

Torture and War Trauma

Information for Refugee Communities



The community of refugees from your home country now in the United States may still suffer from what happened during the war in your country.

Health professionals are beginning to recognize torture and violence of war as public health problems that damage the health of communities both in the home country and in countries of resettlement. Communities suffer symptoms like those suffered by individuals and families. Sadly, the hurt continues as communities of refugees move to a new country.

The Purpose of Torture

Torture is a tool used to create fear in communities, as well as to remove or silence leaders. It works to destroy community. Torture and violence pull apart the culture of people from a particular country, further taking away an individual's sense of identity.

Torture and War Violence Have Ongoing Impact in Resettled Refugee Communities

The effects of torture on a community can result in fear, distrust, loss of cultural identity, broken community leadership and can follow refugees into resettlement. Strong emotions, such as anger, guilt, and fear, may not be expressed in a healthy way. Refugees from various ethnic, religious, or political affiliations are often forced to reside uneasily in the same neighborhood or to use the same services. There can be problems in workplaces, in families, and at schools.

The effects of torture can last the lifetime of the survivor; children and grandchildren may experience the history of distrust and fear.

How Resettled Communities Begin Recovery

Part of the healing process for survivors of political violence lies in rebuilding the damaged community.

When individuals and community leaders begin to understand how torture and war violence work, steps can be taken to counter its effects. Communities can then develop strong support for members, meaningful community structures, and the means to encourage recovery.

The following steps are ones that can help to begin the healing process:

1. Work to understand the effects of war trauma and torture on your community. The Center for Victims of Torture (telephone 612-626-1400) can offer assistance with education about torture and war trauma.
2. Share with others what you have learned.
3. Talk with others in your community about how a strong, healthy community can be built.
4. Strengthen your culture with community celebrations and educational events.