.42	1.13	11
Women are able to receive education to become captains of ships or planes.	1	5	4.34	1.21	12
Women should be elected to managerial positions equally as men.	1	5	4.28	1.23	13
Men should represent the family at tenant's meetings.	1	5	3.58	1.28	14
It is more profitable for an employer to hire a man than a woman.	1	5	3.32	1.58	15
Taking care of children's extracurricular activities should mainly be the mother's, not the father's responsibility.	1	5	4.18	1.35	16
You should be more attentive to women than men.	1	5	2.7	1.39	17

A male preschool teacher cannot be as good as a female teacher.	1	5	3.76	1.46	18
When a couple goes out to dinner for the first time, it is normal for the man to take care of the payment.	1	5	2.52	1.59	19
A mother knows better than a father what TV programs their young children should be allowed to watch.	1	5	3.38	1.60	20
The joint earnings of a married couple should be legally under the husband's control.	1	5	4.6	0.93	21
A woman should feel as free as a man to go to the cinema alone.	1	5	4.58	0.91	22
There are many good reasons why a woman should not be a president of the state.	1	5	4.1	1.26	23
Mothers can buy their children school clothes better than fathers.	1	5	2.96	1.51	24
Women are just as capable of performing long-term work tasks as men.	1	5	4.26	1.08	25
Men need to take their education more seriously because one day they will be the breadwinners of their families.	1	5	2.78	1.46	26
Men should be given preference when competing for management positions.	1	5	4.06	1.35	27
Father and mother should be equally responsible for taking their child for regular dental check-ups.	1	5	4.6	0.86	28
Women are just as capable as men of making important decisions about business organization.	1	5	4.48	1.03	29
The wife should see to it that birthday cards and gifts are sent on time.	1	5	3.92	1.12	30
If the children need to be punished, then the father should do it.	1	5	4.36	0.90	31
A working husband and wife must share household chores equally.	1	5	4.06	1.30	32

A woman can handle pressure at work just as well as a man.	1	5	3.72	1.29	33
A man should be the head of the family.	1	5	3.44	1.55	34
Fathers know better than mothers how to provide children with proper sexual education.	1	5	4.32	1.06	35
Men are generally more independent than their wives.	1	5	3.1	1.49	36
Mathematics professors should expect greater knowledge from male students.	1	5	4.38	1.03	37
Male executives are better business organizers.	1	5	3.94	1.40	38
A woman should feel free to play an active role in a sexual relationship.	1	5	4.48	0.86	39
If they want to use the family car, children should ask permission from their father, not their mother.	1	5	4.12	1.15	40
For a marriage to be successful, a woman needs to adapt her needs to her husband's.	1	5	4.26	1.12	41
Fathers, not mothers, should determine how much children's pocket money will be.	1	5	4.2	1.17	42
Women should feel as free as men to go to nightclubs alone.	1	5	4.46	1.09	43
Men can deal with different types of people more easily than women.	1	5	3.3	1.43	44
Women are just as reliable at work as men.	1	5	4.34	1.06	45
For the development of children's morals, it is important that the father has the authority, not the mother.	1	5	4.32	1.08	46
You should be more polite to women than to men.	1	5	3.38	1.48	47
Most women are capable of managing family finances just as well as their husbands.	1	5	4.34	1.13	48

Fathers and mothers should have equal responsibility to play with their children in their free time.	2	5	4.7	0.64	49
A male doctor inspires more confidence than a female doctor.	1	5	3.88	1.39	50
Women are just as capable as men of receiving an education to be car mechanics.	1	5	2.12	1.34	51
Men should not work as caregivers in nursing homes	1	5	4.28	1.05	52
In a society, a woman should feel as free as a man to express her most honest opinion.	1	5	4.62	0.80	53
Fathers are not able to take care of their sick children as well as mothers.	1	5	3.36	1.54	54
Men and women need different time to adapt to new working conditions.	1	5	3.02	1.39	55
Women like to gossip about their acquaintances more than men.	1	5	2.96	1.57	56
A married woman's career should be just as important as her husband's career	1	5	4.26	1.13	57
Male teachers of younger children cannot develop children's preferences and interests as well as female teachers.	1	5	3.84	1.36	58
The gender of the candidate should be an important factor when hiring workers for a specific position.	1	5	4.12	1.23	59
A woman can decide which car the family will buy just as well as her husband.	1	5	3.96	1.29	60
Women are just as capable as men for research work.	1	5	4.54	0.95	61
Women are just as capable as men of discussing events in politics and the economy.	1	5	4.52	0.97	62
It is important that fathers, as well as mothers, take care of their children's school obligations.	1	5	4.54	0.93	63
The choice of study is not as important for women as it is for men.	1	5	4.26	1.15	64

The average result on the scale of attitudes about gender equality (marked as “SCORE” hereinafter) was $M=250.30$, $SD=47.35$.

Jugović and Kamenov (2001) emphasize the importance of understanding gender (in)equality and discrimination in family relationships. In this paper, the authors rely on the theory of social learning and cognitive development to describe the process of socialization of children in gender roles and the ways in which they adopt these gender roles. Research has shown that parents play an exceptional role in transmitting gender values, but also stereotypes. Moreover, research has shown that traditional gender roles and expectations in relation to a person’s sex are passed down from generation to generation and are reproduced in a society.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, women fight every day for a better position in a traditional society. Common stereotypes, lower wages and longer periods of unemployment are just some of the problems they face. The promotion of gender equality requires changing awareness and increasing knowledge about the causes of discrimination. Gender inequality is particularly pronounced in public and political life and in the labour market (UNICEF 2024).

In this sample of respondents, there is a tendency to agree with a smaller number of statements which can be characterized as stereotypical, some of which refer to the performance of some jobs and some abilities in the domain of education, for example *Women are just as capable as men of receiving an education to be car mechanics* ($M= 2.11$). On average, respondents agreed more with the statement *When a couple goes out to dinner for the first time, it is normal for the man to take care of the payment* ($M=2.52$), which can also be viewed through the prism of patriarchal structures that shape social norms and expectations. It is interesting that, on average, the respondents had divided opinions regarding the following statements *Sewing and knitting courses are suitable only for women* ($M= 3.66$) and *It is more profitable for the employer to employ a man than a woman* ($M=3.32$).

Statements which received support or on which the respondents were divided, and which can be considered to propagate certain stereotypes, reflect prejudices or generally accepted beliefs about the roles, abilities and suitability of certain jobs for different sexes. However, despite this, in the vast majority of attitudes, respondents were more inclined to support gender equality, such as *Women are as capable as men of discussing events in politics and the economy* ($M=4.52$), *Most women are capable of managing family finances as well as their husbands* ($M=4.34$) and others.

Today there is a lack of women in leadership positions, and the question arises why this is so. According to Fay Niewiadomski (2023), the lack of women in significant leadership positions is a complex problem with multiple factors. Although certain advances have been made over the years, there are still numerous challenges that contribute to this imbalance in a certain way. Some of the key factors include:

- Gender biases and stereotypes in society
- Lack of role models for younger women
- A male-biased work culture
- Lack of access to opportunities

- Family responsibilities
- Glass ceilings
- Structural and systemic obstacles

Solving these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes changes at the individual, societal and institutional levels.

The political attitudes of the respondents were examined using an instrument containing fourteen items. Table No. 2 shows the minimum and maximum amounts of individual responses, as well as the arithmetic mean and standard deviation, along with the label that was used during the statistical processing of the data.

Table 2 - Descriptive Indicators of Political Attitudes

Statement	Min	Max	M	SD	Label
Personal merit is enough for success in the country where I live.	1	5	2.34	1.30	STAVK1
Political correctness has made the world boring.	1	5	2.8	1.30	STAVK2
The private sector is a more honest administrator than the government.	1	5	3.22	1.23	STAVK3
The less government interferes in society, the better the country.	1	5	3.3	1.32	STAVK4
Criminals should be punished by death.	1	5	2.4	1.39	STAVK5
Only heterosexual couples should be able to adopt.	1	5	2.56	1.69	STAVK6
Tax is theft, regardless of what the money is used for.	1	5	2.84	1.36	STAVK7
Quality healthcare and education should be guaranteed by the government.	3	5	4.72	0.57	STAVL1
Social justice is more important than economic freedom.	1	5	3.06	1.20	STAVL2
The government should regulate the private sector to promote the public interest.	1	5	3.22	1.25	STAVL3

Women should have the right to choose abortion.	1	5	3.76	1.61	STAVL4
Legalization and regulation of illegal psychoactive substances would bring positive results.	1	5	2.76	1.39	STAVL5
Minority rights movements are legitimate.	1	5	4.16	1.23	STAVL6
Separation of church and state in legal and political matters is essential.	1	5	4.02	1.44	STAVL7

On average, respondents expressed divided or negative attitudes regarding the role of the state in everyday life. For example, the average score for the statement *Personal merits are sufficient for success in the country where I live* was (M=2.34), while for the statement *The private sector is a more honest administrator than the government* was (M=3.22). These results suggest that there is a significant number of respondents who express doubts about the effectiveness of state intervention.

Regarding attitudes on social issues, respondents, on average, supported the right of homosexual couples to adopt children through disagreement with the statement *Only heterosexual couples should have the option of adoption* (M= 2.56), and regarding the right of women to choose their opinions were divided (M=3.76). Attitudes regarding the potential positive effects of the legalization of psychoactive substances were divided, with a more rejecting stance (M=2.76). These results suggest a lack of social support for certain progressive policies.

When it comes to the role of the government and public policy, the majority of respondents agreed with the importance of the government in ensuring a quality health and education system, which is illustrated by a high average score (M=4.72). However, the views on government interference in society are divided, as shown by the average score (M=3.3). This highlights the complexity of respondents' views on the role of government in society and the need for further research to better understand their perspective.

3.1. Comparative and Correlative Analysis

Table 3 - Correlation between the Final Results of the Scale of Attitudes about Gender Equality and Individual Liberal Attitudes

	SCORE	STAVL1	STAVL2	STAVL3	STAVL4	STAVL5	STAVL6	STAVL7
SCORE	1.000	.354*	.307*	.058	.629**	.138	.272	.629**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.012	.030	.691	<.001	.339	.056	<.001

*p < .05; **p < .01

Spearman's correlation test shows a moderate positive correlation between the results on the scale of attitudes about gender equality with STAVL1 ($\rho = 0.354, p = 0.012 < 0.05$), and STAVL2 ($\rho = 0.307, p = 0.030 < 0.05$). A high positive correlation between the results on the scale of attitudes about gender equality with STAVL4 ($\rho = 0.629, p < 0.001$) and STAVL7 ($\rho = 0.629, p < 0.001$), and a weak positive correlation with STAVL5 ($\rho = 0.138, p = 0.025 < 0.05$). The alternative hypothesis H1 can be confirmed for the above statements, but not for STAVL3 and STAVL6. Which means that there is a statistically significant positive correlation between certain liberal attitudes (STAVL1, STAVL2, STAVL4, STAVL5, and STAVL7) and the final results on the scale of attitudes about gender equality in the sense that the respondents who achieved higher results on the scale of gender equality were statistically more in agreement with the stated liberal attitudes.

Table 4 - Correlation of the Final Results of the Scale of Attitudes about Gender Equality and Individual Conservative Attitudes

	SCORE	STAVK 1	STAVK 2	STAVK 3	STAVK 4	STAVK 5	STAVK 6	STAVK 7
SCORE	1,000	-.278	-.356*	-.194	-.187	-.247	-.606**	-.352*
Sig. (2-tailed)		.051	.011	.176	.193	.083	<.001	.012

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Spearman's correlation test shows a moderate negative correlation between the results on the scale of attitudes about gender equality with STAVK2 ($\rho = -0.356, p = 0.011 < 0.05$), a strong negative correlation with STAVK6 ($\rho = -0.606, p < 0.001$), and a moderate negative correlation with STAVK7 ($\rho = -0.352, p = 0.012 < 0.05$). Therefore, we can conclude that there is a statistically significant correlation between certain conservative attitudes (STAVK2, STAVK6 and STAVK7) and the results on the gender equality scale. Respondents who achieved lower results on the gender equality scale were statistically more in agreement with conservative attitudes (STAVK2, STAVK6 and STAVK7). The alternative hypothesis (H2) can be considered confirmed for these attitudes, while no statistically significant correlation between other attitudes and results on the gender equality scale was shown.

Table 5 - Results of t-test for Independent Samples

	Group 1	Group 2	T(df)	p
Sex	M	F	-4.45 (48)	<.001
M	220.52	271.86		
SD	40.13	40,320		
N	21	29		

The t-test for independent samples indicates the existence of a statistically significant difference between men and women ($p < .001$). Therefore, the H_0 hypothesis is rejected and the H_3 hypothesis is confirmed in the sense that women statistically achieved higher results on the scale of attitudes about gender equality in the average amount of ($M=271.86$), which indicates a higher degree of support for gender equality from female respondents.

These results are in accordance with research conducted in 34 countries in the world. In many of these countries, it is women who attach more importance to gender equality than men, although women are less optimistic that their countries will achieve equality in the future and are more inclined to say that men have better living conditions than women (Menasce, Horowitz and Fetterolf 2020).

In the discourse on gender equality, it is also important to emphasize that men have a crucial role in breaking gender stereotypes and achieving gender equality. That is, to achieve complete equality, one must be committed to solving the challenges from both sides. Although most of the inequality between the sexes harms women, it is important to note that there are also important problems that affect men and that need to be solved, such as a high suicide rate, lower level of achievement in education, less involvement in childcare, etc. (European Institute for Gender Equality [EIGE] 2016).

According to Ipsos News (2024), a survey conducted in 31 countries by Ipsos in collaboration with the Global Institute for Women’s Leadership at King’s College London, two-thirds (65%) of respondents in 31 countries agreed that women will not achieve equality in their country if men do not take action to support women’s rights. However, half (51%) of people on average across the 30 countries believed that too much is expected from men in terms of promotion of equality, while less than two fifths (39%) identified as feminists.

Table 6 - Results of Kruskal-Wallis Test (age)

Sample 1	Sample 2	Sig.	Adapted. Sig. ^{And}
36-40	31-31	.544	1,000
36-40	26-30	.130	.781
36-40	18-25	.008	.051
31-35	26-30	.346	1,000
31-35	18-25	.055	.328
26-30	18-25	.489	1,000

Table 6 shows the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test for comparisons between four different age groups regarding attitudes towards gender equality. The samples are grouped according to the age of the subjects, and the p-value of the test and adjusted p-value (in the case of *multiple comparisons*) are shown for each comparison.

The analysis used samples from four age groups: 18-25, 26-30, 31-35 and 36-40 years of age. The results indicate that there are no statistically significant differences in attitudes about gender equality between these groups of respondents, as suggested by p-values higher than the selected level of significance ($p = 0.05$). This indicates consistent results for different age groups, which implies that the age of the respondents is not a significant factor in shaping these attitudes. Therefore, the 0 hypothesis (H_0) is retained, which claims that there are no statistically significant differences in the achieved results on the scale of attitudes about gender equality, while the alternative hypothesis (H_4) is rejected.

According to Ipsos News (2024), despite the perception that Millennials and Gen Z are more progressive, younger generations are actually more conservative on gender equality. Gen Z and Millennials are more likely to think a man who takes care of the kids at home is less masculine (25% and 27%) compared to Generation X (20%) and Baby Boomers (11%). Regarding women’s equality, there are generational differences in opinion where 60% of men from Generation Z and 40% of women from the same generation agree that women’s equality discriminates against men. This is not in accordance with this research, where it has been concluded that there are no statistically significant differences in the perception of gender equality with regard to the age of the respondents.

Table 7 - Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test (education)

Number of respondents	48
Df	3
Asymptomatic Sig. (2-sided test)	.118

In the framework of this research, a possible connection between the level of education of the respondents and their attitudes about gender equality was analysed. The main objective was to investigate whether there are statistically significant differences in the perception of gender equality among respondents of different educational levels. Data from two respondents who stated that they had completed doctoral studies were removed from the analysis since they were not the primary target population. The analysis was performed using the Kruskal-Wallis test. The results showed that the p-value is 0.118, which is not statistically significantly lower than the usual significance threshold of 0.05. Based on these findings, the 0 hypothesis (H_0) was accepted, which asserts that there are no statistically significant differences in attitudes about gender equality with regard to the respondents’ education. Accordingly, hypothesis 5 (H_5), which suggested the existence of statistically significant differences in attitudes about gender equality among different educational groups, was rejected. These findings suggest that respondents’ education does not play a key role in the formation of attitudes about gender equality.

4. Conclusion

By analysing the research results, we arrive at the following research results, which we can turn into some conclusions:

- A negative correlation was found between certain conservative attitudes and results on the scale of attitudes about gender equality. This indicates that participants with lower scores on the mentioned scale more often express a preference for conservative attitudes about gender equality.
- Conversely, a statistically significant positive correlation was observed between most liberal attitudes and scores on the same scale. It is important to note that women, compared to men, achieved statistically significantly higher results on the mentioned scale, which suggests that women may be more inclined to have more liberal views on gender equality.
- Also, age and level of education did not show a significant role in shaping attitudes about gender equality.

These conclusions point to the need for further research in order to better understand the connections between conservative and liberal attitudes and the connection with sociodemographic characteristics and with attitudes about gender equality. The connection between political attitudes and attitudes about gender equality proved to be indicative in this research as well, and confirmed the hypothesis about differences in understanding and the need for gender equality from the perspective of women and from the perspective of men.

Some recommendations for future research are conducting longitudinal research with the aim of monitoring changes in attitudes about gender equality over time, including a qualitative research method in order to gain a deeper insight into attitudes about gender equality, providing a significantly larger sample for the survey with equal representation of men and women, including the variable of self-statement on the respondent's political orientation and the inclusion of a comparative analysis with regard to the respondent's place of residence (city/village).

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Gender Enters Parliament: The Case of Representation of Women in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia During the Plenary Debates on the Law on Gender Equality

Mentor: Dr. Irena Fiket

irena.fiket@ifdt.bg.ac.rs

Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade

Abstract

As one of the basic measures for achieving political representation, and thus gender equality within the parliament, democratic countries introduce mandatory quotas for women on candidate lists. Serbia accepted this solution, mandating electoral lists, on which 40% of the candidates must be women. However, does the prescribed quota necessarily mean the representation of women's interests in the Parliament? This paper aims to consider the reproduction of gender roles in relation to the representation of women in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, by analyzing the content of the debate on the Law on Gender Equality from 2021. The main goal of this paper is to explore the dimension of substantive representation of women through this specific discussion of the Law. Namely, the paper will investigate how women were represented within the discussion about the Law, as well as whether their representation was related to traditional gender roles. First, the paper will present the concepts of descriptive and substantive representation. This segment aims to summarize basic theoretical notions relating to the representation of women. Then, the basic characteristics of these two models will be identified in the case of the Assembly of Serbia. Descriptive representation is operationalized by the proportion of MPs, while the basic principles of substantive representation are shown by the qualitative analysis of discussions on the Law on Gender Equality, framed by the identification of gender roles that are mentioned during the discussions. The results of the research show that although there are formal prerequisites in the form of legal determination of quotas for the less represented sex, as well as descriptive representations, the analyzed discussions show that women are most often represented through the perspective of the traditional gender framework of understanding the role of women.

Keywords: parliamentarism, representation of women, gender roles, Law on Gender Equality.

1. Introduction

Political representation is one of the basic elements of liberal democracy. Parliament, as the highest legislative body, has the basic function of representing the interests of various social groups through representative, deliberative, legislative, supervisory and other functions (Hague and Harrop, 2004). With these activities, MPs reflect the basic idea of representative democracy, which is popular sovereignty. With the political emancipation of women in the 20th century, women received active and passive voting rights, and parliamentary seats have been formally opened for women representatives, with the idea that they represent specifically women's interests. Through discussion, participation in plenary sessions, work in committees and by asking MPs' questions to the executive power, MPs got the opportunity to participate in political life.

Changes in the normative framework, although they provided the basic prerequisites for political participation, did not turn the patriarchal social patterns towards a better representation of women. First, although women had the right to vote, they have not been getting relevant number of seats in the Parliament, primarily due to the specifics of the political system, but (as a result) also the attitude of the parties towards the participation of women, the system of closed lists and the overall unchanged social mood (Paxton, Kunovich, and Hughes 2007). Because of this, the introduction of quotas that would "reserve" a certain number of seats for women in the Parliament turned out to be a common practice in democratic countries. Such a change in election conditions, by obliging the parties to provide a certain part of their lists to female candidates for MPs, serves as a corrective mechanism for the existing discriminatory social structure.

However, societal expectations often still limit women to the private sphere. Historically, participation in political life, career development and income generation for the family were strictly marked as jobs for men, while taking care of children, managing the household and general dedication to the family were marked as women's (Ćeriman, Fiket and Rácz 2018). Although there are efforts to equalize women and men in terms of gender roles, there is still a significant imbalance. This type of inequality is also reflected in the highest representative body of the Republic of Serbia. Although some of the formal prerequisites for women's participation have been introduced in Serbia, female MPs still, in their speeches from the benches say that women in Serbia are primarily mothers, who should do most of the housework, as well as victims of violence (Lončar 2023). So, despite the fact that a significant part of the representative body in Serbia is made up of women, their participation in discussions continues to take place from the perspective of traditionally prescribed gender roles (Ibid.).

Taking that into account, the goal of this paper is to analyze the content of the plenary discussions around the Law on Gender Equality from 2021 in order to investigate the dimension of substantive representation of women. The paper will investigate how women are represented within the discussion about the Law, as well as whether their representation is related to traditional gender roles. The main research question is: What gender roles of women emerged during the plenary discussion on the Law on Gender Equality from 2021, and in what way are they constructed during this discussion?

First of all, the paper will refer to the basic theoretical concepts of descriptive and substantive representation, based on the theory of Hana Pitkin (1967). This segment of the work tries to explain how descriptive and substantive representation are realized in the parliamentary context, as well as basic theoretical and empirical topics. After that, gender roles, sex and gender differences, and gender regimes will be specified, especially in the context of the reproduction of gender roles in political discourse. Together, these two represent the theoretical framework of this research. The second part of the paper looks at the normative and political context during the debate on the Law on Gender Equality. In this part, formal and descriptive representation will be operationalized, through legal regulation of the quota for the less represented sex and the proportion of women in the twelfth convocation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. In the third part, the research methodology will be presented. The fourth part is dedicated to presentation of research results and their discussion. The conclusion will summarize the basic findings and practical implications of the paper for further research on gender equality and women's participation in the representative bodies of the Republic of Serbia.

2. Theoretical Framework

2. 1. *Essential and Descriptive Presentation*

Research into the political representation of women mostly takes place within the framework of Hana Pitkin's (1967) theoretical framework. She initially divided the presentation into four dimensions: formal, descriptive, symbolic and substantive. First of all, formal representation refers to institutional arrangements that enable a certain person to represent the interests of other people. The act of enabling the formal representation of women is embodied in the achievement of active and passive voting rights, i.e. the possibility for women to vote and be elected. Then, Pitkin defines descriptive representation as "the making present of something absent by resemblance or reflection, as in a mirror or in art" (Pitkin 1967:11). In other words, descriptive representation is reflected in the numerical similarity between the representative and the electorate based on certain demographic characteristics (Paxton, Kunovich and Hughes 2007). Unlike descriptive, symbolic representation does not require any demographic similarity, but the connection between the represented and the representative is of a different kind. Finally, substantive representation takes place in advocating for the interests of the represented, as opposed to mere presence (Pitkin 1967). Further theoretical notions of representation focus on understanding the interrelationship of these four dimensions (especially descriptive and substantive), as well as their content.

The existing literature on the representation of women first deals with the relationship between substantive and descriptive representation, that is, how numerical representation in the form of the presence of women in Parliament leads to the representation of women's interests (Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005; Beckwith and Cowell-Meyers 2007; Paxton et al. 2007). This approach is called critical mass theory, which states that women will not have an impact on legislative decision-making until they become a "relevant minority" in Parliament (Childs and Krook 2009). However, the existing paradigm that whoever represents us

influences the types of adopted policies has been repeatedly contested. First of all, authors are not sure what percentage of women in the legislature is needed to have an impact on public policies (Beckwith 2007), while others dispute that any level of descriptive representation can mitigate parliamentary male dominance (Hughes 2011). Therefore, there is a need to reject the simple linear connection of these two dimensions, and move to new models. Thus, the theory of critical actors redirects the question from *when* substantive representation is realized to *the ways* in which it is realized. In addition, it emphasizes the need to reject the essentialization of political actors, which suggests that only women can represent women's interests (Childs and Krook 2009). On the other hand, certain authors try to integrate all four dimensions of representation, emphasizing their intertwined networks of relationships (Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005).

Problems also arise around the universal definition of women's interests and gender policies, which are primarily contextually determined (Beckwith and Cowell-Meyers 2007). Because it is not possible to make a list of women's interests that should be achieved through substantive representation, various authors have developed criteria for evaluating representation and public policies. Thus, the substantive representation of women should be inclusive, responsive (corresponding to the interests of the electorate) and egalitarian (Celis and Childs, 2020).

Nevertheless, certain authors believe that approaches that focus on results in the form of adopted public policies in the interest of women for indicators of substantial representation are limited in their epistemic scope. Instead of observing the results of representation, authors of a constructivist orientation (Liu et al. 2018; Raiber and Spierings 2020; Lončar 2023) strive to discover the ways in which parliamentary debates that focus on women's issues affirm, reproduce and construct different gender roles and identities. Because of this, their research questions shift from whether the already established interests of women are realized through representation, to how representatives formulate women's interests, and how they talk about women and their social roles (Lončar 2023). Thus, both the male and female representatives are no longer seen as a channel of communication between the represented and the institutions, but they are also active participants in that communication. Representing a certain group means defining that group, that is, in the case of representing women, creating an image of women as assumed to be, what they want and what they need (Celis et al. 2014). In the case of a parliament, such images are created and reproduced through language, which shapes the way in which the representatives see reality, as well as the roles which women play in a society (Liu et al. 2018; Raiber and Spierings 2020). Therefore, the constructivist approach to the study of the substantive representation of women focuses on the different ways in which representatives in parliamentary discussions construct images of women, their characteristics and position in the society.

2. 2. Gender Roles

The political representation of women often takes place in the context of existing social norms, which determine different types of gender regimes. They can be defined as relatively structured relations between genders, which include gender identity, appropriate gender roles and gender performances (Blagojević 2007).

The question of gender identity and its roles refers to the classic distinction between sex and gender. Sex can be defined as a biological category that creates differences between women and men, while gender is a socially constructed category that assigns different roles and responsibilities to men and women based on their sex (Petrušić 2007). Given that gender is social, its articulation depends on the socio-historical context.

Gender roles, conditioned by assumed differences between men and women within different societies, can be defined as activities assigned to men and women. Petrušić (2007) summarizes these roles in three basic categories: (1) productive, which refers to work outside the home; (2) reproductive, implying work in the home, related to the creation and caring for children and the family; (3) public affairs, which are carried out for the benefit of the entire community. Productive and public work in the last few decades has often been equally seen as joint work of men and women, while reproductive work such as nurturing and upbringing still largely remains in the domain of women's work (Leinert Novosel 2018). This fact is reflected in the uneven division of housework, the expectation of women to be mothers, raise children and at the same time participate in the labour market.

In Serbia, the character of the gender regime can be described as heterogeneous and inconsistent, simultaneously including pre-modern, modern and post-modern values. The situation of incoherent gender roles is reflected in the long transition towards a democratic society and the position of Serbia on the semi-periphery. However, one can observe two distinct phenomena which characterise the countries in transition in which the ethnic identity is becoming stronger. First, there is a noticeable pattern of "sacrificing" or "scapegoating" of women on the periphery, which is reflected in the increase in violence against women, the lowering of women's economic power and the exclusion or marginalization of women in political life. In addition to the model of sacrificing women i.e. making them into victims, there is also a tendency to instrumentalize women. This model implies the subordination of women's interests to national interests, especially in terms of demography and population policy (Blagojević 2007). According to these two models, women in Serbia are often conceptualized as reproductive objects who will realize the country's population policy, and therefore there is a need for their protection by public institutions. This protection is reflected in the prohibition of discrimination, prevention of gender-based violence, as well as financial assistance to mothers.

3. Context

The Law on Gender Equality entered the parliamentary procedure in April 2020, during the twelfth convocation of the National Assembly, in the context of a *de facto* one-party Parliament, the continuous democratic decline of the Republic of Serbia and formalized efforts to improve the state of gender equality. This law was adopted as a kind of adaptation and improvement of the Law on Gender Equality from 2009. Namely, numerous reports of international bodies indicated that the previous normative framework did not provide opportunities for achieving the goal of equality between women and men, or establish policies for equal opportunities and elimination of discrimination based on sex (UN Committee on

Elimination of Discrimination against Women 2019; European Commission 2020). For this reason, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue drafted a law and held four public hearings at the beginning of 2021, with the aim of better regulation and achieving a satisfactory level of gender equality. It is important to emphasize that the preparation of the new Law began in 2014, but, in the context of numerous social and institutional obstacles, its finalization took place seven years later (Pajvančić 2020). In addition to improving the provisions of the Law on Gender Equality, some areas have been now additionally regulated, such as employment and work, social and health protection, prevention of gender-based violence, as well as the use of gender-sensitive language in the public sphere of the Republic of Serbia. The final proposal of the Law was submitted by the Government in April, to be voted on at the end of May 2021, with 163 votes in favour, 10 against and 2 abstentions (Otvoreni Parlament 2021).

Such a vote, as well as the course of the debate itself, must be seen in the context of the party structure of the twelfth convocation of the National Assembly. After the regular parliamentary elections, held on June 21, 2020, only three majority lists passed the electoral census: the list gathered around the Serbian Progressive Party, the coalition of the Socialist Party of Serbia and United Serbia, as well as the list "Aleksandar Šapić - Victory for Serbia". The monolithic composition of the National Assembly in the twelfth convocation is partly a consequence of the boycott by some opposition parties that claimed that electoral conditions were unjust. Also, bearing in mind the post-election cooperation of all three lists in the formation of the Government, the possibility of MPs leading a constructive debate on the proposed draft law in the spirit of a pluralistic society is questionable. Such facts are supported by the chronic deficiency of democracy in Serbia, which is noted by domestic (CRTA 2021) and international organizations (Freedom House 2021; V-Dem Institute 2021).

As for the formal representation of women, the electoral conditions - embodied in the majority electoral system and the lack of quotas - when the multi-party system was originally introduced in Serbia in 1990, made it difficult for women to participate in politics for a long time (Lončar 2023). Normative regulation of "reserved seats" in the representative bodies took place gradually. Čičkarić (2022) identifies four stages in the process of regulating this problem in Serbia: (1) at the level of local elections in 2002; (2) initial regulation at the national level in 2004; (3) reform and increase of electoral quotas in 2011; and (4) introducing „triple“ quotas in 2020. A major breakthrough was achieved by amending the Law on the Election of People's Representatives in 2020, which ensures a share of 40% of the underrepresented sex on electoral lists for national, local and provincial elections (Lončar 2023). In addition to the fact that the new legal solution stipulates a quota of 40%, it also adds a correction mechanism that ensures that for every five candidates there must be three who are members of one sex and two of the other sex. This type of regulation prevents previous abuse of electoral lists in the form of placing female candidates for parliament at the end of the list, thereby reducing the chance for women to enter the parliamentary benches. Also, the amendment to the Law foresees the obligation that in the event of the resignation of a female Member of Parliament, the vacant position is filled by the next female Member of Parliament from the list (Čičkarić 2022). This regulates the frequent practice of

parliamentary lists in which women MPs resign to give up their place to the next candidate on the list, very often a man. This outcome of the process of introducing “triple” quotas for the less represented sex enables a broad normative framework for women’s political representation, primarily by stipulating that women must make up 40% of the candidates on the lists, that those lists must have an evenly represented sex structure, and that after the resignation of female MPs their seats remain reserved for women.

Regarding the descriptive presentation of the twelfth convocation of the National Assembly, the average number of women candidates on the electoral lists for the twelfth convocation was 42%, and 58% of men (Open Parliament 2020). After the constitution of the National Assembly, the share of female members was 40%, while male members made 60%, reflecting precisely the conditions of formal representation. Comparatively speaking, the descriptive representation in the Parliament has improved significantly compared to 2013, when the share of women in this representative body was 33% (Lendák-Kabók 2013). However, the achieved descriptive representation in Serbia still has not amounted to the creation of a critical mass ensuring substantive representation of women, which would be reflected in the implementation of gender policies in all spheres of public policy making, a more modern environment of the Assembly and greater promotion of feminist values during debates (Čičkarić 2020; Lončar 2023).

4. Methodology

4. 1. Research Question and Hypothesis

The basic research question of this paper is: What gender roles of women emerged during the plenary discussion on the Law on Gender Equality from 2021, and in what way have they been constructed during this discussion? The paper investigates how women have been represented within the discussion on the Law on Gender Equality in 2021, as well as whether their representation is related to traditional gender roles.

4. 2. Sample

The research was carried out on a sample of shorthand notes, made during the twelfth session of the first regular meeting of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. During these two days of the session, which took place on May 18 and 20, 2021, discussions were held both in principle and on details for ten proposed laws, among which was the Law on Gender Equality. The transcripts of discussions in the form of shorthand notes were taken from the official website of the National Assembly.²⁰ Within the sample, the research specifically focused on the political statements of actors in the National Assembly (members of parliament and deputies, but also the female Minister in the Government who was present during the discussion) while they participated in the discussion on the Law on Gender Equality in 2021. The Minister has also been included in this analysis

²⁰ Shorthand notes from the analysed sessions are available by searching the link: <http://www.parlament.gov.rs/narodna-skupstina-.872.html>

since she proved to be a key stakeholder in formulating the direction and directing the discussion.

4. 3. The Procedure for the Analysis

For the purposes of the research, a qualitative analysis of the content of the discussion in principle and detail on the Law on Gender Equality was carried out. The inductive analysis identified the basic gender categories with which the representatives describe women during the discussion about the Law. During the analysis, seven dominant gender roles were identified within which the discussion on the mentioned Law took place: (1) woman in the family; (2) woman as a mother and a reproductive object; (3) women as victims of violence; (4) women as workers; (5) women as victims of discrimination; (6) women as politicians; and (7) women as the weaker sex. Then a thematic analysis of the identified categories was performed, with the aim of defining them within the aforementioned discussion. It is important to note that these categories cannot be considered in isolation, but complement each other. For example, it is often the case that a woman's role in the family is manifested through motherhood and reproduction, just as victims of violence are often discussed in the context of the need to protect women's family role. Therefore, the identified gender roles need to be understood as mutually intertwined and complex.

5. Analysis and Discussion

5. 1. General Findings

During the plenary debates, the majority of MPs expressed their support for the Law on Gender Equality in their statements. However, signals of approval came from quite different positions. In addition to the constructive discussion, led predominantly by the female MPs and the female Minister, certain MPs justified this law on the grounds that it would help the population policy of the Republic of Serbia. Others, on the other hand, were affirmative of the Law because they saw it as necessary for the purpose of harmonizing the legislation with the *acquis communautaire* of the European Union, and as a way to achieve significant progress in the process of accession to the European Union. However, there was also a group of deputies in the minority who strongly opposed this Law, arguing that it promotes "imported" values from the West. Other objections came from the uncertainty about the ways to implement this law. Although the negative attitudes towards the Law came from two deputies, they were certainly given considerable space to express their opinions during the discussion.

5. 2. The Image of Women in the National Assembly

The central identified gender roles of women during the plenary debate mostly coincide with the mentioned models of victimhood, sacrificing and instrumentalization of women (Blagojević 2007). The model of victimhood is reflected in the categories where a woman is seen as a victim of discrimination, a victim of (most

often domestic) violence and the weaker sex that needs additional protection. Economic topics were also present in the discussion, in an effort to equalize women's access to the labour market, as well as the role of women as politicians, with a special need to emphasize the importance of their political participation. As for the instrumentalization model, it is expressed in the understanding of women as the foundation of the family and guardian of family values. These categories are often mentioned in the context of the state's population policy, with the aim of increasing the birth rate and fertility. Overall, it is important to note that the gender roles identified in the discussion materialize implicitly through the plenary discussion of the Law itself.

The category of women objectified by discriminatory practices was initiated by the female Minister for Human and Minority Rights, who was the proponent of the Law. Within this discourse, women were seen as belittled, insulted, humiliated and treated as something less than a human being. Most of this topic addresses the very problems of gender roles based on sex, and their discriminatory effects. The need to relieve women from existing discriminatory practices that prevent their equal recognition was emphasized. In addition, a special place was devoted to the phenomenon of demonization of political activists and feminists, challenging the narrative in which feminism is an "evil" movement, which demands that women acquire a greater scope of rights than men:

"You cannot deny life, no matter how long the struggle to explain the obvious lasts, which is that discrimination exists, that the culture of human rights in Serbia should be built with dedication every day, and that women are unequal in many positions, without any other basis, except for the behaviour entrenched in prejudices that they don't deserve better and that they are always protesting around something, and that must be because they are some feminists or some evil persons who don't in fact understand what the real situation for women in Serbia is" (Gordana Čomić, Minister for Human and Minority Rights, May 18, 2021).

On the other hand, the legitimacy of the category of women as victims of discrimination has also been challenged, primarily by suspicion towards the practice of achieving gender equality. Connecting it with the concept of gender identity, mostly reducing it to the problem of transgender people, certain MPs accepted the concept of gender equality with reservations. Although they formally accept the need to eliminate discrimination and fight for equality, they believed that the normative formalization of such recognition introduces controversial categories that are inconsistent with cultural, ethical and true norms:

" (...) the issue of gender equality in the confusion of the definition of gender identities is a big problem, believe me. We are entering into something that is both ethically and culturally, legally and logically controversial and problematic" (Muaner Zukorlić, representative of the parliamentary group for the Party of Justice and Reconciliation, May 18, 2021).

Woman as a victim of violence proved to be the most present category of representation during the discussion. However, gender-based violence was primarily contextualized within the framework of family values, as a primary factor in the "destruction of the Serbian family" (Gordana Čomić, Minister for Human and Minority Rights, May 18, 2021). In other words, most of the statements of political

actors on this topic were framed around the need to protect women from violence, with the aim of defending the family as a higher value. Thus, suppression of violence and assistance to victims are subordinated to population policy focused on birth rate and fertility. Therefore, the need is “a woman who feels safe in her family (and) in her home (who) can be the basis for a stable state” (Sandra Božić, a representative of the Serbian Progressive Party parliamentary group, May 20, 2021). Nevertheless, the majority of MPs expressed their essential condemnation and commitment to the fight against gender-based forms of violence. However, such dedication is to a significant extent argued by the notions of women as the weaker sex that needs to be protected. Referring to statistical data indicating that victims of violence are more often women than men, one of the female MPs says:

“I will not even try, let alone say that violence does not exist against men, because I would not be honest enough, nor would I be myself, if I did not emphasize it; but the fact is that statistical data speak, unfortunately, in favour of the fact that victims are exclusively women, perhaps or mostly women, maybe also because they are physically weaker” (Snežana Paunović, a representative of the parliamentary group of the Socialist Party of Serbia, May 20, 2021).

Regarding the “productive” roles of women in the society, that is, the problems of professional and career development, equal access to the labour market and the issue of the “second shift”, a large part of the discussion left room for a negative characterization of women in this sphere. First of all, such a characterization indicated the existence of essential gender differences, suggesting that there is no room for employment of women as the “weaker sex” in certain economic sectors. Commenting on the provision concerning the equal principle of employment of men and women, one of the MPs says:

“Then what about the issue of, say, heavy and difficult jobs? What are we going to do with equality, say, in mines, in agriculture, where work is done according to performance, where people are paid according to performance - so many shovels, so many carts, so many of I don’t know what, wagons, this, that?” (Muamer Zukorlić, a representative of the parliamentary group of the Party of Justice and Reconciliation, May 18, 2021).

The characterization of women as the “weaker sex” was also reflected in the justification of free competition in the labour market. Arguing that the economic sector privileges the talented, the same MP says:

“Secondly, the issue of equality - yes, in equal opportunities, but in the matter of imposition, imposition, for example, when it comes to employment? ... but we have a problem with those topics or fields where some other standards are interwoven which are not only of a legal nature, which are not only of a symbolic-ethical nature, which are not only a matter of protection, such as the economic sector” (Muamer Zukorlić, a representative of the parliamentary group of Party of Justice and Reconciliation, May 18, 2021).

On the other hand, there were also statements by deputies that pointed to unequal access to different economic sectors, the wage gap and unequal household chores as relevant problems. However, the discussion on solutions to these problems also took place in the context of improving the family situation in Serbia.

Achieving greater equality in terms of paid work and an equal division of housework were assessed as factors that would have a positive effect on parenthood planning:

“Greater participation of women in the labour market, a more even distribution of unpaid work between women and men, better protection of working women who will not postpone childbirth due to fear of losing their jobs would certainly contribute to family planning...” (Muamer Bačevac, a representative of the parliamentary group of the Social Democratic Party of Serbia, 18 May, 2021).

During the discussion, the category of women as having a role in public affairs was also highlighted. This segment of the discussion was framed by arguments that emphasized the specific importance of the role of women as politicians for the future progress of the Republic of Serbia. This category was followed by a special emphasis on the necessity of increasing the representation of women in managerial positions, which would enable the further formulation of gender-sensitive policies: “Women are one of the sources for the development of Serbia and this Law should enable them to really have the opportunity to decide and to have a say about their own future” (Gordana Čomić, female Minister for Human and Minority Rights, May 20, 2021). The need to expand the circle of female public office holders was also emphasized. This was reflected in the request for women in managerial and leadership roles: “We need to work on increasing the number of women in management positions, balancing the representation of women and men in management bodies in all areas” (Jelena Žarić Kovačević, a representative of the parliamentary group of the Serbian Progressive Party, May 20, 2021)

Nevertheless, the role of women as politicians was also used to praise the current composition of the National Assembly and the already achieved descriptive representation based on the legally prescribed quota of 40% for members of the less represented sex. Moreover, the Serbian National Assembly is presented as an institution that has already achieved gender equality, unlike the parliaments of other countries:

“The National Assembly is a good example and we are among the parliaments with the largest number of women, 99 out of a total of 250 representatives, i.e. 39.6%” (Muamer Bačevac, a representative of the parliamentary group of the Social Democratic Party of Serbia, May 18, 2021).

In the end, the entire discussion on the Law on Gender Equality was permeated with an implicit representation of the patriarchal role of women as mothers within the family. This conception was often cited as a reason for supporting the Law itself “because behind every woman stands maybe a mother, a sister, someone’s daughter...” (Marija Jevđić, a representative of the parliamentary group of the Socialist Party of Serbia, May 18, 2021). Moreover, Serbia’s demographic policy, based on incentives for starting a family, was emphasized to a great extent:

“These two laws ²¹ contribute to a better relationship between the sexes, to understanding between women and men. Therefore, they undoubtedly contribute to family values as well. This then contributes to Serbia’s greater demographic vigour and liveliness. The Constitution of Serbia, in Article 63, says - The Republic of

21 The two laws mean the Law on Gender Equality and the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, which were both discussed on the same plenary session.

Serbia encourages parents to decide to have children and helps them do so (Nebojša Bakarec, a representative of the parliamentary group of the Serbian Progressive Party, May 20, 2024).

Thus, this law has been seen as an incentive mechanism for the preservation of the traditional patriarchal family. The Minister for Human and Minority Rights followed a similar line, by instrumentalizing gender equality for the purpose of encouraging motherhood:

“In this sense, special measures have been defined and if there is interest in more details, representatives are more than welcome to discussions on sustainable development, because the will to give birth implies that the atmosphere in society is positive” (Gordana Čomić, Minister for Human and Minority Rights, 20 May 2024).

Overall, the results of the content analysis show a wide presence of the instrumentalization of the Law on Gender Equality for the purpose of affirming patriarchal gender roles. The research identified that the gender roles of women as the “weaker sex” and family roles represent aspects of the discussion that have a significant impact on other topics of discussion, especially when it comes to the problem of domestic violence and the issue of women’s inclusion in the labour market. On the other hand, the research also pointed out the existence of a constructive discussion aimed at improving gender equality, primarily emphasizing the need for better normative regulation. Therefore, the main dimensions of substantive representation in the debate surrounding this Law are implicit affirmations of patriarchal narratives, through a declarative commitment to gender equality. Such results can be contextualized in the two decades long atmosphere in the Serbian Assembly, which has been marked by a discourse on women in which “traditional framework and family values” dominate (Lončar 2023:76). Even during the consideration of the Law, which seeks to increase the scope of equality, the views of MPs reflected the idea of a woman as a reproductive object, whose needs are reduced to improving her position in the private sphere, that is, the family.

Solutions to this problem can potentially be found in changing the paradigm about gender identity and women’s interests in Serbia. As demonstrated, parliamentary discussions have a stake in reproducing existing gender discourses. Therefore, MPs have the possibility of affirming traditional gender roles, but also have the potential to redefine those roles by using an inherently feminist position during debates. By electing MPs who strive to deconstruct the existing patriarchal regime, the Parliament would be enriched with actors with unwavering feminist views. Such actors would provide substantive representation in the form of a critical gender perspective in plenary discussions, public policy proposals and cooperation with other institutional actors.

6. Conclusion

The paper analyzed the relationship between the descriptive and substantive representation of women in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia during the debate on the Law on Gender Equality, offering a contribution to the understanding of the specific interaction of political representation with gender roles, and existing social norms in the parliamentary context. By combining classical theories of political representation based on the work of Hannah Pitkin with constructivist approaches to representation, the paper seeks to offer a critical and discursive understanding of the complex mechanisms through which women are represented in the representative body.

Numerically, the presence of women in the Serbian Parliament has significantly improved. With the normative regulation of quotas for the representation of women, as well as their adaptation, the prerequisites for the descriptive representation of women are fulfilled. On the other hand, the desirable numerical situation has thus far failed to provide a critical mass of women that would encourage further implementation of the gender perspective in parliamentary discussions. Moving a step further, even the passage of gender-sensitive acts does not necessarily mean that the reasons for their adoption are feminist in nature. Such a phenomenon was illustrated by the previous analysis, showing that representation in the form of taking positions on various women's issues is a location where gender roles are affirmed and reinterpreted. During the conversation, MPs defined women, their interests and demands from the point of view of mothers whose primary sphere of action is in the family and household, which need to be protected from violence because they are inherently weaker, or due to the national interest that implies uninterrupted reproduction. Therefore, there is a need for repeated reinterpretations of traditional gender roles present in the Parliament, the inclusion of critical actors, encouragement of their cooperation inside and outside of the parliament, as well as a comprehensive affirmation of the necessity of implementing gender-sensitive public policies.

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The Impact of Gender Inequality on the Living Standards of Nations

Mentors: Associate Professor Marko Đogo

marko.djogo@ekofis.ues.rs.ba

Assistant Luka Marković

luka.markovic@ekofis.ues.rs.ba

Pale Faculty of Economics, University of East Sarajevo

Abstract

The issue of gender (in)equality is becoming more and more relevant today and attracts the attention of many of not only researchers but also public policy makers. There is broad consensus among them that gender inequality is a negative phenomenon, which should be fought against by creating and implementing various measures. This research examines two groups of countries - Western Balkan countries and Scandinavian countries, covering a time period of 14 years (2006 - 2020). GDP per capita is taken as a dependent variable, and the independent variable in the model used is *the Gender Inequality Index* (GII). In order to quantify the mentioned macroeconomic variables, the panel method is used. The assumption tested was that the increase in gender inequality affects the decrease in the living standard (measured by GDP per capita). The results confirm the stated assumption. In the countries of the Western Balkans, if GII increases by 1%, GDP per capita decreases by 0.48%, while in the Scandinavian countries this decrease amounts to 0.05%.

Key words: gender inequality, gender inequality index (GII), living standard.

1. Introduction

The problem that is dealt with in this paper concerns the examination of the impact of gender inequality on the living standards of nations.

Gender equality (equality between women and men) refers to equal rights, obligations and opportunities for women and men, girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become identical, but that their rights, obligations and opportunities do not depend on whether they were born female or male. Gender equality means taking into account the interests, needs and priorities of women and men and respecting the diversity of different groups of women and men. Equality between women and men is not a women's issue, but must relate to and fully include both sexes. Gender equality is considered a human rights issue,

as well as a prerequisite and indicator of sustainable development focused on humans (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic, the jump in food and energy prices, as well as numerous climate changes around the world have led to an increase in the gender gap in the last few years. The World Economic Forum expects that it will now take more than a hundred years to close this gap. Ensuring equality between women and men in the economy enables a faster recovery of the world from these recent shocks (International Monetary Fund, 2024). Increasing gender equality has a positive effect on society as a whole. Greater equality leads to the effect of increasing GDP (gross domestic product) and a higher employment rate among the population (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2024).

Gender equality is one of the main values of the EU, which is guaranteed by various laws and regulations. Namely, Article 21 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights states: "Any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited". (Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, 2016). On the other hand, the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), Article 153, states that the European Union should act to ensure equal opportunities for both sexes in terms of employment and work.. Article 157 of the TFEU authorizes the undertaking of positive measures for the empowerment of women, while Article 19 of the TFEU provides for the adoption of laws to combat all forms of discrimination, including gender discrimination (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, 2016). This area is also regulated in our country, by the Constitution and legislation. The Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina guarantees gender equality and equal rights and freedoms to all its inhabitants. Article 2, paragraph 4 of the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina reads: "The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms provided for in this Article or in the international agreements listed in Annex I to this Constitution shall be secured to all persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, color, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status" (Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina). The Law on Gender Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina prescribes equality in all areas of life, including education, employment, work, access to resources, social protection, health care, culture, sports, public life and the media (Law on Gender Equality in BiH).

The makers of public policies expect an improvement in the situation regarding gender equality in the world. In this sense, the European Union is working on the creation and implementation of strategies that will take into account all the diversity and needs of individual member countries. The current strategy, the implementation of which is being worked on, is *the Strategy for Gender Equality 2020 - 2025*. The main goals of this strategy are to stop gender violence, demolish gender stereotypes, abolish gender differences in the labour market, achieve equal participation in different sectors of the economy, fight against gender difference in salaries and pensions, the abolition of gender differences in the area of protection and the achievement of gender balance in decision-making in politics (Strategy for Gender Equality 2020-2025). Also, after the adoption of those policies and strategies,

it is necessary to revise them, aiming at improving of the adopted measures, in order to achieve the best effects. These effects are reflected in raising the standard of living of all residents, regardless of gender and other differences, and the equal participation of men and women in overall employment, which is necessary to achieve sustainable economic growth and social development in every country

We have previously defined gender equality, and now we will clarify the concept of the living standard. The living standard is a complex concept, which is quite difficult to define, due to the fact that it includes a large number of components. Taking into account the narrower and broader understandings of this term, the standard of living can be defined as the totality of material and social conditions that enable a certain way of life. These conditions include everyday things such as housing, clothing, food, and meeting cultural, sports, and recreational needs, education, healthcare, hygiene and similar (Životni standard u Bosni i Hercegovini, 2017).

Indicators used to measure the level of living standards are various indices, as well as gross domestic product (GDP) and gross domestic product per capita (GDP per capita).

Gross domestic product - GDP is a measure of all income and expenditure in an economy. It represents the total market value of all final products (goods) and services produced by a given country in a given period of time. There are two methods of measuring GDP: on the basis of income or on the basis of consumption. Measuring gross domestic product on the basis of income implies the sum of rents, salaries of workers, interests and company profits that generated during the production of the final product, plus indirect taxes and depreciation, minus subsidies. Measuring gross domestic product on the basis of consumption implies the sum of consumer expenditure, business expenditure (investments), government expenditure, and net exports (Đerić, Rebić, 2021:287).

A much better indicator of living standards than gross domestic product is gross domestic product per capita.

GDP per capita is gross domestic product (GDP) *divided by the population size*. It is obtained *by directly dividing the total gross domestic product by the total population*. GDP per capita is predominantly expressed in local current currency, local *constant* currency, or a standard unit of currency in international markets, such as the US dollar (USD). GDP per capita is an important indicator of economic performance and a useful unit when comparing economic well-being and average living standards among countries. However, gross domestic product per capita is not a measure of personal income, and its use for cross-country comparisons also has some known weaknesses. GDP per capita does not take into account the quantitative distribution of income in the country (FocusEconomics, 2024). An increase in gross domestic product per capita can affect the growth of living standard and social well-being. (Đerić, Rebić, 2021)

When measuring gender (in)equality, a large number of indicators are used. In our analysis, we used the GII (Gender Inequality Index), due to the availability of data for the observed countries.

GII - Gender Inequality Index. The index represents the loss in human development due to gender inequality in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. The gender equality index ranges from 0 to 1. A higher parameter of the given index indicates a greater inequality between men and women, which leads to a greater loss for human development. (UNDP, 2024).

2. Review of Relevant Literature

When researching the relevant literature, we did not come across a single paper that quantified and examined the given issue from the econometric perspective for the countries of the Western Balkans, which we consider an advantage for our research. Econometric analysis is necessary for us to gain knowledge about the interrelationship of the variables used, and to draw adequate conclusions. However, we found papers that analyzed the given topic econometrically, but for other groups of countries.

The United Nations Development Program (2023) provided an overview of the key elements of an enabling environment for women in the economy. In the observed countries of the Western Balkans (Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Albania) during the period from 2020 to 2023, we found data showing that women make up about 40% of the total number of employees in these countries, while more than 23% of women have an insecure job. The evidence collected in this report reveals that the low participation of women in the labour markets of the Western Balkan countries hinders economic growth.

In its report, the Regional Cooperation Council (2021) provided an overview of the situation of women in the labour market, an assessment of the economic benefit that the empowerment of women brings to the economies of the Western Balkan countries (Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Albania), as well as recommendations for the future. Women's labour force participation rates are high in low-income economies because in those economies women have to work in family businesses or the informal sector. Evidence collected from 2010 to 2019 for this report reveals a positive relationship between women who work and gross domestic product per capita, which can lead to long-term economic effects.

Falk and Hermle (2018) compared and tested two hypotheses that make opposite predictions about the connection between gender equality and economic growth. The researchers used data from 2012, which covered about 90% of the world's population, that is, 76 countries. The selected countries covered all levels of development and geographic regions, including 24 in Europe, 22 in Asia, 1 in Oceania, 15 in the Americas, and 14 in Africa. The data revealed that gender equality is strongly positively related to economic development.

Gvardiol, F. (2023) in her research in Croatia covering the period from 2015 to 2019, concluded that increasing the number of women in entrepreneurship has a positive effect on economic growth.

Aniruddha M., James T. Bang and Arnab Biswas (2014) tested the impact of gender equality on economic growth. They conducted a regression analysis on an unbalanced panel of 101 countries from 1990 to 2008, and concluded that in-

creased gender equality leads to an increase in economic growth by about 1.2 percentage points. They stated that this influence depends on the development of the country.

Elizabeth A. (2017) explored the multidimensional nature of gender equality and how it affects economic growth. The study was conducted using data from 64 countries, in the period from 2000 to 2011, using the endogenous growth model. The results showed that countries that protect women's rights have higher real GDP per capita rates.

Maceira, Helena Morais (2017) explored how gender equality measures can contribute to economic growth. She examined the countries of the European Union, when it consisted of 28 countries, their impacts of reducing gender inequality in areas relevant from a macroeconomic perspective: STEM education, activity in the labour market and salaries. The results showed that improved gender equality would have a largely positive effect on GDP per capita and that by 2050 there would be 10.5 million more jobs.

In this paper, we have set the following hypotheses:

H0: An increase in gender inequality leads to an increase in the standard of living in the observed countries

H1: An increase in gender inequality leads to a decrease in the standard of living in the observed countries.

The data used in the analysis were taken from the IMF website and are organized in the form of two panels. The first panel refers to the countries of the Western Balkans (Albania, BiH, Serbia, Montenegro and North Macedonia), which belong to the same group as BiH in terms of the level of presence of gender inequality (GII value is between 0.1 and 0.2). The second panel includes five Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), in which the gender gap is the smallest (the GII value is the lowest and is between 0 and 0.1).

We took GDP per capita as the dependent variable, which reflects the standard of living, while the gender inequality index (GII - *Gender Inequality Index*) was selected as the independent variable. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) was developed by UNDP in 2010. It shows the loss of potential human development due to the difference between female and male achievements in three key aspects of human development: health, empowerment and the labour market (Apelić, B., 2020).

The analysed period covers 14 years (2006 - 2020). The analysis was performed in the Eviews-10 program.

3. Methodology

Panel analysis has become an indispensable technique of empirical research in all scientific branches. We find the reason for this in the fact that it includes both spatial and temporal components at the same time. This is the advantage of this method, because in addition to obtaining variations that occur in time and space, it enables simultaneous variations of the mentioned dimensions (Omerika, H. and Hadžović, M., 2019).

The simplest panel model is Pooled OLS, which has the following form (Mamić, H., 2015):

$$y_{it} = \alpha + \beta_1 \cdot x_{it1} + \beta_2 \cdot x_{it2} + \dots + \beta_K \cdot x_{itK} + \varepsilon_{it}; \quad i = 1, \dots, N; t = 1, \dots, T$$

where N denotes the number of observed units, T denotes the time period, x_{itk} denotes the value of the independent variable. The parameter α is a constant item that is the same for all observed units and does not change over time, $\beta_1, \beta_2, \dots, \beta_K$ are the parameters to be estimated. The random regression error is represented by ε_{it} . The cross-sectional dimension is represented by i , while t represents the time series dimension.

A number of models have been developed that can be applied to panel data, and the most significant are the fixed (FEM) and random effects (REM) models.

The fixed effects model (FEM) implies that although the section may vary depending on the observed subject, the section of each observed subject does not vary over time, that is, it is observed as unchanged over time (Knežević, A., 2015). Also, this model implies that the slope of the regressor coefficient does not vary over time, nor across the observed subjects. The basic form of the fixed effects model reads:

$$; \quad i = 1, \dots, N; \quad t = 1, \dots, T$$

Wherein the variable α_i contains individual effects specific to the observed unit and are constant over time.

In the random effects model (REM), unlike the model with fixed effects, it is assumed that the variation between observed units is random and uncorrelated with the independent variables. The general notation of the model reads:

$$; \quad i = 1, \dots, N; \quad t = 1, \dots, T$$

while the individual effects variable of the observed unit (ui) is included in the random error of the relation, a key difference between fixed and random effects models is whether the unobserved individual effects of the observed units are correlated with the independent variables included in the model or whether these effects are random (Green, 2008).

When evaluating which of the two previously described models (REM or FEM) is more appropriate, we use the Hausman test. The null hypothesis of this test assumes that a random effects model is more appropriate, while the alternative hypothesis assumes that a fixed effects model is more appropriate to use (Hausman, 1978).

Based on the previous theoretical specifications, we have defined 2 regression equations, in their non-linear forms. The first equation refers to the countries of the Western Balkans, while the second one refers to the Scandinavian countries:

$$GDP_{pp1} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 GII1 + \varepsilon$$

$$GDP_{pp2} = \beta_0 + \beta_2 GII2 + \varepsilon$$

where GDPpp is the gross domestic product per capita, and GII is the Gender Inequality Index (GII).

For the purposes of our analysis, we logarithmized the data, so that the previous two equations are reduced to:

$$LGDP_{pp1} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 LGII_1 + \varepsilon$$

$$LGDP_{pp2} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 LGII_2 + \varepsilon$$

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Model Rating (FEM and REM)

Dependent variable: LGDPpp				
Independent variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	FEM	REM	FEM	REM
LGII	-0.484630 *** (0.027712)	-0.486802 *** (0.027659)	-0.049925 *** (0.010327)	-0.050027 *** (0.010313)
R-squared	0.943660	0.807962	0.884704	0.246210
F – statistic	231,1423	307,1327	105.8916	23.84396
Number of observations	75	75	75	75
Standard errors in parentheses: *** = P<0.01 ** = P<0.05 * = P<0.1				

Source: Author’s Calculation in Eviews

The previous table presents the results obtained using FEM and REM estimation for the observed independent variable. Model 1 refers to the countries of the Western Balkans, and model 2 to the Scandinavian countries. What can be observed is that the results obtained for both estimations are very similar. Namely, in Model 1, we notice that the coefficient value for the independent variable is negative and almost identical, both in FEM (-0.484) and in REM (-0.486). The same is the case with Model 2 (in the FEM model -0.049, and in the REM model -0.050). In both models, the coefficients with the independent variable are statistically

significant. Also, each model is correct, as indicated by the size of the F - statistics. The value of F – statistics for Model 1: FEM 231.142 and REM 307.132; while for Model 2 these values are: FEM 105.891 and REM 23.843. The determination coefficient (R-squared) shows that the variations of the dependent variable are largely explained by the variation of the independent variable used. R-squared for Model 1 is: FEM 0.94 and REM 0.80, while in the case of Model 2, the values are: FEM 0.88 and REM 0.24. The total number of observations is 75.

When making a decision about which of the mentioned 2 models (FEM or REM) is more suitable for use and analysis, we use the Hausman test.

Correlated Random Effects - Hausman Test
 Equation: Untitled
 Test cross-section random effects

Test Summary	Chi-Sq. Statistic	Chi-Sq. d.f.	Prob.
Cross-section random	0.035834	1	0.8499

*Table 2; Hausman Test for Model 1 (Western Balkan countries)
 Source: Author’s calculation in Eviews*

Correlated Random Effects - Hausman Test
 Equation: Untitled
 Test cross-section random effects

Test Summary	Chi-Sq. Statistic	Chi-Sq. d.f.	Prob.
Cross-section random	1.623745	1	0.2026

*Table 3; Hausman test for Model 2 (Scandinavian countries)
 Source: Author’s calculation in Eviews*

From the previous two tables, we conclude that in both cases the random effects model (REM) is more suitable for use, so below we will focus on the interpretation of the coefficients of this model.

In the countries of the Western Balkans, if the GII increases by 1%, the value of GDP per capita will decrease by 0.48%, as shown by the value of the coefficient with the independent variable GII (-0.486). Thus, there is an inversely proportional relationship between gender inequality and the standard of living of a country. On the other hand, the same correlation also applies to the Scandinavian countries - if GII increases by 1%, GDP per capita will decrease by 0.05% (this is what the value

of the coefficient with the independent variable GII -0.050 tells us). Determination coefficient (R-squared) for the countries of the Western Balkans in the amount of 0.80, says that 80% of the variations in GDP per capita are explained by variations in the GII index. In Scandinavian countries, this coefficient is 0.24, which tells us that 24% of variations in their GDP per capita is explained by variations in the GII index. In both cases, the value of the standard error is quite low, which is desirable. In the model of the countries of the Western Balkans, the standard deviation is 0.027, and in the model of the countries of Scandinavia it is 0.010.

The conclusion regarding the obtained results would be that there is a relationship between the used variables, i.e. that the Gender Inequality Index (GII) affects GDP per capita in inverse proportionally. An inversely proportional relationship means that if there is an increase in the independent variable, the value of the dependent variable will decrease. Specifically, with an increase in GII by 1%, there will be a decrease in GDP per capita in the countries of the Western Balkans by 0.48%, and in the Scandinavian countries by 0.05%.

5. Conclusion

The summary conclusion of our research would be that the increase in gender inequality leads to a decrease in the standard of living. This means that we reject the null hypothesis and, based on the obtained results, accept the alternative one. The results showed that in both groups of countries, the growth of GII leads to a decrease in their GDP per capita. This decline is greater in the countries of the Western Balkans (-0.48%) compared to the Scandinavian countries (-0.05%).

Although the selected countries, according to the value of the Gender Inequality Index (GII), belong to the group of countries with very low gender inequality, the conclusions suggest that they should fight more actively, through various measures and policies, against this phenomenon, with the aim of improving their performance in all areas, which would ultimately result in a higher standard of living. By defining different policies, states should ensure gender equality in all spheres of life. Of course, it should not be to the detriment of either of the two sides (men and women), but by finding the ways to benefit everyone.

Some general recommendations would relate to the following five areas:

1. In the area of health, it would be necessary to improve the health status of women and men, through simpler and more efficient access to health institutions
2. In the field of education, it is necessary to take measures to create equal opportunities and access to education for both sexes, at every age
3. It is necessary to ensure equal representation of the sexes in the creation of policies and decision-making at all levels of government
4. In the area of the labour market, it is necessary to eliminate any form of discrimination based on sex, in work and employment
5. It is necessary to intensify cooperation with the bodies of the European Union, in terms of defining and implementing measures to achieve greater gender equality in all spheres of life.

All the previously listed measures should lead to a state of equal opportunities for both sexes, and result in reduction of gender inequality, which would ultimately lead to an increase in the living standards of nations and the general betterment of every inhabitant of our planet.

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THEMATIC PART:

3. WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE AND GENDER INEQUALITY

Female Sexuality Through the Prism of Patriarchy

Mentor: Dr. Zona Zarić

zona.zaric@ifdt.bg.ac.rs

Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade

Abstract

Defining a woman as everything that a man is not, that is, the definition of a woman as “the other”, puts all her desires, needs and decisions, including those concerning her sexuality, in a secondary position compared to those of a man. The entrenchment of sexism and misogyny in society leads us to consider female sexuality permissible only in certain contexts, within romantic relationships, marriage or a relationship that must also include a component of love. Yet, these rules and contexts are not applied to men. How do sexism and misogyny influence keeping women in a subordinate position through the control of their sexuality? Is a woman’s sexual desire a true product of her needs or just a concealed influence of patriarchy, or perhaps a need to defy it? The aim of this paper is precisely to present and consider these questions through an interdisciplinary lens.

Keywords: sexuality, misogyny, morality, patriarchy, sexual desire, sexism.

1. Introduction

Searching for an answer as to whether there is a true female sexual desire, freed from all social and patriarchal expectations, reveals different layers of the mechanisms that keep women in an oppressed position relative to men, as well as the manner in which a woman is defined vis-à-vis these mechanisms. Through reflection and research of those phenomena, from a philosophical-psychological perspective, and starting from the point of view that there is no true female sexual desire, nor real freedom for its expression unconstrained by patriarchal norms, the idea for this paper was born. How do we define a woman? What are the mechanisms that prevent her from moving from the dominated position to that of an equal? Is there really an authentic female sexual desire and can it be expressed in an equally authentic way? These are the questions that this paper tries to answer for its author, as well as to its readers.

2. Defining Women through the Theory of Simon De Beauvoir

“One is not born a woman, one becomes a woman” is perhaps one of the most quoted sentences by the French philosopher and feminist Simone de Beauvoir. Beauvoir in her work “The Other Sex” makes an important conclusion “Humanity is male and male defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself; she is not considered an autonomous being” (Beauvoir 1949:6).

Beauvoir talks about the concept of “the Other” as a way of defining woman in the context of complete opposition to man (in this context, man is referred to as the One). This concept speaks about the position of man as the indispensable one, placing the Other, that is, woman, in the place of the dispensable one (Beauvoir 1949). It is important to mention that in this context the Other/s cannot put themselves in that position, but is put in that position by the One by placing themselves in the position of the main subject (Beauvoir 1949). A woman’s lack of movement from the position of the dominated or oppressed seems to be occurring only because of her choice to remain in that position, or because her not being conscious of her position, being precisely the position of the object vis-a-vis the subject. In relation to a man, a woman always represents the negative pole of the continuum. Her opinion, if it is different (regardless of whether it is right or wrong), is taken as wrong precisely because she is a woman (Beauvoir 1949). Looking back at the concept of the Other, it can be concluded that a man is always right because he is a man, because he is the subject who defines the rules and everything contrary to him is considered wrong. So is the woman by default then inherently wrong?

2.1. *The Problem and the Function of “Otherness” within Female Sexuality*

We cannot say that a woman is inherently wrong, but we can refer to the norms and rules of behaviour assigned to her, as an oppressed person, by the subject, and the conditions in which she exists together with her own needs. When we talk about female sexuality and how she disposes of her own body, we encounter a problem again. A man’s body is significant in itself, while a woman’s body means nothing unless it is placed in relation to a man. Simon de Beauvoir talks about the relationship between men and women in the following way: “They live scattered among men, bound by home, work, economic interests, social position to certain men - father or husband - much more firmly than to other women” (Hristov, Zaharijević and Zarić 2023:285). She also writes about the manner in which “a ‘human being’ cannot be realized in ‘female conditions’ (Hristov et al. 2023:285). Such a point of view leads to the conclusion that a man sees a woman only as a sex, and that she cannot be anything more than what he decides. A woman’s body means nothing by itself. Her body is not significant in itself, nor does she matter if separated from him (the man).

By looking at a woman only from the point of view of her abilities and opportunities which can benefit a man, and placing her in such roles from the earliest years, we actually label all her desires and the possibility of thinking about herself as an autonomous being, someone who has rights to her needs, as well as their fulfilment, as secondary. Accordingly, female sexuality is seen as acceptable only when it is in the service of male pleasure, or if it takes place in some socially

acceptable context (marriage, reproduction). A woman's freedom in sex is considered justified if it is manifested within a romantic relationship, marriage or if the relationship contains a component of love (Halwani 2018). Thomas Aquinas talks about the morality of sex in marriage and its desirability within that context. Sexual act for the purpose of reproduction, i.e. sexual activity with a certain intention is considered permissible and morally acceptable. (Halwani 2018). The previously mentioned view of a woman as a sex, indicates that her sexuality is also accepted as adequate only within the framework of reproduction (Halwani 2018). And yet, we are witnesses that these rules do not apply to men. It is considered normalized and common for a man to have a bigger number of female partners during his life, towards whom he does not have to feel romantic emotions, while women are expected to dedicate their whole lives waiting and guarding themselves for true love in order to have their first sexual experience with him.

Bearing all this in mind, we come to an understanding and clarification of the sentence "one is not born a woman, one becomes a woman", where a woman becomes a woman in the first instance when she is placed in a relational connection to a man (father or partner). We become women only when someone can characterize us as the one who is subordinate to the subject who determines the rules of our existence within the framework of patriarchy.

3. Sexism and Misogyny as Patriarchal Tools

"We are not born submissive, we become submissive" is the conclusion reached by the French philosopher Manon Garcia, based on the work of Simone de Beauvoir. Submissiveness, which occurs as a consequence of growing up in a patriarchy, is a direct influence of the mechanisms of sexism and misogyny. According to the understanding of the American feminist Kate Manne, sexism is defined as an ideological branch of patriarchy, while misogyny is any behaviour that maintains or supports the patriarchal power system (Chotiner 2020). Sexism is a form of prejudice, made up of assumptions, theories and stereotypes that normalize and justify patriarchal norms as inevitable and the most desirable. In relation to this, misogyny represents a method, an "executive and judicial body" that implements the ideology and punishes where there is a violation of the "law" (Prasad 2019). In this part of the paper, we focus precisely on examples of how sexism and misogyny work, as well as on the consequences they can have on women's self-confidence and sexual freedom.

3.1. Donald Trump—an Example of the Functioning of Sexism and Misogyny

Kate Manne analyzes the behaviour of the former president of the United States of America, Donald Trump, with the aim of illustrating how the system of sexism and misogyny works. Through this example, Manne brings the reader closer to the rootedness and dynamics of sexism and misogyny in today's society, as well as the new forms that the aforementioned mechanisms take today for the sake of maintaining women in an oppressed, subordinate position (Manne 2016). The politician Donald Trump is known as someone who doesn't shy away from attacking (insulting) his female rivals in political battles, however, what Manne notices here

is that Trump behaves in this way exclusively towards women who are not subordinated to him, towards women who in some way threaten his position (Manne 2016). Women who work for him and do not oppose him in any way, he considers extremely capable and competent (Manne 2016). It becomes clear that a woman is also sometimes considered competent, as long as she is in the service of a man. Manne draws a very significant conclusion: many of the norms and expectations are manifested precisely in the form of what men are considered to have the right to receive, and what women are obliged to provide for them (Manne 2016). Misogynist insults are directed precisely at women who refuse to serve men, who challenge their authority, who refuse to flatter or admire them. "Think of misogyny, then, as the law enforcement branch of a patriarchal order" (Manne 2016).

3.2. Misogyny in Disguise

Misogyny does not necessarily mean explicit offensive comments; it can also manifest itself in the form of questioning and doubting the assessment of a woman, just because she is a woman. In the example of the Heinz dilemma, which was tested on two eleven-year-olds, Jake and Amy, in order to examine their moral development, a different perception of the functioning of the social system can be observed (Gilligan 2003). The Heinz's dilemma is one of the tasks constructed by the American psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, designed to examine the moral development of adolescents, representing a conflict between moral norms and examining the logic of their solutions. In this dilemma, Heinz is considering whether to steal the medicine he cannot afford in order to save his wife's life. The explanation of the situation is followed by the question "Should Heinz steal the medicine?" (Gilligan 2003). After the dilemma was presented to them, these two eleven-year-olds had different answers. Jake very confidently answered that in such a situation it is completely valid to steal the medicine, because human life is more valuable than potential consequences and that he believes, that even if there is a court case, the judge will understand Heinz and give him, if nothing else, a minimal sentence. Jake's perception of the law is that the law will always be on his side and that the law itself is not perfect or has a solution for absolutely every situation (Gilligan 2003). The interviewers, very pleased with Jake's thinking, concluded that he had reached moral maturity. Amy, on the other hand, begins her answer to this dilemma differently, asking sub-questions to the interviewers, trying to find a solution other than stealing. Although aware that human life is important, Amy sees this dilemma from a different angle. If Heinz were arrested and his wife needed the drug again, how would it work? Heinz's wife cannot do without medicine, but she also cannot do without the only person who can take care of her in this situation (Gilligan 2003). In her answers, Amy focused on the relationship between Heinz and his wife. From this perspective, it seems that her level of moral development is on the same level as Jake's (if not superior). However, the interviewers judged her sub-questions as lack of understanding and kept asking her the same question over and over again, which caused Amy to become increasingly unsure of her thinking and to answer each subsequent answer with less confidence. In the end, the interviewers came to the conclusion that Amy did not meet the criteria and that she is at a lower level of moral development than Jake (Gilligan 2003).

Although the comments in this example are not explicitly misogynist, taking Amy back to square one and assuming she doesn't understand the question, although the underlying problem is a misunderstanding of the initial perspective, is that which keeps women questioning their own beliefs and giving up trying to rebel. Amy's answers are perceived as incorrect, because Jake's are correct. The interviewers start from the basic position, which is the male position, and fail to see that the point of view that Amy presents is more constructive. Her point of view is based on preserving interpersonal relationships and finding a way not to break the law. It is only in contrast to Jake's answers that Amy's answers become incorrect. Amy focuses on interpersonal relationships, while Jake views this dilemma as a mathematical problem (Gilligan 2003). Carol Gilligan, in her book "In a Different Voice", uses the example of the Heinz's dilemma as a criticism, through which she shows how Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development fails to see the logic behind Amy's answers, and as a rule puts her at the stage of moral of development that is below Jake's. In an attempt to understand the point of view from which both Amy and Jake view this dilemma, Gilligan says:

To the question, "What does he see that she does not?" Kohlberg's theory provides a -ready response, manifest in the scoring of Jake's judgments a full stage higher than Amy's in moral maturity; to the question, "What does she see that he does not?" Kohlberg's theory has nothing to say. (Gilligan 2003:31).

3.3. Keeping the Woman in the Position of Submissiveness

As already mentioned, women are since their birth placed in a subordinate position by society, .i.e. the position of the Other. Under patriarchy, women are actually born into the informal service industry (Manne 2016). Their social role carries with it the essence of pleasing, supporting and providing all necessary services to men. What this necessary service is, is decided by the man himself, according to his current needs, attitudes and values. "Service" can vary from words of support to housework (cooking, laundry, cleaning, and so on).

Kate Manne lists sexual intercourse as the most basic "service". A man believes that he has the right to sexual intercourse whenever and wherever he is, and that a woman, on the other hand, has no right to deny him such a thing (Manne 2016). Bearing in mind that she is born into this social position, a woman sees this service role as customary and expected. First of all, because she was always expected to be helpful and kind in all spheres of life (Manne 2016). However, how long does it take for us to understand that the position we are in is actually the position of the submissive, the "subjugated"? What is it that keeps us in that position? This is exactly the question to which this paper tries to provide answers and guidelines, taking the mentioned misogynist mechanisms as a potential, but insufficient part of the answer. Sometimes one misogynist comment is enough to take us two steps back. If, for example, during a political debate between a man and a woman (both politicians), a man says something like "You're cute when you're angry", it leads to a complete questioning of the woman's abilities and skills. The comment made about the appearance, made in a situation that requires a high level of professionalism, is extremely inappropriate and disparages the values and arguments that, in this example, the female politician had presented up until then. Despite

the struggle to be equal and have equal rights to get the opportunity to stand side by side with men in the business sphere of life, this kind of comment devalues all the aforementioned effort and struggle and sends the message that no matter how hard we try, we will never be anything more than our body.

3.4. Women as Guardians of Patriarchy

A woman's internalization of "Otherness" may also represent a key problem that successfully keeps her in a subordinate position and does not allow her the possibility of a total rebellion. In clarifying the concept of the Other, Beauvoir compares the oppression of women with the oppression of the proletariat. However, the key difference she points out is that the woman has never been anything else. For the proletariat there was a time before oppression. On the other hand, at no time in history was a woman separated from a man (Beauvoir 1949). Beauvoir says "They have no past, no history, no religion of their own; and unlike the proletariat, they have no solidarity of labour or interest" (Beauvoir 1949:8). The relationship between a man and a woman is a necessary relationship for the survival of our species, and accordingly a woman cannot exist without a man and vice versa. The common thread that unites both the proletariat and women in this context refers to the sheer number of both groups. "Proletarians are not a numerical minority either, but yet they have never formed a separate group" (Beauvoir 1949:8). Beauvoir says the following about the comparison of the proletariat and women:

Proletarians say "we". So do blacks. Positing themselves as subjects, they thus transform the bourgeois or whites into "others". Women—except in certain abstract gatherings such as conferences—do not use "we"; men say „women“, and women adopt this word to refer to themselves; but they do not posit themselves authentically as Subjects (Beauvoir 1949:8).

Beauvoir points out that, unlike the proletariat, women are closer to the men they live with than to other women. They are more inclined to show solidarity with men of the same class, race and status than with other women who do not belong to the same class, race or status (Beauvoir 1949). By internalizing their position as "assumed" and "acceptable", awareness of the harmfulness of misogynist male behaviour towards women becomes difficult.

4. From Submissiveness to Radical Feminism

Misogyny works through subtle rules that keep women in a submissive position. Women who go against these imposed rules pay a certain price for their behavior. When it comes to the issue of freedom of female sexuality, punishment comes in the form of criticism, insidious and humiliating remarks, being treated as easy prey by men, but it can also have a fatal outcome for a woman's life. On the other hand, a large number of feminists today stand for women's freedom in all spheres of life, one of which is women's sexual freedom. From radical submissiveness and submission to patriarchy to radical feminism, one does not come suddenly. The goal of this part of the paper is to look at both perspectives through social phenomena, which are present in different areas of culture and everyday

life, to which one side submits themselves, while the other tries to defy them and completely reject them.

The male gaze, a term used in feminist literature to denote the portrayal of women in literature and art from a male heterosexual perspective that represents women as heterosexual objects for the satisfaction of the male heterosexual observer, largely shapes the way we view female sexuality and how men behave towards women in that context. This male view can best be explained through Laura Mulvey's critique of visual pleasure and cinematography. She cites three perspectives of the male gaze: the perspective of the camera, which records the events in the scene; the perspective of the observer (the audience watching the film); and the perspective of actors involved in the story (Mulvey 1975). Mulvey also mentions one of Freud's (Sigmund Freud) terms, scopophilia, which is defined as the desire to take pleasure in watching. This refers to the satisfaction that the viewer has while watching the film on the screen (Mulvey 1975). The male gaze thus projects its fantasies onto the female figure who subsequently aligns with them. Lacan (Jacques Lacan) says that the act of watching is fundamental to the development of personal identity (Mulvey 1975). Should we then ask ourselves who our audience is in that case? Who develops our personal identity besides ourselves?

In her critique of the traditional representation of women in film, Mulvey talks about the active observer and the passive observed. This dynamic reflects exactly the dynamics we witness in patriarchy. At the foundation of this is the socio-political inequality between men and women, which generates a value system by which male-created institutions determine what is "normal" and "natural". The characteristic of the gaze is precisely that the person being observed is viewed as an object, not as a human being.

4.1. Consequences of the Male Gaze and Self-Objectification

Edward Snow, as a consequence of the male gaze, mentions the deterioration of the mental health of women. First of all, exhaustion from the constant need to pretend and "perform", which supports the point of view that behavior within these frameworks is not spontaneous for a woman, but rather imposed on her. Consequently, claims and assumptions that women are naturally submissive are being questioned. Also, another important consequence of the male gaze is the additional self-objectification of women.

Playwright Wendy Arons points out in her essay "If her Stunning Beauty Doesn't Bring You to Your Knees, Her Deadly Drop-Kick Will: Violent Women in Hong Kong Kung Fu Film":

Hyper-sexualization of the bodies of female characters symbolically diminishes the threat of emasculation posed by violent women. The focus on the woman's body — as a body in an ostentatious display of breasts, legs, and buttocks — does mitigate the threat that women pose to 'the very fabric of . . . society', by reassuring the (male) viewer of his male privilege, as the possessor of the objectifying (male) gaze (Arons 2001:41).

A woman, when she is no longer seen as a human being, becomes only a sexual object and the possibility of using her sexuality against her becomes a weapon that can be used at any time. Kant (Immanuel Kant) claims that the only way we can protect ourselves from objectification is through monogamous marriage, which he defines as a sexual relationship regulated by law (Papadaki 2010). Kant's opinion is not isolated, bearing in mind that marriage, for a sexual relationship in that type of context, really does represent a type of protective factor, guided by the thinking that the partner respects us as something more than a simple sexual object (Halwani 2018). However, the question arises as to how truly sexual freedom is allowed in this context? Does a monogamous sexual relationship governed by rules really liberate us or does it place us in another form of masked submissiveness defined by different rules?

While we may not be viewed as an independent human being, being viewed as someone's wife sounds far better than being viewed as a walking immoral sex object. Keeping a woman in a submissive position by sending exactly such messages, sends an additional message to her that it is better to be submissive, that this is actually her true and authentic social role, and that in this way she will be rewarded with social respect. Of course, this leaves no room for examining her true desire, because the energy is directed to survival in the patriarchy. A vivid example of the consequences of such messages is provided by the popular British series *Fleabag*, which draws a parallel between two sisters in their thirties, who lead diametrically opposite lives. *Fleabag* leads what you would consider a "messy" life. She tries to navigate between sadness, loneliness, sexual addiction, strained relationships with her family and an unstable business. Her sister, Claire, has a seemingly perfect life. She is married, successful in her work, is always all dressed up and diligent, owns her own house and manages to take care of others, in addition to all that. And yet, Claire is just as unhappy as her sister. What her character shows us is how exhausting it is to live up to society's expectations. Being a successful businesswoman, a good wife, always smiling, caring and fun is impossible and can have serious consequences for one's mental health (Mahadevia 2023).

In order to understand the choice to comply with patriarchal expectations and consequently put our needs last in the context of sexuality, as Claire does in the mentioned British series, we can refer to the term introduced by Carol Pateman: "the sexual contract". A sexual contract applies to all women. The freedom of men and the subjugation of women are based on the original contract—and the character of civil liberty cannot be understood without the missing story that reveals how the patriarchal right of men over women is established through the contract (Pateman 2001:12, according to Hristov et al. 2023:283). The hierarchy that places men as superior and women as inferior, places their sexual relationship in opposition, instead of a relationship of two sexually equal persons. On the other hand, we cannot consider sexuality in itself as an independent positive entity that can be defined independently of the context. It is not an isolated phenomenon, but is connected to other aspects of our life and can have an impact on them (Vlašić 2019). This view of sexuality is highlighted by the Slovenian philosopher and feminist Alenka Zupančič. In response to this problem, the concept of consent seems adequate in the service of establishing sexual equality between men and women. However, consent also implies that the woman accepts rather than initiates,

voluntarily renouncing her own desires, because it is assumed that by entering into sexual relations, women “lose” something (Zarić 2022).

Manon García, in her work “The Joy of Consent”, talks about positive consent, as a resistance to understanding consent as a woman’s agreement with what a man suggests. García understands consent as an opportunity to open a space to discuss sex and to reach the essential desires and needs of both partners in that conversation. Considering sex as a taboo topic, something that is dirty and reserved for the private sphere of life, we taboo it, label it as wrong and turn our heads away from all the problems mentioned so far. The objectification of women, hyper-sexualisation, male gaze, find their place in this grey zone created as a result of the aforementioned tabooing.

4.2. *Is There Authenticity in Defiance?*

On the other side of the continuum is an approach that is characterized by a complete rejection and opposition not only to the male gaze, but also to the patriarchal rules that underlie it. Some feminists believe that due to the great pressure that society puts on women in the form of concern for their appearance and the importance attached to it, women treat themselves as things that should be constantly decorated and observed, i.e. watched (Papadaki 2010). However, as the need for beautification is something that women have internalized, due to the messages that society and culture continuously send to them, they neglect to see their body as strong and active (Papadaki 2010), not considering that their body is intended for anything else, but to please and arouse (a man).

From a point of view that opposes submissiveness and aims to place women, not in the role of an equal, but in the role of the subject; and hence places men in the position of subordinates, i.e. the Other, the concept of the female gaze can be analysed. The female gaze, in its fundament basically represents the same as the male gaze, with the exception of the roles that men and women occupy. The female gaze places a woman in the position of an observer, where a woman observes a man, other women, and herself from the perspective of a heterosexual man. However, observing herself “as” a man, unconsciously leads to self-objectification. An interesting concept that is introduced and can clarify the point of view opposed to the submissive part of the continuum, is another form of gaze or looking. It is the queering of the gaze. This concept refers to the mutual gaze of two women, where neither of them is either the subject, or the object. The term is associated with lesbian cinema. It is interesting that in this context, women are free to be who they are, to express themselves as they really want, which is facilitated precisely because of the absence of a male gaze.

When concluding her considerations of the gaze, cultural researcher Griselda Pollock, in her essay “Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity”, analyzes Robert Doisneau’s painting “The Sideways Glance” and describes a middle-aged bourgeois couple looking at works of art in the window of an art gallery. In the photo, the viewer’s perspective is from the inside of the gallery. The two of them are looking in different directions relative to the viewer’s line of sight. The woman is talking to her husband about the picture she is looking at, while he is distant and interestedly

looking at the picture of a naked woman who is also in the viewer's sight. Pollock analyses this photo with the following words:

"She (the wife) is contrasted, iconographically, to the naked woman. She is denied the picturing of her desire; what she looks at is blank for the spectator. She is denied being the object of desire, because she is represented as a woman who actively looks, rather than (as a woman passively) returning and confirming the gaze of the masculine spectator."

5. Final Considerations

The female status of the object is not something that is assumed, but a consequence of gender inequality. Simon De Beauvoir says "One is not born a woman, one becomes a woman" while Manon García uses this sentence to explain submissiveness, and formulates it as follows "We are not born submissive, we become submissive". Establishing domination in all spheres of life seems to be one of the important tasks of many feminists. Rejecting everything that is considered "normal" in patriarchy to the point of going to the exact opposite just to prove a point, equally raises the question of whether this is someone's true desire, or just a product of rebellion born out of a history of an oppressed position?

Karol Gilligan and Naomi Snider, in their book "Why does Patriarchy Persist?" talk about the sacrifice we must make in order for both men and women to obey patriarchal norms (Burack 2019).

But what aspects of the self become severed and potentially lost varies by sex. According to the authors, boys understand that they must disclaim tenderness, connection, and vulnerability to adhere to patriarchal codes of masculinity. Girls, on the other hand, understand that they must disclaim what they think, feel, and know in order to comply with the requirements of a nurturing femininity and avoid being "too loud" (Burack 2019:336).

Living in patriarchy also means unconsciously adopting the norms, standards and expectations imposed by it. Change begins the moment we become aware of how patriarchy affects us and our behaviour and by which (conscious or unconscious) mechanisms we uphold its existence. "By giving voice to the cognitive dissonance required to live under the patriarchy, you've robbed it of its power" (Jamison 2023).

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Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) – Socio-Cultural Context and Reasons for Practicing FGM

Mentor: Dr. Đurđa Trajković

djurdja.trajkovic@rwwfund.org

Reconstruction Women's Fund

Abstract

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is one of the most controversial and deeply rooted practices affecting millions of girls and women around the world. Rooted in cultural, social, and sometimes religious beliefs, FGM involves the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, often without medical supervision, and usually results in lifelong physical and psychological consequences. The practice varies in severity, from a symbolic incision to complete removal of the clitoris and labia majora, and in some cases also stitching together of the vaginal opening. Despite concerted efforts to eradicate it, FGM persists in many communities across Africa, Asia, and even in other populations around the world. Beyond the immediate health risks, which include severe pain, infection, and complications during childbirth, and even death, FGM reflects broader issues of gender inequality, women's rights, and bodily autonomy. It perpetuates harmful gender norms, reinforcing control over women's sexuality and subjecting them to social expectations of purity and modesty. Furthermore, FGM often serves as a rite of passage into adulthood, deeply embedded in cultural traditions and considered necessary for marriageability and social acceptance. However, increased awareness, advocacy and legal measures have led to some progress in the fight against FGM, but significant challenges remain in overcoming deep-rooted cultural norms and ensuring access to education and health care. This review discusses the complexity of FGM, exploring its types, reasons, health consequences, cultural significance, laws and social factors, and and effective ways to combat this practice today..

Keywords: FGM, practice, reasons, culture, health consequences.

1. Introduction

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is one of many deeply rooted practices that affect millions of girls and women around the world. Rooted in cultural, social and sometimes religious beliefs, FGM involves the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, often without medical supervision, and usually carries lifelong physical and psychological consequences. The practice varies in severity, from

a symbolic incision to the complete removal of the clitoris and labia majora, and in some cases also stitching together the vaginal opening. Despite concerted efforts to eradicate it, FGM persists in many communities across Africa, Asia, and even in other populations around the world, due to massive migration. Beyond the immediate health risks, which include severe pain, infection, complications during childbirth, and even death, FGM reflects broader issues of gender inequality, women's rights, and bodily autonomy. It perpetuates harmful gender norms, reinforcing control over women's sexuality and subjecting them to social expectations of purity and modesty. Furthermore, FGM often serves as a rite of passage into adulthood, deeply embedded in cultural traditions and considered necessary for marriageability and social acceptance. However, increased awareness, advocacy and legal measures have led to some progress in the fight against FGM, but significant challenges remain in overcoming deep-rooted cultural norms and ensuring access to education and health care.

In this paper, I will offer an overview of the complexities of FGM, exploring its types, reasons, health consequences, cultural significance, laws and social factors. Basically, I want to show that the problem of FGM and its eradication lies in the tension between two norms as well as the successful replacement of one norm by another. On the one hand, the longevity of the patriarchal norm of local communities reproduces the inferiority of women so that violence against women is normalized with justifications based on the unquestioned matrix of a traditional society. The social statuses and privileges of a community are attached to the very act of mutilation. The paradox of such a norm is the belief that taking away pleasure is actually good for women and that her giving up of the clitoris enables various gains. On the other hand, the norm with which this practice is to be successfully and intelligently replaced is not based on the celebration of Western values of freedom and enjoyment for women. On the contrary, the effective fight against such a practice today takes into account the local cultural heritage, that dismantles it through various forms of persuasion for change: medical, legal, as well as those found in the equality of the sexes, and absence of violence and pain. Therefore, legal norms and frameworks can only lead to some goals, however, where change must be expected most - is in changing the social context where careful education of the local community can lead to the abolition of the practice.

Africa and the Middle East are home to the majority of girls and women at risk of FGM. These countries cover a wide part of Africa, from Senegal in the west to Somalia in the east. FGM is also known to be practiced in several communities along the Red Sea coast of Yemen. There are also rumours—unconfirmed—of a small number of cases in Jordan, Oman, the Occupied Palestinian Territories (Gaza), and some Kurdish groups in Iraq. Additionally, reports of practice have also come from specific populations in Malaysia, Indonesia, and India. (UNICEF 2008)

Families, communities and civilizations from these areas that practice female genital mutilation have several motives for doing so. The belief that the practice will ensure that a girl respects important social norms, including those related to sexual abstinence, femininity, respect, and maturity, is a primary driver for the practice. For ease of understanding, a social norm can be defined as established rules and guidelines that govern a community and determine the expected behaviour of members of that community, culture, or organization. Norms are basically

“ways of life” that dictate right and wrong behaviour that each person must follow. Keeping in mind what the norm is, we can slowly work towards the factors that make female genital mutilation the norm.

In many societies, families and individuals are not the only parties involved in important decision-making processes; community or group dynamics also play a role. Because of this, interventions aimed exclusively at individuals or families are less likely to be successful. For example, research conducted over three years in Senegal and The Gambia found that many family members, including mothers, fathers, grandfathers, and aunts, make important decisions, such as whether the girl from their household will be subjected to the practice of genital mutilation. However, the results also show that when it comes to female genital mutilation, women now have more decision-making power than men. The mother’s view is a better indicator of whether the girl will be exposed to the practice when couples cannot agree on the matter. This indicates that although fathers oppose female genital mutilation, girls are still subjected to the practice (UNICEF 2023).

Because of this, FGM differs from most other forms of violence against girls and women because it involves women as both perpetrators and victims (WHO 2012). Typically, FGM is organized by female relatives of the girl, and traditional female circumcisers perform the procedure. Health workers, both male and female, are increasingly performing the FGM now. This aspect of FGM serves as an example of how gender norms and practices that encourage violence against women can be reinforced by both men and women. In addition, FGM is also distinguished by the fact that it is widely practiced on almost all girls, mostly minors, and is supported as a highly respected social norm and cultural practice in the communities where it is carried out (WHO 2008).

Because the activity is carried out in response to deeply embedded social conventions and reinforces important social norms, noncompliance often results in harassment, exclusion from important social events and support systems, and discrimination by the peers. Individuals and families are likely to believe that the social dangers associated with FGM outweigh the risks to girls’ physical and mental health, unless there is an agreement of a larger part of the population. Some people believe that community-imposed restrictions, rather than a legal ban on FGM, are more important when it comes to non-compliance.

2. Brief Definition of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Types and Reasons for its Practice

2.1. Definition of FGM

Any procedure that involves the removal of the external genitalia in whole or in part, or any damage done to the female genital organs for a non-medical purpose, is classified as female genital mutilation (FGM). The name used in this process has undergone several significant changes. The procedure was originally called “female circumcision” when it was popularized outside the societies where it was usually performed. However, this term directly compares female circumcision with male circumcision, leading to confusion between these two different processes. (UNICEF 2008)

The phenomenon that affects girls and women is a manifestation of pervasive gender inequality, which places them at the bottom of society and has serious negative consequences for their physical and social prosperity. The word “mutilation” serves to further support the idea that this practice violates the human rights of women and girls, which supports national and international efforts to ban it. (UNICEF 2008).

2.2. Types of FGM

Four types of FGM are classified by the WHO:

- Type I: clitoridectomy, or partial or total removal of the clitoral glans or prepuce
- Type II: excision of the labia majora and partial or total removal of the clitoris and labia minora
- Type III: infibulation, which involves narrowing of the vaginal opening and formation of a protective seal through repositioning and cutting of the labia majora or minora, either in combination with or isolated from the clitoris. Re-infibulation, often called re-closure, is the process of narrowing the vaginal opening after a woman has been de-infibulated (eg, after childbirth).
- Type IV: all other harmful procedures for non-medical purposes (such as pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterizing) performed on the female genitalia (WHO 2012)

The only thing that connects the practices listed under different categories is their impact on the female genitalia. However, their exact effects on the genitals and their nature vary. For example, it is difficult to equate the complete removal of the labia minora or majora, with scratching or piercing of the vaginal region.

Female genital mutilation types I, II and III have been reported in 28 African countries, as well as in several Asian and Middle Eastern countries. Cases of female genital mutilation have also been reported in several other countries, particularly among some ethnic groups in Central and South America. This is mainly carried out on girls from birth to the age of fifteen. However, sometimes adults and married women are also subjected to the procedure. The age at which female genital mutilation is performed varies according to local traditions and circumstances, but is decreasing in some countries (UNICEF 2005a).

It is also important to note that eighteenth-century medical textbooks declared female genital mutilation an appropriate treatment for sexually abnormal behaviour in women, including “masturbation”, “hysteria” and “nymphomania”. These hideous, dangerous, and terrible practices are sometimes dismissed as “just a cultural thing”, unfit for outside criticism, and only fit for discussion by “objective” cultural experts. However, it is insufficient to dismiss the high incidence of disease, mortality and long-term adverse physical consequences as merely cultural norms (Perry and Albee 1998).

2.3. Reasons for the Practice of FGM

Now that we know where it is mostly spread and what it looks like, we can talk about the multiple reasons that have been used over the years to protect the harmful practice of FGM. Some cultures include the practice in initiation rites, often as a prerequisite for girls to join women's secret societies. These groups are thought to be essential for their development into mature, responsible adults (Ahmadu 2000; Hernlund 2003; Behrendt 2005; Johnson 2007). Girls may want to have the surgery themselves due to peer pressure and fear of rejection and stigma from their community if they go against the norm.

Additionally, some places reward girls who have undergone FGM with celebrations, public praise and gifts (Behrendt 2005; UNICEF 2005a). Female genital mutilation has therefore become a significant aspect of the cultural identity of girls and women in societies where it is common. It can also evoke a sense of pride, a sense of growing up, and a sense of inclusion in the community.

Men are often expected to marry only women who have undergone the procedure. The maintenance of the practice can be explained by the desire for a decent marriage, which is often necessary for social and economic security, as well as for the preservation of regional ideas about femininity. The technique is often considered a means to guarantee and preserve the virginity of a woman or girl (Talle 1993, 2007; Berggren et al. 2006; Gruenbaum 2006).

In some communities, FGM is believed to help suppress sexual desire, thereby guaranteeing fidelity in marriage and stopping sexual behaviour that is considered abnormal and immoral (Ahmadu 2000; Hernlund 2000, 2003; Abusharaf 2001; Gruenbaum 2006). Another belief is that female genital mutilation makes girls "pure" and attractive. Removing "male" elements such as the clitoris is the idea behind genital mutilation (Talle 1993; Ahmadu 2000; Johannesen 2007). This can be further linked to orgasmic inequality, which is also accepted as the norm (dare I say worldwide). By removing the clitoris, we remove the most important thing on the female body that allows for her to achieve pleasure (orgasm), and on top of that, to make matters worse, we expect the same woman to be a sexually active individual and to enjoy sexual relations. In the case of infibulation, the goal is to achieve a smoothness that is considered beautiful (Talle 1993; Gruenbaum 2006). Women sometimes said they thought men enjoyed sex more when they had their genitals mutilated in any of the ways mentioned above (Almroth-Berggren et al. 2001).

According to several sources (Budiharsana 2004; Dellenborg 2004; Gruenbaum 2006; Clarence-Smith 2007; Abdi 2007; Johnson 2007), religious beliefs can also support this practice. Female genital mutilation is a practice practiced by Muslims, Christians and Jews, although it has never been sanctioned in any of their scriptures (WHO 1996a; WHO and UNFPA 2006).

Older women who have experienced FGM firsthand often assume the role of guardians of the practice because they believe it is central to the identity of women and girls. This is probably one of the reasons why women—and usually older women—are more inclined to accept the practice and believe that attempts to stop it represent an attack on their culture and identity (Toubia and Sharief 2003; Draege 2007; Johnson 2007).

3. Health Consequences

The World Health Organization (WHO 2018b) describes mental health and well-being in this way: every person who can realize their full potential, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully, and contribute to their community. This definition includes the eudemonic concept of well-being, which explains that positive psychological functioning and the realization of human potential are key elements in achieving well-being (Rogers 1961; Ryff 1989; Ryff & Keyes 1995).

FGM is recognized as a dangerous practice that has adverse effects on women's health, including pain, bleeding, shock, recurrent infections, and difficulty urinating and defecating (WHO 2008). A review and study of the health problems associated with this practice (WHO 2000; WHO Study Group 2006) revealed a number of birth problems, the most common of which are perineal tears, episiotomies, and prolonged and/or difficult labor. A recent systematic study concluded that women who have undergone FGM feel pain during sexual intercourse and have less desire and satisfaction during the sexual intercourse (Berg and Denison 2011). FGM is a painful experience that leaves a long-lasting psychological scar on many girls and women (WHO 2008; HRP 2011).

The next immediate health problems are: bleeding, shock and infection. In addition, FGM can result in ovarian cysts, open sores in the genital area, bacterial infections (tetanus or sepsis) during and after pregnancy, a higher risk of infant mortality, miscarriages and stillbirths, urinary problems, infertility and death.

Chronic pain, infection, keloids, fibrosis, primary infertility, and psychological distress, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, are among the long-term health risks associated with FGM. FGM is often performed in non-sterile environments by traditional female doctors who lack a basic understanding of female anatomy and the potential negative consequences. The procedure itself is painful because girls are usually physically restrained (tied) while it is being performed. Legs that are infibulated are often tied together for several days or weeks (UNICEF 2008).

In countries where the prevalence of FGM is very high, it can be difficult to convince individuals of the significance of the associated health problems. A long postpartum recovery period and difficult births, often exacerbated by FGM, are usually accepted as the norm. Therefore, communities may not blame the FGM method itself for the serious difficulties that arise from it.

It's important to mention that its advocates say the practice is safer than ever and shouldn't be banned because of the improved medical protocols in place. The UN expresses concern that the process is becoming increasingly "medicalized", meaning that less "invasive" surgery is being performed by medical professionals. However, this does not diminish the fact that it harms women physically and psychologically in the long term and has no medical purpose (UN Agencies Together Against Female Genital Mutilation 2008).

4. Laws, Cultural Significance and Social Factors

4.1. Laws

When social norms and self-interests fail to influence people's behaviour in a desired way, laws are often considered a way to control behavior. This implies that, on the one hand, the law should promote and enforce more laws in areas where social norms are present, and govern sectors where they are not present. However, it also implies that the internal fairness and efficacy of current social standards do not seem to be subject to scrutiny (Carbonara 2017).

Laws seem to support social norms that already exist, encouraging the establishment of new ones in the absence of existing ones and adapting them to the law where there is a difference. However, existing social norms can also be violated by legal regulation (suppression) or because of it (legal reaction and opposite effects) (Carbonara 2017).

Modification of social punishment can also change the social norm. The degree of adherence to the norm in many economic models is determined by the perspective of sanctions. As an example, let's say that people have to choose between A and B, where A and B are replaceable symbols. "A" could indicate adherence to a social standard, and "B" its violation. People driven solely by self-interest will choose the action that brings the highest rewards. In such conditions, a greater willingness of individuals to hold perpetrators accountable will result in a greater degree of adherence to the social norm (Carbonara 2017).

Even more harmful outcomes can arise from legal norms, which not only weaken potentially moral social norms, but also polarize societies, exacerbate potential social conflicts, and even worsen individual behaviour by making the behaviours that the law should limit more common (Carbonara 2017).

Therefore, this harmful social norm of female genital mutilation is, in a statement by UN agencies from 2008, defined as a form of violence against girls, a violation of human rights and a form of gender-based discrimination. This practice violates numerous human rights guaranteed by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Because they are by definition not authorized to give their consent, underage girls are almost exclusively the target of FGM, according to the prevailing portrayal of the procedure in the human rights debate. Although it is recognized that adult women are also exposed to FGM, the topic of consent is rarely addressed because it is assumed that these women have no other option but to undergo the procedure and that no rational, educated woman would consent to such a procedure (Krivenko K 2015).

Given the variety of ways in which women are exploited both domestically and internationally, genital mutilation may be the best example of how cultural patriarchies severely abuse and torture women to death. The underlying factors can be linked to the importance of ensuring that women do not deviate from monogamy, that male children will receive property from their real fathers, and that women will not seek sexual satisfaction outside of a male-dominated marriage (El Mouelhy 1992).

FGM violates many well-established human rights norms, principles and standards. These include the right to life (if the procedure results in death), freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and the rights of the child, as mentioned.

International human rights instruments support the freedom of people to engage in cultural activities, but do not support practices that violate people's rights. Therefore, FGM cannot be justified by referring to social or cultural reasons. A society that decides to reject FGM is not rejecting its cultural values, but behaviour that harms women and girls who are equal members of the community, and does so by perpetuating gender stereotypes and disparities.

4.2. Cultural Significance

Female genital mutilation has been documented for thousands of years. It is present among various groups, such as indigenous Australian tribes and many African and other societies. Some of these groups were originally animists and remained so, while others later created official religions (Burrage 2015).

With the discovery of mummies in Egypt, it was confirmed that female genital mutilation was a common practice even then. "Pharaonic circumcision", as it was then called, was equivalent to today's infibulation, and was carried out on female slaves in Egypt (Burrage 2015).

It is a ritual of transition into female adulthood with deep social and family roots in many societies. Maintaining hygiene and health, ensuring the possibility of marriage, preserving the female identity, the "purity" of the woman and the honour of the family are some of the justifications offered for the continuation of the practice. The main driver behind continued practice in many situations is social acceptance. Other justifications include improving aesthetic appeal, protecting against rape, guaranteeing loyalty after marriage, and giving circumcisers a source of income.

There are other non-historical and non-cultural justifications for the continuation of FGM. For example, people in most of West Africa and in countries like Mali and Burkina Faso consider the clitoris a dangerous organ and demand that it be removed. According to this view, the clitoris is poisonous and if it comes into contact with a man's penis, it will either kill him or make him sick. According to some myths, an uncut clitoris causes male impotence and kills infants. Because of these beliefs, it is not surprising that people try to protect themselves in any way possible, even if that includes genital mutilation of their biological children (Williams-Breault 2018).

As hard as it is for "us" to accept, female genital mutilation is not only widespread, but fashionable in such areas. In this way, the concept of natural female genitalia disgusts a large number of women in countries such as Mali, Somalia, Egypt, Kenya and Chad. They consider unaltered genitalia to be ugly, vulgar and disgusting, and as such, not fully human. Unaltered genitalia are associated with life on the periphery of civilization or outside it. "Phew" they mutter to themselves, "who are these savages who don't circumcise their genitals?" Of course, the "yuck"

is mutual. For those belonging to mainstream or majority populations in Europe, the US, China, Japan and other regions of the world, including South Africa, changes in female genitalia are not common and normal. (Shweder 2000; 219)

Activist leading the efforts to eradicate child marriage and female genital mutilation, Jaha Dukureh, UN Regional Goodwill Ambassador for Africa, says: I have seen some of the most educated people practice female genital mutilation because they believe it is their culture. With this in mind, we can see clearly that, in some cases, religion has no bearing on FGM, that class is irrelevant, and that it is not an issue of education. It is important to approach the issue of female genital mutilation with an understanding of the complexity and depth of its roots in culture and society. It is necessary to work on educating people and promoting awareness of the harmfulness of this practice, even among the most educated layers of society. It is also crucial to work with local communities and leaders to promote alternatives and encourage positive change within the cultural context. All this requires a long-term commitment to finally end FGM (WHO 2008).

4.3. Social Factors

People adhere to social norms for a variety of reasons. First, they do it because it benefits them to behave like everyone else. Second, they fear the social sanctions they may face if they do not follow the norms. Social norms often require certain sacrifices or renunciation, and breaking these norms can lead to discomfort or rejection by society. While legal sanctions support legal norms, social norms rely on non-legal sanctions such as shaming or denial of social contact, often enforced by citizens or family. Fear of these sanctions can motivate people to conform to social norms, even when violating those norms serves their immediate self-interest (Carbonara 2017).

According to several studies (Mackie et al. 2014; Shell-Duncan et al. 2011; Shell-Duncan & Hernlund 2000; UNICEF 2013), FGM is widely recognized as a social norm. In a certain context, a practice is considered a social norm if it meets the following criteria: there is a norm of behaviour related to the practice; people know about the rule and feel that it applies to them; people follow the rule to avoid social sanctions and adhere to social conventions within their shared ethnic, religious or social group (UNICEF 2013).

Although there is not much basic research on how FGM affects society, some studies have pointed to the possible negative consequences of not performing FGM for families, girls and women. Since the activity is carried out in response to strong social conventions and confirms important social norms, non-compliance often leads to additional complications.

Understanding FGM as a social norm helps explain why women who have gone through the mutilation themselves and experienced negative health consequences support its continuation. Not because they are ignorant of the negative characteristics of FGM, but because they believe that giving it up will result in a loss of status and protection, which is why they oppose efforts to end it. This helps to explain why some families, although they express a desire to end the practice, decide to have their daughters undergo the operation. Changes in tradition can

only be implemented if a significant part of the community decides to stop the practice in a way that does not benefit any girl or family more than others. (Williams-Breault 2018)

Similar to cases of physical and sexual abuse, and accusations of mental instability, FGM also stems from assumptions that women are naturally inferior and physiologically defective - that is, that their anatomy determines their fate. Imperial conquests and the expansion of industrial monopolies are systematically sustained by the exploitation of women as workers, as reproductive entities and sex slaves. It also affirms male-dominated religious authority. Functional and dysfunctional psychological pathologies, as well as an increase in physical illness and mortality, especially among poor and minority women, are the result of these very systems for women. Initiating strategic social transformation requires disentangling these complex social elements and tracing their roots in deterministic ideologies both in their historical background and in the mechanisms that support them (Perry and Albee 1998).

Because patriarchy touches on the subject of identity and culture, discussing it evokes strong feelings. The gender roles assigned to men and women by society are quite deeply rooted. Every aspect of life, including language, dress and sexual expression, is defined by these gender roles. The unique characteristics of a woman make her different from a man. A woman's body is abnormal while a man's body is normal. A man's knowledge is the standard, while a woman's knowledge is emotional and inappropriate in public settings. To establish a presence in the public sphere, women must set aside their unique traits and adopt traits associated with men. This includes the ability to successfully satisfy a man sexually; during marriage, "physical virginity and patriarchal innocence" (Mernissi) are highly valued. Within the framework of religious instruction, a woman's moral correctness and dignity are primarily determined by her sexual modesty and innocence. It is a burden that falls exclusively on women, while men benefit by maintaining their social position and widening the gender inequality gap by denying women their right to self-determination (Lynnette Monagan 2010).

The very story of mankind's fall from Heaven shows that women, in addition to being considered the inferior sex, were also considered weaker, as shown by the serpent approaching Eve instead of Adam. In addition, it confirms the sexual nature of women by showing how she tricked Adam into rebelling against God after being seduced by the serpent. Thus, a woman's sexuality presents a dichotomy: it can be seductive, but it can also be so harmful that she must be restrained. Eve's punishment for tasting the forbidden fruit establishes the woman's ability to reproduce. God punished Eve for disobedience by making it difficult for her to bear a child and making her submit to her husband (Lynnette Monagan 2010).

Although these structures may change, the norm that supports them may never change because it is rooted in habit or tradition; or alternatively, the norm may change but the underlying social structure does not (Edberg & Krieger 2020). Understanding how social norms affect women through different processes and at different levels within an ecological framework is a key measure in ensuring that women receive equal treatment and that their rights are not violated.

5. How to Fight FGM

Thirty countries in Africa and several in Asia and the Middle East have high rates of FGM. Cases of this behavior have also been reported among some ethnic groups in South America and Central America. The countries with the highest rates of FGM among women aged 15-49 are Somalia (98%), Guinea (97%) and Djibouti (93%). Countries with the highest reported rates of FGM/C among girls under the age of 14 include The Gambia (56%), Mauritania (54%) and Indonesia (~50%). High population growth rates in countries where FGM/C is practiced indicate that by 2030, the number of affected women and girls is likely to increase despite a general decline in FGM rates (Williams-Breault 2018).

In some of the mentioned places, the occurrence of female genital mutilation has decreased as a result of many years of preventive work carried out by local communities, governments, and national and international organizations. Communities that used the consensus-building process were able to stop the practice. In fact, the practice of female genital mutilation can be quickly abolished if the communities that practice it decide to stop it.

Initiatives that include “empowering” teaching, public engagement, debates, and structured outreach have been shown to foster the cooperation and consent needed to end FGM at the local level, in the long term. On a range of issues, including sensitive issues such as female genital mutilation, such activities empower communities to voice their concerns and devise solutions without feeling pressured or judged. Seven years after the initial program intervention, programs using these components and principles have shown significant reductions in prevalence (Ndiaye et al.).

In addition to imparting new knowledge, educational sessions can foster empowerment by providing a platform for participants to share experiences, explore conflicting attitudes towards female genital mutilation in the community, and help uncover and share complex inner feelings. A variety of training programs, such as those focusing on literacy, analytical thinking and problem-solving techniques, as well as general health, and sexual and reproductive health, human rights and religion, can be used to strengthen education (WHO 2008).

It is imperative that educational initiatives are aware of local cultural and religious considerations, so that the information conveyed is not considered morally repugnant and causes adverse reactions in the community. The information offered should be supported by evidence, but also based on local expertise and perceptions (WHO 2008).

Communities should be given the opportunity for public discussion and consideration of new information in order to arrive at the coordinated, collective decision needed to permanently renounce female genital mutilation. Such open discussions provide opportunities to raise community awareness and understanding of women’s human rights and national and international legal frameworks related to FGM. Discussion and argumentation between women, men and community leaders often focuses on the importance of women in society, thereby promoting their proactive participation in decision-making and strengthening their ability to end such behavior (WHO 2008).

Activities carried out at the national level and across national borders have the potential to either facilitate or hinder social transformation within communities. Similar to initiatives at the local level, national initiatives should support a process of social change that results in a consensus on the abolition of female genital mutilation. Parliamentarians, civil society organizations and traditional, religious and government leaders must be involved in such activities. (UNICEF 2008)

The media can be extremely important in providing accurate information and educating the public about potential positive social changes occurring in local communities. This is especially important in situations where talking about female genital mutilation is unacceptable (taboo). In addition to providing information on various topics, such as human rights - including the rights of women and children - facts about female genitalia, the purpose and effects of FGM, and strategies for individual and collective resistance to the practice, information campaigns should focus on the needs and concerns specific to local community (WHO 2008).

Many states have banned the practice by passing new laws or enforcing existing legal prohibitions. But the degree to which the law is connected to the wider process of social transformation determines how effective it is. Legal measures are necessary to deter FGM, assist individuals who have given up the practice or wish to do so, and express government's clear condemnation of the practice. However, sanctions themselves carry the risk of making the practice illegal and have very little impact on behaviour (UNICEF 2005b). In addition to legal measures, public education campaigns and other initiatives should be implemented to strengthen public support for ending the practice.

Health professionals should be qualified to recognize and address problems caused by FGM. This includes treatments for both short-term problems such as defibulation, as well as long-term problems. Evidence shows that better birth conditions based on WHO recommendations (WHO 2001a, 2001b, 2001c) can help reduce the risks associated with female genital mutilation during childbirth, affecting both mother and child.

To ensure that the standards are supported by hard data, the UN plays a key role in both development and conducting research in partnership with academic and development partners. In order to achieve the common goal of ending female genital mutilation, development cooperation organizations play a key role in providing financial and technical support to national and international initiatives (WHO 2008).

With the experience of interventions that can more successfully result in the abandonment of the practice, we now have a greater understanding of the practice itself and the factors that led to its continued existence. If this understanding is applied in a way that encourages collaborative, coordinated efforts at the local, national and global levels, it can result in the abandonment of FGM within a generation. (UNICEF 2008).

6. Conclusion

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a long-standing practice that persists in many parts of the world despite concerted efforts to eradicate it. This harmful tradition not only violates the fundamental rights and dignity of girls and women, but also causes long-term physical, emotional and psychological harm. It is obvious that the practice of FGM is a manifestation of deep-seated cultural beliefs and social norms.

However, progress has been made in recent years through targeted education, advocacy and legislative measures aimed at raising awareness and changing attitudes towards FGM. Efforts to engage communities, religious leaders, and policy makers have been instrumental in challenging the acceptance of FGM and promoting alternative practices that support the rights and well-being of girls and women.

Replacing FGM with healthy cultural norms requires a multidimensional strategy that addresses the root causes of the practice, supports alternative rites of passage (celebration ceremonies, nature-related rituals) and empowers communities to reject harmful practices. It is possible to replace the harmful practice of FGM with positive cultural norms that promote the rights, dignity and well-being of women and girls by putting these ideas into practice through cooperative and adaptive action, without mutilation or any other form of violence.

In conclusion, while the fight against FGM is far from over, there is reason for hope as more and more individuals and organizations come together to end this harmful practice. Unfortunately, it is not enough to just implement certain laws to try to stop FGM. For that, it is necessary to have a society that has the will and desire to stop this, and that is ready to eradicate it alone, with the help of others. By continuing to prioritize education, empowerment and dialogue, we can work towards a future where every girl and woman will be free from the threat of genital mutilation, and will therefore be able to live a dignified, healthy and equal life.

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Women in International Migration: Theory and Practice

Mentor: Associate professor Ana Bilinović Rajačić

ana.bilinovic@ff.uns.ac.rs

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad

Abstract

The main theme of this paper is the analysis of women's experience of migration processes. This topic is relatively recent, taking into account that in the historical context and in research on the subject of migration, the focus was on men. The aim of this paper is to point out the specific experiences of women in migration, their status, their role and the challenges/obstacles they face in international migration of population. The paper will present the history of the development and stages of the gender approach in the study of migration, with a focus on the gender identity and practices of migrant women, emphasizing the differences in relation to the country of origin, transit and destination. Furthermore, the concept of feminization of migration will be analysed, along with the presentation of variations conditioned by the level of development of the country of immigration and migrant's origin. Also, the socio-legal position and status of migrant women will be analyzed, as well as various aspects of marginalization, discrimination and violence against migrant women. Special attention will be paid to personal stories of migrant women and testimonies about challenges on the migration path.

Key words: migration, gender, feminization of migration, gender aspects

1. Introduction

International migration implies processes of voluntary or forced leaving the country of origin or usual place of residence, with the aim of temporary or permanent relocation to another country, as well as the process of voluntary or forced departure from the country of origin due to residence or permanent settlement in another country (Krstić 2012:13)²². In addition, it can be said that migration is a key topic in international relations that includes existential factors of human functioning (Sitompul 2023), as well as being a key factor affecting changes in population distribution (Clark, 2020). We distinguish between the terms of immigration and emigration. Emigration refers to leaving or departing from one's country in order to

22 Internal migration refers to a change of place of residence within the borders of the country of origin, that is, a change of place of residence within the country, when the change occurred under duress (Krstić 2012).

settle in another country, while immigration is a reverse process in which citizens of other countries move into a country for the purpose of settlement. The causes that lead to emigration and immigration can be multiple (poverty, life without perspective and opportunities for advancement, conflicts, etc.). Migration can be voluntary or forced (Krstić 2012:13). Forced migration occurs in circumstances of war in the country of origin, in the case of religious conflicts, as well as natural disasters.

People go from one country to another in search of a better life. This can be carried out in a legal way, or “under the radar”, if the person does not have the necessary permits. Because of these different ways of crossing borders, an entire industry has developed around helping migrants get where they want to go. However, there are also people who are not “on the road” voluntarily, but because they have to flee from wars or the unfavorable positions they have in their home country (forced migrants). It is not necessary to leave the country in which a person is currently located in order for a person to acquire refugee status. “Refugees are persons fleeing conflict or persecution” (Radoičić Nedeljković 2023). For example, if a person is studying, and there is a sudden outbreak of war in their home country, as a result of which they cannot return home safely, the person can request help from the country in which they are currently located, as a refugee (Bonifazi 2011).

Examining the specific experiences of women in migration processes reveals a complex set of challenges and resistance, and therefore migrant women face unique obstacles, but also bring invaluable contributions to the communities in which they are located. Getting to know their stories and needs is key to creating policies that not only respond to their current situation, but also open the way to a more inclusive and just society. A deeper understanding of the women’s perspective on migration can enrich our collective understanding of migration as a global phenomenon, encouraging the development of gender-sensitive policies that promote equality and protection of the rights of all migrants.

2. Peculiarities of the Gender Perspective in the Study of Migration: Towards Gender Studies of Migration

Migration studies have roots in many sciences and scientific disciplines (Pešić 2013). A relatively new way of looking at migration is the analysis of this process in the context of gender. Gender-focused migration studies today are a distinctive sub-discipline using a variety of research approaches and methodologies.²³

Gender studies of migration analyse how gender affects migration processes at different levels - from global economic policies to individual migration decisions. In this context, it is emphasized that migrations are deeply shaped by gender and that it is necessary to take gender into account in the analysis, because this leads to knowledge about the migration process itself - the essential motives and needs of individuals or the entire population, what is the position of individuals in destination countries, what kind of social capital they have, etc. (Pešić 2013:319-320).

23 Migration studies can be divided into two main groups: macro-analytical, which focus on global socio-economic influences on migration, and micro-analytical, which investigate personal migration experiences and decisions of individuals (Pešić 2013:319).

Gender studies developed in parallel with the conceptual frameworks of understanding the categories of sex and gender in the social sciences. It is interesting to pay attention to the theoretical legacy of Judith Butler (Butler 1990), who understands gender not as a fixed or biologically determined category, but as a concept that is dynamically and socially constructed through human practices and ideologies. Gender roles, according to Butler, cannot be viewed in isolation from social power relations and the context in which they are formed (Butler in Pešić 2013:320). In the context of migration, Judith Butler's ideas contribute to the understanding of the fact that migration processes can cause changes in the perception and practice of gender roles. Male and female migrants find themselves in situations where they are expected to fulfil certain gender-specific expectations that may differ from those in the country of origin, transit or destination. This emphasizes the importance of viewing migration through the prism of gender, where changes in economic, political and cultural frameworks are inextricably linked to the transformation and reconfiguration of gender identities and practices (Butler 1990). Faced with new cultural norms and expectations in the host countries, migrants may experience a transformation in the way they understand and practice their gender roles. For example, migration can provide women with the opportunity for greater economic independence or cause changes in traditional gender-oriented tasks within the family (due to the new cultural milieu in the destination country), thereby causing changes in gender dynamics (Pešić 2013; Mršević 2018).

The period of the 60s and 70s of the 20th century was a period of an increased number of women in the migration processes (Pešić 2013; Vrabac, 2020) and interest in gender studies of migration emerged somewhere in the 90s of the 20th century (Vrabac 2020:5). We can claim that the development of feminist theories, women's struggle for the right to vote in the USA and penetration into academic circles were the main influences on the development of this phenomenon (Pešić 2013).

According to Helma Luiz (Luiz in Pešić, 2013:328), the development of gender migration studies from the 1980s to today can be traced through four phases.

In the first phase, the focus was on recognizing women as special actors in migration and on understanding the specific patterns of female migration. In the second phase, women were recognized as innovators in migration processes and as those who contribute and shape migration flows in unique ways. In the third phase, in the mid-1980s, the focus shifts to differences in power and position among women themselves. It strives to understand the complexity of gender relations, taking into account class, race, and ethnicity, as well as how they interrelate and influence the experience of migration. The fourth phase, which occurs in the mid-nineties of the 20th century, is characterized by a paradigm shift, with a wider acceptance of the category of gender instead of focusing exclusively on women. This change enabled a more complex analysis of gender identities and practices and different gender experiences in the context of migration.

For a long time, migration represented a strictly "male phenomenon", in which women-children were viewed as passive actors of the process, following the man as his family (Morokvašić 2010; Mesarić Žabčić 2021). It was considered that male migrants have better economic opportunities and that they can more easily

find ways of progress in the destination countries, while women stagnated, or, as was the case in the period of the 19th century all the way until the 70s of the 20th century, they were not even recorded as participants in the migration process (Vrabac 2020; Mršević and Janković, 2018; Pešić 2013). According to Pešić (2013:327) “this approach creates a division that represents migration as voluntary and active (mainly attributed to men) versus involuntary and passive (associated with women), where women are often considered participants in migration only through the later phase of family reunification”. Women were observed through the prism of men’s behaviour, and therefore were characterized as imitations of men, and thus their needs for migration were identified with those of men (Pešić 2013; Mršević 2016). Girls and women on the road mostly start the trip with a male person or on the way “get” a male person who will take care of them, and the patriarchal power structure overrides the ability of women to decide on their own position (Mršević and Janković 2018).

When people, especially women, flee their countries, they often do so to escape violence and injustice imposed on them because they are women. In many societies, the rules about what women can or cannot do, how they should dress or behave are very strict and come from old traditions that favour men (Jelačić Kojić 2017). In addition, international politics, different cultures and religions can make life even more difficult for women, limiting what they can do or preventing them from pursuing their needs and goals. Basically, all these are big obstacles for women to be what they want and live how they want (Mršević and Janković, 2018; Mršević 2016).

There are many reasons why women leave their country of origin. Violence is very present in some countries and is additionally strengthened by tradition and cultural norms such as revenge marriages, genital mutilation, crimes of honour, reciprocal rape, early and child marriages. What has been noticed when migrant women find themselves in another country is that professionals working with them are often not properly sensitized to be able to process such cases, but that also these women themselves often do not see violence as such, so the situation is even more complex (Mršević and Janković 2018; Mršević 2016; Marković 2017). What is even more disturbing is the fact that even when migrant women flee their countries, in transit countries or destination countries, they experience violence from partners, family members, smugglers, other refugees, etc. (Marković 2017). In practice, women were often returned to their country of origin²⁴ or imprisoned and punished for illegally entering the country (Mršević 2016; Marković 2017; Mršević and Janković 2018). Mechanisms that would help promote gender equality and prevent discrimination are crucial, but, if they are absent, this can lead to overlooking the needs and challenges faced by specific groups of migrants (Pajvančić-Cizelj and Cvjetanović 2017; Vrabac 2020; Jovanović 2018).

24 There is a principle of *non refoulement*, established today within the framework of international law and represents the practice of banning return, regardless of status (Morača 2014)

3. Feminization of Migration

According to Morokvašić (2010:26), “the feminization of migration refers to the appearance of an increasing influx of migrant women compared to men”. The idea that migration is only a “male” thing is outdated. In recent migration waves, women not only participate in more and more, but often lead these processes. This means that women often travel alone or travel first to bring their families and partners later. This type of migration, which does not follow the traditional image where a woman stays at home to take care of the household, is increasingly studied in academic circles and shows how social/gender roles in migration change and deviate from stereotypes (Morokvašić 2010).

Regarding the feminization of migration, there is a significant difference when we compare developed and less developed parts of the world. While the feminization of migration occurs in developed parts of the world, this does not mean that this process is globally represented. In some places, such as North Africa and South Asia, men migrate more, while in developed parts of the world, such as some European countries, there is a higher proportion of women among migrants (Morokvašić 2010). At the beginning of the 20th century, about 40% of migrants were women, and that number grew over time (Morokvašić 2010). Later, the situation changed, and the number of female migrants decreased, which shows that the trend of the feminization of migration is not constant and depends on the development of the country (Morokvašić 2010). In developing countries, we can observe a significant increase in women in migration, but this share does not exceed 45% (Morokvašić 2010: 31) and, on that basis, does not reflect the feminization of migration (Morokvašić 2010). That is why in countries where feminization of migration does not occur, we talk about the concept of “gender transition” which implies changing dynamics and may include the initial phases of feminization that later transition to stabilization or changes directed towards a greater share of men in migration. This term is applicable in situations where the gender structure of migration changes depending on economic, political and social factors in the countries of origin and destination, while within the camps power can be differentiated according to gender, ethnicity or socioeconomic status, which further shapes the experiences of refugees in those spaces (Morokvašić 2010; Kisić 2019). E.g. in the USA, the development of migration throughout the 20th century has been characterized by “gender transition” instead of feminization (Morokvašić 2010). This is reflected in the early majority participation of women among migrants, which stabilized over time, partly due to the migration policy that encouraged family reunification (Morokvašić 2010). Spain has experienced feminization of migration through the need for workers in service industries, including domestic helpers, but the growth of the construction sector since 2000 has attracted male migrants and thus led to masculinization of migration (Morokvašić 2010). Although there may be an increase in the number of migrant women, without a significant change in their share compared to men, one cannot speak of the feminization of migration processes in the true sense of the word (Morokvašić 2010).

4. Criticism of the Feminization of Migration

Criticism of the discussion around the feminization of migration is based on the idea that migrant women are viewed through the prism of their vulnerability and passivity and that they are discriminated against even more (Žarković 2023). Unexplained gender roles and identities of female migrants in migration testify that *methodological nationalism*²⁵ and sexism which have shaped the understanding of migration processes for a long time still dominate the understanding of migration flows (Žarković 2023). The occurrence of migration breeds fear among the citizens of the destination countries in the sense that the migrants will remain loyal to their home countries and prevent their own assimilation and integration into the new culture and potentially threaten the national identity of the citizens of that country (Žarković 2023). In addition to all that has been said - gender, class, race and nationality are ignored in terms of migration, and the issue of the position of migrants is getting complicated²⁶. Such approaches create an “us vs. them” dynamic, and migration is viewed as a struggle between migrants and the state apparatus, and attention is diverted from the basic human needs that should be at the centre of migration issues (Žarković 2023). It is necessary to draw attention to the emphasized position of women as “victims” in the entire process of migration, but also of adaptation to the newly created situation, which can be observed most in the media discourse: “The media consciously present migrant women as “vulnerable” women and connect migration with trade and sexual slavery” (Krstić 2022:4). They are photographed either from a distant perspective or with a “view from behind” with children in their arms, as sad and alienated, in boats or groups of women in camps where they are doing something (Krstić 2022). In the texts in which they emphasize the gravity of their position and the path they have travelled, the narrators are usually not migrant women at all, and the stories are tainted with fear and misinformation. A turning point in the media’s feminization of migration is the portrayal of women as close to the readers, without the perspective of alienation and “distance” in order to develop the acceptance and empathy of the local population (Krstić 2022).

5. Statistics of the Share of Women in International Migration

When talking about the scope of women’s participation in international migration, we should pay attention to the biggest migration crisis of recent times, namely the period of 2015 and 2016, when more than a million people fled from South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa to Europe. Namely, “in 2016 more than 55 percent of refugees were women and children, in contrast to 27 percent from June 2015” (Women’s Commission for Refugees 2016).

The statistics vividly illustrates the profound impact of migration on women and girls. Emphasizing that 50 percent of refugees are women, the data supports

25 The nation is an irreplaceable living category whose appearance compensates for all events in society and makes the national state a monolithic category (Žarković 2023).

26 According to Kimberle Crenshaw, the concept of intersectionality (factors such as class, race, religion, and sexuality) serves us to understand the totality of the personality and the challenges that women in refugees face (Kisić 2019).

the gender dimension in global migration trends. Only 4 percent of projects in UN inter-agency appeals targeted women and girls in 2014, and only 1 percent of all funding for “fragile” states - those most affected by disasters - went to women’s groups or women’s ministries in 2015 (UNHCR 2022).

Over 40 percent of migrant workers are women, which is also a very important indicator of the need for gender-based migration regulation. Also, the high percentage (60 percent) of preventable maternal deaths in conditions of conflict, displacement and disasters indicates a critical need for better access to health care for migrant women. The prevalence of sexual violence against displaced women, where one in five women has experienced sexual violence, together with the significant number of female-headed households in crisis regions such as Yemen (30 percent), highlights the unique vulnerability women face in the context of migration (UN Women 2023). In addition, economic and educational problems for women and girls in conflict-affected countries further highlight the gendered impact of migration crises. These statistics call for a gender-responsive approach in migration management and a humanitarian response to ensure the protection and empowerment of migrant women (UNHCR 2022).

Global data trends show that in 2022 there were 108.4 million forcibly displaced persons, with 5.4 million asylum seekers and 98.400 unaccompanied or separated children (UNHCR 2022). Furthermore, 76% are located in low- and middle-income countries, while 70 percent are settled in neighbouring countries. As many as 52 percent come from just three countries: Syria, Ukraine, and Afghanistan (UNHCR). Children make up 30 percent of the world’s population, but 40 percent of all forcibly displaced people, of which 50 percent are female children under the age of 17 (UNHCR 2022). Also, almost 6 million Palestinian refugees are not at all under the protection of the UNHCR and are not included in the presented statistics.

6. Social Position and Status of Migrant Women

Migrant women in transit are discriminated against multiple times²⁷. Their position is, among other things, unfavourable due to the lack of data that is managed by the “native” population of destination or transit countries, as well as professionals who should be sufficiently sensitized in working with migrant women (Mršević and Janković 2018).

Migrant women migrate because of a series of problems they face in their countries of origin. Most of them are victims of gender-based violence and do not have the necessary support and security (Women’s Commission for Refugees 2016). They are at greater risk of being victims of trafficking, sexual exploitation, secondary victimization and victims of arranged marriages as well as intentional transmission of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS (Mršević 2016; Kisić 2019)²⁸. The phenomenon of human trafficking in refugee crises is very present

27 The contracting states shall apply the provisions of this convention to refugees without discrimination as to race, religion or country of origin (Convention on the Status of Refugees, 1951).

28 “Adolescent girls and young migrant women often face triple discrimination - as women, as young people and as migrant visitors” (Mršević 2016:6).

and is especially pronounced in the fields of agriculture, construction, and household chores, as well as sex industry (Jovanović 2018). In refugee camps, women suffer discrimination and stigmatization because their gender roles are still clearly defined. They often suffer violence from family members and partners, but they also deal with the stress experienced by male family members as “guides” along the way. They often do not have the necessary resources in the camps and are not guaranteed health insurance. Therefore, their health is not taken into account (Mršević 2016; Jovanović 2018). Hygiene in the camps is not adequate because men, as well as professional staff, do not ensure that women to have their own space and toilets, so they need to stick together and help each other (Women’s Commission for Refugees 2016).²⁹

These women often find themselves in a difficult economic and social situation, both in their countries of origin and in the countries of destination. Many of them did not have the opportunity to get an education due to gender-based restrictions in their countries of origin. This puts them in a disadvantageous position - they are not able to exercise and advocate for their own rights, very often they do not speak any language other than their mother tongue, so communication with them is difficult, and the involvement of a female translator and the use of the internet are rare (Mršević and Janković 2018; Women’s Commission for refugees 2016). Their work is characterized by isolation, low wages and social stigmatization, which makes it difficult for them to become economically active and use their education and work experience. Domestic work is often the only option available to them, but that option comes with its own disadvantages, including a lack of labour rights and limited opportunities for economic mobility. At the same time, the demand for cheap labour in developed countries is growing, with employers often preferring illegal migrant women over men due to possible easier control, lower wages and easier dismissal (Mršević 2016; Jovanović 2018). Girls coming from the second generation of migrants face significant challenges when transitioning from education to the labour market (Mršević and Janković 2018). They are repeatedly discriminated against and most often excluded (Mršević and Janković 2018).

7. Public Perception of Female Migrants and their Personal Testimonies

Personal testimonies of migrant women were taken from research conducted in migrant camps in Šid and in Kikinda. In the research conducted in the migrant camp in Šid (Pajvančić – Cizelj and Cvjetanović 2017), the interviews were conducted with eight migrant women who voluntarily agreed to share their deeply personal stories about their experiences before, during and after the trip. These stories highlight their immense courage, presence of spirit and inherent kindness. Presenting these stories to the local community serves as a powerful instrument for developing empathy and a deeper understanding of the life paths of these women. It is important to point out that these women do not allow their difficult experiences

²⁹ When it comes to women in migration, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women applies, which is the first international document that establishes measures and principles to combat discrimination against women. This Convention obliges states to implement the principles of women’s equality in their national laws (Jelačić Kojić 2017:11).

to diminish their value or hold them back. On the contrary, they continue their life journey with dignity and courage. The question is what leads others to misrepresent them as weak and unfortunate when their stories are actually a testament to indestructible human will and strength.

The common motives that run through their stories include escaping from war conflicts and stigmatization in their home countries due to religious differences, as well as striving for a better future where they can freely choose their way of life (Pajvančić – Cizelj and Cvjetanović 2017).³⁰ The grief for their lost homes and the lives they led before the war is deep, but equally strong is their determination to be the protagonists of their lives, striving for freedom and peace. Although they are driven by a justified desire to make up for what was taken from them, they also share fears such as the fear of isolation, loss of rights and turning their backs on others. Especially for pregnant women or mothers, caring for children further strengthens their courage and responsibility. Involuntary departures and stays in transit countries are common experiences, the choice of countries where they flee is a necessity, not a personal choice, and this in itself can lead to dangers (Kisić 2019). However, their aspirations are directed towards Europe and more developed countries such as Switzerland and Germany, guided by faith and hope for a better future. Challenges such as language barriers and fear of men in overcrowded camps further complicate their situation, limiting opportunities to maintain privacy and a sense of security. These women may feel fear, but their strength, determination and courage dominate as they strive to build a life worth living. Their stories are not just stories of survival; they are testimonies of the indestructible desire for dignity, freedom and the opportunity for a new beginning (Pajvančić – Cizelj and Cvjetanović 2017).

In the camp in Kikinda (Knežević and Momčilov 2018), migrant women and girls face a range of challenges that include limited access to health care, economic difficulties that prevent payment for medical services, and complex dynamics related to arranged marriages. Their situation is further complicated by changes in gender dynamics and roles after migration, with reports of greater acceptance and equality in the new environment. What they still worry about is the lack of information they need to get in their new environment and a new place.³¹

30 Female moderator: How would you briefly introduce yourself to others who do not know you (through which role: refugee, mother, father, woman, man, through profession...) (Pajvančić – Cizelj and Cvjetanović 2017:51). “I would say that I am a refugee, from Afghanistan, that is very important for me. Then, that I am a girl who does not have the right to education in her country, to marry as she wishes” (Saqina from Afghanistan).

31 “In Preševo, the Women’s Commission for Refugees met a pregnant woman traveling alone with two children under the age of five. The woman was sitting outside in the cold, waiting for the train that would take her to the Croatian border. Noor complained of pain related to her pregnancy and expressed concern for the baby’s health. Little did she know that there was a medical team just thirty meters away from where she was sitting, and that the train would arrive in more than four hours, which would give her enough time to visit the doctor. When the Women’s Commission for Refugees pointed this out to her, she accepted that one of the members of the NGO escort her to the nearby health centre” (Women’s Commission for Refugees 2016:12).

Isolated by language barriers, these women rely on each other for emotional and psychological support, often facing fear and uncertainty about their future and the future of their families. The camp in Kikinda also runs educational programs on sexual health, pregnancy and gender-based violence, providing women with vital information they can use to improve their lives. However, the need for psychosocial support is great, and opportunities to talk with professionals are limited, which leaves room for improvement in the provision of this type of assistance.³²

These women, although often faced with fear and isolation, show extraordinary strength, courage and determination to overcome obstacles and build a better life for themselves and their families. Their story is a testimony to the endurance of the human spirit and the need for more comprehensive support that includes both practical and emotional help, in order to empower these women to become active participants in the social life of their new communities (Knežević & Momčilov 2018).

8. Conclusion

Understanding migration from women's perspective is essential because it draws attention to the specific challenges and experiences women face during migration processes. Analyzing the trends, the increase in the number of migrant women in migration flows is not only a result of global economic and social changes, but also a reflection of a paradigm shift and female independence. Focusing on women's experiences highlights the need to create policies and practices that adequately respond to their needs, contributions and roles. By understanding migration through a gender lens, we can better address gender-based discrimination, violence and barriers that women face, thus promoting a more inclusive and fair society for all, responsible policies can contribute to the economic empowerment of women, adequate protection from violence and the promotion of their rights. The importance of changing the narrative surrounding migrant women through the possibility of portraying migrant women as strong, instead of vulnerable, provides a deeper insight into their real lives and challenges. Also, by setting up multi-sector initiatives in which the strengths of migrant women would be developed through language learning opportunities, understanding of gender equality as well as psychosocial help which is essential in order for them to share their traumatic experiences and thereby empower themselves.

The feminization of migration does not stop, it grows in all parts of the world in a special way. Feminization does not necessarily mean integration and better living and working conditions of migrant women in destination countries, but rather a continuous process of building a new view and role of women in all aspects of personal existence. By promoting equality and protecting the rights of all migrants, we are building a world where differences and contributions are recognized and valued.

32 "Two women continue to suffer mental violence from their husbands, while one suffers both mental and physical violence, but they don't want to talk about it. They believe that reporting violence will not change anything significant, that it will only keep them in Serbia, separate them from their families and prevent them from continuing their journey to EU countries" (Knežević and Momčilov, 2018:84).

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Experiences of transgender women with the transition process in Serbia

Mentor: Dr. Marija Radoman

marija.radoman@f.bg.ac.rs

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

Abstract

Transgender individuals experience numerous forms of discrimination and marginalization across various spheres of social life, both in public to private domains. Challenges persist notably in the process of medical gender affirmation, primarily due to issues with access to this form of form of healthcare. Moreover, medical transition is a prolonged process accompanied by specific issues that place transgender individuals in a highly vulnerable position. This topic is particularly relevant as science increasingly moves away from pathologizing perspectives on transgender identity, yet many practices hindering the transition process still prevail. This paper explores the transition process among transgender women in Serbia, aiming to depict and understand how they experience and attribute meaning to it. The sample consists of three transgender women at different stages of transition. Data were collected through in-depth interviews to explore deeper layers of meaning, attitudes, experiences, and perspectives of the participants. Open-ended questions structured around several sub-themes were used to guide the conversation, allowing participants to narrate their views, experiences, and feelings on the topic.

Keywords: *transgender, gender identity, medical transition*

1. Introduction

Transgender individuals face various forms of discrimination and marginalization across different social spheres. The process of medical transition itself poses challenges, due to both access issues to this type of healthcare and the lengthy duration of the transition process. Although knowledge and practices in medicine are increasingly moving away from a pathologizing approach to transgender identity, numerous barriers and practices still hinder this process. This paper explores the transition process among transgender women in Serbia, aiming to better understand their experiences and perspectives. We use a sample of three transgender women at different stages of transition and collect data through in-depth interviews. The goal of this study is to explore their attitudes, experiences, and emotions regarding the transition process, allowing them to shape their narratives through open-ended questions designed to guide the conversation on key themes and sub-themes.

The term transgender describes individuals whose gender identity and self-perception differ from the sex assigned at birth. Sex is a biological category assigned at birth based on visible sexual characteristics, involving a combination of anatomy, hormones, and chromosomes of an individual. On the other hand, gender identity represents one's internal experience of gender, or how one sees oneself as belonging to a particular gender (Lev 2004). Trans is an umbrella term that refers to individuals whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex, including those whose identities deviate from the binary gender model, such as non-binary or gender-fluid individuals. Given the numerous identities encompassed by this label, as well as the diversity of desires and needs among transgender individuals, it is clear that this group is not homogeneous.

Transition in this context refers to changes in appearance, presentation, and living in accordance with one's gender identity. Social transition involves using a different name and pronouns, changing one's appearance, and presenting in accordance with one's gender identity in social settings. Hormone therapy and surgical procedures fall under medical transition, which require interventions by mental health professionals, surgeons, and endocrinologists (Bižić et al., 2018). However, it is important to emphasize that there is no universal experience related to the transition process, and the desired outcome of this process varies from person to person. For this reason, this study focuses on how individuals undergoing transition interpret these experiences, rather than just presenting facts and information related to the process.

Transgender individuals express their identity in ways that defy norms imposed by a cisnormative society, which marginalizes and punishes them as a result. Individuals who challenge gender roles and exceed them are positioned low on the social "hierarchy of acceptability" (Herek 1990). Throughout history, violating gender norms has been legally sanctioned, such as through laws criminalizing cross-dressing (Stryker 2008). Today, discrimination against trans people manifests in the form of transphobia and violence, as well as in healthcare, education, employment, and in denying opportunities for establishing or maintaining a family (Geten 2015). Research on the status of trans people in Serbia indicates a more than double the unemployment rate compared to the general population, along with a sense of inability to express their gender identity in public spaces like schools or workplaces (Vidić 2021). This significantly impacts the quality of life for trans individuals, who rate their life satisfaction lower than other LGBT+ communities (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2020).

In Serbia, institutions and broader society exhibit oppressive and marginalizing attitudes toward trans people, stemming from deeply rooted transphobia in the heteropatriarchal Serbian society (Milanović 2022). In recent years, the conservative right has increasingly mobilized against "gender ideology," thereby exacerbating existing homophobia and transphobia in public discourse without hindrance. Media's negative portrayal also plays a significant role in fueling, spreading, and justifying hatred towards trans individuals (Milanović 2022). Transphobia is becoming more noticeable within the left and feminist circles as well, through so-called trans-exclusive radical feminism, which imagines trans women as a threat infiltrating women's spaces (Bakić 2020). In the absence of genuine commitment to women's emancipation, leftist organizations adopt such rhetoric, using anti-trans

sentiments as a patriarchal tool that sacrifices marginalized groups to demonstrate alleged concern for feminist issues (Bilić 2022).

2. Pathologization and Medicalization of Transgender Identity

Since its rapid development in the 19th century, medicine has been an authority capable of shaping societal understanding. This power has often been used to justify social inequalities and the oppression of certain social groups. Medical institutions have the ability to mark - to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy, normal and pathological, thereby hierarchizing people based on potentially neutral characteristics (Stryker 2008). A diagnosis from medical authorities, alongside its positive implications, can also have a stigmatizing effect on the individual. Stigma involves a discrediting attribute, either hidden or apparent, that labels an individual, distinguishing them from those who do not carry the stigma. The non-stigmatized treat the stigmatized as “less human,” diminishing their life chances through conscious or unconscious actions (Goffman 1963).

Gender dysphoria, as experienced by transgender individuals, is appropriated and treated as a condition requiring diagnosis and treatment by medical authorities (Johnson 2019). It is a state of psychological discomfort caused by the mismatch between the gender assigned at birth and one’s gender identity, which can lead to socio-emotional issues, mental health challenges, and other obstacles in daily life (Lev 2016). The advancement of medical understanding of transgender identity has had a profoundly positive impact by allowing transgender individuals access to body-affirming services tailored to their gender identity. On the other hand, science has gained the power to define, monitor, and evaluate these experiences.

One of the pioneers in the field of medicine who studied transgender identity was Magnus Hirschfeld. In 1919, he founded the Institute for Sexology, where he researched gender and sexuality, particularly issues related to transgender and homosexuality. Additionally, he publicly advocated for the decriminalization of homosexuality, while advising sexual minorities on how to navigate their identity in a stigmatizing society (Mancini 2010). His approach to the topic radically differentiated the Institute’s research from other works of that era in the field of gender and sexuality, precisely because it came from a position of understanding rather than condemnation. For the contemporary understanding of transgender identity, Harry Benjamin’s study “The Transsexual Phenomenon” is extremely significant. Benjamin noted that for some individuals, their sense of self differs from their anatomy, and this misalignment cannot be changed or “cured” through psychotherapy. Therefore, he emphasized the necessity of medical transition as a solution to this issue (Benjamin 1966). Furthermore, in this study, he explains and popularizes the term “transsexuality,” drawing a distinction between transsexuality, homosexuality, and transvestism.

3. Medical Transition in Serbia

A medical team for gender identity has existed in Belgrade since 1987, providing trans-specific healthcare services in Serbia. This includes psychiatric evaluation, hormone therapy, and surgical interventions (Vujović et al. 2009). However, it was not until 2012 that the operations of this team were regulated, and the so-called Republic Expert Commission for the Treatment of Transgender Disorders was established, which, following years of appeals by activists, changed its name to the Republic Commission for Transgender Issues. Also in 2012, amendments to the Law on Compulsory Health Insurance came into force, stipulating that 65% of the cost of “gender reassignment due to medical reasons” services be financed from compulsory health insurance funds.

From the establishment of the team until today, medical transition in Serbia has consisted of three steps. Triadic therapy involves psychiatric-psychological assessment, hormone therapy, and surgical procedures (Žigić, Zulević, & Maksimović 2015). The first phase of this process also includes the real-life experience test, which entails living according to one’s gender identity before any other interventions. Psychiatric-psychological monitoring and evaluation last for a minimum of one year, after which hormone therapy can begin with a psychiatrist’s report. These services are still only available in Belgrade, complicating the process for transgender individuals from other locations. Specifically, in addition to their general practitioner, individuals from rural areas must visit a local psychiatrist and local health insurance fund before receiving a referral. This poses a challenge for transgender individuals who are forced to out themselves multiple times before their appointment with the gender identity team (Transgender Europe 2017).

Legal transition, or changing personal documents, requires prior medical interventions. In other words, for a transgender person to change their gender marker on personal documents, they must have a psychiatrist’s report and an endocrinologist’s report documenting at least one year of hormone therapy (Todorović & Lazić 2020). Surgical interventions are no longer a necessary condition for document changes, but the current solution still makes legal transition unattainable for many transgender individuals. Since hormone therapy is mandatory for this step, changing personal documents is impossible for individuals who do not want to take or cannot take hormones.

4. Research Methodology

The methodological approach of this study is qualitative, which best suits the research aim. The sample consists of three transgender women, aged 23 to 25, living in Serbia. The homogeneity of the sample allowed for obtaining more insights into the experiences of transgender women compared to other categories within transgender identities. Additionally, they share similarities in generational experiences, making this study specific by focusing on the younger population within the LGBT+ community. The participants differ in terms of their current stages in the medical transition process. One participant has completed all stages of medical transition, including surgical interventions. Another participant is currently awaiting endocrinology appointments to begin hormone therapy, while the third

participant is in the middle of a psychological evaluation process that had to be interrupted due to certain circumstances. The sample was purposefully selected, based on personal acquaintance with all three participants, which facilitated better rapport while maintaining research distance. Personal data of the participants were altered to ensure anonymity.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews aimed at gaining insights into the individual perspectives, feelings, and experiences of the participants. The interview structure was designed to include two dimensions related to understanding gender identity and experiencing medical transition, which developed into a series of subthemes. Open-ended questions were used to encourage participants to create their own detailed narratives.

5. Research Findings and Discussion

5.1 Identity

5.1.1. Understanding Identity Process

The process of understanding their own gender identity is experienced uniquely by the participants, emphasizing that for them, it differed significantly from the “stereotypical” transgender experience. However, all three describe feelings of discomfort or even disconnection with their own bodies, which emerged early in their lives. The sense of not belonging is also something that accompanied them during this phase, along with the need to alter their physical appearance in some way. Initially, they were unsure why these feelings occurred because they did not know what transgenderism was and therefore did not have a name for what they were going through. Sanja, 25 years old, originally from a smaller town and currently living in a larger city while being employed, describes her process of understanding identity as follows: “In concrete terms, I think that’s something that has been brewing in me for years before I found out, and I guess I don’t have that story that others have... I don’t come from that classic, stereotypical trans story where as a child I play with my mom’s things and so on...” (Sanja, 25) Sanja takes a critical stance towards fitting transgender people into molds where everyone’s identity discovery experience is expected to be identical. She particularly emphasizes the problematic nature of expecting every transgender person to have been aware of their identity from early childhood. She states that this was not the case for her, nor for many others, which certainly should not invalidate their transgender experience. Dunja, 24 years old, living with her mother in a larger city, sees the beginning of understanding her own identity in the following way: “Maybe, somewhere in puberty, I noticed, maybe, now retrospectively in reinterpretation, but I remember that I didn’t like some of the changes happening to my body, I couldn’t contextualize then exactly what and why, but I didn’t like how my body looked, especially that moment of hair growth on my body and face, and so on.” (Dunja, 24) A major turning point in this process was the realization that there are people who are part of the LGBT+ community, either in the media or in everyday life. The generation of transgender women we are studying was marked by having such role models, especially in the media. In addition, networking with other transgender individuals online was an important factor in identity realization. Knowing that

other transgender people existed was a very validating experience for them, as they finally found other people who felt like them. This encouraged them to think more about their own identity and explore, resulting in the realization that they are transgender. Also significant here is the moment of “experimentation,” such as speaking in the female gender in certain situations, in front of friends or in online spaces, which served as a test of what they had been feeling for a long time. Such moments were crucial in building confidence in their gender identity.

Milica is 23 years old and lives independently in a larger city. She is employed and simultaneously studying. She describes her experience as follows: “I remember when I was maybe 16 or 17, there was a certain video on YouTube where I actually first found out what a trans person even is... For some reason, I found that interesting and I had to find out everything about it, and something drew me to it, and then of course, I found out everything and started learning about others and everything else.” (Milica, 23)

The other participants mention similar experiences. “I had friends who were queer, which somehow led me to be more open to questioning my sexuality, and later my gender identity. I mean, I remember that maybe even at 13, 14 I was thinking about it at some instinctive level, but it took me time to actually apply that to myself.” (Dunja, 24)

“Maybe it’s silly, but one of the first things I did during that period was like, I had a Twitter account where I wrote in the female gender, but like from the perspective of some imaginary character. It was like my first experiment, which is a pretty bad term, but it was a first step towards grasping that gender dislocation.” (Sanja, 25)

For Sanja, the opportunity to present herself this way online was very liberating. She viewed transition as a series of changes that were difficult to achieve at that point in her life, primarily due to fear of her family’s reaction. In this sense, the online world was a sphere where she could present herself according to her identity from the beginning, without going through the difficulties associated with transition.

5.1.2. Coming Out to Family and Friends

The moment of coming out is an extremely significant point in taking further steps in the transition. Coming out to friends was a positive experience for all three, and the support and understanding they received was a great encouragement in the later stages of the transition process. Revealing their identity to peers at school or colleagues at work was more problematic because negative reactions could result in dismissal and discrimination at work or violence at school.

“I came out to the public, to friends on Facebook, after I finished high school because that was a very limiting circumstance for me, because earlier in school I was threatened because of things they heard about me or saw on social media. Some people wanted to ambush me. I didn’t want those people to find out or reach me while I still had interaction with them.” (Dunja, 24)

“I was anyway very nicely accepted by my friends. And when I realized that, I still didn’t have the courage to move through the world as a woman, but even

when I presented myself as a male, my best friend used female pronouns with me... The way she did it showed understanding because she wasn't surprised to do that." (Sanja, 25)

"I had a few friends who knew even before I came out, especially I had a best friend who treated me like that very early on even though I wasn't out." (Milica, 23)

For Sanja and Milica, it was very significant that close people treated them according to their identity, even when they were not in a feminine presentation. Such treatment demonstrates a fundamental understanding by others who accept and validate their gender identity, and Sanja emphasizes that this gave her the courage to take further steps in the transition.

On the other hand, talking to family caused great fear of rejection, which was intensified by financial dependence on them. Therefore, employment and independent living in this case represented security and freedom to live according to their identity. What is common to their experiences is that they did not have control over when and how to disclose their identities to their families. Family members found out about the participants' identities on their own, thereby violating their privacy and the possibility of coming out when they were ready for that step. Despite the circumstances, they eventually found support and understanding from family members.

"As for my family, I never had the opportunity to come out, but my father searched through my things and asked my friends and stalked me in one way or another, probably through someone else's profile, and that's how he found out and the rest of my family found out through him. My mother found out through him too, but we didn't openly talk about it until recently, even though I was aware that she knew, and at some point she started calling me by my preferred pronouns and name." (Dunja, 24)

"I didn't even have a moment where I had a chance to tell her (mother) about it, she was poking through my medical records and saw the report that says I'm trans, and then she started spinning what that meant and so on... According to her, the image of a trans person was someone who had undergone surgery, looked disgusting, will never look like a real woman... She really formed an image of me before even asking me." (Milica, 23)

For Milica, the denial of the opportunity to come out meant she would be labeled by family members who already held a negative view of the trans community. The opinion that Milica's mother pre-formed significantly matches the stereotypical negative representation of trans women prevalent in mainstream media. What was certainly important for Milica and Dunja was the moment of regaining control of the situation and the need to still discuss their identity with their families. On the other hand, for Sanja, at the moment when she realized she was trans, her priority was caring for her family, so she put her own needs aside.

"Not long after I realized I was trans, my dad died, so I felt like my life priority wasn't basically to tell my mom 'Hey mom, I'm trans, you have to respect me' or something like that, but to support her. She found out almost relative to this conversation, and for now she's handling it well, and our relationship is great." (Sanja, 25)

Very traditional parental expectations were also a factor that created pressure and hesitation when it came to coming out. Namely, two participants mention that they were expected to conform to patriarchal gender roles, start their own families, and one day “inherit” their parents. The participants did not fit into the cis-heteronormative molds into which their families tried to place them, which created tension in their relationships. Sanja highlights as an important factor in all of this the fact that she comes from a rural area, where she feels that such pressures are even more pronounced.

“Since I only have a sister, my parents expected me throughout my life to marry at the right time, have children, and so on. I felt this from both parents, but my mom was quite explicit in expressing that. Considering I’m now at an age where this is expected to happen, she pressured me quite often... I mean, it’s a rural story, when a son gets married he brings a daughter-in-law into the house and that’s it.” (Sanja, 25)

“All of this completely conflicted with the image she (mother) had for our family, that one day she would live in a house with my brother and me, so that I would have a wife and children and my brother has his wife and children. At that moment, everything apart and then she panicked and made a fuss about it.” (Milica, 23)

4.2. Medical Transition Process

All three participants viewed medical transition as a significant life turning point that offered the opportunity to improve the quality of their lives. In addition to aligning their bodies with their identity, the medical aspect of transition practically facilitates their navigation through the world. At the beginning of this process, hormone therapy was prioritized for the participants, primarily due to its visible results, and later as a way to obtain appropriate personal documents that would enhance their safety in daily life. However, providing trans-specific healthcare in Serbia is still centralized, and they encounter numerous barriers in accessing necessary medical services.

4.2.1. Initiating the Process

The decision to start medical transition and the initial steps towards realizing this for the participants were not without complications. Above all, information about the process itself was extremely confusing and exhausting. Two participants attributed this to the lack of comprehensive resources providing detailed guidance on access and procedure related to medical transition at that time. Additionally, the general lack of knowledge among healthcare workers about how this process functions was another factor that slowed them down. For these reasons, their initial steps in medical transition seemed insurmountable, creating an impression that the healthcare system was not working in their favor but quite the opposite.

“Dunja emphasizes that information from various LGBT+ organizations was very important for her navigation in the beginning. However, she considers informal contacts with other trans people as the most valuable resource, since healthcare professionals did not have the necessary information for her needs.

“So, a friend who is trans, I ask her what I need and how, which documents

and all that in this process, and you can't know in advance, none of the people who should know how to explain it actually know, from the doctors themselves, nurses, people working in the trans health office..." (Dunja, 24)

None of the three participants were from Belgrade, so obtaining referrals to the transgender health office required additional steps, primarily a session with a local psychiatrist, which complicated the process. Milica and Sanja also mention encountering rejection at the student clinic, but at that time, they didn't understand exactly what the doctors required of them to get an appointment. Due to the collapse of the healthcare system during the pandemic, Milica decided to start her medical transition privately, which was a very expensive process. She sees this option as a great privilege, considering that many cannot afford to make their transition easier this way.

"Firstly, I should mention, I did everything privately, I mean, I put myself in a position where I could afford it and understand that it's a privilege, but also, last June I spent one average Serbian salary just on doctors, not to mention what I paid for the surgery and so on." (Milica, 23)

4.2.2. *Psychiatric Evaluation*

All three participants had experiences with psychiatric evaluation, and their experiences of different aspects of this process, as well as the significance they attach to it, vary considerably. For Sanja, these conversations were a source of support, and she believes they helped her significantly in emotional stabilization and dealing with negative feelings about herself.

"Although it seemed to me, in those sessions, that it wasn't starting from a negative, like you're not, but prove that you're trans. The doctor believed me when I told her those things and we talked more about my feelings and she generally worked a lot on stabilizing my emotions, which pleasantly surprised me." (Sanja, 25)

It was very important for Sanja that she did not feel the doctor questioned her identity, but rather her attitude was extremely affirming. However, Sanja had to stop going to therapy after a few months because she was forced to renew her referral in her hometown, not in the city where she lives. At that time, this was impractical for her, coming from a very small place, and she would be forced to come out to a local doctor. The inability to approach a doctor out of fear that "the village would find out" she's trans shows how deeply stigmatized transgender identity is in our society. This stigma greatly undermines Sanja's quality of life, as she cannot access the necessary healthcare service.

"I no longer had the right to request a referral at the student clinic, but I had to go to my hometown, which is a small place of like two thousand people, and ask for a referral there, I didn't want to do that because then everyone would find out there." (Sanja, 25)

On the other hand, Dunja and Milica also highlighted certain negative experiences during psychological evaluation. Dunja felt that during therapy, she was overly questioned about her sexuality, which was extremely uncomfortable for her.

“During that process, I was asked about my sexual fantasies and habits regarding sexual relationships in great detail, and I don’t see how that is relevant. In what way is that connected to my gender identity when it’s generally understood today that sexuality and gender identity, although related, do not necessarily align.” (Dunja, 24)

Additionally, she got the impression that there was a clear preference towards heterosexuality during the psychological evaluation, meaning she would receive a more positive reaction if she talked about being attracted to men. She also noticed that there was an expectation for her to not be connected in any way with other trans people, even though those networks of acquaintances were very important to her throughout this process.

“The idea that, like, someone is authentically trans only if they haven’t been in contact with other trans people who could convince them they’re trans. But if they figured it out on their own and identified that way since childhood, and somehow remembered to come to the doctor to get checked, that’s a ludicrous expectation.” (Dunja, 24)

Milica visited the same doctor at a private clinic, describing the entire therapy process as a negative experience. She points out that there was pressure to be “perfect” and for her behavior to be extremely disciplined. Because of this, she felt she couldn’t be fully honest about her emotions, fearing that mentioning something might further delay her hormone therapy.

“I didn’t feel adequate, like really when I knew I was going to the doctor tomorrow and I haven’t been feeling good for the past week, what do I do now, do I really tell her I don’t feel well or what.” (Milica, 23)

Dunja and Milica also mentioned that at certain times it was easier for them to lie or omit certain details during their conversations with the doctor. Both participants felt pressured to meet certain criteria to continue their medical transition, even though their authentic experiences did not fully align with the expectations of professionals diagnosing gender dysphoria.

4.2.3. Hormone Therapy and Surgical Interventions

Milica is the only one who went through a year of hormone therapy, which was necessary for changing documents, and has been on hormones for almost two years now. She visited an endocrinologist at a private clinic, highlighting the main problem as the infrequent check-ups.

“The amount of money they take privately is absolutely outrageous and how rarely you go for check-ups is also outrageous because we’re talking about health and it really needs to be monitored much more.” (Milica, 23)

Additionally, the prescribed medication is not available in Serbia on prescription; instead it’s smuggled in from other countries and sold at very high prices. Because of this, but also because of health issues worsened by that medication, Milica opted for an alternative, which is supposed to have the same effect.

“If I were to take the medication she tells me to take, I would spend over sixty euros a month just on hormones, smuggled hormones, for which I can’t get a

receipt. I mean, I found an alternative and got a prescription for another drug that is estrogen and available on the market, but this doctor doesn't want to hear about it. Whether that's smart in the long run, I really don't know..." (Milica, 23)

Milica describes the surgical part of her medical transition as the phase that went best for her. She emphasizes that to minimize waiting time, she also decided to undergo surgery privately. She is very satisfied with the outcome of the surgery but also with herself and her life after completing the medical transition. Milica saw the medical transition as "a missing piece" to be fully happy with herself, so the end of this process was a major life milestone for her.

"My brain has absolutely forgotten everything that was before, what happened earlier, as if I've been like this my whole life, and that's how I generally feel about many things regarding the transition, which is very wonderful." (Milica, 23)

6. Conclusion

This paper provides an overview of the entire transition process for transgender women and the personal significance of transition to them. Transgender identity is deeply stigmatized in our society, exposing transgender individuals to constant threats of rejection and violence. Behaviors and identities that do not conform to cis-heteronormative societal standards face sanction and condemnation from the environment, whose limiting influence is evident in various aspects of the respondents' lives. This is primarily manifested through their daily experiences related to fear of non-acceptance by family and close circles.

However, the experiences of the respondents also demonstrate a lack of understanding for their identities and specific needs within institutional frameworks. This is reflected in the difficulties they face in accessing trans-specific health services that are essential yet still centralized. This difficulty further complicates and prolongs the medical transition process for transgender individuals from rural areas, placing them in a very vulnerable position.

Additionally, the respondents' answers question certain aspects of psychiatric evaluation and the diagnosis of gender dysphoria. The mold of the "true trans experience" and implicitly or explicitly expressed expectations of doctors pose a barrier to accessing hormone therapy. While the diagnosis of gender dysphoria enables access to necessary health services, it simultaneously reduces the transgender experience to socially acceptable forms of gender expression, placing pressure on transgender individuals to convince doctors that they fit into these criteria. Here, doctors assume the role of authorities who assess whether someone's transgender experience is legitimate, thus acting as "gatekeepers" to hormones. The experiences of the respondents indicate that they felt there were rigid criteria they did not always meet, forcing them to present their experience in a way that was acceptable to doctors.

Their experiences illustrate the importance of individualizing approaches in the work of medical professionals with transgender individuals, in a way that respects the diversity of transgender experiences.

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Islamic Understanding of Women and Gender Equality

Mentor: Prof. dr.sc. Associate professor Ljubica Tomić-Selimović

ljubica.tomic@untz.ba

University of Tuzla

Abstract

This paper analyzes how the concept of gender equality is interpreted in Islamic beliefs and practices, exploring guidelines and regulations regarding the rights and responsibilities of men and women in Islamic society. Many prejudices about women in Islam stem from deep-seated beliefs and a prevailing idea that is promoted: that women in Islam are oppressed and deprived of rights. Significant mechanisms perpetuating these prejudices include distorted and incorrect interpretations of women's roles and rights in areas such as education, employment, ownership, protection from violence, and marital roles, as well as societal and public life. Therefore, through the analysis of religious texts including the Quran and Hadith, traditions, and interpretations of Islam, this paper explores various perspectives on the role of women in society and their rights in accordance with Islamic teachings. The aim of this analysis is to understand gender equality in Islamic teachings and to illuminate prejudices and stereotypes about women in Islam that contribute to their stigmatization and discrimination.

Keywords: *Islam, women/Muslim women, gender equality*

1. Introduction

Islam, as one of the most widespread global religions, plays a crucial role in shaping social norms and values in many communities around the world. One of the key themes frequently researched and debated in the context of Islam is the issue of gender equality. While Islamic teachings promote the idea of equality among all individuals before God, there exists a wide spectrum of interpretations regarding how this equality is reflected in the roles and rights of women in Muslim societies.

The perception of Muslim women in the Western world is often complex and subject to stereotypes and prejudices. In December 2023, British journalist and host Piers Morgan, in response to Abdul Wahid's question "Why are many women converting to Islam today?" replied, "Because they want to be oppressed." (Piers Morgan Uncensored, 2023), triggering numerous negative reactions from many Muslim women worldwide. Muslim women are often perceived through the lens of negative media portrayals and generalizations, which can lead to stigmatization and discrimination. Research shows that Muslims in Western media are often characterized as violent, backward fundamentalists who pose a threat to Western

civilization (Elmasry, 2015). Most news related to Muslim women and their status focuses on violations of women's rights and fails to consider Muslim women as a diverse, distinct, and heterogeneous group. Studies indicate that Muslim women are perceived as a homogeneous group that supports domestic violence, terrorism, homophobia, gender inequality, traditional gender roles, and other similar issues, influencing their recognition as potential victims of discrimination and violence, which is not uncommon when individuals are influenced by social stereotypes. Additionally, public opinion research reports confirm that prejudices and stereotypical representations of Muslim women are spreading through the media and public discourse, subsequently laying the groundwork for discrimination and violence (CNS, 2016). This perception results from a lack of information about Islam and Muslim communities, as well as political and social events that shape public opinion. Therefore, in an attempt to understand various perspectives in this paper, we will explore the complex issue of Islam and gender equality, analyzing religious texts, traditions, cultural factors, and social practices to gain a deeper understanding of this important topic.

Islam promotes the idea of equality among all people before God, regardless of gender, and emphasizes the importance of respecting and protecting women's rights. "The Qur'an is a creative source that reveals Allah's laws and explains everything related to them. It establishes the general principles and constants of faith that all prophets professed" (el-Alvani, 2020:69). In this regard, the Qur'an serves as the primary source of legislation for Muslims, while the secondary source is the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. The Sunnah can be simply explained as the practice of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, who learned the Qur'an, followed its teachings, taught others with it, and showed them how to implement it in their daily lives (el-Alvani, 2020). Additionally, the literature often refers to the term Hadith, which usually refers to the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. Therefore, this paper will be based not only on the verses of the Qur'an but also on the Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. Islamic understanding of women is based on the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, which form the basis of Muslim faith and practice.

Through this analysis, the aim is to explore how the concept of gender equality, representing "equal opportunities, equal visibility, and representation of men and women in all spheres of public and private life" (Ćopić, 2016:25), is interpreted and applied in the Islamic context, and how the promotion of gender equality in Muslim communities can be enhanced through the analysis of guidelines and regulations concerning the rights and responsibilities of men and women in Islamic society.

2. Woman in Islam

The Qur'an, in its guidance, largely focuses on defining relationships, including the relationships between men and women, their roles, rights, and responsibilities.

When the Qur'an addresses men, it also addresses women using phrases like "O mankind" or "O believers," thereby encompassing both. Since women are fully equal to men as human beings, Islam has made them equally in rights and

responsibilities. In Islamic teachings, women are guaranteed certain rights, including the right to education, work, ownership, and participation in public life. Islam also prescribes certain duties towards women, such as protection, care, and support in the family environment. The differences between women and men in certain rights and duties in Islam are set by taking into account their physical differences and different roles in various aspects of life.

However, it is important to understand that interpretations and applications of these principles may vary in different Muslim communities and cultures. Different interpretations and applications of these principles are one of the reasons for the general perception of Muslim women in the Western world, which is susceptible to stereotypes and prejudices. Most prejudices about women in Islam stem from the mistaken belief that women in Islam are oppressed and have no rights. This misunderstanding is perpetuated by incorrect interpretations of women's rights in various areas such as the right to education, the right to work, the right to ownership, protection from violence, and the role of women in marriage, as well as in society and public life. Therefore, in an attempt to understand the concept of women in Islam and to attempt to break down unfounded prejudices, it is necessary to examine interpretations of certain issues such as education, polygamy, and female genital mutilation, which are often used as mechanisms to perpetuate prejudices about the oppression of women and violence against women in Islam.

In pre-Islamic Arabia, women were subordinate to their relatives or husbands. They were characterized as "movable" objects that could be owned, bought, sold, or inherited. Therefore, men had complete dominance over them. In the event of a husband's death, a woman could be inherited by his sons, along with any property, after which the sons had the option to marry her. Additionally, women had no freedom or power regarding their own welfare and were excluded from social and political life. Women were viewed as sexual objects, as evidenced by documented "annual gatherings and fairs" where women were forced to dance naked while poets watched and simultaneously wrote poems about various parts of their bodies and movements (Jawad, 1998).

There was no restriction on how many wives a man could marry, so tribal leaders had many wives to establish kinship ties for political alliances, thereby minimizing conflicts between tribes and attacks. Some leaders had up to ten wives (Munir, 2005). With the advent of Islam, this practice was prohibited by the revelation of verses:

"If you fear that you will not be just towards orphan girls in marriage, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one." (Qur'an, 4:3)

One interpretation of this verse is that it prohibits marriage to more than four wives. Another perspective considers the context of the number of widows and orphans resulting from warfare, aiming to provide security to these women and children who lacked any means of support. Additionally, the part of the verse stating, "But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one," strictly mandates equal treatment of wives. If there is doubt that this cannot be achieved, it is further clarified in subsequent verses: "And you will never be able to be equal [in feeling] between wives, even if you should strive to do so..." thereby affirming

the prohibition of polygamy in such cases. Thus, polygamy is viewed as contextual rather than normative (Munir, 1998).

What is also characteristic of pre-Islamic Arabia is female infanticide, i.e., the killing of live female children. Since women were considered a burden to the family, the birth of a female child was a shame for the father. This practice was common among the Arabs and was even considered a generous act (Jawad, 1998). Islam strongly condemned this behavior, as indicated by the revealed verses: "And when the buried female infant is asked for what sin she was killed... every soul will know what it has brought [i.e., done]" (Qur'an, 81:8-9, 14). In the interpretation of these verses, it is mentioned that on the Day of Judgment³³, the killed infant girl will be questioned about the crime for which she was killed to threaten her killer, where it is stated that the person who spilled her blood should be punished (Er-Rifa'i, 2002), and also that the slain girls will be in Heaven. The way Arabs viewed the birth of a female child is also described in the Qur'anic verses: "And when one of them is informed of [the birth of] a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief. He hides himself from the people because of the ill of which he has been informed. Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the ground? Unquestionably, evil is what they decide" (Qur'an, 16:58-59).

Education holds an important place in Islam and is considered one of the fundamental principles of faith. Islam emphasizes the importance of acquiring knowledge and education as a means of personal and societal development. Learning and education are valued in Islamic tradition, and Muslims are called upon to seek knowledge and exploration to better understand the world around them and their faith. The Qur'an and Sunnah also promote education as a means to achieve spiritual and moral progress and as a way to establish a more just and prosperous society. The first revelation to the Prophet, peace be upon him, was: "Recite in the name of your Lord who created - created man from a clinging substance. Recite, and your Lord is the most Generous - Who taught by the pen - taught man that which he knew not" (Qur'an, 96:1-5), thereby making education as one of the duties of every Muslim, male and female alike.

The Prophet Muhammad taught others about the Qur'an, thus assuming the role of a teacher, while others assumed the role of students, a dynamic not restricted to men but inclusive of women as well. The Qur'an and Sunnah support the education of women and grant them the right to learn and acquire knowledge. In Islamic tradition, there are many examples of educated and knowledgeable women who contributed to society in various ways. A notable example is Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her), the wife of Muhammad, peace be upon him, who learned about Islam, spread her knowledge to others, and thus was considered a recognized authority in Islamic sciences (Stojšić, 2012). After the death of the Prophet Muhammad, women were degraded and excluded from public life, thereby revoking the rights granted to them by Islam (Zajimović, 1996; cited in Vukić, 2021), and among Muslim authorities, the opinion emerged that learning the basics of faith was sufficient for women, given that their primary role was to be wives and mothers. Consequently, this led to the denial of the right to education, thereby prevent-

33 According to Islamic belief, every soul will be resurrected after death and brought before God, where it will be judged and sent to either Paradise or Hell based on its deeds.

ing awareness of women's rights (Stojšić, 2012). Education of women in Islam is not just a matter of rights, but also a community duty to support and ensure access to education for all its members. By promoting women's education, it can contribute to building a more just and prosperous society in accordance with Islamic values.

3. Gender equality through the lens of Islam

Gender equality in Islam is a topic that elicits various interpretations and viewpoints within the Muslim community. Islam as a religion emphasizes the equality of all people before God, but interpretations of how this applies to gender equality differ among different schools and interpretations within Islam. In some contexts and interpretations, Islamic texts are interpreted as supporting gender equality, insisting on respecting the rights of women and men and their roles in society. For example, the Quran emphasizes the importance of respecting women and providing them with protection and support, mentioning them several times as partners and advisors to men. However, in practice, different cultures and social contexts significantly influence how these principles are applied.

There is ongoing debate within the Islamic world about how best to promote gender equality in line with Islamic principles. While some insist on preserving traditional roles and interpretations, others advocate for reinterpretation of classical texts to ensure that women are granted the same rights and opportunities as men.

Islamic teachings define male-female relationships through three main concepts: equality (*zevđijja*), partnership (*vilaja*), and guardianship (*kavvama*) (Čelebić et al., 2016). The principle of partnership emphasizes equality in creation and teaches that the human species was created in pairs, and that all men and women are created with equal value, regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, or social status. The Quran states: "O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and the wombs. Indeed Allah is ever, over you, an Observer." (Quran, 4:1) The Quran emphasizes the common origin from which man and woman were created, highlighting parity in their creation. Both man and woman are equally necessary, and their functions and roles in sustaining the human race are equally important.

The principle of partnership clearly expresses that neither gender is superior to the other, but they cooperate with each other in doing good and preventing evil. The Quran highlights the relationship between men and women as one of partnership, friendship, and even guardianship. "The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoy what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give zakah and obey Allah and His Messenger. Those - Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise." (Quran, 9:71).

According to the principle of guardianship, "Men are in charge of women" means that a man should take responsibility for providing support and maintenance to his wife, fulfilling an important duty. (Tahzib lisanul-Arab, Ibn Manzur). "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has made one of them excel over the other and because they spend from their wealth..." (Quran, 4:34).

Islam emphasizes equality between women and men, not differentiating between the rights and obligations based on human anatomy, but considering these rights and obligations equal in the eyes of Islam for both men and women (Supriyadi, Julia, Firdaus, 2019; Hasan, Renaldiansyah, Hartawan, Sirait, 2024). Supriyadi et al. (2019) state that Islam, during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, had a mission of liberation, to end discrimination against women, and any form of oppression, inequality of rights, and male cultural and social arbitrariness. On one occasion, the Prophet Muhammad asked a man to marry his daughter to a man named Abu Hind, which the man refused because Abu Hind had previously been a slave. In response, the following Quranic verse was revealed: "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted." (Quran, 49:13).

By this verse, the intention was to emphasize that there are no distinctions among individuals based on gender, but rather differences based on piety and devotion to Allah. A person who is more devoted to religious duties will receive greater rewards than one who is less devoted, illustrating differences based on dedication and piety towards Allah (Fitrah, Sumarlin, 2021; cited in Hasan et al., 2024). Additionally, this verse underscores the liberation of people from various forms of discrimination (based on gender, skin color, ethnic background, etc.).

The Quran addresses both men and women equally: "The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give zakah and obey Allah and His Messenger. Those - Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise." (Quran, 9:71).

Islam commands the same behavior for both men and women through verses such as: "And whoever does good whether male or female and he is a believer - they shall enter the Garden, and they shall not be dealt with a whit unjustly." (Quran, 4:124). Likewise, they will be equally punished if they commit sins, as seen in the verse: "As for the thief, the male and the female, amputate their hands as a penalty for what they have earned as a deterrent [punishment] from Allah. And Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise." (Quran, 5:38). This demonstrates that the same standards of behavior are set for both women and men (Štojs, 2021:182).

According to Islamic teachings, a woman has the right to accept or reject a marriage proposal. Her consent is a prerequisite for the marriage to be valid, as evidenced by the example of El-Hanse bint Hidam, who complained because her father wanted to marry her to a man she did not like. The Prophet, peace be upon him, responded: "Go, this marriage is not valid for him with you. Marry the one you wish." She replied that she agreed with her father's decision but wanted women to know that fathers have no right in their daughter's affairs (Hašimi, 2001; Supriyadi et al., 2019).

Islam desires marital harmony between spouses, without women feeling difficulty or living with someone they do not love. In this regard, one woman sought divorce because she could no longer live with her husband. In one version, she said: "Messenger of Allah, I have no objection to Sabit bin Kais in terms of faith or morals, but I dislike unbelief in Islam." In another version, "I have no objection

to Sabit in faith or morals, but I cannot stand him.” The Prophet instructed her to return the dowry (*mehr*)³⁴ and divorce him, thus confirming that women have the right to seek divorce (Supriyadi et al., 2019).

3.1. Theories of Equality

There are various theories and approaches that promote gender equality within an Islamic context. Most theories derive from or align with Islamic feminism, which combines elements of feminism with Islamic beliefs and practices. Islamic feminists advocate for gender equality within the framework of Islam, emphasizing that Islamic principles are compatible with the idea of equality between women and men. They address issues such as the reinterpretation of religious texts, the promotion of women’s rights in society, and the struggle against patriarchal structures.

Moving away from dominant feminist interpretations within Islamic tradition, three gender theories emerge that deal with the relationship between men and women and their rights and obligations associated with each gender (Jurić, 2017). The first of these is the theory of subordination, which interprets the relationship between men and women in favor of one superior being, namely the man. An example cited here is that Islamic tradition predominantly holds the view that man (Adam, peace be upon him) was created first, and woman (Eve) was created thereafter, thereby being subordinate to Adam. It is important to note that interpretations of the Quran are divided into two groups regarding the creation of Eve. According to some, she was created from Adam’s left rib, while others argue that she was created just as Adam was created (Wikisi, 2015). In support of the latter view, the verse is cited: “O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women.” (Quran, 4:1). Additionally, the second group of interpreters suggests that the term “rib” denotes closeness and emotional attachment between man and woman, highlighting women’s weaker physical constitution and greater sensitivity, which distinguishes them from men (Wikisi, 2015).

Additionally, Jurić (2017) mentions another aspect related to this theory, which is the blaming of Eve for the evil that emerged in this world. Some interpreters of the Quran consider Eve responsible for the expulsion from Paradise, suggesting that her beauty and persistence tempted Adam, peace be upon him, and that she urged him to eat from the forbidden tree. However, when we examine the verse: “But We had already charged Adam before that, but he forgot; and We found not in him determination.” (Quran, 20:115), we can see that the blame and responsibility for the sin committed are placed on Adam, peace be upon him. It is not accurate to interpret that Eve, the woman, is to blame for the first sin as some other religions claim (Wikisi, 2015). Supporting the notion that woman is equal to man is the hadith of the Prophet, peace be upon him: “I advise you to treat women well. Verily they were created from a rib and the most curved part of the rib is the upper part; if you try to straighten it, you will break it, and if you leave it, it will re-

34 A wedding gift in Islam of a specified value that a man is obligated to give to a woman at the time of marriage.

main curved, so I urge you to treat women well.” (Jurić, 2017:20). Furthermore, it would be unacademic and incorrect to conclude that women are inferior based on certain interpretations. This highlights the importance of considering knowledge from various sources such as the Quran, hadith, fiqh, and similar when interpreting religious rules.

The second theory of gender roles is the theory of complementarity, according to which women and men act according to the roles assigned to them based on the commands of Allah, SWT, or the Prophet, peace be upon him. Accordingly, one of the most important roles a woman can have is being a mother, considering her sensitivity, tenderness, and empathy that enable her to fulfill her role in the best possible way. The esteem in which motherhood is held is evident from an incident where a man asked the Prophet, peace be upon him, who among people deserves his attention and companionship the most, to which the Prophet, peace be upon him, replied it is his mother, repeating this three times, and only then did he mention his father on the fourth occasion (Hašimi, 2001; Vukić, 2021).

Furthermore, it also mentions the sexual role of women, namely the obligation of a woman towards her husband not to refuse sexual relations with him except during menstruation (Jurić, 2017). However, this applies not only during the menstrual cycle but also after childbirth, if she is in ihram, if she is ill, and similar circumstances. Therefore, she can refuse her husband if there is a legitimate Sharia reason (Ljakić, 2021). Islam also sets certain rules regarding sexual relations. “And they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them in kindness.” (Quran, 2:228) This shows that, besides the woman’s duty to satisfy her husband, he also has a duty to satisfy her in sexual intercourse. Therefore, if a husband does not fulfill his duties towards his wife in terms of sexual relations, it is not surprising that she rejects him when called to engage in sexual relations (Ljakić, 2020).

The final gender theory highlighted by Jurić (2017) is the theory of egalitarianism, which is based on the equality of men and women in every aspect, emphasizing their mutual complementarity. In support of this theory, one of the mentioned verses (49:13), as well as the verse: “The Creator of the heavens and the earth. He has made for you from yourselves mates, and among the cattle mates; thereby multiplying you...” (Quran, 42:11), affirm that men and women are equal, fellow human beings, endowed with equal opportunities and responsibilities. It emphasizes the importance of men and women working together, encouraging mutual respect and assistance in fulfilling the obligations necessary for the maintenance and survival of the human species (Vukić, 2021; Jurić, 2017).

Regarding their responsibilities, we also have the verse: “The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give zakah and obey Allah and His Messenger. Those - Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.” (Quran, 9:71).

From this verse, we can see that men and women have the obligation to collaborate in society, politics, and education, emphasizing Islam’s direction towards the active role of both men and women in society (Islam, 2019). As stated, the criterion for distinguishing among people is their adherence to religious principles, i.e., following Allah’s regulations. Accordingly, women are born equal to men, and

any subsequent differences are caused by societal systems and the needs of particular societies (Jurić, 2017:23).

4. What do the studies show?

According to the most recent research on gender equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Spahić-Šiljak and Đipa, 2024:21), all respondents concluded that formal gender equality exists in Bosnia and Herzegovina due to positive legal norms, such as the Gender Equality Law in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but these policies are not effectively implemented in practice. The experiences and perceptions of the respondents led to the conclusion that there is a long way to go towards a truly gender-equal society. Given that gender stereotypes are deeply embedded in the social and cultural fabric, the question arises as to how long the road ahead is to raise awareness of gender equality in Islamic understanding, especially considering the deeply rooted perception that the subordination of Muslim women stems from Islam itself. The foundation of this subordination lies in the patriarchal-tribunal nature of Arab-Muslim society, where men have taken on the right to interpret religious texts and laws and define the status of women, who have become victims of rigid misogynistic ideologies (Zekić, 2016). Although Islam originally advocates for gender equality, in practice, this form of equality is either absent or often misinterpreted, as evidenced by analyses conducted in countries where the majority of the population is Muslim and where Islam serves as a form of legislation.

A study conducted in 2013 across 39 countries with majority Muslim populations (including Bosnia and Herzegovina) involved 38,000 respondents, 85% of whom believe that women should always be subordinate to their husbands and obey them. Furthermore, 53% of respondents believe that wearing the hijab should be a woman's decision (Pew Research Center, 2013; cited in Gouda and Potrafke, 2016). Additionally, a study in 2014 (Poushter, 2014; cited in Gouda and Potrafke, 2016) covered seven countries with majority Muslim populations. Findings from Turkey, Tunisia, and Lebanon showed that half of the respondents believe that a woman should decide what to wear, whereas in Iraq, Pakistan, and Egypt, only 27%, 22%, and 14% of respondents, respectively, believe that women should be allowed to decide what to wear.

From 2004 to 2015, studies have shown that women are discriminated against in terms of being prevented from education, participating in the labor market, and taking part in elections (Donno and Russett, 2004; Norton and Tomal, 2009; Cooray and Potrafke, 2011; Cooray, 2012; Kilby and Scholz, 2011; Potrafke and Ursprung, 2012; Cho, 2013; Del PradoLu, 2013; Cooray and Klasen, 2014; Salahodjaev and Azam, 2015; cited in Gouda and Potrafke, 2016). To ascertain these results, researchers used data from various countries with Muslim and Christian populations to examine gender equality. Countries with majority Muslim populations exhibit higher levels of gender discrimination compared to countries with majority Christian populations. However, previous empirical studies have overlooked differences among countries with majority Muslim populations. Gouda and Potrafke (2016) note that women are discriminated against in countries where Islam is a source of legislation and that Sharia law is incompatible with human rights related to gender equality.

Vukić (2021), in her work, cites Iran as an example of a radical Islamic state and its approach to polygamy. In Iran, Muslim families are based on polygamy where the first wife is considered the “principal” wife, while others are considered servants. The principal wife had her own family that she managed and had the right to maintenance from her husband, which extended to her children. However, women who were servants did not have the same rights, though their sons did. Additionally, polygamy in Iran is not restricted or conditioned, and cases of adultery were also present.

Zadravec (2022), in her research, cites data collected from the Our World in Data website, analyzing various statistics in India, Poland, and Saudi Arabia. Some of the analyzed data included education, specifically the completion of primary education by male and female children, as well as respondents’ opinions on whether tertiary education is more important for boys or girls. A comparison of data from 1979 and 2019 was conducted. The percentage of female children who completed primary education was 31.30% in 1979, rising to 92.95% in 2019. For male children, the percentages were 48.08% (in 1979) and 96.50% (in 2019). Data from 2003 on whether tertiary education is more important for boys or girls indicated that 61.92% of respondents believed it was more important for boys.

Zadravec (2022) also mentions female genital mutilation, specifically clitoridectomy, which is a rare occurrence in Saudi Arabia but does exist. This practice aims to “reduce female sexuality,” leading to both physical and psychological consequences. Physically, the procedure, often performed violently, results in the loss of sexual function in female genitalia and reproductive organs. Psychologically, it causes significant trauma, profoundly impacting women’s lives and often their overall mental well-being. It is important to emphasize that this practice does not originate from the Quran, whereas circumcision for males is mandatory for hygiene reasons according to Hadith, whereas for women, it is a matter of choice provided it does not cause harm (Anwar, 2006; cited in Zadravec, 2022). “Any attempt to deprive a woman of her basic right to sexual pleasure, whether through complete clitoridectomy, circumcision, or infibulation, is contrary to Islamic teachings.” (Anwar, 2006; 113; cited in Zadravec, 2022).

Wieinga (2009) sought to address the issues of conservative Islam in Indonesia regarding women’s needs and rights. It is widely believed that a woman is married to a man and is sexually at his service, where even the act of sexual intercourse is termed “melayani suami,” meaning serving the husband. The pressure created by conservative Islam on women can be seen through the example of Eliane. For her, faith played a significant role in marriage and subsequent divorce. The school she attended focused on religious and social issues, where sexuality also played a crucial role. According to these teachings, a woman must be sexually submissive to her husband and fulfill all his sexual desires, even if it means he marries another woman. Eliane felt close to her spiritual teacher, so she tried to behave sexually better to be a “true Muslim woman.” She forced herself to satisfy her husband’s sexual desires, yet her teacher blamed her for not being able to satisfy him, suggesting that this was why he needed another woman. She was even asked if she was a lesbian and whether that was the reason she couldn’t satisfy her husband. Eliane is said to have “diminished” her intelligence because her teacher and husband agreed it was not appropriate for a man to have an intellectually superior wife.

Spahić-Šiljak (2007) investigated how the interpretation of religion influences women's participation as active members of society in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The study included religious legacies of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Regarding religious identity, 77% of respondents indicated that faith was very important to them. Since the mother is considered a key figure in primary socialization and the transmission of tradition and religion, the factor of her education was highlighted, indicating that religion is understood in relation to the level of education. The less educated the mother, the stronger the traditional religious identity. Furthermore, it was found that individuals with lower levels of education adhere to inherited patterns of religious practice and understanding, whereas those with higher education are more active in understanding religion, reading, and actively participating in religious events. However, even among these individuals, there was a lack of readiness for critical reflection. It was also shown that women are not involved in the bodies of religious communities due to the lack of transparent community attitudes towards their participation, and women themselves are not sufficiently motivated and interested. Nevertheless, a majority of respondents (60%) believe that women are equal in their religious traditions concerning adherence to assigned roles, which they view not as discrimination but as a natural division where genders function complementarily (Spahić-Šiljak, 2007).

In the study conducted by Geiger, Puhovski, and Zrinščak (2009) with Muslim and Bosniak populations in Sisak, the presence of traditional and patriarchal beliefs and practices was also documented. There is a noticeable unequal division of household chores, where men are not involved in household duties and child-rearing, a situation which women disagree with and believe should not be so. When discussing this issue, however, they tend to describe it as a "Bosniak mentality" rather than adherence to Islam. Some even believe that the gender equality advocated by the West is unnecessary for them because they are satisfied with Sharia and the rights Islam has granted them. There is a clear prohibition on entering the workforce, as husbands believe it is better for women to stay at home, take care of the household, and raise children. On the other hand, women who are employed mention that this provides them with socialization opportunities, a sense of fulfillment, confidence, and satisfaction that household chores do not provide.

Another important point mentioned by Spahić-Šiljak (2007; cited in Anić, 2012) is women's fear of being recognized as feminists, so they prefer to present themselves as promoters of women's rights. This strategy is used by women in patriarchal societies to avoid the risk of being ostracized by a society that considers them disobedient. This leads to a discussion on the compatibility of Islam and feminism, where women are uncertain whether feminism is compatible with Islam, which is essentially due to ignorance leading to the aforementioned fear.

5. Conclusion

Women have a significant role in Islamic tradition and society, although this role may vary across different cultures and interpretations of Islam. In Islamic doctrine, women are considered equally important as men before God, with equal spiritual and moral rights and responsibilities. Islam places women in high regard through Quranic verses and the Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be

upon him, clearly defining their rights and opportunities. However, in practice, the interpretation of these principles can result in different social, political, and cultural conditions for women in various Muslim communities.

The critical reinterpretation of traditional texts focuses on reinterpreting classical Islamic texts to illuminate issues of gender equality. Advocates of this theory explore the contextual and historical circumstances in which the texts were written, seeking to understand their application in contemporary society. The goal is to interpret the texts in a way that supports gender equality. Analysis of Quranic verses has shown that certain verses are interpreted without considering their context or the purpose of revelation, which results in placing women in an inferior position justified by faith, i.e., claiming it is ordained by religion. This has been observed in research; however, further investigation is needed to explore why men seek to subordinate women by invoking religion. Unfortunately, this is often enabled by the ignorance of Muslim women who consider such interpretations correct. Additionally, the elevation of women's reproductive role as the most important role is acknowledged, but why is this role prioritized to such an extent over other roles such as education and work? Must Muslim women relinquish other roles they are entitled to by accepting one role as Muslim women?

Analyzing the aforementioned themes in this study is important, primarily for Muslims and Muslim women, but also for society in general. Given that traditional interpretations of faith are still prevalent in our region, it is crucial to distinguish between tradition and Islam. We witness the manipulation of Muslims concerning Muslim women when it comes to polygamy; however, when approaching the interpretation of religious provisions, it becomes evident that polygamy is not a topic to be approached without critical and thorough consideration. Additionally, education holds a significant place in the life of individuals in Islam. The more Muslim women are educated, the more insight they gain into their rights and freedoms. This strengthens their identities, their sense of self and consequently can lead to changes such as achieving gender equality. The most noticeable changes occur in family role divisions, where it has been observed that young women strive to change traditional behavioral patterns (Geiger et al., 2009), thereby achieving the equality they deserve. Of course, it is important to involve the education of men as well to refute traditional patriarchal behavioral patterns and work toward gender equality in our society.

Riffat Hassana (2006; cited in Bajramović, 2006) emphasizes, "The tragedy of today's Muslims arises from the fact that Muslims who understand modernity do not understand Islam, just as Muslims who understand Islam do not understand modernity."

Research conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Spahić-Šiljak, 2007) has provided a solid foundation for understanding perceptions of gender equality and how it actually operates in practice. Given the progress in the involvement of Muslim women in understanding their faith and critically reflecting on traditional religious beliefs (Štojs, 2016), it would be useful to examine the current state of Muslim women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, specifically to what extent their rights have been fulfilled. These questions remain open for further discussion and research.

The need for reinterpretation of texts, education and empowerment of women, as well as the promotion of intersectional approaches that take into account different identities and experiences of women in Muslim societies, must be tied to pragmatic approaches to promoting gender equality. This should focus on practical steps that can contribute to improving the position of women in Muslim societies, including Bosnia and Herzegovina. This necessarily involves education, economic empowerment, promotion of women's leadership, and elimination of gender-based discrimination.

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“Selective Abortions Issue in Montenegro - Vision of (In)Equality”

Mentor: Associate Sanja Grbović

sanja.grbovic@outlook.com

University of Montenegro

Abstract

This research aims to address the issue of selective abortions, focusing on the national context of Montenegro. Selective abortion is a complex phenomenon that reflects entrenched patriarchy and the preference for male offspring. This paper will analyze these social contexts to explain the increasing number of selective abortions in Montenegro. Based on previous research that analyzed social, cultural, and economic factors, it has been shown that patriarchal patterns directly contribute to selective abortion and play a key role in shaping people’s attitudes on this issue. This creates favoritism for boys as the only possible and acceptable heirs, placing girls in an unequal position. The paper will also discuss the campaign titled “Unwanted” conducted in Montenegro. This campaign aimed to draw attention to gender inequality that existed even before birth. The paper will explain why understanding conflicting attitudes stemming from social norms and questionable value systems is crucial for developing effective strategies to change societal awareness and combat selective abortions. The concluding part of the paper will provide basic recommendations and guidelines which could, if implemented, ultimately lead to the creation of an egalitarian society with equal opportunities.

Keywords: *selective abortion, gender equality, Montenegro, patriarchy, discrimination.*

1. Introduction

Selective abortion represents a phenomenon that reflects deep social, cultural, and gender patterns rooted in patriarchy. As a result of selective abortions, there are currently 140 million fewer women in the world. In Montenegro, selective abortions occur so frequently that they have led to an imbalance in the newborn sex ratio. This issue is crucial to link with the vision of gender equality within the state, as Montenegro faces numerous challenges in achieving gender equality. Gender equality entails equal participation of women and men in all areas of both public and private sectors, equal status, equal opportunities to exercise all rights and freedoms, and use personal knowledge and abilities for societal development, as well as equal opportunities to benefit from the results of labor (Law on Gender Equality, Official Gazette of Montenegro, No. 046/07 dated July 31, 2007, Official

Gazette of Montenegro, No. 073/10 dated December 10, 2010, 040/11 dated August 8, 2011, 035/15 dated July 7, 2015, Article

2). What creates an environment that favors male offspring while viewing female offspring as less desirable are socio-cultural norms and traditional gender patterns within society, which are entrenched, easily applicable, but not as visible. Selective abortions become a means of controlling the sex of the child, to the detriment of female children, and reflecting the preference for male descendants. The issue of abortion in Montenegro is not merely a medical or legal issue; it is a matter of respecting human rights and ensuring gender equality, given that female children are discriminated against even before birth in this way. This phenomenon points to deeply rooted inequalities in society that require a comprehensive approach to address. Therefore, it is important to analyze its causes, consequences, and implications for achieving gender equality. This paper emphasizes the importance of creating a vision of society that promotes gender equality and ensures the protection of women's and girls' rights. Patriarchy is based on concepts of social structure, status, and roles that are causally linked. The system of social structures and practices that promotes the inferiority of female gender roles while emphasizing the dominance of male gender roles is patriarchy (Walby 1990). Contributing to the discussion on building a more inclusive and just society for all its members is crucial. Campaigns such as "Unwanted," conducted in Montenegro, are important for raising awareness among citizens about this crucial issue that often goes unnoticed and is justified by society in certain ways. In a patriarchal system, abortion as a woman's right to autonomy over her body is not an acceptable option. However, when it comes to selective abortion to the detriment of female offspring, patriarchy remains silent to ensure a male heir without whom the family, according to this system, loses its meaning.

2. The Issue of Acceptability of Abortion in Social Context

Abortion represents a complex issue deeply intertwined with social, moral, and legal contexts. Medically, abortion refers to the termination of a pregnancy before the fetus can survive outside the womb. It is legalized in certain countries worldwide while prohibited under any circumstances in others, including Andorra, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Madagascar, Nicaragua, the Philippines, and Vatican City. Given the omnipresence of patriarchy, the issue of abortion is perceived differently in various contexts. The term "abortion" itself is subject to profound moral, ethical, and religious debates globally, focusing on women's rights, moral values, and public policy. Movements such as pro-life and pro-choice exist worldwide. They utilize religious and medical arguments regarding the beginning of life: whether life begins at the moment of sperm-egg fusion, the first heartbeat, or later stages. The pro-life stance views life as beginning at fertilization and advocates for the legal protection of the unborn fetus. Conversely, the pro-choice stance considers it an individual right of women and their physicians, advocating against state interference in personal decisions (Spahić-Šiljak 2019:109).

Abortion is every woman's right to autonomy over her body, which patriarchy vehemently opposes, perceiving it as murder and condemning it extensively. For many men, abortion signifies the killing of their sons, an unjustifiable loss that

should be prevented at all costs (Mršević 1998:52). In many countries, abortion is regulated as legal only under specific circumstances such as severe health reasons or to save the mother's life. People largely support abortion under these circumstances but oppose it when it is solely a woman's choice, yet research indicates that the same individuals support abortion in cases involving female fetuses.

Everyone has the right to freely and responsibly decide about their body, family formation, number of children, and spacing between births, etc. Advocating for the legalization of abortion as a woman's right in a patriarchal environment can be a double-edged sword. The right to abortion, coupled with the widespread use of prenatal testing, leads to selective abortions due to the misuse of such tests to determine the sex of future children. Hence, advocating against selective abortions and raising awareness about their prevalence, although legally prohibited, can potentially lead to restrictions or even the abolition of abortion itself, which is certainly not the goal. The ban on selective abortions must not be confused with limiting reproductive freedoms, nor does banning selective abortions imply abolishing the right to other types of pregnancy terminations. Therefore, it is crucial to systematically address the issue of selective abortions using appropriate medical instruments in an ethical, moral, legal, and legitimate manner.

The occurrence of selective abortions does not reflect the freedom or right of women rather reinforces patriarchal beliefs, with selective abortions being the product of such beliefs. Granting a "right to life" to the fetus through male identification with it thus represents a verbal articulation of male domination over women (Mršević, 1998: 53).

The issue of abortion itself is complex, and the phenomenon of selective abortions is always overshadowed by the misuse of women's right to decide over their bodies and have autonomy over them. Selective access to abortion occurs when it aligns with patriarchal principles and when the system itself finds ways to justify abortion. The question of pregnancy termination is complex because there is no global consensus on this issue. Over time, countries either ban or permit abortion, which paints an unbalanced picture on this subject. In Poland, abortion was banned in 2020, and later allowed only in cases of incest, rape, and life-threatening situations for the mother. Ireland prohibited abortion until 2013, when it allowed it only when the mother's life was at risk. In 2018, Ireland held a referendum voting for constitutional changes limiting abortion rights, illustrating that even the deepest religious and moral convictions can change. Mexico legalized abortion in 2021, and Argentina permitted the termination of pregnancy up to the 14th week. So far, no international or regional agreement directly addresses the right to abortion, allowing pro-life supporters to influence national legislation further to restrict abortion rights.

2.1. Gender inequality in Montenegro

Gender inequality is a characteristic of all societies today. It is easily perpetuated in the context of patriarchy, which advocates and upholds this idea. One of the characteristics of patriarchy is the imbalance of power between men and women, and as long as it exists, the problem of inequality and discrimination against

women will persist in all societies. In Montenegrin society, gender inequality is a complex and deeply rooted problem shaped by traditional gender roles, cultural norms, and economic structures. Gender equality in Montenegro is guaranteed by the Constitution, the Law on Gender Equality, the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, international treaties, strategies, and action plans. Data from 2013 indicates that 78.2% of people in Montenegro believe that the Law on Gender Equality is being fully and properly implemented (Puzigaća et al. 2014). This suggests that the majority of the population believes that women are equal to men in society, with equal opportunities and rights. However, reality and statistics tell a different story. Gender equality implies equal representation of both sexes in all spheres of public and private life, equal status, and equal opportunities to exercise their rights.

Detailed analysis and monitoring of the situation in Montenegro have shown an artificially created difference between the number of newborn boys and girls. According to the Law on Conditions and Procedure for Termination of Pregnancy, every woman in Montenegro has the right to abortion up to the 10th week of pregnancy (Official Gazette of Montenegro No. 53/2009, Article 4). However, despite legal recognition, patriarchy does not recognize this right. It strongly opposes it, except in one situation - when there are no male children in the family. The justification lies in the idea that heirs of surnames and lineage, which are boys. For these deep-seated reasons and societal pressure, women reluctantly choose abortion upon learning the sex of the fetus if it is a girl. Consequently, there is currently a shortage of 3000 women of reproductive age. Over the last 15 years, according to research, the gender imbalance has averaged 109 boys to 100 girls. Such consistent deviation cannot be accidental but rather a result of human intervention. As medical science has advanced, parents today can determine the sex of their child in early pregnancy. Although prenatal tests as a scientific advancement should be used solely for checking the health of the fetus, they are predominantly used to determine sex, thus being misused. The Law on Conditions and Procedure for Termination of Pregnancy clearly states that termination of pregnancy for the purpose of selecting the sex of the child is prohibited (Official Gazette of Montenegro No. 53/2009, Article 18). However, concrete statistical data on whether selective abortion has actually occurred are not available, so for now, it remains a matter of public secrecy.

Montenegro is among nine countries worldwide with the most significant imbalance in the ratio of newborn boys to girls due to selective abortions. The period when the largest difference in the number of newborn boys and girls was recorded was in 2009, with 549 more boys born than girls. However, in only 2016, this difference was within normal limits at 131. These figures have not only been noted by non-governmental organizations dealing with gender issues in Montenegro but also by international organizations that have immediately responded to the alarming situation. Reactions have come from the UN Population Fund, the Council of Europe, and the GREVIO committee. The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) recommended in 2017 that Montenegro strictly prohibit selective abortion due to the alarming imbalance in the number of newborn male and female babies. The European Union has been warning Montenegro about this gender disparity in newborns for a decade. The female gender identity is seen as a hindrance. The statistical probability that

a woman will have a male child increases with each pregnancy, so one possibility that arises is that a woman continues to bear children until she has a male child or stops having children once she has a male child (Komar 2020). The female identity must constantly be suppressed, although it must exist. It has its role. Daughters are treated as temporary members of the household, while men are seen as those who stay and perpetuate the family name. The identity of women in Montenegro, regardless of their position, has always been shaped through male gender roles. It is not uncommon today to hear daughters being addressed as sons. Cultural patterns in patriarchy reinforce the teaching of traditional gender roles, perpetuating discrimination against the female sex and passing it on to younger generations. Stereotypes about gender roles, poverty, economic and social crises, and patriarchal heritage have created a conducive climate for the existence of a dysfunctional society where an entire category of people is discriminated against based on birth criteria, which persists to this day (Radulović and Ljaljević 2009).

2.2. Patriarchy and Selective Abortions

Patriarchy is a part of both private and public spheres of life, prevalent universally and persistent despite numerous changes in historical circumstances. It creates an environment where men dominate women, both factually and ideologically. It constructs roles that represent expected and acceptable behaviors associated with the status individuals occupy in society. These social norms and roles are not created in a vacuum but are based on existing standards, values, and rules. Therefore, gender differences are not innate but constructed. Patriarchy does not tolerate flexibility and openness. It is a system that imposes hierarchy and has a very defined notion of what is right and what is not. Gender and gender roles are taken for granted, seen as natural and unchangeable, and presumed to be fully understood by all (Špahić-Šiljak 2019:71).

In the context of Montenegro, patriarchal patterns are deeply rooted in our tradition and culture. Gender roles are often clearly defined, with a dominant role for men, while women, unfortunately, are mostly confined to acting within the home. Within the private sphere, a woman's primary role is to be a mother, with reproduction being her central function. The preference for male offspring in a patriarchal environment, and the degradation and marginalization of female offspring, leads to the phenomenon of selective abortions and result in gender discrimination even before birth. Throughout history, a male child has been viewed as the one who provides, creates, carries the family name, and continues the lineage. He inherits property, are considered more important, more valued, and have greater rights to wealth and estates, with Montenegro being one such society that cherishes male heirs. On the other hand, female children are placed in the role of those who leave the household and become "another family's dinner."

You will never hear "first female, then male." The phrase "first male, then female," which is entrenched, clearly illustrates the extent of a boy's role at birth compared to a girl. Even today, during weddings, there is a custom of bringing the so-called "nakonjče" (the youngest son from the husband's family) into the household to fulfill the young couple's "dream" of having a son. Patriarchy describes what men and women are but also dictates what they should be, reinforcing

discrimination, inequality, and hierarchy. It does not allow freedom or deviation from what it dictates as the only correct path. Through expected norms of behavior that they are expected to respect and follow, a gap is created between men as the superior sex and women as subordinates to men. This model illustrates the position genders occupy, both before birth and throughout life, and constitutes the basis of gender inequality in every state and society.

3. Causes and Consequences of Selective Abortions

The theme and focus of this paper are selective abortions based on sex, specifically the deliberate termination of female fetuses. These abortions are a product of social factors, which are difficult to detect and link directly to selective abortions, making them challenging to prove. One of the main causes of selective abortions is the preference for a specific sex. In Montenegrin society, as well as in other patriarchal environments, a male child is more desirable than a female one because families feel compelled to have a male heir, which cannot be fulfilled by a daughter. For this reason, women are subjected to constant pressure to bear a male child due to societal expectations. The narrative dictates that without a male child, it's as if they have no children at all. This is reflected in the presentation of sons as sole inheritors, even when there are sisters in the family, a common occurrence even in the 21st century. However, this shouldn't come as a surprise, given that we are currently fighting for the lives of discriminated girls, even before birth, and striving to explain why every life in society is equally important, regardless of differences. Therefore, despite changing times and more liberal social norms, cultural influences have always been so strong that they continue to play a significant role in making such decisions. Sexism is discrimination or prejudice against people based on their sex or gender. The term is especially used to indicate discrimination against women. Research shows that all traits considered masculine are much more highly valued and are considered norms, while female traits and characteristics are devalued or considered some deviations (Mršević 1998:22).

Montenegro is characterized by continuous gender inequality that manifests in all aspects of people's lives. The undesirability of a female child is the result of long-term subordination of women in social, economic, and political aspects. When a woman gives birth to a male child, she feels respected, and society also perceives her that way. Conversely, giving birth to a girl is perceived as a disappointment and misfortune.

The consequences of selective abortions for society are profound and leave traces on individuals. The fact that women abort because they are expecting a girl does not always mean that it was their choice. Sometimes they find themselves unconsciously in a situation where they must have a boy, because the system has imposed it on them from the beginning. For this reason, they feel as if they do not meet the expectations of those around them, neglecting themselves. There are also many women who inquire about how they can have a boy. All of this clearly speaks to the perception of women in society, their significance, roles, and functions, all predetermined by patriarchy. Therefore, it is crucial to take care of their mental health and well-being. The lack of support and understanding in society further complicates the abortion process. Of course, the consequences left by selective

abortions include changes in demographic trends and gender balance, and widespread use of selective abortions can have long-term implications for society.

The normal trend of births between girls and boys is 100:106. In Montenegro, this ratio was 100:110. Studies show that in countries with disproportionately large numbers of men and women, which Montenegro will become if it continues on this course, such as China and India, men have difficulty finding partners and marrying, and violence against women increases. Based on the current situation, it is believed that in 20 years, there will be 8,000 fewer women than men. The consequences of selective abortions are also visible worldwide, as according to UN data, there is a shortage of 117 million women of reproductive age. The assumption is that selective abortions and the misuse of prenatal tests are causes of such imbalances. Through selective abortions, children are not treated as individuals but as objects. Therefore, prenatal tests exist to serve a benevolent purpose and should not be used to confirm gender stereotypes. They must be used in the best interests of parents and the fetus, which must not be used as a means of confirming gender stereotypes. However, decisions about reproduction have become such that they determine who will exist and who will not, so the child does not get a chance to be born if they do not meet a specific criterion set by the parents (McDougall 2005). Everything has its two sides, and people are very skilled at taking what best suits them to achieve their goals. This is also the case with new technology that has brought prenatal tests to be used for good purposes, but people have used them to meet their needs and have led to selective abortions. For years, the United Nations has prioritized the status of girls and women in national and international policies through its Action Programs.

4. Prevention of Selective Abortions

Resorting to selective abortions due to a preference for a specific sex, in this case male, has significant consequences, necessitating the exploration of various mechanisms for preventing selective abortions. Globally, one of the most prevalent methods is the prohibition of prenatal sex selection and the misuse of procedures for determining fetal sex. However, even laws prohibiting selective abortions have not borne fruit, raising the question of what the problem is. Is it awareness among citizens, penalties, or statistics on the number of selective abortions?

Education - Education is considered one of the fundamental ways to combat resorting to selective abortions. Through education, women are empowered to realize that nothing is mandatory and to distinguish between what they want and what society expects from them. Education also provides knowledge about adequate health care, support, and raises awareness about the importance of gender equality. Therefore, it is crucial at all times and through all means to focus on societal norms regarding this issue, as they support discrimination based on the sex of the child, and it is important to find their connection. An ideal result of this fight for equality for all members of a society where everyone has the same starting point would be the achievement of equality in Montenegro, not only on paper, formally, through adopted laws, but also substantively and applicably, measurably and supported by facts and evidence, visible changes in the education system through programs, strengthening healthy cultural norms, and creating public awareness

that is non-discriminatory and beneficial to every individual.

Education on sexual and reproductive health – should be part of educational institutions. Through secondary socialization, young people should already be familiar with these concepts, distinguish them, and form their own opinions about them. It is important that young people have a different perspective on this topic than what they hear from family or friends daily. This will enable them to recognize important elements and how to apply them on their own. Some recommendations from international organizations to Montenegro were: to enable learning about gender equality at all levels of education; conduct research on the prevention of selective abortions; continuously raise awareness about the consequences of selective abortions on society.

Raising societal awareness – through education, society’s awareness of this issue is raised, which also encompasses many others such as equality, women’s position in society, the right to abortion, etc. Campaigns change social norms and society begins to apply them unconsciously and for good purposes.

The “Unwanted” Campaign – This campaign in Montenegro garnered significant attention from both the media and the broader public in 2019. It was a response to alarming data in Montenegro regarding selective abortions and was led by the Center for Women’s Rights. The goal was to finally speak out about this public secret, to call things by their true names, and to clearly highlight the causes and consequences of selective abortions. The campaign also aimed to raise awareness about gender equality in Montenegro. Selective abortions are a byproduct of systemic problems that have long been neglected, and no one has ever addressed why this tradition still exists today. That was precisely what the campaign sought to draw attention to. A troubling fact is that the issue of selective abortions did not capture significant public attention until 2017. It was then that RTCG journalist Svetlana Vlahović published an investigative story and anonymous testimonies of women who underwent selective abortion. The “Unwanted” campaign followed shortly after the publication of this journalistic investigation. One of the additional aims of this campaign was to elicit responses from both citizens and relevant institutions, given their previous lack of reaction to this problem.

Proactive action by state institutions – These institutions play a crucial role in formulating policies, laws, and implementing measures to prevent discrimination based on the sex of the child and ensure respect for women’s reproductive rights. The Government of Montenegro needs to clearly recognize the seriousness of this issue and treat it as a priority in public health and human rights. State institutions are responsible for ensuring that laws prohibiting discrimination are enforced and taking concrete steps to effectively implement these prohibitions. This can be achieved by strengthening oversight of the operations of healthcare facilities, conducting educational programs on reproductive rights and gender equality both for citizens outside state institutions and those working within them, empowering women to report cases of discrimination and seek justice. With a protective system in place that provides security, women will certainly resort to reporting such situations. It is important for state institutions to collaborate with civil society organizations addressing this issue and to provide support to women who are victims of discrimination or coerced into abortion due to the sex of the child. Such collaboration

can send a strong message, influencing awareness of the problem and providing support to women facing difficult decisions. Only through effective coordination among all relevant stakeholders in the state can Montenegro effectively address the issue of selective abortions and create a society where every woman has the right to make informed decisions about her body without fear of discrimination or condemnation.

5. Final considerations

A key step in combating gender inequality in Montenegro is changing social norms and cultural patterns that support discrimination based on gender. This involves actively promoting the importance of gender equality through education, public campaigns, and the empowerment of women. It is necessary for all societal stakeholders to work together on this issue to create equal opportunities and chances for all women and men in society. Additionally, promoting an inclusive society without prejudices about gender roles and expectations is crucial. Likewise, ongoing efforts to raise public awareness about the harmful consequences of gender discrimination and stereotypes should never be sidelined.

The patriarchal culture deeply rooted in Montenegrin societal consciousness complicates awareness and the ultimate eradication of this issue, as evidenced by numerous studies in this field (Milena Aćimić-Remiković 2022:117). It is crucial for Montenegro to develop judicial institutions that effectively implement laws, sanction discriminatory behaviors, and thereby strengthen the position of women in Montenegrin society.

The issue of selective abortions sparks significant debates and controversies as it touches upon deep moral, ethical, and socio-cultural aspects of society, both in Montenegro and beyond. The topic of selective abortions has never been merely a medical problem but also a social, moral, and practical issue deeply ingrained in a society's value system and norms.

It is important to note that the topic of selective abortions is not just about women, nor can it be solely addressed by women. Similarly, the issue of gender equality does not polarize society into two genders. In fact, this struggle cannot make sense without the involvement of men who understand the core of this issue and are willing to solve it. Men and women in the fight for equality are allies who share the same goal: equal opportunities and chances for all. Therefore, it is important, through raising awareness, to focus on men who will be part of this fight shoulder to shoulder with all women and who will support each other.

Overall, addressing this problem requires engagement from institutions, civil society—especially active non-governmental organizations dealing with gender inequality—educational institutions, and the broader public. Only through collective efforts, networking, vocal advocacy, and a strong dedication to achieving equality can we build a society where every woman has the right to make free and informed decisions about her body, without fear of discrimination or condemnation.

By stepping slightly outside patriarchal norms and realizing our rights and freedoms, women see that the pressures imposed are artificial and they do not

wish to be part of them. As a society, we must proactively work towards solving discrimination issues with the state apparatus. Laws must not remain mere words on paper; they must be applied effectively to protect and uphold the rights of all individuals in society.

Ultimately, our goal is an inclusive society of equal opportunities, closely aligned with legal norms and moral principles, where every child is born out of love and desire, never out of fear, obligation, or pressure. It is a society where everyone has the opportunity to live, contribute to the community, and be equally valued compared to others.

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THEMATIC AREA:
**4. GENDER IN EDUCATION, SCIENCE,
CULTURE, AND ART**

Learning Feminism (?)

Mentor: Associate professor Nevena Mitranić-Marinković

nevena.mitranic@f.bg.ac.rs

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

Abstract

In this paper, we aim to reconsider the relationship between feminist theory and education, exploring how, why, and how further the connection between them can be shaped. Starting from the historical development of this relationship – both education for feminism and feminism in education – and critically examining the existing literature on feminist research conducted in educational contexts, we will explore productive connections between the foundational principles of feminist pedagogy and key trends in contemporary pedagogy more broadly. We seek to highlight what “learning feminism” can truly mean in ways that contribute genuinely to the development of feminism and education. Our findings indicate the necessity of revitalizing feminist principles of equality, critical thinking, inclusivity, transformative learning, empowerment, and intersectionality across all aspects of the educational process, from curriculum design and the educational environment to assessment models. Thus, feminist principles actively thrive within the educational system as a form of “heterotopia” with the potential to extend into society at large, supporting the transformative potential of education that is recognized today as a crucial educational value.

Keywords: *feminism, education, pedagogy, teaching feminism, educational practice*

1. Introduction

In contemporary discourse, where issues of gender, discrimination, and inequality are increasingly relevant, the importance of studying the relationship between feminism and education is more pronounced than ever. This connection is crucial not only because it opens up alternative approaches to education but also because it addresses fundamental questions of equality, inclusivity, and fairness. Since the educational process is inseparable from its social and political context, it is vital to understand that education is not merely a means of transmitting knowledge but a space where societal values, norms, and power dynamics are reproduced and scrutinized.

From a pedagogical perspective, we gain insight into the course of the educational process and ways it can be utilized to promote and implement feminist thought. By examining current educational practices through the lens of feminist ideas, experts can identify implicit biases, stereotypes, and systemic injustices that perpetuate gender-based disparities in the well-being and achievements of participants within the educational system.

Furthermore, the pedagogical perspective is tasked with highlighting the transformative potential of education in dismantling existing oppressive structures and fostering social change. Implementing feminist practices in the development of educational programs can create opportunities to empower students to question existing social norms and promote gender equality.

However, the implications of feminist thought and theory on education, within education, and through education fundamentally depend on the principles underlying the pedagogical process rather than on feminist content per se. This raises questions about how much, despite years of effort, feminism is actually present in education. In this paper, we will examine the existing practices of academicizing feminism and how feminism is integrated into the educational process, aiming to offer a pedagogical perspective on what it truly means to teach feminism.

The first part of this paper presents the historical context of integrating feminist theory into academic settings, as well as the theoretical foundation of feminist ideas that form the basis for feminist studies. This section also discusses the advantages as well as the challenges and issues brought about by the academicization of feminist studies. The second part of the paper analyzes current literature, including anthologies and journals, to highlight the main themes of research interest in feminism within the educational context. The third part of the paper is dedicated to clarifying the understanding of education and the educational process in contemporary pedagogy, while presenting a pedagogical perspective on what it truly means to learn feminism.

2. Feminism and Education

Evidence of the need for, and advocacy of, universal education and mass literacy can be traced back to the 17th century through Jan Amos Comenius, who believed that education should be accessible to all, boys and girls alike, regardless of their socio-economic status or background (Comenius 2007). Significant movements for public education accessible to everyone were also evident during the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution (Lee 2016). For the issues addressed in this paper, it is crucial to mention the impact of World War I on the inclusion of women in the workforce and higher education.

The sudden departure of a large number of young, healthy men to the battlefield opened up new opportunities for women to work in roles previously reserved only for men (Neupert 2021). Consequently, there arose a need to expand educational opportunities for women, which also led to a reconsideration of their role in society. Additionally, the significant role of feminist struggles during the first and second waves of feminism, as well as the Suffrage movement, reignited the initiative for universal education, this time with a focus on educating women at all levels

(Neupert 2021). Hooks considers this issue a crucial goal in the feminist struggle:

“Encouraging women to seek education, to develop their intellect, should be a primary goal of the feminist movement. Education as ‘the practice of freedom’ (to borrow another term from Freire) will be a reality for women only when we develop an educational methodology that addresses the needs of all women. This is an important feminist issue.” (Hooks 1984:21)

Jean Shackelford notes that feminist pedagogy was a term used in the 1980s to encompass a wide range of teaching methods that were not dominated by a male, Eurocentric perspective. What Shackelford refers to as “male pedagogy,” based on authoritarian and hierarchical relationships characterized by control, can be exemplified through teaching methods such as frontal lectures and testing, and pertains to maintaining a competitive environment (Shackelford 1992). Feminist education is grounded in six equally essential principles, including gender equality, critical thinking, inclusivity, transformative potential, empowerment, and intersectionality (Shackelford 1992).

- Gender equality refers to the principle that promotes equal rights and opportunities for all individuals, as well as equal treatment, regardless of their gender (UN 1979). This concept acknowledges the existence of social roles, expectations, and rights that are often based on gender, with women frequently facing discrimination compared to men. Gender equality as a feminist principle aims to eliminate these injustices by providing opportunities for education, employment, and political participation for everyone, boys and girls, men and women alike.

- Critical thinking is a process characterized by actively and reflectively questioning, analyzing, and evaluating information. This concept involves the ability to ask questions, recognize implicit values and beliefs, consider different perspectives, and skillfully distinguish between opinions, facts, and prejudices (Ennis 1989). Critical thinking requires actively using one’s mind and consciousness to create a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of a topic, rather than passively accepting information.

- Inclusivity in education is an approach that seeks to create an open environment tolerant of diverse experiences, thoughts, perspectives, and identities (UNESCO 2009). It recognizes the importance of equal inclusion of all participants in the education process, regardless of their differences or needs, to achieve their full educational potential (Ainscow 2005). Inclusive pedagogy is an instructional approach that centers on students, the diversity of their social identities, backgrounds, and experiences. An inclusive approach should be an integral part of every aspect of the educational process, from curriculum development to the learning process and evaluation (Iturbe-LaGrave 2018). We need inclusive education that takes into account the experiences and positions of women worldwide and is adapted to work with them, not against them.

- Transformative education signifies the ability of the educational process to inspire and challenge changes at individual, societal, and systemic levels (Freire 2018). Learning is seen as a means to achieve positive social change, and education should empower students to engage in the struggle for social justice. Students are encouraged to take an active role in effecting social changes within their

community (Mezirow 1997).

- Empowerment is the process of encouraging individuals to take control of their lives and education (Bandura 1997). It involves promoting autonomy, self-esteem, and self-awareness among students, aiming to create individuals who are ready to utilize resources and opportunities to achieve their educational potential (Zimmerman 2000).

- Intersectionality is the recognition and understanding of how various identity factors such as class, race, gender, and sexual orientation intersect and shape an individual's experience within the educational system (Crenshaw 1989). It highlights the complexity of human identity and seeks to create an inclusive space that supports the diversity of all students.

Respecting these feminist principles in education encourages the creation of an ideal educational environment necessary for all students to feel safe and welcome to share their experiences and opinions and to reach their educational potential.

In the early 1970s, propelled by the activism of second-wave feminists, the United States saw the emergence of the first Women's Studies programs, focusing on issues of gender, discrimination, feminism, and women's experiences (Shaw and Lee 2014). From the 1980s onward, Women's Studies became part of university programs worldwide.

The academic legitimization of Women's Studies established a credible platform for studying, researching, and analyzing women's experiences, contributions, and history within academic contexts, further highlighting the necessity of discussions on gender, discrimination, and inequality. The inclusion of Women's Studies at the institutional level enabled academic recognition of women's achievements and contributions globally in the fields of science and the arts, for which feminists had long advocated (Hooks 2000).

Women's Studies programs in educational institutions provided young people worldwide with new educational opportunities to study feminist theory and thought. Additionally, feminist educators were able to impart knowledge grounded in feminist theory to a broader audience. In her book "Feminism is for Everybody," Bell Hooks underscores the importance of education in disseminating feminist thought during this time: "The feminist movement gained momentum when it found its place in academia. In classrooms across the nation, young minds could learn about feminist thinking, read theory, and apply it to their academic research" (Hooks 2000:20).

However, Bell Hooks also believes that the academic institutionalization of the feminist movement through Women's Studies brought with it a new set of challenges that we still face today (Hooks 2000). Above all, it is crucial to emphasize that education is never politically neutral; educational systems and the institutions within them are rooted in society's values and political ideologies. Approaches to and understanding of education and the educational process, school curricula, and teaching methods can either perpetuate dominant narratives and ideological values propagated by society or be directed toward transforming them. Thus, educational practice often reproduces existing patterns of inequality and discrimination

against certain minority groups but can also serve as a cornerstone for social change. If it does not explicitly combat racism, feminism can easily be co-opted by white supremacist movements and advocate for equality for white women only within the context of white supremacy (Daniels 2009). Accepting the idea that our political beliefs shape education poses a significant challenge to educators of the 'old guard,' who often resist self-reflection, understanding their own roles, and adopting new strategies. Self-reflection requires confronting one's own implicit beliefs and prejudices and being willing to confront the shortcomings and limitations of one's abilities, which may explain the resistance of many educators (Hooks 1994). Bell Hooks speaks about democratic education:

"Neducators who have a vision of democratic education assume that learning is never confined solely to institutionalized classrooms. Rather than incorporating the conventional mistaken assumption that the university environment is not the 'real world' and therefore teaching accordingly, democratic educators pierce through the false construction of the corporate university as separate from real life and strive to re-imagine education as always part of our real-world experience and our real lives." (Hooks 2003:41)

The academic feminist discourse has always aimed to rely on fundamental feminist principles, primarily inclusivity and diversity. However, lacking diverse perspectives in the discussion at the academic level, academic feminism risks becoming an elitist discipline. The use of academic jargon and specialized terminology further excludes already marginalized groups whose experiences we rarely hear about (Hooks 2003).

Hence, one of the significant challenges in integrating feminism into education is the lack of diversity within the academic context. White feminism, Eurocentric perspectives on women's experiences worldwide, often disregard the real issues they face—including frequent violations of basic human rights—which is becoming increasingly prevalent in feminist discourse within academic institutions. The preferred audience becomes white affluent women or middle-class women, hence the issues addressed often revolve around their experiences. There is a tendency to discuss race and class rarely as something isolated from the broader feminist picture, neglecting the necessity of intersectionality within feminist discussions.

In contemporary feminist discourse, intersectionality often emerges from a context where "woman" as an idea is already presented as white (Davis 1983; Lewis 2017), which is taken as the norm. There is an emphasis on the political necessity of analyzing "whiteness" as an ethnicity (Ware 1992) to strip it of its apparent quality of invisibility and unmarkedness, which allows white people to perceive themselves purely as individuals without race, while profiling members of other races (Dyer 1988). When studying various sciences, there is a tendency to place women of other races who have contributed to the development of the field at the end of the semester or to lump discussions about everything related to race and diversity under the same theme (Hooks 1994). "While we are often willing to include those we consider 'marginalized,' we are not always willing to treat their work with the same respect and consideration as we do other work" (Hooks 1994:38). This is how most instructors bring changes based on feminist values into their lectures. Such pedagogy does not truly reflect the questioning of existing biases within the

conventional canon but rather represents a form of tokenism (Hooks 1994). Discussions on experiences of members of other races become quotas that need to be fulfilled, thereby making feminist teaching contradictory to the movement's core values.

Returning to the issue of literacy, we notice that it is precisely the elitist belief that literacy is not one of the leading issues of feminism today. Access to basic education in the 21st century is still not available to everyone, whether due to poverty, conflict, cultural, or religious values; education remains a privilege for many. Literacy concerns all aspects of women's and girls' lives, and neglecting its importance only further reinforces the maintenance of existing systems of inequality and privilege for certain social groups. In developed countries, it is often assumed as a fact that everyone has the ability to read and write, which is not true. Reading and writing are crucial for change because they represent the cheapest and most accessible means of transmitting information and ideas, help develop imagination and critical thinking skills, and through interpreting different realities, increase an individual's capacity to think for themselves and challenge cultural and societal norms. Therefore, every revolutionary movement almost always considers the development of literacy as one of its most important tasks (Bunch 1983, cited in Hooks 2000). "When we remember why literacy is important to movements, it becomes clear that we should not assume that women are already literate, nor ignore the value of teaching women to read, write, and think as part of feminist education." (Bunch 1983, cited in Hooks 2000:21)

The fundamental ideas of liberal feminism emphasize the need for equal opportunities for women and men. The goal of liberal feminism is for women to achieve the same level of representation and power in the public sphere as men. In order to achieve both of these changes, liberal feminists emphasize the importance of women's ability to achieve this equality through their individual actions and choices (Frye 2001). However, it is essential to emphasize that women striving for fulfilling lives come from every racial and socioeconomic background, and they will only benefit from feminism based on collective success, not individual achievements (LaReau 2021). The feminist movement and its integration into the educational system must aim to improve collective consciousness and conditions for all, not just the privileged, as this is precisely the feminist belief.

3. Feminism in Education

Feminism in education is a contemporary discourse that inspires a wide spectrum of scholarly research and discussions. Feminist approaches to education aim to reconcile theory and practice by opening opportunities for addressing issues of discrimination and gender (in)equality, as well as promoting ideas of inclusion and diversity within educational contexts. This chapter aims to explore relevant sources, including collections of works and journals addressing gender, feminism, and education, to identify dominant themes, issues, problems, and challenges related to the feminist learning.

Through an analysis of current collections (such as *The Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, *The Palgrave Handbook of Feminism and Education*,

The Routledge International Handbook of the Sociology of Education, The SAGE Handbook of Feminist Theory, Handbook of Educational Philosophy, Feminist Theory for Everyone, FEMzin Feminist Education) and journals (Gender and Education Journal, Feminist Teacher Journal, Women's Studies in Communication Journal, Feminism & Psychology Journal, Early Childhood Education Journal, Educational Philosophy and Theory Journal) focusing on feminist and educational themes, we conclude that research more often engages with the theory of feminist thought and feminist approaches than with their actual application in practice, or within real educational contexts.

The theoretical application of feminist theory and thought in education remains a highly relevant topic for research, as it allows for a deeper understanding of the social dynamics shaping the learning process. Theoretical frameworks provide the space for analyzing gender-based inequalities in the educational system, the social context, and how patriarchal patterns are reproduced in classrooms, institutions, and curricula. Based on this, various studies address the issue of curriculum change in early education, aiming to incorporate educational strategies characteristic of feminist pedagogy. However, researchers predominantly focus on examining the theoretical basis and proposing program changes, with few studies investigating actual practices.

The most frequently addressed topic within feminism and education studies is gender equality within the educational system. Research in this area also includes themes of discrimination and gender-based violence on campuses and in schools. Regarding the issue of gender equality, significant focus is placed on examining the impact of gender biases on students' success and achievements, their mental health, and overall well-being.

Intersectionality has been a recurring theme in feminism studies for many years and also generates significant interest in studies focusing on teaching feminism. The focus is on the content of Women's Studies programs and other feminist courses, aiming to include as many topics addressing racial and class discrimination as possible. This theme also involves examining the current state of the educational system and the place of feminism within it. Studies and works addressing phenomena such as "white feminism" and "white supremacist feminism" and their impact on feminist education, as well as their placement within the broader context of patriarchal society, fall under this category.

The topic that increasingly appears in recent research relates to student activism. Initiatives promoting student groups engaged in feminist activism, often focusing on gender-based violence and advocacy for women's rights, have gained momentum in the past decade. It is not surprising that this theme, especially involving students, has not been thoroughly researched yet. However, studies have covered the goals, methods, challenges, motivations, and successes of these groups. Furthermore, research focuses on ways to provide students of different age groups with knowledge and critical thinking skills necessary for questioning the social context and effecting social change.

An analysis of the current literature reveals that there still exists a gap between researching theoretical concepts of feminist approaches to education and researching their implementation in real educational contexts. While there is

abundant literature promoting feminist pedagogical viewpoints and their significance for education, concrete examples of how feminist perspectives can be implemented in actual classrooms are lacking. This diminishes the practical relevance of feminist approaches for education practitioners, as there is insufficient insight into the methodology used in teaching feminism within educational contexts, the feasibility of living feminism within educational settings, and potential outcomes of such processes. Existing research heavily emphasizes the content of isolated feminist programs—what should be taught and which topics should be addressed—while research on methods and ways to create the educational context in which teaching occurs is almost completely neglected.

Through an analysis of literature and collections of works currently available in the Balkan region, i.e., former member states of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, a significant gap is evident between the topics addressed there compared to those that are current in other countries worldwide. Research focusing on feminist issues primarily engages with gender sociology, feminism and its societal role, and issues of women's rights and violence against women, while research on any form of feminism in education is almost non-existent. This lack of discussion and research into the role of feminism within the educational process poses a significant obstacle for all educators, pedagogues, psychologists, and sociologists dealing with educational issues. It is essential to first initiate basic research on this topic in our region and then delve deeper to examine the content, methods, and approaches to teaching feminist thought in schools. Additionally, there is a noticeable absence of popular feminist journals in our region addressing current feminist topics and the problems faced by women and members of national minorities.

In order to implement feminism in education, it is essential to have a solid theoretical foundation, but equally important to animate and critically examine these theories in real contexts. Additionally, it is crucial to further explore the education of teachers and their training in using feminist approaches. This field is not adequately developed yet and is of great significance for the successful integration of feminist ideas into real societal and educational contexts.

4. Learning Feminism

Introducing feminist theory into education requires changes that go much deeper than merely adding new content to the curriculum. It is necessary to redefine the curriculum according to feminist principles to ensure the authentic integration of feminist ideas into every aspect of the educational process.

The traditional teaching model, which still dominates educational practice, is based on a hierarchical relationship between teacher and student, where knowledge flows only in one direction, as depicted in Freire's concept of "banking education" (Freire 2018). Freire emphasizes that the banking concept of education assumes there is an omniscient person who bestows knowledge upon those considered ignorant (Freire 2018). However, in an educational process grounded in feminist principles, it is essential to strive for an inclusive approach to learning that is based on the active participation of all participants (UNESCO 2023), thereby revitalizing feminist values such as equality and justice within the educational context.

Introducing feminist principles into education also requires a change in teaching methods to create space for dialogue, self-reflection, critical thinking, and collaboration. Furthermore, students should be enabled to act as subjects in the educational process, rather than objects, to share their opinions and explore diverse perspectives. An educational approach rooted in feminist principles allows the educational system to become a space for empowering all participants, regardless of their gender, race, class, or background. In this way, the education system and educational institutions can actively contribute to building a more inclusive and just society for everyone.

It is necessary to consider changing the systems and methods of evaluation as well, so that students are not merely assessed based on the amount of memorized content, but rather on their ability to think critically, analyze complex issues from various perspectives, and apply theory to real-world problems in social practice. Changing evaluative methods should open up space for all actors in the educational process to practice and enhance their competence in making positive social changes, as education is about ways of being in the world and with the world, not just about the amount of information or competencies an individual possesses (Fink 1960/2000).

To make the educational process more inclusive, it is essential to first recognize the diversity of all participants and create a safe space where these differences can be shared and not only accepted but also celebrated. The diversity of our experiences is what should unite us, so it is important to be exposed to different worldviews in order to become responsible members of society.

In an academic context, learning and teaching feminism entails actively and deeply engaging with the concept of intersectionality, recognizing diverse experiences of individuals based on their race, gender, and ethnic identity, as well as the diversity of experiences, perceptions, and expressions of each of us. We are always present in our bodies and deeply rooted in the material world. Our senses and feelings, as our first interaction with the world around us upon which we build our relationship with the environment, cannot be separated from the interpretations and meanings we attribute to the world, nor from the interpretations and meanings that the world attributes to us (Whitehead 1926; cited in Hickey-Moody and Page 2015). Therefore, Edwards emphasizes the need for the educational context and process to seek ways to equally respect materiality, not just as an object of study, but as a participant in the learning process, as a becoming in mutual interpenetration from which we and the matter itself emerge and the significance of each of us arises (Edwards 2012; cited in Ceder 2020).

Diversity, whether in approaches to teaching or in experiences shared, is not just something that exists in theory but, on the contrary, is part of everyday social context and as such must be included in all fields and aspects of education. The academic context does not exist in a vacuum and is not excluded from social context; rather, it is very much a part of it and directly depends on political ideologies and dominant values in society (Hooks 1994). Therefore, the educational process, methods, and content will vary depending on the social context in which they are based. It is the responsibility of all actors within the educational system to adapt every aspect of the educational process to the given environment, its expectations,

and the specific community in which it takes place, and to continuously reassess the expectations and characteristics of the environment. Education must not be a means by which we shape individuals to fit into the existing, often oppressive system but rather a means through which we strive for change and the shaping of society as a whole so that it serves every individual (Freire 2018). This is precisely what Freire discusses in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* when explaining who these oppressed individuals are:

“However, the truth is that the oppressed are not marginal, they are not people who live ‘outside’ of society. They have always been ‘inside’—within the structure that has made them ‘beings for others’. The solution is not their ‘integration’ into the structure that oppresses, but rather a change in the structure that will make them ‘beings for themselves.’” (Freire 2018:46)

Contemporary pedagogy views the educational process as a holistic approach to learning, which involves more than just transmitting information and encourages critical thinking. Viewing knowledge as a fixed set of facts and predefined solutions often places the learner in the role of a problem that needs to be solved. The aim of education therefore lies in achieving specific educational outcomes and meeting expected stages of development, which can lead to the perception of education as a practice focused solely on transmission, reproduction, and presentation of existing knowledge (Colebrook 2017; Olsson 2009; Semetsky 2006). We cannot simply teach feminism through its presentation and reproduction; it is necessary to live it and make it a part of our everyday lives, to weave it into every aspect of life. “To know is not to see from above or from outside, nor even from a prosthetically improved human body. To know is a matter of intra-action... specific practices through which the world articulates differently and becomes accountable. Knowledge is not a bounded and closed practice but a continuous performance of the world.” (Barad 2007)

Life cannot be merely an object of study, objectively separated from the one who studies it, because we constantly think about life as we live it. Even if we could fully comprehend it through scientific work, that understanding would not necessarily teach us who we truly are and how we should live. Therefore, educating a person is always a process in which humans and the world mutually shape, interpret, and together create life (Colebrook 2017). Feminism needs to be placed foremost in the social context where it has always belonged, instead of isolating it from reality through intellectualized theories and depriving a large number of people—those for whom it was primarily intended (Hooks, 2004).

Constantly questioning the role that education plays in propagating and perpetuating existing patriarchal systems of values and ideologies is an essential task for anyone striving for social justice, inclusivity, and equality. The patriarchal system today is deeply rooted in all aspects of our society, including education. As such, it often implies and promotes implicit norms, stereotypes, and hierarchical structures that largely favor men, their experiences, and abilities, while marginalizing women and other gender identities. Patriarchal structures are deeply ingrained at the core of the educational system, from curriculum to institutional practices that reproduce gender-based roles and stereotypes. For instance, the lack of representation of women in leadership positions within the education system or the

pronounced gender segregation in the choice of subjects or future professions are just some manifestations of patriarchal systems within education.

Strength for change is at the heart of true education (Rakić, 1946), not as an individual force that strengthens individuals themselves, but as the strength and potential of the entire educational system. Education is conceived as a kind of “heterotopia” – a space that represents a “world in itself,” yet it exists within the world and reflects the broader context in which it is grounded, simultaneously embodying its “otherness” (Foucault, 1984/1986). Such pedagogy is “timeless” (Semetsky, 2017), focused on becoming grounded in current practices, but never limited by their current scope.

5. Conclusion

Education and feminism are deeply intertwined and together shape not only pedagogical practice but also theory. Feminism in education advocates for a critical review and questioning of social and gender inequalities and power dynamics within the educational system. Fundamentally, the feminist approach challenges traditional paradigms in education that perpetuate gender discrimination, stereotypes, and prejudices. Instead, feminism strives to create an inclusive and empowering space where the voices of all, both marginalized and privileged alike, are equally welcomed. The feminist approach in education values principles of inclusivity, transformation, empowerment, gender equality, intersectionality, and critical thinking. Current feminist research provides a credible theoretical foundation for implementing feminist ideas and principles in teaching. However, there is a lack of practical research focused on the real-world application of feminist principles in social and educational contexts. There is also a gap in research addressing methods and approaches within the feminist approach, as the focus tends to be more on the content of teaching and its transformation. In feminist education research, there is a notable absence of guidelines for practitioners that explain how to actually “live feminism” in an educational context, which is crucial for truly learning feminism and integrating it into educational practice. It is essential to provide insights into concrete ways to change educational programs, methods, evaluation to incorporate feminist principles and thereby promote the values of the feminist movement. Additionally, concrete guidelines are needed on what it means to create an inclusive, empowering, and supportive environment that promotes equality and diversity for all.

Education is an inseparable part of the social context; it participates in it, shapes it, and changes it. We will truly learn feminism only in our endeavor to make it a part of our everyday lives. In contemporary pedagogy, education is seen as an active transformation of the world, and learning as a change in the way we engage, our capacities, and the world around us. The potential of feminism in education lies in actively living its principles, which open up space for achieving a more qualitative, just, responsible, and meaningful life for all equally. Learning feminism precisely means moving it out of the realm of an isolated subject into the core of every aspect of the educational process.

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Scientific knowledge under the influence of patriarchal violence

Supervisor: Professor Amila Ždralović

a.zdralovic@pfsa.unsa.ba

University of Sarajevo - Faculty of Law

Abstract

Patriarchally proclaimed objectivity of science, at one historical moment, becomes subject to social critique. Critiques arise from the understanding of science as a social endeavor, resulting from the complex interaction of the research community, its traditions, and environment (Kuhn 1962 cited in Geiger 2002:104). Critique emerges within various marginalized groups, including feminist critiques of science. What distinguishes feminist critique is the recognition of the decisive role of the gender of the research subject. The embodied subject, as the creator of neutral and objective science, is replaced in feminist critiques by the embodied knowing and experiential subject, seeking to incorporate subordinate women's experiences into science, previously ignored. All the qualities historically assigned to women are qualities that the traditional scientist does not possess. Thus, under the guise of objectivity, neutrality, and abstraction, science has kept itself distant from women. In the action of feminist critique, the question arises of how to incorporate women's experience and perception into knowledge. One answer is standpoint theory, which, in creating science, requires considering the social context of the subject and establishing a connection between the knowing subject and the research object. Alongside standpoint theory, feminist post-structuralism and intersectionality are feminist epistemological approaches that will be discussed in this paper. These approaches, in addition to the basic understanding, provide a complement and critique to standpoint theory in specific aspects.

Keywords: *feminist epistemology, critique, neutrality of science, oppression, patriarchy.*

1. Introduction

"By demystifying science, the myth of its chastity and isolation from the social, political, and economic context, as well as gender identity and the knowing subject, has been shattered, as emphasized by feminist authors" (Geiger 2002:106).

Enlightenment's purely rational scientific thought, with its veil of neutrality and objectivity, becomes suspicious in its truthfulness to those whom its achievements hold under the veil of oppression and violence. Critique of science, in this regard, is not specific to feminist thought and action alone. It also arises from various social groups that science, through its 'objective' scientific principles, has kept

subordinate. Regarding the convergence of scientific and social realms, Zaharijević (2010) states:

‘The social’ emerges as a direct consequence of industrialization, new scientific theories attempting to describe, qualify, and quantify ‘society,’ and the surge of layered and diverse ‘public opinion’ dispersing and disseminating knowledge and normalized forms of governance, consolidating national fabric and marking its afflicted places (70).

At the same time, a healthy national fabric is the body of man (Zaharijević 2010:74). In addition to unilaterally declared objective scientific principles, subordination was also maintained through the experience of the dominant group. In this sense, there is a wide range of critics: “the black movement, anti-war demonstrations, the hippie movement, the student movement, the neo-feminist movement - all of them emphasized freedom and questioned established truths, value patterns, and order” (Geiger 2002:103). Social groups emerge that perceive different ways of imposing oppression on one another. Such actions have also been reflected in the perception of conceptualizing scientific principles and principles that maintain social domination through the authority of infallible science. Scientific discourse on different/unnatural/deficient “can be codified and translated into the language of “rights, demographics, sociology, anthropology, eugenics, and ethical justifications of slavery or colonies” (Zaharijević 2010:71).

Regarding the timing of such events, we know the following: “within the framework of the turbulent movements of the 1960s and 1970s, discussions about the value neutrality of science came to the forefront” (Geiger 2002:103). The special significance of ‘scientific’ oppression, as well as the struggle against it, is reflected in the fact that it legitimizes subordination and marginalization in all other segments of society. On the other hand, opposing patriarchal science, whose foundation lies in reason, for the dominant group represents entry into the irrational, unreasonable. According to the same principle that opposing the dominant interpretation of religion represents opposition to God, at a key historical moment, it becomes the following principle: opposing science is opposing reason. Holding in subordination, in earlier times dominated by religious beliefs, since the 18th century, it has been maintained through so-called objective science, at the center of which is an abstract, neutral researcher separated from the social context. Such neutrality, embodiment has been able to achieve with its characteristics only a man, and consequently, in the diversity of social groups, open to criticism, feminist criticism appears. At one moment of feminist action, the questioning of the previously infallible science with its ideology and mythology that justifies the supremacy of the male sex. One of the first distinctive features of feminist criticism of science is that, unlike members of other marginalized groups, women experience oppression in the knowledge of each social context. Women are subordinate in the science of colonizers, but also in the science of colonized men. In this vein, author Eltahawy (2016) presents the fact that women participate in two revolutions; a popular one, side by side with the people; the second against the previous compatriots. The same is true in science; women first fight for access to classrooms, and then for science open to the experiential knowledge of women. State, street, as Eltahawy (2016) notes and classroom work against women. Knowledge that we know has its source in the experience and practice of members of the dominant

group of patriarchy. By rejecting the illusion of a neutral knowing subject, whose existence concealed knowledge woven from male experience, feminist criticism demands knowledge that takes into account women's experiences when establishing scientific principles. In the struggle against oppression, it is necessary not to lose awareness that violence and oppression do not always appear in easily recognizable forms. Science is precisely because of the postulates of reason, truth, and abstraction, the most sophisticated and subtle way of imposing social oppression. It is an oppression that justifies the duality of rational and normal versus irrational and abnormal. Based on the above, the main thesis of the paper is that the struggle against established traditional patriarchal science is the most demanding endeavor of feminism. Because violence and oppression cannot be scientifically justified.

The paper consists of two parts. The first part will present the path of the emergence of the general critique of patriarchal science, as well as the fundamental aspects of the feminist epistemological approach, which critiques science cleansed of women's experiences and perceptions. The second part of the paper will encompass the fundamental approaches attempting to establish principles for incorporating "women's knowledge," or experiential knowledge, as one of the most significant issues in feminist critique of science. Primarily, this involves a spectrum of concepts as presented by author Longino (2004) in her work "Feminist Epistemology." Furthermore, basic methodological approaches to experiential knowledge will be introduced, such as standpoint theory, poststructuralist concepts, and intersectionality.

In preparing the paper, a method of reviewing scientific literature was employed, aiming to construct a comprehensive synthesis of methodological approaches and concepts by authors that challenge the objectivity of traditional science and open it to broader experiential understanding based on principles of feminist epistemology. Relevant works used address the concept of science as a social construct, the issue of feminist epistemology, critiques of traditional science, and traditional methods of knowledge. This approach is necessary for systematizing fundamental issues, modes of operation, and anticipated solutions.

2. Unveiling the Patriarchal Monopoly of Knowledge

Modern rationalism results in a science stemming from a "purified and disembodied reason" (Longino 2004:410). Reason is detached from the confines of the body, which is seen as an impediment to scientific knowledge. What distorts the self is the corporeal, from which reason must liberate itself in the process of cognition. The being capable of achieving disembodied action, according to the canon of the dominant group, is the male. "Enlightenment promotion of reason as a societal ideal and principle of governing all relationships actually favors the male norm" (Brstilo 2010:158).

According to the literature (Geiger 2002), a definitive moment in questioning the supremacy of science is Kuhn's work "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions" from 1962, where the author puts forth two fundamental views: science is a social endeavor, and knowledge and scientific truth are products of the complex interaction of the research community, its traditions, and environment (Kuhn 1962). Our

subjectivity, shaped through social context, cannot generate objective scientific fact. The sine qua non of objective scientific fact is the objective knowing subject, which does not walk through reality. The birth of such understanding results in a cascade of critical scrutiny of science.

With the aim of recognizing a common denominator in the struggle against traditional science, I will cite specific works that do not fall within the realm of pure feminist epistemology. These works include those of philosopher Freire and sociologist Giroux. In this regard, Freire (1970) emphasizes the importance of words in science, stating:

“Human beings are not built in silence, but in words, in work, in action – in reflection. (...) But while saying the right word means transforming the world, speaking that word is not the privilege of a few people, but the right of all. Consequently, no one can say the right word alone – nor can they say it for others, in a prescriptive act that takes away their words” (88).

However, Freire emphasizes the fact that for liberation from oppression, self-awareness is necessary, but we cannot achieve self-awareness based on patriarchal scientific principles. Furthermore, Giroux (2020) provides significant criticism of science and objectivity, stating:

“Objectivism suggests more than false expressions of neutrality. Essentially, it tacitly represents a denial of ethical values. Its commitment to rigorous techniques, mathematical expression, and laws supports not only a form of scientific inquiry, but also social formations that are inherently repressive and elitist” (37).

The starting point of the feminist critique of science aligns with Kuhn’s, as well as Freire’s and Giroux’s fundamental views. Ultimately, as Longino (2004) notes: “Feminist sociologists fight for a common cause at different points of convergence with other philosophers who reject or are critical of current mainstreams of Western philosophy” (404). Patriarchal philosophy of neutrality, universality, and abstractness of scientific knowledge leads to the oppression of a spectrum of social groups. Thus, the first determinant of feminist critique of traditional science is the idea that it cannot be completely separated from critiques of science emerging within other determinants. The second determinant, which simultaneously speaks to the importance of feminist reflection on knowledge and its sources, is the fact that Eva Bahovec (2002) defines feminism primarily as an epistemological project. In this sense, the author (2002) defines feminism in three ways. Primarily, feminism as an epistemological project is “oppositional, potential knowledge that opposes dominant ideas, questions literary, philosophical, historical canon, reshapes official knowledge” (Bahovec 2002:23). The second definition of feminism, cited by Bahovec, emphasizes the fact that feminism represents “a conflict with the category of self-evidence, i.e., with everything that is assumed to be given, as unchangeable, when in fact it is not” (2002). The last definition, which brings to light the paradox of patriarchal positioning of women, Bahovec (2002:23) defines through the question “how to deal with the fundamental intellectual dispute within which women are simultaneously absent and too present, bare negative without any form of their own and pure monster as a prototype of excess par excellence, too little and too much, in a word, not (just) the other sex, but (and) the privileged figure of the other.” With the final question, Bahovec emphasizes the paradox of women in science,

simultaneously nonexistent in the role of an active knowing subject, while on the other hand a constant object without consent. Feminists emphasize that science, like other segments of social life, does not represent a societal endeavor for all of us. “With the feminist movement of the 1970s, there was equal concern for conventional social sciences, which reflected male values, knowledge, and experience. Academia was criticized for privileging male biases that excluded and marginalized women” (Henn et al. 2013, cited in Gurung 2020:106). As authors D’Ignazio and Klein (2020) state, “the view from nowhere is always the view from somewhere: a view from a given” (32). And the given perspective is a masculine perception of the world shaped by male experience.

Almost always, this perspective is the perspective of elite white men, as they occupy the most privileged position in this field, as well as in our society at large. By occupying this position, they rarely find their dominance questioned, their neutrality challenged, or their perspectives open to debate. Their privilege renders their bodies invisible – in datasets, algorithms, visualizations, as well as in their everyday lives (D’Ignazio and Klein 2020:32).

One of the reasons for the primacy of male perception in the process of cognition is Descartes’ focus on original knowledge, acquired independently of external influences and determinations (Longino 2004:410). The knowing subject becomes a purified subject:

“The purified subject resulting from the denial of the body is male and white European subject; everything from which he is freed, when freed from the body, is transferred onto the bodies of feminized and racialized Others – European women, non-white women and men – who are thus epistemologically disenfranchised” (Longino 2004:411).

Although we cannot fully separate critiques of science emerging within different social groups and feminist critiques of science, we cannot equate them either. Therefore, acknowledging the social captivity of the knowing subject in feminist critique of science, in addition to the critique already underway, it adds the aspect hitherto neglected: the gender of the knowing subject determines science (Geiger 2002). According to Geiger (2002), the foundation of feminist critique of science lies in the understanding that the knowing subject, the research practices it conducts, and the ultimate concepts of knowledge it arrives at are shaped by its gender identity. Knowledge and science have always been in male hands, and consequently, as Brstilo (2010) notes, the primary argument of feminist critique emphasizes “the systemic neglect of women’s experiences, perspectives, knowledge, and contributions in numerous social as well as scientific fields” (156). Longino (2004) emphasizes that precisely “the understanding of the existence of a difference in experience between men and women haunts feminist reflection on knowledge...” (406). Returning to the beginning of the work, we see that the connection between Kuhn’s definition of science as a social endeavor and feminist critique of science is observed in pragmatism as the philosophical basis of feminist epistemology: “pragmatism defines knowledge as a progressive practice, historically, culturally, and socially determined, valorizing diverse experiential starting points of various social groups” (Brstilo 2010:157). In addition to pragmatism, Brstilo (2010) states that social constructivism is crucial for understanding feminist

epistemology, emphasizing that the neutral knowing subject must be replaced by a subject sensitive to social context and experience. Saeidzadeh (2023) highlights that feminist scholars in their work critique traditional, dominantly male research and knowledge production. Therefore, the fundamental principles of feminist critique of science can be presented through the following propositions: participation in knowledge creation means possessing power that in a patriarchal society belongs to men; created knowledge, imbued with male perception and experience, reflects the power of the dominant group; the legitimacy of knowledge lies in its proclaimed neutrality, abstractness, and universality; patriarchy, through created knowledge, keeps those without power in oppression and violence.

3. Deconstructing the Patriarchal Monopoly of Knowledge – Incorporating Women’s Knowledge

Metaphysical narratives of religion at a certain historical moment transitioned into patriarchal scientific narratives. The common denominator of these narratives is the exclusion of women from the understanding of society. One of the activities historically not forgiven to women is knowledge. Women, in this regard, do not have the right to critique male production of knowledge; to independently create knowledge (when they do, it is deemed insignificant); or to independently understand society. According to Brstilo (2010), “throughout history, women have been better known as witches and healers while men have the social system of legitimate and respected doctors of knowledge” (157).

Thus, the relation between women and science is situated in that of Hegel’s:

Women certainly can be educated, but for higher science, philosophy, and certain productions of art, which require something universal, they are not created. Women can be clever, have taste and charm, but they lack ideals. The difference between man and woman is the difference between animal and plant: the animal corresponds more to the character of man, the plant more to the character of woman because it is more a peaceful development that reflects unity of feeling towards its principle. (...) The education of women happens, it is not known how, simultaneously through the atmosphere of representation, more through life than through acquiring knowledge, while man achieves his position only through the acquisition of thought and many technical efforts (Hegel 1820:299).

From the position of a patriarchally established intellectual incapacity of women, feminist thought begins to critique traditional epistemology. Within the spectrum of topics addressed by feminist critique of science, from the denial of education and access to it, through the marginalization of female scientists and their achievements, to the absolute dominance of male experience and perspective of scientific principles, emerges the question of how to incorporate women’s experience and practice into science.³⁵ As Saeidzadeh (2023) states: “feminist researchers in various disciplines have debated how to incorporate feminist theories, women’s

35 According to the author Field Belenky (as cited in Jakobović-Fribeć 2007:84), there are five ways or models of women’s knowing: silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructivist knowledge.

experiences, and knowledge production through gendered social relations into their analyses” (188).

Longino (2004), when reflecting on the knowing subject, mentions three determinants of feminist scientific knowledge. I will start with the question of “situatedness,” which the author emphasizes represents embodiment, as opposed to disembodiment as a *sine qua non* of scientific knowledge. According to this understanding, our bodies are situated in a specific social context, at a particular time, under specific conditions of life and power relations, which inevitably influence the understanding of society. Taking into account the rootedness of the research subject poses a barrier to the universality of scientific truth (Longino 2004:412).

As the second question, Longino (2004) mentions the “relationship between the knowing subject and the object of study,” which denies the differentiation of the subject and object of knowledge. This approach is interpreted in several ways; primarily as reflexivity, then naturalism, and responsibility. Reflexivity implies that the understanding of the object of knowledge is determined by our attitudes and values, where the awareness of the subject’s influence on such “baggage” is crucial (Longino 2004:414). What we are reflects onto the object of scientific knowledge. On the other hand, naturalism is understood as the inability of the knowing subject to transcend the object of knowledge, and that such inability does not preclude scientific knowledge. Responsibility in feminist knowledge implies responsibility for the object of study and the ways in which we relate to it given that subjects of knowledge are no different from the object (Longino 2004:415).

Jaggar (cited by Longino 2004:415) argues that if we rise above the body, we leave behind the feelings we have towards the object of knowledge, and feelings are, according to the author, necessary for our understanding of the object. The third concept proposed by Longino (2004) is the question of “dependence and interdependence.” This approach speaks to how knowledge is determined by a discursive understanding of what constitutes knowledge in a particular context, as well as who carries knowledge. As an illustrative depiction, Addelson (1983 cited by Longino 2004:418) mentions how the knowledge of those at lower levels of organizational authority, such as the position of a nurse, will be determined as experience, while the knowledge of a doctor will be determined as knowledge. The author defines this concept as a hierarchy of cognitive authority (Addelson 1983 cited by Longino 2004:418).

In addition to the discussed concepts, one of the proposed and most significant methodological approaches of feminist epistemology is standpoint theory, which “marks the historical dimension of women’s experience and relies on the contextual formation of knowledge, its historical dimensions, and social significance” (Brstilo 2010:161). This theory emerged in the 1970s based on feminist discussions of masculine science that defined women based on biology (Saeidzadeh 2023). Gurung (2020) states that standpoint theory is “a kind of critical social theory aimed at empowering the oppressed to improve their situation, which has been largely ignored in social-political theories and movements” (106). Standpoint theory is associated with Marxist ideas and observations of society through two classes, capitalists as the ruling class and the working class as the subordinate class (Kokushkin 2014, Gurung 2020). In this state, a difference in knowledge is observed

between the two classes. The capitalist class, as the dominant group, sees society in a way that affirms the correctness of their position as the dominant group. On the other hand, the worker perceives their humanity necessarily linked to labor, as well as the limited knowledge imposed by the capitalists. The worker understands exploitation by the capitalist class, and considering the perception encompassing both the worker's and capitalist's perspectives, the knowledge of the working class provides broader perceptions and experiences; "since the worker's standpoint is the basis of liberation vision, it is superior to the capitalist standpoint. This superiority is both epistemological and political" (Longino 2004:412). Harstock (citing Longino 2004) adopts the Marxist view and develops it as feminist standpoint theory: "women's life activities provide the basis for a specific feminist historical materialism as well as the basis for a better – less biased and less distorted – understanding of the natural and social world" (Longino 2004:413). "The fact that dominant social institutions treat women as strangers opens up space for women to explain the social order from their perspective"

(Bokan 2005:872). Standpoint theory starts with the assertion that male vision involves "devaluing everything associated with the feminine, elevating consciousness over the body, culture over nature, and abstract over concrete" (Longino 2004:413). On the other hand, just as feminism is not unified in its thinking, standpoint theory encompasses a spectrum of different theories or interpretations thereof. The next one is mentioned by author Naples (2003 cited by Brstilo 2010), who distinguishes three different approaches to standpoint theory. Primarily, it concerns the embodied perspective emphasizing "rootedness in the community in which we find ourselves" and seeks to highlight "the influence, significance, and role of the researcher's baggage (values, attitudes, prejudices) inserted into the research process" (Brstilo 2010:161). As the second approach, the author mentions the interaction between the researcher and the researched, emphasizing the importance of "baggage" not only of the researcher but also of the respondents and the environment where the research is conducted. Brstilo (2010) also mentions a third approach established by Smith. The approach relates to the perpetuation of relationships, or "the power of discourse or the textual basis of rules guiding the activities of social actors" (Brstilo 2010:162). Gurung (2020), on the other hand, outlines four basic theses of standpoint theory: strong objectivity, situated knowledge, power relations, and epistemic privilege. Harding (citing Gurung 2020:108) defines strong objectivity as an analysis of the relationship between the subject and the object of research.

The strongest objectivity is achieved through a marginalized feminist perspective. Perspectives can provide the most accurate and least distorted view of the world. Typically, men hold powerful positions and thus try to maintain the status quo, showing little interest in considering others' perspectives. The idea is that perspectives of marginalized and oppressed individuals can help create more objective representations of the world. The importance is emphasized of starting from the experiences of those traditionally excluded from knowledge production (Harding cited by Gurung 2020:108).

Reality, which science aims to discover, cannot be known outside the real experiences of subjects passing through their existence. Any other reality represents a deception. Only an epistemology that takes into account the lived experiences of

those whose marginalization is legitimized by science can aim to derive accurate scientific principles. Feminists approaching science from the standpoint theory are interested in uncovering power relations hidden in conventional knowledge production relationships (Gurung 2020:108).

Another concept of standpoint theory is the concept of situated knowledge. According to this concept, women perceive things differently from men. Groups living under oppression are in social contexts that lead them to view things differently, to be aware of them, and to question things differently from the conventional patriarchal questioning of things. The way of observing things from an oppressed position provides a broader horizon of understanding. As Freire (1970) notes, the dominant group implies such a narrow perception of reality that even the struggle of the oppressed for basic human rights is perceived as oppression against them.

The concept of epistemic privilege starts from the thesis that standpoint theory implies that the knowledge of marginalized individuals carries more epistemic authority compared to knowledge developed by the dominant group (Gurung 2020:108), as mentioned earlier. Along these lines, dominant groups will always have limited epistemic perspectives compared to marginalized groups, who through their suffering gain broader perspectives, including those of the dominant (patriarchal) group.

The fourth concept mentioned by Gurung (2020) relates to the issue of power relations. Standpoint theory emphasizes taking into account power relations as one of the obstacles in the production of scientific knowledge. According to this understanding, one way of understanding how power works is by considering the viewpoints of the oppressed that is, perceiving society through the perception of the oppressed (Gurung 2020:109). This makes it possible to establish the difference between what is presented as truth and what people experience.

Gurung (2020) mentions the experience of a woman from the Dalit community who experiences violence. Value-free research, in such a case, would not lead to experiential conclusions about the laws of patriarchal power. Scientific principles of neutrality, abstractness, and objectivity, as well as the subjects who proclaim them, cannot reach an understanding of the experience of victims of sexual violence, slavery, discrimination, and other forms of oppression. Thus, their understanding is limited.

Besides standpoint theories, in relation to the question of feminist epistemology, author Saeidzadeh (2023) mentions two additional approaches: feminist post-structuralism and feminist intersectionality. According to the author, the significance of post-structuralism lies in “transcending situatedness by emphasizing locality, bias, contingency, and ambiguity of any worldview” (Saeidzadeh 2023:190). In this understanding, there arises criticism of standpoint theory, accusing it of essentialism, i.e., placing all identities under the uniform category of women, thereby neglecting other identities that lead to different experiences of women. In other words, standpoint theory conflicts with the recognition of female diversity and postmodern doubts about epistemological concepts such as truth (Longino 2004:413).

In this vein, post-structuralist scholar Joan Scott (1991 cited by Saeidzadeh 2023:191) “criticizes standpoint theory and its focus on women’s experience, which she argues exists in language and discourse, thus discourses of women’s experiences are constructed outside the speaker’s or writer’s intentions.” The knowing subject cannot be reduced to a single subject; indeed, “according to feminist post-structuralism, the subject is essentially dead; one’s subjectivity and self-understanding are constructed through discourse” (Saeidzadeh 2023:190). There is no singular women’s experience. In this context, Ždralović (2020) notes the need for a “reaffirmation of women’s subjectivity” (271), which starts from the concept of a “network of women’s identities” (Ždralović 2020:271). The author defines this concept as follows:

The network of women’s identities includes differences without marginalizing or privileging specific identities through hierarchical structuring. Differences are allowed not only in relation to different and inherently fluid collective identities included in the network, such as class or ethnic identities, but also in relation to constantly dynamic identities. The network allows for the intertwining of different identities, the reshaping of old identities that are not forever given static categories, and the incorporation of new and different identities. It assumes fluidity and variability of identities but at the same time encompasses them in all their diversity and remains open to all new categories of identities (Ždralović 2020:271).

However, the author states that what we define as women’s identity, in the real social context, still greatly determines our experiences. In this regard, feminist epistemology must not fall into the trap of reducing all women’s experiences to a universal category but should not lose sight of the common denominator based on which women, in social reality, are a subordinate group.³⁶

As a final approach, Saeidzadeh (2023) mentions feminist intersectionality:

Feminist intersectionality³⁷ focuses on multidimensional and multilayered understandings of power and knowledge. To understand power relations in knowledge production, it is important to know how subjects are positioned; people’s position or social position in power intersections. The situation generates knowledge from specific circumstances where power struggles are immediately at play and when a certain type of knowledge is generated (Saeidzadeh 2023:192).

The basis of intersectional observation of society is the premise that all “social categories (race, gender, class, and others) are experienced in relation to other social categories and constituted in relation to them” (Davis and Žarkov 2017 cited in Lendák-Kabók 2022:171). Intersectionality also problematizes and criticizes the universalization (of women’s experience and identity). Each of our identities, developed in a specific context, is a potentially marginalized identity in relation

36 “At the time of the formation of the feminist movement, the ‘identity’ of a woman was a very precious tool, perhaps even the only one through which a united struggle for rights could be organized” (Zaharijević 2010:63).

37 “Power is an important element in intersectional analysis. Feminist studies, along with anti-racist, postcolonial, queer studies, masculinity studies, and disability studies, continue to improve the way norms are constructed and how power relations interact with one another” (Saeidzadeh 2023:192).

to the dominant patriarchal group. Understanding society intersectionally means understanding “when, how, and under what circumstances intersections arise and become important and specific, as well as what consequences these intersections have for understanding the discourse and practice of domination, exclusion, and marginalization” (Davis and Žarkov 2017 cited in Lendák-Kabók 2022:172).

Criticism directed at the author Betty Friedan by members of what is termed black feminism demonstrates the significance of intersectionality: “Friedan failed to consider how additional factors such as race and class, not to mention sexuality, ability, age, religion, and geographical location, among many others, intersect to shape the personal experience of any specific woman in the world” (D’Ignazio and Klein 2019:7). Subjects in positions of scientific creation expect the actions of women belonging to the majority group, thereby ignoring other determinants of women belonging to minority groups (Lendák-Kabók 2022:172). In this context, in the struggle against traditional science permeated by violence and oppression of Others, all these (and other possible) concepts of experiential scientific knowledge are necessary, as they will elevate women’s oppressive experience to the level of scientific fact.

4. Conclusion

As long as science is created by societal subjects, we cannot speak of it as a neutral concept. It inevitably reflects the knowing subject and their context. Feminist epistemologists (mentioned in this paper, among others) strive through their work to combat traditionally understood science and the oppression perpetuated by it. In doing so, science assumes a dual role: it is both a tool of struggle and an object of critique. In the perpetuation of dominance of some and oppression of others, proclaimed scientific principles become suspect to those whose oppression is justified by science. Social critique of science emerges in the struggle of different social groups who recognize that science and the knowing subject do not operate outside a social context. Science is a social construct that reflects existing power relations. Traditional science is a social construct that reflects and supports male power. In criticizing traditionally established scientific principles, the feminist critique of patriarchal science arises. Feminist epistemology adds to existing critiques of science a previously neglected aspect: the gender of the knowing subject determines science (Geiger 2002). The importance of questioning feminist knowledge is emphasized by Eva Bahovec (2002) when she primarily defines feminism as an epistemological project. In this sense, Bahovec (2002) outlines three definitions of feminism, emphasizing that women’s knowledge represents an ‘other’ knowledge in conflict with dominant scientific principles, or with everything that is ‘self-evident’ (23). In this regard, women, Bahovec (2002) argues, are non-existent as active knowing subjects, while patriarchal science speaks volumes about them as objects of knowledge. The historical basis for women’s erasure from science lies in the scientific attribution of intellectual incapacity to women while attributing the possibility of divine knowledge to men. Within the spectrum of issues addressed by feminist epistemology, there is also the question of how to incorporate embodied women’s knowledge. Various approaches speak to this issue. One of the most significant is standpoint theory, which represents a “kind of critical social theory

aimed at empowering the oppressed to improve their situation, which has been largely ignored in social-political theories and movements” (Gurung 2020:106). Standpoint theory is thereby linked to Marxist ideas and observations of society through two classes, capitalists as the ruling class, and working-class as the subordinate class (Kokushkin 2014; Gurung 2020). Thus, the knowledge of the capitalist includes a limited knowledge of their own position, while the knowledge of the worker encompasses their own perception of the capitalist as well. In this way, the knowledge of the worker is greater. By analogy, patriarchal knowledge with its knowledge only includes a privileged position, while women’s knowledge through embodiment, experience, and emotion, opens science to a wider understanding. Dominant groups will always have limited epistemic perspectives compared to marginalized groups, who through their suffering, gain broader perspectives, including those of the dominant (patriarchal) group. However, standpoint theories are subject to certain criticisms out of fear of reducing women’s experience to a uniform category. Ždralović (2020) discusses the concept of a network of women’s identities as a concept of multiple identities that intertwine with each other and must be taken into account when discussing women’s experience. In addition to standpoint theory, approaches discussed in feminist epistemology include post-structuralism and intersectionality (Saeidzadeh 2023). Feminist epistemology, through various approaches, must not fall into the trap of a unified understanding of women’s knowledge, while on the other hand, it must not overlook the specificity of erasing women’s knowledge by male scientists.

As Eltahawy (2016) states: “until we connect the misogyny of the state and the street,” I add the scientific canon “(...) our political revolutions will be unsuccessful” (82).

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Reflection of Gender Roles on the Relevance of Women's Mental Health and Subjective Well-being: Analysis of Scientific Research Papers in Our Region

Mentor: Dr Irena Fiket

irena.fiket@ifdt.bg.ac.rs

Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade

Abstract

Due to the tendency towards the re-establishment of patriarchal and traditional values in our society, along with an emphasis on gender roles, women find themselves in a highly complex situation that demands they meet society's mutually conflicting expectations. The burden resulting from fulfilling these expectations negatively impacts women's mental health and subjective well-being. Concurrently, although one of science's fundamental aspirations is neutrality, within a society, science often reflects that society's values. Therefore, this study aims to explore whether and how gender roles are reflected in scientific research on women's mental health and subjective well-being in our region. The research was initiated with the hypothesis that traditional understandings of gender roles will influence the structure of research papers, resulting in a majority of papers focusing on women's mental health and subjective well-being within the context of their maternal roles. Out of an initial sample of 50 published research papers on women's mental health and subjective well-being, 55% were included in the analysis. Based on the findings, it was concluded that gender roles of women are indeed reflected in the structure of published research within the realms of mental health and subjective well-being.

Keywords: *women, mental health, subjective well-being, gender roles*

1. Introduction

Given that we live in a society undergoing a transition characterized by processes of repatriarchalization and retraditionalization (Blagojević 2007), understanding gender and gender roles is increasingly central to everyday discussions (Zaharijević and Lončarević 2020). Within these discussions, both scientific and political, the issue of gender roles has become a topic of high national importance in the sphere of politics.

The official definition of a gender role, according to the APA dictionary (2023), is "a pattern of behavior, personality characteristics, and attitudes that define

gender within a specific culture.” Regarding women’s gender roles in the Balkans region, on the one hand, it appears that progress towards equality is being made (Novosel 2017), yet, on the other hand, it is also noticeable that women’s gender roles are becoming increasingly complex and multifaceted (Ćeriman et al. 2018). Women are expected to adhere to their traditional gender roles, while simultaneously, expectations regarding their professional achievement and advancement are becoming more equal to those placed on men. This situation leads to a double burden for women, inevitably impacting their mental health (Fiket 2018, Vasiljević 2024). Besides mental health, such a complex position of dual burden potentially negatively affects subjective well-being, i.e., women’s happiness. In psychotherapy, there is a recognized occurrence of psychosomatic difficulties among women when they face choices between marriage, children, and career (Vasiljević 2024), further highlighting the challenges women face as a result of dual burden.

Mental health is most commonly defined as “a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (World Health Organization 2022). Individual mental health is influenced by a wide range of factors, both personal and environmental. In the same vein, WHO emphasizes the importance of social, economic, geopolitical, and environmental factors, such as inequality and violence. APA or the American Psychological Association (2018) defines subjective well-being in its dictionary as “self-assessment of one’s level of happiness and life satisfaction.” Subjective well-being can further be divided into two components: affective and cognitive well-being. Similar to mental health, environmental factors influence the assessment of well-being, particularly the cognitive component. Thus, the observed differences in subjective well-being between men and women are explained by psychosocial factors, namely women’s aspirations and societal norms (Jovanović 2021).

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze available literature to examine whether and how external factors (gender roles) influence the study of women’s mental health and subjective well-being. Despite science’s fundamental aspiration toward neutrality, scientific trends often mirror the society in which they exist. Taking this into account, the initial hypothesis is that available research on women’s mental health will predominantly focus on women who are mothers and wives, thus primarily women adhering to traditional gender roles. Similarly, the second hypothesis posits that available research on women’s subjective well-being will be linked to roles as mothers and wives. Conversely, the third hypothesis suggests that available research on mental health will predominantly focus on women in high-level business positions, while the fourth hypothesis proposes that available research on subjective well-being will primarily address women in high-level business positions.

In the following sections, I will primarily address the key concepts that this paper deals with and the theoretical frameworks it refers to. In addition, these concepts will be used in the review of scientific papers that form the basis of my empirical analysis. Therefore, after the introduction, the paper will be structured as follows: in the second part, I will focus on the methodology, i.e., the characteristics of the sample used in the analysis, as well as the analysis itself. In the third part, I will describe the results obtained from the conducted analysis. The fourth part of this paper will be dedicated to the discussion where I will address the hypotheses

and provide explanations for any additional observations. In the fifth and final part, the conclusion, I will reflect on the work and discuss the practical implications of this research.

1.1. Mental Health

Mental health is a topic that has become increasingly popular and prevalent in our everyday lives. The consequence of this is reflected in the attitude that mental health, as a field, is quite intuitive and clear, however I would argue that mental health as a field is the opposite of a simple area. To demonstrate my argument, in addition to the definition provided by the World Health Organization, I will also cite the definitions from the American Psychological Association (APA) and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), two other globally recognized and credible sources. First, I would like to remind you of the aforementioned WHO definition. Therefore, according to the World Health Organization, mental health is: “a state of well-being in which individuals can cope with life stresses, realize their abilities, learn and work effectively, and contribute to their community.” Furthermore, according to the APA definition, mental health is “a state of mind characterized by emotional well-being, good behavioral adjustment, relative freedom from anxiety and disabling symptoms, the capacity to establish constructive relationships, and the ability to cope with the demands and stresses of life” (American Psychological Association 2018).

As we can already notice, although similar, the definition given by APA is not identical to the definition provided by WHO. Interestingly, although NIMH includes the phrase mental health in its name, finding a definition of mental health that they adhere to has proven to be a challenging task. In fact, instead of defining mental health, they define what mental illness is. According to NIMH, mental illness is “a mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder” (National Institute of Mental Health 2023). Following psychiatric logic, that is, medicine, what is not health is illness. Based on this definition of mental illness, we can conclude that mental health, according to NIMH, is mental, behavioral, or emotional functionality, i.e., the absence of mental, behavioral, or emotional illness.

All of this indicates that mental health is an extremely broad topic that encompasses various areas of life. Since further exploring the definition and determination of mental health exceeds the purpose and scope of this paper, I will not define it in more detail here. For the purposes of this paper, we can use the definition provided by the WHO. In addition to the definition itself, WHO lists some of the decisive factors of mental health. It is crucial to remember that factors are always interacting, meaning that the mere presence or influence of individual factors is not decisive. Furthermore, factors can be divided into individual and environmental, protective and risk factors. Individual factors include psychological and biological factors, such as substance abuse or resilience. On the other hand, environmental factors can be further divided into social, economic, geopolitical, and environmental factors (World Health Organization 2022). Both individual and environmental factors can be protective or risk factors. For example, high resilience is an individual factor that is also a protective factor that promotes the preservation of mental health in an individual.

1.2. Subjective Well-being

Subjective well-being is an operationalized psychological term for what laypeople would call happiness. According to the definition provided by the American Psychological Association, subjective well-being represents a person's assessment of how happy and satisfied they are with life. Like mental health, the topic of subjective well-being is extremely complex. To begin with, subjective well-being is divided into affective and cognitive well-being. Affective well-being refers to the presence of positive affect and the absence of negative affect. This component often varies over time compared to cognitive well-being. Cognitive well-being relates more to the assessment of quality and consequently satisfaction with the quality of life. The assessment of quality can refer to both overall life satisfaction and satisfaction with specific aspects of life (Jovanović 2021). Subjective well-being is important both for individuals and for society as a whole. In their review, Diner and Ryan (2009) note that individuals reporting higher levels of subjective well-being also exhibit higher levels of prosocial and altruistic behavior. This review also commented on the role that gender plays in happiness. Namely, the difference between men and women in subjective well-being is negligible, explaining less than 1% of the variance. However, when analyzing this small portion of explained variance, we find that it primarily pertains to the affective component of well-being. It is noticeable that women, when assessing their affective well-being, tend to choose responses that are at the extreme ends of scales more frequently. The authors explain this extreme happiness or unhappiness among women by noting that women tend to experience more intense emotions. What is particularly interesting in the context of this paper is a certain paradox that arises. It would be expected that women in highly developed countries would report high levels of well-being. The paradox lies in the fact that this is not happening; instead, we can observe quite the opposite, namely, that women report reduced well-being (Jovanović 2021). This is especially interesting considering our currently highly polarized environment. It is worth questioning whether women will be perceived as happier or not. At the same time, an equally important research question would address which groups of women are perceived as happier, and which, conditionally speaking, less happy, as well as what the determinants of this are. Although these considerations exceed the scope of this paper, I hope they will inspire researchers who will find these initial considerations insightful.

1.3. Gender Roles

To discuss gender roles, it is primarily necessary to define sex and gender. Namely, sex is defined by biological aspects (Wienclaw 2011). In this context, people can be women or men, which is determined by their chromosomes and manifested through primary and secondary sexual characteristics. In contrast, gender is determined by psychological, social, cultural, and behavioral aspects. Gender is a more complex category that includes gender identity and learned gender roles (Wienclaw 2011). Therefore, gender roles are the learned part of how a certain gender, whether female or male, behaves in different cultures, what it means to be of a certain gender in specific societies, the expected reactions, activities, or desires that a certain gender may have... Socialization is a process that begins at

birth, and accordingly, children's learning of gender roles also begins at birth. From baby equipment in certain colors, through school supplies categorized for girls or boys, to classifying children's games, reactions, and questions as "for girls" or "for boys." The traditional female role is reflected in sensitivity, intuitiveness, passivity, emotionality, and a focus on home and family (Wienclaw 2011). From all of the above, we can conclude that roles of mother, housewife, care for others, nurturing, understanding, empathy, and modesty are activities more reserved for the female gender, unlike the male gender. Whereas men are seen as active participants and goal-oriented, women are often viewed as emotionally focused observers Blagojević (2007) places gender roles in the socio-political process of transition. Specifically, the transition period is an extremely unstable period in the existence of a society characterized, among other things, by processes of retraditionalization and repatriarchalization. As a result of declining family standards, privatization, and general insecurity, people seek security and solutions to these problems by resorting to tradition as a form of security. Since these processes are treated as a kind of greater good for society as a whole, there is a resurgence of conservative attitudes, and acts of violence against women, sexism, and exclusion of any form of different behavior or existence are justified. At the same time, traditional gender roles of women as passive, emotional beings, and as beings focused on home and family are being re-established and highly valued.

1.4. Research Question

Considering the unfavorable position in which women find themselves today, it is important to ask how this affects their mental health and subjective well-being. Being, on the one hand, a successful woman in terms of career, and on the other hand, meeting the expectations imposed by processes of repatriarchalization and retraditionalization, are two mutually conflicting tasks that we can reasonably assume affect mental and subjective well-being. In such a situation, a woman is burdened with a dual role or dual presence (Fiket 2018). Accordingly, the specific aim of this study is to determine the structure of available research on the topic of women's mental health and subjective well-being, and to examine how gender roles influence the study of women's mental health and subjective well-being. Specifically, I want to ascertain whether women's gender roles are reflected in the structure of published scientific papers on the topic of mental health and subjective well-being. Given the exploratory nature of this research, we will formulate several hypotheses.

Since the role of mother is a central part of the female gender role, it is expected that mental health will primarily be studied within the framework of this role. Therefore, the first hypothesis is that female mental health will be predominantly studied within the context of the maternal gender role in the majority of papers. Using the same reasoning as for mental health, I propose a second hypothesis that assumes the highest percentage of papers will address female subjective well-being within the framework of the maternal gender role.

The male gender role involves active participation and goal-directed behavior (Wienclaw 2011). Accordingly, the male gender role is closely associated with the domain of career, business, and material success. To further examine the influence

of gender roles on the study of women's mental health, I will propose two hypotheses linking women to the traditional male gender role. Therefore, the third hypothesis is that the highest percentage of papers will address women's mental health among those in high-level business positions. Following that, the fourth hypothesis is that the highest percentage of papers will address women's subjective well-being among those in high-level business positions.

2. Methodology

2.1. Sample

In this analysis, I will use a sample composed of studies found on the first five pages of Google Scholar when searching for the keywords "women," "mental health," and "subjective well-being." Google Scholar was chosen due to its relevance and accessibility. Relevance implies a high likelihood that Google Scholar will be the first choice when searching for scholarly articles, while accessibility refers to the fact that this search engine does not require monetary compensation or physical presence at a specific institution to use. Furthermore, the rationale behind using the first five pages is based on the high probability that individuals interested in the topic will not venture beyond the fifth page. Specifically, when this is checked through Google searches, it is found that more than 80% of people do not click beyond the second page. This data should be considered cautiously as it is more difficult to find research on a specific topic, especially with a focus on Google Scholar, but it still provides adequate support for the rationale. The 50 obtained papers were classified by relevance. The exact algorithm by which this search engine ranks papers is not entirely clear (Beel & Gipp, 2009), but what is clear is that citation plays the greatest role. Citation refers to how many times the author's work has been cited as a source of information in another work.

2.2. Search and Selection Methodology

The initial search for papers was conducted in two stages. The first involved searching Google Scholar using the keywords "women" and "mental health." This search yielded mixed results. The second attempt involved searching Google Scholar with the keywords "women" and "subjective well-being." This search resulted in only one relevant paper found within the first five pages of Google Scholar. Due to these initial search results, the final sample was derived from the search results using exclusively "women" and "mental health" as keywords, with the addition of the one paper found on the topic of women's subjective well-being.

2.3. Method of Analysis

I conducted a thematic analysis of the selected sample. The analysis focused on abstracts and conclusions, where available. After identifying the main themes and conducting content analysis of the abstracts and conclusions, descriptive statistics were used to determine the frequencies of the identified themes.

3. Results

First and foremost, it is important to emphasize the limitations of the analysis method used: the content analysis of abstracts and conclusions was somewhat problematic. Namely, a large number of papers that were specific and included keywords such as mental health and/or subjective well-being had inadequately detailed or poorly written conclusions. Some papers were not even available in their full version, and only the abstract was analyzed. Perhaps the most extreme example of this is a master's thesis on the impact of postpartum depression on women's mental health, where the conclusion was presented as a list of results (Kok-Petrak, 2020). Unfortunately, based on such results, drawing definitive conclusions is not possible. I believe that a more informative study of the entire paper would be beneficial, but due to time constraints and the scope of the work, this was not feasible. Furthermore, more than almost half of the papers were from the field of medical sciences. These papers predominantly treated women as organisms afflicted with a particular illness and examined how that illness affects their mental health and/or subjective well-being. Essentially, these papers treated women as biological organisms, which may seem like a less problematic approach but actually opens the door to new issues. One of these issues is removing women from the context in which they exist and neglecting a large number of confounding variables that could have a greater impact on women's mental health and subjective well-being than the illness itself.

Additionally, by analyzing the main themes, namely gender roles within which women's mental health has been studied, four main themes have emerged. Similarly, in papers focusing solely on women's subjective well-being, two themes have been identified that overlap with those found in studies of women's mental health.

The main themes regarding women's mental health are women as mothers, women as reproductive objects, women as homemakers or wives, and women as a category. The main themes regarding women's subjective well-being overlap with the themes of women as reproductive objects and women as a category mentioned above. I will further elaborate on each theme separately, as well as what each encompasses in the text.

The theme appearing in the majority of papers (42%) is the theme of women as mothers. This theme addresses various aspects (fulfilled or unfulfilled) of motherhood. These papers often explore the correlation between mental health and the use of contraception, abortion, the postpartum period, breastfeeding, etc. This category encompasses a larger number of papers unified by women's (non-) fulfillment of the gendered expectation of childbearing and engaging in the role of motherhood.

Following the theme of "women as mothers" is the theme I would term "women as reproductive objects" (29%). This theme includes papers concerning women's reproductive capacity, specifically the absence of that capacity or some form of "impairment" when that capacity is in question. These papers examine the connection between women's mental health or subjective well-being and conditions like breast or uterine cancer. As noted, this theme also relates to motherhood, which is accurate. However, while papers under the theme "women as mothers" primarily focus on conscious choices regarding contraception, pregnancy

termination, or childbirth, this category concerns biological constraints on such activities without insight into a woman's attitude towards motherhood. This theme also encompasses papers focusing exclusively on subjective well-being, specifically the component within cognitive well-being – quality of life.

The third most prevalent theme (25%) is a theme I will call “women as a category.” These papers did not share many similarities apart from studying mental health and/or subjective well-being among women across broad categories. One of the more interesting examples includes a paper examining the mental health of cat owners (Baran 2021), another focusing on the experiences of women with autism (Janžek 2023), and a study exploring characteristics of women with alcohol dependence issues (Milošević et al. 2020). Thus, this theme is named “women as a category” because it treats the female gender as a category with a wide range of possible behaviors, life circumstances, situations, and roles.

The least prevalent theme is the theme of “women as homemakers or wives” (4%). These papers, as the theme suggests, address the mental health and/or subjective well-being of women who are homemakers and/or wives. As indicated by the above percentage, the number of such papers is very small but exists. These papers examine women from their position focused on home and family as a whole.

Regarding content analysis, it is observed that mental health is often equated with the presence or absence of mental illness or its symptoms. In these cases, discussions often revolve around broadly defined symptoms of anxiety or depression. Interestingly, this aligns closely with the definition provided by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH).

Additionally, some studies completely neglect contextual factors that could have a greater impact on mental health than the issue they examine. A specific example can be found in a study that investigates how intentional abortion affects women's mental health (Niškanović 2014). This study concluded that intentional abortions negatively affect women's mental health, while completely disregarding other relevant statistics indicating that women who undergo more frequent abortions belong to categories of women who already have children, live in rural areas, and are over 38 years old. All three factors are crucial for understanding women's mental health as they can act as risk factors.

4. Discussion

At the outset, I posed four hypotheses to initiate this extensive topic and research. The first hypothesis concerned the expectation that the majority of published studies would examine women's mental health within the gender role of motherhood. The results confirmed this hypothesis, showing that the theme of women as mothers is indeed the most researched topic in relation to mental health.

The second hypothesis anticipated that this trend would be reflected in studies on subjective well-being in relation to the role of motherhood. However, the results revealed a scarcity of data on women's subjective well-being, and among the available studies, the role of motherhood in relation to subjective well-being was not explored. Therefore, the second hypothesis is rejected.

Through the third and fourth hypotheses, I aimed to assess the presence and quality of studies examining the mental health and subjective well-being of women in so-called “male” positions, i.e., women occupying traditional male roles. Accordingly, the third hypothesis predicted that the highest percentage of studies would investigate the mental health of women in high-level corporate positions. However, seeing that the percentage of studies addressing the mental health of women in high positions is zero, this hypothesis is rejected. Similarly, the percentage of studies examining the subjective well-being of women in high corporate positions is also zero, leading to the rejection of the fourth hypothesis. This outcome, although expected, is particularly discouraging when considering the concept of the double burden on women. The fact that women are expected to be both mothers and professionals, while their mental health is studied only in one of these aspects, can lead to a serious crisis in women’s mental health.

Namely, the aspects of professional and family life are intertwined, and if we only understand the specifics of women’s experience within one but not the other, and their combined effects, we may place excessive pressure and expectations on women that are not appropriate or aligned with their context. All of this could further worsen the conditions under which women live. Considering the previously mentioned definitions of mental health and subjective well-being, we can reasonably expect these conditions to deteriorate.

In this study, the availability of papers presented a challenge, but I would conclude that this (un)availability is also relevant and important information. The (un)availability itself speaks volumes about how mental health and subjective well-being are considered (or not) relevant topics in our society. There are very few papers that simultaneously provide us with insights into the state of women’s mental health and how happy women are. The situation becomes even more complex if we require specific, not generalized information about women’s mental health and/or subjective well-being. Again, I would emphasize that this lack of information is highly informative in itself. It informs us that the focus of society, and even researchers themselves, is directed elsewhere. An interesting endeavor would be to examine whether a similar situation occurs when studying the mental health and/or subjective well-being of men.

Furthermore, the fact that three out of four prevalent themes in the papers are related to gender roles, while only one theme exists outside of this, is also informative. It reflects the polarization of our society that is currently in full swing. On one hand, we have people fighting against the processes of re-traditionalization and re-patriarchalization, rejecting conformity to newly imposed gender roles. On the other hand, there are those rushing towards them as a form of salvation. This is reflected in the distribution of themes, where the themes of “woman as mother,” “woman as reproductive object,” and “woman as homemaker or wife” align with the traditional role of women as passive, oriented towards family and home. Meanwhile, the proportion of these papers significantly outweighs the proportion of papers within the theme of “woman as category.”

Moreover, certain papers categorized under “woman as reproductive object” examine the impact of the presence or absence of support among women with breast cancer. While this is a crucial topic, as social support is an important aspect

of recovery, the presence or absence of support renders the woman passive. These studies suggest it's beneficial if a woman already has support, but what if she doesn't?

The research question at the outset was: "Do traditional gender roles manifest in the structure of published scientific papers on the topic of women's mental health and subjective well-being?" Essentially, it is possible to answer this question affirmatively. Based on the results obtained from the analysis of articles from five pages of Google Scholar, we can confirm that traditional gender roles are reflected in the structure of published papers on the topic of women's mental health and subjective well-being.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to determine whether traditional gender roles are reflected in the structure of published papers on women's mental health and subjective well-being. It has been shown that they are, as the analysis of articles has identified four themes under which women's mental health and subjective well-being were investigated. These four themes encompass women as mothers, women as reproductive objects, women as homemakers or wives, and women as a category.

Based on the analyzed papers, a recommendation would be for all research to include aspects covered under the theme "women as a category." Examining the roles of mothers, women with breast cancer, or homemakers is not necessarily flawed or insignificant, but what diminishes the meaning of such research is its excessive generalization and insufficient detail. On the other hand, I would cite the example of the previously mentioned studies that explored the experiences of women with autism and women with alcohol dependency. These studies addressed seemingly well-researched topics and covered all three themes outside of "women as a category." They delved into developmental stages, family life, specific mental health issues, and various other aspects. What set these studies apart from others is that they focused on specific and often neglected populations of women. These studies dealt with women who, in one way or another, are contrary to the passive, gentle, family-oriented stereotype. Therefore, researching their experiences, specific issues, and challenges provides much more informative and meaningful insights into our understanding of women's existence compared to overly generalized studies. By neglecting different versions of women's existence, we allow them to remain hidden, which contradicts the very purpose of science.

Therefore, the recommendations directly stemming from my research, aligned with the goal of transcending gender patterns in science, would be: to conduct more exploratory studies, for example, on cat owners or mothers of eight-year-olds or children with Down syndrome or single mothers, mothers whose child has passed away; women who have found support in battling cancer or women who have found themselves and their freedom by transforming into a category. Such studies will actually result in expanding our knowledge and better, more meaningful planning of activities aimed at improving mental health and subjective well-being where it is truly needed.

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Analysis of Advertising Design and Advertising Campaigns for Menstrual Products in Croatia (Comic Strip Proposal: Conversations)

Mentor: Associate Professor Sanja Bojanić

sanja.bojanic@apuri.uniri.hr

Academy of Applied Arts, University of Rijeka

Abstract

By analyzing the design of menstrual products, I will present the extent to which perceptions of menstruation, as well as the pathologies of this physiological process, such as endometriosis, influence patriarchal behavior patterns and establish women as less valuable in society. Through a review of these advertisements, I investigate the patterns in their creation on a perceptual level – from the choice of colors and preferred fonts to the ways they demonstrate the effectiveness of the products themselves. Additionally, I am interested in the direction these advertisements could and should evolve to truly reflect the needs while fulfilling an educational dimension of their existence. I am particularly concerned with the lack of depiction of the real pain that accompanies menstruation, especially menstrual cramps and endometriosis. My intention is to highlight the inaccuracies and generalizations in the information presented.

As a young designer, I am motivated to apply my artistic expression in the realization of truthful, encouraging, and appropriate advertisements. I aim to create credible and striking visual representations of situations and phenomena that will resonate with a wider audience, and I include the script for the comic strip “Conversations.”

Keywords: *menstruation, dirty/clean, hypocrisy, negative emotions, redesign.*

1. Introduction

In the first step of the analysis, I will focus on the design and marketing messages of menstrual products to identify linguistic and visual motifs. This careful study aims to understand how concepts and assumptions about menstruation are transposed into the material and communicative aspects of the products. In this context, I will investigate how the colors, shapes, and words used in advertising reflect and potentially sustain cultural norms and attitudes towards menstruation. Are soft, subtle shades and discreet descriptions used to downplay the reality of menstruation, or is a more open, educational approach promoted? Furthermore, I will pay attention to how advertisements address or overlook problems associated with menstruation, such as pain and discomfort, and how this influences the perception of menstruation in society.

The second part of the analysis will delve into the deeper implications of these marketing tactics on societal perceptions of femininity and health. I will critically examine how these products and campaigns can perpetuate patriarchal thought patterns, stigmatizing menstruation and marginalizing women because of their biology. Special attention will be given to endometriosis, a condition often invisible in social dialogue, yet significantly impacting the lives of many women. I will explore how the insufficient representation and understanding of this and related pathologies in menstrual product advertisements can contribute to the isolation and mythologization of women's health experiences, thereby promoting shame and ignorance instead of support and empathy. The ultimate goal is to see if changes in this segment of marketing and design can lead to a more progressive and inclusive depiction of the female body and its functions.

By proposing a scenario for redesigning possible advertisements in the form of a comic strip, I aim to draw attention to this issue, encouraging the need for an honest and enlightening approach to communicating about menstruation. My intention is to investigate and challenge the reasons why the pain and discomfort many women experience during menstruation are rarely depicted, and how such representations influence the stigmas and taboos surrounding this natural physiological phenomenon.

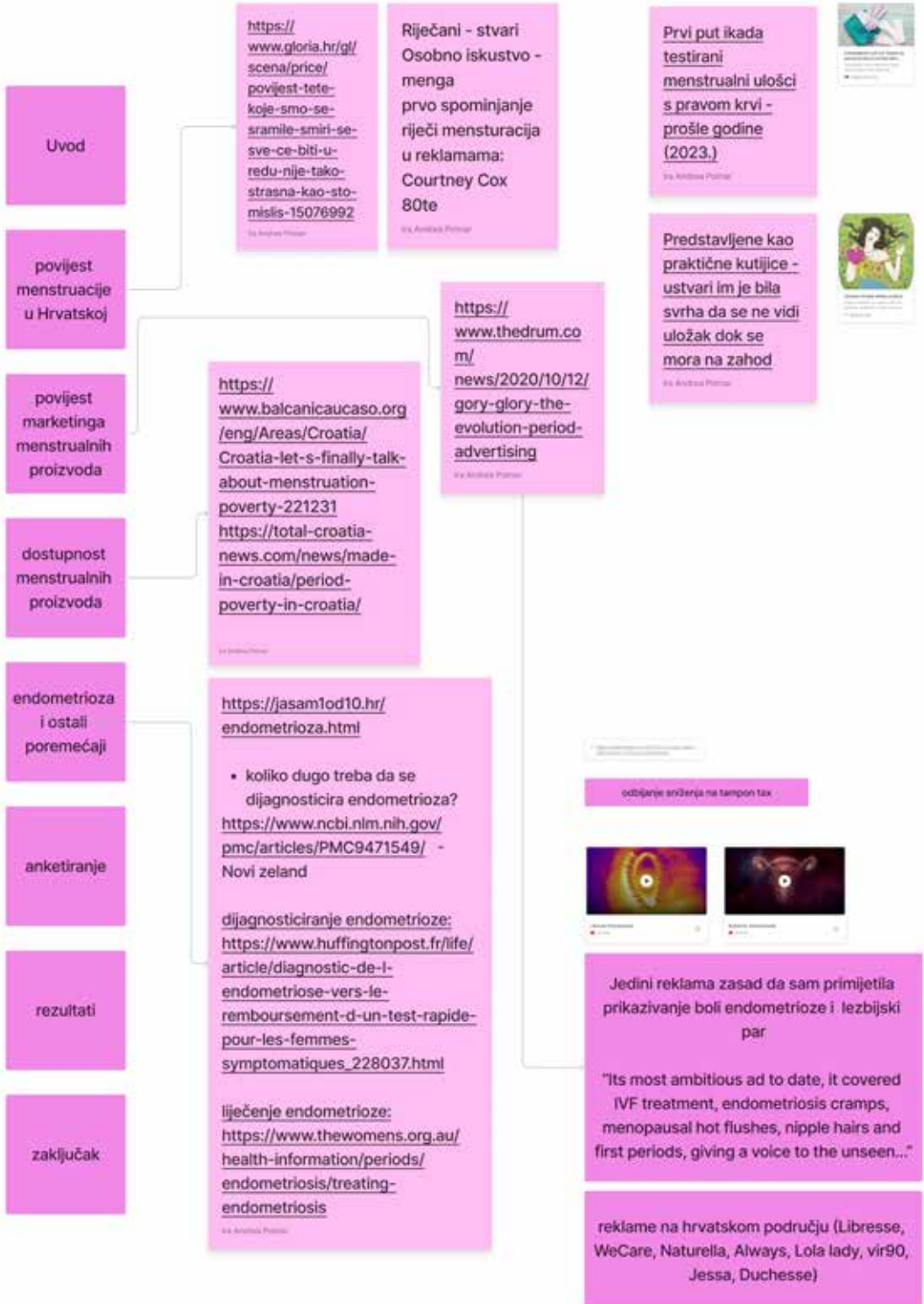
To illustrate the specifics of the design work, at the beginning of the analysis, I will present the methodological research approach using the Figma platform and outline the comic strip scenario. As a young designer, I am deeply motivated by the challenge of transforming my artistic expression into the creation of marketing materials that are truthful, encouraging, and relevant. My goal is to produce visuals that faithfully reflect the experiences of menstruation while being powerful enough to resonate with a broader audience. The comic strip addressing this topic would not only respond to the challenges faced by women but also serve as potential support in understanding that can arise from well-directed advertising campaigns. The scenario I am attaching is intended to initiate a dialogue with other creatives to dare to portray menstruation in its true light.

Advertising or marketing campaign is an organized set of information, visuals, slogans, and other materials intended to present a product, company, or person. Advertisements are considered part of marketing campaigns with shorter durations to facilitate the communication of basic information, quicker and cheaper broadcasting, and wider dissemination (as an advertisement can be shown on TV, a laptop, have an audio version for radio, be printed in newspapers/flyers, etc.). I follow two definitions: "In short, a marketing campaign represents an organized, strategic effort to achieve a specific company goal or to get customer feedback." (inkubator.biz); "Advertisement – a planned and organized communication (through mass media), planned promotion of industrial products and various services; publicity, promotion, advertising." (Croatian Language Portal)

2. Research Methodology

The presented visual research, which followed various aspects of menstrual product advertisements in Croatia, is extensive and highlights the complexity of the topic. It draws attention to the specificities discussed in the text and served as the basis for creating the comic strip.

Endometrijoza 2



Endometrijoza 3

Preispitivanje - bez titla



Always Always Always Always Always

Za ovu reklamu sam legla misle da su stvari jer nisu trunice



Always Always Always Always Always



Always Always Always Always Always

Prva rana iznenade - ga je nitko ne priča o tome, manjak anatomije i prikaza bol, potencijalno reklama i za demografsku obrnivo



Always Always Always Always Always

starna generalizacija - žene su jedne dobre kada se bolno, ili anežu u kati, ne na postoje li nitko - ne juri svaka noćne boga menstruata od PMSa



Always Always Always Always Always



Always Always Always Always Always



Always Always Always Always Always



Always Always Always Always Always



anketna pitanja
ciljana skupina: osobe s menstruacijom koje pate od grčeva ili endometrijoze - dobná granica: neograničena?



Endometriozia 5

No kada se postavi pitanje "A kako biste vi to točno promijenili?", odgovor je ustvari dosta jednostavan. Začniva se na ispitivanju osoba se menstruacijama, ne bi li se dobio iskren i realan uvid u šarenolika iskustva. Potom izradi nekoliko kraćih reklama pričajući te priče, ili barem se osvrćući na to da nisu svi isti. Ne trče svi, ne plešu, nema joga. Neki se ljudi prevrću od boli, neki popiju tabletu pa su ostatak dana u redu, neki usporoko svemu tome stavljaju još jedan uložak i još jedne hače i svejedno ih je strah da će procuriti. Nekima menstruacija i nije problem, već projev, koj je najčešći simptom menstruacije što se tiče probavnog traka, vodeći čak u 45% javljanja u svih osoba koje menstruiraju (Flo aplikacija).

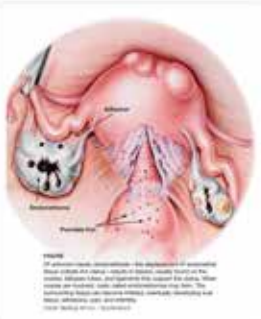
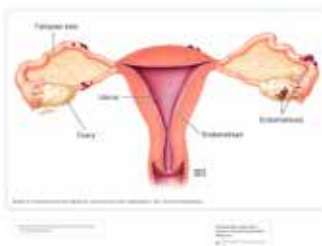
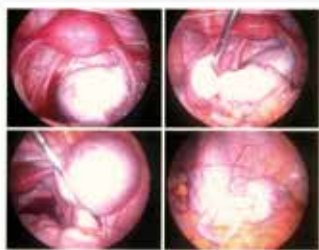
"Experiencing periods and diarrhoea together is very common. About one in three women who do not otherwise have bowel complaints suffer from diarrhoea when they menstruate."

Raditi paletu boja, eksperimentirati s tehnikama snimanja. Nije svaka osoba koja menstruira i žena niti nema svaka osoba PMS. Svaka osoba koja ima PMS nema isto iskustvo, ne nauči svatko o menstruaciji od roditelja, možda iz škole ili prijatelja, interneta u krajnju ruku. Nema svatko pristup menstrualnim proizvodima, neki ljudi ne znaju kako se umeće tampon, neki ljudi imaju drugačije religijske poglede na to. Postoji toliko toga što se može prikazati i spomenuti u istom dahu kada se treba i moći reći menstruacija bez da to izazove zgrožavajuću reakciju.

Ljudi mogu međusobno koristiti svoje termine, ali reklame mogu utjecati na toliko širu publiku da je žalosno da se ne iskoristava takav potencijal.

Centralni problem svih ovih reklama je generalizacija, dobiva se dojam da je osoba koja je predložila ovakve ideje upoznala jednu osobu koja menstruira koja se osjetila dovoljno sigurnom da opiše i kaže što to sve podrazumijeva i nosi, te su to odlučili i prikazati. Moram priznati, da s pomisli da se proizvodi često žele isticati ne bi li ostvarili bolje prodaje kako je ustvari nevjerojatno dosadno promatrati iste primjere reklama, iste boje, slične fontove. Kada se i uzme u obzira da živimo u kapitalističkom sustavu, gdje je takav proizvod neophodan za život i uvijek ćemo ih morati kupovati, reklame bi mogle imati slobodu. Moramo kupiti taj proizvod, zašto onda i moramo gledati iste snimke, iste ideje?

Ira Andrea Potnar



3. Analysis

In the analysis of the predominant colors in advertising campaigns for menstrual products in Croatia, a tendency to use pastel shades of green, pink, blue, and purple is observed. This color choice aims to create an impression of airiness, lightness, accessibility, and elegance. There is a notable avoidance of red, as well as bright tones of yellow, brown, and similar colors. There is also a certain uniformity in the portrayal of the target group: the Croatian market is dominated by images of young, active white women, while depictions of non-white women or non-femme presenting individuals who also menstruate are extremely rare. Additionally, advertisements rarely touch on the topic of menopause, and when they do, a realistic portrayal of the painful and challenging aspects of this life stage is missing.

The market review also reveals that depictions of menstrual pain are almost nonexistent. For instance, pain associated with menstrual cramps or more severe conditions like endometriosis is not addressed in local advertisements. However, there are exceptions, such as the Libresse campaigns from the British market, which are more educational in nature and significantly differ from local practices by including depictions of real experiences related to menstruation. Such advertisements, which are more comprehensive and open, are often shown in shortened versions when they reach the Croatian market. My mother shared her testimony on this, recalling “the image of a woman with a newborn baby in her arms and a visible large pad.” In fact, there is censorship, where the advertising campaign is initially broadcast freely and in its entirety, but with later distribution, it is adapted to the Croatian market.

In this context, it is only a segment of the advertisement that shows a scene where a crumpled woman lies on the cold tiles of the bathroom, struggling with an abstract depiction of pain within her uterus. The prevalence of such advertisements is almost nonexistent. These moments in advertisements that depict the realistic challenges women face during menstruation often remain invisible or insufficiently highlighted at the local level.

The inspiration for the analysis also came from the article “This is the Actual Reason Pad Commercials Use that Weird Blue Liquid” by JR Thorpe, which provides an overview of the portrayal of menstruation as taboo and the use of blue liquid in the 1990s for sanitary pads or baby diapers to avoid authenticity. Unlike red, “blue is uniquely clinical and associated with cleaning products, such as bleach or dish-washing liquid, emphasizing a sense of ‘cleanliness’ and hygiene” (Bustle, 2017).

Behind the shine of menstrual product advertisements lies a deeply rooted problem: the way these products are portrayed and tested. For decades, the people behind production and testing have generally had a superficial understanding of female anatomy, often focused on the aesthetic dimension and idealized depictions. This superficiality extends to the product testing itself, where the test liquid used does not even remotely simulate the actual viscosity and other characteristics of menstrual blood. Additionally, the portrayals in advertisements are sterilized and artificially adapted: we witness how pads absorb perfectly measured amounts of blue liquid, creating the illusion of neatness and control.

But what if testing were done with more realistic liquids that resembled the consistency of real blood? How would the products fare in such tests? What would happen if advertisements showed larger quantities of liquid, those that are not pre-approved and controlled? And, most importantly, why is avoiding realistic red color so imperative in an industry that should embrace and present menstrual blood as it truly is? The blue color, traditionally associated with cleanliness and cleaning products, acts almost as a visual oxymoron in the context of menstruation. Its use symbolizes a departure from reality, almost suggesting that natural bodily processes need to be aestheticized and distanced from the real red blood that is an integral part of women's experiences.

As a graphic design student exploring the symbolism and psychology of colors (see Peić, 1986), I understand that on the color spectrum, blue is not truly opposed to red, given that both, along with yellow, are primary colors. However, in the cultural and societal context specific to our world of Western democracies, red and blue are often perceived as opposites. Red symbolizes warmth, passion, and energy, while blue represents coldness, calmness, and rationality. In everyday life, these colors often carry specific meanings: red is the sign for hot water on faucets, while blue indicates cold, red is associated with fire, and blue with the sea. Although in the context of visual arts and the color wheel, these colors are not explicit opposites, in the perception of most people, and even in my own view, red and blue are sometimes seen as contrasting. This is due to deeply ingrained associations that culture and experience instill in our consciousness.

Therefore, I find the use of the blue color problematic, especially when it comes to rare liquids in advertisements for menstrual products. This creates a paradox: on the one hand, advertisements claim that menstruation is completely normal and natural, while on the other hand, avoiding the depiction of red liquid suggests that something natural is actually not acceptable to show. The blue color in this context creates a clear distance from reality—as if menstruation needs to be cleansed of its natural characteristics to be socially acceptable. This duality between “normal” and “acceptable” on one side, and “abnormal” and “disgusting” on the other, not only creates confusion but also perpetuates the stigma around a natural biological function, implying that cleanliness and desirability come only in certain, socially approved colors.

It's easy to say “anyone can look it up on the internet and check when they have time,” but it's harder to deal with the multitude of information offered as answers to the same question—especially on the internet, where anyone can publish almost anything. One source might say: “Yellow, gray, or green discharge can suggest a bacterial infection or sexually transmitted disease” (Pratt 2023), while another might claim: “Very light yellow discharge is more common than you think. Sometimes it's the color of a daffodil. Other times it leans more towards a greenish-yellow pansy. This color usually indicates an infection, but if you know there's probably no problem (if it's a one-time occurrence), what you eat can affect the color. Some people notice this change with new vitamins or when trying certain foods” (Flo 2023). It clearly states that yellow discharge depends on the shade and accompanying symptoms, but also on the foods and products we consume. The phrase “can suggest” is often just a way to avoid causing panic because if you're a thirteen-year-old girl searching the internet for the first time about why you have

yellow discharge, your eyes will instinctively jump to the frequently highlighted word “infection.”

Blue, red, and yellow are primary colors. However, in the context we are discussing, only blue can be freely used, while red, due to its associations with blood, is often not shown, and yellow is avoided due to its potential connection with discharge. Pads are used not only during menstruation but also for daily discharge, which can vary in color and is often associated with yellow. Similar to menstruation, a lot of inaccurate information about discharge circulates on the internet, which can negatively impact the sexual and health education of young people who menstruate or have discharge.

Advertisements create a contrast in the portrayal of menstruation that carries a subtle but deep irony. The difficulty of depicting real menstruation is such that they resort to dull blue liquid, but paradoxically, menstruation is associated with women’s fertility while its absence is associated with pregnancy. I previously touched on this hypocrisy, but it’s worth mentioning the frequent linking of menstruation with confirming pregnancy, which becomes increasingly pronounced in the context of the demographic renewal of my country. There is an implicit message that places the responsibility for reproduction solely on women, while simultaneously ignoring society’s responsibility to create conditions for a healthy and safe pregnancy. Instead of focusing on creating safe workplaces, banning discriminatory questions about family planning during job interviews, and similar discriminations, these topics are often sidestepped and reproductive rights are attacked with a focus on the issue of abortion.

In cultural terms and linguistic jargon, menstruation becomes a “thing,” a euphemism that diminishes the importance and complexity of this natural process experienced by nearly half of the population. In cities like Rijeka, the word “menstruation” is avoided, limiting the space for open conversation about everything that menstruation can represent outside the context of pregnancy. There is less discussion about how pregnancy itself carries different effects and evokes various emotions in each person. Redefining public discourse about menstruation and reproduction requires honesty and openness, which is unfortunately currently constrained by traditional and often outdated understandings.

Similarly, there are other misconceptions stemming from how women’s fertility and beauty are discussed on the internet. It is suggested that women are most fertile in their youth, often depicting them in a way that idealizes hairless skin without imperfections, creating an image that dangerously approaches the portrayal of pre-pubescent girls. Menstruation is paradoxically valued as desirable because it serves as proof of the ability to conceive new life, but at the same time, those who menstruate are often considered unattractive or undesirable if they do not meet youthful beauty standards.

This is evident in advertisements for menstrual products, where we rarely see people with unshaven legs or adult women, especially those in middle age. The absence of a realistic depiction of aging bodies, bodies with hair, and those going through various phases of the menstrual cycle points to aesthetic models subject to fashion changes and cultural stigmas that advertisements inevitably follow.

This advertising trend not only distorts reality but also complicates the development of a healthy relationship with one's own body, sexuality, and reproductive health. All of this reflects broader social ambiguity about what it means to be a woman, how she should be represented, and what is expected of her.

The choice of typography in advertisements for menstrual products is influenced not only by purchasing power and economic factors. Often, the typography in these ads reflects a desire for a certain gentleness and elegance, using sleek fonts that sometimes include calligraphic elements. These fonts often feature curves and fluid lines symbolizing ease and grace, creating an impression of a gentle breeze. When describing such fonts, I encounter a dilemma regarding the use of the term "feminine fonts," which I consider a misguided approach in describing a phenomenon that involves more than gender dichotomy. Such fonts are common in products exclusively targeted at women, such as women's razors and shampoos, and are therefore associated with the purchasing power of the female audience.

In contrast, products aimed at men often use massive, heavy fonts with minimal contrast, evoking strength and robustness, resembling letters that look like stacked boards or bricks. Looking at brands like Gillette, BIC, Wilkinson, and Harry's, there is a clear difference in visual approach. An exception to this rule is Old Spice, which stands out with its use of italics, fitting into their eccentric marketing approach. Differences in fonts also stem from the background of the product, the target audience, and the intention to stand out in the market. When the purchasing power of the target group is higher, significant typographical differences often manifest more prominently in marketing, especially in the skincare segment.

Since I wrote this as a design student, without the necessary economic or anthropological knowledge, I wouldn't delve into analyses concerning purchasing power. As a designer familiar with analyzing different typographies, I can attest that there is indeed a distinction in fonts used for products aimed at typical "male" versus "female" advertising.

When it comes to marketing products like menstrual items, we observe that some brands emphasize strong visual patterns to stand out on crowded shelves. However, the real challenge becomes evident when the question is posed: "How exactly would you make changes?"

The answer actually lies in authenticity and directness. Changes should stem from behavioral research and conversations with individuals who menstruate to gain a genuine understanding of their diverse experiences. Based on this, a series of short commercials should be created that tell these true stories — stories that testify that menstruation is not the same for everyone. Not everyone dances during menstruation, practices yoga, or lies in bed due to pain; some can continue daily activities only after taking pain relief medication. Some, despite everything, add other pads but also layers of clothing, living in fear of more severe bleeding. It should also be emphasized that menstruation is not the only problem for many individuals. For example, diarrhea is a common symptom associated with menstruation, affecting the digestive tract (see Bence 2023). According to the Flo app (2024), nearly 45% of menstruating individuals experience this symptom. Such real aspects of menstruation are rarely mentioned in advertisements, further undermining understanding and empathy towards the diversity of women's experiences.

Instead of idealized scenes, it is necessary to depict reality — everything that menstruation truly can be, in all its forms and manifestations. Menstrual products will sell because they are needed; seen as essential for life, a more authentic portrayal in advertisements of life-necessary products has the space to break stereotypes, myths, misinformation, and stigma.

One positive example is Libresse's advertisement titled *Bodyform#wombstories*, which successfully portrayed many aspects of women's experiences rarely visible in mainstream media: different symptoms, emotions, and situations related to menstruation. This advertisement could serve as a model for what could be done in our market, where there is a clear need for a more realistic and honest portrayal. However, the problem arises when it is realized that this advertisement was adapted and shortened before reaching the Croatian market, thereby losing the key ideas and representations that made the original campaign so powerful.

Aware of marketing studies and understanding as a graphic design student that there is a practical need to adapt advertisements to the market — they need to be shorter for easier broadcasting and to ensure their memorability. Long advertisements can lead to audience saturation and fatigue, which is not the goal of any branding. However, when adapting an advertisement, it is equally important to preserve its original spirit and message (Alioha 2021). Instead of cutting out precisely those parts that are similar to existing advertisements in our market, segments that provide a new perspective and truth could have been retained. Such an approach would allow for a clear representation of menstrual products and contribute to breaking down taboos and stereotypes that are still strongly present in Croatian society.

One advertisement in our linguistic area that moves in the right direction is WeCare (2024), a brand owned by Violeta company. This advertisement depicts various stages of the menstrual cycle, focusing on women from their first encounter with menstruation to entering menopause. The visual aspect is a digital collage enriched with animations, starting with a portrayal of a girl at a public restroom, likely school-related, then showcasing life stages exploring female sexuality. The advertisement emphasizes how sometimes women eagerly anticipate menstruation, while in other situations they are relieved when it is absent, hinting at the possibility of pregnancy and also featuring pregnant women. Finally, an older woman surrounded by antiques symbolizes entering menopause, with the slogan: "It's a natural course of things." However, even here, I must note the excessive use of pastel colors and fonts that cater to assumed users, along with the phrase "First surprises." The reason for formulating this message "first surprises" is certainly due to the lack of discussion about reproductive health and menstruation in earlier grades of elementary school. These topics are inconsistently discussed, maybe in the seventh or eighth grade, and teachers can ultimately decide on the schedule of lessons and the like, given that the fact that majority of young people get their period much earlier. My experience with menstruation comes from the age of twelve, but I know a girl who faced it at eight. Even when discussing it with friends, there was much we didn't know or simply didn't feel safe enough to ask about natural processes in school and the wider community. The same goes for discussions with parents, as each of us grows up in different environments. If there is someone in the class who is already prone to ridicule for anything else, asking a question about

such a sensitive topic and exposing oneself to additional mockery over something you don't know and can't control is extremely discouraging. We feel a similar discomfort today as adults when we might have difficulty asking a colleague or a stranger if they have a sanitary pad. With the same awkwardness, we quickly search and open boxes left as menstrual product banks at our universities (which is a good initiative but needs to be maintained), only to find that for the third month in a row, there's nothing inside. Or even if there is one tampon, we have to leave it there because we don't know how to use it, and then hide in the toilet and use half a roll of toilet paper, trying to reach a safe place without anyone noticing.

Although there is room for criticism, I must still commend this advertisement for considering the fact that some people eagerly anticipate menstruation. The uncertain fear and anxiety when menstruation is seven days late are strong, so when it finally arrives, regardless of the pain and discomfort, it is experienced as a relief. On the other hand, there are those who are relieved by the absence of menstruation due to a desired pregnancy. The early symptoms of pregnancy are varied, and sometimes menstruation can occur during pregnancy, depending on specific circumstances. However, it is widely accepted that the absence of menstruation usually signals pregnancy. I could speculate that the blue sky in the advertisement is intentionally matched with the blue letters on the cubes as a symbol of the desirability of a male child, but I am also aware that the marketing team could justify this with the depiction of a stork, a symbol often associated with birth and which inevitably flies in the sky. Ultimately, the advertisement also features an older woman, whom we might assume is in menopause. She is depicted as smiling and happy, which may not be the case for everyone, but it is undoubtedly a positive and welcome change.

The same company, Violeta, as described in the example above, used the We-Care brand back in 2015, which was intolerable in its generalization.

I quote: "Yes, we admit, sometimes we wait for days for him to call first, and yes, we admit, sometimes we go out in miniskirts even if it's two degrees." The fact is that both situations are actually reflections of the same societal pressures – women are often considered irrational and difficult to understand. Sometimes we wait for days for "her" to call us, sometimes we just want to look good and cool regardless of the weather, and sometimes we are expected to wait for "them" because if we call them, then we're seen as pushy and breathing down their necks. Other times we're told how we should dress, to get into a club or to follow the dress code for a birthday party. Generalizations about female behavior are dangerous and harmful. Society often accepts jokes about women in miniskirts, but if a woman with a fuller body wears one, it's almost considered offensive. The advertisement that prompted this reflection almost exclusively portrays young women and mothers who are not represented in a professional environment. Instead, they are shown carrying groceries in bags typical of the American market, feeding children, or helping with homework. "But we can multitask, we're resourceful, and when we care, we care completely." However, the way we dress or "treat PMS with shopping" is considered laughable. The portrayal of resourcefulness is limited to how a woman catches pads falling out of her bag, rather than showing her in the business world or fixing household appliances. The notion of care is directed as if it's exclusively a woman's duty, almost ignoring the possibility that care can also be

shown by men or people of other gender identities. It reads almost like we all have the duty to be eternally caring mothers, as if the perfect mother – slim, lively, and elegant – truly exists, as if, after all, there is such a thing as a perfect parent, or, on the other hand, as if all of us want to be, or already are, mothers.

What is to be done?

Progress requires diversity, so expanding the color palette and experimenting with filming techniques are essential in raising awareness about the usefulness and authenticity of menstrual products. It's important to recognize that not only do women menstruate, and not everyone who menstruates is necessarily affected by PMS. Experiences with PMS vary; not everyone learns about menstruation from their parents – some get their information from school, friends, or very often from the internet. Access to menstrual products is not universal, and the use of tampons is not something everyone necessarily knows about. Additionally, there are different religious views on menstruation. The wealth of topics that can be explored and mentioned in the context of menstruation is vast, and the possibility of discussing menstruation without euphemisms and taboos, without eliciting negative reactions, should be normalized and become common practice. In everyday conversations, people may use different terms, but advertisements have the power to influence a broad audience – and it's unfortunate not to use such potential for positive change. If there is an example of an effective advertising campaign abroad that never reached us, we could easily interpret it as a “Western” form of isolationism or a neocolonial relationship where we are supposed to gradually buy into “awareness.” No justification is sufficient, and especially young creatives should engage with these topics. Specifically, when it comes to people who menstruate, even if we don't want to see ads about menstruation, we face its reality every month. If this aspect of life is made more visible in the media, it helps normalize it and creates an understanding that menstruation is a part of life for many around us, potentially for half of the world's population.

The central challenge that arises in such advertisements lies in generalization. It seems that they stem from a limited encounter with a person who menstruates and feels secure enough to share their experience. Only through a research process can decisions be made about

what and how to portray. My impression is that, in the shadow of the intention to highlight the product for better sales, we actually see a repetition of the same advertising approaches, identical colors, and similar fonts, which as a whole becomes very dull and unimaginative. Considering that we live in a capitalist society where such products are necessary and their purchase is inevitable, advertisements could actually be much freer in their expression. If we already have to buy these products, why should we be forced to watch the same scenes, the same stories, the same messages? There is unexplored space for creativity and innovation in advertising that could enliven the everyday aspect of the consumer experience and reflect the broader diversity of experiences of those who use these products. Advertisements not only can but should reflect the vibrancy of life

and the individuality of consumers, instead of reducing them to one-dimensional caricatures. Emancipation is linked to creativity, as we can emancipate ourselves through creativity, while on the other hand, creativity can lead to emancipation. Menstrual products are sold because they are necessary, and due to the nature of the necessity of such products and the general need for their purchase, a small step towards creativity and emancipation is warranted.

Despite the advertising of menstrual products since 2005, when Tampax commercials appeared on the American market (see the bibliography for the link), and eight years later with Libresse limited edition (2013) metal boxes, social norms have not significantly changed. The challenges we face can be divided into two key aspects:

- The first concerns the imperative of secrecy: the necessity of whispering when asking for a tampon and the need for its discreet packaging, which resembles candy, is particularly pronounced among younger girls.
- The second aspect relates to the “comfortable ignorance” of adult men, but also of young men who are equally uninformed. If men were better informed, the need for hiding and whispering would disappear, as would the space for mocking their ignorance

Furthermore, if menstruation and reproductive rights were discussed openly, the normalization of ignorance would be avoided, and opportunities for meaningful dialogue on topics that evoke discomfort and taboos in a patriarchal society would be opened. If one side is denied the opportunity to learn, access to education, which is crucial for understanding the experiences of many of us, is also denied. An additional problem lies in the national education policies regarding sex education and health, as curricula often separate boys from girls when teaching about reproductive organs. I recall my own experience of learning about menstruation and fertilization, where many boys exhibited discomfort, and the classroom was not a safe place for girls either, as they couldn't express their concerns.

To address these and similar challenges, it is crucial to promote inclusivity in the educational system and deconstruct taboos, provide timely information to girls, and encourage boys to ask constructive questions without fear of ridicule. Awareness and open communication are the foundations of understanding natural physiological processes and fostering empathy toward those who menstruate. Adequate support for young people, whether through family, school, or the broader community, must be transparent and continuous, as the process of growing up in each generation faces similar yet contextually different issues. Conversations need to be frequent, unintrusive, and open because young people should not be left to fear and ignorance. Since not everyone is privileged with guaranteed family support and affection, it would be advisable for the educational system to take responsibility for providing clear and useful information that will help young people navigate this aspect of growing up in a healthy and nurturing way.

I have presented a creative approach to raising awareness about the cultural aspects of poorly designed menstrual products in this text through an analysis of past practices as well as my own design solutions in the form of a comic strip. My intention is to continue researching and applying recent findings, such as testing

advertisements that use real blood in menstrual branding (Chudy 2023) or investigating the causes of endometriosis (Letford 2023).

Unfortunately, our history is filled with countless cultural and social narratives that speak about our health, reproductive rights, and hygiene for the “first time.” It seems as though the entire Balkan region is “overly sensitive,” prone to stereotypes and taboos when it comes to advertisements that transparently and directly present menstruation, the positive and negative aspects of pregnancy, as well as the symptoms and consequences of endometriosis, polycystic ovary syndrome, uterine fibroids, and many other not-so-rare gynecological conditions. Are we still waiting for new “first-time” moments? It appears that marketing and industry treat us with the assumption that we are not quite ready and that the truth might shock us.

I believe in and hope for changes in the design of menstrual products because there are methods and approaches that can present them without patronizing or stigmatizing us for inherited ignorance. Even in our region, by applying design and creative thinking about the context and introducing contemporary scientific knowledge, careful, targeted advertisements can be created that promote inclusivity, equality, and credibility. One of the bright examples is certainly the Menstruation Festival (2024), which takes place in mid-April for the second consecutive year, thanks to the organization of the Pariter association from Rijeka. In the words of the organizers: “We want menstruation, menstrual poverty, endometriosis, menopause, bicornuate uterus, abortion, and medical gaslighting to be discussed publicly. We want the power dynamics that affect women’s health and well-being to be discussed publicly. We want a scientifically grounded and dignified approach to women’s health.” – Menstruation Festival.

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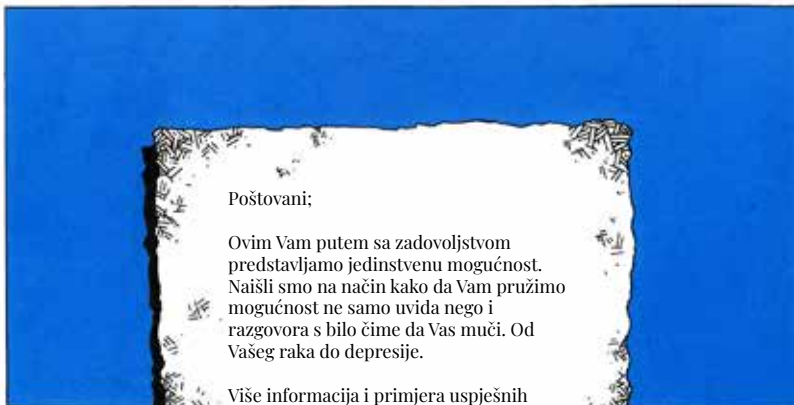
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Attachments:

1. Comic Strip Panels "CONVERSATIONS"
2. Script for the Comic Strip "CONVERSATIONS" Attachment 2: Script for the Comic Strip "CONVERSATIONS"

Attachment 1: Comic Strip Panels "CONVERSATIONS"



Kako da uopće sročim odbijenicu nečemu toliko nemogućem?

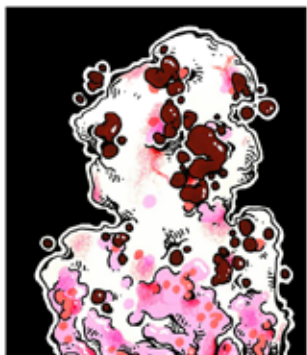
Menstruacija:

Znaš da moram doći,
znaš da sam takva.
Moja priroda jest ja, ne
mogu drugačije.
Oprosti. Oprosti što je
sve vezano uz mene
toliko komplicirano.



PCOS:

Nikad te nisam htjela ograničiti da ostvariš
svoj san, tvoja obitelj bi trebala biti važnija od
svega što ja donosim.



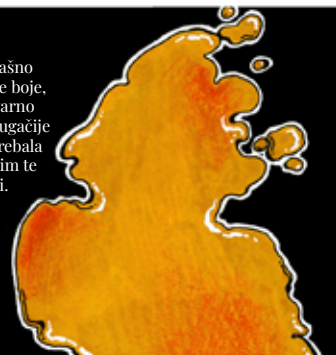
Endometrijoza:

Ne znam zašto sam ovdje, nemam svrhu
van boli. Nadam se samo da ću nestati
čim prije, da ćeš me moći zaboraviti.

Iscjedak:

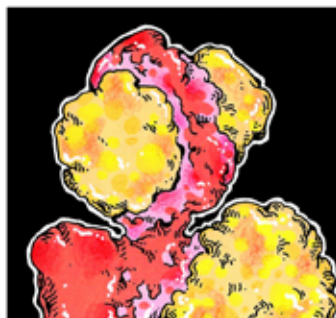
Znam da je strašno
vidjeti sve moje boje,
ali ako ti se stvarno
čini nekako drugačije
možda bi me trebala
razmotriti. Želim te
samo upozoriti.

Ovako sam
jednostavno
normalan dio
ciklusa.



Vaginizam:

Možda te muči
nešto drugo, ja
sam samo
simptom
nečega
dubljeg, težeg.
Ali vidjet ćeš,
možda će biti
u redu jednom
dok nađeš što
radi za tebe.



Fibroidi maternice:

Nemam ništa za reći, žao mi je. Možeš se
ljutiti, možeš me mrziti. Ne trebaš moje
dopuštenje, samo ti kažem da ste slobodni to
napraviti.

Sasvim normalan tok stvari, sasvim prirodan proces.



Ne moraš se brinuti ako te netko vidi, svi bi već trebali znati da je to u redu.



Ne razumijem te, ne razumijem zašto si ovdje. Zašto sam sama, samo s tobom.



U redu je, mislim, nije. Mrzim što me boliš, mučiš me, ali da su me poslušali ranije... ne bi se toliko raširila, ne bi me toliko izjela.



I što ako se zna zašto si ovdje, samo polako.



Ne moraš se brinuti, neće procuriti. Sigurni ste.



Isto si kao i ostalo, ograničavaš me, znaš kako je teško objasniti svakome kome se sviđam da možda bude poteškoća, problema, jednostavno nemoguće? Znaš kako je teško ne mrziti ih?! Pa imaju svako pravo otići ako je to previše za njih... ali gdje ću ja otići od tebe? Gdje se mogu ja sakriti?

Attachment 2: Script for the Comic Strip “CONVERSATIONS”

Page 1: If you had the opportunity to talk about your condition, what would you say?

Where is the world heading, and can we imagine a future where, instead of stigmatizing menstruation and other gynecological conditions, we move towards a direction where it is allowed to speak openly and without shame about these topics? It is simply enough to speak honestly and transparently, without fear.

Invitation: Dear Sir/Madam; We are pleased to present you with a unique opportunity. We have found a way to provide you with not only insights but also a chance to talk about anything that troubles you, from cancer to depression.

More information and examples of successful ... (intentionally left incomplete, knowing that the test continues...)

Title: Conversations

1. They're not normal; who do they think they're fooling with such nonsense?!
2. How do I even draft a rejection for something so impossible?

Page 2: The second page features six panels depicting personifications of various conditions related to the uterus and other reproductive organs:

1. Menstruation
2. PCOS (Polycystic Ovary Syndrome)
3. Endometriosis
4. Discharge
5. Vagismus
6. Uterine Fibroids

These conditions then initiate a conversation with those who have responded to the opportunity to talk.

Menstruation: You know I have to come, you know that's how I am. My nature is me; I can't be any other way. Sorry. Sorry that everything about me is so complicated.

PCOS: I never wanted to limit you from achieving your dream; your family should be more important than anything I bring.

Endometriosis: I don't know why I'm here; I have no purpose outside of pain. I just hope I disappear as soon as possible, so you can forget about me.

Discharge: I know it's awful to see all my colors, but if it really seems different to you, maybe you should reconsider me. I just want to warn you, I'm just a normal part of the cycle.

Vaginismus: Maybe something else is troubling you; I'm just a symptom of something deeper, heavier. But you'll see, it might be okay once you find what works for you.

Uterine Fibroids: I have nothing to say, I'm sorry. You can be angry, you can hate me. You don't need my permission; I'm just telling you that you're free to do it.

Page 3: The third page also features 6 panels, with 3 of them being identical in position and size to those on the first page. These panels depict three people, deliberately looking different (skin color, hair, style, age) and correspond to panels 2, 3, and 6 from the previous page. The remaining three panels show the provision of a pad, the removal of a used pad, and someone sitting apparently alone with tightly clasped legs and hands. These remaining three panels should depict advertisements that provide a safe space and, if they ever existed, prevent the need for such bizarre conversations from ever occurring.

First Panel: A perfectly normal flow of things, a completely natural process. You don't need to worry if someone sees you; everyone should already know that it's okay.

First Person: I don't understand you; I don't understand why you're here. Why am I alone, just with you?

Second Panel: And so what if it's known why you're here, just take it slow.

Second Person: It's okay, I mean, it's not. I hate that you hurt me, torment me, but if they had listened to me earlier... I wouldn't have spread so much, I wouldn't have been eaten up so much.

Third Panel: You don't need to worry, it won't leak. You're safe.

Third Person: You're just like the rest; you limit me. You know how hard it is to explain to everyone who likes me that there might be difficulties, that there might be problems? You know how hard it is not to hate them?! Well, they have every right to leave if it's too much for them... but where can I go from you? Where can I hide?

Expression of Gender in the Film “The Riddle of the Sphinx” by Lore Malvi

Mentor: Associate Professor Mina Đikanović
Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad

mina.djikanovic@ff.uns.ac.rs

Abstract

This paper will analyze the 1977 alternative film *Riddles of the Sphinx* by film theorist and director Lore Malvi. The introductory section aims to familiarize the reader with the film’s plot and structure, while the sections “Gender and Language” and “Acrobatics” will address issues of gender and language, and the way the director approaches experimentation with her own theoretical frameworks through artistic alternative cinema. The aim of the paper is to attempt to answer the question of why the director strives to overcome existing film forms and experiment with new expressions in film. Through descriptive methods followed by a form of philosophical reflection, the film will be analyzed in this paper. The conclusion will seek to provide answers to the previously mentioned questions regarding experimentation with different artistic expressions by interpreting the sentence posed by the author at the beginning of the film, which is: “The narrative of what one who wants to be wants,” by American writer Gertrude Stein.

Keywords: *film, gender, language, expression*

1. Introduction to the Structure of the Film

Riddles of the Sphinx is a 1977 film by film theorist and director Lore Malvi. The film can be characterized as a unique type of experimental film in terms of its structure, script, filming technique, and music. However, what else is experimental about this film? To successfully answer this question, we need to first approach the film’s structure and create a sort of hermeneutic circle of understanding the relationship between the idea behind the film’s title and the parts that make up the film.

Riddles of the Sphinx is divided into seven “chapters,” with the fourth chapter being further divided into 13 episodes preceded by fragments⁶³⁸. It is important to highlight that the author deliberately and intentionally structures the film in this manner. At the very beginning, the director, Lore Malvi, appears and provides an “introduction” to the film by referring to the well-known Greek myth of the Sphinx.

38 There will be more discussion about understanding the role of fragments in film in the section on Gender and Language.

The core of her interest is the interpretation of the relationship between the Sphinx and Oedipus. With this gesture, she introduces the viewer to the film in an engaged manner. What does she do to achieve this? She presents her intention to the viewer without providing an “answer” to the enigmatic title of the film but instead turns to explaining the Greek myth as a guiding framework for understanding the initial position from which the upcoming film will pose numerous questions to various structures of our reality.

The position the author refers to is the position the Sphinx occupies within Greek culture: that of a mute voice that poses a riddle in the form of a question, challenging the existing cultural and political system without providing an answer, but instead asking questions that open space for interpretation. The first three chapters of the film (1. Opening Pages, 2. Lore Speaks, 3. Stones) will serve as the beginning of the “experiment,” and as already mentioned, they are an introduction to the story that follows. The director then introduces us to the theoretical framework where we find the story, aiming to hint at the narrative aspect of the film. This story (4. Luiz’s Story Told in Thirteen Shots) will present the fundamental questions that the director will first pose to the main character and then to the viewers, through the life of the protagonist (Luiz), divided into fragments. The nature of the questions will touch on topics such as: household management, motherhood, romantic relationships, work relations, women’s lives in society, the economic and political system, leisure time, childhood, etc. What can be observed from the way the director problematizes these themes in the life of the main protagonist is that they constantly “dance” between the past and the future, perpetually questioning them. Looking at the structure of the chapters, it can be noted that the first three represent a distinctive homage to the past— the beginning, where we find depictions of pyramids, the sculpture of the Egyptian Sphinx, stones as remnants of past times and immobile monuments of a bygone world, as well as the figure of the Sphinx observing us as viewers in the frames. An interesting fact that the director highlights in the film is that the Greek Sphinx was depicted as a female figure, while the Egyptian Sphinx was represented as male. However, what connects them is precisely the imaginary framework that defines them. They are a riddle, a half-beast, half-angel, enigmatic, posing questions and not providing answers.

Music plays a unique role in this part of the film, as its purpose is not limited to intensifying certain sequences but also occasionally takes on a dialogic and narrative function. Furthermore, in this section, the music, in addition to its basic electronic sound, has an ambient quality, alluding to the music of the Middle East. Music will indeed take on a voice. It will speak for time and people. In the second part of this film, music will evidently assume a narrative role at the moment when the main character, Luiz, goes shopping with her friend Maxine at a shopping center, where the electronic music will imitate the sound of church bells. From this, it can be observed that Malvi draws a comparison between shopping centers and religious practices. Did the author intend to highlight systems that shape our reality, which may seem different but are essentially very similar in their functioning?

In addition to the main protagonist Luiz, the film features her daughter Ana, her friend Maxine, her husband Kris, and Luiz’s mother. Luiz’s story, told in thirteen

segments,³⁹ is the central part of the film, beginning with a depiction of the household and Luiz preparing food for her child and husband while tidying the kitchen. The first three episodes within “Luiz’s Story” take place in her home during her cohabitation with her husband. They address themes of domestic life, motherhood, and her separation from her husband, which results in his leaving the house and abandoning their shared life. The fourth episode will be dedicated to introducing her friend Maxine and the care of Luiz’s daughter Ana in daycare. The fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth episodes will address Luiz’s employment, prompted by her exit from marriage, as well as workers’ rights, support systems for working mothers, and the economic system. The ninth and tenth episodes will mark the beginning of Luiz’s re-evaluation and significant changes in her understanding and experience of her own life, initiated by changes within it. The eleventh episode will, like the fourth, be a turning point in the film⁴⁰ when Luiz, with her friend, visits her ex-husband’s workplace to watch a film he is working on, which adapts a diary of a mother detailing her son’s transition to daycare and the changes between them during his time in the new environment. The twelfth and thirteenth episodes will hold a special place within Luiz’s story, focusing on the relationship between Luiz and her friend Maxine, as well as her daughter Ana, with the narration at times taking on an imaginary and phantasmical character.⁴¹ The “concluding part” of the film consists of chapters (5. Acrobatics, 6. Lora Listens, 7. The End of the Puzzle) that attempt to offer a new perspective on the film itself. The shots that viewers will see in this part of the film are devoid of dialogue and monologue, thereby opening up space for questions.

Gender and Language

The previously outlined structure of the film allows for a more concrete reflection on the depiction of gender and language issues in Lore Malvi’s cinematic work, opening up space to explore new methods within the realm of cinematic space as a field of “experiment,” through which the director offers a different way of thinking about gender and language in film.

How does the filmmaker address the issue of gender? When attempting to answer what gender might be, in opposition to the traditional binary concept of sex, the most succinct definition might be: “Gender is a set of socially conditioned characteristics of members of one sex, likely originating with the initial division of labor, surviving even after losing its original function, and functioning as an instrument of gender politics, with its apparent naturalness being renewed in each individual through the process of growing up and education” (Dojčinović-Nešić 1993:17). Through the character of the young woman, Luiz, the film’s director aims

39 Chapter 4 in the film.

40 More on that in the section on Gender and Language.

41 ⁹ Phantasm – in psychology, an imaginary image that serves as a compromise between an unconscious instinctual desire and the ego’s defense mechanisms. In Lacanian theory, it has a dual function: as a “screen” that protects from an encounter with the Real and as a coordinate of a person’s capacity to desire. It remains repressed and does not become subjectivized in order to function (Žižek 2017).

to examine and reflect on the life experienced by a body born within the framework of what contemporary Western culture encompasses under the term gender 'woman.' Throughout the film, Lora Malvi introduces us to gender issues in various ways: through reading her own essays, character dialogues, the protagonist's internal monologue, movement, music, and an imaginary voice that intermittently takes over the narration within the film, portraying a story about the characteristic position defining an individual determined by their sex and gender as a woman.

In the introduction, the author appears on screen while reading an essay about the interpretation of the Greek Sphinx within Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus Rex*. She poses the question of how to understand the voice of the Sphinx, which she interprets as the voice of women within a patriarchal culture. This question is raised and left open throughout and at the end of the film. It seems that the entire film attempts to grapple with the depiction of what it means to be a woman as a gendered identity within patriarchal culture and what alternative ways of thinking about this position might be. A particular focus of this chapter will be Luiz's story. The issues with the gendered position of being a woman in the existing culture, which are found in Chapter Four—*Luiz's Story Told in Thirteen Shots*—are presented through the developmental journey of the young woman and mother, Luiz, from her separation from her husband, to finding employment to begin an independent life, caring for her child, and what is known as "mental load" (which involves emotional and psychological effort, seemingly invisible, directed at organizing the basic necessities for the household, daily activities of family members, as well as "taking on" the care of the emotional state of family members). This introduces a whirlpool of questions that Luiz will pose to herself, and to the viewers, through her internal monologue. Questions such as:

"Should women seek special workplace conditions for mothers? Should the struggle for women's rights focus on economic issues? Is the division of labor the root of the problem? Is exploitation outside the home better than oppression within it? Does the oppression of women occur at a conscious or unconscious level? Is the family an obstacle to women's liberation?"

These and many other questions point to the constant re-examination that Luiz faces in her daily life.

The director chooses, after Luiz's questions, to introduce an imaginary voice (which sporadically appears in the film, generally echoing Luiz's thoughts and feelings to distill and express the most intimate, hidden aspects occurring within the protagonist), saying:

"Questions come one after another into her mind without reaching a final conclusion. They lead to society and back to her memories. The future and the past are locked together."

This allusion to a position that seemingly leaves the individual without a final conclusion, trapped somewhere between the past and the future, with a desire to find an escape but condemned to remain there due to structures that oversee and govern her life against her will, is an obvious reference to the influence of psychoanalysis and Lacanian theory on the work of Lora Malvi.

To more clearly explain the specificity of this gender position, which is depict-

ed in this film through the social construct of what we understand by the concept of “woman⁴²,” it is essential to pay attention to the detail of the film’s shooting technique. The director chooses to have the camera circle. When it circles, it always returns to the starting position within a scene, creating a loop around the room, park, or any other space where the scene is set. How should we understand this director’s choice? It seems that the author aims to highlight the cyclicity and repetition of experiences in the life of the main character and other women in the film.

The situations in which we find Luiz vary in the themes addressed in the given scene, the different characters present, and the differing textual dialogue, monologue, and music. However, what is noticeable is that the director chooses to frame the diversity of all these situations within the same camera-circling framework. It appears that the intention is to point out a certain pattern to which all experiences of the young woman are subjected. As a sort of key to understanding the director’s intention, we find an interlocutor in psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, who made a “revolution” in the field of psychoanalysis during the 20th century by re-examining its role and purpose, and whose work inspired Lora Malvi in creating this film.

In Lacanian theory, the structure of our reality consists of three levels: the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real. Slavoj Žižek, in his book *How to Read Lacan*, explains that the Symbolic is the standard by which we orient ourselves. To illustrate Lacan’s theory, Žižek uses the example of chess. In this game, the way we use the pieces and what actually makes chess chess are the rules – the movements of the pieces, the playing on the squares... This Symbolic space is closely related to language, which structures our unconscious, and, according to Lacan, our reality.

The Symbolic space functions like a standard by which I measure myself. Thus, the big Other⁴³ can be personified or reified through a single agent: through “God,” who watches over me and all “real individuals” from beyond, or through an Idea that takes hold of me (Freedom, Communism, Nation) and for which I am willing to give my life. Despite its foundational power, the big Other is fragile, insubstantial,

42 Following the thoughts of Simone de Beauvoir, Adriana Zaharijević writes that “One is born a female, but becomes a woman” (Zaharijević 2020:125). According to Simone de Beauvoir, the “female,” the sexed body we are born into, is not something we can renounce. Biological data, the story of sex, are certainly “one of the keys” to answering the fundamental question – what is a woman... They are not enough to define the hierarchy of sexes. They do not explain why woman is the Other... (Zaharijević 2020:124). That process of becoming, along with all conditions – economic and social, society, culture, history, civilization, everything that happens to each individual female body, which through lived reality shapes itself into a woman – provides an answer to the ontological question of what a woman is and what she is now (Zaharijević 2020:125).

43 The Big Other – represents the unknown element in the otherness of the Other. It characterizes the speaking relationship and is tied to the symbolic space. Also: The Symbolic Order, the unwritten social code, is the second nature of every speaking being; it is there to direct and control my actions, it is the sea in which I swim, yet it remains completely opaque – I can never place it before me and master it (Žižek 2017:16).

actually virtual, in the sense that its status is one of subjective assumption. It exists only if subjects act as if it exists (Žižek 2017:17).

It seems that the author, through the specific gesture of manipulating the camera movement, aims to highlight the multitude of these big Others and the entanglement of Luiz in the network of the Symbolic. When Luiz is entangled in this network of the Symbolic, she is also assigned a Symbolic identity. What does Luiz gain by receiving this identity? She is honored with everything that the Symbolic (created by language, culture, society, etc.) says she should be as a woman. Throughout the film, Luiz is depicted in roles such as a homemaker, wife, mother, working woman, and friend. Thus, she is constantly found within the frameworks of the Symbolic network, and according to the director's decision and in line with Lacan himself, this network will envelop Luiz's life until the end of the film.

However, there is a key that can, conditionally speaking, "lead" the subject, the little Other, the main protagonist, out of the realm of Freud's Ideal-I⁴⁴ and Lacan's Symbolic, as Luiz's aspiration and desire to reassess her own life and take initiative emerge—this is precisely the "law of desire." This is not about any desire, but rather an additional intervention in psychoanalysis by Lacan, which is the fourth instance of acting in accordance with one's own desire (Žižek 2017). It is precisely this moment of affirming one's own desire that can be observed in the film. Specifically, when viewed carefully, two things can be noticed that point towards the affirmation of the main protagonist's own desire.

The first affirmation is visible in the context of a kind of personalization. We first see Luiz's face and hear her voice in the situation where her husband leaves her, that is, during her meeting with Maxine at the nursery. Within these events, four potential points of cultural contention are observed, which Lora Malvi portrays through the medium of film: the relationship between men and women, female friendship, motherhood, and women as subjects in the economic sphere. In the first two episodes of Luiz's story, all we hear is the imaginary voice, and what we do not see is her entire body. The fact that Luiz acquires a complete figure and character only in the situation of abandonment is extremely significant.

The second aspect of this affirmation is the change in the camera's direction of movement. Specifically, at the moment when Luiz and Maxine visit Luiz's ex-husband (who is also an editor) at his workplace, we notice that the camera starts its circular movement from the right side, rather than from the left, changing its direction. The camera will continue its usual path of returning to the same shot from the beginning of the scene, but in the opposite direction. It is clear that this change is not a random event but is crucial to the personalization process that Luiz undergoes. Both of these affirmations of Luiz's own desire occur when she is near her friend Maxine. The moments when Luiz engages in dialogue with other characters in the film are with other women or Maxine, and the only time she dialogues with her husband is when she informs him of her desire to sell the house and move in with Maxine.

Did the director intend to present solutions to the issues of gender through

44 A network of socio-symbolic norms and ideals that the subject internalizes during the upbringing process (Žižek 2017:84).

the affirmation of personal desire? Before Luiz begins to ask questions and engage in coherent internal monologue, we find her merely listing objects, feelings, daily activities:

“Distressed, strained, searching, nest, comfort, effort, on the chest, resting, taken, being close...”

This enumeration in some way reflects the atmosphere in which we find Luiz: an atmosphere of questioning, but not concrete questions. Concrete questions are found precisely after these two affirmations, through which the director intervenes in the film regarding the relationship between Luiz’s current position in life and her own desire.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler will argue that the development of language is crucial for feminist theory because it “makes” women politically visible (Butler 2010:47). How did Lora

Malvi, from this perspective, turn to language in her film? She sees the idea of female emancipation as a problem that can find its place within the relationship between politics and art, which has been very close in certain historical periods, citing the example of the Mexican Renaissance (Malvi 2017). When discussing the importance of language development in her first part, Butler implies that something is missing in the current discourse, that it needs development, and that the political and linguistic domains which otherwise form the criteria by which subjects are constituted significantly influence how we perceive reality as beings oriented towards life in society, and that in such an existing order there is a gap (Butler 2010:47). This gap, it seems, plays out in language, and language, which has been considered one of the key characteristics of human beings since antiquity⁴⁵, is an essential constituent of the reality in which we live.

How has language, as a legacy of patriarchal discourse, shaped reality? In the previous section, we referred to Lacan’s statement that “The unconscious is structured like a language” (Žižek 2017:10). When discussing the unconscious, Lacan will highlight its unique nature of speaking and thinking through its own logic, which is not opposed to the rational and conscious. However, he will also say that the traumatic truth speaks through the unconscious, masked by layers of the Symbolic and the Imaginary, and that one of the main tasks of psychoanalysis is to explain how something like reality is constituted (Žižek 2017). Thus, reality, from the perspective of the aforementioned authors, is inevitably tied to language. Language is also, for Malvi, an obvious field of interest and discovery, and in this film, primarily an experiment. In her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, she will pose the question: How to contend with the unconscious structure of language? (Malvi 2017). From this, it is clear that the author also sees the difficulties that language, as part of the symbolic, carries with it. Therefore, she will adopt a very experimental approach to language in this film and will decide to alter the form in the central part of the film by using a clever method of presenting text, which involves introducing each episode within the fourth part with a fragment that is, by itself, incomplete. These fragments, in a way, introduce the theme of the following epi-

45 A summary of Aristotle’s definitions of man can be found in *Ethics* (Perović 2013: 90).

sode, which is a segment of the protagonist's life within the entire film.

Returning to the beginning, the author notes that the Sphinx in Greek culture is interpreted as the voice of the unconscious, a mysterious being that stands outside the city walls and questions the city's culture and political system. As the author states in the film:

The Sphinx represents the voice of questions, enigmas, not the voice of truth or answers, and as such, it represents a mystery and resistance to the existing system, to patriarchy. To patriarchy, the Sphinx, as a woman, is a threat and a riddle, but women in patriarchy face a series of threats and riddles. There are dilemmas that are difficult for women to resolve because the culture they must think within is not their own.

With this introduction, it is clear that the director is trying to find a way to escape from the "culture that is not theirs" and highlight its inadequacies. One of the tools through which she attempts to achieve her vision in this film is precisely language. The fragmented, disjointed text visible not only in the central part of the film but also at its beginning, when Luiz enumerates various things while describing her external and internal worlds, diverging completely from a linear, coherent mode of speech and sentence construction, pointing to the very enigma of the unconscious, through questioning, wordplay, and symbols, highlighting the lack of opportunity for speech, voice, and the possibility to – complete – a sentence. Additionally, in one of her essays, Malvi notes that women's silence is the foundation of patriarchal society, quoting an anonymous guru from the second century BCE who says, "A woman should be as modestly hesitant to reveal her voice to strangers as she would be to remove her clothing" (Malvi 2024:3). The "silence" that is prominently expressed in this film, through unfinished sentences, a lack of dialogue, and text, which is sometimes replaced by music, indicates the author's attempt to deal with this "culture of silence," as she herself writes:

"On the one hand, women have been marginalized by the Symbolic Order through which society constructs and imagines itself; on the other hand, there is the difficulty of finding appropriate words to express emotions and experiences that are beyond or irrelevant to men or mainstream culture" (Malvi 2024:5).

To illustrate and concretely showcase the hegemony of patriarchal mainstream culture, Lora Malvi introduces the concept of the so-called "male gaze" into her theory. The "male gaze" refers to the phenomenon where mainstream films are shaped by a male perspective, due to the principles of the prevailing ideology and psychological structure, which is fundamentally characterized by gender imbalance (Malvi 2017:44). The cause and problem of the "male gaze" are viewed by the author through the lens of psychoanalytic theory, particularly relating to the concept of fetishism, which stems from the so-called fear of castration⁴⁶. Lora

46 The world that revolves around an axis that is, in fact, the phallus constitutes its fears and fantasies according to its own image of the phallus. In the drama of the male castration complex, as Freud discovered, women are nothing more than dolls; their significance lies primarily and most importantly in their lack of a penis, and their key role is to symbolize the castration that men fear (Malvi 2017: 37). Women are merely the backdrop onto which men project their narcissistic

Malvi examines numerous examples of the “male gaze” in the field of art, such as Jean-Luc Godard’s film *Number Two* and Alain Jones’ exhibitions. Malvi points out that one of the characteristics of many artistic works has been the fetishization of the female body and women in general.

It has already been noted that music plays a very distinctive role in this film, and that the language of music is occasionally the only auditory means of communication available. Nietzsche considered music to be the highest form of art (Nietzsche 1983). It can be asserted, without significant reservations, that Lora Malvi aims to address a similar question in her film as Nietzsche did: how to transcend the boundaries of culture, the symbolic, the “rational,” and speak in a language beyond the language of the given culture, in addition to the aforementioned medium of music that the author employs in the film. Therefore, alongside highlighting the problem of “silence,” Lora Malvi expresses a desire to create a new language of desire, one that transcends the oppressive forms found in culture. In her essays, she also provides examples of other female directors who are in search of a “new language”:

Having survived various physical and psychological traumas, and encouraged by the women’s movement, I felt I had the right to confront a completely new lexicon. The language of specific emotional experiences... promised all the ambivalent pleasures and terrors of the experiences themselves: seduction, passion, anger, betrayal, sorrow, and joy (Malvi 2024:7).

What Malvi does through her manipulation of language in the film is to open up the field of possibilities for different interpretations of being a certain gender and the experiences that such a being entails. Language, as a field of possibility for experimenting with reality in theory, is also depicted by Judith Butler with her theory of performativity when she says: “Ultimately, performance in language dictates and enacts an expansion of possibilities, calling for expansion rather than contraction of the shared space of life” (Zaharijević 2020:50). Thus, we can observe that Malvi, by consciously choosing a new mode of expression through the selection of fragments and the creation of a new language, aimed to expand the field of possibilities for representing and thinking about what it means to be a woman, given the limitations and resistance of expression through standard forms of communication.

Acrobats

The fifth chapter of “The Riddle of the Sphinx” is titled “Acrobats” and expresses the author’s desire to figuratively speak a new language of cinematic creation through this segment of the film and attempt to present the female body in the frame beyond the standard framework of the “male gaze.” The chapter “Acrobats” appears quite unusual because throughout its duration, we see an acrobat performing various movements with her body, hanging in the air on a rope or doing somersaults. Additionally, in one frame, the same acrobat is shown juggling while laughing. Thus, the entire chapter is devoid of dialogue, monologue, or imaginary voice, focusing solely on the movements of the acrobat. From this, the chapter might represent a kind of attempt by the director to shift focus to movement and fantasies (Malvi 2017: 39).

abandon standard language, with the aim of escaping the classical portrayal of the “male gaze” of women and their objectified physicality on the screen by explicitly addressing these issues and placing the acrobat and her movements at the center of the action. While explaining the concept of the “male gaze,” Malvi refers to Eneq’s drawings as examples of the intentional depiction of symbolic castration, stating:

“Dancers on tiptoes, waitresses carrying trays, female acrobats who are unsteady on high heels or walk on tightropes—all of them are forced to maintain an upright posture and stretch vertically upward. But this phallic posture carries the threat of self-annihilation: the higher you reach, the greater the depth into which you might fall” (Malvi 2017: 39).

Is it therefore possible to represent women differently, to rethink women within the confines of art, and thus in film as well? As examples that deviate from the classic pattern of representing the female body in art, Lora Malvi cites Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti in the light of what is known as feminist aesthetics.

Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti are artists whose work was based on their bodies, but in a highly specific and authentic sense. Frida Kahlo turned her gaze inward, using art to represent and overcome the pain she experienced throughout her life, while Tina Modotti shifted her gaze outward and transitioned from being a model to a photographer who, as Malvi notes, “did not photograph ‘beauties’ but rather peasant women and proletarians, showing the traces of life they carry... In other words, they are depicted in the process of some action and labor, not in the isolation of posing before the camera” (Malvi 2017:109).

Malvi seeks to achieve a similar gesture in this film, particularly through the scene with the acrobat, by focusing on her movement, devoid of standard linguistic expression, allowing the movement and music to speak in place of voice, thus infusing the film with a melodramatic spirit and employing the concept of “silent text.” This concept is borrowed from Peter Brook, who summarizes the dramatic significance of silence, and the author herself uses his observations in her own context when she says:

Silent gestures are an expressionistic tool—indeed, a tool of melodrama—used to convey meanings that are incomprehensible, yet operational within the sphere of human ethical relations. Gestures might also be included as a form of catachresis, a figure of usage when there is no ‘proper’ name for something... However, the fullness, the pregnant nature of that emptiness is what matters: full of meaning, though inexpressible (Malvi 2024:6).

Malvi also notes that the concept of “silent text” is meant to evoke the inexpressible in women’s lives. Thus, the acrobat can, on one hand, be associated with the position of the female being within patriarchal culture. She floats in the air, juggles, performs flips—these are all images seen in the film that the director may have used metaphorically to explain what women’s experiences are like in a culture that assigns them a subordinate role within the social structure. On the other hand, the acrobat can also be seen as representing the alternative that Malvi offers on the film screen, as well as in theory and practice, which is to think of being-a-woman outside the constraints imposed by an oppressive culture.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the film, we find a quote from American writer Gertrude Stein, which reads: “The narrative of what wants what wants to be.” With this gesture, the director not only hints that we will be introduced to a certain narrative, story, or discourse but also points to three still unknown elements—something that is still in the process of decision and becoming. Who is it that wants? What is it that wants to be? And what is it that wants? It seems that the director aims to be very transparent about her intention to carry out a specific purpose in the following film, yet the content of that intention remains indeterminate. Why does Lora Malvi choose this particular quote, and why does the content of that quote’s intention remain undefined?

The film *The Riddle of the Sphinx* is created within the framework of the so-called alternative film, in which we find and follow mostly female characters and their lives. It appears that with the idea of making this type of film, Lora Malvi wanted to offer a new perspective not only within the confines of the film, considering that she describes the peculiarity of alternative film as: “Alternative film provides space for the emergence of a film that is radical in political and aesthetic terms and questions the fundamental assumptions of mainstream cinema” (Malvi 2017:41). The film contains two moments that indicate the director’s decision to “birth a film” that will pose questions and move beyond the already seen and marked “male gaze.” The first moment is the choice of Luiz’s former husband’s profession as a film editor, and the second moment is related to the episode where Luiz and Maxine read something that points to Maxine’s diary, where she records her dreams and things she likes. The room where this scene takes place is full of mirrors. At one moment, while the camera, moving in a familiar motion, circles around itself, it stops as it films its own reflection in the mirror. In this shot, I see the mirror reflecting the camera and the cinematographer. This shot seems to aim at breaking the fantasy and the barrier between the viewer and the film (camera). Who is watching whom?

In the previous sections, it was mentioned that Malvi refers to Lacan’s theory. In this specific part with the camera and mirror, it seems that Malvi wants to allude to Lacan’s mirror stage⁴⁷ and thereby “shock” the viewer and influence the moment of pleasure stimulated by watching the film, which is related to the concept of scopophilia (pleasure in looking), and thus pointing to Freud’s interpretation of scopophilia as one of the instincts that constitute sexuality, which within the framework of contemporary Western culture is seen on the film screen through the “male gaze” (Malvi 2017:42).

47 The mirror stage occurs when the child’s physical abilities are exceeded by its physical ambitions, and the result is that the child’s recognition of itself brings joy because it imagines that its reflection in the mirror is more complete and perfect than what it perceives as its own body. Thus, recognition is covered by a layer of misrecognition: the recognized image is understood by the child as a reflection of its own body, but it misrecognizes it as better, and this misrecognition projects the child’s body outside itself, projecting it as the ideal ego, as an alienated subject, which, reintegrated as the ego ideal, paves the way for later identification with others. This mirror moment in the child precedes the emergence of language (Malvi 2017:43).

So, what does the director achieve with this gesture of putting the viewer in a state of confusion, a feeling that the camera is watching them, or that the scene and the narrative into which we as viewers were drawn are merely a fantasy, an ideal? It seems that through the two aforementioned scenes, using metaphor, the author has depicted a rupture with the already-seen frameworks of mainstream films and the layered structures of reality that shape them. Through the image of Luiz's separation from her husband, who is an editor, it appears that Malvi wants to part with the traditional framework of the "male perspective" in film. Meanwhile, the depiction of the camera filming itself in the mirror, and the reading of Maxine's occasionally disturbing dream that indicates the articulation of traumatic truths of Lacan's Real and the dismantling of the phantasmatic framework, challenges the viewer to confront themselves.

So, we could conclude that through the medium of alternative cinema, film theorist and director Lora Malvi aimed to create a cinematic experiment by presenting a narrative about an entity that is foreign to contemporary Western culture, an entity that is yet to desire and become, an entity of being-woman. However, the director chooses to speak with the voice of the Sphinx, that is, the voice of questions and riddles, not claiming to provide truth or answers, and remaining vague about the desire of what is yet to become, thus opening up space for questioning reality and the still-unspoken possibilities of Who is it that desires? What is it that desires yet to be? And what does it desire?

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Imagining a Better World: Gender and Gender-Based Violence in the Novel *Dreamsnake* by Vonda N. McIntyre

Mentor: Associate professor Andrea Lešić-Thomas andrea.lesic72@gmail.com

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo

Abstract

This paper examines the novel *Dreamsnake* by Vonda N. McIntyre, published in 1978. The novel is set in a world devastated by nuclear catastrophe, through which Snake, a healer who uses the venom of her snakes to cure, travels. The story begins with the killing of her most precious snake, the rare dreamsnake. The novel continuously explores gender, gender roles, and their future in a world that bears little resemblance to the world we know today. The paper synthesizes these aspects, analyzes them through feminist critical literature, and offers an interpretation in light of genre conventions.

The first part of the paper addresses the genre classification of the novel. The second part is dedicated to how the novel eliminates gender roles and the specificities and broader implications of such a societal arrangement. The third part focuses on the theme of sexual violence and its consequences within this social framework. The aim of the paper is to present a cognitive leap toward a social organization based on empathy and care for others, forming the basis for the near-total elimination of gender-based violence, where rape is widely understood as an aberration that needs to be and can be addressed. In this way, the paper seeks to contribute to the discussion on the dialectical possibilities of genre literature, especially science fiction, and radical transformative reexaminations of ways of thinking about the world and society.

Keywords: *gender-based violence, sexual violence, science fiction, feminism, post-apocalypse*

1. Introduction

In the article titled *Can Women Fly?*, Inge-Lise Paulsen writes: “A common problem for female writers is how to create female characters who can manifest as alternatives to traditional female stereotypes while maintaining credibility as human beings and women” (Paulsen 1984:104). The writer Vonda N. McIntyre succeeds in this endeavor by creating a protagonist who is a healer, not because she is a stereotypical nurturing woman, but because it is what she wants to be and is willing to undergo intense training and live a demanding life: Snake is the main

character of the novel *Dreamsnake*, published in 1978, which won the Hugo, Nebula, and Locus Poll awards.

At the beginning of the novel, Snake arrives at a desert community to heal a boy's tumor. Driven by fear of snakes, one of the community members kills Grass, her green dreamsnake, an extremely rare alien species used to offer a swift and painless death to patients with no other hope. Without Grass, Snake cannot be a healer; however, dreamsnakes are very difficult to breed, as they refuse to mate. Snake heads back to the healer's station, the school where she began her journey, leaving behind Arevin, a young nomad from the community who pleads with her to stay, as they have begun to develop romantic feelings for each other. Shortly after starting her journey, she is called to heal Jesse's injuries. Jesse tells her that she is from the Center, a closed city that grants the previous requests of healers and has contact with alien species; on her recommendation, Snake might negotiate to obtain more dreamsnakes. Jesse dies from the effects of radioactive exposure sustained while waiting for help after falling from a horse. Snake has to use her other snake, a rattlesnake, to deliver a fatal bite to Jesse and end her suffering.

When she returns to her camp, she discovers that someone has robbed her and destroyed her very valuable diaries and maps. She is helped by Grum, an elderly leader of her nomadic trading clan. Continuing her journey, Snake arrives in the city of Mountainside. The people of Mountainside are renowned for their physical beauty; thus, Snake is surprised to meet a girl, Melissa, whose face is scarred from a fire. After discovering that Melissa's guardian physically and sexually abuses her, Snake adopts her and takes her with her. They are not granted permission to enter the Center; however, they are attacked by the same man who robbed Snake's camp. When it is revealed that he is addicted to dreamsnake venom, Snake learns of a community whose leader, North, possesses many dreamsnakes and occasionally rewards his followers with their bite. They travel to this community, where they learn that these snakes only mate under extremely cold conditions and exclusively in threes, unlike earthly species that mate in pairs; this reflects the increasing occurrence of triple marriages among people. North captures them, but due to her profession's resistance to venom, Snake manages to escape from the pit of snakes, carrying a bag full of dreamsnakes. She then rescues the captive Melissa, and outside the community, they are found by Arevin, who helps them recover and begin journey back to the healer's station.

The story is linear and contains typical elements of the hero's journey: new knowledge, disappointments, both minor and major overcome obstacles, unexpected twists, and, ultimately, a changed epistemological framework not only for the heroine but for the entire world. The difference between this traditional monomyth and this example is the heroine's gender: she is a woman, but this does not imply that the genre with a higher degree of mimesis (colloquially referred to as a "more realistic" genre) would necessarily have. Absolutely nothing that Snake personally experiences during her journey is conditioned by her gender identity. It is true that she possesses two venomous snakes, which she acknowledges are enough to deter many potential villains. However, even when she fears an attack or worries that a lunatic is following her and destroying the little property she carries with her, the potential violence simply does not have a gender-based component. With Arevin, she feels the possibility of a romantic relationship, and he travels to

help her; however, he never rescues her from immediate danger because Snake does not need a man's help—she is capable of rescuing herself from trouble. Arevin does not insist on taking a superior position relative to her, nor does he question her abilities; instead, he is content with an equal role in their very young relationship at the end of the novel. His task, at that moment, is to care for her and Melissa.

Gender and gender-based violence are not the only, but they are the most visible important themes that the novel addresses, and it does so through negation: gender roles are abolished, meritocracy prevails in the nomadic tribes, and Snake, although a woman, does not experience fear of gender-based violence. The only exception is Melissa: her experience is a shock to Snake, as she has not previously encountered the concept of rape. This study will demonstrate how the world in the novel is organized without noticeable gender differences and roles, whether and how gender-based violence occurs in that world, and how solutions to these problems are envisioned. It will particularly focus on the episode in which Snake meets and then adopts Melissa to save her from continuous sexual violence, the only such example appearing in the novel. Considering that the novel was published nearly five decades ago, the study will also read it through the lens of contemporary literature, especially concerning consent and sexual violence. Such a reading shows that the novel already revolutionarily recontextualized issues of gender-based violence that remain relevant today—some of which have only begun to be articulated in public discourse after the era in which the novel was published.

1.1. A Few Introductory Notes

Before beginning the paper, it is necessary to make a few notes regarding the language of the novel and translation decisions. The novel *Dreamsnake* was translated into the languages of the Western Balkans in 1984, when it was published in *Monolit*, a science fiction almanac edited by Bojan Knežević, who is also an author of science fiction stories and novels. The translated title of the novel was *Guja sna*. However, as I was unable to obtain the translation in time for this paper, I decided to use the original English edition as the primary source. For the name of the snake species that plays a central role in the story, I will use the translated term *guja sna* to avoid the awkwardness of declining foreign words. The novel's title, however, will be kept in its original English form, which can also serve as a note that in the case of translations, these are my own translations. In this regard, I will translate phrases that are not established in our language but have a direct translation (for example, "healing station" for *iscjeliteljska stanica*).

Another issue is the gender identity of the character Meredith. In the original English version, the gender of this character is never emphasized, as the author skillfully avoids using any gender-specific pronouns. However, unlike our languages, English does not have grammatical gender, which significantly facilitates this artistic approach. In the paper, I will address this instance through the lens of the English original due to the impossibility of consulting the Serbian translation, which likely had to approach this issue differently. The focus of the paper as a whole will not be on this character and the lack of gender differentiation; the character is used only as an example of radical thinking about gender and gender identity, and for the detailed construction of a world where this identity is no longer existentially crucial.

1.2. Genre Definition of the Novel

In terms of genre classification, *Dreamsnake* firmly belongs to the domain of science fiction within the context of reception. For a narrative to be classified as science fiction, it must possess what is known as a “novum,” a “cognitive innovation that is added to or woven into the empirically ‘known’—i.e., culturally defined—world of the author” (Suvin 1979:36).

The most noticeable, but not the only, novum introduced by *Dreamsnake* is the use of domesticated snakes and their venom for healing various illnesses, including difficult-to-cure diseases such as tumors.

However, Suvin points out that there is a genre distinction between naturalistic fiction, which does not require scientific explanation, fantasy, which does not allow for such explanations, and science fiction, which both demands and allows them (ibid). *Dreamsnake* offers relatively few explanations for the world in which readers find themselves: it is filled with radioactive craters left from the last war; snakes are genetically manipulated for medical purposes, but the laboratories where this is done only retain a nostalgic memory of electronic microscopes; in the Center, a domed city that allows no entry under any circumstances, the inhabitants are in contact with extraterrestrial beings.

Compared to other science fiction novels, which elaborate on their novum in detail and are categorized as either hard or soft sci-fi based on the type of explanation (hard usually reserved for technological novums, soft for social and cultural ones), *Dreamsnake*, even when it does provide explanations, is quite economical, resembling more fantastical genres. If we accept this form of categorization—allowing *Dreamsnake* to be classified as fantasy—it would, in that case, fall into the category of immersive fantasy. According to Farah Mendlesohn’s division, immersive fantasy is inherently closest to science fiction: the world is minimally explained, so “our cognitive estrangement is simultaneously complete and denied” (Mendlesohn 2008). The author adds that immersive fantasy often appears in worlds where magic is absent, so the main difference between this type of fantasy and science fiction as a distinct genre is that the world of the former is archaic, while the latter’s is innovative. Since *Dreamsnake* has elements of both—civilizations whose technology was largely destroyed by nuclear war, but which had previously made contact with extraterrestrial species—the novel is thus impossible to categorize definitively within a single genre.

On the other hand, these genres share the characteristic of not belonging to so-called low-mimetic modes (realistic or realistic in a broader sense) by Northrop Frye’s definition: we do not expect them to exhibit a degree of “realism” or verisimilitude—in fact, we often seek them to stand out as visibly different from the world we know (Frye 2020). Therefore, it is important to resist the urge to read such works as instructions, recipes, or even inspirations. Their novum distinguishes them from such literary works, and one of the most recognizable novums in *Dreamsnake* is the way social and gender roles function within this world.

2. Space, Time, and Gender Roles in *Dreamsnake*

Balancing between the need for detailed explanation in science fiction and the implicit recognizability of the world, *Dreamsnake* offers only basic hints about the space and time in which the narrative unfolds. From the episode involving Jesse and her partners, we learn that the face of this world bears the scars of radioactive craters that originated from the last war. This war has destroyed the last vestiges of global civilization, so in the time when the story takes place, both Snake and the majority of the people she encounters live in a bewildering reality: it blends genetic manipulation experiments with a world where the technology needed to build an electronic microscope is lost.

Snake first treats nomadic peoples in the desert and then arrives in a mountain town where people live in stone houses and use gas lighting, but know about aspirin and are happy to sell it to her. In other words, the combination of relatively rudimentary living conditions with science and technology that use ideas and technologies colloquially most often associated with contemporary times (vaccines, genetic engineering, solar panels) creates a picture of a world that clings to preserved scientific achievements but lives beyond nuclear catastrophe. Nevertheless, the novel's insistence on focusing on plot development and interpersonal relationships rather than on the environment and the state of the world means that the reader's sense of disorientation in the world—which prevents full immersion—persists until the very end. This is one of the most unusual yet intriguing approaches to science fiction: Ursula K. Le Guin writes that the world of the novel is a “half-known, half-strange desert world” where significant attention is paid to emotional states, moods, and character changes: “And its generosity towards those characters is very unusual, especially in science fiction which has a tendency towards competitive elitism” (Le Guin 2011:6).

Focus on Interpersonal Relationships in *Dreamsnake*

This focus on interpersonal relationships rather than the physical world surrounding the characters highlights—though it does not question—one of the greatest differences from our own, observable world: people often live in triadic partnerships resembling marriages, though it is unclear whether this world recognizes such a formal structure as marriage. There appears to be no rule about the biological sex of participants in a triad should be, although fully same-sex triads do not appear either; in all examples, there is some combination, such as two men and one woman, or two women and one man.

McIntyre, relatively early in the novel—in the second episode when Snake treats Jesse—radically and subtly questions the importance of gender identity by never specifying the gender of one of Jesse's partners, Merideth. In every instance where a personal (he or she) or possessive pronoun (his or her) might be used, the author opts for the character's name instead. Additionally, Merideth is a relatively neutral Welsh name in English-speaking areas. It can, but does not have to, be associated with one gender; this is a matter of the reader's expectations and is not predetermined. The author thus leaves it up to readers to (not) assign a gender identity to a character, unequivocally indicating the arbitrariness of gender as a

construct. Ursula K. Le Guin writes that she herself did not notice the omission of this character's gender and realized she read Merideth as a man: "I still remember the shock of realizing that I had been nicely subverted. All those things we say about gender as a social construct, as an expectation, turned out to be embedded in my own mind. And through that discovery, my mind was opened" (Le Guin 2011:7). Such recognition might be practically reassuring to readers: if one of the greatest feminist science fiction writers was "fooled" by McIntyre's approach, which she performs "infallibly, with light charm" (ibid.), then we too can forgive ourselves for only then encountering the possibility of opening our minds—rejecting assumptions, refusing to read into the text something that, in reality, isn't there.

2. The Character of Merideth and the Utopian Nature of *Dreamsnake*

As intriguing as the character Merideth is as a linguistic and literary device, it also reveals the utopian nature of the novel itself. If gender is not important to the extent that it does not need to be asserted or even noticed, as evidenced by this post-apocalyptic world, what does this say about the world depicted? If people do not adjust their treatment of others based on perceived gender, it implies that there is no need to do so, that gender identity does not divide people into two distinct types. This is also reflected in the division of responsibilities and duties within the nomadic communities: these societies elect their representatives regardless of their gender, and Arevin, a young man, like all other members, occasionally takes responsibility for children, even babies in the tribe, thus freeing the mothers to focus on their own duties. Survival in the desert is harsh and demands hard work, as the novel reminds us; confining people to a single type of obligation based on their gender identity would be counterproductive.

This directly contrasts with the modern concept of the sexual contract as defined by Carole Pateman: in this framework, which has been intrinsic not only to the present era since the Enlightenment but also to the patriarchal system as a whole, women are restricted to the private sphere through the sexual contract and thereby excluded from the public sphere, and vice versa; men belong to the public sphere and participate minimally in the daily responsibilities of the private sphere (Pateman 1988). Pateman thoroughly explores how contract theory facilitates such inequality, especially to the detriment of women, but ultimately concludes that it is not possible to "reform" the problematic parts of the sexual contract and that a new beginning is necessary (ibid). The novel *Dreamsnake* actually aligns deeply with this thesis: even a decade before Pateman published her ideas, the novel envisions a world without the sexual contract, but only after a nuclear catastrophe has rendered the planet unrecognizable.

Feminist utopian novels written during the era of the second wave of feminism - to which *Dreamsnake* also belongs - imagine, in turn, "social structures based on community and harmony with the natural world" (Silbergleid 1997:158). In this case, it works to create community and harmony conditioned by a world that has become almost completely alien to people, to the species that evolved with it; they must suddenly adapt or disappear. Moreover, one innovation helps adaptation that also includes gender equality. In the world that McIntyre presents to us, people have the ability to biocontrol: they can mentally control their reproductive

processes, thus making themselves infertile during sexual intercourse. Although it is not clarified in what ways women control their own processes (and it is mentioned that women are able to stop their own menstrual cycle and even terminate an unwanted pregnancy), men can raise the temperature of their testicles high enough to kill their own sperm. One of the plots in the episode in *Mountainside* belongs to Gabriel, the mayor's handsome but shy son, who has no biocontrol because he was taught to keep the temperature of the testicles low, which is not as effective. During his first sexual experience, when he was 15 years and his partner 12, neither of them controlled well enough her body so she became pregnant. She managed to terminate the pregnancy, but almost bled to death. Gabriel explains to Snake that the unfortunate event left an extremely deep impact on him, but also that the other inhabitants of the city look at him with distrust, because they wonder what there is nothing wrong with him if he failed to learn the basics of the much-understood biocontrol.

Biocontrol as a novelty thus introduces the next part of the paper: Does sexual violence persist in a world where people have complete control over their biological processes, and if so, how?

3. Sex, Consent, and Rape in the Novel *Dreamsnake*

As a traveling healer, Snake is afraid of people who might rob her, which is later concretized through the lunatic who follows her. However, at no point does she fear sexual violence. Not only is such fear not articulated through her internal monologues, but it is also not reflected in her behavior: she does not hesitate to rest her head on Arevin's shoulder after a very brief acquaintance (and laments not having enough time to engage in an intimate relationship with him); she is not deterred by physical contact with Merideth, a person of indeterminate gender; she engages in a sexual relationship with Gabriel, whom she also knows only briefly, but his lack of biocontrol disturbs her. She knows that this has nothing to do with potential pregnancy, as she not only has perfect biocontrol but is also likely sterile as a healer; she realizes that her additional, previously unnecessary caution is due to the fact that she cannot have the same level of trust in Gabriel as she has in her other partners, and that they have in her. Based on this trust, which she had previously taken for granted, sexual relationships among people become freer, less controversial, and therefore more frequent.

With certain variations, this is the case in every society that Snake encounters. While searching for her, Arevin meets people who indirectly offer him sex; it is not prostitution, but sex for pleasure, without inhibitions or the imperative to build a romantic relationship from it. When Arevin spends the night in a camp with young people he has just met, a young woman—Jean—offers to spend the night with him. When he declines because he wants to be intimate only with Snake, she is offended, thinking that he is questioning her biocontrol or her health. After this brief interaction, Arevin's internal monologue reveals that he has had casual sexual partners, both in his and other clans, but that he abstains because no one else attracts him except Snake.

Perhaps at first it is difficult to imagine sexual violence in this world - for Snake it's also difficult when she comes across this case - but she's naive, just like her she realizes herself, to reject the possibility of his existence. Melissa is a little girl who is helped out at the mayor's stables in Mountainside. She was hurt in a fire a few years earlier; much of her body, including half of her face, is scarred. Mountainside is a city known for the physical beauty of its residents, so Melissa very early on internalizes the idea that she is disfigured and thus unworthy of love and attention, which makes her vulnerable when it comes to the chief groom and her guardian, Ras, who physically and sexually abuses her. Snake knows about the physical abuse, but she is aware that he doesn't can directly intervene, because Ras would take revenge on Melissa as soon as Snake is gone. However, when Melissa finds Gabriel sleeping naked in bed with Snake, she reacts upset, through which Snake discovers that Ras has been raping Melissa for years. It's the only sexual relationship that Melissa knows: sex for her is humiliation and pain, a terrible guilt that she has to pay because she's deformed, she doesn't believe Snake that sex can be pleasurable and that a woman can voluntarily, without coercion, decide to go to bed with a man⁴⁸.

Melissa doesn't even know what biocontrol is; she is completely disenfranchised, with no way to ask for help. Melissa lives in a patriarchy surrounded by a post-patriarchal world.

In this constellation, Melissa's experience can be read through the idea that a feminist Andrea Dworkin represents in her work *Intercourse*: in the patriarchal system, (every) intercourse is violence - hence the infamous reduction of this idea to a reductionist slogan that in patriarchy "every heterosexual sex is rape" (Dworkin 2007). Melissa does not know that her experience is literal rape: she is the victim of what the philosopher Miranda Fricker calls epistemic injustice, which is based on this that the perpetrator knows more about his crime than the victim, often even that it is about crime (Fricker 2007). Moreover, Melissa is the victim of both types of epistemic injustice: i hermeneutical injustice (original: hermeneutical injustice), in which she is not capable of understanding what is happening to her and that what is happening to her is a kind of injustice, and testimonial injustice (originally: testimonial injustice), which means that because of her age and physical deformities, the citizens of Mountainside wouldn't believe her, even if they dared to testify against Ras. Snake at first tries to spare her the need to testify by asking to adopt Melissa instead of receiving money for the treatment services from the mayor. When Ras objects, Snake is forced to change her approach: when she withdraws her application to adopt Melissa, she requests that Melissa travel instead to a teacher for women, who will teach her biocontrol; this is enough for the mayor to ask worriedly how come twelve-year-old Melissa hasn't mastered biocontrol yet, that she didn't even visit the teacher, and when Ras says that it doesn't matter, because who would touch her, Melissa works up the courage to say that he is touching her. The mayor's reaction is immediate: if she wants, Melissa can go with Snake, and Ras has to heal.

48 Although the novel allows for homosexuality, particularly through the concept of triadic relationships, and implies the existence of homosexual connections, the overall structure remains predominantly heteronormative.

Another novelty is the idea that Ras can be cured of his eccentricity, in the absence of better expression. It is difficult to determine, in the context of the narrative, whether he should heal from some urge that leads him to rape or pedophilia; given that it is his control over Melissa based on epistemic injustice, probably it's about combination of these two possibilities. Rape is not based on sexual need or on pleasure, but on control. Melissa has no ability to defend herself, she is completely flooded by racial control. Because of this, it is clear that the mayor's release of Melissa because of the impossibility of biocontrol, it is not a reason, but a trigger: learning biocontrol, implied through Gabriel's example, also implies sexual education, which can help Melissa's emancipation. On the other hand, it still does not guarantee that a person is capable of resisting different forms of sexual violence such as we know from the simple fact that she has mastered biocontrol.

Rape knows various "gray zones" both in the legal sense, but also in the broader social sense discourse. As psychologist Nicola Gavey points out in her work *Just Sex? The Cultural Scaffolding of Rape*, everyday normative forms of heterosexuality, taken for granted, represent a cultural framework for rape: even women's sexual liberation campaigns that are fundamentally androcentric: "Normative heterosex is structured or written in ways that allow too much vagueness in distinguishing what is rape and what is just sex" (Gavey 2019:2). So what happens in cases where one person agrees only for the other to stop pushing? What if the person who so reluctantly agreed doesn't believe that she was raped? What if there is an imbalance in social positions or power relations between partners?

None of these questions find their answer in the concept of biocontrol. The answer is rather located in a social organization that has completely transcended Gavey's normative heterosex. Sex is not asked for, but offered, regardless of gender identity of the one who offers. No one "loses" here, as implied by the concept of consent. In the world of the novel, no gender is subordinated to another, nor are one's needs assumed as more important or urgent. Everyone can fulfill their physical needs relatively easily with any partner without the risk of social stigmatization. Sex is then understood as a form of care for another, which is in perfect harmony with the rest of the novel: if we would insist on isolating one common thread throughout the entire novel, that could be the concern for another. And when it comes to care, empathy, suppressing one's own selfish impulses, there is no place for persuasion, insistence and manipulation. Such a change in approach was not created by the invention of biocontrol or genetic modifications (at least as far as we know). It was created through a cognitive leap by which each of us has a seemingly obvious assumption about the relationship between the sexes thoroughly shaken and most often completely betrayed.

We notice this change through the fact that Snake throughout the whole situation is not a little surprised, as if she doesn't understand the concept of rape. However, not completely changed mental structure does not mean that rape must be eliminated - enough is to be invisible. After all, Melissa is again an ideal example for that: her scars make her invisible, so nothing "visible" can happen to her. One of the biggest problems that the discourse on sexual violence tried to overcome between 1978, when the novel was published, is the invisibility of rape that does not fit in, is still present today, the widely accepted image of a violent act which as such is an aberration, not the rule. Because of this, newer literature from various

sciences - primarily law, psychology and philosophy - questions the justification of understanding consent, which is binary in nature, as decisive factors in determining the nature of sexual relations. Lawyer and feminist Catharine MacKinnon insists on the insufficiency of consent as a concept: in one interview says that consent is “the main legal and social excuse for doing nothing on the occasion of sexual coercion” (Laroche-Joubert 2023). Although it is in a legal context certainly understandable why it is necessary to reconsider the consent - because the rigid letter of the law does not know the subtleties specific to everyday life and its decisions - understanding consent in the everyday environment does not have to be so radical. Philosopher Manon Garcia believes that consent can also serve to liberate: by insisting that the law is not the basis of her book *The Joy of Consent*, she suggests understanding consent as an emancipatory tool, but only on the condition that it precedes an understanding of the ways in which existing social norms create sexual injustices (Garcia 2023). Garcia doesn’t make the cognitive leap that *Dreamsnake* does though. It’s true that consent is also an emancipatory tool in the novel: Snake explicitly consents to each sexual act in which he enters, but also asks for Gabriel’s consent. However, for complete understanding of the differences between our world and the world of the novel, it is important to return to the specificity of the approach to this topic: when we talk about consent in the novel, we are not talking about consent to the request, but acceptance of the offer. Simply put, it doesn’t work like demanding something that someone else has, but about offering what we have.

In this way, *Dreamsnake* is much closer to a radical end to binary consent as represented by MacKinnon rather than its reconceptualization in the idea of Garcia. Even with the time gap between the novel and the literature mentioned here, into the novel the inscribed change in human society is much more fundamental and radical than anything else which still offers emancipatory thought today. The difference, of course, is in our thinking of life within patriarchy and McIntyre’s imagining of life after patriarchy.

4. Conclusion

Reading *Dreamsnake* (or, if you will, any utopian novel) for ideas on how to fix this world is to require art to limit itself exclusively to a didactic function. What the novel can offer, on the other hand, is a kind of proof that better worlds, social structures based on coexistence can be imagined and empathy - even when they are imperfect, even when the first plot of the novel arises as a consequence of very human fear, misunderstanding and conservatism. “Yes, there are also elements of fantasy in McIntyre’s book, but they are so thoroughly, carefully handled in terms of social and personal behaviors that their demonstration is a constant trait of goodness persuasive in human nature – and as far removed from sentimentality as from cynicism”, explains Le Guin (2011:6). The charm of the novel is precisely that: in imagining so that it would appear that people are still people, with all the complaints and shortcomings that we attribute to ourselves, just a little more compassionate, a little more open, and - above all - equal. The fact that we consider gender equality, gentleness and compassion to be radical changes in relation to one’s own world shows the necessity of such excursions into the strange and unexpected. And

science fiction really knows how to create such a world: almost unrecognizable and yet nostalgic, an escape from everyday life and a thought challenge, colorful, a still full of beings that are fundamentally human - and sometimes a little more humane than real, living people.

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Gender and Violence in the Balkans, edited by Jelena Ćeriman, Aleksandra Knežević, and Gordana Lalić-Krstin, describe it as an academically ambitious and pedagogically exceptional endeavor. It includes 22 chapters written by students from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia. Through these chapters, these emerging young scholars, under the mentorship of their professors, tackle many dimensions of gender and gender-based violence as academic topics and social issues facing the societies of the region. Looking solely at the content, the anthology provides an immensely valuable perspective on the subject, approached by students from various disciplines and methodologies. In this way, through numerous smaller pieces of the puzzle, it presents a whole that exposes the problem of gender discrimination and violence in the Balkans to its devastating reality.

Professor Tanja Vučković Juroš Department of Sociology Faculty of Philosophy University of Zagreb

The anthology *Gender and Violence in the Balkans* serves as a register of knowledge on gender issues, representing an exceptional contribution to the study of gender in the region. It provides insightful reflections on the traumatic context of violence, benefiting both those who have long been dedicated to this issue and those who are just beginning their study. Moreover, this book, which also serves as a mosaic of the transition processes in the Balkans, leads toward justice and liberation. It is a register of concepts that we must master on this path, aware that, unfortunately, entrenched patterns persist because patriarchy is resistant to change, pervasive, unpredictable, and complex, making it difficult but not unbeatable. It is important to remember that in this narrative, there are many key terms, but the one we must understand and accept as a guide through turbulent realities is solidarity.

Professor Aleksandra Nikčević Batričević Department of English Language and Literature Faculty of Philology, Nikšić University of Montenegro

The scientific research papers presented in this anthology, each in its own research segment, make a significant contribution to understanding the issue of gender-based violence and to the critical reflection on its causes and consequences. The concepts are clearly defined and drawn from multiple sources, providing insight into the extensive theoretical research on the given topics. The data obtained through empirical research have confirmed the hypotheses set forth, and with a clearly defined methodology, demonstrate a very serious scientific approach. Such work with students, where the results of scientific research clearly reflect substantial theoretical-methodological preparation and the mentorship of professors, is a crucial segment in recognizing gender-based violence and contributing to its practical treatment, especially in prevention, which is the most important step for the future.

Dr. Sabina Subašić Galijatović

Institute for the Study of Crimes Against Humanity and International Law University of Sarajevo

To speak comprehensively and systematically about the phenomenon of violence and to critically illuminate the context that enables, encourages, or fails to punish it is, in itself, a brave and responsible act that must break the confines of the classroom. If we are exposed to the stimulus to think and speak up instead of remaining silent and in denial, it is very possible that we will begin to change the culture—or lack of culture—that condones violence and fails to address it. Therefore, the anthology *Gender and Violence in the Balkans* can indeed be understood as a form of direct action aimed at changing that culture.

Dr. Adriana Zaharijević Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory University of Belgrade



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