

How sufficient are the services provided to victims of sexual violence in shelters in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

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Abstract

There are eight (8) shelters that provide services for victims of violence against women and domestic violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. All shelters are run by the non-government organisations that have a long tradition in providing protection and support services to victims. Within the scope of work of these shelters, support services are also provided to women victims of sexual violence. This paper presents the research findings on capacities of shelters in providing specialized services to victims of sexual violence in accordance with the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) from 2013. Analysis results point out on significant issues regarding the shelters' capacities in terms of accommodation, scope of professional services provided, education of professional and sensibility to work with victims of sexual violence, and supervision available to professional staff. The research design included content analysis of relevant legislative documents and empirical studies. The research findings presented in this paper include many aspects of services available to victims of sexual violence in shelters. Another important finding opened a significant question on where are the boys of mothers who are victims of sexual violence that are placed in shelters in BiH. Specialised services are provided in all shelters in BiH, but depend on individual capacities in terms of finances and human resources of each shelter.

Keywords: victims of sexual violence, children of male gender (boys), shelters

Introduction

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul

Convention) back in 2013. The Istanbul Convention represents the first legally binding act of the Council of Europe in the sphere of prevention and combating violence against women. In its nature, this document doesn't have to be directly implemented in the signatory states, but it does require harmonisation of legal and institutional frameworks of all signatory states, for the purpose of more successful implementation. BiH is the 6th signatory state of the Council of Europe that had ratified the Istanbul Convention. Since already mentioned ratification year of 2013, many efforts have been made in order to harmonise national legislation with the Istanbul Convention. This process of harmonising national legislation has been extremely demanding due to divided jurisdictions in BiH when it comes to protection against violence, at the level of entities (Republic of Srpska/RS and Federation of BiH/FBiH) and District Brcko, and at the level of Cantons of Federation of BiH (FBiH). The Agency for Gender Equality of BiH is responsible for the implementation of Istanbul Convention and providing of a unique system of prevention and protection of victim of violence, regardless of the residency of victims being entity, canton or municipality in which they live. Regardless of all efforts made in BiH, the divided jurisdictions in the field of protection of victims of violence also result in different practices. This means that exercising rights to protection, as well as accessibility of help and support to victims of domestic violence and violence against women are not equal to all. A very complex political and constitutional structure of BiH result in differences in content and scope of policies and laws, therefore, in different levels of protection of women victims of violence. We can also note that the situation concerning victims residing in District Brcko is extremely difficult due to many factors., including the non-existence of overall policy concerning violence against women, different levels of prevention, protection and criminal prosecution. These factors also have impact on victims of violence against women in FBiH and RS, depending on the entity and/or canton of victim's residency.

The non-government organisations (NGOs) in BiH play an important role in providing a set of specialised services of support to women victims of violence, including managing the help line, shelters/safe houses, providing counselling services in area of domestic violence, as well as limited level of psychological and legal support services. Based on the feminist approaches and approaches focused on victim's needs, the NGOs offer a range of services that are not available in other systems/organisations in the country.

GREVIO¹ group has published the Report on BiH in 2022. This Report represents the result of the first (initial) assessment procedure that was carried out to determine the implementation of the Istanbul Convention provisions in BiH. The GREVIO Group

¹ Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) is an independent body for monitoring human rights and mandate to monitor the implementation of the G the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

Report fully covers the Istanbul Convention, assessing the level of harmonisation of BiH legislation and practice in all areas covered by the Istanbul Convention. The Report emphasises few existing legal and strategic measures introduced by the governments in BiH in the field of prevention and combating violence against women and domestic violence. The GREVIO Report also notes a number of issues that need to be addressed and improved, in order to achieve a higher level of harmonisation with the Istanbul Convention provisions. The Report emphasises that strategies and implementation of laws are exclusively directed towards domestic violence, not anticipating any concrete measures for other forms of violence against women. This Report also recognises the importance of improving the Istanbul Convention by including all forms of violence against women (other than domestic violence), currently less represented in strategies, programs and support services, respecting the attention paid to the nature of gender. Furthermore, the Report recognises the immediate need to increase the financing (being very modest), including co-financing organisations for women's rights that have a key role in providing specialised services of support in BiH (GREVIO, 2022).

The Istanbul Convention in Article 25 anticipates support to victims of sexual violence. In BiH, there are no official data on rate of cases of sexual violence and rape. The data available is coming from the NGOs that point out a significant increase in number of cases that were never reported due to stigmatisation. Also, a very high level of secondary victimisation has been determined when it comes to exposure of victims that filled a report (GREVIO, 2022).

The GREVIO Group Report for BiH (2022) recognises that there is no clear path and system in place for referral of victims of sexual violence, including no sufficient therapy for dealing with trauma and long-term psychology counselling. The Report therefore emphasises the need to establish crisis centre or centres for referral of victims of rape and/or sexual violence whose aim is to provide urgent health care, counselling, forensic examination and psychological support by qualified experts, in order to avoid secondary victimisation. The Report also recommends for the transitional period to define a clear path for victims of sexual violence/rape and prompt forensic examination.

Specialised services of support for women victims of violence in BiH is provided by eight (8) Shelters/Safe Houses, all acting as registered non-government organisations (NGOs). Many of the eight above-mentioned NGOs formed shelters for women only few years after the startup. Providing shelter has been one of the registered activities in these NGOs. Also, some of the NGOs have opened shelters after being active in community work over 10 years. The total shelter capacity in BiH covers 181 service users, also receiving legal, psychological and social counselling. Five of the NGOs are located and work in FBiH (Sarajevo, Tuzla, Mostar, Bihac and Zenica), and three in RS (Banja Luka, Bijeljina and Modrica), while District Brcko has no shelters for women

victims of violence. The Shelters are managed by women's rights organisations that provide services based on the understanding of violence against women from the gender perspective, and with the aim to empower victims. These NGOs primarily provide shelter to victims of domestic violence, even though some of them have experience in providing shelter and support to women victims of violence in war. The Shelters' staff work in shifts covering 24 hours every day in a week. Victims placed in shelters can stay up to six months, with possibility to extend their stay, based on approval from the social welfare centre. There is only one active NGO in District Brcko that is focused on violence against women (with limited capacities), but it does not provide specialised services of support to victims of they can access shelters in FBiH and/or RS.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

If we start from the phrase "personal is political" first coined by Carol Hanisch in 1969, becoming the underpinning drive of feminism striving to change the narrative, as well as the discourse concerning women's rights and fight against violence against women, we can easily agree with Phillips (2006:203) pointing out that "emphasizing that the personal is political, the women's movement forced the private spheres of patriarchal domination in relation to sexuality, work and violence, onto the public policy agenda" (Pease at al., 2016:227). Protection of women's and children's rights (as vulnerable categories) represents the fundamental tasks of social work practice, therefore always in focus of social work science too. From the feminist perspective, as a critical social work perspective, as emphasized by Morley (2009) and Fook (2012), this means that critical reflection is an integral component of applying critical approaches in practice of social work. It is also important to acknowledge that contemporary understanding of feminism has its challenges in social work practice. There are many different standpoints and influences (Pease at al., 2016) on feminist social work practice. As the recent literature explains, the continuum goes from conservative and liberal feminism to radical and socialist. While liberal feminism focuses on equality within existing social, economic and political structures, radical and socialist feminism is focused on making structural changes, trying to dismantle the system (capitalist, racist and patriarchal) (Pease at al.,2016).

The key terms are defined in accordance with Istanbul Convention, the Global Program of the United Nations for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN Women), European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), as well as the latest theoretical interpretations of this problem.

Domestic violence (DV) can be understood as a set of behaviours with the aim to control another person or persons using force, intimidation and manipulation. Violence is always based on misuse of power in relations based on inequality. An individual can be exposed to domestic violence throughout its whole life, from childhood to old age. Violent behaviours can come in different forms, intensity and

frequency. Among the different forms of violent behaviours most commonly mentioned are: physical, psychological and emotional, sexual and financial (Halilović, Veljan, Marković, 2021).

Sexual violence (SV) includes, but is not limited to: forced touching or forcing someone to touch in a sexual manner; trying to force sexual intercourse and forcing sexual intercourse. In accordance with the Istanbul Convention, sexual violence can be any unwanted acts: vaginal, anal or oral penetration of sexual nature with any part of the body or with object, without the other person consenting; other deeds of sexual nature with another person without getting consent from that person; influencing other person to participate without consent in deeds of sexual nature with a third party (Gačanica, Rakanović Radonjić, 2019).

Shelters or Safe Houses represent a special measure of support provided to victims of violence against women and domestic violence, mainly provided in the first phase (acute phase) of violence, throughout the transitional phase in which efforts are made in order to eliminate the consequences of violence and resolving of conflicts in family. These support services and measures are provided while victims are placed in shelters, as well as during a specifically defined period after they leave the shelter. Support services most commonly include: accommodation, food and hygiene; counselling and psychological support; medical care, legal and social work support, as well as support when first contact is made with the state institutions (The Law on Domestic Violence Protection, "Official Gazette of Republic of Srpska, No.: 102/12, 108/13, 82/15 and 84/19).

Even though feminist social work approaches have been used fairly recently (in the past few decades), a range of different methods have been developed and used in social work practice with women victims of violence, including interpersonal and domestic violence. In the most general sense, these methods are dominantly focused on education of women or raising consciousness, empowerment and advocacy, group work, collective activism, normalisation, deconstruction of patriarchal norms, applying a gendered analysis, egalitarian relationships and reflexivity (Dominelli 2002; Weeks 2003; Payne 2014; Phillips 2015; Pease et al. 2016). We can also find these methods as common in other critical social work approaches.

Feminists' practice is imbraided with collaboration and partnership. There are many success stories of agencies giving voice to issues affecting women, as well as standing up and critiquing organisations and government policies that oppress women (Macy et. al, 2010, in Pease et. al, 2016). Unfortunately, as Ishkanian (2014) notes, the current neoliberal context is challenging and actually makes room for forced partnerships and collaborations, which has been so much against all feminism stands for (Pease et. al, 2016). Today, women's issues need to be framed in a way that might take them to the political agenda. Even though this might ensure services and funding,

it can also be seen as a trap because it moves away from the radical feminist ideas of “changing underlying social structures” (Pease et. al, 2016).

Violence against women and domestic violence as the broadest possible term consists an extremely multi-dimensional social phenomenon. Recent literature shows that many authors tend to agree that we are witnessing increasing pressure, and as Macy et al. (2010) claim, “to de-gender, pathologize and individualise many of the women’s issues, which might bring many services at risk (Pease et. al, 2016). This means that applying gender analysis and use gender language at all times is extremely important (Morley & MacFarlane, 2008). Another important explanation regarding the use of language is provided by Lang (2000) and Charles (2004) who emphasize that using the term “domestic violence” and framing it as “family violence”, instead of men’s violence against women, tend to be interpreted in public as some form of pathology of the individual and/or family, instead of being seen as social problem caused by the power imbalances that are structured within a given society (in Pease et. al, 2016). This is why it is extremely important for the social work practice to resist (whenever possible) the de-gendering, and to remain the focus on raising consciousness of individuals, which includes children too (regardless of their gender).

Managerial context within the neoliberal systems can be defined as a business model of managing organisations and programs (Pease et. al, 2016), which often implies that managers in welfare or social work are coming from the education background in management (Macy et. al, 2010, in Pease et. al, 2016) or other studies that do not have much of a common ground with social work or any of the helping professions.

Research Design and Methods

The research question defined refers to determining the specialised services provided to women victims of sexual violence who are placed in shelters in BiH. The focus was on the analysis of available services of protection of women victims of violence and their children in shelters/safe houses in BiH. The research analysis included legal framework that regulates the filed of protection from violence against women and domestic violence, including the Istanbul Convention and the national legislation at the entities’ of BiH level and District Brcko. The research analysis also included the content analysis of documents related to implementation of Istanbul Convention in BiH (GREVIO Group Report for BiH, 2022), as well as the Study on experiences of shelters in BiH in working with victims of sexual violence (the Study) that included results on practical implication of the Istanbul Convention on protection of victims of violence against women and domestic violence in BiH¹.

The research also used the specific method of content analysis applied on documents, dominantly descriptive analysis, functional analysis and factor analysis, for the purpose of the analysis on experts’ and scientific literature. These methods were also

¹ One of the authors of this paper is also the author of the Study.

used for the purpose of analysis on normative documentation relevant for regulating and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Two basic content analysis methods were applied: qualitative and quantitative.

Data collection

Empirical data presented in this paper are referring to the practical implications of the protection of victims of sexual violence, also included in the study titled “*Research on experiences of Shelters in BiH in working with victims of sexual violence*”, presented at the Conference “Challenges, good practice and improvement of shelters and specialised support services for victims of gender-based violence in BiH”, held in February 2023, in Bijeljina (BiH).¹

Selected scientific, experts’ and normative sources were collected on the basis of their importance for the research question. The analysis conducted used the content analysis method as an independent theoretical-empirical method. This method is characterised by its own logic, rules, definitions, epistemology and developed operational-technical part (Show, Briar-Lawson, Orme, & Ruckdeschel, 2017). Separately conducted content analysis was applied on following documents: GREVIO Group Report for BiH (2022) and expert’s Study on experiences of shelters in BiH in working with victims of sexual violence (2022).

Research Findings and Discussion

The Istanbul Convention emphasises the importance of general services in the field of social work and health care (Article 20), as well as the necessity to provide specialised services of support to women, all women victims of violence and their children (Article 22). Specialised services must be accessible in appropriate geographical distribution, providing direct short-term and long-term specialised support to women victims of violence and their children. There is no equal and appropriate geographical distribution in BiH. Also, the capacities of shelters in BiH are not adopted to projected and realistic needs of victims. In shelters that operate in BH, victims of violence against women and domestic violence can receive specialised services dominantly designed for women victims of violence, categorised as following: psychological support, psychotherapy services; social support and social work services; financial empowerment; legal aid and support; medical care and support, and other services.

Shelters in BiH do provide services to victims of sexual violence within their own capacities. The data and research findings of the Study show that all shelters in BiH provide services to victims of sexual violence. In the observed period of time (from 2019 to 2021), in seven (7) shelters, 65 in total victims of sexual violence were placed.

¹ Available at: <http://www.fondacijalara.com/aktuelnosti/vijesti/237-odrzana-konferencija-izazovi-dobre-prakse-i-unapredenje-rada-sigurnih-kuca-i-specijalizovanih-usluga-podrske-za-zrtve-rodno-zasnovanog-nasilja-u-bih>

There was no reliable data collected from one shelter (in Tuzla city), due to not keeping separate records on victims of sexual violence. It is estimated that out of the total number of victims of violence (1353), 75 victims are victims of sexual violence. The number of victims of sexual violence placed in each of the 8 existing shelters in BiH are presented in Table 1. The data is also separated in groups based on their age (children/minors and adults), and on gender. As presented in Table below, the shelter in Tuzla placed 30% of the total number of victims of violence, but no separate records on the number of victims of sexual violence.

Table 1. Number of victims of sexual violence placed in shelters in BiH from January 2019 to June 2021

Shelter/Safe House	2019.			2020.			January-Jun 2021.			Total
	W*	C**	Total	W	C	Total	W	C	Total	
Sarajevo	1	5	6	0	0	0	2	0	2	10
Modriča	2	4	6	2	0	2	2	2	2	10
Zenica	0	1 (F)***	1	0	2 (F)	2	1	2 (F)	0	6
Bijeljina	0	6 (F) 1 (M)**	7	0	3 (F)	3	0	3 (f)	3	13
Bihać	0	3 (F)	3	1	3 (F)	4	1	4 (F)	5	8
Banja Luka	1	1(F)	2	1	1 (F)	2	1	1 (F)	2	6
Mostar	1	0	1	5	2 (F)	7	3	1 (F)	4	12
Tuzla										N/A

*Women (W); **Children (C); ***Female (F); ****Male (M)

When it comes to the forms of sexual violence, all shelters in BiH place victims of rape and incest. Other forms of sexual violence experienced by placed victims are: full violence, rape in marriage, exposure to pornographic contents, pimping and trafficking in people. Also, the victims of sexual violence experienced other forms of violence, which means that it can be seen as combined violence (physical, psychological and sexual).

Services provided to victims of sexual violence in all shelters in BiH are taking place in the common area where victims of violence against women and domestic violence also receive services. Procedures followed during the care process designed for victims of sexual violence are the same as in cases of other forms of violence, except in cases of trafficking in people (in shelters where victims of trafficking are placed), when victims are provided with services as per special procedures.

Staff education for sensible work with victims of sexual violence in shelters and supervision of professionals are some of the identified areas that can be improved in shelters in BiH. The Study results show that 25% of shelters' staff are of the opinion that they don't have educated staff for sensible work with victims of sexual violence. In total, 75% of shelters (6) do have professional staff that completed certain education courses. Most commonly these were sporadic education courses with content focused on working with victims of domestic violence, without any specific sensibilisation for work with victims of sexual violence specifically. The educations are most often organised internally, without any systemic and continuing activities. Professionals working in shelters occasionally attend educations organised by different public institutions and international organisations. The results of data analysis show that 50% of shelters in BiH do not have organised supervision for professional staff.

The laws of both entities of BiH (RS and FBiH) anticipate obligation to report violence upon gaining knowledge about it, and this applies to all citizens and residence, including professionals that represent protection and support agencies and institutions. The RS legislation also anticipates obligation to report doubts on existence of violence. In this regard, the Study included the analysis on possibilities for victims that didn't report violence to be users of shelters, meaning in cases where victims of sexual violence rejected medical/forensic examination. In five (5) shelters in BiH (62.5%) victims of violence can use services provided in shelters in cases when medical/forensic examination was rejected, while in two (2) shelters (25%), services were not available and accessible in such cases. This is the case of shelters in Banja Luka and Bihac. In one shelter in BiH such cases were never reported. Analysed data shows that victims of violence that don't want to report violence cannot receive services in shelters in 37.5% of cases (3 shelters), being shelters in Bihac, Sarajevo and Mostar, while in 62.5% of cases (other 5 shelters) women victims of violence do receive services after regulating the accommodation service in shelter. The data collected leaves uncertainty when trying to draw a finding regarding legal obligation to report violence in such cases.

The majority of victims of sexual violence placed in shelters come immediately after the violent act took place. Seven (7) shelters in majority of cases receive applications to place victims immediately after the violence. In one shelter (Tuzla) the majority of

victims apply for shelter after some time passed, while the cases of victims coming to shelter immediately after the violence act took place are only sporadic.

Medical care and services for victims of sexual violence are provided in seven (7) shelters in BiH, while in one shelter medical care and services are provided through a cooperation with the authorised healthcare institution. Shelters that provide healthcare and medical services for victims of sexual violence, as well as in cases of other forms of violence cannot provide medial documentation.

Providing information to victims of sexual violence in all shelters in BiH is a common task. This is about informing the victims of sexual violence (and victims of other forms of violence) about their rights (basic and specific). The analysis of data concerning the task to inform victims of sexual violence about their rights show that shelters maintain contacts with other institution, primarily different public institutions involved in response to violence and protection of victims of domestic violence and violence against women (most frequently with healthcare and social welfare institutions). Some of the shelters (25%) have printed materials (pamphlets) that serve as information source to service users.

Support through the legal proceedings involves organising victims, especially trained counsellors for domestic violence or other forms of support services/advocacy that can be of help and support to victims during investigation and court proceedings. This type of services includes legal counselling and preparation of victims for legal proceedings. The latest amendments to the Law on Domestic Violence Protection, in Article 21a (“Official Gazette of Republic of Srpska”, No. 84/19) anticipates that victims of violence can nominate, in all phases of the proceeding (before or during the process), a person that they trust to be present during one or more proceedings or deeds concerning protection from domestic violence. Such support is available to all victims of sexual violence in all shelters in BiH. Shelters in BiH provide to all victims of sexual violence who are their service users the following services: entourage, legal counselling, psychosocial support during the proceedings, accompanying person of trust during the proceedings. These services are provided by shelters, if possible, within their capacities. Some shelters (4 shelters) provide all the above-mentioned services.

Legal support is available to victims of sexual violence in all shelters in BiH. The research findings show that 87.5% of shelters in BiH provide this service using legal counsellors/lawyers that offer their services to victims of sexual violence (counselling, informing about the proceedings, writing submissions and support in cooperation with other institutions). One shelter in BiH (Sarajevo) offers to victims of sexual violence service of engaging a lawyer and representative in legal proceedings.

Psychological support is available to victims of sexual violence, as well as to victims of other forms of violence in all shelters in BiH (8 shelters). The research results show that this service is about providing individual psychological support to victims of

violence and domestic violence. Some shelters do provide group psychological support that is realised through self-help group activities facilitated by professionals trained for group work with victims of violence. In some cases, victims of sexual violence are provided with psychotherapy with the aim to stabilize their mental health state and overcome trauma. Such services are provided depending on the capacities available in the NGO running the shelter.

The Study also analyses and presents the limitations of accommodation in shelters for specific categories of victims of violence. First of all, this refers to placement (providing accommodation) to male children (boys) with their mothers in shelters. In 62.5% of cases there are age limits when it comes to children of male gender (boys). Depending on internal procedures of shelters, in five (5) shelters in BiH boys cannot be placed if they are of 14 years of age or above (the age limit differs). Such limitations represent a major finding of the Study, being obvious discrimination of children based on their gender and age.

Conclusions

The above-presented findings should be taken into consideration when assessing the needs for support services to victims of sexual violence are concerned, especially bearing in mind that there are only few researches focused on the victims of sexual violence, therefore not so many relevant empirical data available.

BiH has significant resources for providing specialised services to victims of sexual violence in shelters across BiH. These shelters are all founded by NGOs that have a long tradition in community work (20-30 years of experience). Some of the shelters also have experience in providing different types of services to victims of sexual violence that were established during the war conflicts in BiH (during 1990s). This is why we can draw a conclusion that such experience in providing help and support services to victims of sexual violence by these NGOs should be used in creating adequate response to victims of sexual violence.

As for the capacities regarding the support services for victims of sexual violence, the capacities of shelters in BiH are close to $\frac{1}{2}$ of what is needed in order to reach the minimum standards of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2008) and recommendations of the Istanbul Convention (Explanation, Paragraph 135). The above-mentioned standard anticipates that all states need to secure a family place (place for a woman and her child/children), based on the average number of children in a family in given state per 100 000 inhabitants. According to the last census carried out in BiH in 2013 (Agency for Statistics of BiH, 2022), BiH population is close to 3.5 million (3.531 159). According to this recommendation from the Istanbul Convention, BiH needs to provide 350 family places for the purpose of providing services to women victims of violence and domestic violence.

Regardless having different theoretical approaches and diversity in applying feminist theories, certain practice principals and methods can be generally attributed to feminist practice (Pease at al., 2016:229). As suggested by Weeks (2003, in Pease at al., 2016), the four basic premises of feminist practice, being: personal is political; structural change must focus on changes in social, economic and political spheres of women's life; the personal pains or problems affecting women needs to be seen and recognised as a natural response to oppression; and fourth, the organisations providing support need to be transformed to deliver adequate services that fit the women's needs (including safety and services to their children) and support them in resolving problems.

Shelters in BiH provide specialised services and support to victims of violence against women and domestic violence designed to fit the needs of victims and are not available to general population. However, the same services are provided and same procedures applied regardless of the nature of violence against women (same for victims of domestic violence and victims of sexual violence). It is worth noting that there are no procedures and protocols specially designed for working with victims of sexual violence for any of the systems involved in response to violence against women and domestic violence. The conclusion is that there are no clear guidelines for working with victims of sexual violence in shelters.

Human resources, especially the number of professionals directly involved in working with victims of sexual violence are not sufficient enough for adequate response, protection and support services. Professionals employed in shelters do not have continues education for sensible work with victims of sexual violence. In 50% of cases, professionals do not have supervision as mechanism of support and quality assurance, professional development and improvement of competences.

The majority of shelters do not have professional specially educated for working with children who are victims and witnesses of violence. A specific issue that stands out is the unavailability of support services for certain categories of victims, primarily children of male gender (boys) above the certain age. In that regard, it is worth emphasising that shelters in BiH are facing significant challenges addressing these complex issues. First of all, there are many internal issues among which most significant are concerning the professional capacities (human resources), meaning non-adequate and not sensible enough professional staff for working with victims of sexual violence; expert working with children who are victims of sexual violence; staying in the role of helping in process (without emotional engagement), and preventing professional burnout.

The practice of placing boys whose mothers are victims of violence should be changed and harmonised with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention that anticipates protection and support available to all women victims of violence and their children. Especially negative practice that stands out is the practice of

relocating and placing boys above certain age into so called “disciplinary centres”, if no alternative solutions can be found. Another important question that can be addressed here is the question of compliance with the UN Convention of Child Rights and the Istanbul Convention, as the international documents that anticipate protection of children witnesses and victims of violence in the best interest of a child. The argument of not having enough capacities in shelters in BiH to address this issue properly can be taken into consideration, however, this issue cannot stay at the margins and needs to be addressed and prioritised as part of the solution for combating violence against women.

The research data presented in Table 1 clearly show that only one boy was placed in shelter with his mother during the observed period. This raises an important question: Where are the boys whose mothers are victims of sexual violence and placed in shelters in BiH? Researching this question will most certainly raise additional questions, such as issues concerning gender discrimination of boys in such cases, and not working in the best interest of child in such and other situations. Further researches should spread more light on the position of children whose mothers are victims of sexual violence, including services available to support their needs and to reduce and/or eradicate potential risks for children’s development.

Reflecting on the research findings of this analysis, there is a strong agreement with Ann Carrington’s (2016, in Pease at al.,2016) sense felt that feminist practice was under siege. This fear, as Carrington claims, which is supported by Morley and Macfarlane (2008), as well as noted by Ishkanian (2014) concerning the practice in public action and the fear that agitation may result in services losing funding can be recognised in Bosnia and Herzegovina too. We strongly agree with many authors claiming that “the focus on survival has shifted the focus from public activism to resistance and subversive action within the current structure” (Thomas & Davies 2005, Pease at al.,2016:230). As highlighted by Wallace and Pease (2011), the approach is now about “finding the spaces to resist the neoliberal agenda and maintain a feminist analysis” (Pease at al., 2016:230). Subversive action seems to be more frequently used lately. Not being new to feminist approaches, and being successful in the past, this increase in use of subversive action and decrease in public action, as explained in Pease at al. (2016) could be a result of fear of losing funding and other forms of support by society (including government).

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