



A PORTRAIT AGAINST A LANDSCAPE:

**Analysis of media coverage of firearm misuse
in violence against women committed by men**





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REDUCE RISK – IMPROVE SAFETY

Key facts on firearm abuse and domestic violence

95% of all firearms are owned by men.

60% of women and 45% of men feel that a gun at home makes them less safe.

31% of persons killed by a family member in the cases surveyed for this report were murdered with firearms, and 64% of these victims were women.

39% of women killed by an intimate partner in the cases surveyed for this report were killed with firearms.

Firearm abuse resulting in death is much more prevalent in cases of domestic violence than in criminal showdowns.

Five out of the six mass murders recognized in Serbia to date were committed with firearms, and their backgrounds were either tied directly to domestic violence or involved the killing of family members of the man's partner, ex-partner or wife.

Source: Gender and Small Arms in Serbia: Fast Facts, SEESAC, 2019, Gender and SALW in South East Europe, SEESAC, 2016

Lethal outcomes of firearm misuse, according to the type of incident*



domestic violence



dispute with police, security, army



accidental shooting, hunting, celebratory shooting



criminal context (gangs, theft, money, drugs)



public dispute or argument



weapon used for defence

*Lethal outcome rate according to the type of incident, SEESAC, 2014-2018
(Source: www.seesac.org/AVMP)*

KEY FINDINGS

Out of the total number of media stories on violence against women issued in the second half of 2019 (5717), only 10% of such stories also incorporated the topic of firearm misuse in the context of violence against women.

- Less than 2% of the total number of these stories addressed the problem of firearm misuse as a social phenomenon rather than as individual, self-contained incidents.
- The media cover the topics of violence and firearms almost exclusively with the aim of reporting on the important events of a specific date, and not with the motivation to deeply investigate and explain these topics.
- Half of these stories in the observed period were linked to femicide or attempted femicide with firearms (out of which 80% covered events in Serbia, and 20% events abroad).
- Violence and firearms are treated as a pressing topic by the media only insofar as it is necessary to convey the most basic information, with the inclusion of as many sensationalist details about the incident as possible, and those that do not require of journalists any further investigative work.
- When reporting on femicide involving firearms, the media usually reveal the type of firearms used to commit the murder, but they don't search for – or don't report having searched for – information concerning the ownership and origin of the firearms, whether the perpetrator has participated in warfare, or if he has been reported for violence or other crimes in the past.
- Very few media stories examine the connection between the broader topics of the use of firearms for coercion, threats, control, verbal intimidation and rape, of the association between their use and an increased risk of escalating violence, and of the short-term and long-term consequences of this type of violence for survivors. Only in rare cases does the public get insight into the "epilogue," which is not necessarily related only to any associated legal action, but to the various repercussions of firearm misuse.
- In less than 35% of cases does the media cover the possible or actual legal consequences of firearm misuse and the violence or murder committed.
- The issue of firearm misuse by law enforcement officers who carry service weapons is not treated as a separate topic in the media.

- In the majority of cases, the key interviewees (when they are named) who the media interrogate for information about the origin of the firearms involved, the perpetrators' history of violence, or the circumstances in which the incident happened are the victims' or perpetrators' friends/neighbours/co-workers/family members – not professionals from relevant, competent institutions.
- When interviewing professionals from institutions, the media generally fail to ask questions about the connection between violence against women and domestic violence and firearms.
- Not a single media outlet in the observed period featured any analytical or critical assessments on the misuse of firearms in gender-based violence.
- Half of the stories broadcast contained sensationalist or stereotypical phrases to describe firearm misuse, often in the headlines themselves – *“pump full of lead,” “commit a massacre,” “execute,” “sow death,” “shoot up,” “overkill,” “fatal shots,” “bloody bender,”*...
- Along with using slang in describing heinous crimes, these stories were full of stereotypical portraits of victims, perpetrators and the very phenomenon of violence.
- Half of the stories contained murder details that could be relevant in court, but that were not presented in a suitable legal context that could justify the public's interest in knowing them.
- The vast majority of Serbian media outlets do not respect the integrity of women victims of violence, and they trivialize the crimes committed against them. In this way, the media contribute to creating and maintaining a patriarchal culture of violence that sustains this vicious circle of power and control at the level of the society, which perpetrators of violence then replicate at the individual level.
- The media fail to report on the psychological, physical and economic impacts of firearm misuse on victims, their families, witnesses and the community as a whole. They also neglect to raise the question of communal security in the context of firearm misuse in public places.
- The media have refrained from examining the topic of systemic solutions towards providing care and support to victims of violence.
- Through educational and ethical reporting, the media could play a significant role in exposing the widespread, yet underexamined culture of violence and weapons in which the majority of victims are women.

I INTRODUCTION

THE NECESSITY FOR THIS ANALYSIS

Violence against women is the most globally widespread, and ostensibly the most persistent problem in human history, the consequences of which women and girls around the world suffer on a daily basis. In addition to fundamentally violating basic human rights, violence against women is a threat to the development of peaceful, sustainable communities. The consequences of this form of violence go well beyond the explicit injuries and murders of women – they also undermine women’s capacities to equally participate in the economic, political and social lives of their communities, and, together with men, to contribute to the wellbeing and future of children, families and the wider society.



Even though institutions are primarily responsible for eradicating violence against women, prevention and protection are largely conditioned by the attitudes towards, and perceptions of, this form of violence as a social phenomenon in a given society.

Since this form of violence takes place in the private sphere and is usually committed by husbands and intimate partners, domestic violence is in many cultures considered a “normal” aspect of every marriage, intimate relationship or family. Such social normalization of violence impacts not only its identification and early responses to it, but also influences the willingness of individuals in such a society to report such violence, as well as their ability to recognize the risk factors that may result in the worst outcomes, including femicide.

According to data of the *Women against Violence Network*, in Serbia, from 2010 to 2019, at least 307 women were murdered by their husbands or intimate partners. In 2019 alone, 26 women were killed, and six of these murders were committed with firearms. According to the same analysis, in 50% of the cases in which women were murdered with firearms the perpetrator did not possess the weapon legally (Lacmanović, 2010–2020). This data is made available to the wider public annually and it is constantly being collected and processed based on media reporting by the *Women against Violence Network*.

In this context, the media in Serbia plays a powerful role. In functioning as the go-to source of information for monitoring the prevalence of gender-based violence and its characteristics,¹ the media actively participates in shaping the public attitude toward this phenomenon: “The media are the key factor in shaping the perceptions of a community, because they report on current events and offer their interpretation. Choices like who or what was selected to appear on the news, and how these individuals or events were framed, have a deep impact on attitudes, beliefs and behaviour of people.” (Sutherland et al, 2017).

Since 2009, the United Nations Development Programme in Serbia (UNDP Serbia) has been actively implementing programmes focused on the prevention and protection of women from domestic violence. Based on many years of collaboration with the media, and in full awareness of their role and the impact they have on the perception of gender based violence (hereinafter GBV), the UNDP, in 2017, together with the B92 Fund, created the group *Journalists against Violence against Women*. Today, this group comprises over 30 members, women journalists and editors, advocating for the portrayal of GBV as a social problem in reporting on such violence by highlighting the causes behind it. The group also clearly condemns every form of violence and calls for both the perpetrators and the institutions competent for our protection to be held to account.

¹ The only publicly available data on femicide can be found on the web portal of the *Women against Violence Network* (<https://zeneprotivnasilja.net/en/femicide-in-serbia>), while the publicly available data on incidents committed with firearms can be accessed on the SEESAC platform (<https://www.seesac.org/AVMP/>). Both databases rely on the media coverage of these phenomena.

As part of its daily work, the group monitors the quality of media coverage of violence against women based on established, reputable indicators. In addition, the group has developed the [Guidelines for Media Reporting on Violence against Women](#).

There were multiple factors necessitating the creation of the *Analysis of media coverage of firearm misuse in violence against women committed by men*, which was drafted by this group. There exist solid indicators implying the connection between violence against women and the presence of firearms. The armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia made it possible for a large number of civilians to gain possession of firearms. Also, the high availability of firearms during and after these armed conflicts is seen as a factor that has contributed to an increase in violence against women in Serbia (OSCE, 2019).

According to a study on firearms and GBV that the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (hereinafter SEESAC) carried out in 2016, women who had been murdered with firearms had, in the majority of cases, been killed by their husbands and partners, while the majority of the perpetrators of these crimes were men. Attempted femicide by firearm is seven times more likely to be lethal than murder attempted in the context of criminal activities, given that most often this violence takes place in the intimate, closed environment of households, which greatly reduces the chances for victims to avoid the attack, to hide or run, and, thus, to survive. In addition, firearm misuse is not limited to homicide – the instrument is often misused to carry out other forms of violence, such as control, intimidation, threats and psychological and sexual violence. One out of every five men who has committed domestic violence has used firearms to threaten his partner (Hughson, 2018).

Despite all these factors, the public and the media still pay insufficient attention to the phenomena of firearm misuse and violence against women. This problem was also identified in the *Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of SALW and their ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024*, which was adopted in 2018, and which includes the Republic of Serbia in its implementation². One of the issues that the Roadmap is supposed to resolve is the low awareness of the widespread misuse of firearms in cases of domestic violence and GBV, aggravated by the underdeveloped institutional response. The Roadmap assessed the media coverage of firearm misuse as superficial and sympathetic, mostly in the context of “gun culture” and in portraying firearms as “part of traditional values.” The insufficient response of institutions to media reporting and a deficiency in the further monitoring of cases were also identified.³

² The *Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of SALW and their ammunition in the Western Balkans, by 2024* was jointly developed by the Western Balkans authorities, under the auspices of Germany and France, in coordination with the European Union, and with the technical support of UNDP SEESAC. The Roadmap is the most comprehensive arms control exercise in the region, covering all key aspects from securing the stockpiles of weapons and ammunition to mainstreaming gender in SALW control and countering firearms trafficking. The Roadmap was adopted by Heads of States and Governments in the Western Balkans during the Western Balkans London Summit in July 2018.

³ Text of the Roadmap is available at <https://www.seesac.org/f/docs/publications-salw-control-roadmap/Regional-Roadmap-for-a-sustainable-solution-to-the.pdf>

In this context, the *Analysis of media coverage of firearm misuse in violence against women committed by men* is meant to serve as a baseline for the future work of *Journalists against Violence against Women* on this issue. The aim is to develop specific, applicable activities and engage the media in raising awareness and reducing firearm misuse in violence against women, domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence.

The analysis was developed as part of the project *Reduce Risk – Improve Safety: Towards Reducing Firearm Misuse in the Context of Domestic Violence*, implemented by the UNDP Serbia, with the support of the Government of Germany. This project contributes to Goal 4 of the regional *Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of SALW and their ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024*: by 2024, to significantly reduce the supply, demand and misuse of firearms through increased awareness, education, outreach and advocacy.

INTRODUCTION BY THE GROUP JOURNALISTS AGAINST VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

*Each time they report on domestic violence,
the media have the opportunity to save lives.*
The National Domestic Violence Hotline, USA

The Analysis of media coverage of firearm misuse in violence against women committed by men has been developed by the association *Journalists against Violence against Women*, which gathers over 30 women journalists and editors from national and local media outlets committed to resolving violence against women and advocating for the ethical coverage of this topic, with support from the United Nations Development Programme and the B92 Fund.

In addition to the already published *Analysis of media coverage of violence against women* in 2019 and *Guidelines on Media Reporting on Violence against Women*, we wanted to create and provide further in-depth analysis on how the media report on firearms in the context of this problem. Bearing in mind the power the media wields in informing the public, we believe that our role is much more complex than simply providing information – our purpose is to examine the context of the social phenomena we report on, to give voice to those whose voices are unheard, and to ask the relevant authorities why these phenomena exist and occur and what can be done to instigate and accomplish change.

In the experience of this group of journalists, in many newsrooms, there are committed women (and men) journalists who are invested in this issue, doing their best to engage it in a sensitive, inquisitive and professional manner.

Therefore, we intend and hope that this analysis will accomplish its mission; to be useful not only to men and women journalists, but also to men and women editors, as well as to all those who are interested in the topics of media, violence against women and firearms. This should contribute significantly towards realizing its ultimate purpose; to improve the position of women, especially those who live with the consequences of violence and firearm misuse, as well as of their families, and of the families of the those who have lost their lives as victims of this preventable violence.

FIREARMS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN COMMITTED BY MEN

In Serbia today, violence against women in the family and intimate partner relationships is still one of the greatest problems concerning human rights violations, gender equality and the guaranteeing of safe and dignified lives for women.

This form of violence is widespread, but so too are the following attitudes – three out of ten women believe that domestic violence against women is a private matter, while almost 25% hold the victim responsible, or believe that victims exaggerate their claims about abuse or rape. At the same time, two-thirds of women (62%) have suffered some form of violence after the age of 15. If a woman's partner is a veteran of armed conflict, she is then twice as likely to claim that she has suffered physical violence committed by her partner in comparison to women whose partners did not participate in any form of combat (OSCE, 2019). "When talking about factors that may have contributed to the increase of cases of violence against women in Serbia, in the qualitative survey, women identified the high availability of firearms during and after the regional armed conflicts as the key factor. They stated that soldiers had appropriated a large number of firearms after returning home from combat, which they had either kept in their households or had given to others. Since then, these firearms have been used recurrently against women." (Ibid).

The rate of the ultimate, most brutal form of violence against women, femicide – killing a woman only because she is a woman – is also very high. From 2010 to the end of 2019, at least 307 women were murdered by their partners, ex-partners or male family members (Lacmanović, 2010-2020). The statistics on femicide in the context of family or intimate partner relationships are collected and published by the *Women against Violence Network*. These statistics are based on the media coverage of femicide, given



that there are no official publicly available statistics. This means that this figure not only could be, but is likely, even higher, since it is almost certainly the case that not all incidents have wound up in the media.

The same report by the *Women against Violence Network* states that, in the past ten years, 30% of femicide victims were murdered with firearms. This percentage varies from one year to another, so the highest rate (46%) was recorded in 2015, while the lowest (20%) was registered in 2018. The firearms used to commit murder are most commonly guns, followed by hunting rifles, bombs, and assault rifles, like the AK-47. As for the violence documented in intimate partnerships, from 2012 to 2016, 39.4% of women murdered by intimate partners were killed with firearms. Additionally, 91.1% of persons murdered with firearms by their partners were women, in comparison to 8.9% for men, as shown in the survey *Gender and SALW: Key Facts* (Božanić, 2019).

The risk of domestic violence escalating into femicide is significantly increased if there are firearms in the household. Surveys (usually from the United States) show that this risk is raised by a magnitude of 3 to 5 times (Lacmanović, 2010-2020), or even up to 12 times in such situations (Saltzman et al, 1992). In addition, “the *Survey on the Connection between Firearm Ownership and Femicide 2007-2012* has shown that, when it comes to the rate of these murders, Serbia ranks 17th out of the 48 observed countries” (Lacmanović, 2010-2020).

We must dutifully mention several mass murders in recent years that have been motivated by misogyny and committed with firearms. The 2016 study *Gender and SALW in Southeast Europe* states: “Based on media coverage, five out of the six deadliest massacres that have occurred in Serbia after 2000 directly resulted from firearm misuse in the context of domestic violence, or involved the murdering of the perpetrator’s partner or ex-partner or their family members. In each mass shooting, the perpetrator was a man, and the total toll is 40 dead and 28 injured persons. Women made up the majority of victims (55%), a percentage significantly higher than the share of women in the total number of victims of incidents committed with firearms. In at least three cases, there was evidence that the massacre perpetrators committed domestic violence before the shootings” (Božanić, 2016). It is important to mention these specific cases from recent years – in 2013, in Velika Ivanča, seven women and six men were murdered; in 2015, in Kanjiža, four women and two men were murdered; in Žitište, one year later, two women and four men were murdered. According to the media, in all three cases, the murderers were men who had a history of violence against their partners. In addition, the murderers from Velika Ivanča and Kanjiža were veterans of the 1990s wars, while the AK-47 used in the massacre in Žitište was a “leftover” from these wars (*Women against Violence Network, 2016*).

These facts raise some important concerns in regard to the misuse of firearms in femicides in the family or in intimate partner relationships. One is the issue of the consequences of the wars in which Serbia was engaged in the late 20th century on the territory of former Yugoslavia – men who took part in those wars were never provided with adequate, if any, PTSD therapy. Another issue is the omnipresence and nature of firearms; whether they are legal or illegal, whether they originate from the war or were obtained in another manner. The *Survey on Small Arms and Light Weapons 2012-2016* showed that, in 2016, there were alone around 618,061 pieces of firearms in the legal possession of natural persons in Serbia, while another 23,539 pieces of firearms were owned by private legal entities. In the period between 2012 and 2016, these numbers were constantly growing (Buzi, 2019).

Further proof that firearm possession and misuse are highly gendered phenomena is the fact that 94.7% of firearm owners are men (against 5.3% for women). Additionally, in 2017, 37.6% of interviewed men stated that they are open to the idea of owning firearms, in comparison to only 19% of women (Božanić, 2019).

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF MEDIA COVERAGE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The media plays a very important role in informing the public about the presence and prevalence of certain social issues, as well as about how relevant institutions respond to these issues. This allows the media to scrutinize the work of these institutions. Firearm possession and the connection between firearms and women's security are social concerns of great urgency. This is why the media coverage of the connection between domestic violence/femicide and firearms is crucial, especially bearing in mind that the media is often the only source of information available, thus serving as the almost exclusive basis on which monitoring and analysis can be carried out.

Most recently, there has been a notable increase of interest in the topic of violence against women by the media: in 2019, the number of stories covering this issue in printed and electronic media and web portals totalled over 11,000, as stated in the *Analysis of Media Coverage* by the group *Journalists against Violence against Women*. However, these stories have most often focused only on specific cases, in which violence has already occurred (78%), while articles examining the phenomenon of violence against women from an educational standpoint were significantly fewer (22%).

Only 17% of examined media stories on this issue prioritized or included awareness in some way (by describing the phenomenon of violence, as well as its prevention, protections against it and related support measures), while only 13% of stories provided information regarding the causes of violence against women, which often lie in unequal power relations, i.e. gender inequality.

Even though firearms are used in many cases of femicide and domestic violence, surveys on this topic are scarce. One of the few surveys focusing on "media attitudes toward firearms," as stated on the web portal of *Public Policy Research Centre*, was carried out on a four-month sample of media reports published in the aftermath of the previously described Žitište massacre and firearms legalisation action taken in 2016. The survey showed that "the media mostly did not question the root of firearms omnipresence in Serbian society, or the numerous risks related to their possession" (Spasić and Tadić, 2017). Even though this direct survey of the media did not yield particularly comprehensive and detailed results, a second component of the study was based on focus groups, which involved members of vulnerable categories of the population who were seen as being especially exposed to discrimination due to their personal characteristics. Here, it was reported that the focus group "assessed the media coverage of gender-based violence and domestic violence (...) as extremely negative, and as one of the factors that contribute to the vulnerability of women" (Ibid). The same focus group, however, "recognized the power the media could have in raising awareness of these issues, which could function as a specific form of prevention" (Ibid).

II ANALYSIS OF MEDIA COVERAGE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND FIREARM MISUSE

METHODOLOGY

The goal of this analysis of media coverage of violence against women and firearm misuse is to examine when and how the media report on the relationship between these two phenomena, the amount, quality and nature of information they provide to the public, and if they approach the issue of firearm misuse and violence against women in a critical, analytical way.

The analysis includes all media stories about violence against women committed by men in the second half of 2019, i.e. from July 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019, which are available in the *Ebart* media archive database under the following keywords:

- violence against women (*committed by men*),
- domestic violence (*against women committed by men*),
- sexual violence (*against women and girls*),
- femicide (*committed by men in the family or in intimate partner relationships*),
- perpetrators of violence against women.

In a standard analysis of these media stories referencing violence against women, the group *Journalists against Violence against Women* singled out those stories in which firearms were mentioned. This resulted in a sample of 590 stories in which both violence against women and firearms were mentioned, and which subsequently served as the basis for this further analysis. The sample included stories from television and radio stations, printed media and web portals.

The stories were classified into two basic categories; those reporting on a specific case of violence in which a woman was exposed to firearm misuse, and those examining the

wider phenomenon of firearm misuse in violence against women. Another further element of categorisation employed was based on whether a story was simply relaying an official press statement of the Ministry of Interior (or of another institution/organisation), or if it was an original piece prepared by a journalist.

In examining those stories reporting on specific incidents, we investigated whether the following types of information had been mentioned: the type and serial number of the firearms; the firearm's origin of possession (legal or illegal); the perpetrator's history of violence; and if the perpetrator or the firearm had any connection to warfare.

The analysis was particularly focused on determining the presence of critical and analytical media coverage on firearm misuse. We were primarily interested in assessing whether the media stories had provided additional information about firearm misuse, or presented it as a social problem. To this purpose, we examined if a particular story contained the following elements: information about firearm misuse or the prevalence of firearms among the citizens of Serbia; how and to whom illegal firearms can be reported and submitted; when can legally owned firearms be confiscated, especially in the context of violence against women; firearm misuse among law enforcement officers; or any other critical or analytical elements that might signify that a story provided more nuance in its reporting rather than simply disclosing the fact that violence had been committed with firearms.

LIMITATIONS OF THE ANALYSIS

It is important to mention that the sample used in this analysis is representative only of the observed period, particularly given that in this timeframe the media reported an abundance of cases of violence against women committed with firearms, as well as four cases of femicide – amounts that might vary significantly from the norm for such a period. Thus, to paint a more complete picture of how the media cover the connection between violence and firearms, a longer period of time would have to be analysed, especially bearing in mind that in-depth investigative work requires time.

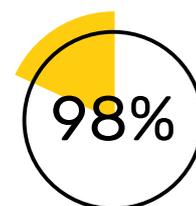
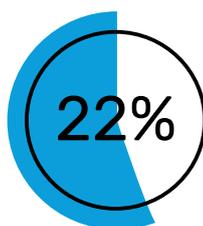
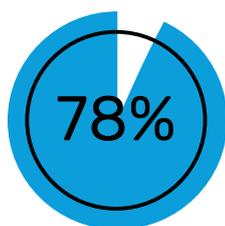
RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

The analysis of media coverage carried out by the group *Journalists against Violence against Women* has shown that in the second half of 2019 the total number of media stories on violence against women (on TV or radio, or in printed media or web portals) amounted to 5,717. Out of these stories, 590, or 10%, of such stories also incorporated

the topic of firearm misuse in the context of violence against women. This includes media reports on specific cases of violence against women in which weapons were the means of execution, as well as reports in which the primary topic was violence against women, but in which firearms were also mentioned generally in the context of criminal offenses.

TIMING AND REASONING BEHIND THE MEDIA'S REPORTING ON VIOLENCE AND FIREARMS

In a great majority of cases, the media covered violence against women as isolated incidents (78%), while stories with an educational aspect, portraying violence against women as a social phenomenon, were far fewer (22%) (Gligorijević and other, 2020). Regarding those stories involving violence against women and firearm misuse, the discrepancy was even more alarming – over 98% of all stories presented specific cases of firearm misuse as isolated cases.



In other words, **less than 2% of the total number of stories dealt with the issue of firearm misuse as a social phenomenon.** However, even these stories rarely resulted from investigative journalism – they were almost exclusively constituted of the relaying of statements and communiqués of international or local women’s organisations about the prevalence of illegal firearms or their easy accessibility, without any additional questions or information on the part of the journalists reporting the incidents, or were simply summarised news from other countries, in which the issue of confiscating firearms after the first report of domestic violence report had been raised.

This indicates that the media covers the topics of violence and firearms almost exclusively out of the need to report on important events for a specific date, and not with the motivation to deeply investigate and explain these topics.

Only 6% of media stories reporting on gender-based violence dealt with firearm misuse in the wider context of violence against women and high femicide rate by referencing available statistics, citing statements of professionals from institutions or NGO experts, or investigating any associated legal penalties imposed. However, even in these situations, the media generally refrained from investigating any more deeply into the connection between firearm misuse and violence against women/femicide. This indicates that the media does not see this connection as a relevant issue, and, moreover, that they do not register a noticeable difference between the perpetrator having access to, say, a

knife or some type of firearm. Even if the weapon itself might seem irrelevant for the outcome, especially in incidents ending in death, it would seem that the media would have a fundamental obligation to underline these risks and statistics. This should be especially emphasized in light of surveys that have exposed the increased risk of a lethal outcome of domestic violence if firearms are present in the household, or if the perpetrator is a war veteran.

"...A large number of gunshots or several dozen stab wounds are typical for homicide motivated by various problems between intimate partners..."

From the article *"ABSURD COURT VERDICTS IN CASES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: A more lenient sentence for the killer if he was lovesick and drunk,"* published on November 26, 2019 in the daily newspaper Politika.

In carrying out the type of analysis used in this study, surveys often differentiate between what are termed either *portrait* or *landscape* types of media reporting. A *portrait* is a story that "is framed as an episode (...) focused on a person or a specific incident, which leaves little room to talk about the context of a problem and possible solutions." In contrast, *landscape* reporting means providing "a thematic framework (...) which may include details about an individual person or a specific incident, but which also portrays the relationship with institutions, the environment, and wider social issues." In other words, "thematic stories are important because they help the audience think about solutions that can change the institutions, the communities, or the social norms." (Dorfman, 2018).

Applying these definitions, we can conclude that Serbian media outlets are still reporting about violence and firearms in the portrait format, even in cases when they cover violence against women as a social phenomenon by publishing statistics and providing quotes from experts and institutions, since they only brush the surface when doing so. By these measures, there has been no difference found between the types of media outlets, whether broadcast, printed or online.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PORTRAIT REPORTING

The prevalence of portrait reporting is particularly obvious if we take into consideration that **half of the stories in the observed period reported on cases of femicide or attempted femicide carried out with firearms** (out of which 80% were events in Serbia, and 20% abroad).

The high percentage of stories about femicide should not be a surprise, as during the relatively short observed period, four separate murders of women by firearm were reported. The first case happened in early July in Požega, when a stepfather shot his stepdaughter with a hunting rifle and then attempted suicide. The next two cases happened over the same weekend in mid-September – first, a man shot his wife and her brother with a gun in downtown Kruševac, and then, after a police manhunt, committed suicide. The next day, a man killed his fiancée with a hunting rifle in their home in Koceljeva. The last case took place only a few days later, at the end of September, when a man shot his ex-partner with a gun before attempting suicide in her apartment in Kotež.

The media reported on the type of firearms used in all four cases, as demonstrated from details above, which were sourced from the media. Only in one case (Koceljeva) did they report that the firearm was legally owned by the perpetrator, which they indicated having learned from “reliable sources.”

“However, ‘Novosti’ has learned from a reliable source that, allegedly, S. had insulted Ž., so he took out his shotgun, for which he had a license.”⁴

“Man took out his shotgun after argument,” September 17, 2019, in the daily newspaper Večernje Novosti

“Ž. shot his wife with a hunting rifle that he legally owned.”

“Wife execution,” September 16, 2019, from the daily newspaper Vesti Frankfurt

As for the remaining three cases, while it is possible that journalists had indeed tried to find information about the legal status of firearms and failed, this was not explicitly stated in their stories. In those reports examining homicide or attempted homicide – except in an extremely small, statistically insignificant number of cases – there are no instances of phrases stating that “the newsroom was not able to discover if the firearm was legally owned,” which would imply that journalists had made efforts to obtain this information but were not able to find it. Yet it is pivotal that this information be sought and reported on, as it brings to light numerous issues related to both the functioning of relevant institutions and the security of citizens, including: whether prevention measures exist for the misuse of legally owned firearms in cases of domestic violence; what steps comprise the process of issuing firearm licences and carrying out background checks; whether these steps could help in advancing the detection of cases of violence against women. At the same time, it is important for citizens to have available information on, and be made aware of, how many pieces of illegal firearms are confiscated annually, and what percentage of these is detected through reported cases of violence.

⁴ When quoting snippets from the media, we have made the names anonymous by only providing initials. Our intention is to preserve the dignity of victims and avoid inflicting additional trauma on their families.



A few isolated examples of informing the public about the context of homicide/attempted homicide

The investigation shall determine how and when he obtained the gun.

"M. died in my arms," September 25, 2019, in the daily newspaper Informer

"I don't know if he abused her or not, because she never complained about him. We do know that his ex-girlfriend reported him to the police," she explained (note: the murdered woman's landlady)

'M. was lying in a puddle of blood with her boyfriend next to her," September 25, 2019, from the daily newspaper Blic

It was established that the man did not legally own the gun that he used for the crime. Forensic experts and criminal police inspectors examined the crime scene. Further investigation shall uncover all the circumstances of this case.

October 25, 2019, from the TV channel Pink

From the Beretta gun that he obtained illegally, A.H. fired several shots at 37-year-old G. He hit her head and her arms. Then he shot himself in the head.

October 25, 2019, Radio-televizija Srbije (Radio-Television Serbia)



Just as information regarding the origin and legality of misused firearms is lacking in those reports examining homicide or attempted homicide, so too is information on whether the perpetrators were war veterans, or if they had previously been reported for violence or other crimes. These factors would also be relevant in the context of firearm misuse and the risk of escalating violence. As was the case regarding the previously described issue of firearm origin, the media stories did not state whether journalists had made any efforts to find these facts but had failed to find them, or whether there had been no attempt at all.

It is important to underline that while some cases of firearm misuse have remained in the media's spotlight for several days, these are most often cases of homicide and attempted homicide. For those cases of violence where firearms were misused to make threats, but which did not result in physical injuries, such attention was far less likely to be maintained. In nearly all situations in which the media's attention is held for a period of days, the same **pattern of reporting is evident**. On the day of the crime, the media releases a brief piece of news, citing only the most basic details, often taken from the official web portal of the Ministry of Interior. By the next day, the public is generally provided with additional details about the case, including the type of firearms used, the number of gunshots fired, the history of perpetrator's behaviour, etc. However, almost all these stories have a short "expiration date" – generally of only two to three days.

Only in rare, specific cases is the public informed about an “epilogue” that includes more than just the legal actions taken. One such example is the attempted homicide of a woman in a Belgrade bakery in October 2019 – the media reported that she was released from the hospital in mid-November 2019. This kind of information could have a preventive impact. However, in less than **35% of the surveyed cases involving firearm misuse for violence or homicide did the media actually report on the possible or enforced legal consequences.** Also, even in these cases, it usually occurred only around the peak of attention centred on the respective case. The information typically presented was simply that the perpetrator had been “apprehended,” “detained” or “interviewed,” or the anticipated length of the foreseen prison sentence or another punishment for the committed crime was related. In these cases, the media generally even failed to name the types of firearms used for the homicides or attempted homicides – rather, they simply stated that women were “shot,” “wounded,” et cetera.

Examples of media coverage of legal punishments for violence and firearm misuse

Petar is faced with 40 years in prison due to the first-degree murder he committed.

“Killed his wife with a hunting rifle,” September 25, 2019, in the daily newspaper Blic

The perpetrator, A. H., a married man with two adult sons, is charged with the crime of attempted murder. After the hearing, it is expected that the prosecutor’s office will press charges against him. If A. is convicted, he could spend between five and fifteen years in prison.

“Bakery woman shot in the head is leaving the hospital,” November 11, 2019, in the daily newspaper Informer

The murderer confessed to the crime, after which he was apprehended and kept in custody.

“S. posted a video from a party with her fiancée, three hours later he killed her because she ‘didn’t want to sleep with him,’” September 17, 2019, from the web portal of the daily newspaper Blic



FIREARMS AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR CONTROL AND INTIMIDATION

As already stated, the media attention is greater and more protracted for cases involving homicide and attempted homicide. Even if the media often relay the press statements of the Ministry of Interior on cases of domestic violence against women with the inclusion of varying consequences, these cases are rarely followed up by field work, by the collection of additional relevant information or by the framing of the story in a wider context – despite there being a clear place and need for this.

As an illustration of these tendencies, during the observed period, the media reported on several cases of violence against women where firearms had been used for intimidation and control, including cases of sexual violence – even cases in which sexual violence was committed against an underage girl, and which had occurred during wartime. Even in these cases, the media **completely failed to address the wider topic of the connection between firearm misuse for coercion, threat, control, verbal intimidation and rape**, of the association between their use and an increased risk of escalating violence, and of the short-term and long-term consequences of this type of violence for survivors. This is particularly important to underline because violence against women is almost always rooted in perpetrators establishing power and control over victims, powerfully damaging in its own right; actual physical violence is not a necessitating factor for the intimidation of victims or in keeping them in a subordinate or dependent position. The very presence of firearms in the household is regarded as a largely threatening factor for a woman when reflecting on whether to report the violence and/or leave her abuser. Furthermore, as much as 60.2% of women surveyed in 2017 stated that a gun at home would make them feel less safe (SALW Survey, 2017). Given that leaving an abusive partner is a situation of high risk for all women with the experience of violence, this makes their position additionally complex, especially given the significant possibility of it becoming life-threatening if the abuser has close access to firearms.

In this sense, **as part of their informational and educational role, the media have a fundamental obligation to redefine the very notion of firearm misuse for violence against women, and view it as a wider topic** – as the instrument that allows abusers to accomplish an ultimate level of control over victims, as often the mere presence of firearms in the household is enough to instil fear and intimidation. Thus, the term *firearm misuse* should be applied more widely to more accurately encompass the full scale of its meaning and not only be restricted to cases in which firearms were misused in the narrower sense of the notion, i.e. when they are actually fired with the intent to intimidate or harm, excepting instances of use for defence.

Another topic that could have, if not should have, received substantially more attention, is **firearm misuse by law enforcement officers who carry service weapons**. In the observed period the media covered also covered the case of a policeman who had locked himself in his apartment with his wife and child (who he later released), and then

used his service gun to make threats. Given the established increased risk of violence and homicide if an abuser has access to firearms, the media could have used this case as an opportunity to investigate this topic in greater detail. They could have searched statistics on law enforcement officers with reported histories of violence toward their partners and/or children, or who had exhibited the use of their service weapons for control and intimidation, as well as statistics on how many law enforcement officers had had their weapons confiscated for these reasons. This is an issue of particular significance because policemen not only have direct access to firearms, but they are trained to use them, they work in a culture of institutionalised masculinity, they have privileged access to information, they know standard procedures, et cetera. All these factors require additional vigilance when it comes to domestic violence. However, even when the media have uncovered such instances and issued reports covering them, they have failed to use such opportunities to investigate more thoroughly this topic of particular importance and weight, and the cases have been covered in only the portrait format.

Finding and selecting interlocutors who are willing to share their thoughts on a particular topic can largely define how a phenomenon will be framed in the media, from what angle and with what information. This is a delicate and important issue, as confirmed by the *Code of Ethics of Journalists of Serbia*, in which there is a whole chapter on this topic (Chapter VI – Relationship with Information Sources) (Press Council, 2015). There are also detailed guidelines for choosing interlocutors when reporting on violence against women, developed by the group *Journalists against Violence against Women* (Journalists against Violence against Women, 2019). The guidelines particularly highlight that media reports must not contain the details of the violence or homicide committed, or statements from interlocutors that are not relevant to the crime.

As part of the framework of our analysis, we examined who the media most frequently referenced as sources of statements and information on the topic of firearms. In the majority of cases, the **key interlocutors** (when named at all) that the media had selected as sources for information on the origin of involved firearms, on the history of violence of perpetrators and on circumstances related to the crime, were **not officials of relevant official institutions, but rather friends, neighbours, co-workers, or family members of the victims and perpetrators**. While it is true that persons close to perpetrators or victims can provide a great deal and variety of information, some of which falls within the realm of public interest, their statements should be corroborated by official institutions, and the public should be adequately informed about such confirmation. The number of cases in which the interlocutors cited were professionals from relevant institutions was relatively low, and even in these cases, the spotlight was not on the specific circumstances of the events – instead, firearms were mentioned as more of a side topic beneath the more prioritized issue of introducing more severe punishments for various crimes. Unfortunately, the media once again fell far short of maximizing the opportunities presented to them, failing to additionally ask the professionals about the connection between violence against women, domestic violence and firearms.

One case of homicide and attempted homicide in the family, which was widely covered in the media, took place in Knjaževac in mid-July of 2019. Using an automatic rifle, a man killed his son-in-law and grandson, and wounded his daughter-in-law and her brother⁵. This case stood out particularly in its inspiring of the media: they were almost competing with each other in revealing details about the used firearm and the history of violence. A closer look at the media reporting, however, might raise suspicions about the work of the police.

Unfortunately, this barrage of coverage by the media went no further than sensationalism, providing statements from neighbours and extended family members that were sometimes contradicting each other. As a result, everything was brought down to the level of gossip. The media did not investigate further or report if the institutions, mainly the Ministry of the Interior, had followed up on the suspicions, if it was ever established from where the perpetrator obtained such extreme firearms, or what had happened following the reports against him, if charges were indeed filed at all. The audience was left to doubt the truth.

As we've found out, in the R. family there had been no previous reports of violence (...)

"Bloody bender in Knjaževac," July 16, 2019, in the daily newspaper Dnevnik

We'd reported him to the police, but it had all ended with verbal warnings only.

"He would have killed them all if I didn't grab his rifle," July 16, 2019, in the daily newspaper Večernje Novosti

Some ten years ago, N. chased me with a gun to shoot me dead. He also tried to run me over with his car. On that day, when he chased me with a gun, I went straight to the police. I told them everything, that he was violent and armed. I reported him and nothing happened. They didn't confiscate his weapons - says S.

"Slaughtered half of his family with an AK-47," July 16, 2019, from the daily newspaper Kurir

Rumour has it that N, allegedly, was close to the police. Some police officers visited him often, they even drank together with him on his balcony, a neighbour says.

"Drunk old man fired 29 bullets, killed his son-in-law and grandson!," July 16, 2019, in the daily newspaper Alo

The suspect, R, didn't reveal when, from whom and why he got his AK-47 automatic rifle, which he used to fire around 30 shots at his son-in-law, two grandsons, and the wife of one of them. He's also mum about his other two guns and the bomb.

He was never in war so was not keeping it as a 'souvenir,' he wasn't connected with any serious crime groups or gangs, and it remains unexplained why he had an AK-47 at home. His life wasn't in danger, he didn't have much money, he lived from remittances sent by his son from Germany, and so he surely didn't need weapons to protect his property. However, all of this implies that he obtained the AK-47 to intimidate or murder someone - Blic learns from sources close to the investigation, adding that the suspect's neighbours weren't aware that he had an AK-47 at home.

"Along with AK-47, the double murderer had two guns and a bomb," July 17, 2019, from the daily newspaper Blic

⁵ Given that one of the injured persons is a woman, we decided to include this case in the analysis.

Despite attributing assorted motives to various cases of firearm misuse in domestic violence, and offering such statements as “things are as dark as they get”⁶ in the observed period, **not a single media outlet came out with an analytical or critical overview of firearm misuse in violence against women.** In other words, **violence and firearms are topical for the media only to the extent needed to convey the most basic information about the incident, with as many sensationalist details as possible** and those that do not require of journalists any further investigative work.

SENSATIONALISM AND STEREOTYPES

Sensationalism is the most typical characteristic of media reporting on violence against women, a tendency often already apparent in the headlines. The same goes for media reporting on violence and firearms.

Almost half (45%) of the media stories surveyed contained sensationalist or stereotypical phrases used to describe firearm misuse, frequently in the headlines themselves – “*pump full of lead*”, “*commit a massacre*”, “*execute*”, “*sow death*”, “*shoot up*”, “*overkill*”, “*fatal shots*”, “*bloody bender*”... In addition to using slang to describe violent crimes, these media stories were full of stereotypical depictions of victims, perpetrators and the very phenomenon of violence. When the media employs such statements as the murder took place “*at a cursed spot*,” “*their divorce was solved with bullets*,” “*the real trigger for the murder*” was something else and not the abuser’s conscious intention to hurt, or the abuser “*worshipped his sniper, I don’t think he’s a killer*,” the responsibility of the act is inherently shifted from the actual perpetrator and placed either upon the victim or upon some external circumstance, which creates a twisted picture of reality that impacts how the public perceives the phenomenon of violence.

At the same time, approximately *half (49%) of the stories contained murder details that could be relevant in court, but which were not presented in a suitable legal context that could justify the public’s interest in knowing them*, such as the number of gunshots fired, which body parts were hit, how many bullets struck each body part, the amount of blood lost, etc.

This sensationalist exploitation of crime details is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, we should bear in mind that these are media stories that are available at newspaper stands, in primetime slots on TV and radio or are just one click away on web portals. This means that everyone, including children, has almost unlimited access to this content, which begs the essential question of whether it is possible to avoid this. Not only does such exposure help to instil a culture of violence, but also **a culture in which the misuse of firearms is reduced to the banal** leading to its normalisation, and even to the voyeuristic glorification of this sort of crime. Secondly, this media approach can give ideas to other abusers on how to commit violence, providing them with further material that they might use to menace their victims, perhaps even threatening them with the very same fate.

⁶ Line from a story published on a web portal after two cases of femicide in two subsequent days in mid-September.

Above all, however, it is the women victims of violence who are hurt the most by this kind of media reporting – both the women that the media report on, and the women who live with violence. Not to mention the import of such messaging and the associated repercussions on all women in the society. Even though the *Law on Public Information and Media*, the *Code of Ethics of Journalists of Serbia*, and the *Rulebook on the Protection of Human Rights in the Area of Media Services* explicitly state that human dignity, and especially the dignity of crime victims, must not be violated by media reporting, this is one of the most common lapses to occur. In other words, **the majority of Serbian media outlets do not respect the integrity of women victims of violence and trivialize the crimes committed against them.** In this way, the media contribute to creating and maintaining the patriarchal culture of violence that sustains the vicious circle of power and control at the level of society, which perpetrators of violence replicate at the individual level.

INVISIBLE TRAUMA

In the final days of 2019, the daily newspaper Blic published an article titled “I survived, and now I want to live,” about Marina Minić, a woman who, in 2018, was shot four times by her partner at her workplace and survived. After this, the man committed suicide, and Marina Minić became a disabled, wheelchair-dependent woman. Even if the reason behind publishing this article was Marina’s fundraising campaign for charitable aid to finance the surgery that would allow her to walk again, this was **a singular story in the observed period that put the spotlight on the survivor.**

“Gunshot. He didn’t say anything, he just came in and took out his gun. And then: bang! I didn’t feel any pain, I just saw a red stain spreading across my thigh. I was aware of what was happening. The first thing that crossed my mind was not to run, there was nowhere to run, but to lower his gun somehow – but then another gunshot came along, and then the third one, and the fourth...”

The story of Marina Minić, published in the article “I survived, and now I want to live,” December 28, 2019, in the daily newspaper Blic

All around the world, different kinds of trauma related to various types of crime are becoming more visible. In journalism, there are now entire departments devoted to dealing exclusively with this issue, such as the *Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma* at Columbia University, which is dedicated to “informed, innovative, and ethical journalism and reporting on violence, conflicts and tragedy” (Dart Center, n.d). In juxtaposition, the Serbian media does not seem to consider or prioritize trauma at all, generally neglecting the topics of psychological, physical and economic repercussions of firearm misuse on survivors, their families and communities. This was true even in the article presented just above, given that fully half of the article was occupied in providing only a detailed

description of the crime, without presenting the wider context of consequences that Marina Minić and her family must now live with. Similarly negligent is the case of the murdered woman from Kruševac, where even though the media revealed that, for example, the murdered women had two children, not a single media outlet embraced this as an opportunity to run a story about the consequences that these children are suffering, and will continue to suffer, because their father killed their mother (and uncle) and then committed suicide. Furthermore, given that this crime took place in public, in a coffee shop, one might expect some additional coverage on the traumatic consequences the numerous witnesses have likely suffered, or the effect that this crime has had on the entire community, yet none has been provided. Finally, **not a single outlet raised the issue of communal security in the context of firearm misuse in a public place.**

Even in the context of the Blic article that invited people to donate to the survivor's fundraising campaign, it is evident that **the media do not deal with the topic of care and support to victims of violence.** Though Serbia already ratified the *Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence* in 2013, the state has expressed clear reservations about the directive, especially regarding the state's obligation to pay compensation to women victims of violence. The *Report of the Republic of Serbia on the Implementation of the Council of Europe Convention* states the following: "In Serbia, at the moment, there is no possibility for victims of violent crimes (...) to receive compensation from the state" and "due to the poor economic situation and high deficit in the state budget, an earmarked state fund has not yet been established, and the funds for this purpose have not been allocated;" this same reason appears to be why Serbia "still has not ratified the *European Convention on the Compensation of Victims of Violent Crimes*, which it signed in October 2010" (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2019). Moreover, the media, in its coverage on violence against women, has never emphasised the state's responsibility to provide compensation to survivors and/or their children or families.



III RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MEDIA

The recommendations provided in this document rely primarily on the existing legal framework, most heavily on the *Law on Public Information and Media*, the *Law on Electronic Media* and the *Law on Public Media Services*, as well as on the *Code of Ethics of Journalists of Serbia* and the *Rulebook on the Protection of Human Rights in the Area of Media Services*.

It is recommended that journalists dealing with this topic also become familiar with the *United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW Convention), the *Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence* (Istanbul Convention), which is the EU umbrella document for this field, and, finally, the *Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence*, certain provisions of the Criminal Code and the *Law on Weapons and Ammunition*. Furthermore, an important source of information is the *Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of SALW and their ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024*, given that Serbia is taking part in its implementation. Along with the Roadmap, to monitor the state's actions, it is important to highlight the *Strategy on the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Republic of Serbia 2019–2024*, as this document states that “possession, use, misuse and effects of small arms and light weapons have a clear gender dimension,” and “special heed shall be paid to implementing prevention measures to curb violence against women, domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence” (Official Gazette, 2019). In this sense, in the context of media reporting, it is imperative to bear in mind that the Action Plan for the implementation of this strategy explicitly includes the following activity: “awareness-raising to reduce the level of firearm misuse in cases of violence against women, domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence.”

The already mentioned *Guidelines on Media Reporting on Violence against Women* deserve special attention since they were developed by an association of professional women journalists dedicated to examining this topic and who demonstrate a particular commitment to responsible and ethical reporting.

A general recommendation to the media would be that the reason for running a story on firearm misuse in violence against women be not limited to simply presenting a specific event (portrait reporting), but to investigate these incidents in an in-depth manner, with an emphasis on their complex, preventative nature (landscape reporting). This entails **reporting based on knowledge, facts and statistics and presenting this phenomenon as a gender-specific, widespread social problem. Reporting should avoid depicting violence against women as something trivial, which in turn leads to the normalisation and glorification of such crime.**

Landscape reporting might consider the following relevant topics:

- the gender characteristics of firearm possession and misuse (the number of women and men who own firearms; the number of women and men who misuse firearms; the reasons behind these figures; women's and men's perceptions of how firearms impact security, e.g., whether they increase or decrease it, and why); the impact of tradition, customs, pop culture, etc., on people's attitudes toward firearms, especially those of young men, with the aim of providing a more comprehensive preventive approach to the problem;⁷
- how to prevent firearm misuse (the roles of educational institutions, media, healthcare institutions, the business sector, the security sector, the veteran affairs sector, the social affairs sector, the institutions dealing with the protection of human rights and equality, etc.);
- the increased risk of lethal outcomes in households where firearms are present;
- redefining and widening the notion of "firearm misuse for violence against women," to more accurately encompass the full scale of its meaning and not only be restricted to cases in which misuse occurred in the narrower sense of the
- notion, i.e. when it was fired without due reason, but also all those cases where firearms exist in households with violence (the misuse of firearms for coercion, threats, control, intimidation and different forms of psychological, sexual and economic violence, even if there is no physical violence; available relevant statistics; impact on victims and their ability to report violence or leave a violent situation; impact on children...);
- the connections between misogyny, violence against women, firearms, participation in wars and the previous history of violent behaviour, in particular in the context of mass murder;
- the connection between cases of femicide in which the perpetrator committed suicide and the perpetrator's mental health;
- the connection between participation in wars, firearm misuse for violence against women and possible mental illnesses (e.g., the prevalence of PTSD and how to provide support to men living with it and their families);
- the production, availability and prevalence of firearms, both legal and illegal, and their misuse in violence against women and femicide;
- possible methods for preventing firearm misuse by those who own them legally (e.g., background checks of persons who have been documented as, or have been reported for, having committed violence against women; statistics of the denying or revoking of firearm licences due to violence against women);

⁷ Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey might be a potential source of information. The source is available at https://www.seesac.org/f/docs/SALW-Surveys/Serbia_SALW-Survey_ENG.pdf

- firearm misuse by law enforcement officers who carry service weapons (e.g., statistics on the misuse and confiscation of service guns among law enforcement officers);
- providing space in the media for the coverage and examination of legislative actions on firearms and for reporting on their results;
- presenting this topic as a global problem and not only a local issue (reporting on the state of affairs in other countries, especially in terms of good practice examples that can inspire discussion at the national, and even local, level);
- firearm misuse in violence against women who belong to particularly vulnerable groups, such as Roma, women with disabilities, older women, rural women... (prevalence and characteristics);
- legal actions administered in cases of firearm misuse in violence against women, including in cases of femicide (e.g., information and statistics about anticipated and imposed sanctions; the reasons behind typical court protocols, and opportunities to improve these polices);
- different consequences of firearm misuse (i.e. beyond the mere presentation of individual, isolated cases, and the direct physical consequences and associated consequences affecting only the victim, a more comprehensive overview of the short-term and long-term psychological, physical and economic repercussions for victims, their families, perpetrators' families, children, witnesses, and the community as a whole);
- systemic solutions for, and the coverage of deficiencies in, providing care and support to survivors and their families or the families of victims (e.g., compensation (or the lack of it) from the state; lengthy, discouraging and inefficient processes that hamper victims from receiving justice and/or compensation from perpetrators or institutions; systemic care and psychological support for children whose mothers were killed by their fathers).

For each of these topics, in addition to interviewing experts from various fields, **it is necessary to engage officials from relevant institutions in the discussion, examining their work and holding them accountable if mistakes were made.**

It is necessary to emphasize that landscape reporting does not exclude reporting about specific cases – it just means it should be present to at least a similar degree. We recommend that the media frame the relevant so-called human-interest stories, i.e. stories focusing on ordinary people and their lives and problems, in such a way that they also provide insight into the wider context of the issue, thus avoiding the problematic tendency for incidents to come across as isolated cases. To this purpose, when reporting on a specific case, we recommend journalists and media outlets do the following:

- preserve the dignity of survivors/victims;
- do not use sensationalist and stereotypical phrases and refrain from conveying the details of crime;
- underline the gravity of the situation, even if firearms were “only” present in the household and not fired;
- search for information about the types of firearms involved, their origin and possible previous misuse and their connection with wars or with previous reports of violence when such firearms should have been confiscated;
- provide statements from a variety of interlocutors, in particular experts and officials from relevant institutions;
- hold institutions accountable if mistakes have been made;
- report on the various and varied repercussions of misuse;
- report on the legal penalties imposed on perpetrators.



In summation, the role of the media in the prevention of firearm misuse in violence against women is considerable. As seen in the diagram above, every time we use the public space and public speech to address this problem, with or without a direct reason, and when we report on the consequences of misuse, we have the power to contribute to its general prevention. And every time we fail to do so, we not only let an opportunity for progress, for the prevention of suffering and for the encouragement of healing slip through our fingers, we perpetuate the very problems of violence, inequality and suffering we are seeking to stop. This is why we call on the media to embrace its fundamental obligation to inform and educate the public and exert its substantial resources and power to minimize the negative repercussions and maximize the positive impacts in its efforts on this vital issue.

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