

PRESS RELEASE

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Psychological consequences of rape on women in the 1991-1995 war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina

ZAGREB – Three quarters of women raped during the 1991-1995 war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina suffered from depression and social phobia even a year after the trauma, shows a study published in the Croatian Medical Journal.

The study included 68 women victims of rape and was conducted at the Medical Center for Human Rights, Zagreb, Croatia, from 1992 to 1995, averagely a year after the trauma. The victims were Croatian and Muslim (Bosniak) women. Forty-four of them were raped more than once, 21 were raped every day during their captivity, and 18 were forced to witness rapes. Most rapes were accompanied by verbal threats and physical torture.

Testimony method and a questionnaire were used to retrospectively obtain the description of rapes and symptoms women suffered immediately after rape and at the time of the study. Depressiveness was the most frequent psychological symptom occurring immediately after the rape, and was felt in 58 women. Avoidance of thoughts or conversations associated with trauma was present in 40 women, and suicidal ideas in 25 women. Although none of the victims had a psychiatric history before the rape, at the time of study 52 suffered from

depression, 51 from social phobia, 21 from posttraumatic stress disorder, and 17 had sexual dysfunctions. These disorders were often combined. Out of 29 women who got pregnant after rape, 17 had artificial abortion. Almost two-thirds of victims had an impaired social functioning and difficulties in their relationship with partner.

Victims and their assailants were always of different nationalities. The rapists of the women included in this study were Serbian soldiers or civilians, or Muslim (Bosniak) soldiers. Women reported their rapists being drunk in almost half of the cases. Two-thirds of women did not know their rapists personally; in other cases, they were their neighbors.

According to the testimonies of victims, rapes occurred continually during Serbian occupation of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1991 to 1994. During that time, the non-Serbian population on the occupied territories decreased as the number of killings, tortures, and deportations increased. In 32 cases rapes occurred during the first 10 days of the Serbian occupation of the town or village.

Since it was not possible to reach the victims immediately after the rape, the data were gathered retrospectively, on the basis of the victim's memory and testimony. In spite of this limitation, the authors believe the results of the study clearly show the grave psychological consequences of rape on women in war against Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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