

# A Toolkit for Healing the Wounds of Violence

## What?

**Traumatic** experiences in a person's life change their entire world. Trauma can emerge as a result of extreme violence and conflict. The devastating events are out of the person's control; as a result they feel helpless and vulnerable.

## How?

**Trauma** manifests itself physically and psychologically. Psychosomatic disorders resulting from trauma are common in many survivors of extreme violence. Studies have shown that individuals exhibiting symptoms of depression and PTSD can later develop psychosomatic conditions (Health & Medicine Week 2003).

*Example:* Refugees, victims of extreme violence, have undergone critical traumatic experiences in their home countries. As a result of the trauma, they are likely to suffer from chronic illness and pains. Thus, the screening process is crucial in identifying the problems, and in determining the next step in therapy.

### ELEVEN POINT TOOLKIT MODEL

Healing the Wounds of Mass Violence

As an indigenous healer, YOU can heal the psychological effects of mass violence and torture by addressing patients' mental health needs.

<b>1. Ask</b>	About the patient's "trauma story"
<b>2. Identify</b>	Concrete physical and mental effects
<b>3. Diagnose &amp; Treat</b>	Grief reactions, generalized anxiety, depression, PTSD, and insomnia
<b>4. Refer</b>	Screened cases of serious mental illness
<b>5. Reinforce and Teach</b>	Positive coping behaviors
<b>6. Recommend</b>	Altruism, work, spiritual activities
<b>7. Reduce</b>	High risk behaviors
<b>8. Be culturally attuned</b>	In communicating and prescribing
<b>9. Prescribe</b>	Psychotropic drugs if necessary
<b>10. Close &amp; Schedule</b>	Follow-up visits
<b>11. Prevent Burnout</b>	By discussing with colleagues

This information guide is based on an NPCT webinar on this topic, presented by Richard Mollica, Ph.D., Director of the Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma. The webinar was originally aired on May 23, 2012 and is archived on our website, [www.gcjfccs.org/refugee under Webinars](http://www.gcjfccs.org/refugee%20under%20Webinars).

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### **1. Ask**

- Victim recounts his/her story to the therapist
- Sample question 1: Many of my patients have felt that experiences of trauma or torture have had a big effect on their health and well-being. Is this the case for you?
- Sample question 2: Have recent international events caused you any physical or emotional problems?
- Sample question 3: Do you worry about future violence or wars?
- See the Trauma Story Assessment Therapy and its four elements of trauma story

### **2. Identify**

- Is the patient complaining of any physical symptoms? (i.e. headaches, back pain, fatigue, weakness)
- Is the patient exhibiting feelings of humiliation? (i.e. anger, revenge, hopelessness, despair)
- Is the patient exhibiting symptoms of grief, anxiety, depression, post-concussive syndrome, PTSD or chronic insomnia?

### **3. Diagnose and Treat (most patients)**

- After a human-rights related trauma, almost everyone will experience some transient physical or psychological symptoms
- 85% of patients will not suffer from serious mental illness and will benefit from your counseling on the nature of their symptoms and coping techniques
- 15% will develop a specific psychiatric disorder including: complex grief reaction; generalized anxiety disorder; chronic insomnia; depression and PTSD.
- Use screening instruments (HPRT) [www.hpert-cambridge.org](http://www.hpert-cambridge.org)

### **4. Refer (screened cases of serious mental illness)**

- Consider screening and referral to a mental health professional in the following circumstances: danger to self and others; complicated grief; severe forms of PTSD and depression; physical and social disability.

### **5. Reinforce/Teach (positive coping behaviors)**

- Recommend coping strategies beginning with self-care
- Reinforce: "I want you to keep up the good work! It is good for you and will help you cope!" "I want you to build physical, spiritual, AND mental strength!"
- Self-healing project
  - Ask patients 4 self-healing questions, then build off them:
    - ◇ What traumatic events have happened?
    - ◇ How are your body and mind repairing these injuries?
    - ◇ What have you done in your daily life to help yourself recover?
    - ◇ What justice to you require?

### **6. Recommend (altruism, work and spiritual activities)**

- "I strongly recommend that you work and keep busy, try to help others, and consult with your clergy or engage in spiritual activities such as meditation and prayer."
- "Did you know that engaging in these activities and behaviors can prevent future mental health problems and help you heal faster?"
- You have the power to recommend a change in behavior!

### **7. Reduce (high risk behaviors)**

- Patients often increase their use of cigarettes, drugs and alcohol or become involved in risky sexual behavior during times of crisis. Clinicians must be alert for these unhealthy activities
- Inquire about high risk behaviors
- If the response is positive, recommend steps to reduce these high-risk activities

### **8. Be culturally attuned to differences**

- Different cultures have different views of trauma, suffering, and different ideas about illness
- Literal translation of your question or diagnosis may be meaningless
- Be aware of patient's health seeking behaviors
- Learn how to properly work with medical interpreters – choose someone with both language and context skills

### **9. Prescribe (psychotropic drugs if necessary)**

- Pay attention to dosage and side effects diverse populations
- Culturally diverse populations have different reactions to doses and side effects (remember – ethnopsychopharmacology is important!)

### **10. Close and schedule (follow-up visits)**

- Create client/therapist relationships through dialogue
- Clinicians need a method for sensitively closing the appointment, especially after a traumatic history has been revealed
- Client feels they have a support system
- Schedule follow-up visits and add diagnosis to the client's record

### **11. Prevent Burnout (discuss with colleagues)**

- Regularly discuss cases and reactions with at least one colleague
- In the same way a client benefits from talking with you, you will gain strength from talking with others.
- Every group needs protocol for self-care

### **Holistic Approach**

- Exposure to extreme violence can have lifelong impact on individuals and communities at large. Survivors of violence and torture suffer from psychological trauma which in turn may cause, or worsen physical illness.
- Mental and physical health are interrelated; survivors of extreme violence need to heal both body and mind in order to regain control of their lives, and be able to return to a normal and healthy functioning state.

## **Additional sources:**

1. Herrman, H., Stewart, D. E., M.D., Diaz-Granados, N., Berger, E. L., D.Phil, Jackson, B., & Yuen, T. (2011). What is resilience? *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 56(5), 258-65. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/873044368?accountid=14585>
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3. Psychosomatics; depression, trauma, stress linked to physical complaints. (2003). *Health & Medicine Week*, 694-694. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/206849565?accountid=14585>

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