



Torture is the deliberate and systematic dismantling of a person's identity and humanity. Torture's purpose is to destroy a sense of community, eliminate leaders and create a climate of fear.

Beatings and psychological torture are the most common forms reported to the Center for Victims of Torture™ (CVT). CVT clinicians have documented more sophisticated forms of torture over the years, especially methods of psychological torture, that do not leave physical scars. This makes it more difficult for survivors to seek redress or make asylum claims.

CVT clients have reported the following forms of torture:

**Physical Assaults**, including beatings, prolonged enforced standing, hanging, suffocation, burnings, electric shock, sexual assault and rape, and exposure to extreme heat or cold.

**Psychological Torture**, including verbal abuses, threats against family, friends and loved ones, false accusations, forced choices, mock executions, and being forced to witness torture, mutilation and murder of others.

**Deprivation of Humane Conditions**, including deprivation of food and water, being held in isolation, restricted movement, blindfolding, sleep deprivation and withholding of medical care.

**Sensory Over-Stimulation**, including exposure to constant noise, screams and voices, powerful lights and forced ingestion of drugs.

### Effects of Torture

- Long-term physical effects of torture include scars, headaches, musculoskeletal pains, foot pains, hearing loss, dental pain, visual problems, abdominal pains, cardiovascular/respiratory problems, sexual difficulties, and neurological damage.
- Long-term psychological effects include difficulty concentrating, nightmares, insomnia, memory loss, fatigue, anxiety, depression and posttraumatic stress disorder.

### Psychological torture is Damaging

- In CVT's experience, psychological torture can be more damaging and cause more severe and long-lasting damage than the pain of physical torture.
- A study found that degrading treatment and psychological manipulation cause as much emotional suffering and long-term mental health harm as physical torture.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Basoglu, et al. *Torture vs Other Cruel, Inhuman, and Degrading Treatment*. Archives of General Psychiatry, Volume 64, March 2007. PDF available at: <http://archpsyc.ama-assn.org/cgi/reprint/64/3/277>

### **Threats of Death or Injury**

- Survivors say mock executions left them feeling they were already dead.
- Survivors relive these near-death experiences in their nightmares or flashbacks.
- CVT clients have reported that they pleaded with their torturers to kill them, preferring real death over the constant threat and intolerable pain it caused.

### **Sexual Humiliation**

- Sexual humiliation leads to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and major depression; victims often have flashbacks or nightmares about their experiences; male and female victims feel shame, grief and fear.
- Forced nakedness creates a power differential, stripping the victims of their identities, inducing immediate shame and creating an environment where the threat of sexual and physical assault is always present.
- At CVT, women clients say sexual humiliation is so shaming, they cannot admit it to their communities or families without fearing rejection.
- Male victims feel degraded, especially if the perpetrator was female.

### **Sensory Deprivation, Including Solitary Confinement**

- All forms of sensory deprivation can have profound and long-lasting psychological consequences.
- Effects of solitary confinement include depression, anxiety, difficulty with concentration and memory, hypersensitivity to external stimuli, hallucinations, perception distortions, paranoia and problems with impulse control.
- According to Physicians for Human Rights, The Berlin Center treated East German ex-political prisoners who'd been subjected to extended isolation, both solitary confinement and sensory deprivation. They reported interrogations that lasted for days along with other disorienting tactics and sleep deprivation. In the Physicians for Human Rights' report, prisoners described psychotic states, loss of confidence in their own perceptions, and extremely impaired cognitive functioning.<sup>2</sup>

### **Sleep Deprivation<sup>3</sup>**

- Physicians for Human Rights notes that cognitive impairment is the primary, although not the only, negative psychological effect of sleep deprivation.
- When deprived of sleep, Physicians for Human Rights states that individuals may experience slowed response time and attention deficits. They may suffer from problems with memory and speech or with ways of thinking, which can become overly-persevering or inflexible. It only takes a single night of sleep deprivation or a few nights with sleep restricted to five hours of sleep for some individuals to experience these symptoms.
- PHR also notes that cardiovascular problems including hypertension can result from sleep restrictions. (See *Break Them Down* by Physicians for Human Rights, below.)

<sup>2,3</sup>Physicians for Human Rights. *Break Them Down: Systematic use of Psychological Torture by U.S. Forces*. Available at: [https://s3.amazonaws.com/PHR\\_Reports/break-them-down.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/PHR_Reports/break-them-down.pdf)