

Certain severe human rights violations like torture, imprisonment under inhumane conditions and disappearance cause a serious damage to the human health. Health professionals concerned about human rights often make their expertise available to help document such abuses, for instance, exhumation of mass graves to examine allegation of executions, examination of torture victims, and assessment of health status of prisoners. Torture, imprisonment under inhumane conditions and the other human rights violations of similar nature lead to severe lifelong effects on physical, mental, and social well-being. Violations of many more human rights have detrimental effects on health. For example, the right to information may be violated when cigarettes are sold without governmental assurance that information about the deleterious health effects of tobacco smoking will also be available. The problem of occupation-related diseases/injuries, disabilities and deaths shows violations of the right to work under just and favourable conditions.

Article 5 of the Universal Declaration states that "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment". Article 7, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provides that "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. In particular, no one shall be subjected without his free consent to medical or scientific experimentation". An obligation on the part of the State not to torture was further defined when the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention against Torture and other Inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in 1984. When a State signs Article 22 of the Convention it is also possible for individual to complain to the Committee against Torture if he feels that the State has violated the Convention. This Convention is one of the most important international legal instruments in the fight against torture.

The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, in its Article 3, prohibits inhuman or degrading treatment and provides that no one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

A simple definition of torture was adopted by Amnesty International in its 1973 report on torture. "Torture is the systematic and



deliberate infliction of acute pain by one person on another, or on a third person, in order to accomplish the purpose of the former against the will of the latter."

The 1975 Declaration of Tokyo adopted by the World Medical Association gives a similar definition which states that "the torture is the deliberate, systematic infliction of physical or mental suffering by one or more persons acting alone or on the orders of any authority, to force another person to yield information, to make a confession, or for any other reason".

The Convention against Torture, in its Article 1, furnishes the definition of torture which states that the term "torture" means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for the purpose of obtaining information or confession from him, when such pain and suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of a public official. The result of the torture is to break down the morale and personality of the victim, and thus render him unfit to the cause he had been advocating and supporting earlier. Torture is the punishment for an act which a person has committed or is

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effects, and how human

suspected of having committed. It is one of the most profound human rights violations and is a worldwide problem.

"Inhuman treatment" is defined as such treatment as deliberately causes severe suffering, mental or physical, which in the particular situation is unjustifiable. Torture is an aggravated form of inhuman treatment.

"Degrading treatment" is that when a human being is grossly humiliated before others.

Victims of torture are criminal suspects as well as political prisoners, the disadvantaged as well as the dissidents. People are targeted because of their identity as well as their beliefs. Torture and ill-treatment are illegal under the laws of virtually all countries.

There are two methods of torture: physical and psychological. Physical torture can be brutal and

may result into severe body damage and a high lethality rate. It produces a well-defined group of acute symptoms and visible signs, mostly secondary to the physical trauma. Some types of torture are related to specific symptoms and objective signs. The late consequences are related to the type and intensity of the method used. In torture survivors, most of the signs and symptoms recover spontaneously or because of treatment. However, in some victims, a residual effect of short or long duration persists, usually chronic pain, scars, orthopaedic and neurological deficits etc.

Head injury can lead to problems, such as post-concussive syndrome, mood disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder and psychosis. Contrary to the physical effects of torture, the psychological symptoms are usually persistent. Victim may experience anxiety, panic, irritability, insomnia, memory defects, nightmares, apathy, lack of initiative, social withdrawal, affective lameness, and flashbacks of the traumatic event even several months or years after the torture. Symptoms of

training procedures for officials involved in custody, Interrogation or Treatment of prisoners, International response and ratification of international instruments.

Amnesty International has published on October 18, 2000 a world-wide survey on torture and has reported that despite universal condemnation of torture, 150 States are involved in routine torture of the people and the number of cases of torture is increasing dramatically. Although some victims make a complete recovery but in most cases there is a deep and prolonged psychological effect from torture. The report indicates that torture in police custody is common in Asia and there have been many cases of people dying from torture in several countries. Amnesty recommends, "police, prison officers ... should be trained and all governments should protect refugees and ratify the United Nations Convention against Torture, with declarations providing for people and inter-state complaints."

The annual report of the Amnesty International published on May 30, 2001 highlights that in Europe, the

are particularly helpful. They can apply their clinical skills or deploy the analytical frame of epidemiology and public health to document the nature and impact of injuries caused by human rights abuses, provide expert testimony and advocate on behalf of the victims.

Physicians have a critical role in looking for, detecting, documenting and prosecuting the offence of torture. They are in a better position to observe the signs of physical torture and could better assess its psychological consequences.

Sometimes, there is a certain level of collaboration between the police and medical professionals. A former member of the UN Committee against Torture, once indicated an incident of a similar kind when he said that a torture victim had been exposed to a torture method where a 3-4 inches nail was hammered into his forehead, which resulted into the death of the torture victim. Doctor falsely declared the cause of death to be epilepsy in the death certificate.

Some international declarations condemn involvement of medical

is necessary if proper attention is be given to the health consequences of human rights violation. Only when health impacts are described, measured, and named violations can the full extent of the relationship between health and human rights be realised.

To make assessment of health impacts resulting from human rights violations is still in the developmental phase. In this progress will require: a sophisticated capacity to document and assess human rights violations, the application of medical, public health and social science methodologies to identify and assess effects on physical, mental and social well-being and research to establish valid associations between human rights violations and health impacts. The assessment of health impacts resulting from violation of human rights will benefit both the public health and human right fields. Using human rights violations as a starting point for recognition of health problems may help uncover previously unrecognised burdens of physical, mental or social well-being. From a human rights viewpoint, documentation of health-impacts of human rights violations may enhance societal awareness of the significance of human rights promotion and protection.

Ignorance of human rights causes physicians to be drawn into unacceptable practices such as participation in the death penalty or development of inhumane weapons systems. It is the responsibility of the national medical associations to mobilise the profession towards prevention and mitigation. It should be a goal to persuade physicians into proactive protection of people from State inflicted harm.

We should work together to create a world in which there is no more torture, and we must teach politicians, journalists, lawyers, and everyone else the dangers of torture and its psychological impact.

The Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture should enable the introduction of unannounced inspection visits to places of detention in every state that has ratified the Optional Protocol.

There are fundamental principles which must be included in the text of the Protocol if it is to be an effective tool for the prevention of torture, viz. a standing invitation to visit the territory of any State Party to the Protocol, as well as a guarantee for the representatives of the UN Committee against Torture to have unlimited access to all places of detention and to all detainees as well as a right to interview detainees in private.

Health implications of human rights violations

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It dilates upon the way torture ruins personality by causing everlasting adverse effects. Human rights activists and physicians can minimise their sufferings

major depression, other mood disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, phobic disorders, and psychosis may also develop. These things also effects the family of torture survivors, with the destruction of the closeness and intimacy of the marriage as well as sexual relationship, with increased irritability and domestic violence.

Amnesty International, in 1983 called on all States to implement the following 12 Points Programme for Prevention of Torture.

These points are: The official condemnation of torture, No secret detention, Protection during interrogation and custody, Limits on incommunicado detention, Independent investigations of reports of torture, No use of statements extracted under torture,

Prohibition of torture in law, Prosecution of alleged torturers, Compensation and rehabilitation

most widely reported human rights violation is torture and ill-treatment by police, particularly in Turkey. In parts of the African continent, large-scale killing of civilians, torture, rape and disappearance have been reported. The medical co-ordinator of the Amnesty says that the medical community has a unique and important role in the prevention of human rights abuses. He further explains, "Doctors can protest against harmful practices, can provide services to those unfortunate enough to have suffered-injury as a result of abuses, and can promote policies which protect both the potential victims of abuses and colleagues who come under pressure to resist governments in human rights abuses."

Human rights violations frequently have serious health consequences and physicians can

personnel in torture. For instance, the Tokyo Declaration 1975, the Hawaii Declaration 1977 and the UN's Resolution on Principles of Medical Ethics 1983, forbid any medical participation in torture. All these documents share the affirmation that "doctors have a special responsibility to refrain from involving themselves in the abuses and torture of prisoners and detainees."

Health professionals and human rights professionals should work in conjunction with each other. Health professionals can contribute the skill to document and measure the health effects of violation, while those working in human rights can provide the context necessary to understand the complexity of the violation and to ascertain whether the information can be use to monitor and ensure government accountability. This joint approach