

# **Aftermath: The Impact Of Conflict on Women In Bosnia and Herzegovina**

**By Martha Walsh**

**Working Paper No. 302  
July 2000**

# Preface

The Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE) has been engaged in a program of evaluation studies to examine the role that international assistance can play in the social and political rehabilitation of war-torn societies. CDIE represented USAID in the multidonor evaluation of “Emergency Assistance to Rwanda” and subsequently authored “Rebuilding Post-War Rwanda.” This report was followed by a book, *Rebuilding Societies After Civil Wars*, which examined the different dimensions of post-war reconstruction, drawing policy lessons for the international community.

CDIE then evaluated the role of international assistance in supporting postconflict elections in six countries and presented its findings in a monograph, “From Bullets to Ballets,” and a volume, *Postconflict Elections, Democratization and International Assistance*. CDIE’s findings affected not only USAID policies and programs but also those of other international agencies.

In October 1997, CDIE organized an international conference on “Promoting Democracy and Human Rights in Postconflict Societies” attended by 350 representatives of national and international organizations and the academic community. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright spoke at this conference. CDIE also undertook three case studies of social reconciliation programs in South Africa, the Middle East, and Bosnia and Herzegovina and brought out several publications on this subject.

CDIE has now initiated a comparative analysis of the effects of intrastate conflicts on gender issues and the ways USAID and other donors can help women in war-torn societies. It has completed a number of field studies in countries such as Cambodia, El Salvador, Georgia, and Rwanda. It is also planning field investigations in Guatemala and Sri Lanka.

Martha Walsh wrote a report on Bosnia and Herzegovina. From Ms. Walsh’s comprehensive report come these two papers. “The Impact of Conflict on Gender in Bosnia and Herzegovina” examines the overall impact of the conflict on gender relations, while “The Role of Women’s Organizations in Post-Conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina” focuses on women’s organizations that have emerged in the aftermath of the conflict. I am sure that USAID, its partners, and other agencies and organizations interested in the subject will find both of these papers useful.

I want to thank the author for the report. I also wish to record my thanks to Meloney Lindberg of the WIDTECH Project, who coordinates the gender study for CDIE, for her superb administrative support.

KRISHNA KUMAR  
Senior Social Scientist



# Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	1
Country Context and Nature of the Conflict .....	1
<b>2. The Impact of Conflict on Gender in Bosnia and Herzegovina</b> .....	2
Demographic Change .....	2
Population Movements .....	2
Sex Ratio Imbalance and Age Structure .....	3
Status and Role in the Family .....	4
Economic Burdens and Opportunities .....	5
Labor Market.....	5
Privatization and Property .....	6
Social Protection .....	7
Health .....	7
Reproductive Healthcare .....	8
Disability .....	8
Violence Against Women .....	9
Mental Health .....	9
Education .....	10
Political Participation .....	10
<b>References.</b> .....	13



# 1. Introduction

This report forms part of a multicountry comparative assessment undertaken by USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE) in the context of a series of evaluative studies on the political and social rehabilitation of war-torn societies. A growing body of literature exists on the gender dimensions of conflict and the various roles that women play during wartime. This paper seeks to contribute to this work, in particular by examining the impact of conflict on gender in Bosnia and Herzegovina. After a brief background on the country context and the nature of the conflict, section 2 outlines the effects of conflict on gender experienced in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## Country Context and Nature Of the Conflict

After World War II, Joseph Broz (Tito) became the head of the new Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, which incorporated the six republics of Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Tito's policy of "brotherhood and unity" was aimed at uniting former enemies to form a new nation of "peace and prosperity" (Bringa 1995, 23), although his tactics in implementing his policy were often Stalinist and brutal (Malcolm 1996, 193).

Bosnia was the third largest of the six republics in terms of both land mass and population. According to the 1991 census, Bosnia's population was 4.3 million, of whom 41 percent were identified as Muslim, 31.4 percent as Serb, 17.3 percent as Croat, and 7.6 percent as other. Despite ethnic identification in the census, all three populations mixed and mingled in urban and rural societies. Since World War II, 30 to 40 percent of marriages in urban areas were mixed (Donia and Fine 1994, 9). The shared history and culture of all three groups formed the basis of a distinct (Donia and Fine 1994, 7) and unifying identity that "straddled ethnoreligious communities, but did not subsume these differences" (Bringa 1995, 33).

The majority of the population, 62 percent, resided in urban areas as the result of an emphasis on industrial-

ization (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina 1996, 4). Since most Bosnians completed at least secondary or vocational schooling, the labor force was highly skilled and educated. In terms of its economy, however, Bosnia ranked fourth among the other republics. In 1991, its gross domestic product (GDP) was \$10.6 million or \$2,429 per capita compared with Slovenia's \$6,500 per capita (World Bank 1999, v).

When Tito died in 1980, the national unity he had struggled to create began to crumble. The economy declined steadily into debt in the 1970s and hyperinflation in the 1980s. At the same time, Serbian nationalism began a resurgence. Reacting to Serb neo-nationalism and the economic decline, as well as fomenting nationalist movements, Croatia and Slovenia declared their independence in June 1991. The Belgrade government reacted with force against what was seen as an illegal secessionist movement, ending with a conflict in Slovenia that lasted 10 days and a war with Croatia that continued until January 1992.

In March 1992, Bosnia held an independence referendum that was approved by a two-thirds majority. Bosnia and Herzegovina was recognized by the European Union on April 6. On the same date, Bosnian Serb nationalists began the siege of Sarajevo, and the Bosnian war began. Bosnian Muslim and Croat forces originally fought a united defense against Bosnian Serb advances. However, Bosnian Croat factions declared the formation of the Croatian Community of Herceg-Bosna in July 1992, which was to fuel distrust between the Bosnian Croats and Muslims. Relations broke down entirely in 1993, engendering a "war within a war" between the Muslim and Croat forces at which time the war spread throughout the country.

The two interrelated atrocities that became the hallmarks of the conflict in Bosnia were ethnic cleansing and the systematic rape of women. Ethnic cleansing was a process whereby towns were "purified" of the other ethnic groups through forced eviction and execution. Women were often forced into flight, while men were rounded up and executed or sent to concentration camps. Rape contributed to this process by

tainting the ethnic purity of the women raped and instilling fear within the community, encouraging them to flee. Although the sexual violence against women has been widely reported, much less is known about the rape and sexual assault of men in concentration camps. The demographic, social, psychological, and physical chaos caused by this strategy of ethnic cleansing and systematic rape is the most horrifying and enduring legacy of the war.

The Bosnian Muslim/Croat conflict was eventually resolved in 1994 through international mediation, which resulted in the creation of the Bosniac–Croat Federation. The reunification of the forces enabled a

stronger resistance. In 1995, the combined forces launched a dramatic offensive, forcing the Bosnian Serbs into a negotiating position. In November 1995, the factions met and reached agreement, and a month later, on December 14, 1995, they signed the General Framework Agreement, also referred to as the Dayton Accords, which brought a halt to the hostilities. The effect of the General Framework Agreement was to create one state, Bosnia and Herzegovina, consisting of two entities. The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of 51 percent of the territory and has a Bosniac and Croat majority among the population. The Republika Srpska (RS) has the remaining 49 percent of the territory, with a Bosnian Serb majority.

---

## 2. The Impact of Conflict on Gender In Bosnia and Herzegovina

The impact of a conflict on a society depends on the nature and extent of the conflict. In Bosnia, virtually every sector was devastated, from the economy to the social fabric of local communities. Although the degree of damage varied, every village and community experienced some, if not all, of the brutality of the war. For example, Sarajevo was constantly under siege for nearly four years. Zenica, an hour away, was not heavily bombarded, but it suffered severely under a blockade in 1993. The paralysis of the state infrastructure and the health and education systems similarly affected all citizens.

All of these impacts are inherently gendered. The way in which men and women experience and deal with the consequences of conflict depends on gender roles and relations prior to the conflict and how they were renegotiated during wartime (Byrne 1995, 23). Class, ethnicity, age, and education, however, also are significant factors that determine the responses of both men and women in a postconflict situation. In some cases, intragender differences will be as significant as—if not greater than—intergender differences. It has been recognized that a scarcity of resources and ethnic tension may in fact lead to competition among women (Byrne 1995, 42). This is certainly true in Bosnia, where class, ethnicity, and residential status are key elements in determining a woman's position and have proved to be a source of conflict between

women and women's organizations. The following section addresses the salient effects of the conflict and their gender implications, drawing out areas of such conflict.

### Demographic Change

Systematic ethnic cleansing and widespread fighting resulted in a radical shift in the demography of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The three most significant effects have been massive population movements, a change in the sex ratio, and modification of the age structure.

### POPULATION MOVEMENTS

Nearly half of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been displaced. One million people sought refuge abroad, while another million were displaced internally. Of those who are displaced internally, most were victims of ethnic cleansing, while others are locally displaced because their homes or villages were destroyed. Despite large-scale efforts by the international community to promote refugee and minority return, only a small fraction of those who were displaced have been willing or able to return. The only gender-disaggregated data available on refugees and the displaced is specific to the RS collective centers, where the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that 51 percent of the population is female and 49 percent is male. The only other indication is that of the 830,000 returnees, internally displaced, and vulnerable persons assisted by UNHCR, 55 percent were women and girls (UNHCR 1998). A later UNHCR report refers to “many female-headed households” among their beneficiaries but, again, does not elaborate on the specific context of assistance. Without a further breakdown of the target groups, a true profile of the displaced cannot be ascertained (UNHCR 1999).

Displacement is traumatic for men and women. Both suffer from a loss of community networks and relationships. For women and particularly rural women, however, the loss of their homes and the dislocation of community support structures may be particularly devastating. An anthropological study of a mixed village near Sarajevo notes that the home, *kuca*, was the “center of any individual’s social environment” (Bringa 1995, 86). For women, who were the sustainers of the home, it was both a moral and social anchor. Women’s social lives were organized around coffee visits to neighbor’s homes. Men, by contrast, were more likely to socialize outside the home in cafes. In rural village communities, women negotiated barter agreements, *kesim*, which were important in ensuring self-sufficiency, particularly for those who were landless (Bringa 1995, 50). In urban areas, the experience of rural displaced women is mixed. Some have established new networks and have been able to take advantage of the various income-generating and microcredit schemes that target them. Others, however, are still lost. Some without husbands do not know how to make a living.

Displacement also has been linked to domestic violence because the traditional mechanisms and outlets for resolving conflicts and handling crises have disappeared (Medica Zenica 1999, 47). This affected both populations that were displaced and communities from which populations left. The transition in cultural norms between urban and rural was noted as causing stress within the family, particularly between generations (Medica Zenica 1999, 47). Younger displaced women also are said to be more vulnerable to traffickers and pimps. This can produce a vicious cycle whereby women who find their way out are ostracized by their families and communities and must return to the sex trade to survive (Medica Zenica 1999, 86).

There has always been a profound bias against rural people, which has been worsened by heavy refugee flows from rural to urban areas. Rural women had their own prejudices against urbanites, believing them to be morally bankrupt (Bringa 1995, 60). Both men and women from rural areas found themselves in urban areas without necessary professional skills to earn a living. They also are blamed for many of the ills that plague the cities, such as the spread of communicable diseases and an increase in pollution. Displaced women in urban areas must compete with other groups of women, such as families of dead soldiers, for housing and other resources (Walsh 1997). A smaller number of refugees fled from urban to rural areas and, without any agricultural skills, had to struggle to become self-sufficient farmers.

There are now indications that girls in displaced populations are not going to school in urban areas in equal numbers with boys. A preliminary study of displaced persons from Srebrenica living in towns near Tuzla has shown that girls are less likely to have finished primary school and much less likely to enroll in secondary school.\* It seems that girls are being kept home, particularly when finances are tight, in favor of educating boys. It is assumed that this is linked to traditional norms, which prioritize boys’ education since women are expected to work at home and, thus, are thought to need less education.

### **SEX RATIO IMBALANCE AND AGE STRUCTURE**

Gender-disaggregated information on the composition of the 250,000 war dead was unavailable. It is believed, however, that the majority of those killed were men of productive age. In addition, over 18,000 remain missing, the majority of whom are men. It is currently estimated that women constitute between 52 and 60 percent of the population and that between 16 and 20 percent of households are headed by females (Prism Research 1998, 13; World Bank 1998, 49). Among populations such as the displaced of Srebrenica from which there are a significant number of men missing, the percentage is likely to be higher.

The age structure also has changed considerably.

---

\*Personal communication from Lilijana Zita, Federation Ombudsman’s Office, Sarajevo.



Current statistics indicate increases in the dependent populations of the young and old, but a significant drop of nearly 10 percent in the productive age population.

Combined with the sex ratio imbalance, the figures suggest that the economic burden and domestic obligations on women have increased considerably. These obligations conflict. The socially ingrained nurturing role may prevent women from being able to seek the productive employment necessary to provide for a dependent household. The absence of men may further constrain women's ability to access resources, such as mobilizing labor for the repair of her house, where men had dominated key networks (Byrne 1995, 33; Walsh 1997, 3; Bringa 1995, 70).

## Status and Role in the Family

Conflict creates a confusing and contradictory dynamic in which gender identities are reified and polarized while at the same time women's roles are expanded into male-dominated arenas. As Byrne notes:

There may be multiple and competing notions of masculinity and femininity in any given time and context. In conflict situations, gender identities become intensely politicised and the process of militarisation can be traced in the reforming and restating of gender identities through legal reforms and changes in employment patterns, propaganda and cultural discourse, education and the socialisation of children (Byrne 1995, 13).

On the one hand, there lies the essentialist notion of men as warriors and women as victims and moral guardians of the community. On the other, at least for women, conflict necessitates a dramatic role change whereby women become the providers and, in some cases, the defenders of the family, a traditionally male role. The way this dynamic plays out and the consequences it has in postconflict development differ between types of conflict and geographical regions.

The type of role change that frequently occurs, whereby women are allowed to move into previously male-dominated sectors of work and community participation, appears to offer transformative potential for the role and status of women in the family and

community. In Bosnia, this process is taking place, although at a very slow pace and to a limited extent. A number of factors may explain the difficulties in realizing the potential for change.

The gender identities of women throughout Yugoslavia were transformed by the wars: "from the idealised working woman of socialist rhetoric, she has become the equally idealized mother of the nation" (Bracewell 1995, 27). Pro-nationalist policies were adopted by all parties and embraced by some women themselves. A Sarajevo woman was quoted as saying "I plan to fire off one baby every year to spite the aggressors" (Bracewell 1995, 28). Such "revenge fertility" has been found in other conflicts with strong ethno-nationalist components, such as Rwanda (*Economist* February 1997). These policies linger latently in Bosnia's labor laws and the reticence of doctors to advocate family planning, thus maintaining an emphasis on women's reproductive roles. Bracewell further argues that "sending women back to the home answers economic needs as well by getting rid of surplus labor and shifting the costs of welfare provision back to the family" (1995, 28). In this sense, it has facilitated a major objective of the postconflict rehabilitation, the employment of demobilized soldiers, thus solidifying the public-private dichotomy. These identities are imposed just as strictly on men as on women. Men fear being considered "henpecked" or effeminate if they break out of norms of masculinity (Savjak 1998).

Although the warring factions may have manipulated gender identities to serve nationalist and economic aims, women in the immediate aftermath of the conflict sought not to challenge the imposition or re-imposition of a patriarchal order in the household. For many women, the safe return of their husbands, sons, fathers, and brothers from the front was paramount. At the end of the war, most simply wanted to return to a "normal life"—that is, the life they led before the war—without questioning what their position actually was or would be. While acknowledging the home as a potential site of oppression, one researcher on Bosnia also noted the importance of recognizing "the power and autonomy certain women gain from recovering the terrain of home and family" (Nguyen-Gillham 1999, 196). She continues:

Faced with the annihilation of existence, women's recreation of home and inner

sanctum signifies resistance to a loss of political and social power. The reclaiming of home and domestic space as refuge restores stability, freedom and control for some women.

Recent research indicates that the value women place on their domestic roles has not changed substantially in the past few years. According to Prism Research (hereafter referred to as the 1997 Prism survey), the family factored as the number one point of pride for women of all backgrounds, although it is higher among those from rural backgrounds between the ages of 35 and 50.\* In addition, roles involving the family (mother, sister, wife) ranked highest among the level of importance placed on life roles. The mothering role ranked highest. Roles as a member of a nationality placed second, although it was less important for Croats than Bosniacs or Serbs and interestingly slightly more important for those in urban than rural areas. Roles and pride in work came further down the list. It is not surprising for working mothers to place family first. Yet, the apparent importance of nationality may play a part in reinforcing family roles as it was noted above that gender identities are bound up with ethno-nationalist idealization of masculinity and femininity.

Where women are contributing income to the household, there does not appear to be a change in the financial decision-making process within the household. Female market traders, for example, reported they make decisions jointly with their husbands. Only one woman said she was the chief decision-maker, and this was due to her husband's having had a stroke. Likewise, the majority of women in the Prism survey reported that decisions are made jointly. Still, it is difficult to know from data and brief conversations what goes on inside the household.

---

\*The Prism survey, which was sponsored by Delphi International STAR with funding from private foundations and international organizations, was the first effort to document the status of women and the economy and perceptions of women about opportunities for change. The study was prepared for the first conference held on this topic in Zenica, BiH, in November 1997.

## **Economic Burdens And Opportunities**

Economic collapse and an increased dependency ratio have combined to produce an extraordinary burden on women. Indeed, women randomly interviewed cited the economy as the biggest problem for women, and many noted that life is more difficult for women than for men because women "now have to do everything."

### **LABOR MARKET**

In 1991, women constituted 35.9 percent of the workforce (UNDP 1999a, 91). Currently, women account for 40 percent of persons on waiting lists of enterprises restarting after the war (UNDP 1999a, 72), although their actual employment and unemployment rates are not known.

Barriers to women's employment in the formal sector are revealed through data that indicate widespread direct and indirect discrimination. One study shows that women, particularly women in female-headed households, have lower employment rates than men (CIET Vulnerability Study in World Bank 1999, 16). Moreover, those who are employed receive wages 20 to 50 percent lower than their male counterparts. Meanwhile ex-soldiers were found to have the lowest unemployment rates and the highest wages. An Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Human Rights report on employment discrimination found that among cases reported, gender discrimination was linked to prioritized employment for demobilized soldiers, the majority of whom are male (OSCE 1999, 9).

Both policy-oriented and social-cultural discrimination have forced women to identify alternative means for income generation. In addition, those who had previously not worked are finding it necessary to engage in economic activity to make up for the shortfall in household revenues. Much of this activity takes place in the "gray economy" of market trading. Although it provides at least a supplemental income, this is a precarious livelihood because the government is clamping down on this sector in an effort to raise revenue.

The dire economic and employment situation also has resulted in women turning to sex in various ways. A

## Market Tales

Saida works at the central market in Sarajevo. She did not work before the war and never thought she would work in a market, but her husband's salary is not enough. With money borrowed from friends, she started her own stall. She now has two stalls for which she pays 570 deutsche marks (DM) per month. After all expenses, she takes home 20 to 30 DM in profit per day. It is "enough to have a normal life, but not to get rich," she said. As women are being laid off from state industries and men can easily find jobs in construction, the situation is much more difficult now for women than for men, she said.

Just down the road, a cluster of women sells vegetables on the sidewalk. One group is from Pofalici, an area within Sarajevo but removed from the center. None of them had worked outside the home before the war, but now their husbands are unemployed or make very little money. They sell the extra produce they grow and carry in a few times a week by bus. The income they earn is enough "to buy bread." There is disagreement as to whether it is more difficult for men or for women. Some say both. Others say it is harder for women because they now have to do everything.

Across town, there is a tool market where men constitute the majority of the traders. Most are unemployed demobilized soldiers. Fata and Behka help out Behka's husband, who has a job but does not earn enough to support the family. The men mainly work there, Behka says, because they are the "fighters of survival" for their families and prefer women to stay at home. In addition, conditions in the market are not suitable for women (there are piles of garbage everywhere) and the main products, tools, are more familiar to men than women. Behka and Fata, however, have learned enough to assist their customers. The trade brings in about 20 to 30 DM per day. It is generally more difficult for women to find work, although women would like to work and for the same salaries as men.

In Banja Luka, Tomka works for someone else at a stall in the market selling cosmetics and other products. Before the war, she was employed at an electronics factory that is still working but has taken back few employees. In the meantime, she has developed arthritis, which will prevent her from returning to her work. Her husband had a stroke and is unable to work. Although he receives some disability pay, her monthly salary of 200 DM is their primary income. She makes the financial decisions for the household, which includes her unemployed son and mother-in-law. Life is harder for women now, she said, because women have so many responsibilities and cannot rely on men because of the trauma they suffered during the war.

recent reporter's study on prostitution and trafficking suggests prostitution may be widespread. As noted above, displaced women may be particularly vulnerable to organized prostitution (Medica Zenica 1999, 86). An increase in the trafficking of foreign women has had the effect of reducing local prostitutes to the most dangerous and debasing work. It also seems that job insecurity in a bleak economic environment is making women more vulnerable to sexual harassment at work.

The one area in which women have a significant advantage is employment with international organizations. Because women were more likely than men to study social sciences, and particularly foreign languages, many have been able to gain very well-paid employment as interpreters, secretaries, and program assistants. Men are more often found as drivers and in lesser paid positions within these organizations.

Whether these short-term gains can be converted into longer term advantages remains to be seen since the pool for secretaries and administrators will soon be saturated. Long-term gains would be more certain where female staff are encouraged to develop within the organizations and acquire new skills marketable in the post-international, nongovernmental organization (NGO) era.

### **PRIVATIZATION AND PROPERTY**

The process of privatization in BiH is immensely complicated. In both the RS and the Federation, it involves a system of vouchers given to individuals to compensate them for income, benefits, and pensions not paid during the war. At the same time, state enterprises are being auctioned off. Although the international community is focusing on the development of a free-market economy, little attention is being

paid to the potential impact of this process on women. Experience from other former Eastern Bloc countries shows that women are likely to be disproportionately disadvantaged (see Einhorn 1993). Specifically, they are usually the first to be “downsized.” A recent UNDP publication on transition economies in Central and Eastern Europe notes that widening gender inequality has been one of the human costs of economic transition (UNDP 1999b). The report highlights the disenfranchisement of women from politics and the economy as well as the impact of cutbacks in social welfare and an increase in domestic violence (ibid.).

Part of the privatization process is the acquisition of ownership rights over formerly socialized property. Before the war, state enterprises owned many apartments that were then given to workers who had tenancy rights. Now, with a chronic shortage of housing attributable to war damage and the scenario of “musical houses” caused by refugee movements,\* establishing ownership is extremely complex. Laws have been written and rewritten a number of times. Some of these laws have negative consequences for women. The Law on the Sale of Apartments in BiH allows for a reduction in the purchase price based on percentage of number of years the buyer has worked. It allows spouses to combine their years of work to increase the deduction. Further, it enables a surviving spouse to use years of deceased spouse. Yet there is no provision to allow a surviving spouse to combine his or her working years with the deceased’s (IHRG 1999, 162). Women, both by virtue of longer life spans and the wartime death toll among men, constitute the majority of surviving spouses. This particularly affects young widows, who have few if any working years of their own. Although a Property Commission has been established to address ownership issues, the gender aspects of the laws have not been fully addressed.

Although there was no bar to women owning property, women are less likely to have legal title to property than men. According to the Prism survey, 25 percent of respondents had tenancy rights to a socially owned flat, and only 3.5 percent to private property. As it

---

\*Displaced persons have swapped houses on a large scale as they occupy the houses of those displaced from the area where they now live (e.g., Bosniacs inhabiting Serb houses and vice versa).

stands, for a woman a divorce case to claim rights over property of which she is not on the title, she must prove that she contributed substantial income during the marriage. Moreover, men can transfer title into the names of others (other family members, for example) so that women have no claim. These issues, along with the overall shortage of housing, pose particular problems for women seeking to leave abusive relationships.

## **SOCIAL PROTECTION**

Other forms of discrimination in the economy include the system of disability payments. In the Federation, payments are divided into three tiers: war veterans, civilian victims, and those with disabilities unconnected to the war, with war veterans receiving the most generous benefits. This creates disadvantages among most women with disabilities as well as women caring for disabled children or other family members. A network of disabled persons associations has organized a lobbying campaign to standardize the benefits package for all disabled persons. Although women are active in disabled persons associations, such as Parents of Children with Disabilities and Lotos, women’s organizations generally have not been involved in this issue.

Relatives and other foster families have taken in a number of war orphans. However, the vast majority of municipalities are not providing support to the foster families (UNDP 1999a, 45), thus stretching both resources and patience within households. As the principal providers of childcare, women are particularly affected.

With the pension system in disarray and without adequate service provision, the elderly continue to constitute a large, vulnerable group. A study conducted in 1998 revealed, however, that elderly men living on their own may in fact be more vulnerable than elderly women given the men’s inability to handle simple domestic tasks, such as cooking and cleaning for themselves (Byron and Walsh 1998).

## **Health**

The pre-war health sector in BiH was based on a three tiered structure: village clinics, *ambulant*s; larger town facilities, *dom zradavljas*, where reproductive

health concerns were addressed; and general or regional hospitals. In addition, some of the larger enterprises had on-site clinics that also handled gynecological problems. Women are thought to have predominated among health professionals, although men constituted the majority of surgeons, head doctors, and clinic directors.

This infrastructure was crippled by the conflict, with a 40 percent loss in personnel. The health system has thus been incapable of handling most normal health concerns, let alone the host of new issues brought on by the war and its aftermath. For women, this has meant a decline in reproductive healthcare provision and a general absence of state services to address disability issues, psycho-social problems, and gender-based violence.

### REPRODUCTIVE HEALTHCARE

The collapse of the healthcare system has meant a sharp decline in the ability of women to obtain reproductive healthcare. A recent study by an NGO in Gorzade noted that the three main health concerns of women were contraceptive use, sexually transmitted diseases, and breast and cervical cancer (Tilson and Camino 1998 in IHRLG, 189). Before the war, abortion was said to be the most common form of birth control, and the number is thought to have tripled during the conflict (UNICEF 1998, 26). Although it is still legal in most of the country, abortions in Croat-controlled areas of BiH are technically illegal. However, it was noted that the same doctors who refuse to perform abortions in public health centers will perform them for a high fee in private clinics. In Muslim areas, while abortion is legal, some doctors refuse to perform the procedure.

Although all healthcare had been free, charges have been introduced for tests and check-ups as well as abortion services. These fees can range from 5 to 100 DM (IHRLG 1999, 191). The Prism survey revealed that 30 percent of respondents rely on their husbands employer for health benefits while 6 percent pay their own costs. Of particular concern are the 17 percent who do not have any health coverage, a figure that increases to 25 percent among the over 50 age group from rural areas. Women not only may not have full access to all the healthcare they may need, but they

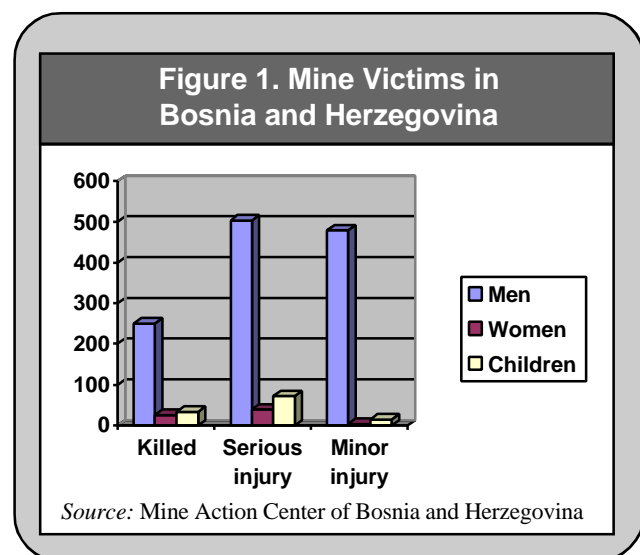
also may be less likely to leave an abusive relationship because they are dependent on their husbands' health benefits.

### DISABILITY

More than 200,000 people were wounded in the war, 13,000 of whom have permanent disabilities. Although there are no gender-disaggregated data on the wounded, it is known that the total included 50,000 children (World Bank 1999, Annex 10). Landmines continue to pose a threat. Data from the Mine Action Center of BiH show that there have been 1,421 mine incidents since the Dayton Peace Accords were signed. Disaggregated data on mine victims is set out in the chart below.

Gender disparities among mine victims may be explained by the gender division of labor. Field-related tasks, such as clearing fields, wood collection, mushroom picking, and fishing, are done by men. The typical mine victim is a young male farmer. Collection of water, which is mainly a woman's job and is responsible for large numbers of women mine victims in developing countries, is much less of an issue in Bosnia given regular water supplies to most areas.

The impact of disability on gender, however, is two-sided. First, women who are themselves disabled face double discrimination. As the system of benefits is biased toward war veterans, ex-combatant invalids are given first priority in obtaining suitable housing, training, and employment programs. The second form of discrimination is social ostracism. Because it is



more socially acceptable for disabled men to go out in public, disabled women are more likely to stay at home, away from school and a social life, and are less likely to marry. A number of women have been divorced after their disability. There is little known about the psycho-social impact of disability on men, where they have lost the ability to provide for or indeed create a family, an essential aspect of their identity. For war veterans, this loss of activity and indeed identity may compound war-related trauma (World Bank 1999, annex 14).

The other side of disability is caring for those who are disabled. Given the sizeable proportion of men among the disabled, women have inevitably had to assume the role of primary breadwinner as well as caretaker where husbands or fathers had provided the main source of income. In addition to burdens on time and resources, this undoubtedly increases stress and tension within the household.

### **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

Although wartime rape is most commonly associated with women in BiH, violence against women in this country takes many forms. A significant health issue, violence against women also cuts across other sectors, such as the economy, the status of women, and the legal system.

The rape of women during wartime is an intentional and strategic act of brutality. It is designed to degrade women as the moral guardians of their traditions and to demoralize the community in which they live. In ethnic conflict, it is a direct assault on their community identity. The majority of aggressors were in the Bosnian Serb militia; however, it is known that all three armies carried out this practice to some extent.

The number of women raped during the war is uncertain. There are estimates of 25,000 to 50,000 women. These numbers, however, have been manipulated by factions for their own purposes and must be read with care (Stiglmeier 1994, 163; Medica Zenica 1999, 79). This is not to underestimate the scale and significance of the war rapes. Those who survived such horrific attacks suffered severe physical and psychological damage that may impede their re-integration into social and economic life. Medica Zenica, one of the first groups to treat women survi-

vors, was careful not to publicly identify its patients as rape victims because in pre-war years raped women were socially ostracized, unable to marry, and “effectively blamed for what had been done to [them]” (Cockburn 1998,180).

Like rape, domestic violence is also underreported. In a study conducted in the municipality of Zenica, 20 percent of respondents reported having been beaten by their partners. However, an additional 53 percent responded that they knew at least one woman who had been beaten (Medica Zenica 1999, 52). Moreover, an SOS hotline in Mostar reported an alarming number of mothers being abused physically and psychologically by their sons, mostly unemployed demobilized soldiers. Many women cite the exigencies of the war—such as posttraumatic stress syndrome, unemployment, and related alcoholism—as the causes of domestic violence. Some believe it is purely a post-conflict phenomenon. It is increasingly being recognized, however, that violence is a form of patriarchal control, exercised out of frustration in the change in gender roles and the increasing independence of women (Medica Zenica 1999, 45).

### **MENTAL HEALTH**

An estimated 15 percent of the population suffers from psychological trauma, notably posttraumatic stress disorder (UNDP 1999a, 58). The 1999 UNDP *Human Development Report* notes that “mental health disorders are a direct result of the war especially among the most vulnerable groups such as displaced people, children and young persons, elderly and demobilized soldiers.” It is interesting to note that women are not included in this list for they, together with children, were the most targeted group for therapy programs. The important distinction made here is that women are not a *prima facie* vulnerable group.

Many women did experience trauma, most notably those who were brutally raped and threatened with death or watched their loved ones being executed. For many, psychological trauma induced further psychosomatic illnesses (Medica Zenica 1996, 21). However, it appears that a disproportionate amount of trauma counseling has been directed towards them while little has been done to address possible psycho-social problems of demobilized soldiers who were more

**Table 1. Percentage of Female Pupils in School and University**

Year	Primary	Secondary	University
1991/92	47	48	49
1995/96	49	47	N/A
1997/98	N/A	48(BiH) 50(RS)	51

Source: Human Development Report 1999

likely to be in close contact with violence. This imbalance may reflect the fact that it is easier to deal with women and that it has been the victims and not the aggressors who have been treated.\*

## Education

Under the socialist system in the pre-war era, schooling was free and was compulsory up to grade eight. Equality of opportunity in education between boys and girls was emphasized, but there has not been equality of result. Enrollment in primary and secondary education has been virtually equal, and at the university level, female full-time enrolment exceeded that of male enrolment. However, these figures do not account for completion rates. Anecdotal evidence suggests that women are less likely to complete tertiary levels of education because they leave school to marry and have children.

The war severely disrupted education, as 60 percent of schools were rendered unusable and the qualified teaching staff was greatly reduced (World Bank, annex 9). However, schools quickly reorganized informally, allowing education to continue throughout the war.

As the table above indicates, the percentage of female pupils at all levels appears to be the same or increasing in the postconflict period. However, there is concern that the introduction of an education fee in the process of privatization may reduce female attendance, particularly in rural areas. Some also are concerned about the distances that girls have to travel to secondary schools since transportation costs may be prohibitive. Moreover, rural women remain wary of the moral environment in urban areas.† Women in

the Social Democratic Party in fact have made this an issue on which they want to campaign. There has also been an increase in the number of women teachers in primary schools, but a decline in their numbers at secondary schools. The reasons for this are not clear, but it may be a cause for concern if women's abilities in the teaching profession are considered linked to socially ascribed gender roles as care givers.

## Political Participation

As part of the socialist egalitarian system, there was a quota for women's representation in government. In 1986, women constituted 24.1 percent of the Assembly of the Republic of BiH and 17.3 percent of representatives of municipal assemblies (OSCE 1998 in IHRLG, 181). However, a number of Bosnian women commented that women elected to office under this system were politically connected and the relatively high rates of women's participation did not reflect commitment to visibility of women in politics (Walsh 1997, 25). After the first postconflict elections in 1996, there was a massive retrenchment of women from public life. In the BiH House of Representatives (which represents both entities), only one woman was elected to the 42-seat chamber (2.38 percent). In the Federation, women were elected to 7 seats out of 140 (5 percent), while in the RS Parliament only 2 out of 106 seats (1.89 percent) were won by women (IHRLG 1999, 181). At the cantonal level in the BiH, women

\*Personal communication from Bjorn Mossberg, chief of mission for SIDA.

†Helms: personal communication.

## There Are More of US, Let's Vote

In an effort to change the gender balance in politics for the 1998 elections, there was a country-wide campaign to educate women voters and push for a quota in the electoral law. It was the first time a coalition of women's organizations had been formed around a collective advocacy initiative. There were 13 participating groups, primarily representing groups focused on human rights and democracy activities.

The League of Women Voters began negotiations with the Provisional Election Commission to include a women's representative on the commission and then pushed for the re-institution of a quota—this time 30 percent—to ensure a critical mass. The result was Article 7.50, paragraph f, which states that male and female candidates will be listed “so that each gender on the list has at least three candidates equally distributed among the first nine candidates on the list.”

At the same time, they worked to encourage participation of women at the grassroots level in the election and approached OSCE for support of a women's voter education project. With assistance from USAID, the organizations sent field representatives to villages and towns throughout the country, reaching 14,000 women in roundtables and discussions. In addition, posters and leaflets were distributed and displayed countrywide.

fared slightly better, averaging 6.4 percent. In the municipal elections of 1997, women's share increased only slightly. In the Federation, women held 6.15 percent of the total seats and in the RS 4.63 percent. In the RS Assembly elections held at the same time, women marginally increased their share to 2.43 percent (IHLRG 1999, 182).

In 1998, Bosnian women activists tackled the issue of women's underrepresentation head on through a process that became an USAID-funded project, “There Are More of Us, Let's Vote.”

Women's representation vastly improved in the 1998 elections. Women's representation in the BiH House of Representatives jumped to 26 percent, with 15 percent in the Federation House of Representatives and 22 percent of the RS National Assembly. At the cantonal level, women hold 18.46 percent of the seats and in the 10 new municipal assemblies, they hold 22.66 percent. Some concern has been expressed as to the caliber of women selected. It was suggested that parties in general select “weaker” party members regardless of gender to ensure party loyalty.

A Permanent Election law is currently being drafted under the leadership of OSCE. The chair of the commission had expressed reservations about institut-

ing quotas. However, it was the women members of Parliament who immediately put together a statement strongly advocating the retention of the quota system. Women's organizations, including many of those involved in the voter education campaign, also have been engaged in this issue, which has become a principal topic of ongoing roundtable discussions. Unfortunately, the electoral system is changing from a closed list to an open list system in which a quota is less likely to assist women. Consequently, the gains they made in the last elections may be rolled back.

In 1997, during discussions on the lack of visibility of women in politics, both men and women expressed the view that “women were too emotional, not interested, and that their priority is family” (Walsh 1997). Although this was not a definitive study, it was perhaps reflective of the absence of women in politics. In a survey taken in June 1999 (OSCE 1999) after the increase in women's representation, attitudes toward women's participation in public life were dramatically different. Of the 1,050 BiH citizens surveyed, 58 percent responded that there should be more women in elected positions. Among women, this figure increased to 73 percent. In addition, 70 percent of all respondents agreed that every registered party should be required to include a certain percentage of women as candidates. The percentage that received greatest



support (33 percent) was 41 to 50 percent. Moreover, 64 percent responded that parties should be required to appoint a certain percentage of women to government positions.

This last question is particularly salient because women's representation in executive positions is negligible. There are no women in the BiH Council of Ministers and out of 64 posts connected to the Council of Ministers, only four women have been appointed. There are no women ministers in either the Federation or the RS. In the Federation, none of the cantonal presidents, assembly presidents, or prime ministers are women (IHRLG 1999, 182–183).

In the judiciary, women constitute the majority of municipal court judges and have significant participation in cantonal and district courts, but there are few female court presidents. There is only one female judge on the BiH Constitutional Court. The situation is worse in the RS where no women sit on the RS Supreme Court and only one out of nine judges in the Constitutional Court is a woman (IHRLG 1999, 183). The Prism study showed that 59.9 percent of respondents believed there should be more women in law. This area ranked highest in the areas of society in which women should be more involved. The absence of women in higher levels of judiciary is problematic given the difficulties in bringing and winning cases on gender-based discrimination and prosecuting sex offences. Even where women do preside in courtrooms, they are not necessarily gender sensitive. A woman judge in Zenica reportedly refused to give priority to cases involving domestic violence, despite the urgency of prosecuting such claims.

Despite the significant achievements of the last year, there is much room for improvement. One of the major hurdles to women's full and active participation in political life is their position in the economy.

Politics and economics are inextricably linked throughout the world. However, the problem seems to be magnified in countries emerging from conflict, where the select few who profited from the war or have emerged as political leaders control both the economic and political landscape. It is difficult for men or women without the proper connections to break through these barriers. The challenges, however, are greater for women because they are found in the least remunerative jobs and are less likely to have connections but more likely to have other burdens and responsibilities. Although quotas will address the short-term issue of instituting a culture receptive to women's political participation, long-term strategies to level the playing field in politics must be coupled with efforts to increase women's economic position and status.

Women in BiH are just beginning to make a link between the low levels of their participation in politics and in decision-making roles and their low status in the economy. As in many central and eastern European countries, there has been little tradition of citizen engagement in economic policy issues, except at a very theoretical level. As women's organizations begin to master skills in public policy advocacy, they are beginning to turn their attention to the practical issues of access to credit, business training, social safety net benefits, and employment.

Although it is still too early to assess what the long-term impact of the conflict and postconflict transition will be on the men and women of BiH, it is clear that the conflict—characterized by widespread fighting, ethnic cleansing, and systematic rape—has left deep scars on almost every aspect of society, the people, and economy of BiH. This report has tried to highlight how men and women, in general, may have experienced and dealt with the consequences of the conflict in different ways.

# References

- Bracewell, W. (1995) "Mothers of the Nation" in Warreport, Institute of War and Peace Reporting: London.
- Bringa, T. (1995) *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village*, Princeton University Press: Princeton.
- Byrne, B. (1995) *Gender Conflict and Development, Volume 1: Overview*, BRIDGE, Institute of Development Studies: Brighton.
- Byron, G; and Walsh, M. (1998) *Beyond Reach: An Assessment of CARE's REACH Program for the Elderly*, unpublished report for CARE.
- Cockburn, C. (1998) *The Space Between Us: Negotiating Gender and National Identities in Conflict*, Zed Books: London.
- Donia, R.J.; and Fine, J.V.A. (1994) *Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Tradition Betrayed*, Hurst and Company: London.
- Einhorn, B. (1993) *The Impact of the Transition from Centrally-Planned Economies on Women's Employment in East Central Europe*, BRIDGE, Institute of Development Studies: Brighton.
- Employment Institute (1996) *Statistical Bulletin*.
- Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996) *Health Reform and Reconstruction Programme of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Ministry of Health, Sarajevo.
- International Human Rights Law Group (1999) *Women's Rights in BiH*, IHRLG: Sarajevo.
- Malcolm: N. (1996) *Bosnia: A Short History*, Macmillan: London.
- Medica Zenica (1996) "Surviving the Violence: War and Violence against Women Are Inseparable," information bulletin.
- Medica Zenica Infoteka (1999) "A Second Look: To Live Without Violence," Medica Zenica: Zenica.
- Nguyen-Gillham, V.Q. (1999) "Bosnian Women and Social Reconstruction: Reweaving the Social Fabric," Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, unpublished.
- OSCE (1999a) *Employment Discrimination in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Human Rights Department, Sarajevo.
- OSCE (1999b) *Survey on the Role of Women in BiH Politics*, Sarajevo.
- OSCE (1998) *Women's Representation in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Statistical Overview 1986, 1990, 1996, 1997*, Sarajevo.
- Prism Research (1998) *Women in the B&H Economy: Current Status and Future Strategies*, Prism Research: Sarajevo.
- Savjak, N. (1998) "Sexism and Equality: Women Between Stereotypes and Autonomy" in *Bulletin of Women Today Roundtables*, Helsinki Citizens Assembly and United Women, Banja Luka, unpublished.

- Stiglmyer, A. (1994) "The Rapes in Bosnia and Herzegovina" in A. Stiglmyer (ed.) *Mass Rape: The War Against Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, University of Nebraska Press: London. pp. 82–169.
- Tilson, D.; and Camino, C.M. (1997) *Reproductive Health Assessment and Health Education Project Gorazde*, for International Rescue Committee.
- UNICEF (1998) *Women and Children: Bosnia and Herzegovina Situation Analysis*, UNICEF: Sarajevo.
- UNDP (1999a) Human Development Report: Bosnia and Herzegovina 1998, UNDP: Sarajevo.
- UNDP (1999b) Transition 1999 Human Development Report for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (from Web site: [www.undp.org/rbec/pubs/hdr99/pr.htm](http://www.undp.org/rbec/pubs/hdr99/pr.htm))
- UNHCR (1998) 1998 Global Appeal: The Former Yugoslavia and Albania (from Web site: [www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch))
- UNHCR (1999) 1999 Global Appeal: The Former Yugoslavia and Albania (from Web site: [www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch)).
- Walsh, M. (1997) *Post-Conflict Bosnia And Herzegovina: Integrating Women's Special Situation and Gender Perspectives in Skills Training and Employment Promotion Programmes*, ILO: Geneva.
- Walsh, M. (1998) "Mind the Gap: Where Feminist Theory Failed to Meet Development Practice—A Missed Opportunity in Bosnia and Herzegovina," in *European Journal of Women's Studies* vol. 5 1998: 329–343.
- Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (1996), "The Struggle for Peace and Recovery in Former Yugoslavia: Moving Women From Background to Foreground!" Delegation visit to Bosnia and Croatia, 9–16 April 1996.
- World Bank (1999), *Bosnia and Herzegovina: 1996–1998 Lessons and Accomplishments Review of the Priority Reconstruction Program and Looking Ahead Towards Sustainable Economic Development*.
- World Bank (1998) *Bosnia and Herzegovina—The Priority Reconstruction Program: Achievements and 1998 Needs*.
- Zena Zenama (1998) Annual Report, unpublished.