

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE AGE OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract: In the months behind us, we have witnessed a global pandemic in the world, which has resulted in the adoption of various measures that limited certain human rights. Among them is the freedom of movement. The effects of the spread of the COVID - 19 virus were felt in various spheres of social life, which changed the way of doing business, education, performing religious services and performing daily activities, redirecting them to the possibilities that the Internet and digital age have opened the door to. The consequences were numerous, and after people were given the opportunity to spend more time with their families, an increase in domestic violence was observed. An interesting question is why and in what percentage the COVID - 19 pandemic affected the increase in domestic violence and whether the restriction of human rights and freedoms significantly affected people's mental and physical health and relationships within the family household. In addition to the causes of this phenomenon, it is necessary to learn about ways to overcome it or reduce it in the future by applying appropriate measures if a similar emergency occurs again.

Keywords: COVID - 19, human rights, domestic violence, state of emergency.

INTRODUCTION

In the course of the last global-scale pandemic, we were for the first time faced with restrictions on a large number of guaranteed human rights and freedoms, during a period spanning over several months with none of the world's countries being exempt from them. The extent and degree of restrictions were different from one country to another. Apart from being dangerous for physical health, the virus also became dangerous (to the same or even larger extent) for the mental health of people who were overnight forced to accept the measures including movement restrictions and isolation, and also all the uncertainty and the feeling of helplessness that accompanied them. Therefore, in a relatively

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brief amount of time, we began to fulfil our daily obligations and tasks via different online platforms. However, a person's need to move and be in direct contact with other people cannot be satisfied by being in the virtual world or on social networks and portals, which also significantly affects the psychological and physical health of people. Movement restrictions and assembly bans are directly related to the increased number of hours that people were spending in their homes, with their family members. Whether as a result of previously disrupted relationships, the resolution of which was being delayed due to the absence of possibilities, willingness or time, or as a result of omnipresent nervousness, anxiety, and stress – the increased number of domestic violence cases has been recorded across the whole world. Today, when we are unable to predict with certainty the future events and the epidemiological course of the disease or any potential outbreak of a new virus in the future, it is important to answer the question of when and to what extent restrictions are justified, and if refusing to apply relaxed measures (by means of which it would be possible to achieve a given goal) leads to a heightened risk of particular socially harmful behaviours, such as violence – above all in the family environment, to which we are primarily confined when movement is restricted. In the continuation of this paper, more will be said about the identified forms of domestic violence which were recorded during the pandemic in our country and in some other countries, and about the percentages and causes of its increase in the months behind us.

THE CONCEPT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE EXISTING LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Domestic violence is a social phenomenon with devastating consequences for the family and for the physical and emotional integrity of everyone of its members. Violence against women is present at all stages of a society's development, with different forms of physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence being identified independently of national, religious, racial, cultural, and status identity. As a result of the recognition of this problem and its significance over the past years, several legal documents have been adopted and ratified in this field at the international and national level of states.²

Article 21 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 98/2006) stipulates that all citizens are equal before the Constitution and the law, so that the right to equal legal protection is enjoyed by all, without discrimination, while gender-based discrimination is not mentioned at all. This gap was filled with the adoption of the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination, which identifies gender-based discrimination as a special form of discrimination.³ The Family Act ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 18/05) defines domestic violence as "the behaviour by which one family member endangers physical integrity, mental health or tranquility of

2 In 1993, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (UN, 1993) was adopted, which originated from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (UN, 1979; "Official Gazette of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – International Agreements", No. 11/1981). The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) is the first legally binding document on the European continent which deals with the prevention of violence against women, their protection, and the punishment of perpetrators, and therefore represents another step towards the elimination of inequality between women and men.

3 The concept of discrimination is defined as "any unwarranted discrimination or unequal treatment, that is to say, omission (exclusion, limitation or preferential treatment) in relation to individuals or groups, as well as members of their families or persons close to them, be it overt or covert, on the grounds of [...] real or presumed personal characteristics".



another family member". Apart from civil-legal protection, criminal-legal protection is also provided for (Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia, 194).⁴

The Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 94/2016) has been enforced since 1 June 2017, and it has introduced some important novelties.⁵ Each reported case of domestic violence is deliberated upon at a Coordination and Cooperation Group meeting (the Group itself consisting of a representative of the Prosecution, a representative of the police, and a representative of the Centre for Social Work), where the individual plan for protection and support is adopted (Articles 25 and 26). The plan may provide for the initiation of criminal proceedings, misdemeanour proceedings or proceedings for protection measures (the length of which may be up to a year or longer). According to the data of the Republic Public Prosecutor, during March 2020, the number of extended urgent measures fell by around 30% in comparison with the previous month, and the number of newly reported cases of domestic violence as deliberated upon at the Coordination and Cooperation Group meetings fell by 50%, which could be a consequence of the fact that there was a 40% decrease in the number of meetings held by the Coordination and Cooperation Group, and that there was a 60% decrease in the number of made individual plans for protection and support. Six basic public prosecutor's offices in Serbia did not hold a single meeting of the Coordination and Cooperation Group during March although the state of emergency was introduced in the second half

4 For all forms of domestic violence specified in the Criminal Code, ex officio prosecution is provided for – criminal proceedings are initiated and conducted by the Attorney General (also for psychological abuse – endangering or harming one's mental integrity). In this manner, the state makes a clear statement or conveys a clear message that domestic violence is a serious, socially harmful behaviour, which as such will not be tolerated. For its basic form, a fine is prescribed or a maximum one-year prison sentence. When the perpetration of the act includes a weapon, a dangerous tool or a tool capable of inflicting a severe corporal injury or grave health impairment, the perpetrator will be punished with three months to three years in prison. If the act from paragraphs 1 and 2 of this article results in a severe corporal injury or permanent and grave health impairment of a family member, or the act is committed against a minor, the perpetrator will be punished with one to eight years of imprisonment. If the act from paragraphs 1 and 2 of this article results in the death of a family member, the perpetrator will be punished with three to twelve years in prison. Whoever breaks the measures of protection from domestic violence, determined for him/her by the court on the basis of the law, will be punished with a fine or with a six-month prison sentence. The criminal sanctions that can be imposed for domestic violence include not only the provided for fine and prison sentence but also the imposition of probation, and when nothing else but a fine is in question then it is possible to impose only judicial admonitions. If the court has established insanity, it is also possible to impose a security measure of compulsory medical treatment and confinement in a medical institution. When a prison sentence or probation is imposed, the court may impose, even without a motion from the prosecutor, a security measure of compulsory treatment of alcohol- and drug-addicts.

5 The police on the spot are obliged to notify the competent police officer about every case of domestic violence and immediate danger of its taking place (Article 14), and if the police officers fail to do so, they are breaking the law. The police patrol has the right, either of its own accord or at the behest of the competent police officer, to bring the possible perpetrator of violence to the police station for the purpose of conducting proceedings (Article 14), and he/she can be detained for eight hours in the police station, where he/she will make a statement (acting as the possible perpetrator), all the necessary information will be collected, and the risk of immediate danger of violence will be assessed (Article 15). When the competent police officer issues an urgent measure order, he/she can order that the perpetrator of violence should be temporarily removed from the flat/house in the following 48 hours; that the perpetrator should be temporarily forbidden to contact the victim and approach them (Article 17). The Attorney General may propose the extension of the urgent measure by another 30 days, and if such a decision is made, then he/she must file a motion to the court within 24 hours (Article 18). The court decides on the motion within 24 hours, without the presence of the perpetrator and based on the submitted documentation (Article 19). The police will file misdemeanour charges, and the Magistrates' Court (may) punish the perpetrator in a summary trial with up to 60 days in prison (Article 36).



of the month, whereas the First Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade and the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Kragujevac held 12 meetings each (data from the Autonomous Women's Center).

Especially worrying are data on the number of children victims which show that the first time children experience violence is precisely in their families (Čović, 2014).⁶ During April, UN women experts for human rights made an appeal to the countries to strengthen their protection measures, warning that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, children are more susceptible to violence, human trafficking, sexual violence and exploitation. They made an appeal to the governments to ensure that the services of child protection and the services of the Interior are at disposal and available to all children, including free-of-charge SOS telephones and SMS services as being available for 24 hours a day. Although there are still no measurable data on violence against children under the circumstances of the pandemic in Serbia, it is noticeable that the counselling psycho-social online services for children that would be available 24 hours a day have not yet been established, and also via the media and the Internet, children within families were exposed to both harmful and disturbing information, such as those pieces of information that they are "dangerous transmitters of the virus" (Eraković, 2020). As far as education is concerned, poor children who live in unhygienic settlements without electricity, computers and smart phones, without television and the Internet, cannot have access to online learning during this pandemic. Problems also appeared in families where there are more children than there are devices via which it is possible to attend lessons and communicate with teachers, and also if parents do not have the capacity to help their children with learning (Eraković, 2020).

The consequences of violence could be different dissociative states; anxiety; fits of panic; sleeping and eating disorders; depression; abuse of alcohol, pills, and drugs; attempted suicide and self-harm; sexual dysfunction and spontaneous abortions (Čović, 2013). It is clear then why, in case of restrictions on the freedom of movement, there is a risk of increased frequency of violence when the victim and the perpetrator share a family household. Other than that, as a result of the epidemic and a general atmosphere of fear in society, when even going to the shop is proclaimed as risky behaviour, there is smaller likelihood that the victim will address the competent bodies asking them for support.

The most frequently identified victims of violence are women and children, although the number of men who have experienced some form of violence in the family environment is not negligible either. However, over the course of the last pandemic and extremely restrictive measures which included restrictions on the freedom of movement for persons over 65 years of age, the public also began to talk more about violence against the old population, which these persons suffer at the hands of their closest housemates. No form of violence should be tolerated, and this does not refer only to physical and sexual violence as the most frequently talked about forms but also to psychological and economic violence as being rather widespread.

6 In the field of the protection of children against violence at the international level, of importance are the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child ("Official Gazette of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – International Agreements", No. 15/1990 and "Official Gazette of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia", Nos. 4/96 and 2/97) and the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia" – International Agreements, No. 1/2010), while at the national level protection from the physical, psychological, economic, and any other form of exploitation or abuse of children is guaranteed by Article 64 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia. The right of a child to a proper and complete development with the character of a general principle which pervades the application of all other rights is prescribed by Article 62 of the Family Act. The legislation in this field was enhanced in 2013, with the adoption of the Law on Special Measures for Preventing the Perpetration of Criminal Offences against the Sexual Freedom of Minors ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 32/2013), which regulates the keeping of a special record for persons convicted of criminal offences against the sexual freedom of minors, with the undertaking of special measures.

RESTRICTIONS ON THE FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Governments are not allowed to interfere with or restrict guaranteed human rights if they are unable to prove that such interference is provided by the law, that it is undertaken for the purpose of a legitimate goal (for example, public health protection), and that it is necessary and proportionate to the achievement of that goal (Čović, 2020).⁷

Article 18 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia prescribes that the human and minority rights guaranteed by the Constitution are enforced directly, while the law can prescribe only the manner of their exercise when this is expressly provided for by the Constitution or when this is necessary due to the nature of an individual right, in which cases it is by all means forbidden to affect its content. Restrictions on these rights are permitted by the law, in the cases and to the extent provided for by the Constitution, without encroachment upon their essence, and the attained level of human and minority rights must not be reduced (Article 20 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia). In the same article it is stated that all state bodies, and especially courts, are obliged in these situations to see that there is proportionality between right restriction and its purpose, or in other words, to ascertain whether it was possible to achieve the same purpose with a relaxed restriction. Derogations from guaranteed rights are permitted during the state of emergency or war to the extent deemed necessary, and they cease upon ending of the state of emergency or war (Article 202 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia). Article 200 also prescribes the conditions and procedure for the proclamation and cessation of the state of emergency. On 15 March 2020, the President of the Republic, the President of the National Assembly, and the Prime Minister made a Decision on the proclamation of the state of emergency, which was effective until 6 May 2020, when it was abolished by a National Assembly Decision.

Article 53 of the Law on the Protection of Citizens from Infectious Diseases ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", Nos. 15/2016 and 68/2020) provides that the Minister of Health may, at the proposal of the Commission and the Institute, order the prohibition or restriction of movement for citizens in the area affected by a particular infectious disease. Based on that, on 10 March 2020, the Government of the Republic of Serbia made a decision by which COVID-19 was proclaimed an infectious disease. The Direction on measures in the state of emergency ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 31/2020-3, dated 16 March 2020) restricted and prohibited the movement of people with this virus and persons suspected of infection; it prohibited outdoor assemblies and restricted indoor assemblies. The Order on restricting and prohibiting the movement of persons in the territory of the Republic of Serbia ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", Nos. 34/2020, 39/2020, 40/2020, 46/2020, and 50/2020) introduced a movement ban in a period longer than 24 hours for all persons in the territory of the state, which raised the question of the justifiability of a measure that was not a restriction on the right to movement but its total abolishment.



PERCEIVED CHALLENGES: AN INCREASE IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DURING THE PANDEMIC

Data on domestic violence during the state of emergency in the Republic of Serbia are still insufficiently analyzed, and according to available reports, it is concluded that there was an increase in recorded cases although, at the same time, there is mention of a smaller number of cases reported to the competent bodies and institutions. The victims of domestic violence during the state of emergency asked for help on a more frequent basis from the non-governmental sector and from organizations for the protection of women's rights. These organizations were quick to adapt to the new circumstances, which had as a result their timely reaction in terms of providing support and by that very fact greater trust on the part of victims. The victims who reported violence to the competent institutions believe that they did not receive adequate protection because the aggressors were warned just verbally. According to the data from the Autonomous Women's Centre, during the first month of the emergency state the centre provided 430 services as follows – 148 SOS telephone calls by 127 women; 108 legal SOS telephone calls by 88 women; 113 exchanged email, Viber, WhatsApp, and FB messages; 52 online consultations for 36 female victims of violence, and 9 written submissions. It is estimated that the number of women who asked for help increased by three times, primarily due to the unavailability of competent bodies and institutions, even though the SOS telephone was at disposal only in the morning shift. Women most frequently reported different forms of psychological violence and also economic violence, especially in the form of refusing to provide alimony, and although the number of reported cases of physical violence was the smallest, it is concluded that the reason for this was the inability or fear of reporting the aggressor during the curfew when the victim was sharing her living space with him (Autonomous Women's Centre, 2020). The same public announcement states that a large number of calls dealt with the issues arising from one parent's inability to see his/her children because of the other parent during the state of emergency, or keeping children by the other parent contrary to the court ruling. Many women and their children are becoming ever more frequently faced with the issues of material existence, which is not a priority in the operation of centres for social work.⁸

From the competent state institutions and the police there were appeals for reporting violence regardless of the state of emergency, and it was pointed out that female victims of violence running away from the aggressor or asking for support would not be penalized if they left their homes and violated the movement ban. Despite this, there was a recorded case of a woman being taken before the on-duty magistrate and penalized with a 50,000-dinar fine for leaving her house to report domestic violence (Đurić, 2020). Moreover, insisting that the victims of violence must have a previous negative COVID-19 test before being admitted to a safe house increases the risk of extended exposure to violence and the emergence of bigger harmful consequences. Bearing in mind that testing is not carried out at night and that one has to wait for the results for 24–48 hours, it would be necessary to provide particular premises in safe houses where women would stay until the moment of receiving their results after being tested.

The Third Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade as being competent for the municipalities of New Belgrade, Zemun, and Surčin, announced the results of its operation in the state of emergency, during which the actions of the prosecutor's office were restricted to urgent and detention cases, and also to criminal offences relating to the state of emergency. There were seventy-five agreements con-

⁸ The EU delegation in Serbia has allocated 100,000 euros for supporting the 14,000 most seriously threatened women in Serbia, and the power to decide who will receive that support was left to the Red Cross of Serbia, which neither has nor should be allowed to have any data on the women who are victims of domestic violence, on single mothers, and the like – as it has been pointed out by the Autonomous Women's Centre.



cluded with accused persons on the confession of criminal offences, of which the largest number of agreements (59) were for the criminal offence of refusing to act in accordance with health regulations. During the state of emergency, 42 criminal complaints were filed with this prosecutor's office for the criminal offence of domestic violence, of which two accused persons were sentenced to probation.⁹ The *United Nations Development Programme* organization states that support was provided to 20 public prosecutors from eight prosecutorial districts in Serbia so that they could organize online meetings for conducting trials over the newly reported and ongoing cases of domestic violence, with the aim of accomplishing continuity and faster operation during the pandemic.¹⁰

The harm that the pandemic has done to human rights, freedoms, economic stability, democratic governance, economy, and the natural environment is enormous, and "the fear manipulated by propaganda time and again defeats knowledge and evidence, as history has shown on countless occasions" (Burrowes, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the "Stay at home" motto has had serious consequences and a large impact on those adults and children who already live with someone who abuses or controls them, and restrictive measures will also probably be "in the hands of those who abuse the strategy of control, surveillance, and coercion" (Bradbury – Jones, 2020: 2048). Experience throughout the world shows that domestic violence (including the abuse of children and old persons) increases during and after great catastrophes or crises, and an article published in *The Guardian* magazine (2020) reports that the increasing numbers of domestic violence cases are present throughout the world, so it is mentioned that there has been a 40–50% increase in Brazil, an increase of around 20% in one of Spain's regions in the first days of isolation, an increase of around 30% in Cyprus in the week following this country's confirmation of its first case of virus infection, and a 25% increase in Great Britain in the first seven days following the government's announcement of more severe social distancing measures (Bradbury – Jones, 2020: 2047). Reports from China point to a dramatic increase in domestic violence, and the police station in the Chinese province of Hubei recorded a double increase in reports on domestic violence in February 2020 during the COVID-19 quarantine (John, N, Casey, SE, Carino, G, McGovern, T, 2020: 66). In Spain, women were exempt from locking in the event of their having to leave a violent home, and they were allowed to use the code "Mask 19" to warn pharmacy shops about their situation (Nigam, 2020).

The World Health Organization also expressed concern over the mental health and psycho-social consequences of the pandemic, emphasizing that self-isolation and quarantine have affected the usual

9 In the period from January to June, 14 women died as a result of domestic violence, which is five times as high as in the same period last year, as pointed out by Vesna Stanojević, the coordinator of the Safe House. The measure of removing the perpetrator from the apartment was imposed in 45% of cases, and a similar percentage of cases had the imposition of both urgent measures – removal from the apartment and the prohibition of contacting or approaching the victim. The prosecutor's offices suggested that as many as 97.3% of police urgent measures should be extended to 30 days, which most often was adopted by the courts. Violent offences were repeated by 6,002 perpetrators or almost every third perpetrator under the urgent measures which, by the way, were violated by 1,809 of them. In 85.3% of cases, the perpetrators were men, and in 74% of cases the victims were women, while 5% of the imposed urgent measures included the protection of children. Children are both the witnesses and victims of domestic violence. Violent offences are repeated because the imposed measures are not rigorous enough in a sense that the aggressors do not take them seriously. At the meetings of the Coordination and Cooperation Group, 51,911 cases of domestic violence were deliberated upon, which is a 25% increase in comparison with 2019. According to the data of the Autonomous Women's Centre, 18,648 individual plans for the protection and support of victims were made, which is a 42% increase in comparison with 2019. The victims rarely ever participated in these meetings, just 1% or 194 victims, which is a 50% decrease in comparison with the previous year – as it was stated by this non-governmental organization, with a remark that based on last year's aggregate data there was a considerable increase in the workload of the employed specialized professionals in the police, prosecutor's office, and centres for social work (Dekić, 2020).

10 More on: <https://www.rs.undp.org/content/serbia/sr/home.html>.



activities, routines, people's life-span and resulted in increasing loneliness, anxiety, depression, insomnia, harmful consumption of alcohol and drugs, self-harm or suicidal behaviour, and increasing domestic violence (Kumar, Navar, 2020). The author Loival (2020) states that a study by the Indian Psychiatric Society has shown a 20% increase in mental illnesses since the outbreak of coronavirus in India (Kumar, Navar, 2020).

The experience of the Ebola epidemic in Africa shows that epidemics worsen socio-economic inequalities and bring the vulnerable groups of women into an even greater risk of violence, which increases even after the crisis, due to rising unemployment and the loss of income, and this makes escaping very difficult (Ndedi, 2020). The financial impact of COVID-19 will also affect the long-term capability of local women's organizations, and in many countries women have no access to mobile phones, computers or the Internet, so that they cannot access those services or they cannot use them safely at home because the perpetrator and other family members can keep a close eye on them (Ndedi, 2020).

A special problem is the constant surveillance of the social media, the Internet, and mobile phones, which can limit the ability of victims to seek for support online, while stress and other factors of domestic violence, such as unemployment, reduced incomes, limited social support, and alcohol abuse increase as a consequence, that is, result of the pandemic (Campbell, 2020). So, a large increase in the percentage of alcohol sale was noticed throughout the United States – by 50% in March only (Piquero, Riddell, Bishopp, *et al*, 2020). Furthermore, reports on an ever-increasing sale of arms and ammunition in the United States during the crisis show a clear connection between the availability of arms and lethal cases of domestic violence (Campbell, 2020). The police are reluctant to intervene and detain a perpetrator during the COVID-19 pandemic, and reception centres for victims of domestic violence are hard to make decisions and reject new clients unless they have proof of negative testing, in order to avoid the spread of virus among the existing clients. In Oregon (USA), telephone lines for domestic violence are used more when COVID-19 spreads over the state, and the persons using them are worried because they do not know whether they will have the opportunity to obtain or extend court restraining orders due to diminished access to court and police services (John, N, Casey, SE, Carino, G, McGovern, T, 2020: 66). To many, during the isolation, the house has become a place of “the re-demonstration of power, feminization of unpaid labour, violence, and reproduction of the patriarchy” (Nigam, 2020).

It has been noted that during the pandemic women are more involved in housework, childcare and care of adults for maintaining the family, community, and health system, but they are invisible and insufficiently paid, which brings about a rise in their duties, in both the private and public sector, their greater exposure and susceptibility to diseases, given that they perform three quarters of unpaid care throughout the world, including the prevention of diseases in the household and care of ill relatives (John, N, Casey, SE, Carino, G, McGovern, T, 2020: 66). It should be mentioned that there is not a single country in the world where men have an equal share in unpaid care. There are opinions that “the rapacious capitalist model, often presented as being commonsensical and with no alternatives, does not respond well to the global health crisis, whereas the socialist models do” (Mezzadra, Stieri, 2020).

During the emergency circumstances caused by the pandemic, the heightened risk was also recognized by the national services for the provision of support to victims, so that in the United States the National Domestic Violence Hotline offers the services of conversation via the Internet or by sending messages in order to make it easier for the victims to ask for support while being at home with the aggressors; in Ecuador, a local organization dedicated to achieving gender equality and preventing domestic violence adapted its business operations to the outbreak of COVID-19 and began to offer counselling services via telephone; in Italy, the National Network of Domestic Violence Shelters kept



its support services for emergency cases open, as well as Skype (John, N, Casey, SE, Carino, G, McGovern, T, 2020: 67).

The countries must continue to ensure the enforcement of laws and the protection of women, children, old people, and handicapped persons from violence and abuse, with ensuring the continuity of support services (COVID-19 and Human Rights – We are all in this together, 2020: 15). In these challenging times, it is necessary to recognize the opportunity to improve the understanding of how to provide the first psychological aid and mental health protection at the state level, given the fact that the global COVID-19 pandemic must be recognized as a pandemic that will soon be followed by mental illnesses, and also to take the steps that are necessary for the attenuation of consequences (Galea S, Merchant RM, Lurie N, 2020: 818).

The laws protecting women must be enforced and the institutions (the police, courts, prosecution offices, and social security services) must be trained how to react, protect, and refer the victims to the relevant services (Ndedi, 2020). The United Nations Organization has adopted particular recommendations such as the enlargement of investments in online services and civil society organizations, the establishment of an alert system in emergency situations, the creation of safe ways for women to ask for support, the avoidance of releasing the prisoners convicted of violence against women in any form, and the intensification of campaigns for raising the awareness of the public, especially those that are intended for men and boys (Nigam, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The Republic of Serbia has ratified all the greatly important conventions in the field of protection from domestic violence, while at the national level legislation has been improved by adopting new laws, and by amending the existing laws and the by-laws adopted on their basis. Nevertheless, we are witnesses to the fact that legislation is often not enough to put an end to domestic violence.¹¹ The situation becomes even more complex in times of emergency situations, emergency states, pandemics, and health risks because, according to the data and studies that are presently available to us, the victims of domestic violence are at an increased safety risk, with a reduced possibility of receiving appropriate support and protection on the part of competent bodies. The things that are noticed are insufficiently developed procedures for monitoring and controlling former convicts for violence against women and girls, and an adequate assessment of security risk. That is why before anything it is necessary to consider their possible negative effects and the possibility of achieving the same goal with more relaxed and in terms of health better-quality measures when introducing greatly significant restrictions, such as the prohibition of leaving the house in a period of several days (which is not a restriction but an abolishment of the freedom of movement).

It is necessary for all of us together to develop not only the care of our own health and the health of our families but also a broader social awareness of the possibilities and means available to us, so we

¹¹ Some of the causes are difficulties in proving a family household, an extramarital affair, and emotional and sexual relationships and acts, given that there are a small number of witnesses or just one witness – the victim. The victim often refuses to testify. A small number of proceedings are conducted and ended on a private complaint because the victim and the perpetrator most often live together over the course of the proceedings, so that blackmails and threats are frequent. Moreover, in Centres for Social Work there are no records of abused children, and when it is impossible for a child to remain in the family, a question arises where to place the child, which confirms that victims lack appropriate financial support and accommodation, without a long administrative procedure. (Čović, 2013).



could timely react and report any similar violence in our environment. The decision of the Ministry of Justice to penalize domestic violence, even during the state of emergency, as a kind of behaviour which demands a prompt reaction is good, and all the experiences acquired during the pandemic and the state of emergency need to be taken into consideration when creating some kind of a future strategy for reacting in the same or similar situations. Apart from telephone lines, online platforms, and panic alarms, which are installed in the apartments of victims in certain countries, the thing that can also be expected in the future is a wider use of particular mobile applications created for the purpose of preventive action and protection from domestic violence, as well as closer cooperation between state bodies and non-governmental organizations.

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