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Phone: +381 11 3161 444
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EDITORIAL

The second issue of the *Journal of Security and Criminology* in 2025, the fourteenth overall, presents current security-related topics. The focus is on stress risks and emotional responses to stressful events among young people training for police work. Interestingly, this topic has been addressed by Dane Subošić, Professor at the University of Criminal Investigation and Police Studies in Belgrade, and Miroslav Đurić, employed at the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republika Srpska. Through research conducted among young people preparing for a profession often described as suitable only for individuals of exceptional character, they reached very interesting conclusions.

Professor Subošić, in his paper *Stress Risks of Students Training for Police Work*, conducted research to determine whether two standardized and previously validated stress measurement questionnaires for police officers (the organizational PSQ-Org and the professional/operational PSQ-Op) are also applicable to students preparing for police work. The starting point is that the lifestyle and work regime at the University of Criminal Investigation and Police Studies in Belgrade is "police-like": students are Ministry of Internal Affairs scholarship recipients, live within an organized daily schedule, and engage in discipline, training, duties, and numerous practical activities that may generate stressors similar to those encountered on the job. Dr. Subošić also presented the structure of the sample, explaining that 119 students (67 men and 52 women) were surveyed in the September 2021 term. The questionnaires were minimally adapted to the student context (5 organizational and 6 professional items) using a 1–7 Likert scale. Subošić concluded that the results produce ranked lists of the most intense stressors: organizationally dominated by expectations of being on duty outside "working" hours, changes in rules, and unequal task distribution; professionally dominated by lack of time for family/friends, fatigue, and off-duty demands. An exceptionally high correlation was found between organizational and professional stress ($r \approx 0.989$), suggesting that managing one group of stressors affects the other. Organizational stress is slightly higher than professional stress, and female students are on average more exposed to stress than male students. Both questionnaires showed high reliability ($\alpha \approx 0.933$ and 0.900), indicating their applicability for this student population and usefulness in stress management during training.

Dr. Miroslav Đurić also conducted thorough research. In his paper *Emotional Responses to Stressful Events among Youth Training for Police Work*, he examined the emotional resilience of young police trainees to stressful events and whether their negative emotional reactions differ according to gender and age. Starting from the fact that police work is among the most stressful professions, the theoretical section reviews typical consequences of stress (emotional, cognitive, health-related, and behavioral), Selye's model of stress phases, and Lazarus' view that outcomes depend on personal characteristics and context.

The study emphasizes the importance of selection and training, as future police officers are expected to maintain controlled emotional responses in critical situations, and it considers possible gender differences in anxiety and specific stressors within the police organization. Dr. Đurić also provided the sample structure: 400 participants (149 students from the Secondary School of Internal Affairs and 251 cadets from the Police Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of RS), aged 17–27 years, including 317 men and 83 women. The research was conducted in 2024 in Banja Luka. Negative emotional reactions to stress were measured using the COPED/NEG-EMOC-BM-1992 scale (10 items, five-point Likert scale), with higher scores indicating stronger negative reactions; reliability in this sample was $\alpha = .83$. Due to the non-normal distribution of results, descriptive statistics and the Mann–Whitney U test were applied.

The results show that most respondents reported that negative reactions "never" or "rarely" occur for most items, while milder reactions (e.g., goosebumps, increased heart rate) were more frequent. Dr. Đurić analyzed his hypotheses, concluding that the first hypothesis is confirmed: young people training for police work exhibit a high level of emotional resilience. The second hypothesis was not confirmed: women statistically more frequently show stronger negative reactions on most items (e.g., trembling, pallor, increased heart rate, feeling of "breath stopping"). The third hypothesis was partially confirmed: younger participants (17–18) show stronger negative reactions on several items compared to older participants (19–27), interpreted as a result of greater emotional maturity in older respondents. In conclusion, the study suggests that the selection process is generally effective, but training should include targeted measures to strengthen stress management capacities, particularly for younger trainees and in areas where women display more pronounced reactions.

Dr. Boris Tučić addressed another topic: *Assumptions of European Strategic Security Autonomy*. The paper analyzes the concept of European strategic security autonomy – its content, scope, and limitations – arguing that its actual "functional verification" depends on the fulfillment of three groups of assumptions: political-institutional, organizational-functional, and material (resources). The author shows that the modern idea of autonomy has gained momentum since 2016 (EU Global Strategy), but in practice is most often interpreted relatively: not as a replacement for NATO, but as strengthening the "European pillar" within NATO and enabling more independent action on issues outside U.S. focus.

According to the author, key obstacles include the intergovernmental nature of decision-making in the EU (unanimity and weaknesses in CSDP), differences in member states' security cultures, and a strong "American factor" limiting ambitions that could undermine NATO's role. Operationally, while mechanisms such as PESCO and the EU Battlegroups exist, political will, financial models, and autonomous capacities are lacking, so the EU relies on NATO (e.g., "Berlin+"). Resource-wise, the war in Ukraine exposed weaknesses in Eu-

rope's defense industry. The conclusion is that European strategic autonomy is still in its infancy, and the EU struggles to function as a truly autonomous security actor.

Finally, Jelena Škrbić Bijelić, also employed at the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Republika Srpska, addresses the topic *Subtle Hate Speech, Prejudices, and Sexism in the Media Representation of Women Online*. In her paper, she analyzes how internet portals in Bosnia and Herzegovina portray women and the extent to which subtle (and sometimes explicit) forms of hate speech, prejudice, and sexism appear. The premise is that women's position in society remains disadvantaged despite legal provisions on equality, while media discourse often maintains and reinforces patriarchal patterns. The author defines hate speech as expressions of intolerance and discrimination based on power relations, noting its types (e.g., incitement, dehumanization, spreading stereotypes, threats), with sexism and prejudice treated as subcategories.

A quantitative-qualitative (critical) discourse analysis was applied to a corpus of 60 texts from six of the most visited portals (three from RS and three from FBiH), identified using the keyword "woman" and retrieved on 26 August 2023. The author concludes that reporting is often unethical, dominated by sensationalist headlines and content sourced from social media. Women are most often represented as victims, then as mothers/wives, as sexual objects, or as "perpetrators." Stereotypes, misogynistic narratives, and "clickbait" rhetoric perpetuate inequality and normalize discrimination. The author calls for changes in editorial policies, greater media literacy, and application of ethical guidelines in gender-sensitive reporting.

The editorial team of the *Journal of Security* can be satisfied with both the quality of the texts published in this issue and the fact that the journal has now been recognized in Serbia as M-52, a publication of national significance.

Editor-In-Chief

Dr. Predrag Ćeranić

CONTENTS

STRESS-RELATED RISKS AMONG STUDENTS PREPARING FOR A CAREER IN THE POLICE

Original Scientific Article

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Dane Subošić[1]
University of Criminal Investigation and Police Studies, Belgrade, Serbia

Abstract: The aim of this study is to examine the applicability of verified organizational and operational stress questionnaires, originally designed for police officers, to students preparing for a career in the police. The study was conducted by surveying students using adapted questionnaires, in which five questions in the organizational questionnaire and six in the professional questionnaire were modified to reflect student activities. The findings indicate the following: 1) organizational and operational stressors were ranked according to their intensity (risk), with certain exceptions identified; 2) very strong positive correlations were found between the mean values of organizational and operational stress (e.g., *Pearson correlation coefficient* for the entire sample amounts to $r = 0.989$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that managing one type of stressor enables effective management of the other; 3) organizational stressors were found to be more intense, and therefore more risky, than operational stressors; 4) female students were exposed to more intense stress than male students, and 5) both questionnaires demonstrated very high reliability (*Cronbach's Alpha coefficient*: organizational ($\alpha = 0.933$) and operational ($\alpha = 0.900$).

Keywords: organizational and operational stressors, student activities, students, questionnaires, police officers, risks

INTRODUCTION

Research problem

Training and education for police work must be as closely aligned as possible with the professional needs of the police. In addition to professional competencies, such forms of police education also include organizational knowledge, which encompasses police professional culture (Constable & Smith, 2015). With these foundations in mind, the educational model was established at the Uni-

1 Corresponding author: Dane Subošić, Full Time Professor, University of Criminal Investigation and Police Studies, Belgrade. Email: dane.subosic@kpu.edu.rs.

versity of Criminal Investigation and Police Studies in Belgrade, Republic of Serbia (UCIPS).

In cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Serbia (MoI RS), in 2019, the UCIPS renewed the system that existed at the Police Academy (the legal predecessor of the UCIPS) until 2006, which ensured a high level of structured education for the profession of policing. This means that the model of police education has been restored so that an undergraduate student (in criminalistics, information technologies and computing, or forensics) signs a contract on mutual rights and obligations with the MoI RS, which provides institutional support to the UCIPS. According to this contract, students receive a scholarship from the MoI RS (which includes food, accommodation, uniforms, equipment, weapons, textbooks, consumables, and other learning necessities, followed by employment with a higher education qualification in the MoI RS upon graduation), while students are obligated to complete their studies within five academic years from enrollment at the UCIPS (Криминалистичко-полицијски универзитет, 2023).

However, every coin has two sides, and in this case the reverse side consists of stressors. These two aspects—motivation and stress—form two sides of the same coin, representing the entirety of police education.

The motivational mechanisms and stressors experienced by UCIPS students manifest through the study, living, and working regime at the University. In undergraduate academic studies, this regime lasts four academic years divided into eight semesters. Each academic year includes six examination periods (a total of 24 over four years), during which students must pass around 40 courses (depending on the study program they attend). A crucial part of the curriculum consists of various types of practical training (important from the perspective of professional stressors, including informational and professional visits to police stations and other organizational units of the Police Directorate, field training, firearms handling training, live-fire exercises, attending crime scene investigations, autopsies, and more). These practical sessions are graded and form a mandatory component of the study program (Криминалистичко-полицијски универзитет, 2021).

The daily life and work of UCIPS students are organized through a structured daily schedule. This schedule prescribes activities from waking up until lights-out (mandatory nighttime rest). Throughout the day, students follow routines that include morning inspection, the inspection of the living quarters, meals, time allocated for morning and afternoon classes, an afternoon rest period, and training in operational-police skills (primarily drill and tactical training, as well as firearms handling), with free time available from dinner until lights-out. In parallel with these activities, students also carry out various official and extracurricular duties, such as shifts, participation in securing the UCIPS facility, maintaining shared rooms and common areas participation in student clubs, securing public gatherings and ceremonies, humanitarian work, and so on. All these requirements apply particularly to first-year undergraduate

students, while in later years this model of life and work is applied to a lesser extent, assuming that senior students have already developed a degree of competence.

The implementation of the daily schedule is overseen by mentors employed at the UCIPS and by instructors from the Gendarmerie (a special-purpose organizational unit of the Police Directorate of the MoI RS) (Субошић, 2020). From them, students acquire both professional and organizational knowledge, including police professional culture. This police culture is paramilitary (uniforms and equipment, ranks, insignia, platoons, commanders, drill procedures, etc.), paternalistic (mentors and instructors are significantly older and adopt a supervisory, protective attitude), and micromanagement-oriented, as attention is paid even to small details (Goldstein, 1990; Shane, 2010). It is referred to as "command–control" (Webber, 1991: 116). The importance of such a culture is confirmed by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) Report, which emphasizes that police culture expresses a "command–control" approach to every situation (Police Executive Research Forum, 2016: 113). Within this culture, the most prominent lessons learned during police training are those that reinforce the paramilitary structure and ethos (Chappell & Lanza-Kaduce, 2010). Ultimately, such a culture quickly fosters a need for rules, command, and control, and a readiness to become part of or an expression of the organization itself (Кесић, 2019: 62; Кесић & Зекавица, 2019: 115). For all these reasons, this paper problematizes the applicability of questionnaires on stressors experienced by police officers to students being trained to work in policing, rather than stressors of student life in general. This distinction is necessary because the model of student life and work at the UCIPS is far closer to police work than to the general university experience (e.g., all UCIPS undergraduate students are scholarship holders of the Ministry of the Interior, which creates specificities in their status and legal position).

The organizational and professional aspects of student life and work at the UCIPS contain both motivational mechanisms (which are not addressed in this study) and stressors (which are addressed). Stressors in the profession of policing have been addressed in numerous studies. For example, Violanti et al. noted "This review includes searches of relevant databases (1990–2016), including PubMed, Scopus, Embase, ProQuest, PsycINFO, PILOTS, and Google Scholar," and 97 articles on the subject were consulted (Violanti et al., 2017). Accordingly, there are also validated questionnaires for police officers, which are divided into those designed to assess organizational stress (Police Organizational Stress Questionnaire – PSQ-Org) and those addressing operational stress (Police Operational Stress Questionnaire – PSQ-Op) (McCreary & Thompson, 2006). Such questionnaires have been validated internationally (McCreary et al., 2017; Acquadro Maran et al., 2018; Kukić et al., 2021), and for the Republic of Serbia, one such pair of questionnaires was validated in 2021 (Kukić et al., 2021).

Hypotheses

General hypothesis: "The validated questionnaires for identifying organizational and operational stressors and their intensities among police officers are applicable to the student population preparing for a career in the police."

- First specific hypothesis: "The validated questionnaires for identifying organizational stressors and their intensities among police officers are applicable to the student population preparing for a career in the police.
  - First individual hypothesis within the first specific hypothesis: "Validated questionnaires for determining organizational stressors and their intensities among police officers are applicable to male students preparing for a career in the police."
  - Second individual hypothesis within the first specific hypothesis: "Validated questionnaires for determining organizational stressors and their intensities among police officers are applicable to female students preparing for a career in the police."
- Second specific hypothesis: "Validated questionnaires for determining operational stressors and their intensities among police officers are applicable to the student population preparing for a career in the police."
  - First individual hypothesis within the second specific hypothesis: "The validated questionnaires for identifying operational stressors and their intensities among police officers are applicable to male students preparing for a career in the police."
  - Second individual hypothesis within the second specific hypothesis: "The validated questionnaires for identifying operational stressors and their intensities among police officers are applicable to female students preparing for a career in the police."

Research Objective

The purpose of this study is to examine the applicability of the verified questionnaires related to organizational and operational stress among police officers to students preparing for a career in the police, internationally and in the Republic of Serbia. The goal is to potentially extend the use of these questionnaires to the student population in question. The practical purpose is to improve stress management among students preparing for a career in the police, ensuring that their education aligns more effectively with both academic requirements and the professional needs of the police service.

Variables

The study includes independent and dependent variables. The independent variable is the students' gender (male and female). The dependent variables are

the respondents' answers on a seven-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 to 7), expressing the intensity of individual stressors categorized as organizational or operational.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Among the 119 dents at the University of Criminal Investigation and Police Studies who participated in the survey, 67 were male and 52 were female. The composition of the surveyed students by gender, study program, and year of study is presented in the table below.

Table 1: Structure of the respondents

Study program	UAS Criminalistics		UAS Information Technology	
Year of study	1st year	2nd year	1st year	3rd year
Male	19	28	10	10
Female	23	17	3	9

Instruments

A survey was the primary method for data collection in this study. It was conducted using two validated questionnaires for police officers in the Republic of Serbia, which are designed to examine stressors and their intensity levels:

- Organizational stress: the Police Organizational Stress Questionnaire (*PSQ-Org*) – the reliability of application among police officers confirmed by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α) = 0.959; and
- Operational stress: the Police Operational Stress Questionnaire (*PSQ-Op*) – the reliability of application among police officers confirmed by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α) = 0.961. Each questionnaire contains 20 items and was developed by Kukić, Subošić, Heinrich, Greco & Koropanovski (Kukić et al., 2021).

For the purpose of applying these questionnaires to students preparing for a career in the police, some items referring to police officers were adapted, as shown in the following two tables.

Table 2: Organizational stressors in policing

For police officers (the primary validated questionnaire)	For students preparing for a career in the police (adapted questionnaire)
Feeling like you always have to prove yourself to to the organisation	Feeling like you always have to prove yourself to your colleagues
Constant changes in policy about police work and/or in legislation	Constant changes in policy about your duties and/or in legislation
Percieved pressure to volunteer your free time	You are expected to remain officially available even during your free time
Leaders over-emphasise the negatives (e.g., superviser evaluations, public complaints)	Supervisors over-emphasise the negatives (e.g. low grades, complaints from professors or non-teaching staff).
Dealing the court system	Dealing with professional services (e.g. student services, library)

As shown in the previous table, five items contained in the organizational stress questionnaire for police officers were adapted for surveying students. This was done symmetrically and minimally, so as not to change the meaning of the items. The adaptation of the items contained in the operational stress questionnaire for police officers for the purpose of surveying students is shown in the following table.

Table 3: Operational stressors in policing

For police officers (the primary validated questionnaire)	For students preparing for a career in the police (adapted questionnaire)
Risk of being injured on the job	Risk of being injured
Eating healthy at work	Eating healthy
Lack of understanding from family and friends about your work	Lack of understanding from family and friends about your studies
Making friends outside the job	Making friends outside your studies
Feeling like you are always on the job	Feeling like you are always engaged in academic tasks
Family and friends feel the effects of the stigma associated with the nature of your job	Family and friends feel the effects of the stigma associated with the nature of your studies

As is shown in the previous table, six items from the operational stress questionnaire for police officers were adapted for the purpose of surveying students. As with the organizational stress questionnaire, this was done symmetrically and minimally so as not to change the meaning of each item.

Responses to both questionnaires were given by circling a value from 1 to 7, i.e., on a seven-point Likert scale, which reflects the respondent's assessment of the intensity (and therefore the risk) of each organizational or operational stressor. The meaning of the individual response values is shown in the following table.

Table 4: The meaning of individual response values of the respondents

No stress at all	Very little stress	Little stress	Moderate stress	Quite a bit of stress	High stress	Extreme stress
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

By adapting the items in both questionnaires, while keeping the remaining items and the scale shown in the previous table unchanged, questionnaires were created to investigate organizational and operational stress among students preparing for a career in the police. The full questionnaires are not presented due to space limitations; only sample items are provided. An example of a question in the organizational stress questionnaire is shown in the following table.

Table 5: Example of a question in the Organizational Stress Questionnaire

Unequal sharing of work responsibilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Table 6: Example of a question in the Operational Stress Questionnaire

Shift work	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Testing procedure

A total of 119 male and female students at the UCIPS responded to the questions in both questionnaires. The sample consisted of first-year and second-year students enrolled in the Undergraduate Academic Studies in Criminalistics (UASC) and first-year and third-year students enrolled in the Undergraduate Academic Studies in Information Technology and Computing (UASITC). The sample was randomly formed and consisted of those students who took exams in two courses in the September examination period in 2021, at the UCIPS. Respondents provided their responses anonymously, voluntarily, individually, and all at the same time, while experiencing pre-exam anxiety. Stress experienced by students prior, during, and after the exams does not only negatively affect academic performance but can also have long-term consequences on physical and mental health, such as dropping out of studies, decreased self-esteem, and underutilized intellectual potential (Dukić & Golubović, 2021: 15).

Data processing

The data obtained from the student survey were processed to form a database in Microsoft Excel, which was subsequently imported into the IBM SPSS

(v.19) software package program. The analysis of the data processed was conducted using descriptive statistics (AM = arithmetic mean, SD = standard deviation, Min. = minimum response value, and Max. = maximum response value), including statistical analysis methods: the bivariate Pearson correlation and an independent samples t-test. The Pearson correlation was applied because the distribution of mean response values for the items related to the intensity (risk) of stressors was normal according to the Shapiro–Wilk test. The independent samples t-test was used to identify exceptions in the prioritization of stressors by intensity (risk) between male and female respondents. The results obtained are presented in tabular format. Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α) was used to assess the reliability of both questionnaires.

FINDINGS

Arithmetic means and other response values related to organizational and operational stress (student activities) in the overall sample are presented in the following two tables.

Table 7: Ranked list of organizational stressors in the overall sample

No.	Organizational stress	N	Min.	Max.	AM	SD
1.	You are expected to remain officially available even during your free time	119	1	7	4.79	1.999
2.	Constant changes in policy about your duties and/or in legislation	118	1	7	4.64	1.994
3.	Unequal sharing of work responsibilities	118	1	7	4.57	1.985
4.	The feeling that different rules apply to different people (e.g. favouritism)	119	1	7	4.52	2.170
5.	Excessive administrative duties	119	1	7	4.08	1.955
6.	Inconsistent leadership style	118	1	7	4.03	1.972
7.	Bureaucratic red tape	119	1	7	3.97	1.915
8.	Inadequate equipment	119	1	7	3.81	2.005
9.	Lack of resources	118	1	7	3.77	2.061
10.	Staff shortages	119	1	7	3.48	2.154
11.	Supervisors over-emphasise the negatives (e.g., low grades, complaints from professors or non-teaching staff)	119	1	7	3.48	2.154
12.	Lack of training on new equipment	118	1	7	3.22	2.064
13.	If you are sick or injured your colleagues seem to look down on you	116	1	7	3.10	2.251
14.	The need to be accountable for doing your job	119	1	7	3.08	2.018
15.	Dealing with supervisors	118	1	7	2.99	1.928
16.	Dealing with professional services (e.g., student services, library)	119	1	7	2.75	2.043

No.	Organizational stress	N	Min.	Max.	AM	SD
17.	Internal investigations	117	1	7	2.71	1.952
18.	Dealing with colleagues	119	1	7	2.59	1.597
19.	Feeling like you always have to prove yourself to your colleagues	118	1	7	2.37	1.843
20.	Too much computer work	118	1	7	2.35	1.770

The ranked list presented above, as well as the one that follows, was derived by arranging the stressors in descending order according to the intensity of risk with which each stressor manifests. The distribution of AM of the respondents' responses to the items related to organizational stressors in the overall sample is normal according to the Shapiro–Wilk test (Statistic = 0.950, *df* = 20, *Sig*. = 0.360). This finding is important for selecting an appropriate statistical analysis method to quantify the relationship between organizational and operational stress, both in the overall sample and the subsamples by gender.

Table 8: Ranked list of operational stressors (student activities) in the overall sample

No.	Operational stress (student activities)	N	Min.	Max.	AM	SD
1.	Not enough time available to spend with friends and family	119	1	7	4.95	1.948
2.	Fatigue (e.g. shift work, over-time)	117	1	7	4.92	1.876
3.	Work related activities on days off	117	1	7	4.82	1.946
4.	Study-related ctivities on days off	119	1	7	4.70	2.141
5.	Feeling like you are always engaged in academic tasks	119	1	7	4.15	2.216
6.	Working alone at night	119	1	7	4.03	2.147
7.	Occupation-related health issues (e.g. back pain)	115	1	7	3.79	2.002
8.	Lack of understanding from family and friends about your studies	119	1	7	3.63	2.389
9.	Managing your social life	119	1	7	3.52	2.127
10.	Traumatic events (e.g. injury)	118	1	7	3.49	1.956
11.	Limitations to your social life (e.g. who your friends are, where you socialize)	119	1	7	3.49	2.186
12.	Shift work	118	1	7	3.44	1.786
13.	Paperwork	117	1	7	3.04	1.729
14.	Finding time to stay in good physical condition	116	1	7	2.91	1.954
15.	Risk of being injured	117	1	7	2.75	1.790
16.	Eating healthy	119	1	7	2.75	2.009
17.	Friends and family feel the effects of the stigma associated with your studies	119	1	7	2.42	1.924
18.	Upholding a higher image in public	118	1	7	2.30	1.655
19.	Negative comments from the public	117	1	7	2.15	1.664
20.	Making friends outside your studies	118	1	7	2.15	1.688

The distribution of AM of the respondents' responses to the items related to operational stressors in the overall sample is also normal according to the Shapiro–Wilk test (Statistic = 0.938, *df* = 20, *Sig.* = 0.221). This is followed by determining the arithmetic means of the respondents' responses related to organizational and operational stress in the overall sample (see Table 9).

Table 9: Arithmetic mean of respondents' responses related to organizational stress and operational stress (student activities) in the overall sample

	N	AM	SD
Organizational stress	119	3.51	0.77
Operational stress (student activities)	119	3.47	0.91

Since both distributions (related to organizational and operational stress) are normal, a parametric method can be applied, specifically the Pearson correlation coefficient. The correlation on the overall sample between organizational and operational stress (student activities) is $r = 0.989$, $p < 0.01$. What follows is the presentation of the arithmetic means of respondents' responses related to organizational and operational stress (student activities) in the male subsample (see Tables 10 and 11).

Table 10: Ranked list of organizational stressors in the male subsample

No.	Organizational stress	N	Min.	Max.	AM	SD
1.	You are expected to remain officially available even during your free time	67	1	7	4.67	2.149
2.	Constant changes in policy about your duties and/or in legislation	67	1	7	4.34	1.951
3.	Unequal sharing of work responsibilities	66	1	7	4.33	1.979
4.	The feeling that different rules apply to different people (e.g. favouritism)	67	1	7	4.27	2.300
5.	Inconsistent leadership style	67	1	7	3.84	2.005
6.	Bureaucratic red tape	67	1	7	3.82	1.874
7.	Excessive administrative duties	67	1	7	3.76	1.801
8.	Lack of resources	67	1	7	3.76	2.053
9.	Inadequate equipment	67	1	7	3.63	2.029
10.	Supervisors over-emphasise the negatives (e.g. low grades, complaints from professors or non-teaching staff).	67	1	7	3.39	2.139
11.	Staff shortages	67	1	7	3.30	2.045
12.	Lack of training on new equipment	67	1	7	3.01	1.887
13.	If you are sick or injured your colleagues seem to look down on you	66	1	7	2.88	2.087

No.	Organizational stress	N	Min.	Max.	AM	SD
14.	Dealing with supervisors	67	1	7	2.82	1.898
15.	The need to be accountable for doing your job	67	1	7	2.67	1.709
16.	Dealing with professional services (e.g. student services, library)	67	1	7	2.52	1.949
17.	Internal investigations	66	1	7	2.52	1.875
18.	Dealing with colleagues	67	1	7	2.46	1.570
19.	Too much computer work	67	1	7	2.21	1.619
20.	Feeling like you always have to prove yourself to your colleagues	67	1	7	2.15	1.645

The distribution of AM of the male respondents' responses regarding organizational stressors is normal according to the Shapiro-Wilk test (Statistic = 0.947, *df* = 20, *Sig*. = 0.326). The Pearson correlation between the AS of the overall sample and the male subsample regarding organizational stress is r = 0.996, p< 0.01. This verifies the first individual hypothesis of the first specific hypothesis: "The validated questionnaires for identifying organizational stressors and their intensities for police officers are applicable to male students preparing for a career in the police." This is followed by the ranked list of professional stressors (student activities) in the male subsample.

Table 11: Ranked list of operational stressors (student activities) in the male subsample

No.	Student activities	N	Min.	Max.	AM	SD
1.	Not enough time available to spend with friends and family	67	1	7	4.58	2.104
2.	Fatigue (e.g. shift work, over-time)	65	1	7	4.45	1.888
3.	Over-time demands	66	1	7	4.42	2.031
4.	Study-related activities on days off	67	1	7	4.39	2.208
5.	Feeling like you are always engaged in academic tasks	67	1	7	3.87	2.229
6.	Working alone at night	67	1	7	3.75	2.163
7.	Occupation-related health issues (e.g. back pain)	64	1	7	3.50	1.877
8.	Lack of understanding from family and friends about your studies	67	1	7	3.42	2.381
9.	Traumatic events (e.g. injury)	67	1	7	3.31	1.948
10.	Limitations to your social life (e.g. who your friends are, where you socialize)	67	1	7	3.28	2.207
11.	Managing your social life	67	1	7	3.09	1.929
12.	Paperwork	65	1	7	3.03	1.658
13.	Shift work	66	1	7	2.91	1.526
14.	Finding time to stay in good physical condition	64	1	7	2.84	1.962
15.	Risk of being injured	65	1	7	2.69	1.785

No.	Student activities	N	Min.	Max.	AM	SD
16.	Eating healthy	67	1	7	2.66	1.887
17.	Upholding a higher image in public	66	1	7	2.52	1.730
18.	Negative comments from the public	65	1	7	2.32	1.669
19.	Friends and family feel the effects of the stigma associated with your studies	67	1	7	2.25	1.878
20.	Making friends outside your studies	67	1	7	2.15	1.672

The distribution of the AM of the male respondents' responses related to professional stressors is normal according to the Shapiro–Wilk test (Statistic = 0.940, *df* = 20, Sig. = 0.238). The Pearson correlation between the AM of the averall sample and the male subsample regarding professional stress is $r = 0.994$, $p < 0.01$. This verifies the first individual hypothesis of the second specific hypothesis: "The validated questionnaires for identifying operational stressors and their intensities among police officers are applicable to male students preparing for a career in the police." This is followed by a comparison of the arithmetic means of organizational stress and student activities in the male subsample.

Table 12: Arithmetic mean of organizational stress and student activities in the male subsample

	N	AM	SD
Organizational stress	67	3.32	0.77
Operational stress (student activities)	67	3.27	0.76

What follows is the presentation of the ranked lists of organizational and operational stressors (student activities) in the female subsample (see Tables 13 and 14).

Табела 13: Ranked list of organizational stressors in the female subsample

No.	Organizational stress	N	Min.	Max.	AM	SD
1.	Constant changes in policy about your duties and/or in legislation	51	1	7	5.04	2.000
2.	You are expected to remain officially available even during your free time	52	1	7	4.94	1.798
3.	Unequal sharing of responsibilities	52	1	7	4.87	1.971
4.	The feeling that different rules apply to different people (e.g. favouritism)	52	1	7	4.85	1.964
5.	Excessive administrative duties	52	1	7	4.50	2.082
6.	Inconsistent leadership style	51	1	7	4.27	1.919
7.	Bureaucratic red tape	52	1	7	4.17	1.968

No.	Organizational stress	N	Min.	Max.	AM	SD
8.	Inadequate equipment	52	1	7	4.04	1.970
9.	Lack of resources	51	1	7	3.78	2.091
10.	Staff shortages	52	1	7	3.71	2.287
11.	The need to be accountable for doing your job	52	1	7	3.60	2.269
12.	Supervisors over-emphasise the negatives (e.g., low grades, complaints from professors or non-teaching staff)	52	1	7	3.60	2.190
13.	Lack of training on new equipment	51	1	7	3.49	2.266
14.	If you are sick or injured your colleagues seem to look down on you	50	1	7	3.40	2.441
15.	Dealing with supervisers	51	1	7	3.22	1.963
16.	Dealing with professional services (e.g. student services, library)	52	1	7	3.04	2.142
17.	Internal investigations	51	1	7	2.96	2.039
18.	Dealing with colleagues	52	1	7	2.75	1.631
19.	Feeling like you always have to prove yourself to your colleagues	51	1	7	2.67	2.056
20.	Too much computer work	51	1	7	2.53	1.953

The distribution of AM of the female respondents across the items related to organizational stressors is normal according to the Shapiro–Wilk test (Statistic = 0.950, $df = 20$, $Sig. = 0.372$). The Pearson correlation between the AS of the overall sample and the female subsample regarding organizational stress is $r = 0.993$, $p < 0.01$. This verifies the second individual hypothesis of the first specific hypothesis: "The validated questionnaires for identifying organizational stressors and their intensity among police officers are applicable to the female students preparing for a career in the police." This is followed by the ranked list of operational stressors (student activities) in the female subsample.

Table 14: Ranked list of operational stressors (student activities) in the female subsample

No.	Student activities	N	Min.	Max.	AM	SD
1.	Fatigue (e.g. shift work, over-time)	52	1	7	5.52	1.698
2.	Not enough time available to spend with friends and family	52	1	7	5.42	1.625
3.	Over-time demands	51	1	7	5.33	1.717
4.	Study-related activities on your days off	52	1	7	5.10	2.003
5.	Feeling like you are always engaged in academic tasks	52	1	7	4.52	2.165
6.	Working alone at night	52	1	7	4.40	2.089
7.	Occupation-related health issues (e.g. back pain)	51	1	7	4.16	2.111
8.	Shift work	52	1	7	4.12	1.875

No.	Student activities	N	Min.	Max.	AM	SD
9.	Managing your social life	52	1	7	4.08	2.257
10.	Lack of understanding from family and friends about your studies	52	1	7	3.90	2.395
11.	Limitations to your social life (e.g. who your friends are, where you socialize)	52	1	7	3.75	2.150
12.	Traumatic events (e.g. injury)	51	1	7	3.73	1.960
13.	Paperwork	52	1	7	3.06	1.830
14.	Finding time to stay in good physical condition	52	1	7	3.00	1.960
15.	Eating healty	52	1	7	2.87	2.170
16.	Risk of being injured	52	1	7	2.83	1.812
17.	Friends and family feel the effects of the stigma associated with your studies	52	1	7	2.63	1.981
18.	Making friends outside your studies	51	1	7	2.16	1.725
19.	Upholding a higher image in public	52	1	7	2.02	1.527
20.	Negative comments from the public	52	1	7	1.94	1.650

The distribution of the AM of the respondents' responses across items related to operational stressors in the female subsample is normal according to the Shapiro–Wilk test (*Statistic* = 0.950, *df* = 20, *Sig*. = 0.362). The Pearson correlation between the AM of the overall sample and the female subsample regarding operational stress is $r = 0.994$, $p < 0.01$. This verifies the second individual hypothesis of the second specific hypothesis: "The validated questionnaires for identifying operational stressors and their intensities among police officers are applicable to female students preparing for a career in the police." What follows is a comparison of the relationship between organizational stress and student activities in the female subsample.

Table 15: Relationship between organizational stress and student activities in the female subsample

	N	AM	SD
Organizational stress	52	3.77	0.79
Student activities	52	3.72	1.13

The next section presents the arithmetic mean of the resondents' responses related to organizational and operational stress among male and female students.

Table 16: Arithmetic mean of respondents' responses related to organizational stress in the male and female samples

	Gender	AM	SD
Organizational stress among students	Males	3.32	0.77
	Females	3.77	0.79

Regarding the respondents' responses related the organizational stress items, it can be observed that such stressors have a stronger impact on female students than on male students. Although the prioritization of organizational stressors is almost identical for both groups, a greater difference is noted for the stressor "The need to be accountable for doing your job", which was the 11th-ranked item for female students (AM=3.60) and the 15th-ranked item for male students (AM=2.67). A statistically significant difference between the responses of male and female students to this item was identified ($t > 1.96$, $p < 0.05$), which was determined by the independent samples t-test and presented in the following table.

Table 17: Results of the independent samples t-test for the stressor – The need to be accountable for doing your job

Organizational stress	Gender	N	AM	SD	t	p
The need to be accountable for doing your job	M	67	2.67	1.71	-2.448	0.016
	F	52	3.60	2.27		

Table 18: Arithmetic mean of respondents' responses related to operational stress (student activities) in the male and female samples

	Gender	AM	SD
Stress among students due to different aspects of student life	Males	3.27	0.76
	Females	3.73	1.13

Regarding the respondents' responses related to operational stress items, (*whis is understood as student activities*), it can be observed that these stressors, like organizational ones, have a stronger impact on female students than on male students. Although the prioritization of operational stressors among female and male students is almost identical, a larger difference is observed for the stressor "Shift work", which is the 8th ranked item for female students (AM=4.12) and the13th ranked item for male students (AM=2.91). This means that female students cope with shift work more poorly than male students (e.g., during on-call duties or securing the University facilities). A statistically sig-

nificant difference in responses for this item was identified ($t > 1.96$, $p < 0.05$), which was determined by the independent samples t-test and is presented in the following table.

Table 19: Results of the independent samples t-test for the stressor – Shift work

Student activities	Gender	N	AM	SD	t	p
Shift work	M	66	2.91	1.53	-3.853	0.000
	F	52	4.12	1.88		

By verifying the first and second individual hypotheses of both specific hypotheses, the specific hypotheses have been verified, namely:

- The first specific hypothesis: "The validated questionnaires for identifying organizational stressors and their intensities among police officers are applicable to the student population preparing for a career in the police."
- Second specific hypothesis: "The validated questionnaires for identifying operational stressors and their intensities among police officers are applicable to the student population preparing for a career in the police."

Finally, the issue of the reliability of the applied questionnaires arises. The reliability of both questionnaires was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha (α), which in this study demonstrated the following values:

- Organizational Stress Questionnaire (*PSQ-Org*): $\alpha = 0.933$ and
- Operational Stress Questionnaire (*PSQ-Op*): $\alpha = 0.900$ (understood as student activities)

Given the previously verified specific hypotheses and the very high reliability of both questionnaires, which were originally developed for police officers but applied here to students preparing for a career in the police, the general hypothesis was also confirmed: "The validated questionnaires for identifying organizational and operational stressors and their intensities among police officers are applicable to the student population preparing for a career in the police."

DISCUSSION

The prioritization of organizational stressors in the overall sample, as well as in the subsamples of male and female students, is nearly identical, which is is evident from the ranked lists of organizational stressors. A more pronounced difference is observed for the stressor "The need to be accountable for doing

your jod," which may indicate a higher level of responsibility among female students toward their professional obligations compared to male students.

The prioritization of operational stressors in the overall sample, as well as in the subsamples of male and female students, is also nearly identical, which is evident from the ranked lists of operational stressors. A more pronounced difference is observed for the stressor "Shift work," which aligns with the findings of a study involving 410 police officers, 50% of whom were women, which indicated that men are more tolerant of shift work than women (Saksvik-Lehouillier & Sørengaard, 2023).

The arithmetic means of the respondents' responses related to organizational stress (AM=3.51) and operational stress (AM=3.47) in the toverall sample indicate that organizational stress is slightly more intense than operational stress. In the male subsample, the arithmetic mean of organizational stress (AM=3.32) and student activities (AM=3.27) suggests that male students are somewhat more exposed to organizational than operational stress. Female students are similarly slightly more exposed to organizational stress (AM=3.77) than operational stress (AM=3.73). This finding aligns with research conducted in Croatia (Glavina et al., 2015), which emphasizes a significant difference between these stressors in favor of organizational stress, particularly in relation to police officers. The difference, which in this regard is not significant among the student population under consideration, suggests that stressors are more homogeneous for students compared to those experienced by police officers.

A very high correlation between organizational and operational stress ($r = 0.989$, $p < 0.01$) indicates that higher organizational stress is associated with higher stress from student activities, and vice versa. This also suggests that influencing one type of stressor can affect the other, which means that if the responsible authorities wanted to reduce stress levels among students (e.g., for educational purposes), it would be sufficient to intervene on just one type of stressor, such as organizational stressors, which would consequently reduce stress related to student activities, and vice versa. Conversely, if the authorities wanted to increase stress levels among students to better prepare them for the risks associated with the policing profession, increasing the intensity of operational stressors would simultaneously elevate exposure to organizational stressors.

The reliability of these results regarding the correlation between organizational and operational stress across the overall sample was confirmed by correlating the same stressors within the male (organizational stress: $r = 0.996$, $p < 0.01$; operational stress: $r = 0.994$, $p < 0.01$) and female (organizational stress: $r = 0.993$, $p < 0.01$; operational stress: r = 0.994, $p < 0.01$) subsamples. These findings are consistent and noncontradictory.

The findings of this study also indicate that women are, on average, more exposed to both organizational (AM = 3.32 and AM = 3.77) and operational (AM = 3.27 and AM = 3.72) stress than men. This difference can be interpreted within the context of police subculture, which students internalize during

their education at the University of Criminal Investigation and Police Studies. The policing profession, and, by extension, its subculture, tends to favor male attributes, as it predominantly relies on characteristics traditionally associated with men, the so-called "male competence domain" (Barrie & Broomhall, 2012). As a result, women may find it more challenging than men to adapt to such an organizational environment. This does not suggest that women should not work in policing; rather, it underscores the necessity of identifying appropriate positions for female police officers, where qualities more commonly associated with women (e.g. empathy) are particularly valuable. The framework for such placement is supported by the concept of *Community Policing* (Miller, 1999).

Finally, based on the values of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (organizational stress – *PSQ-Org*: $\alpha = 0.933$; operational stress – *PSQ-Op*: $\alpha = 0.900$), the reliability and applicability of the adapted questionnaires are confirmed. These reliability levels are slightly lower than those reported in studies involving active police officers, organizational stress (*PSQ-Org*): $\alpha = 0.959$ and professional stress (*PSQ-Op*): $\alpha = 0.961$ (Kukić et al., 2021), which may be explained by their application to students preparing for a career in the police and by the adaptations made to tailor the instruments to this population.

CONCLUSION

The conclusions reached in this study are as follows:

- The individual and specific hypotheses were verified, thereby confirming the general hypothesis: "The validated questionnaires for identifying organizational and operational stressors and their intensities among police officers are applicable to the student population preparing for a career in the police";
- Ranked lists of organizational and operational stressors by intensity (risk) were established for the pverall sample, as well as for the male and female subsamples. These lists are highly similar, with several notable exceptions;
- Organizational stressors are more intensive and therefore more risky than operational stressors;
- There is a very high positive correlation between organizational and operational stress, which enables the management of one type of stressor through the other and vice verse;
- Female students are exposed to more intensive stress than male students (in the context of the policing profession and the training and preparation provided at the University of Criminal Investigation and Police Studies, which may be explained by the greater desirability of traits traditionally associated with masculinity, which are regarded as necessary for addressing security-related challenges that define police work.

Consequently, male students adapt more easily, whereas female students encounter greater difficulty meeting these professional demands);

- Both questionnaires, although adapted, demonstrated high reliability.
- Since student stress is measurable using these questionnaires, it is also manageable;
- The high correlation between organizational and operational stressors enables student stress to be managed in the following ways:
  - If it is in the interest of decision-makers to modify stress levels, then influencing organizational stress can produce corresponding changes in operational stress, and vice versa;
  - Stress intensity can be increased or decreased depending on educational goals or the need to enhance student preparedness for the policing profession.
- The applied questionnaires (*PSQ-Org* and *PSQ-Op*) are reliable for students preparing for a career in the police, although their reliability is slightly lower compared to those intented for active police officers;
- It is possible to continue using the questionnaires employed in this study, ideally with a stratified sample (including forensic science students), where an increase in reliability may be expected.
- The questionnaires may be further refined and subsequently tested using a random sample.
- Future research on this topic may examine student responses by study program and year of study, rather than by sex alone, as it has been done in the present study.

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EMOTIONAL REACTION TO STRESSFUL EVENTS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE PREPARING FOR A PROFESSIONAL CAREER AS POLCE OFFICERS

Original Scientific Article

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Miroslav Đurić[1]
Ministry of the Interior of Republika Srpska, Republika Srpska, BiH

Abstract: This study aimed to determine the extent to which young people preparing for a professional career as police officers demonstrate emotional resilience to stressful events, as well as whether statistically significant differences in emotional resilience to stressful events exist among youth of different genders and ages. The sample consisted of 400 respondents, including 149 students enrolled in the Police High School in Banja Luka and 251 students at the Police Academy of the Republic Srpska Ministry of the Interior. The respondents were between 17 and 27 years of age. Of the total number of respondents, 317 were male and 83 were female. This study was conducted in 2024 in Banja Luka. The COPED/NEG-EMOC-BM-1992 Scale (Милосављевић, 2012) was used to test our hypothesis. The findings indicate that young people preparing for a professional career as police officers exhibit a high level of emotional resilience to stressful events; young women show higher levels of negative emotional reactions to stressful events, while students at the Police High School partially demonstrate higher levels of negative emotional responses to stressful events than students at the Police
Academy.

Keywords: stressful events, gender, age, youth, emotional reaction

Introduction

Police officers, in the course of performing their duties and tasks, are frequently exposed to stressful events, that is, to external stimuli that can increase the burden on the individual. Previous studies show that policing is one of the most stressful occupations (Glavina & Vukosav, 2011).

Stress produces consequences at the emotional level (apathy, aggression, anxiety, etc.), in cognitive functioning (reduced ability to think, solve problems,

1 Corresponding author: Dr Miroslav Đurić, Ministry of the Interior of Republika Srpska, Banja Luka. E-mail: miroslavzdjuric@gmail.com.

etc.), and the health level (decreased immune functioning, increased susceptibility to psychosomatic illnesses), leading to reduced work performance (Pajević, 2006). Some scholars emphasize the following consequences of stress: physical (headache, stomach pain, neck or shoulder pain, muscle tension, elevated blood pressure, etc.); cognitive (forgetfulness, difficulty concentrating, confusion, impaired decision-making, etc.); emotional (excessive worry and irritability, pessimism, low frustration tolerance, etc.); and behavioral (communication difficulties, increased alcohol consumption, sleep and eating disturbances, reduced motivation, etc.) (Delić & Plažanin, 2021).

The stress theories that most clearly explain the negative impact of stressors accompanying certain occupations include Selye's (1956) theory and Lazarus's (1966) theory. The central premise of Selye's theory is that stress reduces the body's physical resistance. This theory is based on the concept of the General Adaptation Syndrome, that is, the body's response to prolonged exposure to stressors, which comprises three stages. In the first stage (the Alarm Stage), which represents the initial phase of stress, the body mobilizes all available resources in order to defend itself from the stressor. In the second stage (the Resistance Stage), chemical and hormonal changes occur within the body that activate physical defense mechanisms. In the third stage (the Exhaustion Stage), the body's reserves become depleted and it ceases its efforts to resist the stressor due to prolonged stress and its inability to cope with it.

Lazarus's (1966) theory is based on the premise that the consequences of stressful events, which can be short-term or long-term consequences, depend on individual characteristics, such as one's beliefs, values, personality traits, and so forth, as well as on environmental factors (the duration of the stressful event, the presence or absence of social support, etc.).

The findings of relevant international studies have shown that stress in police work can negatively impact multiple aspects of life. For example, the study by Neylan et al. (2002) found that police officers—regardless of whether they worked rotating or fixed daytime shifts—had significantly poorer sleep quality and shorter average sleep duration than the respondents in the control group. A study involving police officers demonstrated that stress was associated with sleep difficulties and lower scores on perceived health (Gerber et al., 2010). The study by Garbarino et al. (2013) demonstrated that job-related stress can negatively affect the mental health of police officers. Another study, which included 1,072 police officers, showed that exposure to high-risk situations (critical incidents), workplace discrimination, lack of cooperation among coworkers, and job dissatisfaction were significantly associated with adverse outcomes, including depression and intimate partner violence (Gershon et al., 2009). A study involving 105 police officers over the age of 50 revealed that the most important risk factors associated with perceived occupational stress were excessive alcohol consumption, gambling, anxiety, depression, symptoms of burnout and post-traumatic stress, aggressive behavior, and so on (Gershon et al., 2002). According to the findings of a study involving 852 police officers in New South

Wales, 48% of male and 40% of female respondents reported excessive alcohol consumption, while 12% of male and 15% of female respondents reported experiencing moderate to severe stress symptoms (Richmond et al., 1998).

According to Sheehan and Van Hasselt (2003), the greatest sources of stress in the policing profession is inappropriate training, insufficient supervision, lack of recognition for work performance, inadequate opportunities for promotion, insufficient salaries and financial incentives, insensitivity to family and personal problems, extended working hours, prolonged absences from home, media scrutiny, and so on. The same authors argued that these factors may lead to transient symptoms such as sleep difficulties, eating disorders, and reduced emotional responsiveness, but they may also result in acute or post-traumatic stress disorders.

To perform their duties effectively and preserve their health, police officers are expected not to exhibit high levels of negative emotional reactions to stressful stimuli. Therefore, during the selection of police officer candidates, it is necessary to consider their level of emotional resilience to stressful events, while police officer students should be educated on how to respond appropriately to stressful stimuli during the training. Argues that, in addition to psychological, medical, and motor-skill assessments, the selection of candidates for police training should include interviews and situational testing of stress resilience (Трстењак и Дундовић, 2024).

Bothe male and female candidates apply for admission to police training programs. One of the issues that arises is whether there is a difference in emotional responses to stressful events between males and females. According to Милосављевић et al., (2000) numerous studies have shown that females exhibit high levels of anxiety in response to threats and dangers than males and different explanations have been offered for this – while some scholars argue that women have genetic predispositions toward higher fear, others attribute this to gender-role socialization, according to which women are permitted greater expression of fear than men. The study by McCarty et al. (2007) demonstrated that male and female police officers did not report significantly different levels of stress and burnout at work. Separate multivariate analyses in the same study showed that although there were similar predictors of stress for both male and female officers, differences were found in the models, which, according to the study, suggests that female police officers may experience certain unique stressors within the policing organization.

Empirical section

Research problem

The central research problem of this study is the following: How much are young people preparing for a professional career as police officers emotionally

resilient to stressful events and do gender and age have a statistically significant impact on the level of their emotional resilience to stressful events?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated in this study:

1. Young people preparing for a professional career as police officers exhibit a high level of emotional resilience to stressful events;
2. There is no statistically significant difference in emotional reactions to stressful events between male and female young people preparing for a professional career as police officers;
3. There is no statistically significant difference in emotional reactions to stressful events among young people of different ages preparing for a professional career as police officers.

Research objectives

To answer the research question and test the proposed hypotheses, the following objectives were carried out:

1. To assess the level of emotional reactions to stressful events among young people preparing for a professional career as police officers;
2. To determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in the level of emotional reactions to stressful events between male and female young people preparing for a professional career as police officers;
3. To determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in the level of emotional reactions to stressful events among young people of different ages preparing for a professional career as police officers.

Research aims

The main aim of this study is to assess the emotional resilience of young police officer students to stressful events and determine whether statistically significant differences in emotional resilience to stressful events exist between young people of different genders and ages.

Variables

Gender and age represent the independent variables, while the dependent variable is the level of emotional reactions to stressful events.

The independent variables are categorical, whereas the dependent variable is continuous.

The gender variable has two categories: male and female

The age variable also consists of two categories: The first category includes respondents aged 17–18 (students at the Police High School in Banja Luka). The second category includes respondents aged 19–27 (students at the Police Academy in Banja Luka).

An emotional reaction to stressful events is operationally defined as the score obtained on the COPED/NEG-EMOC-BM-1992 Scale (Милосављевић, 2012). A higher score on the Scale indicates a higher level of negative emotional response to stressful events.

Method

Sample

In this study, the sample consisted of 400 participants, of whom 149 (37.3%) were students at the Police High School in Banja Luka and 251 (62.7%) were students at the Police Academy within the Ministry of the Interior of Republika Srpska. Respondents aged from 17 to 27 years. The respondents aged from 17–18 years were students at the Police High School while the remaining respondents were students at the Police Academy. Of the total sample, 317 respondents (79.2%) were male and 83 respondents (20.8%) were female. A more detailed overview of the sample structure by gender and age is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The sample structure by gender and age of respondents

			Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Age	17-18	N	104	45	149
		% of gender within age group	69.8	30.2	100.0
		% of age within gender group	32.8	54.2	37.3
		% of the total	26.0	11.3	37.3
	19-27	N	213	38	251
		% of gender within age group	84.9	15.1	100.0
		% of age within gender group	67.2	45.8	62.7
		% of the total	53.3	9.5	62.7
	Total	N	317	83	400
		% of age within gender group	100.0	100.0	100.0
		% of the total	79.2	20.8	100.0

Instrument

To measure the dependent variable (emotional reactions to stressful events), the COPED/NEG-EMOC-BM-1992 Scale was used (Милосављевић,

2012). The scale consists of ten items, each representing a specific form of negative emotional response to stressful events. It is a five-point Likert-type scale. Respondents were instructed to select one of the five response options, ranging from "never happens to me" to "always happens to me." The scale reliability, measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, is α=.90. In the present study, the scale reliability, measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, was α=.83.

Procedure

The study was conducted in 2024 at the premises of the Police Education Directorate of the Ministry of the Interior of Republika Srpska in Banja Luka.

The research was anonymous, and participation was voluntary and free of charge. Data collection was carried out in group settings.

Respondents were asked to provide information about their sex and age and to complete the COPED/NEG-EMOC-BM-1992 Scale.

Instructions for completing the Scale were provided both orally and in writing.

Data processing

To test the normality of the distribution of scores on the COPED/NEG-EMOC-BM-1992 Scale, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was used. It has been determined that the conditions required for the application of parametric statistics were not met (*Statistic=.163–.454; p=.000*). Descriptive statistics and the Mann–Whitney U test were used to test the hypotheses.

Finding and discussion

Level of emotional response to stressful events

Table 2 shows the frequencies and percentages of respondents' emotional response to stressful events, the arithmetic mean and standard deviations. The data show that, for eight out of ten items, the majority of respondents reported never experiencing negative emotional reactions to stressful events, and that the number of respondents who do experience such reactions decreases along the scale from "never happens to me" to "always happens to me." For only two items, which reflect milder forms of negative emotional response to stressful events ("I get goosebumps" and "my heart starts pounding"), the majority of respondents stated they occur sometimes.

The mean for all items is below the theoretical average (M = 1.35–2.74), and the degree of agreement among respondents is high (SD = .71–1.23) (Table 2).

Table 2: Descriptive statistics pertaining to the levels of emotional response to stressful events among respondents

Item		Never happens to me	Rarely happens to me	Sometimes happens to me	Happens to me	Always happens to me	M	SD
My head feels numb	f	306	57	30	6	1	1.35	.71
	%	76.5	14.2	7.5	1.5	.3		
I get goosebumps	f	111	103	117	59	10	2.39	1.11
	%	27.8	25.8	29.3	14.8	2.5		
I freeze up	f	160	103	93	39	5	2.07	1.06
	%	40.0	25.8	23.3	9.8	1.3		
My vision goes dark	f	259	71	45	16	9	1.61	.99
	%	64.8	17.8	11.3	4.0	2.3		
I feel like the floor is dropping under my feet	f	289	63	32	12	4	1.45	.84
	%	72.3	15.8	8.0	3.0	1.0		
I turn pale	f	214	97	53	30	6	1.79	1.03
	%	53.5	24.3	13.3	7.5	1.5		
My heart starts pounding	f	80	95	108	83	34	2.74	1.23
	%	20.0	23.8	27.0	20.8	8.5		
My mouth gets dry	f	166	111	89	27	7	2.00	1.03
	%	41.5	27.8	22.3	6.8	1.8		
I feel like I am running out of breath	f	248	81	50	16	5	1.62	.94
	%	62.0	20.3	12.5	4.0	1.3		
I start trembling	f	222	95	56	18	9	1.74	1.01
	%	55.5	23.8	14.0	4.5	2.3		

Based on our findings, it can be concluded that the first hypothesis has been confirmed: young people preparing for a professional career as police officers exhibit a high level of emotional resilience to stressful events.

This outcome indicates that the selection of candidate for admission to the Police High School in Banja Luka and the Police Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Srpska is well-conceived and effectively implemented, at least from the perspective of their emotional responses to stressful events. Considering that the respondents are currently being trained to become police officers, which includes further training to respond adequately to stressful situations, the findings of this study are encouraging. In other words, upon completion of their training, young people are likely be able to respond appropriately to stressful events, at an emotional level, thereby contributing to their own well-being, to the efficiency of the institution in which they will be employed, and to the broader community in which they live and work.

The level of emotional response to stressful events among male and female respondents

The Mann–Whitney U test was used to examine the significance of differences in emotional responses to stressful events among male and female respondents. The analysis revealed that female respondents, at a significance level of .001, exhibited stronger negative emotional reactions, specifically experiencing shivering, paleness, a pounding heart, shortness of breath, and trembling. Additionally, at a significance level of .01, they were more likely to get goosebumps, experience darkening vision, and feeling like the floor is dropping under their feet, compared to male participants (Table 3).

Given that statistically significant differences in the emotional response to stressful events among male and female respondents were identified in eight out of ten items – female respondents exhibited significantly higher levels of negative emotional reactions than male respondents – we may conclude that the hypothesis stating that there is no statistically significant difference in the emotional response to stressful events among male and female young people preparing for a professional career as police officers was not confirmed.

This study demonstrated that young women preparing for a professional career as police officers generally show higher levels of negative emotional reactions to stressful events. However, this does not necessarily imply that female respondents will perform police duties less effectively. Although stress disrupts the body's homeostasis, it also prepares the body for better adaptation (Десимировић, 1997).

Our findings are consistent with the finding of several previous studies. Reported that there is no unequivocal explanation as to why females exhibit higher levels of anxiety in response to threats and danger than males Милосављевић et al. (2000). They add that, according some scholars, women have genetic predispositions for stronger fear responses, while, according to others, this is a consequence of internalized gender-role socialization, whereby women are afforded greater opportunity or social permission to express fear than men.

Table 3: The impact of respondents' gender on emotional response to stressful events

Item	Gender	M	SD	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U Statistic	p
My head feels numb	Male	1.32	.65	198.60	14225.500	.437
	Female	1.44	.86	206.34		
I get goosebumps	Male	2.29	1.09	191.73	12149.500	.006**
	Female	2.66	1.14	227.53		
I freeze up	Male	1.94	1.00	188.87	11286.000	.000***
	Female	2.44	1.18	236.34		
My vision goes dark	Male	1.50	.81	193.20	12592.500	.009**
	Female	1.96	1.34	223.01		

I feel like the floor is dropping under my feet	Male	1.35	.70	193.53	12693.000	.007¨
	Female	1.73	1.14	221.98		
I turn pale	Male	1.64	.90	186.46	10558.000	.000¨¨
	Female	2.28	1.25	243.77		
My heart starts pounding	Male	2.58	1.16	186.98	10714.000	.000¨¨
	Female	3.22	1.34	242.17		
My mouth gets dry	Male	1.93	.98	195.44	13270.500	.105
	Female	2.18	1.18	216.09		
I feel like I am running out of breath	Male	1.50	.81	188.91	11299.000	.000¨¨
	Female	2.00	1.17	236.20		
I start trembling	Male	1.63	.91	189.35	11430.500	.000¨¨
	Female	2.10	1.19	234.86		

¨¨Statistically significant at the level of statistical significance .001

¨ Statistically significant at the level of statistical significance.01

Levels of emotional response to stressful events among respondents of different ages

To test the third hypothesis, which stated that there would be no statistically significant difference in emotional responses to stressful events among young people of different ages who are preparing for a professional career as police officer, the Mann–Whitney U test was used.

The findings indicate that respondents aged 17–18 (students at the Police High School) exhibited significantly higher levels of negative emotional reactions, at the .001 significance level, specifically – their vison goes dark and they feel like the floor is dropping under their feet – compared to respondents aged 19–27 (Police Academy students). Furthermore, it was found that, at the .01 significance level, respondents aged 17–18 were more likely to freeze up and to experience a strong pounding of the heart, and, at the .05 significance level, to turn pale, than respondents aged 19–27 (Table 4).

Given that five out of ten items showed a statistically significant difference in emotional response to stressful events among respondents of different ages – respondents aged 17–18 exhibited significantly higher levels of negative emotional reactions than those aged 19–27 – we may conclude that the hypothesis stating that there is no statistically significant difference in emotional response to stressful events among young people of different ages who are preparing for a professional career as police officers was partially confirmed.

These findings may be explained by the fact that older respondents are generally more emotionally mature. According to the developmental periodization accepted in contemporary developmental psychology, and most commonly used in our region, young people aged 17–18 fall within late adolescence, that

is, the late school age, whereas young people aged 18–24 fall within early adulthood, and those over 25 within middle adulthood (Жиропађа и Миочиновић, 2007).

Table 4: The impact of respondents' age on the level of emotional responses to stressful events

Item	Age	M	SD	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U Statistic	p
My head feels numb	17-18	1.41	.76	206.13	18640.500	.254
	19-27	1.31	.66	196.26		
I get goosebumps	17-18	2.47	1.09	206.43	18587.500	.356
	19-27	2.33	1.13	196.02		
I freeze up	17-18	2.25	1.09	217.94	16608.000	.006¨
	19-27	1.94	1.03	187.34		
My vision goes dark	17-18	1.82	1.11	222.96	15745.500	.000‴
	19-27	1.47	.86	183.56		
I feel like the floor is dropping under my feet	17-18	1.64	.96	221.36	16019.500	.000‴
	19-27	1.31	.72	184.76		
I turn pale	17-18	1.97	1.13	214.18	17254.500	.024˙
	19-27	1.67	.93	190.18		
My heart starts pounding	17-18	2.96	1.23	220.30	16203.000	.002¨
	19-27	2.59	1.22	185.57		
My mouth gets dry	17-18	2.04	1.08	203.79	19042.500	.602
	19-27	1.97	1.00	198.02		
I feel like I am running out of breath	17-18	1.67	.96	204.34	18948.000	.506
	19-27	1.59	.92	197.61		
I start trembling	17-18	1.88	1.11	210.20	17940.000	.106
	19-27	1.65	.91	193.18		

‴Statistically significant at the level of statistical significance .001

¨ Statistically significant at the level of statistical significance .01

˙ Statistically significant at the level of statistical significance .05

Conclusion

Based on our findings, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The hypothesis proposing that young people preparing for a professional career as police officers exhibit a high level of emotional resilience to stressful events was confirmed.

This finding suggests that the selection of candidates for admission to the Police High School in Banja Luka and the cadet candidates to the Police Academy of the Ministry of the Interior of Republika Srpska is well designed and effectively implemented, at least from the perspective of candidates' emotional

response to stressful events. When this is considered alongside the fact that the respondents are undergoing the police training program in which they continue to develop competencies necessary for appropriate response to stressful events, the findings can be viewed as encouraging. More precisely, these findings imply that, upon completing their training, young police officers will be capable of responding to stressful events in an emotionally appropriate manner, thereby contributing to their own well-being, to the efficiency of the institution in which they will be employed, and to the broader community in which they live and work.

2. The hypothesis proposing that there is no statistically significant difference in emotional responses to stressful events among male and female respondents preparing for a professional career as police officers was not confirmed. Young female respondents generally exhibit higher levels of negative emotional reactions to stressful events. However, this does not necessarily imply that female respondents will perform official duties less effectively. Although stress disrupts the organism's homeostasis, it also prepares the body to better adapt.

3. The hypothesis proposing that there is no statistically significant difference in emotional response to stressful events among young people of different ages preparing for a professional career as police officers was partially confirmed. Police High School students exhibit somewhat higher levels of negative emotional response to stressful events compared to Police Academy students. Police Academy students are in early or middle adulthood, whereas Police High School students are in late adolescence, that is, late school age. Consequently, Police Academy students display slightly lower levels of negative emotional reactions to stressful events than Police High School students

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PREREQUISITES FOR EUROPEAN STRATEGIC SECURITY AUTONOMY

Review Article

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Boris Tučić[1]
University of Banja Luka Faculty of Security Studies, Republika Srpska, BiH

Abstract: Within the discipline of international relations, and through the application of relevant scientific methods, such as content analysis, including inductive, deductive, and synthetic methods, this paper examines the concept of European strategic security autonomy, its substance, scope, and limitations. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that the functional verification of European strategic autonomy, the security "maturation" of Europe, and ultimately the assumption of responsibility for its own security, rest upon the fulfilment of several fundamental prerequisites which, for the purpose of clearer conceptual understanding, may be broadly grouped into three categories: political or political and institutional, organizational and functional, and material or resource-based prerequisites. One of the conclusions that emerges from the analysis is that European strategic security autonomy remains in an early stage of development due to the non-fulfilment of these prerequisites. Moreover, under present circumstances, Europe embodied in the institutional, legal, and political structures of the European Union can hardly be identified as an autonomous actor capable and sufficiently capacitated to assume responsibility for its own security and that of its immediate neighborhood.

Keywords: European strategic security autonomy; European Union; Common Security and Defence Policy; political and institutional prerequisites; organizational and functional prerequisites; material (resource-based) prerequisites.

INTRODUCTION

Although conceived and initially developed as an economic project, the process of European integration and cooperation has been accompanied by sporadic, typically unsuccessful, initiatives aimed at strengthening Europe's position, which is embodied in the European Union, as an autonomous security actor on the international stage. With the development of relevant EU policies

1 Corresponding author: Boris Tučić, Full Time Professor, Faculty of Security Studies, University of Banja Luka. Email: boris.tucic@fbn.unibl.org.

in the field of security and defense, particularly under the influence of increasingly dynamic changes in the international order over the past two decades, the need to build European strategic security autonomy has been frequency emphasized, which is viewed as a framework through which relatively independent European security interests may be articulated, thereby enabling the Union to achieve functional verification as an autonomous security actor at both the regional and global levels.

At the center of this analysis is the very concept of European strategic security autonomy, its substance, scope, and limitations, and, in particular, the key prerequisites whose fulfilment fundamentally determines the functional verification of strategic autonomy. The phenomenon of European strategic autonomy is examined through several conceptually, logically, and methodologically interconnected sections and subsections. The first section defines the contemporary meaning of the concept of European strategic autonomy, its essential components and highlights the differentiated approaches to its interpretation, both in political domain and in official documents. The second section is divided into three subsections and considers the prerequisites for achieving European strategic security autonomy, which, taking into account their nature, are grouped into three main categories: political and institutional, organisational–functional, and material (resource-based). It should be noted that these prerequisites, regardless of the category to which they nominally belong, are deeply interdependent and mutually conditioned.

The contemporary concept of European strategic security autonomy

Initiatives aimed at developing an autonomous (Western) European security identity are not of recent origin; they can be traced back to the late 1940s and early 1950s. This is evident both in the establishment of the Western European Union (WEU) through the 1948 Brussels Treaty and in the French proposals for a European Political Community and a European Defence Community, as reflected in the unratified 1952 Paris Treaty. However, contemporary aspirations to build European strategic autonomy[1] were primarily prompted by fears of a potential shift in U.S. foreign policy concerning the defense of the European continent, which was especially pronounced during the administration of Donald Trump. The relative deterioration of military, political, and economic relations between the transatlantic partners (Dimitrova, 2020; Görgen, 2021), coupled with Washington's demands that Europe assume greater responsibility for its own security, including financial contributions to NATO's collective defense system, shifted the focus of European capitals toward the development of a concept of European strategic security autonomy. This concept became coherently articulated in the 2016 European Union Global Strategy (European External Action Service, 2016: 19), after which it emerged as an indispensable reference point in discussions of virtually any aspect of EU security and defense policy (Witney, 2024; Ringsmose & Webber, 2020). However, the establishment

and popularization of this concept have raised more questions than they have resolved, including significant uncertainties regarding its definition, content, and scope (Zielinski, 2020; Helwig & Sinkkonen, 2022; Rekowski, 2023). From the perspective of U.S. geopolitical interests, the most problematic were interpretations of strategic autonomy in an absolute sense, implying institutional, strategic, and structural differentiation from the US and the construction of independent European military–security structures as a counterpart to NATO. Such an understanding meant replacing NATO, the decades-long Euro-Atlantic security umbrella, with narrower autonomous European structures, thereby rapidly weakening the U.S. military presence on the continent. By contrast, relative interpretations of strategic autonomy which, it appears, the architects of the concept had in mind from the very beginning (European External Action Service, 2016: 19) and which eventually gained the support of all European leaders (European External Action Service, 2020), mean that the role of the US and NATO in Europe's defense remains indispensable, while Europe's security autonomy, which is embodied institutionally in the European Union, is focused on the independent regulation of issues that do not lie at the core of Washington's strategic priorities. At the core of this interpretation lies the development of an autonomous European identity within NATO, that is, the creation of its "European pillar," which would introduce new organizational and functional qualities into the Alliance, but without establishing separate European military–security structures that would replace NATO. In this sense, the concept of strategic autonomy, although it takes the EU as its primary institutional reference point, extends beyond EU policies alone and requires a broader platform involving both its member states and non-EU NATO members such as Great Britain or Norway. The most frequently cited argument in support of the relative interpretation of strategic autonomy stems from Article 42(2) of the Lisbon Treaty on European Union, which stipulates that the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), and potentially a future Common Defence, must respect the obligations that member states assume under other military and security arrangements, primarily NATO, and may develop only with full regard for all frameworks and mechanisms established within those arrangements. In other words, from the moment of its treaty-based inception, the EU's CSDP has been positioned as secondary to the military and security commitments that member states undertake within NATO.

European strategic security autonomy can be defined as Europe's ability, as a political and security actor in the international arena, to make decisions independently and to possess the necessary means, capacities, and capabilities to implement those decisions in an autonomous and effective manner whenever required (Zandeel et al., 2020: 2). Its realization is determined by the fulfilment of a set of preconditions at both the internal and external levels, which condition its materialization, developmental trajectory, functional scope, and limitations. These prerequisites are deeply intertwined and mutually reinforcing, and none of them can be examined in isolation.

Prerequisites of strategic autonomy and their classification

Evidently, the existence of European strategic autonomy presupposes, above all, Europe's capability to independently and effectively make decisions through which it articulates its security-related positions and interests, as well as its ability to command appropriate resources and capacities necessary for their practical implementation. For the purposes of a clearer understanding, the prerequisites of European strategic autonomy are conventionally divided into political and institutional, organizational and functional, and material (resource-based) categories.

Political and Institutional Prerequisites

This group of prerequisites encompasses the elements that constitute the necessary internal and external political and institutional context within which European strategic autonomy is shaped and implemented, including the procedural modalities of formulating and executing the European Union's foreign and security policies. The internal aspect of the political and institutional prerequisites refers, among other things, to the need to overcome the status-related and interest-based differences among EU member states in the fields of security and defense, their diverse security traditions and cultures, and, in particular, the necessity of addressing systemic weaknesses in the process of shaping the key aspects of the EU's CSDP, as the framework in which the Union's strategic autonomy should be fully articulated. According to the Lisbon Treaty provisions, the Union's policies in the field of foreign and security affairs rest on mechanisms of intergovernmental cooperation, which constitutes a serious obstacle to the effective functioning of the European organization in this context. Occasional initiatives aimed at implementing treaty reforms that would enable qualified majority voting in this area as well (Coenig, 2020; Navarra & Jančová, 2023; Politico, 2023) have not produced results, primarily due to resistance from a group of member states unwilling to transfer the exercise of their sovereign prerogatives in the field of foreign and security policy to the supranational level. The existing manifestations of the principle of flexibility in the process of European integration and cooperation, such as the mechanism of constructive abstention or the rudimentary forms of enhanced cooperation that can also be identified in these areas, function as extraordinary instruments for overcoming decision-making deadlock, but in no way represent a systematic approach to mobilizing the legitimacy of the Union's actions in the realm of foreign policy. At the same time, the slowness that characterizes the Union in these areas, both in terms of decision-making and in the implementation of adopted decisions, has steered member states toward informal forms of cooperation in the military and security domain. Examples include the Northern Group (NG), which brings together 12 participants, including Sweden and Finland, which, after decades of military neutrality, became NATO members in April 2023 and March 2024,

respectively; the European Intervention Initiative (EI2), which was launched at the initiative of French President Emmanuel Macron and comprises 13 states; and the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), which was established at the initiative of Great Britain and which comprises, alongside Great Britain, Northern European and Baltic states.

The development of an autonomous European security identity, despite certain external homogenizing factors such as the conflict in Ukraine, is considerably hindered by the diverse security traditions of European states, their differing historical experiences, and their incongruent security cultures. This also includes divergent perceptions regarding how best to ensure the military security of European states. Among these are countries with a strong Atlanticist orientation, such as the Scandinavian and Baltic states or Poland; states that remain committed to their military-neutral status, such as Austria or Ireland; and states which, like France, despite their membership in NATO, aspire to the development of a more robust European defense core (Lefebvre, 2024).

Regarding the external dimension, one of the key political and institutional prerequisites for European strategic autonomy involves positioning the European Union as an independent actor in international relations and security, particularly in relation to other relevant actors, such as the US, which has significantly shaped all previous processes of substantive and functional design of security cooperation policies on the European continent. The transformation of the Western European Union into a "sleeping beauty" (Bassets, 1993; Jørgensen, 2019; Тучић, 2023), the "undermining" of the Paris Agreement by plans for the rearmament of the Federal Republic of Germany and its inclusion in military arrangements, and especially developments in the post-bipolar era, when the role of NATO within a changed security paradigm was questioned, indicate that one of the primary objectives of the US was to prevent any European ambitions that might threaten American interests on the continent. American support for strengthening capacities and relatively more autonomous security action by European countries is tightly controlled, with the central principle being the empowerment of European countries exclusively within the functional frameworks of Washington's foreign policy, including countering any initiatives that might jeopardize NATO's role in the defense of the European continent, thereby preserving U.S. presence in Europe. Experience shows that the only acceptable form of European strategic autonomy for the US is one that is extremely relative, subordinated to broader American interests, and achievable in a controlled manner within existing structures managed by Washington, without questioning them, while simultaneously contributing to their enrichment and strengthening. However, the problem is that such interpretations, not only by the US but also by European leaders, effectively undermine the concept of European strategic autonomy, bringing it close to complete nullification. In this context, the position of the Union should also be assessed in relation to key current events, most prominently the conflict in Ukraine. While it is recognized that the conflict between Russia and the political West in Ukraine has

significantly contributed to further relativizing the concept of European strategic autonomy, homogenizing the Euro-Atlantic bloc under NATO, its implications for the further development of the concept appear multilayered. This is a conflict after which, as frequently emphasized, nothing will remain the same in the political, military, economical, or even cultural sense (Andor & Optenhögel, 2023; Pushkar, 2023; Qaisrani et al., 2023; Ozili, 2024), and its repercussions are most strongly projected onto the European continent. Therefore, the Ukrainian conflict, especially in its initial phase, manifested as a turning point in the process of building European strategic autonomy. Instead of recognizing the historical moment and taking steps toward a stronger positioning of the Union as an independent political and security actor, which would have undoubtedly meant distancing from Washington on certain issues and prioritization of European over American interests, the majority of European leaders accepted an irrational framework regarding the Russian security threat (Klymak & Vlandas, 2023) and identified NATO as the key guarantor of European security, thereby definitively verifying a highly relativized understanding of European strategic autonomy. This means that Europe, regardless of the cost, once again accepted subordination to the broader Atlanticist framework (Sierakowski, 2024), which significantly deprives European strategic autonomy of its capacities and substance. Yet, it is not simply a matter of failing to recognize the historical moment; rather, it reflects deliberate and systematic actions, as evidenced, for example, by statements of certain European leaders regarding the nature and purpose of the Minsk agreements (Schwarz, 2022), the intensity of anti-Russian campaigns following the outbreak of the conflict, and especially the unwillingness of leading European countries to assume responsibility for the possible suspension of Article 10 of the Washington Treaty, in accordance with Moscow's demands, thereby directly influencing the prevention of armed conflict (Nitoiu & Pasatoiu, 2023). Instead, Europe has been placed in the most complex security situation since the end of World War II, with real tendencies toward further deterioration, particularly considering the militarization of the continent, especially its eastern part, with American weaponry and military infrastructure. Although some perceive these processes as the construction of a "Fortress Europe" (Rogers, 2024), while the building of the largest NATO base in Europe, on the Black Sea in Constanța, Romania, is metaphorically described as "giving Dracula some teeth" (Grain, 2024), the fact remains that Europe, in the event of further escalation of the conflict, is most exposed to destructive impacts, and a conscious intensification of the war-related security risk cannot, by any means, be in the interest of European states and peoples.

Organizational and functional prerequisites

Organizational and functional prerequisites refer to the necessity of having the organizational and implementation capacities through which the EU's autonomous actions in the military and security domain could be put into in prac-

tice. Since the Saint-Malo meeting in 1998, the European Council in Cologne in 1999, and, particularly, the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, significant, but still insufficient, progress has been made in developing EU capacities that would allow for more independent action and recognition as an essential security actor. Perhaps the most significant step forward has been the establishment of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) within the CSDP (Council of the European Union, 2017), which provides a permanent basis for military and security cooperation among member states, as opposed to the previous *ad hoc* arrangements. Cooperation within PESCO is based on the principle of voluntariness, which is implemented through various projects in which currently all EU member states participate except Malta, but also non-EU countries such as the US, Canada, or Norway, which, by its nature, resembles the more established instrument of enhanced cooperation. Another significant development for strengthening the EU's operational capabilities was the establishment of EU Battle Groups in 2007, multinational forces of up to 1,500 troops tasked with prevention, stabilization, crisis management, and rescue and humanitarian missions, relying on Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, which enables the contractual delegation of such tasks by the Security Council to relevant regional security actors. However, primarily due to the lack of political will and the unanimity required in the Council of the European Union when deciding on their activation, the battle groups, despite numerous opportunities, have not yet been practically verified. One of the fundamental issues concerning the implementation of military activities by the EU relates to the modalities of their financing, especially since, under existing treaty provisions, budgetary support for their implementation is not possible. A transitional solution has been found through the creation of voluntary funds, such as the former ATHENS program or the current European Peace Facility Fund, yet this method of financing cannot be considered fully satisfactory, as EU action depends directly on the willingness of member states to provide financial support at a given time. While it was a member, Great Britain allocated approximately one-quarter of the funds for implementing EU military missions and operations (Shea, 2020: 89), meaning that the situation in Brussels today is further complicated. The lack of sufficient EU-owned capacities, combined with the need to address Washington's concerns regarding NATO's continued role in European security, led to the so-called Berlin Plus arrangements[2] in 2002, a system of seven agreements between the EU and NATO that regulate various forms of cooperation, including granting the EU the possibility to use NATO planning and non-strategic operational capacities for the implementation of its own crisis management military operations (Williams, 2018). The most well-known examples of the application of the Berlin Plus arrangements are the peacekeeping mission named Concordia in North Macedonia in 2003, and Operation Althea, which has been conducted in BiH since 2004. However, to understand the impact of the Berlin Plus arrangements on the development of European strategic autonomy, several points must be highlighted. First, the need to use NATO capacities undoubtedly places the EU in a vulnerable position, as this possibility is conditional upon

the unanimous consent of the North Atlantic Council, in which states with unresolved political issues with Brussels, such as Turkey, are represented. It is well known, for example, that the Concordia operation was delayed by more than six months due to Turkey's blockade, and the EU was frequently forced to make various compromises, including allowing countries whose political and normative alignment with Brussels was questionable to participate in joint military activities. The second point concerns the fact that Berlin Plus is based on postulates proclaimed at the Washington Summit in 1999 (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 1999), such as "NATO has the pre-emptive right" and the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) mechanism. The pre-emptive right reflects NATO's preemptive role in crisis management, requiring NATO, before considering the possibility of allowing the EU to use its capacities, to adopt a formal decision saying that it, as an organization, has no interest in being engaged in the specific issue. The Combined Joint Task Force mechanism, reflecting the principle of flexibility in crisis management, allows member states to abstain from participating in joint military activities if they assess a particular issue as not being in their immediate interest, while their abstention does not prevent other members from participating in crisis management activities, including those led by the EU. Both postulates highlight the secondary position of the EU within such arrangements, regardless of subsequent enhancements to overall EU–NATO cooperation or to the original Berlin Plus, which were achieved through joint declarations in 2016, 2018, and 2023 (NATO, 2016, 2018, 2023) and complementary documents adopted individually by the organizations, such as NATO's new Strategic Concept (NATO, 2022) or the EU Strategic Compass for Security and Defence (European External Action Service, 2022; Тучић, 2023). Currently, slightly over 4,000 personnel are engaged in 11 civilian missions and 7 military missions and operations under the EU CSDP, which are carried out in Africa, the Middle East, the Western Balkans, and Eastern Europe, along with two combined missions in the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea (European External Action Service, 2024). However, the predominance of civilian over military missions and operations, the geographical emphasis on Africa and the Middle East relative to the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe, and, finally, the very nature of most missions generally focused on building local security capacities, post-conflict stabilization, or safeguarding overseas transport routes also point to the EU's secondary significance as a regional and global security actor.

Material (resource-based) prerequisites

Material prerequisites generally refer to the need for an appropriate technological and industrial base capable of continuously meeting the military requirements of European countries, including the implementation of joint activities within the EU's CSDP. A more intensive development of the Union's military and industrial complex, both for commercial and security purposes, has been evident since the early 2000s. To date, a fairly broad spectrum of nor-

mative, institutional, strategic, and financial instruments has been established at the European level to support this segment of the defense industry. For example, the European Defence Agency was established in 2004, the European Defence Research Programme was adopted and launched in 2006, and the European Defence Fund—serving as a financial instrument—was created in 2017. Finally, in March 2024, the key strategic framework in this area was presented: the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) (European Commission, 2024), whose implementation is carried out through three-year operational programs. At present, the European Commission has submitted a regulation defining the European Defence Industry Programme 2025–2027, which provides 1.5 billion euros in the form of grants to achieve the Strategy's objectives. Undoubtedly, two key factors influenced the development of this strategic framework at the EU level and the decision to make the European defense industry more suitable for operating under wartime economic conditions (Gray, 2024): the conflict in Ukraine and the alleged security threat to Europe posed by the Russian Federation, including the renewed fears regarding potential changes in US policy toward Europe's defense in the context of the upcoming American presidential elections. In other words, by adopting the strategic framework and creating the accompanying infrastructure for the accelerated development of the military and industrial complex, European countries have expressed their intention to take firmer control over their own security. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian conflict and the inability of most European countries to fulfil their commitments regarding the supply of arms and military equipment to the Ukrainian army significantly exposed the systemic weaknesses of European defense industry and insufficient production capacities to meet both national needs and generate export-oriented surpluses (Dempsey, 2023; McLeary, 2024; Witney, 2024). Data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute indicate that European countries were ill-prepared for the outbreak of the Ukrainian conflict. For example, among the world's 100 largest defense companies in 2022, more than 40 were American, 15 Chinese, and 10 Russian, while the share of European companies was negligible, consisting mostly of several Italian, German, and Swedish manufacturers primarily engaged in producing dual-use equipment (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2024). In 2023, under the influence of the Ukrainian conflict, almost all European countries increased their defense spending. However, to understand European strategic autonomy, even in its highly relativized form, it should be pointed out that the US still accounts for 68% of total defense spending within NATO, with Turkey and Canada contributing a combined 4%, while the remaining share is attributable to European countries (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2024). Therefore, if European countries genuinely aspire to strategic security autonomy embodied in some form of a "European pillar within NATO," it is essential that they establish, as soon as possible, an appropriate balance between transatlantic partners by raising Europe's share of spending to 50% of the Alliance's total defense spending.

CONCLUSION

Despite its documentary establishment and its significance for understanding the broader question of European security, the concept of European strategic autonomy is still in its infancy. Unlike some earlier initiatives, which aimed to establish structures through which (Western) Europe would assume full responsibility for its own security, today's understanding of European strategic autonomy is highly relativized and reduced to the need to strengthen Europe's security identity within NATO, as part of the broader Euro-Atlantic military-security umbrella. The underdevelopment of European strategic autonomy is the result of a number of factors, above all the failure to meet the basic prerequisites for its functional verification. These prerequisites, taking into account their nature and characteristics, even though they are deeply intertwined, may be grouped into three main categories: political and institutional, organizational and functional, and material or resource-based. The underdevelopment of European strategic autonomy is the result of a number of factors, above all the failure to meet the basic prerequisites for its functional verification. Taking into account their nature and characteristics, even though they are deeply intertwined, these prerequisites may be grouped into three main categories: political and institutional, organizational and functional, and material or resource- based.

Within the political and institutional prerequisites of European strategic security autonomy, several key problems can be identified; they include existing treaty-based, that is, systemic arrangements governing the processes of EU policy development and implementation in the field of security and defense, as well as the distinctly limiting "American factor," namely the decades-long influence of U.S. policy in shaping all European security initiatives in such a way that, should they ever be realized, they would not jeopardize the interests of the transatlantic partner nor the status and role of NATO in the defense of the European continent.

Regarding organizational and functional prerequisites, although significant progress has been made in developing the CSDP over the past two decades, the European Union still lacks the capacities necessary to independently project its security interests at the regional and global levels. Consequently, relying on external capacities in conducting military and security activities and the existing arrangements that enable such reliance not only makes the European Union highly vulnerable but also substantially undermines its role and credibility as an actor capable of assuming responsibility for its own security or that of its immediate neighborhood.

As demonstrated by the experience of the Ukrainian conflict, for example, the decades-long complacency of most European countries and their dependence on the US, that is, NATO, for the defense of the European continent have also contributed to the underdevelopment of the European military and industrial sector. This sector constitutes an essential resource base without which

Europe, institutionally embodied in the European Union, cannot manifest itself as a *relevant military and security actor*.

NOTES

1 Although the term "European strategic autonomy" is broader than "European strategic security autonomy," given that the subject of this research relates to issues of European security and the security policies of the European Union, these terms are used interchangeably and are similar in meaning.

2 Many substantive elements of the "Berlin Plus arrangements" are provided for in the EU–NATO Joint Declaration on European Security and Defence Policy (following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty – the Common Security and Defence Policy) of December 2002.

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SUBTLE HATE SPEECH, PREJUDICE, AND SEXISM IN THE DIGITAL MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN

Original Scientific Article

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Jelena Škrbić Bijelić[1]
Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Srpska, Republic of Srpska, BiH

Abstract: Any form of media writing about women is often accompanied by prejudices embedded throughout the text, as well as sexist attitudes that reflect the mindset of the broader environment and, indirectly, that of the author. Subtle hate speech is therefore present in such texts, and at times even explicit. To verify this thesis, ten articles from six online portals in Bosnia and Herzegovina were analyzed, using "woman" as the key word. The portals were accessed on 26 August 2023. The analysis focused on how women are represented, that is, which roles are assigned to them (including insight into the roles to which women in the media are typically restricted). The findings of the analysis indicate that reporting is unethical and stereotypical, that prejudices against women remain prevalent and continue to be reinforced, and that women are still portrayed through the lens of sexism even in the 21st century.

Keywords: media, woman, sexism, hate speech, prejudice

1. Introduction

The status of women in BiH and the wider region is unfavorable in many respects. Equality exists only on paper. For example, the Law on Gender Equality in BiH prescribes equal treatment for all citizens. Nevertheless, this equality is not realized in practice. According to 2019 data, women made up 63.9% of the working-age population, 32.9% of all employed persons, and 26.7% of the inactive population. While it cannot be stated that the media, or the way women are portrayed in the media, are solely responsible for these statistics, they undoubtedly play a role by perpetuating prejudices and stereotypical representations of women. Article 21, Paragraph 2 (Media) of the Law on Gender Equality in BiH stipulates that "public display or representation of any person in an offensive, demeaning, or humiliating manner on the basis of gender is prohibited." How-

1 Corresponding author: Jelena Škrbić Bijelić., Ministry of Interior of Republika Srpska. E-mail: lenaskrbic@gmail.com

ever, in practice, this provision is largely ignored. Gender-based discrimination remains visible, and indirect discrimination is particularly prevalent in media reporting.

In order to conduct the analysis of the selected texts and achieve the goal of presenting the media portrayal of women in 2023, it is first necessary to define the key terms that are used in this paper.

Hate speech is essentially any form of expression that conveys messages of hatred or intolerance toward a particular group. "(...) It represents an act that simultaneously discriminates against and condemns the victim, while encouraging others to join in the condemnation and persecution by presenting such behavior as socially justified and acceptable, which will not encounter social disapproval" (Ivanović et al., 2019: 19). At the root of hate speech, as with violence, lies a power imbalance, that is, an attempt to position oneself as superior to the victim It is typically based on a specific characteristic, such as race, national or ethnic origin, religion, language, sex, sexual orientation, political beliefs, social origin and so on. Hate speech appears through all channels where spoken or written language is used—from radio and television programs, print media, online news portals, periodicals, and books, to pamphlets and social media.

According to (Ivanović et al., 2019: 22), there are seven types of hate speech: incitement to violence (calls for violence circulated via social media or other mass media); the dissemination of stereotypes and prejudices; the dehumanization of the victim (where the victim is portrayed as an inferior person who does not deserve equal treatment); associating a particular group with criminality (when the commission of an act is attributed to an entire group rather than to individuals, for example, fan groups); spreading false information, creating panic, and alarming the public; direct or indirect threats; and the use of offensive expressions targeting a specific group.

In the broader context, hate speech constitutes a form of violence. In this paper, sexism and prejudice are treated as subcategories of hate speech. Discourse analysis, as an appropriate method, is used determine the extent to which prejudice and hate speech targeting women are present in the 60 examined texts from six different online news portals retrieved using the keyword "woman."

In this paper, the representation of women in media texts is classified into categories. More precisely, the analysis will show the extent to which stereotypical reporting classifies women into specific categories, assigning them a limited range of roles. As Valić Nedeljković notes, drawing on Byerly and Ross, research on the representation of women in news has shown that "women most frequently appear as victims, predominantly of sexual violence, which is presented in the media in a sensationalist manner. Additionally, they are visible primarily as mothers and wives. Women rarely serve as sources of information, be it in local, regional, or national media. They are quoted less often, and when they are, it tends to be only a superficial mention in shorter texts. They are also

considered less credible as sources of information than men" (Valić Nedeljković, 2011: 450).

Regarding the roles women assume in the media (when they receive media space), Валић Недељковић identifies four categories: "female media content creators; women as actors in socio-political practice who are given space to present their ideas and views in the media; women portrayed exclusively as objects; and finally, women who in certain media content alternate between the role of actor and author—such as female journalists who, in some situations, are presented as actors within the socio-political and cultural sphere" (Valić Nedeljković, 2011: 455). The roles of women in the media, more precisely, in the informative (non-magazine) press, are also defined by Milivojević, who identifies three categories: the entertainment role (entertainers, models, singers, etc.); the domestic role (housewives, mothers, companions, or women who balance career and family); and the expert role (psychologists, social workers, beauticians, teachers, doctors, etc.), whose expertise is typically framed in relation to the family sphere and women in family-care roles.

The role of the media in shaping personality is extremely important, and this role has not changed throughout history. However, a contemporary problem is the low level of media literacy, particularly in the realm of online media, which benefits portals whose primary goal is profit, often at the expense of quality and ethical reporting. For this reason, hate speech and prejudice often remain unaddressed, as clicks and views are prioritized over the journalist's (or editor's) ethical code. It is crucial to address the issue of disseminating prejudice in written media discourse, both because of the rapid dissemination of ideas among large groups and across the population (in the case of the Internet) and because of the shifting of responsibility onto others when sharing such content, which is noted by Ivanović et al.: "Due to the difficulty of identifying oneself within the crowd, the sense of responsibility for one's actions is lost, which leads to much more extreme behavior. Certain behaviors (or ideas, note by the author) spread massively like a virus, as individuals in a crowd tend to accept and follow the ideas, opinions, and emotions of the majority without question" (Ivanović et al., 2019: 86).

2. Methodology

Media construct images precisely through language. Language does not only serve as a tool to convey information—it also serves to shape attitudes, affirm (or form) identity, and disseminate ideology. This is why it is important to include other disciplines in the study of language, in order to move away from pure formalism, because language is not only a system of signs but also a system of meaning.

This paper employs quantitative–qualitative discourse analysis, with the unit of analysis being the written text, that is, a single post on an online portal.

Using a comparative method, the results are summarized to distinguish the categories into which women in the media are placed.

Discourse analysis as a method originates in linguistics and later narratology, and today it is used across many disciplines as a systematic and suitable tool for studying textual, cultural, and sociological phenomena from the perspective of meaning. Viewed from a narratological standpoint, the text represents the template, while discourse represents the meaning-making potential of that text. On the structuralist level, text would correspond to fabula, and discourse to syuzhet. Thus, discourse and narrative may be seen as synonyms, with the difference that discourse analysis is now a method used across numerous disciplines, whereas narratology has remained tied to the arts (initially literature, and today also virtual arts such as video games). In this sense, discourse would represent the linguistic analysis of texts, specifically "the highest level of linguistic analysis" (Perović, 2014: 33). In other words, discourse analysis is "a study of the relationship between language and contexts in which it is used" (Lakić, 2014: 57).

> "Critical discourse analysis is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality" (Van Dijk, 2001).

Because critical discourse analysis enables us to identify how language shapes and reinforces the power of ideology, this method is suitable for examining the inequality produced through texts that objectify women.

This paper analyses written discourse. As Savić points out, "written material can, in essence, be categorized into three basic groups according to the criterion of the degree of publicity: (1) printed, (2) non-printed (that is, written but not intended for print), and (3) written but intended for oral delivery (public speeches, radio and/or television news, etc.)" (Savić, 1993: 48). This classification was developed in relation to the media landscape at the time; however, today online news portals may also be considered a form of printed media, but virtually printed. With the development of digital technologies, discourse changes in technical terms, but not in its essence.

2.1. Corpus

Sixty texts from six of the most frequently visited online news portals were analyzed—three from Republika Srpska (*Mondo.ba, Nezavisne.com, Atvbl.com*) and three from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Hayat.ba, Avaz.ba, Klix.ba*)—as identified in Top 20 Bosnia and Herzegovina News Websites and Top Websites in Bosnia and Herzegovina (All Industries) (https://www.semrush.com/trending-websites/ba/all). The texts were published between July and

August 2023 and were located by entering the keyword "woman" (*žena*) into each portal's search tool to ensure the most possible objectivity of the sample. We did not search within *lifestyle* or *leisure* sections, where lighter content implicitly aimed at women is typically published, in order to avoid predetermining the outcome of the analysis. All texts were collected on 26 August 2023 at 9:00 a.m. For clarity, articles from the portals were coded (Appendix 1). The analysis includes linguistic interpretation, given that "language is a means of expression but also of producing social inequality. (...) These are numerous, typically subtle forms of the abuse of social power, where language is the primary instrument of domination over others. This is precisely the subject of critical discourse analysis" (Perović, 2014: 97).

The paper presents the findings of the analysis of media reporting and the extent to which hate speech, prejudice, and sexism are present in the examined texts. The concluding section reiterates several findings outlined in previous sections. The analysis was conducted using the coding sheet from the study *Коīа је изабрала шīамīа у Србији?* (Pralica, 2012: 64), which was adapted for the purposes of this study.

3. Analysis of the portals

In general, women are portrayed in the media either infrequently or as inferior to men. As noted by Markov, referring to Валић Недељковић, "in the media, they are represented as incompetent, inferior, and always at the service of men. The media either ignore women or stereotype them" (Valić Nedeljković, 2011: 448). Валић Недељковић identifies three categories of print media according to their target audience: feminist media, women's media, and gender-unmarked media (Valić Nedeljković, 2011). The analysis primarily pertains to the latter, gender-unmarked category.

It is important to address how dominance (in this case, male) permeates everyday narratives and, by extension, the media. Theories of media manipulation, as discussed by Chomsky and Teun van Dijk, address this phenomenon. Van Dijk, discussing the connection between the cognitive and the affective, highlights the misuse of power not only through actions but also through the mind:

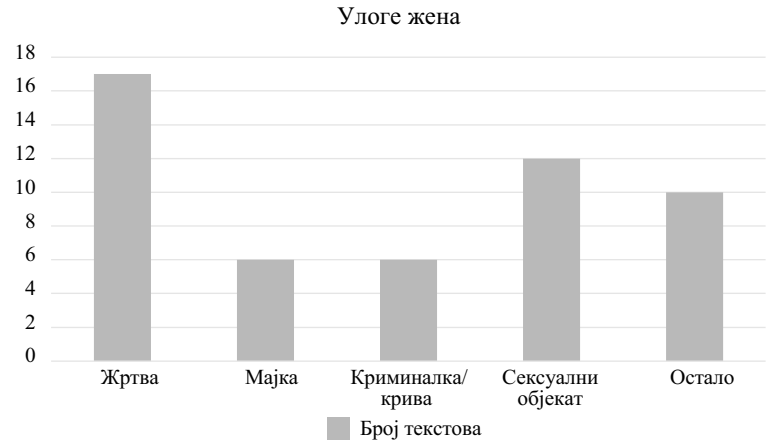
> "That is, through special access to and control over the means of public discourse and communication, dominant groups or institutions may influence the structures of text and talk in such a way that, as a result, the knowledge, attitudes, norms, values, and ideologies of recipients are – more or less indirectly affected – in the interests of the dominant group" (Van Dijk, 2007).

Critical discourse analysis therefore encompasses the study of linguistic structures and analyzes how such structures (headlines, syntax, semantics, style, and stylistic devices) contribute to manipulation.

With regard to the gender composition of editorial staff, which may influence the text being published, the *Dnevni avaz* impressum states that the outlet is a full member of the Press Council in BiH. The editor-in-chief is a woman, while the company director is a man. The editor of *Klix* is male. *Mondo* is headed by a female director, and each section (e.g. news, magazine) has its own male or female editor. In *Nezavisne novine*, both the executive director and the editor-in-chief (as listed in the impressum) are women. Regarding *ATV* and *Hajat* portals, the editor is not specified; only the ownership structure of the television channels, rather than the online portals, is provided. It is evident that women are predominant in editorial positions.

3.1. Categories of women

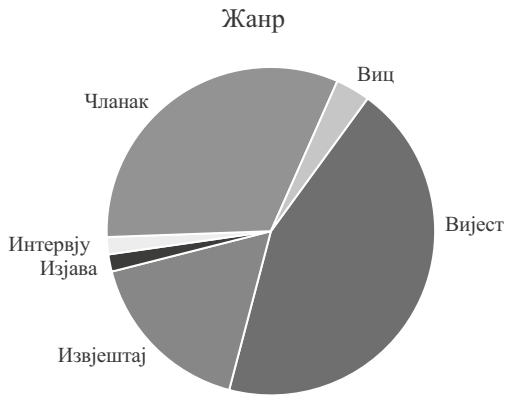
The analysis shows that the categorization does not deviate from those proposed by Valić Nedeljković. The woman often appears as a victim (Graph 1), which corresponds to the dominant media narrative and the ongoing gender-based violence as a consequence of patriarchy. A new category also emerges, reflecting a new form of discrimination—in text X2[1] we encounter a new media role assigned to women: that of a spoiler, someone who "ruins" something (and is once again "at fault"). The text describes a TikTok video of a marriage proposal and a woman who supposedly "ruined" the public beach proposal simply by being present. Here we can identify subtle hate speech both in the text and in the comments that are cited, particularly through the her-us opposition, or more precisely the young versus the old. This also points to the presence of so-called ageism, that is, discrimination against older people.



Graph 1

3.2. Genre and textual elements

In the observed news portals, news items overwhelmingly dominate (Graph 2). The most frequent genre across all analyzed online portals is the news report, while not a single reportage was identified. Texts retrieved from Reddit and slightly adapted were analyzed as articles, which explains a somewhat higher number of articles. Regarding layout features, the only recurring element was photographs serving as meaningful visual accompaniments to the texts (e.g., a photograph of a hornet in article H10[2]). However, the photographs meaningfully accompanying texts that contain prejudices are suitable for such texts, but not for challenging such patterns. For instance, in text M7[3] we find a sentence that reflects not only prejudice but also subtle hate speech followed by the accompanying photos: *Take a look at Larisa, who claims she is 'not just a piece of meat.'*



Graph 2

3.3. Headlines

In general, a headline should provide information about the content of the text. Naturally, it also serves to reinforce ideological messages, which is why ethical codes and guidelines condemn sensationalist headlines that disseminate prejudice. Nevertheless, such headlines fulfill their purpose—they attract clicks and views, thereby influencing the financial aspect of the portal. Metaphorical and sensationalist headlines were grouped into a single category (Graph 3). It was observed that journalists often simply rename news items (for example, from the police or prosecutor's office) by adding phrases such as "New Details of the Accident" (M1[4]) or "Drama in Istria" (A39[5]), in order to create more "explosive" headlines and attract readers.

Sensationalist headlines dominate compared to others, which again highlights the importance of education aimed at influencing changes in editorial policy.

Graph 3

3.4. Style and language

The very form in which something is written already contains information about style and language. Given that the analyzed corpus mainly consisted of news, that is, statements issued by police departments or prosecutors' offices, it is clear that the administrative style typical of these institutions prevails. The sentences are short, clear, and simple. Such texts contain no epithets, verbs are used in the passive voice, and nouns and pronouns dominate. This is expected for this type of text, as their primary function is referential, that is, to convey information. However, a characteristic feature is the conative function that appears in the headlines of such news. This is precisely why they are often categorized as sensationalist, and the message they convey can even be offensive. In articles, by contrast, the sentences are not as short and the language is more colloquial, aiming to be closer to the reader and facilitate the delivery of the message. Text A6 contains many such examples: "Due to the lack of this hormone, women can become very difficult, and will often have outbursts of anger at people who merely looked sideways at them." This pseudoscientific perspective on women reveals a deeply rooted misogyny and sexist attitudes suggesting that a woman is suitable only for sexual intercourse.

3.5. Stereotypes about women

Stereotypes appear both in headlines and in the body of texts across all analyzed portals. From the categories into which women are placed (which has already been discussed) to calls for violence, all these elements contribute to the dissemination of deeply rooted prejudices. For example, in text A2[6] we identify

subtle hate speech and the act of assigning blame to the woman, as the headline emphasizes that she was the one who "left the child sleeping" (rather than stating that the child died in its sleep). Text A6[7] already conveys prejudice in its headline: Experts claim: This is what a woman who has no sexual intercourse looks like. Why? Because such stereotypes rest on the belief that a woman who does not engage in sexual intercourse is incapable of anything, that her reactions are inappropriate precisely due to the absence of sexual activity, and so forth. The text represents a pure reproduction of stereotypes, as it does not specify who these "experts" are, where such research was allegedly conducted, or any other information that would indicate the existence of a scientific study. The concluding part of the article is not only saturated with sexism and misogyny but may also be interpreted as encouraging violence, including rape: "In other words, when you see that a woman looks tired, is irritable, frustrated, angry, and lacks self-confidence—do not argue with her; instead, try to resolve the situation in the way the experts advise—through sexual intercourse."

The *Klix* portal publishes an equal number of texts that adopt a somewhat more serious approach—portraying women as a vital part of the community—and texts that reduce women to objects of male attention. Five of the portal's texts address social problems, while the remaining five reinforce them. The texts in *Nezavisne novine* containing the keyword "woman" also include jokes, which represent a specific form of reinforcing prejudice and stereotypes, as well as sexist ideas. It is disheartening that such content appears on a portal intended for a broad audience, yet it is also indicative of the readership's mentality, given that media literacy remains insufficiently addressed within educational structures. These kinds of jokes also constitute a form of subtle hate speech.

All these stereotypes disseminated through texts confine women to a limited set of roles that are "assigned" to them in a patriarchal society. For example, when discussing the public discrediting of Serbia's former acting president Nataša Mićić solely on the basis of her gender, Milivojević notes the following: "This type of instant discreditation works because it has been carefully prepared through years of media practice that fixed stereotypes of female inferiority in the popular consciousness" (Milivojević, 2005: 12). We are inclined to agree with this observation. Twenty years later, women are still portrayed as secondary, defined only in relation to men, and reduced to objects. The dominant politics that Milivojević described at the time has become even more pervasive today, which is facilitated by the rapid dissemination of information, easier access to online portals, and the expansion of audiences.

4. Conclusion

The findings indicate that Bosnian-Herzegovinian journalism does not follow contemporary recommendations on gender-sensitive reporting. Reporting

on women is stereotypical; women are represented through the lens of prejudice, and the primary role assigned to them (as demonstrated in previous studies as well) is that of the victim. The roles of mother/wife are also prominent, while a new category is introduced—that of the lawbreaker or the woman who is (in some way) to blame. Headlines are either sensationalist or informative, with the former clearly aimed at generating clicks and likes, far more frequently than should be the case, and often in contradiction with reporting guidelines and ethical codes (e.g., *a horrifying fate*), yet effective in attracting readership. Metaphors serve to reinforce prejudices, and at the lexical level women remain confined to predefined categories, with only one exception (K6 [8]– *woman artist*). Epithets are used to amplify sensationalism (and, consequently, prejudice). Within the analyzed corpus, 30 texts were unsigned, 29 were signed with initials (both initials), and only one text was signed with the author's full name and surname.

Of the 60 analyzed texts, nearly one third consist of Reddit posts and descriptions of TikTok videos. Another third comprises statements issued by police departments, published with the addition of sensationalist headlines aimed at attracting visitors to the portal, while the final third consists of articles copied from one outlet to another without any genuine sources. Two texts are jokes. In 17 texts, the woman is presented as a victim. In six texts she appears as a mother or a wife, and in another six she is portrayed as being in conflict with the law. In 12 texts, the woman is depicted as a sexual object, although objectification occurs continuously. Ten texts fall into the category "other," either because they are unrelated to women (e.g., Putin, Dodik), or because the woman is portrayed as a pest in one text, two texts are reports from conferences concerning women, one discusses a women's association, one is an interview with a woman artist, and three include a misattributed keyword. The text about a dentist who falsely presented himself was counted only once, but with two roles (victim and perpetrator). The categories into which women are placed, as well as the stereotypes assigned to them, indicate a significant presence of hate speech targeting women in the analyzed texts.

"Traditional media have merged with the internet in order to respond to the needs of their audiences. And the needs of the new, digital audience revolve around ensuring the fastest possible flow of information in the shortest possible time, which is presented in the form of sensationalist headlines. Reading content on digital media is superficial, without deeper engagement with substance, which leads to a distorted perception of facts. Every fact becomes a shout" (Ivanović et al., 2019: 86). Following this logic, each time hate speech is used and an average consumer of such content encounters misogynistic views (which they do not recognize as misogynistic but rather as factual), women in society maintain their unequal status, as they are perceived by the crowd absorbing these shouts as less competent. This is why it is crucial to address these issues from every perspective and to continuously draw attention to the harmful effects of such patterns."

Media outlets and media professionals must adhere to ethical codes and the law, and base their reporting on principles of education rather than the dissemination of backwardness for the sake of clicks, especially given the extremely low level of media literacy, which makes the average consumer more susceptible to manipulation conveyed both through the text itself and through comments on the text. The analyzed media (the broadest and most widely read ones), therefore, do not deconstruct patriarchy and the norms it imposes. Instead, they reconstruct stereotypes as elements of social reality that have been dogmatized and are thus perceived as normal and unchangeable. In order for change to occur, editorial policies must be reformed. It may be useful to draw on the guidelines for media reporting on gender-based violence developed by Women Journalists Against Violence, as these can also be beneficial for gender-related reporting in general or, quite simply, the ethical standards of the journalistic profession.

Linguistic structures, such as word order in headlines or the use of rhetorical questions, whether in the headline or the body of the text, shape the reader's perception and the formation of attitudes toward a given issue. According to Van Dijk, when readers (i.e., recipients) lack access to alternative information sources or the cognitive ability to resist suggestive messaging, preferred models of specific situations emerge as a result. These models then evolve into generalizations, attitudes, and ideologies (Van Dijk, 2007). This clearly illustrates the extent to which media influence audiences and contribute to the creation or reinforcement of views on particular issues—in this case, the status of women. For this reason, it is essential to change reporting practices on women, reshape media representations, and develop new, affirmative categories in which women will be placed within the media landscape.

Notes

1 Х2 – НЕПОЗНАТА ЖЕНА НА ПЛАЖИ УНИШТИЛА МЛАДОМ ПАРУ ПРОСИДБУ ИЗ СНОВА

2 Н10 – Жена преминула од убода стршљена

3 М7 – ОНА ЈЕ МИС БУМ БУМ 2023: У финалу послала поруку о којој брује друштвене мреже

4 М1 – Нови детаљи несреће на путу Бањалука - Лакташи: Погинула тридесетосмогодишња Прњаворчанка, повријеђене три особе

5 А39 – Драма у Истри: Мушкарац отео жену и побјегао

6 А2 – Стравична судбина човјека који улази у „Задругу": „Жена ставила дијете да спава, послије пет минута је умрло"

7 А6 –Стручњаци тврде: Овако изгледа жена којој фале интимни односи

8 К6 – Ханна Дујмовић: Умјетност је медиј који држи нит међу стваралоцима, прилика да се наше име чује у Европи

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- ✓ The name of the author(s): 11-pt font, centered.

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- ✓ One work by three or more authors include only the surname of the first author followed by the Latin abbreviation et al (not italicized and with a period after al) (Rachal et al., 2007).
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- ✓ List two or more works by different authors cited within the same parentheses in a chronological order by year of publication (Šikman, 2011; Mijlković, 2012), the earliest firs. Separate the citations by semicolons.
- ✓ Secundary sources: (Vuković, 2004, as cited in Krstić).
- ✓ Citing newspaper articles:
  - ➢ Wihout author (Nezavisne novine, 2017)
  - ➢ Author: (Marković, 2017)
- ✓ Citing documents and reports: (first citation: Ministry of the Interior of the Republika Srpska [MUP RS] 2012), subsequent citations (Ministry of the Interior, 2012).

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