

Russian Views on “Ecologically Clean” Food: Basing Beliefs About Health on Personal Connections to Food Production

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In 2000 and 2002, upon meeting many Russians for the first time, I was drawn into conversations about the “terrible quality” of North American food. Discussion of Iraq or Chechnya seemed to take a back seat to worries about imported food and, implicitly and explicitly, imported capitalist influences. Slowly, I realized that concerns about food are a powerful means of criticizing global capitalism without appearing to invoke political and military nationalism.

In this paper, I will examine how Russians think about, talk about and act about their food. In particular, I will explore what the phenomenon of “ecologically clean” food means to Russians and how it informs Russian health and economic practices.

The Russian phrase “ecologically clean” differs from the English word “organic” in a particular way: it refers to the human relationships that go into food production more than the physical processes of agriculture. Local food grown in the countryside, by friends and relatives, is considered the most healthy and most clean, whereas imported food and food produced for a profit is the most dirty and unhealthy. Unlike in Canada, such home-grown “dacha” food provides the majority of food consumed by the Russian population. Economic motives are only part of the story; many Russians are eschewing packaged food out of health concerns. Contrary to popular western portrayals of Russia’s medical, economic and political systems as “collapsed,” many urban Russians are living a self-consciously “organic” life.

Healthy Russian Food is not for Profit

“We are sick. We are unhealthy,” proclaims Mark [1], a successful businessman from Nizhni Novgorod, Russia, who, in outward appearance, is the picture of robust health. What does he blame for his bad health? Like many other Russians, Mark blames western imported food and low domestic food quality for many of his new health problems [2] [3]. Many in the West, on the other hand, tend to blame economic and political factors -- such as a lack of hard currency and internal Russian politics -- for the state of Russian health. They insinuate that the real problem is an underfunded medical system, brought about by a combination of economic depression, corrupt governmental policies and misguided priorities (Zuger 2000, Massey 2002; WHO 2003). Media-reported news about Russia since 1991 has been decidedly pessimistic.

I argue in this paper that our focus on economic indicators such as GNP reflects our Western capitalist bias of valuing profit-making over all else. In fact, there are some great

things happening in Russia that we could learn from. In particular, Russia offers a unique case study in which an urbanized and educated population has not lost their intimate knowledge of the natural world and subsistence agriculture. As far as I can determine, urban, educated Russian elites rely more heavily on food from small, family plots than the urban elites of any other nation.

But many Russians are deeply worried about their food sources. I was told more than once that food quality is so low that continued human life is threatened. Here, I explore the question, “How are the cultural categories of “healthy” and “unhealthy” food understood and constructed?” I see that “healthy food,” in the Russian context, is food that is healthy for both the physical and the social body. Food that helps cement desirable social relationships is healthy; food that disrupts these relationships is not. This understanding of sustenance, that more than just one’s physical body must be nurtured and nourished for true health, is quite contrary to the capitalist-driven, biomedical, western view of health, bodies and nutrition [4].

Food as a Threat to Health: Imported Foods

Michael Taussig notes that humans have always blamed diseases on “foreign” causes. And until “modern Western medicine and the late nineteenth century ‘germ theory of disease’” most of us thought the foreign cause was not just a germ, but “an expression of specific social relations” (Taussig 1980:6). In other words, disease was related to how human beings treated one another and their environments. In Russia, the germ theory of disease has not completely replaced the belief that disease is connected to human relationships. Many foreign-agents of disease are understood to be literally foreign (imported food) and, as such, are explicitly understood as expressions of specific social relations between nations. Most of the Western food available is in the junk food category: Cheetohs, Pringles, Snickers, frozen pizza, etc. Many Russians, especially over age 30 or so, go out of their way to tell me that they’ve tried “our” Western food products (when they became available here as of 1993 or so) and that they’ve become disillusioned with our supposedly-superior products. They now prefer to eat Russian-grown/made products because they’re “better for you” and they “taste much better.” One Russian acquaintance believes that the West is trying to exterminate Russians by poisons such as food additives and preservatives. There is a strong “buy Russian” (anti-import) movement here, supported by the government and an ad campaign.

So strong is this association between the West and “bad” food, that on a number of occasions, my first encounter with new acquaintances revolved around this topic. On one occasion, I was touring a chicken factory near Nizhni Novgorod at the invitation of its CEO. In the employee cafeteria during lunch, a worker at our table realized I was an American and immediately launched into a diatribe against American food. “Europe doesn’t want your food, so you’re trying to dump it on us,” he said. “When will you understand that no one wants to eat your chemicals?” And at a dinner party, one Russian opened our conversation with the question, “Can you explain why Americans are so fat?”

At childbirth education classes and birth clinics where I conducted fieldwork, I quickly realized that Russians saw me as a source of useful information on some topics – but that food and nutrition was not one of them. When I dared to interject something on this topic,

I was usually ignored or challenged. My American status, in this instance, signaled an inherent *lack of knowledge or understanding* of good health and nutrition. This association made all of my nutritional advice – and the nutritional advice in pregnancy books and magazines from the West – suspect [5].

On another level, I posit that concerns about food are a powerful means of criticizing the West and global capitalism without *appearing* to invoke political and military nationalism. Growing international concern with mad cow disease, genetically-modified foods and other food-technology issues lends validity to Russian fears. Russians are expressing a new-found position within the world order, opposing the West on health, rather than ideological (i.e., communist), grounds.

Domestic Foods

At the same time that Russians worry about imported food, they are simultaneously very concerned about the low quality of domestically-produced food. To a large degree, they blame this problem on agricultural chemicals, pollution, bad soil and other environmental problems [6]. These ecological and agricultural problems, fairly or not, are in turn routinely blamed on foreign capitalists. Russians point the finger at western governments and international, profit-driven corporations for world-wide environmental degradation. Environmental problems which may have existed for decades (Feschbach) are, in this way, culturally associated with Taussig's disease-causing "foreign-agents" [7]. One informant, Lena, acknowledges that pollution problems may have pre-existed the collapse of state communism, but explains that,

well, we didn't *know* about the problems before, so even if they did exist before, it didn't seem so. When we grew up, everything seemed clean and healthy. Then all of a sudden when everything disintegrated [state communism], everything was dirty and polluted. Like I always assumed it was in capitalist countries. So it seemed like capitalism had really come here.

Organic Versus "Ecologically Clean" Food

Not surprisingly, a new phrase has joined the everyday Russian lexicon to express these new fears about food quality: *ekologicheskaya chistaya* or "ecologically clean." I originally interpreted this label to mean something more or less along the lines of what the word "organic" means here. That is certainly how multi-national corporations, such as Hipp (a German producer of organic baby food) use the Russian phrase. On handouts produced by Hipp and distributed by pediatricians in Nizhni Novgorod, their baby food ingredients are defined as "ecologically clean" in Russian and "organic" in English. But this facile translation does not tell the whole story. Ultimately, I found that these words, though they sound similar, index very different concepts in North America and in Russia. In short, whereas North Americans emphasize the physical, environmental impact of food production when they question the ecological cleanliness of their food, Russians tend to emphasize the human relationships that went into food production and distribution.

When Russians say that a food is “good for you,” they mean in more ways than purely nutritional value.

In North America, the word “organic” is almost always defined in strictly physical terms. We place strict controls on how far organic fields must be from conventional fields; how long land must be free from pesticides; and how often soil samples must be submitted. But certification does not depend in any way on humane labor agreements, minimum wage compliance or other “human” concerns. In Russia, I found quite opposite assumptions at work. In common parlance, I find the phrase to most often mean that the *human source of the food is known* and/or that the food was not produced by a for-profit entity. For urban Russians, the most ecologically clean food is produced in the countryside on personal plots of land, regardless of the environmental condition of that land.

Urban Russian’s Connection to Rural Life

As an American citizen living in Toronto, I have become acquainted with the Canadian phenomenon of “cottages.” On summer weekends in our neighborhood it often seems like we are the only ones home. Though the cottage tradition preserves a certain connection to the natural world that many in the United States lack, it is a much-watered-down connection compared to the connection fostered by Russian “dachas.” I don’t have time to go into the history of how dachas have come to play the role that they have in Russian life, but it is enormous. A “dacha” refers to a wooden house in the Russian countryside that is usually accompanied by a small plot of garden land. Dachas and gardens are generally built near one another in small villages and the village is usually surrounded by vast expanses of forest, agricultural fields, rivers and/or lakes. Though most urban adult Russians only spend weekends and/or summers at their dachas, many children and retired workers live in the countryside for months or years at a time.

My friend Nina’s family is typical. Nina works full-time as a real estate agent in Nizhni Novgorod; her husband Marat is unemployed and accepts short-term construction jobs outside of the city when available. Both Nina and Marat spent most of their summers as children living with their own grandparents in the countryside while their parents worked in the city. Marat’s mother, now retired, lives year-round in the countryside. In the summer, Nina’s mother and her two small children, aged 5 and 10, live for three months with Marat’s mother. While they are there, they tend a large garden; fish in the rivers and gather berries, mushrooms and medicinal herbs from the forest. On weekends, Nina helps too. Every Fall, she participates in the enormous canning and preserving operation.

Nina and Marat’s family is far from unique in Russia. Despite prestigious university degrees and a well-paying real estate job, they, like most professional Russians, maintain this strong connection to rural living. One study found that 51% of urban households in 1993 cultivated food at their own dachas; many more helped relatives or friends (Rose and Tikhomirov 1993). Another study in the mid-1990s revealed that “55 million households were engaged in producing food on their dachas or plots of land and these households supplied the majority of food that was consumed by the Russian population”

(Buhler 2003). On a personal note, I have never met a Russian in Russia who did not gather mushrooms – a skill that bespeaks an intimacy between people and the natural world that is hard to find in urban North America. Russians know what a vine-ripe tomato and a just-picked apple are supposed to taste like; most Russians are appalled at the taste of blemish-free, cellophane-packaged produce imported from the Netherlands and other “western” producers. As my friend Nina says, “I might buy those expensive apples from Holland to display on my table during a party because they look so beautiful, but I would never buy them just to eat.”

I certainly want to acknowledge that this intense, intimate relationship between urban Russians and rural life is too often a survival tool during what has been a period of economic instability and high rates of unemployment. At the same time, however, I am intrigued that many well-employed, professional families as well as wealthy “New Russians” continue to value time spent in the countryside engaged in these rural activities. At least for the time being, the pressures of global capitalism have not divorced Russians from this part of their tsarist and communist heritage.

In the rest of this paper, I am going to explore the ways that many Russians distinguish between healthy and unhealthy food, particularly the way that they define “ecologically clean” food. I find that the words of food activist Michael Abelman capture the essence of what so many Russians express about “ecologically clean” food. Like the Russians with whom I worked, Abelman argues that focusing on organic agriculture alone – meaning no chemicals – is not good enough. He says,

We need to go beyond organic and address a much broader range of issues, such as labor, water, biodiversity, and energy use.... When we focus on regional production and regional distribution, the issues around the use of chemicals...resolve themselves. It's as simple as standing across the table at the farmers' market from the person who's growing your food. Ultimately the basic health of the food system is not about laws; it's about relationships: interpersonal, ecological, and biological. The people who eat my food don't need a legislative act to know that what I'm providing is safe to eat. They know me, and they know my farm. That, to me, is the best form of certification. It's based on outdated ideas like honor and trust. I could never get away with doing something that might hurt somebody or the land, because the system that polices me is far more sophisticated and powerful than any the government could offer. I could sneak around government laws anytime, no problem. But my local community won't let me get away with anything (Cooper 2003:11-12).

Ecologically-Clean Food and Russian Informal Networks

Apparently, even unborn Russian babies can tell the difference between food grown for a profit and food grown for health and sustenance! One of my informants, Ira, shared with me the journal she had written while pregnant with her first child in 1997. When she was approximately two months pregnant she wrote:

My baby is very intelligent: you ask him questions and he answers; he is very outgoing: he loves to talk with his mother. I feel how he reacts to my voice, that he loves when I walk without hurrying and when I breathe fresh air. He loves to

bathe and in general loves a cold water bath. He doesn't like grocery stores, but he reacts calmly to the food market.

Ira, like many health-conscious Russians, believes that cold water baths promote a healthy immune system. For health and other reasons, she also prefers to buy her food from vendors at a nearby outdoor food market, rather than what she calls the "robot"-like grocery store. After years of frequenting this market, she knows the vendors individually and proudly introduces me, her American friend, to her favorites. They give Ira's son special treats and inquire about her health and the state of her second pregnancy.

In the hierarchy of ecological cleanliness and nutrition, not all food sources are created equal. At least four tiers exist; I will list them here from worst to best. Worst of all, as Ira's baby journal indicates, is the produce available in stores and supermarkets. This, of course, includes all Western imported food. Next in line are the permanent outdoor "city markets" that dot most Russian cities [8]. More ecologically clean and more nutritious than the food found at the city markets is the produce at local farmers' markets. But the most ecologically clean and most nutritious food is food produced by Russians in the countryside for their own use or the use of friends and family. It is easy to accept this definition of local farmers' market food or self-grown dacha food as more nutritious because it is produced locally and is eaten soon after it is harvested. But Russians mean far more than just this. When they proclaim the nutrition and cleanliness of a food, they take into consideration the human connection to that food.

This definition hit home for me when I was given a bucket of apples by Ivan and Yulia in Nizhni Novgorod. They proudly proclaimed the apples "ecologically clean," unlike the ones sitting on my kitchen counter, purchased at an outdoor market. "Throw those away," Yulia told me. "These are much better for you!" These apples were grown on the land at their countryside dacha that I had visited some weeks before. During my visit, Ivan had spent a great deal of time explaining the problem he was having with his fruit trees. Several of them had died and he blamed an infestation of insects. His neighbor, fortunately, had access to pesticides from a privatized farm in the area and shared these chemicals with Ivan and Yulia. These apples, so proudly labeled ecologically clean, were from the very trees treated with these pesticides. When I protested calling the apples ecologically clean on this basis, Yulia said, "But that doesn't matter. We grew them ourselves. With our own hands."

Yulia also served me a sugary *kompot* (a fruit drink) at her apartment one time with the same warning. She claimed that her *kompot* was far better for me than "those store juices" I usually bought. Yulia was not the first Russian to warn me against store-bought juice. Students from Volga-Vyatskaya Academy in Nizhni Novgorod issued disapproving comments when they noticed boxes of commercial juice in my home. The only kind of juice that is appropriate to drink, according to my physician friend Valentina, is home-made and fresh-squeezed. "If you buy it in the store, there are no vitamins left and there are probably lots of preservatives," she says.

Over and over again, I found that Russians who produce ecologically clean food mean, as Yulia said, that they have produced it themselves, not that the water is free of contaminants; the soil untreated with chemicals; and the air free of drifting pesticides and pollen. When I started to notice this subtlety, I began to pay more attention to the distinctions my Russian informants make between the city markets and farmer markets.

Merchants Versus Farmers

There are numerous city markets in Nizhni Novgorod, nearly one in each neighborhood, though some are larger than others. I lived near the central market of the city. Many of the vendors at these city markets come from non-Russian ethnic backgrounds, such as Chechen, Korean or Chinese. But significantly, these vendors are merchants, not farmers. This distinction is not lost on most Russians.

Merchants, by definition, make money by buying at one price and selling for a higher price. During Soviet times, this form of merchant capitalism was illegal. Making a profit in this manner was called “speculation,” and both the word and the act were considered exceedingly distasteful and demeaning (Humphrey 2002:44; Ledeneva 1998). Though this attitude dates back to tsarist times and figures prominently in many traditional Russian fairytales (Afanasev 1945), it was actively cultivated by Soviet leaders (Geiger 1968). Humphrey noted in Russia in 1995 that “to engage in trading professionally is to step over some invisible line of decency” (Humphrey 2002). Merchants at the city markets were referred to as liars and cheaters by many of my informants. I was told repeatedly to hold onto my wallet and hide my money whenever I entered such a market, because the people there are dishonest and untrustworthy.

One way that merchants can cheat customers is by changing their scales in their own favor. For this reason, almost every market has an official scale that customers can demand to use. But the most common way that merchants can cheat customers is simply by charging too much money – in other words, making too large of a profit. “You used to know the price of everything. You turned it over, its price was right there,” remembers my friend, Lena. Though only 21, she can remember this aspect of the Soviet system clearly: that prices for all goods were standardized. Deviation from this state price was speculation – an illegal act. Today, says Lena, prices are confusing: “You never know what you should pay. I don’t like haggling with them (market merchants). It’s their job and I’m not very good at it” [9].

Though outwardly similar in appearance, the farmer markets that are held throughout the city on specific days of the week are entirely different cultural experiences. Whether true or not, urban Russians refer to these vendors as “farmers” who live in the Russian countryside. As opposed to the vendors at city markets, who represent a panoply of ethnicities, most of the farmer market vendors appear to be white and ethnically Russian. Whereas the city market vendors tend to be younger, in the age range of 19-45, most of the farmer market vendors tend to be older, in the age range of 30-70.

Though age and ethnicity are significant factors in the way Russian consumers interpret these two different kinds of vendors, also important, I posit, is the important distinction between merchant and farmer. Whereas a merchant must make money by buying low and selling high (but does not produce anything him/herself), a farmer actually produces something of value. Unlike a merchant, a farmer engages in what Russians call “trud,” or real labor [10]. While we were in a city market surrounded by young Caucasian vendors, the college student Lena, who said she doesn’t like to haggle, confided that she prefers farmer markets. If she overpays, “I’d rather overpay a poor babushka than one of these sleazy guys.” From whom a food comes is a factor in determining an acceptable price for Lena. But beyond price, many Russians make judgments about the nutritional status and desirability of a food according to its human source.

From Whom – Not From Where – Does My Food Come?:The Importance of Personal Relationships and Exchange Networks in Russian Life

In the Russian context, it makes a great deal of sense that more emphasis would be placed on *who* produced the food than where it came from. Russians are well used to acquiring just about everything, including food, through their connections to other people, or what social scientists call “informal exchange networks.”

The extent to which these informal exchange networks dominate the economic activities of ordinary Russians is really breathtaking. The researcher Lonkila found that Russians use connections in the post-Soviet period, on average, several times a day, significantly more than a comparison group in Finland (Lonkila 1997). In large part, this is because the goods, so readily available these days, are often expensive imports out of the fiscal reach of poorly-paid Russian workers. But the deep mistrust of merchants and fears about food quality that I am documenting play important roles here, too. Network exchanges make cultural sense because they express the proper relations between people, which are not supposed to be based on a profit motive.

Conclusion

As I have shown in this talk, Russians are worried that the state of their health has declined dramatically since the collapse of the Soviet Union. But their explanations for – and attempts to mitigate and improve – this situation, are strikingly different from those explanations that most often guide Canadian and U.S. foreign policy, the IMF, the WHO and, even Russian policy making. As I’ve noted, Westerners who grapple with agricultural and health issues in Russia tend to emphasize internal, domestically-produced, macroeconomic problems (including “cultural” problems that interfere with the acceptance and implementation of recommended western practices) (Massey 2002; Helsing 2002) [10]. I argue that such ethnocentric accounts reflect the general tendency in the West to see the mind, body and spirit separately and to treat “social” issues as separate from, not constitutive of and inextricable from, health issues (Leslie 2001).

Russians instead tend to discuss their health by discussing their food. They see the food available in the post-socialist period as increasingly “capitalist,” grown for a profit and

not for human nourishment. Across many sorts of social divides (my informants in this article, for instance, include a “New Russian” businessman; a struggling college language student; Russians who identify as alternative health practitioners and those who prefer more orthodox medicine), Russians I know identify food from known sources as the most healthy.

In a cultural context in which informal exchange networks densely fill the social landscape, I understand this definition of “healthy food” to express concern about proper human relationships. Food produced for a profit (as is all Western, imported food) and food sold by merchants for a profit represent undesirable, diseased human relationships. The food cannot be trusted because the people selling the food cannot be trusted. Food produced on one’s own land, by friends or relatives, or by rural people just trying to make an honest living can be trusted because the people involved can be trusted. The words “ecologically clean,” in this sense, ideally mean that the people involved in the food’s production are more interested in your health than in your money.

Endnotes

- (1) The names of my Russian informants have been changed.
- (2) In a longer version of this paper, I explore two other common concerns as well: the introduction of stress and a loss of time associated with the new economy.
- (3) Demographic statistics do indeed paint a bleak picture of Russian health. According to figures provided by Doctor Mikka Vienonen, head of the World Health Organization in Russia, “Russian medical figures show that only one baby in ten is born healthy here, while pregnancy is around ten times more dangerous for a Russian woman than for her British counterpart” (Wyatt 2001). An oft-quoted statistic is the depressingly low life expectancy for Russian men. From a high of 64, this number plummeted to a low of approximately 55 in 1993 and is currently recorded as 58.9 (WHO 2003 and Cockerham 2002). Though women live quite a bit longer on average, their life expectancy is also relatively low for an industrialized nation at 71.8 years in 2000 (Cockerham 2002). As birth rates have also fallen, most Russians are keenly aware that Russia is losing population. According to the conservative estimates of President Putin, the death rate outstrips the birth rate by 750,000 persons per year (Putin 2000). More poetically, in the words of one informant, Dr. Yakoleva, “Russia is dying.”
- (4) The data and interviews I present in this article come from a larger research project into the Russian medical system and the political economy of childbirth. I conducted fieldwork primarily in two urban settings, Nizhni Novgorod and St. Petersburg, during the year 2000 and on a month-long research trip in 2002. Like many anthropologists, I often found that chance encounters (on a train or in an employee lunch room while on a tour of a chicken factory) illuminated certain issues even more clearly than my formal interviews (Tsing 1993).

I was surprised throughout my fieldwork at how often Russians of disparate backgrounds and ages used similar words when describing markets, food and health issues to me. Nonetheless, I should note that the discourses and practices I describe here almost exclusively come from encounters with European Russians who live in large urban centers. Only a handful of my informants were pensioners over the age of 55; most were between the ages of 17 and 40. I would characterize most of my informants as struggling middle-class (exceptions to this are noted in the text). Though disposable income was often non-existent, most had at least some post-secondary education and most were employed (except the university students). Attitudes and practices of rural Russians, many of whom have extremely limited access to Russia's cash economy (Humphrey 2002:70), may differ in significant ways from those I encountered.

(5) In July 2000, I offered to bring reading material to some Russian women who were confined to bed at the St. Petersburg roddom. They pointedly asked me to bring "our" (Russian) magazines (such as *Zdorovye* or *Malish*), not the Russian-language versions of "your" (western) magazines (such as those produced by *Parents* and *Burda*).

(6) For instance, in the magazine *Moi Rebyonok* (My Baby), a special section on children's food claims that "Allergic reactions are today, unfortunately, not a rare occurrence. The culprit is bad ecology and chemical-based agriculture" (*Moi Rebyonok* May 2001: vii).

(7) Nostalgia for the state communist past informs present-day beliefs about nutrition and food (Urban; Verdery; West). Many Russians express the belief that it is impossible to get the vitamins/minerals one needs from food anymore. Like Lena, they associate this change with post-socialism and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Doctors newly recommend that pregnant women take multivitamins. According to Dr. Trotsko, twenty years ago such advice was frowned upon as "bourgeois" and lazy. "We tried to eat right [back then] and teach people about the nutritive qualities of food," he explains. Now, when I interview doctors, they say there are no vitamins in the food and that frankly they don't trust pregnant women to eat well because it so "impossible" these days. A French-based company, Vision, a multi-level marketing company, markets vitamins by appealing to this common fear. One successful marketer, Sasha, begins most of her spiels with the phrase, "As we all know, it's impossible to be healthy by eating a good diet anymore." This fear is especially acute in the spring, when Russians worry that the long winter has sapped stored foods of their potency. At a childbirth education class on March 22, 2000, one of the women warned the group to "be careful eating potatoes this time of year. And, in general," she said, "I've heard that the elderly and invalids shouldn't eat potatoes after February 1st."

(8) This is my own label for these markets. Russians refer to both city markets and farmers' markets simply as "rinok" or "market," but make distinctions between them in other ways.

(9) Talking about prices that change – that are different for one consumer than another; that differ in one location from another – is an explicit acknowledgement that the Soviet economic system has changed drastically. When I lived in Yaroslavl in 1990, goods may not have been available, but their prices were absolutely predictable. For better or worse, so-called “market” fluctuations, once given names such as “exploitation” and “price gouging,” have entered the lives of Russian citizens. But far from feeling “normal,” price changes, comparison shopping and haggling are often experienced by Russians as “stresses.”

(10) Humphrey comments that “The reaction [to the activity of trading and profit-making] that developed during the Soviet period rests...on the Marxist teaching that true value is created by labor... There simply were no legitimate people in the Soviet Union whose activity was conceptualized as creating wealth in any other way” (Humphrey 2002:59).

(11) For instance, Helsing, et al, describe the frustration of WHO officials who have tried to implement “Baby Friendly” policies, especially policies designed to encourage and support breastfeeding, into Russian health institutions. Though this study takes the important step of including the voices and opinions of new Russian mothers, it does not include the voices and opinions of health workers. Instead of asking these informants directly, the authors surmise what the problem must be: “The problem of slightly reluctant support from some health workers in the early phase of routine changes has been reported earlier...On reflection, we conclude that hospital staff often underestimate the time and effort required physically and mentally to implement the seemingly simple requirements of the BFHI [Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative]” (Helsing 2002).

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