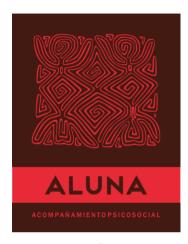


KEYS TOWARDS **PSYCHOSOCIAL** ACCOMPANIMENT

Torture and Sexual Torture







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4. TORTURE AND SEXUAL TORTURE

Fourth Booklet of the Series "Keys towards Psychosocial Accompaniment"

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Torture andSexual Torture¹

General objetive

The purpose is to define torture and its aim as a historical, systematic and generalized practice in our country. Also, to point out how sexual torture has been a method specifically and mainly used against women. Our goal is to emphasize the psychosocial impact and coping mechanisms that need to be contemplated during the psychosocial accompaniment of torture survivors.

Specific objectives

We will learn:

- The definitions and purposes of torture and sexual torture.
- Its background and current expression in Mexico.
- Its psychosocial impacts and the coping mechanisms at a personal, family, organizational, community and social levels.
- Some pre-conceptions and keys in psychosocial accompaniment in cases of torture and sexual torture.

What are torture and sexual torture?

a) Torture

In the Human Rights legal framework there are several international instruments that prohibit the use of torture. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Geneva Conventions, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT),² the American Convention on Human Rights, the Inter-American Convention to Prevent and Punish Torture, to name a few.

One of the great difficulties in reporting torture continues to be how the legal definitions are interpreted and the lack of agreement between national and international legislation. Observe those contemplated in Article 3 of the Federal Law to Prevent and Punish Torture (Mexico), and in Article 2 of the Inter-American Convention to Prevent and Punish Torture:

¹ This booklet collects the contents elaborated during the following workshops: "Psychosocial Accompaniment to Survivors of Torture" held on November, 8th 2014 and facilitated by Liliana Souza and Laura Espinosa, and "Psychosocial Accompaniment in cases of Sexual Torture" held on the 23rd and 24th of January of 2015 and facilitated by Clemencia Correa and Pilar Arrese. The latter was attended by Italia Méndez and Norma Jiménez, from the Campaign against Political Repression and Sexual Torture.

² Signed by the Mexican State in 1984 and ratified in 1986. Likewise, Mexico signed in 2003 the Optional Protocol associated with CAT, from which a commitment emerged to establish a National Mechanism to Prevent Torture-Mecanismo Nacional para Prevenir la Tortura (MNPT), operated by the National Commission of Human Rights-Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos (CNDH). Cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment within the definition of CAT was extended to include the mistreatment of a person in cases without premeditated intention.

FEDERAL LAW

INTER-AMERICAN CONVENTION

The crime of torture is committed by the *public servant* who, because *of their attributions*, inflicts on a person *severe* pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, in order to obtain information or a confession, either from the tortured person or from a third party. Also, to punish them for an act they committed or are suspected of committing, or to coerce them to perform or stop performing a certain behavior. Physical or mental suffering caused by legal actions *inherent* or *incidental* to *lawful measures* or derived from these, are not deemed to be torture.

[...] Torture means any act intentionally carried out by which a person is inflicted with physical or mental pain or suffering for purposes of criminal investigation, as a means of intimidation, as a personal punishment, as a preventive measure, as a punishment or for any other purpose. Torture shall also be understood to be the use of methods upon a person intended to obliterate the personality of the victim or to diminish his physical or mental capacities, even if they do not cause physical pain or mental anguish.³

Without pretending an exhaustive analysis of the previous definitions, let us point out some important elements. In terms of the first definition, to focus on the public servant as the subject-aggressor leaves out other possible players. The same can apply when it specifies that it is carried out because of the public servant's attributions, as torture can occur in other circumstances unrelated to these attributions. An important issue is the seriousness, which is not defined, nor are indicators established. Furthermore, techniques have become sophisticated to the point where there are no visible injuries of torture. In contrast, the second definition is broader: it does not specify who the perpetrator of torture is, nor does it qualify the severity of the physical or mental harm, emphasizing, instead, the intentionality of the action. In addition to listing some purposes, the second definition includes that torture can be inflicted "with any other purpose", which allows us to investigate the motive in each particular case.



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Added to the problem of legal interpretations and gaps, Public Ministry⁵ agents refuse to lodge complaints of torture and, when they do, they typify them as abuse of authority or injuries, in order to evade the responsibility of the State:

3 In both definitions, the italics are ours.

4 Injuries that take less than 15 days to heal are not accepted as proof of torture as they do not put life "at risk".

5 That is the institution in charge of the investigation of the crimes and representation of the victims. Its purpose is to enforce laws through prosecutors and officials. Its highest authority is the Attorney General of the Republic.

It is a crime against humanity⁶ typified in the Human Rights legal framework, in which the State has direct or indirect responsibility. It is used by the State, its institutions and other groups of power to terrorize and control the population, for counterinsurgency purposes or for the "manufacture" of criminals.

It is a crime defined in the Federal Criminal Code,⁷ and occurs when the public servant, "exercising his functions [,] commits violence against a person without legitimate cause or abuses or insults a person [...]", or forces "the accused to testify, using isolation, intimidation or torture."

It is a crime that occurs among citizens and includes "not only injuries, abrasions, bruises, fractures, dislocations, burns, but any alteration in health and any other damage that leaves a material imprint on the human body, if those effects are produced by an external cause." The sanction varies depending on the time it takes for the wound to heal.

Regarding the definition in the second column, responsibility is placed on the official as an autonomous subject; that is, that they violate the law for personal reasons, exempting the institutions, the chain of command and, of course, the entire state apparatus from responsibility in the use of torture. It seeks to diminish its political, historical and systematic nature. The third classification, injuries, implies a greater degree of impunity by denying the direct or indirect relationship of the perpetrator with the State.

Sexual torture, as such, is included in the Istanbul Protocol as a specific method of torture⁸ to be investigated regardless of the victim´s gender. In relation to women, we also find International Agreements on gender violence, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women-La Convención sobre la Eliminación de Todas las Formas de Discriminación contra la Mujer (CEDAW) and the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence Against Women ("Convention of Belém do Pará"), among others. On the other hand, in national legislation, the legal frame-

work includes the Federal Law to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination, the General Law for Equality between Women and Men and the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence. From a legal perspective, the crime of sexual torture is subsumed under torture; that is to say, there is no typification of "sexual torture" as such. This contributes to the concealment of this crime and the corresponding responsibility of the State, whether by action, omission or acquiescence. When these types of events are reported, they are investigated under other episodes, such as rape or sexual abuse.

SEXUAL TORTURE SEXUAL ASSAULT SEXUAL ABUSE

It is a specific method of torture committed by public officials or by other persons under the complicity of some authority. Historically, the States have used it as a mechanism of political control, a weapon of war, a form of gender domination, to implant terror, as a counterinsurgency strategy and for the "fabrication" of culprits.

This crime is committed by whosoever, "by means of physical or moral violence engages in intercourse with a person of either sex [that is,] the introduction of the virile member into the body of the victim vaginally, anally or orally, regardless of gender". Rape is also considered the introduction "vaginally or anally of any element or instrument other than the virile member by means of physical or moral violence".

Sexual abuse occurs when "a person, without his/her consent, is forced to execute on themselves or on another person, sexual acts without the purpose of arriving at copulation". Said sexual acts include: touching or obscene corporal gestures or gestures that represent sexual acts, forcing the victim to observe a sexual act or to exhibit their own body.

⁶ Considered in Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and that includes rape.

⁷ Federal Penal Code. Title Ten. Chap. II, Art. 214

⁸ It includes undressing, teasing, threats of rape or sodomy, touching, humiliation, insults, beatings and electric shocks on the genitals. See Istanbul Protocol. Manual for the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment. United Nations, 2004. Cap. V, Section D, Number 8, p. 79

⁹ The first was signed by the Mexican State in 1980 and ratified in 1981; the second, signed in 1995 and ratified in 1998.

¹⁰ Federal Penal Code. Title Fifteenth. Chapter I. Article 260.

Regarding sexual torture and its impact on women, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) has indicated that it brings "devastating physical, emotional and psychological consequences", and -it adds- "the sexual rape of a detainee by a State agent is a especially serious and reprehensible act, considering the vulnerability of the victim and the abuse of power displayed by the agent".¹¹

Apart from the suffering caused by torture, victims have to face a complicit and corrupt justice apparatus. This practice is supported by factors such as: the training of security forces in sophisticated techniques; the omission or lack of timely and impartial investigation of the facts by the Public Prosecutor's Offices; military trials, in the case of torturers and victims of the Army or the Navy; the judicial validity of statements signed under torture; the omission of injuries by medical doctors, etc. This paves the way for impunity and signifies the revictimization of survivors and their families.

b) What are the aims of torture and sexual torture?

Torture and sexual torture constitute an exercise of power for the purpose of social control that directly affects the body of a person, causing intense physical pain and mental suffering. Sometimes torture has been used selectively and covertly, other times openly and arbitrarily, according to the interest of the groups in power and the specific message they strive to give both to society and to certain sectors. However, its concrete purpose varies according to the particular context in which it is carried out. Thus, both can be used:

- To obtain a confession from a person or from a third person.
- To force a detained person to sign a self-incriminating statement.
- To terrorize a specific person or a sector of the population.
- As a form of punishment, revenge or warning.
- As a counterinsurgency strategy and weapon of war.
- For collective intimidation and demobilization through the rupture of social fabric.

- To break the resistance and physical, psychological, social and symbolic integrity of the victim.
- As a form of discrimination, social cleansing and gender violence.
- To damage the sexual identity and the erotic and/or reproductive capacity of the victim.
- To break female leaders using the body of a woman as a war trophy.
- As a form of patriarchal submission for the mere fact of being women.



Torture cycle.

http://centroprodh.org.mx/torturarnoesjusticia/?cat=5 &paged=2

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11 Lawsuit before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in the case of Valentina Rosendo Cantú and another (Case 12579) against the United Mexican States. IACHR / OAS, August 2, 2009, Washington DC. (Chapter VII, paragraph a, number i, §63

Torture in Mexico

a) Background¹²

Torture has existed in the history of human societies almost from the beginning. In Rome, for example, it was not only a legal practice, but even "necessary" to legitimize trials and obtain the truth. Whilst free men provided "natural proofs", slaves - whose word lacked value - were tortured to obtain "forced proofs" to prove their guilt. Amongst many other examples, the history of torture has endured through the public torture of the Middle Ages; the persecution of heretics and the burning of witches by the Holy Inquisition; the colonialist genocides; the Armenian massacre; the Jewish Holocaust; the Russian gulag; South African Apartheid; the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; military dictatorships, civil wars and armed conflicts in Latin America: the Balkan War: Abu Ghraib.

After its prohibition under the English Rationalism of the early nineteenth century, torture ceased to be a public and legal practice. However, it was simply sent to basements and dungeons. Thanks to science and technology, it became sophisticated. States, through their institutions and laws, were responsible for

both implementing and forbidding it. Rarely sufficient to attain justice, the word of the survivors became the only evidence of torture.

In Mexico, in the second half of the 20th century, torture was a method in which members of the Army were trained¹³ and it was also disseminated to other groups, for example, the Security General Directorate (DGS). the General Directorate of Political and Social Information, the Judicial Police, to name a few. Agents of these offices detained, tortured, executed or disappeared hundreds of people during the so-called dirty war of the seventies and eighties. Equally, the military detained and tortured their victims in a number of barracks during the same period, especially in Military Camp No. 1 and in Military Base No. 7 of Pie de la Cuesta, Acapulco.

Torture was and continues to be one of the main methods of counterinsurgency and social control in Mexico. Of course, "legitimating" discourses have varied according to the "internal enemy" in turn: communists, gunmen, delinquents, guerrillas, seditious and rebellious persons, terrorists, anarchists, drug traffick-

ers, kidnappers, etc. Numerous testimonies of survivors describe the systematic use of torture over the years, mainly against opponents of the regime. But there are many more victims: people who were not directly tortured or who had to flee to save their lives, were witnesses of atrocities, tortures and executions of their relatives and companions.¹⁴

Sexual torture has been permanently used against women - although there are also testimonies of its use on men. We have, for example, the stories of former guerrilla fighters and social militants of the seventies and eighties, survivors of the DGS and Military Camp No. 1; the sentences handed down by the IACHR in favor of two indigenous women sexually tortured by the military in 2002, or the political and legal denunciations of sexual torture of eleven female survivors of the Atenco and Texcoco operations in 2006, to name but a few 15

¹² Prepared with information from Liliana Souza. Impacto psicosocial de la tortura desde la salud colectiva en luchadores sociales y sus familias en el estado de Guerrero, y su imaginario colectivo. Doctoral Thesis. UAM-X. Mexico, 2011.

¹³ In the School of the Americas (SOA) of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), located in Fort Benning, Georgia, and created in 1946. Currently, between 900 and 2000 soldiers per year, including Mexican soldiers, are trained in torture techniques. Data of Alberto López. Historia de las organizaciones político-militares de izquierda en México. Doctoral Thesis. Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales, UNAM. Mexico, 2004.

¹⁴ We'll just mention some of the military, paramilitary and police operations carried out in the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, whose survivors relate the terrible tortures experienced or witnessed: Matanza de Atoyac de Álvarez (1967), Matanza de Tlatelolco (1968), Halconazo (1971), Aguas Blancas Massacre (1995), Acteal Massacre (1997), El Bosque Massacre (1998), El Charco Massacre (1998), police-military operations in Guadalajara (2003), Cancún (2004), Atenco and Texcoco (2006), Oaxaca (2006).

15 See"Bibliography" on the subject of torture, located in the Main Booklet of this same series, for the sources consulted and the testimonies mentioned in this paragraph.

b) Torture today

In spite of the numerous international agreements on the use of torture that the Mexican State has signed and ratified, this practice has not only not stopped, but in recent years it has become more widespread. As well, the spectrum of circumstances, perpetrators and purposes has expanded, reaching sectors of the population that previously had not been targeted.

Beginning in 2006, after President Felipe Calderón´s declaration of "war against drug trafficking", a large number of images of mutilated, decapitated, hanged, half-naked, gagged, bandaged, wrapped in blankets, tied, fire or acid burned bodies began to proliferate in the press and media. The State referred to these deaths as "settling of scores" between drug cartels and organized crime groups, a discourse they used to justify the militarization of several regions of the country.

Frequent appearances of bodies in the northern region of the country were known since the 1990s. At that time, girls and young women were the ones who disappeared in Ciudad Juarez or Chihuahua, their bodies dumped on vacant land. They had been tortured, raped, mutilated and beaten. However, the State´s response was to defame them arguing that they were "prostitutes" or girls who had "run off with the boyfriends", blaming them for their own deaths. But suddenly it wasn´t only women; men began to appear also, mainly young men. According to journalistic investigations, the number of deaths has exceeded 80,000 since 2006, and the massacres continue.

In Mexico the issue of torture has been documented by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture and by Amnesty International (AI). Of actual complaints of torture and mistreatment from 2006 to 2014, the CNDH registered 11,068 cases. ¹⁶ AI indicates that from 2010 to 2014, 7,000 cases of torture and mistreatment inflicted by federal officials were reported, but only seven of these resulted in conviction sentences. ¹⁷

In complicity with the State or under its permissiveness, torture and sexual torture are used by legal or illegal economic power groups. It is inflicted on women and children, via trafficking and sexual exploitation networks and against people forced into slave labor, especially young men and migrants. Furthermore, human rights defenders who protect their territory and their natural assets are subject to harassment, persecution, threats and torture by both private security bodies of local companies or multinationals, and the police and the military who protect these capitals, and who in addition repress the population. Threats of rape against defenders have become increasingly more frequent.

¹⁶ Report on Mexico by the United Nations Rapporteur for Torture 2014. Full text available at: http://sintortura.mx/informe-mexico-del-relator-especial-de-onu-sobretortura-juan-mendez/

¹⁷ Amnesty International included Mexico as one of five countries in its Global Stop Torture Campaign and is carrying out a Campaign against Sexual Torture against women in our country, together with the Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Center. www.es.amnestv.org/paises/mexico/la-tortura-en-cifras/

Presently, torture at the hands of State agents occurs during illegal raids, demonstrations and public actions, in military and police installations, immigration stations, Public Ministry agencies, prisons and detention centers, among others. It should be noted that, by failing to prevent, investigate or attest to acts of torture, other public servants – apart from the direct perpetrators – are equally responsible. Some of them are: legal, military or forensic doctors, judges and public ministries, prison staff and authorities, experts from different public prosecutors' offices and public human rights organizations.

To the above must be added the torture -including sexual torture- that historically stigmatized groups have been subjected to, such as psychiatric patients, sexually diverse people, the homeless, and sex workers.

Finally, we wish to highlight the role the media plays in criminalizing, stigmatizing and revictimizing survivors, generating impunity for the perpetrators, and making torture appear commonplace and normal. In Mexico, it is the victims and not the perpetrators who end up being the lawbreakers.

c) Victims and perpetrators

In the two previous paragraphs we have already referred to the victims and the perpetrators of torture, so we will only list them below.

VÍCTIMS PERPETRATORS

Political opponents, activists, militants and social activists, human rights defenders, journalists, members of trade unions, trade and professional associations, guerrilla fighters. Men, women, children, young people, sexually diverse people, sexworkers, psychiatric patients, the homeless and migrants. People deprived of their freedom.

Police of various corporations and different levels of government, military, marine, immigration agents. Criminal groups, paramilitaries, private security forces. Authorities, staff and prison population, public ministries, judges.

Doctors and forensic psychologists, lawyers and military. Experts of the prosecutor's offices and human rights organizations.



Comparative Report of the UN CED on Forced Disappearance and the Report of the Rapporteur on Torture

http://centroprodh.org.mx/torturarnoesjusticia/?p=245

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Testimonies

An important part of the accompaniment to victims of torture is listening to their testimony. Those who survive torture become narrators and witnesses to the horror, **but even from the basements of torture they recount stories of resistance and solidarity.** Below we share some vignettes with the words of survivors:

Violated in a thousand aberrant ways and savagely tortured for months, Mirta felt liberated when she finally could say it in the group, accompanied by shared tears: "I no longer feel dirty, now I can die in peace", and she died that same year, on July 24 [2012]. Sharing stories operates as a kind of catharsis. If you do not talk, you do not heal. After denouncing in front of the judge, many of us feel an immense 'mission accomplished' sense of relief for finally being able to sleep in peace. (Testimony of Mirta Macedo, torture survivor). 18

A girl began to relate her torture, and in the eyes of those women I recognized my own pain and the burden of silence. The anger began to swell in our hearts, the strength began to return to our bodies, we understood then that we were alive and, from that moment, together. We are looking for different ways of dealing [...] with it, to express those feelings that had us all broken inside. We have managed to talk [...] we dismantled the victimization and the stigma, we managed to place the term sexual torture in a visible place, talk about how it is orchestrated and the damage it causes. We were never victims, we are survivors, full of hope to change the current state of affairs. "(Norma Jiménez and Italia Méndez, survivors of sexual torture in Atenco, State of Mexico, 2006). 19

[...] "Are we going to start again? What, what were you thinking? In the end, even if it takes us to the end of time, we re going to get a statement from this old man. [...] It's not going to be possible, excuse me -I tell him, [;] by then I could speak a little, "excuse me, I say - I cannot be [...] what I am not. If I were -I tell him-I would gladly tell you, I am this! [...] If I were like that, I would say at that time, -I tell him-I am this, I cooperate with this! ... Thus, -I tell him- in this way I cannot make a statement" (Indigenous me'phaa, tortured in Guerrero by members of the Army, 1997).²⁰

Psychosocial impacts of torture and sexual torture²¹

Identifying the psychosocial impacts of torture is a complex task, as is torture itself. In addition, **each person is different and lives, suffers and resists torture in their own unique way.** That is why we do not intend to cover the variety of psychosocial impacts or coping mechanisms that victims usually present. We will only outline some of them in the form of an unfinished guide, that will only make sense when working directly in accompaniment.

Prior to reviewing the psychosocial impacts at a personal, family, organizational, community and social levels, let us note some premises regarding the dynamics of this form of violence.

Torture is always directed against the body. From the legal point of view, the distinction between physical, psychological or sexual torture is usually made, but from the psychosocial point of view, the three are inseparable and all of them inevitably involve the body. The body of a woman or a man; an old or young body; the body of a peasant or a worker; a mulatto, white or mestizo body; a body that sees, smells, hears, touches, savors, secretes, trembles; a body that laughs, fears, cries, is alert, gets excited, shudders; a body that dances, plays, rests, works... **We are formed of several bodies that are however, condensed only in one: our own.** It is through the body that we regulate interactions both with the world and with others.

Although in continuous transformation, in daily life we experience a certain constancy or corporal balance. We can say that our body is silent and generally we become more aware of it through sensations of pleasure and pain.

Torture begins when another person exerts him/herself as master of the victim's body. From that moment, the power and will of the torturer will be inscribed in the softness of the body, whose silence is suddenly torn and sees itself screaming, trembling, bleeding, writhing. Bodily abuse and unbearable pain overcome the victim's psychic defenses and terror and anguish ensue. The most horrific fantasies are seen as possible and not infrequently, death is desired as the only relief.

Torturers seek the victim's weak point and vary the techniques until they find the one that breaks the resistance. They can even resort to torturing or threatening a family member or partner. Sometimes, the victim may be kept captive for days, weeks or months under the worst conditions, and be subjected to several episodes of torture until he/she is broken. The whole experience of torture will influence the impact the victim shows on a personal level.

a) Personal level

After being tortured the person generally presents intense physical and psychological responses associated with the traumatic experience: physical pain, motor difficulties, recurring memories, hypervigilance, tremors or sweating, nightmares, concentration and memory problems, insomnia, lack of appetite, fear, startle response, irritability, crying. This symptomatology can either form a diagnostic picture or not, and its duration depends largely on the context, social support and their own personal resources.

Unless a disabling injury, mutilation, or chronic disease remain, it is common for the physical sequelae to disappear relatively quickly. Even so, the physical scars become a constant reminder of the lived experience, and we must consider the body's memory, that is, sounds, smells, postures, textures, sensations, etc., that can trigger memories even years later. Yet, beyond that, after torture and sexual torture,

²¹ This separation between psychosocial impacts and coping mechanisms has an expositive and didactic function here, but both are manifested simultaneously and singularly from the initial moment of the violent experience. (See Main Booklet, Section "Working with victims").

the question that arises is: how does the person inhabit their own body? Yes, their biological body, but also their erotic and symbolic body.

The psychological marks on victims tend to be deep and lasting. Emotionally they report fear, despair, sadness, anger, impotence, survivor's guilt. On a mental plane, they manifest self-devaluation, questioning of ideas, convictions, life meaning and world meaning. In terms of behavior, a distancing from others, abandonment of previous activities, distrust, sexual disinterest, withdrawal or, on the contrary, recklessness and self-destructive behavior. There are many expressions, but, in general, victims themselves speak of marked transformations after torture.

The intensity of the horror and confusion that prevails during torture is such that it is very difficult for the victim to put the experience into words. In particular, in cases of sexual torture, because of the shame and humiliation experienced, survivors resort to silence. In addition, women who have been subjected to sexual violence are often blamed or stigmatized by their own family members, members of their organization or community, and by the authorities. For survivors this does not only generate fear of reporting, but it deepens the silence, the sense of isolation and the harm.



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b) Family level

Although some torture survivors decide to denounce the facts, either politically or legally, relatives sometimes learn indirectly about what their family member went through. In private it is rarely talked about, and torture can become a taboo subject within the family. Silence protects the bond, but in the long run it can also damage it: each person keeps their suffering private and it is common for family members to have nightmares or fantasies about the ill treatment their loved one had to endure.

The feeling of guilt comes from thinking that something could have been done to avoid torture. This can go to extremes: overprotecting the survivor, not leaving them alone for even a minute to prevent them from being taken again, or blaming them for not defending themselves or putting themselves at risk. The influence of patriarchal stereotypes can make a woman victim of sexual torture be blamed or abandoned by her partner, whilst, in the case of a man, he can respond by concealing the fact and by distancing himself from his partner for fear of losing his manhood, or by being unfaithful to prove to himself that he hasn't lost it.

While we are distinguishing between the survivor and their family, it is important to clarify that the family also experiences their own torture. Let's remember that torture is inflicted during a period of time when the person is removed from the protection of the law and no one knows their whereabouts; at this stage they are victims of enforced disappearance. This generates in the family high levels of anguish, compounded by the difficulties and uncertainty of the search they might undertake. At other times, when the person is imprisoned, this situation also has an impact on the family.

While reuniting with the survivor of torture represents a relief for the family, it also brings a confrontation of all their different traumatic experiences and the impact on each member, the family dynamics that existed before the torture, during the disappearance, detention and after release. These experiences will have an impact on family bonds and it will be necessary to take all this into consideration during the accompaniment.

c) Organizational, community and social levels

The organizational level is not recognized in all scenarios where torture occurs, as this form of violence –as we already noted– is not only directed against organized sectors. However, it is common for people who are involved in political activities to bear in mind the real possibility of torture, linked to the risk of arbitrary detention or forced disappearance.

We say "real possibility" because due to its historicity, torture has an important presence in Mexican social imaginary. The tortured and crucified Christ, the burning of the feet of Mexica emperor Cuauhtémoc, the "tehuacanazo" (agitated mineral water introduced into the nostrils), among others. These are images that extend across collective discourses -sometimes with black humor- and references to this imagery acknowledge the practice, and help to distance and subjectively protect oneself. As torture is thought of as a form of punishment or a means to force criminals" to confess – that is, used against those who "owe something" - this creates a belief that one is not exposed to torture as long as one follows a "good" path.

But in the case of militants, social activists, human rights defenders, journalists, etc., who know that their activities directly or indirectly affect the interests of power groups, the possibility of torture is a known fact. What is not known is when and how it will be, and if it can be resisted. In the social sector with greater political training, the imaginary is nurtured by the recollection of State crimes.

Representations of the "hero" and the "traitor" can also come into play and have a strong impact on survivors and their group ties, depending on

²² See the Booklet on Forced Disappearance of this same

²³ See the Booklet on Arbitrary Detention of this same series.

where they place themselves or where the organization or community places them. Sometimes, when the person has not "broken", confessed or signed a self-incriminating statement, they are considered a hero; in others, when they have been disappeared with other people and are released, relatives or members of organizations and communities may distrust or suspect them: "why did you survive and my family member or comrade didn´t?" The State uses these representations to make torture even more effective.

For women survivors of sexual torture, as we have mentioned, various responses from the community and their own organizational colleagues can be encountered, from blame to stigmatization. Not infrequently they are described as traumatized and their comrades may manifest guilt for not having "protected" them.

Finally, the fear of also being tortured can cause other members of the organization to question their political activity and even to distance themselves. In communities, the State itself can disseminate rumors among the inhabitants, which generates mistrust, stigmatization, distancing and the rupture of social ties.

Coping mechanisms in cases of torture and sexual torture

Let us now review the ways of confronting torture and sexual torture at the same levels: personal, family, organizational, community and social.²⁴

a) Personal level

Just as the psychosocial impact on a personal level in the torture survivor is related to the uniqueness of the experience, the same happens with the coping mechanisms.

The testimonies of people who have experienced torture show how, practically from the beginning, they try to defend or protect themselves: dissuading the aggressor, resisting arrest, invoking their rights. If the physical aggressions are of such intensity that this type of resistance is not possible, they set in motion other mechanisms, such as doing nothing that might "increase" the danger, attentively listen to their captors, memorize faces or voices; if they are blindfolded, but they know the area, they mentally count the number of streets or imagine what road the vehicle is traveling on. When they are captive with other people, they try to be attentive to others and support each other. Some concentrate more on defending their word or try to identify which torture technique is the most painful in order to be prepared.

When people spend considerable time at the hand of their torturers, they can identify patterns, the habits of each torturer, the "forewarning" of a new torture session and they share this knowledge with new prisoners. If, after torture, they are imprisoned, they seek to keep the impacts of torture at bay, concentrate on surviving the institution and enduring the legal process until their release.

According to their culture, victims care for their physical and emotional discomforts in a rather intuitive and traditional way or by seeking professional support. Others hope that time will help them forget and try not to think about it, or else they are sustained by their spiritual and ideological beliefs.

There are also those who try to channel emotions and thoughts through art, ludic or intellectual activities.

There are survivors who prefer not to dwell more on the subject, aiming to follow their life project or look for a different one. There are those who do not see the human rights framework as a way to achieve justice and decide not to be associated with political activities. But there are others who decide to take this path, either because of their previous political training or after they received guidance and solidarity from other victims or members of social and human rights organizations.

It can also be that they decide to take more specific actions, such as seeking specialized information about torture, lodge a legal complaint, join the political struggle and approach other victims, organizations and human rights centers, among others.

b) Family level

The family first focuses its efforts on the immediate search for their relative. Once reunited, relatives try to support the survivor by remaining strong, asking them how they feel or evading the subject so as not to increase their pain; they help them take care of their physical ailments or give them what they need to bear incarceration, if that is the case.

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Some relatives also seek specialized information on torture, mainly to "know" how to support the survivor and understand the changes they notice in their loved one. They also attend health or psychological services for themselves and especially, for their young children.

Finally, there are relatives who get involved with a political or legal complaint to demand justice and the reparation of damage. Sometimes this is not done directly, but by providing the necessary material resources.

c) Organizational, community and social levels

The support that survivors of torture receive usually relates to their previous social networks, the context of torture, and what they put in place to confront the experience.

Giving testimony has a crucial role in coping at these three levels, because it enables survivors to raise awareness, denounce and highlight the context and local patterns of torture. It also helps identify torturers and condemn the ways in which the State represses the population, hiding its complicity or links with other economic power players. The testimonies become tools for struggle, generating solidarity and social organization. The word of the survivors has a function of countering the information of official and media discourses, thus contributing to the truth and the collective narrative and memory.

Women victims of torture usually receive support directly from feminist and women's organizations. These groups provide support to uncover stereotypes and patriarchal mandates that are often what prevent survivors from overcoming the impacts and assuming their role as subjects of their own destiny and fighting for justice. Frequently these survivors initiate their own support strategies for other victims, sharing their experiences and coping tools.

Political, cultural, spiritual and symbolic activities have played a very important role in the social recognition of torture and influence both relationships and the social imaginary. Social outrage can be such that it produces local, national and even international actions.

It is worth highlighting the experiences of torture survivors in the Southern Cone, who have appropriated spaces where clandestine detention and torture centers operated and converted them into memory sites. Equally important is the recognition by some governments of the crimes committed under dictatorships and trials against torturers. The state machinery that seeks to silence is strong, but so is the victims' rage and tenacity for the truth to be known, for the guilty to face trial and, someday, for torture to be eradicated.

Pre-conceptions held by companions

When we wish to accompany survivors of torture and their families, as with other forms of sociopolitical violence, we must have prior theoretical and technical training, and also reflect on those assumptions that may strengthen psychosocial support or, on the contrary, weaken it.

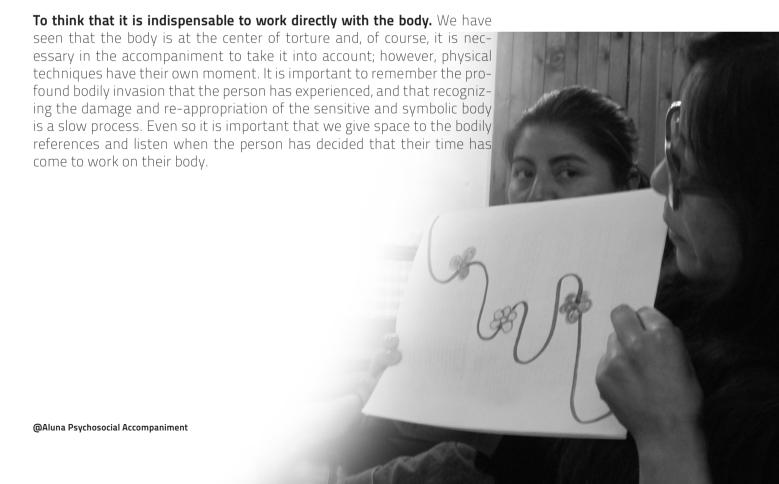
When working with victims of torture it is crucial to engage in a continuous and profound exercise of analysis of our own fears and fantasies. ²⁵This introspection becomes indispensable in cases of sexual torture, because as men and women we place ourselves differently -symbolically, subjectively and socially- in the face of gender violence and sexual violence. This has important implications that must be considered in the accompaniments.

Some of the pre-conceived ideas about accompanying survivors are:

To think that it is indispensable to know all the details of the actual torture. It is important not to confuse documentation with accompaniment. Traumatic experiences carry their own rhythm of psychic and symbolic processing; victims can take years to put some things into words. To this is added the confusion that prevails in cases of torture: for the survivors, some details will always be an enigma. Our job is to listen to what they have to say at the time that is right for them.

To think that it is necessary to be a psychotherapist to accompany. It isn't necessary, but if we are more prepared for the accompaniments, our support will have better results. Knowledge of trauma is necessary, but similarly, knowledge of other disciplines and expert advice from others will help companions recognize their own limits, and if pertinent, be able to suggest to the survivor the need for further specialized support.

To think that the person can be overwhelmed by their emotions and relive the torture. This fear is common among companions, however, let´s consider a few things. We are rarely the first person to whom the survivor tells what happened, as they have already reported it to their lawyer, in ministerial statements, expert reports, public events or interviews, all of which generated mechanisms for managing their emotions. In addition, when survivors decide to start an accompaniment, they know that eventually it will be necessary to talk about the torture, which allows them to be prepared. Finally, the space of listening and containment that we offer is precisely to help the person release much of the emotional burden they carry, so it is important that we are prepared for it.



O Dos and Don'ts for accompaniment in cases of torture and sexual torture

Accompaniments are as unique as we are as people. Nonetheless, it is worth reflecting on some keys that can help us prepare and guide our actions, without losing sight of the fact that the victims are the ones who point the way forward.²⁶

Don 'ts	Dos
Generate ambiguous, out of control or invasive situations.	Encourage the survivor to take control of their own process. Remember that torture seeks the absolute control of the torturer over the victim, hence the importance that they be consulted at every step of the accompaniment and know what will or will not happen, so that they can make their own decisions.
Qualify or make invisible the survivors' psychosocial impacts or coping mechanisms.	Each person is different and manifests their pain and resistance in a unique way. It is necessary to give time and space for the impacts to be manifested and worked on by the person, at their own pace and whatever these may be. Working only on confrontations avoids recognizing the damage and risks emotions becoming encapsulated.
Assume that we feel the pain, or we know the person's situation.	Be mindful of our place as companions. Despite the outrage and other feelings that torture may provoke, the experiences and situations belong to the survivors and their relatives. Limit setting favors the accompaniment because they generate certainty and respect.
Separate psychosocial accompaniment from the torture scenario and the sociopolitical context.	Dedicate enough time to analyze the context and specific scenario of torture, such as the characteristics of violence in the region, the perpetrators and their objectives, the specific techniques used, as well as the resources and security conditions for survivors and their families. It is

26 For the common points to the different modalities of sociopolitical violence, refer to the Section "Work with Victims" of the Main Booklet of this same Series.

important to give time to analyze the before, during and after.

Don 'ts	Dos
Assume that all victims of torture can be accompanied in the same way.	Consider the uniqueness of the experience. Even if we work with victims of torture who have lived events in the same time and place, even though they have been subjected to the same torture techniques -such as sexual torture- each person experiences this event in a unique way, manifests differentiated impacts and sets in motion their own coping mechanisms. The accompaniments have to try to respond to this uniqueness.
Assume that the same accompaniment techniques will be helpful for survivors and family members.	Keep in mind that torture has different impacts and survivors have different coping mechanisms. While torture harms the family group as a whole, it does not affect each person in the same way. Focusing only on the damage done to the survivor or on one of the family members or, on the contrary, implying that all have suffered in the same way, can generate blame and finger-pointing or invisibility of the singular impacts, producing silence and loneliness. The techniques have to respond to both the differences and the common ground.
Suppose that we can accompany in any torture situation.	Be ethical and always keep in mind our own professional and personal limitations. Torture is one of the most horrific and ominous experiences that a person can face; listening to these experiences can awaken very intense emotions in the companions. Working on their own issues will help the companion distinguish what is their own personal emotion and what belongs to the survivor's experience. This will strengthen the companions' listening and containment skills.
Guide the accompaniment towards public or legal complaint.	Maintain respect for the survivor's decisions. Victims do not always want to report, out of fear, shame, distrust or for some other reason. Sometimes, on the contrary, lodging complaints becomes one of the main coping mechanisms with the torture experience. Our role is to help the survivor visualize possible courses of action, accompany them

through their doubts and expectations, and respect their decisions. Promoting autonomy is one of the main objectives of accompaniment.

"El Morralito" (Tool bag)

Finally, we add to the "El Morralito" (tool bag) some of the questions that have arisen in our experiences as companions, hoping to contribute to collective reflection and improve our work.

Considering the greater sophistication of torture, how can the psychosocial approach contribute to the fight for justice and reparation, and add to a recognition of the damage? How to reflect on sexual torture from a perspective that does not limit it only to patriarchy or dissociate it from sociopolitical violence? How to contribute from the psychosocial perspective to the breakdown of gender stereotypes to recognize sexual torture in men, as well as the exercise of torture by women? How to contribute to the recognition of the junctions between sociopolitical violence and other types of violence that have been invisible until now? What should the companion strengthen and be mindful of when working with survivors of torture and sexual torture? How to strengthen and build new tools for the accompaniment of survivors of torture in extreme and confined scenarios, such as maximum-security prisons, for example? What can the psychosocial perspective contribute towards the struggle for the eradication of torture?



NOTES

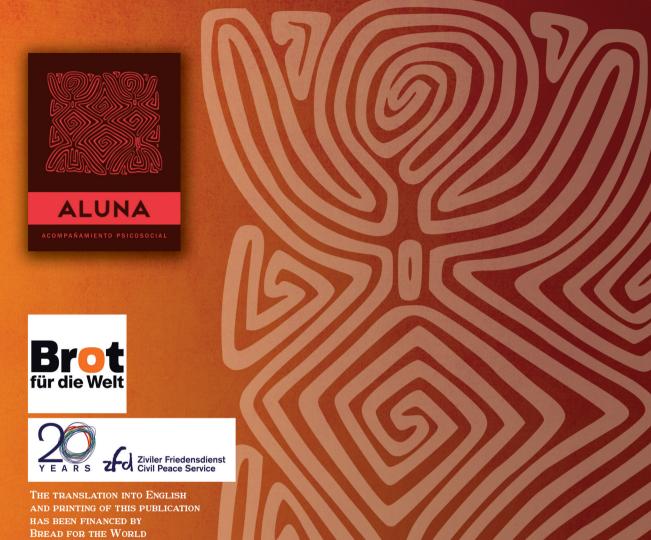


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