The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

When Russian Children Are Allowed to Die

By Marilyn Murray

August 27, 2012



Olga and Sergei sat across from me in deep distress. Sergei's eyes were buried on his shoes as Olga struggled to speak. She shared that their 13-year-old daughter, Maria, had been raped two months earlier. The girl now refused to attend school and rarely left their small house in a village in southern Russia.

Then, with a voice edged in fear, Olga began to tell her own story of sexual assault, which exacerbated her pain regarding their daughter's attack. At age 18, Olga had been excited about a new job in a nearby city, but one night after work as she walked home alone through a park, three men attacked her. They took her to a dacha on the edge of the forest where they took turns raping her for the next 24 hours. Then they drove her back to the park and dumped her.

She did not report the violence because she knew the police probably would do nothing to help her — perhaps only humiliate her and doubt her story.

Over the years, she received no therapy or supportive help. In fact, she had not even told Sergei, her husband of 15 years, until their daughter's rape.

Sergei put his arm around Olga as she wept and then began to relate the rest of their catastrophic story. He said when Maria was 2, Olga gave birth to a baby boy, but he died in her arms on the first day. They were devastated but made a decision to become pregnant again.

When their second son was due to be born, they went to the same hospital and doctor as the first time. But the doctor told them their new baby boy was stillborn and refused to allow them to see the baby. The young couple was overcome with grief but did not question the doctor or the hospital authorities.

Yet when they returned to the same hospital two years later with a third pregnancy, and the doctor once again told them that their baby had died and would not allow them to see their son, they began to protest and decided to investigate.

It took several years, but they eventually discovered that their last two baby boys had not died. They had been sold.

They came to see me to not only deal with the trauma of their daughter's recent rape, but also to ask how to deal with their grief and rage regarding what had happened to their infant sons.

They said they had found other parents in their region who had experienced the same appalling heartbreak of being told their baby was born dead only to find out later that the child had been sold. Now there were enough families to start a support group. They wanted to know if I could advise them.

I have heard many horrific stories in Russia. In the majority of cases, there were no existing social services or assistance for the victims.

Many of my students told me how the Soviet government did not want to allow children who were mentally or physically defective to be born. Several shared that they were told they had to have an abortion when pregnancy exams revealed a fetus with an abnormality.

An older woman named Marina sobbed as she related that her first pregnancy was during a time and place when prenatal exams did not detect she was carrying a baby with Down syndrome.

When she gave birth to her little girl, the baby was immediately taken from her. This was — and still is — the custom in many Russian hospitals, where babies and mothers often are not united for two days. Finally, a doctor came in and told Marina that her baby had died shortly after birth. She insisted on seeing her daughter, but the doctor refused.

Late that night, she slipped out of her room and began searching the maternity ward. Much to her horror she found her dead baby girl — still warm to the touch. The infant had been placed on a table in a small dark room and allowed to die. All alone. Several people in our class told Marina they knew of other mothers whose babies with disfigurements or disabilities were set aside to die.

My good friend Nadiya is one of our best instructors, and I was pleased several years ago when

she told me she was pregnant with a baby boy. Her daughter was 10, and their whole family eagerly awaited the new baby's birth. Tragically, the newborn only lived three days. Nadiya came to an advanced instructor training class the next month, and we all grieved and prayed with her.

Four years later, we were delighted to learn Nadiya was expecting again. She arrived for another advanced instructor training class, obviously pregnant but depressed. She shared that her most recent prenatal test revealed the high possibility her baby had Down syndrome.

Nadiya was 39 and torn apart by the choices facing her. Another test was scheduled in a month, which would definitely reveal whether or not the baby had Downs. Her doctor was strongly advising her and her husband to consider abortion if the results were positive.

She was relieved to be at the instructor training class, since everyone in attendance had been her friend for many years. She now felt free to vent her anger and frustration regarding her crisis: "How could God allow my first son to die and now let this new baby have Downs. It's not fair!"

But she also expressed her deep regard for the value of human life.

Nadiya shared that the greatest concern facing her, her husband and their now teenage daughter was the fact that Russia has very few resources available for persons with Down syndrome and their families, especially in their city near the Urals. If the test was positive and they decided against abortion, the choice would radically affect and change all their lives. She asked for prayers for her family and their crucial decision.

Two months later, Nadiya was an instructor on my teaching team for an advanced class. She had prepared a special video presentation to introduce her topic: the most essential human needs. As she taught about every child's innate need for unconditional love, a powerful photo filled the screen: a mother snuggling a beautiful baby with Down syndrome.

Nadiya then told the class the baby she was carrying would be like this child. She also tearfully shared they had chosen his name: Bogdan, "a gift from God."

This little boy now is almost 2 and even though he has had numerous medical problems, his family feels greatly blessed by his presence and knows he truly is a gift from God. They are great role models for authentic, unconditional love, and are an inspiration to all who know them.

Marilyn Murray is an educator specializing in the treatment of trauma, abuse and deprivation, with more than 2,000 people attending her classes in Russia and other countries from the Commonwealth of Independent States over the past 10 years. Her second book, "The Murray Method," will be released in English and Russian this summer. You can read her interview with The Moscow Times here.

Related articles:

- Human Rights Court Awards Damages to Mother of Dead Soldier

- Parents and 7 Children Killed In Suspected Perm Arson Fire
- 15 Months Later, Boy Rejected by U.S. Mother Lives in Orphanage

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/08/27/when-russian-children-are-allowed-to-die-a17314