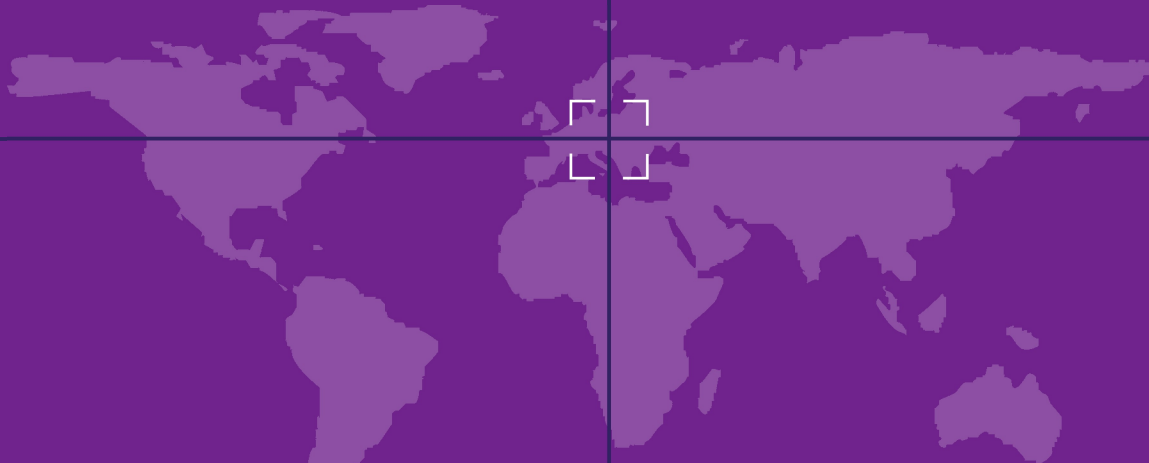


Criminal Justice and Security in Central and Eastern Europe

From Common Sense to Evidence-based Policy-making

25-27 SEPTEMBER, 2018 // LJUBLJANA // SLOVENIA



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Criminal Justice and Security in Central and Eastern Europe

**From Common Sense to Evidence-based Policy-making
Conference Proceedings**

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MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS AND CONSTRUCTIONS OF CRIME, OFFENDERS AND VICTIMS: SERBIAN CASE

Biljana Simeunović-Patić¹

ABSTRACT

By using a content analysis, the author attempts to explore the extent to which the prevailing media portrayals of crime, offenders and victims distract from factuality of crime in Serbia. It is argued that crime news is often distorted with the aim to acquire greater “news value”, or to induce moral panic over specific categories of offenders. The news is commonly distorted in tabloid press through rather simple albeit well approved means: by exaggerating the prevalence and dangers of specific forms of crime, portraying extensively certain uncommon criminal events, causal oversimplification, as well as by over/under/miss-representing specific categories of perpetrators and victims. Particular consideration is given to the problems of selective and culturally sensitive attributions of responsibility for crime and victim blaming, as well as to media portraying of youth violence aiming to induce moral panic over youth crime and to call forth the harsher response toward juvenile offenders.

Keywords: media coverage of crime, representations of offenders, representations of crime victims, Serbia

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INTRODUCTION

Citizens are informed on crime, as well as other risks of modern life, dominantly through the media. Media, on the one hand, have a very important role and their task is to inform citizens in a truthful manner, but at the same time they also have a task that is largely in conflict with the first (Christenson, 2014): to create profit in other words to achieve great print run and ratings, which leads to different market values for different news. The consequence is universal and well-known – the reporting of media in relation to the crime rates, certain types and categories of perpetrators and victims is disproportionate, selective and unrepresentative, whereby in their reports on criminal events and victimization, the media dominantly focus on more serious violent crimes and individual cases of the most severe and relatively rare crimes.

The attention of media paid to the white collar crimes and the corporate crimes, which produce the greatest social and financial damage, or the non-violent property crimes, which usually dominate the structure of crime rates, is not even close to the attention paid by the media to crimes of interpersonal violence (Greer, 2007: 21). Selectivity is noticed even in the reporting on violent crimes, bearing in mind that the media prefer to focus on violent victimisations whose actors were not familiar to each other, rather than on domestic violence, which is far more frequent (Stanko & Lee, 2003).

Media representations of victimisation are dominated by persons who can be labelled as “ideal victims” (Christie, 1986), that is, individuals who are generally perceived as vulnerable, helpless, innocent and worthy of compassion, or persons from those social groups whose members enjoy the legitimate and unquestionable status of the victim (e.g. small children, old women, etc.). On the other hand, victims who are perceived as “undeserving” - such as,

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for example, homeless people, drug users and other people from social margins - get very little media attention and their victimisation can go unnoticed in a social sense. Thus, the media contribute to the maintenance of a phenomenon called 'hierarchy of victimisation' (Carrabine, Iganski, Lee, Plummer, & South, 2004: 116) and the different treatment of victims of crime in public and official discourses (Greer, 2007: 22).

Although the crime itself is valuable topic for media, news about crime does not have the same weight, and does not have the same chance of finding themselves in the field of vision of the media (Greer, 2007: 26). Jewkes (2004) once indicated that the degree to which the criminal story is newsworthy and the probability that it will be published varies depending on several 'news values' including the degree of predictability (regularity) of the crime, the degree of risk of similar victimisation of the auditorium, whether the crime has sexual aspects, whether the actors are celebrities or high-status persons, the intensity of violence, the presence of spectacle or graphic imagery, and whether young people are actors in crime (Jewkes, 2004: 40).

In general, media representations of crime, as indicated in the literature, largely follow the 'law of opposites', so media usually give the most space to those types and forms of crime, and those categories of perpetrators and victims who are the least represented in reality (Pollak & Kubrin, 2007; Reiner, Livingston, & Allen, 2003). Bearing in mind the tendency of the media to profit from the "sale of human pain" (Jugović, 2014) and the intimidation of people, media attention is especially focused on severe violent crimes, as well as on the criminal acts that involve children and young people as actors. Youth violence is a phenomenon that attracts special attention of general and professional public, while the media significantly mediate in creating a dramatized picture of the violence and delinquency of young people, which sometimes results in their "satanisation" and creating a moral panic against juvenile crimes (Kovčo-Vukadin, 2012).

On the other hand, white collar crimes and corporate crimes attract far less media attention, not only because in their case it is not always obvious and doubtless who is their victim and who is responsible for them, because the cases are administered slowly, the crimes are hard to prove and often do not have a clear outcome (Cavender & Mulcahy, 1998: 699), but also because such events in the auditorium do not arouse such a level of fear and moral scandal as is the case with criminal events involving interpersonal violence (Greer, 2007: 36-37).

The manner of presentation of news and the language used in the reporting greatly influence the perception of crime among consumers (Pollak & Kubrin, 2007: 61). The frequency of reporting on various forms of crime and victimisation also contributes to the disproportionate representation of different categories of victims, which results in the fact that many victims (usually members of various marginalised social groups) are underrepresented in the media, while some other groups, like police officers and other criminal justice system personnel, are overrepresented (Greer, 2007: 37-38). Media reporting also constructs explanations or justifications of perpetrators of certain types of crimes, such as, for example, perpetrators of violence against women in a love relationship. Studies conducted in several countries have shown that the media very often romanticise the cases of male partner violence against women by devoting much space to considering the potential mitigating circumstances under which violence has occurred, including in particular emotional stress and 'love' toward the rejecting partner, whereby all, including the perpetrators themselves, are ultimately portrayed as 'victims' of unusual and unfortunate circumstances (Alat 2006; Exner & Thurston, 2009; Sampert, 2010; Saroca, 2013, Sutherland, McCormack, Pirkis, Eastel, Holland, & Vaughan, 2015).

The subject of attention in this paper is the media coverage of crime in the Republic of Serbia, that is, the way in which the news about criminality, perpetrators and victims of crime are presented in the media. Specific research questions include: (a) Does media reports substantially distort the facts on crime problem?; and (b) How crime victims are represented in media / is there victim blaming and risk of secondary victimisation caused by media reporting? It has been generally supposed that media in Serbia, particularly tabloid newspapers, regularly present criminal events selectively and sensationalistically, and thus distort images of crime, offenders and victims. It has been also presumed that victims are often at least partially blamed for crimes suffered in tabloid media reports and also exposed to a high risk of stigmatisation through media reporting.

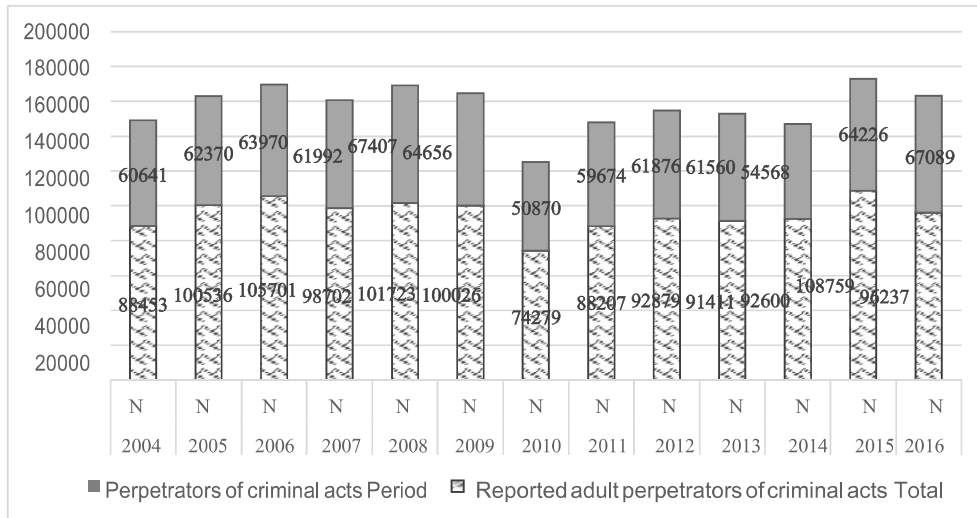
METHODS

In an effort to respond to the above asked research questions concerning media coverage of crime in the Republic of Serbia, a quantitative-qualitative content analysis of media reports was carried out. The sample compiled from the online edition of three widely read daily newspapers with national coverage: Blic, Kurir and Politika, published in the period from March 1st to March 15th 2018. Blic and Kurir are long print run tabloid newspapers with online editions whose web portals, according to measurements carried out by the Gemius, research agency, belong to the most visited portals of Serbian daily newspapers, while Politika is traditional, the oldest daily newspaper of bigger format, which also has its own (moderately visited) web edition.

Since the basic research question in this paper refers to the extent to which the real state of crime, or, more precisely, the official data on crimes in Serbia corresponds to the media representation of this problem, below we will firstly provide basic information from the official crime statistics on crime.

A FEW FACTS ABOUT THE CRIME IN SERBIA

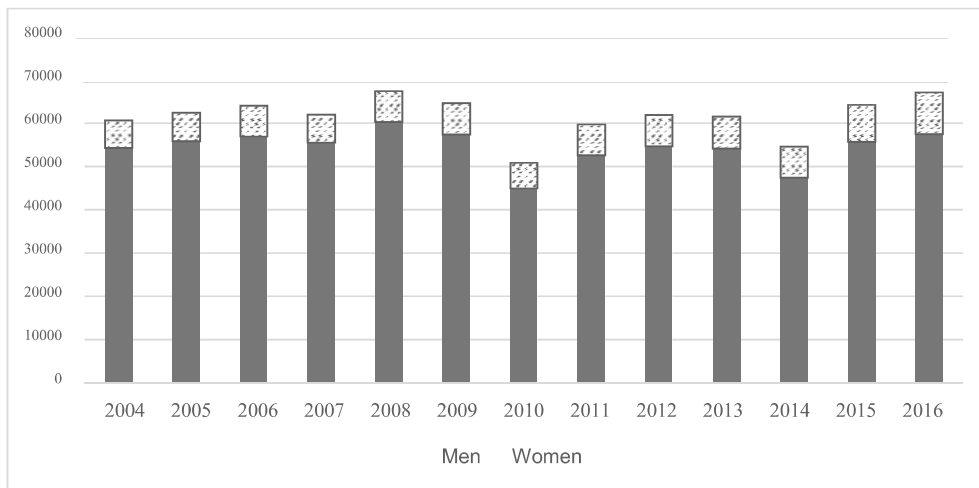
Bearing in mind that in Serbia, unfortunately, there are not recent reliable studies of the dark numbers of crime rates, in this part we will inevitably have to rely on official data on the crime rates provided by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. Based on the data from this source we can conclude that in the period from 2004 to 2016, we do not notice any striking dynamics of the number of persons who were reported as perpetrators of the crime. This number, within this time window, ranged from 74279 in 2010 to 108759 in 2015, or, on average, 95347 (known + unknown) persons per year (Graph 1).



Graph 1: *Adult perpetrators, crime reports*

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2017

The share of known perpetrators in the total number of reported persons ranged from 58.9% in 2014 to 69.7% in 2016, that is, on average, 64.8% per year. The representation of women in the total number of reported perpetrators of crimes in the period 2004-2016, ranged from 7% (in 2008) to 14.3% (in 2016), or, on average, 11.4% per year (Graph 2).

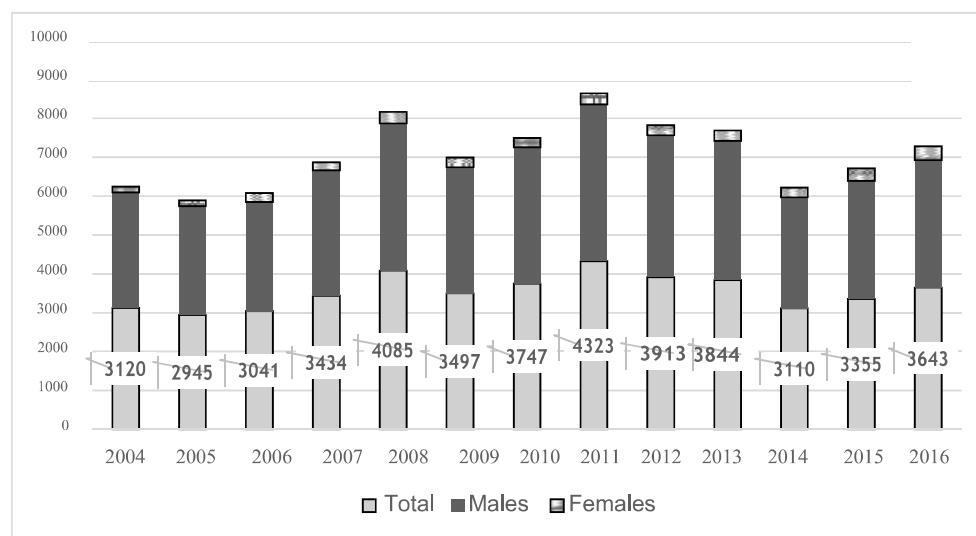


Graph 2: *Adult perpetrators, crime reports*

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2017

The number of juveniles (persons over 14 and under 18 years of age) reported as the perpetrators of the criminal offence, did not significantly fluctuate during the period from 2004 to 2016 and ranged from 2945 in 2005 to 4323 in 2011 (Graph 3). The share of girls in the total number of reported juveniles ranged from 4.5% in 2006 to 7.5% in 2016, and it

can be noted that the number of reported minor girls during the observed period has grown in both absolute and relative terms. While in the first six years of the observed period, the number of girls in the total number of reported juveniles did not exceed 4.9%, in the last three years it was not lower than 7.1%.



Graph 3: *Juvenile perpetrators, crime reports*

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2017

The structure of criminal offences registered by the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Serbia, is dominated by the property crimes (52.7%), while the total participation of violent and sexual crimes is below 4% (Table 1).

Table 1: *Criminal offences recorded by the police on the territory of the Republic of Serbia, 2016*

| Group of criminal offences | N | % |
|---|--------------|--------------|
| Against life and limb | 3056 | 3.2 |
| Against civil freedoms and rights | 2874 | 3.1 |
| Against sexual freedom | 381 | 0.4 |
| Against labour law | 222 | 0.2 |
| Against family and marriage | 6473 | 6.9 |
| Against property | 49518 | 52.7 |
| Against economy | 3046 | 3.2 |
| Against human's health | 7043 | 7.5 |
| Against environment | 1010 | 1.1 |
| Against public safety of persons and property | 747 | 0.8 |
| Against safety of public traffic | 8902 | 9.5 |
| Against public administration | 580 | 0.6 |
| Against jurisdiction | 256 | 0.3 |
| Against public peace and order | 3395 | 3.6 |
| Against legal transactions | 3458 | 3.7 |
| Against official duty | 1178 | 1.2 |
| Other criminal offences | 1907 | 2.0 |
| Total | 93876 | 100.0 |

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2017

In recent years, crime rate in Serbia has not suffered significant structural changes. In the period from 2012 to 2016, the share of property crimes in total number of crimes ranged from 45.7% to 54.3%, while the share of violent crimes varied between 3.5% and 4.2% (Table 2).

Table 2: *Adult perpetrators, crime reports*

| Criminal offences | 2012 | | 2013 | | 2014 | | 2015 | | 2016 | |
|---------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| <i>Life and limb</i> | 3923 | 4.2 | 3734 | 4.1 | 3268 | 3.5 | 3818 | 3.5 | 3451 | 3.6 |
| <i>Sexual freedom</i> | 53 | 0.4 | 39 | 0.4 | 47 | 0.3 | 53 | 0.3 | 41 | 0.4 |
| <i>Family and marriage</i> | 6182 | 6.7 | 6268 | 6.9 | 5914 | 6.4 | 7891 | 7.3 | 10190 | 10.6 |
| <i>Property</i> | 45291 | 48.8 | 45899 | 50.2 | 50303 | 54.3 | 58741 | 54.0 | 44000 | 45.7 |
| <i>Safety of public traffic</i> | 7186 | 7.7 | 7773 | 8.5 | 7439 | 8.0 | 7856 | 7.2 | 7805 | 8.1 |
| <i>Public peace and order</i> | 4022 | 4.3 | 3396 | 3.7 | 2897 | 3.1 | 3671 | 3.4 | 3201 | 3.3 |
| Total | 92879 | 100.0 | 91411 | 100.0 | 92600 | 100.0 | 108759 | 100.0 | 96237 | 100.0 |

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2017

A noticeable increase in absolute and relative share in the structure of reported adults is recorded only in the case of those registered for a criminal offence against marriage and family - in the last four observed years, the number of persons reported for these crimes increased from 5914 to 10190, and the participation of this group of perpetrators in the total number of reported persons increased from 6.4% to 10.6%.

So, with the exception of a moderate increase in absolute and relative representation of minors in the structure of persons reported for criminal acts, as well as an increase in absolute and relative representation of persons reported for criminal offence against marriage and family in the total number of adult persons reported for criminal act, it could be noted that during the past decade, the crime rates in Serbia did not show remarkable dynamic and structural changes. This observation should be taken with caution, bearing in mind that in recent years systematic research on the dark numbers of crime rates has not been carried out in Serbia.

While the observed increase in the share of minor girls in crime rates requires a more careful analysis and cautious conclusions, especially having in mind the low absolute frequencies of juvenile crimes, the absolute and relative increase in the number of adults reported for the offence against family and marriage is a direct consequence of more stringent formal crime control in this area and the introduction of a *zero-tolerance policy* for the criminal act of domestic violence that was widely reported in recent years.

MEDIA COVERAGE OF CRIME AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

The study, which on this occasion was conducted on a sample of media reports published in the online editions of selected daily newspapers in Serbia showed that during the observed two-week period the selected newspapers published a total of 330 crime-related articles, namely: 179 in Blic, 98 in Kurir and 53 in Politika, that is, on average, 12 articles in Blic, 6.5 in Kurir and 3.5 in Politika, daily.

The front page of nearly half of the tabloids during the observed two-week period (7 out of 15 covers of Blic and the same with Kurir) is dominated by the topic of crime, especially the topic of violent crimes, sexual violence against children, violence against women and victimisation of famous people. When it comes to Politika, the crime topic has found its place on the cover in only 2 out of 15 cases. The articles from the sample are absolutely dominated by those which deal with particular criminal events only superficially, while analytical texts on the problem of crime rates are extremely rare. The results of this research confirm the observations of Pollak and Kubrin (2007): in order for a criminal event to be covered by media, it must, by its very nature, be violent. The vast majority of the criminal cases reported by the selected media during the observed period were violent crimes.

As can be seen in Table 3, the strikingly dominant topic in articles from the sample, especially those published in tabloids, is the murder. It is the topic of almost one-third of articles in Kurir and one-fifth of articles in Blic from the total number of published articles dedicated to the topic of crimes. In the bunch of articles dominated by criminal topics, the share of those thematically devoted to conventional property crime such as robbery and theft is 15% in Politika, 14% in Blic and only 6% in Kurir. A similar number of articles in the observed newspapers (13% in Politika, 12.3% in Blic and 7% in the Kurir) is dedicated to the topic of drug-related crimes.

Table 3: *Share of certain topics from wider criminal issues in the sampled daily newspapers (March 1-15, 2018)*

| Theme | Newspaper | | |
|--|------------|-----------|-----------|
| | Blic | Kurir | Politika |
| Murder | 37 | 30 | 7 |
| Robberies and thefts | 25 | 6 | 8 |
| Narco-crime / Organized narco-crime | 22 | 7 | 7 |
| Violence against women / Family violence | 15 | 10 | 1 |
| White-collar crime | 12 | 5 | 10 |
| Organised robberies/ frauds/ abductions | 12 | 6 | 3 |
| Juvenile delinquency | 9 | 2 | 2 |
| Political crime | 7 | 3 | 2 |
| Criminal offences committed by police officers | 6 | 1 | 3 |
| Victimisation of police officers | 5 | 2 | 3 |
| Sexual violence against children | 5 | 2 | 2 |
| Victimisation of show business persons | 4 | 4 | / |
| Unauthorized possession of weapons | 3 | 2 | / |
| Terrorism | 2 | 1 | / |
| Prisoners | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Cyber crime | 2 | 2 | / |
| Confessions of victims' families | 2 | 2 | / |
| Murders linked to organised crime | 1 | 2 | / |
| Immigrants' violent crime | 2 | 1 | / |
| Juvenile gangs | 2 | 1 | / |
| Child neglect | / | 1 | 1 |
| Other | 4 | 7 | 2 |
| Total | 179 | 98 | 53 |

Politika publishes articles dedicated to the white collar crimes much more often than the observed tabloids (Table 3) - each fifth article with a criminal topic is dedicated to this topic, while this is the case with less than 7% of crime-related articles in Blic and Kurir.

As it was expected, it turned out that the tabloids are more prone to devote their space to reports on crimes in which children, police officers and show-business persons appear as (potential) victims or (potential) perpetrators. In spite of its growing spread in contemporary circumstances, cybercrime does not seem to be a newsworthy topic for high print run daily newspapers - a total of four articles have been published in the observed newspapers in this two-week period.

In the absence of news on criminal events in the country, the observed daily newspapers, especially tabloids, as a rule, reach out for such news in neighbouring and other countries. As many as 35 articles published during the observed two-week period in Blic reported on crime or crime rates in neighbouring countries, while 18 articles in Blic, 6 articles in Kurir and 4 articles in Politika were dedicated to reporting on criminal events from various countries worldwide.

When it comes to reporting on cases of murder, it is characterised by insisting on the unpredictability of events, as well as the fascinating strangeness of its actors. Thus, for example, one of the numerous texts dedicated to the event in which a 31-year-old programmer allegedly killed his boss after getting fired and injured another colleague in his former company in the wider centre of Belgrade, is titled as follows: "The programmer-killer's roommate: 'He never even took part in a fight, I cannot believe he's responsible for such bloody horror'" (Blic, 2018a). The whole series of articles about this event bring confessions of cousins and acquaintances of the young man who perpetrated this crime, and, among other things, bring to attention that he was "genius at school", an excellent student who "only knew for the highest grades on faculty", "quiet and modest" young man for whom no one could ever have assumed that he could commit such a crime. As Reiner and his associates have pointed out once, a certain kind of 'disrupted expectations' and 'deviant occurrences' are striking features of news stories about crimes (Reiner et al., 2003: 13). Thus, the particular newsworthiness is obviously in criminal events whose actors are members of traditionally respected social and professional groups and institutions, so reports on crimes whose potential perpetrators are members of the church, police or certain political parties are usually followed by sensationalist, sometimes cynical titles such as: "The priest was dealing dope from Albania? This is how the priest from Požega and the transvestite bell-ringer were dealing dope!" (Kurir, 2018b); "Did the gendarme's prank killed Ranko Panić?" (Derikonjić, 2018); "I want to take my babe to Thailand" - These are the messages used by a politician to blackmail the former Red Star footballer" (Blic, 2018b).

By the way, the analysis of the media reports carried out on this occasion affirms what Jugović once pointed out: the verb "kill" in tabloid journalism is easily transformed into the "sadism of language", along with the verbs such as "cutting up", "cutting down", "slaughtering", "executing", "massacred" (Jugović, 1997, 2014: 231).

A number of articles on the property crime and the perpetrators of criminal acts are written in a highly sensational manner, presenting the perpetrators as very capable and skilful young men who overstep the police and other criminal justice personnel, and sometimes are even characterised by a gentle heart: "The serial burglar elusive for the police: Neat thief robbing houses in Banja Luka" (Morača, 2018b); "After the bank robbery, he attracted attention by film escape from the prison: 'I fell in love and that was a trigger'" (Blic, 2018c); "He was comparing his muscles with the guards, and then escaped from the prison" (Blic, 2018e).

The articles on the topic of juvenile delinquency and youth violence are not as numerous as they are bombastic, dramatic and aimed at intensifying fear and moral panic from juvenile delinquency. The titles of these articles include the following: "From school detention to the criminal and killer: The number of juvenile offenders in the RS is growing" (Blic, 2018b); "Clever, gun and pink backpack - This is how a gang of teenagers looted throughout Belgrade" (Adžić, 2018); "Horror in Petrovac na Mlavi - Juveniles blackmailed a girl with her sex video forcing her to sleep with them and another ten" (Blic, 2018d); "The kids with clever ravened Belgrade" (Kurir, 2018a). Regarding the relations between youth and crime, a sample of media reports from this study confirms what has already been observed in the literature (Greer, 2007) - the media are more inclined to view young people as typical perpetrators of crime, and considerably less represent them as vulnerable persons who are at high risk of victimisation.

When it comes to sensationalisation, stereotyping, the spread of fear and moral panic related to juvenile crime, the media may count on the support of certain "experts". Thus, articles thematically devoted to juvenile crimes who pretend to be analytical, usually contain an expert perspective, but those texts are exactly the ones roughly simplifying and exaggerating the problem. For example, in the above-mentioned article "From school detention to the criminal and killer: The number of juvenile offenders in the RS is growing", which was published in Blic on March 12th 2018 (Morača, 2018a), the police officer from the Banja Luka Police Department, who provided data from the police records, spoke on the problem of juvenile crimes, and stated, among other things: "During the past year, we registered 77 minors who committed 90 criminal offences, and in 2016, there were 52 minors who committed 78 criminal offences... The most common juvenile crimes are theft, serious theft, damaging and stealing other's property, causing serious and slight physical injuries, as well as criminal offences against public transport safety". The statement ended with a warning: "In January and February this year, we already registered 11 minors who have committed 20 criminal offences, and this number is today even bigger because the arrests are happening all the time."

Nevertheless, articles which, from time to time, and on the occasion of criminal events with juvenile actors, point to an "increase", "explosion" or "brutalisation" of a juvenile delinquency, which is suggested, without any argumentation, by certain "experts", are titled as follows: "The minors are more brutal than the adults!" (Večernje novosti, 2013); "The plunder, deal, abuse - dozens of juveniles in Serbia arrested for the gravest crimes" (Blic, 2017); "Young criminals are increasingly brutal" (Novi magazin, 2013); "Juvenile crime: Beardless and cruel" (Nedeljković, 2013); "They steal, rob, kill - This is a profile of a Serbian juvenile delinquent" (Bogosav, 2018b); "Instead of a pencil, brings knife to school, the biggest increase in crime rates among young people in Novi Sad - Criminal acts perpetrated by minors are more and more violent and cruel, with the increasing use of narcotics" (Crnjanski Spasojević, 2015) and the like. The support of experts, more precisely, a smaller group of rotating, overrepresented in media, psychologists, pedagogues and criminologists, in the distortion of media images of juvenile crime in Serbia, is very striking.

VICTIMS, MEDIA AND VICTIMISATION

According to the articles from the sample, the group of "newsworthy" victims for media includes direct and indirect victims of murder, women victims of violence in a partner relationship and children who are victims of sexual violence. How precious and savagely exploited by media are the victims of the murder is proven by the case of Jelena Marjanović,

the singer relatively unknown to public, whose body was found on an embankment in a Belgrade suburb on April 3rd 2016, which is more than two years almost everyday topic of a whole series of Serbian tabloids, which in their reports speculate about possible perpetrators, victim partners and family relations, not bypassing numerous members of the victim's closer and wider family, while articles often mention even the victim's daughter (with accompanying photographs of the child with barely blurred part of the face at the height of the eyes), which at the time of the mother's murder was five years old.²

However, although reporting on violence against women in a partner relationship and domestic violence in Serbia generally is improving in the sense that it becomes somewhat less directly blaming in relation to the victim, reports on this type of violence, as shown by previous surveys in other countries (Sutherland et al., 2015; Bučar Ručman, 2013), generally do not report the social context in which violence occurs, but the presence of various myths and misinterpretations of the background and the drivers of violence against women is still obvious in some media reports. This is the case, for example, with the article titled: "The tragic end of the love drama: "Saša S., who killed his girlfriend last night and then shot himself in the head in a flower shop in Zemun, has passed away" (Kurir, 2018c). Hence, as many previous surveys in other countries have shown, media attention directed to violence against women and partner violence in Serbia, predominantly involves media focusing on cases of murder of woman in an intimate partner relationship.

When it comes to direct victimisation of children as a subject of newspaper articles, the most frequent are poor reports on sexual violence against children, and much less frequent the articles devoted to other forms of abuse or neglect of children. The articles on the most difficult forms of victimisation, followed by very severe consequences, presented by bombastic titles: "Friends noticed that the pupil from Jagodina has changed, and he only told the psychologist the horrible secret he was hiding for months" (Bogosav, 2018a).

The visualisation of news reporting on violence against children and violence against women, as well as the news reports on murder, is unavoidable in tabloid newspapers. Reports of serious crimes in Serbian tabloids, as Jugović recently pointed out, often look like photographs from a police investigation and forensic medical examinations, or as scenes from horror movies, with striking bloody traces (Jugović, 2014: 231). In cases of criminal events involving the deprivation of a person's life, newspaper reports regularly bring interviews with victim's closest persons, often taken immediately after a tragic event. From the case of the Serbian tabloid press, it is quite evident what Greer once observed, that today it is almost expected that the victim's closest persons should share their pain and suffering with the media auditorium, intimidated and fascinated by tragic spectacle that takes place before their eyes (Greer, 2007: 30). Photographs of victims and their loved ones, which have the power to immediately familiarise media consumers, as no words could do (Doyle, 2003), are regularly contained in the articles dedicated to crimes in Serbian tabloids. The desire to achieve this irreplaceable propaganda effect in the sale of human pain and suffering, seems to completely erase every human scruple, professional ethics standards, and the obligation of the media to protect the privacy and dignity of the victim and her loved ones in their reporting of crimes.

2 The spectacle developed around this crime was brought to a climax when the victim's spouse, Zoran Marjanović (who was treated in the media as a "suspect" from the very beginning) took part in the reality show on one of the most viewed commercial televisions in the country. He left the show after only one week, as the media speculated, at the request of the competent centre for social security, because the temporary guardians of his minor daughter should have been appointed. The fact that Marjanović was deprived of liberty and detained in connection with the investigation of the murder of his wife, after leaving the reality show, was largely used by the tabloid media.

The numerous bad examples of treating victims in tabloid media are a good confirmation of what Valić Nedeljković once pointed out, saying that “market-centric media” based their editorial policy on the tabloid model, imposing their journalists several rules that ensure financial success, contrary to the professional code of ethics: “Make the editorial to like you; reach the cover and stay there at all costs; imitate the prejudice of the auditorium; take side of the currently desirable option; give your best to provide as many naked celebrities as possible for your media; fight for the rule of scandal with as little legal consequences as possible; never involve emotionally; without any scruples attack the privacy, with the explanation that the public has the right to know” (Valić Nedeljković, 2009: 16).

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Based on the conducted analysis of media content, it can be concluded that the media in Serbia, especially the tabloids, significantly contribute to the distortion of the reality of crime problem - both in terms of its volume and in terms of its structure and weight. Tabloid newspapers remarkably overrepresent violent crimes by individuals, particularly the topics of murder, and sexual violence against children.

It should be particularly noted that Serbian media show a remarkable tendency to raise the level of attention and spread the fear from juvenile crime, relying heavily on creating negative stereotypes on juveniles and the unsupported expert narratives. These processes are aimed at aggravating the formal social response to juvenile crime, as well as the reversal of traditional and obsolete methods and practices of upbringing the children and youth. Kovčo-Vukadin pointed out that in this context experts and scientists are systematically ignored and silenced because they do not provide recipes for ‘quick’ solutions, but they warn about the complexity of the problem and the importance of a thoughtful and comprehensive coping strategy (Kovčo-Vukadin, 2012: 113). However, it can be added that there are more efficient ways of media exploitation of crime topics than ignoring and silencing the scientists, that are carried out with the support of media-exposed experts who often do not hesitate to find the arguments for their claims not only in the wrongly presented state of things and inaccurate interpreted results of domestic and foreign studies, but also sometimes in fictitious findings of non-existent research.

Victim blaming in tabloid newspapers’ reports persists, although it is usually not direct, but indirect - through causal oversimplification and the development of discourses on mitigating circumstances that have affected the perpetrator. This is especially the case in media coverage on violence against women in an intimate relationship and femicide. Regardless the fact that the media auditorium could not be characterised as the passive recipient of information, it should be kept in mind that the choice of news and the way in which the actors of the events are presented has certain cultural effect, and impact on attitudes, beliefs and behaviour of people (Flood & Pease, 2009).

The risk of secondary victimisation is particularly pronounced in the case of minor victims of sexual violence, which are often media targeted, but also in the case of indirect victims of the murder, since the murder is absolutely the most common topic in the media reports dedicated to the topic of crime.

Overrepresentation of extreme violent events, sensationalistic approach, dramatisation and trivialisation of crime problem clearly indicate that Serbian tabloid media are predominantly market-oriented and focused on profit achievements. It is worth to notice that similar results concerning media attention towards serious violent crime was recently reported by Bučar Ručman (2013) who conducted analogous research in Slovenia, another

former Yugoslav republic which went through political and economic transition after gaining independence, and concluded that her findings on crime news were alike to those found in other western developed countries where the activities of the media are primarily aimed toward financial profit (Bučar Ručman, 2013: 34). It seems to be a universal reality that violent crime news hold a high value (i.e. media corporations' interests) within a growing neoliberal media market. It should be noted, anyway, that the exploitation of violent crime events and violent victimisation by the Serbian tabloid media – through the practice of detailed description of violent scenes, insufficient effort to protect sensitive data on victims, basing newspaper articles on speculations, trivialisation of crime causes, and misuse of victims' ignorance – is quite usual. It not only exceeds the boundaries of moral concerns and human tolerance, but assumes the proportions of an infinite “leeching”, which in some cases lasts for years – most often with the full support of media-exposed “experts” and without the appropriate reaction of national media regulatory and supervisory bodies.

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