

PSYCHOLOGISTS IN ARMENIA: AGENTS OF CHANGE AMID CONSTRAINT AND INTRANSIGENCE

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Abstract: This paper will provide an overview of the personal and structural challenges that psychologists face in providing psychotherapy in urban and rural communities throughout Armenia. Structural challenges include economic insecurity and the associated lack of funds for mental health treatment, the persistence of patriarchal views of women, stigmatizing discourses that result in social defeat in LGBTQ communities, and lack of knowledge and resistance to psychotherapy. Based on ethnographic interviews of twenty psychologists, as well as in-depth case studies, we will discuss the various strategies that psychologists use to garner support for psychological treatment and to make sustainable positive change in the lives of individuals and families (e.g., women and children who endure and survive domestic violence, veterans of the war with Azerbaijan, and members of the LGBTQ community). A relatively new area of healthcare for a very under-served population, the mental health system in Armenia has not firmly established a governing body that oversees the development of professional and ethical standards, criteria for evidence-based treatment, payment procedures, and documentation of continuing education. Yet, mental health specialists in Armenia actively and independently seek training and education opportunities, offered by international NGOs and professionals, and see their degrees and certificates as valid measures of their competency and authority. Our paper will emphasize how these psychologists use therapeutic strategies as forms of resistance to discourses that stigmatize patients and oppress women and marginalized communities, while at the same time finding a balance between supporting individual growth and acknowledging the centrality of familial obligations. This paper will explore the unique ways in which psychologists in Armenia adapt psychological approaches from Russia, Europe, and the U.S. to meet the specific needs of the communities in which they work, and how ultimately, their work becomes a practice of social change for the community as a whole.

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Learning Objectives:

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to identify the ways in which psychologists in Armenia adapt therapeutic approaches from Russia, Europe, and the U.S. to meet the needs of their communities.

2. Participants will be able to identify at least 3 social and cultural factors that impact mental health in rural and urban communities in Armenia.

References:

1. WHO-AIMS Report on Mental Health System in Armenia, WHO and Ministry of Health, Yerevan, Armenia, 2009.
2. McCarthy, J. Harutyunyan, H. Smbatyan, M. , Cressley, H. Armenia: Influences and Organization of Mental Health Services, *Int J Adv Counselling* (2013) 35:100–109