

The problems of beslan in the view of psychology

The peculiarity of psychological problems of primary and secondary victims of the act of terrorism in Beslan consists in the combination of their individual psychological problems with destruction of interpersonal relations in the republic, including national, religious, family, and pedagogical relations with the named social institutes' sudden fall into disfavour, and in the pronounced national colour of changes, occurring in the republic.

The reasons for these phenomena lay in the obvious underestimation of the named circumstances, in the rarity of the befell calamity, and in the existent social situation in Beslan and Northern Osetia as a whole, by representatives of all branches of authority, bodies of law and order, education system, and public health services before, during, and after the act of terrorism; in existing derelictions at conducting investigation and its preliminary results coverage, in distribution of material aid to the victims; in obvious underestimation of the moral values, national, religious, and family traditions of the people with glorious history; in unsystematic, casual, and inconsequent character of the professional psychological help to the population.

Keywords: *Peculiarity of psychological problems of the victims of the terrorist act in Beslan; the hardships, directly connected with the act of terrorism; the secondary symptoms, aggravated or provoked by Beslan calamity; destruction of self-estimations and food behaviour of victims; Stockholm syndrome; new psychological formations of victims of terrorist act; need for systematization of the professional psychological help in Beslan.*

Each of us, somehow or other, was affected by the calamity in Beslan. I worked closely with the victims of terrorist act three times. I was in Vladikavkaz and Beslan in the group of psychologists of the Center of Tolerance of SFR (South Federal Region) at RSU (Rostov State University) on the 4-6th of October 2004. And then, by invitation of All-Russian union of public associations “the Civil society - to the children of Russia” (the project curator is the chairman of the Human Rights Commission under the President of the Russian Federation, chairman of the Union – E.A. Pamphilova), in October 28 - November 1, I took part in the development of the rehabilitation program for the victims of the terrorist act. And from November 14 till December 5, in 2004, I carried out the

psychological rehabilitation of former hostages in the sanatorium “Rodnik” in Pyatigorsk. Now I communicate with the clients and colleagues in Beslan and Vladikavkaz.

The work in October: lectures to psychologists of secondary schools and the Centre of medical-psychological-pedagogical help “Doverye”, which employees were in constant attendance near the palace of culture in Beslan and rendered medical care to children in the Republic children's hospital; analysis of the real cases from the listeners' practice; discussions of the contents of the notes left in Beslan school # 1 and publications about act of terrorism in Russian newspapers, including newspapers of Northern Osetia; group and individual consultations to the listeners on the questions about their professional, personal, and family problems, concerned with the Beslan events on the 1-3rd of September. I have left training appliances and articles about the topical issues of psychological help to psychologists of Vladikavkaz and Beslan as a methodical help.

Victims of the act of terrorism (22 children at the age of 2 - 18 and 11 adults), and also - 72 their relatives, friends and so on, underwent rehabilitation in Pyatigorsk. During the rehabilitation, patients have received full sanatorium-and-spa treatment and psychological help. Ten experts: five young social workers and psychologists from Vladikavkaz and five rather qualified experts from Stavropol, Rostov, and Krasnodar worked in the sanatorium.

I have worked directly with the following classes of clients: 1) children at the age of 7-17: sixteen of them - former hostages and nine children - relatives and friends of victims; 2) adults aged 23-72: seven of them - former hostages, including 3 teachers of the school # 1 and fifteen - relatives of hostages.

More than 60 % of hostages had physical traumas: mine-explosive, missile and bullet wounds, burns, brain concussions, etc. In 48 % of cases there were multitraumas.

There were two methods of work in the sanatorium: individual and group, including the family one. At the beginning and in the end of rehabilitation the psychodiagnostics were carried out; and during all the time, psychological consultation and correction strategic were used. In my group treatment took part from two - nine patients: two children groups of 5 and 4 persons, a group of school teachers, three married couples, and seven families, each of 2 - 7 persons.

The main psychological problems of the patients can be categorized into individual, family, and group problems and be conditionally divided into three groups: 1) problems, directly concerned with the act of terrorism; 2) secondary symptoms, aggravated or provoked by Beslan calamity; 3)

the problems, initiated or supported by significant mistakes in the organization of help to the victims, including their professional psychological rehabilitation.

In this article, I will briefly dwell only on first two groups of difficulties: 1) steady individual and group psychological problems of the victims of terrorist act, which fall into the PTSD (post-traumatic stressful disorder) set of symptoms, and 2) destruction symptoms of the system of mutual relations in Beslan and in the Republic.

I will present those two PTSD-symptoms that, in my opinion, are not described in the special literature (destruction of self-estimation and food behaviour of victims); undoubtedly well-known, Stockholm symptom, to which, I assume, Beslan events have added some description, as well as fixed in the victims well-known psychological formation / Bassin F.V., Rozhnov V.E., Rozhnova M.A., 1979; Vasiljuk F.E., 1990; B. Kolodzin, 1992; M.Sh. Magomed-Eminov, 1998; I.V. Solovjev, 2000; N.V.Tarabrina, 2001; N.V.Tarabrina, H.O.Lazebnaya, 1992; A.I.Taschjova, 1992, 2001; H.M.Cherepanova, 1995, 1996 and others /.

Destruction of children and adults' self-estimation. Overwhelming majority of the primary victims of the terrorist act (in fact, hostages) show the inadequately low self-estimation and the secondary victims (relatives and friends of the hostages) - show greatly underestimated or overestimated self-estimation.

Up to 81,2 % of all respondents ascertain essential self-estimation dynamics, directly connecting it with the events in September. Thus, according to retrospective reports of clients, whose self-estimation had obvious dynamics as a result of the terrorist act, 90,2 % of adults and 100 % of children from among the primary victims, had *negative transformation of self-estimation*; parameters of secondary victims self-estimation were a little bit different: 96,4 % of adults and 77,3 % of children. And, correspondingly, only one adult hostage showed *positive transformation of self-estimation*; relatives and closest friends of hostages showed - 3,6 % (adults) and 22,7 % (children).

Considerable abnormalities in food behaviour of primary and secondary victims of the terrorist act. Even in 1,5 months after the act of terrorism, people refused to eat traditional for ossetians meat dishes that had been their favourite, especially roasted and smoked meat, because of “the smell of smoked human bodies, coming from the dish”; people refused flatly any puree of any kind (mashed potatoes, apple sauce, etc), as those dishes resembled in appearance “the mortal remains of killed people, smeared on the ceiling, walls, and floor”, which many of the saved victims had to step on, “obeying the terrorists, and then the soldiers of storm-

troops, or of their own free will, understanding that otherwise they would not be able to get out of that hell”.

Overwhelming majority of victims felt better, calmly, and more comfortable having an accessible source of water beside them. Many children and adults began to drink water in an unusually large quantity, having, for example, during the night up to 1-3 litres of water; while the physiological parameters of the internal environment of their organisms had not be changed. Many mothers in Beslan still give their children not a habitual cup of water, but certainly a bottle of one - one and a half litre of water at the first request. “Food and water motives” even today are typical subjects of disturbed, unhealthy dreams, figures, thoughts, and “flourishing”, polymorphous fears of victims and their vivid recollections.

During the act of terrorism, 87,3 % of the interrogated adults, who were outside the school, denied themselves the right to eat and 22,7 % - refused to drink: “will eat-drink together with my son-daughter” ...

Stockholm and other symptoms, as the consequences of the violent detainment. 54,5 % of adult hostages and 18,2 % of children showed the signs of Stockholm syndrome. These people, describing nightmares of fifty-two-hours capture in school and their heartache experiences precisely enough, noted that they had expected the terrorists to be even more aggressive. As it turned out, 86,7 % of these rehabilitated patients before and after the events in school had repeatedly suffered various kinds of violence: 6 patients - physically, 2 patients - sexually, 10 - psychologically and 4 patients - economically. Forms of violence were usually combined.

Eight children and five adults recalled examples of “human” treatment of the terrorists: “He told us to wet the underclothes and then suck it to get the water”; “led the elderly women out of the gymnasium for a night to the other room, where those women could lie down on floor, stretching their legs for the first time in two days”; “threw a chocolate”. One child said, that the terrorist had rescued him during the storm, ordering to hide behind the dead bodies and covering the child with his jacket.

From the new diagnosed psychological formations of the victims of the terrorist act, I will mention only the most typical ones, which essence can be formulated metaphorically in the following way:

“I was there, and you (they) were not, hence, you will not understand me and you have no right to judge me” ...

“The government must compensate” ...

“Freedom restrain syndrome”.

“Survival fault”.

“They all (Chechenians, Ingushians, Osetians, Russian) do not deserve a single kind word” ...

“Always keep your guard up”.

“What can I do to get rid of these painful recollections?”

Some patients were angry with themselves (“I should have acted differently then!”), others were angry with the other people (“Where all of them have been?” and “Where are they now, when I feel so bad?”).

Destructive self-perception in the conditions of violent detainment and after it: *in variants of defective state of mind* (“I was and I am useless, weak, apprehensive, worthless, etc.”...) or *omnipotence* (obvious overestimation of one’s own real opportunities in traumatic circumstances).

“I am afraid, that the whole story can repeat” ...

And, finally, about *the secondary symptoms, aggravated or provoked by Beslan calamity*. Till September 2004, these problems were pressing only for the certain groups of citizens and some of them seemed to be impossible.

Most typical of these symptoms are the following: *public nihilism of teenagers of senior and middle age and young men in their attitude to some national traditions in relations with outside people; fragrant and unconcealed disregard of children from the age of seven toward their parents, siblings, and other relatives; unprecedented loss of prestige by authorities of the Republic of Northern Osetia, prestige of the power structures, public health services, education system, and school teachers of the Republic.*

For example, young men and teenagers *began to ignore in a pointed manner the traditions of obligatory, pronouncedly respectful attitude toward the elder people, including males*: a teenager keeps on sitting, does not stand up, when an adult man addresses him; sprawls about at the festive table, when a man proposes a toast and all the other men stand respectfully out of regard for the speaker; and what is more, teenagers openly use bad language in the presence of old people, etc.

Elder ossetians see in especially tragic light the children’s behaviour that breaks unshakable formerly traditions of family relations. Till the first of September 2004, the relationship in many patriarchal ossetian families (and there is a majority of such families in the Republic) were formed in conformity with the strict traditions of sexual-role and generational behaviour, according to seniority of children.

So, the younger child in ossetian family is the favourite one, who remains the object of the every support from all the members of the big family for hundred years, to his dying day. But it is him, who is always obliged to look after all seniors in the house and unconditionally accept orders of any member of family (even those only several months elder than him), according to the fact of being last born in the family. Only two events

could help the youngest child to escape such a fate: birth of one more child or appearance of daughter-in-law in the family, whose status in the given family is a priori minimal. And the age of daughter-in-law is of no importance. Even the youngest child could give her an errand as soon as he is capable to do it.

After September events, children-hostages, and after them the other children of Beslan, try to occupy independently the inviolable seat of father at the table; actively refuse to perform their habitual household chores; openly ignore the errands of their parents, elder brothers and sisters, and other relatives. Children admit, that they more often say rude things, lie to their parents and elder siblings. Some of them, for the first time in their life, felt the need for raising a loud objection against father and, moreover, regardless of traditions, including the traditions of physical punishments, they began to stand upon their own interests, interests of brothers, sisters, and mother to their father.

According to our observations, the given symptom intensity is directly determined by the age of children, their personal characteristics, presence or absence of physical trauma during the act of terrorism, the heaviness of the wound, as well as the child's behaviour in the situation of capture, after liberation and so on.

In my opinion, the *originality of psychological problems of the victims of terrorist act* in Beslan is in the combination of their individual psychological problems with the destruction of traditional system of interpersonal relations in the Republic, including national, religious, family, and pedagogical relations and with the named social institutes' sudden fall into disfavour in the pronounced national colour of changes occurring in the republic.

The situation, certainly, becomes more complicated because of cynicism and blasphemy of the organizers and executors of the terrorist act; a great death-roll (330 people, and among them 186 children) and great amount of victims (1343 people); the feebleness of always really loving and caring parents and teachers, realized by children; weakness of adults and the country as a whole.

If the situation will not change fundamentally in the near future, the further events in Beslan and the Republic can develop in the following way: growth of the number of suicides and bodily diseases; chronification of physical and psychological symptoms; fits of active, uncontrollable aggression towards the government at all levels, the representatives of separate nationalities, mass media, teachers, parents of the survived children, etc.

In a word, we have to ascertain that the terrorists achieved their

object - have generated conditions for obliterating the ossetians as the nation and have created additional conditions for the situation destabilization not only in Northern Caucasus, but also, in some way, in the whole country.

With the described above and all other social and psychological problems should work the representatives of power structures, education system, and public health services of Northern Osetia and all Russia, professional psychologists, teachers (including teachers-hostages), social anthropologists, journalists, art workers, and parents.

The principles and tasks of the work of local and visiting psychologists of Beslan, the class of their clients, optimum procedures and methods of work should be "inventorized" and determined responsibly and skilfully. Dynamics of psychological health of people, first of all, the primary and the secondary victims of the terrorist act should be fairly tracked; psychologists and other experts in the city should agree about cooperation.

The need for systematization, unification of efforts of various experts grows in accordance with the forthcoming N. Kulajev's trial; the typical stage of strengthening of posttraumatic symptomatology (6-9 months) and need for serious, system, including psychological, preparation of the Republic and experts for the 1st September of 2005.

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