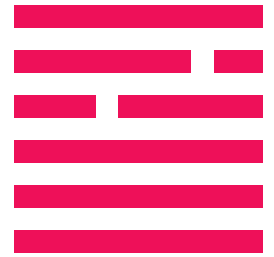


SUPPORT LIFE AFTER SEXUAL TORTURE



Torture is often perpetrated through gender-specific means. Perpetrators know that the interference with a victim's sexuality results in particularly devastating psychosocial consequences. This is why sexual torture, in particular rape, is often used as a strategic weapon in times of conflict. If applied in a systematic manner, it can lead to the internal disruption of whole communities and the disintegration of the social fabric. Victims need support to rebuild their lives after sexual torture.

WHAT IS SEXUAL TORTURE?

Sexual torture can be anything from enforced nakedness and sexual molestation to coerced performance of sexual acts, electric shocks to genitalia, different forms of rape, sometimes including deliberate infection with HIV or enforced impregnation, sexual slavery in detention and over long periods of time, disfigurement or mutilations of sexual organs, sterilisation, and much more.

Acts of sexual torture can be specifically committed on the grounds of a person's sex, gender identity or sexual orientation. This means that, as a result of their wide-spread discrimination, women and girls, as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer people (LGBT) and other individuals suffer disproportionately from gender-specific torture. However, also heterosexual men may be intentionally targeted with sexual torture in order to disrupt perception of masculinity.

Sexual torture has been proven to result in particularly severe and long-lasting effects on mental and physical health, as well as social life. Therefore, victims of gender-based or sexual torture have special rehabilitative needs.

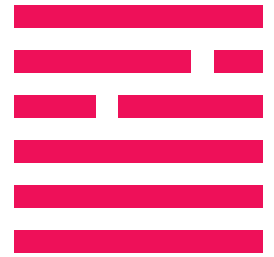
WHY SUPPORT VICTIMS OF SEXUAL TORTURE?

The consequences of sexual torture reach far beyond immediate emotional and bodily pain. Many victims suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, which includes symptoms such as recurrent flashbacks, severe anxiety, insomnia and nightmares, memory lapses, aggressive behaviour, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Victims may also exhibit serious psychosomatic symptoms ranging from self-destructive and self-harming behaviour to suicide. Physical consequences of sexual abuse can be anal or urinary tract infections, including HIV, or injuries to the genitals with strong bleedings, as well as unwanted pregnancies, often accompanied by the effects of illegally and unsafely conducted abortions.

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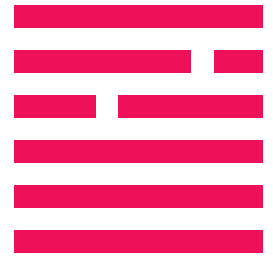
Sexual torture not only affects the victims' personal identity of themselves, but also their ability to maintain familial and social relationships and pursue daily activities. Often the mere inability to pursue their job or to look after their children leads to total social isolation and economic hardship. Health problems like urinary tract infections can make it impossible to continue going to school and participating in social life, and partners or parents might soon feel overwhelmed by the burden this implies for them. In addition, the stigma that a family faces following sexual torture of one of its members can quickly reach the level of total social exclusion, abandonment and disfavour.

Rehabilitation from sexual torture is usually a particularly long and tedious process. Victims of sexual torture often feel intense humiliation, a sense of powerlessness, self-disgust, and worthlessness. Due to the strong stigmatisation of sexuality in most societies, it takes a long time for victims to disclose what happened in the first instance. Admitting their sexual abuse means to expose the most intimate part of themselves to the risk of being stigmatised, judged, and excluded.

In this situation most victims need comprehensive support to begin rebuilding their lives. Only when victims receive support to process their experiences, is it possible to reverse the devastating individual and social effects of sexual abuse. This requires that victims have access to comprehensive rehabilitation services ranging from medical support and psychological counselling to family and community interventions, as well as to legal and economic assistance.

WHAT I CAN DO TO SUPPORT

SUPPORT LIFE AFTER SEXUAL TORTURE



HOW TO SUPPORT VICTIMS OF SEXUAL TORTURE?

Victims need support to restore their lives after sexual torture. We can all do something to support this in our communities, countries and globally. Here is what you can do:

Political decisions makers at all levels should:

- Ensure that national legislation complies with international law that recognises sexual violence as a method of torture or ill-treatment;
- Recognise women, girls, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer persons as groups historically subjected to discrimination who are particularly exposed to violence and take all necessary preventive measures to ensure their protection from ill-treatment and torture;
- Introduce comprehensive policies and budgets to provide specialised health and psychological care, as well as social, economic and legal assistance for victims of sexual torture and ensure they can access it promptly and without discrimination;
- Ensure that state and non-state service-providers, including police forces, medical staff, social workers, lawyers, human rights defenders, and all other relevant stakeholders who interact with them are trained in identifying respective signs and symptoms of sexual torture and are sensitised to the needs of this specific category of victims.

Judges and prosecutors should:

- Ensure that claims for rehabilitation are effectively pursued for every victim of sexual torture in a fair, non-discriminatory and timely manner;
- Ensure that punishment for perpetrators and reparation for victims take account of the broad and devastating effects of sexual torture and reflect the gravity of the crime.

Health, legal and other professionals working with torture victims should:

- Ensure that their services respond to the broad and complex needs of victims of sexual torture and include an individualised and holistic approach that takes account of the familial and social implications of sexual abuse;
- Ensure that services are provided in a safe and confidential environment, respectful of the dignity of the victims;
- Ensure that their approach, whenever possible, addresses the underlying and pervasive gender inequalities which render women and girls and persons who transgress sexual and gender norms particularly vulnerable to violence and torture and often severely limit their ability to seek out any form of reparations.

