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ELDER ABUSE IN DOMESTIC SETTINGS

According to World Health Organization elder abuse is a significant public health problem, predicted to increase as many countries are experiencing rapidly ageing populations. Although Serbia is undoubtedly one of those countries, the problem of elder abuse has not yet been given as much attention (as it does when it comes to women and children as victims of violence). The National Strategy on Ageing, in which one of the goals is action against elder abuse, particularly domestic violence, expired in 2015, and new one has not yet been adopted. There are no surveys at the national level on the issue of elder abuse (in domestic settings), even though the Strategy has raised that topic. Therefore, the author analyzes the available data on the elder abuse prevalence, and response to it, adding the results of her own research (conducted through questionnaires filled out by older respondents, and interviews with professionals from the social welfare system, prosecutor's office and courts from Belgrade). Special attention is paid to economic violence against the elderly and criminal offenses - family violence and violation of family duty. The factors of non-reporting of abuse and inadequate reaction are also addressed, as well as the possibility of a better social and institutional response to the problem.

Keywords: *elder abuse, domestic violence, economic abuse, violation of family duty*

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1. Introduction

Violence against the elderly (elder abuse) was noted for the first time in British scientific journals in 1975. The definition established by the World Health Organization has also British origin (deriving from UK Plan of Action on Elder Abuse, 1995) (WHO, INPEA, 2002: 2). Elder abuse is defined “as a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person (60 years and older¹)”.

This type of violence constitutes a violation of human rights of the elderly, a form of discriminatory treatment, resulting in serious loss of dignity, emotional and physical harm. The consequences are even more painful for the elderly when the perpetrator is someone close and loved by them, as children, in the first place. The elder abuse includes physical abuse, emotional/psychological abuse, sexual abuse, financial exploitation, and neglect. Risk factors are mapped as: profile of perpetrator (usually emotionally unstable person, with problems such as drug addiction, personal or/and financial crisis, criminal record), lack of professional care services, ageism, dependence (economic, emotional or dependence on other people’s care and assistance) and poor economic situation (Ignjatović, Patić, 2011: 70-71).

Definition focusing on “expectation of trust in a relationship” could be criticized as a narrow one, as older person could be an easy victim of robbery in the street (Jovanović, Knežić, 2003) or of other type of violence, and the perpetrator could be utterly unrelated to victim. However, the WHO definition is one that fits perfectly with the issue of elder abuse in domestic setting, one of the most prevalent, but also most underreported, under investigated, although increasing type of violence.

Elder abuse in general (in domestic as well as in institutional settings) is widely recognised as a growing problem, due to ageing of population. Unfortunately, the prevalence of this phenomenon is difficult to measure due to extreme underinvestigating, different definitions of (elder) abuse, as well as definition of an old or older person

¹ It is worth mentioning that International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA) supports a single age based standard of 60 years and older only in developed countries. In the case of less developed countries, where old age starts at a younger age any definition of age should allow for a lower floor as appropriate. In the case of widows living in less developed countries, no minimum age should apply. See: INTERNATIONAL NETWORK FOR THE PREVENTION OF ELDER ABUSE (INPEA) INPUT FOR OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP ON AGEING REGARDING HUMAN R (un.org). However, the general public (in most developed countries) typically defines aging as processes that begin after the age of 65, or after retirement. On more dilemmas about “old age”: Pavlović, 2019: 171-172.

(Solarević, Pavlović, 2018: 58-59), and unwillingness (or inability) of victims to report abuse and cooperate/participate actively (especially in cases of domestic violence) in legal or other procedures aiming to resolve the problem. Older persons won't report incidents of abuse because of their dependence on the caregivers, fear of retaliation, to protect their family secrets or simply because they care about the perpetrators. The situation can be particularly complicated if the older person has cognitive impairments limiting his or her ability to report incidents of abuse and seek help. According to WHO statistics, 90% of abusers are family members (adult children, partners/spouses), but only 4% of abuse of older people is reported (WHO, 2022). The absences of accurate statistic data and/or relevant, comprehensive national research surveys could also be indicators of insufficient care or capacity of state/social agencies to tackle the issue adequately.

Having all previously mentioned in mind, it is not surprising that in Serbia, one of the most rapidly ageing populations in the world, burdened by poverty, poor social care system, patriarchal heritage, tolerance toward violence in general, and complicated political situation, the problem of elder abuse has been brought to light recently, much later than in other, more developed countries.

2. International perspective: relevant institutions, documents and research results

According to the World Health Organization elder abuse is an important public health problem, predicted to increase as many countries are experiencing rapidly ageing populations². The recent surveys indicate that around 1 in 6 people 60 years and older experienced some form of abuse in community settings during the past year; rates of abuse of older people are high in institutions such as nursing homes and long-term care facilities, with 2 in 3 staff reporting that they have committed abuse in the past year; rates of abuse of older people have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic; the most prevalent form of abuse in community settings was psychological abuse, followed by financial abuse and neglect (reported by older adults); in institutional settings all forms of abuse are much more frequent, especially physical violence (it is six times more often reported related to institutional settings than in community settings (reported by older adults and their proxies) (WHO, 2022). The WHO data suggest that cases of elder abuse in institutional settings are more visible, more often reported than violence in domestic

² The global population of people aged 60 years and older will more than double, from 900 million in 2015 to about 2 billion in 2050. (WHO, 2022)

settings, which is not unexpected as domestic violence in general is marked by very high dark figure.

International organizations such as the United Nations and the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA)³ have been engaged in various activities related to raising awareness of the factors and consequences of the elder abuse, asking all states for better recognition, acknowledgment of the problem, and primarily more efficient prevention actions. In 2006 International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse and the World Health Organization established World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) on June 15th⁴. The United Nations General Assembly set up that date in its Resolution 66/127 (2011)⁵ as a day on which the entire world expresses its opposition to any type of elder abuse. The A/RES/66/127 is not the first international document related to problems of ageing. It was preceded by UN Resolution 57/167 of 18 December 2002, endorsing the Political Declaration and the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (2002)⁶; Resolution 58/134 of 22 December 2003, and resolutions 60/135 of 16 December 2005, 61/142 of 19 December 2006, 62/130 of 18 December 2007, 63/151 of 18 December 2008, 64/132 of 18 December 2009 and 65/182 of 21 December 2010⁷ – all of them emphasised the problem of elder abuse, asking the Member States to design and implement more effective prevention strategies and stronger laws and policies to address the problem and its underlying factors. In 2010, the UN General Assembly established the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing⁸, which examines the international framework of the human rights of older persons, and in May 2014 Ms. R. Kornfeld-

³ INPEA is a non-governmental organization (founded in 1997, USA) with special consultative status to EcoSoc, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. See more about it: INPEA - Learn about INPEA and how to participate, accessed on: 28. 7. 2022.

⁴ Much earlier, the General Assembly of the United Nations (on December 14th, 1990) established October 1st as the International Day of Older Persons.

⁵ UN, General Assembly, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 2011, UNITED, accessed on: 1. 8. 2022.

⁶ The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Political Declaration adopted at the Second World Assembly on Ageing in April 2002 mark a turning point in how the world addresses the key challenge of “building a society for all ages”. Madrid Plan of Action and its Implementation | United Nations For Ageing, accessed on: 29. 7. 2022.

⁷ UN General Assembly - Resolutions, accessed on: 1. 8. 2022. This document addresses necessity to raise awareness and protect older persons from physical, psychological, sexual or financial abuse, emphasising specific risks faced by women due to discriminatory societal attitudes and the non-realization of the human rights of women (p. 31 and 49).

⁸ United Nations Open-ended Working Group on Ageing, accessed on: 1. 8. 2022.

Matted was appointed by the UN Human Rights Council as Independent Expert on the rights of older persons⁹.

The Ministerial Conference on Ageing held in Rome (from 16 to 17 June 2022) by the United Nations Economic Commission in Europe (UNECE) mapped the progress made under the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) in the UNECE region. The conference led to the adoption of two complementary declarations: one adopted by the Ministers, reaffirming the commitment towards positive ageing policies; second which was adopted jointly by civil society and researchers. One of the main topics was promoting healthy and active aging, and the protection from abuse was discussed within that context. The United Nations General Assembly declared 2021–2030 the Decade of Healthy Ageing and asked WHO to lead the implementation (WHO, 2021).

Some studies in Europe (the Council of Europe Member States) suggest that the abuse of older people leads to an estimated 2,500 homicides every year in Europe. Furthermore, one in four older people needing high levels of support may be victim of mistreatment¹⁰. The very name of the event related to World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (June 15th, 2015) “Elder abuse – Europe’s hidden shame” depicted (quite well and honestly) the state of affairs in the field of elder abuse, its prevalence, consequences, and lack of adequate responses. Namely, although the first special document concerning the elderly (and their protection from exploitation, physical and mental abuse) was adopted in 1994¹¹ and the last one in 2014 (Recommendation CM/Rec(2014)2 on the promotion of human rights of the older persons)¹² much more has to be done for the elderly in practice. The most important legally-binding document - the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence¹³ does not mention explicitly elder abuse as a form of domestic violence, but its Explanatory Report pays

⁹ OHCHR | Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, accessed on: 1. 8. 2022.

¹⁰ Council of Europe (2015) Elder abuse - Europe’s hidden shame - Events (coe.int), accessed on: 1. 8. 2022.

¹¹ Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers, Recommendation No. R (94) 9, Result details (coe.int), accessed on: 1. 8. 2022.

¹² Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers, Recommendation CM/Rec(2014)2, Prems 39414 GBR 2008 CMRec(2014)2etExposeMotifs TXT A5.indd (coe.int), accessed on: 1. 8. 2022.

¹³ Council of Europe Treaty Series - No. 210. More about requirements of the Convention and their implementation in criminal law and judicial practice in Serbia, see: Jovanović, Vujičić, 2022.

attention to this form of violence, emphasizing it as a form of inter-generational domestic violence¹⁴.

The situation is similar within European Union where the elder abuse has been considered a growing concern as EU countries face irreversibly transformed age pyramids (Georgantzi, 2012: 1; 2018) with the ageism as one of the most common experienced form of discrimination (Georgantzi, 2018: 362; European Commission, 2019).

In USA, up to five million older Americans are abused every year and the annual loss by victims of financial abuse is estimated to be at least \$36.5 billion. Approximately one in 10 Americans aged 60+ has experienced some form of elder abuse. One study estimated that only one in 24 cases of abuse are reported to authorities. (National Council on Ageing, 2021). It is very interesting that NCA emphasizes financial abuse as a form of elder abuse providing precise estimation of annual financial loss, without indicating perpetrators or typical offenses. Indeed, financial abuse is very often related to older persons, either the perpetrators are family members or strangers.

Elder abuse has been an issue of social interest for very long time, and various specific legal instruments and institutional mechanisms have been created for the prevention and victim of elder abuse support and protection. For example, the Administration on Aging (AOA) is the principal agency of the U.S Department of Health and Human Services designated to carry out the provisions of the Older Americans Act of 1965. The AOA established National Elder Abuse Resource Centre (NCEA) in 1988. The NCEA provides the latest information regarding research, training, best practices, news and resources on elder abuse, neglect and exploitation to professionals and the public.¹⁵ Undoubtedly, USA example could be considered as one of good practice, showing interest for problems of the elderly, and providing specific mechanisms to protect them from abuse.

3. State of Affairs in Serbia

As elder abuse in domestic settings is inseparably linked to the context of domestic violence, it is necessary to consider it in the same light. It is dangerous, hidden phenomenon, good example for dark figure of crime, but still not enough in focus as

¹⁴ Explanatory Report to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, p. 8, CETS 210 - Explanatory Report to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (coe.int), accessed on: 1. 8. 2022.

¹⁵ See: Administration on Aging | ACL Administration for Community Living; NCEA - Home (acl.gov), accessed on: 5. 8. 2022.

domestic violence against women and children is. Namely, domestic violence against children is widespread and studies have revealed the link between domestic violence against women and child physical abuse, as well as the trauma that witnessing violence in the home causes in children, but for elderly abuse - reliable data are relatively scarce¹⁶. There are much more policies and legal instruments created or implemented in the field of domestic violence in order to protect women (especially from gender-based violence) and children. Much more media attention has been paid to domestic violence against women and children. Old persons remained somehow forgotten in that context, slowly being recognized as victims that are very often in vulnerable position similar to children's (regarding their vulnerability and powerlessness due to old age, weakness, incapacity and dependence on abusers).

It is already well known that domestic violence is an ongoing problem in Serbia (as well as ageing of population¹⁷ alongside widespread and growing ageism (Ljubičić, 2021: 526; Radaković, 2020: 551-567; Solarević, Pavlović, 2018: 61-62)) despite of the development of different legal and other protective mechanisms, especially when it comes to women and children. So, it is not difficult to assume how grim the situation of the elderly abused in the domestic settings is. The National Strategy on Aging¹⁸, in which one of the goals is an action against elder abuse, particularly domestic violence, expired in 2015, and new one has not been adopted. There are no surveys at the national level on the issue of elder abuse (in domestic settings), even though the Strategy has raised that topic. In the National Strategy for Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women in the Family and Intimate Partner Relationship¹⁹ - which also has expired - older women are mentioned as particularly vulnerable category of victims.

¹⁶ Explanatory Report to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, p. 1

¹⁷ The average age of the population in the Republic of Serbia increased from 42.1 years (2011) to 43.4 (2020). Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2021) Statistical Yearbook, Belgrade, p. 25. With almost 20 per cent of its citizens being 65 and older, Serbia's proportion of elderly people is among the highest in the world. See more detailed statistics for 2011-2021: • Serbia - age structure 2011-2021 | Statista, accessed on: 2. 8. 2022. Also: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2022) Natural Changes of Population, 2021, available at: Dissemination database search (stat.gov.rs), accessed on: 2. 8. 2022.

¹⁸ Government of the Republic of Serbia, National Strategy on Aging 2006-2015, available at: <https://gs.gov.rs/lat/strategije-vs.htm>, accessed on: 29. 7. 2022.

¹⁹ Government of the Republic of Serbia, National Strategy for Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women in the Family and Intimate Partner Relationship, Official Gazette of the RS, No. 21/2011, available at: <https://gs.gov.rs/lat/strategije-vs.htm>, accessed on: 29. 7. 2022.

However, older men could also become victims of domestic violence, even of its severe forms (leading presumably to prosecution and judicial epilogue). Namely, one research conducted prior to the introduction of domestic violence incrimination into criminal law suggests that older people are more often victimized by more severe forms of violence (serious bodily injury) in the family context than outside it. It also points to greater percentage of men as victims, while on the other hand, sons are most often perpetrators. Female partners (older persons, too) are also among perpetrators. One of the explanations for this phenomenon could be that older male victims are ageing *pater familias* figures who, while at full strength, practiced violence as a form of communication with their spouses/partners and other family members. (Lukić, Jovanović, 2001: 44-45).

Similar results related to older men – victims of domestic violence have emerged from the survey on domestic violence in judicial practice in Vojvodina: compared to women of the same age category, men are slightly more frequently victimized at the end of the sixth decade of life or later (after the age of 65), and are most often victims of their children – sons (Jovanović et al., 2012: 70). The same survey also indicates that the structure of the imposed criminal sanctions is depending on the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. Namely, the prison sentence was more frequently imposed in cases of offenses of domestic violence (Article 194, paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia²⁰) committed against parent (truth to be told - in more than twice as many cases as those who abused wives, those who abused their parents were recidivists: 51,7% : 21:7%) (Ibid: 100).

The latest survey on domestic violence in judicial practice (Petrušić, Žunić, Vilić, 2018) points out to an increase in the number of elderly as victims compared to previously conducted similar surveys (Konstantinović Vilić, Petrušić: 2004, 2007) and the presence of the aggravated circumstances as “the offense was committed against an older person”. The children were (continuously) violent towards their old parents, and the most of them had problems with drug/alcohol addiction (Petrušić, Žunić, Vilić, 2018: 95, 111, 113, 140). These findings don’t differ much from those previously mentioned, though, in cases of victimization of parents, courts found aggravating circumstances linked to the specific quality of relation between perpetrator and victim: “perpetrator committed the offense against mother, woman who gave birth to him and raised him” or “perpetrator committed the offense against mentally ill mother” (Jovanović, 2011: 204).

²⁰ Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 85/05, 88/2005, 107/2005, 72/2009, 111/2009, 121/2012, 104/2013, 108/2014, 94/2016, 35/2019.

As it was said before, elder abuse has begun to be recognized as a social and scientific problem in last decade (Knežić, 2010) very slowly and inconsistently. According to the data presented by the Provincial Protector of Citizens – Ombudsman the statistical curve for elder abuse has been increased significantly since 2018. One of the analyses suggests that psychological violence against the elderly is most present, while an analysis of electronic media coverage found that the media reported predominantly on physical violence. Victims of violence are mostly women, in a much higher percentage than men of older age²¹.

The Red Cross of Serbia seems to be very committed to the issue of elder abuse. On the occasion of the International Day of Older Persons in 2021 it was reported that according to the survey of the Red Cross of Serbia from 2016 (conducted in nine municipalities in Serbia; 616 respondents) 18.6% of the elderly experienced some form of abuse (in the first place psychological violence, and neglect) (Maričić, 2021). The latest research was focused on gender-based violence against older women. It pointed out that 16% of older women (65-74 years of age) experienced some form of violence after the age of 65 (in the year that preceded the survey), more often by partners (in the first place psychological violence), and victims were mostly women from rural areas, burdened with patriarchal attitudes and prejudices, reluctant to report violence due to fear, shame, economic dependency, patriarchal upbringing (Todorović et al: 2021: 68-69). It should be also noted that they are even more reluctant to report their children who mistreat and abuse them.

Some authors noted the increase in domestic violence cases emphasizing again violence against women, but mentioning also elder abuse during pandemic/lockout period (Mršević, 2020: 717; Knežić, 2021). Undoubtedly, social exclusion that is common experience for many old persons even in regular occasions is very important factor in the context of victimization by domestic violence, its incidence and intensification, as well as non-reporting.

The elderly in Serbia are still facing poverty (in spite of popular occasional governmental financial help, gifts in vitamins or other goods or even pension increases), discrimination, marginalization, and abuse. Great problem is the lack of special services and support at

²¹ Data were presented at the roundtable “Right to Old Age – Elder Abuse” organized by the Provincial Protector of Citizens – Ombudsman on the occasion of October 1st – International Day of Older Persons, 2021.

home (especially in rural areas), and also well regulated and supervised network of nursing homes, free of abusive practices, and mistreatment of the elderly²².

Protector of Citizens also noted in the Annual Report for 2021 that violence against the elderly is still not sufficiently reported, due to the fact that the elderly cannot report it, do not have support or do not want to report the violence they suffer from their closest family members, most often children, and due to insufficient recognition of emotional, social and economic violence. He emphasized that the problem is especially widespread in rural areas, where older women living alone in households are in a particularly difficult position, or they are most often dependent on other family members in meeting their needs, given that most often they do not have property rights on real estate and movable property, income, nor is their access to community-based services adequately provided in places where the transportation and public transportation structures are not in place (Protector of Citizens, 2022: 21). The fact that in general the least complaints came from the elderly indicates that presumably they are not able, do not know (how or to whom) or don't want to report violations of their rights (Ibid: 28). The Protector of Citizens himself spoke for the media (RTS, 2022) that in the coming period the care of the elderly will be set in focus, especially in the institutional settings. The triggers for the Protector of Citizens' previously mentioned statement/decision presumably were cases of violence against the elderly in private nursing homes presented in media. The similar statement was given by the Belgrade City Secretary for Social Welfare who announced on 15th of June, 2021 that special programmes would be created to protect elderly from abuse, as well as activities to raise awareness of the problem (Maričić, 2021).

It seems that decision makers think about the elderly and their problems most frequently (and conveniently) on special occasions as on October 1st or June 15th when they prepare suitable speeches, declarations and promises.

Author of this paper has conducted her own mini-survey on the issue of elder abuse in domestic settings. The interviews were conducted with 15 professionals (from prosecutor's offices, basic courts and social welfare system from Belgrade). Respondents were selected by random selection method, and the criterion was professional experience in domestic violence cases. The interviews were conducted on the basis of questions with open answers thus giving respondents the opportunity to express their views, comments,

²² The most drastic cases of violence in institutional settings in Serbia have had media coverage, thus initiating discussions on elder abuse and necessity to control better (especially) private nursing homes. The headline in one daily newspaper reads: "This isn't a nursing home for the elderly, it's a torture chamber! The old ones starve, tied to the bed; when they're sick, no one's allowed to call an ambulance! Hell in Krnjača!" (Ogarević, 2022)

observations and explanations. Thirty people over the age of 65 (15 men, 15 women) filled out the questionnaires on the issue of elder abuse in domestic setting. Respondents were selected by the method of snowball sample. Twenty were from the rural area and ten were from Belgrade.

The main findings are similar to those previously mentioned: most victims are women; psychological violence was most frequently mentioned; women are more often willing to talk/complain about violence they suffer from their partners, but officials (prosecutors, judges) are more often in contacts with victims of serious forms of violence committed by children toward their parents (and they think that old fathers are at almost the same risk of victimization as mothers are). The older men (fathers) are more often complaining on neglect, ungratefulness, and financial abuse committed by their children. A universal finding is the refusal of the elderly to report violence to authorities and seek help, and when the case gets a judicial epilogue they very often refuse to testify and/or insist on the treatment of a violent child (who often have problems with addiction and very often combine different forms of violence toward parents to get money or other financial gain).

The answers of all respondents made basis for the undoubted conclusion that there is still widespread sacrifice of parents for the welfare of their children, and the permanent justification for their actions (even violence) with a bad economic situation, the inability to find employment, while neglecting of old parents is justified by the duties and tasks children have at work, their need to take care of their own children, tiredness, etc. Children's mistreatment of parents in old age most likely has roots in the primary family in which parents did not demonstrate adequate parenting capacities and skills being either overprotective towards their children (thus continuous giving and caring from the parents have been taken for granted, despite the fact that the parents became old and they themselves need care and attention) or continuous violence has got reversed direction (former (now old and weak) perpetrators have become victims of domestic violence²³). It is interesting (and entirely expected) that all of the old respondents stated that they knew other old people who were being abused by their children even very severely. Respondents verbally condemn such acts, but did nothing in practice even when violence happened to their friends or acquaintances (except advising victims in several cases). All of the respondents made complaints about lack of visitation and/or desired attention of their children, and some kind of insufficient gratitude for everything they as parents have provided for them. But, some kind of justification usually comes alongside such answers

²³ About minors' violence towards parents and inadequate parenting styles, see: Jovanović, Sofrenović, 2016.

(which has already been discussed). Interestingly, there is also no criminal offense in prosecutorial and court statistics for a violation of family duty (Article 196 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia) that could be rightfully applied in the case of the neglect of old parents by children who are obliged to take care of them. It is an offense that is essentially a form of violence against the elderly, but there is no application of it presumably due to the powerlessness of the victims themselves, as well as the insufficient activity and care of the system.

4. Concluding remarks

Old age more often has been defined as an indicator of incapacity, unproductivity, dependency, impairment, and even burden for family, society, and even for old persons themselves. The burden becomes much heavier when the abuse by family members, the most loved ones occurs. Violence against children and women is still in the focus of the professional and public's interest to the extent that domestic violence is often identified with violence against children or women. All respondents-professionals (from the survey previously mentioned) said that domestic violence is primarily violence against women and children, and that the most common perpetrators are men – spouses/intimate partners and fathers. Most of the international and national policies and legal instruments emphasize women and children as victims. Public discourse is on the same line.

In international frame, elder abuse has become an important issue more than 20 years ago, but in Serbia it has recently been open as an important subject- still more declaratively, on special occasions (on October 1st and June 15th) or in connection with tragic events (brutal elder abuse cases) portrayed in the media in a sensationalist manner. Serbian society, impoverished and burdened by all sorts of problems, seems to be too tired to pay more attention to those who are perceived as burden in its own families, and society as a whole. Movements that would stand up for protecting the elderly from domestic violence are not so visible, nor is legislative or any other activity (except for occasional governmental financial contributions, gifts in vitamins and other goods, free public bus transportation). On the other hand, the society seems to be very hypocritical in its reluctance to legalize euthanasia that would secure the right to a dignified death especially for the elderly who are terminally sick and deprived of adequate medical and other types of care, tired of undignified life (Jovanović, 2020: 547-548).

Ageism in Serbia is booming and violence against the elderly must be seen in that context, especially violence in domestic settings, as it is very well hidden and underreported form of abuse, although according to some researchers – most prevalent form of elder abuse.

Elder abuse in domestic settings is inseparable from the context of domestic violence, too. It is necessary to pay more attention to it (as it was done in case of women and children) having in mind that old men are also victims of violence, and that very often the position of an old person (woman, man) is the same as the position of a child (helplessness due to different reasons). Judicial epilogues (and responses of the professionals) showed that just the most serious cases of elder abuse (with severe consequences and/or after a long time after first incident) in domestic settings are brought to daylight (the same happens with media attention – just the most sensational cases are presented in order to increase circulation or ratings).

It is unnecessary to say that the prevention must be priority, and the efforts must be taken in the sphere of education and raising awareness on zero tolerance on violence, on adequate, balanced parenting skills in primary family, on deconstruction of myths of unquestionable parental self-sacrifice for children underlined with unjustifiable excuses and self-neglecting, and in general healthy and active ageing emphasizing social inclusion of the elderly. The services for professional care at home and regulated and supervised institutional settings are of the great importance, as well as proactive social services sensible to detect and report perceived elder abuse in domestic settings.

The age of violence against the elderly is yet to come, according to data showing an ageing population globally. The number of old (at 60 years and more) will more than double by 2025 compared to 1995 in both developed and developing countries (WHO, 2002a). It is very clear that the absence of adequate family and social care for the elderly, and the lack of effective protective strategies will only foster a wave of elder abuse.

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