

EHRAC

Bulletin



Psychological rehabilitation of the population as a key condition for social stability in Chechnya

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Diagnosing the psychological condition of a society is today a strategic information resource within state programmes to improve the health of a nation. The socio-psychological rehabilitation of the Chechen population is a necessary step towards social stability within the post-war reality. This task is not possible without the provision of psychological services aimed at identifying psychological issues, providing counselling and, where possible, treating psycho-traumatic conditions. To this end a psychological service has been opened at the headquarters of the NGO, Women's Dignity, in the Chechen Republic. Data from this service can be used as an indicator of the psycho-social condition of the population, and may serve as a representative social map of the post-war situation in the Republic for all those working to ensure the psychological, social and political stability of Chechen society. A preliminary analysis of psychological consultations held between June

2009 and June 2010 has revealed the predominant types of psychological problems among clients, as well as giving a tentative diagnostic map of the socio-psychological state of Chechen society, which has lived through two military campaigns in a relatively short period of time.

The files of all 425 clients who underwent psychological consultations between June 2009 and June 2010 were analysed. 83% were women and 27% men. 1,687 appointments were conducted in total. The most common age group was 35-55 years comprising 63.6% of consultations. The largest number of complaints (38.3%) was about relatives who had disappeared during military operations. The issue of missing persons is one of the most acute and difficult to treat through psychological rehabilitation. Psychologists call this an 'unresolved trauma', as waiting for the missing relative makes the trauma 'incomplete' rendering this group extremely complex. Given that this psychological trauma is directly related to military incidents, it is likely to be the predominant 'psychological trauma of war' for the foreseeable fu-

ture.

The next complaint in terms of frequency (32.1%) is the problem of 'constant anxiety'. This could well be an indirect response to military incidents. The states of nervousness, unmotivated fear and anxiety are symptoms of having experienced a state of stress. However, this data could also indicate a sense of uncertainty about the immediate future due to a lack of social security and job stability.

There was an unexpectedly high number of visits regarding issues of domestic and sexual abuse (18.1% of clients, all of them women). This subject is extremely delicate in any society, and in the traditional society of Chechnya it is an absolute taboo. A detailed analysis of this issue within the context of monitoring future consultations will reveal whether this is an overt or a hidden trend. The general and specific conditions causing sexual abuse, both in relation to military incidents and the structural transformations of Chechen society over the last 20 years, need to be identified. In any event, the trends given below are evident, and are symptoms

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of a change in self-consciousness and societal stereotypes regarding the issue of sexual abuse. It is in these trends that we can see the future possibilities for psychological assistance and rehabilitation of this group of clients.

The first trend is that clients are overcoming a huge psychological barrier and are beginning to talk. This is extremely important as the articulation of the problem within society makes the issue of sexual abuse more openly discussed. Victims of abuse, who in the eyes of society are already guilty of having become victims, are given the opportunity for public sympathy, support and socio-psychological rehabilitation.

Secondly, there is the opportunity to give impetus to a mechanism for punishing those guilty of sexual abuse. At present legal proceedings

regarding this issue are especially difficult. Many lawyers say that the domination of traditional cultural stereotypes, in which a victim of sexual abuse has hardly any chance of living a normal, fulfilled life, forces a woman's relatives into accepting financial compensation instead of pursuing a perpetrator through the legal system, and therefore the criminal remains at large and is a potential danger to new victims. Things are no better in the case of victims of sexual abuse during military action – the victim's own low self-worth regarding their position also continues to dominate. If such clients do make it to a psychotherapist, it is generally concluded that they are socially and psychologically isolated from society.

To conclude, a general preliminary analysis of client psychological consultations for June 2009 to June 2010 shows that:

1. post-traumatic stress disorder caused by war is predominant;

2. a lack of social security and the resulting psychological stress is the second most significant trend;

3. male abuse of women within the family and sexual violence more generally have unexpectedly begun to be revealed contrary to the standard taboos of Chechen society;

4. the need for the provision of regular psychological consultations is clear;

5. psychological consultations, along with other forms of social assistance to the population, must become an integral part of a dynamically developing Chechen society.

It is evident that analysing the data from psychological consultations helps to reveal the predominant issues in society and provides indispensable empirical evidence for trying to understand and analyse the psychological state of society. From this information plans can be made for the psychological rehabilitation of the population.