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**ELDERLY PEOPLE AND DISCRIMINATION:  
PREVENTION AND REACTION**

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*Elderly People and Discrimination: Prevention and Reaction*

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## **VIOLENCE AGAINST THE ELDERLY AND POSSIBILITIES OF PREVENTION**

*The elderly represents a particularly vulnerable social group. Due to their cognitive and physical predispositions, they are faced with various limitations and very often become victims of violence.*

*Violence against the elderly is often perpetrated both by family members and employees of institutions for the care and accommodation of the elderly. In this paper, we deal with the phenomenology of this type of violence, as well as the possibilities of its prevention. We start from the assumption that the prevention of violence against the elderly isn't recognized as one of the priority areas both at the global and national level, and that in the coming period, bearing in mind the accelerated aging of the population, it's necessary to improve measures for the protection of the elderly, both from violence, as well as from poverty.*

*In this paper, we deal not only with the analysis of the existing international and national legal framework, but also with the analysis of reports on the situation and dominant forms of violence against the elderly, which were carried out in the previous period at the international and level of the Republic of Serbia by different institutions and organizations. The goal of such analysis is to make recommendations for the improvement of various mechanisms for the prevention of violence against the elderly.*

**Keywords:** *violence, elderly, prevention, institutions, improvement of protection*

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## 1. Introduction

There is no definition of age in the literature. Therefore, the authors state that when assessing age, it's necessary to take into account the physiological and socio-psychological characteristics of the personality. There's no doubt that the way of life and cultural circumstances affect the fact that an individual feels old, as if others also perceive him as an old person. Bearing in mind that the retirement age is 65, in our country elderly persons are generally considered to be persons older than the staged age (Knežić, 2010: 66-67).

Elderly persons are susceptible to victimization primarily because of their physical and psychological predispositions. According to the author's conclusions, which are the result of conducted research, violence against the elderly is influenced by various factors. Among them are the characteristics of abusers, lack of services for professional care of the elderly, prejudice against the elderly, dependence of the elderly on other people's care and help, poor housing and economic conditions (Ignjatović & Simeunović-Patić, 2011: 70 and 71).

Elder abuse is defined by the World Health Organization. It's understood as a one time or repeated action or lack of appropriate action in which there is an expectation of trust, which causes damage or neglect of an elderly person. According to the World Health Organization, violence against the elderly is present both in the family and in the institutional environment. It can take many forms: physical, psychological, financial, sexual and neglect. According to data from the World Health Organization, one out of six people aged sixty or more experiences some form of violence in the family environment, while in institutions (nursing homes) and other institutions for long-term care, the rates of abuse of older people are even higher. The document of the World Health Organization states that two out of three employees in such institutions stated that they abused an elderly person during 2021 (World Health Organization, 2022: 1).

When talking about violence against the elderly, the authors often refer to the tradition, which, although it was very present in society, represented violence against the elderly. Thus, in south-eastern and eastern Serbia, almost until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century "lapot" was present, i.e. the killing of old people, which was most often carried out by children or the closest relatives when the old member of family was no longer able to provide for the household (Satarić, 2016: 54; Pavlović, 2019: 178).

Therefore, even in such an act, the motives were mainly of an economic nature, although it's stated in the literature that the decline of the mental and physical capacities of the elderly can also affect the appearance of violence against the elderly, because the

newly created situation can cause stress in persons who lived with the elderly and who aren't trained how to react adequately (Ignjatović & Simenunović-Patić, 70).

The consequences of elder abuse are serious. According to research data, elderly persons who have been exposed to abuse are at a much higher risk of death than those who haven't experienced such an experience. Among elderly persons, victims of violence, there is a higher level of psychological stress, worsening of chronic diseases has been recorded, and as a result of stress, high blood pressure, as well as heart problems (Janković *et al.* 2015: 35).

In this paper, we start from the assumption that there is a lack of effective mechanisms for the prevention of violence against the elderly at the global and national level, and that it's necessary to improve the system of protection of the elderly persons. Therefore, in this paper we apply the analysis of the content of various legal documents and reports of different institutions and organizations which show the state of exposure to the elderly to violence.

Starting from the fact that the reduction of each individual risk of abuse of the elderly requires special attention, in the first part of the paper, we indicate the risk factors of violence against the elderly. Then, we will look at the content of international standards regarding the protection of older persons from violence, while in a separate section we will refer to national regulations and reports of relevant institutions.

## **2. Risk factors affecting violence against the elderly**

According to research results published in a 2012 study, risk factors are related to both the elderly and abusers. According to them, people with impaired health are more exposed to violence (Petrušić *et al.* 2012).

The presence of cognitive or physical problems in the elderly increases the risk of abuse. According to research, as many as 2/3 of people who use violence against the elderly were family members, children, grandchildren or other relatives. However, it's often pointed out that the stress of caregivers who care for infirm elderly people also contributes to this. The aforementioned problems in the elderly also increase the stress of caregivers, who are often not trained to provide care. The problem is also the social isolation of the elderly, as well as the negative attitude of society towards them, which is reflected in the attitude that the elderly are a burden for society, which often contributes to the formation of prejudices and stereotypes. Social isolation is most often caused by cognitive and physical problems, so it seems that violence against the elderly is caused by the action of various factors. The lack of "intergenerational solidarity" within the family

is highlighted as a very significant problem. In some families, violence is a frequent phenomenon, because it's a pattern of behavior that's passed from generation to generation. However, it's a response to stress and is a means of control (*Ibid.* 18).

When it comes to the elderly, it seems that there's no institutional mechanism that deals with the prevention of violence against them. If we look at other particularly sensitive persons, such as e.g. minors, it can be concluded that they still enjoy a higher degree of protection, at least when it comes to the institutional level. For example, at school, we have different protection mechanisms against minors, i.e. of peer violence (Kostić, 2021 a); Kostić, 2022). Of course, such an approach is completely justified, bearing in mind the needs of minors' personality development. However, the elderly should also enjoy an adequate level of protection from violence, given that there is a high possibility of victimization when it comes to them.

Violence against the elderly also contributes to the reduction of the value of the elderly by society, the migration of younger family members, the weakening of family ties and intergenerational conflict. Women (daughters or daughters-in-law) who take care of the victims stand out as the persons who more often commit violence against the elderly. Their unpreparedness for the relief of caregivers also contributes to violence. However, some families are more prone to violence than others, because violence is a learned behavior that is passed down through generations. In such families, it's a way of reacting to stressful situations (Vujović, 2017: 69).

When it comes to the stress of persons who are in the role of caregivers, it's necessary to look at the wider context of the overall relationship between the victim and the abuser. So, for example, when it comes to caring for Alzheimer's patients, the nature of the relationship between the caregiver and the patient prior to the onset of the disease should also be taken into account, as this also contributes to violent behavior. In addition, it's stated that physically aggressive persons more often have a personality disorder or a problem with the consumption of alcohol or psychoactive substances, and because of this, there's an increased risk of becoming abusers of their older family members (*Ibid.* 70).

Bearing in mind the fact that a frequent cause of violence against the elderly is a lack of economic security, as well as that their better material position could eventually contribute to reducing the possibility of their victimization, the elderly should enjoy the right to an adequate standard of living, which was established by international legal standards. Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights defines the aforementioned right as the right of every member of society to social insurance, the right to realize the economic, social and cultural needs necessary for personal dignity and the free to social insurance, the right to realize the economic, social and cultural needs necessary for personal dignity and the free development of the personality, which should be provided by



the state in various ways, including international cooperation (Ćorić, 2020; Simović & Simović, 2020). However, it depends primarily on the organization of the state, as well as from the resources available to it (Article 22 of the Declaration). In addition, the Declaration provides that everyone has the right to a standard of living that affords him and his family the health and well-being of every member of the family, including food, clothing, furniture, medical care, social services, insurance against unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age and other cases that can lead to the loss of the possibility of maintenance caused by some other circumstances independent of the will of a certain person (Article 25 of the Declaration, cited according to Kostić, 2021 b): 254). When it comes to the elderly, in most cases, due to low pensions, they lack the funds necessary even for the most necessary life needs. In addition, they are often unable to take care of themselves due to their psychophysical abilities, so they are forced to be taken care of by family members, for whom this often represents a great stress. This can be the trigger for committing both psychological and physical violence against the elderly. However, due to a lack of money due to low pensions, the elderly people aren't able to pay for accommodation in nursing homes where they might be able to receive better care due to the training and experience of the staff. However, on the other hand, one should be careful in such cases, bearing in mind that in the previous period, the witnessed various types of violence and inhumane actions towards the elderly precisely in homes for the accommodation and care of the elderly.

When it comes to poverty, it seems necessary to adopt a new poverty reduction strategy at the national level, in which special attention would be paid to vulnerable categories of the population such as the elderly. The last strategy was adopted in 2003. According to the position of the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, poverty shouldn't only be considered the lack of income, but also the inability to live with dignity due to the lack of resources and the ability to achieve an adequate level of living standards and realize civil, cultural, economic and social rights (United Nations - Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Substantive Issues Arising in the Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Poverty and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2001: 1 and 2; Sekulović, 2020: 3 and Kostić, 2021 b): 255).

According to the author's research from 2007, which was carried out on the territory of Croatia, men were more likely to commit psychological violence against older members of the household than women, while older women were more often exposed to violence by their husbands than men were exposed to violence by women. Apart from husbands, according to available data, older women were more exposed to violence by sons, grandsons, sons-in-law, and daughters-in-law than older men. Likewise, when it

comes to their own exposure to violence, it's noticeable that women are more willing to talk about it than men. However, even this research doesn't deny the fact that women are mostly perpetrators of violence against the elderly then talking about the violence that comes from the caregivers (Ajduković *et al.* 2008: 16). According to the results of the same research, in relation to the older population, psychological violence was the most common, followed by material, physical and sexual violence. The willingness to talk about the violence experienced doesn't imply the willingness to report the violence to the competent institutions at the same time. Persons who were more exposed to violence were less ready to report it. Therefore, it's necessary to provide more adequate support through various services and relevant programs to elderly people who are victims of domestic violence (*Ibid.* 19).

Some of the measures that can be taken for the prevention of violence against the elderly are counselling or training of family members or persons who provide care and assistance, as well as the transfer of an elderly person from a violent environment while simultaneously providing medical, psychological and financial assistance. As one of the ways to improve assistance to the elderly who are victims of violence, the possibility of setting up hotlines and information centres to inform the elderly about their rights, while organizations specialized in helping the elderly could provide legal advice and legal assistance to victims of violence (Vodič za nacionalnu implementaciju Madridskog internacionalnog plana akcije o starenju, 96-97).

The approach to the prevention of violence against the elderly should be adapted to the type of abuser. Several different types are distinguished in the literature. One type is the "overcrowded" who are well-intentioned and are expected to provide adequate care for the elderly. They have the qualifications, necessary skills and motivation. However, when they are under pressure, they can't adequately care for the elderly, but attack them verbally or physically, which can contribute to neglect. Then "unsuitable" abusers are mentioned as a special type. They are well-intentioned, but they are people who have a problem and are unable to take care of an elderly person adequately. A very dangerous type of bully, are the so-called "narcissistic" bullies. Their main motive for caring for the elderly is personal gain, and the elderly are only a means to realize their goals. In addition to them, the so-called "arrogant and aggressive" are particularly dangerous. They are abusers who believe that abuse of other person is justified and know where they can behave violently and when not. "Sadistic" abusers are the most dangerous category and they feel power through humiliation, intimidation and injury. Such persons don't show a sense of guilt and remorse (Janković *et al.*, 27-28).

It's possible to act preventively on the first two categories of abusers in order to reduce their burden if they are employees of homes for the elderly or family members and

to help them solve problems through adequate assistance programs, but also with their cooperation. The third category requires the empowerment of older persons in order to recognize abusers and reduce the possibility of their own victimization which isn't an easy task, especially if, for example, dementia occurred in old people. Therefore, in such cases, the involvement of the whole society is necessary. When it comes to "arrogant and aggressive abusers", as well as "sadistic" abusers, it's necessary to apply special measures of both repressive and preventive nature. Bearing in mind that it requires a special approach, it seems that multidisciplinary research in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, sociology, andragogy and law would help in the application of appropriate measures and the eventual improvement of existing prevention mechanisms.

It should be borne in mind that society can't effectively respond to the problem of the elderly if there is no clearly defined coordination of the institutions of the system, as well as the wider local community. A very important prerequisite for such coordination is the timely collection of relevant data and the establishment of unique databases on violence against the elderly with their regular updating (Janković, *et al.* 2015: 39).

### 3. International standards

There is no international standard that deals exclusively with the prohibition of violence against the elderly. In general, the prohibition of violence is prescribed by the provisions of various international documents. According to Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, no person may be subjected to torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.<sup>1</sup> Elderly people usually acquire some kind of disability over time, so from the aspect of their protection, the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities is also important.<sup>2</sup> Article 15 of the aforementioned convention guarantees the absence of abuse or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of persons with disabilities, and the contracting countries are obliged to take all appropriate legal, administrative, social, educational and other measures to protect people with disabilities from violence. According to Article 17 of the

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<sup>1</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966, entry into force 23 March 1976. Text in english of mentioned Covenant is available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/ccpr.pdf>, 7.7.2023.

<sup>2</sup> The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol was adopted on 13 December 2006 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, and was open for signature on 30 March 2007. Text in english of mentioned Convention is available at:

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-2.html>, 7.7.2023.

same convention, every person with a disability has the right to respect for their physical and mental integrity, just like other people.

At the level of the European Union, there is also no standard that would guarantee human rights exclusively to the elderly. The prohibition of torture is also prescribed in a general way. The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in Article 3 prescribes the prohibition of torture.<sup>3</sup> According to Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 5 of the Council of Europe Convention on Human Rights, everyone has the right to protection of mental and physical integrity and protection from inhuman and degrading treatment, everyone has the right to personal freedom and security (Sjeničić, 2020: 15 and 16).<sup>4</sup>

In 1991, the United Nations adopted the Principles for the Elderly. They recognize the reason for which the elderly are most often discriminated against, so in accordance with them, the elderly should be treated fairly regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic affiliation, disability or other status and shouldn't be evaluated independently of their economic contribution. It's precisely this economic moment that contributes to the negative attitude towards the elderly. In addition, the elderly should benefit from family and social care and protection in accordance with the cultural value system of each society. The principles, as an important component of the dignified life of the elderly, also recognize the provisions of access to social and legal services in order to improve their protection, rehabilitation and social and mental stimulation in a human and safe environment. Therefore, older people should be able to enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms when staying in any shelter, care or treatment facility, including full respect for their dignity, beliefs, needs and privacy, as well as the right to make decisions about their care and the quality of life. However, the stated principles aren't legally binding, so the rights of the elderly are viewed in a general way, i.e. in terms of human rights that are guaranteed to everyone by international standards, and which are contained in national constitutions.<sup>5</sup>

In 2002, a non-legally binding document was adopted, the adoption of which was conditioned by the consequences of population aging at the global level. It's the Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging, which can be said to be a very important

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<sup>3</sup> Text of the Convention is available at: [https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/Convention\\_ENG,7.7.2023](https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/Convention_ENG,7.7.2023).

<sup>4</sup> Text of the European Convention of human rights is available at: [https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/Convention\\_ENG,7.7.2023](https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/Convention_ENG,7.7.2023).

<sup>5</sup> The United Nations Principles for Older Persons were adopted by the UN General Assembly (Resolution 46/91) on 16 December 1991. Text is available at: <https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/documents/fourth/AWAZUNprinciplesforolderpersons.pdf,7.7.2023>.

document of global aging policy. The aforementioned document points out the great influence of the media on attitudes in society towards the elderly and their marginalization by glorifying youth and strengthening negative stereotypes about the elderly. The position of older women in developing countries is particularly pointed out, which is increasingly unfavourable, bearing in mind political, social and economic exclusion. The media contributes to this to a great extent by promoting the idea that the role and value of the elderly in modern society is very small or insignificant (Vodič za nacionalnu implementaciju Madridskog internacionalnog plana akcije o starenju, 15).<sup>6</sup> And in the Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging is indicated that violent behaviour towards the elderly can be undertaken both by family members and by persons who provide them with care. However precisely because of the non-reporting of this type of violence, especially when it comes to family members, it's impossible to collect adequate data in order to study the prevalence of such behavior. The elderly can be victims of physical violence as well as neglect, ignoring or banning any social contact (*Ibid.* 96).

During 2022, the World Health Organization published the document "Tackling abuse of older people, five priorities for the United Nations Decade of Health Aging (2021-2030)". The adoption of the mentioned document was preceded by cooperation at the global level of the governments of different countries, civil society organizations, international agencies, professionals, the academic community, the media and the economic sector, with the aim of improving the way of life of older people and the families and communities in which they live. The aforementioned document singles out several priority areas of action in order to realize the aforementioned goal. Violence against the elderly is recognized as a very important issue, as is the lack of coordinated action regarding its prevention (World Health Organization, 2022: 1).

The main priorities in the document are: changing the way of thinking, experiencing and relating to age and aging, enabling communities to nurture the abilities of older people (work, education, housing, social protection, transport), providing integrated car and health services suitable for older people and ensuring access to long-term care for the elderly who need it (*Ibid.* 2). In addition, at the global level, there's a need to improve the way of collecting data on violence against the elderly in order to assess the risk and propose the application of protection measures, as well as the increased allocation of financial resources to reduce violence against the elderly (World Health Organization, 2022: 11-14).

The documents states that violence against the elderly is still at a very low level among world priorities, while the prevention of such violence should be dealt with in a

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<sup>6</sup> Translation in Serbian is available at: <http://www.zavodsz.gov.rs/media/1254/vodic-za-nacionalnu-implementaciju-mipaa.pdf>, 7.7.2023.

more harmonized, sustainable and coordinated manner (*Ibid.* 15). However, the priorities listed in the documents are also not of a binding nature, but their implementation depends on the interest of governments, civil society organizations, academic and research institutions and financiers.

#### **4. Violence against the elderly and available mechanisms at the national level**

Bearing in mind that international legal documents generally don't recognize the elderly as a special category, the same approach is included in the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia.<sup>7</sup> The only provision that expressly mentions the elderly is the provision guaranteeing the prohibition of discrimination. In accordance with it, everyone has the right to equal legal protection without discrimination, and it's prohibited on any basis, especially on the basis of race, gender, nationality, social origin, birth, religion, political or other belief, property status, culture, language, age and mental or physical disability (Article 21).

When it comes to violence against the elderly, the Criminal Code doesn't sanction such behaviour with a special provision.<sup>8</sup> In situation when it comes to any kind of abuse of the elderly, it's possible to apply the provisions of the aforementioned Code, which prescribes criminal acts: domestic violence (Article 194), failure to provide maintenance (Article 195), violation of family obligations (Article 196), abandonment of a powerless person (Article 126), defamation of a powerless person (Article 179), abuse of trust (Article 216).

However, it seems that the establishment of a systemic approach based on effective coordination of various bodies and institutions would be of greater importance for the prevention of violence against the elderly. In this context, the adoption of a new strategy on aging would be of great importance. When adopting it, it should be taken into account not only the obligations taken from international documents, but also the results of scientific research from different fields, which deal with different aspects of aging.

The previous Strategy on Aging at the national level was adopted for the period 2006-2015.<sup>9</sup> In it, as one of the goals that should be realized in the mentioned period, the reaffirmation of the role of the family and family solidarity in improving the quality of

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<sup>7</sup> The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, no. 98/2006 and 115/2021.

<sup>8</sup> The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, no. 85/2005...35/2019).

<sup>9</sup> The text of the Strategy on aging for the period 2006-2015 is available at: [https://www.minzrs.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2018-11/Nacionalna%20strategija%20o%20starenju\\_1.pdf](https://www.minzrs.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2018-11/Nacionalna%20strategija%20o%20starenju_1.pdf), 7.7.2023.

life of the elderly in the development of the social community was foreseen. That goal should have been realized through programs of economic, cultural, social and urban development at the level of local self-government and at the level of the republic. In addition, to the staged goal, the Strategy also envisaged the improvement of the social, economic, political and cultural position and role of the elderly, the improvement of the integration of the elderly by encouraging their active involvement in the community and encouraging the development of intergenerational relations, priority development of forms of social support for the family and assistance to older people in their natural living environment, as well as ensuring more equal access to accommodation services. The last of the stated goals meant overcoming uneven access to housing services in social protection institutions due to capacity deficits and their territorial distribution.

As very important goals in the previous strategy are foreseen: the promotion and support of intergenerational and integration solidarity, as well as the provision of special support to families who care for the elderly and members of family dependent on care and assistance, the development of networks of home treatment and care services, the improvement of social protection services, and especially daycare services and help at home. Support for families caring for their elderly members should have included various types of financial and material assistance, as well as education for family members caring for seriously ill, adult and elderly persons and organizing psychosocial support for caregivers. According to the previous Strategy on Aging, legal and other measures of economic, social and health policy, it was necessary to ensure the protection of women who meet the demands of traditional and modern roles on a daily basis and are the most frequent caregivers of sick elderly family members.

During 2016, the Evaluation of the implementation of the National Strategy on Aging of the Government of the Republic of Serbia 2006-2015 was prepared and proposals for a new strategic framework were made.<sup>10</sup> The mentioned document states that in the implementation of the planned activities, the greatest progress was recorded in terms of improving the institutional system of social protection (homes for housing the elderly) (Kozarčanin & Milojević, 2016: 11). According to the results of the research, it seems that there is an uneven realization of goals in rural compared to urban areas. Rural areas are somewhat neglected, and at the same time it was noted that not all planned activities were fully implemented at the level of all local self-government units (*Ibid.* 28).

In the period of analysis of the results of the implementation of the National Strategy on Aging a lack of personnel in the centers for social work was noted, as well as

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<sup>10</sup> The text of the document is available at: <http://www.zavodsz.gov.rs/media/1230/evaluacija-primene-nacionalne-strategije-o-starenju.pdf>, 7.7.2023.

a lack of financial resources for the implementation of the secondary health care system, which includes both permanent housing for the elderly and their palliative care, so it's one of the general conclusions that the system of such health care is inaccessible especially to people in old age. At the same time, a lack of specialization of future healthcare workers in the field of geriatrics and gerontology was observed, so special attention should be paid to the improvement of knowledge in these fields during regular schooling (Kozarčanin & Milojević, 28-30).

In the observed period, abuses of elderly persons were recorded in the sense of concluding lifetime support contracts with them, as well as complete deprivation of business capacity. In addition, there is a lack of assistance to single elderly households, as well as to informal caregivers, i.e. to family members who take care of parents or relatives (e.g. in terms of domestic help). In this sense, a significantly worse situation was recorded on the territory of the whole of Serbia than during the adoption of the Strategy on Aging for the period 2006-2015 (*Ibid.* 31). However, special attention should be paid to regular monitoring of the work of certain institutions, especially private homes for the elderly, in order to take preventive measures in a timely manner and protect the elderly from violence.

The Commissioner for the Protection of Equality in his annual report for 2022 also indicates the need to improve the position of the elderly, especially the position and economic situation of elderly women who are more exposed to poverty and violence than elderly men (Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, 2022: 22).<sup>11</sup> In the same report, the Commissioner points to the need to encourage activities through which the inclusion of older people in various areas of social life is carried out equally and in a planned manner, as well as the need to improve the availability of help at home, patronage services, telephone counseling, services of occasional and temporary accommodation for the elderly, services palliative care, as well as services for the elderly with mental disabilities, with an increase in the number of medical workers specialized in working with the elderly (*Ibid.* 32).

Of special importance for the improvement of the position of the elderly is the Special Report of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality on the discrimination of the elderly. According to the recommendations from the aforementioned report, all authorities at the republican, provincial and local levels should, when designing and implementing various measures and activities related to reduced poverty, should take into account statistical indicators and results of relevant research, as well as previous analyzes

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<sup>11</sup> Poverenik za zaštitu ravnopravnosti (Commissioner for the Protection of Equality), Regular Annual Report of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality for 2022. The text of the Report is available at:

[https://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/RGI-2022\\_15.3.pdf](https://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/RGI-2022_15.3.pdf), 7.7.2023.



of already undertaken measures and with consideration of the long-term effects of the application of all measures in practice on senior citizens. In addition, as a measure of particular importance, the report emphasizes the necessity of developing a system of support for older citizens at the level of local self-government units (Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, 2021: 278).<sup>12</sup> In addition, to the above, the report points out that when drafting strategic documents, action plans and other acts that envisage measures and activities relevant to the elderly, as well as during their implementation, it's necessary, first of all, to include representatives of elderly citizens and organizations that deal with the human rights of the elderly. In order not to happen that some important measure isn't implemented for many years, regular evaluation of the implementation of the planned measures and activities should be carried out in order to timely assess their effect on different groups of senior citizens and the possible need for their changes (*Ibid.* 348).

## 5. Conclusion

Prevention of violence against the elderly requires a special approach, taking into account their psycho-physical characteristics and greater possibility of exposure to victimization. However, there are still no reliable data on the basis of which precise information can be obtained on the number of elderly persons who have been exposed to violence. According to the research results, the more people were exposed to violence, the less willing they were to report it to the authorities. The reason for this may be risk factors that contribute to the occurrence of violence against the elderly. If persons are dependent on financial, but also physical help and care of family members or relatives, they will probably not report the violence they suffered from those persons due to the fear of losing this kind of help. Therefore, it's necessary to improve accommodation facilities for the elderly and infirm and to improve the coordination of health and social services in order to support the elderly. In addition, the education of the elderly is of special importance, in which various associations and non-governmental organizations can play a significant role. However, their activities should be aimed not only at elderly persons who willingly show interest in this type of cooperation, but also elderly persons who are unable to move or who live in rural and remote household should be informed.

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<sup>12</sup> Poverenik za zaštitu ravnopravnosti (Commissioner for the Protection of Equality) (2021) Special Report on discrimination against older citizens. Text is available at:

<https://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/poseban-izvestaj-o-diskriminaciji-starijih.pdf>, 7.7.2023.

International documents don't exclusively deal with the rights of the elderly. There are only a few of them that contain recommendations for improving the position of the elderly, it seems necessary to first analyze the situation and identify both the types of violence and the types of abusers. Not every case of violence requires an equal approach in terms of future prevention of certain behavior. It's certain that family members and caregivers who care for old and sick people require a different approach in the prevention of potential violent behavior compared to people who abuse the elderly solely for lucrative or other motives. When it comes to people who, as family members and caregivers, take care of the elderly, it's necessary to provide them with adequate education and help so that they are exposed to stress as little as possible. In addition, it's necessary to educate the elderly in order to reduce the possibility of their victimization by persons who are prone to abuse by concluding contracts on lifelong support and complete deprivation of business capacity. Various organizations of the civil sector would greatly help in this, as well as encouraging older people to become members of such organizations. When it comes to persons who provide care in institutions for the elderly, in order to avoid violence against the elderly, special measures should also be applied. First of all, for this purpose, it's necessary to conduct additional research in order to determine the motives and reasons for such actions. Sometimes they are the result of misunderstanding the needs and altered state of consciousness of the elderly caused by various diseases. That's why it's undoubtedly important to introduce geriatrics and gerontology into mandatory education programs for future healthcare workers at all levels of education.

Bearing in mind the rapid aging of the population, which according to the estimates of the World Health Organization will increase in the coming period, the adoption of the New National Strategy on Aging would be of particular importance. However, the goals and activities that would be proposed in that document should be based not only on the evaluation of the implementation of the previous Strategy, but also on the basis of research by experts from various fields. In addition, it's necessary to set aside certain financial resources to improve the position of the elderly, so it might be possible to consider securing these funds not only from the budget, but also from various donations. It should be noted that local self-government units play a major role in improving the protection of the elderly, so it's necessary to improve, adapt or introduce new programs at their level as well.

In raising awareness about the importance of intergenerational solidarity, as well as the role of the elderly in society, the media could contribute to a large extent through various campaigns and shows and programs of an educational nature. In this way, it's possible to affirm the importance of the role of the elderly in society, by promoting the

importance of their role in various activities, such as, for example, sharing experience, with younger people, taking care of grandchildren, etc.

When it comes to the reaction to violence, health workers and police officers should be specially educated in order to develop a specific approach to old people who are victims of violence, bearing in mind that most often the people who are most abused (and especially in the family) are the least ready to talk about own exposure to violence.

Given that poverty largely affects the elderly, national poverty reduction strategies should specifically identify goals and propose activities for its reduction, especially bearing in mind the possibility of greater exposure to violence from the elderly who live in poor material conditions.

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