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FLASH REPORT

Country:	Serbia
Title:	Survey on the Well-being and Safety of Women in Serbia
Date:	5 July 2019
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<u>Context</u>	
Issue at stake:	Violence against women
Grounds of discrimination:	Gender
Field of application:	Other field
Source:	Policy development
Applicable law:	Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence

Content

Serbia has made significant advances in enacting multiple laws and protocols that address violence, particularly domestic and gender-based violence. However, statistics are grim for the victims of domestic violence in Serbia. For the past 10 years, 320 women lost their lives due to their (ex) partners.

The OSCE conducted a survey on the Well-being and Safety of Women in Serbia, with the aim to provide comparable data in the region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Moldova and Ukraine). The survey was conducted in spring/summer 2018, and was published in May 2019. It included a quantitative and qualitative component, covering 15 expert interviews, a survey of a representative sample of 2 023 women aged 18–74 living in Serbia, eight focus groups with women from various backgrounds, as well as four in-depth interviews with women on the violence they have experienced.

The survey on a representative sample revealed a number of trends and findings about the prevalence of violence against women (VAW) in Serbia, confirming that it is a significant concern. More than a quarter of interviewed women personally know someone who has been subjected to VAW. Twenty-two per cent of women surveyed said that they had experienced physical or sexual violence by their partner or non-partner since the age of 15, and 18 % of women by their ex partner. Ten per cent of women with current partners said they had experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of their current partner.

Very few women who have experienced violence have reported it to the police. Three out of ten women believe domestic violence is a private matter and nearly a quarter hold the victim responsible or believe that they exaggerate claims of abuse or rape. They are also prevented from reporting due to feelings of shame and fear or mistrust of the police, social workers and healthcare professionals caused by the perceived stereotypes among representatives of these professions. Shame, mistrust of services, but also economic dependence and fear of retaliation by the perpetrator, are the main barriers to reporting.

The survey showed that women of all ages, from each income group and in all parts of the country are exposed to VAW. Many women surveyed have heard of services to help affected women (73 %) but only few women have accessed those services and in cases of the most serious incident of physical and/or sexual violence. Only 3 % contacted a women's shelter and 1 % a victim support organisation. The survey revealed that numerous barriers prevent women from accessing services. Particularly in rural areas, support services are simply not available, while other women face physical barriers to access or lack long-term and practical support with respect to housing and money. Where support services exist, they are insufficient, and their consistency and quality need to be improved. The key experts, who were interviewed for this study, shared that there is a need for pluralism in service provision and advocated for partnership between the state and civil society organizations.

The expert interviews identified also some gaps concerning the data collection on VAW and underlined the importance of the planned development and implementation of one unique database. They also referred to insufficient protection of victims during court proceedings, and the need to improve training for professionals.

There are four main conclusions that derive from this survey:

1. Cultural norms and attitudes contribute to gender inequality and violence against women;
2. Violence against women is underreported;
3. Provision of services needs to be improved, including multi-sectorial cooperation;
4. There are gaps in the implementation of legislation and in data collection.

These findings, together with main recommendations, has the goal to improve legislative and policy framework for preventing and combating violence.

Internet link source: <https://www.osce.org/sr/secretariat/419756>.