

# A MODEL ASSESSMENT OF AN EMIGRE FAMILY FROM THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

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*The assessment of an emigre family from the former Soviet Union must be multifaceted, including political, socioeconomic, and cultural factors. A purely psychological approach, which describes emigre behaviors as pathological in contrast to American norms, yields a biased assessment. This article presents the many factors, operating on both the macro and micro levels, that must be included in a comprehensive assessment.*

Since 1970, when the third wave of immigrants from the Soviet Union began to arrive, encounters between them and resettlement agency workers have been marked by mutual disillusionment. Immigrants have been described in the social work literature and at professional conferences as overly demanding and aggressive, as using manipulative behavior for getting their needs met, and as being resistant to accepting the American way of providing help. Social work practitioners have described emigre families mostly in terms of the difficulties in working with them and in an ethnocentric way, viewing them in terms of psychopathology compared to the Western norm. For example, emigre families have been described as characterized by "family enmeshment and lack of autonomous functioning accompanied by incomplete object constancy and difficulty in managing ambivalent feelings" (Hulewat, 1981, p. 153).

The body of literature on the adaptation of Soviet refugees that has been created by emigre mental health practitioners, such as Goldstein (1984), Segal (1993), Galperin (1991), and Belozersky (1989), provides a much more complex, multifaceted perspective on adaptation. Rather than focusing solely on the psychological aspects of emigration or on "pathological" behaviors as seen by some American-born practitioners, it integrates political, socioeconomic, cultural, and other factors into an assessment. Some of the emigre authors, while describ-

ing their work with Russian clients, offer insights into their own parallel adaptation dynamics, as expressed for example in their reactions to those clients.

A multifaceted approach allows one to assess an emigre family system and describe where it fits on the enmeshment-disengagement continuum. A typical Russian Jewish family is enmeshed in contrast to the more disengaged American Jewish family. Yet, both types of families can be described as pathological if seen through the prism of the other culture. In fact, both family lifestyles can be highly maladaptive or highly adaptive depending on the political regime in which they live.

This article presents a multifaceted approach to assessing an emigre family that includes the following factors moving from the macro (societal) to micro (individual) levels:

- Impact of the Soviet totalitarian regime: the phenomenon of *Homo Sovieticus* as described by Goldstein (1984) and the impact of perestroika and subsequent changes in Soviet society on the family
- Geographic, ethnic, cultural, class, educational, and religious characteristics of different groups among the emigres, such as Baltic Jews, Bukharian Jews, and emigres from Moscow and Leningrad
- Impact of migration itself: the three stages of migration, different waves of emigration and the impact of migration on immigrants of the third and fourth

waves (Drachman & Halberstadt, 1993), stages of adaptation and different theories of adaptation (Goldstein, 1972; Segal, 1983), issues of loss and mourning (Yaglom, 1994)

- Differences in family structure between a typical American family and a typical emigre family (Hulewat, 1981; Slapentoch, 1984); intergenerational conflicts, structure of a Bukharian family
- Gender roles in different cultural groups: American and Soviet feminist issues (Lissyutkina, 1994), role reversals
- Developmental issues: More vulnerable groups such as perigeriatric and geriatric populations, adolescents, boundary issues within the family system, and the developmental family life cycle (Rhodes, 1977)
- Individual history, including the genetic and psychiatric history: impact of the Soviet mental health care system and its differences from the Western system, impact of the loss of status, and issues of adaptation, loss, and mourning for the individual (Yaglom, 1994)

#### IMPACT OF THE SOVIET TOTALITARIAN REGIME

The dissident Russian philosopher, A. Zinovyiev, first used the term "Homo Sovieticus" to describe the assumptions and values of a group of people who grew up under the Soviet regime. Edgar Goldstein (1984) has further defined this pseudo-species as a

compound identity that actually represents the collective idealized image, which to a great extent, has become internalized by the individual and which is represented intrapsychically as shared assumptions and values and, interpersonally, as a feeling of belonging to Soviet society. It is a state of mind, a sociopsychological entity developed on the basis of a different ethnic identity (p. 120).

Seventy years of political repression created

the psychological and behavioral patterns needed to survive in a pervasively hostile, anti-Semitic Soviet society. However, some of these strategies and patterns, which are described below, are maladaptive to their new lives in America.

- *Ambivalence toward Authority*: The paternalistic quality of Soviet society, its oppressiveness and intrusiveness, encouraged dependency and compliance and discouraged personal responsibility. Thus, Homo Sovieticus is both hostile to and dependent on authority, and "adaptation to freedom" becomes a major problem for emigres (Goldstein, 1984).

Post-perestroika Russian society seems to be split along the seams: part still values the cradle-to-grave security and sense of belonging of the old Soviet society while the other part is acting out a long-suppressed quest for freedom. This split is seen in the families of newly arrived emigres as interfamily and intergenerational conflicts—often between parents who still idealize the stability and order of the Brezhnev era and their children, disillusioned and confused but very much aware of their new freedom to choose the fast way to make money, legally or illegally, and to live the good life. Their heroes are Arnold Schwarzenegger and Steven Segal, rather than Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya or Pavel Korchagin, heroes of the October Revolution of 1917 and World War II.

- *Need to Belong*: For Homo Sovieticus, identity is tied closely to a collective ideal, which is represented intrapsychically by belonging to Soviet society. This sense of belonging is valued much more highly than the individual freedom or autonomy so important to Americans.

The need to belong that was fostered by the Soviet system for seventy years continues to motivate Homo Sovieticus either to look for the fulfillment of this need elsewhere—explaining why many

former Communists are joining nationalist groups or coalitions of pro-Communist and nationalist groups—or to reject the old system altogether.

- *Narcissism*: Soviet society, with its rigid hierarchical structure, was unable to provide its citizens with emotional support but rather stimulated their ambition, demands, and an almost pathological desire to succeed. Identity was closely tied to one's status in society (Belozersky, 1989). The narcissism of *Homo Sovieticus* is caused by feelings of insecurity and inadequacy and manifests itself in a constant seeking of admiration (Segal, 1983) and a sense of entitlement (Belozersky, 1989). The immigrant community is full of former company directors and famous writers and scientists, since the loss of status stimulates over-compensation by exaggeration of past accomplishments.

In post-perestroika Russia, most of the middle-aged former Soviet bureaucrats and Communist leaders who had joined the ranks of the Party for purely economic, not ideological reasons, and were motivated to succeed at all costs, have successfully transformed themselves into a new generation of business people and technocrats, without too many psychological difficulties.

- *Highly Conflicted Sense of Jewish Identity*: In the Soviet Union, Jewishness was a nationality, not a religion, and as such it was stamped in the internal passport, identifying its holder as a member of a persecuted minority, regardless of his or her religious beliefs or lack of them. "Assimilated but not fully integrated into the Soviet society, emigres have a conflicted, neurotic sense of identification with their Jewishness, based on feelings of inferiority, as well as exclusivity" (Goldstein, 1984, p. 123). The quest for a positive Jewish identity linked with a sense of belonging, as opposed to a negative identity as a member of a persecuted group, is one of the dy-

namic forces for emigration for many Jews.

The growth of anti-Semitism and of nationalist organizations in the former Soviet Union has motivated the emigration of many Jews from Central Asian republics, where they had lived relatively peacefully among Muslims until the last few years. Bukharan Jews, who had for the most part preserved the Jewish tradition and had a positive Jewish identity, for the first time in many years, experienced anti-Jewish hostility in many forms, including pogroms. The growth of anti-Jewish feeling has motivated many who used to be fearful of emigration or were more or less adapted comfortably to the Soviet system to leave without any positive personal motivation, such as a quest for personal, religious, professional, or artistic freedom.

#### **Impact of Perestroika on *Homo Sovieticus***

The massive political and economic changes since the breakup of the Soviet Union necessitate that its citizens adapt to the lack of stability and predictability in the new system and to their new freedom of choice. For example, a scientist who for twenty years worked at the same research institute now has to choose whether to conform to the new capitalist ways of asserting himself—by joining a commercial cooperative of scientists or creating a new company or even using his own car to offer rides to people to work and back for a fee—or simply, as the Russians say, die of hunger.

Many of the most recent emigres have no positive motivation to leave, but are emigrating to escape political and economic chaos. They are coming here to save their children or grandchildren from pogroms, from service in the army, from Chernobyl, and from crime and corruption. One emigre woman confided that her main motive for emigration with her husband, an ethnic Russian, and family was to save her son from going to prison or being murdered. Her son, a professional athlete, was em-

ployed as a bodyguard to a black market dealer, and his mother sensed that he was becoming more and more involved in a dangerous way of life that allowed him to throw away money in nightclubs and on call girls.

One effect of the chaos in political and economic systems is a rejection of Marxist materialism and an enormous interest in anything spiritual, including various cults, astrology, psychic healing, and traditional religion. Therefore, many emigres who have arrived within the last five years may have seen a psychotherapist or more likely, a psychic or some kind of healer in Russia. The quality and availability of health care services have deteriorated so badly in recent years that most people have sought alternative medical practitioners and self-proclaimed healers.

## IMPACT OF MIGRATION ITSELF

### Conceptual Framework

The framework underlying this discussion posits three stages of migration—pre-migration or departure, transit, and resettlement.

Russian emigres have come in four waves: the first between the October Revolution of 1917 and ending in the 1920s, the second during and after World War II, the third in the 1970s and early 1980s, and the fourth occurring post-perestroika in the late 1980s and early 1990s. There is a gap of almost a decade between the third and fourth waves.

### Differences between the Third and Fourth Waves of Emigres

#### *Pre-Migration Phase*

For emigres in the third wave, this phase of departure was very traumatic. First, it included a long wait for an exit visa, which was a byproduct of the Soviet view that emigration was equivalent to a betrayal of one's country. Second, many who applied for an exit visa lost their jobs and were expelled from the Communist party and from Com-

somol, the Communist youth organization with compulsory membership for those between the ages of 14 and 28. After expulsion, former co-workers and fellow students harassed, humiliated, and vilified those seeking to leave. In addition, consent from both parents was required before permission to leave could be granted, regardless of the age of the individuals or their relationship with their parents. When parents granted consent, they were also viewed as traitors and subject to harassment. Some would refuse consent because of the threat it posed to their own lives, thereby rupturing their relationship with their children.

Prior to perestroika, emigres were not allowed to return to the Soviet Union. Thus, their departure represented a major loss—the end of contact with family and friends. In addition, they had the burden of continued concern that their decision to emigrate would jeopardize further the welfare of relatives left behind.

The recent political changes have greatly altered emigration policies and thus the pre-migration experience of the fourth wave. Emigres are now permitted to return to visit family and friends, and family in the former Soviet Union are permitted to travel to visit them in their new homes. Thus, the degree of loss for the new arrivals has been mitigated. In addition, many exit visas are approved quickly, and the consequences of leaving are less severe.

There are practically no refuseniks among the most recent arrivals. Instead, a large percentage have come from the former Central Asian republics, fleeing political chaos and war. Many made their decision to leave abruptly, without any preparation, and have only negative motivations—to escape war, crime, and growing anti-Semitism.

Although under perestroika, there are no official consequences for making the decision to leave, many of the new emigres have been the victims of violent crimes that were directed at them once their intention to emigrate became public. In one family, both

parents were killed by someone who wanted their apartment without having to buy it; the grandfather and teenaged grandchildren subsequently emigrated. Another man lost his wife during a robbery, and many have been harassed, threatened, and even tortured by criminals trying to extort their savings.

The impact of these pre-migration experiences will be felt during the initial phase of resettlement in this country, as illustrated by the following case examples. A 57-year-old teacher from Georgia was buried by debris during a bombing in her country's civil war and was rescued after lying for more than an hour unconscious under the rubble. When seen by a mental health clinic here, she suffered from a post-traumatic stress disorder and was worried greatly about her daughter who, with her husband, a high-ranking military officer of the Russian Army, was in another hot spot, the Caucasus. This woman hoped that by emigrating to the United States and reuniting with her sisters she would encourage her daughter and grandchildren to leave, even though her son-in-law would not give up his position and status in the military for an unpredictable future in the West.

Another case involves a mother and daughter who escaped from the unrest of Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan. They spent over two years wandering in Moscow from one friend or acquaintance to another while waiting for exit visas. Lacking a permit to live in Moscow, they were unable to find jobs and so were totally at the mercy of their friends. This traumatic period affected the daughter's self-esteem and strained her relationship with her mother, who also was depressed and traumatized.

#### *Transit Phase*

The transit experiences of Soviet emigres in the third wave were generally positive. After leaving the Soviet Union, they went to Italy while waiting for their papers to be processed for final relocation. Despite scarce funds and tight quarters, many emi-

gres recall their time in Italy with nostalgia. The transit stage was a "Roman vacation" enlivened by a first taste of freedom.

Some emigres, however, had much less pleasant experiences. Some extended families who arrived together in Rome were separated there, provoking severe psychopathology in one or more family members. In several cases, emigres required psychiatric hospitalization for depression either in Italy or upon arrival in the United States.

Emigres in the fourth wave come directly to the United States from Moscow. There is thus no transition period, and often their arrival in the United States is their first encounter with the West.

#### *Resettlement*

The resettlement phase has been described extensively in the literature. Many authors describe different stages of adaptation lasting anywhere from three to five and even ten years (Segal, 1983; Stein et al., 1986). Yet, adaptation is a lifelong process in which individual and family life cycles are shifted and family dynamics change.

One of the frequently described phenomena in adaptation is the loss of professional status experienced by emigres. Clinical experience suggests that men are more often unable to deal with this loss of status, have difficulty accepting and working in lower-status jobs, and are more prone to depression resulting from the loss of professional status. One of the explanations for this differential impact on men is the multiplicity of roles that women play in Soviet society, in contrast to men whose status is determined almost solely by their occupation and financial success. Because female emigres retain their domestic roles and status during the resettlement phase, they prove to be more flexible in assuming different professional roles, are more likely to learn English, and find employment more readily than their spouses. Marital conflicts, as well as role reversals in which adolescent children who adapt very quickly to American culture take on parental roles, occur fre-

quently during the resettlement phase.

Generally, in comparison to third-wave emigres, members of the fourth wave are older, are concentrated more in blue-collar jobs, and have less English-language proficiency than their predecessors. They therefore are more likely to need prolonged government support or job training. In addition, many have chronic medical or mental problems that require immediate attention either because they have been diagnosed properly for the first time or they were not receiving adequate health care because of the poor quality or lack of medical care in the former Soviet Union. Some in fact had postponed surgery or other procedures until after emigration because they did not trust the quality of medical care in their homeland.

Many new emigres have unrealistic expectations, based on the advice of friends and relatives who preceded them, of what help they will receive from the Jewish community. Some experience a conflict between models of adjustment recommended by the resettlement agency and those valued by the emigre community. For example, rather than taking a low-level job that does not require proficiency in English, many would prefer to stay on public assistance, thereby retaining health care benefits, and taking an "off the books" dead-end job.

#### Issues of Loss and Mourning

Emigration inevitably brings with it losses—of valued possessions, careers, places of emotional significance, and family and friends. Successful adaptation requires coming to terms with these losses.

As mentioned above, professional status demotion is found by many to be the most distressing aspect of the resettlement experience. Learning a new language emerges as the second priority for successful resettlement. In addition to these concrete losses, emigres often feel that they "had little choice or control over a variety of matters that were important to them; they felt like second-class citizens, suffered insults based

on their ethnic identity, and had no choice but to accept American customs" (Aroian, 1990, p. 8).

Feeling at home, defined as a positive affective state of psychological comfort derived from feeling at ease, familiar, and included in a social structure, as well as a resolution of grief over leaving one's homeland, are also crucial for successfully mastering resettlement tasks.

Among adjustment problems of Soviet emigres, Miriam Yaglom describes psychosomatic illnesses, depression, and paranoid and antisocial behavior (1994). Mourning their losses, which is necessary for successful resettlement, is difficult for emigres.

#### FAMILY STRUCTURE

In contrast to American concepts of nuclear and extended families, a typical Russian family is made up of three generations who either live together or are very closely involved with each other; parents remain financially and emotionally dependent on their families of origin well into their thirties or forties. These close relationships served to protect family members from the pervasively hostile Soviet society; for Jewish families, mutual dependency and trust were necessary conditions for survival in the anti-Semitic environment. In fact, within Soviet society, Jewish families were noted for their cohesion, which was due to the special role that grandparents played in the family (Mirsky & Prawer, 1991).

Grandparents' active and meaningful role in supporting their adult children and taking care of their grandchildren had some negative consequences, however. Their involvement in the married couples' life often gave rise to marital conflict, power struggles over financial issues, and tensions about child-rearing techniques.

The family structure of Bukharan Jews, which is similar to that of Iranian or Syrian Jews with its tradition of arranged marriages and fixed gender roles, is described in more detail in another article in this *Journal*.

## GENDER ROLES

### Marital Relationships

Over the past sixty years, several conceptions of marriage held sway in the Soviet Union. According to Vladimir Shlapentoch (1984), "We entered the 1930s with a romantic model of a marriage as an ideal and a norm—marriage forever on the basis of romantic love. The pillars of Marxism affirmed that marriage without love was immoral, and the state itself was interested in stable marriages."

In the 1950s, when the Soviet people began to realize that such a romantic conception was unviable, pragmatic sociologists created a new model of marriage. "In this model, in essence they declare war on love as an inappropriate basis for marriage, and seek it in social and cultural affinity plus children. The sociologist Kharchev even provides calculations, showing that love lasts on the average of four years, two months and twelve days" (Shlapentoch, 1984).

This model also had its shortcomings, leaving insufficient room for the role of love, passion, and sex. In the 1960s and 1970s a model of "tolerant marriage" evolved in juxtaposition to the semi-official conception of marriage. In this new model, love coexists with marriage. However, this type of marriage has special rules: "The spouses thoroughly conceal their emotional lives from one another, and if the information nevertheless gets through, they pretend not to know it" (Shlapentoch, 1984).

Soviet marriage and divorce procedures are very easy compared to those in the West so there is no need "to give special thoughts before marriage, nor any deterrents to divorce" (Mirsky & Prawer, 1991, p. 25).

For these reasons, marriage is a less significant institution in the Soviet Union than in America, and friendship plays a more important role as a source of intimacy and an anchor of morality. Despite the tradition of intense homophobia in the Soviet Union, men and women more readily form intense

and intimate relationships with friends of the same sex than with their spouses. "In general, spouses in Russia belong to an oppressed and despised minority. To deceive a spouse, to betray him or her is no more immoral than to swipe something from work. But one must never, under any circumstances, abuse friends" (Goldstein, 1984).

### Women's Roles

Although 92 percent of women are fully employed in the former Soviet Union, inequality prevails in all spheres of life. Francine du Plessix Gray, in her book, *Soviet Women*, reports that "in the past decade, the average female worker, although she was slightly better educated than her male counterpart, earned only two-thirds of the average male income—a disproportion of wages similar to that of the last pre-revolutionary years" (1994). In addition, there is a great disparity between women's arduous schedules and the relative freedom of Soviet men. The average working mother spends about forty hours weekly on domestic tasks, in contrast to men's less than five hours.

As a result, even though traditionally the Russian family was patriarchal, under Soviet society, the mother was the most significant parental figure; she ran the household, took care of the family, and assumed masculine roles both within and outside the family. According to Mirsky and Prawer (1991),

True, the husband, who retained his function as breadwinner, was expected to earn more than his wife or be considered "unsuccessful." However, he usually handed his wages over to his wife. Thus he jettisons his responsibilities of maintaining the family; the wife's control of the family budget magnified her power and responsibility within the family unit. Furthermore, even though the husband was the main breadwinner, the wife took over the masculine role of "hunter." It was she who queued up for the commodities

needed to feed the family and in the conditions of Soviet life "hunter" is by no means figurative (p. 14).

Because of the scarcity of men that has prevailed in the Soviet Union since World War II, the competition for marriage partners leads to the disappearance of loyal friendships among women. A divorced woman becomes a threat to her married friends, and the life of a single woman, especially a single mother, is extremely difficult because of her financial instability, the low status of single women, and the lack of support for the single lifestyle. Although the number of dating services and marriage bureaus is growing in the former Soviet Union, most single women are too overburdened and poor to even think of pursuing a partner. More often, they become prey to married men or consciously seek married men who can offer them some support and companionship.

The goals and priorities of the feminist movement in the former Soviet Union differ greatly from those of American feminists, as noted by Lissyutkina (1994).

*First:* Emancipation for Soviet women is not based upon a demand to work. On the contrary, liberation is perceived by many as the right not to work.

*Second:* Soviet women's ardent desire for consumer goods conflicts with progressive women's criticism of Western consumerism. For Soviet women, the ability to freely select and consume without restrictive provisions has an indisputable value.

*Third:* Soviet women cannot share the hostility of their Western sisters to the ritualized relationships between men and women. Such gestures as men kissing a woman's hand, and other ways of emphasizing a woman's weakness, represent a return to feudal chivalrous culture that is enthusiastically received by Soviet women.

*Fourth:* Feminism provokes a negative reaction among the majority of Soviet women. As a rule, they do not want to commit themselves to feminism.

*Fifth:* The women's movement in the

former Soviet Union does not have to fight for free abortion, a common goal in the West. It is, perhaps, the single way in which "socialism" outdid Western democratic society.

*Sixth:* There is no unanimity about the problem of quotas in elected political offices. Not one of the female deputies in the new legislature demanded a quota for women.

## DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES

### Individual and Family Developmental Issues

Emigre families that have already accomplished the initial tasks of adaptation, such as learning a new language and finding a job, continue their adjustment to family life in a new country and culture. They must deal with intergenerational difficulties exacerbated by the internal and external differences between the old and new culture. For example, in the M. family, Mrs. M. is in therapy because of the profound depression she developed as a reaction to her mother's death. In addition her only child, Liza, is planning to start college in the fall. Liza, who has Americanized faster than her parents, is rebelling against their overprotective and intrusive behavior. She would like to move out of the family home and rent an apartment with a friend as soon as her studies begin. Mrs. M., who was very close to her mother throughout her life and was expecting Liza to be her "friend" and to continue the tradition of a very intimate mother-daughter relationship, sees Liza's desire for greater separation and autonomy as an extreme threat to their loving family style. She perceives Liza's demands for privacy as expressions of coldness and detachment. Psychoeducational aspects of therapy, such as discussions of different family life cycles in American and Russian families, have been extremely helpful in enabling Liza to achieve a greater degree of autonomy without her parents feeling abandoned.



### Adolescents

The developmental task of adolescence—identity formation—is never easy. For any adolescent, this process involves the working through of the conflict between identification with parents and identification with peers. This conflict is especially acute in emigre youngsters, given the wide gap between the parents' Soviet-formed values and those of the American teenage subculture. Yet, many adolescents feel increased guilt about separating from their parents who had experienced the extreme stresses of emigration (Mastyayeva, 1994). One indication of this conflict is the positive correlation between the parents' emphasis on intellectual-cultural pursuits and the adolescents' self-reported levels of psychopathology, which was found in a study by Galperin (1991).

The process of forming a positive Jewish identity is also very complicated. According to Mastyayeva, "the combined effects of state-sponsored atheism and the pragmatic necessity of 'bending the rules' may explain the very low levels of Soviet Jewish emigre families' emphasis on religious, ethical, and moral issues" (1994, p. 31).

Certain problem areas arose consistently in the groups of Soviet emigre adolescents led by this author in New York high schools in the 1980s.

- They experienced a stronger sense of isolation and separation as compared to their peers from different ethnic backgrounds and a feeling of separation from their American-born peers
- Adolescents identified with their parents' values in such important areas as politics, education, and marriage. They also adopted their parents' view of Americans as cold, materialistic, unfeeling, and "primitive." Some expressed criticism of American families as being detached and distant in contrast to the warmth and closeness of their homes. Like their parents, they were skeptical of Americans who, while married, had separate bank

accounts, and they disapproved of the practice of unmarried couples living together.

- Intergenerational conflict was exacerbated because the adolescents had become much more fluent in English and superficially had adopted many of the indicia of American culture more rapidly than their parents. Many group members reported that their parents were extremely overprotective and fearful of the bad influence of American freedom on their children. Yet, despite this infantilization, they were also called on to serve as interpreters and mediators with the outside world for both parents and grandparents, an example of role reversal.
- Confusion over the discrepancy between American and Russian values was expressed in increased anxiety, depression, and a variety of asocial activities, such as truancy. The female adolescents, who comprised 80 percent of the group members, were uninvolved with their studies, and a surprisingly high percentage were dropping out of school to marry. "Perhaps their concentration on Russian nightclubs and discos represents both a reaction to the traditional Russian and Jewish emphasis on scholastic achievement and a species of Americanization" (Halberstadt & Mandel, 1989, p. 41).

### The Elderly

Among Soviet emigres, the elderly are particularly vulnerable during the resettlement period for a variety of reasons. The fact that they had spent most of their lives in a paternalistic and totalitarian society that encouraged compliance and discouraged personal responsibility makes their adaptation to freedom much more difficult than for younger people. Many only became disillusioned with Communist ideology in the last five to ten years, during the era of perestroika. Some among them miss the cradle-to-grave security of the Communist state and are frightened by choice and the loosen-

ing of morals brought about by change and freedom.

The elderly mourn the loss of both concrete and abstract representations of the culture they left behind. The loss of culture is experienced as personal impoverishment. For instance, "culture for a literature teacher from Moscow means Russian poetry, concerts at the Moscow Conservatory, and the Bolshoi Ballet" (Halberstadt, 1994, p. 7).

Loss of professional status and financial security is a major cause of depression in the Russian elderly, particularly the men. It is especially painful for the elderly since the chances of their mastering English and finding comparable employment to their position in the former Soviet Union are almost nonexistent. For many recent emigres, their motivation to leave their comfortable lives was negative—because of their children and grandchildren.

On arrival in the United States, many families that lived together in the former Soviet Union seek to separate, and many elderly often find themselves no longer needed. The very children and grandchildren for whom they emigrated are too busy mastering the tasks of their own adaptation to spend time with the grandparents. As grandchildren become more and more Americanized, they often reject their mother tongue and no longer enjoy their grandparents' cooking or company. Many elderly become very depressed as their family members abruptly move toward separation.

Those elderly who had retained a strong Jewish identity find some gratification in their new homes as they are able to practice Judaism freely. They are also able to communicate in Yiddish with older American Jews. However, the older people who embraced Communist ideology in the past are often twice disappointed and disillusioned—they experienced the collapse of Communism and they find themselves unable to embrace Judaism because they had, unconsciously or consciously, rejected their

Jewish heritage when they were younger.

#### INDIVIDUAL HISTORIES, INCLUDING MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Expectations of emigres with histories of psychiatric outpatient treatment in the FSU are based on their experiences with mental health treatment in their homeland and are quite different from the expectations of American-born clients.

The biomedical model, in which drugs, hospitalization, and even surgery are the major interventions in treating mental disorders, is still prevalent in the FSU. Even though in the post-perestroika era psychotherapy and various nontraditional treatments have become more popular in the large cities, many emigre clients still seek medication for their problems and are very skeptical about the value of talk therapy. Many of the chronically ill expect prolonged hospitalizations for depression and injections to calm them during panic attacks.

Parents of children with learning disabilities and emotional problems are often resistant to the recommendations of schools to have their children undergo educational evaluations. They recall the poorly staffed residential schools for emotionally disturbed and developmental disabled children in the FSU and express their anxiety about their children "getting locked up with the really crazy kids" and their fear of the stigma of mental illness in the community.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

In organizing the assessment of an emigre family, questions should be asked about the following issues:

- *Family Background:* Republic and city of birth and place from which the family emigrated; languages spoken in the family; number of extended family members living together with the nuclear family; education and professional background
- *Emigration, Departure, and Transit Pro-*

cess: On whose initiative and for what reasons did the family emigrate; who in the family agreed with this decision and who did not; who left and who stayed behind; who are the receiving relatives and how supportive have they been in the process; did any traumatic events occur before or during departure; if the family came from a republic that is in a state of war—Central Asia, Moldova, the Caucasus—what was their experience and were there any recent anti-Semitic incidents

- *Resettlement*: Experiences during initial resettlement; how they see their future in terms of employment; whether they are studying English or engaging in job training; how they are coping with the multiple losses of occupational status, language, culture, homeland, and relationships with friends and relatives who have not emigrated
- *Family System*: Atmosphere, mood, and tone of the family; intergenerational relationships; internal and external boundaries; who is the leader in the nuclear family; how decisions are made and conflicts about finances, chores, and child rearing resolved; communication and sexual relationship in the marital dyad; presence of wife battering or child abuse; alliances within the family, particularly mother-son and mother-daughter; what the family sees as its current problems; their support system in the United States; what the family's connections are with their extended family, fellow immigrants from their town of departure, and the American Jewish community

### CONCLUSION

An assessment that takes into consideration such factors as the political and economic climate in both the receiving and sending countries; differences in political and societal structures; cultural, geographic, ethnic, linguistic, and religious characteristics of immigrant populations; family structure; and gender roles offers the advantages of a

multifaceted approach. In contrast, a purely psychological approach, which describes immigrant behaviors during the initial stages of resettlement through such widely used approaches as systems theory or the object relations approach, usually yields a very biased, one-sided assessment. For example, describing the emigre as an infant attempting to separate from its mother yields a metaphor that does not take into account the complex reality of immigration. In addition, attempts to compare Russian and American societies in purely psychological or cultural terms are difficult and the results superficial. The former Soviet Union is a multicultural, multilingual society with a variety of cultural and religious traditions, as is the United States. Therefore, comparisons of so-called Russian and American cultural norms and values are not very fruitful. For these reasons, a multifaceted approach to assessment is essential.

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