

War is not over with the last bullet

Overcoming Obstacles in the Healing Process for Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina



KVINNA TILL KVINNA

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PROJECTS

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for Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Marta Cullberg Weston



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Kvinna till Kvinna addresses the specific needs of women in areas affected by war and conflict. Kvinna till Kvinna co-operates with women's organisations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania, Israel/Palestine and Georgia/Caucasus.

War is not over with the last bullet. Overcoming Obstacles
in the Healing Process for Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina

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*After a war
Someone has to tidy up
Things won't pick themselves up,
After all ...*

*No sound bites,
No photo opportunities
And it takes years.
All the cameras have gone to other wars.*

From "*The End and the Beginning*" by Wislawa Szymborska¹

With warm thanks to all the wonderful women –
at the centers in Nevesinje, Blagaj, Zuanic in Mostar,
at the Psychological Center and at Prijateljice in Tuzla,
at the center in Vukovar,
at the center in Visegrad and
at the legal center in Zenica –
who allowed us to share their experiences from the war and the post-war
reconstruction period.

We love you, we admire you,
and we wish you a better future!

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Foreword

WHEN THE INITIATIVE to start The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation was launched in 1993, one of the main goals was to provide an opportunity for women in the former Yugoslavia, traumatized by the ethnic cleansing, to process their traumas and help them regain their strength so that they could rebuild their society when the war was over.

Psychological trauma research had shown that the opportunity to process traumatic experiences is of critical importance for people to go on with their lives and to help them regain hope for the future. The first projects that The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation supported was the establishment of meeting places (women's centers) where women can meet and, in trauma groups process their devastating memories and start to rebuild their trust in others. The centers also offer study courses and job training to strengthen the competency of women so they can have better opportunities in the job market and a better chance of becoming self-sufficient.

At the end of 2000, five years after the hostilities finally ended with the Dayton Peace Accords, we decided to determine if the theories that have guided our work had relevance. We also wanted to find out more about how the work at the centers had developed and how it benefited the women. Our model has been one of close cooperation with local groups, who initiate projects and assume responsibility for the implementation of the programs. We seek to evaluate the effectiveness of this model and, at the same

time, learn more from the experiences of the beneficiaries that can benefit our future work and the work of other organizations engaged in war-torn societies.

This report is thus an evaluation of the psychosocial support programs that The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation have supported in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH). The psychosocial support program is, however, only one pillar of our programs. Our work aims also to empower women to become involved in democratic political processes and thus to enable them to change their future. That aspect of our program, however, has not been the focus of this study.

We hope that this report will be of value to other international organizations working in the Balkan region and similar war-torn areas. It gives insights into the important processes that enhance healing in war-torn societies and into the valuable role of women in social reconstruction.

This study shows that the way the rebuilding process is handled will intimately influence people's chances for healing. As such, it can be of value to the government in BiH and to the international donor communities. It underlines the importance of long-term planning and of the integration of women at all levels of the rebuilding process.

In the international donor community, there still is a debate about the value of psychosocial support programs. This study provides important evidence of the far-reaching positive effects

of such support. However, no matter how effective the psychosocial support has been, it has not been able to counteract the profoundly negative effect of problems at the governmental level, problems that have prevented international and local investments from infusing new energy into the economic life of BiH. The extensive unemployment that has resulted has thrown women into despair and many are now trapped in poverty. Young people want to leave the country, as they see no chance for a job. This tragic process needs to be vigorously challenged to give people in BiH a genuine opportunity to rebuild their lives.

Since the foundation of the League of Nations after World War I, international efforts have been made to humanize the consequences of conflicts and, to the greatest extent possible, prevent war. We hope that our efforts have contributed to each. In this study, however, the focus is on how to humanize the consequences of war for women, a subject too much neglected in international diplomacy to date.

Stockholm, December 2001

Kerstin Grebäck

President of The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation

“Not only the houses
are in ruins. Our **lives**
are **in ruins!**”

WOMAN IN MOSTAR

CHAPTER 1

HOW DOES ONE

reconstruct women's lives

AFTER ETHNIC WARS?

DECEMBER 14, 2000 MARKED the fifth anniversary of the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords that brought an end to the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The ethnic cleansing of civilians that took place during the war was intensely brutal and led to severe traumas and losses for everyone involved.

Five years is a short time for healing, not only of the extensive personal traumas but also of the societal rifts. Yet, it is a critical time from the perspective of evaluating the rebuilding* and rehabilitation effort. Five years is roughly the time span that international organizational attention to post-war rebuilding can be sustained, even though the media attention span is much shorter. There already has been a withdrawal of quite a few international support organisations in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH).**

* Throughout the report, “rebuilding” and “reconstruction” are used to denote the complex processes of the re-establishment of a post-war society, not only the physical reconstruction.

** Throughout the report we will use the full term “Bosnia-Herzegovina” or the abbreviation BiH, but at times where this is cumbersome, we use “Bosnia” as a term for the whole country. We will also at times use the adjective “Bosnian” to denote all women living in BiH. The term “Bosniac” will be used to refer to the Muslim part of the population.

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation (KtK, see fact sheet at the end) decided to study the healing process in BiH five years after the Dayton Accords to evaluate the work done to support women in rebuilding their shattered lives.*

We wanted to learn more about how best to support women in war-torn regions and thus to develop our approach further. We also hoped that our findings might affect the policy-making, discourse, and planning of rebuilding efforts in the Balkans, as well as the rebuilding process in war-torn societies generally.

In May and June 2001,** we interviewed about 90 women who have taken part in programs we supported in Bosnia-Herzegovina (and Croatia), and we interviewed also about 30 staff members. Another 150 beneficiaries of these programs answered a questionnaire. The interviews focused on how women had been able to heal their wartime traumas, what had been helpful to them in piecing their lives together, how the support offered at women's centers helped them to rebuild their lives, and how they were affected by different societal processes.

This study addresses the following issues relating to the "reconstruction" phase in war-torn societies (stating first the issue and then our investigative aim):

- Post-war life does not bring immediate regeneration. Rather, it often is a prolonged journey of struggle and suffering for the victims. There is thus a need for funds and long-term planning to ensure a sustainable reconstruction process. "Without a recovery momentum we can forget about democratisation, free markets and human rights advancement," is Jonathan Moore's conclusion.²

To give some background to this claim for long-term reconstruction support, this KtK study seeks to clarify what the situation is like for women five years after the war, how they have benefited from the support provided, and what has been missing.

- Reconstruction is often conceived only in terms of political, economic, and physical (infrastructure) rebuilding, but the invisible, inner wounds that result from traumatic experiences need also to be addressed.

An opportunity for individuals to process their traumas in a safe environment is essential for their long-term healing. The recognition that rebuilding a war-torn society entails much more than rebuilding the physical and political infrastructures is a relatively new notion, and there is still controversy about how best to proceed.

An aim of this KtK report is to cast light on the effects of psychosocial support and its contribution to the healing process and the reconstruction of personal lives.

- Women for a long time have been invisible in the planning of relief and rebuilding activities because of male dominance of this process. Most often women constitute an add-on in rebuilding programs despite being in the majority among refugees, displaced persons, and in the population generally. Rebuilding plans for war-torn societies must be conceived by gender-sensitive staff who are aware of women's needs. Also rebuilding plans must be based on gender-desegregated data.

This study provides a magnifying lens that highlights the situation of women survivors. It also presents ways to address women's needs that are locally grounded, respectful of the person, and build on women's inherent strengths.

- The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation has supported local women's NGOs that work with psychosocial and empowerment programs as part of the reconstruction process. We have seen daily proof of the importance of local women's valuable knowledge and expertise in the rebuilding process at the "micro" level. Women are an abundant, motivated, and potent resource in any post-war

* This does not mean that men or children do not need support. They certainly do, but those issues are not addressed here.

** This is technically five and a half years after the Dayton Peace Accords, but we will use five years as the term throughout the report.

society, so it is important to utilize this asset fully in the rebuilding effort. Our experience tells us that, with proper support, women can become central players in the rebuilding of civil society in war-torn societies.

Another aim of this report is to determine if KtK's locally anchored model of support through psychosocial and empowerment programs helped women to become more active in the rebuilding of their lives and their society.

- “*The definition of reconstruction that emphasizes macro-processes tend to exclude and obscure the local efforts of war-affected women,*” notes Viet Q Nguyen-Gillham in her study from BiH.³ The “macro” perspective within reconstruction planning needs to be supplemented by focus on local networks and their human resources. Social reconstruction and post-war development cannot be fully accomplished without women’s full participation.

This report seeks to document and highlight the efforts of local women’s NGOs, which often are a forgotten resource in the rehabilitation puzzle. It seeks also to illustrate that integration of grassroots initiatives is essential in the reconstruction of post-war life and society.

- The majority of trauma research is done within an intact societal and social framework, but healing from traumatic experiences is different when society as a whole is torn apart by ethnic cleansing.

KtK thus wanted to learn more about the process of healing for women in societies ravaged by ethnic cleansing.

- There is a complex relationship between societal rebuilding and how it impinges upon the individuals struggling to piece their lives back together after years of devastating war. A lack of a societal perspective on healing can seriously impact the opportunity for a population to come to grips with its wartime experiences. For instance, the decision by the Bosnian government to reduce pensions, because of IMF pressure for a structural ad-

justment program, severely handicapped the chances for the elderly to develop a decent life after the war.

We need to know more about how political decisions at the “macro” level will influence the healing process at the individual level. This study casts light on several political and economic factors and how they influenced the healing process of women in BiH.

- Rebuilding efforts need to be closely attuned to the resources and culture of the particular society and to proceed from a deep respect for the people involved. “*Any [rebuilding] model needs to be country, context, and culturally sensitive.*”⁴ However, this must not be used as an argument to put aside the important issue of women’s human rights.

Naturally, because this KtK study was undertaken within the Balkan context, the possibility of generalizing from this data beyond the Balkans is limited. However, it nevertheless highlights general lessons that can be valuable in rebuilding efforts elsewhere in the world.

“We were through hell! What I experienced during those war years people should not have to endure. It wears you out.”

WOMAN FROM MOSTAR

C H A P T E R 2

Background situation

THE AFTERMATH OF ETHNIC CLEANSING FOR WOMEN IN BIH*

THE BRUTAL ETHNIC cleansing in BiH, which was part of the larger ethnic warfare in the former Yugoslavia, deliberately targeted the civilian population. The organized attacks on civilians included savage rapes and the humiliation of women. Two million people were internally displaced or became refugees. The people who stayed were trapped in enclaves, subjected to constant fire and threat and made to survive with only very meagre food resources. The traumatic experiences during the four-year war ripped society to pieces and inflicted serious wounds in the souls of the survivors. The war resulted in the traumatic loss of a multicultural society and left a legacy of bitterness, hatred, and distrust among the ethnic groups.

* Our study is focused mainly on BiH. However, we have also included the women's center in Vukovar, Croatia. The situation for women there is very similar to the situation in BiH. See Appendix 1 for the background of the specific problems in Vukovar.

WOMEN'S SUFFERING DURING THE WAR IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

During the war, women suffered severe physical insecurity and life threats that created long-term stress. Fear of violence and sexual abuse prevented women from moving about, and the constant shelling produced severe stress. Over 20,000 women⁵ were the victims of devastating rapes, which often took place in front of family members to humiliate their men and terrorize their community.

Other women were living in enclaves under siege, where they had to struggle to provide for their families while enduring constant shelling of their living quarters. Some were driven from their homes with little or no notice and had to flee under stressful conditions, such as we saw from Srebrenica. Many women lived with their children in refugee camps or in deserted houses separated from their husbands, of whose fate they often knew little or nothing. A large number of women and children were internally displaced.

Despite severe emotional trauma, however, women in BiH often demonstrated remarkable resilience and courage. They continued to take care of their children and to handle the everyday life issues of their family, often picking up tasks the absent men had earlier performed. There are abundant stories about women's resourcefulness and ingenuity in their fight to feed their families and make something out of nothing. Women were "the glue" that held the family together; they helped to preserve fragments of a social network, educational facilities for the children, care for the elderly, and the like. Women were in many ways "*bearers of their communities.*"⁶

WOMEN IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD

The Dayton Peace Accords, signed December 14, 1995, ended the fighting. But it took a long time for life in Bosnia-Herzegovina to regain something of normalcy. During the early phase of the post-conflict transition, the presence of demobilized soldiers and unemployed militiamen continued to be a threat, particularly in rural areas.

In any event, traumatic experiences from a savage war such as the one in BiH take a long time to heal. Five years after Dayton, the survivors are still a long way from feeling "back on track" with their lives, and even longer from a deeper healing.

The war led to a vast increase in households headed by single women, their men having been killed or missing. These women struggle to provide for the family, and housing poses a problem in terms of both claiming and rebuilding property. Often the women have run into problems with property laws, because the deeds to their houses or flats are typically in their husband's names.

In direct violation of the Dayton Peace Accords, which stipulated a right to return, ethnic-cleansing policies were upheld after the war. Many displaced people have been denied the right to return to their homes, which were situated in areas with new ethnic majorities, and some were too scared even to try to return. Belated returns are now beginning to take place five years after the signing of the Dayton Accords, as the resistance is less, the fear is less pronounced, and due to a law passed because of international pressure.*

In addition to the severe emotional and economic losses they have sustained, women at the end of the war faced added insecurities about how to make a living. The economy was in a shambles, unemployment loomed around 80%, and large parts of the country's infrastructure

* The law stated that people had to claim their old home or property before the end of the year 2000, or they would lose their rights to this property.

were destroyed.⁷ The high unemployment rate is especially traumatic in this country, where employment had been considered a basic human right. Men returned from the front to reclaim their jobs, and jobs were reserved for them, so many women thus lost their jobs in the formal sector. Many of the refugees and the displaced were dispossessed of their assets and property when they fled, depriving them of all means to minimize their financial plight.

Added to this chaos has been the disruption caused by the simultaneous transition from a planned (communist) to a market economy. Not only do the laws governing business need to be changed, but BiH has many gigantic industrial plants that are no longer viable in a market economy and thus will not be reopened. In Zenica for instance, around 25,000 employees of a steel mill were all laid off. The former employees are still on a waiting list, but only minor parts of this industrial complex have been re-opened.

Women have played a significant part in the reconstruction of Bosnian society. Volunteering their services, women worked in hospitals and in schools. They often started NGOs to assist people in need. During the post-war years these NGOs evolved into an important empowerment mechanism for women.

Bosnia-Herzegovina had a large group of well-educated women who have used their skills to maintain services where the state faltered during and after the war. Often these initiatives are the basis for the development of strong post-war social-service programs.

The post-war period could have offered transformative opportunities for women in the political and economic life of Bosnian society, but this opportunity was lost because of the gender insensitivity of the Dayton Peace Accords (see below).

When the peace accord was finally brokered, people were emotionally exhausted, and their financial resources were depleted. The full reality of their losses hit them. During the war, women's efforts were focused on surviving and holding their families together. As the fighting subsided, their traumas came back to haunt them, and the long-term stress took its toll. No longer could they put their feelings aside, and life after the war was far from what they had imagined.

Life is still a war.

I am still **fighting**
for survival.

WOMAN IN TUZLA

“Once the initial euphoria of liberation wore off, people were left with a pervasive sense of disappointment and resentment. Despite enormous self-sacrifice, post-war life has failed to live up to their expectations and eager anticipation,” Viet Q. Nguyen-Gillham⁸ writes from the Bihac area a few years after the war.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE TO THE WAR TRAUMAS

Humanitarian aid often consists of necessities for survival, such as shelter, food, and medical supplies. Humans are not mere physical bodies, however. The minds of women (and men and children) in war-torn societies are also traumatized. For this reason, psychosocial assistance was offered to the Bosnian people in an unprecedented way by a large number of NGOs.

However, the need for post-war psychosocial support has not yet been universally embraced as a legitimate part of humanitarian assistance, and it is again questioned.

This study provides evidence for:

- The importance of psychosocial support for the inner survival of women in war-torn societies.
- The fact that this help disseminates (when women get support they in turn can help their families and their societies).

- The fact that psychosocial support is an investment in prevention. (When the traumas can be mourned, they can be put to rest and do not return as vengeful ghosts that can start future conflicts.)
- That working in close cooperation with local women to rebuild the social web at the grass-root level is an important way to provide a more sustainable and peaceful post-war society.

People, who live through violent (ethnic) wars will, for a period of time, fall within the “victim category.” Let this not overshadow the fact, however, that the people in Bosnia-Herzegovina have much strength, resilience, and capacity. Many women in BiH have taken active roles in the reconstruction process. The support from the outside world is only a way of helping a strong people get back on its feet.

STUMBLING BLOCKS IN THE RECONSTRUCTION OF BOSNIA

The Dayton Peace Accords went far beyond a normal peace treaty to create a new state. “Dayton’s aim was not only to stop the fighting but to reverse ethnic cleansing and provide a blueprint for a unified country,”⁹ notes the International Crisis Group (ICG) in a report. The problem with the Dayton Accord is that it presupposes cooperation among the different entities. As the nationalists have managed to stay in power to a significant degree there has been no real cooperation.

*“The few successes of Dayton – the Central Bank, a common currency, common licences plates, state symbols, and customs reforms – are superficial and were imposed by the international community.”*¹⁰

Meanwhile the failures are extensive and they profoundly affect the daily lives of people in BiH in a major way, largely because of the built-in

weakness in the Dayton model, to wit, the weakness of the joint institutions. There is for instance a three-person presidency, which has no authority to govern over the internal affairs of the entities. The national parliament is stifled by a law that allows any entity to block legislation if it is perceived to be against the “national interest” of the particular ethnic group or entity. This fact, not surprisingly, has led to a near paralysis at the state level, because the entities use their veto powers extensively. Not having a national government that functions as a unit is creating problems on many levels for Bosnia-Herzegovina.

On paper there are two entities: Republika Srpska and the Federation. In reality, however, the Federation often acts as two separate entities, with a Croat and a Bosniac part. The International Crisis Group summarizes the problems as follows: “*Today Bosnia and Herzegovina has three de facto mono-ethnic entities, three separate armies, three separate police forces, and a national government that exists mostly on paper and operates at the mercy of entities. Indicted war criminals remain at large, and political power is concentrated largely in the hands of hard-line nationalists determined to obstruct international efforts to advance the peace process. In many areas local political leaders have joined forces with the police and local extremists to prevent refugees from returning to their pre-war homes.*”¹¹

Even if the November 2000 elections marked a step forward, the nationalists still managed to stay in power in critical places and still have a marked influence on politics.

However, a law instigated by the Office of the High Representative (OHR),* pursuant to which one had to claim one’s old home before the end of 2000, has given a push to the return process. This, however, creates renewed anxiety, and many people are falling through the cracks (as will be discussed in Chapter 9).

* The Office of the High Representative was set up by the international community to support and monitor the reconstruction process and to see to that it followed the intentions of the Dayton Peace Accords.

The peace agreements... tend to be, on the whole, **gender insensitive**, and women's concerns and special needs after the war are rarely explicitly identified as an area of emphasis. They therefore do not provide an appropriate framework for ensuring that these special needs are mainstreamed right from the emergency phase.

EUGENIA DATE-BAH, ILO ACTION PROGRAMME ON SKILLS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

As the different entities do not cooperate, few of the necessary changes in society are taking place. One of the most critical problems handled unsuccessfully is the economy. “*After more than five years and five billion dollars of Dayton implementation, the country seems only at the beginning of an economic transition that should have begun in 1996.*”¹² The economic reforms needed to make BiH attractive to investors have not been put in place. There is a mix of old and new rules that differ in the different entities, thus making the system difficult to navigate. In some areas, private businesses are punished with an 80% tax on revenue. Additionally difficult bureaucratic barriers and corruption make the country utterly unfriendly to foreign investors.

People around the country who cannot get a job suffer every day from the lack of effective leadership and necessary economic reforms. Without hope for a job to support their families, their hopes for the future are eroding, as are also their strength and resolve to rebuild their lives.

The initial incentive to the economy that came from post-war reconstruction is now waning. Dayton's fragile and limited achievements can certainly be threatened as donors now start to withdraw from the country.

LACK OF GENDER SENSITIVITY IN THE DAYTON PEACE ACCORDS SET WOMEN BACK

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation has described the gender insensitivity of peace agreements and its effects in the report *Engendering the Peace Process*. In Dayton no women were at the negotiating table, and only one woman was among the signatories. In spite of the fact that the *Beijing Platform for Action** had been adopted just a few months earlier (September 1995), the language of the accord was gender neutral. In practical life that means the old patterns that discriminate against women are left in place. It also misses the important role that women can play as active agents for peace.

There have been different initiatives by women NGOs to focus on the gender issues in the reconstruction process, but establishing sustained interest for this approach has been difficult. The lack of gender mainstreaming in the planning of the reconstruction is a serious missed opportunity. Women's exclusion from the decision-making processes has impacted negatively on many aspects of women's lives in BiH.

* The UN Conference on Women held in Beijing in September of 1995 had adopted an agenda for action to give women their proper place in society.

How the study was conducted

During May and the first part of June 2001, the project leader, a Swedish psychologist, and her assistant visited seven different women's centers offering psychosocial support in Bosnia-Herzegovina and one center in Croatia (see Appendix 1).

A total of 89 women were interviewed for approximately two hours each, in a semi-structured interview that was tape-recorded. The participants told us their first name but were otherwise anonymous.

We interviewed women from all three ethnicities.

The participants were not formally randomized, but in many instances women who happened to be at the center at the time were asked to take part.

The majority of the women had taken part, or were taking part, in the local programs supported by The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation at women's centers all over Bosnia and in Vukovar, Croatia.

Fifteen women who had not yet taken part in the psychosocial activities at the centers but were about to start were included in the interviews as a comparison group (while six of them had been offered legal help). This was as close to a matched comparison, or control group, as one could come under the circumstances.

We had asked to see women in different age brackets and from different walks of life, and in essence this was also the case. The lower age limit was set at 18–20 years of age, as they otherwise would have been too young during the war.

(Appendix 2 presents the general characteristics of the women we interviewed.)

In addition to the interviews, 150 women at the centers were asked to fill out a questionnaire

with essentially the same questions as in the interview. Of these, 15 women were included in the comparison group, as they had not yet started at the centers. (The total comparison group is thus comprised of 15 women from the interview group and 15 from the questionnaire group.)

The questionnaire is available in Appendix 3, and it provides also the gist of the interview questions. The results from the questionnaire group are reported in a separate study by Moa Knutsson: *Att leva vidare efter krig och etnisk rensning – en empirisk studie av kvinnors mentala hälsa i Bosnien (2002)*, www.iktk.se

The percentages presented in this study are based on the interviews. Suffice it to say, the results from the questionnaire group mirror those from the interview group.

We also held more informal interviews with center staff: the center leaders as well as leaders of psychosocial groups, lawyers, psychologists, social workers, and medical doctors.

I was like a wild animal. I lived in
total fear, every day ready to run away!

BOSNIAC WOMAN IN WEST MOSTAR

CHAPTER 3

Wartime traumatization

AND ITS EMOTIONAL IMPACT AT THE END OF THE WAR

EVERYONE IS TRAUMATIZED in ethnic wars, but the traumas inflicted prove wide-ranging, from experiences of the utmost brutality where women are raped and killed to situations where women are harassed by neighbors of another nationality and thus for security reasons decide to leave their home for a place where their ethnic group is in charge. This latter scenario may not seem very traumatic, but the long-term consequences were quite destructive, as people ended up in situations where they had a hard time rebuilding their lives and could not get jobs.

*“The critical element that makes an event traumatic is the subjective assessment by victims of how threatened and helpless they feel.”*¹⁴ Central characteristics of the traumatic stress are the experience of intense fear, helplessness, powerlessness, and the threat to one’s life. This is certainly the case for most people in BiH. In a theoretical background paper, *A Psychological Model of Healing from the Traumas of Ethnic Cleansing—The Case of Bosnia*,¹⁵ the psychological trauma theory is outlined in more detail. This model proved useful in directing the search for the kinds of problems we thought essential to cover.

THE DEGREE OF TRAUMATIZATION

The degree of traumatization varied considerably within the group we studied. In general it is true that, as one woman expressed it: “*We went through hell.*” Even though it all felt like hell, the pattern of traumatization turned out to be different in different places:

Many **villages in Eastern BiH** (e.g. Vlasenica, Bratunac, Kamenica) were shelled heavily for months and then captured, with scenes such as those from Srebrenica, in which women and children were separated and bused from their men/fathers, never to see them again.

In **Mostar**, there actually were two wars. During the first in 1992, “the Serbian War,” the Croats and the Bosniacs jointly fended off a Serbian attack on the city. In 1993, the Croats turned around and attacked the Bosniacs. The city was divided after furious fighting, and if residents happened to live on the “wrong” side, they could be harassed or killed at any moment by paramilitaries knocking at the door. The outlying villages also were ethnically cleansed by brutal measures.

Cities such as **Zenica** and **Tuzla** were put under constant siege and cut off from the outside world, and many neighboring villages endured heavy shelling. People here were exposed to starvation and terror, but it often was possible to remain in one’s own apartment, as these cities were not conquered.

In **Vukovar, Croatia**, the bombardment was devastating in 1991, and people spent much time in bomb shelters while their city was pounded into rubble. Serb forces ultimately conquered Eastern Slavonia and it was governed by the authorities of RS Krajina. In November 1995, there was an international agreement that the UN would administer the region until it was returned to Croatia in 1997. The Croatian government’s subsequent efforts at “cleansing” the area of its Serbian population via unemployment measures put the population in limbo and resulted in hopelessness and despair (see Appendix 1 for more detailed information about Vukovar).

Visegrad, now in Republika Srpska, was the site of intense fighting that resulted in severe ethnic cleansing of the Bosniac population. The area has now a substantial population of Serbian internally displaced persons. The IDPs presently in Visegrad, often were exposed to heavy shelling in the Travnik area, in Sarajevo, and in other places before ending up in a collective center in Visegrad at the end of the war. This is an area with no job opportunities and with no real willingness to integrate the IDPs into the city. The construction of apartment buildings for IDPs was stopped short of completion and left the IDPs in cramped collective centers without opportunity to find jobs.

Women in our interview group experienced one of these fates.

57%* of the women in the interview group had experienced living under siege. Some of them were later forced to leave their homes.

58% of the women interviewed had been or were still refugees within their own country. (Still five years after the war, about one million people in Bosnia-Herzegovina have not been able to return to their homes.) These internally displaced women have lost their homes and all their belongings, which of course contribute to the traumatic experience of the war and to their difficulties in rebuilding their lives. Women who were able to stay in their apartments or houses often salvaged some or all of their things and had also a better chance of retaining a job.

The horrific deeds that took place during the ethnic wars are well documented and well known.¹⁶ Appendix 2 indicates what women in the interview group experienced in terms of traumatizing events, such as being in danger of being killed, seeing someone else being killed, being mistreated, having their husband and children killed, etc.

Our focus here, however, is on the emotional impact of these traumatic war experiences. To gauge the degree of traumatization in the interview group we added the different traumatizing elements experienced by each individual into a scale, as shown by Table 1.**

* We are well aware that according to the spelling rules 57 should have been written in letters. However to bring the numbers to attention we will use this unconventional form throughout the report.

** We are, however, well aware that the emotional impact of the different elements were not equal.

Table 1. Degree of traumatization

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| Lower grade of traumatization: | 35% |
| Medium grade of traumatization: | 45% |
| High degree of traumatization: | 20% |

(It should be noted that most of the women interviewed were attending the women's centers at this time. The degree of traumatization of the women at the centers may have been different in earlier years.)

BETRAYAL BY FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS

A critical traumatic feature for people is how they are treated in their immediate environment during wartime. The betrayal by neighbors was much more prevalent in certain locations than in others, for instance in Mostar. In the areas that were under siege but never captured (e. g. Tuzla) this type of betrayal was infrequent.

In the interview group 43% of the women felt betrayed by their neighbors, and this often contributed to their leaving the home. This rate of betrayal is very similar to what Agger and Mimica report in their 1996 study.¹⁷

THE POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS PROFILE AT THE END OF THE WAR

Strong classical post-traumatic stress reactions

The classical trauma reactions are natural reactions to unnatural events, but they can complicate the lives of, or even terrorize, the survivors and make them more or less permanent victims.

The most common post-traumatic stress symptoms are anxiety, nightmares, intrusive return of memories of the traumatic situation (flashbacks), depression, irritability and anger, difficulties con-

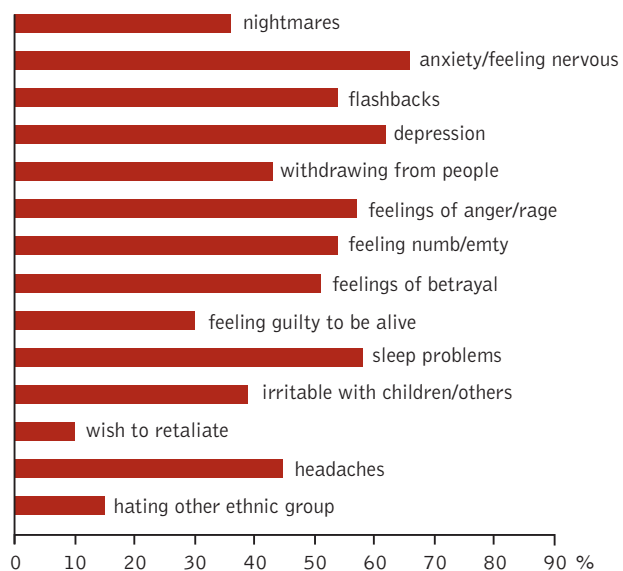
*centrating and sleeping, withdrawal from situations that may revive memories, psychic numbing of emotions, and apathy.*¹⁸

All of these stress reactions were prevalent at the end of the war in the interview group.

Within the official psychiatric classification system (DSM IV), these reactions are part of a syndrome called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). However, as these reactions are normal reactions to abnormal situations we abstain from using the psychiatric diagnosis and instead use the term "post-traumatic stress reactions."^{*}

Post-traumatic stress reactions are often organized into four main clusters of emotional response: re-experiencing, withdrawal/numbing, arousal/lack of control, and self-persecution.

Figure 1a shows the number of women who indicated strong post-traumatic stress reactions at the end of the war. The figure reveals that all the main categories of post-traumatic stress reactions were strong for a majority of women at the end of the war, including strong flashbacks, feelings of anger, and difficult sleep problems. Women also suffered from a strong sense of anxiety and from depression. Some women felt numb, while others cried easily.



Figur 1a. Strong post-traumatic stress reactions at the end of the war (%). Percentage of women indicating strong reactions (5-7 on a scale from 0-7)

* For more details see *A Psychological Model of Healing from the Traumas of Ethnic Cleansing – The Case of Bosnia*, KtK 2001.

One category of post-traumatic stress reactions that was low was the self-persecution category. This is to be expected given that these women did all they could to save their families and themselves during the war. Although they deeply mourn the people who are dead, most of them do not feel guilty for being alive.

Feeling exhausted, vulnerable, and robbed of important years of life

We have added some questions not traditionally associated with the classical post-traumatic stress syndrome, and the answers show that, in wartime, and in ethnic wars particularly, post-traumatic stress reactions are part of a much larger package of emotional stress reactions (see Figure 1b).

The most prevalent of these other strong stress reactions is the **feeling that years of their lives have been stolen – 81% of the women emphasized this very strongly**. This feeling also is commented upon spontaneously, and to the four years of hostilities they often add the post-war years as a continuing source of frustration: *“The best years of my life have been stolen, the years when I should have been able to enjoy my small children and see them grow up. It has been a constant struggle to survive.”*

71% of the women indicate that they felt very vulnerable at the end of the war. A woman refugee in Tuzla expresses it in these terms: *“I was alone in the city with my two children. Our house in the village was burned, my husband was missing, and I did not have any relatives nearby. I was totally dependent on the help organizations for shelter and food. I felt utterly vulnerable. I had no bearings in this situation – I just had to handle it for the sake of the children.”*

60% of the women report that they felt strong emotional exhaustion at the end of the war. The constant stresses to which people were exposed during the war contributed to strong emotional exhaustion. One woman expresses it thus: *“The wartime stresses really wear you out. You are dead tired afterwards.”* A young woman re-

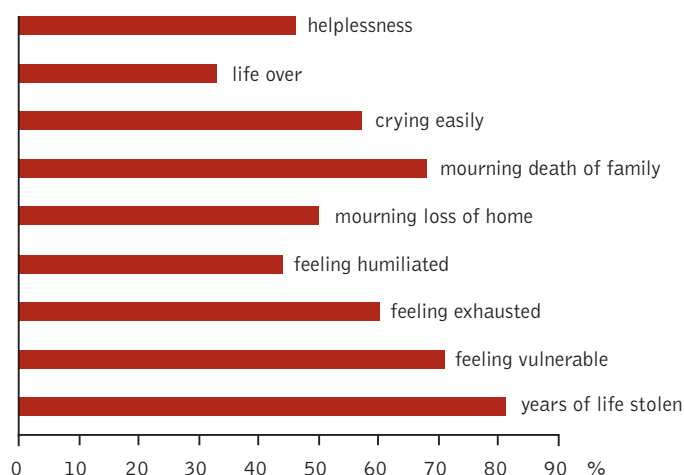


Figure 1b. Strong existential post-traumatic stress reactions at the end of the war (%). Percentage of women indicating strong reactions (5-7 on a scale from 0-7).

members that: *“It was really hard to go to bed every night and be worried that you would not be able to reach school alive the next day because of the heavy shelling.”*

Living under wartime conditions wears one out as the stress goes on for long periods of time. It also is stressful to feel utterly vulnerable for long stretches of time.

Feelings of grief over heavy personal losses

Naturally, many women experience intense mourning at the end of the war for having lost so many relatives. **68% of these women describe their pain and the mourning of their personal losses as very strong at the end of the war:** *“I lost my husband, my children, and my sister. I did not have a will to live anymore.”*

Many described spontaneous suicidal thoughts or feelings resulting from the extreme hardships many had to endure, including the loss of partners, children, and other close family members. **28% of the women interviewed had lost a child or children or seen them badly wounded.**

War causes many losses different from the death of loved ones: *“the loss of home, loss of community, loss of work, money, and material possessions. There are also psychological losses, such as loss of status, loss of belief in oneself,*

loss of trust in others, loss of future hopes, loss of personal invulnerability, loss of trust in protection from others, and, very importantly, loss of power.”¹⁹ All these losses leave one weakened and vulnerable.

50% of the women indicated a strong mourning for their home, which they had been forced to leave and which often had been destroyed.*

“The loss of home is the loss of important social symbols that confirm the identity and the status of a person.”²⁰ When they lost their homes they lost also all their possessions, to which their memories were often intimately connected. It is a devastating blow, made worse by the loss of the community where they belonged. To be thus uprooted affects one’s core identity. These women often feel that they belong nowhere.

Many women also express **feelings of strong humiliation** as they were left without any means and were dependant on others for their survival. When one is used to being an independent adult, it is humiliating to be totally dependent on others and it contributes to intense feelings of shame. A woman IDP in Tuzla expresses it with strong bitterness: “Before the war I had my home, and I had a job. Now I have neither – I am a beggar.”

Few strong wishes for retaliation

It is worth noting how few women – despite feelings of great anger over what they had experienced – express strong wishes for retaliation (10%) or express strong hate towards the ethnic group that inflicted this pain on them (15 %) (see Figure 1a.) During the interviews, these women often express anger at the leaders who started the war, but it seldom is directed at the other ethnic group as such. This is an amazing fact considering what these women have been through. The situation is the same in the comparison group, thus it seems to be independent of activities at the centers.

* As 39% of the women in the interview group stayed in their homes during the war this figure is even stronger.

“I have lost my family and my home. I have become a tree without roots – a refugee!”

WOMAN IDP IN TUZLA, (IN AGGER & MIMICA STUDY)

A lost lifestyle

“The past provides a context and a reference point for the rebuilding of the future,”²¹ but for the Bosnian women the past represented a vanished lifestyle of the Communist era. To restore “normal life,” for which they all longed so much during the war, would prove impossible, as “normal life” was defined in terms of a lifestyle forever gone. After all the sacrifices they had made, and all the hardships they had endured during the war, this was a very bitter realization for Bosnian women (and men as well). In addition to all the personal losses was thus added the loss of a lifestyle.

The return to normal life would prove to be even more difficult given that the reconstruction process contained several stumbling blocks, as we discuss below.

Stumbling blocks to healing

The post-traumatic stress profiles (Figures 1a and 1b) describe the traumatic impact of the war on women in BiH and in Vukovar. We wanted to find out how the healing process had proceeded during the five years since the war, and these results are presented in Chapter 5. To give some background to these results, we focus first (in Chapter 4) on the economic losses and their impact, because the faltering economic recovery turned out to be a major stumbling block for the healing process even five years after the war.

During the war there was at least some humanitarian assistance. Now there is nothing. **We risk starving** again.

WOMAN IDP IN TUZLA

CHAPTER 4

Economic losses

AND STUMBLING-BLOCKS – A CENTERPIECE OF THE TRAUMATIC POST-WAR PICTURE

MAJOR ECONOMIC LOSSES AND THE LOSS OF ONE'S HOME

58% of the women report having lost their home and all their valuable possessions during the war. This loss is very painful, as Bosnian families tend to invest all their resources in their homes. The loss of the home may seem merely a practical problem, but to most Bosnians it has a strong symbolic value that cannot be overestimated. In the local community, women had deep roots. One widow whose village is now in RS expresses her deep loss: *“ I feel full of sorrow because of all my losses (her husband and her house in the village), but I am still going back to my village hoping to have my house rebuilt. My life was in that village.”*

Our impression is that women who were forced to leave their homes, especially the internally displaced, are those who have fared worst since the war. They came to a new area and were offered temporary housing, but they had no close personal connections and could not bring any household goods with them. Often the first emergency help was a blanket, a mattress, a pot, a knife,



and a fork. To rebuild one's life from this bare minimum one needs an income. Since the war, many women have encountered extreme difficulties in getting a job and thus cannot alleviate their squalid living conditions. This is an even more difficult and humiliating experience for these women as they before the war had a lifestyle that allowed them to live well.

Sladjana lived with her family in a comfortable house before the war. It is now nearly ten years later, and they just barely survive living in someone else's house, where they can be evicted at any time. Her husband is unemployed, and so is she; they survive thanks to support from their parents. *"I feel cheated out of my good life. It was such a senseless war. Everyone lost so much,"* she says.

58% of the women interviewed report having lost everything in the war, and another 36% report heavy economic losses. This means that 94% of the women were exposed to heavy economic losses because of the war. Such heavy economic losses turn life upside down and lead to traumas in themselves. To heal one needs a chance to rebuild one's house and life. The problem is that most of the women are left with no chance to rebuild their lives, as most of them do not have jobs. Many women report how humiliated they feel, because they cannot provide for themselves.

THE STUMBLING BLOCK AFTER THE WAR: NO JOBS

Before the war, 70% of the women interviewed had a job, and 12% were studying. Thus 82% were engaged outside the home. Of the remaining 18% some probably were retired, and some were at home with small children. (We do not have those figures.) In the former Yugoslavia, the opportunity to have a job was seen as more or less a human right, so the present situation is thus utterly frustrating and shocking.

In 2001, only 14% of these women have jobs in the marketplace, and 6% are studying.

Another 16% of the women are employed in the projects The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation (or the Prijateljice organization in Tuzla) supports, and as such it is a temporary job that is to-

tally dependent on continued donor support.

The unemployment situation is a major stumbling block for almost all the women we interviewed and it surfaces in all forms. One woman who had tried in vain to get any type of job expresses it thus: *"I am depressed and angry. I have a lot of strength but no way to use it. I try to think positively but there is no hope really."*

This comment is related to the fact that the economy has not picked up. Women are intensely stressed by the fact that they do not have a job, and their husbands (if they have a husband) often do not have a job either. They are worried about how they are to feed their children. The majority of the women we interviewed express utter despair because they see no positive signs in the economy.

The fear of not being able to feed your family is very real for many women in BiH and in Vukovar, and it brought back the anxiety over starvation that so many of them had experienced during the war. Thus, this economic despair has proved quite traumatic for women during the post-war years.

In an ILO study some years after the war, one of the main causes of depression among women in BiH was found to be unemployment.²² This fits exactly with the findings of this study. Another researcher concludes: *"The centrality of paid work to women's reorganisation of their post-war lives cannot be overemphasized."* Societal programs for job creation is thus essential (see Chapter 8), but naturally economic reforms that attract investments as well.

Bosnian women are proud women and they try hard to have a positive outlook. However, many are visibly disturbed as they cannot find a way to provide for their families.

A job but no salary

We naturally were happy when we heard that somebody had a job in the marketplace (14% of the women we interviewed), but we soon learned to add a follow up question: "And are you paid regularly?" It turned out that this was the rare exception.

Often people are not paid for months and if paid they get only a fraction of their already low salary. A cinema attendant had not been paid for

thirteen months, an engineer not for nine months, and a hotel worker for eight months. Another woman is allowed to work only every three months. The reason they still keep up their work is that their medical services are related to working and also the chance to earn a pension somewhere along the road.

A pervasive gender problem

One of course can argue that women who come to the centers are a special group of women, which includes many IDPs, and that thus the unemployed are over-represented in our interview group. This is probably true, but the unemployment problem as such in post-war BiH society is very real.

*“Emergency employment programmes such as those implemented by the World Bank, ILO and bilateral donors are focussed on large-scale infrastructure and public works aimed primarily at the employment of demobilized soldiers.”*²⁴ In post-war societies, because there is so much construction taking place, **there are three times as many jobs created for men as there are for women.**²⁵ Also the existing jobs are reserved for ex-soldiers and men in general, and there is thus widespread direct and indirect discrimination against women. Also women are paid less for the same type of job as men, which is a new situation in the Balkan area.

Practically all of the respondents said it is very difficult or close to impossible for women to get a job today.

The healing effect of a job

We interviewed quite a few women who had gone through the programs and had been offered positions within the women’s centers. It was remarkable to talk to these women and to see the healing effect that a job had on their lives and on their families. One woman, who later became a center leader, describes her transformation as follows: *“Working in the project was like a doping injection. I came to life, and I started to be able to enjoy life again.”*

Women who got this chance to do something meaningful often feel guilty because they have access also to steady, though small, incomes. The other women coming to the center do not have this opportunity.

LACK OF ECONOMIC REFORMS – A KEY FACTOR BEHIND THE GLOOMY ECONOMIC PICTURE

When asked about their economic standard now (2001) compared with before the war, **87% of these women say their standard of living is much lower**; another 7% say it is “lower.” Thus 94% have a lower economic standard.

As noted earlier a coordinated effort at urgently needed post-war economic restructuring has not taken place in BiH. The weakness of the joint governmental institutions in BiH and the paralyzing result of the different entities’ unwillingness to cooperate have prevented the necessary post-war reforms. A country that is perceived not to have a leadership that works will not attract foreign capital. Extensive bureaucratic barriers and corruption also create stumbling blocks. Five years after the war, there is thus the depressing situation of foreign investors’ shying away from BiH despite the low wages.

BiH is also going through a transition from a planned economy to a market economy at the same time that it is grappling with the widespread destruction from the war. This is a difficult process for any country. The old state enterprises had not adapted to the modern market outside the communist bloc and were often shut down during or after the war. Without new enterprises the economy is at a standstill. The immediate effect is widespread unemployment. *Reduction in aid is already taking place and as this process accelerates in the next few years it will make the situation even worse.*

The extent of the unemployment problem is hidden in the official figures, which range around 40% in the Federation and 50% in RS,

because people on the waiting list (for factories to re-open) are not included, nor are most women. These factories will never re-open, however. Especially in RS and Vukovar, the unemployment is staggering.

In addition to the unemployment problems, the IMF put as a prerequisite for giving loans that BiH implement a Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). This requirement has led to severe cuts in pensions, in medical benefits and in other social services. It has had a devastating effect not only for many elderly, whose pensions have been cut, but for people in general who are left without any social welfare net. This destructive policy from the IMF has been a general pattern all over the world leading to severe quality of life changes for the population and a very negative effect on the chances for the healing of war traumas.

“It has been a lot of useless years where we have just survived. We all had plans for **the future** before the war, but they were **brutally stopped** in the tracks.”

WOMAN FROM VUKOVAR



“The bullet that killed my son
killed something in **me as well.**”

WOMAN IN BLAGAJ

C H A P T E R 5

FIVE YEARS AFTER THE WAR – HOW IS

the healing proceeding?

TRAUMATIC EVENTS such as wars rob people of their loved ones, expose them to extreme fear and powerlessness, and deny them their sense of control, connection and meaning in life. In addition, the healing process following an ethnic war takes place in a society that is not only physically destroyed, but destroyed also in the sense that the whole social web is torn apart. Thus, the ordinary social-support system is absent.

In a theoretical background paper,²⁶ we have outlined the necessary psychological steps in the post-trauma healing process:

- First, survivors must feel safe in order to start the process.
- Next, they must be enabled to mourn their losses.
- Further, people need help to establish some meaning or understanding of the traumatic events that devastated their lives.
- For the healing process to move forward, people need to re-establish trust in other people and reconnect with life.
- Then, as the process moves forward, it is important to establish a new sense of self.
- The final, most important step is to be given the opportunity to look forward with hope.



Figure 2a. Strong post-traumatic stress reactions at present = five years after the war (%). Percentage of women indicating strong reactions (5–7 on a scale from 0–7).

These are important psychological steps in healing from trauma, but these steps are set within an intact society. The healing process after ethnic wars is more complex because the whole infrastructure of society has been torn to pieces and with it the emotional support system that otherwise helps people heal.

How rebuilding of the war-torn society is handled affects, in turn, the healing process of the individual citizens. How society manages to restore law and order and how it punishes the war criminals can influence people's chances to feel safe. The economic reconstruction, in turn, influences their opportunity to look forward with hope and to rebuild their lives. Restoring democratic governance so people can feel they are part of society is important as well, and so is the reconstruction of the local communities. For a more detailed analysis see *A Psychological Model of Healing from the Traumas of Ethnic Cleansing*.

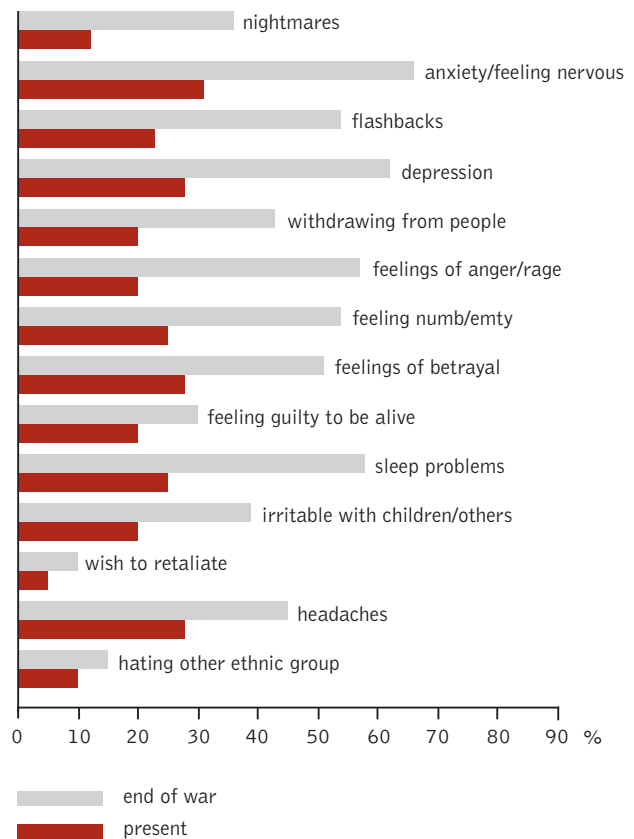


Figure 3a. Comparison between strong post-traumatic stress reactions at the end of the war and five years after the war (%). Percentage of women indicating strong reactions (5–7 on a scale from 0–7).

A SUBSTANTIAL HEALING PROCESS FOR CLASSICAL TRAUMA SYMPTOMS

We wanted to find out how the healing was proceeding in BiH five years after the war. We thus asked the women to assess their emotional stress in 2001 according to the same dimensions as after the war. Figure 2a shows the strength of the emotional stress reactions for women during the last six months. Looking back to Figure 1a indicates some major changes. To facilitate the comparison Figure 3a shows the post-traumatic stress reactions both at the end of the war and presently.

It is easy to see a **marked reduction in the classical post-traumatic stress reactions five years after the war for the women coming to the centers**. At least the majority of the women are no longer terrorized by flashbacks, nightmares,

Figure 4. Comparison between center group and control/comparison group in post-traumatic stress reactions (%).

The interesting comparison is the reduction over time in post-traumatic stress in the center group and in the control group. There is much less reduction in the control/comparison group and sometimes even an increase over time.

numbness, irritability, and so on, even if quite a few are still suffering.*

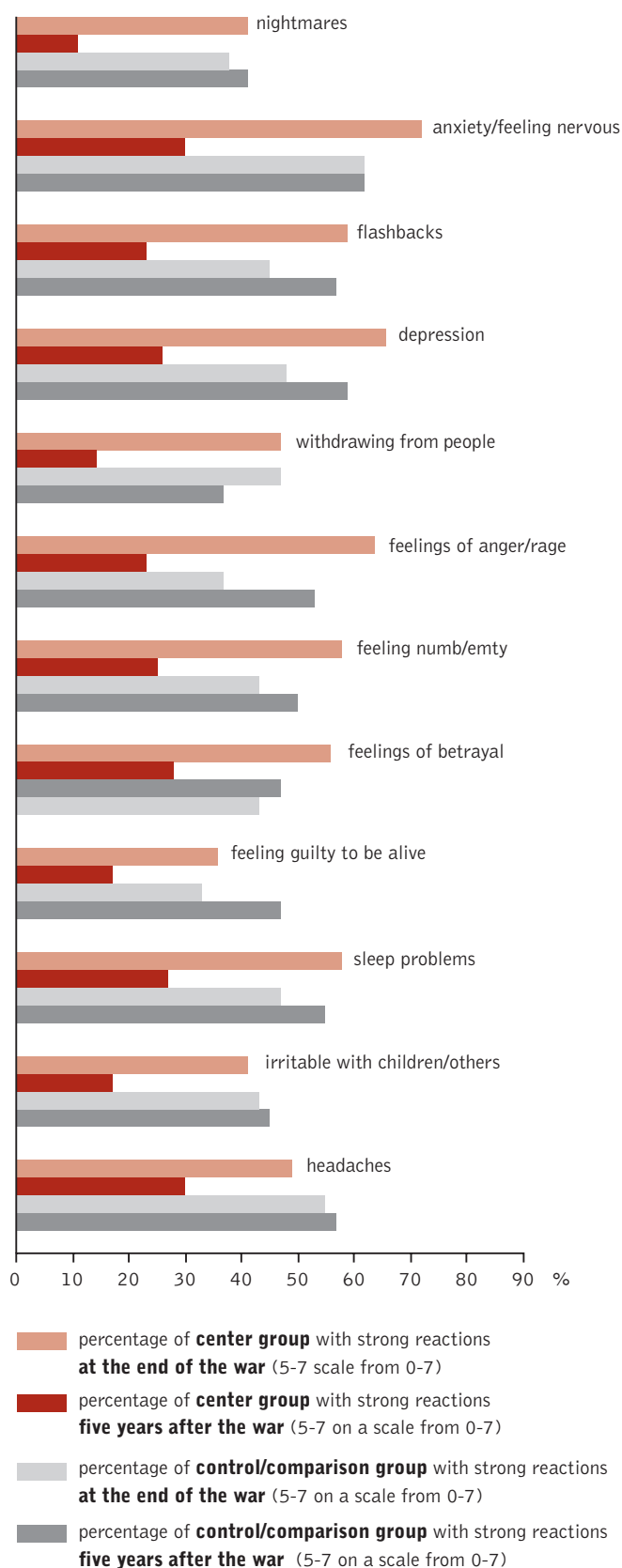
When we study the women taking part in the center activities compared with women in the comparison group, (who have not yet had this opportunity), it becomes evident that the centers have helped women to process their traumatic experiences. The comparison group has less reduction in all aspects of their classical post-traumatic stress reactions (see Figure 4).**

In the comparison group:

- *The survival guilt has increased rather than decreased because these women have not had any chance to process their feelings.*
- *Their irritability with children and others is as high presently as during the war, which naturally affects their families negatively.*
- *Their psychosomatic reactions (headache) are as strong as at the end of the war and the feelings of numbness even greater than at the end of the war.*

Controlling their memories

A critical aspect of classical post-traumatic stress reactions is the return of the traumatic scenes for the inner vision, called flashbacks, which often bring pain and anxiety. To be able to control this process is one important indication of a healing process' taking place. People naturally cannot forget, but as long as the memories do not terrorize, one is in a better place psychologically.



* A separate study by Moa Knutsson, *Att leva vidare efter krig och etnisk rensning - en empirisk studie av kvinnors mentala hälsa i Bosnien*, Department of Psychology, Stockholm, 2002, will analyze the different trauma and healing patterns.

** The control/comparison group consists of 30 women, 15 were interviewed and 15 filled in the questionnaire. The control group has not yet taken part in the women's center activities.

51% of the women indicate that they now feel they can control their memories. On the other hand, 49% do not feel that they are in control of their memory process yet.

It was evident from the interviews that women actively suppress memories to be able to go on with their lives. Although this coping pattern is positive in many ways, it is not an indication of a deeper healing process – old painful memories can easily be re-awakened by new traumatic situations in life.

A CORE GROUP WITH PTSD

In spite of the remarkable reduction in post-traumatic stress reactions for the majority of the women, a core group still have a difficult struggle with symptoms initiated by the war.

Figure 2a shows that **23% of the women in the interview group still report strong flashbacks five years after the war.** This is an indicator of women who need more help to process their traumatic experiences. It gives some indication of the number of women who have residual post-traumatic reactions. For some women the wounds feel too deep to heal: *“I feel like a glass broken into pieces. It is not possible to mend it.”* These women need special services to process their traumas, and here it is more relevant to talk about post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Often there is a need for psychotherapy with a trauma specialist (in other words, a psychologist with training in trauma techniques). One woman expresses the pain that the images from traumatic situations can cause: *“These images are there in front of my eyes all the time. I wish there was an eraser that could extinguish them.”* There is actually a technique for working with trauma called EMDR, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, which in many ways works as a kind of “eraser.” Many of these women could benefit from EMDR.

Naturally many more women with residual post-traumatic stress reactions are found in the comparison group, as they have not yet had a chance to get help at the centers (see Figure 4). **In the comparison group, the women who report strong flashbacks five years after the war are as high as 45%.**

HEALING STALLED FOR EXISTENTIAL STRESS SYMPTOMS AND VULNERABILITY

Existential emotional stress still strong

While there is a substantial reduction in terms of the classical post-traumatic stress reactions, it is evident that existential emotional stress is still strong (see Figures 2b and 3b).

69% of the women in the interview group express strong feelings that many years of their life have been stolen. One woman complains: *“Life after the war is really wasted time. It is terrible. We are just treading water.”* At the time of the interview there is a strong feeling among women, expressed time and again, that the best years of their lives have been stolen.

In contrast to the post-traumatic stress reactions, this feeling of being robbed of important years has been reinforced during the post-war period because of the hardships women have encountered. Younger women expressed that *“their youth was stolen from them,”* a bit older women felt that the precious years with their small children were ruined, while still older women who had saved for a lifetime to enjoy their retirement found everything taken away.

The most predominant and also shocking answer during the interviews were frequent spontaneous comments that **“life is as difficult or even more difficult now than during the war.”** As previously noted, these comments always were related to the fact that people could not any longer earn a living.

Emotional exhaustion

It also is evident from Figure 2(b) that many women are still feeling emotionally exhausted five years after the war. First to survive the cruelties of war and then to have to struggle for years to make ends meet naturally exhausts one emotionally. **42% of the women express strong feelings of emotional exhaustion five years after the war.** One woman sighed: *“I feel like a light*

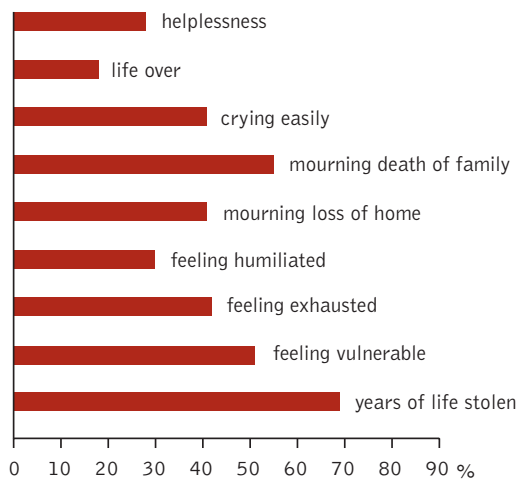


Figure 2b. Strong existential post-traumatic stress reactions at present = five years after the war (%). Percentage of women indicating strong reactions (5-7 on a scale from 0-7).

that has been blown out. I feel totally exhausted.” One widow underscored that “things are worse now than at the end of the war as I feel that I am losing my strength. I am worn out. I feel very alone with all the problems. I cannot sleep at night for my worries. My soul hurts me.”

Feelings of vulnerability

Another characteristic that stands out in Figure 2b is the fact that **51% of the women still feel very vulnerable five years after the war.**

At the time of the interviews, the return process was picking up, because a deadline was set for applications to get one’s former house or apartment back. That deadline had passed, and thus families who had lived in temporary housing since the war often were served with eviction papers. This created much anxiety, as most of these women had nowhere to go. Their own houses often had been burned or blown up, and the rebuilding process has been slow, in several areas blocked by nationalistic leaders who do not want the return of ethnic minority groups.

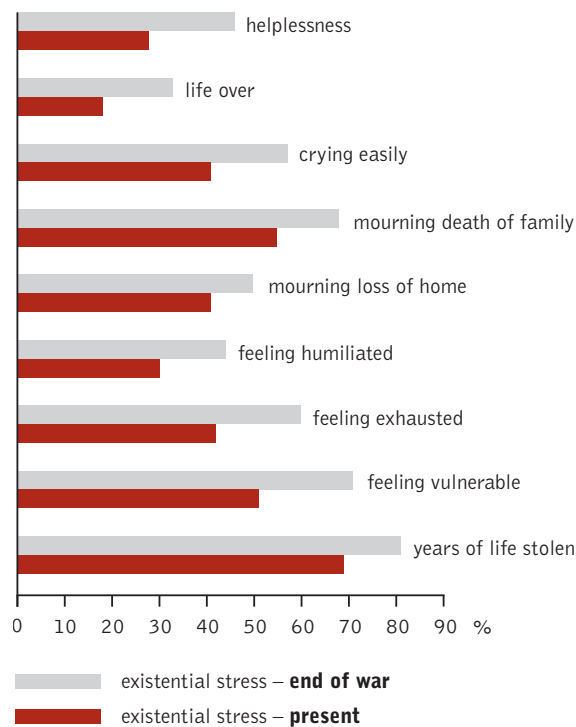


Figure 3b. Comparison between strong existential post-traumatic stress reactions at the end of the war and five years after the war (%). Percentage of women indicating strong reactions (5-7 on a scale from 0-7).

One woman expresses her feelings of vulnerability that this whole process created: *“I feel like I have fallen from an airplane, and I am still falling. I do not know where I will end up.”* (See Chapter 9 for a detailed discussion of the problems involved in the return process.)

Also contributing to the feeling of vulnerability is the fact that families, because of unemployment, feel uncertain whether they will be able to feed their children. Many elderly women also mention the reductions in the welfare system, i.e., the reduction in pensions and health care, as factors that make them feel vulnerable.

Existential stress, exhaustion, and vulnerability are not part of the classical trauma assessments, but our results indicates how important it is to use a broader social concept of trauma when studying the post-traumatic effects of war in contrast to the narrow clinical dimensions.

EXISTENTIAL STRESS MORE DIFFICULT TO HANDLE FOR WOMEN OUTSIDE THE CENTERS

While for women who came to the centers there was some reduction in emotional and existential stress, for the women in the comparison group there was no reduction whatsoever in emotional and existential stress since the war, as can be seen in Figure 5:

- *Their feelings of helplessness increased rather than decreased.*
- *They more often feel that life is over.*
- *They feel more humiliated and more emotionally exhausted than at the end of the war.*
- *They also feel as vulnerable as they did at the end of the war.*
- *Their feelings that years of their lives have been stolen are as strong as when the war ended.*

HEAVY PERSONAL LOSSES TAKE THEIR TOLL LONG AFTER THE WAR

Five years after the war, the feelings of personal loss, the mourning of family members and close friends, of their home, and of the life they once had is still very strong (see Figures 2b and 3b).

Five years after the war, 55% of the women interviewed still express strong mourning for family members who were killed during the war.

It is quite natural that the mourning continues longer than the classical post-traumatic stress reactions. The mourning reactions of mothers who lost their sons (quite common as the sons had been off to the front) seem to be particularly strong. One bereaved mother expresses her grief: *“It is easy to rebuild a house, but you can never get a son back.”*

A widow in Tuzla expresses the heavy burden that the loss of her husband has put on her shoulders: *“As for me I am dead, I am just not buried yet. I stay alive only for the sake of the*

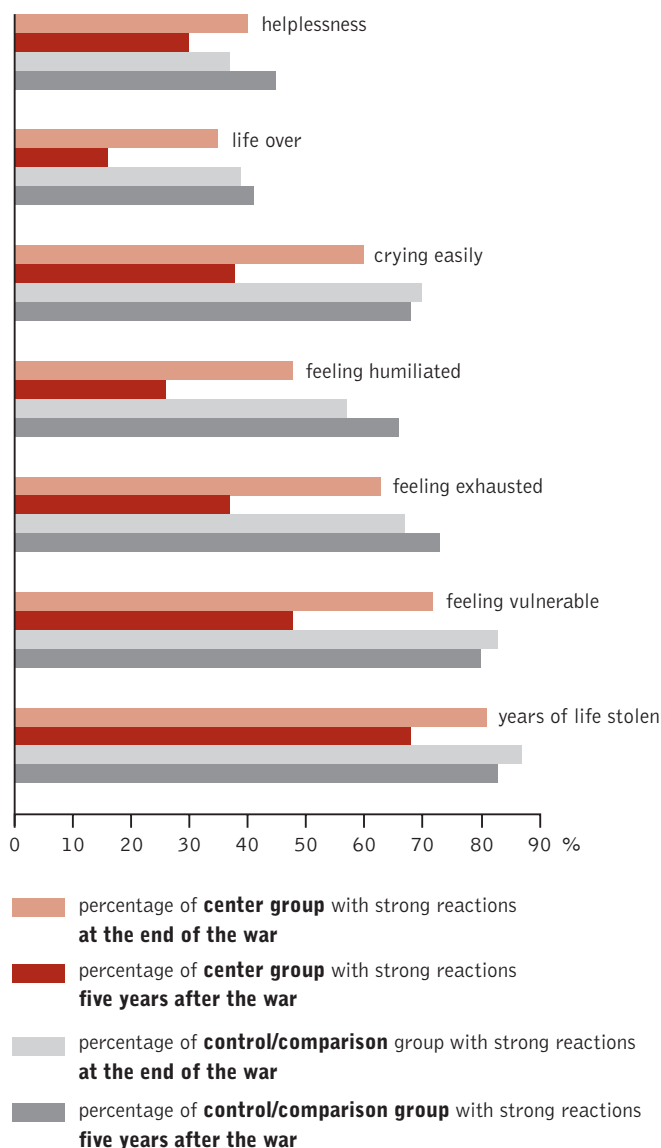


Figure 5. Comparison between center group and control/comparison group in existential post-traumatic stress reactions (%).

The interesting comparison is the reduction over time in existential post-traumatic stress in the center group and in the control group. There is much less reduction in the control/comparison group and sometimes even an increase over time.

children.” To try to provide for the family when there are no jobs available, and the help from relief organizations has dried up is a very difficult task. One widow expresses her worries: *“When I sleep now (in what is not my home) every pillow feels like a stone.”* She continues: *“I cannot lie still. I wake up and walk around all night due to my anxiety. I worry so about how I will be able to feed my family tomorrow.”*

“We lost so much
in the war, and now we have
to **fight for survival** again!
I cannot understand how life
can be so cruel.”

WOMAN REFUGEE IN TUZLA
ABOUT TO LOSE HER TEMPORARY HOME

The mourning of the loss of their homes is also still strong five years after the war for the people who were forced to leave.

The losses that people have faced encompass many different dimensions. A young, severely traumatized woman, now eighteen years old, spent her childhood (she was nine years old when the war started) practically on the front line and witnessed several family members be killed: “*The most painful loss was the loss of my innocence,*” she says, “*those years when I should have been a child playing with dolls I spent in terror and seeing people be killed in front of my eyes.*”

In BiH, the family ties are very strong, and we heard many women testify to the strong feelings of loss caused by their separation from close family members, a common phenomenon during the war. Since the war, family separation has continued, as many are leaving the country, not least the young people. This is a source of continued sadness for the parents. “*Our whole family is split up. My parents now live far from here, my brother was in concentration camp during the war, and he is now abroad. Now my daughter cannot get a job after she graduated, and I know she is planning to leave. I feel like the war has taken our life and walked away with it.*”

POST-WAR DEPRESSION AND STALLED HEALING FIVE YEARS AFTER THE WAR

The residual strong indications of feelings of exhaustion, of vulnerability, and the intense feelings that 10 years of their lives have been stolen is the result of a Bosnian (and Vukovar) reconstruction fraught with economic problems.

One woman expresses this pointedly: “*I have not seen one scintilla of economic recovery—in-
stead it is going downhill.*” Living in a society where one sees little hope for the future naturally does not help to heal the wounds of the war. To leave the traumatic past behind, one needs economic means to rebuild and ensure future security and hope for change. The Bosnian government (and the Croat government with respect to Vukovar) has not provided its people with a feeling of hope for a future. There are massive post-war problems that the governments have not dealt with, and this contributes to the stalling of the healing process. We discuss this further in Chapter 8.

Our results show the importance of using a broader social concept of trauma that includes existential stress and vulnerability. We come away with the following conclusions relating to **the emotional situation for women in BiH 2001:** *A post-war depression that is pervasive. People have lost a lifestyle they cannot recover, and they are mourning the loss of close family members, often also their home, and they are grappling with major economic problems of post-war society without proper support from the government.* The women interviewed often tried to keep up a good front, but the hopelessness and despair seeped through in their responses to individual questions.

“*The post-war period risks being much longer and much more painful than the war itself,*” the author Predrag Matvejevic wrote early on.²⁸ Sadly, we found that his predictions have been proven true. The depressive feelings naturally are not mitigated by the fact that the war that robbed them of so much seemed senseless then and still more so today.

“The war finally stopped, but it was replaced by a **war within the family**. It really became too much to handle.”

WOMAN IN MOSTAR



CHAPTER 6

Effects of the war

ON THE FAMILY

POST-TRAUMATIC EFFECTS ON MEN AND THEREBY ON FAMILY

The men who survived the war went through terrible ordeals that in many ways changed them forever. They greatly needed trauma support that seems to have been severely lacking.* If society is to resume its course after war, the provision of trauma services for men is critical, even though it is not an uncomplicated matter. Many women commented spontaneously that men who had spent time in concentration camps did not talk to anyone about their intensely traumatic experiences. This cultural pattern is very destructive because the men then continue to harbor their unprocessed traumas, leading to an inner situation that risks expression in destructive forms.

62% of the women interviewed indicate that their husbands have changed negatively, and 25% say that the war destroyed the lives of their husbands (or fathers in the case of young women). 87% of the women thus find a very negative impact on the men in their lives.

* There was evidently some hesitation about how to start working with trauma groups for men as there might surface information that they had been involved in acts that would qualify for sending them to the War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague.

This finding also mirrors the fact that **85% of the women report a negative effect of the war on their family life**. Among these, 40% indicated that their family was destroyed. (For some, however, probably because they were widowed.)

Failure to deal with the plight of victims in post-war societies can be disastrous for a society. *“The cost of the re-enactment of trauma in society in the form of child abuse, domestic abuse, continued violence, and lack of productivity, are staggering,”* as trauma specialists van der Kolk & McFarlane note.²⁹

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COMMON

It is evident from many interviews that men had started to drink during the war and that this contributed to the breakup of marriages among the women studied. Often the drinking exacerbated incidents of domestic abuse. Many women express their despair that when the war finally stopped it was replaced by a war within the family. The post-traumatic effects in men often manifest themselves in aggressive behavior patterns.

We do not have figures on how many women in our interview group suffered from domestic abuse, but the figures from the Center of Legal Assistance for Women in Zenica are shocking. **80% of the women seeking their legal services indicate that they have experienced domestic violence** (see p. 43). This gives us a sad indication of the magnitude of the problem of domestic abuse in BiH today.

After a concerted effort, not least by women NGOs in BiH, a new law criminalizing domestic violence was put in place in 1999. It is, however, a long way until the police, the courts, and other authorities will enforce the law and handle these cases in an effective manner. A woman from Zenica described that she had managed to get a divorce from her husband who was very violent when drunk. The problem was, however, that the court ruled that she and her children could stay in the family apartment, but that the woman had to find a place for her former husband to live. She does not have any money, so she cannot buy him a flat, and thus four years af-

ter the divorce he still is living in the apartment and still abusing her. When she calls the police they come, write a report and then leave.

A “MACHO” SOCIETY

There are many spontaneous comments by women during the interviews that point to the “macho” character of Bosnian society. For instance, *“It is a very sad thing that men want to be above women in this society,”* or *“Women do not have rights in this country.”* It is evident from many comments that women are not free to shape their lives – in marriage, the men dictate the rules, in spite of the fact that there are many strong and well-educated women in BiH. Men have the freedom to go out to see friends, while women are expected to stay at home. In so many ways, the wife seems to be “part of the property” of the man.

During the war, women played an important role in keeping society going, but as the war ended they were in many cases pushed back into the homes. Without gender-affirming provisions in the Dayton Peace Accords³⁰ this was bound to happen, and it set women back in BiH considerably.

The women’s centers are one of the few places where women can find a “safe haven” where they can meet and feel free to discuss with other women and build their strength. The centers have thus become an oasis in the “desert” of post-war life (see Chapter 7).

MIXED MARRIAGES – ONE OF THE WAR CASUALTIES

In mixed marriages, an ethnic war leads very directly to a war within the family. In most cases, these marriages ended up in painful divorces and separation. One woman in Mostar expresses this with a lot of sadness: *“My marriage is one of the victims of the war.”* The marriages that survived have gone through enormous difficulties because of strong external pressures, and women often were the target of psychological or physical abuse (see for instance the example on

p. 38). Children in mixed marriages struggled as well and often became victims of discrimination from their peers.

One woman of Serbian background fled Mostar with her newborn child in the early part of the war. She never saw her Bosniac husband again, and her child knows nothing about her father. She later learned that her husband had remarried, and because she was harassed in her new Serbian community (for her Bosniac name) she quickly remarried and thus erased the “Bosniac stamp.” This marriage, however, turned out very negatively with domestic violence and another separation. She is now a single mother with three daughters and no income.

IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Most of the women (97%) indicate that the wartime experiences were quite stressful for the children, but only 37% believed the trauma would leave a lasting, serious mark. How much of this is an optimistic appraisal by parents is difficult to judge. However, as so many indicated that they thought it best not to talk to their children about the war experiences (see below), they might not really know what lasting effects there have been on their children, at least if they are not manifested in behavior.

There are, however, many indications from the young women interviewed that their childhood years were destroyed by the war. “*Basically hell broke out, and I had to grow up overnight,*” one young woman comments. Many young people feel robbed of important years in their development when they should have been allowed to be carefree. There were naturally not many opportunities for them to play during the war. It is easy to appreciate the developmental deficit that this causes.

It was also stressful for children to go to school not knowing if shelling would take place in their area. Some of the children could not follow the school curriculum and thus have educational deficits.

There have been many programs with trauma support for children in the former Yugoslavia, but this has not been available for all children. In many instances, it was evident that the families were operating under the false impression

that not talking about their wartime experiences will help their children forget what they have gone through. This is contrary to all psychological evidence. One would have hoped that they had learned at the women’s centers that not talking about the traumatic experiences is not a psychologically good strategy for themselves or for their children.

In interviews at The Center of Legal Assistance for Women in Zenica it was indicated that, because of the difficult economic situation, many parents in rural areas are not sending their children regularly to school and only for a few years, as they do not have money for the bus, for clothes, for books, and so on.

The risk of rising illiteracy because of the strained economy is a factor that needs consideration. This risk is even more pronounced because there was also a lack of teachers during the war.

YOUNG PEOPLE DISTRUST THE FUTURE IN BIH

Many young women feel robbed of important years of growing up and express thoughts such as these, of a young woman in Visegrad: “*The war took away my youth. There was no time for me to be dating, to be carefree and happy. I had to grow up overnight.*” A young man from the same area who was about to graduate from high school asked his mother in despair: “*How long will this misery last?*” He is old enough to remember another life before the war. The trouble is that life does not seem to pick up again after the war.

The future of a country is dependent on its young generations. It therefore is troubling to find – according to the information we received from youth club leaders and young women we interviewed – that **most of the young people in BiH want to leave the country, as they see no chance of getting a job** and earning a living. One young woman who was going to the fifth annual reunion of her high-school class, did not expect to meet many of her old schoolmates, because most of them have left the country already.

Because of the massive unemployment, the majority of young people are not working and thus are not getting used to the structure of

work in their daily life. It is a serious situation relative to the future, and it helps to alienate young people from society. It thus is not surprising, although troubling, to learn that **drugs have become a major problem among young people in BiH.**

Also among the drawbacks of the structural adjustment policies (SAP) implemented since the war is the high cost of studying at the university. This shuts the doors to higher education for many gifted young people.

At some of the centers, youth programs and youth clubs fill an important function in providing stimulating activities for the young generation. Many young women take part also in the regular study groups in English and computer skills at the centers. Some of the centers also have started programs to help parents discover and deal with drug use among their children and to inform the young about the risks of drugs.

YOUNG WOMEN RISK BEING FORCED INTO PROSTITUTION AND TRAFFICKING

Young women without jobs or the hope of ever finding a job are more vulnerable to prostitution because they may see it as their only opportunity to make some money.

The prostitution in BiH has increased because of the international presence, and in some places it is even included in an “ordinary” job at a bar. A local women’s NGO notes that there has also been an increase of local clients in bars and brothels in BiH.

The issue of trafficking is now also a worrying phenomenon. The main problem in BiH today is that young women from the former East bloc countries have been lured into trafficker’s nets and end up in Bosnia. Many local NGOs, however, see the Bosnian women as the next target of traffickers. As the economy is bad and there is little hope for young women to get a job, the thought of a well-paying job in a foreign country is very tempting. But upon arrival, their passports are taken away and they are forced into prostitution.

Presently there are only a few cases of Bosnian women who have returned home after being lured into traffickers’ business. However there is information (within “The Ring”, an NGO working against trafficking) that there are Bosnian women in such conditions in Italy, Greece, Canada and Austria. Therefore, it is important with information campaigns directed at young women in BiH about the risks involved in accepting jobs abroad.

While trafficking and prostitution was not covered in our interviews, it is mentioned as part of the disruptive factors to families in post-war societies. It also is an area of concern in our organization.

THE OLDER GENERATION IS DEVASTATED

The war and the post-war period have been very hard on older people in BiH. **89 % of the women indicated that the war has had a negative impact upon or destroyed the lives of older people.**

Many of the older women we interviewed had survived one war in childhood, and that early experience seems to have primed them for a strong anxiety response the second time around. *“I am a nervous wreck. I cannot cry – I am just shaking all the time. I have to have sedatives to be able to live.”* Some of the women interviewed were Jewish, and they had been in concentration camps on coastal islands during WWII. But as one woman expressed it: *“That time it was foreigners who terrorized us, Germans and Italians, but this time was even worse, as this time it was our neighbors and former friends who were killing us.”*

For older people to lose their homes is even more traumatic than for younger people who naturally have greater opportunities to being able some time to rebuild it. It is expressed time and again: *“I have lost my life, and it is too late to rebuild it.”* Often women who were forced to leave their villages have not been able to return because their houses have been destroyed and not rebuilt (see Chapter 9 for a case study of those problems). Also families were split up by the war, or sons were killed in the war, so many

older women were robbed of the chance to move in with their adult children's families, as was formerly the custom.

We talked also to women who were about to retire when the war started, and all their savings and investments in their home had been wiped away. *"We were just about to start a new life, but the war killed our dreams. We lost everything, our home, our health, our children."*

Additionally, the Bosnian government, at the insistence of the IMF, put in place a structural adjustment plan (SAP) to reduce pensions and health care benefits extensively. The pensions and benefits are now so low that older women have no opportunity to sustain themselves. They also do not have money to pay for the medications they need. Naturally, many older women feel very bitter toward their governments for their perceived abandonment. One woman sighs: *"We are a lost generation. I cannot believe how our government can do this to us."*

"The dismantling of the safety net is a source of bitter disappointment"³¹ for the elderly. Another old woman says: *"I lost my eyesight from all the tears during the war, and now my husband is so depressed I am worried. He has lost all interest in life."* She is doing a bit better herself because she can go to the women's center. She is not restricted to their temporary quarters, which is a small room with space only for the bed. *"For my husband, waiting for death is all that is left."*

We found too, that many older women did not have eyeglasses, because they cannot afford them.* This means that they cannot watch television or read. We heard frequent comments during the interviews indicating that many older women cannot afford to buy the medications they need, nor the proper food, nor visit the doctor, and so on. Eventually this will lead to premature deaths. Some of the centers have again started to bring clothes from relief agencies to alleviate the most urgent clothing needs among the women and their families.

Poverty is now a sad reality for many elderly women in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

**"I have a lot of strength
but no way to use it. I try to
think positively but there is
no hope really."**

YOUNG SERBIAN WOMAN IN VUKOVAR

* "Not having glasses" is, however, also a way for illiterate women to get out of the difficult situation of explaining that they cannot read the instructions. In these cases the interpreter read out aloud the questions. We do not have figures on how many of these women were actually illiterate and how many needed glasses.


“When somebody
helps you it is so much easier to
gather your own strength”

WOMAN IN VUKOVAR

CHAPTER 7

Women's centers

AN OASIS



IT WAS MOVING to hear the spontaneous positive reactions from these women about their experiences at the centers. One woman walked, hitchhiked, and then took the bus, a journey that took several hours, to talk to us about her experience at one of the centers in Mostar. She does this every week to join her psychosocial support group, which she claims has saved her life and marriage. She is a partner in a mixed marriage, and during the war her husband began to drink and be physically abusive, even aiming his gun at her and shooting in an attempt to kill her. Her psychosocial group helped her handle her problems and even found a way for her to put a stop to the domestic violence. Her husband has not been drinking for 1 1/2 years, and her family with three children is doing better, though they are very poor. Neither she, her husband, nor their eighteen-year old son have been able to find work since the war.

*“If we want to assist traumatized people we must first create a safe atmosphere,”*³² psychologist Inger Agger notes, and the women's centers provide exactly that. Women commented often that the center is an oasis for them in an otherwise harsh and strenuous environment. One woman, underlining the impor-

tance of the center for her personally, said: “*The center is the only light in the darkness.*” Her comment mirrors the despair that so many women voice but also the importance of the women’s centers as places where women can gather strength. At the centers, they find other women who understand them, who show them compassion, and who help them in their struggle to get back on their feet after the war.

The positive effect of the women’s centers is decidedly multidimensional. In a study at the end of the war, Inger Agger concluded that: “*The activities offered in the women’s centers are less important than the general atmosphere of communal healing.*” While the general atmosphere of communal healing is of utmost importance, it is, however quite evident that now, five years after the war, the activities that are aimed at empowering the women (e.g. study courses and job training) are valuable to women just as are the psychosocial support groups. But it is true that the opportunity just to come to the center and talk to the staff, to have a cup of coffee, and to “hang out” is also an important aspect of the healing effect.

The fact that the women’s centers provide study courses and job training is important because they provide an impetus for a woman’s first visit. In BiH and in Vukovar, there is still a tendency to think that emotional problems should be handled on one’s own without help. But when women come to the center they soon discover the psychosocial support programs and find them very valuable. The varied types of support make it easier for women to come to the center in the first place.

The women working at the centers are very dedicated and do an outstanding job. As they have themselves experienced the war they can directly empathize with the plight of the women coming to the centers.

As noted already in Chapter 5, **post-traumatic stress reactions have been reduced more extensively for women coming to the centers than for the comparison group** (Figure 4, p. 28). This underlines the importance of the work done at the centers.

Also in existential stress and vulnerability there was a certain reduction for women coming

to the centers as they regained their strength to cope to some extent with their economic problems and the unemployment (see Figure 5, p. 31).

In the comparison group (women who did not have the benefit of the services at the centers) **the existential stress reactions have often increased since the war.**

Providing this sort of oasis in post-war society helps women get back on their feet. In BiH and Vukovar, with their drawn-out processes of reconstruction and the consequent stress of unemployment, these centers fill an invaluable role.

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT GROUPS

Because of the massive traumas resulting from the war a group approach to trauma therapy and trauma support has many advantages. Judith Herman summarizes: “*The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. Trauma isolates; the group creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanises the victim; the group restores her humanity.*”³³

The psychosocial support groups naturally are working on other issues now than those that concerned them directly after the war, when the war traumas were the main focus. While traumatic memories from the war still are re-awakened by situations in life, and while there are women who only now have the opportunity to come to a support group, **five years after the war, much of the focus is on the anxieties and problems that are caused by the return process.** Although the chance to return is in itself a positive process, it can create many problems for the individual women. Almost every day, some woman is served with eviction papers because the original owners want their property back. We had several opportunities to observe how this opened floodgates to intense anxiety, as many of the internally displaced women have no place to which they can return, as their homes have often been burned down (see further

Chapter 9). The governmental agencies that formerly helped IDPs find temporary quarters are no longer working or provide very limited services. It is now an essentially unregulated market economy, and if people cannot find work, they do not have money to rent an apartment.

The psychosocial support groups meet once or twice a week for 1 1/2 hours. Often they have a topic of the day and, in addition to the group talk, they provide relaxation exercises and a warm sense of community, where people feel safe, can laugh, and find some relief from their plight.

The goal of trauma therapy is that *“feelings can be felt and named and endured without overwhelming arousal, without defensive numbing and without dissociation.”*³⁴

The psychosocial support groups provided the right setting for this process to take place. Also much of the mourning can be facilitated in the groups, as when women feel emotionally supported, they can release frozen emotions. We see often that bereavement reactions are delayed until a new situation of trust and security is established. While painful: *“the process or mourning is, in fact, the process of mastering the loss,”* as Henry Krystal notes.³⁵

The evaluations of the psychosocial support groups are extremely favorable. **98 % of the women at the centers indicate that the support groups helped them, and that there is much mutual support in the groups that is helpful.** *

HOW SUPPORT GROUPS HELP THEIR MEMBERS

- 92% state that belonging to a group of people who understand and accept them is very helpful.
- 83% find it very helpful to learn that they are not alone in having problems.
- 85% find it very helpful to have a chance to talk about their feelings.

- 76% have found it helpful to learn that stress symptoms after wartime experiences are normal.
- 91% report that the group members have become something of a family to them and who they have learned to trust, and that this is very helpful.
- 78% find it very helpful to learn to handle stress symptoms in a better way.
- 84% say that being able to help other group members in their struggle has been very helpful.

It is evident that the psychosocial support groups fill several important functions: It helps them to feel less lonely and *within the group setting are re-created the basic capacities for trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy* that Judith Herman indicated are essential elements of the healing process.³⁶

While Bosnian men meet their friends at the café, there are not many opportunities for Bosnian women to get out of their home when they do not have a job. When they feel like “climbing the walls” they can always go to the center, have a cup of coffee, and talk to the staff. The staff is empathetic and supportive, and as local women, they know exactly what these women have gone through. One woman expresses what many women communicated to us: *“I have taken all the courses at the center, but when I feel down I come here to cleanse my mind of the destructive thoughts. And it always works. The women here are amazing.”*

Most of the groups are clearly support groups, and there is a distinct need for support, even though it is now five years after the war. As the return process had only lately picked up, there is much “free-floating” anxiety. With conditions in society being so harsh, the support groups and the women’s centers are important sources for comfort and understanding. *“Senada (the center leader) and the center saved my life. I had stopped eating, and I was so depressed that I*

* There might be a tendency to “please the donor” but it turned out that most beneficiaries were not aware that The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation was supporting the projects, as they were run by local NGOs.

was hospitalized for ten days. If I had not found the center, then I would not have survived. Coming here has helped me start my life again.”

Our evaluation thus shows that the psychosocial support groups are very successful and fill a distinct need for women in these difficult and turbulent times.

When women have somewhere to go with their problems, it takes a load off their shoulders and consequently **it helps the whole family.** Many of the women mentioned that the support helps them to handle their families and their children better. Thus, there are ripple effects on every member in the family.

At certain of the centers, women gather around to crochet and talk (crocheting is very much part of Bosnian women’s culture), as that is the way they feel most comfortable. There were a few women during the interviews who indicated that they do not like the idea of sitting around talking about their traumatic experiences. They preferred, instead, the opportunity to take part in an activity. This underlines the importance of offering a variety of activities at the centers.

WHAT CAN BE ADDED?

If something should be added to the group programs at the centers it might be more **physical activity.** Quite a few women showed signs that stress was taking its toll in terms of psychosomatic reactions such as headaches, neck pain, high blood pressure, and so on. **Five years after the war, 28% of the women still indicate that they are strongly affected by headaches.**

At one center are plans to add Qi Gong, a technique that addresses this issue. Massage would probably also be beneficial. Massage training could perhaps be added to the job training programs; then other women at the centers would have a chance to be “treated” as part of the practice sessions within the training.

It would be important if the centers also focused on helping women understand that the best way to help their children is not “to forget” the war but to help them talk about their experiences and that way process their traumas.

PROFESSIONAL TRAUMA THERAPY AND DELAYED TRAUMA REACTIONS

The psychosocial support groups at the centers are the base units that handle most of the trauma therapy, and after the war these groups were all-focused on this task. For most of the women, the psychosocial support groups have been effective in terms of alleviating the traumatic stress from the war.

However, as noted (in Chapter 5) **23% of the women still report strong flashbacks five years after the war.** This can be seen a reasonably good indicator of women who need more help to process their traumatic wartime experiences than the group has provided. It gives some indication of the number of women with residual post-traumatic reactions that need more specialized psychological trauma therapies. Access to more professional trauma therapies as a backup is thus important at the centers.

During the war, working to survive was paramount; thereafter were all the practical problems of finding a job, providing food, housing, schooling for the children, and so on. It was evident that even at this late date many people develop delayed post-traumatic stress reactions. One woman recalls: *“After the war the instinct for survival that had kept us going diminished. It was peace in the country, but nothing was going in the right direction. Then my problems started to appear. I thought I was going crazy, and I dared not go out of the house.”* Often women develop panic attacks or depression, and the regular psychiatric units do not have the trauma psychological framework necessary to help them. The Psychological Center in Tuzla gets many referrals of delayed post-traumatic stress reactions from the hospitals. Quite a few of these clients report that they thought they were going crazy. In their therapies they learn that their (trauma) symptoms are normal reactions to an abnormal situation, and this helps them to start processing their painful memories. One woman stated that: *“I would not be alive if it wasn’t for the therapists at the Psychological Center. I was suicidal!”* Another woman reported that her family is doing much better: *“I do not*

blame my husband for the death of our daughter any more. I am able to deal with my loss in other ways.” The results from the center in helping these women are truly impressive.

At the Psychological Center in Tuzla most of the trauma therapy is done also in groups, but unlike at the centers they are led by psychologists. There are opportunities also for some individual therapy. Their work alleviating the traumatic stress showed impressive results. In the Mostar region (*Koraci Nade*), a mobile team consisting of a psychologist, a lawyer, and a social worker visits five centers regularly. The psychologist offers individual therapy for women who need more therapeutic help than the support groups can provide.

STUDY GROUPS AT THE WOMEN’S CENTERS

The centers also offer free study groups. The courses offered vary from center to center, but they usually include English, typing, and computer skills. These study groups are very attractive because they improve women’s chances of getting a job and provide a distraction from their worries. They also attract many young women to the centers and help to give them hope for the future.

The spontaneous comments about the study groups are extremely positive. While all the women taking part in study groups report that it helped them feel better it is interesting to see what aspects they value most:

- *91% state that they are very interested in learning new things, and that the groups help them to do this in a significant way.*
- *76% of the women find the study groups to be very important for their self-esteem.*
- *76% find it very important to be able to meet with other women in the group.*
- *73% of the women indicate that the groups are very helpful because they take their minds off their problems.*
- *53% indicate that taking part in the study groups might give them a better chance for*

future jobs. This lower figure reflects the difficulty to get a job in spite of good qualifications.

As it is now five years since the war, there is increased pressure to ask women to pay a fee for these educational services. However, given the present economic situation in BiH, this is often difficult. Offering these courses free of charge gives women who really need it a chance to add something valuable to their lives. Some of the centers, however, ask a fee from people who can afford to pay.

The free study courses give young girls an important chance to feel that they are not totally behind the rest of the world. While their schools may have one computer for the whole school/class, they can get the hands-on experience that is necessary to learn to operate computers at the center. They also value the opportunity to learn English better.

JOB TRAINING

To empower women so that they can support their families, many centers offer more practical training to help women move into the workplace. Courses are offered in hairdressing, tailoring, office work and computers, and nursery work. These courses are very popular, and all the participants found the courses very helpful despite the fact that they might not get a job. We asked what aspects are most important to women:

- *69% say that attending the job training gives them a better chance to get a job. Still another 17 % think this is rather important.*
- *73% say that taking part in this training is very important because it gives them better self-esteem. Another 20 % find it rather important for their self-esteem.*
- *70% note that it is very important for them to meet with others in the group, as that makes them feel better. Another 20% mark this aspect as rather important.*
- *73% indicate that the job training is very important in terms of taking their minds off their other problems.*

- 87% express that it is very important for them to learn new skills, and still another 10% mark this as rather important.

The chance to learn new skills is definitely the most important aspect. The women we met in these groups displayed a strong sense of pride in what they were learning and a radiant pleasure in the activities in which they took part. Even if they were not very hopeful about their chances of getting a job in the near future, they were building their competence and learning things that will benefit their families (e.g. learning to sew clothes for the family).

The women at the centers come from all walks of life, so it is important to offer a range of activities that are not only intellectually oriented. Different women have different needs.

FREE LEGAL SERVICE

At several of the centers, lawyers are working part time to offer free legal services because women are confronted with many complicated legal issues in the post-war society. Often women have been forced to leave one entity with one set of laws and now are temporarily living in another jurisdiction, with another set of laws. It is a true legal maze even for lawyers to navigate. In the BiH post-war society, women are extremely vulnerable because commonly they do not have their names on the titles of their former homes. During the period leading up to the deadline to reclaim one's house or apartment, there was an intense flurry of activities where the lawyers helped women to fill out the papers and file motions at the correct institution. As this return process now moves forward, the lawyers at the projects support the people who are served with eviction papers to help them in the appeal process. **The legal support is truly invaluable to the women.** Without free legal support they would have been powerless because they do not have money to pay legal fees. Additionally, women often did not know their rights, and the lawyers thus helped them to become more educated about their legal rights. The free legal service also limits women's anxieties and gives them better access to due process.

In Zenica, The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation supports The Center of Legal Assistance for Women. The center provides free legal assistance in a variety of situations – for example, to reclaim jobs when women have lost their positions in state companies; to reclaim property; and to get child support and help with divorce proceedings. When they register at the center, women answer a few questions. Those answers show that **80% of the women seeking legal services are the victims of domestic abuse** (even if this was not the reason for their seeking the legal service). This gives a sobering indication of the magnitude of the problem of domestic abuse in BiH today, even if this may be a somewhat select group of women.

The clients we interviewed were effusive in their praise for the legal services and noted that they would never have had the chance to have legal support were it not for the center. The female lawyers are very dedicated, and although psychosocial support is not part of their job, they offer important support to their clients. One woman expressed this most pertinently: *“When somebody helps you it is easier to gather your own strength.”*

The lawyers at the center in Zenica are now also focusing on the effects of the privatization process on women. They have seen several instances where a man is allowed to buy a state company at a low price because he promises to keep women as part of the staff. The buyer then turns around and offers these female employees a low amount for quitting their jobs. Quite a few women have been enticed into accepting such an offer, losing not only their wages, but their medical benefits and pension benefits. It is certainly important to alert women about these risks and to inform them about their rights so that they are not cheated out of their long-term privileges.

The lawyers at The Center of Legal Assistance for Women in Zenica are also overseeing new legislative proposals and lobbying for changes in outdated laws that affect women negatively.

MEDICAL INFORMATION

During and just after the war, The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation supported a mobile gynecological clinic in BiH and also offered free cancer tests for women when there were still no such opportunities for women in society. While this was an important part of the program during and just after the war, it is now reduced. Five years after the war, efforts are focused on providing preventive health-care information for women by way of lectures, teaching breast examination, and so on. The rationale is not to compete with official medical services.

In Bosnia, the health-care system is tied to employment, and with such high unemployment, women are put in a difficult situation. Many women report that they do not have resources to pay for a visit to the doctor, and naturally they do not go for checkups under these circumstances. Also many women cannot take their children to the doctor for vaccinations or to the dentist, as they have no money to pay the bills.

Many people died prematurely during the war because of lack of medication, and this continues to be a problem. The medical doctor providing health information at the center in Vukovar reported TB patients and older people dying prematurely because of the inability to afford medications.

A new health-care system not so closely tied to employment seems an important reform to work toward in the Bosnian society.

THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AT THE CENTERS

No doubt all categories of women at the centers feel empowered by their experiences there. However, interviewing women who have gone through the programs at the center and then later were hired to work there gave an amazing indication of the empowerment of women in the process.

Most of the women who have been hired have some special training (e.g. tailoring) that is useful at the centers. This is not always the case, however. One woman, now a dynamic center leader, had not been allowed by her father to fin-

ish her secondary school, and she was a victim of domestic abuse. With the help from the center, she managed to separate from her husband, continue her studies, and learn computer skills and administrative skills. She then started working with psychosocial support at the center and now, as a leader, she is a magnificent role model. In fact, she is now going into local politics to influence policies important to women.

It is evident that the opportunity to work offered new chances for empowerment. There is generally **a steep growth curve in self-confidence and in strength**. Another woman, who radiated strength, and who now is working outside the center (after waiting 17 years for a job), describes her development thus: *“I was very quiet and had lost all self confidence from being at home for so long. At the center I met other women who helped me regain my strength. Working there I grew stronger still. I am another person today, and I owe it all to the center.”*

While working at the center the staff develops its organizational skills through the internal development program that is part of the Kvinna till Kvinna model. Continuous dialogues between the KtK field coordinators and the leaders of the centers about organizational issues, about the content of the services, and about the accountability aspects are part of the programs. The organizational skills developed within the centers can be very useful in many professional areas of the post-war society.

From her work in South America, Inger Agger notes that: *“Self-empowerment is a means of counteracting victimization.”*³⁷ This was quite evident. The women who work at the centers have managed to handle their victimisation in another way. The active work to help others also turned out to help the women themselves. This is naturally a truth with some limitations. There is a growing awareness of a secondary traumatization phenomenon. Because these women are so happy to have a job it is not mentioned as a problem by the staff at most of the centers. However, quite a few of the centers are well aware of this problem and have mechanisms in place to alleviate the problem of the staff listening to and psychologically internalising so much traumatic material.

THE REBUILDING OF SOCIAL CONNECTIONS IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Restoring a trustworthy community has a healing effect for citizens of war-torn societies. In pre-war BiH, especially in the rural areas, the community was integrated through the social and reciprocal bonds created by women. Because of ethnic cleansing, many women were brutally uprooted from their communities. There also were many spontaneous comments to the effect that the war had so changed people that everyone cared only about herself.

At the centers, women can start to rebuild the trust that has been shattered during the war. There, for the first time, they can have a new sense of community, and women bask in this newfound community. The center not only becomes a safe place but becomes also a breeding ground for new friendships and mutual support. Empowered by their own experiences these women often reach out in their communities. They also have more strength to handle their own families.

Restoring a trustworthy community has a healing effect on people who suffer from traumatic stress reactions, according to Shay.³⁸ The Dayton Peace Accords put very little emphasis on the importance of civil society and the organizations active within it, which is a serious omission. **We found that the women NGOs made an important contribution to the rebuilding of the communities at the same time as they were working to restore the personal lives of women.**

The centers are integrated in a regional network that gives strength to the centers themselves and provided invaluable contacts with women working in other parts of the country and beyond. It also helped build a stronger, more sustainable organization.

WHAT IS MISSING? PROJECTS WHERE WOMEN CAN EARN SOME MONEY

There are very few programs today where women can earn some money, indeed it was possible only at one or two of the centers we visited. Prijateljice in Tuzla has developed a nursery, where a few women learn how to develop roses from the wild kind and then sell them to hotels and flower stores. This project is just about to become self-sustaining. Prijateljice is also starting a laundry, where some women will have an opportunity to work.

In Visegrad the center has provided a series of workshops in how to start a business. The centers also have started a project where a few women package sugar in small packets for cafés, bars, and hotels, but a larger operation manufacturing plastic bags was shut down because of the laws governing NGOs. This law was under revision, and there were hopes that it would be rewritten by the end of the summer. At this writing, however, December 2001, this was not yet the case.

With the depressing pattern of unemployment and poverty for so many women in BiH, there is a need for projects that can help to bridge the gap until necessary economic reforms have been instigated on the governmental level.

The programs at the women's centers that The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation has supported have focused on processing the traumas and empowering women, so that they are better able to handle their lives in post-war society.* This is a good policy in societies where the government actively tries to address the post-war economic problems. Where this is not the case, it is more problematic as women are left in limbo. Many women have already taken all the courses available at the centers and are just trading water because they cannot get a job. In the present situation in BiH and in Vukovar, women are restricted to their homes without a job, without money, and left in a dangerous economic dependency on men.

* The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation also supports programs to inspire women to become involved in politics and take part in democracy development. See fact sheet about the KtK-foundation.

I had been living with such intense fear for so long. My system was close to a breakdown. When I started to come to the center I could again start to become grounded. Slowly I could build back my strength, **thanks to** the other **women** at the center.

WOMAN IN MOSTAR, NOW A CENTER LEADER

Programs or activities where women can earn money can be very helpful to bridge the gap and keep women hopeful for a better future until society can provide more job opportunities. It would also help them gain some self-sufficiency. However, income-generating programs are not something The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation is prepared to initiate. Another way of bringing this opportunity to women is to cooperate with other organizations specializing in income-generating projects.

There have been quite a few plans in BiH offering “micro-credits” as one way of helping women begin a new economic course. We found, however, that it was amazingly few women who had been aware of such programs; **92% of the women we interviewed had never been offered any micro-credits.** It thus seems that the information about these options need to be better disseminated. Also some of the so-called “micro-credits” we encountered were actually “macro-credits” (10,000 DM) with demands of security that were out of reach for every one of the women at the centers.

The women centers could distribute information about micro-credits, but it is evident that in BiH and in Vukovar (in contrast to South East Asia where the Grameen Bank originated), women are often at a loss as to what kind of enterprise they might start. They lack a business idea. Private entrepreneurship was not valued in the former Yugoslavia.

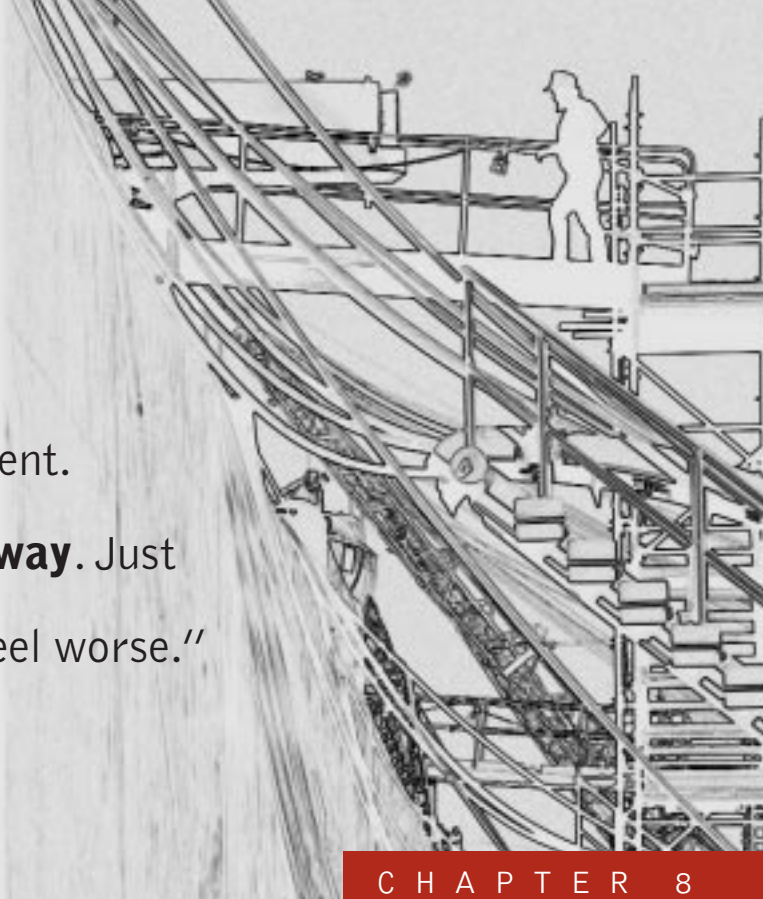
In the neighboring republic of Montenegro there is an encouraging program that could give inspiration to women in BiH for economic development. The Center for Entrepreneurship and Economic Development in Montenegro has

a subsection, the Women’s Business Center, which provides information campaigns about the privatization process. They also provide courses targeted at women on how to start small businesses and basic courses in business economics, on how to develop a business plan, and how to do accounting. Quite a few of the women taking part in these programs have been able to create new job opportunities for themselves. These programs seem suited to the specific problems of women in states in transition such as Bosnia and Montenegro.

As long as the present tax system prevails, and as long as there is no real market to sell the goods, it will be difficult to make money from any enterprise. The most urgent issue is thus that the barriers to the economic recovery be removed on the “macro” level. International and national investments are badly needed if the economy is to have a chance to revive. However, foreign investors will not come until the overriding problems are resolved at the state level. Meanwhile, there is the problem of how to help women keep up their hope for a better future.

SOMETHING TO BE ADDED: EVALUATIONS

Lastly, a comment about evaluations. The centers make excellent contributions to the healing process, but this is not documented. A simple feedback mechanism from the beneficiaries would be helpful to monitor the services. In a study for the European Community Humanitarian Office, (ECHO) Inger Agger underlines the importance of continuous evaluation of the services that are offered.³⁹ It would be easy to ask women to fill out a small questionnaire when they first come to the center and then again when they are ready to leave. This way the progress can be documented.



"I am furious at the government.

They do not help us in any way. Just thinking about it makes me feel worse."

WOMAN IN VISEGRAD

CHAPTER 8

Societal factors

AND THEIR EFFECT ON WOMEN IN POST-WAR SOCIETY

THE HEALING PROCESS after traumatic experiences during ethnic wars does not take place in isolation. How society is being rebuilt, how hope is being sustained, what economic possibilities there are to rebuild one's life, how society handles the crimes of war – all of these factors naturally influence people's chances to leave their traumas behind and to move towards a new future. In *A Psychological Model of Healing from the Traumas of Ethnic Cleansing*,⁴⁰ the author has outlined a model for healing that encompasses all of these different aspects. The findings in the present study support this wider notion of societal factors affecting the healing process.

In the interviews, we tried briefly to gauge the impact of societal action and of political decisions on women's lives in the post-war community:

DISAPPOINTMENT IN GOVERNMENT

Most women in this study are extremely disappointed in their own governments and there are frequent negative, spontaneous comments.

96% of the women state that they had gotten no help from their government to handle the problems after the war. They usually describe it in even stronger terms as feeling abandoned by their governments.

Add this to the fact that most of these women believe the war was a crazy idea by nationalistic leaders, and the alienation of women from the governmental agencies cannot be stronger.

The negative responses illustrate a critical failure on the part of the government to care for its citizens and to convey support for people struggling in the post-war society.

In contrast, 57% of these women say that religion has been helpful in the post-war recovery process. We did not have a chance to explore this further, but probably religion offers some comfort during the mourning of personal losses and perhaps also gives some meaning to an otherwise meaningless suffering.

In addition, government has made some decisions that have had profound negative impact on people's lives, especially the Structural Adjustment Plans (SAP) ordered by the IMF that led to major reductions in pensions and health care benefits.

74% of the women describe a very negative impact on their lives resulting from the reduction in pensions and health care plans. Another 17% describe a somewhat negative impact. A total of 90% of our women were disgruntled by the SAP policies.

Failures in governmental policies tended to increase feelings of vulnerability in women, and they led to feelings of hopelessness and less possibility to heal.

THE PROFOUNDLY NEGATIVE EFFECT OF LACK OF ECONOMIC REFORMS

This is a subject that has been commented upon extensively above, so only some brief comments are entered here to put this important factor within the present framework.

The lack of economic reform and the subsequent unemployment has been a major factor that has stalled the healing process.

88% of women indicate that the slow economic recovery in the post-war period has had a very negative impact on their efforts to rebuild their lives. Another 11% indicate that it had a somewhat negative impact. All blame the government for this slow economic recovery.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the weakness of the joint governmental institutions in BiH and the inability to cooperate among entities and to leg-

islate the necessary reforms has scared off foreign investors. New enterprises are not established, while the old, oversized, and outdated state enterprises were shut down during or after the war. There is thus a major economic crisis, which makes the unemployment staggering in all the different entities. Women are especially hard hit.

In our interview group, **only 14% of the women had jobs in the regular marketplace** and even if they had a job they often are paid irregularly or not at all for their work. We have commented already on the desperation that women feel relative to supporting their children and providing them with the essentials when no one in the family has managed to get a job.

As a result of these difficult circumstances, **71% of the women we interviewed characterize life after the war as "a new suffering."**

The negative effect of the new poverty affects women of all ages – from hindering many young women from going to school because their parents do not have money for the bus, clothes, etc., to putting young unemployed women in situations of dangerous dependence on men, to elderly women who cannot buy the medications they need and who therefore die prematurely.

WOMEN AND POLITICS

When we asked questions that were only marginally related to politics the majority of women in this study spontaneously commented that they are not informed about politics, and that they are not interested in politics. It was very evident that this is an area that they have left to men. For many women, politics is "dirty business" that they avoid.

This is a sad fact, however, as it prevents women from influencing their future lives. **Projects that help women overcome their antipathy for politics and the cultural barriers that have barred them from taking part in politics are important.** There are quite a few such projects in the region that The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation supports.

At many of the centers we visited there were discussions about important issues affecting women that clearly were political. Taking a

step further and bringing the ideas and results of the discussions to the local politicians is not a long one. This can bridge the gap and make women more aware that politics is an arena they should not shun.

Women often have difficulty seeing themselves as agents of social change. They need a chance to change their perspective and thus assert more control of their lives. Women can with proper empowerment develop an image of themselves as agents for social reconstruction, and many of the projects that The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation supports are aiming at just that.

When asked if their government is addressing the issues that are important to women, 92% answered no.

When asked if there are enough opportunities for women to be elected and influence politics, 72% of the women answered no.

Thus we note once again the alienation that women feel relative to their governments. They do not believe that their interests are being protected. But if women turn their back on politics this will not change.

RESTORING LAW AND ORDER AND HANDLING OF WAR CRIMES

The post-war society needs to restore law and order and put in place safeguards against the kinds of atrocities committed. As part of this process, it is important that the perpetrators of war crimes are tried and punished. This process has been slow and faltering in BiH because the old nationalist leadership has managed to keep power in its hands in many places. Also the interpretation of the SFOR mandate (regarding the arrest of war criminals) has been overly restrictive because of considerations in the international community.

84% of the women feel that society has not dealt adequately with the perpetrators of war crimes. However, it is evident from the interviews that who was perceived as a war criminal varied depending on the media of the different entities. It also became clear that some women defined war criminals as those who committed

When the war is no longer holy, the heroes become killers.

PSYCHOLOGIST INGER AGGER
IN LECTURE IN GAMARTH

violent crimes during the war, while other women thought this of people who took advantage of the war for economic gain (e.g. robbed other people's houses).

Generally, there was no disputing that there are many war criminals walking around in society. **55% of the women are very upset about war criminals walking around free in society**, and another 34% indicate that they are rather upset, a total of 89%. This naturally leads to feelings of unease and insecurity. There was generally a strong sense that society had not managed to restore law and order so that people might feel secure to talk about what they have gone through. One woman expressed this clearly: *"You can have anyone removed in this country if you just pay a bit for it – so people do not dare talk about what they were exposed to during the war."*

Some women spontaneously noted something similar: *"People do not dare talk about what happened in the concentration camps. Those people in charge of the concentration camps are still around, and people are afraid of what will happen to their children. So no one talks."*

The attitude towards the war crimes tribunal in The Hague differed in different entities. **61% of the women felt that the tribunal had created some justice**, but this was again an area where many women confessed to not knowing much. Also, as one woman underlined: *"There are deep crimes nobody can wash away. Some things can never be repaired."*

When asked if they thought it might be **a good idea to add other measures besides the war crimes tribunal such as a truth commission or testimonials** where, in the different entities, people could tell the world about what they had suffered, **83% answered in the affirmative**. There is not much knowledge about these procedures, but the wish to bring testimony about the atroc-

I am disgusted with this government. There is **no progress**.

I want to leave, and so do all the young people I know.

TWENTY-ONE-YEAR-OLD WOMAN IN TUZLA

ities during the war is strong. There were, however, many comments about the importance of witness protection, as people today do not feel safe talking about what they have experienced during the war.

When post-war society is not able to restore a sense of justice, it seriously hampers the healing process. When people do not feel secure and when people do not feel free to talk about what they have gone through, it naturally diminishes the opportunities to process traumatic experiences and move on.

FEAR OF ANOTHER ETHNIC CONFLICT

The interviews took place shortly after the incident in Mostar, where the international community clamped down on corruption and on secessionist plans by the local Croat politicians. This led to some violent clashes, and shortly afterwards there were clashes around the mosque to be built in Banja Luka. These incidents awakened people's fears that new ethnic conflicts would erupt.

73% of the women interviewed expressed fear of renewed ethnic conflict sometime in the future.

A woman in Mostar stated: *"The only safety here is the SFOR. If they leave, I leave too."* Another woman noted that: *"The old politicians should be replaced. They cheated the people, but people have opened their eyes."*

The problem is that nationalistic leaders are still in power in many places, and therefore people do not expect that there will be new policies put in place. Women voters could make a difference if they decided to vote in accordance with the views expressed during the

interviews. Many organizations have been working towards getting women to vote and vote independently, but it is something that still takes much work to accomplish.

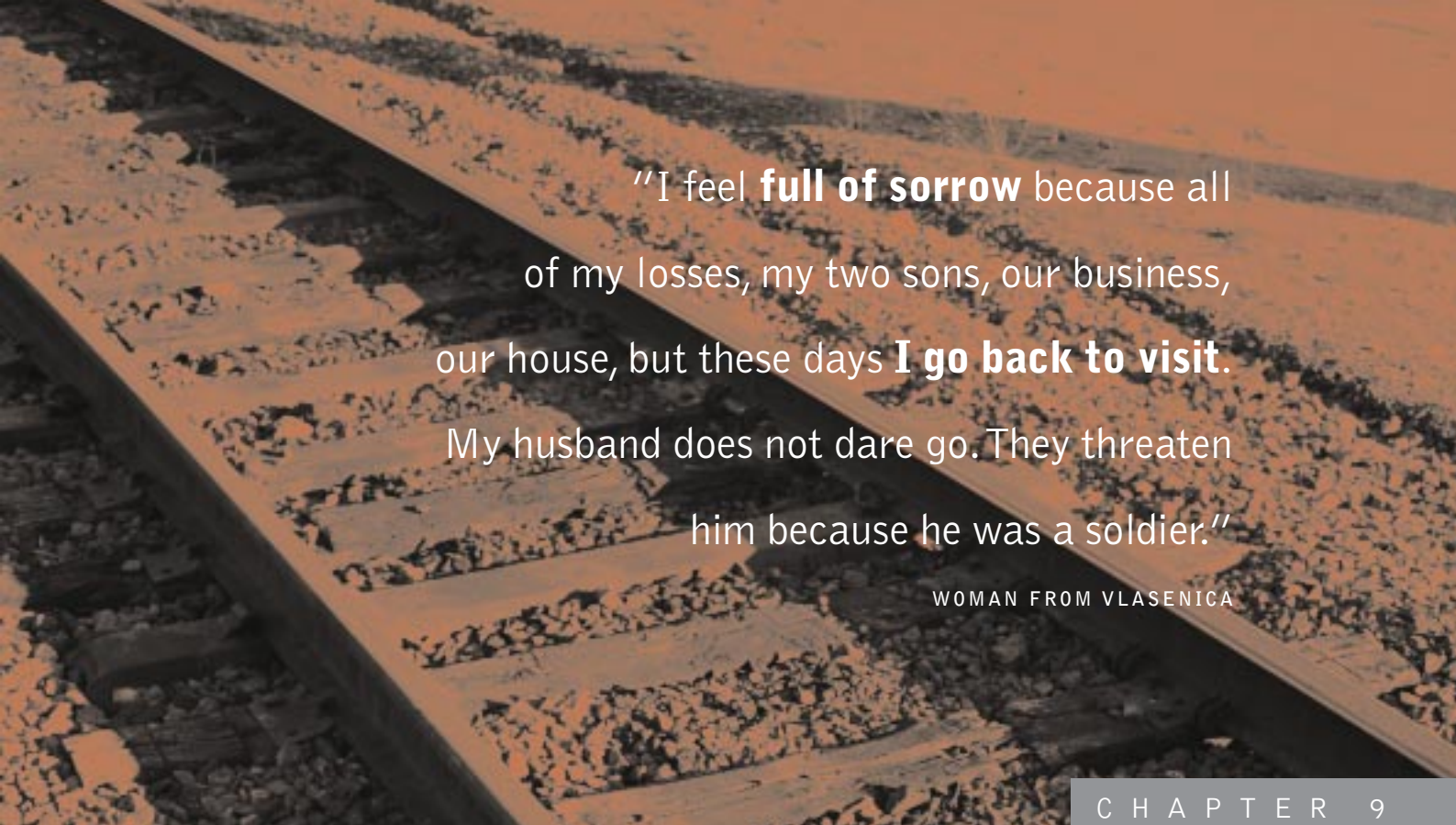
There were many spontaneous comments about the horrors of the war during the interviews and the importance of solving all political questions at the negotiating table. **64% of the women answered that they thought there was a way to build back the trust among the ethnic groups**, but that answer was followed nearly always by comments that: **"It will take a long time."**

However, the low expressions of hate and wishes for retaliation are to be noted (as seen in Figures 1a and 2a) despite all that these women have gone through as a consequence of the ethnic warfare.

THE REBUILDING OF POST-WAR SOCIETY INFLUENCES THE HEALING PROCESS

*People live within a "person-community ecosystem within which an individual experiences, copes with, and makes meaning of traumatizing events."*⁴¹ It is evident that how the rebuilding of society after a war progresses will influence people's opportunities to heal and to go on with their lives. Every interview bore evidence of this in its own way. The specific questions that probe the experience of people with governmental and societal actions all show a strong influence on their mood and how they might recover from their traumas.

In Chapter 5, we earlier emphasized that while the classical post-traumatic stress symptoms showed a marked reduction five years after the war, this is not at all the case for existential stress and vulnerability. In the interviews, this is linked to the frustrations in post-war society where people cannot get a job, where they feel there is no help from the government, and where the re-establishment of law and order is unsatisfactory.



"I feel **full of sorrow** because all of my losses, my two sons, our business, our house, but these days **I go back to visit**. My husband does not dare go. They threaten him because he was a soldier."

WOMAN FROM VLASENICA

CHAPTER 9

The return process

AND ITS PITFALLS

THE RIGHT TO RETURN to one's original home was proclaimed in the Dayton Peace Accords, and it was a central piece in trying to counteract the ethnic cleansing from the war. **While the principle of the right to return sounds fairly simple and straightforward, it has in reality proved to be a difficult step.** For a long time this process was blocked on all levels by the nationalist leadership, who did not want any minorities to return to the areas that at gunpoint had been ethnically cleansed during the war.

In the last few years it has been possible for people to visit their old homes for the first time, visits that naturally have been simultaneously joyous and painful. These visits have in many ways re-ignited traumatic memories from the war. People who try to move back have been met with renewed threats and harassments.

The deadline for the claiming of property had been extended time and again, until the Office of the High Representative decided to impose a final deadline for reclaiming one's home. Suddenly there was an intense activity because people had to apply or miss their chance to have their property back. While it was a necessary step, it has created much anxiety and confusion.

One of the main problems with the return process is that many houses were burned down or blown up during the war precisely to prevent returns. And, despite of extensive international support, only a fraction of the houses have been rebuilt, and people do not have money to rebuild themselves.

Though the aim is to counteracting ethnic cleansing, the effects of the return process can in certain cases proceed along the same lines. Thus, for example, a Serb family who left the Federation during the war for Republika Srpska can apply to have their property returned even if they do not plan to go back to the Federation to live. They can, instead, exchange their property with a Bosniac family that originally lived in area now part of RS. Complicating the equation is that in their original house in the Federation a displaced Bosniac family, whose house was destroyed, now lives. Thus this family will be served with eviction papers from their temporary home and have no place to go (as their house was destroyed). This naturally creates much anxiety.

During the war, special governmental agencies such as the Center for Displaced Persons and Refugees helped people find temporary quarters and subsidized the rent. These agencies are no longer providing this help.

In the interviews, we heard many tales about these problems, and how people, despite well-intended policies, fall into the cracks. Thus old traumatic experiences are brought back to the forefront. Consider a concrete example:

Fadila* is a farming woman from Kamenica, a village now situated in RS. She endured a terrible 10-month siege of her village. The family was shelled from four sides and from the sky, so they lived in the basement. They had no hospital, so a man did the amputations of legs hurt by grenade shrapnel with a saw and without anaesthesia. They tried to break out three times but did not manage. This was the worst period in Fadila's life. Her husband was at the front, and she was alone with her three children. They had no food, no clothes, nothing. She lost much weight trying giving the little food available to her children; sometimes they did not have any-

thing to eat for days. After six months she received word that her husband had died in the fighting. Ultimately, at the time of Srebrenica's fall, she and her children managed to break out and get to Tuzla. Fadila was devastated to learn that the destruction of the houses in Kamenica that took place after they left was done by local Serbs and not by some unknown paramilitaries.

Fadila has not had much schooling herself, but she is trying hard to give her children a good education in Tuzla. Her oldest son had to break off his studies in Sarajevo, however, as she did not have money to support him. Her daughter is silent and seems depressed. Her younger son is a very good soccer player, but she cannot buy him the clothes he needs to play on the team.

Fadila herself has very strong post-traumatic stress reactions and is devastated by the loss of her husband and her home. She expresses this vividly: "*As for me I am dead, just not buried yet. I stay alive only for the children.*" During the years after the war it has been a struggle to survive. Fadila used to walk to the market to sell her knitted things and then carried 35-40 kg of flour on her shoulders several miles to her home to feed her hungry children. At the women's center, she has taken part in the psychosocial group and in knitting and sewing courses. Finding a community of women has helped her to survive and to take care of her children.

Nowadays Fadila goes to Kamenica for a week at a time (as there is a bus connection only once a week) to clear the building site of concrete rubble, hoping to get funds from international organizations to rebuild the house. She also grows food there to feed her family, but the bus ride is expensive and greatly taxes her minimal budget. She has 150 DM in a pension from her husband and 50 DM for each of her children as long as they go to school.

It has not been easy to come back to Kamenica because images from the war return when she visits. The local Serbs also shoot over their heads to frighten them as they do not want them back. In spite of this, Fadila is struggling very hard to be able to return: "*I would love to be back. I would be happiest there in spite of all the war memories.*"

* This is an alias to protect the person.

Things are **worse now** than at the end of the war. I am **losing** my **strength**. It has been such an uphill battle for so long. The only thing that keeps me going is the other women I meet at the center.

WIDOW FROM SREBRENICA LEFT WITH FOUR SMALL CHILDREN AND NO REBUILT HOUSE

Fadila and her children are about to be evicted from their temporary housing in Tuzla. She does not know where to live a week from when the interview takes place and the Center for Displaced Persons is not offering help anymore. “*I will be in the street,*” she says, “*I’d better hang myself.*” At times she becomes very bitter because she has struggled so hard, and there is little help from the government: “*I am not welcome anywhere. I’d better kill myself.*”

She is very worried, and rightly so, that her house in Kamenica will not be rebuilt in spite of her struggle, because she is a single woman. The men in the village want families with men to return, because they can protect the village. When an international organization comes to the village with the intent to rebuild houses, they find a “*village representative,*” a man with whom they can deal. He makes a list of the houses to be rebuilt and always takes care of his relatives first, then other families. The single-woman households always end up last on the list. As not all of the houses in a village are rebuilt, the houses of single women are often disregarded.

Most of the international organizations involved in rebuilding these days give the material to rebuild the houses but expect people to do much of the labour themselves. A single-woman household will have more difficulty in this respect.

Another issue for families who manage to get their houses rebuilt is the problem of the school systems. The curriculum is different in the entities with different accounts of history, different religious instruction, and even different alphabets. Thus, to get the Bosnian type of education the Bosniac children who return with their parents to villages in RS must travel long stretches to schools in the Federation. The same is true in reverse.

Also there are often no medical services, no fire brigade, and no communal functions in the villages that have been (partly) rebuilt.

As we finish up the interview, Fadila summarizes her situation in these bitter and despairing words: “*I have more problems now than when the war started. At that time it was solely a question of survival. There is no food now either, but now there is no help, and we do not have a home even.*”

This is only one case of so many we heard about in BiH where the return process is fraught with problems.

The final point is that single-woman households are discriminated against. There is a need for special provisions in the international rebuilding programs to balance these forces. A simple measure would be a **quota system**, where a specific percentage of the houses to be rebuilt would be houses for single-woman households. In any event, it is important that the rebuilding is done with a gender perspective and with awareness of the fact that women have special needs.

Another issue related to the return process is the fact that certain local governments strongly advise people not to return to their old homes. The gist of the message seems to be that “history has taught us that it is better that we live separate.” In spite of people struggling with horrible unemployment, people in such areas were generally hesitant to consider moving back, even to places where the risk of harassment is low. The propaganda unfortunately has been quite successful.



“**Life** after the war **is wasted time.**

It is terrible. We are just treading water.”

WOMAN IN VUKOVAR

CHAPTER 10

A SUMMARY

War is not over with the last bullet

LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION

“WAR IS NOT OVER WITH THE LAST BULLET.” This statement by one Bosnian woman describes the difficult situation that post-war life has proven to be for women in BiH, at least for the women interviewed. It is obvious that reconstruction would not be simple either for society or individual people, but it still was shocking to find out how difficult it has been for people to recommence their lives in BiH and in Vukovar after the war.

71% of the women we interviewed characterize their life five years after the war as a new suffering, and there are abundant comments to the effect that “**life is as bad or even worse than during the war.**”

Four years of war and five years of stressful post-war existence have made people exhausted. The despair expressed over the unemployment situation is palpable. As the majority of people do not have a job they cannot provide for their families and at the same time the old social security net has been dismantled. Without money, they cannot rebuild their lives.

The weakness of the joint institutions in BiH and the failure to cooperate between the entities, a jungle of different laws and corruption on top keeps foreign investors away. The economic stalemate has produced a difficult situation threatening the whole international effort, including more than \$5 billion in support provided to help BiH get back on its feet. It certainly has stalled the healing process for women.

We now summarize our main findings: first a general conclusion and then our main findings under eleven headings. The next and final section contains recommendations.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

We have found that psychosocial support has been vital for women to survive and recover from the post-traumatic stress from the ethnic wars in BiH. Here it was successfully administered by local women who had received special training. This support needs to be offered early and to continue during the entire rebuilding phase.

OUR DATA ILLUSTRATE THE IMPORTANCE OF A LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVE IN THE SUPPORT EFFORT

Five years after the war, the women interviewed in BiH and in Vukovar are still suffering substantially. They are exhausted from the war and from five strenuous post-war years during which time they have been struggling without visible signs of any real recovery. The healing of existential stress and of vulnerability is stalled because of problems in society, not least the economic situation (see below). They cannot take any more of a backlash without personally falling apart.

The reconstruction phase in BiH has shown that, after ethnic wars, certain processes are delayed because of the devastating psychological impact of the brutalities. Thus, only during the most recent years has the return process begun to accelerate, six years after the war ended.

The return process has itself re-awakened many traumas. It throws many families into anxiety and panic because they are expelled from their temporary housing. Often, though, their former houses are destroyed, or they dare not go back. It is important not to concentrate all funding solely in the first years of reconstruction but, rather, to have a plan that encompasses all the difficult stages.

SUPPORT FOR THE HEALING OF INNER PSYCHIC WOUNDS IS A CRITICAL PART OF THE REBUILDING PROCESS

Psychosocial support is critical for survivors to process their traumas and to regain their strength after the painful destruction that war has brought to their lives. It is important with social spaces like women's centers that can promote healing when people's natural support systems are shattered in a society in chaos.

In an ethnic war, the whole social web is torn apart. Thus, the reconstruction of the social fabric is of basic significance for the healing process. Women who had access to women's centers and psychosocial support groups expressed how much it has helped them to survive the difficult times through which they have been put during and after the war. It has helped them to rebuild their trust; it has helped them to handle their families better; it has helped them to regain their strength so as to be able to participate in the reconstruction of civil society. *"When somebody helps you it is easier for you to gather your own strength,"* one woman said.

For the majority of the women that have come to the centers the healing of the classical post-traumatic stress symptoms is substantial five years after the war. There is still a need for support, however, because of strong existential post-traumatic stress, and vulnerability caused by problems in the reconstruction process in BiH and in Vukovar, and to anxieties awakened by the return process.

The fact that men did not get the same psychosocial support to process their war traumas was a serious failure, as there are frequent reports showing that men act out their frustration and their post-traumatic stress within their families. BiH is a "macho" society, and there certainly was domestic abuse before the war. In the interviews, however, there were frequent reports that the war was the starting point for destructive cycles of drinking and domestic abuse in many families. Among the women seeking the services of a legal center, 80% reported that they had experienced domestic abuse, even if this was not the reason they sought legal counsel.

THE WAR TRAUMAS AND THE HEALING PROCESS

When the peace accord was finally brokered, people were emotionally exhausted and their financial resources depleted. They all hoped for life to return to normal, i.e., to life as it was before the war. That has not happened, and will not happen because there is no way to retrieve the former lifestyle. *“People are left with a pervasive sense of disappointment and resentment. Despite enormous self-sacrifice, post-war life has failed to live up to their expectations and eager anticipation.”*⁴²

We did not restrict our investigation of the post-traumatic stress to the narrow clinical definition but brought in other aspects, such as existential stress and vulnerability. This proved important because these factors showed a different picture of the healing process than did the classical post-traumatic stress reactions.

- The majority of the women we interviewed experienced massive post-traumatic reactions at the end of the war, with strong flashbacks, strong anxiety, intense numbness and withdrawal reactions, anger, and depression (see Figure 1a, p. 19).
- There were strong indications of existential stress, and strong feelings of vulnerability and emotional exhaustion among women at the end of the war (see Figure 1b, p. 20):
81% of the women felt that they had been robbed of important years of their life.
71% felt extremely vulnerable.
60% indicated strong feelings of emotional exhaustion.
- There were strong feelings of loss and mourning, not only the pain from the loss of family members and close relatives, but a strong pain at losing their homes as well. For women in BiH, the home is an essential part of identity and social structure.
- There was great variation in the types of traumas women in BiH endured during the war. The IDPs who lost their homes and all their belongings and could not return be-

cause their houses were destroyed seem to be a particularly vulnerable group. It is difficult to restart life from scratch.

- Betrayal by neighbours was part of the traumatic experience for 43% of the women. This kind of behaviour was common in certain regions and not in others.
- In spite of what the women have suffered, very few express strong hate or wishes to retaliate. At the end of the war, only 15% of the women we interviewed expressed strong hate towards the ethnic group that had inflicted pain on them, and only 10% indicated strong wishes to retaliate.
- **Five years after the war, there is a substantial reduction in the classical post-traumatic stress reactions among the women that have come to the centers** (see Figure 2a or Figure 3a comparing the two situations, p. 27).
- However, more than 20% of the women we interviewed still suffer strong flashbacks five years after the war, a rather good indicator of PTSD. They are in need of professional therapy. In the comparison group, which did not get help at the centers, around 45% fall in this category.
- **Five years after the war, existential stress and vulnerability are not reduced to the same extent as post-traumatic stress** (see Figure 2b or 3b for comparison, p. 30):

69% of the women still have strong feelings (and sometimes even stronger than five years earlier) that important years of their lives have been stolen.

51% indicate strong feelings of vulnerability.

42% express feelings of strong emotional exhaustion.

This is caused mainly by the difficult economic conditions of the post-war period that effect a constant stress and block opportunities to feel hope for the future.

- Five years after the war, the mourning of lost family members and relatives is still strong; the mourning of lost homes continues relatively unabated.

- In BiH, the wartime losses are compounded by the irretrievable loss of a pre-war lifestyle. This makes for a separate mourning process.

ECONOMIC HARDSHIP HAS THROWN WOMEN INTO DESPAIR AND ABORTED HEALING

All over BiH and in Vukovar, economic hardship due to lack of economic reforms has thrown women into despair. The intense existential stress and vulnerability that women report is strongly related to the fact that women do not have jobs, that their husbands (if they have them) often do not have jobs, and that their adult children cannot get jobs when they finish school. It illustrates how intimately societal factors impact the healing process.

- **In 2001, only 14% of the women we interviewed had jobs in the marketplace**, and many of these women are not paid for long periods of time. Before the war, 70% of these same women had jobs.
- All the women interviewed considered it very difficult or close to impossible for women to get a job.
- Very few micro-credit programs have reached women, some of which also demand securities that are inaccessible to ordinary women. On the other hand, most women did not have a business plan, and today there really is no market for the products they might produce because people do not have money to buy things. In countries in transition from a planned economy, additional measures are needed.
- Lack of job opportunities for women throws them back into total economic dependence on men — a risky situation in post-war societies with increased domestic violence.

- There has been inadequate support of women to help them get a job and become self-sufficient.
- The fact that there have not been women in economic and political decision-making positions has hampered the rebuilding process for women.
- The privatisation process is fraught with stumbling blocks for women. They need information on how to avoid being cheated out of their rights.

THE POST-WAR HEALING IS INTIMATELY AFFECTED BY THE REBUILDING PROCESS

Our data illustrate the influence of societal rebuilding on the healing process. The decisions on the macro (political) level directly affect people's chances to rebuild their lives, and it affects the healing process. This has been shown again and again in this study. The failure of the joint governmental institutions in BiH to function effectively and to put in place necessary (economic) reforms, as well as the failure of the Croat government to develop the Vukovar and Eastern Slavonia area economically, is a source of intense anger and despair.

Also, other aspects have influenced the healing negatively, such as society's failure to restore law and order and failing to address the issue of war criminals. This has left people feeling unsafe.

- Women in all the entities feel abandoned by their governments. Their central and local governments have not provided the basic support people expected and have not supported them psychologically. This sense of abandonment contributes to feelings of despair and depression that are not conducive to healing.
- Society has not dealt adequately with war criminals, and this leads to fear and uneasiness among people. There were reports in BiH that people do not dare talk freely about the people who committed atrocities in the camps or in society as their lives can be at risk.

- The inability of the respective governments to attract investments and restart the economy is the source of bitter resentment. The severe unemployment situation in BiH and in Vukovar after the war robs women of their hope that they shall be able to rebuild their lives. **Besides palpable existential stress, there are signs of a post-war depression and a stalling of the healing process.**
- The structural adjustment plans have seriously impaired the chance for older people to rebuild a life for themselves. Also, the new costs for going to university blocks many gifted students from studying. All such measures contribute to despair and depression.
- Young people want to leave the country because they see no future when they cannot get a job after finishing school. It creates alienation and blocks healing. It is a serious indication of the failure of government to handle post-war economic reconstruction.
- The post-war reconstruction period is a critical time to ensure women's full participation at all levels of society. The laws and institutions put in place at this time will have influence long into the future. The failure of the international community and of local governments to put a gender program in place from the beginning has seriously disadvantaged women in BiH. The effect is palpable in the despair expressed by women about their situation.

THE SUPPORT OFFERED AT WOMEN'S CENTERS IS EFFECTIVE

Healing in a situation where the whole of society is in chaos after an ethnic war is a more difficult process than when the social support system is intact. In the post-war setting, many women are cut off from friends and family, and they do not have people they feel they can trust. Therefore special measures are needed. Women in BiH and in Vukovar cannot meet their friends in a café as easily as the men do. Instead they often are restricted to their apartments, which can

become a very oppressive situation when you have to handle your war traumas.

- Our study shows how important it is to offer women a chance to rebuild their trust and emotional support systems. Women's centers provide this opportunity.
- Many women describe the women's centers as "*a light in the darkness.*" They see them as oases, where they found comfort during the stressful war and post-war period. It helped them cope with their difficult situation.
- To heal, women need a community setting where they can share their traumatic experiences, where they can rebuild trust, and where they are met with a warm, understanding atmosphere. Inger Agger concludes in a study from the end of the war that: "*The greatest benefit of the programmes seems to be their capacity to create a new social network in which beneficiaries can get human contact, care and empathy. These qualities, which mostly are related to the environment and atmosphere by the staff, seem to be the basic 'healing factors.'*"⁴³ This study confirms the importance of the social network, but it also underlines the specific importance of the different programs offered.
- **The psychosocial support programs led by local women (who have received special training) have been very effective for women in the post-war setting.** The psychosocial support groups provide women with a safe place where they can talk about their problems, where they learn that they are not alone with their problems, where they feel accepted and supported, and where they can learn how to cope with their problems in a better way. This has had a deep healing effect on their traumatic wounds from the war.
- It is evident that the centers have helped women to process their traumatic experiences. The women **in the comparison group who have not had this chance have less reduction in all aspects of their post-traumatic stress reactions five years after the war** (see Figure 4, p. 28).

In the comparison group as of 2001:

45% still have severe flashback reactions.

Their survival guilt has increased rather than decreased.

Their irritability with children and others is as high as during the war.

Their psychosomatic reactions are as strong as at the end of the war.

Their feeling of numbing is even greater than at the end of the war.

- Also, **existential stress has been more difficult to handle for women outside the centers** (see Figure 5, p. 31). While there is some reduction in existential stress caused by the lack of economic and societal restructuring for those women who come to the centers, there is no reduction in the comparison group. Instead, there often is an increase.

In the comparison group as of 2001:

feelings of helplessness has increased rather than decreased;

they more often feel that life is over;

they feel more humiliated and more emotionally exhausted;

they feel as vulnerable as at the end of the war; and

the feelings that years of their lives have been stolen are as strong as when war ended.

- For around 20% of women with severe flashbacks and other post-traumatic stress symptoms, the psychosocial group approach is not sufficient to handle their traumatic symptoms. More professional psychological help is needed. This, however, the local organizations often provided in one form or another. Such professionals can be a resource shared among several centers.
- Quite a few women develop psychosomatic stress problems during and after the war, such as headaches, neck pain, and high blood pressure. Activities directed at relieving tensions in the body are thus important to include in the center programs, such as Qi Gong, massage, and relaxation exercises.

- **Women centers also function as an important empowerment setting for women** where they can rebuild their strength and self-esteem. **The chance to study** and learn new skills is highly valued by women in the post-war period because it helps them sustain their hope for a better future. It also takes their minds off their other problems, and the support from the other group participants enhances the healing process.
- The centers often also offer **job training**, which is an important way to help women become more self-sustaining. In a post-war society, where many women are widowed, the opportunity to develop job skills is essential. The women who took part in these programs had very positive experiences resulting from their time in the groups. There also was a strong sense of commitment and solidarity among the participants, and they often processed their daily problems within the group.
- The complicated legal maze in the post-war society makes **legal assistance for women an intrinsic part of the support program**. There was extensive use of these services, and women had a chance to understand and claim their rights, which they would not otherwise have been able to do.
- **Medical support** during the war and during the early post-war period was important for women, as the public resources were limited. The free cancer tests that were offered to women during the early post-war years filled an important function.
In BiH today, there are many women who are without medical benefits because of high unemployment, and thus their health may again be in jeopardy.
- The staff at the centers are amazing in their roles. Our observations strongly support the idea that *"Self-empowerment is a means of counteracting victimization."*⁴⁴
The staff also become important role models for the beneficiaries and they learn coping skills from them.
- The Kvinna till Kvinna model builds on the idea that the local women are in charge, as

they know the practical, social, and emotional circumstances in the area. Our results confirm that this model has been working well. The evaluations of the centers and the services they provide are extremely positive.

WOMEN ARE IMPORTANT ACTORS IN REBUILDING. THEY MUST BE INVOLVED FROM PLANNING TO IMPLEMENTATION

“A definition of reconstruction that emphasizes macro-processes tend to exclude and obscure the local efforts of war-affected women,” Nguyen-Gillham notes.⁴⁵ This is a serious omission.

We found that, with some initial aid, women can become central actors in the rebuilding of civil society in war-torn societies. In fact, the goals of social reconstruction and post-war development cannot be fully accomplished without the participation of women.

- This study highlights the fact that **women are an abundant, motivated, and potent resource in post-war society**. The professional, warm, and caring way that these centers are run by the local women is truly impressive, as is the healing process and the empowerment process they foster.
- The local women who run these centers perform an important reconstruction task on the grassroots level, helping to restore trust and social connections, a critical process in the post-war state.
- After taking part in the activities at the centers, many women felt ready to volunteer their services in other parts of society. Healing released power.
- The multidimensional empowerment and growth experienced by the beneficiaries at the women’s centers illustrates that, if allowed to take part, women can be an important resource for rebuilding.
- For quite a few women, the opportunity actively to combat the negative effects of the

war, for example by starting NGOs that developed into women’s centers or by working in a center, was a healing experience in itself.

- *“Knowing how to read the female dimension in humanitarian crises and draw the right conclusions from it, can render our interventions much more efficient and infinitely more humane,”* Emma Bonino, the European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, notes.⁴⁶

Not only seeing the “victims” but the potential actors is one important way of reading the female dimension.

POST-WAR STRESS ON THE FAMILY AND SPECIAL GROUPS

The family in BiH is often an extended family with several generations living together. The family ties are very strong, and thus what happens to one member influences the others directly. The families living in BiH and in Vukovar were often torn apart during the war, and this created much pain. Family members leaving the country during or after the war also broke up close-knit families. Multiple stresses affected the families:

- Men did not get the help they needed to process their war traumas, and this omission directly influenced women and children. There are frequent reports of a negative cycle of drinking and domestic abuse that has destroyed many families. There are indications that in many cases **war moved into the family**.
- There are many spontaneous comments from women that Bosnian society is ruled by men in a “macho” society. While not a new phenomenon, there seems to have been a **strong increase in domestic violence during and after the war**.
- Mixed marriages seem to be one of the victims of the war, with much personal trauma.
- Young people have lost an important part of their childhood. They feel robbed of some-

thing valuable, and they do not feel hopeful about their chances for employment. **Thus a majority of young people plan to leave the country**, leading to further losses for their families.

- Many young people feel alienated, and therefore **many young people have become involved with drugs** since the war. This is a serious problem that also reflects loss of hope for a better future.
- There were alarming reports that illiteracy rates may be rising because some parents are not able to send their children to school regularly for lack of money to buy clothes, for transportation, etc. Also, studies at the university are now beyond many gifted students because the fees are too high for the parents to afford them.
- Elderly people have often been devastated by the war. Some people have experienced two wars, and this added burden has produced too much psychic stress for them to handle.
- **Because of the reduction in pensions, many elderly people live below the poverty line.** They often cannot afford to buy their medications and thus risk dying prematurely. They also do not have money to buy glasses, so they cannot read, or watch television. The dismantling of the safety net because of the structural adjustment plans is a source of bitter disappointment.

WOMEN AND POLITICS

For women to be fully integrated in the democratic society, they need to be involved with what is going on in society and feel a sense of commitment to influence the decisions. In post-war societies there is often disgust at the politics that led up to the war, and this is clearly the case among the women we interviewed.

- The women we interviewed in BiH have a negative attitude to politics and thus leave politics to men. There were lots of spontaneous comments that they are not informed

about politics. This creates problems, as they then will not try to get their message across in elections or in different forms of lobbying activities.

- The women we interviewed in BiH and in Vukovar were extremely disappointed in their own governments, but as long as they do not use politics to channel their disappointment it will not reach their respective governments.
- **92% of the women we interviewed felt that their governments did not address issues that are important to women.**
- **84% of the women we interviewed did not think society had dealt adequately with the perpetrators of war crimes**, and many expressed upset about the fact that they were walking around freely. However, there was some difference in how they defined war criminals.
- Many women spontaneously expressed during the interviews that they do not feel safe in the BiH society.
- While a majority of women we interviewed think that the War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague has created some justice, we found that the attitude varied considerably in different entities because of different information perspectives.
- **Most women expressed a wish to give some testimony to the world about the atrocities that they have been exposed to during the war.** They are, however, worried about witness protection with such a process.
- Many of the women we interviewed express fear of another ethnic conflict.
- The majority of women say that a rebuilding of trust between the ethnic groups is possible, but that it will take a long time.

THE RETURN PROCESS

The right to return was guaranteed in the Dayton Peace Accords, but for a long period the nationalist leaderships (on many levels) blocked this process because they did not want minorities to return to areas that had been ethnically cleansed.

People were also for a long time too scared to return, but now the return process has picked up and has been accelerated by a law, instigated by the OHR, that mandated claiming of former homes before the end of 2000. The claims lead to evictions and thus exacerbated the anxieties in society.

- During the return process, free legal counseling is more important than ever; there are a multitude of legal questions that arise during this process. For women to know their right and to claim their right, they need counsel.
- **Single-women households are discriminated against in the rebuilding programs** because of a procedure that allows a male village representative to list the houses to be rebuilt. With such a procedure the single-woman households end up last on the list.
- The rebuilding programs that demand homeowners' labor often disadvantage single-woman households.
- The curriculum in the schools is different in different entities – even to the point of using different alphabets, and this creates problems for families with children to return.
- Some local governments try to scare people from returning. They tell people that the lesson of the last years is that the different ethnicities should live separately.

SUSTAINABILITY

Some of the projects we studied have provided services for years; some are relatively new. They all have the human and professional potential to carry on into the next phase in BiH civil society. At present, however, they are dependent on international support because local governments do not have proper resources. In the present economic situation, the centers have difficulty charging for the services because most women do not have proper resources.

Most centers are trying to open up a dialogue with local governments about the possibility of economic support. Some have been offered free housing, and there has been acknowledgement of the important role these centers play. Even if there has seldom been any chance for other forms of economic support, it is at least a beginning.

Things are **worse now than at the end of the war.**

I am loosing my strength. It has been such an uphill battle for so long. The only thing that keeps me going is the other women at the center.

WIDOW FROM SREBRENICA LEFT WITH FOUR SMALL CHILDREN

CHAPTER 11

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL DONOR COMMUNITIES

- *Post-war reconstruction needs to be funded and planned with a long-term time frame to ensure sustainable progress.*
Five years after the war, the return process in BiH is now accelerating, but it is filled with stumbling blocks and people are falling in the cracks. Four years of war and five years of continued hardship have brought people in BiH to the breaking point. *Now is not the time for the international community to withdraw its support.*
- It is important to realize that *the way in which the rebuilding process is handled will intimately influence people's chances for healing.* To overcome their war traumas, people must be able to earn money so they can rebuild their lives or else they end up in despair. Also before they can start to feel hopeful for the future, people need to feel safe and to be assured that war criminals will be penalized.
- During post-war reconstruction often three times as many jobs are created for men as for women. There is a need in post-war societies to include *a wide variety of programs that promote economic solutions for women.* It is important to support the self-sufficiency of women in the vulnerable post-war period and also help them avoid the poverty trap.

- *Recovery assistance must contribute to a process that addresses the psychic damage of all parts of the population.* While the positive effect from psychosocial support was impressive for women, the negative effect of failing to address the traumatic stress of men in BiH is affecting women negatively, with marked increase in domestic violence.
- *Women need to be part of the planning of relief/rebuilding activities from the start* to avoid the problems we have seen in BiH where women's issues have been sidelined. Examples of issues to be considered include *gender-desegregated data for post-war planning and adjustment of rebuilding programs* (for destroyed houses) to take single woman households into account (for example with quotas).
- Many women and children are today without healthcare benefits due to the high unemployment rate. It is important to find a health care system that is not so closely tied to employment.
- There is an urgent need to find a common curriculum that can be used in the whole country in order to solve, not least, the problems of returnee children.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS IN BIH

- *It is important for women to be part of the decision-making process in post-war reconstruction planning at the governmental level.*
- Governmental inaction relative to coordinated efforts for effective legislation among the entities is directly hurting the citizens, not least because of faltering economic recovery. Due to present massive unemployment, everyone, but women in particular, are threatened by poverty. *There is an urgent need for legislative economic reforms that will make investments possible and thus create new job opportunities.*
- To help the victims of domestic violence, governments should be required to put in place education and training for courts, police, and other agencies handling domestic violence cases so that the new law(s) can have some tangible effect.
- *In war-torn societies it is important not to be limited by the clinical definition of post-traumatic stress symptoms but invoke a broad social concept that includes for consideration and treatment also existential stress and vulnerability factors.* Trauma support thus also includes, and may over time evolve into psychosocial support.
- The authority for implementing recovery programs for women needs to be delegated to local women's groups that have relevant knowledge about local conditions.
- Women's centers with varied programs of trauma support and skills training are an effective way to empower women and to help them overcome their traumas.
- "The centrality of paid work to women's re-organisation of their post-war lives can not be overemphasized."⁴⁷ *Different kinds of job creation programs for women need to be top priority* in order to help them provide for their families and regain their hope for the future. It also helps them promote their self-sufficiency and avoid the poverty trap.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND NGOs INVOLVED IN THE REBUILDING PROCESS

- Programs for “micro-credits” had not been widely dispersed among BiH women, we found, in spite of several such programs. However, *there are certain built-in problems with “micro-credits”*: 1) they presuppose that women have a business idea, which we found to be infrequent in BiH; 2) they presuppose that there is a functioning market where women can sell the goods they produce, which is not the case in BiH; and 3) some of the programs presuppose securities that most women cannot put up. *Thus, there is a need for economic initiatives other than “micro-credits” in countries in transition from a planned to a market economy.*
- As there is a marked increase in domestic violence in post-war societies, *there is a need for programs that support the victims of domestic abuse, that lobby governments for preventive actions, and that provide training for institutions to handle abuse cases.*
- There is a need for *information to teenage girls and young women about the risks of lucrative job offers in foreign countries, as trafficking is a serious problem in post-war countries.*

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation – Women’s Empowerment Projects

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation (KtK) was initiated by Swedish women and the peace movement in Sweden in 1993. We work to support women and to strengthen women’s positions in areas affected by war and conflict, as well as in post-war societies in transition.

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation adjusts its support to the social, political, and economic situations in the specific country, as well as to the relevant phase (war, cease fire, or peace process). In times of conflict and early post-conflict periods, emergency aid, psychosocial support, and trauma treatment have to be offered to give people a chance to start to heal and to build strength to believe in the future. Still, emergency aid has to be followed up by, and combined with, long-term support.

Women need empowerment in terms of strengthening their self-esteem, further education and job training. They also need knowledge about women’s human rights and support to be able to take part in the institution-building and in the reconstruction of a true democratic society. Working towards sustainable development, The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation offers support to local organisations on a long-term basis. We focus on local women’s initiatives, long-term engagement, empowerment of women, and low-key projects that start small.

We have supported initiatives such as mobile health service, women’s centres providing trauma support groups, study programs, job-training, centres for free legal aid, women’s seminars and conferences about gender issues, media programs focussed on women, initiatives to extend the number of women in politics, initiatives to address problems of domestic violence and trafficking in women, and also initiatives about creating regional networks for women NGOs in different parts of West Balkans.

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation model is one of co-operation based on mutual respect and close working contact with local organisations. We do not implement projects ourselves. Our local co-operating partners identify problems and formulate measures, based on their competence and knowledge of local needs and situations. With our support they develop the project plan and the funding application. Transfer of know-how takes place through close and continuous contacts between our co-ordinators and the partner organisations, a process that also leads to transparency. As the projects are local initiatives, they are more sustainable. The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation contributes financial help, supervision, guidance, and developmental and organizational support. We also serve as an important intermediary in the establishment of women’s networks, on local, regional, and international levels.

Some key concepts that guide our work are: Mutual Respect, Transfer of Know-how, Networking, Long-term Support, Sustainable Projects, Low Key, Local Focus of Control, and Transparency.

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation also works to influence the international community in mainstreaming their activities and to introduce a gender perspective on peace negotiations and the peace-building/reconstruction process. For this purpose, we produce a series of reports with a gender perspective on the peace-building and reconstruction process.

We have recently started to support projects also in Israel, Palestine, and in the Caucasus region (Georgia).

Appendix 1

WHERE THE INTERVIEWS TOOK PLACE

The interviews took place at the following sites:

The Women's Center in Nevesinje, RS
The Women's Center in Blagaj, Federation
The Women's Center Zunic, West Mostar
Mobile team—Mostar region
Center Leader Zalic Center, Mostar
Psychological Center, Tuzla
Prijateljice, Tuzla
Prijateljice Psychosocial Unit
Jezevac Refugee Settlement
The Women's Center in Vukovar, Croatia
Most Women's Center in Visegrad, RS
The Center of Legal Assistance for Women, Zenica

A note about Vukovar and the problems in that area

The main focus in this study is on the healing process in Bosnia, but we were interested also to find out more about the recovery problems in Vukovar.

The war was over already in 1992 in most parts of Croatia, and thus a substantial rebuilding of the society has already taken place. However, Vukovar was particularly badly damaged by the war and most of the houses were turned to rubble. Eastern Slavonia, where Vukovar is situated, and the Knin area were occupied by Serb forces and governed by the authorities of RS Krajina. The Knin/Krajina area was recaptured by the Croatian army in 1995 while Eastern Slavonia, by international agreement (12 November 1995), was placed under UN protection (UNTAES) until being returned to Croatia in 1997-1998.

While the rest of Croatia has had time to recover from the war, this has not been the case in Vukovar. When Eastern Slavonia was returned

to Croatia, the Croatian mood seems to have been to wait for the local Serb population to move away before starting to rebuild Vukovar and to invest in the economic revival of the region. However, because the local Serbs have lived their entire life there, they have not moved away. The result is that people are living in a city that is only marginally rebuilt, where the Croatian population that fled during the war is hesitating to come back, where the economy is in total shambles, and where unemployment is as vast as it is in Bosnia. The few jobs that are available go to the Croats. This makes the situation still worse for the local Serb families who do not want to leave their home town.

Appendix 2

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WOMEN INTERVIEWED

We interviewed a total of 89 women. However three interviews were not included in the statistical analysis as those women had not been in Bosnia/Croatia during the war.

| Age | | Marital Status | |
|---------|-----|----------------|-----|
| 18-25 | 5% | Married | 58% |
| 26-50 | 72% | Unmarried | 14% |
| over 50 | 23% | Divorced | 12% |
| | | Widow | 16% |

86% of the women had children

Before the war 70% of the women lived in a city, 30% in the countryside.

School background:

| | |
|--------------------------|-----|
| Primary school (or less) | 24% |
| Secondary School | 51% |
| Beyond Secondary school | 25% |

Present housing situation:

| | |
|--|-----|
| Could stay in my home | 29% |
| Been able to move back to my original home | 22% |
| Have been relocated and think I can stay | 20% |
| Still risk dislocation | 29% |

Living conditions during the war: (N.B. women can fit into one or more categories below)

| | |
|--|-----|
| Living under siege | 57% |
| Living as displaced within the country | 58% |
| Living in refugee camp | 8% |
| Refugee in other country | 15% |

Traumatizing events: (N.B. women can have experienced more than one category.)

| | |
|--|-----|
| Seeing a family member or close relative be killed/seriously wounded | 16% |
| Seeing someone else killed | 36% |
| In danger of being killed yourself | 67% |
| Seeing women being sexually abused | 4%* |
| Your child(-ren) wounded or killed | 23% |
| Your husband missing | 7% |
| Your husband dead | 7% |
| Spending time in concentration camp | 4% |
| Being physically hurt or mistreated yourself. | 9% |

Ethnic background:

| | |
|------------------------|------|
| Bosniac (Muslim) | 43% |
| Bosnian Serb or Serb | 37% |
| Bosnian Croat or Croat | 13% |
| Mixed/ Other | 7%** |

* The reason for this formulation was that earlier research had shown that women were reluctant to confirm that they had themselves been exposed to rape and thus this is a way of assessing something close.

** Some people distinctly disliked the categorization and thus opted for other/mixed.

Appendix 3

THE ENGLISH VERSION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE
(WHICH WAS TRANSLATED INTO BOSNIAN) AND WHICH CONTAINS
THE MAIN QUESTIONS IN THE INTERVIEW. (REDUCED IN SIZE)

QUESTIONNAIRE about HOW YOUR LIFE HAS BEEN AFFECTED BY THE WAR AND THE HELP YOU GOT TO COPE WITH IT

We are asking you to please fill out this form because we want to learn more from the women of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia about their plight during and after the war.

We are the Swedish organization, The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation. We have been involved in supporting women all over the former Yugoslavia since 1993, but we think we can learn more from you about what kind of support you need. That way we hope to be able to improve our programs to empower women.

After a war it takes a long time for people to heal and it takes a long time to rebuild society.

There are many wounds inside people that you do not see. We therefore would like to ask you about your war time experiences, how you have coped with them and what has been helpful to you in your struggle to go on with your life.

You do not have to give your name. You can be anonymous. Your answers will be processed by two Swedish researchers and handled confidentially.

All the answers will contribute to a report that will be distributed internationally and in the former Yugoslavia. Hopefully it can lead to better support for women here and for women in other war-torn areas.

We are very grateful if you try to answer all the questions that fit your situation.

There may be questions that you have to skip as it relates to issues you have not encountered. Just put N/A (not applicable) over that question and continue with the rest.

Also do not worry about the sometimes strange numbering of the questions, as they relate to the coding system.

Thank you in advance for helping us to understand your situation better.

2. How old are you? 1 2 3

3. Are you married? (Put an X in the box that fits your situation)

- 1 Married
- 2 Unmarried
- 3 Widow
- 4 Divorced

4. Do you have any children? 1 Yes 2 No If yes – how many children?

5. Where did you live before the war? 1 City 2 Rural area

6. Have you had to move to another type of area? 1 Yes 2 No

7. How are your living conditions now? (Put an X in the box that fits your situation)

- 1 I could stay in my home all through the war
- 2 I have been able to move back to my original home
- 3 Have been relocated and think I can stay there
- 4 Still risk dislocation

8. What kind of wartime stress did you experience in terms of living conditions?

(Put an X in the box that fits your situation)

- | | | |
|----------------------------|--|-----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | Living under siege | How long? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | Being expelled from your house—living as displaced | How long? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | Living in refugee camp | How long? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | Living as a refugee in other country | How long? |

9–11. What kind of traumatic wartime stress did you experience? Check **all the boxes that fit!**

- | | | | |
|----------------------------|---|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | Seeing a family member or close relative be killed or seriously wounded | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | Seeing someone else killed | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | In danger of being killed yourself | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | Seeing women being sexually abused | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | Your child (-ren) wounded or killed | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6 | Your husband missing | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7 | Your husband dead | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 8 | Spending time in concentration camp | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 9 | Being physically hurt or mistreated yourself | 12. <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 |

13. Were you betrayed by neighbours/friends from other ethnic groups during the war?

- 1 Yes 2 No

14. Did you lose your home, furniture and other valuable goods?

- 1 Yes 2 No

15. How severe were your economic losses?

- 1 Not so heavy losses
 2 Rather heavy losses
 3 Lost everything

Wartime experiences lead to many losses and to serious stress that affects everyone. Did you after the war (spring of 1996) experience any of the following feelings/reactions:

Circle the intensity that fits best:

| | Not at all | A little | Quite some | A lot/Strongly | | | | |
|--|------------|----------|------------|----------------|---|---|---|---|
| 16. Nightmares | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 17. Anxiety/feeling nervous | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 18. Flashbacks of scenes from the war | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 19. Depression | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 20. Feeling like withdrawing from people | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 21. Feelings of anger and rage | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 22. Feeling numb/empty inside | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 23. Feelings of betrayal and distrust | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 24. Mourning the death of close family/relatives | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 25. Feeling guilty for being alive when so many were not | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 26. Problems to sleep | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 27. Irritable with the children/others | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 28. Wishes to retaliate | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 29. Feelings of helplessness | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 30. Headaches | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 31. Feeling that life is over | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 32. Crying easily | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 33. Mourning the loss of your home | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 34. Feeling humiliated | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 35. Hate towards the ethnic group that inflicted this pain on you | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 36. Feeling exhausted emotionally | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 37. Feeling that years of your life were stolen from you | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 38. Feeling vulnerable | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Any other reactions that were prominent

.....

Are some of these feelings/reactions still with you today – early summer of 2001?

Circle the intensity that fits best:

| | Not at all | A little | | | Quite some | | A lot/Strongly | |
|--|------------|----------|---|---|------------|---|----------------|---|
| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 39. Nightmares | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 40. Anxiety/ feeling nervous | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 41. Flashbacks of scenes from the war | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 42. Depression | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 43. Feeling like withdrawing from people | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 44. Feelings of anger and rage | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 45. Feeling numb/empty inside | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 46. Feelings of betrayal and distrust | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 47. Mourning the death of close family/relatives | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 48. Feeling guilty for being alive when so many were not | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 49. Problems to sleep | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 50. Irritable with the children/others | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 51. Wishes to retaliate | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 52. Feelings of helplessness | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 53. Headaches | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 54. Feeling that life is over | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 55. Crying easily | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 56. Mourning the loss of your home | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 57. Feeling humiliated | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 58. Hate towards the ethnic group that inflicted this pain on you | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 59. Feeling exhausted emotionally | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 60. Feeling that years of your life were stolen from you | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 61. Feeling vulnerable | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Any other reactions that are prominent today?

.....

62. Can you control your memories now so that they do not tyrannize you? 1 Yes 2 No

63. Do you have a sense that you are in control of your life again? 1 Yes 2 No

And now a few questions about your family:

64. How have the wartime experiences impacted on your family life? (Put an X in the box that fits your situation)

- 1 Not impacted
- 2 Changed negatively
- 3 Destroyed my family

65. How has the war experiences impacted on your husband? (If you are married)

- 1 Not impacted
- 2 Changed negatively
- 3 Destroyed his life

66. If you are now the head of the household, how have you been able to adjust to that?

- 1 Is working out quite well
- 2 Has been rather difficult to adjust to
- 3 Is very difficult to handle

67. How have the wartime experiences impacted on your children? (If you have children)

- 1 Not impacted
- 2 Been quite stressful
- 3 Left a serious mark

68. How have the war impacted on the older generation in your family?

- 1 Not impacted
- 2 Changed negatively
- 3 Destroyed their lives

69. Do you have any handicapped persons in your household?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

70. How is your economic standard now compared to before the war?

- 1 Same as before
- 2 Lower
- 3 Much lower

Now we would like to ask you about the support you have come across:

71. Did you get any support/help in the aftermath of the war? 1 Yes 2 No

72–74. If your answer is yes can you please indicate what kind of help by marking all of the boxes that fit:

- 1 Support from family and friends
- 2 Support from government (to rebuild your house etc)
- 3 Economic support (micro credit) by international organizations
- 4 Help at a women's centre/ women's project (more specifics in next question)
- 5 Legal advice
- 6 Help to get a job
- 7 Medical services
- 8 Other.....

75–77. What kind of help did you get from the women's centre/ women's project:

- 1 Possibility to come and meet with other women in same situation
- 2 Taking part in a trauma support group
- 3 Taking part in activity group (like knitting) where you also talk about your problems
- 4 Study courses to learn new things
- 5 Job training to develop job skills
- 6 Medical check-ups
- 7 Other.....

78. Did taking part in a (trauma) support group at a women's centre/ women's project help you feel better?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

| Can you rate what was helpful from: | Did not help | Helped somewhat | Very helpful |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 79. Belonging to a group of people who understood and accepted me | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| 80. Learning that I am not the only one who had my type of problems | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| 81. A chance to talk about my feelings | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| 82. Learning that stress symptoms after wartime experiences is normal | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| 83. The group became something of a family to me—learned to trust them | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| 84. Learning to handle my stress symptoms in a better way | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| 85. Being able to help other group members in their struggle | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |

86. Did taking part in a study group help you feel better? 1 Yes 2 No

What did you study?.....

| What was important to you? | Not important | Relatively important | Very important |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 87. Better chance to get a job | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| 88. Better self-esteem | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| 89. Meeting with others in the group | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| 90. Having something that took my mind off my problems | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| 91. Interesting to learn new things | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |

92. Did taking part in job training help you feel better? 1 Yes 2 No

What kind of job training did you participate in?.....

| What was important to you? | Not important | Relatively important | Very important |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 93. Better chance to get a job | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| 94. Better self-esteem | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| 95. Meeting with others in the group | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| 96. Having something that took my mind off my problems | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| 97. Good to learn new skills | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |

98. Did you have a profession/were you working before the war? 1 Yes 2 No

99. How many years did you go to school? 1 2 3

100. Do you have a job now? 1 Yes 2 No

101. How difficult is it to get a job where you live?

- 1 Not so difficult
- 2 Very difficult
- 3 Close to impossible

102–104. When you now look back at it – What has helped you most to overcome the traumatic experiences from the war?

Mark the three most helpful things in the boxes below.

- 1 Talking to friends or partner
- 2 The support from my family
- 3 Taking part in a support group or other group at a women’s centre/project
- 4 Taking part in a study group at a women’s centre/project
- 5 Taking part in job training at a women’s centre/project
- 6 Economic support to start a business
- 7 Help to get a job
- 8 Funds to repair my home
- 9 The thought that perpetrators will eventually be put on trial
- 10 Being involved in a group working together (to help others, change politics)
- Other

105–107. What kind of support would you have needed and did not get? (Mark all the boxes that fit)

- 1 A trauma support group
- 2 A chance to learn new things (study group)
- 3 Job training
- 4 Economic support to start a business
- 5 Help to get a job
- 6 Funds to repair my home
- 7 That society put the perpetrators on trial
- 8 Being involved in a group working together (to help others, change politics)
- 9 Other.....

108. Has religion played any part in your recovery after the war? 1 Yes 2 No

109. How would you characterize your life after the war?

- 1 Another kind of suffering
- 2 A difficult time but improving
- 3 A new beginning

110. Have you been able to re-construct a network of friends? 1 Yes 2 No

111. What are the main obstacles to your recovery from all the losses during the war?

.....
.....

112. Can you feel hopeful for the future? 1 Yes 2 No

And lastly some questions about society:

113. Has the governmental agencies helped you handle your problems after the war?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

114. Have you felt supported or abandoned by your government after the war?

- 1 Supported
- 2 Abandoned

115. How has the reductions in pensions, health care and so on impacted on you and your family?

- 1 Not impacted
- 2 Somewhat negative impact
- 3 Very negative impact

116. Has the international community provided some help to handle your problems?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

117. Has the slow economic recovery after the war impacted on your efforts to rebuild your life?

- 1 Not impacted
- 2 Somewhat negative impact
- 3 Very negative impact

118. Are there enough possibilities for women to get a job?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

119. Have you come across any job creation plan or micro-credits to help you start a business?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

120. Are there enough possibilities for women to be elected and influence politics?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

121. Do you think that your government is addressing the issues of women?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

122. Do you have any worries about development of religious fundamentalism?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

123. Do you feel society has dealt adequately with the perpetrators of war crimes?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

124. How do you feel about the fact that so many perpetrators of war crimes are walking around free in society?

- 1 Very upset
- 2 Rather upset
- 3 Do not care (any more)

125. Has the war crimes tribunal in the Hague created some justice (albeit late)?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

126. If your answer was no -- what other measures would you like to see?

- 1 A truth-commission where the atrocities and the perpetrators can be exposed.
- 2 Testimonies in all entities where people can tell the world what they have suffered.
- 3 Other:.....

127. Are you sometimes afraid that there will be another ethnic conflict?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

It would also be helpful for us to know something about your own ethnic background:

128. I am : (Put an X in the box that fits your situation)

- 1 Bosniac
- 2 Bosnian Croat
- 3 Bosnian Serb
- 4 Croat
- 5 Serb
- 6 Mixed
- 7 Other

129. Is there some way to build back the trust between the different ethnic groups?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

If your answer was yes—how do you think it could be done?

.....

.....

Thank you a lot for taking of your time to answer all these questions!

If you have some questions to us or want to talk to us we will be around at the centre/project a few days.

Appendix 4

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

Beijing Platform for Action: A declaration adopted at the Beijing Conference on Women, 1995, which states the agenda for bringing the world's women into their rightful position in all aspects of community life.

ECHO: European Community Humanitarian Office, an agency within the EU with the mandate to handle humanitarian issues.

EMDR: Eye Movement Desensitisation and Re-processing. A technique developed by Francine Shapiro that in many evaluations has proven successful in ridding trauma victims of flashbacks and other disturbing trauma symptoms.

ICG: International Crisis Group, a private multinational organization working on prevention, understanding, and management of conflicts worldwide. Political analysts based on the ground in crisis areas gather information and produce analytical reports with practical recommendations targeting international decision-makers.

IDP: Internally displaced person, i.e., a refugee within a war-torn or otherwise severely disrupted country.

IMF: International Monetary Fund, an international lending organisation.

NGO: Non-governmental organization.

Office of the High Representative (OHR): The international community's highest representative in Bosnia-Herzegovina with the mandate to implement the civilian part of the Dayton Peace Accords.

SAP: Structural Adjustment Programs, which are designed to reduce the expenses of governments, but which always hit hard on the civil population. It is often an IMF precondition for giving loans to countries.

SFOR: Stabilization force, a NATO-led international peacekeeping military force under UN mandate, stationed in Bosnia-Herzegovina since the Dayton Agreement.

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WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PROJECTS

Kvinna till Kvinna addresses the specific needs of women in areas affected by war and conflict. Kvinna till Kvinna co-operates with women's organisations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania, Israel/Palestine and Georgia/Caucasus.

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