ON THE CUTTING EDGE: FAMILY THERAPY TRAINING IN RUSSIA

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ABSTRACT: This article describes briefly the founding of the Moscow Institute for Family Studies and some of the far reaching results of beginning to offer family therapy training in Russia, as well as some of the challenges of this endeavor.

As the state and government in the 1990s devote increasing attention to the importance and needs of the individual in Russian society, the condition of families and the treatment of their problems take on significance for the first time. Professional training in family therapy is just beginning in Russia.

A PROBLEM OF CREDIBILITY

In order to understand the condition and place of family therapy in Russia, it is necessary to look at attitudes and practices in psychology and psychiatry in the former Soviet Union over the last 75 years. The abuses of psychiatry by the Soviet government are common knowledge. For many years psychiatry was a political tool used to incarcerate and subsequently render harmless through medication people whose opinions differed from those of the political leaderships. Thus there is small wonder that feelings of extreme distrust towards psychiatry and psychology still exist in Russia.

Some of this distrust is justified, because, although the country

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and its government are going through changes, much of the change can be classified as first-order change. Numerous institutes are still run by the same individuals who ran them in earlier years. Hence, it does not matter if the government is no longer using psychiatric institutions to hold political prisoners in the sense that there is widespread opinion that there are still a large number of people in those institutions who should not be there.

Psychology, which is dedicated to the growth of the individual, was by definition the antithesis of the values of Soviet communism as it was practiced in real life. It, therefore, was suspect in the years of the authorities. For decades, the accepted view in psychology taught at universities was made up of the Pavlovian theory of conditioning, as well as humanistic psychology. The humanistic psychology was a school of thought that emphasized man as the only being in the universe and focused on man's reasoning powers and responsibility toward himself or herself and the society, with accent on the latter.

It is against this background that counseling and therapy with families was practiced for many years in the Soviet Union. Work with families was generally performed on a limited scale, most often by persons with insufficient training, and typically in clinics set up to care for pregnant women, perform abortions, and provide gynecological care. Advice and counseling for the family were tacked on to the usual clinic services. This pattern especially prevailed in small towns and rural areas which did not have major hospitals.

Thus the origins of family therapy in Russia actually helped to promote the attitude that family therapy was close to the people and was there to help simple folk. Today, therefore, it is not connected very closely with traditional psychiatry and does not share psychiatry's credibility problems.

**SYSTEMIC FAMILY THERAPY TRAINING IN RUSSIA TODAY**

The concept of family therapy as a specific and legitimate way of working with people, as a discipline that requires study and training, has been introduced in Russia only in the last few years. This began as some of the world's master therapists—Carl Rogers, Virginia Satir, and, later, Carl Whitaker, for example—visited Moscow and gave workshops for Russian psychologists. Others followed, generally teaching in workshop of one to three days in duration.