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**TRAUMA, JUSTICE, AND THE LONG ROAD
OF RECOVERY: LESSONS
FROM BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

Alma Taso Deljković has more than twenty years of experience in judicial institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where she helped develop the victim and witness support system in courts and prosecutor's offices. She now works directly with trauma survivors, including veterans, as a psychotherapist. Her contribution focused on the intersection of trauma and the justice process, and on what is required to ensure that legal proceedings do not cause additional harm.

Trauma as the central lens

Trauma must be understood as the central issue in all work with veterans and war-affected people within the justice system. Trauma affects how people communicate, regulate their emotions, make decisions, and participate in legal processes. Professionals who do not understand this will misread behaviour, mishandle interactions, and risk causing serious additional harm [1].

The justice process can retraumatise

Participation in judicial proceedings — appearing in court, being questioned, sitting through a hearing — can itself be deeply distressing. The courtroom setting, specific words, tones of voice, or non-verbal behaviour can trigger memories and responses linked to war trauma. The experience is not predictable: something that appears manageable at first can become overwhelming in a moment. Deljković described a case from her practice in which a veteran who had survived severe atrocities appeared as a witness in court. He had been prepared by support services and was initially able to describe events, but when he reached a specific traumatic moment in his testimony, he was no longer psychologically in the courtroom — he was reliving his

experience. The judge and prosecutor did not adequately recognise what was happening, and the support service needed to intervene [2].

Trauma does not simply pass

Drawing on the experience of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Deljković emphasised that the consequences of war trauma do not fade quickly or automatically. More than twenty years after the war in Bosnia, she continues to work with veterans and survivors who carry its effects. Ukraine will need sustained, long-term investment in psychosocial support — not only in the immediate aftermath, but for decades ahead.

What needs to change

Deljković identified four interconnected requirements. First, trauma-informed protocols: clear procedures that reduce ambiguity and support consistent professional responses. Second, training across the entire justice chain: judges, prosecutors, police officers, investigators, and victim and witness support staff all need to understand trauma reactions and how to communicate effectively with affected people. Third, multidisciplinary cooperation involving psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, community organisations, and formal institutions. Fourth, genuine empathy and flexibility — the capacity to respond to what is actually happening in the room, not only to follow procedure.

References

1. SAMHSA (2014). SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884.
2. Tsai, J., & Seamone, E. R. (Eds.) (2019). Intersections between mental health and law among veterans. Springer.