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## **Abstract**

The goal of this study was to look into the institution of female monasticism in the Serbian Orthodox Church in the period of post-communist transition in order to advance our understanding of its social and anthropological particularity.

On the basis of my research there are about 706 nuns and 74 novices in the Serbian Orthodox Church today. This is an increase in over 20% in little over a decade, when 563 nuns and 43 novices were recorded. Coupled with a significant increase in the number of young women seminarians (over 20% of the students body), these data point to a significant rise in interest in religion among women in contemporary Serbian society. While women who take a monastic vows are still relatively few, the monastic calling is becoming more intriguing for the general public, especially in the light of the fact that the latest wave of monastics do not fit into the stereotype (prevalent in socialist times) of persons from backward rural areas, poorly educated, and sometimes even physically or otherwise impaired.

Taken as a whole, the three generations of monastic experiences of women in the Serbian Orthodox Church reveal not only personal narratives centered around specific religious sensibilities, but also offer a rare perspective and commentary on particular social and historical conditions. Even though monastics are members of an unique social group, there seems to be a growing audience in these post-communist times willing to hear these stories. Monastics themselves are also rediscovering their roles as spiritual fathers and mothers, councilors and guides in spiritual matters for a number of young people who grew up in 80s and 90s, who witnessed the wars of disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia, sanctions, the break down of one system of values and painful attempts to create a new one out of the friction of awakened religious needs and the unfolding ways of the so called civil society. By reclaiming its place in the society today, the institution of monasticism is also reclaiming its rich heritage from the past, which reveals that its founders were not dubious or marginal characters, but major figures in Serbian history and culture. Those who take up monastic way of life nowadays see themselves in the context of that honorable living tradition and find in it the source of inspiration and strength for their mission in today's Serbian society in transition.