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Women's Autonomy and Domestic Violence in the Sandzak Region: The Influence of Religion and Region*

This paper seeks to shed light on a specific aspect of domestic violence—wife beating in the Sandzak region, southwestern Serbia. The paper draws upon data collected in the course of a study on women's autonomy in the region. Violence against women in this area is closely linked to the institution of marriage, where related norms and cultural practices reinforce women's powerlessness, exposing them to domestic violence.

Key words:

women's status, wife beating,
gender cultural practices,
Sandzak

Introduction

This study focuses on wife beating and women's autonomy in the Serbian region of Sandzak, where Muslim and Christian Orthodox (Serbs) populations live side by side. This is an area with the largest concentration of Serbian Muslim population, known as Bosniaks. The Sandzak women are sometimes beaten by their husbands and pressurized by other men, mainly their fathers. The factors that play a part in this form of violent behavior are various as a consequence of traditions, transition, new economic practices and religion revival.

In Islamic settings, women occupy a separate and distinctive position that denies them autonomy and education (Caldwell 1986:175). The lack of control of their own lives is cited as the main factor that contributes to coercion of women and poorer mortality outcomes (Ghuman 2003, Das Gupta 1996, but see Dyson and

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Moore 1983, Jejeebhoy and Sathar 2001). On the other hand, there are some evidence suggesting wide variations in the ways which gender and behavioral norms are manifested across a range of Islamic countries (Obermeyer 1992). Several studies demonstrated that the dominant influence of behavior and cultural norms are imprinted by regionally prescribed social systems, and once religion is controlled, Muslim women exert as much autonomy (and the lack of domestic violence) as do non-Muslim women, wherever they reside (Jejeebhoy and Sathar 2001, Dyson and Moore 1983).

This paper explores these assertions empirically, using data collected during 2006-2007 extensive fieldwork in three Sandzak settlements. I compare the lives of Serbian and Muslim women and assess similarities and differences in women's autonomy and exposure to family violence in regard to religion/ethnicity, education, age, fertility, marriage patterns, and economic activity....

During the past decades, issues concerning domestic violence became one of the primary concerns of policy makers and researchers interested in women's health and status. Many women, especially in developing countries are exposed to many types of violence, but domestic/partner violence appears to be the most pervasive form. The World Bank (1993) estimates that domestic violence account for 5% of the healthy years of life lost to a woman of reproductive age in developing countries. Partner violence is the most prevailing form of gender violence worldwide (Heise et al. 1994). Domestic violence is directly linked with numerous kinds of physical and psychological injury to women. As such, domestic violence is not only an issue of human rights but also a serious social and public health concern. There are a number of studies to identify possible determinants of domestic violence, some of which are salient across diverse cultural and social contexts, but theories put forward to explain these issues remain relatively limited (Jejeebhoy 1998). Most studies on this issue have been focused on Western or South Asian countries (Koenig et al. 2003). Reliable data from the Balkans cultures remain limited and sources scarce. In the absence of evidence, many policy makers and authorities have been reluctant to deal with this issue, especially given that it refers to traditional cultural patterns and highly sensitive aspect of family life (Stanojevic 2006).

Novi Pazar's population is mostly Muslim - over 65,000 - compared to around 20,000 Serbs. The municipality of Novi Pazar has a high natural population increase rate, and in the period 1971-1981 it was 14%, while in 2002 it was 11.46% (Statistics for Serbia). Due to migrations and low natural increase, the Serbian and Montenegrin population was decreasing, and the Muslim population was constantly increasing.

Historical background

The Sandzak area seems appropriate to situate these issues: it is a region where women traditionally had little or no saying about their own life choices including marriage. The area became gradually Islamized since the 15th century and

the coming of Turks (Lutovac 1978). Today, it is an area with the largest concentration of Serbian Muslim population, known as Bosniaks. The other populations, which make national or ethnic minorities, consist of Orthodox Serbs and Montenegrins, and smaller groups of Turks and Albanians. Sandzak was founded as a military district during Turkish occupation in 1451. This territory is specific for the reason that there is a mixture of both Orthodox and Muslim Serbs. Current estimates on their relative population sizes vary, but Muslims form a significant majority in the region. The ethnic structure of the population of the Sandzak region is rather complex, complicated, and difficult to analyze. This results from the historical development of the Sandzak region, the events of which made it possible for the populations of different confessions "...to declare themselves, in certain social and economic, cultural and political circumstances, as members of different nations even though their ethnic roots are the same" (Rudic and Stepic 1993:54).

Still today, the populations of Sandzak are largely gender stratified, characterized by patrilineal descent, patrilocal residence, and hierarchical relations in which the patriarch or his relatives have considerable autonomy over family members, regardless of the religious affiliation (Gavrilovic 1985, Rudic and Stepic 1993). Strong control is exerted on women in almost every sphere of their lives: freedom of movement, decisions in family affairs, economic independence, and their relation with their husbands. All cultures in the region have been characterized by an ethic of honor and shame; these concepts may include vast number of moral correctness and reputation, female chastity being perhaps the most important element of familial honor (Gavrilovic 1985). Beyond the broad generalization on women's status in the Sandzak region, levels and patterns of female autonomy and exposure to family violence vary considerably within the region (information obtained by the courtesy of local non-government organization UrbanIn, in Novi Pazar), especially so after the transition has began. Sandzak has been one of the poorest areas of Serbia, but in the nineties it experienced a startling economic boom, thanks to private activity and small businesses mainly concentrated in the textile and footwear sectors. However, the beginning of transition period has produced a sudden collapse of this economic expansion resulting in mass unemployment. Nevertheless, many local people engage in a not-so-secret black economy, smuggling goods to and from Serbia to Kosovo and taking advantage of differences in prices and duties. According to the National Employment Agency, about one third of the local, healthy working-age adults are jobless, where young women make more than 40%. Today, the whole Sandzak area is struggling with the demands of a more complex economy and its people are stressed to make a living and to win political recognition of their claims to land and identity in what they consider to be their traditional territory.

Fieldwork

The fieldwork was conducted in three settlements in the Sandzak area: in a suburban area of Novi Pazar, the largest town, and two other settlements in close

proximity of the main municipality of Novi Pazar in 2006-2007. The names and locations of the settlement are being withheld at the request of most women informants.

The town of Novi Pazar (literally New Market, in Turkish *Yeni Bazaar*) was founded by a “Turkish” nobleman, Ishak-beg Ishaković around 1460 as an important trading post en route from Istanbul via Skopje to Bosnia and Dubrovnik (Rudic 1988). This trade route brought prosperity to the town in the 16th and 17th century, when, in terms of size and commercial power, it became the second most important town, comparable in importance to modern Belgrade or Sarajevo. Although the town deteriorated in the course of the 19th century the town retained its significance as the center of Sandzak, an administrative unit of the Ottoman Empire. As Sandzak was a territory keeping Serbia and Montenegro divided, the region was of great importance to both the Ottomans and the Habsburgs. Today, Novi Pazar is the most oriental town in Serbia, both in appearance and in spirit. There are echo of muezzins prayers from minarets across the town of around 85.000 which is today nearly 90 percent Muslim; beggars, Gypsies and unavailing young males crowd around improvised markets, selling everything from framed Koran verses to bogus designer blue jeans, underwear, toilet paper and perfumes. Many women are veiled and clothed head to toe in black, contrary to the region’s traditional mild Sunni version of the faith. “Islamic” ways are clearly seeing a revival. Although illegal since 1946, polygyny is encouraged by certain religious circles in Sandzak, and there is a current increase in number. For example, in spite that Serbian marriage law recognizes only one wife, that did not stop religious leader (mufti of Novi Pazar) Muharem Zukorlic from taking a second wife (Politika 2007). In addition, Sandzak’s Muslims like to be called Bosniaks because they claim they ethnically belong to Bosnia, not Serbia. Apart from being the center of the Serbian speaking Muslims, it is best known for its trade and especially for a jeans industry that developed during the last decade after state-owned textile factories went bankrupt.

The second settlement is a mix of rural and urban areas, with around 16.000 people, out of which around 98% are Muslims. The country town belongs to Novi Pazar municipality, around 44km from the town of Novi Pazar. The Muslim population declaring as Bosniaks (around 98%) is a mix of Islamized Albanians, Montenegrins and Serbs who converted to Islam in 18th and 19th centuries (Dzokovic 2003). Orthodox population makes around 2-4 %. This settlement has a high natural increase of population: from the available data, in 2004, it was 19.5% (Statistics for Serbia 2004).

The third settlement is semi-rural, around 40 km from Novi Pazar, inhabited by Orthodox population exclusively. It is a typical rural settlement, where the population engages in agriculture and cattle-breeding. The population has a very low natural increase, around -5.3%, similar to other Sandzak areas where Serbs make a majority (Statistics for Serbia 2004).

In all settings with Muslim majority, there are special religious schools known as *medresa*, which local Muslim children attend more or less regularly in

addition to regular schools. Male and female children attend separately religious schools. In fact, local Muslims voted for autonomy at a referendum in 1991, but the referendum was declared invalid by the former regime of Slobodan Milošević. Muslims, nevertheless, have their own media, schools and the right to the Bosnian language. Lately, inter- and intra- ethnic tensions have been elevated.

Data/Methods

I will present preliminary results on wife beating, women's autonomy and address men's attitudes and behavior on family violence. The main research questions concerned the levels and patterns of female autonomy, variability within the religious division, and exposure to domestic/partner violence. I report preliminary results from in-depth interviews and self-questioner administered to 345 people, 171 women and 175 men, in three locations. The study's qualitative components examined autonomy of women, the social, cultural and economic processes underlying marriage, and violence within marriage. Autonomy has been defined in various terms as "the degree of women's access (and control over) material resources (including food, income, land and other forms of wealth) and to social resources (including knowledge, power and prestige) within the family, in the community, and in the society at large" (Dixon 1978:6). In this research, I measured autonomy as the control that women have over their own lives, including choice of marriage partner, voice within their families, control of employment and earnings, degree on physical mobility and decision on their and their offspring health care. In addition, participants were also asked to describe their own experiences and those of women in general, especially how they perceived women's circumstances in marriage to change over time. The quantitative data come from a survey administered to the participants. The survey covered a range of topics related to women's social, cultural, economic and physical well being, including their capacities and access to resources, empowerment, marriage characteristics, experiences of domestic violence... Currently married women were asked 6 questions on whether their husband had committed violent acts against them ever or in the past 24 months. All these questions asked about specific behaviors. One of the independent variables, education, was measured as number of years of school completed. In addition, one variable was used to assess for women's economic activity- the contribution to household expenses-

Logistic regression models were used to examine associations between domestic violence and other variables. (autonomy/violence; variables: age, education, iq, early marriage and reproduction, fertility...)

The criteria for selecting the settlements were designed to ensure some geographical and ethnic/religion variation. The sites are typical for this part of rural Serbia, all settlements being relatively poor and conservative. The participant were selected randomly, in a door-to-door research, therefore the generalizability of the results is not that limited. The results document the types and severity of violence against women in marriage, and explore the potential cultural and social determinants of domestic violence.

Survey findings

The comparison between the three settlements show that women in Novi Pazar (both Serbs and Muslims) and in the settlement inhabited by Muslim majority have an earlier age at initial reproduction, more children, more marriages and higher infant mortality than their counterparts from the Serbian village. Also, women's autonomy and all forms of family violence differ between the settlements. It appears that in the settlement inhabited by Muslim majority women have the least amount of autonomy and are the most exposed to family violence, when compared with the women in Novi Pazar and the Serbian village; in the settlement inhabited by Muslims, women are also the least educated. The results from a mix population in Novi Pazar could be explained by a relatively more urban setting and general urban modernization affecting all aspects of life, including family relations, which all may have influenced to a great extent the position of all women there. However, when the women are divided based on their religion (ethnicity), regardless of their place of residence, it appears that the Muslim women are disadvantaged in terms of autonomy and exposure to violence in comparison to the Orthodox women. They also tend to reside with in-laws more than the Orthodox women. Also, their demography and household data differ.

ethnicity	gender	age	N	minimum	maximum	mean	Std. deviation
Bosniak	F		97	17	65	35.51	10.41
		Years of schooling	94	2.00	16.00	10.5319	3.2018
		Age at 1 st reproduction	97	16	34	21.08	3.83
		No miscarriages	97	0	5	.40	0.91
		Intercourse frequency per year	97	.00	364.00	163.6804	82.6972
		Women autonomy	97	.00	7.00	2.6907	1.6225
		Valid (listwise)	94				
	M	age	138	22	60	36.12	8.72
		Years of schooling	135	2.00	16.00	10.7704	3.3855
		Age at 1 st reproduction	138	17	39	23.50	3.63
		No miscarriages	138	0	3	0.19	.48
		Intercourse	138	.00	364.00	150.0725	79.7223

		frequency per year					
		Women autonomy	138	.00	7.00	2.6377	1.6387
		Valid (listwise)	135				
Serbs	F	age	67	22	61	38.51	10.31
		Years of schooling	67	8.00	16.00	12.4776	2.7434
		Age at 1 st reproduction	67	19	39	24.69	4.96
		No miscarriages	67	0	1	7.46	0.26
		Intercourse frequency per year	67	2.00	208.00	51.0746	44.9324
		Women autonomy	67	.00	7.00	6.2836	1.3462
		Valid (listwise)	67				
	M	age	61	22	60	41.18	10.02
		Years of schooling	61	8.00	16.00	12.3934	2.6031
		Age at 1 st reproduction	61	18	38	26.74	4.00
		No miscarriages	61	0	1	4.92	.22
		Intercourse frequency per year	61	2.00	156.00	47.3279	36.8541
		Women autonomy	61	2.00	7.00	5.6393	1.1110
		Valid (listwise)	61				

On average, Muslims household have 5, 43 members, while Serbs have 4, 05. Serbian women have lower fertility: 1,78 in contrast with 2, 9 by Muslim women. They also have lower age at reproduction, less child mortality and less divorce than their Muslim counterparts. Furthermore, 80% of Serbian women responded that they think that women in general have much more freedom today, than in times of their mothers, while only 20 % of Muslim women responded so. When it comes to decision making, freedom of movement and exposure to violence, the Muslim women are clearly disadvantaged in comparison with their Serbian counterparts. For example, 58,33% of Serbian women can make their own, independent decision regarding their children (general upbringing, health practices, school choice) without asking or consulting their husbands or an elder member of their family, while only 24,60 % of Muslim women from the settlements can do that. Furthermore, the majority of Serbian women make their own decision about

employment (whether or not to work, where, and what kind of job) while only 17,7% of Muslim women are able to do so. Also, managing resources, such as money, is another difference between the Serb and Muslim women: 81,7 Serbian women and 45,38% Muslim women can use money (earned or family money) the way they feel like it.

The differences in mobility, freedom of movement and fear from their husbands respectively, are clearly shown: only 5% of Serbian women have to ask for permission from their husbands to visit a doctor, while 38% of Muslim women are able to do so. Moreover, only 1,6% Serbian women but 39,23% Muslim women have to have their husbands permission to go shopping (for personal items or those for their children). Going out without their husbands or an elder member of their family is not allowed for only 8% of Serbian women but the majority of Muslim women cannot do so: 93,85 responded they cannot go out of the house to meet a friend or have coffee in a local café if they are not accompanied by their husbands or elder relative. Also, only 13,3% of Serbian women fear to “speak up” and confront their husbands in family matters, while 51,54% of Muslim women fear so.

There are drastic differences in the levels of autonomy between Muslim and Serbian women: on a scale 0-7, Muslim women average 2,66 while Serbian women average 5,98.

Within the Muslim group, the key variables determining the level of autonomy are age (positively correlated: older women have more autonomy), number of marriages (more marriages less autonomy), and to a certain extent, employment (positively increasing autonomy). Both males and females assessed the level of autonomy similarly.

Within the Serb group, the key variables influencing the level of autonomy are age (negatively correlated: younger women have more autonomy), and education (more education correlates with more autonomy). In addition, Serbian women assessed their level of autonomy much higher than Serbian males did.

The participants were then asked to describe their own experiences in marriage regarding violence. The responses are as follows: 41,54% Muslim women responded that their husbands have beaten them up more than once, while only 3,33% of Serbian women reported the same events. Younger women reported more and recent beatings than older women in both groups. In addition, 5% Serbian women reported that their husbands have slapped them, while 80% of Muslim women reported so. Threats by their husbands (yelling and threats of physical violence) are experienced by 50% of Serbian women and 85,38 of Muslim women. In Muslim homes, verbal intimidation include threats to divorce the wife, to remarry, or to take the kids away if she does not do exactly as she is told.

Wife beating

				<i>Wife beating</i> In the last couple of years		Total
GENDER				No	Yes	
F	ETHNICIT	BOSNIAK	Count	56	41	97
			% within ETHNICIT	57.7%	42.3%	100.0%
		SER	Count	63	4	67
			% within ETHNICIT	94.0%	6.0%	100.0%
	Total		Count	119	45	164
			% within ETHNICIT	72.6%	27.4%	100.0%
M	ETHNICIT	BOSNIAK	Count	84	54	138
			% within ETHNICIT	60.9%	39.1%	100.0%
		SER	Count	61		61
			% within ETHNICIT	100.0%		100.0%
	Total		Count	145	54	199
			% within ETHNICIT	72.9%	27.1%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests						
GENDER		Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
F	Pearson Chi-Square	26.224(b)	1	.000		
	Continuity Correction(a)	24.432	1	.000		
	Likelihood Ratio	30.280	1	.000		
	Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
	Linear-by-Linear Association					
	N of Valid Cases	164				
M	Pearson Chi-Square	32.759(c)	1	.000		
	Continuity Correction(a)	30.810	1	.000		
	Likelihood Ratio	47.938	1	.000		
	Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
	Linear-by-Linear Association					

N of Valid Cases	199			
a Computed only for a 2x2 table				
b 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 18.38.				
c 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 16.55.				

Symmetric Measures					
GENDER		Value	Asymp. Std. Error(a)	Approx. T(b)	Approx. Sig.
F	Nominal by Nominal	Phi	-.400		.000
		Cramer's V	.400		.000
	N of Valid Cases		164		
M	Nominal by Nominal	Phi	-.406		.000
		Cramer's V	.406		.000
	N of Valid Cases		199		
a Not assuming the null hypothesis.					
b Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.					

Among the Muslim group, domestic violence is in a high correlation with religion. In addition, employed women are less exposed to any kind of family violence and threats, the same as those women with the least number of marriages (partners). Women's autonomy, patterns of marriage (arranged), and education are negatively correlated with family/partner violence.

Within the Serbian sample, age, employment and autonomy are negatively correlated with family violence, while sexual intercourse frequency is positively correlated with threats.

For the most participants, both men and women, the questions on domestic violence seemed not to be troublesome. Wife-beating appears accepted for most participants of Islamic faith, both by women and their husbands. Wife-beating is not a strange custom among Serbian men, but some Serbs (40%) have expressed their disagreement with the practice, complaining that their lives "...are hard enough since the transition is here, even without family disputes", as one informant put it. One Serb argued: "take a look at my wife [of 15 years], do you have any idea what she would do to me [referring to her somewhat robust physical appearance and the fact that they are jointly running a small farm]?". Based on the answers from the male Serbian informants, disputes within a family start and end up with yelling at each other; most of the times, a Serbian husband and wife argue because they disagree on children's issues. Many Muslim men, on the other hand, stated that sometimes, a wife, especially if she is a young inexperienced bride, "deserves" spanking, when she is disobeying or complaining in some other way.

Discussion

The relaxed attitude toward wife beating and the acceptance of relatively low status of women may come from the controversial issue on women in general in Islamic thought (Ali 2006, Nomani 2006). The family life in the Sandzak area was under the heavy influence of Islamic law and traditions for centuries. In this sample, the reasons for violence, according to Muslim female informants, included a woman's disobeying her husband's orders, and most of the time, a husband's jealousy. This brings up one of the more controversial issues in Islam worldwide: the authorization for husbands to beat disobedient wives. The 9th chapter of Koran says that men and women "are friends and protectors of one another" (Nomani 2006:42). Nevertheless, according to some interpretations of the Koran that allows wife-beating as a form of punishment, especially the verse 4:34, one translation says for "those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them and leave the alone in the sleeping places and beat them" (Ali 2006: 56). Among Islamic countries, the practical application of legal codes varies considerably among countries; also, the meanings of the Koran concerning women, inheritance, polygyny, and m'uta marriages (short term unions) are not agreed upon, which creates ambiguity of Islamic doctrine and lack of a uniform message (Esposito 2001, cited in Ghuman 2003:421). This flexibility of religious practices has been used to justify both subordination and empowerment of women, and opposition to family planning, depending on the political and economic situation (Ali 2006).

In the present sample, Muslim women have little autonomy or freedom of movement, and limited opportunities for control over economic resources. Astonishing 91,1% are not employed outside their homes, and only 21% manages to earn some income of their own, whether through black market dealings or from part-time employment. In terms of marriage patterns, 95, 38% of marriages are arranged marriages, where young women have little or no saying about their future husbands. After marriage, these women are expected to remain under the authority of their husband's family, especially mother-in-laws. In general, they have little to say in domestic and decisions regarding children, and about the only means to enhance their status and confirm themselves as women is their fertility. One young uneducated recently married woman, a mother of two small children, explained: "What else to do, except to have babies? There's nothing for me in this place anyway. I don't have any school, and even if I do, my husband would never allow me to work outside home. I cannot go out with my girlfriends 'cause I'm married now, and it's boring. My babies keep me occupied so I don't think about other things, I'm too tired".

In contrast, Serbian women have more autonomy in all of these respects: they are less if at all secluded, free to choose their own profession (91% are employed outside home) and make decisions about children and their own health. On the other hand, most female informants regardless of their religious affiliation stated that they face threats of divorce or separation from children when they have "a huge argument" with their husbands over family issues. However, based on the

present data, Serbian men rarely fulfill their threats- in this sample, divorce among Serbs is 0%, while 31,53% of Muslim men had at least one divorce.

In the past, based on Islamic marriage rights, a divorce was possible and easily obtained by the male. Today customary practices are not so strictly obeyed, however, traditional cultural norms still affect the behavior of many men. In fact, 23, 66% of the Muslim men in the sample have had multiple marriages, some at the same time. The customary practice in this area is to have one registered marriage and in addition, to form informal unions that are more or less known to everybody. Children from these informal unions are recognized by their fathers. The additional wives have separate households and most of the time all know about each other. In the present sample, several Muslim men (5) stated having more than one wife, justifying their simultaneous unions by Islam's teachings. One of them explained: "Why having only one wife? I can support more, why should I make happy only one woman, when I can make several of them very happy!". From the available official data at the registrar's office in the Muslim settlement, in 2004, there were 468 marriages and 144 divorces, all requested by males. There are no data on informal unions, but many women commented that in such unions, the woman's position is even worse. Several Muslim women stated they would rather that their husband commits adultery than that he brings a second wife. Alternatively, several Serbian men detested the idea to have more than one wife "as the Turks [Bosniaks are called Turks by the Serbs] do"; they see monogamy as the social tradition that distinguishes them from Muslims.

In informal conversation, many women, both Muslim and Orthodox, expressed the view that a severely beaten woman is justified to leave her husband, but the cultural norms and economic realities in the region constrain the majority of women to do so. A divorced woman faces many challenges, including finding a job, social stigma and lack of support from her natal family. It appears that prevailing cultural norms on marriage and divorce (honor and shame) influence women powerlessness, being a critical factor underlying both their vulnerability to domestic violence and their exclusion from decisions, including those surrounding care during pregnancy, infant and child health.

An example of one young, educated woman from the Muslim settlement illustrates this. She is a 36-year old divorcee, living with her parents and her son. She left her husband of several years, after recurring episodes of violence provoked by his jealousy; her marriage was arranged. She and her child are stigmatized to the extent that she is socially isolated in public, while her son gets frequently scorned or even beaten by his schoolmates. She has a job in a local post office, but complains that her co-workers do not treat her same as other (married) women. Her situation would change, though, if she re-marries; however, she rejected several marriage offers, being afraid of another bad experience. She is lonely, and misses a father for her son, nevertheless, she does not regret her decision to get out of an unhappy and violent marriage: "My marriage was hell. He [the husband] forced me to cover my face, he prohibited me to greet people on the streets, all these coming from the man I didn't even know! I saw him only once before our marriage. I blame my parents for giving me to a completely foreign man, but he was from a good family, a good

opportunity. He used to beat me every time I would go out, even to buy bread in the local bakery. He treated me like I am not a human being, but a mare. I am just so happy that I have a son – men are so much luckier than we are. My son will not have to go through what most of us are going – a living hell, with no freedom, privacy or your own free will”. She admits she was lucky enough that her parents took her back; without that option, she would be still trapped in abusive relationship. Her mother explains that it is more the matter of a “family shame” than anything else; she herself was married when she was only 15, to an older man. She claims that she suffered beatings in her younger days, just like her daughter did recently, but never got any support to change her life: “It’s like a vicious circle. First my mother, than me, than my daughter...all given away, without a right to complain. This is one damned culture where men dominate us. I don’t think it will change any time. This is extremely closed society, where everybody is spying on everybody, especially women”.

Ecological and cultural forces influence marriage patterns and reproductive behavior and timing. In pastoral and agricultural societies many men are able to accumulate resources needed to support more than one wife; in cultures without the prohibition of having only one wife men compete with each other for the establishment, social dominance and control of resources that women need to raise children (Borgerhoff Mulder 1990). Social and economic dominance influence the number of women a man can have and the number of surviving children (Irons 1993). The investment of wealth in mating effort is a successful reproductive strategy for men in these cultures. In contrast, unstable ecologies or large, stratified societies are characterized by ecologically or socially imposed monogamy (Draper and Harpending 1988). High levels of paternal investment is necessary for children survival while ecological conditions limit men’s ability to accumulate wealth, hence limiting mating opportunities. In many industrial societies, monogamy is socially imposed, and the result is a relative shift in men’s reproductive efforts, from mating to parenting (MacDonald 1995). Legal and social prohibitions against polygynous marriages are combined with women’s preference for high-investment monogamous marriages, limiting men’s mating opportunity and hence reducing the opportunity cost of paternal investment. In cultures that allow polygyny, even monogamous men often divert social and material resources from their families to their mating efforts, in their attempts to attract and obtain more wives (Hames 1992). Traditionally, Islam in Sandzak has tolerated polygyny and encouraged large families and numerous children. When social or ecological conditions do not impose monogamy, many men focus more on mating than on parenting. The available human data on polygyny and reproductive success tell that polygyny benefits the male: men gained in fitness from increasing degrees of polygyny (Daly and Wilson 1983). The care that females give becomes a resource for which males compete: the male who manage to inseminate a female also wins for his descendants a share of the female’s parental investment. The higher number of divorces and low parental investment in the Muslim sample for both males and females could be explained by their social tradition of tolerated polygyny (Cvorovic, in preparation). In addition, prestige and access to women interact: women are both a reward and a sign of status (Symons 1979). The absence of a rule

prohibiting multiple wives regularly involves competition between males, often involving violence (Cvorovic 2004). Consequently, there is considerable competition for getting and keeping as many wives as possible. Because of this competition and latent violence, many societies have attempted to mitigate these through complex traditions. In Sandzak Muslims' settings, one of such social tradition appears to be "claustration" practices: women of reproductive age are veiled, they are commonly chaperoned, guarded and even secluded for the acknowledged purpose of protecting their chastity. Furthermore, in a multicultural environment, such as Sandzak, a mix of cultures and influences form a specific cultural system prescribing traditional women's role both in Islam and Christianity. In the Serbian sample, secularization plays an important part in shaping peoples lives and the status of women. In the Muslim sample, "Islamic" ways are experiencing a revival, influencing already low position of women. Interesting differences between the two populations remain, especially in the area of education, marriage, fertility, domestic violence and women's status.

In human societies all women must face at least the prospect of being beaten by their husbands (Draper 1992). This fact is not just a matter of social inequality. Human males are larger and more aggressive compared with human females, and worldwide, men almost exclusively monopolize positions of authority. This size difference, observed generally among mammals, is an outcome of mammalian reproductive physiology (Alexander et al. 1979, Daly and Wilson 1983). The size dimorphism and behavior have to do with the reproductive specialization of the sexes: females experience lengthy internal gestation, postnatal nourishment and prolonged maternal care, while males became more specialized in directing efforts toward finding access to mates and toward somatic developments that favor successful competition with other males over mating opportunity with females (Trivers 1972). Humans produce only a few slow maturing offspring, who require large parental investment in order to survive, carrying so the mammalian specialization to an extreme. Women are dedicated to an uneven amount of the parental care since, unlike males, they cannot recuperate one or a few infant/child deaths by finding another mate (Lancaster 1985). This reproductive inequality affected both the behavioral and somatic dimorphism between the sexes. In general, women invest more in offspring and have a greater concern to bind a male to themselves than vice versa (van den Berghe 1979). Among humans the male parental role is important to the survival of offspring and the price that females pay for obtaining the economic cooperation of their mates is male sexual jealousy (Daly and Wilson 1988).

If we accept that men have evolved to pursue fitness, it comes as no surprise that they also strive to control women and to traffic in female reproductive capacity (Paige and Paige 1981, Levi-Strauss 1969). Men have gained access to women primarily through marriage. In a substantial majority of society from Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock 1967), marriage appears as a contract between men, a formalized exchange of women as commodities (Levi-Strauss 1969). In many societies women are very much treated as male property, while in others they seem to be more autonomous but still under control exercised by kin groups and their

husbands. Based on a relationship attitude between husbands and wives, data from a majority of societies point out that marriage is best viewed as a reciprocal exchange of benefits between husband and wife, an exchange that includes the man's parental investment for paternity of offspring provided by the woman (Daly and Wilson 1983:290). On the other hand, men's proprietary attitude toward women's reproductive capacity is manifested in violent sexual jealousy and in many other restrictive claustration practices that serve for the most part as confidence of paternity tactics (Dickemann 1981). In fact, male sexual jealousy is the primary motive in spousal homicides throughout the world (Daly and Wilson 1983), and appears as the leading motive in non-fatal wife beating also.

An interesting aspect of cultural variability is the extent to which the underlying reproductive asymmetry of men and women is institutionalized (Draper 1992). Most cultures recognize that men and women have different reproductive strategies and interests, and institutionalize a double standard of sexual morality (Broude and Green 1976). A greater measure of restrictions is generally imposed to women than to men, and the usual way to regulate men's greater sexual leeway is polygyny (van den Berghe 1979).

In fact, all men have deep polygamous tendency, and even in monogamous societies, men will compete for females, since "in men, these tendencies are natural and universal, and that only limitations born of the environment and culture are responsible for their suppression" (Levi-Strauss 1969:37). On the other hand, in circumstances where fertility is low and monogamy is imposed, as a result of ecological constraints or social conventions, there should be greater restraints on the ability of men to coerce females. In this situation, the reproductive interests of the sexes are the same (Alexander et al. 1979). That is why the low-fertility monogamous Serbs show greater restraints in coercing women. The cooperation among human males in traditional societies may reflect the achievement of cooperation as a competitive strategy: male reproductive success depended on social and political skills in controlling and managing aggression.

The main findings suggest that religion and accompanying cultural practices still play an important role in influencing female autonomy and her exposure to violence in this study sample, especially so in the Muslim sample. The results confirm considerable variation in the levels of violence and determinants of women's autonomy in the Sandzak region. The data suggest that in the more gender stratified settings the lack of autonomy is largely the result of factors that were traditionally influenced by religion and in recent times, enhanced by fundamentalistic movement in Islam. The findings also demonstrate the importance of cultural institutions of gender in each community, shaped by religion. So, there is a support for the argument that Muslim women are disadvantaged in terms of autonomy (Das Gupta 1996), at least when compared with their Orthodox counterparts from the same region. Muslim-Orthodox differences in every dimension of autonomy and family violence are significant. Therefore, religion remains an important part of the explanation of social and cultural traditionalism/conservatism in the region, and the greater conservatism of the Muslim families can be traced to the more strict forms of Islam that prescribe

women's role and status. The main suggestion is that marriage represents an important site for expression of gender roles and relations and that the prevailing marriage systems and practices in the Sandzak region need to be understood in the context of strategies developed by individuals and families, under the influence of the political, historical and religious factors, as the best strategies for reproduction and survival.

The finding that employment raises women autonomy in both Muslim and Serbian samples in spite the traditional factors that remain strong, suggest strategies that should focus on women's gender consciousness, enabling women to access resources and public services, providing support for challenging traditional norms that underlie gender norms.

Conclusion

This paper has described the social and economic conditions that influence the coercion of women in the region of Sandzak. The findings imply that religion and accompanying cultural practices still play an important role in influencing female autonomy and her exposure to violence in this study sample. Economic and cultural contexts – operationalized here by religion – influence the factors associated with autonomy and subsequently, wife beating. One of the most important influences on women's coercion comes from the marriage pattern that does not condemn aggression in both cultures. The cultures of the Sandzak region differ in many features, but the coercive constraint of women is applied widely, reflecting perhaps human selective history of paternal investment and attendant cuckoldry risks (Daly and Wilson 1983). Human marriage tends to polygyny, and the actual mating system is one in which males compete for the limited resource of female reproductive strategy, with varying degrees of success. At least three elements are considered important in understanding the unique hindrance of the human female, crucial in her victimization:

1. due to the extremely dependent state in which children are born, and due to their slow development, any roles conflicting with a woman's reproductive agenda are usually being avoided either by her alone as an individual or denied her by her mates and her kin;
2. a woman can maintain several dependent offspring at the same time, at different stages of dependence, while her own physical energy and time remain the same;
3. a woman needs help in order to rear a child, and while some help may come from her kin, all human cultures try to regulate access to the reproductive capabilities of women by encouraging marriage, making thus a father/husband to share the responsibilities of rearing the children (Draper 1992:45).

In Sandzak, traditional forces continue to influence women's position. The results confirm considerable variation in the levels of violence and determinants of women's autonomy in the Sandzak region. Muslim women are disadvantaged in

terms of autonomy and more exposed to violence when compared to Serbian women from the same region. Findings suggest that Muslim women are for the most part excluded from family decision making, they have limited access to resources and their freedom of movement is constrained; few are free from threat and violence from their husbands.

The data suggest that in the more gender stratified settings the lack of autonomy is largely the result of factors that were traditionally influenced by religion and in recent times, enhanced by fundamentalistic movement in Islam. Religion so remains an important part of the explanation of social and cultural conservatism in this area, and the reinforcement of Muslim culture. In contrast, the direct influence of Islam is more modest among Christian part of population, although no doubt has played an important role in developing cultural values and norms. In the Serbian Orthodox tradition, the marriage of a man to more than one woman or vice versa is sharply forbidden. Islam has always permitted divorce for males – a husband simply declares “I divorce you” three times in a row (Ali 2006). This also affects a woman’s position in her family and society as a whole. In addition, the traditional forces such as co-residence with in laws among Muslim communities continue to influence levels of autonomy. Early, arranged marriages lead to early reproductive activity and higher fertility among these women; the high fertility, low status and socio-economic position of women are prescribed cultural roles that few of them can escape. Lacking economic support, education and skills, these women have nowhere to turn to, including their own kin group. Most of the time, women in their kin group are as powerless as they are, lacking means to support or help. Some of these women declared that their fathers or other male kin were severe and physically intimidating in insisting that they stay with their abusive husbands. In rare occasions, individual, older women by virtue of their age come to stand in position of more power; their power comes from the fact that they are way past child bearing age, with several grown up children- their reproductive value to their husbands and other potential mates was diminished and reasons for jealousy faded out. In contrast, in more gender egalitarian settings, traditional norms keep on influencing levels of autonomy, but in a more modest way. There are many economic hence practical reasons that influence restraining on the coercion of women among the Serbs. The Serbian women contribute to the family earnings. Serbs are a minority in Sandzak, and in the given unstable and unpredictable political and economic environment of Sandzak, regular work by husband and wife is necessary to support their children. In this local Serbian culture, women are valuable not just for their reproductive effort but for their economic labor too. In addition, the availability of kin, together with the small size of Serbian population in the area, implies there are few occasions when women are outside informal pressure of the community scrutiny.

The findings also demonstrate the importance of cultural institutions of gender in each community, shaped by religion. These findings do not reflect “the Islamic world”, which is much too complex to be reduced to a single cultural design. Islam can take many different characteristics, and there are many doctrinal differences within Islam.

The main suggestion is that violence against women in this area is closely linked to the institution of marriage where related norms and cultural practices reinforce women's powerlessness, exposing them to domestic violence: men often use violence to enforce their dominance and non-egalitarian gender norms. In the past environments of evolutionary adaptation in which human social and sexual behavior has been shaped, a woman has had few degrees of freedom (Draper 1992:45). The fitness penalties for a woman's error in judging a man's support have been too severe. This fundamental picture should be kept in mind by those who claim not to understand why so many women remain for so long in abusive environments.

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Аутономија жена и насиље у породици у регији Санџака: утицај религије и регије

Кључне речи:

насиље у породици, Санџак, жене, еволуција

Овај рад се бави специфичним аспектом насиља у породици – насиљем над женама у регији Санџака. Насиље уперено према женама повезано је са институцијом брака, где културне норме и норме понашања утичу на положај и обесправљеност жена, излажући их насиљу у породици. Жене у Санџаку (Српкиње и Муслиманке подједнако) повремено су тучене и малтретиране од стране својих мушкараца – очева, браће, а нарочито мужева или партнера. Анализа обухвата укупно 164 жене (и њихове партнере), различитог економског, образовног и друштвеног статуса, различите религије, фертилитета и економске активности.

У испитиваној групи муслиманских жена, најважније варијабле које утичу на ниво аутономије жена јесу година рођења (у позитивној корелацији), број бракова (негативна корелација) и, донекле, економска активност. У овој групи испитаника, и мушкарци и жене подједнако оцењују ниво аутономије жена.

У групи испитаних српских жена, најважније варијабле које утичу на ниво аутономије жена јесу година рођења (у негативној корелацији) и образовање (позитивна корелација). Поред тога, српске жене оцењују свој ниво аутономије као много већи у односу на то како га оцењују њихови партнери.

Брак је, као институција, у блиској вези са насиљем у породицама у српским и муслиманским заједницама у Санџаку: мушкарци често користе насиље да потврде своју доминантност и неједнак положај жене у оквиру породице. У давном природном и друштвеном окружењу, када су се формирале еволуционе адаптације, жене су имале мало или нимало слободе. Фитнес „казне“ за учињене грешке при процени партнера и његове будуће подршке/улагања биле су сигурно несагледиве у еволуционом смислу. Овај основни постулат еволуције треба имати на уму када се питамо зашто толико жена остаје и опстаје у насилним везама брака/средине.