



Torture Survivors in the United States

- ***What is torture?*** Torture is the intentional infliction of physical or psychological pain and suffering on another. This abhorrent practice represents a deliberate and systematic dismantling of a person's identity and humanity. Survivors report being subjected to severe beatings, rape, deprivation, humiliation, threats, mock executions, sensory stress, kidnapping, forced postures, asphyxiation, burning, and witness to murder and torture of family members.
- ***Who are the Survivors?*** Survivors of torture were leaders in their home countries; they are educators, lawyers, journalists, doctors, nurses, scientists, engineers and others who worked for democratic change. They are resilient and driven to succeed, learning English, creating businesses, and making other important contributions to the economic and social fabric of the communities that welcome them.
- ***What are the Long Term Impacts of Torture?*** Experiences of torture commonly lead survivors to demonstrate symptoms such as chronic pain, sleep disorders, severe depression and anxiety, the inability to concentrate, and thoughts of suicide. NCTTP analyzed data from 9,025 torture survivors from 125 different countries living in the United States who sought services at one of 23 NCTTP member centers.¹ A diagnostic study of a portion of these survivors found that 69% of the survivors had post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and 52.4% had major depressive disorder (MDD).
- ***How Many Survivors of Torture are there in the United States?*** A meta-analysis of previous research studies on torture prevalence rates within refugee populations in the United States revealed that as many as 44% of refugees are either primary or secondary survivors of torture.² Applying the 44% torture prevalence rate to the overall number of refugees who have been resettled in the past 30 years, there could be as many as 1.3 million survivors of torture in the United States, not counting the large number of torture survivors who sought and continue to seek protection through U.S. asylum processes.
- ***How do Specialized Services Help Survivors of Torture?*** Without the benefit of help, torture survivors can become immobilized by their distress, unable to function within their communities or contribute to their family's well-being. Effective torture survivor rehabilitation programs are able to address a survivor's physical, psychological, legal and social needs to reduce their suffering and restore functioning as quickly as possible. NCTTP's data analysis found that one and two years after beginning treatment, survivors showed increased rates of employment and improvements in their immigration status. Moreover, the analysis found that earlier treatment limits depression.

¹ NCTTP, "Descriptive, inferential, functional outcome data on 9,025 torture survivors over six years in the United States," Torture Journal, Volume 25, No. 2, 2015. <http://www.irct.org/media-and-resources/library/torture-journal.aspx>.

² Center for Victims of Torture, "Updating the Estimate of Refugees Resettled in the United States who have Suffered Torture," (Sept. 2015). http://www.cvt.org/sites/cvt.org/files/SurvivorNumberMetaAnalysis_Sept2015_0.pdf.