



Hi, my name is Pankti Bhatt and I handle Legal Affairs at the Center for Survivors of Torture, a non-profit serving refugees and asylees in Texas and Oklahoma who are rebuilding their lives after fleeing torture in other countries. Center for Survivors of Torture provides psychological, social, legal and medical services, referrals and training for survivors and community members.

Torture is an attack on fundamental democratic values perpetrated by governments of the left and right by destroying individuals and stifling democracy. It is violent means of controlling, silencing, and intimidating individuals and societies. The psychological and physical effects of torture are profound and will be long-term, particularly if untreated. There is an urgent need for psychological and physical rehabilitation for torture survivors, given the fact that over two-thirds of the countries of the world actively or tacitly endorse torture as a means of political control. In 2010, Amnesty International reported torture occurring in more than 98 countries. Three billion people live in countries that allow torture.

How does that affect us in the U.S.?

The Office of Refugee Resettlement reports that there are an estimated 500,000 torture survivors in the U.S. with approximately 45,000 residing in Texas. According to the National Consortium of Torture Treatment Providers (NCTTP) in 2008, the 27 members of NCTTP had the capacity to provide services to 5,000 to 6,000 survivors of torture. This leaves a significant gap in resources available to survivors. Many survivors of torture arrive in the United States as refugees and seekers of political asylum, but others come here as students, employees, and visitors. Whatever their path to the United States, when these individuals arrive here they are faced with adjusting to a new home, a new language, and new customs. Most often, they are alone. Many come here without necessities for survival and must find housing, food, clothing, and employment. They are often in need of legal and medical services. They must face these challenges while struggling with the pain of the trauma they experienced, the loss of their home, and the separation from family and friends. Counseling at CST helps to mitigate the impact of trauma as survivors rebuild their lives.

In addition to the physical damage often caused by torture, many survivors suffer from anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder. Symptoms can include flashbacks, backaches, headaches, poor sleep, decreased appetite, hopelessness, nightmares, emotional numbness, and paranoia. The effects of torture also extend beyond the immediate victims to their families, friends, and communities.



At CST, we help people who have been tortured because of who they are or what they believe. Survivors must overcome language barriers, economic struggles, and social stigma to get treatment for the atrocities they have endured. CST seeks to actively engage survivors in their physical and mental health treatment to achieve the best outcome possible – a fulfilling life. CST has helped more than 1,700 torture survivors to restore their spirits and rebuild their lives. Left untreated, torture survivors may become homeless, mentally ill, and unemployed. Many can be at risk for suicide. When people are unable to heal, the consequences can reach far into following generations.

With treatment from trained licensed professionals, survivors can overcome the devastating effects of torture and live healthy, productive lives. From impact assessment, CST reports that clients are able to resolve grief and trauma, and to integrate the torture experiences into the larger context of the person they are. *Over 85 percent of CST clients meet their counseling goals within a 6-month period.* Individuals are able to eat, sleep without nightmares, concentrate, and feel joy again. They have been debilitated by torture, but with treatment at CST, they are able to re-establish their lives. With interventions, survivors can become dynamic members of their new communities.

We thank the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for their work in funding rehabilitative programs for survivors of torture through effective programs such as the UNVFVT. We hope you continue to support such programs as they are integral to building a productive and strong American society.