

# How to Identify and Assist Victims of Torture

Clients are very unlikely to define themselves as victims of torture (for linguistic, cultural and/or social reasons), but up to 20% of refugees are.

## How to identify survivors

- In his/her home country, was he/she or a family member ever *threatened* by members of the government, military/militia, rebel group, police or political group?
- Was he/she or a family member ever *hurt physically or emotionally* by members of the government, military/militia, rebel groups, police or political groups?
- Was he/she ever *hurt or threatened* while detained, arrested, or jailed? This includes *threats to harm* friends or family members.

Don't ask them outright if they are victims of torture, but if they tell you something concerning or if you suspect this, tell RAA or contact The Florida Center for Survivors of Torture directly (see below).

# Nature

- Destroys one's sense of self and strips one of his/her dignity
- Humiliates and shames
- Shatters and distorts human reasoning, social interaction, ethics and values



# Consequences

Individuals will manifest consequences of torture in different ways.

- Affliction: **physical**, psychological, social and/or spiritual
- Limited ability to function day-to-day
  - Difficulty maintaining relationships
  - Difficulty with adjustment process in new community
  - Limited ability to adapt and cope with stressful situations
  - Limited ability to problem-solve
  - Lack of self-confidence
- Enhanced resiliency
  - Traumatic events can be transformational experiences



Mollica, R. (2008)

Their ability to process information, navigate their new life, or function may be affected by past torture experiences.

# Types of Torture

*This list is not meant to be exhaustive*

- Physical
  - Forced postures
  - Electrocutation
  - Sexual torture
  - *Falanga* – beating bottom of feet
  - Strategic beating
  - Burning
  - Pharmacological torture
- Psychological
  - Mock executions
  - Forced to witness torture
  - Deprivation:
    - Food
    - Medical attention
  - Repeated and systematic threats
  - Isolation
  - Sensory Stress

Unless you are an MSW (Master's in Social Work) with specific experience working with victims of torture, *you are not qualified to deal with this issue*, other than being friendly and supportive of the victim. RAA is also not qualified, though we do have a MSW on staff who could talk to you about any concern. The Florida Center for Survivors of Torture *is* qualified, and RAA has a relationship with them for such things.

## Florida Center for Survivors of Torture

Center Without Walls in Tampa Bay and Miami

- Client centered and strength based
- Client services - Intensive Case Management
- Support & Assistance with addressing 5 life domains:
  - Legal
  - Healthcare/Mental Health
  - Employment
  - Social services
  - Social support



\*Funded by the Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement and United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture

<https://healtorture.org/content/florida-center-survivors-torture-miami>

### **RAA's contact there:**

**Sabine Balmir Derenoncourt, MSW**  
**sabine.derenoncourt@gcjfcs.org**

***Cell 786-390-9245***

Write to her as an RAA volunteer and explain your concern. She will take it from there. Copy RAA staff (or reach out to us prior to writing them, especially if you'd like to talk this through with our MSW) if you'd like. We are here to help.