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Violence Against Women in Belgrade, Serbia:

SOS Hotline 1990-1993

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The SOS Hotline for Women and Children Victims of Violence opened in Belgrade, Serbia, in 1990. For each call reporting an incident of violence, a data form was completed with the details of the call. Almost all the callers were victims of violence from family members or intimate partners. The majority reported incidents of physical and verbal/emotional violence; a minority reported sexual and economic violence. The frequency and duration of violence were very high. Callers were often forced to live with perpetrators because of the lack of available housing, which worsened due to privatization, economic sanctions against Serbia, and the influx of refugees. Men's participation in the wars in Croatia and Bosnia increased their violence against women at home, especially sons against their mothers. Most refugees were housed in private homes, resulting in increased violence against women refugees and women hosts.

At the beginning of the decade, women in Belgrade founded an SOS Hotline to meet the needs of women and children victims of violence who were ignored by institutions and official organizations. Their goal was to assist individual women and raise the consciousness of a city about violence against women and children. This paper reports the findings of research on violence against women conducted by the staff at the SOS Hotline for Women and Children Victims of Violence in Belgrade.

BACKGROUND

Although socialism constrained the development of feminism by labeling it "Western," the borders of the Socialist Federal

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Republic of Yugoslavia were more open than those of many other socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. As early as 1976, feminist ideas were presented at academic conferences. In Belgrade in 1978, a feminist conference was held to introduce the ideas of feminism and challenge socialist patriarchy (Papić, 1995). A discussion group, called "Women and Society," formed in Belgrade (and Zagreb, Croatia) and continued to meet and discuss topics of interest to women. In 1986, this group defined itself as feminist. The group was condemned as an enemy of the state and as procapitalist by the official women's governmental organization. The group operated independent of governmental approval or financial support (Mladjenović & Litričin, 1993). They held workshops and public discussions on a broad range of topics, one of which was violence against women.

The first SOS Hotline in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia opened in 1987 in Zagreb, Croatia. Following this, the women in Belgrade, Serbia, tried for the next few years to establish a similar crisis line, but the authorities were suspicious and refused to grant them space and resources. After persistent effort, on March 8, 1990, International Women's Day, the SOS Hotline for Women and Children Victims of Violence opened in Belgrade.

At this time, former socialist countries in Eastern and Central Europe were undergoing democratization. For men's formal politics and economics, this meant multiparty elections and a free market economy, but for women, the reality was predatory capitalism, theft of national wealth, organized crime, and loss of social rights. Women lost on many levels from seats in Parliament to kindergartens for children. Accompanying democratization was the growth of nationalism and a new role for religious ideology that called for a return to patriarchal "old values." From their new platforms, political leaders blamed women for declining public morality and increasing criminal behavior and called for women to return to the kitchens.

A little over a year after the opening of the SOS Hotline, wars started in the Republic of Slovenia, then in the Republic of Croatia, and later in the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, as these countries declared their independence from the Yugoslav federation. The rise of nationalism, militarism, war, and, eventually, economic crisis intensified violence against women in Belgrade.

PHILOSOPHY, MISSION, AND ORGANIZATION

For the women who founded the SOS Hotline, most of whom define themselves as feminists, violence against women is a political issue. They do not believe that violence is a private affair of individual men and women, but a social problem that all social, political, and economic institutions should recognize and address.

From the beginning, the women founders of the SOS Hotline saw their work as political. Initially, the municipal and state agencies refused to provide office space and resources. With no local institutional support, the women turned to other women's organizations from other countries to get money and resources to establish the SOS Hotline.

The original mission of the SOS Hotline for Women and Children was threefold: (a) to assist victims of violence through a hotline; (b) to make visible to the public the existence, seriousness, and reality of men's violence against women and children; and (c) to initiate institutional change to bring about more prompt, serious, and sensitive responses to victims of violence.

During the first 4 years of its service (1990-1993), the SOS Hotline was the only service in the city of Belgrade (population 1,625,000) whose sole purpose was to assist women and address violence against women and children. During this time, 25 volunteers, who had undergone a training program on how to respond to calls from women and children seeking assistance, staffed the SOS Hotline. The women were on duty to answer the phone every evening from 6 to 10 p.m. During this time, the SOS Hotline received approximately 3,000 calls.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

For each call reporting an incident of violence, the woman staffing the hotline filled out a data form with the details of the call. Not all calls were recorded, nor were the full details of the caller or the violence always recorded. A portion of the calls were for emergency assistance or consisted solely of expressions of emotion about the violence with little detail, so the staff did not complete a data form. Requests for information were not recorded on the data forms. Also, given the nature of a volunteer organiza-

tion, some staff members did not complete data forms or did so inconsistently. The statistics compiled in this report are from the 770 completed data forms only (250 from 1991, 317 from 1992, and 203 from 1993). These represent approximately 26% of calls to the SOS Hotline.

FINDINGS

TYPES OF VIOLENCE

For 87% ($n = 670$) of the recorded calls, the caller was the direct victim of the violence. The remaining 13% ($n = 100$) of the calls were from friends or family members concerned about a woman, or a mother concerned about the abuse of her children.

The callers reported all levels and types of violence and threats—physical, sexual, emotional, and economic. Typical were the following calls to the SOS Hotline:

A man brutally beat a woman in front of her 2½-year-old child. When she went to the community police station to report the assault, the police told her that it was common practice for a husband to beat his wife.

Anita, age 40, has been married 13 years. Her husband is an alcoholic and has been in prison for assault. He beats her and her children regularly. After being beaten so badly she needed emergency treatment for head injuries, she went to the Center for Social Work, but they were closed. She called the SOS Hotline. She wants a divorce but is afraid of her husband. She said, "He beats me as if he doesn't see me, as if I am a sack."

On the first day of school, Vesna and Nada's father pointed a gun at them and told them to do their homework. The police did not seize the gun because the father has a license for it.

Biljana, age 37, is married to a man with a good-paying job. Several years ago, she divorced him because of his drinking and violence. Under pressure from her family and his promises that he had "changed completely," she returned to him. Now he beats her terribly and rapes her afterwards. They live in her apartment and he refuses to leave. She is frightened to ask for a divorce, especially if the court procedures are lengthy. He knows she wants a divorce and every day says to her, "I will kill you. You will see. I will put you under the earth. Your time is over."

Over 70% ($n = 568$) of the women reported being victims of physical violence ($n = 543$) and verbal/emotional violence ($n = 568$) (see Table 1). Over the 3-year period, 15.5% ($n = 119$) of all cases included threats to kill. In the cases of physical violence, the abuse had often continued for years. In 76.3% ($n = 416$) of the cases, the violence was several years in duration. Forty-four percent ($n = 240$) of the victims of physical violence indicated that the violence started immediately after they married. The violence was exacerbated by the frequency of the abuse. About 58% ($n = 318$) of the women reported that they were battered almost every day and 27.1% ($n = 148$) reported that they were battered at least once per week. Almost 12% ($n = 90$) reported that they had been raped. Most of the rapes were reported in conjunction with physical violence.

Six percent ($n = 46$) of the women reported incidences of economic violence, which is defined as violence against women's property and the exploitation by force of women's property, wages, and work. Through this type of violence the woman loses control over her money and property. Often she is only given a small allowance that is inadequate for her needs or the needs of the family for which she is responsible. She is often forced to do all the domestic work for an extended family. For example:

Sonja, age 70, continued to live in her husband's apartment after he died. Later she remarried and her new husband coerced her into selling the apartment. He used the money to build a new larger house and then invited his whole family to live there. They took Sonja's pension and forced her out of the house. She was hungry and dirty from sleeping in the streets and fields.

PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE

In this analysis of the perpetrators of violence against women, the following definitions are used: a "husband" is a man with whom the woman has a permanent living arrangement, whether or not they are married; a "partner" is a boyfriend or a man with whom the connection is less permanent; and a "former husband" is a man the woman has divorced or broken the permanent living arrangement.

Eighty-three percent ($n = 641$) of the perpetrators of violence against women are either husbands (64.9%, $n = 500$), former

TABLE 1
Type of Violence Reported by Women Callers

| <i>Type of Violence</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
|-------------------------|----------|----------|
| Physical | 543 | 70.5 |
| Verbal/emotional | 568 | 73.8 |
| Threat to kill | 119 | 15.5 |
| Sexual | 90 | 11.5 |
| Economic | 46 | 6.0 |

NOTE: Numbers and percentages exceed total number of calls and 100% because more than one type of violence could be reported per call.

husbands (13.2%, $n = 102$), or partners (5.1%, $n = 39$). When fathers (2.5%, $n = 19$) and sons (8.2%, $n = 63$) are included, we find that 94% ($n = 723$) of the violent attacks on women came from male family members or intimate partners. In only 6.1% ($n = 47$) of the cases are the perpetrators neighbors or strangers. Seventy-eight percent of the women ($n = 601$) live with the perpetrator of violence, making escape from potentially violent situations difficult (see Table 2).

Over the 3-year period of this analysis, there was an increase in the reports of violence against mothers from their sons, from 6.4% ($n = 16$) in 1991, to 7.6% ($n = 24$) in 1992, to 11.1% ($n = 23$) in 1993. This increase in violence from sons may be related to increased militarism in Serbia and young men's participation in the wars in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, a point to which we will return shortly.

The perpetrators come from all segments of society, including steel mill workers, clerks, university professors, physicians, and politicians (Ćetković, 1994). Although violence is a problem for a woman from all parts of society, the SOS Hotline knows more about violence against women from the middle class. Ćetković, a volunteer at the SOS Hotline, notes that members of the middle class have a telephone, they buy newspapers, and have learned about the SOS service. They are more likely to know about the SOS Hotline and be able to contact the office. Very little is known about the violence taking place in squatters camps and illegally built houses, or among ethnic Albanians, Gypsies, and other ethnic groups living in Belgrade.

TABLE 2
Relationship of the Perpetrator of Violence to the Victim

| <i>Perpetrator</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
|--------------------|----------|----------|
| Husband | 500 | 64.9 |
| Former husband | 102 | 13.2 |
| Partner | 39 | 5.1 |
| Father | 19 | 2.5 |
| Son | | |
| 1991 | 16 | 6.4 |
| 1992 | 24 | 7.6 |
| 1993 | 23 | 11.1 |
| Total | 63 | 8.2 |
| Other | 47 | 6.1 |
| Total | 770 | 100 |

VIOLENCE: REACTIONS AND CAUSES

Violence against women is a tactic by which men maintain control over and exploit women's bodies and labor. It can be used when a woman does not comply with the perpetrator's wishes. Sometimes she is used as a target for his displaced anger or to bolster his sagging masculinity.

One half (49.2%, $n = 377$) of all women callers reported that the cause of the man's violence was a minor irritation, such as "The baby cried," "There was too much salt in the soup," "Dinner was not ready at the expected time," or "There was no beer in the refrigerator" (see Table 3). The staff at the SOS Hotline came to refer to this cause as "nothing"—what might appear to be violence with almost no cause. The finding that violence is frequently precipitated by minor irritations is a common observation. Edwards (1989, p. 171) reported that women in refuges in the United Kingdom said they were beaten for "anything." As a man exploits a woman's physical, sexual, and emotional labor in the home, his demands for her to meet his needs increase, until a woman can be beaten for the smallest infraction or inconvenience in his life. Almost 60% of this sample reported that they were victimized almost every day, and three quarters of the women reported that the violence was of several years duration. These women lived in a state of constant violence and terror.

One third (33.5%, $n = 257$) of the women reported that the cause of the men's violence was alcohol. Men's violent behavior is often

TABLE 3
Women's Reports on Causes of Violence

| <i>Cause</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
|-------------------|----------|----------|
| Minor irritations | 377 | 49.2 |
| Alcohol | 257 | 33.5 |
| Jealousy | 78 | 10.2 |
| Apartment | 71 | 9.3 |
| Money | 65 | 8.5 |
| Children | 38 | 5.0 |
| Other | 85 | 11.1 |

excused because they were under the influence of alcohol. Although alcohol is often associated with men's violent behavior, feminists usually see it as a contributing factor to violent behavior, not a direct cause.

Ten percent (10.2%, $n = 78$) of the women reported that a cause of the violence was the man's jealousy. The accusation that a woman is seeing other men or thinking about seeing other men is common among perpetrators. Findings from other studies indicate that only in a small percentage of cases do such accusations have any validity (Edwards, 1989). The accusations and violence appear to be for the purpose of social control of the woman to keep her isolated.

The apartment (9.3%, $n = 71$) and money (8.5%, $n = 65$) were also reported as causes of the perpetrator's violence (see Inability to Escape section below for further discussion of the apartment). In addition, women cited the children as the cause of the men's violence in 5% ($n = 38$) of the cases. Other reasons were given in 11.1% ($n = 85$) of the cases. The staff of the SOS Hotline said that one of the causes of violence that appears in the Other category is "another woman." They observed that when a man starts a relationship with another woman the violence against the first woman starts or escalates.

The emotional reactions reported by the victims of violence were humiliation (52.3%, $n = 400$), anger (33.7%, $n = 258$), horror (27.6%, $n = 221$), shame (23.1%, $n = 177$), helplessness (13.2%, $n = 101$), fear (12.8%, $n = 98$), guilt (9.7%, $n = 74$), and shock (6.3%, $n = 48$) (see Table 4). Here it bears repeating that almost 60% of the women reported that they were battered every day and over one

TABLE 4
Emotional Reactions of the Victims to Violence

| <i>Emotion</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
|----------------|----------|----------|
| Humiliation | 400 | 52.3 |
| Anger | 258 | 33.7 |
| Horror | 221 | 27.6 |
| Shame | 177 | 23.1 |
| Helplessness | 101 | 13.2 |
| Fear | 98 | 12.8 |
| Guilt | 74 | 9.7 |
| Shock | 48 | 6.3 |

NOTE: Numbers and percentages exceed total number of calls and 100% because more than one emotion could be reported.

fourth reported that they were battered at least once a week. Over three fourths of the women reported that the violence was of several years duration. Violence of this intensity is torture. Under conditions such as these, a woman cannot survive with her self intact. The psychological adaptations of women to such violence have been described as traumatic bonding (Herman, 1992) and the Stockholm Syndrome (Graham, 1994).

LACK OF INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

The services of the SOS Hotline were needed because traditional institutions had little awareness or sympathy for women victims of violence, especially when the violence was committed by male family members. Table 5 shows institutional contacts by type of violence. The type of violence most likely to be reported to the police is threats to kill (40.3%, $n = 48$). Across institutions, the type of violence for which women are most likely to request institutional assistance is economic violence.

Within institutions where women request assistance, the structures and attitudes are conservative, the workings slow and inefficient. A slogan among workers is "Nobody can pay me as little as I work." Belgrade was the capital of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, so the institutions and bureaucracy were large. Since the withdrawal of the Republics of Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the institutions have downsized to reflect the needs of the smaller country. (The Federal Republic

TABLE 5
Requests for Assistance From Institutional Sources by Type of Violence

| <i>Type of Violence</i> | <i>Total</i> | <i>Police</i> | | <i>Social Workers</i> | | <i>Medical</i> | | <i>Lawyers</i> | |
|-------------------------|--------------|---------------|----------|-----------------------|----------|----------------|----------|----------------|----------|
| | | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
| Physical | 543 | 143 | 26.3 | 84 | 15.5 | 73 | 13.4 | 50 | 9.2 |
| Verbal/emotional | 568 | 143 | 25.2 | 100 | 17.6 | 76 | 13.4 | 67 | 11.8 |
| Threats to kill | 119 | 48 | 40.3 | 27 | 22.7 | 23 | 19.3 | 25 | 21.0 |
| Sexual | 90 | 31 | 34.4 | 24 | 26.7 | 12 | 13.3 | 18 | 20.0 |
| Economic | 46 | 15 | 32.6 | 16 | 34.8 | 12 | 26.1 | 12 | 26.1 |

of Yugoslavia is now composed of the Republics of Serbia and Montenegro.) The reorganization has meant cutting the number of employees. The officials generally function according to their own personal interests or benefits. The most frequent ways of getting action are through bribes or a personal connection, such as friend, relative, or common country of origin. When the client has such a connection, the machinery of the institution will work for him or her, sometimes even when the request is against the law. Doing favors is a sort of obsession. People claim their contribution by saying, "I always helped people," or "I always do nice things for nice people." If a woman does not have such a connection, she can expect to be greeted with coolness. This way of functioning means that attention is not given according to law or need.

The data from the SOS Hotline show that 31% ($n = 239$) of callers to the SOS Hotline had not previously contacted an institution or official about the violence. The majority of the callers, approximately 70%, had requested intervention or assistance from institutional sources such as police, social workers, physicians, and lawyers. A high percentage (70.5-84.7%) of those requesting intervention or assistance were dissatisfied with the response they received from officials in traditional institutions (see Table 6). Women reported that the response was inadequate, or they received no response at all. For example:

When a mother and child urged a man to stop watching his sports program on TV and allow the child to watch her program, the man became angry and beat the woman until she was covered in blood. She escaped and called the police. When the police arrived, the man said she was crazy and was always making trouble for him. He said she hit her own head on the wall just to provoke him and

get him in trouble. He offered the police brandy. The police and the perpetrator sat down together, drank, and talked. When the police left they warned the woman not to disturb a decent man anymore.

A woman who was badly beaten went to the Center for Social Work for assistance. They told her that marriage is a good institution and tried to convince her that her problems weren't that bad. The social worker told the woman it was her duty to save the family and suggested that she paint the walls of her apartment instead of complain about her husband.

A woman, age 29, has two daughters, ages 9 and 4. Her husband beats her regularly and humiliates her in front of their children. He beats her in a special way by hitting her head on the floor and punching her in the stomach and kidneys. He threatens her with a knife and tells her, "If you try to go away I'll cut you into little pieces. You will regret it. I will find you wherever you go and after I am finished there will be nothing left." Three years ago she wanted to leave him and get a divorce. She went to the Center for Social Work for assistance. They convinced her to stay with her husband and try to make a "normal" marriage and family. She wants a divorce now, but is terrified of her husband.

A woman, age 22, took a ride from a stranger after a fight with her boyfriend. He forced her at knifepoint to go to his apartment where he raped her. Later in the night she escaped and went to the police. She did not know the man's name and couldn't remember the address because she was traumatized, confused, and wanted only to escape. (She remembered the main entrance of the building, but not the apartment number.) The police did not believe her and accused her of making up the story. The police suspected her boyfriend of selling drugs, so accused her of using and selling drugs also. They pressed her to confess everything. They did not send her for a gynecological exam or collect any evidence to investigate or prosecute the crime.

One fourth of the women callers (23.9%, $n = 184$) to the SOS Hotline had previously contacted the police with complaints against the perpetrator. Of the women who had contacted the police, 79.3% ($n = 146$) were not satisfied with the response they received from the police.

Approximately 16% ($n = 125$) of the women callers had previously talked to social workers about the violence against them. Of those, 82.4% ($n = 103$) were dissatisfied with the assistance they received. In Belgrade, the Social Work Centers are bureaucratic and do not view women as an oppressed or exploited group. Women seeking assistance quickly become discouraged. The So-

TABLE 6
Women's Reports of Institutional Response to Their Requests for Assistance

| <i>Institutions and Officials Contacted</i> | <i>Contacts With Official Institutions</i> | | <i>Dissatisfaction With Institutional Response</i> | |
|---|--|----------|--|----------|
| | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
| Police | 184 | 23.9 | 146 | 79.3 |
| Social workers | 125 | 16.2 | 103 | 82.4 |
| Medical | 98 | 12.7 | 83 | 84.7 |
| Lawyers | 79 | 10.3 | 55 | 70.5 |
| Other | 91 | 11.8 | 55 | 60.4 |
| No contacts/requests | 239 | 31.0 | | |

cial Work Centers are not designed to address the needs of women, so women are often told that their requests are beyond the scope of the centers' responsibilities. Frequently, the staff at the social work centers refer women to lawyers.

Some of the women (12.7%, $n = 98$) turned to medical institutions for assistance. Women often need medical treatment for injuries caused by violence. Medical professionals may be the first public contact women have after they are battered. The SOS Hotline found that women were more dissatisfied (84.7%, $n = 83$) with the assistance they received from medical personnel than any other institutional group contacted. Violence against women is a health issue. When investigating women's health, Byllye Avery (1990) found that violence was an underlying cause of much of women's poor health.

Personnel in medical institutions are supposed to document, on request, any injuries a person has sustained. This record becomes a legal document to be used in court proceedings. When women with injuries requested this examination and documentation they were often discouraged or refused with a list of excuses. Doctors claim that the injury is not that serious or tell the women they do not have time to do it now, come back tomorrow. Some doctors try to get women to pay to get the examination and documentation. They try to send the women to other medical institutions. Often, they tell the women they do not want to interfere or take sides in a domestic dispute. Because the medical personnel are aware that police need this documentation for criminal prosecution, the conclusion to be drawn is that doctors do not see women's injuries as evidence of a crime.

A few women (10.3%, $n = 79$) sought assistance from lawyers. Although 70.5% ($n = 55$) of these women were dissatisfied with the assistance they received from lawyers, this level of dissatisfaction was the lowest among the institutional groups consulted. Women were most likely to get satisfaction through attorneys in filing for divorce or in court proceedings that attempted to correct abuses from economic violence. Although the procedures are slow and inefficient, the woman often wins because she is legally entitled to the mutual property. The SOS Hotline provides women with legal aid to make it possible for them to appear in court and win their cases.

Although institutions have always been conservative, they have become more so in the past few years, accompanying the increase in nationalism. They have reaffirmed patriarchal "eternal" values of family and women's roles as wife, mother, and caretaker. All other possibilities are judged harshly (Zajović, 1991). Nationalism and militarism have increased anger and hatred toward the enemies, which means anyone or anything that is different from the Serbian-defined norm (Denitch, 1994; Korac, 1993). As the wars continue, the people are becoming more intolerant, and violence is becoming more acceptable as a way of resolving conflict. Everyday problems and poverty increase people's irritability, and women and children are more likely to be judged as being responsible for the crimes committed against them. Democratization did allow a few people of different political views into institutions, but they are mostly grouped according to their political party affiliation. The result has been quarreling within institutions and discrimination against clients based on their party affiliation.

LACK OF PRIVATE RESPONSE

Women who are victims of violence are often left isolated and alone. They get little or no assistance from public institutions and often they get no help, support, or understanding from their family and friends. Table 7 lists private contacts that the women made by the type of violence committed against them. Women were most likely to talk to private sources about economic violence against them.

Many of the women callers indicated that private support from family and friends was very important to them, but only a minor-

TABLE 7
Requests for Assistance From Private Sources by Type of Violence

| <i>Type of Violence</i> | <i>Total</i> | <i>Parents</i> | | <i>Friends</i> | | <i>Neighbors</i> | | <i>Other</i> | |
|-------------------------|--------------|----------------|----------|----------------|----------|------------------|----------|--------------|----------|
| | | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
| Physical | 543 | 109 | 20.1 | 119 | 21.9 | 68 | 12.5 | 64 | 11.8 |
| Verbal/emotional | 568 | 108 | 19.0 | 116 | 20.4 | 75 | 13.2 | 75 | 13.2 |
| Threats to kill | 119 | 26 | 21.8 | 31 | 26.1 | 32 | 26.9 | 14 | 11.8 |
| Sexual | 90 | 22 | 24.4 | 22 | 24.4 | 16 | 17.8 | 9 | 10.0 |
| Economic | 46 | 13 | 28.3 | 13 | 28.3 | 14 | 30.4 | 4 | 8.7 |

ity (34.5-39.6%) received the support and assistance they wanted and needed. The majority of women (60.4-65.2%) reported dissatisfaction with the response they received from friends, parents, neighbors, or others, such as clergy or journalists (see Table 8). In almost two thirds of cases (65.2%, $n = 91$), women who asked for assistance from parents were disappointed with the response. Generally, however, women were more satisfied with the support and assistance they received from private sources than from institutional sources.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE PERPETRATOR TO THE VICTIM DETERMINES ASSISTANCE

The relationship of the perpetrator to the victim also determined the amount of assistance the victim received from public institutions and private individuals. Former wives received the least assistance, followed by mothers, wives, then partners (see Table 9). Although 82% of women who were victims of former husbands requested assistance or support (18% did not), this group reported the highest level of dissatisfaction with the assistance they received. Fifty-seven percent ($n = 57$) of former wives were not satisfied with the public and/or private support they received. It may be that less assistance is given to former wives because it is assumed that the divorce resolved the problem and soon all will be well.

The next highest rate of dissatisfaction with response to victims was from mothers abused by sons. About 75% of mothers sought support or assistance (25.3% did not), and one half of the women (49.2%, $n = 31$) were not satisfied with the response they received. Wives were less likely to have contacted private or institutional

TABLE 8
Reports of Satisfaction to Requests for Assistance From Private Sources

| <i>Source</i> | <i>Total</i> | <i>Dissatisfaction</i> | |
|---------------|--------------|------------------------|----------|
| | | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
| Friends | 151 | 96 | 63.6 |
| Parents | 139 | 91 | 65.2 |
| Neighbors | 92 | 60 | 65.2 |
| Others | 91 | 55 | 60.4 |

TABLE 9
Relationship of the Perpetrator to the Victim and Dissatisfaction With Response

| <i>Perpetrator (N = 758)</i> | <i>Callers Who Told No One of the Violence</i> | | <i>Dissatisfaction With Response From Institutional and Private Sources</i> | |
|----------------------------------|--|----------|---|----------|
| | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
| Former husband (<i>n</i> = 100) | 18 | 18.0 | 57 | 57.0 |
| Son (<i>n</i> = 63) | 16 | 25.3 | 31 | 49.2 |
| Husband (<i>n</i> = 491) | 159 | 32.4 | 216 | 44.0 |
| Partner (<i>n</i> = 38) | 14 | 36.8 | 14 | 36.8 |
| Father (<i>n</i> = 19) | 6 | 31.5 | 7 | 36.8 |
| Others (<i>n</i> = 47) | 17 | 36.2 | 19 | 40.4 |

sources for support or assistance. Of the two-thirds of wives who requested assistance (67.6%), 44% (*n* = 216) were dissatisfied with the public and/or private assistance. Women who were victims of violence from partners were the least likely to ask for assistance (36.8% had told no one), but when they did tell someone they were most likely to receive assistance and be the least dissatisfied. Almost 37% (*n* = 14) reported being dissatisfied with public and/or private assistance they received. It may be that a less permanent relationship between the victim and the perpetrator enables friends, relatives, and officials to see and respond to the violence in a more appropriate way and be less likely to blame the victim. If the relationship is seen as less permanent, people may think that support and intervention are more likely to result in change.

INABILITY TO ESCAPE

Escaping violence is difficult for women. Serious constraints on women's ability to escape are created by almost all (94%) of the

TABLE 10
Reasons for Staying With Perpetrator

| <i>Reason for Staying</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
|---------------------------|----------|----------|
| Need place to live | 221 | 28.7 |
| Economic necessity | 194 | 25.2 |
| Fear of more violence | 173 | 22.5 |
| Emotional connection | 128 | 16.6 |
| Children | 99 | 12.9 |
| Ignorance of law | 67 | 8.7 |
| Social pressure | 29 | 3.8 |
| Sexual needs | 6 | 0.8 |
| Other | 22 | 2.9 |

NOTE: Numbers and percentages will exceed total number of calls and 100% because more than one reason was given for staying with a perpetrator.

perpetrators who are family members and the lack of response or unsatisfactory response to requests for institutional and private assistance. During the course of conversations on the SOS Hotline, women often gave reasons why they were unable to escape the violence and had to continue to live with a perpetrator (see Table 10).

The most frequent reason (28.7%, $n = 221$) for being unable to escape a perpetrator was that the woman needed a place to live. Apartments are very difficult for women to obtain in Belgrade. During socialism, apartments were allotted by the state according to an assessment of need. A deduction was made from each employed person's salary for housing costs and the state invested large sums of money into building apartments. At each place of work, there was a commission that assessed the housing needs of its employees and allocated the available apartments. The criteria for determining who got an apartment were number of family members, number of children, length of time on the waiting list, and length of employment. For single people it was impossible to get an apartment. For residents of Belgrade who had been born there, the wait was longer because it was assumed that they could live with their parents. After obtaining an apartment, the tenants had social ownership and did not have to pay rent. The occupants had a legal right to live there and they could not be moved, but they did not have a legal right to sell it. There was much corruption involved in this process. There were a few independently owned apartments, but they were very expensive compared to people's salaries.

During socialism, the apartment was almost always obtained through the man's place of employment. Women, especially single women, were not thought to need an apartment. When couples divorced, apartments were considered part of social property and courts awarded the apartment to the spouse who was most in need. Usually, women were awarded the apartment because they had custody of the children and needed the space. Sometimes a large apartment would be exchanged for two smaller ones. Custody of children was the key issue in determining who was awarded the apartment. Many men tried to get custody of the children to keep the apartment.

With privatization (the transition from socialism to a market economy and private ownership), apartments were sold and tenants had the opportunity to buy the apartments from the companies where they worked, and there was a period during which people could get loans from banks to purchase apartments. However, when apartments became private property, the chance of a woman getting an apartment decreased. Most apartments had been obtained through the men and their names were on the legal documents. Now, when a couple divorces, the apartment is not viewed as social property, but as private property, and there are no legal provisions for the courts to award the apartment to the woman, even if she has custody of children. Some women have challenged men's right to ownership of the apartment even if his is the only name on the legal document. The women argue that the apartment was originally allocated to the family and if the man had been single he would not have been able to obtain the apartment in the first place. These court challenges are long and the outcomes are unpredictable. The SOS Hotline advises women who are divorcing violent men on how to go about obtaining their apartment after divorce.

Presently, apartments are on the market, but with the economic crisis brought on by the war and international sanctions against Serbia, owners will accept payment only in foreign currency.

One fourth of the women (25.2%, $n = 194$) indicated that they did not have the financial resources to leave and live on their own, and often support children or other family members. Over one half of the women callers (53.9%, $n = 415$) cited lack of financial resources and a place to live for their inability to escape the violence. Although economic circumstances are often what keep

women the world over trapped in violence, the economic situation in Belgrade has deteriorated greatly since the SOS Hotline opened in 1990. Prior to the separation of the Republics and the resulting wars, Yugoslavia had one of the highest standards of living of any of the Eastern or Central European communist countries. Since the beginning of the wars in Slovenia, then Croatia, and eventually, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the economy has been in crisis. International sanctions against Serbia for its aggression in Croatia, and eventually Bosnia-Herzegovina have created unemployment and hyperinflation. Also, Belgrade has been the destination for many refugees. Poverty and hardship are widespread, and women and children often pay the highest price. The result for women who are being abused is that escape is almost impossible.

The next most frequent reason for staying with a perpetrator was fear of more violence (22.5%, $n = 173$). Violence is used to control women and when a woman tries to leave, she is making an effort to escape the control of the perpetrator, therefore violence will often escalate with further harm to the woman. A woman's fear of more violence if she tries to leave is well-founded.

Even though women are abused, some still maintain an emotional connection to the perpetrator. A significant minority (16.6%, $n = 128$) of the women callers gave this as a reason they remain with a perpetrator. Recent research (Graham, 1994; Herman, 1992) has given a psychological explanation for the bonding that sometimes occurs between victim and perpetrator.

Children were also given as a reason (12.9%, $n = 99$) women remained with a man who was violent to them. Women are responsible for children's care and well-being. When women remain in a situation that is dangerous to them, it is often because they lack the financial resources to support children without the man's income. A few women (3.8%, $n = 29$) said they stayed with a perpetrator because of social pressure. Family traditions are often used to coerce women into living with violence. This rationale is often closely related to women's responsibility for children. Women are taught that to be a responsible mother they need to care for their children, even if it means tolerating violence to provide a family unit. When women discuss leaving a perpetrator, family and friends often argue that it would not be good for the children not to have a father.

A very small percentage (0.8%, $n = 6$) of the women gave sexual needs as the reason for staying with a perpetrator. Reasons that could not be easily categorized were included under the heading "Other." These accounted for a small number of women (2.9%, $n = 22$).

DIVORCE

Many women callers to the SOS Hotline thought the best way to escape violence is to get a divorce. Thirty-one percent ($n = 239$) of all women callers to the SOS Hotline considered divorce. Although this is a logical choice for most people, it should be noted that because violence against women is a way in which men control and exploit women, when women try to end men's control and exploitation the violence will often increase, not decrease. For the 3 years of recorded data, approximately 10% ($n = 77$) of all recorded calls were from women who had been abused during or after a divorce. It also verifies women's fear of leaving a perpetrator and makes her "choice" to stay with a perpetrator not illogical. The SOS Hotline staff report that the most serious physical injuries and the most threats to kill occurred when a woman tried to leave and get a divorce.

CHILDREN

Children were witnesses to acts of violence in 70% ($n = 533$) of the cases. Children also called the SOS Hotline. Generally, they wanted to talk about problems with school or friends. At first these calls were not seen as important or as serious as calls from women about violence. A few staff members with more patience and sensitivity continued talking to the children and often discovered more serious problems, such as incest, alcoholism, and abuse and threats to kill.¹

VIOLENCE RELATED TO WAR

Although there have been ethnic conflicts in the Balkans for centuries, these latest wars are the result of nationalism orchestrated by those in power or those aspiring to positions of power. The conflicts are not of grassroots origins (Women in Black, 1993,

1994). An essential component in the generation of hate toward the "others" has been media propaganda. The media war propaganda in Serbia gives accounts of how the "others" had and are victimizing Serbs and calls for a defense of their rights and country against the enemies, first Slovenia, then Croatia, and finally Bosnia-Herzegovina. The nationalist ideology is constructed through media propaganda on aggressive and violent masculinity (Korac, 1993; Zajović, 1991). When some men were asked why they went to fight in the wars, they said it was because they could not stand to see how Serbs were being killed in Croatia or Bosnia-Herzegovina.

There has been no fighting in Serbia, but men are soldiers in the Federal Yugoslav Army, which was involved in the wars in Slovenia and Croatia. Serbia has not officially been involved in the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (although there have been reports that contradict that claim). Men from Serbia joined paramilitary units, which are ruthless gangs that have been responsible for many of the atrocities, rape, and ethnic cleansing in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. A couple of the most notorious paramilitaries are known to originate in Serbia. (One paramilitary unit is reported to be led by a member of the Serbian Parliament.)

The nationalist hatred generated in Serbia requires a target on which to act out those feelings. In the autumn of 1991, the SOS Hotline started receiving calls from women who were battered after men watched the TV news (or special broadcasts) in which pictures of dead bodies were shown. The narratives were filled with hatred for "the enemy." Women reported that men became enraged after watching the nationalist propaganda and they beat women as a way to avenge their wounded national pride. Some women reported that they were beaten for the first time in their lives after the men watched one of the nationalist reports on Serbian victims of war.

The data collection form used by SOS Hotline staff was made up before the onset of the wars, so no questions directly addressed violence as a result of war and/or militarism, and a separate accounting of incidents relating to the war was not kept.² However, one of the items on the data form was "When did the violence begin?" In 1992, 10 women callers (3.2% of calls for 1992) indicated that the violence started "When he returned from the war." In 1993, six women (3.0% of calls for 1993) gave the same response. The SOS staff note that these low numbers that got reported on

data forms do not reflect the increase in violence to women they observed. (Also note the numbers are only for the recorded calls, which are approximately one fourth of all calls received.)

Men often searched for weapons long hidden in the house. Women told SOS Hotline staff that their husbands cursed the Croats and Muslims in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina while beating them. In some of these incidents, the women were beaten so badly that an ambulance was called to take them for emergency treatment. In most of these cases, the nationality of the woman was the same as that of her partner. The men displaced their hatred and anger onto a convenient target: the woman. In cases where the nationality of the man and the woman was different, the man beat the woman, claiming, "Our five minutes has come," meaning that this was the man's opportunity to be the victor for his nationality/ethnicity for a short period of time (Mladjenović, 1992, p. 55).

Men come back from fighting traumatized, angry, and violent. They bring the weapons they used in fighting with them and use them to threaten or harm women. Since the beginning of the wars, weapons have been kept in many homes. Pistols, hand grenades, and automatic weapons have become part of households. Shop windows display holsters and accessories for guns and knives. Women often call the SOS Hotline to say their partners are keeping hand grenades and revolvers.

Some of the men who came back from the front (from regular army or paramilitary battalions) continue massacres in their homes: They abuse women, beat their children, sleep with machine guns under their pillows, rape their wives while they are sleeping, destroy the furniture, scream, swear, spit, and accuse. (Mladjenović 1992, p. 54)

Women report an increase in men's alcohol abuse. After returning from fighting, men join criminal gangs even if prior to the war, they had no involvement in such groups. Men are angry and violent because they have not received the material rewards they thought they would from participating in paramilitary units. The men expect and demand emotional understanding and support from the women around them. They want to be viewed as heroes and expect a hero's welcome when they return to Belgrade. The enraged, frustrated men sometimes see their wives as their first enemy or someone on whom they can displace their rage.

One of the sharpest increases in violence since the beginning of the wars has been young men's violence against their mothers. The percentage of calls from women who were battered by sons almost doubled from 1991 to 1993 (6.4% to 11.1%).

Mladjenović (1992) has observed an increase in all types of rape, including martial rape, stranger rape, rape perpetrated by war veterans, and rape of the women refugees while they were escaping or staying at friends' homes. There is also an increase in the number of women reporting they have been threatened with guns or weapons while being raped.

The longer the wars continue, the more tolerance and acceptance there is for violence as a way of resolving conflict or gaining control. Since the wars, violence is legitimate in Parliament, streets, and homes, with the result being an increase in violence against women in the streets and homes. Consider the following examples:

I work at a hotel as a supervisor of cleaning ladies. Since the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina began, the hotel guests are mostly dubious individuals: bearded, ragged, and armed. Guns are an obligatory part of the apparel of the local boys. They never leave home without them. They don't make love [sic] too far from them. Violence is a part of everyday life. (Jasmina, quoted in *Women in Black*, 1993, p. 69)

Yesterday, while riding a bus, two women were talking about a Democratic Party rally that they had attended. A man was listening to them and when they got off he followed them. As the bus was pulling out of the station, I saw him slap one of them. (Tanya, quoted in *Women in Black*, 1993, p. 69)

A young woman student wanted to leave her boyfriend. He wanted her to stay and be near him. When she refused he threw a grenade into her house when she and her family members were present.

This level of violence and the use of military weapons in domestic locations was previously unheard of. From their observations and experiences with women who have suffered violence from war veterans, women are frightened to call the SOS Hotline for fear of reprisals or death. When the perpetrators are war veterans, getting the violence to stop is even more difficult. For these men, the use of violence as a way of resolving conflict has been reinforced. In addition, they have their comrades, with

whom they have killed, to legitimize and reinforce the use of violence. In Serbia, nationalism and militarism have become dominant ideologies in society. War veterans are put forth as heroes and held in high regard in society, so police, the court, and other state institutions are more reluctant to criticize or punish them.

REFUGEES

By the end of 1993, there were an estimated 469,000 refugees in Serbia, many of them in the capital city of Belgrade.³ Approximately 90% of refugees in Belgrade are housed in private homes (United Nations Human Rights Commission, 1993). As more and more refugees came to Belgrade in 1992 and 1993 and economic sanctions against Serbia created economic hardships, refugees overloaded the ability of family and friends to house them or economically support them. Women from Belgrade reported that the extra work of accommodating the refugees usually fell on them. They were responsible for managing the increased financial burden, solving problems, and providing for everyone's emotional needs. In situations where there previously was violence, the additional stress of refugees in the home escalated the violence. For instance:

Ana has in her house members of her husband's family who have fled the war in Bosnia. They are all men and none of them work. They wait for her to prepare their food, wash their clothes (even though there is no washing machine or running water in the house), iron their clothes, and clean the house. She has a little garden to grow vegetables, but the men will not help with that either—gardening is not men's work. The men give her no money. So, besides all the work in her home, she cleans neighbors' houses for money. She must keep this work secret so the men do not take what little money she earns or beat her for causing them shame by showing that they are not capable of providing for the family.

Women refugees themselves are at high risk of violence when they are being forced out of their homes (ethnic cleansing) and while they are traveling. When women are housed in private accommodations, they are at risk of violence from those with whom they must stay. The SOS Hotline received calls from women refugees who had been raped by men as an act of war or by men they lived with once they arrived in Belgrade. For example:

Mira and her children are refugees. They came to stay at her godfather's house in Belgrade. During the first week of their stay, the godfather raped Mira. She was too frightened to give her address when she called the SOS Hotline.

In response to rape and violence against women as a result of the war, women from the SOS Hotline formed first, the Group for Women Raped in War, and later, the Autonomous Women's Center Against Sexual Violence in Belgrade (Hughes & Foster, 1996; Hughes, Mladjenović, & Mršević, 1995; *Women in Black*, 1993).

CONCLUSIONS

Research from the SOS Hotline found that almost all of the callers were victims of violence from family members or intimate partners (94.0%). These findings are consistent with research from all parts of the world that indicate women are much more likely to be victims of violence from family and friends than they are from strangers.

The majority of callers reported incidents of physical and verbal/emotional violence (70.0%), with a minority of callers reporting incidents of rape (11.7%). A small portion of the callers reported incidents of economic violence in which the woman's property, wages, or work were exploited by force (6.0%). The staff of the Hotline acknowledge that most of their callers are from the middle class, who are more likely to know about the existence of the Hotline. They know little about violence against women from minority ethnic groups or those in marginal housing.

The frequency and duration of violence against SOS callers were very high. The majority of women who called the SOS Hotline reported that the incidents of violence occurred daily or weekly (58.3% and 27.1%, respectively) and had been ongoing for years (44.0%).

The reported causes of violence against women are in agreement with findings from other parts of the world. The women's reports of the cause of the violence are consistent with the feminist explanation of men's violence being a means of controlling women's physical, sexual, and emotional labor. As men's control over women increases, the infractions against men's wishes get smaller, until women feel as if they are being beaten for "nothing"

(49.2%). Also consistent with other research on violence against women, alcohol consumption is often associated with incidents of violence (33.5%). Men's fear of losing control over women's lives results in feelings of jealousy and suspicion that the women are seeing other men (although this is almost always unfounded). Violence from men's jealousy comprised a small but significant number of calls from women (10.1%).

Because almost all of the perpetrators of violence against women are family members, the majority of women live with the perpetrators (78.0%). Disputes about the apartment were a cause of violence (9.3%). The most frequent reason women gave for being unable to escape the violence was lack of another place to live (28.7%). The transition from socialism to a market economy has decreased women's ability to obtain an apartment. The international economic sanctions against Serbia for its aggression in the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina have also created an economic crisis and constraints so that women are unable to buy apartments, which are now under private ownership.

Media propaganda, nationalism, and the involvement of men in military and paramilitary actions have increased the violence against women in Belgrade. Women have been victims of war, directly and indirectly. Starting in autumn 1991, the SOS Hotline received calls from women who were beaten by men following nationalist media reports of war atrocities. From 1991 to 1993, the incidents of violence against mothers from their sons almost doubled.

Almost all of the refugees in Belgrade were housed in private homes, and this appeared to increase the risk of violent victimization—both for women refugees and women hosts.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE AND THE SOS HOTLINE

The original goal of the SOS Hotline for Women and Children Victims of Violence was to assist individual women and raise the consciousness of a city. The staff at the SOS Hotline have documented the insensitivity and lack of adequate institutional response to violence against women and children. Women have not been able to find assistance from the police, physicians, social workers, or lawyers. The personnel in institutions have had no preparation or education on the existence or dynamics of violence

against women. These officials and professionals have minimized or ignored violence against women, which is serious and often life threatening. The staff at the SOS Hotline found that insensitivity to violence against women is deeply rooted in institutions in Belgrade. The majority of callers to the SOS Hotline had previously contacted an institution (police, social work, medical, or lawyer) for assistance (69.9%), and the majority of the women were dissatisfied with the support or assistance they received (70.5-84.7%).

One of the goals of the SOS Hotline was to make the existence and seriousness of the violence and lack of institutional response visible to the public and thereby impel institutional change. However, these institutions are powerful and reluctant to change. In addition, the changes in Belgrade from 1990 to 1993 were toward nationalism and militarism—the antitheses of women's rights.

The SOS Hotline staff have found individuals within institutions that are more sensitive and willing to work with the SOS Hotline. They have made connections with individual social workers, police officers, physicians, and lawyers who are more sympathetic to women and child victims of violence and the work of the SOS Hotline. For now, the staff of the SOS Hotline works with these individuals until there is a time and opportunity for more influence within these institutions themselves.

ORIGIN OF FEMINIST EDUCATION AND ORGANIZATION

One impact the SOS Hotline did not anticipate at its inception was its role as the leading educator on women's issues and the progenitor of other feminist groups and organizations for women in Belgrade. The workshops and trainings at the SOS Hotline became a school of feminism where women learned the reality of women's lives and experiences. Numerous women's organizations have emerged directly from the SOS Hotline: the Group for Women Raped in War, the Autonomous Women's Center Against Sexual Violence, the SOS Hotline and Center for Girls, and the Law Advocacy Center. Some staff members of the SOS Hotline founded the antiwar group, Women in Black, and the Center for Women's Studies Research and Communication (Hughes & Mladjenović, 1995). The SOS Hotline provided the training ground for many feminists in Belgrade who have continued to

work at the SOS Hotline and have moved on to organize new initiatives for women all over Belgrade and farther afield, as new SOS Hotlines have opened in other towns and cities in Serbia.

NOTES

1. In 1994, an SOS Hotline and Center for Girls was founded in Belgrade.
2. For a description of antiwar activism, projects, and organizations created to assist victims of war, see Hughes, Mladjenović, and Mršević, 1995.
3. Following the war in Slovenia, 37,000 Serbs left Slovenia and registered as refugees in Serbia. During the war in Croatia, tens of thousands of Serbs fled to areas of Croatia under nationalist Serb control, whereas 160,000 people (almost all Serbs) left Croatia and registered as refugees in Serbia. All figures are quoted from the U.S. Committee for Refugees (1993), which relied on the Commissariat for Refugees, Republic of Serbia. In 1993, the United Nations Human Rights Commission, basing its figures on Red Cross reports from each country, reported that within the territory of the former Yugoslavia, there were the following numbers of refugees: 985,000 in Croatia; 87,000 in Krajina; 469,000 in Serbia; 2,280,000 in Bosnia-Herzegovina; 60,000 in Montenegro; and 32,000 in Macedonia.

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