

Intergenerational Trauma from Holodomor Genocide

Lecture Contribution to Holodomor National Awareness Week, November 23-29, 2015



A lecture on "The Long Term Intergenerational Impact of the Holodomor Genocide on Ukrainians" was delivered in English by researcher Brent Bezo on November 20, 2015 at St. Vladimir Institute, Toronto. Mr. Bezo is a PhD Candidate in Psychology at Carleton University in Ottawa. The presentation was organized by the Shevchenko Scientific Society of Canada (NTSh) and the Ukrainian Canadian Research and Documentation Centre (UCRDC) as a contribution to Holodomor National Awareness Week, November 23-29, 2015. Opening remarks were made by Dr. Daria Darewych, President of NTSh, with introduction of the featured speaker by NTSh-UCRDC Member and moderator Miroslaw Iwanek. Closing remarks were given by Prof. Jurij Darewych, President of UCRDC.

An artificial "famine", the Holodomor - murder by starvation (also known as the 'Great Terror') was orchestrated by Moscow under the direction of Joseph Stalin and implemented in 1932-1933 across Soviet Ukraine and adjacent territories of Soviet Russia with predominantly large Ukrainian populations. The goal was to break Ukrainian resistance against forced farm and property collectivisation, and Ukrainian national identity, the result of which an estimated 7-10 million persons did not survive.

In his lecture, Brent Bezo presented, for reference, Northern Hemisphere statistical data on medical and mental health risk factors, indicating Ukraine's ranking among countries. Also, distinction was made between circumstances and signs showing an individual person's trauma compared with signs indicative of family,

community, collective group or societal trauma. In his research work, Mr. Bezo explained that he employed a qualitative investigative approach on the intergenerational impact of the Holodomor Genocide of 1932-1933 in Ukraine that claimed millions of lives by forced starvation. Three generations of 15 Ukrainian families residing in Ukraine were interviewed, each family consisting of a first generation survivor, a second generation adult child, and third generation adult grandchild.

Mr. Bezo's thematic analysis of answers from his 45 interviews revealed that a pattern of emotions, inner states and trauma-based coping strategies which emerged in survivors during the Holodomor Genocide period still showed up in second and third generations. This pattern of participants living in "survival mode" is characterised by experiences of "horror, fear, mistrust, sadness, shame, anger, stress and anxiety, decreased self-worth, stock-piling, reverence and overemphasis on food and overeating, inability to discard unneeded items, an indifference toward others, social hostility, and risky health behaviours." Since these findings show that "trauma transmission" is intergenerational, the Holodomor Genocide continues to affect, particularly, family relationships and community-society norms, Individual's physical and psychological health, and language and culture in modern day Ukraine. These results underline "the importance of multi-framework approaches for studying and healing collective trauma" after many decades of Russian "Colonial Genocide" perpetrated against Ukraine and Ukrainians.

In a limited Q & A period, among the comments made and questions posed by the large audience to Brent Bezo included the significance of multiple traumatic national events and their cumulative effects in Ukraine in the 20th Century, such as the post-Russian Revolution civil war and Bolshevik takeover of Ukraine, Stalin's reign of terror, Nazi and Soviet Occupation and the Second World War, Soviet gulag imprisonment, and the Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster.

The results of Mr. Bezo's PhD research will be formally presented at his doctoral thesis defence and published in Spring 2016. A recent article "Living in 'survival mode:' Intergenerational transmission of trauma from the Holodomor Genocide of 1932-1933 in Ukraine" by Brent Bezo and Stefania Maggi was published in *Social Science & Medicine*, Volume 134, June 2015, pages 87-94. To view the article's abstract and highlights, visit <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277953615002294> or visit the journal's homepage: www.elsevier.co/locate/socscimed

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