

## VICTIMIZATION OF ELDERLY PERSONS

*(In Serbian)*

**Author: Miomira Kostić**

**Publication Center, Faculty of Law, University of Niš, 2010, p.247.**

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The process of aging begins from the moment of one's birth. Although the aging process is inevitable, elderly people are marginalized in our society. Generally speaking, they are perceived as a burden, as dependants who are a kind of ballast for younger generations. Yet, younger generations and policy makers seem to neglect the fact that providing for a better social care and status of elderly persons in the community is an investment in their own future which will ultimately contribute to creating better conditions in their own old age. The book "**Victimization of elderly persons**", authored by Prof. dr Miomira Kostić, was published over 6 years ago but the topical and ongoing issues pertaining to the victimization of elderly people in Serbia impose the need to keep this problem in the spotlight of the contemporary academic, professional and general public.

The book "**Victimization of elderly persons**" offers a clear and scientifically substantiated analysis of the process of victimization of elderly persons in a real social context. After providing a comprehensive overview of biological, psychological and social features that mark the aging process, the author discusses the most important factors influencing the victimization of the elderly: physiological processes, diminished work capacity, growing alienation and marginalization of elderly people, which contribute to their victimization.

The book "**Victimization of elderly persons**", written by Prof. dr Miomira Kostić, is composed of three parts. In the first part, titled "*The Theoretical Approach*", the author provides an overview of definitions and indicators of abuse of the elderly, which is of great importance in identifying their victimization considering that this extremely harmful social process is often clandestine and concealed within the family. Then, the author focuses on the basic characteristics that make the elderly susceptible to victimization. In particular, the author studies the victimization of elderly persons in warfares, in exile and in prisons where the convicted elderly persons serve their sentences; in all these situations, elderly people easily fall victims to illicit behavior and this predisposition is a significant victimological

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Received March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016/ Accepted April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016

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factor that deserves special attention. Further on, the author elaborates on the contents of the most important international and national legal documents that are directly or indirectly related to the issues of victimization of elderly persons. The first part of the book ends with a description of specific measures to prevent and combat the victimization of the elderly and improve their position in society.

In the second part of the book, titled "*The Empirical Approach*", the author presents the results of an empirical research on elderly persons' victimization which was conducted in two phases at the Gerontology Center in Niš and at the Social Work Center "St. Sava in Niš". This research was intensive rather than extensive, and it was aimed at presenting systematically and explaining the victimization process by analyzing all victimization cases reported by elderly people to these two institutions. In addition to applying the method of content analysis, the author used the interview technique which was particularly suitable for obtaining data about the interviewed elderly persons' victimization experiences.

The first phase of the empirical research was carried out at the Gerontology Center in Niš in autumn 2004; it included the analysis of specific cases involving the victimization of elderly people. In particular, the research included refugee women over the age of 60, who participated in the project "Safe and Sound" and the workshop "My Living Space", where they were involved in arts and crafts activities as part of their therapy program.

The second phase of the empirical research was carried out at the study Centre for Social Work "St. Sava" in Niš in the period from May to December 2009. This phase entailed the study of all cases involving the victimization of elderly persons reported to the Social Work Centre "St. Sava" in Niš and analysis of the collected material. All reported elderly persons' victimization cases were classified into 3 groups: abuse, neglect and misuse/abuse, and neglect. The focal point of the author's case study was the analysis of physical and psychological violence against elderly people, except for sexual violence; notably, as the Social Work Center had no reported sexual violence cases, this issue was not examined in detail. In the book, the author underscores the significance of the offender-victim relationship because the research results show that a vast majority of examined cases include some kind of interpersonal relationship between the offender and the victim. This part of the study is especially important because it provides a clear insight into the scope and extent of elderly persons' victimization. The author analyzed 36 cases related to the abuse and neglect of elderly persons, as well as the cases where the reports were considered to be unjustified. In particular, the author refers to the measures taken by the officers of the Social Work Centre in Niš to resolve each reported victimization case. Although the personnel of this institution had understanding and empathy for the needs of elderly citizens, the author notes that this issue should be observed and addressed in a wider social context.

In conclusion, the author highlights the research results and the detrimental effects of elderly persons' victimization. Drawing attention of the professional and general public to the victimization problems, the author underscores the need for specific action which would be aimed at improving the social position of the oldest part of the Serbian population. This goal can only be achieved by raising public awareness about the position of the elderly in our society, taking relevant action to provide their protection and being actively committed to ensuring that the society we live in is a society of all its citizens, regardless of any personal properties. Bearing in mind the entire scientific and academic opus of Prof. Miomira Kostić, I believe that the book "**Victimization of elderly persons**" is a great contribution to creating a more humane society where the aging process and elderly people's victimization will be addressed with due consideration and enacting more effective legal solutions.