

Discussions Questions for October 13 – Group 2

*Questions:*

One issue regarding torture concerns comparisons between the physical effects of torture and the psychological effects. To help you examine this issue, I've presented a case study below. You should read it and think about the answer to the following two questions: (1) Do you agree with the article that the psychological effects of torture are worse than the physical ones? (2) Are there certain physical effects or psychological effects of torture that you think are unacceptable? Which ones?

*Case: (excerpted from "Torture's psychological impact 'often worse' than physical" by Elizabeth Landau from CNN, May 22, 2009)*

Amir was a salesman before being arrested and taken to the infamous Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq in 2003. During his time there, he says, he was forced to lay down in urine and feces, stay naked in his cell for days, and "howl like dogs do" while being pulled by a dog leash. According to his accounts, he was also sodomized with a broomstick and had his genitals stepped on.

After his release from Abu Ghraib in November 2004 – without being charged – he had a slew of physical and psychological ailments, including symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, according to Dr. Allen Keller, director of the Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture. Keller testified at a U.S. Helsinki Commission briefing in July 2008.

"It's like in my head I have never left Abu Ghraib," Keller says Amir told doctors.

Keller and his colleagues testified they found physical and psychological evidence of what they called "torture" during medical evaluations of former detainees of the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and the military detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

... The psychological effects of torture can often be worse than the physical effects, said Ellen Gerrity, assistant professor of psychiatry at Duke University and co-editor of "The Mental Health Consequences of Torture."

... “The psychological symptoms can often be worse in the sense that person can never recover from that, and may in the end, be in such despair and pain that they take their own lives, especially if they don’t have treatment or support around them,” she said.

Experts say torture victims can develop post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and symptoms such as social withdrawal, confusion and sleep problems.

They may also show an impaired immune system and have a higher incidence of cancer, said Rosa Garcia-Peltoniemi, senior consulting clinician at the Center for Victims of Torture in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Clients at the Center for Victims of Torture show a high rate of head injury, which can lead to neurological symptoms and other dysfunction, she said.

Other physical symptoms include headaches, dizziness, faintness, weakness, chest pain, tachycardia (racing heart), trembling, joint and soft tissue damage, stomach problems and digestive problems, Garcia-Peltoniemi said.

The mistrust survivors feel may even carry over to the next generation, with children observing their parents keeping secrets and feeling shame, Gerity said.

“It’s very hard to regain a sense of trust in the world, and in the environment, even [in] themselves if forced to participate in actions that they are ashamed of and would never have done,” she said.