

Physical Therapy for Survivors of Torture

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Goals for Presentation

- 1) Identify 4 issues present in torture survivors that may be addressed by P.T.
- 2) List 3 indicators for referral to P.T. and learn 2 key points for facilitating referral
- 3) Describe 3 ways that P.T. can avoid re-traumatizing clients
- 4) Identify 3 common techniques used by P.T.'s working with survivors of torture

Infliction of pain and suffering

- * Physical and psychological aspects of torture
- * Physical torture usually directed at musculoskeletal system
- * Torture methods of suspension, beatings, forced positions, strapping, sexual and electric torture all lead to pain and injury
- * There are also many physical effects of stress itself
- * Complex mind/body connections which may be difficult for both client and others to sort out

Long History of P.T. with Torture Survivors

- * First international conference of P.T.'s treating torture survivors 1994, Copenhagen
- * Many centers world and nation-wide have physical therapy either on-site or close referral relationship
- * CVT has had volunteer P.T.'s in Minnesota for 21 years and has staff physiotherapy trainers, physiotherapists and U. S. P.T. advisors in Jordan and Kenya

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Quotes from torture survivors in Minnesota

“The pain in my body is a constant reminder of my torture.”



Quotes from torture survivors in Minnesota

“The torturers told me that I would never get better. They were wrong! Now I am so much better and I know that the torturers were wrong and that they lied to me.”



Quotes from torture survivors in Minnesota

“My hard work doing my exercises has helped me to improve. I feel that I am defeating my torturers by regaining my function.”



Client Issues Which P.T. May Address



- * Chronic pain in head, joints and muscles
- * Decreased posture and overall mobility
- * Inability to perform typical activities such as walking, lifting, child care, sleeping comfortably, sports and recreation
- * Decreased strength, range-of-motion, coordination, balance
- * Sensory changes, vision changes and dizziness
- * Pelvic floor issues



Client Issues Which P.T. May Address

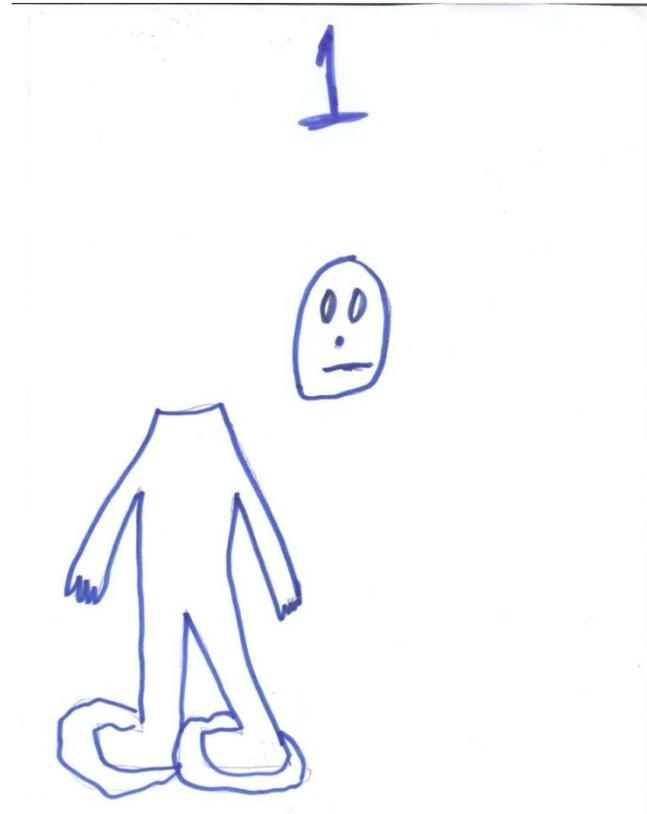
- * **Body awareness:**
 - * Judge distance from self
 - * Localize pain
 - * Imitate movements easily
- * **Self regulation**
 - * Alter breathing rate and pattern
 - * Alter speed and intensity of activity
 - * Have appropriate energy level
 - * Calm self after high energy activity
 - * Relaxation

Role of Dissociation

- * Good survival strategy at the time of torture
- * Later, can contribute to feeling disconnected, foggy, not at home in one's own body
- * Body image drawings:
 - * Used by P.T. at Berlin Center for Torture Victims
 - * Help to direct treatment and to monitor progress
 - * Drawings clearly show how survivors often view themselves before physical and psychological treatment

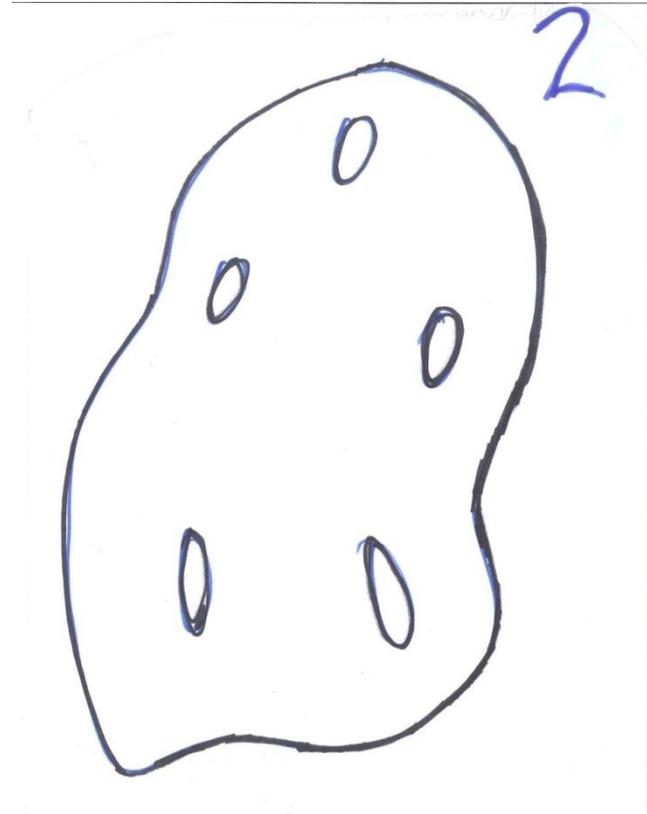
Sketch of Body Image 1

This client felt very disconnected from his body. He was focused on pain in his feet from falanga torture.



Sketch of Body Image 2

This client saw her body as an amorphous blob. Ovals are areas where she felt the most pain.



Sketch of Body Image 3

This client has ringing in the ear, headache, pain in feet and elbows



Role of Dissociation

- * Improvements noted in drawings after course of P.T. and psychological counseling
- * Amazingly, by end of treatments, client's body images were typical and well-proportioned

Indicators for Referral to P.T.

- * Acute /chronic pain
- * Falanga torture
- * Decreased posture, body awareness, self regulation, proprioception
- * Decreased strength, ROM
- * Decreased mobility / ability to perform desired activities



Keys for Facilitating Appropriate P.T. Referral

- * P.T. departments that see large numbers of refugees
- * Which P.T. is comfortable working with survivors of trauma and torture
- * Release of client information? Ask.
- * Select records to P.T. to sensitize P.T. to special needs of client from first session



Avoiding Re-traumatization

- * May do evaluation over several sessions and pace hands on assessment
- * Avoid excessive questions initially so does not feel like an interrogation
- * Be on time
- * Doors or curtain open if desired by client
- * Ask permission before touching client, and check in about how is tolerating. (Touch can be extremely therapeutic for client!)



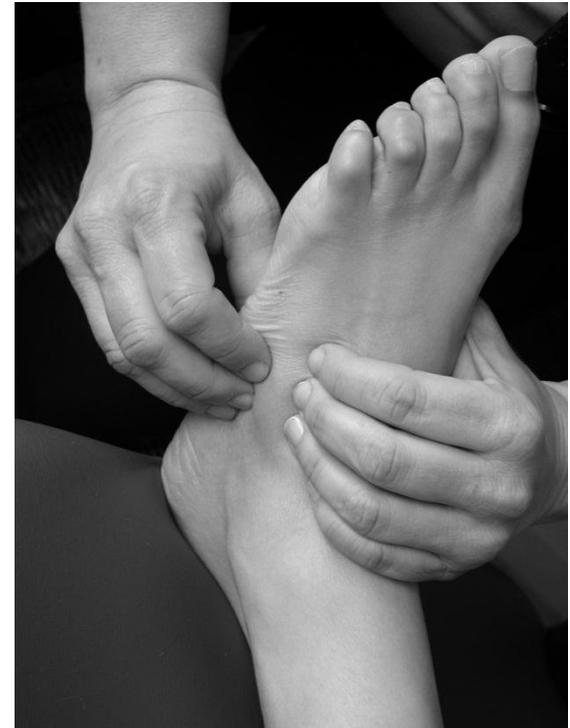
Avoiding Re-traumatization

- * Give clients choice in all matters related to treatment:
 - * Positions to treat in
 - * Issues to focus on
 - * Speed of treatment progression
- * Some modalities may be similar to torture experiences, but may be well tolerated – be sensitive
- * Caution with mirrors, bright lights, uniforms



Physical Therapy Techniques

- * Emphasize home program of exercises and modalities to promote self-efficacy in being able to decrease pain, increase mobility
- * Hands on techniques if accepted
- * Progressive work for balance and fluency of movements
- * Pelvic floor treatment



Physical Therapy Techniques

- * Pool exercises
- * Sensory awareness techniques
- * Specialized treatment for falanga torture
 - * 60-page book about this – free
- * Equipment
 - * Canes, walkers, shoe inserts, knee/back braces, etc.



Community Exercise Options

- * Group P.T. sessions
 - * CVT-Jordan program
 - * Group by physical issues
OR
 - * Group by body awareness issues/self-regulation deficits
- * Team sports
- * Bicycle donations, clubs (see 11/16/09 webinar)
- * Hiking groups
- * Health club
- * Exercise DVD



Resources

Full article available for free download
through Dignity – the Danish Institute Against Torture:
www.dignityinstitute.org

- * Amris, K., & Prip, K. (1994). Introduction to examination by the physiotherapist. *Torture* (supplementum 1), 15-27.
<http://doc.rct.dk/doc/tort1994.suppl.1.3.pdf>
- * Amris, K., & Prip, K. (2000). Physiotherapy for Torture Victims (I): Chronic pain in torture victims: possible mechanisms for the pain. *Torture*, 10 (3) 73-76. <http://doc.rct.dk/doc/TORT2000-3-3.pdf>
- * Amris, K., & Prip, K. (2000). Physiotherapy for Torture Victims (II): treatment of chronic pain. *Torture*, 10 (6) 112-116.
<http://doc.rct.dk/doc/TORT2000-4-5.pdf>
- * Holten, N., Prip, K., Tived, L. (1995) *Physiotherapy for Torture Survivors: a basic introduction*. Copenhagen. International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims.
<http://doc.rct.dk/doc/mon1995.135.pdf>

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- * Hough, A. (1992). *Physiotherapy for Survivors of Torture*.
Physiotherapy.
<http://www.freedomfromtorture.org/sites/default/files/documents/Hough-%20PhysiotherapyforSurvivors%20.pdf>
- * Prip, K. (1994). *Sequelae in soft tissues after beating, suspension and fixation*. *Torture Quarterly*.
<http://doc.rct.dk/doc/tort1994.suppl.1.4.pdf>
- * Skjaerback, I. (1994). *Pain physiological mechanisms used in physiotherapy*. *Torture quarterly*.
<http://doc.rct.dk/doc/tort1994.suppl.1.5.pdf>
- * For the list at the Dignity Library of all 404 articles, lectures, etc. about PT and torture, the link is:
http://www.reindex.org/RCT/main/Hits.php?ColSearch=node0_0&qe=physiotherapy&tgtGroup%5B%5D=1032&tgtGroup%5B%5D=1033&PortalMode=1&tgtPos=1&SearchMode=lay

Resources

Available via the Dignity library

- * The following may be requested, free, via library@dignityinstitute.dk - they will mail a copy to you:
- * Torture Survivors-Introduction to Physiotherapy. World Confederation for Physical Therapy--Barcelone, Spain 2003
- * Falanga Torture-Diagnostic Considerations, Assessment and Treatment. Amris, K, and Prip, Karen. (59 page book)

Resources

More resources

- * Prip, K., Persson, A., Sjölund, B. Self-Reported activity in tortured refugees with long-term sequelae including pain and the impact of foot pain from falanga: a cross-sectional study. *Disability and rehabilitation*, 33 (7) 569-578.
- * Scheermesser, M., Bachmann, S., Schamann, A. (2012). A qualitative study on the role of cultural background in patients' perspectives on rehabilitation. *BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders*, 13:5 free online access at <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2474/13/5>
- * Sluka K., (2009) *Mechanisms and Management of Pain for the Physical Therapist*. Seattle. IASP Press Seattle. http://www.iasp-pain.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=IASP_Press_Books2&Template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=10677

Thank you so much!

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- * Many free resources to establish your own library of books and articles about torture treatment on list of supporting tools