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Violence against women

Assessing Domestic Violence against Women - Lessons Learned from Research in Serbia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present lessons learned from two surveys on violence against women conducted in Central Serbia in 2010 (Babovic, Ginic, Vukovic, 2010) and in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in 2013 (Babovic, Ginic, Vukovic, 2013). Both surveys were the first surveys specially focused on VAW that were implemented on a representative sample of the population, so they enabled valid measures of prevalence. However, the survey in Serbia was limited to Central Serbia, while in BiH the sample was constructed in a way that enabled conclusions at the state level (whole BiH) and entity levels (Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska). The main differences between surveys were: in the subjects - in Serbia the focus was only on domestic violence against women, while in BiH non-domestic VAW was also included; in VAW measures - in BiH UNECE indicators defined the methodological framework, while in Serbia indices were constructed based on different methodologies; in data collection methods – in Serbia self-completion and face-to-face interviews in BiH. The results of two surveys were not comparable due to these differences, but they brought abundant experience and enabled us to learn about specific advantages and disadvantages based on that experience.

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Lessons learned are presented along several dimensions: definitions, indices, data sources, data collection method, factors of VAW and specific contexts. These lessons are of particular importance in this moment as Serbia prepares for first FRA survey. Although implementation of FRA survey means implementation of already defined methodology and standards, it will be important to take into account previous experiences and to enable at least partial comparability with previous surveys in order to estimate possible changes in the prevalence and characteristics of VAW. Lessons are also important in the context of further development and monitoring of policies and improvement of the system for protection and prevention.

I. Lesson 1: The scale and features of violence cannot reliably be estimated based on official evidence - specialized surveys are necessary

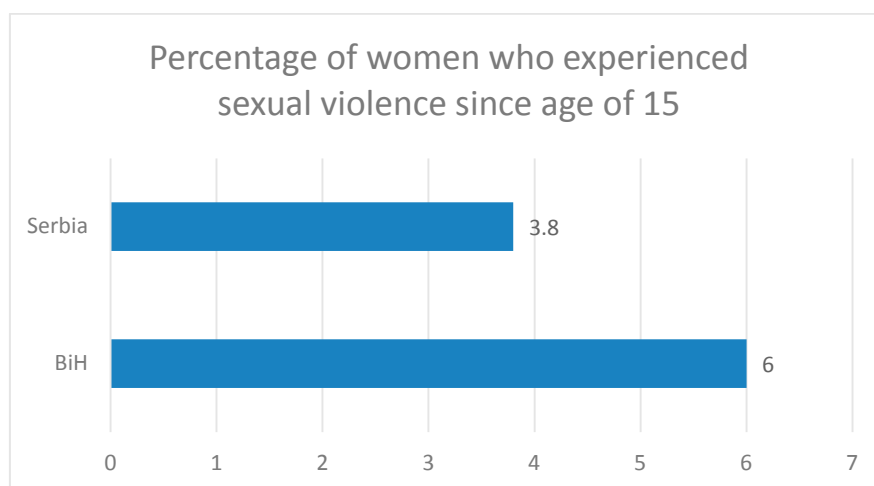
1. The improvement of official evidence on VAW is necessary for improvement of the protection of women and monitoring and evaluation of relevant policies and functioning of systems for protection and their component parts (police, health care, social protection, judiciary, etc.). However, relying only on data registered by the system for protection carries a risk of severely underestimating the scale of violence and of getting a biased view of its numerous features. This is because only 10% of women who were exposed to violence contacted any institution or organization for support (including medical doctor, police, centres for social work or NGO specialized for support to victims of violence), as indicated by the surveys. In BiH 13% of women did not know to name any institution or organization that might provide support in case of violence.
2. Secondly, it is important to have a proper specialized survey, not only a module in any household survey. VAW is a highly sensitive topic and instruments, interviewing situation, methods of interviewing, all elements of the survey have to be designed specifically in line with the with sensitivity, needs and risks of respondents and interviewers. Only through specialized surveys is it possible to obtain more appropriate insights into the scale and features of VAW. Even in specialized surveys, due to the tendency to hide violence, we can assume that obtained prevalence rates are lower than real.

II. Lesson 2: Operational definitions of violence - Be cautious when saving space and time by reducing number of items measuring forms of violent behaviour

3. The definitions of VAW were very similar in both surveys, although the survey in Serbia was implemented prior to the Istanbul Convention while the survey in BiH was aligned with definitions in the Convention. Four types of violence were included: physical, psychological (with two sub-forms: emotional and controlling/stalking), economic and sexual. Operational definitions of violence are crucial for the estimation of the prevalence rates. The prevalence rate is very sensitive to the number and type of items (forms of concrete violent behaviours) that are used to measure certain form of violence. Limited resources put pressure to reduce the number of items, and this can significantly influence the total prevalence rate and prevalence rates of specific forms of VAW.
4. The survey in BiH included 4 items for measuring sexual violence, while in Serbia only 2 items were included. Basically, indicators in Serbia were limited to measuring rape (forced sexual intercourse or some acts during the sexual intercourse by verbal or physical threat or harm). The questionnaire for

BiH included in addition to rape only one question, asking about experiences of touching or any other acts that were of sexual meaning without the consent of the respondent. This influenced higher prevalence rate of sexual violence. Although the results are not fully comparable due to the different data collection methods, clearly there is difference in life-time experience of sexual violence between women from Serbia and BiH which are grounded in the differences in definition.

Figure 1:

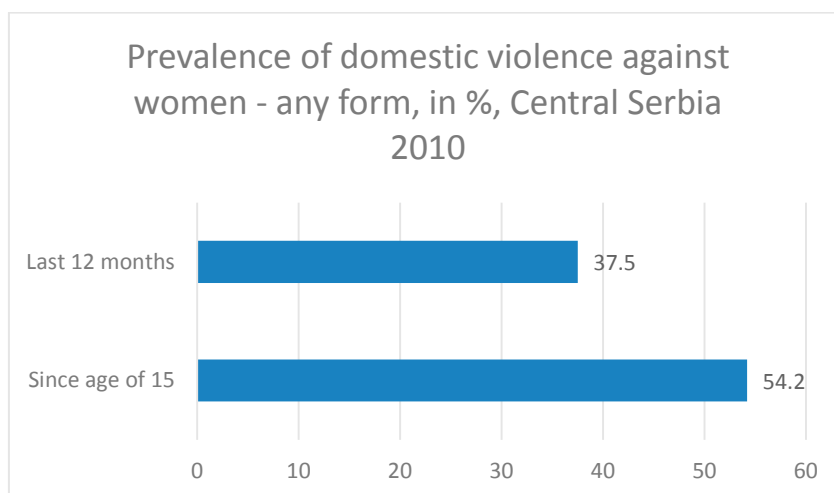


Source: Babovic, Ginic, Vukovic, 2010, 2013.

III. Lesson 3: We need precise single indices, but also complex, composite indicators that enable life course perspective

5. The indices enable us to measure precisely prevalence, incidence of different forms of violence, lifetime and current, as well as to identify characteristics of perpetrators. There is no doubt that we need precise indicators to measure single forms of violence – i.e. sexual violence committed by current partners – but often focusing on a single form or perpetrator, or only the current period hinders measurement of the real scale of violence to which women are exposed throughout their life course.

Figure 2:



Source: Babovic, Ginic, Vukovic, 2010.

- Some women are exposed to multiple forms of violence and this kind of ‘concentration’ of violence leads to particularly severe damage and undermines their chances to lead quality lives. Over 40% of women are exposed to multiple forms of violence and 15% to three or more forms.

Table 1: Exposure to different forms of violence since age of 15, Serbia 2010

Forms of violence	% of women who experienced violence since age of 15
Psychological	46.1
Physical and psychological	17.3
Physical, psychological and economic	12.0
Psychological and economic	8.0
Economic	4.8
Physical	4.2
Physical, psychological, economic and sexual	3.4
Other	4.3
Total	100

Source: Babovic, Ginic, Vukovic, 2010.

- A life course perspective is important to take into account when researching violence, as it reveals the diversity of forms of violence to which women were exposed during lifetime and the ‘gallery’ of perpetrators. Only with this kind of insights can we study violence as embedded in social relations of women with other persons, as structured, rooted in culture and reproduced by ineffective, unsupportive formal and informal institutions. The qualitative component of the research in Serbia reveals that a typical pattern of violence throughout the life course includes violence in the primary family, mostly committed by the father, which continues during adult age and is committed mostly by partners (current and former), and transforms in older age into violence committed by sons in addition to partners or as a replacement for partner violence (in the case of widowed women). It also changes form, as young women are more exposed to physical violence than older, but it does not stop even in old age. Older women often describe that lack of physical strength and physical

capabilities of their partners does not stop violence but just transforms it from physical to more intense psychological.

8. The quantitative survey data did not enable this life course perspective in the full sense, but comparing different generation of women, these qualitative insights are confirmed. In the following table the most frequent perpetrators of physical violence committed against women of various age (or life course stages) are presented.

Table 2: Perpetrators of violence against women of different age

Perpetrators	% of responses of women who experienced physical violence		
	18-24	25-64	65-75
Current partner	20.7	38.4	31.0
Former partner	17.1	33.0	46.6
Father	18.3	7.8	3.4
Father in law	-	2.9	6.9
Son	-	1.7	6.9
Brother	13.4	3.6	1.7
Mother	12.2	5.1	-
Mother in law	-	1.4	1.7
Daughter	-	0.3	1.7
Other male relative	6.1	2.2	-
Other female relative	12.2	3.6	-
Total	100	100	100

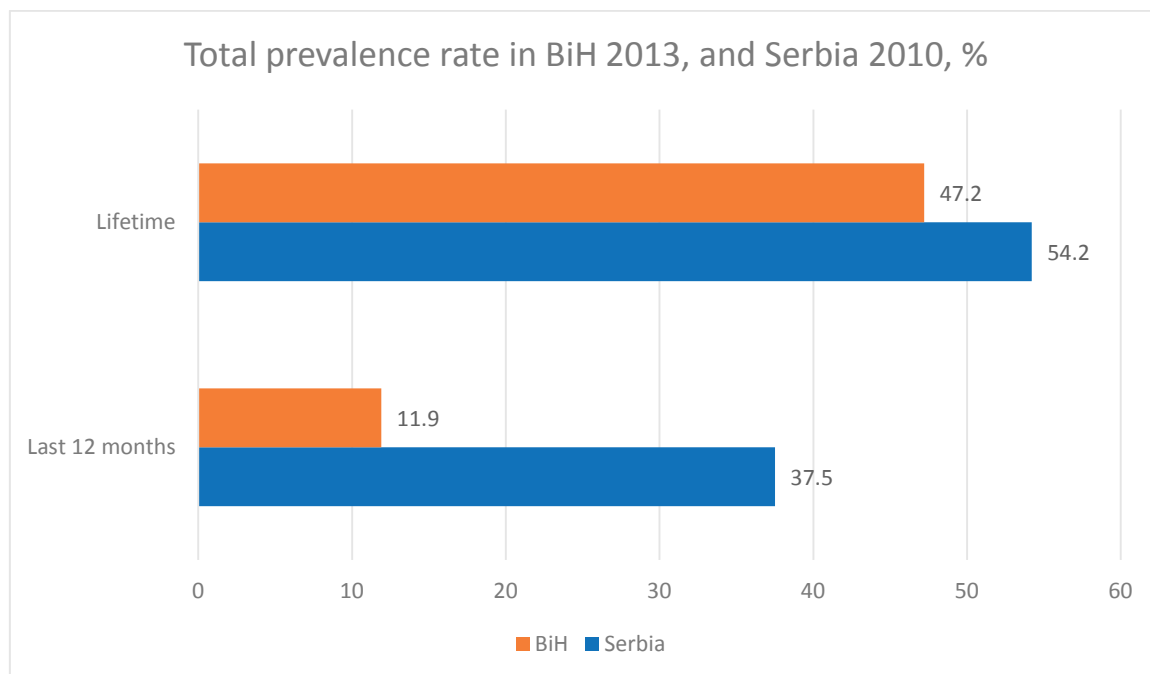
Source: Babovic, Ginic, Vukovic, 2010.

IV. Lesson 4: How to choose data collection method – interviewing vs. self-completion

9. The experiences from our surveys do not provide a strong recommendation for either of the data collection methods. This is also a very context-dependent aspect of research. The survey in Serbia was implemented by self-completion, taking into account findings from other experts that prevalence rates are higher when data are collected by this method (4-5 times in UK and Germany), and it is easier to provide an adequate environment for respondents (Walby, 2004). The survey method was developed in ‘trojan horse’ style, as interviewers conducted interviews with other household members collecting data on the household, while women were separated in the other rooms and self-completed the questionnaire. This was explained as a section with women’s reproductive health questions. Only in a few cases when women had difficulties in reading, writing, or in the case of older, lower-educated women in remote rural areas, were data collected through interview.
10. In BiH, in line with UNECE methodology that provided the main framework for the survey, data were collected through face-to-face interviews. After the experience in Serbia, the team was afraid that different data collection method would bring much lower prevalence rates, and this could raise some doubts as there are strong links in the region and results will be compared between countries. When total actual prevalence rate which counts all forms of violence within last 12 months is compared between Serbia and BiH, it is obvious that it is much higher in Serbia. This is possibly the effect of data collection methods, but other factors should not be underestimated as they require further exploration. On the other hand, the difference is smaller when comparing lifetime prevalence

rate. A possible explanation is that women are more open to report past experiences than current ones in the interview.

Figure 2:



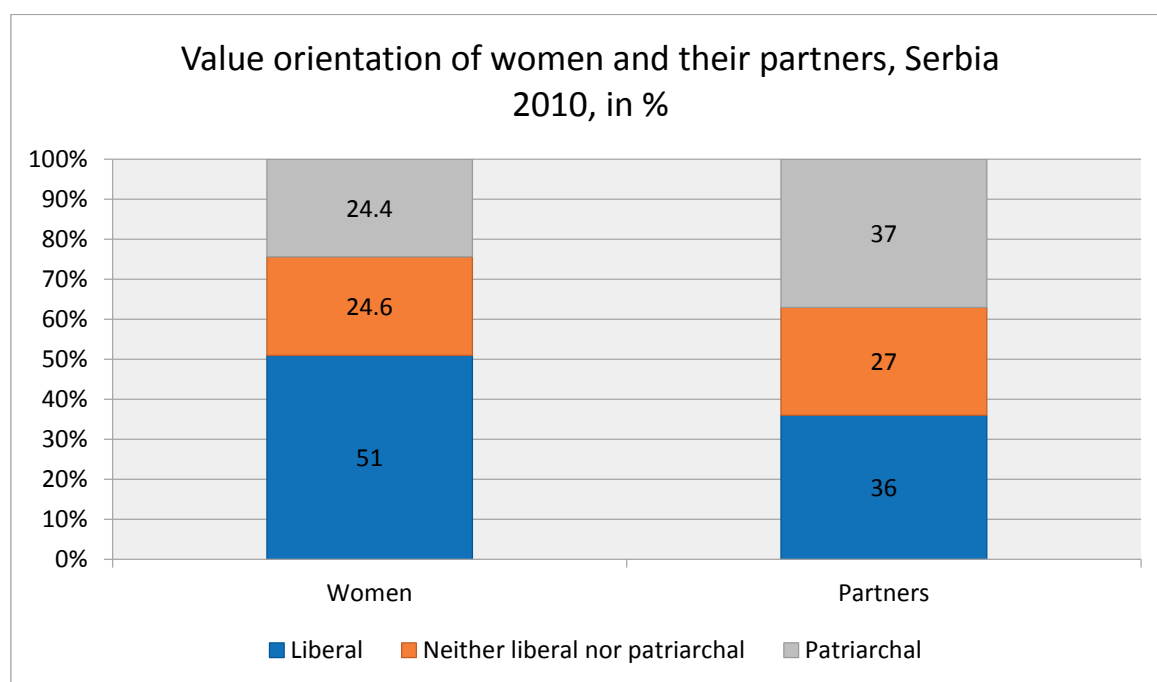
- Here is worth mentioning the third type of data collection method that was implemented in the survey conducted by the Victimology Society of Serbia in AP Vojvodina in 2010. The data were collected by ‘feminist action research’, which entails more in-depth face-to-face interviewing through which women are also made more aware of their experiences and enabled to recognize and identify different types of violence to which they have been exposed. This type of data collection gives good results in estimating the scale of violence and providing information on various features, but it is very demanding as it requires highly-skilled interviewers, specifically trained for feminist action research, and more resources as the interview setting must be optimized, which means that it can require multiple attempts to interview one respondent.

V. **Lessons 5: Exploring factors is necessary for designing protection but also prevention of VAW**

- In order to appropriately address VAW and eliminate it, it is of key importance to know what factors increase the risk of VAW, under what circumstances, and in what context.
- Surveys indicated that the most important are family-related factors, health problems of family members (particularly the presence of alcohol and drug abuse in the family), participation in war, but also economic factors, such as material deprivation of the household, and cultural factors, such as values and gender roles attitudes. It is true that violence occurs in rich and poor families, among low and high educated, but risks of poverty and deprivation and value ‘confusion’ of the partner significantly increase risks of violence against women.

14. Statistically important factors that were found to increase risks of partner violence against women in BiH included: level of education of both women and partners, alcohol abuse, dominant power of partner (estimated through patterns of financial decision-making), and material deprivation of the household. Important predictors of family violence against women were: type of settlement (higher prevalence in rural areas), material deprivation, cultural factors such as gender role attitudes and culture of conflict solving in the family, as well as presence of various family problems (alcohol abuse, dysfunctional family, etc.).
15. Findings from Serbia indicated that values and gender roles of the partner are important factors. Value discrepancy between women and men was found, with women being more liberal than men. Logistic regression analysis revealed that highest risks of violence against women are found in couples in which husband has neither liberal nor purely patriarchal value orientation, but some kind of mixture, which indicates certain value-confusion or inconsistency. In comparison to women with liberal partners, women with patriarchal partners have 1.7 times higher risks of experiencing violence, while women with partners with inconsistent value orientation have two times higher chances of being exposed to violence.

Figure 3:



Source: Babovic, Ginic, Vukovic, 2010.

VI. Lesson 6: Socio-cultural and historical context matters

16. Finally, we learned that context matters. Even in case of similar countries, such as Serbia and BiH, there are important differences that should be taken into account. Furthermore, within the same country, there are important differences between rural and urban areas, which should be taken into account when designing research methodology.
17. In Serbia women were more reluctant to speak about violence than in BiH. This is probably an unfortunate consequence of a more violent past during the wars in BiH that increased the openness

of women to speak about it. In Serbia, women from rural areas were much less open to report violence, even with self-completion, than women from cities. We understood that a reason for this is the specific context. Lack of anonymity in rural areas combined with strong campaigns against VAW, made them aware that this is an experience that is not acceptable, and to feel shame or fear to report it even on paper.

18. Another contextual difference was related to participation in wars as a predictor of VAW in the partner relationship or in the family. Presence of household member who participated in the wars in former Yugoslavia during 1990s was found to be a statistically important factor in Serbia that increased the risk of violence 1.2 times. In BiH, however, this was not revealed as a statistically significant factor. A probable explanation can be that mass involvement in war conflicts annulled the differences and variation across the households.
19. The instrument for identifying economic violence worked better in Serbia than BiH, and the reasons are not clear; they would require further exploration. In both countries economic violence was measured through limited access to money in the household, lack of personal pocket money for personal consumption, involuntary seizing of money from women by partner or other household member, forbidding or preventing women to take up employment, and partner spending household money by on alcohol, gambling or other things by men which leaves household without sufficient means for monthly consumption.

VII. Conclusions

20. The experiences presented from surveys on VAW in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia provided several important lessons that should be taken into account when designing future research on VAW and designing policies and measures. The estimation of the scale of violence should not be limited to official evidence as only a small portion of women experiencing violence approaches institutions and organizations engaged in the system of protection from violence. Measuring the prevalence of violence is very sensitive and depends strongly on the number of individual forms of behaviours listed in the survey questionnaires. Reducing lists of items that represent examples of certain forms of harm can significantly reduce the apparent prevalence rate and reduce the measured scale of VAW. Our experience supports the findings of other experts that self-completion results in higher prevalence rates than face-to-face interviews. Exploration of factors of violence is very important for providing inputs for policies and protection and prevention measures, and already available knowledge can provide good guidance for future research in the region. Questionnaires and data collection methods should be carefully designed, taking into account specific historical, social and cultural context, not only at the national but also sub-national levels.

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