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Analysis of the situation in Beslan and Vladikavkaz after the act of terrorism

In September 2004, according to the association agreement, experts of South-Russian Regional Fund for Development of Tolerance and Preventive Measures of Extremism (Rostov-on-Don) worked in Vladikavkaz and Beslan.

The purpose of work was studying the analysis of the situation and rendering psychological and methodical help to psychologists and teachers of Beslan and Vladikavkaz, as well as to children, parents, and other people, who had suffered from act of terrorism and took part in the liberation of hostages.

Visiting school # 1 in Beslan produced a profound impression.

The school appeared dreadful because of the blood traces, bullets, shells, smell of burning, smashed window-frames, etc. Impression from the seen was like in Stalker: it seemed that no one could have survived there and that inside the school building had been everything but a submarine, such shambles it had.

There were no walls, no ceilings, and above a number of rooms there were only rafters. From the repair, that had been made a short time previously, remained just small areas of cleanliness. Children's things, clothes, white aprons, shoes, textbooks, pupils' mark books, photos, and manuals.... being left all over the place, horrified. And, certainly, the notes on the walls, blackboards, funeral wreaths... Those notes could be divided into several parts:

- Prayer for victims' forgiveness;
- Beseeking the God to be merciful to the innocent victims;
- Gratitude to the lost teachers, who were near the children up to the end;
- Damnation, directed against the terrorists, Islam, all Ingushians, R. Aushev, the governing body of Northern Osetia, military departments, Ministry of Internal Affairs of the republic, and the head master;
- Gratitude to the soldiers of "Alpha" and "Vypmel", killed at the liberation of hostages;
- Promise of terrible revenge with the specified addresses, where, supposedly, the just anger would come from.

Employees of Tolerance Fund had led the meetings with the representatives of Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Education of republic Northern Osetia - Alania, and the education department of Beslan.

Administration of the PPMSS (Psycho-Pedagogical and Medico-Social Support) Centre was contacted and there was a meeting, at which the purposes and tasks of the psychological and pedagogical help were coordinated and the plan of joint actions was developed.

Study and analysis of the situation on rendering the psycho-social help to the victims showed that:

- For rendering the urgent psychological help there is an emergency psychological help line, as well as consulting rooms for the psychological help, organized at the hospitals. The reception is mainly conducted by visiting experts. Experts of Beslan are present at the consultations and have an opportunity to observe the visiting experts, doing their work;
- Several teams of psychologists from different cities (Moscow, Stavropol, and Rostov-on-Don) and different departments (Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Labour and Social Protection) have arrived to the republic for rendering a psychosocial help to the victims and that caused coordination difficulties of their actions and interactions;
- The system of the visiting experts' continuous work with the victims is not determined;
- There are more than 100 people in the hospitals of Beslan, Vladikavkaz, and Ardon;
- Several groups of victims, suffered from the act of terrorism and requiring a psychological help can be determined: hostages, their relatives, pupils and teachers of the school # 1 of Beslan, pupils, parents and teachers of other schools of Beslan and Vladikavkaz, employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, public health services, and other departments, involved in rendering assistance to the victims;
- The most topical problem in the educational institutions of Beslan and Vladikavkaz is children and their parents' fear of school attendance;
- There are not enough experts-psychologists in the educational institutions of Vladikavkaz, only one third of necessary number;
- Psychologists of the educational institutions of Vladikavkaz and Beslan do not have sufficient standard of knowledge, skills, and practical experience for the work with children, who have suffered in the state of emergency. The present psychologists need to raise the level of their skills in rendering assistance to the people with acute form of psychological trauma and post-stress traumatic disorder.

The analysis of the situation let us to draw to the following conclusions:

- It is necessary to take certain special measures to train the psychological experts of Vladikavkaz and Beslan for the work with victims in the state of emergency;

- The task of creating a coordinating system of continued work with the victims by visiting and local experts is still topical;

- Realization of the rehabilitation programs for the experts, involved in Beslan events, is important and these programs should have a system character;

- It is necessary to carry out the diagnostic research to determine the risk-groups and groups that require a psychological aid more than others and to organize a system of psychological rehabilitation.

- For psychologists of the educational institutes, the PPMSS (Psycho-Pedagogical and Medico-Social Support) centre “Doverye” (“Trust”), and psychologists of MIA (Ministry of Internal Affairs) were conducted a number of seminars. With the purpose of psychological rehabilitation there was an individual consultation of the experts, involved in the work with relatives and the population during expectation, at the storm of school, and during corpse identification by relatives of victims.

- The employees of the Centre “Doverye” have received a number of materials, which can be useful to experts in their work on rendering psychological help to victims of the act of terrorism: publications, xero-copies of methodical supplies on psychological consultation and psychological correction of children’s fears, clauses about work with families, having psychological problems, connected with grief and upbringing of handicapped children.

The general effect of the atmosphere in the centre “Doverye” is sorrowful and optimistic. The group of psychologists, whom we could communicate with, participated in rendering a psychological help to the victims in Beslan and in the republican hospital of Vladikavkaz.

By increasing the activity of work with the direct victims of the terrorist act, the sthenic character of negative emotional experiences becomes more strongly pronounced. Most of people that we could have a talk with were in the condition of distressing waiting for the situation continuation and possible aggravation of the conflict of the beginning of nineties.

There was highly expressed aggressiveness directed to the participants and possible organizers of the crime (in the interlocutors’ opinion) - Ingushians.

However, these aggressive tendencies have rather forced, protective character, which is based on the public opinion, than the active one,

displaying readiness for direct actions and revival of the conflict.

Distrust of authority and the loss of its prestige become evident. The distrust at the greater extent is shown regarding the local authorities, rather than federal ones. In the people's opinion, inactivity and corruption of the authority makes it partially guilty in the present state of affairs.

Discussion with the experts of PPMSS Centre "Doverye" the problems of rendering a psychological help to the victims and the pupils helped to reveal the most difficult and most topical moments in their work. Taking these moments into consideration, the training seminars for experts of educational institutions, the employees of PPMSS Centre "Doverye", and for the experts of Ministry of Internal Affairs, were organized.

In the theoretical part of the seminar, the following themes have been covered:

- Trauma and posttraumatic reactions. Symptoms and phases of PTSD (post-traumatic stressful disorder) development. Factors of PTSD development. Clinical symptoms of PTSD;

- Reactions to traumatic events, depending on the age of children. The first aid;

- Diagnostic test for the traumatic experiences of children evaluation;

- Grief of loss. Children's reactions. Phases and problems of grief.

What complicates the process of grieving? How to help a child to overcome the grief ?

- Children's fears. Ineffective strategy of parents. Methods of diagnostics and correction;

- Psychology of extreme cases.

The practical part of the seminar let the participants of seminars to:

- realize the personal reactions to the events in Beslan;

- mark the basic moments and to develop the skills of getting into contact with a child;

- master techniques of the work with emotional sphere and with children's fears.

Participants of the seminars (in a feedback) have emphasized:

- the increase of personal professional confidence and readiness for work with the victims in emergency situations;

- The value that the theoretical part was of an application character and was illustrated with the examples of the experts' experience;

- The importance of organizing a space within the framework of the seminar, which let to work through the practical skills;

- Creation the atmosphere that promotes a respond to the negative emotions, derivation of encouragement, and realization of rehabilitation actions;

- Need of the started training of experts continuation.

During the round table discussions, the psychologists' interests for the further work were designated:

- Strategies and methods of the work on the psychological trauma of children, parents, and victims' relatives;
- Specific character of the work with the psychological trauma of children, depending on the age differences;
- Work with the children, who have become orphans (in consequence of the terrorist act), with children from the incomplete families;
- Work with the children's fears;
- The violence that children experienced, the ways of psycho-correction and rehabilitation;
- The peculiarities of group work with children;
- Rehabilitation programs for experts;
- Psychological support for restraint, hyperactive, and aggressive children;
- Children's neurotic reactions;
- Psychologists' overwork, a "burning" syndrome;
- Pedagogically neglected children;
- Children's deviant behaviour;
- Motivations to training the pupils;
- Children's MR (mental retardation).

Thus, the psychologists' interests can be divided into two groups: connected with the emergency situation in the republic and connected with the work with children on the problems of development, training, and behaviour.

By inquiry of the administration of school # 3 of Beslan, there was a meeting with teachers and administration of the school in the form of group psychological consultation.

In the first part of the meeting, the teachers have got some idea of the psychological trauma of children in their situation, of the peculiarities of the course of posttraumatic disorders, depending on the age of the child and about the areas, in which they occur: emotional, cognitive, corporal, and behavioural.

Three basic groups of PTSD symptoms: repeated experience, avoidance, and excitability enhancement were explained and illustrated by the examples, taken from the consultation. The teachers became acquainted with the basic criteria of the time, when it is necessary for them to visit a psychologist and to direct the child or his parents to the expert-psychologists. The analysis was carried out and the recommendations were given to the teachers about the ways they could help the pupils, their

parents, and their relatives under the circumstances and in the future, what they can undertake and make after the stressful situation for themselves and for their family.

In the second part of the meeting, the answers to their questions were given, for example:

- How to overcome the fear of the following terrorist act?
 - How to conduct an explanatory work with parents and children to make them to attend the school?
 - How to interact with pupils at the lessons?
 - What may be said about the terrorist act, and what may not?
 - How to estimate their knowledge, what system to use?
 - What should be done, if the child starts to cry at the lesson, saying he is very much afraid?
 - What is to be done with the “minute of silence”, whether to perform this ritual of commemoration all forty days and at every lesson?
 - How to respond if the child starts to manipulate a situation?
 - How to establish relation with the child and how to teach him if it is the second trauma during a year (he had been in bank at the moment of robbery and in the school at the time of the terrorist act)?
 - How to talk to the child, who has many fears and was frightened by his parents in connection with the relative’s death?
 - How to provide safety at school?
 - How to talk to parents, who go into hysteric at the parents’ meeting?
 - What can be done for the children’s safety by the strength of parents and teachers?
- ...And many other questions.

South-Russian Regional Fund for Development of Tolerance and Preventive Measures of Extremism (Rostov-on-Don) has made the contract for establishing a representation office in RNO - Alania, on the basis of the Centre of psycho-pedagogical and medical-social support “Doverye” (Vladikavkaz) together with the Ministry of general and vocational education of RNO - Alania, in the person of the minister - A. A. Levitskaya; with the Vladikavkaz Department of Education, in the person of the head of the department - L.N. Belogurova; with the Centre of psycho-pedagogical and medical-social support “Doverye” (Vladikavkaz), in the person of the director of the centre - T.K. Avsaragova.

As evidenced by the foregoing, there is a plan of the further work, which can be carried out in the following directions:

- Rendering the practical help to the victims.

- Carrying out the continuous work with the children, parents, and families;
- Rendering aid to the children with especially severe disorders.
- Organization of courses of training and raising the level of psychologists' professional skill, teaching the methods and ways of work with the victims.
- Organization of rehabilitation actions for the experts, who had participated in Beslan events and had rendered assistance to the victims.
- Work with schoolteachers of Beslan and Vladikavkaz;
- Carrying out the group consultations on the organization of the educational process, taking into consideration the situation in the Republic;
- Carrying out the studies, directed on work with the personal traumatic experience.
- Carrying out a monitoring of the state of children, who have suffered the act of terrorism, for revealing the extent of posttraumatic disorders.