



Dart Center for  
Journalism and Trauma

## Foreign and Georgian Experts of Psychotrauma Agree on Post-emergency Psychosocial Responses

**The population traumatized as a result of the August Conflict needs qualified psychosocial assistance during the post-crisis period as well as afterwards. The state party should elaborate long-term strategy of the mental health care for those affected covering 3-5 years.**

The given statement was the main message of professor Berthold Gersons' presentation. A well-known European expert who is a professor at the Academic Medical Centre of the Netherlands, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Amsterdam, and the past president of the European Society of Traumatic Stress Studies, visited Georgia together with his colleagues and participated in the International conference "Post-Emergency Responses in crisis situation: An Integrative Approach to Psychotrauma" that was held in Tbilisi on 17 – 18 October of 2008.



His recommendations were discussed and supported by foreign and Georgian speakers.

The conference, with more than 100 guest attendance, was held in a conference hall of "Tbilisi - Marriott Hotel" upon the initiative of the Georgian Society of Psychotrauma and the European Society of Traumatic Stress Studies. Representatives from the Parliament of Georgia, the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs, Embassies, local and international agencies, NGOs working in the field of mental healthcare, universities, psychiatric institutions, journalists and others took active part in the event.

Mr. Otar Toidze, the chairman of the Committee for Healthcare and Social Affairs, and Ambassador Per Eklund, the Head of the European Commission's Delegation to Georgia, made the welcoming speeches, highlighting the importance of developing an effective psychosocial care system in Georgia. In the presentations of prof. Miranda Olf (the Netherlands), Dr. Christian Pross (Germany), Dr. Wouter van der Schaar (the Netherlands) international experience of working in post-conflict situations was analyzed. The representatives of the Georgian Society of Psychotrauma presented their own working methodology as well as problems and challenges of psychosocial aid work.



According to Dr. Nino Makhashvili, the newly elected president of the Georgian Society of Psychotrauma, despite the on-going psychosocial support to those representing "at-risk groups" (children, women, elderly), the screening exercise undertaken since mid- September demonstrates the presence of grave posttraumatic symptoms in 67.85% of the monitored displaced population. "Mental health care for traumatized people is responsibility of the State and the significant step towards this should be designing of the new state program, calculation of the

essential budget and its financial provision".

Workshop of the Dart Center for Trauma and Journalism (USA) with representatives of printed and electronic media should also be highlighted. Acting journalists, student-journalists from GIPA and Dart Centre members discussed coverage of war, conflict, violent events, ethical principles of portraying trauma stories and ways to improve the professional performance.

The conclusive recommendations of this intensive conference are as follows:

- Local, Georgian expertise should be applied as much as possible in order to set up sustainable psychosocial assistance service for traumatized communities;
- Assistance should be rendered to as many people as possible, therefore indirect assistance is more reasonable (consultations, informing, training of the primary level medical personnel, advices for decision makers; self-help groups, community mobilization, etc.);
- Any attempt to pathologize & “medicalize” the situation should be avoided; the survivors’ needs should be assessed carefully and addressed accordingly;
- Arranging long-term monitoring systems, screening for persistent mental health problems;
- Introducing of effective, evidence- based methods of psychosocial assistance, treatment and rehabilitation;
- Setting up the specialized services for severely affected – outreach mobile crisis teams, trauma clinics;
- Introducing emergency staff care and supervision.

The conference was organized with financial support of European Union, fund “GIP – Tbilisi”, GCRT and the CSPPRP (Civil Society and Public Policy Reform Project).



*The Georgian Society of Psychotrauma (GSP), the affiliated member of the European Society of Traumatic Stress Studies, was established in 2007. GSP promotes the advancement and exchange of knowledge about severe stress and trauma, understanding the scope and consequences of traumatic exposure and amelioration of its impact.*

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