

Whole Family Approach with Torture-Affected Families

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR AND DIRECTOR

Dr. Mary Bunn, PhD, LCSW
University of Illinois Chicago

CO-INVESTIGATOR

Dr. Karin Wachter, PhD
Arizona State University

TEAM MEMBERS

Fatima Al-Hanoosh, MS
University of Illinois Chicago

Chloe Polutnik Smith, MPH
University of Illinois Chicago

Sara Bracewell
Center for Victims of Torture

Amy Kamel, MSW, LICSW
Center for Victims of Torture

Megumi Layman, MBA
Center for Victims of Torture

Huy Pham, MPH
Center for Victims of Torture

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The Whole Family Approach with Torture-Affected Families was conceptualized as part of a multi-phased initiative to develop a family services framework to guide programming and services in U.S. Survivor of Torture programs. The Whole Family Approach brings additional clarity and attention to the importance and the “how-to” of working with torture-affected families.

EVIDENCE-BASED AND PARTICIPATORY PROCESS

The team engaged in an in-depth process to define the Whole Family Approach with Torture-Affected Families, which included conducting a rapid review of the existing literature^{1,2,3,4,5}, eliciting feedback from advisory team members on key elements to include in the conceptualization, cross-referencing key elements from the rapid review and advisory team input, and an iterative process of drafting, redrafting, and finalizing language with ongoing input from collaborators and advisory team members. The definition below is the product of this collaborative process.

THE WHOLE FAMILY APPROACH WITH TORTURE-AFFECTED FAMILIES

A whole family approach with torture-affected families draws on family systems perspectives and situates wellbeing within the context of the family. A whole family approach recognizes torture, trauma and other adversities as experiences that impact the family as a unit, as well as individual members, and primary and secondary torture survivors as integral members of their

natal or chosen family, whether present, absent, or deceased. Fundamental principles underpinning this approach are: families are inherently adaptive and resourceful, families are important sources of strength and support, and families have tremendous potential to support coping and healing.

In adopting this approach, providers work with individuals of all ages within a given family to assess needs and provide family-oriented services, tailored to the unique cultures, languages and needs of torture-affected families. In using this approach, providers encourage and ensure the age-appropriate participation of family members in addressing key issues and making decisions impacting their family. This includes working in collaboration with families to identify targeted resources and services and supporting families in overcoming hardships.

CENTER OF EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE: BUILDING A WHOLE FAMILY APPROACH FOR TORTURE-AFFECTED FAMILIES

The Whole Family Approach described here is one component of a broader Center of Excellence initiative focused on advancing family and systems-centered approaches within U.S. Survivor of Torture programs. This initiative includes the development of a comprehensive whole family services framework, compilation of vetted clinical tools, implementation resources, research publications and evidence-based interventions designed to support providers and programs in fostering whole family healing and resilience.

ADVISORY TEAM

Walter Fendrich, LCSW-R
Libertas Center for Human Rights

Stacey Frymier, MA, LPCC
Las Cumbres Community Services

Julia Givens
Freedom House

Farida Hasanova, MA
International Rescue Committee

Marty Hill, PhD
Heartland Alliance International
Marjorie Kovler Center

Connor Molloy, LICSW
Center for Victims of Torture

Beth Rutten-Turner, LCSW
Program for Survivors of
Torture, St. Alphonsus Health

Rosalie Wright-Lapin, LICSW
New England Survivors of
Torture and Trauma

FUNDING

This Center of Excellence received funding through the National Capacity Building Project, a technical assistance partnership of the Office of Refugee Resettlement, Technical Assistance to the Survivors of Torture Program (Award #90ZT0214). The Center is also supported with funding from grant #K01MH128524 (PI: Bunn) from the National Institute of Mental Health. The work product of the Center is solely the responsibility of its authors and partners, and do not necessarily represent the official views of ORR, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

PLEASE USE THIS REFERENCE TO CITE THIS WORK:

Bunn, M. & Wachter, K. (2026) Whole family approach with torture-affected families. [Unpublished resource guide] Centering Families Center of Excellence (remove project), Department of Psychiatry, University of Illinois Chicago.

For more information about this Center of Excellence, please contact Dr. Mary Bunn at mbunn@uic.edu

REFERENCES

1. Women's Funding Network and Ascend at the Aspen Institute. (2020). Whole family approaches to economic mobility: A funder's guide to supporting multigenerational policy and practice. Retrieved from <https://wholefamilyguide.org/>
2. Phillips, A. (n.d.). Engaging the whole family: Overview and evolution of whole family approach. Indiana Community Action Poverty Institute. Retrieved from <https://institute.incap.org/assets/docs/Presentations/WFA%20Presentation%201.pdf>
3. Scottish Government. (2023). A rapid review of the literature on whole family approach. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.scot/publications/rapid-review-literature-whole-family-approach/>
4. Tew, J., Nicholls, V., Plumridge, G and Clarke, H. (2017). Family inclusive approaches to reablement in mental health: Models, mechanisms and outcomes. *The British Journal of Social Work* (italicize journal name), 47 (3), 864–884, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcw106>
5. Circle: Supporting families in Scotland. (n.d). Whole family approach. Retrieved from <https://circle.scot/whole-family-approach/>

