



**Human Security for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century - Collection of students' papers**

Publishers

OSCE Mission to Serbia

Public Policy Research Center

Translation

Mirjana Stolić-Srdanov

Design

Milica Dervišević

Print

Jovšić Printing Centar doo, Belgrade

Copy

100

Belgrade, 2023

---

Human Security for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century -  
Collection of students' papers

---



---

# CONTENTS

---

PREFACE .....	7
WHERE IS THE INTERSECTION OF FEMICIDE AND THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN SECURITY IN SERBIA? .....	9
GENDER ASPECT OF SECURITY: THE ROLE OF SMALL ARMS IN FEMICIDE .....	21
MAINTAINING SCHOOL SAFETY AFTER THE MISUSE OF FIREARMS: EVALUATION OF ACTIONS TAKEN AFTER A MASS KILLING AT A PRIMARY SCHOOL IN BELGRADE .....	33



---

# PREFACE

---

In front of you is the seventh Student Paper Collection from a prize competition organised by the Svetlana Djurdjević Lukić Fund. With this initiative, the Public Policy Research Centre (“PPRC”) pays tribute to Svetlana Djurdjević Lukić, a human security expert and the PPRC co-founder, who has left a lasting mark in the area of public (security) policies. Svetlana Djurdjević Lukić (1963-2016) devoted her life to human security research and advocacy, aiming to understand and address the key challenges facing our society. Her dedicated work and efforts have left a profound imprint on security policies research. The prize competition is an opportunity for research on the subject of human security. Following in the footsteps of Svetlana Djurdjević Lukić, our aim is to motivate young authors to engage in research on security.

This year’s competition focuses on four key areas that represent the current challenges facing our society. Each of the topics aims to stimulate thought, research and action in the area of human security. In the wake of the immense tragedy at the Vladislav Ribnikar Primary School, we steered the competition towards the understanding and research of peer violence, gender-based violence, small arms and safety in schools. This year’s Student Paper Collection includes three papers that problematize these topics.

In her paper entitled *Where is the Intersection of Femicide and the Concept of Human Security in Serbia?*, Milica Oтовиć, an undergraduate student at the University of Belgrade Faculty of Security Studies, seeks to understand the concept of femicide from a human security perspective. By analysing secondary material, the author establishes connection between (mis)use of small arms and violence against women, arguing that the issue of violence against women primarily relates to the established unwanted behaviour patterns and that only a shift in the social narrative and perspective can raise awareness about this issue.

Tijana Bauer, a master’s student at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, focuses on a similar subject in her paper entitled *Gender Aspect of Security: The Role of Small Arms in Femicide*. The author provides an overview of statistical data on femicide, linking it to the cult of small arms possession and misuse in Serbia. In addition to the evident risk related to these weapons, the author argues that there is a deep cultural link between the cult of the gun and the notion of a woman as a man’s property. The

weak institutional frameworks governing these issues, as well as the way in which the media inform society about such cases, upholding the tradition of patriarchy further, are also identified.

*Maintaining School Safety after Misuse of Firearms: Evaluation of Action Taken after a Mass Killing at a Primary School in Belgrade* is the title of the paper written by Kristina Bosilj, a master's student at The London School of Economics and Political Science and the winner of the last year's prize competition. The paper takes the form of a policy brief aiming to promote human security. It analyses the actions taken after the mass killing at the Vladislav Ribnikar Primary School, focusing on the media impact and the disarmament issue. The author emphasises the many effects of media violence and suggests ways in which coverage of similar contents could be regulated. Regarding disarmament, the author acknowledges the social significance of the issue, in view of the proliferation of weapons in Serbia, and proposes a model for improving school safety through the implementation of technical security measures and a zero-tolerance violence policy.

The prize competition of the Svetlana Djurdjević Lukić Fund is more than an opportunity to gain recognition. It is an opportunity to impact change in society and policies through research. For that reason, we have encouraged undergraduate, specialist, master's and PhD students to submit papers and demonstrate their potential for seven years in a row. This is the seventh collection of students' papers published by the PPRC within the scope of activities of the Svetlana Djurdjević Lukić Fund and with the support of the Democratisation Department of the OSCE Mission to Serbia. We want to extend thanks to the OSCE Mission to Serbia that has given us continuous support and recognised the importance of encouraging students to develop their academic skills, take critical approach and gain insights into key threats to human security. The PPRC also wants to thank the jury, including Vladimir Bilandžić, PhD, Vanja Rokvić, PhD and Srdjan Korać, PhD.

Belgrade, December 2023

Svetlana Djurdjević Lukić Fund  
Filip Stojanović



---

# WHERE IS THE INTERSECTION OF FEMICIDE AND THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN SECURITY IN SERBIA?

---

**Milica OTOVIĆ\***, undergraduate student  
University of Belgrade Faculty of Security Studies

**Abstract:** *It took over three decades for the concept of femicide to gain recognition in the Serbian discourse. Initially, understanding the term was challenging, but today it is increasingly discussed and presented in the media and everyday conversations due to the prevalence of this phenomenon. The social structure and narrative, i.e. the social perception of femicide, plays a crucial role in understanding and positioning femicide in Serbia. The existence of violence, which femicide de facto is, is just one of the threats undermining human security. In analysing the high femicide rate in Serbia, reports of killings were considered, relevant risk factors were identified and a comparative data analysis was conducted. The presence and accessibility of firearms and their misuse in violence against women pose an additional threat, increasing the likelihood of fatal outcomes of violence. The issue of violence against women primarily concerns the established unwanted behaviour patterns. It is only the shift in the social narrative and perspective that can raise awareness about this issue and support the efforts of relevant authorities and professionals responsible for ensuring the individual and community safety.*

**Key words:** *femicide, violence, human security, gender equality, social narrative*

---

\*milicaotovic01@gmail.com

## Femicide as a Phenomenon

The term ‘femicide’ has only recently emerged in the public sphere, but it is still predominantly used within academic circles. In the media or everyday speech, alternative phrases with neutral or male-centric connotations are used to describe this concept. Examples include ‘fatal shootings of women’, ‘the killing of women’, ‘victimisation of women killings’ or even ‘manslaughter’ (Halilović, 2022:7). In various societies worldwide, femicide is also recognized as ‘dowry death’ (India) and ‘honour killing’ (Pakistan), ‘partner or spousal violence’, ‘murder with rape’, ‘the killing of prostitutes’, ‘female infanticide’ or ‘selective abortion’. Femicide also encompasses other deaths that, as indicated by forensic reports, result from women or girls being specifically targeted due to their sex (Milković, 2022:7 as cited in Laurent, 2013). A more recent definition of femicide is not limited to a strictly feminist perspective as it departs from the fact that “femicide is any killing of a female person” (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2008:2). Although femicide was not totally overlooked in the past, it had a different meaning in everyday discourse and was treated as just another gender-sensitive issue, which led to its *romanticisation* at some point.

Namely, as stated by Majda Halilović in the *Atlantic Initiative Newsletter*, femicide is a killing, but its main characteristic is that it is a **gender-based killing** resulting from gender-based violence (Halilović at al, 2022). In Serbia, femicide is still considered to be an extreme form of domestic violence, while its gender-related dimension, as the other side of this phenomenon, remains overshadowed. The International Human Rights System, on the other hand, has long put emphasis on the link between gender-based discrimination and gender-based violence, seeking to reduce and eliminate these phenomena as much as possible, as they are “a threat to human security”, as argued by Kadribašić in the Newsletter (2022:22).

## The Intersection of Human Security and Femicide

Shortly before the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) first promoted the concept of human security in its annual *Human Development Report 1994* (UNDP, 1994), Diana Russell, the originator of the term ‘femicide’, had brought attention to this 19<sup>th</sup>-century term that had previously fallen out of wider use by the public (2008). This term could be heard in Diana Russell’s presentation at the *International Tribunal on Crimes against Women* in Brussels, but could not be specifically and precisely defined (1977). Russell later redefined femicide as “the killing of females by males because they are female” (2008:26). Owing to her, this term has become a symbol of the ongoing struggle to liberate women from violence.

Violence is an important issue of human security and can be viewed as a distinct alternative to human security, as it impacts individuals at a personal level, arises from social relations and affects freedom from fear, scarcity and dignity (n.d.). Just like there is no universally accepted and agreed-upon definition of violence, there is also no generally accepted definition of femicide. However, research into violence over the past few decades has transitioned from a reductionist approach, which mainly understands violence in terms of physical injury, to a more comprehensive approach involving different manifestations of violence – direct and indirect, interpersonal and structural, physical, emotional, economic and others (n.d.). These steps have helped to explain femicide as one of the extreme forms of violence, securing it a place in the human security concept.

The existence of violence in any form is just one element that jeopardises human security. Human security in turn encompasses a much broader spectrum of factors that contribute to personal security, such as “respect for human rights, good governance, access to education and health care services, and the creation of conditions where every individual has the possibility to choose their own path and fulfil their potential” (CHS 2003:4).

A new doctrine for the implementation of the European Security Strategy, namely, the report entitled *A Human Security Doctrine for Europe* focuses on the capabilities required to address situations of severe physical insecurity, specifically ‘freedom from fear’, rather than on the full range of possibilities and instruments of the European foreign and security policies (2004:5). In the new global context, the security policy of the European Union should be based on human security, and not solely on state security. It is important here to distinguish between the concepts of human security and national security, as femicide is closely related to both, despite the fact that they are different objects of reference. According to the definition of the *United Nations Development Programme* (UNDP), the protection of individuals and communities, including the safeguarding of female lives in case of femicide, “secures their personal security which is an integral part of human security as a whole” (UNDP, 1994:84). On the other hand, it is the state, its integrity, sovereignty and stability that are protected under the national security concept. Acting with due diligence, the state has a duty to ensure protection of the overall human security domain (Dulić, 2006. as cited in Oberleitner, 2003). In other words, the state has an obligation to minimise all risk factors potentially leading to femicide by implementing its policies (Kovačević, 2019).

According to the Council of Europe *Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence* (the Istanbul Convention), gender-based violence against women means violence that *is directed against a woman because she*

*is a woman or that affects women disproportionately* (Konstantinović-Vilić, Petrušić, 2021:16). Violence against women is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

Additionally, gender-based violence is a phenomenon deeply rooted in gender inequalities, and is reflected primarily in disproportionate power of women and men in society, both in the public sphere (politics, economy) and in the sphere of private, intimate and family relations (Pešić, 2006). When speaking about our tradition and the traditions of other countries in the Western Balkans, it is evident that there was a major influence of the Ottoman culture, which contributed to prevalence of this inequality of power between men and women in our patriarchal culture. This created an environment characterised by male dominance, in which gender-based violence, including domestic violence, is a manifestation of this power within the community; the prevailing value models in this environment often tolerate, if not support, these manifestations of inequality.

Man attains a superior position over woman in an environment where he is perceived as a symbol of strength and power and only secondarily as the pillar and support of a small community, such as family. This clearly does not reflect an equal relationship in terms of gender. Man is still believed to have a duty of providing all of life's necessities, with family security being top priority. Therefore, it is no wonder that in Serbia, approximately 50% of households own firearms, both legal and illegal (Beker, Vilić 2022). This phenomenon is frequently explained as a consequence of war or as a traditional contribution to family security, which assertion is not corroborated by research. On the contrary, the research has not shown that firearm possession in one's home reduces the risk of potential threats. However, there is a shift, albeit very slow, towards the acceptance of values resulting from modernity, making the transformation of the system more difficult and uncertain. The once influential historical factors and the present character of social relations produce opposite effects, creating an imbalance between the spheres of the normative order and the protected values (Pešić, 2006). Therefore, it is essential to explain femicide so that every individual understands that it is an issue facing the entire society and that it still escapes normative definition but nonetheless affects human (ill)well-being.

In a society where the consequences of war are still visible, the firearm possession is explained as an act of security rather than a risk factor for escalation of violence. Also, femicide is usually not a single act of violence that occurs suddenly or unex-

pectedly. Quite opposite, it is a culmination of prolonged violence, escalating from discrimination to abuse, perpetrated by a man against a woman. Therefore, femicide is a complex social phenomenon that calls for a multidisciplinary approach and efforts of all community members so that the numbers of victims indicated in the available annual reports would finally start to decline (Spasić, Tadić, 2017).

The error lies in the fact that this phenomenon is *the least* examined through the gender-specific lens and is often equated with other known forms of violence and violent behaviours. Conflicts of responsibilities among relevant authorities, unequal engagement of stakeholders and lack of adequate assistance to families in coping with post-traumatic conditions they later experience are still persisting. **Violence is violence** and it is not justifiable regardless of the circumstances, as the abuser always has a choice, i.e. **can decide not to commit violence**. Further efforts should be made to deepen psychological, sociological and legal approaches to better understand why the femicide rate remains high despite progress in gender equality.

## THE FEMICIDE TRENDS IN THE PAST TWO DECADES: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF REPORTS

Annual analyses and final reports of the results are essential for research and monitoring of femicide developments. Comparative analysis of reports from different years can be beneficial in forecasting future results and, thus, help to improve prevention measures. In regards to femicide studies in this country, they indicate lack of government-commissioned analyses of this phenomenon and a scarcity of official and publicly accessible data on existing cases (Konstantinović-Vilić, Petrušić, 2021).

For the purposes of a comparative review, the data from three reports, dating from three different periods and prepared by Vedrana Lacmanović for the *Women against Violence* network are considered below:

- *Femicide – Killings of Women in Serbia, Quantitative and narrative annual report for 2010* (Lacmanović, 2011).
- *Femicide – Killings of Women in Serbia, Quantitative and narrative report January 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020* (Lacmanović, 2021).
- *Femicide – Killings of Women in Serbia, Quantitative and narrative report January 1, 2022 – June 30, 2022* (Lacmanović, 2022a).

Complete data covering the entire year is given in the reports for 2011 and 2021, whereas the last year's report shows semi-annual data for the period from January 1, 2022 through June 30, 2022. Only the data that is found in all three reports and relevant to this paper was taken into account, while the other data has been considered and is presented in the remainder of the paper. It should be noted that the availability of research data was limited at the time when it was collected from the media and through relevant authorities and that there may be cases that remained unknown to the general public. Highly likely, the data was more difficult to obtain in 2010 due to lack of acknowledgment of this phenomenon or due to reluctance on the side of data handlers. As a result, not only has the number of cases failed to decline, but quite an opposite, a moderate increase in the next period can be foreseen.

According to the above studies, in 2010, 30 women were killed in Serbia: 26 within the family/relationship setting and 4 outside of it, whereas, in 2020, there were 44 deaths of adult females: 26 femicides occurred within the family/relationship setting and others outside of this setting. The relevant data indicates that the *total number of female killings has increased during this decade-long period*, while the number of femicides committed in the family/relationship setting has not changed. The results of the annual studies indicate that a large number of abusers committed *suicide* after killing a female. This occurred in as many as 38.46 % of cases in 2010, while in 2020, half of perpetrators either committed or attempted suicide following femicide. While the profiles of abusers vary, the above reports suggest that the majority of the killings were carried out by a current or former partner, which is followed by cases involving a spouse or former spouse.

The data that does not affect the conclusions and that remained unchanged in this decade-long period refers to:

- *Place of killing*

The fact that most women were killed, as indicated in both reports, in the space they shared with their abusers shatters the prejudice about home as a place of love, protection and safety. Considering that most violent acts occur within the confines of one's home, 'home' could become synonymous with a place of suffering for women who endure violence.

- *Relationship with the victim*

The reports consider the data indicating the circumstances in which women were killed. Namely, as many as 38.46% of the 26 femicides in the family/relationship setting in 2010 were committed with the use of **firearms**. After ten years, a decline of

7.66 percent was marked in the number of femicides committed with the use of firearms or explosive devices (one case). Nonetheless, the fact that a firearm was *one of the most commonly used murder weapons* remained unchanged. The highest and the lowest shares of firearm deaths in the total number of femicides were reported in 2015 and 2018, respectively (45.71% versus 20%) (Lacmanović, Pavlov, 2023:11). The share of firearm femicides followed by suicide was the highest in 2017 (57.69%) and the lowest in 2016 (18.16%) (Lacmanović, Pavlov, 2023:11). The most commonly used firearm was a handgun. In respect to the legality of firearms, according to the data of the relevant authorities, the perpetrators were in legal possession of the firearm in 37.5% of the cases, one in four cases involved the use of an illegal firearm or a firearm of unknown origin, and the data is lacking for the same number of cases (Lacmanović, 2022b).

Firearm femicides connect two issues facing Serbia – **female killings and the quantity of privately owned firearms**. Common to these two issues is the fact that they are *deeply rooted in the social structure of this country* and fit in traditional narratives. The primary purpose of violence against women was the demonstration of male superiority, which was normalised as a frequent occurrence until recently, especially in small communities. The presence and accessibility of firearms and their misuse in violence against women pose an additional threat, increasing the likelihood of fatal outcome of violence. Furthermore, mere knowledge that an abuser possesses a firearm instils fear in the victim, making them hesitant to report acts of violence, and makes intervention and support by witnesses of violence more difficult (Lacmanović, Pavlov 2023:6).

The societies worldwide are required to make urgent changes on two levels that involve transition “from an exclusive emphasis on territorial security to a much stronger emphasis on human security, and from security provided by weapons to security achieved by sustainable human development,” as described by the UNDP (Boyle, Simonsen 2006:132-133). The risk of femicide in this country could be reduced by regulating private ownership of firearms and many initiatives, regulations and legal amendments have been launched to that end. Naturally, in order to achieve observable results, the entire society needs to work towards implementing new regulations, while ensuring full respect of the human rights system, particularly in relation to the concept of human security. Considering that the concept of human security encompasses practically all types of violence, including femicide, reducing risk factors for femicide would enhance the factors contributing to an individual’s feeling of safety within community.

## CONCLUSION

The primary conclusion of the review of the reports is that the number of femicides is not declining. All characteristics of femicide still persist and there is a risk that a new case may occur any day. While the issue of gender-based violence is recognised to exist, the full awareness of its significance and impact on the community seems to be lacking. At the same time, one should not lose sight of the fact that the issue of violence against women primarily concerns the established unwanted behaviour patterns and that only a *shift in the social narrative and perspective* can raise awareness about this issue and support the efforts of relevant authorities and professionals responsible for ensuring the individual and community safety. In the context of responsible individuals, *every person* assumes this role as femicide is an issue affecting society as a whole. Only through joint efforts can progress be achieved and further gender-based violence prevented, thus safeguarding human rights, while respecting the concept of human security.



## LIST OF REFERENCES

Albrecht, U., Chinkin, C., Dervis, K., Dwan, R., Giddens, A., Gnesotto, N., ... & Serra, N. A. R. C. I. S. (2004). *A human security doctrine for Europe: the Barcelona Report of the Study Group on Europe's Security Capabilities*. Retrieved 23.10.2023 from [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004\\_2009/documents/dv/human\\_security\\_report/\\_human\\_security\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/human_security_report/_human_security_report_en.pdf)

Baker, K., Halilović, M., Kadribašić, A., Nović I., Vilić V. (2022). *Femicid - Bilten Atlantske inicijative*. Beograd: Atlantska inicijativa: Udruženje za promovisanje evroatlantskih integracija 2022. Retrieved 15.9.2023 from <https://atlantskainicijativa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Femicid-Web.pdf>.

Bojl K., Simonsen S. (2006). *Ljudska bezbednost, ljudska prava i razoružanje*. Institut Ujedinjenih nacija za razoružanje: Forum za razoružanje. No. 3 2004 (UNIDIR/DF/2004/3). Retrieved 15.9.2023 from <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/529201>

Commission on Human Security (CHS) (2003). *Ljudska bezbednost sada: zaštita i osnaživanje*. Njujork : The Commission. Retrieved 15.9.2023 from <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/503749>.

Council of Europe (CoE) (2011). *Konvencija o sprečavanju i borbi protiv nasilja nad ženama i nasilju u porodici*. Istanbul: Council of Europe Treaty Series — № 210. Retrieved 15.9.2023 from <https://rm.coe.int/1680462540>

Corradi, C., et al. (2016). „Teorije femicida i njihov značaj za društvena istraživanja“. *Aktuelna sociologija*. 64 (7), 975-995. In Milković, A. (2022). „Nesretna žena“: *Analiza medijskih članaka o femicidima*. Diplomski rad. Zagreb: Univerzitet u Zagrebu, Pravni fakultet.

Corradi, C. (2021). Femicide, its causes and recent trends: What do we know. European Parliament Coordinator. Retrieved 23.10.2023 from [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/653655/EXPO\\_BRI\(2021\)653655\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/653655/EXPO_BRI(2021)653655_EN.pdf).

Dulić, D. (ed.). (2006). *Ljudska bezbednost. Zbornik tekstova II*, 99-135. Beograd: Fond za otvoreno društvo.

Human Security Research Center (n.d.). *Gender based violence as a human security issue*. Retrieved 23.10.2023 from <https://humansecuritycourse.info/module-4-human-security-in-diverse-contexts/issue-1-gender-based-violence/>

Konstantinović-Vilić, S., Petrušić, N. (2021). *Pokušaj femicida i femicid u Srbiji: sprečavanje i procesuiranje*. Pančevo: Udruženje građanki „FemPlatz”. Retrieved 23.10.2023 from [https://www.femplatz.org/library/publications/2021-04\\_Femicid\\_-\\_Pokusaj\\_femicida\\_i\\_femicid\\_u\\_Srbiji.pdf](https://www.femplatz.org/library/publications/2021-04_Femicid_-_Pokusaj_femicida_i_femicid_u_Srbiji.pdf)

Kovačević, M.(2019). Femicid i načelo dužne pažnje. *Društvene devijacije*, 4:22-29. Beograd: Fakultet za specijalnu edukaciju i rehabilitaciju.

Lacmanović, V. (2011). *Femnicid – Ubistva žena u Srbiji, Kvantitativno-narativni godišnji izveštaj za 2010. godinu*. Beograd: Mreža „Žene protiv nasilja“. Retrieved 15.9.2023 from [www.zeneprotivnasilja.net](http://www.zeneprotivnasilja.net)

Lacmanović, V. (2021). *Femnicid – Ubistva žena u Srbiji, Kvantitativno-narativni izveštaj 1. januar - 31. decembar 2020. godine*. Beograd: Mreža „Žene protiv nasilja“. Retrieved 15.9.2023 from [www.zeneprotivnasilja.net](http://www.zeneprotivnasilja.net)

Lacmanović, V. (2022a). *Femnicid – Ubistva žena u Srbiji, Kvantitativno-narativni izveštaj 1. januar - 30. jun 2022. godine*. Beograd: Mreža „Žene protiv nasilja“. Retrieved 15.9.2023 from [www.zeneprotivnasilja.net](http://www.zeneprotivnasilja.net)

Lacmanović, V. (2022b). *Kad institucije zakažu ostaje tišina - Analiza institucionalnog odgovora na prijave nasilja koje su prethodile femicidima (2017-2018)*. Beograd: Autonomni ženski centar. Retrieved 15.9.2023 from [https://www.womenngo.org.rs/images/publikacije-dp/2022/Kad\\_institucije\\_zakazu\\_ostaje\\_tisina.pdf](https://www.womenngo.org.rs/images/publikacije-dp/2022/Kad_institucije_zakazu_ostaje_tisina.pdf).

Lacmanović, V., Pavlov, T., (2023). *Karakteristike i prevencija slučajeva femicida-suicida počinjenih vatrenim oružjem u intimnom partnerskom odnosu*. Beograd: Program Ujedinjenih nacija za razvoj. Retrieved 15.9.2023 from <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-04/Istrazivanje%20femicid-suicid%20rs%20web.pdf>.

Laurent, C. (2013). *FEMICID, Ubistvo žena i devojaka širom sveta*. Njujork: Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS). In Milković, A. (2022). „Nesretna žena“: *Analiza medijskih članaka o femicidima*. Diplomski rad. Zagreb: Univerzitet u Zagrebu, Pravni fakultet.

Milković, A. (2022). „Nesretna žena“: Analiza medijskih članaka o femicidima. Diplomski rad. Zagreb: Univerzitet u Zagrebu, Pravni fakultet.

Oberlajtner, G. (2003). *Ljudska prava i bezbednost – dve kule?* Centar za proučavanje ljudskih prava, Grupa za diskusiju 11 (2003). In Dulić, D. (Ur). (2006). *Ljudska bezbednost. Zbornik tekstova II*, 13-19. Beograd: Fond za otvoreno društvo.

Pešić, J. (2006). *Persistence of Traditionalist Value Orientations in Serbia*. Faculty of Philosophy University of Belgrade. Retrieved 23.10.2023 from <https://scindeks-clanci.ceon.rs/data/pdf/0038-0318/2006/0038-03180604289P.pdf>

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), (1994). *Human Development Report 1994: New Dimensions of Human Security*. New York. Retrieved 15.9.2023. from <https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-1994>.

Russell, D. E. (1977). Report on the international tribunal on crimes against women. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*. Retrieved 23.10.2023 from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3346102>

Russell, D. E. (2008). Femicide: Politicizing the killing of females. In *An opening panel discussion for the meeting was co-sponsored by the Interagency Gender Working Group (IGWG) of the US Agency for International Development*. (p. 26). Retrieved 15.9.2023 from [https://media.path.org/documents/GVR\\_femicide\\_rpt.pdf#page=33](https://media.path.org/documents/GVR_femicide_rpt.pdf#page=33)

Secretariat, G. D. (2008). *Global burden of armed violence report*. Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, Geneva, Switzerland. Retrieved 24.10.2023 from <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/494a455d2.pdf>.

Spasić, D., Tadić, M. (2017). *Zloupotreba oružja i rodno zasnovano nasilje*. Beograd: Centar za istraživanje javnih politika. Retrieved 15.9.2023 from <https://publicpolicy.rs/publikacije/dfc34db7ac4716d34a86798a0c8096e4e235ec75.pdf>.



---

# GENDER ASPECT OF SECURITY: THE ROLE OF SMALL ARMS IN FEMICIDE

---

**Tijana BAUER\***, master's student

Ca' Foscari University of Venice (Comparative International Relations – Global Studies)

**Abstract:** *Femicide is the killing of women by men, motivated by misogyny. Analyses conducted to date reveal that home is the most dangerous place for women, killed by their partners or family members, with 137 women being killed globally on a daily basis in such circumstances in 2017. Femicide very rarely occurs suddenly and without premeditation and is usually preceded by other degrees of domestic violence. Possession of light weapons is one of the key risks in a violence-ridden relationship, drastically increasing chances of femicide. Apart from the obvious risks related to these weapons, there is a deep cultural link between the cult of the gun and the notion of a woman as a man's property. The weak institutional frameworks governing these issues and the way in which the media inform society about such cases uphold the tradition of patriarchy still further, discouraging women to report violence and potentially save themselves from abusers.*

**Key words:** *femicide, weapons, violence, gender, women*

---

\* [tijanabauer00@gmail.com](mailto:tijanabauer00@gmail.com)

## INTRODUCTION: CONCEPT AND RELEVANCE OF FEMICIDE

The term *femicide* was defined in the 1970s as “the murders carried out by men motivated by a sense of superiority over women, by pleasure or sadistic desires towards women, or by the assumption of ownership over women” (De Vido, Sosa, 2021: 159). Today, femicide refers to gender-based killings perpetrated by males, with the victim’s gender i.e. the fact that the victim is a woman being the crucial factor for the perpetrator (Spasić, Tadić, 2017: 11). The importance of the term does not just lie in the accurate definition of homicide targeting women but also in drawing attention to other forms of violence against women, including physical, emotional, sexual and any other form of violence which can lead to femicide. Moreover, a major aspect of terminological accuracy lies also in the recognition of social and historical oppression of women as well as the opportunities for improving their status in society (De Vido, Sosa, 2021: 159).

Due to the age-long tradition of patriarchy not treating women as equal human beings, domestic violence and violence against women were considered as private matters in the past, something a state should not concern itself with. However, the awareness that these issues nevertheless fall into the sphere of human rights, representing the problem facing the entire society, because they are part of inalienable freedoms, the right to life and the right to security of person, has grown over time (Tahirović, Radulović, 2021: 93). Even though some headway has been made with respect to women’s safety, especially in the theoretical sphere, gender-based violence remains a major issue facing the entire society. The alarming statistics point to this. In 2017 alone, 87,000 women were killed worldwide, with more than half of them being killed by intimate partners or family members, which means that during that year 137 women were killed on average every day by someone they trusted (UNODC, 2019: 10). While men are primary victims and perpetrators of global-level homicides in general, women account for 82% of the victims of domestic and intimate partner homicides (Monckton Smith, 2020: 1267). Over the past decade, more than 300 femicides have been committed in Serbia (Ćurčić, Tomić, 2023), with some studies suggesting that one in two or one in three women will at some point become the victims of psychological or physical violence committed by someone close to them (Lacmanovic, 2021: 60). These figures provide just an outline of victims of the final stage of violence against women, not including a much higher number of women experiencing ‘lower-level’ violence. The patriarchal notion of inequality between women and men, convincing men still further that they have the right to be the masters of their wives’ lives, lies at the bottom of this problem (Danaj, 2021: 14). Moreover, it should be not-

ed that studies conducted to date suggest that, in the majority of cases, intimate partner femicide is not a crime committed suddenly but the culmination of the abuse perpetrated up to that point (De Vido, Sosa, 2021: 160).

This paper focuses on what lies behind intimate partner femicide, the primary risks leading to it and the way in which society and law perceive this problem. One section of the paper deals with the issue of violence against and control over women at global level to demonstrate that this is a universal problem of patriarchal societies. The paper next focuses on the situation in the Republic of Serbia and the region in order to show how patriarchal tradition impacts their societies.

Drawing on previously written scholarly papers and conducted studies, the paper also aims to shed light on the connection between violence against women and small arms control, as well as the culture of masculine domination underlying both problems. The previously conducted studies have been selected as suitable reference material for this paper primarily because they span different geographic areas, showing that femicide is a global problem. Based on the analysis of the selected texts and studies, I have reached the conclusion that the proliferation of small arms is an additional risk not only to women but also to society in general. However, the aim of this paper is to focus on women's safety and status, touching additionally on the issue which, despite its being increasingly in focus lately, has not been solved yet. Finally, the paper's aim is to provide a critical analysis of all problems listed above and draw attention to their causes as well as consequences and the way in which society can cope with them.

### **Cultural and psychological aspect of femicide**

In the analyses of femicide, especially intimate partner femicide, conducted to date, two most dominant discourses can be singled out: the one claiming that coercive control directed at women leads to homicide and the other which mainly perceives femicide as a 'crime of passion'. In her paper, Jane M. Smith notes that the 'crime of passion' concept panders to patriarchal tradition, disregarding the notion of women being subservient to men, and analyses eight stages of control in relationships ultimately leading to homicide. These eight stages include the following: pre-relationship, early relationship, relationship, trigger events, escalation, decision-making, planning and homicide. The initial stages are characterised by a seemingly idyllic relationship as well as unnaturally sudden intimacy. Getting into a relationship leads to the start of victim abuse/control: her isolation from other persons close to her, the monitoring of her routine, the checking of her e-mail etc. During this stage, victims often do not realise what is going on or if they do realise it, they do not find it alarming, choosing

to accept the situation rather than to heighten tensions in their relationships. Trigger events occur when the perpetrator starts feeling that he has lost control due to the victim's leaving or threatening to leave, real or imaginary infidelity or common paranoia. This stage next leads to decision-making and planning the crime based on the notion that the victim is the perpetrator's property and, consequently, has no right to leave, which ultimately frequently ends in femicide. (Smith, 2020: 1270-1280). Additional research has revealed that the victim's partner's pathological jealousy, based mainly on non-existent evidence, is precisely one of the main reasons for the committed femicide (Aldridge, Browne, 2003: 270). Although it is mainly women who are presented as jealous and possessive in society, this research offers an interesting insight into how different genders are presented in everyday life and the reasons for it.

Focusing on the pattern which can often be applied to intimate partner violence cases is important so that society could further accept the fact that violence against women is not only perpetrated by men suffering from some mental illness, men addicted to psychoactive substances or some 'monsters' as they are often depicted by the media, but also by men taught to treat women as being less worthy than they are or in a way suggesting ownership (Danaj, 2021:14).

A multi-country study, conducted also in Serbia, further supports this thesis, showing that the majority of men who abused women in their lives in any way also fall under the behavioural pattern involving a high degree of partner controlling. In addition, the study's empirical results revealed that women were in fact most at risk in their own homes (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2006: 1265-1268). Moreover, the men's unemployment resulted in an increase in intimate partner violence, while the women's unemployment had the opposite effect (Peterman et al., 2020: 7-9). Although patriarchal culture portrays a man as the pillar of the family, job insecurity evidently makes him feel that he is losing control, while a woman's better material status undermines his position in society and makes it easier for her to leave him. On the other hand, if a woman is unemployed, she is more easily controlled.

Another type of intimate partner femicide includes the killings of women by their fathers, brothers or distant relatives in order to preserve family honour. There are several situations which can lead to it such as women's extramarital relationships, extramarital births or even the fact that one of the women or girls in the family has been raped (UNODC, 2019: 30-31). Again, the notion underlying such relationships is that a woman is not free to decide about her life or to be a sexual being and, as she can no longer be controlled, she is a disgrace to her family.

Follow-up analyses have aimed to identify the most common life circumstances which are the main risks of abuse and or/femicide in a relationship, apart from the



perpetrator's personality. They include the following: unemployment, level of qualifications, alcohol or drug abuse, cohabitation with the victim, cohabitation with the victim's child and the fact whether the perpetrator possesses any weapons. The findings of the analyses have revealed that, if the partner has a weapon, the risk of homicide is drastically higher, except in situations in which the victim has never lived with her partner, in which case it is slightly lower. Previous threats with a weapon or threats to kill have had even more drastic impact on the risk of femicide. The findings have shown that the seizure of a weapon from the perpetrator of gender-based violence is one of the key ways of preventing a potential femicide (Campbell et al., 2003: 1090-1093). Although a very small number of countries maintain datasets on firearm possession with gender-disaggregated statistics, those which do show that men possess most of the weapons (Frate et al., 2020: 3-5). Although the countries with high crime rates feature at the top of femicide ranking, it is surprising that some countries, primarily in Europe, have high femicide rates despite low crime rates. Nevertheless, on average, small arms were used in one third of femicides worldwide (Nowak, 2012: 1-4). The proliferation of light weapons and the men's pathological need to control women have the same roots, supporting each other, especially in regions such as the Western Balkans.

### **Connection between femicide and small arms**

What makes small arms and light weapons different from other weapons is the very fact that, of about 875 million pieces of this type of weapons, more than 75% is in the possession of individuals or non-state structures, according to a study conducted in 2017 (Spasić, Tadić, 2017: 13-14). This is further compounded by the fact that the majority of homicides were committed by this very type of weapons, legally owned by perpetrators. Even though this is a global issue, it has its special foothold in the Balkans, especially in the countries which emerged from former Yugoslavia. Apart from legally-owned weapons appearing in mass circulation, illegal weapons, the quantity of which it is hard to establish, are also a problem. One of the reasons for it are the wars waged in the region, especially in the 1990s, leaving weaponry in their wake. The poor rule of law, the unfinished security sector reform, strong criminal structures and the emotional and psychological war legacy have only exacerbated the small arms problem in the region (Spasić, Tadić, 2017: 13-14).

Still, despite the evident risk to which women are exposed with weapons in the home, the cultural aspect connecting femicide and light weapons possession should be mentioned as well. The Western Balkans is a region in which the cult of the gun is still strongly present, permeating the people's everyday life, which includes its symbol-

ic role during celebrations or in times of grieving (Spasić, Tadić, 2017: 14-26). Gun possession is associated with the idea of a strong traditional man, who in this way further asserts and proves his masculinity and dominance over other members of society, especially women, to himself and society in general. Guns are associated with the image of a man capable of not only protecting his property but also posing a threat to other people's property. However, despite the obvious set of issues related to this phenomenon, there is another one, namely men governed by this traditionally patriarchal ideology often treat women as their property. As highlighted by the observations made in the above analyses and papers, a man's need to control a woman is one of the principal reasons of femicide. If this image of a woman as a man's property is put into context with the cult of a traditional man who finds his strength in a handgun or another such weapon, it comes as no surprise that about 40% of femicides were indeed perpetrated by firearms (Spasić, Tadić, 2017: 25). When analysing the culture manifesting itself in this way, one should bear in mind that, historically, a woman was legally as well as mentally perceived as a man's property until recently and, consequently, she had no right to leave her marriage or relationship of her own free will (Johnson et al., 2017: 7). Due to all that, it comes as no surprise that domestic violence was regulated by law and penalised in Serbia as late as 2002 (Spasić, Tadić, 2017: 34).

Institutional distrust, legislative shortcomings and failure to implement legislation pose yet another problem associated with both weapons possession as well as femicide and violence against women. As for weapons control, a major objection to the current Law on Weapons and Ammunition is that the fitness to possess and carry weapons is checked only once in five years. One of the reasons why this could be a problem is that a lot can change over the course of five years, especially as regards a person's mental health. Another reason is the lack of trust in both judicial as well as health care institutions (Spasić, Tadić, 2017: 27-29). Regrettably, it is not hard to imagine a situation in which a medical examination is not performed at all or is not properly performed, with personal gain or personal acquaintance being the sole reasons for the issuing of the relevant certificate.

In addition to these objections, I would like to add that, partly due to traditional patriarchal culture, mental health issues are highly stigmatised in the Balkans so that, this, too, could be the reason why some medical examinations may not have been properly conducted. Moreover, these obstacles appear only during the control of circulation of legally-held weapons, without even probing into the issue of illegal weapons possession. Although the majority of women have been killed with weapons in legal possession (Spasić, Tadić, 2017: 25), illegally-held weapons present yet another challenge in the fight against this situation. The initiative to hand in illegally-held weap-

ons stands out among the most recent efforts of the Government of the Republic of Serbia to do something about the problem. The initiative was launched following the tragic events which hit Belgrade and Serbia in May 2023. It resulted in the surrender of large quantities of different weapons, however, this is by no means an end to efforts to combat the problem (Glavonjić, 2023).

Moreover, legislative shortcomings and institutional distrust have a bearing on reports of domestic violence and society's response to and prosecution of femicide as well. In 2019, 26 femicide cases were registered in Serbia, while in 2020 the number of confirmed victims remained the same, with five other women being suspected femicide victims. The problem of femicide victim registration in Serbia, as in most countries which do not have a separate law defining gender-based homicide, is that institutions have no victim classifications or data, so that media reports are the basic source of information. Still, analyses to date suggest that, in the past few years, one in three killed women did indeed first contact some relevant institution to report violence, while today only one in seven women report it. Regrettably, this information primarily shows that the main reason for it is the growing belief that reports to institutions will not help solve the problem, while at the same time they may infuriate the perpetrator still further (Tahirović, Radulović, 2021: 95).

The factors lying behind this may primarily be found in the idea of the 'perfect victim' launched in society. This idea depicts a woman who is the victim of violence as a seriously injured, tormented and blameless person, who could in no way have provoked the abuser with any of her actions. The social, academic and institutional frameworks introduced this discourse at the point when domestic violence was first shifted to the public sphere in order to win sympathy for women who are victims of violence and serve justice more easily. However, even though initial intentions were just, the idea is still present today, doing more harm than good to women. Fearing that they may not be able to fit the narrow and hard-to-prove image of the victim, women think that society and institutions will not believe them and, consequently, do not try to seek help. Moreover, as a result, even the victims themselves do not consider low-level violence as violence or they do not believe that they can be protected from it. This type of violence includes low-level physical violence such as an 'occasional slap' or mental abuse, degradation, stalking and control (Johnson et al., 2017: 7-8). Another reason why women, especially those living in the Balkans, decide not to contact institutions, specifically in small towns, is their experience of officials from these institutions, such as police officers, taking the abuser's side or believing that this is a family matter or, in some situations, even helping or encouraging the abuser to continue the abuse (Spasić, Tadić, 2017: 50-54).

The situation in Serbia is further compounded by the media, which report on femicide cases in a sensation-mongering way, disregarding the very essence of the problem. They look for motives for the perpetrator's act, focusing on comments on his personality and shifting the blame to his victim in a way (Tahirović, Radulović, 2021: 96). On top of that, some media content, such as reality shows, presents violence and the cult of the gun as something acceptable, even desirable, featuring different scenes and types of abuse of women for the purpose of entertainment (Lacmanovic, 2021: 63).

Although only a small number of countries recognise femicide as a separate type of crime, some EU member states, such as France and Greece, have made initial efforts to address the issue, recognising the fact that being a female can prove in some cases to be the decisive factor in the committed crime (De Vido, Sosa, 2021: 164-165). The Republic of Croatia has also announced that it will not only tighten sentences for criminal offences like rape or violence against women but will also introduce the term femicide into its justice system (VoxFeminae, 2023). It is a truly devastating fact that while such steps are taken in the EU, in the countries which are Serbia's neighbours, the Serbian justice system does not treat these crimes as grave murder in coping with femicide, pronouncing less severe sentences on such grounds as the perpetrator being a father of two children, whose mother he has killed. Sometimes these crimes are tried as domestic violence accidentally ending in homicide, which is also a mitigating circumstance and may result in a reduced sentence for the perpetrator (Ćurčić, Tomić, 2023).

## CONCLUSION

Even though the above analysis, which is the subject of this paper, has demonstrated that the possession of small arms and light weapons poses a great risk to women in intimate relationships, it is just one of a series of side effects of the problems having much deeper roots. Stricter regulation of gun possession and a better institutional response to the issue would by all means help increase women's safety. However, they would not eliminate the main problem and the main threat to women.

As stated above, the need to control women which may lead to femicide and the cult of the gun have the same roots, which lie in the patriarchal notion of the traditional role of a man, who is always more dominant than a woman. Moreover, social and sometimes even institutional refusal to shift domestic violence entirely from the private sphere to the public sphere places women in an even more vulnerable position. The legal interpretation of these crimes as 'crimes of passion' disregards all that lying behind the event culminating in femicide. Also, finding mitigating circumstances which may result in a reduced sentence for the perpetrator signals that women will not get any protection or justice even once they are dead. The media coverage of these crimes further discourages the victims to perceive themselves as victims in the first place and seek help, because it might just happen that the news that a woman was "killed for reporting violence" appears in the newspapers.

The conclusion reached within the confines of this paper is that the effective resolution of this problem will be possible only once society has become fully aware of these issues. Even though various initiatives by non-governmental organisations and academia have managed to put the spotlight on them, it is necessary to develop this topic still further and break the stereotypes based on decades of misinterpreted beliefs and tradition. Moreover, it is vital to ensure the involvement of official institutions and authorities in addressing these issues and do something about the way in which the media report on domestic violence and femicide. One of the ways to do it would doubtless be to introduce femicide into the Serbian Criminal Code or at least to treat it as a serious crime. The best approach to the improvement of women's status in society and their exercise of the right to life and integrity is education. The education of broader social strata and in particular younger generations and a serious institutional approach to problems of this kind would render possible preventive action aiming to discourage potential perpetrators. Without that, focusing on the role of firearms in the perpetration of these crimes will have no crucial impact on the change in the overall situation.

## LIST OF REFERENCES

- Aldridge, M., Browne, K. (2003). Perpetrators of spousal homicide: A review. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 4(3), 265-274.
- Campbell, J. C., Webster, D., Koziol-McLain, J., Block, C., Campbell, D., Curry, M., Laughon, K. (2003). Risk factors for femicide in abusive relationships: Results from a multisite case control study. *American Journal of Public Health*, 93(7), 1089–1097.
- Ćurčić, T., Tomić, J. (2023). *Femicid u Srbiji: Zločin i manje kazne*. Retrieved on 25.09.2023, from <https://www.cins.rs/femicid-u-srbiji-zlocin-i-manje-kazne/>
- Danaj, E. (2021). Kako tradicija i patrijarhat utječu na nasilje nad ženama na Zapadnom Balkanu. In Gačanica, L. (ed.) (2021). *Perspectives: Political Analyses and Commentary - Southeastern Europe*. (pp. 13-18) Sarajevo: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung.
- De Vido, S., Sosa, L. (2021). *Criminalisation of gender-based violence against women in European States, including ICT-facilitated violence*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- Frate, A. A. del, Hideg, G., & LeBrun, E. (2020). *Gender Counts: Assessing Global Armed Violence Datasets for Gender Relevance*. Small Arms Survey.
- Garcia-Moreno, C., Jansen, H. A., Ellsberg, M., Heise, L., Watts, C. H. (2006). Prevalence of intimate partner violence: Findings from the who multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence. *The Lancet*, 368(9543), 1260–1269.
- Glavonjić, Z. (2023, June 30). *Završena predaja oružja u Srbiji: Šta je urađeno?*. Retrieved on 24.09.2023, from <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/ubistva-razoruzavanje-srbija/32484006.html>
- Johnson, H., Eriksson, L., Mazerolle, P., & Wortley, R. (2017). Intimate femicide: The role of coercive control. *Feminist Criminology*, 14(1), 3–23.
- Lacmanovic, V. (2021). Femicid izlazi na vidjelo. In Gačanica, L. (ed.) (2021). *Perspectives: Political Analyses and Commentary - Southeastern Europe*. (pp. 60-66) Sarajevo: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung.

Monckton Smith, J. (2019). Intimate partner femicide: Using foucauldian analysis to track an eight stage progression to homicide. *Violence Against Women*, 26(11), 1267–1285.

Nowak, M. (2012). *Femicide: A Global Problem* (pp. 1–5). Small Arms Survey.

Peterman, A., Potts, A., O'Donnell, M., Thompson, K., Shah, N., Oertelt-Prigione, S., & Gelder, N. van. (2020). *Pandemics and Violence Against Women and Children*. Center for Global Development .

Spasić, D, Tadić, M. (2017). *Zloupotreba vatrenog oružja i rodno zasnovano nasilje*. Beograd: Centar za istraživanje javnih politika.

Tahirović, M., Radulović-Glamočak, J. (2021). Femicide prevention in the light of New Legal Solutions application in the Criminal Law of Republic of Serbia. *Pravo - Teorija i Praksa*, 38(3), 92–107.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2019). *Global Study on Homicide: Gender-related Killing of Women and Girls*. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime: Vienna.

VoxFeminae. (2023). *Femicid ulazi u hrvatski zakon*. Retrieved on 25.09.2023, from <https://voxfeminae.net/vijesti/femicid-ulazi-u-hrvatski-zakon/>.





---

# MAINTAINING SCHOOL SAFETY AFTER THE MISUSE OF FIREARMS: EVALUATION OF ACTIONS TAKEN AFTER A MASS KILLING AT A PRIMARY SCHOOL IN BELGRADE

---

**Kristina BOSILJ\***, master's student  
London School of Economics and Political Science

**Abstract:***In May 2023, Serbia was shocked by the news of a mass killing at a primary school in Belgrade, committed by one of its students. The news of killings in the world are often met with disbelief, but what is specific for this case is that the Serbian public has never before been in a position to witness the misuse of firearms in educational institutions. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that the measures introduced following the incident were not designed in the best way possible. This is exactly what I write about in my essay. In order to help promote human security in the future, my paper is written in the form of a policy brief. I do that by analysing the actions taken after the mass killing and explain why the measures taken could have been better informed, taking into account previous studies conducted in the world after school killings. Consequently, although the essay is primarily based on the mass killing committed in Serbia, it justifies its argumentation through an interdisciplinary approach which analyses media impact and disarmament with a view to improving safety. This is extremely important because the misuse of firearms has a negative bearing on human security. I conclude that the media coverage of violence and in particular school killings has numerous effects, which are taken much too lightly. The essay therefore recommends public regulation of the media coverage of similar content. As for disarmament, the essay recognises its significance in view of proliferation of weapons in Serbia but it also calls for measures directly adapted to school environments, such as metal detectors and 'zero-tolerance' policies*

**Key words:** *safety, school system, firearms*

---

\* kristinabosilj15@gmail.com

# INTRODUCTION

In May 2023, Serbia was shocked by the news of a mass killing at a primary school in Belgrade, committed by one of its students (N1, 2023a). The news of killings in the world are often met with disbelief, but what is specific for this case is that the Serbian public has never before been in a position to witness the misuse of firearms in educational institutions. Without using the uniqueness of the event as a pretext, I try to propose alternative solutions for the improvement of school safety in the form of a policy brief in response to the evaluation of the ways in which the Serbian media and authorities handled the mass killing situation. I believe that the evaluation of the actions is important because it can serve as a lesson should situations of this kind occur again as it teaches us to differentiate between good and bad approaches to the problem when the aim is safety. Bearing this in mind, I claim in the essay that the sequence of actions after the mass killing in Serbia was not thought through in the best way possible. As the misuse of firearms has a negative bearing on human security, I believe that it is of crucial importance to improve the response to it to create room for headway in the human security sphere. To justify my argumentation, I first introduce the concepts of misuse of firearms in schools and safety. I then apply the acquired theoretical knowledge to the case registered in Serbia, which makes it necessary to explain the event and the actions taken in its wake. This allows me to identify potential areas of improvement primarily based on the media coverage of violent incidents, such as this one, and the disarmament campaign in Serbia with a view to preventing attempts to bring guns to schools again.

## Theoretical approach: the misuse of firearms in schools and safety

To explain the significance of the problem and the need for a response, the first step is to understand the problem. I therefore start this essay with an introduction into the proliferation and misuse of firearms, focusing primarily on the school system and the connection with safety in a school environment. Small arms and light weapons (SALW) is the term used for “conventional weapons which are relatively cheap, easily available and simple to use and maintain” (Kotlarić, Joksimović, 2015, p.252). The problem of small arms and light weapons starts with their proliferation. Speaking in figures, two thirds of 850 million small arms and light weapons in the world are in private possession, mainly in homes (Spasić, Radovanović, 2019). In the Western Balkans, Serbia included, the proliferation of firearms is a big problem for society (Stojanović, Šekarić, 2019). To put this into perspective, the number of firearms per

capita in Serbia exceeds 39, which puts it in fifth place on the list of countries with the highest number of civilian-held weapons per capita (Small Arms Survey, 2017). According to Kotlarić and Joksimović (2015), small arms and light weapons are used in most of the armed conflicts. Consequently, the problem of small arms proliferation arises from its implications manifesting themselves as criminal activity (Stojanović, Šekarić, 2019). As criminal activity has a negative bearing on personal safety, the proliferation of firearms also poses a threat to it in the long run, which will be discussed in more detail later in the essay. However, before I focus more on the concept of personal safety, I would like to touch on the issue of misuse of firearms in various environments, placing the focus on the school system.

The misuse of firearms can occur in various places with different consequences. For example, some forms of firearms misuse can result in unintentional injuries as well as violence in the form of domestic violence, mass killings, school shootings and even terrorism (Allely, 2020). Consequently, in addition to the authorities, the issue of firearms misuse should be addressed by the health care system with the focus on mental health, as well as criminology and criminal justice (Rivara, Kellermann, 2007) in order to solve it. Due to its extensiveness, it is not possible to find a solution which could have a full effect on all aspects of firearms misuse. Consequently, this paragraph primarily focuses on firearms misuse in school systems. The reason for is that, over the past 25 years, the 'trend' of firearm misuse has been registered across the world, primarily in the United States (Böckler et al., 2013). As for mass shootings, in 2023, 476 cases were registered by August 28 alone (BBC, 2023). For each of the last three calendar years there have been over 600 mass shootings, which is something unprecedented. In view of the fact that this paper deals with the improvement of safety in school systems, it is important to understand what lies behind the issue. It should be primarily mentioned that there is no uniform official definition explaining or conceptualising a school shooting. The problem primarily arises because different systems define the issue in different ways (Böckler et al., 2013). Consequently, the justice system, for example, treats firearms misuse in schools differently from health care workers and psychologists. Böckler et al. (2013) explain that, for this reason, these systems interpret the misuse phenomenon in different ways, namely as a result of sociocultural influences, the lack of policies or the pathological structure of personality. Since this makes research into the issue and potential solutions even more difficult, I have decided to place the focus of my paper on the broad general definition of the term 'school shooting' as the killing of one or frequently more victims with firearms in a school environment (Kelley, May, 2011). Having a clearly-defined problem provides a starting point in the search for a solution and, consequently, even though firearms misuse in school systems can be analysed in different ways, I can offer a solution while recognising the extensiveness of the problem.

As mentioned above, firearms misuse has negative impact on human security. In its broadest sense, human security can be explained as the protection of an individual's security through the absence of direct or indirect threats in the broadest sense (UNDP, 1994). Under the definition, threats to human security can be highly diverse, including natural disasters, violent conflicts, impoverishment, health pandemics, terrorism, economic disasters etc. (UNOCHA, 2009). From that perspective, it is clear that firearms misuse is doubtless a threat to human security. When you add to it a rise in the misuse, especially in cases involving school systems, the situation assumes alarming proportions, because it is harder to maintain safety. Consequently, by defining the given problem, firearms misuse and its impact on safety, I try to help improve the relevant school safety policy. To do this based on a specific case, I have decided to focus on the incident which took place at the primary school in Belgrade. The previous chapter can therefore serve as a starting point in understanding the concepts the study will further deal with. Once I have introduced the specific case in the next chapter, the definition of the problem will allow me to evaluate safety maintenance policies and make my modest proposals.

### **Study of the case which took place in Serbia**

In this chapter, I try to shed more light on the case of firearms misuse resulting in the mass killing at the primary school in Belgrade. I will first explain what happened on the day of the incident and will then look into what happened after the incident with a view to maintaining safety, including the actions taken immediately after it and long-term goals. Namely, the incident occurred when an underage student opened fire with handguns at the Belgrade primary school on May 3, killing eight fellow-students and a security guard (N1, 2023a). He also wounded six more children and a teacher. It all happened in the early hours of the morning, about 8.40 a.m. and just after lessons began (N1, 2023a). After the incident, the killer left the school, heading for the schoolyard, whence he called the police that found him there and took him into custody (N1, 2023b). What we know is that the student used two pistols, a 9 mm pistol and a small-calibre pistol, both of which belonged to his father (Blic, 2023). This information was collected and spread fast via TV news and newspaper reports even on the day of the incident. The issues related to this practice will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter of the essay. At this point, I just want to share the sources I used while collecting information about the incident.

The facts mentioned in the above paragraph, with additional information about the names of the victims and the killer and his and his family's private life, were released in public by a large number of Serbian as well as foreign news desks. Public disclo-

sure of the facts was the first thing that happened after the incident. Politicians and police also disclosed some information to the public while the investigation was still ongoing (Maja Nikolić, 2023). Moreover, as the incident took place on Wednesday morning, all schools were closed in Serbia on Thursday and Friday, while the nation was in mourning (N1, 2023v). Although I do not intend to go into more detail, because the paper focuses on school safety, another firearms misuse incident was registered less than 48 hours after the first incident (N1, 2023g). Still, even though I think that this approach to a mass killing, especially that committed in a school environment, was far from ideal, the fact that the country was for the first time ever confronted with this kind of problem and that the ideal way of proceeding was not part of common knowledge should be taken into account. Although similar incidents did occur in the world in the past, none of them were registered in the Republic of Serbia. Consequently, I would like to touch on the plans aimed at safety maintenance, made in the months after the incident, i.e. at the point when it was evident what the ‘ideal’ way of proceeding in the given situation was.

One of the major efforts to improve safety in the months after the incident was the disarmament campaign, i.e. the surrender of illegal weapons, and control of the conditions in which guns were kept in homes (RTS, 2023). As for the disarmament campaign, the Government of the Republic of Serbia called on its citizens to hand in illegal guns within a month and not face any consequences. In addition, the new draft law provides for a prison sentence for unlawful possession of weapons and more frequent checks of whether weapon-keeping requirements are met (including psychiatric and psychological examination and testing for psychoactive substances), which will be conducted once in six to twelve months, because the security situation requires the strictest measures possible (Ivković, 2023). Consequently, student safety, even over the longer term, is something that was given a lot of thought after the incident. Moreover, the measures were introduced to reduce potentially the chances of a similar incident occurring in the future. Admittedly, only from the disarmament perspective, to make its perpetration physically more difficult. In the next chapter of the essay, I seek to improve this approach to firearms misuse, using scholarly literature based on previous cases which are similar. Consequently, I place my focus not only on disarmament but also on other approaches promoting safety and reducing the chances of recurrence of such incidents.

## **How to learn from mistakes related to safety improvement**

Given that the previous chapter deals with the attempts to improve safety made in Serbia after the incident, in this chapter I look more deeply into the actions taken in

its wake, comparing them to the proposals which were tested and which proved to be successful in the past. Consequently, I focus on the media coverage of the incident and the disarmament campaign, i.e. stricter requirements for holding weapons, and their link to safety.

## **Media coverage of the incident**

The studies conducted support the thesis that the media coverage of school shootings is watched far more often than the coverage of other violent news (Maguire et al., 2017). Consequently, the news of the Belgrade primary school incident, too, reached the public in record time. Within 30 minutes of the incident, reporters were crowding in front of the school and the news appeared on the websites of media outlets (N1, 2023a). Despite this high media coverage, it is a well-known fact that interviewing victims exposed to trauma, which in this case includes all present in the school as well as their nearest, can have greater effects on posttraumatic stress symptoms than in victims who are not interviewed (Haravouri et al., 2011). Bearing this in mind, as well as the post-incident developments, it is evident that different steps could have been taken in the given situation, with less severe consequences for the victims. Gentile et al. (2007) provide a comprehensive study of media violence policies, focusing primarily on children. To avoid repetition, I would like to focus primarily on the idea of co-regulation (pp. 51-53). According to this idea, the best approach to policies on violent content coverage is the combination of public regulation of the content and self-regulation of the level of exposure to it. What I see as a shortcoming of these policies is that they do not focus on the media coverage of school shootings. It is important to note that the way in which school shootings are covered affects the way in which the readers respond to an incident. Consequently, rage and, as a result, more violence can be triggered (O'Toole & Fondacaro, 2017) as well as public fear (Burns & Crawford, 1999; Newman et al., 2004). Rocque (2012) also explains that the media often present school shootings in an overdramatic way. Whether the policies can treat the coverage of this type of violence in the same way as the coverage of other types of violence should be therefore open to debate.

Although causing fear is problematic in itself, there are much greater consequences if media coverage triggers the chain of events resulting in other similar incidents in the future. Gentile et al. (2007) have studied media impact and its potential to trigger the desire to copycat, explained by social learning theory and model-based learning. According to this theory, personal behaviour and personality traits are adopted by observing behavioural models, as explained by Bandura and Walters (1977). Consequently, in practice this means that, by observing school shooting incidents, oth-

ers can be inspired to imitate such behaviours. In this case, the possibility to copycat can be reflected in a higher number of gun misuse incidents and higher incidence of school violence. For example, less than two days after the incident in the Belgrade primary school, another gun misuse incident was registered in Serbia (N1, 2023). I admit that more research is needed to establish the correlation between the two incidents, still it is evident that both of them occurred in a very short interval of time. It is also evident that no attempt was made to regulate the media and their coverage of violence at the time when the incidents occurred. I therefore suggest the introduction of policies governing the media coverage of violent incidents as a better approach when aiming to reduce the incidence of violence and improve the people's safety.

### **Disarmament and stricter gun-holding requirements**

In the previous paragraph, I have touched on the policies preventing recurrent gun misuse that one frequently comes across. Given that this is the most common way of introducing policies after major gun misuse incidents and that similar policies were introduced in the studied case on which this paper is based, I would like to look deeper into previous studies on the subject and make a comment on it. Popular argumentation suggests that the first step in preventing recurrent school shootings is reducing the opportunity for violence (Rocque, 2012). This primarily refers to policies controlling access to guns and promoting school safety. Consequently, policies recommending the hiring of security guards and installation of metal detectors and video surveillance systems are quite common, as well as 'zero-tolerance' policies mandating immediate suspension of students who bring weapons to schools (Rocque, 2012; Trump, 2000). Still, it should be noted that there are no evaluation processes for the given policies, i.e. that the efficacy of the policies as such has not been tested. Rocque (2012) argues that it is extremely difficult to evaluate the policies simply because school shootings are rare occurrences. Consequently, due to the small number of school shooting incidents, it is hard to determine the policy impact on them. As a result, the question of whether incidents of firearms misuse in schools should be treated as a unique subtype of violence or whether the general information on violence and introduction of violence prevention policies can be applied to school shootings remains open. As in the case of the media coverage of school shootings, I come across the problem having to do with the lack of previous studies on school shooting-related policies. Despite that, I still believe that there is room for policy improvement in order to ensure personal safety and apply that to the Belgrade primary school incident.

In the previous chapter of the paper, I have mentioned the policies introduced in Serbia after the incident. The conclusion I have made is that, in Serbia, too, the main fo-

cus was placed on the control of access to weapons. In view of the proliferation of weapons in Serbian homes mentioned above, campaigns to this end are more than welcome, even when they are unrelated to mass killing incidents. Still, what I recognise as a shortcoming is that the newly-introduced policies were neither adapted nor more closely linked to the school system. The surrender of illegal weapons and control of conditions in which they are kept are indeed ways of controlling access to guns in order to prevent their potential misuse in the future. However, the implementation is still not adapted to schools to prevent gun misuse in them. For example, the proposals made in the reference material, including the introduction of metal detectors and 'zero-tolerance' policies can be very effective in this case. Metal detectors have already been introduced in different public institutions such as courts and, consequently, I believe that their introduction in schools would not be so much different. The goal achieved in this case would be a safer learning environment and the students' being less concerned while at school. I believe that it is necessary to make such a move, because safety was compromised precisely in such an environment in the given case, rather than to speak in general terms that this happened because large quantities of weapons were present in the country. Naturally, the shortcoming related to not being able to conduct the evaluation remains an open issue, compounded by large investments resulting from these policies. Still, the paper's focus remains on the theoretical approach to the improvement of school safety, while these limitations call for further studies on the subject.



## CONCLUSION

In view of the mass killing incident which took place at the Belgrade primary school in May 2023, this essay is in the form of a policy brief with focus on personal safety, proposing public regulation of media violence and the restriction of guns in school environments. The argumentation I have defended is that the Republic of Serbia's approach to the issue was limited and superficial and, as a result, the policies implemented were not at the highest level, necessary for ensuring the people's safety after the incident. My arguments are backed by previous studies on school shootings, focusing primarily on the media approach to such incidents and efforts to make further gun misuse physically impossible. A definite limitation of this paper, which can be observed in both cases, is the small number of studies conducted on the subject. Consequently, the paper calls for further studies on the subject to ensure a higher level of safety in school environments. It is extremely important to pay maximum attention to the issue to maintain the satisfactory level of education in the country, apart from the obvious importance of maintaining people's safety.

## LIST OF REFERENCES

- Allely, C. (2020). *The psychology of extreme violence: a case study approach to serial homicide, mass shooting, school shooting and lone-actor terrorism*. Routledge.
- Bandura, A., & Walters, R. H. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice Hall: Englewood cliffs.
- BBC. (2023). 'How many US mass shootings have there been in 2023?'. BBC, 27 August. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-41488081> (Accessed: 15.09. 2023).
- Böckler, N., Seeger, T., Sitzer, P., & Heitmeyer, W. (2013). School shootings: Conceptual framework and international empirical trends. In (eds.) *School shootings: International research, case studies, and concepts for prevention*. Springer Science & Business Media, pp. 1-24.
- Burns, R., & Crawford, C. (1999). 'School shootings, the media, and public fear: Ingredients for a moral panic'. *Crime, law and social change*, 32, pp. 147-168.
- Gentile, D. A., Saleem, M., & Anderson, C. A. (2007). 'Public policy and the effects of media violence on children'. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 1(1), 15-61.
- Ivković, P. (2023). 'MUP odgovorio na sva pitanja oko predaje oružja: Jedno se tiče i onog koje je registrovano', *Telegraf*, 10 May. Available at: <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/srbija/3676409-vratite-nelegalno-oruzje-bez-upisivanja-licnih-podataka-ali-to-nije-sve> (Accessed: 15.09. 2023).
- Jevtić, Ž. (2023). 'IMAO JE JOŠ 34 METKA Koja sila sudbine je srećom sprečila dečaka ubicu da nastavi krvavi pir? Izvor "Blica" otkriva KLJUČNI DETALJ', *Blic*, 5 May. Available at: <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/decak-ubica-imao-jos-34-metka-ali-ga-je-prst-sudbine-sprecio-da-nastavi-krvavi-pir/91t8hz5> (Accessed: 15.09. 2023).
- Kotarlić, D., Joksimović, S. (2015). 'Usklađivanje zakonske regulative Republike Srbije sa Strategijom EU za borbu protiv nedozvoljenog sakupljanja i prometa lakog i streljačkog naoružanja i municije – stepen usklađenosti i neophodne mere'. *Vojno delo*. 3, pp. 251–270.

- Kelley, E., & May, D. (2011). 'Increases in school shootings: Reality or myth?'. *International Journal of Sociological Research*, 4(1), pp. 45–57.
- Maguire, B. Weatherby, G.A., & Mathers, R. (2002). 'Network news coverage of school shootings', *The Social Science Journal*, 39(3), pp. 465-470.
- N1 (2023a). 'MUP: Devetoro stradalih u pucnjavi u školi na Vračaru, sedmoro ranjenih', N1, 3 May. Available at: <https://n1info.rs/vesti/devet-stradalih-u-pucnjavi-u-skoli-na-vracaru/> (Accessed: 15.09. 2023).
- N1 (2023b). 'MUP: Dečak se sam prijavio, imao spisak i plan i molotovljeve koktele', N1, 3 May. Available at: <https://n1info.rs/vesti/mup-osumnjiceni-decak-pozvao-policiju-i-prijavio-da-je-pucao/> (Accessed: 15.09. 2023).
- N1 (2023v). 'Proglašena trodnevna žalost u Srbiji, od petka do nedelje', N1, 3 May. Available at: <https://n1info.rs/vesti/ministarstvo-prosvete-predlozilo-da-se-proglasi-trodnevna-zalost/> (Accessed: 15.09. 2023).
- N1 (2023g). 'Pucnjava kod Mladenovca: Osam mrtvih, više ranjenih, MUP – teroristički akt', N1, 4 May. Available at: <https://n1info.rs/vesti/pucnjava-kod-mladenovca-ima-ranjenih/> (Accessed: 15.09. 2023).
- Newman, K. et al. (2004). *Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings*. New York: Basic Books.
- Nikolić, M. (2023). 'I tabloid da pozavidi na informacijama: Odakle Vučiću podaci o dečaku i porodici', N1, 4 May. Available at: <https://n1info.rs/vesti/i-tabloid-da-pozavidi-na-informacijama-odakle-vucicu-podaci-o-decaku-i-porodici/> (Accessed: 15.09. 2023).
- O'Toole, M. J., & Fondacaro, M. R. (2017). 'When school-shooting media fuels a retributive public: An examination of psychological mediators'. *Youth violence and juvenile justice*, 15(2), pp. 154-171.
- Rivara, F. P., & Kellermann, A. L. (2007). 'Reducing the Misuse of Firearms'. In *Handbook of Injury and Violence Prevention*. Boston, MA: Springer US, pp. 311-331.
- Rocque, M. (2012) 'Exploring school rampage shootings: Research, theory, and policy'. *The Social Science Journal*, 49(3), pp. 304-313.

RTS (2023) 'Predaja nelegalnog oružja MUP-u bez posledica od 8. maja do 8. juna', N1, 5 May. Available at: <https://n1info.rs/vesti/predaja-nelegalnog-oruzja-mup-u-bez-posledica-od-8-maja-do-8-juna/> (Accessed: 15.09. 2023).

Small Arms Survey (2017). *Civilian Firearms Holdings 2017*. Small Arms Survey. Available at: [http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/Weapons\\_and\\_Markets/Tools/Firearms\\_holdings/SAS-BP-Civilianheld-firearms-annexe.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/Weapons_and_Markets/Tools/Firearms_holdings/SAS-BP-Civilianheld-firearms-annexe.pdf) (Accessed: 15.09. 2023).

Spasić, D., Radovanović, I. (2019). 'Kontekst zaštite od nasilja u porodici i zloupotrebe oružja: zakonodavni okvir i Rezolucija 1325 u Srbiji'. *Zbornik radova Pravnog fakulteta u Nišu*, 58(83), pp. 145-162.

Stanarević, S (2021). 'Uvodna razmatranja'. In Stanarević, S., Rokvić, V. (eds.) *Obrazovanje za bezbednost u sistemu osnovnog i srednjeg obrazovanja*. Beograd: Godišnjak Fakulteta Bezbednosti

Stojanović, F., Šekarić, N. (2019). 'Uloga policije u suzbijanju problema lakog i malokalibarskog oružja u Republici Srbiji i na Zapadnom Balkanu'. *Kultura polisa*, XVI (38), pp. 615-634.

Trump, K. S. (2000). *Classroom killers? Hallway hostages? How schools can prevent and manage school crises*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

United Nation Development Programme. (1994). *Human Development Report*. UNDP.

UNOCHA. (2009). *Human security in theory and practice*. New York: UNOCHA, Human Security Unit.

Haravuori, H., Suomalainen, L., Berg, N., Kiviruusu, O., & Marttunen, M. (2011). 'Effects of media exposure on adolescents traumatized in a school shooting'. *Journal of traumatic stress*, 24(1), pp. 70-77.