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WHAT ARE
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OF SERBIAN
CONCENTRATION
CAMPS TESTIFYING
ON?

INTRODUCTION

Since its early beginning, human history has had abundant examples of one group of people attempting to exterminate another group. It is reasonable to expect that the frequency and severity of consequences of mass crimes would lower with the strengthening of the collective memory and progress of a civilization. However, the most terrible massacres occurred in the 20th century; moreover, the Holocaust, considered as one the most famous acts of genocide, occurred on “the most civilized” continent – Europe. It is therefore evident that human recollection of the consequences of these crimes as well as global civilizational development have not played a crucial role in their prevention. For that reason, in the 20th century, and in particular after the Second World War, a great interest in the real causes of mass crimes became apparent in the fields of social sciences, especially sociology and psychology. Great contribution came from the field of social psychology which tried to offer a better understanding of the causes of genocide and mass killings.

In 2002, a group of authors published a book entitled “Understanding Genocide – The Social Psychology of the Holocaust” and very thoroughly investigated genocide and mass killing using socio-psychological theories and concepts. The book is actually a proceeding consisting of 14 separate chapters in which twenty prominent social psychologists deal with different aspects of genocide and mass killing based on past researches as well as on contemporary information derived from the field of social psychology. With the aim to apply models described in the book on the data presented in this paper; it is necessary to give a brief overview of certain parts of the book which may have relevance for the concluding discussion.

According to Newman and Erber (2002), crisis, fear and threat are most frequently related to genocide. These three factors initiate the seeking of a scapegoat in another population group. Among factors that are likely to mobi-

lize perpetrators toward a genocide or mass violence, certain cultural values are most distinctive. General human tendency toward conformism and submissive behaviour, inactivity of passive bystanders, perpetrators' tendency to cover-up their crimes with lies, proneness toward extremely brutal treatment of victims and attempts to justify the crimes by subsequent analyses, are some of the factors characteristic for the act of genocide.

The authors analyse in detail all these fundamental factors that lead one population group toward genocide or mass killing of another population group. Frey and Rez (2002) state that each out-group may be treated as a scapegoat as long as it is incapable to fight back, though according to previous beliefs some groups are more likely than others to be selected as scapegoats (see Staub and Mandel, 2002). Oyserman and Lauffer (2002) analysed the impact of culture on the probability of gaining a scapegoat status and assumed that this probability becomes greater when the perception of an out-group is obtained from the context of a dominant collectivistic culture or when placed within the framework of a collectivistic culture. For these authors, Nazism is an example of a radical collectivistic movement with Jew minority as a scapegoat of committed genocide.

According to the mentioned authors, from the perpetrators' approach to genocide or mass killing, the scapegoat is not a group that considers itself inferior but also a group that is dangerous and threatening to a perpetrator's goals. Therefore, the out-group is additionally stigmatised, that is, it is likely to identify itself with wild animals, which in great majority of perpetrators diminishes the sense of liability for committed crimes. Furthermore, principal psychological factors that facilitate their violence-prone behaviour are tendencies to conform to the in-group demands, obedience and submissiveness. When several other features are added, such as passive bystanders, non-involved in conflict (see Staub, 2002), lying and self-deception of perpetrators (see Erber, 2002), the social framework for genocide and mass killing is created.

Beside the Holocaust, authors cited several other examples of genocide and mass killing which occurred in the 20th century; Armenian genocide in Turkey 1915-1916, "autogenocide" in Cambodia 1975-1979, genocide in Rwanda 1994, and mass killing in Argentina 1976-1979.

In second Yugoslavia, genocide and mass killing which took place during the early nineties are mentioned only in the paper by Glicka (2002) as examples of ideologically rooted violence - but only for Serbian aggression on

Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. However, in the early nineties, in addition to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, Serbia carried out aggression on Croatia. Genocide and mass killing were a constituent part of the war strategy with the aim to prevent Croatia from democratic separation from second Yugoslavia as well as separation of the great part of its territory which collided with a several-century-old plan of Great Serbia (see Pavličević, 1992).

This paper deals with the aspect of aggression that is most illustrative for the thesis on genocide and/or mass killing as a part of war strategy, and in the concluding part of this paper, we will try to apply a theoretical framework presented by the book to the example from our recent past.

Until recently only the media have been, almost exclusively, dealing with experiences of liberated defenders and civilians from Serbian concentration camps, especially by way of particular testimonies or unsystematic accounts of anecdotal character. And although such testimonies are also significant, systematic researches on population or those conducted on unbiased, enviably large, samples are much more valuable in the scientific sense. Researchers from the *Ivo Pilar Institute*, in cooperation with the Croatian Association of Former Prisoners in Serbian Concentration Camps, have conducted a survey on the sample of almost two thousands liberated defenders and civilians, based on which, with all methodological reservations, treatment in concentration camps may be evaluated, not only on the level of individual cases, but also as a reflection of the general principle.

Method

This paper presents results of the survey conducted on the sample of 1917 detainees of Serbian concentration camps. Research was designed as populational, because every member of the Croatian Association of Former Prisoners in Serbian Concentration Camps was requested to participate in the survey. Experts of different profiles were consulted about the construction of the survey, but members of the Association Board decided on the final form and contents, their primary goal being to collect as much relevant data as possible. At its first conference, the Board has decided that it is the responsibility of each member of the Association to participate in the survey, and until today records were collected on more than two thousand detained participants of the war and civilians, whereas five hundred of them gave also a more detailed account on their transfers during captivity.

Although the data collected is very valuable for shedding light on the situation in Serbian concentration camps, this research has faced some problems that are, up to a certain measure, limiting its validity and reliability. Before we start analysing the data, let us mention methodological limitations, which prevent us from presenting the results as a completely reliable illustration of what has happened to defenders and civilians during their captivity.

One of the survey shortcomings is definitely that the survey method proves incapable to involve answers that are not anticipated. The project was intended as a close combination of the qualitative and quantitative approach, which would use the unaffected, spontaneous conversation with several former prisoners or their written statements as the framework for the survey construction. However, the data obtained by applying the qualitative methodology have shown that persons liberated from Serbian concentration camps were not inclined to give very detailed and sincere answers, but followed the factography and avoided any unpleasant details. Testimonies on torture, murders and other brutalities are only stated in a small number of accounts, but very rarely told in the first person, like they were referring to somebody else. Such defence mechanism is reasonable and serves to protect personal integrity of an individual, but because of it, our study was deprived of probably very valuable data.

Another question arises regarding the respondents' censorship of their own answers in the survey questionnaire. Although it could be assumed that validity of the questionnaire was thus much less jeopardised than in the free form written statements, the problem of denying and hiding painful experiences definitely must be considered in the interpretation. Such remark is even more significant if we take into consideration that the survey was not anonymous and that members of the Governing Board were present in the room while respondents were filling in the questionnaires, directing them how to answer the questions. Non-guaranteed anonymity could definitely be a reason for increased censorship and withholding from the completely sincere answers, particularly with persons who have lived through especially traumatic experiences.

Another obvious problem of the questionnaire administered to former detainees was its incompleteness and roughness, probably the consequence of the haste it was created in. Let us just mention the example of leaving out the most often used method of physical torture - kicking and beating - from the inventory offered to respondents. Other problems are related to weak metric solutions of

certain questions, which have limited the statistical analysis to exclusively descriptive indicators, without the possibility to thoroughly elaborate on the complete issue.

Regardless of all mentioned limitations, data collected with the questionnaire are exceedingly valuable, because they undoubtedly represent a progress in our understanding when compared to the individual personal accounts of detainees given by the media. The collected data offer a much wider illustration of the time spent in Serbian concentration camps, and detainees' experiences can no longer be considered as an individual case or exceptional circumstance. The greatest advantage of collected data lies in the evaluation of populational parameters, that is, in dispersion of certain experiences among all prisoners. Naturally there is some doubt whether the sample of persons participating in the survey is representative for all prisoners. Although absolutely all members of the Association, without exception, were participating, there is always a reasonable doubt that results would be considerably different if those who never came back from captivity had the opportunity to participate. Therefore, it can be presumed that bias of the data is probably responsible for a trend creating a somewhat better image of life in Serbian concentration camps than it really was.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample

According to the majority of socio-demographic characteristics, a sample of liberated detainees does not differ from the average population. The greatest difference lies in gender representation. Men are evidently dominating the sample (over 95%), which is expected, regarding the circumstances. Average age of detainees at the moment of captivity was 38 years, which approximately corresponds to the population average, if under-aged population is exempted. Large majorities of detainees are Croats (94%) and Catholics (94%).

Imprisonment data

The sample predominantly consisted of defenders (72%), civilian population represented 12% and members of civil protection 15% of the total number of detainees. Majority of respondents was captured by the Yugoslav National Army (79%), and significantly less number by paramilitary formations (14%) and "territorials" (5%).

Captivity

Detainees were mostly taken to Serbian concentration camps of Sremska Mitrovica (34%) and Stajicevo (28%), while other localities were rarely mentioned. Significant percentage of detainees were held in Begejci (9%) and Manjača (3%), and a small number were taken to Bileća, Glina, Knin, Niš or Stara Gradiška. A great number of respondents named two or more locations, which indicates that they were usually transferred from transitory to destination concentration camps.

Duration of captivity mainly depended on status at the time of capture. Civilians and civil guard members were mostly freed after one to three months, while defenders were held prisoners much longer, some of them for more than two years. On average, captivity lasted for almost four months. Furthermore, testimonies of recently freed persons, stating that today there are still Croatian prisoners in Serbian prisons, should not be neglected. This data, if taken into consideration, would considerably extend presented evaluations.

Accommodation conditions in concentration camps are most often described as “bad”, “indigent” and “inappropriate”. Food and sanitary conditions are rated equally inappropriate. Such answers were given by all liberated prisoners, almost without exception.

Torture

Testimonies of liberated prisoners indicate that torture was the inevitable part of captivity, and not only a separate case of an individual or a smaller group of people. The most severe forms of torture were applied, including killing of prisoners. Almost one half of respondents (46%) witnessed to killing of other prisoners (Figure 1). Regrettably, this experience can not be limited only to particular camps. On the contrary, if testimonies of prisoners from different concentration camps were compared, in each camp there would be approximately the same percentage of those who have witnessed killing of a prisoner. Unfortunately, this survey does not allow us to differentiate killings that took place immediately after imprisonment from those that have happened after prisoners were taken to concentration camps.

A series of different physical and mental methods of torture were applied in concentration camps, and all prisoners, without exception, were subjected to at least some methods. A list of described physical methods included twelve methods of torture applied in concentration camps

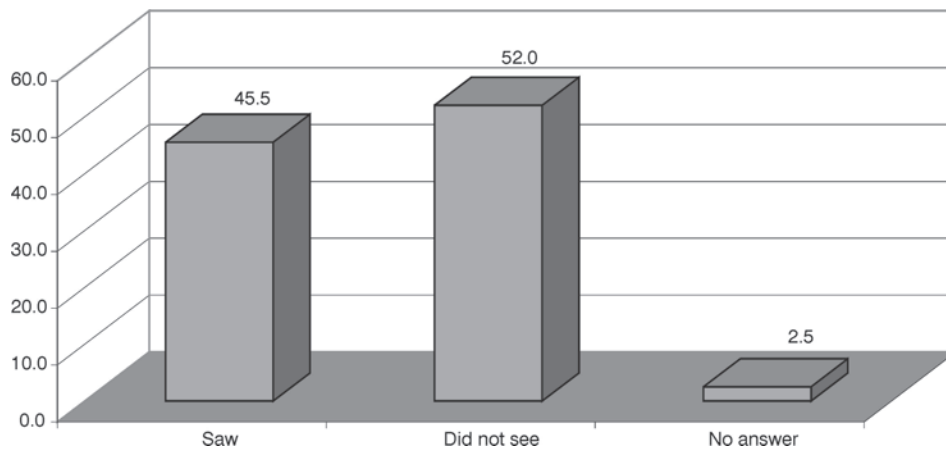
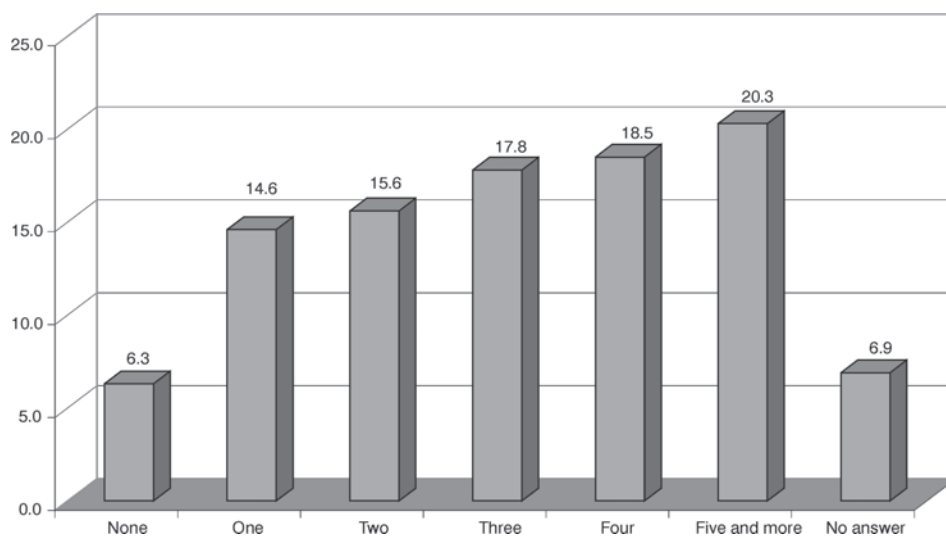


Figure 1.
Witnessed killing of a prisoner

with different frequency. However, some of them were almost consistently present, resulting in only 6% of liberated prisoners who have stated that they have not experienced any of the listed methods. Those are mostly civilians who were kept in captivity for shorter periods. All other prisoners have experienced at least one or more constant ways of abuse (Figure 2).

Among all methods of torture, those that could be described as deprivation of bare essentials for life, inappropriate accommodation and inappropriate care for prisoners are the most often. Torture with hunger and thirst were definitely the most spread abuse methods. The first one was experienced by 67%, and the latter by 54% of prisoners. Nourishment in concentration camps is obvious from the difference in the average weight before im-

Figure 2.
Number of applied methods of physical torture



prisonment and after release, which is almost 18 kilograms. Considering the duration of captivity, a person was on average losing five kilograms per month in concentration camps. Such data are clearly pointing to intentional starvation, systematically carried out in all camps. Deprivation of sleep was also frequently applied (52%), and it is common knowledge that it results in complete disorientation and mental weakness of the prisoner, in literature known as the brainwash. Most prisoners were also exposed to cold (49%), and if we were to analyse the periods of their imprisonment, we would probably conclude that those who were not exposed to cold were staying in concentration camps during the warmer part of the year. Isolation was one of the most frequently used as the abuse method (48%). Among highly ranked, frequently mentioned methods, there is also the torture with animals, stated by over 19% percent of all liberated prisoners. Although it is rather imprecisely determined, this method probably equally refers to unhygienic conditions in rooms where animals like rats and insects were present, as to the actual abuse with animals, like setting dogs on prisoners.

Torture, in the limited sense of the word, consists of inflicting physical pain, which is not only the result of staying in inappropriate rooms or being deprived of bare essentials for life. A notionally diverse category of “other physical methods”, selected by 25% of respondents, mostly includes those who were beaten during captivity. Unfortunately, this, the most common method, was certainly used much more often than the numbers are indicating. An oversight occurred during the construction of the survey, and this method was left out by mistake, thus leaving the respondents to mention it only at their own initiative. However, we can still make some conclusions regarding its dispersed use. Less usual methods of torture or exceptionally cruel ones were rarely mentioned. Torture with medications was mentioned by 9% of prisoners, which probably refers to deprivation of medication, and not to giving inappropriate pharmacological preparations. Torture with electricity was experienced by 8% of prisoners, torture by burning by 5%, sexual abuse and torture by hanging by 4%, and around fifty prisoners (2%) were subjected to exceptionally cruel method of torture by castration (Figure 3).

Testimonies on abuse are offering a rather clear picture of that what has happened in Serbian concentration camps. It is completely indisputable that prisoners were placed in completely inappropriate rooms and that they were treated without any concern even for the basic physiological needs. Furthermore, a significant number of pris-

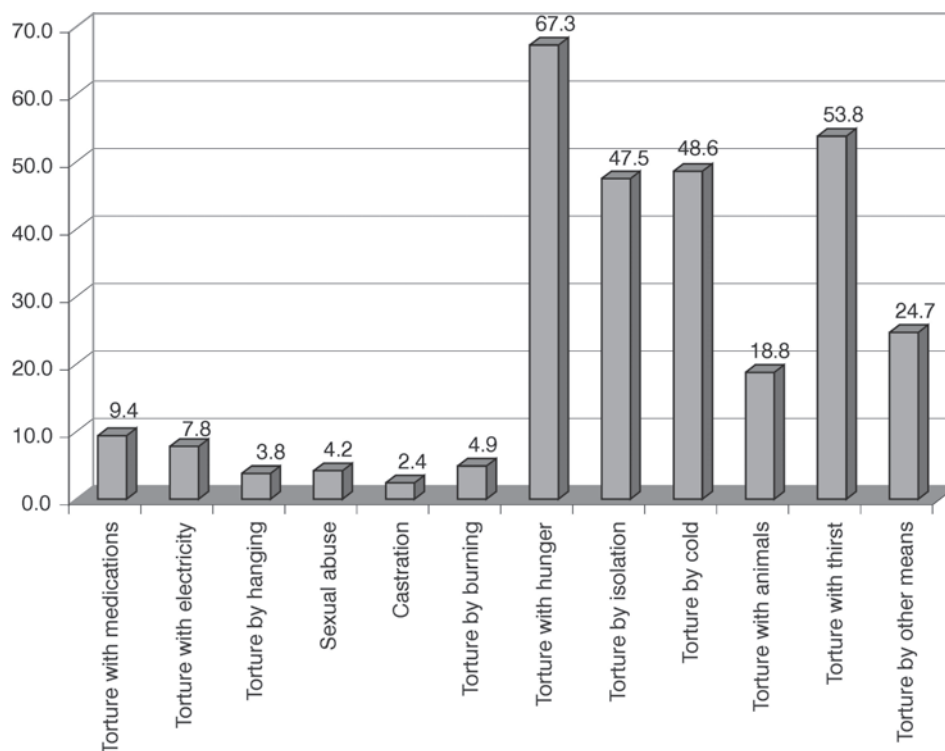


Figure 3.
Frequency of applying different methods of physical torture

oners were exposed to abuse with the intention to hurt them or permanently mutilate them. For that purpose, beating was most commonly used in concentration camps, and other, much crueller and bizarre methods were also used, although rarely. Unwillingness of many prisoners to admit to some especially unpleasant and traumatic personal experiences should be taken into consideration in the analysis, because it could have led to underestimation of particular forms of abuse.

Respondents' answers are furthermore suggesting that mental abuse was even more often applied than the physical one. Only 5% of prisoner reported that they were not exposed to any form of mental torture. The rest of detainees admit that they were subjected to at least one form, though it was more usual that a wide range of mental ill-treatment was applied. A significant number of detainees responded that they were subjected to all mentioned methods of mistreatment. It is not difficult to assume what was the intention of mental torture; these methods were intended to humiliate internees, weaken their morale, affect their self-confidence and self-esteem and instigate the feeling of complete insecurity. These were the methods used in many wars, and corresponding ill-treatment suffered American soldiers imprisoned in

the Corean War when actually, the term “brainwashing” was first coined.

The most frequent methods of mental torture were applied in order to destroy the feeling of relatedness to Croatia and to separate defenders from all values that inspired them to take part in the defence of their country. As many as 82% of liberated detainees state they were told that Croatia does not want them, and 74% were even compelled to sing chetnik’s songs. Fear, insecurity and disorganisation were encouraged by immediate physical threats. About three quarters of detainees (70%) were forced to listen the howls of other prisoners, a large number of them (64%) were exposed to threats of execution by shooting. For many of detainees (47%) these were not only threats – they were exposed to false executions. Other methods of intimidation reported include forced witnessing to killings and tortures of (28%) or witnessing sexual abuses (5%). False exchanges were carried out to weaken the morale of the prisoners (58%) as well as leading the detainees away to unknown directions (45%) which undoubtedly caused them to believe that they would never be saved. Questioning, on several occasions, day and night, experienced about two third of detainees (60%) which, along with sleep deprivation had intention to instigate the feeling of disorientation and physical febleness so that certain information could be obtained more easily. Additional precondition for this was complete isolation and prevention of any ability to communicate with the rest of prisoners which was confirmed by more than a half of the total number of detainees (51%). Many detainees were confined into solitary cells (36). All these ill-treatments were not randomly applied procedures but a part of the carefully planned and exercised method. The detainees were also forced to appear in media (19%), to write petitions (32%) and certain number of them (32%) had to sign false statements (Figures 4 and 5).

The whole span of used methods enables us to see more clearly what were the intentions and strategies of the torture. Its is obvious that treatment in camps had as its primary goals instrumentalization and disintegration of prisoners in both physical and mental way. Those who survived were exposed to tortures planned to cause fear, humiliation and to disrupt the feeling of own worth as a precondition for modification of the political attitudes and values. After the time spent in concentration camps, the prisoners were “ready” to be further used in order to create false image of a justified war in the eyes of public in the country and abroad.

Figure 4.
Number of applied methods of mental torture

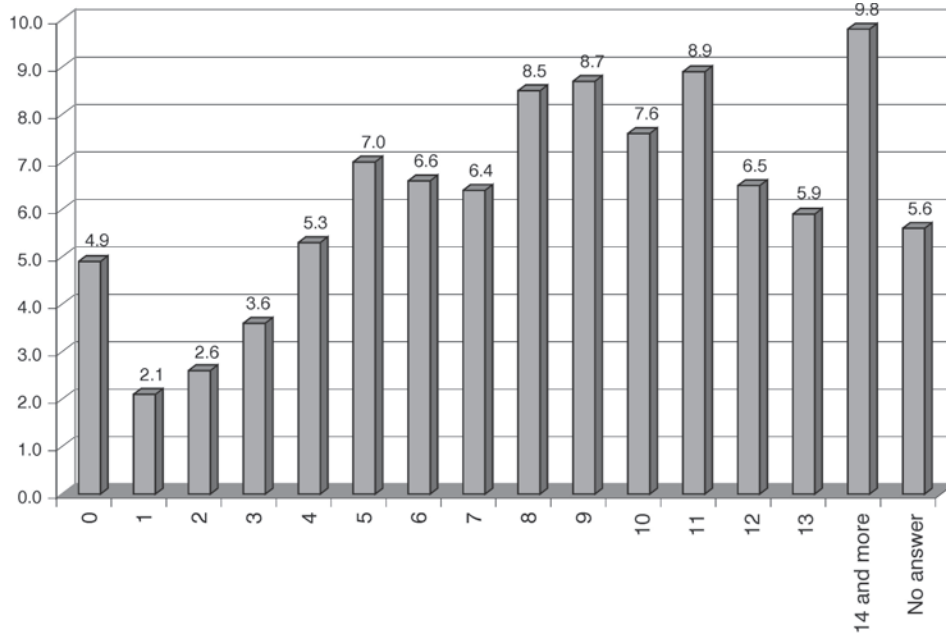
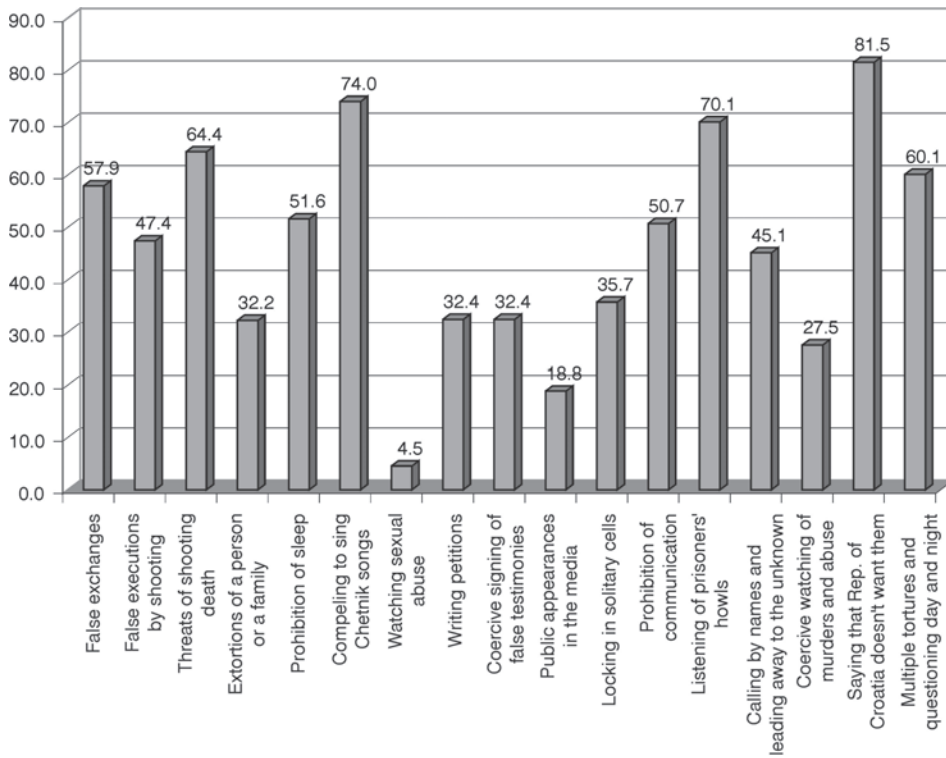


Figure 5.
Frequency of applying different methods of mental torture



CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

D. Rehak, the editor and one of the authors of the book in Croatian entitled "The Roads to Hell, through Serbian concentration camps into 21st century" was himself a detainee of a Serbian concentration camp during the Serbian aggression on Croatia in 1991. In the book he listed sixty concentration camps in the territory of the Republic of Serbia and Montenegro where Croats were taken in the early 1990s and were exposed to severe maltreatment. A group of authors (Rogić et al., 1995) have also published a detailed data and described the circumstances of several thousands non-Serbian civilians who were expelled from their homes. Some of their testimonies and personal accounts of their tragic experiences were published in the book "Hundred Testimonies" (Zagreb, 1994) and in a number of other publications. By analysing all available sources on this subject one can get a clear picture of all means of mass killing and expulsions carried out on the whole territory of the Republic of Croatia during 1991 (see Šakić et al., 1992).

These publications are mentioned in support of the data stated in the preceding paragraphs in order to make the application of a theoretical framework, described in the introductory section, more tangible.

Serbian aggression on Croatia occurred during the process of dissipation of communism at the world level, as well as the disintegration of the second Yugoslavia, in which – despite a proclaimed equal status of all five nationalities – Serbs had a dominant political, protective and economic role. In other words, the disintegration of Yugoslavia and resulting crisis were most threatening for Serbia, and the privileges it had over the whole territory of Yugoslavia, and especially in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo for almost fifty years. The threat aroused fear and homogenization of the Serbs faced with the advancing dissipation of communism. The Serbian Academy of Sciences issued the *Memorandum* as a manifesto of its own kind, allegedly with the intention to save the second Yugoslavia – in reality, it was their way to restore to life hundred-year-old aspirations for not-owned territories, in particular Croatian. For the purpose of additional homogenization of the Serbs, religion was abused and through certain circles in the Serbian Orthodox Church, it served to political goals. Consequently, at the beginning of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the Serbs were completely nationally and ideologically homogenized; they had their "leader" and control over the Yugoslav National Army.

Other nationalities from the second Yugoslavia were absolutely inferior. However, as their scapegoats they selected three national groups - Croats, Bosnians (Muslims) and Albanians from Kosovo - because such a choice favoured their Great-Serbian intentions. When they attacked Croatia, the Croatian population was completely disarmed, and at the international level, an embargo to the weapon import was introduced. The Serbs felt superior and safe from any out-group or scapegoats to fight back. They carried out aggression, first on Croatia; followed Bosnia and Herzegovina, and finally Kosovo. In all three cases they used methods of ethnic cleansing and mass killing. In all three cases, various institutions and members of the international community witnessed the most dramatic moments - but remained passive bystanders (best illustrations are mass executions at Ovčara in Vukovar and Srebrenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina). When all these facts are summed up: conformism and submission of the Serbs to their leader Milošević; apathy of the international community; scapegoats incapable to fight back - one can ask a logical question: Does this mean that all the crucial conditions included in the theoretical framework of genocide and mass killing were met? Serbian deceitful construction also fits into the framework; they explained that Croats were killed for revenge over Jasenovac or in order to save Serbian minority in Croatia (similar to German deception in the Second World War - that they had attacked Czech Republic in order to save Germans from Sudetenland), and Muslims and Albanians were killed for revenge due to the defeat in the Kosovo polje in 1471. With regard to international circles that supported the role of the international community as a passive bystander, the explanation can be found in the analyses of their individual interests to preserve Yugoslavia in spite of the dissipation of communism. Finally, in this context weapon-import embargo can also be discussed; it was more than obvious that all other nationalities except the Serbs are inferior, and that Croats and Slovenes will be the first to try to achieve democratic independence. And that triggered the genocide described in this paper and in numerous other publications - all these data may serve as a good basis for further elaboration of the assumed agreement between the socio-psychological theoretical framework and our actual past.

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