

Part I



Research report and analysis

“Addressing the needs of children in crisis: single, teen-age mothers in the Russian Federation”

prepared for

CHILDHOOD
World Childhood Foundation

By MiraMed Institute
Moscow, Russia

March, 2002

Staff writers and researchers:

Juliette Engel, MD, MiraMed Institute
Robert Aronson, MiraMed Institute
Julie Pedersen, MiraMed Institute
Natalia Navikova, MiraMed Institute
Eric Batsie, MiraMed Institute
Marina Pavadzinskaya, World Bank, Russia Country Unit
Nadezhda Belik, “House of Culture,” Nizhni Novgorod
Margarita Korkina, “Lada,” Nizhni Novgorod
Galina Volkhova, “House of Dignity,” St. Petersburg
Marianna Vronskaya, “Goluba,” Moscow
Yulia Shevelya, Attorney for MiraMed Institute, Moscow

SINGLE TEENAGE MOTHERHOOD IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

NARRATIVE AND STATISTICAL REVIEW:

One-third of all Russian babies currently born to unwed mothers

According to research conducted at the Center for Demography and Human Ecology at the Russian Academy of Sciences and published in the November 2001 issue of *Demoscope*, one-third of all babies born in Russia last year were born to unwed mothers. This is double the percentage of a decade earlier and at a level not seen since World War II.

More than 40 percent of these babies were born to women under 21 years of age. The number of births to unmarried teenagers, ages 15-19, grew more rapidly than any other age group - from 55,695 in 1990 to 66,859 in 2000, a percentage leap from 20 percent to 41 percent.

Concurrently, the number of births to married women dropped from 1.87 million in 1989 to 912,500 in 2000, while the number of births to unmarried women increased from 291,700 to 354,300 -- an increase from 13 percent to 28 percent. The teenage population also grew proportionately during the decade as did the number of institutionalized teenagers -- either abandoned, taken from their homes by state agencies or orphaned -- living in orphanages and internats.

According to researchers at the Center, there is a serious paucity of information about the young women who comprise the growing population of young, unwed mothers in Russia. Little is known about their education or economic levels, how many live with the fathers of their children or with their families or what their possibilities are for supporting themselves and their children.

Because the vast majority of unwed mothers do not seek prenatal care (only 20% of pregnant women in Russia have access to prenatal care of any kind), the only statistics available on pregnancies and births are those obtained from the birth records of district hospitals. These statistics do not indicate whether an unwed mother is from an orphanage or lives in a home environment. Nor is there any indication of education level or employment.

According to N. Istomina of the State Statistical Committee of Moscow, the "surrender" rate of newborn infants by single, under aged or orphaned mothers in birth houses is "not recorded". When an under aged mother enters a birth house, she is given a state appointed "guardian". If she decides to give up her baby, the guardian writes a surrender claim shortly after the birth without indicating the mother's age or marital status. All statistics are maintained in the name of the guardian.

Russia's declining birth rate

Simultaneous to the rapid growth in the percentage of single, teenaged mothers, the birthrate in Russia continues its steep decline, with deaths exceeding births by almost two to one. On average, only 1,200,000 babies were born each year over the past five

years, while, to maintain the normal reproduction of the population, the country needs a minimum of 2,000,000 babies every year, according to ITAR-TASS Statistical Department.

Infertility caused by abortion, which remains the most common form of birth control in Russia, exacerbates the decline. According to sources in the Institute of Gynaecology, Perinatology and Maternity, 2.3 million abortions are registered in Russia every year – exceeding the abortion rate in any other industrialized nation. Complications from un-sterile abortions leave ten percent of women infertile from pelvic inflammatory disease. The average Russian woman has between 7 and 11 abortions during the course of her lifetime. Performed without anesthesia in crowded clinics at a rate of one abortion every eleven minutes, women and girls live in terror of the abortion clinics. Many single women carry pregnancies to term merely because of their fear of abortion.

No official statistics are kept on the number or fate of girls becoming pregnant in orphanages. However, interviews with several orphanage directors indicate that this is an ongoing problem in the poorly supervised co-educational institutions and that girls becoming pregnant are forced to have abortions by the state, their official “guardian” and that no records are kept of how many abortions are done. At the same time, there are no officially recognized programs of sex education being offered in orphanages or internats. Researchers spoke to several orphanage directors who indicated that they regularly dispense condoms but do not provide education on their use.

Finally, Russia still has the highest infant *and* maternal mortality rate in Europe and is plagued with a system of health care that remains archaic and under-funded. Young adults who could become mothers and fathers are dying at an alarming rate—the murder rate has doubled for the 14-20 year old age group and the highest percentage increase in the death rate over the past three years is among young adults

Impact of international sexual trafficking on women of childbearing age

In the past five years yet another predator has come to threaten the well being of young women and girls from Russia. According to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United States State Department, over 500,000 women and girls from the former Soviet Union, mainly from the Russian Federation, have been enticed by international organized criminal groups into seeking legitimate seeming work overseas only to be forced into sexual slavery as prostitutes in over 50 receiving countries – including the United States. Each year, as the economy of the NIS countries continues to decline, tens of thousands of new victims are falling prey to traffickers.

The impact of sexual trafficking is most severe in rural and economically depressed regions. As economic and educational opportunities for women worsen, they are easy targets for traffickers posing as legitimate businesses offering lucrative work abroad. At the current time, Russia has no enforceable laws relating to the trade in human beings. Traffickers cannot be prosecuted. They are free to operate without fear. It is the experience of MiraMed Institute and other NGO's working in Russia on this issue that orphanage girls are prime targets of international traffickers.

When trafficked women become pregnant while working in forced prostitution in Europe, according to *Medicins sans Frontiers*, they are forced to abort, killed or returned to Russia where no statistics are kept on them following their return. Of 20 victims returning to the City of Kazan, the organization "Women of Tartarstan" reports that 15 were from regional orphanages and that ten of those were pregnant. Of those ten, three tested positive for HIV.

A legacy of neglect by the Russian government

The Russian government has chronically ignored the crisis in its population in spite of the fact that reports of the decline in population, growing numbers of abandoned children, teenaged pregnancies and the poor health of Russian children in general were appearing in the Russian press as early as 1991. Until 2001, however, this issue was not addressed at a federal level. However, in response to the recent Civic Forum held in November, 2001, when thousands of NGO's from across Russia met in the Kremlin to demand a federal response to this crisis, Vladimir Putin has publicly placed the condition of Russian children as a "national catastrophe and social priority #1."

Illustrative of the sudden urgency of the federal government's reaction was the recent "Parliamentary Hour" broadcast from the State Duma on 26th December, 2001, which focused on the necessity of government to "protect children and address declining population...". During that broadcast, Member of Parliament Vera Lekareva stated, "I am convinced that State Duma deputies will agree with me that children's health can actually be proclaimed a national disaster. If we do not take emergency measures now to save our children we will be losing the nation's gene pool 10-15 years from now and this will undermine the country's survival capacity."

According to Lekareva, one-third out of all of the 35 million Russian children are undergoing treatment for chronic disease, 250,000 are living in State run institutions, three million are living on the streets and 120,000 children under the age of 18 have been sentenced to prison and are serving time in jail. "Criminals, sexual predators and drug dealers have opened an insolent and merciless hunt on our children," she concluded.

The crisis is worsening

According to Russian State Prosecutor General, Vladimir Ustinov, during parliamentary hearings on February 13, 2002 devoted to the problem of Russia's runaway, homeless and abandoned children, Russian police took in more than 1.1 million minors for questioning last year, 310,000 aged 12 or under, including 1,600 who were subsequently accused of murder. Some 185,000 of the children were arrested for crimes and misdemeanours, including 14,800 for theft, 6,000 for armed robbery, and 3,000 for grievous bodily harm. Around 45,000 of them were illiterate.

He further indicated approximately 300,000 children were found during January 2002 living in railway stations, at airports, and in the cellars of buildings. Ustinov called urgently for greater coordination between social ministries and law enforcement agencies.

Although ten percent of its children are homeless, three percent live in archaic institutions as wards of the State, and one third of births in a nation with a seriously declining population are to unwed mothers, the Russian government has failed to respond to such overwhelming evidence of social catastrophe.

Why the Russian government has failed to respond

The root causes of this institutionalized neglect can be found in the disruption of civil society following the collapse of Soviet communism with its archaic but functional federal social safety net. During the Communist era, the USSR relied entirely on government institutions to provide for civil society. The collapse of communism left an enormous void in the structure of the social safety net. State structures and committees that had maintained – however poorly – a system of support for the marginalized population including the poor, the elderly and children, vanished with Perestroika.

As government structures failed, there was no independent third sector of non-governmental organizations capable of filling the void by identifying societal crises and developing measures to alleviate them.

At the current time, there is a desperate paucity of structures, governmental or non-governmental, functioning to address social issues--let alone do anything about them.

Most Russian NGO's registered to do social programs exist only on paper

Tatyana Vasilieva, Deputy Mayor of Moscow and Chairman of the Committee on NGO's, states that of the 25,000 NGO's registered in Moscow and receiving Federal and/or City support, only 500 of them have demonstrable programs. The rest are being funded because of personal relationships to federal and city officials, or through some other personal connection.

Following the recent Civic Forum in Moscow, Russian President Vladimir Putin was highly critical of this failing system and his own ministers stating, "There are too many (child welfare) programs that produce no results. Either the programs are bad or the bureaucrats are useless." In fact, hundreds of thousands of workers in three ministries focus on child welfare producing hundreds of programs on paper that do not appear in practice.

While conducting this analysis, researchers also met with the Mayor's Committee on NGO's to look for registered Russian organizations working with single mothers and found that only five organizations were on the official list for Moscow. When we contacted and interviewed these organizations, all of them were collecting money for programs that existed only on paper.

Prosecutor General Vladimir Ustinov told parliament on February 13, 2002, "If we judge the spiritual and physical health of the nation by our youth, it will be no exaggeration to say the health of the nation is in danger," he told the State Duma lower house. "A barrage of statistics shows a system that is failing to protect children, and getting worse. Children are increasingly likely to become both criminals and victims of crimes," he said.

UNICEF Director, Carol Bellamy, following a study of 15 to 24-year-olds in former Soviet countries by the United Nations Children's Fund states: "We are concerned about the young people who are slipping through the cracks -- the ...street children, young prostitutes, teenage mothers....their numbers of growing." UNICEF in Russia, however, informs the researchers that it does not have any plans for programs assisting young single mothers in Russia for at least the next three years.

Russian government willingness to partner with but not to fund foreign organizations

Moscow, as the seat of government and the city with Russia's highest population, is under intense scrutiny to "do something" about the burgeoning population of abandoned and street children, teen-aged single pregnancies and the growth of drug addiction, alcoholism and crime among minors. To accomplish this, the Committee on NGO's has indicated that it must reach beyond the usual cadre of ineffective Russian organizations and encourage international partnerships. This is a new and innovative policy in Russia.

When MiraMed Independent Living and Social Adaption Center (MILSAC) Director Eric Batsie and Dr. Juliette Engel, Founding Director of MiraMed Institute, met with Special Consultant to the Mayor of Moscow, E. Litchnikokva, she indicated that the new "action plan" being developed by Mayor's office calls for any new funding provided by the Federal Government to be preferentially given to Russian organizations partnering with reputable and well-known international NGO's. These foreign NGO's must have demonstrated, successful programs already serving the target population – such as MiraMed Institute. This is the first time such a partnership has been proposed.

No funding will be available for non-Russian organizations, however.

REVIEW OF RESOURCES CURRENTLY AVAILABLE

The following federal committees are those primarily tasked with programs for youth and children in Russia. Researchers visited these and other agencies looking for existing programs and resources already in place. At the time of the meetings program plans for a single mothers project were discussed and input received by researchers. The cooperation of these three federal committees is necessary to successfully conduct a program for single mothers.

Federal level:

- 1) **Committee of Social Protection:** This city agency is tasked with assistance to single mothers, and orphanage graduates but does not currently support any programs for single mothers or orphanage graduates who are parents but has the authority to provide appropriate space for programs free of charge including kitchens and furnishings.
- 2) **Committee of Family Issues:** This city agency is tasked with the welfare of the Moscow family but does not have any programs for single/young mothers. According to this committee, the designation "**orphan** single

mother” does not exist -- just “single mother.” In this way, no statistics are kept which would indicate the percentage of single mothers who are from orphanages. This committee has the authority to start programs in orphanages and internats.

- 3) **Committee on Inter-Regional Relations:** A liaison committee between the City of Moscow and the Federal Government. This committee oversees the distribution of Federal funds to Russian NGO’s working in all fields and will be the funding source for Russian NGO’s working with MiraMed Institute on this project.

Non-governmental organizations: The following are examples of non-governmental organizations reviewed by the researchers and found to have operational programs ready to partner. This list is a meager one as most of the recommended programs did not actually deliver programs or services.

One of the first tasks of the program proposal will be to increase the search for appropriate Russian and international NGO partners while working closely with the three federal committees listed above.

Taganskii Childrens Foundation, Moscow (serving 530 one-parent families)

- 1) British NGO working in the Taganka district of Central Moscow
- 2) Works with mostly divorced women with children but also with some single mothers and widows
- 3) Provides humanitarian aid for mothers in their program -- food, clothes, and shoes for children provided by Russian companies.
- 4) Sponsors “clubs” for children of low-income single moms for a small fee.
- 5) Provide computer and other classes for children and mothers. The classes are taught by professionals and run all day so mothers and children can come when it’s convenient. The also have music, painting, choir, theater and concerts by the students, parties, tourist items like tents and skies. They organize trips like hiking in summer and skiing in the winter.
- 6) A psychologist hired by organization answers the phone and the phone is answered from 4-6 hours a day.

Piamo, Moscow (500 one-parent families)

Is basically the same as Taganski but in the east district

Goluba (orphans, single mothers who are orphans)

Provides a hotline staffed by a psychologist who is on the payroll. The hotline runs sporadically in the late afternoon through evening hours. Goluba does not currently does not work with any orphan single mothers but is receiving funding from the City of Moscow to run such a program. Although well recommended by the Moscow government, this program is well funded to do very little. It is only included on this list to illustrate the paucity of Russian resources as it was recommended as the leading provider of services.

Souchastie v sud’be (orphans, one parent families, single mothers)

Excellent Russian NGO supported by Eurasia Foundation which provides legal services for orphans including rights to housing, legal rights to state

stipends, handling abuse, etc. Already a longstanding partner of MiraMed Institute.

Lada

- 1) The young women's center "Lada" was created in Nizhni Novgorod in response to the startling increase in the number of births to girls under the age of 16 (1000 in the year 2001). The City Duma of Nizhni Novgorod identified teenage pregnancy as the #1 problem of young girls in their city. The #2 problem is international criminal sexual trafficking. In both instances, the primary at risk age group is girls 15 to 21 years of age.
- 2) The City Administration works closely with "Lada" by encouraging incentives to press publishing public information articles by "Lada".
- 3) "Lada" now has programs in 66% of schools in Nizhni Novgorod conducting two 45 minute classes per week.
- 4) Programs focus on building the self esteem of all girls and helping them define their roles in their families, schools and communities.

TARGET GROUP INTERVIEWS

Needs Assessment Results of Young Single Mothers

Over the course of the research period, 22 young single mothers were interviewed. The age range was 14-25 with 20 of those below 21 years of age. These young women were interviewed at MILSAC in Moscow and MILSAC/House of Dignity in St. Petersburg. All of those interviewed were orphanage graduates.

Education:

15 have completed secondary education
2 still in school 1 vocational and 1 secondary
1 completed vocational school

Employment:

4 are employed

Any education/profession you would like?

Seamstress
Psychology
Coach
Courtroom secretary
Hairdresser
Cook
Higher education
Artist sculptor
Lawyer
Decoration specialist
Theatrical profession
"Anything that would help me provide for my child and myself"

If you are not working or going to school and would like to,

what is preventing this?

- 9 stated it was because no one to care for child
- 2 stated because giving birth soon
- 1 had other family problems

Children:

- 15 have children 0-3
- 6 have children 4-7
- 4 are pregnant

note: one mother is pregnant and has 1 child; one mother has 3 children

Financial situation and where does the money come from?

- 8 receive single mother allowance 240 rubles month
- 5 receive single mother allowance 135 rubles month
- 5 No source of income
- 3 receive single mother allowance 70 rubles month

note: 31 rubles is \$1; allowances are \$2.50 to \$7.75

Place of Residence and is there any problems there?

- 3 have flats with no problems
- 3 state that they have flats but also a rent debt
- 3 in situation where they live in an overcrowded communal flat with other emancipated orphans
- 2 have a flat but problems with neighbors whom she claims are alcoholics
- 2 live with friends because of no money
- 2 live with friends because of problems getting a flat
- 2 live with friends but are expecting apartments in the near future
- 1 lost her Moscow apartment because she did not know her rights. MILSAC referred her to legal organization that is helping her restore her Moscow registration
- 1 lives out of Moscow because she lost her Moscow apartment through fraud
- 1 lives with friend out of Moscow because was convinced to sign over her apartment to then boyfriend who then sold it. Is currently in a living situation where she is regularly raped (which resulted in her pregnancy) and beaten but has nowhere else to go.
- 1 is homeless and has no place to live
- 1 lives in communal flat with step father, has 4 sq meters and says it's not enough room for her and her baby and that she has conflicts with her step father

How was your health during pregnancy and now?**How would you describe your child's health?**

- 14 claim that they were healthy during pregnancy and now
- 10 claim that their babies are healthy
- 8 claim that their babies have health problems. Problems listed were chronic bronchitis, neurological problems, sight problems, burns that need ongoing medical treatment, mental disabilities
- 6 mothers claimed hard pregnancies and health following delivery. Problems included miscarriage threat, necessary caesarian section, kidney problems and heart problems

2 claim their pregnancies and children are healthy but are also at risk of domestic violence as are their children

When it was time to give birth, what did you do? Call 03? Call a neighbor? A friend?

Most women gave birth in a hospital with the assistance of friends or neighbors to get there.

1 woman called the ambulance herself

1 woman was already in hospital because of pregnancy complications

1 woman gave birth at home because there wasn't time to get to the hospital. Her neighbor helped her and then she went to the hospital.

1 pregnant woman whom is 8 months pregnant has not yet registered at polyclinic

Would you be interested in taking classes that would help you learn more about yourself and taking care of your baby? If yes, what would you like to learn?

15 Yes

4 no answer

3 no (1 because of lack of time)

Child development:

verbatim: "anything they can teach me"

"contraception" (many)

"how to bring up child without father"

"child psychology"

"how to care for child"

"how to better understand my child and myself"

"doesn't matter, I just want to be helpful to my child"

Do you get any assistance with the baby?

(government services, relatives, friends, neighbors?)

Only in the form of welfare (see above under finances)

Other comments:

Sometimes friends and sisters help

Little mother program (St Petersburg)

Some assistance with food

Friends help with food

What other kinds of support would be helpful for you and your child?

7 "financial assistance"

7 "kindergarten for my child (for children under 1.5)

5 "any kind of support"

5 "everything will be helpful" and other variations of this

4 "find a job"

2 "ticket to the sea for child's health"

If childcare was offered for you so she could continue your education or look for a job, is this a service you would use?

13 Yes

9 No

What are your 3 largest current problems?

Are there any problems you anticipate in the next year?

17 Financial situation

13 Place to live/flat problems

6 Need job

6 Education 5 Baby's health

3 Mothers health

2 No/broken furniture

2 Future childbirth

1 Legal (documents to get welfare;

1 Don't know enough about child care

Would you be interested in having a mentor or special friend who could work with you and support you with things related to you and your baby?

What kinds of things do you think this person could help you with?

18 Yes

4 No or not answered

Are you able to provide nutritious meals daily for you and your child?

14 No

8 Yes

Do you have adequate clothing for yourself and your child?

Like...appropriate, warm enough, etc...

19 No

3 Yes

Do you feel you know enough about taking care of your child's health and physical needs?

14 No

7 Yes

1 Don't know

Do you feel your baby is developing as he/she should be?

15 Yes

4 No

3 Are pregnant mothers

Do you get frustrated when your baby cries? If yes...how do you deal with this?

12 Yes

5 No

3 pregnant mothers

1 "he doesn't cry"

1 "it depends on the reason"

verbatim: "I get upset often"

"I pity him and worry myself"

"I talk to doctors"

Do you frequently feel overwhelmed with motherhood?

How do you deal with this?

11 No

8 Yes

3 pregnant mothers

verbatim:

“I talk to psychologist”

“only the financial part of it”

“I’m worried about future independent living”

“I don’t do anything to deal with it”

“I try to get over it”

“when I don’t have clothes for my child to wear and no food to give her.

I try to survive, borrow money, etc....”

Are you frequently sad since the birth of your child?

11 No

7 Yes

3 pregnant mothers

1 unanswered

verbatim: “sometimes when we walk together and the child is asking to buy something and my pockets are empty”

“only because of lack of money”

Do you punish your child? If so, how and for what behavior?

Do you ever feel like hurting your baby?

12 No verbatim:

“I try to convince her with words”

“I use words. It is the easiest thing to hit a child. You should never do it.”

“I scold them but never hurt them”

“I slightly slap back but not hurt them.”

“I try to explain what is right and wrong

7 Yes verbatim:

“I punish him everyday for hooliganism”

“But I never wanted to hurt her”

“ I slap her”

3 pregnant mothers

How else could our center help you?

Verbatim:

“Financial help”

“Clothes”

“Food”

“Any kind of help”

“Knowledge”

“Classes for child”

“Moral support”

“Psychological support”

“Medical supplies”

“Helping me find a place to live”

”Toys”

“Examination of my child by a “good” pediatrician because he is sick too often”.

Typical case histories of single mothers

Case 1 “Natasha”

Natasha, age 22, came to the MILSAC center because she had no money and no food. She at one time had a flat in Moscow but she surrendered it to her then boyfriend who sold it for the money. She then moved outside of Moscow with him.

She has a son who is 2 years old and she is also currently 8 months pregnant. She lives outside of Moscow with the father of her baby, also an emancipated orphan, and his wife because she has no where else to go. She is sexually abused by this man and the baby she is carrying was conceived through rape. She claims that he beats her and her son regularly. She also had a one year old daughter who died in the past year because of what her mother describes “regular undernourishment” although this may also have been because of abuse. There is no polyclinic where she currently lives so she doesn’t know where she will have her baby.

Natasha has completed secondary school and vocational school and wants to be a seamstress. She says her dream is to have enough money to support herself and her children. At this time, however, she is severely depressed and sees no way out of her present situation. Also because of lack of money, she does not eat for several days at a time. She is considering sending her older child to an orphanage and talks of surrendering her newborn baby when it is born.

Case 2 “Nastia”

Nastia, age 21, is currently living with a friend because the place where she is registered is outside of Moscow with the father of her baby who is aggressive and physically abuses her. He provides no financial support so this girl has no money. Where she is currently living is not an ideal situation because one friend is an alcoholic and when she gets drunk she threatens this girl and hits her.

Due to the fact she had little knowledge of her rights, this girl lost her Moscow apartment through fraud. She has been referred to a legal consultant to help her with this and hopefully her Moscow registration will be restored. Because she is not registered in Moscow she cannot register at a polyclinic here and she refuses to go back to the town where she is registered because of fear of the man she lives with.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

SEE Part II

Proposal for a three-year program of prevention, intervention, education and support of teenage single mothers in Russia.

