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La práctica del trabajo social en la lucha contra la alcoholización de la población indígena de Kamchatka: El concepto de "gen del Norte"
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Resumen

El artículo está dedicado al problema del alcoholismo de la población indígena de Kamchatka, así como a los conceptos y teorías que explican el problema del fuerte aumento de la dependencia del alcohol de los pueblos del Norte en los años 70-80. El concepto (idea) del llamado "gen del norte" ha sido una de las explicaciones lógicas durante mucho tiempo, sin embargo, hoy en día se critica activamente. Incluso antes de que se formara la idea del gen nórdico, había habido una lucha activa contra la alcoholización de la población de Siberia y el Lejano Oriente. Estas prácticas no son menos importantes para entender la situación actual y encontrar soluciones a este problema humanitario.

Palabras clave: Alcoholismo, Pueblos indígenas de Kamchatka, Pequeños pueblos indígenas del Norte, Gen del Norte.

Abstract

Social work practice on combating alcoholization of the indigenous population of Kamchatka: The concept of the "Northern gene"

The article is devoted to the problem of alcoholization of the indigenous population of Kamchatka, as well as concepts and theories explaining the problem of a sharp spike in alcohol dependence of the peoples of the North in the 1970s – 1980s. The concept (idea) of the so-called "northern gene" had been one of the logical explanations for a long time. However, today it is actively criticized. Even before the idea of the northern gene was formed, there had been an active struggle against the alcoholization of the population of Siberia and the Far East. These practices are no less important for understanding the current situation and finding solutions to this humanitarian problem.

Key words: Alcoholization, Indigenous peoples of Kamchatka, Small indigenous peoples of the North, northern gene.

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1.- Introduction

The problem of alcoholism and related medical and humanitarian problems is not fundamentally new for Siberia and the Russian Far East. The problem was discussed during the period of "perestroika" in 1985 – 1991, in the process of the anti-alcohol campaign that began, including in the societies of the small indigenous peoples of the North (hereinafter – the SIPN). However, scholars and ethnographers have written about the existence of this problem since the beginning of the 20th century. Thus, I.I. Gapanovich (1926: 12) wrote about the inhabitants of Kamchatka the following:

"The Russian newcomers did not improve the life of the natives; on the contrary, they rewarded it with new ulcers. All Kamchadals are subject to alcoholism and will give everything they have for alcohol. It is not for nothing that they say that anything can be left in the tundra without the risk of loss, except alcohol (the temptation is too great even with the high honesty of the natives)".

The Swedish researcher S. Bergman writes no less sadly about the drunkenness of the inhabitants of Kamchatka; he mentions drunkenness among the local population. According to the scholar, the most popular goods among the local population were tea, tobacco, flour for cakes, and alcohol. Moreover, the local population got drunk quickly and behaved quite violently. The researcher writes that he repeatedly witnessed the so-called "alcohol orgies", which were considered a kind of form of leisure and well-deserved rest (Bergman, 2000: 107-108). Such records are not isolated. Similar descriptions can be found in the works of journalists and ethnographers of the 1970s – 1980s:

"In the house of some collective farm worker... they pushed it down copiously, I can't say for what reason. Without a reason, most likely out of habit... my appearance dangerously excited... a not quite young, portly Evenki. I knew her, but only when she was sober... she studied at the Institute of the Peoples of the North named after Herzen and therefore was considered an educated national cadre" (Pasenyuk, 2002: 8).

Thus, we see that the problem was not completely new, and we can already initially conclude based only on these data that the peoples of the North are predisposed to drunkenness and are not able to overcome alcoholism. Alcoholism is a natural consequence of interaction with Russians. However, these conclusions are extremely superficial, although they are actively broadcast in the Russian media (Kofman, 2014; Newsru.Com, 2014).

2. Materials and methods

Modern historical science has a wide range of methodological approaches and research methods. We chose the following for our research:

- case-study, which will allow focusing on one problem – alcoholization of the population of the North of Siberia and the Far East and ways to combat this social evil (using the example of materials from Kamchatka and Yakutia);

- comparative approach: a historical-comparative method, in which we will take a vertical comparison (that is, the study of the methods of the state's struggle with the problem in historical retrospect);

- historical and genetic approach (to determine the genesis of the idea of the "northern gene" and the directions of its development).

Thus, this article is based on the classical approaches for the Russian historical and ethnographic school.

3. Results

The idea of the "northern gene": origin, development, and criticism

The data of ethnographers and research scholars, government officials who conducted censuses and judicial practice (a significant part of offenses were committed while intoxicated) of the 19th – early 20th centuries showed that the peoples of the North (foreign researchers include the peoples of the Arctic) are prone to alcoholization. Numerous notes and memoirs of party workers, correspondents, and scholars have formed in the everyday consciousness, including scholars, the image of an eternally drunk or actively drinking northerner. The quotes given in the introduction about northern drunkenness are only a small part of what could be quoted on the problem. For this reason, by the middle of the 20th century, the scientific community had already formed a question about the causes of the so-called "northern drunkenness".

The first steps to solve this issue were genetic studies of the 1970s – 1980s, which allowed determining that the genotype of the peoples of the North differs from the Indo-Europeans. More in-depth studies in this direction revealed that "representatives of the SIPN do not have genes that contribute to reducing intoxication of the body when taking alcohol, which causes accelerated intoxication and addiction to alcohol-containing beverages" (Borinskaya et al., 2009b). Moreover, it was not only about taking fortified alcohol (vodka, cognac, absinthe), but also any so-called "low-alcohol drink" (beer, wine, ale, etc.). Thus, a medical and biological explanation of the causes of the deep and accelerated alcohol dependence of the peoples of the North on alcohol was formed in the 1980s – 1990s. It was reinforced by research in the early 2000s. (Belkovets et al., 2011; Borinskaya et al., 2008a, 2009b; Marussin et al., 2004). The peak of the development of the concept of a special genotype of the northern peoples, and as a result of a special threat to them of alcohol, can be called 2008 – 2015, when these materials were widely published in the mass media, including ethnic media, and were actively discussed by both the scientific community and the ethnic intelligentsia.

The explanation of the phenomenon of northern drunkenness from a medical point of view has several advantages:

1) the presence of a single explanation and identified causes of alcoholization of the population – it's all about genes, namely,

"Ethnogenetic (more precisely, ethnophenotypic) features of the populations of the peoples of the North concerning enzyme systems that ensure the exchange of ethanol in the body and its involvement in metabolism. Since the main cause of the neuro- and somatotoxic effects of alcohol, the formation of alcohol dependence, is acetaldehyde, the resistance to alcohol reduces as the body's ability to oxidize ethanol decreases without the formation of increased concentrations of acetaldehyde" (Kershengolts et al. 2012: 22; Solopekina, 2011: 72);

2) there is a single method of solving the problem – direct restriction of consumption to avoid further consequences, which by the beginning of the 2000s were already fully manifested: there was a "decrease in population resistance to alcohol in generations, established back in the 80–90s of the 20th century" (Kershengolts et al. 2012: 24). Legal levers can also be used to restrict access;

3) in some cases, the inebriating of the indigenous population can be explained and presented in a negative light (this was especially consistent with the Marxist methodology, which described the pre-Soviet period as a prison for peoples, so the sale of alcohol to the northerners was interpreted as the destruction of the indigenous population, now a clear scientific justification has appeared under these conclusions).

Thus, the medical justification of the phenomenon of "northern alcoholism" provides fairly simple answers to the questions posed for science, allows creating ready-made and unambiguous solutions to the problem of reducing alcoholism.

However, the idea of the "northern gene" was already criticized in the 2010s. Thus, scholars noted, "the well-established opinion in Russian society that the propensity to drunkenness and alcoholism is almost an innate, "genetically determined" feature of the "peoples of the North" should be revised" (Kozlov et al., 2013: 79). After all, it was the mass publication of materials about the features of the northern genome that led to the fact that a similar opinion about the northerners was formed in the broad philistine consciousness. For this reason, an exclusively medical explanation of the problem of northern drunkenness can lead to harassment of the indigenous population, a negative stereotype about their craving for alcohol and the separation of the entire Russian society, an opinion about the representatives of the SIPN as weak people, unable to self-control, and other negative ideas. An equally important reason for criticizing the idea of the "northern gene" is that "small indigenous peoples of the North" are "an association based on social and political principles, but not on the anthropological similarity of ethnic groups ... it is a gross mistake to suggest any "unified solutions", as is often done" (Kozlov et al., 2013: 77). Indeed, the composition of the SIPN only in Kamchatka includes representatives of Paleoasiatic ethnic groups – Koryaks, Itelmen, Chukchi, Tungus-Manchurian – Evens and Evenki, the mixed population – Kamchadals. Thus, the difference in origin, material and spiritual cultures, as well as the historical path of development is too great to offer the only correct solution suitable for each ethnic group.

The third reason for criticizing the idea of the northern gene as exclusively true and the only one that explains the reasons for the alcoholization of the SIPN in the 20th century is the ineffectiveness of the fight against alcoholization of the population during the "dry law", under the restrictions by the Soviet authorities on the sale of alcohol to Northerners and active health care in the 2000s, including coding and other means.

All these factors allow concluding that the phenomenon of northern alcoholism is a medical and social phenomenon, the roots of which are not only in the genetic differences of the SIPN from the Indo-Europeans but also in the differences in the culture of alcohol consumption (or its absence in some ethnic groups), during the transformation processes in the societies of Northerners in the 20th century, including the growth of well-being and the emergence of leisure in the 1970s – 1980s, as well as in the destruction of traditional social and family structures of the SIPN (genera and multi-generational families) in the Soviet and post-Soviet period. An equally important reason for the alcoholization of northern societies was the socio-economic upheavals of perestroika and the first post-Soviet years (Funk & Zaitseva, 2021: 684-693). For this reason, the idea of the "northern gene" continues to develop today, the medical and genetic justification is an important part, but not the only explanation for the causes of alcoholization of the peoples of the North. Knowledge of the genome and ethnophenotypic features of the populations of the peoples of the North allows ethnographers, historians, and anthropologists to study the problem more deeply and approach its solution more consciously, as well as formulate proposals to reduce the level of alcoholization of the northern population. At the same time, it is necessary to refer to the experience of previous generations and summarize various attempts to solve this problem.

The practice of combating alcoholization of the northern population in the 20th – early 21st centuries

This article uses materials from the history of Kamchatka (most of them are associated with the Bystrinsky district) to analyze the practices of combating northern drunkenness in the 20th century.

In general, the following periods of development of the problem of alcoholization of the population of Kamchatka in the 20th – early 21st centuries can be distinguished:

1) the 1920s – 1930s: the first period of a high degree of alcoholization: the reasons were active smuggling of alcohol and moonshine (in the protocols it was called "zyudavarenie" in the Far East), up to 1928 – 1929, and in the early 1930s the usual high level of alcohol consumption was still preserved;

2) the mid-1930s – 1950s, the first period of the decline in alcohol consumption among the Kamchatka SIPN. The decline is associated with the development of the law enforcement system (the appearance of police departments in the districts) and tougher penalties for alcohol smuggling and clandestine production of alcohol, as well as with state control of the import of alcohol-containing products in the district and its turnover,

as well as active cultural and mass work was carried out, and leisure was extremely limited: the population attended educational schools, mandatory meetings, etc. after the working day, performed additional types of work to help the front during the war years;

3) the 1960s – mid-1980s, the second period of growth of alcoholization in the northern population of Kamchatka. The main reasons are: the enlargement of settlements and ill-considered settlement, which led to an excessive concentration of labor in new settlements and the formation of hidden unemployment, the growth of real incomes of the population (the excess of funds could be spent on alcohol), the increase in the duration of leisure and the appearance of more free time;

4) the mid-1980s – 1990s was the period of the anti-alcohol campaign, during these years it was difficult to "get" alcohol, its quantity was quite limited in the country, however, there was no significant reduction in alcohol consumption due to the revival of moonshine, especially in remote villages and settlements;

5) 1991 – 2012, the third period of growth in alcohol consumption, associated with the crisis phenomena of the 1990s, the general economic recession, and crises, as well as the decline in the rural population. During this period, alcohol becomes a means of combating depression, as well as an option for organizing leisure activities.

The last 9 years from 2012 to 2021 are still difficult to include in the periodization, it is necessary to study the trends in the development of societies and the processes taking place in them more carefully, probably this refers to a new stage associated with a gradual decrease in the amount of alcohol consumed.

At each stage, even though the problem was not always made public, the state was aware of its presence and fought against the alcoholization of the population. The Soviet government faced two problems related to alcohol in the 1920s: the smuggling of alcohol and alcohol-containing beverages and the fairly frequent use of alcohol by the indigenous population of the peninsula (after all, it was for alcohol that merchants and traders exchanged furs from the northerners). Thus, the Customs in Kamchatka in the early 1920s was only in Petropavlovsk, so it worked unevenly, however, in 1925, 23 detentions were carried out of 1747 rubles 25 kopecks within the Customs area, and 31 detentions of 3706 rubles 71 kopecks outside the Customs area, more than 70% of the amounts were for the smuggling of alcohol and alcohol-containing beverages (Russian State Historical Archive of the Far East, n.d.a). However, it turned out to be almost impossible to quickly stop alcohol smuggling, so in 1928 M.S. Antropov wrote about drunkenness among Lamuts the following:

"There is a special kind of alcohol dealers in Kamchatka – alcohol carriers. The alcoholic comes into the yurt under the guise of a friend, treats the whole family, and starts bargaining... Lamut drinks on an empty stomach, does not eat anything... and not only adults drink ... they accustom children to drinking" (Antropov, 1931: 25).

The reasons were both a large number of alcohol carriers, merchants who sold alcohol, and the insufficient material and technical base of the Kamchatka Customs:

employees did not have enough ammunition, weapons, there was not even a boat to patrol the water area and rivers, trips were carried out on private ships (they also carried smugglers). However, the government did not give up the fight: The Kamchatka Provincial Revolutionary Committee (hereinafter referred to as the Gubrevkom) banned "the import of all kinds of alcoholic beverages, the distillation of moonshine and other surrogates" (Russian State Historical Archive of the Far East, n.d.b) on January 17, 1923, extremely high fines were also imposed for appearing drunk in public places. In general, the fines imposed by the Gubrevkom were high: the fine was from 300 to 1000 rubles in gold for the import or sale of alcohol at the initial violation, and the violator was threatened with a fine from 1000 to 10,000 rubles or imprisonment at the repeated violation; the fine was up to 25 rubles for appearing in a public place drunk (for the primary violation), and the person should have been brought to court in case of a repeated violation (Russian State Historical Archive of the Far East, n.d.b).

However, significant results could not be achieved, due to the lack of proper police control on the ground (there were simply no policemen and the functions of law enforcement in the villages in the 1920s were performed by workers of rural revolutionary committees, later village councils) and the weak material and technical base of the police during the very first Soviet transformations. Thus, we can note that only prohibitive measures and penalties, especially without proper control and high-quality execution of them, did not bring practically any results. The establishment of state control over the turnover of alcohol led to a decrease in the level of alcoholization of the northern population only with the development of the material and technical base of the police, the increase in the number of law enforcement officers, and the appearance of police stations in remote settlements. Therewith, it should be noted that the organization of leisure activities (Red Yarangs and Red Canopies, reading huts, and clubs) also played an important role in reducing the amount of alcohol consumed by the SIPN.

The development of the infrastructure of villages, and then the consolidation of villages and the expansion of trade and the range of goods, as well as the rooting of Soviet holidays (for example, the New Year and its attribute champagne; weddings with civil registration of marriage and banquets), led to the steady use of alcohol in the Even and Koryak environment of the Bystrinsky district. The authorities began to audit the achievements of the first stage of the Soviet modernization of the North in the 1950s: the consolidation of settlements began. As noted by ethnographers (V.I. Vasiliev, I.S. Gurvich, M.Ya. Zhornitskaya, V.V. Lebedev, Yu.B. Simchenko, A.V. Smolyak, Z.P. Sokolova), "settling in large villages should have been a complex measure, but it did not become so: only one problem was solved – concentration of the population in relatively comfortable settlements, its cultural and everyday services" (Vasiliev, 1989: 41). Even in this matter, not everything was smooth: when the village of Tvayan was relocated to Bystraya, the collective farmers had been living in temporary apartments for almost a year, a public bath did not work in the new settlement, there were no laundries in the kindergarten and boarding school, the bakery was in an unsanitary state (Municipal archive of the Essovsky rural settlement, n.d.; State archives of the Kamchatka

Territory, n.d.a). The store also worked intermittently, alcohol was delivered irregularly, but moonshine met the demand. Often, it was the use of alcohol that served as a kind of "consolation" and "solution" to problems. Also, the period of the 1950s – 1960s was marked by an increase in real incomes of the population, which, combined with the destruction of the usual way of life (unwanted relocation, moving without the ability to pick up many-dimensional things, the transition from domestic nomadism to production one, i.e. the shift method of working in herds – the rest of the time living in the village, and often without work and organized leisure) led to an intensive increase in alcohol consumption.

The 1970s – 1980s were marked by a surge in alcoholization of the indigenous population of Kamchatka: according to the Essovsky Village Council, 45 families were identified on its territory in 1976, in which one or more family members abused alcohol, a total of 195 people (State archives of the Kamchatka Territory, n.d.b), which was 14% of the total population of Esso and 51% of the Even population of the village (Passport of the Bystrinsky region 1970-1990, n.d.). To prevent this antisocial phenomenon, representatives of the voluntary citizen patrol and activists of enterprises took patronage over each unreliable family, conducted educational conversations, visited the mentees, and controlled their family budget, explaining how to spend money correctly and economically, in some cases, drinkers were placed in specialized institutions. In addition to social and medical assistance, the state again resorted to restrictive and prohibitive measures: in 1976, it was decided to increase the sale of vodka products to 10% of all food products, there was a clear instruction in stores to sell no more than 1 bottle of vodka per customer and not to sell it to representatives of the local indigenous nationality, that is, Even and Koryaks (Conversation with V.F. Fedorov, 2010; State archives of the Kamchatka Territory, n.d.c). However, these measures did not give a significant result: the issue of a radical change in the world picture and the loss of an important layer of traditional spiritual culture [were](#) not resolved.

During the collapse of the USSR and the first post-Soviet years, the problem of alcoholization of the northern population was also not radically solved: the difficult economic conditions of the breakdown of the Soviet economic model, unemployment, and everyday problems led to the fact that the population began to look for "consolation" in the use of alcoholic beverages. Alcohol consumption per capita did not decrease despite the prescient conversations about the dangers of drunkenness by both doctors and public figures, active anti-alcohol propaganda, and the opportunity to buy alcohol only on coupons in the early 1990s.

The development of the idea of the northern gene and the special instability of the SIPN to alcohol led to an increase in attempts to solve the problem medically, for example, by coding against drunkenness. Thus, on September 9, 1994, Dr. V.I. Zvyagin, known for his methods of coding from alcohol and tobacco use, came to Anavgay. Even shepherds from the herds came to his sessions, as well as several people from Esso ("Absolutely sober village", 1994; "At an angle of 40 degrees", 1999).

The situation did not radically improve in the early 2000s. Young people took alcoholic beverages to the disco, bought beer for evening gatherings in friendly companies, the saying was very popular: "Beer for a jerk". In addition, 2-3 shelves are standard in the shops of the district, and sometimes a whole rack was allocated for various types of alcohol. Beer remained the most popular drink. As the locals believed, it is not vodka, so it is less dangerous. The reasons for the continued alcoholization were the economic and socio-cultural problems of villages that have persisted since the 1990s: a limited number of jobs, unsatisfactory work of cultural institutions (cultural centers), incomplete schools (sometimes there were no subject teachers for 6-8 months), the lack of new housing construction, the outflow of young people and the able-bodied population from settlements, etc.

Implementation of state national projects and strategies for the sustainable development of the Far East, as well as stimulating small businesses and self-employment, further growth of tourism and measures to preserve and revive traditional cultures and lifestyles in the 2010s, the emergence of youth associations of Northerners, it is the organization "Friendship of Northerners" in Kamchatka and an active advertising campaign that being a representative of the SIPN is good, and not a shame, the appearance in Petropavlovsk and other cities of the Kamchatka Territory of ethnic sites that allow young people who have left their native villages not to break ties with their ethnos allow partially solving the socio-cultural problems of the SIPN, which are also one of the factors of the so-called "northern drunkenness".

4. Conclusion

The problem of alcoholization of the SIPN is a serious problem not only in Kamchatka, but also in many other regions of Russia. The phenomenon of the so-called "northern drunkenness", which began to be discussed in the 1990s, continues to be actively studied by historians, ethnographers, and anthropologists. Attempts to explain it had been undertaken throughout the 20th century. However, the first and most successful attempt turned out to be the idea of the "northern gene", the special weakness of the SIPN over alcohol due to their genetic characteristics and the absence of enzymes for the breakdown of alcohol. However, the exclusively medical interpretation of the causes of "northern drunkenness" turned out to be extremely narrow and unproductive, so today researchers note not only the genetic but also the socio-economic and cultural roots of this problem. Being a complex problem and taking into account the diversity of ethnic groups included in the SIPN, the solution of the problem of alcoholization of the northern peoples requires an integrated approach. Having studied the historical retrospective of the fight against alcoholism of the SIPN, it can be concluded that only prohibitive measures, restrictions, or a medical approach are ineffective, and it is also extremely necessary both the intervention of the state and the desire of society itself to solve the problem.

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