Research on the long term consequences of war rape and coping strategies of survivors in Bosnia-Herzegowina, medica mondiale and Medica Zenica (2014)



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Research questions focussing on:

- Consequences of war rape and sexual violence on survivors lives, health and relationships
- How does Bosnian society treat survivors today ? Social acknowledgement
- Coping strategies and sources of resilience in the past 20 years
- Impact of Medica Zenica

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Consultants and Activists of Medica Zenica and medica mondiale involved in the research



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Values: feminist perspective and stress- and trauma-sensitivity

- Research done by women, for women, about women, from women's perspective, research for change
- Interviews with survivors were done by trained staff members of Medica
- Informed consent, feedback during research process and authorization of survivors
- Research and reflective group which was centered around Medica Zenica (interviewers of survivors)
- Counsellor for survivors, Life story interviews in safe settings
- Survivors choose where to meet
- Debriefing sessions for all especially interviewers

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Methodology

- Multi-method design: questionnaire with open and closed questions, the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire Bosnia and Herzegovina version (HTQ-BH; Oruč et al., 2008), the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI; Derogatis, 1993) and the Brief Cope Questionnaire (Brief COPE; Carver, 1997)
- Seven participants also took part in life story interviews, and key informant interviews were conducted with two relevant ministries, alongside focus group discussions with six NGOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Life Story of Zehra:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dd9M9dmCfdc

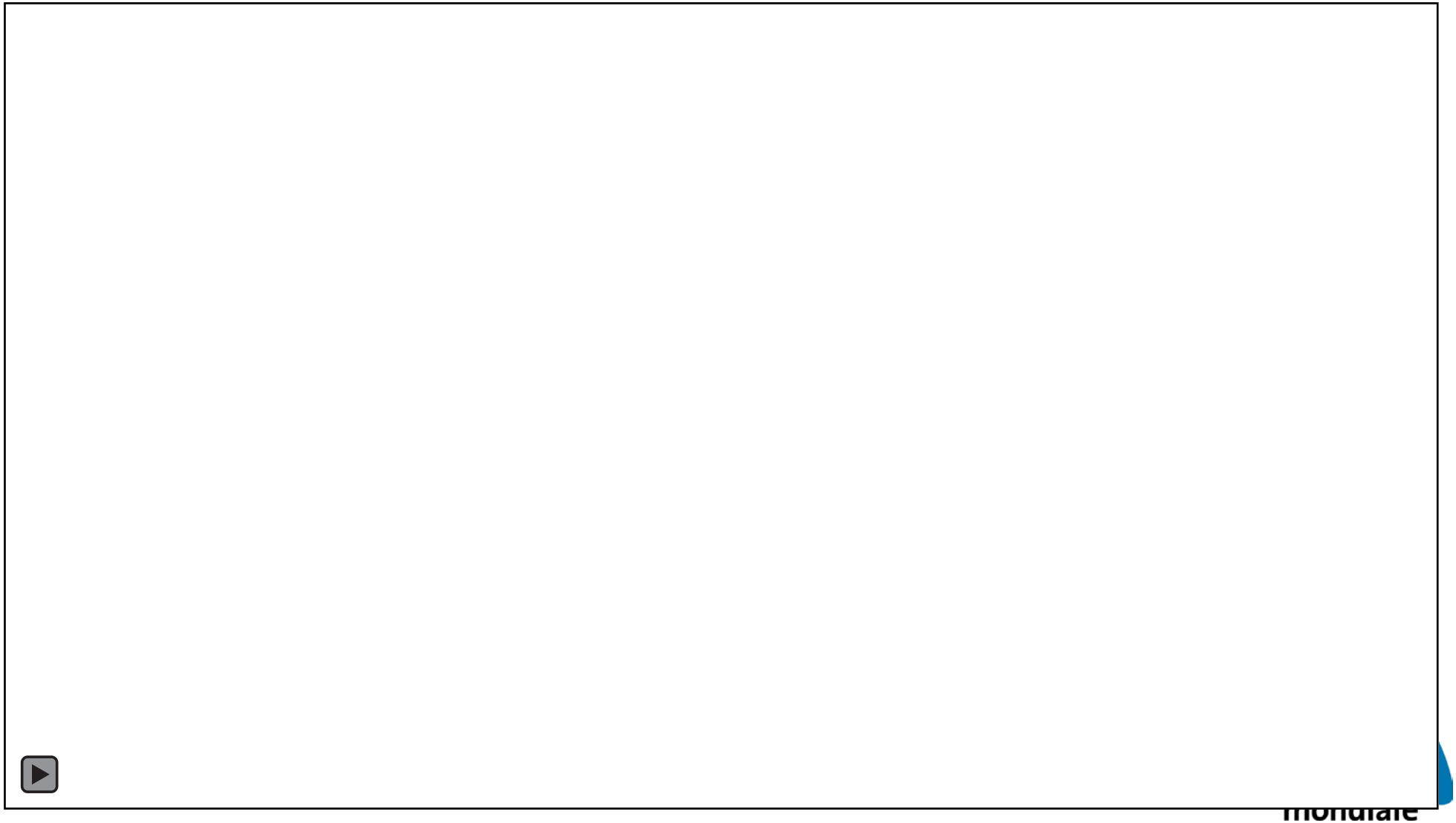


Video: "The Story of Zehra" - research on the long-term consequences of war rape in Bosnia

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Video Essence



„We are still alive. We have been harmed but we are brave and strong“

Key findings of the research: health

The mental and general health situation of survivors is of grave concern:

- 57% are suffering from Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms
- More than 85% see a doctor on regular basis
- 57% perceived their health condition “as bad”
- 65% take medicines regularly, half of them already for the past 20 years
- More than 58% suffer from at least four or more gynaecological symptoms
- 11% reported cancer

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Key findings of the research: relationships

- More than 75% reported that the rape experience influenced their lives with husbands and partners
- More than half of the women reported that the rape experience affected their relationships with their children
- Indications of transgenerational effects of war rape consequences on children

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Key findings of the research: coping/resilience

- Many women reported using coping strategies: diverting attention,
- BUT: Women are still immersed in traumatic memories in their daily lives
- Relationships with children, grandchildren and also with husbands, family members are their main source of resilience
- Care, availability, understanding , acceptance, safe space for sharing playing major role in their recovery

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Key findings of the research: Lack social acknowledgement

- Ongoing stigmatisation in communities, sexualised wartime violence is still a taboo in BiH
- Lack of protection for witnesses
- Insensitivity towards survivors in institutions
- The status of “Civilian War Victim” – not an instrument of social recognition?
- In contrast to male war veterans, who are regarded as heroes by themselves and others, the affected women do not perceive this status to be an expression of social acknowledgement.
- “So what, why didn’t she take care of herself like I did, why nobody raped me”

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Conclusions

- War rape leaves a deep and long-lasting wound on the survivors
- War rape not only wounds its survivors, but affects the whole society. Transgenerational effects are a challenge.
- The trauma of war rape survivor is a social, economic and political issue in BiH
- Survivors need direct services and social acknowledgement
- **There is no „healing“ without social acknowledgment, justice and transformation of gender roles!**

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Research for Change

„I dont want to take medication, I want to laugh“

- Training programs in the health sector: education on the impact of conflict related rape trauma on health, trauma-sensitive approach
- Nationwide hotline number offering help and support 24/7 to survivors of war rape and sexual violence.
- Campaign “Stop Stigmatization”
- Advocacy on national, european and international level (PSVI)

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Research "We are still alive" on the long-term consequences of war rape in Bosnia Herzegovina

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Thank you for Listening

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