

Psychiatry and Psychological Disorders

Review Article

Mental Disorders in Leaders and Ideologists: An Update

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Abstract

An attempt is made here to analyze mental conditions of Vladimir Putin and the ideologist Aleksandr Dugin, who was called the "Putin's Brain". Physical maltreatment was described in Putin's biographies. Child abuse is associated with various psychiatric and related conditions including paranoia. A paranoid call may sanction destruction of supposed enemies. Putin formulated the aims of his current military operation: to disarm and denazify Ukraine, to protect ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers from "genocide". Apparently, this idea is delusional. Certain war instigators are paranoid in their tendency to present themselves as prophets or world saviors. Some of them are aggressive against delusional goals. Mentally healthy people can be susceptible to psychotic appeals, a predisposing condition being fear of strangers and projection of hatred upon them. Certain behavioral stereotypes include attacking weaker individuals and yielding to dominant figures. The latter seems to be reflected by Putin's relationships with Ramzan Kadyrov, the head of Chechen Republic. Some ethnically non-Russian subjects of the Federation may be interested in a continuation of the Ukraine war; and there are concerns that Putin has come under their influence. The most important topic in this connection is the inter-ethnic difference in the birth rate and migrations, which is avoided by Russian media and officials these days. In conclusion, mental derangements in politicians are dangerous and must be diagnosed by psychiatrists on the basis of speech, writings, and behavior. More expert opinions are needed.

Keywords: Paranoia; Child abuse; Paranoia; Vladimir Putin; Aleksandr Dugin; Armed conflict

Introduction

The psychopathological approach to politics is successful if it identifies politicians or ideologists with limited mental competence [1]. Apparently, the need to warn the public overrides the duty of confidentiality [2]. Clinical insights may help to understand destructive behavior [3]. If a leader is psychotic while other functions are more or less intact, he can preserve abilities to remain in a position of power [4]. Several Soviet leaders had mental abnormalities [5]. Grave consequences occur when paranoid ideas persist in a dictator along with rationality and efficiency, so that delusions are put into life [4]. Paranoid individuals dismiss disconfirming evidence and may sanction a destruction of supposed enemies [6]. A be-

lieve that others intend harm contributes to aggressiveness. Some paranoiacs are belligerent against delusional goals. Governments in democracy are more transparent; therefore, it is less probable that power would be kept or influenced by mentally abnormal individuals.

Child abuse is associated with an increased vulnerability to mental and related conditions: affective, obsessive-compulsive and post-traumatic stress disorders, alcohol and drug abuse, narcissism, possibly also schizophrenia, as well as low self-esteem, anxiety and anger [7-15]. Results of an interview study suggested that child abuse statistically predicts psychosis. It was concluded that early adverse experiences

may cause cognitive vulnerability e.g., beliefs about the self as vulnerable and of others as dangerous, leading to paranoid ideations. Some cases of schizophrenia may be in this continuum [16].

Child abuse has been rarely discussed in Russia. There were several publications in the period 1990- 2016 but today the topic is largely avoided; details and references are in [17]. According to an estimate, the prevalence of family violence in Russia during last decades has been 45-70 times higher than in England and France [18]. There is neither uniformly agreed attitude nor consequent policies.

Vladimir Putin

In 2017 Putin has signed into law an amendment decriminalizing some forms of domestic violence [19,20]. The physical abuse was described in Putin's biographies [21-24]. His father is said to have beaten the boy [23,24]. Presumably, Putin's early childhood experience of physical maltreatment was recapitulated at school, where he was bullied. His saying "If a fight is [perceived as] inevitable, you must strike first" could have originated from reminiscences of bullying [24,25]. It was hypothesized that Putin is re-enacting his traumas in conditions of an intergenerational traumatic chain [24,26,27]. There is a "danger of blundering into a nuclear war" [26] thanks to this case of child maltreatment.

Apparently, it was not so much the Russian population who perceived external threats, as it did their leader, re-enacting his puerile fears. This supposition does not contradict to the hypothesis that Vladimir Putin has Hubris Syndrome (HS), enticing him to adopt immature coping mechanisms [28,29]. There are several psychiatric or related conditions that may belong to a continuum around HS: adult ADHD, hypomania and, last but not least important, the paranoid syndrome [29]. Paranoia is another potential sequel of child maltreatment. Research has demonstrated significant associations between adverse childhood experiences, including physical abuse, with paranoia [30]. An association between brain injuries and paranoid syndrome was suggested [31]. Reportedly, the worse a child is treated, especially by his father, the more frequent are paranoid ideations in the adult life [32].

The association between paranoia and violence is known. A paranoid call may sanction destruction of supposed enemies [6]. Putin formulated the aims of his military operation: to disarm and denazify Ukraine, to protect Russian-speakers from "genocide". It is known that Ukraine has not been governed by such leaders and that ethnic Russians have not been victims of genocide [33-35]. Apparently, the idea of denazification is delusional. The difference between delusions and strongly held ideas is seen in the degree of conviction despite contradictory evidence [36], irrespective of logic and the "way of the world" [37]. Andrei Snezhnevsky [38,39] and other Soviet psychiatrists could diagnose sluggish schizophrenia on the basis of such symptoms; details and references are in [40]. Another ex-Soviet psychiatrist

Anatoly Smulevich [41], discussed paranoia (apart from its "soft" form) within the scope of schizophrenia. Behaviors of paranoid individuals may include arrogance, insults, presumption of privilege and exploitation of weaknesses [42], which is recognizable in some Russian politicians, Dmitry Medvedev in particular.

Dmitry Medvedev

Below are several citations; more details are in the preprint [43]. Offensive and obscene terms, ad hominem attacks and threats, used by Medvedev and known from the media, are not cited here or replaced in the following quotes by dots (...): "Our weapon is the truth. That is why our cause is right"; "Our main task to inflict a devastating defeat on all enemies – the Ukronazis, the US, (...) NATO including (...) Poland, and other Western (...)"; "UK, our eternal enemy" [44]. In the author's opinion, the discourses by Dmitry Medvedev and some other politicians are compatible with HS. Hubris denotes over-confidence and exaggerated pride. The misuse of alcohol tends to accentuate the features of HS [45]. Nemesis, sometimes discussed in the context with hubris, denotes a destruction or punishment that can follow in the wake of hubris [46].

Aleksandr Dugin

Grave consequences can occur when paranoid and delusional ideas coexist in a dictator who otherwise is rational and efficient, but may be influenced by mentally disordered persons. Paranoid rulers tend to promote abnormal individuals and rely on their opinions [47]. An example is the "Eurasianist" ideologist Aleksandr Dugin, called the "Putin's Brain" [48], who preaches Russia's westward expansion. Here follow several citations from his works (verbatim translations): "To close down America is our sacred duty" [49]; "Anti-Americanism is a Creed. The prohibition of war propaganda is pharisaic. You can't get away from the war and you shouldn't try" [50]; "Only a traitor would wish peace today" [51]; "We must forget about the nightmare that is called political correctness, liberalism and human rights. We must forget this terrible nonsense" [52]; "We make the war. It originates in our heart. We give birth to the war [53]. Dugin's delusion-like or overvalued ideas include the "Western plot to undermine Russia" and "Eternal struggle between Land and Sea" [54], the latter probably being a reminiscence of the novel 1984 by George Orwell. Taking into account the above and other Dugin's discourses, he was considered to be a mental patient, albeit a widely read and influential one [55].

Ramzan Kadyrov

Some individuals, maltreated during their childhood, respond by acting out fight or flight responses [25]. Defensive behaviors include attacking weaker persons and submitting to dominant ones [56]. This seems to be reflected by Putin's relationships with Kadyrov, the head of Chechen Republic,

who appears as a dominant personality. There has been a stereotype of “chechenophobia” in Russia [57]. Certain non-European subjects of the Russian Federation may be interested in a continuation of the Ukraine war, and there are concerns that Putin has come under their influence. The same might be true in regard to the newly appointed Kursk governor Alexander Khinshtein. The most important topic in this connection is the inter-ethnic difference in the birth rate and migrations [58], which is avoided by Russian media and officials today. According to the media, Kadyrov has 2 wives and 12 children at least. Kadyrov argued that Chechens in Ukraine are participating in a holy jihad against the “Western Satanist ideology” [59].

Discussion

Paranoid individuals tend to be self-centered, arrogant and vulnerable at the same time. Their behaviors may include megalomaniac defenses e.g. attempts to destroy enemies through a self-destructive war [25]. Several Soviet leaders had paranoia, other mental and/or neurological abnormalities [5,60]. Paranoia was recognizable to some extent both in authorities and the society [61]. Certain populations subscribe to delusions at large. It is possible for a majority to be deluded and minority not to be deluded [62]. The homogeneity of thinking is a predictor of conformism, which is conducive to dictatorship [63]. Apart from induced delusion-like ideas, political leaders’ views are repeated by aides and yes-men while alternative views are ignored or dismissed as heretical [28]. Paranoid leaders can remain in positions of power in the nations lacking appropriate checks and balances [4]. Governments in democracy are more transparent; so it is less likely that power falls into the hands of mentally abnormal persons. Furthermore, shame and envy contribute to hostility and aggression. Envious people blame those who make them feel ashamed by comparison. In its turn, intense shame confers vulnerability for paranoia [33,64]. Repressed shame may cause aggression [65]. Shame was described as the affective core of paranoia [66]. Some functionaries are descendants of rural people who burnt mansions in 1917 and committed violent crimes out of envy [67].

As for HS, the differential diagnosis and exclusion of other conditions is difficult, because individuals with HS do not usually collaborate in examinations [68]. On the contrary, politicians tend to conceal mental disorders [69]. Since hubristic leaders are contemptuous to the advice of others and reckless in strategic choices, the early identification and prevention of HS is important [68]. It can be reasonably assumed that ruling classes with experiences of leadership, especially royal families that have been in the public attention for centuries, have lesser risk of HS than unknown people promoted by bureaucracy. The concepts of duty and service are of great importance for aristocrats. On the other hand, the quest for honor and glory was a motive for engaging in

wars [70]. Of note, HS may develop after a person has held substantial power for a considerable amount of time [45]. The United States did well when they ruled that a president can be re-elected only once [68].

Conclusion

Physical abuse in childhood and adolescence can induce psychiatric abnormalities in initially healthy individuals, among others, persecutory delusions and paranoid ideations. The world may be in danger of nuclear war thanks to mental derangements in Vladimir Putin and his surroundings. More expert opinions are needed. Of note, many people subscribe to delusions at large.

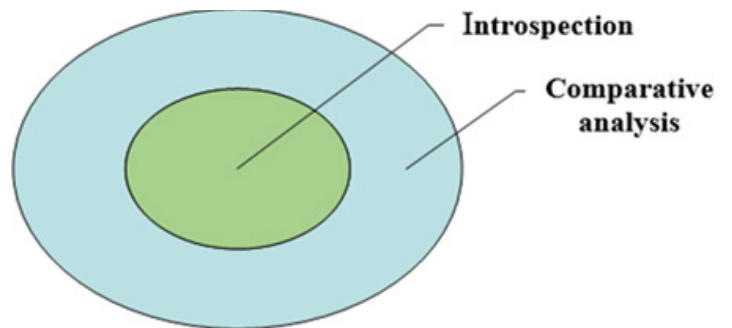


Figure 1: Drawings by Vladimir Putin: a – According to the expert graphologist, it exposes a paranoid, depressed and anxious leader [71]. Apparently, Fig. 1a, the flat disfigured face with a puerile smile, reflects the attitude to “paper” soldiers. Fig. 1b demonstrates a similar attitude to cats and, allegorically, to females undergoing reproductive coercion [72].

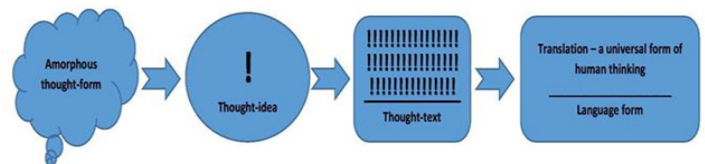


Figure 2: For comparison: drawings of schizophrenia patients. Among typical features are flat disfigured faces with emphasized eyes. Animals are often depicted from behind [73-75].



Figure 3: Vladimir Putin and Ramzan Kadyrov [76]; the latter seems to be a dominant figure.

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