

# **Assessing the Impact of the Kosovo Conflict on the Mental Health and Well Being of Newcomer Serbian Children and Youth in the Greater Toronto Area - Summary Research Report (2000-2002)**

Submitted to the  
Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on  
Immigration and Settlement (CERIS) -Toronto

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## **Research Synopsis**

This mixed-methodological study assessed the psychosocial impact of the 1999 Kosovo conflict on the mental health and well being of newcomer Serbian children and youth in the Greater Toronto Area two-and-a-half years after the NATO intervention in Serbia. Detailed survey questionnaires were administered to eighty school-aged Serbian children and youth – and separately to their most knowledgeable parent, - and six semi-structured confirmatory focus group interviews held with key stakeholders. The study also analyzed the response of parents, educators, healthcare professionals, social service providers, and

settlement workers during the crisis itself to determine - in light of research findings - effective response strategies and trauma-recovery interventions that would help safeguard the well being of other war-affected immigrant and refugee children faced with similar stresses. Research findings suggest that explicit war coverage, negative media portrayal, ethnic discrimination, ambivalent feelings towards the host country, parental distress and compromised family functioning appear to act as amplifiers of both pre- and post-migration trauma, thereby producing more severe mental health effects than these children and youth might otherwise have experienced.

## **Brief Research Overview**

**Background** - An increasingly violent struggle between Serbs and Albanians in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia over control over the southern Serbian province of Kosovo led to a February 1999 meeting between Serbian and Albanian officials in Rambouillet, France, organized by the international community to discuss peace. Serbs were seeking to protect the cradle of their culture, civilization and identity against Albanians' battle for an independent Kosovo. When agreement could not be reached NATO countries, in order to protect Albanians from "ethnic cleansing," launched an air and missile bombardment campaign of Serbia on March 24, 1999, that lasted 78 days. NATO's intervention in what came to be known as "the Kosovo conflict" injured and killed innocent civilians, destroyed factories, workplaces, schools and hospitals, damaged the country's energy, transport and communications systems, triggered economic, social and ecological disaster, and rendered thousands homeless. It traumatized families and individuals on all sides of the conflict, including those in the diaspora who had fled Yugoslavia's civil war in the early 1990s.

The majority of the Greater Toronto Area's estimated 70,000 Serbian population is comprised of immigrants and refugees from this earlier civil war. Many had been forced to flee their homes for political and religious reasons, against their will, under direct threat and in extremely dangerous and stressful conditions. Many of these newcomers witnessed firsthand casualties and injuries to neighbours, friends and loved ones, or had been victims of torture themselves. Whether exposed to direct combat or not, all had been subject to years of escalating conflict, bombardment, and deprivation of basic needs, as well as to a climate of deadly hatred between ethnic groups.

The widespread destruction of Yugoslavia and loss of innocent lives during NATO's intervention in the more recent Kosovo conflict has had an enormous impact on this newcomer community. According to the Family Service Association's direct experience with the Serbian community during this time, the bombardment re-activated previous war-trauma, created additional resettlement-related stresses for newcomer Serbian families, and adversely affected the quality of life of the entire community, including their children and youth.

**Research Topic** - This research study assessed the psychosocial impact of the 1999 Kosovo conflict on the mental health and well being of newcomer school-aged Serbian

children and youth in the Greater Toronto Area as measured two years later. The experiences and responses of parents, educators, settlement and social services workers and healthcare providers during the conflict itself were also analyzed to determine effective response strategies that would help safeguard the mental health and well being of all war-affected immigrant children in distress, and thereby also facilitate their resettlement, adaptation and social integration.

#### **Research Objectives –**

1. To examine the nature and intensity of psychological distress stemming from the 1999 Kosovo conflict among newcomer Serbian children within the Greater Toronto Area;
2. To record and analyse the concomitant experiences of parents, educators, health care professionals, settlement service workers and social service providers; and
3. To seek to develop, articulate and communicate effective responses to various stresses associated with war trauma among immigrant and refugee children.

#### **Key Research Issues Questions –**

- 1) What is the level of trauma – if any - experienced by newcomer Serbian children and youth due to the Kosovo conflict?
  - 2) What is the nature, level and extent of psychopathology in these children?
- 3) What variations exist across various group categories (age, gender, previous trauma experience, etc.)?
  - 4) What factors help to explain these findings?
- 5) What are parents' perceptions and concerns regarding their children's mental health and well being and how do these correspond to children's self-reports?

Other study questions included: How did parents, educators, health care professionals, settlement service workers and social service providers respond to the children's distress? What lessons may be learned that could contribute to the development of effective response strategies to meet the needs of traumatized war-affected immigrant children and youth?

**Research Methodology** – An in-depth mixed-methodological approach was employed in undertaking this research. The impact of the Kosovo conflict on the mental health and wellbeing of immigrant Serbian school children and youth in the Greater Toronto Area was assessed via detailed **survey questionnaires**. Experiences and responses by parents, community leaders, educators, health care providers, settlement service workers and social service providers were ascertained via semi-structured **focus-group interviews**. Validity was ensured through the use of multiple researchers, interviewers, methods, survey instruments and measures, as well as through interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral research collaboration and consultation.

**Research Design** - The **quantitative** research component entailed the administration of survey questionnaires to 80 newcomer Serbian students (10-18 years of age) and their 'most knowledgeable' parent, a total of 180 participants. Three complementary, partially matching, questionnaires were developed for the project: a Child About Child (CAC) questionnaire; a corresponding Parent About Child (PAC) questionnaire; and a Parent

About Family (PAF) questionnaire. Specially-developed questionnaire modules sought information regarding family background; Kosovo conflict context, experience and response; and included assessments of child/youth mental health and well-being using various standardized scale measures in both self-reports and parental reports. Care was taken to ensure that all questionnaire instruments were both age-appropriate and sensitive to the cultural and situational context of newcomer Serbian children and youth. They were also translated into Serbian and back-translated to English to ensure that all research participants could respond in their language of choice.

The survey component was complemented by six in-depth **qualitative** focus group interviews with key stakeholders - parents, community leaders, educators and school administrators, community-based and mainstream settlement service workers, and mental health professionals - that were both confirmatory and exploratory in nature. Their three-fold purpose was: **a)** to seek a deeper understanding of the major issues and challenges faced by newcomer Serbian families during the Kosovo conflict; **b)** to disseminate and compare initial project findings with participants' personal and/or professional experiences; and **c)** to solicit expert and/or experience-based advice that would enable the investigators to develop sound recommendations for effective trauma response strategies.

**Research Participants – *Survey Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria:*** The study's target population sample consisted of 80 newcomer school-aged Serbian children who had emigrated from the former Yugoslavia to Canada after 1991, were living in the Greater Toronto Area during the Kosovo conflict (March-June 1999), and were between 7-18 years of age. The achieved sample of 80 newcomer Serbian children and youth aged 10-18 years, together with their 'most knowledgeable' parent, yielded a total of 160 participants. *Focus Group Participants* were selected for their knowledge and expertise regarding related issues to form interview groups of five to six participants. Care was also taken to ensure adequate representation of salient differences within each stakeholder group.

### **Research Challenges**

*Ethical Issues:* Possible re-traumatization of child survey participants was avoided by asking specific traumata questions only of parents. Research interviewers were trained to spot signs of distress in both parents and youth and instructed to stop the interview and ensure necessary follow-up if needed. Having a child trauma specialist as referral resource ensured immediate access to appropriate professional support. *Recruitment Difficulties:* Recruiting study participants for this study proved to be an enormous challenge. Despite thorough saturation of the entire Serbian community in the Greater Toronto Area with informational recruitment letters, project posters, community newspaper notices, website postings, electronic mailings and community presentations, and despite the direct involvement of three well-respected community members on the research team, we received not a single participant-initiated response. All participating families had to be recruited through direct contact by investigators and research assistants at community events and via voluntary referrals. Even then, the study's **overall refusal rate was 1 in 3 (33.75%)**. Reasons for this recruitment difficulty include: the continuing sensitivity of the topic; fear of re-traumatization; ambivalence about Canada; resettlement

pressures; security concerns; as well as specific current events. *A Shifting Context:* During the course of this research (Sept. 2000-March 2002) a) there was a change of government in Yugoslavia; b) Former Yugoslavian leader Slobodan Milosevic was brought before the War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague; c) the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon occurred in the United States. Each of these events had an immediate negative impact on participant recruitment and interviewing.

**Data Collection** - All survey interviews and focus group discussions were strictly *voluntary*. Study participants are *anonymous* and all information gathered has been treated as strictly *confidential*. Participants are not identified by name on questionnaires or other research materials; signed letters of consent are also kept separately at an undisclosed location.

*Survey Interviews* were undertaken by two research assistants. Children, youth and parents were interviewed separately at their home and in their language of choice regarding their experiences both during and since the Kosovo conflict. Family interviews averaged 2.5 to 3 hours: child interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and parent interviews 90 minutes. Participants unanimously expressed a preference to be interviewed in Serbian. *Focus Group Interviews* with key stakeholders were held after the data entry and initial analysis had been completed. They were lead by both investigators, involved five to six interview participants and were approximately two hours in duration. These semi-structured focus group sessions were taped using a micro-cassette recorder, with the full knowledge and informed consent of all involved; the only exception was the Serbian-origin community settlement worker group interview in which at least one individual expressed a preference that the session not be taped. In this case both investigators took copious notes that were later compared to ensure validity and then compiled.

**Data Analysis - *Quantitative Analyses:*** The basic analytical challenges involved determining the relationships between different groups of variables, including the type of trauma, trauma symptoms, various personality characteristics, attitudes toward the host society, discrimination, identification, family socio-demographics, dynamics, migration history, resettlement, and experiences during the Kosovo conflict. The dependent variable in these analyses - psychopathology or psychology of Kosovo trauma among newcomer Serbian children/youth - was assessed via various mental health measures and personality characteristics, and related to the nature and level of traumatization found among research participants. Analyses were also undertaken to determine the impact of various factors on child/youth mental health and well being, as well as possible variations across groups (age, gender, previous trauma, parent/child, etc.). All data cleaning and statistical analyses have been undertaken by Ms. Joanne Daciuk, Research Coordinator, Centre for Applied Social Statistics, Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto. This includes univariate descriptives and frequencies, bi-variate analyses (T-tests; cross-tabulations; correlation matrices), and multi-variate analyses (factor analysis, linear regression, canonic analysis, Achenbach cluster analysis), as per instruction by the investigators. *Qualitative Analyses:* The analysis of the qualitative focus group data was in keeping with established principles and practices governing ethnographic research, and entailed

Careful examination of field notes and interview tapes in order to identify common themes. Validity was ensured via comparative analyses, repeated cross-triangulation, involvement of multiple researchers, and the use of both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in this study.

## Key Research Findings

### Core Survey Findings

*Sample Description:* A total of 80 newcomer Serbian *children/youth* between the ages of 10 and 18 were surveyed, together with their 'most knowledgeable parent.' 63.8% (n=51) of these young respondents were female, and 36.3% (n=29) were male. The average age was 15.30 years. 40% of the survey population was between the ages of 10-14, 16.3% were 15-16 years old, and 43.8% were between the ages of 17-18. 78% (n=63) of the 80 *parents* interviewed were female, 21.3% (n=17) were male. Parent respondents were between the ages of 32 and 53 years with an average age of 43.25 for respondents and 44.25 for the non-respondent parent. Parent respondents and their spouses were born in Bosnia (n=77), Serbia (n=61), Croatia (15), Montenegro (n=4), Macedonia (n=1), with one spouse born in Poland, and one non-response. All child respondents were born in the former Yugoslavia. Survey *families* arrived between 1989-1999 with 1994 being the average year of arrival. The average length of stay in Canada at time of interviewing was 7.68 years for mothers and 7.73 years for fathers. All but one family had either landed immigrant status or Canadian citizenship.

### Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Stemming from the Kosovo Conflict

- **26.3% of the children and youth interviewed met diagnostic criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** - a condition characterized by intrusive memories of the past, sleep disturbances, nightmares, hyper-arousal, affective numbing and emotional withdrawal - as a direct result of the Kosovo conflict. The survey instrument used in both child self-reports and parental reports is keyed to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV; 1994) diagnostic criteria for PTSD and referred specifically and exclusively to the Kosovo conflict. Relevant trauma were thus directly related to the Kosovo conflict itself, and occurred despite the fact that these newcomer children and youth were at safely living in Canada throughout the NATO intervention. There was a highly significant difference according to age (when used as a continuous variable) with **older children more likely to exhibit PTSD** (mean 14.80 'No PTSD' vs. 16.71 'Any PTSD' with  $p < .001$ ). There was **no significant difference according to gender**.
- The corresponding percentage from parental child reports is 17.5%, indicating that **for 1 out of 3 children exhibiting PTSD, parents are unaware of the nature and severity of their children's distress and traumatization**.
- **The study's PTSD findings are conservative.** The lack of even a single participant-initiated response despite extensive participant recruiting efforts, together with a very high overall participant refusal rate (33.75%) to direct

requests, resulted in a study population sample that is neither random nor fully representative of the newcomer Serbian population in the GTA. Instead it is limited through the process of self-selection to those families who were both willing and able to participate in the survey. Our study sample very likely does not - and could not - include those families still too traumatized on various counts to be willing or able to be interviewed. **All survey findings need to be contextualized and understood accordingly.**

#### Experiences During the Kosovo Conflict

- According to parental reports **100.0% of children/youth interviewed experienced one or more of various war-related stressors due to the Kosovo conflict.** The nature of media coverage of the Kosovo conflict, negative media portrayal of Serbs, and perceptions of both systemic and individual ethnic discrimination, emerged alongside worry/grief about extended family members back home, witnessing of parental distress, experience of dehumanization and concern about double-standards as significant stressors for newcomer Serbian children and youth throughout the Kosovo conflict.

#### Previous Trauma Experience in the Former Yugoslavia

- According to parental reports **48.8% of children/youth surveyed had experienced one or more war traumata while still in Former Yugoslavia.**
- There was **no significant difference in likelihood of meeting PTSD diagnostic criteria due to the Kosovo conflict between the 48.8% of child survey respondents who had experienced previous war trauma in Yugoslavia and those who had not.** However, study results reveal that children with prior trauma experience and those without have been **differently impacted** by the Kosovo conflict. Variations also exist according to gender and age.

#### Mental Health and Psychosocial Well Being

Findings from the survey's mental health measures are consistent with the study's PTSD findings, PTSD symptomatology, and clinically-documented likely occurrence of co-morbidity.

- **All survey children and youth experienced one or more stressors or traumata related directly to the Kosovo conflict** according to parental reports.
- While sample sizes are small (29 males; 51 females), **females** score marginally higher on Dissociation scales while **males** score higher on Social Non-Integration and Physical Aggression scales in child self-reports.
- **Differences between child self-reports and parental reports are highly significant** on the following measures: PTSD Experience of Event, Pro-Social Behaviour, Emotional Disorder-Anxiety, Indirect Aggression and Physical Aggression scales. A very significant difference between child self-reports and parental reports may be found on the following measures: PTSD Response to Event sub-scale, PTSD Symptoms and Hyperactivity-Inattention scales.

- **In all cases child self-report scores were higher than those from parental reports**, suggesting a significant degree of lack of parental awareness, denial or unwillingness to report relevant symptoms.
- **Survey children and youth meeting PTSD diagnostic criteria scored significantly higher on all three dimensions of the Horowitz Impact of Event Scale** including both Intrusiveness and Avoidance sub-scales, Emotional Disorder–Anxiety and Dissociation Scale. **Females** rated high on Horowitz Impact of Event (Total scale; Avoidance; Intrusiveness); Emotional Disorder–Anxiety; Dissociation; and Anxiety measures, while **males** rated high on the Horowitz Impact of Event Scale. The small sample sizes – 15 females and 6 males – preclude a full gender comparison.
- **Survey children and youth with previous trauma experiences in Yugoslavia - 48.8% of the total according to parental reports - scored significantly higher on Dissociation, Emotional-Anxiety Disorder and Pro-Social Behaviour scale measures** than those without such experiences. While n sizes are small (51 females; 29 males) **females** scored significantly higher on the Hyperactivity-Inattention scale measure while **males** scored relatively higher on the Pro-Social Behaviour scale measure and on the Horowitz Impact of Event Scale - total scale, including both intrusive and avoidance scale dimensions.
- When split into two age groups, **younger children (10-15 years of age) scored higher on the Pro-Social Behaviour scale, the Dissociation Scale and the Self Respect scale. Youth (aged 16-18) scored lower than their younger cohorts on Instrumental Competence, Social Competence, and Self-Respect.**

#### Ethnic Discrimination

- 47.5% (n=38) of children and youth surveyed reported experiencing ethnic discrimination during the Kosovo conflict because they were Serbian.
- Older children (73.7%; n=28) were more likely to report ethnic discrimination than younger children (26.3%; n=10) ( $\chi^2=5.647$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.05$ ).
- Children who reported having experienced ethnic discrimination scored significantly higher on each of the three PTSD sub-scales (Experience of the Event; Response; and Symptoms).
- The proportion of children reporting experience with ethnic discrimination was also considerably higher for the PTSD respondents (62%) than for non-PTSD respondents (42%). This did not, however, translate into a significantly different likelihood of PTSD diagnosis.
- Older children meeting a likely diagnosis of PTSD tend to feel marginally more discriminated against. These findings should be interpreted with caution given the small sample size. 21 out of 80 children met the diagnostic criteria for PTSD; 13 of these reported having experienced ethnic discrimination, 8 reported none.
- In contrast to the child reports, 23.2% of parents surveyed reported that their children were treated unfairly during the Kosovo conflict because they were Serbian, suggesting that close to half of the parents interviewed were unaware of their child's experiences with perceived ethnic discrimination.
- In terms of their own experiences, 36.3% of parent respondents agreed with the statement that "A lot of Canadians tend to look down on Serbian people" (40%

- not sure), and 95% felt that "in the [Canadian] media, Serbian people are portrayed less fairly than other groups" (3.8% not sure).
- 100% of parents expressed concern that Canadian media sources were either biased or inaccurate in their reporting of the Kosovo conflict; this response was true for all of the various types of media including newspapers, newsmagazines, television and radio.
  - Among survey children and youth who had experienced ethnic discrimination in Canada, those with previous trauma experience in Yugoslavia score significantly higher on PTSD experience and symptoms (but not response) than those with no prior war-related traumata. However, despite higher scores on two of the three PTSD sub-scales there was no significant difference between children who had experienced ethnic discrimination in Canada and previous traumata in Former Yugoslavia and those without previous trauma in terms of meeting PTSD diagnostic criteria.

#### Attitudes Towards Canadian Society

- Frequency data from this survey instrument suggest **considerable ambivalence** in newcomer Serbian children/youth's attitudes towards Canadian society. Study findings indicate that attitudes among Serbian newcomer children and youth are highly polarized and range from expectations of prosperity and success in Canada, through disorientation and uncertainty regarding support expected, to mistrust and suspiciousness related to Canadian values and distress at Canada's involvement in the killing of innocent civilians during the NATO intervention.

#### Identification

- **Self-identification as Serbian was very strong among child/youth survey respondents** and appears not to have been adversely affected by experiences of ethnic discrimination or negative media portrayal. This very strong identification as Serbian by child and youth respondents suggests that collective group self-esteem is high.

#### **Core Focus Group Findings**

Focus group findings and participant observations indicate that parents were not only overwhelmed and preoccupied by their own trauma concerns during the Kosovo conflict but also quite uncertain as to how to help their children and alleviate their distress. As suggested by the Family Service Association of Toronto's experience during the Kosovo crisis, they also confirm that many schools were caught entirely unprepared to react appropriately to the unique stresses affecting their Serbian students. The same may be said of both the Serbian community itself and of Canadian society more generally. The qualitative analysis of interview tapes and/or detailed notes from six focus group interviews with Serbian community leaders, parents and service providers, and with teachers, health care professionals and mainstream service providers respectively, revealed **ten major themes**:

- This research is viewed as critically important

- The Kosovo conflict and NATO Intervention has seriously affected Serbian families
- Children and adults differ in their views and experiences of war
- The media has played an important role during the Kosovo conflict
- Human pain and suffering of all war-affected populations should be considered equally
- Serbs did not feel they had a voice in Canada
- The negative portrayal and discrimination of Serbs continues
- Newcomer Serbs feel vulnerable
- Parents and teachers do not know how to respond to a traumatized child
- Serbian participants did not express interest in psychosocial services

### **Overall Research Findings**

- The NATO bombardment during the Kosovo conflict re-triggered previous war trauma
- The Kosovo conflict was itself sufficient to adversely affect the mental health and well being of newcomer Serbian children and youth in the GTA
- War-related trauma associated with the Kosovo conflict was exacerbated by graphic media coverage of the NATO bombardment
- War-related trauma associated with the Kosovo conflict was exacerbated by increasingly negative portrayal of Serbs in Canadian popular media and by both systemic and individual forms of ethnic discrimination
- Ambivalence towards their host country and perception of a "double standard" caused additional distress
- Normal family functioning was compromised
- The effects of Kosovo-related traumata continue

## **Research Contributions**

This study represents **the first comprehensive assessment of the impact of the Kosovo conflict on newcomer Serbian children and youth in the diaspora**. It provides empirical as well as explanatory research data regarding the psychosocial effects of secondary traumata on the mental health and well being of marginalized newcomer children/youth, and considers the impact on their resettlement, adaptation, and integration process as well as on their personal development. Research analyses identify the major traumata and stressors that directly affect the well being of these children and youth and increase the probability of emotional, cognitive and social difficulties. In so doing this study **provides a solid conceptual and empirical basis for meaningful comparisons with other war-affected newcomer populations** both in Canada and overseas, including most notably Kosovo Albanian refugees.

This research contributes to the documentation and analysis of long-term impacts of crisis and disaster on the mental health and well being of children and youth. By extending consideration to newcomer children and youth, it **extends the analysis to a consideration of the impact of war trauma during the resettlement process itself**.

The study also examines the ways in which being an "enemy of the state" affects the mental health and well being of new immigrants to Canada and explores the implications thereof for social integration. The Serbian experience in Canada during the Kosovo conflict is in many ways comparable to that of Japanese Canadian "enemy aliens" during World War II and Vietnamese Americans during the Vietnam war; what makes the current study population unique is their actual war trauma experience, migrant status, youth, and degree of marginalization. By looking at "ethnic" discrimination rather than "racial" discrimination per se, the study also **contributes to the Canadian literature on minority rights in Canada** (see *Kallen 1995; Henry 1995*). Finally, *Palmer (1997)* and others have examined Canadians' attitudes towards immigrants; this research effectively reverses direction and **examines instead the attitudes of newcomer children and youth towards their host country, together with possible links with their mental health and well being.**

The current research is *unique* in its consideration of both secondary war-trauma and related traumata, and multiple traumatic exposure; and in its comparisons between previously exposed and non-exposed populations as well as between parental and self-reports of mental health and well being. Several study findings also represent *new contributions* to the field. These include the identification of ethnic discrimination and consistently negative media portrayal as significant secondary traumata; the links between 'enemy alien' status, ambivalent feelings regarding the host country, discriminatory experiences, and mental health outcomes; the surprisingly strong impact of secondary war-trauma on individuals safely removed from the area of conflict; and perhaps most importantly, the finding of some variation but relatively little difference in overall mental health impact of a secondary trauma between children/youth who experienced previous war-trauma and those without such prior exposure.

## **Relevance to Policy and Practice**

*Contributions to Policy Development:* The psychological consequences of war - particularly among children - involve a dynamic process whose lasting impact is strongly influenced by the availability of appropriate services, culturally sensitive treatment initiatives, as well as broader psychosocial support. The impact of war trauma, ambivalent attitudes towards the host society, explicit and/or negative media portrayal, and ethnic discrimination on newcomer children's mental health and well being will be of particular interest to **Health Canada**. It is hoped that this study will help inform effective, sensitive and comprehensive mental health treatment interventions, thereby enhancing the capacities and development potential of all new Canadian children previously exposed to war. Study findings suggesting that ethnic discrimination (including negative media portrayal) and ambivalent feelings toward the host society can act as an amplifier of both pre- and post-migration traumata, thereby producing even more severe repercussions, will also be of concern to the **Department of Canadian Heritage (Multiculturalism)**. Immigrant and refugee children vary tremendously in terms of the pre-migration experiences and resources they bring with them. This research will also be of use to **Citizenship and Immigration Canada** as it touches directly on

issues of settlement service delivery for newcomer immigrant and refugee children and youth who have been exposed to war in their countries of origin. Informed, group-specific, culturally-sensitive knowledge and response is essential not only for ensuring the psychological well being of particularly vulnerable immigrant populations but also their successful settlement adaptation and social integration.

*Contributions to Practice:* Study findings will be helpful to *service providers* in designing crisis response strategies that ensure immediate, comprehensive and equitable interventions related to acute, often enduring, psychological trauma. It is hoped that the dissemination of study results will help increase awareness among *health care professionals* and *settlement service workers* regarding the impact of war trauma, discrimination, and other resettlement stresses on the health and wellbeing of immigrant and refugee children; this would help inform the development of effective, sensitive and comprehensive mental health treatment interventions, thereby enhancing the capacities and development potential of all new Canadian children previously exposed to war. A key output of the study is the development of a crisis intervention **Trauma Response/Recovery Manual** to assist various stakeholders in dealing with war trauma, ethnic discrimination and related settlement distress experienced by immigrant and refugee children. This resource compendium will consist of stand-alone modules offering a summary of the key issues, practical solutions, important contacts and resources, and target parents, educators, health care providers, social service providers, media representatives and policy makers respectively. These will be made available singly and collectively in both hard copy and in an electronic format suitable for cross-posting on relevant websites. The resource manual aims to offer practical help to *parents* by informing them about the particular difficulties traumatized children experience and the actions that can be taken to promote their well being, and assist *educators* to more quickly recognize symptoms of war-trauma and to coordinate more effective and appropriate crisis responses. The manual also seeks to help increase the *media's* awareness of the ways in which seemingly factual reporting can inadvertently result in a negative presentation of certain immigrant groups in such a way as to seriously compromise their emotional well being and social integration. Since *communities* have the potential to not only confer risk but also promote resilience, this trauma response/recovery manual will also point to ways in which the structure of response and respective roles of government, schools, health institutions, and various service agencies can incorporate community involvement to effectively safeguard the well being of all Canadian children.

See also [Project Recommendations](#) click here.

## **Dissemination Activities and Research Outputs**

Research findings are being widely disseminated to various stakeholders via public talks, professional workshops, community and organizational newsletters, media interviews, website postings, conference presentations and submissions to scholarly journals. Research participants and other members of the Serbian community both in Canada and

abroad will receive a summarized report of the findings; the study will also continue to receive media coverage. A trauma response/recovery manual geared at key stakeholders is in preparation, as is the posting of executive research summaries on relevant organizational websites. In keeping with the mandate of the Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS), the research findings will also be disseminated to Health Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and Canadian Heritage (Multiculturalism) in order to help inform policy recommendations aimed at normalizing war-affected children's lives in Canada.

Please consult [www.ceris.metropolis.net](http://www.ceris.metropolis.net) for copies of project reports and ensuing publications.

#### *Presentations To-Date (11/2002)*

- Focus group sessions with key stakeholders (March 2002). Initial project findings were disseminated separately to community leaders, parents, educators, health care professionals, and to both mainstream and community-based settlement agency workers and social service providers, and feedback requested. Similar sessions are planned with Serbian children/youth and mainstream media representatives respectively.

#### *Presentation Commitments (11/2002)*

- Presentation to the Toronto Serbian community. Confirmed for January 2003
- Presentation at Family Service Association of Toronto, as well as to other settlement service organizations and providers. Confirmed for February 2003.
- Joanna Anneke Rummens and Rajko Seat. "Assessing the Impact of the Kosovo Conflict on the Mental Health and Well Being of Newcomer Serbian Children and Youth in the Greater Toronto Area." Sixth National Metropolis Conference, Edmonton, March 21-24, 2003.
- Interfaculty Research Seminar Series. Culture, Community and Health Studies, Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto, and Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), Toronto. Cross-disciplinary dissemination to university researchers and mental health practitioners. Confirmed for April 17, 2003.
- Meet Our Community Partners Series – The Serbian Community. Culture, Community and Health Studies, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), Toronto. Dissemination to mental health care specialists and to the public via media exposure. Confirmed for April/May 2003.

#### *Research Reports To-Date (11/2002)*

- Joanna Anneke Rummens and Rajko Seat. *Assessing the Impact of the Kosovo Conflict on the Mental Health and Well Being of Newcomer Serbian Children and Youth in the Greater Toronto Area: Research Report*. Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS) – Toronto, October 2002, 40 pp.
- Joanna Anneke Rummens and Rajko Seat. *Assessing the Impact of the Kosovo Conflict on the Mental Health and Well Being of Newcomer Serbian Children and Youth in the Greater Toronto Area: Summary Research Report*. Joint Centre of

Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS) – Toronto, October 2002, 15 pp. Available via [www.ceris.metropolis.net](http://www.ceris.metropolis.net)

- Joanna Anneke Rummens and Rajko Seat. *Assessing the Impact of the Kosovo Conflict on the Mental Health and Well Being of Newcomer Serbian Children and Youth in the Greater Toronto Area: Project Recommendations*. Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS) – Toronto, October 2002, 6 pp. Available via [www.ceris.metropolis.net](http://www.ceris.metropolis.net)

#### In Progress (11/2002)

- Joanna Anneke Rummens and Rajko Seat. *Assessing the Impact of the Kosovo Conflict on the Mental Health and Well Being of Newcomer Serbian Children and Youth in the Greater Toronto Area: Full Research Report*. Culture, Community and Health Studies, Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto; Family Service Association of Toronto; Social, Prevention and Health Policy Research Department, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto; Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS)– Toronto, [March 2003; 140+ pp].
- Joanna Anneke Rummens and Rajko Seat. "The Mental Health Impact of the Kosovo Conflict on New Canadian Children and Youth." Journal manuscript.
- Joanna Anneke Rummens and Rajko Seat. "Safeguarding Our Children's Well Being: Addressing the Impact of the Kosovo Conflict on Serbian Children and Youth in the Greater Toronto Area." Community Research Report in both Serbian and English. Culture, Community and Health Studies, University of Toronto & CAMH, and Family Service Association of Toronto
- Joanna Anneke Rummens and Rajko Seat. *Meeting the Needs of War-Affected Immigrant and Refugee Children and Youth*. A Trauma Response Resource Manual available in hard copy and also suitable for electronic posting on relevant high-traffic web sites

#### Media Coverage To-Date (11/2002)

- "The War Changes Life Forever" (translated from the Serbian) by Gorana Gligorevic, *Vestie* (international Serbian newspaper), April 17, 2001.

## **Nature of Research Collaboration**

**Academic/community** research partner-ships were integral to the design and implementation of this study and remain essential for effective research dissemination. Academic partnerships among investigators, research assistants, collaborators, consultants and contributors, were **interdisciplinary** in nature (anthropology, education, international relations, medicine, political science, psychiatry, psychology, sociology) and included two individuals specialized in the recognition and treatment of trauma. Community collaboration was **cross-sectoral** (newcomer Serbian families; Toronto's Serbian community; educators; settlement and social service workers; mental health professionals; media representatives). This collaboration also bridged the **research/practice** divide by involving both scholars and clinicians. **International collaboration** with researchers in the Former Yugoslavia permits immigrant/non-immigrant group comparisons.

The *Research Team* consisted of two co-investigators: Joanna Anneke Rummens Ph.D. (sociologist/anthropologist), Assistant Professor and Scientist, Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto and Centre for Addiction and Mental Health – Toronto; and Rajko Seat, Ph.D. (trained clinical psychologist), Community Worker, Family Service Association of Toronto. They were assisted by a university-based research assistant - Bojan Djuricic (graduate student, International Relations, University of Toronto) - and a community-based research assistant - Ms. Gorana Gligorevic (teacher; journalist).

*Collaborative partners* include: Mr. Dragomir Radojkovic, President, The Serbian Centre for Newcomers and Serbian Heritage Academy; Father Vasilije Tomic, Protospresbyter, St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Church; Mr. Radmilo Anicic, President of "Strazilovo" Folklore Group, Member of St. Sava's Board of Directors; and Mr. Ray Cunningham, Principal, Chester Public School. *International collaborators* include researchers at the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy-Psychology Department with whom survey instruments and methodology were shared for the purpose of later comparative analyses between Canada and the Former Yugoslavia. *Consultants* included the project's statistical analyst, Joanne Daciuk, Research Coordinator, Centre for Applied Social Statistics, Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto; and our child trauma expert and referral resource, Patti Schabas M.D., Child Psychiatrist, Trauma Team, Mount Sinai Hospital. *Other contributors* included colleagues at Culture, Community and Health Studies – Programme Head Morton Beiser M.D., Samuel Noh Ph.D. and Violet Kaspar Ph.D. who granted permission to use a few of the instruments also included in the survey component of this study.

## **Training Opportunities Provided**

Both the full-time graduate student and community-based research assistant associated with this research project received in-depth training and experience in survey research design, implementation and coordination. This included project presentation, participant recruitment, interviewing techniques and community collaboration. The graduate student received additional training in database design and data entry.

**Project Recommendations** are available via [www.ceris.metropolis.net](http://www.ceris.metropolis.net)

**For additional information please contact:**

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