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## PROFILING TROUBLED YOUTH (POSIT) IN REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA - TEN YEARS LATER

*Abstract:* Civil wars in former Yugoslavia have resulted in divided societies especially in those cultures where ethnic divisions exist. Problems become intergenerational when there are not sufficient resolutions leading to viable reconciliation. There often exists a collective malaise in these situations that manifests itself as primary and secondary post-traumatic disorders (PTSD). Secondary PTSD often afflicts the children and adolescent offspring of their parents or grandparents impacted by the conflict *per se*. Given that, group profiles of students from Republika Srpska (2010. versus 2020.) measured with the Problem-Oriented Screening Instrument for Teenagers, POSIT (Rahdert 1991) which covers 10 functional adolescent problem areas including substance use, mental health, family relations, and aggressive behavior/delinquency. Ten years later, it is important to maintain focus on the unmet psychological and social/cultural needs of traumatized children and youth, second-generation war victims because neglecting these problems could be costly for society in terms of later disorganization of this population, as it matures.

*Key words:* youth, Republika Srpska, POSIT.

### INTRODUCTION

Conflict resolution and restorative justice within divided societies are challenging endeavors that often take generations to adequately resolve. War trauma adds to this challenge. Geopolitical solutions, while on the surface appear to appease all parties, are rarely sufficiently adequate, leaving a simmering latent hostility among competing groups. Social psychologists note that the subtle transfer of intergenerational biases help define inter-group dynamics that contribute to defining non-members

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as „others” while, at the same time, facilitating in-group cohesion and confirmation narratives (attribution biases). Race, ethnicity, religion (sectarianism), sex/gender, regionalism, and social class are common categories in discerning in-group/out-group dynamics. Following Simmel’s classic theorem (Simmel 1955) during stressful times, out-group hostilities increase in-group cohesion. Other noted sociologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Lemert 1951; Merton 1968; Park 1950; Sellin 1938; Becker 1964; 1963; Coser 1967; 1956) posited theories and models of group dynamics including the collective need to maintain social, cultural, and psychological boundaries in order for societal members to know where they stand vis-à-vis the status quo at any given time. Similarly, more recent theories such as intergroup emotions theory (Mackie et al. 2009; Mackie, Smith 2015; Maitner et al. 2017) postulates that worldview shapes our emotions due to similar group identification. Accordingly, these needs are intensified during times of chaos and crisis, whereby young people represent a particularly vulnerable category.

As a social group, the young people, first and foremost, share their belonging to a certain age group, as well as specific social characteristics, appropriate social roles, and behavioral patterns. It should be noted that the circumstances that hinder adequate social integration of the young people are especially noticeable in transitional societies. This is confirmed by the results of the research on young people in South-East Europe (Lavrič et al. 2019). In such societies, economic developments have shown that labor market demands are becoming so contradictory and changeable that the young people can hardly make rational decisions regarding their education and professional goals. Unemployment and insecurity related to building a professional career and changes in the field of education in terms of prestigious educational institutions that are unavailable to many are also accompanying phenomena (Lavrič et al. 2019). Mobility and intensified population migrations (usually from underdeveloped to more developed parts of the world) that accompany globalization multiply the risk factors (Ruddick 2003).

If all this is considered in the context of the young generation’s growing up in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republic of Srpska entity), the situation becomes even more complicated, and the outcomes of growing up are extremely uncertain. Thus, ethnic prejudice after the 1991-1995 civil war affect the existing modes of transferring values and behavioral patterns to the next generation. The young people are therefore pressured to seek a more uncertain and difficult path to gaining their identity and individual strategies for social integration. All of the identified problems also affect the young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republic of Srpska entity), their position being even more precarious because, due to war, they have an immediate experience of existential vulnerability. Therefore, children and the young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina constitute a vulnerable population, as they live with their parents, some of whom, having gone through a four-year war, suffer from untreated PTSD. Given that the mentioned circumstances make them susceptible to problems in numerous areas of psychosocial functioning, they need continuous monitoring in this context.

## ASSESSING INTER-GENERATIONAL STRESS AMONG ADOLESCENTS

In 1990, the United States National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) created a protocol to assess teens - the Adolescent Assessment/Referral System (AARS) (Rahdert 1991) with an objective 139-item forced-choice instrument – the Problem-Oriented Screening Instrument for Teenagers ( POSIT) that measured ten functional domains, including substance use, mental health, family relations, and aggressive behavior/delinquency. The United States National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) offered this tool to all nations interested in these youth issues. Laurence French, working with Dr. Rahdert, adapted the POSIT as a tool for measuring cohorts of teens in order to ascertain their level of performance relevant to the 10 domain areas allowing for aggregate profiles by group (class, race/ethnicity/gender...). This process provided not only a snapshot of the group at any given time but allowed for intra-and inter-group comparisons. Moreover, it could be administered to a school cohort prior to the administration of an intervention (intervention on the part of an administrative body – eg in a hospital or other health care facility) and later, as an outcome measure of the program's effectiveness (pre and post assessment protocol). The test case for the aggregated POSIT was conducted in the mid-1990s with a sample of 468 rural White, Black, Mexican-American, Navajo, and Mexican adolescents (French, Pichall-French 1996; 1998; French 1983; 1994).

## PROFILING ADOLESCENTS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA FOLLOWING THE BALKAN WARS

Intergenerational trauma results when restorative measures are delayed as a result of patch-work geo-political solutions like those that emerged from the Balkan Wars of the nineties of the last century. Generalized war trauma encompassed the vast population engulfed in the Balkan Wars which continued until 2002. leading to untreated clinical issues resulting in increased violence including homicides and suicides. This is illustrated by a major study (Başoglu et al. 2005) which was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Psychiatry, King's College, University of London. The study addressed the psychiatric and cognitive effects of the Balkan War in the former Yugoslavia. A cross-sectional survey conducted between March 2000 and July 2002 with a population-based sample of 1358 war survivors from Belgrade, Serbia; Rijeka, Croatia; Sarajevo, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina entity / Bosnia and Herzegovina; and Banja Luka, Republic of Srpska entity / Bosnia and Herzegovina who had experienced at least 1 war-related stressor (combat, torture, internal displacement, refugee experience, siege, and/or aerial bombardment). The sample included men and women who were refugees displaced from their original homes (Internally Displaced Persons-IDPs). The study included a corresponding control group based on ethnicity, gender, and age. Regardless of ethnicity affiliation, the findings showed a common theme: that the survivors reported a sense

of injustice in relations to what they perceived to be a lack of redress for their trauma. Compared to the control group, the traumatized survivors held stronger emotional responses to impunity, a greater fear and loss of control over their lives, a diminished belief in the benevolence of people, a stronger affiliation to the dictates of their ethnic beliefs and higher rates of PTSD and depression (Başoğlu et al. 2005). These unmet and untreated social and psychological needs are invariably transmitted to their children and subsequent generations sentiments again stated in the 2009 NATO Parliamentary Assembly's 70<sup>th</sup> Rose-Roth Seminar held in Sarajevo.

### THE PRESENT/COMPARATIVE STUDY

The Rose-Roth (2009) report indicated that young people in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) had acquired an even more provincial and narrow outlook than that of their parents who were directly involved in the Balkan Wars of the nineties of the last century. Part of this problem is that the schools in BiH are almost exclusively segregated along ethnic lines with each entity promoting its skewed version of the conflict. Collectively, psychological crises among children and youth serve to impede any reconciliation efforts within the various ethnic groups caught up in the Balkan conflicts. Studies on ethnic stereotypes in Bosnia-Herzegovina measured the nature of continued out-group negativity harbored by youths in Sarajevo (Bosnians) and Banja Luka (Serbs) indicated significant inter-group negative stereotypes, a clear reflection of their respective socialization within a polarized society (Turjačanin 2004).

Using the Rose-Roth findings, in 2009-2010 Laurence French, conducted a POSIT assessment of youth impacted by the effects of the Balkan Wars, including NATO bombing of the Vojvodina, Province in Serbia during the Kosovo conflict in 1999. Here, French and his associates, Goran Kovacevic and Lidija Nikolic-Novakovic (French et al. 2013), embarked on administering the POSIT among samples representing the three major ethnic groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Muslim Bosnians, Catholic Croats, Orthodox Serbs) as well as Orthodox Serbs in the Vojvodina Province. The authors (French et al. 2013) normed the 139-item POSIT in the Slavic language with special attention to cultural nuances common to the entire sample set. The Slavic-language screening instrument was offered as a tool designed not only to ascertain the current collective profile of the students and to identify (red flag) individuals with major unmet social, health, and clinical needs but also as a method for measuring outcomes from intervention programs being offered by numerous NGOs (French 2003).

The selective representative sampling involved testing a high school students from a Republic of Srpska school, East Sarajevo – the predominant Orthodox section of the national capital (48 students), the Persian Bosnian College, an exclusive Bosnian high school in Sarajevo (68 students), the Croatian Catholic School in Kiseljak, Bosnia and Herzegovina (31 ученик), and the High School of Mechanical Engineering in Pancevo, Serbia (49 students), located in Vojvodina Province. The total sample

consisted of 217 students (131 males and 86 females) ( $M = 16,50$ ,  $SD = 1,63$ ). As stated earlier, the minimum mean score (MMS) is 38 which represents the cumulative cut off (red flag) for critical scores. The only group that fell below the MMS was the female Bosnian (37.8) in comparison to the female Serbia sample (63). The male Bosnian and female RS Orthodox samples each had a MMS of 50 while the female Catholics had a similar score (49.5) with their male counterpart registering 47.6.

Second POSIT research was conducted on a sample of students from Republika Srpska at the end of 2019 and during 2020. This research was conducted on a sample of 789 students, 471 of which were primary school students and 318 were secondary school students from Republic of Srpska entity. The sample included 53.7% boys and 46.3% girls. The ages of the participants ranged from 12 to 19 years old ( $M = 14,92$ ,  $SD = 1,79$ ). 51.8% of respondents were from urban areas and 48.2% from rural areas. Most of them come from two-parent (86.2%), two-child (63.2%) families, and according to the self-report, most of them were financially well off (76%). The parents' educational level is mainly secondary (70.1% mothers and 76.2% fathers).

The research sample included schools from predominately Orthodox/Serbs neighborhoods from the Republic of Serbia resulting in a selective stratified sample of 789 students (424 boys/365 girls) from five Public Institution Primary School (PIPS). The three rural PIPS schools included in the sample were „Petar Petrović Njegoš”, Maslovare, „Stanko Rakita” in Vrbanja and „Branko Ćopić” in Prnjavor. The PIPS urban schools, both in Banja Luka, included in the sample were „Branko Ćopić” and „Sveti Sava” (Saint Sava). The three Public Institution (PI) secondary schools included in the sample were the PI Electrotechnical School, „Nikola Tesla;” the PI Economic School, and the PI Secondary School for Tourism, Catering, and Trade – all located in Banja Luka (RS high schools are located in urban settings accommodating urban and rural communities).

In both studies students were informed about the study by their teachers, after which the parents received written information about the research and gave written consent for their child's participation in the study. The research was conducted within classrooms, with school officials' approval and supervision at the time when they were free of their regular school duties and tasks. Students received no payment for completing the questionnaires and their participation was strictly voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

### Research design

The aim of the current research was to measure the extent of progress or stagnation in the context of the Rose-Roth assessment of the war-torn children and youth. In this cross-sectional comparative study raw data collected during 2010. (French et al. 2013) and during 2020. were used. It is important to point out that the second study began and ended before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent closures, so this factor did not affect the results of the study. Table 1 shows examples of POSIT items.

Table 1: POSIT Item examples

POSIT Functional Areas	Item examples <sup>a</sup>
Substance use/abuse	Do you get into trouble because you use drugs or alcohol at school? Have you started using more and more drugs or alcohol to get the effect you want?
Physical health status	Do you have trouble with stomach pain or nausea? Do you have less energy than you think you should?
Mental health status	Do you get easily frightened? Do you feel sad most of the time?
Family relations	Do your parents or guardians usually agree about how to handle you? Do your parents or guardians and you do a lots of things together?
Peer relations	Do you have friends who damage or destroy things on purpose? Do your friends cut school a lot?
Educational status	Do you get A's and B's in some classes and fail others? Are you good at math?
Vocational status (16 yrs. and over)	Did you have a paying job last summer? Have you been frequently absent or late for work?
Social skills	Is it hard for you to ask for help from others? Do people your own age like and respect you?
Leisure and recreation	Is your free time spent just hanging out with friends? Do you participate in team sports which have regular practices?
Agressive behaviour and delinquency	Have you stolen things? Do you get into fights a lot?

<sup>a</sup> Rahdert 1991; Dembo, Anderson 2005.

## RESULTS

The original standardization (reliability and validity) of the POSIT provided cutting scores (critical scores) for each of the 10 functional areas (domains). A profile sheet allows for either individual or aggregate presentation of the 10 functional areas and their level of significance (Rahdert 1991). Table 2 shows group comparative POSIT profiles on a sample of students from Republika Srpska.

Table 2. Comparative POSIT profiles - 2010. (N= 48) vs. 2020. (N=789)

POSIT Functional Areas	2010		2020		Critical score for pathology
	M	F	M	F	
	32 66,67%	16 33,33%	427 (53,7%)	365 (46,3%)	
Substance use/abuse	2	0	2	1	(1)
Physical health status	2	3	3	3	(3)
Mental health status	7	9	7	9	(4)
Family relations	2	3	3	2	(4)
Peer relations	4	4	3	2	(1)
Educational status	9	9	9	10	(6)
Vocational status	5	9	7	8	(5)
Social skills	3	4	3	3	(3)
Leisure and recreation	5	6	5	5	(5)
Agressive behaviour and delinquency	7	5	5	5	(6)
*MMC	46	50	47	47	(38)

\*MMS – Minimum Mean Score baseline for pathology = 38

The research results indicate that the 2010 and 2020 POSIT profiles of research sample of students are quite similar leaving current Republic of Srpska youth as vulnerable as the earlier generation targeted by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's 70<sup>th</sup> Rose-Roth report. The 2020 minimum mean scores, like the 2010 profile, remain at pathological levels 2 to 5 points above the MMS level. Even then, substance abuse and/or aggressive behaviors do not manifest themselves as pathological domains. It is possible that mental health problems in research samples of young people from 2010 and 2020 affect their peer relations and educational outcomes. Both POSIT profiles indicate that mental health issues affect females more than their male counterparts. On the other hand, family relations appear to be a protective factor in both samples. Nonetheless, the POSIT has proven its utility in both identifying individuals with severe pathologies in need of treatment as well as providing an overview of the collective student profile providing guidance to intervention programs that can be measured in a "pre/post" test format in order to more accurately measure desired outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

Corrective measures for a more harmonious society were spelled out at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's 70<sup>th</sup> Rose-Roth conference held in Sarajevo in March 2009 which called for a neutral and objective judiciary, secular education, the end of corruption, economic stability, and the resettlement of ethnic enclaves displaced during the 1991-1995 conflict. This was an exploratory study devised to measure the

effectiveness, if any, of the programs outlined and proposed by the combined European Council, EU, and NATO to bring about reconciliation and restorative justice within Bosnia-Herzegovina. The basic premise is that any successes should be manifested in the attitudes and behaviors of the emerging generation – the adolescent cohort being formally socialized in schools and at home.

Given that Bosnia and Herzegovina is still divided between three main ethnic groups, muslim Bosniaks, orthodox Serbs and catholic Croats, the idea for future researchers would be to re-include young people from the other two factions in the research sample. Such a comparative study would show which psychosocial areas of young people indicate a pathological level of functioning, largely caused by the provincial, ethnically biased perspectives of the Balkan wars, which is reflected on these victims of the war of the second generation, ten years later.

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## ПРОФИЛИСАЊЕ ОСУЈЕЂЕНЕ ОМЛАДИНЕ (POSIT) У РЕПУБЛИЦИ СРПСКОЈ – ДЕСЕТ ГОДИНА ПОСЛИЈЕ

### РЕЗИМЕ

Грађански ратови у бившој Југославији резултирали су подијељеним друштвима, посебно у оним културама у којима постоје етничке подјеле. Проблеми постају међугенерациски када нема извјесног рјешења које води до одрживог помирења. У овим, етнички подијељеним друштвима, често постоји колективна малаксалост, која се манифестује као примарни и секундарни посттрауматски стресни поремећај (ПТСП). Секундарни ПТСП често погађа дјецу и адолесценте преко њихових родитеља који су погођени конфликтом *per se*. С обзиром на то, упоређени су групни профили ученика из Републике Српске (2010. *versus* 2020.), мјерени Инструментом за скрининг оријентисаним на проблеме за тинејџере (Problem-Oriented Screening Instrument for Teenagersк, POSIT (Rahdert 1991) који покрива 10 функционалних проблематичних области адолесцената укључујући употребу суштанци, ментално здравље, породичне односе и агресивно понашање/делинквенцију. Десет година послје, важно је одржати фокус на незадовољеним психолошким и социјалним/културним потребама трауматизоване дјеце и омладине, жртава рата друге генерације, јер би занемаривање ових проблема могло бити „скупо“ за друштво у смислу касније дезорганизације ове популације, како сазријева.

Кључне ријечи: млади, Република Српска, POSIT.

