

VAWG in public spaces

Key findings

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NASILJE PREMA ŽENAMA I DEVOJČICAMA U JAVNOM PROSTORU

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Violence against women and girls in public spaces

- Women and girls are exposed to various forms of violence in all areas/spaces where their daily lives take place
- Women and girls in Serbia do not feel safe in public spaces
- They have a high level of fear of crime
- They are exposed to various forms of violence.

Public space

- **PUBLIC SPACE is not gender sensitive nor adapted to the needs of women and girls. It is male dominated** (names of streets, institutions...)
- Open spaces accessible to all, including town squares, streets, underground passages and garages, markets, parks, parking lots, public transport, public transport stops, outdoor venues where sports and cultural events are held, and all other public places that are freely used and where time is spent
- (Aligned with the UN HABITAT definition, does not include spaces that are not open to the general public, such as schools, stadiums, hospitals, municipality halls, airports and the like)

Research methodology

- **Desk research**
- **Empirical research** – four research methods, one quantitative and three qualitative
 - Survey (1212 women 15+)
 - In-depth interviews (31)
 - Focus group discussions (50 women)
 - Case studies (6, but over 60 testimonies collected)

Fear of the crime

- Women felt unsafe both during the day and at night, but the **feeling of unsafety** was especially evident for the **night period**.
- **Unlit streets** located far from the town or village centre, parks and densely forested parts of the town, **areas around clubs/restaurants/venues** selling alcohol/narcotics were extremely unsafe public spaces.
- For girls and younger women, **public transport stops and public transport**, especially the lines far from the town centre, as well as the parts in the back of transport vehicles, were extremely unsafe.
- The biggest cause of women's fear of crime during the night was the rise in street violence, **followed by sexual assaults and sexual harassment**, while pickpocketing and street robberies ranked third.
- The **younger the women were, the greater their fear of sexual violence** was.

Level of the fear of the crime

- As for the women who expressed fear of certain forms of crime, their greatest fear was ('Very afraid'):
 - Rape
 - Murder
 - Kidnapping
 - Sexual harassment
- A slightly lower level of fear ('Afraid') was present when it comes to pickpocketing, sexual harassment, attempted rape, and verbal assault.
- Girls and younger women were more affraid.
- Also, they were afraid of being followed and stalked.

Evaluation of the work of institutions & Personal safety strategies

- Institutions are evaluated with very low grades (police; LSGU; etc.) – lower graded by young women (15-17).
- **As many as 76.7%** of the respondents believed that they themselves were responsible for their own safety.
- Women primarily rely on their own strategies:
 - limitation of their own movement (e.g. giving up from going out at the night)
 - length of stay in public spaces
 - different precaution measures (phone – light or pretend to talk or actually talk...)

Assessment of prevalence of different forms of violence in public spaces

- Most women believed that violence in public spaces was very widespread and happened very often.
- All the time: inappropriate staring or leering
- Occasionally: unwanted touching, hugging and kissing
- Very often: offensive catcalls and comments referring to physical appearance and way of dressing, while many women are exposed to different comments with sexual connotation, especially when they pass by a group of men.

Personal experience of violence in public space

- Women had different personal experiences concerning certain forms of violence in public spaces both during the course of their life and in the year preceding the survey.
- There were more women in the sample claiming that they had experienced the following forms of violence one to three times:
 - unwanted touching, hugging and kissing, inappropriate staring or leering, jokes with sexual connotation or insulting comments
 - inappropriate dating invitations, intrusive and offensive questions about their private life, and also obscene gestures, honking, whistling and catcalling, and bullying behaviour
 - men exposing private/intimate body parts, physical assaults and injuries, snatching of a bag or purse, grabbing and pinching body parts, following and stalking, and violent behaviour.

Personal experience of violence in public space

- **9,2% of the women had experienced rape or attempted rape in public space** (the most numerous age group 40-49);
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- The least safe place was the street, then public transport, parking lot, park, bus stop, promenade.
- The lowest number of women had experienced violence at outdoor concerts, outdoor venues for recreational sports, and large outdoor sports events

Personal experience of violence in public space

- Women most often experienced violence when returning from work or school and at night.
- Violence in public spaces usually occurred in the presence of third persons, who usually failed to react, especially if the victim was a Roma woman. Witnesses of such events usually opted to “mind their own business” and did not want to be involved in the event in any way.
- Most women did not react, because they did not expect violence and were “caught by surprise”. However, there were a relatively large number of women who ran away and shouted, while the smallest number of women called the police or ignored the perpetrator.

Personal experience of violence in public space

- Women generally did not report violence in public spaces to the police, and the police took no action regarding the violence that was reported.
- Filing criminal complaints was extremely rare, and initiating criminal proceedings was even more sporadic.
- Women claimed that the reaction of the police was inadequate, that violence in public spaces was relativised, and that women experienced secondary victimisation, which further contributed to non-reporting of violence.
- Other reasons: shame, fear of the perpetrator, lack of information; fear that others will find out what happened, waste of time.

Consequences of violence

- Violence against women in public space causes a series of negative psychological consequences.
- For the majority of women, violence caused anxiety, anger, unease and fear. A significant number of women had a desire for revenge, they felt shame and embarrassment, and even guilt, and for some women violence led to a decline in self-confidence, feeling of safety and emotional stability.
- Violence in public spaces predominantly took the form of psychological or verbal violence, while physical violence was far less common, mostly in the form of inflicting minor injuries, which does not diminish its being a threat to society and against the law.

Support from women's CSO

- There were a very small number of women with experience of violence in a public space who turned to women's organisations for support and assistance.
- Of those who approached these organisations, the majority stated that they received no concrete help, and a small number of women said that the conversation benefited them.
- The reasons for not contacting women's organisations varied: women could deal with the problem themselves, they did not know that such organisations existed, or they were convinced that these organisations could not help them.

Thank you!

