

VICTIMIZATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN URBAN AREAS: THE CASE STUDY OF NOVI PAZAR

Abstract: The study aims to explore the various facets of victimization of women and girls in public urban areas and perception of security of spaces they use in everyday life. For this purpose, 776 girls and women aged 10 to 65 from the area of Novi Pazar was surveyed. Research results indicate that women and girls greatly fear for their safety in public spaces and are daily exposed to different forms of violence and harassment. Unlit streets, lack of video surveillance, absence of police officers, lack of adequate night public transportation, presence of male persons abusing PAS are some of the occurring factors that make women and girls uncomfortable when using urban public spaces. Although respondents fear physical violence, especially sexual harassment, rape, being followed or stalked, the types of victimization they frequently experience are related to verbal violence such as intrusive and offensive questions about private life, insults, sexually suggestive jokes, comments about their appearance, inappropriate looking etc. Bearing in mind that these experiences greatly influence their daily lives, mobility, social activity, and overall quality of life, it is important to create urban security policies and strategies which will take into consideration women's and girls' experience of victimization in urban areas.

Key words: victimization of women and girls, violence, harassment, public spaces, Novi Pazar

1. INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is a universal phenomenon and it occurs in different areas of life, in all segments and spheres of human interaction. All societies, regardless of their political and/or economic context, the level of institutional development achieved, the influence of religion, accepted cultural values, dominant norms and attitudes of the community or the very level of development of the culture of human rights, face violence against women and girls (Konstantinović Vilić et al., 2022). Violence against women, as gender-based violence, its models and patterns, its way of existence, are part of patriarchal or traditional understandings of the relationship between women and men, which are manifested through gender patterns and gender roles, which are reflected in other parts of the social structure (Archer, 2006). How widespread it is testifies the fact that every second woman in the EU has experienced sexual harassment since the age of 15.

It should be mentioned that women and girls face violence and harassment in private as well as in public sphere. While the topic of domestic violence or workplace harassment is well researched, victimization women and girls experience in public spaces is yet to be systematically studied, although the scientific and professional interest about the phenomenon is

* PhD, Research assistant, Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research in Belgrade, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7880-7379>. E-mail: parausicana@gmail.com. The current paper is part of a re-search endeavor funded by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia, conducted by the Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research, 2024, number 451-03-66/2024-03/200039.

** PhD, Associate professor at the Faculty of Law, University Vitez in Travnik. E-mail: a.ivanovicmonitor@gmail.com.

growing especially in recent decades (Fairchild, Rudman, 2008; Lenton et al., 1999; Bowman, 1993). Some authors identify two reasons for the lack of interest in dealing with the topic: 1) in public places, harassment is not illegal if it is not an attack, it can even be interpreted as trivial or as a compliment; 2) public places are places of casual passage and are not subject to the same strict norms of behaviour as more formal places, such as workplaces or educational institutions (Horvat, Perasović Cigrovski, 2014 according to Lenton et al., 1999; Ilijevski, Stanojaska, Shushak Lozanovska, 2023). Moreover, harassment of women and girls in public places, such as occurring insults, stalking, and touching from unknown men, is often trivialized or considered an inevitable part of public life (Gardner, 1995). Nevertheless, different experiences of violence against women and girls in public places reduces the feeling of security and prevents women and girls from fully participating in society, thus significantly contributing to the broader social problem of inequality and discrimination against women. Although harassment and violence can happen to people of both genders, research and statistics indicate the “overrepresentation” of women and girls among those who are harassed and those who are subjected to violence (Horvat, Perasović Cigrovski, 2014 according to Borić, 2007:82).

Bearing in mind the severity of the problem of victimization of women and girls in urban areas and the notion that this topic is under researched, the subject of the paper is to explore the various facets of victimization of women and girls in public urban areas and their perception of security of spaces they use in everyday life. Specifically, we will explore the security of women and girls in Novi Pazar through several segments: general sense of fear in public space, specific fears for personal safety in public areas, experience of victimization in public spaces of women and girls and factors and activities that might enhance personal security of women and girls in public spaces of Novi Pazar.

2. WOMEN AND URBAN SECURITY

Women are exposed to violence or may be victims of violence and harassment in all areas where their daily lives take place. So is the public space, like the sphere of people’s everyday life, the environment in which gender-based violence against women and girls continuously occurs. Public spaces are all those spaces that people in the local community can freely use such as squares, parks, markets, public city transport stops, public transport, sidewalks, streets, paths, promenades, etc (Đan, Stakić, 2016: 11). Harassment in public places is common in urban areas (Bowman, 1993; Kearl, 2010), and is less common in small towns/villages where most people know each other.

More than one century feminist organizations have been protesting and marching to “take back the night” as a way of expressing concerns about raging sexual violence and threat of violence in public space (Listerborn, 2015). However, only in the last three decades has greater awareness of the women’s public experience of fear shifted to policy agenda. Introducing the issue of urban security as part of women’s everyday social reality has recast women’s needs and identities in relation to their unique urban experience (Kallus, Churchman, 2004: 198).

There are some notions about architecture design of cities not suitable for women’s needs. In recent years there has been a growing awareness of the fact that men and women use and experience urban public space differently and that architecture design of cities are not suitable for women’s needs. Women do not enjoy the same freedom as men do in using public spaces (Boys, 1984; Day, 1999; Lofland, 1984), and despite the improvements in women’s social position over the years, urban public spaces are still less available or accessible to women than to men (Franck, Paxson, 1989; Kallus, 2001). As a result, one of the most important and decisive

factors influencing the way in which women use public space is related to their feeling of safety (Epstein, 1998; Koskela, 1997; Valentine, 1990). The potential presence of violence determines to a large extent the place, time and kinds of activities in which women participate (Keane, 1998; Morrell, 1996; Nasar, Jones, 1997; Valentine, 1990; Wekerle, Peterson, Morley, 1981). Urban areas are more than often places of fear and not spaces where women can walk without harassment (Kern, 2020). Research and analysis of violence against women in public space show that it is a lasting phenomenon and largely affects perception of urban security.

Safety, and the perception of safety, are critical to the vitality of any city and to the wellbeing of all citizens. It affects individuals' personal behaviour as it shapes daily routines, and influences neighbourhoods and the city as a whole. A full understanding of urban insecurities cannot be gender neutral, and must take into account that women and men experience violence differently and thus develop different fears (Epstein, 1998; Koskela, 1997). Women are far more likely than men to be concerned about crime and to consequently restrict their own and their children's activities, which greatly impact their urban mobility. Hence, most women practice a „strategy of avoidance“ regarding public places after dark. This reduces their ability to be educated, work and participate in public life, use basic services and enjoy cultural and recreational activities, which negatively affects their overall health and well-being in community life.

Women generally express a higher degree of fear than men, they perceive the risk of victimization to a greater extent and more often apply various protective measures against crime (Đurić, Popović-Čitić, 2013). Moreover, men and women have different concerns regarding the types of endangering behaviour they face in public urban places. Sexual assault, the crime most often feared by women, is a far more terrifying crime to contemplate than robbery, which is the crime most feared by men (Toronto Safer City Guidelines, 1997). Moreover there are other various types of threats to women's safety in public space that range from simple staring, looking sideways, all the way to stalking, robbery, physical and/or sexual assault. Harassment of women and girls in public places refers to a wide spectrum of unwanted behavior towards women and girls from insults, suggestions and comments, offensive and discriminatory remarks and jokes, to physical contacts such as stalking, obstructing the passage, touching and grabbing, exposing a person to sexual content, and similar behaviors that can exceed harassment and begin to include different forms of violence (Kearl, 2010). Therefore, the problem of women's safety in public space is not only related to their physical safety and protection, but also to perception of safety and fear of violence.

Overall built environment (infrastructural elements such as lighting, maintenance of spaces, signage, presence of alleyways, etc.), the social environment (how people use the space, the kinds of people using the space, sense of community in the area, presence of cultural activities), and girls' and women's own experience and perceptions impact the sense of security (Women in Cities International, Plan International, UN-HABITAT, 2013). Moreover, it is important to incorporate all three elements in the policy and strategies creating cycle in order to produce urban spaces safer for women and girls, but ultimately for all users of public spaces.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. *Participants*

Research sample consisted of 779 women and girls aged 10 to over 65 years from the area of Novi Pazar. When it comes to age of the respondents, 76(9.76%) girls are 10-14 years old, 206(26.44%) girls are 14-18 years old, 188(24.13%) women are aged 18-30, 210(26.96%)

women aged 30-40, 75(9.63%) aged 40-65, while 13(1.67%) aged over 65. More than half of the respondents are unmarried, one third is married, less than 4% is divorced, around 1% are widowed and less than 1% live in common law marriage or same sex relationship. Regarding the nationality, more than 60% of respondents are Bosnian and one third are Serbs. Little less than 70% of surveyed women and girls are Muslim, while around 25% are Orthodox Christians.

3.2. Instrument

The questionnaire consisted of 32 questions was created for the purpose of the research project. The questions were grouped in several batteries. The first battery consisted of socio-demographic questions regarding the public space respondents usually use, age, marital status, nationality, religious believes etc. (11 questions). The second category of questions measure the general sense of fear, i.e. security of the respondents in selected public spaces (4 questions). The next category consisted of questions concerning specific fears for personal safety in public areas (4 questions). The goal of this questions was to determine which characteristics of public spaces make women and girls unsafe, what do they fear most in public space and who are the actors in public spaces respondents are mostly afraid of in Novi Pazar. Beside that surveyed women and girls addressed the behaviours and actors they think contribute do their sense of personal safety in public space. Exploring the experience of victimization in public spaces of women and girls was the goal of the next battery of question (12). The aim was to provide answers about the causes of unsafety for the respondents, whether it is the result of personal experience, knowledge, or the fact that someone else was the target of violence and harassment in public space. Final 2 questions related to factors and activities surveyed women and girls believe will enhance their personal security in public spaces.

3.3. Procedure

The data was collected in the period from February 1st till June 18th 2023. The survey was conducted on five locations in the city of Novi Pazar: 1) Pedestrian zone in city centre; 2) Recreational centre; 3) City Park; 4) Promenade on the Raška river and 5) Area around sport fields on Deževski road.

4. Results

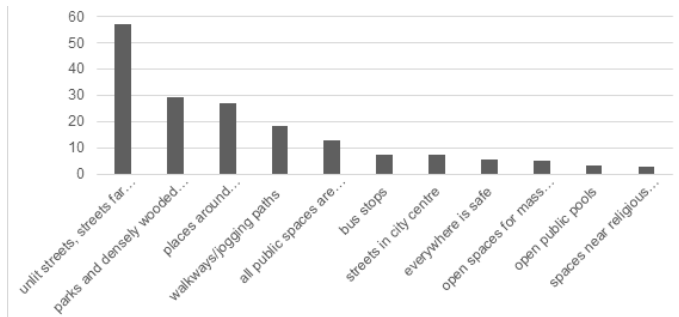
The perception of urban security in public spaces of women and girls was measured through a set of questions related to the feeling of security and the level of fear from certain forms of crime. Several questions were aimed at assessing the state of security in public space as well as identifying actors and factors that have impact on the personal safety of the respondents.

The majority of respondents feel very safe (34.05%) or safe (28.69%) in the public space they use during the day. However, when it comes to the feeling of security during the night, the situation is much less favourable. Almost 14% of respondents feel unsafe, and 5.36% feel very unsafe. A positive sense of security was expressed by 42.73% of women and girls. Comparing responses regarding the perception of safe during the day and at night shows that women feel much safer during the day than at night. The number of women with a negative sense of security during the night is almost three times higher than those who have such a feeling during the day.

Table 1. The perception of security during day and at night

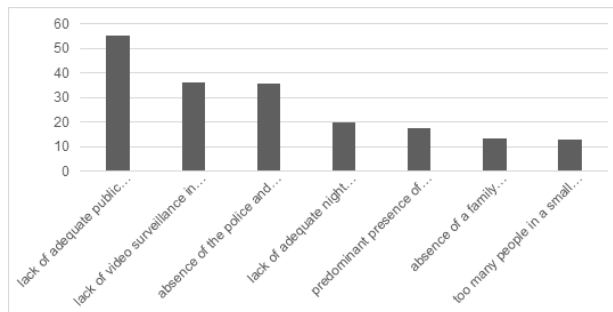
	Very safe	2	3	4	Very unsafe
Day	34.05	28.69	17.26	5.6	2.14
Night	15.71	27.02	25.48	13.93	5.36

The most unsafe places in the city of Novi Pazar women and girls addressed unlit streets and/or streets far from the city centre (56.9%). Little less than 30% of surveyed women and girls consider parks and densely wooded parts of the city as extremely unsafe public spaces, as well as places around nightclubs/bars/places selling alcohol. Relatively large number of respondents rated walkways/jogging paths as extremely unsafe (18.33), while slightly more than 13% of surveyed women and girls believe that all public spaces are equally unsafe. The least number of respondents rated spaces near religious buildings as extremely unsafe.



Graph 1. Assessment of the safety of public spaces in Novi Pazar

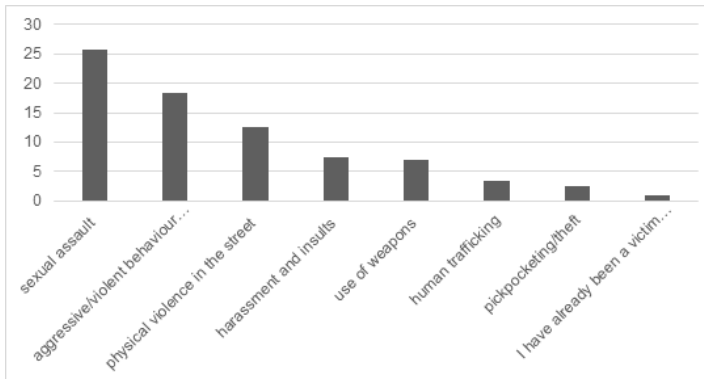
When answering the question about the characteristics of public space that make it unsafe, more than half women and girls highlighted the absence or lack of adequate public lighting (55%). Many surveyed women and girls believe that the problem is the lack of video surveillance in public areas (36.07%) and the absence of the police officer and subjects of formal social control (35.71%). A relatively large number of respondents indicated the lack of adequate night public transport (19.88%) and the predominant presence of men in a certain public space (17.62) as characteristics that make a public space unsafe.



Graph 2. Characteristics of public spaces that make them unsafe.

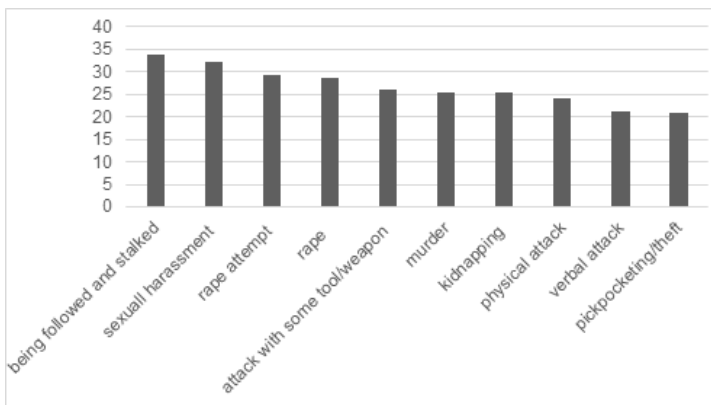
When it comes to the causes of fear of women and girls in public space, around a quarter of the respondents fear being sexually assaulted (rape or attempted rape) (25.6%), followed by aggressive/violent behaviour due to abuse of alcohol and psychoactive substances (18.33%), while the third most prevalent is the fear of physical violence in the streets (12.62%). The

number of respondents whose cause of fear is harassment and insults (7.38%) and the use of weapons (6.90%) is also considerable.



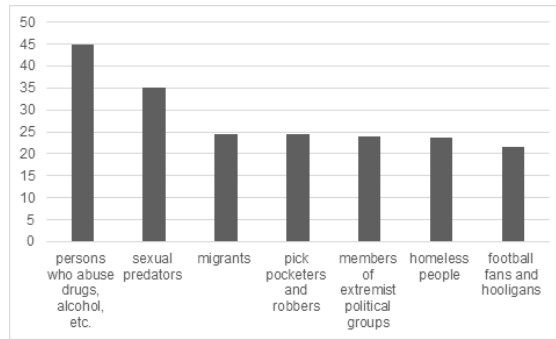
Graph 3. Causes of fear in public space

The level of fear of the surveyed women and girls varies in relation to specific forms of violence or harassment. Respondents most often reported that they were afraid of being followed and stalked (33.77%) or sexually harassed (32.14%), that they would be exposed to a rape attempt (29.24%) or be raped (28.52%). In a slightly smaller percentage surveyed women and girls indicated that they were afraid of being attacked with some tool/weapon (25.93%), killed (25.48%), kidnapped (25.42%), physically attacked (23.96%), verbally attacked (21.12%) and pickpocketed (20.71%).



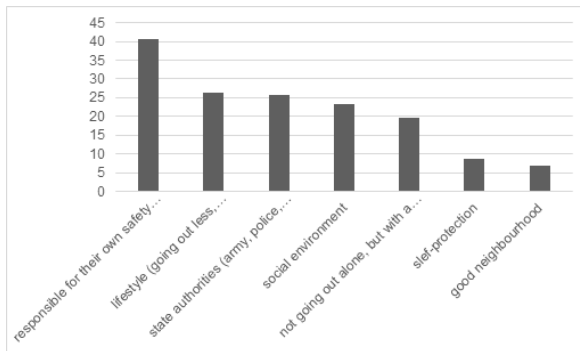
Graph 4. The level of fear of different forms of violence and harassment in public space

Women and girls also spoke about actors in public space who cause them to fear for personal safety. Almost half of all the respondents fear persons who abuse drugs, alcohol, etc. (44.87%), while around 35% of the surveyed women and girls indicate sexual predators (35.16%) as their biggest fear. A slightly smaller number of women and girls are afraid of migrants (24.58%), pick pocketers and robbers (24.4%), members of extremist political groups (23.87%), homeless people (23.75%) and football fans and hooligans (21.69%).



Graph 5. The level of fear of certain actor in public areas

Apart from the causes and level of fear for personal safety in public space, the surveyed women and girls answered the question about who they consider responsible for their safety. In ensuring personal safety, women primarily rely on their own strategies, which include limiting their own mobility and length of stay in public space. Over 40% of respondents believe that they are responsible for their own safety because they are careful and take care of their behaviour. In the sample, 26.31% of the respondents answered that their lifestyle has an impact on personal safety, i.e. they go out less, or spend more time at home, while 19.76% of women estimate that they achieve personal safety by not going out alone, but with a family member. These answers imply that women feel threatened when are outside the safety of their own home or when they are alone in a public space. A little more than a quarter of respondents stated that they believe that state authorities (army, police, etc.) contribute to their personal safety, while for 23.33% of them, the environment in which they live is a factor responsible for their safety.



Graph 6. Perception of responsibility for personal safety

According to the findings of the research regarding the experience of victimization in public spaces, most respondents experienced intrusive and offensive questions about their private life 4 or more times (22.86%) and inappropriate looking, whistling, sexually suggestive jokes, honking from the car (21.76%). In addition to this, a relatively larger number of female respondents often experienced insults and comments regarding their physical appearance or clothing (13.93%) and violent behaviour and/or disruption of public order (12.74%). Occasionally (1-3 times), the most surveyed women and girls experienced inappropriate staring, whistling, sexually suggestive jokes, honking from the car (23.57%), followed by indecent gesturing (23.33%), intrusive and offensive questions about private life (22.74%), violent behaviour and/or disturbance of public order (20.48%), following and stalking (20%), insulting remarks and comments

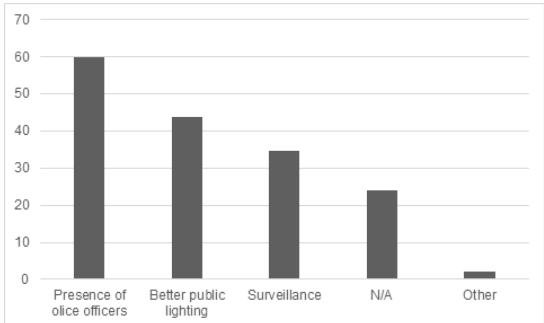
regarding physical appearance and clothing (19.4%) and cursing and insults (18.81%). Based on the answers of women and girls, it can be concluded that stealing purses or wallets, physical attacks and exhibitionism are the phenomena that happen rarely in public space.

Table 2. Prevalence of victimization of women and girls in public spaces

Type of violent/harassing behaviour	Not once %	1-3 %	4 or more %	Do not want to respond %
Intrusive and offensive questions about private life	30.83	22.74	22.86	1.07
Inappropriate looking, whistling, sexually suggestive jokes, honking from the car	31.31	23.57	21.79	0.83
Insults and comments regarding physical appearance or clothing	43.10	19.4	13.93	1.07
Violent behaviour and/or disturbance of public order	43.81	20.48	12.74	0.48
Following and stalking	48.57	20	7.98	0.95
Cursing and insults	50.24	18.81	7.74	0.71
Inappropriate gesture	46.19	23.33	7.38	0.6
Unwanted touching, hugging, and kissing	65.24	9.17	1.55	1.55
Grabbing and pinching body parts	64.76	10.24	1.43	1.07
Exhibitionism	67.86	7.98	0.83	0.83
Physical attacks	72.26	3.93	0.71	0.6
Stealing purses or wallets	73.81	3.21	0.12	0.36

Results regarding the victimization of women and girls in public space, lead to the conclusion that many women and girls are daily exposed to behaviours that make them feel unsafe in public space. Although the majority of surveyed women and girls were not victimized by direct physical violence, verbal violence, harassment, following and stalking are risks that women and girls face every day in public space, which have a direct impact on the perception of personal safety.

In order to create a holistic insight about women`s and girls` perception of security in public space, in addition to the prevalence of violence and harassment and the experience of victimization, strategies and approaches that could enhance the security of the specific areas are addressed. Therefore, the respondents answered the question about what would increase the sense of security in their city. Most respondents (60%) believe that they would feel safer if there were more police officers in public space. Also, a significant number of surveyed women and girls (43.81%) point out that better lighting would make a public space they usually use safer. Slightly more than a third of all respondents believe that video surveillance would contribute to a greater sense of security in public space.



Graph 7. Suggestions for enhancing security of public spaces

5. DISCUSSION

Some important conclusions could be derived from conducted research on victimization of women and girls in Novi Pazar. As we expected, women and girls fear greatly for their safety when walking at night. Similar results are found in the study “Program for leaders in security and rule of law” conducted by Standing Conference of towns and municipalities (2014), where 44% of women feel occasionally unsafe walking at night in the neighbourhood, while the same felling reports around 20% men.

One of the key characteristics that makes a place unsafe, according to the results of our research, are unlit streets which is an issue addresses in similar studies. In 2012 study to understand how safe and inclusive cities were for adolescent girls carried out in Cairo, Delhi, Hanoi, Kampala, and Lima, the issue of lighting emerged as the most tangible element of the built environment that has an important impact on how safe adolescent girls feel in different spaces. Girls knew the streets or alleys that were well lit and those that lacked lighting, which then influenced the paths they try to avoid at night (Women in Cities International, Plan International, UN-HABITAT, 2013: 22). According to the research on security of women in public spaces of Novi Pazar conducted in 2015, women feel unsafe due to the dark streets and lack of public lighting (Radovanović, Đan, 2015). In the research conducted by the Women’s Room (Mamula, 2006) the most common places of harassment were different public places such as cafes, the street, buses, and trams. Hollaback Croatia, the Croatian branch of the international movement against harassment in public places, conducted a survey which included 446 women aged 13 to 74 (Perasović Cigrovski, Horvat, Komšić, 2012). The streets as a place of harassment were mentioned by 57% of women, followed by public transport (17%) and bus stops (7%).

Interesting finding of our study is relating to the fear from aggressive and violent behaviour due to the abuse of alcohol, drug et. Moreover, the women and girls in our study are most fearful of persons that consume psychoactive substances (PAS). Similarly, adolescent girls in research conducted in 2012 in Cairo, Delhi, Hanoi, Kampala, and Lima highlighted that the presence of people abusing drugs or alcohol caused them to feel unsafe (Women in Cities International, Plan International, UN-HABITAT, 2013: 23).

Women and girls usually really on themselves when ensuring the safety in urban areas, and accordingly adjust their behaviour to avoid victimization in public places, as our research indicates. Other studies also found that women use different types of behaviour to escape violence and harassment in public spaces such as taking care what they wear, walking in groups, avoiding unlit parts of the city, holding phone in hands etc. (Radovanović, Đan, 2015).

One of the main findings in our research point to the conclusion that women and girls are frequently exposed to victimization in urban public spaces such as intrusive and offensive questions about private life, inappropriate looking, whistling, sexually suggestive jokes, honking from the car, insults and comments regarding physical appearance or clothing. These types of behaviour are usually overlooked and dismissed as “not serious” because they do not include physical damage or injury. In the study conducted in 2015, women in Novi Pazar are exposed to insults and scorn from their surroundings daily. Most often, comments are directed at them because of their “inappropriate” clothing (Radovanović, Đan, 2015: 9). Research by the Women’s Room on a sample of 1,491 women (Mamula, 2006) found that 55% of women in Croatia experienced unwanted sexual remarks and vulgar offers, and 43% experienced unwanted body touching. In the research conducted by Hollaback Croatia 99.6% of respondents confirmed that they were exposed to at least one form of harassment in public places. The research suggests that

less threatening forms, such as staring (experienced by 94% of women), unwanted comments about appearance (93%) or whistling (92%) are more common than more threatening ones, such as stalking (53%), touching (55 %) or sexual assault (32%) (Perasović Cigrovski, Horvat, & Komšić, 2012).

Besides direct emotional or physical consequences of violence and harassment, victimization of women and girls in urban areas has wider social impact. Women try to normalize situations in which they are exposed to verbal violence by taking “responsibility” for such behaviour of men and justifying their behaviour with their “inappropriate” appearance. From a young age, women are used to avoiding certain behaviour to avoid violence. These strategies limit women’s freedom and are based on the principles of “blaming the victim”, according to which women are most responsible for the violence they experience. Therefore, it is important to create policies and strategies for improving urban security that will be evidence based and integrate the gender dimension in policy cycle, the issue we will briefly discuss in the conclusion of the paper.

6. INSTEAD OF THE CONCLUSION – CREATING GENDER-BASED POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR URBAN SECURITY

Conducted research on victimization of women and girls in Novi Pazar indicates that they greatly fear for their safety in public spaces and are daily exposed to different forms of violence and harassment. Unlit streets, lack of video surveillance, absence of police officers, lack of adequate night public transportation, presence of male persons abusing PAS are some of the occurring factors that make women and girls uncomfortable when using urban public spaces. Although respondents fear physical violence, especially sexual harassment, rape, being followed or stalked, the types of victimization they frequently experience are related to verbal violence such as intrusive and offensive questions about private life, insults, sexually suggestive jokes, comments about their appearance, inappropriate looking etc. Bearing in mind that these experiences greatly influence their daily lives, mobility, social activity and overall quality of life, it is important to create policies and strategies of urban security which will take in consideration women’s and girls’ experience of victimization in urban areas, but also have women and girls actively participate in the different steps of the policy and strategy creating cycle (planning, budgeting, implementing, evaluating).

In western cities, gender perspective is widely incorporated in urban safety and crime prevention initiatives. But more than just crime and violence prevention actions, programs of enhancing women’s security in public spaces include urban design, public transportation, domestic violence, and educational programs for the police (Listerborn, 2015). This stems from the fact that there is a clear relationship between public violence, fear of crime and the urban built environment. Safety of women in the urban environment must be recognized as an issue that requires the attention of the planning profession and of municipal governments (Kallus, Churchman, 2004: 199).

Cities and communities that are safe and free from violence against women enable and support the creation of equal opportunities for women and men. When safe and comfortable, public spaces in cities offer opportunities for the participation of women and girls in all spheres of social life. The creation of cities and communities that are safe for the daily life of women and girls depends on the elimination of violence and feelings of insecurity, which prevent women and girls from freely using public spaces (UN Women, 2018). Because of all this, it is necessary that gender differences are included in the planning of the development

of cities, public spaces and public transportation, which will improve women's well-being and safety (UN Women, 2020). The process of programming safe cities and safe public spaces assumes and implies that men and women acquire and possess different personal experiences of living and working in the city, so the process itself requires that the concept of gender be placed at the center of urban planning and design. Modeling public spaces to suite men and women imply the use multisectoral, holistic, long-term approach that focuses on comprehensive and systematic changes. Research and programming on safe cities for women should be based on a clear understanding that making cities safe for women makes cities safer for all.

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