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Политические науки и регионоведение

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The activities of medical trade unions in Karelia during the coronavirus pandemic

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Аннотация. In this article, using the example of the activities of professional medical unions of Karelia during the first three waves of the spread of coronavirus, one of the ways of communication between the authorities and society during the coronavirus pandemic is analyzed. The research is based on a survey of representatives of the medical community of Karelia and a comparison of two medical trade unions. The results of the survey allow us to analyze the level of respondents' confidence in medical trade unions, and comparison allows us to identify the specifics of their activities during a pandemic.

Ключевые слова: Republic of Karelia, pandemic, medical trade unions, health care system, trade union activity

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Modern trade union organizations in Russia are institutions of civil society aimed at protecting the rights of citizens in the field of labor, social and cultural relations, therefore, due to the established management practice, trade unions turn in their activities primarily to state institutions that direct the development of individual sectors of the national economy. This statement also applies to public health organizations, which are distinguished by a certain autonomy in solving a number of social and cultural needs of their members, as well as the entire medical community, but when solving more serious problems, medical trade unions must obey the bureaucratic apparatus.

In the 1990s, a number of laws were developed to regulate the activities of trade unions and streamline their relations with the administrative apparatus [Trade unions in Russia: imitation of work or real protection of labor rights]:

1) innovations in labor legislation, which greatly simplified the dismissal of trade union activists;

2) the creation of a state labor inspectorate, which deprived the FNPR (Foundation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia) of the right to conduct a trade union technical inspection;

3) the accounts of the Social Insurance Fund were transferred to the Federal Treasury from the «Solidarity» Bank owned by the Federation. Since then, the state has been able to monitor and control the fund's financial activities.

4) In 1998, the adoption of a law on compulsory social insurance against accidents. This law has greatly helped unions in the fight to ensure employers comply with labor and labor protection laws.

5) Adoption of federal laws «On the procedure for resolving collective labor disputes», «On trade unions, their rights and guarantees of activity». The result of this process, on the one hand, was a sharp reduction in the number of trade union organizations, which in turn affected their activities, on the other, the formation of a legal mechanism for social partnership in modern Russia, which also determined the role of trade union organizations today.

In turn, the healthcare system in Russia underwent major changes in the 2000s. The «optimization» of the medical service system led to an acute shortage of medical personnel in the regions, to the closure of many FAPs, hospitals and polyclinics and, in principle, to a deterioration in the quality of medical care, including in medical institutions in Karelia. These problems became especially noticeable during the pandemic. In the context of an aggravated epidemiological situation, the health care system of the region turned out to be physically unable to cope

with the number of cases, as well as provide other medical services. But in this case, questions arise, how this negative trend was overcome and who was the mediator of these events? When analyzing the events of the first three waves of the pandemic in Karelia, special attention is paid to the activities of medical trade unions. It was they who, at the initial stage, were able to gather and organize a variety of groups in the medical community (medical workers, medical students, volunteer organizations, etc.) [On determining the procedure for extending the action of measures to ensure the sanitary and epidemiological well-being of the population in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation in connection with the spread of a new coronavirus infection (COVID-19)]. Thus, this study is devoted to the problem of trust in the medical trade unions of Karelia, since this factor significantly affects the functioning of public organizations, as well as the specifics of their activities during the first three waves of the pandemic.

Research question: what is the role of medical trade unions in organizing healthcare system during a pandemic. Research object: medical trade unions of the Republic of Karelia.

Subject of research: forms of trade union activity at different stages of the development of a pandemic (first, second and third waves of a pandemic).

Purpose of the study: to reveal the peculiarities of the functioning of the medical trade unions of Karelia, as well as the peculiarities of their activities during a pandemic.

Research goals:

Analyze the foundations of the legal activity of medical trade unions of the Republic of Karelia.

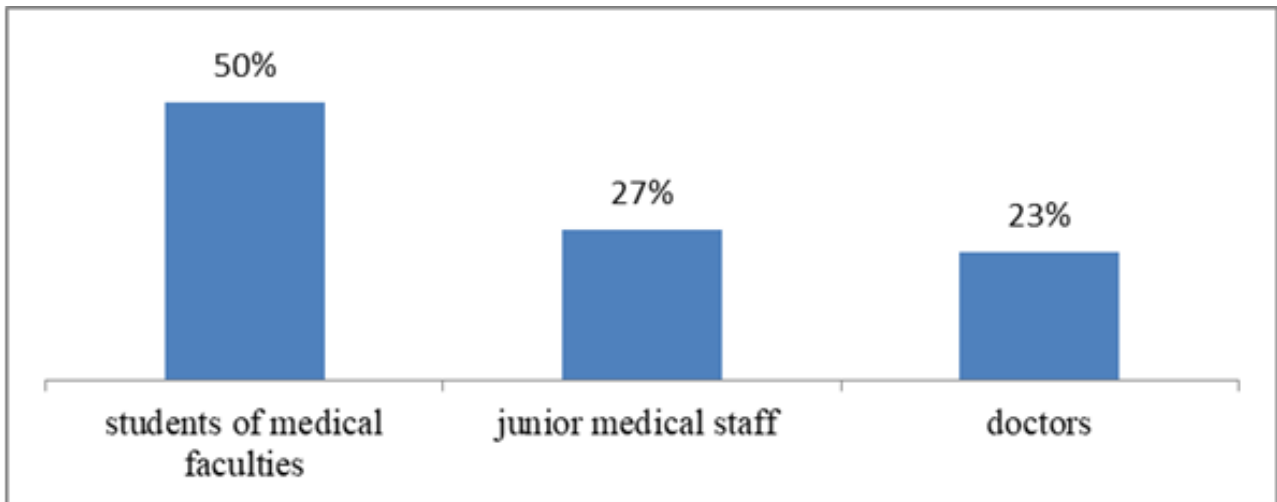
To compare the peculiarities of the activity of two medical trade unions of Karelia, which occupy different positions in the system of public-power communication.

Based on the survey, to reveal the level of respondents' confidence in the medical trade unions of the Republic of Karelia.

Chronological scope of the study: from March 2020 to August 2021, the period of the spread of the first-third waves of the pandemic in the Republic of Karelia.

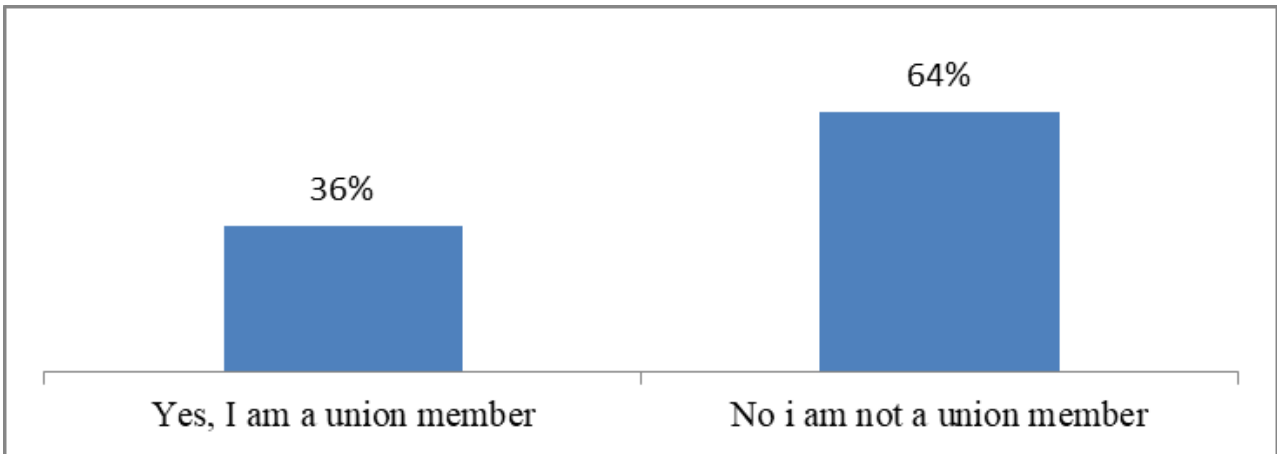
Research methods: institutional, functional and comparative analysis, survey of medical workers - 52 respondents: 26 students of medical faculties, 14 junior medical staff and 12 doctors.

It should be noted that the specificity of the activities of any trade unions during a pandemic was also determined by the attitude towards them on the part of society, which was partially studied using the example of a survey conducted.



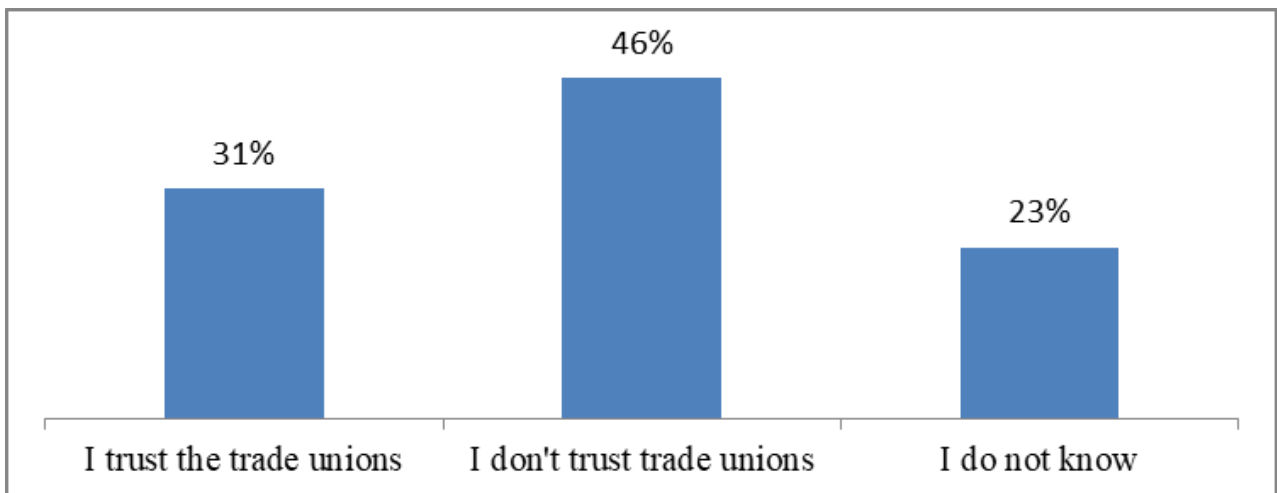
Drawing 1. Employment of respondents (Source: calculated by the author)

Among all respondents, 36% were members of medical unions, while 64% stated that they are not members of trade unions and do not intend to join trade unions, the data is presented in the following table. (Drawing. 2).



Drawing 2. Share of trade union members among respondents (Source: calculated by the author)

In turn, the level of public confidence in medical trade unions is only 31%, 46% of respondents answered that they do not trust healthcare organizations, and 23% of respondents found it difficult to answer this question. (Drawing. 3).



Drawing 3. Level of trust of respondents in medical trade unions (Source: calculated by the author)

The distrust of health workers in community organizations is likely one of the factors that have revitalized the activities of other public organizations and volunteers involved in supporting health care personnel during a pandemic, but these forms of public participation are not explored in this article.

The main results of the activity of trade unions are considered on the example of two organizations - the trade union «Action» and the «Trade union of health workers».

The comparison is carried out according to the following criteria: the attitude of trade unions to public health policy, methods of action of trade union organizations, their activities during a pandemic, means of communication (how much information is available about the activities of trade unions, how actively trade unions interact with society).

The first studied trade union in Karelia is the «Trade union of health workers». This community in its actions is focused on supporting the state policy in the field of medicine, therefore the main method of its actions is a conventional dialogue with the authorities. The organization was active during the first and second waves of the pandemic. At the first stage, the trade union initiated inspections of medical organizations for violations of the law. At the second stage, the trade union concluded a new sectoral regional Agreement with the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Karelia. The main provisions of this agreement are [Sectoral regional Agreement between the Ministry of Health and Social Development of the Republic of Karelia and the Karelian Republican Organization of the Trade Union of Health Workers of the Russian Federation]

- compensation payments to employees performing work with harmful and hazardous working conditions, depending on the class and degree.

- a new procedure for passing advanced training for medical workers.

During the third wave of the pandemic, the union had the opportunity to use the results of the agreement in its day-to-day activities. If we talk about the interaction of the community and the media, then this organization is not distinguished by its activity on social networks and rarely updates the official website.

The «Action» Trade Union is an organization that is known for its critical attitude to certain measures carried out by the state in the field of healthcare, therefore it uses both conventional and non-conventional methods (strikes, rallies) in its activities [The Action union of medical workers called on the Prosecutor General to check the work of the leadership of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation]. This union was active during the first, second and third waves of the pandemic. During the first wave, the union actively informed the public about problems in the field of medicine and participated in solving the problem of shortages of personal protective equipment [A nurse was punished in a Karelian hospital: the trade union is sure that this is how unwanted people are punished]. During the second wave, the community also actively worked with the media, defended the rights of medical workers and initiated checks in medical organizations [Doctors want to return to themselves coronavirus pension, ministers respond with talk about ethics]. During the third wave of the pandemic, the union fought for financial benefits and fringe benefits for doctors [Ambulance dispatcher to sue for libel]. It is worth noting that from the first wave of the pandemic to the third, the activity of this trade union has significantly decreased, as well as the degree of its influence on the situation as a whole. Another feature of the trade union is its interaction with the media. This community actively maintains social networks and has its own official website, as well as actively interacts with local newspapers [Official site of the trade union Action].

Based on the comparison, we can conclude that the medical trade unions of Karelia have some problems with the level of trust on the part of the population, which makes some of their actions not as effective as originally planned. Nevertheless, civil society organizations showed significant activity during the first wave of the pandemic, and made many important decisions on their own. Based on this, we can say that the medical trade unions of Karelia were mediators of events during the spread of the first wave of covid, but over time the degree of their influence on the processes became less and less. As the analysis of official and departmental documents shows, this fact is due to the fact that after the first wave of the pandemic, the initiative in developing solutions

related to the organization of the healthcare system was again concentrated in administrative structures, and since the onset of the second wave, state institutions are the mediator of events. In turn, the trade unions continued their daily activities, building on the experience that had been accumulated earlier.

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Political science and regional studies

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